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## **Memory, Remembrance, Trauma, War. Traumatic Memory in Contemporary Art from Hungary and Poland after 1989**

Memory, trauma, remembrance, processes of remembering and forgetting as a part of so called collective memory – memory owned by every group or nation – constitute and determine the starting point of my current studies. The aim of the research I am conducting in the Doctoral School for Art History at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest is to analyze above mentioned issues taking place in Hungarian and Polish contemporary art arisen after 1989. What interests me are processes occurring in collective memory and ruled by it and the nature of remembering itself, reflected in socially engaged art from Hungary and Poland. The subject of my research shall include the both, memory *stricte* connected to the traumatic events of the Second World War with Holocaust as its core, but also the problem of memory in general, as it appears in contemporary art in the countries I am focusing on.

In this case-study analyzing contemporary art from Hungary and Poland a specific historical, political, social, and economical factors must be taken into consideration. Similarities arisen from a suchlike geopolitical situation in both countries, years of omission and distortion, relativization of historical truth caused by Communist regime constitute a congruent foundation. To a great extent, it was only after the political transition of 1989 when it became possible to raise the questions concerning commemoration of the tragic events of the Second World War and to manifest them by the means of artistic expression. Remembrance in the Post-Communist countries was never easy; besides, in the context of Hungary and Poland – like anywhere else – substantial factors and occurrences bind to memory hinder the *bearbeitung* of the past. Problems concerning remembrance of Shoah in Poland are marked by specific factors from which I will recall here only two: Polish lands being marked by the inhuman perpetration and becoming the site of crime (*les lieux de mémoire*) in the understanding of Pierre Nora – with Auschwitz as a symbol of collapse of the human race, the Evil in its pure form. The second one emerges in a form of the Anti-Semitism, followed by the centuries of unjust stereotypes and prejudices, even after Auschwitz being a significant

enough to call this occurrence “the Anti-Semitism without Jews”. The situation seems to be complicated also in Hungarian memory, where the collaboration with Nazi Germany during the Second World War, the felonious activity of the Arrow Cross Party and their nationalistic advocates is being constantly rejected and latent in the official politics of remembrance – just as Roma Holocaust, so called Porrajmos – omitted and repressed from the collective memory. The latter is always distorted by various factors; thus, the reconciliation with the past, especially if difficult and painful, is a condition that determines a proper functioning of society in this regard. This is where trauma appears as a crucial factor affecting the processes of memory. The only way to understand the present is to confront with the painful memory, to work through the trauma hidden in the collective memory. In the process of *bearbeitung* of the past it is significant to come back to the complex which occurred because of the painful past. This seems to be possible only through trauma and this is why I find so indispensable to examine its presence in art from Hungary and Poland in the context of my research.

Variety of studies will serve me as a theoretical background, to name only some: James E. Young, Dominick LaCapra, Jan Assmann, Zygmunt Bauman. Since this research covers the period after 1989, all the artists this dissertation will be occupied with were born after the Second World War, which makes them so called third/fourth generation of the Holocaust survivors. Their works deal with remembrance, trauma, although the artists themselves haven't directly experienced the tragedy of Holocaust. Regarding this, crucial will be the notion of “post-memory” introduced by Marianne Hirsch, which refers to the “memory” which has been transformed from older generations, from those who remember. Furthermore, some of works I wish to include in my research deal with the memory of specific sites marked and stigmatized by Shoah; therefore, I find it highly relevant to adapt above mentioned Pierre Nora's concept of *les lieux de mémoire* in those particular cases.

My aim is to trace down specific factors and dependencies that form the remembrance in consequently Hungarian and Polish art. I am particularly interested in video art; however, my aim is to include all kinds of artistic expression where the problems I wish to analyze are being manifested. An additional, complementary element of this research will focus on exhibitions, publications, and institutions with the purpose to strengthen the analysis of particular works, broaden the perspectives, and help to outline the condition of Hungarian and Polish art dealing with memory, remembrance, and trauma.