



Unsettled: Movable Monuments at the Cusp of German and Polish Heritage

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Abstract

Using methods stemming from anthropology and performance studies, this article focuses on the objects that remained in the official spaces of the so-called Recovered Territories – formerly German areas incorporated into Poland after World War II – even as population transfers changed the character of the region. By discovering and analyzing both presence and use of the German objects in Polish public institutions, the article zooms in on the liminal points of contact between the two legacies: pre- and post-1945. It is an experimental attempt to depart from the language of ownership and in turn to allow these objects to speak via movements and gestures they bring about.

Keywords: objects; displacement; heritage; archive; gesture; artifact; material culture

On July 11, 1948, more than three years after the first Polish settlers started taking up residence in formerly German Lower Silesia, Stefan Götze signed and published a “Decree

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to permanently remove remaining traces of Germanness”.¹ In his appeal, Götze, the Polish acting mayor of Cieplice Śląskie-Zdrój (formerly German Bad Warmbrunn), complained about obstinate traces of the German past that pervaded the public sphere.² In an attempt to raise local people to action, Götze said:

The three-year period of managing and administering these Lands should have been long enough for the traces of Germanness and all Germanic influences to disappear. Unfortunately, many of these traces still remain, they became commonplace and we are passing over them in everyday life, while many of them are again peeking out from under poor varnishes and paints. (*Zarządzenie*, 1948)³

His appeal was a reaction to an anticipated shift that had not happened fast enough, as if he noticed a sluggish fault in a newly-established chronology. By “Lands”, the acting mayor meant the areas that in the aftermath of World War II experienced a rupture of ownership. After the surrender of the Third Reich in May 1945, in August of the same year, the Potsdam Agreement came to determine the new borders of Central European countries. The vanquished were to cease their eastern territories, and Poland was to acquire large areas in the west and north. Among the lands that changed their host and were to be called by the Polish government “Recovered Territories” was Lower Silesia, a southwestern region, stretched between the swift streams of Western and Eastern Neisse Rivers, and embraced by the Sudetes Mountains. While the lives of millions of German and Polish people were uprooted, the objects of material culture too were spun out of their accustomed belonging. Simultaneously, under the supervision of the local officials like Götze, state-led initiatives of erasure and (re-)Polonization stripped “the Lands” of their previous looks.⁴

What pervades through the Decree is the separation between the past and current command of the area. Expunging whatever was left of the previous ruler meant preparing the ground for the new Polish generations to come. In Götze’s definition of German traces we find a myriad of objects – paintings, maps and plans, binders, prints, advertisements, objects of daily use, and plaques with German inscriptions, things that are located in various places, from restaurants and hotels to workplaces and homes. In short, the Decree

1 “Zarządzenie w celu trwałego usunięcia pozostałych śladów niemieczyny”, poster, July 11, 1948, published by the Ministry of Health. State Archives in Wrocław, branch in Jelenia Góra (*Zarządzenie*, 1948).

2 Since 1976, Cieplice Śląskie-Zdrój has been a district of Jelenia Góra. From the fourteenth century until 1945 this spa resort was known as Warmbrunn and Bad Warmbrunn, and for the most part it was in the hands of the Schaffgotsch family. Due to their relative proximity and importance in the region, the fates of these two places – Cieplice and Jelenia Góra – have been inextricably connected. See for instance: Borcz and Niedźwiecka-Filipiak (2017); Weczerka (1974).

3 All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

4 As written here, the prefix *re-* is in parentheses due to the contested nature of that process. Communists used the word “re-Polonization”, in line with the point that Poles were not simply Polonizing the lands but taking back what belonged to them in the past, under the Piast dynasty of the medieval period. This “historical right” is also expressed in the term “Recovered Territories”, here accompanied by quotation marks or preceded by the words “so-called” to convey the same questionable nature of the term. As my essay does not strictly deal with the complex processes of the ethnic cleansing and (re-)Polonization in the region, for an in-depth analysis and discussion of the topic see Thum (2011) and Service (2013).

targets the German past that, to his and the rest of the authorities' dismay, dares to *remain*. The objects are participating in the new lives of the settlers while the traces are actively "peeking out from under poor varnishes". "This state of affairs must radically change in our town!" shouts the Decree, and that change must be *permanent*. Yet, almost eighty years later, the traces stubbornly continue to endure albeit their meanings shift.

This essay is an exploration of the story told by "formerly-German" and "now Polish" objects that are located in public institutions, but that remain outside museums and archives, the conventional, official repositories of storytelling. What is the status of those objects and how do their meanings shift when freed of the shackles of narratives imposed from above? As if unsettled at a tricky midpoint between two legacies, all of them exist in the framework of a complex heritage of post-displacement areas. The choice to call the objects German, pre-German, formerly-German, or Polish assigns them a fixed ownership, taking away the potential affective charge that falls outside of nationalistic prescriptions. Meanwhile, their status seems to be much more complex and far more active. Strongly embedded in the present context, they are accessible for use to a wider public and as such they are still in motion – touched, moved around and interacted with, their provenance or belonging set aside.

The scholarship of the "Recovered Territories" keeps the objects, for the most part, inscribed in the framework of national belonging or highlights the difficulty of the process in which they are embraced. When Jan Józef Lipski confronts the forced inheritance of German legacy, he declares: "We are [...] the depositories of this heritage. This obliges us, with the full consciousness of the fact that we are guarding the heritage of German culture [...] to protect these treasures for the future, our future" (Lipski, 1981). Existing on a divided plane of "ours" vs. "theirs", the objects boil down to a deposit that is temporarily taken into custody; they are locked in a stronghold of nationally-driven divides. While, of course, these divisions have a practical dimension, they do not allow for the objects' movement outside of them. When Robert Traba (2014) talks about a foreign cultural landscape of the "Recovered Territories", he signals the necessity of "making it our own (*musimy [go] najpierw umoić*)". Here as well, the appeal to make the foreign familiar, is simply calling for making the elements of culture pass through a process between these fixed categories, from German, theirs, to Polish, ours. Highlighting a different angle of the objects from the German past, Anna Kurpiel and Katarzyna Maniak (Kurpiel & Maniak, 2024) focus on the relationship between them and the current inhabitants of the "Recovered Territories". The authors identify this connection as "kinship" and therefore shift the focus from top-down ownership to a horizontal relation of interaction. I wondered, therefore, whether the remaining objects of German origin in Polish public contexts are capable of generating interaction on their own. This essay, then, is an experiment allowing these objects to speak and looking at the movements and gestures they bring about. Their agency might also be gleaned from the descriptions which, at times, tend to lose their objective tone.

In this article, I journey through selected public institutions – a registry office, city council, theater and university – in a Lower Silesian town of Jelenia Góra (formerly German Hirschberg)

tracing visible – and at times also invisible – remnants of the past still in use in the present. For the purposes of my research, I perused the documents at the local branch of the Provincial Office for Historic Preservation (Wojewódzki Urząd Ochrony Zabytków) in order to find public institutions which still house so-called movable monuments (*zabytki ruchome*). I used these records as a roadmap for potential encounters with objects that carried on performing their function despite their historical weight. Through their active stance of being used in everyday routines of the institutions and yet being recognized as monuments, the objects occupy a compelling middle ground I then proceeded to visit. In my field research, in a gesture merging two different traditions coming together, I used methods stemming from anthropology (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Hirsch & O'Hanlon, 1995; Sanjek, 1990; A. Schneider, 2020) and performance studies (Gonquergood, 1989; R. Schneider, 2011). While the former gave me practical tools for extracting research material from interviews and real time fieldnotes, the latter sharpened my eye to gestures, interanimation and syncopated time. In an attempt to depart from the language of ownership, I scrutinized objects at the cusp of a “dissonant heritage”, paying attention to their unfixed and animated character.⁵ My analysis of the material and tactile traces of the past takes experimental agency and precedence over properly human German-Polish struggle for symbolic dominance.

This field research in a single city of the “Recovered Territories” does not aspire to create a uniform theory of a single space nor a whole region. The goal of this undertaking is to use this particular town as a case study and a possible methodological blueprint for post-displacement areas. By discovering and analyzing both presence and use of German objects in Polish public institutions, I zoom in on the liminal points of contact between the two legacies: pre- and post-1945 – attempting to trace movement. Echoing Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska’s characterization of the fickleness inscribed in the “formerly-German” category of objects as one “that not only unites, but also divides. Like everything in the ‘Recovered Territories’, it equally binds and disjoins, ties and untangles” (Ćwiek-Rogalska, 2020), I point to that precise mercurial movement of coming together and falling apart. It is an exploration that places itself somewhere between permanence and transience, at that quivering point in the middle which refuses to take sides.

In an inquiry at the intersection of archive and performance, I distinguish between the representational knowledge of objects enclosed in archives and museums, and the embodied knowledge that comes with regular use of that which carries the memory of the past. In this way, I understand the items stored in the repositories as descriptive and instrumental in creating the narrative of separateness, while those stored elsewhere and remaining in use –

5 Here I echo Erica Lehrer, who remarked that “the language of ownership and property is insufficient to both theorize and productively activate certain kinds of material culture present in museums and heritage sites” (Sendyka & Lehrer, 2019, p. 58), as well as Yael Navaro-Yashin’s work on non-human agency of objects (Navaro-Yashin, 2009, pp. 1–18). I am also alluding to John E. Tunbridge and Gregory John Ashworth’s work on dissonant heritage (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). My article, despite being inscribed in the complex webs of difficult or dissonant heritage, is not, however, an intervention in the discourse on the topic. For a thorough discussion on the subject see Macdonald (2008).

as objects prone to shifts of meaning. Thus, in my research I pay attention to interactive gestures that put these objects in motion, and, parallelly, the movements that these objects provoke and generate. The inconspicuous wheeze of a leather chair gently imploding under the weight of someone sitting down on it. But also: the gesture of carefully sliding it back into place. The beat of the city hall tower clock structuring the day of the town's inhabitants. But also: the gesture of winding it every two weeks, to ensure its accuracy. The distinct wooden scent of a paneled room that has not yet been extensively renovated. But also: the act of its maintenance to make it stay in good shape and last longer. A handful of points of contact between objects and their users, between the past and the present.

My functional unit of research in this piece is the category of "movable monuments" (*zabytki ruchome*), which works both on a practical and metaphorical plane. The original term emerges from the Register of Objects of Cultural Heritage (*rejestr zabytków*), where the objects in question are considered to be "mainly works of art [...]. In exceptional cases, [they] may also include objects (which are not necessarily works of art) that have high historical and scientific value, being a testimony to the degree of material culture" (Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, 2011). Importantly, these objects are not part of architecture – apart from so-called small architecture that adorns the walls, such as decorative rosettes, bas-reliefs, etc. – and are characterized by not being attached to a foundation and therefore can be moved. An entry in the Register of Objects of Cultural Heritage, quite obviously, subsumes an object as part of Polish heritage and grants it legal protection. As such, it is safeguarded from being destroyed, sold or discarded, but also from being modified in any shape or form or even renovated without the supervision of the local conservator. Initially, this term helped me navigate through what these public institutions hold and through furnishings that are under the conservator's protection, but soon I noticed the term's larger usefulness in defining the pre-1945 objects that carry on and are still being used – and function under an invisible veil of "historic protection" but are not, however, entered into the Register. Thus in this article I also borrow the term "movable monuments" and use it in its broader sense to designate formerly-German objects that remain and are still in use by Poles, creating the points of contact and interaction.

The lasting fragments of the past in the "Recovered Territories" are fragments of a bygone, German heritage. It seems fair to say, then, that without the community who cherished the objects as part of their national legacy and without direct agency over the objects left behind, the German heritage is in consequence "dead" and at best, defunct, confined to the inaccessible past. It is present as a written form of knowledge that does not live anymore. The Polish community, effectively in charge of that which endured from the past, is the one alive and defined by continuity. Just as in Lipski's take, the heritage is lodged in trust, immobilized, while those who inherit it are responsible for acting out its future. This brings to mind the dichotomy of archive and repertoire. While pondering the distinction between written and embodied forms of knowledge and memory, Diana Taylor distinguishes between archival memory and ephemeral repertoire. The former,

revealed in material traces of texts and documents, continues to hold power over memory, while repertoire, which encompasses performances, gestures and movement, “acts out” and transmits embodied knowledge (Taylor, 2007, pp. 19–20). The unconstrained set of gestures these movable monuments generate, therefore, constitutes a peculiar repertoire which bypasses the national divides while offering a non-human perspective.

In dealing with a similar set of questions, Rebecca Schneider points out that inanimate and “live” often occur not in distinction from one another but in direct relation to each other. In thinking about how embodied practice and gestures allow the live and the no-longer live to cohabitate, she thinks through the notion of interinanimation. Schneider departs from “The Extasie” by the English metaphysical poet John Donne, where he invents the word “interinanimation” to express the coupling of the living and motionless. In the poem, Donne talks about the souls of two lovers, whose bodies, like two stone statues, intertwine while their souls multiply. It is a point in which the two meanings, the live and the fixed, converge, and their coupling is mutually enlivening. Using the example of the poem, Schneider talks about instances where liveness and deadness are so tightly intertwined that the difference between them is practically impossible to adjudicate. Similarly, in the case of the two national legacies, coming together in the formerly German and now Polish lands, the points of memory – and heritage – are difficult to discern. Schneider argues, “The live, so often composed in the striking of stills, takes place in the place of the still; and the still takes place live” (R. Schneider, 2011, p. 145). In displacing the accents in the static-live dichotomy, she highlights a greater malleability of these terms and argues that “animate and inanimate, moving and stilled, are not in this sense diametrically opposed as much as part and parcel of an inter(in)animation” (R. Schneider, 2011, p. 145). And it is precisely this aspect of inter(in)animation that, in a larger and metaphorical sense, puts the two legacies into enlivening motion.

The separation of the two – the German past and Polish future – involved another set of gestures: those of erasure and rewriting. From the perspective of the budding leadership in Warsaw, any associations with Germanness were quite obviously negative. The Polish communist government, faced with the challenge of stitching the newly acquired lands into the consciousness of the newcomers, turned to the medieval legacy of the Piasts to emphasize the lands’ Polish roots.⁶ Despite the claim of the lands’ familiar roots, they still required an amount of “familiarizing”. The government regularly used the crutch of propaganda to convince fellow countrymen that the process of familiarizing the “familiar” was coming to a completion.⁷ Stefan Götze’s Decree was just a reiteration of similar calls

6 For more on this process see, for instance, Grzechnik (2017).

7 Of course, the erasure of traces belonging to the previous population did not solely belong in the nebulous universe of propaganda. The settlers themselves actively participated in such acts of obliteration. For instance, in 1947 the newspaper *Słowo Polskie* [The Polish Word] organized a competition entitled “We are removing the traces of Germanness”. Inhabitants of Wrocław sent the editors letters detailing the work that had been done, thus documenting gestures that precipitated this process. Among those who participated, book prizes were given out (*Słowo Polskie* (1947), no. 94, no. 99, no. 110, no. 150, etc.).

to action that were raised in all the so-called Recovered Territories and were meant to get rid of tangible signs of the German presence. Initial measures to do so were taken as early as the summer of 1945 (Service, 2013, p. 277). Some of those acts came to new Polish settlers quite naturally – destroying symbols of Nazism required no encouragement. However, 1948 was a year of intensified focus on “exorcizing” the German spirit out of the newly acquired lands since three years after the end of the war, Lower Silesia was preparing for an exciting summer of narrative-producing celebrations. “The Exhibition of the Recovered Territories” (Wystawa Ziem Odzyskanych) was about to begin in nearby Wrocław (formerly German Breslau) as a propaganda fest of success, demonstrating post-war progress and the vibrant Polishness of the area.⁸

A meager hundred and twenty kilometers southwest of Wrocław, “Dni Karkonoszy” – The Giant Mountains Days – were to take place and make its own claim on Polishness in August of the same year. Slightly more than ten years after their German counterparts enjoyed themselves at Hirschberg and “Riesengebirgswoche” (Giant Mountains Week) in celebration of the town’s 650-year anniversary, the inhabitants of Jelenia Góra threw a party to commemorate 840-year anniversary of the same town. The place suddenly grew almost two hundred years older in the span of a decade as if the turmoil of the war, mass displacement and reshaping of the social order fussed with its temporality, spurring the clock hand into dizzying revolutions. In point of fact, however, it was the incongruity of historical narratives that caused the town’s sudden aging. It was accompanied by the gesture of rewriting the previous tradition, or, to some extent, of adapting it. The posters released for both events (Fig. 1, Fig. 2) – both featuring the panorama of the old town and the mountains as well as text, the name of the town and dates placed



in almost exactly the same positions – bear a discreet, twisted resemblance. The interplay between the two – the gesture of interacting with that past legacy to create a new one – is a curious reiteration of the archival remains being put into motion and a good image to have in mind while departing on a search of tangible remains of the past.

Fig. 1. Poster announcing the “Giant Mountains Week” (Riesengebirgswoche) in July 1938, celebrating the 650-year anniversary of Hirschberg (present-day Jelenia Góra). The panorama of the old town is superimposed on the panorama of the mountains. The German caretaker of the town towers over it. “650 Jahrfeier Hirschberg 6. Riesengebirge Woche vom 16.-24. Juli 1938”, Jeleniogórska Biblioteka Cyfrowa, Książnica Karkonoska. <https://jbc.jelenia-gora.pl/publication/16454>

⁸ For more on “The Exhibition of the Recovered Territories” see Tyszkiewicz (1997).



Fig. 2. Poster announcing the “Giant Mountains Days” (Dni Karkonoszy) in August 1948, celebrating the 840-year anniversary of Jelenia Góra (formerly German Hirschberg). The panorama of the old town is superimposed on the panorama of the mountains. The flag featuring the Piast eagle towers above the town, and an archival scroll undergirds the market square. “Dni Karkonoszy: 840 lat Jeleniej Góry”, (1948) Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu, Oddział w Jeleniej Górze.

Extinguishing tangible memories of the departed German population was concomitant with erasure, but also with the redefinition of the property and belongings that stayed behind. The authorities passed two acts, issued on May 6, 1945 and March 8, 1946, to change their legal status. According to the former, any movable or immovable property that was previously owned or held by the German state was considered abandoned property, and the same applied to the property of German citizens (*Ustawa z dnia 6 maja 1945 r. o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych*, 1945; Dz.U. 1945 nr 17, poz. 97). The latter act stipulated that “all property of the German Reich [...] and German citizens, by operation of law, passes to the property of the [Polish] State Treasury” (*Dekret z dnia 8 marca 1946 r. o majątkach opuszczonych i poniemieckich*, 1946; Dz.U. 1946 nr 13, poz. 87). These two pieces of legislation paved the way for the legal takeover of property and delineated the new shapes of ownership but, of course, by no means influenced the objects’ fate and the ways in which they would integrate into the local heritage. In order to remain, the contents of homes, buildings and palaces left behind had to survive the legal erasure described above, but also ubiquitous destruction and looting – first by the Soviet Army, which took over the town on May 9, 1945, and then by Polish civilians. Thus, the objects that survived, managed to do it against all odds, astutely and quietly reintegrating into the fabric of public life in the post-displacement areas.

Cieplice Śląskie-Zdrój, now a district of Jelenia Góra, the very place targeted by Götze’s Decree, was once suffused with movable monuments. It is here, in a neoclassical palace built in 1784, that the prominent Schaffgotsch family resided for more than one hundred and sixty years. The history of these Silesian aristocrats in the region goes back almost 800 years, and their collection – made up of countless manuscripts, militaria, handicrafts, works of art, numismatics, rocks and minerals, taxidermied animals, herbaria, birds’ eggs and nests – crowded many corners of their local properties, their palace included.

The Schaffgotsch Palace is now mostly purged from its former abundant collection and, more importantly, from its very function. Since 1975 it has served as headquarters of the Wrocław University of Science and Technology branch. When I call the former palace to arrange my meeting with the formerly-German pieces of furniture and their current care-

takers, doubting whether one can simply walk in and investigate institutional furnishings, one of the first things I hear is “Of course. We are neither a locked fortress nor a museum, come on over” (author’s fieldwork, February 19, 2024). Curiously, the separation between the immobile repository (museum) and a more interactive space of knowledge formation establishes itself here in this very first exchange.

A few hours later, the university secretary greets me in her astoundingly opulent workplace. The Empire-style candelabra chandelier, with strings of glass beads and topped with a ceiling rosette, oversees our meeting from above. The secretary’s desk takes up one of the corners, right by a white round-tiled stove that has not been warm for years. Instead, the job of keeping the temperature high in the room now belongs to its neighbor – a humble radiator that stands next to it, mirroring functionality of its predecessor. The walls are covered in lemony silk tapestry with a floral pattern. They are replicas crafted to match the color, material and pattern of the ones they inevitably replaced. “The repeated pattern is the same, it’s just that Polish machines were too small to print it in the same intervals, that’s why it is a bit more crowded now,” explains the secretary (author’s fieldwork, February 19, 2024). Thus, the blueprint from the past and its adaptation, hand in hand envelop the room formerly known as a golden hall.

A couple of mustard-yellow nineteenth-century benches and chairs add to the dissonant character of the space and so do the arabesque-decorated mirrors, now reflecting the blinking screen of the secretary’s computer. Late eighteenth-century wardrobes, carved in oak wood, guard the room from both sides. Their style looks a little off, it is unclear whether they belonged here to begin with, are one of Schaffgotsch’s collection items, or simply came here from another part of town, earning their illustrious spot through old age. Regardless of their provenance, they look homey now and do not look much like artifacts of a bygone era. A flippant local paramedic, holding a rose in his mouth, stares at me from a calendar hung from one of the wardrobe’s sides, punctuating an already confused temporality. The two pieces of furniture both hold administrative files and colorful binders; the employees lock and unlock them with the very same keys their predecessors used, a small number dangling on each key. “This furniture earns its keep,” remarks the vice-director and we move on to the next room, equally suffused with old objects (author’s fieldwork, February 19, 2024). Another tiled stove, an enormous table standing on four stylized and ornamented legs, passing into animal paws with a ball in their claws, and a bench adorned with carvings of griffins and floral motifs all crowd the main office of the university’s director, who sits on an eighteenth-century wooden chair while responding to his emails. There is an old billiard table turned conference table that was found in the palace’s attic. Miscellaneous diplomas the university has gotten are tucked behind the glass of a nineteenth-century white display case, which most likely held Schaffgotsch’s antique tableware in the past. Light reflects off of multiple crystal mirrors and chandeliers. A decorative cabinet on six curly legs, decorated with a suspended ornament of stylized floral thread, holds university pennants and photos of the staff. A colorful Schaffgotsch

family tree looks down on it from above. And by the door hangs a photo of Count Friedrich, the last lord of the Warmbrunn estate, at one point the head of the second wealthiest family in Lower Silesia. Here in full hunter attire, rifle on his lap and mountains behind his back, like an image of a long lost relative, Count Friedrich contemplates his former domain (author's fieldwork, February 19, 2024).

Throughout my visit I hear the phrase "this is not a museum" twice more and indeed, each of these items performs a concrete function. Despite their protected status assigned by the local conservator, the objects are touched and used repeatedly throughout the work-day. While the elaborate halls serve as administrative offices, former bedroom quarters turned into a library and lecture halls where students acquire their skills in electrical and mechanical fields. With new tasks assigned and purpose rewritten, the objects are adapted to perform differently, and effectively they are interacted with in a distinct way – not as elements of the larger museum collection but as necessary parts of the university's routine (author's fieldwork, February 19, 2024).

Before the Polish government confiscated Schaffgotsch properties once the war was over and borders redrawn, the palace fell prey to the Soviet Army. Soon after arriving in Hirschberg / Jelenia Góra on May 8, 1945, the Soviets turned the opulent chambers into a one-of-a-kind hospital for soldiers suffering from venereal diseases. During their stay, to keep themselves warm, they used various furnishings as firewood (Kuzio-Podrucki & Woźnicki, 2007, p. 125). That part of the Schaffgotsch collection will remain forever unaccounted for, burnt into dust during the cold postwar winter. The rest of the objects fell prey to a different kind of fire. Communist authorities, without much of a paper trail, parceled out the remaining items to various repositories across Poland – museums, libraries and archives, implanting them into Polish heritage. Some of the items were distributed among the local public institutions. In fact, many of the objects I found in this search seem to come from the Schaffgotsch Palace.

The partial destruction and later dispersal of the Schaffgotsch collection feels personal to my interlocutors. During my visit at the university, all three of its employees brought up the Soviet burning of the palace's furnishings. The fire, like a mythical monster, entered our conversations and consumed the would-have-beens in a split second. Imagined chairs, broken by imagined Soviets, burned to ashes in the not-so-imagined – because placed in front of us – palace's tiled stoves.

Merely seven kilometers northeast of the Schaffgotsch Palace, along a straight road down the Jelenia Góra valley, a towering Art Nouveau building with two spires has carried on for a hundred and twenty years. It first housed *Kunst und Vereinshaus*, then turned into *Stadttheater Hirschberg*, to become the *Cyprian Kamil Norwid Theater* in 1945. Its Polish beginnings have become the stuff of legends; once it was even pompously called the place where Poland reemerged spiritually because it was here, not in ruined Warsaw, that Polish theatrical performances resurrected Polish culture from the rubble of war (Łaborewicz, 2019, p. 70). On the surface, the dominion of live performance does not seem to have many

movable monuments. One of the most prominent, the eighteenth-century stone sculpture of a slave woman, stands in the foyer as evidence of its own mobility. It was transported here right after the war from the building of the town's archive. Apart from that, all points to the lack of monuments as the institution has just undergone a thorough renovation and replaced practically all of its furnishings. What stayed were the spacious staircases, door handles, the foyer mirrors but not more than that, unless one digs deeper.

Ambitiously, the remodeling was supposed to erase it all and start anew, modernized with the building as its shell, a meager reminder of what came before. Soon, however, the significance of the past made itself felt. "It turned out that the spirit of the theater flees if the fabric of the theater is not preserved," explained the institution's director in narrating the changes that did not take place (author's interview with the director of Teatr im. Cypriana Kamila Norwida, Tadeusz Wnuk, February 20, 2024). With a slight change of material, the acoustic properties would change, and that was the modification nobody wanted to accept. And thus, with the help of engineers from the Wrocław University of Science and Technology who, as we know, work in the Schaffgotsch Palace, the designs, calculations and adjustments were made to keep the German-designed acoustics intact. From the materials used for renovating the stage, the fabric lining the curtain and the seats, to the decision to keep double windows, the renovation proceeded with one goal in mind: not to compromise the intangible and yet timeless quality of sound.

Whereas for the theater the disembodied acoustics figured as a point of contact with the past, the very palpable movable monuments it inherited turned out to be the most problematic legacy. Three Louis XVI-style chairs along with the bench of the same set, a tiny table and a black cabinet complete their lives in the strangest purgatory – theater's storage room. Currently they are not used to describe the past reality nor, in fact, are they used at all. Theoretically, they could be used as props and perform fully, on the stage, with all the performative gestures that would put them in enlivening motion. And yet, the status of a monument gave them protection incompatible with the institution they are stored in. To be listed as an item belonging to cultural heritage means not to be destroyed, but pieces of furniture used on the stage are constantly reworked by the institution's carpenters, their looks change and they are strengthened to hold even the roughest gestures of the actors. In this way, the theater's movable monuments are not movable at all. Their potential mobility ends here; given the lack of funding for renovation and the incongruity of their use, they constitute fragments of the past that is not interacted with, doomed to oblivion and therefore – "properly" erased.⁹

Every Saturday afternoon, elegantly dressed couples, their hearts beating with trepidation and attire rustling with solemnity, walk up the stairs of the local Town Hall. The Registry Office staff guides them and a handful of their guests to the brightly lit parlor, where the couples await their turn to get married in front of the city clerk. The party pours into

⁹ All the listed movable monuments in the theater storage room are speculated to have been part of the furnishings of the Schaffgotsch Palace in Cieplice.

this cozy toasting room and gravitates towards a magnificent table topped with green marble. The rectangular tabletop rests on the heads of four caryatids; at the bottom, two winged sphinxes guard the only harbinger of the ceremony to come – it's the *lêbes gamikôs*, nuptial vase used by ancient Greeks. This is also, most likely, the only reason why this set became tied to this room in the 1970s. A set of chairs and a sofa bench, all upholstered in white and red, stand against the walls, surrounding the table. Their armrests are supported by the heads of another duo of winged sphinxes made of bronze while their seats – by the heads of winged lions standing on a single paw each. But for those who want to sit down and take a breather there is some disappointing news. Each of the chairs bears a laminated sign in the colors of the town: “Display only. Do not sit.” There is no information about what the display is all about or what the story of the set is. It is only understood that one is dealing with monumental pieces of furniture here and they are important, they are here not to be used but to be looked at. Most waiting rooms have seating, but few have it for display only (author's fieldwork, February 21, 2024).

Before the party moves to the room next door and the ceremony starts, few might also notice a dresser perched quietly in one of the corners. Its ledge is decorated with gilded bronze ornamentation. Floral motifs, laurel leaves and griffins seem to be discreetly resembling similar motifs found in the Schaffgotsch Palace in Cieplice. In the quiet of the mid-week morning, I replay the plausible wedding scenarios in my head and consult the conservator's records that describe in detail all the movable monuments of the Registry Office. The documents do not point directly to the time and place from which the toast room's furnishings came from, but they do speculate about their provenance. The bracket entitled “object's history” states: “probably belonged to the furnishings of the Schaffgotsch Palace” (Conservator's records, Urząd Miasta Jelenia Góra). Their source – a mystery; the objects do not tell their story but are incorporated into the fabric of the Registry Office as silent witnesses of the emotional anticipation and joyous unwinding of the before and after of the locals' wedding ceremonies. Similarly to Schaffgotsch's intention but perhaps coincidentally, they pulsate with an analogous purpose as before – they become collectibles intended for being stored and admired.

When the time for exchanging vows comes and the party gathers in front of the city clerk, this minimalistic wedding hall offers very little: there is just a desk and nine chairs – two for the newlyweds, one for the city clerk, and six for the guests. The chairs look all the same and they are scarce for a reason (Fig. 3, Fig. 4). They are the only remaining ones from a different time but the same place. The chairs, all a hundred years old, are upholstered with leather, and their backrests bear the town's former coat of arms, the image dating back to 1599 (Basatygo, 2010). In the years 1924–1945, all of them served upstairs as furnishings of the Town Council, accompanying councilors while they were making legally binding decisions affecting the locals. Now, once again, intertwined with a performative – and legally binding – act of marriage, they are sat on, moved around and subsumed into the fabric of the ceremonies.



Fig. 3; Fig. 4. Former German Town Hall leather chairs bearing the town's old (1599) coat of arms. Now – as part of the furnishings of the wedding hall of the Polish City Hall. Photos by Agata Tumiłowicz-Mazur, February 2024.

The Registry Office is located on the ground floor of the Town Hall, erected in 1744–1747 and designed by Christoph Gottlieb Hedemann (1703–1776). The building stands proudly at the center of the market square and also houses the Town Council. This impressive centerpiece of the square is in some ways the most magnetic remnant of the past, breathing through the stones that endured more than two hundred and seventy years. The arcades surrounding the market on four sides, on the other hand, did not stand the test of time and gradually crumbled. They were rebuilt in 1965. Things progressed, buildings underwent renovations and so did the town council meeting room, which posed a curious conundrum to the decision makers. Renovating a room that carries governmental weight, suggested leaning on and honoring local tradition. That meant, in consequence, restoring one of the room's previous looks. In confronting the past, the decision makers were faced with three choices. Restoring the Polish heritage of the place would be concomitant with bringing back the communist appearance of the meeting room, and that aspect was not welcome. Moving back in time to pre-communist Hirschberg meant referring to its infamous Nazi period. It is therefore the appearance from 1924 that became a blueprint for the meeting room's renovation (author's fieldwork, February 21, 2024). In this bizarre dance between temporalities, the photographic remains depicting the German past were used to create a new, historically-charged and layered Polish tradition.

As if to complete the look, one of the windows in the meeting room has two town crests, the surviving German one in the right pane and a newer Polish one in the left (Fig. 5). In fact, originally there were two German crests adorning the window; when the Soviets took over the town in May 1945, they shattered the one in the left pane (author's fieldwork, February 21, 2024). Thus the window, in its materiality, encapsulates the whole twentieth-century arc of the town's history. The remaining German crest gently signals the absence of its identical counterpart which, in turn, anchors the Soviet ephemeral gesture of breaking it in place. The invisible and yet palpable motion facilitated what came next: the Polish act of replacement and adaptation. The present-day deer in the crest, its color more saturated, stands more firmly on its four legs, and yet it does not confront its predecessor but looks on in the same direction. In the end, the two crests are placed side by side in a dance of two traditions mirroring one another. Their temporalities intertwined, both legacies are spun into an enlivening motion and harmonize in a dissonant act of inter(in)animation.



Fig. 5. Stained glass window in the town council meeting room, where three layers of the town's history come together. The surviving German crest in the right pane, the absence of an identical one in the left, a result of Soviet vandalism, and finally, the Polish crest currently adorning the left pane. Photo by Agata Tumiłowicz-Mazur, February 2024.

A rectangular tower and an octagonal cupola that crowns the baroque-style Town Hall, hold the four faces of the clock, its mechanism diligently ticking on the inside. It lets the inhabitants know whenever a quarter of an hour passes. For hundreds of years, the everyday routines of the inhabitants have relied on the very same gears, pendula and springs that measure the passage of time, without regard for political upheavals. Until today the mechanism does not use electricity but is moved by the gravitational power of weights steadily going down. The strikes are and have been the cozy sonic background of the old town. With the consistent gesture of a diligent caretaker who visits it every two weeks, the clock is hand-cranked, and it is through that gesture that the town runs on time set by those that came before; those who are no longer there.

The post-1945 story of the so-called Recovered Territories is stretched on a handful of imperfect gestures. From erasure through replacement and redefinition, the remains of the previous population endure while blurring the accepted temporalities and the notion of a homogenous heritage. The objects that continue on in the public institutions of the post-displacement areas, subsumed under the protected category of movable monuments, are themselves capable of provoking gestures of interaction. In this way, these unique objects become like overpasses, capable of escaping the language of ownership. Such interactions are acted out not only on the surface level of repeated use, but also on a plane of inspiration, mirroring and adaptation. Here, posters and events are starting points for new traditions, pieces of furniture are subsumed as essential elements of official ceremonies, and symbols echo their dissonant similarities to their predecessors. The remnants of the past and elements of present legacies inter(in)animate one another, exploding the clear-cut separation of narratives, and offering points of contact that traverse temporal and experiential divides.

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Chwiejne. Zabytki ruchome na styku niemieckiego i polskiego dziedzictwa

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł jest poświęcony zabytkom ruchomym, które pozostały w przestrzeniach oficjalnych na terenie tzw. Ziem Odzyskanych – dawnych terenów niemieckich wcielonych do Polski po II wojnie światowej. Stosując metody badań antropologicznych i studiów nad performatywnością (*performance studies*), autorka odkrywa i analizuje zarówno obecność, jak i wykorzystanie niemieckich przedmiotów w polskich instytucjach publicznych. Artykuł skupia się na stanie liminalnym analizowanych zabytków, które znajdują się na styku spuścizny okresu sprzed 1945 roku, a dziedzictwa okresu późniejszego. Praca jest eksperymentalną próbą odejścia od języka własności i, w rezultacie, próbą sprawienia, aby owe przedmioty mogły przemówić poprzez działania i gesty, które wywołują.

Słowa kluczowe: przedmioty; przesiedlenie; dziedzictwo; archiwum; gest; artefakt; kultura materialna

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