

i s r f b u l l e t i n

Issue XVIII

Here & Now Then & There

Edited by Dr Lars Cornelissen

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**Here & Now
Then & There**

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EDITORIAL

Dr. Lars Cornelissen

ISRF Academic Editor

We are accustomed to thinking of time as a unidirectional phenomenon, where past, present and future are ordered in a linear way and where the boundary between the then and the now is reliably impermeable. Mapped onto our self-conception as social scientists, this view of time can easily be translated into equally impermeable disciplinary frontiers: the historian concerns herself with the past, whilst the political scientist or the sociologist is dedicated to studying the present.

There are situations, however, where this neat and intuitive notion of temporality begins to falter. In particular, there exist spaces where the pull of the past is so strong that its distinction from the present comes to fade away. One could think of memorial sites, archives, monuments, graveyards and archaeological digs—all of which are sites that, either by design or by accident, function as a means for the past to bleed into the present. Here, the division that separates the now from the then ceases to be a boundary and becomes a threshold, inviting us to remember, study or simply acknowledge the events and people that made us who we are today. As our customary understanding of time is thus unsettled, crucial questions present themselves. How are we to make sense of the complex relationship between spatiality and temporality? What are the origins of our everyday understanding of the passage of time? And, more narrowly, to what extent do disciplinary boundaries stand in the way of finding satisfactory answers to these questions?

The topic for the ISRF's 2018 Annual Workshop was 'Relating Pasts and Presents'. Co-organised with and hosted by the Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, this Workshop sought to bring social scientists and historians of science together in order to reflect precisely on the complex relationship between the past and the present. Key to this discussion was the necessity for, and the meaning

of, interdisciplinarity in the pursuit of this topic. The contributions to this Bulletin have all come out of this Workshop, and this is why each grapples, albeit in highly diverse ways, with complex intersections of the temporal and the spatial.

In her contribution, Athena Hadji proposes to view the graffiti and street art that today litters the walls of Athens not as an ephemeral phenomenon but as a means for local communities and individuals to express their grievances, hopes and desires. As an aesthetic practice, graffiti is capable of inscribing forms of experience into the cityscape that otherwise might not readily find public representation. Hadji thus holds out that instances of street art should be interpreted as repositories of (collective) memory, indexing the manner in which urban communities experience their own pasts.

Although he too is interested in what imaginaries of urban life can tell us about present-day culture, Paul Dobraszczyk turns his attention to the ways in which the future, rather than the past, tends to blend into the present. Looking at a range of cultural texts, including a spate of recent films as well as several mid-century literary works, his article seeks to grasp how our culture has come to imagine urban life in a post-apocalyptic future. What he finds is that although many such texts seem to be permeated with anxieties over impending civilizational collapse, some of them also contain glimmers of a differently imagined future, one that disrupts dominant renderings of how human and non-human life might coexist in and after the Anthropocene.

For her part, Giulia Rispoli is similarly intrigued by interpretative models that are disruptive of dominant epistemological frameworks. Her contribution engages with the work of Russian physician Alexander A. Malinovsky, alias Bogdanov (1873–1928), who, during the interwar period, devised a science of organisation that he labelled “tektology.” Seeking to decipher the structural regularities that determine both living and non-living systems, Bogdanov forged a complex philosophical framework attuned to the timeless regularities underpinning systems large and small. In so doing, he was driven to conceptualise time and space in a way that defies their conventional understanding in Western epistemology. In the tektological model, only timeless, structural regularities matter, and thus time becomes detached from such

notions as linearity or progress.

Chris Hann draws our attention away from the manner in which the past forces itself into the present and invites us to contemplate how constructions of and narratives about the past can be mobilised in the present. Focusing particularly on post-Soviet processes of nation-building in Eastern Europe, he argues that many comparatively young states have had to establish a sense of national identity on the basis of more or less imagined traditions. This process is especially noticeable in the rhetoric of Viktor Orbán, whose efforts to conjure a sense of national identity draw upon a colourful palette of real and imagined historical legacies, ranging from (largely unscientific) assertions about the Turkic roots of the Hungarian language to sweeping statements about Hungary's essentially Christian heritage, even if these two claims do not fit together comfortably. Here, then, the uncertainties of the present generate a highly selective attitude to the past, which comes to figure as a repository for shards of identity that may be pieced together in somewhat haphazard ways.

The task of closing this Bulletin falls to Rachael Kiddey—an unfamiliar task for somebody who for the past few years has primarily introduced, rather than concluded, ISRF Bulletins. Indeed, Rachael left the Foundation in late 2018, exchanging its “inclusive, nurturing, and creative” environment (as she puts it) for a post-doctoral research project entitled *Migrant Materialities*, to be undertaken at the University of Oxford. She has written us a heart-warming note recounting her time at the ISRF and setting out her plans for the future.

HERE, AND THERE... NOW, AND THEN...

Dr. Louise Braddock

ISRF Director of Research

In 2019 the ISRF is now entering its second decade, and with it an academic context that could not have been predicted at the time of its foundation. Within this changing context the ISRF continues to adapt and invent; this is its business-as-usual. Initiatives developed in the first ten years include support of independent scholarship, flexible grants funding for small projects, promoting ISRF-linked workshops and study days, and most recently, a competitive research residencies call for 2019. All this has brought an increasingly reflexive approach on our part to investigating the 'how' of interdisciplinarity. The articles in this Bulletin emanate from the ISRF's 2018 Annual Workshop partnership with the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, which allowed social scientists and historians, including historians of science, to dissolve any disciplinary divide between the 'here and now' and the 'there and then'. The theme of such necessary flexibility of thought is introduced by the Bulletin's new Academic Editor, Lars Cornelissen and taken up in the parting reflections of his predecessor Rachael Kiddey on her time with the ISRF.

The marker of a decade itself prompts reflection on the past—on what has been achieved in the first ten years and what the ISRF has, as a result, become so far. Most notably, in that time over 60 fellows have been competitively awarded, usually 1-year grants to buy out academic time. These are much valued, increasingly sought-after and often gratefully, and sometimes wistfully, remembered. Also as I like to point out, fellowship, even if optionally, is for life; we do not forget you! But, neither do former fellows forget us, it seems. There has been an exemplary response from fellows asked to participate in a new initial triage process for the grants competitions. This process will come into play when, as now sometimes happens, application numbers are too great for me to read all of them. By calling on former fellows to help

HERE, AND THERE... NOW, AND THEN...

with this task the ISRF will, I hope, be able to maintain its founding aims and values in the face of change. A collegial Fellowship which can help carry the ISRF's ethos in collective memory is an important achievement in this respect. One change that this year will bring is the appointment, for 2020, of a new Director of Research to take over the ever-adaptive business of realising the intentions with which the ISRF was founded. The support of the scholars we fund, fellows and others, is always much enjoyed by the team, and by me as Director. This part of our history will be a valuable resource for the Director who will be leading the academic work of the foundation in the future.

CONTEMPORARY GRAFFITI AND STREET ART IN THE CITY OF ATHENS

Narrating Pasts and Presents

Dr. Athena Hadji

ISRF Independent Scholar Fellow 2018–19.

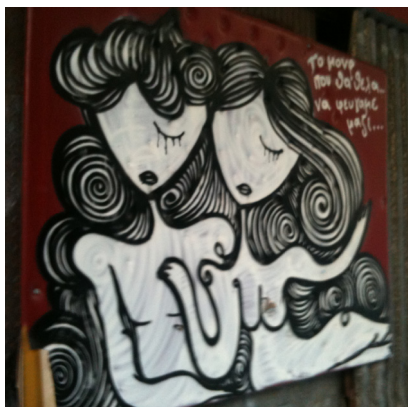
My background in archaeology and history of prehistoric art have taught me that the past is certainly a foreign country, as L. P. Hartley would have it.¹ However, they don't really "do things differently there", to paraphrase the great writer.² The past certainly informs and often distorts our view of the present, including our perception of attitudes toward contemporary urban space. This brief narrative is a story about an art historian and social anthropologist with a training in archaeology who seeks to unravel the entanglement of art, culture and society in contemporary Athens, Greece, through the inscription (literal and metaphorical) of its multiple and simultaneous realities on the walls—and various other surfaces, public and otherwise—of the city.

My interest in the project sprang from a long-term theoretical involvement in everyday—mundane—practices, whether in prehistory (as part of my archaeological research agenda) or contemporary life and culture (as part of my anthropology teaching and research). The current situation in Greece, especially Athens, amidst a financial crisis that spread across the south of Europe (from Spain to Cyprus), but struck Greece especially hard in the past decade or so, is ripe for a comprehensive and balanced anthropological inquiry into the politics of the present—as well as past political stances, not solely official politics, but also, mostly, the political (under)currents that mandate the

1. L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (The New York Review of Books, 1953), 17.

2. Ibid.

CONTEMPORARY GRAFFITI AND STREET ART IN THE CITY OF ATHENS



Clockwise from top left: Piece by artist Sonke, found in Athens downtown; 'Lobotomy' stencil, found on Athens University Campus; 'I heart police' stencil, found on Athens University Campus; 'Candle' piece found in Koukaki neighbourhood, Acropolis area.

All photos by author.



'Graduated from the street' piece, found on Athens University Campus. Artist unknown.

average citizen's stance and attitude.

Nowadays, more than ever, the necessity for a reconsideration of our relationship with the city emerges urgently. Athenian graffiti and street art until recently lagged behind developments in the international metropolises (Berlin, where the first self-proclaimed "Museum of Street Art" opened recently, New York, London). However, during the past few years, the so-called "crisis years", admittedly a time of widespread degradation, abandonment and, if I might borrow this term from geology, *desertification* of formerly vital parts of the city, street art has emerged as a fertile power of expression with political, social, historical, mythological and romantic axes, as seen in the accompanying images. Graffiti artists and writers, as active members of the urban community and agents in the urban space, echo the heartbeat of a city that insists on living and holds on to its right to live in ways sometimes spasmodic, but always deeply human.

Art is usually considered in isolation, as an axiomatically elevated category among human endeavors. At least, this is a justification for the discipline of History of Art. On the other hand, anthropology studies all aspects of communal human life in an endeavor to decipher norms, patterns and—on the threshold of the Anthropocene—understand what it is that makes us distinctly human but also what can be done to prevent a downfall that sometimes feels inevitable nowadays (climate change, xenophobia, extremism in theory or in action, a feeling that the world is closing down upon us rapidly and irreversibly). My project brought together the two disciplines, employing the anthropological method of inquiry to study a mostly spontaneous, peculiar genre that has as of late partly entered the corpus of official Art History: graffiti and street art. In the past, we tended to restrict the use and study of symbols and symbolic manifestations of human life to the "Other" and forget at times that we too are beings living lives imbued in symbolism and acts thereof. It is especially welcoming to witness distinct disciplines converging toward the common goal of understanding the urban condition in a coherent and inclusive way.

Graffiti and street art have a long history, starting from scribbling on immobile surfaces (walls) or more frequently mobile objects (ceramic shards) already in antiquity. The term 'graffiti' itself, in its



Outdoor gallery in the Metaxourgeio area. Photo by author.

present understanding, dates from the 19th century, coined to denote these scribbles upon the walls of the Roman city of Pompeii in Italy, then newly-rediscovered and systematically studied for the first time. Modern graffiti appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s on the East Coast of the USA (especially Philadelphia, followed by New York), and quickly spread in Europe. Since, it has emerged as an independent, spontaneous, mostly illegal, albeit legitimate art genre and has found its way into art books, gallery exhibitions, auction houses and collectors' possessions (the work of British artist Banksy is the most well-known and financially rewarded case). However, perhaps due to the obscurity surrounding the legal aspect of the practice and premise of street art, academic attention was only recently drawn to it.

Vanity lies in the heart of artistic intention, the artists craving to be seen and shown in an urban condition of collective anonymities. The proliferation of graffiti and street art renders a *par excellence* competitive community even more so. In the past few years, Athens has emerged as a global trendsetter in street art, whereas until recently



'I was poor before it was cool' by Lebaniz Blonde, found in downtown Athens. Photo by author.

it only sporadically showed signs of awareness of the international graffiti scene. This brought about a greater acceptance of the practice and reality of walls as fields of urban narratives but also a liberty in the application of graffiti and art compositions alike anywhere in the city and has generated a dialogue, sometimes debate on the artistic merit and/or vandalistic aspect of graffiti and street art.

As far as the ensuing crisis is concerned, the financial aspects have been way overstressed at the expense of the ethical, cultural and aesthetic dimensions—where aesthetics is derived from ethics, in a Platonic view of human nature. The study of graffiti and street art is a hitherto unutilised tool for approaching real-life problems, such as aggression, poverty, isolation, substance abuse, violence, alienation, xenophobia, polarisation, to name but a few. Besides the kind of formal knowledge we produce and provide to our students of architecture, anthropology, art and archaeology about the city and the urban condition, there is another kind of knowledge; the kind that is inferred from living in the city and experiencing the (built) environment as a

multisensory enterprise with a multifaceted meaning.

Through my analysis, graffiti and street art are examined, studied, analysed and presented as a collective and powerful means of navigating and negotiating the urban condition amidst rapidly changing financial, social, political and above all cultural circumstances. The project delves into the mechanisms of the social memory of space, in order to unravel the kind(s) of knowledge that occur as a result of the use and abuse of architecture, especially iconic urban architecture in its most extreme manifestations. According to Pierre Nora, “we speak so much of memory, because there is so little of it left”.³ As an inscription and processing device of information, memory is vital for the evolution of the individual and, in its collective form, for the making of history, establishing the authority of the past within communities. Street art is usually connected with the ephemeral due to its fleeting nature; in a methodological twist, I study it as a means for the preservation of (collective) memory.

In a longer-term perspective, urban sprawls are evident worldwide and projections for the immediate future include numbers of people unheard of until recently who will inhabit a single city of the kind denoted by Constantine Doxiadis in 1968 as ‘ecumenopolis’. In relation to the *crisis-scape* that has drastically shaped our views of our socio-cultural milieu, a new and thus far unnamed, albeit not unseen, conflict emerges. In a landscape of financial, ethical, social and cultural crisis the issue at stake is how we can protect the city and its inhabitants under these rapidly changing circumstances. Medical research has shown that unloved, untouched and neglected human bodies become bodies of ailment. In a direct analogy, cities neglected become ailing, aching bodies. The wounded city as a resilient body is an avenue ripe for exploration. Amidst shifts—paradigm, institutional, population, climate and otherwise—education can and must act as a bulwark to the advent of the a-historical, the obliteration of memory, and the exile of the past to the land of myth. This, then, is the contribution I hope to make with the study and analysis of contemporary graffiti and street art.

3. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.

THE ENTROPIC CITY¹

Dr. Paul Dobraszczyk

ISRF Independent Scholar Fellow, 2015–16

Cities are always on the verge of ruin. If maintenance of the built environment ceases, it inevitably slides towards decay. This tendency for all materials to degrade over time is known as entropy and is a fundamental part of the branch of physics known as thermodynamics, which measures the degree of disorder within any closed system. Entropy suggests that ruins are always present and also that ruin is a process rather than an object—a verb rather than a noun.

Thinking about entropy and the city is particularly prescient; for, in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis and the bankruptcy of many property developers, thousands of structures around the world—from individual buildings to entire cities—have been left incomplete: brand new ruins whose futures are already radically uncertain (see figure 1).² With a characteristic visual lexicon of exposed breeze blocks, skeletal concrete frames, and concrete pillars sprouting tendrils of steel, new ruins do not conform to the conventional Romantic aesthetic of ruins—the slow decay of materials like stone, brick and timber that speaks of lost pasts; rather, they seem to be stuck in a suspended future. Yet, in a remarkably direct way, in their open display of such uncertainty, unfinished structures represent, albeit in extreme form, the condition found in most cities, that is, the constant churning of creation and destruction; they are, in effect, a form of construction, but one that has been frozen in time.

1. This article is a revised extract from *Future Cities: Architecture and the Imagination*, published by Reaktion Books in February 2019. I'm grateful to the publisher for permission to re-use this material. I am also indebted to the ISRF for an Independent Scholar Fellowship in 2016 which enabled me to begin the research for this book.

2. See Paul Dobraszczyk, *The Dead City: Urban Ruins and the Spectacle of Decay* (IB Tauris, 2017), pp. 189–213, for an investigation of new ruins in Spain, Britain and Italy.



Figure 1: Unfinished public plaza in Valdeluz, Spain, abandoned in 2008. Photograph by author, 2015.

Entropic decay also represents a threat to our sense of significance as both individuals and collectively as a species; one that feeds into the anxieties that underpin many cinematic visions of future cities, such as London in *28 Days Later* (2002) and New York in *I Am Legend* (2007) where the empty city hides monstrous threats, namely infected hordes of post-humans (see figure 2). Deserted cities may also serve as vehicles to voice anti-urban feeling, such as in Clifford Simak's 1944 story 'The City', in which a future city is abandoned by its inhabitants in favour of a more wholesome and politically autonomous pastoral existence. In a similar vein, the future city in Charles Platt's novel *The Twilight of the City* (1974) falls victim to a global economic collapse which sees its descent into inter-factional warfare, the central protagonist eventually finding a new and more stable life in the countryside.

More ambivalent is J. G. Ballard's 'The Ultimate City', the longest of his many short stories, published in 1978, and which sets a future Garden City—seemingly an ecological urban utopia run on renewable energy—against its defunct counterpart—a 20th-century metropolis powered by petroleum that now lies in ruins. The story centres on the figure of

Figure 2: Still from *28 Days Later* (2002), in which London seems, to this survivor, to be emptied of its inhabitants.



Halloway, who turns his back on the bucolic but puritanical Garden City in favour of the freedom and thrill of the metropolitan ruins, where he escapes to in order to repair its abandoned cars and restore electricity to its decaying buildings and street lights. What is unusual about Ballard's tale is the way in which it suggests the emergence of a post-urban world after the industrial city has ended. Throughout the story, Halloway is attracted to the detritus left over from industrial technologies, waste with its own 'fierce and wayward beauty':

Halloway was fascinated by the glimmering sheen of the metal-scummed canals, by the strange submarine melancholy of drowned cars looming up at him from abandoned lakes, by the brilliant colours of the garbage hills, by the glitter of a million cans embedded in a matrix of detergent packs and tinfoil, a kaleidoscope of everything that one could wear, eat and drink ... the undimmed beauty of industrial wastes produced by skills and imaginations far richer than nature's, more splendid than any Arcadian meadow. Unlike nature, here there was no death.³

At once terrifying and exhilarating, this deliberately provocative invitation to find beauty in industrial wastes would clearly appal those who are currently pushing for cities to become greener and cleaner. Yet, in their startlingly alien forms and textures, industrial wastes in

3. J. G. Ballard, 'The Ultimate City' (1978), in *The Complete Short Stories of J. G. Ballard* (W. W. Norton, 2010), p. 915.

this story offer up a vision of something quite different, namely the possibility of a utopian reworking of industrial disaster rather than a repudiation of it. Clearly, Ballard was concerned that simply forsaking energy-guzzling cities in favour of greener alternatives would not solve all of humanity's problems, particularly the destructive impulses that lie at the heart of Halloway's desire to leave his eco-paradise.

Ballard's story provides a provocative take on how we might relate more positively to the wastes of our own contemporary cities. As demonstrated by the colossal garbage vortexes in the world's oceans—seas of plastic created by the 8 million tonnes of discarded waste that end up there every year—our urban detritus is fundamentally altering the ecosystem of the planet. Indeed, some estimate that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the world's oceans than fish.⁴ It may seem downright unethical to find beauty in these toxic wastes; yet we don't solve anything by merely discounting them from having any value. For those plastics in our oceans share with the wastes in 'The Ultimate City' a permanence that means they will never die. When all natural life in the sea is gone, plastic will still remain as the 'new' nature that never perishes, affecting the earth's ecosystems for tens of thousands of years to come.

These incorruptible wastes seem to defy the entropic principle that governs most conceptions of future ruined cities. These are often imagined as places in which nature returns, creating a verdant post-urban world without humans. Made popular by James Lovelock's influential Gaia hypothesis, first put forward in the 1970s, the earth is widely understood today as a self-regulating ecological system that will go on flourishing without us, hence the popularity of televisual and cinematic renderings of the world without humans, such as *The Future Is Wild* (2002), *Life after People* (2008), *I Am Legend* (2007) and *Oblivion* (2013). In *Oblivion* a future alien invasion has left the Earth ravaged by the aftereffects of nuclear war and geological upheavals caused by the destruction of the Moon. More notable for its spectacular renderings of a ruined New York City than its derivative plot, the film provides

4. Graeme Wearden, 'More plastic than fish in the sea by 2050, says Ellen MacArthur,' *The Guardian*, 19 January 2016. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jan/19/more-plastic-than-fish-in-the-sea-by-2050-warns-ellen-macarthur>.

startling images of the city's skyscrapers embedded in canyons, its sports' stadiums and cultural buildings sunk into the ground, and, in one of the film's publicity posters, the Empire State Building engulfed by a waterfall, an image that directly recalls one of artist Tsunehisa Kimura's images published in *Visual Scandals by Photomontage* in 1979 (see figure 3). Although creating a spectacular fusion of the human and the non-human and providing a strong sense of how the ruins of the human world will inevitably interact with the nature that might engulf them in the future, the film nevertheless glosses over this interaction by presenting it in almost geological terms, as if the skyscrapers of New York have become the natural cliffs and canyons they have so often been compared with. The reality of any future collision of nature and cities will almost certainly look a lot messier and far less beautiful than *Oblivion's* seductive vision.

More prescient in terms of contemporary awareness of the Anthropocene is Colm McCarthy's 2016 film *The Girl with All the Gifts*. In a future London where the human population has been decimated

Figure 3: Left: an image from Tsunehisa Kimura's Visual Scandals by Photomontage (1979); right: publicity poster for Oblivion (2013).





Figure 4: Still from *The Girl with all the Gifts* (2016), showing toxic vegetation enveloping the Post Office Tower in London.

by a fungal infection that turns its victims into flesh-eating zombies, a group of survivors seek contact with Beacon, a large military base presumed to be a safe area. The group are led by Melanie—the girl of the film’s title—an infected child who has developed some tolerance to the fungus so that she is able to partially resist her cannibalistic urges. Like many in the post-apocalyptic genre, the film’s plot is well-worn, the tired zombie trope being the most obviously derivative element of its narrative setup. Yet its portrayal of how human life might adapt to a catastrophic pandemic is a far cry from the reassuring ‘hero’ mould of similar films like *Oblivion* and *I Am Legend*. Here, a future London has been overtaken by both native vegetation and a deadly new plant that sprouts from the decomposing bodies of the infected humans. Spiralling up the Post Office Tower in a dense vine-like formation, these plants support seed pods that threaten to create a new and far deadlier air-borne version of the infection that would undoubtedly wipe out all the remaining humans on earth (see figure 4). The film concludes with Melanie forsaking her non-infected companions and setting light to the seed pods, thus ending the era of humanity (bar one lone female) but leaving behind a group of children who, like her, are infected but are also able to be civilised. Recalling the invasion of London by homicidal plants in John Wyndham’s novel *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), the film cleverly disrupts conventional notions of how

the human and non-human might interact in a future ruined city.

As all of these examples show, the detritus produced by the city and its inhabitants might be reconfigured into something beautiful, if no doubt disturbingly so. Whether we like it or not, our wastes—inorganic and organic alike—are just as much part of what counts as urban nature today as that which we cultivate in our parks and gardens. Only by forging connections between these ruins and the world in which they sit can we begin to untangle and work with the nature we are all co-producing.

THE SPACE-TIME CONTINUUM AND THE TEKTOLOGICAL ORGANISATION OF THE EARTH-SYSTEM

Dr. Giulia Rispoli

Postdoctoral Fellow, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science

In 1829 the Russian philosopher Petr Cadaev wrote in one of his *Filosovskye Pisma* (Philosophical Letters) that impressive vastness and uniformity are distinctive characteristics of the Russian territory. On the contrary, the presence of mountains has facilitated the internal division of Western Europe into many countries and states based on their different geographical environments. Indeed, unlike the cultural tradition that emerged in the Western world, in which the perception of time seems to be very significant, in the Russian cultural experience, space is the primary and dominant category through which to interpret and perceive external reality. Accordingly, the interpretation of space-time as a continuum suggests the dominance of the first component over the second.¹

Along the same line, two major Russian historians of the 19th century, Sergey M. Solovyev and Vasily O. Kljuchevskij, insisted on the non-European geographical Russian space and the significance that this perception of space has had on the interpretation of the historical development of Russia. In his *History of Russia*, Solovyev described the “vast flatland” and the “enormous distance” that extends from the White Sea to the Black Sea and from the Baltic to the Caspian as a boundless territory in which a traveller may not experience any sharp distinction, any real borders, but only the cohesiveness of the landscape.²

1. Petr Cadaev, *Polnoe sobranie schinenij i izbrannye pis'ma* (Complete Works and Correspondences) vol. 1 (Moscow, 1991), 323.

2. Vittorio Strada, *La questione russa: Identità e destino* (Padova 1991), 131–132.

The characteristics of Russian geography made possible the development of a distinct intellectual tradition in the natural sciences, which is characterised by unique conceptions of space, time and boundaries. This uniqueness is probably at the base of Russia's impressive career in the Earth sciences, which reached its peak between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Such a legacy produced a particular attitude among Russian naturalists who adopted an uncommon approach to the investigation of the history of Earth and the history of Life on Earth, treating them as an integrated subject. In other words, geo-history and life-history are two parts of one system of complementary correlations regulated by the process of "co-evolution".

The work and ideas of the physician Alexander A. Malinovsky, alias Bogdanov (1873-1928), is a particularly interesting example of this intellectual legacy in which the dominance of space over time co-exists with a co-evolutionary and historical approach. Bogdanov proposed a systemic perspective on nature, cognition and society long before Norbert Wiener's Cybernetics and Ludwig von Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory appeared in the second half of the 20th century.

The General Science of Organization: Tektology is a 3-volume book in which Bogdanov provides some basic principles for understanding nature as composed of parts that continuously interact by means of dynamic *organisation*.³ Here, tektology should not be confused with cybernetics. *Kibernetes*, which means "steersman", the term that Wiener used as a metaphor for "control" or "governor", refers to the rules according to which one can govern any regulatory system, their structures, constraints or possibilities through the use of technologies. Tektology, instead, from the Ancient Greek noun *tektōn* (τέκτων, which means "craftsman"), whose verb means to create, build or produce, emphasises the constructive, organisational aspect of systems' activities, placing more emphasis on action than on subjection to control.

Mainly inspired by a Darwinian evolutionary perspective, by Wilhelm

3. Alexander Bogdanov, *Vseobshaja organizaiionnaja nauka: Tektologija*, ed. L.I. Abalkin et al. (Moscow, 1989).

Ostwald's energetism and by the monistic theories of Ludwig Noire, Bogdanov's general organisational science was concerned with structural regularities, general types of systems, the general laws of their transformation and the fundamental laws of organisation of any elements in nature, practice and cognition. Tektology was one of the first attempts to produce a systematic formulation of the principles operating in both living and non-living systems. Bogdanov preferred using the term "complex" over the term "system". In his view, "complex" emphasises the dynamic aspects of its behaviour while "system" is a spatially closed entity with a self-supporting structure. For this reason, systems seem to have static properties that are not influenced by time. However, according to Bogdanov, the movement and change of the environment, meant as a complex composed by a myriad of interacting parts, can be rightly understood only if a historical point of view is adopted.⁴

Physical, chemical, biological, social, ecological, planetary and cosmological systems are contemplated in this overarching organisational theory based on specific notions such as self-regulation, conjugation, selection, feedback, complementary correlation, assimilation and disassimilation, convergence, divergence, crisis, and co-evolution. Any natural system, independently of its scale—it could be an atomic-scale system or a supra-anthropic scale system—accords to some basic principles, and has to be analysed from the point of view of its internal organisation and its constitutive relationship with the environment. The latter is conceived as both biotic, thus including other biological systems, and abiotic, that is, the physical and chemical environment.

As Bogdanov pointed out:

We already know two important things about the preservation of complexes: first, their preservation is never absolute and is always approximate only; second, it is the result of a dynamic equilibrium of the system with its environment, i.e., it is created by the two flows

4. Alexander Bogdanov, *Osnovnye Elementy Istoricheskogo vzgliada na prirodu* (St. Petersburg, 1899), 10. See also, *Poznanie s istoricheskie tochky zreinja* (St. Petersburg, 1901).

of activities: the absorption and assimilation of activities from outside, and the dissimilation of activities, their loss or transfer to the external environment. And this means two uninterrupted and parallel series of processes of progressive selection, both positive and negative. They can equalize quantitatively, with fluctuations in this or that direction, but each, as we have already seen, performs by its very nature a special tektological role and has a special influence on the structure of a system. Together they both regulate its development.

In what direction do they regulate this development? Obviously, in the direction of the most stable correlations since the less stable correlations must be gradually eliminated, and the more stable are strengthened by positive selection.

At the same time, this development, it should be remembered, is achieved through divergence, inasmuch as parts of the whole possess separateness. In this way *differences grow, leading to increasingly more stable structural correlations.*⁵

According to Bogdanov, systems are evolving organisations of elements that are not reversible as they evolve over time. The environment plays a constitutive and constructive role in the evolutionary process of systems. Plasticity is, therefore, an essential feature of tektological complexes which can be analysed as evolving unities thanks to the continuous exchange of matter and energy with the environment. A system under development involves an environment under development.

Bogdanov's theory of tektological organisation not only was pioneering for it anticipated concepts that were to become crucial to systems theory and cybernetics. But, even more interesting, it offered an explanation of the plurality, scales and complexity of systems belonging to different organisational levels: from particles to biological

5. Alexander Bogdanov, *Essays in Tektology, the general science of organization*, ed. G. Gorelik (Intersystems Publication, 1984), 127–128.

communities, from ecosystem to societies, from the biosphere to the earth-system. And in this sense, Bogdanov offered insights towards the early formulation of system and planetary ecology, both scientific perspectives that study how communities of organisms, including human societies, interact with specific ecosystems at different steps of the food chain, and with the entire planet, to keep stable conditions for their existence. Some of Bogdanov's ideas were even anticipatory of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, the theory of the Earth as a living organism that played a role in the development of Earth System Science in the 1980s.

As Bogdanov pointed out:

The entire realm of life on earth can be considered as a single system of divergence, based on the rotation of carbon dioxide. This rotation forms a basis for complementary correlations between life as a whole—the "biosphere"—and gaseous cover of the earth—the "atmosphere". The stability of atmospheric content is sustained by the biosphere, which draws from the atmosphere the material for assimilation.⁶

According to Milan Zeleny:

Bogdanov coupled biosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere into a single holistic system of mutual co-evolving influences: a result of evolution through systemic divergence. Complementary correlations between the big segregated groupings of elements of the Earth's surface have evolved over hundreds of millions of years by a long series of processes of selections.⁷

However, Bogdanov went probably much further than Lovelock did by boxing life on/and Earth into an overarching cybernetics system of self-organisation. Bogdanov argued for a polymorphic concept of the environment, which he considered neither empty physical space waiting to be occupied by evolving living organisms nor a collection

6. Ibid., 130.

7. Milan Zeleny, "Tectologia," *General System*, 14 (1988): 331–343.

of structural conditions that determine uni-directionally the life of the community.⁸

This polymorphic idea does not apply only to biological organisms different from human beings. Indeed, in Tektology there is a clear attempt to consistently address the long-term process of co-evolution of human communities and the biosphere. After all, the Anthropocene, the new geological epoch proposed by Paul Crutzen in 2000 to describe the all-encompassing impact on humanity on the earth's geology, does not start after the Holocene for the Russians. Instead, it coincides with it. Indeed, the most critical steps of human evolution can't be limited merely to the 19th or the 20th century, when the accelerated dynamics start. We have to explore at least the last twelve thousand years to deal with the Anthropocene.⁹ Russians believe that a careful review of all past attempts to make sense of the human-environment nexus must be considered, and only a perspective based on the *longue-durée* of both human and global history could enable such a profound historical account. In this sense, spatial dynamics and human temporalities become deep, ramified, and integrated, losing the character of linearity, separateness and predictability that characterises Western progressivist narratives.

8. Giulia Rispoli, "Sharing in Action: Bogdanov, the Living Experience and the Systemic Concept of the Environment," in: *Culture as Organization in Early Soviet Thought*, ed. P. Tikka et al. (Aalto University, 2016).

9. Mark Maslin & Simon Lewis, *The Human Planet: How we Created the Anthropocene* (Penguin, 2018).

MULTIPLE PASTS FOR A TROUBLED PRESENT

The Case of Hungary

Professor Chris Hann

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Few Western Europeans (hereafter WEs) realise that Eastern Europeans (EEs) are just as diverse as they are. Beyond differences in physical appearance, language, and religion, EEs belong to societies with histories just as complicated and different from each other as those of WEs in Britain, France, Spain, and so on.

For WEs, and to a more limited extent EEs themselves, these differences were collapsed during the Cold War into the semblance of a monolithic bloc. For seven decades in the case of societies incorporated into the Soviet Union, and four decades for those added to the Soviet empire after the Second World War, Marxism-Leninist ideology imposed a stifling homogeneity. The focus was on building an international communist future dominated by an emancipated working class, rather than commemorating more or less glorious national pasts. There was no political freedom to put forward alternative visions of either past or future. Everyday life in the present was a struggle, such that socialist textbook renderings of the past were hardly contested outside small circles of intellectuals known as “dissidents”.

But this narrative of the Cold War is itself a little too simple. EEs’ experiences with socialism were very diverse, ranging from repression in East Germany and Romania to experiments with a decentralised market socialism in Hungary and even self-management in Yugoslavia, which remained outside the Soviet bloc altogether. By the late 1980s, following the impact of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in Moscow, it was impossible to ignore what US historian Joseph Rothschild termed the



Figure 1: The turul, sacred bird of the Hungarian nomads when they settled in the Carpathian basin. Sculpture by Péter Mátl at the national heritage park, Ópusztaszer. Photo by author, 2017.

“return of diversity” throughout the region.¹ Following the convulsions of 1989-1993, it was clear that the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of history was dead. History would again be written and disseminated with the nation in the foreground. At the very moment when WEs were beginning to realise the need to move beyond the nation-state (“methodological nationalism”), EEs plunged into the waters of national(ist) historiography. As always, representations of the past were shaped by the interests of power holders in the present. Whereas the East German state disappeared into a united Germany, elsewhere from the Baltic republics to Czechoslovakia and the Balkans the number of political units increased. With socialist inhibitions lifted, Serbs and Croats recalled that they had slaughtered each other in large numbers in the 1940s and began to do so again. In less tragic fashion, inter-ethnic tensions re-emerged in other sub-regions. The Hungarian case to which I now turn has been overwhelmingly peaceful, which is perhaps why it has received comparatively little attention; but it is particularly rich and instructive in the ways it highlights the manipulation of the past by contemporary elites.

1. Joseph Rothschild, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

Constructing a usable past

Most nations, certainly those that consider themselves to be “historic”, as distinct from those that emerged somehow artificially in the course of wars and treaties and cannot look back on many centuries of statehood, have multiple possibilities for the interpretation of their past. This is particularly true of the Magyars because of their origins as nomadic tribesmen. They differed from neighboring EEs because they spoke a non-Indo-European language and could even invoke shamanic myths of origin. These symbolic resources were helpful in preserving a strong sense of national distinctiveness. Of course, most of what passes for tradition in this context is the product of later invention in the age of romantic nationalism. Medieval sources, written down long after the non-literate Magyars had settled in the Carpathian basin, are scant. This creates spaces of ambiguity that politicians can exploit. When the present Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán took part for the first time in a Cooperation Summit of the Turkic-speaking peoples in September 2018 in Kyrgyzstan, he declared Hungarian to be “a unique and strange language, which is related to the Turkic languages ... the Hungarians see themselves as the late descendants of Attila.”² These propositions are not endorsed by serious linguists and historians, who classify Magyar as a member of the Finno-Ugric language-family. But so what? The option to emphasise oriental, non-Christian heritage clearly has resonance not only for geopolitical relations but also in many domains of popular culture and counter-culture, where it is cool to be a pagan.³

Orbán was careful to point out in his speech that, following their great migration westwards, his people had become Christian. He further declared that “being both a member of the European Union and an Eastern nation is a unique experience”. This was a thinly veiled reference to current tensions between the central institutions of the Union and the Hungarian government, which is widely alleged to be undermining democracy, the rule of law and freedom of speech. Much

2. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s speech at the 6th Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking States. Accessed September 6, 2018: www.kormany.hu.

3. See László Kürti, “Neoshamanism, National Identity and the Holy Crown of Hungary,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 8 (2015): 1–26.

of the antagonism since 2015 has centred around “illegal migration” along the so-called Balkan route. Viktor Orbán has pursued a hard line, exemplified in the fence he has installed along the border with Serbia. These policies have undoubtedly helped him to win elections. He insists that he is concerned with the preservation not merely of Hungarian national sovereignty and identity but with the values of a pan-European Christian civilisation. While the Chancellor of Germany (perhaps hypocritically since her deeper agenda is to serve the interests of German capital) defines Europeanness in terms of humanitarian values, Viktor Orbán points out that Hungarians fought to repel the Ottoman Turks who occupied most of their country for a century and a half. In short, Hungary is a proud Christian nation and WEs owe her a great deal, in the past and today, for defending Europe’s boundaries. The Christian component is evident in the prominent position that the mainstream churches have assumed in the life of the nation since the demise of socialism, thereby resuming the trajectory that was forcibly interrupted by Marxist-Leninist socialism.

Figure 2: Trianon memorial outside the city hall in Kecskemét (southeast of Budapest). Photo by author, 2017.



It follows that the recent past, that of socialism, must be represented negatively in the schoolbooks of today. Beyond the re-naming of streets and the demolition of statues, a new ritual calendar has been introduced, e.g. with national and religious holidays replacing days to mark the Soviet revolution and Hungary's liberation in 1945. The trouble with this transformation of the public sphere is that, for very many Hungarian citizens, the last decades of socialism remain a source of deep private nostalgia. They enjoyed job security and, especially following economic reform in 1968, considerable freedom to pursue strategies of private accumulation if they wished. A predominantly agrarian ("peasant") society morphed into a consumerist society in which EEs (especially the young) had basically the same tastes and lifestyles as WEs. This convergence has continued in the postsocialist decades but it has acquired many unexpected negative aspects, notably high rates of unemployment and a more general precarity. The gap between WEs and EEs has *not* narrowed, as the latter were assured it would in 1990. Rather, roughly half a million Hungarians (out of total of less than ten), most of them with skills and qualifications, are now working outside the country because they cannot find suitable jobs at home. Villagers deplore the fact that their children are scattered in the West and they ask: how can it be right that the EU should impose refugee quotas on us when there are not even enough jobs in this country for our own families?⁴

In such an "overheated" conjuncture, populist politicians such as Orbán appeal to national solidarity to disguise the massive redistribution of income that his government is facilitating for the benefit of corrupt elites. Rewriting history is a key component in the ongoing "culture wars". Already it is becoming possible to revise assessments of Admiral Miklós Horthy, Regent of Hungarian between 1920 and 1944. Should he be reappraised as an honest statesman who did the best he could in difficult times, or as an anti-Semite who collaborated with Hitler's Germany and plunged the country into its greatest depths of shame? And then there is the Treaty of Trianon. Whereas most WEs are familiar only with Versailles, for Hungarians the treaty that mattered at the end of the First World War was the one signed a little later in

4. Chris Hann, "Overheated Underdogs: Civilizational Analysis and Migration on the Danube-Tisza Interfluve," *History and Anthropology* 27 (2016) 5: 602–616.



Figure 3: Regent Miklós Horthy as represented in the ceremonial chamber of the Kecskemét city hall. For decades this image was concealed by a curtain but it is nowadays exposed to visitors on request. Photo by author, 2017.

1920, at the Grand Trianon Palace. This resulted in a reduction of the country's territory by more than two thirds and in millions of ethnic Hungarians being left outside the borders of the new nation-state. Trianon was rejected across the entire political spectrum in Hungary, which acquiesced only under duress. National *ressentiments* were cultivated systematically under the regime of Admiral Horthy. During the socialist era they were suppressed in the public sphere, but the feeling of a grave national injustice persisted through informal and familial transmission. Since 1990 the grievance has been articulated constantly by right-of-centre politicians and nationalist associations. Public monuments all over the county demonstrate the "emasculatation" of the country cartographically by comparing the map of pre-1920 Hungary with the boundaries of today's state. It will be interesting to observe how Viktor Orbán approaches the centenary of the Trianon treaty on 4th June 2020.

FROM PART-TIME ACADEMIC EDITOR TO BRITISH ACADEMY POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW

*A Small Thank You to the ISRF from
the Outgoing Academic Editor*

Dr. Rachael Kiddey

British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Oxford

In 2014, I was several months post-PhD and seven months pregnant and starting to wonder whether I would ever find an academic job that would allow me to balance my impending motherhood and hard-earned desire to become a fully-fledged academic. Looking through Jobs.ac.uk I came upon an advert for a part-time Academic Editor for a small public benefit foundation called the Independent Social Research Foundation. I applied and was invited to interview. 'Ah!', I thought, 'I had better mention my enormous bump!' I remember precisely what Stuart said when I called the office, 'Congratulations! Lots of people have babies and jobs. Come to interview. I'm sure we can arrange things suitably for everyone if necessary.' That was the first time that my involvement with the ISRF gave me cause to sit back and give a happy sigh.

Fast forward a year or two and instead of my tummy, it was my job that was expanding! Reporting to Louise and managed by Stuart, I made the move from 8-hours per week 'assisting' to an almost full-time role as Academic Editor, a move that was, from an employee point of view, expertly handled. Instead of me being expected to fit into a job description, I was encouraged to grow the job in ways that benefitted the Foundation whilst also making the most of my personal talents, interests and skills. This ethos spans the Foundation's approach to everyone with whom it is engaged, from those awarded the smallest flexible funds to Mid-Career Fellowships. In part, the

A SMALL THANK YOU

ISRF hired me because I had some previous media experience. I was offered professional training with a website design company and given a budget to record and edit interviews with Fellows. Similarly, I was enabled to work from home when necessary and no-one minded if Teddy (and later, our second son, Rufus), sat on my knee during Skype meetings or under the table, opening and closing our Founder's suitcase clips, during an Executive Team meeting!

However, perhaps the most generous thing recognised was that, in advertising for an Academic Editor *with a doctorate*, the ISRF expected the hired person would bring with them a particular research interest, which in my case is Contemporary Archaeology (more about that later). Louise and Stuart (and other senior colleagues) insisted that it was important for me to think of myself as an *active* academic researcher... with a day job. It was written into my contract that I could spend some of my work time pursuing my own research—reading and writing papers, attending conferences and workshops that were of interest to me and simultaneously relevant to the work of the Foundation. In these combined ways, the ISRF facilitated and nurtured *the real me*. The Academic Editor, Dr Kiddey *and* the parent me was supported, trained, and enabled to be the best, creative, and most productive that I could possibly be. And so, despite the fact that I was really very happy working for the ISRF, I thought that I might regret it later in life if I didn't give the British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship just one bash! I don't mind admitting that I was astonished when the email came through to say that my proposed project, *Migrant Materialities*, had been chosen for funding.

I started the project in November 2018, based at the School of Archaeology at the University of Oxford. The project will develop methods generated during my doctoral work on contemporary homelessness. Focusing on migrants' material culture in Europe, *Migrant Materialities* asks how forced and undocumented migrants use and adapt materials to serve practical and emotional purposes; how they sustain and re/create identity through material culture along their journeys. Fieldwork in two European locations, inside and outside formal settings, will enable comparative analysis of the role that material culture plays in shaping and affecting how people forced to flee their homes sustain identities and recreate notions of 'home'. I

intend this work to be fully participatory and collaborative—working *with* refugees, not *on* them. In this way, I hope that cultural heritage work can function as a form of advocacy, contribute to improved human rights for refugees, and also offer new public archaeological approaches to understanding forced and undocumented migration in contemporary Europe.

What will I take from my happy time working at the Independent Social Research Foundation? Several things. First, I feel as though I have been professionalised. The calm, measured, and immensely fair ways in which the ISRF conducts its business has taught me that excellent planning and communication and careful attention to even the smallest of details, lead to a happier, more productive working environment for everyone involved, and that reputation for such is everything. Second, I learned not to give up if something doesn't work in the way that it was first imagined, but rather to take a little time, go for a short walk in the fresh air and come back to it from a different angle. This can make all the difference! Third, Louise in particular taught me that very little is unsolvable if we are prepared to put everything else down and listen properly to the views of others and if we have the humility to continue our own learning by having our prejudices and preconceptions challenged, perhaps changed.

Indeed, if I had to characterise the ISRF approach, I would describe it as having a wholly civilising effect upon academia; bringing disciplines together, making the production of new knowledge a more inclusive, nurturing, and creative experience. Although it is an acorn sized funder, great oaks will surely grow from it. A diverse, virtual college, ISRF warmly welcomes people of all persuasions and from all backgrounds. It is a favourite jumper, on a cold day. In fact, the only downside to having worked for the ISRF for four years is that I now expect far too much from ordinary funders, particularly when it comes to conference catering! I miss the ISRF like an arm or leg but remain ever grateful to them for enabling my next move.

ISRF SOCIAL THEORY ESSAY COMPETITION

Essay Topic

Authors are free to choose both their topic and title

Essay Length

10,000 words, all inclusive

Essay Format

Follow the JTSB Author Guidelines, available on the JTSB website

Language

English

Submission Deadline

31 March 2020

The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and the *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* (JTSB) intend to award a prize of EUR 7,000 for the best essay on a topic within the area of social behaviour and its investigation.

The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and the JTSB.

Essays selected for the shortlist by the Editors and the ISRF will be judged by a joint ISRF-JTSB academic panel (the ISRF Essay Prize Committee). The panel's decision will be final, and no assessments or comments will be made available. The result will be notified to applicants by email during July 2020, and will then be announced by posting on the websites of the ISRF and of the JTSB. The ISRF and the JTSB reserve the right not to award the Prize if there is no essay judged to be of sufficient merit.

Visit <http://isrf.org/funding-opportunities/essay-competitions/>

This issue features:

Athena Hadji

Paul Dobraszczyk

Giulia Rispoli

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