

BETWEEN APPROPRIATION AND APORIA: CULTURAL ACTIVISM IN POST-EAST PRUSSIAN POLAND

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Abstract

Following the process of creating a cultural festival around a castle post-East Prussian Poland, this article explores the moral complexities and political pulls within which cultural activism and engaged anthropology take place in this contested area. At the heart of the discussion stands problematising the tendencies of the gradual appropriation of the festival initiative for political trajectories and the transformation of value. The article tells a story that can be read as part of an anthropology of post-WWII and post-Cold War Europe and its lasting traumas and inequalities; it can also be seen within the (engaged) anthropology of future making.

Adopting the concepts of aporia and haunting, the author reflects on her position as the founder of the festival and the evolving internal dialogue between resisting appropriation and facilitating it. In form of an autoethnographic, textual montage she presents her positionality, and participation in this process as anthropologist-cum-activist and German citizen living and working in Poland, proposing the notion of “entangled anthropology” to engage with the dimensions of the moral dilemma.

Keywords: *Engaged Anthropology, Entangled Anthropology, Festival, Performative Heritage, Cultural Activism, Post-East Prussia, German-Polish Relationships, Autoethnographic Montage, Aporia, Gentrification, Appropriation.*

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Part I

Introduction and methodological considerations

This contribution unpacks the political pulls around a cultural initiative, more precisely a castle festival in Northeast Poland, former East Prussia.¹ It problematises the tendencies of the gradual appropriation of the event for political and economic trajectories. As engaged anthropologist and founder of the festival, I present my positionality and participation in the process, reflecting on my own cultural activism and my evolving internal dialogue between resisting those external pulls and facilitating them. Borrowing from activist Kathrin Böhm, I am asking myself “[w]hat do I produce and what do I reproduce with the way I work?” [De Waechter 2019: 1] in this particular setting and time.

The article tells a story that can be read fruitfully as an (auto-)ethnography of post-WWII and post-Cold War Central Europe² and Poland’s late post-socialist *twilight zone* [Buchowski 2019]: with its complex entanglements of patronising forces and moments of (self-)subordination at the peripheries [Rakowski 2017: 95]. It is situated regionally within the specific power-relations that emerge at the “poniemieckie”, “post-German” [cf. Kuszyk 2019] or, more precisely, “post-prussian” crossroads of value creation for heritage-making, tourism investment, social research and civic society. It can also be seen within the (engaged) anthropology of future making [cf. Salazar et al. 2017, Kazubowski-Houston and Auslaender 2021] as it spans over roughly ten years, tracing the steps of creating an annual cultural event, which is part of creating a heritage site, a village, a region, future inter-state relations, to only name a few. The cultural activities are inspired by contemporary *activist* approaches across the globe and specifically by the work of radical constructivist applied art of Michał Kurzwelny at the German-Polish border that created the transnational, civic, imaginative spatialities of Ślubfurt and Nowa Amerika.³ It is

¹ The identity of the place will be easy to identify for any interested reader as anonymizing it is impossible within the argument. To take some weight off the public exposure the proper names of palace and festival won’t be mentioned in headings and the main body of the article.

² I follow Michał Buchowski and Hana Cervinkova who use the notion of *Central Europe* arguing that it is “a creation that has acquired a realistic status through articulations in practices and, in consequence, in social relations – interethnic, intergroup, interstate, and interregional” [2015: 3]. My addition of post-WW II and post-Cold War is an emphasis about the origins of entanglements and emotional landscapes that matter in the past-presencing [Macdonald 2012] within my fieldsite.

³ <https://nowa-amerika.eu/manipulate-reality/> (viewed 9.04.2024.)

further an activist ethnography [Juris and Khasnabish 2013] with para-ethnographic edge [Holmes and Marcus 2020: 28] situated in an unlikely social environment that includes political as well as economic, cultural and intellectual elites, against and together with whom it interacts. And lastly, it is an affective, reflexive and entangled ethnography of performing the state and of negotiating citizenship [following Reeves et al. 2013: 11], in that it presents the moral dilemma of a cultural activist and citizen in face of political pressure and privilege.

The story roughly unrolls over the past decade and continues into the present, in which I am authoring this article, and into an imagined future. In fact, my writing stands in direct competition with organisational duties of the actual event. The festival itself is situated around a historical estate in the Masurian Lake District, contemporary Northeast Poland and former East Prussia, but reaches further to the urban centres of Warsaw and Berlin, and not least to Poznań, Poland, where I am based as a university lecturer. In the following I will introduce the reader to the site and the festival, as well as to my own story around and affective involvement with arising dilemmas.

Throughout the text, I am making use of the montage as a representational space that hosts what is otherwise incommensurable [Nielsen 2013 following Deleuze: 2]. In this case, it will be an autobiographical montage that hosts the different voices of the author and their different roles; the anthropologist-cum-producer, the practitioner, observer, activist, academic, citizen. Those montages are a methodological tool to represent experiences of aporia and haunting – two guiding concepts in this article, inspired by Nils Bubandt's [2014] discussion of witch discourses on an Indonesian island and by Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska's [2024] research on post-German materialities, through which I theorise the paradoxical experiences of "taking place" and "losing touch" during my cultural activism in post-German Northeast Poland. Aporia signifies a sense of difficulty and pathlessness when possessing insufficient knowledge or tools to address ambiguities and incompatible paradigms. Haunting highlights the histories of suffering and the weight of living together on their rubbles. Aporia emerges between my research-led intentions of a cultural activism that wants to make space for marginalized communities (and their stories) and of creating encounters between disjointed social groups, and the gradual appropriation of the cultural initiative, a multi-genre festival, by transnational stakeholders, which involves incorporation into their institutional structures. My research-led trajectory of cultural activism simultaneously opposes and counters this process of appropriation and facilitates it. Thus, aporia here describes a dilemma that evolves within enduring power relationships and unequal interdependencies, politics of value and claims to meaning-making. Confronting this dilemma, I am haunted by the violent pasts of the area and standing on constantly shaking moral grounds.

Next to my academic analysis stand snippets of returning interior dialogues that I have had with myself since the beginning of organising the festival. They add to the phenomenology of my embodied ambivalence. They also tell a story of disjuncture between internal, private expressions and outward manifestations [Irving 2011: 24] and of a vivid two-way knowledge exchange and translation. These snippets also talk about the dilemma of identifying and acting as someone – an anthropologist-cum-cultural-activist – while being read and involved as someone else – an engaged citizen. I call them soliloquies¹, borrowing from the language of drama, because while they represent my *Selbstgespräche* (German for auto-communication), they are performed on the stage of this article to the readership. What both the chosen method and the chosen form of writing allow me to further is an argument about situated and specific odds of producing a performing arts setting as a highly educated, Polish-speaking German national in post-East Prussian Poland. These odds evolve through external pressures, internalised loyalties, and power inequalities, in a situation marked by the seductiveness and responsibility that come with imposed, exceptional privilege.

We owe it to Judith Okely's and Helen Callaway's seminal collection "Anthropology and Autobiography" [1992] [but also others, cf. Hastrup 1992; Bochner and Ellis 2016; Anderson 2006; and most recently: Laviolette and Boskovic 2022] that the academic community of Social Anthropologists have come to recognise autobiographical writing as a powerful, irreplaceable source for knowledge creation. Work such as Kazubowski-Huston's [2011] on her tenuous performance project with Polish youth and Polish Roma communities evidences that specifically for engaged anthropologists, self-reflective, autoethnographic writing is an essential part of a process of professional scrutiny. I hence use personal experience as well as the anthropological analytical tools of my positionality in the field of cultural and heritage activism to self-assess my professional input and to critique processes of appropriating cultural engagement of civic initiatives. This critique must be viewed within the larger contemporary context of the multiple and enduring [Stoler, 2016] national, international and transnational legacies of imperial and colonial forms of engagement – German, Polish and other with the area, Poland's part of former East

¹ Lat. for single speech, inspired from the Greek concept of the monologue, from which it grew apart over the centuries. I follow the Shakespearian school of using the soliloquy as "a dramatic speech uttered by a single character, usually alone on the stage, either as a confidential disclosure to the audience or in private but audible self-communion. This kind of speech may reveal motives that are hidden from the other characters (..); or unfold a character's inner tensions and doubts (..). The device may also serve comic purposes (..)." In: Baldick, C. (2015). Soliloquy. In: *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved 12 Sep. 2023, from <https://www-oxfordreference-com.manchester.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref/9780198708735.001.0001/acref-9780198708735-e-2698>

Prussia; as a manifestation of this engagement we may count the area's exploitation over the course of time for military activities¹, recreation², investment³, national identity politics⁴. Some of those aspects will become relevant at a later point.

My positionality in this particular field has become a type of condenser [Kazubowski-Houston 2021] and privileged site of contest over meaning, loyalty, and resources in which I was both acting as well as being acted upon [Jackson 2013: 207], carving out an activist agenda, that was gradually being made to serve other ones.

In this instance, appropriation becomes a relevant concept with which I (self-) critique collaborative processes, showing how they advance structural domination and subordination of communally produced meanings and networks under larger political or economic agendas. Philosopher Eric Hatala Matthes [2016] draws attention to the ironic double bind between critiques of cultural appropriation and essentialist thought, warning about their dangerous proximity. He argues that

“persons who make claims objecting to cultural appropriation predicated on essentialist distinctions between insiders and outsiders risk causing harms of a similar kind to the appropriations to which they are objecting” [Matthes 2016: 346].

Much of the previously introduced experience of aporia is linked to the difficult navigation between hopes for a politics of representation and for practices of cooperation and fears about mechanisms of essentialisation and domination. The question of appropriation arises when a dominant semiotic and structural framework is imposed onto a cultural initiative, which is being framed as “German-Polish” and thereby starts contributing to a particular historical genealogy of value creation. This frame emerges as an essentialising division to the project team and organisation that comes with its own historical hauntings. Appropriation secondly happens through such collaborations within the project that fix certain groups in certain places – with the effect that existing power-inequalities and essentialisations of the “other” risk to be reproduced and affirmed – but could also be addressed and actively challenged.

¹ Area is full of military pasts and presents, including Prussian fortresses, Nazi-bunkers, and contemporary NATO facilities.

² The area was developed as a domestic tourism destination in East Prussia and, later in the People's Republic of Poland this development was taken up again this development continuing into the present.

³ Companies and individuals from outside the region have been buying up land and property in the area since this was possible after 1990.

⁴ The area has been a contested territory for symbolic national identity politics between Germany and Poland, with one of the iconic myths being the battles of Grunwald/Tannenberg.

The Castle, the village, former East Prussia: a peripheral, chronotopian festival setting

If we approach the festival setting from the bird's eye view, we zoom into the northernmost corner of the Masurian Lake District, Northeast Poland, to see a small dot of a village on a peninsula, surrounded by lakes and forest. The closest three small towns are each half an hour's drive away. Oblast Kaliningrad is in mobile phone roaming distance. If we zoom in some more, we can see the large, temporarily covered red roof of a historical castle, a bunch of residential buildings, a larger pleasure port, and some ongoing building works. The biggest actor here is the international investor company who owns most of the village and is investing millions of Zloty into the development of the village from a seasonal tourism resort to an all-year-round modern resort for regular tourists, sailors and digital nomads. Other actors are: the permanent residents and homeowners of the village, around twenty-five households of around seventy individuals, former state farm worker families, who are mostly pensioners or employed in tourism. And there is the owner of the deteriorated historical castle, a Polish-German heritage foundation, together with a loosely affiliated cluster of heritage activists, activist groups, and state representatives. With the festival we are in the middle of a huge building site of futures; time, place, and community are being turned upside down and in-the-making: one could say a peripheral place [Adener 1987, 2012], in which the utopias brought there by outsiders and their ruins tend to dominate over the local ones; and a chronotope [Bakhtin 1981], in which time and space condense and overlap.

The festival itself takes place around the castle and within its evolving socio-political configurations. These are inseparable from past frictions, violence and tears. A short glimpse into the history of the site betrays the torn and traumatic past of the whole region and the to-and-fro between German and Polish state agendas. The castle was constructed by a family of East Prussian landowners, who lived and ruled over their extensive landed estate and the people working there for around 500 years, until World War II [Schabe and Wadle 2017: 153]. As a result of Nazi Germany's brutal activities in World War II, East Prussia as one of several previous Eastern German territories was no longer part of post-1945 Germany. The region was subsequently divided between the national territory of the People's Republic of Poland (part of today's voivodeship Warmia and Masuria) and Soviet Russia (enclave of Kaliningrad, former Königsberg). Only a few years after aggressive Germanisation politics, murderous terror against large numbers of individuals from targeted minorities¹, and the military colonisa-

¹ Jewish individuals [Williams 2023], Sinti and Romani individuals [Rosenhaft 2023], individuals with disabilities (cf. [Topp et al. 2008]).

tion¹ of the region through the Nazis, East Prussia underwent a process of radical Polonisation following Soviet guidelines, wiping out previous memories loosely associated as “German”: it was renamed as so-called “regained territories” of the Polish State and recolonised with displaced people from the former Polish East and other parts of the war-shattered country, and, later, with agricultural workers and tourists². This process took place after forced mass migration of the local populations of fourteen million individuals.³ In the process of re-colonisation, the castle became Polish state property and was used to fulfil an array of communal purposes for the socialist State.⁴ As we will see, the echoes of these violent histories, the state trajectories that facilitated them, and the diplomatic long-term dilemmas and shades of guilt and taboo they brought along with them reappear in the configurations for the production of the festival, in heritage activism discourses and in my own experience of doubt and disjuncture.

From the 1980s onward, with the collapse of Socialism and the ensuing political transformation in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe, there was a prolonged period during which ownership of the building changed hands multiple times. During this time, there were various considerations regarding the potential repurposing of the building for both commercial and non-commercial projects. In the mid-2000s, the deteriorated building was taken custody of by a Polish-German heritage foundation, its current owner. Since then, the building has become a heritage-site-in-the-making and palace-in-progress [cf. Schabe and Wadle 2017, Wadle 2020]. Different civic

¹ This military colonisation concerns specifically the area around the festival grounds. In this area, Adolf Hitler had an outpost of the Nazi government built to plan and execute the attack on Russia/ Soviet Union. Decisions taken here, also concerned the Holocaust and the destruction of Warsaw; at the centre of the colony, there was his headquarter, the bunker settlement “Wolf’s Lair”, and in the surroundings were outposts of different governmental departments and military divisions. Hitler and his entire governmental staff were stationed in the area between 1941 and 1944 [Neumärker, Conrad, Woywodt 2012].

² New historical narratives about this process have been a project of Polish and international historians in the past decade. An example of this is the edited volume “Ziemie odzyskane”. W poszukiwaniu nowych narracji” (“Regained Territories”. In search of new narrations), edited by Kledzik, Michalskiego and Praczyk [2018].

³ Towards the end of the War and in the years after, fourteen million individuals from East Prussia (mostly those who identified as ethnic German and ethnic Masures) and millions of individuals from former Eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic (people from today’s Lithuania, Belarus, deportees from Siberia and, notably individuals from Ukraine – here through the government order of the Akcja Wisła) were forcibly displaced. Driven out of their homes, by armies, partisans, state order, or the ethnic violence of their neighbours, they undertook often deadly journeys of seeking shelter within the new boundaries of their national states, Germany or Poland (cf. [Hryciuk and Siekiewicz 2009], [Kossert 2020], [Urban 2004]).

⁴ Such as kindergarten, headquarters of state farm, sewing studio, holiday camp, canteen and others.

German and Polish-German heritage and cultural initiatives have emerged around the castle, competing over or collaborating for its uncertain futures. The limbo and the contested futures are some of the reasons for the festival to happen: it has become part of the process of place-making – a space for dialogue that holds its own fluid agency.

The Festival Opening

While the history of the festival will be told throughout the article, let me provide some initial information about the event as it may be described at present. The festival is a public event over roughly a week in August that thanks to public funding¹, private donations², and volunteer work³ has been free of charge since its beginning. It is a multi-stakeholder event that became mostly docked onto the German-Polish heritage/ cultural activism paradigm; it is currently mainly affiliated with a German NGO that is devoted to the heritage of the palace, a Polish regional partner organisation⁴, and with the Anthropology department of the Polish university I am employed at⁵. Other involved parties are German diplomatic representatives in Poland. The assemblage of stakeholders as well as of funding arrangements have been part of the evolution of my concerns and evolving aporia – internal contradictions – along the way of organizing the festival, as shall be explored later on.

The programme includes art workshops, public masterclasses and guided tours of the castle in the daytime and one signature stage event per evening. There have also been art exhibitions and art residencies. The festival is interdisciplinary and held together by an annual motto that inspires each single element. Those mottos take a playful approach to critically commenting on local developments, subtly evoking regional histories, and gently addressing global concerns in the festival space. The festival opening is the moment to introduce the motto to the onsite, live audience.⁶ This is where I want to take you next.

¹ A binational German-Polish foundation and cultural funds of German diplomatic representations – which will be discussed in more detail later.

² Mostly membership fees of the German partner NGO, individual donations of members of the NGO, individual former festival visitors.

³ Members of the partner NGOs, participants of the international volunteers' programme, student interns from a Polish university, local and international friends and family members of the organizer team, the author of this article.

⁴ The Polish partner organisation focuses on community and arts projects around historical memory and regional identities.

⁵ Apart from me, a number of students and some of my colleagues became involved since I started working in that university department.

⁶ Some of the mottos were: "Welcome to the Playground", "Summer of Windows", "Clouds", "Hospitality", most recently "Circles, Cycles, Bubbles".

Here we are at the opening ceremony of the seventh festival edition of 2022 around the deteriorated palace in a small village-cum-tourism resort in the Masurian Lake District. Just like in the past few years, the Festival Organising Committee, me and the three other members, are waiting to perform the opening essay together, in Polish and German language¹: this year, our essay introduces the theme of *hospitality*.² We are: a long-term castle restoration activist and chair of the formal organiser of the festival – a German NGO; the only permanent on-site employee at the castle – a multi-lingual MA graduate; a local A-level student who works as part-time summer visitor guide, and me, anthropologist and cultural activist. Our ages range from 19 to 73.

This year, there is a spontaneously announced and prestigious addition to the festival opening that we learn about briefly before the event: before it is our turn, one of our previous special guests, a diplomatic representative of the German Federal Republic in Poland, heads up to the microphone for the opening address in German and Polish: in a cordial and supportive speech, they praise the initiative and achievements of the event, the high level of engagement, the spirit of the festival, and the contribution to the manifold activities around the heritage activism and revitalisation of the castle. The address finishes with a warm welcome to the special guests that are attending this year: a representative of the German media, a German clergyman, a member of the Bundestag, family members of former East Prussian palace owners are among the mentioned.

Apart from this illustrious group, many chairs remain empty this year and the student photographers are trying their best to show a crowd, where there is none. They capture a few members of the heritage association, some sporadic previous visitors from the region, my own family, and festival performers for the following days, as well as volunteers – mostly my anthropology students, offering locally-made cakes and taking photographs. Who is missing are people from the village, from the port, from the nearby towns. The local television has arrived late to stream the event. “Gladly so,” I think to myself, and further: “something is off here. This is not where our festival was supposed to go. The party has gone out of control.” Or maybe rather: it has started to gain uncanny privilege and be controlled by stakeholders that were not planned for controlling it.

¹The speech is based on an essay that I wrote and published each year as the festival director. It explores the festival motto in relation to local and global events. I tended to use these mottos and related essays as invitations for critical observation of what is happening around the palace and as a tool for shaping the discourses on it.

²The speech touches, among others, upon migration from war-torn Ukraine, the Humanitarian Crisis at the Polish Belarussian Border, tourism and gentrification in the Masurian Lake District and forced migrations in the area during World War II.

The next day I meet my volunteer PR-team in agony. Surprised by the opening address of the German diplomat, they quickly posted a Social Media story in which they misspelled the name of the diplomat and their exact function. A follow-up apology was posted, but the student team remains divided over the incident. In a subsequent volunteer team gathering I try to clarify the roots of this mishap, and the mismatch of expectations that we as a team of volunteers had been thrown into. I tell them something like: “*Remember that at present we are a low-budget, non-profit festival run by you interns and volunteers, which is suddenly required to provide professional services on the standards of international diplomacy and media – of course without receiving payment for them, and without much notice about the appearance of those high-level attendees.*”

The opening and the subsequent incidents are revealing about the internal dissonances of this event: the infrastructures within which the event is organised and the shape it is expected to take given these conditions. It also hints at the different visions and purposes that its varying protagonists have allocated to the festival over time – me being one of them. These reach from an integrational, inclusive community festival, to an event from heritage activists for heritage activists, to a showcase lobbying event for an (inter)national group of stakeholders. In-between those, as we can see, are emergent incompatibilities and diverging priorities.

Soliloquy (1/4)

In a narrow kitchen in Jeżyce, Poznań, around noon in February

H. arrives from the office, talking to herself, wrapped in a blanket waist-down to brew coffee. In the backdrop we softly hear the end of Chemical Brothers’ “Out of Control”¹ then the advertisement jingle of the streaming platform.

Why do you insist the festival has gone out of control? What could possibly be the issue with organising a cultural festival in the quiet, remote Masurian Lake District in the Northeast of Poland? Apart from the weather, power supply and acquiring the necessary funds? Nobody is going to prison for anything here, no police to cut the power and chase the audience out, no state power to hold you back violently, nothing the like. It is not even a political event.

¹ *We’re out of control/ Out of control/ Out of control/ Out of control/ Out of control/ Sometimes I feel that I’m misunderstood/ The river’s runnin’ deep right through my blood/ Your naked body’s lying on the ground/ You always get me up when I’m down*
Chemical Brothers [Out of Control 1999].

Maybe I am putting it wrongly – the party has not gone out of control, it has gone into control. The big deal is not that the state is chasing us, it is rather the opposite: instead of cutting us the power the state is more likely to be bringing us the power; instead of carrying and chasing us away, they are joining us, starting to attend and populate the event; instead of exercising violence to control us, they are affording us privilege and increasing access to resources. This scares me.

Why complain about this, why not just shut up and enjoy?

Possibly you are right, I should not, I should just carry on, no big problem, right? But something got out of control here; this party was never meant to belong to any state and it was not meant to become the mingling grounds for any special guests. And I never wanted my activities to be praised by any representative of the state. Because wouldn't that really mean that I did them on behalf of my state – and when it comes down to it – that they own me?

Hear yourself talking – a spoilt German white kid! Somebody you didn't want to have there, stormed your party and you offered them drinks and accepted their gifts, because you didn't really know how to deal with the privilege you obtained. I get it. You thought it was all part of the inclusivity agenda, but it came at the cost of others: while you were receiving a bit more funding and occasional invitations to your embassy, others got the side effects of feeling out of place at the party in their own village. It seemed no longer for them, but for a crowd who wore fancy clothes, looked down at the present of the village and fathomed about its future.

Ouch, that hurt! Did you know things could be a lot worse, if I didn't speak up, rejected offers, found new allies? But I agree, essentially you are right. But why did they want this very party, wasn't there enough space for everyone to start an event, really, they could have had their own.

Yes, I wonder why. No, but really, you have to stop being so naïve.

Part II

H. and the Castle: The Anthropologist returns

I came to read Franz Kafka's "The Castle" [1998, 1926] relatively late in life, in fact, I suppose too late to take it as a serious warning about the seductive force that castles exercise over us and the relations of power that reside in castles, waiting to possess us. But when I finally did read it, I was personally alarmed. To most readers, Kafka's unfinished novel about the land surveyor K., who arrives in the village to be increasingly and irrevocably drawn to the castle upon the hill, the assumed site of power, and attracted to everyone who is connected to it, is meaningful in metaphorical ways, to me it had a literal analogy. In many ways, it narrates the story of my years of fieldwork and field engagement in the village in Northeast Poland.

H., the fieldworker, first arrives in the village with the castle for a year of ethnographic fieldwork that she will base her PhD thesis on.¹ As she researches the different angles of the village and of tourism in the area, she meets most of the heritage activists during her observations.² In the first and second summer, she accompanies and interviews them. When the last tourists go, she stays in the village. She parks her white VW with the German number plate that betrays some of her identity in the snow. Then she walks from house to house to learn about life in the village, drinks tea, peels potatoes, and finally moves in with an elderly couple, who have a vacancy. Sometimes she asks people about the castle, too. They have many stories from their younger years about the castle – of living there, working there, first kisses and kindergarten³ – but nobody in the village really knows what's going on up there now. They rely on gossip and on the sparse reports that the local newspaper is publishing.

When people ask H., if she is involved with the castle people, she negates firmly. No, she says, she is an Anthropologist from Germany doing a PhD in the UK, she is not part of the castle people, she is just interested in the castle as part of the village.

¹ This dates not long after the financial crisis and some time before Brexit, Covid, Putin's War and Charles the Second.

² In the summer she learns the skills of tourism: sailing Mazury on the lakes, East Prussia on the bike, then takes a chair and sits down in front of the castle, watching people come and go, comment, complain to the on-site castle employee, and donate or withhold donations.

³ Since starting cultural activism around the castle, apart from my own ethnographic research, some of the palace stories from post-1945 have been documented in a recent oral history-storytelling project by a German-speaking writer in collaboration with a transnationally acting, Germany-based museum curator. The larger project was funded by public sources and also included interviews with palace activists, including myself.

She may be German, but she did not intend to come here as a German for the castle's sake. Still, they continue asking her: "*So, H., what's new with the castle, do you know anything?*" In the end, doesn't she understand the castle people and their language? And wouldn't it be more obvious, yes, natural, to align with the castle people, rather than with the villagers? She shares whatever news about the castle pass her way of research and tries to facilitate encounters between informants from the village and from around the castle. She sticks with the villagers. But don't castles always manage to take what they think is theirs, in the end?

After graduation, she returns to the village for a bit.¹ "*We would have helped you defend the thesis with the pitchfork*", the people in the village say and hug her, kisses on cheeks, she is "*nasza*" (pl. "ours"). H. doesn't return with a plan as most people do when they come back anywhere. Rather with a vague wish to share, discuss and evolve her research findings in one way or another. This will be a new beginning for H., the anthropologist, the beginning of H., the anthropologist-producer, cultural activist. It will also be another beginning, an unanticipated one – the beginning of H., the German, who *nolesn-volens* is affiliated with the castle people.

Returns to Masuria: Entangled Anthropologist

Here is a challenge many of you will have faced before me: How to address, maybe even critique something that is not yet set in stone – a future that is only lurking at the horizon, unfixed, mouldable, not only for others, but for you, too? How can the interventionist anthropology of the future that Salazar et al. [2017] call for look in the practice of our own fields?

"*Engaged anthropology responds to questions about the responsibilities of anthropologists to their informants and the desire to address contemporary problems in our work. It differs from other anthropological projects in its recognition that anthropologists have more to contribute to the solution of these problems than just their texts.*" [Kirsch 2018: 230] writes Stuart Kirsch in the conclusion of his book "Engaged Anthropology", in which he summarizes the ambiguous findings of getting involved in local politics as an anthropologist.

I shared Kirsch's sentiments after I had made my point and argued against ongoing heritage politics in my thesis and in articles, but was struggling to communicate them to my field contacts. In my critiques, I had addressed the exclusiveness of the

¹ For matters of precision: In summer 2015 I stayed a month in the folklore museum of a nearby town and found a very supportive environment there. I also visited the family in the small village of around 30 families, where I had spent much of my time during fieldwork between 2010–11. And I spoke to activists around the historical estate of the village – about the property situation, the renovation plans and about what was going on in the often highly entangled German-Polish heritage project.

heritage project, and the pre-1945 centric historical perspective. Instead, I wanted local histories to become part of the big story about the palace, the castle community to be evolving through shared experiences and encounters, local residents to have a permanent foot in the door and co-own the process of palace-making, the castle to be an inclusive transnational process without dominant sides. I wished for what Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston and Mark Auslaender have called “*a dramaturgy that forges connections between multiple and disparate imaginings of the future*” [2021: 14], the core idea to an anthropology of the future in their edited volume “In Search of Lost Futures”. When I offered to present a tailored report of my observations, insights, and suggestions to the palace owner, the transnational heritage foundation, they had not been interested in my proposition.

Therefore, the longer I thought about it, the clearer it became to me that the most obvious person to address all those critiques onsite rather than through writing or even reports, the one who had the knowledge and privilege to do so was I¹. But what are your tools, when you decide to get your hands dirty and turn some soil? Pink and Salazar [2017: 19–20] and Kazubowski-Houston and Auslaender [2021: 8] suggest that techniques such as creative arts, digital technologies and participatory and improvisational strategies will be enabling for anthropologists to engage with futures. Yet, they are no ready-to-go-recipes with certain outcomes nor a comprehensive list.

All forms of (future) engagement have their rationale and should be individually weighed up against one another. In questions of failure no single one version is riskier than the other, and the paradigm of contrasting “engaged” and “non-engaged” anthropology is unhelpful, all anthropology is engaged: each form brings its own risks, and, to remind us of a common truth, whichever way we decide to act, we are acting, we are doing, creating, and risking something. As a working term to challenge the engaged and non-engaged paradigm in my case, I propose the notion of entangled anthropology – it well reflects my experience of getting actively and consciously involved in long-term processes in the field – as a professional and often also as an individual.

Hacking the Narrative

In 2017, in a cloak-and-dagger operation, I put up a poster exhibition at the castle, on which I had worked for the past two years, assembling materials, researching, copy writing, illustrating. The exhibition contained 15 illustrated posters in Polish and German and was also available online and as a brochure. It was called “Chronicler

¹ I spoke both languages, had contacts and access to all communities, had thought it through for the past years, was angry about how things were going and wished to change them.

of our Dreams” and told post-War histories of the castle, acknowledging and valuing the lived histories of residents, workers, and summer visitors in the “People’s Palace” that was created by the new socialist regime after WWII.¹ The post-War history of the castle, first in the People’s Republic of Poland and later in the Republic of Poland, was a period usually summed up by the German, and often also Polish heritage activists in one sentence: as a time, during which the castle was rapidly decaying, until, so the further course of the narrative, it was rescued, last minute before final decay, by the binational heritage foundation. There was usually no mention of everyday life in and around the castle since the village had become Polish after the War; unsurprisingly so, with the former castle village then being a rural socialist ideological project that evolved in the crevices of Post- and Cold War politics of trauma, taboo, historical amnesia, at the fissures of what Andrzej Leder [2014] calls “Sleepwalking the Revolution”. The meaning the palace and the village had earned for post-War and current residents was absent in the historical discourse about the emerging heritage site. This attitude also emerged from a conservationist perspective, from which socialism had provenly been an epoch of destruction and decay for many historical monuments.

While many of my colleagues in Poland were and are working on countering a climate of historical amnesia regarding the times before 1945 in the area², my first post-fieldwork activities hence concerned countering the devaluation and ignorance of social life in the area since the end of World War II. This commitment was also

¹ Following an initial invitation to prepare the exhibition, the opening had continuously gotten delayed because the person who had invited me, had subsequently lost access to the castle themselves due to a discord with the heritage foundation. With growing uncertainty whether I would receive the permission, I was following the contemporary paradigm of “hacking place”. The website with the digital exhibition that I had built for the purpose was up before the physical exhibition – as a backup plan, if the public event was cancelled by the owner. I was able to gain the permissions last minute and organise an exhibition opening with a guided tour through the “people’s castle”.

² To add to the complexity of the setting it must be said that the history of the area as part of East Prussia also remained strongly marginalised on the level of history politics in Poland. After decades of socialist state pedagogies of vilification of all German and all gentry, a momentum of rediscovering and acknowledging the multi-ethnic and transnational character of the area started with regional movements in the 1990s. The re-valuation of the German-built (often gentry) heritage started as a subversive project with transnational co-operations already since the 1970s [Lewandowska 2014]. However, during their lasting governance, the conservative PIS government dimmed the volume of all those regional and transnational initiatives through public discourse and funding politics. To this day Polish and transnational cultural activists, scholars, and writers are putting in much effort and courage to unpack the complexities of the East Prussian past in their national discourse.

inspired by the work of German and Polish geographers and sociologists¹ on spatial appropriation and home-making among the multi-ethnic post-war populations in Masuria [Mai (Ed.) 2001], by work on East-Elbian “palaces without masters” [Forbrich 2008], and by the groundbreaking work on re-discovering local identities beyond historical ideologies that was forged by the organization Borussia² in Olsztyn. It is important to mention that I was not alone in wanting to contribute to re-narrations of place at the time: since I started my activities a new wave of research, writing and artistic activities on these post-war/ post-German experiences and processes of appropriation has been growing – including the work of Borkowska [cf. 2011], Zborowska [cf. 2019], Ćwiek-Rogalska [cf. 2024], but also in the literary work of Kuszyk [2019] and the artistic work of Źmijewska [2020]. I hence believed that if this was becoming a place that claimed to be “shared Polish-German and European heritage” as it was often repeated, it needed to be based on all the different stories that various people and groups identified with, and the evolving master narrative needed to be stretched and expanded.

After the exhibition opening in May 2017 and throughout the summer, hundreds of visitors came to read about the recent past of the palace, a time many of them had memories of and identified with. This first year finished with the publication of my exhibition on the website of the German-Polish heritage foundation. A few months later, I was invited to contribute the story to the anniversary volume of the German-Polish heritage foundation: another person had withdrawn their planned contribution. That way, the narrative about the socialist and post-socialist people’s history of the palace made it into the transnational heritage discourse in a printed form.

Soliloquy (2/4)

H. cycling back from Morasko Campus in Poznań through Kurpińskiego Street, late April afternoon. The last sunlight is illuminating the concrete walls of the socialist apartment blocks in deep orange before fading.

I keep asking myself one thing here... did I sell out in those days? Did I disown the people I wrote about?

Continue, it sounds you are having some interesting thoughts here...

¹ One of the researchers of this group, Wojciech Łukowski, has been particularly influential in the process of the project.

² Founded by Kazimierz Brakoniecki and Robert Traba (whose work has been important in the process of the project), <http://borussia.pl/index.php/fundacja-borussia/> (viewed 3.04.2024.)

I mean, disown the community from the control over the story, through my own work of communicating and translating it? Did I take away the stake of the community via the subtle force of a translated representation of their story? Did I effect an encroaching integration into a heritage development paradigm for the palace that prioritised other identities than theirs?

Why cast aside doubts, when they make perfect sense? Why all those question marks? Decisions have shadows.

I made a conscious decision, I was aware of the risk and the shadow. But, in the end my wish to counter normative understandings of the past and to do something about the fact that parts of the story are left out, weighed stronger than the risk of disowning. Can't we sometimes use our privilege of access for somebody else? Which is worse: to patronize by highlighting overlooked and undervalued histories, thereby reshaping the still-developing historical master narrative¹, or to neglect using one's privilege to seize an opportunity to make a difference?

You seem concerned, but uncertain; an uneasy decision infused with lights and shadows, won't turn black or white, will stay uneasy in its outcome also.

Are you some kind of Zen master, now? Such decisions are not easy to take, but they are exactly that: decisions with consequences on either side of action.

Sticky Collaborations

This is the moment when you invite somebody to stay for a few days and they just move in with you. But you also don't really oppose, because the house has no proper roof yet, and it doesn't really belong to you either. Yet, you did have a plan for it. So what do you do now?

The first proper festival takes shape in 2018, the year after the exhibition: product of a series of coincidental encounters that happened mostly during the exhibition summer, when I ran an activity week with free tours and a community arts project. A pianist declared they will come back and play a free concert in the castle; a local group of visitors offered their help as volunteers; a young dramaturg, who had written a play about the palace wanted to direct it onsite; two outdoor artists asked to get involved; list continues. Before I knew it, I was in the middle of organising a

¹ cf. [Smith 2006].

week-long event at the palace with zero budget but uncountable hands to help realise the idea. My network of friends and fieldwork contacts supported my initiative. I followed the strategy of coming with empty hands to give everyone the chance to contribute and add their share. That way, the festival became a joint effort from an entire community of fieldwork contacts and newly joined local and international volunteers.

Thereby, moving on from the previous phase of pushing for narrative representation, the event became a next step of opening the castle to local residents and visitors, who had been excluded from the castle space and from the planning developments. The potential of emerging and inventive spaces was something I had seen evolve in Michael Kurzwelley's applied art activities in the German-Polish borderlands around Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice: his vision of the participatory spatial fiction Słubfurt and Nowa Amerika that transcended national boundaries and narratives had become part of everyday experiences and future making-processes in the area.¹ In Kurzwelley's words:

“Large realities” seemingly imposed on us from the outside, are merely conventional notions that we have accepted as a valid social norm. Because of this, we can, through target ‘reordered spaces’, create new constructions. By living according to such a redefined space, it manifests itself essentially as a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy.’²

I saw the space of the festival as a re-ordering tool to counter Kafka's self-fulfilling prophecy of the palace as site of domination within post-German and post-socialist entanglements of power and affect. Festivals create a shared sense of time and place, of being together, doing things together, sharing experience in the here and now and making memories for the future. Festival communities appropriate space, make it their home, their temporary community. Our emerging festival thus mobilised the potential to create such a space.

Using the fragile privilege of my half-heartedly tolerated access to the castle, I wanted to start encouraging local residents, visitors, and related NGOs to claim *their* share of the castle now and for the future; to give them the confidence not to wait for an explicit invitation, but take the initiative to realise their own ideas. I developed this concept of shared, performative heritage in former writings [cf. Wadle 2012].

¹ <https://nowa-amerika.eu/slubfurt-3/> (viewed 09.04.2024.)

² Transl. from Polish. Talk by Michael Kurzwelley at the National Gallery of Poznań: Konstruowanie rzeczywistości jako metoda stosowana na terenach pogranicza (“Construction of reality as applied method in the borderlands”), <https://mnp.art.pl/event/konstruowanie-rzeczywistosci-jako-metoda-stosowana-na-terenach-pogranicza> (viewed 09.04.2024.)

Thematically, the focus shifted from the previous year onto another historical event of relevance: from the post-War history of the palace to the World War II history of the castle¹. The main reason for this was the recent launch of a book translation (German into Polish) that told the history of the last East Prussian owners of the palace and their tragically ending engagement in the failed assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler led by Claus von Stauffenberg. The palace, in close proximity to one of Hitler's former headquarters, the Wolf's Lair, had been an ambiguous site – both a place of resistance against the Nazis, where the Lehndorff couple and their associate conspirers were planning the attack on Hitler's life, and one that was inhabited by Nazi German foreign secretary Joachim von Ribbentrop and frequented by members of the Nazi government and Hitler himself. The availability of the publication for a Polish-speaking audience gave the chance to share and reflect on this part of the castle history across languages.

This was probably one of the most catchy and valuable stories to single out the palace against other similar buildings. And it was at the same time one that carried an exceptional symbolic capital for German national identity politics. Following my premise of opening the festival to all involved stakeholders and lobby groups around the place, I had invited a Germany-based organisation with expertise on the East Prussian owners of the palace to present this version of the story. Due to the thematic focus, the festival was offered a small sum of funding for a concert from the cultural budget of the German embassy, which we accepted.

How I saw myself and my activities – as an engaged UK-, and later Poland-based researcher, an anthropologist-cum-activist – started to diverge strongly from the way I was read by others: My person and the event I organised became a convenient docking point and cultural broker for German-speaking heritage activists and the German diplomatic environment; to them, I was clearly an engaged German national who cared for cultural heritage and transnational understanding in former East Prussia, for “German-Polish relations”, and for advancing German memory culture. The question, which cause the festival ought to be serving was work-in-progress and part of a negotiation, in which I found my initial heritage vision to be increasingly utopian: power relations between the involved organisations became obviously

¹ The festival was entitled “Spacer/Spaziergang/ Walk” and referred to the social, political and affective role that walks, public and private, seen and unseen, in the garden, in the forests, or on horseback had played for the World War II history in the place. One of the examples being that it was during walks that plans about the attack on Hitler's life by General Stauffenberg on 20 July 1944 were passed on and drafted. Another that Nazi Germany's Foreign Secretary General Ribbentrop, who had occupied one of the wings as his residency near to Hitler's headquarters from 1941–1944, and lived with the Lehndorff Family, liked to have his Sunday walks in the park, which were photographed for the benefit of creating attractive propaganda material.

unequally distributed and some invitees came to stay and claim their stake in the project. Thereby, the definition of value generated through the festival was shifting together with the new partners that invested in it.

The Gift

Somebody always invites the other: A husband his wife, a parent their children, a queen her people, a lord the village.

When analysing the situation of the festival and my decisions in it, I like to return to an article on the transformative potential of the festival by David Picard [2016], in which he uses Victor Turner's [2017, 1969] concept of the festive frame. In the article, the author argues that festivals

“suggest an overarching metaphorical framework for social life, entailing simultaneously a myth of origin, a value guide to exemplary behaviour, and a story explaining the separations within the social world” [Picard 2016: 603].

I support the proposition that a festival is a cosmological site of immense normative potential, able to help communities through significant changes and crises in their lives. It is thus a precious space for making change. Part of the suggested festive framework by Picard is the type of circulation of wealth and resources that facilitate the festive excesses of different kinds. This resonates with my concerns: the funding structures of an event are a system of obligations as is any flow of capital; they can foster equality and participation or patron-client relationships. We know since Marcel Mauss [1967, 1925] that the gift is an act of reciprocity, and Daniel Graeber [cf. 2014] has reminded us how the powerful have used reciprocity and the shared fiction of debt to keep their power. It is not exactly a secret that whoever pays for the party, owns it, owns its values and its cosmology, and will use it to ascertain the political order the festival space produces. If there is no balanced circulation of resources between the festival actors, the power relations established in the festival are more easily maintained. We have already started the story of our festival funding and so let me continue it.

In the autumn after our festival, I received an invitation to the German embassy for a meeting about the reconstruction of the castle. It was the first of its kind and many more should follow. I had entered the building only after presenting my ID and opening my bag. Looking at my ID reminded me of my nationality and I imagined others were reminded, also: especially invitees of the meeting with Polish nationality. I was entering my national territory and they were leaving theirs to discuss about the future of a castle in Northeast Poland with East Prussian heritage. The meeting was held in German, at the time Polish translation was still available upon request, later, despite counter-voices, these translations were treated as optional, under the assumption that “everybody knows German”. I had been assigned a slot on the agenda

of the meeting by the host to talk about the festival and its achievements and our goals for the future. A meeting that takes place in an embassy, no matter which one, carries an obvious flavour of importance and authority. Being invited to it had the character of an appointment not to be rejected. In addition, I had felt an obligation to reciprocate for the support the embassy had granted the festival that year and the one they had announced in the future. I had thus accepted and prepared a presentation.

After the presentation, and once more, after the overall meeting, a leading representative of a German-Polish funding body approached me: “Do write a funding application to our foundation for the festival in the coming year! If you have any questions, you can contact me”, they said loudly, so that everyone around could hear it, too. As a scholar who had intensely worked on German-Polish relations and as a practitioner who had, before her PhD research, been a leader of numerous German-Polish youth encounters, I was already familiar with the German-Polish project funding landscape and this particular foundation also.

Such binational initiatives came out of the Declaration of German-Polish Friendship (14 November 1989), the following German-Polish neighbourhood agreements (17 June 1991) between the German Federal Republic and the Republic of Poland, where both states pledged cooperation between Germany and Poland in many fields, including cultural heritage, community encounters and cultural work.¹ Guided by those agreements the key purpose of the abovementioned foundation that had offered a funding opportunity was “*to allocate financial support to projects which are the subject of mutual interest of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Poland.*”² The start-up fund to the foundation had been made up from the debt-repayments of a large credit from West Germany³ to the People’s Republic

¹ There was an important political edge to these agreements, some aspects of which are relevant for understanding the entanglements of the festival. Firstly, the agreements asserted the final, contractual settling of the post-World War II borders – which bore relevance mostly with respect to the formerly German territories such as the Polish part of former East Prussia; this had been a big cause of uncertainty and tension between the two countries. Secondly, the agreements (this was laid out in detail in a separate agreement) initiated a transformation of the financial debt that Poland held towards the Federal Republic of Germany since the financial credit over one billion DM from 1975.

² Point 1, Translated fragment of the statute of the foundation, <https://sdpz.org/die-stiftung/satzung> (viewed 21.05.2023.)

³ Point 2 “The founding fund resulted from the capital and interest payments to be made in Polish currency, in accordance with the agreement, in instalments of the financial loan granted to Bank Handlowy SA. w Warszawie by Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau, Frankfurt am Main, on 31 October 1975 on the basis of the agreement of 9 October 1975 between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the Polish People’s Republic on the granting of a financial loan.” Translated fragment of the statute of the foundation, <https://sdpz.org/die-stiftung/satzung> (viewed 21.05.2023).

of Poland¹. I had actively avoided tapping into this funding landscape, as I did not want our event to function within this dominant framework of a “German-Polish Project”. It was thought of as an independent initiative that created an alternative, critical and playful space of its own, outside state agendas and their inherent asymmetries, as recently critiqued by German historian Felix Ackermann² [2022]. The project was not intended to engage large-scale national historical narratives of guilt and indebtedness between two nations; it shied away from being framed within

¹ The era of First Secretary Edward Gierek stood under the star sign of investment and new levels of consumption in Poland. Increasing demands for energy and globally rising oil prices aided a political course of significant state indebtedness credits from capitalist “Western” economies; paired with domestic factors this ultimately led to the collapse of the Polish economy and public upheaval in worker’s strikes and the Solidarity movement about the austere living condition that the state economy had created. The German credit to Poland came with a diplomatic and economic strategy: upon its discussion in the Bundesrat of Germany on 7 November 1975, the members of the legislative organ that complements the Bundestag, highlighted that the exceptionally long duration and interest subsidy (in contrast to the other Polish foreign credits) of the loan was supposed to “lead to a strengthened economic relationship with Poland and a lasting improvement of the German-Polish relationships”; further, it was emphasized that much of the credit would be spent on investing in German businesses and deepening economic relationship, or you could say dependencies (p. 310, section B). An aspect that should not be omitted, but that exceeds the realm of what I am able to discuss in this paper, is that the agreement was bundled together with two other ones: a less controversial agreement about pension and insurance payments for remaining Germans in Poland, and, more importantly the agreement of the Polish state to grant 125 000 individuals, meaning individuals of German origin, the permission to leave Poland for the Federal Republic. The records of the exemplary debate in the Bundesrat mention the words “humanitarian” as an argument to agree to the agreement bundle, alongside “human trade” with respect to the connection between the loan and the release of individuals, alongside the German “mortgage” of guilt and perpetratorhood with respect to the necessity to provide economic support and foster longtime economic relations with Poland: these are pieces to a large, complex and morally entangled debate on German-Polish relations after World War II, in which the Holocaust, the terror on the Polish people, the destruction of Warsaw and other Polish cities, the post-war territorial divisions and borders as well as the suffering of German minorities in the former German Eastern territories in the aftermaths of the War are recent events, the diplomatic meanings and civil aftermaths of which are actively shaped in the political present. Resource: Bundesrat, Bericht über die 425. Sitzung, Bonn den 7 November 1975, https://www.bundesrat.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/plenarprotokolle/1975/Plenarprotokoll-425.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2 (viewed 21.05.2023).

² My attention was drawn to this article when two more senior German-Polish activists, one German national, one Polish national, discussed it at the palace festival and expressed shock with the author’s argumentation, as well as feeling personally attacked. They found it misguided to deplore power asymmetries between Germany and Poland, and argued that since there will never be a power balance between any states and one will always be stronger in some aspect, the goal would not be balance, but good management of the power inequalities.

the larger purpose of what was commonly termed the reconciliation between the two nation states.

The previously related speech act of inviting me to submit a funding bid to the foundation, framed by the formal setting of the German embassy, and witnessed by a community of heritage activists and state representatives, had thus the effect of an unwanted gift on me. I did not want it as it came with its own strong visions and trajectories, but also I could not refuse it as it could have led to the festival to be claimed illegal and soon prohibited, while at the same time knowing that I would have to reciprocate it. The invitation that certainly entailed encouragement and positive feedback for the previous events, also came with expectations and ideas about the future of the place. It further reflected the desire of a larger community to assimilate the initiative and functionalise it for their purposes.

In the chain of events, the Berlin-based association who had contributed to the festival in the same year, approached me with the offer to write the funding bid in their name and under their legal wings – as a registered association in Germany and in cooperation with a regional Polish partner of theirs. This was, because at the time, formal requirements to apply for funding were not yet fulfilled for our emerging festival team: Each submitted project had to be run by a legally registered organisation from Germany and one from Poland to be in the drawing pool for funding. I was hesitant about agreeing to the offer: from the start this was not a cooperation between two equal partners, but rather one of an accepted incorporation. So, what from one perspective was a step towards finding good ways to generate funding for the event and reliable partners, from another, it was an acceptance of structures that questioned the initial premises for the festival. The following festival hence happened under what might be called the protectorate of the German NGO and their Polish partner organisation, and included a significant investment from their side into the festival, thanks to which we could apply for an equal amount of funding from the German-Polish foundation.

After the festival of 2019, I spent weekend over weekend of the following autumn and winter working out how to prepare the final budget to suit the formal requirements and fit the pre-prints of the grant-giver. I painfully came to understand that our event had been designed to be accountable to itself and to its own purpose and goals for the future. Since the first year, in 2017, I had written and shared comprehensive reports that critically assessed the festival goals and listed the budget. Thence, the event had not in the first place been designed to be accountable to our new funder. Anyone who writes project applications and reports to external grant givers knows that this is impossible to do without a) playing *by the* rules and b) playing *the* rules of the grant giver. This results in a savvy performativity, in which projects are projected into the future and evaluated not only in relation to themselves, but

in relation to the values and language of the grant giver. Pragmatically speaking, I understood the necessity of those new routines, but from an activist perspective, it saddened me to give away (some) of the reporting authority to the foundation, making the event thereby productive for the project of (bi-)national politics and diplomacy.

Project, process and product were inseparably entangled (cf. also [Sansi 2019: 722]). I would have preferred its unproductivity on any formal national level, leaving all meaning to the participants of the event exclusively, for the sake of itself. Or is that so? This wish hides some hypocrisy as it comes from an anthropologist-academic, who in this moment is making the project productive for her own process of meaning making and value creation in the empire of the academy.

Soliloquy (3/4)

Konin 6.40 am, Intercity Express to Warsaw. H. on her way from Poznań to attend a palace related meeting in the German embassy.

Should I have said no and never accepted the invitation for the funding bid or the collaboration at this point? And to whose benefit would that have been?

Well, you didn't say no, did you? So, what do you want from me – a confirmation that you were right, or a moral lesson, about how you were wrong? We always decide for something – just as I said earlier. If it makes you feel better, why don't you explain, what your reasoning was, when you made the decision?

Can't you just once give me an opinion? At the time, I came to the conclusion that rejecting the offer would be a self-centered choice. Wasn't the festival I wished for mainly one that satisfied my own desire as a social anthropologist and cultural activist? Wasn't I, too, focused on putting my ideas, or rather my ideals into practice, more than anyone else's? Local residents actually wished for a fast reconstruction of the palace – no matter by whom and in which form¹–, future performers would benefit from playing in a more financially secure set-up, and the entire group of heritage activists who were passionate about the castle restoration and essentially open to the project, wished to support us with the premise that it was somewhat aligned with the overall agenda.

Alright, well said. But you did keep worrying about turning in the project to “the Germans” who would appropriate it and take over.

¹ This widely held opinion emerged during my field research and it persisted over the years.

All the time. ALL THE TIME.

So what do you consider yourself as, then?

The GUA

Those deep-lying concerns that I am clumsily trying to give shape to through my writing about the festival are both specific to me and to the space which I am co-creating with others: As a German-national who works in Poland and Anthropologist in post-Prussian Poland, I am reminded of the *gua*, a cannibalistic, liver-eating witch that threatens the life and sanity of people in Buli, Indonesia, of which Nils Bubandt writes about in “The Empty Seashell” [2014]. The *gua* takes charge of individuals who then cause a threat to others. Perpetratorhood is as much a feared option as victimhood.

“This multiplicity of ways in which a person can become a gua makes the possibility of becoming a gua as likely as becoming its victim. As much as daily life is concerned with protecting oneself against becoming the victim of a gua, it is also about convincing others and oneself that one is not a potential gua” [Bubandt 2014: 53].

This incessant fear of contagion with evil spirits – and of becoming a host for them or being consumed by them, resonates with me on the other side of the globe: I cannot discard the feeling that there is a *gua* out there that could be dangerous, attacking and consuming me, or also using me as a host to attack others.

I am in nagging uncertainty about what form this witch takes and what languages it speaks. The witch – the haunting of imperial pasts and practices of violence that have endured all the transitions and changes of heart by translating themselves into new practices, figures of thought, blind spots in the memory, supporting structures, networks, shared affects – into the sturdy and yet often unnoticed residual matter that Ann Laura Stoler evokes in “Duress”:

“The geopolitical and spatial distribution of inequalities cast across our world today are not simply mimetic versions of earlier imperial incarnations but refashioned and sometimes opaque and oblique reworkings of them” [2016: 4].

Like Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska [2024] and Karolina Kuszyk [2019] ask about other post-German areas, I am asking about the festival in Post-Prussia: what is happening to the ghostly memories – German or not – in this area, where are they, and are they being recycled or reused, or something else? My answer is personal: I am

haunted, my actions are haunted by the game of guilt and loss, by the pedagogies of emotion about the past of both Germany and Poland, by the suffering and longing of all imperial subjects in the history of the area who fell and fall through the grids of national and diplomatic self-preservation. I am scared of East Prussia, because you can do nothing right here – as an anthropologist, activist, German citizen.

Every move in the present carries the spectre of broken pasts and of a future, in which its meanings will be taken away from you. In German Samoa, the work of German Anthropologists was slowly appropriated and used by the colonial regime to govern their colonial subjects [Steinmetz 2004]. Their work, often anticolonial in character, was later used by the imperial governors and turned into guidelines for good governance of colonised peoples. What are and what will be the “uncontrollable afterlives of ethnography” [Steinmetz 2014] here, in Northeast Poland and former East Prussia, where multiple neo-imperial and colonial endeavours are at play, concurring and competing, waiting for each other to make mistakes or to lose territory? My ideas and colourful activism, not so unlike the ones of my colleague in Samoa, quickly travelled beyond my comfort zone into new realms of value extraction: they appear as images in the investment portfolio about the village, evidencing the vivid cultural activities around the palace and its future worth for the neighbouring leisure complex. They are used as evidence of social engagement and inclusivity in international funding bids and political lobbying by the German-(Polish) heritage project leaders.

In-between German heritage desires and the capitalist value extraction of a neoliberal enterprise in an overall climate of Polish right-wing ethnic nationalism with offensively anti-German politics – there are of course limits to the analogy with Samoa. But in both places, the debates between political and economic elites were messy and multi-voiced, reflecting the socio-political positionalities and values of the different external elites with governing aspirations about “good governance” for a new (or re-emerging) sphere of influence. In this political spectrum, then and now, there was space for anthropologically inspired forms of governance – back then promoting to be in tune with local customs and customary law, today praising participatory, inclusive, community-oriented governance. But the two of them remain arguments about how to best govern the other, not whether to govern them at all. And both in Samoa and in Masuria anthropological knowledge was and has become welcomed for governing the future. It was a matter of time then and now to get entangled and be made to fit the political project as anthropologist, be it in person or via the knowledge one had previously produced.

Part III

New Reasonings, Shifting Attention and Accountability

After one year of learning to deal with funding bodies and the new festival partners, 2020 could have been a year of normalisation; but then everything stayed as unusual as usual.

It was a few months into the preparation of the next festival edition, when television channels showed Italian military vehicles transporting huge numbers of coffins outside of Bergamo. Life across the globe, including Poland and Germany, had come to a non-anticipatable halt: the COVID-19 Pandemic had reached us. Borders, including those in the Schengen-Zone, for instance between Poland and Germany, were temporarily closed, trains stopped running between the two countries. As societies and individuals, we were to surprise ourselves with our new, situational and pragmatist rationalities in this state of exception.¹ New, adapted forms of reasoning and prioritizing were also to evolve in my reasoning about the festival. Within the new team, we all agreed quickly that the festival would not be cancelled in 2020 – that each previous festival year had been uncertain enough for us to learn how to improvise and deal with the unknown during and in the run-up to the festival. We were closely watching the news, following new scientific knowledge about the virus spread, checking the German-Polish border situations, comparing the legal regulations in Germany and Poland about lockdowns, safety distances, limits of persons in spaces, restrictions regarding certain activities, such as singing or dancing, and the overall organisation of cultural events.

The fast-track digitalisation of meetings through the pandemic worked in favour of the organisation process. We were regularly meeting in our newly evolving transnational team to develop a festival theme and programme for 2020. In the run-up to the festival, we expanded the festival website, adding a festival exhibition space with contributions from different parts of the world and creating the format of a weekly Q&A session live from the castle, which was hosted by the onsite palace representative and varying guests and streamed via Facebook live. We were preparing ourselves to run the event online and offline, depending on how the situation was unfolding. My earlier discussed concerns about the entanglement of power, national interests and related forms of value creation in the funding

¹ I, for instance, after almost ten years of confident automobile abstinence, decided to buy a car in the last minute before border closure and drove from Poland to my home town in Germany.

relationships were pushed to the backdrop overnight.¹ Other decisive factors had moved to the front stage.

We were facing not only a health crisis, but also, as one of its many co-morbidities, an amplified precariousness crisis in the arts. As a non-commercial festival producer with access to funding I had privilege and responsibility to alleviate this situation: I could use the festival to create employment opportunities. Programming and grant writing was different for me in this situation than in the previous year: I did it confidently and proudly to be able to make a small difference. I had sworn myself that I would not let any available funding go to waste and use our prior festival experience of dealing with uncertainties as an asset for making the festival happen in 2020. But that was not all: we were in a situation, in which social insularity and isolation seemed more obvious threats than before and it was easy for grant-givers to identify the challenge of keeping transnational civic cooperation alive.

With the cancellation of numerous provisioned projects and constantly changing legal ground rules for public gatherings, our funders allowed for much flexibility regarding the programming of the event, while giving generous funding security. Thanks to this funding flexibility, we could wait until a few weeks before the event to decide that all concerts and events would be happening onsite. We decided to stream them online in cooperation with the local television, who had learned to stream religious services in the prior months. In that sense, my concern from the previous year that we would have to adapt to a stiff corset of funding rules was reversed, and the funders understood that the practice of resilient and adaptive planning, had become the only *modus operandi* for cultural events during the COVID-19 pandemic.²

¹ This does not mean that the festival lost any subversive edge and that I agreed to every proposition that was put forward to me: in a friendly message I rejected the suggestion from within the German embassy to devote the 2020 edition of the festival to the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union through a projection of the European Flag onto the castle. Moreover, a rainbow flag would adorn the festival flyer in solidarity with LGBTQ+ individuals in Poland, whose rights were increasingly cut at the time.

² The open-air festival programme was designed to comply with safety standards and in a way that avoided close contacts: while keeping stage events – concerts, a solo theatre performance, and a roundtable debate – we had resigned from interactive onsite elements in the daytime, such as workshops and children’s activities, and also from our international volunteers’ programme. The following year, after vaccination campaigns, better knowledge about the risks of COVID-19, and looser legal regulations in Poland, we introduced the format of themed masterclasses and guided walks around the village, in which it was still possible to allow participation to individuals with different health needs.

Showcasing the Palace and Staging the Periphery

When Vladimir Putin started Russia's war offensive against Ukraine and its people by mobilising the military to attack and invade the country on 24 February 2022, geopolitical meanings, imaginations, and alliances across the globe underwent overnight changes. Some of these changes reverberated in the castle, the festival, and the communities connected to them. If previously the closeness of the castle to the Russian Oblast Kaliningrad had mostly been of interest for history enthusiasts, homesick tourists, and for those who were commuting for informal trade, it now obtained a new urgency and reason for concern for everyone in the region and beyond: local families took a fatalist stance, stating "if something is supposed to happen it will happen", Ukrainian War refugees only reluctantly moved into Masurian accommodations that were too close to the border with the aggressor¹, and German tourists crossed Masuria (and Poland, Czech, and the whole of "The old East Block") out of their lists of holiday destinations for this year², just to be on the safe side. As to the heritage activists: the fact that the castle was located within this field of geo-political tensions had altered the story they told about the present and future of the castle.

This became necessary for two reasons: the new German government announced budget restructurings, fitting both the support for Ukraine and their own, altered political priorities. Meanwhile the relations between Poland and Germany were reaching a low point.³ In this climate, the members of the discursive community began to view and emphasize the value of the castle as a strategically meaningful site for demonstrating the presence of a strong European, German-Polish alliance in the present and in imagined post-War futures. The peripherality of the castle was no longer on the minus list, but had now become an asset and argument in its political and metaphorical value negotiation. This value was further carved out in the planning report of an expert working group that had been appointed by the planning commission, where the site was, among others, framed as forum for European dialogue⁴. If the castle had already increasingly been presented as an asset to national identity politics (in Germany), now, it seemed, its international political value (for

¹ A coach driver on the way to North Masuria was overruled by a group of Ukrainian war refugees to bring them back to Warsaw, when they realized they were driving towards the Russian Border.

² <https://podroze.dziennik.pl/aktualnosci/artykuly/8567702,niemcy-turystyka-wojna.html>

³ Firstly, over the German economic relations to Russia, then over the military supplies to Ukraine, and finally over Poland's request for reparation payments.

⁴ The committee, in which the author of this paper was a member also, presented its final report in April 2023 to the castle working group and on the 7th festival edition in August 2023 to the public.

Germany and the German-Polish alliance) as a site of present and future diplomacy and soft power was becoming unquestionable.

Our original festival programme was actively altered by those developments. Increasingly, there were additional events to be accommodated in the festival period that made the site relevant for diplomacy and identity politics. These events, notably a large award ceremony with high ranking politicians, were organised by other active members of the heritage group and we had to make space for them in the line-up and accept that they changed the entire tone of our initial programme. Furthermore, the festival was refashioned with invitation-only-events alongside the public festival: these consisted of planning assemblies on the one hand, and special incentives such as boat trips or dinners on the other. Such events created an edge of enigma and exclusivity to an event that had been created with the vision of radical openness and inclusivity. Those developments also raised the suspicion of the Polish festival partner who called the festival a parachute and a UFO, reproaching it to land in the region, take place, and leave nothing behind. Our experienced partner had been involved in social research that had explicitly addressed processes of cultural domination in the area.¹

Thanks to these modifications, the festival could increasingly serve as a showcase event for heritage lobbying among political decision makers, potential private donors, and representatives of the media. Since the German-led heritage community had come to the conclusion that the most representative season for the castle was the festival period, there was more pressure on me and the organizing committee to play along and do justice to this showcasing of the palace: we were asked to adapt the festival dates to the visits of particular groups of invitees; to be thoughtful about the visiting delegation of stakeholders when developing the festival programme; and, finally, some parts of funding were directly designated to programme elements that had *a priori* been decided by the funding body: specific artists, speakers and others. This shift diverted attention from developing the event for and with local community members.

The heritage community was not the only one to have a close eye on the festival and its realization. The festival activities were also critically watched by the investment company, who was giving the touristic part of the village an expensive makeover, leading it into a new era of tourism, in times of remote work and digital nomadism. What was happening at the castle was relevant for the future of their investment, too. While we received support in using some of the facilities for our concerts, we also added value to the company: the festival provided free cultural entertainment to guests and brought in more guests that came for the festival only. However, used to

¹ Cf. Fatyga et al. [2012].

the pace of an investment over millions, and the work of PR professionals and event managers from the capital, our neighbours were increasingly impatient with the organisation of the festival that was clearly unprofessional to their standards as well as with the slow pace of the heritage project at large – its lengthy planning meetings and no tangible budget in sight.

Soliloquy (4/4)

Tuesday night jam session in a local pub of Jeżyce¹, Poznań, mid-May 2023. H. sips on a drink while listening to the improvisations of aspiring and seasoned musicians from the neighbourhood.

Do I sound angry to you?

I don't know. Not so angry now, more disappointed, I guess.

What do you reckon I am disappointed with?

I wouldn't dare to answer that question for you.

I failed, right? Or did I? Or is it all a success: the success of attracting public investors, of creating a flair of hope and possibility, of making space for shared vision of the future? Didn't I intend to become invisible at some point, anyway? The festival was a provisional format, nothing more.

Suppose you were hoping appropriation would happen a bit differently.

I saw things coming that way, I wasn't naïve. When I started, I thought, carve out a corner now, because this story you are telling is not one for the main stage. So I was ready to fight for the margin and a representation of it from the start. We are dealing with the centre stage of a castle – whoever owns it, will want to put meaning to it, and whoever puts meanings to it, will own some of it.

Do you want to own the castle?

You got me there, probably I do, let's be honest about it.

I see. What are you going to do about it?

I shall bring my people.

¹ Jeżyce: name of a gentrifying neighbourhood with many bars and restaurants in Poznań, Poland.

Conclusion: Dilutional or Delusional Activism?

Over the following years I grew fond of the idea of rebalancing the festival event, of initiating a recalibration of the social and political spectrum of the festival by including new participants, whose presence would help changing the tone, the atmosphere and the engagements on site. Important elements of that rebalancing of the crowd were a residency for emerging artists, workshops with regional experts, an international volunteers' programme, and, notably the work with university students from the Anthropology and Ethnology department, where I worked. I had introduced the festival during the semester, sharing my doubts, difficulties and the questions that I was asking myself as an anthropologist and cultural activist in that place with them. At some point, some of my students had approached me with the desire of getting involved. I was glad when they joined the organising committee. Following the premise of the idea of dilution, I hoped that the increasing imbalance of participants to the event from the past years could be addressed and altered. If the atmosphere of a festival was a bit like the composition of a perfume – then adding some new scents to the previous composition and diluting the mix could radically alter the overall fragrance.

In my mind, as mentioned previously, the festival itself, was based on the premise of shaping the present together and thereby crafting a memory and a realm of self-realised possibilities that was owned by those who participated in the event. This kind of cultural activism is what I have called performative heritage. Following this premise, altering the present of the event was a logical and promising intervention that supposedly implied real consequences.

Of course, this is only a very fragmentary description of the much larger and more complex processes that happen with placemaking. And insofar it was not long until doubts started to surface. Participation in a place, co-creating its meaning and making it to be *something new*, does not mean that we are automatically the owners of this *something new*. The use of artists for urban gentrification has been widely shown to be a common strategy in longer processes of disowning – both of artists and of the residents of housing in the given areas [cf. Tunali, 2021; Gądecki 2012; Dziadek and Murzyn-Kupisz, 2014]. My persisting concern that had already partially proven true was that all this creating of an eventful present with many contributors, would ultimately, in one way or another, be appropriated by owners – corporate investors or a nation state that would claim the place as part of their narrative. What we were creating through our own resources and for ourselves as a community, would be employed for the future-making of others.

And there were more concerns: the idea of diluting the crowd was insofar illusionary that there were power relations and assumptions about the others at play that had tendencies of subjugating them. The increase in number of new participants

from diverse backgrounds did not automatically ensure that they all had an equal standing or the same claims to the place as those who initially began using the festival as a platform for their political displays and visions of the future. Rather, there was the possibility that these new participants would be allocated secondary roles of serving and doing the productive labour of the festival, such as PR, social media, photography, merchandise, while others consumed it and employed it as a backdrop to their political trajectories. Of course, this is an oversimplification of a process, in which value travels not only in one, but in many directions. In the end, those who volunteered on the organising committee acquired knowledge, experience and skills, and obtained a reference letter that opened them professional doors. However, the evolving division of labour at the festival was concerning, and I hadn't done enough to address this issue: Ultimately, it was the members of civil society who were working without compensation, while state representatives and corporate leaders capitalized on the event for their political agendas, potentially displacing those who had genuinely invested their efforts in creating it. So, while the principle of dilution did become an important element of changing the crowd and of adding perspectives, values, and trajectories, it came with the bitter aftertaste that I was providing and possibly establishing the structures for an unpaid workforce, who was used and would in the future be used to cater for the labour and production of an event that was less and less self-governed.

In this context, I am turning back to the question that community-based intervention artist Kathrin Böhm asked herself in the process of self-assessment: "What do I produce and what do I reproduce with the way I work?" [De Waechter 2019: 1]. I am further compelled to ponder the path of value creation: who can and will the festival serve most and what is the long-term perspective, what kinds of reciprocities [cf. Picard 2016] can it foster? What can my action, the work I do, add to this process? What, if I facilitate a slow disowning of the palace to the local residents? What, if I contribute to re-establishing and perpetuating relationships of social inequality and elitism, speeding up marginalisation and exclusion and post-feudal thinking?

"Engaged anthropology is open-ended and experimental. It involves taking risks. There is no guarantee an intervention will be successful." Kirsch notes [2018: 223], a note that one might misunderstand as a warning, but that, in my reading, is more of an agreement with oneself and the community of anthropologists that when becoming an engaged (or entangled) anthropologist, the possibility of failing, making mistakes and hitting walls must be consciously included and accepted in the decision of engagement. This possibility of failure must be weighed up with the option of letting the chance of engagement pass for good. And in doing so, we say farewell to the seemingly innocence of non-engaged anthropology and its remoteness from the option of entanglement beyond text. Creating a space of encounter and a

crossroads of different stakeholder groups in the equation of the palace and within the framework of German-Polish cooperation without the above listed questions and pitfalls, has turned out to be utopian.

“Our challenge for the planet is to transform longing into action. The path leads from utopia to heterotopia. Society becomes a laboratory where the future is tried out and failure is allowed”¹,

write members of the *artivist* collective around Michael Kurzwelly at the German-Polish border. They encourage to accept failure in the process of engaged, imaginative future making and emphasise that results strive for a reality-checked, rather than idealist character. Between the lines of this statement, I read the warning that those reality checks and the movement from utopia to heterotopia can feel like failure, sometimes. And that there are many different protagonists who may want to transform longings into actions, and whose longings might coincide in funny, awkward ways with our own. Returning to the previously introduced idea by Kurzwelly that *artivism* and entangled anthropology may disruptively and imaginatively interact with the seemingly self-fulfilling prophecy of social spatialities, I am left wondering about the limits of challenging or even undoing such self-fulfilling prophecies (or shall we call them a type of hauntings? Or moments of duress?).

The palace itself is such a suggestive framework: even if it tries to reverse the inequalities it is based upon, for many, these very inequalities are the first, fetishized points of reference, the Dream, the Legacy, the Field of Practice. A similar effect comes when working on transnational, civic projects within the German-Polish framework. Cultural activism within the framework of German-Polish cooperation in post-East Prussian spaces can summon hauntings of past and present, especially, when national political trajectories are directly getting involved in the process. While such cultural activities may attempt to create a shared space of encounters, if enmeshed with national interests in the German-Polish context, they come with the risk of reifying divisions, inequalities, trauma, and privilege.

Following Jacques Derrida, Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska² presents the hauntings in (post-)German spaces not as something to be resolved but to be attended to: as a call to notice untold stories and blind spots in our vision and to give them shape. If not to resolve the hauntings, what can be the work of entangled ethnographers in places in which we feel processes of appropriation and essentialisation that are stronger

¹ Michael Kurzwelly, Karsten Wittke, Joanna Kiliszek, <https://nowa-amerika.eu/project/art-saves-the-world/> (viewed 09.04.2024.)

² *O tym, jak rzeczy zmieniają się w duchy* (How things turn into ghosts), talk by Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska for Copernicus Centre, <https://www.youtube.com/live/DQmkbiBkGMc?feature=shared> (viewed 09.04.2024.)

than us and even feed on our identities? While we may still need those labels and frameworks for strategic essentialisms in the struggle for equality or representation [Matthes 2016: 360–61], it is crucial to continue striving for alternative ways of associating that are less essentialising and divisive and less attached to genealogies of national power-constellations. Deconstructing the seductiveness of the palace is as much an ongoing, never-ending process as reconstructing or maintaining the palace. This can happen in the form of cultural activism, and other times in critical writing and auto-ethnography. Sometimes one form of engagement reaches its limits and needs to reshape into a different aggregate state to continue and shape thought and future action.

Post Scriptum: In autumn 2023, I stepped down from my role as the festival manager and have since spoken to many individuals about this decision. Writing this article has been part of this journey. While I am still supporting the continuation of the event and sharing contacts to artists, local groups, interested volunteers and other networks, I have decided to stop offering my free labour for the event and the emerging surrounding political context as a cultural organiser. The feeling of aporia the festival activities evoked in me had become too burdensome over the years to justify continuing them as before.

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