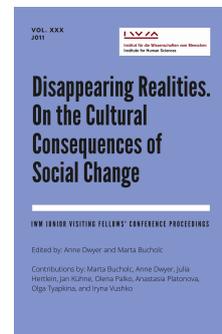


Disappearing Social Realities – Introduction

M. Bucholc, A. Dwyer

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Vienna is a unique place on the European map of disappearances. The lands and peoples of the Habsburg Empire disappeared with the Empire itself. Some of them joined other polities in order to share their very different fates. Some of them vanished from the European social and cultural history in one cruel coup, virtually overnight, leaving a painful open wound which will not heal. Some were quietly disowned, and thrown into regimes and narratives alien to their cultural heritage, which in their turn also disappeared, leaving perhaps one of the grandest mass confusions in history.

After this high tide of disappearances, it appears that the time has finally come when no one in this corner of the world is forced to vanish any more. We would like to believe that all forms of cultural diversity in Europe are protected against both hostility and entropy. Nevertheless, this means that a way of life is again changing silently with the growth of half-cherished and half-forced multiculturalism and openness. The city of disappearances is also a place where maintaining appearances is paramount and apparitions haunt the present. The past lurks behind the golden facades stupefied at the sight of crowds of tourists who show little respect for imperial *Prunk*. The future pushes its way through the international arty crowds in Museums Quartier and basks in the sun on Yppenplatz. The present randomly navigates in the crowd of young men dressed like Mozart only to vanish in the Bermuda Triangle around the Synagogue. In Vienna it is so very easy to disappear.

The fraudulent ease with which objects, ideas and people disappear in Central and Eastern Europe can be viewed as a *specialité de la maison* of the region and sometimes not a particularly attractive one from the point of view of its inhabitants, for whom the bliss of leading an interesting life is sometimes more than they bargained for. Nonetheless, this is a very appealing trait for those wishing to research the disappearing process and its consequences and to investigate the dynamics hidden behind the stability of political, social and cultural phenomena. Reality here is a flow of events as much as anywhere, but not everywhere is one inspired to focus so absolutely on the volatility of existence.

The volume we are presenting is a result of this focus. Last year's Conference of Junior Fellows at the Institute for Human Sciences (Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen), which took place on December 16, 2010, was largely dedicated to various encounters with things which have disappeared or are about to do so in the future. Our speakers analyzed the genesis of this process, looked into its trajectories and dynamics, and speculated on the possible outcomes. This bias places our studies in disappearance in the domain of social memorizing of absence. The important common feature of the papers in this volume is their concern with things which have once been there, aimed at tracing their impact on our reality. This is not necessarily the typical activity of the historian, as the descriptive aspect of our work is subordinate to the explanatory effort. However, the common heuristic to be found in the following chapters of this book is very much the logic of the jigsaw puzzle: let us examine the shapes of things as they are and try to spot the places where there are gaps in the tissue of being understood socially, politically, and culturally. It may very well be that the city of Vienna itself has subtly influenced us to give precedence in our thinking to the past and the present, rather than the future.

The text opening the volume, by **Iryna Vushko**, is a clear example of this emphasis on what is no longer there—in this case, Vienna and the Habsburg empire during the Napoleonic Wars. Imperial management in the vast Habsburg lands invariably appeals to the postmodern imagination: we like to think of a multilingual and multicultural polity that is internally inconsistent; nothing appears to connect the individual sets of social units except the common crown. This picture loses a lot of its charm when we realize that a common crown also means the common potential for repression and suppression of the very national and cultural diversity that seemed to remain the trademark of the Austrian monarchy even as its neighbors were forming new nation-states. Vushko shows the diversity present and tangible in small social practices (such as the Glückshafen, a popular lottery which provides illustration for her theses), whereas the central regulative power represents a universalist approach which tends toward the leveling of diversity. The subordination of social idiosyncrasies to abstract and general rules of rationalistic (though very often irrational) administration makes the small-scale practice disappear. The most surprising thesis of Vushko's paper, however, is that this uniformity did not stem from centralist logic, but from the centrifugal forces generated by the peripheral areas of the empire. Thus the parts of the state which were the carriers of diverse cultural models did in fact contribute to the disappearance of diversity.

Olena Palko's article on Ukrainian national communism takes on as its subject the disappearance of a very important political movement in the history of 1920s Ukraine, which fell victim to another imperial project, namely the Soviet Union. Again we have a case of small- and large-scale organisms meeting with disastrous effects. National communism was an ideological option opposed to the project of uniting all communist countries under one Soviet rule. Its main tenets were as follows: there may be more than one communist country and communism may be reconciled with national identity and independence. This program, if we look beyond its historical determinants analyzed by Palko, may be interpreted as a defense of cultural self-standing of one country against imperial claims of a multinational, rapidly centralizing post-state organism. Hard as it may be to understand from today's perspective, there were times in Eastern and Central

Europe when communists were both adherents of national independence and advocates of transnational unification. The life stories of Ukrainian communists referred to in Olena Palko's paper clearly demonstrate the ease with which people and ideas vanish in the parts of the world in which small, particular interests clash with large and allegedly universal ones.

A similar encounter is the subject matter of **Jan Kühne's** paper. Placing special emphasis on the motif of the meeting of civilizations, Kühne traces transpositions of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* (1779) in Jewish literature of the twentieth century. The hero of this essay is German-born Zionist Sammy Gronemann (1875-1952), one of the founders of contemporary Jewish identity. Kühne leads the reader through Gronemann's critical engagement in the interwar period with the Enlightenment worldview expressed by Lessing, and indicates the difficulties in adapting the idea of interreligious and intercultural dialogue to conditions of twentieth century Europe. In Lessing's Enlightenment we find another overwhelming, universal idea facing the realities of Jewish fate in our contemporary world and failing to provide satisfactory answers. At the same time, Lessing and subsequent generations undertake dialogue with the universal on the ground of their own particular experience. The universal thereby ceases to exist and it falls into many fractions on which the particular experience is built. But disappearing ideal survives in a changed form, still traceable for those seeking realities which are no longer there. Kühne follows the reception of *Nathan der Weise* in German and Jewish literary tradition in order to show that new ideas may be born in the spaces created by the social change. In this iteration, disappearance is also a creative process.

The three papers above mentioned dealt with either social, political or literary reality – the authors of the last four contributions are more concerned with the state of the social sciences examining these disappearing realities.

Julia Hertlein's "Critique of critique" may be the most future-oriented of our contributions, as the article does preparatory work toward finding the epistemological grounds on which to build an emancipatory or transformative critique in the social sciences. But Hertlein, too, indexes the remains of past ideological systems and grand narratives as she diagnoses the risks and pitfalls of the "art of critique," understood both as hermeneutic tradition and situated practice. She reconstructs a twofold pattern of mental evolution of post-war social sciences. On the one hand, the critique as it used to be understood and practiced by the first generation of the Frankfurt School no longer holds its place in the world of liquid modernity – it has vanished together with social (political, cultural) conditions from which it was born. On the other hand, the activities which might replace the early critique inspired by Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis are inevitably susceptible to become nothing but yet another form of reproduction of the social system. The ultimate threat is that the critique could serve nothing but a verbose redefinition of reality performed by artful critics imposing structures of meaning on those, whose job it is to just live their lives. Julia Hertlein's synoptic essay covers wide theoretical ground as she distills many open questions in the theoretical literature, and reminds us that the greatest risk of critique is its own ossification as a *topos*, its tendency to turn on itself, and be absorbed into dominant paradigms of thought and behavior.

Olga Tyapkina presents a short overview of the history of Western European urban studies, starting from the end of nineteenth century until today, in order to discuss the application of this model to the research agenda of Russian urban studies after the fall of the USSR. Again, we have here the context of a disappearing political organism, whose absence rapidly changed the ideological character of social science in Russia. The Marxist paradigm, which had for such a long time determined the direction of research, disappeared (at least in its normative capacity) and was replaced by a free market of ideas from which scholars may choose freely. This situation, although very stimulating for an academy lagging behind the Western world in terms of theoretical development, may at the same time lead to the same problems with scientific identity which had been pestering Western social sciences for decades. Olga Tyapkina views the interest in small towns as one of the signs of the great awakening in Russian research and she argues that this expanding of empirical goals may result in increasing self-consciousness of Russian society. However, it remains to be seen what science emerges in the void created by the vanishing Marxist rule. Russian social science – both as cognitive activity and as an institution – is still in the process of formation.

Marta Bucholc also poses a question regarding the new shape of a social sphere which is currently *in statu nascendi*, namely politics. She evokes the sociological narrative of modernity in order to show that sociologists typically picture our times as the era of a centrifugal drift of beliefs, practices and habituses, in which it does not seem safe to take any sort of social unity for granted. Bucholc tries to imagine responsible politics as envisaged by Max Weber, consisting in leadership based on matter-of-fact appreciation of real determinants of social life, in a disperse social reality. She applies two theories of language (Ludwig Wittgenstein's and Norbert Elias's), which – independently – stress the interdependence of language, worldview and action in order to provide an illustration of what today's world really is: a collection of multiple linguistic monads. Thus politics becomes an art of translation between these separated spheres and the politician becomes a new kind of professional translator, which means a reformulation of a politician's mission in society in comparison to the one set forth by Weber. In a world, in which the unity of worldview has disappeared, responsible Weberian politicians need to adapt or perish. Thus, a new political sphere may be born, corresponding to the new reality of postmodern society, which would challenge both sociology and political theory to reconsider its basic assumptions.

Anastasia Platonova also dedicates her text to new challenges facing those calling for more responsibility in the contemporary world. She discusses problems of responsibility for technological development in our times. The issue, which was vitally important for all currents of ethical reflection drawing on Kantian inspirations—in particular for the Frankfurt school—clearly is set in terms of disappearing realities. In this case, however, it is not the fact of their disappearance which interests us the most, but the possibility of spotting the agency behind it. We should indeed be profoundly worried. Social forms as we know them, along with our natural surroundings vanish on a daily basis due to misadvised use of technology. The definition of human nature may be moved in any possible direction, making us strangers to ourselves. Anastasia Platonova's concern is the possibility to coin a plausible philosophical framework of liability for the effects of

technological progress. She indicates the weaknesses of the standpoints of classical ethics and she points out those features of technological development which call for a new conceptualization of ethical responsibility in the society in which individual action and personal agency are in the course of disappearing.

Disappearing social realities create new problems, which require innovative methodological approaches and inventive techniques of analysis. Not only are the realities themselves passing away, but our state of knowledge and the scientific instruments we apply in order to find our place in the stream of events constantly balance on the verge of obsolescence. The dynamic of reality can be felt and lived by those who experience it daily, but can it also be apprehended by the social sciences? To this question we still do not know the answer.

Anne Dwyer is assistant professor of Russian at Pomona College in Claremont, California. She earned her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley in 2007, and has two overlapping fields of research. The first (also the topic of her dissertation) is the literary treatment of Russia and Austria as multiethnic empires: here the emphasis is on the tension between national and imperial identities and literary forms in the second half of nineteenth century. Lately she has begun to work on the so-called Russian formalists, a group of literary scholars that banded together in Russia in the early 20th century, some of whom remained active in cultural life throughout the Soviet period. She is particularly interested in the intersection of theory and practice in the fiction, (auto)biographical prose, and cinema work of these scholars and their students. Anne Dwyer has published in *Slavic Review*, *Russian Review*, and *Slavonica*.

Marta Bucholc was born in 1978 in Olsztyn, Poland. She graduated in sociology, philosophy and law at the University of Warsaw. For her master thesis in Sociology she received the Florian Znaniecki Award (2000). Since 2000 she has been an assistant professor in sociology at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw, where she obtained her Ph.D. in 2006. She was awarded the scholarship of the Tygodnik „Polityka” Foundation (2003), a START scholarship from the Foundation for the Development of Polish Science as well as Bronisław Geremek Fellowship at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna, Austria (2010-2011). As a researcher she focuses on classic sociological thought, philosophy of politics and sociology of knowledge. Her translations into Polish include *The Sociological Imagination* by Charles Wright Mills, *Purity and Danger* by Mary Douglas and *Le Temps des tribus* by Michel Maffesoli.

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