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Abstract:

This paper explores one of the possible approaches to the question of future in memory research. It aims to show that both the currently anticipated future as well as future past and the affective facts construed on its basis (B. Massumi) are a part of collective memory. Polish memory of the Second World War is the main analytical focus in the article and it is considered as a particularly clear example of the influence held by that which did not occur, but merely might have, over contemporary politics of memory. It is argued that the analysis of the visions of the future, which are expressed, for example, in alternative histories, can be beneficial for research on the functioning of at least some European politics of memory, and in particular for those focused on contemporary Polish memory, which is entangled in the need for a constant rewriting and restructuring of the memory of the past.

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Affective Future and Non-existent History. The Issue of Future Past in Memory Research[1]

The future and memory research

Memory studies, which have been at the center of interest in the humanities for the previous twenty years, regularly face new problems and challenges in the course of their development. Some of these resolve themselves naturally with time, and some cease to be as important to the discipline. But others, in turn, become ever more pressing, harder to overlook or ignore. They grow into questions that, when examined carefully, could define the future direction of the entire field. One of such crucial challenges that could redefine memory studies is posed by the future itself, which can be understood not only as the future of memory research as a discipline, but also in a different, twofold manner: as the part the currently imagined future plays in constructing different versions of memory and as the future past (Massumi, 2015a).

Recognizing that the future is as integral a point of reference for memory as the present is, seems like the next step in the development of the discipline, which has for years underscored the gravity of the fact that memory of past events is shaped and construed in the present moment, and on the possible ways of defining the relationship between remembered or recollected past and the present, as it is currently experienced (A. Assmann, 2011; Nora, 1974; Olick, 2007; Winter, 2010). In this paper I will try to show that imaginations of the future are a part of the experience of the present, and therefore what was expected but never came to be can shape the memory of what really happened.

To explain more closely how the future can be a part of memory, I should briefly define how I understand the notion of the future. There are at least five ways of defining this concept. The first, and the most traditional one, underlines the fact that the past should be treated as a lesson for the future and, therefore, our obligation is to create such a version of memory which would enable reconciliation. Good examples of such an approach to the issue of the future may be found in the concepts of noncompeting versions of collective memory, dialogic memory (A. Assmann, 2010, 2011, 2012), relative memory (Edkins, 2006), multidirectional memory (Rothberg, 2009), or the normalization of memory (Olick, 2003).

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The second understanding is based on the belief that memory should be a source of collective identity for future generations. This means that the future as a point of reference for memory has already been well defined in the classical theories of cultural memory (J. Assmann, 2005 [1992]) and of frames of memory (Halbwachs, 1992 [1925]). The third conceptualization is built on the conviction that future – understood as a horizon of expectations – is an integral point of reference for history. This view is most strongly emphasized in the work of Reinhart Koselleck (2004, 2002), who recognizes that the study of the relationship between the space of experience (i.e. what happened in the past or is currently happening) and the horizon of expectations (which can be shaped not only by rational forecast of the future, but also by utopian visions) is the only way to fully understand the complex experience of temporality.

Koselleck's remarks allows to better explain the fourth – and the most important for this paper – understanding of the future: future that was once expected but was never realized. The intuition that something that never happened can have very real consequences is best expressed by Brian Massumi's theory of future past and affective facts (2015a), as well as in the concepts of counterfactual and alternative histories, both embedded in the philosophical notion of possible words. I will analyze these concepts in greater detail in the following section, but it is worth emphasizing that they are essentially different from the previously presented ways of understanding the future, as they show how things that merely could have happened are becoming a part of our experience of reality.

At the intersection of these four types of thinking about the future, there is the fifth, most undefined and amalgamated one, in which the future is understood as a challenge that provokes us to look for alternative approaches to history and to broaden our thinking about the complex relationship between the past and the present (Erll, 2011; Bell, 2006). Good examples of such practices are the concepts of potential history (Azoluay, 2019), memories of joy (Andersen and Ortner, 2019), or memories of hope (Rigney, 2018), as well as the attempts to reconstruct our understanding of history (Loventhal, 2015) and memory in relation to the future (Gutman and Sodaro, 2010; Crownshaw, Kilby, and Rowland, 2010), and the first attempts to create coherent theories focusing on collective future thought (Szpunar and Szpunar, 2016).

The future is therefore an integral part of memory studies, just as the past and the present are. Nonetheless, despite future's growing importance, there is still very little research done into the way how certain visions of the future influence the reconstruction of memory. The aim of this article is to show that the future, especially the one that never came

to be, is an active and often underestimated component of contemporary memory frames. To explain how that which did not happen can be so crucial for constructing collective identity, especially in the case of the collective memory of those societies that look at the past with regret, I will refer to several distinct contexts, some of which are rarely mentioned in memory studies, namely, the theory of alternative histories and past futures, and, afterwards, I will analyze a specific example of a Polish collective memory. Polish memory was chosen as an example because of two main reasons: first of all, Polish politics of memory has been changing dynamically in recent years, adapting to current political needs, and, secondly, alternative scenarios of the course of history have been important for Polish memory for at least a century.[2] As the last fifteen years have shown, even events from a quite distant past (for example the Second World War) are susceptible to numerous rewritings and retellings, which cannot be fully analyzed without introducing the notion of future past and affective facts to interpretation.

Possible worlds of futures past

In this paper, I understand the concept of future past after Brian Massumi's theory of ontopower, not after Reinhart Koselleck's definition of the term. Therefore, future past is such a vision of the past, which although it never came to be is nonetheless an important component of our present. Therefore, the phenomenon of futures past can be analyzed in two different but still interrelated ways: on the one hand, it is a part of our memory of the past, on the other hand, the visions of future past shape our present and as such are associated with the current affective politics, and especially with administering fear (Massumi, 1993, 2015b).

As Brian Massumi (2015a) pointed out, future past is a part of a wider strategy of affect management, one which the philosopher terms preemption. To explain the correlation of these two phenomena Massumi recalls the circumstances in which George W. Bush sought reelection in the 2004 presidential campaign: the Iraq War, which was initially supported by a substantial part of American society and actively backed by a significant number of European countries, turned out to be a complete political failure and the president was being accused of starting it for no good reason. Addressing these accusations, George W. Bush placed the justification of his actions in a past vision of a future that at one time might have been possible:

[2] Examples of creating alternative scenarios of history can be found in the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century (Wierzbiński, 1931; Ligocki, 1927).

> The invasion was right because in the past there was a future threat. You cannot erase a 'fact' like that. Just because the menace potential never became a clear and present danger doesn't mean that it wasn't there, all the more real for being nonexistent. (Massumi 2015a: 190).

According to Massumi, if something was once perceived as a possibility, it would always be perceived as an affective fact.[3] An affective fact is therefore a feeling connected to the once possible version of reality: even if that version is not based on facts, the feeling itself is and always will be a fact that shapes the subject's perception of reality.

Massumi's intuition shed a new interpretative light on the growing interest – of both theoreticians and artist – in alternative histories.[4] As Matthew Schneider-Mayerson (2009) points out, the wider interest in alternative history came only in the second half of the 1990s[5] and is associated with the liberation of post-Cold-War historical imagination. This phenomenon could also be explained by the break with the deterministic and causative outlook on history (Ferguson, 2000), which encourages experimentation with the past and the creation of alternative versions of events (Ferguson 2000: 18). Nevertheless, it can be better understood, as Gavriel Rosenfeld pointed out, if we take into account the need of a given society to face the uncomfortable elements of the past, for example Nazism (Rosenfeld, 2002, 2005). Alternative scenarios help to reconcile difficult events from the past (Schenkel, 2012) by restructuring the very fabric of memory (Górecka, 2014). To recall notions proposed by Massumi: alternative histories produce and cultivate affective facts, which have an actual influence on contemporary memory practices. Although alternative versions of history are not real, their influence on memory could not be more real: they adapt and rearrange memory scenarios in order to fill in certain memory gaps and make the past easier to remember (Massumi, 2015a).

The fundamental novelty of alternate histories as a separate literary genre is also clearly visible in Poland, where the twenty-first century saw an increased interest in this kind of story concomitantly on the theoretical (cf., Sugiera, 2016; Wąsowicz, 2017; Górecka, 2014; Lemann, 2019), sociological and historical (cf. especially books of Zychowich, 2012;

[3] Massumi's framing of the problem calls to mind the well-known philosophical problem of the existence of possible worlds. Massumi draws upon that philosophical intuition (cf. Lewis, 1973), but substantial differences between these two ideas are clearly visible. Possible worlds were initially closely associated with the problems of semantical interpretation of modal logic, which recognizes possibility and necessity operators.

[4] It is worth noting that alternative history is a distinct genre from counterfactual history (Demandt, 1993), as alternative histories are open to include into narration not only fictional, but also fantastic elements.

[5] In 1995 the Sidewise Award for Alternate History was founded, which is considered a symbolic recognition of alternative history as an independent genre that is different from utopias, dystopias, allotopias, and science-fiction writing.

Orłowski, 2018), and literary level (cf., Parowski, 2010; Pietrasiewicz and Bogalczyk, 2013; Szczerek 2013; Wolski 2012; Ziemkiewicz 1998; Redliński, 1998; Dukaj 2007; Orbitowski, 2012). Other interesting examples are the Netflix drama *1983* and the anthology of literary, sociological and political texts *PL+ 50. Historie przyszłości* (Dukaj, 2004), which considered how Poland would be functioning fifty years after joining the European Union.[6]

The clear distinctiveness of alternate histories from other narratives about the possible versions of reality comes from their basic treatment of history as something accidental – possible but not necessary. The shock of two world wars and the Cold War paved the way for thinking about historical change as something random (Dannenberg, 2012; Hellekson, 2001), and not as a logical (irrespective of whether good or bad) continuation of reality.

This way of thinking is also augmented by postmodern theories of the future (cf., Jameson, 2005), though their fundamental trait is rather found in their strong reactivity – alternative histories are to a larger extent a response to current social attitudes (or the memory of certain events, which evokes an affective response), than thought experiments that are meant to familiarize a certain version of the future. The affective potential of at least some alternative histories stems from the fact that they exploit once possible scenarios of the future. Those scenarios are not always seen simply as a missed counterfactual opportunity, but rather as a future that was unjustly taken away from a particular society. In such cases alternative histories are a tool used to create a 'corrected' vision of the future and as a symbolical way of regaining what was lost. The future depicted in such visions is both extremely affective and reactive, which makes its interactions with the collective memory more than complex. To explain this relationship, I will refer to the examples associated with the Polish contemporary memory of the Second World War.

The affective overabundance of the future

Introducing and describing the ideas relating to futures past, alternative histories, and affective facts might make an impression of terminological chaos. However, this chaos is intentional, to a certain extent, as it illustrates the multitude of ways of thinking about the relationship between the past and memory. What this article sets out to accomplish is not a straightforward cataloging of previously developed theories, but rather introducing a new way of thinking about the role that future past and alternative histories play in building

[6] I am aware that alternative histories have a tradition going well beyond the last 30 years, but the number of publications (I only mention the most interesting examples but the list could be expanded further) in recent years indicates a significant change in the position of the genre, which is no longer a niche type of fantasy.

collective memory. The novelty of the proposed approach is based not on starting out with a blank slate but, rather, on performing a series of slight misreading of the aforementioned theories in order to show that a certain previously unacknowledged space, relating to the future, already existed within them, but was not clearly seen.

The first step in this process is to acknowledge the fact that the relationship between affects and memory is bidirectional: fixed versions of memory provoke an affective reaction, but at the same time collectively experienced affects and affective facts connected with them shape the framework of memory. To briefly explain the nature of this process, I will refer to a single example that is extremely significant for Polish collective memory: the memory of the September Campaign[7]. Though experts differ in their assessment of the event itself, it can be – I am of course simplifying that discussion for the sake of the current argument – interpreted either as a great Polish military defeat (and the reason for the defeat was the weakness of the army, especially the lack of an appropriate number of armored units and air force) or as a moment in history when Poland was betrayed by its allies (Allied help is perceived as late and weak) and by the Soviet Union (which attacked Poland on 17 September 1939). If the latter hypothesis is accepted, the responsibility for the Polish defeat lies not so much with the Polish leadership, but with the allies. According to this logic, Poland *could have* won the war. The possibility of winning the September Campaign thus becomes an affective fact and a part of the memory of futures past that is deeply ingrained in Polish culture, as many alternative histories (analyzed in the next section) exploring this scenario indicate.

This example shows that at least some communities of memory construct their identity not only upon that what has happened but also upon that what *might* have been. Usually, this is merely one of the components of a certain memory (this is recognized by Wenzel, 2006; Traverso, 2016), though in certain cases it takes on the dominant role. It is certainly at the heart of the Polish memory of the Second World War (analyzed, i.a., by Kwiatkowski, Nijakowski, Szacka and Szpociński, 2010; Kwiatkowski, 2008), which is influenced not only by various frames of memory that are centered around the still volatile and incendiary events explored by numerous scholars – such as, the memory of the Holocaust (Engelking et al., 2018; Tokarska-Bakir, 2016), the memory of the Katyn massacre and the Warsaw Uprising (Kobielska, 2016), memory of liberation and all of its consequences (Orla-Bukowska, 2006), and the hurtful problem of disremembrance (Bilewicz, 2016) – but also by the memory of what might have happened between the war and the current time (Sugiera,

[7] This is a common name for the Polish defensive war during the first months of WWII; it was fought between 1 September and 6 October 1939 and ended in Polish defeat.

2016). Alternative versions of WWII are a part of a more complex phenomenon: the current need to make past 'easier,' more bearable to remember, and more fitting with the contemporary visions of Poland as a country in bloom, which was denied its bright future time after time. The nature of the most popular versions of future past in Poland is predominantly determined by three events: an alternative course of WWII, a different outcome of negotiations immediately after the war, and the outbreak of another war following WWII. Each of the abovementioned versions of futures past supports the creation of affective facts, which commonly revolve around two feelings: resentment caused by the sudden interruption of the short period of complete independence and relative prosperity of the country in the interwar period, and the feeling of betrayal.[8] The enduring and still active character of both these affects is noteworthy, as they are incessantly used and reused in political skirmishes, particularly in enticing resentment towards particular European states and the European Union.

The negative affects arising from this are based on the contrast between the visions of a happy future (Ahmed, 2010) anticipated in the 1920s and 1930s, and actual events; on alternative histories constructed *ex post* and on deliberately nurtured political resentment. A common – and at the same time paradoxical – background of these phenomena is the interwar optimism characteristic for those countries which regained their independence in the course of WWI. In the Polish context of the interwar period this manifested through the expansionist, superpower rhetoric of development, which was amplified by the spectacular victory in the Polish–Bolshevik War of 1920 (this event is still a vital part of Polish identity, cf. Borzęcki, 2008). This superpower rhetoric was – at the time – counterbalanced by numerous lectures, speeches, press commentaries, and books, all of which pointed out the perils awaiting the new state, as well as by the novels directly endorsing or criticizing Sanation[9] politics (cf., especially, Dołęga-Mostowicz, 2015 [1932]; Kaden-Bandrowski, 1965 [1933]). Therefore the public discourse had to encompass two visions of the same country: one based on actual challenges: economic, fiscal, and political; and the other one, based on the rhetoric of victory, positive change, rebirth, and reclaiming the 'due' place in the European order. These two rhetorical framings were not always mutually exclusive – quite

[8] These feelings can be considered analogously to Ngai's 'ugly feelings' (Ngai, 2005); they are considerably less spectacular and recognized than great negative emotions (such as anger). Just as is the case with irritation and envy that are analyzed by Ngai, these feeling are also chronic in their character, and they are shameful and non-cathartic emotions.

[9] The interwar political movement led by Józef Piłsudski. The word is a Latinism, meaning 'healing' and describes the movements goal of ridding the country of corruption.

often productive and effective social and economic programs were the result of their conflict and of the strive towards improvement of the state's efficacy (Winiarski, 2006).

However, memories of the interwar Poland have lately undergone substantial levelling. During the last decade a new politics of memory emerged; one which the rule of the Law and Justice Party was presented as a simple continuation of the pre-war, supposedly golden period of Polish development. According to this policy, what is remembered are mostly successes and not the actual level of economic and industrial development of the country. Furthermore, in this memory scheme the Polish defeat during WWII is perceived as an event that was both unexpected and unjustified. According to this logic, it is a historical error that should be corrected. In this instance the *memory of that what was* has been substituted by the *memory of what might have been* – that is with a version of a happy future, construed on the premise: if only WWII did not impede the development of the country then in the next twenty years economic development and level of modernization would be on par with that of Western European countries. Leaving facts and questions of whether this was really attainable aside, I would like to examine the very mechanism of memory hidden beyond these assumptions. *A particular future past is incorporated into memory*, it is weaved upon vague but optimistic premises. From this moment on, the memory of what occurred during WWII and after it is *marked by nonexistence*, by the unrealized vision of a certain future. The memory of WWII thus conceived is influenced both by the visions of alternative (from the current perspective) futures past that were presupposed in the interwar period, as well as the currently posited models of a future that was achievable at a certain point in time, but was carelessly squandered. Oftentimes these two kinds of futures past – the one that was dreamt of at some point in history and the other that is currently being actively inscribed into the memory of the past – overlap one another.

This is precisely what is occurring right now at the heart of Polish memory, and the reconstruction process that is fueled by insufficiency and difference of the anticipated and actual future past goes way beyond the Second World War. In the aftermath of this affective event (I employ this notion in the sense given to it by Lauren Berlant (2008), as any event with the impact grave enough to influence and change the whole society, including its politics of affect) the whole structure of ordinary affects (Stewart, 2007) is permanently transformed. In consequence, both the memory of the interwar period – which is perceived, in Sara Ahmed's terms, as a happy object, a source of national pride – and the memory of postwar times, which encompasses also current political events, are reconstructed. The power of influence of this phenomenon directly reflects the affective difference: the optimism of the

1920s and 1930s is supplanted by very strong ugly feelings (Ngai, 2005), that have endured for the last eighty years and are only partly explainable by the indisputable horrors of war. The sudden fracture between the imagined and actual future was no less influential in this regard.

There are at least two clear consequences of this affective catastrophe: firstly, in Poland WWII has become a fixed point around which memory loops itself in the strangest of ways, secondly, the memory of war becomes exceptionally malleable. Starting with the first of these consequences I will state the obvious: the Second World War is a source of a peculiar, collective, obsessive-compulsive disorder in Poland. At a time when our memories should slowly migrate from the area of communicative memory to the area of cultural memory (J. Assmann, 2005 [1992]: 50), something goes wrong. The memory of The Second World War is apparently still not settled, it is not resolved to a degree that would allow it to become part of cultural memory. Even after all these years it remains a traumatic and affective past, one that demands constant repetitions and retellings.

These repetitions and retellings are, in turn, the consequence of the need to concurrently narrate that what has happened and that what should have happened. The impossibility of meeting this challenge turns the Second World War into the centerpiece of Polish culture around which memory loops itself; it is the crucial point to which everything gravitates, even when entirely different matters are being discussed. And this entails an unending reconstruction of WWII memory; its edition and adjustment to particular, political needs.

The second of the aforementioned consequences is directly tied with this issue. The memory of the Second World War is highly susceptible to inscribing into it the remnants of future past. And it is that kind of rewriting which influences the collective perception of the reality of certain events. To better explain what I have in mind, I will refer to the way alternative histories function. The majority of alternative histories rely on the formula of pointing out a certain pivotal event wherein even a slight change in the way things were would lead to a significant change in the course of history (Hellekson, 2001). These points are predominantly associated with grand historical events and the visions construed within their boundaries are based on realistic premises. For the most part, the aim of alternative history is presenting a different but plausible turn of events (the use of fictional or even fantastic elements of plot usually supports this goal). But, occasionally, some vision of possible events – even if it is devised *ex post* – starts to present itself to a given community not as a probable, though unfulfilled, version of reality but as something perfectly real, even

more so than that what had actually occurred. Such an alternative history turns into a future past, and it holds the stronger grip over society, the more it is affectively charged. In the process it becomes – in accordance with the ideas proposed by B. Massumi (2015) – not only an affective fact upon which both affective politics and politics of memory can be based, but, most of all, it becomes *superlatively* real, surpassing in its perceived reality that what had actually happened.

Unrealized visions of the future past are then viewed as something permanently absent, and therefore as precluding the awaited happy future. Restating Massumi's insights, it can be said that not only unrealized threats skew the perception of the future, present, and past. As the Polish example aptly illustrates, the same power is wielded by an unrealized and unrealistic, though still active hope for a better future. In relation to futures past it tends towards redressing the 'errors of history' and in its visions of the future it is inclined towards sometimes cruel optimism.

Alternative histories: memories of joy and non-existent history

This perspective shines, in my opinion, an interesting light on the Polish culture of memory. In this part of the paper I would like to pay closer attention to several alternate histories from around the same time, which are related to the course of the Second World War. Four books seem to be of utmost relevance in this case, these are: *Burza* by Maciej Parowski (2010), Marcin Wolski's *Wallenrod* (2009), Łukasz Orbitowski's *Widma* (2012), and *Rzeczpospolita zwycięska* by Ziemowit Szczerek (2013). This list is in no way comprehensive and leaves out many alternate histories and fantastic novels referring to the war that were written around the same time.[10] Nevertheless, these four representatives showcase the specificity of the cultural current under discussion here and permit an analysis of the complicated relationship between literary texts, understood as a medium of memory, and that what I call – following Kathleen Stewart's lead in this – the affective structure solidifying around the subject of the Second World War.

Wallenrod and *Burza* were published a year apart and they both take up a similar topic: what would have to have happened, for Poland not to be overpowered during the September Campaign? *Burza* offers the simpler explanation of this question. The book, set in the young adult novel genre and aggressively promoted by Polish cultural institutions after

[10] In case of Polish literature the majority of writers creating alternate histories have a background in the fantasy genre; hence the unmistakable intermingling of conventions that is present in the works of Jacek Dukaj, Łukasz Orbitowski, Rafał Ziemkiewicz, or Maciej Parowski.

publication,[11] relies on a simple narrative design. Poland defeated Hitler's army in September 1939 thanks to unforeseen storms and mists which lasted several days, completely grounding German mechanised and air forces. The source of Polish military's weakness in history as we know it, turns into an advantage leading to its victory in the alternate narrative (Parowski, 2010: 82). The novel, though it contains some fantastic elements (there are suggestions that Polish politicians relied on a clairvoyant in their decisions), finds 'salvation' for Polish history in a completely fortuitous event – in sudden downpours. What comes next – a swift counterattack of French and British forces, Hitler's downfall in the aftermath of the rushed Operation Valkyrie coup, the sudden rise of Poland's standing on the international arena – are mere consequences of this seemingly insignificant change in history.

Wallenrod lays its accents somewhat differently. Here we also encounter fantastical elements (experimental medical interventions prolong Józef Piłsudski's life well into the 1940s), but the change in the course of the war requires many adjustments to reality: Piłsudski forms an alliance with Hitler already in the 1930s, in a way precluding the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. At the same time, Hitler is kept constantly under surveillance and the key part in the intelligence operation is played by the eponymous Wallenrod. This time, in contrast with the famous nineteenth-century tragedy authored by Adam Mickiewicz, Wallenrod (that is someone working under cover for many years in order to thwart the enemy's plan) is a woman, known as Helena Wichmann.

I will not summarise the aforementioned novels here, but instead I hope to show their inner mechanism: in each case alternate reality is constructed so as to show that Polish defeat in WWII was avertable. Particular narrative devices illustrate which changes to reality could lead to the desired outcome: strong leadership, a more skilful approach to international alliances in the 1930s, concentrated intelligence gathering, securing a swifter allied response in September 1939, or a serendipitous sequence of events that are beyond anyone's influence (such as weather) – these are all recurrent themes not only in Parowski's or Wolski's novels, but also in debates of historians (this indicates that these novels ought not to be interpreted as ironically transforming past hopes, but as quite straightforward illustrations of still vivid imaginations of possible future past). Nonetheless, here their aim is not an exposition of a detailed scenario of some once possible counterfactual future, but presenting Poland as it would be, if not for the wartime destruction it experienced; Poland whose millions of citizens, among them prominent representatives of the intelligentsia and artistic circles, such as

[11] The book was awarded the special recognition in the ninth edition of the Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize.

Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, are not destined to die a horrible death – this subject is explored especially in *Burza*. The primary goal of these novels is, therefore, to provide a scrupulous vision of a happy Poland, it is the creation of otherwise unattainable memories of joy – this is fulfilled by bringing to life in the alternate narrative the persons who vanished in the war and through detailed descriptions of successful military operations. This approach has a double effect – it brings not only a momentary feeling of relief and happiness, but it also leads to the appearance of more complicated responses, such as bitterness over the loss of a possible happy future, a strong need to assign the blame for the missteps that led to military defeat, and finally anger directed not only toward Nazi Germany, but also toward the Allied forces that have, according to right-wing narratives, failed Poland miserably. The superposition of these affects causes Polish post-war reality to be seen as erroneous (because it is the result of domestic and foreign mistakes) and disappointing, because it does not fit with the alternative memories of joy that are being inscribed into Polish memory.

Burza and *Walenrod* therefore fulfil the need of rewriting history and of reliving otherwise unavailable positive affects. Nonetheless, not all alternate histories go with the current of collective fantasies about the lost happy future. Some – *Widma* and *Rzeczpospolita zwycięska* among them – confront these visions instead. *Widma* is a novel, as its subtitle clearly states, about Poland without the Warsaw Uprising. Its protagonists are Basia and Krzysztof, who are modelled on the poet Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and his wife Barbara Drapczyńska. Here, like in *Burza*, Baczyński survived the war but neither his life, nor the 'new' Poland resemble the ones found in the joyful visions. In the alternative year 1955, the country remains in the Soviet sphere of influence and the political terror of that time is similar, and to a large extent also focused on controlling the memory of events from August 1944. But what is under control in this instance is not the memory of the withheld Soviet aid during the Uprising, but the events that have replaced the military struggle. Their nature is unclear, but the semi-realistic, semi-fantastic convention adopted by the novel suggests that the Uprising did not take place because of supernatural intervention – the reality wherein the Uprising does take place was sealed in a 'magic box.' When, by chance, the box is opened in 1955, reality starts to readjust itself to the state known from actual history: Warsaw begins to deteriorate rapidly, whole buildings collapse or disappear, and people start to die.

The disintegration does not spare both protagonists, who – just like their historical counterparts – will not be able to escape death. The narrative arc is determined by the fate of the heroes but also by the question of the possibility of changing the course of Polish history.

As it turns out, there exist innumerable boxes with alternative chains of events – with 'non-existent history' (Orbitowski, 2012: 573).

Widma were already analysed in the context of memory at least several times, in greatest detail by Maria Kobielska, who pointed out that this text argues that the Warsaw Uprising is an essential part of Polish memory (Kobielska, 2016: 248). I do not dispute this, but I would like to discuss another aspect of this novel instead. The story rests upon a paradox: the alternate reality is structured around an event (the Uprising) not taking place, but the narrative arc reveals the tendency of history to self-correct and to restore such essential events – those which seem inevitable from a broader perspective – to the memory-affective experience. The book therefore illustrates a particular affective tension: The Warsaw Uprising is an extreme example of an event that seems to be erroneous and pointless, at the same time being the logical outcome of a chain of multiple decisions, an event that in a certain way concludes the martyrological narrative about the wartime sacrifice of the Polish nation during the Second World; hence, it is necessary. The novel can be viewed as an opinion on the peculiarities of Polish memory, and especially a diagnosis of its looping around certain moments in history – when memory clashes with events both senseless and inevitable, it splits and begins to enfold them with various narratives, exploring other possible ways of how things could have developed. In Orbitowski's novel there are numerous boxes with memory – as the ending tells us – just as there are many conceivable versions of history. Still, the fact that something is conceivable in no way means that it is attainable.

The concept developed by Orbitowski seems to be similar to the ideas presented in the last of the previously mentioned novels – *Rzeczpospolita zwycięska* by Ziemowit Szczerek. This work explores from a critical and sometimes ironic perspective the question of what would happen, if Poland won WWII. It therefore follows a similar pattern as *Wallenrod*, but – unlike that book – it is not a novel, and it lacks its optimism, fantastical elements, and fictional protagonists. Szczerek's vision is woven from more or less realistic hopes concerning the past, including those that were characteristic of the 1930s and those that keep recurring nowadays in the context of WWII. Szczerek confronts the optimistic scenario of Poland's development with facts, which show that the country never came close to becoming a regional leader (Tabaszewska, 2017). The fictitious reportage from the alternate year 2013, that concludes the book, can be considered to be both a political commentary on the changes occurring in Polish historical policy, which emphasizes Poland's bright future past, and a voice questioning the value of creating alternate histories that 'produce' a vision of a happy future by changing just one particular event from the past.

Conclusion

Though the analysed examples present only a fragment of the broad universe of Polish alternate histories, they reveal two dominant tendencies that structure this literary genre in Poland: the first supports the visions of an optimistic future past that has been lost through WWII, the second disputes the simplistic view of history understood as a series of isolated events. The latter, represented in novels of Orbitowski and Szczerek, blurs the generic outlines of alternate history by pointing to the conventional nature of the constructed alternate course of history, as well as to the dominant Polish rhetoric of collective memory, which sees WWII as an event interrupting the 'natural' development of Polish statehood. It is interesting that even though the mentioned novels are influenced by the classical representatives of the genre in world literature, such as *The Man in the High Castle* by Philip K. Dick ([1962] 2011]), and they follow a similar pattern as Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004), they lack the pedagogical bent that is characteristic for North American alternative histories. They do not caution against the things that might have happened, they do not explore the pessimistic avenues of history, but they concentrate on the optimistic ones instead, which – in the first of the two mentioned tendencies – are treated as harmful to Polish memory, because they offer an easy escape from real problems and events into a fantasy of what could be.

The power – and danger – of alternate histories constructed in response to the dissatisfaction with the past is rooted in the complicated tension of memory and affect inherent to their nature. Undeniably, alternate histories are fictional and they should not influence the memory of particular historical events. Nonetheless, if they are a part of a new historical policy[12] – and they are in case of Polish memory – whose role it is to recast any, even not that praiseworthy, event into a source of national pride or into evidence of the way Polish history should have been, then their influence on the outlines of the memory of WWII is substantial. Based on facts and playing with affects deeply embedded in Polish social structure (especially with the disillusionment with the presently not so great state that Poland is in), they support two concurrent memory-affective responses – first, returning to the past and rewriting it so that it is consistent with contemporary expectations and is a source of pride, and second, imagining the future as an adjustment of past events, as the fulfilment of a bright future past that was delayed by an unfavourable turn of history. In this case both the

[12] The majority of Polish alternate histories and fantasy novels associated with the topic of WWII are published with the active support of the Polish National Centre for Culture. This does not necessarily mean that they are politicized, but hey can indisputably be considered to be dependent upon the current politics of memory (which has been changing rapidly in the last decade).

memory of the past and thinking about the future become deformed – if the future is supposed to be a return to an unrealised future past, then it becomes an affective repetition and correction of the past, becoming lopped around the disenchantment with that what was.

Alternate histories therefore promote the construction of what was aptly described by Orbitowski as ‘non-existent history’: they are used in the construction of actual cultural memory of events that have never taken place and which were merely possible at some point in time. Transposing somewhat Massumi’s ideas, it could be argued that memory of a non-existent history breeds a very palpable affective response, which influences social attitudes not only toward the past, but also toward the present and the future. The analysis of cultures of memory that became looped on a particular experience, replaying events long in the past and inscribing their innumerable versions into the code of national identity, will be incomplete without acknowledging that this kind of non-existent history can be, and in fact already is, a part of collective and cultural memory. Taking into account ‘non-existent’ history and acknowledging the affective facts triggered by it as an active component in the frames of memory can bring a better understanding of the peculiar way in which the rhetoric of memory works in countries that have not yet dealt with their experience of the Second World War – such as Poland – and which instrumentalize memory for particular political gains.

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