

Memory Project

Łódź - New Orleans



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EXIT



Memory Project: an Introduction

Robin Levy:
Artist

In the fall of 2011, my mother, Anne Skorecki Levy, expressed interest in returning to her birthplace, Łódź, Poland. A World War II survivor, she had not been to Łódź since 1945 and wanted to visit her birthplace with her children and grandchildren. My immediate and acute concern that she would relive painful events from her childhood upon her return provoked me to construct a positive framework for the trip: I would create a commemorative homecoming event for my mother that would enable her to acknowledge her difficult past while engaging with present-day Łódź. To that end, I asked my mother to recall one happy childhood memory and sought her permission to use this positive connection to her past as the basis for a commemorative event. She gave me permission and shared her most cherished prewar memory: idyllic Sunday afternoons before the war when she and her father had gone for balloons and ice cream.



It was also important to me to seek the engagement of current Polish citizenry in my project—without its participation my mother’s “homecoming” would simply be a return to a haunted place without any redemptive qualities. Consequently, I sent a proposal to numerous Polish cultural professionals seeking to establish a Polish-American collaboration that would address my mother’s experiences in Łódź and also look at how those experiences might connect to her current home, New Orleans, which has experienced its own unique traumas. Keenly aware that these histories are vastly different, I was hopeful that someone from Łódź would recognize the opportunity to develop, together, a commemoration connecting two cities that have experienced significant trauma, albeit of very different kinds.

In February 2012, Marta Madejska, a PhD candidate at Institute of Contemporary Culture, University of Łódź, responded to my proposal and explained that my project was strongly related to her current work. She offered her assistance and advised me of several art and community organizations that I should also contact. Eventually, I traveled to Poland to meet with Marta and numerous other colleagues. There, we agreed to organize an art exhibition in Łódź with pre-war childhood memory as its theme. I returned home with spirited commitments from Marta (as co-organizer) and her deeply thoughtful community, and together, we developed what would soon become phase one of “Memory Project”.

Marta Madejska:
Researcher, Activist, Publicist

For several years, as a researcher, activist, and mostly new citizen of Łódź, I've tried to learn about the city's history and difficult postindustrial heritage. My organization, Topografie, collects oral histories as a means of preserving local memory. Among these stories, one can find very few Jewish narratives. This absence reflects how a community that contributed significantly to Łódź's development was annihilated during WWII. As a result, an equally significant portion of the city's local memory vanished as well.

I happened to receive Robin's proposal at the same time I began examining this part of the local history. I appreciated her awareness—even though she intended to commemorate the past, she respected that the project would enter into the city's current life. At that time, she did not yet know how complicated the local context of Łódź might be.

During phase one, the project brought about questions: How does memory work? How does one remember, commemorate, and continue to move forward? How does a place inform perspective? In phase two, we followed Anne's biography to New Orleans, where we encountered a different history.



Anne Skorecki and her sister, Lila
ca. 1937-39



Skorecki family
Postwar portrait
(New Orleans)
ca. 1954-55



Skorecki sisters
with their nanny
ca. 1938

Marta and Robin:

“Memory Project” phase two follows Anne Skorecki Levy's life story post-WWII to New Orleans, her current home. Recognizing that both cities provide very different historic traumatic backdrops, we broadened the theme of childhood memories from those specific to Łódź to include a host of New Orleans-related memories. We shared with local artists in both locales how Levy links Łódź and New Orleans through her specific experiences and asked them to interpret these themes of memory and place as they relate to their own cities. Artists participating in each exhibition brought to life the complexities of our themes with their poignant and nuanced works.

Establishing a creative structure within which to interpret and reflect history, we assembled members of the cultural communities from both cities to participate in a truly interesting social experiment. We are most grateful to Anne Skorecki Levy for her inspiration and trust, and to all those who helped us with this modest, yet significant international endeavor.

Going back to a place that doesn't exist: "Memory Project" in Łódź, Poland

by Eliza Gaust

Project Coordinator, Marek Edelman Dialogue Center, Łódź



Spacerowa Street, Pre-war boulevard
from Anne Skorecki's childhood memory.
photo courtesy of Museum of the City of Łódź

My name is Robin Levy.

I am an artist living and creating in New Orleans, USA.

*I am writing to share with you a project I hope to produce in
Poland within the next several months.*

This email, sent by artist Robin Levy, was the starting point of
"Memory Project", a creative initiative undertaken in Łódź, Poland, in

August 2012 to correspond with the return of the artist's mother to her
birthplace of Łódź, her first visit since her departure during WWII.

Anne Skorecki Levy (Polish name, Nusia Skórecka) was born into a
Jewish family in Łódź. She was four years old when Germany invaded
Poland in 1939. Anne's immediate family survived the Litzmannstadt
(Łódź) Ghetto and two years in the Warsaw Ghetto, eventually escaping
in 1943. The family left Poland after the war, relocated to Germany, and
finally settled in New Orleans. Anne, then a little girl, preserved only a
handful of memories from that time.

*There are so few memories that are with me from before the war,
but here I go.*

*The most vivid are the walks with Tata down the wide avenue on
Sundays, getting balloons and ice cream.*

*I remember vaguely playing in my grandmother's kitchen with a
scale and measuring beans and potatoes.*

*The third is the last summer in August of 1939 in the country with
the German Shepherd dog in his doghouse.*

*Then the war came and my childhood started again in 1945 in
Tirschenreut.*

Very short story.

Sunday walks down the avenue, balloons, and ice cream. Anne's years in Łódź, not yet marked by the war, are remembered as a safe time seen through the eyes of a child. These memories served as inspiration for Anne's daughter Robin to arrange the unusual return of her mother to her hometown for the first time since the 1940s.

When this project began, no one knew exactly what it would be. It was important, however, that the format be open-ended, based on spontaneity and initiatives put forth by the participants involved. From the beginning, it was clear what the project shouldn't be—Robin did not want her mother's return to be marked by martyrdom. It was not to be a commemoration or a means of overcoming trauma, but rather an affirmation of life. Anne's family was much more fortunate than the vast majority of the Jewish community. Anne's nuclear family survived, left the ghetto, and landed in New Orleans. Initially, Robin assumed that re-enacting her mother's activities from 1939 in the vibrant contemporary community of the city could bridge the past and present. It happened, but in different ways than she anticipated.

In December 2011, Robin sent an open message to artists and cultural professionals who live and work in Łódź. Her email was answered by Marta Madejska from Łódź's Topografie Association, an organization that strives to reinforce the cultural identity of Łódź. Robin and Marta decided to work together to realize the idea under the title "Memory Project," through which Polish artists, cultural activists, and one filmmaker would participate in conjunction with Anne's milestone return after seventy-three years.

Łódź was once a city structured around the textile industry. Prior to the Second World War it was inhabited by Poles, Jews, and Germans. Three cultures lived alongside one another until the outbreak of war. Although Łódź's urban fabric wasn't affected by destruction during the war, the social structure of the city was changed dramatically. The multicultural world of Łódź was gone. The population decreased from 670,000 to

300,000, but started increasing again after 1945, when new communist authorities started to develop old industry. Polish workers soon filled deserted houses. During the four decades after WWII, Łódź continued to grow while struggling through difficult economic circumstances. The city was, as before the war, filled with textile workers, primarily women, who experienced low wages and many hours of repetitive work. In 1989, following various political transformations, the textile industry collapsed. On one hand, there is the city of Łódź that has disappeared and remains solely in the personal memories of its older generation. On the other, the city here and now— still struggling with the emigration of young people to the capital and other wealthier cities in Europe— has recently become very active at the grassroots level with the support of many local organizations, activists, and artists. In addition, the city is undergoing huge but ambiguous changes due to urban constructions.

Anne returned to Łódź in August 2012 in an attempt to reconnect with the topography of the city of her childhood. Part of the street where her family used to live is still the same, except for a synagogue that was burned in 1939. However, the avenue she walked down with her father, where he bought her balloons and ice cream, is now a wide, noisy street void of trees and filled with cars. These experiences beg the question: Is it possible to tell a story about a time and place that no longer exists and of memories that are lost?

Robin Levy's project was intended to be an interpretation of the past, not the reconstruction of a place that doesn't exist anymore. In her proposal sent to artists in Łódź she wrote:

I encourage you to explore the notion of a child's safe, timeless world of warmth and protection. What does childhood paradise feel like? Look like? Smell like? Sound like? How can memory connected to a specific time and place re-emerge several decades later?



Included in her proposal, were several memories of older residents of Łódź who had survived the war, which were collected and provided by Topografie Association. With their responses, Robin hoped to create a more universal scenario, though strongly rooted in a particular place (Anne's birth city). Robin's message was promptly answered by Agnieszka Chojnacka, Adam Klimczak, Piotr Szczepański, Tomasz Ciesielski, and Kuba Pałys. Each of the artists from Łódź proposed an idea for an action that corresponded with Robin's concept. The participants represent different generations and thus explored different layers of memories—Anne Skorecki was born in 1935; Robin was born in 1959. Aside from Adam Klimczak, who represents Robin's generation, the artists and Marta (one of the organizers of the project) are all much younger. As a result, the project reflects historically different experiences. The issue of locality is significant for the artists as well—most were born and raised in Łódź, which informed their decision to use their own memories instead of those of seniors they had been given.

The activities of the first phase of "Memory Project," which took place in Łódź on August 5, 2012, was composed of three parts. The first took place at City Culture Point PREXER-UŁ, where oral history recordings were heard and recorded as part of Marta Madejska's *Listen and Recount*, 2012. Second was a visual art exhibition hosted by East Gallery. The third part—a screening of a film created for "Memory Project" and an interactive theatrical performance—was held at the former Helena Wolf Hospital.

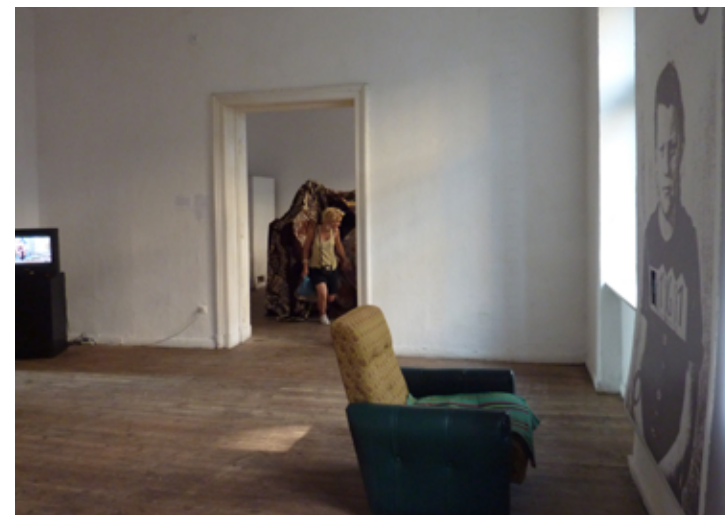
Robin's contribution to the exhibition in Łódź, *Nusia*, 2012, greeted the visitor in each phase of the event: white balloons with Nusia Skórecki's childhood picture—a girl in a sailor suit with a white bow in her hair and a ball with polka dots. She is smiling, unsuspecting of what is soon to come, the end of this carefree phase of her life in Łódź. These balloons were created for her mother to hand out during the exhibition, inviting others to share Anne Skorecki Levy's most cherished childhood memory.

Adam Klimczak's participation in "Memory Project" was twofold. He contributed as an artist and as owner of East Gallery (Galeria Wschodnia). This space, dating back to 1981, is unique for its history as an important experimental center. East Gallery is maintained with private funds from its initiators Klimczak and Jerzy Grzegorzewski, as well as friends and artists associated with this place. Housed in a private apartment and located in an old building on East Street (ulica Wschodnia), it includes a kitchen and lounge. The private, somewhat intimate character of the gallery corresponded perfectly with the events taking place there.



Anne Skorecki Levy handing out balloons at East Gallery (Galeria Wschodnia), Łódź

At the opening, visitors walked through the courtyard and up a staircase to enter the space. White balloons were hung on brass stairs leading to the entrance. Inside the gallery, the ceiling was filled with the same balloons, and visitors were invited to take one. They prompted many questions about the event and provided a social dimension to the exhibition, inspiring random passersby to engage with the project.



East Gallery (Galeria Wschodnia), Łódź

In the gallery's main room, an enlarged photograph of a girl was installed between two windows. She has a worried look on her face and the number 161 is visible on her breast. Within this large photo is a small square cut-out with a series of images taken from a family photo album and displayed in a loop on a digital picture frame.

Adam Klimczak's installation, *161 photographs with Lodzia (161 fotografii z Lodzia)*, 2012, refers to the name of the artist's mother, Leokadia (Lodzia), and may also refer to the name of her birthplace, Łódź. Anne's memories and visit to Łódź encouraged Klimczak to create a piece dedicated to his own mother.

An armchair, similar to those many people have in their homes, was an additional component of the installation, inviting visitors to sit and spend time with the photographs. Viewers engaged in a very intimate experience as they looked at other people's memories, particularly

the kind that are usually hidden in drawers and boxes. Pictures of Lodzia, including those from her funeral, remind us that we all have such photographs in our family albums serving as part of a collective memory.

Justyna Wencel's contribution was the only work not created specifically for "Memory Project." *A Place Called Home (Miejsce zwane domem)*, 2012 involved the artist moving a portion of her room from her family home to the gallery. By observing and mythologizing space in this manner, everyday objects were transformed into grotesque forms. Wencel refers to this work as follows:

My actions enhanced the elements of destruction and resulted in disintegration of the original form and context. They also reflect my ambivalent attitude toward "home."

Indeed, the objects created by Wencel were disturbing: the curved form of the colorful buttons hanging from the ceiling, the cube to which teeth are glued in neat rows, the straw surface on which cutlery forming a triangle is placed beside an embroidered heart with embedded pins. Nearby was a hanging grass mat with many small items commonly found in Polish homes. Re-contextualized, their significance was reshaped, creating strange forms and dangerous, unfamiliar creatures.

Additionally, Wencel presented *Hereditary Traits (Cechy dziedziczne)*, 2012, based on video documentation of intimate activities she performed in the family home, garden and town where she grew up. The video elaborates the story of her life and identity as an artist and as a woman.

An adjacent room housed an installation by Agnieszka Chojnacka titled *The Cave (Jaskinia)*, 2012. This cave is actually a tent, a hovel, a fort—constructed of chairs covered with blankets. Most people can probably recall building a similar cave as a child by covering a table or chairs with blankets to separate themselves from the outside world. This desire for



temporary isolation, an illusion of independence and safety, is universal. Though the cave appears to be an intimate space in which strangers are not allowed, Chojnacka invited gallery visitors into her world. In this dark, isolated space, she presented a video that shows a moving wand with a star on top popping bubbles. A mumbled melody from the movie *The Never Ending Story* (released when the artist was five years old) was playing. Perhaps Chojnacka wanted to transport the viewer to a particular moment in time when, for her, everything was still magical and mysterious. She undermines this tranquility, however, with sounds from outside the “cave” of bombs exploding in synchronization with the bubbles popping inside the structure.

These installations and the distribution of the balloons were both connected and protected by the unusual atmosphere provided by East Gallery—one of warmth and privacy, but also with its door open welcoming outsiders to enter and become part of the creative engagement.

Piotr Szczepański’s film, a very personal work titled *Memory Project*, 2012, with music by Agnieszka Stulgińska, was screened later in the evening outside, in front of the former Helena Wolf Hospital building on Łagiewnicka Street. The screening took place in this specific location based on Szczepański’s history with the hospital (when it was still operational). Szczepański’s first-person narrative begins with the memory of a friend who had a mental breakdown: “I remember walking along the white corridors on a bright sunny day.” The story moves through his years in high school and to a memory of the girl who brought him to that place, who is now his wife. The narrative is eventually interrupted by a woman’s voice who talks about the hospital’s current state, now abandoned and ruined. By pairing moments from the past with the dilapidated building of the present, the memory/history of the building is contrasted with its current state. Szczepański re-creates a history and a topography of this site based on his own narrative:



Only recently my mother told me I was born there. It was once known as “Helena Wolf Hospital.” Today that place is in the past. Same as the Ghetto in the middle of which it was standing.

Szczepański also introduces other crucial facts about the building’s meaning within the city of Łódź. Prior to WWII, it was constructed in a poor, Jewish, working-class district, and during the war it was located within the borders of the Litzmannstadt Ghetto. In this instance, biographical memory crosses historical and collective memory, establishing a continuity of place even though there is an obvious disconnection. Szczepański concluded:

The whole project became an experiment with the forms of documentary impressions, where the past and the present are intertwined. But is that not the way our memory works?



still from Piotr Szczepański’s film, *Memory Project*

Following the screening at Helena Wolf Hospital, Tomasz Ciesielski and Kuba Pałys engaged in *Sense-Action (Sens-akcja)*, 2012, a performance in which the artists used fragments of memories selected from archival

materials and interviews with residents of Łódź who survived the war. The performance-installation by Ciesielski and Pałys was an attempt to restore/revisit sensory childhood experiences of the city’s older generation. The performance was accompanied by the warning: “to be a participant in this event one must agree to the physically unsettling experience of history in order to access its parts through hearing, smell, and touch.” Participants were required to cover their eyes and trust someone to lead him or her by the hand.

The artistic activities associated with “Memory Project” in Łódź created an intricate puzzle consisting of multiple personal and collective experiences. Anne Skorecki Levy revisited her memories of Łódź prior to WWII through the eyes of the artists currently residing there, who also recalled their own memories formed closer in time to their present-day city.

“Memory Project” was continued in New Orleans, where Anne eventually settled and continues to live, which created an even greater looping of voices, places, and persons. The questions about memory—how it is connected with our identity, how it depends on certain locations and culture, if it has universal patterns—are difficult to answer. The value of projects such as “Memory Project” is that they activate dialog about our conception of memory and place and often restore images that would have otherwise been lost forever.

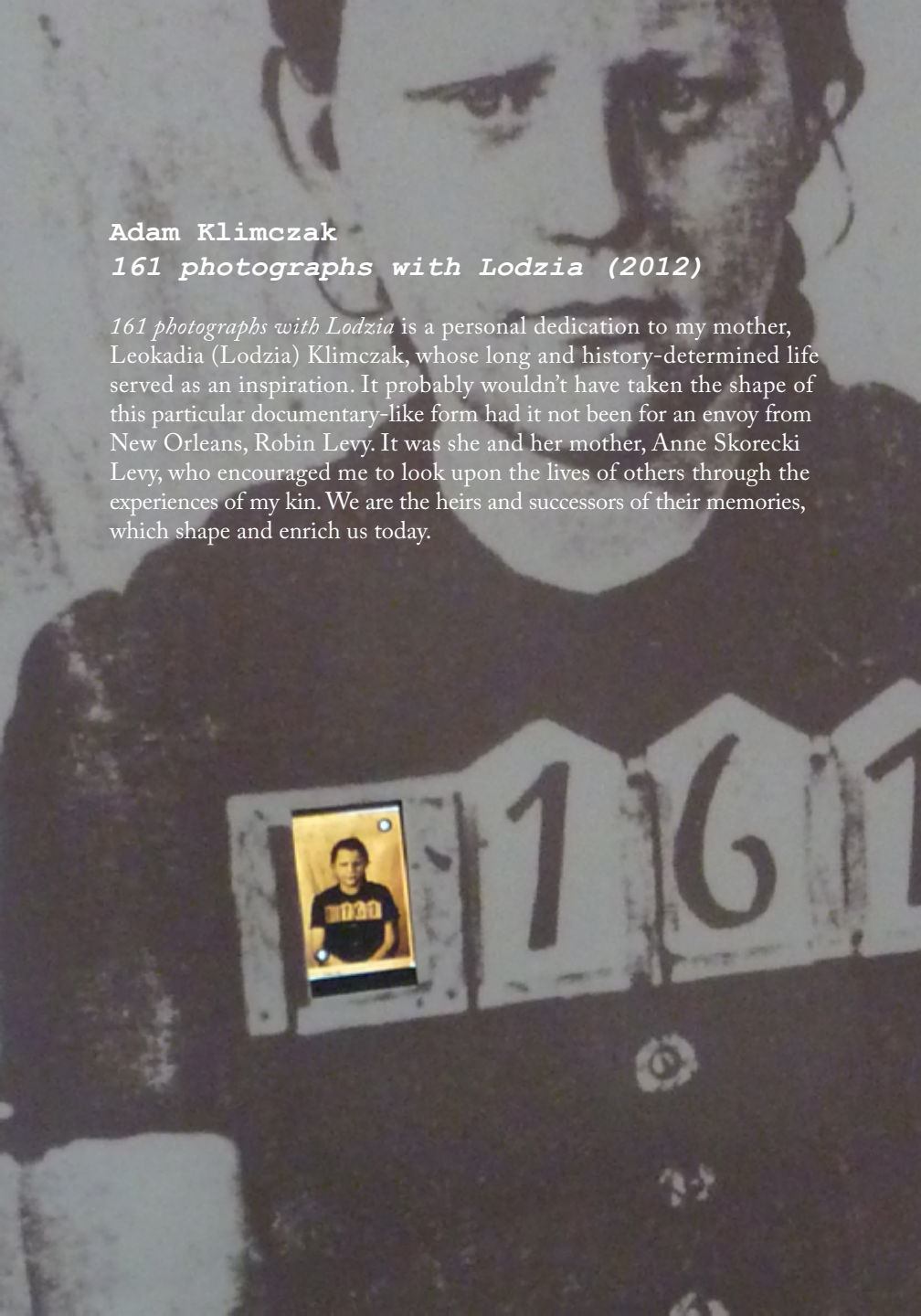
Agnieszka Chojnacka
***The Cave* (2012/2013)**

The Cave is a domestic construction, modeled after those built by children in order to create a space of their own and the illusion of independence and security. Inside, there is a video showing annihilation of soap bubbles with the use of a magic wand. Each disappearance of a bubble is combined with the sound of an explosion. Joyful child's play is joined with aggression. Inside the safe construction, one can enjoy destruction.





New Orleans installation



Adam Klimczak

161 photographs with Lodzia (2012)

161 photographs with Lodzia is a personal dedication to my mother, Leokadia (Lodzia) Klimczak, whose long and history-determined life served as an inspiration. It probably wouldn't have taken the shape of this particular documentary-like form had it not been for an envoy from New Orleans, Robin Levy. It was she and her mother, Anne Skorecki Levy, who encouraged me to look upon the lives of others through the experiences of my kin. We are the heirs and successors of their memories, which shape and enrich us today.






Justyna Wencel
A Place Called Home (2012)

The meanings generated by the installation belong to a variety of registers: childhood, religion, and Polish history. The straw mat with objects not only visually represents the space of votive offerings but is also a synonym of expression for the youth of my generation, born in the 1970s in communist Poland. My performance resulted in the objects' disintegration. The original forms and contexts disappeared, life energy was regained, and fragments were put together again. Transformation of the walking stick turned the object associated with old age and loss into the attribute of journey, leadership, and power.



Justyna Wencel
Hereditary Traits, 3:50 min. (2012)

The video expresses the ambivalence of the heritage women take over from other women. In the series of actions, the female protagonist plays with the common attributes of femininity in order to question or discard them. In the context of the mother-daughter relationship, her manipulation of meanings and acts of destruction enhance the woman's imperative to follow her own way.



Piotr Szczepański
***Memory Project*, 6:36 min. (2012)**

Memory Project came out of an impulse to name a lot of things I've been carrying within myself for a long time. A documentary film is, for me, a recording of the passage of time. Robin's appeal allowed me to manifest something that's very personal. What I've recorded on camera is documentary photographs and situations that occurred throughout one day in July 2012 around former Helena Wolf Hospital. However, they refer to memories from my entire life. My words give these images new meanings. Through editing I was able to pull them out of the context of the present and transpose them beyond time. The whole project became an experiment with the forms of documentary impressions, where the past and the present are intertwined. But is that not the way our memory works?



Robin Levy
***Nusia* (2012)**

A memory can transport a person to a particular place and time. My intention was to activate a childhood memory that remains crystal clear and cherished by my mother: “strolling with Tata (father) down the wide avenue on Sundays getting balloons and ice cream.” During the 2012 opening of “Memory Project,” my mother, Anne Skorecki Levy, handed out balloons printed with her photograph taken at the age of four in Łódź, Poland. Mom had the opportunity to reclaim and share with others one of her last innocent pre-WWII recollections—seventy-three years later, in her birth city—connecting past and present. In November 2013, during the New Orleans opening, Mom repeated this ritual gesture with people who live in her present-day community.



Deborah Luster

***Tooth For An Eye: A Chorography of
Violence in Orleans Parish (2008 - 2010)***

In the atavistic culture of New Orleans, so alive with the historic, symbolic, and sensual, there exists a porousness between the worlds of the living and the dead, where time bends and flows, and neither world lives or dies free of the other's space or influence.

Tooth For An Eye is a project that attempts to take a very close look at something that no longer exists—an invisible population—in the only way one can approach such things, obliquely and through reference. The result is a photographic archive documenting contemporary and historical homicide sites in the city of New Orleans and is, as well, an exploration of the empty, dizzying space at the core of violence.





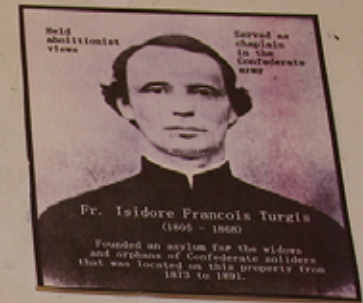


Courtney Egan and Anita Yesho
A Partial History of Square 356,
lots 12 and 13 (2013)

Research, as an act in and of itself, expands one's awareness beyond the veneer of the present. Interconnected arrays of facts, memories, serendipity, and one's own conscious or unconscious biases reconstruct multiple narratives in the mind's eye. *A Partial History of Square 356* invited visitors to Press Street's Antenna Gallery to participate in their own acts of reconstruction. Participants were invited to sit down and, with magnifying glasses, sift and glean from a table spread with photographs, census records, city directories, sales documents, and the occasional presence of historian Anita Yesho and others. A narrative of property sales, known residents, and selected cultural shifts was projected onto the table from above. The intention was to acknowledge recent demographic changes in the Bywater neighborhood of New Orleans, in which Press Street's headquarters is located, by highlighting the neighborhood's tumultuous past.



UPON BUSINESS FORMS
 HAVE YOUR COMPLETE BUSINESS FORMS
 COMPANY
 LUMBER



Detestable
 a butcher.
 Listed



2 Sept 1891.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE - BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
 FOURTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES - POPULATION
 NAME OF ENUMERATED PLACE: New Orleans, La.
 ENUMERATED BY ME ON THE 28th

NAME	AGE	SEX	RACE	INDUSTRY	EDUCATION	PROPERTY	RELIGION	OTHER
Handy, J. J.	35	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, M. J.	32	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, J. M.	28	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, J. P.	25	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, J. R.	22	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, J. S.	19	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, J. T.	16	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, J. U.	13	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, J. V.	10	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, J. W.	7	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, J. X.	4	M	W	...	...	...	...	...
Handy, J. Y.	1	M	W

NAME	AGE	SEX	RACE	INDUSTRY	EDUCATION	PROPERTY	RELIGION	OTHER
...
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detail, A Partial History of Square 365, lots 12 and 13



Marta Madejska

Listen and Recount (2012/2013)

During phase one of “Memory Project” in August 2012, my friend Hania Gill-Piątek agreed to share her childhood memories from Łódź. She was born in 1974, between the second and third generation after WWII and remembers Łódź during the last decades when textile factories were still working. Hania recalls her ambivalent remembrance of women workers: their fatigued bodies and clothes and their smells, but also a kindness and tenderness she experienced from these women.

In New Orleans I invited people to listen to (or read) my friend’s very peculiar memories and asked them to share their stories.





Tomasz Ciesielski and Kuba Pałys
***Sense-Action* (2012/2013)**

The performance was thought to be an invitation to a strange meeting with someone's memories through a "guided tour" of sensory stimulations/simulations undertaken blindfolded. A rope was the only guide in Łódź, which participants followed and underwent the scent, sound, and tactile mirages of the pre-war childhood memories of inhabitants of Łódź. *Sense-Action* in New Orleans became a real encounter with four guides who, aside from stimulating the senses, used their bodies as signposts inviting participants to have fun and dance, to create new stories while the original ones remained as memories. It was no longer about recalling memories, but above all, about taking the risk of exploring a new relationship, discovering through a cordial meeting how open we are today—after traumas—and how ready are we to trust and how trustworthy we are ourselves.

New Orleans performers: Max Jay-Dixon, Nelson Gonzalez, David Kaplinsky, Eli Tim

Phantom Presences: "Memory Project" in New Orleans

by Amy Mackie

Independent Curator, Writer, and Co-Director of PARSE Gallery

"Memory Project," presented at Antenna Gallery in New Orleans in November 2013, expanded on a narrative about memory and place that commenced many months earlier in Łódź, Poland. Its co-organizers, New Orleans-based artist (and Press Street/Antenna member) Robin Levy and Polish educator and researcher Marta Madejska, invited a group of Łódź-based artists to contribute projects about childhood memories to an exhibition that coincided with Levy's mother's return to Łódź, her birthplace, for the first time since the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 and her family's subsequent escape. This exhibition—which included works by Agnieszka Chojnacka, Tomek Ciesielski, Adam Klimczak, Kuba Pałys, Piotr Szczepański, and Justyna Wencel, presented in three venues throughout Łódź in August 2012—marked the first phase of "Memory Project." For its second phase, Levy and Madejska included their own work as well as contributions by New Orleans-based artists Courtney Egan (who collaborated with historian Anita Yesho) and Deborah Luster alongside the six Polish artists. The focus of this essay, however, is the work of Egan/Yesho and Luster presented in phase two, the exhibition in New Orleans. Both of these projects use research and artistry to interrogate the past through a process of recovering and unfolding multiple histories in New Orleans—Egan/Yesho's through the architecture of a fixed space and Luster's through the architecture of the human spirit.

Luster's *Tooth For An Eye: A Chorography of Violence in Orleans Parish* is a series of photographs (2008 – 2010) as well as a book (Twin Palms, 2011) in which the artist captures barren landscapes, deteriorating neighborhoods, and empty hotel rooms where homicides have taken

place in and around New Orleans. This series was presented in solo exhibitions at the Odgen Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans in 2013 and at Jack Shaiman Gallery in New York in 2011. Each photograph in the book is accompanied by a handwritten explanation of the act of violence that took place at the location pictured. Absent of emotion, the straightforward facts reiterate the anonymity of the crimes committed and the hopeless void in which these actions and their consequences reside. In Eva Diaz' article about Luster's work for *Pelican Bomb* in 2011, she refers to the way the wind can be harnessed and captured as "phantom presences,"¹ but it could equally be stated that the lack of human bodies in the photographs summons the faceless spirits of the departed. Photographs often serve as perpetual purgatories of sorts—as the common practice of photographing the dead in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries makes clear—and in Luster's work this liminal space is overwhelmingly present.

The book, as well as one of Luster's large circular photographs, was included in phase two of "Memory Project." The photograph taken at the intersection of Florida Avenue and Congress Street where an eighteen year-old boy named Charlie Hulbert died of multiple gunshot wounds documents a desolate expanse, but through Luster's insightful vision it is transformed into a requiem for the many lives lost throughout a city with terrifyingly high murder rate. The circular format of this series of images additionally points to the cyclical and destructive nature of violent crime in neighborhoods throughout the United States, while the impetus to gather and visually map such information exposes the unseen—and thus, often unaddressed—social architecture of urban life.

¹ Eva Diaz, "Absent Populations: Deborah Luster's Tooth For An Eye," in *Pelican Bomb*, May 12, 2011, available at <http://www.pelicanbomb.com/read/absent-populations-deborah-luster%27s-tooth-for-an-eye/> (last accessed March 5, 2014).

Geographer Richard Campanella's maps charting the development of New Orleans' neighborhoods, first published in *Bienville's Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans*, as well as Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Law* (one of the few films to capture expansive stretches of the Bywater neighborhood of New Orleans in the 1980s) inspired Egan/Yeshe's archive project *A Partial History of Square 356, lots 12 and 13* (2013). Developed specifically for "Memory Project," this initiative was a historical investigation of the structure located at 3718 St. Claude Avenue—the building that currently houses the nonprofit literary and visual arts collective Press Street/Antenna, which hosted the exhibition in New Orleans. Press Street/Antenna relocated to this space in November 2012 and has a ten-year lease. Egan and Yeshe pursued their research as a means to explore the past, but also to ruminate on the future of this site. It is located in a rapidly developing neighborhood that has been the subject of many ongoing conversations about gentrification, and *A Partial History of Square 356* unveils the shifts that have occurred on or around St. Claude Avenue dating back to the mid-to late-1800s.

For Egan, an artist who was born in New Orleans and who is also a founding member of Press Street/Antenna, this exploration was a natural outgrowth of her own interest in the city, though it is ultimately intended to serve as a resource and an archive for Press Street/Antenna. Egan primarily known for her video installations and *Deep Water Dates* (2007), a site-specific installation of plaques noting floods in New Orleans dating back to 1849 for which she traversed similar territory in mapping little-known histories in specific pockets of the city. *A Partial History of Square 356* also corresponds with Polish artist Piotr Szczepański's film *Memory Project* (2012), which explores the history of the former Helena Wolf Hospital building in Łódź, where the artist was born.

Egan and Yeshe brought together information they found through the New Orleans Office of Conveyances, Ancestry.com, and The

Historic New Orleans Collection regarding the residents and owners of the property at 3718 St. Claude Avenue. The resulting archive of photographs, maps, acts of sale, etc. pertaining to the building—which has seemingly been unoccupied since the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005—was accompanied by magnifying glasses on a table at the entrance to the exhibition at Antenna Gallery. A projector mounted on the ceiling and facing the table displayed visual and textual information, including a timeline of events and activities at the site, synchronized with an audio recording of a hand knocking on a door. The archival materials revealed that the Catholic Church owned the property for many decades and its occupants at various points included free people of color and German immigrants. Gallery visitors were invited to peruse the materials and to share their own experiences of a neighborhood that has experienced massive racial and socio-economic changes over the last several decades. The archive additionally encouraged viewers to consider the history of this property dating back to the years preceding the abolition of slavery in the United States in 1865.

The works Egan/Yeshe and Luster contributed to "Memory Project" illuminated finite moments in New Orleans' past and encouraged viewers to bear witness to these histories. Both projects summoned an overwhelming human presence by highlighting its absence. Another critical link between Luster's *Tooth For An Eye* and Egan/Yeshe's *A Partial History of Square 356* can be found in the boundless possibilities of language and its ability to recount and make accessible overlooked moments in time. By positioning these projects within a pre-existing conversation about the strained history of Łódź, Levy and Madejska bring Levy's mother's journey full circle to the city where her recovery process continued following her brief stay in Germany from 1945 to 1949. It also raises questions about how the unearthing of these incidents and moments inform the present and what they might imply about the future: Are memory and trauma about absence or presence? And does an attempt at reconciling the past change our relationship to it?

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installation view, Antenna Gallery, New Orleans, 2013

