TRAJECTORIES OF DISPLACEMENT: (NON)WRITTEN AND ERASED BIOGRAPHIES

Tania Arcimovich

Doctorate Candidate, International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture, Justus-Liebig-University
Otto-Behaghel-Straße 12, 35394 Gießen

E-mail: tania.arcimovich@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-6691-3409

Abstract: The paper examines some 'stories' of female artists who were connected (in different ways) to Belarusian cultural space, mainly in the first half of the twentieth century. Despite women's prominent and incontestable contribution to art, firstly, as producers, their role and place are still mainly invisible in 'global' and 'local' art history, whose 'canon' is oriented on the male experience.
Exploring history and the strategies of displacement, erasing, forgetting, and non-recognition of female producers in art, the paper asks about so-called universal common patterns of how this marginalisation (and, as a result, absent) still happens, no matter what field — art, science, technology — in any area which is considered as a male realm. Discussing several obstacles scholars might face in the process of reconstructing women's biographies, the author argues that the feminist approach of *storytelling* aims not merely to extend 'history'. It is a strategy to trouble the existing male-oriented 'canon' that contributes to creating multidiverse and plural 'epistemic spaces' as the fundamental matter of transnational feminism.

Keywords: female artists, art's histories, canon, Belarus, transnational feminism

introduction

The preface to the collective investigation of women's history in the Dada movement Ina Boesch begins with a group photo of Parisian dadaists. Almost all of them were men. The only female figure is the writer Cèline Arnauld, who was one of the active members of the group

from the very beginning, including her contribution to the Parisian Dada manifesto. Several years later, Tzara did not even mention her name in his version of the history of dadaism. There might be several reasons, one of which is that "he did not take her as an artist seriously" (Boesch, 2015, p. 2). As Ruth Hemus mentions, basically, the first histories of the movements were written by "the male dadaists themselves," which determined how these stories were told (qtd. in Allmer, 2016, p. 367). And the exclusion and forgetting of women in dadaism are merely one example among the others (Deepwell, 1998; Allmer, 2016). We can see many women in the photos from the history of different art movements including modernism and the avant-gardes as the most historically mythologised but the same "male" (Felski, 1995, p. 2). However, the titles often present only well-known male names. The female figures usually remain with 'no names', and if they have, it tells *nothing*. Most readers might only suppose that *she* was a lover? a model? but definitely *not a producer*. Almost nobody usually asks (except for, probably, 'curious' feminist scholars) who *she* was in fact.

There is a vast corpus of literature published in recent decades which aim at inclusion of the names of female producers in the history of different art movements. However, as feminist and women's historians mention, such an "extension" cannot influence the general (male-oriented) narrative (Feinberg, 2019). The achievements of female producers remain on the margins of art history (as less meaningful), since the identity of a 'great artist' will always belong to the male realm (Nochlin, 1971).

Therefore, this paper traces some of the "forgotten" (or marginalised) female names from Belarusian art history asking about how the exclusion of women artists happened and by what means. Based on a biographical approach and feminist theory, the paper investigates (and at some point compares) the life stories of several female producers — from the history of the People's Art School in Viciebsk, Nadzia Chadasievič-Léger, Volha Dziadok-Biembiel, and Halina Rusak-Rodzka. The aim is to disclose the "common points" and the differences in female producers' paths that either allowed them to remain in history or, in contrast, left them "forgotten." I also describe some obstacles scholars might face in the process of reconstructing women's biographies highlighting the role of memoirs and archives. I wonder about the role of language (including its function to represent a particular ideological discourse) as a significant means not merely for describing "herself" in history (and, in this way, leaving "traces"). The search for a proper language which enables to represent *her* experience remains a fundamental task not only for female producers but also for scholars who explore the "traces" of these women.

Demonstrating how many still "undiscovered" sites every art phenomenon might have, the article disputes the ability of the existing "canon" *to tell a story* (Meskimmon, 2023, p. 1). At this point, *another* (feminist) approach to writing art histories insists not merely on the

extension of narrative. The fundamental point is the revision of the canon (as male-oriented) as a necessary condition to change "the way we think about the past" (Feinberg, 2019, p. 155). In addition, it allows to create multidiverse and plural "epistemic spaces" as the opposition to the existing hierarchical frame which would remain open to any new story.

'forgotten' names — 'erased' stories

The history of female artists who belonged to the People's Art School is an example of how art history can turn the phenomenon into an exclusively male achievement, ignoring and forgetting facts or leaving them somewhere *behind* as insignificant. Founded by Marc Chagall in 1918, the School is associated mainly with the names of Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitzky, Mstislav Dobuzhinky, David Jakerson or Ivan Puni. Some of the female names, mainly of teachers, are at least mentioned, for instance, Vera Ermolaeva and Nina Kogan (but because of their administrative functions) or Ksenia Boguslavskaya and Elena Kabischer-Jakerson (as the were wives of Puni and Jakerson). Those who were students, and they were more than one-third of the whole number, almost 'disappeared' from the School's history. Meantime, it was mainly female students who quantitatively dominated the classes of Malevich, Kogan or Ermolaeva and represented the most ardent followers of cubism and suprematism.

As a matter of fact, the first post-revolutionary decade was a productive period for women in art and literature in Soviet Belarus. The Belarusian literary scholar Aksana Danilčyk notes that in contrast to the end of the nineteenth century, when women preferred to take male pen names, already in the 1920s, "they tended to underscore their gender" (Danilčyk, 2017, p. 9). Every collective publication had to include a number of women authors. Sometimes, male publicists took female pen names since there was a lack of women, especially at the beginning of the 1920s[1]. In several years, the situation changed radically. Dozens of female poets and writers voiced themselves, and, as Danilčyk argues, it might be considered *a particular literary phenomenon* (ibid).

As for visual arts, more precisely, the activity of the People's Art School, the number of women among the students was the highest during the first post-revolutionary years[2]. There were several reasons.

1 The Belarusian poet Uladzimir Duboŭka remembered that during the preparation of 'Aršanski Maladniak' magazine, he as an editor noticed that all authors were men. "I then crossed out my name under some article and wrote Hanna Aršanica" (in Seviaryniec, 2017, p. 108).

2 For instance, the register of the students after the reorganisation of the School in 1924 shows much less number of female students. There were 9 from the whole number of 83 (GAVO, f. 837, o.1, d. 6, s. 83).

Firstly, the particular Bolshevik woman's policy was oriented toward including women in all spheres of social and cultural life (Clements, 1997; Chatterjee, 2002). Secondly, the financial and ideological support of the School from the People's Commissariat for Education (Narkompros) in Moscow allowed Chagall to realise a particular artistic education model[3]. Besides, many of these female students had Jewish origin. Even in orthodox Jewish families, women were encouraged to get secular education in order to become educated wives and mothers. It explains why their parents did allow their daughters to attend Jehuda Pen's studio early or the People's Art School after the Bolshevik Revolution (Stampfer, 1993; Parush, 2004). It did not automatically indicate the success of the Bolshevik women's emancipation policy within Jewish communities. Contrary, Elissa Bemporad asserts, this policy failed since Jewish women's involvement in politics existed mainly in theory (Bemporad, 2013, ch. 6).

However, these different reasons gave women access to art education as never before. The School's register of students in 1921 includes 24 female names from the whole number of 66:

> Gertrude Lepe (18 years, painting class), Sonja Gandel (16 years, Malevich's class, UNOVIS member), Tzila Ezrohi (16 years, Kogan's class), Natalia Silich (13 years, Kogan's class), Anya Sundikova (14 years, painting class), Riva Pruss (15 years, Kogan's class), Polina Vasilek (18 years, not specified), Eugenia Magaril (19 years, cubism class, UNOVIS member), Haya (Hanna) Kagan (20 years, Kogan's class), Bella Kaldobskaya (16 years, Ermolaeva's class), Sofia Levina (19 years, cubism class), Lyuba Lifman (19 years, cubism class), Tatyana Meerson (15 years, Kogan's class, UNOVIS member), Zina Osnos (16 years, Kogan's class), Lilya Ryndzyunskaya (15 years, painting class), Sima Rivinson (18 ears, Malevich's class), Tzivia Rosengolts (50 years, painting class), Nina Chuikina (13 years, painting class), Lilya Gilina (18 years, painting class), Mina Dyatkina (20 years, painting class), Ekaterina Ivanovskaya (13 years, Kogan's class), Natalya Ivanova (20 years, Malevich's class, UNOVIS member), Anastasia Girutskaya (23 years, Malevich's class, UNOVIS member), Reveka Geltzer (16 years, painting class).

According to the chosen specialisation, most of these female students studied the program of cubism and suprematism. Besides, the list of UNOVIS members included more female artists who are not represented in the existing registers (F. Belostotskaya, Fanya Yakovlevna, Gurovich, Emma Ilyinichna, L. Klyatskina[4]). At the same time, the names of Frida Rabkina and Elena Kabischer-Jakerson are not in-

3 In contrast to previous existing 'limits', the admission to the School was open to all people regardless of age, nationality, class or gender.

4 Klyatskina is mentioned only in the transcript of the 'experimental drawing' event which took place on March 27, 1920 (UNOVIS *Almanac*, no 1'1920).

cluded in these lists at all, although they were enrolled at the School in 1919. Therefore, there were evidently more women among students[5]. But due to the lack of documents[6], only the paths of a few of them can be reconstructed, which may also be caused by a 'selective' historical approach, Stalinist repressions in the 1930s and the Holocaust during WWII[7].

However, even the rest of the 'traces' of these female artists demonstrate the intensional artistic life they had. Eugenia Magaril and Haya (Hanna) Kagan were Malevich's most well-known female students, although their biographies and contributions to the Soviet avant-gardes are still not valued (Pihalskaja, 2020). Magaril's and Kagan's artworks were demonstrated at the UNOVIS exhibitions in Moscow and Petrograd. In 1922, the artists graduated from the People's Art School and were enrolled at the Higher Art and Technical Institute in Petrograd. Eugenia Magaril (1902–1987) was born in Viciebsk and studied in Chagall's and then Malevich's classes. She attended Mikhail Matyushin's course in Petrograd, who remembered her as a "spontaneously gifted" student (in Nesmelov, ed., 2008, p. 215). She was a member of Matyushin's collective KORN (Extended Vision Collective), experimenting with space, light environment and colour. At the same time, she collaborated with Malevich at the GINKhUK (From Russ. 'State Institute of Artistic Culture'). Magaril survived the years of the siege of Leningrad. After WWII, she was a member of the Union of Artists, taught children and participated in exhibitions. The life of Haya Kagan (1902–1974) is less known. She was born in the Viciebsk district and was also a Malevich student. Her works were demonstrated in the group's exhibition in Berlin (the First Russian Art Exhibition 1922) and Amsterdam (1923).

Frida Rabkina (1903–1953) and Elena Kabischer-Jakerson (1905–1990) are usually mentioned in connection with their marriages (Rabkina's husband was Lev Zevin, Chagal's and Malevich's student). They were born in Viciebsk, attended Pen's school and then became students of the People's Art School. Rabkina studied at the Chagall's

5 According to the Finnish artist Alexanderi Ahola-Valo who came to the School in 1920, there were "only girls and first-year students" (qtd. in Saarinen, 2021, p. 11). Apparently, Valo's memoirs should be taken into account carefully as he often presented facts mistakenly, for instance, he refused the role of Chagall for the School's foundation and called him 'a student' (ibid, 117). However, his perception of the School can support the fact that there was a big number of female students.

6 There are many reasons for such a lack (developed further). In some cases, only one mention remains, for instance, the only records of Meerson's and Gandel's activities are their artworks which were published in the UNOVIS almanac (Shatskikh, 2007, p. 130).

7 Many Jewish artists, actors, and writers of Soviet Belarus perished whether in the 1930s or in ghettos during WWII. Their archives might be lost, burned or still kept by families.

and Falk's classes and moved to Moscow with her husband. She was a member of different artistic groups and participated in exhibitions. After WWII (Zevin died on the frontline in 1942), she mainly taught and worked in textile design. Elena Kabischer, the graphic artist, painter, and sculptor, joined UNOVIS and created cubist and abstract paintings and compositions. In 1921, she married. After several years, the family moved to Moscow. Kabischer joined VKhUTEMAS (From Russ. 'Higher Art and Technical Studios') and attended Falk's class. In the 1930s, she had to adapt her style to Soviet ideological requirements. After her husband died in 1949, Kabischer finished her artistic career and lived in Moscow.

The figures of Vera Ermolaeva and Nina Kogan might seem 'lucky' since they were not 'forgotten' and even 'found' their place in the history of the School (Goryacheva, 2000; Shatskikh, 2007). At the same time, as was mentioned, they are usually appreciated as managers and Malevich's ardent followers, merely participating in creating his mythology but not their own, as if all their activities beyond the Viciebsk page made no sense at all. However, even their artworks during the School period are not recognisable thoroughly. Except for their teacher's experience and theoretical contributions[8], Kogan and Ermolaeva produced two remarkable performances — 'Suprematic Ballet' and 'Victory over the Sun' — which have a particular place not only in the history of avant-gardism[9] but also in performing arts.

Mentioning these performances, scholars usually focus only on the historical background of 'Victory over the Sun', which is associated with the authors of the first version staged in 1913 in St. Petersburg. Initially, the performance was created by Alexei Kruchionykh (the libretto), Velemir Khlebnikov (the prologue), Mikhail Matyushin (music) and Kazimir Malevich (visualisation, stage design and costumes), and the evening of its premiere is identified as a particular moment for Russian futurism (Clark, 2010, p. 38). Malevich defined this performative experience as "the first step of a new path on the deathly dreary, decrepit theatre stage" (Malevich, 1917). However, despite the general task of reconstructing the first version, Viciebsk's production might be considered a unique event. It was based on the text by Kruchionykh and Khlebnikov but performed without music (because of a lack of such singers) with a new stage design and costumes created by Ermolaeva

8 Ermolaeva and Kogan not only led their classes but developed their own study programs. UNOVIS almanac 1'1920 included articles 'Suprematic Ballet' and 'The beginning of abstractionism in painting' by Kogan and 'About study of cubism' by Ermolaeva. Besides, they continued teaching after they departed from Viciebsk.

9 Malevich's costumes of 1913 proclaimed the beginning of what he soon called Suprematism. The (post-Suprematic) line engravings of 1920 by Ermolaeva took on special significance in the artist's biography. In 1923, Lissitsky published a series of lithographs 'Figures from the Opera "Victory over the Sun"' conceptualising the idea of kinetic art (Shatskikh, 2007, p. 95–96).

(Malevich designed only the figure of Futurist Strongman). Ermolaeva also led the whole process of conceptualisation and rehearsals with the School's students, who were involved in the construction of decoration and performing. There was no mention of why Malevich delegated the performance to Ermolaeva. Shatskikh calls him "the opera's sponsor" (Shatskikh, 2007, p. 97). The idea to repeat it probably came from discussing how more visible the UNOVIS might declare itself in public. Malevich needed a 'loud' event with the same effect, like the premiere of 1913. Although there was little time to prepare for the event, Ermolaeva handled it. But it was a *different* performance because of another — author, structure, performers, and, more crucially, place and historical conditions. As Shatskikh points out, the "accent on the 'future' reveals the fundamental difference between Petersburg and Vitebsk productions" (ibid, p. 98).

The only review of that evening titled 'Viciebsk butedlyane' ('Butedlyanin' is a character of 'Victory over the Sun'; was invented by Khlebnikov) stressed the originality of stage design and costumes but generally, the performance was rather perplexing. "The sun may have taken offence at the Viciebsk 'Butedlyans' and left them in the dark for a year to wean them off the cock-crowing that took place in this performance", the author concluded (qtd. in Shishanov, 2010, p. 60). A year later, the artist Mikhail Kunin wrote, "the experience of 'Victory over the Sun' certainly provides enough that there is no place for Suprematism in the theatre" (qtd. in Shatskikh, 2007, p. 100). In a certain sense, these 'reviews' caused misjudgment of both performances since the scholars refer to them to prove a secondary character of these productions. Or was it not the main reason for this kind of conclusion? How would the intonation of these reports have changed if the authorship of the performances belonged to Malevich or Lissitzky? While we can only conjecture, such an approach in evaluation obviously demonstrates how non-recognition and a resultant displacement happened, including through language that I develop in the third part.

becoming a producer under given conditions

The fact that we can mention these names and even tell a story underlines the privileged (in several senses) status of these women. Although they are on the margins, but at least in the 'history'. The life paths of these 'lucky' women were almost identical. Most of them were protected by male artists, including permanent references to 'great' men. Class and economic conditions were also significantly impacted. Before the October Revolution, these women mainly belonged to the middle class or artistic families, got a good education (including in the Western art academies) and could move to central cities (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kyiv, Berlin, Paris). Consequently, the status of an artist's wife or an 'ardent' student and/or class privilege was not obligatory

but required for women to enter artistic circles. After the Bolsheviks came to power, the situation changed, firstly, in terms of class. 'The privilege' was to have worker or peasant roots. But as the stories of Nadzia Chadasievič-Léger and Volha Dziadok-Biembiel show, despite the possible different routes for women from the 'periphery', a marriage (or relations) with a male artist remained a necessary condition to get involved in history. As for their professional ambitions, it might not always mean 'a happy end'.

Nadzia Chadasievič (1904-1983) was born into a low-income family in the Belarusian village Asiecišča in the Viciebsk district. During WWI, her family moved to Russia (she mentioned Tulsk District), where she finished college. Then, she attended the drawing school in Belovo, the Kemerovo District. At the beginning of the 1920s, she came to Smolensk and became a student of Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro, who had already opened the UNOVIS branch in the city (Lisov, 2019) and became the leaders of the avant-garde in Poland later. Malevich visited Smolensk several times during her studies, and Chadasievič attended his lectures. Already in 1921, after the Treaty of Riga, she decided to move to Poland. Since Chadasievič was officially catholic, she could 'prove' her Polish roots (Catholicism automatically referred to Polish identity) and left the territory controlled by the Bolsheviks. Nonetheless, later, she permanently stressed her Belarusian origin (Dubenskaya, 1978), which might underline a tool character of the notion of identity at that time[10].

During the study, Chadasievič met her future husband — the artist Stanisław Grabowski who provided for her financially; they married in 1924. In a year, they moved to Paris. Chadasievič applied for a scholarship for this study trip, but only her husband got it (Zychovicz, 2019, p. 102). She enrolled at the Académie Moderne in Paris and became a student of Fernand Léger, who invited her to teach at the Academy soon. Chadasievič remembered her relations with her husband as 'torturous'. He was constantly making rows and getting angry at her progress. She describes how she sold her first painting. "And he wasn't happy. We were both artists and suddenly I, a woman, got such a big fee" (qtd. in Dubenskaya, 1978, p. 84). In 1932, they divorced. Chadasievič married Lèger in 1950 after the death of his first wife. Despite the heritage of artworks including monumental mosaics and panels, Chadasievič-Léger presents in art history as an artist of a 'not-clear'

10 Chadasievič-Léger's 'national' belongingness is not a matter of the study; however, these kinds of documents from those times should be considered carefully because of the 'moving' political borders and ideological confrontation. Thus, the reference to Catholicism was already a reason to be allowed to leave Soviet Belarus. But even after, on the Polish site, a person had to prove that she or he did not serve the Bolsheviks. For instance, the document at the Academy of Fine Art in Warsaw confirmed that "Miss Wanda-Nadzieia Chodasiewiczówna is Polish-Catholic and right-thinking with regard to the Polish state" (qtd. in Zychovicz, 2019, p. 99).

identity (Belarusian, Russian, Polish or French) who associates with the names of male artists — a wife of Léger, a student of Malevich and less Strzemiński (and what about Kobro?) as if it is the only way to value her art.

However, the biography of Nadzia Chadasievič-Léger, even if her place in art history as a producer is still indefinitely, looks entirely 'successful' compared with the paths of most other women. Moreover, she placed the names of male artists in her biography herself, stressing how more 'significant' they were compared with her (Dubenskaya, 1978). The fate of Volha Dziadok-Biembiel was different. She is known as the wife of the Belarusian sculptor Andrei Biembiel, one of the founders of the Byelorussian socialist realism canon and the (co)author of several significant monuments in BSSR. Sometimes, she is mentioned as the mother of Alieh Biembiel, the philosopher and Soviet dissident. And rarely do art historians write about her as a sculptor.

Volha Dziadok (1906–1974) was born into a poor peasant family in Homiel. She remembered the teacher at school noticed her talent for drawing and strongly recommended developing the skills. The February Revolution happened. "We have accepted the revolution with enthusiasm. The Tsar abdicated the throne! The Republic. Freedom. Everyone put on their red bows", she wrote (here and further: Dedok-Bembel, 2006). Then, the German troops came, and later, the city was attached to Western Ukraine for a while[11]. But a young girl did not even notice these events since she felt "under the protection of parents" and merely wanted to be an artist.

> And certainly no less than Leonardo da Vinci. 'And if I am to be a loser, I will be an art teacher at school', I said, not believing for a second that I really could be a loser. [...] But we are at the Hermitage then. I am ruined and crushed completely. I'll never... I'll never paint like this in my life! I am only not a genius, not Leonardo da Vinci, I am miserably lacking in talent who has never seen paint, who cannot hold a pencil. And I haven't touched a pencil in a year since the Hermitage.

Despite the self-doubt ("I have 'no worldview', no categorical judgments, no definite views, no personality, no 'I'"), Dziadok decided to take a risk. She applied to the sculpture department at the Petrograd State Art-Educational Studios (former Imperial Academy of Arts). She prepared hard and was among the few women who became its students. It was the mid-1920s already, and, as was mentioned, the education system in the USSR was open not only to people of any nationality

11 In March 1918, Homiel was occupied by German troops and became part of the Chernihiv District of the Ukrainian State, soon the Ukrainian People's Republic. At the beginning of 1919, the Red Army came to the city, and it became a part of the RSFSR (as the centre of the Gomel District). In 1926 the city was included in the territory of BSSR.

and class ("I am accepted. Because I am a daughter of a worker by birth") but to women. Volha Dziadok met Andrei Biembiel, who was her fellow student. He was born in Velizh (the Viciebsk district, now Smolensk oblast in Russia) and was taught in the People's Art School in Kerzin's studio. They married. Dziadok became pregnant in the last year of the study. She could choose — whether to end her studies with a diploma or to take a break, return to the Institute later and then officially graduate from it. She chose the last way: "I needed and wanted to learn more". At that time, she believed that she had managed it.

> A clash of dreams and prose, frustration with family. The clutter of housework — alone with two babies and no housemaid. The inability not only to grow up but even to touch the art, the loss of professionalism and the consequent disdain of a stronger friend, who was the reason for my wallowing in the kitchen and diapering.

Soon, Andrei Biembiel won a project for low reliefs in the House of the Government in Minsk and became one of the most successful sculptures of the BSSR. The time of need ended. In the 1930s, they had a typical lifestyle of privileged Soviet cultural workers — a house-studio at the centre of Minsk, dinners in restaurants, recreation in Crimean sanatoriums, nurses and housekeepers. However, Dziadok did not return to art. Sometimes, she helped her husband with the work ("Andrei made me an apprentice"). He did not see her as an autonomous artist but as his assistant or, probably, a future author of his biography. She blamed herself for the cowardice:

> I was wrong: the worldly formula 'to keep the father for children', to give them at least the appearance of a family... No, it didn't work. I should have done my best to separate. But I didn't want publicity, I wanted to save my husband's good name. That's one. Secondly, what could I do with my ill mother and two children, and I could not give anything for their excellent education? [...] So I gave up.

Remembering the first years of her marriage, Dziadok mentioned her mother, who supported her a lot: "I grew dull from continuous work [...]. The mother cried for my fate..." as if there were no other way. At the same time, the mother did not share the idea of keeping a nurse or housemaid. "The mother came", Dziadok writes. "She immediately sent a housekeeper out of the house. I found it difficult again." Therefore, the role of female artists' mothers in the reproduction of social norms (e.g. visions of being 'a good wife' or 'good mother') must also be taken into account (Deepwell, 1998, pp. 11–12)[12]. Hence, the girl who dreamed

12 Describing her first marriage and the scandals with the husband, Nadzia Chadasievič also mentioned her mother, who said: "Endure. You are a wife now" (Dubenskaya, 1978, p. 58).

of being no less than da Vinci became a wife, a mother and an author of several sculptural compositions and low reliefs but somewhere on 'the edges' of her biography.

following *her* traces

In a certain sense, the different routes of Dziadok-Biembiel and Chadasievič-Lèger represent 'typical' biographies of female artists. At the same time, it is essential to differentiate women's experiences and recognise their multivocality (through their life writing), focusing on different aspects and strategies of their marginalisation (Deepwell, 1998; Pachmanová, 2019). The problematic aspect that complicates the process of women's identification in art history is the scarcity of documents even for reconstructing their biography.

For instance, exploring the case of Elizabeth Siddall, Griselda Pollock shows that letters and diaries created by W. M. Rossetti, a member of the Pre-Raphaelites who "constructed himself as a careful, pedantic recorder" (Pollock, 2003, p. 141), became a basis for unfolding not only his story but Siddall as well. Despite her artistic activity, she is still known only as his muse. In contrast to him, she did not leave any record. Besides, artworks made by women often remain whether not attributed or 'missing' as a result, for instance, misspellings, different names' spelling or mixed identification. Thus, Nadzia Chadasievič-Lèger is also known as: Nadia Khodasevich-Lèger, Wanda Chodasiewicz, Wanda Chodasiewicz-Grabowska, Nadia Chodossiewitsch, Nadezda Chodosevic, Nadia Khodossievitch-Léger, Nadia Petrova, Nadezda Petrovna Leze, Nadzeja Patrouna Chadasievic-Leze (Zychovicz, 2019, p. 98). This list does not include Cyrillic spellings. Identifying artists of Jewish origin is also often complicated because of Yiddish and Russian versions of the names, like Moise and Marc, Leib and Lev, or Haja and Hanna. One more 'transformation' could happen due to the change in a cultural context. For instance, after Polina Chentova, the artist from Viciebsk, moved to Germany and then to England, her surname was transformed into Khentoff since there was no female version of the name in German; therefore, she had to be registered precisely as her father.

Except for the numerous archival documents, Nadzia Chadasievič-Lèger left at least the memoir and had an active public life until her death. Volha Dziadok-Biembiel also wrote the diary, but it was published only after her death, initiated and supported by family members (Gapova, 2006). Who knows how many still not published notes are kept in family archives? Dziadok's diary is a unique document not only because it witnesses the *epoch* — the 1920–30s and the life under Nazi occupation of Minsk in 1941–1944 since Dziadok remained in the city with her two children (Exeler, 2022). In contrast to the memoir of Chadasievič-Léger, who told her story to the public from the

beginning[13] (and it might include some aspects of mythologisation), Dziadok-Biembiel did not 'censor' the final edition before publishing.

One more significant point is the 'language' since, as feminist scholars note, the process of writing was and still is the way a woman discovers herself. This process implicates the search for a proper language which is able to represent *her* experience (hooks, 1999). Exploring the phenomenon of women's memoirs, particularly the text by Paluta Badunova, Elena Gapova notices,

> 'Memoirs', as any document of private life, is an evidence: of some events and their cultural and semantic context; in this case, the text fixed an attempt to tell 'what is impossible to tell', what is forbidden to tell, id est, to force through 'impossibility' of telling. The nature of this impossibility is complicated. It refers to the (Belarusian) language that the author uses, to an attempt to create the language of love, and to the phenomenon of 'women's writing' ('women's voice') (Gapova, 2009, p. 820).

The break with the language norms (and sometimes, it is a reason that women's memoirs are literally not accepted — as a 'bad literature' written by a 'wrong hysterical language') signifies women's exclusion from the field of speech, which as a political realm belongs to men. Intervening in this field, even in the forms of intimate writing, a woman learns not only to voice but to "identify herself" looking for the language (which was invented by and for men) enabled "to tell her story" (ibid, p. 821).

But storytelling implicates not only their own written texts but the memoirs of others about female artists, reviews and even theoretical publications. For instance, Shatskikh, who devotes several pages of her scholarship to underscore the role of female artists in the life of the People's Art School (and it is already a considerable contribution to the study), mentions that only some of these women could realise "their God-given talents. [...] However, their ability to cultivate their talents was thwarted by the roles assigned to them as women, and as a result, they were only partially able to realise their artistic vision of the world" (my underlining, Shatskikh, 2007, p. 131). Despite the importance of the comment on the role of the family in the artist's life, Shatskikh indicated the 'limitations' these female artists a priori had. In the publication about Nina Kogan, Tatiana Goryacheva also indicates the 'modest giftedness' and 'mediocrity' of the artist, who was rather "ready to serve others selflessly" (Goryacheva, 2019, p. 239). It is not clear what was the reason for such a conclusion. In another publication, Goryacheva points out that Kogan merely imitated Malevich's ideas. At the same

13 The book is a non-fiction written by Lubov Dubenskaya and based on records which Nadia Khodasevich made special for this publication in 1974–1977.

time, the scholar criticised the artist for "relative learning of Malevich's theory" since the transformation of the figures in Kogan's 'Suprematic Ballet' happened in a different order (Goryacheva, 2003, p. 41). But what if it was Kogan's idea to destroy the order? What if she was not such a 'diligent' student as Goryacheva describes her?

Such approaches problematise the language in which the history of female artists should be written in order not to reproduce 'the canon', which makes it almost impossible to disclose the female artists as producers without comparing them with men. Therefore, as Polock underscores, analysis of private and such public documents as records, transcripts, registers, etc., should be done carefully since it might "not necessarily produce an alternative version" (Polock, 2003, p. 138). Besides, the archive should be considered "part of a system of representation by means of which the past seems to be left, deposited in the present" (ibid, p. 139). And both memoirs by Chadasievič and Dziadok disclose it well. The aim is to place "this more extended range of historical materials [...] in a theoretically informed framework of the social, economic and ideological practices" of the investigated period (ibid, p. 138). At this point, archives, in a broader sense, function politically as a means of exclusion and forgetting, but they can serve as a tool of inclusion as well.

the ideological discourse of the 'language'

Regarding 'language', one more aspect should be taken into account. As the subsequent story of the artist Halina Rusak-Rodzka (1930–2000) discloses, a particular language refers not only to a cultural context but also to an ideological discourse that it represents. She was born in Navahrudak. After WWII, her family left Belarus[14]. She graduated from Freiburg and Leuven universities. Since 1949, she has lived in the USA. She received a master's degree in humanities from Rutgers University (New Jersey) and then worked as the director of the art library of this university. Rusak was a member of the leadership of the Association of Belarusian Artists and Craftsmen. However, according to another Belarusian artist Tamara Stahanovič-Kolba, who also emigrated with her parents during WWII, Rusak wanted to be an artist from the beginning and envied Stahanovič-Kolba who made a Master in Art. But Rusak's husband — "a pragmatic man" — insisted on library science for his wife since it "gives a job, art — no!!! [... but] she took lessons of one Hungarian artist" (Stahanovič-Kolba, 2018, p. 337)[15]. The main object of

14 Her father Filaret Rodzka led the Educational School in Navahrudak. Her brother Usievalad collaborated with the Nazi Army, being one of the leaders the Belarusian Independence Party founded during WWII.

15 The memoirs of Stahanovič-Kolba is a unique document not only because it describes the 'background' of the Belarusian emigration wave after WWII. As

Rusak's paintings was landscapes as she tended, and the next phrase is possibly her own explanation, "to capture and retain the beauty of nature, and belief in the decisive impact of the nature on the development of human values"[16] (Halina Rusak. Exhibition, 1971). Except for the paintings which pictured her new 'home', the artist referred to her memory in order to recreate the 'imaginative (Mother)land' as a significant part of her identification.

In the Belarusian cultural discourse in Belarusian (and this linguistic note is essential here that I explain further), her achievements in art and theory are mentioned briefly, mainly in terms of her reference to Belarus as a homeland. She represented a particular part of the Belarusian diaspora who left the country after WWII and actively participated in Belarusian social and cultural life abroad (Vaŭraniuk, 2000; Imiony Svabody: Halina Rusak, 2006). Her works were exhibited in the Belarusian National Art Museum in 1992. At the same time, the search in English presents a more 'extended' portrait of Rusak. As a theoretician, she was an editor of the book 'Abstract Expressionist Women Painters: An Annotated Bibliography' (1995); she also published articles in the Academic Journal of Belarusian Emigration 'Zapisy' founded by the Belarusian Institute of Arts and Sciences in the USA. She was a member of the collective of the New York art gallery SoHo 20, which was one of the first galleries in Manhattan aimed to showcase the work of female artists. The gallery was founded in 1973 by a group of women artists; Rusak was one of the founders. She participated in the exhibitions at the Douglass College Library, which pioneered the exhibitions of women artists' work. Reviewing one exhibition, the feminist art theoretician Linda Nochlin mentions the diversity of female artists' styles to voice themselves. She wrote about Rusak's works,

> The impact of folk-art inspiration is evident also in Halina Rusak's brilliantly colored, biomorphic flower-scapes, although in this case, the folk-tradition is that of the artist's native Eastern Europe. In both cases, the original sources of inspiration have been completely transformed by the artists in question and simply linger on as a kind of evocative visual memory trace in the new pictorial structure (Nochlin, 1974).

Natallia Hardzienka points out, this text titled 'Cuttings from previous years' "stands out from a number of texts of Belarusian emigration [since it is] not traditional memoirs of emigrant women about famous husbands [...] but the life and work of the author herself" (Hardzienka, 2018, p. 6–7). Rusak did not leave own records (or they are not published). Stahanovič-Kolba mentions her briefly several times in different periods of the biography.

16 This quotation comes from the catalogue of Rusak's exhibition in New York in 1971. The source of the quotation is not mentioned.

In 1974, American artist Sylvia Sleigh created a diptych 'SoHo 20 Gallery', which contained portraits of the collective members of SoHo 20 Gallery. Halina Rusak, who is a short woman in a grey shirt with a red necklace, stands in the second row in the left painting. The artist Carrie Moyer stated that these paintings could be "read today like detailed history paintings that record the birth of the Feminist Art Movement" (Moyer, 2010).

Except for its applied meaning (as a means for the reconstruction of a biography), this searching for facts in different linguistic registers demonstrates how language can function ideologically. Before 2020, Belarusian culture in Belarusian represented mainly those groups which were oriented on the national (in most cases, patriarchal) model of Belarusian culture (that culture which had to serve national building)[17]. It might be a reason that the brief biographical notions about Rusak in Belarusian ignored (or erased) her feminist activities in the US (again, as less meaningful, in contrast to her contribution to the Belarusian national discourse). At the same time, feminist discourse is often confronted with any reference to nationality as the patriarchal model. From these perspectives, the artist of Belarusian origin whose artworks are described by Belarusian publicists as not more than "impressionist landscapes" (Imiony Svabody: Halina Rusak, 2006)[18] troubled not only the homogenous 'canonical' picture of how 'Belarusian' should be represented (beyond patriarchal frames). She questioned the frame of both discourses — 'national' since she located herself in feminism and 'feminist' as the 'roots' mattered to her.

To make a (preliminary) conclusion, the story of Rusak, like many other female producers, discloses the need for *another* approach to discovering and telling these stories since it is not a question of entering the existing 'art history' which "is not just indifferent to women", as Pollock states.

> It is a masculinist discourse, partly to the social construction of sexual difference. As an ideological discourse, it comprises procedures and techniques by which a specific representation of art is manufactured (Pollock, 2003, p. 15).

17 I refer to 2020 here as a symbolic point (Bekus and Gabowitsch, 2023) which also influenced the discussions about the models of Belarusian culture, including its linguistic modes. Evidently, the Belarusian language was also used before 2020 by different communities to create different models of Belarusian culture (beyond nationalist programs), e.g. by LGBTQ groups or contemporary artists. However, these alternative visions were marginalised. In recent decades, the Belarusian language has been mainly associated with national-oriented groups. Radyjo Svaboda Media was one of the most significant platforms to represent these groups (including those who lived abroad).

18 At the same time, there is a reference to expressionism in the catalogue of the exhibition, which was probably written by Rusak (Halina Rusak. Exhibition, 1971).

At this point, working with the female producers' heritage, something will always be missed as it does not fit the existing 'frame'. For this reason, feminist scholars do not focus on the differentiation between different art movements and do not value female artists 'aesthetically'. Such an evaluation merely reproduced the male canon pivoted on the concept of 'genius' (Nochlin, 1971) and "Eurocentrism and masculine supremacy" (Pollock, 2003, p. xix) in which a woman is "a marginalised 'Other'" (Deepwell, 1998, p. 5). Hence, the canon and the whole system must be changed. Or, more precisely, deterritorialized that implicates the deconstruction of any unification or universalism in order to escape a trap to invent a new limited canon.

Apparently, particular imagination is necessary for these processes since the point is not only the essential theory which assists in such a deconstruction. The stories I unfolded above were (partly) recorded, in other words, they are proved by documents. But how can we deal with the past if there are no even recorded traces of a story? For instance, the only trace of the artist Palmira Mračkoŭskaja is her portrait made by Jakov Kruger in 1916, a founder of the drawing school in Minsk. There are none of her works or other documents. Can these 'no traces' mean something? How far can feminist approaches advance history? Do we need to move forward or entirely change the directions to be capable of imagining how the landscape of art history can be changed when these stories (including with 'no traces') are told? From this perspective, deterritorialization refers to a kind of imagination regimes as we should be able to envision how the new 'territory', as a result of a reterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari), might look. Evidently, such an approach implies a radical re-imagination not only of art history but the whole epistemological space as the fundamental matter of feminist theories.

Developing a transnational feminist approach to art history as a tool to "reject universal discourses of mastery and domination in all of their forms" (Meskimmon, 2023, p. 3), Marsha Meskimmon underlines the necessity to avoid "to seek in women's art some monolithic 'female essence'" (ibid, p. 3). Instead, what she calls 'art's histories' — as "radical practices of materialisation that can enable multiple epistemic worlds to flourish" (ibid, p. 1) — might be opened for every personal experience, especially those who were ignored for centuries. As the projects "with and through, [but] not just *about* art" (ibid, p. 2), art's histories aim to claim "the existing discipline politically" (Pollock, 2003, p. 1). And *storytelling* remains a fundamental means of this political performance. According to Pachmanova, historical narratives are not only "usable tools in the legitimation of violence and oppression" but "also an important vehicle for legitimation of difference and autonomy" (Pachmanova, 2019, p. 114).

The author expresses gratitude to the Belarusian art historian Volha Archipava who shared her materials being confident (and it is inspired a lot) that the rich history of Belarusian female artists can be written.

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