

Preface

Integration, Internationalism, Nationalism
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The three films, *Jarmark Europa* (2006), *Esperi* (2005), and *Zubr* (2006) were all shot over the duration of a single journey that lasted ten days, that I shared with a contact I had made through the art school in Warsaw, who acted as Polish translator, and a friend and fellow film maker. On the first leg of the journey we travelled north east by road from Warsaw to Białystok where the Esperanto headquarters is located. After shooting material for *Esperi* here, we followed the border between Poland and Belarus south to the small village of Białowieża, the site of the Polish Białowieża National Park headquarters. We then moved on via the border town Terespol, which is a main entry point into Belarus on the Berlin-Warsaw-Minsk-Moscow transport link, to the Belarusian city of Brest. Brest became our base for our short stay in Belarus and from here we travelled into the heart of Europe's last primeval forest Belovezhskaya Pushcha (Białowieża Forest) on the Belarusian side of the border. It was at the Belarusian National Park headquarters in Kamieniuki that we finally saw a zubr, the European Bison behind the fences of Kamieniuki zoo. The films are laid out to reflect this course, beginning in Warsaw and ending in the Białowieża Forest.

My initial reason for organising this journey was an interest in the accession of Poland by the E.U. and the consequential fortification of the border between Belarus and Poland that was cleaving the Białowieża Forest in two. I was also interested in seeing the zubr having heard about its re-introduction and the 'untouched areas of primeval forest' within the Białowieża reserve, as both seemed to embody questions around artifice/nature and identity that I was interested in at the time. The common theme of language between the films was not pre-empted but developed organically out of experiences during the journey itself such as: not being able to talk to the Vietnamese market traders (via Polish translator as I had hoped); the spontaneous lesson in Esperanto that we received at the Esperanto headquarters; and the increasing presence of Russian along the way, such as in written signs, that changed from Polish to Russian (not to Belarusian as I had expected) long before entering Belarus.

The films were made with the idea to represent a spectrum of political and social realities from across the region at the time. Creating statements on current issues is precarious as you find yourself subject to perpetually changing situations and attitudes. For this reason I found it hard to draw a line under the works and compiling this publication has given me an opportunity to revisit some of the issues that the films attempted to represent. With the benefit of hindsight I hope to follow up on the development of some of those situations through the compilation of documents within this publication. Accompanying these documents is an essay titled *The Distant Beast* by Maija Timonen. This text was originally commissioned by the Lever Hulme Trust through the arts organisation Lux as a contribution to the book *8 Metaphors*. This publication looked at the translation of the moving image into a printed form. A different address to language than the films but one that I think carries well to this publication. I am therefore grateful to both Maija Timonen and Lux for their permission to reprint this essay that acts as a centre piece to the more fragmentary collection of texts that surround it. The indications in Timonen's text to the links between language and national identity are particularly enriching in respect of the film *Zubr*. In this film I attempt to point to the Belarusian opposition's use of a Romantic European notion of nationalism to reclaim the country's identity from its Soviet past; and conversely the efforts of the Russian influenced government to heavily repress the one aspect that most significantly defines that identity, the national language.

Jarmark Europa

Returning to the location of *Jarmark Europa* revealed perhaps the most extreme case of change in the subject of any of the three films since my journey. The market after which the film was named was well known as Europe's largest outdoor market and was held within Stadion Dziesięciolecia (Stadium X). Since shooting *Jarmark Europa*, the market has been closed, the old stadium demolished and the Vietnamese traders that feature in the film have been evicted and become dispersed. Rebuilding work began in September 2008 and a new 'National Stadium' will be completed on the site ready to host the 2012 European Football Championship.

I have not reproduced accounts of the closure, such as news reports, as I felt it would simply remain a fact and restating the closure of the

market and eviction would bring no further insight. Instead, at the kind permission of the authors, I have included a the chapter ‘The Adjustment of Vietnamese Migrants to the Polish Society’ from an anthropological study written before the closure of the market titled *Influx and Integration of Migrants in Poland in the Early XXI Century*. Not only does this bring another form of observation and response to the subject contrary to the video itself, the extract also highlights the cultural importance of the market to the Vietnamese community before it closed and gives further insight into the reasons for Vietnamese migrants choosing to travel to Poland from Vietnam. Initially this was a migration brought about by the shared political ideology of the two countries but more recently it is one brought about by economic forces. The text also points to the lack of an ability to speak Polish by the majority of Vietnamese that settle in Poland. This is something I was unprepared for when visiting the market with a Polish translator which led to the mostly playful (though occasionally not so) mediation between me and the traders through the camera that was transformed through translation in post-production sub-titling.

A further reason for not presenting documentation of the closure of Stadium X is that the event was marked by actions of various artists at the time; most notably in association with the independent group The Laura Palmer² Foundation under the collective title *The Finissage of Stadium X*.² Also of note was a performative work by the artist Sharon Hayes that drew on the history of the Stadium as a site of protest with a work performed outside the stadium in its final months as part of her series *In the Near Future* (2005–on going). In the performance Hayes displays a hand written placard reading ‘We condemn US aggression in Vietnam’ a statement first voiced in 1968 by the country’s communist government, under which rallies against American imperialism were reportedly organised. Around the same time as the opposition to the American War in Vietnam the stadium became the site of protest against the military action of the Polish government. On the 8th September 1968 Ryszard Siwiec performed self-immolation in the stadium in protest against the use of Polish troops in the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia. Siwiec’s grievous action was performed in front of the 100,000 people that occupied the Stadium for the National Harvest Festival whilst the Polish Communist leader Władysław Gomułka gave a speech. Despite this and the action being captured by Polish media camera crews, news

of the protest was omitted from official coverage of the festival and it remained an official secret until the 1980's.

Esperi

When I visited the Esperanto headquarters in Bialystock the President, Elzbieta Karczewska, was very excited about a campaign to establish Esperanto as the official bridging language of the European Parliament by 2009. Elzbieta's aspirations originated from an ideological movement within the Esperanto community that aims to establish Esperanto as a global second language. The moment this will be achieved is described as Esperanto's 'Fina Venko' ('Final Victory') hence the movement's name, Finvenkismo. The first text that I have included in this publication relating to *Esperi* is ***The Prague Manifesto*** (not to be confused with the anti-Stalinist, Soviet Military document of 1944) which was drafted following the 1996 World Esperanto Congress. The manifesto makes statements on language rights, preservation of language diversity and effective language education, and is considered within the Esperanto community to be the modern incarnation of the ideological principles of the Finvenkismo movement.

Following the manifesto is a series of exchanges given in the European Parliament that document the efforts made to achieve the acceptance and use of Esperanto as a bridging language by the E.U. in the form of ***Parliamentary Questions***. The debate follows efforts to first get Esperanto recognised as a minority language despite it being an artificial language; before moving on to proposals to establish it as a bridging language that seem to be defeated by the projected Fina Venko date of 2009. I also found it interesting that in *Esperi* Elzbieta expresses concern over the domination of the English language (particularly in relation to economics) and that the debate published in the E.U. parliament archives is conducted almost completely in English.

Zubr

The final film of the three, *Zubr*, seeks to complicate the political and social situations that I encountered in Poland and Belarus by pitting historical and journalistic facts against my own personal reflections and other individuals' accounts. The film is divided between Poland

and Belarus with a short section on Terespol, joining the two sides. Terespol is a very small town that seemed to function solely as a point of departure and arrival to and from Belarus. This contradictory feeling of people waiting and coming and going gave the area around the station the feeling of an occupied no-mans land. At the front of the station were gathered a group of around twenty women who had apparently travelled over from Brest for the day. They were carrying vodka and cigarettes, much cheaper in Belarus than Poland, to sell to the commuters and locals. I later found out that these women performed this journey regularly and when they could sell their wares would buy groceries and other essentials that weren't available in Belarus to take back with them. I regret not being able to better represent the weight of feeling in Terespol completely, though this would have required a dedicated work and much more skill than is present in any of these three short films.

The group of women outside the station was large and very persistent so we waited for the train in an American style diner called Bar Kantor that was adjacent to the station. Inside I was coaxed into a game of pool by a Belarusian man about the same age as me. He was quite open about wanting to beat me at the game because I was English. In fact he was so determined he was slamming the balls so hard they flew way past their mark. Somehow, despite my best attempts to throw the game away I found myself winning with only the black to pot. He insisted that I pot it in a particular pocket designated by him to win. The pocket he chose made it an impossible shot but he insisted, explaining it was the local rules. I knocked the black straight into a different pocket, which was an easy shot and explained that he had won by his rules and I by mine. He seemed disappointed but accepted the joint victory gracefully and we shook hands.

On the return journey from Brest we were sharing a train cabin with a large group of women similar to the traders outside of Terespol station. Waiting with passports and identity cards open to be let off the train at Terespol was intimidating and very tense. The women all shuffled together trying to get to the front of the carriage when they weren't being observed and immediately sat down still when the border guards presented themselves. Presumably the border guards wouldn't let everyone through and there would be a better chance if you were dealt with first. I had managed to photograph the commotion that seemed like a ritualistic game of musical chairs,

with the video camera, but one of the border guards saw me and confiscated the tape. The effect on these people of the tightening of the border is lightly touched on in the BBC report *Poland toughens border controls*. Presumably the women named as ‘Irena, Belarusian trader’, whose quote I have taken from the report and used in the film *Zubr*, was in a similar situation to the women we had encountered on the train and in Terespol. The desperately poor situation that we were leaving behind in Brest certainly attested to the great lengths to which these people were going to get by and in some cases get out.

I researched and compiled much of the written material for *Zubr* during the following year of 2006, whilst there were large demonstrations in October Square, Minsk as a presidential election was to be held in March. These protests that are represented in the Free Radio Europe article, *Protesters Hold Vigil Amid Continuing Crackdown*, are reported to have brought together the *Zubr* civic youth group and the main opposition party. Prior to the elections the E.U. had invested around two million euros into the creation of two radio stations, European Radio for Belarus and Radio Baltic Wave, that would broadcast ‘independent’ news on the election and demonstrations into Belarus from Poland with daily slots in the Belarusian language. Also, the Polish station Radio Racja resumed broadcasting after a funding gap of four years.

The Reporters Without Border article, *Government continues to hamper Polish radio station broadcasting to Belarus*, illustrates following attempts by Radio Racja to establish a physical presence in Belarus in 2008. The station is still broadcast from transmitters in eastern Poland and Lithuania today and the article, *Appeal of Belarusian Radio Racja for solidarity Korespondent Wschodni*, shows the most recent attempts by the Belarusian government to prevent their actions. Most radio stations in Belarus broadcast in Russian which is used most commonly in all aspects of public life in Belarus. However, Russian is not only well established as the official language of Belarus due to its authoritarian implementation; Belarusian is also actively suppressed and there are many accounts of individuals being persecuted for the use of Belarusian in public. The chronological list under the title *The Belarusian Language Today*, from the website *A Belarus Miscellany*, compiles examples of such cases of suppression and persecution and are similar to accounts of the suppression of the Basque language under Francisco Franco’s regime in Spain in the

1940s and '50s.

Running parallel to ideas of Nation as defined by borders and language in the film is a pitting of the authenticity of an idea of 'perfect-ed nature' against 'untouched nature' and a campaign to preserve this state by environmental activists. The Białowieża Forest Campaign's report ***Polish protected treasure devastated by State Forest axe***, is one of the earliest reports linking the destruction of the Białowieża Forest to the fortification of Europe's eastern frontier that I could find. Another ecological implication of the border fences is that it prevents larger animals, such as the zubr, from roaming between the two sides of the forest. This is an effect that the creation of protected yet isolated conservation areas on the Polish side, in amongst the larger 'managed' forest, is also having. The correspondence from the UNESCO archives that follows, ***CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE***, gives an insight into the relationship between the UN and Polish and Belarusian governments concerning the management of the World Heritage Site. The separation of the two sides of the forest becomes significant towards the end of the document where there are concessions made by the Polish government (following pressure from campaigners headed by Greenpeace). However, the Belarusian management is handed over to European section of the Forests Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) process that is headed by Russia. This process is unfortunately claimed to be ineffective by many respected N.G.O.'s despite (or perhaps due to) being supported by the World Bank who ironically but unsurprisingly calculate losses due to illegal logging in terms of market value. The concluding two reports from the site IllegalLogging, ***Poland to limit deforestation in primeval Białowieża*** and ***World Bank to assess FLEG programme fulfillment in Belarus***, illustrate the divisive outcome. Although my tour of the forest was not extensive I did notice a very different attitude to the forest on either side of the border.

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As well as exploring themes of language we cannot ignore that the three films, in representing Integration (*Jarmark Europa*), Internationalism (*Esperi*) and Nationalism (*Zubr*), open questions on the impact of borders and the movement and collaboration of people between states. As the objective of this publication is to assess the

current situation in relation to that at the time of shooting the films I feel it is appropriate to acknowledge a more general yet current state of affairs than the specific cases represented by the documents described above.

The films were shot shortly following Poland's E.U. membership had been agreed and one of the conditions of this agreement was that the E.U.'s eastern frontier was to be fortified. As an E.U. member state Poland also became part of the Schengen Agreement that allows the free movement of people between E.U. states without passports or visa controls; a pretense perhaps for fortifying and controlling so heavily the European perimeter. This international resolution to collaborate on border policy in order to allow greater freedom of movement (at least within the E.U.) has been tested over the past six months in the wake of the North African revolutions that have collectively been named the 'Arab Spring'. In the first three months of this year up to around 6000 economic and political refugees fleeing mainly Tunisia and Libya were reported to have landed on the Italian island of Lampedusa, which is the closest European island to the North African coast. Tragically, hundreds have also been reported lost at sea each month, an estimated 800 were reported missing presumed dead in the month of April alone, around 2000 in total to date. Those lost in April included a boat of 72 men, women and children whose calls for assistance were ignored when they made contact twice, once with what was thought to be a N.A.T.O. aircraft carrier and again with an unidentified military helicopter.³ International maritime law requires all vessels, including military craft, to respond to distress calls and provide aid whenever possible. Despite this fact the boat carrying the refugees was left at sea for 16 days and all but 11 passengers died of exposure, thirst and exhaustion.

Following events such as the landings on Lampedusa and the seemingly large number of political and economic refugees that have reached Europe from the events of the Arab Spring, the Italian and French leaders reacted not with calls for humanitarian compassion in aiding and accommodating these people but by making a joint call to review the Schengen Agreement suggesting that "in exceptional circumstances, we both believe that there should be variations to the Schengen treaty".⁴ The French government also re-instated passport restrictions on the parts of the French-Italian border to prevent the entry of refugees to France and the British government stated it

would not receive refugees from the conflict in Libya. The redefinition of national borders through their restriction was accompanied by encouragement of Nationalistic feeling in the Lampedusan population by French and Italian right wing politicians and activists against the acceptance of further refugees. There is a distinct contradiction between these French and British attempts to prevent entry to and refusal to accept Libyan refugees and those countries' military involvement in the Libyan conflict under the pretext of humanitarianism.⁵ It is in this contradiction between British and French foreign and border policy that the application of Nationalistic ideology in forming the opinion of the domestic population is revealed for its political and economic intent. Perhaps, despite the very open use of military force to maintain access to Libya's energy resources, to accept refugees on humanitarian grounds would be to admit complicity in their plight. This is a form of denial without any sense of culpability, responsibility or regard for human life that is much like turning a deaf ear to the distress calls of a ship lost at sea.

Temperate areas such as northern Europe are facing increased numbers of refugees arriving, not only due to global economic disparity and political events such as the Arab Spring; there is also increasing displacement due to loss of habitable land and resources, and subsequent conflict, arising from environmental change.⁶ The evacuation of the Carteret Islands rendered uninhabitable by rising sea levels over the last decade created the first complete nation of climate refugees to be displaced beyond their borders. Rising sea levels that threaten other islands such as the Maldives and Tuvalu, countries susceptible to flooding such as Bangladesh and spreading desertification in parts of China and Africa are all currently contributing to the increasing numbers of environmental refugees. Despite continuing to fail to recognise people displaced beyond their country of origin by environmental changes as attaining refugee status the United Nations has made a conservative estimate that at least 250 million people will be displaced by climate change by 2050. The current figure of environmental refugees is already estimated to be higher than that of people displaced by conflict or political persecution.

It can be argued that feelings of tribalism are instinctual in humans and can bring group strength and organisational focus. This positive function can perhaps be seen in the example of the Belarusian opposition using nationality, as defined by language and culture, to

stand against the oppression of post-Soviet Russian influence. However, as in dealing with the fall out from the Arab Spring, questions such as ‘what are we to do’ when faced with future refugees cannot be grounded in the vested interests of nationalistic ideology if the answers are to be ethically and rationally balanced. The privileged nations of Western Europe currently have the access to resources, technology and infrastructure necessary to accommodate many of those displaced by such events.⁷ This position gives us the false belief that ‘we’ are the ones that bear the responsibility of deciding who should be granted access to safe haven; though this may yet be exposed as arrogance and vanity in a situation where possibly only collaboration and compassion may be of real value.

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1. The final shot in *Zubr* of the animal in the wild was not shot by myself but taken from an internet source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lj1DAXCunRA&feature=channel_video_title (shot on 19th October 2006).

2. <http://www.laura-palmer.pl/en/projects/>

3 “The Guardian [Newspaper] has made extensive inquiries to ascertain the identity of the aircraft carrier, and has concluded that it is likely to have been the French ship Charles de Gaulle, which was operating in the Mediterranean on those dates” Source: ‘Aircraft carrier left us to die say migrants’, The Guardian, 8th May 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/08/nato-ship-libyan-migrants>

4. In a presentation on 28th June before the Italian Parliament’s Schengen Committee officials from the Italian Coast Guard reported that at least 44,000 migrants had reached Italy by boat so far in 2011. Source: <http://migrantsatsea.wordpress.com/2011/07/01/italian-coast-guard-44000-migrants-reach-italy-by-boat-in-first-half-of-2011/> and Silvio Berlusconi speaking at a news conference in Rome. Source: ‘France and Italy push for reform of Schengen treaty’ BBC News, 26th April, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13189682>

5. The Washington post revealed on June 11, 2011 that ‘Libya has some of the biggest and most proven oil reserves — 43.6 billion barrels — outside Saudi Arabia, and some of the best drilling prospects.’. Previous to the civil uprising and following NATO led conflict in Libya US State Department cable leaked by WikiLeaks from November 2007, stated ‘growing evidence of Libyan resource nationalism’ and in late February 2008, a similarly leaked US State Department cable described how Gaddafi had ‘threatened to dramatically reduce Libya’s oil production and/or expel... U.S. oil and gas companies’. Source: Three Little Words: WikiLeaks, Libya, Oil, Media Lens, 22nd June, 2011, http://medialens.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=632:three-little-words-wikileaks-libya-oil&catid=24:alerts-2011&Itemid=68

6. A special meeting to discuss ‘green helmets’ force to intervene in conflicts caused by rising seas levels and shrinking resources was held by the UN in July 2011. Source: ‘UN security council to consider climate change peacekeeping’, The Guardian, 20th July, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/jul/20/un-climate-change-peacekeeping>

7. It is a tragic irony that events that the industries of Western Europe are complicit in creating i.e. global warming will effect mainly the parts of the world that Western Europe has tapped for natural resources for hundreds of years.