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Entangled memories of human rights in Kristina Norman's video art: space, visual frames, politics of art

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with entangled acts of memory in contemporary art that intertwine memories of a violent past with human rights violations or experiences of bloody conflicts in the present to study their potential for solidarity and justice. The article argues that the aim of Kristina Norman's video art is not only to create awareness of human rights issues in the present, but to also reflect on esthetic, ethical, and political problems related to entangled remembering, in particular (1) the role of space as a trigger of entangled memory, (2) the role of discursive norms and visual frames in the asymmetrical distribution of recognition, and (3) questions of the politics of art dealing with human rights, cultural memory, and recognition.

KEYWORDS Transnational memory; entangled memory; human rights; video art; Kristina Norman

Introduction

Since the development of contemporary memory studies in the 1990 s, scholars of memory have conceived of cultural memory as a vehicle for national identity that is anchored in various texts, material objects, and locations (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995; Nora 1997). In the past decade, however, cultural memory has increasingly been seen as a fluid and dynamic process that moves across and beyond national and cultural borders and is essentially entangled and transnational (Erll 2011; De Cesari and Rigney 2014; Bond and Rappson 2014; Bond, Craps, and Vermeulen 2016). In his pioneering study on the multidirectional memory of the Holocaust in the age of de-colonialization, Rothberg (2009, 11) argues that cultural memory often works through dynamic transfers, cross-referencing, and borrowing, and so it inevitably brings together different histories: 'remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites.' Rothberg focuses on the comparative discourses of the Holocaust and slavery in the US, and the Holocaust and European colonialism, and he argues that despite the competitive nature of these discourses and the frequent claims that the Holocaust has overshadowed the memory of other crimes, Holocaust memory has actually created consciousness and provided the rhetoric and images that can be used for articulating other violent histories. More interestingly, he shows that in the postwar period these memories emerged together in an entangled form and often, as in the Algerian War in the 1960 s, it was the anticolonial struggle that helped to bring

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the Holocaust into public awareness. Hence cultural memory for Rothberg is inherently entangled. The memory of historical violence needs the support of other memories if it is to emerge in public: 'the public articulation of collective memory by marginalized and oppositional social groups provides resources for other groups to articulate their own claims for recognition and justice' (Rothberg 2011, 524). The view of cultural memory as intrinsically entangled cuts the ties between memory and group identity, including national identity, and introduces a new, comparative way of thinking about and studying the cultural memories of different groups, the interaction of those memories, and flows of influence.

Part of the benefits of thinking about cultural memory as an entangled process is the potential it offers for solidarity and justice not only between the diverse legacies of past violence, but also between the past, the present, and the future. Levy and Sznaider (2006) famously define Holocaust memory as a memory imperative that could perhaps prevent genocide and human rights violations in the present through its comparative, cautionary dynamic. Huyssen (2011, 608) also stresses the need to move beyond remembering a traumatic past as an end in itself and to tie cultural memory more tightly to the contemporary transnational human rights movement and to questions of justice. He argues that cultural memory and human rights are intimately linked because the prosecution of past human rights violations depends greatly on there being an active public memory of those violations in the present (Huyssen 2011, 612). He adds though that the link to the future of human rights could be strengthened further, as the memory of rights violations should prevent violations happening in the present and in the future (Huyssen 2011, 608). In this context, Huyssen (2011, 616–617) stresses the importance of taking the individual approach that is typical of cultural memory studies, as the use of witnesses and testimony can contribute to a purely political discourse of human rights: 'it is precisely the focus on the force of individual memories of rights violations that can keep human rights discourse from slipping too quickly into ahistorical abstraction.'

Huyssen lists a series of issues where cultural remembering and human rights meet today, such as the rights of indigenous peoples, language rights, gender inequality, sexual rights, and citizenship rights. One area of growing concern is certainly the political rights of refugees and migrants, as the memory of the legacies of social and political modernization in past centuries, such as the Holocaust and colonialism, have to be brought in as a tool for dealing with the current 'lingering racialized and displaced colonial practices in the metropole itself' (Huyssen 2011, 622). Huyssen (2011, 614) reminds us that the question of rights is a question of asymmetries of power between human beings and so the politics of memory should concern itself with these asymmetries in the present.

The question of asymmetry has been an important one in the context of entangled cultural remembering. As already stated, entangled forms of remembering have the potential to create solidarity between communities in the past and those in the present that share similar histories of victimhood, but there are certainly also competitive asymmetrical political positions that can be articulated in entangled form. This has raised questions about the ethical limits of comparison and the strategic entanglement of different historical legacies, and it has highlighted the need for an ethics of comparison. Which comparisons are ethically admissible and which are ethically and politically suspect is a complex issue. Rothberg (2011, 525–6) addresses the question of the ethics of comparison and favors differentiated acts of entangled remembering that, firstly, do

not equate historical events but acknowledge instead their asymmetry, and secondly, aim to find solidarity and not competition between memories. Huyssen notes the asymmetries of power in relation to human rights, however, and this also draws attention to the asymmetrical relevance of different cultural memories in the public sphere, which is an issue that both cultural memory studies and human rights movements have to take seriously.

In this article I will explore the entangled acts of remembering in art that intertwine memories of a violent past with human rights breaches or experiences of bloody conflicts in the present to study their potential to offer solidarity and justice. I will do so by examining a series of video art pieces by the Tallinn-based filmmaker and video artist Kristina Norman in which the entanglement of memories is the formal compositional principle of the artwork.[1] In the set of works she addresses national memories in Finland, Estonia, and Russia to draw attention to the life of political refugees or to contemporary experiences of violence in these societies. In her first site-specific work *0.8 Square Meters* (2012) for the Gallery Augusta in Suomenlinna, Helsinki, Norman juxtaposes memories of the bloody violence of the Finnish Civil War with narratives of contemporary political refugees from Chechnya, the former Yugoslavia, and Northern Kurdistan in Turkey, who now live in Finland. In her second piece *Common Ground* (2013) for the Köler Prize exhibition in Tallinn, Estonia, Norman pairs memories of the mass migration of Estonians in September 1944 with stories of contemporary asylum seekers in Estonia. Finally, in *Iron Arch* (2014) for the public program of the 2014 Manifesta contemporary art biennale in St. Petersburg, Norman brings together the Euromaidan events at the Nezalezhnosti (Independence) Square in Kyiv in November 2013 and memories of the revolutionary past in Russia such as the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1905, and the October Revolution that are evoked by Palace Square in St. Petersburg, the location of Manifesta.

In all these works Norman aims to draw attention to human rights violations and political violence in the present by harking back to similar experiences of imprisonment, refuge, or revolutionary violence in the past. While Rothberg believes that multidirectional memory should remain vigilant to the asymmetry of historical experiences brought together in an act of entangled remembering, Norman's initial aim in her art is to highlight the asymmetry of public recognition of these experiences. The entangled acts of memory are often triggered precisely by the way that memories of different experiences have an asymmetrical relevance in the public sphere, meaning the historical experience that is more visible can be drawn upon to highlight a similar experience that has received less attention. It is asymmetry, rather than only a desired endpoint, that must be the starting point of entangled remembering, as Norman shows.

This article explores the potential of art for bringing together different memories and creating solidarity between people with diverse historical legacies. I will firstly ask about the grounds for comparing different memories and discuss space as an important trigger of entangled remembering. Secondly, I will examine the ethical questions raised by bringing together different memories in an entangled act of memory. In this regard I will argue that Norman's art functions as a 'theoretical object' (Bal 2003, 14) that not only aims to draw attention to obliterated experiences, but also equips us to think about issues of how cultural memory and human rights are entangled and what are the potential and limits of comparative remembering, particularly the role of discursive norms and visual frames in the asymmetrical distribution of recognition. I would like to show how Norman's video art is a reflection on the asymmetry of public remembering

and how her critique of asymmetry is part of her movement toward solidarity. Thirdly, I will tackle the question of the politics of art that concerns public remembering. To what extent can art use entangled memory to contribute to solidarity and justice by creating a more comprehensive memory culture?

0.8 Square Meters: space as a ground for comparison

Norman's first piece, *0.8 Square Meters*, is site-specific and was commissioned for the Gallery Augusta in Suomenlinna, Finland.[2] It intertwines the history of the gallery building as a prison camp of the White forces during the Finnish Civil War in 1918 with the narratives of political refugees from the former Yugoslavia, Chechnya, and Northern Kurdistan. In bringing these memories together Norman apparently harks back to the obliterated memories of bloody violence in the Finnish Civil War in order to create a consciousness for victims of contemporary civil wars and state terror who now live in Finnish society.

The entanglement of memories in this piece is triggered by space. The incentive for the piece was that the history of the gallery building as a White prison camp was not marked publicly anywhere, leading the artist to 'work with memories' so that the history of the Finnish Civil War and the experiences of contemporary refugees could emerge together.[3] The Finnish Civil War, in the early twentieth century, brought an unprecedented wave of political violence and non-combat terror to Finnish soil, which had been relatively peaceful over the preceding century.[4] In Suomenlinna, which was part of the Helsinki prison camp where more than 10,000 people were held, 1,400 people died (War Victims 2004). Even though the legacies of that terror have long been discussed in Finnish society, it might be argued that at least until the centenary of the war in 2018, the individual suffering that happened within this fratricidal violence was not publicly remembered in Finland.

In the interwar period, the memory of the Civil War and its internal terror remained a divisive memory in Finnish society. The victorious Whites imposed their own official narrative about defending the nation, and so the experience of the terror suffered by the Reds remained at the level of the social memory of the groups affected (Peltonen 2002, 192). Tuomas Tepora (2014) has shown that Finnish society at the end of the 1930 s sought reconciliatory narratives of the war that focused on dissimilar, but still shared, memories of the event, but it was only in the 1960 s that the reinterpretation of the Civil War as fratricide became part of the integration of the communists into mainstream Finnish society (Alapuro 2002, 176, 2004, 94–96). The incorporation of the memory of the White terror into mainstream memory culture was partly facilitated by art as the publication of the second volume of Väino Linna's novel *Under the North Star* (1960) thematized the violence in the prison camps (Peltonen 2002, 192; Alapuro 2004, 195). It was only in the 1990 s, however, that the White terror received serious scholarly and public scrutiny (Alapuro 2002, 181), and it is only with the new global tendency since the 1990 s to pay more attention in public remembering to the traumatic experiences of individuals that the specific individual legacies of the experiences of terror and the prison camps have been addressed in Finland within the context of the war.[5] This is why the still unrecognized history of the Gallery Augusta building as a White prison camp provoked Norman's interest and scrutiny in 2012.

To highlight the importance of how spaces carry traces of history, Norman starts the video stream of her 30-minute two-channel video installation with a double photograph of the Suomenlinna prison camp on both screens. She then uses the second screen to identify textually the windows of the building on the archive photograph as the windows of the contemporary Gallery Augusta and to briefly explain the history of the prison camp. She reports that the 1,474 prisoners held in the gallery space each had only 0.8 square meters of space, a fact that stresses the spatial focus of the artwork and explains its title. The archive photograph then fades into a contemporary picture of the gallery building from the outside, while the second screen shows the empty gallery room, the same space that the audience occupied while originally viewing the work.

The rest of the installation features the testimonies of political refugees on one screen and material from a public event Norman had previously organized in the gallery space on the other. She had publicly invited people to participate in her art project in May 2012 to reenact the conditions of imprisonment, the 0.8 square meters per person of the former Civil War prison. During the public event each participant occupied their tiny space measured out on the floor of the Gallery Augusta, and in the final installation the material filmed at the event was set side by side with the testimonies of the refugees.

The art work turns the participants in the public event into an audience for the testimonies of the victims of contemporary violence. The first of them is Musa, a victim of the state terror in the Second Chechen War of 1999–2009. He starts his testimony in multidirectional terms by saying that he can imagine what people may have felt in this place because it triggers memories of his own 11-month imprisonment in Grozny, Chechnya. Sultana and Edina present more testimonies of contemporary violence that are audio-visually intertwined with each other and with the images of the participants of the reenactment. Sultana is a political refugee from Turkey, who was imprisoned on 8 March 2006 for three months because of her brother's involvement in exile in Finland with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and for being politically active herself. Edina is a survivor of the Bosnian War (1992–5) and gives testimony about the women's experience of imprisonment in her home town of Prijedor after the men had been killed by the Serbs.

While the testimonies differ in the historical conflicts they describe, they develop a dialogue with each other and with the history of the gallery building by focusing on the specific bodily and psychological experiences of imprisonment and by literally mapping the experiences on the gallery space. The witnesses describe their prison cells in relation to the gallery hall. They all talk about confinement in the specific space where they were held and the psychological suffering it created. Musa talks about having seen the limits of humanity. Edina recalls the traumatic experience of recognizing her own selfishness in an extreme situation. Sultana explains how she and her cell mates were forced to hear children being tortured in the Turkish prison. They all testify to physical and psychological torture and the dehumanizing effects of imprisonment. The testimonies end with a reflection on their home and the prospects of returning.

Entangling these testimonies with the history of terror in the Finnish Civil War through the galley building and the people who were made to reexperience the conditions of confinement through their bodies has several effects. Norman seems to want to draw attention to violent conflicts in the present by excavating aspects of national history that the community is implicated in, but that have been obliterated. Entangling these memories thus allows them to emerge together. Norman also reflects critically, however, on the limits of the identification, empathy and solidarity that are

created through reenactment and through witnessing such testimonies. That the participants in the reenactment, who mirror the position of the audience of the artwork, are turned into an unsuspecting and perhaps even unwilling audience to the testimonies is reflected in the video stream in the sections where they seem bored or are just minding their own business.

Common Ground: visual frames and discursive norms

A second work of Norman's that deals with entangled memories is *Common Ground*, a 40 minute one-channel video installation that compares the memories of Estonian refugees during and after World War II to the stories of contemporary asylum seekers in Estonia interviewed in the Estonian asylum center in Illuka, Ida-Virumaa, in 2013.[6] The experience of the thousands of Estonians who fled over the Baltic Sea in small fishing boats over just a few days in September 1944 to escape imminent Soviet occupation is widely remembered in the post-Soviet Estonian public sphere as one of the most tragic moments of World War II for the Estonian population.[7] The asylum seekers in contrast were, at least until the beginning of the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015, generally presented in the public discourse as economic migrants who were trying to pass themselves off as refugees. By bringing together stories that are interpreted so differently, Norman seeks to give voice and visibility to the plight of contemporary asylum seekers by evoking memories that are similar, but are closer to the national community.

Norman has a clear political agenda in intertwining these testimonies. She shows how the elderly Estonians in Sweden, all interviewed in their Estonian retirement home in Stockholm, recall their reception by the Swedes in 1944 with great warmth. They highlight the hospitality that provided their basic human needs like food, shelter, and healthcare. The experiences of the contemporary asylum seekers in Estonia are quite different though. They have no one to ask about how to feed themselves using very limited state relief subsidies, or how to cook, or take a shower in an accommodation center has access to water, but it was temporarily unavailable due to an breakdown in the system. The experiences of the asylum seekers testify to official negligence and to the various psychological problems of refugee life. By highlighting the difference between the experiences of the Estonians in Sweden and contemporary refugees in Estonia, Norman makes the formal principle of entangling memories serve the aim of political criticism. This also raises, however, a variety of ethical questions. What is the position of the testimonies of the Estonian refugees from 1944 in this artwork? Do they have a separate place there or are they just used to draw attention to the plight of contemporary asylum seekers? How are the asylum seekers represented and with what aims?

I would argue that the questions of ethics and politics are addressed in this artwork through its function as a 'theoretical object' (Bal 2003, 14) that forces us to think not only about asymmetry and the comparability of experiences in different times and places, but also about the asymmetrical recognition of the memories of these experiences in our contemporary societies.[8] Norman's work specifically makes us think about the visual frames and discursive norms that regulate recognition and hence our ability to relate to these memories effectively. Even though the piece is called *Common Ground*, its aim is to only superficially equate these memories of the different experiences of refugee life. Rather, the search for some common ground serves the purpose of

making the asymmetries of power visible in the contemporary politics of memory and of finding unexpected points of dialogue between the testimonies.

This deeper theoretical, ethical, and political reflection is initiated in *Common Ground* by a very practical constraint that is formally visible in the artwork. In her attempt to give visibility and voice to the asylum seekers and their testimonies in contemporary Estonia Norman faces the problem that she is not actually able to reveal their faces, their names, or the details of their stories for security reasons, as doing so might jeopardize their position at home or be detrimental to their asylum applications in Estonia. Whereas the first Estonian witness from Sweden is shown in frontal view and starts her testimony with the identifying statement: 'I am Imbi Mai Raud. My married name is Pähn. I use the double surname Raud-Pähn. I was born on 2 November 1920 in Pärnu. I fled from Haapsalu in 1944,' the asylum seekers remain unidentified. They sit or stand with their backs turned toward the viewer, their stories testifying to generic situations that occur in war, the typicality of their story risking swallowing the singularity of their experience.

Emmanuel Levinas in his ethical philosophy famously theorized the importance of face in the ethical relationship to the other, and how the relationship between giving face and recognizing somebody as a human subject worthy of attention is not merely metaphorical. For him it is precisely the human face that presents us with an ethical challenge, asking us to protect it against injury and death. Levinas (1999, 139–40) writes: 'Face, before any particular expression and beneath all expression that – already countenance given to self – hides the nakedness of the face. Face that is not unveiling but the pure denudation of defenseless exposure. Exposure as such, extreme exposure to the precariousness of the stranger.' Face for Levinas testifies to the precariousness and vulnerability of the other, and when standing face-to-face one is asked to take responsibility for the other's life.

Following Levinas's understanding of our ethical responsibility for the precariousness of the other, which arises because no self can survive on its own, Judith Butler has tried to describe a global ethics of cohabitation that would be broader than the individual relationship between one's self and the other.[9] The precariousness means both for Levinas and Butler that as human animals we are from our very birth dependent on each other for basic human needs like food and shelter, and in our need for protection against injury and extinction:

> Over and against an existential concept of finitude that singularizes our relation to death and to life, precariousness underscores our radical substitutability and anonymity in relation both to certain socially facilitated modes of dying and death and to other socially conditioned modes of persisting and flourishing. It is not that we are born and then later become precarious, but rather that precariousness is coextensive with birth itself (birth is, by definition, precarious), which means that it matters whether or not this infant being survives, and that its survival is dependent on what we might call a social network of hands (Butler 2009, 14).

Starting from the bodily ontology of codependency that we usually associate with the relation of proximity, Butler tries to conceive of ethical relations in non-communitarian terms and to consider whether and how we are responsible for people who do not form part of our community or whose suffering we perhaps witness at a distance, as we do in Norman's art. If the face of another is, however, the something that shows them in their precariousness and establishes an ethical relationship to them, then what happens if we do not see their face? The question of how to provoke empathy for the asylum seekers without showing their faces becomes the central artistic problem in Norman's project.

Common Ground explores the question by turning the practical constraint of the art work – the inability to show faces – into a theoretical reflection about visual norms and the ways in which these norms regulate our unequal affective and ethical responses to other people and to their precariousness. If we are all vulnerable, then why do we feel empathy, and consequently responsibility, for some but not for others, grieve for some deaths while remaining unresponsive to others? Butler (2009, 2–3) argues that even though all human animals are precarious, this precariousness is overshadowed by political and economic structures that make some less precarious and others more so. The precarity, which is Butler's (2004, 146) twin term to precariousness, is also distributed unequally by certain discursive norms and visual frames that govern our perception of lives as human lives, sometimes completely effacing them as livable lives, and sometimes framing them in such a way that they we cannot grieve for them in wars and violent conflicts.

Butler (2004, 146–7) argues that the discursive norms and visual frames often work to erase the face entirely, as if there had never been any human being at all, nor any suffering for which we ought to feel empathy. If Norman does not show the faces of the asylum seekers, she risks precisely this kind of erasure. Norman also shows, however, that in contrast to Levinas's argument, the face does not always lead to humanization. Under certain circumstances it can also dehumanize and increase precarity, and she shows that the face is also a visual norm, and that the relationship between representation of the face and humanization is much more complicated.

Norman underscores the role of the face as a visual norm of the human being by alternating in the montage the sunny faces of the Estonian ladies in the front view with the bluish backs of the asylum seekers, the men from the 'Global South.' The ladies are shown through a warm yellow filter, with the wide angle of the camera showing the protagonists embraced by the comfortable environment of their retirement home. The men appear through a cool blue filter, the exaggerated juxtaposition further highlighting the striking differences between the warmth of the memories of the Estonian refugees about how they were received by the Swedes and the bleakness of the experience of the asylum seekers in Estonia, and also underlining the asymmetrical recognition of their testimonies. By juxtaposing the faces and the backs, Norman critically reflects on the face as the visual norm of the human being.

The complicated relationship between representation and humanization concerns not only the faces, but also the stories of the asylum seekers. As noted earlier, they cannot tell their story in full detail for security reasons. They cannot reveal their names or their countries of origin, they cannot say what happened to them, or what exactly threatened them. The problem is exacerbated because the crucial issue in seeking asylum is precisely the narrative of who you are, where you come from, and why. Only if someone manages to convince the authorities about their circumstances will their life be understood to be in danger and so needing protection. By offering anonymous stories without identifying details, the asylum seekers draw attention to the normative aspect of the autobiographical narratives used when seeking asylum that have to conform to certain models. The normative stories may create empathy in some contexts, but they may also increase precarity for those who are expected to narrate their stories in this way, as they may reveal important personal circumstances. In this, the practical constraint of the artwork illuminates how the name and the story become essential conditions for the recognition of a life as a life worth protecting and highlights the relationship between representation and humanization and how the discursive

norms and visual frames produce what Butler (2004, 90, 143, 2009, 42, 64) calls 'the paradigmatically human' or 'the recognizably human.'

In her analysis of the 'arts of resistance' in the Calais 'Jungle,' Debarati Sanyal (2017) questions the whole framework of the politics of rights, recognition, and visibility because visibility has become an imperative of the current security regime. She shows how the refugees cling to anonymity, to 'the dialectic of invisibility and visibility' (Sanyal 2017, 6) by mutilating their fingerprints with razors or fire as a way of resisting biometric control over their movement (2017, 14). Referencing Maurice Blanchot, Sanyal (2017) terms these practices 'the right to disappear,' which contrasts with the right to appear, so important in the discourse of rights and recognition.

Referring to Didier Fassin, Sanyal (2017, 4–5) also questions the discourse of empathy as it replaces the struggle of the refugees for political rights and justice with the humanitarian morality of feeling compassion, and forces the refugees into the position of passive victims instead of political subjects with their own agency. She suggests that we should allow the refugees to represent themselves through 'alternate subjectivations, potential "lines of flight", and ephemeral solidarities' (Sanyal 2017, 5), and hopes that art offers a 'visible and audible form to the singularities of refugees' experience, sometimes by challenging normative conceptions of what it means to appear and to have a voice in the traditional conception of the polis' and configures 'our understanding of what it means to see and be seen beyond the regime of visibility, recognition and control' (Sanyal 2017, 6).

So, beyond the theoretical reflection, the question remains of whether and how Norman is able to draw attention to the stories of asylum seekers without showing their faces, without asking them to tell their stories in full detail. The first hint for how to answer this question is given by Butler (2004, 1339), who points out Levinas's claim in his essay 'Peace and Proximity' that his concept of the face is not limited to the real face with its identifying features and expressions, but is a pure expression of suffering. He says that face can also be a back, and refers to Vasily Grossman's 1960 memoir *Life and Fate* (Levinas 1999, 140). When he writes about Stalinist repressions, which also have relevance in the Baltic context, Grossman describes the line of relatives outside the gates of the Lubyanka prison in Moscow, where only the backs of other people could be seen and nothing else. Grossman (1985) writes:

> Never had she thought the human back could be so expressive and transmit states of mind so penetratingly. The people who approached the window had a special way of stretching the neck and back; the raised shoulders had shoulder-blades tensed as if by springs, and they seemed to shout, to cry, to sob.

Echoing this scene, Norman puts her viewers face to face with the backs of the asylum seekers.[10]

The narratives of the asylum seekers, even if their fragmented testimonies do not give a full and coherent account of their circumstances, transmit the stories about some of their experiences, aspirations, and hopes that reverberate with the stories of the Estonian refugees of 1944. The common ground Norman finds in the entangled testimonies is the precariousness and the mutual dependency of humans on each other for their bodily needs and bodily exposure. Like in *0.8 Square Meters*, where Norman brings different memories together by focusing on the bodily experience of confinement, the testimonies here focus on the simple signs of hospitality or the rejection of it through such basic human needs as food, water, and the chance to wash. In one of the most moving of these stories an Estonian

Swedish lady recalls how a nurse washed her hair before releasing her from the hospital after a serious bout of diphtheria, not out of duty, but purely out of human care. In this way Norman draws attention to the devastating effects of violent histories and the nurturing impact of hospitality in the circumstances of forced migration. While bodily needs are usually relegated to the private sphere, Butler (2012, 147–8) argues in her attempt to develop a global ethics of cohabitation that the basic needs of the body are of a political nature, and she stresses the importance of the political, economic, and social infrastructures that sustain corporeal persistence and the reproduction of the material conditions of life.

In entangling the testimonies from different historical periods and in looking for a common ground in them, another question that remains is the ethics of the comparison performed in this art work. Do the memories of Estonian refugees from 1944 have a place of their own in it or are they just taken advantage of to rally support for contemporary asylum seekers? Obviously, the setup of the artwork alone does not offer any guarantee about how the witnesses feel about the artistic presentation of their testimonies in the entangled framework nor about how the artwork is perceived by the audiences along the breath of the political spectrum. Norman's objective in juxtaposing different memories, however, seems not to equate diverse historical events or contexts or to highlight ones at the expense of the others, but to reflect on the similarity of personal experiences of basic human needs such as food, water, and shelter in circumstances of forced migration. Norman's aim in entangling the memories is to draw attention to bodily precariousness as the common ground of these different testimonies.

Iron Arch: politics of art

In *Iron Arch*, the third work in the series of pieces on entangled memory, which was presented in the public program of Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg in 2014, Norman compares the events at the Nezalezhnosti Square in Kyiv in November 2013, known as the Maidan events, to the memories of the revolutionary past in Russia, the Bloody Sunday Massacre, and the October Revolution evoked by Palace Square in St. Petersburg, the location of Manifesta 10.[11] The piece is in two parts. In the first, Norman erected a Christmas tree, one of the symbols of the Maidan events, on Palace Square. The sculpture was called *Souvenir* and was inaugurated by Norman on 20 July 2014 and remained on the square until 3 August 2014. The second part occurred inside one of the Palace Square buildings where Norman presented a 14-minute video testimony delivered on Palace Square by one of the participants in the Maidan events, the Ukrainian artist Alevtina Kakhidze. Like in *0.8 Square Meters*, the space and the history it evokes again enable a dialogue between different memories. The histories of public protest in Russia and in Ukraine are compared with the help of the main squares of two cities, which have considerable architectural and institutional similarities.[12] Like in the Finnish piece, the comparison is effectuated by spatial mapping. In a highly theatrical subjective testimony Kakhidze maps the events of the Maidan protests onto Palace Square by describing them as if they had taken place there.

Iron Arch and the context of its presentation raises the issue of the politics of art that deals with entangled remembering. Norman has often been criticized for being politically provocative, but this has to be seen in the context of the institutionalization of contemporary art that limits its potential for making an impact on the political processes of recognition and inclusion. The often deliberately incendiary nature of

Norman's art and the open-endedness that is built into it seems to be her attempt to break out of this institutionalization and provoke debate. Her pieces often have very interesting after-lives. For instance, Musa, the witness to state terror in Chechnya in Norman's *0.8 Square Meters*, extracted his testimony from the comparative art work, edited it into an individual statement and made it available on the YouTube channel of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (Waynakh 2012). By doing so he rejected the framework of the entangled remembering that the artwork staged, but it is clear that his participation in the art project had allowed his testimony and greatly empowered him as a political actor.

Iron Arch is obviously the most provocative of Norman's pieces discussed in this article, as it referenced Euromaidan in the main square of St. Petersburg in Putin's Russia in the middle of the evolving Ukrainian conflict. Manifesta 10 opened in the summer of 2014 immediately after the Maidan events, the annexation of Crimea, and the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Many artists, including progressive artists from Russia such as the group *Chto Delat* (What to do) from St. Petersburg, decided to boycott the Manifesta that was being taken to St. Petersburg to celebrate both the twentieth anniversary of Manifesta and the 250th anniversary of the Hermitage.[13] Norman decided to participate and to work with the most burning political issue of the time (Norman 2014b).

When she erected a Christmas tree on Palace Square in the middle of the summer she made her work deliberately open-ended. The story of the Christmas tree on Nezalezhnosti Square in Kyiv in 2013 was notably one of appropriation and re-signification. The erection of the traditional Christmas tree was interrupted by political protests, in the course of which the metal scaffolding for the tree was appropriated by the protesters to hang flags and slogans on in place of branches. Norman's decision to erect a similar structure in St. Petersburg was an invitation to the people of St. Petersburg to appropriate and re-signify this tree. This actually occurred on 2 August, Russian Paratroopers Day, when the tree was decorated with rainbow flags and slogans by Russian gay activist Kirill Kalugin.[14]

Another reaction that the piece provoked was a statement by the director of the Hermitage, Mikhail Piotrovsky (2014), on the official website of the Hermitage that read:

> The process of building up a Christmas tree on the main square of Kiev has been started but has never been finished. The square turned into Maidan. And Maidan caused chaos. We hear the alert spoken in the language of art: be aware! Disturbances can be borne out of innocent entertainments … Carnivals are not innocent. And the Palace Square is vulnerable.[15]

Piotrovsky's statement was a clear attempt to steer the interpretation of the artwork and frame it in a way that would diminish its political provocation. Instead of calling for political protest against the violent conflicts in Ukraine and against Russia's involvement in them, Piotrovsky tries to read the opposite message into the artwork, one that would warn against such protests.[16] The politics of Norman's art aims to provoke precisely this kind of debate in order to bring art out of its institutional frame and make it relevant for the political processes of recognition and solidarity.

This brings us back to the question of the impact of Norman's art. It might be argued that the often-provocative nature of Norman's art might undermine her perceived aim of contributing to solidarity and justice by entangling memories and thereby creating a more comprehensive memory culture. Solidarity and justice or at least the road to it should not, however, be conceived only in terms of a consensus on the questions of

remembering – equally important is the debate itself that keeps memories alive (Rigney 2012, 620), a debate that is often provocatively opened up by works of art.

Conclusion

The aim of Kristina Norman's series of video art pieces on entangled memory is to draw attention to the co-existence of very different historical legacies in the neighboring societies of Finland, Estonia, and Russia and to the asymmetrical recognition of similar experiences of human rights violations, political violence, and refuge in the public space. In addition, they offer an extended reflection on the potential and limits of entangled remembering and art's capacity to contribute to the discourse on the protection of human rights by deliberately juxtaposing historical legacies with breaches of human rights in the present. Her various works highlight the importance of space as a container of different layers of memory that can be mobilized to draw attention to contemporary experiences. They also reflect the visual frames and discursive norms that regulate how people are recognized in the contemporary discourse on human rights and on art's capacity to rethink these norms by giving a visible and narrative form to their experiences. Norman also powerfully raises the question of the politics of art and how to deal with cultural remembering and its effectiveness.

Taken together Norman's pieces evoke a surprisingly common Nordic-Baltic-Russian 'memoryscape' that transcends national borders and shows that countries that tend to think of themselves as very different both politically and in their memorial cultures still share many transnational concerns about the protection of human rights and the inclusion of marginalized memories of suffering.

Notes

1. Kristina Norman is an artist and documentary filmmaker based in Tallinn, Estonia, who is primarily known for her mixed media project *After-war* for the 2009 Venice Biennale. It deals with the Bronze Soldier conflict in Tallinn in 2007.
2. The video installation was part of the exhibition *Takes on Memory and Flight Paths*, Gallery Augusta, Helsinki, 2012.
3. The victims of the prison camp are commemorated in Suomenlinna by a modest memorial stone in a green area hidden away close to the main quay.
4. More than 36,000 people died in that war, only around 5,000 of them in combat. More than 9,000 were executed, shot, or murdered and 13,000 people died in prison camps, most of them Reds (War Victims in Finland, 1914–1922 2004).
5. One example of this was the government-funded project 'War Victims in Finland 1914–1922,' which aimed in 1988 to identify all the victims of the terror and the prison camps. See War Victims in Finland, 1914–1922 (2004).
6. *Common Ground* was commissioned by the Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia for the 2013 Köler Prize exhibition in Tallinn and was shown on a single large screen. Norman's *0.8 Square Meters* was also exhibited at the museum.
7. Within a couple of months in summer and early autumn 1944, 70,000 people left Estonia, fleeing from Soviet occupation (Kasekamp 2010, 127).
8. Mieke Bal (2003) defines artworks as theoretical objects when they become 'triggers, if not containers, of theoretical ideas that are not generally available because their level of complexity makes them hard to articulate.'
9. For Butler's global ethics of cohabitation and her extensive engagement with Levinas see Butler (2004, 2009, 2012).
10. Another issue that merits discussion is the voice. Even if the ethical relationship to the other is established for Levinas through face above and beyond any individuality of that person, one thing

that individuates the faceless witnesses in *Common Ground* is their accent. They give their testimony in English and their accent says something about the parts of the world they might have come from and perhaps indirectly about the political circumstances that caused them to seek asylum.

11. The main program of Manifesta 10 was hosted by the State Hermitage Museum in the Winter Palace.
12. Both squares have central column-shaped monuments, the Alexander Column in St. Petersburg and the Independence Monument in Kyiv; art museums looking onto the square, the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and the National Art Museum of Ukraine in Kyiv; arches, the Triumphal Arch of the General Staff Building in St. Petersburg and the Iron Arch (the Soviet Peoples' Friendship Arch) a little further from the square in Kyiv; and other similarities.
13. *Chto Delat* announced their withdrawal on 15 March 2014 to support the Peace March in Moscow. The announcement was the group's reaction to the decision of the curator of Manifesta 10, Kasper König, not to cancel Manifesta 10 despite various calls for a boycott. According to *Chto Delat*, König's statement 'denigrates any attempts to address the present situation in Russia by artistic means, demoting them to "self-righteous representation" and "cheap provocation" and thus effectively preemptively censoring them.' For König's statement see: https://manifesta.org/2014/03/manifesta-10-will-stay-in-st-petersburg/For the announcement by *Chto Delat* see: https://chtodelat.org/b9-texts-2/chto-delat-withdraws-from-manifesta-10/.
14. Kalugin's individual protest was widely covered in the local and international press, though Norman's artwork was often not mentioned e.g.: http://news.trust.org//item/20140802124707-g01dk/.
15. http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_Ru/11/2014/hm11_1_456.html [Accessed 20 October 2014]. The statement is not available on the site any more. It is still available at: http://petersburgcity.com/news/culture/2014/07/21/Manifest_Norman_210714/[Accessed 30 January 2019].
16. For a pertinent discussion of the political effects of the Manifesta 10 public program, including Norman's work and Piotrovsky's comments on it, see Riff (2014). In the conversation with Riff, Ukrainian artist Nikita Kadan calls Piotrovsky's statement 'Putinist' and considers it to be much more effective than Norman's art.

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