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Strzemiński's War

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Strzemiński's War

Władysław Strzemiński's war drawings comprise at least seven cycles of works. I will focus on those in the collection of the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, many of which were donated in person by Strzemiński in November 1945.[1] There is limited scholarship on these works. The first to refer to them was Julian Przyboś, in 1956, noting in a brief passage the peculiar suspension of the drawings between abstraction and realism, their syntheticism, unusually expressive qualities, and their focus on the concrete.[2] The poet interpreted a number of works as relating to the Holocaust. At the end of the 1980s, Janina Ładnowska perceptively pointed to the emotional content of the war works and to the importance of emotions in Strzemiński's writings, examining the drawings primarily in relation to the artist's 1936 article 'Aspects of Reality', which was devoted, among other topics, to a critical reading of Surrealism.[3] The artist's friend Stefan Krygier also stressed the role of sensation (in addition to form and seeing) and the sensitivity to the suffering of others that he believed the drawings expressed.[4] Ładnowska interpreted these works as a reaction to the 'horrors of war', a 'dramatic expression of the fate not of the individual but common to humankind as a species', synthesised in the postwar cycle of collages *To My Friends the Jews* (*Moim przyjaciołom Żydom*, 1945–1947).[5] In a similar spirit, Krygier stressed the presence in the drawings of the universal experience of the human tragedy of war. He emphasised the interpretative importance of the title and linked the works, in this respect, above all, to Surrealism. The first and only researcher to date to interpret and attend to the aforementioned works has been Andrzej Turowski, in a passage of his chapter on war in the book *Constructors of the World* (*Budowniczowie świata*), his comprehensive take on avant-garde and modern art history in Poland.[6] He noted the presence of biographical experience in the drawings, and connected them (as did Ładnowska) to the cycle *To My Friends the Jews*, analysing them in relation to ideas such as trace, shadow, and emptiness.[7] Most of the aforementioned authors (with the exception of Przyboś), associate the *Deportations* (*Deportacje*) series with the deportation of the Polish population from Łódź, as do Zenobia Karnicka and Eleonora Jedlińska.[8] The latter has aligned the *Cheap as Mud* cycle in a rather general manner with the 'terror of the events of the Holocaust being played out in Łódź, in Poland, in Europe … beyond history, as represented', referring principally to Turowski's text and to Nika Strzemińska's book *Art, Love and Hate. Concerning Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński* (*Sztuka*, *miłość i nienawiść. O Katarzynie Kobro i Władysławie Strzemińskim*).[9] Although a decided majority of authors consider Strzemiński's wartime experiences to be key, a universalising perspective pervades all these articles.[10] In his book on the relationship between visual arts and neuroaesthetics,

Łukasz Kędziora devotes a few sentences to the drawings in question and calls the artist a 'conscious neurobiologist'.[11] In the text that follows, I draw on these analyses and interpretations, while simultaneously proposing a somewhat different direction of inquiry. While I also acknowledge Strzemiński's biographical experience as the starting point for the production of the drawings, rather than seeing them as universalising and abstracting war and the Holocaust, I propose, on the contrary, to view them as the direct response of a feeling eyewitness, who was emotionally, almost physically involved in the scenes of expulsion, suffering, cruelty, and death taking place in three very different contexts: West Belorussia, Łódź (incorporated into the Third Reich), and the Łódź ghetto. In the interpretation of Strzemiński's war drawings which follows, I introduce the concept of neurotestimony, by which I understand a report on the empirical, polysensory experiences of the artist/observer, which affects both his/her ways of seeing and the work's subject matter, while, at the same time, intensively stimulating the spectator's visual brain.

Positioning

Strzemiński was not a victim of the Second World War. His subject position can perhaps best be described by the category of the observer and by concepts such as fluidity, transitoriness, and un-groundedness. No doubt understanding the real danger of being shot by the Einsatzgruppen, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, Strzemiński, his wife Katarzyna Kobro, and their young daughter Nika managed to leave Łódź for Wilejka Powiatowa in Eastern Poland. On 17 September 1939, as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Poland was invaded by the Soviet Union. Wilejka Powiatowa became a part of West Belorussia, incorporated into the USSR on 2 November 1939. It is unclear what national identity the artist adopted in the months that followed. All that is known is that he taught in a secondary school in the autumn and winter of 1939 to 1940, [12] and that he designed the small district town's decorations on the occasion of the 1 May celebrations in 1940.[13] The fact that the Strzemińskis survived the autumn and winter of 1939 to 1940 in Wilejka Powiatowa, and that they reached Łódź (renamed Litzmannstadt by the Nazis) relatively safely in one of the last transports in May 1940, borders on the miraculous. Perhaps the decision to leave Wilejka was an attempt to escape Soviet citizenship and was connected with the increasingly-intensive 'passport operations' underway in the first half of 1940 on these territories which were absorbed into the USSR. Katarzyna Kobro commented on the problem in her diary, with reference to the winter of 1939 to 1940: 'Strzemiński advised me to register myself as Polish. I registered myself as Russian. When the expulsions came, after Christmas, and searches were underway next door, in a flash he burned my birth certificate stating that I was born in Moscow and our marriage certificate from Smolensk'.[14] How did Strzemiński and his family survive two major deportations primarily targetting the Polish population (as a representative of the Polish intelligentsia and a defector from Central Poland)?[15] How was it that he was able to teach in a school and why was he allowed to design propaganda decorations? Could it be that the artist accepted a Soviet passport?[16] If not, then it seems more likely that when, a year later, Strzemiński signed the Russian List in Łódź, the decision must have been all the more humiliating and shameful for him. Perhaps the source of Kobro and Strzemiński's later bitter conflict lurks in this little-known thread of the biographies of the two artists between autumn 1939 and spring 1940 in West Belorussia. Questions concerning national (as well as other forms of) identity in this period became a matter determining life and death. In mid-May 1940, the Strzemińskis returned to Łódź, which at that time was in the *Wartheland,* a part of the territory of Poland created and incorporated in October 1939 by Nazi Germany into the Reich, and subject to intense Germanisation.[17] To make this possible, as their daughter wrote, the artists made a case on the basis of Katarzyna Kobro's German origins.[18] Theirs was one of the last transports to reach Łódź. As early as June 1940, refugees from central Poland declaring a desire to return were deported deep into the USSR.[19] The incorrect transliteration of Strzemiński's surname from the Russian to the Latin alphabet (Strschemid[ń?]ski) saved his life, and the artist hid behind this somewhat accidental identity for the duration of the war.[20] This was probably also why the Strzemińskis did not return to their apartment on Srebrzyńska Street. To begin with they lived with their friends,

the Krauzes (Jerzy Krauze declared as an ethnic German (*volksdeutsch*), and helped Katarzyna Kobro and her sister Wera to save Strzemiński's pre-war oeuvre), then they moved to Karolew (a district of Łódź). A year later, in Łódź, both Strzemiński's work and the International Collection of Modern Art (Międzynarodowa Kolekcja Sztuki Nowoczesnej) founded by the artist were deemed 'degenerate art' and were publicly denounced.[21] In July 1941, Strzemiński / Strschemid[ń?]ski, like Katarzyna Kobro, signed the Russian List, which guaranteed some benefits.[22] His subject position was characterised by uncertainty and a lack of stability. As an avant-garde artist, whose anti-Nazi views were widely known before the war, as a famous representative of 'degenerate art', and as someone with severe disabilities, he could well have been a victim (and executed like Karol Hiller) had he been discovered.[23] Signing the Russian List, on the other hand, positioned him dangerously close to the Nazi perpetrators. A novel written after the war points to Strzemiński's acute sensitivity as regards national lists and changes in national identity, even to fixation on the question, as well as to the sense of guilt associated with this.[24] At the same time, as the artist's works from the war period indicate, Strzemiński expressed sympathy for the victims of the scenes of violence and crime he witnessed, such as the victims of the deportations from the eastern part of Poland, the Poles expelled from Łódź, and the Jewish population murdered in the Łódź ghetto. His drawings take up the challenge of bearing specific witness to violence, injustice, and crime.

Like Kazimierz Wyka, whose situation has been described by Aleksandra Ubertowska, Strzemiński was an observer with an extremely narrow field of vision.[25] First in Wilejka Powiatowa, then from May 1940 to the end of the war in Łódź, the artist was cut off both from information and from his artistic milieu. Nevertheless, he lived in the sphere of the empirical facts of constant danger, terror, and death. He observed the destruction of statehood and terror on the territories occupied by the USSR in the years 1939 to 1940, and then the extreme suffering and death of the Jews in Łódź ghetto. Strzemiński's drawings, carried out contemporaneously with these inconceivable realities, reveal the destruction and the lawlessness under both the Soviet occupation and the German occupation, without, however, making these equivalent.

The Holocaust does not occupy a central place in Strzemiński's war-time work. Created somewhat on the margins, visual notes accumulate like waves, before being recognised as events that radically break the meaning of history, humanity, and aesthetics in the postwar series *To my Friends the Jews*.[26] Earlier, the proximity, not of the victims of the Holocaust, but of its observers seems to appear in all its ambivalence in some of the war cycles, particularly in the works *Cheap as Mud* (*Tanie jak błoto*, 1943–1944). The significance of this marginality is, I believe, similar to the case of the writing of Kazimierz Wyka summarising the war period, as Aleksandra Ubertowska has perceptively noted. She defined the strategy of the author of *Imaginary Life* (*Życie na niby*), in this particular case the essay 'Two Autumns', as a means of 'positioning': 'The author very carefully describes the spatial position from which he observed the Warsaw uprising, for he was conscious of the fact that this position also defined his judgement and attitude [to it]'.[27]

Both in Wyka's case and in Strzemiński's, this 'spatial position' assumes a certain distance from the events being described. Nevertheless, their distance should not be understood as a sign of objectivity, but of a conscious self-criticism of their position in relation to the atrocity taking place, a position that is always already embroiled in the scene of the crime, devoid of innocence and neutrality. In the case of Wyka the location was Krzeszowice, in Strzemiński's it was Wilejka Powiatowa, then occupied Łódź. Ubertowska referred to Wyka's essays as an 'autobiographical account of the experience of war and the Holocaust'.[28] I see Strzemiński's drawings in a similar way, while maintaining the specificity of the visual medium of drawing. In his drawn records, the artist reported first from West Belorussia, then from Łódź, recording repressive measures against the Polish civilian population, and then addressing the progressive extermination of the Jews in Łódź ghetto literally taking place before his eyes. The three events intersect, become entangled, but without obscuring one another. The destruction of the rule of law, the fall of reason, the abyss of violence and death that opened up, seemed to result in drawings, which in all likelihood referred to the Holocaust, emerging from the margins to become the central event. At around the same time, Kazimierz Wyka wrote: 'The means by which the Germans liquidated the Jews falls

on their conscience. Reacting to these means, however, falls on our conscience'.[29] Strzemiński's drawings, constituting such a reaction, represent an important contribution to the history of the Polish conscience.

Neurotestimony

The drawings were carried out in pencil on thick, soft paper, using stencils made of technical tracing paper. As Janina Ładnowska has noted, the artist drew the outline of the form on tracing paper, which he then pressed onto cardboard and traced around.[30] In these works, Strzemiński was referring to his artistic experiences involving a so-called organic or biological line, which appeared at the beginning of the 1930s in the *Seascapes* (*Pejzaże morskie*), and then, more forcefully, as researchers have noted, in the cycle of lithographs *Łódź without Functionalism* (*Łódź bez funkcjonalizmu*, 1936).[31] Strzemiński also devoted a short, but unusually striking fragment of the *Theory of Seeing* (*Teoria widzenia*), written between 1945 and 1952, to the war drawings:

> When I set about making these works (most of which were burned by the Hitlerites during the Occupation) I subjectively experienced them as being realist and empirical, demanding a far greater degree of observation than paintings considered realist. But I was weighed down by the bias that "realism" is sixteenth century. I was also weighed down by false theories that every departure from this "realism" is a departure towards deformation and abstraction. From these theories it transpired that anything demanding considerable attention and concentration and thorough observation is a "deformation," anything resulting from superficial observation is realism …
>
> Only by examining the visual base, by defining the components of visual consciousness, was I able to position them accurately: these are works based on the empirical method, and their aim is to incorporate into visual consciousness the effects of internal physiological rhythms. Thus, this is impressionism (physiological seeing) that differs from historical Impressionism (such as it formed in history) by way of the fact that it allows for a new component of visual consciousness (physiological rhythm, which Impressionism had not usually allowed for). Historical Impressionism developed problems related to the visual content of *gazes* themselves as cast. The *reception* of these gazes, however—the way in which our organism reacts, receives these gazes—generally remained outside the scope of the Impressionists' interests, despite being a component of the physiological process of seeing.[32]

What did Strzemiński have in mind when he wrote about his drawings in terms of the 'reception of gazes'? Or, to take this question further, what are the bodily experiences corresponding to 'receiving the gaze' of a victim of deportation, hunger, cruelty, a person in despair, condemned to death, for these are the scenes to which the drawings refer? What sort of 'transaction' is associated, in Strzemiński's case, with the exchange of gazes between the victim of violence and the observer of the victim's distress, humiliations, and death?

In the aforementioned citation from the *Theory of Seeing*, the specific interpretation of visibility is striking, as is the multifaceted, sustained observation embodied in Strzemiński's drawn accounts (their 'empirical method'). The second point emerging from the artist's words can be described as attributing to the works from the war period the status of accounts of inner feeling, bodily response ('the effects of internal physiological rhythms') accompanied by the intensive work of thought and the multifaceted analysis of reality, leading to the transformation and complication of forms ('anything demanding considerable attention and concentration and thorough observation is a deformation'). The pictures are thus one consequence of the attempt to reflect the scenes seen, as well as a bodily, affective reaction to the event perceived ('the reception of these gazes … the way in which our organism reacts'). I would therefore propose that in his cycles the artist is not referring to abstract imaginings or to a universalised experience of war, but to specific events, which he had either observed directly or knew of. I would like to propose the concept of neurotestimony as a way to define this phenomenon present in Strzemiński's war drawings.

Aleksandra Ubertowska summarises the most important conceptualisations of the idea of testimony as an amalgamation of several features: '1. an ethically conditioned referential order; 2. a forcefully signalled authorial / autobiographical signature, to which the qualities of authenticity and trustworthiness are ascribed; 3. the category of voice, orality as a model of "source communication" (which may, though does not have to, filter into the structure of the written text)'.[33] Strzemiński's drawings contain referential and autobiographical allusions (of which more below), but as visual representations, they include not oral but another type of primary experience: the ability of the brain to see and to create images. They are both literal and visual. As neurotestimonies, the artists' drawings unite the notation of external, often liminal events, neurophysiological processes of seeing, and the inner, visceral response to the scenes captured by the retina of the eye associated with these. The drawn record does not, therefore, relate solely to visual observation and to the multi-faceted observation of the scenes observed, subjects and objects, but also to the bodily experience of the specific event and the reactions of the observer associated with these. Representation becomes a screen for the recording of reality experienced, the body of the observer (its physiological reactions), as well as its conscious, unconscious, and unwitting response. In Strzemiński's drawings, the observer is not only intertwined with what is observed, but also vice-versa: under the influence of the observed scenes, the observer inevitably succumbs to the risks of opening and to continual change. It is precisely this phenomenon recorded in the drawings (which, interestingly, are formally similar to writing) to which I give the name neurotestimony.

West Belorussia, 1939

The 1939 series *West Belorussia* (*Białoruś Zachodnia*) was executed on 38 x 31 cm, white, rectangular card. The artist draws in synthetic outline, characterised by its precisely-driven, concretely-curving line. This line serves several purposes: it allows for the separation of form from ground, as well as immersing form in ground (it is the active ground of the grainy paper alone that fills all the forms); it defines volume and distance; it constructs the perspectival ground; and lends expression to shapes.

The drawings in this series are defined (with one exception) by a thick, dark contour, marked in soft pencil. Strzemiński represents the local rural population, which is to say the Belorussian peasantry. The figures of women and men are large, massive, ungainly. In *Man and Woman* (*Mężczyzna i kobieta*), the figure of the peasant woman is signalled by a headscarf, wide skirt, and disproportionately-vast boots. The man has a prominent nose, a traditional hat, and high boots with wide trousers tucked in. Their surroundings are sketched with the help of a poured horizontal stain: an index of an inhospitable, muddy yard or field. The figures represented in other works from this series, such as in the drawing *Woman's Figure (Postać kobieca),* are also less at home in the landscape than dependent on it: they shuttle and quiver in a seemingly resistant, empty, white space. Strzemiński seems to convey, by way of these few interventions, the landscape of the exceptionally cold winter of 1939 to 1940, when temperatures plunged to minus forty-five degrees Celsius.

Line defines subjects, objects, and elements of the landscape alike. The drawings define a strong dependency between man and habitat. The autonomous shapes sketched are in close proximity as though attracting one another. Houses take on soft, uncertain, pasty forms. Some are revealed to be empty, recently abandoned, as in the drawing *Village* (*Wieś*); in others, such as *Man and Landscape with Houses* (*Człowiek i pejzaż z domami*), returning home is a struggle. A process of disintegration is underway, a melting of both people and things. Even the trees quake. With its organic passage, line equalises people, objects, and nature, and its pulse defines all the elements of the world represented here. In the drawing *Two Figures* (*Dwie postacie*), in which Strzemiński used a hard pencil, which gives the effect of a fine grey line, a man with a small child on his right has been drafted in the central space. The heads of the man and the child are captured in profile, while their bodies face forwards. The former extends his arm to the left, in a supplicating gesture, begging. Their complex, protruding forms, as though slowly escaping the ground (the grey colour

of the fine line) diverge from the massive forms represented in other works. Is this a record of hunger and poverty?

Strzemiński gave his drawings the somewhat unexpected, un-Polish-centric title *West Belorussia* (Poles rather referred to this region as *Kresy Wschodnie,* the Eastern Borderlands). Anarchy and violence engulfed these territories after the Soviet invasion of 17 September 1939. It was to such peasants as those depicted by Strzemiński that the Red Army addressed its slogans of liberation from the 'oppression of the Polish overlords, landowners, capitalists', promising at once freedom, equality, and prosperity.[34] The new, Communist, authorities rapidly undertook the appropriation of the vast properties belonging to estates, the nationalisation of factories, the parcelisation of land, as well as intensive arrests and deportations. Among the 'enemies of the people' were, above all, the representatives of the Polish national administration, Polish settlers and landowners, the intelligentsia, members of religious orders, as well as wealthy peasants.[35] Małgorzata Ruchniewicz notes that:

> when considered in relation to the total number of inhabitants of the occupied territories, the extent of the Soviet repression may not appear to be of a mass nature … If, however, we consider those subjected to repressive measures in terms of national structure and relate these figures to the position of particular national groups within these territories, we ascertain that the number of casualties among the Polish population was high … The Soviet occupation of 1939–1941 certainly weakened the Polish presence in these territories, destroying groups associated with the pre-war State apparatus, the old social hierarchy (historical classes such as the landowning class), in broad terms the leading groups at various levels (social and political activists, the intelligentsia) as well as threatening the remaining population, destroying traditional social ties.[36]

The Belarusian peasantry depicted by Strzemiński was soon subject to the Stalinist apparatus of terror too: while their modest living conditions initially improved (through agricultural reform), within a few months they took a dramatic turn for the worse (as a result of the imposition, among others, of the requisitioning of agricultural produce in December 1939, and then compulsory labour for the state and collectivisation in 1940).[37] As Małgorzata Ruchniewicz has observed, this social group was also a target for a multitude of arrests and deportations in the years 1939 to 1941.[38] The local peasant population is represented in a manner more grotesque than demonising in Strzemiński's drawings, arousing a form of sympathy, rather than fear. Poverty, the daily struggle for survival, and the frailty of existence are revealed. Despite their solid build, the figures seem to be reduced to the level of bare life, or (to use the words of Kazimierz Wyka) 'vegetative continuity', oscillating 'between the hen-house and the cemetary'.[39] The figures are singular, suspended in space, isolated. Poverty, unrest and degradation affect people, their humble property and environment alike. There is a noticeable accumulation of redrawing in the *West Belorussia* cycle, producing a grotesque effect. In the remaining cycles, biologism takes centre stage.

***Deportations*, 1940**

We do not know the precise dates, nor even the month when the cycle *Deportations* was produced, though, both in this case and in the case of the cycle *Cheap as Mud*, the date is particularly important. In comparison with the earlier works, the human figures are more slight, carried out with a variegated, calculated outline. The contour line in them is more varied both in terms of density (carried out in some places with a hard, elsewhere with a soft pencil, sometimes silver, sometimes black graphite) and complexity, which affects the expressive qualities of the works. The line defines not only perspective, but also movement, the action in which Strzemiński's figures are engaged, as well as their 'vitality'. One of the drawings, entitled *Evicted* (*Wyrzuceni*), was carried out in hard pencil. The forms subtly stand out from the ground, arranging themselves into a figure (perhaps a woman) hurrying along to the right, and a child accompanying her. They form a tangled, almost decorative shape, with softly-flowing folds and angles, related to the drawing *Two Figures* (from the cycle *West Belorussia*), although *Evicted* is more complex. The representations of the woman and the child are accompanied by smaller forms located beside them and beneath their

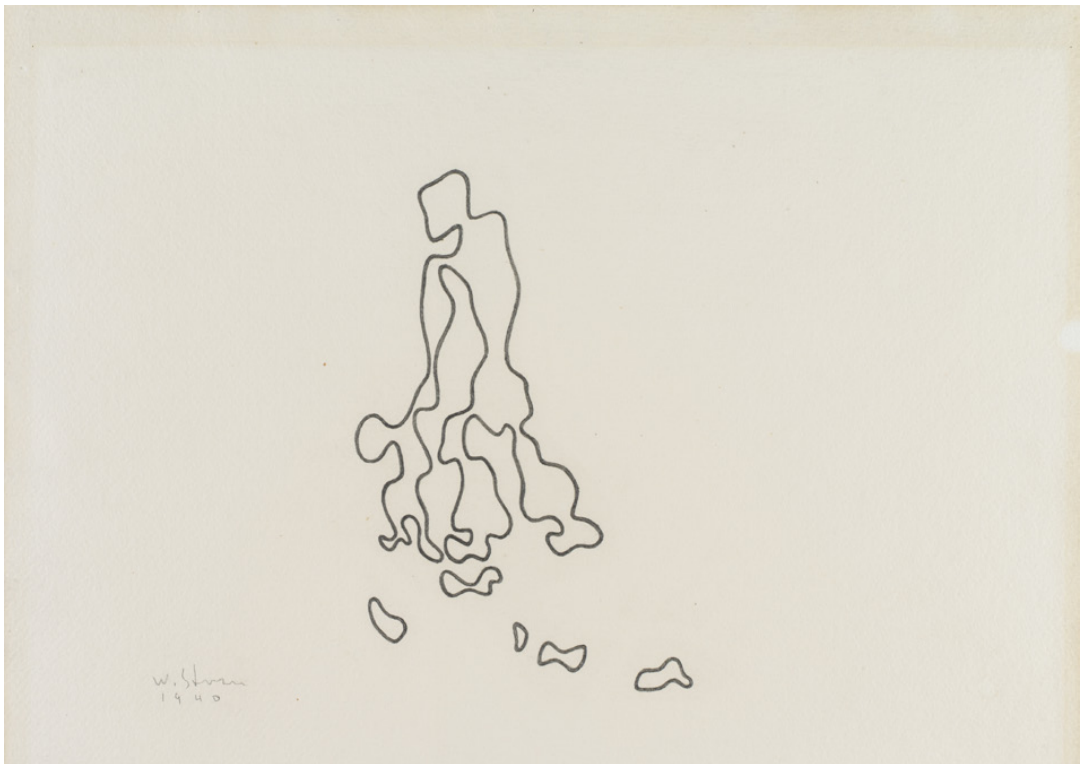

Fig. 22.1. Władysław Strzemiński, *The Only Trace (Deportation* series*)* (*Jedyny ślad*, cykl *Deportacje*), 1944). Pencil drawing on paper, 30 x 38 cm. Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

feet, as though lost, detached, 'expropriated' from the bodies of the figures. In other drawings, a soft pencil was used, articulating the shape of a man by way of a meaty fat line, as in *On the Pavement* (*Na bruku*). Although this still refers to biological, cellular shapes, these are far less complex. An adult figure holding the hand of the small figure of a child is discernible in three of the six drawings from the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź collection. An organic line, sometimes thicker and sometimes thinner, defines the figures' gender (among other means, by way of its thicker or more decorative use), but it also draws attention to the frailty of the bodies of women, men, and children, the precarity of their lives. They could burst open, killing them at any moment.

This group of drawings relates, I think, to two types of deportations, both of which Strzemiński observed directly.[40] The first is the dramatic deportation of the local and alien population of the so-called Eastern Borderlands (among these West Belorussia) in the first half of the year 1940. After the invasion of the Red Army, the brunt of the Stalinist apparatus of terror (arrests, executions, deportations) in these lands was directed at Polish institutions and elites, then at civil servants, landowners, wealthy peasants, Jews, and the Belarusian population.[41] The Strzemińskis witnessed the first two (of four) deportations. The first wave of deportations took place on 10 February 1940, targetting representatives of the Polish state apparatus, employees of the Forestry Corps (along with their families), and Polish settlers.[42]

Of the four deportations, the first, which affected 50, 224 people, resulted in the highest number of fatal casualties. The next major phase of deportations, on 13 April 1940, also mainly affected Poles. This was when the families of those imprisoned or sent to labour camps by the NKVD (including civil servants, landowners, 'counter-revolutionaries') were deported, as well as refugees from central Poland, among them Polish Jews: altogether around 29, 699 people.[43]

The drawing *The Only Trace* (*Jedyny ślad*, Fig. 22.1) shows two figures from behind—one large, one very small—holding hands and heading towards the left of the space represented, in thick black line. They look like a grown man holding a child tightly by the hand, almost flowing into a single shape. A few amorphous forms are visible in the lower part of the picture, like footprints melting in the snow. In more metaphorical terms, these figures could be seen as defenseless people without any hope, alone in their misery, condemned to death, and yet connected by an affective tie. This drawing may be the only visual trace of the silhouettes that Strzemiński saw at the time, looming in the distance. *The Only Trace* seems to refer to one of the aforementioned waves of deportations, perhaps the one in February, the worst of these. As Jan Tomasz Gross wrote,

people were taken from the streets, entire families were evicted from their homes, irrespective of their age or the state of their health, and entire districts of towns and villages were depopulated overnight.[44] A vast number of those deported, particularly children, perished of hunger and cold during transportation. The temperature reached minus fifty degrees Celsius. Dead bodies, mostly frozen children, were thrown out of the wagons straight into the snow by the guards. There was a train station in Wilejka Powiatowa where Strzemiński might have witnessed these sorts of scenes in February 1940. The author of one of the testimonies read by Gross, who was twelve years old at the time of these events, recounted:

> It is the eve of 10 February, it is night, 1 o'clock, screams can be heard in the street, and the things I saw! A whole string of sleighs went on endlessly, with mothers and children seated in them, older ones but also some as young as a few weeks old. On one of the sleighs, I saw a woman with six children, two of them twins a few weeks old. The mother had wrapped the poor children in a blanket and was taking them to the station like that. But sadly, to the mother's great despair, the children froze on the way to Russia, and because there was nothing else to be done, they were thrown out of the window. Seeing this, the NKVD [man] said with a contemptuous smile: "miorznut Polskije sobaki" [Polish dogs are freezing].[45]

The figure in the drawing *A Gazing Woman* (*Patrząca kobieta*), located in the centre of the composition, facing to the right, seems to be holding something in her arms. Perhaps a bundle, perhaps a small child. She is captured in a tense, waiting position, while also presenting herself and what she has in her arms. This could be a representation of a mother with a small child awaiting deportation, or it may refer to another scene that was common at that time: women standing for hours with their children in front of overcrowded jails in order to give their family members or friends packages with food and clothing, women looking for their loved ones. In Wilejka Powiatowa, where Strzemiński and his family were living at the time, there was a jail that was at least five times more full than it should have been at the time. Jan Tomasz Gross has cited shocking testimonies relating to the prisons in the region at the turn of 1939 to 1940.[46] As he has pointed out, people went to prisons to see whether their loved ones were still alive, but also to show a sign of life, since besides torture, during interrogation, people were threatened with the imprisonment or deportation of family members.[47] It was mostly women and children who spent ours waiting outside the jails, trying to give food to the prisoners.

The second type of deportation relates to occupied Łódź. The deportations affected the Polish population of Łódź and were accompanied by an intensive campaign of Germanisation. They lasted from the beginning of December 1939 to March 1941. 76, 599 Poles were deported from the Łódź region, which was incorporated into the Third Reich as part of the Wartheland.[48] Poles were removed to transit camps with only a small bundle of belongings, and then, after a few months, transported to the General Government, a territory occupied by Nazi Germany in the central part of Poland, or for forced labour in Germany. The expulsions of Poles from Łódź were described dramatically in the memoirs of Marian Minich.[49] After returning to Łódź in May 1940, Strzemiński, his wife, and child lived for a time in the Karolew district of Łódź, but one can assume not as Poles but as Russians with German roots. According to Andrzej Rukowiecki, several hundred Polish families were expelled from Karolew the night of the 30–31 August 1940, mostly workers, their lodgings taken over by Germans from the Baltic states and from Wołyń.[50] The Strzemińskis may have witnessed these expulsions. Did they move into one of the abandoned apartments?

The two versions of the drawing *On the Pavement*, as well as *Paving Stones* (*Bruk*), and *Evicted* seem to correspond to the deportations from Łódź. In the first three drawings, we see a human figure (undoubtedly a man) drawn with a crisp black line. The cobblestones that give the piece its name have been marked with a few amorphous stains. The emptiness dominating the space represents not only the dispossession of material goods, abandonment, but also symbolic loss and degradation. The forms in the drawing *Evicted*, showing a woman and a child, are convoluted, as though conveying the emotions of perturbation, despair, and anger, both of the represented figure and the observer representing her situation. All the drawings from the cycles *Deportations*

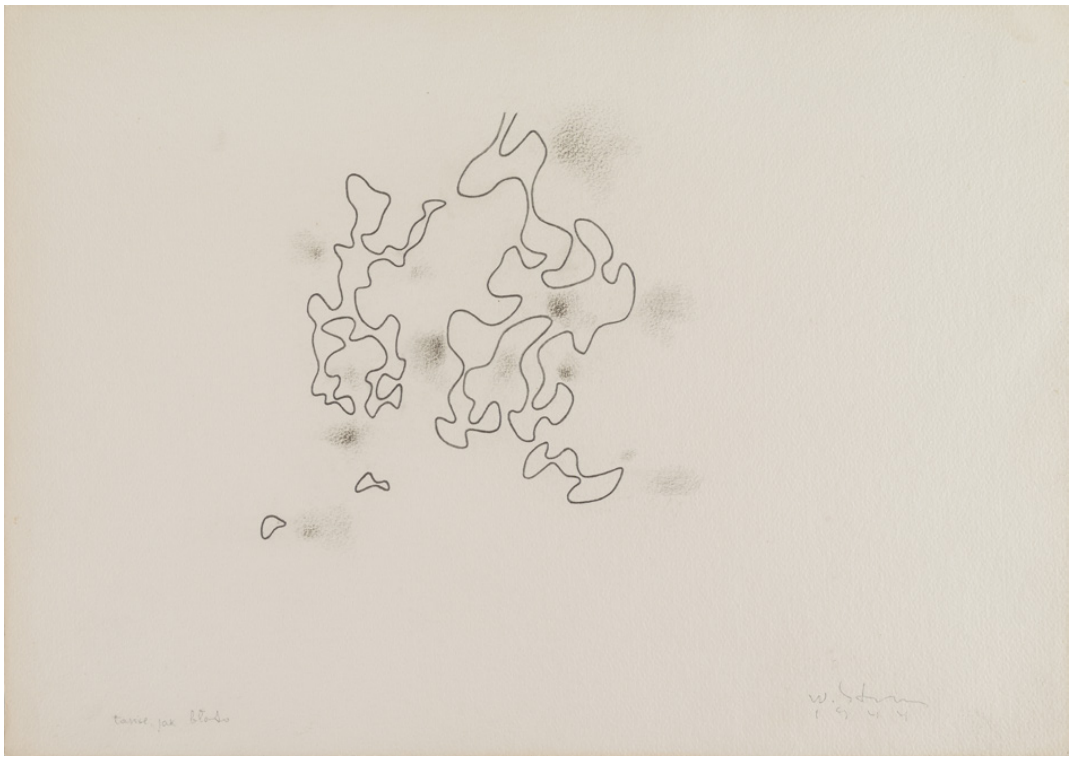

Fig. 22.2. Władysław Strzemiński, *Untitled* (*Cheap as Mud II* series) (*Bez tytułu*, cykl *Tanie jak błoto II*), 1940). Pencil drawing on paper, 29.5 x 41.7 cm. Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

and *West Belorussia* are characterised by a certain marked distance between the observer and the event recorded. Although the observer is emotionally engaged in the representation (showing sympathy, compassion, empathy for the outrage and despair), he remains on the outside. This situation changes in the cycle *Faces* (*Twarze*), which are marked by an almost intimate proximity, particularly in the four drawings from the cycle *Cheap as Mud*, in which the observer and the observed scene literally melt into one another in the drawn representation.[51]

Cheap as Mud, 1943–1944

The drawings in the series *Cheap as Mud* were carried out on decidedly grainy paper. In the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź there is a collection of fourteen drawings, three of which, with the specific title *On the Trenches* (*Na okopy*), seem either to belong to a separate series, or to posit one, as they differ from the rest. They are all signed and dated. One of these, the earliest (*Untitled*, 1943, 29.7 x 41.8 cm), was carried out in hard pencil and the most delicate of contours on a lightly-enriched paper. The impression of graininess, almost smudging the texture, is increased. In this drawing, which is also the only one in portrait orientation and rectangular in shape, we see two figures holding hands: one larger, one smaller; a woman (suggested by the highly decorative nature of the form) and a child. They are positioned in the centre of the picture space, turning slightly left; the woman leans protectively towards the child, the child's head is raised, looking into the woman's face, and the child's legs flow into one. It seems that we are witnessing the child asking a question. Or else, perhaps the child and mother (?) are turning their heads away from something, turning to the right. The left side, gaping with emptiness, in such an interpretation, serves to bracket the literal distance, dividing the figures from the terrifying scene. The figures drawn with a bulging contour are represented in such a way that we cannot be sure whether they are approaching or receding from the spectator. They are accompanied by graphite fingerprints, though these do not touch the figures holding hands tightly, heading in an unknown direction. The use of a hard pencil gives the impression that the shapes are vanishing behind the smudges; by comparison with the strong fingerprints, they seem fragile, light, delicate.

Organic line describes complex shapes by way of flowing folds and angles in all the works in this cycle. However, in this cycle, certain forms are also interrupted, opening onto the emptiness of the ground: there is no stable point of perspective. The flat imprints of fingers covered in graphite, probably Strzemiński's, can be found in four works. Three of them are versions of three

others (the placement of the fingerprints differentiates them from one another), and one can be treated as a synthesis of two drawings. This is the one that I will describe and analyse.

It is the only one to have been not only dated and signed (on the bottom right), but also supplied with a commentary or title in the artist's hand (on the bottom left): 'cheap as mud' (Fig. 22.2). The drawing has been in the collection of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź since 1974, when it was purchased from Bolesław Hochlinger (a friend of Strzemiński's). It is rectangular and has a landscape orientation, with the dimensions 42 x 30 cm. It can be read from at least two angles: as a frontal view or as an aerial view. Read frontally, the centre of the composition has been positioned slightly to the left of the central axis of the picture. Two forms in outline, three smaller shapes positioned at the bottom and the constellation of rounded stains accompanying them: large graphite finger prints. The two larger outlined forms do not touch, though they are close to one another. The smaller form resembles a child caught in the gesture of extending its hand to an adult. This expression of fear or of the need for protection, support, and togetherness, is especially moving. The larger, much more amorphous figure, its upper part partially melting away, is open, and does not respond to the child's gesture. The only detail indicating that this is a person are the deformed feet. In its positioning and also the particularly-developed, blurred, central part of the figure extended to the right, the form comes to suggest movement towards the right. The graphite fingerprints underline the transparency of the forms as well as their smudging. We have the impression of an interference in the field of vision, fine particles irritating our eyes.

Julian Przyboś, a well-known Polish avant-garde poet and art critic, who was a close friend of the artist's, saw these drawings as referring to the Holocaust. Przyboś discussed the theme of the Holocaust in Strzemiński's work in 1956, though he confused the *Deportations* cycle with *Cheap as Mud* (possibly also overlaying his memories with the cycle *To my Friends the Jews*):

> These are abstract but figurative pictures, made with the most general of syntheses of line and colour, and they give things a particular, unique expressive quality. For example the drawings from the *Deportations* cycle, representing the tragedy of the ghetto, or the cycle of drawing *Ruins* (*Ruiny*). The artist was able to give his human figures a startlingly expressive quality (without indicating eyes, mouths or facial features) with one waving line defining the outline, a line which seems alike in each individual drawing. Exhibited in Łódź immediately after the war, these drawings—why should I not say so?—made a stronger impression on me than Picasso's *Guernica*.[52]

Perhaps Przyboś heard a reading along these lines from his friend Strzemiński. I would like to develop and somewhat complicate it.

In the case of the drawing from 1943 and the works from the following year, Strzemiński may have been working on scenes of which he had not been just an eyewitness, but also an audio or even a 'poly-sensory' observer. Between mid-January and the end of July 1942, the Germans deported around fifty-five thousand Jews from the Łódź ghetto to the extermination camp at Chełmno nad Nerem (Kulmhof am Ner). They were all killed. Earlier, in January 1942, the Nazis liquidated the gipsy camp, killing four thousand three hundred Roma and Sinti, also at Chełmno nad Nerem.[53] Heinrich Himmler took the decision to liquidate the ghetto in occupied Łódź at the beginning of 1944.[54] Between 23 June and the end of August, over seventy thousand people were deported to the extermination camps at Chełmno nad Nerem and Auschwitz-Birkenau.[55] It may be that these events, as well as the extreme conditions of life in the ghetto—widespread hunger, illness, and terror—served as a reference point for the *Cheap as Mud* drawings. The dominant presence of the figure of the small child is, nevertheless, striking in this cycle. It is found in as many as seven of the eleven drawings that can, strictly speaking, be linked to this cycle. I am inclined to believe that the drawings in which the figures of children appear, two in particular, refer, above all, to the tragic events of the great deportation action, known as the *Wielka Szpera* (from the German *allgemeine Gehsperre*, meaning general curfew) of September 1942. Children under the age of ten, persons over the age of sixty-five, and all those who were weak or sick: altogether 15, 681 people were transported to Chełmno nad Nerem and killed.[56] The *Wielka Szpera* was accompanied by murders and executions; the ghetto was filled with crying, screaming, and terror. First the security

guards, and then divisions of the Nazi police searched the ghetto, quarter by quarter. The selection was often made in an arbitrary manner. Desperate people tried to hide their children, but their opposition was met with the perverse cruelty of the Gestapo. Children were murdered before their parents' eyes, parents before their children's. The Nazis murdered several dozen or several hundred people who resisted. There was no one in the ghetto who did not lose a loved one. People were also aware that certain death awaited the victims of the *Wielka Szpera*.[57] In her monograph on the Łódź ghetto, Andrea Löw wrote that:

> Judel Kleiman was the driver of one of the vehicles and recalls that some of the children sang during the journey. Others tried to escape by jumping from the lorries; they were shot down on the spot. The same thing happened to the older people who had been selected for deportation and tried to escape, as well as to parents trying to get their children out of the vehicles. Several mothers and children were shot by German police as they tried to escape from the yard of the surrounded tenement building.[58]

The figure of the child in *Cheap as Mud* is represented in three simple forms: in two cases alone (the same composition, the only difference in the second case being the addition of finger traces); and in the remaining five drawings, paired with an adult figure (three of these have the same formal composition, the images are distinguished from one another by way of their format, the addition of fingerprints, or the thickness of the line). If we view the figures from above, we see human forms in them, or rather human remains: a stream of blood, a form imprinted in a soft, muddy ground. By applying two perspectives simultaneously, frontal and aerial, the child in the drawings is shown as both still living and already dead, on the border between life and death. Either someone accompanies the child in this liminal situation (represented paired with an adult figure) or else the child dies utterly alone.

The stains and fingerprints in four drawings of the cycle *Cheap as Mud* neither give the figures volume nor construct perspective, as Strzemiński had tested out in the still life studies in 1943. The observer sees the scene taking place nearby, and remains at a certain distance, but nevertheless participates in it. The drawings from the cycle *Cheap as Mud*, stained with fingerprints, are an exposé of the collapse of the boundary between the representation of the subject and object, the observer and the observed. These drawings not only testify to events, but also to a process of gradual disintegration. In Ewa Domańska's terms, they are an expression of the 'transhumanation' ('*transhumanacja*') of the subject, who, at some point, in some way, identifies with the scene represented, while at the same time reveals symptoms of a subjective breakdown triggered by the observed, liminal situation.[59] The remains of the person represented are traces of existence trodden into mud, evidence of a humanity soiled by crime. The finger prints, meanwhile, are a sign of life, whose value has been levelled with mud, in view of the catastrophe taking place. At the same time, the fingers touch the trace left of the person in an extraordinarily-tender, close way. We might say that this is a substitute for an action associated with mourning, a symbolic burial of the dead. The union of the observer with the observed is almost literal. Strzemiński not only wrote his affective reaction, the engagement of the observer in reality, the tremors of his heart, into the drawings, but also his own disintegration as a subject.

Drawings: A neuroaesthetic analysis[60]

In its suspension between abstraction and Realism, Strzemiński's line stimulates free associations, as though fulfilling the function of the Rorschach test.[61] This is because Strzemiński's drawings deploy, among others, Vilayanur S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein's 'peak shift' principle, that is to say that they differentiate the basic characteristics of an object, intensify basic shapes, and draw our attention to the representation of overemphasised anatomical poses.[62] The arrangement of lines is characterised by gentle interruptions, the circularity of the shapes reminiscent of the structure of cells, marking a vertical stance, legs, comparisons between the lower and upper parts, meaning that, as viewers, we see first the human figure, and then the adult or child, woman or man, an attitude of resignation, sadness or agitation. Strzemiński also applies the principle defined by Ramachandran and Hirstein as 'perceptual grouping': binding figures on the basis

of correlations (all executed in an energetic winding line), which activates individual modules of seeing, the segmentation of the visual field, and, ultimately, the attainment of the unification and separation (as well as the differentiation) of individual figures. It also activates contrasts: black-white, outline-surface, vertical-horizontal, decorative-ascetic, and, on a metaphorical level, living-dead. Contrast, as the authors of the concept of neuroaesthetics write, particularly activates the visual pathways: 'Cells in the retina, lateral geniculate body … and in the visual cortex respond mainly to edges … so a line drawing or cartoon stimulates these cells as effectively as a half tone photograph'.[63] Strzemiński's drawings are somewhat reminiscent of a visual puzzle, though one in which the final result is not predetermined. The visual apparatus is forced to look for solutions, what Ramachandran and Hirstein call the 'perceptual problem solving' principle.[64] Primary forms, their grouping, and the contrast making it possible to distinguish figure from ground are based on the arousal of the nervous system associated with seeing. With it, Ramachandran and Hirstein argue, the process of perception is activated, as is the limbic system responsible for, among others, affects and emotions. So these drawings are not only a testimony of real events and at the same time a record of the affective reaction of the artist; they also activate various parts of the brain of the viewer on every occasion. If, as I have argued, they are a neurotestimony, they force the engagement of attention, and, with it, an emotional reaction as well as conscious processes associated with memory and understanding, both on the part of the artist and the receiver.

In contemporary neurological accounts the term 'visual brain' is used. Semir Zeki argues that:

> it is becoming increasingly evident that the entire network of connections within the visual cortex, including the reentrant connections to VI and V2, must function healthily for the brain to gain complete knowledge of the external world. Yet as patients with blindsight have shown, knowledge cannot be acquired without consciousness, which seems to be a crucial feature of a properly functioning visual apparatus. Consequently, no one will be able to understand the visual brain in any profound sense without tackling the problem of consciousness as well … It is no longer possible to divide the process of seeing from that of understanding, as neurologists once imagined, nor is it possible to separate the acquisition of visual knowledge from consciousness. Indeed, consciousness is a property of the complex neural apparatus that the brain has developed to acquire knowledge.[65]

Strzemiński had an exceptionally modern view of the connection between the work of the brain and the visual apparatus. Somewhat like Semir Zeki, though of course using completely different terminology and driven rather by artistic experiences, he claimed that it is precisely thought that poses the questions to which the eye replies. Seeing, then, is a continual process of work and exchange between the eye and the brain. Conceived of in this way, seeing is visual consciousness; it constitutes the activities of seeing, understanding, and producing knowledge. The pulsating and rambling body, entangled with the mind, and radiating in the eye (observing the world), brings us closer to humanity.[66]

Strzemiński's neurotestimony reveals images that not only posit the active process of seeing, but also of understanding, though initiated at an unconscious, neurological level. In the war drawings, for the first time, the intricate process of seeing taking place between the organ of sight and the brain allows for the emergence of figures, objects, and scenes from the drawings. They refer to the world of things, and take on life and movement at the moment of perception, making it possible to recognise the flash of a painful history. Strzemiński constructed his visual consciousness in an effort of protect the remains of his humanity. Its results were works that I define as neurotestimony.[67] This visual record of inconceivable, extreme events, and of their effects, imprinted on embodied subjectivity and returning as an echo in representation is the basis of the most important theoretical work defining modernity in Poland: *Theory of Seeing*. The slivers of its core theoretical concepts and categories, so important for the artists of the Polish neo-avant-garde, were defined by an unheroic observer, in the shadow of a world falling apart.

Translated by Klara Kemp-Welch

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1 Some of the drawings are in the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, some in the National Museum in Warsaw and in Poznań, and some in private collections. Their exact number is unknown and not all of them are signed and dated. The artist donated the following body of works (among others) to the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź in November 1945: *West Belorussia (Białoruś Zachodnia*); *Deportations* (*Deportacje*); *War to Houses* (*Wojna domom*, given as *Civil War* (*Wojna domowa*) in the inventory); *Faces* (*Twarze*), *Landscapes* (*Pejzaże*) and *Still Lifes* (*Martwe natury*); *Cheap as Mud* (*Tanie jak błoto*); *Hands*, *Which are Not with Us* (*Ręce, które nie z nami*).

2 Julian Przyboś, 'Przedmowa. Nowatorstwo Władysława Strzemińskiego', in Władysław Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1974), p. 8.

3 Janina Ładnowska, 'Rysunki – realizm rytmu fizjologicznego' in Janusz Zagrodzki (ed.), *Władysław Strzemiński. In memoriam* (Łódź: Wyd. Sztuka Polska, 1988), p. 127–135, Władysław Strzemiński, 'Aspekty rzeczywistości' (1936), in Grzegorz Sztabiński (ed.), *Władysław Strzemiński. Wybór pism estetycznych* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), pp. 134–145.

4 Stefan Krygier, 'Władysław Strzemiński – artysta, pedagog. Wspomnienia', in Zagrodzki (ed.), *Władysław Strzemiński*, p. 40.

5 Ładnowska, 'Rysunki – realizm rytmu fizjologicznego', p. 133.

6 Andrzej Turowski, *Budowniczowie świata. Z dziejów radykalnego modernizmu w sztuce polskiej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), pp. 222–234.

7 Turowski, *Budowniczowie świata,* pp. 222, 225.

8 Przyboś situates the cycles *Deportations*, *War on Houses* (which he calls *Ruins*) and *Cheap as Mud* in the context of the Holocaust. Zenobia Karnicka, 'The life and work of Władysław Strzemiński – chronology', in *Władysław Strzemiński. On the 100th anniversary of his birth*, exhibition catalogue, Muzeum Sztuki (Łódź, 1994), p. 85; Eleonora Jedlińska, 'Cykle wojenne: rysunki i kolaże Władysława Strzemińskiego z lat 1939–1945. Doświadczenie wojny – żal i melancholia', in Grzegorz Sztabiński (ed.), *Władysław Strzemiński. Uniwersalne oddziaływanie idei* (Łódź: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych im. Władysława Strzemińskiego, 2005), pp. 91–97. Another work devoted to Strzemiński's drawings is the small catalogue: A. Wesołowska (ed.), *Warsztat Władysława Strzemińskiego* (Łódź: Galeria Anny Wesołowskiej, 1985).

9 Jedlińska, *Cykle wojenne*, p. 94.

10 Nika Strzemińska, *Sztuka, miłość i nienawiść. O Katarzynie Kobro i Władysławie Strzemińskim* (Warszawa: Scholar, 2001). The first fragments of the book were serialised at the end of the 1980s in the journal *Sztuka* (*Art*). The first (incomplete) edition was in 1991 (Warszawa: Res Publica)

11 Łukasz Kędziora was the first scholar to have noticed neuroaesthetic strands in Strzemiński's work. His MA dissertation offered an interesting neuroaesthetic analysis of selected works from the 1930s and 40s by the artist (while entirely omitting the war drawings, *To My Friends the Jews*, and the *Theory of Seeing*). Łukasz Kędziora, '*Neuroestetyka jako nowa metoda analizy obrazów*' (MA thesis, Instytut Historii Sztuki, Department of History UAM, Poznań 2012), pp. 59–69. Kędziora rightly refers to Strzemiński in his work as a 'conscious neurobiologist', as well as indicating the 'empathetic impulse' in *To My Friends the Jews*. See: Łukasz Kędziora, *Wizualność dzieła sztuki: ocena potencjału neuroestetyki w badaniach historyczno-artystycznych* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2016), p. 120.

12 Kędziora, *Wizualność dzieła sztuki*, p. 81.

13 Julian Przyboś, 'Strzemiński przed śmiercią', in Przyboś, *Zapiski bez daty* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970), p. 331. Przyboś referred to this event on the basis of Jerzy Putrament's account.

14 Katarzyna Kobro, diary extract. Cited in: Strzemińska, *Sztuka*, *miłość i nienawiść*, p. 81.

15 As Eugeniusz Mironowicz noted, the first two deportations in West Belorussia, to which I refer, took place on 10 February and 13 April 1940. Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Białoruś* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2007), pp. 168–169.

16 The acceptance of a Soviet passport was treated by Polish citizens as a highly ambiguous act. However, refusal was linked to harsh repressions: arrests, tortures, and the deportation of family members. The answers to the above question require in-depth research in Russian and Belorussian archives.

17 For more information see: 'The Łódź Ghetto – Historical Background', accessed 30 October 2019, https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/the-lodz-ghetto-historical-background.html

18 Mironowicz, *Białoruś*, p. 83.

19 Timothy Snyder, *Czarna ziemia. Holokaust jako ostrzeżenie*, trans. Bartłomiej Pietrzyk (Kraków: Znak Horyzont, 2015), p. 168. Małgorzata Ruchniewicz wrote that this deportation affected refugees from Central and Western Poland, who did not have Russian passports. The decision as to this deportation was taken in March 1940. Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, *Wieś zachodniobiałoruska 1944–1953: wybrane aspekty* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2010), p. 85.

20 See Strzemiński's document issued in Łódź. The eighth letter of the surname in the document is not clear, it could be read as a 'd' or 'ń'. Akta w sprawie Władysław Strzemiński, Prokuratura Sądu Specjalnego Karnego w Łodzi, Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, reference R. 3087/45, 2013 (no. 1/81).

21 Adolf Kargel, 'Internationale Kunst', *Litzmannstadter Zeitung* 82 (1941).

22 See Strzemiński's aforementioned document from Łódź, Akta w sprawie Władysława Strzemińskiego. The privileges consisted of, for example, larger portions of food or the possibility of living in a larger apartment. However, Władysław Strzemiński's daughter Nika stated that her parents used only a very small part of these privileges, such as bigger portions of food, sharing it with others in need. Strzemińska, *Sztuka*, *miłość i nienawiść*, p. 55, 57.

23 During the First World War, Władysław Strzemiński fought on the front line of the Eastern Front as an Officer in charge of a Platoon of Sappers. He received many awards for his bravery and courage. Most probably as a consequence of chlorine poisoning, the infections resulting from this, and the amputations that followed, or as a result of an accident in the trenches, he lost part of his left arm and right leg, and sustained seriously-impaired vision in his left eye (all that remained, his daughter Nika Strzemińska wrote, was a 'a feeling of light'). See: Iwona Luba and Ewa Paulina Wawer, *Władysław Strzemiński. Zawsze w awangardzie. Rekonstrukcja nieznanej biografii 1893–1917* (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2017), pp. 149–226. An accident in the trenches was previously mentioned by Nika Strzemińska, *Miłość, sztuka i nienawiść. O Katarzynie Kobro i Władysławie Strzemińskim*, *Sztuka*, *miłość i nienawiść*, p. 59. According to Luba and Wawer, they found no archival evidence for this, and his life-changing injuries must have been sustained in some other way.

24 Władysław Strzemiński, 'Fragment powieści', in Jarosław Lubiak (ed.), *Powidoki życia. Władysław Strzemiński i prawa dla sztuki* (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2012), pp. 347–395.

25 Aleksandra Ubertowska '"Tchnienie małostkowej nekrofilii". Zagłada w eseistyce Kazimierza Wyki', in Ubertowska, *Holokaust. Auto(tanato)grafie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN, 2014), p. 98. Kazimierz Wyka (born 1910 in Krzeszowice, died 1975 in Kraków) is one the most renowned and significant figures in Polish culture; he was a literary critic, literary historian, and essayist, and, after the Second World War, was Professor of Polish at the Jagellonian University as well as co-founder of the Institute of Literary Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences (Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk).

26 This is the title by which the cycle is widely known in the available literature. However, I believe that Strzemiński gave his cycle a slightly different title: *Pamięci przyjaciół – Żydów* / *In Memory of Friends – Jews*. For more on this subject, see: Luiza Nader, 'Wunderblock Strzemińskiego. Pamięci przyjaciół Żydów',

RIHA Journal (October–December 2014), accessed 30 October 2019, https://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2014/2014-oct-dec/special-issue-

27 Ubertowska, '"Tchnienie małostkowej nekrofilii"', pp. 97–98.

28 Ubertowska, '"Tchnienie małostkowej nekrofilii"', p. 94.

29 Kazimierz Wyka, 'Gospodarka wyłączona', in Wyka, *Życie na niby* (Kraków: Universitas 2010), p. 293.

30 'The sketches, or rather models for works, were drawn on tracing paper, then the artist printed them on mostly soft paper, after which he outlined the print in pencil. Strzemiński worked out a particular alphabet or "dictionary" of forms. Sometimes the same sheet of tracing paper has forms-drawings made at the same time, employed in works produced several years apart. Combinations of forms occur. Some forms can be traced in many drawings across the space of several years. The method used gave the artist the possibility of an almost infinite configuration of forms … This manner of working helped the author achieve a maximum synthesis of form, an optically unified, yet variable, whole'. Ładnowska, 'Rysunki – realizm rytmu fizjologicznego', p. 130

31 Ładnowska, 'Rysunki – realizm rytmu fizjologicznego', p. 129.

32 Władysław Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia* (1958) (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974), pp. 240–241.

33 Aleksandra Ubertowska, 'Pomiędzy torturą a "krajobrazem ruin". O "podmiocie po Auschwitz" w eseistyce Jeana Amery'ego', in Ubertowska, *Holokaust. Auto[tanato]grafie*, p. 22.

34 Cited in Ruchniewicz, *Wieś zachodniobiałoruska*, p. 63.

35 Ruchniewicz, *Wieś zachodniobiałoruska,* p. 65; Mironowicz, *Białoruś*, pp. 150–151.

36 Ruchniewicz, *Wieś zachodniobiałoruska*, p. 89.

37 Marek Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Białorusini w zaborze sowieckim. Stosunki polsko-białoruskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II RP pod okupacją sowiecką 1939-1941* (Warszawa: Fronda, 2007), pp. 360–363.

38 Ruchniewicz, *Wieś zachodniobiałoruska*, pp. 80–81.

39 This was how Wyka described his immediate neighbourhood, Krzeszowice. Kazimierz Wyka '*O świcie*', in Wyka, *Życie na niby*, p. 151.

40 Almost all the authors mentioned at the beginning (see notes 3, 4, 6, and 8) associate the cycle *Deportations* with the deportation of Poles from Łódź, with the exception of Przyboś, who mistakenly connects the *Deportations* with the Holocaust. Dr Hab. Iwona Luba mentioned to me in conversation in October 2015 the connection between the *Deportations* cycle and *West Belorussia*. I have found no textual references to this topic.

41 Snyder, *Czarna ziemia*, p. 168.

42 Mironowicz, *Białoruś*, p. 168.

43 Mironowicz, *Białoruś,* pp. 168–169.

44 Marian U, '1928/powiat dziśnieński', in Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross (eds.), "*W czterdziestym nas matko na Sibir zesłali…": Polska a Rosja 1939–1942* (Kraków: Znak, 2008), p. 193.

45 Cited in Gross and Grudzińska-Gross (eds.), "*W czterdziestym nas matko na Sibir zesłali"*, p. 7.

46 Gross and Grudzińska-Gross (eds.), "*W czterdziestym nas matko na Sibir zesłali"*, pp. 51–57. The account relates to conditions in the prison in Wilejka Powiatowa, p. 52.

47 Gross and Grudzińska-Gross (eds.), "*W czterdziestym nas matko na Sibir zesłali"*, pp. 54–55.

48 Andrzej Rukowiecki, *Łódź. 1939–1945. Kronika okupacji* (Łódź: Dom Wydawniczy Księży Młyn, 2012), p. 84.

49 Agnieszka Minich-Scholz, 'Marian Minich – pod wiatr', in *Marian Minich – pod wiatr / Wspomnienia wojenne*, *Szalona galeria* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, 2015).

50 Rukowiecki, *Łódź*, p. 69.

51 Due to considerations of length, I am not able to discuss this cycle here.

52 Julian Przyboś, 'Introduction', in Strzemiński *Teoria widzenia*, p. 8. Przyboś continued this strand in the text 'Realizm rytmu fizjologicznego', in *Linia i gwar* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1959), p. 143.

53 Sławomir M. Nowinowski, Adam Sitarek, Michał Trębacz, Ewa Wiatr, 'Zarys historii getta łódzkiego', in Julian Baranowski and Sławomir M. Nowinowski (eds.), *Getto łódzkie / Litzmannstadt Getto* (Łódź: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej Oddział w Łodzi, 2009), p. 30.

54 Baranowski and Nowinowski (eds.), *Getto łódzkie*, p. 38.

55 Janina Podolska, 'Litzmannstadt Getto', accessed 30 October 2019, http://www.lodzgetto.pl/litzmannstadt_getto_w_datach.html,2-42.

56 Podolska, 'Litzmannstadt Getto'.

57 Andrea Löw, *Getto łódzkie/Litzmannstadt getto: warunki życia i sposoby przetrwania*, trans. M. Półrola and Ł. M. Pleś (Łódź Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2012), pp. 231–242. See also: Nowinowski, Sitarek, Trębacz, and Wiatr, 'Zarys historii getta łódzkiego', pp. 32–33.

58 Löw, *Getto łódzkie*, p. 241.

59 Ewa Domańska, 'Hermeneutyka przejścia (Wspomnienia z Rosji Jana Żarno)', in Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne. Refleksja o przeszłości w nowej humanistyce* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2006), pp. 131–160. Ewa Domańska analyses the 'transhumanisation' of the 'civilised person' into a 'prisoner of the gulag', a monstrous creature based on the diary of Jan Żarno and the 'extraordinary story' in it about a female cannibal, who is, in her view, an 'existential trace' of the liminal condition of the author himself. See pp. 142–144.

60 In the text I propose an analysis of the drawings from a neuroaesthetic position, which is, nevertheless, in the case of Strzemiński's war drawings, different from the view proposed by Łukasz Kędziora in his book *Wizualność dzieła sztuki.*

61 The Rorschach test is one perhaps the most famous of the projective tests used in psychology to assess personality. As the authors of *Essentials of Psychology* claim: 'all the tests and procedures labeled 'projective' offer the subject an ambiguous or vague stimulus of some kind—inkblots, sentences to complete, photographs of people interacting—and ask the subject to talk or write about the stimulus. Since the original stimulus is so vague, the assumption is that the subject 'projects' his or her own attitudes or problems onto the stimulus material'. The Rorschach test 'uses black and white and colored inkblots as stimuli … The interpretation of subjects' responses to the Rorschach is both complex and controversial'. John p. Houston, Helen Bee, Elaine Hatfield, and David C. Rimm, *Essentials of Psychology* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, San Francisco: Academic Press Inc., 1981), p. 401.

62 Vilayanur S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein, 'The Science of Art. A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6/6–7 (1999): pp. 15–51. I am aware of the apparent anachronism of this conception in relation to Strzemiński. Nevertheless, the neurophysiologial mechanisms described by the authors had been known in the empirical practice of artists for centuries. For more on the 'peak shift', see: pp. 17–21.

63 Ramachandran and Hirstein, 'The Science of Art', p. 25.

64 Ramachandran and Hirstein, 'The Science of Art', p. 23.

65 Semir Zeki, 'The Visual Image in Mind and Brain', *Scientific American* (September 1992): p. 76.

66 Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia.*

67 The concept of neurotestimony, as Ewa Domańska has pointed out to me, already exists in neuropsychiatry, legal psychiatry, and is associated with the forensic turn, and this is the direction in which I seek to develop this category.