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Anti-Empire: A Visual Reconstruction of the World by Lithuanian Thinkers in the Spirit of Minor Nations Liberation

Lithuania lived through the “stopped” time during the Soviet occupation as a special resistance experience that led to profound transformations and a global wave of phenomena of national revivals. This gave new impulses to the knowledge of responsibility for other nations, to inspire their freedom and to experience the discoveries of an alternative global, sacred space. Lithuanian thinkers — visionaries, creators and photographers capturing borderline reality are like the Franciscan monk sculptor Vilius Orvidas (1952–1992), who, during the Soviet era, transformed the inner space of his homestead park into a unique juxtaposition of sacredness, nature and the absurdity of totalitarianism. It became the anti-empire of reality transformations, the “battlefield” of the liberation of ideas, overcoming the “enslaved mind” with silence. The freelance photographer and traveller Paulius Normantas (1948–2017) sensed his vocation through the pain of the marginal situations of the vanishing minor nations scattered on the edges of the world’s empires. In his being, Paulius united the peoples of Lithuania and the Himalayas, thereby expressing the responsibility for the freedom of the enslaved peoples, which lies in the Lithuanian genetic code. Photographer, publicist, and translator Juozas Valiušaitis (*1964) discovered his “resurrection from oblivion” mission through Jewish tombstones left for destruction in Vilnius, embedded in the pavement or overgrown with grass in the woods. After the beginning of Maidan (2004, 2013–2014), Juozas’ empathy for the Ukrainian nation, walking to freedom, became the decisive slogan of his life and his vision in photographs, creating the miracle of the moment, the breakthrough of freedom.

Keywords: alternative, space, freedom, self, sacrality, minor nations, globality, Lithuanian visionaries, Himalaya, Jewish tombstones, Ukraine

While surviving the occupation, the nurturers of Lithuanianness and thinkers overtaken with ideas about freedom began creating their own alternative space. In that space, the deep-rooted “rejection” of the Soviet Union was hidden, and a new transcendental political geography was born, springing from sources untouched by time. Such a transcendent landscape is stronger than reality. This phenomenon manifested itself in various forms of thought, not only in literature but also in the silence of the stones rejecting compromised words, i.e., in music through the horizons of the pulse of time in the ritual of repetition of rhythm. This is especially true in visual art, where one reopens **space** itself – nature and sculpture, its contact with the sky, the limitless vault, and the paradigm of the gesture of freedom.

Vilius Orvidas (1952–1992). The alternative space. The thinking of a stone is the time-suspended spirit of Lithuania. The silence of history is a vision of the revolution of reality. Lithuania itself gave this anti-imperial vision its immeasurable instruments. At first, they lie lost in the shelter of nature as they are the simplest field stones. The philosophy of stone has unfolded in an unexpected gesture of restoring spirituality – a gesture of life. Thus, the language of stone appeared and was coded by the sculptor, thinker,

and monk Vilius Orvidas. In reality, it is a sculpture garden, a homestead museum; it has a vision of a cross and a sky vault in which time is suspended, where the “silence of history” – a metaphor for the transformation of reality and anti-reality into one another, thrives. Under its influence, the *other space* is born. The sculptor’s vision of the native homestead and the surrounding natural area becoming a unique space-time event, where a world without limits comes together, where an unknown, mystical code of freedom – the key to **anti-empire**, was revealed. It was caused by the simplest contact with the stone and wood – a spirit suspended in time.

Vilius Orvidas walked his anti-systemic path relying on pure impulses of self-creation from religion to the opening of artistic genius. The genesis of religion here also emanated from the sources of paganism, from the imagination’s connection with the universe – the forms of nature and art. This universality had a special power of attraction; the transformation of the traveller’s spirit took place here, a secret spontaneous imperative of total change, an action that led to the “turn of the world” and of Lithuania in it as well.

Vilius Orvidas himself also went through a transformation from the creator of the sacred space to the museum of absurdity to a Franciscan monk. He adored Saint Francis, a witness to the sacredness of the natural world. Franciscan monk brother Petras Giedrius Šepka remembers that ‘when I first came to Vilius, I considered myself a pagan, and I discovered much *paganism* in that environment in the oaks and the relationship with nature... Vilius personally *caught* me precisely through paganism, but then he was able to share Christian values as well. He just did it somehow unconsciously.’ (Parulskienė, 2003, p. 116).

Contact with stone – especially many sculptures of Mary, angels, and saints, took the pivotal attention – another space of time, like a living abode of the spirit, where different laws were valid. Brother Petras, the Franciscan mentioned above, continues writing:

‘It goes without saying that when you went to Vilius’ homestead, you felt like you were in a completely different dimension. Many people chose to stay there because they felt it was not a country house but *somewhere* completely different. Even the relationship between constantly changing people was distinct; there was a community. The friendships that started here were different, special, and based on something else. <...> Vilius ploughed a triangle around the entire homestead with an excavator, working all summer long. He made it look like an eye of God surrounding the homestead. He also wanted to create a rosary in three parts so that the whole area would be surrounded by it. He had a strong sense of the whole and created a unique harmony. <...> It was not just some homestead composition but something more. I think it was an expression of his faith’ (ibid., p. 118-119).

‘Vilius used to say that the most important thing to him is a person but not a stone or a tree. He had no intention of creating a museum; he even strongly objected if someone called his farmhouse a *museum*. “Here, it is not a museum,” he used to say. “Because there are dead things in the museum, and there are no dead things here.” And indeed, the place was very lively’ (ibid., p. 119).

It is an exceptional phenomenon of special significance related to the sacredness of space, which had nothing to do with the ideology of the Soviet era, along with Western secular modernism with its open concept of Emptiness (Heidegger). *A dead space, a museum of art values* has no meaning here; the placement of time and space in Vilius Orvidas’ vision meets the opposition of depth – the sacred life of nature, the meaningful codes of pilgrimage, signs of history turns, the universe symphony of the pyramids’ contacts with the sky. Open space resounds with new chords of turning time points as an alternative to reality. For a reason, one visitor called him the *devil* with the sword of courage and the sabre of talent in his hands (Žukas, 1999, p. 16). Vilius Orvidas acted here as a messenger of eternity, moving stones untouched by

time. ‘The Most High chooses us and checks whether we are strong and not broken’, journalist Neringa Jonušaitė remembers his words (ibid., p. 16).

‘The giant pyramid was built from hundred-year-old oak trunks (forcibly dismantled during the Soviet era) and the Lithuanian boulders carrying memories of the glaciers that Vilius collected using heavy tractors, the *Stalinists*. Later, he placed a smaller and triangular one on top of one Samogitian Puntukas and carved the composition of the Last Judgment here.

Vilius used another huge, already split, candle flame-shaped stone for the composition of the Holy Trinity with a particularly highlighted figure of the Crucified (a giant dove above Christ’s head representing the Holy Spirit) and large Hands of God the Father on the sides’ (ibid., p. 16).

‘In addition to the symbolism of sacred relics, Orvidas also raised the symbol of Sovietism – the tank. It shocked the space with a postmodernism hit: the Fluxus factor intervened. At the beginning of the revival, but still during the Soviet era, he began negotiations with the authorities of Salantai town and Kretinga district to allow the demolition of the Soviet tank, the “liberator”, standing on a platform in the middle of the town. And a couple of years later, Vilius dragged the caterpillar-treated relict to his museum...” (ibid., p. 18).

Then, the space-time event took an incredible turn as a museum of imperial absurdity. A projection of the futuristic transformation of the Soviet Union: an anti-imperial code greets park visitors right at the entrance as if foretelling the future fiesta of Soviet sculptures, Grūtas Park (the nature’s park – museum of thrown away socialism monuments). The field of Vilius Orvidas’ ideas progressed magnificently into the spread of anti-imperial zones, primarily in Lithuania’s context. From the stone, the sculptures of Mary and the wings of angels, from the space-time of sacred relics, it transformed through the simplicity of collision between earth and sky into a universe carrying the meaning of political change.

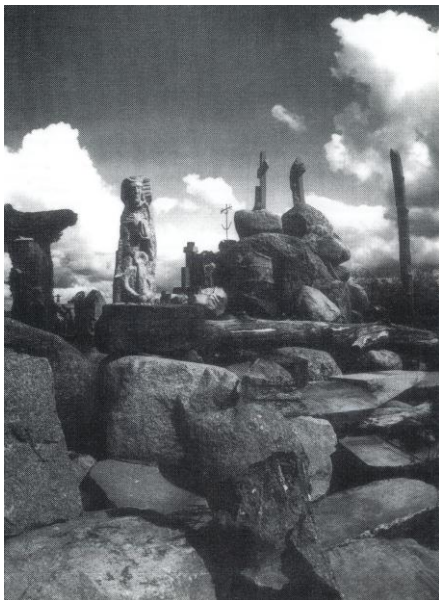


Photo 1. *Orvidas’ homestead area*, in Žukas, V.
Vilius Orvydas. 1999, p. 17.

The sacredness of the whole and the transformation of time stops at its decisive moment in the idea of Orvidas’ homestead. It is a transcendental landscape that has turned into reality, giving birth to the structure of the nation’s identity and the dawn of independence in the still continuing grey hour. The architectonics of this idea is a multi-layered and multi-sense being, which includes an intertwined community of dungeons, mysteries, darkness and sky gaps.

‘The entire homestead is laid in several levels: the lower underground catacomb part (now collapsed in many places), the middle part is traditional, although various terrain obstacles await here, stairs, ramparts, ditches, and the upper part, accessible only by climbing onto turf-covered roofs, pyramids, large stone terraces, stacks, on thick five-meter tree stumps. Eventually, the whole homestead developed the shape of a giant, regular triangle. This eye of Providence, traditional in Christian iconography, deliberately composed by Vilius Orvidas, surrounded by canals, stone and earth mounds, is clearly visible only from an aeroplane (ibid., p. 18–19).

So here we discover an unfamiliar, coded space of the universe that can only be determined from a bird’s eye view, a sacred anti-imperial space-time carrier, which is probably the first time met by that post-Soviet futuristic apocalyptic symbol — a *tank liberator*, a precursor of an overturned space-time and continuing to overturn further... This way, the sculptor, visionary, Franciscan monk Vilius Orvidas gave Lithuania a vision of freedom coded in global terms, liberating the nation’s identity in a space subordinated only to him alone, reading the signs of which promised a new turn in the world, towards the restoration of historical truth...

**Photographer Paulius Normantas (1948-2017). Pilgrimage to Enslaved Nations:
The great empathy to the minor**

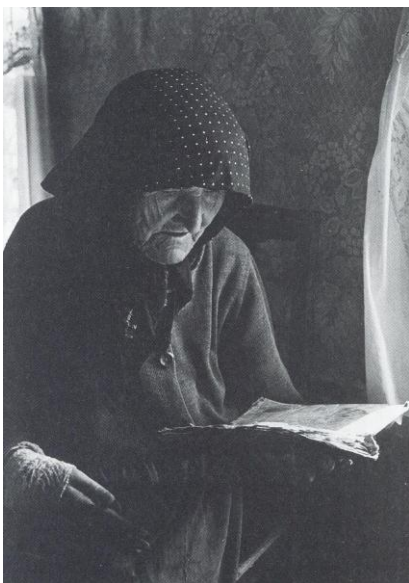


Photo 2. “Only this old woman knows the old religious rituals because all the men are already dead” From the cycle *Mordovians* (1984). In Normantas, P., *Paulius Normantas.: [Paulius Normantas’ Journey to the Faraway and into Himself.]* 2019, p 111.

The philosophy of perspective in digging for vanishing minority fates in the world of photography and the change of the self-paradigm has a say here. Normantas’ work is associated with the function of photography as a representation of global humanity, where, according to the French philosopher Roland Barthes, ‘First <...> the exoticism is strongly emphasised <...> and one can still see hints that beneath every difference lies an identical “nature”...’ (Pabedinskas, 2019, p. 61). However, these common values seem to leave aside the histories of small nations and states. Although associated with Oriental countries and cultures, the early part of Normantas’ work is treasured – a cycle of photographs that immortalised as many as seventeen minor Finno-Ugric nations – almost disappearing ethnographic groups in an album titled “Vanishing sources” (1990), which allow us to get as close as possible to the sense of time in borderline situations, to the landscape of crumbling existence.



Photo 3. *Mirusi Marė*. [The Dead Mari Woman] (1987). In Normantas, P., *Paulius Normantas.: [Paulius Normantas' Journey to the Faraway and into Himself.]* 2019, p. 51.

According to Barthes,

'<...> Such photography,' 'cannot be grasped at once and forgotten. ...The evoked sense transcends the limits of visual information and combines the cognitive function with the attraction of a transcendent landscape. Then, the details lose their previous meaning and come to the *other space* for the impulse of awakening imagination and historical conscience. This flow is like a philosophical becoming. The global anti-empire is a sign of the pilgrimage of Normantas' work and geopolitical decoding of freedom' (ibid., p. 64–65).

'With my camera. I am digging into fates of vanishing nations,' says Normantas, and he notes responsibility for enslaved minor nations. (ibid., p. 62-64).

It is also achieved through the trauma of peoples' fragile existence, which leaves the photographic image in the infinite memory when thinking about the fate of humanity. At the same time, it purifies and compares the stories of the minor nations with the big ones, prevents the latter from dominating, and unfolds the flow of authentic time into the global symphony of fate. The action of Paulius Normantas had a special meaning for the Lithuanian world as if it connected vessels of differences into a common identity, which also has the dimensions of existentialism and religious Enlightenment, turning the journey into a vision of the convergence of small nations, which will never fade away in time.



Photo 4. Paulius Normantas. *Sena chantė žiūri į saulę*. [An Old Khanty Woman Looks at the Sun]. (1983). In Normantas, P., *Paulius Normantas.: [Paulius Normantas' Journey to the Faraway and into Himself.]* 2019, p. 67

It is especially true of Paulius Normantas' trips to distant Asia, to Tibet, whose cry for empathy and freedom, thanks to Normantas and the writer Jurga Ivanauskaitė (1961-2007), became very personal and heard widely in Lithuania. It also spread its aura over Vilnius, where it flourished in Užupis (Old Town area), which recognised the Independence of Tibet in its constitution (it is another typically Lithuanian phenomenon, like a Fluxus-style involvement in the diplomatic struggle for the freedom of Tibet).

Konstantinas Andrijauskas, one of the researchers of Normantas' work, unfolds the importance of Tibet in explaining this pilgrimage phenomenon:

In 2012, the thirteenth photo album by Paulius Normantas, "The Four Feet of the Buddha: Four Holy Cities", was published consisting of 108 photographs taken in South Asia between 2007 and 2010, dedicated to the most sacred pilgrimage centres associated with the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni: his birth, enlightenment, the beginning of the Teaching and legacy of (this) world' writes Konstantinas Andrijauskas (Andrijauskas, 2019, p. 174). The photographer's good friend, His Holiness the Dalai Lama XIV, wrote the album's foreword. The researcher notes that the problem of space pushed aside in philosophy and its academic discourse is revealed here, returning through visual anthropology in the aspects of architecture, geography and global civilisation (ibid., p. 177).

From the earliest times, the spread of Tibetan Buddhism was closely associated with the construction of sacred architectural objects. Buddhism also inspired the photographer's motivational development, marking his photos with limitlessness.

Academician Antanas Andrijauskas, a researcher of Normantas' work, writes:

'After discovering the harsh and majestic beauty of Siberian and the Far East nature, Paulius felt the powerful call of harsh landscapes and disappearing nations in his early photo album "Vanishing Sources", published in Hungary in 1990. <...> Buddhist culture relics to see in Buryatia <...> led to the knowledge of Tibet and other Buddhist nations. <...> In 1999, Paulius' photo album "Buddha's Children: Badakians, Mustangians, Dolpieians, Tibetans" appeared, dedicated to the everyday life of the peoples of the most difficult-to-access region of Asia, where Tibet, Nepal and India meet the magnificent nature of this region. The mission of the traveller and photographer to the small Himalayan nations expanded and grew into literary, poetic visions in his texts. He added a haiku to his cycle of photographs in the Himalayan mountains: a book of photographs and poems, "Baltas" [White]. (Normantas, 2005).

The illustrative section of the book covers many impressive images from Tibet, India, Nepal, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, and Indonesia <...> the sequence of images is constructed here not by geographical principles but by the principles of classical Chinese numerological philosophy and the four elements – Earth, Water, Fire, Air and one more – Tree. <...> The visual structure of the book is complemented with verses. Why did Paulius choose the poetic form of *haiku*? Probably because the essence of the extremely concise form of the Japanese lyric genre (13-line, 17-syllable poem) responds to the creator's authentic relationship with the depicted object, the ability to extinguish one's. Self and by poetically dissecting or expanding the elements of nature in a separate detail to reveal the Whole <...> Haiku duality helped to broaden the artistic space of the laconic poetic form, and a complex sequence of images, associations, and hints to connect the levels of everyday life and eternity.' (Andrijauskas, 2019, p. 68–96, p. 90–91).

Such meaning of eternity developed from detail is a projection of the resolution of Normantas' Baltic phenomenon, covering the fateful paradigm of the world's little brothers (one of his albums says: 'Tibetians, my brothers...'). This way, the *light* of Lithuanian *anti-empire* spread. Vytautas Rubavičius writes:

‘The fate of those who disappear is in those faces. <...> That’s why these photos are so real, full of unspoken existential sadness and compassion, knowing that no one can change anything anymore. Such a feeling is not invented, and you will not think about it – it is given to one or the other as a grace to see the twist of the fate of a nation or country, to respond with your spirit to the light of the end...’ (Rubavičius, 2019, p. 101.)

Tibetan photo album, published in 1994 with Dalai Lama’s foreword, “Invincible Amdo Tibetans”, is also essential in its geopolitical aspect – the opening up of freedom-seeking nations that are still little-recognised to confront all-encompassing imperial power. It also lifts to light the image of the resistance of those at the borders of the world who still dare to change the paradigmatic line structure of the philosophical discourse. Thanks to the photographer’s camera, the continent of high vibrations, the map of the liberated nations of another space begins from small details. Rubavičius notes that ‘...one essential thing stood out in the album – the signs of the fate of our liberation from punishing political reality – the images of a free life path, wandering and at the same time spiritual ascent. <...> Paulius managed to break out of the grip of the Soviet system’ (ibid., pp. 102, 103). Later, the opportunity of photographing in the Himalayas, Tibet arose to him,

‘with the Dalai Lama’s complaisance in allowing to be photographed. Holy words, holy sprouts of the soul. Photography became not only a job but also a ritual, as if thanking the Most High for the wanderer’s path and the opportunity given to experience and live the reflections of the soul of the heights. He walked not only on the paths of the earth, the spirit also tried to rise... (ibid., p. 103). Paulius, and later the artist and writer Jurga Ivanauskaitė, as if in one move brought the Himalayas and Tibet closer to Lithuania’ (ibid., p. 104).

It was essential for Lithuania’s spiritual experience during the period of political revival to feel part of the world of freedom of small liberating nations – mediator of resurrection, creator of the great anti-empire of Selfhood.



Photo 5. *Photo of a Boy*. Normantas. P., Photo album *Invincible Amdo Tibetans* (1994), in Normantas, P., 2019, p.105.

Only a person with absolute courage and profound civilisational imagination like Paulius Normantas could open the borders this way. He writes:

Himalajų šviesa

Labai pavargau

Nuo kalbų ir tylos.

Kas liko tikra – kelias

...

Užmigo žvaigždės

Ant blakstienų.

Žvaigždės – mano namai

...

Slėny ilsėjosi pailgas debesys.

Aš pasidėjau jį po galva.

Panirau į šimtametį sapną.

...

Sustingo pasaulis,

Nereikia nei stiklo iš smėlio.

Tik reikia sustot kalnuose.

...

Kai ateis metas palikti šią žemę,

Aš paliesiu delnais Himalajus,

Iškeliausiu samsaros ratu.

<...>

Debesų karalija pilna miškų ir rūmų atšvaitų

Lėtai slenka žydru dangumi apšviesta saulės

Neužkliūdama už Vieکشnių bažnyčios stogo

.

...

Lūžtančioje bangoje

Pasislėpę mano pasakyti žodžiai

Nebus surasti

(Niekados neišplauks į krantą)

...

Bastausi po žemės rutulį

Mažytį su alkana siela

Ir sužeista širdim

...

Kalnai, aukštieji broliai

Jūsų ramybės ir tylos

Kasmet į jūsų glėby sugrįžtu

Himalayan light

I am exhausted

From talk and silence.

What remains certain is the road.

...

The stars fell asleep

On the eyelashes.

The stars are my home

...

An oblong cloud rested in the valley.

I put it under my head.

I plunged into a hundred-year-old dream.

...

The world froze

You don't even need a glass made of sand.

You just need to stop in the mountains.

...

When the time comes to leave this earth,

I will touch the Himalayas with my palms,

I will leave in the circle of samsara.

<...>

The Cloud Kingdom, full of reflections of forests and palaces,

Slowly crosses the blue sky, illuminated under the sun

Without getting stuck on the roof of Vieکشniai church.

...

In a breaking wave

The hidden words I said

Will not be found

(They'll never make it ashore)

...

I am wandering around the globe

A little one with a hungry soul

And a wounded heart

...

Mountains, tall brothers

For your peace and serenity

I return to your arms every year

(Paulius Normantas. Himalajų šviesa. The Light of Himalaya. 2019, p. 278, 279, 280)¹

¹ Translated by Daiva Judges. Free translation for this article.

Photographer Juozas Valiušaitis (*1964). From the Jewish tombstones to the Ukraine's Maidan: Visualisation of the Political Transformation of Eastern Europe into an Anti-Imperial space. Juozas, in personal correspondence with J. Landsbergytė-Becher on August 7, 2024, writes: 'The call of photography arose in my life and pushed away all other spheres, and it involved me in exciting life and political and social circumstances and led me through life values and creativity. In 34 years, I organised 150 photography exhibitions.' Exceptional attention to Juozas' photographs was born during the history of preserving the memory of Jews, their monuments, and disappearing gravestones scattered on the outskirts of Vilnius and in the forests of Lithuania. With their deep content of political and cultural vision, these memorable signs of time were the first motif of Juozas' image capture, opening up the unknown depths of subtexts and contexts that photography can unfold. There was no need for long journeys or a global civilisational discourse – the world, with its deep pulse of time and the pain of history catastrophes, was nearby in the very centre of Vilnius and its surroundings. The stones told the incredible saga of the biblical nation, painfully "small" and globally significant and scattered. Valiušaitis' photographs of Lithuanian Jewish tombstones are like a magnet of transcendence, attracting the gaze and thoughts of historians, philosophers, artists, and reflection of infinity.

Juozas Valiušaitis' exhibition on the motifs of the old Jewish cemeteries was a big step for Lithuania to integrate into the civilisation of the Western world. They have been held since 1991 and had meaningful thematic titles: "Praeities prasivėrimas" [The Opening of the Past], "Grimzdantis laivas ir sausuolio žiedai" [The Sinking Ship and the Blossoms of a Withered Tree], "Namų prisiminimas" [A Memory of Home], "Puslapis ir šulinys" [The Page and the Well], "Kas nuaus dilgėlių marškinius?" [Who Will Weave the Nettle Shirt?] The exhibition organised in Leipzig's town hall was called "The Soul is not Oppressed by the Burden of the Body", and on that occasion, a book of essays, "The Page and the Well", was published, where the literary talent of the photographer blossomed and was felt in every word (Valiušaitis, 1994).

Ten exhibitions followed it in Finland, "Išdriskusis Lietuvos istorijos puslapis" [The Ripped Page of Lithuanian History]. Here, the steps of historical meaning are concentrated on the path to the enlightenment of one nation through the suffering of another nation. Both nations, Jews and Lithuanians, are like tree branches grown into stone – an existential cry, survival and explanation of the meaning of the world going to life. It is how the photographer understands the idea of his work, and he writes:

'What a mysterious fusion of Life and Death in one moment! <...> After seeing two unique photographs by Henry Cartier Bresson, I understood HOW to take photographs and HOW photography differs from Painting <...> (It) awakened my calling and shaped my philosophy' (Valiušaitis, August 8, 2024, personal letter to the J. L-B).

Here, the dimension of reality is a decisive factor. It provides the necessary breakthrough, stops its moment for centuries and allows for further projection of the vault of inspiration. And it walks further and further through history to the transformation of the present.

However, time has led our photographer in the direction of his breakthroughs. Ukraine became his central theme, even for his inner self, which drove his personality into brave, great works. It is the most prominent country of liberation now, the anti-empire, which made the world wonder and bewilder. Having forced the world to choose between the seemingly over-powerful empire or the consistent expansion of democracy into the *grey zones* occupied by the empire... Unfortunately, some countries somehow return to the *grey zones* themselves. However, the leap to freedom in Ukraine became the essence of Juozas Valiušaitis' photographs, as Tibet was the essence of Paulius Normantas. The photographer could not resist this strong attraction. Even being in feeble health all his life and having mobility problems, he went to Kyiv Maidan in 2004 and 2013–14 to photograph the values of courage, fraternity and infinite humanism breakthroughs of a nation advancing to Europe, regardless of anything. The moments of the Maidan

revolution captured in Juozas Valiušaitis' photographs (by the way, he also speaks Ukrainian very well), his contacts with prominent Ukrainian luminaries and cultural figures began to capture the hearts and minds of the people of Lithuania. It is a unique political act that proves the historical deep power of photography – language and vision that unites both nations and their media sphere.

Sovietism was a terrorising system, according to an American Lithuanian historian (Bielinis, 1963), evoking the reaction of various resistential impulses. Juozas Valiušaitis explains,

‘We all came from different spheres during the Soviet era, having felt the extraordinary power of photography, the rejection of lies in the textual sphere, a space that has within itself the root of *realism* that was so craved by the era, behind which there was an area of extremely great freedom of expression, where during the Soviet era Lithuanians elaborated the language of hints or metaphors lurking under the image which skillfully expressed the inner life without using all-controlling words, and which was completely distant to the Western art world, and even more incomprehensible and indecipherable to the Soviet party spirit’ (Valiušaitis, 2024:1).

‘Let’s return to the topic of the old Jewish cemeteries. At the beginning of my life and studies in Vilnius, I used to go to lectures at the Pedagogical Institute via a small, cobbled street named after the Soviet journalist Jonas Marcinkevičius on the banks of the Neris River in Žvėrynas. Wading through the yellow, green, and red maple leaves in October, I scattered them with my foot and saw pieces of broken polished stone cemented between the boulders, which had writings still unknown to me then. I knew the politician Emanuelis Zingeris, who studied Lithuanian literature with my brother and knew Hebrew. So, I called my friend, telling him I may have found a pavement with Hebrew tombstones in Žvėrynas. He immediately hurried to me excitedly, and here it was on the first stone I showed him that he had read the word “Bible” [Torah]. And after two weeks, the street with all the tombstone fragments was paved. It was in October 1982’ (Valiušaitis, 2024, p. 2).

Eight years have passed. The Revival has begun. Lithuania declared itself to be an Independent State. Emanuelis Zingeris, already a signatory of the Act of Independence of Lithuania (March 11, 1990), found me again, saying: ‘Juozas, many wonderful Hebrew stone carvings and ruined old Jewish cemeteries are in Lithuania. You could photograph all of them sensitively’ (Valiušaitis, *ibid.* p. 2).

Emanuelis, a Lithuanian philology specialist, also ignited the photographer’s passion for the ancient cultures of surviving nations for the rest of his life.

‘With tears in his eyes, Emanuelis excitedly said, “I had heard, Juozas, that somewhere in Vilnius there are stairs paved with Jewish gravestones, but that the whole street... <...> you know how I feel now? Imagine, we were walking along Laisvės avenue in Kaunas, looked at the pavement and here is your Father’s tombstone...” I was moved and affected. ... The impression was etched inside me for a long time. ...As soon as Independence was declared, attention to all cultures was revived’ (Valiušaitis, 2024, p. 3).

Further, the philosophy of the depths of humanity led itself with the discoveries of its images and words. Valiušaitis says,

‘The plots of the Old and New Testaments simply met us in the cemetery with metaphors, hints, and undergrowth clinging onto the trousers’ legs as if saying: “Stop! Look at me – I am the grave of someone, the place of life, the memory!” And the eyes that looked at the stone as if it was a sign of human life excitedly saw the stories of the Bible laid out with specific names, chapters,

and cycles that I had been reading since I was a teenager. <...> “Jerusalajim, d’Lita, kum!” (“Jerusalem of Lithuania, get up!” alludes to the dead girl from the New Testament, whom Jesus takes by the hand and raises, saying “Talitha, kum!”) or is it a Trust in Providence. BLOOMing flowER!.. “The Spirit of the Prophet Daniel: what is Fragile and what is Strong”.

So, here it is. <...> Reflections on the Stone – how I developed a symbol of the Lithuanian nation’s deep relation to Jews in a cycle of 130 photographs (Valiušaitis, 2024, p. 2–3).



Photo 6. Valiušaitis J. “(Pharisee) Nicodemus’ question” (Old Linkuva Jewish cemetery, photographed on 18–04–1991). Presented at the exhibition ‘*Openings of the Past*’ [Praeities prasivėrimai] in Vilnius photography gallery, June 20, 1991.



Photo 7. Valiušaitis J. “The spirit of the Prophet Daniel. What is brittle and what is strong” (Old Kaunas Vilijampolė cemetery, photographed on 18–04–1991). The monument is about 250 years old according to the Old Testament, the chapter *Prophet Daniel in the Lion’s Den*. Presented at the exhibition ‘*Openings of the Past*’ [Praeities prasivėrimai] in Vilnius photography gallery, June 20, 1991.

Here, the presentation of signs is critical; their affixing in time inspires the reloading of the stopped time into the turn of history. Juozas also sees this measure of time and its breakthrough in the sky of Kyiv – the golden gesture of the orange sunset – the future revolutionary flash of both Maidans, the life force of Ukraine, which also determines the future of Europe.

‘From here on December 1st, 2004, I took a historical shot with the Lithuanian flag fluttering above the Maidan, with the sculpture of Ukrainian Freedom floating in the snow mist: an extraordinarily graceful Ukrainian girl in national robes, in her arms wrapped in an ornamented cloak, holding a branch of snowball trees, the Ukrainian (and Lithuanian) national tree, in her hands. The 12-meter-high sculpture of a Girl standing on a 50-meter-high Roman column, looking at her from the ground, her hands with a scarf look like the wings of an Angel...’ (Valiušaitis, 2024, p. 3.).

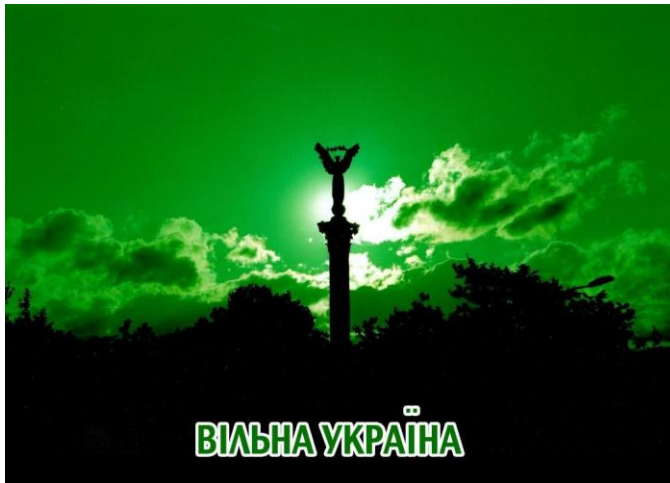


Photo 8. Valiušaitis, J. *Laisva Ukraina [Free Ukraine]*, 2004. Photographed on 08–05–2004. Published at Juozas Valiušaitis's photo exhibition '*Kyiv's Gold, Rust and Flaming Autumn*' in the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on Dec 25, 2004.

The photographer stops the hum of light of the most critical time of our times and captures the image as if opening a new Baltic dawn, rising in Ukraine, ringing bells about the birth of the world, the birth of a nation, and trust in the power of freedom and democracy. Juozas Valiušaitis' photographs and Ukrainian devotion to the idea of Europe, based on deep personal faith, self-experienced biblical signs of the immortality of nations, spread through Lithuania, like a prophetic dream becoming a long-awaited reality, the anti-empire call of European states. Here, the photographer saw and captured the transcendental fulfilment of history – the harmony of the nation's fragility (the girl's sculpture) and rising enlightenment power (the Roman column) in the sky of Kyiv, where the gold of the towers and the blue depth presents infinity and freedom. This greatness lives not in the blood of other murdered people, showing the Empire's power, but, first of all, in love for nations, like for a girlfriend, the goddess of the life breakthrough paradigm, liberating from the grip of darkness. The photographs of Valiušaitis' Maidans (in 2004, 2013–14) were a strong message of awakening the spirit of Lithuania, which cares about freedom of other nations and which moved all the political layers of the shared history as well. It is an ideal example of the light in the sky of an anti-imperial vision, touching the dimensions of signs of immortality, as in the case of Jewish memorial stones.

Conclusions

The anti-empire in Lithuania is a profound paradigm of nations recovering. It matured for a long time and rose to the surface as a multidimensional plant of national Selfhood – a tree in which all its visible and hidden dimensions have the essence. The most important of them opened up in the prophetic visions of people not accepting the Soviet era, disconnecting themselves from the occupation period, as if not touched by this antisensual world and making their realisation in *other space*. This way, a historically profound transcendental landscape was created from farmsteads-museums to photography linked to pilgrimage and religious meanings. The sacrality unfurled in the stones, the call of nature and the words discovered as signs of eternity. The time was stopped for the rise of the anti-empire and the empire's fall. Its most essential instruments for this step are:

- a) metaphor – the “mother” of Lithuanian photography;
- b) empathy for small, disappearing, occupied nations, nations and states according to the 19th-century slogan: ‘For our and your freedom!’ (Joachim Lelewel, 1786–1861 Uprisings);
- c) a sense of sacredness and longing for an eternal free world paradigm;
- d) insight into the divinity of nature;
- e) ecological essence of existential Self-preservation;

f) discoveries of the cultural identity of nations – the key to their resurrection.

g) dimensions of nations *Self* in contradiction of absurdity of Empyre.

If imperialism developed its image of greatness through romanticism, but anti-empire was born in a field of no less sensitivity and attention to the smallest details. It had its dramaturgy processes as well. These features of anti-imperial creativity are particularly characteristic of Lithuanian visionaries who inspire the revival of their own and other nations.

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