POLITICS OF ERASURE

FROM "DAMNATIO MEMORIAE" TO ALLURING VOID

Conferences and Studies
of the Polish Institute of World Art Studies

Vol. XIII

Editorial Board

Agnieszka Kluczewska-Wójcik & Jerzy Malinowski

In collaboration with

INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF WROCŁAW

POLITICS OF ERASURE

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Edited by

Anna Markowska

Kup książkę

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POLITICS OF ERASURE
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Anna Markowska

Introduction

Words "elimination" or "marginalisation" have dreary connotations in the history of the 20th century. Not so long ago dictators ordered to remove figures from pictures, at the same time erasing facts and removing the unwanted versions of history along with those that have lost the favour of the authorities. Nicolai Yezhov, the chief of the NKVD Soviet secret police, was retouched out of a photograph taken on 22th of April 1937 representing an inspection of building the Volga Canal (ills. 1–2). He accompanied Kliment Voroshilov, Vyacheslav Molotov and Joseph Stalin – the leader of the Soviet Union himself – and they all were presented while smiling, chatting and strolling along the river bank. The "bloody dwarf" – as Yezhov was named – conducted the Great Purge and as he came into power thanks to Stalin's graciousness, he also fell from it because of the loss of his leader's favours. It was noticed, not without a black sense of humour, that he was replaced by the waters of the Volga Canal in Moscow. Noticeably, Yezhov was a People's Commissar of Water Transport. He simply vanished – physically persecuted to death and morally in disgrace of memory. Although he disappeared from the official Soviet iconography because of falling into disgrace, his comeback after the perestroika was not in glory and he was not rehabilitated posthumously. Not a nonperson anymore, he can be again linked to documentary records, he regained his legal status but not his fame. Contrary to Yezhov, Lev Trotsky managed to extricate himself from an obvious moral label and the estimation of his role in Soviet revolution is more ambiguous. Although he was one of the major figures in the Soviet Politburo, deeply involved in shaping the new Bolshevik order, his being ousted from the Communist Party and exile from the Soviet Union secured him compassion in the Western world. Many intellectuals believed he was a symbol of the "right" way of the revolution, interrupted and wrecked by Stalin. On the photograph from 5th May 1920 we can see him standing close to Lev Kamenev near the tribune where Lenin is giving a speech to a large audience. An empty space where both of them stood was all that was left after they fell into Stalin's disgrace. It is widely known now – although during Communist times Poles were not allowed to say it aloud – that the Red Army which liberated our country from the Nazi Germany's regime imposed its own terror. Poles were robbed and abused during the Soviet Army offensive. And the famous photograph depicting the placement of the flag over the Reichstag shows two watches on the Soviet soldier's wrist. On the retouched version the soldier has got only one. Andrzej Poczobut, a journalist from "Gazeta Wyborcza", in his article *Wyretuszowani* (The retouched) gives a contemporary example of Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow with a Brequet wristwatch. The watch actually disappeared from the retouched photo but its reflection remained on the highly polished table.[1]

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[1] Poczobut (2013: 12–13).

Ill. 1. Inspection of building the Volga Canal: Kliment
Voroshilov, Vyacheslav Molotov and Joseph Stalin
with Nikolai Yezhov, 22 April 1937

Ill. 2. Retouched photography with no trace of Yezhov,
"The Vanishing Commissar", ca 1940

Condemnation of memory is only one of the aspects of erasing people and events; the fact annihilation procedure took place many times with the help of supposedly scientific methods or ideological premises, without resorting to forgery, crime or violence. After all, it is no weapon that decides about the field of vision and exclusion, just simple stereotypes, unified and wrongful prejudices. The great avant-garde goals or ideals of modernity had their own Janus-faces. To state that history of art as an academic discipline passed over many things in silence is to state the obvious. Another truism is reminding that the most sacred convictions about good taste or the right judgment of reality eliminated both particular works of art as well as whole artistic movements. Many examples can be found: the derogatory perception of women efficiently eliminated the works of women artists from museums, racial prejudice or homophobia played its part in the marginalisation of large areas of cultural achievements and their change into blank spots.

The book *Politics of Erasure. From "Damnatio Memoriae" to Alluring Void* on the one hand deals with the strategies of widely understood erasure in visual arts (i.e. exclusion, annulment and depreciation) in terms of particular works of art, museum narrations or urban spaces; on the other hand, it attempts to look at the ways of writing history because here the required and necessary virtue of synthesis sometimes transforms into a injurious scheme. Thus, oscillation between the general consciousness of the method and its precise use within case studies becomes not only a presentation of significant works of the Polish art of the 20th century showed in the general European context, but also a reflection on the craft of the historian, its limitations and possibilities. What is quite important in this context, however, is that the presented volume – although it is in favour of "re-remembering" what was purposefully or subconsciously pushed out in the course of the traumatic events of the 20th century – does not reduce the oblivion to an unambiguous negative; it also tries to look at the positive sides of selection, a clear shortcut, even of the oblivion or the peculiar ethos of impoverishment and its healing properties. The "politics of erasure" in the title does not link only with the ruthless power struggle hostile to any signs of resistance, it can also be a strategy aiming at widening our perception or negotiating what is visible and real. In this last case it does not reconcile itself to the terror of the visible and becomes a persevering attempt to expand the range of imagination and activate memory and intuition. Probably Georges Didi-Huberman was not wrong noticing two sides of the same coin in the tyranny of the Visible and the tyranny of the Idea. The ambivalence of erasure was excellently expressed by Robert Rauschenberg in his work *Erased de Kooning* (1953, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) that consisted in erasing and scratching out a drawing by an older fellow artist of his. The artist calling the used method "technique of erasure" was conscious of the ambivalence of destruction and creating. This work – "patricidal" and ruthless on the one hand and entertaining and affirmative on the other – is a patron saint behind this volume in which "the politics of erasure" is showed from different, seemingly contradictory perspectives.

The book – compiled after the international conference *Politics of erasure. Memory, Representation, Tyranny and Ethos* which hold place in the Insitute of Art History in Wrocław in October 17–18, 2012 – analyses six basic trains of thought connected with the politics of erasure. It consists

of 35 articles by researchers (mainly art historians, but also culture experts, archaeologists and sociologists) from domestic universities as well as from Israel, Greece, Romania, Great Britain and the United States. In the first part, *Damnatio Memoriae – Oblivion as Condemnation to Death*, it reaches for examples of the procedure of condemning memory, i.e. removing names and figures from works of art of ancient Rome and medieval Europe. Here rulers were the initiators of the destruction. The second part, *Forgetting Holocaust?*, completes the ideas of purposeful destruction with the triviality of everyday life with its carelessness and thoughtlessness; its hero is society – we ourselves – who do not wish to remember what happened over half a century before in the places where we live. Eleonora Jedlińska follows the traces of Jewish culture in Łódź, bitterly remarking that what the Germans had not destroyed during World War II was finished off by the Polish during the times of the People's Republic of Poland. Agnieszka Kłos contemplates the nature in the Birkenau concentration camp in the context of conservation works because the mute witnesses of the Holocaust – animals and plants – are not included in the museum-memorial plans. Part III – *Fight for the Reassessment of Representation as Administering Justice* – concentrates on the criticism of representation and attempts to straighten out the found situation and historical events through looking for solutions that are more just. Does the fight on the field of representation still have a chance for a positive outcome? This part focuses on positives, successfully reminding what had been marginalised but the next part (IV) clearly shows the Sisyphean task of a historian whose work – as an angel of resurrection, to use Didi-Huberman's expression again – is never finished. Thus in part III we will read among others the analyses of Terrorháza museum exhibitions in Budapest (Anna Ziębińska-Witek, *Historical Museums: Between Representation and Illusion*) and at the Jewish Museum Berlin (Xanthi Tsiftsi, *Void, the Art of Erasure. Representing Absence in the Jewish Museum Berlin*). The first one was dedicated to the memory of Communist and Nazi totalitarianism in the context of a wider consideration of historical exhibitions that not only show but also conceal fragments of the past, the second – in the context of the acute emptiness in the modern cityscape left by the murdered Jews. A special focus was placed on various instances of marginalisation of outstanding artists in the perspective of balancing the justice after the fall of Central European regimes. Lucia Popa does that for Romania (*"Removing Romania": The Western Art World Colonized by the "East"*), and Jed Speare (*Washing up Memories: Some Strategies of Milan Kohout's Performance Activism*) for the former Czechoslovakia; most attention, however, was given to Polish art: Andrzej Jarosz in his article *The Absent Ones – Placing the Post-war Wrocław Painting in the Context of Polish Art* concentrates on marginalising the "provincial" artists of Wrocław from the perspective of Warsaw and the possibilities that were given in this scope by the centred system of art management in the times of the People's Republic of Poland. Agata Soczyńska in turn reflects on the scant reception of Marek Oberländer's painting in those times in the text *Marek Oberländer – a Painter Undesired by the Time* and reaches the conclusion that it was directly connected with accusing the artist – who almost miraculously survived the Holocaust – of emotional blackmail of the viewer. Małgorzata Ksenia Krzyżanowska in "*Nothing Is Getting as Old as Modernity*" *– i.e. Why the Trend for Nine Graphic Artists Group Has Passed* considers the elusive issue of fashion for certain cultural phenomena and its transposition to memory.

Part IV *Tyranny of the Visible and the Tyranny of the Idea* investigates the traps that the necessity of synthesis sets for historians and how they can fight for objectivism with all their distortive, preconceived ideas. It tries to answer the question if it is possible to write about past avoiding the pitfall of doing it in smart aleck fashion and to make visual art abandoning ideas of the essential nature of seeing and the absolute truth. Actually, this question is positively answered only by Anna Stec in her article *Anish Kapoor, Memory* where she analyses the sculpture-installation *Memory* created by Anish Kapoor for the Deutsche Guggenheim in 2008. The author shows how the artist managed to force the audience to move, a movement in which viewers, strolling around, successively discovered the shapes of the work and started up the memory of what they saw and not saw, instead of expecting and pointing out – in the course of exploration – some kind of an a priori, imposed idea. However, eventually – a paradox of memory – the wish to report the experience of seeing emerges anyway and it is focused around that a priori, imposed idea of interpretation. We do not wonder then that other answers to the question about the possibility of overthrowing the tyranny

of an idea and visibility are still negative. And we will read here on many ideas which, formerly praiseworthy, turned out to be distortive, damaging and harmful. Rafał Eysymontt in the article *The Town as a Palimpsest. Erasing and Recovering the Medieval Town* accuses modernist ideas of destroying urban tissue and its medieval genetic code. Jakub Zarzycki in *Polish History Painting in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century as a "Quasi"- Metanarrative. Visible Tyranny of Idea?* reproaches Polish artists and the audience with developing a specific "prison slang" that removed everything except its own martyrology from view. For Michał Zawada in *Imagining Iconoclasm* the destruction of two colossal images of Buddha in the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan is a pretext to show iconoclastic wars in the circle of the Western civilisation in entirely contemporary times. Part V *Ethos of Deprivation or Irrevocable Ambivalence* deals with radical ways of impoverishment through eliminating the signature style, responsibility, aura. And although the published articles do not demonstrate grief that the development of contemporary art takes such a course and not a different one, still, it is difficult not to notice also negative (or at least quite ambivalent) consequences of this "ethos of deprivation". Memory on a data carrier is both a relief for memory as well as a threat of carelessness and irresponsibility. Rafał Ilnicki (*Digital Lethe of Transhumanism: Weak Mind Uploading as Erasure of Individual and Collective Memory*) writes about the consequences of storing memory on hard disks and freeing our minds from the necessity to memorize many facts. However, it is not transhumanist memory that is his concern, it is our gained "freedom". Agnieszka Bandura (*Politics of Replacing in New Romanticism*) analysing neo-romantic tendencies in contemporary art reaches the conclusion that the artists of this movement attempt to remove an over-rational (in their opinion) image of the world and the overly logical order that emerges from it. Katarzyna Bojarska in *Spectrality and the Possibility of Seeing (Loss). Photography Against the Referentiality of History* deliberates on our identity and that of our images and, following in the steps of contemporary artists, breaks this connection. Photography – a border medium for Bojarska – "remembers" us as well as does not notice us dialectically and deprives us of ourselves. And finally part VI *Alluring Voids* notices the positives and the inspirational effect of vacant, annulled and emptied spaces: such were both the

modernist autonomy of a work of art erasing its "vulgar" context as well as the cartographic silence that excites the imagination. Małgorzata Nieszczerzewska in *Erasure of Time. Photographs of Abandoned Places* considers the poetics and narration of abandonment in the context of photos of architectural ruins including desolate industrial buildings. In turn Maria Magdalena Morawiecka in *"Terra incognita". On Cartographic Silence on Old Maps* shows the inspiring effect of blank spaces on maps. *Konrad Niemira in Isolation – Erasure – Oblivion* is interested in the process of isolation and "cleaning" the context of a work of art in a modernist project by Marcel Proust. The above-mentioned texts are only a token of many other articles that can be found in this book.

The main area of research of this volume is contemporary art. Polish art is presented within a wider context of world art (such artists as e.g. Gerhard Richter or Anish Kapoor) and shows struggling with a new vision of the world after the trauma of wars and totalitarianisms and also after the period of time called post-transitional in our part of Europe. The technological revolution and a new vision of man (posthumanism) entice us with a hope for a better future and a new way of being with others. But is it really for everyone? Has anything escaped our attention again? – this is again a question about the erasure mentioned in the title; are we able to learn anything from history and will an unattainable goal not remain our horizon? It follows from the book that although the strategy of removal may be considered a political reinforcement of irrefutable truths and ruthless purges, we cannot ignore the fact that sometimes it may be a chance for a new experience of reality without the mediation of stereotypes and common convictions. Eventually, erasure turns out to be a utopia that was aptly phrased by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz "Why does something exist rather that nothing?"

Bibliography

Poczobut 2013 = Poczobut, Andrzej: „Wyretuszowani" (The retouched)*, Ale historia* [*Gazeta Wyborcza* suppplement], 2013, No. 28(78), 12–13.

Damnatio memoriae
– oblivion as condemnation to death

POLITICS OF ERASURE
FROM "DAMNATIO MEMORIAE"
TO ALLURING VOID

Agata Kubala
University of Wrocław

Damnatio memoriae and Roman imperial art

Damnatio memoriae, literally the condemnation of memory, is a term coined in the modern period to denote a wide array of injunctions levelled against an individual accused of treason or deemed an enemy (*hostis*) of the Roman state. Ancient Romans believed that the worst punishment for mortals was to sentence them for an absolute oblivion, because it meant erasing from a collective memory and it was tantamount to the non-existence. The collective memory originating from a great veneration for ancestors was very important for ancient Romans, because it secured the eternal surviving.[1] Names and titles of the condemned were removed from official records and commemorative inscriptions as if they had never existed. What is more, the condemnation of memory was also connected with legal proceedings whose aim was to remove every trace of the existence of a condemned individual. In the Republican period there were many sanctions available. Property of the condemned could be confiscated, their houses could be demolished, and their wills could be annulled. The condemned's wax masks called *imagines* could be banned from funeral processions. His family was not allowed to use their *praenomen*. Portraits of the condemned were removed from public places and private display, mutilated or even destroyed. Some of them were thrown into rivers, cisterns or wells to dishonour and, at the same time, to purify. Bronze images were melted down. One of the best-known late republican dignitaries who suffered *damnatio memoriae* was Marcus Antonius, declared public enemy by Augustus. It is very possible, that his portraits were not only removed and destroyed. Some of them may have been recut into likenesses of the deified Julius Caesar as the marble portrait in the J. Paul Getty Museum shows.[2]

In the Imperial Period the Romans' attempt of damnation of an individual's memory was generally politically motivated. The institution of *damnatio memoriae* became a weapon in the fight of the Senate with an emperor or an emperor with the opposition.[3] Unlike in the Republican Period it almost exclusively concerned overthrown emperors, their family members, and private individuals who had conspired against reigning emperor. Names and titles of damned individuals were still obliterated in inscriptions, their likenesses were erased from reliefs and paintings. However, three-dimensional, marble portraits of those who suffered some form of condemnation were more rarely destroyed. Rep-

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[1] Mrozewicz (2011: 11).

[2] Pollini (2006: 592).
[3] Mrozewicz (2011: 12).

resentations of emperors posthumously condemned by the Senate were very often warehoused and then reconfigured into likenesses of victorious successors or revered predecessors. Alternatively, portraits could be physically attacked and mutilated. The sensory organs, eyes, nose, mouth, and ears, were usually targets of abuse. Destruction and transformation of imperial representations were intended to reach a large segment of the Roman population and to signal the rule of a new regime. E. Varner wrote: "Certainly those illiterate members of the population who could not read the written history of the failed regime could read its visual history as embodied in mutilated and transformed images."[4]

The process of the negation of artistic monuments for political or ideological reasons was not initiated in Roman times. The earliest known example of such practices comes from the Near East and dates back to the third millennium B.C. It is the deliberately mutilated copper head of an Akkadian ruler from Nineveh.[5] Political motivation may also be ascribed to damaged Assyrian royal images and inscriptions. None of historical records survived from the reign of Assyrian king Shalmaneser V. They had been intentionally destroyed by his successor (and murderer) Sargon II who tried to discredit his predecessor and to erase his name and his deeds from the memory of future generations.[6]

Notable examples of the destruction of royal monuments survived from Egypt. Images of queen Hatshepsut who proclaimed herself a pharaoh were intentionally damaged and her cartouches were erased by her successor Tuthmose III. A similar attack was carried out on Akhenaten from the same eighteenth dynasty. Monuments honouring this pharaoh who imposed a monotheistic religious tyranny in Egypt were systematically destroyed after his death as well as images of the new god Aten. In the Ptolemaic period several portraits of rulers were recut for political reasons. E. Varner suggested that they stood as important precursors to the altered likenesses of the Roman imperial period.[7]

As shown above, Romans were not the first in the ancient world who used the sanction *damnatio memoriae* to erase the memory of condemned individuals. However, they were definitely the first an-

cient people who made this sanction a permanent component of their political life, especially in the Imperial Period.

A good number of altered sculptures and reworked reliefs were found in the vast territory of the Roman Empire. When portraits of condemned Roman emperors were recut, they were usually transformed into likenesses of other *principes*, their predecessors, especially those who had been deified, or victorious successors. However, portraits of an overthrown emperor were not always altered immediately. They might have been stored for many years before finally being reworked. Sometimes a portrait even underwent more than one recutting. Transformed imperial images survived in Italy, Gaul, Spain, Germany, Greece, Egypt, and Asia Minor.[8] A recarved portrait is relatively easy to recognize. Certain features such as unnatural flatness of the face, reduced volume of the head, disproportionate hairline or unusually flattened ears, and abnormal thickness of the neck are typical signs that a bust has been altered from an earlier likeness.

The first Roman emperor who suffered *damnatio memoriae* was Gaius Iulius Caesar Germanicus known as Caligula. He ruled only four years (37–41 A.C.), but his short reign was a very gloomy period in the history of the Roman empire. Caligula is presently commonly regarded as a dangerous despot and lunatic, and this judgement is in large measure well-deserved. However, during first months of his reign there were no indication of future repression. On the contrary, he had all the makings of a good ruler. After the terror of the last years under Tiberius, Romans warmly welcomed a new, young emperor who initially came up to their expectations. The situation changed in October 37 A.C. when Caligula got better after a serious illness.[9] A new wave of political trials and confiscations of properties together with a destructive behaviour and a riotous life of the emperor provoked an increase in opposing feeling, especially among the senatorial aristocracy whose life and property were most of all put in danger. Caligula was assassinated in January 41 by his two praetorians' officers. The Senate desired to issue an official decree of condemnation of his memory, but Caligula's successor Claudius refused to permit official sanctions. However, he unofficially allowed to remove Caligula's likenesses

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[4] Varner (2004: 9).
[5] Nylander (1980: 331).
[6] Zawadzki (2011: 18–19).
[7] Varner (2004: 15).

[8] Varner (2004: 5).
[9] Krawczuk (1986: 47).

from public places and to erase his name from inscriptions. Cassius Dio describes these events in such words: "And yet, when the senate desired to dishonour of Gaius, he personally prevented the passage of the measure, but on his own responsibility caused all his predecessor's images to disappear by night. Hence the name of Gaius does not occur in the list of emperors whom we mention in our oaths and prayers any more than does that of Tiberius; and yet neither one of them suffered disgraced by official decree."[10] Thus Caligula's damnation was unofficial. Its results are, however, visible in surviving portraits, that were treated differently. After removing from public display which was a consequence of the unofficial condemnation, some of them were intentionally mutilated to dishonour the "bad" emperor's memory, although in rare instances only Caligula's portraits were attacked and disfigured. Many images of Caligula were thrown into the Tiber River as a sign of dishonour, and at the same time, as a way of "purifying" them.[11] Significantly, numerous sculptural portraits of Caligula were warehoused for later recutting. As E. Varner pointed, the reworking, rather than intentional mutilation, was the preferred approach to the emperor's sculptural likenesses which was economically as well as ideologically motivated.[12] Caligula's portraits were then transformed into images of his predecessors, Augustus and Tiberius, and his successors Claudius and Titus. Caligula's portraits in gold, silver and bronze may have been melted down for their metal content, an effective combination of destroying and reusing. Certain Caligulan coins were also mutilated. The emperor's face and the initial letter of his name were erased. Also, Claudius allowed the Senate to order melting down senatorial coins, which bore Caligula's image.

Another emperor whose reign was characterised by destructive behaviour and whose memory was obliterated was Nero, the last ruler of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. He was at the same time the first Roman emperor to be officially condemned posthumously and declared an enemy of the state (*hostis*) by the Senate. However, the effects of Nero's *damnatio memoriae* were the same as in the case of the unofficial condemnation of Caligula and included sanctions against his monuments and inscriptions.

Nero Claudius Drusus Germanicus, an adopted son of emperor Claudius, became an emperor in 54 A.C. in the age of seventeen after the death of his adoptive father. The early years of his reign were not bad. Nero governed well under the guidance of his tutor, Lucius Aenneus Seneca. After his dismissal in 62 A.C. Nero's autocratic tendencies increased as well as his interest in artistic pursuits. Additionally, relations between the emperor and the Senate became worse and Nero's popularity was on the decline, especially among the military and prominent citizens at Rome. In 68 A.C. governors of some provinces revolted against the emperor. Abandoned by most of the army and the Senate, Nero committed suicide in June 68 A.C. After his death and official condemnation the destruction of Nero's portraits, inscriptions and coins took place. Several surviving portraits of Nero were intentionally damaged after his overthrow. The sensory organs, eyes, nose and lips, were chiselled out. Nero's likenesses on coins were also damaged and accompanying inscriptions were often obliterated. These defaced portraits may have been visible signifiers of Nero's posthumous denigration and their destruction was probably the result of spontaneous demonstrations against his memory.[13] As in the case of Caligula's likenesses, the mutilation of Nero's sculpted portraits and his images on coins were rather isolated events. Most of his likenesses were removed from their original context on his successor Galba's order and then warehoused. It confirms that the practice of recutting became the standard approach to images of Nero, too. E. Varner stated that over forty surviving marble portraits of Nero have been later recarved into images of other emperors.[14] There are surviving portraits of Galba and emperors from the Flavian dynasty: Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian which have been recut from the images of Nero. A good example of such practice is portrait of Vespasian in the Cleveland Museum of Art, because its facial features and hairstyle clearly betrays its origin as an image of Nero.[15] Several surviving likenesses of Titus also show sufficient traces of original images to indicate that they were reworked from images of Nero.[16] Some of Nero's

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[10] Cassius Dio 60, 4, 5–6.
[11] Pollini (2006: 593).
[12] Varner (2004: 25).

[13] Varner (2004: 49–50).
[14] Varner (2004: 53).
[15] Pollini (1984: 548–550; figs. 1–4).
[16] See for instance portrait of Titus from the Metron at Olimpia or his likenesses in the Villa Borghese and the Uffizi, Varner (2004: 56).

portraits had remained in depot for a long time before they finally were altered into images of emperors from the third and even fourth centuries as portrait of Gallienus found in Egypt, and the image of one of the sons of Constantine from the Terme show.[17]

The removal of Nero's public images and their recutting represent an attempt to obliterate him from the historical record. The erasure of his name in inscriptions and the destruction of his commemorative monuments such as the triumphal arch erected in Nero's honour on the Capitoline Hill and then completely demolished under his successor[18] served the same purpose.

The three emperors that followed, Galba, Otho, and Vitelius, ruling in the politically uncertain "year of the four emperors" also suffered the de facto *damnatio*, although surviving historical sources do not inform directly of the official condemnations of their memories by the Senate. However, Plutarchus records that Galba's portraits in Rome were felled and destroyed.[19] The evidence of the destruction of Otho's images is provided by an intentionally mutilated colossal portrait of him found in a sewer in Ostia. It has both eyes, nose and lips damaged which is symptomatic of the *damnatio memoriae*. After its destruction, the portrait was thrown into a sewer to denigrate Otho's memory[20]. Portraits of Vitelius were refashioned after his assassination into likenesses of his victorious successor Vespasian as three existing examples in Tessalonika, Hannover, and Trier show.[21]

A very good example of the official posthumous *damnatio memoriae* is Titus Flavius Domitianus, commonly known as Domitian, the younger son of emperor Vespasian, and the last ruler of the Flavian dynasty. Domitian was extremely hated by the senators because of his despotic behaviour and persecution of the elite. It is hardly surprising that after his assassination in 96 A.C. he was very vindictively treated by them. He was declared tyrant by the Senate, which officially condemned his name and ordered to erase his name from all inscriptions. Suetonius provides a description of these events: "The Senate was so overjoyed, that they met in all haste, and in a full assembly reviled his memory in the

most bitter terms. They even had ladders brought and his shields and images torn down before their eyes and dashed upon the ground; finally they passed a decree that his inscriptions should everywhere be erased and all record of him obliterated."[22] Another Roman writer, Pliny the Younger records a destruction of statues of the murdered emperor.[23] Archaeological evidence for the destruction and mutilation of Domitian' images is rather rare. As Suetonius records, it was mainly the senatorial aristocracy who was overwhelmed with the desire of the destruction of the condemned emperor's likenesses. In provinces, the people's respond to the *damnatio* of Domitian was much more abstemious which is proved by numerous surviving images of him. It is very likely that destructions of Domitian's likenesses were spontaneous and rather isolated acts. Many of his portraits were transformed, since the practise of recutting became the standard approach to images of condemned emperors. Following this habit established earlier in the first century, portraits of Domitian were commonly recut into likenesses of his two immediate successors, Nerva[24] and Trajan.[25] One of the best examples of the reconfiguration of imperial likenesses to be seen on Frieze A of the *Cancelleria reliefs* in Musei Vaticani, dates back to the time of Domitian.[26] The pre-existing image of the emperor was refashioned into the likeness of Nerva. Another good example is a bronze equestrian statue from Misenum in which Domitian's face was cut out and replaced by that of Nerva.[27] Also monuments erected by Domitian were rededicated after his condemnation. The *Forum Transitorium* which was built by him was then named in honour of Nerva.

The practice of abolition of emperor's memory continued in the second century. After almost one hundred years long interval, the next emperor who suffered the damnation in all respects was Lucius Aurelius Commodus, the son and successor of Marcus Aurelius. Upon his death the Senate passed the *damnatio memoriae* on him and declared him an

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[17] Varner (2004: 64–65).
[18] Kleiner (1985: 70).
[19] Plutarchus, *Galba*, 22, 4; 26, 7.
[20] Varner (2004: 108).
[21] Varner (2004: 109).

[22] Suetonius, *Domitianus*, 23.
[23] Plinius, *Panegirycus*, 52, after: Mrozewicz (2011: 14).
[24] See for instance reworked portraits of Nerva in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (inv. 1454), the Palazzo dei Conservatori (inv. 423) or the Museo Capitolino (inv. 417).
[25] See for instance a basalt portrait of Trajan in the Museo Nazionale Romano alle Terme (inv. 61160) recut from the image of Domitian; Pollini (2006: 596, note 36).
[26] Kleiner (2010: 135, fig. 9.23).
[27] Pollini (2006: 594).

enemy to the country and gods. Cassius Dio reports: "Both the Senate and the people wanted to drag off his body and tear limb from limb, as they did do, in facts, with his statues."[28] Public images of Commodus were then overthrown, some of them were deliberately mutilated.[29] His name was systematically erased from inscriptions, both public and private. Relief images in public places also faced the full wrath of *damnatio* and were duly obliterated. This is most clearly visible on the so-called *Panel Reliefs of Marcus Aurelius*. Commodus's image was once present in two scenes together with his father.[30] However, the *damnatio memoriae* in both cases involved the entire removal of his body, not only replacement of his head. It is obvious that the conceptual shift in the treatment of portraits of the condemned emperor occurred. As E. Varner pointed out, while removal and destruction of portraits continued, recarving sculpted likenesses ceased to be practised on a wide scale.[31] Indeed, there are no known examples of Commodus's relief images being merely reworked, in each case they were entirely removed. Additionally, unlike the images of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, none of Commodus's portraits was refashioned immediately after his condemnation. Only several warehoused images were recarved and it happened not earlier than the third century. It was closely connected with Commodus's rehabilitation and deification under Septimius Severus, only four years after the abolition of his memory. Most of his previously stored portraits were probably re-erected.

The case of Commodus clearly shows that the condemnation of memory, *damnatio memoriae*, was not of the irreversible character. Commodus is first known condemned emperor whose memory was not only rehabilitated, but who was even deified.

The third century A.C. witnessed numerous emperors' condemnations. The most commonly known are those of Geta and Elagabalus, both from the Severan dynasty. Geta was the younger son of Septimius Severus, the founder of the dynasty. His father's intention was that after his death,

his two sons would rule together. However, they hated each other and the consequence of this hatred was Caracalla's murder of Geta. The elder son of Septimius Severus and Geta's co-emperor hated his younger brother so much, that immediately after the assassination he publicly expunged his memory. Geta was also declared an enemy by the praetorians corrupted by Caracalla. Cassius Dio, the witness of these events, records that the new emperor also prohibited pronouncing and writing Geta's name and ordered to destroy his statues and melt coins which bore his name.[32] In response to the *damnatio memoriae*, Geta's images were also deliberately mutilated, as the only surviving full length portrait of Geta in the Villa dell Poggio Imperiale shows.[33] Furthermore, Geta's name and likenesses were erased from inscriptions and reliefs. The most spectacular examples of this practice are known from the Severan monuments in Rome and Leptis Magna. The epigraphic reference to Geta was removed from the Arch of Septimius Severus in the Forum Romanum.[34] Geta's name and titles as well as his likenesses were chiselled out from the so-called *Arch of the Argentarii* in Rome. Geta's images were also removed from the Severan arch in Leptis Magna. Face of the condemned emperor was obliterated from a painted wooden tondo of Severan family found in Egypt, presently exhibited in Berlin.[35] As with the images of Commodus, portraits of Geta removed from the public display and warehoused were not refashioned immediately after his condemnation.

The emperor who suffered *damnatio memoriae* was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, popularly known as Elagabalus. Hated by most Romans because of his irresponsible and immoral behaviour Elagabalus was murdered by praetorians and soldiers in 222 A.C.

Immediately after the assassination, his memory was condemned, his body desecrated and then thrown into the Tiber.[36] The Senate passed a decree that the name of Antoninus should be removed from official documents and inscriptions when referring to Elagabalus. Clear traces of Elagabalus's *damnatio* are to be seen on some surviving papyri, when the emperor's name was replaced with other

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28 Cassius Dio 73,2.
29 As E. Varner (2004: 138–139) has suggested, four surviving Commodus's marble portraits bear clear traces of intentional damage.
30 They are so-called *Thriumph Panel* and the *Liberalitas Panel*, see Beckman (2011: 33).
31 Varner (2004: 136).

32 Cassius Dio, 78, 12, 5–6.
33 See Varner (2004: 170, fig. 165).
34 Królczyk (2011: 88).
35 Kleiner (2010: 233. fig. 16.4).
36 Cassius Dio, 80, 20, 1–2.

elements.[37] Traditionally, most images of the condemned emperor were destroyed, while several of his portraits were reconfigured into likenesses of his immediate successor and cousin Alexander Severus.

The period between 235 and 284 A.C. as the time of the maximum instability of the Roman Empire witnessed many condemnations of emperors, who were enthroned and overthrown by the army. As in the past, the condemnations were strictly connected with visual repressions of likenesses of damned rulers.

The sanction of *damnatio memoriae* continued in the early fourth century. Maxentius, the defeated rival of Constantine, is a very good example of an individual's condemnation for political reasons. Constantine's victory required the eradication of Maxentius's legacy, because he enjoyed a great popularity. The victorious emperor achieved it by traditional Roman means: damning his memory and appropriation of his architectural achievements. Constantine expunged the record of Maxentius's good deeds and attributed them to himself. A number of monuments that have traditionally been scribed to Constantine could in fact be Maxentian, including the *Basilica Nova*, the circus complex on Via Appia or the *Baths of Constantine*. Maxentius's images were mutilated in a typical way: eyes, nose, chin and ears were attacked with a hammer. After a long break, the return of an artistic recycling of portraits can be noticed. Some of Maxentius's sculpted portraits were transformed into likenesses of his victorious successor. The most famous of them is the colossal portrait of Constantine in the cortile of the Palazzo dei Conservatori, with clear signs of refashioning.[38] Like before, Maxentius's images were also removed from public display and warehoused. Thanks to this practise they are in a remarkably good state of preservation.

The sanction of *damnatio memorie* was also passed upon wives or daughters of emperors. Imperial women were either condemned jointly with their husbands, or as a consequence of controversies with the reigning emperor. Their visual representations were generally treated in the same manner as those of their male counterparts.[39] Among the empresses who suffered some form of condemnation together with their husbands were for instance Milonia Cesonia, wife of Caligula and Poppea, Nero's wife. Their portraits were removed, destroyed or intentionally mutilated in conjunction with those of their husbands. Another empress who suffered a collateral *damnatio* was Julia Soemias, not the wife, but the mother of Elagabalus. She came to the political prominence and was the chief Augusta during the reign of her son. Thus, it is hardly surprising that she was murdered together with him and her memory was also condemned. However, Julia Soemias is the only condemned empresses whose corpse was desecrated. Her name was erased in inscriptions and her likenesses removed from the public display and then destroyed so effectively that no securely identified sculpted image of the empress has survived[40]. Collateral condemnations also affected imperial women and their images during the period of political instability of the Roman Empire between 235 and 284 A.C. and they continued into the fourth century. Portraits of Galeria Valeria Maximilla were probably destroyed in conjunction with those of her husband, Maxentius after his condemnation.[41]

The great number of imperial women were condemned because of their involvements in political intrigues against reigning emperors. The first of them was Julia, the only child of emperor Augustus. She was banished and disinherited by her father. Such a form of condemnation also resulted in removal and destruction of Julia's public images and no surviving sculpted image can be convincingly identified with her at present. Valeria Messalina, the wife of emperor Claudius suffered the official condemnation executed by the Senate for her role in conspiracy against her husband. Messalina's name was erased both from public and private inscriptions and her likenesses removed from public display, typical results of the *damnatio*. A very good state of preservation of Messalina's statue in the Louvre indicates that her portraits may have been warehoused after their removal.[42] Messalina's images were also transformed into likenesses of Agrippina Minor, who married Claudius shortly after Messalina's death.[43] The visible result of Messalina's condemnation was also a deliberate mutila-

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[37] Królczyk (2011: 91).
[38] Varner (2004: 217).
[39] Varner (2001: 45).

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[40] Varner (2001: 49).
[41] Fittchen, Zanker (1983: 227, pl. 206).
[42] Wood (1992: fig. 1).
[43] Fittchen, Zanker (1983: 6, no. 5).