



The Challenge of the Heritage of Protest Movements: Collecting, Documenting and Preserving the “Women’s Rebellion”

By
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Abstract

This article analyses the challenge of collecting the heritage of present-day global protest movements, which are shaped and influenced by digital practices. In focus of the analysis are the mass-street demonstrations which took place in cities all over Poland in 2020 and 2021 to denounce the ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal imposing a near-total ban on abortion (the “women’s rebellion”). Considered as the largest social protests since the fall of communism in 1989, they have engendered several spontaneous documenting and collecting initiatives. The aims and outcomes of such projects, launched by Polish museums, NGOs, artistic collectives, etc. will be juxtaposed in this article with similar ventures aimed at collecting and archiving the global social movements of the twenty-first century and examined as the first Polish examples of Rapid Response Collecting (RRC). This article, by analysing the recent RRC projects of the 2020/21 protests against the abortion ban in Poland, aims to inscribe them in the current discussions on the preservation of digital heritage. While pointing out definitional issues with digital heritage, my analysis also demonstrates the need to integrate and interrelate digital heritage within the wider framework of cultural heritage, its preservation and institutionalisation.

Keywords: Rapid Response Collecting; Digital Heritage; Global Movements; Memory Institutions; Women’s Rights

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Introduction

In the first days of the 2020 nationwide mass protests in Poland against the ban on abortion, a graphic design artist based in Gdansk, Michał Marcinkowski, shared on social media his digital poster titled *Gdańsk to dźwignie* [Gdansk will raise it] (Fig. 1). Comprising important symbols – a crane in the port of Gdansk (a reference to the Solidarity movement) and a red lightning bolt (the visual identification of the ongoing protests) – this digital poster was readily used by social media users as a manifestation of their identification with and engagement in the protests. A few days later, Marcinkowski donated the printouts of the poster to the Museum of Gdansk (MG). This donation – a response to the MG’s public appeal to document the ongoing protests – is one of the first objects acquired by a Polish memory institution as a result of Rapid Response Collecting (RRC), a twenty-first century curatorial and archiving practice aimed at documenting and collecting materials on ongoing landmark events and important social phenomena. The term “Rapid Response Collecting” was coined in 2014, and was popularized with the worldwide explosion of the documentation and collection initiatives focused on the Sars-Cov-2 pandemics. Its origins, however, go back to the turn of the twenty-first century (and its precedents are as old as collecting itself). Furthermore, many projects focused on documenting contemporary landmark events and collecting items associated therewith are not referred to as RRC. Launched as a response to the events, they are spontaneous and based on ad hoc practices and methods.

This article, by analysing the recent RRC projects of the 2020/21 protests against the abortion ban in Poland, aims to inscribe them in the current discussions on the preservation of digital heritage.¹ In fact, the focus of RRC initiatives is on objects and phenomena arising and evolving in both the physical and digital spheres. Thus, among other things, they take on the challenge of a timely – and still far from standardized – practice of digital heritage preservation. The relevant recommendations of international organizations – such as UNESCO, the International Committee for Documentation of the International Council of Museums, or the International Coalition of the Library Consortia – tackle general



Fig. 1: Michał Marcinkowski, *Gdańsk to dźwignie*, digital graphic 2020

and technical issues; for example, web archiving, database archiving, copyright issues, born-digital heritage collecting, and the legal and institutional status of digital surrogates. Based on the definition of digital heritage and on the key concepts of its preservation as expressed in the 2003 UNESCO Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage and in its 2015 Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form (von Schorlemer 2020) they frame digital heritage as an element of documentary heritage in the first place (de Lunset 2007). RRC, however, is not entirely based on the key concepts and assumptions of such recommendations. What makes of it a truly enlightening case study is that by focusing on history “in the making” RRC evidences how digitisation has changed our perceptions of the present and of the past. RRC is, arguably, a methodology of documenting and organizing the contemporary; of selecting among the excess of information, images, objects, intangible phenomena the ones worth of preservation. Thus, RRC is a “supermodernity” collecting and documenting practice. The term “supermodernity” was coined by the French anthropologist, Marc Augé to define our times (Augé 1995). According to Augé, our sense of contemporaneity is shaped and reinforced among others by the excess of events that we have to witness at one time, and by an excess of space, i.e. by the sense of a “shrinking” world and the increasing awareness of the world as a whole (Augé 1995).

The projects which are the focus of this article were pursued in Poland, a country where even the most general issues related to digital heritage have not yet been tackled at the legal, institutional, academic, or publicist levels. Thus, they not only reflect the general challenges of documenting and organizing the contemporary, but also evidence pitfalls and challenges related to the definition, institutionalisation and preservation of digital heritage. Based on intuitive and often unconsidered questionnaires, methodologies, and practices, they reflect how the new concepts of heritage, in particular digital heritage, are still in a fluid state.

In the first section of this article, I introduce the context of the 2020/21 protests against the abortion ban and frame them as a global social movement. Next, I analyse the heritage of these protests, placing particular emphasis on the intertwining of physical and digital dimensions. Before moving on to discuss the RRC projects focused on the 2020/21 protests, I discuss the origins and premises of RRC. In conclusion, I recall recent digital heritage theories and their impact on the definitions, documentation, and preservation of digital heritage. I argue that these emerging definitions and practices also need to consider the wider context of cultural heritage and of its institutionalisation.

The “Women’s Rebellion” as a Global Movement

Between October 2020 and January 2021, despite the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic restrictions a wave of mass-scale demonstrations, marches, and acts of civil disobedience swept through hundreds of Polish cities and small towns. The cause of such widespread discontent was the ruling of the Constitutional Court in Warsaw, delivered on October 22, which made even stricter one of the already most restrictive anti-abortion legislations in Europe (Łętowska 2020). The Polish legislation, in place since 1993, allowed abortion just in three cases: when the pregnancy constitutes a threat to the life or to the health of the mother; when it is the result of an illegal act; when the foetus is irreversibly damaged. By declaring the latter exception unconstitutional, the 2020 ruling marked the end of the so-called “abortion compromise” between the full ban on and unlimited access to abortion. Cracks in the compromise first appeared in 2016 when a bill banning abortion in case of an irreversibly damaged foetus was discussed in the Polish parliament. This first serious attempt at tightening the abortion law was met with protests and demonstrations, which in the following weeks and months revived with equal force each time the discussion of the bill was put on the Parliament’s agenda, and when it was finally referred as a legal question to the Constitutional Court.

The protests were launched spontaneously by the All-Poland Women’s Strike [Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet], a women’s rights social movement established in 2016 in response to the official attempts to limit the right to abortion. Commonly referred to as a “women’s rebellion” (Graff 2020), they should be framed globally in the context of other social movements of the twenty-first century (Korolczuk & alt. 2019: 19–26). Indeed, they share important features with such movements as Black Lives Matter, climate change strikes, or the Umbrella movement; i.e., their mass scale, focus on fundamental human rights, grassroots origins and organization, and their reliance on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). First, the street manifestations and various acts of civil disobedience organized Poland-wide in over five hundred cities and towns were the largest manifestations since the Polish revolution of 1989. Second, the protests have – besides the right to abortion – also focused on supporting other fundamental human rights under threat, for example the right to protest against limitations on women’s, LGBTQ+ or disability rights. Third, the All-Poland Women’s Strike and other NGOs involved in the “women’s rebellion” served not as a leader but as a platform and help desk for individuals and groups willing to organize grassroots manifestations and other forms of protests. Fourth, the widespread popularity of the protests was not just due to an overwhelming public dissent vis-à-vis the changes pushed through since 2016, but also to the reliance on ICT. Indeed, the global movements of the twenty first century are organized,

sustained, disseminated, crowdsourced and expressed via social media and messaging services. Furthermore, they are based on social media communication strategies and many actions are performed only in the internet space (Jackson 2020). According to Elżbieta Korolczuk, the “women’s rebellion” was shaped by the logic of connective action, and it is thanks to ICT that it had such a mass and long-lasting scale (Korolczuk 2016, 105–107). The “women’s rebellion” is more rightly framed as one of the global social movements, as already in the first week following its outbreak its organizers built networks and contacts with other women’s right activists and movements around the world (Suchanow 2020). This informal collaboration resulted in the International Women’s Strike – a global movement with protests and manifestations organized worldwide since 2017 on International Women’s Day (Graff 2020). The instantaneous and spontaneous connection and networking of women’s activists worldwide and the rapid transformation of local protests and manifestations into a global movement was enabled by ICT, and in particular by social networks.

Finally, the twenty-first century global movements are strongly characterized by a visual identification and a heritage of their own, “a material and performative culture with a high capacity to be replicated digitally and shared across social media networks, ideological terrain, state borders, and linguistic frontiers” (McGarry & alt. 2020: 18). Not only do the symbols, logos, and images transition smoothly between physical world and the digital realm, but the protests and bottom-up events themselves are organized, lived, and performed with these two spheres in mind. This is precisely what distinguishes the aesthetics of the twenty-first century global movements from their historical predecessors. As Jim Aulich has justly argued, such aesthetics have not really changed since the time of the French Revolution: protests are spectacles characterized by the collectivity of the performing crowds; by such requisites as flags, banners and posters; and by a cacophony of speeches, singing and chanting (Aulich 2020: 269–174). What has changed is that the digital realm, and in particular social media, have given the protesters a new sense of presence and visibility. The protests are performed, experienced in the squares and streets and immediately perceived through digital photography: the activists and participants of the street rallies and manifestations stage themselves, often unwittingly, for photographs and videos taken with their own smartphones or by photojournalists. This combination of amateur and professional visual coverage is immediately posted on social media as a personal political declaration, memento, or testimony, as well as a means of enabling those who for various reasons cannot physically attend to engage in the protests.

The Heritage of the “Women’s Rebellion”

The visual identification of the All-Poland Woman’s Strike (Fig. 2) – a white female silhouette (alluding to Marianne, the nineteenth-century personification of republican values) on a black background (the colour of the women’s strike) – was coined in 2016 in a bottom-up initiative of the graphic designer and activist Ola Jasionowska.² The image was shared for free use and download on social media just prior to the date of the first planned demonstration. It was posted by thousands of social media users as profile pictures and/or photos and its pdf format was downloaded and printed in various sizes and used by thousands as banners and flags, either carried during the manifestations or hung from windows and balconies. Jasionowska’s digital personification of the first 2016 women’s strike was soon transformed into the symbol of the whole movement, used by activist organizations and thousands of people in the following months and years. Shared with the global network of women’s organizations and activists, it was also re-used as a symbol of women’s protests organized worldwide, and finally – of the International Women’s Strike (Fig. 3). In the meantime, other young artists and activists designed and shared other digital graphics and symbols of the protests. The 2020/21 demonstrations witnessed a true boom of such initiatives: with tens of artists posting and sharing digital graphics almost every day.³ Again, it was Jasionowska’s work – the red lightning bolt – which gained the status of the most powerful symbol of this second massive wave of protests (Brown 2020).

Of course, not all the symbols and images of the “women’s rebellion” were shared and distributed just in social media. The city streets and squares – arenas of the manifestations and rallies – were the main spaces for shaping the imaginary and visual identity of this movement. Usually this was a spontaneous and sometimes even accidental process. This is exactly the case of the black umbrella, one among



Fig. 2: Ola Jasionowska, *Strajk Kobiet*, digital graphic 2016



Fig. 3: Inspired by Ola Jasionowska, *International Women's Strike*, digital graphic, 2018



Fig. 4: Adam Lach, Black Monday, October 3, 2016, digital photograph, Archiwum Protestów Publicznych

the most powerful symbols of the “women’s rebellion.” While its popularity was explained by important historical⁴ and contemporary connotations,⁵ the truth is much simpler than that. In fact, the 2016 rallies took place during torrents of rain, making the umbrella an obvious tool and attributed to the activists and protesters. The powerful drone pictures of the Warsaw Black Monday rally showing the massive Castle square and the surrounding streets filled with open umbrellas – which were posted in both the Polish and international media – have helped to solidify the object’s iconic meaning (Fig. 4).

Indeed, the digital and physical imagery of protests are interlinked. The motifs of the umbrella and of the metal rack (another real life “women’s rebellion” symbol⁶) were immediately transformed by artists-activists into digital logos and posted by thousands as profile and colour photos. Of course, the inspiration could also go the other way around. The red lightning bolt, a motif in Jasinowska’s digital graphics of 2016 gained its true momentum only five years later (Bryl 2021) (Fig. 5). In view of the fact that



Fig. 5: Paweł Stark, Demonstration on March 8, 2021, digital photograph, Archiwum Protestów Publicznych



Fig. 6: Michał Adamski, Demonstration in Leszno on October 30, 2020, digital photograph, Archiwum Protestów Publicznych

the massive manifestations and rallies took place amid the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic's restrictions, Jasinowska has modified her famous silhouette profile providing it with a red face mask decorated with a lightning bolt. In the following months the logo gained an unexpected shelf-life in the public space. With its simple graphics, clear message, and connotations it lent itself to being copied and remade. Thus, the visual sphere of the 2020 protests was dominated by its creative and very often home-made adaptations: the red lightning bolt was drawn with lipstick on faces and windows; it served as a decoration of facial masks and canvas bags; it was drawn on placards with slogans etc. Jasinowska herself did not expect her logo to have such an impact: "What really surprised me were the protesters who put the logotype onto posters, banners, t-shirts, embroideries" (Batycka 2020) (Fig. 6).

The handmade placards with slogans – the most appealing and captivating element of the 2020 manifestations – is yet another example of a culture of protests unfolding both in the squares and streets and online (Fig. 7). Produced by young people (students,



Fig. 7: Rafał Milach, Demonstration in front of the Ministry of National Education, 2020, digital photograph, Archiwum Protestów Publicznych

teenagers and even young teens) with handwritten slogans springing from the codes, culture and poetics of their own, they form the manifestation of a generational experience in the first instance. Students and teenagers demonstrated in 2020 on a massive scale never seen before and the placards were perceived as a true voice of a group which until then was hardly present in the public space. Raised in the era of the Internet, the Generation Z naturally merged in the slogans their social media slang with quotations from Netflix series, school readings, poetry, professional codes etc. Produced on a daily basis for each demonstration, they engendered competition between the protesters, who hoped their slogans would be noticed and commented on and shared on social media and on broadcasting networks. Of course, the placards were produced with both the streets and the social media as stages of performance in mind. During the days of the protests and manifestations the internet was literally flooded with close-up photographs of the placards deemed most relevant, creative, and witty and with the transcriptions of the slogans.

The weight, scale and importance of the “women’s rebellion” and the ephemeral nature of its heritage have triggered numerous collecting and documenting initiatives. But how does one document and collect a culture and events unfolding at the same time on the streets and in the digital space?

Rapid Response Collecting: The Challenge of Preserving and Documenting the Ephemeral in the Twenty-First Century

The origins of digital heritage preservation and RRC are strongly linked. At the turn of the twenty-first century memory institutions worldwide began to seriously approach the issue of preservation of digital resources. Strategies and programs were created with both governmental and public websites in mind, but the pioneering web-archive was a result of spontaneous collecting projects engendered by a landmark and tragic event: the 9/11 Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the USA.

The 9/11 web-archive was established by the Library of Congress (LC) in the time-frame of just three months.⁷ Documenting the websites of individuals, groups, the press and various institutions, which appeared as an immediate reaction to the shocking events, this collection was supplemented in 2003 by the *September 11 Digital Archive*, consisting of written accounts, e-mails, audio recordings, video clips, photographs, websites and other digital materials.⁸ Gathered within the framework of a documentary project of two research centres specializing in digital history,⁹ this archive was donated to the LC to ensure its protection

and continuation. Indeed, the LC is a pioneer in digital heritage preservation. Since 1994 the LC has – within the framework of the National Digital Library Program – carried out the *American Memory*, a project with the ambitious aim of making available in the public domain millions of books, photographs, archival documents, videos, audio recordings etc.¹⁰ Moreover, in 2000 it established the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIP) in order to archive, provide access to, and preserve digital resources, including those that do not exist in formats other than digital. The 9/11 web-archive was the first collection formed within the framework of the NDIIP. Since the establishment of the Program, the LC has been constantly expanding its digital heritage documentation and preservation agenda to keep pace with the constantly evolving functions and increasing role of the Internet. Its collecting and preservation strategy, however, continues to have a strong focus on the online coverage of and responses to landmark events affecting American and (to a lesser extend) world societies. The events are selected according to the Collection Policy Statements and the Supplemental Guidelines for Web Archiving and comprise, *inter alia*, the U.S. National Elections; the 2002 Olympics; the War in Iraq; and the Hurricanes Catharina and Rita. An important aspect of the LC web-archive – well evidenced already in the 9/11 collections – is its focus on both the objective and official, as well as on the private, subjective, spontaneous and emotional coverage of and responses to the unfolding events. Thus, the LC has committed to document the unofficial spaces of the web and to archive and preserve them following a selective strategy which focuses on important themes and ground-breaking events. An important landmark and confirmation of the LC's strategy was the acquisition of the Twitter archive: in 2010 the microblogging and social networking service donated to the LC the collection of all the public tweets and committed itself to regularly update it (Fondren & McCune 2018). The initial idea of creating a comprehensive archive was, however, quickly abandoned. Already at the date of its acquisition this collection was so large and rapidly expanding that the LC is still struggling to find technical ways and means to ensure access to it. Given this, and the evolving nature of Twitter (the dramatic increase in volume and the shift of content from textual to visual), in 2017 the LC revised its strategy and decided that, from that time on, it will expand its Twitter archive only on selected themes and on an events-based basis.

The 9/11 web-archive was just one among the many collections formed in the framework of the LC in response to the terrorist attacks. In September 2001 literally every department of this institution established a program to document and collect 9/11 materials related to its impact on American society (Nester Kresh 2002). The pictorial documentation was gathered by its Prints and Photography Division; newspaper titles and special issues were documented by its Newspaper

Division; and the American Folklife Centre's ethnographers and folklorists recorded dozens of analogue radio and video interviews across America to document the individual reactions.¹¹ Furthermore, documenting and collecting initiatives were not limited to America's national library, but were undertaken by numerous memory institutions across the country. Within days of the attacks, for example, the New York Historical Society (NYHS) launched the *History Responds* project, focused on "preserving objects related both to those who were lost in the 9/11 attacks and those who struggled to keep their memories alive in the days and months that followed."¹² *History Responds* referred to and was connected with the NYHS's mission: founded in 1804, i.e. in the aftermath of the American Revolution and the British occupation of New York, the NYHS was the first American institution concerned with the collecting of records of American history. What distinguishes this new project from its nineteenth-century predecessors is the focus on individual stories and emotions in the first place. Another important novelty of the 9/11 documenting projects was the inclusion of contemporary means of expression. In particular, the Internet was considered for the first time as an important space where history and social events are documented and commemorated.

The 9/11 collecting and memorializing initiatives marked the real beginning of new documenting, archival, and curatorial practices, and not only at the LC. For example, *History Responds* was transformed into a permanent initiative of the NYHS, aimed at documenting "history as it unfolds". Since its first 9/11 project, it has focused on important social movements and protests taking place in New York: Occupy Wall Street; the 2017 Women's March for Our Lives; the Climate Strike; and the Black Live Matters protests, among others.¹³ At the same time, other museums – both in the US and worldwide – have introduced strategies and plans for documenting and collecting social movements and landmark events. In particular, in 2014 the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) implemented Rapid Response Collecting (RRC) as a new strand of its activity. Since its founding in 1852 the V&A, as an applied arts, decorative arts and design museum, has put particular stress on collecting and promoting contemporary design as an inspiration of its audiences and of the British creative industries. In 2002 the museum established a Contemporary Team to organize collections, exhibitions, events etc. reflecting the main aspects and evolution of contemporary arts and design.¹⁴ The RRC – "a reactive mode of collecting that enables the acquisition and immediate display of designed things that articulate important moments in the recent history of design and manufacturing" – formulated a clarification of this collection strategy. The focus is on single and symptomatic design objects (for example the protest umbrella from the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong; the pussy hat worn at the 2017 Women's march in Washington; the 3D-printed

Extinction Rebellion logotype woodblock, the iPhone6, or the Zano drone) and the strategy provides for the acquisition of just ten to twelve objects yearly.¹⁵ Importantly, the RRC was an initiative of the Contemporary Team's Design, Architecture and Digital Department (DADD), established in 2015 within the framework of the Contemporary Team to best meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, and in particular the challenge of digital design collecting (Kane & Pasternak 2020). Thus, the RRC initiative reflects the extension of the V&A's mission in the twenty-first century. Moreover, it links twenty-first century global movements and protests with the development of art and design. According to the RRC's definition "objects have been newsworthy either because they advance what design can do, or because they reveal truths about how we live."¹⁶

Interestingly, the definition of RRC was coined within the framework of the V&A's focus on art and design collecting. In fact, an important category of actors involved in RRC are contemporary art museums, galleries, and artists' collectives (Debono 2021). As argued above, the global movements and landmark events have developed their own aesthetics of protests as a peculiar visual, sonic and performative identity. Moreover, artists are important actors of the protests, involved both as activists and as documenting observers. Thus, while the focus of such RRC projects is on socially engaged culture, they should be framed as yet another form of civic activism (ex. Ho & Ting 2019).

Although the RRC is a deliberate strategy corresponding to the V&A mission and collection focused expressively on design's history and future, its name is nowadays generally used to define projects aimed at documenting and collecting all aspects of contemporary social movements, protests, and ground-breaking events (Debono 2021). An important milestone in the development and wider spreading of RRC has been the recent Sars-Cov-2 global pandemic, which has motivated memory institutions worldwide to embark, often for the first time, in these kinds of initiatives and projects (Mubarek 2021; Debono 2021). Carried out as a combination of curatorial practices and crowdsourcing, these projects are aimed at documenting local, national, and/or global experiences fitting within their mission and collecting strategies. Global movements and protests taking place during the time of the pandemic are, of course, an important focus of these initiatives. For example, the NYHS's *History Responds* Covid-19 pandemic initiative focused on, among other things, handmade signs, placards, flyers, and artworks of the protests' participants. Another example comes from the House of European History (HEH), which under the working title of *Documenting Covid* embarked on a project of collecting evidence of life in Europe during the pandemic. As the focus was on phenomena, solidarity, and community building, the collection welcomed, *inter alia*, objects related to the protests against the limitations on fundamental human rights, for example the umbrella used in the

2020 during the protests against the anti-abortion law in Poland.¹⁷ The HEH has also conducted a survey on and served as a platform for local initiatives of the kind undertaken by museums in the EU. Featuring twenty-one projects undertaken across Europe, the platform reflects the variety of museums involved (city, contemporary art, ethnographic and anthropological, open air, historical, national, post and telecommunication etc.) and their different focuses and strategies (photography, oral history, objects etc.).

The 2020/21 “women’s rebellion” was not the first massive protest movement in Poland’s twenty-first century history. It was preceded by, among others, a series of large demonstrations organized nation-wide in Poland in defence of democracy, independence of the judiciary, a free media, and fundamental human rights (Karolewski 2016). Furthermore, as already noted the anti-abortion strikes and demonstrations have been organized since 2016. Only the 2020/21 protests, however, have engendered the first Polish RRC initiatives. Indeed, the year 2020, just like elsewhere in the world, has sparked spontaneous collecting initiatives focused on the time of pandemics, thus popularizing the RRC objectives. Furthermore, the “women’s rebellion” was the first social movement in twenty first century Poland to feature such a widespread and popular involvement of both artists and activists, and the first one strongly characterized by a peculiar and appealing aesthetics and performance. Last but not least, the unprecedented scale of the protests and the massive involvement of the younger generation caused them to be widely perceived as landmark events.

The “Women’s Rebellion” RRC Projects

At the time of the outbreak of the “women’s rebellion” no institution in Poland was committed to document contemporary landmark events and neither has elaborated even preliminary RRC principles and methods. Thus, the “women’s rebellion” collecting and documenting projects should be considered as the first major Polish attempt at facing fundamental issues of ephemeral and digital heritage collecting, documentation, and preservation. Depending on their goals and objectives, the projects can be divided into three groups.

The first group – undertaken independently during the first days of the protests by municipal museums – the Museum of Gdansk (MG) and the Museum of Krakow (MK) – focused on the “women’s rebellion” as an urban phenomenon. Although both ventures were spontaneous, they were linked to the institutions’ respective traditions, missions, and current projects. The MG’s *Memorabilia of the Women’s Strike*¹⁸ was a pilot project of *The Donor of the Museum of Gdansk*, a longstanding initiative just launched on the occasion of the institution’s fifty-year jubilee. The MK project was part of a larger collecting initiative launched in May

2020 with the aim of documenting Krakow's everyday life during the pandemic.¹⁹ Importantly, both projects should be framed in the first place as an attempt to establish new links between the institution and the citizens and communities they served. Both were announced on the institutions' social media, appealed to the citizens to get involved, and relied mainly on donated objects.

Unlike the U.S. initiatives discussed above, the MK's and MG's projects did not engender new strategies, guidelines, and missions aimed at adapting the museums to meet the challenges of collecting and documenting the landmark events of the twenty-first century and the contemporary heritage "in the making". Both museums limited themselves to linking the new projects with their institutional history, tradition, and mission. The MG stressed, in general terms, its role as a repository of knowledge about the past, and the MK underlined that its mission was to "describe, document and narrate Krakow" and referred "not only to what has happened in the past, but also to what is happening here and now."²⁰ Both museums recognized the protests as events worthy of documenting and collecting. The MK, for example, has underlined that "important and significant things are happening which will be permanently inscribed in the history of our city. This includes all the discussions, strikes, and actions that have followed the decisions of the Constitutional Tribunal."²¹ In this context it is important to analyse the language used by both institutions to address their projects to citizens and communities. The MG referred to an outdated nineteenth-century cultural heritage and museum "slang" that is still widely used in the Polish cultural heritage sector: the museum as a "repository of knowledge for future generations"; and the heritage of the "women's rebellion" is defined as "memorabilia" and the citizens and communities are considered as "donors". The MK adopted a different strategy by using the convention of social media posts. Thus, its Facebook appeal to the citizens of Krakow is direct and involving. The MK is described as "we" ("we document, we listen, we collect") and the citizens as "you" ("But it will not happen without you! You can send us your photos, films, but above all - leave us your banners!") This change with respect to the previously official language of communication is, however, superficial. It is more an emanation of the growing role of social media as a space of communication than a shift in the MK's mission and strategy.

One of the greatest unaddressed challenges of both projects referred to born digital heritage. Approximately 70% of the donations to the MK (and ca. 90% of those related to the "women's rebellion") were in the digital format – mainly smartphone photographs and videos. Similarly, the outcome of the MG's project included both material (posters, handmade placards, bags, face masks, pins, art works etc.) and digital (photographs and videos) objects. The status of the approximately two hundred digital photographs (constituting two thirds of the

donated objects) is a major challenge for the MG's curators, as digital heritage is still not defined in Polish museum legislation (Murzyn & Pokojska 2018). Thus, digital objects cannot be included in the museum's inventory. Furthermore, the Polish memory institutions have not elaborated yet any strategies and solutions referring to the preservation of born digital heritage, its collecting and assessment.

While the MG's project was conceived as a collection-building initiative, the MK aimed in the first instance to organize a temporary exhibition. Inaugurated on the first of July 2021, the *Coexistence* [*Współistnienie*] was publicized as the first fully participatory exhibition, built not on the museum collections but on the contribution of those citizens who, by means of words and images, expressed their feelings and emotions about the pandemic.²² Conceived as a narrative exhibition in which the story of the pandemic unfolds through a mix of material exhibits and interactive multimedia, the *Coexistence* relies on the digital format and on multimedia. The videos, digital reportage interviews with the donors, and photographs are shown on multimedia panels. Moreover, among the digital exhibits there are two soundtracks composed and performed especially for the show, which can be listened to on the visitors' smartphones. Indeed, the narrative multimedia exhibition is already well-established in Polish museum culture. Since the 2004 inauguration of the Warsaw Uprising Museum, narrative exhibitions – distinguished by an appealing and interactive methodology of display (based on multimedia and interactive scenography) which is distinct from the traditional object-centred museum – have become a hallmark feature of the Polish museum landscape (Jakubowski & Manikowska 2021). Still, from the legal and practical points of view the digital dimension of narrative museums and exhibitions is not considered as heritage, i.e., as an element of the museum collection which must be preserved (Jakubowski & Jagielska-Burduk 2020). Thus, the future of the MK's pandemic collection is unclear. One can even conjecture that once the exhibition is over, it might be dispersed.

The second group of projects related to the “women's rebellion” focuses on the aesthetics and performativity of the 2020/21 protests. The Foundation Barrack of Culture [*Barak Kultury*] in Poznan has launched a collecting initiative of the placards with slogans used by the Poznan activists and protesters (Przybylska 2020). The items were acquired by the project's curators during the manifestations as a result of donations. The aim of this project was to display the placards in the front window of the Foundation's seat in a kind of street gallery show. Such an exhibition was considered to be a way of documenting and preserving the physical traces of the protests. It was framed as a manifestation of “the carnival of freedom”, “an important chapter in the history of Polish counter-culture” with traditions going back to the 1950s.

The “women’s rebellion” has also inspired several exhibition projects staged by contemporary art galleries. The *Galeria Labirynt*, a cultural institution of the city of Lublin, in December 2020 inaugurated – amidst the ongoing protests – an exhibition with its title inspired by one of the main slogans of the protests: *You will never walk alone* [*Nigdy nie będziesz szła sama*].²³ Consisting of installations of placards with slogans and of digital screenings showing the performativity and aesthetics of the manifestations, the exhibition was staged in collaboration with the “women’s rebellion” activists. It was conceived on the one hand as a manifesto of solidarity, and on the other as a documentary project. As a cultural institution focused on contemporary art and with the documentation of contemporary artistic life inscribed in its mission, the *Galeria Labirynt* has know-how with respect to the collecting practices of ongoing cultural phenomena. Thus, the curators used the exhibition as an opportunity to encourage donations of photographs, videos, and objects illustrating the culture of protests and ensured that all the objects would find a place in the gallery’s archive.

The third group of projects was documentary in nature and used the Internet as an important documentation and exhibition space. The *Archiwum Protestów Publicznych* [the Archive of Public Protests, APP], an online initiative launched by a cooperative of professional photographers at the turn of 2020/21, was conceived as an online non-profit repository of visual (mainly photographic) documentation of all grassroots protests ongoing in Poland since 2016.²⁴ Defined as a “warning against rising populism and discrimination in its broadest sense: xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny and climate catastrophe”, the APP is framed as an activist project.²⁵ The online archive gathers digital photographs of the “women’s rebellion” and of all protests and manifestation organized in Poland in defence of fundamental human rights.

The webdoc *Women. Revolution. Words 2020* [*Kobiety. Rewolucja. Słowa 2020*] was an initiative of the House of Words, a branch of the Grodzka Gate – the NN Theatre Centre in Lublin (Theatre NN).²⁶ This mission of this cultural institution – founded in 1998 on the basis of an alternative theatre – is to “tell the story/ies” of the city through theatrical performance, exhibitions, education, community-based projects etc. In particular, the Theatre NN has implemented important and innovative commemoration projects and educational and research initiatives focused on the Jewish heritage of Lublin and on the Holocaust: a memory route, literary festivals, or the mysteries of memory. Furthermore, the Theatre NN is a pioneer in applying digitization and ICT to heritage education, documentation and preservation. The digital sphere is particularly important in the activity of its House of Words branch, whose programme – built around the meaning of words in culture and society – focuses on the written word, storytelling, the printed word, the socially engaged word, and freedom of

speech.²⁷ The webdoc – a multimedia reportage exploiting all multimedia tools (photography, video, audio) and an important format of digital story telling – is particularly fit for the House of Words’ storytelling projects. Among other things it has been used to document the history of the people, events and places of the Żmigród street, the address of the House of Words headquarters, and to document the stories related to the tree growing on the main square of Lublin. The webdoc has also resulted a format fit for RRC projects. Between 2020 and 2021 the House of Words launched its first initiatives of this kind: two webdocs; one documenting the pandemic and the other documenting the “women’s rebellion.” The webdoc *Women. Revolution. Words. 2020* consists of the following sections – Photo Stories, Words of the Revolution (a lexicon of the protest slogans), and My Protest (individual impressions and reflections of the protest participants), protest poetry and prose, protest music, interviews, memes and collages, protest posters, protest comics, protest performances and exhibitions – which have a clear connection to the institutional mission and a clear vision for its future development. Inscribed in the two main areas of the House of Words’ activity (the socially engaged word and freedom of speech) the webdoc was also designed as an important element of its programmes, workshops, and other initiatives dedicated to the values of freedom and democracy. Indeed, the *Women. Revolution. Words 2020* is a ground-breaking and innovative example of the digital documentation of contemporary heritage and phenomena. Importantly however, the House of Words has equally acknowledged the importance of forming a tangible documentation of the “women’s rebellion.” In collaboration with the Galeria Labirynt it will stage the artefacts from the *You will never walk alone* show within the framework of its permanent exhibition dedicated to the power of the free word.

The “women’s rebellion” RRC projects have been undertaken by civic museums, cultural institutions, NGOs, contemporary art galleries and artists’ collectives. However, there has not been any similar initiative by any national memory institution. Neither the National Library, nor any of the several national museums, nor the Museum of Contemporary Art has embarked on a project aimed at collecting, documenting and preserving the 2020/21 protests. This is striking because the “women’s rebellion” is widely regarded as a landmark event for the whole state and nation. Indeed, as already mentioned, the lack of even preliminary principles and methods of RRC has meant that many institutions were simply unprepared to embark in such projects. Furthermore, it should be stressed that due to the anti-government nature of the protests, public institutions may also have feared possible financial and personal repercussions. The last-minute cancellation of the exhibition *The Gravity of the Situation [Powaga sytuacji]* is a telling example of the political pressure experienced by public cultural and memory institutions in contemporary Poland. Conceived as a highlight of the 2021 edition

of the Krakow Photomonth Festival, one of the largest contemporary art cyclical events in Poland, the exhibition was to be staged in the CRICOTECA and aimed at framing the “women’s rebellion” in the history of Polish counter-culture and socially engaged art.²⁸ The show, however, was cancelled and never inaugurated following a last-minute censorship of the venue’s director, who demanded the removal of the politically engaged works inspired by the 2020 manifestations (Theus 2021). Tellingly, the CRICOTECA is an institution whose mission is to preserve and promote the heritage of Tadeusz Kantor, a world-renowned Polish happening and socially engaged artist.

Conclusions

Michał Marcinkowski, mentioned at the beginning of this article, was truly surprised that his digital poster made its presence known not only in the social media but also in the physical public space. His decision to donate the tangible “surrogates” of his digital work was not dictated only by the legal and institutional constraints affecting the collecting of digital heritage in Poland. Arguably, it sprang from his conviction of the inseparability of these two social, cultural, and artistic spaces. The example of Marcinkowski’s posters can be inscribed in the recent discussions around digital heritage, art and culture, such as the emerging concept of “phygital” heritage which seek to define the material qualities of digital “artefacts” (Avantis and Zuanni 2021; Meehan 2020); or the theories of “post-digital” art and culture (Alexenberg 2011). Importantly, such influential theories springing from the distinctive features of the digital realm influence nowadays the practice of memory and cultural institutions. Thus, for example, a museum is often defined as a container and its collection – as content. Such new words and definitions, increasingly used in the museum “slang”, are nowadays deeply affecting not only museum theory but also institutional practice. For example, the intersections between the digital and material and the tangible and intangible aspects of digital heritage have been recently stressed in the V&A 2019 Collecting Strategy:

Digital design works across both the physical and digital domain and intersects with other forms of design. (...) DAD’s digital design collection will work to make the intangible and immaterial (that which we cannot immediately touch or see) tangible through objects that show evidence of, or make present, the existence of a digitally enabled and mediated world. This may be through collecting the work of artists and speculative designers that give rise to challenges concerning digital design or collecting user-generated design.²⁹

Marcinkowski's poster and the projects which are the focus of this article reveal, however, a different aspect of digital heritage preservation: its inseparability from the wider context of cultural heritage and its institutionalisation in all its tangible and intangible, official and unofficial, dimensions. Although the RRC "women's rebellion" projects were based on intuitive methods and criteria, they did not distinguish between the tangible and digital heritage of the protests. Furthermore, they all sought to embed such heritage and its collecting and documenting in well-established institutional, social, or artistic traditions. The municipal museums appealed to their civic and participatory roots and collections built around the city and its citizens. The contemporary art galleries, artistic collectives and cultural institutions – to the twentieth-century tradition of Polish politically engaged art and to the vanguard tools of its documenting and collecting. Thus, the 2020/21 placard slogans are framed both as an expression of the peculiar culture of Generation Z and the new incarnation of a well-established culture of rebellion. The House of Words web-docs is both an innovative documenting and collecting practice and a continuation of the Theatre NN's vanguard projects.

Indeed, the Polish RRC projects discussed in this article confirm the complex and polyphonic nature of digital heritage and the urgent need to incorporate its definition, and issues relevant to its preservation, into the policy and practice of memory institutions. But at the same time, they clearly demonstrate the need to integrate and interrelate digital heritage within a wider pre-existing context of cultural heritage preservation and institutionalisation. This is exactly what is at the roots of the ground-breaking RRC projects and strategies discussed in this article. The V&A's "Rapid Response Collecting", the New York Historical Society's *History Responds* or the LC's web-archive are inscribed in the institutional mission, which goes back to the nineteenth century and strictly connected with the institution's pre-existing departments and collections.

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² Alfabet Buntu. Ola Jasinowska [The Alphabet of Rebellion: Ola Jasinowska], <https://archiwumosiatoryn-skiego.pl/alfabet-buntu/ola-jasionowska/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

³ Plakaty na Strajk Kobiet do pobrania. Tak twórcy wspierają walkę o prawa kobiet [Downloadable Women's Strike's Posters. This is how Artsits Support the Fight for Women's Rights], Polska Times 3rd November 2020, <https://polskatimes.pl/plakaty-na-strajk-kobiet-do-pobrania-tak-tworcy-wspieraja-walke-o-prawa-kobiet-najlepsze-plakaty-na-protest/ar/c6-15256378> (Accessed 10/7/21).

⁴ Back in 1918, during the protests for women's voting rights, Polish suffragists were knocking with umbrellas on the door of Poland's Chief of State, Józef Piłsudski.

⁵ The Hong Kong Umbrella movement.

⁶ Another important real life "women's rebellion" symbol alluding to an illegal abortion tool.

⁷ See: <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/0110/911archive.html> (Accessed 10/7/21).

⁸ The September 11 Digital Archive is available at: <https://911digitalarchive.org/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

⁹ The City University of New York Graduate Centre's American Social History Project with the George Mason University's Center for History and New Media.

¹⁰ See: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html> (Accessed 10/7/21).

¹¹ Library Accepts September 11 Digital Archive, Holds Symposium. <https://www.loc.gov/item/prn-03-142/library-accepts-september-11-digital-archive-holds-symposium/2003-08-15/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

¹² Available at: <https://www.nyhistory.org/september-11-collection> (Accessed 10/7/21).

¹³ See: <https://www.nyhistory.org/history-responds> (Accessed 10/7/21).

¹⁴ V&A Collection Development Policy, April 2010, 63. <http://media.vam.ac.uk/media/documents/about-us/2010/v&a-collections-development-policy.pdf> (Accessed 10/7/21).

¹⁵ For an overview of the RRC collection, see: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/rapid-response-collecting>.

¹⁶ <https://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/rapid-response-collecting> (Accessed 10/7/21).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Pamiątki ze Strajku Kobiet (protestów I kontrprotestów) [Memorabilia of the Women's Strike (of the protests / counterprotests)], see: <https://hi-in.facebook.com/muzeumkrakowa/posts/10158044770123495/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

¹⁹ See: <https://muzeumkrakowa.pl/aktualnosci/opowiedz-z-nami-o-czasie-pandemii> (Accessed 10/7/21).

²⁰ See: <https://hi-in.facebook.com/muzeumkrakowa/posts/10158044770123495/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

²¹ See: <https://hi-in.facebook.com/muzeumkrakowa/posts/10158044770123495/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

²² „Współistnienie” – pierwsza taka wystawa [„Coexistence” – the First Exhibition of its Kind], <https://podgorze.pl/wspolistnienie-pierwsza-taka-wystawa/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

²³ See: <http://labirynt.com/2020/12/15/nigdy-nie-bedziesz-szla-sama/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

²⁴ See: <https://archiwumprotestow.pl/pl/strona-glowna/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

²⁵ See: <https://archiwumprotestow.pl/pl/strona-glowna/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

²⁶ See: <https://teatrnn.pl/opowiadanie-swiata/kobiety-rewolucja-slowa-202/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

²⁷ See: <https://teatrnn.pl/domslow/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

²⁸ See: <https://photomonth.com/pl/powaga-sytuacji/> (Accessed 10/7/21).

²⁹ See: <https://vanda-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/2019/08/05/10/18/38/9432e948-aede-479a-bdee-3cb18be965c2/2019%20Collections%20Development%20Policy.pdf>, 13 (Accessed 10/7/21).

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