

Title: “Recycling the German Ghosts. Resettlement Cultures in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia after 1945 (SPECTRAL RECYCLING)”

Summary:

Ghosts are often presented as the spirits of the dead haunting the living. But what if we understood them as material remains, bringing to light overlooked past and enabling us to grasp the experience of the otherness? I propose such an approach in research on displacement, on territories previously inhabited by one culture but after a forced migration resettled by another one. The displacement comprises expulsion and resettlement. While the former is well-researched, much of the latter remains understudied: especially the settlers’ experiences with things previous inhabitants had left behind. Things act as “ghosts” of previous culture and force settlers to interact with the “spectral” presence of the expellees. Hence, I will operationalize the category of “post-displacement” as a form of afterlife, based on archival records and fieldwork, in 3 regions in Slavic Central Europe where the traces of previous German cultures remained visible, regardless of the efforts to remove them. With hauntology as the proposed research framework and introduction of the category of recycling, I will establish a novel approach in research on the post-displacement regions.

Hauntology, a spectral theory of being, shows how the present is pervaded by the past and enables us to engage with unresolved questions, becoming a tool to investigate unexplained phenomena.

Recycling is a mechanism of reintroducing the things that were left by expellees into the life of the settlers. My approach will bring fresh insights into everyday life in the post-displacement regions by providing a more nuanced and coherent understanding of forced migration processes and their continuous reinterpretations in different political and ideological regimes. In understanding what post-displacement things are and the attitude of people towards them, the project presents a showcase study of what we can learn about the emergence of new cultures from the experiences of Central Europe.