

The idea to look backwards at the past which determines our present moment and the ways we imagine and shape our futures is challenging yet hopeful in that it seeks to undo the existent legacies by opening up the past, disrupting the collective narrative and offering a different one. This disruption is possible owing to the potential of the analysis of the biblical parable of the Lot's wife. Who was she? Why did she look back unlike the rest of her fleeing family? Why was she turned into a pillar of salt rather than annihilated? How does a secular reading of this story today differ from a religious one, and what actually are the religious interpretations out there? If she could be considered too curious, too attached to her mundane life, too stupid to understand the power of revelation – as some might say, the question is can her curiosity, attachment and refusal to understand (and accept) be treated today as powerful act of resistance to power, to destruction, to patriarchy? What are the benefits of such thinking? Can Lot's wife be claimed the foremother of what could be framed as the feminist memory? Can we think of her as a paradigmatic witness, a person who wants to see in spite of all, and when struck by the powerful image of violence and destruction (of Sodom and Gomorrah) she is mortified, yet does not disappear, but instead – in an act of resilience – she is turned into a monument to her own act, an act of witnessing and at the same time an act of lamentation and mourning (based on a straightforward association of salt and tears).

The project offers a very contemporary reading of a very ancient protagonist and narrative, it also asks a question why such a powerful figure was absent from critical reflection on memory, femininity and trauma (beside several examples referred to in the project). Developed in the field of visual culture and memory studies the project concentrates on the backward looking (a physical and metaphorical movement) as the most explicit visual marker of relating to what is behind (past) but also of curiosity, attachment or longing. In order to better understand the workings of cultural memory and the conceptualization of gendered historicity, the project looks at other figures important for the cultural history and philosophical thought in relation to the questions of power relations, history, memory, death, destruction and resilience: Antigone, Eurydice and Angelus Novus. By offering this perspective the project hopes to provide a new theory of memory practice or “philosophy of history” which combines theoretical reflection with critical analysis of works of art and literature. The latter serve here as acts of backward looking, or artistic witnessing which finds its new conceptualization in the framework proposed by the researcher.

The project is inspired by the works of Ariella Azoulay, Susan Buck-Morss, Marianne Hirsch and Mieke Bal or Ewa Domańska among many others devoted on the one hand to the study of images and visual culture and on the other to the workings of public and cultural memory or even to rewriting history. It believes in and hopes to contribute to engaged, self-reflective work in the humanities in and outside of the academia.