

SUMMARY

THE HISTORY OF THE POSED ONE: JUSTINAS MIKUTIS

The book reconstructs the portrait of a personality from the behind-the-scenes of silent modernism culture. Justinas Mikutis (1922-1988) was an intellectual, thinker, literary critic, art theorist, political exile, and a man of tragic fate, who expressed himself freely in an oppressed Soviet society. His life was a tragic aberration of the time. Displaced from his life's path and returning from exile, he chose a mode of existence closest to him in the cultural backstage, becoming a marginal yet important actor in cultural life. He was and remains a figure of the margins of modern Lithuanian culture – working behind the official scenes to create spaces of unusual intensity that liberated both himself and others. Even his pseudonym, *Pelys* (“Mouse”), reflects not only his image as a bookworm but also his role as a vibrant figure of cultural recesses and peripheries, profoundly influencing the worldview of individual groups of artists.

The monograph reveals the existential paradox of an intellectual of Vytautas Mačernis's generation, highlighting the distortions of a bygone era. After returning from Siberian exile, Mikutis intermittently worked as an artist's model at the Lithuanian SSR State Art Institute and the Vilnius Children's Art School. However, even in this role, he was no ordinary model: through his distinctive existential stance and wandering lifestyle, he embodied a nonconformist attitude. Engaging with young artists, he sought to broaden their worldview, drawing them into processes of authentic thought through poetic and philosophical discourse.

Entering the backstage of cultural and artistic life as a model, Mikutis became a prominent figure within the community of rebellious creators and dissenters. He turned the circumstances of his life toward informal activities, taking on moral commitments to educate and liberate the artists around him. His “legend” was shaped both by the generations of artists who interacted with him, listened to his profound, unconventional reflections freed from stereotypes, and by Mikutis himself, who embraced the role of a wandering sage.

This monograph is dedicated to reconstructing the portrait of Mikutis as an enigmatic figure of the cultural backstage, focusing on the core of his worldview and his cultural contributions during the Soviet regime in the circle of rebellious artists. It also seeks to unveil his intellectual map, exploring how

Mikutis's “legend” emerged, the sociocultural context that shaped it, and its broader significance.

The study draws on political and cultural anthropology to examine Mikutis's mode of existence in Soviet-era culture, exploring his symbolic behaviour, speech codes, and the practice of living philosophy as a quiet form of *everyday resistance*. To characterize Mikutis's stance, the concept of everyday resistance developed by political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott proved particularly apt, as it emphasizes the “unheroic” actors of such resistance. This form of resistance, rooted in everyday life, manifests through a way of living that offers its own unique *infrapolitics*. By fostering sensitivity to humanity, providing meaningful guidance, and encouraging self-awareness, Mikutis created alternative spaces for dialogue and thought within informal communities of silent modernism. In these spaces, he shared “hidden transcripts” – alternative discourses that challenged the dominant narratives.

Resistance rooted in everyday life is not merely a practice but also a lifestyle that dynamically interacts with power. This book approaches Mikutis's life and his cultivated “infrapolitics” through the lens of resistance studies, viewing it as a form of opposition that was partly conscious and partly unconscious. Such a perspective highlights Mikutis's nonconformist cultural stance, behaviour, and practices as a morally engaged struggle for freedom – not only for Lithuania's independence but also for the spiritual freedom foundational to human dignity.

The monograph is divided into five parts. The first part, applying Scott's theoretical model, explores the intertwined stories of two models and political exiles – Kazimieras Skebėra and Justinas Mikutis. It reveals their extraordinary existential stance, cultural engagement, and behaviour, focusing on Mikutis's integration into the Art Institute environment and the informal artistic milieu. It also sketches his lived experience as an “existential thinker” embedded in the fabric of everyday life.

The second part maps Mikutis's intellectual landscape, examining the ideas that shaped his worldview. It begins with the philosophical tradition that developed in interwar Lithuania, tracing connections to existentialist thinkers at Vytautas Magnus University such as Antanas Maceina, Juozas Girnius, and Lev Karsavin. It draws parallels with the rebellious, *de profundis* philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard-inspired Lev Shestov and explores Mikutis's ties to the Žemėninkai poets, emphasizing his deeply rooted sense of nature and existential awareness derived from his native Samogitia (Žemaitija).

The third part is exclusively dedicated to analysing and interpreting Mikutis's authentic thinking. Using archival materials and manuscripts, it identifies two elements of his Christian-poetic worldview as articulated by Mikutis him-

self. It delves into the Christian foundations of his thought, closely linked to Kierkegaard's religious philosophy and the works of Christian writers such as François Mauriac and Graham Greene. It highlights Mikutis's tendency toward paradox and double reflection, his tension-filled and branching thought processes, and the significance of his spoken philosophy. The section also examines the lived poetic experience, particularly the engagement with the poetry of Georg Trakl and Friedrich Hölderlin, which merged with the philosophy of creation, literary and art criticism.

The fourth chapter connects Mikutis's stance to his experiences of exile and the scars of labour camps, which awakened his existential thinking. It reconstructs his relationships with fellow exiles, including those he maintained contact with after amnesty. Special attention is given to his friendship with the Russian poet and translator Konstantin Bogatyryov, whose home in Moscow served as a gathering place for thought-dissidents. Through correspondence, the shared spiritual tensions, existential quests, and literary exchanges among former exiles are reconstructed.

The fifth chapter explores the dissemination of Mikutis's living philosophy within the margins of silent modernism, encompassing his informal pedagogical practices and unique theory of creativity. Testimonies from witnesses of the cultural life of that era reconstruct Mikutis's role on the periphery of modern culture and the art scene.

Mikutis was introduced to the post-war generation of artists by Vincas Kisarauskas. Among the artists close to this circle were Saulė Kisarauskienė, Antanas Kmieliauskas, Valentinas Antanavičius, Vladas Vildžiūnas, Marija Ladigaitė-Vildžiūnienė, Alfonsas Ambraziūnas, Algimantas Stankevičius-Stankus, Juozas Miliūnas, Napoleonas Gučas, Igoris Piekuras, Marija Teresė Rožanskaitė, Vytautas Šerys, Birutė Žilytė, Algirdas Steponavičius, Rimtautas Gibavičius, Vytautas Užpalis, and others.

The second generation of artists, introduced to Mikutis by Arvydas Šaltenis, found him a frequent visitor to exhibitions by Art Academy students and a lively participant in discussions held in the studios of Antanas Martinaitis, Povilas Ričardas Vaitiekūnas, Petras Repšys, Šarūnas Šimulynas, Leonardas Gutauskas, and Algimantas Švėgžda, where he expanded and deepened his intellectual exchanges.

The third generation, who referred to Mikutis as a Teacher, included Vaidotas Žukas, Algimanta Stankutė, Arūnas Vaitkūnas, Eugenijus Varkulevičius, Eglė Velaniškytė, Jonas Maldžiūnas, Audronė Petrašiūnaitė, and Audrius Naujokaitis. Mikutis became an inseparable part of the bohemian lifestyle and a legendary figure of the wandering philosopher, whose deep metaphysical re-

flections, poetic experiences, and evaluations of art and history opened up a vast field for creative exploration. Despite his significant influence, the invisible traces of Mikutis's cultural presence and authentic thinking in modern creative work remain elusive. Nor can his way of life – marked by both imperfections and moments of grandeur – be easily defined as a form of silent resistance.

The aim of this book is not to solve the enigma of his obscure personality but to grasp how his life and thinking integrated into the creative world. Through archival documentation, the book attempts to uncover the intentions and mindset of this wandering sage, while personal recollections and testimonies reveal how he was perceived and what marks he left on the deeper layers of culture. Thus, the monograph seeks to demonstrate the coherence and significance of Mikutis's being and thought in the history of culture and cultural resistance.

In conclusion, Mikutis's resistance, as an unarticulated, invisible form of opposition by a thwarted literary scholar and broken individual, manifested as a quiet reinforcement of self-awareness through confrontation. He fostered networks of mutual understanding among artists, forming informal communities. This silent resistance asserted itself in the realm of thought, offering alternatives within the domain of worldviews. These shifts in perspective and imagination stirred existential and moral awakenings that cannot be precisely measured.

Through his nomadic lifestyle and philosophical reflections, Mikutis practiced philosophy in both thought and action. By immersing himself in groups of rebellious artists engaged in existential defence, he created environments conducive to free thought, enhancing subjectivity and broadening horizons. A master of authentic dialogue, he offered "alternative transcripts" – spoken discourses that spread through living relationships. These served to liberate thought and creativity from the ideological concepts imposed by external forces.