



## VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS | RESEARCH ARTICLE

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\*Corresponding author: Jūratė Baranova, Department for Continental Philosophy and Religious Studies, Vilnius University, Universiteto St.9/1, Vilnius, LT 01513, Lithuania  
E-mail: [jurabara@gmail.com](mailto:jurabara@gmail.com)

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# Deleuzian/Guattarian cartographies: Art outside galleries in new Vilnius map

Jūratė Baranova<sup>1\*</sup>

**Abstract:** The task of this paper is to draw the possible new trajectories of the narrative concerning the map of Vilnius of the generation who lived in the Vilnius after Independence (from 1991). The article tries to discern traces of the possible *post-modern Vilnius*. The main focus is concentrated to Guattarian idea about ecological and therapeutic social functions of art promoting *art outside galleries* which takes place in Vilnius map. The author concludes that taking the example of contemporary Lithuanian artist Gitenis Umbrasas (b.1961) projects of art one can see striking similarities and parallelism with Guattarian idea. As a methodological approach is used the idea of cartographies discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

**Subjects:** Art & Visual Culture; Performance Theory; Practice and Practitioners; Visual Arts; Philosophy

**Keywords:** art outside galleries; Guattari; Umbrasas; Vilnius

### 1. Introduction

Vilnius is the Lithuania's capital and its largest city (population 550,000). Officially established in the fourteenth century (but likely dating to an earlier era), this city is well-known for its massive UNESCO-inscribed Medieval old town. As usual all reflections about Vilnius take their origin in the history of the city. As concluded Tomas Venclova (2011) there are three different narratives about the



Jūratė Baranova

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jūratė Baranova (official surname Rubavičienė, pen name Ana Audicka) is a Professor in the Department for Continental Philosophy and Religious Studies at the Vilnius University. She has published the following books in Lithuanian: *twentieth Century Moral Philosophy: a Conversation with Kant* (2004, 2015), *Philosophy and Literature: Contradictions, Parallels and Intersections* (2006), *Nietzsche and Postmodernism* (2007), *Cinema and Philosophy* (with co-authors, 2012), *The Phenomenon of Jurga Ivanauskaitė: Between Surrealism and Existentialism* (2014). She has also edited and published books in English, amongst them: *Between Visual and Literary Creation: Tarkovsky and Ivanauskaitė* (2015), *Lithuanian Philosophy: Persons and Ideas* (2000), *Contemporary Philosophical Discourse in Lithuania* (2005), and with co-authors: *Rhythm and Refrain: In Between Philosophy and Arts* (2016). She has written two books of essays: *Meditations: Texts and Images* (2004) and *The Fear of Being Drawned* (2009). She is a member of the Lithuanian Writers' Union.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

How it is possible to trace in the city signs of philosophy? Can the artist contribute in creating some conceptual aspects of the city he loves or lives in? The article "Deleuzian/Guattarian Cartographies: Art Outside Galleries in New Vilnius Map" suggests a positive answer and takes the example of the contemporary artist Gitenis Umbrasas (b.1961) and his inventions in Vilnius (the capital of Lithuania). These inventions look like the examples of Félix Guattari's active stance as regards the mission of the arts. On the other hand, they are inventions by the artist himself without contributions from any philosophers. For lovers of "art outside galleries" who at some time intend to visit Vilnius we suggest they just follow the route of Umbrasas's bio and the ecological art inclusions on the new Vilnius map. They are described in this article. Unofficially.

historical side of the town: Lithuanian, Polish and Belarusian. They negate each other and clash. There is also the narrative of the people who are missing: the narrative of the Jews who consisted almost the half of the population before the Second World War and almost disappeared after the war. Czeslaw Milosz (2012) tells his own story of Polish Vilnius between the two wars: this time coincides with his youth: he studied here. Tomas Venclova (2011) tells his own story of Soviet Vilnius: starting from the first days after the Second World War until his emigration in 1977. The task of this paper is to draw the possible new trajectories of the narrative concerning the map of Vilnius of the following generation: the ones who half of their lives lived in the Vilnius after Independence (from 1991). Two questions would be asked: (1) How is possible the narrative about the *postmodern Vilnius* and what it is about? (2) How the Guattarian idea about the *art outside galleries* takes place in Vilnius map as the examples of Gitenis Umbrasas projects of art. As a methodological approach is used the idea of cartographies discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

## 2. The catalytic power of art: Gitenis Umbrasas' projects

Deleuze and Guattari oppose the aesthetics of “art for art’s sake.” Art for them is always in life, for life and because of life. They look at art as the refrain of life, as notices Stephen Zepke (Deleuze & the Production of the New, 2008, pp. 33–44). The art can be connected with something which is non-art. Therefore, this methodology leads to the possible justification of the new forms of art, connected with life: bio-art, electronic art, commercial art and art methodologies, which enact a live process in the world. As an example of such a new type of art, Stephen Zepke describes the performance of the American artist Adrian Piper, who in her work *Catalysis IV* (1970) involved her travelling on a bus, the subway and the Empire State building elevator with a white hand towel stuffed into her mouth. She wanted to take art outside the institution in order to unleash the full power of its catalytic event. She wanted to prove that the work of art exists as an event in the midst of things entirely independent of any institutional structure (Deleuze & the Production of the New, 2008, p. 41).

Piper’s performance revealed the social aspect of performative art. This performance in any case in a democratic society was accepted as a creative experiment. Zepke commented: “In doing so Piper’s performances inhabit an alterity close to madness, but only in order to create an affect that revitalises “everyday” sensation through the eruption of an unmediated, and invariably humorous, real” (Deleuze & the Production of the New, 2008, p. 42). In order for such a creative experiment to become humorous, but not an example of madness, there should be some level of tolerance in the societies’ political milieu and there should also be art experts with a free and high sense of humour. Such an experiment was accepted as an artistic performance in the milieu of postmodern capitalism. But the evaluation is quite different in the different political conditions, for example, of the socialist society.

In 1979–1980, a young Lithuanian art student named Gitenis Umbrasas (born 1961) also decided to take art outside the institution and organised the happening connected with a walk through Vilnius Old Town through Gorkio street, recently Pilies, in the uniform of a German soldier from the Second World War with a knife impaled in his back. Today in Independent Lithuania this performance is considered as one of the first examples of performative art outside the institution. But the leaders in the Soviet regime, as it happens in all regimes, as described by Milan Kundera in his novel *The Joke* (1992), had no sophisticated sense of humour and were not very good professional experts in the new art forms. Umbrasas was locked up in a psychiatric hospital and afterwards in prison, in the so-called “detention room” (KPZ in Russian, kamera predvalitel'nogo zakliuchenija). It is a miracle he succeeded in commencing his studies at the Lithuanian SSR State Art Institute (now Vilnius Academy of Arts), and even for some time was lecturing at the same Academy. He is an experienced draughtsman.

Nowadays Umbrasas is one of the most visible artists of performances as a part of everyday life experience. When he made his first artistic kite *Flying Brick* (*Skraidanti plyta*) in 1989 he said: “I wanted to liberate painting from exhibition halls.” In 1989 his kite *Flying Brick* was lifted up above the Gediminas’ Hill in the centre of Vilnius. Only two years after his first performance with his first kite

Umbrasas learnt that at the same time but in the parallel space the festival of kites was held in Paris “The Pictures in the Sky” he knew nothing about. But the outside world somehow learnt about him. The year of 2000 was the year of the Dragon and he was invited to the festival in Detmold in German to the festival I of the kites. The creators of kites participated from different countries: Swiss, France Japan, Canada, Germany, etc. Umbrasas’ kite won the second prize and he presented it to the museum of this German city. Umbrasas taught to create the kites the young generation in the international camp for kite creators “One Sky-One World” in 2004 in Nida. In his reflection about the kites Umbrasas says that for him a kite is like a sign of the soul. The thin thread binds it to the body on the ground. The special linkage connects the kite with the man who holds it. When he lifted up the kite “St. Francis Vision” Umbrasas was wearing the brown garment of the Franciscan monk (Figure 1).

Zepke, describing Piper’s readymade as an example of “bio-aesthetic”, notices that it includes “both her own body, and the ideological affective circuits (refrains) that produces it and are reproduced by it” (Deleuze & the Production of the New, 2008, p. 41). The same can be said about the performances of Umbrasas, but adding some decisive additional aspect: some of them were performed in situations of extreme risk. It was not very risky to organise with the students the performance of making braids from grass in the little river Vilnelė or making braids from the young trees. But it was very risky for his future to make the performance as was mentioned before, and it was even more risky (a matter of life and death) near the Parliament in Vilnius in 1991, when the Parliament announced Lithuania’s independence and the Russian army was still there. The tanks were sent to the tower of Press and thirteen unarmed defenders were killed. The defenders of the Parliament at this time may have had real guns, but not enough. Umbrasas in this situation wanted to give to those defenders some moral support, so he made a very innovative art performance with his friends: a cardboard cannon named *Patriot*, become ill and only in spring he came with it to the Parliament (Figure 2).

In the process of making the cannon he injured his hand, which was bandaged, but he decided to wrap his head as well. It is a miracle that the Russian army never came to the Parliament, no unarmed defenders, or that Umbrasas was not killed, but they could not have known it in advance. It was a miracle that they survived, the same as the miracle of the very phenomenon of independence.

**Figure 1. Gitenis Umbrasas. St. Francis Vision. Kite. 2008. Image courtesy of the artist.**



**Figure 2. Gitenis Umbrasas in his way to Parliament with “Patriot” in 1991. Image courtesy of the artist.**



“The miracle” (*Stebuklas*, in Lithuanian), written in one of the fixtures on the ground of Cathedral Square in Vilnius, is the other example of the performative art created by Umbrasas in Independent Lithuania. The tourist’s guide instructs: one has to step onto it, to imagine some dream and turn around three times in waiting for the miracle in the future to come true. Umbrasas also without asking permission from any official institutions created on his own money three fixtures with *Stebuklas* as the works of arts and presented them to the city: he inserted three fixtures into the pavement in three different places. Two of them disappeared, but one remained, was accepted as a work of art and become an integral part of the city.

From the one side, he creates conceptual art, stemming from his own reflections and world-view. But these reflections take their basis in the existential sources of life. His ecological stance has some resonance with Guattari’s ecological and therapeutic position.

And, as was already mentioned, on the other side, he has the revolutionary and activist position Guattari required for the artist to take. Around 1988 when *Sąjūdis*, the movement for Lithuanian independence, was already here, but the Soviet regime was still alive, he was involved in a risky project again. At this time he was a professor at the Lithuanian Academy of Arts, and he created some miniature religious-mythological frescoes in the hollows of the trees in the *Sereikiškių* park (during Soviet times, the *Jaunimo sodas*) (Figure 3).

“These works appeared like a continuation, only in more modern form, of the pagan, later Christianised, tradition of placing small shrines in trees and tree hollows...The images of the Crucified Christ, St. Christopher and other figures, painted in the open wounds of trees, gradually succumbed to the trees’ own self-healing—over the years the wounds closed, enveloping and hiding the paintings”, says Jolanta Marcišauskyė-Jurašienė interpreting his works (Umbrasas 2015) (Figure 4).

To Guattari and Deleuze the sign of a tree was the symbol of classical knowledge and to it they opposed a rhizome, as a new type of multiple movement of thought. “What the artist confronts in this way is chaos, the forces of chaos, the forces of a raw and untamed matter upon which Forms must be imposed in order to make substances, and Codes in order to make milieus” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 338). Umbrasas takes the classical side of a tree, not rhizome, but he reflects about the cosmos and chaos the same, as they did. In one the frescoes Umbrasas painted St. Christopher,

**Figure 3. Gitenis Umbrasas. *Baptism*. Fresco in the hollow of tree. 1990. Image courtesy of the artist.**



**Figure 4. Gitenis Umbrasas. *Crucified*. 1990. Fresco in the hollow in the Tree. Image courtesy of the artist.**



the patron of Vilnius, carrying the little boy on his back, not with a stick, but with the living tree. Why? “In sketches of St. Christopher I tried to join chaos and the cosmos via the tree of life as if through an umbilical cord,” says the artist. St. Christopher is holding the tree in his hands as the main point of stability in the centre of the world. In the chapter *1837: Of the Refrain*, Deleuze and Guattari start from the possibility of finding a “calm and stable, centre in the heart of chaos” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 311). They consider this drive as the source of the first stage of the refrain. They wrote about rhythm and chaos as the chaosmos and the marking of the territory as territorialisation act by

different animals and especially birds. But is not an ecologist—artist somehow like a bit of an animal (like a rabbit or monkey—the philosophers are mentioning) marking his own territory, even knowing in advance that his marks will quite soon disappear? He is not creating for eternity; he is creating for a very short time for a tree to heal itself and close forever his painting from the observer's sight. The artist's becoming a territorial animal defers from the real animals doing the same—marking their territory for the reason the artist is not aggressive towards the members of his own species doing the same. Umbrasas invites the Vilnius city and the nature to become mediators and collaborators in creating art. As one of the best examples, Guattari suggested the therapeutic and stabilising power of art can serve Umbrasas' idea to create the dialogue between the two banks of the river Neris in Vilnius near the Green Bridge. The one bank of the river says: *I love you* (Aš myliu tave). The other answers: *Me too* (Ir aš tave). The stabilising and harmonising space is created. This lasting performance *Banks of Love* (Meilės krantai) was created by bedding flowering plants. Flowers need care and for the duration of the performance, the new flowers should be planted every spring. The artist is not able to do it alone, and he is not the gardener of the city. The performance lasts only for the reason that the city accepted the gift and takes care of it itself—the idea and the Banks of Love became one of the attributes of it. So Umbrasas' creation is somehow resonating Guattari's view that art has to change society's life.

Art is not a privilege of human beings, say Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 316). They refer to composer Olivier Messiaen in saying that many birds are not only virtuosos but also artists. They discuss the peculiarities of creating refrains of such birds as African shrikes, chaffinches and others. In 1980 Umbrasas created the *Chirping Cross* (Čiulbantis kryžius), the special Cross in the district of Vilnius—Žvėrynas—for the travelling birds to rest and to live in. His idea was to create not one, but several Chirping Crosses, following the Path of the Birds, placed among bird migration routes, from Lithuania in the North to Jerusalem in the south. The project was not completed until the end. In the niches of the cross, the artist painted the visions of St. Francis, the Patron saint of Animals (Figure 5).

On the other hand, his activist position is linked with the tragic moment of his society. He is the author of the *Trinity*—the Mosaic in Chapel—Columbarium Dome (2009), where the people from different ideological stances were killed. His huge (9 metre) *Angel of Death* (2007) is the main symbol of the Karveliškės Cemetery in Vilnius, where the former deportees from Lithuania to Siberia during Stalin's regime find their place for peace.

### 3. Deleuze/Guattari: Artist as the therapist of society

Is Umbrasas' "art outside galleries" to be considered as postmodern art? According to our opinion, in describing the tendency of Umbrasas' work it is more suitable to use the term "activist art" or "eco art" as opposed to postmodern in the sense as it was understood by Deleuze and Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari did not identify themselves with postmodern thinkers or postmodern culture. They dislike the usage of the term *postmodern* as well. There is not one single word about postmodernism in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, postmodernism is mentioned only as a title of the book by Jacques Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition*. "I've never worried about going beyond metaphysics or the death of philosophy, and I never made a big thing about giving up Totality, Unity, the Subject," Deleuze says rather clearly in one of his interviews (Deleuze, 1990, p. 88)

Why is Guattari so hostile to "all forms of postmodernism" and what kind of "all forms" does he have in mind? Postmodernism discords with his political activism: it is passive. According to Guattari, "whether they are painters, architects, or philosophers, the heroes of postmodernism have in common the belief that the crises experienced today in artistic and social practices can only lead to an irrevocable refusal of any large-scale social undertaking. So we ought to take care of our own backyards first and, preferably, in conformity with the habits and customs of our contemporaries" (Guattari, 1996, p. 111). Guattari dramatises the passive stance of so-called "postmodernists" by exclaiming as from their own viewpoint: "Don't rock the boat! Just drift with the currents of the

**Figure 5. Gitenis Umbrasas. *Chirping Cross*. 2001. Latvian street in Vilnius. Image courtesy of the artist.**



marketplace of art and opinion that are modulated by publicity campaigns and surveys” (Guattari, 1996, p. 111).

Guattari begins from the diagnosis of the poor state in the contemporary world’s situation: from a curious mix of enrichment and impoverishment, from unemployment, from, despite the apparent democratisation of access to data and modes of knowledge, a segregative exclusion of the masses from their means of development. After passionately describing the causes and the picture of global disenchantment, Guattari declares he is not going to waste time discussing modernism or postmodernism. He suggests, instead of “indulging in the disillusioned indulgences of postmodernism,” to try to find a way out of the dilemma.

Who is blamed for these vices? Helpless postmodernists, of course. He accuses them rather strictly: “It is to this regrettable conclusion that a number of intellectuals and artists, especially those influenced by postmodernist thought, have arrived” (Guattari, 1996, p. 109). He mentions the large



promotional operations dubbed “neo-expressionism” in Germany; “Bad Painting” or “New Painting” in the US; “Trans-avant-garde” in Italy; “Free Representation” and the “New Fauvism” in France, and so on.

Guattari is in some sense echoing Jürgen Habermas whose book *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* is based on the supposition that postmodernism is nothing but the last gasp of modernism, a reaction to and, in a certain way, a mirror of the formalist abuses and reductions of modernism, from which, in the end, it is no different. He leaves some chance for salvation for individual artists, but does not see the possibilities for a revival of the whole movement.

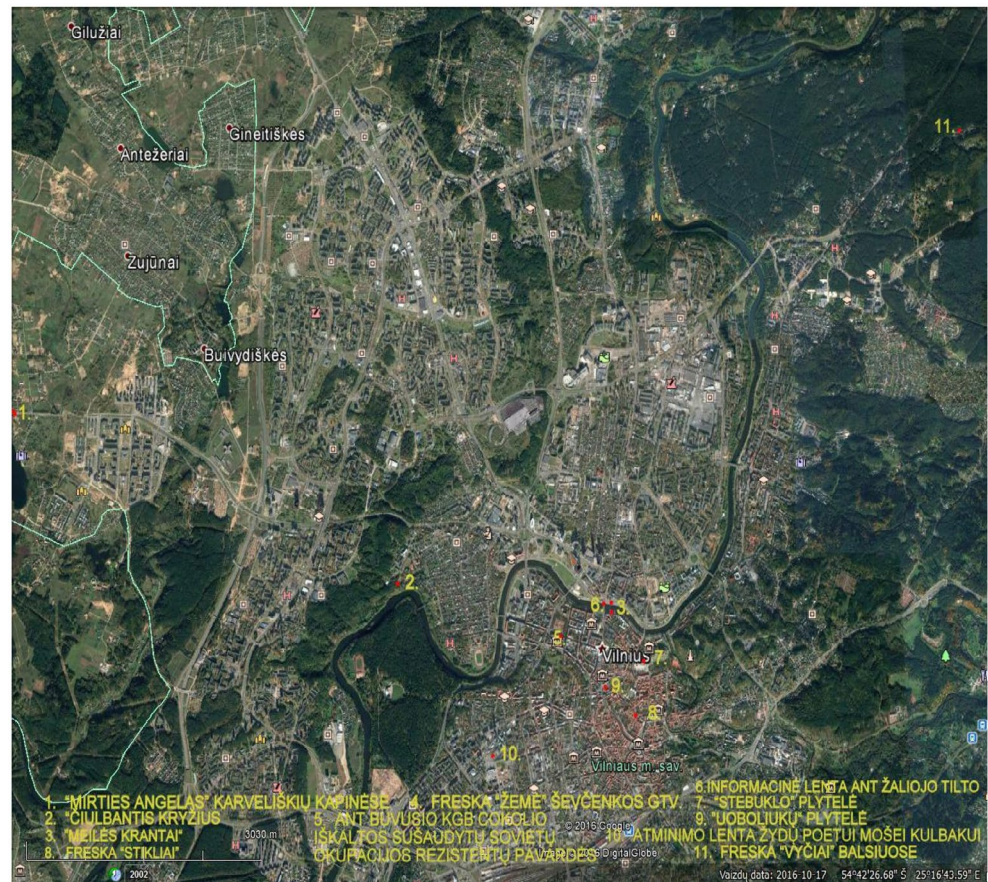
Guattari supposes that from all the arts, it is mainly architecture that is better secured to the deeply reterritorialising tendencies of present capitalistic subjectivity. For this reason, he considers the post-modern architecture “less superficial and much more indicative of the place assigned to art by the dominant power formations...Whereas in the domain of the plastic arts, young painters are required to submit to the prevalent conservatism of the market, failing which they find themselves condemned to vegetate on the margins, here adaptation to the values of the most retrograde neo-liberalism is made without hesitation. And while painting has never been for the ruling classes anything more than a matter of a “supplement of the spirit”, a kind of currency of prestige, architecture has always occupied a major place in the making of territories of power, the fixing of its emblems, and the proclamation of its durability” (Guattari, 1996, p. 110). Guattari is reflecting on the connection between architecture and power structures in Western societies with the “old traditions” of capitalism.

As a proof of Guattari’s insight, one can notice that in the “young capitalist” countries, such as Lithuania with 25 years of free market society, architecture has also made the decisive turn towards neoliberalism without any hesitation in searching for its place in the territories of power. Vytautas Rubavičius, reflecting on the place of architecture in the medium of postmodern capitalism in Vilnius, notices that during the Soviet time the Lithuanian school of architecture was very close to modernism à la Le Corbusier. For the Soviet ideology, the conception of Le Corbusier was very useful, supposing that the new urban milieu has to change the social relations, to heal society from the past and turn its gaze towards the future. The prevailing understanding of the mission of the architect as seer and powwow was close to Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe’s views which have influenced Western architecture. Rubavičius notices that today the modernism in architecture in Lithuania is no longer alive as the new ideas prevail, but some aspects of the modernist ideology survived, and mainly these aspects which help to adapt to the new tendencies of capitalism in order to make “quick” money. “The offhand approach towards cultural historical urban heritage is no more inter-related with any ideology, but justified by the arguments that every period of time has its own architectural expression, so the architects simply have the obligation to leave their own creative signs” (Rubavičius, 2014, p. 199).

But these new creative signs are distinguished not for the subtleness of expression or the constructive elegance (as in the best examples of international style), nor by the characteristic expressiveness of form or silhouette, but by the aggressive fortification of banality in the approaches to the old town in Vilnius (Rubavičius, 2014, p. 211). It seems that there is no real postmodern architecture in Lithuania as described in Jencks’s books, but the tendencies of the linkage revealed by Guattari between the architecture and power territories in postmodern capitalism are paradoxically alive.

Guattari accuses the philosophical postmodernism together with other forms of postmodernism of not involving itself in a large-scale social undertaking. Speaking in Nietzsche’s words, they refuse to be the therapists of society. And Guattari conceives his own mission and the mission of the intellectual altogether as the therapy of society. Umbrasas intuitively takes the stance of the artist as the therapist of society. He does not rely on Guattari or any other conceptual framework. The coincidence of his ideas with Guattarian outlook is striking as in fact always seem striking the similarity of the same ideas expressed in different spheres of culture by the artists, philosophers, even scientists who do not know about the existence of the others.

**Figure 6. Gitenis Umbrasas. *Chirping Cross*. 2001. Latvii street in Vilnius. Image courtesy of the artist. (1) Angel of Death in Karveliskiu Cemetary; (2) Chirping Cross; (3) Banks of Love; (4) Fresco “Earth” in Sevcenkos 31; (5) Engraving stencils of the names of the resistance fighters who were shot for opposing Soviet regime at the base of the former KGB headquarters building; (6) The Map of Vilnius: the places of the “art outside galleries” in Vilnius created by Gitenis Umbrasas; (7) Paver “Miracle” in Cathedral Square; (8) Informative desk on the Green Bridge; (9) Paver “Apple”; (10) Memorial for Jewish poet Mose Kulbak; (11) Fresco “Vyciai” in Balsiai.**



#### 4. Conclusion

Umbrasas never read neither Guattari nor Deleuze and does not need any type of philosophical insight to prove what he feels as an intuitive turn expelling art from the galleries into the city. Umbrasas has an intuitive and rational standpoint towards art as Guattari had: he thinks that art has the power to change and to shape society in order for it to be more open to the world and towards nature. Neither Guattari nor Deleuze visited Vilnius or mentioned it in their works. In any case, one can discern traces of their ideas in Vilnius map. It is possible even to travel following from one place to another verifying their insights (Figure 6). These Deleuzian/Guattarian cartographies in the map of the city have nothing to do with the signs of the postmodern architecture in Vilnius city but are the traces of the possible dialogue between a man and a cosmos, between the society and the surrounding natural world.

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#### Author details

Jūratė Baranova<sup>1</sup>  
E-mail: [jurabara@gmail.com](mailto:jurabara@gmail.com)  
ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4085-2737>  
<sup>1</sup> Department for Continental Philosophy and Religious Studies, Vilnius University, Universiteto St.9/1, Vilnius, LT 01513, Lithuania.

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#### Cover image

Gitenis Umbrasas in Vilnelė river presenting his work *Iron She-Wolf*. 1992. Published with permission of the artist.

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