

Anna Lorenc

Dissertation summary

The dissertation entitled *'Towards the centre. Depicting the Upper Silesian metropolitan area'* comprises a photography series and its theoretical framework (explication).

In the explication, creative attitudes, which determine strategies of depicting the Urban Upper Silesian landscape were presented, and an emphasis was put on the role of photography in the process of creating this picture. The thesis covered, most of all, the latest and most recent works, i.e. those produced in 21st century and at the same examples of artistic attitudes characteristic for the photography of the second half of 20th century were featured.

Additionally, the study approached the idea of the 'city' as a phenomenon, the city as a 'living organism', the city as a creation which undergoes constant transformations, and last but not least, the city as a source of creative inspiration.

Furthermore, the dissertation discusses the relation between a man and a place as well as an attempt to find an identity of an individual in the postindustrial landscape, the landscape which today sometimes undergoes processes of radical transformations, progressing urban alternations, greatly marked modifications in the architectonic aesthetics, in the scale of buildings and the scale of road infrastructure, the landscape subjected to degradation and revitalisation.

The series of photographs was focused on documenting the urban landscape of Upper Silesian metropolitan area which is a habitat for people and at the same time the space which is created by them.

TOWARDS THE CENTRE

Space of the metropolitan area

The space of Upper Silesian metropolitan area is full of visual contrasts. In particular, I am taking into consideration the cultural landscape of the whole conurbation which consists of its postindustrial heritage subjected both to degradation and destructive processes in a large scale and to restoration and revitalisation activities - in case of some buildings¹ and

¹ e.g. Gliwice Coalmine, see: <http://rewitalizacja.silesia.org.pl/>, retrieved August 27, 2016.

postindustrial areas², as well as an architectonic and urban characteristics of the metropolitan space shaped irregularly in different parts of the conurbation.

Transformation processes of the urban architectonic space in the downtown area of Katowice have become especially prominent in the recent years. One of the biggest space transformations accomplished in this period is called the ‘Cultural Zone’ or the ‘Space of Culture in Katowice’, that is to say, a spatial arrangement created by the buildings of the new premises of Silesian Museum, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra and the buildings of a newly built International Conference Centre with the adjacent area. At the same time, ‘the very city centre’ of Katowice was undergoing the process of transformation according to the planning directives of Investment Promotion of the City of Katowice, chosen through the urban and architectonic competition carried out in 2006.³ The said directives established, among others, development of *a new central public space*⁴ as a result of planned investments in the centre of Katowice.

Changes, in this vast central area, influenced the character of the city ‘centre’ which had existed until then. Not only did ‘the picture of the centre’ (in the visual sense) change but also its function was modified to some extent. The scheme of changes assumed the growth of significance of culture and art as well as of modern communication technologies in the central area.⁵ It is difficult to predict today how consistent this assumption will be and what will be the scale of its realisation in the following years to come. The transformation of the central public space was taking place also in other cities of the region. An example of a direct effect on the urban landscape was building a section of the central highway known as DTŚ (Drogowa Trasa Średnicowa) going through the centre of Gliwice. Various areas used for investments connected with house building sector e.g. in Ligota district in Katowice where a new ‘Osiedle Książęce’ was built, underwent a similar transformation (which appears to be a very natural process of the urban area development). The character of the metropolitan landscape is shaped also by the public facility investments, e.g. completed football stadium Arena Zabrze⁶ or unfinished, long-term modernisation of the Silesian Stadium.

Liquidating some buildings left empty spaces behind in the urban tissue. The area which used to be occupied by the ruined and later demolished zinc works in Katowice

² e.g. ‘Żabie Doły’ Nature and landscape protected area, <http://www.bytom.pl/zespol-przyrodniczo-krajobrazowy-zabie-doly>, retrieved August 27, 2016.

³ Iwona Batkowska, Dominik Czajkowski, Anna Jabłońska, Tomasz Konior i inn., *Założenia Programu Transformacji Centrum*, in: idem, *Transformacja centrum miasta Katowice. Wytyczne planistyczne*, Biuro Rozwoju Regionu Sp. z o.o., Konior Studio, Katowice, 24.

⁴ Ibidem, 27.

⁵ I. Batkowska, D. Czajkowski, A. Jabłońska, T. Konior and others, *Transformacja...*, op. cit., 21.

⁶ <http://stadion-zabrze.pl/news2,71,0>, retrieved August 27, 2016.

Welnowiec, has still not been taken care of. A similar situation concerns the area left after demolishing a historic tenement building at Chorzowska Street in Bytom.

A question of preserving postindustrial buildings on the Upper Silesian metropolitan area presents a separate challenge. Architects, town-planners, art historians, art and culture people, politicians, social activists and citizens are engaged in the discussion.

Irma Kozina notices an individual character of particular industrial areas (*they are as a matter of fact individual casi*⁷); she claims that an attempt to anticipate their future will give inaccurate answers. *Their future is (...) undoubtedly conditioned by the activity of people engaged in the actions leading to the preservation of – in the form adapted to new conditions – a substance recognised as a worth protecting heritage of the civilisation*⁸.

Leszek Jodliński (art historian, the director of Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom, between 2008–2013 a director of Silesian Museum in Katowice) notices the necessity to choose only parts of these ‘casi’ which should be preserved, out of a bigger group of buildings and facilities, referred to as ‘*postindustrial matter*’⁹ by Anna Syska and Paweł Jaworski.

«Postindustrial heritage» must be digested. We must answer ourselves, how much of it we want to keep not to become a burden for us. (...) It requires (...) cogitation which is connected with the sense of possessing. (...) We must ask ourselves a question how much past we need in the future, how much of it we can bear.¹⁰

The photography series

Jerzy Lewczyński writing an introduction to the album by Rafał Milach entitled *Szare* said:

A photography slowly but systematically defends the necessity of the so-called author’s work expression. Apart from the style, commentary and structure, an

⁷ Irma Kozina, *Przemiany miast przemysłowych*, in: *autoportret. pismo o dobrej przestrzeni*, 1[40]2013, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków, 2013, ISSN: 1730-3613, 27.

⁸ Ibidem, 27.

⁹ The expression comes from the title of a conversation run by A. Syska and P. Jaworski with Leszek Jodliński. V.: *Materia poprzemysłowa i poprzemysłowa społeczność*, in: *autoportret.pismo o dobrej przestrzeni...*, op.cit., 84.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 91.

artist photographer endeavours his work of art to become a document of the times in which he lives¹¹.

A question of currentness of a photographic work was one of the most vital issues for many generations of photographers-documentalists. It was also important for documentalists from the circle of 'new topographics'. When describing the artists' key message, whose form of an artistic expression was a documentary record of the landscape shaped by a man, Britt Salvesen says:

[These] photographs of man-altered landscapes forestalled nostalgia and prevented an escape into the past – instead, they forced viewers to remain in the present and think about the future. New Topographics had redemptive aspects in its renovation of landscape photography, attention to cultural landscape, and depiction of heedless land use. Its key message is not revelation but responsibility¹².

In critical texts about phenomenon of New Topographics by Salvesen, the word 'identity' is hardly ever mentioned although the works of New Topographics are sometimes analysed from the aspect of a relation between people and the land, a territory which they inhabit. However, the word 'responsibility' appears in the text. Tadeusz Sławek points out that *a man as an autonomous entity and also a member of a community grows up to one's identity in a dialogue with a place which he inhabits*¹³.

A problem of responsibility in a discussion about Silesian identity is evoked by Irma Kozina. She talks about the existence of *particular self identification*¹⁴, which arises various forms of activity.

In Poland there were community actions but they were artificial and compulsory. When people were planting trees, those trees did not take roots because the community action was scheduled for November, after the first ground frosts. We did not have this situation here – Silesia Park exists, which

¹¹ Jerzy Lewczyński, in: Rafał Milach, *Szare/The Grey/Das Graue*, Frodo, Bytom, czerwiec 2002, ISBN: 83-910093-6-X, 6–7.

¹² Britt Salvesen, *New Topographics*, in: *New Topographics*, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film, Steidl, Göttingen, Second edition 2010, ISBN: 978-3-86521-827-8, 58.

¹³ T. Sławek, *Wstęp*, in: A. Kunce, Z. Kadłubek, *Mysleć Śląsk: wybór esejów*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2007, 7, quotation after: Zofia Oslislo-Piekarska, *Nowi Ślązacy. Miasto, dizajn, tożsamość*, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Katowicach, Katowice, 2015, ISBN: 978-83-61424-73-4, 53.

¹⁴ Irma Kozina, *Tożsamość to odpowiedzialność*, in: Z. Oslislo-Piekarska, *Nowi Ślązacy...*, op. cit., 250.

means that people planted those trees well. Why? Because they felt responsible for what they were doing – this is identity for me¹⁵.

By treating the landscape which we inhabit in a responsible way and by protecting the cultural heritage that we can derive from, we build and shape our identity.

In the face of existing no visual work which interprets the process of shaping the area of the centre and its periphery in a wider perspective, and which presents some phenomena which constitute a visual manifesto of this process in relation to the *core* of the metropolitan area – focused also on an attempt to point at particular features of poetics of a place and space transformations occurring at present, at the moment ‘right here and now¹⁶’ – I made an attempt to construct a series entitled *Towards the centre...*

Choosing a camera as a tool to record these transformations seemed to be natural.

Similarly to other artists who depict the area of Upper Silesia, the fascination of a place became the source of my inspiration: the landscape, architecture and history of the region. Moreover, I am stimulated by many views of the city which changes constantly, falling into ruin and developing at the same time.

I got used to treating the Upper Silesian metropolitan area as one urban organism. The organism in which the borders between the territories of particular cities are blurred. In this sense (spatial), the metropolitan area is one *City*.

I was reflecting on how I can create a story of a place relying on recording of an (un)familiar landscape which characterises the metropolitan area and which is a place where I live, and not to follow old ‘clichés’ or exploited motifs.

I decided to react to the landscape, to some extent as if I saw particular places for the first time – which in many cases appeared to be true. I focused on searching for places which were new for me as well as for views new for the Upper Silesian landscape – I was searching for cracks in the urban tissue and its suburbs, I was seeking after manifestoes of little, ephemeral changes, and also these made on a huge (spatial) scale, demolitions and construction sites, traces of natural destruction and last but not least signs of artistic ‘interruptions’ in the urban space.

Furthermore, in the cultural texts I was searching for a modern visual story connected with the area where I live, the one which says: ‘this is what it looks like here now’. My desire was partially fulfilled by *Brutal* by Michał Łuczak¹⁷, a story about a phenomenon of a place,

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ My research was conducted between 2014 and 2016.

¹⁷ V.: Michał Łuczak, *Brutal*, First edition, self-published, Katowice 2012, ISBN: 978-83-933361-7-3.

for some even described as a ‘cult’ place (despite that this term is seemingly not congruent with the picture of the building of the railway station neglected for many decades and falling into ruin), about its decadent period and eventually its disappearance. *Brutal* still remains a very essential work among visual essays rooted in the area of Upper Silesia, a document of changes in the picture of the metropolitan area and its centre and finally architectonic and social transformations. This is a piece of work which also goes back to the past.

When constructing *Brutal*, a book documenting the space of the railway station in Katowice in the period before its demolishing, Łuczak allowed himself to juggle with the words: brutality – brute – brutal. He emphasizes that the photographic book *Brutal*¹⁸ was published with a text in English – among others due to the fact that the word *brutal* in English is an adjective (and not a noun as it is in Polish), which opens a much wider range of associations with reference to the topic of the series¹⁹, being a portrait not only of an architectonic space of the railway station, but its users (not necessarily travellers) as well.

The second photographic story, which also refers (although in a different manner) to the problem of transformations in the area of architecture and space which are taking place in the Upper Silesian region at present, would be *Struktur und Architektur*. by Thomas Vossbeck²⁰. The subject matter of these images is concentrated around postindustrial areas and buildings – Vossbeck in his realisation emphasizes mainly alternations occurring within the shape of the building and interiors of heavy industrial plants, defining their present conditions and functions. Existence of these buildings in a wider interpreted scenery recedes into the background and other aspects shaping the landscape of the metropolitan area are completely ignored (e.g. new phenomena in a sphere of architecture and infrastructure of urban space).

Vossbeck’s attention is focused on visual remains left after heavy industry infrastructure. My attention was concentrated on a subject (perhaps to a more general extent) of shaping space of the metropolitan area, without a particular and excessive intension to emphasize the role of industry, and of exposing issues concerning transformations of postindustrial buildings and areas.

What is striking in the space of the metropolitan area, it is the existence of places of visual peculiarity – one would say – periphery but those sometimes found within zones of the biggest cities of the metropolitan area, in the vicinity of city centres or their district centres

¹⁸ Brutal is an expression describing the railway station in Katowice, referring to its modernistic architecture of brutality type.

¹⁹ Statement by Michał Łuczak during the session with an author and presentation of *Brutal*, SARP, Katowice, 16.10.2012.

²⁰ V.: Thomas Vossbeck, *Struktura i architektura. Postindustrialne dziedzictwo Górnego Śląska*. Europareportage, 2010, ISBN: 978-3-936168-57-0.

(with headquarters of public administration institutions, dynamically operating companies, buildings of colleges and universities, cultural institutions and other public buildings).

I call them periphery in the centre.

It is really a noteworthy fact that I often found these ‘suburbial images’ in the centres of the cities (Chorzów, Gliwice, Katowice).

From my photography series not only does an image of big investments effects, realised in the centres of the metropolitan area, emerge but rather views of ongoing construction works.

Depicting the space of Upper Silesia metropolitan area in the photography series *Towards the centre...* does not present a *typical* image of Upper Silesia metropolitan area’s landscape, however it constitutes its *subjective* picture, using *objective* methods of documentary recording.

Too little (or maybe too excessive?) attractiveness of the central space of Katowice limited the number of images of *technological make-up*²¹ in the series.

In the photographic representations of the landscape I especially appreciate these which do not depict a human figure but tell a lot about a man. About where one lives, what one does, how dynamically one builds and designs, what is one’s attitude to nature, whether one ruthlessly ‘rips from the land’ what one needs. If one lives in beautiful or rather degraded space, if a human expansion is vast...

Picture of such scenery, although rarely depicts a human figure, it composes a story of a man and conditionings of one’s life which is influenced by the character of the habitat. In the history of Upper Silesia, the bond between its citizens and their land was created in a special way; nowadays when mining industry is becoming less and less significant, the above mentioned bond with the place will have to be realised by other forms of human activity. It is difficult to judge which branch of production or other range of human activity will be brought to the forefront in the Upper Silesian metropolitan area; it might happen that none of the branches of industry or fields of science, culture and art will be so strong to dominate others as a symbol of Upper Silesia, as something which will make the region recognised.

I do believe that the postindustrial heritage will constitute ‘strong points’ on the map of the region as well as in its mental *image*²², despite the fact that the visual character of the

²¹ A metaphore borrowed from Krzysztof Siwczyk. V.: K.Siwczyk, *Koło Miejsca*, Muzeum w Gliwicach, Gliwice 2016, ISBN: 978-83-89856-80-7, 11.

²² According to Kevin Lynch: ‘There seems to be a public image of any given city which is the overlap of many individual images. Or perhaps there is a series of public images, each held by some significant number of citizens. Such group images are necessary if an individual is to operate successfully within his environment and

landscape of the Upper Silesian metropolitan area changed due to decreasing significance of heavy industry plants shaping that landscape.

There is a conception according to which the processes of metropolis development (*metropolisation*) lead to the growth of their centres at the cost of periphery. A metropolis (a central city, principal city) reinforces its dominance over the *hinterland* (...) *draining resources from the periphery*²³.

I think that this process can be observed to some extent in the Upper Silesian metropolitan area – it is reflected in the visual space of the cities. When working on the photography series *Towards the centre...* I could notice this phenomenon clearly (e.g. in the form of progressive processes of peripheral areas degradation).

It is impossible to photograph *en bloc* the Upper Silesian metropolitan area within a few years. I do not know if it would be possible during the whole life. Bernd and Hilla Becher photographed most of the industrial buildings which were available at that time, working as a collaborative duo for many decades, claim that many buildings of that kind had been demolished or rebuilt before they managed to record them with their large format camera²⁴.

As the most original impulse to photograph I consider the concept of the camera constituting an extension of a human eye; I will repeat after Walker Evans:

I go to the street
for the education
of my eye
and for the sustenance
that the eye needs---
the hungry eye,
and my eye is hungry²⁵

to cooperate with his fellows(...) in: Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1960, ISBN: 0-262-62-001-4, 46.

²³ Zbigniew Rykiel, *Koncepcje metropolii jako formy miasta i regionu* in: *Miasta, aglomeracje, metropolie w nurcie globalnych przemian*, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2014, ISBN: 978-83-7784-479-3, 49.

²⁴ V.: Bernd & Hilla Becher, *Bernd und Hilla Becher in Gespräch mit Suzanne Lange*, in: Bernd & Hilla Becher, *Industriellandschaften*, ISBN: 978-3-8296-0003-3, 10.

²⁵ The original wording and text composition were kept in the form given by the authors of a study about W. Evan's works. Walter Evans in Gilles Mora, John T. Hill, *Walker Evans, The Hungry Eye*, First paperback edition, Thames&Hudson, London 2004, ISBN: 0-500-28529-2, 8.