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Experimental exhibitions and theatrical performances in Silesian post-industrial spaces

Every large strip mine could support an artist in residence. Flattened mountain tops await the aesthetic touch. Dank and noxious acres of spoil piles cry out for some redeeming sculptural shape. Bottomless industrial pits yawn for creative filling – or deepening. There must be crews out there, straining and tense in the seats of their D-8 caterpillars, waiting for that confident artist to stride over the ravaged ground and give the command, ‘Gentlemen, start your engines, and let us definitely conclude the twentieth century.’

Robert Morris (1980: 12)

The 1980 textual manifesto by American sculptor and minimalism theoretician Robert Morris is an excellent harbinger for the aura of action taken by contemporary Polish activists to protect industrial heritage: mines, steelworks and other, lesser industrial complexes, shut down for economic reasons. Silesia is a region particularly infused with such post-industrial facilities. This is where nearly a quarter of all asset accrual associated with the construction of new manufacturing plants had been clustered in socialist Poland, investments mainly involving heavy industry leaning on raw materials available in the voivodship (province). While the artist-assigned mission – as described by Morris – chiefly involved the demolition of the old world, it is common knowledge that when demolishing, the artist is already in a construction-planning process. In their profound uncommonness, shut-down facilities or post-strip mine areas are an excellent proposition in terms of piquing the curiosity of art project curators, artists or directors. I would like to use this roughly-sketched essay as an opportunity to present two cherry-picked Silesian post-industrial complexes which have turned their purpose around over the past decade: the *Wilson* shaft in Janów and Zinc Rolling Mill in Szopienice (both districts in the city of Katowice, capital of Upper Silesia). Both are now venues of institutions of culture, galleries and temporary museums, their buildings entered onto historical museum registers and gradually subjected to material, spiritual and

social revitalisation owing to artistic and academic activity (exhibitions, workshops for children and adults, theatrical performances and concerts on the one hand – conferences and publications on the other).

Specification of selected post-industrial facilities and activities they engage in

Poland has yet to legally regulate the concept of post-industrial areas. Such facilities – buildings and their surroundings alike – are most frequently excluded from use, losing their original purpose in consequence. Following in the footsteps of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Alina Maciejewska and Agnieszka Turek have proposed that such areas be classified as *superfunds* or *brownfields*, respectively (Maciejewska, Turek 2019: 11). The former are the most polluted and contaminated areas, a direct threat to human health. While precluding planned artistic activity, they may become a source of inspiration, as proven by ecological art ventures.¹¹ *Brownfields* are facilities and areas allowing expansion, development, reconstruction and/or reuse – yet such endeavours may be intricate in view of the local presence of hazardous substances and/or contamination. Soil contamination apart, local facilities are usually dilapidated, technological infrastructure incompleting. Nonetheless, they tend to be located rather attractively, often as not in urbanised neighbourhoods. “Furthermore, such areas – as authors of ‘Rewitalizacja terenów poprzemysłowych’ (‘Revitalising Post-Industrial Areas’) argue – are key to shaping the given location’s identity and outlining its industrial era-related heritage, and as such require that new practical purposes be assigned to them, the areas themselves be made part of functional and spatial urban structures” (Maciejewska, Turek 2019: 12). In the context of particular revitalisation and reclamation case studies discussed by afore-quoted authors, the specificity of these areas as explained has been affirmed in themes explored by local artists and institutions of culture residents, curators and directors – aforementioned desirable new users of post-industrial spaces.

Formerly owned by the “*Wieżorek*” Hard Coal Mine in Katowice, the *Wilson* Shaft is my first reference facility.¹² The entire post-industrial complex includes several buildings, worksites and post-mining small architecture included. Since 1998, it has been leased by two industrial heritage aficionados: lawyer Monika Paca-Bros and businessman Johan Bros. The main Shaft building occupies just under 2,500 m² of space. Its exhibition area (*Wilson* Shaft Gallery¹³) consists of three halls: the so-called Small Gallery, Medium Gallery with mezzanine, and Large Gallery with adjacent premises, formerly a changing/common room and bathhouse designed by Emil and Georg Zillmann. Today, space occupied by corporate headquarters apart, premises are rented out

¹¹ Participative activities of the kind described i.a. in: (Doś 2009).

¹² Shafts on the Gallery’s current location were originally called “*Richthofen*” and “*Hulda*,” renamed “*Wilson*” in 1935 to honour the President of the United States. After World War II, the site was owned by the “*Wieżorek*” Coal Mine.

¹³ <http://www.szybwilson.org/historia-galerii.html>

short-term for exhibition and assorted event purposes,¹⁴ smaller rooms mostly used to exhibit the Gallery's in-house contemporary art collection – paintings, sculptures and installations, i.a. by Karol Wiczorek, Andrzej Urbanowicz, Marek Kamieński, Lech Kołodziejczyk, Andrzej Tobis, the *Eco-Industri-Art* Group, Erwin Sówka, *Janowska* Group (*Grupa Janowska*) and foreign artists.

The latter most frequently include patrons of the notorious event regularly hosted by the Gallery on *Wilson Shaft* premises: the *Art Naif* Festival, a total of fourteen editions held until the year 2021.¹⁵ While an exhibition of non-professional art continues to be at its core, individual editions have been expanded to include film screenings, concerts, and the *Art Jarmark* (Fair) in Nikiszowiec – Katowice's historical workers' quarter, adjacent to Janów. The *Eko-Art Silesia* Foundation established at the *Wilson Shaft* Gallery has been contributing in a major way to supporting the artistic activity of amateur art groups associated with the Silesian region. Conferring legal personality upon the Gallery, the move has made it possible for further activities to be held in order to espouse the local community, frequently affected by exclusion and impoverishment: summer camps, extra tuition and workshops have been organised. In addition, theatres could be provided with an option of staging performances on Gallery premises. Pro Invest, a company who are also the administrator of the referenced facility, has joined the post-industrial facility revitalisation programme.

After three years of Shaft renovation, a non-commercial gallery was established, its activity commencing on the opening night of the exhibition *Druga zmiana* (*New Shift*). The artworks refrained from referencing mining directly (the trope revisited over successive years), the *New Shift* title chosen with intent to showcase a generational change in the local art community: young professionals' works were shown alongside pieces by *Grupa Janowska*, amateur artists taken care of by the "Wiczorek" Coal Mine after World War II. The title could also be interpreted as alluding to space abandoning industrial purposes for art circle activity. Frequent mentions of the historically significant *Grupa Janowska*, a collective working in the building (coal mine common room), is thus a motif combining both eras, the industrial and post-industrial. Such dual interpretation of the exhibition itself is also endorsed by symbolic gestures observable at the opening night: "The visual works area was separated from the audience with heavy metal doors. When they banged opened just a crack, the previously played loud music fell silent, subtle tones of a flute audibly wafting from what used to be the common room and is now the gallery. And this is how we symbolically passed from the industrial to contemporary art space – from austere mining halls to rare gallery interiors" (Luksa, Nowak, 2015: 11).

Successive exhibitions at the *Wilson Shaft* served the purpose of exploring selected fields of local cultural heritage. Developed jointly with students of two Silesian

¹⁴ E.g. *Polytonal Two-dimensional Harmonies*, an exhibition of paintings and graphic art by Marek Batorski, September 4th until October 1st 2015, accompanied by a performance by the jazz band *MOVE ON*, the artist on stage. <http://szybwilson.org/zobacz?item=221>

¹⁵ Cf. *14th Art Naif Festival, Poland, Wilson Shaft Gallery* (catalogue), Katowice: Eko-Art Silesia Foundation, <https://artnaiffestiwal.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/katalog-art-naif-XIV-online.pdf>

universities and guided by the motto *Ale to już było... Demokratyczna wystawa dizajnu* (Those Days Are Over: a Democratic Exhibition of Design), professor Irma Kozina's project placed items from socialist Poland centre stage, the show expanded to include private stories of their users, alongside designs by Czesław Fiolek with his close ties to the mining community.¹⁶

Notably, aforementioned exhibition initiatives have been enjoying the growing interest of individuals not used to interacting with art on a daily basis. Reasons for the Wilson Shaft's popularity may well be sought in the diversity and ludic nature of its propositions, which includes painting and sculpture displays as well as concerts, light effect shows and regional cuisine tastings.

Other audiences – familiar with experimental theatre and hailing from larger cities – are attracted by the Wilson Shaft's theatrical repertoire developed in collaboration i.a. with the Śląski Theatre in Katowice. Not your typical guest performances, these pieces draw – from beginning to end – on the specificity and furnishings of the facility. *Morphine* premiered at the Shaft in 2014. Based on one of the most celebrated novels of the past decade – writer Szczepan Twardoch exploring lost Silesian identity – it formed part of the *Śląsk święty/Śląsk przeklęty* (Silesia Saint/Silesia Damned) cycle initiated in the season 2013/14. In 2016, the Shaft showed *Leni Riefenstahl. Epizody niepamięci* (Episodes of Amnesia), a piece with a focus on the falsification of history. Both performances were directed by Ewelina Marciniak, young and frequently referred to as “scandalous.” Several years before, Przemysław Wojcieszek's *Made in Poland* enjoyed great popularity, having premiered at the Helena Modrzejewska Theatre in Legnica in 2005. The play tells the story of a hatred-consumed young boy from the projects. The local community – Wilson Shaft neighbours – were actually part of the cast as extras on stage.

Referred to as “street art,” some forms of art activity have trickled over from the interiors to the surroundings of the *Wilson Shaft*, some of the graffiti created illegally, albeit in all likelihood in tacit collusion with the facility's hosts who have candidly declared their openness to such practices. Since the vast majority of local murals were developed as part of local collective actions, some including children, not all are examples of high or professional art (Stano, 2017 II: 29–49).

Purchased from artists friendly with hosts of the Shaft, i.a. Paweł Orłowski, Witold Pichurski and Mona Tusz, vividly polychromed open-air sculptures have been installed among the facility's structures. Poetically titled *Z szafy madame: którą głowę dzisiaj włożę?* (*From Madame's Wardrobe: Which Head to Wear Today?*, 2010), Mona Tusz's piece is a good case in point for site-specific realisations, having been based on an oval-shaped shelter shaft. The surrealist, theatrical figure-and-object arrangement is a diversion from the form's original purpose. The Shaft's gate has been replaced as well, its form now openwork-based, its content “*military*” (design by Paweł Orłowski). A public bus-stop shelter was installed as part of the *Industriada* project.

¹⁶ For purposes of his final diploma at the State Higher School of Visual Arts in Wrocław, Czesław Fiolek designed a visual signalling system for hard coal mines. Cf. *Wilson Shaft Gallery*, <http://www.szybwilson.org/news/66/92/Ale-to-juz-bylo-Demokratyczna-wystawa-dizajnu.html>

Forming part of the early 20th-century Bernhardi Zinc Works (Ryguś, 2015: 89–91), the Zinc Rolling Mill is the other fascinating post-industrial building in Katowice. The Rolling Mill's main hall, engine room included, is nearly 200 metres long and 20 metres wide. Production stopped in 2002. While the sheet rolling machines were shut down, nobody removed them. Piotr Gerber, academic staff member at the Wrocław University of Technology, with experience in resurrecting historical complexes, purchased the building from the liquidator in 2013. Gerber opened a Museum of Industry and the Railroad in Jaworzyna Śląska in 2004, on a historical locomotive depot site. The Zinc Rolling Mill site was placed under official monument conservation protection in 2015. Owing to efforts by the Foundation for the Protection of Silesian Industrial Heritage, a new and permanent quality evolved: the "Rolling Mill" Museum of Zinc Metallurgy opened. The new institution's offer includes i.a. museum classes associated with regional education, and scientific activities: conferences referencing the location's industrial nature and its revitalisation,¹⁷ and publications on industrial heritage.¹⁸

The collective exhibition-performance *Pamięć pracy. Pokaż Twoje Rany. Droga przemysłowa 13, Wejść w głąb ziemi* (*Memory of Work. Show Your Wounds. Industrial Road No. 13, Enter the Depths of Earth*, Stano, 2015: 59–76) was the first spectacular event to attract large visitor groups from neighbouring districts and the region. Its realisation (2013) coincided with a period when the facility resembled something akin to a romantic ruin. Stephan Stroux, actor and German theatrical director, decided to draw on the potential of these circumstances by skilfully combining selected art-work cycles – site-specific installations, photographs and videos – with what he found on site: empty metal smelting furnaces, broken glass, walls shedding peeling paint. The outcome included a dramatized show for the opening night audience, and an exhibition open to visitors for several weeks.¹⁹ The overall arrangement was a perfect fit for the industrial context, including artefacts originally not associated with Silesia as a region, basically exploring the history and contemporaneity of work – or, in all actuality, the loss thereof – in the post-1989 reality of social and economic transformation. Handpicked artists showcased aforementioned issues through destructive change to locations and natural landscapes, and deeply moving recollections of former local

¹⁷ Scientific conferences: *Ochrona dziedzictwa przemysłowego* (*Protecting Industrial Heritage*, June 13th 2014); *Dobre praktyki w ochronie dziedzictwa przemysłowego* (*Good Practices in Protecting Industrial Heritage*, June 11th 2015); *Dziedzictwo przemysłowe – wizje przetrwania* (*Industrial Heritage – Visions of Survival*, June 10th 2016); *Co możemy ratować? Projekty i realizacje związane z zachowaniem dziedzictwa przemysłowego* (*What is Salvageable? Projects and Realisations Associated with Preserving Industrial Heritage*, June 9th 2017).

¹⁸ Cf. "Zeszyty Naukowe Fundacji Ochrony Dziedzictwa Przemysłowego Śląska" (*Scientific Brochures of the Foundation for the Protection of Silesian Industrial Heritage*).

¹⁹ The first version of the installation was titled *Erinnerung an Arbeit*. It was shown at the Zollverein mine in Essen in 2012, as part of the cultural programme "Klopsztanga. Poland without Borders in North Rhine Westphalia 2012/2013." In Germany, the installation included multiple works: videos, installations, objects, photograph sets, paintings, and graphic art by forty Polish and German artists, half of whom took part in the Katowice project, a number of new ones joining. Both events were designed by Stephan Stroux – German actor and theatrical director. He dedicated the Silesian installation to former workers of the Zinc Works in Katowice.

workers. The curator organised all components according to a pre-agreed key motif of the ethos of passage, allowing gradation of the narrative-related tension. His proposition for the audience involved a peregrination experience reminiscent of a symbolic Way of the Cross, involving figurative stations in nooks and crannies of the hall, and intimate contact with artwork sets and old records. While the Rolling Mill had lost its workplace purpose, the project served to restore it in ideological and actual sense alike – former workers gave tours of the exhibition and participated in the process of machinery activation.

From that moment onwards, once mass audiences had been given the opportunity to enter the facility, the *Ars Cameralis* Foundation has been organising new events on site as part of the *Industriada* Festival of Historical Technologies programme. Many of those combine attractive entertainment with industrial heritage-related education. The opening night of Stephan Stroux's exhibition had also included a ludic show of fire and drums. The following *Industriada* edition (2014) was given a symbolic title, an announcement of salvaging the facility, its material revitalisation: *Serce zaczyna z wolna bić (Heartbeat Slowly Resuming)*. While the Rolling Mill was privately owned by the time, it required urgent renovation. This particular set of events included children's workshops built around the motif of natural elements, a multimedia installation (*Miejsce na Oddech – Space to Breathe*) by artists of the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, and, most importantly, "industrial" concerts, i.a. experiments by the Department of Sound Katowice. In 2015, the Rolling Mill entrance was flanked by a Silesian town of cardboard boxes – para-architectonic workshops for young visitors; the hall's nooks and crannies revealed a show of art by Erwin Sówka, Silesian amateur painter. A guest of the *Industriada*, he gave an account of his life and inspiration with the region. Yet performances by music ensembles again proved to be the most powerful and loudest item on the three-day agenda. Historical engines – industrial engineering artefacts – apart, multiple visual artwork assemblages were shown, such as photographs and videos featuring industrial heritage motifs of the Ruhr from the archives of Stiftung Zollverein in Essen, and a series of large-format industrial work-themed reproductions of Adolph Menzel's paintings and Max Steckel's photographs, among others (exhibition titled *Homo Faber Homo Ludens*). The 2016 *Industriada* edition included a graphic arts exhibition (*Przemysłowe hasła propagandowe – Industrial Propaganda Slogans*) in the Rolling Mill; furthermore, the organisers (Museum of Zinc Metallurgy in the lead) invited visitors to view a display of historical records pertaining to the local *Balkan* narrow-gauge railway with something of a cult following, and spectacular steam engine activation shows.

Alternative space and non-theatrical venues – offer of post-industrial space for visual arts and the theatre

More or less since the 1960s, artists have been losing interest in neutral "white cube" exhibition space, a direct result of installation art development. Post-industrial locations began morphing into desirable alternative space, wherein curators could provide artists with relative freedom of creation, all necessary accessories included. Parallel

attempts at introducing art into the context of live industrial facilities had obviously been made across the socialist bloc, e.g. as part of open-air sculpture projects popular in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet in these cases, the creative process – driven by the mission of disseminating culture as ordered by communist authorities – had to follow a strict set of rules, (Stano, 2019). Notably, installation authors were not the only ones to have discovered such alternative space for themselves. Early happenings were also organised in definition-eluding spaces of warehouses and abandoned factories. Only in recent decades did theatre actually begin entering non-theatrical venues: urban streets, squares, churches, tram depots, railway stations and manufacturing plants (Tyszka, 1998), albeit spectacular episodes of the kind did go down in history, in the communist USSR state of the interwar period in particular (consider the *Storming of the Winter Palace*, directed by Nikolai Evreinov in 1920) (Chaberski, 2015: 120–140). Often as not, organisers of events in non-gallery and non-theatrical locations were counting on active audiences showing up in great numbers, in view of the ostensible culture-spreading and propaganda nature of such performances. Yet Morris' declaration "*There must be crews out there...*" has nothing to do with entertaining the masses, or indeed politicising them. It is distinctly catastrophic, a reference to a time when annihilation of civilisations is spoken of much more frequently than the mission of building. It may well be interpreted not only as a metaphor of perplexity in space devoid of function, but also as a hope-inspiring attempt at dialogue with those faced with the need to work and live in the rubble of industry. Given that particular artist's activity, his words become a harbinger of participative and educational projects mentioned herein in the context of aforesaid objects and institutions of culture (Stano, 2017 I: 285–301). Curators and animators of culture are responsible for provoking artists into using motifs and accessories from a specific industrial environment and addressing local communities with their message with a view to engage in dialogue regarding locally important issues, such as groups of neglected children from working neighbourhoods, or teenagers seeking powerful audio stimuli. It is further noteworthy that the *Wilson* Shaft site and its immediate surroundings are a place of work for many people representing other professions (including service-related ones) with no direct connection to art, such circumstances suggesting energy exchange between the two spheres we might refer to as *sacrum* – art and *profanum* – uniqueness, respectively.

This pairing has also become an option for contemporary theatre, gradually abandoning the Italian convention of the picture frame stage predominant across Europe over the past centuries, and seeking performance venues outside traditional buildings. During performances staged at the *Wilson* Shaft, boundaries between the stage "*appropriating*" the spacious interior and the makeshift auditorium become a thing of convention actors transcend in a variety of ways, just like in Szajna or Kantor's theatre. Yet one would be hard-pressed to identify such actions with the phenomenon referred to as "*reality theatre*": in the wake of revitalisation, coal mine buildings have lost multiple workplace features.²⁰ All that is left is cubature, letting set designers develop

²⁰ "Reality theatre has been developing with a particular dynamic ever since the performative breakthrough of the 1960s. (...) Its characteristics include aspirations to transcend the

diverse fictitious spaces and use distinctive “*industrial*” acoustics.²¹ The broadly defined location context is significant as well – issues explored by all aforementioned performances referenced contemporaneous regional transformation (property destruction, unemployment), or, through allusion, engaged in dialogue with the highly intricate and multinational local history (borders and national identity of Silesia and Silesians). Consequently, not only was this a perfect match for the repertoire of Katowice’s theatres (*Śląski, Korez, Gry i Ludzie*), Chorzów’s *Entertainment Theatre* or Zabrze’s *Nowy*, but also for the practice of younger institutions – such as the Dance and Movement Theatre in Bytom – or ephemeral, camera-captured realisations bordering on dance, performance and happenings. The latter include i.a. Zorka Wollny and Anna Sz wajger’s *Song at Work* performed by five Gdańsk Shipyard employees (2011); Rafał Urbacki’s *I’m on Fire* with actors of the *Śląski Theatre*, the opening night organised in the former power plant hall of the Royal Steelworks in Chorzów (2016); and Jaśmina Wójcik’s film *Symphony of the Ursus Factory* (2019). Authors of aforesaid realisations with palpable genetic ties to assorted industrial communities, as it were, are unified in their intent to recall and apprise the ethos of working in industry, the cult of work, even, bringing socialism to mind. In their choice of channels (festivals, cinemas, public space) and means of expression, they are also driven to reach audiences bereft of contact with institutions promoting elite culture. Furthermore, settings of aforesaid performances revisit the *topos* of devastation: post-industrial venues are very particular locations, heterogenous, palimpsests. Some time ago, in following Marc Augé’s mindset and theories, one could have well simultaneously classified them as “*non-places*” serving a specific purpose (manufacturing, mining) and “*anthropological places*” of everyday life and relationship building (Augé, 2012: 34–35). Today, some are heavily imprinted with dilapidated existence, dispossessed of identity and primary functions and relations, robbed of any symptoms of any modicum of stability. Buildings fall into ruin, land morphs into wasteland, “*fourth nature*” ultimately making its way into and appropriating ruins as well (Edensor, 2006).²² Performances in wreckage, lines delivered by actors in walls devoid of plasterwork or any furnishings take on additional meaning, as argued by Mateusz Chaberski in a selected case study analysis of environmental theatre and site-specific performance in his book *The (Syn)aesthetic Experience: Performative Aspects of Site-Specific Productions* (Chaberski, 2015).

barrier separating elements of reality and illusion in theatrical performance, and – in terms of space – assorted attempts at deconstruction, destruction, and replacing the traditional picture frame stage with other spatial models.” (Duda, 2009: 273).

²¹ The phenomenon is observable in multiple post-industrial buildings undergoing thorough revitalisation. Many “*austere*” workplace benefits have been abandoned in favour of new functions, universal aesthetics, and user convenience. Examples include the Dance and Movement Theatre in Bytom, organised in revitalised space of the “*Rozbark*” Coal Mine changing/common room, cf. <http://www.teatrrozbark.pl/industriada-w-teatrze-rozbark>

²² German scholar of Berlin’s flora Ingo Kowarik identified four categories of nature in urban conditions, referring to wasteland-related nature as *fourth nature* (*Natur der vierten Art*). Cf. Kacper Jakubowski, *Czwarta przyroda w mieście* (*Fourth Nature in the City*), “*Autoportret*” 2019, No. 3, pp. 17–25.

Theatre academic Artur Duda aptly described the nature of such propositions as responding to the needs and expectations of experimental theatre: "A non-theatrical building has its own reality – materiality, instrumentality (convenience), it can occasionally be a work of art – which reality is then used for purposes of a theatrical performance staged within" (Duda, 2006:344). Following that train of thought, one may even presuppose that shortages identified on-site in facilities acquired for art purposes (in terms of architecture, infrastructure, function) may also become such "*instruments*": in post-industrial complexes, the loss of previous functionalities – clearly defined, fostering survival – should be identified as the fundamental differentiating factor. Yet any feature of the industrial environment is potentially attractive: brick and plastered façades, a strip of greenery running wild, extinguished furnaces, "*dormant*" steam engines, artificial elevations: heaps or scrap metal repositories. The origin of any locally secured material is of consequence to the durability of installations or items it yields. Interestingly enough, artists have a capacity to make such imperfections valuable as well: poor substance may symbolise the transience of the individual – or the impoverishment of a specific social group.

It goes without saying that industrial facilities are exposed to negative phenomena: plunder, devastation, overgrowth all lead to ruin. Yet they undergo positive change as well: roofing replacement, windows refitted to replace original glass, human activity in infrastructure found and purchased – historical machinery being taken out, brought in, deposited and rearranged has modified the art exhibition capacity at the Zinc Rolling Mill considerably over the past two years. Today, artworks can no longer be introduced to Mill space well-nigh at random, as had been the case in 2013 when the whole facility was handed over to Stroux to accommodate his installation. Restriction has thus become something akin to value.

Comparable with open public space only, monumental scale is what attracts artists to post-industrial sites, first and foremost. Portuguese curator Inês Moriera also points to the particular colour quality of industrial exhibition interiors: "the proposed conceptual figuration – Brown rooms / Grey halls – enunciates imperfect and incomplete spaces that resonate with absences and presence, with an intense materiality (...)" (Moriera, 2015: 218). Visual properties of walls tie in with their hapticity and – more broadly speaking – polysensory impact. Rich sensual impressions experienced at such locations are occasionally yet distinctly more intense than in other exhibition spaces. "Undergoing demolition, the quayside hall reeks of lubricants, mould, dirt of the ages." (Drewniak, 2004:84) – was the theatre critic's description of the setting for a performance of *Hamlet* (directed by J. Klata, 2004) on a post-shipyard site in Gdańsk. Under such circumstances, any action taken by an artist or actor has to necessarily defend its own visibility. Often as not, measures employed by directors or curators in traditional galleries or on stage lose all meaning in industrial space. In theatrical performance, the actor's means of expression (facial or vocal in particular) may suffer. In case of art exhibitions, casualties may include nuances to painting texture, recognisability of motifs, audibility or purity of sound. At this juncture, Brian O'Doherty's prophetic statement merits a mention: "The city is the indispensable context of collage and of the gallery space. Modern art needs the sound of traffic outside to authenticate it." (O'Doherty,

2015: 52). While an abandoned rolling mill or power plant has lost the assemblage of its natural sounds, actors and performers are perfectly capable of resurrecting them, as proven by countless examples. They can hardly be identified as genuine components of industrial space, their form having been strongly modified – yet they prevail, synonyms of lost “life.” Sound, fire or “worker” activity brought in by curators or artists are an excellent match for an encounter with any recipient who “remembers.”²³ Even if not directly referencing industry, the performance will resonate differently on stage than in empty factory halls.

In summary of this review of curator, theatre and animation activities, one might well conclude protecting of industrial heritage in Silesia – and revitalising individual facilities in consequence – fit in with the notion of transforming the region’s image from highly industrialised to a place of culture, an attractive tourist destination (idea: *Katowice, City of Gardens* or *Katowice, City of Music*). Structures handpicked from facilities and sites abandoned by the industry assume new functions while others are demolished, yielding space to new investment. The original industrial purpose of any building does carry within a certain intent to ultimately turn it into a yet another museum of technology, list it as historical in a register of monuments, and/or place it firmly on the Industrial Monuments Route of the Silesian Voivodship²⁴ – yet all examples listed herein are ample proof that revitalisation may also take on a spiritual dimension (restoring meaning of life and a sense of personal value to the unemployed, stimulating the imagination of tourists, forming and shaping environment-friendly mentality), not to mention social aspects (building and restoring bonds between local community members and new arrivals, spurring people into action). Initiated in this part of Katowice, public and private revitalisation activities have begun spreading across ever-greater terrain, becoming comprehensive in nature, serving purposes of infrastructure and landscape protection, encouraging positive social relations, and developing a local sense of aesthetics. The “aesthetic touch” Robert Morris had been expecting towards the end of the 20th century is finally seeing daylight.

²³ Numerous events on revitalised post-industrial sites have been leaning towards aforementioned qualities – e.g. the Metallurgy Museum in Chorzów hosted *Ognisty fajer* on August 20th 2022: a festival promoting fire-related professions. Cf. <https://muzeumhutnictwa.pl/aktualnosci/ognisty-fajer/>

²⁴ Notable examples include a brand-new investment in the Silesian region – revitalisation of the historical power plant hall of the Royal (“*Królewska*”) Steelworks in Chorzów. The facility was fully secured, its roof renovated. The former power plant has been converted into a venue for multiple events, including a World Press Photo exhibition, *INDUSTRIADA* – Industrial Monuments Route Days, and the Metropolitan Night of Theatres. Appointed by the Mayor of the City of Chorzów, task forces for establishing a Metallurgy Museum in Chorzów operated in the years 2013–2017. In 2018, the Mayor appointed a Programme Council for the Museum-to-be. In 2017, the Coal Mining Museum in Zabrze (main beneficiary) and City of Chorzów (project partner) were awarded a grant from EU funds. The project “*Revitalisation and Sharing of Upper Silesian Post-Industrial Heritage*” received funding within the framework of the Operational Programme *Infrastructure and Environment* for the years 2014–2020. Opened in 2022, the Metallurgy Museum in Chorzów is a local government institution of culture of the City of Chorzów; cf. Metallurgy Museum in Chorzów <https://muzeumhutnictwa.pl/historia/>

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is an outline of the activity of art curators, modern art representatives and theatre directors in selected examples of post-industrial space in Southern Poland – and Upper Silesia in particular. Industrial facilities provide them with both inspiration and attractive exhibition spaces. Historical buildings and their surroundings are granted new aesthetic and conceptual meanings based on the study of their history and the remembrance of their former users. They also often contribute to the revitalisation of industrial heritage.

Keywords: revitalisation through art, post-industrial space, industrial landscape

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Fig. 1. Fragment of the installation *Memory of Work...* – at the Zinc Rolling Mill in Katowice-Szopienice, 2013, photo by: B. Stano.

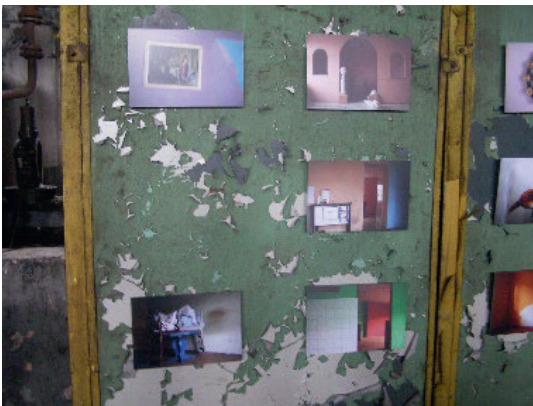


Fig. 2. Piotr Wójcik, *Bytom Karb – Memory Flats*, photcollage between machinery units, installation *Memory of Work...*, photo by: B. Stano.



Fig. 3. Mona Tusz, *Flywheel Setting*, mural, Zinc Rolling Mill in Szopienice, 2011, photo by: M. Tusz.



Fig. 4. Witold Pichurski, *The Conjoined*, wood sculpture, 185 x 500 cm, *Wilson Shaft*, photo by: B. Stano.



Fig. 5. *Polytonal Two-dimensional Harmonies*, an exhibition of paintings and graphic art by Marek Batorski, September 4th until October 1st 2015, accompanied by a performance by the jazz band *MOVE ON*, the artist on stage, *Wilson Shaft*, photo by: B. Stano.

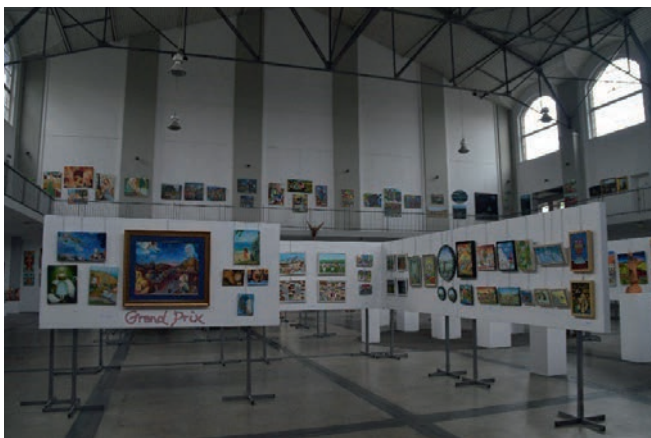


Fig. 6. *Art Naif Festival, VI* 2016, *Wilson Shaft*, photo by: B. Stano.