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Documenting the City: A Construction of Urban Memory¹

Abstract: The text reflects on photographic methods of documenting the city. The paper is parted into four sections: the first presents the issues surrounding documenting, the second discusses historical examples of urban documentary, the third analyses the modern tendency of construction and, finally, the last fourth section introduces examples of contemporary art practice. Written with regard to the concepts of François Soulages I will discuss, among others, the following projects: *The Inventory (Inwentaryzacja)* by Ireneusz Zjeżdżałka, *A Sky over Warsaw* by Juliusz Sokołowski and *The Other City (Inne miasto)* by Wojciech Wilczyk and Elżbieta Janicka. All examples focus on different aspects of documentation: they allow preserving in a viewer's mind the lost past, create a contra-image of a city or reveal the unseen and forgotten fragments of history.

Key words: photography, documentary, urban memory, artistic practice

How do we imagine cities? What initiates any recollection of urban space? Is it a physical experience or visual representation? Usually, we recognize cities through images published in books, presented in films or on Internet sites. Even during our travels, when we change ourselves into an army of tourists and we think that we are “just taking photos”, we often forget that the images of Paris, London, Berlin or Venice produced by us and glued carefully into our material albums or inserted into virtual ones will stand in place of these real spaces for years. These photographs that represent places and objects will serve as markers of cities more efficiently than the blurred experience of our memory.

The article has two goals: the first is to consider the function of the visual documentation of urban space, the second – to find a difference between architectural and documentary photography. Is such documentation only an image of passing shadows and traces of streets and buildings? Or, maybe, is it a process during which the memory of the city is created? Urban photographs usurp the position of images of real space and last in our memory forever.

¹ The article develops and revises some ideas presented in an essay *Portretowanie architektury* (Portraying Architecture), “Autoportret” 2013, no. 1 (40), pp. 46–51.

Documenting the visual

The French philosopher François Soulages asks a question: “is photography a slave or a master of architecture?”² Soulages does not settle from the beginning what will be the answer and carefully analyses the methods of taking pictures of architecture and urban space. In his opinion, when we talk about pictures of the city, we deal with different genres of photography. According to him, for example, architectural photography differs from the photography of the urban landscape and pictures of monuments (and that is why many of Atget’s and Marville’s famous images have to be excluded from his definition). He concludes that the architectural photographer follows the architect’s traces to reveal his intentions while an urban photographer deconstructs the city and creates its image afresh.³ To understand the difference between the two approaches, it is necessary to look closely at the tradition of the documentary genre.

Derrick Price states as follows: “Documentary has been described as a form, a genre, a tradition, a style, a movement and a practice; It is not useful to try offer a single definition of the word”.⁴ Although Price has in mind visual practices, his words could be considered in the context of documentary practices in general. We deal with different documentary sources (public and private) that regard the past time. However, the term “documentary photography” means more than just a visualisation of the past. In making a documentary a particular attitude of the photographer is employed. According to Karin Becker, “the photographer’s goal was to bring the attention of an audience to the subject of his or her work and, in many cases, to pave the way for social change”.⁵ Documentary photography, though, is often seen as a part of a social discourse. Undoubtedly, such an approach towards practices of visualisation is based on the legacy of John Grierson’s film concept of documentary film.⁶ In his text from 1932 he considered films that were “made from natural material” and therefore allowed both to observe chosen forms of life and to expose the “reality” of everyday stories.⁷ What’s important for urban studies, Grierson in his explanation of what documentary is, recalled not only ethnographic films (R. Flaherty’s *Nanook*, 1922), but mostly films (W. Ruttmann’s *Berlin: A Symphony of a Great City*, 1927) and poetry on cities (C. Sandburg’s poems on Chicago, 1916). According to Grierson, these artworks represented “the return from romance to reality”.⁸

² F. Soulages, *Estetyka fotografii. Strata i zysk*, transl. B. Mytych-Forajter, W. Forajter, Universitas, Kraków 2007, p. 381.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ D. Price, *Surveyors and Surveyed*, [in:] L. Wells (ed.), *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London–New York 2004, p. 69.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ R.M. Barsam, *Non-fiction Film Theory and Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1973, p. 22.

⁷ J. Grierson, *First Principles of Documentary*, [in:] C. Fowler (ed.), *The European Cinema Reader*, Routledge, London–New York 1973, p. 40.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

Thus, urban documentary not only shows buildings and streets, but also tells stories about people's lives seen from a certain perspective. The significant change in understanding of the notion of documentary has come together with the poststructural criticism towards the authority of objectivity. In the theoretical concepts by Allan Sekula and John Tagg we can find the inspiration of Foucault's ideas on the relationship between institutional powers and the surface of appearance. Their belief that an act of documentation is never neutral and generally is employed by various institutions influenced the theory of photography from the eighties till today. Usually, documentary is used with a particular goal in mind – it might be a legitimization of definite powers or a presentation of their abuses. Luc Pauwels has interestingly contributed to the theory of documentary nowadays. He analysed the visual methods used in social and cultural research. The visual researcher distinguished between two modes of performing the research. The first mode, called “mimetic”, focuses on realistic representation. Pauwels stated: “Essentially we then try to use images as «windows» to the depicted world. This rather «realist» approach is legitimate if we are primarily interested in the depicted matter for further scrutiny”,⁹ even though he warns against being misled by that which is depicted (the referent) and the depiction (visual representation). The second mode, called “expressive”, leaves more creative space for the researcher, but also demands more technical skills and visual competence (“visual scientific literacy”¹⁰).

Nevertheless, qualitative researchers usually emphasize the engaged specifics of documentary practices. Marcus Banks noticed that a documentary cannot be neutral because it represent “objects, people and events” due to enlightening their social meanings and mechanisms.¹¹ Moreover, the photographer's intention may differ from the documentary's further use. The pictures of an amateur photographer, which had been taken just for author's own pleasure, may for a historian become after some years a historical testimony. In this sense each photograph that was taken in the past will become a document, and the way of its use will change.¹² Urban documentation seems to be even more political and ideological than we suspected. Martha Rosler sees the need of documentary work in the fight for citizens' rights and presenting their demands in public.¹³ Documentary is described here as a tool that initiates the process of awakening the audience's social consciousness through exposing the most acute urban problems. Documentary work aims to register chosen aspects of everyday life (objects and behaviours) with typical and unexpected events that later will be interpreted by researchers.

After this brief review of theoretical approaches toward the documentary, we have to ask the main questions: What is documented in the city and why?

⁹ L. Pauwels, *Visual Sociology Reframed: An Analytical Synthesis and Discussion of Visual Methods in Social and Cultural Research*, “Sociological Methods & Research” 2010, no. 38 (4), p. 557.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 568.

¹¹ M. Banks, *Materiały wizualne w badaniach jakościowych*, transl. P. Tomanek, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009, pp. 37, 127.

¹² A. Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1991, p. 169.

¹³ M. Rosler, *Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint*, [in:] M. Miles, T. Hall, I. Borden (eds.), *The City Cultures Reader*, Routledge, London–New York 2004.

Urban documentary

I will start with a comparison of two pictures, one taken in the second half of the 19th century, the second – over a hundred years later.



Fig. 1. Ireneusz Zjeżdżałka, *Inventory (Inwentaryzacja)* (Stokbet we Wrześni), 2000–2004. Courtesy of Anna Zjeżdżałka.

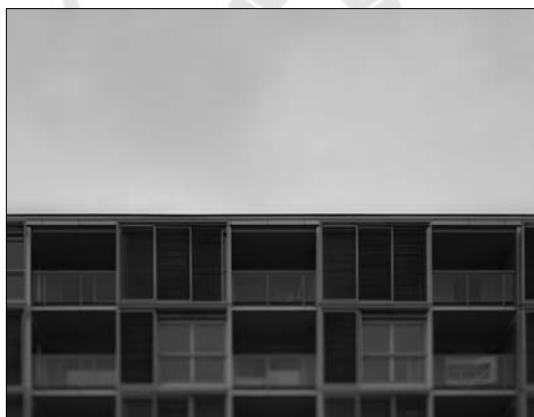


Fig. 2. Juliusz Sokołowski, *A Sky over Warsaw (Niebo nad Warszawą)*, 2008. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2. Both images are in black and white and both present the shape of a metal construction, typical of early-modern architecture. Our sight, driven by the perspective lines, follows the depth of the images. There is any human figure on neither of them. The images seem similar, although it is clear that they were not taken at the same time and represent different edifices. Despite their visual likeness, the pictures, indeed, are divided by a hundred fifty years and by the photographer's intention as well. The author of the first one, Édouard-Denis Baldus, the participant of the French *Le Mission Heliographique*, documented the monuments of an approaching new era of steel and steam. The second photographer, Ireneusz Zjeżdżałka, eternised the rest of an age that had already and ultimately gone. These two images frame the era of changes that started with a hope and belief in the progress of modernity and ended with its great fall. What's interesting from a historic perspective is that we can "read" these images on two levels: the first is the level of a "pure", let's say, mimetic depiction, a detailed representation of a particular building. The second level adds a metaphorical dimension. Undoubtedly, this process is well known by those who are experienced in semiotics (in both the Barthesian and Peircean versions). These almost "mimetic" (in Pauwels words) visualisations of modern, industrial architecture represent completely different meanings: from faith in the future to melancholy, from innocent modernity to its deconstruction. How did it happen that two images so akin to one another contain such varied implications?

To answer the above question we have to go back to the history of urban documentary. Since the second half of the 19th century the instrumental use of documentary images has been subsequently developed. In institutional surveillance practices (police, medical, educational) photography was legitimized by the authority of science and seen as an objective proof for the depicted objects. Representations of urban life served as evidence of what existed. For example, the reports of social engineers on industrial urban areas, like J.S. Cameron's report on Leed's Insanitary Areas, were regarded as a depiction of "pure" facts from the workers' everyday life.

It is worth remembering why a documentary was made in those times. The thing is that photography was early recognised as a beneficial tool to "city fathers" (the term used by Andreas Huyssen). Documentary commissions that presented the poor districts of Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham, York or Sheffield provided support for arguments in favour of city redevelopment.¹⁴ Photographs of Paris from the same time were less socially and more politically engaged. Charles Marville's well-known pictures of Parisian cobblestones – taken as a commission for the City Council – documented fragments of urban tissue that were supposed to be erased with a huge rebuilding plan. The Delmaet and Durandelle documentary of Opera Garnier represented a detailed chronicle of a construction.¹⁵ Yet early photographers realised that there is a thin line between documentary and artistic ambitions. In 1851, when the French *Commission des Monuments Historiques* founded *Le Mission Heliographique*,

¹⁴ J. Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York–Hampshire 1988, pp. 120–139.

¹⁵ E. Perego, *The Urban Machine*, [in:] M. Frizot (ed.), *A New History of Photography*, Könemann, Köln 1998, pp. 199, 217.

its goal was described as a preservation of architecture,¹⁶ especially historical heritage. Baldus and other photographers and archivists employed by the Commission: Charles Nègre, Hippolyte Bayard, Gustave Le Gray, Henri Le Secq and Auguste Mestral, were mostly educated in painting and treated their work for Le Mission not only as a documentation, but also as an artistic challenge. They founded the canon of architectural photography: with their accurate perspective and thorough representation of architectural details, as well as the fact they looked for their own subjective vision. Soulages recalled Nègre's words: "everywhere, when I could free myself from architectural precision, I created in a picturesque manner".¹⁷ The artist's nature struggled here with the visual convention. We could say also that a mimetic genre fights against the expressive one. An effect of this ambiguity is striking. We can see a precise depiction of architecture, originally composed on Nègre's photogravures. There is a view of a column at La Place du Châtelet taken from a level of the cobblestones, the group of three chimney sweepers walking along the boulevard on Seine, a priest sitting on the stairs of the Cathedral. These images present not only buildings but city life as well, the everyday life of people.

How are these images perceived from the present-day perspective? From the archives of institutions that commissioned the pictures they were moved to the public sphere, published, often in a form of a postcard or in albums. Soon they became a picturesque representation of the past, a symbol of a city or a sign of social change. Even today, when we try to imagine the "old Paris" or "old Glasgow", in our minds appear the pictures popularised by Marville's, Atget's or Thomas Annans' photographs. There are narrow streets, cobblestones and a slightly gloomy air in the mental pictures we create.

In contemporary criticism towards the objectivity of the 19th century documentary works, it is the ambiguity of photography that is emphasized. This ambiguity is founded in the questions about the context of use of the images. Martha Rosler states: "documentary practices are social practices that produce meanings in a particular context".¹⁸ Also artists are more and more conscious of photography's entanglement into social and cultural frameworks. Not only a knowledge of the instrumental discourse of the past is necessary to understand the architectural photography, but also nowadays the documentary genre becomes an object of artists' metareflection.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, see as well M. Frizot, *The Truthfulness of the Calotype*, [in:] M. Frizot (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 72–73.

¹⁷ F. Soulages, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

¹⁸ M. Rosler, *op. cit.*, p. 119.



Fig. 3. Elżbieta Janicka, Wojciech Wilczyk, *The Other City*, 2011.



Fig. 4. Wojciech Wilczyk, *There Is No Such Thing as an Innocent Eye* (*Niewinne oko nie istnieje*), 2006–2008. Courtesy of the artist.

How artists' approaches may differ illustrates the following comparison of two projects. Firstly, let's look at Juliusz Sokołowski's commission of the JEMS architectural company. The photographer delves here into the old convention of architectural photography. A series titled *A Sky over Warsaw* consists of two parts: the first presents small, black and white fragments of the JEMS edifices. They are contrasted with the massive sky. The second, colourful part of the series shows a landscape with a narrow line of buildings. Sokołowski's photographs direct the attention of the viewer to the aesthetics and visual principles of the presentation of cities. From one perspective he recalls the genre of the modern fragmentation of facades, from the other he brings to mind the tradition of *veduta* – the city panorama, popular from the 16th till the end of the 19th century.

Wilczyk chooses a totally different approach. *There is no such thing as an innocent eye* is a massive visual archive of former Jewish buildings in Poland. From about 5800 photographs that were taken, 307 images were published in a book. The author added short descriptions of the buildings' histories and interviews with passers-by. The pictures are almost "styleless" (even if a lack of style can be seen as a genre as well). There are accidental road signs, cars and transmission lines in front of the buildings in Wilczyk's images – objects that usually are carefully erased from architectural visualisations. The sky often is grey and sunless. The aesthetics is reduced to highlight the cultural meaning. Wilczyk's photos are supposed to make us question the history and intercultural relationship represented by these buildings. The photographer's attitude corresponds to Rosler's understanding of documentary as a social practice that encourages public debate. Both materials create the city's image, where a real space changes into a discursive one. The title of Wilczyk's work: *There Is No Such Thing as an Innocent Eye* between other meanings is a straight deconstruction of the photographic objectivity. Also Sokołowski does the same by his intervention into the visual convention of architectural photography.

According to the 19th century classification system, these two projects would never be presented in the same show-room. Sokołowski's aesthetic compositions would rather belong to the world of the Art Salon, while Wilczyk's would stay hidden in a file cabinet owned by a historian. Nowadays, both belong to the same body of urban documentary, both can be seen partly as a representation of reality, partly as the artist's declaration.

Cities in construction and fall

Modernity moved the focus from general views of a city to architecture and its details. The Swiss architect Peter Zumthor claims that architecture should be self-sufficient. A construction of a building represents its very idea and its primary functions. He states: "To remain close to the thing itself, close to the essence of the thing I have to shape, confident that if the building is convinced accurately enough for its place and its function, it will develop its own strength, with no need for artistic additions".¹⁹ Zumthor's book titled *Thinking Architecture* is intriguingly illustrated with minimalist photographs by Laura Padgett. Shapes

¹⁹ P. Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, Birkäuser, Basel, Boston–Berlin 2010, p. 29.

and textures are perfectly composed. Geometry of space together with the sophisticated colour of photographed surfaces create almost abstract images. Zumthor's architecture is extremely photogenic. Their perspective seems to be drawn for a photographer's eye. Even if the architecture may be self-sufficient when we walk in it, for its representation it demands the camera. We couldn't imagine these projects if we couldn't have photographs. The same way as text and images interplay in a book, architecture and photography are inseparable in our minds.

Elvire Perego in her essay on industrial architecture explained this photography/architecture relationship. With regard to the meaning of the word machine she noticed that the invention of photography added a deeper dimension to the understanding of architecture. In the Renaissance the words *maccina* and *edificio* meant the same. "In fact – she continues – *edifice* was often applied to a war-machine or hydraulic apparatus, the framework of which looked like a building, whereas machine was also used for architectural works – for example Milan Cathedral or Brunelleschi's dome in Florence Cathedral. This observation opens our eyes to the all-powerful nature of technology, the mechanistic principle within those intellectual creations, machines and constructions".²⁰

Thus photography appeared at a stage of history, in a particular moment – at the threshold of the age of the technological experiment of modernity. What's more, it supported the idea of the beauty of modern architecture. The photographic archives of the late 19th century were filled with the appearances of constructions built for successive Great Exhibitions. Those images that were taken by photographers like P.H. Delamotte (the Crystal Palace, 1851), Bisson Brothers (Paris World Exhibition, 1867), Durandelle and Chevojon (the Eiffel Tower, 1888) exposed the structure and the scale of the photographed objects. The photographs goal was to arouse audience admiration towards the creative powers of the human mind.

Somehow modern photography may be seen as both proud and vain. It doesn't match the austere role ascribed to it of being "a servant of science and arts" that was sketched for the new invention in Baudelaire's famous essay. It announced an arrival of a new era and a new city. The 20th century appeared together with new ideologies that changed our view on these pictures. The same images that previously were seen as manifestos of modernity started to be read as testimonies of the past.

There were vertical forms that started to dominate over the landscape of the twentieth century cities. New symbols emerged: skyscrapers and chimneys growing from the bodies of factories. A machine became a model for human existence. In Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* an audience sees the first android, and his visual imagination stands for a vision of a city for years. Urban dynamics and vertical objects were celebrated not only by filmmakers but by photographers as well. Edward Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz and Berenice Abbott simultaneously worked on the new visual conventions of the representation of urban space. The harmony of the horizontal cityscape and the vertical shapes of landmarks that were previously counterbalanced by a central perspective was replaced with diagonal lines, unexpected

²⁰ E. Perego, *The Urban Machine*, [in:] M. Frizot (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 197.

close-ups and the pure play of forms in the modernists' pictures. With reference to Walter Benjamin "architecture has always offered the prototype of an artwork that is received in a state of distraction and through the collective".²¹

Almost each avant-garde artist from the twenties had taken photographs that turned functional devices into an abstract form. Paul Outerbridge, Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler, Germaine Krull, Margaret Bourke-White and Ansel Adams had photographed all those wonderful tangles of pipes and pistons that finally, in the second half of the twentieth century, found their reference in the Renzo Piano design of the Centre Pompidou building. Especially Krull, befriended by Benjamin, possessed a rare ability of introducing into images elements of a "photographic new vision" that linked the poetry of expression with a symbolic vision. Krull documented constructions of bridges that look like spiders' webs and racks that takes after laces. The images of cities changed into complicated systems of fragments and geometries. Objects are abstracted from their original function. Krull, like other modernist artists, noticed at least one significant feature of architecture. Because it aims to be functional, not ornamental, the structure of the object plays the role of ornament. Photographers were seduced by the lines and textures of steel ropes and concrete cylinders and started to use them as elements of a new construction. The city to the modernist appears as geometric, black and white, built on light and shadows.

However, it was Albert Renger-Patzsch's works that provoked a noteworthy dispute on the goals and functions of modern photography. Again, as in the examples presented earlier, two discourses collided here – the first was a discourse of aesthetics, the second – of social meaning. In 1928 the album titled *Die Welt ist Schön* was published. There were comparisons of the images of the natural world and of industrial architecture in the pictures. The message was clear – the beauty of nature is replaced by the beauty of technique. Renger-Patzsch knew how to anaesthetize a world of machines by means of photography. A well chosen frame, a transfer of colour into the black-and-white mode, a focusing on the texture of a photographed substance, turned the reality into an autonomous composition of lines and patches. The aesthetics of image made social oriented interpreters ask a question – what was it that Renger-Patzsch actually presented?

Benjamin, who commented on Bertold Brecht's opinion on Renger-Patzsch's work, wrote that the fashionable, modern frame of photography may change the image of poverty into a commodity fetish.²² The title *The World Is Beautiful* was a leitmotif for the Marxists, who criticised the trend towards any aesthetisation that obscured the revolutionary message of the artwork. (What's intriguing, the relationship between aesthetics and politics would be discussed years after in Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics*). The issue of visual beauty is significant for photography, because a camera that frames and cuts fragments from reality changes its context and changes its meaning. How may a photographer resign from any composition and not be "creative"? Benjamin advised the use of visual tools to "unmask and

²¹ W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, transl. E. Jephcott, R. Livingstone et al., Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2008, p. 40.

²² W. Benjamin, *Twórcza jako wytwórcza*, transl. J. Sikorski, [in:] *idem, Anioł historii*, H. Orłowski (ed.), Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 1996, p. 173.

construct” the reality itself. Thus, the authenticity of the photograph should be exposed. The camera should be “prepared to grasp [the] fleeting, secret image whose shock will bring the mechanism of association in the viewer to a complete halt”.²³ Complemented with a caption, the image in a viewer’s mind is unequivocal and tells the social and political “truth”. But isn’t it naïve to think that a photograph can be unequivocal? It happens that even with captions photographs are rather ambiguous.

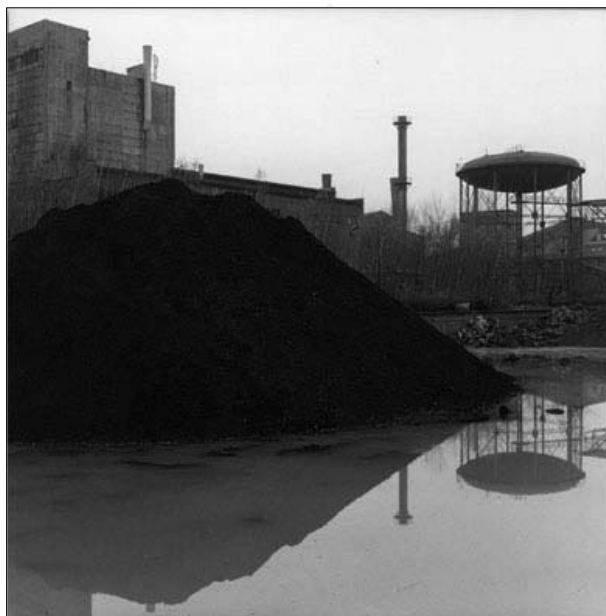


Fig. 5. Wojciech Wilczyk, *Bytom-Bobrek, Huta "Bobrek"*, 12.11.2001. Courtesy of the artist.

If we would compare photographs from the beginning of the last century to Wojciech Wilczyk’s works that present Silesia,²⁴ we could see how misleading may be the canon of photography. There is a reflection of a black mine’s waste dump in muddy water in the foreground of one of Wilczyk’s images. Towards the left there are rectangular concrete objects, and towards the right a delicate metal construction where a cylindrical form is floating. Visually black-and-white images, focused on geometry and light effects, recall the aesthetics of “new objectivism”. However Wilczyk unlike Renger-Patzsch and Krull takes pictures that expose the sunless, grey sky, and eliminates the contrast between light and shadows. He tries

²³ W. Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography*, transl. P. Patton, [in:] A. Trachtenberg (ed.), *Classic Essays on Photography*, Leete’s Island Books, New Haven, CT 1980, p. 215.

²⁴ The images have been seen a few times, in a series *Czarno-biały Śląsk* (Black-and-White Silesia), 1999–2003; published in a book *Kapitał w słowach i obrazach* (Capital in Words and Pictures), 2002; or the artist’s solo show *Postindustrial*, 2004.

to direct the viewer's attention to signs of the degradation of space. His Silesia is gloomy and hopeless. What's more, his photographs published together with the commentaries of cooperating writers reveal the real face of the postindustrial world, where people are made to search for a new way of life. Somehow Wilczyk managed to fulfil Benjamin's will – he presents photographs that are not “bound in coincidences”,²⁵ but which bitterly comment on the state of the urban fall.

The photographer was conscious of the photographic tendency towards making the world beautiful. While commenting on the project he mentioned once that maybe in his portraits of Silesian factories and cities there was too much melancholic attractiveness and maybe the images should be taken in a more “realistic”, colourful style. What's also interesting, Wilczyk's images were quite influential on Polish photography. Many photographers tried to depict Silesia similarly – as an astonishing and romantic ruin. This kind of imagination, where cities are bleak and shaded, still exists, even if cities as Katowice or Bytom make an effort to change their image and to present themselves as colourful and healthy.

Nevertheless, maybe social change and melancholy are inseparable? Benjamin, who glorified social change, praised melancholy as well. Wouldn't the Silesian photographs be a symbol of the process of history for him? Here are buildings wiped out by the storm of progress. Angelus Novus, whose eyes are wide-opened, moves forward, but looks backwards. There are only “ruins on ruins”,²⁶ a never-ending circle of constructing and falls.

What is seen? What is remembered?

François Soulages realised that contemporary architects and photographers are aware of the mutual benefits arising from cooperation between their domains. The main purpose of photography is no longer to reflect a perfect representation of architectural values but a presentation of those values “photographically”. That means that photography may expose those aspects of buildings and urban space which were perhaps unnoticed by an architect. Thus, the photographic image has a power of transforming into architecture non-architectural objects. The French philosopher called this ability “the aesthetics of a protocol, a document, a ruin, of an unsighted”.²⁷ To explain this point of view Soulages gave the example of Bernd and Hilla Becher's conceptual photography. An act of photography, in his opinion, transformed neutral objects like water towers and residential houses into architecture. Previously these edifices were nothing more than just “a building or a real estate”.²⁸

A turn from constructivism to conceptual art had to happen to start to think about industrial forms and boring city outskirts as a part of urban space. Becher's *Typologies* changed the interpretative frame for photographed objects. They were extracted from the functional realm and put into an aesthetic frame. The approach of artists from Düsseldorf was revolu-

²⁵ W. Benjamin, *A Short History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

²⁶ *Idem*, *O pojęciu historii*, transl. K. Krzemieniowa, [in:] *idem*, *Aniol historii*, *op.cit.*, p. 418.

²⁷ F. Soulages, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

tionary, because they resigned from the artistic experiment of modernists and went back to the 19th century, monotonous genre of documenting. Instead of small, light, instant cameras – so liked by Benjamin and others – they used a large, heavy camera on a tripod. The photographed objects seemed to be cut from their spatial context. Viewers accustomed to looking at modern games of shadow and light, perspective shortenings and close-ups, suddenly were confronted with a view of multiplexed buildings, similar to one another – a detailed depiction instead of modern expressivity. What's intriguing is that the convention founded by the Bechers soon became popular. In the eighties, authors like Thomas Struth (the Becher's student) and Giorgio Basilico presented the cityscapes as abandoned and dehumanised. Grey, geometric perspectives of streets surrounded by skyscrapers and endless areas filled with identical blocks of flats became a new imagination for the post-modern metropolis, a metropolis that leaves no place for its inhabitant.

Thus, Soulages finds two genres of architectural photography. The first has been described above – the transformation of something non-architectural into architecture. The second genre is a quest for the *arché* of architecture. *Arché* denotes the basis of a construction or a primary order. Soulages writes about two ways in which photographers are looking for the *arché*. One is “spectral photography”, based on objects that already exist or that are founded by non-architectural substances. The second way – “the Proustian photography” – reuses the fragments of architectural wholes and locates them in the memory of the photographer.²⁹

My second example in the paper is Zjeżdżałka's *Inventory*. Undoubtedly, this project belongs to the genre of Proustian photography. Images register the traces of the past and tell stories about a world that does not exist any longer. Although they look photorealistic,³⁰ they are close to being magic realism. These pictures are like memories that constantly move between the unconsciousness and the realm of the photograph. While looking at them we travel in time – between an idealistic vision of the past and the contemporary pictorial ruin. Zjeżdżałka exposed a romantic side to an industrial wreck. Wilczyk, using a similar visual means, achieved in his Silesia series quite a different goal – he demystified the social catastrophe of the region.

Are we able to understand what is the *arché* of the contemporary urban? Can we find an essence of the material forms that are inhabited by us? Are those constructions of buildings, the rhythm of brick, just concrete columns or industrial (and postindustrial) factories? Somehow Italo Calvino in his brilliant *Le città invisibili managed to find that arché, that Ur-sprache of the city in language. But how to do this visually?*

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 386.

³⁰ The term is used for documentary photography.

Let's now look at the last example. In 2011 Elżbieta Janicka and Wojciech Wilczyk worked on a project entitled *The Other City*. They photographed a part of Warsaw, where between 1940 and 1943 the Jewish ghetto was founded by the Nazis. Completely destroyed due to the ghetto's liquidation following the Jewish Uprising, after WWII it was rebuilt – and in a real-socialist manner filled with blocks of flats. Nowadays, the area is surrounded by significant objects like the Pałac Kultury i Nauki (The Palace of Culture and Science, a symbol of communism) and the Arkadia Shopping Centre (a symbol of neo-liberal times). To the east of the area is Nowe Miasto, Plac i Ogród Krasińskich, Plac Bankowy, and the historical PAST edifice; to the west Żelazna and Okopowa streets with the Jewish and Stare Powązki cemeteries.³¹

The photographs, shaped by a tool that is employed in the project (4x5 inches camera), recall the instrumental photography of the 19th century or Bechers' documentary style. The authors decided to use colour footage to omit the trap of a black-and-white anesthetisation discourse. The point of view was situated high up: on roofs or the last floors of buildings. Pictures were taken on sunless days that erased the contrast between light and shadow. Like in Daguerre's famous view on the Boulevard du Temple, there are no people. Warsaw seems to be abandoned, which fits in well with the message of the project. The city seen from above reveals the incoherencies of urban planning. What remains of the pre-war urban planning seems to be covered with modernist buildings and new, often uncontrolled development. The project documents what really exists but also re-creates the past that is hidden under the new buildings. It is a panorama of what was erased by history. The frantic, recent development has left "holes" in the urban tissue, places where buildings were never rebuilt, fragments of new constructions, and a few monuments of the past. There is an "other", spectral city under the present one, which is visible. Changing the point of view and moving from the level of the streets to a bird's eye perspective has deconstructed the view of Warsaw popularised by the tourist industry as well. Such a city image is unknown or deliberately concealed. On the other hand, when we once look at the view of Warsaw created by Janicka and Wilczyk, their image of the city will last forever in our minds.

Conclusion

All things considered, we might ask what is the relationship between photography and architecture, between a picture and a city. From my point of view, photography always adds "something" to our view of buildings and streets. It allows to supplement the representation of the real city with personal imagination and to see the phenomena previously unnoticed. A good example here is the book *Istanbul: Memories of a City* by Orhan Pamuk. The author analysed closely photographs to reconstruct his own past, but also the history of the city. Ara Güler's images chosen by Pamuk as an illustration for the text do not only depict a space and time that could be unknown for readers, but also create in their minds an atmosphere that was important for Pamuk – the black-and-white photographs represent *huzun*, a certain kind

³¹ Information at: <http://zacheta.art.pl/article/view/1342/janicka-wilczyk-inne-miasto> (access: 30.09.2013).

of a Turkish melancholy. Therefore, the imagery can be seen as a representation of a memory, but it also might be a substitute for the memory for those who have never been in a city.

In the article I have described various examples of artistic practices that may change viewers' ideas of the cities and broaden their knowledge on their historic and contemporary state. Architectural photography seen basically as a planner's instrument in the hand of an experienced artist turns into a touching vision of the city. Furthermore, a documentary image may reveal implicit meanings of the city space. Photographers know the great power they have over the visual memory of a viewer. They will never change our memories of smells or tastes – but they can have an influence on what it is that we really see.

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