



**Sanatorium  
of memory:**

memorial for Jewish  
community in Otwock



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master thesis dissertation,

4th semester, Spatial Design

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*“The historical sense involves a perception, not  
only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence”*

— *T.S. Eliot*



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## Prologue

*“In a certain sense the past is far more real, or at any rate more stable, more resilient than the present. The present slips and vanishes like sand between the fingers, acquiring material weight, only in its recollection.”*

— *Andrej Tarkowski*

If you're trying to understand your own identity and where it has emerged from, you may turn to other people to ask questions. If they are gone, it is the places, and old documents you investigate to find answers, instead. What you find is fragments, that with use of imagination can grow into stories. The stories you create are both truthful and imaginary. But the new memories are as real as the ones you have of the events you lived through yourself because we never remember anything exactly as it was.

Two people standing next to each other will never see the space they are in, the same way. They will filter it through their past experience, memories. The memory that builds their understanding of themselves, where they are, and what got them to be there. Space will bring back a definition of something they have already seen before, a familiar smell, a sound, a shape, color, or material. Or a general sense of being, in a similar place .

Architecture and memory have been bound with each other since the beginning of human civili-

zation. We create our memories in the context of spaces. Memories shape our understanding of the past, present, and future. But of course, we don't clearly remember everything. It is as natural to remember, as it is to forget.

When we forget, there is always a chance we will never regain the memory. It will get lost, if we have no evidence of acquiring it, or no reason to keep it alive in our mental palace. More we live, the more moments we have captured and even more we have completely neglected. It's not only the unimportant events we decide to not keep the track of. Sometimes we choose to forget, in order to move on after a traumatic experience or to rebuild our identity in another way. Sometimes we believe that the new identity is what only matters in the present moment. The memory of the past might be lost for us, but fragments of it will keep on living in the minds of others, who we shared the experience with. Sometimes they will stay encapsulated in the objects and places.

Every passing day, every year is created out of sequences of events and pauses. The cyclical nature of our lives and surrounding nature may be a helpful tool to help us remember, even without effort. We don't have to be aware of the exact first time we walked on a path we use daily, from one place to another, to know how to use it every time we have to communicate between these pla-

ces again. And sometimes to our surprise, even if we follow all steps, exactly as we did before, we end up with a different result. Something happened on the way that we had not expected to when we were starting the journey. And the new experience will strike us, and make us question what we thought we knew so well.

I believe that if we observe our actions and objects we encounter with curiosity, as if we were to do or see them for the first time, we may discover new truths about ourselves and about the world that surrounds us. It is the curiosity that will allow us to take a step forward, to find new ways of being together, of coexistence. Coexistence that is rooted in deepened understanding, of our differences and our similarities. This common ground is where we should build our future society,

respecting we are different, knowing that it is this what makes us special.

I will start this series of essays, looking upon the link between memory and architecture, and factors that shape the relationship between them. Further, I will investigate the impact and relevance of heritage on the consciousness of present generations of their cultural identity, as well as their social behaviors and opinions. I will also present the history and current situation of the city with which I work in this project, Otwock near Warsaw. The analytical part will become a supporting element for the further introduced design method and description of the final proposal of the memorial in the surrounding of modern ruins.







# Theoretical background



*collaged wall, Malaga, Spain  
photo made by the author*

## Art of remembering

What is the link between architecture and memory? Places and objects become triggers that help bring back memories as well as they always are the scenography in which new memories are being created. Architecture is a witness of the past and the production of past societies, their ideas about living, and their concepts of beauty. But it is also something more, architecture not only helps us remember the past through its ability to outlive the existence of its builders and owners, even whole generations. Architecture can also be evidence of processes that happen now in our societies. Also processes of collective remembering and forgetting.

Commonly used phrases in linguistics show a direct link between memory and architecture. The ways we refer to the fact of forgetting, as to say, of memory that is fading (like a color exposed to the sun) or being rusty (decay processes connected with the gradual destruction of a material by the water). These very illustrative ways of referring to the loss of memory, reveal also the role that time and environment play in both destruction of architecture as well in the destruction of memory. *“It is not, of course, time itself but processes happening in time that lead to corrosion and decay- nevertheless, some events require special intervention to bring them about, others will occur unless positive steps are taken to prevent them.”* As there is a strong link between

architecture and the process of forgetting, is there a link between architecture and remembering? In the end, remembering and forgetting are two notions that seem inseparable from each other.

For example, what makes us remember or brings about old memories is the familiarity of an environment or circumstances we create the new memory in. To create strong memories and to retain them, this aspect of familiarity is crucial. Also, familiarity makes places understandable and approachable to a large group of users, independent of their education or cultural background. The other element that improves retention of memory is exercise. On a scale of a large group of people (eg. a nation, a local community), exercising memory can be conducted through repetitive rituals or participation in annual commemorative events. Also, the cultivation of traditions - in crafts or in ways of the building may also be a way to preserve memory through its cultivation in praxis.

What we also observe, in connection to the notion of familiarity, is the fact that it may be an element that allows the architecture to directly reach a large and varied group of users. To trigger similar memories of emotions and images to appear in their minds, when they encounter the same space. Familiarity allows us to create links that are at the same time universal and specific

in nature. A very good example of that kind of shared image is home. But the image of the home has a very strong connotation to emotions - and not everyone will for example associate home with positive memories. On the other hand, there are images, bound to a specific typology that even though may bring varied specific images, depending on the user, they are limited enough for two people with completely different backgrounds to understand each other. Francesca Torzo gives an example of such a typology, and elaborates on this idea of universal images, on an example of a tower.

*“We use this knowledge every day to communicate with others, and we refer to it in our thoughts and imagination. We can, for example, agree that a tower is a built space with a footprint that is smaller than its height, a structure that allows us to observe things far away because it rises above an urban context or a landscape, and, in many cases, an orientation point and a visual reference. At the same time, each of us has our own perception of ‘tower’, where direct experiences as well as memories of others’ experiences are combined in unpredictable ways, through narratives derived from a book, a story heard in a bar, a painting or a sequence in a movie. Each of us may have visited a specific tower, but in our experience that tower engages with the imagination and memory of many other towers that we have never visited. We collect fragments of events that happen around us in a store of memories and experiences that continue to be present in the back of our mind, helping us to learn how we can build in dialogue with the culture of those who lived before us, a few days or millennia ago.”* (Torzo, 2019)

Another interesting concept that ties memory and architecture is the mnemonic technique invented by Cicero in antiquity. It is also related to a term that has been prevailing in the architectural theories of place since - the concept of loci or genius loci. Cicero’s „method of loci”, a part of the mnemonic technique known as „the art of memory” is a technique that shows how to exercise memory. Cicero suggests that to, for example, memorize a speech, one should memorize a particular space (e.g. a temple) and then divide the speech into parts and link the parts with singular architectural elements of the space. Then while reciting the speech, one should imagine walking through space and envision the order of elements as they naturally appear to his eyes. Cicero, not only uses architectural space, as an element that enhances the usage of memory. He also underlines the qualities of this space that have to be met in order to make the technique effective. *„Cicero explained that each of the architectural elements should be distinct, clearly defined, different in appearance, and well separated from the body or fabric of the building as well as from each other. Distributing the various aspects of the text throughout the hierarchically arranged parts of this imaginary palace, Cicero advises not to place the textual fragments too close together, nor in elements that are too similar to one another.”* (Dodds, 1992)

This mnemonic technique, although very theoretical, has some relation to natural ways in which spaces and objects trigger a recollection of memory. Here the link between memory and the physical aspect of space was made clear by Aristotle. Aristotle in his perception of what memo-

ry is, suggests that it is an imprint in a person of things felt and observed in the past. He makes a comparison of memory being similar to the way in which a signet ring imprints a shape in a wax stain on a paper while being pressed against it. In the same way, we might say, an architect leaves an imprint of his client's needs and his own ideas in the form of a building. This concept works both ways, if the mark of the signet can be evidence of memory being made in mind, similarly the evidence of a memory being created in mind might be encapsulated in an object. Therefore the object becomes a guard/symbol of a non-physical sensation experienced in the past. What happens to this memory afterward? It might be brought about when we encounter an object that preserves memory. At the same time, the image of the imprint becomes something more in mind. The memory is being used, to understand all experiences that come afterward. "All remembering involves being conscious as well that one previously saw or heard or learned; that is why you can't remember without having a sense of time" said Aristotle.

Memory is always a factor that shapes our understanding of a new space. But can memory be used also as a factor that allows an architect to create a space that is both specific (or local) and at the same time universally understandable. A space that will bring back memories. A space that is egalitarian on a comprehension level. What role in this creation of that kind of familiarity play typologies, materials, and spatial arrangements? But maybe it's not enough, to correspond to known familiar images, to evoke a certain understanding in users of the space. Maybe also

this familiarity has to reach the actions that take place in space? As a building is not only a pile of bricks put together or a specific arrangement of columns - architecture is primarily a frame for human activities. And the activities, that it gives the potential to take place, define the final character of a space. Can also a shared memory be seen as a uniting element for large and varied groups of people? How to exercise memory in a place? Can acts of commemoration lead to the creation of stronger bonds between users of a space?

### **Architecture as a collective memory of a place**

While architects in the 19th century reflected upon history shifting the general understanding of the present in the 21st century thanks to (or because of) development of sciences we mainly concentrate on the future. One of the main topics that become very important in the discussion about architecture today is sustainability. In the definition of sustainable development, lies a statement that whatever we do, apart from our own interests, we should act in favor of future generations. This sensible gesture, of caring for ones that we have not met yet, who maybe don't even exist, allows us to grasp or define the meaning of our contemporary work and our lives. It is in my opinion, this is a very optimistic and altruistic approach to architecture, that we should continue to develop. Maybe this approach comes from fear of being judged upon one's actions. We know for sure, that only time can reveal truly if our aims and objectives were right. What is then the role that an architect can take in the creation



*Italian Political Rally  
David 'Chim' Seymour, 1956*



of this sustainable future and present? Firstly, I would say - understand the past, the past of places we build in, the tradition our action will become a part of, the past that defined the context of our work. Focus on the present-day problems, observe weak points of the existing social structures and strengthen them, to fully reflect their diversity and complexity. Protect the future, so to say - build in that way, that our contemporary creations will become the heritage of future generations and not their burden. A combination of these three perspectives should always be a priority to any new architectural investment. Because all forms of art, architecture, or any other cultural productions are bound with time - past, present, and future.

I believe that architectural praxis should return to the way that was performed before the modernist movement. Architects should present a strong understanding of the past, and tradition. Should seek to re-interpret the tradition in a new form, but neglect strive for “innovation”. In order to understand how to develop new approaches to contemporary problems, we can revise theoretical texts that sprung in the critical moment, just before the modernist movement proceeded. The end of the 19th century was a moment when a grand change in the social movements appeared and the existing ways of understanding and shaping reality started to be insufficient. They’re the questions that occurred, may have been answered differently. Rather than (as the modernism movement did) to completely reinvent the know, an evolutionary change might have been put in place. And today, if we observe the questions that arose at that time with curiosity we might

be able to answer them differently. The same process might be occurring around us now, just revealing themselves in different forms. The theory will become a tool for investigation and a compass for the way to find the answers to everlasting questions.

A very similar approach was shared by the architects who criticized the modernist movement, the moment it was ending with all of its weaknesses exposed. Especially important and relevant in the consideration of this project are the writings of Aldo Rossi but also Giancarlo de Carlo and Carlo Scarpa. All considered architects of post-modern movements emphasized the importance of community in the creation of the city, it’s an image, its understanding, and identity. Before I address their works and ideas, I want to bring about maybe the most important book that has undermined the role of modernism, by introducing a new perspective on architecture and its future, that was based on a historical tradition. Venturi’s “Complexity and Contradiction” from 1966 has changed the way architecture has been produced since.

In the introduction of the book, a remarkable architectural historian, Vincent Scully writes about what exactly has made Venturi’s approach represented in the book so significant. It is how the author has made use of his historical knowledge, to address relevant issues. How he seeks compromise, rather than general truths as the modernist did. How “his conclusions are general only by implication”. His approach (Venturi’s), can be seen as non-purist, respectful towards existing context, and complex. And this com-

plexity of thought is seen by Scully, as the biggest asset of Venturi's thinking. He suggests that complexity is what makes this approach much more natural and similar to natural environments since the natural world is a very complex structure itself. Different species are living next to each other in harmony. This, in his view, makes this post-modern approach more humanistic and empathetic. But also he underlines that it might not meet expectations of society at large, since "*Venturi looks both too complicated and too much like everyday for such people, precisely because he recognizes and uses social phenomena as they exist.*" (Scully, 1966)

He finishes with a paragraph that summarizes Venturi's approach and what he sees as the key importance of his work. "*There is no way to separate form from meaning; one cannot exist without the other. There can only be different critical assessments of the major ways through which form transmits meaning to the viewer: through empathy, said the nineteenth century, it embodies it; through the recognition of signs, say the linguists, it conveys it. Each side would agree that the relevant functioning agent in this process of the human brain is the memory: empathy and the identification of signs are both learned responses, the result of specific cultural experiences. The two modes of knowing and of deriving meaning from outside reality complement each other and are both at work in varying degrees in the shaping and of all works of art.*

*In that sense, the making and the experience of architecture, as of every art, are always critical-historical acts, involving what the architect*

*and the viewer have learned to distinguish and to image through their own relationship with life and things. It therefore follows that the strength and value of our contact with art will depend upon the quality of our historical knowledge. And it is obvious that knowledge instead of learning is the word which has to be employed here.*" (Scully, 1966)

Published the same year, Aldo Rossi's *L'architettura della città*, although significantly different from Venturi's treatise, reveals many similarities. It similarly exposes the weaknesses of modernism and turns to historical architecture, as a refuge of certainty and inspiration for further development of the discipline. It also sees value, similarly as Venturi's text, in this continuation of a historical tradition, as well as associated with its meanings and forms. But Rossi mostly pays attention to the surroundings that affect his own perception, as an architect, not on finding a definition of a new way of doing. He rather with his writing tries to understand the meaning of what surrounds us and what impacts the future architectural production - the historical city. The phenomenon of its uprising, the way all elements, some older and newer ones define its understanding in the minds of its inhabitants. How the city, eventually in his opinion, is mainly defined by the collective memory of its users.

*"One can say that the city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like memory it is associated with objects and places. The city is the locus of the collective memory. This relationship between the locus and the citizenry then becomes the city's predominant image, both of architecture*

*and of landscape, and as certain artifacts become part of its memory, new ones emerge. In this entirely positive sense great ideas flow through the history of the city and give shape to it”*. (Rossi, 1966)

The two perspectives, presented by Rossi and Venturi give an inspiring view on how the architects can approach history and how it is relevant in the present. The deepened understanding of the complexity of the past may become a way to create a more conscious future. Future architectural expression, but also a more conscious future society. Although both authors primarily studied the historical significance of the cities in Italy on the development of architectural typologies and styles there, I believe a similar logic can be applied in other countries. This perspective can also be applied in the studies of the past and further development of cities in Poland, the old historical ones, but also the younger ones that represent some kind of specificity and local tradition. Also, apart from the architectural tradition, most of the cities also reveal the marks of events that occurred there in recent past, that create an additional layer of history.

The spatial marks of World War II in Polish cities are still seen, and shaping the collective memory of their inhabitants. Memorials became the elements that condition the composition of many public interiors. Not only the intentional

monuments but also unintentional ones, that allow us to understand the past of cities and sites in the present. Many of the sites of former concentration camps or mass murders were turned into museums and memorials. Sometimes new architectural elements were added, to create an understandable narration in a space, but to also enable continuous conduct of restoration and research work on documents and objects left behind. Some cities, like Warsaw, kept marks of the Ghetto borders making them integrated elements of the new city tissue. But the heritage of the Holocaust is still considered problematic. The scale of the crime was so big and so concentrated on our lands it is hard for all cities to properly commemorate the local victims. At the same time, the intense urban development of Poland after the war that still is ongoing creates a situation where heritage becomes threatened by the needs of commodity and paradigm of change. Especially fragile heritage, that is considered stray, becomes neglected or an easy victim of developers deeds for economic development. How can we preserve the memory of the past, and their marks at the same time moving forward? How a place can develop, at the same time keeping the important elements of its “collective memory” alive? How can we use the natural contradictions, observed in the city’s landscape as a positive and valuable element, that can become an inspiration to its further development?



*Tereska, a child in a residence for disturbed children, drawing a picture of „home” on the blackboard.  
David ,Chim’ Seymou (Magnum Photos) Warsaw, 1948*

## Absent memories

*“What cannot be imagined cannot even be talked about.”*

— *Ludwig Wittgenstein*

In his lecture, called “Art of Forgetting” Adrian Forty mentions a story that comes from Greek mythology. It talks about activities that a worshiper visiting an oracle had to address oneself to. They were first made to drink from a spring called Lathe (forgetfulness), and afterward from a second one called Mimosine (memory). Following this ritual only enabled them to fully understand the oracles’ truth. This story implies that to make a lasting memory, one has to first forget and regain memory in order to remember. That underlines how memory and forgetfulness are interconnected and co-dependent notions.

Amnesia, a symptom that might occur after an accident in the brain of a patient, is considered one of the most terrifying experiences a person may encounter during a lifetime. The lack of memory, partial or complete, brings confusion and feeling of inadequacy. A very similar process might be observed in societies. Some memories, especially traumatic stay absent and hidden for many years. The history remains sealed, only sometimes reaching the surface and a chance to be exposed. But the revealed marks due to their unsure link to known reality, remain only mere fragments of the past. They are marks of absent

memory, which recollection might be very difficult.

To understand this phenomenon of absent memory, I turned to a study conducted at the University of Amsterdam. Frank van Vree in his extensive paper, titled following the name of the phenomenon itself, shares reflections on social forgetting, on the link between individual and collective memories and suggests ways in which retrieving of the memory may occur. As previously mentioned forgetting is a natural process of a similar dynamic as remembering, a process that constitutes remembering and its value, by being its binary opposition. As Marc Auge has pointed out *„Forgetting is a full natural or even necessary phenomenon for the individual as well as society”*. Therefore forgetfulness is fully excused, by human nature. Usually, though, the forgotten memories can easily be brought back. Sometimes though distortion or dysfunctionality may occur in the process, that might result in the permanent absence of certain memories. Until lately, there were two main ways of understanding why certain memories are absent, also of events that took place among big groups of people.

The first paradigm, explaining social forgetfulness, called the paradigm of hegemonic memory can be seen as a result of suppression of the memory that is caused by systematic control of

present social thought, with the use of the past. This paradigm can be observed well, in anti-utopian systems presented in the literature, such as for example in 1984 written by George Orwell. The novel was based on the author's observation of changes in real societies, and the rise of totalitarianism especially in Eastern Europe, just after the war. Forgetfulness, in this case, is imposed institutionally, sometimes with help of also specially shaped education systems, or even by replacement of the previous language. Therefore in this new reality, some memories do not fit or are even considered dangerous to the unity of the system. This does not apply only to systems of national reach, but in general to institutions. After the war, many institutions took over buildings that previously have been places where war crimes were executed or directed from. But newly re-established hospitals or police stations could make use of the space and equipment found in these buildings from before the war. Therefore in order to work efficiently without being affected by the past, forgetfulness was seen as a positive element, especially for the sake of new members of the staff.

The second paradigm, on the contrary, is connected with the internalisation of the memory by a group. The paradigm of post-traumatic memory especially comes into play after tragic events, that have caused big irreversible changes to the group's health or existence of some of its members. The absence of memory is a reaction of the individuals, who make up the group to a degrading act or an extremely painful situation. The post-traumatic absence of memory is seen as a socio-psychological phenomenon, discove-

red first in accordance to post-war philosophical reflections and testimonies of the victims from Auschwitz and other Nazi death camps. Trauma in this context is considered as such an overwhelming experience that resists integration and expression in both individual and collective memory. At the same time, it seems that the silencing of the victims, even if evoked by the pain itself of reliving the events from the past, only leads to further damage. Without this expression of memory, there is no chance to take preventive action in order to never again let similar events to happen.

Apart from understanding two basic paradigms of social forgetting, *“what we need is a deeper, more layered view of social forgetting as a dynamic process, by introducing a variety of motives and factors leading to forgetting and silencing of past experiences.”* (Vree,2013). Both in social sciences and psychology from the late 80's it has been emphasized that suppressed memories have to be revealed in order to deal with trauma. That brings me to the link between individual memories and collective memories. Individual memories are embodied in the physical body and memory of the owner. They are reminiscent of events and thought processes that a person has been through in their lives. Of course, most experiences, and thoughts take place in a particular context and in the presence of others, who then share with us the memory. Even though they are linked with a certain external reality, individual memories are characterized as fragmented, episodic, and subjective. *“In other words, personal memories may be completely unspoken, buried in the individual's brain, but nevertheless*

*they have an undisputed social dimension, particularly in modern society, in which as Auge argues, in the form of collective stories, images, music, and tropes, posing a threat to the “integrity” of personal narratives”.* (Vree, 2013)

Here again, this link is shown as a mutual dependency of collective and individual memory. The individual memories are being re-shaped or enlarged by the members of groups who communicate their individual stories with each other. This also underlines a very important characteristic of collective memory, which is its performative nature. Social memories experienced and communicated within communities, increasingly mediated in the form of collective images by works of art, music, films etc. - linking them back with personal memories and recollections of individuals. Social forgetting is a dynamic process. Within the process, by a medium of conversation, memories can be reshaped or reinforced. Creating a shared reality for the beholders of individual memories - called „mnemonic tuning”.

Why are then some memories absent even though they have been experienced by several different individuals or groups? As Vree suggests the personal memories become social memories only if they fit into existing frames of perception and communication. *„Frames in that understanding create meaning by ordering and excluding information and experiences”.* (Vree, 2013) Frames are elements of a coherent collection of narratives or mental filters for understanding and responding to the surrounding reality. Lack of social frame can be for example the fact that something, at a particular moment, is virtually unimaginable.

As for example was the Holocaust, that was far crueler and more organized than any wartime crime ever experienced before. The idea of a frame, in opposition to the previously mentioned paradigms, allows us to seek ways in which the absent memories can be rebuilt. The creation of a new frame can happen naturally, over the course of passing time. A shift of generations has been seen as that kind of frame, a truth hidden and associated with shame by the victims, is being exposed by the ancestors who don't have a personal link to the event itself. The indirectness of the impact of the trauma on themselves, allows them to seek justice, to create strong narrations of the past seen from their more neutral position. The shame is not only a burden of the victims, but it is also the burden of the oppressor or the silent observer. These actors, sometimes are found even more resilient protectors of the silence. They become loyal to their own distorted memory, believe in the lie they invented by any means. In psychology, it is clearly underlined that during the process of memories recollection, judgment should be avoided, and replaced with reconciliation.

The reconciliation from conflicts and the re-activation of memory, to become a present element of the shared reality, has to be done by both sides simultaneously. It involves some forgetfulness, in order to move on. But before the forgetfulness may appear, extra attention has to be put out. *“ It is the collective will of society alone that can change the situation and turn the tables. Only then will the voice of the witness be heard and, by gaining the support of the public media, be acknowledged as a testimony”.* (Vree, 2013) To



*Otwock, Jewish community before War  
phot. Roman Vishniac, unknown author*



find new common ground, the frame has to become an element of a sort of universal comprehension (at least of a local scale). “*To speak up, to communicate one’s experiences, to turn personal memories into meaningful stories, there has to be a proper frame, to make these memories understandable for others.*” (Vree, 2013) New frames can be created in the process of further cultural development of the society, and due to elements of art production, such as novels, history books, films, songs and other artifacts of the culture. Art is seen as a tool, that can enable healing and establishment of permanent frames where singular stories can become parts of a bigger collective image.

It has been said that testimonies of victims of the Holocaust, have been controlled by a double wall of silence, where both victims decided not to reflect on their past but also the surrounding society has been presenting an attitude of not wanting to listen. Both of these walls have been for many years taken down and now it seems as we as a global society have access to very broad documentation and knowledge of the Holocaust. But on peripheries, it is not always that easy to turn to the channels that allow us to acquire this knowledge. There are many places, where the recollections of the local crimes and truths of the pre-war history of the place, have been discovered not so long ago. The preservation of memory in these places is still a very hard endeavor, sometimes only kept alive by enthusiasts or local historians. In the peripheries, where frames created by culture, especially literature have a very vague impact on society, there is a need to seek more direct frames that can help preserve and nourish

the collective memory. “*Framing allows us to understand social forgetting as either deliberate or non-deliberate. And it helps account for the malleable and communicative character of memory and the complex negotiations that produce a certain shared image of the past while rejecting conflicting versions.*” (Hirsch,2013)

Previously mentioned communication seems to be a recurring motif in connection to memory and its maintenance. Also to its shaping and re-configuration. Personal memories frequently are mediated into groups by the use of oral testimonies. In order to be understood, not only a speaker has to present a realistic background of the story, match an existing or newly created frame. As Wittensieing suggested, he also has to use images that are known to the listeners. And through this use of familiar images new stronger memory, based on approval of the group, is created. As Auge has pointed out „*those who speak the same language, recognize they belong to the same world*”. But could it be a gesture, an element that has a non-verbal character also seen as a testimony? A creation, an object, a drawing? Again quoting Wittenstein „*the limits of my language mean the limits of my world*”, but not all experiences can be expressed with words alone. Some experiences are conveyed better directly as images. Some atmospheres can trigger recollection of memories we thought we did not possess a knowledge of at all. „*Sometimes we see something that confuses us thoroughly*”(Holtrop). Something we feel an unclear link to and passion towards.

Some stories, even imaginary, evoke strong

emotional responses. They create links between the subconscious, embedded in our memories of the past. Of maybe, not even our own past. Ruins have this capacity for ambiguous understanding and interpretation. Their unclear material status is full of obscurity and doubt in their purpose. In movies, they are used frequently as elements that instantly evoke a feeling of nostalgia, mystery but also pastness. That use of images of collective memory underlines that memory can, and should be seen as a shared heritage. Not excluding, but egalitarian. As mentioned before, in order to rebuild absent memories both - there has to be the will of a victim to speak and the will of the community to listen. Therefore the memory and the maintenance of its presence should be collective acts.

Aristotle suggested that in order to create very strong memories of one's thoughts and reflections, rather than events, one has to "secure the starting point", the first appearance of the idea. *"Memory - and its recollection- have to be of the past, of our first encounter with the truths of geometry, which are not past but timeless, will have to be a matter of seeing, not of remembering or recollection."* This is for example the way we create an understanding of certain typologies. We very strongly remember and are impacted by the ideas we are faced with in youth. Ideas passed onto us by our parents but also by our grandparents. Some of their memories are anachronistic to ours and that we become extremely curious about them. The storyteller becomes the link between distant reality and our reality. Nostalgia has therefore a very contemporary value, becoming a factor that shapes our identity. Adrian

Forty, suggests not to delimit the understanding of the value of memory, only seen in accordance with the Aristotelian tradition. Not only memory has value, when represented and encapsulated in physical objects. Forty mentions African tribes that create as he called the "ephemeral monuments". Objects or places, that as soon as they serve their purpose, are being disposed of, left to decay, or destroyed. Their purpose is not to commemorate, but to bring back the memory of the same event happening before back into the present consciousness of the tribe. The image re-occurs to create a link to the past memory, to enable communal experience and create shared comprehension of certain meanings. Again, in this case, the memory is more strongly connected to shared images and experience, rather than actual physical matter.

As we look at the photos of the Jewish community from before the war, children, and families together, we frequently get the opposite emotions than the one we observe on their faces. The image does not evoke positive feelings, because of the knowledge we have of the events that ended their lives. The past horror, absent in the photography itself, but present in our imagination imprints directly on its expression. In many interviews, descendants of Jews who were direct victims of the Holocaust expressed, that the memory of the event has been an element present in their life and has been a burden. In that sense, that it was hard for them to connect with the history of their family from before the war, Holocaust has outshined every other important event. This recovery of the pre-war heritage has for many of them come with difficulty, but

when reached, it brought a feeling of fulfillment and collectedness.

Archaeology is a discipline that brings into light new evidence, absent marks of memories. The memory that triggers new understanding, shifts ideas of the past, but also has a very contemporary dimension. Can private archaeology have a similar impact? Can it shift individuals' nature, positions, and opinions? Archeological escalations, not always revealed complete elements (like for example in case of the city of Pompei) but frequently what is being found are only fragments, put in a certain order, or linked with a story become images. The full picture emerges out of these scraps of memory by the use of imagination and creativity. The fragment may have a stronger impact on the receiver than a whole

picture because it evokes more intense thought processes. Processes that later become contextual memory. Among the new frames that enable recollection of absent memories, Vree mentions literature, art, and other elements of the cultural production of societies. Contemporary British architect, Adam Caruso in his essay „Cover versions” underlines similarities of the practice of architecture to other arts, such as the „production” of poetry, or music. Re-introducing a perspective on architecture frequently abandoned due to commodified standards that deny it the status of art, trying to acknowledge it only based on its practical nature. Can, therefore, architecture is seen as art, serve as a frame where absent memories can be rebuilt? What aspects have space represent to trigger the creation of new contextual memories?



*„View of the Japanese Palace after the attack”  
Theodor Rosenhauer works between rubble on his oil painting*

## Art in postmodernity

*“Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.”*

— *Soren Kierkegaard*

Dynamic increase of nationalistic political movements among European countries within the last 10 years has shown that history, as Nietzsche suggests, has a cyclical rather than a linear nature. The Far-right government in Poland that has been in power for the last 5 years, is no exception to this. One of their main agendas is to rewrite national history, by focusing on events that can become supporting context to their contemporary political actions. The multicultural Polish heritage is not a notion that one can easily identify with. And since the Jewish community in Poland has shrunk immensely in the post-war period, there is little opposition from their side. Of course, it is not only Jews who are not the only minority, excluded from the narration of the new national identity. Due to the location of the project as well as my personal interest in exploring that part of Poland (and my family) history, I have decided to work with forms of inclusion of the memory of that community, as a means of creation of a more sensible national identity.

We can protect the future, by understanding the history in the present. The role of the past is to make us conscious of the possible consequences of our events. Unfortunately, both Zygmunt

Bauman and Giorgio Agamben (two modern philosophers who extensively reflected upon Holocaust, its meaning and causes) point out that *“the same processes of exclusion that were at work in the Holocaust could, and to an extent do, still come into play today.”*

Polish conservative national values as well as historical figures put on a pedestal by the ruling party, clearly define what it means to be Polish, what it means to be a patriot. *“Such processes of collectivism are created through splitting and through discourses and narratives told from the positionality of the Other, which predominantly have functioned as a process of exclusion”* (Balogun, 2016). Therefore the stories of Others are slowly vanishing from the collective narrations and memories, as they are useless, if not perceived threatening to national solidarity. The conservative point of view of many Poles is rooted in the belief that the national identity is something still fragile (historically Poland, unfortunately, has been many times a victim of regimes that were institutionally limiting the freedom of national expression) that only, national identity, restricted by the notion of purity can become resistant. This fear, although understandable, prevents a truthful understanding of the value that pre-war Polish multicultural identity had, and how it can become an inspiration for further development of a multifaceted understanding of

the nation today.

Today in Poland, processes of exclusion are highly visible. It is not of course, something that occurred lately. The fear of others has been also something that existed for a long time, there were for example, many cases of antisemitic behavior also before the War when Poland was one of the biggest diasporas in Europe. Although, they did not become very vivid up until nationalistic thought became very strong in the whole of Europe. Today, on the other hand, excluded are not only Jews, but also refugees, homosexuals, and other groups that are seen as different, from the perspective of stereotypical Polish catholic. The same case applies to the limitations of perception of historical significance. For example, in the case of memorials Poles feel their national identity has been impaired by “memorials of Jews”, how they have to fight for more recognition of the Christian Polish heritage ( in their perception). The experience of the Holocaust is a painful memory and heritage, but due to its universality and impact, one that cannot be neglected. On the contrary, I believe active preservation of it by Polish citizens may become a way of dealing with embedded prejudice towards Others. Not only Jews but all social groups that are discriminated against in Poland today.

In 2019 American Anti-Defamation League has released a report connected with a study conducted in all European countries, that was measuring the degree of anti-Semitism among their inhabitants. While in most of western European countries the degree has stayed approximately on its level since the previous study conducted in

2015, it raised in most of the countries in Eastern and Central Europe, including Poland. The notified change over 11 percentage points, reached 48 percent of the respondents, who answered the majority of questions from the list in a prejudiced manner. This disappointing statistic comes as no surprise. Even if we observe the common usage of the word Jew in popular language in Poland, it always has a pejorative connotation. It is always someone who will not lend you money, someone who will take a higher position than you or the one who controls the public media. A synonym for all the phrases that are feared in a weak society, feared out of own insecurities, but also secretly desired by many. Assertiveness, ambition, ease in achieving public attention.

For some time now, I have believed that those affected by the extermination have been able to live intensely and with a strong will to create. Anda Rottenberg, Alina Szapocznikow, Roman Polanski or not of Jewish ancestry, Mirosław Balka, who were harnessed by this situation after the war in Poland, began to create from a critical position. They wanted to understand a personal or common tragedy. To find ways of reconciling themselves in art with what was recorded in the space around them. This experience of the collective memory of Holocaust has been at some point exploited to an extreme in Polish art production. In 2005 Oskar Dawicki made and art piece “Nigdy nie zrobiłem pracy o Holokauście / I have never made and artwork about Holocaust”. A pencil writing on a white A4 piece of paper, put in frame and exhibited in a gallery is a statement of the artist criticizing the issue of instrumentalisation or trivialisation by some other

artists of big tragic themes. The work itself is based on a paradox, since making this statement in fact he has also become one of many who made an artwork about Holocaust.

But as much we would want to deny it, the memory of the Holocaust is one of the most universal and uniting elements of modern Polish history, as it affected equally everyone independent of their education or social status. There was no place in Poland that was not marked by this crime, and there were no Polish citizens who survived the War who have not understood what has happened in front of their eyes. Some of them just refused to acknowledge the fact, and silence all the surrounding voices. Jewish heritage became a problem. Many buildings they left behind got taken over illegally, many of them were included into the national treasury, some were sold to private owners or given into use by communal tenants by the Soviet government.

Holocaust apart from becoming a strong force, that shaped the artistic discourse of post-war Poland has as well influenced its sociological and philosophical thought. One of the most important thinkers of Polish-Jewish origin, Zygmunt Bauman has extensively studied the subject in many of his writings, from which the most well know one "Modernity and the Holocaust" has been considered one of the most important books of 20th century. Its merits were to underline, that Holocaust should not be seen as a historical event that has been settled and repaired in the post-war processes, an event that is of importance to the Jewish community only, but to perceive it as a collective memory of humanity that has

to be understood and kept alive to be taken as a lesson for the future. He links the Holocaust with the modernity itself, suggesting that the mass extermination was only a final effect of the discriminations that came with development of the modern social thought, based on categorization, rules, and regulations of natural processes.

Modernity in Bauman's view produced a set of rules and categorizations that distinguished also a certain group in the society, that might be called the Others. Present yet unfamiliar might be an object of fear, potential threat to others, of higher, more established position. Therefore the others should be removed from society because they can ruin the established order. What he points out more, is that we might have not learned all the lessons that the Holocaust has to offer us, as we overlook its true meaning and upcoming. In my own view, I believe that if we do not pay attention to social forgetting, as an issue, the rise of nationalism and repression may occur also in the 21st century, leading to tragic events.

Bauman in later years has also commented on the more contemporary structures of society he was observing. He named the times that we live in as postmodernity that has started with a shift from a society of producers to the society of consumers. In post-modernity security is gained because of freedom, freedom to consume, purchase, and hedonistically enjoy life. Fears are being less clear, they are fragmented - they are liquid fears - that have no easily identifiable reference, in opposition to the clear fears of modernity, namely the Others.

Especially interesting in the light of this paper is how Bauman positioned the arts and their purpose and threats in post-modernity. If our aim is not the object of our longing but the action of longing itself, and the worst peril is reaching complete satisfaction, does it mean art has only a temporary status as well? How can art position itself in a world where the fleeting is the dominant paradigm. In Bauman's opinion art is something that contributes to giving immortality to virtually anything. He suggested that maybe it is the art that can transform the ephemeral into an eternal matter. In today's reality, we have a tendency to omit the established traditional values, the eternal and everlasting elements. The dominant paradigm of the "fleeting" is something that art has to reflect upon and challenge. „An object is cultural if it persists; its temporary aspect, its permanence, is opposite to the functional [...] culture sees itself threatened when all the objects in the world, those produced today and those of the past, are exclusively considered from the point of view of utility for the social process of survival”

Big, difficult and pressing issues, such as identity of a nation or local identity, through the medium of art and its emotional and frequently sensual approach, can be exposed to individual judgment of the viewer. This reflection upon art piece, maybe participation in assessment of its meaning and value - can as well become a mirror in which one's own attitude is being reflected. The observer in this situation, becomes the actor and the spectator. The observer gains from the interaction with an art piece a new perspective, also on oneself. Engagement with art be-

comes a way to find a new understanding of the known. But does this logic imply architecture? Will encounter with a re-introduced detail of a historical building become an element that will trigger both the value of the old structure, but at the same way can it bring a new image to the user- on how to use this knowledge in the future? Similarly, does understanding of a nation or a place's past allow us to get a more clear perspective on its future, despite changing and unknown circumstances?

There seem to be no easy answers to this problem. And in a sense, it even becomes more complex when the past has been impacted by such a global and unprecedented trauma as the trauma of the Holocaust. In fact, the word trauma and traumatic memory, have been first introduced in connection to studies of victims of this event. The memory of the Holocaust, is not only an issue in Poland that in a very strong way has been affected by it due to its geopolitical location. But it is problematic, that is present in the historical narrations of most of the European countries, and also in the memory of all the survivors who either left Europe just before the war or soon after and now are living all around the globe. As in the case of the Holocaust, we have to not only acknowledge the historical event itself but in order to understand it, we have, similarly to Bauman trackback the uprising of the problem and its origins. In the same way, the crisis we are facing now globally, namely, the climate crisis, in order to be understood and fixed in the most reasonable way, has to be first traced back to its origin. To the moment when changes in society occurred that led to this alarming situation, we



have to deal with now. Can new architecture become a space for reconciliation of old conflicts and an answer to new problems? Can unwanted heritage become a framework for a new understanding of one's identity?



*photo of ruined Warsaw, 1945  
ruins, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, XVIII cent.*

## Ruined ruins

*„Contemporary ruinophilia relates to the prospective dimension of nostalgia, the type of nostalgia that is reflective rather than restorative and dreams of the potential futures rather than imaginary pasts.”*

— Svetlana Boym

What is a monument? This question and a definition of the notion has been defined by Alois Riegl in his essay “The Modern Cult of Monuments: its character and its origin in 1908, leading to separation of architectural practice and conservation. The conservation was meant to take care of the relicts of the past, while architecture in the spirit of the ideology of the modern movement was meant to concentrate on the future. That enabled architecture to cut off from the tradition, to strive for individual expression, and eventually, has also become the biggest shortfall of the modernist movement. At the same time conservation has been thriving as a discipline. Maybe just because the scope of monuments has been dramatically enlarging with the passage of time. Maybe because the classification of buildings and areas as heritage sites, not only grants their historical value but also enhances their economical value while making them subjects of tourism.

Riegl’s essay has become the basic framework for the development of many international laws

concerning heritage that came afterward. Most vividly it has influenced the Venice Charter in 1964 that was dealing with complex issues of post-war rehabilitation. It dealt with notions of - preservation, adaptation and rebuild, and definition of cases in which selected methods could be applied. This argument has to be seen not only as a practical investigation but more as an ethical dispute that primarily is concerned with the notions of memory and historical truth. At the same time, it has highlighted the importance of the heritage, as an element that should be a concern of living generations as a natural element of their environment. The Charter’s assembly, following the ideas put forward by Riegl in his writings, has decided that only preservation is seen as a justified act, and that said all heritage should be assessed with measures that limit or slow down their decay processes. Renovation and rebuild of historical structures can only be justified if the devastation has taken away a significant part of the local heritage that is seen as crucial for the understanding of local identity. On behalf of this exception, was presented a case of Warsaw’s Old Town, collectively rebuilt by the citizens after the war in order to regain a fraction of the pre-war identity of the city that has been destroyed in 98% by the Nazi during the last days of World War II. In 1980 the area became an official UNESCO site, is the only reconstructed object on their list.

In the following decades, many alike meetings were held and concluded with doctrinal or suggestive documents concerning conservation in architecture. Many of them revised the particular problems that did not get thorough attention in the previous documents. I find two of them extremely relevant in the light of this project. The first one is the Nara Document of Authenticity (1994) and the second, most recent, the Warsaw recommendation on recovery and reconstruction of Cultural Heritage (2018). The meeting in Japan (Nara) has mainly been concerned with notions of authenticity and diversity of heritage. The relevance of these two topics was underlined in the preamble of the document. “*In a world that is increasingly subject to the forces of globalization and homogenization, and in a world in which the search for cultural identity is sometimes pursued through aggressive nationalism and the suppression of the cultures of minorities, the essential contribution made by the consideration of authenticity in conservation practice is to clarify and illuminate the collective memory of humanity.*” Therefore a need to underline the importance of diversity seen as an irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness, that’s preservation should be seen as the basis for any future development.

The document underlines a strong connection between material heritage and cultural identity. Without marks of the past, it’s hard to form an identity that is based on recognition of history and belonging. Sometimes systems, their homogenous nature do not give enough space for individual expression of groups. Sometimes also, if the ethical group connected with a particular

heritage is absent in the region, it is being neglected. That’s why the Nara document of authenticity stated that “*the cultural heritage of each, is the cultural heritage of all*”. The care for heritage should abandon boundaries. It should though acknowledge that no general rules should be imposed on preservation practices around the world. Because “*It is thus not possible to base judgments of values and authenticity within fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong.*” Striving for the preservation of the authentic aspect of heritage is seen as crucial. Therefore efforts to determine authenticity in accordance with the diversity of heritage require individual assessment of problems and development of an individual set of tools specific to their nature and needs. But there are some guidelines on how to do so, efforts to ensure assessment of authenticity involve multidisciplinary collaboration and expert participation. Before any action is taken, the particular nature of authenticity for monuments and sites should be documented clearly, also with practical guides for future treatment and monitoring.

Even though the Charters recommendations are seen as international law, they are only obligatory applied to elements of heritage that are listed. That happens for two reasons, first because their obedience demands usually bigger sums of money if the object is wanted to be brought back to use, or maintain its usefulness. The second reason is the regulation that actually demands local communities or institutions to take care of historic areas and buildings that are granted the

status of first-class heritage. Therefore the list is very carefully expanded, and new structures are added mostly in cases when their survival is endangered. That of course, naturally is connected with investments of a higher measure, if they were preserved while still in quite a good condition. This paradox has been described also by Riegl who has in a sense foreseen such a catch occurring. He explains it in a case of historical documents: “*we neglect them in many cases because we have enough other monuments which convey much the same thing in a richer and more detailed manner. But where this scrap of paper the only surviving testimony to the art of its time, we would consider it, though trivial in itself, an utterly indispensable artifact.*” (Riegl, 1903) This leads to a very common situation, where only selected objects of a certain architectural tradition persist, but at the same time losing their mundane daily relevance and usefulness, by being turned into museums or heritage parks.

Because of the prevailing reminiscences of modernist thought, in many places, there is a lack of local tradition being cultivated. Where also the traditional methods have been forgotten. A tradition that could be seen as another way of heritage preservation, if not factual preservation of architectural matter, but rather the preservation of craft and traditional practice. Nara Charter has underlined the strong connection between material heritage and cultural identity. Also, acknowledgment of the fact, that there are cultural practices that perceive preservation of heritage in a different way than it has been commonly seen in the post-Renaissance European tradition. Namely, the case of Ise Jingu grand

shrine in Mie Prefecture that is being rebuilt every 30 years. Every time a new Shrine is being build, also one of the construction elements of the previous one is included in its construction. The preservation is seen not in maintenance of the matter itself, but maintenance of the craft, education of the new craftsmen and passage of the knowledge. Not only this, also a very particular and frequently cited theoretical texts case, of unusual preservation practice, might evoke some reflection upon the paradigm of the factual buildings tissue and its age as the main criterion and concern of preservation. Previously mentioned rituals described by Adrian Forty in his lecture, “Art of Forgetting” point out many different acts of commemoration that also support the statements behind Nara Charter. The commemorative acts of production, in the architectural dimension, concerned the tradition of two different tribes in Africa. The object’s function is not to become symbols of the event from the past but to momentarily bring back an image that is preserved in the tribe’s collective memory. The moment the memory returns, the object loses its only function and becomes unimportant. Ideally, the memories should be brought back only for a short while, to then be lost again. The forgetting is a deliberate act.

### **Unintentional forgetfulness**

There are also cases of structures falling on decay, not because it was planned as such from the beginning of their conception. Unintentional monuments, unwanted heritage, and fragile monuments are notions that try to describe many similar cases of overlooked structures that silen-

tly fall into decay. One of the biggest problems of heritage today is the insufficient funds that limit possibilities of restoration of some less significant buildings and structures. This only brings about more issues, such as lack of effort for documentation to be prepared that could become useful in the future (or if the funds would be collected), to put in place acts of preservation. In many cases, money is not the only issue. It is the lack of interest of the observers to acknowledge the value of such a monument. Walter Benjamin has analyzed the allure of ruins, and what it emerges from. *“The notion of the isolated image ‘blasted out of the continuum of history’ reoccurs throughout Benjamin’s philosophy of history, reflecting a central tenet of historical materialism, that the past is constructed by the present, and must, therefore, be read in and through the present”*. The monuments, found curious because of its ambiguous state, between nature and architecture might attract some interest, but only on a superficial level. *“For Benjamin, it is through the suddenness and shock of destruction that the subject emerges from the ‘dream’ of tradition and into modern life in the present.”* But if present society, cannot or is not willing to give value to an object, it will most probably fall into oblivion.

Alois Riegl has pointed out that the most important factor for a historical artifact to become an object of heritage is the acknowledgment of its significance by the living generations. This communal agreement, on the immeasurable value that the object possesses, is what grants it the status of a monument. But what happens if for some reason a structure is not being viewed as important, by the local community? There are a

few possible scenarios to this situation, and probably some that I am unaware of. Firstly, such a structure could be appropriated by the new group of people, for other purposes than it was originally meant for. This process may result in some adjustments that would be done to the structure, to fit a new purpose, but not necessarily. The perhaps most popular case of such appropriation might be the case of how Christianity has made use of basilicas to turn them from a place of business gatherings, into a place of communal prayer. Similarly, Christianity has adapted the typologies and even actual pagan temples to become sacred places of the new religion. Due to that, for example, Pantheon has remained in its form, unchanged for decades, becoming one of the most important heritage sites in the world. Another factor that enabled Pantheon, to resist the dynamic changes around it, was its materiality - monolithic concrete that could not be disassembled and used as spoilia. At the same time for example a colosseum in the same city of Rome, has since its creation, undergone many changes. After the fall of the empire, it served as a market, and then has been in the middle ages taken apart, used as a quarry for stone material. Even though the Coliseum has been disassembled and ruined, it also has become an important landmark in the landscape of Rome. The ruins significance does not come from the fact of its usefulness, but the story that it tells for the generations to come.

The most vulnerable of course in this case is, also delimited as a category by Riegl, unintentional monuments. Buildings or structures that became relevant due to their age-value, rather than arti-

stic or commemorative one. Their survival remains uncertain, as with their status as landmarks they lack certain usefulness or chance for transformation, which makes them easy victims of the rapidly changing taste of societies. These unintentional monuments frequently end in a state of ruin. Ruins are placed on the scale of value constructed by Alois Riegl in between monuments in use and rubble, which was perceived to have no artistic nor historical value. Is ruination then the last state of a building's lifespan? Or is it just the beginning of a new way of perceiving it? Maybe a chance to become inhabited by other species than the human? Ruins are not only endangered by the natural process of ruination and weathering. Heritage frequently becomes an instrument of politics. "They show the process of preserving objects to be enmeshed in the production and politics of cultural identity, and not simply a detached mirror of it".

Ruins are threatened, by politics, the commodity, paradigm of fleeting, bad restoration or even tourism. Tourism, which frequently grants them their useful status in contemporary society, also exposes them to further vandalisation. Not only material vandalisation, but vandalisation of their romantic nature, or historical connotations. As Guy Debord, has mentioned, in his book *The Society of the Spectacle*, ruins can become victims of objectivization. „Tourism - human circulation packed for consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities - is the opportunity to go and see what has been banalized. The economic organization of travel to different places already guarantees their equivalence. The modernization that has eliminated the time

involved in travel has simultaneously eliminated any real space from it." They no longer are perceived as elements of the local culture, but also their image reaches far beyond their territorial extent. Their images multiplied on postcards, in guidebooks and in commercials, make them partially objects of the consumerist production. This trivialisation of their role, becomes most inadequate especially in connection to objects of heritage connected with trauma. Where commercialisation of heritage cannot be seen differently than an highly morally corrupt act.

Although from a practical point of view almost useless, ruins have a very strong and particular status in the society. They bring about feelings of nostalgia of fading away past. They are a metaphor of an inevitable end of human existence, if not even a whole society. They are connected with mythological thinking, romanticisation of the past and maybe due to some distortion of shape or destruction of matter, also simplification of historical truth and its idealisation or falsification. What could be then, seen from a broad perspective, the future value of heritage? How to think of new architectural production, from a perspective of it becoming future generations heritage?

### **Entropy and vandalism, how the human became more violent than nature.**

As Eugene Victor has pointed out, what "*we are threatened today by two kinds of environmental degradation: one is pollution – a menace that we all acknowledge; the other is loss of meaning. For the first time in human history, people are syste-*



*trash in Otwock fores, photo form a local newspaper*  
*Fairy Rings by Richard Doyle , 1875*



*matically building meaningless places.*” Heritage is not only defined as the past elements of cultural production. There are three categories of heritage, the tangible, intangible and natural. I have addressed the two first ones, already quite extensively in this paper. But the three perspectives cannot be seen separately from each other. Because no matter what category heritage falls into, it will always directly impact our contemporary environment. And the natural environment today is facing a global crisis. Iconoclasm is a practice that involves both destruction of an artifact as well as the expression of rejection of cherished beliefs and institutions or established values and practices. I feel like with reckless actions, and lack of attention towards the meaning of our behaviour, its broad impact, we have conducted an iconoclasm of the natural environment.

Preservation, in contrast to just simple hedonistic action of creation, requires a certain discipline, a very precise system of values, almost philosophically justified. Preservation requires care and attention. Detailed investigation of the subject. Of causes, of the symptoms of decay, where all even small information has an importance. A very similar approach has to be employed, in accordance with restoration of the natural environments. Because in 2020 there are no natural environments left, in the most original understanding of this notion. Anthropocene, name for the contemporary, geologic “human epoch,” proposed in 2000 by Eugene F. Stoermer and Paul J. Crutzen is known almost to anyone with higher education. Of course, there are representatives in the society of so-called, climate denialists, which are people who do not believe

in climate change being caused by humans, or even affecting the life of the planet at the moment. But most of the global society has been faced with the threat of the crisis happening in a very near future, and even though it will affect everyone, most continue with business as usual. The Anthropocene is a post-natural, post environmental epoch in which nature in the sense of a background for our actions uncontaminated by human interventions no longer exists. What surrounds us, today is “post-nature”. And if there is a chance to rebuild it, it is only in our hands as species of homo sapiens to do so.

Iconoclasm can be seen as an act that also sparks some positive change. In the case of disgraced monuments, particularly monuments of Soviet Union, that have been removed from their pedestals, in most countries that after 1989 have gained independence. This proceder, I have observed in Warsaw as well. A monument for the Red Army, in one of the central parks of the city, first has been vandalised many times, by unknown subjects, who at night would throw red paint on them. This situation has repeated and eventually the city council has decided to remove the statue from its location. What is left, is an empty pedestal. It is not neutral, the iconoclasm does not erase history, it leaves an empty space. A gap, a question. Does the iconoclasm we committed in the natural environment also resulted with a gap? A longing, for lost spirituality, for lost connection with the natural environment?

Taking into consideration the limitation of architectural production that will occur, if we want to react to the ongoing climatic crisis, we

will have to rethink the meaning of the word heritage. Maybe even deconstruct its common meaning. Heritage will no longer be associated with the objects of the past, but also the products of our contemporary society. That of course changes the role of an architect, conservator, preservationist. Their role will become much more active than in the past, as well as their actions will have to address an increasingly broadening range of problems. Hopefully their conscious actions and sensible approach, will affect the general perception of preservationists' role and position in the society, also their role in the architectural production itself. Ideas put out by Alois Riegl and other preservationists, in the past, that we take for granted in our understanding of heritage today, were only at their inception a pure hypothesis. Therefore the new generation also has to pose assumptions, and ask questions in order that maybe in the future will turn into common practices. The preservation will be more connected with experiment, rather than carefully calculated encounters with cultural objects of the past. As following Wittgenstein's advice, we shall not "get involved in partial problems, but always take flight to where there is a free view over the whole single great problem, even if this view is still not a clear one."

Preservation is also a practice that is different from production of architecture, due to its very complex authorship status. The preservationists may introduce changes to the original structure, that also already probably has undergone changes connected with the destruction process or use in time. Therefore preservationist is form begging, tangled in a set of authorship relations,

he or she must be aware of and respectful to. That also restricts actions of preservationist to be moderate and follow rules and suggestions made for him by other, co creators. Global preservation practice, especially linked with big bureaucratic institutions such as UNESCO, rely on almost dogmatic sets of rules. This also highly restricts the creativity that is a crucial element of any art production. But local preservationist don't have to strictly follow the strong outlines, especially that most of the charters are rather written in a suggestive and contemplative way, evoking rather criticism connected with the approach rather than studying practical cases itself. Therefore there is a space for a local preservationist to be at the same time inventive in approach to the rules and creative in his endeavors.

That brings me to an idea, presented by a researcher from the United States, Jason Rhys Parry, who observed how ruins have become in many places "unlikely refuge for endangered species". Abandoned by human structures, have become places where biodiversity thrives. His, an Anticipatory Theory of Ruin Ecology, invites architects to design in a perspective of the buildings becoming ruins, and also homes for other nonhuman species in the far future. That idea, of designing not only with now in perspective, but of course also with a perspective of inevitable death of the structure, has been present in architectural theory and practice. Sir John Soane, while designing Bank of England, has asked Joseph Gandy to produce drawing of the intended design as well as of the same structure in ruin. Similarly, Albert Speer also imagined and presented his designs of Monuments for the Third Reich as ruins. He al-

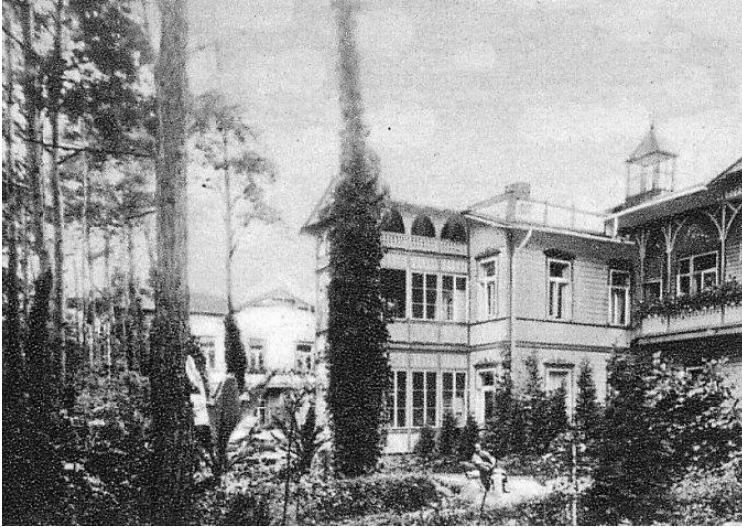
though wished, that the buildings in state of ruin will be re-discovered by future generations, and admires as we admire ruins of antiquity.

Previously described ideas and observations, create a certain link of action that has to be taken for the heritage in a broad understanding of the notion, regaining its status and value. First, vandalism of both historical structures and the natural environment has to be neglected. Then processes of preservation only can be effective. If not, discipline of both environmental and architectural preservation will be worthless. It will become very similar to actions taken by the mythological Sisyphus, who everyday would push a gigantic stone up the hill, and always drop it at the top of the mountain. This inevitable fate, and recurring effort was a punishment he received from gods for cheating the envoy of the king underworld Thanatos, and therefore causing temporary stagnation of cases of deaths on earth. But I also wondered, that maybe what Sisyphus was doing wrong was to apply the same logic to the recurring problem. If he decided, for example, to change something in the way he was pushing the stone, maybe pulling it from the top, or asking for help from someone else, he would be able to fulfil the task. I believe that even if there are many ways heritage is being endangered, and it seems as though climate change might be an irreversible thread to our society, we should not neglect the preservation efforts we can put in place. Maybe we just have to radicalise the approach we represent now.

In this search for new ways of coping with issues, we can turn to seek answers in the mechanisms existing in nature. What can we learn about collaboration from other species? For example in the case of fungi, mushrooms are a species that is being invited by trees into their environment, in the last cycle of their lives. Therefore the fungi helps transport the energy that the tree has, into the soil, and into other species. They are a very crucial element of any ecosystem. Connected also with magical thinking, and spiritual beliefs. Fungi appearing in the forest in a form of a ring, was seen as a symbol of good luck. They have been imagined as marks left by fairies dancing, and enchanting the place. Far from this magical connotation, fungi are the first species that appears in the areas where nuclear bombs have been dropped. The occurrence of fungi is seen as a symptom of the end of contamination, and allows for the return of humans (and hopefully other species) into this place. Growth and decay are revealed in natural equilibrium. And as Tom Emerson has stated “ all points towards a potential future are at the intersection of nature and culture, the environments and arts. Can we then, as architects learn from the post-human scenarios presented by scientists? Can architecture be a tool that will reconnect humans with nature? How to evoke desire for meaning, for complex understanding of surrounding us connections, that may change individual and collective actions?



## Context



*photos of Sanatoriums in Otwock.,  
author unknown*

## Mythologies of sanatorium

*“ But I find it equally important to make constant reference to myth and to the entire human imaginarium. Returning to the compact structures of mythology could bring a sense of stability within the lack of specificity in which we are living nowadays. I believe that myths are the building material for our psyche, and we cannot possibly ignore them (at most we might be unaware of their influence).*

—Olga Tokarczuk

Otwock is a suburb of Warsaw, located about 23 kilometers from the capital city of Poland. In the beginning of 20th century, Otwock became a popular health resort, due to its favourable climatic conditions, predominance of pine trees, sandy soil and dry air. This links development of the city of Otwock with the broader impact that “ tuberculosis and neurosis” had on the rise of modern architecture, as suggests Beatrice Colomina in her book “X-Ray architecture”. In case of Otwock it is the development of a specific type of wooden vernacular architecture called “Świdermajer”, that in the top period of cities prosperity, numbered more than 500 wooden villas in that style.

First modern settlements in this area are connected with development of the steel train line that was established between Warsaw and Mława at the end of the 19th century. This first stage

of development of City Otwock has been captured in a urban plan drawing called “Stacyja Otwock/ Otwock station”. Although the place already had many inhabitants and visitors, it still had no official city rights and no official name. It was simply a gathering of woden villas surrounded by carefully arranged parks, complementing the ubiquitous pine forest. The forest itself seems to be for the author describing the settlement, (Edumnd Diehl, 1889) the most important asset of this place. He mentions May as the most advised period to visit the city as then, during the whole month one can experience the blooming of the pine trees. This comment, underlines how important the natural environment and its poetic beauty were for the first settlers. At this point, only two streets were given names - that is the perpendicular to the station Kościelna street, and the paralel one called Warszawska. The names remain till this day.

In 1916 Otwock was granted city rights, and in 1923 it officially gained a status of a health resort for public use and local significance. The elements that constituted Otwock as a city were two brick buildings, the new build station that allowed more visitors to arrive to the city and the post-telegraph office in a building called “Willa Julia” , a former inhalatorium and residence of Gotlieb Kremer, one of the doctors in Zofiówka sanatorium for mentally ill Jews. The city apart

from many guesthouses and public sanatoriums, was also fully electrified, had a system of public Chambaud technology sewage, as well as paved roads and pathways. All these architectural and urban elements in the opinion of the press at that time constituted the splendor and prosperity of the city.

In the informant about Poland's health resorts from 1928, we can find statistical information that suggests the scale of the city and its dynamic. It mentions 2 big hotels, 40 guest-houses, 1300 private houses, 3 restaurants, and 5 canteens - a general number of rooms in all mentioned properties around 4500. The season lasts for a whole year, although the resort is more popular during the summer vacations. Yearly there are 14.000 visitors coming to the city, which approximately was the same amount as the permanent number of inhabitants.

In 1925 a small book on the city-sanatorium Otwock was published. The paper called "Otwock resort informant" is a complex report that both consists of a descriptive-literary part that speaks of the city's splendor, as well as a large data-based information part that is meant to support the subjective character of the first part. In 1925 when the informant was published, Otwock was still on the way to its peak performance as a city. Its literary part is characterized by excessive usage of metaphors and poetic reflections. It is a non-fictional piece of literature, that reads like a novel. Starts with the description of the city itself, its surroundings, and the beginnings of the city's development. Described almost like a myth. A myth of a city, among

pinus that could cure from terminal illnesses. "And then, when going by train from Warsaw to Dęblin, one could see on both sides of the plantation solid walls of the forest and no settlements, neither cottages nor houses. But then came after the forest merchant or maybe together with him a sick man, and when he found out that the forest was such an extraordinary doctor and counselor, he started to build here, settle down, cure and heal their lungs." And of course, this was true. Otwock has flourished as a city, due to the treatments of tuberculosis that were conducted there. Many doctors from Warsaw moved there to run private clinics and develop further investigations of the impact of climate on the human body. Otwock was the only health resort for tuberculosis in Poland located in lowland areas. That most definitely made it a unique place.

All buildings were settled among the forest, so the whole city was immersed in the greenery. „You don't even have to reach far from the streets of the resort to find yourself in groups of pines that are not so compact that they are able to hold the air flow, yet so denser that the air is clean and balsamic. This modest pine is a huge factory of life-giving breaths, it is again an involuntary painter and poet-lirish". [...] For there is an even higher degree of such a community of existence. Trees and herbs enjoy themselves in the company of other trees, shrubs and herbs, they grow side by side with each other, and it is good for them; as if their neighborhood were to be convenient for them, as if they had some beginning of instinct, selection. "

The city worked as a very well functioning or-



ganism. All houses were connected with paved roads, the same as parts of the body that are connected by veins. Also, there was electricity in most of the sanatoriums and canalization system. Otwock in the 30s was probably much more modern, and hygienic, than many parts of Warsaw. There were many different "special" buildings spread around the city. Inhalatorium for those who required special additional sessions, cabinets of specialists, dentist. The majority of buildings were wooden villas built in a local style called Świdermajer. They had big porches, where patients could sunbathe and inhale the fresh air in a horizontal position. Many of the guesthouses also had banquet rooms, restaurants where a variety of dietetic dishes were served. In 1926 the city council took out a loan of a dizzying sum of 2 million Polish zlotych, to build a local casino. The building, opened in 1933, surrounded by a beautiful park still stands, today it functions as a high school. Otwock was seen by many as a place full of splendor, but also due to the fact that some of the sanatoriums were run by the newly established non-profit social organizations, it also was a quite egalitarian place, where the children from poor families could come for summer vacations in the wood camps, or mentally ill were taken in for rehabilitation. It was almost a place from a dream, where the charity would thrive, where new equal society could develop. This was the story of this place, told by the media and guides, to the general public. There was some literary fiction in it all. But as Aristotle has said, fiction is always a kind of truth.

Today in Otwock is a boring and dull city, that has little to do with the image of it from the

pre-war times. The knowledge of the city's past mostly circulates in written documents. In 2009 in Otwock, a historical bulletin called "Andriolówka" started being published. An aperiodic is meant to popularize the life and work of illustrator Elwiro Michał Andriolli, who purchased most of the land that is now the city Otwock in the late 19th century and is seen as the progenitor of the city's settlement, as well as the Świdermajer architecture style. Andriolli, the historical figure, became in Otwock a sort of protagonist character that can be spotted in many other publications. For example, in a small book published by the city, with advice on do's and don'ts of conservation of wooden villas in Świdermajer style, drawings are supported by annotations made by the historical figure of Andriolli. *"Andriolli advises storing the wooden planks for a year in a dry spot before they can be used in the interiors for renovation"*. This myth of an "ancient ancestor" who has raised the once prominent city, resembles motifs seen also in antique mythologies. It can be read as a way to cope with, marks of the past that somehow inevitably has vanished and is no longer existent. A tradition that has been forgotten and is still reminiscing in a reduced or misunderstood manner. At the same time, this re-created locality, the fictional but functioning mythology becomes a shared reality of inhabitants.

The myth of sanatorium persists although the city has long ago lost its status of a health resort. It is important to acknowledge and remember, that it was not the style of the buildings that has constituted its popularity. The architecture was only a part of a system, of a city that has

a specific atmosphere, that enables culture and nature to coexist next to each other. Otwock was one of the favorite places for summer holidays, of the Warsaw intellectual elite of the mid-war - Władysław Reymont has written there, his Nobel novel "Chłopi". It was thanks to a director of the local sanatorium for mentally ill Jews Zofiówka, he was able to stay there and work on his writing. Doctor Samuel Goldflam, knowing of the author's poor financial situation, while examining him after an accident he had, when he broke two of his ribs, has informed the insurance company that actually he had all of his ribs broken and also a post-accidental neurosis (neurasthenia) that requires further treatment in the sanatorium. This lie, of a highly established neurologist who noticed the extraordinary talent of Reymont's, granted him time and some financial stability to continue his work.

The intellectual heritage of the doctors connected with pre-war Otwock still is seen as incredibly relevant in medicine today. *"The scientist or artist chooses the subject of his or her work himself or herself, and the doctor is completely dependent on the subject of his or her research. The sick person cannot be invited, nor bought or hired. He comes of his own free will, he may not come. The only workshop for good medical work is a properly equipped hospital, where you can keep an eye on the patient day and night. [...] Dr. Samuel Goldflam, considered the Anti-Jewish movement in Poland to be a symptom of the mental disability of its adherents. As a neurologist, he treated anti-Semitism as mental perversion. He dreamt of healing anti-Semites in special sanatoriums. He left us when we needed him most"*, has described

in his memoirs, devoted to Samuel Goldflam, dr Zygmunt Bychowski from 1933. Samuel Goldflam, apart from a doctor, was also a patron of the arts. At his funeral, Warsaw Philharmony played Beethoven: Symphony No 3 in E flat major, 'Eroica'.

Work of his life, the hospital established with help of other Jewish doctors, Zofiówka today gradually falls into more decay. One other ruin, of a house on Kościelna street, has brought me to the first Polish bacteriologist Odo Feliks Kazimierz Bujwid. And then again, a thought appears, as there is a linguistic link between human culture, with art, literature, and music, there is also a much more simple type of culture, the culture of bacterias. This similarity, as abstract it might be, reveals in some sense the interconnection between different elements of life on earth, evolving next to each other. Also similarity, of people who ethnically might belong to different cultures, but are defined by a similar understanding of what matters to them. Similarly fascinated by still undescribed natural phenomenons, keen to collaborate and create, concerned with their environment and their traditions, cultural heritage. This image of the pre-war Otwock and stories of its inhabitants, especially the Jewish ones, have mostly remained in individual memories of their ancestors. Some of the stories, accessible to a broader audience, have been presented in the local Museum. Where also, a paper version of the mentioned at the beginning guide from 1925 is being exhibited. Where Otwock is described as this ecosystem of harmony between humans and nature. A harmony that should exist also between the people of different ethnicities.

*“ Paradoxically, an idea appears: a plant is a team animal and this is its natural form of existence in the world; it concentrates in forests, coniferous forests, and primeval forests, whether as an ornamentation of the strangest beauty full of beauty that covers wetlands and peat bogs, or otherwise. It is, in a way, a new science: it is called phytosociology and it withdraws the notion of a community life beyond man and animal. It operates in masses and ensembles, and this word is its canon: it is closely related to the ground and nature of the soil and creates a unity of issues with geology - it reveals new truths and takes us into new relationships and communications. (...) For there is an even higher degree of such community. Trees and herbs like each other in the company of other trees, shrubs and herbs, they grow side by side with each other, and it is good for them; as if the neighborhood were to be convenient for them, as if there was some beginning of instinct, selection in them.” (Otwock uzdrawisko, 1925)*

### **Sanatorium in literature**

*“Space, like time, engenders forgetfulness; but it does so by setting us bodily free from our surroundings and giving us back our primitive, unattached state ... Time, we say, is Lethe; but change of air is a similar draught, and, if it works less thoroughly, does so more quickly.”*

—Thomas Mann

In my research, apart from architectural and anthropological studies, I also turned to literature, for two reasons. First, because it gives the best way to understand a complex reality, maybe one

that passed away. Second of all, because reading requires the use of imagination. A novel is at the same time historical evidence of a past time, but also it allows us to engage with the past in a more personal way. Literature has simultaneously documented and shaped the thought of societies. The most known depiction of a sanatorium in literature is a novel written by Thomas Mann “Magic Mountain”. Sanatorium in this novel becomes an allegory of the whole continent- Europe before the first World War. Similarly, in the novel written by a Polish author, Stanisław Lem in the years just after the Second World War, called „Hospital of Transfiguration”. It was the first novel in the series called - “Time not lost” in which Lem was dealing with the past trauma of the War. Only the first part has been approved later by the author, as the other two he said were influenced by the Soviet censors who made him develop it in the spirit that applauds the socialist system.

The novel in 1968 was adapted into a movie, made by the national Polish television. With the starting credits of the movie, we are being taken on a journey that reveals the ethical nature of the young doctor, gradually revealing his set of moral values. It is important to acknowledge that a doctor is young and inexperienced when he first comes to the hospital. He is keen to learn and approaches every experience with a strong dose of curiosity. The author portrays the microcosm of Polish pre-war society exposing divisions among the hospital staff in the face of extreme situations. Book presents many different personalities, political and ethical positions represented at large in Polish society at the beginning of the

Second World War. The characters in the movie, allegorically represent the fractions found in Polish society at the beginning of Nazi Occupation. The events presented at the end of the movie are almost an exact depiction of events action T4. The action that was also conducted in Zofiówka sanatorium in Otwock, where around 130 patients were killed by Nazi soldiers on the site.

Both in Mans and Lem's novels sanatorium is a place of transition of the young characters' perception of the world, due to his direct experiences and philosophical contemplations. Step by step, we are introduced to new ideas on society, articulated by different characters the patient/doctor meets during his stay in the sanatorium. With that difference, events in Lems' book end much more tragically than in Mann's. *"It is a sort of philosophical-moral treaty, not hiding his relationship with the Magic Mountain of Thomas Mann. From the magnum opus Manna is primarily „laboratory”, to say the least, character a place of action, which is separated from the rest of the world of the sanatorium, a thread educational, and above all, a combination of the characters' misfortunes with the great a discussion on philosophical issues, which is also an attempt to diagnose the situation European culture. The main difference is that Lem - unlike Mann, really was a doctor, so the theme of the disease and the body in his novel is not just a metaphor, but it is quite realistic. The Polish writer - let's say it right away - is dealing with the state of cultural health of the organism in which we live, from a different position than Mann, from the position of man after the Holocaust, after the biggest in the history of the massacre of people and value systems, societies*

*and ideals".* (Jarzębski, 2014)

The image of sanatorium from literature casts a shadow on its possibility as a place to shape one's ideas, because of peripheral location and patients ability for endless contemplations, enhanced by picturesque views. But how did this image relate to real sanatoriums from the early '20s? Beatriz Colomina, a researcher from Princeton University has been investigating the link between the development of sanatoriums and modern architecture. In the beginning of her book, „X-ray architecture” she states *“tuberculosis helped make modern architecture modern. It is not modern architects who made modern sanatoriums. Rather sanatoriums modernized architects”*. (Colomina, 2019) She sees the buildings of sanatoriums, as part of the medical instruments developed for treatment. Their horizontal terraces, meant to allow far views for patients laying on them, sunbathing, and taking inhalations with fresh air. The sanatorium was designed especially for the horizontal position of a patient in bed. Used colors were meant to bring positive emotions. Sanatorium as a place was meant to replace medicine. Was meant to allow healing with nature. Until the 1880's hospitals were considered institutions for the poor, as the healing of the upper classes took place in their homes. The invention of sanatoriums changed this situation. The more wealthy started spending their summers in sanatoriums, also for preventive reasons. Sanatoriums apart from tuberculosis also started focusing on the treatment of illnesses nervous system, the other major disease that came with the development of modernity.

One of the characters of the book "Tristan" by Thomas Mann, explains why he pays a visit to the sanatorium. *"I will tell you the real reason why I am here, madame... It is a feeling for style. [...] This brightness and hardness, this cold, austere simplicity as reserved strength madame-it has upon me the ultimate effect of an inward purification and rebirth."* And this image went out into the world, making sanatoriums a symbol of modernity, new values, and health. Death itself was hidden in sanatoriums, as it would be considered a spot on sanatoriums reputation. In some a system of tunnels was developed, to carry the bodies of the dead out, without acknowledgment of other patients. Terminally sick patients were not taken in in many sanatoriums, that was also a case of many guest houses in Otwock. As Beatriz Colomina mentions *"architecture may have been seen as a medical instrument, but the patient was removed from view when the instrument didn't provide the expected results. [...] Modern architecture represented the cure but couldn't face failure"*. (Colomina, 2019) The fascination with medicine, its ability to categorize, order, and cure the society was taken further into the architecture of modernism. Modern architects themselves frequently based designs on their own experience of sickness and processes of healing. The role of the architect has changed in society. The architect was seen as Colomina suggests, one of many medical consultants, that would be responsible for shaping a healthy living environment for a modern person. The architecture of the sanatorium influenced the architecture of the city. Soon life in all places on earth was meant to be well organized and hygienic. „Health became a new type of religion and mo-

dern architecture built its temples." Temples of the worshippers of order.

The link between the sanatorium and modernism brings associations to previously mentioned ideas of the link between modernity and holocaust. Hospitals and medicines also became an element of the Nazi plans. There were developed experiments, on how to kill efficiently, which then were used on a mass scale in concentration camps. In Lem's novel, there are also characters of doctors who develop experiments on their patients. How the main character calls it, they conduct hygienic murders, for scientific purposes. What happened to Jewish sanatoriums in Otwock after the war?

The story of remains, of one of the sanatoriums in Otwock, is presented in a book published recently, by Piotr Paziński. Paziński represents the third generation of Polish Jews, who are indirectly affected by the marks left by the Holocaust existing in the contemporary Polish context. He visits Sanatorium in Otwock, where his grandmother used to stay temporarily before the war, as well recently for a few recent years before her death. The author visits „Śródborowianka" where he interacts with its inhabitants, his late grandmother's friends. With a special precision, he describes the specific atmosphere he finds there, the anachronistic interior decor, the not so frequently visited by inhabitants' big banquet rooms. The bedrooms of individual patients are full of fragments of memory encapsulated in collections of bizarre objects. Inhabitants of the old Sanatorium, elderly Jews who after the war neglected their ethnicity in order to create new lives for themselves, in their old years recapture the me-

mories of their childhood. Expressions from the Hebrew language return to their consciousness, even though they did not use them for 50/60 years. But the story about the place starts with an unexpected discovery of the author himself.

*“Śródborowiankę I found in the „Book”. It had dark blue covers and was lying as if nothing had ever happened in the window of one of Krakow’s antique shop [...] But my „Book”, or „Almanac of Health Resorts”, published by the Polish Balneological Society in 1934, with diagrams and photographs, advertisements and recommendations by outstanding scientists and medical writers, made me sure that Śródborowianka existed not only before I was born, but also earlier, even before the war. [...] ] now what was left was a handful of natives-chip people and their ark in a pine garden, as in the past covered with sheet metal and whitewashed with lime, long and curved, with winding corridors, a dining room and a common room that used to be a reading room and a house of prayer, and probably more frequently used as a TV room where people discussed and played cards, and where contemporary voices intermingled with those from the past. [...] Immediately afterwards, I felt the pride that accompanied the discovery that an ancient pedigree, additionally certified in print, is a place so well-known to me. If this is the case, I thought, since the Book has survived, I can now continue it with my own commentary on the history of Śródborowianka. [...] Afterwards, I went again. to Śródborowo, I located myself in one of the rooms, evoked ghosts and distant images, and then everything suddenly became clear, as if numerous doors opened to distant, infinite spaces and landscapes.*

“ (Paziński, 2018)

Soon the author discovered that living in the old sanatorium is not as pleasing as he anticipated it could be. This exploration of personal archeology is a subject of many of his actions during his stay. Inhabitants share with him their stories, triggered by the objects they found in their rooms. The reality of “Pensjonat” ( the Guesthouse) is shaped by the memory of a memory of trauma. It is a melancholic reality, of half sounds, shadows, and unfinished sentences. It is not far different from the atmosphere of the author’s childhood memories, as he mentions “ my childhood worked somehow like that, I was surrounded by old people and death”. And this shows clearly, how grandparents have a strong impact on our lives, especially the childhood memories that shape our identity. They pass on the tradition, they reveal stories from the past, they share with us knowledge of events, we will rediscover again in history lessons. But their perspective of the past has a much more personal dimension. It allows us to connect directly with the described story. Sometimes they will show us a small object, that for them is the guard of the memory. In the novel, one of the residents of the sanatorium reveals her connection to the little objects (buttons, scraps of documents) and their importance to her. “ *What objects can a person carry out of a burning city? Where do you take them? Maybe, you think, it is better not to take anything. The memory becomes a burden and doesn’t let you sleep at night. [...] But the ones that did not take anything, look at these little objects that grandma put into the pocket of her jacket with envy.*” (Paziński, 2018)





*Zofiówka Sanatorium in the 1908 and around 1920,  
unknown authors*



## Ruins in Otwock: identity in decay

History of the Jewish community in Otwock starts in 1893 when Dr. J. Geisler built the first Sanatorium in this area for patients with respiratory diseases. In the following years, many other Jewish doctors and entrepreneurs have decided to settle in this area, running private clinics and guest houses. Before the Second World War, the Jewish citizens made up for 60-70% of the city's inhabitants. Comparable was the proportion of Jewish citizens in the city council and a bit higher if to statistically analyze the proportion of guest house owners. But if we consider the status of ownership of the land and properties, what actually turns out is that pre-war Otwock was in fact a Jewish city. 85% of the properties were owned by Jewish citizens. This is why, when in the first years of occupation the ghetto was established, a bigger part of the city was in the borders of the ghetto rather than outside of it. Not only districts with private houses were incorporated into its borders, but also all the health institutions located on the peripheries.

In Otwock health resort among two sanatoriums for tuberculosis patients, it was also located one institution that in a very similar way was considered a very important factor that decided of the cities popularity and has supported its further development, into an important element of the Polish pre-war medical base. Zofiówka, the sanatorium for mentally ill Jews in Otwock, was

in 1908 established by the "Society for the Care of Mentally and Nervously Ill Jews"; a group of passionate activists, who were dedicated to enabling mental care for the underprivileged members of the society. Prior to this, for a few years, efforts were made to fundraise the money from the Jewish communities in Warsaw and Otwock to create such an institution. The 18ha (30 morgens) land was given in 1907 to the "Society for the Care of Mentally and Nervously Ill Jews" by Zofia Endelmanowa, the local philanthropist. This gesture became an inspiration for the name of the new place, from that time officially called "Zofiówka".

The first two pavilions were designed by architect Stiefelman, allowing to host 40 patients at once. In the following years, well prosperous institutions started to dynamically expand. Eventually around 1939 there were 350 beds in the whole complex. Numerous one and two-story pavilions, made out of brick with white paint finish were built, spread over the land. Also, additional buildings were constructed, such as the kitchen and workshops. Also, the villa of the old owner of the land was kept, which consisted of 4 rooms and utility rooms, that received a function of a house for the doctors working in the hospital.

The institution was conceived and run mainly from donations from the Jewish community,

with exceptional cases when private patients were taken in from afar and then they had to pay small fees. This social aspect of the sanatorium was seen as very innovative and considered one of the modernizing steps towards a more social and equal society. The methods of treatments were mostly connected with non-demanding work in the flower gardens and agricultural land surrounding the hospital. Patients were advised to take long walks in the forests, relax on the terrace in order to regain mental strength. Some were treated with medication for neurosis, which was being extensively studied at the moment in Europe. The main factor seen in their convalescence was silence and peacefulness of the surroundings as well as the specific climate.

After 1939 when the occupation started the situation in the hospital started getting worse. It has remained the only functioning institution for the mentally ill Jews in this region of Poland, so many new patients were taken in. In the fall of 1940 when officially ghetto was established in Otwock, sanatoriums "Zofiówka" and neighboring tuberculosis sanatorium "Bijus" became a district of its own, called "health resort ghetto". Zofiówka also started functioning as a ward for children disturbed by the war and Jewish orphans. In years between that and the final extermination of the Jewish community in the city, many patients died due to hunger and typhus plague that had developed within the facility.

On the night before the extermination day, 19th of August 1942, some doctors and nurses in the hospital received a note about planned nazi action. Some of them fled to Warsaw in a stolen

ambulance, some committed suicide. During the following day, when in the main part of the ghetto Jewish citizens were waiting for transportation to Treblinka death camp, patients were killed on spot with gunshots by Nazi officers. Children were killed in an especially cruel way, to save bullets, their heads were splashed against walls of the building. The bodies of victims were buried on the site by Ukrainian troops collaborating with the Nazi army. It is estimated that around 3000 Jews were buried in mass graves, on the site and in the surrounding forests as well as along Reymonta street, where Today stands a commemorative stone paying tribute to all of them.

The tragic events of the mass murders of the Jewish patients were not the last Nazi crimes bound with this facility. In the last years of the occupation, both Zofiówka and Bijus sanatoriums were planned to be turned into Lebensborn institutions, where the pure Aryan race was meant to be bred. There are stories of victims, who were kept there and raped by the officers but eventually, the plan of turning the two buildings officially into a Lebensborn never got fully put in place. After the war, for a brief period Zofiówka as well as many other guest houses in the city of Otwock, were temporary homes for children who lost their parents during the war. In the following years, in Otwock and surrounding areas, a few houses for Jewish orphans, saved by the Polish nuns and families were officially established. Among them, guest house Zachęta connected with Seymour's family, an aunt of a famous photographer Chim, who himself visited the city while conducting work for UNICEF documenting rehabilitation processes after the war in 5 countries. The photos

were published in the spring of 1948, in an album called "Children of Europe". His photos of kids in Otwock, Warsaw, and a few other places in Poland became documentation material for the anthropological study of the post-war state of architectural tissue and activities of its users, as well as inspiration for this project.

During the times of the Polish People's Republic, Zofiówkas facilities were brought back to function as a tuberculosis sanatorium. In the mid 80's it returned to its primary function as a place meant for the rehabilitation of mentally ill patients. Especially young adults and children who had problems with abuse substances. After the system changes that happened in the early 90's the patients were moved to another facility, and the buildings and land partially returned to the Jewish religious commune. Today the land and the ruin are owned by the previously mentioned commune as well as the National Treasury and Mazovian voivodeship marshal. Its tragic past and uncertain ownership status led to further ruination of the place. It also became a victim of vandalization and robbing. All metal elements of the buildings such as radiators and pipes were torn out and sold to the local metal scrap dump.

In the past 10 years, there were multiple fires further devastating the structures, set by accident by the groups of young urban explorers. Many walls are covered with graffiti, sometimes consisting of violent slogans and symbols (as swastikas). From the original 6 pavilions, there are only two of them still remaining in a state that allows to imagine how they function and looked before. Among some inhabitants of the city,

circulates a belief that the buildings are haunted and this is also one of the reasons the place became overlooked. In 2012 during one of the "Otwock" residencies run by Mirosław Bałka, artist Luc Tuymans created an ephemeral art piece in the main space of the bigger pavilion. The room was filled with black balloons and was meant to commemorate all victims killed in this building by the Nazis.

### **State of material memory of Jews in Otwock**

There were 3 synagogues in Otwock and many prayer houses. The two big ones, one on the Warszawska street (analyzed in the research part of the project) and the other on Reymonta street were destroyed by Nazi soldiers during the first year of occupation. The first synagogue was designed by the city's pre-war general architect, a woman, Eugenia Jabłońska. The last, much smaller synagogue with the bathhouse in the backyard has survived the war and was adapted to other public functions during the times of the Polish People's Republic. After the system changes that occurred in the '90s the land was returned to the Jewish religious commune in Warsaw. The new owners sold the land for development, that move has been criticized by the local group of historians. They argued that although the building had no architectural significance, in their opinion it represented a unique historical value. Jewish religious commune from Warsaw has claimed that they view their actions justified for two reasons, first because the synagogue is not considered a sacred place (as in for example buildings in Christian tradition) and secondly because there is no local community in this re-



*installation „Ten” in Zofiówka Sanatorium,  
photos from Otwock project website, 2012*

gion that would benefit from the preservation of this building. Suggestion, from the local Jewish commemoration committee, to turn the buildings into a local Jewish museum came too late, and eventually, on the site a large residential building was raised. The developer decided to reach a truce by hanging a commemorative sign with an inscription mentioning Jewish citizens and the past synagogue, next to the new building.

A second monument connected with the Jewish past of the city, a stone monument on Reymonta street that commemorates the mass murder that took place on this site after the events of liquidation of the Jewish ghetto on the 19th August of 1942. It is located on the peripheries of the city, not far from the ruins of Zofiówka sanatorium. In this place, around 3000 victims were shot and buried in ditches along the road. These were the Jewish citizens that avoided being transported to Treblinka death camp because they were able to hide in their houses or on the Arian side on that one day. Most of the executions took place in the week following the transportation, as Nazi soldiers with persistence search through every house and every industrial site within the city borders to find the hidden citizens.

The stone was founded by the city council of Otwock, not long after the war, in 1949. At first, the inscription mentioned 2000 Jewish victims, and in 2012 the inscription on the stone was updated to a factual number of 3000 victims. Responsible for conducting this correction was the "Social Committee for the Remembrance of Otwock and Karczew Jews", an association started by a sociologist and theology professor

Zbigniew Nosowski, in 2000. From that time one every year on the anniversary of the Otwock ghetto liquidation, a memorial march is organized, starting on the siding near the railway station where the Germans crowded the victims, up to the memorial stone, which is a symbolic burial place for the victims murdered within the city. Although the act of updating the monument speaks on behalf of the efforts of the committee, it is insufficient to work as a significant element of the city's landscape, due to its location on the site of a road and lack of any supporting buildings that could speak more of its purpose.

On the official site of the city of Otwock, in the section about tourism, there is a list of all commemorative signs and monuments in the city. The monument mentioned before on Reymonta street is one of 44 other historical monuments. This makes up for around 2% of city official memorial sites to be reminding of the city's 2/3 pre-war population. 1 out of 44. There was also a notified case of the stone's vandalization. Someone has spray-painted a swastika on its surface. The same night, with the intervention of the local stone-mason, the disgraceful sign was cleaned away, returning the monument to its "ideal" state. Afterward, an article in the local newspaper was published, becoming a testimony of this event.

On the other hand, if we investigate the city in search of monuments, from a perspective suggested by Alois Riegl, we could say that there are many unintentional monuments of the Jewish community there. There is a ruin of Villa Julia, an old inhalatorium and telephone office located

near the main station of Otwock. This beautiful neo-gothic building, made entirely out of red brick, gracefully falls into ruin. Next to it, on the same plot, stands one of the most popular restaurants in the city, *Stylowa*, the place where most wakes are organized after funerals. In Otwock, life and death are elements that seem to be inseparable and vividly connected. This „danse macabre”, of the old architectural tradition fading away into decay, and new well-prospering buildings, flourishing due to very profitable function and no architectural significance, takes place sometimes in one tight plot. Lately, the “*Stylowa*” restaurant was extended, to enable more ceremonies to take place there at one time, it was also repainted in a hideous bright yellow color. Yellow, maybe intended to attract attention to the listed monument it neighbors.

Further down *Kościelna* street, there are ruins of two wooden villas in *Świdrmajer* style. In the strict city center, they don't stand out so much since there are many newer buildings also built on the big plots that the buildings used to belong to, and were divided after the war. This urban densification that occurred in between the 60s and 90s, somehow quite well hides the poor state of the buildings considered local heritage. In the peripheries of the city center, there are more villas that also fall into decay. They are hidden between the woods and sometimes still are inhabited by communal owners. Usually, the plots they stand on are full of garbage, all kinds, starting from disposed of plastic packaging, up to old car tires and furniture, or even old machines and cars. Scrolling through the local newspaper site, with ease one can find, multiple articles abo-

ut new cases of contamination of the neutral sites occurring. Some citizens of the city, rather than for recreation, use the forest as a landfill.

Many of the vernacular wooden houses are being notoriously burned down. From the original number of at least 500 wooden villas, there are approximately around 120 left. All cases from the past 10 years, eventually have been reported as accidents, but an opinion circulates among the local inhabitants that actually the fires are being set on purpose. It is the owners of the land, who want to get rid of the unwanted heritage in order to increase the price of the land for development or be able to build a new house instead, and remaining below limits of density on the plot. These frauds usually don't end up with a case in court, because of a lack of evidence against the owners. During one of the fires, a local fireman has even found, hidden in a wall of an old *Świdrmajer*, an old praying book, left there by probably one of the Jews before the war. At first, neither he nor the owners of the land did not know what it was, or that the building had some associations with the Jews.

This aligns only with global issues, connected with the environmental crisis. The forests, so beautifully defining the context of the city, because of upcoming droughts may become victims of uncontrolled fires. The fires will not only threaten the natural environment but also the lives of the inhabitants of the city. But global warming is also partially an effect of reckless actions of the inhabitants from the past. The natural micro-climate in Otwock has been destroyed by air pollutants. Many inhabitants of the small houses

in the city, burn trash instead of wood in their chimneys, or on their yards. The once climatic air, during the winter period, reaches very dangerous levels of pollution. There are many cases of trash being dumped in the forests since that does not require taking on payment for its utilization. In Otwock, it is not that easy anyways to find a communal recycling center or garbage dump. Many citizens, when they have to empty a house, will struggle to find a good place for the objects they want to dispose of. The local cemetery is in my observation one of the most polluting places in the city. Every day, many visitors buy new lights for the graves, and bouquets with artificial flowers. With each visit, all these elements are replaced by new, producing enormous amounts of waste. The beach next to the local river, Świder has been closed for many years due to contamination of the water by a leak from a local factory. Only recently, access to the river was granted again.

There are countless cases of unfinished houses standing in Otwock. Also, the main square of the city is a big hole in the ground, with concrete columns sticking out, that can be seen from outside the fence that surrounds it. It was meant to be a local shopping center, but the developer bankrupted and it stands unfinished for the last 10 years. There are many large-area supermarkets in the city, owned by foreign concerns. This is where most of the city's inhabitants get a chance to meet, gather in bigger groups. The local cinema, once very important, has been long closed since there is always a chance to reach Warsaw if one seeks cultural attractions. Otwock is a ghost-city, a suburb where transportation is do-

minated by individual cars, where it's cheaper to live in than in Warsaw, and most of its citizens commute to work in the capital every day. At the same time, many people from Warsaw come to Otwock during the weekends. Mainly they visit the local forests, the nature park that is being kept in quite good shape. The Celestynów woods have also a quite good system of care over the state of the forest, but it is only because the quality of forest keeping practices in Poland, in general, is still in the process of rebuilding its structures from the Soviet period. The woods have been objectified and seen mainly useful as places that provide the wood for construction and furniture production, also for export. Now the effort is being made to keep the forests mainly as places of recreation. The wood is sold, only in two cases. It is sourced in processes of care treatments and clear cuttings. The second one is conducted when the forest has been harmed by natural catastrophe or vandalization of the forest by wild animals and humans. Wood is being sold in a special auction system by the superintendence, and the money is being used for the maintenance of their services.

All of these cases of acts of vandalism observed in Otwock, in my view, are symptoms of a corrupted set of values that the community has. And it shows how generic culture overtakes the highly precious specific one bound with the place. How this paradigm of fleeting described by Bauman, and desire for constant change, superficial improvement, further disconnects the local inhabitants from their closest environment.



*archive photos of children from Otwock Jewish Orphanage,  
fot. Julia Pirotte, 1946*



## Resistance and revitalisation

*“ Buildings can express ideologies and shape social life. They can mirror human desires or reflect the impossibility of their realisation. And as there is an architecture of power there is also an anti-architecture of resistance.”*

—Charles Moore

An interest to preserve the wooden villas, and the need to acknowledge their value came in the moment they started disappearing. Preservation in this case, is a post-factum act that happens in the situation of crisis. The preservation becomes a very complicated and expensive action that can only be conducted on a limited amount of buildings. Because of the fact that they are being chosen, they represent a myth - a myth of a city consisting only of these wooden houses that existed in the beginning of 20th century. At the same time in the sociological scope, the preservation actions and this situation of crisis, has led to establishment of social movements among the inhabitants of Otwock. Groups such as, “Social Committee for the Remembrance of Otwock and Karczew Jews” or “ Society of Friends of Otwock”, consisting mainly from historians who live in the city, teachers at the local schools, enthusiasts of the vernacular style of architecture, who started to act in order to raise awareness of issues they perceived pressing. Due to their protests and actions, two of the villas have been put on the list of national heritage.

This aspect of social resistance, and activism is something that has a strong link to preservation. Not only preservation of architectural or cultural heritage. The word preservation can be used in many other connotations, where it can be seen as a multidisciplinary and ambiguous notion. It relates to many acts conducted on a daily basis by representatives of some professions. For example as the forester is the guard of the forest. As the librarian, is the guard of the knowledge collected in the library. The local resident becomes the guard of the ruins, the guard for the memory. Individually, many people collect and preserve objects, in home archives, connected with their families past and tradition. The action of preservation, the exercise of remembering and carrying can also be seen as acts leading to revitalisation. Traumatic memories of the past, can be revitalised by action. One of the past residents of city Otwock, of Jewish origin, Ruth Rintel after the war moved to New York and has been running a psychology practice. The method she used with her patients was therapy through art. Something similar, I spotted in the performance, that I have been a witness of (online) made by a grand-grand-nephew of dr. Goldflam's - the first principle of Zofiówka. He decided to bring him back to this place, to in a sense evoke his spirit in the ruin. The performance was in two parts, one was the bringing of his chest sculpted before to the ruins and situating him in his old office. The second

act was painting his portrait on the terrace of the ruin, and hanging it down from the terrace almost as a banner. This presence of art production is somehow rooted in genes of people connected with Otwock and in the place itself, recurring in different expressions among some inhabitants of the city.

Art and culture have also been always connected with some expressions of criticism to totalitarian systems that were existing in Poland. During the occupation, later also during the soviet period, music, film and art became a critical commentary of the dreadful reality. At the same time, unfortunately in contrary art also sometimes becomes a slave of totalitarian systems. Historically architecture has been, in many cases, an expression of systems or a scenography for representations of their power. From triumph arcs in Rome, through Cathedrals of the catholic church, Haussmann's renovation of Paris and Albert Speer's projects for Third Reich - architecture has been used as a tool that helps to highlight the importance of regimes, that helps to constitute their importance in the eyes of the public. Today the main agent that provokes the architectural production is the financial capital. Capital that does not ask, if the building or structure is good or bad, if it creates a community bound with a place or destroys an existing natural settlement of things. It asks about efficiency, costs and usefulness.

Can architecture be a form of resistance? An expression of a collective will to undermine existing paradigms? To work against climate change, inequality or exclusion. How to grant sensi-

ble architecture a chance to be appreciated, in order to present a counter-voice and hopefully spark a change. A change in law legislations, a change in user's perception or a change among architects, to follow their hearts and minds first in the design process, and not to be afraid of the restrictions imposed by the system. Where in a transparent way, we can show what exactly makes an architectural practice resilient - is the time the structures they designed has been appreciated by its users, it's an approach to the topic of sustainability or creative way of engaging users in its production. Architecture that respects the past and secures presence of absent memory. *"Memory" has tended in practice to become synonymous with "counter memory", defined in opposition to hegemonic views of the past and associated with groups who have been "left out", as if were, of mainstream history. The study of such memories has been based on a belief in the importance and possibility of "recovering" memories which were once there and which have since been "lost" or "hidden".* (Rigney, 2005)

In the increasingly homogenising and globalising reality, turn to locality could be seen as such a form of resistance. When facing the global climate crisis, a form of resilience would be seeking re-connection with the earth, with other species and spirituality. Studying the pine, the element so present in Otwocka landscape, I got to discover its symbolic meaning and ritual use. *"The Slowians were treating pines with respect and dignity. During the celebrations of The Rite of Spring pine played the role of a liturgical object. A pine branch or a small tree was put on flowers and other ornaments and carried around the houses wishing*

*a happy „new yearling”*. Pine was a symbol of death and power of the universe. It connects the cosmic with the mundane, the sky with earth. They were frequently planted in sacred places. It is a symbol of strength, immortality. A question that came to me afterwards was also. Why are there so many pine trees in the Mazowsze region of Poland in general? Pines were planted all over Poland during reforestation of areas destroyed during the II World War, because they were capable of adjusting to many different environments.

It was also a symbol of death, connected with the ritual of burial. The cremation stacks were formed from pine wood, probably because of the resin content, as well as the widespread occurrence. Pine could have been used for burial because of its dual meaning as a symbol of sadness, but also immortality. Does one system have to die for another to be born? Is this death, destruction and decay something that brings attention and helps rebuild? I don't believe architecture can change the world. But I believe that it could lead to a change by becoming a tool that questions the existing structures, an architect's approach can show a way of how to do differently, live, engage with space. A different philosophy of building can become an allegory of how society can change, and how it can change already using the existing models and elements but just adjusting them to new problems.

The definition of the pine, as a symbol of death brings me to the notion of immortality, a topic connected also with the duality of ruins. As witnesses of the distant past, ruins continue to

exist- they both penetrate time and prevail beyond it. *„New buildings and installations neither destroy the past nor rebuild it; rather, the architect or the artist cocreates with the remainders of history, collaborates with modern ruins, redefines their functions—both utilitarian and poetic.”* Ruins are seen also a symbols of human existence itself. Walter Benjamin even suggested that ruins are a metaphor, embodiment of the process of thinking itself. Since antiquity, there has been an isomorphism between nature, architecture, and the human body. Later on the uncanny anthropomorphism of ruins was reintroduced, in reference to the anatomic theater, where the dissection of the human body took place against the backdrop of classical ruins. Ruins, help us reflect upon the inevitable end of our lives. The lives, of those who build them, and are long gone. *“Architecture is a trigger for the mechanism of remembering. Buildings are landmarks in the topography of collective memory. Ruins connect us to the past. Decay and entropy, however, reflect the concerns and priorities of the present as much as the history of a site.”* Architecture is perceived, in Moore's opinion, both because of humans ability to read shared cultural signs as well as through the lense of their own personal experience. While facing ruins we are confronting mythical narratives with its physical reality of its destruction. This means that ruins help us reflect, not only on the past, but also on the possible future to come. They symbolise the end of one era, and provoke us to take action in the present. *“Constructing a new order often ends in the destruction of an old one. New architectural space shapes new forms of social identity. Therefore, those who purportedly seek to establish a new system first erase the existing*

historical texture of their territory, both physically and culturally, before marking it with their own symbols of power.” But can we simultaneously keep the ruin and its ability to evoke philosophical reflection, at the same time proposing a new system that complements it? As Svetlana Boys suggests “ *The contemporary obsession with ruins is neither a Baroque meditation on worldly vanitas, nor a romantic mourning for the lost wholeness of the past. [...] The ruins of modernity as viewed from a 21st-century perspective point at possible futures that never came to be. But those futures do not necessarily inspire restorative nostalgia. Instead, they make us aware of the vagaries of progressive vision as such.*” (Boym, 2008) Therefore what actually, the ruins might lead to, in this understanding is questioning of the existing social structures that are far from the utopian concepts they might have been inspired by or be the reminiscence of.

What were the utopian visions that did not come into play in Otwock, but may be seen as inspiration for the new action to be taken? In 1989 a group called “Komuna Otwock” was established. It was a commune, that based their actions on anarchistic thought. As one of the past members of the group said : *„Otwock 2012 is a ruined city. And it was supposed to be different... In 1989, when Otwock Commune was founded, everything seemed possible. In 1990, Stonek was to enter the city council, then we were to take over full power, establish an anarchist republic, ban meat-eating, co-participate in the work establishments, give the hospitals to nurses and patients, instead of schools there were to be free universities, in churches choirs were to sing Górecki and Cage, recycling was to be the city's bloodstream.*” What has kept

this idea from becoming reality? Maybe the idealistic approach? Maybe the fact that there was no desire for any form of socialism in post-soviet Poland. Consumerism with its alluring link to the Western world, has led to further devastation of the landscape, that densified with generic architectural production. Along with the architectural garbage, consumerism of the late 90s and early 00's in Poland has been bound with overproduction of products of lowest quality. Plastic was everywhere, and has irreversibly destroyed the natural environment.

A different approach, far from a utopian one, that could be put in place now is related with the socio-economic system called degrowth. What it suggests is to seek moderation in our actions. It argues that by radically reducing our consumption and production we might in fact be happier and more capable of taking care of our planet and ourselves. Degrowth is a social and intellectual movement born in the end of 70's, that raised from the criticism of development in southern countries, and critiques of consumer society in northern ones. It underlines the economic growth is neither possible nor desirable, it denounces the concept of sustainable development, and makes it rival. Because how can the idea of eternal growth be sustainable? “ It is a concept-platform with multiple meanings, shaped by five sources of thought: The ecological source, which affirms the primacy of nature; the bio economical source, which accepts the limits of economic growth; The anthropological source, which calls into question the uniformization of the world; The democratic source, which re-legitimizes public debate; And the spiritual source,

which responds to the crisis of meaning in modern societies. Applying the system of degrowth, to any design task, allows to create spaces that are friendly for nature as well as the human being. Where all small elements, in their full complexity are being considered. Following Donna Haraway *"It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories."*

In the age of the climate crisis, architects can become the guides, towards a more respectful future. Even while working in historical context, contemporary architects should aim to reconnect with nature through her/his design. We destroyed the privileged status of the environment, the moment we decided to turn away from nature, to tame it. Nature in antiquity, and up to the industrial era was seen as more powerful than a human being. It made human beings humble, to its unpredictable powers. It was reflected with stories and myths that showed amazement and curiosity of the human in nature. Mythology became a way of understanding, but as well has influenced the practices. It created meaning, ritual and a frame for human actions in accordance to nature, and in accordance to each other. Now we act, following the rules, schemes. We neglect the curiosity, for judgments. We simplify the tradition that we are born into, calling it outdated, only because we don't acknowledge its value. One of the most evocative in my perception, stories of movements of resistance to tota-

litarian systems, is presented in a novel and its movie adaptation, Fahrenheit 451. In the society, where reading is forbidden by the system, and books are burdened by the "fireman", on the peripheries of the city lives a commune of outcasts, who each in order to preserve some of the arts of literature that remained in circulation, learn by heart one each. The members of the resistance, become personifications of the books and knowledge or poetic beauty of stories they contained. When asked, they recite the books they memorised, and therefore share the knowledge with each other. Maybe architects should become the storytellers of the new resistance? Ones that can create realities that are different from the consumerist approach that exists?



## Method and approach



*walls in livingroom of my grandmothers house, the pre-war layer of paint  
photo taken by the author*



## Drawing from memory

*“Several times in my inner life, I had already experienced the process of inoculation as something salutary. In this situation, too, I resolved to follow suit, and I deliberately called to mind those images which, in exile, are most apt to awaken homesickness: images of childhood. My assumption was that the feeling of longing would no more gain mastery over my spirit than a vaccine does over a healthy body. I sought to limit its effect through insight into the irretrievability - not the contingent biographical but the necessary social irretrievability - of the past.”*

— Walter Benjamin

Memory has a value itself, it's worth springs from our appreciation of the time which has elapsed since it was made and which has burdened it with traces of age. The persistent images, recurring and building our understanding of things, can be used as a tool for the creation of places that have a value. That is meaningful and rooted in a broader understanding of all things. That is timeless, even if in their temporal nature. An image that persists, through its recollection, triggered with each new encounter with a similar place. Memory allows the particular to emerge from the general. It allows to separate single images from a set of events, making them more important than others. It also allows the use of these images, in the processes of understanding, to again from a single image, reflecting upon

the general, universal problems. Memory can be evoked by sensory perception. Touch, smell, sound along with images, somehow build up our memory. Therefore creation and recollection of memories are multi-sensual experiences.

The complex nature of the link between architecture and memory in a sense creates a possibility for an individual to create spaces that others will understand. Spaces that allow ambivalent reading of their purpose, of the concepts of one who was creating it. Naturally architect, in a way without effort, uses her/his memory, of things seen, of things experienced in the moment of creation of the work of architecture. But my concern here was, how to in a conscious way incorporate memory in the process of creation of architecture. I have been studying this possibility on many levels. One was directed towards typologies and spatial arrangements, affecting the phenomenological structures of perception, and ability to reach the subconscious levels into the user's memory, to evoke in them a feeling of recognition of purpose and familiarity. The second one referred to the notion connected with memory through the idea of age-value, namely authenticity. Memory gives us the ability to acknowledge processes that took place in space. Not ones we witnessed, by ones that we imagine that has happened, based on observed traces. The traces of time passed or effort put into the creation

of an object, justify its authenticity. Memory contained in materials and the ways of their production. The last one was linked to memory and collective images.

Buildings exist not only as elements of physical space. They are also, existent in drawings, photographs, documents, written testimonies. In that way, they can remain in the consciousness of people, even if they are destroyed or changed. In this project, I both have preserved the memory of my grandmother's house, but also used my recollections in order to address contemporary issues occurring in the place that I was working with. The elements of the house, I turned into stories. Stories told by the architectural installations. The specificity of these objects helped me create elements that also have a certain dimension of individuality. The objects were not very unusual, some even maybe quite generic. But for me my grandmother's house was unique because it was so different than our flat in the city, and all the other houses that I knew. It had a certain heaviness and realness. Heaviness, that I read as an equivalent of presence, truth, continuity. This project allowed me to go back to this house, also to bring back again a memory of myself, who visited the house. A reference to a grandmother's house - is at the same time, specific and universal. There is my grandmother's house, but of course many will understand my emotional link to this place or any other old house they encountered as kids.

I have worked with the medium of writing, to allow it to become a supporting element for my drawings. This created a chain of elements that

became my process. I've been writing down memories of my experiences that then inspired me to create drawings of buildings that, if built, could allow recollection of the memory through a spatial experience. It would allow the creation of new memories, based on the experience of designed space, and influence the memory of others. I felt a need to share these images because they were the most direct elements of my investigation of Otwock and my grandmother's house, an investigation made with my body that became a long-lasting memory. I wanted to share the atmosphere I was experiencing with others, through the spaces I designed in the memorial.

As Joseph Rykwert has explained, „ *the passage of the work of art through the different stages from conception to completion is thus analogous to the filtering that the conception incarnate in the sounds and shapes of one language undergoes in its passage to another language.*” This use of different methods, different languages of expression allowed me to express my memory more fully, then if I would use only drawing. The moment of writing the stories down and sharing them with you was also a unique experience in the whole design process. “*Life is created by events, but it is only when we are able to interpret them, try to understand them, and lend them meaning that they are transformed into experience. Events are facts, but the experience is something inexpressibly different. It is experience, and not any event, that makes up the material of our lives. Experience is a fact that has been interpreted and situated in memory. It also refers to a certain foundation we have in our minds, to a deep structure of significations upon which we can unfurl our own lives*

*and examine them fully and carefully. I believe that myth performs the function of that structure. Everyone knows that myths never really happened but are always going on.”* (Tokarczuk, 2019)



*nature reclaiming the site, stream in the mountains  
photo taken by the author*

## Re-creation of locus

Marc Auge has studied the difference between space and place, in relation to his notion of non-places. *"A place can be defined relational, historical and concerned with identity [...] space, for him is a frequented place, and the intersection of moving bodies, it is a pedestrian who transforms a street into space."* (Auge, 1995) Therefore primarily the difference between space is a place, its relation to movement. The place is where one is. Space is a distance, one takes in-between places. The anthropological place is where the action takes place. But that requires movement as well. In a place, also movement takes place. In space, the movement is in between two points, on a map, observed between things or in between two moments in time ("space of a day, week"). The movement in place in order, it creates a net of relations. Therefore architecture has been for ages concerned with the identification of places, clearly defined spots in the immeasurable universe of spaces between things. There were many notions that wanted to characterize places, to set values to them and their importance. Ancient Romans invented the idea of 'genius loci' a spirit that makes one place more atmospheric than others. The notion recurred, to the interest of architects vividly at the end of modernism, with the development of the philosophical thought on architectural phenomenology. Simultaneously many other concepts of referring to places by architects came into play. Notions of context,

ambiente, and locus. As Adrian Forty has mentioned, *"context was perhaps the last modernist term or the first postmodern one"*. The concern with the surroundings of architectural production, meanings they contained became a topic of extensive study.

I would like to focus on the idea of locus, in the understanding of texts by Aldo Rossi. In his book, *Architecture of the City*, Rossi builds up his reflection on the notion of "le preezistance ambientali" or shorter, ambiente introduced by Ernesto Rogers. In his critique of modernism, Roger expressed that architecture should be considered dialogue with surroundings in the immediate physical sense, but also as a historical continuum. Similarly, Rossi defined locus, which should be acknowledged in every case of architectural production. *"For Rossi, the locus of the city is constructed, over time, through the accumulation of urban artifacts, and primary elements. While Rossi argues that the city of history is an accumulation of primary elements, it is the image of these primary forms that persist through time, independent of their material condition."* (Dodds,1992) In its semantic definition, locus is the action of putting words in place. Locus then is a more significant notion, in relation to placemaking then context, because it in a sense prevails over time, and is not defined only by the physical matter of the architecture

and its style. *“The demonstration of the memory of a given place, manifest in both the apprehension of its singularity and in its construction over time.”* (Dodds,1992) Image of the place/city is being preserved, while it becomes a part of the collective memory of the inhabitants - the place that image holds in memory of users is what defines its identity, not its material presence. The collective image is what defines the “cities’ sense of itself”. In Rossi’s view, contextualism is reductive because it is placed out of history, by “tautological reading” of its figures in search of a limited definition. Therefore architects should incorporate themselves into the creation, or preservation of the city’s locus. *“Locus of the city purposefully demonstrates the construction of the city through the accumulation of what Rossi calls primary elements. Through that construction or accumulation, the memory of a place and the actions that brought that place into being are revealed as are possible future actions, grounded in that place.”* (Dodds,1992)

How did Rossi then use this idea of locus in his designs? Mainly he was concerned with the notion of primary elements, so to say recurring themes and motives in the city. The “fragment” that kept on recurring in Rossi’s works, was the Filarete’s column, taken from Ca’ del Duca in Venice. The column is an interpretation of an image that is established in Venetian collective memory- a column, spolia brought from a conquered territory. An example of this “collaged” memory, both contextual and somehow universal, is the ensemble of borrowed elements in the St.Mark’s Cathedral in Venice. Cathedral, truly Venetian, it is a collection of a broad variety of pre-existing

architectural elements, taken from distant localisations. The building is a collection of memory-fragments of the builders and providers of the elements. Rossi also reflects upon the idea of a global meaning on the example of the Ise Shrine in Japan, rebuilt every 30 years. Its transcendence (of the meaning) is bound with its image rather than its material presence. Recognition of a fragment (such as the column) is based on a different principle. *„Recognition seems to be the essence of the Ise Shrine: its ability to be recognized does not lie in the materials, whether new or old, nor in the object in itself, but purely in the image, in an event that once recognized, is reproduced almost without asking about its meaning. In the western world, this may be somewhat related to ritual, but it is totally different from the idea of the fragment, perhaps because the fragment does not presuppose a global image sufficiently strong as to be distinct from its own materiality. I think of the classic „white” stones of humanistic culture, of the cult of the fragment.”* (Dodds,1992) What is the interesting relationship between the fragment and the repetitive image, is also seen in the case of the Shrine. With every it is rebuilt, one of the wooden pieces of a previous one is built into a new one. One singular piece of the old fabric, surrounded by thousands of new ones, all completing a known image.

Another Italian architect from this period has worked with the locus of Venice in another way. The recurring theme of Scarpa’s work is probably the discontinued wall. This discontinuity is also seen in his drawings and method of work. “Indeed, what is usually absent in the drawings of his projects is the representation of the pro-

ject as a complete form. Like the Gothic Scholastics before him, Scarpa literally constructed the whole through an explanation of the parts". Both drawings and build works of Scarpa, are conceived through a montage of multiple layers and elements. In this technique, most vividly reveals itself the notion of locus, understood in the way Rossi was describing it. This layering of certain memories, shapes that come to existence on paper, retrieved from the memory of the author, invites the viewer to participate in the process of creation of the locus. This shows how previously architects engaged with the locus of a place, with its memory, with the use of different approaches. I also investigated how contemporary architects approach this problem, also turning their engagement with a place into architectural research and sharing it with others. Tom Emerson, with his studio form ETH has produced a study of Glasgow, which they named "atlas".

*"Learning from an existing landscape is a way to be revolutionary for an architect"*. (Emerson, 2016) In a way that is based on a curiosity towards, even the best-known solutions and typologies. Emmerson advised his students, to first in their design process, carry out an extensive survey of the existing place they were working with (in this case Glasgow). The survey they conducted was very broad research that focused, both on architecture, art, history, existing state, marks, and other elements of the environments their projects were meant to become a part of. The created Atlas was a document that both have been helpful for the design part but also has a value in itself. It preserves an exciting image of the place. It is a document with a historical

dimension. As well of course as any survey, for example, made with a medium of photography, even if it is only made for personal use. Caruso is also very fond of the medium of photographic research. As he says "the photographs restore the light, shadow, and color that are excluded in drawings. They contain the time, both in the instant in which the image was taken, but also in the traces of wear and tear in the stone and the turbulence of the sky."(Emerson, 2016) Bas Princen has said that photography has a "possibility to visually build new spaces starting from reality as a source of imagination." Into images, we can add elements that they themselves lack- time, story memory.

The process of being on the site, its active survey and engagement with existing architectural typologies in a medium of a drawing, is seen by Emerson as an element that is crucial for any architectural project. He also speaks about an approach that he would suggest for architects in the 21st century, especially if working in contexts of abandoned sites. He says that we should pay attention to nature, and not compose it (in accordance with the tradition of picturesque), but engage with it. As nature itself engages with the abandoned structures. *"Nature comes back as soon as intense human activity stops. Within a generation, nature has reclaimed it (landscape of Glasgow). It reclaimed it through the cracks"*. (Emerson, 2016) Emerson makes a proposal for architects to become more like gardeners. To see their actions, as engagement with cycles of growth but also decay. He calls for an approach that is less judgmental and non-arbitrary. Engagement with not only physical architectural matter

but also time. He also talks about heritage, *“if we really took care of our environment we would not have to list anything”*. (Emerson, 2016) That suggests that the process of engagement with the site should not be temporary for an architect, but should be seen as a process. As caretaking can be seen and an instrument for the creation of a community. Community bond with a certain place and certain cultural production, bound with it.

I have used this rhetoric to reflect upon the locus of my site. The non-existent sanatorium that once existed, and has been raised due to the “genius-loci” of the place. The locus of ruins. The collective image they represent, and the associations they bear. The actual tragic history of the site of Zofiówka. And what I have concluded with, is an attempt to recreate the locus of the city and the sanatorium on the site by proposing new architectural interventions. Interventions related to rituals of healing. Rituals codify the way users move through space. They also link the past and present, they keep the tradition alive, bond the community. Some buildings become a stage for the rituals to happen. Rituals imprint themselves in memory of users. They allow us to link the action and space. Sanatoriums were also places where specific rituals took place, allowing the process of healing to occur. These rituals were being performed in cycles, enabling the factor of repetition to embrace the state of body or mind to overcome the sickness. We might say that the user that comes to the sanatorium has a body that is ruined. Architecture and a city can also become a ruin. To help the patient to get better, a cause of the sickness must be traced and assessed in a specific way. I have been trying to

investigate the symptoms and possible causes of the illness, with an extensive study of the place, interviews with local actors, to afterward develop the treatment plan for the site. The set of rituals of healing and a set of instruments, the architectural installations.

One of the main inspirations was the treatments used in the place before. In the Zofiówka sanatorium before the war, work in the garden was used as a therapeutic means. It was seen as the most efficient way to treat neurosis at that time. I also experienced work in my grandmother’s garden as a therapeutic, grounding experience. An activity that makes your present. Silvotherapy is a form of therapy that uses encounters with trees and walks in the forests, as a ritual of healing. In traditional medicine, plants are studied for their healing abilities. Anatomy of the human body and anatomy of elements in nature have many similarities. In traditional medicine, attention is put also on production with zero-waste. The use of all parts of plants are seen as materials, showing that all elements are useful. That they all have potential. Certain processes of post-production allow us to use them in many different ways. In my project apart from the architectural medium, I also investigated the possibility to re-vitalize the biodiversity of greenery in the forest. The logic of zero-waste observed in natural medicine, I have implemented into the ways of working with the pine. Not only is it used, as an element of wooden construction. Needles are turned into wool, that the seats in the reading room are made of. The branches are used to make imprints in tiles that build up the stove in its interior. The resin is turned into a specimen that is used to



darken and protect the wood of the wooden construction and outside shingles.

I have studied the architectural language in the city. Also the natural assets of the place. The vernacular architecture style that is bound with the local material, pine. The second wave of vernacularity, connected to houses built out of generic materials such as brick and concrete blocks, that replaced the original houses. I wondered what to do with the waste and excess of materials that still remain on many of their sites, from the time they were being constructed. I used them in one of the installations, where the rumble became the fabric of walls. I searched for natural materials that could be made on the site. Linen fabric that could be made out of heap planted on the meadow at the bottom. Linens' process of production is bound with a set of rituals itself. I tried to use materials according to the structures' foreseen lifespan. For the ones with more restricted functions that require care and attention, I used biodegradable (in long-span) wood. For the ones I intended that could remain, as symbols of the place, I used materials that have almost an eternal durability. Self-healing concrete, cast iron, and in parts elements of local rumble. All these ideas came to me from the extensive study of the locus and contemporary problems of the city. From a curious observation. From an attempt on the rediscovery of my own aesthetics, based on the study of Otwock, as an important place connected with my childhood.

In our daily lives, we tend to create rituals, paths, and ways of doing that enable us to be more effective or productive. Even leisure has become

a restricted act of following certain rules and procedures. Psychogeography allows us to break this pattern. Theoretical ideas on the future of architecture, try to work against these schemes in order to make exploration of a city (or natural landscape) a playful act that allows also simultaneous exploration of self. Following "dérive" one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. But the *dérive* includes both this letting go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities. In my exploration I have turned to Otwock, known but yet undiscovered, I wanted to change my prejudiced perception of the place, through my design, reconnect with it on a new level. To find its spirit, and evoke it back. In his 2001 essay 'Can spirit of place be a guide to an ethical building?', Isis Brooks identified a range of ideas that have been associated with the spirit of place, including energy fields, authenticity, local distinctiveness, narrative, with layers of history, empowerment of ordinary people, essence or interiority, character and individuality, ecosystem, pantheism, panpsychism, the health of a place or emergent property. I hope that all these elements somehow can be brought back to the site of Zofiówka, to rebuild its locus. Brooks suggested that a solution to this ambiguity with regard to the genius loci is to accept that the spirit of the place has its own legitimacy as a means of preventing homogenized design, rather than simply reflecting human feelings about places.



*Mirosław Balka, „37,1 (cont.)”, (1993)  
part of the exhibition in Polish pavilion during Art Biennale in Venice*

## Art as reference

Looking for traces, marks, and defining qualities of the city Otwock from abroad, seemed hard to achieve at first. I made big use of my own memory and collective memory represented by archive documents, photographs, and maps. I also followed thoroughly work and biography of a contemporary sculptor bound with this place, Mirosław Bałka. Bałka is one of the most influential Polish artists, whose artworks are in collections of museums such as Tate Modern and MoMA. Interviews, notes, and books published in connection with his work became a guidepost for understanding my own recollections. The artist's way of seeing, became a voice shifting my way of understanding the familiar and yet unknown Otwock.

It is important to point out that not only works of the artist, that frequently explore notions of private archeology connected with his home and his home city but as well the annual residency he hosts in Otwock since the year 2000 have been major points of my interest. The residency project, where Bałka shares his studio and his "archive" with other, mainly international artists, highlights the potential that Otwock has as a highly specific as well as universal ground for artistic expression. As the artist underlines - the realness of the site helps to produce work that escapes the „fetishization" that imprints artist's works made for museums and galleries. But Mi-

rosław Bałka has a very personal objective, in the making of the residency program. He stated that he has decided to share his house with other artists, in order to "preserve it". This approach, that allows a personal image or memory through a medium of art, to become a part of collective memory, of course, is a common artistic practice, although it seems in Bałkas case, it has been pursued to the limits of its exhaustion. In almost 35 years of his artistic practice, he has repeatedly been coming back to his childhood memories or making use of materials found in his home and garden. The breaking point, for the establishment of the residency, was also based on a "discovery" of a similar nature, during the renovation of his house a few years back.

*"I started with the roof. I went into the attic, where I wasn't in for 35 years, and a new sculptural material appeared: pine needles, with which the house was insulated. A touching moment. I used needles before, but they were from Christmas trees. And now I have six bags of needles from 1935! The renovation was a stimulus: can it do anything else?"*

What is there in Otwock that is so relevant, that allows the residencies to continue to be going on for the last 10 years? The answers seem to be the ubiquitous contradictions inherent in the location. *"The sculptor believes that today's mediocrity*



*SI\_92537 (2016), Villa Suprise (2011)  
artipieces produced by various artists and students invited to the „Otwock” residency*

*of a clearly degraded town, once a well-known Tuberculosis Resort, situated among beautiful pine forests, may also be interesting for other artists".* Each year's edition has focused on a different theme, site-specific or site-responsive. The pieces produced by invited artists, focus mainly on vanishing elements of the local heritage but as well comment on the ongoing changes in the landscape- like for example the reductions of local forests. In the following years, the topics were: the town, the studio, fictional narratives, duties and pleasures, silvohortiaromatherapy, 6 (named by its own number in the order), and the seventh, latest season was dedicated to a single artist - Lawrence Weiner. This wide range of inspirations and the backgrounds of singular artists created a collection of elements that contribute to the city's image. Although meaningful, the art pieces still are only marks, of the attempts made by artists to rebuild or strengthen some parts of the endangered identity. Otwock's heritage, documented and exposed by the artworks, is still in decay. As one of the international critics describing the „Otwock" project has said, *"The sites ongoing material transformations perhaps form a parallel to national program of collective forgetting- a pointed disregard for the material remains that bore witness to the violence and occupation that constitute Poland's recent history".*

This enormous collection of references that residency has produced is anyways uncomparable to the density of implications that spring from works made by the artist himself. Yearly he produces at least two solo shows, and participates in around 20 group exhibitions. His passion for artistic production parallel with the urge to ask

relevant questions and comment on contemporary events has been continuously ongoing since his graduation from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1985. Any attempt to summarise the whole of his artistic production or biography, in this writing, would be reductive, not even grasping the fraction of complexity and significance of his work at large. Therefore the references I will recall, are only fragments. They are selections of pieces and artist's statements that I found most relevant for my own work in Otwock.

Early in his career, he has produced many figurative art pieces that explored dimensions of his body and his personal memories - such as for example the memory of the first communion. Around the 90s his work expression, has shifted into more conceptual language, at the same time also creating more direct relations to the spaces it was exhibited at. Although the figure of the body disappeared, the connection to the body remained present. Sometimes in the temperature of the art piece, sometimes in its dimensions, sometimes by use of shapes that the body interacts with at different stages of life, such as bed or coffin. Also, artist has made use of associations with common rituals that the body is being exposed to eg. washing, sweating, by the use of materials that are connected with them, such as soap or salt. Artist uses his own body as a reference. Also in many pieces he has returned to the house, a place that was special for him, and that has somehow shaped him. Apart from personal archeology, he has also concentrated on topics related to history that was embedded in the space that surrounded him or topics that were present in his thoughts,



as for example marks of the Holocaust. The art pieces he produces are very personal and evoke frequent feelings of nostalgia. Also in many cases, they require reading into the context of his biography, to be fully understood.

*“Sickness and death are the experiences of my childhood”*, the artist stated. He refers to the fact that in the early years he used to live in one house with his paralyzed grandfather, whose sickness he was partially sharing throughout the rhythms of the days spent at the house. The second grandfather was a stonemason making tombstones, for the Otwock cemetery. Young Mirosław used to spend his summers with him, frequently joining him during his work. As the artist puts it, „the cemetery was in fact the sandpit of his

childhood”, an exercise in acceptance of inevitable death. Later in his works he went back to this memory, for example by using marble and terrazzo as materials for his artistic installations. For the exhibition at Venice Biennale, he presented a work called 2x (190x60x10) that resembled two gravestones put next to each other, heated up to the temperature of a human body at the beginning of infection (37,1 °C). The dimensions of the stones correspond to the artist’s body, while the unexpected temperature creates a slight feeling of discomfort mixed with familiarity. As artist Wiesław Borowski has captured *“the heated tombstone is provoking you to lie down on it. These are not direct suggestions for the viewer, but only private opportunities”*. The Artist’s precision in stating an exact temperature of the piece (in the name of the exhibition - 37,1 °C) can also be seen as a reference to Mann’s Magic Mountain, where the body temperature of patients in the sanatorium is checked almost at all times. This combination of an indirect link to personal memories achieved by usage of specific materials, highly intellectual references, and very simplistic form of the arrangement itself is something that links most of Bałka’s non-figurative pieces.

But as the artist points out, what he strives mostly is to evoke emotions. *“Surely this is not an art style that only uses the intellect. I base it all on experience, on the directness of the encounters. On the other hand, intellectual is in a sense the form and discipline I impose on myself in this respect. If I were to compare my art to something, then the ideal of Haiku poetry is closest to me - a combination of emotions in content and discipline and simplicity in the form.”* Even though con-

ceptual, many of his art pieces also carry burdens of the actual place of their production, the grandparent's house, now studio. At the same time they cannot simply be perceived only in relation to this place (the house), as they are always seen a-contextual in white interiors of galleries and museums. *"By looking closely at my own environment, I don't lose my universal perspective. The contrary. A thorough analysis of each object allows me to better understand the world"* the artist explained in one of his interviews.

His identity as an artist is bound as he says with Otwock, like with no other place, although he has lived and worked in many other locations. This identity is not formed only by the memories of his grandparent's house, that he in the early '90s turned into his studio. As he said: *"what does it mean - Polish identity? What exists only, is a local identity"*. It's a memory of him in this place, of his movements, of the marks he and his family left in the house. Bałka did multiple art pieces that were mapping the house, reproducing elements found there, starting new conversations within a known environment. Artist allows the place and known materials to surprise him again, to help him answer questions of existential nature but as well, the house clearly limits his expression. The pieces have to be possible to be taken out of the studio, which has kept very domestic proportions. If he has to work on bigger pieces, he works in the garden, and then again the direct environment of art production impacts the outcome. Rust and marks of sun exposure change the material.

Artist's work production has also frequently

been linked with the topic of the Holocaust. It's a topic that has haunted him, as he mentioned, because of the fact he discovered Otwock's Jewish past quite late in his life. He felt an urge to make up for this oversight in his work. He is an author of a memorial in Kraków called AUSCHWITZWIELICZKA, that stands on the path between MocaK museum of modern art and Shindler's factory museum. Artist also documented his pilgrimages to the death camps in Poland and fragments of the footage of these journeys he has turned into a series of short video-pieces. In the exhibition, called "Fragments" that took place in CSW in Warsaw, videos made over a large period of time were put together, revealing then that the topic of extermination and its marks, has been returning and still relevant to the artist. The exposition was designed as a sequence of empty rooms, filled with salt and tv-boxes that displayed the short movies. The inspiration, as the artist says for the main material, came from his understanding of what is left, from human pain and effort, tears, and sweat - marks of salt.

This selection of works shows that at the same time Bałka is an artist who has established a certain language of expression and a pallet of topics he frequently revisits. At the same time, he has no problems escaping the dominating in his works' connections with homogeneous memory (either personal or historical-collective) in order to, for example, make a comment on the contemporary reality he encounters. An example of such a comment would be one of his latest works, Random Access Memory (2018) he presented in the White Cube gallery in London. The metal structure put up in the space, separates the two main spaces of

the gallery from each other. It is being heated to 45 degrees, a temperature in which blood clots and enzymes denature. It is a metaphor of the planet that heats up, the wall is a separation between imagined paradise, and known imperfect reality. It also brings associations to, storage of knowledge, such as big server rooms that became part of our daily work environments. Although we have advanced technology to store knowledge, as the artist has said “ access to memory is always controlled, and responsibility for safegu-

arding this memory lies solely with ourselves”. All of the artist’s works, due to their simplicity and also the author’s intellect, are full of references and are always very ambiguous in meaning. What makes his work especially relevant for the project is the fact that in many of his works, I have found references to the notions this project has been concerned with: personal archeology, mythologies, re-use of materials, the familiarity of spaces and above all memory.







*clear cuttings in Otwock  
photo taken by the author*

## Atmosphere of silence

Silence has an ambiguous nature. Depending on the situation and context, it can be understood as either a positive or a negative gesture. We commemorate the past with a gesture of temporary silence. A minute of silence for victims of a mass murder crime, among the rattle of the daily activities. At the same time, silencing victims to speak about the truth, to share their stories is seen as a form of further repression. When a society decides to be silent, to omit the truth, to forget, the oppressor's actions are being forgotten. The truth is a subjective notion that only gains value when based on mutual recognition of more than one person. Therefore in a complex situation, it takes time to gain an understanding of what has happened and who to support. The judgment lands on a spectrum between black and white. Or if it can be avoided, thus is made without judgment, just with acknowledgment and promise to not harm in the same way again. And the silence that occurs after, is a silence of mutual understanding that allows us to take a step further.

Jochen Gerz, the author of the Hamburg Jewish memorial, also known as the anti-memorial, has mentioned frequently in catalogs of his exhibitions, that a memory that perhaps has shaped him the most as an artist was an experience of seeing his childhood house destroyed on his eyes by bombs. He said that the event left him literally speechless for a year. The year of silence has

evoked in him a strong sensibility and understanding of the horror of war, he then put into many of his works. The trauma of war produced also another type of silence. The silence of unspeakable pain, the silence of the victims that could not fight for justice and recognition. It also silenced many voices that created the pre-war reality, by exterminating their owners. It silenced whole societies that observed the Holocaust and did not have the courage to act against it. The silence led to an emptiness that was created in the void of stories not being told.

As Max Picard has argued, "*nothing has changed the nature of man so much as the loss of silence*". In my interpretation silence is seen as the ability to contemplate the world as it is. We increasingly lose spaces, where we can experience silence. Where there are no electric machines humming, no music playing, no cars moving with noise. But still, we are able to define silence. Silence for contemporary people is the ability to stop, to listen to their surroundings. To not produce noise. We frequently say, in these moments of pause we listen to the silence. In mindful meditation, a practice of temporary silence, where thoughts are not being processed, where movement is not taken, but only what we experience is the silence that is equal to the sense of being, of existence. Meditation heals, the constantly chasing brain and body of the modern man. The silence that

was also taken away by modernism, by ordering of time. Clocks, measure and give superficial rhythm to all actions. Juhani Pallasma argues that with the loss of silence, came the invention of speed which we want to fight against passing time. We also lost, because of this chase, the capacity to take care of memory. *“The degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting”*. And as we speeded more, trying to reach the imaginary fictional future, we lose track of the past. Should we stop and listen to silence?

The grand task of art and architecture today is to recreate and maintain the mythical, poetics, and sensuous reality of the world. In the world where we tend to escape into collective identity, through cultural noise, mass communication, entertainment, and fashion, art becomes a refuge that offers a chance for reaching stillness in the act of contemplation. As Picard suggested, the *“ontological silence of the universe”* threatens us, as it reveals our loneliness and pushes us to seek connection with others through previously mentioned streams of collective identity. *“World loses its mystery and poetry as well as a sensuous appeal”*. Because the experience of silence is not merely the experience of one sense of hearing itself. It is a multi-sensual experience or experience of self in an environment on a metaphysical level. Nature, in some places, has kept the atmosphere of silence. *“The silence of nature evokes a pantheistic experience, which connects us with the cosmic dimension. This silence also evokes the unity and singularity of the world and a sense of healing participation.”* (Pallasma, 2015) Sounds

of nature may be perceived as healing, due to their simple and at the same time poetic harmony. Leaves moved by the wind, accompanied by stream flowing, birds singing. What a soothing image. *“Sounds of nature are an essential ingredient of nature’s primal silence. [...] Sound arises from silence, not silence from the sound. Silence slows downtime and permits us to experience phenomena beyond our normal awareness”*. (Pallasma, 2015)

If we can create an architecture of silence, that is respectful, what would it be like? It would allow contemplation of the simplicity of nature. Also contemplation of time. Such as a sundial, allows direct contemplation of passing time linked to the movement of the sun in the sky. Connecting the earth and the sky. Mundane with universal. Unknown universe, that we can observe and reflect upon from the surface of the planet. Link stars into constellations, in the science of the night. *“The notion of experience of silence is evidently connected with emptiness [...] In fact both silence and emptiness invite subtle multi-sensory experiences, as if they were voids that invoke imaginary sensation”*. (Pallasma, 2015) Does then silence allow us to wonder? Maybe also, reflect upon what we have lost. To make us aware of our existence, same as a ruin, makes us reflect upon our inevitable death. Silence is in that sense an attribute of presence. Of life, supported by art. *„The mental task of art is to concretize our being in the world, or perhaps our understanding of being in the world”*. (Pallasma, 2015)

Temporary silence can be read as a gesture of tact and politeness. Art is also based on gestures. The

strokes of the brush, the destruction of marble by the sculptor, the touch imprinted in a clay surface of potters' work. Architecture also can be based on a gesture. The imprint left by a wooden plank on concrete. A gesture of the hand applying plaster to a wall will create the experience for the one observing it after. The gesture is, as Roland Barthes called it a surplus of an action. It is an element of the invention, not planned but added driven by an impulse. It makes an element imperfect and therefore, maybe more beautiful. The gesture gives another dimension to the perception of things. It makes us imagine the hand of the creator at once with the perception of the creation itself. Architecture is a stage of a performance, not only in its creation but also in its explanation. All that happens in the framework of architecture is a performance. Repetitive daily habits, mixed with special events. Some types of architecture are suited for precise performance, sacred ritual, as for example Church. Space, movement, atmosphere, smell, sound all come together to become more than action, become an experience. Citing from Merleau-Ponty, *„my perception is not a sum of visual, tactile, and audible givens: I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once”*.

After the Holocaust, the memory of the Jewish community in Otwock was silenced. The absence of memory occurred for many reasons that came together. The previously mentioned two main paradigms of forgetting came into play, hegemonic, and post-traumatic absence of memory. The first one occurred because of the

political system of communism that did not allow any attention to be given to ethnic differences among citizens of Poland. Citizens could only be categorized by class. Their ethnicity did not matter, therefore was not given any space to be expressed. The second one occurred due to silence that accompanied denial and shame. Most of the pre-war citizens who survived the war have been silent observers of the horror that took place with the liquidation of the Otwock Ghetto. The subject of Jews became a taboo in school because the teachers would not be willing to explain their stagnation in the face of the terror put on their fellow citizens. Last survivors of the Holocaust in this region left Poland, around 1967, due to still existing anti-Semitic behavior, most emigrated to Israel. Until 1993 the memory of Jews in Otwock was sealed. The element that broke the silence, was a testimony of Cael Prechodnik, a Jewish citizen of pre-war Otwock who because of his work as a Judenrat police officer has survived the war. He wrote his testimony in order to preserve the memory of his wife and daughter who were killed in Treblinka. The testimony created a frame that allowed many other testimonies, of elderly citizens of Otwock, to speak about the contacts they had with fellow Jewish citizens before the war. But the silence of the places that Jews left empty remains. The ruins of their old buildings, overlooked by the contemporary citizens, don't speak about the lives of their inhabitants anymore.

The testimony of Cael Prechodnik also has a very philosophical dimension. He speaks about the unbearable silence and emptiness of the house he retired to the day his wife was taken away

to Treblinka, and how he wished that he would find the house plundered. But he found it left as usual. The testimony is full of reflections on ethical and universal matters. He was amazed by the nihilism that the war has evoked in people. The pluralistic ignorance. According to Perechodnik, every passerby is guilty, who dispassionately evades evil or ignores it. In his story, the tragedy of the Jews takes place in front of the passengers of the suburban railway, in front of the inhabitants of the Aryan side - and they remain silent. They don't talk about it, even though as he says *„there were tragedies that people never dreamed of, and yet they didn't even turn out to be an interesting*

*topic for conversation.*” For many months, Calel listened to the sounds of Warsaw street from his hiding - and this silence struck him, and these were months of liquidation of the ghetto, then days of the Jewish Uprising. And what was present all of this time, was this unbearable silence. This was when he started writing his testimony. He said, that the evil of Holocaust could not go to waste, and his participation in this evil as a Judenrat policeman, who collaborated with the evil cannot go to waste. His testimony is bitter, and I hope, that there could be another more positive frame created to acknowledge the story of Otwock Jews.





Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*,  
8th International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, 2003



## Ephemeral memorials and repetition

*'A building is not a building. A building, in the sense of walls, floors, empty spaces, rooms, materials, etc., is only the outline of a potential: it is only made relevant by the group of people it is intended for'*

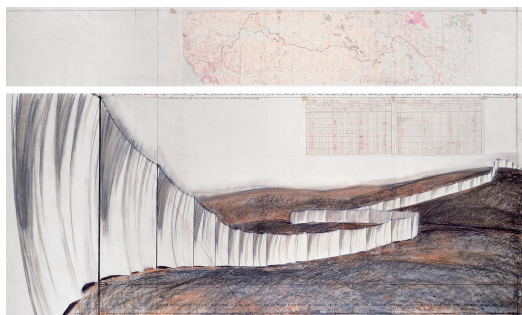
—Gincarlo de Carlo

As Walter Benjamin has suggested we perceive a building in our peripheral vision as an embodied and sensuous knowledge, as a given. Longer a person encounters a building, less attention this person gives to it. But this is false objectivity of architecture as a constant. Architecture changes in time are being transformed and this process of transformation denies it the status of a static object. Experiencing architecture is very alike to the way we experience a movie. In architecture, light, sound, and emotions come together simultaneously creating a living picture in front of our eyes. And we ourselves control the creation of the picture, with our movement, with our understanding. In good architecture comes together in one place, and can be observed, the complexity of time, based on the co-existence of elements that are eternal, ephemeral, and repetitive.

One of my favorite works of art, a gigantic installation made by Janne Claude and Cristo called "Running Fence" is a great example of a work of art that has a uniting impact on a big group of people. It was a joint effort of teamwork be-

tween many different groups of people, artists, local ranchers, and local government. When in 1976 a duo of artists, Christo and Jean-Claude, proposed their artwork called "Running Fence" to be realized in the state of California, among many legal limitations they faced, their proposal was also questioned to be an artwork at all. It took „ 42 months of collaborative efforts, 18 public hearings, three sessions at the Superior Courts of California" for them to be allowed to realize the piece that they invested from their own budget. In addition to their work, they also conducted many research activities, needed for the to be granted permission. They provided a 400-page long environmental impact report, while such reports are only lately becoming a necessity for architectural investments. Although it lasted only 2 weeks the art piece and its documentation, became a strong statement in the art scene at that time, as well as in the perception of art among locals. The temporality, of this grand gesture, might have been its greatest asset.

Artist Christian Boltanski asked to make a memorial to the Holocaust said that if one wanted to do such a thing, one would have to remake it every day. Because in his view, only by the constant remaking of the memory, could any memory of that scale be preserved. The weakness in certain situations might be seen as a strength. The beauty of a thin glass vase is in its fragility.



In the ease in which it could be destroyed, and irreversibility of this act on its existence. We admire the fragility, and we act carefully with it in order to maintain its usefulness and presence in our home. There is also a certain beauty in materials that are of the opposite strength. Materials of almost eternal durability, such as stone or cast iron. Memorials are frequently made out of stone, that in a sense, positions them similarly to the material itself, both in relation to the distant past and future. „*Stone speaks of its distant geological origins, its durability and inherent symbolism of permanence*” (Pallasma, 2000) As previously mentioned, to preserve memory one has to “exercise” it. Therefore I decided that to make a memorial, for example out of stone, is not enough. In this project I want to propose installations that deal with processes in time, some are ephemeral - made to disappear, some are cyclical, retained by exercise or preservation, maintenance of a structure. Some like the existing ruin are also eternal, made to last. I sought to understand, first, how I could create the polyphony of experiences and processes happening on site.

I turned to the method of rhythmanalysis invented by Henri Lefebvre in 1992. Most of his theoretical writings investigated the link between

space and time in relation to everyday life. His study shows “non-linear conception of time and history balanced his famous rethinking of the question of space.” Through years of studying, and engagement with different philosophical notions, Lefebvre arrived at the concept rhythmanalysis of at the end of his life. “*In general terms, Lefebvre is concerned with taking the concept of rhythm and turning it into ‘a science, a new field of knowledge: the analysis of rhythms; with practical consequences’.* Rhythm, for Lefebvre, is something inseparable from an understanding of time, in particular repetition.” (Lefebvre, 2004) But already his previous works, have been aiming to evoke reflection upon time and pace, their correlation and co-dependence. In his early years, he closely collaborated with a group of Paris philosophers and writers. It was then when he developed his ‘theory of moments’, an idea that underlines the importance of brief periods of time when existing paradigms can be shifted due to a temporal crisis when a change at large might become possible.

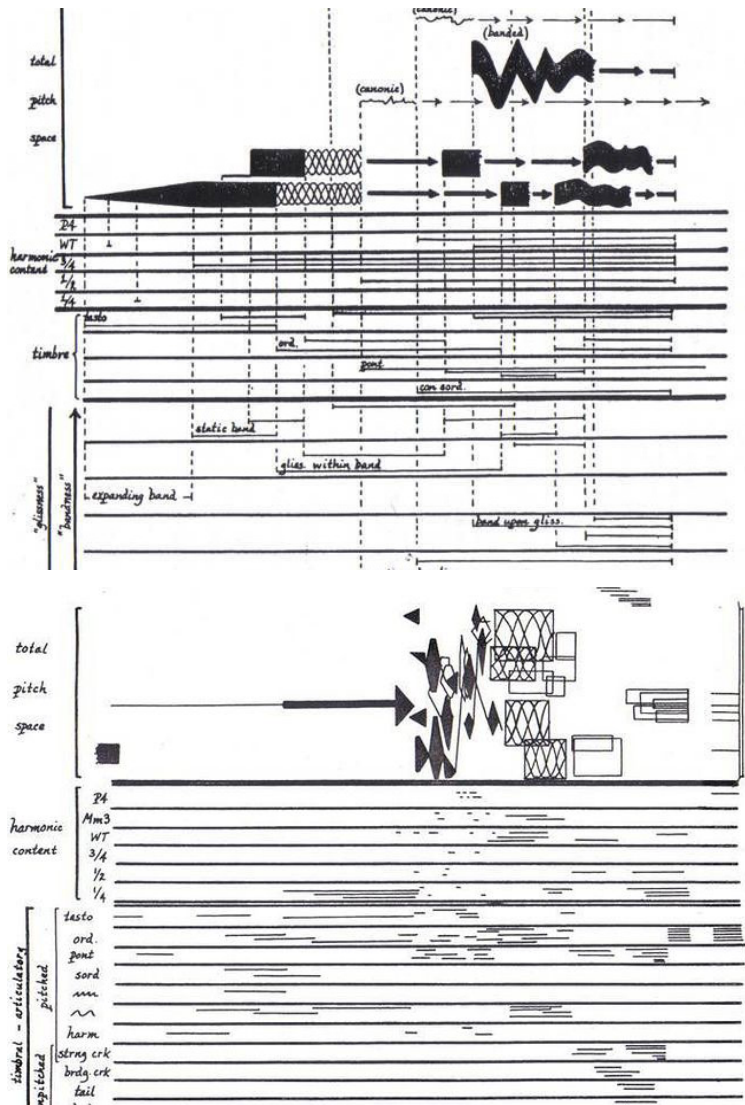
He was not alone in his view, as the theory of moments can be seen similar to thoughts expressed before by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. „*Lefebvre’s understanding of time was also shaped by his reading of Proust, with the issues of loss and memory, recollection and repetition becoming particularly important.*” (Lefebvre, 2004) In his understanding of the passage of time, he was much closer to the “Nietzschean sense of change and cycles”, rather than the perception of time as a linear process, that proceeds similarly to a line of domino blocks, hour after hour flipping one another. He saw the concept of time, being me-

asured by a clock, as limiting as to see the space through the lens of cartesian geometry. Lefebvre sees rhythm analysis as a tool for questioning the surrounding world „*rhythm analysis is 'capable of listening to a house, a street, a town as one listens to a symphony, an opera.'*” „*At no moment has the analysis of the rhythms and the rhythm-analytical project lost sight of the body*” notes Lefebvre, suggesting that body can be used not only as a subject of study but also the tool for the investigation itself. As the body is trained by us (and society) all our life to follow cycles, to create rhythm, it can easily become a tool of investigation of the surrounding reality. „*Everywhere where there is an interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm*”. (Lefebvre, 2004)

He starts his description of the method by a general remark, that the study of rhythms should be seen as similar to an act of contemplation of an almost philosophical nature. We should study rhythms, from particular to general, with scientific evidence, use of comparison. Starting with concepts - „*instead of going from concrete to abstract, one starts with full consciousness of the abstract in order to arrive at the concrete.*” Is there a general concept of a rhythm? Yes and no. „*We easily confuse rhythm with movement [mouvement], speed, a sequence of movements [gestes] or objects. Following this we tend to attribute to rhythms a mechanical overtone, brushing aside the organic aspect of rhythmic movements. Repetition - for example - is never perfect, there is no identical repetition that lasts forever. When it concerns every day, rites, ceremonies, fêtes, rules, and laws, there is always something new and un-*

*foreseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference.*” (Lefebvre, 2004) Lefebvre underlines, that study of rhythms is always interfered by sort of irregularity, which should be seen as a neutral part of it. „*Cyclical repetition and the linear repetitive separate out under analysis, but in reality interfere with one another constantly. The cyclical originates in the cosmic, in nature: days, nights, seasons, the waves and tides of the sea, monthly cycles, etc. The linear would come rather from social practice, therefore from human activity: the monotony of actions and of movements imposed structures.*” (Lefebvre, 2004) This also shows how the study takes on two primary subjects, human and nature. Lefebvre shows how nature reveals its cyclical nature, to us endlessly and with remarkable beauty. “*Dawn, always new, often superb, inaugurates the return of the everyday. [...] 'Time and space, measure themselves against one another, each one makes itself and is made a measuring-measure.*” (Lefebvre, 2004) Rhythm always implies measure, an element that allows us to define it. The measure can be a duration in time, physical distance from elements, etc. There are two types of rhythm - rational rhythms that we impose on our bodies, as well as natural rhythms - breathing, the beating of the heart, hunger, thirst. One may disrupt another.

The body, as Lefebvre suggests should be used by the one who wants to study the surrounding world by use of rhythm analysis, like a metronome. As a tool of investigation. Also with being open to reveal some inconsistencies and individual ways of perception. „*This is the case even though each rhythm has its own and specific me-*



Krzysztof Penderecki „Polymorphia”,  
parts of the score of the musical composition

*asure: speed, frequency, consistency. Spontaneously, each of us has our preferences, references, frequencies; each must appreciate rhythms by referring them to oneself, one's heart or breathing, but also to one's hours of work, of rest, of waking and of sleep". (Lefebvre, 2004) How does the study of rhythms be applied to societies and places, not only individuals? To create a change, a society or a group has to intervene (known) by imprinting itself on an era. They need to propose an innovation or new meaning. Their acts must arrive from an existing reality. The change will be perceived only in retrospection. „ Occasionally, a long time after the action, one sees the emergence of novelty. Perspicacity, attention and above all an opening are required. In practice and in culture, exhaustion is visible sooner and more clearly than growth and innovation, more obscure realities and idealities.” (Lefebvre, 2004)*

*„ Everywhere where there is an interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm. [...] The notion of rhythm brings with it or requires some complementary considerations: the implied but different notions of polyrhythmia, eurhythmia and arrhythmia.”* Polyrhythmia reveals itself in the processes that happen in one's body. At the same time separate rhythms work in a symbiotic manner, not being easily recognizable. Although if we pay particular attention to them separately, we discover the uniqueness of every single one of them. What is it to think? What is it to be conscious? What is it to think of a rhythm? Is it to comment on existing rhythms? Rythmanalisis allows us to change the perspective on surroundings, to question existing conceptions. It shows a different

approach than classical philosophy. Sensibility takes primacy. „*There is also a strong relationship between rhythm, secret, and public. There are secret rhythms (of thoughts, the said and the silenced), public rhythms (of shared experiences, of naturally expressed emotions), fictional rhythms (eloquence, learning - the imaginary), and dominating rhythms (notions of everyday and everlasting) aiming for an effect beyond themselves. The rythmanalysis consists in understanding that which comes to it from nature and that which is acquired, conventional, even sophisticated, by trying to isolate particular rhythms from one another. It is a difficult type of analysis, one for which there are possible ethical, which is to say practical, implications. In other words, knowledge of the lived would modify, metamorphose, the lived without knowing it. Here we find, approached in a different way, but the same, the thought of metamorphosis.*” (Lefebvre, 2004) Lefebvre suggests that the observer affects the output of the observed experiment.

*“ At no moment have the analysis of rhythms and the rhythmanalytical project lost sight of the body. Not the anatomical or functional body, but the body as polyrhythmic and eurhythmic (in the so-called normal state). As such, the living body has (in general) always been present: a constant reference. The theory of rhythms is founded on the experience and knowledge [connaissance] of the body; the concepts derive from this consciousness and this knowledge, simultaneously banal and full of surprises – of the unknown and the misunderstood.” (Lefebvre, 2004) The body is - polyrhythmic and eurythmic. Arrhythmia in the body leads to illness, the illness enhances the*

arrhythmia leading to disruption and entropy of all the rhythms. Iso- and eu-rhythmia are mutually exclusive. Iso-rhythmia is defined by perfectly equal measure. To cure illness, one has to approach it with an introduction of a rhythm. „ *Rhythmalytic therapy would be preventative rather than curative, announcing, observing and classifying the pathological state.*” “ *Rhythmalytic analysis thus theorised does not constitute a separate science. Partial studies and a global conceptualisation – though necessary – are not sufficient. No more so than the particular instances of rhythmised experience that everyone possesses. Thought strengthens itself only if it enters into practice: into use.*” (Lefebvre, 2004)

How can the study of rhythms be employed in the production of architecture? We can search for intersections, for the moments when the paths cross. Complexity is not only good in architectural production. It is also what makes it real, which makes it natural. Every second of our existence, millions of tiny events happen and we will never be able to limit or define them all. Most of them have nothing to do with our human actions; they are simply beyond our control. And they will influence the existence of the architecture we create. For architecture not to lose its ability to be recognized, according to what Benjamin said, there has to appear change. “ *Everybody knows—and especially architects, of course—that a building is not a static object but a moving project, and that even once it is has been built, it ages, it is transformed by its users, modified by all of what happens inside and outside, and that it will pass or be renovated, adulterated and transformed beyond recognition.*” (Latour &

Yaneva, 2008). Active preservation can be seen as a change. What I aim for in a project is the creation of a set of rituals. Rituals that are bound with preservation. Rituals create a memory that is immediately spatial. They are a concrete experience that influences the social organization of the community, even if connected by a belief or memory that has a very transcendent nature.

Rituals constitute sacred space, not its architecture. But also in daily life, there are rituals, the rhythms previously described by Lefebvre. In my project, I aim to create rituals that are secular but not detached from spirituality. Empty space also is a ground for a ritual. In ancient Greek architecture, a ritual was performed within empty space, loosely framed by freestanding structures. The architecture provides direction for movement but does not define the boundaries for action. The pilgrim does not acknowledge only the moment he arrives at a place of his journey. The journey has a value itself, his individual choice of paths changes his experience.

By re-activating the position of ritual in our contemporary society, we may rediscover the beauty that lies in the simplest and most ordinary elements of our environment. Create architecture that is spectacular, in its humility. Architecture that makes us reflect on ethical choices we take in our lives if we are supporting equality if we give space to diversity if we do not harm our natural environment. “ *Decision is thus experienced as the momentum that introduces discontinuity and crisis into the daily routine of existence, and this eventful character, according to Schmitt, is an inheritor of the power of religious revelation.*”

(Aureli, 2016) In religion, oral communication is frequently replaced by gestures. A gesture that bears the meaning, that has an educational role. "By means of the repetition of a complex sequence of actions, the ritual ensures the communication and transmission of religious content. [...] Within the ritual, verbal language merges with gestures that both amplify and control its expressive power, raising it from pure logos to bodily and thus spatial expression." In rituals, gestures codified are both knowledge and meaning. Re-enactment of ritual is like a repetition of memory that is passed to others but also refreshed in the

one performing it. The rituals enable groups of people to connect and create a community. As Latour has pointed out, "*these networks are potentially transient, existing in a constant making and re-making. This means that relations need to be repeatedly "performed" or the network will dissolve.*" Without rituals, repetitive daily activities, spaces have no use. Buildings are a part of these networks, also acting as active elements of its creation of the net. A religious building makes God's presence tangible. In the same way, a memorial makes a memory present. Turning intangible heritage into a tangible one.



*Macleod Quarrying and Contracting Company, northwest of Monarch, Alberta, from. Glenbow Archives NA-3267-53, (1912)*



## Material narrations

*“Materials and surfaces have a language of their own. Stone speaks of its distant geological origins, its durability and inherent symbolism of permanence; brick makes one think of earth and fire, gravity and the ageless traditions of construction; bronze evokes the extreme heat of its manufacture, the ancient processes of casting and the passage of time as measured in its patina.”*

—Juhani Pallasma

Previously, I already have been dealing with the problem of preservation in connection to the materiality and climatic crisis. I have proposed a notion of ‘critical preservation’, an approach that ties together reflection upon the future of heritage with the crisis that we observe in the world today. Critical, because it requires us as designers to question many obvious concepts like function, form, readability, etc. but also critical because it is an action that is strongly connected with the crisis we are facing at the moment. It is a crisis that happens on many levels simultaneously, affecting the climate we live in but also the social structures that we create. Preservation, because in the upcoming decade we will have to drastically reduce the production of buildings, that will directly shift the focus of architects on maintenance and re-appropriation of the building structures that we have in the cities. What I mean by critical preservation is a specific approach towards the production of architecture that

both consists of conscious choices in the design process that will allow new buildings to last for a long time (on a functional, social, tectonic and material level), as well as maintenance, practices that will preserve the growing age-value and memory value of a building in its lifespan. Memory and age in that argument are considered as notions understood universally, legitimizing the building in the eyes of the users.

It suggests a conscious approach towards architectural production, as a reaction to the crisis of values perceived important in contemporary society, that has affected the environmental crisis we are living through today. Where in the light of threads such as irreversible contamination of the planet, overgrowth of waste, and extinction of many natural environments we still overproduce useless objects for sake of economic growth. ‘Critical preservation’ aims for dialogue with the function and users’ contributions in the field of architecture. Aiming for a critical change of perception of values that will hopefully lead to a change of actions. Preservation is perceived here as a complex action, both consisting of acts of creation that limit the production of new materials as well as favorable investment into the preservation of existing structure or their reuse. Preservation in both these cases is seen as an active approach, rather than a post-factum action. In the case of new buildings, ways of future pre-

ervation are being introduced to the discussion as early as the project starts forming its shape. The processes of production of architecture and its assessment during its lifetime, are being bound with each other in order to become a correlated set of actions based on similar characteristics. This coherence in making and using is seen here as strong value, both as a contemporary art value as well as an anticipated historical value of the object.

All of our future action has to come from an acknowledgment that we are in the crisis. Crisis of values and the general crisis of culture, that our consumption and lust-driven approach has led us to. Also, the position of an architect that has been established in the past century (best expressed by portmanteau - starchitect) that achieves general recognition due to the "innovative" approach to form and function he or she presents, has now reached the moment it will become outdated. In the moment of crisis, there is no place for "celebrated individuals" but joined action towards more reasonable action. An architect who acts in spite of the ideology of 'critical preservation' accepts the need of co-creation. Accepts the fact that she or he will just partially be a creator of the structure, allowing complexity and change to occur. This acceptance allows the architect at the same time to collaborate with other creative individuals but as well invites the natural environment to make an imprint on the structure. This radical acceptance of inevitable changes may allow the architect to let go of his/her ego and become a member of the community that creates the place. The community that is the one bearing the most important element of the

creation of locus: the memory of the place.

'Critical preservation' encourages establishing unconventional relationships between architecture and its users. Create a link between the processes of production of architecture and its future use. It redefines the role of the user and time, as two actors who unconsciously add value to architectural objects. It may reveal the social potential of the space, but also the social capital of a certain group brought together. Architecture is an organizational activity that not only organizes loose matter into a structure. It also organizes movement, organizes the structure of a group, and society. Grants a possibility of a gathering of a group, but also allows solitude for an individual. And only users' perception of fitness of the space, for their endeavors, will grant it its meaning. It is important to create architecture that allows the user to engage with the space on her or his own rules. So each can create his own understanding of its purpose. Preservation of the structure, also by its use, will be an act that will create a link between the user and the place. "*Some buildings attract interest precisely because they have fallen into ruins, and others require careful maintenance to sustain meaning.*"

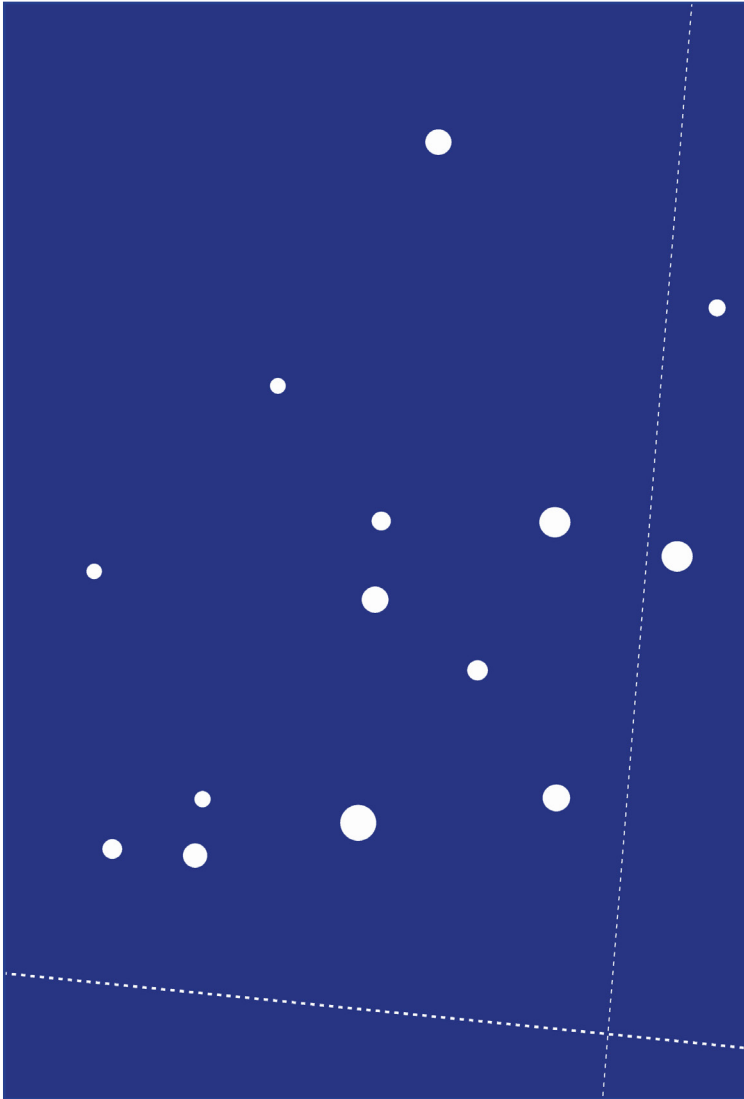
When architecture is being detached from its meaning, from the image that users have of it, it loses its identity, usually causing an abandonment of the structure by the users. Every change in the structure has to assess the connotation it has with individual users, marks left by them in the space. Amnesia caused by an uncared change of the material, vanishment of traces of the past, destroys the identity of a place. The marks,

build up the locus, are carriers of meaning that the structure had throughout the time of its existence. And these marks are elements that speak directly of the structure's status. Therefore any new investment on a site has to respect the previous marks left by users and time, and also correspond with them, to maintain the level of authenticity of the whole. „ *Geometry and formal reduction serve the heroic and utopian line of architecture that rejects time, whereas materiality and fragile form evokes a sense of humility and duration.*” (Pallasma, 2000) Subversion of aesthetics deconstructs the idea of ideal beauty.

In arts, subversion of aesthetics that appeared around the 90s has been used as an approach that allowed to undermine established values, gave way to critical assessment and interpretation of the idea of beauty. Processes of decay, cheap materiality but used in an unusual way represent the beauty of its own. Destruction is seen alluring. „*The new aesthetic, or more pointedly a subversion of aesthetics, is unveiled by the arbitrary processes of decay.*” Therefore, also we, as architects, should accept decay as an element of life of structures, and pay tribute to its natural beauty.



# Design proposal



*Constellation Otwock - end of XIX century,  
sketch made by the author*

## Constellation of fragments

*„ When people talk about poetry as a project, they suggest that the road through a poem is a single line. When really the road through a poem is a series of lines, like a constellation, all interconnected. Poems take place in the realm of chance, where the self and the universal combine, where life exists. I can't suggest to you that going through a line that is more like a constellation than a road is easy - or that the blurring of the self and the universal doesn't shred a poet a little bit in the process. The terrain of a poem is unmap-ped (including the shapes of the trees along the constellation-road). A great poet knows never to expect sun or rain or cold or wind in the process of creating a poem. In a great poem all can come to the fore at once. It would be worse yet, if none are there at all.”*

— Dorothea Lasky

Since the beginning of the project two terms kept on recurring in my head, and I would repeatedly find the in the texts, I've been reading. Fragment and constellation. The fragment first came to me in connection with the ruins, but not the ones I have seen on my site, but ruins I have seen as a child that have created in my head the image of what a ruin is. It was the ruins of the ancient city of Fez. Of course, before I have seen ruins in history books, but they did not create a spatial understanding of ruin in my head. What has struck me the most, was how the physical

encounter with the ruin has fed my imagination. Seeing capitals standing on the ground in lines, I imagined how they must have been creating a row of columns along the city's main street. The loose elements, connected, by my knowledge and provided a description, created a more holistic vision of how the city in the past might have been. From fragments of evidence, sometimes very different from each other, scientists can find an answer to questions they have. They may link information from many different sources and cases to legitimize a studied phenomenon. In the beginning, my knowledge of Jews in Otwock was also fragmented. For a very long time, clues I was finding in my grandmother's house were telling me nothing about the link of the house to the pre-war history of the city. To the existing there mythological thinking, that has influenced the choices, my grandmother was making in the interior of her house. The tropical palm tree, the wooden shingles covering the radiator, the elements of decoration connected with national pride. All these elements can be linked to the aesthetical ideas that were still present, or possible to observe in Otwock after the war, even when the city started changing.

The fragments are not fully defined images. They allow ambivalence to come into play. Ambivalence allows people to see and decide for themselves what they want. They encourage engagement of

thought processes of the observers, who try to understand the meaning of what they observe. Mirosław Bałka in 2011 has presented an exhibition called “Fragment” in CSW in Warsaw. He presented there, only video pieces he was making for many years. The videos are very short, sometimes they are only a few seconds. The process of putting all fragments together on display in one space, so to say on one site, allows us to see the images in correspondence to each other. To find links between them, the link of the author, because they all take on different topics. Some have similar themes, like the recurring motif of the Holocaust. Some present ordinary objects, like gas stoves filmed in action, shining with blue light. Is that also an artwork about the Holocaust? Gas stove first makes a sound of gas being released, then burning. This image could bring associations with death camps and the procedure that took place there. The decision on how to interpret this “fragment” lays on the viewer himself. As Mirosław Bałka said in one of the interviews, the perception of the art piece is in big part related to the viewer’s state, the moment the viewer is in direct relation with the artifice. And if they are tired that day, if they are in hasten, or have a lot of time for contemplation, depending on their emotional state.

The artworks in this exhibition in a sense, are also based on contradiction. Radiating heat can be seen as a sign of a dreadful sickness, but also can be associated with the heart of the home, of a stove, as something soothing and pleasing. A big hole in the ground can be imagined to be seen as a place for a mass grave, but also it can be a place prepared for a cellar where multiple objects

could be stored and preserved. Fragment of an overheard conversation could be interpreted in many different ways, depending on the opinion of the listener or the other information this person possesses. This possibility of the fragment, to be interpreted even in contradictory ways constitutes the strength that a fragment has. In the rhythm analysis, Lefebvre has underlined the contradiction as a natural element in the understanding of the processes around us. Where there is repetition, there is also a difference, mechanical and organic, discovery and creation, cyclical, and linear processes. In my installations, I have decided not to limit, but instead, create multiple layers of reading. Each installation has many connotations to different ideas I had, the different images I was seeing, and remembering. Sometimes even long after deciding on taking a certain decision in the design, even one taken intuitively, I was finding new references that were even more convincing to me of the correctness of previously taken directions. Fragments that I grew so strongly bonded with, were allowing me to order reality with means of imagination. *„Perhaps we should trust fragments, as it is fragments that create constellations capable of describing more, and in a more complex way, multi-dimensionally. Our stories could refer to one another in an infinite way, and their central characters could enter into relationships with each other.”* (Tokarczuk, 2019)

The idea of the “constellation” of installations, resonates with my abstract sketch of the city, where I marked all the regular circles in the plan and main axis. The map redrawing like this looks a bit like a night sky map, a constellation. As the stars, on the sky with their unknown ori-



gin and purpose, the elements can be linked by a more understandable net of paths. The paths have a certain direction but do not suggest or limit the wandering. A user can explore the site of the memorial, at his own pace, and with individual logic. Fragments allow an individual composition of uncomplete elements, into a bigger picture. The peripheral location of the site provokes anticipation of getting to a distant location and brings the awareness of the journey itself. Peripheral location and peripheral vision, the peripheral meaning of ruins. In order to reach the site, some users will travel from far, maybe from Israel or the United States. Some will visit the place, on a Sunday walk with their dog. *„Constellation of singular objects whose positioning would emphasize the passage from one place to another, rather than individuality of the objects themselves”*. (Aurelli, 2016)

The wandering on the site, in between installations, as psychogeography suggests, becomes not only a physical act of discovering the site and the architecture installed there. It also allows the discovery of the self by the wanderer. As in sanatoriums, this place should allow the guest through physical engagement with the surroundings and stories of others, question the ethical position he/she has. *„ So it could be best to tell stories honestly in a way that activates a sense of the whole in the [users] mind, that sets off the [users] capacity to unite fragments into a single design and to discover entire constellations in the small particles of events.”* (Tokarczuk, 2019) Right images can express emotions, beyond the verbal. A poet is a one who uses a single image to express a universal message. Taking advantage of the tactility

of architectural image and familiar textures link is to poetry. Shared imagination, imagination is a physical space one shares with others through poetry. Words transcribe images that appear in thoughts into images that can be shared. Words allow us to enter spaces that are not accessible by other mediums (eg.imagination).

The experience of the site would then similar to the experience of a poem. There are certain elements that can make architecture more poetic. The allowance for it to be interpretative, allow plural meanings, evoke complex connotations. Both architecture and poetry use means of language, they are build out of basic elements. And they are put together following a certain order, grammar. Language as a means that can help understand, as object becomes a carrier of meaning. *„Poems are special because they make a space, a real space, where we all can go. This place is a city called The Imagination. It is whatever you want it to be, half-hell, half-dream world, half-Paradise, half-light, and ashes, but poems are special things that make it real forever.”*(Lasky, 2019)

The fragment and the constellation are maybe just metaphors, more clearly describing a complex train of thoughts in my head, connected with this project. I have to admit, I am not completely sure of righteousness all decisions taken in it, of the clearness of the whole concept. But I hope that the strong link with the place, my own memory, and my own set of aesthetics can be read in each installation separately as well as in the whole concept of the place. *“We can express our feelings regarding the world around us either by poetic or by descriptive means. I prefer to express*

*myself metaphorically. Let me stress: metaphorically, not symbolically. A symbol contains within itself a definite meaning, certain intellectual formula, while metaphor is an image. An image possessing the same distinguishing features as the world it represents. An image — as opposed to a symbol — is indefinite in meaning. One cannot speak of the infinite world by applying tools that*

*are definite and finite. We can analyse the formula that constitutes a symbol, while metaphor is a being-within-itself; it's a monomial. It falls apart at any attempt of touching it.” (Tarkowsky, 1984)*





110 / 500



Człobowia strażnicy ogniowej ochotniczej.

Set of inspirations, for one of installations called „the Measuring Wall”  
sketch made by the author

## New interventions and references

A sanatorium is a place of healing, and I have decided that I wanted to use this aspect of the place to heal the still very fragmented memory of the Jewish community that used to live in the city of Otwock and whose most members were killed at Treblinka death camp. There are no Jews in Otwock today, but the link to Otwock as a place connects many Jews scattered around Poland and the globe. Ancestors of the Otwock Jews visit the city, but all they find is that the dreamland from the stories of their parents and grandparents does not exist anymore. That it has changed beyond recognition. I want to make this place for them, so they can find an ersatz of this old Otwock among the ruins of the Zofiówka sanatorium. But primarily I want to revitalize that site for the local community. I would like this place to be a refuge for them too. A place where they can stop, where they can listen to silence, where they can engage with greenery. Where they can educate themselves about the history of the city they live in, and find new ways of engagement with its past. Maybe the vision of a place I present to them will spark other projects of a similar nature to appear in the city. Maybe the way the project engages with abandoned heritage will change their perception of it. This series of installations may work similar to a ritual of acupuncture, that will help heal the decayed city. This place, the sanatorium of memory, is a memorial for the tragic past, but also a project full of hope for a better, different future for Otwock.

There were a few principles for the project that I was trying to follow. I decided all installations should strive to be made out of local materials. Three of them are made out of local pine wood. Also, the formwork for the measuring wall is made out of wood, collected from the clearings of the local woods. These thin elements are usually because of their small diameter sold as wood for domestic use. In the project, with help of supporting wood construction, they become walls of the formwork, that is later burned, in which the self-healing concrete is being cast creating two monumental walls of the measuring wall installation. The rest of the construction is disassembled before the burning process is put in place, and used for the construction of the sundial installation. The idea of avoiding waste from wood production was also very important for me. The pine needles are used to produce wool for the seats in the reading room. The small branches are used to make imprints in the tiles that build up the tile chimney in the middle of the reading room. The resin is used to paint the wood of the reading room into a dark brown color. From the rest of the excess elements, the aromatic oil or natural medicine could be made. The pine is being divided into all possible elements and each of them gets a purpose. As in the natural ecosystem where every element plays an important part.

All installations have a clear link to the notion of preservation. The intervention that engages with the ruined buildings of the sanatorium, called

“infecting the ruin” is my proposal on how to preserve the ruin. Human violence has made its impact on the structure and has to stop. I invite lichen and fungi to take over care of the ruin. Fungi that in most forest ecosystems are elements that help trees give away their energy, in the last cycle of their life, here help the ruin of the sanatorium at the end of its life. The biodiverse natural elements become new inhabitants of the ruin, allowing it to maintain value, just for the non-human users. The passage of the caretaking activities to the fungi and lichen, allows transition of the ruins matter from daily cyclical time frames, of cultural time periods, into geological time periods. It allows the ruin to step into the last cycle of its existence, at the same time becoming a shelter for the development of bio-diverse endangered species of plants. The inhaling corridor is a self-preserving wooden structure that also produces a preserving substance: salt. This installation also reintroduces the previous function of one of the other ruins in Otwock, Willa Julia that used to be for many years before the war an inhalatorium. Each 5 years brushwood in the walls has to be replaced and collected again from the local orchards.

The synagogue installation is being preserved by the fact of being put underground. The underground location has been inspired by the act preserving of the names in jars by Irena Sendlerowa during the second World War. Soil is a good preserving material, that for example has been a helpful substance in the preservation of many ancient archeological sites. At the same time, the choice of material it is made from is another act of preservation in itself. Preservation of the natu-

ral environment. The walls of the installation are made out of rubble collected from unfinished building sites in the city of Otwock. The excess and waste of the contemporary inhabitants of the city, become the building material of the space that relates to the destroyed at the beginning of the occupation synagogue on Warszawska street. The underground synagogue same as the original synagogue is a place of assembly, not members of the Jewish community, but the assembly of donated waste materials. In the sundial installation tropical plants and colorful flowers once grew in the sanatoriums gardens, are re-introduced. It is a place where the botanist works on ways to reintroduce endangered species in the region. The aim of the work in this place would be to reintroduce or bring from other places at least 130 species of plants, for each to become a symbol of a patient that was killed on the site of Zofiówka on 19th August 1942. The interior fabric screens are made out of linen fabric, which is planted in a clearing before construction, and weaved locally.

The measuring wall, the most monumental element out of the whole set of installations, is made out of self-healing concrete and cast iron. Materials that almost have eternal durability. This installation is made to self preserve itself and became an element that could become the longest prevailing mark of the memorial's existence. The last installation, the reading room, although wooden, stores information that will be retained in the memory of readers. It is an archive where all now scattered around archive materials and photos could be collected and digitalized. This building also has its own guard, the archivist, who helps navigate in the collection of their

knowledge, who may also collaborate with historians and researchers who are interested in the history of this place. The outer wall of the building is covered with shingles, cut into the typical *świdermajer* ornaments. The archive is not only a library of written materials but also an archive of re-interpreted architectural details. The process of preservation of the wooden villas in the region would be in the documentation and measurements, 3d scanning of their details. The produced data would be stored in the archive and could become an inspiration for conscious re-engagements with the traditional detailing conceded with the region.

The installations are made to narrate memory with space, to allow the creation of new sensual memories and connect them strongly with experience of the body. An inspiration that shows a clear link to the body, is rituals and gestures. Rituals of healing, taken from the analysis of the context of the sanatorium. Gestures of hatred taken from the contemporary state of vandalized heritage in Otwock. The gestures and rituals are translated into processes. Processes of creating architecture and processes connected with its preservation and use. Levi Strauss introduced the word *bricolage* in his book "The Savage Mind" to describe "characteristic patterns of mythological thought". He compares two types of creators: the *bricoleur* and the engineer. The *bricoleur* "puts pre-existing things together in new ways, and makes do with whatever is at hand. [...] The working of the *bricoleur* is parallel to the construction of mythological narratives." And how Derrida has followed his thought, in his critique of the division itself. "A *bricoleur* doesn't care

about the purity or stability or 'truth' of a system he or she uses, but rather uses what's there to get a particular job done." Is *bricoleur* then purely utilitarian in his creation? I have seen myself as a *bricoleur* in this project. Where the product of my work the "*bricolage* understands meaning not as something eternal and immutable, but as something provisional, something shifting." All installations emerge from small elements of thought put together in order. Some actual architectural elements from the city have been incorporated and re-designed. But the link to the original is definitely clear, almost literal. The details have not been re-drawn, or copy-pasted but re-assembled on the site, and in the contemporary context. Personal memories, collective memories, and desired atmospheres, with the use of specific and local materiality all come together in each installation. Creating a set of collaged fragments.

## **Memories and references :**

### **Infecting the ruin**

This intervention is connected with ritual of healing - vaccination, and connected with elements that my grandmother had in her houses, such as dried out hard mushrooms and other souvenirs from walks in the forest. How I propose to preserve the ruin is to clean it and afterward to moist it and inoculate lichen and fungi for them to take over the structure. Post-human approach to preservation, it has also been shown that ruins are a unique environment for new bio-diverse local species to develop in.

### **The inhalation corridor**

This installation is connected with ritual of healing - inhalation. In Otwock before the war there used to be a special building (now in ruin also) that was an inhalatorium. Spatially the structure resembles a long storage space in my grandmother's house. It is a long wooden corridor built in the technology of a graduation tower ( it produces mist and specific atmosphere by evaporating water that runs through brushwood that the walls are made from). Graduation towers are one of the most important architectural heritage sites in Poland. The interesting element of the experience is the contrasting atmospheres - the air in Otwock is very dry whilst inside of the structure it is moist. The structure engages senses such as smell, touch, and view - as I can imagine that at some point in the walk you would get to the point you cannot see to the front or the back because of the mist.

### **The synagogue**

This installation is connected with the ritual of healing - bathing, or immersing the body into water/void. The installation in the geometry is inspired by the Synagogue that was destroyed by Nazi in Otwock at the beginning of the war. The underground location of the installation is connected with a story of Irena Sendlerowa who preserved the identities of children she saved from the ghetto, by writing their names on paper and putting them into jars that she would bury underground in her yard. Also, it is a link to the cellar full of jars with jams in my grandmother's house. Space serves a function of a gathering spa-

ce where the commemorating events that occur now (readings of the Torah and Jewish poetry), held by the "Social Committee for the Remembrance of Otwock and Karczew Jews", could take place. The walls are made out of excess rubble collected from the construction sites in the city.

### **The sundial**

This installation is connected with the ritual of healing - sunbathing and plant therapy. In many sanatoriums in Otwock before the war, there were tropical plants in the gardens and in rooms. The reminiscence of that was the palm tree that my grandmother as well as my aunts would have in their houses - as items that were a symbol of some prestige. The special place for relaxation in my grandmother's house was a bench on the southern side of the house. The installation is a combination of these two elements - a palm house and a sundial installation - a sun clock that you can read time from using your body as a reference. What was important to me was to create a few different atmospheres in the installations that would differ in the proportion of sun exposure. The structure is made out of wood and glass, and linen division walls. Also, the plants create a specific atmosphere inside.

### **The measuring wall**

This installation is connected with the ritual of healing - counting. We count to calm down or to fall asleep - we also count to illustrate the amount of for example victims of a crime. This installation in spatial form refers to a space in my grandmother's house, a measuring threshold



where every time I would visit her when she would mark how much I have grown. The installation works as an observation tower. It also shows - in two different shades of concrete the percentage of Otwock's population before the war that was exterminated in the Holocaust on one front wall. It is made out of self-healing concrete that is cast in a wooden formwork that is being burned down. The stairs and railings are made out of cast iron, cast in sand molds. To the installation, lead white horizontal lines marked on the pine trunks, re-drawn every year by the participants of the commemorating events of the anniversary of the annihilation of the Otwock Jews.

### **The reading room**

The last installation is the reading room - an installation that refers to the fact of preservation of knowledge - of the historical data as well as building a tradition of the region. It refers to the ritual of exercising memory. It is an enclosed heated space where one can sit and read the materials, where the archivist has his office and there is a toilet. The main piece of furniture is the warm bench connected with the chimney. That is a traditional element of old Polish houses reinterpreted, with my grandparent's house included. The chimney in my grandparent's house was replaced by iron radiators, which then my

grandfather has covered with a dark wooden ornamented box. The outer facade is made out of wooden shingles that are cut in the typical forms observed in the region, so the facade becomes an archive of these ornaments. Due to the fact it is open only to the greenery and sheltered from the main path, it provides privacy for the reader.

Preservationists, the guards of the memorial are - the archivist, the botanist, and the local community. Also, the bio-diverse nature that gradually would be reintroduced to the forest. The local community could use the site for rites, performances, readings of poetry, theater plays. It could become a place where nature and culture come together and exist next to each other in harmony. Just like in Otwock in the descriptions from before the war. This project is a hypothesis on the site's potential. It is only a particle of interdisciplinary work that would have to be put in place to even start the process of healing of Otwock. As a continuation of thoughts presented in this paper I have collected a group of friends with whom I want to take the first step in the process of healing, by carrying out a series of workshops connected with the Jewish heritage and notion of local identity with the local community. If the first attempt will be successful, maybe in time we can help Otwock recover



## Interview with Mirosław Bałka

22 May 2020

We met on skype, Mr. Mirosław was in Spain where he went just before the start of the pandemic. I was in my apartment in Copenhagen, where I have been remotely working on my diploma for several months. We briefly talked about the situation, about the subject of my project and in general about conditions connected with working remotely. Mirosław Bałka tutors a couple of diploma projects online at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. After this short exchange, following the artist's suggestion, we proceeded to the interview.

**AK:** Memory of the Jews in Otwock and not only there - I know that this subject has become an inspiration for many of your works. Why, and could you tell me a little more about it? Tell me more about working with the subject of the Holocaust.

**MB :** It seemed to me that it is my duty as an inhabitant of Otwock to take up a topic that was so carefully hidden throughout the years of my childhood and youth, Otwock was a Jewish town. The Otwock line was basically Jewish, the majority of its inhabitants were Jews who were almost completely displaced from memory after the Holocaust. After 1989 there was an information breakthrough, Jews slowly began to return to the space of historical thinking in Poland. For me a very important element in rebuilding this

memory space was the book by Calka Perechodnik. Do you know it?

**AK :** Yes, but I read it only fragmentarily. It was released in the year of my birth, so I read it only recently, in connection with the project.

**MB :** This book had different adventures, because at the beginning it was published under a different title, later the title was changed, later fragments were also changed, corrected. I read different versions, compared them. It's not only a book about a shocking time, but also an interesting material for a discussion about remembrance and forgetfulness.

**AK :** I agree, for me also an interesting theme in the book is how the main character undermines, by analyzing simple objects and decisions, the existence of good and evil. He asks grand questions, like whether a lie is good or bad, how it depends on the situation. I also wanted to ask whether as a child in Otwock you found traces of the former presence of Jewish residents? Were these traces ever to be found in the city space?

**MB :** No, there was no topic at all, the house where I lived and I still have one of my studios, a very important studio, is a street away from Wiejska Street, which was the western border of the ghetto. It was the outskirts of Otwock,

the district that is called Kresy (Borderlands). Jews who were expelled from the more affluent Otwock were moved to this area. They were moved to very small, petty, cheap houses, where Perechodnik was also moved. The subject of Jews during my childhood was never discussed.

**AK :** According to my observations in Otwock it was in a sense a taboo subject. Now new research indicates that the perception of Jews in Poland is pejorative, anti-Semitic remarks are still present among Poles.

**MB :** Poles react badly to all strangers and not Poles. Coming back to Perechodnik, we had the same dentist. The dentist, whom he describes as a young person with anti-Semitic tendencies. She had a fondness only for the Jews of Otwock, and for these other Jews, not too much. After the relocation she consistently took over parts of Calka Perechodnik's fathers' house. Did you manage to get to this house?

**AK :** Yes, I was there and I know where the house is. Maybe I'll just mention that my family comes from Otwock. And my mother grew up in Otwock and went to the same primary school, and probably to the same church as you.

**MB :** What year is your mother from?

**AK :** From 1965.

**MB :** We probably have passed each other in this school. Because I'm from 1958.

**AK :** What I wanted to say was that I started to learn about this Otwock story, connected with Jews through my grandmother's house. In which,

sometimes in a strange way, I got to this information. And it was some kind of a hotspot, for further interest in this subject. Maybe somehow through this reference we will move on to the next topic, that is home. The grandparents' house in Otwock became an important place in your work, it often influenced the size of the works, and inspired the choice of materials. This private archaeology is the subject of many of your works, and did the image of Otwock also influence you as an artist?

**MB :** In my childhood I had such points of reference, I often talked in various interviews or conversations about inspiration by boredom, simply just by such an inferiority. I used to spend a lot of time on my bicycle going around the kiosks, around the city, watching exhibitions in these kiosks. Now I know from the perspective of an adult artist that it was an important circulation. I drew inspiration from what was. From boredom and poor context. My research area was very poor, but important.

Otwock is becoming more and more ugly and it is a more and more difficult reference point. The house where I started working, which was my first independent studio in the early 90s, was important. Later on, I expanded my scope of research to include topics dedicated to the memory of the Jews in Otwock. And later this area was expanded, with the exploration of the Świder culture, please do not confuse this term with Świdermaier. I am talking about prehistory. Do you know the term „Swiderian culture”?

**AK :** No, I don't.

**MB :** This term relates to the period when the reindeer tribes that traded in husked flint were roaming the Świder. I did a lot of video work related to the Holocaust. I had a very intense period of many years when I was travelling, with a video camera. These were expeditions to places like Treblinka, where most of the Jews from Otwock were deported. They were pilgrimages. During which I was gathering video records. Were you in Treblinka?

**AK :** I was in Treblinka as a child and I have quite strong memories of this event, I even have written them down because for this diploma, I was writing down memories from my grandmother's house and not only related to my knowledge, acquired prior to the project about Jews. But as a place, I don't remember Treblinka, because I didn't enter the camp then because of fear, I was a very sensitive child.

**MB :** There are no barracks in Treblinka, there is only strong memory. There is also one of the most interesting architecturally, memorial projects.

**AK :** Yes, I know this work, from Lanzmann's film „Shoah”. All those giant stones from Treblinka, appear there in the movie.

**MB :** The monument was created by sculptor Franciszek Duszeńko and architect Adam Haupt. The idea of this monument was created in the second half of the 1950s, and here it is worth noting the incredible innovativeness of the solutions, because it was even before minimal art, before the land art projects. Later, a few

more interesting projects were created in Poland, e.g. on the grounds of the Majdanek camp, or a project of the monument in Auschwitz, regardless of how it turned out to be.

**AK :** A memorial of Hansen's design?

**MB :** Very interesting realisations, because the authorities did not require as much naive iconographic symbolism as now. Those monuments are really the avant-garde of monuments, and today's monumental realisations are simply pathetic.

**AK :** Speaking in the context of Poland?

**MB :** Yes.

**AK :** For me, a very interesting monument in this subject is also, for example, the project of Rachel Whiteread, a Holocaust monument, perhaps in Vienna. In the form of a casting of the library's negative.

**MB :** But this is the 1990s. That's 30 years ago. It was still a period of value creation.

**AK :** Coming back to Otwock. Do you think that there is something that makes Otwock unique as a place? For example, does the fact that it had some uniqueness in pre-war times and one could say that it was ‚a place’, today it is a bit more of a ‚non-place’, is this uniqueness still readable in Otwock?

**MB :** From today's perspective, very hard. Otwock disappears, just like I said, even that Zofiówka, to which you want to refer, will disap-

pear one day.

**AK :** In my project it disappears a bit like that, too. Because in my project I'm giving her away into the care of mushrooms and lichens.

**MB :** Yes, this ruin should be taken to heaven with all that traumatic memory.

**AK :** In a way one can observe in Otwock the existence of some ‚genius loci‘. It's like some kind of magnetism that makes people come back there and look for their place.

**MB :** Yes, such magnetism was also a medical episode, associated with a huge amount of dry air, which treated tuberculosis, at least in theory. It was a situation that I compare with the Magic Mountain, by Thomas Mann. So „Davos“, only horizontally arranged, not as a mountain but as a forest, in which beautiful sanatoriums appear, which now are vanishing. Also this, somewhere, was a testimony of some character of Otwock.

I am linked to Otwock by the activity of my grandparents, one was a stonemason in Otwock, where he built a lot of tombstones, with terrazzo. The other grandfather was a carpenter, before the war, who built a lot of these houses in the Świdermajer style and sanatoriums . These are my connections with the architecture of this town. Now the thread connecting me with Otwock is getting thinner. But we have made projects there, with other artists you may have heard about them.

**AK :** Yes, I read about all of them on the project

website.

**MB :** If you are a student of architecture and you are writing about it, maybe it is worth mentioning that Joseph Rykwert, an outstanding architecture historian, was also raised there.

**AK :** Yes, I've already managed to make contact with him. That's part of my bigger plan for these interviews. Because I also wish to try a bit differently, to work with architecture in general. I'm not sure if after graduation I'll want to build or rather deal with architecture more in its sense as a cultural production. Maybe I'll work with curation, publications, research on architecture, and also write something myself. Also to escape a little bit from the standard way of perceiving the profession of an architect.

**MB :** I think it's interesting in the culture not to lock yourself in the professional drawers. It is important to exchange views, discuss, hold dialogues. The unsealing of the walls of the profession, which entitles us to this one and only professional opinion. We need to take care of a more humanistic way of moving around the spaces of our lives and professions.

**AK :** I agree with you completely, there is a quote from Giancarlo de Carlo, „architecture is too important to leave it to architects“. In a sense, I identify with this motto to a large extent. It seems to me that as a person I am not self-sufficient in finding inspiration for my work. To stimulate thinking. Also, I seek inspiration partly in architecture and partly in other cultural areas. Coming back to the topic of residency, I would

like to ask more about one of the works. I wanted to talk about Luc Tuymans' work „Ten”. - why did the artist choose Zofiówka as the place of intervention?

**MB :** We took Luc Tuymans to Zofiówka, which wasn't as completely demolished then as it is now. This place inspired him to create a work, using lots of balloons. The black balloons with the number 10 were filled with helium, so they floated in space. A very spectacular canteen space, with beautiful huge windows on both sides. It had to be a wonderful place, very representative. In the middle of this room, the balloons floated under the ceiling. Then there was an interesting interaction with this work. When the local children realized that there was gas in there, which when swallowed, can distort speech and you can speak as Donald Duck. All the helium from the balloons was consumed. And what were Luc's motivations for choosing this work for the Zofiówka space? He often works with an element of one and zero. Presence and absence.

**AK :** Such a binary system

**MB :** Balloons taken out of the context of fun here have become a funeral element. Very subversive work.

**AK :** And apart from such a personal language of the artist's creative expression, did this history of the place, especially the tragic history, influence the expression of this work?

**MB :** I think it could have had an impact. Of course, we've familiarized Luc with the history

of the place, quite thoroughly with the curator of these projects, Kasia Redzisz, who is currently a senior curator at Tate Liverpool. Luc Tuymans has been consciously moving in the areas of the Holocaust since the mid 1980s. These are areas very close to his heart, which he interpreted creatively. I think it brought us closer together. The fact that living in completely different parts of Europe, somewhere we were connected by these freight wagons transporting Jews across Europe, bringing them to Poland. Very strongly. We have been friends for 30 years.

**AK :** Yes, it seems that this memory of the Holocaust is so common that it can also be a unifying element to some extent. Cruelly unifying, but at the same time it can also have a positive overtone simply of the desire to maintain this memory and this is something building, maybe even unifying. And wasn't it necessary for the Jewish Community to agree to use the ruins of the building, or other owners?

**MB :** I don't know the owners, I don't know whose land this is now. No consent was required.

**AK :** I'd still like to talk for a while about the materials you work with. Because often they are simple materials encountered at home such as needles or items you find at home. But also in these later works, they are often very contemporary architectural materials. For example, in the works you did at the White Cube Gallery in London. Built from large stretches of plywood, corrugated sheet metal, the concrete you often use - what is the relation of material to form.

**MB :** Very important. The form and choice of material results from the mental context. I do not simply create forms. These are forms involved in some kind of mental concept, the choice of material is a consequence of materialization of the mental process. For example, corrugated sheet metal, used a year ago at the Random Access Memory exhibition, at the White Cube gallery. A cheap fencing material very present in urban architecture. Building passages, fencing off construction sites. Barrier. The exhibition at the White Cube consisted of a dialogue between the ou-topos and eu-topos. Between the no-land and paradise. About an inaccessible paradise behind the fence. Wavy sheet metal is cheap material that nobody pays attention to. At this exhibition in White Cube, it has gained dignity. It stood there proudly, very evenly inserted into the exhibition space. I try to introduce discipline and order in my works, I attach great importance to it. There the sheet appeared as if it was a very precious material. An important element was that there were heating pipes behind the sheet metal. The wall was heated to a feverish temperature, it provoked a touch. The touch is very important. Just like the movement of the viewer in space. I work with the whole exhibition space. In White Cube, I wanted to emphasize the role of this non-place which is the gallery reception desk. The corridors have become important. Corridors are very important to me as an artistic material. Whether it's a corridor covered with soap, or a corridor made of metal mesh, or a corridor where there are very strong fans, touching the body, with a cold stream of air. The physicality of presence is important to me. The perception of the exhibition is not only with eyes but with the

body that is present in the space.

**AK:** Something that interested me very much was what you said about this image, which inspired you, that it is the recreation of some image from the city, the observations about the sheet metal that separates places. That it appears in the city as such an element that divides, partitions a bit, and how then this image is interpreted by you in the exhibition space.

**MB :** These are important measures, such as using cheap material or blocking two main exhibition spaces in a huge gallery. The artists' works there cost a lot, and I am able to make a gesture of blocking the exhibition spaces and generating a new artistic statement.

**AK:** So this is also a bit of a provocation on your part?

**MB :** I guess so. I think this is an important lesson for younger artists, students who come there and ask where the objects are. There is a thought re-setting.

**AK :** This work has already to some extent referred to this situation, which is the situation that surrounds us today and builds our reality, namely the climate crisis. Will your approach to material selection change due to this crisis?

**MB :** I don't like works that work directly. I like multi-layered works. Possibility of multi-layered interpretation. Any interpretation is good if it is thoughtful. I don't throw away materials thoughtlessly. Even the ash that was created by



burning coal in the kitchen to warm up the studio I wasn't able to throw away. I decided to use it creatively. Ash from Otwock is in Tel-Aviv in the museum. It covers the walls of one of the museum rooms. I think it is also some kind of process that gives evidence of understanding of climate and ecological threats.

**AK :** This question was not supposed to sound like an accusation. It's something that in my current thinking appears very often now. And I'm also looking for a way to think about architecture in such a context, but without trivializing it. The horrifying thing is that this crisis is becoming, at least in architecture, another element to commercialize architecture. Suddenly there are concepts of skyscrapers made of wood, at the moment when no attention is paid to the architectural tissue that is already in cities. From which one could create very locally.

**MB :** Humanity works in a system of quests. It looks for quick, direct answers to the situation, it doesn't understand the process, which is much deeper. It is a problem to understand that, above all, change and reaction should take place within everyone, as a process of attentiveness and care for one's own reality, which can later be translated into other spaces. There are a lot of violations that are accepted, but this is how the world is.

**AK :** If we came back to these more social topics, I will ask if you managed to reach the local community with this Otwock residence project. Do you think that this project has made the Otwock residents more interested in contemporary art, since when have you been working more in this

space?

**MB :** Not necessarily, I think very individually with the cooperation we had with young people who gathered around such places as the Museum of Otwock Region, which was very nicely run by a team of people involved in culture and history, also Jewish culture. Six months ago they were expelled. The recipients of this project were actually more people we invited from Warsaw, my students from Warsaw, who wanted to take part in the project as well.

**AK :** And the last question, which may sound a little strange in the context of our whole conversation. What potential is hidden in Otwock for local inhabitants and can art help them to find it or rebuild it?

**MB :** The potential for mediocrity and boredom, most certainly, which can be tackled creatively, of which I am an example. Can art change something there? I think that this city could be changed if culture was treated sensibly. Meanwhile, the department of culture was dismantled, which was merged with the department of sport and tourism. These are completely differential activities, while culture is understood as a festival. Total degradation accompanied by the joy of rebuilding some mock-ups of Świermajer and making it a reference point. In addition, total air pollution in winter.

**AK :** Well, I remember the most from the period when I was visiting my Grandmother, not as a child, but a bit later the problem of the Świder river pollution. Just like before, we some-

times went to rest on the beach and bathe, so afterwards it was impossible because the beach was closed and you couldn't swim. Surprising and frightening for me is how these natural qualities of the city are also deliberately destroyed. The air, the forest, the river are simply degraded and deliberately destroyed as a result of some kind of hatred, but I don't know what for? Well, maybe for everything around them?

**MB :** Yes, unfortunately. I see it too and I experience it too and I feel total helplessness, because I don't know how to change it. Also education, in which ecology is not very important. How to educate people who are aware of their being in the world in harmony with nature, when the president of this country boasts that we have coal reserves for 200 years, not to mention what will happen after that period of time. What will Poland look like, or the future of our grandchildren. In what context they will live. And maybe it is a sign to end our conversation.



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