

Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

in the field of Art, within the discipline of Visual Arts and the Conservation of Works of Art

I AM FROM THE STEELWORKS

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INTRODUCTION

The artistic undertaking I have realized is grounded in the ethos of a place—in its particular *genius loci*—whose sense and significance in Poland’s most recent history are widely acknowledged. The medium I employed is documentary photography, used in an orthodox manner: one that avoids any attempt to construct a narrative founded on an aestheticizing, formally stylized rhetoric. The photographs I produced are meant to describe the encountered reality with relative fidelity, and their artistic context arises from a constellation of meanings that derives from the idea of pure testimony.

Today, Nowa Huta is a district of Kraków in its own right, fully equal in status. It has long ceased to be regarded indulgently as the city’s “younger sister.” Indeed, immediately after its founding it was Nowa Huta that eclipsed Kraków’s position; only over time did these roles reverse. The construction of Nowa Huta for many years relegated Kraków’s needs and luster to the background, arresting its development. This, in turn, compounded conflicts and grievances, intensifying reluctance and distance on the part of the native inhabitants of the enlightened heart of Lesser Poland toward the incoming population of Nowa Huta.

Since 2023, Nowa Huta has been recognized as a Monument of History.¹ By documenting this place for years in a particular way, I feel myself to be a chronicler of an important, historically momentous, tangible change—one I have witnessed from 2015 to the present. I mean the process of “de-concreting” a fragment of the city: its reconstruction in an ecological direction, reintroducing plant life into spaces previously deprived of it. My account therefore consists of a daily record of the rebuilding of the central urban artery—Aleja Róż. In the course of developing the Civic Budget for this initiative, the project met with broad approval: 7,000 residents of Kraków signed in support of it. I resolved to document the realization of this undertaking photographically, and to endow it with the markers of an artistic reality through an exhibition presentation and a publication. When I began this work, I did not yet grasp the scale and the trajectory in which my project would unfold.

What initially motivated me to act was the fact that the planned redevelopment concerned a space close to me—both physically and mentally. My family and I live just nearby, and for years this place had been a natural destination of our everyday visits. The concrete surface of Aleja Róż invited roller-skating, which we gladly took advantage of. At first, I did not respond unequivocally positively to the decision to rebuild this site in the direction of “de-concreting.” My attitude shifted over the course of the works themselves, during which, for a year, I co-participated in the transformations as they unfolded.

At this point I wish to draw attention to the significance of the collective undertaking I accompanied. Bearing in mind the ethos of shared labor as a symbol of Nowa Huta in the making, I followed with care the informa-

¹ The recognition of Nowa Huta as a Monument of History constitutes the formal sanctioning of many years of efforts by the local community, experts, and all individuals and institutions committed to protecting and communicating the uniqueness of this cultural landscape. In Kraków we have no doubts that Nowa Huta holds particular importance for our country’s heritage, history, and culture, with all its material and immaterial values. The district forms a coherent cultural landscape: a site of significant historical events, an area of exceptional architecture, the setting for important literary and cinematic works; it is also one of the most active cultural spaces, with esteemed theatres, art galleries, and alternative festivals. “I regard the honoring of Nowa Huta through its entry on the list of Monuments of History as an important gesture—one that enables us to speak about the district in the context of Polish and world history,” says the Mayor of Kraków, Jacek Majchrowski. (Source: Karnet Kraków Culture, article on Nowa Huta as a Monument of History.)

tion appearing about various social initiatives. One of them was an attempt—undertaken by the Imago Mundi Foundation—to identify the builders of Nowa Huta. It must be added: without spectacular results. Not many individuals were recognized. The message posted on social media read as follows:

“Dear residents of Nowa Huta, we are searching for the builders of Nowa Huta who were photographed in 1954 by Wiktor Pental, as well as for employees of the Kombinat who were photographed in the 1950s and 1960s by Henryk Makarewicz. Thanks to the exhibition 802 Percent of the Norm, held in Warsaw in 2007, their faces became known to nearly all of Poland. And yet—to this day—no one has identified them. Is it possible that no one remembers them anymore? Perhaps one of you will manage to uncover their stories?”²

That Facebook post made a strong impression on me and planted the idea of a photographic cycle entitled *The People Who Moved the Concrete* — a series that would become a conscious, intentional record of the redevelopment of Aleja Róż, restoring its functions and appearance in accordance with the assumptions of the original spatial development plan. I realized that the project’s scope, its meaning, and the immense discipline required for systematic work predisposed it to the status of a doctoral theme—the kind I had been seeking for some time.

A significant impulse that motivated me to undertake this project was my earlier collective work, in which I participated as a co-creator. I began the process of coming to terms with myself—through the idea of collaboration with other artists—in 2015, at the moment I joined the Wrocław-based group gathered around the Authorial Laboratory of Photography.³ This collaboration gave me energy and sustained my willingness to act, even though in the meantime my children were born and a natural slowing-down occurred. From the outset it mattered to me that motherhood should not become an obstacle to my development. Yet despite my efforts and intentions, I felt it was becoming increasingly difficult, and that I was ceasing to photograph actively. It was then that the thought emerged: I had to shake myself out of a kind of “maternal torpor.” Thus the idea for the blog *Portfolio as Archive* was born.⁴ I knew that the form of collaboration with artists I had devised would remain possible even with small children. I could work remotely. I found the courage to submit an application for a scholarship from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. When I sent it, I promised myself that if I did not receive the scholarship, I would give up artistic activity and devote myself exclusively to my family. I received it—and, speaking colloquially, from that moment on I have not been able to stop.

Portfolio as Archive is an undertaking broad in scope and open in form. Although the objectives of the scholarship have already been fulfilled, far more material has been created than I had originally planned. In the near future, I intend to publish several new texts as well as a book that will bring my work to a close. The

2 Fragment of a post published on Facebook by Dom Utopii – International Center of Empathy, 12 Oct 2022 (link as provided by the author).

3 Source: Authorial Laboratory of Photography—programme/idea page (link as provided by the author).

4 *Portfolio as Archive* is a blog in which, in successive instalments, conversations with invited artists address issues related to the creative process: the intentions behind particular bodies of work, as well as the storage, cataloguing, digitisation, and presentation of artworks. Posts published on the blog in 2021–2022 were produced as part of a scholarship from the Minister of Culture and National Heritage. See: www.portfoliojakoarchiwum.com.

scholarship project allowed me to grow accustomed to working with people and to believe that I am capable of forming satisfying relationships with them. Around the project itself, a number of compelling events emerged: conversations with artists in the form of interviews, photographic plein-air, author presentations, and a collection of works by invited guests.

The experience I gained constituted—this is how I see it today—a kind of interpersonal training. Those numerous contacts and collaborations with artists of different backgrounds made it easier for me, on the methodological level, to formulate a strategy for my future doctoral work, the essence of which was to consist in close cooperation with a large group of people: architects, builders, administrators, and officials—without whose assistance and goodwill my intention could not have succeeded.

CHAPTER I

NOWA HUTA — IN A SOCIO-HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 NOWA HUTA — A BRIEF SKETCH FROM THE DISTRICT'S MOST RECENT HISTORY

The decision to locate the steelworks and the city subordinated to it was taken on 25 February 1949. Its adoption was shaped by a range of geopolitical considerations as well as a number of practical factors: favourable geotechnical conditions, existing railway infrastructure, the support of higher technical education institutions, and a high unemployment rate in the region.⁵ The master plan envisioned a combine with an annual production capacity of 1,500,000 tonnes of steel and 1,300,000 tonnes of rolled products.⁶ Work began in June of the same year with the construction of the municipal facilities whose purpose was to provide accommodation for the builders of the steelworks. Until 1952—when the authorities approved the general implementation design—construction proceeded on the basis of preliminary arrangements.⁷ Tadeusz Ptaszycki was appointed the chief designer of Nowa Huta.⁸

Although the earliest guidelines anticipated a city for 60,000 inhabitants, the final decision was to design a city of 100,000. The plan proposed a division into housing estates conceived as autonomous residential units, each equipped with a full complement of commercial, service, and social amenities. It also provided for the construction of a municipal hospital, a complex of vocational schools with dormitories, municipal infrastructure (a wastewater treatment plant, among others), and a one-kilometre-wide green belt that would separate the newly built city from the industrial zone of the combine. Ultimately, the target was the creation of 54,700 dwelling rooms, 23 primary schools, 7 vocational schools, 4 general secondary schools, 55 kindergartens, 40 nurseries, 485 shops, and 77 canteens and restaurants.⁹ Four residential complexes (A, B, C, and D) were each to accommodate 20,000 residents. On 23 June 1949, construction began on the first residential block in what is today the Wandy Estate, and on 26 June 1950 the construction of the steelworks commenced.¹⁰ The area of Nowa Huta became an immense building site.

5 J. Zdradzisz (ed.), *Tadeusz Sendzimir Steelworks S.A. in Kraków 1949–1999*, Kraków 1999, p. 14.

6 J. Duda, „Industrial heritage of the metallurgical complex in Nowa Huta,” in: J. Salwiński, L. Sybila (eds.), *Nowa Huta – Past and Vision. A Study of a Dispersed Museum*, Kraków 2005, p. 146.

7 S. Juchnowicz, „Nowa Huta, Past and Vision: Experiences from a Design Workshop,” in: J. Salwiński, L. Sybila (eds.), *Nowa Huta – Past and Vision. A Study of a Dispersed Museum*, Kraków 2005, pp. 199–200.

8 T. Binek, *Investment services in Nowa Huta*, Kraków 2009, p. 12.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

10 W. Komorowski, „Cultural values of Nowa Huta: Urbanism and Architecture,” in: J. Salwiński, L. Sybila (eds.), *Nowa Huta – Past and Vision. A Study of a Dispersed Museum*, Kraków 2005.

“He came to me. After all, it is my intersection.

A small fragment of the world, still changing.

As everywhere. This is the album of my corner.”

— quote from a line of dialogue in Wayne Wang’s film SMOKE

Dedicated to my husband.

The centrally imposed style of the housing estates was framed within the doctrine of Socialist Realism, which rejected modernist elements in favour of seeking models in Renaissance and Baroque architecture.¹¹ The plan of Nowa Huta was founded on the concept of the ideal city.¹² It assumed a layout structured around five radially diverging streets, with the principal axis intended to contain the most important buildings (the town hall, the theatre, and so forth). Residential buildings, in turn, were to form compact urban blocks, while the corner structures—taller and more richly ornamented—were designed as a kind of gateway, marking streets and public spaces. The housing estates were meant to be citizen-friendly and grounded in the notion of the “neighbourhood unit.” The central placement of schools and services was to foster the integration of the local community. In developing the project, the planners drew on the concept advanced by C. A. Perry (employed in 1929 during work on the plan for New York).¹³ Thus, an American idea gained recognition among Socialist Realist theoreticians, although in official nomenclature the term “social estate” (osiedle społeczne) remained consistently in use.¹⁴ Without exaggeration, one may state that from the very beginning Nowa Huta became a vast demographic experiment, and its assumptions were meant to make the city a symbol of new times and of social advancement.¹⁵ Countless propaganda materials encouraged participation in its construction.

“The government of the people has placed participation in the execution of this task also before Polish youth—before the sons of Polish workers and peasants. Yet it is not only a matter of Polish youth contributing to the construction of Nowa Huta; it is a matter of ensuring that, at the building site of Poland’s greatest industrial works—the first socialist city—there will grow, from among the thousands of peasant and working-class sons labouring here, cadres of future technicians, foremen, and skilled workers for Nowa Huta.”¹⁶

“Work on the construction sites of Nowa Huta is not only good wages, a good life, or housing. It is also the act of putting one’s own hand to the building of a common cause—putting one’s hand to the task of making Poland a wealthy country. The construction of Nowa Huta is a matter of honour and patriotism for the Polish working class and Polish peasants. Every Pole should help in building a better tomorrow.”¹⁷

The rapidly growing city took in war orphans and children from orphanages. Propaganda campaigns were also aimed at villagers and young women, who on posters saw their peers posing against the backdrop of scaffolding, concrete mixers, or lime mixers, praising the wages and opportunities for advancement. For a long time,

11 M. Włodarczyk, *Modernism of the 1960s and the Architecture and Urban Planning of Nowa Huta*, in: K. Jurewicz (ed.), *A New Space: Modernism in Nowa Huta*, Kraków 2012, p. 30.

12 M. Smaga, *The 1960s in Nowa Huta: Urban Planning, Architecture, and Interiors*, in: K. Jurewicz (ed.), *A New Space: Modernism in Nowa Huta*, Kraków 2012, p. 10.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

14 J. Słodczyk, *The History of Urban Planning and City-Building*, Opole 2012, p. 391.

15 S. Juchnowicz, *Nowa Huta: Past and Vision from the Experience of the Design Workshop*, in: J. Salwiński, L. Sybila (eds.), *Nowa Huta—Past and Vision: A Study of a Dispersed Museum*, Kraków 2005, p. 179.

16 M. Brandys, *Nowa Huta*, Warsaw 1950, p. 8.

17 “Nowa Huta Calls You”, Kraków 1952, p. 18.

however, men made up the overwhelming majority of the population; as late as 1955 there were twice as many of them.¹⁸ Only when they achieved relative stability in their new location did they begin to start families and slowly correct the aforementioned imbalance. Work at the industrial complex offered opportunities for learning and acquiring a trade. Workers were also entitled to a substantial social benefits package. This translated into rapid employment growth, which rose from 465 employees in 1949 to 17,929 over the course of ten years.¹⁹

The idyllic image of life in the new city was disrupted by Adam Ważyk's publication of „A Poem for Adults” in 1955. This work initiated a series of publications critical of the reality in Nowa Huta, portraying it in sharp contrast to the ideologized vision promoted by propaganda. In sometimes drastic materials, attention was drawn to pathological tendencies among the influx population and to their cultural uprooting.²⁰ During the city's construction, most decisions were made without regard for the objections of the local community — both Kraków residents and villagers who were resettled and dispossessed for next to nothing; this practice affected nearly 4,000 households.²¹ All of this provoked protests, and often aggression toward the first builders and inhabitants of Nowa Huta.

An extensive infrastructure—and, with it, Nowa Huta's self-sufficiency—brought with it yet another consequence. Residents were able to meet their needs without having to venture “into the city” (that is, Kraków). The phrase, incidentally, remains in use to this day, suggesting not only the physical distance separating the district from the centre, but also a certain social distance dividing the inhabitants of these two areas.

Until quite recently, the distinctiveness of Nowa Huta's residents manifested itself in many respects: family size, the average age of inhabitants, the degree of long-term settlement, and the structure of education and employment. The people of “old” Kraków not infrequently displayed snobbery and a sense of superiority toward Nowa Huta's community; anecdotes about the steelworks' builders raising poultry and rabbits in their bathrooms, or burning parquet staves in their stoves, still circulated in Kraków in the first decade of the twenty-first century.²² Moreover, the Nowa Huta working class—celebrated in party slogans about the dictatorship of the proletariat²³—aroused suspicion among Kraków's residents, where the intelligentsia had historically been the dominant social stratum and where the possibility of withdrawing from manual labour remained an obvious marker of social advancement.

The “bad reputation” outlined above clung to Nowa Huta from the 1960s for almost fifty years. One of the simplest measures of its impact may be found in property prices, and in the fact that, for decades, purchase and rental rates in Nowa Huta were lower by approximately 25–30% than in the other districts of Kraków (including peripheral ones). This seems to be clear evidence of the social valuation of space, and of Nowa Huta's functioning as an “inferior” district—or, more cautiously put, as one that did not reflect particularly well on the status of its residents. Its reputation as dangerous and unwelcoming was also linked to a high crime rate,

18 S. Panek, E. Piasecki, *Nowa Huta: Population Integration in the Light of Anthropological Research*, Wrocław 1971, p. 28.

19 J. Zdradzisz (ed.), *Tadeusz Sendzimir Steelworks S.A. in Kraków 1949–1999*, Kraków 1999, p. 94.

20 J. Suliński, *Sociological Problems of Contemporary Kraków*, in: W. Leśniewski (ed.), *Studies in Sociology, Ethnography, and History*, Kraków 1972, pp. 340–341.

21 B. Klich-Kluczewska, *Nowa Huta—Where We Come From*, in: K. Jurewicz (ed.), *My Nowa Huta*, Kraków 2009, p. 9.

22 M. Rabij, “Postcards from the Red Planet”, in *Newsweek Polska*, no. 26/2007, p. 82.

23 J. Pawłowicz, J. W. Gołębiowski, A. Kurz, *Fundamentals of the Ideology and Politics of the PZPR*, Warsaw 1976, p. 172.

characteristic of regions with an unstable social structure and intensified migratory processes. Although these processes had already stabilised in the 1960s, they were replaced by a range of other undesirable phenomena—above all, the rise in unemployment at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, when the steelworks, confronted with the challenges of the free market, proved unprofitable and inefficient, quickly leading to workforce reductions. At the time, both the local and the nationwide press were flooded with reports of juvenile offenders banding together into gangs (the so-called *blokersi*), of a police force rendered helpless, and of citizen patrols organised by Nowa Huta residents. Interestingly, research on Kraków’s “geography of crime” did not confirm an increased incidence of criminal activity in Nowa Huta; instead, it pointed to an overrepresentation of such phenomena (in comparison with other districts) in media coverage.²⁴

A district degraded for decades and steadily falling into disrepair began to revive only relatively recently, and a clear emblem of this gradual turn for the better seems to be the flourishing of cultural life. As late as the 1990s, Nowa Huta drew attention in this regard mainly as a kind of open-air museum of the People’s Republic era. At the beginning of the new millennium, the efforts of the Circle of Friends of Nowa Huta to have its unique urban layout entered into the register of historic monuments gained wide publicity.²⁵ Shortly thereafter, Kraków city councillors submitted an application to inscribe its oldest section on the UNESCO World Heritage List.²⁶ A museum, several contemporary art galleries, cultural centres, and libraries began to operate in the district. As Bartosz Szydłowski, director of the Łaźnia Nowa Theatre, recently remarked in a press interview:

“Nowa Huta remains a promise. It is different from Kraków; it reflects it like a mirror, and at the same time it still holds potential—freshness. It should cease to be treated in a degrading manner. We must give voice where people want to speak. And Nowa Huta wants to speak.”²⁷

1.2 NOWA HUTA – AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Upon the more cursory outline of Nowa Huta’s recent history, my own personal story has been overlaid. The social, the general dimension has become inextricably intertwined with the private—intimate, deeply personal. The merging of the district’s ethos with my life unfolded gradually. At first, it was merely a point on a map, a place that—for various reasons—became my address.

Yet, systematically, I began to yield to its influence, and my life within it grew ever less provisional. In every other place (and there were many), I felt a lack of belonging. In Nowa Huta, I made a home for my mind and my heart.

I am not a native New Huta resident. I come from the seaside, from a medium-sized town. I arrived in Kraków in 2001. I worked two shifts and on weekends, and I pursued two degrees. These were the consequences of my decisions and choices, as well as broader social circumstances; like many before and after me, I came to

24 R. Guzik, “The Image of Crime in the Kraków Press”, in: “Jagiellonian University Research Papers. Geographical Studies”, Issue 106, Kraków 2000, pp. 197–216.

25 K. Fijałek, “An Application to Enter Nowa Huta in the Register of Historic Monuments”, in: “Gazeta w Krakowie. Supplement to Gazeta Wyborcza”, 23.03.2003.

26 “Nowa Huta on the UNESCO List?”, in: “Gazeta w Krakowie. Supplement to Gazeta Wyborcza”, 16.01.2004.

27 K. Kobylarczyk, “Nowa Huta Has Grown into an Important Place on the Cultural Map Not Only of Kraków”, in: “Tygodnik Powszechny”, no. 47/2023.

the big city in search of a better life. I was exhausted and overwhelmed by the excess of obligations. I had no time for anything. Slowly, I was turning into a workaholic. In the centre of Kraków there was an aggressive din, congestion, and a lack of greenery; at a certain point, this began to irritate me intensely and became the first important impulse to move. I was looking for calm, stability, and a home—a home in the fullest sense of the word.

Nowa Huta took me in twice. The first time was in the Centrum C housing estate. I lived there throughout 2003. It was an unsafe place: plenty of hooliganism and aggressive youth. In 2004 I emigrated to England for economic reasons. After returning in 2005, I lived in central Kraków. Eight years later, in 2013, I moved once again into a flat in Centrum C in Nowa Huta. Some things had changed. The estate's rough-and-ready crowd had grown up, moved away, or ended up in prison. Before long, I realised that the entire district had become quite welcoming. My life brought me a husband and children, and, above all, a sense of belonging to a place. At last, I had found home.

CHAPTER II

PREMISES AND INSPIRATIONS

2.1 PERSONAL INSPIRATIONS – AUTHORIAL

I have been engaged in photography for twenty-five years, beginning with my studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań and later in Kraków. I develop original artistic projects and teach photography in courses and in schools. Yet a substantial—and no less important—part of my activity is concentrated around attempts to describe my life in order to pass on an individual, personal narrative to those closest to me. I do not know whether I will live to see the moment when, in the minds of my grown, independent children, a curiosity will take root as to who their mother was and what kind of reality filled her everyday existence. For this reason, I decided to prepare that story for them in advance, and I naturally recognised the medium of photography as the most fitting language in which to tell it.

My work on the project Portfolio as an Archive strengthened my conviction that photography—understood as a carrier of memory—possesses an inestimable value; almost every day, this belief grew more steadfast. Photographic documentation of life appears as a support for remembrance that is difficult to overstate: on the one hand, it acts as a catalyst for memory; on the other, it becomes an instrument that makes it possible to objectify recollection. Moreover, in the case of photographs discovered in the recesses of family archives, it can serve as a kind of peephole through which an individual biography connects with the life stories of relatives who are no longer alive.

Interestingly, I soon came to see that “autobiographical” sets and “artistic” sets interpenetrate and mutually nourish one another. It is likely not without significance that, in producing both, I sought to remain open to the diversity of images I gathered, to the choice of editorial means, and to modes of presentation. The path I have travelled has led from analogue techniques, through digital ones, to the “phone photography” I have favoured in recent years. I nonetheless assume that the tools I use are of secondary importance in relation to the final effect and the proper presentation of the sets.

In my work, I sought to examine more closely the relationships outlined above and, for artistic purposes, to undertake an attempt at drawing upon the photographic archive of everyday life. Moreover, I intended to revise entrenched patterns of thinking about the significance of the personal photographic archive and to indicate its potential to compensate for deficiencies in the verbal description of objective reality. From this perspective, the visual and textual planes interpenetrate and mutually complement one another. Both elements become equivalent, since the removal of either would render my narrative incomplete.

Although memories are our property - perhaps our most precious - they are far from providing a precise account of a past existence. The world-renowned neurologist Oliver Sacks, writing about the appropriation of memories, observed that we sometimes “remember” as our own experiences events in which we did not

participate.²⁸

This may concern stories heard from others, fleeting images, and even television programmes. On the other hand, memory can deceive us, “overwriting” recollections in the way digital files are overwritten after seemingly insignificant, cosmetic edits. Repeated over the years, this multiplied “overwriting” not infrequently distorts the original memory so radically that we lose irrevocable access to it. Images registered in memory undergo a complex psychological and cultural processing, layering themselves onto our imaginings, desires, phobias, and fears. Though they constitute a bank of remembrance, they nonetheless could not testify about us in a fully objective manner.

For this reason, one of the most important tasks I set myself in the course of this work was to investigate whether—and under what conditions—a private photographic archive can objectify our memory and the memory of us. Is photography a catalyst for recollection, its prosthesis, or perhaps a metaphor? Can an artistic project derived from the resources of a personal archive fulfil a referential function with respect to objective reality, serving as credible evidence of its actual occurrence?

2.2 EXTERNAL INSPIRATIONS

My reflection on time, memory, and repetition—and on the adequacy of photography as a medium capable of sustaining a deepened contemplation of these categories—has accompanied me for at least a dozen years. Ironically, however, in this case a broad temporal frame undermines memory and effectively hinders any chronological reconstruction of the influences and inspirations that determined the particular shape my artistic works have taken. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall attempt briefly to refer to a few of the most symptomatic examples of ideas and works whose nearer or more distant echo I recognise today as the intellectual backdrop to the projects presented here.

Opalka 1965 / 1–∞

The emergence of conceptual art in the 1960s brought far-reaching changes in the understanding of such notions as the “artwork” or “artistic practice.” The centre of gravity shifted from the category of the object (the “work” understood as the final outcome of the artist’s labour) to the domain of process (the conceptual creative act realised directly within artistic experience). Without radically rejecting traditional forms of expression—painting, sculpture, and the like—conceptual artists nonetheless granted primacy to the idea and to the varied ways in which it might be transposed into a work of art. Proceeding from the premise that an idea, in itself, cannot assume any determinate form and requires concretisation in order to exist artistically, they turned toward uncomplicated techniques and media that allowed them to document their actions with freedom: media that expressed and underscored the processual character of this art, since, in its initial phase, they helped articulate

the concept, while in its final phase they served to record it.²⁹ Alongside drawing or the note, photography played a significant role here: it “not only draws a moment out of a certain temporal continuum, but preserves it and, as it were, places it outside the date: a given moment acquires a double existence and can be subjected to manipulation. With a series of photographs one can trace a line of events, using the substance of past time.”³⁰ Many works within this current therefore take the form of a photographic documentation of a creative action which, upon renewed reading, can be not only reconstructed by the maker but also interpreted by the viewer. The category that such practices attempt to “seize” is that of passing time. As Jack Burnham wrote, conceptual art “confronts us with the extra-spatial scope of the surrounding world. It concerns itself with time, processes, and interrelationships as we experience them in everyday life.”³¹ Temporality ceases to be merely the historical or narrative layer of a work; it assumes an almost material form—rising to the status of an object the artist seeks to apprehend, and of an interpretive model through which they attempt to speak about the world that surrounds them.

Roman Opalka’s programme (OPALKA 1965 / 1–∞) is perhaps one of the most emblematic examples of an artwork that takes up the issues outlined above. Belonging to the canon of contemporary world art, the cycle, from a formal point of view, consists of three elements. It comprises large-format canvases of uniform dimensions (196 cm × 135 cm); audio recordings on magnetic tape, on which the artist documented the successive numbers he recited aloud; and photographic self-portraits made after each working session (likewise standardised—the same camera, framing, and attire, the same lighting). Beginning with the numeral “one” applied in white paint to the black ground of the first “Detail,” Opalka consistently continued his counting, replacing each filled canvas with the next—each subsequent ground lightened by one percent in saturation—so that, in the end, the process would lead toward a point of “absolute whiteness,” when the written numbers would no longer be visible on a white background, and the only testimony to the work still being carried out would be the sound recordings and the photographic register. A peculiar logic of irreversibility means that the repetition of the artistic gesture wholly eludes accusations of tedium or predictability. Perhaps for this reason, each renewed encounter with the cycle strengthens my conviction about the exceptional value of consistent and disciplined work: work that is precise and candid, bound by a schedule that tolerates neither omissions nor deviations—work that fuses artistic action and everyday existence into a single, indivisible whole.

Jolanta Brach-Czaina, “Szczeliny istnienia”

Whereas, in his programme, Opalka employs the categories of time and repetition in forms that are “purified,” extracted from the stream of life (and running parallel to it), “Szczeliny istnienia” by Jolanta Brach-Czaina seems to be immersed in that stream without remainder. First published in 1992 and reissued twice, this small “textual hybrid” of blurred genre boundaries (essay / philosophical treatise / poetic meditation)³² has, over the years, gathered an ever-widening circle of devoted readers and commentators, eventually attaining the status of one of the most important Polish philosophical books of the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.³³

29 Cf. M. H. Zdanowicz, “The Concept and Experience of Time in Polish Conceptual Art,” in: “Art and Documentation,” no. 6 (2012), pp. 141–142.

30 A. Kępińska, “Reaching the Impossible,” in: P. Polit, P. Woźniakiewicz (eds.), “Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art. The Experience of Discourse: 1965–1975,” Warsaw 2000, p. 11.

31 Quoted in: P. Krakowski, “On New and the Newest Art,” Warsaw 1981, p. 129.

32 G. Grochowski, „Textual Hybrids. Literariness and Its Borderlands,” Toruń 2014

33 T. Stawiszyński, “Serce istnienia”, in: J. Brach-Czaina, “Szczeliny istnienia”, Warszawa 2018, p. 5.

It owes this position chiefly to an exceptional perspective on everyday life—everyday life treated on a par with the great philosophical themes, not only perceived in its “almost transparent” form, but also defined as the very essence of human experience.³⁴ The foundational character of Brach-Czaina’s text is underscored³⁵, among others, by the authors of the most significant Polish studies in the field of the “anthropology of everyday life”: Roch Sulima and Olga Drenda, whose “Duchologia polska”³⁶ served me as a kind of point of reference in my work on part of the series.

Commentators most often situate Brach-Czaina’s intellectual project within the tradition of micrology, which calls us to “subject our sensitivity to nuance to reflection, so as to remain vigilant and retain a passion for specification, and moreover to be ready to receive what seems elusive and inexpressible.”³⁷ As I have already noted, the detail—the particular, the concrete—upon which, in the author’s view, we ought to fix our attention may very well belong to our most ordinary experiences, because meaning discloses itself within existence itself; it is not a game of the intellect, nor a philosophical abstraction. Such attuned sensitivity makes it possible to perceive an almost metaphysical dimension in everyday, repetitive acts—in all those invisible trifles that, in fact, compose the course of our lives.

“The foundation of our existence is everyday life. And since we experience the fact of existing as extraordinarily important, we are seized by astonishment whenever we realize that it passes in trifles. Everydayness, forming the existential background of extraordinary events for which we wait—often in vain—may therefore decide everything. It is of a minor dimension. Of great frequency. It is unnoticeable.” (emphasis by K. Laskus-Stwora).³⁸

In the pages of *Szczeliny istnienia*, the author shows step by step how the smallest objects, actions, and events conceal themselves from us—and how they may “come alive” within the field of sustained attention: a stone, a cherry, a pile of dirty dishes, clipping one’s nails, chasing a departing bus, cleaning... For my part, I might add: the view from the kitchen window, laundry drying on the line, curbside cast-offs, the daily-passed renovation on a neighbouring street... All of these—too familiar, too repetitive, too self-evident to invite thought—seem empty, stripped of significance. Yet since it is precisely they that largely fill our experience, one might conclude that in denying them value we, in a sense, annul ourselves. Extraordinary events dominate ostentatiously: they seize us and, of their own accord, attract intensified interest. Everyday experience, by contrast, manifests itself chiefly in its ostentatious inconspicuousness. It flows from existence into non-existence, stirring no one’s attention:

“It seems that the matter consists in a cunning exploitation of our weaknesses. We do not notice slight differences, slow changes (...) We allow habit to fuse recurring events, tearing vast stretches of existential experience out of our memory. We need distance in order to make sense of anything at all, and everyday occurrences do not give us the chance to

34 T. Fazan, “Raczej istniejemy”, “Mały Format” no. 04/2018.

35 “Efekt szczeliny (ankieta literacka)”, “Mały Format” no. 04/2018.

36 O. Drenda, “Polish Hauntology: Things and People in the Years of Transformation”, Kraków 2016.

37 S. Walczewska, “The Concrete and Touch”, in: “Szum” no. 34 (2001), p. 35.

38 J. Brach-Czaina, “Cracks of Existence”, Warsaw 2018, p. 67.

view them from afar. Inattentive, half-seeing, we are not, in fact, properly equipped to maintain the lucidity of existence.”³⁹

Innumerable everyday actions; vistas brushed, at most, by an indifferent glance; minute, unnoticed differences that our memory does not retain. Reading “Szczeliny istnienia” revealed them to me as realms not only worthy of sustained attention, but also—of which I grow ever more convinced with each successive realization—worthy of being fixed, preserved in memory: for myself, and for others.⁴⁰ So that, even if only to a small extent, through my work the everyday life of Nowa Huta might cease to be a reality “condemned—and condemning us—to oblivion.”⁴¹

“Smoke” by Wayne Wang

Time, repetition, everydayness, and memory—introduced here through the great works of Roman Opalka and Jolanta Brach-Czaina (and at the same time the four principal pillars on which my own photographic project rests)—intersect and illuminate one another in a seemingly secondary thread woven into Wayne Wang’s 1995 film “Smoke.” The leading motif of this postmodern, largely “entertainment” work⁴² appears to be speech—in the sense of telling stories—which, at certain particular moments, transforms from ordinary chatter into utterance of consequence, grounded in a kind of singular “revelation.”

In this sense, critics cite Wang’s film as an example of cinema that salvages faith in reality—and those “saved” are said to be the ones who “choose to believe in that reality; those who slow down, look closely, reflect, and live through—emotionally—their contact with the world.”⁴³

This prescription can be read metaphorically from many passages of the film, yet it is voiced almost directly in one particular scene—one that, many years ago, lodged itself deep in my memory and may have inaugurated in me this way of thinking about photography, the very way whose realization is embodied in the series I present here (it should be added that the “Auggie Wren project” described below is only one of several photographic traces hidden in the script of “Smoke,” and that the film itself may, without exaggeration, be treated as “a praise of the cultural—or even culture-forming—role of photography”).⁴⁴

One evening, as one of the protagonists (Paul Benjamin—a writer) dashes into the tobacconist’s shop run by the

39 Ibid., p. 74.

40 It seems justified to recall here the dual relationship between memory and photography. Images not only generate and summon recollections. Photography is also one of the historical metaphors through which scholars have sought to grasp and describe the very phenomenon of memory: “And once again, after the passage of a century, the invention of photography brought a new, revolutionary technique for preserving images. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, when advances in photochemistry and improvements in camera design made it possible to take sharp photographs that no longer faded, treatises on memory began to employ a variety of photographic metaphors, gradually transforming the human brain into a photosensitive surface, memory into an album filled with mute photographs, and consciousness into a gallery whose walls displayed long rows of daguerreotypes and talbotypes, ambrotypes and collotypes. Until the invention of cinematography, photography remained the dominant metaphor in the para-optics of the mind” [D. Draaisma, “The Machinery of Metaphor: A History of Memory”, Warsaw 2009, p. 159].

41 J. Brach-Czaina, “Cracks of Existence”, Warsaw 2018, p. 75.

42 M. Kępna-Pieniążek, “Formulas of Spirituality in Contemporary Cinema”, Katowice 2013, p. 203.

43 J. Szyłak, “Cinema and Something More: Sketches on Postmodern American Films and Viewers’ Metaphysical Longings”, Kraków 2001, p. 24.

44 Cf. S. Sikora, “Memory: A Space in Which Events Repeat Themselves”, in: idem, “Photography—Between Document and Symbol”, Izabelin 2004, pp. 183–197. In Sławomir Sikora’s reading, the film story of Paul Benjamin begins at the very point where Roland Barthes’s story ended. Saved from stepping under the wheels of a speeding truck, Paul—in the film’s opening scene—escapes the fate that befell Barthes on 25 February 1980 on rue des Écoles. From that moment on, the screenwriter of “Smoke”, Paul Auster, “symbolically takes up the thread and tells the story once again.” The subject of this re-telling is the inextricable bond between photography, memory, and time. In “Camera Lucida” (cf. R. Barthes, “Camera Lucida”, Warsaw 2008), Barthes—confronted with a photograph of his deceased mother—speaks of the impossible-to-overcome experience of “frozen time.” In “Smoke”, Paul’s confrontation with a previously unknown photograph of his late wife (incidentally drawn from Auggie’s album) “releases time”, which begins to flow again for a protagonist until then sunk in the numb stupor of mourning. Sikora’s multi-page analysis illuminates this analogy from numerous perspectives, drawing both on Barthes’s work and on extensive references to “Smoke” as well as to the autobiographical oeuvre of its screenwriter.

other (Auggie Wren) just before closing time, a conversation unfolds between them—one that soon continues in Auggie’s apartment.

There, over beer and cigarettes, Auggie shows his guest a series of photographic albums filled with images of the intersection of Third Street and Seventh Avenue in Brooklyn:

“PB: They’re all the same.

AW: That’s right. Over four thousand shots of the corner of Third and Seventh—eight o’clock in the morning. Four thousand days, no matter the weather.

PB: Every morning at eight? I’ve never seen anything like this.

AW: It’s my project. You could call it my life’s work.

PB: Incredible. But I’m not sure I understand it. How did you come up with the idea for this project?”

AW: I don’t know. It came to me. After all, it’s my intersection. A small fragment of the world that keeps changing—like everything else. This is the album of my corner. (emphasis K. L-S)

PB: It’s a bit overwhelming.

AW: You’ll never understand it if you don’t slow down, my friend.

PB: Meaning?

AW: You’re going through them too fast—you’re barely looking.

PB: But they’re all the same!

AW: Taken in the same place, sure, but each one is different. Bright mornings and dark mornings. Summer sun and autumn sun. Weekdays and weekends. People in coats and rubber boots. In T-shirts and shorts. Sometimes the same people, sometimes different ones. Over time, different ones become the same—and the same ones disappear. The earth goes around the sun, and every day the light falls at a different angle.

PB: So I’m supposed to slow down, is that it?

AW: That’s what I’m suggesting. You know how it goes: tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow...—time moves at an even pace.

(quotation from the dialogue in the film “Smoke”, directed by Wayne Wang)

Meanwhile, on the screen, pages of the album—each filled with six photographs—are flipped through in haste, only to give way to a slow, frame-by-frame presentation in which, together with Paul, we begin to perceive those subtle yet profoundly meaningful differences that Auggie has been recording with such persistence. The lesson he offers his guest (and, indirectly, the viewer as well) seems to belong to a “pedagogy of seeing”—a mode of attention in which some philosophers discern a remedy for the increasingly oppressive character of contemporary life.

“To learn to look means to train the eye in calm, in patience, in allowing phenomena to come close—this is to educate the eye toward deep and contemplative attention, toward a long and slow gaze. **The learning of seeing is to be the first preliminary preparation for spirituality.**”⁴⁵

Under a gaze trained in this way, the vast collection—the fruit of more than a decade of consistent and disciplined work—gains the chance to elevate an otherwise inconspicuous fragment of reality to the rank of a “centre of the world”.⁴⁶

For such a transformation to be possible (and for the “lesson in seeing” offered to the viewer to succeed), the author of the collection must curb the ambition to “produce information” through the incessant “testing of the value of the photographic program.” He must therefore adopt a position opposite to the strategy described by Vilém Flusser.

“The photographic apparatus is programmed to produce photographs, and each photograph is the realisation of one of the possibilities contained in the programme of the photographic apparatus. The number of these possibilities is great, but finite: it is the number of all those photographs the apparatus can produce. One can, of course, in theory, go on photographing a single shot in the same or a similar way, but this is uninteresting for photography itself. Such images are ‘redundant’: they convey no new information and are superfluous [emphasis mine – KL-S]. In what follows we shall abstract from redundant photographs, and the concept of ‘to photograph’ will be confined to the production of informative images, although in this way the greater part of ordinary ‘snapping’ will fall outside the scope of our inquiry. With each (informative) photograph the programme of the photographic apparatus is impoverished by one possibility, while the photographic universe is enriched by one realisation. The photographer strives to exhaust the programme by realising all its possibilities. But the programme is rich and opaque, so the photographer strives to discover possibilities still unknown to him: he examines the apparatus, turns it this way

45 Byung-Chul Han, “The Burnout Society and Other Essays”, Warsaw 2022, p. 43.
46 P. Zawojcki, “Great Films of the Turn of the Century”, Kraków 2007, pp. 39–41.

and that, peers into it and looks through it. And when he looks at the world through the apparatus, it is not out of interest in the world, but because he is searching for new possibilities of producing information and for testing the value of the photographic programme. His interest is focused on the apparatus, while the world serves him only as a pretext for the realisation of the apparatus's possibilities."⁴⁷

From the vantage point of nearly twenty years, I am inclined to suspect that the passage quoted above contains one possible answer to the question of why I never carried out another, closely kindred project. In the years 2004–2006 I lived in Kraków on Lubicz Street, beside a vast construction site that was ultimately to become Galeria Krakowska—a large-scale complex of buildings that permanently altered the landscape of the city's central area. Together with my flatmate at the time, I repeatedly wondered how one might document the day-to-day progress of that construction. In our conversations, the idea of a photographic “daily record” surfaced more than once, yet we could not find either a sufficiently “attractive” form or the technical means necessary to realise it. As a result, we abandoned the idea; what remained in me was regret and a sense of incompleteness. To a considerable extent, it was precisely this that—two decades later, while photographing Aleja Róż—led me to reach for the most natural, almost self-evident conceptual and technical solutions: solutions that had earlier struck me as too simple. In this sense, the “lesson in seeing” first had to be learned by the photographer herself.

2.3 Photographic inspirations

The film image, briefly outlined in the preceding paragraphs, not only gathers into a single whole the categories introduced earlier, but also redirects this reflection toward the medium of photography—and toward photographic inspirations—without which this concise survey could not, of course, be complete.

In the first instance I must mention the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, whose practice is focused almost exclusively on architecture, and whose recognition sparked a heightened interest in the photography of inanimate objects—objects whose photographic actuality was translated into the realm of art. For over thirty years the couple photographed blast furnaces, water towers, cooling towers, headframes, gas holders, and the like. Since, in the late 1950s, they had defined the object of their attention, they not only sought out and photographed industrial structures, but also “turned them—always in the same, strictly determined manner—into sculptures or sculptural images: frontally, filling the frame, in neutral light and with unified horizon lines, and then arranging individual images into tableaux, into series, in the sense of conceptual art and Minimal art.”⁴⁸ A major distinction for their work was undoubtedly the prize awarded to them at the Venice Biennale in 1993—a prize that to this day, however, still provokes considerable controversy, since it was granted to the Bechers in the category of sculpture.⁴⁹

47 V. Flusser, *Toward a Philosophy of Photography*, Warsaw 2015, pp. 65–66.

48 W. Kemp, „History of Photography — from Daguerre to Gursky,” Kraków 2014, p. 148

49 R. Miselbeck, “Fotografia XX wieku w Museum Ludwig w Kolonii”, Kolonia 2001.

In the works they produced, the Bechers oppose the rush to seek ever-new settings; instead, they propose sustained attention to objects usually overlooked. Their photography—laconic and distanced—demonstrates that even a demonstratively impersonal view can function as a recognizable artistic signature. Faithful to the principle of the series, both the Bechers and their students adopted a strategy that excludes work with narrative moments and resists an understanding of photography in which a singular instant in time would play the dominant role (for example, the “decisive moment” as understood by Henri Cartier-Bresson).⁵⁰ It is a strategy in which “the boredom of order passes with a long gaze.”⁵¹

Another, important point of reference for my thinking about photography is a particular moment in its technological development—one that today may seem self-evident. I mean the introduction to the market, by George Eastman, of a camera intended for amateurs. The genesis of this invention is said to reach back to 1874, when the future owner of the Kodak company, planning a longed-for journey to Santo Domingo, decided to purchase photographic equipment with which he wished to preserve impressions from the expedition. A collodion-photography set, however, proved extraordinarily heavy, complicated, and dependent on specialist knowledge. This disappointing experience became the impulse for technological investigations that led to the development of a transparent, rollable film and a mechanism for advancing it—and thus to a complete change in the direction of photography’s development. When, in 1888, Kodak introduced an “amateur” camera to the market, advertised with the slogan “You push the button, we do the rest,” the new medium left the interior of the studio to—symbolically—step out into the street and cross the thresholds of ordinary homes.

From that moment photography gained the ability to record private and even intimate social situations. An excellent illustration of this new possibility are the works of Jacques Henri Lartigue. Here is a boy, fascinated by the technological novelty his father bought, pointing the lens at everyday family life. The freedom and independence afforded by the handy equipment allow him to capture the awkwardness, grotesqueness, and even absurdity of people’s behavior, who until then—on “official,” posed, mostly studio photographs—had been associated only with a superficial ideal. Solemnity, pathos, and pomposity are replaced by humor and irony. Lartigue himself becomes the embodiment of photography’s childhood, “a true primitivist”⁵²—one of those thanks to whom amateur photography becomes an integral part of the medium’s history.

This brief reference to the beginnings of amateur photography matters to me insofar as it sheds light on particular aspects of my own practice. The realisation of a photographic “daily chronicle” required from me a constant access to equipment. The pictures were made, as it were, in passing—and with three small children, who accompanied me almost continuously throughout the project, the choice of camera seemed self-evident. Opting for professional gear would have imposed an additional burden in the form of a tripod; by contrast, the camera in my phone could always be at hand, and its grid of auxiliary lines made it possible to maintain the repeatability of my framings. While using it to document the transformations of Aleja Róż, I long felt an unease

50 Cf. M. P. Markowski, “Świat jako artefakt”, in: idem, “Słońce, możliwość, radość”, Wołowiec 2010.

51 W. Kemp, “Historia fotografii – od Daguerre’a do Gursky’ego”, Kraków 2014, p. 152.

From that moment on, photography gained the capacity to preserve private—indeed, even intimate—moments of social life. A superb illustration of this new possibility can be found in the work of Jacques Henri Lartigue. Here is a boy, enthralled by a technological novelty purchased by his father, turning the lens toward the everyday life of his family. The freedom and self-reliance afforded by a handy camera allow him to capture the awkwardness, the grotesquerie, and at times even the sheer absurdity of behaviours that, in “official,” posed—largely studio—photographs, had previously been associated only with a façade-like ideal. Solemnity, pathos, and pomp yield to humour and irony. Lartigue himself becomes, in turn, the embodiment of photography’s childhood—a “true primitivist”⁵²—one of those through whom amateur photography becomes an integral part of the history of the medium.

52 K. Moore, “Jacques Henri Lartigue: The Invention of the Artist”, Gdańsk 2015, p. 163.

rooted in my awareness of the technical imperfection of these images. Yet as the project unfolded, it became clear to me that the choice of such—and not another—device is itself a kind of document: a contemporary “sign of the times” within photography as such.

Finally, I owe at least a few words to the photographers who recorded the first years after Nowa Huta’s founding. Although I encountered most of their work only while developing my own sets, it nonetheless constitutes an important context—one that expands the interpretive frame of the project I present here. Henryk Hermanowicz, Henryk Makarewicz, and Wiktor Pental (like myself—though, of course, within an altogether different historical reality) arrived in Nowa Huta from other cities and found here their own place: photographing, forming clubs, and educating subsequent adepts of their discipline.⁵³

The photographs they left behind are of considerable historical import, and of an undisputable, high artistic value. Hermanowicz—known chiefly as an outstanding photographer of architecture, landscape, and folklore—focused in Nowa Huta both on recording its construction and functioning, and on asserting his presence as the author of images documenting the ordinary, everyday lives of its residents. Makarewicz and Pental, whose restrained, thoughtful, finely composed frames from that period I sincerely admire, not only portrayed exemplary workers for the purposes of propaganda materials, but also—thanks to an extraordinary (for those times) distance and sense of humour—lifted the Nowa Huta everyday of the 1950s and 1960s beyond the rigid conventions of representations aligned with the spirit of Socialist Realism.⁵⁴

53 See A. Gryczyński, “Nowa Huta in Photography”, in: J. Kłaś, M. Wąchała-Skindzier (eds.), “Nowa Huta in Culture – Culture in Nowa Huta”, Kraków 2019, pp. 76–89.

54 See H. Makarewicz, W. Pental, “802 Percent of the Norm: The Early Years of Nowa Huta”, Kraków 2008.

I must also mention here Janusz Podlecki, who documented the transformation of the Avenue of Roses at the beginning of the 1970s, when the appearance of this place—until then filled with flowers and greenery—was altered for the next fifty years (the reconstruction began in 1970, and the famous Lenin monument was erected in 1973). When I made a photographic juxtaposition of our works, to my great surprise it turned out that we are connected not only by a similar way of framing, but also by a similar sense of obligation to document the changes unfolding here.

CHAPTER III

AUTHORIAL WORKS

Since the early 2000s, I have photographed out of a deep need to describe the world around me. Photography became for me a carrier of memory, a portal to times past, and also an instrument of creation. It is hardly surprising, then, that I came to terms with Nowa Huta in precisely this way—by photographing it incessantly. Along the way I also found an ally in the smartphone and its photographic capabilities, which I made eager use of.

Below I present selected photographic works of my own connected with Nowa Huta, created between 2003 and 2020. They point to the areas of my fascination with a place that, to an ever greater degree, was becoming close to me. These searches—seemingly ordinary, everyday notes—formed my personal “Nowa Huta collection”, founded on documenting what appears banal and “transparent” to the typical resident of the district. For me, however, it had—and continues to have—a reflective dimension; in the everyday and in the absence of spectacular “visual situations” I found the flavour of belonging to a place, as well as its *genius loci*, increasingly intriguing.

Trabant in the Sandbox, 2003

In my original intention, it was a record of a commemorative nature. With the passage of time, however—like most photographic notes of this kind—it has become an important testimony to a bygone era. The photographs document the destruction of my old Trabant: for some, a pretext for jokes, yet also a sign of my financial condition at the time. With a group of friends we wanted to take pleasure in it as— in a sense— a conscious investment; we suspected that within a few years it might acquire significance in the context of the cultural legacy of the socialist era. Unfortunately, Nowa Huta hooligans effectively made that impossible. First they snapped off the mirror, then they stole the battery. Finally, they pushed the car into a sandbox, wrecked it, and tried to set it on fire. True, I managed to restore it to a usable state—only to sell it, and, as time would show, to move out of the Centrum C estate for the next decade. “Trabant in the Sandbox” is an authentic, emotionally grounded, personal document. Yet I am convinced that, through this singular event, I also pointed—symbolically—to the mentality of a certain part of Nowa Huta’s residents at that time: a mentality that shaped the reputation of the place.

High crime rates and a low level of safety were an obvious fact there, corroborated by the relevant statistical yearbooks. For me, however, that period is associated above all with emotions and the specific aura of the estate I inhabited. The series presented here is a subjective trace of living through what is common—seemingly not extending beyond the trivial character of photographic registration.

Base, 2014

At the beginning of 2014 I made a photographic series entitled “Base”, for I had just moved to Nowa Huta for the second time. Slowly I was acclimating to a new reality, a new place of residence. I was filled with hope and

with the promise of stability. My approach to photography gained courage, and a new identity-construct began to take shape: I + Nowa Huta + the camera + my emotions + as yet indistinct intuitions as to the meaning of the records I was making.

Although the photographs depict ordinary views of urban space, in my memory they function as a kind of “bookmark”: they describe the context and backdrop of an intensely lived life, with the full weight of its good moments as well as its difficult ones. They are something deeply personal, yet—so I believe—also a universal point of reference to the existence of other inhabitants of the city. The architectural elements shown, the cars, parks, playgrounds (and even the quality of light) bear witness to that time. They hold fast what was important and new to me, even though it had already, on the surface, been encountered a decade earlier. In this set I defined the Centrum C estate as the place to which I bound my existence.

This series, comprising several works, was presented in group exhibitions:

“Structures of the City”, ZPAP Gallery in Gliwice, 2014.

“Structures of the City”, BWA (Bureau of Art Exhibitions) in Tarnów, 2014.

Concrete Monument, 2014

While working on this series—over forty shots—I assumed I would reveal the particular beauty and monumental character of Nowa Huta’s architecture: the repetition and rhythm of a certain “concrete subtlety” in the buildings and streets I photographed. I was convinced that my way of receiving this district was deeply personal. For a long time I wondered how to render that impression. I made many frames built on a strong perspectival foreshortening. I moved close to the massive structures, practically pressing myself against them, solely to emphasise their monumentality and to diminish my own significance in relation to them.

(Urban) Self-Portrait, 2016

A substantial part of my photographic practice has been (and remains) the self-portrait. This area became my safe harbour. I produced self-portraits in different emotional states—an image-record of my private life, commenting on its various existential aspects (including those bound up with a self-critical attitude toward my own appearance). At a certain point, work with the self-portrait also transformed into a cycle connected with places that had left an imprint on my biography. The collages that compose it refer to Słupsk, Poznań, Wrocław, Kraków and... Nowa Huta. Looking at these works, I trust they allow the viewer to feel my relationship with a given place. Here I juxtaposed my likeness with urban landscapes, without concealing the seams of montage; for greater expressive force I even accentuated them further.

This set, consisting of five works, was presented at the exhibitions:

“Plagiarisms – Creative Correlations K.L. and P.B.”, Arttess Gallery, Świebodzice, 2018. <https://www.zpaf.pl/aktualnosci/plagiaty-kl-pb-swiebodzice/>

“Water and Concrete”, OT Rondo Gallery in Słupsk, 2022, and online at: <https://katarzynalaskus.com/portret-miejski>;

and published in Głos Pomorski:

“On the (Un)Memory of Places”, interview conducted by Wojciech Nowak for Głos Pomorski, ISSN 0137-9526.

Place of Stay, 2016

As in “Urban Self-Portrait”, this work is a photographic document enriched by an intervention in the image’s structure. I introduced deliberate motion during shooting, attempting in this way to reproduce a disturbance of sight resulting from the overlay of what is seen in the present with the afterimages of the past.

“Place of stay”, as a subject in its own right, matters to me insofar as it refers to my early departure from the family home and the too-lengthy search for belonging to another place. It took me fifteen years. During that period I lived in many cities, and each of them, after the fact, I photographed retrospectively.

This series consists of several dozen shots. It received a distinction at the 41st Photographic Confrontations, Mała Galeria, Gorzów Wielkopolski, 2022.

It was also presented at the exhibitions:

“Water and Concrete”, 15 November 2022, OT Rondo Gallery in Słupsk, 2022.

FotoOpen, FotoArtFestiwal, Bielsko-Biała, 2019.

Parallel Worlds, Reveal II, Authorial Laboratory of Photography, Castle Gallery, Historical Museum in Lubin, 2019.

Parallel Worlds, Reveal I, Authorial Laboratory of Photography, Artress Gallery, Świebodzice, 2017.

“Place of Stay”, Wrocław City Museum, City Arsenal, Wrocław, 2017.

The series is available online at: <https://katarzynaalaskus.com/pejzaz-miejski-2>

A Nowa Huta Walk, 2017

From 2016 onward my life changed radically. My children were born, and with them came an avalanche of positive changes in my functioning on every plane. Crucially, there also appeared courage, a sense of agency, and a conviction that Nowa Huta—the place that became my home—is an interesting, historically significant, and also personally hospitable culmination of my earlier searching. I decided to focus on details, revealing a kind of morphology whose perception, I am convinced, testifies to a deeper entry into the city’s visual structure. The resulting records are simple, yet for me extraordinarily important: they became the beginning of inspirations for more extensive artistic undertakings. Looking back, I now see this set as a small but important step toward concentrating my photographic work around Nowa Huta.

The Horizontal Expanse of the Nowa Huta Reservoir, 2017

The Nowa Huta Reservoir is a family-friendly place. At first I went there on walks with my dog; later I discovered it again while strolling with my children. I photographed motifs I had not previously noticed. Although these are picturesque, aestheticising frames—repeated in many variants—I like them and value them. Today, as my children are older, we no longer walk in that direction. And perhaps here lies the greatest value of these photographs: almost without my noticing, they became a carrier of memory, preserving views that serve for me as a catalyst of recollection, unlocking access to past emotions. The images from this series remind me of the importance of the moments to which they refer.

This set comprises fifteen works; part of it is presented online at: <https://katarzynaalaskus.com/zalew-nowo-hucki063>

Curbside Giveaways (2018)

My need to document Nowa Huta runs deep. I devoted many cycles to its particular “beauty”. Yet there came a moment when I ceased to be interested in the purely aesthetic, visual aspect of the district. I began to be drawn instead to people and their stories. I therefore expanded the scope of my inquiry to include the category of the local community. The effects of this shift are visible in the first cycle of this kind that I produced.

“Curbside Giveaways” consists of photographs of unwanted things—replaced by new ones—often ending their lives at municipal dumps, and sometimes finding their way into another owner’s hands. Only in recent years has it become fashionable to adopt seemingly useless furniture, to restore it, and to put it back into circulation (a practice that is at once economic and cultural).

In my housing estate, bulky-waste collections are scheduled throughout the year. For that reason, at regular intervals, piles of old furniture appear beside the buildings—piles which, through photography, I transformed into a distinctive kind of still life. This cycle is an open collection, a photographic document of the era marked by the signs and symbols of the People’s Republic of Poland, but not only that. Contemporary Nowa Huta has regained its lustre: it is attractive, “hipster”, and no longer dependent on the centre of Kraków. New shopfronts, new faces, new orders. Yet this situation also produces stereotypical “nouveau-riche” behaviours among those participating in transformations under the banner of financial success—a success that customarily compels the replacement of the old with the new.

Once, Nowa Huta was a point of departure for thousands of people migrating (mainly from villages adjacent to Kraków) in search of a better life. Today, those people are increasingly rare: the old Nowa Huta residents—my neighbours—for whom the district’s original assumptions (uniformity, repetition, predictability) still seem to guarantee stability. But it is not only they who seek stability here. People several decades younger—ready to work and to start families—also search for it, migrating from the centre to the outskirts in order to begin a new life among their “own décor”. Hence the permanent, colourful curbside giveaways: blooming, makeshift furniture storerooms in front of stairwells, vanishing as quickly as they appear—taken either by the garbage truck or by enthusiasts of PRL-era design.

“Curbside Giveaways” is a photographic archive of the signs of change I have described above. This set relates directly to the residents of Nowa Huta’s housing estates: to how they think about their place, about new beginnings, about the fulfilment of dreams. In fact, I myself behaved similarly. On the day I signed the purchase agreement for my flat, I asked the previous owner to empty it completely. Only afterwards did I realise that I had disposed of several truly valuable PRL-era pieces of furniture.

I present “Curbside Giveaways” in full on my website:

www.katarzynaalaskus.com

Nowa Huta Destruction (2019–2020)

From the perspective of entropy—understood both literally and metaphorically—Nowa Huta undergoes destruction through irreversible processes arising from the cycle of passing away. The series “Nowa Huta Destruction” symbolically points to the fragility of matter as such, paradoxically in order to indicate the transience and brittleness of Nowa Huta’s concrete. The core of this work is a set of several photographs severely dam-

aged in their material layer, printed on cardboard—an exceptionally fragile and delicate support.

Once again, passing and the flow of time move to the foreground. This time, however, I approached the process from another angle. I decided to assume the role of observer and documentarian, but also of someone who initiates certain processes. To that end, I planned a sequence of specific actions. For two years I worked with photographs printed on cardboard sheets measuring 100 × 70 cm, which I fixed to an outdoor wall, watching with curiosity the prolonged impact of weather conditions as they gradually altered their appearance. To this day I remember the unease that accompanied me—an almost metaphysical fear that I was, in a ruthless manner, documenting disappearance itself.

Although the process has ended and one could say that it resulted in a work, the work continues to advance in its degradation; the process, though at a different tempo, remains open. When I decided to remove the cardboard from the wall—because, in my view, a certain stage had been completed—I was overtaken by a sense of emptiness and the futility of the two-year undertaking. The ruined, torn boards—largely stripped of their image layer, soaked through, inhabited by ants and snails—I cleaned carefully, dried, and secured. I registered a sign of time: in the form of degraded cardboard and the city images carried upon it. Conceptually, what mattered most was the degradation not only of the material objects themselves, but also of their image—an effect that, for me, symbolically intensifies the message.

This series was presented at the following exhibitions:

Fear (1), “Za Szafą” Gallery, Wrocław, 2022 – group exhibition

Fear (2), Kontrast Small Photography Gallery, Oborniki Śląskie, 2023 – group exhibition

Fear (3), Centre for Creative Activities, Lubin, 2023 – group exhibition

“Water and Concrete”, OT Rondo Gallery, Słupsk, 2022

and on my website at:

<https://katarzynaalaskus.com/destrukcja-nowohucka>

Lockdown (2020)

The year 2020, not only for me, was filled with new experiences—psychologically and physically exhausting. It was not only I who was put to the test of survival at that time. This series shows how Nowa Huta “fell silent” during the COVID lockdown. I noticed that many small businesses were being shut down. To this day, most of them have not recovered from that crisis. What remained were their small kiosks—decaying monuments to the years 2020/2021. “Lockdown”, a set of 30 images, is my private, modest contribution to documenting a difficult time experienced by Nowa Huta, as by the entire country and the world.

This series is presented on my website at:

<https://katarzynaalaskus.com/nbp---nowohucki-biznes-plajtuje-covid-19>

Golden Nowa Huta (2022)

At times I want to fulfil myself artistically by working with the matter of photography—its physical, material side. In the act of transforming it, I forget that it is a digital record. I savour its physicality: the contact with the surface, the glue, the imitation gold leaf. Photographic collages emerge, in which creation intertwines with testimony, ultimately producing a value grounded in a variation of media. I consider this practice important to

my “meditation” on a place that has, for many years, tangibly defined the existence of my family and myself.

This series was presented as an individual exhibition:

“Water and Concrete”, OT Rondo Gallery, Słupsk, 2022

A Walk Across the Rooftops (2022)

Above all, I am fascinated by Nowa Huta as it is—without unnecessary embellishment or aestheticising. I search for a perspective appropriate to my sensibility and my mode of narration. The district’s monumentality sets in motion a gallop of ideas worth pursuing. One of them was to look at the city from the vantage point of rooftops. Today, thanks to the possibilities created by drones equipped with cameras, this kind of photographic challenge can seem almost alien. I, however, in a “classical” manner, decided to take several walks across Nowa Huta’s roofs, so as to inscribe into the photographs—not only the image, but also the emotions bound up with the uniqueness of such an experience. And, at the same time, to see my place on earth from this perspective, ordinarily inaccessible.

This set was presented at author events:

“Concrete Mama, Concrete!”, Dom Utopii – International Centre of Empathy, Kraków, June 2023

“Concrete Mama, Concrete!”, Cepelin, KluboKsięgarnia, Słupsk, August 2023

“Concrete Mama, Concrete!”, screening during the Autorskie Laboratorium Fotografii plein-air in Przesieka, September 2023

Laundry Lines (2023)

In watching Nowa Huta—patiently, insistently, in detail—I have come to notice many subjects worthy of registration. One of them is as prosaic an activity as doing the laundry. What strikes me, and what seems to transgress the boundaries of good taste, is the public drying of washing. Passing by, I feel embarrassed. I often change my route so as not to become a victim of underpants spread wide and sheets billowing in the wind. On the one hand, it is slightly improper; on the other, it is disarmingly natural. I observe these “installations” with curiosity and photograph each encounter with meticulous care.

The architects and builders of Nowa Huta forgot about balconies. The housing estates have, quite literally, only a handful—whoever owns one may consider themselves lucky. Some residents use drying rooms located in uncomfortable basements; most, however, hang laundry on lines strung between the blocks. When I photograph underwear fluttering in the wind, I am often seized by fear and uncertainty: am I trespassing into someone’s intimacy? Laundry belongs to the intimate sphere; it also says a great deal about one’s material circumstances. I do not, of course, judge the quality of the garments on display, though at times I find myself wondering to what extent this is a purely routine act, and to what extent the person hanging out the washing has first made a quiet “selection.”

Photographing drying laundry is “silent,” as if it did not exist. The photographer becomes a voyeur, and there is something perverse in that: in photographing, I cross a thin line, hoping to remain unseen. Most of all, I like to photograph curtains and sheets as they enter into an interaction with the wind...

I am deeply moved by the photographs Henryk Makarewicz and Wiktor Pental made during the years when

Nowa Huta was coming into being. With painstaking care, they recorded the mingling of everyday life and the ethos of construction—showing, among other things, courtyards of newly built estates with laundry lines and cows in the background. I study these details with fascination, searching for meanings that matter. With their images before my eyes, I felt all the more encouraged to register frames that seem lifted from the city's earlier daily life. Nothing has changed over the years: we all do laundry; we all undertake the same efforts toward a more comfortable life, work, leisure, development. In different ways, we seek the fulfillment of our existence.

A Street from Nowa Huta (2022)

This idea grew out of my encounter with Eustachy Kossakowski's series *6 Metres from Paris*, in which he photographed all entrances to and exits from the French capital. In doing so, he drew attention to the significance of the everyday landscape—so easily missed amid the city's din. Naturalistic frames, stripped of aesthetic “distinctions,” are perhaps the truest—if, in a sense, unintended—objective record of reality. Like Paris, Nowa Huta deserves every attempt at description. I have made many photographs of this kind, and more are underway.

The series—currently comprising 30 photographs—has been presented at author talks:

“Concrete Mama, Concrete!” Dom Utopii – International Centre of Empathy, Kraków, June 2023

“Concrete Mama, Concrete!” Cepelin, club-bookshop, Słupsk, August 2023

“Concrete Mama, Concrete!” screening as part of the Autorskie Laboratorium Fotografii plein-air workshop in Przesieka, September 2023

Youth Series (2022–2023)

I have been working—and continue to work—on many Nowa Huta series in parallel. I also developed sketches for artists' books. This process was sometimes accompanied by a group of young people (at the School of Polygraphic and Media Arts in Kraków I teach a set of subjects related to photographic technique and technology, and to the aesthetics of photography), to whom I explained—using my own practice—what long-term projects consist of. I tried to convince them that the key to success is calmness and trust: in oneself, but also in the people one meets along the way. Several students from this group agreed to take part in a shared project. I invited them to photograph the estates adjacent to Aleja Róż (Centrum C and Centrum B), which introduced a conscious photographic action: the students photographed the entrance gates to the estates.

In photographing Nowa Huta together, what pleased me most was the personal gaze of my students—their decisions about the meaningfulness of one way of seeing rather than another. The resulting works are an important supplement to my own story about Nowa Huta. This form of artistic dialogue with young people enriches my understanding of the city and—so I hope—does the same for them.

Portrait of a Nowa Huta Dog (2023–2024)

This warm, deeply personal series was made by my seven-year-old daughter, Anika. She undertook it for two reasons: on the one hand, she wanted time alone with me (these were photographic walks of mother and daughter); on the other, she was filled with pride and joy at the thought that a publication would include her photographs—something that remains important to her and gives her great happiness.

This is the last—the sixteenth—series I decided to include in this study. Its subject matter, method, and the

sense of its messages have strengthened my conviction that photographing Nowa Huta has grown into an essential need: a kind of obsession, a way of thinking, seeing, and continuously recording this place. I therefore recognized that my work to date has brought me to the point where a doctoral project can be realized within documentary photography with an autobiographical emphasis. The proposed project directly links to my earlier experiences of documenting Nowa Huta, extending them in a searching, exploratory way.

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCTORAL PROJECT “I AM FROM HUTA”

The quintessence of the project is the doctoral exhibition, composed of the following elements:

1. **Introduction**
2. **The Daily Journal** — a series of 365 photographs made during the renovation works along Aleja Róż (description of the action in the text, p. 94)
3. **Views from the Window** — a series of several dozen photographs, an open-ended project (description of the action, p. 102)
4. **Alternative forms of authorial publication**
 - newspaper pastiche
 - sketchbooks
5. **Spatial objects**
 - mosaic cubes
 - a telephone
6. **Photographs**
 - “Enough”
 - “A Nowa Huta Portrait”
 - “Nowa Huta Stereoscopic”

In the further part of this study, I present brief authorial commentaries describing each of the six components of the exhibition.

(1) INTRODUCTION

A kind of prologue to the exhibition is a compendium of selected works connected with Nowa Huta, presented in the form of a book that includes the individual series discussed in Chapter III. In my view, this makes it easier to introduce the viewer appropriately to the subsequent parts of the project.

(2) THE DAILY JOURNAL

(stop-motion animation, multimedia projection, enlargements, book)

The Daily Journal is the principal backbone of my project. Its core is a record of a process extended in time: the modernization—what I call the “de-concreting”—of Aleja Róż, as mentioned in the Introduction (p. 5). I began documenting on 11 September 2022 and, as planned, for 270 days (the duration of the reconstruction) I made a record every single day. It became my habit and, after some time, an uncompromising necessity, bringing me a sense of satisfaction derived from sustained, consistent action. After the reconstruction was completed, I decided to continue registering the site for a further three months, in order to document the new situation in which the local community was finding its footing.

In total, I made 365 identically framed shots of the same place. A grid was set on the display; I used two intersection points of that grid to align the buildings. Photographing from a fixed location was not difficult, because it was determined by counting seventeen steps from the left curb of the parking area by Aleja Róż. After a few weeks I no longer needed to count—I could see the frame and knew I was standing in the right place. Thanks to the permanently designated spot from which I photographed, and to the auxiliary grid lines on the screen, the repeatability of the frame was easy to achieve.

I treated everything that appeared in the space between me and the construction site with meticulous care. Light, weather, unintended artefacts entering the frame, passers-by—none of this posed a problem. These were the unpredictable elements of my registrations. I accepted this compilation of variables as added value. Because of it, the series becomes more compelling, and the individual photographs, with their own poetics, invite an analysis of the changes that occurred. From the resulting images I assembled a stop-motion animation. Because I photographed without a tripod permanently mounted in one place, the animation does not match the precision of a time-lapse⁵⁵—which initially unsettled me. In time, however, I stopped worrying and accepted the work as it could be made under the conditions available to me. I took most of the photographs on my way back from kindergarten with three children, and I was therefore unable to refine an “ideal” frame: I always had to keep an eye not only on Aleja Róż, but also on three exceptionally energetic and inventive young people. The sounds accompanying the animation—the construction site’s soundscape—are the authentic noises of the work being carried out along Aleja Róż.

A few separate sentences are warranted here as a commentary on The Daily Journal, in relation to the question of time inscribed within the project. Over the centuries, the problem of time has gradually entered the orbit of almost all the humanities and social sciences—from philosophy, through anthropology, cultural studies, and psychology, to sociology. Both the content and the form of my photographic daily journal, as I see it, open be-

55 Photographs taken at a fixed time and within a fixed frame, often later assembled into a stop-motion film. This idea operates across almost every creative field: it is not dedicated solely to street photography, but also appears in documentary and conceptual practices. See Tom Ryaboi—creator of time-lapse films devoted to the life and pulse of cities. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnDknAdAWz0&t=50s>.

fore the viewer at least three interwoven interpretive paths connected with the category of time and temporality. First, one may attend to the nature of the changes I photographed as they unfolded in shared space, and relate this observation to the category of “social time.” In sociological research, social time is not quantitative but qualitative (intervals equal in quantity are not equal in quality). Its system of measures is non-uniform, and its tempo and periods are marked by critical dates.⁵⁶ Each community orders time according to its own reference points—generations, the reigns of rulers, years of plenty, wars, and so on.⁵⁷ In this light, the reconstruction of Aleja Róż may appear as a critical date for the Nowa Huta community gathered around this place. A radical transformation in space can indeed function as a boundary marker, dividing the timeline into “before” and “after,” together with the qualities that belong to each of these segments.

In the next instance, one is drawn to reflect on the form of the “Daily Log” itself—indeed, to attempt an answer to the question of what this form may communicate to the viewer about time and temporality. In my view, its consistency and repetition stand in open counterpoint to the contemporary “acceleration trap,” which Wiesław Sztumski describes as follows:

“The contemporary world resembles a moving treadmill on which people run at a deranged pace, while it slips ever faster from beneath their feet. The speed of life is determined by the velocity of that treadmill; it can be increased still further by technical progress. Already many people are unable to keep up with the rising tempo of life, despite their best intentions and enormous efforts. Whoever does not take part in this frenzied run drops out of circulation, is excluded, and loses the chance to survive. Our capacities to adapt to the galloping pace of life are becoming exhausted. Technology cannot help us much here. Our ability to accelerate bodily and intellectual activities is severely limited. Despite considerable support from technical means and the replacement of our organs by various kinds of prostheses, we cannot cope with the present tempo of life and the lack of time. Both of these mean that we live in escalating stress.”⁵⁸

This inability to master time affects individuals in a disorienting manner and disrupts their sense of order in reality.⁵⁹ Threatened are not only the intervals of “before” and “after,” but even “here” and “now.” The next moment arrives instantaneously and does not allow the preceding one to settle into the duration of its own being.⁶⁰ Time slips beyond ordinary temporal frames, intensifying both individual and collective feelings of anxiety and uncertainty...

Considered in this light, the project in question “restores” to everyday life its natural rhythm of time, wrenching it from the tyranny of immediacy. Change does not occur in the blink of an eye; it unfolds day after day, frame after frame—at a pace that makes it possible to notice minute transformations and to grow accustomed to them. It is also worth noting the ambiguous orientation of the “arrow of time” which, in the case of the “Diary,” does not (in a certain sense) point to a strictly one-way passing bound up with rising entropy,⁶¹ because the passage

56 E. Tarkowska, “Time in Society: Problems, Traditions, Research Directions”, Wrocław 1987, p. 125.

57 T. Banaszczyk, “Time as a Social Category”, Wrocław–Warsaw–Kraków 1981, pp. 26–30.

58 W. Sztumski, „Turbo-world, the Trap of Acceleration and the Ecology of Time,” in: K. Popiołek, A. Chudzicka-Czupała (eds.), *Time in Human Life*, Katowice 2010, p. 35.

59 J. Kopka, „Mental Health and the Temporal Dimension of Social Life,” *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Sociologica* 2013, no. 45, p. 198.

60 T. H. Eriksen, “Tyrania chwili”, Warszawa 2003, pp. 11–12.

61 Por. P. Komorowski, “Consciousness of Time and Its Essence” Critical text for the exhibition

of time is associated here not only with the emergence of a new quality but—interestingly as well—with a return to assumptions once abandoned in the past, as though a new branch had grown from the trunk of time, upon which Aleja Róż blossoms once again, just as it did fifty years ago.

A vital complement to this part of the project is the book “Concrete, Mom, Concrete”—a collection of photographic narratives devoted to individual events connected with the redevelopment. With the support of Kraków’s Municipal Greenery Authority (Zarząd Zieleni Miejskiej), I was able to print 1,000 copies of the book—conceived as a story about people and for people. Any interested person could receive a copy free of charge.

(3) VIEWS FROM THE WINDOW

photographs

An important set that binds together the main strands of the work is the multimedia presentation “Views from the Window.” In a symbolic gesture, I move from the outside world into the hush of domestic space—into interiors to which I was invited by the residents of Nowa Huta. Apartment doors opened before me so that I could encounter an intimate perspective on the city: the city seen through the eyes of those who live there. In this way, I speak—indirectly—about these people, these families, my neighbours, who are part of my story.

I suffer from a compulsive “peeking.” It is a condition that likely affects most urban communities. Walking through the estates on winter evenings, I drink in the glow of warm light spilling from windows. I try to decipher the residents’ unspoken conversations. I like to notice the authenticity of domestic spaces—the harmless mess, the everyday disorder. No one is performing a role. I become a witness to authenticity. But to look through a window from the other side, from within, requires time and trust. For an outsider, access to these views is limited. Each photograph that captures a view from a window is my small trophy—proof that I have “won” that view. Because before the photograph could exist, I had to persuade the owner of a given home to invite me inside. And that usually was not easy.

While interpreting the symbolism of the window, I discovered in myself a need for friendship, closeness, and belonging to the local community. Once I understood this, I felt an urgency to show the perspectives from which my nearer and more distant neighbours look at Nowa Huta. I realised I wanted to show the view from Mrs Krystyna’s window, Mr Franek’s window, just as much as the view from my own living-room window. Each of them is saturated with the residents’ personal narratives—and with my emotions: the emotions of an invited guest, a watcher. I am fascinated by the “awareness of possession,” by the momentary ownership of a view that is not mine. Through it I become a participant in a private space that does not belong to me—a space made up of countless “views from windows” existing in the world.

Every day I look out of the window to check the weather. I do it absent-mindedly, automatically. I do not think about the beauty or ugliness of the view itself, but about what I should dress my children in so they won’t be cold. I suspect everyone functions in a similar way. In the rush of daily life we do not reflect on the repetition or monotony that surrounds us. And in this way—incidentally, without noticing—we lose sensitivity to a uniquely privileged insight into reality.

In the presented animation I show several dozen views from the windows of apartments in the “old” Nowa Huta. The underlying aim is to present window views from apartments across all Nowa Huta estates: to learn the district’s specificity from multiple vantage points. But also to feel, in a sense, like a universal resident of many homes—through a synthetic glance at many such views, which testify to difference and singularity, and above all to the intimacy of inhabited domestic spaces. They testify as well to the variety of viewpoints on an ostensibly uniform and universal reality—yet one that is, nonetheless, “seen” in many different ways.

(4) ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF AUTHORIAL PUBLICATION

- **newspaper (pastiche)**

The newspaper is a deliberately chosen, pastiche-like format that references what used to be the primary mode of communication. It serves as a way of presenting a compilation of the series I have produced. In this edition, private cycles intertwine with those created for the doctoral project. They are accompanied by a suitable personal narrative in the form of a light commentary.

- **sketchbooks**

The sketchbooks are the part of the work that emerged the fastest. Here I was not concerned with quality, but solely with the concept of the realization. Thanks to them, the overall shape of my work gradually began to take form. They are scribbled over, torn... and immensely important. Everything is in them. They are my memory and documentation of the process.

Another kind of sketchbook is a look at Aleja Róż from the perspective of a resident who wants to show this place in the broadest possible context. Within this project I focused on producing a series of carefully composed, high-resolution black-and-white photographs. It is a kind of walk, during which the viewer can observe the urban space with exceptional precision, discovering its details step by step. This form of documentation was made possible by a precise approach to photographing, preceded by setting specific technical parameters such as tripod height, exposure time, and lens focal length. The set of photographs is presented as a twelve-metre ribbon—a sequence that takes the form of a monumental installation in the exhibition space.

In addition, the project aimed to capture not only the physical structure of Aleja Róż, but also its atmosphere and the emotional charge it carries for the local community. Each photograph was taken with the intention of holding onto a moment that might slip away in everyday haste. With this approach, the viewer has a chance to notice nuances that usually remain unseen. The accordion-like form of presentation encourages interaction—the viewer can decide the pace of viewing and the direction of interpretation. The whole becomes not only an urban documentation, but also a personal commentary on a space that shapes the identity of its residents.

(5) OBJECTS

- **mosaic cubes**

After a few months of construction work, I befriended the builders. They accepted me and my camera. They agreed to my presence and to what I was doing. One day I asked a worker laying the mosaic for two paving

cubes—one white and one red. I wanted to keep them as a souvenir. He didn't just hand them over. He offered to choose the nicest ones. It took him a good few minutes. Finally, clearly pleased with his selection, he brought me those two. I suppose he wanted them to be special, because by then he already knew that what I was doing mattered to me. He treated me seriously and with understanding. Although these two elements are modest, for me personally they are especially meaningful. They transport the viewer directly onto the construction site.

- phone

My personal phone—the one I used to make the “Codziennik” series—is a fairly modern smartphone, and therefore not entirely an “attractive” object. Yet it will gain a different kind of value over time. I am sure of that, which is why I include it in the exhibition.

(6) PHOTOGRAPHS

- **“Enough”**

print on canvas and bookbinding board

Moving on to the next series, I need to emphasize that it relates to Nowa Huta only insofar as my home was physically located there at the time. For three months, due to personal issues, I felt trapped in that place. What I was fighting for was outside Nowa Huta—and yet also within it. I shared that traumatic period with this place, and it received my condition and, I am certain, has inscribed it within itself forever as a testimony to an important, though difficult, time in my life. The presented series of photographs records changes taking place in my body and mind.

The first image is evidence of fear and helplessness, while the last is resignation. These photographs, seemingly at odds with the earlier ones, give my work a personal resonance. Looking through them, I feel relief and joy that I am already somewhere else.

The title “Enough” signals that my life had gone far beyond my comfort zone. I was “pushed to the wall.” Turning in circles, terrified and alone, I was searching for a way out. I made this series of self-portraits over the course of a dozen or so days. It was a time in which I was getting used to the situation that had occurred. Each individual portrait is a record of all the emotions of that day. I made it in the evening, in silence and calm, after putting the children to bed. The eyes symbolize faith and hope, the search for help, peace, and a resolution to a tangled situation. With each day, hope evaporated from them, giving way to disappointment. Photographically, this cycle is important because it is authentic. There is no acting, no creation. It is a pure, documentary record. The part printed on board was then subjected to a six-month exposure to all weather conditions. I hung it on a wall in the garden and left it. After half a year, I returned for the finished record, which literally and truthfully shows my “scars”—a map of the catastrophes of my life.

- **“Nowa Huta Portrait”**
(print on paper)

I realize this work goes beyond the main core of the project described in the “Codziennik,” but I believe it is important to show what is happening now, contemporarily, on what used to be a construction site. In a way, I am still continuing this set to this day. My family life weaves between the quiet of home and the courtyard

spaces of our housing estates. After the “de-concreting” of Aleja Róż, we use this place a little differently, although we still ride bikes and scooters there, sometimes we play ball. But we always, without exception, take a photo from our family photographic spot. The “Codziennik” viewpoint became a symbolic studio. This work was meant to satisfy my need to photograph while preserving the original frame that matters to me. Its essence is the recurring view of Aleja Róż, which I photograph in many ways. Continuously and without conflict, I merge family with photography. These are my two equally important worlds. In this set, however, the dominant accent is always Aleja Róż. It is Her portrait that seems most essential. I treat Her as a subject. Everyone photographed should feel distinguished, able to pose against Her backdrop (the portrayed are usually people with whom I am connected in some way).

- **“Nowa Huta Stereoscopic”**

To present this series, I used a table where up to six people can sit. Each person has a pair of stereoscopic glasses, can choose photographs, read their descriptions, and adjust the glasses to their eyesight. I mounted the photographs on boards and provided appropriate captions. For a long time I wondered what tool I could use to bind all my cycles together. Even though they are generally coherent, I wanted to put the final “dot over the i” in a special way. The answer came on its own when I became interested in the secrets of stereoscopic photography—suddenly there was the possibility of yet another alternative plane of expression for content that matters to me.

The technique and logic of this kind of photography guided me on their own, and I—calmly, with intuitive trust—let myself be pulled completely into the magic of stereoscopic depiction of the world. My intention was not to create a Nowa Huta stereoscopic salon, but to draw on its idea.⁶² Stereoscopic photography in the Holmes⁶³ format allowed me to achieve a “magical” representation of Nowa Huta. Depending on perspective and personal sensitivity, the viewer can create their own temporal interpretation here (in fact, the photographs were made in 2023–2024). Stereoscopic photography, because it is analog photography made using old cameras, has a particular, unforgeable image quality. It is easy to find references here to the street photoplasticon, and to say that, through it, I wanted to “solve the problem of getting to know” Nowa Huta.⁶⁴

Many frames were produced. Unfortunately, learning this technique as I went, I made mistakes, and as a result many pairs “didn’t stand up”⁶⁵ (even so, these photographs have their own unique dimension and function in my work as analog miniatures, 10 × 10 cm). In this part I combined multiple methods of acquiring and processing images, relying mainly on analog photography; I noticed that I felt a particular satisfaction while working on this part of the project when using analog light-sensitive materials and photochemical processing. I often repeat in my work that it doesn’t matter to me what I photograph with. And generally, that is true. Nevertheless, this time I undertook an attempt to make photographs using a technique that has delighted viewers since the 1850s. Working on this set required me to combine analog photography with digital image processing, as

62 Por. etos Fotoplastykonu.

63 https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Wendell_Holmes_Sr.

64 K. Olkusz, „Fotoplastikon Augusta Fuhrmanna”, Brochure of the Museum of Cinematography, December 2017. Here I am referring to Fuhrmann’s promotional slogan: “With the Imperial Panorama, you will solve the problem of discovering the world!”

65 When describing the effect of a stereoscopic photograph, one often says that the image has “come to life,” meaning the 3D effect has appeared (KL-S)

well as manual elements related to the mounting and finishing of the photographs. “Nowa Huta Stereoscopic” is built from many components that I made myself or with the help of bookbinders. Numerous stereoscopic diptychs were created, glued according to strictly defined rules onto 3 mm boards.

Compared to the earlier series, this one is exceptionally involving—and that is what makes it unique. The mode of viewing and the kind of contact with this type of photography also deserve special attention. The stereoscopic viewers, by covering the temples, cut the recipient off from external stimuli. In this way they generate a specific intimacy, a heightened focus of attention, and concentration. In addition, I aim here to emphasize and bring out the spatiality of Nowa Huta—a spatiality that cannot be achieved by presenting a classic, monoscopic image. (Stereoscopic photography is complex in terms of acquiring images and presenting photographs, and even when executed correctly it may happen that not everyone will be able to perceive the 3D images.⁶⁶)

This set turned out to be the culmination of my work. It requires engagement from the viewer and a willingness to participate. This, in turn, creates an interaction which, in my view, influences the reception of the work as a whole. Using stereoscopic photography, I created further Nowa Huta frames that directly refer to earlier realizations (e.g., “Trabant in the Sandbox,” “Urban (Auto)Portrait,” “Nowa Huta Walk”). I tried to allude to them, to find contexts, and in a few places I attempted to recreate the framing. This intensified the sense of complementarity between old and new cycles. The story was closed. But also, thanks to the three-dimensionality, I gave my earlier works—both literally and metaphorically—a certain added value.

In the years 2022–2024, a vast body of commemorative photography was created—a reliable carrier of memory. Therefore, the artistic part of my work is built from many photographic cycles, coherent and gently interwoven with the city’s noise or the sounds of domestic quiet (in the form of soundtracks complementing the multimedia presentations).

66 Not everyone perceives 3D images in the same way. Individuals with various vision impairments—such as low visual acuity, astigmatism, or differences in sharpness between the eyes—may struggle to experience the 3D effect. Even when the technique of creation and presentation is flawless, some people will still be unable to perceive depth because their brains interpret visual information differently. Certain conditions, including forms of stereoscopic vision disorder, can further hinder the perception of 3D imagery, sometimes leading to discomfort or headaches. (KL S)

SUMMARY

The process of photographing was structured, yet dynamic. I experienced a range of emotions stemming from a broad spectrum of themes that seemed important. I was also disciplined by limited time. Everything I present is contained within strict time frames, because the changes taking place are clear and visible.

In my project I sought to emphasize two equally important intentions: documentary and creative. Both should be read in relation to the photographic recording of the “de-concreting” of Aleja Róż—one of the main arteries of Nowa Huta.

In developing my project, I consistently aimed to obtain evidence of changes in the form of the city’s public space. The impulse for my activity in this area was the creation of the photographic series, books, and sketches described above. I also made sure to secure unique objects used in carrying out the project’s assumptions (i.e., the phone I photographed with, cubes from the newly laid mosaic, and an acoustic record of the renovation—the sounds of machines, hammers, conversations, ambient noise, etc.).

I took several tens of thousands of photographs as a detailed record of the most recent transformation affecting a fragment of my city. The result is a photographic document—a chronicle of events—intended to provide a direct record of discomfort, stress, hard work, noisy machines, metal fencing, and other elements of the surroundings that are not visible at first glance. It is a raw chronicle, without additional narration, presenting a record of the inconveniences that disappeared from residents’ sight once the redevelopment ended. In the blink of an eye, the local community stopped talking about discomfort and began finding its way in the changed reality. Many people I encountered by chance, who viewed my photographic records, openly appreciated them as a non-obvious, unexpected, yet important record. Each individual photograph is a separate record/document of the passage of time and of the builders’ particular, creative activity. In addition, I documented the process of searching for solutions prompted by the then-present discomfort—showing how people coped with the construction obstacles they coexisted with for just under a year.

A subtle but crucial element of my work was its ultimate dimension: an artistic reality built upon the essence of an urban and architectural transformation of a fragment of the city. I assumed that the act of photographing reality itself is already an artistic gesture—an action that goes beyond pure documentation. Aware of both aspects, I encourage the viewer to form their own interpretation, because every interpretation is valid.

The core of the project can be seen in the “Daily Log”—a cycle of 365 photographs taken by me day after day, describing the entire process, complex both logistically and in construction terms. I see the idea, meaning, and purpose of this action in continuous documentation carried out every day in the form of the same frame. On the surface it was a monotonous, unspectacular activity; however, as a complete work presented in book form as well as in a multimedia screening, it contains a clear concept based, on the one hand, on a factual situational record, and on the other, on an engagement with the essence of time—condensed into 365 frames—which synthetically depicts and makes palpable the category of passing. In this case, passing is marked with a positive sign—as growth, progress, a kind of “reverse entropy”—which is extremely important to me. Both the redevelopment itself and my photographic undertakings focused around it form a sequence of positive, and often even joyful, moments. Beyond the awareness of making important records, I also entered into deep relationships with all the parties involved in the redevelopment of Aleja Róż—from city administration officials,

through workers carrying out the basic tasks, to employees of the Municipal Greenery Authority. A record of collective, social engagement emerged. With a deep conviction about the importance of preserving their images, I decided to make portraits of the people involved in the Nowa Huta redevelopment—from activists, through architects and workers, to “ordinary” city residents. It mattered to me that the portraits would allow full identification of the people depicted—by first and last name and function. I managed to photograph 40 people directly involved in the redevelopment.

I was also personally interested in the very process of “taming” the people I photographed—people who were convinced that I appeared at the construction site to produce a pejorative report and create photographic evidence of mistakes and shortcomings in their work. This situation, however, lasted only a short time. Thanks to my persistence and daily presence on the construction site, I managed to earn their trust and acceptance. When they learned what the photographs were really about—obtaining their portraits for a book commemorating the major change of Aleja Róż—they could not believe they might be included. I saw how surprising it was for them to be asked to pose. It was hard for them to believe that someone considered them important subjects of the whole undertaking. After several days of reflection, most ultimately agreed. Later they asked me whether the book would really be made, and if so, when. At first the idea of working with such a diverse group of people filled me with uncertainty. In hindsight, despite significant stress and several obstacles, I am convinced the idea was justified. With full awareness, I can assess my action as important—at least for the Nowa Huta community. I feel great satisfaction from the fact that my daily presence on the construction site and the emotional connection I formed with the builders made them aware of the ethical dimension of their work. It linked them to this place in a way that went beyond an employment relationship, fostering the conviction that what they do matters in itself—as a useful action desired by the local community. In a sense, their work echoed the former work ethos that held a special status in Nowa Huta. I omit here any political references connected with the history of the Polish People’s Republic, because the builders of Nowa Huta pursued above all their life ambitions and had no direct influence on the ideological premises intertwined with the large-scale project in which they participated. Yet they must have had an almost certain intuition that they were taking part in an undertaking of enormous impact.

Today, in a reality of extreme commercialization of work and its strongly mercantile context, pointing out and reinforcing its moral meaning (as a good serving others) seems to me something significant and much needed. In recent years, awareness of social coexistence within a given space has noticeably weakened. Yet I believe civic consolidation around shared values should not be treated as an outdated utopia; on the contrary, it should emerge as the only path toward building a sensible future for subsequent generations. The micro-scale action I describe above is a model situation of a shift in awareness—necessary to change mentality toward perceiving the common good as a value in itself, as important as the pursuit of individual goals. I have the impression that through my work I managed to draw the attention of some people employed around the redevelopment of Aleja Róż to the issues mentioned above. I want to emphasize that the undertaking described here would not have been possible without collective cooperation, to which I invited, among others, Małgorzata Szymczyk-Karnasiewicz—an activist and the originator of the de-concreting of Aleja Róż—who enabled me to realize all

my project assumptions.

In 2023, on the occasion of opening Aleja Róż for public use, the Municipal Greenery Authority proposed that I produce an album publication about my activities around the construction works. The 100-page book I mentioned earlier was published in an edition of 1,000 copies, contributing to the city's historical archive. At the same time, its production became tangible proof of the collective effort of the team involved in the re-development—received enthusiastically by its members. For me, it confirmed the sense of my photographic records. I felt—crucially for me—that I had become a subject of the community, permanently grounded in its local structure.

By documenting Nowa Huta, I simultaneously tell the story of my own life, preserving the image of both. An important, though background, thread is therefore autobiographical: the context and placement of myself within family life and the Nowa Huta reality. My family and Nowa Huta are my parallel worlds. My family—able to live with calm and understanding and to find value in my artistic actions—not only accepts my fascination with Nowa Huta, but also actively participates in documenting it. Therefore, my project could not omit autobiographical sets built from family or authorial photographs. I dared to undertake such an action in the hope that, beyond constituting my own existence within the field of Nowa Huta's influence, I would also touch on universal values and allow viewers to find personal backgrounds for their own experiences. The first impulse for my Nowa Huta photographs was the district's monumentalism. With time I have learned that this impression was temporary and I no longer perceive it that way. I have become accustomed to its style, often of Socialist Realist provenance, and it no longer affects me as it once did. Subsequent actions—self-portraits—are not necessarily treated by me as pure documentation. In them I satisfy my longings, fears, and frustrations. I speak of placing myself in a new space; and by creating self-portraits, I document the process of searching for a sense of belonging to a place.

The goal I set at the beginning of work on the doctoral set was focused on self-portraiture. In my original concept, I assumed that personal and family threads would dominate, forming a coherent narrative in the shape of a photographic record, treated by me as a carrier of memory. What I wanted to record or remember was indeed thematically connected with Nowa Huta, but I approached it in a deeply personal way. The initial premise was a “Diary for the Future,” which was meant to consist of photographic observations about my life, the lives of my loved ones, and the place where our shared existence unfolds. This kind of description of Nowa Huta would therefore have been a beautiful family undertaking, in which neighbourhood events would be narrated solely through a narrowed, intimate perspective. I did not expect that I would ultimately construct a book that would become a significant testimony for the local community and that would enter the space of an institutionalized cultural archive. Yet as I deepened my photographic actions and continuously observed the sets as they emerged, I noticed that subsequent realizations were increasingly enriched with universal content. The greatest surprise for me, however, was the combination of calm and “greed” in imaging Nowa Huta's changes. I quickly understood that shifting the emphasis from the personal to the social was both desired and entirely appropriate here.

The intimate thread thus moved to the background in thematic terms, yet it never became unimportant within the overall creative process. My immediate family co-participated in the making of subsequent sets, and the intention to describe the world around us as reliably as possible was also meant to co-create our own intimate, family archive. My children and husband, actively engaged in my undertaking, helped me discover further important themes. This most personal, intimate dimension of my work, unfortunately, came to completion on its own.

The sudden and incomprehensible death of my husband underscored the essence of the whole undertaking as a record of our time together. It was then that I understood the project was complete and closed.

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