



Illustration: Natalia Kulka

Epic Fail

About Two Photographic Projects

Weronika Lipszyc

Abstract: The paper discusses images of failure in Polish photography created in 1970–2000, drawing on three particular projects: *Archeology of Photography* by Jerzy Lewczyński and the exhibitions *The New Documentalists* (2006) and *Postdocument: Missing Documents: Documents of the Polish Transformation After 1989* (2012). As such, it concentrates on documentary, or post-documentary, photography which suffers no illusions as to the mimetic power of the medium, but persists in hoping that photos can have social impact.

As the analyzed projects aim to create a critical picture of reality, they focus on spaces and people subject to exclusion and on the experience of failure (e.g., *Unfinished Houses* by Konrad Pustoła and Wojciech Wilczyk's *There's No Such Thing as an Innocent Eye*), as well as on the erosion of interpersonal relations (e.g., Aneta Grzeszykowska's *Album*). Disappointments stemming from both the socialist reality and Polish capitalism mix with the desire to find and preserve what is intimate and authentic.

The discussed artists devote the majority of their attention to the problem of photography as a medium and its ability to generate social change. However, they remain fully aware of the fact that the very nature of the photographic image, with its media entanglements, makes it difficult to create an unadulterated reflection of reality; it also makes it difficult to accept anything that does not fit the visual poetics of success, anything old, damaged, *démodé*, or kitschy. Accordingly, the artists raise important questions about the rules for creating images in the photographic universe and about the possibility of transcending them to create a new type of document, one that would elude the rules of "dominant images" (a term first coined by Rafał Drozdowski), and to enable such a use of photography as was postulated by John Berger: rooted in personal experience and memory.

Keywords: photography; document; archive; Jerzy Lewczyński; New Documentalists; archeology of photography

Archeology and Document

The rhetoric of victory and failure is an inextricable part of the photographic discourse. According to a number of pundits,¹ photography was, and still is, a technique for fixing the visual in time providing the greatest degree of authenticity and thus offering the perfect medium for direct, material transfer of three-dimensional reality onto a two-dimensional image. The belief in a direct correlation between the representation and the represented object still sets photography apart from other iconic texts, and deconstructing this correlation requires considerable effort. This, naturally, pertains much more to analog photography than its digital counterpart, as the latter allows for an incomparably greater level of control over the appearance of the final picture, which can ultimately strip the medium of its credibility and lead to its failure. The ethics of manipulating the digital image continue to be a point of contention for many theorists of photography (see: Barrett, 2020, pp. 20–27). The problem seems all the more vital given the fact that photographs are used to capture not just the private but the public, too, and can be harnessed to serve a variety of political and economic interests. They are also a part of the global iconosphere, which enables us to interrogate their status in the context of authorship, property rights, and responsibility for the image. All of these issues are interlaced and intertwined within the artistic and curatorial efforts describes in this essay. Questions concerning the authenticity of the photographic image, its relationship to individual experience and social reality make up specific visions of photography as a key medium of exchanging information and value: that of an archaeological find and of a document.

The first project this essay will probe into is Jerzy Lewczyński's *archeology of photography*, a late-1970s artistic initiative that involved the collection, modification, and display of photographs, both old and new, taken by Lewczyński himself and by others. The second project involves the concept of the *New Document*, best expressed by two group exhibitions curated by Adam Mazur: *The New Documentalists* and *Postdocument: Missing Documents: Documents of the Polish Transformation After 1989*.² While both projects presumed the social impact of photography, the ambitions of the New Documentalists were both similar to Lewczyński's efforts and considerably different in a number of areas. The concepts included in the titles of both undertakings warrant particular

1 "One of the most widespread stereotypes about photography is the belief that it can capture an objective picture of visible reality" (Stiegler, 2009, p. 144). See bibliography cited therein. See also: Barrett, 2020, particularly pp. 14–23. The question of the equivalency between objects and images is a key issue that Roland Barthes interrogated in his *Camera Lucida*. Cf. "In Photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric" (Barthes, 1982, p. 78), "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent" (Barthes, 1982, p. 80).

2 *The New Documentalists* were unveiled in 2006, and *Postdocument: Missing Documents: Documents of the Polish Transformation After 1989* in 2012; both exhibitions were held at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw. See: Mazur, 2006; Mazur, 2012b. The original Polish title of the latter exhibition featured the phrase *Świat nieprzedstawiony* (*The World Not Represented*, the title of an influential collection of essays by Adam Zagajewski and Julian Kornhauser) rather than *Missing Documents*.

attention, as they reveal their organizers' reading of photography and their expectations toward its meaning and impact. Archeology and documentation are both underpinned by the urge to uncover knowledge of the past from the traces left in material culture. But where archeology is primarily focused on these rudiments, unearthed and meticulously preserved, documentation may adopt a similar lens but does not have to; at times, it serves purely as a medium for knowledge about something extrinsic to itself, at which point its materiality loses significance. A document suggests some sort of connection with the issuing institution or author, to whom it owns its authenticity and effectiveness; it may also lose its relevance. Meanwhile, once introduced into the museum system, an archeological find keeps its status forever.

The two projects in question could also be examined through the lens of an archive, itself a term related to both archeology and document. While archive is etymologically related to archeology,³ the concept itself is actually closer to documentation – after all, an archive denotes a collection of documents, writings, or records pulled from everyday circulation but meriting preservation (potentially to be used as *evidence*, should such a need arise). As a mode of collecting and producing knowledge, an archive may also imply failure.⁴ Bernd Stiegler notes that “the archive is not just a place used for storage, it is also the site of forgetting, of erasing from memory, of disappearing” (Stiegler, 2009, p. 21). In his critique of the “archive fever”, the undue preoccupation with large-scale documentation projects characteristic of contemporary art, Andrzej Leśniak observes that archives, by definition a part of the industry of memory, preclude the emergence of counternarratives, and thus tend to become monuments rather than sources of genuine historical knowledge (Leśniak, 2013, pp. 70ff.). This might also be a good point to bring up Susan Sontag's interrogation of the ethical value of photography. The theorist points out that the meaning of photography is often produced only by its attendant commentary, which erodes the power of the image itself (Sontag, 2005, pp. 17–18). The above remarks seem to subvert the factual, documentary character of photography collections and, *ipso facto*, indicate that any undertaking based upon them is inevitably doomed to failure.

The projects discussed herein define, albeit differently, the medium of photography and its relationship to reality. Both are total in character, and as such destined to fail (but it is a failure of projects based on photographic archives, not of photography itself). Although heading toward an inevitable fiasco, the artists do succeed in certain respects.

3 “Archeology” and “archive” both derive from the Greek *archē*, meaning “*ur*-substance” or “first principle”; they are related to the possibility of accessing the ultimate sense, the essence of the meaning. But while an archive stores knowledge, its material medium notwithstanding, in an archeologist's collection, the material nature of an object is paramount, an extension of the *archē*.

4 The issue of the archive as a strategy employed in contemporary art has been discussed, among other places, in *Kultura Współczesna* 2011, no. 4: “Return to the Archive”; see the comprehensive bibliography of the subject therein.

Total Archeology

Jerzy Lewczyński, one of the most renowned and respected Polish photographers working in the second half of the twentieth century, declared:

“Archeology of photography” involves efforts aimed at discovering, exploring, and discussing events, facts, and situations that took place in the so-called photographic past. The continuity of visual contact with the past that photography enables allows to amplify the impact of the culture-forming strata on the present day. (Lewczyński, 2005, p. 7)

This conception of archeology was based on the collection, preservation, and display of photographs, taken by both professionals and amateurs. The first sentence from the passage quoted above has been adopted as a motto by the Archeology of Photography Foundation, established in Warsaw in 2008 to collect photographs and set up photography archives, promote knowledge about the collections, as well as about the means of preserving, describing, and sharing them – all of which the man who inspired it believed an essential part of his artistic labor.⁵ His collection efforts have been successfully continued by the Foundation. Lewczyński, however, was neither a curator nor a cultural worker but a photographer first and foremost, thus his archivist project (which grew into an institution only a couple years before his death) was inextricably linked with his artistic practice. Due to the specific and many-avenued nature of the work of the man behind the *Portrait Found in the Street*, his archeology of photography itself extended far beyond just the collection of photographs.

The work of Jerzy Lewczyński usually brings up connotations with documentary photography, capturing the unadorned reality of his time, and indeed, the majority of his pictures could be classified as such. Lewczyński interpreted the documentary nature of photography rather traditionally – as material proof of the veracity of a particular visual impression. The Gliwice-based artist believed that pictures, especially old ones that depicted a world no longer there, enabled us to establish genuine, material contact with the bygone. He wrote,

It seems to me that photographs convey a much broader spectrum of traces of the past than just the representation of bygone reality. [...] perhaps photographs of individual eras contain vestiges of metamatter that come alive with the slightest surge of remembrance or emotion. (Lewczyński, 2001, p. 4)

This metaphysical vision recasts Lewczyński as the Grand Archivist,⁶ a madman-collector. He was maniacal about gathering photos: his own, his family's, other people's,

⁵ See: <https://faf.org.pl>

⁶ The term was first used by Olga Ptak (Ptak, 2012, p. 23). Her small collection of memoirs and observations about the artist (published two years before his death) provides more insight into Lewczyński-as-photographer than dozens of introductions to catalogues or analytical essays ever could – perhaps because it portrays him as he was, flaws and all. Such an approach seems most fitting for an artist whose life and work are bound so closely together; who, in his own words, made photography his life. See Lewczyński, 1980.

taken by known and unknown authors, prints and negatives, collected alongside a variety of other documents: letters, press clippings, postcards, catalogues, pamphlets, poems, etc., as well as objects of everyday use and mementos. He asserted: “No [...] photograph is unneeded, failed!” (Lewczyński, 2005, p. 9). The photographer believed every picture important, precious, necessary, as each one was proof of existence of humans, the natural world, or objects. Analyzing the work of the Gliwice artist, Wojciech Nowicki brought up the idea first put forward by another photographer, Mariusz Hermanowicz, who suggested all camera owners take a picture at the same time, creating the fullest and truest photographic record of that particular moment. “This total record – and its result, the total archive – will haunt Lewczyński, as well” (Nowicki, 2012, p. 13).⁷

Lewczyński's work was by no means limited to taking and exhibiting photos. He was known to borrow from other people's works, make use of reproductions, and create collages.⁸ Having come across pictures of indeterminate authorship, the photographer did not just preserve them. He collected photos found on the streets, mislaid in the drawers of his friends, forgotten in the attics of old houses and put them on display. Lewczyński also used the negatives he stumbled upon (his 1971 *Tryptych znaleziony na strychu* [Tryptych Found in the Attic] was the first effort of the kind), developing them into prints and exhibiting them – under his own name but with a footnote explaining that he did not take the photo. He often sought to find as much about the original author or the person in the picture as possible. One of his more famous pieces, the 1971 *Nysa, nasze powiększenie* [Nysa, Our Close-Up], was a collage based around Władysław Rękasowski's amateur photograph of repatriates from the east arriving at the train station in Nysa in 1945. From the broader scene, Lewczyński picked a handful of individuals or groups and overlaid the picture with their close-ups – creating something akin to art albums' detailed portrayals of artworks, with individual details blown up for closer inspection. Rescaling the print and replicating its parts ultimately split the photograph into separate narratives revolving around selected individuals. Lewczyński applied a similar strategy, involving reproduction, resizing, fragmentation or recontextualization, in the processing of his own pictures. The collages also made use of press clippings, passages from literary works, and postcards (examples include the 1968 piece *Dzieciństwo* [Childhood] and *Drzwi* [Door] from 1970).⁹

The totality of Lewczyński's intention derives from the fact that the archive he was designing theoretically ought to encompass every photographic image, in all possible

7 “‘There's no documentation’, says Jerzy Lewczyński repeatedly, with a measure of reproach, to anyone who can, ought to, must photograph. This is what the man is like, an apostle, an evangelist, a photographic pusher” (Nowicki, 2012, p. 15). For a discussion of the problem of the archive in the work of Jerzy Lewczyński, see Pijarski, 2011a.

8 For a discussion of different strategies of authorship manifest in the work of Jerzy Lewczyński, see Lipszyc, 2015.

9 Pictures found by Lewczyński were featured at a variety of exhibitions dedicated to his work since the 1970s, including *Fotografowie poszukujący* [The Searching Photographers] (The Contemporary Gallery in Warsaw, 1971). The 2012 exhibition of the photographer's works at the National Museum in Krakow, *Jerzy Lewczyński: Memory of the Image*, was promoted using his 1970 picture *Portrait Found in the Street*, which, as Olga Ptak points out, is likely his best known work (Ptak, 2012, p. 88).

variants and configurations. His belief in a material link between the representation and the represented object precluded the artist from discarding anything – every picture merited the same respect as the person it portrayed, the person who owned it or as much as had any emotional relationship with what it depicted. His *found photography* projects are prime examples of the exceptional significance Lewczyński assigned to the “life” of photos. The photographer believed that the pictures he came across could have been someone’s cherished, tragically lost possessions. Thus, preserving them from ruin and, most importantly, presenting them for public consumption offered the original owner the opportunity to recover a treasured item, possibly even locate persons believed lost?¹⁰ The extent of his devotion to these personal documents is evident in his decision to reproduce both sides of the exhibited pictures, as even their verso could contain key information, such as dates, dedications, notes, or even smudged or wrinkles, testifying to the mode and duration of their storage, frequent usage, or deterioration due to carelessness. Because the photographer ascribed importance to the picture as a definite object and not just the *signifiant* of the image, his collection grew *ad infinitum*, impossible to arrange in any orderly fashion, into an archive as defined above. By blending iconophilia with a belief in the value of photography as an object, the photographer behind *Negatyw znalezione na ulicy* managed, in an era before the Internet, to create and solve the problem brought about by the surfeit of images reproduced by technical means. He achieved this by wholly rejecting the question of the original or simulacrum nature of photography. He freely used pictures taken by others, as well as copies of his own works, which he believed equal to the originals. All of them were genuine, alive, and emanating their own distinct aura.¹¹

Discussing the myriad visual modes of representing reality that preceded the emergence of photography (including panoramic paintings, Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg’s *Eidophusikon*, opened in 1781, or Étienne-Gaspard Robertson’s phantasmagoria shows from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries), Andrzej Pienkoś mentions their “absoluteness”, their irresistible realism; the sights they conjured “pretended to be reality itself, stripped of any medium” (Pieńkos, 2012, p. 63).¹² These images, almost more authentic than the world around them, Pieńkos dubbed “secular *acheiropoietai*” (Pieńkos, 2012, p. 63). The term *acheiropoietai* refers to images produced without human intervention, such as the impression of Christ’s face on the veil held by Saint Veronica (*veraikon*).¹³ The material presence of the divine prompting the creation of the image presupposes not just its value as a holy relic but also the absolute realism of the representation. To eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences, using technical means to

10 Lewczyński was born in 1924 and this belief was undoubtedly rooted in his experience of World War II. See Ptak, 2012, p. 75.

11 See Benjamin’s remarks on the aura of photographs: Benjamin, 1972, pp. 18ff.

12 For a history of inventions meant for capturing and fixing images, see “Ciemna izba w historii sztuki. Od *camera obscura* do lustrzanki” [The Darkened Room in the History of Art: From the *Camera Obscura* to the Reflex Camera], in: Brauchitsch, 2004.

13 See the entry for “Vera ikon” in Stiegler, 2009, p. 244.

produce a representation was the ultimate proof of its authenticity. Devices like the *camera obscura* or assorted *laternae magicae* amplified the efforts of the artist with mechanical perfection, to create works of art almost surpassing reality itself. The conviction that a representation crafted in such a manner could be perfectly identical to the captured object was rooted both in the trust universally placed in machines and in the belief in the metaphysics of presence mediated by light. As a technique of fixing a still image by means of light, photography was the object of that belief along with other kinds of secular *acheiropoietai*.

Lewczyński approached every single photographic image with similar piety. Without a clear line between the physical and the representation, between creation and interpretation, every picture was genuine, authentic. This might be a good place to bring up Charles Sanders Peirce's assertion that the thought does not exist outside of the sign, ergo everything we think and see could be considered a sign. Peirce, who conceived the sign as having a triadic structure, did not abide by the signified–signifier distinction; in different signs, each leg of his triad could serve different functions. This, in turn, means that the semiotic chains are not linear, but networked, and can grow more or less limitlessly (Peirce, 1992, pp. 23–24).¹⁴ Lewczyński's work resembled this kind of limitless semiosis: each picture (or its element) could reappear in his other work, often in wholly different contexts, create new linkages, multiply meanings. The latest configuration did not erase its predecessors, and new interpretations did not invalidate earlier ones. Hence the unwillingness to discard any picture whatsoever – each one marked a key stage in the series of transformations, or merely awaited its own place, its own constellation, its own story. As the strange alchemy of serendipity played a key part in putting individual elements together, the only reasonable strategy was to keep all pictures, associations, and interpretations always at the ready. Consequently, Lewczyński's grand project could never come to an end – and go on forever.

In his essay “*Porządek i chaos*”: *Retoryka patrzenia* [“Order and Chaos”: The Rhetoric of Looking] (Rusinek, 2012), Michał Rusinek points out how differently chaotic and ordered collections are organized in rhetorical terms: order is based on the figure of *distributio*, whereas chaos relies on *enumeratio*. While both cases allow for basically infinite introduction of new items, in ordered collections the items are placed in precisely defined locations; the logic of disorder, meanwhile, allows for the appending of new elements, but precludes the imposition of any sort of structure on the collection. An archive ought to be organized by the logic of distribution; ought to fix objects in their designated fields. Lewczyński's collection neither was nor could be like that, if only because of the repetition of individual elements. “I thought I would be able to breathe a little order

14 Stiegler interrogates photography as it relates to the category of the trace (a concept of photography developed by Roland Barthes and Philippe Dubois). “Photography becomes a trace of the past, but a trace which, like in the typology devised by Charles Sanders Peirce – one of the few philosophers who dealt with the theory of photography – can be read as an index. Peirce would later combine within this single concept both photography and animal tracks left behind in the snow or mud” (Stiegler, 2009, p. 224).

into the whole thing, but that didn't happen. I was going to arrange it by topic: architecture, events, the Photographic Society – but then how would I classify those pictures that fell under more than one of these? Then I tried to arrange them by dates, it didn't work out, either”, the artist confessed to Wojciech Nowicki (Nowicki, 2012, p. 39).¹⁵ The sheer totality of project undertaken by the author of *Portrait Found in the Street* meant its own failure – although Lewczyński succeeded in incorporating a finite number of pictures in his collection, it still has proven impossible to organize, examine, or even control. In this sense, *archeology of photography* ended in failure – the collected materials, themselves only a fraction of what the artist wanted to preserve, eluded classification and interrogation, and thus refused to become an archive: a total, comprehensive picture of reality. The collection itself, however, remained very much alive: Lewczyński kept discovering new contexts, remembering important details, telling stories related to the objects, and the objects grew each time, incorporating the reactions of audiences or new associations that came to the photographer's mind. His *archeology of photography also transformed space itself*: over time, Lewczyński's apartment in Gliwice grew into a sort of inhabited archive, resembling Edward Krasiński's apartment-slash-studio (see *Instytut Awangardy*, n.d.), eventually becoming a networked text – a site of events, a subject of stories, and backdrop for pictures and movies. The strategies employed by the artist turned out to be so successful that his works are still used to this day in the production of meanings.¹⁶

Total (New) Document

The work of Jerzy Lewczyński and the efforts of the New Documentalists share a number of theoretical-slash-artistic and institutional connections.¹⁷ First and fore-

15 On the Sisyphean attempts to organize the document collection, see also Ptak, 2012, pp. 22ff., 95ff. Cf.: “On the desk and all around it, he kept a sizable collection of paperclips, rubber bands, staples, tacks, strings, glues, tapes, pencils, rulers, triangles, and other office supplies that helped with the archiving. If he could, he probably would have archived everything; given access to a larger apartment, he likely would have converted it into storage space for the growing collection, seeing that in its current state it already took up two of the four rooms” (Ptak, 2012, p. 23).

16 One example can be found in the exhibition *Playing the Archive* – organized as part of the Living Archives project – which included a showcase of works selected by Krzysztof Pijarski from Lewczyński's collection: J. Lewczyński / K. Pijarski, *Gra w archiwum* [Playing the Archive] (Archeology of Photography Foundation / Asymetria Gallery, June 17–July 31, 2011), see *LUFT Email Marketing – Gra w archiwum*, n.d., and K. Pijarski, *JL – KP*, 2011, a film produced for the *Playing the Archive* exhibition (Pijarski, 2011c).

17 Adam Mazur and Krzysztof Pijarski sit on the board of the Archeology of Photography Foundation. Lewczyński's work makes up a key portion of the Foundation's online database; major events organized by the Foundation include the aforementioned *Playing the Archive* exhibition, which proposed a new reading of the collection and the work of Jerzy Lewczyński, as well as *Antiphotographs*, held at the Arsenal Gallery in Poznań and curated by Adam Mazur (see Mazur, 2007), its title referring to *Pokaz zamknięty* [Closed Presentation], a famous 1959 show organized by Lewczyński, alongside Zdzisław Beksiński and Bronisław Schlabs. At the show, the Gliwice photographer displayed two series with three pictures each, as well as a number of assorted photographs arranged loosely on a table to encourage collective interpretation. Some of the photographs had already been shown elsewhere, but their configurations were new. Beksiński's showcase was similar in character, featuring

most, however, the two share a belief in photography as an instrument for changing reality and a proclivity toward using photographic archives in artistic practices. The assumption that photos hold value regardless of their content might also be seen as a potential linkage between the two. Writing in the catalogue of the 2006 exhibition *The New Documentalists*, its curator Adam Mazur sought to define the phenomenon, which he associated with the “documentary turn” in Polish photography, believed to have happened somewhere around the year 2000.¹⁸ Mazur argued that these New Documentalists were Benjaminian producers “[...] searching out and documenting fragments of reality that virtually anyone could photograph and record, but in end no one does” (Mazur, 2006, p. 8). And indeed, both the exhibition and the catalogue featured photographs portraying diverse yet ordinary sights, a potential common denominator for Lewczyński and the New Documentalists. The latter, however, aimed to develop *a new mode of seeing*, which Marek Grygiel described as “the focus on and elevation of all that which, being marginal in everyday life, in their interpretation becomes the main reference point for our existence” (Mazur, 2006, p. 28). Here, however, that exaltation is hard to find, unless we consider putting photographs up for display an ennoblement of scenes from everyday lives. At the exhibition, Igor Omulecki’s *Album* (2004), featuring pictures from his family’s archives, including his childhood photos, was displayed alongside Aneta Grzeszykowska’s *Album* (2005), comprising pictures from which the author scrubbed her own visage. Przemysław Pokrycki’s series *Ślub* [Wedding] (2004–2005), *Chrzcziny* [Baptism] (2005–2006), and *Komunia* [First Communion] (2005–2006), exploring events that were private, intimate, and yet still embedded in the fabric of social life, were complemented by Anna Bedyńska’s 2005 *Męski poród* [Male Birth], a photographic account of the male experience of childbirth. In *Polskie drogi* [Polish Roads] (2004–2005), Igor Przybylski captured old cars and buses, as well as the eponymous roads he journeyed down in search of new objects to photograph. Passions and leisure pursuits were the subject of Andrzej Kramarz and Weronika Łodzińska’s *Hobbyści* [Hobbyists] (2005), which documented the interiors of hobbyist homes. For the exhibition, the cu-

a number of photo collages with single-word captions, while Schlabs displayed his more abstract compositions produced through manual intervention into film negatives. The event itself was structured in a very peculiar way: after the twenty-five invited guests (including photographers, critics, and even psychiatrists) arrived at the opening of the exhibition (on June 20, 1959), they were tasked with interpreting the showcased works live, on the spot. The three artists also participated in the discussions, which were an integral part of the event. *Closed Presentation* caused quite a stir, and the overall reactions of the critics are well illustrated by a review penned by Alfred Ligocki, who called Beksiński and Lewczyński’s work “[...] an attack against the very foundations of the art of photography, the concept of the artistic value of a singular artwork, the criteria of individual artistic expression, and the very concept of authorship itself” (Ligocki, 1959). The extreme reactions were prompted primarily by the specific arrangement of the works on display, in which individual artworks were stripped of autonomy and the attendant artistic intention was questioned and undermined. The term “antiphotography”, which Ligocki used in his review, was eventually adopted as an alternative title for the exhibition and later used to describe Lewczyński’s particular photographic practice, which involved “pulling” pictures with established meanings from albums and recontextualizing them. See Sobota, 1993, p. 12. The circumstances outlined above seem to identify Lewczyński as the primary inspiration and spiritual predecessor of the New Documentalists.

18 The title was a reference to the exhibition *New Documents*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1967 (curated by John Szarkowski). See Mazur, 2012a, pp. 22ff.

rator compiled a collection of pictures of everyday life, enthralling in its banality, surprising in its repetitiveness.

Most of the photographs on display at the exhibition captured ordinary, everyday life – and the very fact that these mundane events were noticed and recorded ought to be considered significant. The work of the New Documentalists, however, aims beyond that, and the divergence marks the major difference between archeology and document. The latter usually appears regarding, with respect to, on behalf of. Krzysztof Pijarski has observed that even an unremarkable documentary record is capable of reshaping the field of visual information: “[...] it is our intention to raise the archive as an issue, interrogate it as a construct teeming with political implications rather than a neutral and ‘natural’ source, a site offering authentic access to past events, narratives, and truths” (Śwircz & Pijarski, n.d., see Pijarski, 2011b). The project also involves a depiction of the visual reality that the general flow of information tends to pass over, as well as stressing its social and political aspects. From all this emerges a critical project that has little to do with elevating the margins of everyday life and seems instead more of an unpleasant (albeit important) duty. Adam Mazur noted that “the recording and reproduction of media pathos-free images of reality has a lot in common with the tedious, unspectacular work of the archivist” (Mazur, 2006, p. 15).

Mazur first declared the critical (or maybe even “post-critical”¹⁹) and interventionist aims of documentary photography already in 2006, asserting that the capitalist system in Poland was based on a fictional spectacle that deflected attention away from genuine problems. “A simple²⁰ documentary recording exposes this illusion, revealing before the viewer the desolate landscape of the Real”, the author claimed (Mazur, 2006, p. 8). Such a framing clearly establishes the intended domain of artistic action. At its core, the *New Documentalists* exhibition was supposed to shed light on “reality-structuring inequality” (Mazur, 2006, p. 8), primarily by way of identifying specific sites of exclusion, be it social, economic, or (perhaps most of all) taking the form of asymmetric access to information and visibility. Hence, a sort of aporia seems to underpin the projects of the New Documentalists: intending, on the one hand, to capture visual reality without constraints or rules, they also seek to practice social interventionism on the other. And while the 2006 exhibition has managed to maintain a delicate balance between the two, the 2012 show was too precise about defining its area of interest, an opinion shared by many critics, myself included. To quote the authors themselves, *Postdocument: Missing Documents: Documents of the Polish Transformation After 1989* is an

exhibition of photography from the period of systemic transformation, one seen through the eyes of domestic and foreign photographers as incomplete and full of tension. [...] [The ar-

19 See <http://csw.art.pl/ns/2006/dokumentalisci.htm>, accessed 29.09.2016.

20 As this designation reveals, Adam Mazur believed that the “simple documentary recording”, entirely different from the media spectacle, ultimately situated itself on the side of the truth – naked, pure, and “natural”, cf. the statement from Krzysztof Pijarski above.

tists] show a country subsumed in an economic, social, and cultural crisis, seeking its identity between real-socialism and turbo-capitalism. (*Missing documents*, n.d.)

The clear delineation of the exhibition's ideological objectives acknowledges the failure of the earlier project (or at least the artists' dissatisfaction with the end result).²¹ I find myself agreeing with Lidia Pańków's assertion that

Although the photographic series authored by Kramarz, Wilczyk or Tomaszewski are quite striking on their own, that impact is diluted when they are displayed alongside one another. Promoted as a critique of neoliberalism and draped in obnoxious commentary about a world repressed, they swiftly grow vexing. (Pańków, 2012)

The shift in course is evinced by the subtitle of the other exhibition and a higher proportion of images pertaining to the public rather than the private sphere; ultimately, it would seem that the more traditional documentary pictures of the Gdańsk Shipyard taken by Chris Niedenthal or Michał Szlaga are simply more compelling than the plain documentary record of reality, one "that anyone could photograph or capture".

A notable example of New Documentalist opinions on the purposes of photography can be found in the commentary penned by Wojciech Wilczyk to Andrzej Ślusarczyk's album *Wałbrzych – powidoki* [Wałbrzych – Afterimages] (Ślusarczyk, 2010), an account of the metamorphoses undergone by the landscape and the industrial infrastructure in Silesia. The album, comprising 103 black-and-white uncaptioned photos taken between 1974 and 2010, would, in Wilczyk's view, have been an excellent dossier on the transformation "if only the layout of the book and the portrayal of the source material had been subjected to greater narrative discipline" (Wilczyk, 2013, p. 223). In a note attached to the album, Ślusarczyk openly declares: "I have embraced the position of witness". "It's high time we changed that", replies Wilczyk (Wilczyk, 2013, p. 255). The "change" in question pertains not just to the position of the photographer but to social reality, as well. The author notes that in Poland, artistic documentary projects and photo essays "usually avoid going beyond run-of-the-mill 'witness' testimony, which essentially boils down to the statement 'This is how it was'" (Wilczyk, 2013, p. 225). What is striking here is the disapproval for randomness of the form of photographic capture, considerably limiting the creative freedom of the artist. Wilczyk reserved similar judgment for Wojciech Zawadzki's 1997 series *My America*²² (the review was first published in the same issue of *Fotografia* that featured the curator's statement for *Postdocument: Missing Documents*, thus it can be considered part of the battle for the New Document). Commenting on the incorrect (meaning, non-critical) portrayal of Jelenia Góra and its vicinity (not only by Zawadzki, but other artists, too), Wilczyk concludes:

21 This may also be corroborated by Adam Mazur's curatorial statement, in which he almost explains himself over the first exhibition, describing it as "a provocation produced at breakneck pace" (Mazur, 2012b, p. 137). The 2012 exhibition, meanwhile, is described as "expanding the battlefield over the *New Documentalists* [...]" (Mazur, 2012b, p. 139).

22 W. Zawadzki, *Moja Ameryka*, BWA Jelenia Góra, September 19–October 16, 2003. See *Wojciech Zawadzki – Moja Ameryka*, 2003.

Briefly put, there is plenty of material to photograph around there, but most of the photographers in the area continue to view the local reality through a filter of long-assimilated, unintimidating visual traditions, which tend to blunt the edge of the documentary record by referring the audience to the unspecified past of a faux archive. (Wilczyk, 2012)²³

The allegations of aesthetic regressiveness put forward by Wilczyk, which according to him belied the message of the photographs, suggest that he knows the truth of reality and knows what means ought to be used in order to best capture and communicate it. He situates the New Document, which he contrasts with “faux archives” in his closing paragraphs, on the only (aesthetically and ideologically) correct position.

Given the burden of the task placed upon photography by the New Documentalists, any doubt as to its authenticity is cause for legitimate concern. This derives primarily from an approach to the photographic medium different from Lewczyński's, one that sees it more as a digital simulacrum than a trace of material reality. The realization of how easy it is to manipulate images, undermining any faith in their genuineness, blends with the fear over media-related circumstances of their functioning. The problem is further exacerbated by the relationship between photographers and commercial institutions, which exploit pictures in the pursuit of goals that stand in stark contrast to the postulates behind the *new mode of seeing*. The New Documentalists are artists who

don't intend to oppose it [the apparatus – W. L.]²⁴ with abstract artistic production, but instead adopt the strategy of over-identification, that enables them to trick the soulless mechanism and change the rules of its functioning from within. (Mazur, 2006, p. 16)

This Machiavellian (or Wallenrodian) plan, however, must necessarily breed some doubt in the authors as to their position and the credibility of their artistic expression; this also ties in with their contradictory expectations toward art paradigms according to which they would like to function. On the one hand, the New Documentalists would prefer to preserve their autonomy, distancing themselves from the problem of the increasingly commercialized iconosphere, the gradual supplanting of professional photography by its amateur counterpart, and the blurring of the line between the artist and the producer. On the other hand, they would still like to engage in the art of social revolution. Magda Pustoła observes:

In this new configuration, retaining one's awareness and subjectivity isn't solely a protest, based on intellectual analysis of the social realities, against economic exploitation. This is not a sense of solidarity with the proletariat or even cognitariat that the author experiences in recognition of his or her position as producer in the structure of the relations of production. This is a fight for life. (Mazur, 2006, p. 47)

23 The same issue also includes a bitter retort from his adversary: Zawadzki, 2012.

24 For more on the term “apparatus”, see Flusser, 1983, pp. 21–32.

Here, however, economic injustice is not a marginal issue, especially in light of the artists' increasing tendency to see themselves as being on the receiving end of that injustice. In his commentary to Konrad Pustoła's *Widoki władzy / Views of Power*, a 2011 project which featured Pustoła photographing the views stretching from the windows of institutions wielding political, economic, and symbolic power, Maciej Gdula observed that it was the cultural workers that had the worst views (Pustoła, 2011, p. 9). Thus, the failure of photography is not only epistemological or ideological, but also economic and reputational. Even worse, the New Documentalists fail not just at the media spectacle they were supposed to contest and deconstruct, but they also come to naught with their own project – as soon as they realize their own precarity, they are precluded from heeding the Benjaminian imperative of speaking on behalf of the proletariat (Benjamin, 2003, p. 85). At the same time, cognizant of the asymmetry of visibility, they cannot take advantage of their privileged position.

Two Failures, One Greater Than the Other

As I have mentioned above, documentary photography operates primarily in two domains: preserving the present as it moves into the past and interceding to identify problems of modernity. Both purposes compel authors to turn toward images of broadly defined failure or missed opportunity. The pictures of the New Documentalists often show deteriorating spaces: environmental degradation and decaying industrial facilities in, for example, Wojciech Wilczyk's *Postindustrial* (2003–2006) and Ireneusz Zjeżdżałka's *Września* (2002), or the kitsch of capitalist cities in Wilczyk's *Capital* (2002)²⁵ and Mariusz Forecki's *blue box* (2003). Other key issues include social marginalization, explored through portrayals of the elderly, or of disappearing professions in, for example, Zorka Project's *Rzemieślniczka* [Craftswoman] (2004), as well as of the erosion of interpersonal relations (interrogated in Aneta Grzeszykowska's *Album*). The repetition of these tropes leads to the entrenchment of a specific iconography of failure and the attribution of pre-defined meanings to specific categories of images. Thus, decaying industrial infrastructure implies predatory capitalism; the old meshed with the new implies aggressive, dehumanizing economic transformation; portrayal of everyday life implies rampant consumerism; images of people from outside the canons of “beauty terror” imply a lack of prospects and individuality. Overuse of these images, however, is dangerous in itself, as Susan Sontag's observations from *On Photography* seem to still hold true today: “‘concerned’ photography has done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it. The ethical content of photographs is fragile” (Sontag, 2005, pp. 15–16).

25 The pictures comprising the series are featured in the book *Kapitał w słowach i obrazach* [Capital in Words and Images], see Jaworski & Wilczyk, 2002.

The critic also observes that social change is ultimately replaced by a change in images; a similar shift takes place with the New Documentalists. The aesthetic of socialist success or “turbocapitalist” kitsch is replaced by the ugliness of contention. When the convention is internalized by artists and audiences alike, the critical potential of images is quickly exhausted. This nefarious possibility has been identified by Adam Mazur, who argued that the New Document “quickly became a mannerism, a popular cliché” (Mazur, 2012a, p. 23), while the efforts of the involved artists “may be treated both as points of resistance and as products, ready for sale and subject to the principles of spectacle, intended to diversify the media tapestry” (Mazur, 2012a, p. 22).²⁶

Lewczyński also drew on the aesthetic of destruction and misery; he photographed ordinary objects, things that were old, ruined, worn down. But because his photographic project sought to preserve what faded away, capturing the decay was in a sense proof of a triumph: it exemplified the passage of time which nevertheless was unable to obliterate an object, or at least its image. Cognizant of the strong bond between the present and the past, the artist was capable of affirming even impermanence. The New Documentalists, meanwhile, proved unable to put forward anything positive that could counter the destruction. The degradation of the visible is, ultimately, a mark of social failure – pictures capable only of saying “This is how it was” imply a sort of surrender. On the other hand, the artists know that the image cannot, on its own, produce the critical meaning, which is generated by commentary. Recognition of the ease with which images can be manipulated implies a certain fluidity of meanings which precludes both the pursuit of traditionally conceived documentariness and the laying of the groundwork for social change, as it is impossible to craft images free of myth.²⁷ In his book *Obraza na obrazy. Strategie społecznego oporu wobec obrazów dominujących* [Taking Offense to Pictures: Strategies of Public Resistance Against Dominant Images] (Drozdowski, 2006), Rafał Drozdowski points out that “non- dominant images”, that is images crafted outside mainstream aesthetics (meaning those not necessarily “pretty”, in focus, emphasizing status, etc.) and outside the broadly conceived information market, are created mostly by accident, and usually for a very small audience, and thus remain unnoticed because they fail to meet contemporary norms of visibility. They remain excluded from the media spectacle which, contrary to what New Documentalists might claim, extends beyond the editorial rooms of tabloids and glossies, notoriously oppressing their staffs and preying on their clients; it includes the online vanity fair of vlogs, social media profile pictures changed every week, and, last but not least, galleries and exhibition catalogues. The considerable leeway on display at the first New Documen-

26 Mazur’s embrace of the “documentary turn” as a significant albeit defunct movement in Polish photography, which ultimately proved unsuccessful in changing either the Polish art realm or Polish society, can be taken as proof of the abandonment of the New Document project, and thus an acknowledgment of its failure. From this point onward, the theorist’s attention would be focused on the *postdocument*, a trend represented by, for example, Mikołaj Długosz’s project *Real Foto* (Długosz et al., 2008). See Mazur, 2012a, pp. 23–24.

27 Even Roland Barthes, although rather reluctantly, admitted that there was myth on the Left (although he tried to differentiate it from the myth on the Right). See Barthes, 2012, especially pp. 258–262.

talist exhibition, which collected a broad variety of works that did not come together into a coherent whole, enabled the artists to transcend that particular media regime. In *Postdocument: Missing Documents*, the desire for a clearly articulated critique of social conditions dominates over the randomness of the “plain record” – while the message underpinning that exhibition is much clearer, it simultaneously strips it of its authenticity and undermines its critical potential.

John Berger claims that in a world swamped with an overabundance of meaningless images, the only relief may come from their recontextualization, which would bind them to personal experience (Berger, 1991). That notion is one of the driving principles behind Lewczyński's collection; and while it was postulated by the New Documentalists, they ultimately failed to put it into practice. Grygiel describes their efforts as follows: “To touch upon reality with the whole of its – not necessarily visually attractive – burden, the contemporary photographers turn their attention toward the inconspicuous fragments of places in which we live” (Mazur, 2006, p. 27). Because of this transparency, images are no longer bound to a specific space or person, and thus can be stripped of their context and repurposed. This is the case in, for example, Konrad Pustoła's *Niedokończone domy / Unfinished Houses* (2005): bringing together photos portraying domiciles halted mid-construction establishes an intersubjective, social meaning (here: the creeping pauperization of families, debt spiral, failed dreams of property ownership, etc.), but their personal dimension is lost in the process. Another example of the phenomenon can be found in the work of the Zorka Project duo, made up of Monika Redzisz and Monika Bereżecka. At the 2006 exhibition, which featured photos from their 2004 series *Laski* [Girls] and the 2005 follow-up *Matki* [Mothers], the two photographers said that the models included their friends, relatives, and women who answered the call they put out. Their portraits, adorned with captions describing their social roles, show the women posing inside their own homes. Here, the convention of the photographic document genre does not erase the individuality and diversity of the figures, or their particular relations (in the pictures of mothers with their children, for example). For their 2008 series *Przeciętni* [Average People], the artists decided to change their strategy:

In our photo series, we usually attempted to reach people that were somehow special – leading unusual lives, working in rare professions, or living in extreme conditions. This time, we decided to embrace different criteria. We chose to look for the ordinary, nondescript people that usually go unnoticed by either photographers or writers. And it is among these seemingly average people that we struck upon an unexpected richness. (as cited in Mazur, 2012b, p. 137)

The statement is somewhat surprising: after all, we would be hard-pressed to see the women photographed for *Laski*, *Matki*, or even *Tramwajarki* [[Female] Tram Drivers] (2004) as particularly unusual (in a social sense). While in their earlier projects the photographers pursued their interests and achieved ambiguous but highly interesting

effects, for *Average People* they decided to look for “ordinary, nondescript people”, as if they had not noticed that ordinary people did not have to be sought out; as if they had not lived alongside them all that time. It would seem as their theoretical awareness grew, so did the distance between the artists and the reality around them, and thus reflection ultimately pushed the photographers away from their prospective subjects.

The example described above clearly illustrates the reasons for the failure of the New Document project. Abandoning the nonaligned nature of the individual gaze turned it into a mere archive – a collection of pictures that, while important, are nonetheless isolated from social reality. The above-quoted Andrzej Leśniak also emphasized that the “fascination with the boundlessness of the material becomes a justification for inaction in the face of the vastness of historical testimonies and the passivity of the viewer, visitor, or critic. One consequence of this fascination is a not entirely conscious praise for ignorance” (Leśniak, 2013, p. 67) – here, inaction is tied to the belief that no question remains unanswered. This might be a good place to bring up Jonathan Crary’s *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, in which, drawing on the notions of Fredric Jameson, Crary argues that while up to the mid-twentieth century the majority of images (associated primarily with mass culture) provided ways of evading the prohibitions of the super-ego,

now in a reversal, the demand for mandatory 24/7 immersion in visual content effectively becomes a new form of institutional super-ego. Of course, more images, of many kinds, are looked at, are seen, than ever before, but it is within what Foucault has described as a “network of permanent observation”. Most of the historically accumulated understandings of the term “observer” are destabilized under such conditions: that is, when individual acts of vision are unendingly solicited for conversion into information that will both enhance technologies of control *and* be a form of surplus value in a marketplace based on the accumulation of data on user behavior. There is a much more literal overturning of assumptions about the position and agency of an observer in the expanding array of technical means for making acts of seeing themselves into objects of observation. (Crary, 2013, pp. 47–48)

The New Documentalists cast themselves into a situation where they were compelled to document a social reality they wanted to change, and consequently bound themselves to it. This effort, which Mazur compared to “the tedious, unglamorous work of the archivist”, indeed stripped the photographers of their resourcefulness and their influence. Rather than sharpen their gaze, it confined them to a particular aesthetic mannerism with an ever decreasing impact. Could it be that the media spectacle ultimately defeated the agents of change, not only by employing them to produce images reinforcing the asymmetry of visibility, but also by making sure that they spend all their remaining time on documenting “fragments of reality that anyone could photograph or capture, but ultimately no one does”? Rather than place the prisoner in a panopticon, today’s power of the gaze ensures that the prisoner is endlessly busy constructing it.

In their 2010 book *Za fotografię!* [For Photography!], Rafał Drozdowski and Marek Krajewski outline a radical program for visual sociology, which shifts focus away from

pictures captured using a camera and toward “a broad spectrum of diverse micropractices related, firstly, to the creation of the photographic image and, secondly, to the many methods of managing photographs” (Drozdowski & Krajewski, 2010, p. 10). The authors believe that the specific social context of the production and functioning of photographs merits closer attention than their content or form, seeing as

most modern societies increasingly embrace the notion that image alone can explain very little, because the reasons behind phenomena and tendencies believed by late modern individuals to be important in the context of their (political, economic, status, etc.) situations are increasingly more complex and increasingly less visible. (Drozdowski & Krajewski, 2010, p. 131)

In this context, the New Documentalists’ stalwart faith in the critical, subversive power of the photographic archive seems naive and anachronistic, although their position has a solid theoretical foundation – touching upon photography itself, visuality in postmodernist culture, the social functions of the artist, capitalist societies, etc. Meanwhile, the clearly archaic project of the *archeology of photography*, based on a more metaphysical interpretation of the medium, whose author, Jerzy Lewczyński, would not have recognized a simulacrum if he had come across it on the street, and his sole reaction to the concept of naked life would probably include him yelling “Shenanigans!” (Ptak, 2012, pp. 98–99), has been successfully functioning in the public discourse for decades now. It might be because he consistently renounced the mantle of artist and instead committed himself unreservedly to his artistic practice, building his theory of photography from casual declarations and never letting any of these pronouncements (which often contradicted one another) limit his freedom. Those seeking to preserve the truth of the New Document seem to have forgotten that, ultimately, truth is always constructed, never discovered. Lewczyński felt no apprehension at the prospect of crafting new truths, readings, interpretations. He knew that the archeologist, rather than the documentalist, would always emerge the victor, as the latter only dealt with living, mutable time, whose flow would, sooner or later, inevitably claim him. The archeologist, meanwhile, only concerned himself with what *chronos* had already brought onto the shore.

Translated by Jan Szelągiewicz

References

- Barrett, T.** (2020). *Criticizing photographs: An introduction to understanding images* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Barthes, R.** (1982). *Camera lucida: Reflections on photography* (R. Howard, Trans.). Hill and Wang.
- Barthes, R.** (2012). Myth today. In R. Barthes, *Mythologies: Complete edition* (R. Howard & A. Lavers, Trans.; 2nd ed.; pp. 215–287). Hill and Wang.

- Benjamin, W.** (1972). A short history of photography. *Screen*, 13(1), 5–26.
- Benjamin, W.** (2003). The artist as a producer. In W. Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* (A. Bostock, Trans.; pp. 85–103). Verso.
- Berger, J.** (1991). *About looking*. Vintage.
- Brauchitsch, B. von.** (2004). *Mała historia fotografii* (J. Koźbiał & B. Tarnas, Trans.). Wydawnictwo Cyklady.
- Crary, J.** (2013). *24/7: Late capitalism and the ends of sleep*. Verso.
- Długosz, M., Gorczyca, Ł., & Mazur, A.** (2008). *Real foto* (F. Niedenthal, Trans.). Fundacja “Korporacja Ha!art”.
- Drozdowski, R.** (2006). *Obraza na obrazy: Strategie społecznego oporu wobec obrazów dominujących*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.
- Drozdowski, R., & Krajewski, M.** (2010). *Za fotografię! W stronę radykalnego programu socjologii wizualnej*. Fundacja Nowej Kultury “Bęc Zmiana”.
- Flusser, V.** (1983). *Towards a philosophy of photography*. Reaktion Books.
- Instytut Awangardy.* (n.d.). Retrieved August 17, 2019, from <http://www.instytutawangardy.org/pl>
- Jaworski, K., & Wilczyk, W.** (2002). *Kapitał w słowach i obrazach*. Zakład Wydawniczy “SFS Studio Full Scan”.
- Leśniak, A.** (2013). Gorączka archiwum. *Szum*, 2013(1), 66–76.
- Lewczyński, J.** (1980). Zamieniłem życie na fotografię. *Fotografia*, 1980(3).
- Lewczyński, J.** (2001). *Wrocław: Fotografie*. Galeria BWA – Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej.
- Lewczyński, J.** (2005). *Archeologia fotografii: Prace z lat 1941–2005* (K. Jurecki & I. Zjeżdżałka, Red.; M. Hrehorowicz & H. Korolczuk, Tłum.). Wydawnictwo Kropka.
- Ligocki, A.** (1959). Antyfotografia. *Fotografia*, 1959(9).
- Lipszyc, W.** (2015). Fotograficzny przymuszacz: Autorstwo w fotografii Jerzego Lewczyńskiego. *Tekstualia*, 2015(2), 103–116.
- LUFT Email Marketing – Gra w archiwum, Jerzy Lewczyński / Krzysztof Pijarski, 17 czerwca, godzina 20.00.* (n.d.). news.archeologiafotografii.pl. <http://news.archeologiafotografii.pl/index.php?action=message&c=10&message=7>
- Mazur, A. (Ed.).** (2006). *Nowi dokumentaliści / The new documentalists*. Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski.
- Mazur, A.** (2007). *Antyfotografie*. Galeria Miejska Arsenał.
- Mazur, A.** (2012a). *Decydujący moment: Nowe zjawiska w fotografii polskiej po 2000 roku*. Wydawnictwo Karakter.
- Mazur, A.** (2012b). Postdokument: Świat nie przedstawiony: Dokumenty polskiej transformacji po 1989 roku. *Kwartalnik Fotografia*, 2012(38).
- Missing documents: Photographs of the Polish transformation after 1989.* (n.d.). Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski. <http://archiwum.u-jazdowski.pl/index.php?action=aktualnosci&s2=1&id=509&lang=eng>
- Nowicki, W.** (2012). JL. In J. Lewczyński, *Jerzy Lewczyński: Pamięć obrazu* (W. Nowicki, Ed.). Muzeum w Gliwicach.
- Pańków, L.** (2012). Naiwna wiara w reprezentację: Postdokument w CSW. *Dwutygodnik*, 2012(78). <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/3307-naiwna-wiara-w-reprezentacje-postdokument-w-csw.html>
- Peirce, C. S.** (1992). *The essential Peirce: Selected philosophical writings: Vol. 1. 1869–1973* (N. Houser & C. Kloesel, Eds.). Indiana University Press.
- Pieńkos, A.** (2012). *Tracona moc obrazu, czyli epizody nowoczesnego realizmu*. Wydawnictwo “Neriton”.
- Pijarski, K.** (2011a). Archeologie fotografii: Czy można zarchiwizować gest? *Kultura Współczesna*, 2011(4), 121–135.

- Pijarski, K. (Ed.). (2011b). *The archive as project: The poetics and politics of the (photo)archive / Archiwum jako projekt. Poetyka i polityka (foto)archiwum* (K. Bartoszyńska et al., Trans.). Fundacja "Archeologia Fotografii".
- Pijarski, K. (2011c). JL – KP [Video]. <http://pijarski.art.pl/pl/works/jl-kp-playing-the-archive-2011>
- Ptak, O. (2012). *Jerzozwierz: Portrety i autoportrety Jerzego Lewczyńskiego*. Muzeum w Gliwicach.
- Pustoła, K. (2011). *Widoki władzy*. Fundacja Nowej Kultury "Bęc Zmiana".
- Rusinek, M. (2012). *Retoryka obrazu: Przyczynek do percepcyjnej teorii figur*. Słowo/obraz terytoria.
- Ślusarczyk, A. (2010). *Wałbrzych – powidoki*. Agencja Reklamowo-Wydawnicza "Fine Grain".
- Sobota, A. (1993). *Antyfotografia i ciąg dalszy: Beksiński, Lewczyński, Schlabs*. Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu.
- Sontag, S. (2005). *On photography*. Rosetta.
- Stiegler, B. (2009). *Obrazy fotografii: Album metafor fotograficznych* (J. Czudec, Trans.). Universitas.
- Śwircz, K., & Pijarski, K. (n.d.). *Archiwum jako projekt: Poetyka i polityka (foto)archiwum: Kuba Śwircz rozmawia z Krzysztofem Pijarskim*. Fundacja "Archeologia Fotografii". http://faf.org.pl/wywiad_konferencja.pdf
- Wilczyk, W. (2012). Starzy dokumentaliści albo podrabiane archiwum. *Kwartalnik Fotografia*, 2012(38).
- Wilczyk, W. (2013). Świat nieprzedstawiony i nieinterpretowany. *Herito: Dziedzictwo, kultura, współczesność*, 2013(4), 213–225.
- Wojciech Zawadzki – *Moja Ameryka: 19 września – 16 października 2003 r.* (2003). BWA Jelenia Góra. <http://galeria-bwa.karkonosze.com/wojciech-zawadzki-moja-ameryka/>
- Zawadzki, W. (2012). Kilka refleksji... *Kwartalnik Fotografia*, 2012(38).

Totalna porażka. O dwóch projektach fotograficznych

Abstrakt: Artykuł ukazuje obrazy porażki w fotografii polskiej powstałej w okresie 1970–2000. Odwołuje się do trzech projektów: *Archeologii fotografii* Jerzego Lewczyńskiego oraz wystaw *Nowi dokumentaliści* (2006) i *Postdokument. Świat nie przedstawiony. Dokumenty polskiej transformacji po 1989 roku* (2012). Skupia się więc na fotografii nurtu dokumentalnego czy postdokumentalnego – nieżywiącej złudzeń co do mimetycznej mocy medium, ale nieporzucającej nadziei na społeczne oddziaływanie zdjęć.

Przywoływane projekty stawiają sobie za cel stworzenie krytycznego obrazu rzeczywistości, a więc koncentrują się na przestrzeniach i ludziach podlegających wykluczeniu, przegranych (np. *Niedokończone domy* Konrada Pustoły, *Niewinne oko nie istnieje* Wojciecha Wilczyka), a także na erozji stosunków międzyludzkich (np. *Album Anety Grzeszykowskiej*). Rozczarowania związane zarówno z rzeczywistością socjalistyczną, jak i polskim kapitalizmem, mieszają się z pragnieniem odnalezienia i ocalenia tego, co żywe, bliskie, autentyczne.

Artyści najwięcej uwagi poświęcają problemowi fotografii jako medium i jej zdolności generowania społecznej zmiany. Zdają sobie sprawę, że specyfika obrazu fotograficznego z jego medialnymi uwikłaniami utrudnia przekazanie niezafalszowanego obrazu rzeczywistości oraz akceptację tego, co nie mieści się w obrębie wizualnej poetyki sukcesu, tego, co stare, zniszczone, niemodne, kiczowate. Zadają w ten sposób pytanie o reguły tworzenia obrazów w fotograficznym uniwersum i o możliwość ich przekroczenia – stworzenia nowego dokumentu. Miałby on wymykać się regułom „obrazów dominujących” (określenie Rafała Drozdowskiego), umożliwić takie użycie fotografii, jakie postulował John Berger: zakorzenione w osobistym doświadczeniu i pamięci.

Wyrażenia kluczowe: fotografia; dokument; archiwum; Jerzy Lewczyński; nowi dokumentaliści; archeologia fotografii



Article No. 2244

DOI: 10.11649/slh.2244

Citation: Lipszyc, W. (2020). Epic fail: About two photographic projects. *Studia Litteraria et Historica*, 2020(9), Article 2244. <https://doi.org/10.11649/slh.2244>

This is a translation of the original article *Totalna porażka: O dwóch projektach fotograficznych*, which was published in *Studia Litteraria et Historica*, 2020(9).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License, which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. <http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl>

© The Author(s) 2020

© to the English translation: Jan Szelągiewicz, 2020

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

Author: Weronika Lipszyc, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6210-9018>

Correspondence: w.lipszyc@gmail.com

The preparation of this work was self-financed by the author.

Competing interests: The author has declared she has no competing interests.