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# Investigations

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Elżbieta Rybicka

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## Landscape after Transformation

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**T**he third landscape,<sup>1</sup> the unintentional landscape,<sup>2</sup> the disturbed landscape,<sup>3</sup> the post-industrial landscape<sup>4</sup> – these are arguably just some of the terms that address the peculiarities and diverse aspects of a landscape intensively transformed by human activity, especially industrial activity. Their multiplicity is indicative of the

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1 Gilles Clement, "Trzeci krajobraz" [The third landscape], trans. Marta Turnau, *Autoportret* 3 (2019), accessed December 3, 2020, <https://autoportret.pl/artykuly/manifest-trzeciego-krajobrazu/>.

2 Matthew Gandy, "Unintentional Landscapes," *Landscape Research* 41 (4) (2016).

3 Aleksandra Brylska, "Radioaktywne kwiaty wiśni. Relacje Japończyków ze skażonymi obszarami wokół elektrowni Fukushima Daiichi" [Radioactive cherry blossoms. Japanese people's relationship with the contaminated areas around the Fukushima Daiichi power plant], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2020): 147.

4 Wolfram Höfer and Vera Vicenzotti, "Post-industrial Landscapes: Evolving Concepts," in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. Peter Howard, Ian Thompson and Emma Waterton (London: Routledge, 2013).

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confusion created by attempts to capture the landscape after human impact. Are these landscapes post-natural? Post-human? Artificial? Sites of a “new wilderness”?<sup>5</sup> Similarly, analogous questions arise not only in academic discourse, but also in culture, predominantly visual culture (primarily photography), albeit also in artistic projects and narrative genres, especially in recent years when the environmental crisis has become the triggering impulse. Here, I would like to approach this growing interest in the post-industrial landscape as a starting point for formulating several issues, most notably the question of how it is perceived by contemporary artists and for what reasons, and how, through cultural practices, they reconceptualize the experience and understanding of landscape.

Thus, the conceptual framework for the analysis of the narrative and landscape photography will be transformation. It defines the time horizon – it concerns, on the one hand, the processes of landscape transformation in Poland after 1989 and the question of the role of political and economic changes, especially the crisis and the partial collapse of the mining industry, in these transformations. Whereas in the 1990s these were not yet clearly perceived and articulated, the last decade, given their rise and the stronger introduction of a global context, has seen a growing wave of multi-directional diagnoses, warnings or interventions. There is indeed no single landscape discourse – taking into account recent practices (textual, visual, aural), it can be noticed that several perspectives coexist: culturocentric and biocentric, apocalyptic and consolatory, triggered by the climate crisis or inspired by Anthropocene or Capitalocene theories. And it is the latter that provide the second, significantly broader optic of perception of the landscape after transformation, that is, to put it more precisely, the anthropogenic landscape, transformed by human action also at the geological and morphological level. Thus, I will consider transformation in terms of two scales – the local one, related to the Polish context, and the global one, triggered by the concept of the Anthropocene and its rapidly proliferating derivatives. With this somewhat treacherous approach, it is possible to see the intersection of two perspectives: socio-economic and environmental.

For this analysis, I have selected primarily photography and non-fiction literature, as they allow to capture the landscapes of the Anthropocene not as a phenomenon safely distant in time and space, somewhere far away and later, but here and now, at a close scale, in an almost everyday experience. However, the manner of understanding landscape results from the specificity of the analyzed phenomena, which resonates best with inspirations coming

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5 Ingo Kowarik, “Cities and Wilderness. A New Perspective,” *International Journal of Wilderness* 3 (2013): 33.

from two sources. The first is the hardly known but worth recalling approach of Stanisław Vincenz, who in a sketch from 1943 emphasized the materiality, relationality, hapticity and causal impact of landscape:

"Landscape" means, of course, not only the pictorial or visual effects, but also the soil on which we tread, on which we work, its undulations or plains, its waters – seas, rivers or swamps – its air that we breathe: whatever lends form to a man's movements, whatever forms his steps, his works, his arms and legs, his posture, presumably even his breath.<sup>6</sup>

The second source is non-representational theories, concepts that have emerged in cultural geography in response to the dominant constructivist approaches, to the excessive emphasis on texts and images.<sup>7</sup> These highlight previously overlooked factors – embodied experience, the senses, affects, practices and actions, performative potential – emphasizing a way of approaching the landscape that discerns in it, as did Vincenz, something "more-than-representation."<sup>8</sup>

### Disappearing, Trembling, Extracting

The landscape after transformation is primarily a consequence of at least partial withdrawal and reduction of development based on heavy industry and mining. However, in order to identify its complexity and multidimensionality more precisely, it is worth considering it on a longer time scale and

6 Stanisław Vincenz, "Krajobraz jako tło dziejów" [Landscape as the backdrop of history], in Vincenz, *Z perspektywy podróży* (Kraków: Znak, 1980), 362–363. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

7 I wrote more about the development of landscape research in the article "Krajobraz kulturowy. Między ideologiami a działaniami" [Cultural landscape. Between ideologies and actions], in *Wiecej niż obraz*, ed. Eugeniusz Wilk, Anna Nacher, Magdalena Zdrodowska, Ewelina Twardoch and Michał Gulik (Gdańsk: Katedra Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2015).

8 Cf. Emma Waterton, "Landscape and Non-representational Theories," in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, ed. Peter Howard, Ian Thompson and Emma Waterton (London: Routledge, 2013); John Wylie, *Landscape* (London: Routledge), 162–169. Reconceptualization of landscape also appears in Polish research – in aesthetics (Beata Frydryczak, *Krajobraz. Od estetyki the picturesque do doświadczenia topograficznego* [Landscape. From the aesthetics of the picturesque to the topographical experience] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2013) and anthropology: Dorota Angutek, *Kulturowe wymiary krajobrazu. Antropologiczne studium recepcji krajobrazu na prowincji: od teorii do empirii* [Cultural dimensions of landscape. Anthropological study of landscape reception in the province: From theory to empirics] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Poznań 2013).

based on the example of a particular type of landscape – the Silesian landscape. Following the political transformation, the Silesian landscape was the most rapidly transformed and, as a “landscape built on coal,”<sup>9</sup> it arouses the greatest collective emotions, both locally and nationwide. Meanwhile, the introduction of the Anthropocene as a descriptive category for contemporary transformations triggered a search for new solutions, especially in the case of photography, which is considered to be the primary instrument for documenting Anthropocene transformations in the landscape.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the “ragged”<sup>11</sup> landscape of Silesia, the region which was the first to confront industrialization and the first to enter, at least in part, the post-industrial stage, has become the most active area for documenting the transformation.

Nevertheless, ruins, including post-industrial ones, can sometimes be seductively picturesque, which is the reason for the contemporary popularity of the ruin porn trend.<sup>12</sup> Photography of the Silesian landscape after the transformation had to deal with this challenge. One of the solutions was proposed by Wojciech Wilczyk in a long-term photographic project carried out since 1992 and presented over the course of time, among others, in the book *Kapitał w słowach i obrazach*<sup>13</sup> [Capital in words and images], published together with Krzysztof Jaworski (2002), in the album *Czarno-biały Śląsk* [Black and white Silesia] (2004), and at the exhibition *Postindustrial* (2004). Adam Mazur calls

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9 I refer to the book Justyna Gorgoń, ed., *Krajobraz zbudowany na węglu – intelektualna i artystyczna perspektywa różnorodności krajobrazów w regionach przemysłowych* [Landscape built on coal: An intellectual and artistic perspective on landscape diversity in post-industrial regions] (Katowice: Instytut Ekologii Terenów Przemysłowych, 2008). On cultural representations of the Silesian landscape see also Elżbieta Dutka, “Literackie krajobrazy Górnego Śląska” [Literary landscapes of Upper Silesia], in Dutka, *Próby topograficzne. Miejsca i krajobrazy w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2014); Ilona Copik, *Topografie i krajobrazy. Filmowy Śląsk* [Topographies and landscapes. Cinematic Silesia] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2017); Izabela Kaczmarzyk, *Krajobraz, portret, maska. Studia o górnośląskim imaginariu przemysłowym* [Landscape, portrait, mask. Studies on the Upper Silesian industrial imaginary] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum w Krakowie, 2019).

10 CUCO – curatorial concepts berlin e.V. “Tęsknota za krajobrazem – fotografia w dobie antropocenu” [Longing for the landscape: Photography in the age of the Anthropocene], trans. Małgorzata Szubartowska, *Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej* 22 (2018).

11 Henryk Waniek, “Rozszarpany krajobraz” [Torn landscape], *Fabryka Silesia* 3 (2013): 13.

12 Cf. Joanna Żylinska, “Fotografia po człowieku” [Photography after the human], trans. Patrycja Poniatowska, *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2017): 353–355.

13 Krzysztof Jaworski and Wojciech Wilczyk, *Kapitał w słowach i obrazach* [Capital in words and images] (Kielce: Zakład Wydawniczy SFS, 2002).

the photographer a “landscape-revisionist,”<sup>14</sup> a critical gesture referring in this case to the trend of landscape photography which was initiated by Jan Bułhak’s concept of “homeland photography” and its later continuations, oriented towards the aestheticisation of landscape.<sup>15</sup> For Wilczyk himself, on the other hand, the point of reference is the intersecting areas of interest: the Silesian photography of Michał Cała and various currents of twentieth-century documentary photography, especially the New Topographics Movement.<sup>16</sup>

Contemporary topographic photography often focuses on the periphery and the remnants of modernization. Such was also the Silesian landscape in Wilczyk’s photographs – decaying, agonizing, abandoned on the periphery as a result of new economic processes and deindustrialization. One could sense its disappearance and emptiness – the absence of people, movement, action, activity, work – in the desolate spaces left behind by mines, steel mills, coking plants, zinc works. In fact, almost emptiness. Indeed, what Wilczyk could not officially and fully document photographically, he documented narratively.<sup>17</sup> In the text “Czarno-biały Śląsk”, a topographical entry accompanying the album, he described his first trips to the “Walenty” coal coking plant in Ruda Śląska in 1992 and what followed apart from the later presented photographic frames:

There was some sort of strange vivacity here. Even though I almost immediately took my camera out of my bag and started taking pictures, nobody actually paid any attention to me. There was a large group of men covered in dirt and dismantling everything... that could easily be dismantled. It looked a bit like the actions of a community of ants in contact with some dead fauna, as they so readily show in nature films recently. Using french spanners, the ants unscrewed everything

14 Adam Mazur, “Święta wojna” [Holy war], in Wojciech Wilczyk, *Święta wojna* [Holy war] (Kraków: Karakter, 2014), 8.

15 On the tradition of Polish landscape photography cf. Maciej Szymanowicz, “O kontekstach utrwalania polskich terytoriów” [On the contexts of preserving Polish territories], in *Procesy, sedymentacje, topografie. O polskim dokumencie fotograficznym*, ed. Marianna Michałowska and Maciej Szymanowicz (Warszawa: PWN, 2021).

16 On Polish topographic photography cf. Marianna Michałowska, “Czy istnieje ‘nowa topografia’ w polskiej fotografii?” [Is there a “new topography” in Polish photography?], in *Procesy, sedymentacje, topografie*, 25–56, On “new documentaryism”: Adam Mazur, “Nowi dokumentaliści” [New documentary filmmakers], *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 54/55 (2006): 299–311.

17 Wojciech Wilczyk is not only one of the most respected photographers, but also a poet, author of the volumes: *Eternit* [Eternit] (Warszawa, 2002), *Realizm* [Realism] (Kraków, 2017), *Minimalizm* [Minimalism] (Warszawa, 2020).

that could be unscrewed, using crowbars to tear out what could be torn or snapped off. Some other ants took care of the transport. Either on their backs or in baby carriages, they carried away pipes, tubes, bolts, valves, angles of all sizes, window frames and, in general, all sorts of iron and steel.<sup>18</sup>

By recording this scene, Wilczyk suggests a counterpoint supplement to the photographic narrative – the biological, animalizing language emphasizes the close connection between the decay of industrial objects and the vitality of demolition, thus derivatively naturalizing both the industrial object and the process of destruction<sup>19</sup>. Post-industrial life after life, work after work, though, also reveals an alternative circulation of matter and an alternative economy of the unemployed, often former employees of bankrupt factories. Former industrial productivity is being transformed into a practice of a new type – post-industrial productivity, which is transforming the landscape with the same intensity. There is thus a further active life going on in it, although, due to its illegality, it is rarely documented (an important exception is the photographic series *Biedaszyby* by Arkadiusz Gola).

To the extent that photography does teach us how to see, Wojciech Wilczyk's topographic record did so by de-emphasizing the "prettiness" of the view, aestheticizing the landscape of industrial ruins.<sup>20</sup> Instead, he focused on disintegration and decomposition, yet not to expose its picturesque qualities or plunge us into the melancholy of transience and catastrophe, but to raise questions about the repressed consequences of political and economic transformation, about the shame provoked by unaesthetic industrialization, even though we are still, as he says, its beneficiaries.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, he led us into an area beset with traps – both industrialization and its decline were becoming ambivalent processes. After all, the spectacular downfall of the socialist (and modern) myth of industrialization exposed the ruthlessness of the new myth as an economic necessity – that of deindustrialization. As well as an equally ruthless entanglement in the irresolvable conflict between

18 Wojciech Wilczyk, "Czarno-biały Śląsk" [Black and white Silesia], in Wojciech Wilczyk, *Czarno-biały Śląsk* (Katowice: Galeria Zderzak, Górnośląskie Centrum Kultury, 2004), 7.

19 Significantly, Henryk Waniek, in his essay on the transformation of the Silesian landscape, notes a similar analogy: "power over the landscape has been taken by the wind and scrap-ers" (Waniek, "Rozszarpany krajobraz," 13).

20 On the aestheticization of the photography of ruins, cf. Małgorzata Nieszczerzewska, *Ruinologie. Kontekstualizacje pozostałości architektury* [Ruinologies. Contextualizations of architectural remains] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Społecznych UAM, 2018), 240–254.

21 Wilczyk, "Czarno-biały Śląsk," 12.

social costs and ecological costs. Thus, the landscape featured in *Kapitał* and “Czarno-biały Śląsk” in its disintegrated material substance and alternative circulation of matter revealed, from today’s point of view, the contradictions in which we are embroiled as we face the effects of the first stage of decarbonization.

In the last decade, however, there has been an exhaustion of the formula for seeing the post-industrial landscape, recognized also by photographers themselves. Nevertheless, the post-industrial ruin reproduced in thousands of amateur photos proved to be excessively photogenic and resulted in a state of aesthetic petrification (which, of course, does not diminish its role and value as a document). The landshaping of the view, however, tends to be the impetus for the search for different visual codes. Such was also the case in Silesia – a new generation of photographers presented less obvious ways of seeing. In fact, post-industrial landscapes have been increasingly approached by the artists themselves from the perspective of the climate and environmental crisis. Arguably, an important catalyst for this change was the 2018 summit, the United Nations Climate Conference, held in Katowice, which was accompanied by an extraordinarily intense nationwide debate focused on decarbonization and many artistic and cultural activities.

For Krzysztof Szewczyk, author of the photographic project *Drżenie* [Trembling] (2017), a landscape “built on coal” means more than just a visually accessible view or image. However, it does also feature a haptic dimension, resulting from ground shaking after mining operations, micro tremors, subsidence and landslides caused by the instability of the excavated ground. Mining tremors occur in Poland in three areas – in Silesia, near the Belchatow mine and in the Zagłębie Miedziowe (Copper Belt). Their scale is surprising: seismic stations record about 1.500 microshocks per year (in 2019 there were about 1.800), although the stronger ones noticeable on the surface are about three hundred per year. Predominant among them are induced tremors, arising from the disturbance of the natural state of geological equilibrium by coal mining, while anthropogenic seismicity is “a manifestation of the dynamic deformation of the rock mass under the influence of the ongoing exploitation of the deposit.”<sup>22</sup>

Instability as one of the fundamental properties of the Silesian landscape, its material, geological foundations, at the same time evokes a strong emotional resonance, as the photographer comments:

22 Adam F. Idziak, Lesław Teper and Waław M. Zuberek, *Sejsmiczność a tektonika Górnośląskiego Zagłębia Węglowego* [Seismicity versus tectonics of the Upper Silesian Coal Basin] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1999), 15.

Thus, “trembling” can be taken literally – as the trembling of the earth, the upheaval that is caused by extractive human activity. In a metaphorical sense, “trembling” refers to a very violent relationship between people and the landscape. It refers to “trembling” understood as fear for life. Indeed, it would appear that the anxiety associated with working underground is experienced mainly by miners and their families. However, this is not the case, residents of mining towns are also terrified. Not so long ago, people were literally sitting on suitcases, fearing that at any moment their house could collapse underground. Those in Bytom said that all you had to do was put your ear to the ground to hear the mine work. Yet the fear, of which my photos are implicitly about, can also last for just a fraction of a second, as much as the bump itself.<sup>23</sup>

Trembling is an exceptionally evocative and pertinent metaphor for the relationship between man and the post-transformation landscape, a symptom of both the feedback and mutual destabilization. It makes almost palpable the resonance, the waves of vibration flowing between the tectonic tremors of the earth, ripped through and hollowed out by tunnels, the vibrations of buildings, objects and human emotions. The trembling conditions bring together geology, matter, the operation of the mining industry and human reactions, thus pointing to interdependencies that can escape visual perception. What makes this aspect important is that shifting attention to the invisible or less visible dimensions of the landscape meant, for the photographer, focusing on what happens underground, researching the “hidden topography of the land.”<sup>24</sup> The tools of research involved seismological maps marking the epicenters of underground tremors, and the method of work was walking in the footsteps of successive tremors. However, these often cannot be seen on the surface, even seismological maps pulsate with constant changes. Tremors are thus a condition that hardly lends itself to the rules of traditional photographic representation. Thus, Szewczyk’s project had to restrict itself to visualizing the surface, signaling at the same time the rupture, disjunction and desynchronization between the stability of the photographic frame, the tools for measuring seismic tremor (as a metonymy of epistemological order, knowledge and research) and the invisible geological tremors. After all, subterranean movements, though measurable, are uncontrollable, so the tremor also highlights the entanglement of causality – it is human activity, the extraction of minerals, that has thrown the earth out of geological equilibrium,

23 Conversation with Krzysztof Szewczyk, accessed January 18, 2020, <http://kulturaobrazu.org/rozmowa-z-krzysztofem-szewczykiem/>.

24 Ibid.



initiating a process of destabilization; the seismic tremors themselves, however, are a dynamic response to these activities.

By opting for trembling as a key metaphor and at the same time a physical state, Szewczyk reorients the perception of the landscape, making visible its haptic dimension, or rather, its polysensory intertwining of relations, which can be combined with the extended hapticity proposed by Marta Smolinska, integrated and cooperating with other modalities, especially auditory and visual, but also with the sense of balance.<sup>25</sup> Trembling is activating through the flow of vibrations a haptic resonance, which, together with the propagating waves, encompasses the full somatic sensation and creates a kind of synergistic union between touch, body balance and awareness of space.<sup>26</sup> Let me just note in passing that exceptionally evocatively this haptic resonance, the synergistic fusion of the trembling Silesian earth with human and non-human reactions, was reported by Felix Netz in his novel *Dysharmonia caelestis*:

Trembling – it was just another word I picked up while living in a familok. Initially it was just a word, but one day it became flesh: something in the depths of the earth trembled, something rolled lazily from side to side, seeking more space for its own movement; the shadow of a lampshade rocked on the ceiling, a painting on the wall with Jesus with an exposed, burning heart leaned away from the vertical. The pieces of coal in the box, which in German was called kolkista, rattled like mice under the floor. In such a moment, people look into each other's eyes with tense attention, alertly listening to the tremor of varying intensity as the underground roaring rocks burst with a roar of pain, ashamed of that roar, and even more with a sigh of relief.<sup>27</sup>

Haptic resonance, in turn, triggers affective reaction. This correlation was pointed out by Mark Paterson: “haptic orientation reduces the abstract distance generated by the gaze and accommodates the affective response.”<sup>28</sup>

25 Cf. Marta Smolińska, *Haptyczność poszerzona. Zmysł dotyku w sztuce polskiej drugiej połowy XX i początku XXI wieku* [Hapticity expanded. The sense of touch in Polish art of the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first century] (Kraków: Universitas, 2020).

26 Ibid, 320; see also Paul Rodaway, “Haptyczne geografie” [Haptic geographies], trans. Dorota Angutek, in *Krajobraz. Antologia tekstów*, ed. Beata Frydryczak and Dorota Angutek (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2014).

27 Feliks Netz, *Dysharmonia caelestis* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 2004), 30.

28 Mark Paterson “W jaki sposób dotyka nas świat: estetyka haptyczna” [“How the world touches us”: Haptic aesthetics], trans. Michalina Kmieć, *Ruch Literacki* 2 (2020): 183. See

Thus, affect – as sudden, violent arousal – circulates in a looped relationship between the earth's energy discharge and human responses. There is another element to this looping: in the old seismology, light-sensitive paper was used to measure tremors. Szewczyk's photographic project can – by analogy – be interpreted as an attempt to record affective tremor, and at the same time the difficulty of documenting it photographically, which always appears asynchronously, in delay.

Trembling as an entanglement of material effect and affect thus leads toward a view of the landscape that is close to non-representational theories. Here it most accurately defines the diverse manifestations of the Anthropocene landscape and its state of disequilibrium,<sup>29</sup> when what is subterranean, geological (to some extent hidden, implicit, although caused by human interference and exploitation) sets in motion, vibrates what is on the surface and includes in haptic resonance the materiality of the excavated earth, human affects, somatic reactions and, finally, the fragile and violated foundations of life. Indeed, in such a perspective, microshocks cause equalization – the earth, bodies, objects become the same trembling matter.

The question of destabilization of the Silesian landscape and its anthropocenic character is also addressed by Michał Łuczak in a multi-phase project presented in part in the exhibitions *Wydobycie* [Extraction] (2018), *Doświadczanie punktów. Nowy krajobraz śląski* [Experiencing the points. The new Silesian landscape] (2018), *Mgła* [The fog] project and as part of the intervention *Stopnie nachylenia* [Grades of inclination] (2019) presented at the Silesian Museum (carried out jointly with Szymon Szewczyk). Each installment revolves around a common problem – “a landscape built on coal” and the consequences of its extraction, which pulsates with meanings as much as trembling.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the poster announcing the *Wydobycie* exhibition features the landscape not as a spatial frame, but outlined on a human body. Viewed from behind, a man's head, neck and part of his bare back are covered with coal dust, arranged in black dots, streaks and spots on his skin. However, in other photographs of miners, the dust forms dark streaks, zones and bays on their bodies. One may seek an anthropological

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also Mark Paterson, “Haptic Geographies: Ethnography, Haptic Knowledges and Sensuous Dispositions,” *Progress in Human Geography* 33 (6) (2009): 766–788.

29 On the post-mining landscape as an indicator of the Anthropocene see Jan Zalasiewicz, Colin N. Waters and Mark Williams, “Human Bioturbation, and the Subterranean Landscape of the Anthropocene,” *Anthropocene* 6 (2014): 6.

30 Cf. Ugo Bardi, *Wydobycie. Jak poszukiwanie bogactw mineralnych pustoszy naszą planetę* [Mining. How the search for mineral resources is ravaging our planet], trans. Joanna Bednarek (Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2018).

and cultural motivation for this analogy between the corporeal and terrestrial landscapes as perceived by David Howes in his concept *skinscape*.<sup>31</sup> What seems more significant in this case, however, is the indication of the relationship of corporeal adjacency between man, his physical labor in the mine and coal. As well as a subversive reference to one of the oldest artistic techniques – sketches in charcoal, the traditional material of landscape drawing. Subversive because these landscapes on human skin are in fact the work of nature, the unintentional, spontaneous art of the earth, in which it is the earth itself that creates its material image, although they are also at the same time a literalised carbon footprint. Within this multiplied form (dirt-art), the haptic dimension of the landscape experience is also revealed. Coal dust is not something distant, it becomes a material imprint, dirt, and even more, its atomized particles (as respirable dust) penetrate skin barriers, enter the respiratory system and sometimes lead to pneumoconiosis, an occupational disease of miners.

The photographs featured in the *Mgła* [The fog] exhibition, on the other hand, directed attention to one of the most obvious issues – air pollution by dust, from the burning of coal. What is perhaps most significant, the fog, like the tremors caused by underground upheaval, knows no boundaries, settles on bodies, along with the breath it penetrates inside organisms. Here, too, embodied experience is thus activated. However, the photographer problematizes the phenomenon itself, pointing not only to the “foggy” of the air, as the discourse and debate around the smog crisis is equally “foggy,” rendering certain and transparent knowledge impossible.<sup>32</sup>

In all the installments of Łuczak's project, he was interested in the changeability of coal and its circulation in non-human and human circulation, including the geological cycle and deep time, which is why it has such a metamorphic form in the photographs. Being a sedimentary rock of plant origin, it is the result of decomposition processes of Carboniferous forests, giant horsetails, forbs and ferns, whose imprints or fossils are found on blocks extracted from mines. It is a hard lump of ore with a lustrous texture. It is scattered matter, dust, tarnish, dirt, derived from the bowels of the earth, which settles on the surface of bodies. It is a mist, toxic dust particles in the air we breathe. A coal footprint. The heaps of post-coal waste that shape the anthropogenic Silesian landscape, sometimes waste

31 David Howes, “Skinscapes. Embodiment, Culture and Environment,” in *The Book of Touch*, ed. Constance Classen (New York: Berg, 2005), 27–39.

32 Cf. Mateusz Chaberski, *Asamblaże, asamblaże. Doświadczenie w zamglonym antropocenie* [Assemblages, assemblages. Experience in the foggy anthropocene] (Kraków: Świągarnia Akademicka, 2019), 54–55.

land, and sometimes the substratum of new, living ecosystems. Its excavation gives rise to architectural and landscape peculiarities in Silesia – the earth, plowed through with tunnels and with a disturbed geological balance, reacts with unpredictable and sudden collapses, causes sloping, collapsing or cracking of buildings, as in the nearly 100-year-old Łuczak family house in Giszowiec. In all its shape-shifting forms it is a material component of the landscape, and in all of them it enters into a relationship – sometimes haptic, respiratory, metabolic – with man.

My intention was to strongly emphasize this distinctiveness of Łuczak's perspective, because coal is usually considered one-dimensionally in the optics of the central critical discourse – it is now, as Edwin Bendyk points out, “public enemy No. 1.”<sup>33</sup> In Silesia, on the other hand, in the last decade, since the 2013 exhibition *Węgiel Boom!*, it has become a kind of gadget, used for the post-industrial and design rebranding of the region, a raw material refined in processing as jewelry or cosmetic products. In this sophisticated form, be it a soap or jewelry, it loses its dirtiness, its connection to the earth, natural history, manual labor and its consequences, Łuczak, on the other hand, restores that primal dirtiness associated with the touch of coal.<sup>34</sup> Thus, similarly to Szewczyk, he brings it out from the hidden level, from underground layers, shows its circulation on the surface or in the air as dispersed matter, atomized and circulating among organisms, at the same time directing our attention to the network of interdependencies between the geological and atmospheric dimensions of the landscape.

Such a way of perceiving the landscape “built on coal” – as a material-mineral circulation – results in broadening the perspective to include extinct species (as in the photograph of a fossilized Carboniferous plant – *lepidodendron? syngaria?*) and what is inanimate. It therefore activates a different, metabolic perspective, which, within the framework of environmental humanities, Monika Bakke has written about:

Indeed, there is more than just life involved in the process of becoming within the ecological ruins of the Anthropocene, as metabolic networks of matter and energy flow connect living organisms with non-living – mineral forms of matter organization. [...] Thus, social history is linked to natural history, which includes

33 Edwin Bendyk, *Świat bez węgla* [A world without coal], in *Polski węgiel* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2015), 7.

34 Aleksandra Kunce writes brilliantly about this dirtiness and tangibility of coal in the essay: *Dotknięcie węgla* [A touch of coal], in Aleksandra Kunce and Zbigniew Kałużek, *Myśleć Śląsk. Wybór esejów* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2007), 259–269.

both the biological dimension – treated in terms of life (*bios, zoe*) and death (*thanatos*) – as well as the broader geological dimension (*geos*).<sup>35</sup>

The focus on the entanglements and metabolic circulation of animate and inanimate matter, organic and mineral, seems particularly pertinent to experiencing and understanding the Silesian landscape and firmly established in the region's chthonic-geological imagination.<sup>36</sup> Such mineral-geological-metamorphic flows of *bios, zoe, thanatos* and *geos* are, for example, the driving energy behind the narrative in Szczepan Twardoch's *Drach*.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, in the photographic practices and modes of vision of the new generation of Silesian photographers, what is revealed is not so much a committed rhetoric of intervention, breaking out of the marasm of the Anthropocene,<sup>38</sup> or an accusatory critique, but an attempt to capture the complexity of transformative processes, less explicit and more oriented towards the search for interdependence. However, unlike Edward Burtynsky's best-known photographs of the Anthropocene landscape, which operate with a monumentalism that gravitates toward the aesthetics of the sublime and the beauty of catastrophe, Szewczyk and Łuczak offer a more intimate

35 Monika Bakke, "Gdy stawka jest większa niż życie. Sztuka wobec mineralno-biologicznych wspólnot" [When the stake is greater than life. Art in the face of mineral-biological communities], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2020): 167.

36 Materiality as a specific feature of the Silesian landscape is pointed out by Elżbieta Dutka in Dutka, "Literackie krajobrazy Górnego Śląska," 244–254. It is worth adding that the founding text for the geological imagination of the region, namely Walenty Roździeński's *Officina ferraria*, was published as early as 1612.

37 Cf. "Upper Silesia is a Drach. A dragon. It is more than a metaphor. [...] Drach's body sometimes trembles, sometimes gases bloat the dragon's intestines, as in Halemba in 2006, or as in Makoszowy in 1958, woe then to those who clean the dragon's intestines of coal, that is, dragon shit, in which are imprinted the organic remnants of worlds that no longer exist and in which we, too, will one day imprint ourselves, another deck high above the forbs and horsetails, ammonites and sharks of the Carboniferous. [...] For Drach we are his body, like everything else, Drach knows that in the end, like everything else, we will turn to black stone." Szczepan Twardoch, "Drach, czyli Śląsk" [Drach, that is Silesia], *Fabryka Silesia* 1 (2013): 94–95. cf. also Anna Barcz, "Pod ziemią. Antropoceniczne narracje na przykładzie *Dracha* Szczepana Twardocha i *Miedzianki* Filipa Springera" [Underground. Anthropocene narratives on the example of Szczepan Twardoch's *Drach* and Filip Springer's *Miedzianka*], in *Poetyki ekocydu. Historia, natura, konflikt*, ed. Aleksandra Ubortowska, Dobrosława Korczyńska-Partyka and Ewa Kuliś (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2019), 164–170.

38 Ewa Bińczyk, *Epoka człowieka. Retoryka i marazm antropocenu* [The age of human. The rhetoric and torpor of the Anthropocene] (Warszawa: PWN, 2018).

yet multidimensional perception – they expand the visibility of the landscape to include haptics and a corporeal relationship with humans close to eco-haptic photography.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, they reduce the distance – the landscape of the Anthropocene is not an image or view seen from afar, relegated to a safe distance, but something that penetrates, permeates, settles on the skin and lungs, is the trembling earth underfoot, the tilted house in which one lives, matter that vibrates and circulates. Thus, they make the threat real, opening up perception to affective responses.

Therefore, in the case of Szewczyk and Łuczak's projects, one can speak of bringing to the surface the emotions that accompany the transformation of the landscape, especially solastalgia. This is a term introduced by Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht, referring to the emotional reactions of people living in heavily transformed areas when their immediate surroundings no longer meet the criteria of a safe and secure location.<sup>40</sup> Psychoterratic and somatoterratic disorders are induced by factors related to profound environmental changes, pollution, degradation of the residential landscape. Indeed, the projects of both photographers, who are biographically connected to Silesia, recognize this relational coupling, in which the erosion and destabilization of the land produces not only material consequences, but also the effect of eroding emotional and psychophysical stability.<sup>41</sup> Solastalgia in this case assumes the form of a precipitate sense of balance and security, anxiety, fear, trembling, also a polarization between a strong identification with the Silesian landscape and place of residence and an awareness of living in an environment that is simultaneously threatened and endangered. Autobiographical experience, emphasized by both of them, also makes the internal point of view stronger, making the photographs not so much about the Anthropocene as

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39 Cf. Derek Gladwin, "Eco-haptic Photography Visualizing Irish Bogland in Rachel Giese's *The Donegal Pictures*," *Photography and Culture* 6 (2) (2013): 157–174.

40 Glenn Albrecht, "Solastalgia. A New Concept in Health and Identity," *Philosophy, Activism, Nature* 3 (2005): 41–55.

41 I'm leaving aside the issue of diseases generated by the development of industry in Silesia, since the photographs do not directly refer to them, but one should not forget the pneumoconiosis or lead epidemic in the 1970s among the children of Szopienice. Marta Mazuś wrote about them in her reportage: *Życie na bezhuciu* (*Polityka* 17 [2014]) and Michał Jedryka in his book *Ołowiane dzieci. Zapomniana epidemia* [Lead children. The forgotten epidemic] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyka Polityczna, 2020). Cf. also Marta Tomczok, "Dyskursy ołowicy i krzemicy (na podstawie literatury fikcyjnej i dokumentów literackich o przemyśle metalurgicznym)" [Discourses of lead and silicosis (based on fiction and literary documents about the metallurgical industry)], *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2022).

deeply embedded in it,<sup>42</sup> which is why the fragility of landscape, matter, life is so strongly visualized in them.

One more aspect of Silesian post-transition landscape photographs is important, namely their peripherality. Marianna Michalowska pointed to the role of photographs of peripheral places in the context of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene, calling them “critical landscapes” as they are “not just about seeing the landscape, but about linking natural thinking with an awareness of the consequences of human action.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, their critical dimension stems from being located on the margins, and the “peripheral gaze,”<sup>44</sup> makes one’s view sharper: as in the case of Wilczyk, who portrays the repressed, embarrassing (in the central and dominant perspective of the free market, of course) effects of deindustrialization, or as in the case of Łuczak, who presented the *Mgła* [The fog] exhibition during the Katowice climate summit, where the native, central narrative ignored the environmental and health effects of coal power.

### Purification, Fabrication

Wojciech Wilczyk’s *Czarno-Biały Śląsk* opens with a short prose piece by Andrzej Stasiuk – *I tak to się wszystko kiedyś skończy* [And so it will all come to an end one day]. In the writer’s narrative, there also appears, as in the photographs, a post-industrial landscape of decay and decomposition framed in a mortal and material metaphoric<sup>45</sup>:

Those are steel mills, mines, coking plants, power plants. Extinguished, exhausted, burned out, destroyed, extinguished. [...] All this looks like a skeleton from which the meat is falling off, and only now can you see how it was made. Here you can come like a graveyard to reconcile and prepare. It’s only now that it’s falling apart that you can see that there was too much of it, that it was unnecessary, and nothing has actually happened now that it’s gone.<sup>46</sup>

42 Cf. CoCo, “Fotografia antropocenu,” 38.

43 Marianna Michałowska, “Krajobraz krytyczny w polskiej fotografii – geografie peryferii” [Critical landscape in Polish photography: Geographies of the peripheries], *Zeszyty Artystyczne* 37 (2020): 31.

44 Paweł Starzec, “Ślad w przestrzeni społecznej. Socjologiczne spojrzenie na ‘nową topografię’” [Trace in social space. A sociological perspective on the “new topography”], in *Procesy, sedymentacje, topografie*, 169.

45 Cf. Dutka, “Literackie krajobrazy Górnego Śląska,” 262–263.

46 Andrzej Stasiuk, “I tak to się wszystko kiedyś skończy” [And so it will all come to an end one day], in Wilczyk, *Czarno-biały Śląsk*, 5–6.

However, Stasiuk recognizes even deeper correlations – the link between industrial infrastructure and the exploitation of the earth's resources and the circular movement of matter:

In order to build a city or a factory, you had to get a lot of stuff out of the ground. You couldn't build from the air or water. Now you need to bury it back somewhere, and before that you need to haul it away somewhere, all those stones, ironstone, those minerals, bricks, concrete and the rest of it.<sup>47</sup>

Following this brief commentary on the ruination of the Silesian landscape, however, comes a passage that radically changes the optics. For this time the main actor in the circulation of matter is not man, but nature, and it is nature that overgrows and patches up the cracks of the "torn" landscape:

Amazingly, but one can see how grass crawls into the cracks, and trees grow out of the poisoned places. Water appears in puddles, clouds are reflected in the water. Everything indicates that at the end, however, it will be the same as it was at the beginning. Instead, the landscape will simply become covered with sky, water and plants, it will grow together, and the whole industrial episode will go into oblivion. And the trees will feed on inedible leftovers.<sup>48</sup>

A similar perspective can be found in Adam Robinski's book *Hajstry. Krajobraz bocznych dróg* [Black storks. Landscape of side roads], entirely devoted to post-transition landscapes. The destination of one of the expeditions is the anthropogenic lake district of the Łuk Mużakowski:

There's no better name for it: a moonscape. Here's what mining shallow deposits does to space. Initially, mining was done deep underground, at an oblique angle, with abandoned collapse shafts. Subsequently, as mining technologies advanced, open pit was used. Over time, mines were closed because mining was no longer profitable. Either way, the holes in the ground were filling with rainwater. As groundwater also came to the fore, a lake was formed. Acidic, because the soil contained pyrite accompanying the minerals and a host of other chemicals. There are several hundred such lakes on the Muskau Arc [...]. Each one is different, because it is permeated with different kinds of chemicals.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>49</sup> Adam Robiński, *Hajstry. Krajobraz bocznych dróg* [Black storks. Landscape of side roads] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2017), 187–188.



The anthropogenic lakeland of the Muskauer Arc is an area on the Polish-German border where intensive mining of lignite (first by underground method, then by open pit), ceramic clay, quartz sands has been carried out since 1834.<sup>50</sup> After the last mine closed in 1973, some of the degraded post-mining areas were subjected to reclamation, while spontaneous renaturalization processes are taking place in the remaining areas. They are already so advanced that a geopark was created at the site in 2009, which was listed by UNESCO in 2015.

However, Robinski does not travel to the Lake District to indulge in a fetishization of the disaster, and does not simply limit himself to providing a descriptive account of the contamination of the landscape. Rather, what intrigues him most is the phenomenon of the exceptionally high population of dragonflies in the area and the processuality of the landscape's evolution after the cessation of mining. Indeed, the landscape of the Arc is only seemingly synchronous, with expeditions to particular places in the lake district revealing different stages in the natural history of the place.<sup>51</sup> While the younger reservoirs are indeed contaminated and overly acidic, the older, century-old ones have already become neutralized and eutrophied. Nonetheless, even the acidified ones have proven to be an attractive biotope for rare dragonfly species. The narrative was thus guided to balance the effect of the landscape's toxicity with its reverse – the evolution of the abandoned area into a natural refuge, a “third landscape.”<sup>52</sup> And perhaps even more – Robinski builds the story in such a way as to eliminate the horror or fear reflex (usually produced when toxicity is experienced) and reveal the processuality of the post-disaster state – its particular temporality stretched over a long natural time, since the post-transformation landscape is always still in the process of transformation. The current (post-mining) transformation is not the only one, by the way, as the reporter further deepens temporality with a geological dimension, the landscape plowed through by quarries reveals older layers: “I reached my fingers into the wall of the heap and pulled out souvenirs from the Miocene. [...] In the Miocene forest from which the local lignite was formed, magnolias, ginkgoes, sequoias, cedars and cypresses grew. After several million years, a mere touch turned them into dust.”<sup>53</sup> Significantly, one more time the perception of landscape shifts towards hapticism.

50 Jacek Koźma, “Antropogeniczne zmiany krajobrazu związane z dawnym górnictwem węgla brunatnego na przykładzie polskiej części obszaru łuku Mużakowa” [Anthropogenic landscape transformations associated with former lignite mining on the example of the Polish part of the Muskau Arc area], *Górnictwo Odkrywkowe* 3 (2016).

51 Robiński, *Hajstry*, 203.

52 Clement, “Manifest trzeciego krajobrazu.”

53 Robiński, *Hajstry*, 207.

Therefore, neither Stasiuk nor Robinski raise laments over the ecological catastrophe – the “post-human” landscape they see, after the destructive exploitation of resources, although polluted, chemical, contaminated, over-lives and often recovers spontaneously. The lake district of the Muskau Arc has become a sanctuary for rare species of dragonflies, in the Błędowska Desert an ongoing battle is taking place between man and nature, which is striving to regain its former territory after an ecological disaster, the heaps of Silesia are being replanted with vegetation. That’s one of the prevalent – partly consolatory – approaches in the contemporary perception of the post-industrial landscape, emphasizing more strongly the processes of renaturalization and revitalization than devastation and annihilation. However, the writers step outside the pastoral phantasm, which is why they do not view the nature-industrialization relationship in an apocalyptic manner. They are interested in the very process of transformation, the circulation of matter, in what happens when man withdraws from the industrial landscape and vegetation enters. Therefore, they do not fall into the constraints of the discourse of catastrophe or apocalypse, which are somehow affected by the one-dimensionality and in many cases by the objectification of nature as a passive victim. These are landscapes of a sometimes peculiar metabolism, yet it is then that nature ceases to be a resource exploited by man and becomes once again a zoe, a driving force that performs another act of transformation in a persistent process. Furthermore, such an explicit emphasis on the processuality and activity of nature’s forces – its potential for self-purification – radically profiles the viewer’s vision of the landscape more differently, highlighting its vitality and thus prudently delineating possible trajectories for the future.

In contrast, an unambiguously apocalyptic interpretive framework is proposed by Filip Springer in his reportage series *Zmiana klimatu już tu jest. Podróż do przyszłości* [Climate change is already here. Journey to the future] published in 2019 issue of the journal *Pismo*. Thus, each of them focuses on a different aspect of climate change, however one that clearly leaves its mark or even ravages the landscape: with the titles *Noteć wysycha na naszych oczach, Śląsk – kraina katastrof, Czy zatrują nas wysychające torfowiska?* [The Noteć River is drying up right in front of our eyes, Silesia – the land of disasters, will we be poisoned by drying peat bogs?] directly evoke further threats. In his perspective, all these phenomena are derivatives of human hyperactivity, so (according to the optics of the Anthropocene) it is possible to reverse the perspective and perceive in them not so much “natural” disasters, but post-natural ones.<sup>54</sup>

Such a perspective is revealed even more clearly in the reportage *Uberlandshaft* from the open-pit mine in Belchatow. Here Springer juxtaposes the

54 Ewa Bińczyk, *Epoka człowieka*, 118.

natural processes of geological landscape formation as they occur in deep time with human short-term actions. By operating on a grand scale, he makes a point of examining the effect of disproportionality in the desert landscape of the quarry. However, most importantly, he regards the landscape as a foreshadowing of the apocalypse:

I arrived at the edge of the quarry to learn something about the future. I sought to be overwhelmed by the scale in which not only the individual, but also the giant machine means nothing. Both of them are equal here – they are lost in immensity. Yet immensity diminishes the dimension of time. Suddenly the continuance of civilization in it seems a blink. The geological perspective of the stratification, the long duration of millions of years and us with our anxiety about tomorrow. Well, there will be no tomorrow and this thought is just dust on the surface of history. Yes, somewhere here is the beginning of the apocalypse of which we will most likely be participants. We, along with our children and grandchildren. You can read it from the landscape, all you have to do is watch carefully.<sup>55</sup>

In the landscape of the Belchatow area, Springer primarily notices those features that indicate human interference, the transformation of the natural morphology and geology of the area: the shifting of the river bed, the creation of Kamieński Mountain with a ski lift on a former mine dump. Basically, all these artificial elements create an artifact, a constructed landscape, an *erzac* of nature. Or to put it even more explicitly, the landscape after reclamation represents for him “an attempt to obliterate the fact of the crime.”

The entire area is full of landscape *erzacs*. Man replaced nature here, moved the river, piled up a mountain, planted a forest. All this took four decades. How to treat a landscape that was created in such a short time? When the quarries are flooded, one of the largest lakes in this part of Poland will appear here. A splinter of our greed, a landscape attempt to obliterate the fact of the crime. But how to call it? A super landscape? Landsuperscape? Hyper landscape? Uberlandschaft?<sup>56</sup>

Thus, for Springer, the anthropogenic landscape after mining operations is completely unnatural, post-natural, “fabricated.” However, the problem is not of aesthetic nature, although the reporter talks about landscape aesthetics. For him, the artificial landscape of the coal “open pit” is only a “cover”,

55 Filip Springer, “Uberlandschaft (albo epilog)” [Uberlandschaft (or epilogue)], in Springer, *Wanna z kolumnadq. Reportaże o polskiej przestrzeni* (Kraków: Karakter, 2020), 306.

56 *Ibid.*, 309.

a camouflage for the upcoming apocalypse. The objective of guiding the narrative in this way seems obvious: to provoke a reaction, to provoke a reflexive intervention, to free us from catatonia, so the reporter operates with a strategy of hyperbolization, the rhetoric of shock and the threat of catastrophe. However, most importantly, he activates emotions – those most emblematic of the psychology of the climate crisis, terror or panic, but also a sense of pretraumatic stress.<sup>57</sup> Springer's short reportage thus brings the Anthropocene into the heart of the debates – on the one hand the multiplied loss of nature, the future and the landscape, and on the other the overproduction of threatening emotions.

These are two radically different landscape narratives and two rhetorics. The first can be called vitalist (or neovitalist),<sup>58</sup> stemming from the belief that nature's spontaneous succession, its spontaneous reclamation potential and the spontaneous dynamics of rebirth will lead to the renaturalization of the post-industrial landscape. Thus, it tends to focus on the causality of the ecosystem, the adaptability – it is a landscape of double transformation, first anthropogenic, then natural, now most often referred to as the “third landscape” (Clement) or “fourth nature” (Kowarik). Meanwhile, the second rhetoric, the apocalyptic one, focuses on man's destructive hyperspace, discerning only artificiality in the post-transformation landscape, with a stronger impact on the affective sphere. However, both of them enable us to see not so much an abstract idea or statistical data, but the material consequences of the Anthropocene or Capitalocene discernible in the geomorphology of the landscape. To put it differently, both narratives transfer a concept fraught with the risk of speculativeness to the geological concrete, available in experience.

### Heap and Utopia

Heaps are literally leftovers, rejects, mining and post-production waste, ashes, slags and dust. At present, they have become a phenomenon of exceptional complexity: they represent a threat to the environment due to the possibility of spontaneous combustion, from a biological perspective they are a kind of scientific laboratory, new species appear on them, such as the arbuscular

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57 Cf. Bożena Gulla, Kinga Tucholska and Agnieszka Ziarnicka-Wojtaszek, *Psychologia kryzysu klimatycznego* [The psychology of the climate crisis] (Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 2020).

58 On the importance of the new vitalism for cultural geography and the non-representational perspective, see Beth Greenhough, “Vitalist Geographies. Life and More-than-human,” in *Taking Places. Non-representational Theories and Geography*, ed. Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison (London: Routledge, 2016).

fungus *Rhizoglosum silesianum* discovered on the partially unreclosed Mako-szowy heap, with time they become refuges of local biodiversity<sup>59</sup>. The heaps are therefore overgrown with plants and become overgrown with meanings. Some of the more important ones were proposed by Diana Lelonek in her project *Hałda rokitnikowa* [Buckthorn slag heap], prepared in response to the Katowice Climate Summit. While it does not concern the Silesian heaps, it nevertheless remains embedded in transformational optics, as the artist, posing the question of what comes after coal, addressed the degradation of the landscape after the open-pit mines of the Konin Basin. The effect of mining is the desertification of these areas, with the Gniezno Lake District disappearing, riparian forests and rivers drying up, among other things. However, Lelonek focused not only on the apocalyptic dimension of the landscape's "exploitation of the ecosystem,"<sup>60</sup> but also on one of the main actors in the reclamation of these areas – sea buckthorn, which, as a particularly resistant plant, is found planted on post-mining spoil heaps. Albeit Lelonek calls it a post-apocalyptic species,<sup>61</sup> it is essentially a pioneer species that strives on the front line, stabilizing the ground, preparing the soil for the next, more demanding plants.

The artist used a kind of imaginative and conceptual volte-face – the title of the project *Hałda rokitnikowa* [Buckthorn slag heap] transfers and shifts attention from the mining industry to the natural-environmental aspect of reclamation. Through this symbolic rebranding from coal to sea buckthorn, the plant becomes a starting point for rethinking the transformation. However, not the one that has already taken place (industrial) and not the one that is taking place (natural), but the next one, the social one, because, as Lelonek points out, she was interested in introducing the issue of "just transformation of the coal region" into the public debate.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the answer to the question of what comes after coal is not just a life-giving plant, but also a different idea of the economic model. So the jars of sea buckthorn preserves, first prepared

59 Adam Rostański, "Wartość przyrodnicza zwałowisk odpadów przemysłowych" [Natural value of post-industrial waste dumps], in *Krajobraz zbudowany na węglu*, 141–148.

60 Joanna Bednarek, "Pełzająca katastrofa" [A creeping catastrophe], *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* 22 (2018), accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.pismowidok.org/pl/archiwum/2018/22-zobaczyc-antropocen/pelejajaca-katastrofa>.

61 "Katastrofa klimatyczna to nie sezonowa moda. Rozmowa z Dianą Lelonek" [Climate catastrophe is not a seasonal trend. A conversation with Diana Lelonek], *Magazyn Szum* January 18, 2019, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://magazynszum.pl/katastrofa-klimatyczna-to-nie-sezonowa-moda-rozmowa-z-diana-lelonek/>.

62 "Postsztuka w czasach postnatury. Z Dianą Lelonek rozmawia Natałka Dovha" [Post-art in the age of post-nature. Diana Lelonek interviewed by Natałka Dovha], *Fragile* 1/2 (2020): 50.

together with volunteers and then smuggled to the Katowice climate congress, are contraband from a different system. As she comments, sea buckthorn:

can be the origin of a social economy that is an alternative to the hegemony of the Konin mine. [...] To ensure that the transformation of the region is successful – i.e., fair and providing residents with alternatives for survival – it can't be that we replace one giant corpo with another giant corpo. It is necessary to develop a mixture – smaller initiatives, companies, cooperatives, cooperatives instead of one giant – because if this is missing, everything collapses. *Rokitnikowa Hałda* [Buckthorn slag heap – translator's note] is a utopian idea – a rokitniki basin instead of a coal basin, but also an initiative aimed at restoring these post-apocalyptic areas back to the locals.<sup>63</sup>

Consequently, Lelonek does not limit herself to a critical perspective, but creates an alternative scenario for the future, not only in natural terms, but also in social, political or economic terms. She proposes a utopian solution realizing that the field of art is the area where such “real, local micro-utopias”<sup>64</sup> of an even other more just transformation can be imagined and tested.

The discourse of the Anthropocene takes away the future, while Lelonek's project allows this future to be witnessed, as it balances the ecocide perspective with a less catastrophic point of view, one that, however, does not lead to nostalgic or escapist pastoralism. This is not due to mechanisms of displacement, adaptation to catastrophe or other negation strategies identified by researchers, but to the conviction that apocalyptic rhetoric carries the risk of being counterproductive, for example due to habituation. Local micro-utopias are a different kind of mobilization for action because “neither tales of progress nor of ruin tell us how to think about collective survival.”<sup>65</sup>

### Towards Landscape Geontology

The Anthropocene has triggered an unusually heavy fervor in the scientific sphere in almost all disciplines, the dizzying overproduction of theories,

63 “Rośliny robią swoje. Rozmowa Anny Cieplak z Dianą Lelonek” [Plants do their own thing. A conversation between Anna Cieplak and Diana Lelonek], *Krytyka Polityczna*, January 9, 2019, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/sztuki-wizualne/diana-lelonek-rosliny/>.

64 Ewa Domańska, “Sprawiedliwość epistemiczna w humanistyce zaangażowanej” [Epistemic justice in the engaged humanities], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2017): 53.

65 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, “Sztuki uważności” [The art of noticing], trans. Przemysław Czaplński, *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2020): 206.

concepts, notions, nevertheless, results in them often circulating (despite the best intentions of the authors) in their own closed circuit. Should we consider that the role of culture is not only to diagnose, but also to translate abstract ideas into an idiom of concretizations observable in the experiential mode, the referenced photographs and narratives of the post-transition landscape enable us to “see” the Anthropocene as much, as postulated by Nicholas Mirzoeff,<sup>66</sup> as much as to realize its haptic proximity, its real, somaterratic and psychoterratic consequences, and the conjunctions and flows between the geological and the atmospheric, exploitation and its material impacts and affects.

More importantly, not only to make the haptic resonance apparent, but also to perceive the complexity of transformative processes. For, the multidirectionality of observation refuses to become reconciled into a coherent, one-line or illustrative narrative. Both processes and discourses proceed in parallel. On the one hand, images of ecocide with recognition of human hyper-powerfulness, aiming at mobilization, breaking us out of our stagnation, with an alarmist rhetoric operating with a strong emotional register, evoking a reflex of panic at the coming catastrophe, as an instrument. On the other hand, the vitalist narrative, emphasizing *zoe* energy, the causality of the natural environment, the potential for rebirth and renaturalization, seems equally powerful. However, this one too sets off emotional registers, closer to restrained and moderate hope as an alternative. Nevertheless, the issue triggered by Wilczyk’s photographic series and Lelonek’s project – the commonly disregarded problem of the collision between ecological and social costs – deserves equal attention.

In all the recognitions, though, the landscape after transformation is not merely a passive screen onto which the diagnoses and fears of the Anthropocene are projected, but also an active battleground of forces that transcend human manageability. It is a geological and metabolic landscape, imbalanced yet uncontrollable, endangered and threatening, material and affective, fragile and vital, revealing a heterogeneous temporality in which the deep time of natural history and the violent, destructive time of human exploitation are intertwined. Thus, in this non-obvious, agonized (post-natural and post-human at the same time) ontology, it regains its depth of dimensions (geological, temporal) and material substantiality, not only organic (humus, soil), but also mineral, inanimate. Due to this geontological<sup>67</sup> extension, we become part of the landscape after transformation – its “trembling” matter.

66 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Jak zobaczyć świat* [How to see the world], trans. Łukasz Zaremba (Warszawa: Karakter, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2016), 220–261.

67 Cf. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, “Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories,” *E-flux Journal* April 2017, accessed May 15, 2021, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/123372/geontologies-the-concept-and-its-territories/>; Bakke, *Gdy stawka jest większa niż życie*, 168–169.

## Abstract

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*Landscape after Transformation*

The article reconstructs the modern understanding of a landscape intensely transformed by the mining industry. Its methodological inspiration comes from non-representational theories, which emphasize such factors as embodied experience, senses, and affects, treating landscape as something more than a visual representation. The author analyzes documentaries, photographs, and reportages. They allow her to highlight the complexity and multidirectionality of landscape transformation processes in the Anthropocene, especially the interdependencies between geology and atmosphere, exploitation and its material effects and affects. They indicate the non-obvious ontology of the landscape after transformation, which is simultaneously post-natural and post-human.

## Keywords

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landscape, transformation, Anthropocene, photography, reportage