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Rubble Warsaw, 1945–1946: Urban Landscaping and Architectural Remains

The city gives the illusion that earth does not exist.

Robert Smithson, 1968¹

Exposition

A collaboration between artists, architects and archaeologists entitled *The Cut* took place in Warsaw, during seven days of late September 2015. It was an “intentional rupture into the anthropogenic surface of the city”² conceived by the artist Aslı Çavuşoğlu and the architecture studio Centrala formed by Simone De Iacobis and Małgorzata Kuciewicz.³ In their statements about *The Cut*, both the artist and the architects expressed their interest in the phenomenon of the past that currently exists in contemporary cities stratified underneath the built environment. Such an observation, deeply indebted to modern philosophy, literature and science, proves particularly relevant in Warsaw. During the Second World War the city underwent almost complete destruction with the majority of buildings transformed into heaps of rubble. In the post-war era it was reconstructed in new political, economic and ideological conditions.

The Cut aimed to make public the hidden anthropogenic strata of Warsaw’s topography and activate the material histories stored within it. Supported by the POLIN Museum of Polish Jews, the group chose an excavation site within the area of Muranów Housing Estate, which is a place particularly loaded with meanings

1 R. Smithson, “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects”, in: *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. J. Flam, Berkley–Los Angeles–London, 1996, p. 102.

2 See: <http://centrala.net.pl/our-work/cut> [accessed 27 Nov. 2018]. I would like to thank Simone De Iacobis, Małgorzata Kuciewicz and Jerzy Elżanowski for their generous consultations and discussion which are of significant importance in the development of my work.

3 Ibid.

and history related to wartime atrocities and death. Over the course of a week, an open-format event was held at the estate with the participation of local community, professionals and scholars. During the first days, archaeologists excavated the first layers of soil and almost immediately an excess of historical material erupted from the underground. First came bricks of many kinds, sizes and colours, parts of the interiors and exteriors of buildings, then cutlery, kitchen utensils, metal door signs, and finally pins and personal objects once existing in the closest proximity to those who lived in this area before the war.⁴ All this material was imbued with the traumatic and violent history of dispossession, systematic oppression and genocide of the Jewish population of Warsaw and Poland.

The decision regarding the excavation site was informed by the history and architecture of the estate itself. Muranów is a centrally located district completed in 1948 and designed by the renowned Polish architect Bohdan Lachert. It is a unique architectural work which merges a commemorative role with the role of a residential estate and thus with everyday life. Its buildings are erected from rubble-concrete of the Warsaw Ghetto and situated on top of a rubblescape formed of bricks, daily objects and remains left in place after the Warsaw Ghetto was levelled by the German Army. The housing-estate project was since its beginning described by Lachert as having a strong commemorative value, even though this aspect of its existence was not accepted by the new communist administration and after 1949 the over-ground appearance of the estate was aligned with the doctrine of Socialist Realism.⁵ What remained was the underground sphere which *The Cut* engaged with. The action provokes historical inquiry into the modes of existence of the past that lie beyond those officially acknowledged, verbalised and established. If official monuments, as Sigmund Freud claimed in regard to London memorials, enable a society to channel its hysterias and melancholias, to forget and keep on living, than how should we regard the strata of rubble, and historical matter hidden under the soil upon which, in Warsaw, we walk every day?⁶

Architectural materialism

A general shift towards materiality has been observed in such disciplines as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, as well as history, since the late 1990's. Things, objects or matter re-emerged after the linguistic interest of post-structuralist methodologies. The "object-oriented ontologies" represented by philosophers such as Jane

4 For the account of the excavation: J. Elżanowski, "Domesticating Violence: Notes from a Socio-Spatial Incursion into Warsaw's Anthropogenic Stratum", in: *Presence/Absence/Traces: Contemporary Artists of Jewish Warsaw*, exhibition catalogue, eds. E. Chomicka, A. Pindera, Warsaw, 2015, pp. 164–180.

5 See M. Meng, "Muranów as a Ruin: Layered Memories in Postwar Warsaw", in: *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, eds. E. T. Lehrer, M. Meng, Bloomington, 2015; M. Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland*, Cambridge, 2011.

6 *Urban Memory: History and Amnesia in the Modern City*, ed. M. Crinson, London, 2005, p. xvii.

Bennett suggested possible ways of thinking about matter and objects as agents in our social life.⁷ In history, we have witnessed a resurgence of studies which followed particular commodities or objects of daily use, constructing stories which linked domestic use-values with global markets of exchange, revealing processes of social stratification and identity formation.⁸ Interestingly, only some studies labelled as “materialist” engaged with the materialities beyond their tangible or commodity-forms. This is particularly the case of architectural history, which still persistently favours form over matter, leaving the latter to the engineering discourses and those of labourers on construction sites.⁹

The alternative approach to the architectural field is represented in the conference volume edited by Katie Lloyd Thomas suggestively entitled *Material Matters*. The volume aims to look how the current interdisciplinary interest in materiality “might open architectural discourse up to social and political questions of material practice”.¹⁰ Architecture is a discipline particularly focused on the structuring, giving form, containing – the architect is historically established as a form giver. Therefore, matter becomes abstracted, acting as a passive mass which is given a form in a process of design. From such a position, both its history and contemporary architectural practice excludes a crucial perspective on the building process as a reconfiguration of different kinds of matter in space by means of labour and technology. From this point of view, “Materials must be extracted or manufactured, they must be worked and, once *in situ*, they must be maintained. And of course materials are themselves active; it is a transaction, rather than a one-way operation, that occurs in the shaping of stuff”.¹¹ What does this materialist approach to the field imply for the architectural histories? The outcomes can be observed, for example, in a seminal book by Adrian Forty *Concrete and Culture*.¹² Focusing on concrete proved to be highly inspiring, exposing a wide range of complexities, paradoxes and struggles embedded within the core of a modern project. Concrete offered the possibility of writing about history from a range of angles – from religion to labour, while involving the broad scope of social strata.

Persisting matter

The period between the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War in Europe is a transitional moment which only recently became historicised on its own terms. Despite the amount of processes occurring in the immediate post-war period

7 J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham–London, 2010.

8 F. Trentmann, “Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics”, *Journal of British Studies*, 2009, 48, pp. 283–307.

9 K. L. Thomas, *Material Matters: Architecture and Material Practice*, London–New York, 2006, p. 1.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

12 A. Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History*, London, 2012.

on local and global scales, for a long time it remained co-opted by the history of the periods which came before and after it. Therefore, the years between 1945 and 1948 tend to be characterised by contradictory statements – by the atrocity of the law and the violent post-war crisis, as well as the “rise of an alternative universalising ideology of expertise, science, and technical knowledge”.¹³ Indeed, the second half of the 1940s should be considered in its liminality where different tendencies coexist: economical crisis combines with political transition and social struggles feed into the process of reconstruction. Willing to approach the early process of reconstruction in Warsaw with a sensibility towards the material, we immediately encounter a mass of rubble – 30 million cubic meters of debris – which covered the city in the beginning of January 1945.

This particular materiality, excessively present in post-war Warsaw, is the topic of a paper published by the architect and scholar Jerzy Elżanowski, who later became a consultant and participant of *The Cut*. His paper focuses on the history of the Muranów Housing Estate designed by Bohdan Lachert and built on, and from, the rubble of the levelled Warsaw Ghetto. Elżanowski examines the way architects from the Bureau for the Capital City Reconstruction [Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy, BOS] mapped the destruction of the city in the series of surveys conducted in 1945 and 1946 and follows the construction of the estate which was both a commemorative public monument and the first estate to be built for the workers after the emergence of the communist government. Elżanowski shows how the rubble in Warsaw was uniquely used by Lachert to create a living monument, and calls “for a re-evaluation of the relationship between the body of architecture and the human body as it challenges the reader to consider the possibility that Warsaw’s post-war rubble-concrete buildings may contain human remains”.¹⁴

Because of its historical, architectural and contemporary features, Muranów is the most prominent example of rubble architecture in Warsaw. As such, it is discussed extensively in the context of Jewish heritage in Michael Meng’s *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Post-war Germany and Poland*. However, both Elżanowski and Meng focus on an explicitly commemorative project and consider the rubble as a matter of commemoration and trauma within the city. While it is undoubtedly a promising way to approach this matter, we should reconstruct an alternative. This is offered to us by Jeffry M. Diefendorf, who devotes one chapter of his book on West Germany reconstruction to *Trümmer* (rubble).¹⁵ Diefendorf’s study focuses on the official, semi-official and illegal economies which emerged around rubble as a building material during the immediate post-war era. This account suggests an ap-

13 *Post-War Reconstruction in Europe: International Perspectives, 1945–1949*, ed. M. Mazower, J. Reinisch, D. Feldman, Oxford, 2011, 24.

14 Cf. J. Elżanowski, “Ruins, Rubble And Human Remains: Negotiating Culture And Violence in Post-Catastrophic Warsaw”, *Public Art Dialogue*, 2012, 2 [abstract].

15 J. M. Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War: The Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II*, New York–Oxford, 1993, p. 18.

proach which mobilises knowledge from the areas of politics and economics, setting post-war debris in the centre of the early struggles for reconstruction.

The following work is a part of a broader PhD research which looks at rubble in order to reconstruct a complex and vast set of operations, discussions and struggles which concerned this issue in the early period of the reconstruction. This essay moves forward by learning from the approaches of Elżanowski and Diefendorf and shifting the scale of the inquiry to the whole urban area of Warsaw. When reviewing the stratification of historical material from the wartime destruction in contemporary landscape of the city, it is necessary to examine the historical process of rubble-clearing and utilisation conducted in the immediate post-war era. Here, I have chosen to focus on the earliest approaches to the problem which relate to the landscaping and vernacular procedures that emerged around rubble-clearing in Warsaw. The final part of the text points out the broader interdisciplinary aim which emerges from the material historiography of architecture.

The problem of building waste and the Warsaw Reconstruction Office

The post-war period of architectural works in Warsaw can be divided into three not mutually exclusive historical parts. Between January 1945 and December 1946, the Bureau for the Capital City Reconstruction [Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy, hereafter: BOS] was founded and it immediately started to prepare and implement rebuilding programs, which mainly focused on housing. The second stage, between January 1947 until the beginning of 1949, was the period during which the previously planned works commenced, with machinery commonly used and all the institutions fully operational. Several governmental and public administration buildings were erected at this stage. The third stage was the “six-year plan”, carried out between 1949 and 1955 and proclaimed by the president of Poland, Bolesław Bierut.¹⁶ The plan was announced just after the official introduction of the Socialist Realism in architecture and arts in general.¹⁷ In July 1945 the BOS employed some 1500 architects and urban planners, many of whom were strongly influenced by international modernism which they tried to implement in the new projects for Warsaw.

One of the main figures in the Bureau was Józef Sigalin. Sigalin’s architectural education was interrupted by the war; yet, having fled to the Soviet Union following the invasion of Warsaw, he made a career in the Red Army and thus became one of the first architects to arrive in Warsaw after the liberation. He supported the

16 B. Bierut, *Sześcioletni plan odbudowy Warszawy* [Six-Year Plan of Warsaw Reconstruction], Warsaw, 1950.

17 The doctrine of Socialist Realism was officially announced by Bolesław Bierut at the Warsaw Conference of Communist Party on 3 July 1949. The programme of Socialist Realism in architecture was proclaimed on June 21 of the same year at the Conference of Architects of the Communist Party.

newly established communist government and strongly believed in architecture's mission in the process of rebuilding the capital, as well as in constructing the country's new ideological identity. In 1986, a four-volume work by Sigalin was published under the title *Warsaw 1944–1980*.¹⁸ It is a historical account of Warsaw's development, which mainly consists of documents and clippings from Sigalin's archive. His account is distinctly teleological, mainly showing the value of architectural work at that time; however, his narration can provide us with some information on the founding circumstances of the "Rubble Commission" and the discourses concerning rubble in Warsaw.

A reading of documents from the period 1945 and 1946 may give the impression that the clearing and utilisation of the rubble proceeded quickly and easily. On 24 July the Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej [TRJN] (Provisional Government of National Unity) established several bodies related to the reconstruction – the Ministry of Reconstruction, the Building Research Institute, and Bureau for the Capital City Reconstruction (active from January 1945, albeit under a different name).¹⁹ Just five days later Sigalin reported on the first discussions on the rubble problem. At the meeting on 29 May 1945 the urban-planning section of the BOS discussed the possibilities of rubble disposal throughout the whole area of the old Vistula basin.²⁰ Rubble became a part of a larger plan of landscaping and natural environment restitution which were among the main points of the projected city design.

In the first year after the liberation, the plan was for rubble to be treated as a natural waste material, dealt with mainly by the inhabitants of Warsaw; whereas architects struggled to keep up with these works in order to make some use of the rubble. However, at the meetings on 11 July and 12 July 1945, the first ideas for the so-called rubble rationalisation and economisation emerged: "Rubble is a building material which should be economically exploited (sorted and processed)".²¹ Such statements arose at both meetings, but were followed by such excuses as "In the initial period, when the lack of equipment does not allow for properly conducted utilisation of rubble, [...] the rubble must be used as a landscaping material [...]".²² Architects were haunted by technological and financial scarcity and the amount of rubble seemed impossible to clear at that point. The problem-solving process was postponed, with the decision: "Until the introduction of a rubble disposal system, limit the removal as much as possible".²³

18 J. Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980*, Warsaw, 1986.

19 Provisional Government of National Unity, *Dekret z dnia 24 maja 1945 r. o utworzeniu Ministerstwa Odbudowy* [Decree dated 24 May 1945 on the establishment of the Bureau for the Capital City Reconstruction], (Warsaw: TRJN, 1945), <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU19450210123> [accessed 28 July 2017].

20 Sigalin, *Warszawa...*, p. 119.

21 Ibid., p. 120.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 121.

People's Clearance

While the BOS was discussing these issues, the city began to buzz with life. The census carried out in May 1945 shows that Warsaw was inhabited by 377,900 people, and this number increased month by month to reach almost 820,000 in 1950.²⁴ People returned to their old homes, which had ceased to exist, but even greater numbers of migrants from the whole of Poland came to Warsaw to dwell in the city's remains. The state and local administration was undergoing post-war turbulence and transitions which – at least in the beginning – left people on their own in the process of settling the ruins of the city – a process characterised by barter cooperation and a barter economy, as well as thefts and violence. Making the city inhabitable was strictly related to housing, but even more importantly to the communication infrastructure. The roads, pavements and ruined houses had to be cleared from debris, rubble and wartime remains, and the bodies found all over the city needed to be buried or reburied. All these motifs are found in the oral accounts of the period which give us an insight into the down-to-earth, everyday issues in 1945 Warsaw. This is how Maria Nowicka describes the process of rubble clearing:

It was a matter [...] of bringing the city to life again, because one could neither ride nor walk through these streets littered with rubble – they were utterly cluttered. The utilisation of rubble in Warsaw was mainly facilitated by horse-drawn carts coming from suburban villages. We only had our bare hands because there was no machinery or equipment. We loaded rubble onto the carts and cleared bricks by making piles of them in order to contribute to the reconstruction of Warsaw.²⁵

Maria Nowicka was one of the thousands of women engaged in the process of rubble-clearing. A public organisation known as the Work Brigades was formed immediately after the liberation. Most of the labourers were women, old people and children – the men were still at the front or in the labour camps in Germany. The history of the Work Brigades is a dramatic one. The authorities established them in order to start a systematic process of clearing rubble. Workers joined because there was no other work to be had or because they felt an obligation towards the destroyed capital, or both. The pay was also good for the time – until the money ran out. In July 1945 around 23,000 people were employed in the Brigades, clearing, sorting and working through the rubble and ruins. If we estimate that every working person had a group of relatives or people to support, we arrive at the conclusion that around 1/3 of Warsaw eked out a living from the rubble-clearing works. As Nowicka and others mentioned, not even basic tools were available, nor machines or any other help – only bare hands, and pieces of cloth used as bags to carry the

24 B. Czerwińska-Jędrusiak, *Ludność i powierzchnia Warszawy w latach 1921–2008* [The population and area of Warsaw in the years 1921–2008], Warsaw, 2009, http://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/l_ludnosc_powierzchnia_Warszawy_1921_2008.pdf, [accessed 27 November 2018].

25 Maria Nowicka, “AHM_0672”, transcript of an oral history conducted by Jarosław Pałka, *Zapomniani świadkowie XX wieku, Audiodhistoria*, Warsaw, 2008, part 011.

loads to the horse-carts. In November, the brigades were dismantled because of the burden that they put on the city's budget.

New inhabitants came from all over Poland to participate in the rebuilding of the city, looking for a dwelling of their own and for possibilities to make a living. Andrzej Cylejewski provides us with a highly detailed account of scenarios related to rubble:

After our arrival my father bought a horse and a wagon, one made from solid planks, and simply hired himself out for the removal of rubble from Warsaw. On Redutowa Street, there was a big valley, with a small lake at the bottom, the same as in Moczydło park, where a hole had been previously dug for the extraction of clay. It was there that the rubble was deposited. The tram network did not work, but the tracks were fine and there were some burnt-out cars standing on them. On the chassis of these cars, boxes with open sides were added. They were used to transport rubble through Wolska Street to the clay pits. The cars were pulled by tractors of course; the rubble was dumped from the tracks on the sides, and then it was all levelled and covered with soil. There is currently a park in that place, with the trees that were planted in the 1950s. On the side walls of these trams transporting the rubble, there were three letters – BOS. [...] My father was annoyed, because while carrying the rubble he had to pass under the railway tracks which linked Gdańska Station with the other one. The officials there issued receipts stating that the carriage was moving rubble out of the city – they were needed for settlement and payment. The horses were always tired at this point. Father worked transporting rubble until there was no more need for this.²⁶

As these personal histories clearly indicate, the rubble was an everyday obstacle in the reconstruction of Warsaw. Around its existence a discursive, social and economic layer formed while those determined to dwell in Poland's capital laboured towards the restoration of the in-city mobility, communication and, simply put, their own immediate surroundings. However, the everyday social life, politics and economies of the immediate post-war era were rife with contradictions and complexities that may easily confuse the historical investigation of this period. Oral versions are therefore a valuable source of cohesive counter-narratives to those emerging from archival sources, that is, ones given by professionals and the state administration. Moving between all those strata, we can discover links and exchanges which would not be obvious in a history focused on one particular layer of the reconstruction process.

A rubblescape for Warsaw

To keep up with the inhabitants working around the city, architects were obliged to propose solutions which would subordinate the process of rubble clearance to a broad planning agenda. As previously indicated, the architectural approaches to

26 Andrzej Cylejewski, "AHM_3356", transcript of an interview conducted by Iwona Makowska, *Zapomniani świadkowie XX wieku, Audiohistoria* [The forgotten witnesses of the 20th century. Recorded history], Warsaw, 2016, part 005.

the mass of rubble during the reconstruction could be provisionally divided into architecturally “productive” or “unproductive” ones. Examination of the productive approaches – such as, for example, the production of rubble concrete and technologies of rubble prefabrication – lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is possible to grasp the extent of the latter approach, which focused on the intentional and unintentional processes of landscaping that were an outcome of rubble clearing within the city’s central areas. Some architects working for the BOS were most probably inspired by the vernacular flow of architectural matter and officially proposed designs which would facilitate such an unorganised process. In a document dated 27 October 1945, the “Commission for the development of demolition material utilisation techniques”, a predecessor of the “Rubble Commission”, states that the project proposed by architect Maciej Nowicki was economically feasible and could be carried out.²⁷ This short notice reveals the lack of appropriate research on the subject, although it states that the proposal was an economical method of rubble utilisation. Nowicki, an architect and engineer who at this point in time was planning his emigration to the United States,²⁸ was a renowned architect, famous for his experimentation with building materials and geometries. His project, evaluated by the commission, was possibly the first broad urban incorporation of architectural remains into the landscape of the city of Warsaw.²⁹ It appears that the drawings prepared by the architect for the project are now missing from the archive, although the description of the project still exists together with a handwritten table of contents for the proposal (Fig. 1).

Nowicki, designing for the future central trade and office districts, proposed to leave the rubble from the destroyed buildings and tear down the remaining ruins. The remains were meant to raise the ground level between the streets: Marszałkowska, Żelazna, Aleje Jerozolimskie, and the Saskia Axis. Uniquely, the project started with the idea of the economical reuse of rubble, to quickly move towards arguments from the field of modern urban planning and urban aesthetics. Nowicki criticises the “American” idea of dividing the vehicles and pedestrians by underground passages for the latter to walk safely. Instead, by using the mass of rubble left by the war, he proposes a model based on a landscape in which the traffic is divided in a smoother way, accommodating the constant flow of people in the central quarters of the city. Accordingly, in the project the pre-war street level is left for the pedestrians and shops, with the vehicles moving on rubble ramparts that can also be used as places for plants and trees. In this way, Nowicki suggests, the city could get rid of as much as 1,500,000m³ of rubble and create a unique landscape for

27 State Archive of the Capital City of Warsaw, the BOS Archive (Archiwum Państwowe m. st. Warszawy, zespół Biura Odbudowy Stolicy), file no. 2492, p. 109.

28 Maciej Nowicki together with his wife Stanisława Sandecka left Warsaw for New York in the autumn of 1945. Nowicki died around midnight on 31 August/1 September 1950, in a plane crash in the Western Desert of Egypt.

29 State Archive of the Capital City of Warsaw, the BOS Archive (Archiwum Państwowe m. st. Warszawy, zespół Biura Odbudowy Stolicy), file no. 2492, p. 103.

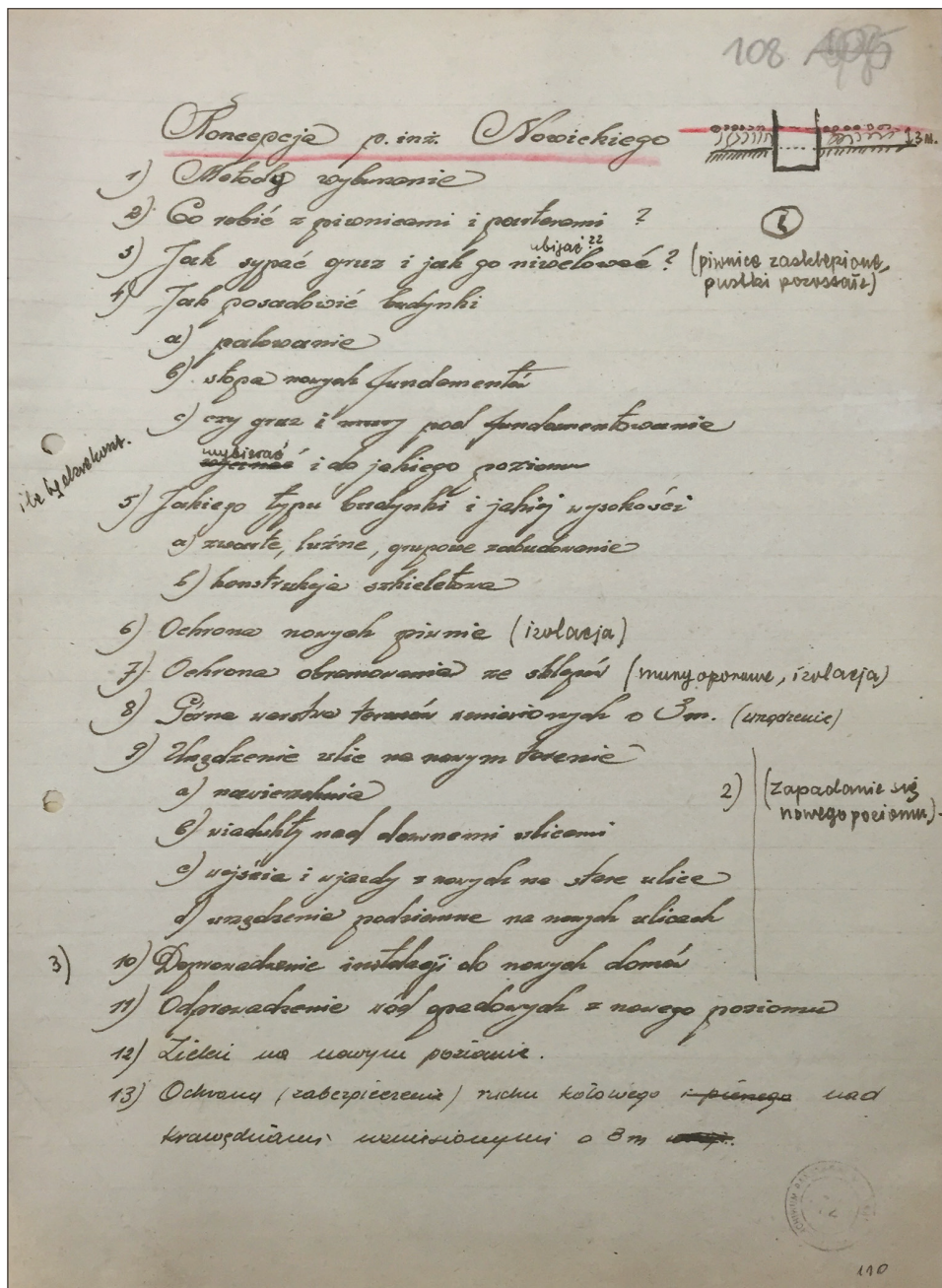


Fig. 1. Proposal for rubble landscaping by Maciej Nowicki, photo: State Archive of the Capital City of Warsaw, the BOS Archive

a new city. The ramparts would more thoroughly expose the buildings to the traffic, creating a double “ground floor”; moreover, a diversified landscape would be created, accommodating both old and new buildings in the city centre.

Despite the positive preliminary opinion regarding the project, an informative document dating from 1946, authored by engineers Jerzy Nowiński and Stanisław Mazurkiewicz, provides us with an explanation for the project’s disappearance from the BOS agenda and its failure to materialise in reality. In the report entitled “Management of rubble in the area of Warsaw”, in the chapter on “Building of Elevated Areas From Demolition Rubble”, the authors criticise Nowicki’s idea (without naming the architect).³⁰ They state that the idea of building on rubble mounds seems economically reasonable, but after precise study it turns out to be the opposite – rubble clearing and removal into dumps is much more cost-effective. The crucial problems, and thus the reasons why the BOS discarded the whole idea, include the instability of a rubble foundation and the additional amount of money to be spent on the connecting infrastructure between different levels of the city. In the case of Nowicki’s proposal, productivity and the rationalisation of the building process became arguments against the implementation of the idea. However, aesthetically driven and commemorative approaches to rubble utilisation were realised in the years following Nowicki’s time at the BOS.

Irresolvable rubble

Looking at the documents from the BOS archive and listening to the oral histories, we can clearly see that the institutional influence could not accommodate the mass of rubble it was faced with. The infrastructural and administrative power of the newly established state bodies was not enough to accommodate the process to the full extent. Therefore, the process of rubble clearing was a manifold mediation, firstly led by the individual and collective initiatives of the inhabitants and later by the authorities. Simultaneously, the administration responded to the conditions by introducing an official system into informal rubble clearing. The official sites for rubble dumping and utilisation established by the BOS are indicated on the map (Fig. 2). They clearly indicate that the process of removal was vast, complex and manifold.³¹

The map shows a division between the places for dumping “non-usable rubble”, “points for building material depots and rubble utilisation”, and “barge loading points”. Through the map we are able to envisage the scope of the operation. Some of rubble was used in the landscaping of Vistula river embankments; some formed

30 State Archive of the Capital City of Warsaw, the BOS Archive (Archiwum Państwowe m. st. Warszawy, zespół Biura Odbudowy Stolicy), file no. 2491, p. 12.

31 State Archive of the Capital City of Warsaw, the BOS Archive (Archiwum Państwowe m. st. Warszawy, zespół Biura Odbudowy Stolicy), file no. 2574, p. 4.



Fig. 2. *BOS Map of rubble dump and utilization sites*, photo: State Archive of the Capital City of Warsaw, the BOS Archive

hills and mounds in peripheral points of the city, sometimes related to the sites of historical fortifications (Fort Bema, Fort Augustówka). Other loads of rubble were productively utilised and transformed into rubble bricks and concrete, mainly inside the Muranów district, as well as other early architectural developments of post-war Warsaw, such as the Koło estate (Osiedle Koło) designed by Helena and Szymon Syrkus. Finally, an important part of Warsaw's architectural remains was transported by waterway to the countryside and dumped in places as yet undiscovered.

BOS-designated dump sites are a part of the phenomenon of rubble removal, although they were far from being able to accommodate the full quantity of the existing material. Most of the landscaping was therefore done informally, and to this day rubble mounds of various shapes and sizes are found all over the capital city of Poland, created by its inhabitants for the post-war reconstitution of the city-space as their dwelling-space. The major ones, through time, earned their own place in history, like the Szczęśliwicka Mound, which is a famous ski slope inside the city, or the Mound of the Warsaw Uprising which commemorates the wartime heroic history on the one hand, and on the other constitutes one of the most important spots for downhill cycling in the capital. Almost every park in Warsaw (Fig. 3) features rubble mounds – invisible agents diversifying the landscape and introducing variations to the predominantly flat topography of Warsaw;³² they lie there silently, unacknowledged in their historical complexity and importance.

In an analysis of the landscaping of the whole city, the architectural history can be informed by knowledge gained through the natural sciences, namely geology. Geological descriptions which analyse the ground sedimentation in urban areas tend to include both information on past geological changes and those of a more recent anthropogenic nature in the ground structure. Based on the geological mapping made by the anthropogenic strata, we can identify a variety of places in Warsaw where throughout time the population-driven sedimentation occurred (Fig. 4). This clearly shows how the conditions set in the natural topographies are transformed through the processes of inhabitation forming the city landscape. Considered together, the geological mapping of anthropogenic strata and historical BOS maps (Fig. 2) of rubble dump-sites form a basis for an extensive mapping of the post-war remains beyond the sites mentioned above. Geological sources point towards the natural Vistula river embankment, which since the Middle Ages was used as a dumping site for any excess or waste material, as a potential place of several of smaller rubble deposits scattered across the whole city.³³

32 With the exception of the old Vistula river embankment, which transverses the entire city, there are no other naturally formed hills in the close proximity of the city.

33 http://geoportal.pgi.gov.pl/zrozumiec_ziemie/wycieczki/warszawa_1#002 [accessed 27 Nov. 2018].



Fig. 3. One of the first rubble mounds created by the BOS – stratification, photo by Adam Przywara, 2016.

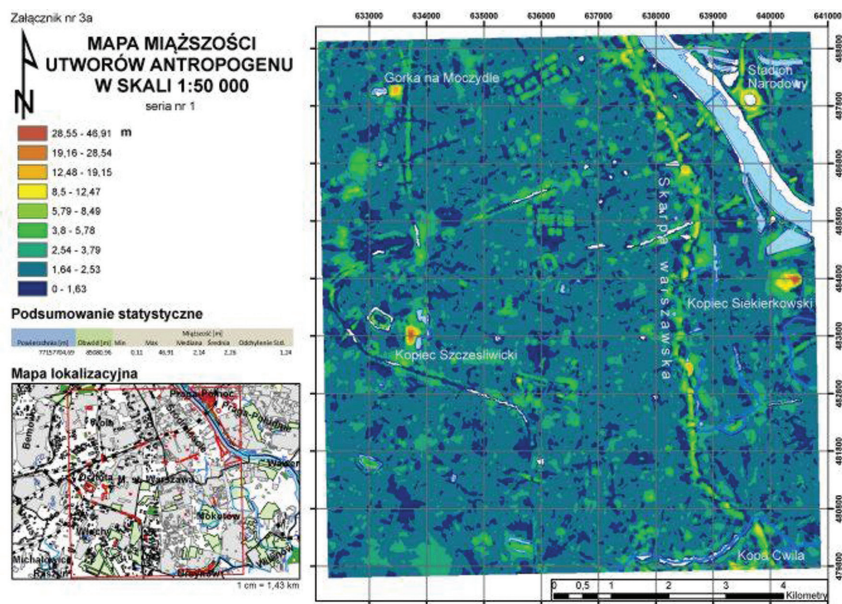


Fig. 4. Map of Thickness of Anthropogenic Strata scale 1:50 000, http://geoportal.pgi.gov.pl/zrozumiec_ziemie/wycieczki/warszawa_1#017 [accessed: 27 Nov 2018]

Conclusion

*What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm.*³⁴

Georges Bataille

We have established methods and sources and traced the most important places in which the post-war architectural remains were deposited in Warsaw, following official and unofficial processes which subsequently formed the landscape of the city. We have demonstrated how the unrealised architectural proposal of Maciej Nowicki tried to mediate between the informal rubble utilisation of the immediate post-war period and the possible aesthetic and utilitarian values which could be potentially derived from the city centre defined by the hilly rubbelscape. Finally, by looking at the subject of rubble, we were able to engage with the transitional period between the Second World War and the Cold War from the perspective of the professional architects and the population. The oral reports of the latter group revealed the extent of the social effort and collective struggle which had to be mobilised in order to re-establish Warsaw as a habitable environment after the atrocities of war. The architects' perspective underlines the complex and manifold characteristics of the reconstruction process – as a professional group, they obtained significant resources and major political influence while at the same time they were unable to fully take control over the social process and political transitions. Within the narrative, rubble and, more broadly, architectural remains became a crux for a new set of narratives about Warsaw's past – ones that referred to commemoration as well as to historical progress, to the processes of becoming a collective and of becoming a city.

When considered in a broader interdisciplinary field, rubble exposes the social process in its complexity of relations between institutions, individuals, technologies and the material world. While doing so, through its material properties, it grants a way for breaking down some of the dualities and contradictions deeply embedded and sustained within the Modern Project. Rubble is truly "formless",³⁵ distorting language categories, professional divisions and discursive distinctions such as those between architectural forms, their symbolic historical contexts and social use. For example, rubble is natural, both as a traditional building material formed with mineral particles and as part of the geological strata of contemporary landscape. Simultaneously it is unnatural, or rather it stems from cultural, technological and economical developments from a once existing metropolis destroyed and levelled in a meticulously planned process; if we look closer on the technologies of war employed in the process, it can almost be considered to have been industrially produced. Following that reasoning – rubble is a matter of commemoration, materi-

34 G. Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927–1939*, ed. and transl. A. Stoekl, Manchester, 1985, p. 31.

35 For an art historical elaboration on the concept see: R. Krauss, Y.-A. Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide*, New York, 1997.

alising both the pre-war Warsaw and the wartime atrocities it underwent in the contemporary city. At the same time, when compared with official memorials of any kind, it constitutes the opposite of commemoration – an absence, underlining a constitutive need to forget among populations who faced traumatic experiences and losses.

The introduction of such epistemological ambiguities seems necessary for the history of architecture and contemporary architectural knowledge which still tend to limit themselves to specific kinds of forms, their representations or particular actors in the historical process. Rubble has an immediate relevance, if we consider architectural discussions on the interdisciplinary frameworks constructed around the Anthropocene Thesis which, for some time, have been making inquiries into architecture's encounter with a "multi-disciplinary, multi-scalar, and multi-centred reality [...]".³⁶ The dynamics between war, capitalism and architecture and the global process of materialities are core issues in such new modes of analysis. On the other hand, in the local scale of individual and collective memories, the particularity of conditions inscribed in rubble through the operations leading to its appearance and disappearance lead us towards forgotten histories of multi-layered cooperation that re-established the city's habitability after the disaster of war.

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³⁶ *Architecture in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Design, Deep Time, Science and Philosophy*, ed. E. Turpin, Ann Arbor, 2013, p. 5.

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Abstract

This paper is a contribution to the contemporary discussions around architectural materialities and the history of the immediate post-war period in the urban areas of Europe. The opening paragraphs include references to the artistic action *The Cut* which took place in 2015, exposed the anthropogenic strata in Warsaw's landscape and acknowledged the continuous material existence of the city's history within its soil. Focusing on rubble, debris and post-war architectural waste, the author presents the theoretical approach by referring to a broad shift in the humanities towards approaches oriented towards objects and particular materialities. The subsequent historical narrative centres on the problems of rubble clearing and utilisation in the early reconstruction period of Warsaw. It shows the views and operations aimed at the removal of the mass of rubble proposed by the architects from the Bureau for the Capital City Reconstruction (BOS) and the inhabitants returning to the ruined city in 1945. Mobilising both narratives, the paper presents problems and discussions related to rubble utilisation and removal. Referring to Maciej Nowicki's unrealised design for Warsaw's city centre and contrasting it with the oral testimonies of the city's inhabitants, the article reveals the struggles and discussions that raged during that early stage of city reconstruction. Finally, through the use of various sources from geological mapping to archival materials, the paper aims to locate, describe and document the rubble landscapes located around the city of Warsaw. In the conclusion the author points out how the subject could be expanded and how rubble relates to contemporary discourses in the humanities.

Keywords: rubble, ruins, postwar reconstruction, architecture materiality, formless