

Katowice, construction site of the Silesian Museum,
in the background: buildings
of the former Katowice Coal Mine

CONTEMPORARY SILESIA ARCHITECTURE

DISCUSSION BETWEEN:
ANDRZEJ DUDA
LESZEK JODLIŃSKI
DOROTA LEŚNIAK-RYCHŁAK
TOMASZ NAWROCKI
ANNA SYSKA

DOROTA LEŚNIAK-RYCHLAK: My first question must necessarily be directed to Mr Andrzej Duda, who, in my opinion, is the father of the term Silesian Architecture, and at the same time the teacher of a plethora of architects associated with this school. I would like to ask you about Silesian determinants in contemporary architecture.

ANDRZEJ DUDA: Silesia is a unique region of Poland, the most heavily urbanised and industrial. After 1989, as a result of Poland's opening up to the world, new opportunities arose, with Polish architects gaining access to the latest information and construction technologies, while they started to catch up with Europe. I would list four architectural circles which asserted their presence in the context of this transformation: the Silesian, Varsovian, Bratislavian, and Cracovian ones. Various groups of architects developed with different approaches to the challenges which contemporary architecture had to face at the time. Warsaw was always cosmopolitan, open to the world. There were large investment projects to be implemented there, and there was a lot of money to carry them out, which made it possible for a specific variety of modernity to develop. Kraków on the other hand was more fixed upon history, on Cracovian modernism, and endeavoured to continue this valuable tradition. Wrocław remained post-modernist, even after 1989: suffice it to recall the many tenement houses built in the centre of the city in that period. Silesia, on the other hand, was a little different, since it related to the tradition of industrial architecture, which, incidentally, provides an archetype of modern architecture in general. The constructors who designed industrial buildings – factories, mines, blast furnaces, pipelines, bridges – often had no architectural qualifications, they were engineers. They were less concerned with form, they were not influenced with the aesthetic traditions of classical architecture; they designed for speed, economy, and efficiency. This way of thinking became glorified later, in the 1920s, by great architects such as Le Corbusier, van der Rohe, or Loos and Berlage before them, and it was integrated into the official doctrine of modern architecture. They also drew from the

tradition of industrial architecture, and they created a new canon of modernist architecture, which we should properly refer to as functionalist architecture, and which has since spread all over the world. When discussing the special characteristics of Silesian architecture, we must speak of industrial architecture as a guide, as schematic guidelines, the original impulse instructing us how to design. Designing is not the work of an artist; it is a pragmatic, rational endeavour, and the forms we get as the end result always derive from the function and the structure; they are often surprising, avant-garde. Industrial architecture reconciled people with new forms. Simple objects emerged, constructed from new materials, such as curtain walls, steel structures, or skylights.

There is another determinant: the large-city aspect of Upper Silesia. There is no other region in Poland where such a sizeable area is covered with architecture of such high quality. Also, this is where renowned architects started their careers: Erich Mendelsohn built his first department store in Gliwice – the Weichmann Textile Store of 1922, an archetype of his later famous buildings designed in many German cities, including Wrocław. There was Dominikus Böhm in Zabrze, with his church of St. Joseph.

There is another feature which in fact is an essential one: the construction materials they used in the architecture of Upper Silesia. This was mostly concrete, steel; structures of a new type, light curtain walls, glass, and, above all, clinker brick. When we look at the buildings constructed towards the end of the 19th century and before World War I, we see that practically all the coal mines had been built of brick. Because coal was available – as the source of energy – brickyards were opened, allowing for cheap production. This is why brick is so characteristic of Upper Silesia.

DL-R: What about contemporary determinants? If you were to point out, in the buildings designed by your students, a group of features which might define contemporary Silesian architecture?

AD: First we should mention a few names, people from the generation of today's 30 and 40 year-olds. At the top of the list, I would say, Robert Konieczny.

DL-R: He even designed a house he named "The House from the Land of Silesia" (*Dom z ziemi śląskiej*).

AD: Then Jan Kubec, who recently completed the Copernicus Science Centre in Warsaw, and the church at Zabrze-Bielszowice; Damian Radwański who, together with Roman Rutkowski, built a circular family home in Mikołów, the winner of many competitions. We should mention also Małgorzata Pilinkiewicz and Tomasz Studniarek, who designed the new courthouse in Katowice, among other things. The office of Medusa Group also merits a place on the list – Przemysław Łukasik and Łukasz Zagała, whose diploma work I supervised. They embody the Silesian character; their designs are expression of simplicity and rationalism, and are formally reduced. I would also point to Marcin Jójko and Bartłomiej Nawrocki (also my diploma students), authors of many excellent designs for competitions. Nawrocki worked in France; he did an internship in Holland.

DL-R: This seems to be a common feature of these designers' CVs: they have all spent time on internships or work experience abroad – just like yourself and the partner at your own architectural office.

AD: I would not overstate the importance of this fact. Of course, this kind of experience, abroad, at a good office or school of architecture, is valuable (we obtained it at the Berlage Institute in Amsterdam). It allows you to test and confront the knowledge you gained at your Polish school with the views represented in other countries; it is an important element of your education. To continue the list of names, though; there are so many of them, I would not want to leave anybody out: Antoni Domicz, Oskar Grąbczewski, Piotr Kuczia, Paweł Barczyk, Michał Stangel, Adam and Małgorzata Zgraja; also somewhat older architects, for example Ryszard Jurkowski.



PHOTO: A. SYSKA

Gliwice, Weichmann's Textile House, designed by Erich Mendelsson, 1921-1922

technologies. All this puts a certain pressure upon him, to which he yields to some extent, when designing – he reworks his design, which continues to evolve, before the conclusion is reached. An architect working in Silesia is subjected to Silesian factors and forces; the architect combines them with a certain international universalism, but the Silesian quality, the “Silesianness” remains, and this distinctiveness is apparent.

TOMASZ NAWROCKI: When you spoke about the material, the brick... I am an outsider, with no pretence to knowledge of architecture, but I would like to add something. I don't know which schools Stanisław Niem-

DL-R: What about Beata and Witold Goczoł?

AD: The Goczołs come from the Cracovian school, which is noticeable in their works.

DL-R: And Tomasz Konior?

AD: Tomasz Konior is also from Kraków, yet his designs bear some distinctly Silesian characteristics. We have spoken many times, our views clashing. I remember one discussion on the city as such. A real city, according to Tomasz, exists only when it resembles an ancient, medieval city, and that is the only acceptable form. I believe there are different types of interesting urban spaces: there can be a closed city, an open city, a dispersed city, and so on – it is not only the narrow streets, signs, and shops that create an urban atmosphere. The brick in the extension of the Music Academy, designed by Tomasz Konior, is no accident: it is Silesian.

ANNA SYSKA: Perhaps using a different material would introduce too much of a contrast between the new parts and the original building?

AD: I believe that a different material would work just as well – for instance, the whole compound could conceivably be finished with copper sheet.

DL-R: Brick is also the material of a medieval city... Let us try to sum this up: could you list the several traits which are common denominators, which somehow link the teams of architects you listed and their architecture?

AD: The first thing: to think of oneself as an architect who is not an artist with his head in the clouds, not a designer, but rather a rational engineer. The second: beauty can be found everywhere; it is not exclusively found in spectacular enterprises, but also in small, simple elements. All you need to do is notice it and bring it to the surface. This is very perceptible in Silesian architecture. In terms of material – to use local materials, in such a way that they are honestly presented, while their special characteristics and their value is brought out. Architectural honesty. Each Silesian architect should know the tradition, know his masters, and relate to this tradition. Then there is a chance that the designer will not get lost in his pursuits, but he will follow a certain line.

There is yet another thing, though. From a psychological point of view, the design process is a complicated one – the architect clashes with many different forces which influence him, beginning with the investor, and ending with various material suppliers; he meets many people and multiple new

Zabrze, St. Joseph's church, designed by Dominikus Böhm, 1930-1931



PHOTO: P. JAWORSKI



PHOTO: P. JAWORSKI

Zabrze Końcycze, Corpus Christi Church, designed by Jan Kubec and Damian Radwański, 1998

Below: Zabrze, building of the Social Insurance Institution, designed by Andrzej Duda and Henryk Zubeł, 1994-1997

czyk attended, but the way he brings in Silesian qualities to his work – as he did in the school in Giszowiec – is very interesting. Perhaps it would be worth looking at the designs of architects older than 30. For instance, at the proposal by the architectural office of Jan Pallado and Aleksander Skupin for the reconstruction of the Municipal Baths in Katowice.

AD: Pallado and Skupin successfully specialised in residential architecture evoking traditional Silesian housing blocks (*familoki*): for two, four, eight families together.

Niemczyk has been christened the Polish Imre Makovecz. He has created many extremely original works, mostly in brick. Niemczyk's way to the architecture he is designing today led through modernist, white architecture. This is what the first projects he realised, still with the Wejcherts, looked like. One of our students took an interest in a ruined building designed by Niemczyk in the 1960s, and he discovered – also to our surprise – that Staszek Niemczyk was a functionalist purist. It was not until later that he evolved and started designing quite differently. In Mikołów he designed residential houses with gables...

DL-R: This was his conscious choice, his deliberate departure from modernism.

AD: Niemczyk has a very special approach to investors, to the people he deals with. He educates them first – he meets with them, debates with them, and teaches them what good architecture is. This is not always possible. Yet Niemczyk is able to do it. He does not work for investors who are unwilling to learn.

TN: The first projects conducted by Niemczyk resulted from the idiosyncratic functioning of the Miastoprojekt milieu in Tychy.

AD: It was an interesting community, presided over by the Wejcherts, a solid, rational school of designing.



PHOTO: J. SKOKUJA

DL-R: We previously mentioned the people whom Niemczyk educates. I have a question for you, as a sociologist: is there any social expectation for the space to look Silesian? How are the latest projects received, what are the comments?

TN: It depends whom you ask, and whose comments we are talking about. Research I carried out, by myself or together with my colleague Krzysztof Bierwiazzonek, indicated a relatively limited reception of these architectural icons. Spodek ("The Saucer") remains the landmark of Katowice. Only those with some sort of interest in the field are aware of the existence of Niemczyk's school and his Church of the Holy Spirit, or the present shape of the Monopol hotel. Social reception is, sadly, very minor. I find it hard to talk about expectations towards the Silesian quality of space, as this quality is difficult to define. Perhaps it is easier to define the regional features of architecture, but the many-faceted notion of "Silesianness" does not make it easy to relate to it in a deliberate, conscious manner. The research shows, instead, that Tomasz Konior senses the way people think about the city – he reveals the archetype of a traditional town with a central square and narrow streets leading away from the centre. Having said that, these streets do not necessarily have to be co-

PHOTO: INARERCO



vered with further shopping malls, as was proposed along the axis of *Rondo-Rynek* (the Roundabout – the Town Square) in Katowice. I believe there is room for further research; if we want a reliable outcome, we need to verify people's perceptions.

In our research we asked questions about symbolic and significant places which allow the inhabitants to build their identity. We are less concerned with the



PHOTO: D. RUMIANCEW

Katowice, "Symfonia" Center for Musical Education - expansion of the building of the Musical Academy, designed by Tomasz Konior and Krzysztof Bałysz, 2004

Below: Czechowice-Dziedzice, Jesus Christ the Redeemer's Church, designed by Stanisław Niemczyk, 1995-1998/1998

AS: A building that, most importantly, fitted in perfectly with the spatial plan, the layout of Aleja Korfańtego. It is as if we pulled out a tooth, not any tooth, but one of the front incisors.

AD: The Palace was designed by the same architect who also created the Superunit (*Superjednostka*) – Mieczysław Król.

TN: This is not just about architectural value. We do not know what the overall spatial planning is going to look like. What has been presented as guidelines for the layout of the Rondo-Rynek axis inspires doubt, and I am afraid not much is left of Konior's vision – the vision which was controversial, but nevertheless consistent and coherent. The case of the Wedding Palace, unfortunately, illustrates the attitude of those who decide on the shape of the public space in some cities. An important building is being disregarded – and along with it, the memory of the locals who got married there, who visited it, who have a lot of memories in connection with the place.

AS: This is also the question of the bad memory of the PRL (Polish People's Republic). The people now in power represent the generation of 50- and 60-year olds, and they remember clearly the things that went on before 1989. Only their children and grandchildren are beginning to see the value in the heritage of PRL: they are enchanted with the MDM hotel in Warsaw, or Development A in Tychy. This meets with incomprehension on the part of the people who lived in those times. The same thing happened with modernist architecture. The boom for inter-war architecture is happening now, and not before, whereas in 10 or 15 years the architecture built after 1945 will become popular when the generation of people who created it is dying out.

LESZEK JODLIŃSKI: I don't know if it's as simple as that. I have my doubts... Although I'm not a sociologist, I also have doubts when I think about the public space in Katowice. What you have just said was very interesting, but at the same time we should not forget that 14 million



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for discovering one's identity in Katowice, through referring back to modernism. It is fashionable not just among students of art and architecture to be interested in that. This is a positive snobbery of sorts. Perception of Katowice is gradually changing in the eyes of some of its inhabitants, who are seeking reference points in what makes their city different from all the others. It is this that drives the popularity of Katowice's modernist architecture. People follow its fortunes, they take an interest in it. As a result, the Modernist Trail has been created. The locals find the markings of their identity therein.

DL-R: And yet at the same, the Katowice railway station is being demolished ...

TN: The creation of a city lies not only in the realisation of the architects' vision – there are other players involved, with an important role in the creation of space. Demolition of the railway station is a scandal; let us not forget also about the Wedding Palace. Rather than trying to think about how to relate, to play with this form and include it somehow in the future axis between the Roundabout and the Square (Rondo-Rynek), the easiest way out was chosen, and a really remarkable building demolished.

identity of architecture itself than the degree to which it becomes part of the space of identity, and the degree to which we, the city dwellers, will identify with the places through those buildings. Apart from those individuals who deal with this due to their profession or any other special interest, the social reception of contemporary architecture is still very feeble – it is comforting, though, that the situation is beginning to change. Recently, we saw the beginning of a fashion

Gliwice, adaptation of a former granary to lofts, designed by Medusa Group, 2007-2008

people have visited the Silesia City Center shopping mall, and that these people, according to recent research, consider it to be a friendly and welcoming space.

TN: Yes, this indeed follows from the research I conducted together with Krzysztof Bierwiazzonek and Barbara Lewicka.

LI: You are speaking of the Wedding Palace, but I remember – perhaps I should explain that I am not from Katowice, and Katowice is not the same as Silesia, I always try to avoid equating the Silesian school with Katowice only – I remember stories about many people who tried as hard as they could not to have their wedding in this “fantastic” new palace. Also recently, many people postponed their wedding ceremony so that it could take place in the new Wedding Palace [i.e. the Goldstein Brothers Villa, made available in 2011 – editor’s note], in a familiar, historicising, stylish costume. I would like to return to the question about “Silesian architecture”. Its modernist editing is still rejected by society at large, and the quest for distinctive features continues. Perhaps from my position as a museum curator, I will be the most iconoclastic among you, but I will venture to ask: did the Silesian school even exist before 1989? Where does this come from? A school needs architectural centres, and Silesia, in fact, had none. Of course we are talking about the Silesian Polytechnic, and so on, but if we speak of a different formula or school, then the inter-war period defined this particular school as a centre without a fixed core – as mostly new and open architecture, importing “from here and there”. The “Silesian” architecture for me signified fringe architecture, and so defined, it demonstrated its capacity to absorb arrivals from the outside, without generating autogenic phenomena immediately – and certainly not in the period which meets with such fascination today. I study Mendelsohn’s architecture, and I believe that he was a consistently overlooked, yet outstanding architect of the inter-war period. For me it is clear that he fell victim to his particular cognitive embargo, which included the German history of the architecture of Upper Silesia. This concerned as much the Polish architecture before 1939 as the German archi-



PHOTO: T. ZAKRZEWSKI

ture, or, more generally, all architecture created in Silesia during the inter-war period. Who was Stefan Bryła? Who was Karol Schayer? These names, these people, had no place in the collective consciousness. I started studying Mendelsohn in 1991, because I sensed – forgive me – some kind of embarrassment resulting from the fact that Mendelsohn and his work in Gliwice, being within arm’s reach, remains without a proper monograph.

Is the architecture in Silesia really Silesian architecture? I would place a huge question mark here. I even doubt whether Silesian architecture may be defined as such, and whether the things we treat as very Silesian are not simply the things which became engraved in our memories, which provide us with a reference point that creates our places of memory and describes our identity. In my opinion, the Wedding Palace by Mieczysław Król was a good example of that. Some people breathed a sigh of relief, truly and honestly glad that the architecture they in no way related to had disappeared. They either did not want to, or could not relate to it. It was not something that was Silesian in form.

I would agree that the construction material is constitutive for the notion of “Silesian” architecture. I think that this is a very important element. The *less is more* principle, the Dutch restraint; perhaps we are progres-



PHOTO: T. ZAKRZEWSKI

sing towards some kind of functionality after all. But if we have a school, then where is its centre, the core? If it is Silesian, where is this something which provides it with its features? We might say that, to some extent, these features permeate and infiltrate each other, that they create themselves. I really like the idea of industry being the *fons vitae* of Silesian architecture, and this is certainly present. I do not know, however, how it relates to the large-city phenomenon, or the fact that a conurbation exists here – a formation where, necessarily, architecture becomes condensed, where contexts



Katowice, the Palace of Weddings (non-existing), designed by Mieczysław Król, opened in 1969

Below: Katowice, Silesian Museum (non-existing), designed by Karol Schayer, 1934

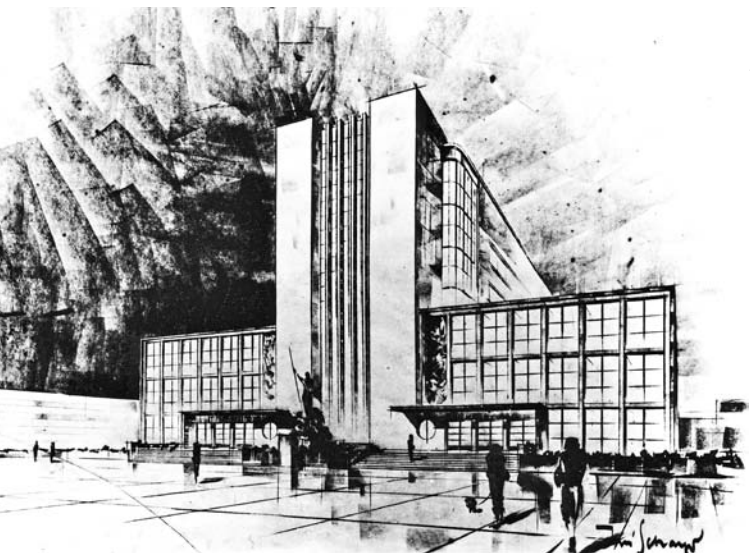


PHOTO: ARCHIWUM MUZEUM ŚLĄSKIEGO

something... Silesian architecture is an attitude within which several different approaches are contained. I choose to call it the new architecture, or the architecture marked with something that Professor Ewa Chojecka calls the imperative of modernity. Kraków will never be this way – in my opinion there is no chance – because it is burdened with the tradition of an archaic, as opposed to a modern, city. Even the fact that at the turn of the 20th century no new city centre emerged proves that Kraków simply did not make it. Case closed. Warsaw is a little different, and Wrocław different still, the baggage of the heritage context is different. I believe that Silesia is based on the paradigm of modernity, not because we approach something that is currently trendy in architecture, but because it really carries innovative elements compared to what had already been there. With the material, the space, as the starting points – as this is the element of “Silesianness”. There is not another place, not among those we have mentioned, that could compete with Silesia on the level of such influence; this kind of openness to modernity is great indeed. I can see no other way of bringing together the moods of Böhm, the functionalism of Mendelsohn, or even the realisations of the contemporary group of 30 and 40-year-olds – since they are, in a sense, alike in this, even if they might perceive the above statement as lacking appreciation for their originality.

and spaces overlap. I will insist that the Monument Conservation authority would not allow copper sheet cladding on the Music Academy. I am saying this to show the gravity of matter Silesian architecture is subjected to. In this space of influence in which the architect functions, it would be rather difficult to employ a different material, and it would be out of context.

I would venture the statement that the notion of “Silesian architecture” only appears in opposition to

DL-R: Now I wish to play devil’s advocate for a while. We are talking about those buildings which became famous, whereas the reality and its social reception are the way they are. Among the results of what happened after 1989 are the deluge of shopping malls and the expansion of suburbs. Today, these spaces have a rather pitiful look about them. Earlier, when I spoke to Anna Syska, we discussed the ubiquitous “German mansion”, or the German catalogue home, which branded the Silesian landscape. I would like to pose the following problem: perhaps the Silesian school of architecture exists, but Silesian architects design for a very specific social group. This group is the middle class, plus the managerial class – in the case of office buildings – and although shopping malls are universally accessible to the public, the homes designed by Robert Konieczny and the Medusa Group are made for people with substantially higher financial means. Therefore the range of influence, the impact of these architects on our surroundings is in fact relatively small – even if we agree on the obvious high quality they represent. My question is somewhat provocative – should we not think of creating a type of Silesian architecture? It seems to me that Silesia is the only region in Poland with clear reference points that could allow a debate of this sort. In Małopolska we will not have enough to talk about, as in terms of regional identity determinants, it is much too vague, too ambiguous. Would it not make sense to try and design, for instance, social housing projects fashioned after the *familoki*, or model homes, which would employ an idiom of a kind – in order to stop the encroaching deterioration of the landscape?

TN: There have been such attempts. Niemczyk’s school is the best example, and the building serves huge numbers of schoolchildren. Within the same development, Jan Pallado and Aleksander Skupin filled in the empty part, relating successfully, in my opinion, to the architecture of the rest of the Giszowiec district.

AD: I think that the architectural scene in Silesia is too weak to change the whole face of Silesia and the consciousness of all its inhabitants. We cannot pre-

Katowice, a House from the Silesian Land, designed by KWK Promes - Robert Konieczny, Marlena Wolnik, 2000

Katowice, Silesian House, designed by Archistudio Studniarek + Pilinkiewicz, 1997

scribe the creation of an architectural type which will be mass-replicated, with everyone designing in this manner only – this is simply not the way things are done, not anywhere in the world. There is a certain general trend in the development of architecture, which gets adapted in various countries all over the globe, and there are certain enclaves, or niches, with groups of people who see things a bit differently, and they become independent. A school involves independence of thinking on the part of its members, who do not follow an external example. Unfortunately, in most cases, Polish architecture merely follows the mainstream of Western architecture. Nobody is terribly concerned with whether this fits a given region or it doesn't. This local independence is preached to students at polytechnics, and for some of them it becomes encoded, ingrained.

The attitude towards form in architecture is another distinguishing feature of the Silesian School, I think. The better the building, the less important its form is. There exists this phenomenon in the psychology of design: if we cannot find the mechanism according to which the building should be designed, then we try to cover this up with the form. In such instances, one usually follows the outside models which happen to be fashionable at the time. There is a force which influences the architect in this manner. If someone manages to discover a new mechanism of a building, a new solution to a function, a new usage for materials, or new combinations of all these different elements, then the form ceases to be important to him. The form is merely the result, and this is the reason why it is interesting.

LI: This is a terribly difficult question – the question relating to the investors' market. To quote my teacher, Professor Bogdan Lisowski, architecture prefers more expensive forms to cheaper ones; it does not like to be limited by definition.

DL-R: But you yourselves [Duda and Zubel] have designed some social housing projects.



PHOTO: KWK PROMES

AD: Yes, we have, the TBS housing in Częstochowa.

LI: But that, then, is a Silesian implant in Częstochowa. I would argue whether or not we see a particular Silesian character here. As far as the form is concerned, I am thinking, again, about the Axis of Culture. I don't know whether this was the architects' intention, but let us note what they are being praised for. When we look at the Congress Centre in Warsaw [designed by JEMS Architekci – editor's note], the question again arises as to the meaning of the Silesian school. The project is likened to an industrial dumping ground; while I see the Yokohama seaport instead – not a dump, but a green isle, which pretends to be something it is not. Likewise in Katowice. In the case of the Congress Centre, the association with the visual code of an industrial dump is something we might decide to like, or it is a decisive element for our liking of this architecture. We enjoy the "Silesianness" thus defined. In the NOSPR building, Tomasz Konior uses a similar operation: by using the colour red from the window frames of Silesian housing blocks, he evokes this "Silesian" code. He uses the aesthetics, he certainly uses the form, and not just the function, in order to define, to create the Silesian character. I propose that the "Silesianness" does not result only from the place of birth, while the instinct of an excellent architect determines the manner and the



PHOTO: ARCHISTUDIO STUDIAREK + PILINKIEWICZ

degree of drawing from a given space, starting with the material.

DL-R: Perhaps this is simply Konior's marketing strategy. Is that what you are suggesting?

LI: I am suggesting that you cannot just say that the Silesian quality is based on the fact of negating the form, or separating the form from the meaning. As far as the relations with the public are concerned, I



Katowice, the Giszowiec worker's housing estate, designed by Georg and Emil Zillmann, 1906

still think that people expect opportunities for finding codes, which they at least are able to identify. An industrial dump, a housing block – or even the Rie-
we-Riegler project [the authors of the design for the Silesian Museum – editor's note] respect the context, because these spaces are neutral, because, in a manner of speaking, the architecture gives up on itself (which, incidentally, some criticised heavily), because, in fact, we are hiding underground. We do not really exist, or at the very least, we do not try to compete against the context. Does it follow that the form is not important? I should say, ironic as it may be, that it is extremely important – and the space is even more important, because we want to mould it in a contemporary fashion, while still retaining a multitude of associations with tradition.

DL-R: I would like to bring up another controversial subject. It seems to me that architects are educated to design for a specific social group, and they do not see their tasks elsewhere. Perhaps this is a question of the limited capacity of the market, or other determinants. And yet is it not so that an ideal investor for an architect who has graduated from the Gliwice Polytechnic is a person with high income who can afford trendy gadgets; someone whom Robert Konieczny may offer copies of Le Corbusier's furniture for the interior, and

who will feel comfortable among them? Is it not so that education limits the possibility of influence?

AD: I believe that it is exactly the opposite. A well-educated architect should above all realise that the quality of architecture does not depend on money. It is possible to build excellent architecture with little money, and it is also possible to build something very bad with an enormous budget – for example *Złote Tarasy* (the "Golden Terraces" shopping mall) in Warsaw. We are trying to educate our students in such a way that they realise the possibility of assembling something from the simplest, cheapest materials, to create the tectonics of a building in such a manner that it becomes extremely interesting and functional. Of course there are limits – in order to build anything, funds are needed. But money is not the most important thing in the process.

AS: Konieczny himself designed a house for his parents in Ruda Śląska [House with a Capsule] and he repeatedly stressed that it was designed to be an inexpensive building. Another example is his standard house (*Dom Typowy*), constructed near Pszczyna.

LI: Still, this is not a house for just anyone – let us not exaggerate its "cheapness". This is not a replicable model of a one-family home.

DL-R: We are talking a lot about the form, and we seem to forget about the person, the user, the customer. The form may be interesting or uninteresting, more or less effective, the mechanism of the building well-functioning or not – but where are the people?

AS: The user has an ingrained archetype of a house, a house, which is a box with a slanting roof. If that upper part is missing, he may feel uncomfortable in such a space.

AD: Of course, people are not experts on architecture.

DL-R: But then again, architects are not experts on people.

AD: Perhaps they are not, or perhaps there are not many architects at all who are experts on architecture.

LI: That would explain the limited range of influence the Silesian school has.

AD: I would like to return, still, to modernism. It should not be seen as a formal style; instead, what is important here is the way of thinking. It is possible to design a building in the modernist style which is as far removed from a typical cube as possible.

DL-R: After all, modernism had its leftist, social programme....

LI: I am thinking about Taut's design: the less a woman needs to move around in the kitchen, the better it is for her. And I see that today the design would not be equally popular if it turned out that one cannot find one's way around the designed space. I would like to add something to the question of the user. I agree that the school is limited to architects. There exists a problem of elites, of the market, of who commissions designs; and there is also a problem, which lies elsewhere, other than the creation of the elites. I observe this other problem in the context of the mission development for the Silesian Museum – namely the extent to which social

Katowice, the Nikiszowiec worker's housing estate, designed by Georg and Emil Zillmann, 1908

expectations in terms of defining what is “Silesian” remain unarticulated, unnamed. It is not that they are vague, but they are multifaceted, multithreaded. It is my belief that these two worlds – the Silesian school, and the abstract notion of “Silesianness” – fail to meet. It is not deliberate – nonetheless, sometimes they find it hard to coincide. I feel closer to the Zillmanns [Emil and Georg Zillmanns, architects of the Giszowiec district – editor’s note] and the kind of Silesian house they developed. Because the Zillmanns took pains to dive into the essence of their own perception of what is Silesian. I do not know whether today’s architects would be willing to go on a similar trip throughout Silesia. There also exists another example, unsuccessful, and quite the opposite to the Zillmanns: an anti-model of the attitude which synthesises a new identity, namely the Palace of Culture and Science. When looking at that attempt, we know what Polish architecture is not... But to return to our topic: the Zillmanns took such pains, and they achieved a success of sorts, because – although the form is artificial, not “endemic” – it is treated by the great majority of Silesians as... Silesian. Of course, we need to add to that the fact of migration, the creation of brand new elites. When I recall the Lviv modernism – not in terms of architecture, but a certain way of thinking and initiative, which was imported into Silesia – another question arises: is this a traditional way of speaking about Silesia? Of course it is not. These spaces can never meet. Architects may create Silesian quality the way the school understands it, in the relationship between master and student, in following the best models available – but that does not mean that they “read” the expectations of the locals.

TN: Perhaps the heart of the problem lies in what you have stressed so strongly – that it is difficult to define “Silesianness”, that it perpetually defines itself anew.

LI: There is no solid core.

TN: It continues to evolve. It is difficult to find a name for something so fluid, so hard to ascertain.

DL-R: In that case, let me ask you, as the director of the Silesian Museum: For the purpose of the institution you are running, you must create some kind of vision of what “Silesian” is? This is the first part of my question. And the second, you need to design, to project in a certain way. Does space have a role to play in the process?

AD: The new building, which is being developed at present, fits in perfectly within the Silesian school of architecture, even though it does not derive from it. In my opinion, the idea to construct the museum in this manner is an excellent one, and all Silesian architects would gladly sign off on that – including those who did not win the competition. I have spoken to Dick van Gameren, the winner of the second prize, jointly with Marcin Jójka and Bartłomiej Nawrocki. He stated that the first-prize design is better than theirs. This is also characteristic of the Silesian school: this openness. It does not follow the latest trends blindly, but tests out its own special features. Interestingly, the new museum is connected to the buildings of an old mine. New glass cubes are contrasted with the old, bulky structure.

LI: I love the expression Irma Kozina coined in relation to the museum: “architecture without architecture”. It demonstrates that the Silesian school may be devoid of such simple, easily associated features, just because it is open. The museum’s architecture respects what it has found, what was already there. It does not attempt to repeat, to replicate what is seen – at most, it wants to reflect it like a mirror. It is a mirror reflection through the glass boxes which are trying to show, from every possible angle, what is beyond them and beside them.

Returning to the question – since the museum could carry us towards a different topic altogether. In the cultural sense, in the sense of cultural determinants – for example, the Silesian dialect – we can clearly see a certain process of the Silesian Museum regaining reliability; after all, so far the Silesian quality has been neither utilised, nor fully appreciated. Until recently, all things Silesian were not so much censored as – how shall I put it – reduced down to one dimension. To



PHOTO: P. JANOWSKI



PHOTO: P. JANOWSKI



Katowice, buildings of the former Katowice Coal Mine, power plant of the Bartosz shaft

PHOTO: J. GAWRON

regain a reliable relationship between regionalism and modernity does, of course, require very hard work. And yet any museum today must constitute a point of reference for both collective memory and contemporary sensibility – however the two may differ.

As far as space is concerned – I could easily share the opinions already voiced here. Ironically, from the functional standpoint, this is not an easy solution for a museum, as museums are not usually built underground. I have another argument which I do, nonetheless, not enjoy very much. It is the simple metaphor of the project, which rather unoriginally exploits the *topos* of a treasure: transforming the coal-treasure into contemporary art-treasure, the museum protects it, keeps it safe, and... mines it. Apparently, the social reading of the project must be clear. Perhaps people really enjoy simple interpretations: a treasure for a treasure, we are replacing one gold with another.

This anti-functionality of the underground museum forces its director to face certain dilemmas in terms of development and management – including the test of actual usage, because this is an area of former mines, orogeny, and so forth. This does not involve risk, but it does involve functional concerns; it is a new kind of experience – perhaps that is the best expression to use.

The architecture of the new museum, however, contributes something very important – and for this I am grateful to both the jury who selected the project and the architects who proposed it. Because it really respects the space, trying to “deal” with it not in an aggressive way, but through a certain kind of co-existence. It preserves the legacy. The project preserves the space which has already been there, and through this it establishes its credibility in the present, the contemporary.

Necessarily it is also important for the museum that the project relates to the past as an element we respect, and it does so in a manner which we might call tolerant but not subservient – thus conserving the historical landscape, which is disappearing from the space of Upper Silesia at a disturbing speed. Fortunately, there were no attempts here to create architecture that copied the buildings of the former mine, thus creating a Disneyland effect, building a mock-Silesian architecture. This is very important, and I believe museum visitors and other people using the space around the museum will appreciate that. We made a daring decision not to build a fence around the museum compound. It will be a museum without fences, without barriers, without a restricted access system. It will be an open space, just like we perceive the Silesianness of the project to be.

DL-R: And your own vision of what Silesianness is? Don't you project it somehow through your programme?

LI: Our programme is to reclaim memory. It only sounds simple on the surface, but in fact it is a very demanding programme. Today it is already easier than before to speak of the Silesian language, and we even have the Association of People of Silesian Nationality, which as recently as three years ago would not have been so obvious. And yet it was the Silesian Museum that published the book of “The Most Beautiful Silesian Words”. We are hosting a Silesian language course at the museum, and some of our books have summaries in Silesian – codification of that language is quite another issue, though. Reclaiming the memory is extremely important, as is reconstructing the memory of Silesian modernism. The fact that regaining the identity which is coded in that memory is so much delayed does not result from the lack of appreciation for its merits, but from an extreme ignorance on the subject. Until very recently, only a very small group of people possessed that memory, and it was further restricted by the unitarian national policy. I recall groups of students from Germany who discover what Silesia is and what it is like. It is but another fragment of the process by which to reclaim the memory of the European dimension in Silesian culture.

Coming back to the programme. Right now, this is the actual reclaiming of memory – that is, lending credibility to the fact that the Silesian essence, meaning a certain code of cultural behaviour, memory, thinking about the future, is something important, which does not, however, concern only the locals, those who live in the area, but which can be re-exported to the outside – since it is a quality which is interesting from a cognitive point of view. Our otherness is not an otherness which has to explain itself. We do not need to justify ourselves to the others, to justify what we do, and what we don't do; it is merely an otherness, which can be valuable.

A scale model of the new building of the Silesian Museum in Katowice, designed by Riegler Riewe Architekten, 2007

I would not wish the Silesian character to be reduced to one dimension only. I would wish for it to have a chance, an opportunity to accept separate voices, the voices from the outside – perhaps also in order to verify certain positions. This year we held an exhibition devoted to the presence of the Allied Forces in Upper Silesia; I mention this because that experience taught us something. French researchers come here and say: “we were not emotionally involved in the situation of Upper Silesia. In 1920 we came to Silesia in order to realise very precise political and economic goals.” The price of demystification is a bitter one, and it does meet with reluctance. We are prepared for situations in which naming certain phenomena in a different way will require that we enter into a kind of conflict with an alternatively constructed memory.

AS: In what way will the existing buildings in the museum compound fall within the functional programme of the new institution?

LI: This is not yet definitely decided for the so-called central and northern part of the museum land [the area not included in the EU co-financing for the years 2007-2013 – editor’s note]. The spatial planning concept of the project being implemented at present entails revitalisation of the whole area of the former mine, where the Silesian Museum will find its new quarters. Today this functions as a backstage for us, a space for staging projects such as the Tauron New Music Festival. We would like to create something here that might evoke the atmosphere of Berlin-Mitte or the Kreuzberg of the 1990s. I believe this is a chance for the museum functionally to enter something extremely important for Silesian modernity, In other words, an opportunity to draw such audiences for whom museums in general (and not only this museum) do not represent attractive content, but who are interested in off-stream culture. In my opinion, Silesia likes off-stream phenomena, and not the mainstream; Silesia wants a voice of its own.

AS: I would like to ask Mr Nawrocki a question, if I may: as a sociologist, what do you believe to be the

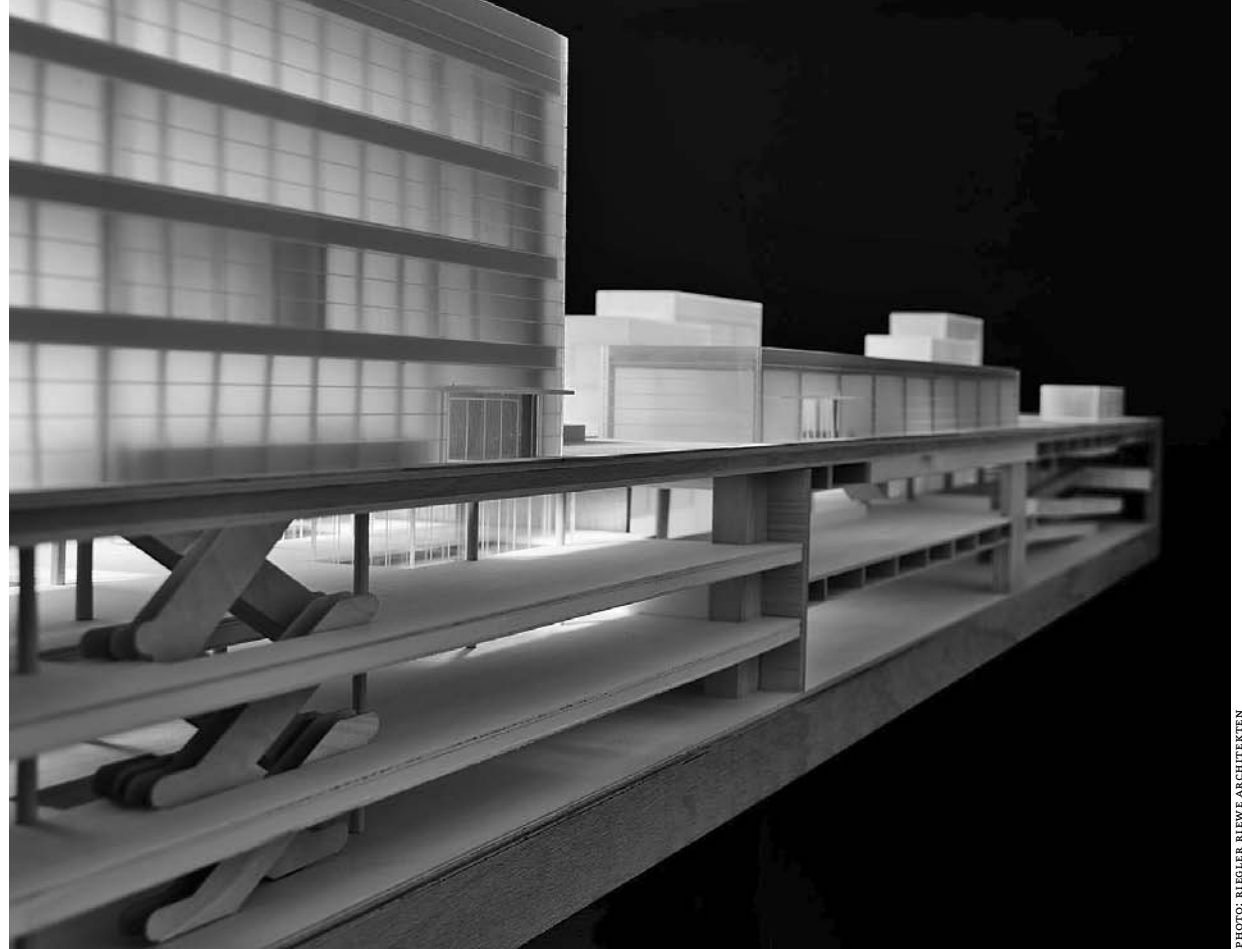


PHOTO: RIEGLER RIEWE ARCHITECTEN

reasons for this renaissance of identity in Poland, while it is so immersed in globality?

TN: Globality should be treated in Giddensian terms, in connection with locality. In a world which is becoming global we are all subjected to the same mechanisms – we are functioning within the same kind of shopping malls, we eat at the same McDonald’s – and yet at the same time, increasingly often we ask ourselves the question “who are we?”, and try to find an answer to it. Globalisation also triggers a reflection upon locality; we speak of glocalisation, that is, of global factors influencing local factors, and the two elements balancing each other out.

At a certain moment in time, a group of twenty- and thirty-years-olds from Katowice decided that they did not want to live in any old city, a city without a face. That triggered, among other things, the activities aiming to make the city the European Capital of Culture, and it coincided with many other events, which led to the point where the fact of “being from Katowice” made people proud. It is very similar with being Sile-

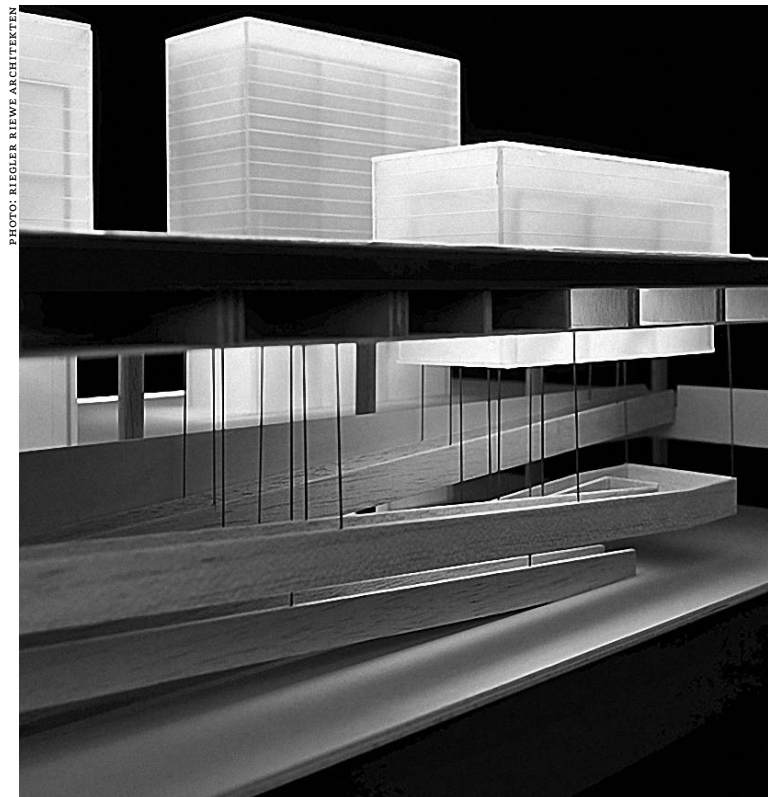


PHOTO: RIEGLER RIEWE ARCHITECTEN

sian – not exactly the same, though, as this is a much more complex question, with many factors overlapping in it, not least the context of the PRL.

DL-R: The context of the PRL – do you mean the freezing, or the channelling of “Silesianness”? In a way, in spite of Gierek, the People’s Republic was oppressive for Silesia.

TN: Gierek has little to do with it, other than his birthplace beyond the Brynica river, and the fact that he was the First Secretary of the Party’s Executive Committee. But there was another person active in that period, Ziętek, who did a lot of good for Silesia. We also need to go back to the period of the Polish People’s Republic to find the origins of the phenomena depicted in some movies by Kazimierz Kutz, which forced (at least) the representatives of my generation to define ourselves in relation to the place where we lived. But it is true that the time of the PRL is mostly the time of perceived hurt and injustice. The sense that the Silesians were always injured, always bruised is one of the elements which sustain this “Silesianness”. I feel an affinity with your vision of the Silesian Museum, although I realise how difficult it will be to realise, because of this ambiguity of Silesianness; I can only imagine what conflicts it may be subjected to. There will always be those who will see themselves as guardians of the one definition of Silesianness, and who will seek to impose this one code upon the others. Silesianness is dynamic, as is our Silesian identity, which should be continuously redefined in time. We should not forget that after 1945 these lands saw the arrival of many migrants who have made their mark, who added their input. When we speak of the Silesian school of architecture, we also remember where these professors came from, who taught architecture at the polytechnic and who somehow integrated with the region. Of course there are circles which represent a different, closed vision of Silesianness, and there are those who open themselves to those issues. What is Silesian in cinema, is it Kutz, or is it also Magdalena Piekorz? And what about reading Wojciech Kuczok?

LI: This is a general question about the art of Upper Silesia. In Wrocław there are several academics, historians and art historians who claim that there is no such thing as the identity of Upper Silesian art. This opinion is not treated as anachronous there at all. At the same time, for instance Joanna Helander and Zofia Rydetowa actually possess this Upper Silesian identity. Visual arts, graphic arts, design, they all maintain their regional distinctiveness. Suddenly it turns out that Katowice and, more broadly, Upper Silesia is a competitive centre, perhaps even superior in terms of what I would call creativity and innovation – in graphic arts, now in computer technologies. This is something which constitutes a separate identity; this is a trans-border area indeed. I know that the trans-border area has changed; I am not talking about the historical trans-border.

TN: And yet the cultural trans-border area remains.

LI: Where are better civilisations and circumstances to be found if not in a place where different elements of identity remain, in a sense, as possible alternatives to one another?

TN: There is another problem. For many years, Silesian identity was the bad identity, as its perception was one-sided only. The issue of the attitude towards the German heritage, and the phenomenon of Polish and German narratives overlapping, intertwined – which functions more naturally elsewhere, for instance in Gdańsk; here in Katowice it still meets with serious reservations.


AS: The City Council assembly hall in Katowice is lined with portraits of local administrators since the dawn of the town’s history, but right next to Mayor Skiba we find portraits of those who ruled in Katowice after 1922. There are no images of the German mayors. It seems it is time to fill that gap...

TN: We should mention another issue. Questions of nationality and the overlapping of traditions is one

thing, but let us not forget the other problem – that is, the embarrassment with which Silesia treats its own industrial traditions. As Krzysztof and Krystyna Nawratek remarked recently, this is why the museum is great – and it is excellent what happens in the surroundings, namely the Tauron New Music Festival: in the place where a mine once was there is now something modern – and this modern museum will, at the same time, reach back to the past. This does not happen in many other places: Consider the sorry lot of Szopienice, for example. If no concept is developed for it, for instance in relation to the Centre of Science, then most probably something will be lost – something that could otherwise provide the identity axis of the place. What is a natural tendency in the West – where it is commonplace to revitalise industrial areas in the same manner as we revitalise the Silesian Museum today – still meets with opposition and barriers in Poland, since evoking the mining tradition remains something of an embarrassment. This is the reason why last year Jerzy Owsiak did not ascend from a mining shaft in Katowice: it was decided that this would not be beneficial for the city’s image. At this point I am not talking about those architects who willingly evoke the tradition, but about the embarrassment which forces us to run away from the past, instead of embracing it.

AD: I think that journalists have an important role to play in this matter. If the media presented the remnants of industrial architecture well – had they shown, for instance, the examples of Gliwice’s lofts – people would begin to see it all differently.

LI: I would not quite agree with the postulates directed at journalists. I do think they have done a rather good job already. But I have my reservations as far as the institutions which by definition should be responsible for such activity are concerned. You did mention the trail, but I need to add, with some bitterness, that it ends in Katowice. Neither the newly rediscovered Mendelsohn in Gliwice nor the Böhm in Zabrze were included, and neither were many others.



AD: The Mendelsohn is an example of a very inept restoration, may I add.

LI: But at least it is still standing – it did not follow the fate of some of the buildings in Bytom and Katowice.

I just wanted to say that memory is very much underestimated on the institutional level. Having commuted daily from Kraków to Katowice and back, I want to protest against the media message promoting Upper Silesia as the one constructed by PR agencies and the like, who are responsible for this kind of promotion today. What do I get as a synthesis, Silesia in a nutshell? Thongs from Koniaków, Silesian dumplings, the Planetarium and the park, the formula of which is long outdated, in my opinion... I don't understand the debate on the promotional value of the Regional Park of Culture and Recreation and the real potential it has from the viewpoint of what we call today the services offered for the leisure industry.

DL-R: Again, somewhat provocatively, I would like to return to architecture. It seems another construct, if you will, of the Silesian school of architecture, or the contemporary Silesian architecture, is emerging – and this is a good thing, there are certainly grounds for that. But it is based upon modernism, the modernism which is both German and Polish. We need to remember that those architects never debated what the “Silesian quality” is. And yet today, modernism becomes an argument in the debate upon “Silesianness”, and included within the new construct. This is not a complaint, but merely a statement of fact.

LI: During the inter-war period, precisely in Upper Silesia, an interesting clash between the architectural trends in German and French modernism took place... This rivalry entailed a meeting of two attitudes, contrasting in terms of idea and programme, and to some extent, burdened with the context of the national struggle – we are talking about bilateral legitimisation of the rights to Silesia. Or, we should rather say,

about Germany reclaiming Silesia, and Poland looking for legitimisation of its rights to Upper Silesia. Something was born out of this clash, something which perhaps in fact resulted in the Silesian quality. In a sense, an added value, however unintended.

AS: I think that the sentiment of Silesian identity is stronger in smaller communities, for instance in Rydułtowy, or Bojszowy, where not so many migrants arrived after 1945.

TN: The questions of proportions between various groups certainly influenced the ways in which traditions were upheld, while Bojszowy was additionally lucky to count among its populace such persons as Alojzy Lysko and Józef Kłyk. Kazimierz Kutz once wrote that one day in the distant future, when archaeologists excavate Bojszowy, they shall conclude that it must have been the capital of Silesia. Kłyk's films create the Wild West in the countryside, with the participation of villagers; these are Silesian westerns. I think it a symbolic fact that the leader of the autonomous movement himself is a krojczok (of mixed origin, part-hanys, part-gorol). Jerzy Gorzelik's grandfather was a very important figure in the development of the literary scene in Silesia, and that too seems symbolic somehow. “Cholonek”, which delights some people, is rejected by others. For several years (together with Gorzelik, with Professor Chojecka, and Irma Kozina – this is how our collaboration started), I ran the programme of studies in regional education for teachers. This form of education also relates to space – that is something you deal with. And yet we met with very strong reservations when it turned out that someone wanted to develop a series of lessons based on “Cholonek”. That was beyond comprehension.

The discussion was held at the Silesian Museum in Katowice on 13 January 2012.

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY DOROTA WĄSIK

Katowice, construction site of the Silesian Museum, in the background: buildings of the former Katowice Coal Mine