

LA ND

LORENZO CASTORE





















































WOJCIECH NOWICKI

It was a journey across the plain, starting from my old city that lay on that plain. One of the highest elevations in the city was a hillock not unlike those that sprang up in many Polish high-rise housing projects in times of demographic explosion. Originally, it was a pile of dirt remaining after digging the foundations of blocks of flats, worthless soil temporarily heaped up into a mound. With time, this temporary arrangement began to take on a permanent shape, one no longer subject to erosion. The mound was grassed over and became the estate's main attraction alongside the self-service store and the church. This earth was no one's. It served no function. In that city and across the country the superfluity of similar earthen structures remained awkwardly conspicuous for years: they were pieces of unplanned happiness in a concrete landscape, small promontories that begged to be climbed and, much to the delight of local dentists, run down, ridden down on bicycles or sleighs.

It was many years after its creation that I ascended the mound for the first time. A little late perhaps. After all, this was not my housing estate, and when this hump came into being, I was not interested in that kind of fun anymore. So, it wasn't until many years later that I scaled this little peak, pushing up a stroller with a baby. The summer was drawing to a close, and the sun was bright that day, although by that time it had already cooled down a bit. The grass and people cast long shadows – I remember this as I took a photo. I noticed in this light that the plaster on the walls of the blocks had peeled off, the paint had turned gray, the house numbers, painted in dark colours, had faded, yet all of this was enveloped in a warm, benevolent light that brought out all the details while at the same time clothing this squalor in a rich, honeyed livery. The church building, well-designed and constructed at enormous cost, glowed dark and cool. At that time, it still seemed too big, like a new airport in the middle of nowhere which a decade

after its opening turned out to be outdated and undersized. Everything else, so it seemed at the time, was nearing collapse. Only this hill, this random fold of earth that was too low to find its way onto maps, had become fixed in the landscape. Reinforced with its turf it already seemed natural: another monument to the human era.

In a way nothing there was mine. Everything was alien and short-lived. Whenever I could I would leave this place, this city sprawling far beyond its original limits that now covered an area surpassing that of Europe's largest capital cities. I would run away, curious about other streets, invariably convinced that they are more interesting and perhaps better, and not quite aware yet that it is not the destination, nor the streets, parks or museums that truly mattered. Rather, the point of these journeys was all that lay in between, the sheer wandering, the way to the station, the train ride itself.

Perhaps it is a matter of roots. Mine have been pulled out from under me.

At that time you wouldn't travel far – to Wrocław or, in the opposite direction, to Gliwice or Katowice – to savour something less familiar, a dusty grandeur. I did not remember much of all this, and most of what I did was of Gliwice, especially those things that were then common to many cities: the railway station with the adjoining bus terminus, just as stale as all the others, as if Zwycięstwa Street, the city's finest thoroughfare, its showroom and most prestigious address, led straight into the station entrance hall, where, despite the distance, the stench of the toilets was clearly detectable. Yet with all its pervasiveness, this odour was obvious then and it was not something you would worry about; rather, something else then was more likely to strike you: a certain dignity conveyed by the building itself, its loftiness and enormous size, plus the large mosaic in the hall opposite the entrance, glittering in various shades of blue. During these years, its decor, added as a fervent hallmark of modernity, a glossy symbol of the present, in defiance of the architectural order dictated by the building and its designers, failed to delight. It would reveal its inherent beauty only when it became outdated and coated with patina, when the final context of its beginnings was lost for good. This was fortunate, as this decor was not innocent. It was meant to serve as a counterweight for something that was hidden or at least understated. It denied the obvious: that this city, just like all the others in the area, was not ours. It built for them a new identity by covering up the old one.

Gliwice, Gleiwitz: rundown platforms, a station with a mosaic, oddly solemn, imposing even, toilets and a restaurant, a bus terminal with its spluttering buses. From the station you soon find yourself on a street with trams called Zwycięstwa Street, its lower section intersected by a ravine of market stalls. Further on still is the Kłodnica, a small river resembling a sewer, followed by a green space that turns into a park with signs directing you to a long-defunct palm house. On Zwycięstwa Street there was a café with a shop window displaying multi-coloured jelly sweets in salad bowls, a masterful show of confectionery art in an era of scarcity, a miracle of the transfiguration of water, sugar, gelatine and colour additives into a fluorescent temptation. Finally, there was Rynek (the Main Square) and the maze of streets, a few more housing projects and exit roads: in this area all the arteries were through roads, joining together many towns and cities. Even the tram service offered routes that covered the entire conurbation, which anywhere else would be unthinkable. Not much remains of all this, which probably is for the better, but nevertheless one thing should be made clear: these things should be recalled not out of any soppy nostalgia or cheap sentimentality, but rather because it represents one of the many layers of the city, or rather of the country as a whole, and for the time being it appears to be the last but one layer. (And also because we feel more and more compelled to explain this country to ourselves).

For years, the local towns were a mere pause on our journey, nothing more than a stop-over for a train to or from Cracow. I would sometimes feel an urge to jump out of my carriage, to immerse myself again in the city's all too familiar fabric, to follow old, faded habits. Looking through the train window, I wished I could walk those treacherous sidewalks again, redraw the map of those places where one can relax, have a coffee, watch people from behind the 'curtain' of a newspaper. And yet I would not get off: sensibly, or so I thought at the time, I was following the right path, from point A to point B, stifling the urge to protest and preventing my own escape. I wanted to go back there, head straight as a die to the station, to Zwycięstwa Street, the Rynek, to then get lost in the labyrinthine tangle of streets named after occupations and vital points on the map of the past, Tkacka (Weavers' St.), Wysoka (High St.), Mleczna (Milk St.), Średnia (Middle St.), Basztowa (Gate Tower St.), though at the time they did not have names, as I did not know them yet. They were like a familiar wood through which you wander without a map for the sheer pleasure of roaming. I wanted to go back, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it.

Seventy kilometres – today an hour by train, sometimes less. Now, however, I reach the city from the other side, so the train is out of the question. Hindering my way is a vast barrier of sinkholes. And even though the distance is the same, the tracks get more and more hazardous and the journey takes longer. The route that once ran through that universe of rust and decay so typical of railroads is today a nondescript road like so many others in the world: an extraterritorial motorway, a series of noise barriers, fields, and buildings visible from afar.

One day, when I started visiting Gliwice again, this time from the other side, from the east, I discovered that I had never done any proper sightseeing before. Or, to put it differently, I had never really got to know it back then. In a way, this is almost laughable, I'm thinking to myself: *I'm constantly on the move and yet I've been an inattentive tourist*. Because when the name of this city is uttered, keywords seem to arrange themselves into a route, creating a guide not unlike a key to real and phantom space. The fabled Gliwice Radio Tower, the palm house, Gliwice's Bauhaus, the elegant and comically diminutive Weichmann's textile store, the Rynek and the castle, the synagogues (the old and new one), the Christ the King Church, the former hotel building housing the Town Hall, the Polytechnic, about which I would hear ad nauseam. All this, in the guise of places, buildings or memories, was out there somewhere, and I hardly got anywhere. I didn't feel any need to. I knew the Rynek, empty as always, with its arcades and graffiti, all in the style of unfaithful imitators of the past that would haunt me everywhere I went: my country was flaunting its newly erected historic buildings. Walking from the station, you pass the former textile store and the town hall, as well as the signs directing visitors to the palm house; on one occasion, at the end of a street I caught a glimpse of the castle. And that was all. And yet, throughout all those years, I had kept a healthy distance, refusing to believe that points marked arbitrarily by someone, pins with different-coloured heads stuck in the city plan, could define its essence.

This is my way of doing things. Visiting botanical gardens, natural history museums, poring over fossils, preserved muscles, while steering clear of other, often more important, places. I have a predilection for animals that were stuffed a long time ago, for display cases with specimens that have been nibbled by pests, for glass drawers with thousands of butterflies stuck on miniature pins. Similarly, I am drawn to places that are shabby, falling into ruin, areas where I would not like to live in any case. I'm looking for layers. Gliwice, Silesia, it is plainly evident, are a palimpsest – they speak many languages, many architectural orders, epochs, cultures at once. This appealed to me.

It is also about repetition, leaping back into an already familiar rut, retracing one's steps. The act of looking remains the same, but it is expressed in a different way. Over time the intensity is somehow blunted, as if worn down by water. I watch palimpsests of streets, buildings grown into one another, a gaudy patchwork of styles: the brutal simplicity of poorly finished concrete, next to it slightly softer plaster covering post-war brickwork, fused into one with mascarons, atlases or emerald tiles glistening on the facade: a while ago, I discover, this *mélange* seemed contrary to nature. I could not accept this lack of sensitivity and tenderness; today I look in it for a story to be told. In the past I shamefully omitted the more recent layers, those resulting from the need to cram people into small spaces, to fill the gaps between buildings. Now I look at these amalgams, these conjoined twins, and register successive layers, the onslaught of plastic ads from the last decade of the last century, the globalising zeal of the first decades of the new one, which, however, in Silesia assume peculiar forms, as they cannot but fit, usually without success, into a context that is incomprehensible to their authors.

As I painstakingly recreated my past routes from more than three decades, namely all my rides to Szopienice, Mysłowice, Bytom, Ruda Śląska and Piekary, years later, much to my astonishment, I discovered how many of them I had actually made. In fact, too many to mention, besides, there's not much point in recalling them. Through tram windows I watched city boundaries pass by, seemingly the ultimate end of any urban organism. Yet somehow the tram would continue on its route. It traversed fields and meadows, rolling country enveloped in dust and soot, so polluted that I found myself desperately gasping for air, hoping that the tram would soon leave the city behind. I peered out at ponds and reservoirs flashing by, mementos of man's failed endeavours, repurposed to suit his needs, just like this mound in the housing estate in my first city. And then at last we encounter more and more modest red-brick buildings with green or red shutters, and carpet hangers hung with eiderdowns. I would then get off by the last buildings and walk down a dirt road which after several hundred metres turned into a grass footpath, which in turn led to a little shack, a makeshift store in which the only merchandise to be bought was beer. You did not even have to order it – as soon as you stepped through the door a mug found its way under the tap. I was always the odd one out: the others, who all seemed riveted to their spots, stared at me in silence as they smoked. They all knew each other, neighbours, work and drinking buddies, miners spending their spare time by the reservoir, soothing their nerves by angling and drinking beer in the shack amongst the fields, ending their day with a bike ride home. When I raised my mug to them, nodding my head, interest waned: they found out that I knew how to behave.

Conducting yourself in the right manner is appreciated here.

Even I can't tell how many trips I've made over those years. The memories are too vague now. Probably I would have to find that mound in that housing estate, summon up once more the stench of those train station toilets and the blueness of those station mosaics, rekindle my fascination with the enormity and decay of Zwycięstwa Street, attempt to grasp the purity of an architecture, all those Bauhaus relics, from a world completely unknown in Poland outside Silesia. Finally, I would have to cast my mind back to something that is most difficult to pin down: the air itself, some unique quality that entraps me with its sticky tentacles.

Years later, behind the backrest of my favourite armchair in the apartment of an old photographer, a lace curtain was fluttering. The window was open. The view from it was similar to the views from hundreds of windows on that housing estate with its mound in my old city. It was the same country, essentially the same land, Silesia, more specifically Upper Silesia. Not far away, just seventy kilometres, you would find minor differences. A threadbare lawn, well-worn footpaths. Because for some reason sidewalks were laid out with a ruler, and so people used shortcuts. My host, the window, the housing estate and the lawn: images begin to merge together. The conclusion to be drawn is that Gliwice and Silesia blend into a single whole by virtue of photography and photographers. After all, my life is somewhere else. I look at the city through visitor's eyes. I am only passing by. I'm only left with photos and the people who take them.

Through the man whose apartment I was visiting, Jerzy Lewczyński, I was trying to make sense of the people who settled here, a place that I wouldn't find attractive enough to hop off the train to see for an hour or two, let alone visit for a couple of days – it was hardly ever on my way. And the answer came to me out of the blue, without reflection, as clear as day from the very outset: namely, that his story, as well as the story of others, was so often also the story of my relatives who, though born far away, settled in this region because this is where they found a place to live and work. Their flats afforded the same view as this one through lace-curtained windows: public lawns and blocks of flats. Here was the repetitiveness of post-war architecture, estates full of prefabricated blocks, clumsy cars with asthmatic engines, garbage chutes, sloppiness, vandalised common areas, light bulbs pilfered in the corridors, confinement in the gilded cage that was one's own flat, with standardised furniture and identical kitchens. It was nothing to write home about. And yet at least it was something, better than next to nothing, better than those empty hands



that was all they could call theirs. And in Jerzy's case, it was always a place that one could return to because of a tangled past.

I sat in Lewczyński's flat, on a couch or in an armchair. We talked, stopping only to eat, or when Lewczyński, nearly ninety years of age and an engineer by profession, watched the news on television. The rhythm of the day had to be kept, the rituals had to be performed. The window was open, the curtain was fluttering. Outside there was the housing estate and one could hear the call of a peasant peddling potatoes door-to-door. Things here were just like anywhere else. On this couch, outside this window, it was like it was in my first city: the same lawn, the same blocks built to the same design from identical prefabricated concrete panels – DIY houses. Initially, they were nothing more than a heap of precast concrete slabs lying about in the mud. But over time they metamorphosed into residential structures with access roads and greenery, at which time they were fully ready to be lived in. Identical walls, identical views, similar problems, which is why it is easier to figure out what kept or brought them here, all those people whose biographies and work I've been exploring for years.

Lewczyński, the man telling me his life story from his couch, transformed Polish photography; he pursued his goals attentively, methodically eliminating anything that was redundant and leaving ample space for abstract thinking. Yet he ended up settling in a city which, so it would seem years later, had little to offer somebody with a powerful imagination. He gave proof of his imaginative qualities on numerous occasions, perhaps most notably when he embarked on his series *Archeologia fotografii* [Archeology of Photography], in which he gave voice to other people's photos and photographic junk, negatives picked up on the street that are barely decipherable, random reproductions from medical atlases and newspapers. Towards the end of his life he was xeroxing his own and other people's photographs, together with loose jottings and scraps: this was his final break with the school that had formed him, and at the same time it was a founding gesture.

Zofia Rydet, who was a friend of Lewczyński's, had a more traditional approach to photography. She was a latecomer to her profession, only becoming a full-time photographer in her mature years. Over time, her paid job had become something of a boring necessity and a mere footnote to her real life: she knew by then that photography was her life. For years she lurched from one subject to another, all distressingly remote from the possibility of expressing herself and the world.

Her work ranged from somewhat naïve and bleak scenes rooted in misty representations produced in the spirit of early 20th century, right through to expressive and symbolic photomontages. And then there are the photos that were to become her life's work: a long-term project begun in her retirement and never completed—or rather completed in the only way that was in tune with those pictures: the deterioration and death of the author herself. She called it a *Zapis socjologiczny* [A Sociological Record]. When she first set out on this adventure, she did not know how it would multiply, diversify, and branch out in all directions. She set out to document a certain segment of Poland, which she invariably depicted in a similar fashion: a wall in a dwelling, typically a kitchen, with its inhabitants in stiff poses. Some photos in this cycle are scarcely believable, yet I myself remember such scenes, I remember seeing similar human abodes, gloomy peasant huts akin to pit-houses, with barely anything inside, a pile of coal in the corner, a crooked stove, beds straight out of Maupassant's rural nightmare. We see highlander cabins, jam-packed with holy pictures and equally hallowed depictions of American presidents, decorations, brandy labels—poverty camouflaged with style and pride. We get the selfsame drab apartments of the aspiring intelligentsia, complete with the standard staffage: a wall unit, a picture, film posters, some books, aspirations to modernity, embodied here in a fleecy bedspread and a plastic lamp shade. (*We have to explain this country anew to ourselves*, I increasingly think nowadays). All this, and so much more, thousands of such images, taken in the harsh glare of a flash bulb, without an ounce of pity for the portrayed, and thus for the author herself. A sea of images, motifs repeating themselves in myriad versions; add to this everything she could not resist, offshoots of this cycle, fleeting changes, deflections, as if she were still painstakingly searching for something.

I found myself most deeply immersed in my work when dealing with the photographs of Wilhelm von Blandowski. It's hard to determine exactly what this man wanted to become in his life; he did all kinds of jobs. He was a restless man, according to his contemporaries his head was wracked with anxiety. Considered a pettifogger and a madman in his final years, he was forced to travel a good part of the world and spend much of his life in Australia, before he would finally return to Gliwice, Gleiwitz, where he lived out his last days. In Australia, he became a gold-digger, an explorer of that continent, and in the end a thief. Despite his troubled personality and adventurous disposition, he was successful, perhaps precisely because he was constantly beset by forces which I have no desire to know. In his native city he had to take up the profession he had only recently mastered: photography. His studio was located by the milk market—a place that attracted the petty bourgeois, Jews, and visitors from neighbouring towns rather

than industrial magnates. He appears to have kept his head above water without ever getting rich. Short-tempered, given to fits of rage and anger, he was universally feared. He knew that the photographic Eldorado lay elsewhere, in the vicinity of the train station, where industrialists had their homes and offices. In fact, not much survives of his work, but what little remains is enough to conclude (rather unsurprisingly) that there is no justice for exceptional individuals. For he was exceptional indeed, although in a disagreeable way, just as there is no understanding for people of great talent who also happen to be malodorous oddballs, globetrotters, secret lovers of knowledge and occasional thieves. Blandowski's legacy: a scattering of surviving landscapes, extensive photographic documentation of a herd of pedigree cattle, probably worth more than all the money the photographer's whole family earned throughout its existence, a handful of outdoor photos, a unique visual record of Silesia (which at the time was still largely uninhabited, bucolic even, dotted only with islands of wooden headframes), and a considerable number of atelier portraits, many delightfully bizarre. He died from a twisted bowel, a beautiful death befitting a madman.

Being a restless spirit, Blandowski was forced to return to Gliwice when all his hopes elsewhere had been dashed to pieces. Lewczyński came to the city to study; fearing political repression, he wanted to be as far away from home as possible, and after graduation he simply stayed here for good, found a decent job, friends, a family, and put down roots in the city. Rydet was also rootless. War and the new borders cut her off from her place of origin. She was consumed with ambition, finding in the city an environment that gave her a secure footing.

They, and others, are the footprints that guide me on my way back here. These are some of my Silesian 'leads'. They lead me to Gliwice.

At roughly the same time as myself, just a few years later in fact, Lorenzo Castore also began his wanderings around Silesia. Sometimes we traversed parallel routes, and as I can see now from photos and our stories, our paths crossed here and there. We did not have a clue about each other back then. But how could we? We had no need, I suspect, of each other's company. We were both looking for something else, if, that is, we knew that we were actually looking for something at all. He came to Gliwice and took up residence here. This was his first Silesian address, the first trace of that place impressed upon his memory. Then came his first encounters, somewhere in that realm between dream and reality, and his first contacts, some of which proved

to be lasting and still play a significant role in his life. He wanted to pursue photography, but differently from before, to break free of something he no longer had a desire to do. Shortly before that trip he had come back from Kosovo. For many the career path of a war reporter is a typical choice, and usually the wrong one. He realised he was not cut out for it. He came to Poland in search of a place where nothing happens, but at the same time a place steeped in history. Gliwice is an important point on the map, if only because of that ill-famed act of German provocation, the capture of the radio station, and thus one of those alarm bells that set the Second World War in motion for Poland. The wooden radio tower is still standing, bearing testimony to this event. Then, however, Castore focused on the present, looking for layers deposited one on top of another in this place where history has left its heavy mark; like myself, he was blind to those pins stuck on the map marking those must-see destinations on the itinerary of the well-heeled tourist. So these were years spent roaming, getting to know the country and its people, living among them, a time of bewilderment. This is when he also tried to be a photographer and be his own boss. He continues to do both to this day.

Castore embarked upon his new life behind the camera lens by portraying life in a land pockmarked with bulges, bumps, scars and hollows. Here, everything speaks of something that happened some time ago: buildings obeying a different aesthetic and order to the rest of the country, an architecture inherited and neglected, nature that does not evoke images of lushness and tranquillity. His photos do not provide a transparent account but rather a somnambular journey, secret landscapes registered in delirium through steamy windows. The darkened plaster of a nameless city, fields under a heavy winter sky: the blackness of the earth, the sullied whiteness of snow. Abandoned, overgrown areas, shadowy train stations, one cigarette after another. Mined visions, like a view from the porthole of a bathyscaphe at the bottom of the ocean. Ghostlike processions under the sign of the cross, the closeness of a girl. Stuffiness.

This is the first part of the album, featuring photos from 1999–2001.

Castore returned to Silesia in 2018, breaking his own habit of not revisiting places he knows well: even though he still felt an attachment to the region, which many viewed as baffling, he found the area already barren.

And yet what has become more and more visible over time, and today is no longer hidden, namely the degradation and destruction of Silesia, its redundancy or obvious superfluity, its factories surviving on subsidies and dying a slow death, this whole process of what once seemed irreversible decline has now in fact begun to reverse. This desolate land has remained as it always has, deeply scarred and exploited to the point of exhaustion. And now nobody knows what to do with it. Spoil tips, worthless dumped gangue, excrescences rising up from the landscape, sometimes impressively high. The remains of mines, sinkholes, ground damaged by mining, land that needs to be re-invented and today is being redefined. This is a historical, architectural and linguistic patchwork, where voices talk over one another, each trying to tell a different story: once upon a time German, Polish, Yiddish and some English could be heard. Today Polish, Silesian, German, Japanese and Italian are spoken, and, above all this, English once again, as Silesia, whether distinct in its own right or not, is catching up with the rest of the world and, when necessary, switches to this lingua franca, another bridge language alongside Silesian and German. This is the tongue of its modern inhabitants, its factory owners and their employees. The cratered earth, the smokestacks, the scarified, pitted landscape, all those superfluous entrails ripped open and jettisoned on the ground surface, the spoil waiting to be loaded, the noxious smoke, the constant need to clean one's windows, because both family custom and local honour, those stone tablets inscribed with that ancient law, declared: men shall not have dirty faces and hands deeply ingrained with coal dust. And yet with time all of this, as might have been expected, has given way to a more benign reign of large cuboid edifices with metal sheet walls, virtually portable manufacturing centres churning out everything in demand, both in this country and its neighbours: car parts, engines, entire cars, washbasins, packaging, IT services. All this land has moulted once again and is now growing a new skin. Its cast-off coat is drying and crumbling into dust: the remains of small businesses from a few years ago lure customers with fading ads, chain stores keep opening and closing. Silesia, more global today than ever, is still aware of its uniqueness as it merges with the wider world. Small boxing and weightlifting clubs have become an endangered species, just like those sports events in local culture centres which years ago I watched with dogged perseverance, mesmerised by the spirit of competition at the lowest level. Defeat was a daily occurrence in these places. The struggle with the barbell was brief. Failure was already glaring you in the face even before you entered the podium in your threadbare club singlet, before the coach gave you that morale-boosting pat of the hand. Because you knew it would very soon be followed by his hasty one-arm embrace after the disappointing thud of iron on wooden boards and a faint cloud of dust spelling failure. I was dazzled by this spectacle of slightly built

young men and judges in suits, no less than I was by the stuffy air, the vapour of human bodies, the courtesy shown by the onlookers dressed in their Sunday best. Everybody knew the name of the game.

This was how they used to spend their spare time. Today, their lives are filled with different attractions – the same as everyone else – trips to shopping malls, new buildings with brick facades and metal sheet backs. Those who a while ago would have taken up boxing or weightlifting today pump iron in gyms, fantasise of fights in octagon cages, so brutal and popular nowadays, dreaming of becoming famous warriors drowning in mountains of cash. They are glued to their laptops and tablets. They enter contests, eager to make a career in modelling or make it big on TV shows. They work in one of those anonymous assembly shops or production halls, or, alternatively, they still earn a living in a mine or steel plant. Or, like everywhere, they are getting an education. They leave and then come back. They are seeing what life is like beyond this dense network of ageless things. Not all will succeed.

These are the people Castore photographed in 2018 – new Earthlings on ancient Earth. He portrayed them at close range, without tricks. It's clear that these are his photos, taken with the same hands. And yet almost twenty years later these portraits seem more intimate.

As is my wont, I was treading my own path without even wondering why. One day it became clear to me: I must begin to carve out new ones, pore over stacks of other photographers' pictures, follow in the footsteps of the people who once lived here. In the end, I knew I had to let our paths cross, Lorenzo Castore's and mine.

A train station or a bus stop, and between them an old Jewish cemetery which I examined through a rusty wire fence. It was nothing more than an overgrown wasteland whose *matzevot* were barely visible. But this is just a the sloughed skin of memory, yet more useless sediment, as today it looks completely different. Further on, intersecting Zwycięstwa Street, is the old ravine of market stalls, that one-time bustling hive of shacks and of stalls, which should be relocated *en masse* to the regional historical museum as an example of an economy that has lost its way and is searching vainly for a way out. This is a place endlessly torn between the old and the new, a dismal hodgepodge of everything you can imagine, citrus fruit and bras, potatoes and cheap electronics. Today it has turned into a busy thoroughfare that partly runs underground.

And next to the bank located in Weichmann's former textile store, there's the turn right sign directing passers-by to the palm house. I walked past this place for years, but never went there. After this one reaches the Kłodnica, a river that will never be clean as long as there are people and industry here, unless the whole of Silesia collapses and sends its hard-working tribe of manufacturers fleeing. Finally, there's the Rynek with its miniature town enclosed by non-existent walls. And stretching beyond that is the real city, one no longer dominated by trade or pageant, a city that is a home. An ordinary city.

It was only recently that I went to the palm house for the very first time. This building, a humbler and more mixed-up version of the crystal palaces of this world, those royal and imperial hothouses of European capitals, has survived and been given a new lease of life in a greatly extended form. That day, down with a fever, I was unable to stand on my feet. I decided to rest on a bench in a corner opposite one of the many terrariums. However, what caught my eye was not the animals locked up among glass walls, even if they were rather exotic and interesting to see, and still less was I interested in the plants, which were not as impressive as I had seen elsewhere. Rather, more than anything else I was drawn to the local people there, the women with a glaring fondness for dying their hair ginger or bright red, as if they wished to throw down a challenge to everyone, and their men, docile to their wives come Sunday, determined and gruffly affectionate. I was born among people like these: the same curtains in the window, the same lawn outside, the same principles. *Do they also have a little hill in their housing estate?* I wondered.

Polska wersja tekstu jest dostępna na stronach internetowych Muzeum w Gliwicach (<http://muzeum.gliwice.pl>) i BLOW UP PRESS (<https://blowuppress.eu>).

















































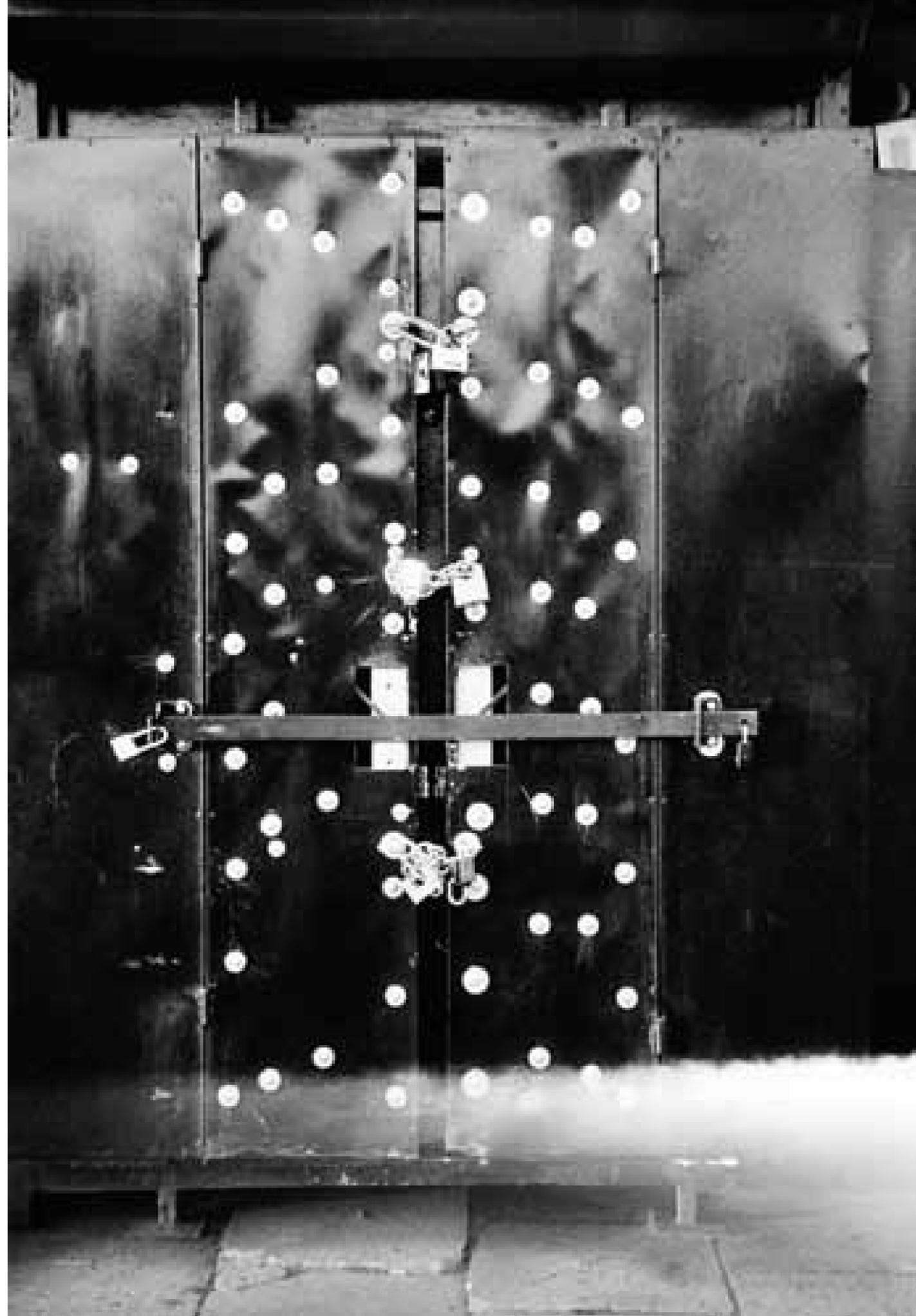




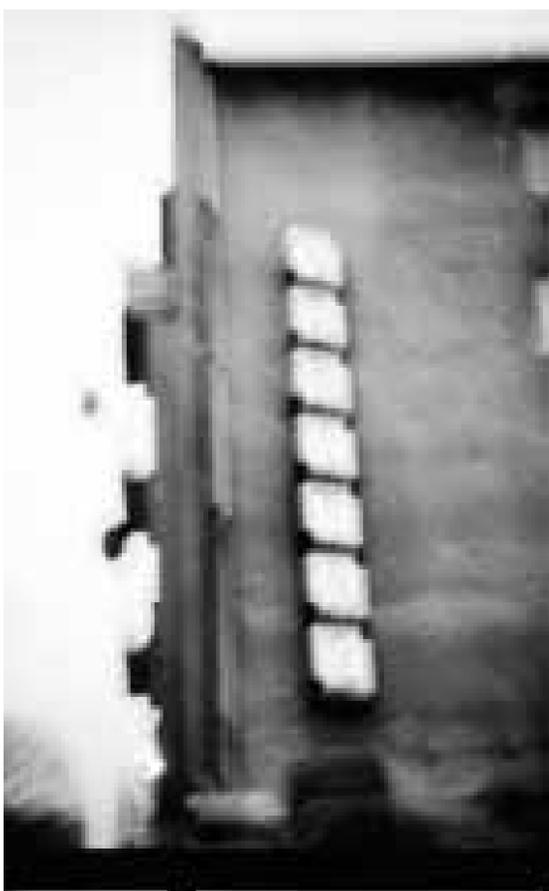


























































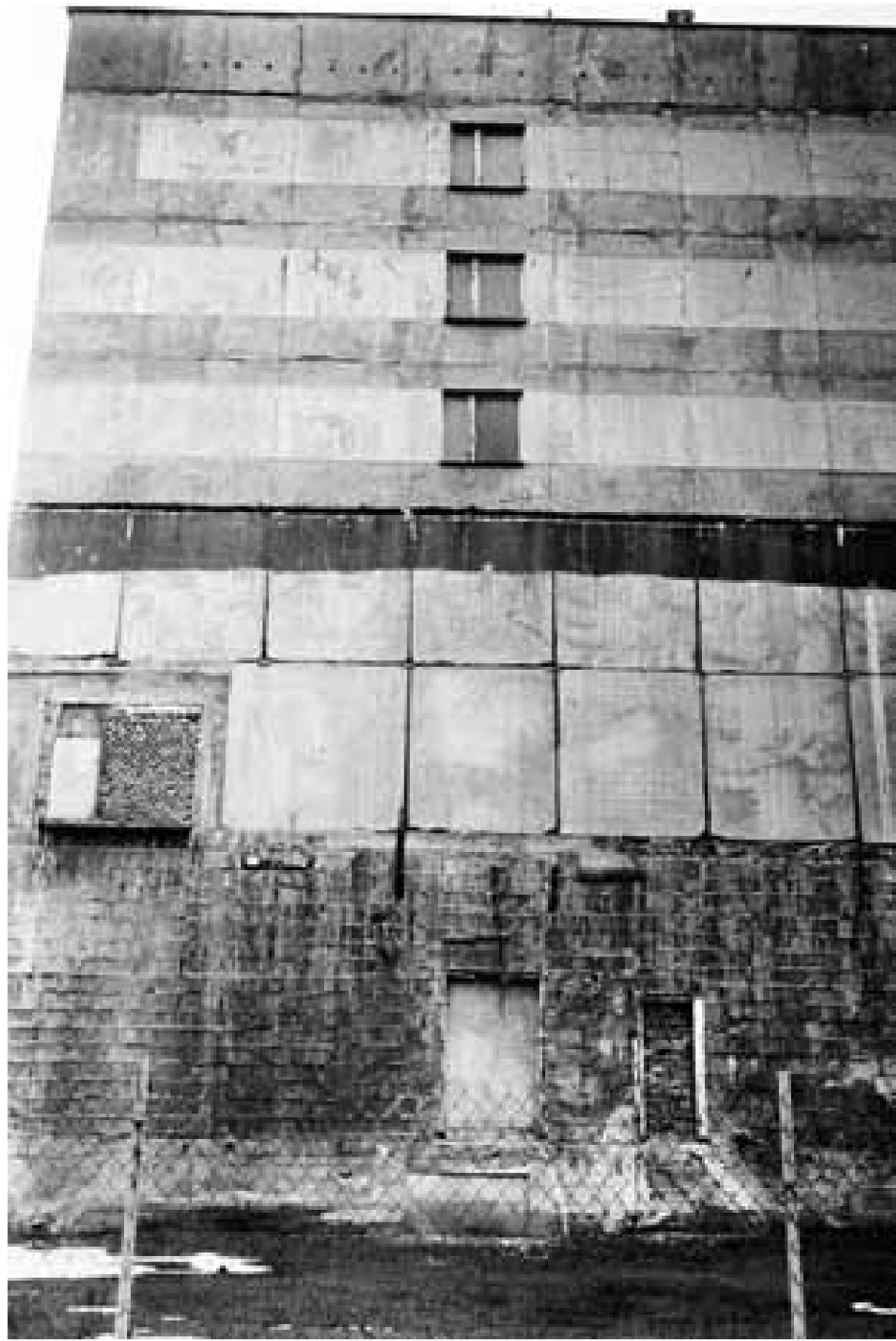


























LORENZO CASTORE

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The book uses maps from the collections of the State Archives in Katowice, Branch in Gliwice, the Archives of the Municipal Office in Gliwice, the Berlin City Library, the Museum in Gliwice, as well as photographs and postcards from the collection of the Museum in Gliwice.

The book is a result of the artistic residence of Lorenzo Castore organised in 2018 as part of the Czytelnia Sztuki project by the Museum in Gliwice, Poland.

