

## QUELLE

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### **Memory and Photography. Jewish District in Lublin (Poland) in Stefan Kielsznia's Photographs**

#### **Photography – between ‘documentary’ and ‘art’<sup>1</sup>**

The contradiction between ‘documentary’ and ‘creative’ values of photography has been discussed almost from the earliest years of the existence of the medium itself. These issues arise particularly when one refers to pictures as the material for historical, anthropological or sociological analyses, especially when the discussed pictures provide images of non-existing objects and past historical events. This would be the case of the ‘Podzamcze’ Jewish district in Lublin, which was largely demolished by the Nazis during World War II, after the destruction of the local Jewish community that mostly perished in the death camp of Bełżec. Later on, between 1944 and 1954, the last traces of the ‘Podzamcze’ district were eradicated by local communist authorities. Although many pictures of ‘Podzamcze’ and other nearby streets inhabited before World War II by Jews have been preserved and are being used in numerous exhibitions, publications and educational programmes as a tool to ‘evoke’ or ‘represent’ the pre-war life of the Jewish community in Lublin, the discussion of their documentary values has not been conducted yet.

The tension between ‘representative’ and ‘aesthetic’ functions of images trapped on photographic negatives seems to be particularly important when dealing with the pictures of Nowa, Lubartowska, Kowalska, Świętoduska and Szeroka streets taken in the 1930s by Stefan Kielsznia. Although Kielsznia's pictures constitute unique material that shows numerous street scenes, they cannot be treated as a ‘pure document’ of everyday life of the Jewish community. It is impossible to determine when exactly the pictures were taken and what the original purpose of undertaking this project was, and this mystery affects to a great extent our contemporary perception of the whole collection. Without understanding the intention of an author and without putting pictures into a proper historical context, the documentary function of photographs can be weakened and overshadowed by the aesthetic one. Although Kielsznia's pictures can help to re-read, recreate and restore the images of the Jewish streets of pre-war Lublin, playing – at the same time – an important role in the process of re-constructing the Polish-Jewish memory of the city, their documentary function *per se* is more problematic and can be analysed and interpreted in a few different perspectives that refer to a few supposed functions of the images taken.

<sup>1</sup> Note documented items by Stefan Kielsznia, see:  
[http://www.medaon.de/anhang/MEDAON\\_11\\_Kielsznia.pdf](http://www.medaon.de/anhang/MEDAON_11_Kielsznia.pdf).

### **Lublin – a former Polish-Jewish City**

For many centuries Lublin, the biggest city in south-eastern Poland, has been a town whose ethnic, religious and national diversity determined the character of the place. Since the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Jews constituted the most important community among all the minority groups. It was here that Vaad Arba Aratzot (the Council of Four Lands, also known as the Jewish Parliament) gathered during the times of prosperity in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In its golden age the city was sometimes called the “Jerusalem of the Polish Kingdom”, or the “Jewish Oxford”, on account of the high level of instruction at the local yeshiva and the impressive quality of sacred volumes in Hebrew published and printed locally. At the turn of the eighteenth century Yakov Yitzkhak Horowitz, called the Seer of Lublin, served here as a Hassidic rebbe. It was due to him that Lublin became a well-known Hassidic centre. In the 1930s, around 35% of Lublin’s citizens were Jews, who formed a vivid part of Lublin’s economic and cultural life. In 1933 Yeshivat Khakhmei Lublin was established here – the Talmudic academy which soon became famous worldwide.

During World War II, thirty-eight thousand Lublin Jews were exterminated by the Nazis, mostly in the death camp of Belżec and also in Sobibór and Majdanek. Between 1942 and 1944, Germans also destroyed the Jewish district of Podzamcze (literally: the area below the castle). After the war, under the influence of communist ideology, the Polish-Jewish past of the city was ignored. Around the mid-1950s, all traces of the former Jewish district were eradicated and the whole space rearranged. Within a few years the process of destroying the original physical urban structure of the Jewish District that served as proof of the presence and destruction of the local Jewish community was completed. Today, instead of a variety of streets below the castle, one can see meadows, a highway (in the area where the main synagogue – Maharshal shul – used to stand), a bus station and a huge square which serves as a car park.

Only after the year 1989, which brought crucial political and social changes to Poland, did the history and culture of Jews together with the Holocaust issues become a part of public discourse. Also in Lublin, the former cultural diversity, together with the history of its destruction, was recognized as an important element that constitutes the historical and cultural identity of the city.

### **The Treasure of Stefan Kielsznia’s Collection**

In an ongoing process of re-discovering and re-reading the past of the city, pre-war photographs play an important role, providing images of the world of the Poles and Jews of Lublin which no longer exists. The collection of Stefan Kielsznia occupies a unique position among pictures that were taken in the 1920s and 1930s by a number of authors: Edward Hartwig, Stanisław Magierski, Stanisław Pastusiak, Henryk Poddębski, Wiktor Ziółkowski, Józef Czechowicz, Jan Bułhak, Alter Kacyzne and Roman Vishniak. What makes his pictures special is the quite

exceptional method of his work. In the 1930s, most of the photographers mentioned above referred in their work to the aesthetics of pictorial photography. It derived the value of a picture from its ability to imitate paintings and rejected the “pure photographic image”, considered as too literal and therefore not fulfilling the criteria of an art object. Unlike other photographers, who aimed at creating picturesque and well-composed frames, Kielsznia systematically took pictures of tenement houses of five streets, one by one, capturing single scenes from the flow of events taking place in time and space. The image of the Jewish district created by Kielsznia differs not only from the over-romanticized vision inspired by the aesthetic of pictorialism, but also from the brutal images created by the Nazi propaganda in the 1940s, which would lastingly distort the perception of Jewish life in Europe through to the present.<sup>2</sup> Due to their precise character, Kielsznia’s photos are an unsentimental depiction of streets inhabited mostly by Jewish citizens, in all their social variety, which – soon after that – were partly destroyed and lost their unique character.

Born in 1911 in Jakubowice near Lublin, since his youth Kielsznia had been fascinated by painting and graphic art, yet he was unable to pursue his dream of studying art. Due to the difficult financial situation of his family, soon after graduating from the Guild Commercial College in 1928, he started to earn a living on his own. Working at the “St. Wojciech” bookstore, located in the Victoria Hotel at Krakowskie Przedmieście in Lublin, he became an enthusiastic amateur photographer, a possessor of a large collection of books on the subject, and in 1937 one of the founders of Lublin Photographic Society.<sup>3</sup>

In Kielsznia’s pictures one can see the odd-numbered sides of Lubartowska and Nowa streets (which is today the upper part of Lubartowska) and the even-numbered side of Świętoduska – which – in terms of architectural structure – still exists in its original pre-war form. He also shows us the even-numbered side of Kowalska street, which was partly demolished during the war, and fragments of its natural extension, Szeroka – the main street of the former Jewish quarter, which to a large degree was demolished by the Nazis during the occupation and then wiped out by the communist authorities after the war. Referring to archival materials and memoirs of former citizens, one can imagine this part of the city as poor and neglected, but vivid and resounding with Yiddish, the language of daily life, and Hebrew, the holy tongue of prayer, coming from synagogues, prayer houses and kheders. Kielsznia photographed textile stores, sweet shops, pharmacies, kosher restaurants, barber’s and grocer’s shops, bakeries and small hotels. Numerous, often bilingual, Polish-Yiddish advertisement sign-boards visible in every picture remind us of the former coexistence of Poles and Jews in the area. Framed against the first floors of dilapidated house facades, one can see people who happened to be there at that particular moment – street vendors, shop owners in the doorways of their shops, porters with ropes bound around their waists, peasant women in checked kerchiefs

<sup>2</sup> Krahl, Kathrin/Mennicke-Schwarz, Christiane/Wagler, Silke: Introduction, in: *Fabrics from Lublin*. Ulrike Grossarth, Leipzig 2011, p. 22-28 cit. p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Adamczyk-Garbowska, Monika/ Kubiszyn, Marta: Memory in Photographs: Stefan Kielsznia' Images of the Extinct Jewish Town, in: Grossarth, Ulrike (Hg.): *Stefan Kielsznia. Ulica Nowa 3. Street Photographs of the Jewish Quarter of Lublin in the 1930s*, Leipzig 2011, p. 47.

loaded with bundles, wealthier citizens in elegant coats and hats, pious Jews in traditional garments, policemen, beggars and carriage drivers. Most of them do not even notice or consciously ignore the photographer, who moves quickly along in the flow of everyday life, keeping a respectful distance to the reality he depicts and pointing his lenses above the heads of passers-by. Some of them, however, glance or openly look at Kielsznia, or even smile straight toward the camera. In a few pictures from Świętoduska one can see a little boy in a white shirt, and in some pictures from Kowalska a girl with a package in her hand, walking along with Kielsznia, letting themselves be included in several frames.

In the 1930s Kielsznia developed the negatives, but probably did not make prints from them. The rolls of film survived the war but the author, harried by the secret police during the Stalinist period because of his war contacts with the Home Army, destroyed some of the negatives in his possession, including – probably – some of those documenting the quarter inhabited by the Jews. Only in the late 1970s did he turn to them again, when he realized that the forgotten rolls had a historical value. Soon afterwards he showed several prints to Henryk Gawarecki, who was serving as the president of the Society of Friends of Lublin at the time. In December 1977, on Gawarecki's initiative, the first exhibition was organized under the title "Dawny Lublin na Fotografiach Stefana Kielszni" ("Old Lublin in Stefan Kielsznia's Photographs"). The exhibition included photographs of Nowa, Lubartowska, Kowalska, Świętoduska and Szeroka streets, among others, as well as views of the castle and the Old Town, made in pictorial-like style. In 1980 Kielsznia's pictures were presented at the exhibition "Dawny Lublin" (Old Lublin) in the Cultural Centre of the "LSM" District, and in 1984 pictures from Nowa were displayed in the Cultural Centre of Lublin Voivodship together with similar pictures taken contemporarily at the same spots. In 1987 photos were published in a book with a preface by M. Kurzątkowski, "Lublin Trzech Pokoleń" (Lublin of Three Generations).<sup>4</sup> In the 1980s, Kielsznia's pictures were displayed at the exhibition entitled "Poland – Aperture to a World Laid Waste", organized by the Forbes Collection together with the Navigator Foundation from Boston. It was presented in San Francisco (1983), Paris (1985), Boston (1986) and Tel Aviv (1988).<sup>5</sup> Probably during the process of composing and transporting the exhibition, some of the original negatives were lost or destroyed. In 1998 Kielsznia's works were included in the well-known photo album "And I Still See Their Faces..." published by the Shalom Foundation in Warsaw, where they open the part of the book devoted to street life.

<sup>4</sup> Kurzątkowski, Mieczysław: Lublin Trzech Pokoleń, Lublin 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Majuk, Dominika/Wiśniewska, Agnieszka: Exposed for Eternity: Stefan Kielsznia, Photographer from Lublin, in: Grossarth, Kielsznia, 2011, p. 27-30, cit. p. 29.

### Between Art and Document – the Unsolved Mystery of Kielsznia’s Project

It is impossible to determine the original size of Kielsznia’s collection. In the interview that Kielsznia gave to Krystyna Kotowicz from Radio Lublin in 1985,<sup>6</sup> the author himself claims that he took approximately several dozen rolls of negatives, among them about 400 good pictures of the Jewish district. However, one can assume that these numbers may refer in fact to all the pictures taken by Kielsznia before World War II, and not to the collection discussed. It is also unclear how many rolls of negatives of that particular collection (if any) Kielsznia might have destroyed in the 1950s, when he was harried by the secret police.

Today the collection includes 145 frames of high stylistic coherence. A few pre-war negatives, together with some prints made in the 1970s and some others in the 1990s from original negatives (probably lost in the 1980s), were donated to the archive of the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre in Lublin by Stefan’s son, Jerzy Kielsznia, and by Dr Symcha Wajs, an activist in the Jewish communities of Lublin and Warsaw. Therefore Kielsznia’s pictures became an element of two exhibitions displayed by the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre that referred to the pre-war Polish-Jewish history: “Portret Miejsca” (A Portrait of the Place, 1999–2010) and the exhibition “Pamięć Miejsca” (Memory of the Place), opened in February 2011, which is now an element of the institution’s interiors.

Examining all the known shots that were taken by Kielsznia in the interwar period, it is clear that he also took a number of shots of the Jewish district and other streets which conformed to the conventions of pictorial photography. However, in the process of taking the pictures of Nowa, Lubartowska, Świętoduska, Kowalska and Szeroka streets, Kielsznia was far from the “artistic approach” – he did not attempt to create picturesque views of the quarter, nor did he attempt to prove the quality of his photographic skills and often left some technical imperfections. When viewing the tenement pictures, one can assume that the goal of his work was to make a simple documentation of the buildings or the documentation of advertisement sign-boards of stores and workshops.<sup>7</sup>

Although the pictures from the collection have high documentary values, they should not be categorized as “documentary photography” – as in photography that attempts to show through certain events, places or people the “essence” of the photographed world. Kielsznia was not interested in unusual events or places, in something extraordinary taking place, nor did he choose individuals or themes that were representative of a specific milieu. Kielsznia acts here as a passionless witness,

<sup>6</sup> Radio broadcast by Krystyna Kotowicz: “Alfabet wspomnień – Stefan Kielsznia”, Radio Lublin S.A., Lublin 1985, transcribed by Barbara Odnous for the Archives of the Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN Center; see also: [http://tnn.pl/audycja\\_opis.php?id=21&f\\_2audycje\\_plikiOrder=Sorter\\_f\\_2audycje\\_pliki\\_czas\\_trwania&f\\_2audycje\\_plikiDir=ASC](http://tnn.pl/audycja_opis.php?id=21&f_2audycje_plikiOrder=Sorter_f_2audycje_pliki_czas_trwania&f_2audycje_plikiDir=ASC) [30.08.2012].

<sup>7</sup> In 1935–1939 the Art Council Of Lublin [Rada Artystyczna Miasta Lublina], consulting the city authorities in matters connected with the aesthetic appearance of the city, criticized posters and advertising sign-boards of Jewish stores and shops, which – in their opinion – did not fulfill certain aesthetic criteria. Although there are no sources available to prove it, one can assume that Kielsznia’s documentary work might have had something to do with the work of the Council, see Danczowska, Halina: Rada Artystyczna miasta Lublina 1935-1939, Lublin 2011, p. 11-20.

who is not a part of the photographed reality, and does not even try to cross the barrier between himself and the world he observes. This approach, however, allowed him to introduce the external perspective, which is impossible to achieve for a single individual that is a part of the presented world. Pictures give an impression of observing the city from the outside, as a complex structure; however, it is not an individual view of a reporter, who focuses on a certain problem and creates the narrative. Nor is it the perspective of a press photographer, who searches for “attractive” topics and tries to catch “life as it is”. Kielsznia’s works cannot be considered, either, as “socially-oriented photography” that was developing in those days in Europe and the United States<sup>8</sup> and focused on presenting the life of people from different social strata, to make the whole society more empathic to the economic differences. Although Kielsznia’s pictures show the everyday life of the Jewish quarter, together with the poverty of its inhabitants whose belonging to certain groups is clearly betrayed by their clothing, the author does not describe their existence and does not comment on the relationships within certain social groups.<sup>9</sup>

Referring to accessible sources, it is hard to determine when Kielsznia took his pictures. In the quoted interview Kielsznia claims that his best pictures of Lublin were taken shortly after he had bought a modern Rolleiflex in 1937.<sup>10</sup> However, he does not tell precisely which pictures he is referring to. Up until 2009, no one had questioned the information published in the catalogue of the first exhibition of Kielsznia’s works, organized in December 1977, that the pictures were taken in 1938. This alleged dating of the collection was recently questioned by Marcin Fedorowicz from the Grodzka Gate Centre. After detailed analyses of posters in Polish and Yiddish announcing certain events, which are visible in the pictures, and comparing the information mentioned there with the data given in articles from the newspapers and magazines of the 1930s, Fedorowicz deduced that the pictures were probably taken in the autumn of 1934.<sup>11</sup> Photographs that constitute the collection were taken on 35 mm negative material,<sup>12</sup> and considering the quite rough quality of the pictures and the fact that Kielsznia clearly moved along the streets quite quickly, one has to assume that he must have used a small, handy camera for 35 millimetre negatives, probably a Leica type, rather than a big and heavy Rolleiflex. Actually, in the interview Kielsznia recalls that his first ever attempted efforts at photographing Lublin were in fact in 1934, and from other sources we know that he might have used the ICA roll film camera then.<sup>13</sup> However, it is not clear what kind of pictures he took then and whether he took any street views of Lublin.

<sup>8</sup> See: Garzdecki, Janusz: *Zarys dziejów fotografii społecznej*, in: *Fotografia*, Warszawa 1981, no 2, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Adameczyk-Garbowska/Kubiszyn, *Memory in Photographs*, 2011, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> Kotowicz, Radio broadcast.

<sup>11</sup> See: Fedorowicz, Marcin: *A Critical Analysis of Stefan Kielsznia’s Photographs. On Questions of Dating*, in: Grossarth, Kielsznia, 2011, p. 11-12, cit. p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Lubartowska was made on negatives produced by the German company *Mimosa*, and Świętoduska, Kowalska and Szeroka on *Gevaert* negatives from Belgium. It is hard to determine which negatives Kielsznia used to take pictures of Szeroka, because the whereabouts of the negatives are not clear, see: Fedorowicz, *Critical analysis*, 2011, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Stefan Kielsznia. *Biography*, in: Grossarth, Kielsznia, 2011, p. 59-61.

It is also hard to determine the purpose of creating the whole collection. In the foreword to the catalogue of Kielsznia's exhibition of 1977, Henryk Gawarecki suggested that taking pictures of this part of the town by a number of photographers in the 1930s was connected with the restoration and renovation works of the Old Town Square and side streets that were being carried out by the municipality in the 1930s.<sup>14</sup> He also explained that Józef Dutkiewicz, who was at that time the District Conservator, wanted to extend those construction works to the whole area of the Old Town and Podzamcze, and perhaps commissioned Kielsznia in 1938 to make a photographic inventory of the first floors of the buildings in the area of Nowa, Kowalska and Szeroka streets. No documents have been preserved (or at least none have so far been discovered) which would confirm an official assignment of this nature;<sup>15</sup> nor was any mention made of such an official commission by Kielsznia himself in the interview cited above.<sup>16</sup> He only states that Dutkiewicz's appeals – or similar suggestions apparently published in the press of the time – inspired a group of Lublin photographers to make an effort at documenting the Jewish quarter “in the lasting memory of the place”.<sup>17</sup> In the interview Kielsznia stresses, however, the fact that in the late 1930s a number of the members of the Lublin Photographic Society wanted to take pictures of the quarter, which was supposed to undergo reconstruction. Despite being neglected and having a bad reputation among some of the inhabitants of Lublin, it constituted an attractive and particularly picturesque location.<sup>18</sup>

In Kielsznia's collection, simple frontal shots are dominant and thanks to the maximum depth of field, the author allows almost the same degree of attention to be paid to each plane of the composition, so that city space and architecture are treated by him in the same way as human figures. The impressive number of shots and their stylistic coherence seem to confirm the “inventory”, rather “technical” and “non-artistic” character of the project. However, Kielsznia himself did not let the viewers continue with such interpretations or hypothesis that would suggest any kind of “commercial” purpose of his work. By stressing that he used to treat photography as an instrument that made it possible to ‘capture time’, Kielsznia seems to allow us to consider him as the one who consciously negated pictorialism and the aesthetics of the so-called “homeland photography”, which was dominant in Polish photography (including documentary photography) of those times.<sup>19</sup> In the interview Kielsznia also stressed that in his work he referred to the theoretical books of photography that

<sup>14</sup> Gawarecki, Henryk: *Dawny Lublin na fotografiach Stefana Kielszni – katalog wystawy*, Lublin 1977, p. 3-11, cit. p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> The Annual Reports of the Town Council for 1921–39 informs about the planned redevelopment of the Jewish District of Podzamcze. The redevelopment of Nowa, Lubartowska and Kowalska were officially approved in the protocol no. 76 from the Town Council Session on 27th June 1938; however, there is no evidence there of any official commission being given to anyone to document the area; after: Majuk, Wiśniewska, *Exposed*, 2011, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Kotowicz, Radio broadcast.

<sup>17</sup> Confirming this would require further research.

<sup>18</sup> Adamczyk-Garbowska/Kubiszyn, *Memory in Photographs*, 2011, p. 47-48, 49.

<sup>19</sup> See: Lechowicz, Lech: *Fotoeseje. Teksty o fotografii polskiej*, Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa 2010, p. 19-32.

he possessed, which gave him the knowledge of contemporary tendencies in world photography.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, most of the books from his collection were lost and it is hard to determine which books were so inspiring for him, and at the same time one cannot be sure to which photographs he was actually referring to. However, if one assumes that he had in mind the pictures from the discussed collection, one can believe that some of the books might have been related to the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement (“New Reality” – in Poland also known as “new photography” or “German aesthetic”),<sup>21</sup> which in the 1920s brought the demand to give greater attention to the reality and create the “visual encyclopaedia” of each and every visible element of it.<sup>22</sup>

Not knowing the purpose of Kielsznia’s project of photographing Lublin and studying these pictures nowadays, without concerning their original context one can – *post factum* – grant artistic values to Kielsznia’s works. It would not be an isolated case in the history of photography. It has happened several times before that pictures taken as a documentation of a scientific project or a reportage for an illustrated magazine were later on granted the status of an art object.<sup>23</sup> However, if one were to treat Kielsznia’s work as a conceptual artistic activity, one should consider this project as an innovative chapter in the history of Polish photography, going beyond current trends.<sup>24</sup> Although the years 1929–39 were in fact the period of breaking away from the dominating position of pictorialism, in Polish photography magazines all the new tendencies, including the “German aesthetics” mentioned above, were ignored or criticized, and pictures defined in the terms of “simple representation of reality” had no right to aspire to art.<sup>25</sup>

### **Kielsznia’s Pictures as a Key to (Re)discovering the Polish-Jewish Past of Lublin**

Walking in the area of the former Jewish district, described by Kielsznia himself as “ruined”, “strikingly temporary” and on the border of being demolished because

<sup>20</sup> Kotowicz, Radio broadcast.

<sup>21</sup> Lechowicz, Fotoeseje, 2010, pp. 39, 52, 60-61.

<sup>22</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s in Germany, two German artists, Hilla and Bernd Becher, connected with the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, elaborated a new, neutral style of photographing that aimed at creating the objective image of reality. Although categorized in the beginning as a form of creating the documentation of objects, in the 1990s it was granted the value of a separate style, named “deadpan”. It developed in the 1990s in contrast to the excessive subjectivism and neo-expressionism of the 1970s and 1980s. However, Bechers, just like the photographers of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* aesthetics, aimed in fact at documenting certain buildings and aimed at creating the typology of objects and places, which was obviously not the goal of Kielsznia’s project, see: Ch. Cotton, Charlotte: Fotografia jako sztuka współczesna, Kraków 2010, p. 15-16, 81-82.

<sup>23</sup> See m. in. Potocka, Maria Anna: Fotografia, Warszawa 2010, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Artistic photographic projects aimed at creating the “documentation” of the city space were realized in 1960s and 1970s. In 1963 with the book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, Edward Ruscha began a series of art books that documented some elements of everyday life in Los Angeles. For *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, he fixed a camera at the back of a car and photographed every building he passed, achieving an almost anthropological record of the urban experience. The book, published in 1966, was bound accordion-style as one continuous folding strip with all the pictures printed in order and labelled with their street numbers; after: Cotton, *Fotografia* 2010, p. 336-237.

<sup>25</sup> See: Lechowicz, Fotoeseje, 2010, pp. 39, 44-56, 59-61.

of the bad condition of the buildings,<sup>26</sup> the author took pictures of “everything he could”, unaware that barely a few years later, in the spring of 1942, a real annihilation of this part of the city and its inhabitants would take place.<sup>27</sup> The “realm of things” evoked by Kielsznia’s pictures passed away in time, while its memory perished together with its inhabitants and is not widely present among contemporary generations. This is the awareness of events separating us and the people in the photographs, together with our knowledge of their future deaths and the destruction of their world in few years, that strikes and touches us, inevitably reminding us of loss and obliteration.<sup>28</sup> Only the viewers who are aware of the social and urban changes that occurred within the last 70 years can appreciate the unique value of Kielsznia’s work, while they understand that the richness of the world captured by the photographer was therefore in a sense saved from total annihilation.

No wonder that the confrontation of the city present in Kielsznia’s photographs and the contemporary appearance and spatial structure of Lublin’s city centre may awaken in viewers a need to look for some additional narration which might constitute a context for a more profound “reading” of the photographs. This narration may be built with the help of literary texts and memoirs or by means of other photos, or by other documents that provide a wider context for interpreting them as specific texts of culture.

Kielsznia’s pictures, regarded as signs of the former presence of the Jews in Lublin and – at the same time – as proof of their absence, are used in numerous artistic and educational projects. One of the most important is the Educational Program on Yiddish Culture (EPYC), focused on teaching about Jewish Lublin in schools in America, carried out at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York and prepared by an American sociologist Adina Cimet.<sup>29</sup> As a part of the project, Kielsznia’s photographs from Nowa street were assembled by means of a computer programme to show a bustling street in the past, one of the most important commercial arteries of pre-war Lublin.<sup>30</sup>

Kielsznia’s pictures also became an inspiration for the Polish-German project entitled *Stoffe aus Lublin* (Fabrics from Lublin), realized by the German artist Ulrike Grossarth in 2009–2010.<sup>31</sup> In an attempt to transpose the spatial-temporal sensitivity gained through physical movement into the visual art work and by referring to subjects related to the history of mentalities and thus to the intellectual foundation of

<sup>26</sup> Kotowicz, Radio broadcast.

<sup>27</sup> Kotowicz, Radio broadcast; see also Odnous, Barbara: Fotograf zaginionego miasta, Karta, no 31, 2000, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Feyertag, Karoline: What left of Lublin. The Materiality of Memory, in: Krahl/Mennicke-Schwarz/Wagler, Fabrics from Lublin, 2011, p. 130-136.

<sup>29</sup> Cimet, Adina: Projekt EPYC. Lublin w Amerykańskich szkołach, Scriptores 2003 nr 2 (28) Lublin, p. 47-48.

<sup>30</sup> See: <http://epyc.yivo.org/main.php?uid=2> [30.08.2012] In order to reach this site one should go to the EPYC website, then go to PLACES, then Shtot, then LUBLIN, and once on that page move to page 2 of Lublin in order to see the Lubartowska street collage made into a large picture. Running the cursor over the Polish and Yiddish signs translates them into English.

<sup>31</sup> Wagler, Silke: On the Photo Archive of Stefan Kielsznia: Picture Types and Context of Origin, in: Grossarth, Kielsznia, 2011, p. 3, 4.

our culture, the artist examines the input of certain values present in European philosophical and cultural tradition into the historical events that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In her attempt to understand the development of European history, Grossarth came to Poland in the late 1990s, where her interest in Jewish mysticism and Jewish tradition in Eastern Europe brought her to Lublin.<sup>32</sup> When she encountered Kielsznia's photos displayed in the Grodzka Gate Centre she realized that what was shown there was very close to what she was attempting to reveal in her own artistic work.<sup>33</sup> Therefore the artist started the international art project which resonated with those pictures entitled "Fabrics from Lublin – Ulrike Grossarth: Contemporary Art and Stefan Kielsznia: Historical Street Photographs from Lublin". She created visual works corresponding with Kielsznia's collection, in an attempt to activate the principles of her subjective experience with encountering the contemporary city space and the atmosphere of the Polish-Jewish environment from before the war that was captured by Kielsznia. The inspiration for her first work came from the advertisement sign-boards for the tailor shop on Nowa street with crossed bales of cloth, where the writing and the depiction of products were given equal emphasis. After studying material archives in the Textile Museum in Łódź, Grossarth even managed to reconstruct the colours of the fabrics. Little details captured in Kielsznia's pictures, like bags, baskets, combs and brushes, appear in the art-works enlarged and detached from their original context. The artist does not aim at saving the images of the past or evoking them, nor does she construct any narratives or change the existing ones. She does not recreate or depict the past, either, but rather tries to examine the differences between "then" and "now".<sup>34</sup> By separating individual visual fragments of everyday life, reconstructing and applying colours of fabrics from advertisement sign-boards, placing motifs and patterns from Kielsznia's pictures into the new context, she refers to the method of fragmentation as an appropriate way of remembering after the Shoah.<sup>35</sup> Referring both to pre-war pictures and to the contemporary experience of that part of the town, the artist invited the viewer into the world of symbols and senses, defined by the artist herself as the "European Realm of Memory". She created figures assembled from different elements drawn from Diderot's and d'Alembert's 18<sup>th</sup>-century *Encyclopedie*, images from George Richardson's *Iconology* from 1779 and illustrations by the alchemist Michael Maier from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, she created a symbolic language that operates with allegories of the traditional mind-body and matter-spirit dichotomies. This approach, so significant for the scientific, categorizing and separating casual logic of our Western European Enlightenment was – as Grossarth

<sup>32</sup> Krahl/Mennicke-Schwarz/Wagner, Introduction, 2011, p. 22-23.

<sup>33</sup> Grossarth, Ulrike: Fabrics from Lublin, in: Grossarth, Kielsznia, 2011, p. 16-17.

<sup>34</sup> Feyertag, What left, 2011, p. 131.

<sup>35</sup> Schmetterling, Astrid: The Whispering of Fabric, in: Krahl/Mennicke-Schwarz/Wagler, Fabrics from Lublin, 2011, pp. 88-92, cit. p. 89.

<sup>36</sup> Krahl/Mennicke-Schwarz/Wagler, Introduction, 2011, p. 24.

claims – signifying hostility toward the body and contributed to the creation of the roots of Nazi ideology – and to the destruction of the Jews.<sup>37</sup>

From 11 June till 19 September 2010, Grossarth's exhibition was displayed at the Kunsthaus Dresden, where the unique images of city street life of the Jewish district from before the war were juxtaposed with the artistic reflections that these pictures prompted in Ulrike Grossarth.<sup>38</sup> In August 2011, to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stefan Kielsznia's birth, in a framework of a wider project run by the Grodzka Gate Centre entitled *The Art of Remembrance: Kielsznia*, Ulrike Grossarth prepared the exhibition *Stoffe aus Lublin / Running Lubartowska*, presented partly in the city space from 22 August till 15 September 2011. The artist invited several institutions and private shops to participate in the project. Therefore, it was possible to introduce contemporary artworks into the area to which they actually refer – from the Grodzka Gate, along Kowalska and Lubartowska streets up to the building of Yeshivat Khakhmei Lublin.

### Conclusion

Numerous pictures of the Jewish quarter in Lublin taken by different photographers in the 1920s and 1930s have a particular historical value, especially because they captured images of people who were murdered and places that were eradicated during World War II and shortly after it. Within the last 30 years, Stefan Kielsznia's pictures, together with photographs taken by other photographers, have been re-discovered and re-introduced – in numerous exhibitions and publications – into the realm of social memory of the local community. Together with oral testimonies and other archival materials they empower educational and artistic projects that aim at reconstructing the complex historical narratives of the city. However, together with activities of this kind, the discussion of the nature and documentary values of sources of different kinds that refer to the past is required. It is necessary to stress that both pictures and oral testimonies, just as other materials that are sometimes treated by exhibition curators, publishers and cultural activists as pure 'documents of the past', can also be interpreted as specific 'cultural texts' and therefore need to be analysed and interpreted within the framework of a wider historical, sociological or anthropological context.

Kielsznia's pictures are interesting for us today not only because of their exceptional character that allows us to analyse them in a wide context of the 'Polish-Jewish memory' and 'the Holocaust' discourses or because of the mystery associated with the purpose and dating of the whole collection. The educational project prepared by Adina Cimet that stresses the value of Kielsznia's pictures as 'traces' of the non-existing world of Jewish streets of pre-war Lublin and – on the other hand – Ulrike Grossarth's artistic works that reflect both the documentary and aesthetic nature of these materials, make it possible to redirect the discussion of particular, detailed local issues into the wider, more complex problems of history and culture

<sup>37</sup> Schmetterling, *Whispering*, 2011, p. 91.

<sup>38</sup> Krahl/Mennicke-Schwarz/Wagler, *Introduction* 2011, p. 22-23.

and reveal the complex nature of the frames of Nowa, Lubartowska, Kowalska, Świętoduska and Szeroka streets. The fact that these pictures can be successfully analysed in so many different ways and in various contexts suggests the crucial position they occupy in the ongoing discourse over the ambivalent nature of photography itself. The attempt to deal with Kielsznia's project on the theoretical level reveals in an intricate way the tension between the documentary and creative nature of photography as the medium and the language of modern culture. Without understanding the purpose and Kielsznia's original intentions, the contemporary observer must always face the ambivalence between aesthetic and documentary values of preserved frames that live their 'second life' put into different displays and variously used by both contemporary art and education.

***Quotation** Marta Kubiszyn: Memory and Photography. Jewish District in Lublin (Poland) in Stefan Kielsznia's Photographs, in: MEDAON – Magazin für jüdisches Leben in Forschung und Bildung, 6. Jg., 2012, Nr. 11, S. 1-12, online unter [http://medaon.de/pdf/MEDAON\\_11\\_Kubiszyn.pdf](http://medaon.de/pdf/MEDAON_11_Kubiszyn.pdf) [dd.mm.yyyy].*

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