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The Public Trial and Execution of Arthur Greiser in Poznań: Visual Rhetoric of Documentary Photography and Local Memory

Publiczny proces i egzekucja Arthura Greisera w Poznaniu. Retoryka wizualna fotografii dokumentalnej i pamięć lokalna

Abstract

On the example of the ethically controversial photographs made by Zbigniew Zielonacki from the public trial and execution of Arthur Greiser, the Nazi deputy in the Wartheland, the author demonstrates the visuality of local memory at the intersection of the narrative and non-narrative, private and public, individual and collective sphere. The photographs have become an inherent element of Poznań inhabitants' memory of World War II and its outcomes, although they did not fit any of the emerging main war narratives.

Na przykładzie etycznie kontrowersyjnych fotografii Zbigniewa Zielonackiego z publicznego procesu i egzekucji Arthura Greisera, nazistowskiego namiestnika w Kraju Warty, autorka pokazuje, jak wizualność pamięci lokalnej funkcjonuje na przecięciu sfery narracyjnej i nienarracyjnej, prywatnej i publicznej, indywidualnej i zbiorowej. Omawiane w artykule fotografie stały się elementem pamięci mieszkańców Poznania o drugiej wojnie światowej i jej zakończeniu, mimo że nie wpasowywały się w żadną z wyłaniających się głównych narracji wojennych.

Key words

visuality, documentary photography, memory, World War II, war criminal
wizualność, fotografia dokumentalna, pamięć, II wojna światowa, zbrodniarz wojenny

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Introduction

Susan Sontag noticed in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* that "[t]he memory of war, however, like all memory, is mostly local" (Sontag 2003, 35)[1]. Communities, even those living in diasporas, make the effort to remember their local histories as a part of, or against, more broader narratives which are further from individual experience and often highly mythologized. The issue of local memory should be, in my opinion, in the heart of attempts to understand how collective memory works – as local memory is also a collective memory – not the one imposed top-down, through institutionalized "figures of memory," but the one which emerges from the ground, even if influenced by previously existing narratives, and even if later merged with the national version of it. Let us begin with what Jan Assmann says: "The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity" (Assmann 1995, 132). Local memory in the same way has the power to unite community around common experience, emotions that are often expressed together, and concrete known places, available within a walking distance in the neighborhood. Also local memory can become universalized and its visible symbols can be used in more general contexts. However, local memory focuses the moment in which broader collective memory and individuals' everyday memory – or communicative memory, as Assmann wants – meet.

1. This quote is also a motto of my PhD Thesis and the book that I am currently preparing which looks at the intersection of memory and visuality in the context of my hometown of Poznań and specificity of this region and its war history. It is entitled: *Memory and Visuality. Representations of the Second World War in Poznań in the 20th and 21st centuries* [Pamięć i wizualność. Reprezentacje drugiej wojny światowej w Poznaniu w XX i XXI wieku].

In this text I will show how local visual memory functions at the intersection of the narrative and non-narrative, private and public, individual and collective sphere. To do so, I will analyze the rhetoric of the ethically controversial photographs taken by Zbigniew Zielonacki from the public trial and execution of Arthur Greiser, the Nazi deputy in the Wartheland. The photographs have become an inherent element of Poznań inhabitants' memory of World War II and its outcomes, although they did not fit any of the main emerging war narratives.

When we think about collective memory in the 20th-century broadly defined Western culture, we should, indeed, first look at its images and material objects, as Pierre Nora advises in his famous text *Between Memory and History*, where he defines the modern collective memory in the following way: "Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image" (Nora 1989, 13). Thus, memory is materialized and visualized in archives, in collections, in objects, and in photographs. A similar observation can be found in Susan Sontag, who especially underlines photography, and says:

> Non-stop imagery (…) is our surround, but when it comes to remembering, the photograph has the deeper bite. Memory freeze-frames; its basic unit is the single image. (…) the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it. The photograph is like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb (Sontag 2003, 22).

This is where memory studies meet with visual rhetoric studies. Indeed, I believe, that photography, or – more broadly – cultural visuality surrounding us, is, to a large extent, a kind of language. This language has the power to universalize, or, as Roland Barthes puts it, to mythologize (Barthes 1972). It is not any longer the content of the message which counts, but the way it is conveyed. "Visual rhetoric – as the Editors of *Visual Rhetoric* write – name[s] (...) symbolic actions enacted primarily through visual means, made meaningful through culturally derived ways of looking and seeing and endeavoring to influence diverse publics." It "seeks and produces communities of viewers, spectators, witnesses, and participants through actions visualized in various forms" (Olson et al. 2008, 3). As it turns out, a community-building process is a common denominator of commemoration/memorialization and rhetoric of visualization.

But according to Roland Barthes, who is a key theorist in the field of visual rhetoric, there are two ways of reading photographs[2] – the medium that I focus on here. First, as *studium*, that is, the reading of a photograph as a cultural phenomenon. Here, images are constructed according to specific rhetorical conventions. They rely on specific patterns and comprehensible signs that convey meaning not

2. I treat Roland Barthes' work as a coherent whole and provide a broader interpretation of his works and their usefulness in the analysis of photography (Topolska 2008).

only by their content or context, but also through reference to other images in the culture at large and this way refer to broader cultural meanings. Janis Edwards writes, for example:

> Photographs such as Dorothea Lange's Migrant Mother, Joe Rosenthal's shot of a flag raising at the battle of Iwo Jima, and Nick Ut's poignant image of anguished children and adults fleeing their napalmed village in Viet Nam are repeatedly presented in the media as representative of the historical moment and shared perceptions about the enduring meanings of such moments. Their power is in a perceived ability to frame an event and to suggest more universal values that attach to the event in the public imagination. (Edwards 2004, 179)

But, according to Barthes, particularly in his later works, photography can also be seen as *punctum* (Barthes 1981). This is a subjective reading of an image, from outside of culture. *Punctum* can be the element of a photograph that absorbs our attention and structures our experience of the photo, or it can be seen as "time" that is involved in the existence of the image. Documentary photography involves both of these aspects, the cultural, almost linguistically structured *studium*, which, following Barthes (1977), comprises the denoted and the connoted message, and the unstructured, subconscious, or emotional and experiential *punctum*. In my opinion, memory consists of both of these realms. On the one hand, it is narrated, verbally or visually, and on the other it is often an unstructured, instinctive imprint in a person's mind or body, especially if traumatic. If we, however, talk about collective memory, also in its local versions, then looking at visuality is a helpful way of getting inside both, the structured as well as unstructured, elements of this memory. This is because an image – unlike verbal text – can be both a narration and a non-narrative object to be experienced by the spectator.

Zielonacki's documentary photography

In this article, I look at the photographs of Zbigniew Zielonacki, a locally well-known photojournalist who documented the last days of the Second World War in Poznań, with a special attention to war-time destruction, and the process of transgression of the city and its inhabitants into a not yet stable peace-time. His collection of almost 600 photographs includes the most well-known ones – from the public process and the execution of Arthur Greiser at the slopes of Poznań Citadel in the summer of 1946. These images have been circulating in the local iconosphere and war narratives since the day they were taken, as the photographer first displayed them outside his atelier in the city center and then they were printed, together with the other pictures from the collection, on postcards distributed among the inhabitants. This way the images made by a familiar photographer (before the war Zielonacki had worked in a popular local newspaper) landed in the

family collections of personal photographs stored in private albums, and this way the history of the city became a part of individual memory of city inhabitants, a part of their family albums as well as the collective "family album." The photographs later were many times reprinted in various local newspapers, mostly on the occasions of war anniversaries, and finally have been digitized and displayed on-line in the virtual museum of Poznań history "Cyryl," where they can be found today ("Cyryl" s.a.). The photographs which interest me here are most controversial from the entire collection and not all of them are available to the public, as they are considered too drastic.

Zielonacki's photographs function, obviously, in the contexts of broader local, national, and global memory about the Second World War. This memory in Poznań accrued its own specificity in the post-war decades, which resulted from the historical background and the role of these territories during the war (cf. Topolska 2019). I argue that the memory which was imposed top-down by the communist authorities in the visual sphere emphasized the motifs of the liberation of Poznań (and the entire Poland) by the Soviet Union and of the Polish-Soviet friendship. At the same time, a counter-memory developed and was supported by numerous city inhabitants. In contrast to the triumphant rhetoric of the communists, it had a martyrological character. This memory was in need of visualization and institutionalization, which was gradually occurring. It was strongly connected with a local trauma, historical background, and prewar political preferences of the majority of inhabitants of these territories. In turn, the memory visualized in the city space by the authorities was, on the one hand, strongly a part of global discourses connected to the Cold-War division of the world, but, on the other hand, also taking into account the specificity of Poznań. It was intent on drawing a picture which would allow the authorities to gain some kind of legitimization on these territories and would distance them from the martyrological rhetoric related to, among others, right-wing (Endecja) circles of Poznań. This imposed memory, being a memory with a global perspective, was, at the same time, focused locally, and adjusted to the historical specificity of the Poznań region.

The photographs by Zielonacki documented different aspects of the reality of the days immediately after the war, so they could fit in both of these contexts and be a rhetorical expression of both of them. Some of the albums show the mourning of the city, mass funeral ceremonies, the destruction of various districts of the city, including the Old Town with its historic City Hall and various churches, the dead bodies of the victims of concentration camps and gestapo prisons, as well as mass graves. Thus, they rhetorically correspond with the martyrological theme. Other ones document the beginning of the new political system which was being gradually introduced. We can see military parades attended by communist

officials, Labor Day (1st of May) gatherings with displays of portraits of Joseph Stalin, Soviet propaganda posters, among other elements of the postwar reality. This would reinforce the rhetoric of a triumph gradually developed on various levels of public sphere of the post-war Poznań, with visuality being a part of it. But as Susan Sontag suggests, photography hardly ever conveys an immediate truth about what it depicts and it can be taken from one context and put into another one to mean something different. In *On Photography* she says: "The camera makes reality atomic, manageable, and opaque. It is a view of the world which denies interconnectedness, continuity, but which confers on each moment the character of mystery" (Sontag 2001, 23).

The photographs taken by Zielonacki could be found in all of the described historical-political configurations, and would contribute not only to the rhetoric of martyrology but also to the rhetoric of triumph. What makes them local and collective, but also public/private, is the fact that, as previously mentioned, they were circulated on postcards and were distributed among the city inhabitants. This would make them especially open to multiple readings depending on the context they were placed in.

The photographs of the trial and execution of Arthur Greiser, although one of the most problematic, were not treated differently, but, first of all, they were an expression of a need for revenge, or – as a popular booklet from 1946 explained (Wietrzykowski 1946) – a sense of historical justice of Poznań inhabitants, because of the atrocities Greiser had committed or supervised. This makes them, on the one hand, morally dubious – should we visualize the death of our persecutors and watch it as a spectacle? – but, on the other, an expression of an unstructured/non-narrative feeling of the community, which does not incorporate this feeling into their victimhood narrative, neither is it a part of the imposed narrative of the Soviet legitimacy in the region. We can see here another kind of narrative – one that is neither martyrological nor triumphal. These photographs rhetorically contribute to the very local feelings, and if we would like to identify any propaganda inscribed in them, it would be rather the narrative of local unification of inhabitants collectively experiencing historical justice, a moment of collective experience extended through the medium of photography in time and space, what I will discuss later. What is more, if we consider all the albums by the photographer, this event is a "logical" element of the sequence of the photographs of his photo-report: the physical destruction of the city, the buildings of the concentration camps (Fort VII and Żabikowo), the images of dead bodies and mass graves, the funerals, the hanging of the war criminal (Greiser), and then the parades ushering the new post-war order.

Arthur Greiser: the Nazi war criminal and his the public trial

Arthur Greiser, a Nazi from Środa Wielkopolska, was the deputy for the territories of Wartheland incorporated in September 1939 into the Reich. He arrived in Poznań, which would become his headquarters, on 13th September with the intention to make the territory he supervised completely Germanized by eliminating Polish people through expulsions and resettlement, as well as through gradual extermination, especially of the elites. The killing took place mostly in Fort VII in Poznań – the first concentration camp on the Polish territory established by the Nazis during WWII and the place where the first mass execution in an experimental gas chamber took place[3]. He also wanted to achieve ethnic cleansing by exterminating Jewish people in the specially designed death camp in Chełmno or exploiting them to death in the labor camps in Poznań, for example, by having them dig to create two artificial lakes in Poznań: Rusałka and Malta. His plan was to bring Germans to this territory to colonize it, at which he partly succeeded. He supervised all the camps and prisons in Wartheland, including the ones already mentioned. As Czesław Łuczak (1997), the author of Greiser's biography, writes he had all the attributes of the total administration on these territories; he even controlled partially the army and all the local organizations. He was a person who wanted to please Adolf Hitler as much as he could, so his speeches at rallies always praised the Führer and the Nazi ideology. He was responsible for the death machine and terror in the region while the inhabitants who remained in the city of Poznań and avoided being killed were completely deprived of civil rights[4]. The situation on this territory was even worse than in the General Government and, in consequence, the functioning of the underground structures was also hindered, which is discussed in the memoir of the emissary Jan Karski, who at some point visited Poznań, and included his observations in his *Story of a Secret State* (Karski 1944). Greiser was known as one of the most cruel Nazi officials.

Greiser was arrested in May 1945 by Americans in Austria where he fled, and then, on 30 March 1946, he was transferred into Polish hands. After spending some time under arrest in Warsaw, he was transported to Poznań on 14 June, where the trial against him began on 21 June. He was accused of mass murder and individual murders of civilians and prisoners of war, of persecution and oppression and exploitation of people including physical injuries. He was accused of systematic destruction of the Polish culture, looting of Polish cultural valuables, of Germanization of the country, displacement of Polish people to the General Government, and of unlawful confiscation of public goods as well as private possessions of Polish people (*Proces Arthura Greisera* 1946, 12). He was also accused

3. I write about this place and its commemoration more broadly in my article (Topolska 2017).
4. For details of the occupation in Wartheland see: *Kronika Miasta Poznania: Okupacja I* (2009), *Kronika Miasta Poznania: Okupacja II* (2009), and a study by Topolski (1999).

of the persecution and murdering Jewish people of these territories. The indictment further goes into greater detail and enumerates all the activities Greiser performed or supervised in Wartheland and their purposes, such as shifting Poles to the position of an inferior population, "slaves", and their Germanization. Wartheland was the first of the territories incorporated to the Reich where civilians lost their citizenship status as soon as in October 1939 (while in the rest of the territories in 1941) (*Proces Arthura Greisera* 1946, 16).

For Poznań inhabitants the proceedings against Greiser became a kind of spectacle. They could see personally the defeat of the man who had so much influence on their fate and the fate of people who they had known. It was also a moment when individual and local history met with the history of international significance. As Katrzyna Kolska writes: "The trial of the Nazi criminal, whose name was known by every child in Wielkopolska, was arousing an understandable interest, and because of that, for two subsequent weeks the assembly hall was fully packed"[5]. What was important for the preservation of this spectacle in the memory of Poznań's inhabitants was that Zielonacki "was among the observers and was documenting the trial. It is in his photographs that we can see the witnesses testifying against Greiser, and the defendant himself" (Kolska 2011, 49).

There are seven photographs from the proceedings of the court – Highest National Tribunal in the Assembly Hall of the University of Poznań – in the album entitled "The trial and execution of Arthur Greiser 1946." Two photographs depict a fully packed assembly hall with a white eagle (already without the crown hanging above the disputants, which was the Polish People's Republic's national emblem, which visually dominates the space by being the only symbol there. Regaining authority over the city by Poles has here a dimension of a triumph. Two subsequent photographs present, in a greater close-up, the debating tribunal. The next one depicts Arthur Greiser with his head down, being watched by a guard with a severe face expression, while in the background again we see the Polish symbols. This image signifies the victory of Poles and the humiliation of Greiser. The two next photographs are the images of the audience and journalists present at the trial. We can see that the room really was fully packed and the social interest was high. This mass participation must also have been the message which the photographer wanted to convey to his audience and future generations.

Hannah Arendt wrote the words about the trial of Adolf Eichman which can be also said here: "And although the judges very consistently tried to hide in the shadow against the flesh of the reflectors, they were sitting there, on the top of a high podium, facing the audience, as actors on stage" (Arendt 1998, 11). In fact, the chair of the Highest National Tribunal, Wacław Barcikowski, while opening the

5. Transl. – A. T.

trial proclaimed that the significance of its outcome was much broader that only deciding about the guilt or innocence of the defendant. He said that the trial had an exceptional historical significance (*Proces Arthura Greisera* 1946, 52). For that reason, the spotlight was placed on the judges of the tribunal and the defendant, and so the proceedings resembled a spectacle while Zielonacki's images froze the moment to focus collective attention and represent the collective sense of justice, and by further circulation reinforced that feeling in the local community.

What is more, at the time when the Nuremberg trials were going on (since 1945), this collection of images became a part of the iconography of the post-war anti-Nazi trials – it did not differ from other visual reports of such kind. All of the documentary photographs from these trials have similar aesthetics and include such aforementioned elements as the presence of flags and national emblems of the victorious states, highlighted judges depicted as serious, noble, and focused, as well as defendants with heads down, who are guarded by soldiers, and in body positions revealing their humiliation or arrogance. The message of those images was simple: to confirm who is the victor, to show that the victors are righteous even when it comes to war criminals as they provide serious trials for them, and that all the outcomes of the trials would be historically justified.

The rhetorical message of Zielonacki's photographs from Grieser's trial was no different since it represented the historical justice in the making. Through the discussed aesthetic interventions, the photographer aimed at giving people a sense of justice after all they had gone through during the war. On the one hand, the author is one of them, a well-known fact, so he shares their experience – this way he gets more trust – on the other hand, he follows the aesthetic and rhetorical rules typical of documentary photography of that time, which can be confirmed by looking at the photographs from other trials of Nazi criminals. This also confirms my assumption that Zielonacki's photographs were not made to necessarily follow the rules of the new Soviet authorities on the Polish territories and their triumphant narrative. Zielonacki's photographs were representative of war victory, but their visual connotations were rather Western. Also, we do not see Soviet flags in them. This way Zielonacki's photographs indeed were neither a part the Polish victimhood narrative which prevailed in the commemorations coming gradually up from the ground, nor a part of the Soviet triumphant propaganda imposed top-down. Zielonacki's photographs constituted a truly local narrative with some global connotations by making Poznań inhabitants feel the sense of historical justice but not only in the national sense but in a broader sense of humanity in general.

The post-war decades are the times of the development of "the society of spectacle" described in detail in the book of Guy Debord (1970) in the 1960s, but such events as Grieser's trial, photographed and existing in the community's memory

as an image, was a precursor of this phenomenon. Debord observes that the post--war world shifted the weight from reality, separating itself from its real existence, into its own representation. He did not mean, however, a collection of generated images, but a new kind of social relations which are mediated by those images. The images are not an addition to reality but the core of unreality of the society, and the spectacle serves the purposes of legitimization of the existing system. In the case of the images from Greiser's trial, we can speak about the unifying power of images for the community. A common spectacle, a common experience, a collective fulfillment of the need of revenge and the sense of historical justice were frozen in a snapshot that circulated among the community members, and become a part of their war memory, at the intersection of individual and collective one.

But the trial itself is very interesting as well. In his last word, Greiser emphasized that he did not know about the atrocities being committed on his territory, and that he was not aware of the crimes at Fort VII. Instead he said that he was a simple clerk who had two souls: the official soul which was carrying out orders, and the private one, which was a human soul (*Proces Arthura Greisera*… 1946; Kolbuszewska 2009). This is the same line of defense that was adopted by Adolf Eichman in his trial in 1961. The court, however, did not accept that explanation and stated in the verdict that:

> The duality of the character of German "public soul" and "private soul," revealed by the defendant, is a typical symptom. No other nation can bring together in their mentality the elements of cruelty toward others (…) and the elements of seeming kindliness in family and private life (Kolbuszewska 2009, 129-130).

This phenomenon is another symptom of what Hannah Arendt described as the "banality of evil" in the context of the trial of Adolf Eichman (Arendt 1998, 175), who, like Greiser, was co-responsible for the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity. Greiser was sentenced on 7 July 1946 to death on the gallows as a war criminal. The sentence was administered on the slope of Poznań Citadel on 21 July 1946.

Visual rhetoric of the photographs and the visual collective memory

The execution of Greiser gathered even bigger number of spectators than the trial, and this number was even further multiplied with the medium of Zielonacki's photography. Already the first photograph shows a sea of viewers. As the vice-president of Poznań, Jędrzej Solarski, said in 2015: "Zbigniew Zielonacki preserved, among others, the execution of Arthur Greiser, the deputy of the Reich in the Wartheland. I was told about this last public execution by my grandfather. Today

it is a gruesome event, but at that time it was a happy celebration" (Galnc 2015). Indeed, the city authorities took care that a possibly biggest number of people could witness the execution. As the journalist Paweł Żuk reports:

> In the day before the execution of Greiser in Poznań, a special press supplement was distributed announcing the date and place of the execution. The slopes of the Citadel were chosen not accidentally – they guaranteed participation of even 100 thousand spectators (Żuk 2017).

In the first two photos from the execution in the collection made by Zielonacki we can see countless crowds gathered around the Citadel. This is also one of the rhetorical purposes of these images – to document, commemorate and communicate the unifying presence of Poznań's inhabitants. Both of the pictures are panoramic views in which we cannot identify individuals but only learn that masses of people gathered for an important event. However, each of the participants could look at the picture and say that he/she was there, or that they knew someone who participated. Let us remember that at that time visual culture was only just developing and such a thing as the presence at a commemorated and visualized event was more important for an individual than it was in later decades. However, it is also impossible to say what kind of event it is. If we did not know the context, we could think that it might have been a national celebration, a Catholic mass, a parade, or even a sports event. Only the context indicates that those people came to the Citadel to witness the death of the Nazi war criminal who had been their superior and tormentor. However, the atmosphere in the photos is indeed full of excitement and curiosity. It radically changes when we look at the subsequent photograph which is a close-up of a few individuals: the hangman, his assistant, and some military men. The hangman, a well-built man, is dressed in a tuxedo. He and his assistant also wear masks, which adds awe to the scene. All of the photographed have serious facial expressions with a streak of confidence and pride. The next image takes us a step further and we can see those two hangmen standing on the gallows. They are not posing, the photo is taken from the back, as if stealthily, while they are preparing to proceed with the execution. The next photograph already shows the convict who is being led to the gallows by two military men, as he is blindfolded while the hangmen are waiting. The gallows is surrounded by more soldiers. In the following photo we see the next step – looping the neck of the convict, who is guarded by two soldiers. And the next three pictures are already the images of the dead Greiser hanging on the gallows, and the fourth one depicts taking him down. At this last one, the cover is already taken away from his face and we can identify the convict. There are four more photographs which are separated from the collection and not made public in the virtual museum of Poznań "Cyryl". All of them are close-ups of dead Greiser hanging on the gallows. They

were considered too drastic for a public view and are only available for research purposes.

The execution was not only photographed by Zielonacki, but also reported live on the radio by Bogusław Borowicz (Żuk 2017) and videotaped, which became a basis of a documentary entitled “Unprofessional Rope” directed by Robert Stando (Żuk 2017). As Żuk says: “On the film that remained till this day, we can see a sea of people’s heads. An atmosphere of a picnic, of excitement. In the crowds one could buy ice cream, drinks and sweets. After the execution, a scuffle for the rope used in the execution took place. It was said to bring luck” (Żuk 2017). This confirms what we could see in the photographs by Zielonacki. The event clearly mixed the atmosphere and feelings of revenge, retaliation, celebration and fair. The detailed documentation of the entire execution and numerous images of the dead convict taken from all the angles prove two things. One is the historical significance of the moment and the fact that the organizers were aware of it, as they hired several journalists to take notes or pictures. The other is the significance of visuality in preserving those moments and in control over both history and the defeated. In the society of the spectacle what is not visualized does not exist. And the one who holds the camera has the control over the narrative and can influence people’s emotions with visual rhetoric.

The message which we can induce from the described photographs, besides the already mentioned unifying power of the event represented by the images of gathered masses, is the development of a community building process, which concerned the experience of an immediate sense of justice and revenge. The aesthetics of the images brings to mind documentary photographs which try to, first of all, give the impression of objectivism and journalistic indifference, even when picturing close-ups of the dead convict. The frames are not necessarily intentionally composed and give an impression of snapshots, of taking pictures of an action in process where there is no space for photographer’s interference. This impression is reinforced by the multiplicity of the photographs with each step captured, and their power coming, to a large extent, from this strategy. This is the connoted layer of the photographs disguised as the denoted layer, through which the author conveyed the sense of the natural course of events, with the laws of history being in process and the viewers, present and future, being morally just witnesses of history. This way the main rhetorical purpose of the images – to reinforce the sense of revenge – appears to be a morally justified and appropriate thing.

However, despite the author’s intention and the majority reading it this in such a way – there appeared a dispute surrounding the discussed images. As Barthes notes, there is a sphere in photography which cannot be culturally structured and is open to subjective feelings and readings: *punctum*. I think that the dispute was

exactly the discrepancy between *studium* and *punctum* points of view, without being either *studium* or *punctum* completely on the side of those who felt revenge while looking at the photos, nor of those who felt impropriety in looking at them.

It is often said that camera is a weapon and the process of taking a photo is a violent act. By taking a photo of someone's suffering, death or humiliation, one can re-victimize them. And this is often an argument in the discussion about our right to watch the images of victims, especially victims of the WWII and the Holocaust, as these photos were often taken by the perpetrators. This is for instance the thesis voiced by Susan Crane in her article *Choosing Not To Look: Representation, Repatriation and Holocaust Atrocity Photography* (2008). Also Janina Struk puts forward the idea that we should not make such photographs public, as the Nazis were taking them to humiliate their victims (Struk 2004). She gives an example of a photograph displayed in Birkenau in 1999:

> A photograph of a woman and children has been displayed as if they were going the way which once led to the gas chambers. Whoever they were, they were condemned to walk that way for eternity. Displaying their photographs in Birkenau may be their final humiliation. (Struk 2004, 283)

Susie Linfield, in turn, emphasizes that: "Nazi photographs were used to expose Nazi brutality while the actual Nazi state was threatening the civilized world. Viewing them was not a form of what Struk calls "collusion" but, rather, a spur to outrage and action (at least hopefully)" (Linfield 2005).

But what about the images of suffering and death of the persecutors of those victims. Do these problems also apply to them? Are we entitled to take and look at such photographs? For sure they are, as in the case of Greiser's trial photos, an expression of a need to satisfy revenge and a sense of a triumph over and defeat of the enemy. This revenge and a sense of triumph are multiplied by the medium of photography, which makes the images more problematic. That might have been the reason for which some of them are today excluded from the public view. However, in the immediate post-war times, as already emphasized, they were broadly distributed and became fixed in the visual memory of Poznań inhabitants. As Żuk states accurately: "The execution of gauleiter Arthur Greiser on the slopes of Poznań Citadel was observed by dozens of thousands of people. Among them children. The will of revenge was stronger than the care for the consequences for mental health" (Żuk 2017). What is more, the communist authorities used the event for propaganda by hanging posters about the successful execution the day later. And, what must have had the biggest influence on people's visual memory, Zielonacki hung the pictures in the glass case of his photographic atelier in the city center. Already a few days later the case was vandalized and the photos stolen, which

was reported by “Głos Wielkopolski,” a local daily newspaper which suspected a German provocation: “this act could have been committed only by a German, who felt offended by the documents of this historical act of justice on the tormentor of Wielkopolska” (Kolska 2011, 294). Already at that time it fueled a heated discussion in the press concerning the ethical dimension of those photographs and their public display. Readers were writing to the newspaper, often supporting the man who destroyed the glass case. One of them wrote, for example:

> The photographs were attracting and gathering a lot of people in front of the glass case, mostly youth and children. I had an opportunity to witness the at times staring eyes of those children. I saw in their gaze an unhealthy glance of interest (…) The justice has been done. The tormentor and a monster in the human body does not belong to the living anymore. We, the Polish people, will never forgive or forget the wrongs. But we have to finish this gruesome exhibitionism. (Kolska 2011, 294-295)

Eventually, the person who damaged the glass case revealed himself. It turned out that it was a prisoner of one of the concentration camps who was worried about the impact of such images on mental health of youth and children. We can read in his letter: “Let us spare our youth unhealthy emotions, as their nerves have been torn during the years of occupation anyway” (Kolska 2011, 296). Indeed, a fatal accident inspired by Greiser’s execution occurred. There was a popular children’s game in those times called “hanging Greiser” and one of children suffocated while playing it. As both Kolbuszewska and Żuk report, “the authorities carefully covered up the case” (Kolbuszewska 2009, 133). Some of the images of the execution of Greiser also aroused an objection of influential intellectuals. For instance, Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina stated that, as Żuk reports,

> That procedure [showing photographs of atrocities – A.T.] reminded her the passion of Nazis for publishing similar descriptions. The writer was terrified by the fact that carpenters from Łódź asked the authorities for permission to construct the gallows for Greiser. As well as by the fact that German perpetrators were being hanged by their former prisoners. She was explaining that taking the role of the executioner for revenge is a perversion of humanity (Żuk 2017).

It was the last public execution in Poland, as, under the pressure of the indignation of intellectuals, executions of German criminals were finally condemned by the Minister of Justice, Henryk Świątkowski.

However, the photographs that I have discussed here contributed permanently to the collective visual memory of the local community of Poznań inhabitants, which, as I argue more broadly in another work (Topolska 2019), was the beginning of what Debord terms as the society of spectacle. Visual rhetoric of the photographs – the narrative dimension of them – reached for the aesthetics of “objective” documentary photography, but the feeling they were able to trigger in

the audience was corresponding with people's need for revenge. Zielonacki's album not necessarily has functioned as a conscious element of working through the war trauma, neither has it fitted into the emerging martyrological and triumphant pro-Soviet narratives. It has been resonating with some local people's need for historical justice – more often verbalized in the sources, but, on the other hand, it also offered a sense of humanity which made some other people condemn public visualization of suffering of every person, including that of crime perpetrators.

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