

Magdalena Franczak

Summary of the dissertation

Places Without People

The dissertation *Places Without People* is a multi-stage work based on artistic exploration, searching for a lost voice. It is a record of encounters with the energy of abandonment. I had contact with each of the places explored and described in the dissertation through my personal history – a close or more distant presence. At different times, in varying degrees of desolation, I searched for a gap between the unfinished past and the yet-to-begin future, in which, according to Karen Barad, “the world holds the memories of its iterative reconfigurings.”

Sensing the potential of such a space, I gave voice to places that had lost their voice. Places that were abandoned, degraded, stripped of their original function. On the one hand, these were spaces of public utility: small shops and service establishments, where social exchange took place in a small environment. On the other hand, I also included places where the only traces of human presence were the remnants of building foundations, wells or orchards. These spaces have been taken over by nature. Nature looked after them, changing their form, smoothing out their unevenness, and protecting the access to them.

My work on “*Places Without People*” is structured like a book.

As a whole, it forms a spatial narrative. Individual projects (summaries in the form of exhibitions) could be seen as its chapters and were located in the spaces I explored, although not in every case. In certain situations, the place “gathering” stories was a space of a similar status, located nearby. In constructing my dissertation like a book, I adopted a multi-stage method of work: the projects developed in the rhythm of my returns to the places I observed. The visual language intertwined with the written word. Sometimes they were accompanied by sound as an element

extending the accessibility to people with visual impairments. These languages are equivalent and complement each other. They convey the narrative by dialoguing with each other and with the place.

Objects, which played the role of characters wandering from chapter to chapter, were also vital elements of the narrative. They provided the link between the place and the viewer.

I searched for the language of narration, collecting these places in my memory, mapping them, returning to them. I juxtaposed the stories about returning to the places stored in my memory for a long time with the stories I was currently experiencing. By photographing, recording and writing, I built an archive of disappearance, growing gradually as I returned to the places I was studying. This was the basis for the publication *Archiwum miejsc bez ludzi* (Archive of Places Without People), which is an essential part of my thesis. When thinking about the structure of the book, I imagined the tension between the linear narrative in the book, a material object, and the individual chapters, situated in specific, abandoned spaces. I explored and described twelve such spaces. As a result, I created a series of narrative structures representing the places studied.

When researching the energy of abandonment or the emotions associated with it, I found it meaningful to work with different scales. The personal and the social scale. The intimate and the planetary one. When we are experiencing the world through the body and its memory, these scales intersect. That which is the closest affects the overall picture.

The subject of abandonment seems to be inexhaustible. For me, it ended with the lack of access to the spaces I was exploring. However, as one place closed, another space opened up before me, with more biographies inscribed in it. Because places without people are filled with

presence and emptiness at the same time, which is why it seemed so important to me to touch on these few moments and include them in this doctoral dissertation. Most of them, except for the last ones, no longer exist in the form I studied. The only remnants are ceramic impressions, frottages, which I tentatively called "scans of the place," as well as photographs, sculptures, texts, sounds, and an entire archive of disappearance.

Key words: memory of place, abandoned buildings, economy of uselessness, tactility of place, relationship with space, archive, intermediality, book, object, photography, artistic research, site specific