



Do cities remember? Maps of cities are flat, yet their histories contain vertical strata of events. Where in the topography and consciousness of a city can we locate its memory? Maps of the Polish city Zielona Góra depict an empty unmarked rectangular area located on Wrocławska Street, across from the Focus Park shopping mall. Located centrally within the city this area looks abandoned, being composed mostly of broken masonry and wood debris. Inquiries to citizens of Zielona Góra indicate that many of them do not know the history of this abandoned area, including those who grew up near the site.

On June 9th, 2012 I flew on a small airplane to film this territory and its surroundings. The flight marked the beginning of a new project that developed into a short experimental film and a dialogue with the citizens of Zielona Góra. During the Second World War the site was a forced labor camp, which later became a concentration camp designated primarily for Jewish women. The camp was developed on the

site of the German wool factory, Deutsche Wollenwaren Manufaktur AG, which supplied the German war machine with military clothing. (It has since been converted to a shopping mall.) During the war about 1,000 young women worked there as seamstresses and eventually became prisoners of the concentration camp complex governed by KZ Groß-Rosen. Towards the very end of the war the prisoners were sent on one of the most tragic of the forced Death Marches where many of them died.

Looking down from the airplane we see well-kept buildings surrounding the ruins of the former camp, as though it were an open yet forgotten wound in the body of the center of the city. During the performative phase of the project, a group of young women from Zielona Góra spent some time in silence on the site of the camp, performing minimal gestures of lamentation and evoking the absence of the prisoners through their presence.

In another part of the film, a young woman wrapping bandages onto her chest in a gesture of defense, or perhaps caress. Her body stands for our common body, anonymous as if it were a membrane between the self and the external world. Awareness of our marginality becomes elevated into the realm of meaning through our brief encounter with memory and history.

We hear spoken and whispering voices in Polish, German, and Urdu. I have recorded and mixed the voices into an overlapping composition. Passages recorded in German are often digitally reversed evoking the idea of the collapse of language in the face of the loss of the ability to mean. Sound explores lament as a musical form and also as referring to historical trauma and conversely, historical amnesia. Performing silent gestures of lamentation on the site of the abandoned and forgotten concentration camp, becomes a poetic and political expression, with social ties that go beyond generational and geographical divides.

Monika Weiss

Zielona Góra, June 15, 2012



Image credit: Monika Weiss *Shrouds (Caluny)* 2012

Aerial photography (limited edition series), two-channel experimental film, ephemeral public project, exhibition