

## Industrial nostalgia: The case of Poldi Kladno

*Abstract:* In the last few years, industrial architecture has started to attract more attention than probably ever before. In order to pursue the issue of growing aesthetic interest in the industrial landscape I analyse contemporary visual and related discursive representations of industrial architecture and industrial landscape in the Czech Republic. Discussing the case of a vast industrial brownfield adjacent to the town centre of Kladno, a former industrial city in Central Bohemia, I try to show how the industrial architecture is in fact aestheticised. By questioning what lies behind such aestheticisation I want to show how industrial landscape and the past it embodies have been negotiated within the urban space. I perceive the visual as well as discursive representations of industrial architecture as predominantly melancholic and nostalgic. My argument is, however, that nostalgia does not have to present a weakness since it originates in the image we hold of our past and it embodies our fears about our future. It can thus serve as a position from which we could critically question our present-day existence and our potential futures. Our aesthetic perception has been changing. The discussion of the reasons why it has been happening and what lies behind such changes is needed since it relates to the wider discussion about our relationship with the past and thus also about the image we have of ourselves.

## Industrial nostalgia: The Case of Poldi Kladno

Poldi Kladno is a big industrial site in Kladno, a town in Central Bohemia. Within the Czech cultural context it is a well-known factory, not only because of the economic importance it played in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but mainly because of its presence in many works of art ranging from socialist realist paintings and writings to the writings of Bohumil Hrabal. Even after its decline in the 1990s it still attracts attention – because of the political background of its break-down, because of its presence in the form of a ruinous brownfield just in the centre of the city, and last but not least because of the aesthetic appeal industrial ruins have for many people nowadays.

When I visited Poldi in spring 2008 – it has been my last visit so far – I met there a group of about 10 photographers from the 120 km distant town of Lanškroun (fig.1). The ruins, usually inhabited by birds and visited from time to time by people walking their dogs, by gypsies trying to mine out rare metals in order to sell them or by individual explorers like me, were suddenly full of activity. Here and there people arranging their tripods could be seen through holes in the walls or in distance. When I realised where they were from, I, indeed, asked them what made them to travel so far. They agreed on that they wanted “to document the state of it all because in few years it won’t be there”. It was “the ravages of time” that brought them there and I could not help myself, I heard a kind of nostalgia in what they were saying.

I think I understand them. It is the time at work that makes ruinous spaces so appealing (to them). Something has been vanishing, something irreplaceable, and the only thing they can do is to take a picture of it. If they do not, something will vanish without a trace. Such an urge to document the process of a loss and disappearance goes inevitably hand in hand with melancholy and nostalgia. However, the nostalgia I am referring to is a special kind of nostalgia, an aimless one. Surprisingly maybe, it does not aim at getting back to some particular golden time, at bringing back the past. It is a similar kind of nostalgia Svetlana Boym speaks about when she says that nostalgic can be homesick and sick of home at once (Boym 2001, 50). It stems from the physical encounter with ruinous spaces where the past and present are felt to co-exist in a kind of unmediated form, it stems from the physical encounter with the process of disappearance rather than from the wish to get back in time.



Figure 1: Photographers from Lanškroun in Poldi. Source: Official web page of Lanškroun Photo Society (<http://www.fotolan.cz/akce-fotoklubu/rude-kladno-nejak-vybladlo-13.4.2008/>; 21 April 2008)

Industrial architecture has attracted more attention in the last few years than probably ever before and the general interest in it has been steadily growing. I believe the strong appeal industrial ruins – and ruins in general – have for us, people of late modernity, stems from their ability to induce nostalgia. After all, it is the late modern society, which is preoccupied with searching for its own roots, and it is (industrial) ruin that can be seen as a slowly but inevitably vanishing link to our immediate past. Indeed, we can think of nostalgia dismissively as of a symptom of weakness, an excessively emotional response of people unable to face challenges of the present, “an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetical failure” (Boym 2001, xiv). In this paper, however, I would like to make case for nostalgia, since I believe that understanding it can help us to understand ourselves.

In doing so, I will concentrate on three intertwined issues. I will sketch out very briefly the historical and ‘ideological’ context of the Czech industrial architecture and its representations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I will explore contemporary visual and accompanying discursive representations of industrial landscape using examples from photographic books and web pages created by professional as well as layman photographers in order to understand the contemporary interest in industrial ruins. I will argue that the contemporary industrial imaginary is predominantly nostalgic. Throughout the paper I will try to comprehend the role the industrial imaginary plays within our relationship to ruinous industrial landscape. And I will use the example of the industrial brownfield of Poldi Kladno in order to question how the past, industrial heritage and urban space are being experienced and negotiated in post-social late modernity.

I understand contemporary industrial imaginary as infused with nostalgia. My argument here is that nostalgia does not have to present a weakness since it originates in the image we hold of our past and it embodies our fears about our future. It can thus serve as a position from

which we could understand and critically question our present-day existence and our potential futures. The general aim of this paper thus lies in acknowledging the potential of theorizing both nostalgia and industrial landscape. Put another way, I believe that questioning the nostalgia grounding the contemporary industrial imaginary can help us to understand our post-socialist situation in our post-industrial landscape.

### Industrialization in the Czech Republic and its photographic representations



Figure 2: Anonymous – Poldi Ironworks in Kladno, 1895. Source: Composite authors (eds.) *Tvář průmyslové doby: Svědectví fotografie/ A Portrait of Industrial Age: Captured in Photography*, Prague: Research Centre for Industrial Heritage, 2007.

In the Czech part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the process of industrialization began slowly in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the pace of industrialization had been rising throughout the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Central Bohemia became one of the most important industrial regions in the Empire, with Prague at its centre, and Kladno, the town I will concentrate on in the second part of this essay, as a vanguard of heavy industry in the region. The other important region was located in the northeast of the country with the town Ostrava at its heart. The process of industrialization brought about two radical and linked changes – the transformation of lifestyles and the transformation of landscape (cf. Hozák 2007). These two changes lay at heart of the early photographic representations of industrial architecture and its context.

The industrial boom with the promise of the seemingly never-ending technological progress changed not only the material but also the mental aspects of human life. Modernity measured itself against nature through the achievements of the human mind, through works of manufacturing, engineering, through technology. Man aimed at subjugating matter, space and time by means of technology and technology seemed to promise better future for all mankind. New aesthetic experience of technology emerged, the one that is often referred to as sublime –



that of awe, wonder, and amazement aroused by the confrontation with the impressiveness of man-made objects (Nye 1994,xiii). The quasi-religious experience of technological sublime could be found in the “uncritical admirations for new technical innovations, extolling human ingenuity and skill as ‘a triumph of the spirit over nature’ (Hozák 2007,14). Just like the idea of progress lies in the intellectual foundations of modernity, the experience of technological sublime lies in the heart of modern experience. In the world of modernity, which is increasingly desacralised, “the sublime represents a way to reinvest the landscape and the works of man with transcendent significance” (Nye 1994,xiii).

Nevertheless, the feeling of technological sublime was in the Czech Kingdom at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century accompanied by a kind of nostalgia for the past, a sense that something “had changed dramatically mainly as a result of the advancement of industry and transportation” (Scheufler 2007,29). Consequently, some photographers tried to capture and document the existing state of towns and landscape<sup>1</sup> and the way they had been changing because of the industrialization of the country. Figure 2 represents the Poldi factory in Kladno shortly after it was founded in order to illustrate what kind of landscape photography and landscape change I have in mind.



Figure 3: Jindřich Eckert, Julius Müller'n – Vojtěch Ironworks in Kladno, 1878. Source: Composite authors (eds.) *Tvář průmyslové doby: Svědectví fotografie/ A Portrait of Industrial Age: Captured in Photography*, Prague: Research Centre for Industrial Heritage, 2007.

Apart from the attempts to document the changes on one hand and to embrace them on the other, a third strand of photographic representation emerged in the Czech Kingdom at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Photographic pictorialism “was not interested in faithful depiction of reality but tried instead through mood and atmosphere to move closer to the techniques of

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<sup>1</sup> In 1894 the Monument Inventory Commission was set up in Prague in order to organise a photo-documentation of sites decided for redevelopment. (Scheufler 2007,30)

painting and graphics and thus introduce a new dimension into the photographs – a sense of the reality portrayed. ... The documentary component, whether true-to-life or idealising, withdrew into the background and was replaced as the centre of attention by conveying mood and feelings evoked by the machine and the role of the man working with the machine” (Scheufler 2007,33-34). Figure 3 represents an example of such mood-conveying photographic representation of technology.

The sublimity of new technological objects and newly created landscape together with the nostalgia stemming from the changes in the landscape went hand in hand with the aestheticisation of technology and industry. I hope that within the course of the paper I will succeed in conveying the importance of the triad – sublime, nostalgia and aestheticisation – for understanding not only the aesthetic interest in technology at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but more importantly the contemporary interest in the industrial ruins of modernity.

When, after the Second World War, communists seized power in Czechoslovakia, the image of industry and its representation changed slightly. Industry and the trope of building the country started to occupy a prominent place within the communist official discourse. The brighter future should have been built and technology was to play an important role not only as a means of reaching communism but with its sublime liberatory potential also as one of its constitutional elements. After all, communism (or, more precisely, the state socialism of the second world) is a high watermark of modernity and its ideas about technology stem from modernist dreams about technology and its liberatory powers. Thus the discourse of socialism is infused with figures such as ‘miner’ or ‘metallurgist’ and the trope of ‘building the socialism’ played a prominent role within the speech of the political system from its very beginning in 1948 until its very end in 1989. Figure 4 shows how the discourse is imbued with industrial imaginary – even the simplest thing such as the advertisement for a newspaper was based on it, using it while at the same time reinforcing it.



Figure 4: Sobotka – Rudé Právo-pomocník výstavby socialismu/ Red Justice-helping to build socialism, 1948. Red Justice used to be the official newspaper of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia. Source: <http://www.czechdesign.cz/index.php?status=c&clanek=679&lang=1>; 21 April 2008

Despite it being such a prominent feature of the communist discourse, I feel there is a peculiar lack of studies about this interconnection, and even about the representation of industry throughout this period. The exhibition catalogue *Czechoslovakian Socialist Realism 1948-1958* by Petišková (2002) is one of the few works based within the Czech cultural context that try to explore the link between aesthetics, representation and different prominent tropes of the communist speech. Unfortunately, as the catalogue is based mainly on examples of artworks from the Army Artistic Centre, it underrepresents the works depicting or using industrial motives.

### Contemporary interest in industrial aesthetics ...

Having been so much connected to the official discourse, the attractiveness and the sublime experience of technology exhausted themselves in the never-ending monologue of the communist speech (cf. Fidelius, 2002). The aesthetic and moral appeal of technology and industrial motives evanesced in the last two decades of socialism and the fall of communism, which resulted in a wild economic transformation and consequently in the downfall of substantial parts of the Czech industry, brought about the overall political, economic as well as aesthetical neglect of anything industrial that was left. However, during the last few years the neglect has changed into a frenzied interest. Professional as well as layman photographers, urban explorers, artists and general public are more and more attracted by the ruinous spaces scattered around the Czech landscape. To understand what lies in behind such interest, I will briefly comment on representations of industrial landscape by contemporary photographers.

While pondering why the old photographs depicting the industrialization process in the Czech Republic are so appealing for us, Hozák offers a few reasons. It is the appeal of the topic itself, the questions we ask ourselves when confronted with such photographs, “the emotional strength, drama, and rawness of the photographs and the wealth of information they contain”, as well as “the sense of almost idyllic calm that many of the photographs from this period, especially landscape images, are often able to provoke in us” (Hozák 2007,8). But mainly it is the process of change captured by the photographs which makes the photographs so emotionally charged for us. “The confrontation of two evolutionary poles, which many of the photographs succeed in capturing, portraying the end of a world of relative tranquillity and unspoiled landscapes as it collided with the predacious and reckless onslaught of technological civilisation, was probably never as overt and telling in form as it appeared at the end of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth century” (ibid.).

I find Hozák’s account extremely apt. However, I believe the changes that occurred in the age of late modernity – or for the second world in the age of post-socialism – are comparable to the ones that occurred at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at least regarding their aesthetically-emotional appeal. It is maybe symbolic that the subsequent ends of the century brought profound changes to the lives of people as well as to the landscape. The old technology of modernity and its physical manifestation in the industrial landscape has given place to a new form of post-industrial landscape in which only the old ruinous factories, forgotten monuments and despised socialist architecture evoke what we left behind. Maybe the present-day interest in the industrial architecture and aesthetics originates in a similar kind of nostalgia and appeal Hozák describes for the dusk of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The often-expressed reason why photographers get interested in industrial architecture is the biographical one. In the motto to his photographic book “*Ostrava guys to everyone*”, the photographer Boris Renner (2007) says: “I was born in 1965 in Ostrava. Somebody is born to



the village and he sees greenery and trees. I grew up surrounded by smoke-stacks and steel monsters. The sun leaked through them in the morning, in the night they turned into uncanny castles. I don't know when it happened, but suddenly it got into me, it was my Ostrava. Original as its people, but alive and distinctive. I still want to explore it, document its perpetual changes." Here, industrial sites act as sources of artistic and potentially also of individual identity.

Hand in hand with the issue of identity goes the urge to document the so far neglected aesthetic richness of industrial sites, as is not only the case of Renner, but also of the already mentioned Lanškroun photographers. There are, of course, also pragmatic reasons, as in the case of the book "*Vítkovice Industria*"<sup>2</sup>, commissioned by the steelworks as an expression of its historical importance and its interest in the future of the whole region, particularly in the industrial monuments as a potential source of regional identity. But I believe all of these reasons stem from – or as in the latter case – work with the mixture of aesthetic attractiveness of the industrial photographs and the nostalgia we feel for and from industrial ruins.



Figure 5: Milan Sýkora – V pecích už jen tma/Only darkness in the furnaces, 2006. Source: Sýkora 2006b.

Exemplary instance of such a mixture can be detected in the photographic work and especially in the commentaries published by Michal Sýkora, a layman photographer from Kladno, at his website. As he wrote in 2006: "It was not for the first time I went to Poldi in Kladno. But maybe it was for the last time – recently the production was ended in the last rolling mill in Kladno. [...] I was in the halls; I got everywhere. Sad experience: There was absolute silence in that big factory. [...] It was sad, however it was photographically absolutely exceptional and beautiful. [...] The hall was built in the 50s [...] and it is closed now. You can guess what they will build in its place. A supermarket, indeed. As if we don't have a lot of them. I don't know why but I simply like Poldi. I feel that the world I knew is

<sup>2</sup> Vítkovice is part of the town of Ostrava.

vanishing. No monuments from the 20<sup>th</sup> century will survive...” (Sýkora 2006a). Here, the nostalgia, mixed with almost religious, romantic aestheticisation of the ruinous space, results in an imminent, even wrathful, critique of our contemporary situation.

Sýkora, Renner and the Lanškroun photographers, they all represent to me a kind of post-modern romantic explorers, mourning about the loss that takes place in the landscape around us while at the same time desperately trying to document it, to preserve at least a trace, an image of it. As another Sýkora’s comment illustrates, they aestheticise not only the object of their interest – industrial ruins – but also their experience: “Poldi dies away slowly but surely – so I went there again to see something and to retain it. *It was adventurous: unexpected holes in the ground, unexpected strange people [...], places where the depth or height takes one’s breath away*” (Sýkora 2006b; italics mine). Contemporary explorers go out for a kind of romantic explorations; they differ from their romantic predecessors only by having digital cameras instead of drawing-books. Figure 5 shows a snapshot from one of Sýkora’s explorations.

The case of Václav Jirásek and his project “*Industria*” emphasises even more the potential critical aspect of contemporary industrial imaginary. In his work, Jirásek shows how the aesthetically nostalgic exploration of industrial motives (fig.6) can be combined with a critical stance about the present-day state of the industry and its social as well as spatial consequences. He “repeatedly stresses that his work is classical colour photography, devoid of any manipulative interventions – and in doing so, underscores the bizarre, fantastic aspects of the thoroughly artificial, thoroughly man-made environment of the factory, showing it to be an actual, and above all still extant reality, however much we may have expelled it from our consciousness, shifting it far from the angle of vision of contemporary priorities, dreams, projects” (Nedoma 2006,14). Jirásek thus depicts not only the factories on the verge of complete destruction, but he is also interested in the people still working there (fig.7) – “workers bent by labour and now ruled by the fear of unemployment” (ibid. 16). In his *Industria*, the aesthetics of nostalgia merges with socially critical statement about our past and our present in “a grandiose expression of the monumentality of the decay and dissolution of the impossibly gigantic dreams of the yesterday that was to have been tomorrow” (ibid.).

I believe there is a threefold reason behind layman as well as professional photographic exploration of industrial ruins. Firstly, it is the urge to document the vanishing world. Secondly, it is the effort to convey the experienced unexpected beauty of such places, strange and organic compound of natural and man-made merging under the auspices of relentless time. There is an aspect of romanticisation concerning contemporary photographic as well as discursive representation of industrial ruins and hand in hand with it goes a process of aestheticisation of industrial space. In order to turn reality into an aesthetic object the distancing of the viewer is needed (cf. Williams 2004,29). But thirdly, despite the distancing, there is still, as the case of Jirásek’s *Industria* shows, a critical potential regarding contemporary industrial imaginary.

All the photographic works I mentioned here are the result of about the last 10 years of artistic activity. I believe it to mean that our aesthetic perception of industrial motives has changed profoundly in the last two decades. After all, who, from the general public, would even think about going to Poldi for a romantic exploration during the first half of 1990s?





Figure 6: Václav Jirásek – Untitled. Source: Jirásek 2006.



Figure 7: Václav Jirásek – Untitled. Source: Jirásek 2006.

... and the case of Poldi Kladno

Kladno is a town with a long and rich industrial history dating back to 1854 when the first metallurgist plant was founded close to the city centre. Since then, surrounded by coalmines and deposits of iron ore, Kladno became one of the leading metallurgist areas in Bohemia. Steelworks were founded by Karl Wittgenstein in 1889 just next to the older plant and were named Poldi after his wife Leopoldina. Because of heavy pollution and mining industry, Kladno became known as a black town. After the World War II both plants were nationalized by communist government, merged into one large factory called SONP Poldi, and Kladno acquired another prominent label, that of a red town. Since red had always been the colour attributed to the communist party and because in Kladno, like in many industrial towns at the turn of the century, there was a strong socialist and communist workers' movement, the history re-narrated by the communist historiography and propaganda after communists seized power in 1948 tended to hyperbolise the image of Kladno as a workers' town, always devoted to the ideals of communism, as a 'black-and-red' town.

A good example of such re-narration of Kladno's history, using the explicit colour-based imagery, can be found in the book written by the leading member of early communist party and the second communist president of socialist Czechoslovakia Antonín Zápotocký, who was native of the region. His quasi-autobiographical novel, metaphorically called *Red Glare Above Kladno*, depicts how the idea of communism and the struggle for it gradually engulfed workers and miners in Kladno and then spread into the surrounding region. Zápotocký uses the image of the physical red light illuminating the landscape when steel is discharged from the blast furnaces and slag is spilled onto dumps as a representation of the communist idea illuminating and cultivating the workers' souls. His story starts poetically with: "They spilled slag onto the dump and red glare glowed above Kladno" to end ideologically with slightly changed: "They spilled slag onto the dump and red glare glowed above the whole country." In Zápotocký's novel the black-and-red Kladno is given its prominent place in the story of the march towards communism. The novel, set in the 'black-and-red' workers' town and filled with industrial metaphors (as the one I quoted above), can serve as a good literary example of the communist industrial imaginary.

After the fall of communism and the downfall of heavy industry in the 1990s, Poldi as a big factory went broke. Some small plants survived the breakdown of the industrial colossus, but the **major** part of its 6 km<sup>2</sup> area became a brownfield with small workshops or warehouses scattered here and there, but mainly filled with the ruins of old industrial buildings and technology<sup>3</sup>. Figure 8 shows a large part of the brownfield area. Nevertheless, what survived this breakdown was the image of the red and black industrial town once created by communist ideology, which acknowledges the long and industrial history of the town but also clogs it with the ideological ballast of the former political regime. What also survived was the space of former Poldi, a ruinous area that attracts some by its aesthetic beauty and historical authenticity and repels others for its discursive connection to the communist propaganda or for its spatial and/or social disorderliness. For ones, the aesthetics and historical connections represent a burden to be cast away, for others something that should be protected.

Municipal politics in Kladno is controlled by a right-wing party, according to which Kladno's industrial history is not a proper, attractive one. In her article about Poldi, Schmelzová (2007) even quotes the municipal clerk according to whom Kladno does not have any proper history at all. Such statement can sound as nonsense but there is a hidden logic in behind. Kladno does not simply have the history some people wish it had. "People interested in history who come to the town understand that it is far from being only the red and black town," said the

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<sup>3</sup> The area I refer to as a Poldi brownfield (or in short Poldi) represents only a part of the industrial site. It is the area where the older factory used to be, the area sometimes referred to as 'Vojtěžská hut' or 'Koněv'.



governor of the county on the occasion of the re-opening of the county's museum (CBR 2008) and the mayor of the town warmly supported him. The question, which came to my mind when I listened to them, was to what extent these proclamations are honest attempts to foster the process of regional identity making and to what extent they simply try to avoid the problem of facing the uncomfortable yet still painfully present past of the region. To what extent is the municipality trying to shift our attention from Kladno's immediate past to Kladno's bygone history? And what spatial aspects and consequences does such an approach mean for Kladno and its surroundings?



Figure 8: The view of the ruinous part of Poldi. Source: Author's archive.

In order to shed at least some light on these issues I will, in the rest of the paper, concentrate on the spatial aspects of industrial ruins and by referring to Poldi I will try to show what has been at play in the experience and negotiation of the industrial landscape of Kladno. Or, in other words, I will try to pin down the ideas about space, past and future embodied in different approaches to industrial spaces.

Edensor nicely shows that industrial ruins are sensually richer and more stimulating than the mundane urban landscape. Full of strange noises, smells and unidentifiable objects, structures and decay, the material environment of the ruins, “its deregulation, decay and the distribution of objects and less distinguishable matter, provides a realm in which sensual experience and performance is cajoled into unfamiliar enactments that coerce encounters with unfamiliar things and their affordances“ (Edensor 2007,227). Concerning the bodily movement, there is thus a liberatory potential in the ruin, since the “confrontation with excess matter offers opportunities to engage with the material world in a more playful, sensual fashion than is usually afforded in much smoothed-over urban space” (ibid.). I believe this is the aspect of industrial ruins that makes them so appealing and romantic and the explorations of them so ‘adventurous’.

Industrial ruins – and Poldi Kladno is a fitting example since it lies literally in the centre of the city – can thus serve as an urban counter-space. Not only are industrial ruins materially



disordered and sensually richer than the urban space, they are also a space out of reach of any formal political control. Although being in the centre, Poldi is a space on the margin of the city, literally, since it is often occupied by marginalized people, as well as metaphorically, since it is not considered to be a physical part of the city anymore. There is no one to exercise formal power over anyone else's conduct. Going there you can meet big groups of gypsies trying to dig out rare metal pieces from the ground in order to sell them, couples at rendezvous, people walking their dogs, strolling around the ruins, smoking weed and using drugs, spraying over the walls, smashing things into pieces or simply taking photographs. Time to time you can also meet policemen patrolling and embodying the attempts of the municipality to get back control over the space. But there are so many spaces to hide from their sights and the area is so vast. In the world pre-obsessed with control and security over the public space, industrial ruins offer the spaces of escape from the regulated urban landscape populated more and more by restrictions and CCTV cameras. For academics, moreover, they can serve as a kind of "thirdspace" (see Soja 1996), the space on the margin from which it is possible to critically think over the issues of public space and its regulations, public control and personal responsibility, social injustice and social memory.

The liberatory power of ruins does not lie only in their spatial and/or social disorderliness and thus in the impossibility to gain absolute control over the space, but also in the connections they hold to the past, in their sensual nature. A kind of history we know from the history books cannot be read out from industrial ruins straight away. What the ruins narrate, or in other words, what we can see in the ruins are neither memories of particular events, nor stories of what happened there. In the ruins we encounter things thrown out of their original context and we do usually not even know what purposes those things could have served. Moreover, the things we encounter are rusted, rotten, damaged and dissolved. As Edensor argues, the incomprehensibility of things and their arrangements within a ruin, the time materialised and made visible in them evoke empathy, 'vague memories', this all together opens dimensions of memory which are "neither available for inclusion in stories nor communicable". The ruins offer openings, not stories, they trigger fantasy and imagination. The past they embody is neither history, nor articulate memory. Memory, and I would argue that memory is tightly connected to meanings hidden for us in our landscapes, "is not always articulate but is located in the habitual and the sensual" (Edensor 2005: 846). It is a 'vague' past that is hidden in the ruins, a past without any fixed meaning, without any fixed story to be told. Ruinous Poldi does not embody the story of, let's say, industrialization, what it embodies is a 'vague memory' of time passing by.

It seems to me the photographers from Lanškroun were right. Maybe it is "the ravages of time" that we mostly see in the things there, maybe it is a twofold reference to materialization of time, what makes industrial ruins so appealing. On one hand, the industrial ruin of Poldi is a silent material remnant of the industrial age, of historical time, which passed and cannot be returned back. But on the other, the decay of Poldi, the process of its dissolution in and into nature reflects and embodies in a different way the passage of time itself. Or, as Rendell puts it, there is "an important temporal aspect of the ruin, whether natural or cultural, that it is not simply a sign of the past in the present, but rather marks the moment at which what is now becomes what has been" (Rendell 2006,97-8).

New materials such as concrete, steel and especially zinc-coated materials, used in new industrial structures such as warehouses that are being built in the area of Poldi, do not get back to nature so easily. At least in their present state, they do not embody time in such ways the old and ruinous industrial buildings do, and thus seem to us generally unattractive. Or, as one photographer from Lanškroun told me, "they are simply uninteresting and, moreover, they are all the same".

The resolution about the need to protect the Poldi brownfield area as an industrial heritage site was, according to Schmelzová (2007), received by the municipality as well as by the National Institution for Heritage but nothing substantial happened. On the contrary, demolition activities slowly continue to erase Poldi from the map. I think I clarified why the municipal government perceives the ruinous brownfield area as something like a black hole adjacent to the centre of the town, or maybe something like a grey zone – according to its colour in the municipal plan –, which should be cleared up or at least ordered and brought under control. Indeed, it is a space of disorder, social as well as spatial. The tragedy of last summer when one of the big halls collapsed onto four “metal-miners” after they attempted to dismantle it and to redeem it provided the municipality with a new “reason” to get rid of Poldi. It is, after all, a dangerous place where citizens can come to harm.

In addition, it is a space of the closest connection to the uncomfortable past of the former regime and to its propaganda, discourse and imaginary. It is the most red-and-black space of Kladno and if Kladno is to be cleared of its red-and-black history, it must be cleared of Poldi. Poldi is thus uncomfortable since, as Schmelzová aptly put it, “the municipality perceives it as an unwanted defect in the attentively built image of Kladno as a calm suburban area of Prague” (Schmelzová 2007,48). Poldi once served as a place the image of which was used to adjust and adapt the meaning of history according to the politically correct interpretation. “It seems that today a similar process of modifying history is at work, just oriented the other way round” (ibid. 47). Since, as the Lanškroun photographers pointed out, if there are no material traces left, there is nothing to be remembered.

#### Conclusion: Industrial ruins and the nostalgia for the future

As Picon observed, “in traditional landscapes, the productions of man, his constructions in particular, surrendered themselves progressively to nature in the form of the ruin” (Picon 2000,76). Industrial ruin is of this kind: severe facades of buildings together with organic clusters of pipes and cables surrender to the organicity and vitality of nature (fig.9). In successive stages, the (industrial) ruin reintegrates “the traces of human activity into the cycles of nature” (Picon 2000,77). But is there any substantial difference between the ruin Picon speaks about and the industrial ruin? I believe the way in which industrial ruins refer us to time is in fact more complex than Rendell suggests.

After all, industrial ruins are ruins of modernity and modernist dreams about technology and better future. The whole thing is not as simple as that Rendell’s “moment at which what is now becomes what has been;” the message we can read out is more context-specific and thus can be more telling, more emotionally and intellectually charged for us. It is true that “in the body of the ruin the past is both present in its residues and yet no longer accessible” (Huysen 2006,7), but regarding industrial ruins, the past is a specific past of ours. In this sense I must agree with Huysen when he suggests that „we are nostalgic for the ruins of modernity because they still seem to hold a promise that has vanished from our own age: the promise of an alternative future” (ibid.).

Maybe here lies the answer to why late modernity is so obsessed with its own past, why it is an age so filled with nostalgia. And that is why I believe in liberatory powers of ruins stemming from the nostalgia they stimulate. That is also why it pays to question industrial ruins and through them to question our present, our relationship to our past and thus open up the possibility to question also our future the foundations of which are now being laid. Industrial ruins are the place from where an alternative could be offered, since they disturb and resist “modern attempts to cleanse, banish ambiguity and order the memory of space” (Edensor 2005,845). Because of their disorderliness, continuous change and the impossibility to be governed, they do not fit well into prepared historical narratives. Rather, they are a place

with a narrative potential, a place that encourages starting a new narrative (cf. Crang and Travlou 2001). In addition, since industrial ruins are about the never-ending process of change, they stand out against any attempts to control or fix their meaning and thus can serve as a kind of 'thirdspace' opening a possibility for critique and alternatives. And last but not least, they refer us to our modernist past when the future was seen as offering a possibility. It seems to me the industrial nostalgia is not for the past, but for the vanished promises of the past, for the vanished belief in the future<sup>4</sup>.



Figure 9: The production of man surrenders progressively to nature – a view from Poldi ruinous area. Source: Author's archive.

I can imagine a project, for example, in which the decisions and discourse of Kladno municipality about the space of Poldi would serve as a starting point for analysing the power which is being exercised over public space, and the discourse about public realm supporting it – the discourse about our 'security', freedom and responsibility for ourselves. The future of urban public space we are seemingly inevitably heading to – the space crammed with

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<sup>4</sup> For more about this see also Boym 2001, xvi



restrictions, CCTV cameras and benches curved in such a way that homeless people would not be able to sleep on them – could thus be called in question from the point of view offered by the 'thirdspace' of the industrial ruin of Poldi.

In this paper I tried to elucidate why industrial ruins can be important not only because of their aesthetic appeal but also because of the connection to the past and the future they hold. Highly aestheticised because of their visual attractiveness and romanticised because of their ability to induce nostalgia, industrial ruins attract us. Because of the reasons expressed throughout the paper I believe the nostalgia accompanying our interest in ruins could prove as a good starting point for a critical reassessment of our attitude to the world surrounding us. Maybe the encounter with the time at work mediated by industrial ruins is a kind of late modern sublime experience, and maybe some deep emotion is what we need in our relentless post-socialist age of change.

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