

# GLASS HOUSES —

VISIONS AND PRACTICES  
OF SOCIAL  
MODERNISATION  
AFTER 1918





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edited by Joanna Kordjak

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# **the future will be different**



Joanna Kordjak



Recent publications on social history and the history of literature and visual culture (press, film, theatre), written using contemporary research tools and from the perspective of the modern 'other' — mainly women or industrial workers — have shed new light on the interwar period. They have thus inscribed themselves in the process of revising the perception, maintained throughout the decades of People's Poland and distorted by its propaganda machine, of that particular era (which was idealised and mythologised like no other as if in spite of the propaganda)<sup>1</sup>, making its image less and less obvious. From today's point of view, the historical record of the two interwar decades seems highly mixed. On the one hand, it is a time when Poland is more open, dynamic, and pro-European than ever; on the other hand, literature (such as Czesław Miłosz's *An Excursion Through the Twenties and Thirties*) offers a picture of society deeply stratified and divided into classes and ethnic groups.

Asking about the identity and present condition of our society (issues such as gender equality), it is worth looking at the period that followed the revival of independent Polish statehood (comparable to the post-1989 transformation period)<sup>2</sup> — in the context of both the dangers and the extremely inspiring, yet forgotten or underappreciated, potential of the era. Writing about the phenomenal rise of women's literature during the interwar period, Agata Araszkiewicz emphasises the epoch's creative dynamics:

Many previously repressed and marginalised ideas erupt with new strength, and culture is eager to make up for the lost time, to 'catch up' with the contemporary . . . What the epoch says about itself is something that didn't always have the chance to mature in time and wasn't always consciously acknowledged, yet often saw far into the future. . . . Focused until now on preserving (forbidden) Polishness, literature and art gain a new sphere of freedom. The emancipatory discourse, usually connected with pro-independence political work, can finally assume a more civilian, individualistic form.<sup>3</sup>

1 Under communism, the 'beautiful 20s and 30s' functioned as a popular myth of a lost paradise, and for intellectuals as an alternative to the realities of the authoritarian state.

2 Agata Araszkiewicz, *Zapomniana rewolucja. Rozkwit kobiecego pisania w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2014, p. 11.

3 Ibid.



Courtyard, Cluster 4, Warsaw Housing Cooperative (WSM) housing estate, Żoliborz, Warsaw  
1930s, WSM Hall of History

The exhibition *The Future Will Be Different. Visions and Practices of Social Modernisation after 1918*<sup>4</sup> aims to inscribe itself in the above outlined context of research interest in socio-cultural changes after 1918. Its narratives are defined by modernising social ideas emerging in Poland after World War I or being implemented by institutions and organisations that themselves had emerged in the wake of Poland's rebirth as an independent nation state. While those ideas form part of a broader process of socio-cultural change in post-WWI Europe, the situation of a country that was both rebuilding its statehood after being absent for over a century from the political map of the world and trying to forge a common national identity in an ethnically diverse society that until recently lived in three different empires, a society afflicted by widespread poverty and underdevelopment, presented a particularly fertile ground for them to emerge and flourish.

The new conceptions of the organisation of social life referenced by the exhibition sought to address the needs of previously marginalised groups, such as women, children, workers, or ethnic minorities. It is worth stressing that the re-establishment of political independence was accompanied by significant progress in the process of the emancipation of Polish women, including early enactment of women's suffrage (1918), though of course, despite the legislative reforms, the question of whether Polish women had been fully emancipated remained open. Particularly important here are the Positivism-rooted ideas of the democratisation of access to culture, emancipation (of marginalised, disenfranchised, underrepresented social groups) mutual aid and self-organisation.

Drawing up an image of the Second Polish Republic as seen in large part through the history of the 'weak' and their emancipation taps into the already mentioned process of the period's demythologisation, but it also makes it possible to highlight its valuable social ideas that remain as topical and valid today as ever. Their prewar origins are not widely known because the communist authorities of People's Poland often exploited those ideas (such as women's rights or cooperativism) for their own purposes, distorting their original meaning. Aimed at designing a modern society (starting with the social education of children), the more or less utopian visions of modernisation emerged in the context of the crisis caused by the reassertion of independence and the ensuing need to integrate a country divided by the partitions, to reduce sharp economic disparities across regions and industries. They were also a response to acute social issues such as rampant unemployment, housing deficit, or a large number of orphaned and/or homeless children.

Presenting the various aspects of the modernist project of the 'new world' and 'new man', we are aware of its inner contradictions and the resulting tensions as well as the complex and dynamic nature of the changes taking place during the two interwar

4 The first part of the title is a reference to a fragment of an essay about the cooperative movement: 'Worries, problems, exorbitant prices, commercial exploitation — this is what fills day after day. But we live on in the hope that the future will be different . . .', Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska, 'Przez kooperatywy do przyszłego ustroju' (1921), in *Spółdzielczość jako organizacja gospodarcza w II RP. Wybór pism*, ed. Filip Karol Leszczyński, Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 2017, p. 42.

decades. Neither socio-political nor cultural processes can be confined within the time brackets of the two wars, and the two decades stretching between them are a gulf apart. If, simplifying things, we describe the 1920s as a time of modernist utopias in the spirit of 'glass houses', underpinned by the slogan of building a new world, then the 1930s appear marked by an intensifying sense of 'catastrophism', by forebodings of failure and destruction.<sup>5</sup> Differences between the two decades can also be noticed in socio-political life, including in the context of the ideas of interest to us here; whereas the 1920s see an unprecedented rise of the cooperative movement, driven not only by progressive legislation but also, importantly, by grassroots initiatives, the following decade is characterised by growing authoritarianism, a nationalisation drive (including in the cooperative sector), and stiffening political conflict. The turning point, which coincided with the turn of the decades, was determined by the economic, social, and political situation in the world (the Great Depression of 1929–1933 and its political consequences) and in Poland (the May 1926 coup and a sharp political turn to the right). This set the context for increasingly heated debates on the social role of the artist and for a clash of different perceptions of art's social impact and commitment.

Against a background so outlined, the exhibition presents carefully selected examples of the idea of social modernisation as embodied in such fields of visual culture as architecture, design, theatre, press, or photography. The most crucial medium, however, and one widely represented in the exhibition-accompanying publication, is film, the true 'modernity machine', whether artistic, experimental, documentary, or popular. Like no other medium, film reflected the dynamics and change vectors of the era, and the force and scale of its social impact was unparalleled. With its techniques of montage and concurrence — the 'simultaneity of multiple phenomena', so fascinating for artists at the time — film infiltrated various disciplines of art, revolutionising its language. It also disrupted the 'homogeneous vision of culture and annulled reflection on the compositional principles of the image as an autonomous entity, emphatically blending mass culture with elite culture, low-brow art with high-brow art, and blurring differences between the two'.<sup>6</sup>

One attempt to implement progressive social ideas of the time were the standard-setting working-class housing developments built by the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa, WSM) in the neighbourhoods of Żoliborz and Rakowiec or benchmark residential care and educational facilities. According to Jacques Rancière's definition of utopia, they can be described as 'good places', where there is harmony between what we do, see, and say.<sup>7</sup> Particularly influ-

5 In his *Builders of the World*, Andrzej Turowski describes the ambiguity of the modernist project through the topos of the Babel tower as its symbol — an 'image of the most daring building reaching towards the sky and at the same time of ruin, chaos, downfall of man', cf. idem, Andrzej Turowski, *Budowniczość świata. Z dziejów radykalnego modernizmu w sztuce polskiej*, Kraków: Universitas, 2000.

6 Piotr Słodkowski, *Montages of Modernity. Adaptations of Cinematographic and Photographic Aesthetics in 1920s (Polish) Modernism*, in this volume, pp. 134–143.

7 Cf. Monika Talarczyk, *Wanda Jakubowska. Od nowa*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2015, p. 62.

ential for many of the initiatives evoked in the exhibition and discussed in the accompanying book was the idea of cooperativism, with the cooperative sector experiencing dynamic growth in independent Poland thanks to a 1920 cooperative law, considered Europe's most advanced at the time. Construed as a progressive conception of the organisation of social life, the idea encompassed all of its fields: education, culture, sport, commerce, leisure (including tourism), or political activity. It also defined the organisational model for some areas of artistic life, as exemplified by filmmaker co-operatives. In the words of the idea's most outspoken advocate, Stanisław Tołwiński, cooperativism laid the 'foundations of a new order and educated the new man for it'<sup>8</sup>, while also becoming a means of emancipation for various social groups (women, children, ethnic minorities). It also entailed an open definition of the nation, where everyone, whatever their affiliation in terms of class, political views, religion, or ethnicity, could be a Pole — a member of the cooperative community.

The key principle that the cooperative movement helped to introduce to public debate was the notion of the community as a well-designed space. The idea of community architecture was embodied in designs of standard-setting social housing projects, an important element of which were collective facilities providing the 'benefits of communal living'.

Interwar architects such as Helena and Szymon Syrkus or Barbara Brukalska sought not only to shape space but also to influence human and social relationships. What seems particularly interesting from today's perspective is the design process itself, which included, wherever possible, consultations with the future tenants, thus intuitively embodying the principle of social participation.<sup>9</sup>

Among the numerous facilities and spaces meant for collective use, such as central heating, swimming pool, laundry, reading room, dayroom, theatre/cinema, or hobby clubs, an important element were the courtyards — a green, integrative, and democratic public space. A 'plant sanatorium' gardening centre at the WSM Żoliborz or the 'quiet rooms' planned for the housing schemes in Rakowiec and Żoliborz, offering respite from 'urban noise pollution', can be considered as examples of ecological thinking, the beginnings of which date back precisely to the interwar period.

Contact with nature — as an element of the educational programme, a means of recreation, and the idea of environmental protection — forms an integral aspect of the project of social modernisation. It is worth noting that the WSM residents widely involved themselves in the creation of the 'garden community', which brings our attention to the emergence at the time of an ethical attitude to nature: plants and animals.

8 Przemysław Strożek, *The Cooperative Spirit on the Road. The Legend of the Tramp Inn and Polish Working-Class Tourism*, in this volume, pp. 108–117.

9 The design process of the WSM Rakowiec scheme included resident surveys and open meetings with future users, including children. This aspect of architectural practice in the interwar period is noted by Agata Twardoch, *Architecture Is Always Political. Collective Installations at Prewar Projects of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative WSM*, in this volume, pp. 54–63.



According to Barbara Brukalska, the modern architect should become an ‘element of social organisation’, his or her role being to organise living space of the new man on macro (city/housing scheme) and micro (house/home) scale. ‘Beauty is in the organisation of space, not in the chaos of superfluous decoration’, a slogan coined by the Praesens art collective for their 1930 exhibit at WSM Żoliborz, *The Smallest Home*, aptly describes the philosophy of the nascent discipline of interior design. The decorative arts had been supplanted by modern design practices, which aimed to reorganise human living. The design of the home-as-machine should be based on the scientifically sound principles of rationalism, Taylorism, and hygiene. An interesting example of such an approach was the House and Garden consultancy run by Barbara Brukalska and Nina Jankowska.

The spatial layout, its scale, aesthetic values, and educational significance played a pivotal role in a new, important discipline — design for children. It was shaped by two related aspects of social change. Firstly, it was a time of the professional emancipation of women, who not only had to but also wanted to work for money. This necessitated the introduction of comprehensive child-care solutions, which meant new challenges for architects and a new architecture of nurseries, kindergartens, and dayrooms. Secondly, progressive pedagogical theories led to the acknowledgement of the child’s autonomy and subjectivity, as epitomised in Janusz Korczak’s assertion that ‘children won’t be but already *are* people’. Modern educators listened to the child, recognising their right to self-determination. Consequently, the child became the focus of all hopes, but also all anxieties, of the interwar period, occupying a special place in the modernist project of social reform.

Modern pedagogical-educational programmes, developing in parallel but drawing inspiration from European trends (such as the theories of Maria Montessori), implemented through, for example, the ‘Żoliborz experiment’<sup>10</sup>, and making use of recent achievements in paediatrics and psychology, they covered education and leisure time, fostering individuality and self-reliance while teaching community work and shaping proactivist attitudes.

Standard-setting mini-societies (taking the adult one as their model) were comprised by the pupils of institutions such as the Korczak-founded and Maria (Maryna) Falska-run Our Home care and educational facility at Bielany, Warsaw or the patients of the Włodzimierz Medem sanatorium for Jewish children with tuberculosis in Miedzeszyn, known as the ‘little Eden’. The modernist pedagogical utopia turned into reality at the latter — the ‘children’s republic’ — became the subject of Aleksander Ford’s few preserved prewar films, *Mir kumen on* (*Children Must Laugh*). The documentary combined the effectuality and ‘pull’ of propaganda film with artistic values, employing a language shaped by the most cutting-edge cinematographic productions of the time.<sup>11</sup> He also

10 Cf. Adam Próchnik, ‘„Szkłane domy”: eksperyment z życia spółdzielczego’, in *Kooperatyzm, spółdzielczość, demokracja. Wybór pism*, ed. Bartłomiej Błesznowski, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2014, pp. 312–320.

11 Cf. Anna Szczepańska, *A Teaspoon from Nowy Świat Street*, in this volume, pp. 14–23.

pursued the idea of socially useful film, thus fulfilling the main postulate of the leftist START Association of Art Film Enthusiasts, among whose other members were Eugeniusz Cękalski and Wanda Jakubowska, both residents of the WSM Żoliborz scheme. START believed that film should combine radical ideas with mass appeal to facilitate the transformation of social awareness. The association's members shared the idea of film production as a discipline based on collective work, organised according to more general principles, an embodiment of which was the Krag film cooperative they founded in 1933. With very few of their films preserved, we are prompted to use our imagination and consider the potential of the lost ones as well as those that were nipped off by the censors.<sup>12</sup>

Social changes occurring after World War I, notably the new forms of the proletariat's participation in public life — rallies, demonstrations, strikes — impacted significantly on the formulation of modern theatre theories concerning both the stage space (revoking sharp division between stage and audience) and the new mass viewer. Inspired by and referring in its very name to the filmic 'simultaneity of multiple phenomena,' Andrzej Pronaszko and Szymon Syrkus's concept of the Simultaneous Theatre may serve as an example here. It was meant as a response to Pronaszko's slogan of 'The smallest home — the greatest theatre,' a reference to the idea of small and inexpensive but functional working-class homes. The postulates of social commitment and democratic access to culture were being pursued at the time — amid political censorship and regulatory restrictions — by workers' theatres (such as the theatre of Witold Wandurski). Leon Schiller responded to them with his documentary-theatre performances, a.k.a, *fact-o-montages* (referring in their very name to the medium of film), which commented on some of the most contentious issues of the 1930s public discourse such as abortion or labour rights. One of the most original Polish conceptions of socially engaged art was advanced by Jędrzej Cierniak's folk theatre, which worked with the local community through a democratic and collective-based creative process.

The exhibition and the accompanying publication focus on visions and practices of social modernisation initiated after 1918 that seem to still hold both socio-political and artistic potential today. The ideas and their implementations, discussed on selected examples, sought to integrate and transcend social divisions, to notice and empower marginalised social groups. The modern concept of the 'other' includes not only underprivileged, disenfranchised groups but also non-human entities — plants and animals — which require care and teach us empathy. Early ecological ideas, very contemporary architectural practices based on end-user participation, collective theatrical work involving and activating the local community, or progressive educational concepts, including in the field of sexual education, are only some of the aspects of the rapid socio-cultural change occurring in the interwar period.

12        Monika Talarczyk analyses the circumstances of the preproduction and possible inspirations of *Black Wings*, a film that couldn't happen because of its controversial subject matter (the economic crisis and coal miner strikes in the Zagłębie region); cf. *The Black Wings of START in the Would-Be History of Prewar Polish Cinema*, in this volume, pp. 118–133.

# **a teaspoon from a new world**



Anna Szczepańska



Don't think the world is a tavern — created  
For fighting your way, with fists and with nails  
To the bar, where you gorge and you guzzle, while others  
Look on, glassy-eyed, from a distance  
Swooning from hunger, and swallowing spit  
Drawing their swollen cramped bellies in tighter  
Oh, don't think the world is a tavern.

Icchok Lejbusz Perec<sup>1</sup>

Among the thousands of documents related to the history of the Bund held at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research at West 16th Street in New York<sup>2</sup>, a single item from the Włodzimierz Medem Sanatorium has been preserved, labelled as 'a teaspoon from the Medem Sanatorium'. If the label is correct, then the teaspoon doubtless served to feed hundreds of, mainly Jewish, children from poor working-class backgrounds who for several months were able to live and study at one of the most progressive secular Jewish institutions in pre-WWII Poland. Blackened by time, the spoon, which by some strange coincidence has found itself in the archive between two vintage newspapers, is finely made, decorated with an elegant floral motif. It is a material trace of the Medem Sanatorium's mission: to feed the body and the soul in order to lead children towards autonomy and self-determination, which are the prerequisites of the arrival of a 'new world'.

In this children's republic, admired by pedagogues from all over Europe, the spoon was not just a means for the adult to feed the child. Before every meal, it was laid carefully on the table by a child from the 'meal committee', which was responsible for setting the tables at fixed hours, just as the shoe committee oversaw the cleanliness and proper condition of all footwear at the sanatorium, and the bed committee made

1 Icchok Lejbusz Perec, *Don't Think*, trans. Jeffrey (Shaye) Mallow.

2 The Author wishes to thank the following persons and institutions for their help and support in researching this essay: Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah (Annette Wiewiorka), YIVO Archive (Leo Greenbaum and Marek Web), Les Documents cinématographiques (Brigitte Berg), FINA FilMOTEKA Narodowa — Instytut Audiowizualny (Anna Sienkiewicz-Rogowska and Elżbieta Wysocka), Deutsche Kinemathek (Martin Koerber), Museum of Modern Art in New York (Katie Trainor), Archive of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, London (Wojtek Deluga), Édition Lobster (Serge Bromberg), Centre Medem — Arbeter Ring, Paris; the Author also thanks Lea Minczeles, Stanisław Janicki, Konstancja Ford, Monika Talarczyk, and Sylvie Lindeperg.



Stills from *Mir kumen on* (*Children Must Laugh*), dir. Aleksander Ford, 1936, after digital restoration, National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute





sure the bedclothes were neat and clean. The pedagogical staff hoped that such a precise division of duties would instil a sense of self-reliance and communal responsibility in every child. The ultimate goal was a world drawn along more brotherly lines, one that would no longer be but a 'tavern . . . a market . . . a wasteland'.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of the sanatorium, built in 1926 in Miedzeszyn, some 20 kilometres south-east of Warsaw, was to prevent and treat diseases, particularly respiratory ones, in children aged six to sixteen, 80 percent of which came from the families of workers, craftsmen, and low-level employees. The manner of their treatment was informed by progressive pedagogical theories as well as the Bund's secular and socialist values. From its rise in the 19th century, the Jewish labour movement fought against discrimination and worked towards the enfranchisement of Jewish workers,<sup>4</sup> eventually developing a large network of educational facilities. The Medem Sanatorium was like one of those fantasy lands from early-19th-century Yiddish poems:

High on a mountain, on green grass,  
as a child I dreamed of happiness.<sup>5</sup>

In 1935, roughly ten years into the sanatorium's history, the standard-setting institution felt the consequences of the radicalisation of Polish politics. As the Sanacja government grew increasingly authoritarian, minorities, particularly the Jewish one, were hard hit.<sup>6</sup> The sanatorium's budget was cut so sharply that its very existence seemed in peril.<sup>7</sup> In order to be able to continue feeding, treating, and instructing his juvenile patients, the facility's director, Szlojme Giliński, came up with the brilliant idea of using the era's most modern and effective medium: film.<sup>8</sup> He commissioned Aleksander Ford, one of the most promising Jewish filmmakers of his generation, to make a film that would promote the institution but also help raise funds for it by reaching Bund sympathisers around the world, especially in the United States. The 27-year-old Ford seemed perfect for the job. Born Mosze Lifszyc, he was a member of the leftist START Association of Film Enthusiasts<sup>9</sup> and an advocate of 'socially useful' film. He had a proven track record, both as an author of documentaries (*The Legion*

3 Ibid.

4 As Henri Minczeles explains, the General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, founded in Vilnius on 25–28 September 1897 and known commonly as the Bund, was firmly anti-Zionist and quickly adopted the 'course of autonomy, opposing both nationalism and assimilation'; idem, *Histoire générale du Bund, un mouvement révolutionnaire juif*, Paris: Denoël, 1999, p. 67.

5 Chaim Nachman Bialik, *High on a Mountain*, translated by Zackary Sholem Berger.

6 Georges Mink, *Polska w sercu Europy*, trans. Magdalena Kozłowska, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2017, p. 115–134.

7 Magdalena Kozłowska, '(Nie)urzeczywistniona utopia', *Midrasz*, November–December 2015.

8 The project wouldn't have happened without the support of Bund activist Szlojme Mendelsohn and Central Jewish School Organisation (Centralna Żydowska Organizacja Szkolna, CISZO), director Chaim Kazdan. Cf. Roman Włodek, 'Dokąd prowadzi droga młodych', *Midrasz*, November–December 2015.

9 Cf. Monika Talarczyk-Gubała, *Wanda Jakubowska. Od nowa*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2015, pp. 37–58.

of the Street) and of features (*Mascotte*; *Awakening*; *Sabra*), even if his productions were hardly mainstream at the time.<sup>10</sup> With the help of writer and PPS activist Wanda Wasilewska, writer Jakub Pat, and cinematographer Stanisław Lipiński, in summer 1935 Ford began shooting footage for the film, which was originally meant solely as a fundraiser.

Due to the nature of the project, his brief was clearly defined: the film was to document the institution's daily life while conveying the ideas of humanism and social progress that the Medem Sanatorium championed. But Ford, informed by Soviet avant-garde art of the 1920s, knew that a pedagogical and ideological pamphlet, even a persuasive one, wouldn't suffice. In order to convince potential donors to chip in their hard earned dollars for the sake of an institution based in a small Polish town of an unpronounceable name, which they surely wouldn't be able to locate on the map, it was necessary, besides providing the necessary information, to win their hearts and minds. The key issue — the *Grundproblem*, as Sergei Eisenstein would have it — was to find the right form, one able to appeal to the viewer's conscience. Ford's purpose was therefore to raise the film's status from a semi-commercial to a propaganda artistic work so that he would fulfil his contractual obligation without compromising his own ambitions as an auteur.

Studying the origins of *Mir kumen on* (*Children Must Laugh*) and the research materials used by Ford and his crew, we can try to imagine how a publicity film for the Medem Sanatorium might look like. *In Sun and Joy*<sup>11</sup>, a brochure published in 1933, lists the institution's goals, admission requirements (age, ethnicity, language, social background), hygienic and medical considerations (food, materials), as well as the sports, leisure, and arts classes offered by the pedagogical team. Also the admission sheet, filled on the day a child was admitted to the facility, reflects the surprisingly modern nature of the educational model practiced in Miedzeszyn. Divided into six sections, the questionnaire sought to precisely recreate the patient's life path so far: the circumstances of their birth, any special physical or mental characteristics, parents' social background, living conditions, habits and character traits. Do they sleep well at night? Do they happen to lose their temper? Do they suck their thumb? It was thus a cross between a medical record book and a sociological survey, helpful for educators and teachers in their dealings with the child. Postcards published by the Medem Sanatorium show the different spaces that were made available to Ford and his crew as locations: a modern-looking building with large windows set near a grove a trees, with large rooms (dining room, biological laboratory, dormitory, library) abundantly stocked with medical and pedagogical materials. Ford could have simply accepted the administrative-medical logic and made the film revolve around the efforts of the institution's staff, accompanying it with voiceover commentary praising the methods they employed.

10 Stanisław Janicki, *Aleksander Ford*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1967, pp. 6–46.

11 *W słońcu i w radości. Dziecko w Sanatorjum im. Wł. Medema w Miedzeszynie*, Miedzeszyn: Zarząd Sanatorjum dla Dzieci im. Wł. Medema, 1933.

But he did nothing of the sort. In order to highlight the quality and modernity of the place, which was quite spectacular for Polish standards, he decided to use the technique of contrast. The first sequence, starting right after the opening credits, shows — without a word of commentary — the daily life of the children before they have been taken in. We see the streets of a Warsaw slum, where poor proletarian families live in difficult conditions, crowded together in dark, cramped spaces, performing arduous daily chores. The children raised in such places by parents overburdened with the toil of life, malnourished and meagrely dressed, are doomed to their fate, and the only way for them to have any fun is to play outside, in the seedy backyards and perilous streets.

*Mir kumen on* is thus based on the dialectic principle, simple and effective: the sunlit garden of Eden — the sanatorium — becomes meaningful only when juxtaposed with a gloomy urban reality, filmed in Warsaw on streets like Gęsia Street, Smocza Street, or Franciszkańska Street. It is possible, it says, offering hope, to leave behind the wretched conditions, the which are the cause of diseases and a whole range of mental disorders. The contrast is heartening. As a contemporary critic noted, 'Darkness gives way to light, the run-down house walls step aside. The film vibrates with air and space, and under speeding clouds, set amid greenery and trees, there stands a large white house. We are at the Medem Sanatorium near Warsaw, among a large bunch of cheerful and happy kids.'<sup>12</sup> This dialectical strategy brings to mind the most beautiful peaks of committed literature which already 70 years earlier alleged that the industrial 'society is culpable, in that it does not afford instruction gratis; it is responsible for the night which it produces. This soul is full of shadow; sin is therein committed. The guilty one is not the person who has committed the sin, but the person who has created the shadow'.<sup>13</sup> The opposition between the shadow of misery and the light of education and modern urban architecture can also be found in the socially conscious photography from the period following the 1929 crisis. Suffice it to mention here the photographs of Aleksander Minorski, a member of the START collective. In the series *The Weal and Woe of Our Children*, devoted to the conditions of their living in Poland, the dialectic, consistently employed, determines the visual montage; interpretation is informed by a clear commentary delivered in the name of the children: 'At home the conditions for study aren't always that good. We are happy to go to the courtyard of our school, where we can play and do our homework.' On the left we see a dark room, lit with a kerosene lamp around which children have gathered to read a book. On the same page, on the right side, we can admire a spacious room of a modern school, where everyone has access to plenty of natural light. Social progress thus works in this binary and Manichean form for the sake of the cause, and the reader has no other choice but to agree with the visually impeccable argumentation.

12 Wanda Kragen, 'Zakazany film', *Oblicze Dnia*, 30 April 1936.

13 Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, translated by Isabel F. Hapgood.

But the contemporary censors proved extremely watchful. *Mir kumen on* was banned, mainly because of its opening sequence, which one of the censors, Józef Redliński, accused of ‘feeding on the poverty of the masses and promoting the communist ideology . . . posing threat to the vital interests of the country’. Another fragment, showing solidarity between the Sanatorium kids and striking Polish workers, only made things worse in the eyes of the Central Film Bureau. But the ban immediately becomes the subject of polemical comments in the press. Authors such as Antoni Słonimski or Wanda Kragen express their astonishment and ask ironically how a fight against tuberculosis, a return to nature, a promotion of sports and hygiene, and the teaching of solidarity and art can ‘pose a threat to the vital interests of the country’.<sup>14</sup> Such violent reactions made no difference, though, and the film was banned right after the completion of production in 1936. It was screened in Poland only eight decades later, in August 2017, on the initiative of Serge Bromberg and Lea Minczeles, in association with the Deutsche Kinemathek, the New York Museum of Modern Art, and the Polish National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute, institutions that made it possible to restore a copy of the film in its original and full version.<sup>15</sup>

But the fact of the ban was quickly seized upon abroad. During the film’s first official screening in Paris in March 1936, the socialist filmmaker and biologist, Jean Painlevé, delivered in the Salle Pleyel a scathing attack on the Polish authorities: ‘Under a government that is oppressively both racially and socially, the Jewish working class in Poland is one of the most wretched in the world. Having transferred from the authority of Tsarist Russia to that of Polish capitalism, this class continues to fight for its right to work and right to culture.’ The draft of the speech, held at the Painlevé archive in Paris, betrays a telling uncertainty: the author crossed out ‘Polish capitalism’, replacing it with ‘fascism’.<sup>16</sup> The film’s defenders in America harkened back to the French filmmaker’s argumentation, speaking of the ‘medieval squalor of life in Polish ghettos’.<sup>17</sup> Ford’s film was presented in the United States as coming from a country where fascism has grown strong and as such, it should be distributed as widely as possible by the Bund network to oppose the ideology’s spread in Europe. US critics elaborated on this argumentation, suggesting *Mir kumen on* was a ‘first step in a “Labor cinema” to combat the poison that has been oozing from Cinecittà’.<sup>18</sup> Ford’s picture thus became a work of counterpropaganda, its purposes stretching far beyond social conflict in Poland.

The film is indeed an accusation, but its greatest achievement lies in its virtuosic promotion of the Bund’s progressive, secular, and socialist ideology. In order

14 Wanda Kragen.

15 Released in France as part of the DVD set *Trésors du cinéma Yiddish*, Édition Lobster, 2016. Cf. Ania Szczepańska, ‘Trésors du cinéma yiddish’, *Journal Film of Preservation*, no. 97, 2017, p. 142.

16 *A propos du film sur le Préventorium populaire Wladimir Medem*, Archives Jean Painlevé, Paris, no. 20091.

17 Film reviews, 6 April 1938, YIVO Archive, no. 244.

18 Gus Tyler, film review, YIVO Archive, no. 438.

to clearly convey the modern nature of the sanatorium's pedagogical model, the director made an important choice: instead of focusing on the work of the grownups, he decided to portray the hope for a better future by turning the camera primarily at the children, their well-rested bodies and smiling faces, enlivened with laughter and collective song. In fact, Ford is serious about respecting the principles of the pupils' autonomy and self-government as well as of learning through play, praised by pedagogues from all over the world visiting the facility. Translated into the language of film, they manifest in the kids' vital energy and artistic talent.

The film's appeal was due also to its use of a cinematic idiom influenced by some of the most cutting-edge productions of the time. The scene of the arrival at the sanatorium is emblematic in this respect: the children's coughing turns into their feverish repetition of the Yiddish phrase 'helz mi' (help me), which also imitates the mechanical rhythm of the train that carries the kids to the sanatorium, delivering them, as it were, from their lamentable condition. The spoken words then give way to a powerful children's chorus, the song *Mir kumen on*. Placed centre stage, the Yiddish language sets the editing rhythm, bringing to mind the poetic verses in *Mailing Post*, a film made in the same year by John Grierson, the father of the propaganda documentary, as an innovative form of publicity for the British post. The Yiddish poems, political chants, and folk songs (e.g., a lullaby sung in Polish, showing the patients' bilingualism) are delivered facing the camera, and as the singing children wave their legs, the vigour of their movement becomes contagious. Ford's cinematic inspirations, mainly Russian, French, and German (as suggested by the titles mentioned in the programming manifesto of START), can be felt throughout the film. The opening sequence, shot in Warsaw, echoes the aesthetics of avant-garde documentaries from the late 1920s, such as Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927) or Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). The concept of 'attraction', formulated by Eisenstein, is tapped on two levels here. Firstly, to add variety through children's artistic performances inspired by folk culture — circus, commedia dell'arte, puppet theatre — which constitute an important motif of the last part of the film. In fact, the *New York Times* praised the casting of the movie: 'Hollywood scouts would do well to locate some of the children, especially little Zalmen and Lazar, and the pretty girl radio announcer.' But attraction as defined by Eisenstein also has its other side as an aggressive element, attacking the viewer and provoking a violent psychological reaction in them: in, for example, the image of a horse galloping through the Warsaw streets, menacing the kids' frail little bodies, or in numerous close-ups of hands shaking (in the scene of the children greeting the striking Polish workers) or giving applause. The imagery clearly conveys the idea of fraternity and solidarity. We could repeat after a US critic that the 'camera has succeeded where words have failed'.<sup>19</sup> This success stems doubtless from the wealth of the visual forms employed by the director and his ability to transform verbal discourses in a poetic style characteristic of the cinematic experiments of the era.

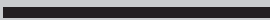


Ford's talent is also to combine the documentary diversity of real-life vignettes with a perfect knack for the plot: the children can play their roles so convincingly because every scene has been sensibly directed, with the cooperation of young non-professional actors. The script employs various mood ranges. The viewer is sometimes moved by a pedagogue's kindness, like when a teacher catches the young Łazarz stealing muffins and tells him to better wrap them in a clean napkin before pocketing them. We also smile when two boys who have been at odds are told to clean the floor together and do so to a choreography reminiscent of contemporary slapstick comedy. The sanatorium's rules and organisation presented in such scenes arouse our sympathy as we develop an emotional attachment to the different characters. Performing the tasks entrusted to them — gardening, cleaning, producing weather reports, staging theatre shows, keeping a daily log — the kids begin to understand the world around them and to function in it. Thus they gradually release themselves from adult authority, becoming free and responsible in accordance with the child development theory and methodology propounded by Maria Montessori and Janusz Korczak. The closing theatre scene, which brings to mind *Glumov's Diary* by Eisenstein (1923), represents the culmination of this process: like Pinocchio, the children cut off the strings that controlled them and start dancing merrily, 'in sun and joy'.

In this sense, *Mir kumen on* embodies a utopia, one that was realised and then brutally destroyed. The teaspoon preserved at the YIVO in New York moves us so much for the same reason as the Ford film does: we are aware it is part of a world that has vanished and is no longer. Like the prisoners' belongings emerging from the ground during excavations at Auschwitz in Andrzej Brzozowski's film *Archaeology* (1967), the Medem Sanatorium teaspoon represents a fragile trace of a tragedy, an echo of which can also be heard in a wire sent to New York on 3 December 1942: '250 sanatorium children murdered, like most staff. Staff members had a choice and decided to share the kids' fate'. In August 1942, they had all been taken to Treblinka. *Mir kumen on* sounds today like a revolutionary song, but also like a requiem.

**'the child  
— already  
a resident,  
a citizen, and  
already a person.'**

Between Practice and Utopia



Marta Ciesielska

When will the honest moment arrive when the  
texts of adult and child life become equivalent?

Janusz Korczak<sup>1</sup>

A young medicine student — Henryk Goldszmit, later to be known as Janusz Korczak — wrote as early as in 1899: ‘It’s not so that children will eventually become people — they are people, aye, they are people, not dolls: you can appeal to their reason, they will respond, you can appeal to their heart, they will empathise with you’.<sup>2</sup> From then on, the idea that ‘children won’t be but are people’ will become a major theme of his creative and public work. As a doctor, educator, activist, writer, lecturer, speaker, court expert, he will passionately promote<sup>3</sup> it and, perhaps even more importantly, practice it — first of all at the two educational institutions that he worked most closely with, the Orphans’ Home (Dom Sierot) (1912–1942) and the Our Home (Nasz Dom) institute for Polish children (Pruszków 1919, from 1928 at Bielany, Warsaw). Very early on, Korczak joined the grassroots movement for the rights of marginalised social classes and groups, which from the turn of the centuries gained momentum due to a plethora of strong modernisation and emancipation impulses — national, social, feminist, or educational ones.<sup>4</sup> In the Polish lands and then the reborn Polish state, it was animated by ‘progressive’ and ‘defiant’ writers, doctors, lawyers, educators, or activists, directly or indirectly involved in pro-independence work,<sup>5</sup> in many cases considering

1 Janusz Korczak, *Pedagogika żartobliwa. Moje wakacje. Gadaninki starego doktora*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo J. Morkowicza, 1939.

2 Janusz [Korczak], ‘Rozwój idei miłości bliźniego w XIX wieku’, *Czytelnia dla Wszystkich*, no. 52, 1899, quoted in idem, *Dzieła*, vol. 3, part 1, Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Latona, 1994, p. 226. He signed the text ‘Janusz’; he will adopt ‘Janusz Korczak’ as his basic nom de plume only in early 1900.

3 ‘I work with public awareness to awaken respect for the child and a sense of responsibility for bringing them to this world’; idem, ‘Bez gniewu’, *Praca Szkolna*, no. 2, 1929, quoted in idem, *Dzieła*, vol. 13, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2017, p. 157.

4 ‘... the novators started advocating the idea that the child does not belong exclusively to their father who has the right to sell them, kill them, or eat them. And there was indignation: “How so? I’ve given them life and have no right to do that? Madness!” And: “Independent women? Nonsense. Civic rights for Jews? Rubbish. Discussions and negotiations with hired workers? Clownery.” The child cries for liberation ...’; idem, ‘Wiosna i dziecko’, 1921, in *ibid.*, p. 31.

5 Towards the end of his life, Korczak stated that he had never been a member of any political party, but that he had been ‘in close touch with many underground politicians’ from the left side of the scene; cf. *Podanie do Biura Personalnego Rady Żydowskiej*, 9 February 1942, in idem, *Pamiętnik i inne pisma z getta*, Warsaw: W.A.B., 2012, p. 156. The Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS) was the original affiliation of Maria (Maryna) Rogowska-Falska, who ran the Our Home orphanage, and of some of the Our Home Society activists, e.g., its president, Stanisław Siedlecki, who was also a board member of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa, WSM).

their activism first and foremost as service and a civic duty. At the same time, the consequences of war felt in the first decades of the 20th century — oppressions that afflicted the civilian masses, tragically aggravating the living conditions of the weakest, i.e., children — meant that from the birth of independent Poland strong efforts were made to put their problem on top of the agenda, in the legislative, institutional, an even ideological-propagandistic sense.

Even before the end of World War I (at the turn of July and August 1918<sup>6</sup>), a congress of Polish doctors demanded the recognition of 'children's right to state protection from birth' and the founding of a 'national institution for child welfare, in whose hands there would be united all state aid for infants and children up to a certain legally-defined age', a Child Ministry ('The institution should be in charge of all matters relating to the life, health, upbringing and rights of the child') or a Ministry for Child Welfare and Child Code ('all regulations pertaining to the welfare and protection of children should be codified into a separate law').<sup>7</sup>

The following were recognised as the key policy areas, guaranteed by state law and implemented by an institutional system: protection of maternity; welfare of orphaned, working, sick, handicapped, criminal children; organization of their free time (apart from school education); educating and raising the awareness of doctors, pedagogues, lawyers, etc.<sup>8</sup>

Such designs reflected the desired course and scope of action, but the actual realities significantly limited the possibility of their implementation. It is worth noting, though, that the medical community, formative for Korczak, played a particularly influential and pivotal role in the movement for children's rights. This was confirmed by the introduction, on the initiative of the Polish Paediatric Society (which Korczak was a member of), of the following formula to the Polish Constitution of March 1921: 'Children without sufficient parental care, neglected in their upbringing, have the right to state protection and aid'; an appropriate law was passed by parliament in 1923.

Poland at the time was the subject of various international campaigns and initiatives (many organisations had their offices or missions here), and the communities that Korczak was associated with actively partook in them. When the international community had approved the first joint document on the duties of 'men and women of all nationalities' towards children, that is the Geneva Declaration, announced by the Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants in 1923 and adopted by the League of

6 Discharged from the Russian army, Korczak returned to Warsaw in June 1918; there is no mention of his participation in the congress, but among those in attendance were his close acquaintances, e.g., Julian Kramsztyk, quoted in *Pamiętnik II Zjazdu Higienistów Polskich*, Warsaw, 1918, pp. 171, 161, 170, 173.

7 The latter postulate would be voiced again: '... a special code of children's rights should be enacted, modelled on the British Children's Act, passed in 1908'; Tadeusz Jaroszyński, 'Psychologia i profilaktyka przestępczości u dzieci', *Opieka nad Dzieckiem*, no. 2, 1923.

8 Cf. St[efania] Sempotowska, 'Wnioski w sprawie „Opieki nad dzieckiem”', *Robotnik*, no. 166, 1919. At a teachers' congress in spring 1919, Sempotowska floated also the idea of a 'children's charter of rights'.

Nations in 1924, it was also signed in Warsaw, by the Polish-American Committee for Children's Aid (on which Korczak represented Jewish institutions), in the name of 'institutions providing aid to children in Poland', on 28 March 1925, at their congress, which was attended by official government figures.

The declaration was widely promoted, particularly in the 1920s, including directly by Korczak<sup>9</sup>, who in the democratic circles working professionally and through activism on behalf of children was considered an authority and a practitioner with a proven track record. Working as part of a wider movement, he often anticipated — as a pioneer, or perhaps a visionary<sup>10</sup> — the contemporary trends. Already in the first edition of his *Jak kochać dziecko. Dziecko w rodzinie* [How to love the child. The child in the family] (written during the war, published in October 1918, though dated 1919), he called 'for a *Magna Carta Libertatis*, for children's rights', formulating them as follows: 1. 'The child's right to death' (controversial to this day); 2. 'The child's right to the present day'; 3. 'The child's right to be themselves'; in the second edition, he added 'The child's right to express their thoughts, to participate actively in our reflections and judgements on them' (1929<sup>11</sup>). In the last part of the tetralogy (*Jak kochać dziecko. Dom Sierot*, 1920), he described his primary workplace, which he co-run with Stefania Wilczyńska, i.e., the Orphans' Home, emphasising the charges' agency in the institution's life: 'The child became the shelter's host, staff member, and manager.'<sup>12</sup> A special role in this mini-community, with its own, autonomous, democratic institutions, organised on a partnership basis, with laws pertaining to all of its members, was played by the court and its procedures (e.g., the election of judges by lot or the lodging of complaints). Its establishment and operation (which wasn't without its early difficulties, honestly recounted by Korczak) was to serve a new praxis of coexistence between people: grown-up and juvenile, strong and weak, 'importunate' and 'quiet' ones (like at the Our Home, the court tried both kids and adults). Korczak argued that the court 'can become a germ of the child's emancipation, [for] it leads to a constitution, to the announcement of a declaration of children's rights'.<sup>13</sup> And on his own invaluable

9 He quoted it for the first time in the annual report of the 'Aid to Orphans' Society [Towarzystwo 'Pomoc dla Sierot'], which funded the Orphanage, for the year 1924 (published 1925), and for the last time in December 1939 and in 1940, in the *To Christian Citizens* appeals for relief for the Orphans' Home.

10 An early utopian vision of an institution leading for social change (published by Korczak in 1907/1908) was called up — and confronted with its actual implementation, i.e., the Orphans' Home — by Korczak's fellow medical student and in the 1930s the Minister of Social Welfare, Stefan Hubicki: 'I read *The School of Life* a long time ago. Then I learned that that school of life . . . a literary chimera, had found its realisation. . . . After the Bolshevik war, I met Dr. Goldszmit at the Łazienki Park with two citizens of that Republic. The citizens were ten years old, barefoot, in skimpy clothes, but a short conversation made me aware that they were not only very intelligent but also had a strong sense of something that is seldom encountered at this age: a strong sense of civic duty'; *Jubileuszowe Walne Zebranie Towarzystwa „Pomoc dla Sierot”*. *Stenogram*, 1933, quoted in Janusz Korczak, *Dzieła*, vol. 14, part 1, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2008, pp. 157, 158.

11 In early 1929, Korczak published his policy manifesto, *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [The child's right to respect], in a way summing up his experiences from the active 1920s.

12 Idem, *Dzieła*, vol. 7, Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Latona, 1993, p. 276.

13 Ibid., p. 297; next quotation, p. 352.

experience as a defendant: 'those couple of cases were a cornerstone of my own formation as a new, "constitutional" educator who does no harm to children not because he likes or loves them, but because there exists an institution that defends them from the educator's [that is, the public authority's — MC] lawlessness, licence, or despotism'.

In the second half of the 1920s, as part of a lecture series called *Prawa dziecka jako jednostki* [The rights of the child as an individual], Korczak raised the postulate of the right to a 'full citizenship in one's own world' and the 'democratisation of education', as well as defining the educator's role as a 'children's rights ombudsman'<sup>14</sup> (which anticipated international practice by many decades — the first children's commissioner was established in Norway in 1981).

Korczak's historical experience was never to be an exact model to follow, but rather an inspiration to seek one's own path, and his at times documentary descriptions were shared 'educational moments', a testimony of practice and reflection, an insightful account of participant observation (Korczak's legacy is, in large part, a literature of the personal document), supporting a 'yearning for a better life that isn't now but will be once, a life of Truth and Justice'<sup>15</sup>. In today's discourse of democracy, with adjectives (deliberative, liberal, sovereign, totalitarian) or without them, of social inclusion and exclusion, of community building (above divisions, despite divisions, its redefinition), of participation, even tutoring<sup>16</sup>, can Korczak — and he himself encouraged critical analyses<sup>17</sup> — provide us with lessons that will serve to reinforce the rule of law, strengthen civil society, shore up human rights, that will help us to better understand what he have achieved, what we have forgotten, what we have overlooked, what we must yet strive for?

14 Besides Korczak's 'revolutionary' series, the courses organised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs covered more traditional subjects, including 'child physiology and psychology, child mental disorders, basic knowledge of social welfare, general hygiene and physical education, or the organisation of closed facilities'; 'Projekt programu wykładów na kursach dokształcających dla czynnych wychowawców w zakładach opiekuńczo-wychowawczych', *Opieka nad Dzieckiem*, no 6, 1925. By the late 1920s, children's rights had stricken off the curriculum; Korczak continued to lecture but now it was on 'nocturia'. The lectures are known from abstracts only, cf. 'Kursy dokształcające dla wychowawców zakładów opiekuńczo-wychowawczych. Uzasadnienie i programy', 1928, in idem, *Dzieła*, vol. 13, pp. 313–314.

A single lecture, *Prawa dziecka, jako żywej istoty, człowieka, niedoświadczonego pracownika* [The rights of the child as a living being, human being, and inexperienced employee], remained on Korczak's curriculum, *Principles of Boarding-School Education*, at the State Institute of Special Pedagogy.

15 Idem, 'Pożegnanie', *W Stońcu*, no. 12, 1919, quoted in idem, *Dzieła*, vol. 11, part 1, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2003, p. 218.

16 The care system at the Orphans' Home and at Our Home (pupils caring for other pupils, e.g., novices or those requiring extra support) is an example of effective peer tutoring.

17 'Instead of parasitizing on the meritorious ones . . . let us feel like their fellow citizens; let us study their life like a corpse to learn the anatomy of our own, for every life has a skeleton, muscles, heart, brain, entrails, and an outer shell'; idem, 'Stowo wstępne', in Jędrzej Śniadecki, *O fizycznym wychowaniu dzieci*, 1920, quoted in Korczak, *Dzieła*, vol. 13, p. 12.



Janusz Korczak with his pupils in front of the Orphans' Home building, Warsaw, Krochmalna 92 Street, 1920s, Korczakianum — Museum of Warsaw

### A Mini-Anthology of Texts

Children are rational beings, well aware of the needs, difficulties and hurdles of their life. Not despotic dictate, enforced rigour and mistrustful control, but tactful agreement, faith in experience, cooperation and cohabitation.

Janusz Korczak, 'The child's right to respect', 1929 (*Dzieta*, vol. 7, p. 448)

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... life plays out a whole gamut complex events ... of the child society — a society in the literal sense of the word — with frictions and conflicting interests — the victories of the strong and smart — the persecution or scorn of the weak and clumsy — a society capable of amazing outbursts of justice or altruism — magnanimous or selfish and cruel.

Janusz Korczak, 'Michałówka. A summer camp for Jewish children (From a superintendent's notes)', *Izraelita*, no. 44, 1904 (*Dzieta*, vol. 5, p. 251)

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The lucid democratism of children knows no hierarchies. Up to a certain age they are hurt by the sweat of the worker and a hungry peer, the misfortune of an abused horse, a slaughtered



chicken. They feel close to the dog and the bird, equal to the butterfly and the flower, finding a brother in a pebble and a seashell. Non-solidary in the haughty pride of a nouveau-riche, the child knows not that only man has a soul.

Janusz Korczak, 'The child's right to respect', 1929 (*Dzieta*, vol. 7, p. 435)

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[The child] senses the moment when men come to terms with their fellow humans, not only whites with blacks, the rich with the poor, men with women, and adults with kids — but also when they come to terms with the sun and stars, water and air, with the white birch tree and the lily of the valley, with the dog and the lark.

Janusz Korczak, *Spring and the Child*, 1921 (*Dzieta*, vol. 13, pp. 17–18)

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Children are tomorrow. They will be the employee, the citizen, the employer, but we need to wait. Wait patiently. . . . Look, think, and wait again. Act very, very carefully, and at certain — appropriate — moments only, through a small gesture, whisper, smile, slight frown. Neither the hammer nor the saw, nor the scythe will teach the child the method of action, a shout, a strong word will frighten them away.

Janusz Korczak, 'Our Home', *Robotnik*, no. 410, 1919 (*Dzieta*, vol. 14, part 1, pp. 193–194)

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Contemporary education is based on the premise that the educator is responsible for the children to society, whereas we want to predicate it on such principles where the educator would be responsible for society to the children.

The purpose of contemporary education is to prepare children for life, when years later they become people. We want to convince the general public that children already are people, that they should be treated like living and already human beings.

Our goal is to organise the child society based on the principles of justice, fraternity, the equality of rights and duties.

Lacking better models than those developed by adult society, we shall be emulating them, adapting them to the needs and characteristics of the child society.

We wish to replace discipline with order, dictate with voluntary adaptation to the forms of collective life, lifeless moralising with a joyous striving towards self-perfection and self-transformation.

We place self-respect on the same footing as kindness for fellow human beings, or rather fellow citizens.

We must do away with the view that the child is supposed to feed on the mercy of the crumbs offered to them by a tender, lenient, or caressing heart of the mother or a philanthropist.

We shall strive to build an international organisation of children and youth, encouraging its members to agree on a common holiday, common banner, common song and work, and common language, to demand emancipation for themselves.



Rather than mould and correct the child, we want to understand and communicate with them, help their servile, mendicant soul, help them shake off the dirt that has infiltrated and gripped the child society as a pestilence of the adults. Children have been demoralised by being fed ideas and ideals whose realisation is decades away. . . . We must proceed slowly and carefully, educating and mentoring ourselves watchfully under the kids' direction.

Janusz Korczak, 'Report of the "Our Home" Society for 24 November 1921—30 October 1923' (*Dzieła*, vol. 14, part 1, pp. 196, 199)

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The educator is not obliged to assume responsibility for the distant future — but he is wholly responsible for the present day. I know that this statement will be misunderstood. They claim the opposite, erroneously in my opinion, when speaking honestly. But is it honestly? Perhaps falsely. It's easier to defer responsibility, delay it into a vague tomorrow, than to give account of every hour already today.

I don't know, I'm searching, asking questions. Forging myself and maturing in fatigue. Work is the most precious part of my most personal life. Not the easy, but most comprehensively effective.

Janusz Korczak, 'Theory and practice', *Szkoła Specjalna*, no. 2, 1924/1925 (*Dzieła*, vol. 13, pp. 90, 88)

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I will stubbornly keep on defending this premise in defiance of the cliché of the future member of society, the future citizen. Those who ignore childhood, aiming at the distant future, will miss their target.

Janusz Korczak, 'The educator is the defender', *Szkoła Specjalna*, no. 2, 1926/1927 (*Dzieła*, vol. 13, p. 120)

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The child — already a resident, a citizen, and already a person. Not in the future but now. The child has an antiquity and a past. They have memories and mementos. The childhood years are real life, not its harbinger. The joy and pain are real, not imaginary. No bona fide moment of their serious — and not jocular or tentative — life will ever return, worth in itself as a whole — collapsing — it makes grooves. Not empty moralising or platitudes about future tasks and duties, only the present ones. Near terrain, small fields where they gather experiences, try their hand, celebrate victories, suffer defeats, resume their efforts, reap the harvest — exercise, toughen up, and control themselves.

The child looks around, rejoices, wonders, worries. The world is beautiful, abounding with joyful surprises and proud victories. But it's not only sunny and warm, merry and bright. It's also hard, stern, cunning, cruel.

...

The child trusts. They want to believe in strong, balanced, mature truth and good. [Our job is] to gently prepare them for the fact that the ideal is a dream, whereas weakness and imperfection are reality. That we are children too. And not to outwit and deceive them. . . .

We are searching for new educational methods. The clash between the old generation and the new one will be the more violent, the more the former try to endure and preserve and the latter to recklessly hurry and goad on.

Conflict can be irritating and unproductive or it can be creative, depending on whether the warring sides arm themselves with enough evidence to support their arguments.

Janusz Korczak, 'Introduction', in Maria Rogowska-Falska, *The 'Our Home' Care and Educational Facility. An Information Sketch*, 1928 (*Dzieła*, vol. 14, part 1, pp. 204, 207, 208)

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The Arbitration Court — as a prelude to the child's emancipation. As an attempt to regulate the individual's coexistence with another individual, with the group, their cooperation with adults — a path of the moral judgement of deeds already accomplished.

From moral judgement — to preventive measures, shaping the *law* . . .

To spur the child to ever greater achievement — by allowing them to learn what the group thinks about them: the *plebiscite*.

To spur them to achievement by indicating grades, setting specific tasks and growth targets: civic qualifications.

Newsletter, communications: the reporting and informational bodies.

Calendar. — Chronicle. — Reminiscences. Accounts, stories, and narratives by children.

. . .

Searching for ways to reconcile the principle of transparency with that of respect for the child's inner world, with discretion regarding their inner efforts.

Searching for the line of life growth: from the control of opinion, external evaluation — to self-control and self-evaluation.

From obeying external law — to obeying moral law — in oneself.

. . .

Civic qualifications teach the stern law of life that one bears the consequences of one's deeds.

Civic qualifications teach how to climb arduously — rung by rung — upwards.

They offer the joy of victory.

They warn that one can fall again.

And they give a new hope — in the possibility of a new victory.

Maria Rogowska-Falska, 'The 'Our Home' care and educational facility. An information sketch', 1928 (Maria Falska, *Nasz Dom — zrozumieć, porozumieć się, poznać*, vol. 1, ed. Marta Ciesielska, Barbara Puszkin, Warsaw: Muzeum Historyczne m.st. Warszawy, 2007, pp. 32–33, 70–71)

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If they do something bad — forgive them. If they've done it because they didn't know — they know it now. If they've done it unintentionally — they'll be more careful in the future. If they've done it because it's hard for them to adapt — they'll try. If they've done it induced by others — they won't listen to them anymore. . . .

But the Court must protect the quiet so that the pesky and truculent don't harm them, must protect the weak so that the strong don't bully them, must protect the scrupulous and diligent so that the bunglers and idlers don't disturb them. The Court must ensure order, for disorder harms quiet, good, and earnest people more than anyone else.

The Court is not the truth but must pursue the truth. The Court is not justice but must pursue justice. The judges can be wrong — there is nothing shameful in that. The judges can try for things they did themselves. If they too did things for which they are to try others, they are effectively saying that what they did was wrong.

The only shameful thing is for a judge to deliberately make an unfair ruling.

Janusz Korczak, 'The code of the arbitration court at Our Home in Pruszków', *W Słońcu*, no. 5, 1921 (*Dzieta*, vol. 11, part 1, pp. 241–242)

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If during the first couple of days one watches closely how the children get to know each other, one can easily find out that the good ones need help, support, and above all vigilant and careful protection from those few for whom your system is inconvenient.

If the government's duty is to protect the public from violence and abuses by harmful elements, the educator's duty is to protect children from punch, threat, and insult, to protect their property (whether it's a stick or a pebble) and their organisation (whether it's playing ball or building sand castles).

Janusz Korczak, 'How to love the child. Summer camps', 1920, 1929 (*Dzieta*, vol. 11, part 1, p. 262)

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The teacher's duty is to know their students and here in the most uncommon cases to state without anger, without sulking, but rather with regret: 'This one is a nuisance, auguring trouble and worry.'

It is the teacher's duty to protect the class from them now. It is not their role to wonder what is going to happen.

Experience teaches us that there is no child who couldn't improve. If they don't improve, let them live on their own.

We don't know the future: perhaps in the second or third generation they will produce valuable offspring . . .

A reprehensible child is a sick child whom we cannot or don't want to cure. . .

To protect the class, the even-tempered, quiet, and disciplined, from them, so that the troublemakers don't bully, don't punch, don't steal, and lest the whole group be held responsible for their malicious initiative, for anxiety both in the class and in the teacher's feelings.

Janusz Korczak, 'Bez gniewu', *Praca Szkolna*, no. 2, 1929 (*Dzieta*, vol. 13, p. 156)

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If we want to produce good citizens, there is no need to produce idealists. . . No educator will foster a hundred idealists out of a hundred children, a few will emerge on their own, and woe

betide them if they don't know how to count. For money gives you everything except happiness; it even gives you happiness and reason, and health, and morality. Teach the child that it also gives you unhappiness and sickness, that it makes you lose your senses.

Let them spend the money they've earned on ice cream and let them suffer from an upset stomach, let them fall out with a friend over a tenner, let them lose it, gamble it away, let someone steal it from them, let them come to regret buying, let them grab an opportunity to earn a little extra and find out that it wasn't worth it, let them pay for the damage they've done.'

Janusz Korczak, 'How to love the child. The Orphans' Home', 1920, 1929 (*Dzieła*, vol. 7, p. 289)

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... we closely watched the child's moral standing. Play, learning, help in maintaining external order, reconciling the tough requirements of adult society with the views and feelings of the kids, the difficult issue of a hundred different individuals living under one roof — all that clearly confirmed the fact that the child deserves trust, respect, and kindness.

This is corroborated not by compassion, not by leniency, not by forbearance, but by the result of diligent and meticulous research, supported with material evidence. We could stop collecting facts for our own purposes — it is the mistrustful world that needs them now. ...

The child is a human being who hastens towards perfection. In opposition to and in defiance of their own heredity, memories, and reality, they want to improve quickly and categorically; rather than encouraging, one needs to slow them down, show them a contingent way. Not a perfect man but, for now, just a worker and a disciplined citizen.'

Janusz Korczak, '1912–1917' [introduction], in *Report of the 'Aid to Orphans' Society for the year 1927, 1928* (*Dzieła*, vol. 14, part 1, pp. 127–128)

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Ever clearer mental projections through the small group of the pupils into the adult world, its laws and phenomena: from the pupil council to parliaments of the world.

Janusz Korczak, Foreword to the second edition, 'How to Love the Child. Boarding School. Summer Camps. Orphans' Home', 1929 (*Dzieła*, vol. 7, p. 138)

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... the role of the council is to ensure the wellbeing of all those who work, study, and spend half of each day together, to make sure that they don't hurt, disturb, bully, or mock each other, but on the contrary, that they do favours to, help, and care for each other, and keep order. ... The council is not just work, but also struggle.

Who seeks to settle matters through violence or threat of violence, through insult, quarrel, mockery, or behind-the-back crabbing, needs to be forced to respect the rights and demands of the better majority.

... The purpose of the pupil council is to make sure that school life is clear and transparent, open and honest.

Janusz Korczak, 'The pupil council' (parts 1 & 2), *Mały Przegląd*, 16 September 1927 (*Dzieła*, vol. 11, part 3, p. 7)

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... I look with concern at how zealots with the mentality of prison guards, vigorous misanthropes, provident and active careerists (for children — a toady, a bigot, a fox), finally loners — hermits — intellectuals, are forced to do social work in the classroom. 'If you wanted to do it, you'd be able to and could do it'. No, it's actually: 'If I were able to and could do it, then I'd want to do it.'

A child who reads and understands a lot, who listens attentively and asks interesting questions, but who won't explain things to their classmate, won't enlighten them, won't help them — is at first but a rich scrooge (unobliging, stingy, jealous). Reluctance towards him will quickly turn into hatred if the teacher allows him to boss around, demands privileges for him from the rest of class, or points to him as a model to follow.

When are ambition and competition healthy and noble and when are they distorted, false, degenerate? For show, for speculation? How many horses' power that drives the engine, the goal of our efforts? ... The anatomy, physiology, and chemistry of ambition: of a politician, an activist, an educator.

Janusz Korczak, 'The ambitious educator', *Szkola Specjalna*, no. 1, 1938/1939 (*Dzieła*, vol. 13, p. 299)

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... I am amazed by how often educators don't know whether to allow their pupils to complain or to *mendaciously* forbid them to do so, how, tolerating [the practice] reluctantly, they try to restrict it, how they are oblivious to the fact that using complaints as current, understandable, valuable material they can teach children how to submit to each other, how to coexist peacefully...

A complaint is man's most convenient weapon. Not a brawl, not a quarrel, not an insidious settlement, but a bold, loud, open, and earnest: 'He's wronged me. I have the right. I can prove it. I trust I'll win.'

Janusz Korczak, 'The complaint', *Wychowanie Przedszkolne*, no. 6, 1929 (*Dzieła*, vol. 13, pp. 107, 108)

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... in education everything is an experiment — a trial. I try gently and sternly, I try to encourage and to prevent, to accelerate and to delay, to reduce and to exaggerate — we are not going to renounce our programme of trying on behalf of despotic dogma. — A trial should be careful, prudent, safe — and such is our educational system at large. ... Only one-sided, dull, and arrogant self-assurance experiments by despotically dictating its will and views. Yes, it experiments too, but unconsciously and uncritically, trying to impose and enforce ...

Janusz Korczak, [untitled, I], *Tygodnik Bursy* [of the Orphans' House], 1925 (*Dzieła*, vol. 14, part 2, pp. 12, 13, 14)

# **our home: a pedagogical machine**



Zuzanna Sękowska

In 1928, in the introduction to the book *The Decennary of Reborn Poland 1918–1928* — a monumental account of the achievements of the Second Polish Republic's first decade — we read, 'And if these pages . . . move you or give you joy, if they inspire a wave of confidence, a sense of healthy and creative optimism in your hearts, if pride lifts your chests and you are seized by an imperative of work — work for today, for tomorrow, for the coming decades of the Reborn Homeland — we will be happy.'<sup>1</sup> Alas, the 'imperative of work', transformation and civilisational progress, visions of forging a young statehood, were blurred by a gloomy background of economic and social woes. Warsaw itself suffered from serious shortcomings, which in 'public utilities and infrastructure gave it quite an un-European appearance'.<sup>2</sup> The city hall had to focus not only on designing bold visions but also on managing current crises. In 1927, the press reported on plans concerning two neighbouring districts of northern Warsaw:

In Żoliborz, the construction of the first house in a scheme designed by the City Hall has already begun. . . . In the Technicians Association auditorium, Mr Słomiński, B.Eng., Head of the City Hall's Technical Department, gave the lecture *The Regulatory Issues of Greater Warsaw*, explaining the key points of a plan of Greater Warsaw laid out by the City Hall. . . . Janusz Dzierżawski, B.Eng., has organised a 'building cooperative for the poorest unemployed', a scheme through which 160 working-class families have already moved in to their own homes at the Zdobycz Robotnicza neighbourhood in Bielany.<sup>3</sup>

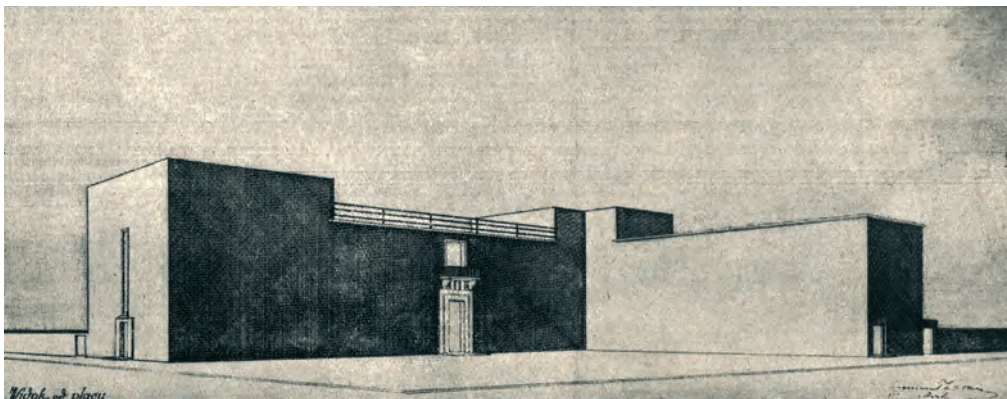
The Second Polish Republic grappled with an unwanted legacy of the partitions era: wide disparities across regions and industries. Emotions were heated up further by press news and reportage<sup>4</sup>, describing dismal living conditions of impoverished working-class families and 'enclaves of poverty'. Warsaw lost its creditworthiness in as early as 1927, bringing capital spending to a halt. In the congested urban space,

1 *Dziesięciolecie Polski Odrodzonej: Księga pamiątkowa 1918–1928*, ed. Marian Dąbrowski, Piotr Lot, Kraków–Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Ilustrowanego Kuryera Codziennego, 1928, reprint, p. 9. I thank Marta Ciesielska at the Korczakianum — Museum of Warsaw for making research materials available to me and for help in researching this essay, and Ewa Toniał for her valuable input.

2 Grzegorz Piątek, *Sanator*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2017, p. 28, *passim*.

3 *Architektura i Budownictwo*, no. 5, 1927, pp. 154–155.

4 Published in 1933, *Diaries of the Unemployed* gave a voice to a 'silent' social stratum; cf. Urszula Glensk, *Historia słabych. Reportaż i życie w dwudziestoleciu (1918–1939)*, Kraków: Universitas, 2014, *passim*.



Zygmunt Tarasin, Design of the building of the orphanage, selected in the competition organised by the Nasz Dom (Our Home) Society, *Architektura i Budownictwo*, no. 5, 1927, p. 159, National Library

poverty-related problems were mounting, and things were no better in the suburbs. The fact that living conditions were actually better in the city than in the country is hardly consoling. Unemployment led to widespread homelessness. Due to the worsening economic situation, tenant protection regulations were tightened and modified. On the upside, civil-society and charity organisations grew so dynamically that discerning between them was sometimes difficult.

For it is not only support for the mother and child, for the elderly, the homeless, the unemployed, that comprises social security, but also the prevention of poverty by creating jobs, providing professional training, supporting organised forces, inuring people to work and to struggle against hardship. . . . The last decade has offered unprecedented welfare to the child. Milk Drop stations have mushroomed [in Warsaw], the 'Saving the Infants' Society has been founded. . . . On the initiative and with the active participation of Marshal Piłsudski's wife, the so called Estates have been set up, their remit being to run nurseries, feed up children, organise summer camps and in-city activities . . . provide children with warm clothing etc.<sup>5</sup>

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In the second half of the 1920s, thanks to the support and patronage of Aleksandra Piłsudska, the Our Home Society (Towarzystwo Nasz Dom), founded in 19121 on the initiative of Janusz Korczak, Maria Rogowska-Falska<sup>6</sup>, Jan Durko, and Wanda Krahelska-

<sup>5</sup> *Dziesięciolecie Polski Odrodzonej...*, p. 275.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Rogowska-Falska (Maryna Falska) (1877–1944), pedagogue and social activist, referred to by her pupils as 'Maryna', used the form herself, signing some of her letters with it. It is worth noting that the Dom Dziecka nr 1 orphanage at Bielany, Warsaw, is named after Maryna Falska.



Filipowicz, had raised enough money to buy a plot of land in Bielany in northern Warsaw and build a new facility there. The original Nasz Dom, an education-and-care facility for Polish (catholic) children (which the Society funded), run by Falska and co-organised by Maria Podwysocka and Janusz Korczak, was based from 1919 in a small building at 12 Cedrowa Street in Pruszków near Warsaw. Cramped and difficult conditions made securing new premises an urgent necessity.<sup>7</sup>

In 1927, the following press release is published,

On 14 April this year, Our Home Society announced the winners of its competition for the design of an Orphans' Home for Children and Youth which is to be built in an area near Bielany, covered by the Greater Warsaw zoning plan. Out of eight submissions, three entries were equally awarded . . . their authors are architects Jerzy Müller, Franciszek Eychhorn / Aleksander Ruśkiewicz, and Zygmunt Tarasin. . . . The Board of the Our Home Society has entrusted the detailed design to Zygmunt Tarasin, M.Sc. Civil Engineer Architect.<sup>8</sup>

The design envisaged a T-shaped building with a triangular avant-corps that brings to mind the outline of an airplane.<sup>9</sup> The rather unassuming two-storey block opens up to the west with a balanced composition of side wings. An elongated section that repeats their proportions complements the building from the east. The corps de logis is compact, well-balanced, devoid of any dynamic elements, with a modest façade, virtually the only decoration being a massive sculpted portal.

The most interesting sketch shows the isolated building — without windows and reduced to bare rectangular boxes — with an emphasis on a 'dent' in the roof (i.e. a sharp drop in its line in the form of a balustraded terrace), highlighting the section's similarity to a fuselage.<sup>10</sup> A peculiar machine — a two-storey aeroplane.

In terms of formal sparseness, the interior matches the exterior; its layout is meant to ensure maximum functionality and ease of communication, with sleeping rooms in the wings and common-use and maintenance spaces in the central section. Large windows allow for good ventilation and provide a lot of light. With its harmonious layout and simplicity, the building represents a fine example of the functionalist trend in school architecture.<sup>11</sup>

7 'A cramped site and the lack of the most basic auxiliary means paralyses, sometimes hopelessly, the educator's plans and intentions. For years you won't find in Our Home's budget so much as a penny for entertainment or for art classes. . . . Hard necessity. A natural and understandable thing when for long months you can afford bread once a week only'; Maria Rogowska-Falska, *Zakład Wychowawczy „Nasz Dom”. Szkic informacyjny*, Warsaw: Towarzystwo Nasz Dom, 1928, p. 26.

8 *Architektura i Budownictwo*, no. 4, 1927, p. 124.

9 Competition design by Zygmunt Tarasin, in association with Janusz Korczak (unnamed), cf. *Architektura i Budownictwo*, no. 5, 1927, p. 158.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

11 Cf. *Architektura i Budownictwo*, no. 10, 1938, on the design of Warsaw school buildings.

'In summer 1928, the Board of the Our Home Society began the construction of a new facility on a large plot of land (17,800 sq m) in Bielany.'<sup>12</sup> Looking at aerial photos (taken in 1935<sup>13</sup>), we get the impression that the building's isolation (visible in one of the sketches) is not just a matter of convention: the 'airplane' has landed in an almost completely empty area, amid fields, surrounded by clusters of young trees. Its only neighbours are the recently completed Zdobycz Robotnicza ('Workers' Achievement') housing estate and a handful of residential buildings. In the next couple of years the Central Institute of Physical Education will be built in the neighbourhood, and Bielany will be the site of an exhibition of detached houses, *An Inexpensive Own Home*<sup>14</sup>, as well as of numerous activist initiatives.

Bielany was a suburban area at the time, rather sparsely populated, and Our Home stood on a large site. The right climate conditions, the proximity of wooded areas, and the nearby river with sandy beaches meant that the children were able to spend a lot of time outdoors. Consequently, the out-of-town summer camps were discontinued.<sup>15</sup>

'The school's backyard is a recreation room, not an addition to the building, but its key element, its extension, an essential, indispensable complement . . . We still wrongly adhere to the medieval spirit where the rampart, the wall, caused people to coop up, to throng, to crowd together.'<sup>16</sup> As it will turn out a couple of years later, the 'exit' from the building will go even further — not only beyond its walls but even beyond the backyard itself.

In 1931, Maryna Falska wrote about Our Home that it is,

an educational facility for 10–20 small children, 70 school-age kids, and 30 older minors. Like the Orphans' Home at 92 Krochmalna Street, Warsaw, it is run by people who have devoted many years to the study of new educational methods. The director of Our Home is Mrs. Falska who works together with Dr. Janusz Korczak, the director of the abovementioned orphanage and the author of an educational system employed at both facilities.<sup>17</sup>

The Our Home Society's annual report for 1936/1937<sup>18</sup> states that the plans of building a boarding school in Bielany provided for continuing its hitherto model of

12 Maria Rogowska-Falska, p. 101.

13 [http://www.mapa.um.warszawa.pl/mapaApp1/mapa?service=mapa\\_historyczna#](http://www.mapa.um.warszawa.pl/mapaApp1/mapa?service=mapa_historyczna#), folder: zdjęcia, 1935, accessed 15 September 2017.

14 Cf. *Architektura i Budownictwo*, no. 2, 1933.

15 Cf. Maria Falska, *Nasz Dom — zrozumieć, porozumieć się, poznać*, vol. 1, ed. Marta Ciesielska, Barbara Puszkina, Warsaw: Muzeum Historyczne m.st. Warszawy, 2007, p. 313.

16 Janusz Korczak, *Teoria a praktyka. Artykuły pedagogiczne (1919–1939)* [*Dzieta*, vol. 13], ed. Hanna Kirchner et al., Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2017, p. 93.

17 Maria Falska, p. 231.

18 Towarzystwo „Nasz Dom”, *Sprawozdanie roczne za rok 1936/37*, Warszawa 1937. A detailed description of the Society's activities and pedagogical methods can be found in a 1928 brochure: Maria Rogowska-Falska.

'closed care' in a form adapted to the 'needs of boarding-school life'.<sup>19</sup> Compared with the Pruszków period, the number of pupils was to double (to 100); moreover, the facility would include a boarding kindergarten as well as residencies for pedagogy students (to make it possible for the future teachers to gain the necessary practical experience). The notion of the child as a 'legitimate' citizen<sup>20</sup> and of the educational process as continuing uninterruptedly from the youngest age<sup>21</sup> were key methodological premises. A partner relationship<sup>22</sup> between the faculty and the students was reflected in various organisational aspects, such as the 'publication of communiqués and newsletters, the recording of complaints and accolades, the keeping of calendars and special books where the children's stories are written down.'<sup>23</sup> According to Falska, all those elements served to stimulate community life and to shape the institution's desired public image.

Their significance as documentation, enabling us to examine the potential of Our Home as a place 'whose residents, at first supervised and evaluated by others, now effectively supervise and evaluate themselves',<sup>24</sup> cannot be overestimated. A lot of emphasis was also placed on self-awareness. Character formation was understood as an ability to critically evaluate one's relationships with other individuals and with the community so that the child willingly respected the school rules and was able to sacrifice their own interests for the greater good. The students were encouraged to develop self-discipline, to demonstrate virtue and get rid of bad habits. A fair division of tasks, a focus on initiative, self-evaluation, and systematic work, were all meant to shape a sense of mutual responsibility and a willingness to participate in the common duties.

The moral aspect (the 'judgement of the moral significance of one's actions') was no less important.<sup>25</sup> But the way things were actually working out surprised the educators, something they mentioned in the report: 'The record of the first years of working in the new, beautiful spacious building was not quite as expected. We noted with concern some symptoms of **aristocratism and selfishness among the kids as they lived an isolated life, for themselves only**'.<sup>26</sup>

Given this context as well as the situation in the neighbourhood (where poverty was sharply on the rise among financially ineffective families at Zdobycz Robotnicza<sup>27</sup>),

19 Ibid., p. 3.

20 Cf. Janusz Korczak, *Prawa dziecka*, in idem, *Teoria a praktyka...*, pp. 313–314.

21 'Those who ignore childhood, aiming at the distant future, will miss their target', Janusz Korczak, *Wychowawca obrońcą*, in ibidem, p. 120.

22 A partnership relation between the pedagogues and the pupils is also evidenced by greetings cards from 1929 and 1935 created on the occasion of Marshal Piłsudski's nameday, which were signed by all pupils as well as the teachers. The 1935 card bears Falska's signature, among others; cf. set 2/109/0, sign. 656 and 703, Central Archives of Modern Records, Warsaw.

23 Maria Falska, *Nasz dom...*, p. 234.

24 Ibid.

25 The so called Arbitration Court. 'The educator records the children's complaints, thanks, or compliments on a daily basis . . . Their analysis helps to explain moral concepts. . . . Once the moral aspect of the given case has been analysed, we consider it from the legal point of view'; Maria Falska, *Nasz Dom zakład wychowawczy dla sierot*, in ibid., pp. 233–234.

26 Towarzystwo Nasz Dom, *Sprawozdanie roczne za rok 1936/37*, p. 3, emphasis added.

27 Zdobycz Robotnicza housing cooperative that had developed the scheme went bankrupt in 1932.

what was defined in the report as 'decisive' pedagogical measures were introduced in order to alleviate the institution's hermetic character and soften the impact of living in an elite enclave. In 1934, the boarding kindergarten was closed down and its space in the wing of the building was turned for the use of 'children of unemployed and under-employed parents living at Zdobycz Robotnicza and thereabouts'.<sup>28</sup>

The first half of the day was devoted to an 80-strong kindergarten group (the 'non-boarding kindergarten'), and in the second half Our Home made the space available to school-age and older youths from low-income families.

When a few years later the adult boarding school was discontinued (due to a high student-rotation rate), Our Home expanded the 'non-boarding' kindergarten to 160 (!) children, and the in-city summer camp for poorest children from the neighbourhood now included not 150 but 250 participants. These figures evidence how strong a period of growth were the years 1934–1935 for the institution. At first, visiting children had access to Our House's library collection, and in the later period, through an agreement with the Municipal Public Library Board, a reading room was opened, offering a fine selection of children's books.

The pedagogues were happy with the results of the school's opening out to the local community: 'Previously off-limits to strangers, Our Home is becoming a centre of planned and systematic educational and cultural work. At the same time, we note with great satisfaction a hugely favourable impact of this living pulse of life on the younger and older pupils of our institution'.<sup>29</sup>

The finely designed building contributed undoubtedly to the success of the ambitious educational project. The architecture wasn't flexible enough, however, to satisfy growing needs, and by 1936 Our Home was already suffering from a shortage of space, which hindered educational initiatives. Child care and education issues were widely discussed in the 1930s.<sup>30</sup> The press 'continued . . . a campaign, begun in 1934, against corporal punishment in the home and systematically reported on the living conditions of abandoned and "morally neglected" children'.<sup>31</sup>

By establishing friendly contacts with the pupils, the Our Home pedagogues were able to build close and trustful relationships with whole families ('The children should feel that the institution has respect for their parents. This is an important educational factor')<sup>32</sup>, and thus to engraft positive behavioural models into the family set-

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., p. 4.

30 A heated public debate had been provoked, in part, by dramatic reports from a care facility in Studzieniec, where pupils were abused and starved (the 1929 trial of the director and staff members made national headlines). The *Wychowawca* quarterly, published by the Educators' Union, wrote about Studzieniec as a sick organism: 'It's only 40-degree fever that opens your eyes. The Studzieniec trial showed 40 degrees on the court thermometer'. Among the examples of facilities that were free from abusive practices and should be upheld as paragons of virtue, the periodical mentioned the Krochmalna Street Orphans' Home and Our Home; cf. *Wychowawca*, no. 1, 1929, pp. 65–70.

31 Urszula Glensk, p. 404.

32 Ibid., p. 5.

ting as well as ‘improve the culture of parents’ attitude to children’.<sup>33</sup> This philosophy not only placed the child at the centre of the educators’ attention, but also acknowledged the role of the community in the development process.<sup>34</sup>

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Our Home’s embrace of children from the working-class Zdobyycz Robotnicza housing scheme showed a kind of ‘continuity’ in the institution’s history. Let us cite Maryna Falska again:

In November last year (1919), a new shelter for children was opened in Pruszków. It has taken in and provided care to a bunch of working-class children. For the shelter owes its existence first and foremost to the efforts and endeavours of workers. They came up with the idea of founding it, contributed their hard-earned buck to the cause, and made sure the project was carried through.<sup>35</sup>

That facility knew what poverty and malnutrition meant; in the early years of its existence (when still based in Pruszków), it was heavily underfunded and the situation changed only in the mid-1920s, thanks to support from persons close to Aleksandra Piłsudska.<sup>36</sup> In this context, the radically inclusive approach adopted by the pedagogues — an efficient and swift reaction to current issues and the challenges of the time — seems all the more understandable and obvious, if still risky.

A few years before Our Home’s relocation to Bielany, Janusz Korczak writes prophetically: ‘The aeroplane is already here. We’ve achieved the flight, we’ve remembered — the course.’<sup>37</sup>

33 Ibid.

34 The early 1930s see a clash between, on the one hand, deep-observation practices of social relationships (aimed at identifying the pathogenic influence of one’s immediate environment) and, on the other hand, stereotypisation and the theory of individual responsibility (‘moral defect’); cf. *ibid.*, p. 375, *passim*.

35 Maria Falska, *Nasz Dom...*, p. 130.

36 ‘The Building Commission [of Our Home]: Zygmunt Stomiński, Janusz Korczak, Aleksander Raniecki, Stanisław Siedlecki, Stanisław Kruszewski. The [Our Home] Society Board: Aleksandra Piłsudska, Roman Kutylowski, Janusz Korczak, Marja Falska, Marja Podwysocka, Marja Grzegorzewska, Władysława Weychert-Szymanowska, Ludwik Hryniewiecki’; *Zakład Wychowawczy „Nasz Dom”...*, p. 101.

37 Janusz Korczak, *Teoria a praktyka...*, p. 93.

# let's swim!

Water Sports in the Interwar Period  
on the Example of Selected Architectural  
Designs



Anna Syska

Of all sports, those that best contribute to physical development and fitness are the water sports, with the first place among them held by rowing and swimming. No other sport exercises all the muscles of the body and ventilates the lungs as well as rowing and swimming, and only skiing matches the water sports in this regard.

Feliks Htasko<sup>1</sup>

In its early years, the reborn Polish state struggled not only with political problems, but first and foremost with economic and social ones. The consequences of World War I, including, notably, a very large number of casualties and disabled persons, made it necessary to implement a new public health and fitness policy, based on medical and hygiene knowledge. The health context became central also to thinking about the country's defence and military potential, with the citizens considered as one of its key elements. Building a strong statehood required a healthy and robust society that would be able to bear the hardship of a potential armed conflict.

One of the perceived components of building military potential — besides investing in the defence sector and spending on fortifications, armed forces, patriotic education, and paramilitary organisations — was the development of physical education. 'Such activities were meant as a long-term policy, with the state considering a healthy and fit society as a biological regeneration of the nation and the country's strength.'<sup>2</sup> The lack of proper exercise was perceived as a cause of all kinds of physical shortcomings and postural defects: 'it has become clear that a wide range of defects and deficiencies, not only physical but spiritual as well, can be attributed to inadequate physical education.'<sup>3</sup> There were marked disproportions in the development levels of urban and rural youths as well as between the sexes in a single locality.

Implementing the ambitious plans concerning the citizens' health and fitness was however extremely difficult; complicating the matter further were war devastation, economic crises, housing shortages, substandard rural living conditions, poverty and lack of basic healthcare, as well as poor public awareness of fitness-related

1 Feliks Htasko, 'Wpływ sportów wodnych na zdrowie', *Sport Wodny*, no. 20, 1929, p. 3.

2 Tomasz Śleboda, *Centralny Instytut Wychowania Fizycznego w Warszawie. Architektura największego założenia sportowego międzywojennej Polski*, in *Studia z architektury nowoczesnej*, ed. Jerzy Malinowski, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2000, pp. 147–148.

3 *Budowa terenów i urządzeń sportowych*, ed. Władysław Osmolski, Henryk Jeziorowski, Warsaw: Główna Księgarnia Wojskowa, 1928, p. XIV.





Zofia Chomętowska, Legia club swimming pool, 1938,  
Archeology of Photography Foundation



Water park, Ustroń (designed by Eugeniusz Zaczynski, Łukasz Obtutowicz, Józef Koziet, 1932), postcard, c. 1940, coll. of Anna Syska

issues. Changing this required not only years of propaganda work, but also large-scale investment and prosocial initiatives, entailing massive public spending.

Domestic efforts echoed a global focus on physical culture, which was trending due to the combination of a number of factors, such as the development of medical knowledge, industrialisation, rural-urban migration, development of water-supply and sewerage systems, social security, as well as changes in fashion, lifestyle, and forms of leisure. The expansion of the press sector also played its role. In the interwar period, sport ceased to be a domain of the rich and was no longer perceived as an elite hobby of the ruling class. It became a popular way of spending free time, especially among workers and urban dwellers. A muscular and sun-tanned body was an epitome of fitness, and its owner was able to call themselves a modern person. It was also believed that 'sport in the life of modern society is a collective need and a factor of democratic culture'.<sup>4</sup> The idea of a 'healthy mind in a healthy body' acquired political significance, identified with a patriotic and civic attitude. State policies aimed at popularising physical education and improving public access to sports facilities echoed similar trends elsewhere in Europe;

4

Ibid., p. XXXIV.

Poland was by no means a pioneer of such policies in the region, especially compared with countries such as the Weimar Republic or Czechoslovakia. An athletic look was en vogue, and millions participated — both actively and passively — in sporting events. Sport grew in popularity; at first, it was mainly those disciplines that didn't require special infrastructure, such as football, gymnastics, track and field athletics, or boxing, followed by cycling, shooting sports, and motor sports. Swimming was one of those disciplines that flourished relatively late,<sup>5</sup> but its popularity grew rapidly nonetheless.

Mass participation in sporting activities and a phenomenon that we would call today the amateur practice of various disciplines required the widest possible access to sporting facilities. Public spending in this area accelerated with the founding, in 1927, of the Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training (Państwowy Urząd Wychowania Fizycznego i Przysposobienia Wojskowego, PUWFiPW).<sup>6</sup> From this moment on we can speak of large-scale planned development of sports infrastructure. Besides working to popularise physical culture, the Office financed or co-financed the construction of new facilities, and its local representatives, acting through province-, county-, and municipal-level Committees of Physical Education and Military Preparation, had real impact on local decisions. The process accelerated from 1933 onwards, when all sporting-infrastructure investment projects had to be approved by the Office. In 1934, the *Basic Norms of Sporting Facilities in Poland* were introduced,<sup>7</sup> which set minimum requirements for their floor area per local inhabitant. The regulation meant that sports infrastructure started to be taken into consideration in local zoning plans.<sup>8</sup> The *Basic Norms* regulated also the maximum allowed radius of distance to a sporting facility, which for swimming pools, for example, was 1,500 metres; this meant that every inhabitant should have such a facility within the range of a 15-minute walk. Reality, however, differed widely from the official norms.

Due to climate conditions, water sports in Poland were practiced mainly during the summer season. After World War I, there was only one public indoor swimming pool in the country — the municipal bath in Katowice.<sup>9</sup> The other one, that of the Laura steel plant in Siemianowice Śląskie, had suffered damage during the war and was un-

5 Anna Syska, 'Międzywojenna obyczajowość a architektura basenów Górnego Śląska', *Pracownia Kultury*, no. 8, 2018, <http://www.laboratoriumkultury.us.edu.pl/?p=31050>, accessed 18 September 2017.

6 Cf. Piotr Rozwadowski, *Państwowy Urząd Wychowania Fizycznego i Przysposobienia Wojskowego 1927–1939*, Warsaw: Bellona, 2000.

7 *Budownictwo wojskowe 1918–1935*, ed. Aleksander Król, Warsaw: Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych, 1935, pp. 543–549.

8 Anna Syska, 'Międzywojenne obiekty kąpielowe Górnego Śląska', in *Miedzy formą a ideologią. Architektura XX wieku w Polsce*, ed. Ewa Perlińska-Kobierzyńska, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Ciekawe Miejsca.net, 2012, p. 89.

9 Built in 1894–1895 as the municipal bath, it featured a 11-metre-long pool, which was expanded to 11 × 18 m during the interwar period, not enough to hold competitions there; cf. Anna Syska, 'Katowickie baseny — subiektywna historia budownictwa kąpielowego do 1939 roku', *Wiadomości Konserwatorskie Województwa Śląskiego*, vol. 7, ed. Irena Kontny, Katowice: Śląski Wojewódzki Konserwator w Katowicach, Śląskie Centrum Dziedzictwa Kulturowego w Katowicach, 2015, pp. 309–320.



serviceable.<sup>10</sup> This shows how much Poland lagged behind the neighbouring countries, especially Germany, and it needs to be remembered that both aforementioned facilities had been built under German administration.

The postwar infrastructural shortcomings were a result, in the first place, of the prohibitive costs of building and maintaining new facilities. This was alleviated through the use of outdoor swimming pools, which were initially set up on rivers and lakes. Such facilities had been built sometimes back in the 19th century in larger towns and health resorts. They were usually equipped with timber infrastructure, which was cheaper and easier to build. Though they weren't too numerous, that didn't prevent the practice of swimming. Enthusiasts of the sport made do with any body of water in their area, usually a lake or a pond. With time, however, they tried to arrange the necessary infrastructure, building piers, diving platforms, changing rooms, and even viewing galleries. Such modest and sometimes makeshift solutions, however, were no obstacle to acquiring skills necessary to win medals at competitions. The Małgorzata pond in Giszowiec near Katowice was used by the athletes of the 23 Giszowiec-Nikiszowiec Swimming Association<sup>11</sup>, which specialised in women's swimming.<sup>12</sup> One of them was Rozalia Kajzer who represented Poland at the Amsterdam Olympic Games in 1928 and broke numerous domestic records, proving that major successes could be achieved without fancy infrastructure.

Wooden infrastructure was present not only at small-town facilities, but also at those built at larger and more affluent locations. A swimming pool at Lubomelska street in Lublin boasted wooden changing rooms as well as a wooden deck, which was a rare feature — the decks were usually made of concrete. The latter was the case in Królewska Huta (now Chorzów)<sup>13</sup> at a swimming pool that was part of interwar Poland's first sports park, built in 1925–1927. The park included four playing fields, two of them surrounded by running tracks, tennis and cricket courts, a restaurant, and a cafe. Here, all the buildings, both the viewing galleries and the locker rooms, were made of wood. At Sołacz district in Poznań, a reinforced-concrete pool and diving platform were accompanied by a one-storied wooden building housing the changing rooms. The same was true in Kielce, at a swimming pool at the Stadiony X-lecia (Decennial Stadiums) complex.<sup>14</sup>

A short-term solution, not requiring large expenses, was the construction of shallow wading pools for small children, which addressed the need for providing wide access to swimming infrastructure and, to some degree at least, complied with the accessibility-radius principle. In Katowice, two such facilities were built in 1928, one

10 Eugeniusz Strug, Tadeusz Semadeni, 'Budujemy pływalnie', *Sport Wodny*, no. 4, 1926, p. 49.

11 Anna Syska, 'Katowickie baseny . . .', p. 314.

12 Antoni Steuer, *Sport na Górnym Śląsku 1896–1996*, Katowice: Muzeum Historii Katowic, 1997, pp. 30–31.

13 Cf. Antoni Steuer, Ryszard Szopa, 'Stadion Wychowania Fizycznego i Przysposobienia Wojskowego w Królewskiej Hucie (Chorzowie) (1927–1939)', *Zeszyty Chorzowskie*, vol. 7, 2003, p. 140; Anna Syska, *Międzywojenne obiekty kąpielowe . . .*, pp. 89–91.

14 Patrycja Piróg, 'Naród. Sport. Modernizm. Architektura kompleksów kulturalno-sportowych w Kielcach okresu międzywojennego', in *Miedzy formą a ideologią . . .*

downtown and one at one of the peripheral neighbourhoods, both designed by Lucjan Sikorski, the municipal architect. Those were circular pools equipped with fountains and foot-rinsing gutters, accompanied by grassy and sandy beaches and playgrounds. One also featured a changing room and a milk kitchen.<sup>15</sup> It was estimated that up to 1,000 children used the wading pools on hot summer days. Entry was free, and the age limit was 15. The kids were supposed to bathe in trunks since full-body ‘tricot’ swimsuits were considered unhealthy due to their longer drying time, and every now and then the city hall purchased a larger number of bathing trunks to distribute them among those children who lacked proper attire.<sup>16</sup> Guarding the safety of the youngest bathers was an ‘elderly disabled man who kept an eye on the beach and the lawn where the kids changed their clothes’, whereas ‘in the pool itself a teenage boy was on the lookout lest one of the smaller children, knocked over in the crowd, got under water’.<sup>17</sup> Similar wading pools accompanied children’s gardens (‘Jordan’s gardens’) built in large numbers throughout the country.<sup>18</sup> Such facilities filled a gap between gym classes at schools and the participation in organised activities at sports venues and other facilities, and recreational summer bathing contributed to raising both parents’ and kids’ awareness of the significance of physical education.

Due to the small number of swimming facilities within the boundaries of the reborn state, Polish designers faced the problem of the lack of design guidelines and specialist publications. To address this, they started going on study trips, mainly to Germany, France, and Italy, but also to Czechoslovakia,<sup>19</sup> where they also studied scholarly publications and periodicals dedicated to the subject. In 1928, the first Polish handbook for sporting facility designers was published, *The Construction of Sports Grounds and Facilities*. Citing mainly foreign examples, it discussed both 19th- and 20th-century facilities, listing the dimensions of various playing fields and their features as well as suggesting specific outcomes and the minimum spatial requirements for the different disciplines. The publication’s importance cannot be overstated — with the most influential international examples collected in a single volume, architects no longer needed to spend money on foreign trips.

The handbook featured two unrealised designs of indoor swimming pools for mid-sized towns by Czesław Kłoś.<sup>20</sup> A cursory analysis of these proposals reveals two things: the designer was primarily inspired by 19th-century examples and assumed that men and women would be bathing separately. This shows how the participation of women in sports, and swimming in particular, was thought about in the 1920s. At older swimming baths, this problem was solved in various ways, with larger facilities sporting two different pools for

15 ‘Gartenbauliche Neuerung in Kattowitz’, *Oberschlesien im Bild*, no. 51, 1928, p. 4.

16 A. (?), ‘Baseny kąpielowe dla dzieci w Katowicach’, *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 8, 1929, pp. 12–14.

17 Ibid., p. 14.

18 Cf. Helena Śliwowska, Kazimierz Wędrowski, *Ogrody jordanowskie*, Warsaw: Główna Księgarnia Wojskowa, 1937.

19 Tomasz Śleboda, p. 153.

20 *Budowa terenów* . . . , pp. 265–278.

men and women, respectively, and smaller ones being equipped with separate changing rooms; alternating use was another solution.<sup>21</sup> Two separate pools are a format dating back to outdoor swimming facilities; at the South Baths in Sopot, their main building preserved to this day, four piers designated the bathing places for men and women, separated by the family zone, the *familienbad*.<sup>22</sup> After World War I, such family zones became increasingly popular and gender segregation was gradually phased out<sup>23</sup>, though, as the examples in the 1928 handbook show, that wasn't so obvious for the book's authors. It is possible that their outdated approach was a result of the specificity of designing for military purposes, though the book was in fact addressed at civil engineers only.

In his first design, Kłóś proposed a system of changing rooms, dating back to the 19th century, consisting of a series of booths surrounding the pool, which one entered from one side and exited from the other, so that once in a swimsuit, one could only be seen from inside the pool.<sup>24</sup> The second design features no separate changing rooms or showers for men and women, suggesting they would take turns using the pool, or that it was meant as a military, men-only facility.

Well into the 1930s, many single-pool facilities employed a system whereby one day men bathed in the morning and women in the afternoon, and the next day it was the other way round. Family baths functioned on some days only, e.g., Sundays, and required the presence of both parents and a child; with time, this was relaxed to the presence of either parent. There were cases of unmarried men 'borrowing' children from friends to be able to enter.

Society was changing, cultural norms were changing, and gender segregation was gradually being discontinued. Two separate pools were not only obsolete but also expensive, including in terms of day-to-day maintenance costs. The popularity of swimming pools and baths meant that changing rooms were being redesigned.

One popular solution was to locate the locker rooms at either sides of a café. Sometimes, two separate entrances were used, as in a 1932 swimming pool in Ustroń, designed by Eugeniusz Zaczynski, Łukasz Obtutowicz, and Józef Koziół, where men and women moved separately from one of the free-standing ticket booths, through separate entrances in the wings of the main building, to the locker rooms, meeting again only by the pool itself.

The Ustroń facility was part of a larger water park. Rather than competition swimming pools, such recreational complexes often featured grassy or sandy beaches, tennis courts, playing fields, playgrounds, fountains, cafés, and restaurants.<sup>25</sup>

21 Felix Genzmer, *Handbuch der Architektur*, vol. 4: *Entwerfen, Anlage und Einrichtung der Gebäude*, vol. 5: *Gebäude für Heil- und sonstige Wohlfahrts-Anstalten*, part 3: *Bade- und Schwimm-Anstalten*, Stuttgart 1899.

22 Justyna Gibbs, 'Sopockie Łazienki Południowe i Północne z początku XX wieku', in *Studia z architektury nowoczesnej*, pp. 147–148, 65–94.

23 Paul Overy, *Light, Air and Openness*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2007, p. 162.

24 Anna Syska, *Międzywojenna obyczajowość*. . .

25 Tomasz Śleboda, 'Architektura sportowa dwudziestolecia międzywojennego w Polsce', *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Zabytkoznawstwo i Konserwatorstwo*, vol. 33, Toruń 2002, pp. 182–186.

Sports parks were very often built at spas (e.g., Jastrzębie Zdrój), though this was by no means an iron-clad rule, for such multi-purpose facilities were also erected in Borystów, Kielce, Kraków, Lviv, Radom, Rivne, or Lutsk.<sup>26</sup> The sports park in Wiśła, in turn, was meant to add extra value to the health resort which gained fame with the construction there of one of the official residences of the President of Poland.<sup>27</sup> Wiśła with the nearby Ustroń was promoted as the main leisure-and-recreation base for Upper Silesia, and its connection to the railway led to a massive rise in tourist traffic. In 1930–1934, a water park with a reinforced-concrete pool and diving platform, timber changing rooms, beach, tennis courts, and a café was built there. The café, which also housed offices and locker rooms for hockey players (who used the pool in winter time), was designed by Stefan Tworowski.<sup>28</sup> The architect made good use of the limited space available, proposing a small two-storey pavilion with large glass surfaces and an arcade. Izabela Wiśłocka called it one of the finest examples of 1930s Polish architecture.<sup>29</sup>

Much larger than the Wiśła one was a bathing complex in another spa town, Ciechocinek, designed by Romuald Gutt and Aleksander Szniolis in 1931.<sup>30</sup> The engineers proposed a large facility with a highly sophisticated locker-room building with rounded corners and a concave roof above the entrance. The vestibule divided the men's and women's locker rooms, which had separate entrances, a popular solution. Devised as a large complex adjacent to the Ciechocinek graduation towers, with playing fields, beaches, a milk kitchen for children, and a saline swimming pool, it was meant to complement the town's wellness offer as a place where,

in direct communion with nature, in perfect conditions, close to the graduation towers, the wide masses of the unwell and their companions will find healthy entertainment and well thought-out, doctor-supervised physical exercise. In properly arranged Jordan's gardens, large numbers of weak children prone to tuberculosis and other diseases will receive care and preventive treatment.<sup>31</sup>

Due to financial constraints, those plans had to be modified and only the swimming pool was actually built, but it is nonetheless a highly successful realisation, one that blends harmoniously with the surroundings, taking advantage of the resort's health merits and aspiring to be an elegant and modern place.

26 Ibid., p. 186.

27 Cf. Dominik Konarzewski, Michał Kawulok, *Od wsi do uzdrowiska. Dziedzictwo architektoniczne Wiśły, Wiśła: Urząd Miasta Wiśły*, 2009; Przemysław Czernek, 'Ustroń i Wiśła — kurorty Beskidu Śląskiego', in *Modernizmy, Architektura nowoczesności w II Rzeczypospolitej. Województwo śląskie*, ed. Andrzej Szczerski, Kraków: Dodo Editor, 2014, pp. 301–315.

28 'Park kąpielowy w Wiśle', *Architektura i Budownictwo*, no. 9, 1935, pp. 30–32.

29 Izabela Wiśłocka, *Awangardowa architektura polska 1918–1939*, Warsaw: Arkady, 1968, p. 200.

30 Romuald Gutt, Aleksander Szniolis, 'Pływalnia solankowo-termalna w Ciechocinku', *Architektura i Budownictwo*, no. 12, 1932, pp. 368–378.

31 *Informator na nowy sezon leczniczy, Ciechocinek 1932*, quoted in Waldemar Affelt, Aldona Nocna, 'Ciechociński Park Zdrowia, czyli „miniatura morza południowego” (1932–2001)', in *Modernizm w Europie. Modernizm w Gdyni. Architektura lat międzywojennych i jej ochrona*, ed. Maria Sottysik, Robert Hirsch, Gdynia: Urząd Miasta Gdyni, 2009, pp. 143–148.



An equally interesting spatial solution was realised in the swimming pool of the Legia Military Sports Club complex in Warsaw. The pool was built in 1928–1929 according to the design of Aleksander Kodelski.<sup>32</sup> The two-storey L-shaped changing-room building had an entrance in a rounded corner; the ground floor housed changing booths and cloakrooms for men (in the longer wing) and women (in the shorter one); club cloakrooms occupied the first floor. Kodelski chose a layout used to this day, whereby men and women, upon entering the building and buying tickets, go to separate changing rooms in order to meet again on the water. The Legia pool was Warsaw's first sports venue where swimming competitions could be organised; previously the Port Praski and Port Czerniakowski outdoor pools were used for the purpose.<sup>33</sup>

Tadeusz Krasiński, the designer of an indoor swimming pool in Lviv, placed the changing rooms for men and women on different floors. 'Each changing room consists of 17 walk-through booths so ingeniously connected that once we've changed into a swimming costume, we have no chance of meeting anyone still fully dressed'.<sup>34</sup> The Lviv pool was part of the District Centre of Physical Education at Strzatkowska Street and one of the most state-of-the-art indoor swimming facilities in Poland. It was equipped with small viewing galleries, and one of the glass walls was removed in summer time, opening the interior out to a beach.

When we look at how the question of gender segregation was functionally solved at interwar bathing and swimming facilities, it is possible to notice changes that occurred within less than two decades. Women's growing participation in sports (both professional and amateur) and recreation forced architects to introduce adequate spatial solutions. Separate swimming pools, a legacy of the 19th century, became obsolete because they were uneconomic. The development of sports architecture in interwar Poland, in terms of both quantity and quality, reflects a rapid cultural change that took place in society. The efforts of the Office for Physical Education and Civil Defence Training, aimed at beefing up the country's military potential through sports, weren't but an idealistic pipe dream. Polish sports infrastructure, reflecting architectural trends of the era, developed virtually from scratch, and although it has its more and less successful examples, it nevertheless shows how great was the enthusiasm for building a new statehood in various fields of life.

32 'Tereny sportowe w Warszawie', *Architektura i Budownictwo*, no. 8, 1929, pp. 307–314; T., 'Wzorowa pływalnia w Warszawie', *Sport Wodny*, no. 12, 1929, pp. 198–199.

33 Tomasz Śleboda, p. 153.

34 'Otwarcie pierwszej krytej pływalni we Lwowie', *Sport Wodny*, no. 22, 1934, p. 436.

# **architecture is always political**

Collective Facilities at the Warsaw Housing  
Cooperative's Interwar Housing Estates



Agata Twardoch

'A dwelling is not only something you can kill someone with like with an axe. It is also something on which you can predicate the development of social bond that raises the cultural level of the working society at large, its responsibility and conscientiousness', Stanisław Totwiński wrote in 1936.<sup>1</sup> A dwelling is far more than four walls and a roof, and architecture is always political. But cooperative residential architecture has particularly many political meanings. Analysing interwar cooperative movements, including the housing estates built by the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa, WSM), we need to bear in mind various contexts imparting political significance to it: young statehood, housing shortages, modernist architecture and the Athens Charter, emancipation movements, and, initially at least, a wave of postwar optimism.

Bestowing meaning on the cooperating individuals, cooperativism was doubtless a means of emancipation for various social groups: workers, women, or ethnic minorities. Even those cooperatives that remained politically neutral put the overthrow of capitalism<sup>2</sup> and the emancipation of the working classes on top of their agendas. Cutting the middleman, the (worker, consumer, housing etc.) cooperative was meant to eliminate capitalistic monopoly on the distribution of goods. In this sense, non-profit cooperative-based housing construction will always be anti-capitalist. The pro-independence nature of cooperativism, in the context of pre-WWI cooperatives, was emphasised by Stanisław Thugutt: 'It was a community where the subject of one of the three partitioning emperors had turned into a citizen of the future, yet invisible, but already upcoming, Polish Republic.'<sup>3</sup> It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the first shots of the Warsaw Uprising were fired at the WSM estate in Żoliborz (outside the boiler house — four hours before 'W' Hour), and Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, describing a childhood spent at the WSM Cluster 3 ['Kolonія'] in his memoirs, calls the Uprising the pivotal event of his early years. 'The only survivors were us, the youngest boys'<sup>4</sup>, he wrote. All the older boys died in the insurrection.

1 Stanisław Totwiński, 'Bogactwo form spółdzielczego ruchu mieszkaniowego', *Spółnota Pracy*, no. 12, 1936, retrieved from <http://lewicowo.pl/bogactwo-form-spoldzielczego-ruchu-mieszkaniowego/>, accessed 3 December 2017.

2 Marian Rapacki, 'Powszechność czy klasowość kooperacji', *Rzeczpospolita Spółdzielcza*, no. 10, 1923, retrieved from <http://lewicowo.pl/powszechnosc-czy-klasowosc-kooperacji/>, accessed 3 December 2017.

3 Stanisław Thugutt, 'Spółdzielczość wychowawczynią', *Spotem*, no. 20, 1931.

4 Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, *Lwy mojego podwórka*, Warsaw: Twój Styl, 2000, p. 6.



Boiler station chimney at the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (WSM) housing estate, Żoliborz, Warsaw, 1930s, WSM Hall of History



Central boiler station building at the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (WSM) estate, Żoliborz, Warsaw, visible poster for the show *Boston* (1934), WSM Hall of History

International movements of modern architecture were another important context for the housing cooperatives founded during the interwar period. The formative conferences of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne, CIAM) postulated sounder principles — prefabrication, simplification of customs, better organisation of cities, universal access to education — first and foremost in the area of health and hygiene, but also a greater focus on the problems of the broad masses and the construction of flats rather than of grandiose, monumental buildings (postulates of the first CIAM conference at La Sarraz, 1928).<sup>5</sup> The CIAM architects envisaged a new important role for themselves — that of educators and activists.

### **The Community as a Well-Designed Space**

If progressive interwar architects claimed a role far beyond simple house building, it is no wonder that, shaping architecture, they wanted to shape not only space but also social relationships. In the conclusions of the Athens Charter, formulated during the 4th CIAM congress, it is stated that the 'city should assure both individual liberty and the benefits of collective action on both the spiritual and material planes'.<sup>6</sup> This postulate, as well as that, stemming from the spirit of the document,

5 Helena Syrkus, *Spółeczne cele urbanizacji*, Warsaw: PWN, 1984, p. 129.

6 Helena Syrkus, *Ku idei osiedla społecznego*, Warsaw: PWN, p. 146.

of equal access to ‘sunlight, air, and green space’, is evident in the layout of the interwar WSM developments: the original nine settlements in Żoliborz and the WSM estate in Rakowiec in southern Warsaw. The freestanding buildings, innovatively situated alongside the north-south axis in Rakowiec and arranged around large courtyards in Żoliborz, ensure good solar exposure in all dwellings. Moreover, the characteristic ‘faulted’ design of the Rakowiec I houses is meant to provide more sunlight for the corridors and for a carpet-beating place at the north end and a sunbathing place at the south end. The courtyards are full of greenery, and Cluster 4 even boasts a small botanical garden with a greenhouse where plants are grown for the estate’s purposes. Small flats, socially most needed, usually with 1.5 bedrooms, meant to ensure ‘individual freedom’ and a decent life for working-class families, are accompanied by collective facilities that not only make up for the flats’ modest floor areas and rudimentary amenities, but also provide the ‘benefits of collective action’ — improved hygiene, common education, and emancipation. For this reason, collective facilities usually play a double role. And so cooperative grocery shops (at Units 1 and 2) not only sell at lower margins and thus offer better prices, but also constitute the ‘best foundation for and a most convenient hotspot of creative work in areas inhabited by a marginalised, impoverished population’.<sup>7</sup> They are a place of ‘ground work’ where, on the occasion of shopping, it is possible to educate or provide aid that won’t be just alms-giving.

Playing a similarly double role are collective hygiene facilities. Built in 1931 at the WSM Żoliborz Cluster 6, according to a design of Bruno Zborowski, the central laundry serves the whole estate. It features 20 soaking tanks, six electric washing machines, three spin driers, a 16-rack drying room, two electric wringers, an electric mangle, a lifting crane, a steam-removing ventilator, pressing tables, and irons. A cooperative bath with tubs and showers is set up upstairs. A couple of years later, Helena and Szymon Syrkus design the Community Centre in Rakowiec, featuring a slightly smaller laundry, a steam bath, and a consulting centre for parents called The Healthy Child. Collective laundries are built to prevent mould growth caused by in-flat laundering; en suite bathrooms are offered only from Cluster 9 onwards, following consultations with elderly occupants. But hygiene facilities are located outside the individual dwelling not only for practical purposes; education and better occupant control are important reasons too. The WSM management believe that the use of such facilities should actually be compulsory. Article 17 of the 1930 Residence Rules bans home laundering and drying<sup>8</sup>, while Tołwiński postulates that charges for collective bath and laundry use should be included in rent, hoping for a ‘I’ve paid for — I’ll use it’ effect.<sup>9</sup> Some laundries are

7 ‘Działalność społeczno-wychowawcza kooperatyw’, in *Kalendarz spółdzielczy na 1919 rok*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Związku Stowarzyszeń Spożywców, 1919, retrieved from <http://lewicowo.pl/dzialalnosc-spoecznie-wychowawcza-kooperatyw/>, accessed 3 December 2017.

8 ‘Przepisy korzystania z mieszkań’, in *Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa — Statut. Regulaminy*, Warsaw: WSM, 1930, p. 21, Art. 17.

9 Stanisław Tołwiński, ‘Finansowanie urządzeń społecznych w osiedlach mieszkalnych’, *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 11, 1935, pp. 11–12.



even bundled with rest rooms complete with reference libraries and kitchen annexes. The Healthy Child consulting centre is set up not to actually treat sick children, but to 'prevent diseases and ailments by teaching parents how to properly raise and nurse children from infancy'.<sup>10</sup> Other collective facilities at cooperative housing schemes include eating places, such as the canteen of the Polish Society of Working Women at Cluster 1, or bachelor rooms, e.g., six rooms at the Community Centre in Rakowiec. In these cases too there is an evident desire to educate and control: the canteen is strictly alcohol-free and the bachelor rooms adjoin the house supervisor's office.

The Warsaw Housing Cooperative never intended to limit its mission to housing development. Its founding statute reads that, 'the cooperative's purpose is: 1. the provision and rental of inexpensive, healthy, and properly furnished homes, built through mutual self-aid with the support of public, municipal, and civil-society institutions; 2. the collective fulfilment of the members' cultural needs'.<sup>11</sup> In order to meet the latter objective as well as create a basis for the coexistence of all WSM occupants — including in all matters concerning their moral and material wellbeing<sup>12</sup> — the WSM 'Glass Houses' Tenant Mutual Aid Association was founded. Besides co-managing the estate and providing material and legal assistance, its remit included culture and education. Activities such as readership promotion, musical and self-government education, organisation of hobby groups, lectures, or, from 1932, regular general-knowledge courses, often led on a gratuitous basis by local intellectuals, were meant to integrate the residents and stimulate cultural interests among the proletariat.<sup>13</sup> Such practices sometimes carried a slightly paternalistic undertone; for example, among the hobby clubs operating under the Association's auspices was the Aesthetics and Beauty Propaganda Club, started in 1931. The Club and the associated My Home consulting centre taught workers how to furnish a small flat, helped design furniture, and criticised petit-bourgeois aesthetics. Educational work took place not only occasionally — at the laundry, the grocery shop, or the canteen — but also required appropriate spaces. And so initially lectures and meetings were held in the Cluster 1 assembly hall, next to which a gallery and library were located; from 1933 they took place in a new theatre/music hall, designed by Bruno Zborowski, at Cluster 6. From 1935, the Association was also active at the Community Centre in Rakowiec, where the assembly hall, library, and reading room were adapted for its purposes.

10 *Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa*, reprint from the monographic publication *Spółdzielczość mieszkaniowa w Polsce*, Warsaw: WSM, 1938, retrieved from <http://lewicowo.pl/warszawska-spoldzielnia-mieszkaniowa/>, accessed 3 December 2017.

11 *Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa — Statut i Regulaminy*, p. 3, Art. 2.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 30, Art. 2 and 3.

13 That the Association targeted mainly workers is suggested by its membership levels in Żoliborz and Rakowiec. In WSM Żoliborz, where the homes proved too expensive for the working class, only 38 percent of occupants joined. In Rakowiec, where the dwellings were genuinely inexpensive and workers constituted 80 percent of all residents, the percentage of those who joined the Association approached that number; cf. Elżbieta Mazur, 'Działalność Stowarzyszenia Lokatorów „Szkłane Domy” przy Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej w latach 1927–1939', *Przegląd Historyczny*, no. 81(1/2), 1990, pp. 151–166, 155.



## The Women's Question

Among the clubs run by the 'Glass Houses' Association was the Women's Club, started in 1935 by the WSM's Cooperative Women's Guild. Both the Club and the Guild, among whose activists were Maria Orsetti, Janina Świącicka, or Zofia Żarnecka, were meant to promote the cooperative idea among women as well as 'improving their level of knowledge and social education'.<sup>14</sup> According to Orsetti, a pioneer of the cooperative movement and doctor of social sciences, women united in cooperatives will constitute a real political force: 'If the woman wants to throw her purchasing power into the scale of the struggle for a better tomorrow, for humane living conditions for everyone, she has to join forces, i.e., associate herself with other shopping-cart managers, has to join organisations that carry out such struggle by setting up business based on non-capitalist principles.'<sup>15</sup> The cooperative activists knew however that for women to join cooperative (and social) work, they need to educate themselves, and to educate themselves — they need time. At this point, the third (and perhaps most important) function of cooperative collective facilities (laundries, kindergartens, canteens) comes into focus: the rationalisation of women's work. 'For housewives to be able to study, they need time, and time they will have when they perform the household chores in a rational manner, economic in terms of time and effort. The woman has to abandon ancient ways of cooking, laundering etc.', Orsetti argued.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the Club and the Guild organised courses of (rational) cooking, sewing, laundering, and so on, as well as exhibitions and presentations devoted, for example, to (rational) interior design. But since the rationalisation of household work wasn't an end unto itself, but was meant to serve the cause of women's emancipation, such courses were also used as an opportunity to discuss legal regulations, issues of birth control, marital law, social security, or homelessness. Moreover, the Guild ran a free-of-charge employment agency for women residents, set up a branch of the Home Servants' Union, and planned to open a small shelter for homeless and unemployed women.<sup>17</sup>

## House — Cluster — Estate — District

Not only the various spaces of a WSM housing estate are equipped with additional meanings — its whole structure is designed in such a way, and for a reason. A standard-setting social housing estate, as we learn, for example, from the wartime writings of Barbara Brukalska<sup>18</sup> and Stanisław Totwiński<sup>19</sup>, needs a proper spatial

14 WSM — *Sprawozdanie za rok 1930*, Warsaw: WSM, 1931, p. 138.

15 Maria Orsetti, *Kobieta, której na imię miliony (rzecz o zadaniach kobiet w ruchu spółdzielczym)*, Kraków: Stowarzyszenie „Służba obywatelska”, 1933, retrieved from <http://lewicowo.pl/kobieta-ktorej-na-imie-miliony-rzecz-o-zadaniach-kobiet-w-ruchu-spoldzielczym/>, accessed 3 December 2017.

16 Ibid.

17 This plan was never carried through.

18 Barbara Brukalska, *Zasady społeczne projektowania osiedli mieszkaniowych*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trzaska, Evert i Michalski, 1948.

19 Stanisław Totwiński, 'Osiedle społeczne i dzielnica mieszkaniowa' (1943/44), in *Zagadnienie samorządu w świetle doświadczeń demokracji ludowej*, Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1946, retrieved from <http://lewicowo.pl/osiedle-spoleczne-i-dzielnica-mieszkaniowa/>, accessed 3 December 2017.

structure corresponding with its organisational structure. According to Brukalska, who with her husband designed the WSM Żoliborz Units 4, 7, and 9, the design of a housing estate should be underpinned by certain general scientific principles<sup>20</sup> as well as ideological guidelines. One of those, *Guideline VI. Collectivised Individualism*, speaks of achieving an equilibrium between individualism and individual freedom on the one hand and community life on the other: 'We strive towards a gradual, though limited, expansion of the 1B area (collective satisfaction of biological needs) at the expense of the 1A area (individual expansion of biological needs), and towards a parallel and unlimited expansion of both 2A and 2B areas (individual and collective satisfaction of psychological needs)', writes Brukalska. Optimal coordination between A and B areas, the individual and the collective, is to be ensured by fully functional, if small, dwellings, socially most in demand, by the various collective facilities, as well as, no less importantly, by their democratic management and the decentralisation of the administration apparatus. But since 'experience shows that as the community grows, its connection with even the most democratic management becomes weaker and weaker [and] every management lacking connection with the masses sooner or later becomes bureaucratic'<sup>21</sup>, the architect and activist postulates hierarchical decentralisation. Hence the structure of the social housing estate realised in Żoliborz and subsequently presented by the Underground Architecture and Urban Planning Studio (Konspiracyjna Pracownia Architektoniczno-Urbanistyczna): houses — clusters — estates — districts, and only then: cities.<sup>22</sup> The smallest management unit is a house or a number of dwellings accessible from a single staircase, overseen by the staircase custodian or delegate, and a proper arrangement of the entrance zone meets the basic needs. And so the entrance hall by every staircase should feature a small waiting area, a call office, a place for letterboxes, parcels, and, if possible, prams, as well as a 'table with daily newspapers and address books that will allow one, when passing by, to glance at the latest news, find a required address, place a phone order etc.'<sup>23</sup> The staircase custodian, elected from among the occupants — a function that can assume the form of cyclical duties — is to be the 'first universal activist of community life, able to direct someone looking for a particular address or service, be it a home, a shop, a clinic etc.' The second level of hierarchical management is the cluster, i.e., a number of residential houses with their immediate surroundings, an equivalent of Clarence Perry's concept of the neighbourhood unit. It is inhabited by some 2,000 occupants (1,250–2,500 according to Helena Syrkus) who, as Totwiński writes during the war, have at least heard so much about each other, to be able to elect proper representatives to the already diversified self-government bodies charged with the task of fulfilling the needs of the residents of the whole estate and district. The cluster is the first-degree

20 E.g., Principle I. Optimum production quota; Principle II. Collective fulfilment of needs; Principle VIII. Architecture adapted to form of government.

21 Barbara Brukalska.

22 Helena Syrkus, *Ku idei osiedla społecznego*. . . , pp. 229–281.

23 This and the following quotations from: Stanisław Totwiński, *Osiedle społeczne* . . .

electoral district for all bodies of diversified self-government. All cooperatives already have here their institutions for the collective fulfilment of needs: a housing cooperative — the smallest administrative unit with the cluster administrator, a consumer cooperative — the basic grocery store, a healthcare cooperative — the nursery and kindergarten, a cultural-educational cooperative — the reading room of daily magazines, the holiday cooperative — the first leisure areas.

The next level of self-government, and also the next element in the spatial hierarchy, is the estate, that is, a group of several clusters. 'The facilities for the collective fulfilment of needs are completely developed and diversified here.' A housing cooperative should have a central laundry, bath, boiler house, and garden; a consumer cooperative — specialised shops, a coal/firewood depot, and a canteen; a healthcare cooperative — a clinic, a pharmacy, and a barber shop; a holiday cooperative — playing fields, recreation areas, and 'lowest-level branches of sports and tourist clubs'. Estate-level cultural and educational needs are to be met by a high school, a community centre with a library, a reading room, a quiet room, science studios, lecture rooms, meeting rooms, and clubs. The self-government structure reflects the hierarchy of the urban structure: cluster-level elected delegates comprise the estate councils and make up the district-level general assembly. 'Each delegate has executive functions on the lower level of self-government, and controlling and supervisory functions on the higher one'.

The functional housing estate should constitute an autonomous centre — to the extent that Tołwiński suggests developing estate-level judiciary bodies for trying minor local cases: 'A decentralised judiciary, if the interested parties choose to be tried by it, relieves higher courts of the burden of very many cases, which by necessity are tried less thoroughly, often to the detriment of community institutions and thus the interested parties themselves.'

## Conclusion

Quoted above, Barbara Brukalska's book, *The Social Principles of Housing-Estate Design*, published in 1948, was removed from bookstores less than a year later and the entire print run was destroyed. The official reason was the author's critique of totalism, which must have been considered by the young socialist state as a critique of its political system. In a several-pages-long review published in the *Architektura* monthly, Jan Minorski supports the decision, delivering a scathing attack on the book.<sup>24</sup> He condemns its style, language, and layout, but devotes most space to discrediting the idea of collectivised individualism, now as interfering too much in the life of individuals (sic), now as too conservative, resembling 'medieval communes', and too capitalistic, echoing the English-speaking world's concept of the neighbourhood unit. One can hardly resist the impression that the concept of collectivised individualism,

<sup>24</sup> Jan Minorski, 'O zasadach społecznych projektowania osiedli mieszkaniowych', *Architektura*, no. 2, 1949, pp. 58–60, 63.

that is, in a way, a strong community of free individuals, could indeed pose a threat for socialism. The collectivised individualism of the interwar WSM housing estates seems to ensure strong social bonds, i.e., in academic language, normative integration.<sup>25</sup> Among the many testimonies of a strong sense of community there, it is worth quoting Newerly's comment about Jews who during the occupation stayed in Żoliborz: 'They survived. This is a miracle and the most beautiful chapter in the history of WSM Żoliborz. . . . The estate was a kind of haven, where half of the occupants helped and the other half kept silent.'<sup>26</sup>

Describing today what the interwar WSM activists wanted to achieve we would speak of social capital, which is of course territorial. Strong relations develop primarily between neighbours<sup>27</sup>, but for those relations to be properly shaped, the neighbourhood needs to be properly arranged. Already Brukalska knew that being neighbours wasn't enough in itself: 'In the old-type tenements, even though people lived close to each other, the neighbourly relations were basically negative — there was almost no positive feeling between them at all.'<sup>28</sup> After several decades of various experiences with housing development, we are all the more aware of how difficult it is to design a well-functioning collective space. Although the philosophy of the WSM founders was perhaps overly patronising, too expertly, and the interwar architects ascribed themselves too important a role and usurped too many rights, from today's perspective they were doubtless successful. They intuitively introduced the beginnings of social participation, conducting surveys of occupants and organising open-access meetings with the future residents, including children! Less than a month before the outbreak of war, on 2 August 1939, the Syrkuses and the WSM management met for the last time with young people in Rakowiec — in order to determine the program of the estate's sports areas.

Just as Minorski criticised neighbourly ties as 'diverting away from class struggle', so social capital is inconvenient for liberalism because it diverts us from unrestrained consumption. Social capital impacts favourably on the quality of life — but not necessarily on economic growth. As Krzysztof Nawratek writes, 'All good deeds performed not for profit are an attack on GDP'.<sup>29</sup> Well-designed collective facilities shape citizens. Neoliberalism needs consumers. Architecture is always political.

25 Waldemar Siemiński, 'Kształtowanie więzi społecznych jako cel tworzenia osiedli mieszkaniowych', *Człowiek i Środowisko*, no. 35, 2011, p. 95.

26 Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, p. 69.

27 Krzysztof Nawratek, *Miasto jako idea polityczna*, Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2008, p. 12.

28 Barbara Brukalska, p. 30.

29 Krzysztof Nawratek, p. 8.

# **room with a view**

Barbara Brukalska & Nina Jankowska,  
Ltd.



Marta Leśniakowska

The cover of the April 1932 issue of the *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie* [House, Estate, Home] monthly featured a negative drawing of an avant-garde home, with a large window, a decorative panel showing a map of the world, several pieces of lightweight open-work furniture, and a home orangery with exotic plants. The drawing opened an issue devoted to small homes and to the Association of Polish Architects' and Art Propaganda Institute's (Instytut Propagandy Sztuki, IPS) 'Interior' competition for the design of a home and furniture for a middle-income family. The cover drawing was of one of the two award-winning entries submitted by the ephemeral design consultancy Dom i Ogród [Home and Garden], founded in 1932 at Warsaw Housing Cooperative (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa, WSM) estate in Żoliborz by architect Barbara Brukalska (1899–1980) and designer Nina Jankowska (1889–1979). Dom i Ogród was founded independently of the Moje Mieszkanie<sup>1</sup> [My Home] consultancy which operated at the WSM during the same time, and which both women, as well as their colleague, Jadwiga Toeplitzówna, worked for. It is not clear why Brukalska and Jankowska had decided to set up a rival firm, which advertised its designs and prototypes of small-home furnishings as well as services 'in all matters related to home and garden design' in the monthly magazine *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie* (run by Nina's husband, Józef Jankowski), nor why the business closed down a year later, and equally little is known about its achievements, save for the two award-winning designs and images of several pieces of furniture that were reproduced in the magazine.<sup>2</sup> Still, it is worth examining this scant material as a representation of wider issues that manifest themselves here. The negative (reverse) cover drawing directs us towards a complex avant-garde phenomenon that employed 'inverse' images in a radical discourse aimed at opposing realism and the mimetic functions of images, and negated those functions through an attitude that was critical of traditionally 'correct' norms and ways of perceiving the world. The cover illustration isn't thus just an application of the Ozalid printing process, which was commonly used by designers. This kind of design drawing can be interpreted as

1 The Moje Mieszkanie [My Home] Consultancy for Rational Home Furnishings was affiliated with the Żoliborz branch of the Workers' Society of Friends of Children (RTPD). Staff included Barbara Brukalska (head for architecture and gardening), Nina Jankowska, Jadwiga Toeplitzówna, or Dr. Aleksander Landy (head for hygiene), among others. The consultancy offered home and garden advice, and ran a furniture rental and a furniture pattern shop for small homes; see 'Poradnia „Moje mieszkanie” w Warszawie', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 1, 1932, p. 31; Maciej Demel, *Aleksander Landy. Lekcja pedagogiki i medycyny przyszłości*, Warsaw: PWN, 1982.

2 'O urządzeniu mieszkań', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 1, 1932, pp. 15–23; 'Poradnia Dom i Ogród' [advertisement], *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 1, 1932, n.pag.; no. 6, 1932, p. 43.

**d o m**

**o s i e d l e**

**m i e s z k a n i e**

**4**



**c e n a      w n u m e r z e:      k w i e c i e ń**

małe mieszkanie  
konkurs „wnętrze” instytutu propa-  
gandy sztuki. (reprodukcje prac na-  
grodzonych).

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Design consultancy Dom i Ogród [Home and Garden] (Barbara Brukalska i Nina Jankowska), competition for the design of a home for a middle-income family, *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 4, 1932, University of Warsaw Library



a negative entity', as Victor Stoichita calls it, and a figure of the Freudian unconscious — an object, covering/uncovering a disturbing nature of things, that has found itself at the centre of modern artistic reflection as a useful means of redefining and challenging the orders according to which we live.<sup>3</sup>

Contained in its name, the agenda of Brukalska and Jankowska's consultancy reflected the fundamental principles of the modern functionalist home and housing estate. Those were defined in accordance with modernistic, biologicistic evolutionism as a 'living organism' that comprehensively organised the residents' life, a kind of urban Arcadia created by the architect who 'like a gardener' is meant to produce a psychologically favourable effect. Brukalska, Jankowska, and Toeplitzówna follow this model.<sup>4</sup> This is especially true for Brukalska, who before opting for architecture studied farming and gardening in Puławy; those first-choice studies clearly informed her work as architect and designer when she designed gardens for WSM housing projects or home orangeries, like at her avant-garde house at Niegolewskiego Street in Żoliborz, Warsaw (1927–1929) or in the design featured on the cover of *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*. It was in this field that the New Art agenda was realised, which interpreted nature as an instinct-driven machine, and the machine as a 'nature' and a 'primeval culture' on a par with exotic birds and plants, which made modernist art a product of pure (eugenic) physiology of 'normal and healthy organisms'. *Dom i Ogród* redefined, in its own way, the idea of the garden city, transforming, as Brukalska would have it, the urban housing estate into a kind of idyll meant to reconcile urban civilisation with the Romantic dream of nature. Gardens were a lasting trace of Brukalska's 'first love', both her distinct signature as a woman and a symptom of the larger issue of women's position in the field of art. In the 18th and 19th centuries, gardening was one of the few creative disciplines where women, constrained by patriarchal systems, were able to speak in their own voice. Brukalska's gardening studies and her own aesthetic preferences oriented her towards Neo-romanticism, which is why she enriched the hard geometries of the international style and the Italian modernism-inspired modernised classicism preferred by her husband with picturesque non-geometric gardens that extended the home to include a green, integrative, democratic public space, 'optimistically' open to all. Brukalska and Jankowska's consultancy reveals the androgynous characteristics of modernism, a result of the inclusion of affective feminine elements (natural materials, softness of form and detail)<sup>5</sup> that countered the 'hard' geometry of the 'masculine' international style with its rhetorics of nationalism and technicism. In bringing forth

3 Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow*, London: Reaction Books, 1997; Barbara A. Babcock, 'Introduction', in *The Reversible World. Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara A. Babcock, Ithaca—London: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 28; cf. Witold Kanicki, *Ujemny biegun fotografii. Negatywowe obrazy w sztuce nowoczesnej*, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2015.

4 See Nina Jankowska, Jadwiga Toeplitzówna, 'Wnętrze i ogródek', in *Katalog Wystawy Budowlano-Mieszkaniowej BGK na Kole w Warszawie, 1935, maj–sierpień*, Warsaw: Związek Propagandy Turystycznej m.st. Warszawy, 1935, pp. 11–12.

5 See Lucy R. Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan. Selected Feminist Essays on Art*, New York: New Press, 1995; Brandon Taylor, *The Art of Today*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995, pp. 18–26.

this aesthetic, the female team of Dom i Ogród was supported by visual artists educated at the Warsaw School of Fine Arts and associated with the Ład collective which promoted non-avant-garde modernity in the Scandinavian vein: simplicity, economy of means, designs based on updated folk motifs and handicraft techniques. It was in this area that a clash took place between two aesthetic conceptions represented in Dom i Ogród's designs published in *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*: namely, between that of functionalism/international style, informed by the radical European avant-garde, and that of 'familiarised' modernism spiced up with neo-folk motifs characteristic for 1930s design. In this respect, Brukalska and Jankowska's interiors/exhibits were an expression of a new politics of aesthetics addressed at the young intelligentsia and a democratic society.

Brukalska's competition design was for a dwelling for one or two persons in a collective house. It was thus ideologically connected with European avant-garde concepts, promoted during the interwar period, that advocated new models of habitation stemming from ideological sources common for Western culture: the visionary designs of French revolutionaries and utopian socialists (Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, Nikolay Chernyshevsky). In Europe, these concepts produced solutions, varied in terms of standards but informed by the same principle, that experimented with the model of the collective house. Brukalska's design is thus her interpretation of the social-democratic Scandinavian *folkhemmet* (folk home) ideal that was developed by the Scandinavian reform/revival movement as part of its efforts to combine a new comfort of daily life with the rationalisation of the contemporary users' needs and their changing rituals of family life.<sup>6</sup> The relatively few Polish designs in a similar vein came from the milieus of the collectives Blok and Praesens and from authors associated with the rightwing women's magazine *Bluszcz* which, due to a shift in social paradigms after World War I and a sharp rise in the number of single women, promoted a more comfortable version of the apartment house, with small flats and better-designed furniture. 'Simplicity and utility. This is what modern architecture requires at every step of the way',<sup>7</sup> it was argued. Brukalska's design, influenced by new cultural paradigms with their cult of rationalism, sport, and youth, paradigms that generated a new architectural space — an effect of testing the modernist theory of space which found repercussions in the spatially sophisticated and innovatively designed interiors of the 1920s and 1930s — was consistent with that postulate.

Both of the Dom i Ogród designs, shown at the Art Propaganda Institute and reproduced in *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, were strictly in line with a methodology and aes-

6 The biopolitical project of a democratic welfare state and 'collectivised socialism' was consistently implemented after World War II in Stockholm's housing estates built according to the 'a-b-c' principle: *arbete* (work), *bostad* (home), *centrum* (commerce, services); cf. *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*, ed. Hele Mattsson, Sven-Olov Wallenstein, London: Black Dog, 2010; *Utopia & Reality. Modernity in Sweden 1900–1960. Art, Architecture, Photography, Film, Design*, ed. Cecilia Widenheim, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

7 Stefania Szurlejówna [Kossowska], 'Architektura dnia dzisiejszego' [continued], *Bluszcz*, no. 23, 1934, pp. 704–706.

thetic developed during the interwar period by a new discipline (and new profession): interior design, which had supplanted the pre-modern and pre-industrial decorative arts. As a new field of design work, the purpose of interior design was to comprehensively and 'scientifically' program the living space according to the methodologies of rationalism, Taylorism, and Fordism, hygiene, and eugenics, identified as the basic components of a modern design practice. It was through them that Brukalska and Jankowska deconstructed the traditional model of the residential interior and, consequently, the old rituals of daily life, using the idea, crucial for modernist philosophy, of spatiality and transparency. That idea was expressed in the disruption/deconstruction of the former functional arrangement of the home: the replacement of closed spaces of strictly defined function with a variable-function open space, and the introduction of a free plan with a large number of transparent elements, notably lightweight 'hygienic' steel-pipe furniture reminiscent of hospital furnishings. Multifunctionality and spatiality/openness were a visual interpretation of the cultural paradigms of modernism: its tentativeness, variability, and ambiguity.<sup>8</sup> Here can be discerned the mechanisms of architectural 'determinism' and modernist politics of space where design — alongside fashion standards and visual presentations of homes (in magazines, catalogues etc.) as the 'correct' aesthetic/cultural models — contributes to non-verbal politics as one of the performative practices that promote socially (politically) desirable roles. The interior designs of Brukalska and Jankowska's consultancy were a direct representation of this, with their perfect grip of functional 'Taylorisation', hygiene, new materials, and an aesthetic of spatiality/emptiness — a Heideggerian category very important in the context of modernist design and architecture, one that makes it possible to read the meaning of the modern 'culture of emptiness' which, as Heidegger put it, is not a lack but a bringing to light.

Exclusive in its simplicity and economy, Brukalska's interior was meant for a specific recipient: the intelligentsia. The architect designed an aesthetically consistent space here: walls wainscoted with cherry-tree panels, heaters covered by a strip of opaque glass, spectacular lighting in the shape of a luminous tube inset in the wall, a home orangery (referred to as the 'plant room'), and finally a new type of decoration eliminating traditional framed paintings (to the dissatisfaction, notably, of Andrzej Pronaszko<sup>9</sup>) on behalf of a large panel with the motif, much en vogue among modernist designers, of the map of the world. Thus the old *homo viator* topos was redefined: its place now taken by the representative of a new social class, a contemporary nomad, an explorer/researcher/traveller whose home is his image/self-portrait and metaphor.<sup>10</sup> In this context the home orangery is significant too, in its miniature form displaying, like

8 In Jankowska's design, an open-space multifunctional space connected a study with a sleeping alcove with built-in closets, a multi-purpose table ('can be used for eating in bed or for work during the day'), metal-base box furniture, and an armchair upholstered with navy-blue suede.

9 Andrzej Pronaszko, 'Małe mieszkanie', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 4, 1932, pp. 4–7.

10 See the Brukalski duo's interior designs for MS *Batory* and MS *Piłsudski*; also the interior designs of Eileen Grey (1931), William R. Huntington, Robert S. Hutchins, Eric Bagge, Betty Joel, or the Maciej Nowicki & Stanisława Sandecka-Nowicka duo (1938).

the natural museum, exotic vegetation perceived as a 'trophy' from (imaginary) travels. Brukalska's idea of setting up small home orangeries is a modernist reinterpretation of the fashion for winter gardens and exotic plants in Victorian homes, widespread since the 19th century. But this element of modern interior design reveals something else too. We are dealing here with one of those things that may be unclear for us today because a process of the social decomposition of meaning has occurred in it, severing our connection with things from the past.<sup>11</sup> As part of the contemporary turn towards materiality (new materialism) and the metonymic interpretation, the meanings of things that used to be obvious for their users are being restored. If we look at Brukalska's 'plant room' with its 'domesticated' tropical greenery (an *Opuntia* and a *Ficus*) from this perspective, it will turn out to be more than just a trendy detail. Embedded in this seemingly insignificant idea/thing is the past: the room extends, in an impoverished form, cultural practices of the Victorian era, retaining their 'incidental memory'.<sup>12</sup> This, in turn, makes us think of the colonial aspect of the trendiness of home orangeries: exotic plants became a popular feature of 19th-century middle- and upper-class homes as a token/trophy of imperial conquests. The 'plant room' in Brukalska's drawing can, to some extent, be related to this: it bespeaks not only of dreams of, or reminiscences from, exotic voyages but perhaps also of fantasies about colonial Poland, a figure of which was the legend, revived during the interwar period, of Maurycy Beniowski colonising, on behalf of the French, the island of Madagascar, one of the places from which plant cuttings were brought to Europe. Brukalska's avant-garde interior is thus a cultural text that can be 'read' on several levels, an urban home that is a transcription of the seashore bungalow (a model derived from the centuries-old tradition of a 'second home') or the ocean-liner cabin, inhabited by a modern *homo viator* surrounded by substitutes and 'trophies' from actual or imaginary travels: a map of the world, a marine-theme decorative panel, a window awning, lightweight 'beach-style' furniture, and exotic plants.

We don't know what the colour scheme of this intriguing interior was supposed to be, but it likely followed the modernist principles of the style-making functions of colour in architecture and interior design as a token of a particular aesthetic orientation. Those rules were applied based on contemporary research into the physiology and psychology of colours in interiors, analogically to the theory of colour and light in painting.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, Brukalska's drawing could be an illustration of the modern apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Youngblood, described ironically by Witold Gombrowicz in

11 Literary studies are inspiring here, e.g., Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things. Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

12 Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade. Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 84–85; Jennifer Cole, *Forgot Colonialism? Sacrifice and the Art of Memory in Madagascar*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, p. 133.

13 See Marta Leśniakowska, 'Modernistka w kuchni. Barbara Brukalska, Grete Schütte-Lihotzky i „polityka kuchenna” (wstęp do architektury modernizmu)', *Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, no. 1/2, 2004, pp. 179–196; eadem, 'Dom Adama, dom Ewy, Dyskurs różnicy w (pod)tekstach historii architektury', *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, vol. 30, 2005, pp. 31–45; eadem, 'Jak widzieć architekturę, kiedy się ją czyta (u Gombrowicza i innych modernistów?)', *Teksty Drugie*, no. 3, 2005, pp. 38–57.

his *Ferdydurke*: 'The walls were painted pale blue, the curtains were cream coloured, a radio stood on a little shelf, the cute furniture was contemporary, consistently modern, clean, smooth, simple, with two built-in closets and a little table. . . . Cleanliness, order, sunlight, thrift, and simplicity . . . And what was this bedroom? — a Utopia. . . . How stingy was this cleanliness — and cramped — light blue, incompatible with the colour of earth and of a human being!' <sup>14</sup>

Brukalska's interior is a 'theoretical object' where the potential of the psychology-based modernist theory of furniture is tested. We see how the centre is deconstructed here by opening up the space, that is, abandoning the traditional division into the social (the living room) and the private. Importantly, the interior designs and furniture prototypes shown here are functionally androgynous, subverting the traditional masculine-feminine difference and thus leading towards transgenderism and transsexualism, a universal metaphor of gender identity as a cultural product and its prothetic function.

The designs of Brukalska and Jankowska's consultancy thus feature two icons of modernist philosophy: the Androgyne and New Architecture (interior design) as a figure of geometry/abstraction; two clues to the question of the gender of avant-garde architecture. An answer to this question is provided by the literary descriptions of the modern interior in Gombrowicz and Iwaszkiewicz, openly 'masculine' and heterophobic, for designed according to the idea of spatiality and transparency — a peak projection of the concept of the interior as a 'masculine' space. Iwaszkiewicz's description of the home of the main character in his *Pasje błędomierskie* reads like a detailed inventory of an interior deceptively similar to that designed by Brukalska: ' . . . where you couldn't move so much as a single piece of furniture for fear of undermining the symmetry or fancy asymmetry of the whole thing — the place was most modern, "funkis", as they say in Scandinavia'; a black faux-granite fireplace and light discreetly hidden behind opaque glass between the shelves ('how much the nasty stuff had cost!'), but then 'chilly, damp, and smelling of withered feathers . . . in the damp drawers under a built-in mirror'. A home for a contemporary dandy, a modern studio flat: irony and grotesque don't leave Iwaszkiewicz for a moment when, like Gombrowicz, he associates the 'funkis' interior with the protagonist's nouveau-riche background, a typical product of the new times. As critical observers of the new civilisation, both writers view modernism and the avant-garde as a mask and pretence ('the whole "functionalism" was a humbug', writes Iwaszkiewicz, pointing to the dummy fireplace), and in their persuasive strategy use familiar rhetorical gimmicks: the new interiors are always 'strange', cold, repulsive, full of 'bizarre', fancy, and costly ideas, with 'wearisome' colours (blue, yellow, black) and a 'nauseating' smell. <sup>15</sup> Such literary accounts of the avant-garde

<sup>14</sup> Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, trans. Danuta Borchartt, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 106, 154–155.

<sup>15</sup> 'The colour of the study was so blue that the contours of the walls and the roundness of the ceiling melted away in it. Mr. Leszek Korbowski sat in the middle of the study behind a small black desk like a small black angel in a very blue heaven'; Jarostaw Iwaszkiewicz, *Pasje błędomierskie* (1938), Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1976, pp. 11, 27, 45, 86, 96, 30.

interior show how in its space there is embodied the textual conception of architecture as a cultural generalisation of modernism and how such an interior becomes a metaphor of democracy, a system whose degenerate forms can lead to totalitarianism. As if drawing a lesson from Dom i Ogród, Jerzy Zagórski calls an avant-garde (fictitious) house in Żoliborz a 'cruel resonating chamber for all the uncoordinated sounds of the democratic street': large 'Swedish' windows, 'everyday constructivism and functionalism, annoying and constraining. Why did you move into this stupid "contemporary" house? Why, you know Chesterton and you know Huxley, and your peer, the thirty-year-old Gombrowicz, has told you what to think of such homes. . . . You've already replaced the paintings, the tapestries, and the furniture . . . for "clean" ones, made of metal pipes, empty like blown metaphors, and cord or rubber plait . . . . For ten years now you've been wandering around the box of this home . . . built poorly, not for people.'<sup>16</sup>

Averse or actually hostile to the avant-garde, such literary accounts of modern homes are a continuation of the model — rooted in Neo-Platonism and established by Balzac — of the writer as an interior decorator who observes the principle of correlation between a residential space and its occupant.<sup>17</sup> Bożena Shallcross notices here the already mentioned metaphor of the protagonist and analyses the signs inscribed in furniture hermeneutically, revealing that they portray their owner, his social class, and even his psyche, with the precision of a mirror reflection.<sup>18</sup> This Balzacian strategy, drawing a parallel between dweller and dwelling, i.e., between the external and the internal, yet readable from signs written on the surface, can be found not only in literary creations: 'Don't think these are but external forms. There is an inner depth behind it. . . . The stairs, the entrance, the strips of windows in the rhythm of the rushing cars and express transit . . . You are the master! . . . That's why such architecture'<sup>19</sup>, architect Erich Mendelsohn replied to his critics. Maria Kuncewiczowa unveils the dwelling-dweller relationship in *The Stranger* (1936), using the language of household items and domestic scenography to outline a liminal process of changes leading from a symbolic interior, based on the patriotic-national-historical patterns of the patriarchal system, to a functionalist one as a figure of cosmopolitanism.<sup>20</sup> Jean Baudrillard offers an analysis of this kind of transformation in *The System of Objects*. According to him, it occurred at the turning point of the subject's emancipation from national-patriarchal symbolic violence towards pure function by means of the interwar functionalist revolution which appealed with the simplicity of a designer project freed from the tyranny of sentiments

16 Jerzy Zagórski, 'Pryska obręcz milczenia', *Pióro*, no. 2, 1939, pp. 131–143, reprinted in *Źródła do historii awangardy*, ed. Tadeusz Kłak, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1981, pp. 315–332, quotation pp. 315–316.

17 Bożena Shallcross, *Rzeczy i zagłada*, Kraków: Universitas, 2010, p. 127. English edition: *The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

18 'The Balzacian hermeneutics of the home evokes through paintings, mirrors, tapestries, fabrics, furnishings, with the quality of their making, the knowledge of wood, marbles, textiles, furniture — also a supra-individual epicality in which French history is encoded', Bożena Shallcross, pp. 127–128.

19 Erich Mendelsohn, 'Warum diese Architektur?', *Baukunst*, no. 2, vol. 5, 1929, p. 7.

20 For more on this see Bożena Shallcross and Marta Leśniakowska, *Jak widzieć architekturę . . .*



and history (memory), now formatted according to the rules of hygiene and eugenics: air, light, space, large windows, simplicity, comfort, emptiness, prosthesis-like modern and efficient furnishings, neutral colours.<sup>21</sup> Such a modernist home of an architect is described by Jerzy Andrzejewski in *Wielki Tydzień* [Holy Week] (1945). Andrzejewski sets it in German-occupied Warsaw as a 'museum of modernism', a reminiscence of a lost Arcadia, a Corbusian utopia cultivated in the situation of wartime dystopia, as Shallcross comments. The hermeneutics of this literary interior, situated in Bielany, one of those Warsaw neighbourhoods where the avant-garde utopia of a New Architecture for a New Society was located before the war, confirms the mechanism whereby utopias grow on the ruins of reality, and dystopias — on the ruins of utopias.

The interiors/exhibits designed in 1932 by Brukalska and Jankowska's Dom i Ogród fulfilled all those criteria of aesthetic and ideological novelty and the associated category of 'originality' that became the principal and virtually sole criterion of the value of a new work of art.<sup>22</sup> This problem defines the essence of the experience of the avant-garde as an atopia — something that is unusual, strange, different, impossible to classify using the existing set of categories, the system of language or concepts.<sup>23</sup> Atopia as a cultural space makes it possible to analyse the mechanism of the rejection/repression of avant-garde art, which Hans-Georg Gadamer interprets psychologically as a fear of its atopic features, arising when we encounter something that, being strange or alien, disorients, provokes, and hinders understanding, refusing to fit into the patterns of our expectations, knowledge of the world, habits, or our understanding of a particular fragment of space.<sup>24</sup> The avant-garde generates an atopic space, it is unfamiliar, located beyond the topoi of order, a non-place<sup>25</sup>, undermining the status quo, divesting it of familiarity and security; it attacks the *heimlich* with the *unheimlich*, as John Caputo puts it.<sup>26</sup> But at the same time it has the power to produce new places able to generate a new identity experience, one informed not by continuity/tradition in old-style culture but by novelty as a category — based on negation and a different kind of community — of rupture: narrower, selective, marked by a new elitism and a sense of arcane knowledge. In the field of symbolic culture, the avant-garde does that in order to produce a new meaning for the multilayered space/space that it creates — a transcultural texture, as Henri Lefebvre calls it.

21 Bożena Shallcross, pp. 128–129, 134.

22 Horst W. Janson, 'Oryginalność jako kryterium doskonałości', in *Pojęcia, problemy, metody współczesnej nauki o sztuce*, ed. Jan Białostocki, Warsaw: PWN, 1976, pp. 215–221.

23 Zuzanna Dziuban, 'Atopia — poza miejscem i „nie-miejscem”', in *Czas przestrzeni*, ed. Krystyna Wilkoszewska, Kraków: Universitas, 2008, pp. 301–302.

24 Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Language and Understanding' (1970), *Theory Culture Society*, no. 23, 2006.

25 See Donatella Di Cesare, 'Atopos. Hermeneutyka i miejsce poza rozumieniem', trans. Andrzej Przytyński, in *Dziedzictwo Gadamera*, ed. Andrzej Przytyński, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, Poznań, 2004, pp. 67–68; Marc Augé, *Nie-miejsca. Wprowadzenie do antropologii hipernowoczesności*, trans. Roman Chymkowski, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2010, p. 77.

26 John Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics. On Not Knowing Who We Are*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 19, quoted in Zuzanna Dziuban, p. 306.



Those issues are perfectly evident in the context of the work of interwar avant-garde designers, confirming the argument that ‘each work of art gives us a form or paradigm or model of knowing something, an epistemology’.<sup>27</sup> Trans- or intertextuality makes it possible to analyse avant-garde design — as exemplified by the work of Dom i Ogród — in various ways: as a sign/construct produced within the area of cultural hegemonies and thus functioning in complex multilevel transmissions of variable references and interpretations, but also as a *thing* that, as philosopher Remo Bodei puts it, ‘invested with emotions, concepts, and symbols that are projected onto it by individuals, society, and history’.<sup>28</sup> The latter perspective shifts reflection on interwar design on to new territories, in search of the latent meanings of design which, as Sarah Wilson would put it, exists ‘in its own time, through time and beyond time’ and can step into another text/object. From the vantage of new materiality, the designs of Brukalska and Jankowska’s Dom i Ogród thus make it possible to grasp the essence of the agency of the thing as no longer just a sign (‘text’), as the (post)structuralists would have it, but as a creator of the subject. The theory of the thing as an actor-network raises the question of design as a being that exists not just ‘for the sake of our benefit, pleasure or use’, but defines the ‘frameworks for our orientation in the world’.<sup>29</sup> From this perspective, the propositions of Dom i Ogród come across as possessing an inherent ability to produce values that organise two categories: the future and utopia. They shed light on the liquid nature of design whose characteristics include relationality and mediation (of meanings, functions etc.) relating to its social function. The seemingly insignificant designs of an ephemeral practice show themselves as a semantic field that negotiates dreams with reality and initiates socially desirable changes by shaping the material environment and thus — the future itself. After Pierre Bourdieu, we could interpret Brukalska’s avant-garde design in its pure function of a ‘cultural broker’ that, as design researchers put it, mediates in human interactions as a seductive object, characterised by a utopian impulse, ‘both material and immaterial, aesthetic and technological, semiotic and anthropological’, activated by and activating imagination, an ability to think holistically and to subvert the order of things.<sup>30</sup>

The ephemeral work of Dom i Ogród as a ‘theoretical object’ of modernism constitutes a case study confirming Yuri Lotman’s conclusion that ‘every significant object of culture usually exists in a twofold manner: in its direct function, when it serves a particular sphere of social needs, and in a “metaphorical” function, when

27 Susan Sontag, ‘The Aesthetics of Silence’, in eadem, *Styles of Radical Will*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969, pp. 31–32.

28 Remo Bodei, *The Life of Things, The Love of Things*, trans. Murtha Baca, Fordham University Press, 2015, p. 20.

29 Håkan Karlsson, ‘Anthropocentrism Revisited. A Contemplative Archeological Critique’, *Archaeological Dialogues*, no. 1, vol. 4, 1997, pp. 114–119.

30 Monika Rosińska, *Utopie dizajnu. Pomiędzy afirmacją a krytyką nowoczesności*, PhD dissertation, Poznań: Instytut Socjologii, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2017 (in print). I hereby thank the author for making the text available to me.

its characteristics apply to a wide range of social facts of which it itself becomes a model'.<sup>31</sup>

Last but not least, Brukalska and Jankowska's consultancy is one of the many examples of women's participation in the history of the avant-garde, once again giving the lie to the obscure idea of the avant-garde as a male intellectual sect founded on the categories of cultural and ideological universalism. Women's role in designing modernist visions of a new world has already been well researched; it makes it possible to distinguish a 'women's avant-garde' as 'hidden' level of the modern movement — one with characteristics that express the feminine experience. In the 1920s, a new, previously unheard-of professional group emerges in Poland: academically-trained woman architects, the first female graduates of architecture studies, mainly at the Warsaw University of Technology. Brukalska and Jankowska were part of that movement, from the very beginning representing, like all women designers from the 'youth revolt' generation, a distinctly modernist attitude. One of the most interesting individualities among them, Brukalska believed that a modern architect should go beyond being an artist and become an 'element of social organisation' so that the idealistic dream of synthesising all arts in order to create a new space and a new aesthetic for the New Man can finally be realised. Fascinated by Le Corbusier, she designed open-space, 'Corbusian' interiors — with large glass surfaces, strip windows, and openwork hygienic furniture in the vein of Charlotte Perriand or Eileen Grey — which she tested at her own avant-garde house in Żoliborz (1927–1929),<sup>32</sup> in the Apartment House graduation project (1934), or in the 1932 competition design of an interior addressed at the potential customers of her ephemeral consultancy, Dom i Ogród.

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This essay had already been submitted when a short presentation of Dom i Ogród was brought to my attention; see Maria Dłutek, 'Poradnia Dom i Ogród. Skarb praktycznych wskazówek', in *Polskie art déco. Materiały 6 sesji naukowej „Polskie art déco. Wnętrza mieszkalne”*, Płock: Muzeum Mazowieckie w Płocku, 2017, pp. 76–86.

31 Jurij Łotman, 'Lalki w systemie kultury', *Teksty*, no. 6, 1978, p. 46.

32 For more on this see Marta Leśniakowska, 'Modernistka w kuchni . . .', pp. 179–196.

# **the home at the child's service**



Joanna Kordjak,  
Katarzyna Uchowicz

The child owns less than we do, but potentially possesses more. . . . A lot is wasted in the adult of what was dormant in the child.

Stefan Szuman<sup>1</sup>

'The child is not a miniature of the mature man and . . . uses quite a different reality-perception apparatus', wrote Karol Hiller in a review of an exhibition of children's drawings in Moscow in 1923, postulating the organisation of similar presentations in Poland.<sup>2</sup> This was four years before the publication of the first Polish study devoted exclusively to children's art, the monograph *Child Art: The Psychology of Children's Drawings* by the psychologist, philosopher, doctor, and pedagogue, Stefan Szuman.

The acknowledgment of the child's autonomy and subjectivity was an important manifestation of the social change that had occurred in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century which, after Ellen Key's famous book, was branded the 'century of the child'.<sup>3</sup> This impacted on many areas of life, including art, architecture, and, notably, design. The emancipation of children was one of the pillars of the modernist project of shaping a new society. On the one hand, childhood, the 'lost paradise', and children's art became, alongside another early-20th-century discovery — primitive art — a major impulse for the European avant-garde. The latter drew heavily on the 'primitive' art of children, exploiting the refreshing potential of its unrestrained imagination and considering it as a source of art's renewal. On the other hand, the very idea of designing specifically for the child as the end user, taking into account recent advances in paediatrics and psychology, modern design, and the Neo-Plastic theory of colour, represented quite a new and special challenge. Progressive pedagogical and educational concepts, which after the 19th-century pedagogue Friedrich Wilhelm Fröbel deemed the preschool age as crucial for individual development, assumed that designing a 'new world' and a 'new man' began with the child. The belief that design projects could truly influence (through the architecture of kindergartens, schools, and

1 Stefan Szuman, *Sztuka dziecka: psychologia twórczości rysunkowej dziecka*, Warsaw: Książnica „Atlas” Towarzystwa Nauczycieli Szkół Wyższych, 1927.

2 Karol Hiller, 'Rysunki dziecięce', *Republika*, 30 January 1923, p. 3. The text suggests that Hiller knew and practiced — as a drawing teacher — innovative pedagogical methods.

3 See Ellen Key, *Century of the Child*, New York—London: G. P. Putnam, 1909.



Cover of *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 6, 1933,  
University of Warsaw Library

nurseries, through furniture, toys, and books) not only the ‘here and now’ but also the future society invested them with an important artistic as well as moral and spiritual dimension.<sup>4</sup>

In Poland, design for children saw its heyday in the early post-WWII years, just like in the United States, where Charles and Ray Eames work on *The Toy* from 1951. But even during the two interwar decades, when prototype designs for children were being created both at the German Bauhaus and in the Soviet Union, we can speak of several Polish examples of truly modern thinking about designing children’s spaces and objects. Among the most interesting solutions — alongside the books of Franciszka and Stefan Themerson and Katarzyna Kobro’s renowned design of a kindergarten pavilion for a children’s garden in Łódź — were the concepts of two women architects associated with the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa, WSM).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For a thorough study of the subject of design for children, see *Century of the Child. Growing by Design 1900–2000*, exh. cat., ed. Juliet Kinchin, Aidan O’Connor, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Nina Jankowska (Weinfeld-Jankowska) was also the author of the graphic design for the first

## 1. Cylinder, Sphere, and Cube: the Object

Roominess, cleanliness, air, and light acquire special significance when one of the residents is a child. It has to have freedom of movement, to be able to move around the home without disturbing the adults. In this case, interior design needs to be particularly meticulous. The furnishings mustn't occupy too much space, obscure light, hinder the inflow of fresh air.<sup>6</sup>

The Corbusian ideas mentioned by the author of the above-quoted article (probably Barbara Brukalska), such as the need of hygiene or the right to air, sunlight, and greenery, applied as much to adults as to children. But it was not Le Corbusier who was the best guide to spaces designed for the youngest, even if the designs of Brukalska and Jankowska, who were both active in this field, tapped into and contributed to the modern architecture movement (while possessing a clearly distinct character). That guide were modern pedagogical and educational ideas according to which space and objects are meant first and foremost to stimulate the child's development and imagination; the theories of Fröbel and the educational philosophy, increasingly popular at the time, of the Italian doctor, Maria Montessori, based on the ideas of liberty and spontaneity, of growing in accordance with nature and one's own potential. Thanks to those educational concepts, design for children was meant to take into account the crucial value that is time — time for play, for activity, but also for self-reliance. 'Endowed with a creative imagination, the child feels perfectly well in a primitively furnished room where nothing hinders their individuality and where it can realise its ideas without bumping into a rigid, alien, order of things', read an article in *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie* [House, Estate, Home], a periodical that promoted modern architecture and design. Another article presented the Montessori philosophy and explained how its ideas could be applied in the field of design, using the examples of simple chairs and tables for children designed by architects Rudolf Schwartz and Hans Schwippert of Germany — lightweight pieces, made of unpainted wood, of uncomplicated construction, that allowed the younger user to study the material, shape, and manner of assembly and arrange space by themselves. The same architects introduced the idea of marking children's drawers with pictograms (e.g. anchor, bear, ball etc.), a system that remains in use to this day.<sup>7</sup>

In 1931, Brukalska, then an architecture student at the Warsaw University of Technology, wrote to Rector Stanisław Noakowski: 'I hereby ask to be granted a leave of absence in the academic year 1931/1932 as I will be unable to continue my studies this year due to the need to tend to a baby and because of my distant

edition of Julian Tuwim's *Stoń Trąbalski* (1938).

6 'Dziecko w mieszkaniu', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 1, 1932, p. 20.

7 Piotr Maria Lubiński, 'Dziecinne meble i dziecinna architektura', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 1, 1931, pp. 12–14.

domicile.<sup>8</sup> Already a year later, the architect became involved in the organisation of the *Mój Dom* ['My Home'] consultancy for the WSM Żoliborz housing estate which, at the approval of the paediatrician and activist, Dr. Aleksander Landy, she opened with Nina Jankowska and Jadwiga Toeplitzówna. The consultancy was located at Barbara and Stanisław Brukalskis' home at 8 Niegolewskiego Street and at number 24 there (probably at the home of Jadwiga Toeplitzówna), and cooperated with the Aesthetics and Beauty Propaganda Club. A co-founder of the Praesens collective and pioneer of modern design, Brukalska's micro-design concepts drew doubtless on her own experience as a mother (professionally active, she sought to simplify as much as possible the child-related daily chores, which translated into specific interior- or furniture-design solutions)<sup>9</sup>. Working together with WSM Żoliborz, she was able to carry through her pioneering projects. That cooperation not only played a unique role in the history of the Polish cooperative movement as a perfect embodiment of its guiding principle, but was also a socio-political experiment where important significance needs to be ascribed to an innovative pedagogical/educational programme realised through the Workers' Society of Friends of Children (*Robotnicze Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci*, RTPD). Founded in 1919, the Society's Żoliborz branch, overseen by the WSM Board, was established in 1927. Its kernel was a kindergarten opened in the same year in one of the buildings at the estate's Cluster 1; the RTPD also ran a primary school and a middle school.

Playing a key role in the RTPD was Landy, who at his Child's Health (*Zdrowie Dziecka*) medical consultancy not only promoted hygiene and preventive treatments, but also advocated rational child-care practices.<sup>10</sup> More than a clinic in the strict sense of the word, *Zdrowie Dziecka* was meant to 'guide child-rearing practices . . . in accordance with modern views on hygiene, health, and pedagogy', with medicine supporting 'the process of raising and educating the child', helping it 'acquire culture and adapt to the conditions of civilised life'. Nina Jankowska, who cooperated closely with Landy, stressed his modern view on architecture: 'He was one of the few paediatricians who recognised the educational significance of the spatial layout of the environment, its scale, and aesthetic values.'<sup>11</sup> Landy's ideas had a direct impact on the designs of buildings, interiors, and children's facilities commissioned by the RTPD, including to *Moje Mieszkanie*. The latter's first design was a prototype

8 Student Records Department, Warsaw University of Technology, student file of Barbara Wanda Brukalska, nee Sokotowska, file no. 5995.

9 The subject of designing for children was also familiar to other avant-garde artists. For example, Aleksander Rafatowski, member, alongside Brukalska, of the Praesens collective of modernist artists, published in the first issue of the group's eponymous periodical the design of a basement-level children's room (it was actually a small room for gymnastics exercises with a multi-colour composition of the walls); see Aleksander Rafatowski, 'Pokój dziecięcy', *Praesens*, no. 1, 1926, p. 58.

10 In 1937, the consultancy offered 1,584 pieces of advice. A total of 257 children used the sun lamp. *Zdrowie Dziecka* also ran a milk kitchen for infants.

11 Implemented by Landy at the WSM Żoliborz, the idea of collaboration between architects and doctors was very much in step with international trends (as voiced, for example, at the 1937 CIAM congress in Paris).



children's playpen which was meant to be used on a rental basis among the WSM Żoliborz residents. For-hire furnishings or those 'growing' with the child would dominate among Brukalska and Jankowska's designs. Items for children — ergonomic, utilitarian, simple, and aesthetic — were a topical design issue at the time, widely commented on in the press. In 1932, propositions of functional children's rooms were promoted in *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie* by Piotr Maria Lubiński (an architect and commentator, co-author in 1935, with Lucjan Korngold, of the famous Łepkowski House at 2 Francuska Street in Warsaw) and by Jankowska and Brukalska. What kind of items were those? For example, a 'children's lowboy on high legs that make cleaning easy while ensuring the spaciousness of the room . . . painted red and yellow', or a 'trough-shaped shallow bathtub for children up to six months of age, holding 12–15 litres of water . . . with space-saving skid legs'.

Running a rental shop of children's furniture, Brukalska seemed to be confirming what Janina Ginett-Wojnarowiczowa suggested in the text *The Home at the Child's Service*: that what matters the most in a child's room is empty space. Second came hygiene, interpreted also as ease of cleaning thanks to the use of Salubra wallpapers. Willingly or not, the author advertised Le Corbusier here, who had created a wallcovering collection, which he referred to as 'keyboards of colour', for Salubra, a wallpaper manufacturer based in Grenzach (Baden).<sup>12</sup> Children's furnishings, of clearly prototypal character, were also designed by the company Konrad, Jarnuszkiewicz i S-ka, a domestic market leader, which in the 1930 exhibition *The Smallest Home* presented a furniture set for a children's room, consisting of two beds (larger and smaller), a table, and two chairs. The renowned manufacturer Thonet Mundus showed a children's bed and chairs, designed by Stefan Sienicki, a leading industrial designer of the era. The Fabryka Wyrobów Metalowych Jan Serkowski metal goods factory, originally a major manufacturer of kerosene lamps founded in 1862 and renamed in 1922, presented a lamp for a children's room. The presence of these renowned companies in *The Smallest Home* confirmed that designing for children had become a distinct field of the applied arts and design. The exhibit took place at the WSM Żoliborz, in recently completed houses of Cluster 4. One of its advertising slogans read, 'Don't litter your home with luxury-imitating kitsch. Hygiene — furniture; thrift — furniture; comfort — furniture. Beauty is in the organisation of space, not in the chaos of superfluous decoration.'

## 2. Play

The curtilages of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative are treated not as yards but as places of play for children and relaxation for adults. Each curtilage features sandboxes for the youngest and playgrounds for the older kids. There are also lawns, intersected with paths only, lined with decorative trees, so they look

12

Le Corbusier, 'Klawiatura barw', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 11, 1931, p. 23.

like parkways. On the lawns and under the windows one finds plenty of flower beds and decorative shrubs.<sup>13</sup>

Play, outdoor activity, and contact with nature are the basic prerequisites of the child's correct development. The layout and character of the WSM spaces referred to as 'child refuges' were in keeping with the ideas of fitness, outdoor activity, and group cooperation, widely promoted during the interwar period. The playgrounds were also devised as places for socialising, featuring small concrete wading pools, cool in summertime and turning into miniature ice rinks in winter, and sandboxes. Examples of similar solutions were drawn from Sweden, among other countries; a 1930 issue of *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie* featured an article by Sven Wallander from Stockholm.<sup>14</sup> Press coverage and the work of non-governmental organisations meant that not only designers but also parents were increasingly well aware of the need for finely designed spaces for children. Shortly before the opening of the *Smallest Home* exhibition, a parents' rally was held to demand sensibly organised and safe playgrounds ('child refuges'); organised by the *Młoda Matka* [Young Mother] magazine and the Society of the Friends of the Children's Garden located on the grounds of the State Office for Physical Education at Aleje Ujazdowskie, it took place on 26 January 1930 in the assembly room of the Hygiene Society.

The subject of discussion was the issue of adapting the gardens to the needs of children and a resolution was passed in this respect. It seems to us that the postulates expressed in it — arranging lawns where children could roam, roofed porches, a larger number of toilets and lavatories etc. — don't exceed the city's financial capabilities, especially in a situation where it spends millions on greenhouses or park lamps and decorations. In all speeches there could be felt a sense of regret that the city hall doesn't pay enough attention to the needs of the youngest generation. With the large number of empty lots, setting up playground refuges throughout the city for kids who wander around the streets wouldn't present a problem.<sup>15</sup>

In response to the demand for 'children's refuges', all available empty spaces were adapted. At the same time, Le Corbusier's postulates of modern architecture were being fulfilled: on the roof/terrace of the houses of WSM Cluster 2, sandboxes, tables, benches, showers, and sun shades were installed, meant for the

13      *Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa*, reprinted in the monograph *Spółdzielczość Mieszkaniowa w Polsce*, Warsaw: WSM, 1938, retrieved from <http://lewicowo.pl/warszawska-spoldzielnia-mieszkaniowa/>, accessed 15 October 2017.

14      Sven Wallander, 'Budownictwo spółdzielcze w Szwecji', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 3, 1930, pp. 19–21. One example of Swedish influence on Polish social architecture, a subject never yet analysed, was the experimental window work used by WSM to provide maximum sunlight to small flats; see B. M., 'Okna szwedzkie', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 3, 1930, pp. 22–25.

15      'Wiec rodziców organizowany przez „Młodą Matkę”', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 3, 1930, p. 50.

pupils of the local kindergarten. Such projects were a response to the need, voiced in *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie* by Alfons Zielonko, for 'children's gardens/homes'. The author bemoaned the situation of the city kids, for whom the only available places of rest were the stairs, thresholds, or sidewalk curbs. Instead of the balsam of trees, shrubs, and flowers — the 'scorching-hot walls of dusty houses'. An exemplar here, Zielonko suggested, were the green squares of Katowice, conveying an image of a 'carefree and joyous existence of children who certainly won't grow up to become consumptives or lunatics'. 'By definition — he concluded — hygienic living and public green areas will produce a better effect than pretty lectures or family-planning bureaus.'<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Kindergarten — a 'Mini Glass House'

The growing public demand for nurseries, kindergartens, and day rooms was driven by socio-economic changes occurring in the wake of World War I and the resulting professional emancipation of women. The project of a modern democratic society pursued by the Warsaw Housing Cooperative, where a woman not only had to work but actually desired a professional career, could not but include comprehensive child-care solutions. Architectural designs and recommendations for nurseries, kindergartens, and schools as standalone buildings were being developed during the interwar period. The WSM Żoliborz kindergarten, whose nickname, the 'mini glass house', brought to mind the concept of 'glass houses' from the Stefan Żeromski novel, *The Spring to Come*, was designed in 1933 by Nina Jankowska, a project commissioned by Aleksander Landy and Maria Zdanowska of the WSM Board. Planned originally as a temporary wooden structure, it was situated at Cluster 6, near the boiler station at Płońska Street (today Próchnika Street). The pavilion's architecture was to be economic (based on inexpensive materials), adapted in size to meet the requirements of its juvenile users, offering ample sunlight and proper airiness. The simple-plan building comprised two classrooms, a lavatory, and a changing room of 2.5 metre height, a metre higher than official norms provided for. Non-standard-size strip windows filled the walls almost completely, and window sills were installed at the height of 40 cm. Within a short time, two more rooms were added due to a growing number of pupils.<sup>17</sup> Jankowska herself stressed that the notion of mental hygiene (the need for considering not only educational aspects but also the users' comfort and wellbeing) was central for her in designing for children.

The instrumentalities designed by the architect for the kindergarten, like all appliances and furniture for the RTPD, were hygienic, inexpensive, and aesthetic (possibly simple in form and painted in light colours). Their form was influenced by Jankowska's ergonomic research (of which she was a pioneer in Poland) and by the

16 Alfons Zielonko, 'Tragizm dzieci miejskich a bielmo na oczach', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 6, 1933, p. 14.

17 Karolina Andrzejewska-Batko, 'Na dziecięcą miarę. Działalność Niny Jankowskiej w dziedzinie projektowania architektury i wzornictwa przemysłowego dla dzieci', *Miejsce*, vol. 1, 2015, pp. 131–132.

pedagogical theories mentioned earlier. The furnishings, adapted to the physical parameters of their juvenile users, were also simple to use, encouraging self-reliance.

Ensuring optimal hygienic conditions, the kindergarten embodied Żeromski's idea of the 'glass house' as an 'abode of health, where diseases like scarlatina, smallpox, typhus, or malaria have been destroyed', where glass was meant to symbolise cleanliness and hygiene. But the transparency of the architecture also played an important propaganda role: '... our life and work is visible not only during outdoor classes, but also indoors — through the glass walls. This is a permanent, natural form of promoting what we do.'<sup>18</sup> The large windows were also consistent with the postulates of modern architecture, producing a kind of *tableaux vivants*, like at the Brukalskis' home in Żoliborz, where the Moje Mieszkanie consultancy was located. The building's interior interpenetrated with the exterior space, and the lightweight architecture of the kindergarten pavilion blended harmoniously with nature. A children's garden was an integral part of the layout, as accorded by the RTPD's health and education agenda. Contact with nature and outdoor activities were also in line with Landy's disease prevention programme. The children's garden movement and ideas of outdoor activity and education, inspired by Fröbel's theories, were increasingly popular in Europe during the interwar period. As recommended by Landy, the pupils spent three hours every day outdoors, and only two hours indoors, for classes and meals. All activities were subordinated to the logic of the educational process: '... we don't separate teaching and classes from education. Undressing, dressing, eurhythmics, clay modelling, playing, toy making etc. — everything is organised from the viewpoint of the educational tasks.'<sup>19</sup>

The meaning of the term 'children's garden', a calque of the German *Kinder-garten*, was broad at the time, denoting a garden where kids could play, grow plants, and keep pet animals. In Poland, the term 'Jordan's gardens' was also used, designating recreational areas for children and youth set up in accordance with the postulates of the Kraków-based doctor, Henryk Jordan; in Warsaw, such spaces were also sponsored by the industrialist Wilhelm Rau and consequently referred to as 'Rau's gardens'.

#### 4. Day Room

The WSM housing estates in Żoliborz and Rakowiec in Warsaw were special in featuring a wide range of collective facilities such as central heating, laundry, bath, assembly rooms, club rooms, libraries, reading rooms, or day rooms for children and youth with spaces for doing homework, known as the 'quiet rooms'. Brukalska envisaged a similar place for workers seeking respite from noise. A 'quiet room' she described in a 1948 publication based on her prewar experiences was to be equipped with soft

18      *Sprawozdanie z działalności za rok 1934*, Warsaw: WSM, 1935, p. 126.

19      *Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa*, retrieved from <http://lewicowo.pl/warszawska-spoldzielnia-mieszkaniowa/>, accessed 3 December 2017.

light, aquariums, plants, and art works.<sup>20</sup> A day room at the WSM estate was located at the RTPD primary school and meant for children aged 6–14. It offered daily activities during the winter and summer breaks as well.

The regular activities offered by the day room included eurhythmics, gymnastics, choir, storytelling, fancywork, and percussion orchestra; among the extras were per-demand workshops, drawing classes, table tennis, library and reading-room activities, motor-, memory-, and group games, and field outings. Various hobby groups were organised, and the day rooms sported a library and a reading room. The basis of such a comprehensive agenda was the WSM statute, Article 2 of which defined the cooperative's mission as the 'provision . . . of inexpensive, healthy, and properly furnished homes, built through mutual self-aid with the support of public, municipal, and civil-society institutions' and the 'collective fulfilment of the members' cultural needs'.

### 5. Cultural Education — Baj Theatre

Cultural education — visual arts, dance, eurhythmics, as well as theatre — was another of the perceived prerequisites of children's comprehensive development. A special role in the life of the youngest WSM residents was played by the Baj Puppet Theatre [Teatr Kukietek Baj], founded in 1928 and from 1930 run by Jan Wesotowski. Most of its scripts were written by Maria Kownacka,<sup>21</sup> and its puppets and stage sets were designed by members of the Czapka Frygijska [Phrygian Cap] collective, artists Zygmunt Bobowski and Witold Miller. The theatre's activities were part of a wider pedagogical/educational agenda pursued by the WSM: Baj cooperated with psychologists, researched viewer reactions, and even established a psychology section run by Professor Stefan Baley.

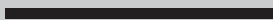
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Utilising recent advances in paediatrics, pedagogy, and psychology, the complex educational programme realised as part of the 'Żoliborz experiment' covered all stages of the child's life and activity (education and free time — at home, in the playground, as well as during the RTPD-organised summer camps), taught children how to spend free time in rewarding ways and how to function in a collective, promoted physical fitness and mental development, always, however, with respect to every child's individual potential and developmental rhythm. The recognition of the subjectivity of minors stimulated creative energy, social commitment, and institutional support.

20 '... 3. as opposed to the austere design of the collective facilities, the design of the quiet room should be comfortable and elegant (optimum temperature and ventilation, soft light, plants, aquarium, art works); 4. users can behave in any way they want, provided they keep silent'; see Barbara Brukalska, *Zasady społeczne projektowania osiedli mieszkaniowych*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trzaska, Ewert i Michalski, 1948, p. 86.

21 This was no accident: from 1931 the writer lived at the WSM estate at 5 Słowackiego Street, where she had moved following the success of the first part of the *Plastuś* story, published in *Plomyczek*.

# **animals in glass houses**



Ewa Klekot

In 1933, a new gorilla pavilion, designed by the avant-garde architectural collective, Tecton Group, was opened at the London Zoo in Regent's Park. Next summer, a penguin pool, also by Tecton, was launched to much fanfare. Cutting-edge architecture and the satisfaction of the zoo's management meant that both projects quickly gained wide recognition. Tecton would go on to design a bar, two newsstands, a giraffe pavilion, an elephant house, and the Studio of Animal Art for the zoo. László Moholy-Nagy's *The New Architecture and the London Zoo* (1936) — the first ever film on architecture to be shown at an architecture exhibition<sup>1</sup> — further popularised the group's designs for animals, and the interlocking spiral ramps of the penguin pool became one of the most frequently cited examples of modernist architecture. And although their main author, Berthold Lubetkin, argued that the geometric shapes employed in the designs were meant to emphasise the spectacularity of the goings-on in the pool and produce a theatrical effect, humans, that is, according to historian Peder Anker, the zoo management, opted for Tecton's designs for a different reason. The zoologists running the institution were interested first and foremost in the animals' health and wellbeing and decided to go for modernist architecture because they associated it with the promise of healthier, sunnier homes for the masses. They subscribed to the Darwinian notion that the difference between humans and other animals was quantitative rather than qualitative, and their decision to place animals in a pavilion that was a paragon of a healthy home was a direct consequence of that. It also, Anker argues, sent a deeply moral message: just as the penguins, provided they gained freedom from enemies, regular food, and general hygiene, seemed to thrive in the most unnatural of conditions, i.e., those of modernist architecture, so workers and the poor, 'who were in desperate need of being liberated from their "natural" condition of criminal and filthy slums' would thrive in the 'unnatural' environment of modernist glass houses. According to the Secretary of the Zoological Society of London, Peter Chalmers Mitchell, the discoveries of evolutionary biology suggested that peaceful coexistence was the best survival strategy for both animals and people, and that all species could prosper if given the chance to live in a healthy and peaceful environment. 'It was thus of revolutionary importance to display thriving animals in an unnatural setting as if to prove that humans too could prosper in

1 Richard Horsney, 'László Moholy-Nagy and the London Zoo: Animal Enclosures and the Unleashed Camera', in *The Zoo and the Screen Media: Images of Exhibition and Encounter*, ed. Michael Lawrence, Karen Lury, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 224, 223–246.



# PLAN

## ogrodu zoologicznego



WARSZAWA



Plan of the zoological garden in Warsaw, designed by Henryk Stażewski, c. 1934–1935, coll. of Jan Straus

a new environment.<sup>2</sup> Glass houses for animals (and people) are a modernist project that the British left sought to pursue in the 1930s. And what were the major animal-related projects of the modernising, independent Second Polish Republic?

### **Modern Primordality: Restitution of the Białowieża Wisent**

An important mission of a modern nation state that was building its independent existence was, according to its authors, the nationalisation of its landscape. As early as 1915, Alfred Lauterbach called for the 'Polonisation of the looks of Warsaw'.<sup>3</sup> Similar postulates, raised with regard to towns and villages, underpinned programmes aimed at recreating the 'nativeness' of the landscape, not only by rebuilding the country from wartime ruination in accordance with the 'Polish national style', but also by 'purging' the landscape of the traces of the partitioning powers and their culture.<sup>4</sup> The re-formation of the country's nature can be viewed from a similar perspective, and especially so in the case of the reintroduction of the wisent in the Białowieża Forest. Since Adam Mickiewicz's times, groves, woodlands, and forests were an important topos of the native landscape, reinforced by the legend of the 1863 January Uprising in the paintings of Artur Grottger and novels of Maria Rodziewiczówna, through Józef Ignacy Kraszewski and accounts of expeditions into the native backwoods written down by members of the urban intelligentsia endowed with literary talent. The wisent and the bear were the most powerful residents of the archaic lairs of nativeness, which meant that a powerful and modern Polish state had to protect them also for symbolic reasons. 'Following a short contest with Germany, Poland has come decisively to the fore in the field of wisent breeding. Today it is almost exclusively on us that the future of this noble animal depends'<sup>5</sup>, wrote Jan Żabiński, zoologist and long-time director of the Warsaw Zoo. But when a National Park was established in the Białowieża Forest (which was public property) in December 1921, creating a separate administrative unit — a 4,500 hectare forest inspectorate called Rezerwat ['Reserve'], with a couple of small reserves isolated from other inspectorates<sup>6</sup> — there was not a single wisent there; the last cow had been shot by poachers the previous winter.

National parks were established to protect the natural environment from the dangers of industrialisation and modern farming and to exclude it from capitalistic land trading. On the conceptual level, however, this reinforced the modern separation of nature from culture, while concealing, under the label of 'environmental protection', a whole complex process of purification that nature was subjected to in order to be-

2 Peder Anker, *From Bauhaus to Ecohouse. A History of Ecological Design*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2010, pp. 19–22.

3 Ewa Manikowska, 'Wielka Wojna i zabytki', in *Polskie dziedzictwo kulturowe u progu niepodległości. Wokół Towarzystwa Opieki nad Zabytkami Przeszłości*, ed. eadem, Piotr Jamski, Warsaw: MKiDN, Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2010, p. 52.

4 Ewa Manikowska, pp. 51–54.

5 Jan Żabiński, *Walka o żubra*, Warsaw: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1947, p. 44.

6 Jan Jerzy Karpiński, *Puszcza Białowieża i Park Narodowy w Białowieży*, Kraków: Dyrekcja Lasów Państwowych w Białowieży, 1930, p. 14.



come truly 'natural'.<sup>7</sup> With environmental protection, an alternative project of modernity was born. As Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, and Patrick Kupper rightly note in the introduction to a book devoted to the history of national parks around the world<sup>8</sup>, the protection of nature — an expression of its specifically modern valuation — became a measure of social development. Thanks to that, its promotion could be presented as a civilising mission, and famous wildlife conservationists such as Julian Huxley were able to remind young nation states that 'in the modern world . . . a country without a national park can hardly be regarded as civilised'.<sup>9</sup> The creation of national parks is a process that can be viewed from the perspective of Heidegger's conception of the world picture, where the world is actually 'grasped as picture'<sup>10</sup>, a vantage point that encourages man to treat the world as he would treat a picture he himself has created. National parks establish wildness in the order of the picturesque that requires maintaining a safe distance between nature and its lover; they also make possible the territorialisation of nature. 'Thereafter, wild nature could no longer be conceptualised as an unlimited mental and practical resource *beyond*, but became a finite resource *within* the boundaries drawn by civilisation.'<sup>11</sup> But the establishment of the order of the picturesque meant that the enclosure of wild nature was 'employed not to exclude nature from civilisation but rather to incorporate certain forms of valued nature into schemes of national or imperial development'.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the Białowieża primeval forest was included in the project of the construction of a modern nation state — the problem, however, was that by then, the *Bison bonasus* had become extinct in Poland.<sup>13</sup> The situation changed when the Silesian uprisings led to border changes and the Hochbergs' estate in Pszczyna became part of Polish territory. Although the number of wisents in the Pszczyna menagerie had been reduced to just three in the course of the fighting, the animals, their lineage tracing back to four Białowieża wisents presented by the Tsar to Prince Hochberg in 1865 in return for 20 deer, proved a crucial link in the process of the wisent's restitution in Białowieża. In 1924, the Poznań zoo (Poland's only such institution at the time, founded in 1874<sup>14</sup>), acquired a couple of wisents from the von Beyme breeding enterprise in Germany, and a further three animals were purchased from Sweden in 1929 by the recently opened Warsaw zoo.<sup>15</sup> In the same year, the Warsaw wisents were sent

7 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

8 Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, Patrick Kupper, 'Introduction', in *Civilizing Nature. National Parks in Global Historical Perspective*, ed. eadem, New York–Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012.

9 Ibid., p. 8.

10 Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 67.

11 Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, Patrick Kupper, p. 9.

12 Ibid., p. 9.

13 Jan Żabiński, p. 44.

14 *125 lat Ogrodu Zoologicznego w Poznaniu*, Poznań: Ogród Zoologiczny w Poznaniu, 1999.

15 Both the Poznań wisents, acquired from the von Beyme herd, and the Swedish ones, were descendants of the Białowieża wisent, but the bull brought from Sweden had a small admixture of Caucasian blood.

to Białowieża, where the Poznań specimens and one bull from Pszczyna were later brought too. Until World War II, the Białowieża wisents lived exclusively in the reserve, where it was possible to,

ensure rational breeding practices, i.e., separate cows about to calve from the rest of the herd, keep the bulls apart to prevent them from fighting with each other or playing foolishly and dangerously with the baby calves that don't understand the necessity of keeping away from their thick-skinned father. Not even out of malice, but simply being unaware of the delicateness of the baby, the father may harm it, thus spoiling the efforts of the breeders.<sup>16</sup>

In the context of the Białowieża Forest, valued for its primeval and primordial character, it might seem that 'wisent breeding', a practice requiring man's presence and purposeful effort, calls into question the ancientness of the resident of lairs untouched by the human foot and invalidates the authenticity of the whole project of protecting the archaic primordially of nature. 'By *art* likewise, we make them greater or taller than their kind is; and contrariwise dwarf them, and stay their growth: we make them more fruitful and bearing than their kind is; and contrariwise barren and not generative. Also we make them differ in colour, shape, activity, many ways.'<sup>17</sup> It turns out, however, that the 'Białowieża primordially' as a characteristic of the wisent can be achieved 'by art' without detriment to its authenticity. This was done the way other desirable traits in a species or a particular breed thereof are developed: through selective breeding. Among the first European wisents released in Białowieża in 1929 was a Swedish-born bull with an admixture of Caucasian blood and purebred Białowieża cows. Their offspring, therefore, could not be regarded as 'primordially' of Białowieża. Following the importation of a Białowieża-pedigree bull from Pszczyna in 1936 and the birth of his offspring with the Białowieża cows, all wisents with the Caucasian admixture were, in accordance with recommendations adopted by the International Society for European Bison Protection<sup>18</sup>, to be relocated to a new reserve created in 1939 in Niepołomice near Kraków. The Białowieża wisents thus owed not only their existence but above all their authenticity to many breeding decisions: without the ingenuity of the modern man, 'nature' could be neither 'natural' nor 'authentic'.

16 Jan Żabiński, p. 46. Żabiński's vision of the aggressive bull's relationship with its young offspring corresponds with a modern notion of maleness according to which the father should have only minimal physical contact with the 'little ones' he has sired until they have grown old enough. Virtually all ethnographers and anthropologists writing about non-European societies/communities construed the social life of animals according to the then-dominant norms of human interaction. On modern representations of animals of various sex and age as reflecting the patriarchal norms of the modern family and modern constructions of cultural gender, see Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions*, New York: Routledge, 1989.

17 Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis*, The Harvard Classics, 1909–1914, vol. 3, New York: P. F. Collier & Son., par. 63.

18 Founded in 1923 on the initiative of the Polish naturalist, Jan Sztolcman, see Jan Żabiński, p. 40.

## The Animal: a Free-Time Companion

As rightly noted by the author of an essay devoted to the cultural models of man-animal relationships in the Polish countryside, 'it is the animals, plants, and fungi that make the peasant a peasant'.<sup>19</sup> The point, of course, is that animals are a resource whose direct exploitation is the basis of the peasant's existence. In the modern city, in turn, animal products become a fetish, like other goods. As the conditions of their production disappear from view, attitudes towards animals change, leading to a sharp rise in the number of pet animals which become a regular and increasingly important feature of the urban lifestyle. Considered as a leisure-time companion, the animal contributes to the development of modern affects that inspire the establishment of civil-society organisations on behalf of the humane treatment of animals and consequently the introduction of appropriate legal regulations.<sup>20</sup> In interwar Poland, man-animal relationships were regulated only ten years after the restoration of independence, and not by statute but by the Ordinance of the President of Poland on the Protection of Animals, which entered in force on 23 April 1928.

As a sensitivity informed by the notion of the animal as a free-time companion took hold, spectacular modern forms of leisure that involved animals: the zoological garden and horse races, flourished in the modern city. Animal shows aren't, of course a modern invention, but an urban zoo instead of the nobleman's or travelling menagerie and full-blood horse races based on codified rules applying to all actors of the event are very much modern spectacles. Based on the scientific concepts of systematic zoology and animal breeding, they reveal at the same time a tension, constitutive for modernity, between the democratising action of modern science/education and the socially hierarchising distinction determined by lifestyle and the judgment of taste. The most important projects of interwar Warsaw predicated on the institutionalised presence of animals in the modern city are the Warsaw zoological garden (opened in March 1928) and the Służewiec horse-racing track (opened in June 1939). Both institutions belonged to the sphere of leisure, and their primary function was the presentation of animals. The former had been funded by the city hall; the latter by the Society for the Promotion of Horse Breeding in Poland (Towarzystwo Zachęty do Hodowli Koni w Polsce, TZHKP) with support granted by the government of General Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski in the years 1937–1939.

At the time of its opening, the Służewiec racecourse was one the finest and largest such facilities in Europe and featured many state-of-the-art architectural

19 Maja Vogt-Kostecka, 'Żywe nam nie przepuści. Przyczynki do hodowlanej historii Polski', *Czas Kultury*, no. 3, 2016, p. 81.

20 The world's first modern animal welfare organisation was the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, founded in Britain in 1824, and the first legal acts to that effect were the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act of 1822 and the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1849; see Roni Grén, *The Concept of the Animal and Modern Theories of Art*, New York–London: Routledge, 2017, p. 58. The term 'animal rights' appeared for the first time in Henry S. Salt, *Animals' Rights Considered in Relation to Social Progress*, London–New York: Macmillan, 1894. For more on this see also Éric Baratay, *Zwierzęcy punkt widzenia*, trans. Paulina Tarasewicz, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo w Podwórku, 2014, especially pp. 212–268, original edition: *Le Point de vue animal, une autre version de l'histoire*, Paris: Le Seuil, 2012.

solutions. It had been built on land acquired by the TŻHKP in 1925. Shortly after the acquisition the Society set up the Racetrack Construction Committee; in 1926, a situation plan was drawn up; in 1928, the cornerstone was laid under the foundation of the reinforced-concrete fence surrounding the site; finally, after the top half-metre of the soil had been replaced, five varieties of grass were sown and systematic cultivation of the turf began. Besides the British-imported lawn mowers and rollers, an important role was played in this regard by a flock of sheep, brought specially for the purpose, which grazed on the grass, trampling the ground with their hooves.<sup>21</sup> Economic crisis slowed down the pace of the work, but the city's pressure for the racecourse to be moved from Pole Mokotowskie to Służewiec meant that, thanks to the efforts of influential TŻHKP members, government ministers, and the city hall, in July 1936 the Sejm amended the Horse-Racing Act so that tote boards could be installed in the centre of Warsaw (as opposed to strictly the racing grounds) as well as in Łódź. This boosted the Society's revenue as the operator of the racetrack; moreover, in 1937 the government approved a 2.5 million zloty loan for the TŻHKP and when those funds were exhausted, more subsidies were awarded.<sup>22</sup> Construction works were carried out in 1937–1939 according to a design by Zygmunt Zyberk-Plater and team. An entire horse-racing 'town' was built on a 140-hectare plot previously belonging to the Służewiec Grange, which was part of the Wilanów estate. The complex consisted of a racecourse for three types of races (flat, hurdles, and steeplechase) with three viewing terraces for over 12,000 spectators,<sup>23</sup> facilitating collision-free social segregation, a small terrace for the coaches, jockeys, and stables staff, a paddock with auxiliary buildings, stables for 500 horses, and 13 residential buildings with a total of 311 bedrooms. The complex had its own water supply, wells, and water tower, a rail and tramway connection, and a car parking lot adjacent to the viewing platforms.<sup>24</sup>

The Municipal Zoological Garden in Warsaw was called into existence by a city hall resolution dated 14 June 1927.<sup>25</sup> It was located on the right bank of the Vistula river, on the site of the former Park Aleksandryjski ['Alexander Park'], a location that had been assigned as early as 1912.<sup>26</sup> The first director was Wenanty Burdziński (1864–1928), co-founder and first director of the Kyiv zoo, who died in winter 1928, having caught a cold when rescuing animals brought to the unfinished Warsaw zoo. In 1929, the position was taken over by Jan Żabiński, graduate of the Szkoła Główna Gospo-

21 Witold Pruski, *Wyścigi i hodowla koni pełnej krwi oraz czystej krwi arabskiej w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, Warsaw: Ossolineum, 1980, pp. 154–155.

22 Ibid., pp. 153, 157.

23 Including 1. the grandstand for members and premium paying places, accompanied by a lobby, a grand room, an entertainment suite, and a dining room; 2. the main terrace with a capacity of 5,400, with seated and standing places and a large roofed tote pool hall; and 3. the discount-ticket stand, with a capacity of 7,000.

24 Witold Pruski, pp. 156–158.

25 *Sprawozdanie z działalności Zarządu m. st. Warszawy za rok 1927/28*, cyt. za: *85 lat Miejskiego Ogródu Zoologicznego w Warszawie*, Warsaw: Miejski Ogród Zoologiczny w Warszawie, 2013, p. 20.

26 Jan Żabiński, *Przekrój przez zoo*, Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1954, p. 22.



darstwa Wiejskiego husbandry school (today the Warsaw University of Life Sciences), with a PhD from the University of Warsaw. As the facility's director and main organiser, Żabiński favoured the Hagenbeckian conception of a landscape zoo,<sup>27</sup> where the animals are displayed in open enclosures, with the safety of both parties of the spectacle ensured by a system of moats and other low protections (e.g., spikes). The idea of the zoo as a complex of interpenetrating and stratifying panoramas, where animals from a particular geographical area can be seen together, was first implemented by entrepreneur Carl Hagenbeck at a private zoological garden he started building in 1900 in Hellabrunn near Hamburg. Thanks to his conception, the spectacle of the zoo could be rid of the iron bars and cages that, being associated with captivity, were less and less acceptable for the modern viewer. 'I desired above all things to give the animals the maximum of liberty. I wished to exhibit them not as captives, confined within narrow spaces, and looked at between bars, but as free to wander from place to place within as large limits as possible'<sup>28</sup>, wrote Hagenbeck, who was not only the world's most famous turn-of-the-century trader of exotic animals but also an initiator and operator of lucrative 'human zoo' shows where members of exotic ethnic groups were presented alongside the animals they bred in their native countries (such as elephants or reindeer), demonstrating 'typical' activities of their culture.<sup>29</sup>

Żabiński was also a fervent advocate of the zoo as a research, science, and education institution, the main purpose of which is to produce and popularise academic knowledge of animals. With 'cultural entertainment for the broad masses' last on his list of the zoo's tasks, among those he deemed more important was, for example, the 'provision of models for the development of animal themes in the visual arts'.<sup>30</sup> The status of animal art in modernist practices was ambiguous; on the one hand, it was often considered inferior, being associated with sentimentality, a trait the modern avant-garde rejected; on the other hand, the avant-garde's disavowal of academic hierarchies, in which animal art ranked low, made possible the genre's cultural advancement.<sup>31</sup> The idea of having artists work on site was part of the modern zoo's agenda, and Julian Huxley, who in 1934 succeeded Chalmers Mitchell as Secretary of the Zoological Society of London, continued the program of introducing avant-garde architecture to the zoo, commissioning the Tecton group to design a Studio of Animal Art. Built in 1937, some 200 artists worked there daily, taking advantage of the possibility of depicting live animals.<sup>32</sup> Though lacking a special studio in this vein, the Warsaw zoo was also open to artists. The best-known of those was Magdalena Gross (1891–1948), who from 1930 created Art Dèco-inspired animal sculptures.<sup>33</sup>

27 Ibid., pp. 31–37.

28 Vicky Croke, *The Modern Ark. The Story of Zoos: Past, Present and Future*, New York: Scribner, 2014.

29 Ibid.

30 Jan Żabiński, *Przekrój...*, pp. 14–18.

31 See Roni Grén.

32 Peder Anker, pp. 23, 26.

33 During the German occupation of Warsaw, Gross hid at the Żabińskis' house on the premises of the zoo.

### Discipline and Empathy: the Animal as the Other

‘With regard to the concept of the animal, the modern age could be characterised as an epoch of human exception’, Roni Grén writes in a book devoted to the concept of the animal in the context of modern theories of art.<sup>34</sup> This exception was founded, on the one hand, on the notion that the difference between people and animals is essential rather than of degree, an argument that becomes the cornerstone of Cartesian philosophy, and on the other hand, on the affirmation of the human subject by Romanticism and German idealism. Darwin’s theory, and with it the belief that the ‘mind is function of the body’<sup>35</sup>, had radical consequences both for the very conception of a human-animal boundary and for its underlying dichotomies of matter vs. spirit, nature vs. culture, body vs. mind — but they still filtered through to the field of philosophy and art reluctantly and very slowly. The belief in a qualitative nature of the boundary between man and animal led to the construction of the latter as the Other. The animal always embodied the second component of those fundamental dichotomies, identified with matter, nature, and body.

It also shared the fate of the other Others of the modern era: subaltern peoples and classes, women, children — deprived of subjectivity, mute, immersed in an eternal now, and unalienated from the world. ‘Where we see the future only, it sees everything and itself in everything, eternally healed and whole.’<sup>36</sup> Yet ‘granting or refusing the Other the right to history is not an innocent gesture but a political one’<sup>37</sup>, and ‘we need the same kind of conceptual revaluation with respect to animals that has been effected with respect to other people’<sup>38</sup>, writes French historian Éric Baratay, reflecting on the difference in our ability to learn the history of others. For, trying to understand the daily life of serfs from accounts left by their masters, or the life of insurgents in the colonies from the transcripts of their interrogations by the colonial authorities, is the knowledge so gained qualitatively different from that we can gain about animals? ‘Do we understand other people better than we understand animals? We surely understand them more, but not necessarily better, so the former could be placed among the latter. The difference between them is of degree rather than of nature because the animal is also an Other.’<sup>39</sup>

If we assume that the difference between man and animal is one of quantity rather than of quality, as the discourse of modern philosophy art, or religion would suggest, than the role of animals in the modern socialisation of children can be interpreted from the perspective of the concentration of otherness in the realm of a certain continuum and the hierarchy resulting from that concentration. The modern Others

34 Roni Grén, p. 6.

35 Ibid., p. 62.

36 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Duino Elegies*, trans. Leslie Norris, Alan Keele, Camden House, 2008, p. 47.

37 Éric Baratay, p. 331.

38 Ibid., p. 39.

39 Ibid., p. 41.

— women, ‘peoples without history’, ‘Oriental peoples’, the lower classes, children, or finally animals — have a lot in common, for they are construed as an alter ego of the Self. At the same time, however, due to the different functions they play in the modern world, outsiders of various denominations are submitted to different degrees of acculturation to the modern in-group rules, that is, instructed and educated. The modern socialising metaphors of the ‘wild child’ and ‘child of nature’<sup>40</sup> posit a similarity between children and animals with respect to those traits that are discriminated in the process of education, whether valued positively or negatively. Modern animals play a very important role in the socialisation of modern children not only because they appear in fables that convey knowledge about social structure, its underlying relationships, and the characteristics of the different groups and actors of social interactions, but above all as an object on the example of which they learn the social attitudes desired by our modern society: discipline and empathy. The pet animal becomes for the child an object of educational practices, just as the child is an object of educational practices on the hands of adults; the wild animal becomes an object of care and protection; the domestic animal — of empathy and care. In Kornel Makuszyński’s novel for young people, *The Devil from Seventh Grade*, city kids — scouts — are vegetarian<sup>41</sup>, and the main protagonist of *The Follies of Miss Eva* stands up for a horse that is being cruelly whipped by a coachman.

If we look once again at the ideas underpinning the modernist architecture of the London zoo, both those that informed Lubetkin and the socially committed motivations of Chalmers Mitchell and Huxley, we arrive at the inevitable conclusion that modernity wants to force the Other into the role he is supposed to play in ‘ourness’ by alienating him from ‘otherness’. If however — as the discourse of modern philosophy and art would have it in spite of Darwin — the animal (the woman, the savage) differs from man essentially (rather than by degree), then resigning otherness means for it becoming alienated from its own essence. That, by definition, is not entirely possible — an Other that is essentially different will never become ‘one of us’. The only solution, therefore, is to exert control over the Other. In this respect, Poles were, and still are, very modern: according to a 2005 survey, the single behavioural trait that pet (dog and cat) owners valued the most in their pets was obedience.<sup>42</sup>

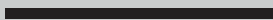
40 See Krzysztof Tomasz Konecki, *Ludzie i ich zwierzęta*, Warsaw: Scholar, 2005, p. 68 ff.

41 See Ewelina Rąbkowska, ‘Zwierzęcy świat w „Szatanie z siódmej klasy” Kornela Makuszyńskiego’, in *Zwierzęta, gender, kultura. Perspektywa ekologiczna, etyczna i krytyczna*, ed. Anna Barcz, Magdalena Dąbrowska, Lublin: E-naukowiec, 2014, pp. 175–187. Of course, vegetarianism is far more complex an issue and even in the context of the scouts themselves it may have been motivated by considerations related to health and fitness (see for example the work of Dr Apolinary Tarnawski and his wife Romualda) or even national identity (Slavism, see the views of Konstanty Moes-Oskragietto.), as both of those themes had been present in the Polish vegetarian discourse since the 1880s; the outstanding child psychologist Józefa Joteyko also wrote about vegetarianism in children and scouting.

42 Krzysztof Tomasz Konecki, pp. 71–72.

# 'garden community'

Green Warsaw  
of the Interwar Period



Ewa Toniak

'I can think of no better form of personal involvement in the cure of the environment than that of gardening.'<sup>1</sup> Those words by the American theoretician and ecological activist, Wendell Berry, can be related to the pro-ecological, integrative, and pro-environmental activities of the inhabitants of pre-WWII Warsaw, which bring to mind the contemporary practices of community gardening. Postulates of environmental awareness were informed by the modernisation processes of the interwar period and shaped Varsovians' attitudes towards nature.

It seems legitimate, therefore, to ask whether it is possible to reconstruct the interwar-period 'green Warsaw' micro-narrative and find out how a space of integration was forged out of the local and to what extent the conscious involvement of the users of urban space contributed to building a community based on reciprocity rather than exploitation. As Mateusz Salwa notes, community gardens 'not only make it possible to experience non-human persons differently — as partners and with a sense of responsibility — but also to experience persons other than ourselves in this way. In this sense, the garden, a community of humans and non-humans can serve as a paragon for the human community itself'.<sup>2</sup>

By definition anachronistic — adapting contemporary categories for the purposes of an essay dealing with historical subject matter — the perspective may also allow us to see the makers of small neighbourhood-unit green squares, recreational gardens considered as sites of pro-community education (such as the 'Jordan's gardens'), balcony-box 'hanging gardens', or the early allotment gardens, as embodying the attitude of the custodian (steward) who cares for the welfare of nature.<sup>3</sup> As Mateusz Salwa notes, contemporary redefinitions of the figure of the steward make it possible to look at gardening as a practice that 'does not remain without an impact on the gardener themselves'.<sup>4</sup>

What seems particularly inspiring in this context is the 'garden community' of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative's (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa, WSM) housing estates in Żoliborz and Rakowiec — 'centres of **new life** based not on competition and

1 Wendell Berry, 'Think Little', in idem, *A Continuous Harmony: Essays Cultural and Agricultural*, Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012, p. 79. Quoted in Mateusz Salwa, *Estetyka ogrodu. Między sztuką a ekologią*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Przypis, 2016, p. 238.

2 Mateusz Salwa, p. 238.

3 Ibid., p. 241.

4 Ibid., p. 245.



'The plant hostel' at the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (WSM) housing estate, Żoliborz, Warsaw, second half of 1930s, WSM Hall of History







rivalry as in the capitalist world',<sup>5</sup> but on the principle of **mutual aid**, corresponding with the idea, appreciated by contemporary feminism, of the gift economy.

### A Garden for Living

Remembering the late Teodor Toeplitz (1875–1937), Tadeusz Totwiński emphasised the great significance that the WSM co-founder attached to the yards and gardens, which are 'no less important than the layout of the apartment and the collective facilities of the cooperative housing scheme, for it is in the context of these facilities and the outdoor environment that the social life of the occupants shapes itself'.<sup>6</sup> The article is illustrated with images from the 1928 'Tree Planting Day' at the WSM Cluster 1, one of them showing the sunlit façade of an apartment house with wide open windows.<sup>7</sup> The picture is more than just a document of a moment in time. It also records a symbolic act, founding a 'new mode of inhabitation'<sup>8</sup> for groups that previously lacked access to 'air, green space, and light'.<sup>9</sup> 'Only social housing', Toeplitz wrote in the first issue of *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, 'can provide the masses with a healthy, sunny, well-aired home, equipped with all those conveniences that in for-profit housing are only available to the rich'.<sup>10</sup>

Illustrating the project of radical change and the chance of 'improving the housing culture' of marginalised social groups are two photographs featured on the same page of the magazine, showing a 'dwelling at a tenement house': unkempt, chaotic, with sheets of newspapers as partitions, and the destination 'worker-cooperative apartment': lofty, bright, with a large window and lush plants growing in suspended pots.<sup>11</sup>

### Optimistic Yards and Window-Sill Sanatoriums

'According to the liberal-leftist views of the WSM ideologues', Marta Leśniakowska writes in the context of Barbara Brukalska's work, green yards 'were meant to constitute a "naturally green" integrative public space, democratic and "optimistically" open to all'.<sup>12</sup> Such 'garden policy' was strongly informed by Brukalska's gardening studies and her aesthetic preferences, which 'oriented her towards neo-Romanticism' and 'caused

5 *Życie Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej*, June 1931 (original italics). I hereby thank Zuzanna Sękowska for her help in conducting archival research.

6 Tadeusz Totwiński, 'Teodor Toeplitz w Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 1, 1939, p. 31.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Landscape architect Aleksander Zielonko formulated the principle categorically. He wrote, 'The modern home can be divided into the dwelling-home and the garden-home'; in idem, 'Zazielenianie osiedli', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 1, 1933, p. 10.

10 Teodor Toeplitz, 'Spółeczne budownictwo mieszkaniowe', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 1, 1929, p. 18.

11 *Ibid.*

12 Marta Leśniakowska, 'Barbara Brukalska: subtelna budownicza płaszczyzn i form', in *Architektki*, ed. Ewa Mańkowska-Grin, Kraków: Wydawnictwo EMG, 2016, p. 48. On WSM home-design principles, see Katarzyna Uchowicz, 'WSM. Mieszkanie jako algorytm', in *Robotnik. Performans pamięci*, ed. Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, Dorota Sajewska, Dorota Sosnowska, Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszelewskiego; Instytut Wydawniczy Prasa i Książka; Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2017, pp. 305–334.

her to introduce picturesque, non-geometric garden layouts, accompanied by natural elements, to the rigid geometries of purism and the Italian modernism-inspired international modernistic classicism preferred by her husband [Stanisław Brukalski].<sup>13</sup> As can be inferred from the WSM newsletters, Brukalska's projects wouldn't have gone far without the commitment of local residents and the firm support of the cooperative itself. Funds for setting up and cultivating the flower gardens in the WSM courtyards were raised on a voluntary basis among the occupants and amounted to several hundred zlotys a year, which was a significant sum of money.<sup>14</sup>

If the pro-ecological commitment of the WSM Żoliborz residents can be expressed in numbers, then the record goes to the Gardening Centre, started by the WSM Board in 1932 in order to 'promote the growing of houseplants'.<sup>15</sup> Enjoying particular popularity was the 'plant hostel', probably the only such undertaking in Poland, launched in 1936, where only within the first couple of months, as Ewa Grzesiewicz reported, some 400 co-op members 'brought their beloved plants, in their handfuls and dozens, asking for advice, skilful transplanting, or treatment'.<sup>16</sup> Anthropomorphisation, or a personal relationship with plants, referred to by the author of the paragraph as 'patients', indicates an ethical attitude to domesticated nature, based on a feeling of emotional intimacy with non-human organisms. The intention of the write-up is clear, but one still cannot help but to appreciate the idea of a non-violent and unambiguously non-utilitarian attitude to nature.

The plant hostel's activities weren't limited to its own space at a newly built greenhouse. From 1936, in-home assistance was also provided by the Gardening Centre to WSM Żoliborz residents. Those 'co-inhabitants' (formerly known as owners) who signed a proper release and paid a small fee were visited once a month by a gardener who offered professional advice and actual treatment to bring sick window-sill residents back to good health.<sup>17</sup>

13 Marta Leśniakowska, p. 48. As the author notes, 'In "green" projects, Brukalska competed with the era's most famous landscape architect, Alina Scholtzówna', *ibid.*, pp. 47–48. See also *eadem*, 'Zutów Marszałka Piłsudskiego. Metafizyka miejsca, czyli refleksje nad wyciętym lasem', *Arche*, vol. 17/18, 1998, pp. 31–35.

14 For example, in 1931, a sum of 400 zlotys was chipped in for the purpose, enough to buy '300 rose bushes as well as other flowers and plants', meaning that the 'yards of the first three clusters can receive a pleasing appearance, reflecting the residents' culture'. Lack of funding prevented a similar upgrade of the Cluster 4 yard when a loan tranche approved by Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego was not paid out; see *Życie Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej*, June 1931. The WSM annual report for 1938 states that 78 percent of the co-op's new members earned less than 300 zlotys a month; see *Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa. Sprawozdanie za rok 1938*, Warsaw, 1939, p. 7.

15 *Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa*, reprinted in the monograph *Spółdzielczość Mieszkaniowa w Polsce*, Warsaw: WSM, 1938, retrieved from <http://lewicowo.pl/warszawska-spoldzielnia-mieszkaniowa/>, accessed 8 December 2017.

16 E.[wa] Grzesiewicz, 'Cudze chwalicie... Nasz pensjonat roślinny', *Życie Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej*, September 1936. The idea of the subjectivisation of plants, i.e., non-human beings, can also be found in the WSM's 1938 annual report: 'The number of plants in treatment and storage at the "plant sanatorium" is almost identical as last year', see *Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa. Sprawozdanie za rok 1938*, Warsaw, 1939, p. 61.

17 E.[wa] Grzesiewicz.

## The Backyard Stigma

In the articles featured in *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie* and in the WSM's official communiqués, the common spaces between the buildings are often referred to as 'curtilages' rather than 'yards'. It is worth dwelling for a moment upon this subtle distinction. In a typical tenement house in prewar Warsaw, the occupants of the WSM co-ops would live in basement or backyard flats, in the least prominent and looked-after part of the house.<sup>18</sup> Provided, of course, that they could afford to live in the city at all.<sup>19</sup> Even new multi-storey houses that, due to zoning regulations, were built around a common garden, reproduced in fact the plan of the narrow 'puteal' backyard. For Brukalska, such designs carried the 'backyard stigma'.<sup>20</sup> She called them a 'transition stage between the backyard-based layout and more advanced urban-planning outcomes'<sup>21</sup>, such as linear development, where 'air flows freely along the buildings and green spaces simultaneously purify and exchange the air'.<sup>22</sup> Replacing the hated 'yard' in the nomenclature of the Praesens group, the 'curtilage' evokes an open, well-lit space. 'There will be no sunless homes anymore', Praesens wrote in 1931 about the design of WSM Rakowiec.<sup>23</sup>

'There will be no sunless cities anymore', Toeplitz upped the ante, bemoaning in 1932 the construction of Warsaw's first skyscraper, the Prudential.<sup>24</sup> His rhetorical question, 'Is it necessary to take sunlight away not only from the neighbours but even from the school kids playing on winter days at Ewangelicki Square or the babies strolled in prams down Mazowiecka Street?'<sup>25</sup>, supported by measurements of natural light intensity around the sixteen-storey colossus, echoed the WSM's ideological principles and the contemporary press debate about the 'American tower'. Access to natural light, or lack thereof, was a measure of social distinction and the symbolic violence of capital.

## Thy Fellow Flower

Despite intense training and gentle attempts of acculturation, the rationally designed community wasn't always willing to 'properly maintain' the green areas. And while we may be slightly put off by the somewhat impersonal and paternalistic way in which the

18 As one of the workmen employed at the WSM Rakowiec housing estate put it, the new homes 'face the sun rather than the gutter'; quoted in Juliusz Żakowski, 'O racjonalną regulację dzielnic mieszkaniowych', *Dom, Ogród, Mieszkanie*, no. 10/11, 1936, p. 13.

19 Among the residents of WSM Rakowiec were workers from the nearby industrial plants.

20 Barbara Brukalska, 'Na peryferiach Warszawy', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 2, 1930, p. 9.

21 Ibid., p. 10.

22 Ibid.

23 Zespół Praesens, 'Osiedle Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej na Rakowcu', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 5, 1931, p. 8. The architects revised the design so that all residents would have access to 'sun rays'.

24 Teodor Toeplitz, 'Kradzież słońca', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 2, 1932, pp. 1–2. For more on the Prudential building, see Ewa Toniał, 'Budynek Prudentialu jako afektywna heterotopia. Rekonesans', *Miejsce*, no. 3, 2017, pp. 43–74.

25 Teodor Toeplitz.

architects refer to the occupants of the housing schemes they design, the message 'Flowers are entrusted to the care of the residents, and especially children', introduced instead of the usual 'Keep off the grass', disarms any suspicions of colonising practices. 'In order to care for nature', Mateusz Salwa writes, 'one needs . . . to be friendly and benign towards it, sometimes show it mercy, in other words, treat it like a close person.'<sup>26</sup>

Entrusting the care of the weaker, for dependent on people, to children, that is, to those who are also weak and dependent, seems to have much in common with the contemporary biocentric perspective with its sensitivity to the non-human. Empathy towards non-human beings was something the kids were able to develop not only by growing plants at specially prepared 'mini-plots' at the WSM Cluster 4<sup>27</sup>, but also by making friends with a fox, a stork, the squirrel Mickey or the notorious fleer from the school menagerie, the jackdaw Katie.<sup>28</sup>

### Empathising with Plants

A similarly empathic relationship between humans and non-human beings is advocated in articles written by Ewa Wudzka (nee Grzesiewicz) and Jadwiga Toeplitzówna, encouraging readers to grow flowers and potted plants at home. In one of the articles featured in *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, the author suggests arranging a 'flower room' in the 'machine for living', setting up a miniature greenhouse because 'plants don't like sudden temperature changes or drafts'.<sup>29</sup> Of a warm yet not condescending tone is an emotionally moving article<sup>30</sup> in which Toeplitzówna convinces the future 'plant hostel' hosts that 'animate organisms mustn't be treated like inanimate ones: just water them mechanically . . . and forget the rest. Rather, one needs to approach them with empathy, to know and understand them'.<sup>31</sup> Clear and lucid writing, frequently referring to the reader's experiences and emotions, was meant to accustom them to ideas that the 'working-class home didn't know before'.<sup>32</sup>

26 Mateusz Salwa, p. 245.

27 'Zagonki dla dzieci', *Życie Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej*, czerwiec 1931, p. 9.

28 See *Życie Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej*, September 1935, p. 12.

29 N.N., 'Kwiaty w mieszkaniu', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 1, 1932, pp. 22, 23. The author was probably Jadwiga Toeplitzówna, who published an article under the same title in the issue no. 12.

30 J.[adwiga] T.[oeplitzówna], 'Kwiaty w mieszkaniu', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 12, 1930, pp. 18–21.

31 Ibid.

32 A. Dziewierz [Antoni Duda-Dziewierz], 'Z doświadczeń administratora osiedli mieszkalnych', *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 11/12, 1936, p. 56. The manager of WSM Rakowiec believed that green squares would help the working-class residents feel at home at their new address: 'Plant flowers, more and more flowers, for only in this way will the resident come to like his yards . . . . Flowers in the yards mean flowers in every home — again something that the working-class home didn't know before, and if so, then to a very small degree'; *ibidem*. It was this aspect of the life of Warsaw's poorest social groups that was emphasised in the first place by the women writers and journalists of the time. Pola Gojawiczyńska's *Nowolipki Street* stands for 'dark and dirty alleys and yards, and the stench of the open garbage dumps, and leafless trees in backyards where nothing would grow or flower — not even the meagrest grass'; Pola Gojawiczyńska, *Dziewczęta z Nowolipek* (1935), Warsaw: Prószyński i Spółka, 1999, p. 134. Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina describes degenerated plants, like the places where the poor live. In Wola, in one of the houses, behind windows that are 'wadded with rags and cluttered with strange plants in pots, cans, and shells'; *eadem*, 'Białe gołębie', in *eadem*, *Krzyże z papieru*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo MON,

## How to Dwell Well

A chasm between the ‘search for an algorithm — for fixed points and clear principles of architectural design, the key functions of which would be dwelling, work, recreation, and transportation’<sup>33</sup> and the forms of actual usage by people of a habitus different from that of the scheme’s designers is heralded by the disappointment present in Helena Wolska’s enunciation featured in *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie* in 1933. The author concedes that economic stabilisation and improved living conditions among workers don’t necessarily translate into a rise in their cultural capital. ‘Experience shows that as soon as achieving even the barest degree of prosperity, the working-class family leans towards the “bourgeois” type and is not really interested in buying furnishings designed for the rational small home.’<sup>34</sup> Upon ‘inspecting and photographing’ the homes of the new residents of WSM Rakowiec, most of whom were previously homeless, the Syrkuses were shocked to find out ‘at how primitive a level the dwelling culture stands’<sup>35</sup> and how unrealistic their expectations had been.

The dream of the Praesens architects — for the occupants of the ‘living unit’ to understand that the algorithm of life is not played out in a ‘mawkish miniature’, does not keep up the ‘appearances of the bourgeois home’, but ‘has its own functional character, resulting from the adaptation of the dimensions and the layout to the needs they are meant to serve’<sup>36</sup> — could hardly be realised. According to Tomasz Zatuski, ‘functionalist architecture is a biopolitical production of daily life’; as such, it ‘implants production-management techniques in the modes of thinking and acting, in human emotions, bodily habits, and behaviours’.<sup>37</sup>

Taylorist-Fordist paradigms worked well in architectural designs, but the human material, subjected to social conditioning, deprived of intimacy in the communal bathhouses, and lumped indiscriminately into the collectives of New Men, rebelled whenever they could avoid the watchful eye of the community. But the presence of petit-bourgeois furniture in the austere interiors as a barricade against daylight and too much air didn’t prevent the ‘committed intern’<sup>38</sup> from checking the cleanliness of

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1955, p. 77. The above quotations after: Małgorzata Büthner-Zawadzka, *Warszawa w oczach pisarek. Obraz i doświadczenie miasta w polskiej prozie kobiecej 1864–1939*, Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2014, the chapter ‘Pomiędzy śródmieściem a przedmieściem. Barwy i odcienie zaangażowania’, pp. 367–518.

33 Katarzyna Uchowicz, p. 396.

34 Helena Wolska, ‘Najmniejsze mieszkanie i przedmioty codziennego użytku’, *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 12, 1933, p. 15. Even in 1936, a manager of a WSM housing project was convinced that the ‘future residents need to be taught how to dwell properly’; see A. Dziewierz, p. 52.

35 Hanna Syrkus, Szymon Syrkus, ‘Współdziałanie użytkowników przy opracowaniu projektów mieszkania robotniczego w osiedlu na Rakowcu’, *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 10/11, 1936, p. 34.

36 Zespół Praesens, p. 3.

37 Tomasz Zatuski, ‘Futerat na ciało. Tayloryzm i biopolityka w koncepcji architektury funkcjonalistycznej Katarzyny Kobro i Władysława Strzemińskiego’, in *Miasto-Zdrój. Architektura i programowanie zmysłów*, ed. Joanna Kusiak, Bogna Świątkowska, Warsaw: Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, 2013, p. 202.

38 In 1938, the Residents Council conducted a cleanliness inspection at 400 homes ‘with the help of a committed intern’, finding ‘numerous examples of often gross negligence; see *Warszawska*

the kitchens and corridors. The only way to escape the algorithm of the living unit was through the garden, unproductively practicing an 'escalation of optimism' in the mini-greenhouse — the 'plant room' — for one's own sake only. 'When a cactus blooms or is particularly pretty in the costume of its spines,' the author suggests, 'you can put it in a prominent place for a while and hold a small feast, following which both you and the plant return to your own affairs and places.'<sup>39</sup> Usually, however, as the statistics of the WSM 'plant hostel' show, it was not the cactus but the potted palm tree that occupied a prominent place in the working-class home — not unlike in a self-respecting bourgeois apartment.<sup>40</sup>

The remoulding of the older generation along the lines of avant-garde utopias didn't necessarily have to succeed, and attempts to breed a new one in the functionalist greenhouse, such as the WSM housing schemes with their 'transparent walls', could be thwarted even by the jackdaw Katie and squirrel Mickey, skilled as they were in the 'elimination of redundant movements'.<sup>41</sup>

*Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa. Sprawozdanie za rok 1938*, Warsaw 1939, p. 55.

39 'A mini indoor greenhouse is the ideal here, a plant room with the optimum temperature, air humidity, and amount of light. . . . In a small . . . home, the greenhouse should be replaced by a special plant window: bright, with a large sill, and not opened for plants don't like sudden temperature changes or drafts'; 'Kwiaty w mieszkaniu', *Dom, Ogród, Mieszkanie*, no. 1, 1932, p. 22.

40 Out of a total of 659 plants kept at the hostel, 247 were palm trees; see *Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa. Sprawozdanie za rok 1938*, Warsaw 1939, p. 61.

41 I am referring here to Tomasz Żałoski's discussion of Taylorism, see *idem*, p. 184.

# **the cooperative spirit on the road**

The Legend of the Vagabond Inn  
and Polish Working-Class Tourism



Przemysław Strożek



The Vagabond Inn Housing and Tourism Cooperative (Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowo-Turystyczna Gospoda Włóczęgów) was active in the years 1923–1936 and during that time it became something of a cult phenomenon. Founded in Warsaw on the initiative of Jan Hempel and Stanisław Totwiński under the auspices of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa, WSM), its mission was to meet the WSM members' recreational needs by organising excursions and tourist clubs. Structured as a holidaymaking cooperative, it brought together activists from the Communist Party of Poland, Polish Socialist Party, and other leftist organisations, playing a pioneering role in the popularisation of tourism among the working class. Tourism was one of the earliest developing fields of activity of the worker physical-culture movement and cooperative associations.<sup>1</sup>

'Cooperative associations are thoroughly constructive organisations, building, laying the economic foundations of a new order and educating the new man for it'<sup>2</sup>, stressed Totwiński in his manifesto, *The Cooperative Spirit* (1921). Tourism was perfectly suited as a means of educating the proletariat, combining cultural aspects with those of physical education and regional knowledge. Moreover, excursions and outings offered workers a much-needed contact with nature, allowing them to spend time in a healthy environment, far from the harmful conditions in which they worked or lived. It was for a reason, therefore, that Totwiński was thinking about starting a workers' tourism-and-recreation cooperative. It was registered in 1923 and its statutory goals included providing workers with holiday quarters, organising group trips, as well as satisfying their cultural and educational needs in the spirit of leftwing propaganda.<sup>3</sup>

The Vagabond Inn was open to anyone who was accepted by the cooperative's Supervisory Board and agreed to pay membership fees, as well as to act on behalf of the organisation's development. In the first year, slightly more than 100 persons joined. Enrolment was handled by the Inn office, run by Totwiński's sister, Anna Totwińska, and located at Krucza Street on the premises of Spółdzielnia Książka, Poland's first book-selling cooperative, which issued important publications promoting working-class culture.

1 Jerzy Gaj, *Dzieje turystyki w Polsce*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo AlmaMer, 2006, p. 91.

2 Stanisław Totwiński, 'Duch spółdzielczości', in idem, *Wybór pism*, Warsaw: Centralny Związek Spółdzielni Budownictwa Mieszkaniowego. Komisja Historyczna Rady Naukowej, 1975, p. 22.

3 See *Statut Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej p.n. „Gospoda Włóczęgów”*, Warsaw 1923, retrieved from <https://polona.pl/item/69958338/0>, accessed 20 September 2017.



The Vagabond Inn at the Antałówka House (on the photo, among others, architect Jan Chmielewski), 1930s, Polish Academy of Sciences, Archive in Warsaw

Over the 15 years of its career, the Vagabond Inn organised numerous domestic and international tours, and its members made contact with similar organisations abroad. And while its activities went far beyond organising excursions into the Tatra Mountains, it was precisely mountain tourism that became the Vagabond Inn's trademark. A focal point in this respect was the Antałówka House (Dom na Antałówce) mountain shelter, which leftist activists deemed a 'revolutionary paradise'.<sup>4</sup>

### At the Antałówka House

In order to secure convenient lodgings for the Vagabond Inn members, on 15 September 1923 Totwiński signed an agreement with Maria Witkiewiczowa, leasing the Antałówka House in Zakopane until 1 May 1925.<sup>5</sup> The contract was then extended for another ten years. While there were plans for the Inn to build its own shelter in Dolina Białego, a design drafted to this end by architect Karol Stryeński was never realised. The idea of extending the Antałówka House, conceived by architect Jan Chmielewski, wasn't carried through either. The shelter comprised only six bedrooms and a kitchen, which made it too small for larger groups, and demand for accommodations was very high — the Vagabond Inn had 104 members only in the first year of its functioning, after all. It is also worth remembering that there were relatively few tourist lodgings in the Tatra Mountains at the time.

Among those acting as mountain guides were Boleśław Bierut and Mieczysław Kwiatkowski, both associated with Spółdzielnia Książka, as well as Totwiński himself.<sup>6</sup> The Inn organised group trips under their leadership, using such outings as an opportunity to carry out cultural-educational work and promote the 'cooperative spirit'. The Antałówka House also comprised a library and a dayroom where lectures, discussions, and presentations took place, organised by leftist activists. Literary soirees, where besides pieces by Władysław Broniewski, Witold Wandurski, or Stanisław Ryszard Stande, Vladimir Mayakovsky's revolutionary poems were recited, enjoyed immense popularity.<sup>7</sup>

Much of what we know about the shelter's daily life and cultural programme comes from the memoirs left by leftwing activists, writers, and artists, which were published after World War II.<sup>8</sup> During the People's Poland era, the Vagabond Inn was considered a legendary place, the true 'forging place of socialism'.<sup>9</sup> It was at the

4 Wojciech Jarzębowski, Andrzej Konieczny, *Zakopiański jarmark romantyczny i tragiczny*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sport i Turystyka, 1978, p. 184.

5 Contract between Stanisław Totwiński and Maria Witkiewiczowa, 15 September 1923, Stanisław Totwiński Archive, Polish Academy of Sciences, sign. III-185, II 66.

6 Stanisław Totwiński, 'Gospoda Włóczęgów spółdzielnia mieszkaniowo-turystyczna', in *Sport robotniczy: opracowania, dokumenty, materiały. T.2, 1918–1939*, ed. Andrzej Wohl, Henryka Młodzianowska, Henryk Laskiewicz, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sport i Turystyka, 1964, p. 171.

7 Tadeusz Paszta, *Z pokolenia w pokolenie*, Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1976, p. 177.

8 Among other authors to have written about the Inn was Witold Henryk Paryski, see 'Gospoda Włóczęgów', in *Mieczysław Szczuka*, ed. Aleksander Stern, Mieczysław Berman, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1965, pp. 154–155.

9 Tadeusz Paszta, p. 179.

Antałówka House that political activists, ex-prisoners, left-oriented artists, writers, and architects met, spending time together exploring the mountains. Among the regular guests were Totwiński, Bierut, Hempel, Kwiatkowski, as well as Włodzimierz Sokorski, Władysław Broniewski, Antonina Sokolicz, Ludwik Merkel, or Mieczysław Szczuka. 'It was only our joint treks around the Tatras that brought us closer together'<sup>10</sup>, wrote Sokorski about his first meeting with Broniewski, while the latter, in a text published after the war, stressed the place's great atmosphere:

The Inn was able to accommodate up to 30 people, the majority of those sleeping on straw mattresses spread on the floor in two bedrooms and the dining room. I first visited the place in 1925. It was clean, though more than modest. The schedule was pretty rigorous: by 8 a.m. everybody was already up and sitting to breakfast, the mattresses neatly folded and put aside. Ropes, hooks, and other mountaineering equipment were at hand. In fact, the late lamented [Mieczysław] Szczuka, my colleague from the editorial board of *Dźwignia*, a painter and mountaineer, had his own gear . . . The names of the others have become blurred in my memory, but I guess all 'vagabonds' remember the beautiful, noble atmosphere of that cooperative house.<sup>11</sup>

The Inn was a meeting place for important artists who exerted significant influence on the Polish culture of the interwar period. It brought together people like Totwiński — a housing expert, later a member of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (Congrès internationaux d'Architecture moderne, CIAM); Ludwik Merkel — the designer of Poland's first central-heating boiler room at WSM Żoliborz; Leon Schiller — a leftwing theatre director and theoretician; Broniewski — a poet, leader of the Polish literary left at the time; or Szczuka — co-founder of the Constructivist collective Blok and its eponymous periodical, author of photomontages and architect, leader of the leftwing avant-garde. Szczuka was in fact the graphic designer of Broniewski's poetry volume, *Dymy nad miastem* [Smoke over the city], published in 1927 by Spółdzielnia Książka.

Unlike Broniewski, who simply participated in hiking tours, or Totwiński, a guide on the less-demanding routes, Szczuka was a professional climber and populariser of mountaineering. *Blok* (1924–1926), which he co-edited, featured his photographs from the Tatras next to reproductions of international avant-garde art works. In *Dźwignia* (1927–1928), in turn, which he was the sole editor of, he presented his own architectural designs for the expansion of Warsaw's residential districts, among other things, as well explaining, already in the first issue, what mountain climbing meant for him: 'The essence of climbing is not to satisfy one's ambition by doing first routes. Repeating a route done previously by someone else — but unknown to me — I discover

10 Włodzimierz Sokorski, 'Wspomnienia o Broniewskim', *Miesięcznik Literacki*, no. 1, 1973, p. 68.

11 Władysław Broniewski, 'Gospoda Włóczęgów', *Turystyka*, no. 3/4, 1951, p. 18.

it for myself as a new one. . . . An unknown route gives me all kinds of emotions and presents me with tall challenges that no topo or the knowledge that someone else has done before me it can diminish — if I cannot manage it myself.<sup>12</sup>

Szczuka was thus referring to Marian Sokołowski's article, *For a New Headword in Climbing*, published in the sports periodical, *Stadion*, emphasising the optimism with which the founder of the Climbing Section of the Kraków Academic Sports Association (Akademicki Związek Sportowy, AZS) viewed the future of alpinism. We can also learn from Szczuka's correspondence with Sokołowski that the *Dźwignia* editor organised lectures at the Warsaw branch of the Polish Tourism Society in order to 'promote idea of major expeditions among young climbers'.<sup>13</sup> He even wanted to start a Climbing Club in Warsaw, affiliated with the AZS Climbing Section.

Szczuka's sporting ambitions clearly went far beyond the ideas of the Vagabond Inn itself, which mainly gathered the enthusiasts of mountain hiking. Alongside Józef Orenburg or Józef Oppenheim (long-time director of the Tatra Mountains Volunteer Rescue Service, TOPR), Szczuka was among the most experienced alpinists who stayed at the Inn. He tried and climbed some of the most difficult routes in the Tatras, including a new variant on the north-eastern face of Mięguszowiecki Szczyt.<sup>14</sup> He climbed Zamarła Turnia on several occasions, which made all the more puzzling his expedition on 13 August 1927, when he died trying to ascent the summit in the company of two young and inexperienced climbers. In one of his last, unfinished works, an illustration for Anatol Stern's epic poem, *Europe* (1927–1929), he surrounded Zamarła with an obituary-style black border, perhaps sensing that this would be his last climb ever.<sup>15</sup>

It seems that Szczuka's love for the Tatras balanced to some extent his innovative artistic efforts. Individual climbing achievements were accompanied in his case by the idea of collective collaboration promoted by the Warsaw Constructivist group Blok. As Szczuka's mountaineering friend, Jan Alfred Szczepański, stressed shortly after his death in a letter to Broniewski:

Of course, it is absolutely untrue that Szczuka released in tourism the energies of an artist doomed to limited activity in other fields, even to forced inactivity. Of course, Szczuka's climbing had far deeper motivations. Of course,

12 Mieczysław Szczuka, 'Na marginesie sportowym', *Dźwignia*, no. 1, 1927, p. 56.

13 Mieczysław Szczuka's letter to Marian Sokołowski, 6 November 1926, in *Mieczysław Szczuka...*, p. 165.

14 Wawrzyniec Żuławski, *Sygnaty ze skalnych ścian, Tragedie tatrzańskie. Wędrówki alpejskie. Skalne lato*, Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia, 1967, p. 143.

15 Anatol Stern wrote, 'If I were a mystic, I'd have to feel the breath of the otherworld at the sight of the "obituary" that the artist placed in my poem – the summit, surrounded by a thick black border, with a point marking the exact place in the cliff where Szczuka would fall off'; idem, *Głód jednoznaczności i inne szkice*, Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1972, p. 351. More on the interpretation of the 'obituary' in the context of Szczuka's climbing, see Andrzej Turowski, *Budowniczości świata*, Kraków: Universitas, 2000, pp. 368–370.

even if he'd been able to realise all his ideas, he'd still have been spending long months in the mountains, pursuing his (why avoid the word?) love. Of course, the passion of an alpinist lived in him almost on a par with the passion of an artist.<sup>16</sup>

'He had the gift of inspiring young people'<sup>17</sup>, Tadeusz Paszta, later the President of the Board of the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajoznawcze, PTTK), wrote about his first meeting with Szczuka at the Antałówka House. In his memoirs, Paszta stressed that the man was a prominent figure at the shelter, with young climbers in particular being greatly impressed by him. The Antałówka House attracted all kinds of individualities, and the visitors, Paszta wrote, could be divided into three distinct groups:

The first group were the real alpinists who had been climbing for years and served as instructors for the less experienced; the second one were those who only hiked along marked trails; and the third one were elderly people, sick people, or those recovering from many years' imprisonment, for whom the ability to breathe mountain air had a therapeutic effect. All were members of the leftist community. . . . They were not only united by a common idea, a common struggle for social liberation, but also shared a love for the beauty of nature and for tourism. The latter played an important social and educational role as well as camouflaging the illegal activities — the meetings and conferences that could be organised at the Vagabond Inn.<sup>18</sup>

Between 1923 and 1936, the Antałówka House brought together professional climbers and mountain guides, politicians, cultural activists, artists, and ex-political prisoners seeking a safe haven in the mountains. The Vagabond Inn offered help and support to revolutionaries returning from prisons and served as a transit point for communists fleeing abroad to avoid persecution by the Polish authorities. This as well as the illegal meetings and educational/cultural activities in the spirit of leftist propaganda aroused the suspicion of the authorities, resulting in frequent police inspections and searches. The first police reports concerning the Antałówka House date from 1924, barely a year after the Inn's opening.<sup>19</sup> Due to the unwelcoming official attitude and lack of funding, the shelter was closed down in 1936.

16 Jan Alfred Szczepański, 'List do Broniewskiego z 31 sierpnia 1927', in *Od bliskich i dalekich. Korespondencja do Broniewskiego, 1915–1939*, vol. 1, ed. Feliksa Lichodziejewska, Warsaw: PIW, 1981, p. 367.

17 Tadeusz Paszta, p. 167.

18 Ibid., p. 163.

19 The police records are kept in the Stanisław Tułwiński Archive, Polish Academy of Sciences, Archive in Warsaw, sign. III-186, II 66.



### Foreign Excursions in a Cooperative Spirit

As has been mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the activities of the Vagabond Inn weren't limited to the cultural/educational programme of the Antałówka House and the Tatra Mountains. In 1927–1930, acting on the initiative of Ludwik Merkel, the cooperative organised, in the Warsaw district of Koło, another facility, Dom Dziecka, a home for the children of imprisoned or deceased leftwing activists.<sup>20</sup> The building had been donated by the pharmacist Piotr Wojciechowski, and the profile of the institution was not related to tourism.

Much of the Inn's activity consisted in organising tourist trips to destinations both in Poland and abroad. The former included Toruń, Bydgoszcz, or, for example, the largest hydroelectric power station in Pomerania; there were also kayaking trips down the Vistula or biking excursions around Warsaw. The purpose of the foreign trips, in turn, was to get to know the work of international cooperative organisations. In the second half of 1924, for example, a Vagabond Inn group visited Germany, Belgium, and Great Britain, the highlight of the tour being the International Cooperative Exhibition in Ghent, an overview of national pavilions that used exhibits and diagrams to present the achievements of the cooperative sectors in their respective countries. One of the participants of the expedition, Jan Żerkowski, praised the Belgian, Czech, and Italian pavilions while criticising the Polish one:

Unfortunately, the Polish show didn't enjoy official support and even had to pay export duty for the exhibits being sent to Belgium. Our pavilion . . . is very impractically arranged. . . . Of the consumer cooperatives, the largest exhibitor is Społem. . . . The small number of exhibits by Polish cooperatives reflects, on the one hand, a missing sense of the need for international co-existence and solidarity, and on the other hand, the fact that our cooperative sector is still poorly developed.<sup>21</sup>

Besides Ghent, the Vagabonds visited the first co-op housing scheme in Freidorf, Germany, the birthplace of British cooperativism — Rochdale, cooperative manufactories in Liverpool as well as co-op warehouses in Manchester and London. While in London, they went to see the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Park and got in touch with the Workers' Travel Association (WTA). *Nowa Kultura*, a worker-culture periodical co-edited by Vagabond Inn co-founder, Jan Hempel, had earlier stressed the WTA's role in fostering international contacts:

The mission of the Workers' Travel Organisation in England, founded by working-class activists, is to establish social connections between workers from

20 Bernard Konarski, 'Gospoda Włóczęgów Lewicowa Spółdzielnia Turystyczna', *Mówią Wieki*, no. 1, 1981, p. 35.

21 Jan Żerkowski, *Wycieczka spółdzielcza do Anglii i Belgii*, press clipping from the *Totwiński Archive*, Polish Academy of Sciences, Archive in Warsaw, sign. III–185, II 66.



different countries. In 1923, it organised a number of trips: to Paris, Vienna, Berlin etc. Based on the principle of mutual aid, the association has been expanding rapidly, serving the English working class's tourist needs, which are growing daily.<sup>22</sup>

Making contact with the WTA, the Vagabonds hoped for what is called the 'networking' effect today, resulting in long-term international tourist cooperation between their organisations. In a letter to Totwiński, WTA members wrote they were interested in coming to Poland and finding out about the cooperative movement there.<sup>23</sup> It is not clear, however, whether such an expedition ever took place, for there is no trace of it in the memoirs of either Totwiński or other members of the Vagabond Inn.

### **The Significance of Worker Tourism**

'It was the first organisation in Poland to initiate a social, class-based orientation of tourism and sightseeing based on mass-membership workers' organisations'<sup>24</sup>, Franciszek Ksawery Sawicki wrote about the Vagabond Inn. It was certainly the first such organisation in the country, but not the only one. Another one was a unit of the Youth Organisation of the Workers' University Society (OMTUR), a cell of cultural/educational and sport/recreational work of socialist youth. Also here the distinct character of workers' tourism was stressed during trips and excursions. By visiting historical landmarks or workplaces, the participants were meant to become acquainted with the struggle, life, and various activities of the proletariat. In fact, in the mid-1930s, withering due to the lack of funding, the Vagabond Inn ceded some of its agencies and lines of tourist activity over to the OMTUR. An offshoot of the latter were the Red Scouts, a socialist organisation led, among others, by Stanisław Dubois, which sought to educate young people in the spirit of the socialist ideas expressed in the programmes of the Polish Socialist Party.<sup>25</sup>

Ideological differences aside, leftwing organisations had a similar view of tourism as the rightwing ones, such as the Polish Scouting Organisation (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego, ZHP) or the Falcon Polish Gymnastic Society (Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne Sokół). According to Mieczysław Orłowicz, head of the Tourism Department at the Ministry of Public Works, tourism held significance for the state in two respects: cultural education, which included sightseeing tours, e.g., of historical landmarks or museums, and physical education, serving to release the physical forces of the nation.<sup>26</sup> In both cases — of leftist and rightist organisations — tourism and sightseeing were envisaged as efficient means of education and promotion of physical culture,

22 'Robotnicze Stowarzyszenie Turystyczne w Anglii...', *Nowa Kultura*, no. 14, 1924, p. 334.

23 Correspondence between the Vagabond Inn and the Workers' Travel Association in the Totwiński Archive, Polish Academy of Sciences, Archive in Warsaw, sign. III-185, II 66.

24 Franciszek Ksawery Sawicki, 'Gospoda Włóczęgów', *Wierchy*, 1950/1951, p. 177.

25 Jerzy Gaj, *Dzieje turystyki w Polsce...*, p. 75.

26 Ibid.

even if the underlying ideological goals were different. On the other hand, workers' tourist organisations were financed primarily with members' donations and couldn't count on official support.

The Vagabond Inn has gone down in the history of Polish working-class tourism. The Antałówka House was an elite place, bringing together members of the progressive intelligentsia as well as leftwing activists who after World War II would come to occupy some of the top official positions in the state. Bolesław Bierut would become the first president of the People's Republic of Poland, Stanisław Totwiński — the first postwar president of Warsaw, Władysław Gromkowski — the first postwar mayor of Zakopane, Alfred Fiderkiewicz — the first postwar president of Kraków, Stanisław Szwalbe — the vice-president of the State National Council, and Włodzimierz Sokorski — the minister of culture. The experiences of the Vagabond Inn will also become the basis of the tourist activities of many social and cooperative organisations in communist Poland. 'That small and modest house was one of the forging places of socialism',<sup>27</sup> stressed Paszta in his memoirs, thus contributing, alongside Sokorski, Broniewski and others, to the legend of the Antałówka House. Years later, the PTTK planned to establish a museum there, and until recently the shelter was located at a street named after one of its regular guests, Władysław Broniewski. Ultimately, the Antałówka House was torn down in 2008.

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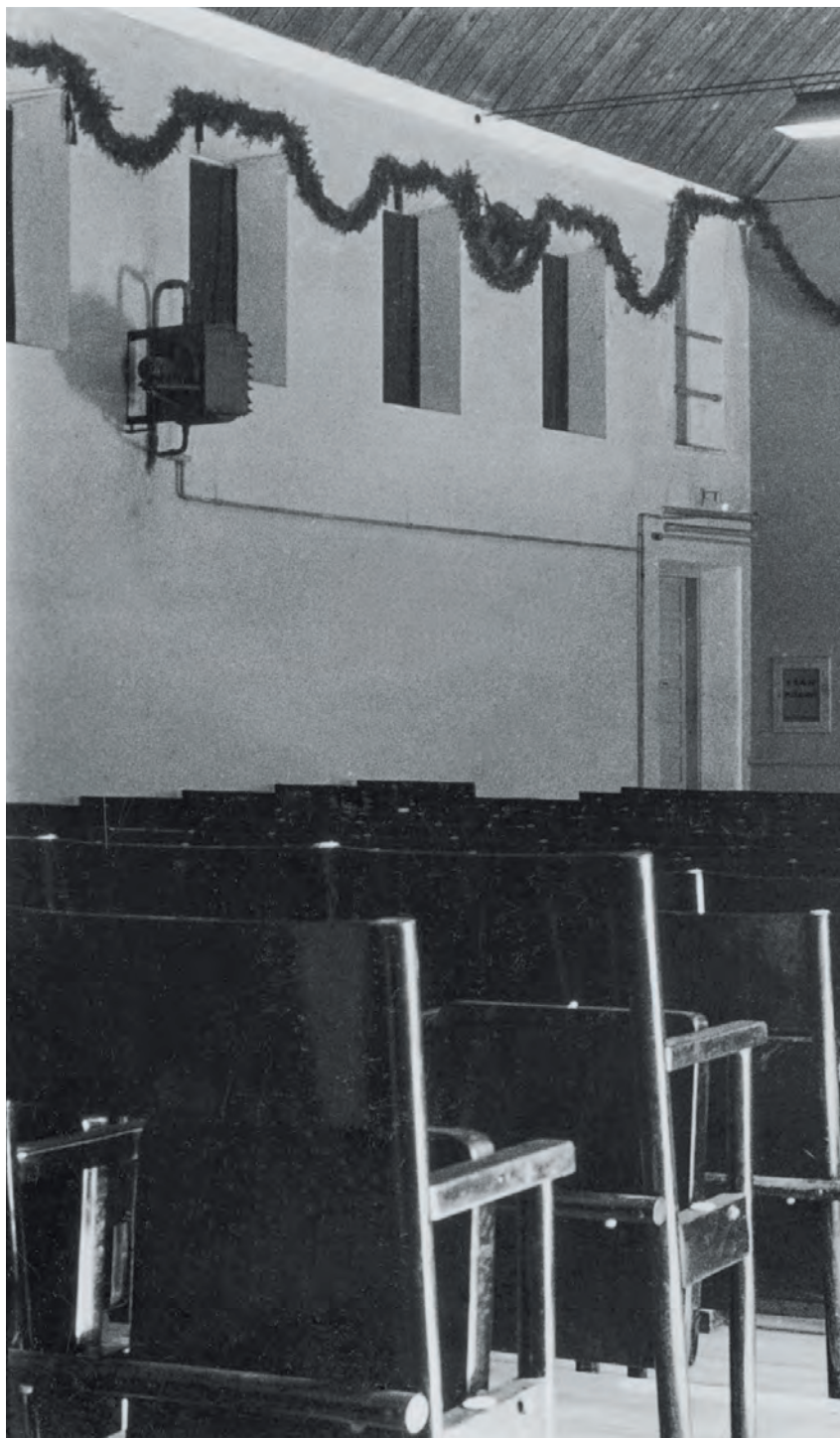
**the *black wings*  
of start in the  
would-be history  
of prewar  
polish cinema**

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Monika Talarczyk

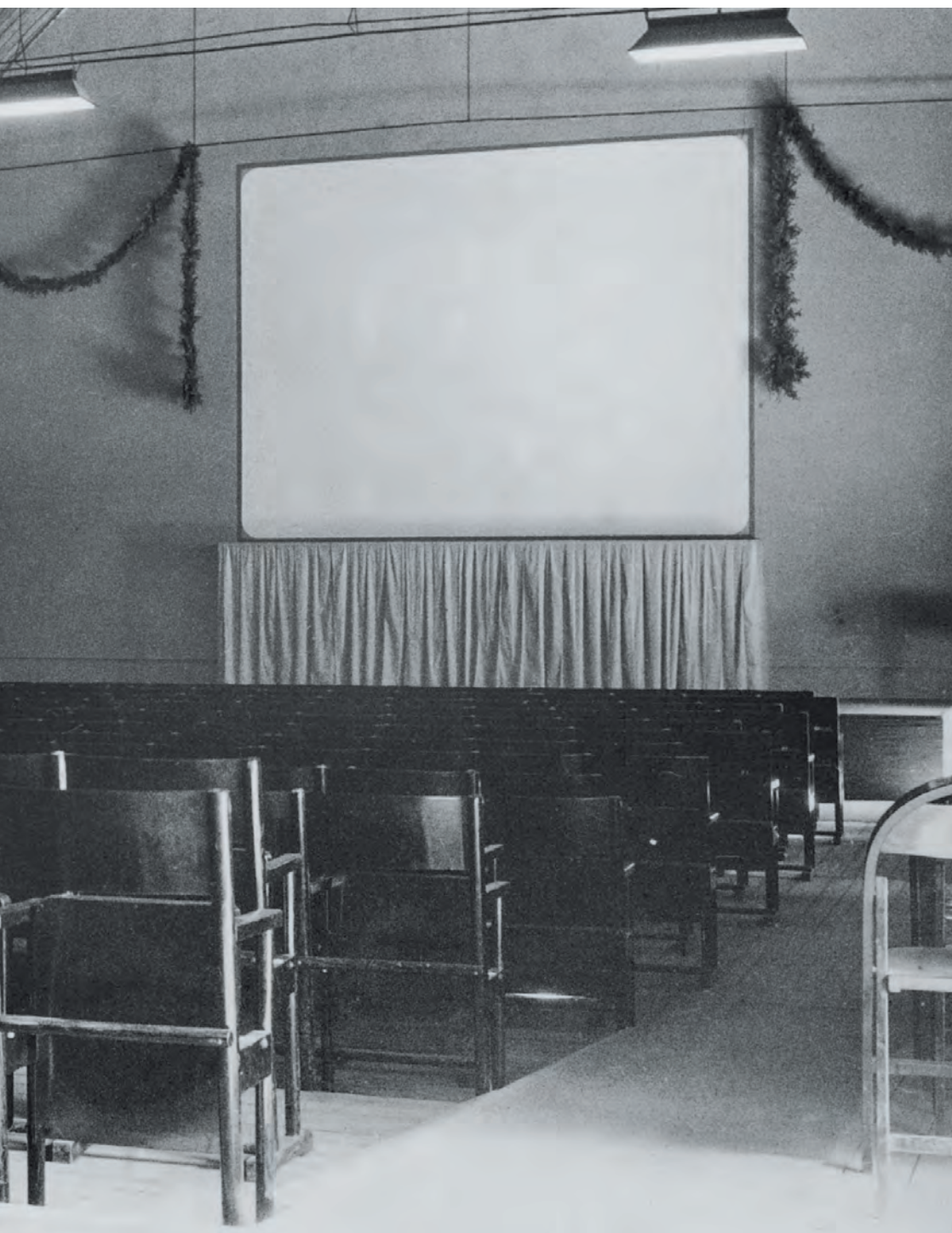
What is most interesting in the creative output of Polish cinematography of the inter-war period is not what has been preserved, but what has been lost or nipped in the bud. Not only for the simple reason that the unknown fires our imagination, but also because the whole postwar history of Polish film had its roots in the prewar losses. I am referring, of course, to the achievements of the START Association of Art Film Enthusiasts (1930–1935), whose ideological and organisational potential is not to be overestimated also from the perspective of the 21st century.<sup>1</sup> Although the collective's core members — Eugeniusz Cękalski, Wanda Jakubowska, Stanisław Wohl, Jerzy Zarzycki, Jerzy Toeplitz, Aleksander Ford — were fortunate to survive the war, almost all of the START films and documentations burned down in the occupied Warsaw. From the viewpoint of a cinema historian fascinated with this particular generation of the Polish intelligentsia, the history of these filmmakers seems extremely interesting. On the one hand, they appear as utopianists whose plans were thwarted by history, their early work destroyed, which would give us every reason to see them as 'angry young men' stopped in their tracks by forces beyond their control. On the other hand, the very same forces meant that those young utopian idealists, having survived the war on various fronts (in occupied Warsaw, in concentration camps, working for Soviet film studios, or attached to the Polish armed forces film production unit), were given a chance to turn their ideas into actual film projects as part of a film industry that had been turned socialist to an extent that went beyond their prewar postulates. It is hard to judge the artistic value of START's shorts and their first full-length features since only a handful of them have survived. World War II destroyed the prewar world so completely that it is equally hard to imagine how their film-education initiatives and the work of the Film Authors' Cooperative (Spółdzielnia Autorów Filmowych, SAF) would have developed in the successive decades of the Second Polish Republic. We do know, however, that after searching for the right formula in the early postwar years, the idea of socially useful film disgraced itself in socialist-realist productions before stabilising in the individual styles of the former START members who by then had been relegated to the fringes of mainstream Polish cinematography. The argument that the achievements of Polish film of the socialist era, i.e., works created as part of a state-owned film industry, owe their success to the conception of the cinematographic institution, which can

1        Łukasz Biskupski, writing about START in the context of similar initiatives in Western Europe, is less enthusiastic; see idem, *Kinofilia zaangażowana. Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Filmu Artystycznego „Start” i upowszechnianie kultury filmowej w latach 30. XX wieku*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Przypis, 2017.



Cinema-theatre, boiler station at the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (WSM) housing estate, Żoliborz, Warsaw, 1930s, WSM Hall of History







be traced back precisely to START, remains controversial. What research perspectives would make it possible to revive that tradition in the most fruitful way if more of those productions have been lost, destroyed, discontinued, or radically reedited than have survived intact?

In the realm of film history, this path has been blazed by Tadeusz Lubelski, author of the pioneering study, *A Would-Be History of People's Poland Cinema*, where he described examples of never-made films by first-rate directors. In the ingenious form of the review of one such film, he conjectured on what shape they could have assumed had they actually been made. Lubelski argues,

Such a perspective is particularly useful for practicing the history of film. All over the world, producers, and especially supervising producers at film production companies, review hundreds of screenplays, scripts, treatments, in other words — ideas for films that haven't been made yet. Only a small percentage of those will actually make it to the screen. Film history is therefore full of stories about projects never completed, cancelled, discontinued at early stages or in mid-production, about screenplays that that should have been made into a film but the latter either fell into development hell or a completely different film was made because the script was pitched to the wrong director.<sup>2</sup>

Never-made, discontinued, or lost films necessitate such analysis and interpretation where the researcher shifts her focus from a nonexistent complete text to its development stage, to the possibilities of the project's realisation, the causes of its failure, the circumstances in which a film got lost, and to the cinematographic para-texts that constitute the only remaining traces of the project: the co-authors' notes, cost estimates, posters, reminiscences, press notes, and so on. They are thus located within the research area of a new history of cinema, one that returns to hushed genealogies and revises established views. Such research taps into the historical study of the culture of production. It is no accident that, besides Marcin Adamczak's book, *Obok ekranu* [Next to the screen] (2014), it was initiated in Poland, in collaboration with Czech and Hungarian partners, by the Restart collective. This para-institution has been working since 2010 on behalf of reforming ('restarting') Polish cinema, its name and underlying concept alluding to the prewar START.<sup>3</sup> One of their research projects was devoted to reviving the START-inspired tradition of filmmakers' cooperatives and conceptualising the practice of collective work in cinematography.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from the information left for cinema history by the START members themselves, the present state of knowledge about their achievements has chiefly been

2 Tadeusz Lubelski, *Historia niebyta kina PRL*, Kraków: Znak, p. 14.

3 Restart, <http://restart-polskiego-kina.blogspot.com/>, accessed 15 November 2017.

4 *Restart zespołów filmowych / Film units restart*, ed. Marcin Adamczak, Marcin Malatyński, Piotr Marecki, Kraków–Łódź: Korporacja Ha!art, Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Filmowa, Telewizyjna i Teatralna im. Leona Schillera, 2013.

improved by the publications of Jerzy Toeplitz, Jolanta Lemann's book about Eugeniusz Cękalski<sup>5</sup>, and essays devoted to Wanda Jakubowska.<sup>6</sup> In the book, *Wanda Jakubowska. Od nowa* [Wanda Jakubowska. Anew], I try to reconstruct START's creative output also through the lost films, notably *Nad Niemnem* [On the Neman River], Jakubowska's debut full-length feature, and one of the three major productions of the SAF besides the preserved *Strachy* [Fears] and *Żołnierz królowej Madagaskaru* [The soldier of the queen of Madagascar]. The Krąg filmmaking cooperative, founded by the START auteurs in 1933, is seldom mentioned, even though it produced Cękalski flagship short, *Czerwiec* [June], which spawned the impressional documentary 'June school'. Krąg is nowhere to be found in *Diariusz START-u*, and *Czarne skrzydła* [Black wings], a would-be Krąg film by Aleksander Ford, based on the novel of Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, gets no mention in the START filmography drawn up by Leszek Armatys, even though it also includes un-realised films. At best, *Black Wings* are cited in literature as an episode in Ford's professional biography.<sup>7</sup> Yet it is precisely this failed project, which would have been START's first full-length feature, that shows how radically the START artists sought to connect the process of film production with the theme of production — the effects of the Great Depression in Silesia — a theme practically absent from prewar Polish cinema.

What was the position in START of Aleksander Ford, the would-be director of *Black Wings*? It is common knowledge that the moving spirit behind the initiative that ultimately crystallised as START was Eugeniusz Cękalski, the first among its members with actual filmmaking experience, elected president of both its first board (1930) and the second one (1935). A prolific journalist and author of essays on film aesthetics, host of the association's first official residence at his private home at 6 Lwowska Street in Warsaw, Ford joined START in late 1932, becoming also a member of its Audit Board.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in the second management board, appointed shortly before the association's dissolution in 1935, he was elected its vice-president.<sup>9</sup> On the 30th anniversary of START, its members were willing to include Ford's films in its filmography alongside Cękalski's early works, even though they had been made independently of each other: so both Cękalski's *Dróżnik nr 24* [Crossing keeper no. 24] (1929) and Ford's *Nad ranem* [In the morning] from the same year (the latter with a public premiere at Splendid Cinema!).<sup>10</sup> As film historians aptly put it years later, 'Whereas Cękalski was a leading theoretician of the young rebel filmmakers of the 1930s and a noble example of actually embodying the theoretical passion that consumed him, Aleksander Ford was an auteur whose work verified the meaning of their ideological struggle.'<sup>11</sup>

5 Jolanta Lemann, *Eugeniusz Cękalski*, Łódź: Muzeum Kinematografii, 1996.

6 Monika Talarczyk-Gubała, *Wanda Jakubowska. Od nowa*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2015.

7 Stanisław Janicki, *Aleksander Ford*, Warsaw: WAI F, 1967, p. 24.

8 'Towarzystwo „Start” na nowych drogach', *Głos Stolicy*, no. 80, 1932, p. 3.

9 'Diariusz START-u', ed. Leszek Armatys, *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, no. 1, 1961, p. 67.

10 'Filmografia START-u', *ibid.*, p. 61.

11 Barbara Armatys, Leszek Armatys, Wiesław Stradomski, *Historia filmu polskiego*, t. 3: 1930–1939, Warsaw: WAI F, 1988, p. 168.

That verification proved most painful for Ford himself: suffice it to mention the case of his *Przebudzenie* [The awakening], which was taken away from him, reedited and released in 1934 as *Miłość maturzystki* [The graduate's love], dir. Jan Nowina-Przybylski, receiving scathing reviews, the banning of his *Mir kumen on* (Children Must Laugh) (1936), or earlier the discontinuation, in mid-production, of *Black Wings* (1934). Ford would have probably pursued his artistic plans even if START hadn't been founded. Still, his presence makes the group appear as a more cohesive structure both ideologically and aesthetically.

It is worth remembering that the circle around Cękalski<sup>12</sup> was joined by a group gathering for the so called mikvahs, or — as they call it — 'spiritual baths', which included Jerzy Toeplitz, Henryk Ładosz, Szczepan Baczyński, and Hanka Totwińska.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in 1932 START was joined not only by Ford but with him also by the members of the informal Marxist collective Awangarda, politically most radical. The leader of the group, which met at 4 Solna Street, was Kazimierz Haltrecht, a mathematics student fascinated with film. Among the regular guests were Aleksander Ford, Aleksander Bachrach, Jerzy Bossak, Seweryn Tross (journalist), Ignacy Robb (the later Colonel 'Narbutt'), or Stefan Gołąb. As Bachrach later explained, plans to officially register the group as a filmmaking cooperative, to be called Independent Film Avant-Garde (Awangarda Filmu Niezależnego), fell through due to its members' affiliation with the Communist Party of Poland.<sup>14</sup> Besides Ford, the most active, film- and organisation-wise, member of the group was Haltrecht, head of the START laboratory section from November 1932, and in 1934 briefly the association's secretary, author of screenplay for Cękalski *Gore!* [Fire!] (1937), who also worked with Ford on *Awakening*. Haltrecht gained recognition for his short, *Tematy miejskie* [Urban themes] (1933), when it was banned from cinemas following an official complaint lodged by the Warsaw Tourism Propaganda Union (Związek Propagandy Turystyki), according to which it showed Warsaw 'in too bleak colours, which could hinder its publicity as a tourist destination'.<sup>15</sup> Whereas the START members' filmic impressions portrayed the city's bright side (Łazienki Park) and its urban folklore (the Kercelak market), the short films of the Solna Street avant-gardists captured its darker backstreets, immediately encountering official resistance.

The group was also divided in its thinking about the purposefulness of experimentation in cinematography and about how much film should be rooted in reality. One could say that the line of division ran between the enthusiasts of pure film, the advocates of socially useful experimental cinema, and those in favour of realistic film of

12 The ten founding members: Eugeniusz Cękalski, Janina Cękalska, Janina Dziarnowska, Wanda Jakubowska, Tadeusz Kowalski, Henryk Ładosz, Hanna Totwińska, Stanisław Totwiński, Stanisław Wohl, Jerzy Zarzycki.

13 Stefania Beylin, *A jak to było, opowiem...*, Warsaw: Filmowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1958, p. 69.

14 'Z wieczoru wspomnień. Wspomina Aleksander Bachrach', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, no. 1, 1961, pp. 45–46.

15 Małgorzata Hendrykowska, 'Miasto jako perpetuum mobile. Berlin, symfonia wielkiego miasta (1927) Waltera Ruttmanna', *Images*, no. 21, vol. 12, 2013, p. 75.

high artistic value. Tadeusz Kowalski affirmed 'filmic dynamics in itself' in the shape of cinema-form.<sup>16</sup> Also in favour of avant-garde film were Jerzy Zarzycki, Teodor Braude, or Mieczysław Choynowski, author of collages and photomontages.<sup>17</sup> It is not hard to guess that opting for the closest possible connection with reality, but also for powerful stylistic means, were the members of Awangarda. A close touch with reality doesn't necessitate a transparent style or inscribing the given theme in a narrative schema. 'The simplest everyday reality, properly captured and portrayed, can play its role as well as any human actor', Seweryn Tross wrote, citing the example of Joris Ivens's *Industrial Symphony*.<sup>18</sup> Cękalski straddled the fence, convinced that 'cinematicity' was achievable both in significative-conception films and in emotive-conception (abstract) ones.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, it was the former model — of realistic film with artistic ambitions and community values — that prevailed in the full-length features of START, the works of Cękalski, Jakubowska, or Ford. At the foundation of START, as Stefan Themerson explained, lay a generational experience: 'We constitute a whole first and foremost as a certain generation that has had to overcome quite significant difficulties, we are a whole from the historical point of view'.<sup>20</sup>

What kind of difficulties were those? To begin with, it is worth citing Barbara Armatys, who believed that the founding date of START wasn't accidental (initiated 1930, registered 1931). The Great Depression coincided with the onset of sound film; both phenomena added to the chaos in the Polish film industry.<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, though, it was not the groundbreaking changeover to sound (even if Cękalski wrote aesthetic essays about it<sup>22</sup>) but precisely the economic crisis as a failure of capitalism that may have encouraged the START artists to raise as crucial the issue of the social economy of culture. From the very beginning, they write about film culture in socio-economic terms, and reflect on film as not just a work of art but also a project that, besides material profit, should generate symbolic value. In order to make that happen, it is necessary to estimate not only its economic value but also its ideological and artistic potential; furthermore, the financing and production process, usually chaotic and disorderly, should be carefully planned based on sound organisational principles.<sup>23</sup> The search for the category of cinematicity in the sphere of aesthetics was matched by an adequate search in the sphere of production. Since it is based on collaboration and collectivity,

16 Tadeusz Kowalski, 'O elementach filmu czystego', *Pamiętnik Warszawski*, no. 10/12, 1931; *Publicystyka START-u*, ed. Alicja Helman, Warsaw: Centralne Archiwum Filmowe, 1960, p. 13.

17 Stefania Beylin, p. 69.

18 Seweryn Tross, 'Głosy z oddali', *Dekada*, no. 27, 1935, p. 11, quoted after Leszek Armatys, 'Myśl filmowa i działalność artystyczna START-u', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, no. 1, 1961, p. 26.

19 Eugeniusz Cękalski, 'Kryteria filmowe', *Reporter Filmowy*, no. 2, 1933, quoted in *Publicystyka START-u*, p. 50.

20 Stanisław Łąg, 'Rozmowy o STARCIE', *Pion*, no. 5, 1933; *Publicystyka START-u*, p. 42.

21 Barbara Armatys, 'Dorobek publicystyczny i działalność społeczna START-u (1930–1939)', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, no. 1, 1961, p. 4.

22 Eugeniusz Cękalski, 'Drogi rozwoju filmu dźwiękowego', *Epoka*, no. 28/29, 1933; Antoni Bohdziewicz, 'Bilans filmu dźwiękowego', *Pion*, no. 14, 1935, quoted after *Publicystyka START-u*.

23 Jerzy Toeplitz, 'Filmowa produkcja planowa', *Pion*, no. 18, 1934.

it should reflect such a mode of working that one would also like to function in outside cinema, i.e., the cooperative one. From the very beginning, the START artists thought about film culture in terms of cultural circulation, including the organisation of production, the creation of opportunities for filmmakers (from training to the regulation of director-producer relationship), to the need for stimulating the viewers' needs and shaping their tastes.

In order to enter the film circuit with their productions and win over the left-oriented audience for cinema, they decided to start the Krąg filmmaking cooperative. The law forbade associations from conducting for-profit activities or entering in commercial relations with market entities, yet full-length features required substantial budgets. A cooperative, on the other hand, was able to operate on the commercial market while offering protection from the negative effects of capitalism, which in film production led to profiteering and all kinds of scandals.<sup>24</sup> According to historians, the Cooperative Act of 1920 was one of the most successful and progressive pieces of such legislation in Europe at the time. Among its political backers were Władysław Grabski and Wincenty Witos.<sup>25</sup> And one of the most successful housing cooperatives of the era, it is widely agreed, was the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa, WSM), members of which, including Cękalski and Jakubowska, comprised the bulk of the START line-up. There were practical reasons behind the idea of organising film production, as a collective activity, along the lines of cooperation functioning outside the film industry. The so called Rochdale principles were to be observed here: voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training, and information, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for community.<sup>26</sup> Even though some of them came from well-off Warsaw families, on their own the START artists weren't able to fund anything beyond short subjects, so in order to make features, they needed to strike deals with private investors. Still, in negotiations with those their position remained stronger than a single filmmaker's due to their range of professional skills (hence the later Film Authors' Cooperative, comprised of representatives of the many professions involved in the filmmaking process) and growing interest in and recognition of their production-unrelated activities. One could say that in their negotiations with a private investor (producer, cinema owner), START possessed mainly cultural and social capital, but — importantly for commercial relations — it was registered capital. They correctly identified the 'bottleneck'

24 The first filmmaking cooperative was founded in 1921, a pioneering initiative as emphasised by its full name: Pierwsza Polska Spółdzielnia Kinematograficzno-Artystyczna Art-Film (First Polish Cinematographic-Artistic Cooperative 'Art-Film'). Among its board members were Władysław Reymont and Kornel Makuszyński, and the presidents were Kazimierz Kamiński (director, actor) and Henryk Bigoszt (director). The cooperative disbanded following the fiasco of Bigoszt's first two films (*Krzyk w nocy* and *Kizia Mizia*, both 1922); see Edward Zajiček, *Zarys historii gospodarczej kinematografii polskiej*, vol. 1, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteki PWSFTviT w Łodzi, 2015, p. 254.

25 Henryk Cioch, *Prawo spółdzielcze*, Warszawa: Wolters Kluwer Polska, 2011, p. 18.

26 Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochdale\\_Principles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochdale_Principles), accessed 2 February 2018.

of the relatively small Polish film industry in the cinema owners who were interested primarily in uncomplicated flicks of broad commercial appeal. Ultimately, the cooperative's remit would have to include not only the production of films, but also their reception. In the late 1930s, following the release of the SAF-produced *Fears*, Antoni Bohdziewicz argued (with the residents of WSM Żoliborz in mind): 'A film-making cooperative should be based on a film-consuming cooperative. It should have its own viewers, its subscribers, as it were.'<sup>27</sup>

The START members gathered their first cooperative experiences a couple of years before the founding of the SAF. The name of the Krag [Circle] cooperative, started in 1933, echoes the similar nomenclature of democratic cooperation, as in *Spółem* [Together], the first Polish consumer cooperative (founded 1907), which became a model for Polish cooperative movements. 'The cooperative's president was Aleksander Zelwerowicz. Contributing his name, he wanted to help us launch production activities'<sup>28</sup>, Stanisław Wohl confirmed years later. Here, one can again notice the pivotal role of Cękalski, who got to know Zelwerowicz during his studies at the Warsaw Music Conservatory's Faculty of Drama in the second half of the 1920s. When START was being founded, Zelwerowicz had already gained recognition as the founder and director of the State Institute of Theatre Art (Państwowy Instytut Sztuki Teatralnej, PIST) in Warsaw. He also appeared in some of the START films, e.g., *The Awakening*, *Ludzie Wistyl* [People of the Vistula River], and after the war in Wohl's *Dwie godziny* [Two hours]. His wife, Krystyna Severin-Zelwerowiczowa, assistant director under Józef Lejtes, worked with Jakubowska and Szotowski on *Nad Niemnem*. Press reports about the newly founded filmmaking cooperative mentioned that its first production was already in development.<sup>29</sup> On 30 April 1933, *Kino* reported, 'The screenplay is nearly complete and location shooting is scheduled to start sometime in May. It will be Poland's first collectively made moving picture.'<sup>30</sup> Writing the script for *Black Wings*, with the approval of the author of the original book, Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, were Cękalski and Jakubowska, with direction entrusted to Ford, whose talent, following the success of *Legion ulicy* [The legion of the street] (1932) was beyond doubt. Stanisław Wohl was named the director of photography. Financing sources were not disclosed.<sup>31</sup>

27 Antoni Bohdziewicz, 'Pierwszy film S.A.F.-u', *Życie Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej*, no. 1, 1939, p. 7. Already half a year later it turns out that the WSM is unable to fund the Świat cinema in Żoliborz by itself and is leasing it to a private company, while establishing a Repertoire Committee; see S. N., 'Zasady współpracy z dzierżawcą kina „Świat”', *Życie Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej*, no. 7, 1939, p. 155.

28 'Z wieczoru wspomnień', p. 42.

29 'Przyszły sezon filmowy', *Świat*, no. 18, 1933, p. 26.

30 'Czy wiecie, że...', *Kino*, no. 18, 1933, p. 2.

31 A year later, at the turn of April and May 1934, Krag organised film screenings at the WSM showroom at Suzina Street. According to *Życie Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej*, Krag was to apply for a cinema licence so that the screenings could be continued, but the repertoire proved not attractive enough and the project fell through. In October, the showroom was leased to Arlux Film, a private company, which converted it into a movie theater called Kino Stella; see 'Kronika', *Życie Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej*, no. 5, 1934, p. 8; no. 10, p. 11.



The decision to adapt Kaden-Bandrowski's 1929 political novel, a widely commented work that proved controversial for both the opposition and the government, had been a bold gesture.<sup>32</sup> Given the official efforts aimed at reforming the mining industry — the establishment of the Mining Academy in Kraków in 1919, the institution of the Supreme Mining Office in Katowice in 1922, and the introduction of new Mining Law in 1930 — it could be safely assumed that a critical political film would irritate the authorities. On the other hand, the subject of the Great Depression was virtually absent from Polish cinema, and political themes were limited to historical-patriotic eyewash aimed at sustaining the myth of Piłsudski's Legions. In officially-sponsored documentary film, in turn, the focus was on the sea — Gdynia harbour, the fishing sector, naval squadrons<sup>33</sup> — rather than on tensions in the heavy industry.<sup>34</sup> Cękałski so criticised the shallowness of Polish and international feature film:

Love and money — the two driving engines of contemporary film — are accompanied in Poland by a third moment: the memory of political subordination and struggle against Tsarist authority. Of those three 'driving engines', money plays the relatively smallest role in Polish movies . . . no Polish film is interested in the actual issue of the struggle for existence, unemployment, and crisis. Polish film timidly avoids the contemporary and the existential truth. Everyone is well-off, and if someone is poor, they dream of wealth and opulence rather than of a slice of bread.

According to a list drawn up by Cękałski of the various social groups portrayed in Polish movies released in 1933, the 'urban trash' and the 'military and police' appeared in over ten films, while the proletariat (like the intelligentsia and artists) in barely two.<sup>35</sup> One could say that love and money are also the key motifs of *Black Wings*, with the difference that their melodramatic and adventuring pedigree is transformed in the course of the plot: love into social solidarity and the pursuit of profit into the joint generation of economic value. This dynamic is embodied by Tadeusz Mieniewski, a former member of Piłsudski's Legions, son of a socialist deputy. He arrives in Zagłębie Górnicze (the mining region), driven by the desire to secure funding for the production of his invention, whether it will come from his father, a popular activist, or from the director of a French-owned mine. Once there, he learns ' . . . how capital buys the miners. With jobs. It's all really simple: the workers' wages are the lowest in Europe. The mining equipment is the poorest. The dollars they get for the coal ruin the domestic

32 Włodzimierz Suleja, 'Propagandowe treści powieści politycznych Juliusza Kadena-Bandrowskiego', *Dzieje Najnowsze*, no. 3, 1981.

33 Barbara Armatys, Leszek Armatys, Wiesław Stradomski, p. 154.

34 The mining theme appeared in a Wytwórnia Doświadczalna newsreel: *Zjazd międzynarodowego związku górników*, 1930, silent film, 30" (speech by Arthur James Cook, leader of the 'mining international', and the delegates' reactions), retrieved from <http://repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/4132>, accessed 20 November 2017.

35 Eugeniusz Cękałski, *Epoka* no. 39, 1933, pp. 6–7, quoted after Barbara Armatys, p. 10.

currency. If you don't want to play by, they threaten you with unemployment. That's how it works in the big market'.<sup>36</sup> Forcibly acquainted with the relationships between local politicians, Polish Socialist Party journalists, foreign capitalists, and Silesian workers, virtually thrown into those communities due to personal mishaps, Mieniewski changes his surname to the more down-to-earth Mieniuk and takes up a mining job.

Due to that transformation, the young Mieniewski appears as the novel's main protagonist, conveying its underlying idea, but Kaden-Bandrowski makes sure to portray a wide representation of other circles too, from the top echelons of economic power in the persons of Director Coeur, the plenipotentiary of the French owners, and Director Kostryń, the Polish chief executive, through local politicians and journalists, to workers representing various generations and views. Prominent among the latter are Mieniewski's sweetheart, Lenora Duś; her brother, Janek, a miner and young communist; Martyzel, an old miner, symbol of the miners' toil. Through free indirect speech, each of these characters speaks to the reader in their own words, not only in dialogues but also in internal monologues. This adds dynamism to the narrative and serves as a literary equivalent of the region's socio-political dynamics, based, as it is, on ruthless economic relationships: 'Everything, everywhere — capital. That is, money, that is, bona fide equilibrium, that is, the truest conscience of all things human'.<sup>37</sup> The novel's narrative structure almost anticipated the succession of stages through which that which has so far been hardly visible in Polish cinema will be shown in close-up:

You couldn't see people at all. The mine exhaled thick smoke fumes, crackling terribly in many places. Only upon closer inspection could one see — in the bends and corners, at track intersections, or in the low effusions of black swelling earth — the movement of small yellow lumps. Workers!<sup>38</sup>

Kaden-Bandrowski's novel satisfied doubly the START postulate for the plot of feature films to be derived from reality, inspired by press reports or actual events. The author based it on his own studies in Dąbrowa Górnicza at the turn of 1923 and 1924 where, in September 1923, a fire led eventually to an explosion of flammable gasses at the Reden Mine, killing 38 miners. The management blamed the firemen, arguing that by trying to quench the fire with water they caused a dangerous compression of the gasses. A subsequent investigation found, however, that the mine's ventilation system was outdated and inefficient.<sup>39</sup> Coeur, the mine's French director, slashes jobs, refuses to take new orders, cancels an agreement with the miners' union, and will not spend a penny on projects that would improve the ventilation system. Economic crisis exerts a heavy toll on the miners' already gruelling existence:

36 Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, *Czarne skrzydła*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1979, p. 41.

37 Ibid., p. 70.

38 Ibid., p. 199.

39 Włodzimierz Starościak, *280 lat historii Dąbrowy Górniczej*, Dąbrowa Górnicza: Muzeum Miejskie „Szttygarka”, 2006, p. 36.

Count in the lunch breaks and you have an extra two hours to the eight-hour work day. That's ten hours. The time to commute, for there are those who live far away, plus the time to go underground and return to the surface, that's another three. By the time you have washed and eaten, for there is no bath at the mine, another two hours have passed, that's fifteen. Eight hours of sleep with such work and commute, and poor nutrition, isn't much. That's twenty three hours in total. Which leaves the miner just one hour of private life a day!<sup>40</sup>

In the novel, the lethal explosion is preceded by smaller individual outbursts of the female characters (mainly those dependent on the two directors), unable to bear the humiliating fashion in which they are treated, and the funeral of the wife of the mine's old doorman, which becomes a political demonstration. That these events involve women is significant because the issue of female workers' emancipation is central to *Black Wings* and not limited to feminist aspects. As the titles of the novel's two parts — *Lenora* (part 1) and *Tadeusz* (part 2) — suggest, both sexes play an equally important role in the composition. The strong position of the character of Lenora in the START project is reflected by the fact that the decision to entrust the role to Jaga Boryta was publicised early on.<sup>41</sup> Making love to a deputy's son, Lenora, a young orphaned worker, complains about her by no means virgin life:

No one knows how a girl is tossed around at the mine. . . . As soon as she arrives, there is the doorman. The first one. . . . Then, so you can be assigned to the cleaning plant for winter — again. At the cleaning plant — again. Then, come spring, lest the putter wrongs you — again. . . . And before that, here, on these heaps, so that they give you good slag — again. And always — again. And again — and again — and again.<sup>42</sup>

The customs are still patriarchal, but emancipation ideas are taking root. The old miner, Martyzel, 'believed, according to Michelet's *L'Amour*, that the woman shares everything with the man as his equal. That is why they walked not arm in arm, but next to each other, in friendship, ready in solidarity for any adversities that might occur.<sup>43</sup> It was in this closeness, in the agreement, that the man's and woman's defiance against uncontrolled reproduction was born: 'All in one: are workers meant to breed like rabbits? Is the worker supposed to reproduce poverty with his body? When my body is dung for him? When it's manure? When it's litter? For capital!<sup>44</sup> The exploit-

40 Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, pp. 147–148.

41 'Czy wiecie, że...', *Kino*, no. 18, 1933, p. 2. It is hard to say today who would have been cast as Mieniewski. Since the character had been compared to Cezary Baryka, perhaps it would have been Boryta's brother, Zbigniew Sawan, who played Baryka in the 1928 adaptation of *The Spring to Come*.

42 Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, p. 206.

43 Ibid., p. 52.

44 Ibid., p. 43.

ed worker is a raw material, turned in the process of production into ashes: 'France, England, America, Australia, Germany, all peoples, nations, the whole world has been stoking the furnaces of its trade, its industry, its whole life, with our death. The heat of our death flows through their homes, our death!<sup>45</sup> This is a logic close to Ford's, who in his early film, *Tętno polskiego Manchesteru* [The pulse of the Polish Manchester], drew analogies between the process of textile manufacturing at a Łódź factory and the exploitation of the worker, for whom the process ends in unemployment and physical degradation. Thrown by the workers into the shaft in an outburst of tragic justice, Director Coeur dies in the fire. Mieniuk makes a heroic effort to save the young communist, Jan Duś, but fails, and the dead man's body is covered with a legionnaire's coat. Through such symbolic images, Kaden-Bandrowski suggests that the idea of a communist international, even if brotherly for an idealistic socialist, is in fact too radical. Did Ford, a member of the Communist Party of Poland, share the view?

Let us try to conjecture what visual style Ford would have used for *Black Wings*. Would he have followed up on the expressionist prose and sharpened in monochromatic contrast the protagonists' facial features and the coal-smeared landscape? Fragments of the novel evoke harrowing scenes: 'All kinds of riff-raff stood here, a compact mass yet strangely light in itself. Young, sharp faces, tight-skinned, sweat glistening over their sunken eyes.<sup>46</sup> 'Pointed, shiny faces . . . Clenched, silent. With brows raised high, eyes too wide, as if already gripped by a piercing cry.'<sup>47</sup> The romantic passages are also infused with earthly matter, Lenora appearing to Tadeusz as a white fruit of the black earth, a smoothly rounded stone: 'He kissed her on the mouth. It smelled of rock and iron. He kissed her eyes. They smelled of clay.'<sup>48</sup> The workers' daily life is filled with hunger, anxiety, and anger, and the mining disaster triggers horrible images: Jan Duś's crushed legs flying in the air, Director Coeur's ebony head rolling down the shaft. At times the mine resembled a black-ribbed hungry monster<sup>49</sup>, and a tin-black tiger 'was lifted in black wings flapping from the shaft by a crime too great and obvious'.<sup>50</sup>

Would Ford have tried to convey the political message of *Black Wings* in dialogues, in the confrontation of the characters' attitudes, in the logic of the events, or would he have rather sought to move the viewer emotionally through expressionist imagery? What would such a film's chances to pass through the censors have been? Slim, like in the case of *Mir kumen on*, which in the scenes outside the safe haven of the sanatorium came across as a social horror? If we look at 1930s iconography, we can find images of Silesia that correspond with Kaden-Bandrowski's reality-inspired visions: Bronisław Linke's apocalyptic series of graphics from 1936.<sup>51</sup> Though coming

45 Ibid., p. 355.

46 Ibid., p. 20.

47 Ibid., pp. 51–52.

48 Ibid., p. 207.

49 Ibid., p. 420.

50 Ibid., p. 412.

51 Barbara Szczypka-Gwiazda, 'Śląska apokalipsa według Linkego', -*grafica*, no. 3/4, 2006.

slightly later in time, it would resonate with Ford's project both in ideological terms (due to Linke's connections with the Czapka Frygijska [Phrygian Cap] artist collective) and in aesthetic ones. Like in Kaden-Bandrowski, Linke's expressionist, drastic visions of dehumanised figures at the service of monstrous industry took its point of departure in actual field research. If Ford had gone this way, his film would have likely shared the fate of Linke's graphics, which, exhibited in 1938 at the Art Propaganda Institute, were banned due to their 'socially harmful content'.

A different course — slightly less radical visually, but ideologically unchanged — would have been as likely. At almost exactly at the same time, Joris Ivens and Henri Storck were working on a documentary film devoted to mining strikes and their consequences. Fascinated with Ivens's work, the START artists cited his films in their writings and included them in the screenings they organised.<sup>52</sup> For them, *Industrial Symphony* (1931) was a perfect example of how avant-garde film should portray factory work: ennobling it, emphasising the visual appeal of objects and the musical rhythm of the gestures. Still, in his next 'industrial' film, the Dutch director openly pointed to the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only possible solution to the problem of the poverty and degradation of the working masses. The poetic sublimation of physical work in *Misère au Borinage* [Misery in the Borinage] (1934) is but a brief sequence (in the 'Rationalisation' segment) in a series of filmic arguments explaining the tragedy of the miners and the consequences of the 1932 general strike in Belgium. There, too, safety measures were ignored, causing the death of 200 miners in the Borinage region in 1934. Those striking against pay cuts, in turn, were fired, as a result of which they were unable to pay rent, buy food, or ironically, coal for heating. Having sold their furniture, they left their homes. The town emptied. Over the bed of one of the nameless protagonists there hung a Lenin photo with a torn corner. Ivens deliberately restrained his usual photogenic experiments so that nothing distracted the viewer in following his visual argumentation.<sup>53</sup> Poverty is not visually attractive; poverty is a fact. Would such an approach have been tenable in a feature film?

An answer to the question of how Ford would have chosen to portray the life of the miners should be sought in the documentary *Mir kumen on* (Children Must Laugh). In the prologue, showing the living conditions of working-class children, tenement houses shown at an angle, from below, and the shadows of striking workers passing a lay-off notice, indicate expressionist inspirations drawn from socially sensitive *kammerspiel*. In the Silesian sequence, in turn, a rhythmic montage alternating a long shot of the smoky Silesian landscape with a close-up of a ringing workshift bell, to the accompaniment of a song about the 'extractors of black diamonds', indicates that Ford

52 A screening of *Industrial Symphony* at Styłowy cinema, 21 February 1932: 'Co wyświetlano na prywatnych pokazach', *Kino*, no. 11, 13 March 1932; a screening at the WSM Żoliborz, 11 December 1932: 'Po co chodzimy do kina?', *Głos Stolicy*, no. 101, 1932, p. 7. After the war, the Dutch documentalist visited Bytom to shoot a Polish segment for his film about four democracies: *Joris Ivens kręci film*, *Polska Kronika Filmowa*, vol. 16, 1948, <http://www.repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/7468>, accessed 15 November 2017.

53 Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 149.

would have likely used visual means that were very seldom encountered in interwar Polish cinema — those characteristic of Soviet avant-garde film.<sup>54</sup>

START returned to the theme of mining in 1935 when, commissioned by the Institute of Social Affairs (Instytut Spraw Społecznych, ISS), Eugeniusz Cękański (direction) and Stanisław Wohl (cinematography) made the documentary *W kopalni węgla* [At the coal mine], portraying the miners at work and during their free time. Alongside the instructional *Uwaga* [Attention] (1935), a short about workplace safety precautions, it was shown to British workers in screenings organised in the UK by Cękański during his National Culture Fund residency there.<sup>55</sup> The theme of the economic crisis at Polish coal mines had been tackled shortly before the war by Jerzy Gabryelski in *Czarne diamenty* [Black diamonds] (1939), but *Black Wings* was successfully adapted for the screen only after the war, in 1962, by the Zespół Kamera film studio run by Jerzy Bos-sak. The film was written and directed by Ewa and Czesław Petelski, with photography by Kurt Weber; locations included actual coal mines in Chorzów. But despite its first-rate cast (Kazimierz Opaliński, Wojciech Siemion, Czesław Wołłejko, Beata Tyszkiewicz) and excellent camerawork by an outstanding cinematographer, the film is hardly a gem in the Petelskis' uneven oeuvre. Compared with the mining sequence in *Mir kumen on*, it comes across as one-dimensional and inarticulate. It is hard to understand why the directors have decided to relinquish the Lenora character on behalf of her brother, Jan Duś, and to limit Mieniewski's motivation to offended pride and his role to that of an agitator. Wanda Jakubowska, the scriptwriter of the failed prewar *Black Wings*, also went underground with a camera, in 1965, to make *Gorąca linia* [Hot line], about an idealistic mining engineer in the context of the postwar industrial realities. On that occasion, she reminisced about the prewar project: 'Highly moved by the theme of the miners' life, we very much wanted to make that film. But the censors wouldn't hear of it. Viewers being familiar with the postwar adaptation by Ewa and Czesław Petelski, I don't need to explain why that was so. And we only did some test shots of the mining communities.'<sup>56</sup> In an interview with Stanisław Janicki, Ford explained that a filming permit had been refused by the voivode of the Silesian Province.<sup>57</sup> In 1934, Towarzystwo Francusko-Włoskie Dąbrowskich Kopalń Węgla, the Franco-Italian parent company, decided to close down the Reden Mine. The mine itself, and the ambitions of the prewar authors of political cinema, fell into oblivion, with the unrealised adaptation of *Black Wings* serving as but one of the tokens of that. Today, the site of the former mine is occupied by the General Józef Haller Park and the Nemo Water Park.

54 For more on the film, see Anna Szczepańska, *A Spoon from a New World*, in this volume, pp. 14–23.

55 Jolanta Leman, *Eugeniusz Cękański*, Łódź: Muzeum Kinematografii w Łodzi, 1996, pp. 80–81.

56 Elżbieta Smoleń-Wasilewska, 'Spotkania i rozmówki: Wanda Jakubowska', *Film*, no. 31, 1964, p. 2.

57 Stanisław Janicki, p. 24.



# montages of modernity

Adaptations of Film and Photography  
Aesthetics in (Polish) Interwar Modernism

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Piotr Słodkowski

‘Photomontage — a modern epopee.’

Mieczysław Szczuka<sup>1</sup>

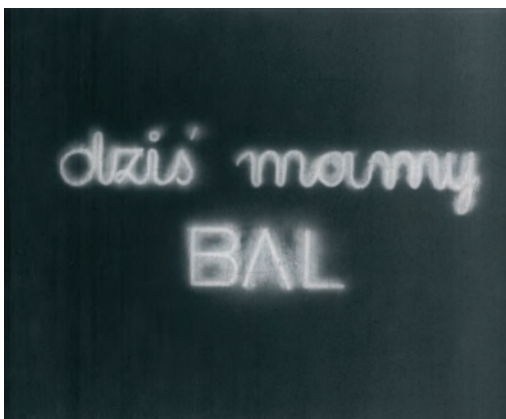
Citing Walter Benjamin’s famous essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Piotr Juskiewicz points out the hard-to-understand practice of interpreting it from the perspective of grieving an irreducible original quality — the ‘aura’ — that art has lost.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as the researcher soberly notes, despite the sentimentalism implicit in such an interpretation, Benjamin himself gladly consigns the work of art to the garbage dump of history on behalf of an openly non-auratic medium of artistic expression: film. An art of the future, film perfectly suits modern civilisation, combining persuasion, mass appeal, and technology.

If we adopt this perspective, there immediately emerge utterly primary contexts closely connecting modernity, film, and a fragment of the visual arts, that is, modernism/radical, modernism/avant-garde. Putting aside all the complexities, tensions, and aporias inherent in the modern project, let us only repeat after Jean-François Lyotard that modernity is governed by a particular meta-narrative: a story about universal emancipation and liberation of people that remains in an ambivalent connection with myth.<sup>3</sup> Narratives are like myths because they too are meant to legitimise institutions and social practices, yet they also differ from them insofar that they don’t seek their legitimising power in the founding gesture (in the past), but in a projection of tomorrow — in the utopia of a future order. Complementing this idea in an interesting way are the reflections of Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and those of Joseph Campbell as interpreted by Juskiewicz. All emphasise a paradoxical relationship with myth that is actually foundational for modernity: whereas the latter firmly brushes aside old, pre-Enlightenment views in a gesture of clearing the field for future projects (thus disenchanting the world, as Weber puts it), its visions too — as dictated by the logic of repetition

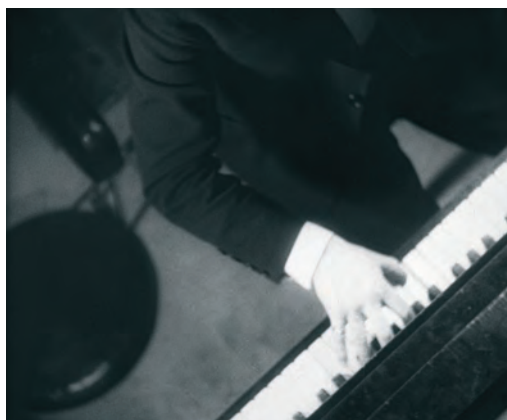
1 Mieczysław Szczuka, ‘Fotomontaż’, *Blok*, no. 8/9, 1924, p. 6. Debora Vogel used the enunciation as the opening motto of her essay, *The Genealogy of Photomontage and Its Potential*; see eadem, ‘Genealogia fotomontażu i jego możliwości’, *Sygnaty*, no. 12, 1934, p. 4.

2 Piotr Juskiewicz, ‘Film — najważniejsza ze sztuk’, in idem, *Cień modernizmu*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013, pp. 177–178. See also Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935).

3 Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodernizm dla dzieci. Korespondencja 1982–1985*, trans. Janusz Migasiński, Warsaw: Aletheia, 1998.



Stills from *Dzisiaj mamy bal* [Today we have a ball], dir. Jerzy Zarzycki, Tadeusz Kowalski, 1931, after digital restoration, National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute



— are based on myth, a new myth that fetishizes reason, civilisation, regeneration of the world.<sup>4</sup>

If modernity feeds on the new myth of rational progress as something that explains the expansive logic of its development, then modernism, which in this conceptual constellation should be construed as a function, or aesthetic dimension, of modernity, searches for new formulas of adequately imaging the dynamics of change. Outlining such a broad phenomenal panorama is necessary for understanding a common ideological core of various non-identical artistic visions: those selflessly — for lack of a better definition — encompassing metropolis, machine, modernisation, and film, and those exploiting such fascinations to produce a strictly political project. Let their ideological community be illustrated by the following two examples.

On the one hand, it needs to be remembered that one of the more important elements of Fernand Léger's painting aesthetics — the principle of the isolated object — stemmed from the artist's profound inspirations and diverse ties with film. According to Christopher Green, Léger's work on the scenography (the appearance of the laboratory) for Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine* (1923) and on his own experimental production, *Ballet mécanique* (1925), made him keenly aware of the different characteristics of the medium of film and the medium of painting.<sup>5</sup> Above all, however, cinema (and advertising) facilitated new modes of representation based on such cinematographic techniques as contrast, sequentiality, cut, or drastic close-up. 'The cinema has confronted us with the human fragment, the emotive close-up of a hand, an eye, a face. The contemporary painter must disclose his sources in all that. A fragment enlarged a hundred times imposes a *new realism* on us . . .', argued Léger in *The Problem of Freedom in Art* (1950), and in the significantly titled essay, *New Realism* (1935), added that ' . . . in this fascinating history of the object we have been supported by cinema and its close-ups; cinema has allowed us to "go faster"'.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, wasn't Sergei Eisenstein exploring new visuality using similar methods at the same time? The only difference is that, in his case, fragment, sequence, and contrast were employed in the service of political propaganda. The semantic work of film in *Battle-ship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1928) occurs through associative montage: the intensification of meanings by juxtaposing 'images in which figures, objects, light, and movement produce clear-cut visual-conceptual stereotypes' — of the Bolsheviks and their antagonists.<sup>7</sup>

It is worth adding at this point that also those Polish artists who didn't express themselves primarily through the medium of painting often used short cin-

4 These themes are discussed in detail by Piotr Juszkiewicz, 'Nowy mit', in idem, *Cień modernizmu*, pp. 50–74.

5 See Christopher Green, *Léger and the Avant-Garde*, New Heaven–London: Yale University Press, 1976, pp. 250–285, especially pp. 275–285.

6 Fernand Léger, 'The Problem of Freedom in Art', in *Functions of Painting*, trans. Alexandra Anderson, New York: Viking Press, 1973, p. 166; 'Nowy realizm', in *Funkcje malarstwa*, trans. Joanna Guze, Warsaw: PIW, p. 52.

7 Piotr Juszkiewicz, 'Introduction', in idem, *Cień modernizmu*, p. 21.



ematic forms as a convenient means of capturing modernity in the dimension (which Léger resonated with) of city life and its spectacle (streets, shop windows, revues etc.). One example is Jerzy Zarzycki and Tadeusz Kowalski's short, *Dziś mamy bal* [Today we have a ball] (1931), a quasi-reportage that shows, through avant-garde aesthetics, the glamour of an evening dance party. The narrative is filled with isolated close-ups of the typical attributes of modernity: the telephone dial-plate, a printing press rapidly spitting out invitations for the party, electric (rather than gas) street lamps, and finally a jazz band. A moving abstract composition bringing to mind Futurist aesthetics appears on the screen — a visual interlude, as it were — between the scenes of the ball. The party itself is presented through a strict choreography of movements and rhythmic repetitions – a dancing couple thrice draw a precise spiral, and an elegant man walking down the stairs is shown in a sequence of cuts and close-ups on his perfectly polished patent-leather shoes. The logic of plastic movement is an expression of the modern beauty of the object-spectacle — so, paraphrasing Léger, should these cinematic gestures be actually seen. It is interesting to note that this affirmation of the interwar city and its elegant inhabitants corresponds with modernist painting: for example, with the image of 1920s Lviv in Henryk Streng's collage watercolour, *The Street* (1924), which is also populated by passers-by in shiny shoes, surrounded by isolated references to the metropolis: electric street lamps, shop windows, advertisements of cafés, cinemas, or jazz bands. Though the composition includes other aspects of urban living too, it is certainly noteworthy in this respect, being one of the few works in which the artist shows the modernising face of Lviv.

Assuming that film as a new medium and radical modernism (the avant-garde) as a field of testing the traditional media shared the same context of visualising modernity, let us now try to more synthetically outline the nature of the relationships between experimental cinema and painting on the example of artists representing three artistic hubs of interwar Poland: Kraków, Lviv, and Warsaw. In other words, let us reflect on how cinematic (and photographic) inspirations changed the status of the modernist picture.

First of all, the phenomenon decisively broadened the formula of representation. If, as Marcin Lachowski would have it, the central tradition of interwar Polish modernism is the Unist picture, a uniform organism, for which an 'incision' of the canvas means death<sup>8</sup>, then cinematic and photographic experiments thwarted the uniformity of the composition, opening it up to the technique of (photo)montage: a single object and figure, their close-ups and lean-outs (differences of scale), a sequence- or contrast-based collage set. This inclusive gesture carried new formal and compositional values, as evidenced, for example, by the montages of Lviv-based artists such

8 See Marcin Lachowski, *Nowocześni po katastrofie. Sztuka w Polsce w latach 1945–1960*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013, pp. 154–155. The author posits that for post-1945 artists, the key points of reference to interwar art were two traditions: the theory of Unism and the figure of the doll, mannequin, puppet.



as Aleksander Krzywobłocki, Jerzy Janisch, or Margit Sielska. But it also had at least two important consequences for the conception of the work of art itself. It undermined an homogeneous vision of culture and rescinded reflection on the compositional principles of the picture-as-an-autonomous-entity, for it very clearly introduced mass culture to elite culture, low-brow art to high-brow art, blurring differences between them (as exemplified by the work of Janusz Maria Brzeski). Thanks to its potential of producing persuasive juxtapositions of contrasting aspects of social life, montage was also employed by various kinds of committed art, from radical constructivism (the productivism of Mieczysław Szczuka) to the Artes collective and its 'realism of facts' project (Tadeusz Wojciechowski's theory of comparative documentary theatre).

Significantly, the poet, writer, and art theoretician, Debora Vogel, located the practice of montage at the very heart of contemporary artistic practices, adapting it also for her own work in what she referred to as 'literary montages'.<sup>9</sup> As Paweł Mościcki argued, tracing Vogel's ties with film, montage served for her as a 'tool of non-hierarchically combining diverse elements', becoming a 'whole governed by the rule of universal adherence, of ceaseless and simultaneous connection between entirely separate orders of meaning'.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, such cross-sectional thinking produces an original 'amalgam of civilisation and nature'.<sup>11</sup> Importantly, Vogel's idea, which is in tune with the aesthetics of Giacomo Balla, Jalu Kurek, or Stefania and Franciszek Themerson<sup>12</sup>, finds a reflection in the practices of the members of the Artes collective. In her well-known essay, *The Genealogy of Photomontage and Its Potential*, Vogel cites Jerzy Janisch's *Photomontage* (1931) — an absurd combination of the images of a female nude (Venus of Milo), human intestines, and the half-shaft and wheel of an automobile — adding a significant comment: 'A Constructivist juxtaposition of the body and a machine with an emphasis on a *kinship of both organisms*: the life of the machine, revealed in the machine's spinning wheel, has its counterpart in the organic forms arranged in a circle in the opened belly of the human body'.<sup>13</sup> A description of the modern condition through a seamless combination of elements belonging to civilisation, culture, and nature, gains in Janisch's composition a flavour of surrealist irony. However, Vogel's choice of illustrations for the essay makes us realise that montage juxtapositions are semantically so broad that they actually encompass many unconnected artistic idioms, so the 'surrealist' label seems too general a descriptive category here. On the one hand, we can mention the works of Aleksander Krzywobłocki, student of the Lviv Polytechnic, who emphasised the

9 For a discussion of how ideas developed within the realm of avant-garde painting influenced Vogel's literary philosophy and practice, see Karolina Szymaniak, *Być agentem wiecznej idei. Przemiany poglądów estetycznych Debory Vogel*, Kraków: Universitas, 2006.

10 Paweł Mościcki, 'Montage, Metropolis, Monotony', in *Montaże. Debora Vogel i nowa legenda miasta*, ed. Andrij Bojarov, Paweł Polt, Karolina Szymaniak, Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2017, p. 197.

11 Ibid., p. 200.

12 Ibid., p. 197.

13 Debora Vogel, 'The Genealogy of Photomontage and Its Potential', trans. Benjamin Paloff, in *Montaże. Debora Vogel...*, p. 315.

monumental stability of architectural elements (a column among simple flat forms), sometimes incorporating body fragments in them (a hand next to an arch), or radically juxtaposing the organic and the geometric (a close-up of a foot and a glass ball). On the other hand, among many other examples contrasting with the above, there is the *Drawing Montage* (1933) by Streng, who combined the metaphorisation of composition with a new language: socially sensitive factual realism that dominated in his practice around the mid-1930s. In Streng's work, montage thus encompassed a synchrony of dissociate idioms and meanings, constituting the organising principle of a surreal composition as well as serving as a means of committed art.

A different use of montage was represented by Janusz Maria Brzeski who worked as a photomontagist for the Paris magazine *Vu* before settling in Kraków in 1930. He naturally went beyond intra-artistic poetics, considering mass culture as an inherent aspect of modern living, and photography and film as legitimate fields of the visual arts. It was on his initiative, as Andrzej Turowski stresses, that the Polish Film Avant-Garde Studio was founded in Kraków; the Studio organised 'film matinees' and 'journals' presenting, for example, the films of László Moholy-Nagy or the photomontages of Kazimierz Podsadecki. 'In 1933 in Warsaw, under the Praesens label, the same artists organised an international festival of contemporary film that included screenings of the Themersons' *Europe* or Joris Ivens's *Industrial Symphony*.'<sup>14</sup> Brzeski and Podsadecki, author of the renowned photomontage, *City, the Mill of Life* (1929), also made two films together, *Przekroje* [Cross-sections] (1931) and *Beton* [Concrete] (1932).

Brzeski's photomontages ostentatiously exposed the stereotypical visage of the modern city and fantasies about it. One might call them semi-performative, since — being published in *Kurier Literacko-Naukowy*, a supplement to the popular *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* — they were addressed at the mass urban reader.<sup>15</sup> Showing the seductive expression of the metropolis through the aesthetics of the fragment, like the so called cross-section films, they didn't set their sights on an individual protagonist but rather on generalised figures of modern life. A good example of such an approach is *The Runner* (1935), an image of an athlete pasted into a geometrical, cylindrical composition, or *Faster Still* (1933), a montage affirming the mighty power of new vehicles. The choice of theme is by no means accidental, for a fascination with an athletic and muscular body, as well as with vertical architecture, aviation, automobility, and machine speed — all expressions of man's victory over the resistance of matter — defined the intellectual horizons of Kraków modernists like Brzeski as well as of those associated with *L'Esprit nouveau* in Paris.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Andrzej Turowski, *Budowniczość świata. Z dziejów radykalnego modernizmu w sztuce polskiej*, Kraków: Universitas, 2000, p. 136.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>16</sup> On the *L'Esprit nouveau* artists' and thinkers' fascination with modern iconography, see Gladys C. Fabre, 'The Modern Spirit in Figurative Painting. From modernist iconography to a modernist conception of the work of art', in *Léger et l'esprit moderne: une alternative d'avant-garde à l'art*

That film and montage were at the centre of the Polish avant-garde's preoccupations is evidenced by one of its leading periodicals: *Blok*, in the first issue of which Mieczysław Szczuka featured a concise diagram illustrating the *Five Moments of Abstract Film* — sequentially arranged fragments of geometric figures.<sup>17</sup> In the issue no. 8/9, Szczuka calls photomontage a 'modern epopee' and a cross between poetry and the plastic arts, but he also notes its cognitive values: just as film allows the simultaneous duration of multiple phenomena, so photomontage produces an 'objectivism of forms', analogically being a 'coinstantaneous multiplicity of phenomena' and 'expanding the available formal range'.<sup>18</sup> Szczuka's reflection, however, steered neither towards compositional comparisons in the name of an urgent search for an original object, as surrealist poetry-painting was framed in the Artes group's *Leaflet*<sup>19</sup>, nor towards an affirmation of popular culture and urban fantasies, as in Brzeski. His Marxist-inspired approach required using the new medium to amplify the ideological message, hence photomontage — like the work of art in general — became for him but a point of departure for changing the social status quo, as in the designs of political ephemera ('dayflies') or covers of socialist writers' books (such as Władysław Broniewski's *Smoke over the City*).

It is worth mentioning that one aspect of montage emphasised by Szczuka — the simultaneity of its composition — was also given prominence by a member of the Lviv-based artist collective Artes, Tadeusz Wojciechowski, who, analogically to the constructivist, interpreted it through the prism of social commitment. Wojciechowski postulated tendentious art, the most useful tool of which would be 'comparative documentary theatre', facilitating free juxtapositions of objects, ideas, and facts (social trends) according to laws of contrast or analogy.<sup>20</sup> In doing so, it opened up a very inspiring possibility, allowing the committed artist to embrace all possible formal means and tricks that would amplify the social message. Unlike in Szczuka's constructivist montages, this meant constantly oscillating between the aesthetics of modernism and a postulated language of realism that would be easily graspable by the masses.

Avant-garde, experimental, abstract film infiltrated the modernist picture — a framed still image — most fully as photo- and fact-o-montage. It went beyond the narrow confines of '-ism', stopping short of conveying any particular agenda, but by

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non-objective 1918–1931 / Léger and the modern spirit: an avant-garde alternative to non-objective art 1918–1931, ed. eadem, Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1982, pp. 145–169.

17 *Blok. Czasopismo Awangardy Artystycznej*, no. 1, 1924, p. 2.

18 *Blok. Czasopismo Awangardy Artystycznej*, no. 8/9, 1924, p. 6.

19 *Czarownik przy zielonej skale. Henryk Streng/Marek Włodarski*, ed. Józef Chrobak, Justyna Michalik, Marek Wilk, Poznań: Galeria Piekary, 2009, pp. 48–49.

20 Tadeusz Wojciechowski's theory is outlined by Andrzej Turowski, pp. 335–336. I analysed Streng's attempts to apply it in his artistic practice in my doctoral thesis, *Modernizm, zaangażowanie, tożsamość. Przypadek Henryka Strenga/Marka Włodarskiego*, Faculty of History, University of Warsaw, 2017, pp. 155–161.

radically expanding the capacities of a hitherto coherent composition it served as a plastic form that could be filled with various contents, reflecting the different focal points of future-oriented visions of the emancipating narrative of modernity.

# **socially useful *fears***



Iwona Kurz

Ziuta Młodziakówna (Zuta Youngblood) — who so memorably attacks the narrator of Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke* (1937) with her bare calf — wears tennis shoes, speaks casually, and refuses to use the traditional complimentary formulas. She possesses virtually all the attributes of modernity, at least insofar as they seemed attractive in their novelty in the 1930s. Boys at the time were 'loaded . . . with . . . films, romantic novels, and newspapers', and it is precisely to a movie theatre that Zuta is going with her friend: 'Fine, at seven sharp, for sure, the movies, bye.'<sup>1</sup> It was a popular form of big-city entertainment at the time. A Varsovian went to the movies an average of twelve times a year (two or three times more often than today).<sup>2</sup> Is the 'modern schoolgirl' particularly (un)fond of Polish productions? And if she decided to see a Polish movie after all — which wasn't so obvious at the time — would she have chosen a popular comedy like *Jadzia* (1936), with its prominent references to tennis? Or *Piętro wyżej* [Upstairs], where one Mr. Pączek is a great fan of radio and another is a radio speaker? It probably wouldn't have been a romance film, like *Skłamałam* [I lied] or the sequel to *Trędowata* [Leper], more likely the Yiddish-language *The Dybbuk* or, ambitiously, *Dziewczęta z Nowolipiek* [The girls of Nowolipki], all of which premiered in 1937.

A year later, the choice would have been rather obvious: *Strachy* [Fears] (1938), directed by Eugeniusz Cękański and Karol Szołowski. A film enjoying good reviews, including in the influential *Wiadomości Literackie*, with artistic ambitions and thrills provided by a (relatively) daring plot featuring the lives of cabaret dancers, abortion, and suicide — themes as much controversial as they were intriguing. Like the figure of Zuta Youngblood, *Fears* embodied the various modern tensions experienced by a not yet entirely modern society. It is not without a reason that Gombrowicz in his novel criticises modern gestures limited to excitement with the new, i.e., that which ages most quickly.

### The Moderns

Cinema is a machine of modernity — that much is obvious. It records, reproduces, and circulates, with all strength and anew, not only images and stories but also social practices, gestures, and customs. This machine can, however, be used

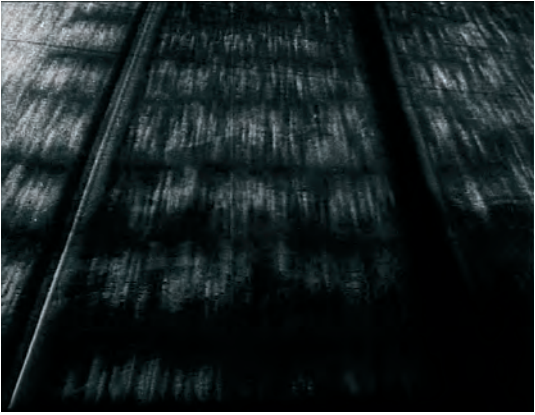
1 Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, trans. Danuta Borchardt, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 121.

2 See Małgorzata Hendrykowska, *Kronika kinematografii polskiej 1895–1997*, Poznań: Ars Nova, 1999, p. 143.





Stills from *Strachy* [Fears], dir. Eugeniusz Cękalski, Karol Szołowski, 1938,  
National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute



in different ways. The ‘biz’, as the interwar film industry was colloquially called, filled them usually with upper-class costume and melodrama, causing some critics, such as Stefania Zahorska, the regular reviewer of *Wiadomości Literackie* as well as an associate of the START Association of Art Film Enthusiasts, to complain about the lack of any true modernity in Polish film.<sup>3</sup> Cękalski, in turn, one of the leaders of START and later of the Film Authors’ Cooperative (Spółdzielnia Autorów Filmowych, SAF), and the co-director of *Fears*, argued that money and the ‘real issue of the struggle for existence’<sup>4</sup> were completely absent from Polish cinema. Alina Madej, author of one of the most interesting studies of interwar film, put it bluntly: ‘Watching those movies, one gets the impression that real life stopped at the gates of the film studios, turning cinema into a unique preserve of native stereotypes, obsessions, and phantasms.’<sup>5</sup>

The START filmmakers mocked such mainstream production as ‘commerce’ or ‘schlock’, but its nature — entertainment films meant to make the audience feel good — nonetheless set the horizon of their own aspirations. All they wanted was to make *good Polish films*. With domestic productions accounting for less than 10 percent of the repertoire,<sup>6</sup> ‘Polishness’, construed here as the quality of being affiliated with (only recently regained) national culture and addressing vital social and civil issues, can indeed be considered as one of the default determinants of their efforts.

Defining a ‘good’ film is more difficult, though. In a recent monograph on START, Łukasz Biskupski calls the group an example of ‘committed cinephilia’.<sup>7</sup> In this perspective, the love of cinema in its many guises would become infectious, transmitting to the public at large. It would also reconcile the tackling of socially sensitive themes with formal experimentation. As the START artists wrote in a text that might be called their manifesto, they were interested in,

Film that embraces all the achievements of cinematic language in order to produce an emotional effect or to convey certain ideas.

3 As a result, she praised a work like *Jadzia* in a manner incommensurate with the film’s actual artistic value: ‘Quite a democratic picture, promoting commercial and industrial activity as well as fair competition with a matrimonial ending. . . . No gentry or idlers’, see Stefania Zahorska, ‘Nowe filmy’, *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 41, 1936.

4 According to Małgorzata Hendrykowska, lack of funding was the number one problem for the successor of START, the SAF; see eadem, *Historia polskiego filmu dokumentalnego (1896–1944)*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza, 2016. Monika Talarczyk also discusses this in her essay, ‘The Black Wings of START in the Would-Be History of Prewar Polish Cinema’, in this volume, pp. 118–133.

5 Alina Madej, *Mitologie i konwencje. O polskim filmie fabularnym dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, Kraków: Universitas, 1994, p. 9.

6 My principal source in writing about the production-related aspects of Polish cinematography — including of the period in question — is Edward Zajiček, *Poza ekranem. Kinematografia polska 1918–1991*, Warsaw: FilMOTEKA Narodowa; Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1992.

7 Łukasz Biskupski, *Kinofilia zaangażowana. Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Filmu Artystycznego „Start” i upowszechnianie kultury filmowej w latach 30. XX wieku*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Przystań, 2017. I hereby thank the author very much for making the typescript available to me.

Film whose authors possess a social conscience and act in accordance with it.

Film that doesn't falsify reality, but frames it in an artistically organised form.<sup>8</sup>

To achieve this, it was necessary to popularise fine (artistic) film, condemn or actually boycott low-brow productions, support experiments, as well as arouse 'public interest in film as a first-rate means of education'.

Moreover, Cękalski urged members of the elites, still considering cinema as an inferior art form, to come forward and embrace it earnestly:

May those reluctant gentlemen who write the history of world culture come off the pedestal and start working on reviving cinema, on deepening its truth, on developing the art of film and setting it in a direction that will be consistent with the mission of educating the generations, for this mission is one that cinema, loved by the millions, has to fulfil and is already fulfilling it despite the wishes of the scholars, and fulfilling it badly, of course. Millions of cinema-loving viewers can demand that. Then cinema will give them something on top of a moment of joy: a real vital energy, it will cease to be a dream and become instead a bridge to a better, but still real, world.<sup>9</sup>

Such cinematographic practice had all the characteristics of leftist intelligentsia commitment: an attachment to the values of social equality and coherence, based on faith in education as a means of transforming social consciousness. Education *about* film was to facilitate — through fine films and the involvement of sensitive viewers — education *through* film. Such an agenda was radical only insofar as it stood apart from the usual practices of the 'industry', which churned out one vaudeville or melodrama after another. But there was also a certain ambiguity to it, characteristic, in fact, for many public-enlightenment projects, an ambiguity resulting from the way the viewers themselves were framed in the debate: on the one hand, as cinema-loving, on the other, as demanding (where and how?) a 'true' cinema; on the one hand, as obviously needing 'different' — socially engaged — films, on the other, presented in unfavourable light as being co-responsible for a situation where all that is bad in film (*and* politics) results from 'pandering to the tastes of the hoi polloi'.<sup>10</sup>

8 Zarząd Stowarzyszenia „Start”, 'Film polski na bezdrożach. Między nakazem kasowości a nakazem sztuki. Produkcja spółdzielcza drogą do filmu artystycznego', *Głos Stolicy*, no. 87, 4 December 1932, p. 15, quoted in Appendix, Łukasz Biskupski, *Kinofilia* . . .

9 Eugeniusz Cękalski, 'Dlaczego kochamy kino?', *Kino*, no. 32, 1933. While Cękalski is addressing 'gentlemen', in what is obviously a staple of the period, women played an important role in START, e.g., Wanda Jakubowska or Janina Dłuska, whom Cękalski married in the mid-1930s.

10 Antoni Bohdziewicz, 'Pierwszy film S.A.F.-u', *Życie Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej, Stowarzyszenia »Szkłane Domy«, Oddziału Robotniczego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Dzieci na Żoliborzu i Gospody Spółdzielczej*, no. 1, 1939, pp. 6–7.

### Social Film, Useful Film

Essentially, therefore, the START agenda negotiated between decisive attempts to find new means of expression and the idea of making fine mainstream films. The association's members calling themselves 'avant-gardists' was something of an exaggeration; again, such a label held true only when compared with the dominant production. What is evident in the practices of the START filmmakers is, on the one hand, a striving, fundamental for the avant-garde, to play a socially significant role and, on the other, a desire to transform the world, with due consideration however for the existing conditions of production (which didn't preclude attempts aimed at changing them). As Cękalski wrote, 'Reconciling the idea of profit with that of cultural usefulness is necessary if one wants to combine cinematographic work with the principles which virtually everything around us is based on.'<sup>11</sup>

*Fears* was the first and practically only feature film the SAF ever made.<sup>12</sup> It is considered one of the more interesting interwar productions, also because it was a platform and effect of all kinds of negotiations within the system of cinematography and art production, negotiations that were meant to accommodate radical ideas with the broadest possible popular appeal.

Based on an autobiographical novel by Maria Ukniewska, whose real name was Maria Kuśniewiczowa (nee Brejnakowska), the film tells the story of two female dancers who try to make ends meet while falling in love. Linka (Jadwiga Andrzejewska) develops a fatal attraction to the cynical Dwierycz (Jan Kreczmar), gets pregnant, and, forced to undergo an abortion, kills herself. Teresa (Hanna Karwowska, the author's alter ego) meets a famous revue dancer, Zygmunt Modecki (Eugeniusz Bodo), and they form a happy relationship. The happy ending was reportedly a result of the censors' intervention, which, in any social circumstances, should be considered as an important factor of the aforementioned socio-politico-economic negotiations.

The author's own experience made the film all the more credible, but — due to her position as the wife of writer and diplomat, Andrzej Kuśniewicz — also added certain piquancy to it. The ending revealed, in fact, that the lifestyle of the upper middle class defined a horizon of the era's social aspirations: a modernist apartment block, an elevator, a telephone are the kind of attributes that we also know from the Youngbloods' home in *Ferdydurke*. At the same time, Ukniewska's novel was part of a wider realist trend emerging in the 1930s. It included, on the one hand, the works of career writers such as Zbigniew Unitowski, Helena Boguszewska, or Pola Gojawiczyńska, and, on the other, those of semi-amateurs such as Sergiusz Piasecki (*Kochanek Wielkiej Niedźwiedzicy* [Lover of the Great Bear]) or Henryk Worcell (*Zakłętą rewirą*). A background for those was the work of the Institute of Socio-Economics (Instytut Gospodarki

11 Eugeniusz Cękalski, 'Drogi naprawy filmu', *Epoka*, no. 48, 1933, quoted in Łukasz Biskupski.

12 Made a year later, *Żołnierz królowej Madagaskaru* [The soldier of the queen of Madagascar], dir. Jerzy Zarzycki, premiered in 1940 and was a co-production. It was, in fact, hardly an auteur or artistic film. Work on another production, *Przygody pana Piorunkiewicza*, based on the novel by Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz, was interrupted by the war.



Spółecznej, IGS), run by Ludwik Krzywicki, which researched social issues, such as workers' living conditions, but also collected and published workers' diaries.

This kind of themes begin to be tackled at the time also by film, including mainstream cinema, as evidenced by *The Girls of Nowolipki*, based on the novel by Pola Gojawiczyńska and directed by Józef Lejtes who co-wrote the script with the author. Gojawiczyńska, who obviously recognised the artistic and educational potential of film, received a high fee for her contribution, 5,000 zlotys, equal to the salary of the movie's leading actress, Elżbieta Barszczewska. The picture was a distinct, if rare, example of a filmmaker's collaboration with a novelist, as a result of which an alliance with the literary cabaret — typical for interwar cinema, and comedy film in particular — was replaced by an alliance with realism.

Although the avant-gardists demanded recognition for the filmmaker's role as an auteur<sup>13</sup>, *Fears* still reserved the male lead role for Eugeniusz Bodo, one of the celebrities of Polish cinema and Warsaw vaudeville and cabaret. The strategy was clear: to maintain the good-for-business connection with cabaret and superstar cinema while subjecting the entertainment world to social critique, exposing its financial structure, relationships of (mostly male) power, and bodily politics. The film's value lay in referencing the most popular form of entertainment, closely entwined with the sort of cinema that exploited ideas, songs, narrative devices, and characters offered by theatre. '*Fears* was a movie that was naturally immersed in the reality of its time', Tadeusz Drewnowski wrote in a review of a postwar TV series based on Ukniewska's novel.<sup>14</sup>

An autobiographical work was also becoming self-referential, bringing out the concreteness of artistic work: the (financial and psychological) costs involved or the indifference of — again! — the audience, members of which munch on snacks during one of the shows. There are many more such concrete references here, all of which are pretty uncommon in interwar cinema. One notes the use of locations and the presence of topographical details. The décor of the homes or offices of the different protagonists reveals inequalities of class and/or income. The mention of pregnancy termination — as both a calamity and a necessity — harkens back to one of the most heated social debates of the 1930s. We are also informed, time and again, exactly how much the protagonists pay for the things they buy: a room to sublet — 35 zlotys, a pair of shoes — 30 zlotys. Sometimes the information about the prices is provided by an off-screen narrator, revealing a hidden dimension of social life. Existential conditions, hierarchical violence, alcoholism caused by ageing or critical uncertainty, are some of the other themes appearing in the film, not so much discussed as signalled, or played out as a solo drama, as in the case of the intoxicated dance master Dubenko, played by Józef Węgrzyn, whose performance in the film was highly praised by the critics.

13 As Stefania Heymanowa wrote, rhyming perhaps a little awkwardly: 'Enough! Protest! From today I decree a new trend, a new vector: cult of the director', in eadem, 'Nowa moda, nowy kult...', *Kino*, no. 23, 1932.

14 *Kino*, no. 4, 1980; *Strachy* [Fears], TV series, dir. Stanisław Lenartowicz, starring Izabela Schuetz (later Trojanowska), 1979.



Nonetheless, *Fears* was also modern insofar as it documented the contemporary lifestyle and its everyday experience.

Stefania Zahorska titled her review, *Finally a Polish Film*, by which, as can be induced from the text, she meant the first truly fine film made in Poland. She wrote,

It was clear that a change in Polish cinema could only originate with the young, the crazy, the experimenters, the idealists. Credit goes to director Cękalski and his colleagues, Szotowski and the cinematographer Wohl — all young avant-gardists! — not only for consistently overcoming all the technical difficulties, but also for successfully handling the calculation. In fact, kudos go to the ‘calculators’ too: Superfilm has ventured the hefty sum of 200,000 zlotys. And that is worth something.<sup>15</sup>

### **Absolute Film**

Putting aside the plot — socially committed, with some heady zest — *Fears* also revealed the artistic ambitions of Cękalski and his team. What they tried to do was convey individual sentiments and social judgements through film. Postulates of shrewd social observation were thus accompanied by those of creating significant visual effects. Stressing the compromise nature of *Fears*, which combined the characteristics and goals of the nascent genre of reportage with formal experiments aimed at devising a visual language suitable for the film medium, Leszek Armatys wrote,

Reneging on his original principle of relinquishing the ‘literary’, the narrative, as elements alien to film, while remaining true to the postulate of realism, Cękalski sought, precisely within the framework of narrative film, to reconcile the formulas of ‘absolute film’, a ‘visually experienced reality’, with the social mission of cinematography.<sup>16</sup>

In this context, one should emphasise, of course, the fine work of the film’s cinematographers, Stanisław Wohl and Adolf Forbert, which all critics noted, even if they grumbled about a certain excess and pretences present in them. Earlier, the same artists made impressional documentary shorts, such as the etude, *Czerwiec* [June] (1933), by Cękalski and Wohl, based on contrasts between summertime urban and rural landscapes. According to Armatys, the film, often cited as characteristic for the Polish avant-garde, shows it at its best and worst at the same time: the stylistic consistence of *June* eventually becomes affected and mannered. Also the co-director, Karol Szotowski, had previous experience making shorts, such as his collaboration with Wohl, *Lato ludzi* [Summer of the people] (1933).

15 Stefania Zahorska, ‘Nareszcie polski film. Strachy’, *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 47, 1938.

16 Leszek Armatys, ‘Strachy’, *Kino*, no. 4, 1972.

*Fears* seeks to achieve a poetic quality of the image as well as — another dimension of negotiations — offering frequent digressions from the main narrative, scenes not directly related to the plot, attempting to present the protagonists' inner world not only through actions and words, as it is characteristic for mainstream cinema, but also through their dreams and fantasies. The way the camera goes outside, producing a mental image reflecting the characters' feelings, which is then contrasted with the cramped theatre spaces as well as with sound and off-screen commentary, contributes to a sense of visual coherence. There are also interesting transitions between scenes, as when a cut matches the legs of bar customers with the legs of dancing girls; the movement of a train directly references the rhythm of modernity, and a carousel conveys the protagonists' sense of emotional confusion.

Theatrical sequences also serve an important role in the film, especially the group dance scenes, where the dancers comprise a single organism, highly trained and precise. *Fears* takes advantage here, and very much in a filmic fashion, of the choreographic experience and dancing skills of the troupe of Tacjana Wysocka, who also performed at the popular cabaret, Qui Pro Quo. The often-cited paper-mask dance scene, with its Cubist inspirations, or the contrasty 'Negro' scene (characteristic for the era's fascination with the exotic) were another example of such formal investigations. Zahorska stressed those purely filmic values in her review:

The action is fast-paced, holding the viewer in suspense, with a well-measured rhythm alternating light, well-lit, vibrating dance scenes with dark, moody ones, conveying the silent tragedy of the ballet girls. It is almost surprising how sure and expert the editing is, the scenes precisely measured, never so much as a single frame too long — here is Professor Dubenko standing at the bar, drinking away his nostalgia for a 'snow swept' home country, when the Warsaw dancers arrive — and there's a cut: the ballet's already on stage. Teresa is writing a letter, repeating the words that trickle reluctantly from her pen — and there's a cut: the letter is already in Modecki's hand. A dialogue between the girls — the words evoking an imaginary situation that is immediately concretised on screen — then a cut and the plot rushes forward. Thus are produced purely filmic linkages, at times poetic, associative, unlike anything that happens in theatre or literature: a specifically cinematic course of action.<sup>17</sup>

The self-education of START, and then of SAF — a key element in educational practice-oriented intelligentsia projects, based, as such, on the previous assimilation of knowledge and new theories — was yielding results: the makers of *Fears* were not only aware that film required its own, specific, means of expression, but also knew how to use them. The notion of the 'photogenic' also mattered here. The

discussion about it, carried out from the mid-1920s and involving, for example, Leon Trystan or Karol Irzykowski, concerned in fact the essence of film as a medium of motion and visibility. The photogenic would be an effect of a certain surfeit here, an excess of visibility<sup>18</sup>, albeit one necessary for conveying the character of the modern world of impressions and movement, and at the same time an inherent dimension of the film medium. To some viewers, though, that excess seemed redundant — for example, the *Prosto z Mostu* critic suggested that all those scenes ‘could as well be cut out’<sup>19</sup>, and called the editing, so highly praised by Zahorska, a ‘hodgepodge’.

### The Cooperative

Eventually, however, the social reality caught up with *Fears*. The movie was accused of philo-Semitism as a ‘Jewish film in a Polish language version’. The charge was motivated by the fact that the last name of the main villain was changed, in post-production, from Ferstenglass (as in the novel) to Dwierycz. In 1939, the film’s screening licence was revoked.

The war destroyed some of START’s already completed films and halted work on others, but the postwar reality saw the group’s key postulates fulfilled: the nationalisation of the film industry, collectivisation of production, establishment of a system of film education, from serious periodicals to the founding of the Film School in Łódź. The conception of film as discussing social issues through the stories of the individual characters, sometimes in a sophisticated visual form, also became firmly entrenched. But it wasn’t always practical — due, again, to censorship pressure. In hindsight, it is obvious that cinema — if it aims to reach the masses and describe the contemporary reality — is always a field of compromises and negotiations. This is partly due to the essential nature of mass culture, and partly an integral trait of the modern world, with its simultaneity of conflicting tendencies and movements.

In a way, the SAF’s first film was thus truly the first Polish motion picture whose authors not only realised that, but also sought to convey the notion in both the plot and the visual form of their work. In its name, the Film Authors’ Cooperative, which worked collectively — in the strict sense of making the artistic decisions together — alluded to another important phenomenon of the 1920s: the cooperative movement. Antoni Bohdziewicz thought the reception of *Fears* was symptomatic: the critics are happy, but the masses ‘don’t buy it’ (one can also discern here the familiar undertone of contempt for the plebeian or unsophisticated viewer). The blame was laid however on the distributors, that is the cinema owners, who pretty much dictated the terms on the Polish film market. All production remained in private hands, usually random ones (the vast majority of production companies disbanded after making their first film). After the war, cinematography was nationalised — but not

18 See Paulina Kwiatkowska, ‘Fotogeniczność’, in *Kultura wizualna w Polsce, Vol. 2. Spojrzenia*, ed. Iwona Kurz, Paulina Kwiatkowska, Magda Szczęśniak, Łukasz Zaremba, Warsaw: Fundacja Bęc Zmiana; Instytut Kultury Polskiej UW, 2017.

19 Aleksander Piskor, ‘Strachy’, *Prosto z Mostu*, no. 50, 1938.

truly socialised. Bohdziewicz postulated setting up a cooperative of viewers who would 'subscribe' to to-be-made films, a concept similar to the crowdfunding of today<sup>20</sup> — with the important difference that the idea was to build a cinema-focused community able to transform society.

# **the factory and the street in the elemental space of scenic repetition**



Dorota Sajewska

Cinema history has its originary image in which film as a medium of modernity and the industrial civilisation meets the proletariat as the latter's embodied subject. In *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895), Louis and August Lumière 'showed for the very first time on a screen the lower classes in full movement'.<sup>1</sup> The scene, in which we see workers making their exit through the factory gates, was a kind of visual repetition of the structure that unified their existence, producing a memorable image of the working class.<sup>2</sup> Its power stemmed doubtless from the fact that it showed a liminal moment — that of exiting the place of disciplined work and entering the street, which appeared here as a 'field of possibilities'<sup>3</sup>, also political ones. This potential of the street included a wide repertoire of social behaviours, from free-time dispersion to various forms of organisation: strike, workplace occupation, or street demonstration. Lasting only 46 seconds, the Lumière brothers' film thus introduced the problem of the cinematic image's entanglement in the modes of the exposure and representation of the proletariat, forcing us to reflect each and every time on the alienating or emancipating power of the forms of visibility constructed by it.

In this seemingly harmonious inception of cinema, Georges Didi-Huberman notices a threefold paradox revealing a dense web of connections and relationships between cinema and the spectacle of modern capitalism. Firstly, an image of workers leaving for a lunch break unexpectedly resulted in a kind of 'political meeting', for the film was presented to an audience consisting solely of members of the bourgeoisie. Secondly, the workers, employed in the manufacture of photographic stock, became the actors of the first film of their own employers (the factory's owners and at the same time the inventors of the motion picture). Moreover, the personnel were shown at the moment of leaving their workplace. The invention of film as a new commodity meant, therefore, that it was necessary to interrupt work, resulting in the subordination also of free time to the principles of capitalist production and consumption. Thirdly — and most importantly in the context of this essay — this originary cinematic image 'was an *origin* only by displaying itself completely in the facts of *repetition* and *rehearsal* — two notions contained in a single word in French, *répétition*'.<sup>4</sup>

1 Georges Didi-Huberman, 'People exposed, people as extras', trans. Shane Lillis, *Radical Philosophy*, no. 156, July/August 2009, p. 16.

2 Harun Farocki writes more on this in *Workers Leaving the Factory*, trans. Laurent Faasch-Ibrahim, NachDruck/Imprint, Berlin: Verlag Vorwerk, New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2001.

3 Georges Didi-Huberman, p. 16.

4 Ibid.





Janina Mierzecka, plates 27 and 28, from the series *Working Hand*, 1924–1938, in Henryk Mierzecki, *Ręka pracująca. 120 tablic fotograficznych*, Warsaw 1947, private collection



Janina Mierzecka, plates 37 and 38, from the series *Working Hand*, 1924–1938, in Henryk Mierzecki, *Ręka pracująca. 120 tablic fotograficznych*, Warsaw 1947, private collection

This was not only because the audience of the first public screening of the less-than-a-minute-long film, amazed by the sight of the Other, requested a repetition of the projection. As Didi-Huberman notes, the celluloid film was preceded by a 'general rehearsal' on an (unscreenable) paper medium and followed by repetitions of the same scene, recorded in various versions until the end of the 19th century. The version that has gone down in the history of cinema as its 'true beginning' was, in turn, recorded specially for the purpose of the film on a day off, Sunday, which is why we see the workers dressed in their 'Sunday best'. Moreover, the 'actors' had been actually assembled inside and told to start moving out at a prearranged signal, so the quasi-documentary image of a crowd of male and female workers streaming out through the gateway turns out to be a re-enactment: an ordinary, everyday, procedure is orchestrated as an aesthetically-organised theatre scene.

The above brief history of the Lumière brothers' film, standing at the birth of cinema as a medium inseparably linked with 'another product of the industrial civilisation — the proletariat'<sup>5</sup>, seems to be an important point of reference for an attempt to reconstruct (the history of) workers' theatre as a particular form of modern theatre. The inception of cinema undoubtedly contributed to the self-awareness of theatre, a medium that gained autonomy at the turn of the 20th century, defining its essence precisely through a body acting in a particular space. The decision to present movement as a quality intrinsic to the film medium through a scene showing workers leaving a factory forces us also to raise the question of where and how the proletariat is represented in theatre. The gateway of the Lumière factory, framing the modern social body, is something that I would like to treat as a symbolic threshold between two opposite action fields for (modern) workers' theatre: the street and the factory. I construe them as spaces where proletarian 'practices of public participation' and 'repertoires of political behaviour' — which can be considered as forms of identity suggesting that the working class has entered 'political modernity'<sup>6</sup> — are generated.

The most obvious place where the proletarian masses tested and demonstrated their agency was the street. As Wiktor Marzec argues, towards the end of the 19th century, episodic or local forms of resistance against exploitation, such as tumults, refusals to work, or house intrusions, were increasingly giving way to strikes, demonstrations, and political rallies, i.e., activities contributive to broad supranational social movements. In theatre, the sense that the repertoire of contestation was changing — with particularistic forms being supplanted by mass political strategies — found its most emphatic expression in Gerhart Hauptmann's play, *The Weavers*. Written in 1891 or 1892, it told the story of an uprising staged by Silesian weavers, and did so precisely in terms of a refusal to work, motivated by a sense of grievance and injustice, turning into a political rebellion, with the mob first demolishing a capitalist's house and then

5 Jakub Majmurek, 'Kino — historia proletariatu', *Krytyka Polityczna*, no. 35/36, 2013, p. 81.

6 Wiktor Marzec, *Rebelia i reakcja. Rewolucja 1905 roku i plebejskie doświadczenie polityczne*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego; Kraków: Universitas, 2016, pp. 60, 61.

turning against the troops sent in to restore law and order. In the play, which premiered at the Neues Theater in Berlin on 26 December 1893, Hauptmann not only directly formulated political tasks for the industrial proletariat, but also created a history for it.

Eyewitness accounts of the play's Polish productions attest to the powerful emotions that scenic repetition-updated history evoked: during the intermissions, the viewers sang revolutionary songs (*Marseillaise*, *Whirlwinds of Danger*), made speeches, and then enthusiastically reacted to the goings-on on stage, particularly the scene where a mob of hungry proletarians demolishes the factory owner's house. The Revolution of 1905 greatly enhanced the position of *The Weavers*. When on 21 January 1906, on the 20th anniversary of the execution of the members of the First Proletariat party and the first anniversary of the revolution in Russia, the Amateurs Club enacted Hauptmann's play, on Karol Adwentowicz's initiative, the working-class audience finally saw 'true proletarians' on stage, a 'desperate mob destroying the vampire capitalist's possessions, dying from the soldiers' bullets . . . the proletarian soul, developing from hopeless despair to class consciousness'.<sup>7</sup> One can hardly think of a more obvious example of political theatre exerting an affective influence. No other moment in the history of Polish culture saw such unity between workers' theatre and the practices of the proletariat's participation in public life as the period directly before, during, and after the Revolution of 1905. The successful integration of aesthetics with politics was also an expression of 'workers' unity as the principal identity, transgressing, and even invalidating, national identification'.<sup>8</sup> Wiktor Marzec writes convincingly about the significance of the general strike in Łódź in January 1905 as a foundational event for working-class consciousness. The workers emerged as a political subject in their own right, and the strikes became a model for further protests and struggles that led to the 'entrenchment, or actually "institutionalisation", of a space for political activity in the factory'.<sup>9</sup> Osmosis between grassroots worker practices and organised party work rooted in the socialist tradition as well as practices informed by intellectuals' notions about the 'possible forms of worker participation', contributed to the process in a major way.<sup>10</sup>

Practices of celebration that broke away with the traditional religious or national festivities occupied a special role in the context of the proletariat's emancipation. Labour Day, in particular, established by the working class itself on 1 May, was a token of the emergence of a secular and supranational community.<sup>11</sup> Secularisation, clearly present in the Polish proletarian culture at the beginning of the 20th century, heralding the creation in the future of a new revolutionary calendar, was overshadowed after 1907 by the question of national independence. This seems to be the reason why the year 1917 in Poland contributed to the development of new practices of proletarian

7 Józef Kozłowski, *Życie teatralne proletariatu polskiego 1878–1914*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1982, p. 153.

8 Wiktor Marzec, p. 65.

9 Ibid., p. 76.

10 Ibid., p. 77.

11 Wiktor Marzec writes extensively on this, *ibid.*

celebration or the development of workers' theatre (or, more broadly, working-class culture) nowhere near as radically as it did in Russia or Germany. And yet it was only after the October Revolution that the proletarian masses had confirmed their identity as an active subject (actor) of history, as expressed in performative acts that produced real social effects.

The theatre unfolding in the street, particularly in the Soviet Union, included social and political performances (strikes, rallies, marches) as well as aesthetic strategy-observing mass shows and amateur enactments.<sup>12</sup> Exploring the open territory of the street, all these forms of workers' theatre were gestures of the repetition of revolutionary actions, allowing the proletarians to establish their own history by re-embodying them. Classic historical reconstructions, such as the famous *Storming of the Winter Palace*, and semi-documentary montaged re-enactments of events from 1917, were meant to establish a close connection between historical experience and the individual body updating it.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, such re-enactments were devoid of individual experiences, for they were supposed to produce an image of an organised and active collective body. For the people to be able to cast themselves as a protagonist of history, for the revolutionary masses to emerge as a new political subject, the individual had to be reduced to the role of an extra.

The invalidation of individual experience, the ideological interpretation of historical documents, and the employment of legitimating strategies in the process of scenic reconstruction comprised an ultimate apotheosis of the October Revolution. The function of the re-enactment practices related to the year 1917 wasn't to precisely recreate historical events, but rather to 'generate a founding myth — a myth of the revolution'<sup>14</sup> that in itself would constitute a matrix for further repetitions. As Erika Fischer-Lichte notes, the myth of the revolution connoted both the end of history and the beginning of a new messianic time. 'Through re-enactment, the historio-political event of the revolution was transformed into a mythical event that occurred not in historical time but in a time of salvation.'<sup>15</sup> The theatre engendered by the revolutionary events (and their re-enactments) became, on the one hand, a ritual form of memory, and on the other hand, a constituent part of a new and autonomous proletarian culture that shaped modern theatre aesthetics as much as it was shaped itself by the champions of 1920s and 1930s avant-garde theatre such as Nikolai Evreinov, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Sergei Tretyakov, or Erwin Piscator.

Whereas the street was a space where the proletariat was able to test and probe the emancipatory forms of manifesting its political identity and participating in

12 Katarzyna Osińska, 'Ewolucja widowisk masowych w Związku Radzieckim (od roku 1917 do lat 30.)', *Konteksty*, no. 2, 2008.

13 Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Die Wiederholung als Ereignis. Reenactment als Aneignung von Geschichte', in *Theater als Zeitmaschine. Zur performativen Praxis des Reenactments*, Bielefeld: [transcript], 2012, p. 30.

14 Ibid., p. 37.

15 Ibid.



public life, factories (already during the Revolution of 1905) were ‘becoming alternative public spaces embedded in the context of production’.<sup>16</sup> The notion of the factory as a proletarian public sphere as well as, in a broader context, the birthplace of the working class as a future society was one of the crucial motifs of Soviet post-revolutionary art. Repeated as slogans, lines from Vladimir Mayakovsky’s *Decree to the Army of Art*: ‘The streets shall be our brushes / Our palettes shall be the squares’, were matched by the no less emphatic pronouncement from his *Back Home*: ‘I feel myself to be a Soviet factory, manufacturing happiness.’ The most famous embodiment of the idea of the factory as a modern theatre stage was Sergei Eisenstein’s staging of Sergei Tretyakov’s *Gas Masks* in an actual factory hall at the Moscow gas works in February 1924. Produced under the auspices of Proletkult, the event was one of the first site-specific art performances ever. It was meant as a radical gesture of overturning theatre as an institution and annulling the rigid distinction between stage and audience, especially that the factory shows were organised for working-class viewers only. A small constructivist stage was built at the centre of the factory, the actors wore genuine worker uniforms, and the various sounds of the gas works formed an integral part of the show. But the idea of merging art and life didn’t work: the performance only distracted the workers as they went about their usual tasks. The theatrical dialogues had a false ring to them, the stage machinery didn’t work, leading to the collapse of the project and Eisenstein’s ultimate divorce with theatre. His next work was a full-length feature film, *Strike* (1925), where the theme of the factory returned in a different way: the suicide of a worker unfairly accused of theft provokes an all-out worker revolt. Ending with scenes showing the military intervening at the behest of the shareholders and bloodily crushing the strike, the film depicted the factory as a place where the utter alienation of the proletariat is expressed.

A territory separated from the society at large by walls, gates, hierarchies, schedules, and machines, where the human body is subjected to extreme discipline, supervision, and permanent hazard, the factory was a ready-made scenery for the demonstration of capitalist crime. At the same time, as a product of industrial civilisation, it became that modern theatre space in which it was possible to conduct critical reflection on the worker’s labour and identity, a reflection based on a dialectic confrontation of the principles of social policy with its subject, the working masses. In order to establish a new order of the theatre archive, one constituted by scenes showing the working class in connection with its actual workplace — the factory — I suggest that we recognise as originary for modern theatre a *reverse* of the image created by film on the eve of the 20th century: not workers leaving the factory, but entering it.

However, as Alan Badiou notes, ‘to enter into the factory is to enter into un-presentation’<sup>17</sup>, for it means to enter a territory of death — in their anonymity, workers resemble soldiers, they are recruits of death submitted to a system of effectiveness,

16 Wiktor Marzec, p. 87.

17 Alain Badiou, ‘The Factory as Event-Site’, *Prelom*, no. 8, Fall 2006, p. 175.



their presence mattering only insofar as they are substitutable. But the repressive order of productivity can nonetheless be destabilised. Arguing that 'in modern historical presentation, the factory is the event par excellence'<sup>18</sup>, Badiou points out that recognising the factory as an event-site doesn't necessarily mean that factory events have to happen, only that they can happen. Moreover, the event as such is not political: it is only 'qualified as such through the retroaction of a conditioned intervention'.<sup>19</sup>

One event that activates the factory's potential to emancipate the working class, I would like to suggest, is the work accident, which radically interrupts the order of productivity based on the idea of unified worker identity. A workplace accident manifests the utter alienation of the workers and at the same time the collapse of the apparent integrity of the capitalist system that has turned man into machine. It is a scene that makes it possible at all to experience time and history at the factory. A situation, concentrated in the 'here and now', that contains both the past (allowing one to reconstruct its political, economic, and social causes) and the future (creating the potential for a collective political reaction towards the machine-incapacitated human body). Construed as a performative situation, the accident is not so much based on the strategy of representation as subject to the principle of repetition.

An interesting take on the factory as an event-site in the sense that I am proposing is the only preserved scene from the documentary-theatre play *The Social Policy of the Republic of Poland*, written by Aleksander Wat and staged by Leon Schiller at the General Domestic Exhibition in Poznań in the summer of 1929. An indictment against capitalist violations of workers' rights in independent Poland, the dramatic work opens not so much with an actual re-enactment of a factory accident, but with a female worker's account of it:

*Darkness. Five Workers of different ages. An alarm bell rings. A Female Worker rushes onto the stage, lit by a spotlight.*

Female Worker: An accident! The conveyor has caught a man!

*Pause.*

Female Worker: The conveyor belt caught him by the uniform, spun him around several times, thrashed him against the wall and threw him on the floor. I looked closely: a bloody pulp.<sup>20</sup>

The accident prompts the other workers to remember similar events they have witnessed.

18 Ibid., p. 172.

19 Ibid.

20 Aleksander Wat, 'Polityka społeczna RP', in *Faktomontaże Leona Schillera*, ed. Anna Kuligowska-Korzeniewska, Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Z. Raszewskiego, 2015, p. 33.

First Miner: The conveyors, lathes, threshers, we are abundant prey for them. The belt gears crush us, the buzz saws cut off our fingers, the scaffoldings collapse under our weight, the elevator ropes snap, heavy objects fall from above. You do piecework, haste rushes your fingers — a moment — an accident.

We were working with shooting powder. An electrician was repairing the cables. . . . A spark fell, the powder exploded. Twenty nine men badly burned, two dead.

Second Miner: At the steel works behind the mine, a couple of workers were checking the hatch of the gas downcomer yesterday. They stood on the foot-board, propped a crowbar against the floor and pried hard to lift the hatch. The rusted floor gave in, and a worker fell from eighteen metres into the furnace shaft. Charred.

Farm Labourer: A female worker was tying her headscarf near the threshing machine. The drum of the thresher caught the ends of the scarf, pulled the worker's head in and crushed it.

The 'accident scene' appears here essentially as a 'repetition scene', subject neither to the strategies of illusion nor of the production of emotion. The purpose of the epic reconstruction of the event is to produce an estrangement effect — to create an epic situation that will allow the viewer or listener to draw conclusions, to adopt a stance, to become engaged in the overall case rather than identifying with a particular victim. I thus consider the accident scene as a trigger of an anamnetic process aimed to make one aware, through individual experience, of being part of a collective. The latter, in turn, was supposed to become a manifestation of the idea of a new society, one functioning — in accordance with the tenets of avant-garde art — like a perfect machine. Thus the above-quoted scene reveals a double contradiction. Firstly, the accident is an act that ruptures the human being's organic fusion with the machine, and secondly, it exposes the machine's Pyrrhic victory over man's biological existence. The rhythm of the machine, whose mechanism is based on repetition, determines in effect the rhythm of man's death, subject to the same principle of repetition. Thus the boundary between the mechanical and the organic, but also between dead body and living body, is effaced. The body of the worker, whose individual identity no longer matters, updates itself solely as part of a larger whole, in the elemental space of scenic repetition.

A fixation on the seriality rather than the particularity of accidents deprived the event itself of corporeality and emphasised its spectrality in the sense discussed by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx*. The irremovable presence and repetitiveness of the accident as an event meant that the factory was presented as a 'staging for the

end of history' that is governed first and foremost by a 'logic of haunting': a dead worker returns on stage as a ghost whose return is expected which is why it has to occur over and over again.<sup>21</sup> It could be said, therefore, that the other workers — as witnesses of the event — both fear and desire his return, as if only an unjustified death were able to 'do right, to render justice, and to redress history, the wrong [tort] of history'.<sup>22</sup>

Viewed from this perspective, the accident appears as a moment when 'time is unhinged'; it occurs so that the mission of 'putting a dislocated time back on its hinges' can be embarked on. The theatre stage, in turn, becomes the auditorium of a 'politics of memory' which Derrida considers to be a necessary condition of a just society. 'History rises from its grave and haunts the living to remind them of things that haven't been put straight or worked through.'<sup>23</sup> A murderous beginning becomes thus inscribed in a revolutionary order of the future and a messianic time of the revolution, the originary scene of which is the accident. As Derrida argues,

There is tragedy, there is essence of the tragic only on the condition of this originary, more precisely of this pre-originary and properly spectral anteriority of the crime — the crime of the other, a misdeed whose event and reality, whose truth can never present themselves in flesh and blood, but can only allow themselves to be presumed, reconstructed, fantasized.<sup>24</sup>

Although the factory accident can be considered an originary scene for the revolution, the memory of this particular image of capitalist violence was subordinated to political potential rather than to a reconstruction of the event itself, resulting in the removal of trauma from the revolutionary discourse. The accident served solely as a means of ideologising the particular experience of an individual worker in the name of a new collective subject (the mass), the revolution, and a future society. And yet the accident scene carried a strong potential of traumatising the other workers who watched the capitalist scene of crime, having survived, in a way, a violent event. Both the primary trauma of the survivors and the secondary traumatising of those viewing a representation of the violent scene were blocked and then eliminated from the post-revolutionary discourse. The precept to give testimony in the case of the survivor found a symmetry in the repetition of the accident scene on the one hand and a promise of the revolution-event on the other. The precept to speak about a crime was replaced by a precept of political action (strike, manifestation, revolution) as a reaction to the originary scene. One can therefore posit that repressing the accident scene as a traumatic event became a necessary condition of the revolution.

21 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York and London: Routledge, 1994, p. 10.

22 Ibid., p. 24.

23 Ralph Fischer, *Walking Artists: Über die Entdeckung des Gehens in den performativen Künsten*, Bielefeld: [transcript], 2011, p. 276.

24 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*. . . , p. 24.

A particular paradox appears in the scene of the factory accident. It is a manifestation of the utter repressiveness of the capitalist system — which treats man as an object, a human error in the machine, an element that disturbs smooth production processes — but also a situation where the other workers — witnesses of the accident — become potential victims and, at the same time, passive observers of a crime. Perhaps the most perfect example of this paradox is the factory accident scene in Andrzej Wajda's *The Promised Land* (1975), based on a late-19th-century novel by Władysław Reymont. A worker's death paralyses the factory, causing the other proletarians to halt work; watching the tragedy of the dying man, they recognise themselves in his mutilated corpse. Their silence is then brutally pierced by the ruthless reaction of the capitalist who, shouting, 'To the machines!', disperses the group of witnesses ('people gathered around the corpse'), restoring the order of production in the factory space. Recognised by capitalism, the political danger inherent in the event is averted not only by immediately restarting the machines, but also by warning the workers that the cost of any wasted material will be deduced from their wages. Whereas in the Reymont novel the trauma is not abreacted at all, Wajda opts for a revolutionary scenario, the film ending with the famous scene where the workers leave their workplaces and take to the street, to which the agents of capitalism respond by ordering the police to open fire at the revolted mob.

The paradox of the factory accident as an impossible or repressed traumatic event is a result of two extreme ideological perspectives. The memory of an individual traumatic experience is a redundant and problematic element both for the capitalist system and for the revolutionary forces, which ignore the experience of the individual worker. The latter has thus been castrated from memory and deprived of history: capitalism views him as being always immersed in a timeless process of production, and the proletarian revolution as being part of a mass struggle for a better future. Perhaps this double negation of the possibility of the experience of trauma by the worker explains why the factory accident remains to this day a blank page both in trauma studies and in post-revolutionary theatre concepts.

# **theatre as a political practice**

On the People's Theatre of Jędrzej Cierniak



Zofia Dworakowska

We decided that the point of departure for our work would be to rely on the common people and their ingenuity in the first place, i.e., that we didn't want to make theatre for the people, but a people's theatre, the people's own. This was generally received favourably. Only Mr. Hoffman protested categorically, maintaining that the common people couldn't provide a repertoire, so an autonomous people's theatre wasn't in fact possible.

Jędrzej Cierniak<sup>1</sup>

The nature of Jędrzej Cierniak's practices — their peripherality and low status — means that it is difficult to discern in his writings a project of larger scale and ambition. Occasionally cited by rural theatre managers and some theatre historians, Cierniak is read far less widely today than other activists of his era, such as Helena Radlińska or Edward Abramowski. Younger than them, he also combined theory with practice, and his writings reflect a similar zeal and devotion. What distinguishes him from the other activists working on behalf of the peasant class at the time is the fact that he came from it himself. Born in 1886 in Zaborów in the Małopolska region, he was one of few students from his village to complete secondary education and went on to study classical philology and Polish philology at the Jagiellonian University. He worked as a teacher, with time advancing to the position of deputy headmaster of the renowned Wojciech Górski Gymnasium in Warsaw, and later also as inspector for out-of-school education at the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education. Apart from his job, he was utterly devoted to the cause of rural theatres — he wrote ideological and instructional texts, ran courses, drafted scripts, directed performances, and edited (pro bono) the *Teatr Ludowy* [People's Theatre] periodical; he was an activist (and vice-president) of the Union of People's Theatres (Związek Teatrów Ludowych) as well as initiator and president of the People's Theatre Institute (Instytut Teatrów Ludowych).

What emerges from his multifaceted and extensive body of work, created at a crucial moment in Polish history, is a project whose ambitions go far beyond the leisure-time activities of a particular social class. A fundamental context for its author was precisely the restitution of an independent Polish state and the

1 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Nasz cel i nasze drogi', *Teatr Ludowy*, no. 1/4, 1927, quoted in idem, *Źródła i nurty polskiego teatru ludowego. Wybór pism, inscenizacji i listów*, ed. Antoni Olcha, Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1963, p. 54.





30th anniversary of the social and educational work of Jędrzej Cierniak, founder of folk theatres, organised after the finale of the *Franusiowa dola* folk spectacle (Jędrzej Cierniak in the centre), Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków, 1935, National Digital Archives

constitution of a new civic community. At the same time, from the very beginning, he chose theatre as a form and field of his practice, significantly transforming the nature of the medium itself. It is precisely this unobvious combination of politics and art, where the latter is not solely a means of propaganda or popularisation, that makes Cierniak's project so special. Political radicalism conjoins with artistic radicalism on equal terms here. It is worth taking a closer look at this relationship.

The starting point for Cierniak's political reflections were social disparities in the reborn Polish state and the domination of rural inhabitants in the social structure. He frequently deplored in his writings 'cultural, legal-civic, and socio-economic disproportions'<sup>2</sup> that were a consequence of the serfdom era, but also of the intellectual elites' continued disregard for the peasant class. Reporting at the Presidium of the Council of Ministers' conference on folk culture in 1936, Cierniak stressed, 'The socio-political system of the old Poland had relegated the peasant to the role of a slave. Lacking any political rights, living in misery, often in contempt, deprived of the benefits of education, for centuries he made no cultural progress, living in the most wretched conditions of human existence.'<sup>3</sup> Cierniak's principal mission became to change the situation of the peasantry, a programme based on two related postulates: political emancipation of the class and a redefinition of the notions of state and nation.

'Poland is not just the bemedaled dignitaries, but also the millions of citizens below, not just the palaces and castles, but also the peasant cottage, and the village with the bumpy road, and the cramped basic room.'<sup>4</sup> Characteristically, speaking on behalf of the political emancipation of the peasantry, Cierniak used images in his rhetoric, as if he were trying to broaden the scope of the visible within the *polis* — the new Polish state. Granting equal rights to the marginalised class, he believed, would effectively transform the political order as such.

His negative view of modernisation processes and their social consequences in the interwar period was another reason why he thought the peasants deserved full inclusion in the young state. Cierniak criticised the 'American pace of life' in big cities, the 'tawdriness of existence', the 'domination of technology and organisation over moral attitudes towards life'.<sup>5</sup> An alternative for these unwelcome changes was folk culture, which he mythologised as a distinct and immutable whole, untainted by industrial civilisation. Here, his thinking echoed the ideas of the agrarianists, according to whom peasants are an elementary and coherent

2 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Słowo o kulturze chłopstwa polskiego (Referat wygłoszony w dniu 28.05.1936 na konferencji zwołanej przez Prezydium Rady Ministrów w sprawie kultury wsi)', in idem, *Zaborowska nuta*, ed. Stanisław Pigoń, Jerzy Zawieyski, Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1956, p. 49, see also idem, 'Nasz cel i nasze drogi', p. 44.

3 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Słowo o kulturze chłopstwa polskiego', p. 51.

4 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'O „uziemienu” oświaty pozaszkolnej, czyli od form pracy oświatowej do środowiska', *Praca Oświatowa*, no. 4, 1937, in idem, *Źródła i nurty polskiego teatru ludowego*, p. 170.

5 See for example Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Nasz cel i nasze drogi', s. 46; idem, 'O „uziemienu” oświaty pozaszkolnej, czyli od form pracy oświatowej do środowiska', p. 162.

social class, coexisting with nature and loving the land. Paradoxically, its long-time isolation, the fact that it has preserved traditional values, means that it can serve as a source of moral reform and 'state-formative energy'.<sup>6</sup>

A relic notion of folk culture allowed Cierniak to do one more thing: connect the peasant-emancipation question with the project of a new Poland. In his writings, peasants are mentioned on several occasions as a personification of the Piasts,<sup>7</sup> the forefathers of the Polish nation, and folk culture is construed as a reservoir of Polishness. 'In the ritual scenes, in songs, and in the wailing music, the Polish people expressed themselves from generation to generation, for centuries.'<sup>8</sup> This wasn't the main strand of his thought, but various scattered comments suggest that Cierniak's vision of the Second Polish Republic was based on the conception of a homogeneous nation.<sup>9</sup> While postulating that regional cultural diversity should be protected, he didn't pay any particular attention to ethnic, national, or religious distinctions.<sup>10</sup> Members of some minorities, such as the Jews or the Roma, do appear sometimes in his scripts, but always in the background, stereotypically framed, solely to provide context for the main protagonists — Polish peasants.

Not without a significance for such a distribution of accents was probably the time when Cierniak formulated his thoughts as well as their intended target, i.e., not only members of the elites, but also the peasants themselves. He was aware that due, among other things, to the fresh memory of serfdom and only recently being under the rule of three foreign empires, identification with the Polish state was by no means obvious among the country folk. The point, therefore, was not only for the nation to notice the people, but also for the people to notice the nation. Hence in many of his writings, even those dealing with the technical aspects of theatrical production, Cierniak introduced a perspective that went beyond the local context or that of a particular show. He wrote that 'every organiser of rural performances and celebrations should see broader horizons in his work and sense its important role in the historical process of the social and cultural transformation of the Polish nation.'<sup>11</sup>

Cierniak based his project on the idea of the emancipation of the peasantry within a new nation-state community, while at the same time analysing the possibilities of transgressing the social stratum's class status, originating in serfdom

6 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'U podstaw ideowych teatru ludowego w Polsce', *Teatr Ludowy*, no. 9, 1938, in idem, *Źródła i nurty polskiego teatru ludowego*, p. 215.

7 See for example *Teatry ludowe w Polsce. Dotychczasowy rozwój ruchu, możliwości ideowe i organizacyjne na przyszłość*, ed. Adam Bień, Jędrzej Cierniak, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Związku Teatrów Ludowych, 1928, p. 34; Jędrzej Cierniak, 'O treść teatru chłopskiego', *Teatr Ludowy*, no. 5, 1937, quoted in idem, *Źródła i nurty polskiego teatru ludowego*, p. 181; idem, 'O „styl” w teatrze ludowym', *Teatr Ludowy*, no. 2, 1938, quoted in idem, *Źródła i nurty polskiego teatru ludowego*, p. 212.

8 *Wesele krakowskie, Inscenizacja obrzędów ludowych, opracowana z zespołem młodzieży szkolnej przez Jędrzeja Cierniaka*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Związku Teatrów Ludowych, 1926, p. 76.

9 See Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Nasz cel i nasze drogi', p. 43.

10 See *Teatry ludowe w Polsce* . . . , p. 44.

11 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'U podstaw ideowych teatru ludowego w Polsce', p. 214.

and being constantly updated. 'We need to use every possible means to emancipate those masses', he wrote. 'It is no time today for bestowing the bread of charity in return for a humble bow and a kiss on the lord's hand, today we want to be equal and dine together at one table.'<sup>12</sup> The figure of the 'lord', representing the elites' traditionally patronising attitude towards the peasantry, Cierniak's writings feature another negative character, that of the 'educational activist', who defines the peasant as weak and needy, again forcing him into a hierarchical relationship. Cierniak described this kind of work as an 'act of socio-cultural charity, often in the shape of philanthropic educational pulp, for the common people are still widely considered today as a cultural infant that has no teeth to chew on anything more substantial'.<sup>13</sup> He frequently expressed his criticism of educational projects that, limited to the top-down popularisation of art or national consciousness, in fact refused to acknowledge the peasant class's subjectivity and agency.

One example of such practices was the contemporary amateur theatre, organised by urban activists, leaning towards an unambitious repertoire blending education with entertainment. In opposition to such 'theatre for the people', Cierniak formulated his conception of a 'people's theatre'<sup>14</sup>, which he defined thus: 'It should express the creativity and aesthetic needs of the given community. And so a peasant theatre should be a theatre of the peasants, a soldier theatre — a theatre of the soldiers, a school theatre — a theatre of the youth and so on.'<sup>15</sup>

Cierniak projected his vision of a people's theatre not only in opposition to the dominant trend of amateur theatre, but also by ascertaining its generic distinction from professional theatre. 'We discern', he stressed, 'two different theatres: 1) professional theatre, and 2) people's theatre'.<sup>16</sup> '1) People's theatre takes place in completely different conditions than the professional one and has its own socio-cultural goals; 2) people's theatre needs not and must not slavishly copy professional theatre in either form or content; 3) to preserve its autonomy, people's theatre has to have its own material, own life, and own artistic expression.'<sup>17</sup> Thus Cierniak broke up with the hierarchical relationship between professional theatre and its (necessarily inept) imitation, amateur theatre.

The above conception of independent people's theatre needs to be interpreted as an application, in the field of art, of the political postulates of peasant-class emancipation. This interconnection of the different 'horizons' of theory and practice, of the micro and macro perspectives, the field of politics and the field of theatre, constituted the essence of Cierniak's project. The situation of the author

12 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Nasz cel i nasze drogi', p. 44.

13 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'O treść teatru chłopskiego', p. 181.

14 See for example Jędrzej Cierniak, *Wesele krakowskie*, p. 8; idem, 'Nasz cel i nasze drogi', p. 54; *Teatry ludowe w Polsce* . . . , p. 44.

15 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Nasz cel i nasze drogi', p. 54.

16 Ibid., p. 38.

17 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Co to jest teatr ludowy?', *Teatr Ludowy*, no. 3/4, 1932, quoted in idem, *Zaborowska nuta*, p. 213.

himself was not insignificant here either. When he wrote, 'That's how the countryside was looked at from the windows of the manor house, from the train, and is today looked at from the summer resort or on a tourist trip',<sup>18</sup> he was referring to his own experience — speaking from the perspective of the one 'looked at', even though he had by now become the 'looker'. The different perspectives inscribed in his unique biography — of both peasant and intellectual, theoretician and practitioner, stage director and leader of a nationwide movement — define the dynamics of this project and reveal in it a field of mutual negotiations.

Cierniak's peasant background and his deliberate inclusion of a viewpoint that ethnographers would call *emic* certainly adds credibility to his project, but it also sheds light on its underlying 'methodology'. The latter precludes undertaking any activities in the community — educational, artistic etc. — without first recognising the local context and hearing out the common people. 'You need to truly learn the community, study it with the humbleness of an ignorant man, research and comprehensively evaluate it.'<sup>19</sup> This principle applies also to the organisation of the Union of People's Theatres, where broad powers were delegated to the regional branches as being better aware of local needs<sup>20</sup>, as well as to the production of individual shows, particularly the choice of repertoire.

Cierniak's project provided for relinquishing dramatic text, one of the first such postulates in the history of Polish theatre. He rejected drama as something finite and complete, and as something imposed from above, originating from a different social context. The repertoire of people's theatre was to be based not on literature written by the intellectuals for the popular masses but on familiar contents, sources of which he saw in the oral tradition and folk customs. 'Instead of memorising someone else's lines, we recite the words and sing the songs that were recited and sung, in the same or very similar manner, by our fathers, forefathers, and ancestors, perhaps even before Piast Kołodziej [Piast the Wheelwright].'<sup>21</sup> The vision of 'folk culture' emerging from Cierniak's writings merits a separate discussion, for it was shaped at a moment that was significant both for socio-cultural changes in the countryside and for the development of ethnographic studies. At this point, it is only worth remembering the already mentioned mythologisation of 'folk culture' as a distinct, ahistorical, immutable whole and a reservoir of Polishness — for such a framing implies that this culture is under constant threat. There is no doubt that the Union of People's Theatres (which Cierniak was vice-president of) was one of the first organisations aimed at protecting traditional culture, and a principal form of that protection was the presentation of its products outside the ceremonial context and outside the local community. 'The old, traditional, folk culture, which has been

18 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'O treść teatru chłopskiego', p. 181.

19 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'O „uziemieniu” oświaty pozaszkolnej czyli od form pracy oświatowej do środowiska', p. 176.

20 See *Teatry ludowe w Polsce...*, pp. 41–42.

21 Jędrzej Cierniak, *Wesele krakowskie*, p. 76.



withering in its hitherto form in real life, should transfer as a material to not even folk art, but national art'<sup>22</sup>, Cierniak wrote. This change of original function and meaning, which researchers have described as a transition from folklore to folklorism<sup>23</sup>, underlies today's movement of song-and-dance ensembles, folkloristic groups, and ritual theatres, where 'traditional material' functions as a repertoire resource often as alien to the performers as the dramatic texts once criticised by Cierniak.

While the work of contemporary ensembles such as Mazowsze may seem to fulfil the above postulate, it is hard to say how Cierniak himself would see it. While certainly interested in preserving the cultural heritage of the Polish countryside, this wasn't the main goal of the rural theatre movement that he animated. He saw 'folk culture' primarily as the countryside's own, and putting it on stage meant giving the voice to the peasantry. 'Such is the point of departure, and it should allow us to capture our own gesture, our own expression'<sup>24</sup>, he wrote. He also stressed on many occasions that the re-enactment of folk ceremonies could be but an intermediary phase of theatrical work: 'why, there's obviously more to people's theatre than just ethnography itself'.<sup>25</sup> As the performers' agility and acting skills improved and their self-awareness grew, Cierniak planned to introduce celebrations of major historical events, dance parties and soirees, as well as adaptations of domestic and international dramatic works. 'The point is also for the contemporary rural life in its various manifestations to find an expression on the stage of the folk theatre which should, after all, be a mirror of its time.'<sup>26</sup> 'Folk culture' is not construed here exclusively as a source material for rural theatre, but its reference serves rather to illustrate a new approach to repertoire. This also entails a change in the significance and formula of the rehearsals, which until now served for the performers to memorise the roles and rehearse the successive scenes. According to Cierniak, it is precisely during the rehearsals that the final text of the performance should be hammered out. 'When you have a repertoire, you need to adapt it properly. Here, we favour a team-based method, collective yet autonomous.'<sup>27</sup> The postulate of 'adapting' and 'staging'<sup>28</sup> applies to all kinds of source material — not only ceremonies or rituals that haven't been transcribed yet, but also to existing scripts or dramatic texts.

This departure from the simple acting out of literature, and the resulting emancipation of the troupe in the creative process, was something that Cierniak described in detail in the essay, *How to Conduct Theatre Rehearsals*. They should

22 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'O „styl” w teatrze ludowym', p. 212.

23 Józef Burszta, 'Współczesny folklor widowiskowy. Zarys postaci zjawiska. Naukowe i potoczne rozumienie folkloru', *Lud*, vol. 56, 1972, pp. 83–102; Anna Weronika Brzezińska, 'Różne światy kultury ludowej — perspektywa teoretyczna a działania praktyczne', in *Kultura ludowa. Teorie, praktyki, polityki*, ed. Barbara Fatyga, Ryszard Michalski, Warsaw: Instytut Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych, 2014, pp. 133–154.

24 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Nasz cel i nasze drogi', p. 51

25 Ibid., p. 63.

26 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'U podstaw ideowych teatru ludowego w Polsce', p. 217.

27 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Nasz cel i nasze drogi', p. 51.

28 See *Teatry ludowe w Polsce* . . . , p. 114.



begin, he argued, not with the selection of a text but with a shared 'intention'. 'And only then, having identified the intention of the show, can we proceed to look for the material, which may be found in literary texts, dramatic or not, in folk customs, songs, or legends, or perhaps we'll need to compile various crude materials, or else develop the show wholly by ourselves.'<sup>29</sup> Such an approach to dramatic text, it is worth noting, was popularised only during the 'second theatre reform' in the 1950s and remained unique during the interwar period. Cierniak was thus one of the first theatre artists to emphasise improvisation, 'self-devising', 'playing extemporaneously'.<sup>30</sup> He was also ahead of his time in introducing improvisation at script-writing stage as well as in encouraging actors to improvise during the successive performances. His work anticipates many improvisation-based theatrical experiments of later years, such as collective creation, 'stage writing', or devised theatre, but it is also an example of testing the possibilities of democratising the creative process.

Interesting material is provided here by Cierniak's scripts, where efforts to precisely record the course of a ritual or program its future renditions coexist with attempts to leave the text incomplete, open to interactions and additions. On the one hand, these scripts look very much like director's copies, with extensive comments, comprehensive stage directions, notes on history and tradition, acting style, stage design and so on. On the other hand, the author encourages the performers to 'adapt' the scripts for the purposes of actual productions. 'It's better to abbreviate and omit something, which is made possible by the loose structure of the dramatic whole.'<sup>31</sup> In *The Story of the Wandering Soldier*, Cierniak stressed that the dialogues were only 'tentative'<sup>32</sup>, declaring: 'I don't want to offer a complete thing to be memorised and enacted, for that would miss the goal; I'm only offering one of the possible approaches to the dramatisation of the story. In fact, the tale is fictitious so the members of the troupe are free to invent further, as long as there is an integrating keynote and live dramatic action.'<sup>33</sup> The text of *A Kraków Wedding* consists of precisely described 'wedding affairs', to which improvised fragments are to be added onstage by the performers.<sup>34</sup>

The emphasis on the crucial significance of rehearsals in the collective process and their collective aspect is yet another application of the more general principle of the emancipation of the peasantry. Consequently, Cierniak postulates revising the division of tasks within the ensemble, for which he finds a negative

29 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Jak prowadzić próby teatralne', *Teatr Ludowy*, no. 7, 1934, quoted in idem, *Zaborowska nuta*, p. 268.

30 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Opowieść o żołnierzu tułacz', quoted in ibid., p. 394.

31 Szopka krakowska. Prymitywne widowisko kolendowe z tekstami, nutami i rycinami na podstawie polskich źródeł etnograficznych, ed. Jędrzej Cierniak, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Związku Teatrów Ludowych, 1926, p. 83.

32 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Opowieść o żołnierzu tułacz', quoted in idem, *Zaborowska nuta*, p. 394.

33 Ibid., p. 385.

34 See Jędrzej Cierniak, *Wesele krakowskie*, p. 66.

point of reference in both professional and amateur theatre. He wrote about the director that he, 'doesn't drill, doesn't position the actor, doesn't dictate his absolute will to a passive crowd, as that wouldn't be a collective theatre. Instead, with everybody's support, he makes sure the work is orderly, encourages individual initiative, but reckons with every voice, every comment, every independent idea. For theatre is something that we create all together.'<sup>35</sup> Cierniak's articles in *Teatr Ludowy* and his scripts contain many detailed comments on how this polyphony and democracy should be practiced. This applies to all aspects of group work, from script writing to direction, casting, choice of scenography and so on.<sup>36</sup>

The collective dimension of theatre in Cierniak's project extends also to the audience, which almost always has an active role to play in his scripts. As he wrote about a staging of the traditional harvest festival, 'Everyone directly contributes to the course of the ceremony, there being — God forbid! — no distinction between the performers and the viewers, and just as the whole congregation prays during church service, so the whole congregation partakes in the harvest festival, bound by the joyous sense of having laboured to produce the bread that feeds us all'.<sup>37</sup> The viewers' inclusion in the action occurs in the dramatic field here, but it also significantly affects the acting space. First of all, Cierniak does away with the routine division into stage and auditorium, often relinquishing the proscenium, wings, and curtain, and instead designs the actors-audience relationship and space each time anew, especially for every show, in which he is again similar to other avant-garde theatre artists. In *A Kraków Wedding*, the viewers become the wedding guests, invited by the groomsmen, and the party takes place all over the room.<sup>38</sup> *The Story of the Wandering Soldier* is enacted outdoors: the viewers, seated in a semi-circle, sing together as if during a village meeting, and the performers stand up from among them.<sup>39</sup> Leaving the building and taking theatre outside, into open space, is something that Cierniak postulates on several occasions: 'There will be no lack of space: a forest clearing, a meadow, a mountain slope, a ruined castle, an old battlefield, a town market square, a church square and so on'.<sup>40</sup>

Experiments with space and auditorium are imbricated with the local context, since the actors and the viewers belong to the same community, inhabiting a shared territory.

This theatre arises within a close-knit social group. The performers are members of this group . . . The viewers are its members too, people who

35 Ibid., p. 75.

36 See Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Wychowawcze wartości pracy w zespole', *Teatr Ludowy*, no. 10, 1923, quoted in idem, *Zaborowska nuta*, p. 261.

37 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Po żniwach na dożynki', *Teatr Ludowy*, no. 8, 1932, quoted in idem, *Źródła i nurty polskiego teatru ludowego*, pp. 318–319. See also *Teatry ludowe w Polsce . . .*, pp. 34–35.

38 See Jędrzej Cierniak, *Wesele krakowskie*, p. 68.

39 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Opowieść o żołnierzu tułaczcu', pp. 394–395.

40 Jędrzej Cierniak, *Wesele krakowskie*, p. 77.

know each other from daily life. Such theatre grows spontaneously in the community out of an artistic need . . . it doesn't seek an outside audience and is well understood and felt among its own people.<sup>41</sup>

Cierniak's conception of *teatr gromadzki* (gregarious theatre), based on collective creation, viewer involvement, and local rootedness, needs to be acknowledged as the Polish prototype of 'community theatre', anticipating later initiatives of this kind. It complements his avant-garde theatre project, consisting of the already mentioned conceptions: of working with text, acting, space.

It is worth noting yet another important aspect of this project: Cierniak's frequent mention of 'here and now' or 'live' situations, when it is hard to draw the line between the theatrical and the real — when the show is performed in natural scenery, when the viewers spontaneously dance at a wedding, when the actors improvise and so on. It seems that such experiments may be the result of searching for a different status of the theatrical situation, of a desire to establish a different relationship with reality. One can hardly fail to mention in this context Cierniak's preoccupation with the ritual, stemming not only from aesthetic or patriotic choices. This is how he perceived traditional culture: 'This output contains ancient elements of a kind of natural theatre. Sacred, ritual, customary, and amusing.'<sup>42</sup> What is most important in his writings, though, is not a genealogy of theatre, but the recognition of a generic affinity between theatre and ritual. Cierniak seemed to view them both as performances, with only secondary differences between them, and drew practical conclusions from the recognition, designing ritual-like spaces and forms of participation for his theatre. The perspective he adopted, reminiscent of today's performative studies, became a groundwork for artistic experiments, but it was also connected with a striving to establish a relationship with reality going beyond the purely theatrical. Cierniak invoked the ritual because it was possessed of an effectiveness indispensable in his political project. He perceived *teatr gromadzki* shows as community performances, collective acts during which the community celebrates its bonds, reconstitutes itself, and takes control of its own future. Thus the emancipatory postulates inscribed in his project draw their effectiveness from the effectivity of the ritual.

Jędrzej Cierniak's multifaceted and extensive body of work undoubtedly constitutes one of the most original Polish conceptions of engaged art, particularly interesting in its consistent combination of political and artistic postulates. His project — at the same time conservative and experimental, national and popular — comes across as a dynamic field of testing the possibilities of the democratisation of art. The commitment of his theatre wasn't limited to the articulation of social diagnoses, but also entailed a critical reflection on the institutional order,

41 Jędrzej Cierniak, 'Nasz cel i nasze drogi', p. 39.

42 Ibid., p. 50.

power relationships within the ensemble, and viewer participation. Cierniak's 'people's theatre' is a treatise on the efficacy of local and collective artistic practices capable of altering the political order.

# **boyshevism: sounds familiar?**



Agnieszka Kościańska

When I read an avalanche of articles on those matters in Western magazines, I think with resentment, 'Hey, we were the first'.

Irena Krzywicka<sup>1</sup>

### Need to Educate

Officially, the international history of sex education begins in Sweden and Great Britain in the 1940s and 1950s; it is there that the first textbooks are written and the first classes are conducted on the subject.<sup>2</sup> But was that actually the case? The Polish history of sex education suggests otherwise. On 10 December 1920, the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education ordered doctors to conduct lectures on hygiene, covering also sexual matters 'from the biological, ethical, and social perspective'.<sup>3</sup> Of course, real-life practice varied, but that wasn't just a Polish specificity — the Swedish and British had similar problems.<sup>4</sup>

In Poland, sex education — though the actual term wasn't used — was posulated even before World War I. At the beginning of the 20th century, biology teacher, Wacław Jezierski, taught the first class on the subject and soon convinced his colleagues to follow suit.<sup>5</sup> But it was outside the school that sex education was discussed in the first place. As Jeffrey Weeks, a leading British historian of sexuality, once wrote, 'As sex goes, so goes society'.<sup>6</sup> So talking about sex, or actually quarrelling about it, Poles were actually debating about Poland, about the desired model of society. Do we want a modern, egalitarian, open-minded, and secular Poland or a conservative, traditional, and Catholic one? Do we want the sexes to be equal and for women to be able to decide about their lives and bodies, or should the fathers

1 Irena Krzywicka, *Wyznania gorszyielki*, Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1998, p. 234.

2 See for example Mariola Chomczyńska-Miliszkiewicz, *Edukacja seksualna w społeczeństwie współczesnym. Konteksty pedagogiczne i psychospołeczne*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2002, p. 16.

3 Quoted in Marek Babik, *Polskie koncepcje wychowania seksualnego w latach 1900–1939*, Kraków: Wyższa Szkoła Filozoficzno-Pedagogiczna „Ignatianum”, Wydawnictwo WAM, 2010, p. 131; see also Kamil Janicki, *Epoka hipokryzji. Seks i erotyka w przedwojennej Polsce*, Kraków: Znak, 2015.

4 Jonathan Zimmerman, *Too Hot To Handle: A Global History of Sex Education*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

5 Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza, '„Skąd się wziął twój braciszek?”. Początki dyskusji o wychowaniu seksualnym dzieci i młodzieży', in *Kobieta i małżeństwo. Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty seksualności: wiek XIX i XX*, ed. Anna Żarnowska, Andrzej Szwarc, Warszawa: DiG, 2004. See also Wacław Jezierski, '„Drażliwie kwestje” w nauczaniu szkolnym', *Nowe Tory*, no. 3, 1906.

6 Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality*, Chichester, Sussex—London: Ellis Horwood and Tavistock, 1986, p. 29.



# Senzacyjna premiera w teatrze Miejskim

GŁOS PORANNY



GŁOS PORANNY

Sztuka Wolffa „Cjankali“

Fotomontaż p. Ło

Announcement of the Friedrich Wolf's *Cjankali* play in Miejski Theatre, Łódź,  
*Głos Poranny*, no. 21, 26 January 1930

and husbands wield all the power? Do we want rights for minorities (including sexual ones) or only for heterosexual ethnic Poles? Do we want to tell boys and girls the same about sex or should boys learn that they can do whatever they want, and girls that they should have no premarital sex, avoid arousing men, and fulfil themselves in motherhood? Do we want to talk openly with young people about sexuality, gender, and equality, or do we consider such dialogue demoralising?

It was exactly when the Second Polish Republic was being born that our contemporary debates — about sex, gender, equality — began. Also those about the model of the state, which is particularly evident in discussions about the (sexual) education of the future generations, hence their heatedness.

Yet back in 1920 the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education was clearly looking for a compromise. Everyone agreed that sexuality education was necessary. Research conducted at the turn of the 20th century showed that sexual initiation took place early and in conditions of inequality.<sup>7</sup> Boys from middle-class homes used the services of ‘ladies of pleasure’ or ordinary ‘streetwalkers’, or forced housemaids to have sex with them. No one really cared about ‘fallen’ women or those simply low-born: cases of gonorrhoea or syphilis were considered their own fault, and their offspring had no rights whatsoever. To avoid pregnancy, they risked their health and freedom; the 1847 penal code of the Kingdom of Poland punished abortion with the deprivation of rights and exile to Siberia, which applied to both the woman terminating her pregnancy and the person or persons helping her. Still, backstreet abortions were standard before World War I and afterwards. A patient of a family-planning bureau, cited in a 1935 book, ‘used a catheter to miscarry as many as twelve times, even though on several occasions this caused her to become seriously ill.’<sup>8</sup>

Both the progressives and the conservatives realised the gravity of the issue and agreed that education was necessary. But whereas the former saw its place in school, demanding openness and equality<sup>9</sup> (and blaming patriarchy rather than women for sexually transmitted diseases)<sup>10</sup>, the latter insisted it was a domestic rather than public matter (writing in 1930, a popular Catholic author, Father Henryk Weryński, advised mothers to explain that ‘children are given by God’<sup>11</sup>), and condemning the idea of sexual education at school as psychological exhibitionism.<sup>12</sup>

7 E.g. Marian Falski, ‘Niektóre dane z życia młodzieży szkół średnich’, *Nowe Tory*, no. 8, 1906, pp. 781–809 (part 1); no. 9, pp. 861–878 (part 2). For more, see Agnieszka Kościańska, *Zobaczyć tośia. Historia polskiej edukacji seksualnej od pierwszej lekcji do internetu*, Włocławek: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2017, p. 54.

8 Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka, *Świadome macierzyństwo*, Warsaw: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze „Rój”, 1935, p. 55.

9 See for example Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński et al., *Liga Reformy Obyczajów* [leaflet], Warsaw: F. Piekarniak, 1933.

10 Walenty Miklaszewski, ‘Odezwa do młodzieży dojrzałej’, *Nowe Tory*, no. 10, 1906, pp. 953–977; Walenty Miklaszewski, ‘Odezwa do młodzieży dojrzewającej’, *Nowe Tory*, no. 9, 1906, pp. 879–901.

11 Henryk Weryński, *Na progu uświadomienia*, Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1930, quoted in Marek Babik, p. 186.

12 Marek Babik, p. 53.

While acknowledging the problem of the out-of-wedlock children of prostitutes and housemaids, they stopped short of postulating the abolition of patriarchy, legalisation of abortion, or promotion of contraceptives.

At this point — which is late 1920 — we can see an attempt to reconcile the positions of both sides by the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education, led by Maciej Rataj. Sure, let the doctors speak to the youngsters about sex, but a textbook was also suggested: *An Address to Young Men. A Lecture by Alexander Herzen, Delivered in Lausanne and Geneva*. Written at the turn of the century and first published in Polish in 1904, the brochure wasn't particularly progressive even at the time of its writing when we compare it, for example, with Walenty Miklaszewski's *An Address to Mature Youths* (1906). Even the titles themselves are telling: while Miklaszewski addresses both sexes, Herzen speaks to boys only.

Laying the blame on capitalism and patriarchy, Miklaszewski wrote,

For as long as the education of girls aims to make them passive, to kill their innate instincts of thinking and action, until the girl has become an autonomous human being and been granted equal rights with the boy, until that time the relationship between the sexes will have no moral foundations and will be determined by man's physical and legal domination over the woman.<sup>13</sup>

In his *An Address to Adolescent Youths*, also from 1906, Miklaszewski, a professor of law, argued that, 'The extraordinary preoccupation with physical beauty, which is spreading faster than a plague across societies, has a terrible effect on [girls'] lives. The girl . . . succumbs to the influence of industrialists, who in the pursuit of profit keep changing the fashions, making the naïve beings believe that they won't be liked if they don't follow them.'<sup>14</sup> Herzen, in turn, tried to scare the lads, partly with diseases (something that Miklaszewski did too, both in *An Address* . . . and in his play, *Three Marriages*, staged in 1905), and partly with the prospect of things turning against them:

Shouldn't the young man think about the kind of future that awaits the mother and child because of him? The mother will be rejected by her family, will give birth secretly or in a hospital . . . and may try to kill herself or the baby, in which case she will be tried for murder. For she knows not, poor thing, how to feed the baby and how to nurture it. Sometimes she is forced to resort to selling her body in order to earn a living. . . . How many times has an unfortunate girl, dressed in rags, been seen during a wedding or outside the church, handing a baby to the bride with the words, 'It's his child!'<sup>15</sup>

13 Walenty Miklaszewski, 'Odezwa do młodzież dojrzałej', p. 968.

14 Walenty Miklaszewski, 'Odezwa do młodzieży dojrzewającej', p. 895.

15 Quoted in Marek Babik, p. 305.

Despite efforts to reconcile the two camps during the interwar period, conflict gradually intensified.

### **Towards Cultural Reform**

The key nexus of cultural reform was the milieu of the *Wiadomości Literackie* literary magazine. Everything began with Irena Krzywicka. Raised by a liberally-minded mother and concerned with social issues, the writer not only saw the suffering of women around her ('In the house where I lived, three women died within a short time as a result of backstreet abortions'<sup>16</sup>). Consequently, she decided to start a struggle for what poet Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska called 'good birth' in one of her poems, i.e., reproduction rights in modern language. In order to demonstrate that it wasn't just a women's issue, Krzywicka persuaded writer Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński to dedicate himself the cause. He was joined by other leading figures from the field of literature and medicine, such as Wanda Melcer, Zofia Nałkowska, Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka, Herman Rubinraut, or the aforementioned Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, also from abroad: among those contributing to *Życie Świadome*, a sex-education supplement to *Wiadomości Literackie*, was Magnus Hirschfeld, a Kołobrzeg-born and Berlin-based sexologist, founder of the world's first organisation for the emancipation of homosexual and transgender persons and initiator of the World League for Sexual Reform, an international movement for sexual and reproduction rights.

Krzywicka, Boy, and others rallied for the realisation of the League's postulates in independent Poland, the shape of which continued to be negotiated. A 1933 leaflet read,

Promotion of humanist philosophy and secular ethics. Education reform. True emancipation of women. Child protection. Civil marriage. Maternity rights for every woman. Protection from unwanted pregnancy. Nationwide counselling centres for women. Effective and rational combating of the plague of miscarriages. Amendment of 'anti-miscarriage' penal code regulations as inexpedient and harmful. Sexual education, protection from venereal diseases. Liberalisation of prostitution laws. Abolition of capital punishment. An international alliance of people sharing the League's views.<sup>17</sup>

The leaflet made no mention of the decriminalisation of homosexual relationships, a postulate that featured in the League's international manifesto. It didn't need to because the first modern Polish penal code, introduced in 1932, didn't penalise homosexuality (except prostitution, Art. 207). Moreover, its definition of rape was broad enough to protect from homosexual rape too. In this regard, Poland was ahead of

16 Irena Krzywicka, *Wyznania gorszyścielki*, p. 234.

17 Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, *Liga Reformy Obyczajów*.

other European countries: in the Third Reich, homosexuals were sent to concentration camps, England and Wales had to wait until 1967 for the decriminalisation of homosexual relationships, and Scotland until 1981; the legal definition of rape in the UK was limited to penis-vagina penetration until the 21st century.

Progressive as it was, however, the 1932 penal code didn't offer a comprehensive solution on birth control, which was a central issue for Krzywicka, Boy-Żeleński, and others. Just like after the fall of communism in 1989, the sharpest divide in the Second Polish Republic was that between 'pro-choice' and 'pro-life' campaigns. The 'abortion compromise' wasn't invented in the 1990s; it was already present then. Articles 231 and 232 provided for a penalty of up to three years' imprisonment for a woman who terminated her pregnancy and up to five years for her helper(s). However, abortion was legal for health reasons and when the pregnancy was the result of a crime: sex with a minor or a mentally disabled person, rape, incest, or non-consensual sex (Art. 233). Abortion for social reasons wasn't permitted. To activists, both in Poland and abroad, that was the crux of the matter. Friedrich Wolf, author of the play, *Cyanka-li*, which was also staged in Poland, pointedly, as Boy-Żeleński reported, exposed the 'stupid and cruel' regulation:

... we see on stage the contrast that happens every day in real life: unable to find professional assistance, an unemployed proletarian woman dies in the hands of amateurs, while the same doctor who, citing moral objections, refuses to help the pauper, eagerly obliges an affluent customer in the same situation. Dr Wolf's play captures the ordeal of the proletariat, which is kept in purposeful ignorance in this respect while the moralisers retain all the privileges of impunity. It sheds a bright light on a regulation, powerless and murderous at the same time, that prevents nothing and only makes matters worse; that demoralises citizens, teaching them to ignore and circumvent the law; that encourages denouncement and blackmail; that, finally, turns one third of the population into criminals, since statistics tell us that one in three German women have undergone abortion at least once in their lives.<sup>18</sup>

Wolf contested the law also as a doctor, which eventually landed him in prison. But neither Wolf, nor Boy-Żeleński, nor any other pro-choice activists were advocates of abortion; they simply opposed its criminalisation. The solution lay in family planning, and here practical efforts were undertaken. In 1933, the first Polish 'voluntary motherhood' consultancy opened, offering inexpensive (or free) advice on how to avoid an unwanted pregnancy. One in three customers admitted to having undergone at least one abortion, and a 30-year-old 'record holder' had (illegally) terminated a total of 29 pregnancies. 'What joy it is for these victims of excessive, thoughtless fertility to finally

18 Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, *Nasi okupanci*, 1st edition, 1932, <https://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/nasi-okupanci/>, accessed 3 December 2017.

find a haven of voluntary motherhood in our consultancy!’<sup>19</sup> commented the bureau’s chief, Dr Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka.

Like these days, the activities of the progressives were denounced by conservative circles which demanded a complete ban on abortion (even if the woman’s health was at risk). They also protested the awareness-raising efforts. Priests slung mud at the family-planning bureaus, calling them ‘slaughterhouses of children’.<sup>20</sup> The Catholic Church firmly opposed any forms of family planning (including the so called natural ones, allowed today). The pope Pius XI called contraception a ‘violation of the natural act’. ‘Any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin’<sup>21</sup>, he wrote in the *Casti connubii* encyclical (1930).

Shortly after the opening of the family-planning consultancy in Warsaw, Senator Maksymilian Thullie of the Christian Democratic caucus submitted an interpellation to the Minister of the Interior:

We learn that the Mayor of Warsaw has — due allegedly to the lobbying of Mr. Boy-Żeleński and Mrs. Budzińska-Tylicka — permitted the opening of a birth-control consultancy at Leszno Street. “Birth control” is obviously but a euphemism for pregnancy termination, which is a criminal offence. We need not to prove that the opening of this kind of enterprise will have a harmful effect on public morality. In fact, contraception procedures also have adverse health effects, as confirmed both by highly respectable medical authorities and by Soviet statistics, according to which they have left 37 percent of women in Russia infertile.

Therefore, we are asking the Minister:

- 1) is he willing to revoke the permit granted by the Mayor?
- 2) will he deign to instruct the political authorities subordinate to him on the unacceptability of issuing such permits?<sup>22</sup>

The minister stood up for the Leszno Street establishment and it survived, but, as Budzińska-Tylicka wrote, the lack of substantial state support meant that developing a nationwide network of similar bureaus proved unfeasible.<sup>23</sup> A ‘compromise’ again?

Another major item on the education agenda were sexually transmitted diseases. In the spirit of Miklaszewski’s views, the progressives connected the issue with gender inequality, among other things. Women prostitute themselves because

19 Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka, p. 56.

20 Ibid.

21 *Casti connubii. Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Christian Marriage*, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19301231\\_casti-connubii.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html), accessed 13 February 2018.

22 Quoted in Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, *Nasi okupanci*.

23 Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka, pp. 58–59.



a double-standard society leaves them no other option. Prostitutes were obliged to register with the police. Once on the list, there was no return to normal life for them. Consequently, emancipation and equal rights were the way to combat venereal diseases. However, the view never really took hold, and certainly not during the interwar period – on that score, half-measures have always been the norm. A perfect illustration of this is *Za zastoną* [Behind the curtain], a 1938 educational melodrama directed by Tadeusz Chrzanowski. The movie tells a love story with syphilis in the background, criticising ignorance and prudery (there would have been no problem if Janek, played by Feliks Żukowski, hadn't been ashamed to visit a doctor), but it again lays all the blame on women practicing the 'oldest profession in the world'. As the Doctor, played by Stanisław Grolicki, explains, 'When dusk falls, thousands of prostitutes take to the streets, circling like moths, luring, enticing, and each of them, each and every one, is a transmitter of venereal diseases. Will a reasonable man ever use a prostitute's services? Never! But alcohol blurs reason. That's why most infections occur when one is intoxicated.'

### Legacy

The sexual-education debates of the 1920s and 1930s continue to this day. The rhetoric is similar, the subjects and adversaries too, and, sadly, the issues themselves haven't changed either. Despite many highly progressive legal regulations and ahead-of-their-time attempts of sexual education — despite the fact that 'we were the first' — consensus on matters such as sex education, birth control, or prevention of STDs has never really been achieved.

Sexual education remains a matter of contention between the progressives and conservatives. On the one hand, the tradition symbolised by Boy-Żeleński remains alive. In 1957, the Voluntary Motherhood Society was founded, alluding to it not only nominally, for among its initiators were people committed to the cause since the 1930s. The People's Poland-era sexologists viewed the *Wiadomości Literackie* sexual-education movement as a major source of inspiration. Michalina Wistocka was clear about it: 'I loved Boy-Żeleński, I thought he was a genius in terms of the promotion of contraception.'<sup>24</sup> A couple of years ago, the independent initiative *Boyówki Feministyczne* [Feminist Boy Commando] was started. There has also been institutional continuity. The Voluntary Motherhood Society, renamed as the Family Planning Society and then the Family Development Society, has survived to this day and is affiliated with the Federation for Women and Family Planning, one of the offshoots of which is the 'Pontoon' Group of Sexual Educators, the most high-profile organisation today working on behalf of progressive, egalitarian sexual education. It has also been most sharply attacked by the conservatives on the other side of the divide, who accuse it of demoralising the Polish youth and propagating the 'gender ideology'.

24 Darek Zaborek, 'Seksualistka. Rozmowa z dr Michaliną Wistocką', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 September 2004, <http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,127291,2291497.html>, accessed 14 October 2017.

The old arguments are coming back. In the 1930s, Boy was called a communist, a 'Boyshevik', a Freemason pursuing an 'anti-Polish' agenda, or someone 'embroiling a beautiful Polish surname' in a Jewish plan.<sup>25</sup> In the late 1980s, the critics of a progressive sexual-education textbook, drawn up by experts affiliated with the Family Development Society, wrote that it 'attacks the consciousness of the Nation's most precious treasure — the youth' and warned that the 'ghost of Boy-Żeleński is coming back to haunt us'.<sup>26</sup>

Today, Father Dariusz Oko compares 'gender ideology' to criminal communism<sup>27</sup>, and a 2013 pastoral letter issued by the Polish Episcopate appealed for schools to keep equal-rights sexual education off their curricula and urged them to 'resist the pressure of very few, but highly outspoken, communities with substantial funds at their disposal'.<sup>28</sup> Sounds familiar?

25 *Prawda o Boyu-Żeleńskim. Głosy krytyczne*, ed. Czesław Lechnicki, Warsaw: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1933.

26 Bolestaw Suszka, *Podręcznik szkolny „Przysposobienie do życia w rodzinie” — zagrożenie czy wyzwanie?*, Poznań: Duszpasterstwo Rodzin Archidiecezji Poznańskiej, 1987. I cover the topic in detail in Agnieszka Kościńska.

27 See for example *Gender — ideologia totalna* (interview with Dariusz Oko), <http://www.niedziela.pl/artukul/106423/nd/>, accessed 3 December 2017.

28 *List pasterski na Niedzielę Świętej Rodziny 2013 roku*, <http://episkopat.pl/list-pasterski-na-niedziele-swietej-rodziny-2013-roku/>, accessed 3 December 2017.

# **'stylish modernists' from galicia**

Film Actresses of the Interwar Era  
in Photographs and Daily Life



Małgorzata Radkiewicz

The Galician roots of popular film actresses — Maria Malicka, Maria Bogda, or Zofia Batycka — were frequently mentioned by the local media in Kraków and Lviv as they reported on their professional and private lives. Illustrated supplements to daily newspapers, whose readership grew proportionately to the number of photos they featured, played a particularly influential role in fostering the female stardom tradition. The market leader here was the daily *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, or 'Ikac', as it was commonly known, whose photographic archive makes it possible to trace the career paths of actresses adored by thousands of moviegoers. In 1935, the IKC group launched *As. Ilustrowany Magazyn Tygodniowy*, a weekly magazine, filled with photographs and aimed mainly at women, its layout designed by a team of illustrators hired specially for the purpose.<sup>1</sup> An illustrated supplement was also published by the Lviv-based Jewish magazine, *Chwila*, known for its extensive coverage of socio-cultural issues. Besides foreign-sourced materials, it also featured photographs by domestic authors, including, uniquely, Lviv-based women photographers such as Janina Mierzecka, Wanda Diamand, or Adela Wixlowa.

Working for the IKC were highly active photographers who documented major social and cultural events. The paper actually took pride in showing its 'collaboration' with female celebrities. For example, Zofia Batycka, Miss Polonia 1930, was immediately asked to pose for a photo, which was accompanied by the following dedication: 'To my favourite newspaper, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, with the warmest greetings — Zofia Batycka, Miss Polonia 1930'.<sup>2</sup> She was photographed not only at the paper's office in Lviv,<sup>3</sup> but also on the roof of Kraków's Press Palace, with the Wawel Castle in the background, thus highlighting the prestige of both the guest and the locality itself.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of the IKC, the photographers captured even so 'unspectacular' a moment as Batycka's visit at the Polish Radio studios where she gave an interview.<sup>5</sup>

Kraków-born actress Maria Malicka appeared in the IKC on the occasion of artistic tours and fan meetings, but also official ceremonies. In 1938, when she was the owner and director of a popular Warsaw theatre, readers could see her in a photo with

1 See Zofia Sokół, 'Czasopisma, dodatki kobiece i dla kobiet wydawane przez koncern IKC (w latach 1918–1939)', in *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny. Księga pamiątkowa w stulecie powstania dziennika i wydawnictwa 1910–1913*, ed. Grażyna Wróblewska, Piotr Borowiec, Krzysztof Woźniakowski, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Śląsk, 2010, pp. 344–349.

2 National Digital Archive collection (hereafter: NAC), 1-K-7447.

3 NAC, 1-K-7449.

4 NAC, 1-K-7450.

5 NAC, 1-K-1358.



Maria Malicka shortly after her car accident in 1929, at the hospital in Rivne, photo by B. Gapan, 1929, National Digital Archives



the mayor of Warsaw, Stefan Starzyński, wishing her a happy name day.<sup>6</sup> Besides the mayor's wife and other guests, the picture shows also one of the actress's pet dogs, held in the lap by a friend of hers. The image of the amused party must have seemed not official enough, for another picture was taken, where Starzyński offers his compliments to Malicka in virtually the same pose, albeit this time in his office.<sup>7</sup>

Seemingly oblivious to the circumstances, the *IKC* reporters portrayed Malicka shortly after her car accident in 1929, with her head bandaged, at the hospital in Rivne.<sup>8</sup> To make sure she looked presentable enough, the patient received careful make-up and was surrounded by flowers — it happened to be a season for chrysanthemums. The actress had the accident while on tour, as suggested by another photo, in which she is with fellow actor Aleksander Węgierko and impresario Bronisław Narkiewicz, both bandaged like her.<sup>9</sup> Next to them are sitting Malicka's husband, Zbigniew Sawan, and her sister, who had promptly come to Rivne to visit the patient. Thanks to the *IKC*, also the readers could be reassured that their idol, though hurt, would soon be back in business.

Such and similar pre-WWII images of Galician actresses, published in the illustrated press, as postcards, and in film programs, can be considered from two perspectives. The first one is defined by the emergence of commercial pop culture, particularly intense in the first decades of the 20th century, and in Poland especially so after 1918. The second one is bound up with the study of women's history, encompassing various forms of their emancipation and activity in public space, including the media space. Mary Chapman and Barbara Green combined the two perspectives in their research, concluding that for women aspiring to independence, a career in pop culture was a form of activism, one as important as political engagement. A dynamic print culture — including periodicals and illustrated supplements — in particular contributed to women developing a 'counter public sphere'<sup>10</sup>, first of all by editing women's magazines, but also through the presence of female voices in periodicals promoting critical views and attitudes. The impact of press publications was all the stronger since their authors frequently spoke in public, delivering lectures and talks, including on the radio, discussing and commenting on the issues they wrote about. Evidence of such attitudes can be found in the enunciations of Galician actresses who also represented a lifestyle typical for the independent 'new women'.<sup>11</sup> They paid equal attention to the way they were presented in both trade and popular journals, making sure that the

6 NAC, 1-K-8556-1.

7 NAC, 1-K-8556-2.

8 NAC, 1-K-8557-2.

9 NAC, 1-K-8557-1.

10 Mary Chapman, Barbara Green, *Suffrage and Spectacle*, in *Gender in Modernism. New Geographies, Complex Intersections*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott, Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007, p. 25.

11 The term 'new woman' was coined in the 1890s, when urbanisation and modernisation led to the emergence of new models of female identity, different from the dominant Victorian patterns. The term acquired special significance at the turn of the 20th century, with the rise of a new generation of women — mainly hailing from the aristocracy and the middle class — who, thanks to social reforms, were able to choose a professional or political career instead of being just housewives.



pictures and texts conveyed an image of a modern, professionally active woman, consistently pursuing her life goals. The fact that the process of the 'feminisation of movie fan culture'<sup>12</sup>, which had occurred in America in the early 20th century, very quickly repeated itself in Poland was not without significance either. All kinds of social and cultural news and gossip about the lives of popular actresses were eagerly awaited by thousands of female readers for whom they were an essence of modern womanhood and a source of inspiration.

Immediately after Batycka won the title of Miss Polonia 1930, a local daily reported that among the contestants was another Lviv girl, Krzysia Höflingerówna, who had received only two votes less than the winner. Consequently, the paper published images of both women, adding the following piece of practical advice for future participants in the pageant: 'All the reproduced pictures of the two candidates were taken at the renowned photo studio "Flora" at 7 Plac Mariacki, which is why their beauty is so faithfully represented in them.'<sup>13</sup>

In order to satisfy its readers' curiosity, *Chwila* ran a detailed report about the Miss Polonia 1930 beauty pageant, stressing that it was only the second edition of the contest and although it had taken place in Warsaw, the candidates came from all over the country. Adding prestige to the event was the line-up of the jury, which included painters Edward Wittig and Tadeusz Pruszkowski or theatre directors Arnold Szyfman and Juliusz Osterwa. Another member of the 'competition tribunal', as it was officially called, was writer Zofia Nałkowska, who offered some inside information: 'In real life, in movement, the candidates were so different than in photographs that it was hard to connect them to the images. This is not to say they were more or less beautiful — they were just completely different as types and characters. They were unexpected.'<sup>14</sup> *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* made sure, of course, to provide a group photo, in which Batycka stands right behind the seated Nałkowska, the only female member of the jury.<sup>15</sup>

After the contest, *Chwila* interviewed the winner, who first thanked all those who had voted for her and then explained her vision of being Miss Polonia: 'I understand perfectly well that . . . the mission of representing Poland abroad, even in the trifle field of beauty, entails great and serious duties on my part. . . . I will do all I can to represent the beauty of Polish women in the most appropriate manner possible.'<sup>16</sup> Remembering Miss Polonia 1929, Władysława Kostakówna<sup>17</sup>, who 'stole everyone's hearts'<sup>18</sup>, Batycka

12 H. A. Hallett, *Go West, Young Women! The Rise of Early Hollywood*, Berkeley: California University Press, 2013, p. 14.

13 'Nasze fotografie lwowskich królowych piękności', *Sprawiedliwość. Niezależne Radykalne Pismo Tygodniowe*, no. 119, 1 February 1930, p. 6.

14 'Jak dokonano wyboru „Miss Polonii”. Wywiad z panną Batycką', *Chwila*, no. 3898, 31 January 1930, p. 12.

15 NAC, 1-K-12630.

16 'Jak dokonano wyboru „Miss Polonii”...'

17 The IKC archive includes a wedding photo of Władysława Kostakówna and Leopold Śliwiński, 1930, NAC, 1-K-12637.

18 'Jak dokonano wyboru „Miss Polonii”...'

said she felt fully prepared for the role, not least because of her skills and abilities: 'I know the world quite a bit, having travelled a lot, and I am fluent in several languages. . . . I play the piano, take singing classes, draw [at which point she produces a perfect self-caricature]. As far as sports go, I swim, row, play tennis, ski, I know how to drive a car, I ride horses, and I'm also passionate about bulls-eye shooting.'<sup>19</sup>

The interview conveys the image of a woman similar to those that could be found on the cinema screen and among the photos of Hollywood movie stars. Writing about them for *Kino*, a columnist known as 'Jaga' stressed that being fit and in shape was all about physical activity. 'In this regard . . . we should take our example from film actresses. For them, exercise and sporting activities are a measure of professionalism. To this end, we have featured photographs showing movie stars doing physical exercises.'<sup>20</sup> The images of Hollywood actresses performing various fitness routines were meant to demonstrate that, 'We modern women are in the fortunate situation where we can exercise our bodies and hone our athletic skills without shocking anyone.'<sup>21</sup>

Sporty, slender, and shapely, Zofia Batycka seemed a perfect candidate for a movie star. In a 1929 interview for *Chwila*, occasioned by the premiere of *Grzeszna miłość* [Sinful love]<sup>22</sup>, in which she played one of the lead roles, she talked about her plans for a film career. Mentioning her extensive education, which included studies at an agricultural college, she quipped, 'I am great at milking cows, excellent at baking bread, and an outstanding floor scrubber.'<sup>23</sup> But, she hastened to add, what had always mattered to her was pursuing her 'wide-ranging artistic passions': 'I've loved dancing since I was a child, and I dreamed of going to a ballet school. Instead, I was sent to an [Ursuline] monastery. But even there, as part of the amateur theatre, I was able to dance as much as I wanted.'<sup>24</sup>

Quite unexpectedly, therefore, monastic education led Batycka to cinema, which turned out to be her greatest passion: 'I am captivated by the studio atmosphere, the glow of the reflectors intoxicates me, the hissing of the spotlights, the sound of the cranking handle are the most beautiful music to my ears. No trace of stage fright, just zeal, energy, and enthusiasm.'<sup>25</sup> Asked about what she wishes for, Batycka talks about her professional aspirations: 'I wish to keep working for film. If I were very rich, I'd use all my money to support Polish cinematography. And please write one more thing: I will never, ever, get married.'<sup>26</sup> The question of Ms. Batycka's marriage returns in *Chwila*

19 Ibid.

20 'Jaga', 'Ruch! Sport! Gimnastyka! Oto szkoła piękności pań', *Kino*, no. 4, 1930, p. 11.

21 Ibid.

22 The film, directed by Mieczysław Krawicz and Zbigniew Gniazdowski, was an adaptation of Andrzej Strug's novel, *Pokolenia Marka Świdry*; no copy has been preserved to this day.

23 'Lwowianka na ekranie', *Chwila*, no. 3786, 8 October 1929, p. 4.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

after her winning the Miss Polonia contest.<sup>27</sup> This time as the subject of a 'sentimental feuilleton with a happy end'<sup>28</sup>, whose author was invited for tea to the home of Mr. Batycki, Esq., and his wife, in the mansion at 50 Piekarska Street in Lviv. The father of the most beautiful Polish woman and film debutante, himself an eminent lawyer, joined the conversation, declaring 'with a frown on his face': 'My God, how much would I give for Zofia to forget it all, to give up film, and get married instead.'<sup>29</sup> His wife chimed in: 'She's had such wonderful proposals and yet she rejects them all, saying she loves art only.'<sup>30</sup>

In an interview for *Kino*, the stubborn daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Batycki stresses that her encounter with film has only strengthened her resolve: 'My perseverance, my relinquishment of idle life and the position of a marriageable girl on behalf of my beloved art, will overcome all obstacles and I will attain the goal I've set for myself.'<sup>31</sup> Things, however, would not work out this way, and Batycka's successes in international beauty pageants<sup>32</sup> didn't translate into a film career, which boiled down to just five supporting roles and one lead role over a period of three years.<sup>33</sup> In a 1934 interview for *Chwila*, the former Miss Polonia spoke soberly about her future: 'The collapse of the International Artists Corporation meant that my engagement to Hollywood, just like Smosarska's or Kiepusza's, didn't happen. . . . I'm currently taking singing lessons and have done much progress in that direction. Then we'll see.'<sup>34</sup> The lessons led to her appearing in the musical, *Portraits and Rumours from the Court of King Staś*, dir. Stefan Miczyński, staged in Lviv in 1935,<sup>35</sup> but no other roles followed.

Looking as spectacular as Batycka and other Miss Polonia winners in their red-carpet dresses were film actresses, such as Maria Bogda or Maria Malicka, attending winter-time fashion galas (there were summer editions too) at the Europejski Hotel in Warsaw. Since those events were considered virtually as a kind of 'live fashion journal', the *IKC* and other photojournalists almost literally bent over backwards to

27 In the early 1930s, Batycka was romantically involved with Jan Kiepusza, but the affair fizzled out. In 1938, she married Dutchman François Pittevil and settled in Antwerp. The *IKC* archive contains a picture of Kiepusza and his secretary, a Mr. Leszczyński, in the garden of the Batyckis' mansion in Lviv, NAC, 1-K-8251.

28 (ig.), 'Na herbatce — z Miss Polonią. (Felieton sentymentalny z happy-endem)', *Chwila*, no. 3940, 14 March 1930, p. 7.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Zofia Batycka, 'Chcę być gwiazdą filmową!', *Kino*, no. 2, 1930, p. 3.

32 She was also a member of the Polish delegation to the International Esperanto Congress in Paris in 1932, as we learn from the caption of a photo taken at the 'Venus' Photographic and Portrait Studio in Lviv, NAC, 1-K-7448.

33 *Szlakiem hańby* (dir. Mieczysław Krawicz, Alfred Niemirski, 1929), *Grzeszna mitość* (dir. Mieczysław Krawicz, Zbigniew Gniazdowski, 1929), *Moralność Pani Dulskiej* (dir. Bolestaw Newolin, 1930), *Dusze w niewoli* (dir. Leon Trystan, 1930), *Kobieta, która się śmieje* (dir. Ryszard Ordyński, 1931), *Dziesięciu z Pawiaka* (dir. Ryszard Ordyński, 1931).

34 F. Sch., 'Każda z nas pięknocią stynie, która najpiękniejsza z nas...?', *Chwila*. Wydanie Wieczorne, no. 1, 1 September 1934, p. 6.

35 NAC, 1-K-11639-1.

pick up every possible detail of the celebs' outfits. Yet theirs was still an easier job than that of a fledgling *Kino* reporter, confused amid all the hype, so portrayed in a feuilleton by critic Aniela Waldenbergowa: 'Ms. Hala is clenching her pencil tightly and looking around. . . . She has no idea who is that lady in the beautiful gown. She's so slender. . . . There are many white dresses. Plenty of colourful ones too. . . . Why are these people bustling around so frantically? How to find someone to tell her where the celebrities are?'<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, back at the editorial room, Ms. Hala reaches for the recent publicity photographs and describes the evening dresses of Hollywood stars, Loretta Young and Joan Crawford.

The omnipresence of modern fashion, popularised by Hollywood blockbusters and the illustrated press, could also be felt in modernist prose, especially that penned by women. As Hope Howell Hodgkins argues, women writers of the first decades of the 20th century treated the subject of dress very personally, using descriptions of clothing to create unique characters. For them, dress is a kind of language — diverse and individualised — used to 'charm, to persuade, to mask hidden feelings, or to project a longed-for self'.<sup>37</sup> Just like the protagonists of modernist novels, movie stars were aware of being constantly watched, an acute sense that determined their looks as much as fashion, style, or taste did. As 'Jaga' explained to the readers of *Kino*, what matters the most for women performing in front of the camera is the right choice of costumes which constitute an 'integral part of the whole' and are very much responsible for creating a successful look. That is why a 'movie star's costumes have to combine the realism of life with the specific effects of the screen'.<sup>38</sup> Paraphrasing, we could say that functioning in the public sphere required film celebrities to combine screen effects, such as acting, with the specificity of a real situation, such as a carnival ball.

At a gala organised in January 1938 at the Europejski Hotel in Warsaw by the Union of Dramatic Artists, the Best Dressed Pair title was awarded to Lviv-born actors, Maria Bogda and Adam Brodzisz. *IKC* took posed full-figure pictures of them to highlight in particular Bogda's long sleeveless dress with a large buckle.<sup>39</sup> The fur coat over her shoulder serves as a reminder of her celebrity status. Bogda was also perceived as a paragon of elegance, something that filmmakers not always appreciated, believing her to be a beauty type best suited to playing local characters in stylised costumes. She appeared as a country girl, Marysia, in *Kobiety na krawędzi* [Women on the edge] (dir. Michał Waszyński, Emil Chaberski, 1938), a flick about the trafficking of Polish women to sell them into prostitution abroad. For the purposes of this social drama, the glamorous actress was dressed in a folk costume and a headscarf (plus the obligatory braided hair), which served to vividly emphasise her status and background rather than to capture any local specificity.

36 Aniela Waldenbergowa, 'Kłopoty panny Hali', *Kino*, no. 7, 1934, p. 12.

37 See Hope Howell Hodgkins, *Style and the Single Girl. How Modern Women Re-Dressed the Novel, 1922–1977*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016, p. XV.

38 Jaga, 'Od poranka — do północy. Stroje divy filmowej', *Kino*, no. 1, 1930, p. 15.

39 NAC, 1-P-2524-16, 1-P-2524-17.

She made a more striking appearance in the supporting role of a contemporary woman in *Rapsodia Bałtyku* [The rhapsody of the Baltic] (dir. Leonard Buczkowski, 1935), where she played Janka, the sister of a navy officer (and later his friend's wife). A publicity still for the movie, showing her in an officer's uniform and cap<sup>40</sup>, as if to counter the stereotypical portrayal of the professional roles of women, is particularly interesting.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, the image of a popular celebrity in an untypical, male, attire corresponded with *Kino*'s message to its readers, formulated by 'Jaga' as early as 1934, when in spite of reports from Paris that retro was back she expressed firm belief that the revolution in fashion and customs would not be undone: 'How is a modern woman supposed to reconcile her professional activities, her love of sports and of sunlight, water, and freedom — with an armour-like corset, with a trailing, flowing dress? . . . Can we imagine a woman getting into a car or a tramway in a huge hat?'<sup>42</sup> The sight of smiling, utterly modern, Hollywood stars left no doubt that 'never, ever, will today's athletic woman, supple and bouncy, give up her comfortable, utilitarian, yet aesthetic, costume'.<sup>43</sup>

Putting on a male uniform, Bogda demonstrated her ingenuity and sense of humour, which earned her a lot of popularity. Among the letters received by *Kino* in response to the 1934 survey, 'Who Will Be the King and Queen of Polish Cinema?', there was one with a record number of signatures: 'We are voting for Maria Bogda and Adam Brodzisz. Let them reign long on screen! 80 signatures.'<sup>44</sup> Two more readers voted for the pair, having solicited a total of 13 signatures between them. Other contenders were Maria Malicka and Mieczysław Cybulski who, despite having never yet appeared on screen together, were among the era's most recognisable actors. A letter from Zofia Hołubówna (and three other people) read, 'We are casting our votes for Maria Malicka and Mieczysław Cybulski as the subtlest and most beautiful pair, worthy of the royal crown.'<sup>45</sup>

The votes cast for Malicka suggest that she had a substantial fan base, as confirmed by pictures from her artistic voyages. In Rivne, she is posing by an automobile, from the window of which her partner, Zbigniew Sawan, is leaning out.<sup>46</sup> They are surrounded by a crowd of admirers, obviously fascinated by the closeness of the celebrities and the presence of a professional photographer. Lest there be any doubts about the marketing purpose of the shot, the actress is holding a copy of *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*. A picture taken in Kalisz in 1935, at the height of the duo's popularity, shows them sitting in a white limousine, holding up their dogs for the camera, with a throng of onlookers in the background.<sup>47</sup>

40 Mieczysław Bil-Biłżewski, FINA, 1-F-2531-7.

41 Jerzy Gaus, FINA, 1-F-2531-7.

42 Jaga, 'Dawniej a dziś', *Kino*, no. 3, 1930, p. 11.

43 Ibid.

44 'Kto będzie Królem i Królową ekranów polskich?', *Kino*, no. 26, 1934, p. 11.

45 Ibid.

46 NAC, 1-K-8558.

47 NAC, 1-K-8563.

Attesting to Malicka's frequent tours are the preserved advertising posters from the 1930s.<sup>48</sup> One is for four performances in Poznań of a new three-act comedy, *Trio*<sup>49</sup>, featuring Malicka, Sawan, and Aleksander Węgierko, directed by the latter ('an outstanding artist and director'), with stage design by the 'painter, Mrs. Zofia Węgierko'. As for costumes, the bill informed, Malicka's had been tailored by the 'Studio "Zuzanna", Warsaw, 22 Nowy Świat Street.' Her modern and fashionable outfits were surely appreciated by the female readers of *Kino*, which stressed that, 'imagination and ingenuity — originality that avoids being bizarre — that is the ideal of elegance . . . This rule applies to the movie star more than to any other woman.'<sup>50</sup> No wonder, therefore, that Malicka and other popular actresses were considered authorities on 'how to adapt fashion to one's own looks, add individuality to the symphony of templates, emphasise one's assets, and mask the shortcomings. That is true art . . . And only when a woman has mastered it perfectly can she be really beautiful, elegant, and impressive.'<sup>51</sup>

Like other celebrities of the interwar era, Malicka too attended the Warsaw fashion galas, for example, in January 1929, where she was photographed with Sawan right upon her arrival, before she had had the chance to remove her coat<sup>52</sup>, and again on the stairs, when she stands in her fine dress, surrounded by a group of men, signing an autograph.<sup>53</sup> Still, she also made sure to diversify her image, twice posing for photo shoots at her home. In 1927, she was pictured by the piano<sup>54</sup>, and seated in an armchair, reading a book<sup>55</sup>, and in 1930, in a more modern-looking scenery, listening to the radio.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, in 1936 she posed as a driver in a car.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, she came across as a modern, talented woman, curious about the world, and fond of active leisure, as illustrated by pictures from her skiing trip to Rabka. Although she sits on the snow rather than rushing downhill, her attire suggests that this was just a momentary break in her enjoyment of the winter sport.<sup>58</sup>

The sportswoman ideal was sequaciously promoted by *Kino*, which as early as 1930 featured images of Hollywood actresses in functional bathing costumes. Such garments, the periodical argued, were a must at a time 'when the cult of the body is omnipresent, and a tight-fitting, short suit allows the contemporary *rusałka* to enjoy the beach and bathe without hindrances and objections'.<sup>59</sup> Aniela Waldenbergowa's

48 Polona online archive, [https://polona.pl/search/?query=Maria\\_Malicka](https://polona.pl/search/?query=Maria_Malicka), accessed 10 December 2017.

49 Play by J. Lenc, translated by Zofia Jachimecka, adapted for stage by Zdzisław Kleszczyński.

50 Jaga, 'Dla was piękne panie', *Kino*, no. 2, 1930, p. 11.

51 Ibid.

52 NAC, 1-K-8560-1.

53 NAC, 1-K-8560-2.

54 NAC, 1-K-8549-1.

55 NAC, 1-K-8549-2.

56 NAC, 1-K-8550.

57 NAC, 1-K-8555.

58 NAC, 1-K-8552.

59 Jaga, 'Współczesne rusałki', *Kino*, no. 10, 1930, p. 10.



feuilleton from summer 1934 describes the ordinary beachgoers: 'Laying on the sand, bathing in the sea, talking, napping, flirting, or simply looking at the sky . . . They've left their everyday clothes in the changing rooms . . . Left the burden of the daily concerns . . . Now they are stealing moments of carefree oblivion.'<sup>60</sup> Though illustrated with images from California beaches, the text conveys a highly egalitarian message: 'More and more people are flocking to the beach, more and more are undressing. . . . "Listen, girls!" Hela calls out loud, "let's get away from this official beach, it's good for the bourgeois, not for us! Let's hold hands and run to join the rest of our gang!"'<sup>61</sup>

Hela's example was followed by the members of Lviv's Working Girls Club, photographed during their first joint summer camp by Wanda Diamand.<sup>62</sup> The picture shows a group of young women in light dresses, taking a rest during a walk in Trościan near Mikołajów on the river Dunajec, as the caption informs us. Perhaps it is the working girls who couldn't go on a vacation that are standing in a queue to buy ice cream, captured by Diamand in a photo captioned as 'summer in Lviv'.<sup>63</sup> Or are hiking in the mountains during a trip on a 'sunny Sunday'.<sup>64</sup> Even these few photos and captions are enough to conjure up an image of a young, working woman who follows the latest trends in fashion and cinema to find attractive lifestyle propositions. It was the portrayal of such characters in film that Aniela Waldenbergowa called for in *Kino*: 'The average man — our brother. . . . We talk about him, literature writes about him. He's become a symbol of the crisis and will go down in history. But somehow no one is writing about her, the "average woman", our sister . . . It is on her frail shoulders that the burden of providing for the home rests. She works in a bureau, a shop, or an office.'<sup>65</sup> On top of that, she takes care of the children, often without any support from her partner, who 'hurries to his office job'. Lacking time for herself, she also lives on a budget, so 'for the average woman, every dress, garment, or pair of shoes is an almost heroic achievement! The result of long deliberations: where to get the money for the fabric, what to remake, where to find an inexpensive seamstress? And it's not only oneself that one needs to clothe — the husband needs to be decently dressed too and the kids are growing so fast!'<sup>66</sup>

But while the critic considered the 'average woman' a heroine of her time, cinema wasn't by default interested in portraying women's everyday lives. Such imagery is easier to find in the photographs of the Lviv-based artist, Janina Mierzecka. A picture from the *Obrazki podlwowskie* [Images from around Lviv] series shows a group of people waiting at a bus stop in the Sygniówka neighbourhood, among them women commuting to a downtown workplace or school.<sup>67</sup> Even more 'average women' can be seen

60 Aniela Waldenbergowa, 'Na plaży', *Kino*, no. 26, 1934, pp. 8–9.

61 Ibid., p. 9.

62 *Chwila. Dodatek Ilustrowany*, no. 30, 26 July 1931, p. 3.

63 Ibid., p. 2.

64 *Chwila. Dodatek Ilustrowany*, no. 29, 22 July 1934, p. 2.

65 Aniela Waldenbergowa, 'Szara kobieta. Bohaterka naszych czasów', *Kino*, no. 42, 1935, p. 12.

66 Ibid.

67 *Chwila. Dodatek Ilustrowany*, no. 9, 2 March 1930, p. 2.

in the picture of an open-air market, where they are not only selling but also shopping.<sup>68</sup> Among the springtime stalls there stands a young woman in a hat and checked coat, her contemporary urban look contrasting with the figure of the headscarved vendor.<sup>69</sup> But even the vendors can enjoy spring, like the peasant woman who poses with a smile, surrounded by baskets with lettuce and radish. A more diverse array of female figures has been captured in a picture showing numerous mothers, nannies, and babysitters strolling in the spring sun in front of the university building. For some of them this is leisure, whilst for others it is paid labour.<sup>70</sup>

Press articles illustrated with still photos of film stars as well as documentary photographs of the daily life of female movie fans show clearly that among the ‘heroines of our times’ of the 1920s and 1930s there was great demand for novelties and innovations. Women of the era aspired to being independent and modern by pursuing professional or artistic careers or participating in pop culture, which researchers consider a form of female activism. Historians of the period emphasise that women’s activity in the public sphere and the arts was correlated with the era’s characteristic fascination with the experimental and the new.<sup>71</sup> The actresses from Galicia, as ‘stylish modernists’, would thus be experimenters, and often also reformers, in terms of constructing or promoting a new model of femininity. Their popularity confirms that public demand for such experiments and reforms was very strong indeed.

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68 *Chwila. Dodatek Ilustrowany*, no. 5, 23 February 1930, p. 2.

69 *Chwila. Dodatek Ilustrowany*, no. 15, 4 May 1930, p. 3.

70 *Chwila. Dodatek Ilustrowany*, no. 9, 2 March 1930, p. 2.

71 See Mary Chapman, Barbara Green, p. 25.

# **caveman, bridge player, sea dog?**

Interwar Reflections  
on the One-Hundred-Percent Man



Anna Wotlińska

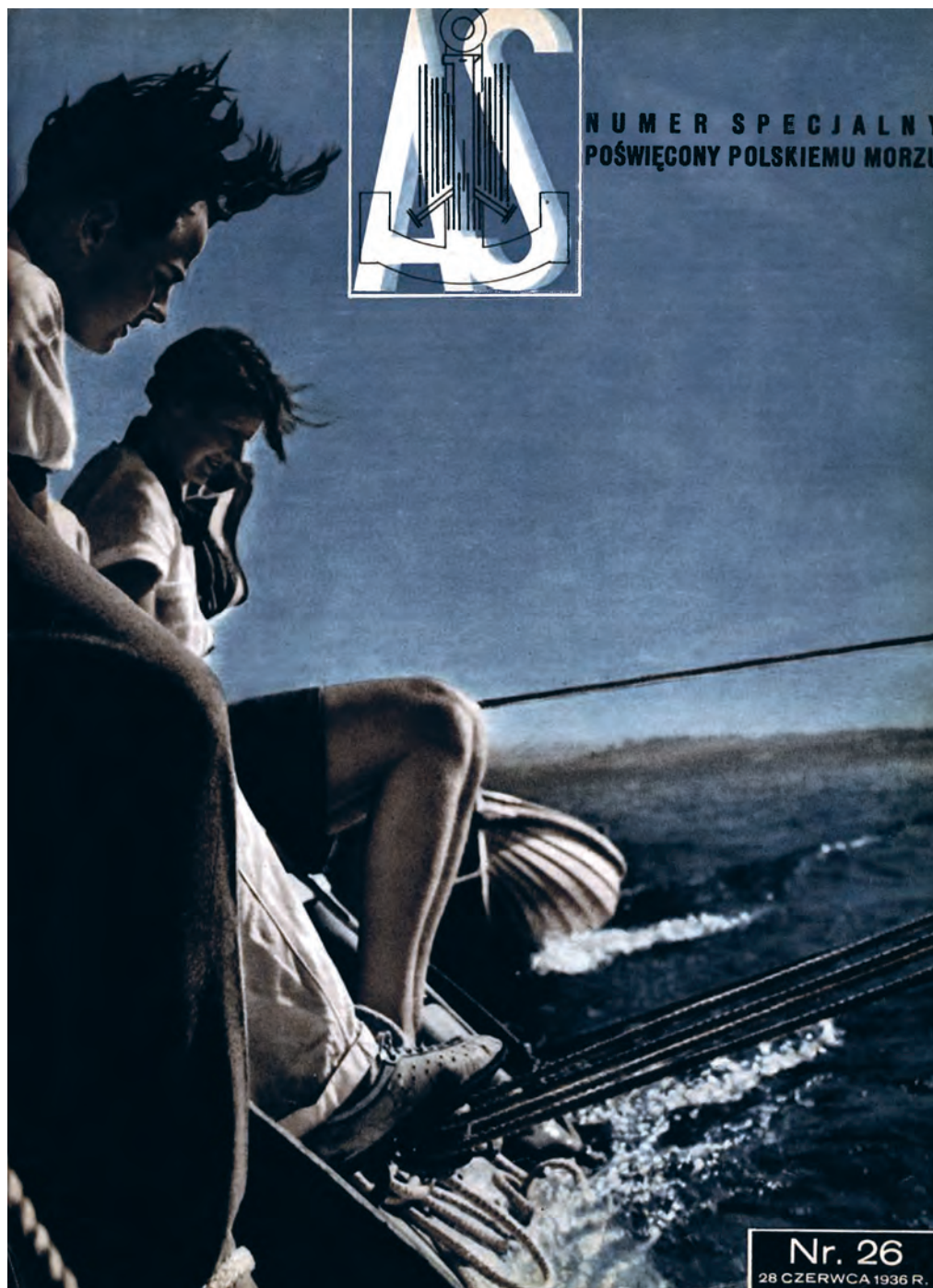
‘No one has ever loved an adventurous woman as they have loved adventurous men’<sup>1</sup>, Anaïs Nin wrote in 1934, summing up her observations of women and men, after psychoanalytic therapy had, as she put it, allowed the ‘birth of the real her’. This brief quote from the diary of the extravagant writer illustrates the difference between the traditional perception of female activity and vitality and the qualities attributed to men as natural and impressive, inherent to their attractiveness. In her diaries, written over several decades, she spoke not as an artist, but as a woman; she spoke on behalf of herself, but also on behalf of mute women from the past as well as the contemporary ones, active, and, as she said, prone to imitate men. There she also defined her borderline position: in the middle of the stage of her life, but, more importantly, straddling the contemporary notions of femininity and masculinity.

Attesting to the difficulty of defining one’s position, including towards feminine and masculine cultural costumes, are the reflections of many interwar women artists and writers, including Polish ones, such as the contributor of *Bluszcz*, Maria Grossek-Korycka. Contrary to what the title might suggest, her column, ‘Women’s World’, didn’t focus exclusively on the dimension of femininity, which, according to her — and similarly as in the thought of the contemporary Italian anthropologist, Franco La Cecla — was naturally contiguous with masculinity. Several decades after Grossek-Korycka, he writes that, ‘masculinity, like femininity for that matter, is an ability to look, to notice that part of the world which is overlooked by others. When men look at women, just like when women look at men, their gazes are not mutually interchangeable. That gaze is saturated with desire, and desire is a special form of learning, of getting to know that which is mutually non-interchangeable.’<sup>2</sup>

In the interwar period, when society sought to organise itself anew after the disastrous experience of World War I and the previous social hierarchies had been shaken up, there was an acute need for rethinking the relationship between men and women. The postwar woman and man, their relationships, fantasies, and the expectations those fantasies triggered, came under close scrutiny. The focus was on building a new identity for both, an identity for which, as Honorata Jakubowska-Mroskowiak aptly notes, citing Anna Giza-Poleszczuk and Mirosława Marody,

1        *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume 1: 1931–1934*, ed. Gunther Stuhlmann, San Diego–New York–London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1969, p. 360.

2        Franco La Cecla, *Szorstkim być. Antropologia mężczyzny*, Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 2004, p. 32; original edition: *Modi Bruschi, antropologia del maschio*, 2010.



As. Ilustrowany Magazyn Tygodniowy, no. 26, 1936, Jagiellonian Digital Library

gender is one of the most general and fundamental conceptual frameworks . . . It encompasses all aspects of human activity, not only those of sexuality and biological reproduction, but also those related to work, leisure, politics, religion, as well as relationships in the family and in the public sphere. Being a woman — or a man — is socially defined not only by specific functions, but also in terms of a particular ‘style’ of action that differentiates the genders in all fields of social life.<sup>3</sup>

As the author stresses, it is precisely ‘culture that creates conditions for the particular forms of being a man and sets expectations concerning those forms’. It was the same during the interwar era, which, as Agata Araszkiewicz writes, was a time of ‘searching for the woman’<sup>4</sup> as well as (though probably to a lesser degree) for the man.

In this situation, it seems natural that the burning issue of a newly structured relationship between women and men came under the media’s radar. One of the periodicals reflecting on their mutual influence, but also on the existing, lost, and desired model of both, was *As. Ilustrowany Magazyn Tygodniowy*, a weekly magazine addressed at the ‘intellectually sophisticated reader’, interested in contemporary popular culture, and film in particular.<sup>5</sup> As featured fashion sections for men and women, gossip columns reporting about the lives of movie stars, famous athletes, scientists, and other successful personalities, cooking tips, ads for modern household appliances, travel features, crosswords and puzzles, and short fiction. Competitions and surveys, involving anonymous readers as well as celebrity artists or sportspeople, were a frequent practice. One example of it was the survey, *Whom Do I Call a One-Hundred-Percent Man*<sup>6</sup>, conducted in 1936 on a group of women of various professions. The question was asked to critically acclaimed and popular artists, e.g., Wanda Melcer, Maria Kuncewiczowa, or Irena Pokrzywicka, prominent figures of the Warsaw entertainment scene, such as Wanda Vorbond-Dąbrowska, and successful professional women working in the service sector, catering to a diverse and affluent clientele. There were no housewives among the respondents, which seems to confirm the periodical’s intended target group. This means that the image of the man emerging from the survey is brought forth by self-reliant and successful women, largely independent of their partners. Though some of them were married, they remained professionally active, or studied, like sportswoman Hanka Szelestowska, who went into training to be able to run fitness classes on her own rather than as her husband’s helper. The interviewer soon noticed that the respondents defined the mythical one-hundred-percent masculinity

3 Honorata Jakubowska-Mroskowiak, ‘Portret prawdziwego mężczyzny’, *Czas Kultury*, no. 3, 2002, p. 25.

4 Agata Araszkiewicz, *Zapomniana rewolucja. Rozkwit kobiecego pisania w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2014, p. 37.

5 Andrzej Paczkowski, *Prasa polska w latach 1918–1939*, Warsaw: PWN, 1980, p. 249.

6 This and all subsequent quotations from: *As. Ilustrowany Magazyn Tygodniowy*, no. 18, 1936, pp. 11–12; no. 20, p. 11; no. 22, p. 8; no. 25, pp. 11, 18; no. 39, p. 12.



through the prism of their professions, but also their feelings. It needs to be noted that some took the liberty of modifying or interpreting the survey question, which seemed to make answering it easier. The one-hundred-percent male thus turned out to be the imaginary female ideal, magical and elusive like the fern flower. And equally hard to identify, one might add, which left room for imagination.

His occurrence rate seemed to be increased by infatuated women, romantically involved only with one-hundred-percent men who by some miraculous twist of fate had been put on their path. This trivialised their replies a bit, which sometimes boiled down to the declaration that the perfect male was their husband (or boss). The subject wasn't elaborated on, though, and it is hard to say what exactly made those men so perfect. Using the words of Kuncewiczowa, who also said that she was 'rubbish at arithmetic' (including, it may be supposed, the arithmetic of love), the 'perfect man is the man you love'. Adopting this uncomplicated principle, we can say that since the world is full of enamoured women, there are as many one-hundred-percent men in it. But if we distance ourselves from the simplistic and slightly ironic notion (though it was present in the survey replies, of course), we need to acknowledge that the respondents' declarations were inspiring enough to be used as a basis for an attempt to sketch a portrait of the perfect man of the interwar era.

That describing Mr. Perfect was a hard nut to crack was something that the editors of *As* were well aware of. In an introduction to the first interview, the author calls the notion of the one-hundred-percent man 'bizarre' and wonders who he will actually be asking the respondents about. He reflects on the qualities of the object: psychologically, does he tend towards the 'calm and cool-headed gentleman or the jealous brute?' Should he have the clean-shaved cosmopolitan look or sport a beard and a moustache, the tokens of masculine power? Equally important is the question of the — real or imaginary — space that Mr. Perfect inhabits. The replies the interviewer wanted to hear were important, he thought, for the female readers, but they also mattered to the 'uglier half of the human race, so ruthlessly and thoroughly measured on a percentage scale'. It is hard to say whether the *As* journalist forgot or simply didn't know about an earlier survey concerning the contemporary woman's image — the existing one and the ideal desired by men. It was conducted by the weekly in 1935, with respondents ranging from high-profile artists (e.g., visual artist and designer Stefan Norblin, actor Eugeniusz Bodo, or writer Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz) to elite professionals such as the Lviv-based doctor, Kazimierz Lewandowski. It was, therefore, not only interwar-era men who were 'ruthlessly measured on a percentage scale', but women, too, were gauged (if not mathematically) for the concentration of femininity in their psychology and physiognomy.

Oversimplifying a bit, we can assume that the endorphin effect of love causes every infatuated woman to perceive her beloved as perfect, regardless of his objective qualities, which the respondents actually don't mention, whether for the sake of discretion or to avoid compromising their life choices. In the context of those, life seems an infinity that is better shared with a fancied superman than a real fellow, with his shortish

legs and not always intelligent gaze of Peter Pan. Painter Irena Pokrzywicka hit the nail on the head by saying that 'you can imagine whatever you want', though the fancy remains, well, unreal. Sometimes, though, it did assume a physical form, if one distorted by fantasy, desires, or expectations. For all the pertinence of Pokrzywicka's comment, some of the respondents remembered actual encounters with one-hundred-percent men and in doing so, incidentally revealed their fantasies or (stereotypical) notions of the perfect man. This was done also by those happily in love, whose super-hubbies seemed with their arm span to restrict their field of vision. For those women, they were the epitome of masculinity.

Most interesting, funny, or sometimes mischievous are the enunciations of the artists. Kuncewiczowa, speaking at first rather enigmatically, as if trying to hide behind her literary characters, at some point seems to become more candid in articulating her views on the subject in question. Perhaps they were consistent with the common stereotypical opinions, for the writer says that she is soon going on a trip to Palestine and Egypt, the 'land of the proverbial one-hundred-percent men'. This experience is to be described in her next novel, not to produce any complex erotic algebra, but solely as literary studies. Kuncewiczowa's frequent evasions can be interpreted as a simple act of sticking to safe ground, but also as reflecting the difficulty of defining masculinity, especially the perfect one, which is a kind of phantasm. The latter remains an element of the world of imagination, of art, a centuries-long narrative about female desire, one that is difficult, or simply impossible, to satisfy, and even (if found) potentially harmful as a real entity. Such dilemmas were unknown to women of established professional and personal position, as were the notions of male-female relationships and the one-hundred-percent man.

Resounding most emphatically are the voices of Wanda Melcer and Irena Pokrzywicka. The former not only delivered an opinion on the cultural construct as a woman and artist, but had earlier speculated on the causes of its popularity. The main culprit here, she argued, was cinema with its male protagonists, the 'mace-wielding cavemen'. Cinematography had not only created the model, but fostered and cultivated it in order to promote its stars. Yet the male entity so engendered seemed uninspiring and dull to Melcer, who furthermore said that measuring character in percentages was an outdated practice from the times of Otto Weininger. Citing psychological research, she stressed that the so called feminine qualities (meekness, submissiveness, gentleness) were a product of women's social status and — something that had been proven — simply human qualities. Some of those characteristics were also considered by other respondents as independent of gender and significant in the context of the discussion of masculinity.

Returning to Melcer the artist, she confessed to be more interested in complex male figures, with qualities traditionally regarded as feminine, which make masculinity more complete. It becomes less grotesque, less cinematic in its realness, gaining attractiveness through ambiguity and various refractions. Moreover, a super-masculine character is problematic even in a novel (Wanda Melcer, *Two Persons*, 1936), his behaviour

causing all sorts of trouble. The writer seemed to think along similar lines about one-hundred-percent masculinity in real life, where she not only not sought it, but actually avoided it. Her reason here was a desire to maintain her independence, a supreme value that would be threatened by a super-macho. Melcer identified the latter, in both art and real life, with domination, brutality, and aggression, which precluded an equal relationship and posed a threat for the woman. Thus, she stressed, 'instead of such a "one-hundred-percent" guy, if we are to remain with a name more fitting for the products of the distillery industry, I prefer my purebred setter . . . his high percentage is less of a burden for my independence'.

Irena Pokrzywicka too noticed that the 'one-hundred-percent' terminology made one think of liquor products. As she boldly declared, she had so far met 'only seven-percent men, so of a percentage lower than the average alcohol'. Prompted by the interviewer, she let her imagination loose, and it suggested the image of a responsible, courageous, and ambitious man, of a strong will and character, a 'reinforced concrete of morality'. Among the stars and cosmopolitans, the one coming closest to match the ideal was the navy sailor Stanisław Radwan, a famed strongman, nicknamed the 'Iron Jaws'. Serving aboard the ORP *Grom* destroyer, Radwan was an idol of women, and his extraordinary physical abilities were appreciated by Pokrzywicka. For her, she was an example of a good soldier and a healthy, cheerful, and uncompromising man — whom she had actually never met in person. As to why, she explained to the surprised As interviewer that she was 'afraid of disappointment'. She would say no more, implying that she stuck to her beliefs and considered as mere fables the fantasies of a male ideal incompatible with the prose of life. She also confirms her argument, based on real-life observations, that 'many women are lonely precisely because of the lack of such a man'.

That a one-hundred-percent man was hard to find was confirmed by such stars of the Warsaw entertainment scene as Wanda Vorbond-Dąbrowska, composer and founder of the first female barbershop quartet, Te4, and Ziuta Carlo, a dance hostess. The latter met many men, but many of those were one-hundred-percent males who had identified the percentage with nonchalance, dominance, and lack of respect for the woman, especially one who, like Carlo, could be considered an easy prey. According to the dancer, she and her colleagues — even when working at the classiest and most elegant venues, the male clientele of which, though affluent, could be arrogant and rude — were vulnerable to the machismo. 'Among the guests . . . there were gentlemen . . . who came to ask you for a dance with the hands in their pockets and a cigarette in their mouth. They seem to be forgetting that a hard-working girl, and a woman in general, deserves that little bit of respect'. The artist, part of her job being to dance with customers and keep them company, confessed that foreigners in Warsaw were much better at being truly male men. She appreciated them not only for treating the hostess as a companion for the evening, but above all for their courtesy, kindness, and, well, hygiene. As she reminisced, 'They can ask you for company in a polite manner; they are interesting to talk to, well-behaved, good dancers, and importantly, they are clean too. They are able to

hand me my fee in a gentlemanly and subtle fashion.’ This certainly distinguished them from the domestic specimens of one-hundred-percent of masculinity, ‘one hundred of whom propose flirt, without even bothering to invite you to the movies’.

Composer Wanda Vorbond-Dąbrowska defined super-masculinity along similar lines. She also thought dominance — the common male attribute — was uninteresting and repulsive, while appreciating qualities traditionally associated with femininity, such as subtlety, to complement the complex male psyche. Just like Melcer, Vorbond-Dąbrowska opted for the androgynous conception of the human being, acknowledging male qualities in herself too. What interested her the most in the one-hundred-percent man was that part which she herself didn’t possess, a mysterious ‘x’ set, which ultimately produced the mathematical formula, ‘100%-x’. The only one to ever approximate it had been the biblical Adam, who in the end succumbed — didn’t he? — to the charms of the foremother of mankind.

For the sportswoman, Hanka Szelestowska, however, meekness was unacceptable in a one-hundred-percent man. Wife of an Olympic athlete, she thought a ‘hen-pecked husband didn’t have so much as a single percent of masculinity’. Familiar with the world of sports, she wanted the epitome of masculinity to behave naturally, but also to be fast, brave, and firm, also in marriage. She was, one can suppose, the type of a woman who stands a bit behind her husband, the medal-winner. She eagerly supported him in running a fitness club and summer fitness camps. She spoke with exaltation about her work as his helper, only once mentioning the licence that she needed to become an instructor herself. Due perhaps to her profession and interests, Szelestowska spoke openly about the physical qualities of Mr. Perfect, which in her case meant her husband — sporty, athletic, handsome in a masculine yet subtle way, as his photographs seem to confirm. In this context, it is worth quoting an excerpt from the interview with Zofia Lindorf, who, imitating one of her movie characters, a schoolgirl, spoke childishly on the subject, in order to finally drop her role and declare, ‘I’ve never been infatuated with my teachers. I’ve always had good taste!’ It’s hard to say whether the teachers happened to be unattractive or whether the profession itself, with the particular tasks involved, wasn’t a domain of supermen. The attribute of strength was doubtless a feature of female fantasies, and though not principal, it seemed to play a leading role in the sphere of physicality.

Significantly, none of the respondents paid much attention to the male qualities of the body. They mentioned them only after sketching an emotional-psychological portrait of the perfect man, and male beauty clearly plays a secondary role in their replies.

The attribute wasn’t important either for Halina Skowrońska, a professional photographer who ran a portrait studio. Her occupation meant that she met all kinds of male types, displaying different concentrations of masculinity, which over the years she learned to identify. She didn’t care much for those overly preoccupied with their looks, whom we would call metrosexual today, a type that turns out to have already been present during the interwar period: ‘he would come to the studio straight from the

barber, all pomaded, his hair dressed, sometimes permed, and smelling of cologne from half a mile'. Incredulous, the interviewer learned also that the same men 'shave their eyebrows so that it's easier for the retoucher to draw a pretty line à la Ramón Novarro or [Gary] Cooper'. Unmanly, according to Skowrońska, such an individual closely examines his countenance in the mirror before the picture is taken, instructing the photographer as to its particular features. The type disgusted her, but he also made her work more difficult, since it wasn't limited to posing the subject and releasing the shutter, but involved conceptual work as well. That subtlety could be understood by someone endowed with a keen artistic — and particularly musical — sensibility. According to the photographer, and surprisingly perhaps, the one-hundred-percent man is one who understands music. Such an artistic customer was not only desirable (for he appreciated the work that went into the portrait), but also presentable, being able to tune himself in to the photographer's intentions. Alas, he was a rare find.

Also Hanka Batorska, a manicurist who met plenty of men in her line of work, seldom had to do with one-hundred-percent masculine types. She too measured the concentration of masculinity through the prism of her profession, but also of her personal views. In the world of cosmetic services, like in that of photographic ones, men overly concerned with their appearance came across as unmanly. A bridge player's sophisticated manicure (enamelled nails and pencil-whitened tips) was absolutely disqualifying. Batorska accepted when a man was groomed, but within reasonable bounds, meaning simply that his 'hands were neat and clean'. She sharply disapproved of those who not only asked her for a date, but had special expectations: 'Once a man wanted me to hold his hand not on the table but on my knee. He probably thought it was something that befitted a "one-hundred-percent man"'. He got angry when she refused and, demonstrating a quick temper, broke her nail file. Such an aggressive reaction to a lack of interest from her side was, according to her, nothing but a token of the man being overly preoccupied with his masculinity and fully convinced that his sex appeal gave him an edge over any rival. To such a macho, she said in conclusion, she preferred a gentleman who 'simply reads a newspaper while being manicured' (something that, by the way, must have required a lot of dexterity), and then 'politely offers an ordinary "thank you"'.

So what was the object of the interwar woman's fantasies and desires? As has been stated above, the image remains unclear, due mainly to the respondents' diverse preferences as well as the nature of the survey itself. The respondents' expectations were sometimes incompatible, and while some believed that a Mr. Perfect existed and could indeed be found, others thought the one-hundred-percent man was nothing but a pipe dream. It needs to be noted, though, that the image was consistent with the gender stereotype, which, as Monika Kozłowska notes, is forged not only through mutual contacts between men and women, but also through social structures, such as family, school, or mass media. The set of rules, qualities, and behaviours coded in the stereotype is used in contact with other people, but also in the process of forming one's own views and expectations towards other people. According to Kozłowska, such views

'define the forms of behaviour, professional roles, familial functions as well as psychological qualities desirable in each gender.'<sup>7</sup> It would be pointless to discuss the complex theory of the stereotype here, but it is important from the viewpoint of Kozłowska's study of its contemporary vision to take a look at its make-up. The purpose of the 2011 survey was to identify the male and female stereotypes by naming their characteristic qualities. Though conducted over 70 years after the As survey, the characteristics ascribed to men in Kozłowska's study (even if a more detailed methodology means that the terminology is different) come very close to those mentioned by female respondents in the mid-1930s. Based on their experience and personal observations (mainly from the workplace), the latter mentioned dominance, nonchalance, aggressiveness, and vanity as qualities typical for a one-hundred-percent male. Those attributes were negatively valorised, just like in the 2011 survey, where brutality, rudeness, and aggressiveness are mentioned as negative male traits, something that actually both male and female respondents agree on. At the opposite pole were and are qualities like vitality (today identified perhaps also with neutral bravado), bravery, ambition (associated with leadership), and firmness, even in trivial situations such as the choice of attire. These partly stereotypical masculine traits were appreciated by the respondents of the As survey. To those, they added basically feminine qualities, such as subtlety, sophistication (today associated with feminine aesthetics, gracefulness, sensibility), and most importantly, the one they missed the most in men — respect. Respect and responsibility seem crucial for the subject in question. They were signalled by the respondents, but Grossek-Korycka also paid a lot of attention to them, suggesting that men should undergo an emotional-psychological evolution to stop being driven by instincts and become responsible for their own lives and those of their families, and to demonstrate empathy, respect, and understanding for women's needs as partners at home and in the workplace. This would help to reconcile the positions and form more equal relationships. Such thinking was close to the views of the As respondents, who rather than Anaïs Nin's 'adventurous man' sought a friendly, open-minded, and subtle partner who appreciated art. The traits identified by men (perhaps to this day) as super-masculine — strength, tenacity, dominance, rudeness, impulsiveness — were considered by the respondents as unwelcome, something that, as the 2011 survey shows, still holds true today. For those independent and successful women, male dominance and rapaciousness felt threatening; chauvinism and lack of manners were a token of vulgarity. Physical strength and attractive looks were welcome and admirable, but they were considered as secondary and merely complementing the key psychological and emotional predispositions. An impulsive adventurer, a dominant, adroit and physically strong superman was a perfect hero of fantasies, separated from reality by a thousand miles of female imagination.

7            Monika Kozłowska, 'Kobiecość i męskość — współczesna rewizja stereotypu rodzaju', in *Kobiecość i męskość. Komunikacja, relacje, społeczeństwo*, ed. Bartosz Bogna, Warsaw: Eneteia, 2011, pp. 48–49, survey results provided therein.





## AFTERWORD

The book *Glass Houses. Visions and Practices of Social Modernisation after 1918* forms a coherent whole with the exhibition *The Future Will Be Different* with the same subtitle and the accompanying educational programme. This was made possible, among other things, thanks to the cooperation with the National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute and the National Digital Archive — co-organisers of the exhibition which is our joint contribution to the celebrations of the centenary of Poland regaining independence.

You cannot think about the future without looking at the past. This thought was close to our hearts while working on this project. We began the introduction to the subject of the exhibition and publication in 2017 with the *Glass Houses* series of lectures, initiated by Professor Andrzej Mencwel from the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. The starting point was the belief that the idea known from *The Spring to Come* is not just a utopia. 'A thorough reading of Żeromski, enriched with a proper review of his achievements shows,' as Professor Mencwel wrote, 'that the vision of "glass houses" was, admittedly, a mythisation, but it had an inspiring causative power in many areas of reality.' One could learn about what was achieved in the interwar period, what utopias could be realised in the field of literature, visual culture, theatre or upbringing during the year-long lectures. During the exhibition, we are still looking at the past, but our gaze also goes back to the present. We ask ourselves: what can we do for society? How do we care for the common good? We look at cooperatism and community actions, which is why Dr Bartłomiej Błesznowski, a sociologist from the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw, prepared a series of discussions on this subject, while Dr Iwona Kurz from the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw developed a series of seminars during which we reflect on 'the creative practice of the Polish avant-garde of the 20th century, undertaken in close friendship and love relationships, in which life and work, private and public, were not separate from each other'.

The exhibition is also accompanied by a film programme focused on those projects from the interwar period, which are characterised by avant-garde language, modern image manipulation, expressing the title aspiration for a 'different future', including screenings devoted to filmmakers associated with the START Association of Art Film Enthusiasts, according to which cinema was to be primarily an art of social utility. Meetings at Zachęta (and outside of it) concerning the still living ideas of acting for the common good are a link between the accompanying events. We meet with people involved in food cooperatives, setting up food sharing programmes, allotment gardens and democratic schools. We would like to believe that thanks to them, the future will be different. Better.

Hanna Wróblewska, Director of Zachęta — National Gallery of Art  
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**Agata Twardoch** is an architect and urban planner, assistant professor in the Faculty of Architecture, Silesian University of Technology, member of the Society of Polish Town Planners. Co-owner of the design studio 44STO. Interested in accessible housing construction and alternative forms of housing, she conducts research, lectures, and runs design workshops. Author of texts published in trade periodicals. She designs public spaces, architecture, and interiors.

**Katarzyna Uchowicz** is an art historian working in the Catalogue of Art Monuments in Poland, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences. Her research concerns modernist architecture, the avant-garde artistic community, and postwar experimental art. Curator of the exhibition *Obverse/Reverse. Architect Bohdan Lachert* at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław (2017–2018). Author of *Eternity and a Moment. 1918–1939 — Architecture As a Tool in Constructing Polish National Identity* (2017) and *Ariergarda modernizmu. Katalog projektów i realizacji Bohdana Lacherta i Józefa Szanajcy* (2017).

**Anna Wotlińska** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Editing and Style, Institute of Applied Polish Studies, Faculty of Polish Studies, University of Warsaw. She runs the Department of Cultural Education at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, cooperating in this respect with Polish and international organisations and institutions. In her research, she is interested in the history of women and women's magazines in a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective. She is currently preoccupied with the Polish-Italian feminist thought of the 1920s and 1930s, and the conception of masculinity conveyed by press commentators.



# **the exhibition**

The Future Will Be Different.  
Visions and Practices of Social  
Modernisation after 1918

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# 1. community as a well-organised space

A flat can not only serve to kill someone as with an axe, but also provide the basis for the development of social bonds improving the customs, responsibility and conscientiousness of the whole working society.

Stanisław Tołwiński, 'Bogactwo form spółdzielczego ruchu mieszkaniowego'

[Wealth of the forms of the housing cooperative movement], *Spółnota Pracy*, 1936

An attempt to implement progressive social concepts emerging in the interwar period were the standard-setting working-class housing estates designed and built by the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa, WSM) in the Żoliborz and Rakowiec districts.

The basic principle introduced into social life on the basis of cooperative ideas was the understanding of a community as a well-organised space. The concept of community architecture was implemented in housing development designs, and important element of which was collective equipment providing 'the benefits of community life' (such as a central heating boiler room, swimming pool, laundry, theatre and cinema room, hobby clubs, courtyards). What seems particularly interesting from today's perspective is the design process itself, which included, wherever possible, consultations with future tenants, thus intuitively embodying the principles of social participation. The 'plant hostel' gardening centre (with its seat in the greenhouse built in 1936) at the WSM Żoliborz or the 'quiet rooms', planned for the housing schemes in Rakowiec and Żoliborz, offering respite from 'urban noise pollution', can be considered as examples of ecological thinking, the beginnings of which date back precisely to the interwar period. Interwar architects such as Helena and Szymon Syrkus or Barbara Brukalska sought to influence interpersonal and social relationships through organising a living space for a new man — both on the macro (city/housing development) and micro scale (house/apartment).









## 2. the children's republic

Standard-setting educational institutions were an excellent example of the implementation of social modernisation ideals. Model mini-societies were created by the pupils of institutions such as the care and educational facility Our Home (Nasz Dom) in Warsaw's Bielany district, founded by Janusz Korczak and run by Maria (Maryna) Falska, or the patients of the Włodzimierz Medem Sanatorium for Jewish children with tuberculosis in Miedzeszyn, known as 'little Eden'.

The spatial layout, its scale, aesthetic values, and educational significance played a pivotal role in a new, important discipline — design for children. It was shaped by two related aspects of social change. On the one hand, it was a time of professional emancipation of women, which necessitated the introduction of comprehensive childcare services, which meant new challenges for architects and a new architecture of nursery schools, preschools and dayrooms. On the other hand, progressive pedagogical theories led to the acknowledgement of the child's autonomy and subjectivity, clearly expressed in Janusz Korczak's statement: 'The child — already a resident, a citizen, and already a person. Not in the future but now.' Children became the focus of all the hopes, but also the anxieties, of the interwar period, occupying a special place in the modernist project of a better society.

Modern pedagogy and education programmes in Poland, developing in parallel with but drawing inspiration from European trends (such as Maria Montessori's theories), and using the latest achievements in paediatrics and psychology, were carried out at the time, including at the Warsaw Housing Cooperative through the work of the Workers' Society of Friends of Children.

Contact with nature as an element of the educational programme and a means of recreation, as well as the idea of environmental protection — a manifestation of the ethical attitude towards animals and plants, which was being formed at that time — constituted an integral aspect of the project of social modernisation.















### 3. right to rest

The concept of 'free time' developed in the interwar period is connected with the democratisation of access to sport, understood as an important element of the project of social modernisation. Sport was one of the areas of emancipation of various social groups: women, the working class, as well as national minorities. Football, athletics, boxing and swimming were dynamically developing disciplines. Wide participation in sports activities required universal access to sports equipment and modern architectural solutions that followed the cultural changes.

One of the earliest growing fields of activity of the workers' trend of physical culture and cooperative associations was tourism. It fit perfectly into carrying out the educational role of the proletariat, combining physical education with cultural and educational principles, as well as sightseeing.







## 4. independent woman

The regaining of political independence was accompanied by significant progress in the emancipation of Polish women — they gained the right to vote early, in 1918. Despite the modern legislative reforms, the question of whether Polish women had been fully emancipated remained open.

One of the paths of women's emancipation at the time was active participation in the main trend of visual culture, including the new medium — film and its close relative, photography. In this part of the exhibition, we look at various images of 'new women', including the figures of professionally active photographers who often broke social taboos.

The interwar period was also a time of lively discussions and disputes about sex education, conscious motherhood and the right to abortion. Eugeniusz Cękalski and Karol Szotowski's film, *Strachy* [Fears] was part of the public debate in the 1930s. It simultaneously criticised the world of entertainment, exposing its financial structure, power relations (especially male) and the policy of carnality.



## 5. leaving a factory

The economic strikes of 1905 played a decisive role in the political empowerment of workers in Poland (with the Łódź general strike being considered as particularly important in this respect). These events opened the doors to a new model of workers' participation in public life, leading to the change in the protest repertoire from individual forms to mass political strategies: strikes, demonstrations and rallies.

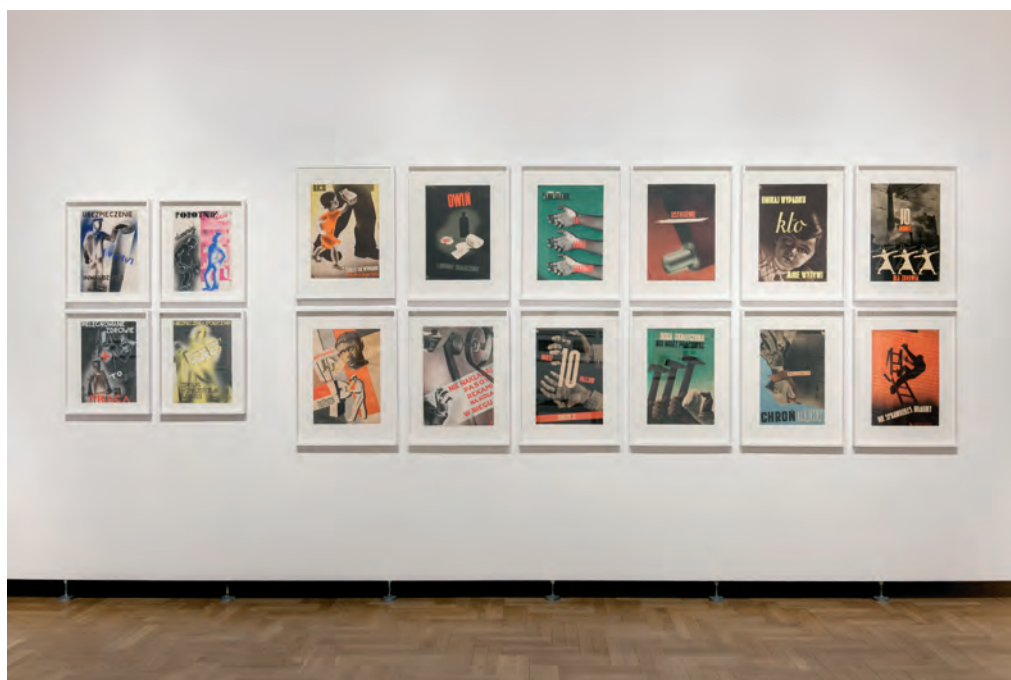
In the context of the emancipation of the proletariat, a special place was assigned to celebration practices which broke away from traditional religious or national holidays. Besides, sport, whose rapid evolution occurred in the 1920s, and the possibility of taking part in mass sport events fulfilled a vital role. New forms of participation included also involvement in culture which became more accessible thanks to the development of the press, cinema and workers' theatre.

Labourers' rights and conditions of work became the subject of public interest (including of the legislation of the time). In this context, the activity of the Institute of Social Affairs (Instytut Spraw Społecznych) is recalled. It commissioned films (produced among others by avant-garde film-makers such as Franciszka and Stefan Themerson or Eugeniusz Cękalski) and the series of warning posters which propagated the occupational health and safety rules.









## 6. the greatest theatre

Social changes occurring after World War I had a significant influence on the formulation of modern theatre theories concerning both the stage space (revoking the sharp division between the stage and the audience, actors and spectators) and the new mass audience. Inspired by and referring in its very name to the filmic 'simultaneity of multiple phenomena', Andrzej Pronaszko and Szymon Syrkus's concept of the Simultaneous Theatre may serve as an example here. It was meant as a response to Pronaszko's slogan of 'the smallest home — the greatest theatre'.

The postulates of social commitment and democratic access to culture were being pursued at the time — amid political censorship and regulatory restrictions — by workers' theatres such as the Łódź Workers' Scene (Scena Robotnicza) of Witold Wandurski (cooperating with Karol Hiller) or Warsaw Workers' Scene and Lute (Scena i Lutnia Robotnicza) of Antonina Sokolicz. One of the most original Polish concepts of engaged art was put into action by Jędrzej Cierniak's folk theatre which was based on a democratic and collective artistic process and involved the local rural community.



## 7. useful film

Cinema, like no other medium, showed the dynamics and direction of the change in the epoch, and the power and scale of its social impact were unrivalled. Together with its technique of editing and simultaneity, so fascinating to creators of the time, it permeated various fields of art, revolutionising its language. The social dimension of the cinema, already noted at the time, was also extremely important. Film screenings offered opportunities for various groups excluded from many areas of culture to fully participate in it.

The exhibition recalls the activities of the leftist START Association of Art Film Enthusiasts, whose members, apart from Aleksander Ford, included Eugeniusz Cękański and Wanda Jakubowska — both residents of the WSM Żoliborz housing development. According to the postulates of the START, film was supposed to combine radical ideas with mass appeal to a wide audience and be a tool of transformation of social awareness. Members of the association shared the idea of film production as a discipline based on collective work, organized according to more general principles, an embodiment of which was the Krag film cooperative they founded in 1933. The few preserved films they produced, such as *Mir kumen on (Children Must Laugh)* directed by Ford, combine the postulated 'social usefulness' with artistic values, employing a language shaped by the most cutting-edge cinematographic productions of the time.











EXHIBITION

**The Future Will Be Different.**  
**Visions and Practices of Social  
Modernisation after 1918**

24.02–27.05.2018



Zachęta — National Gallery of Art  
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Stanisław Welbel

This project is part of the commemoration of the  
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*niepodległa*

POLAND  
THE CENTENARY  
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front cover: Helena Syrkus on the terrace  
of the Leisure House in Królewska  
Góra, Konstancin (designed by Helena  
and Szymon Syrkus, 1931), Museum of  
Architecture in Wrocław

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