

ELEMENTY

Sztuka i Dizajn

Ends of the world

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Magdalena Ujma

**EDITORIAL:
GLOBAL PERIPHERIES**

Dears Readers

In the third issue of *Elementy*, we try to show a shift in the understanding of distance and attempts to escape the pair of mutually exclusive notions of ‘peripheries’ and ‘centre’. Let me refer to Piotr Piotrowski, an authority in the study of the above issues in relation to the art history of Eastern Europe, who explained that ‘centres are only interesting insofar as we consider them as peripheries’. And further: ‘everything is peripheral because it is immersed in a specific context.’¹ The researcher preferred to use the term ‘margins’, considering it more relevant to today’s situation.

So, we could say that the peripheries-margins are by no means located at the end of the world. We are unable to locate them according to the distance criteria measured in kilometres. Living in the middle of the forest, one can be up to date with science, culture, media, politics, even better than many living in the supposed centre, i.e. a large metropolis. The founders of the Bored Wolves publishing house, featured in this issue of *Elementy*, moved from New York to a village in the Beskid Mountains. Their activity is a proof of the complete redefinition of the way we understand distance. Running a niche publishing house, they stay in touch with their authors and audiences in Turkey, America and England through advanced communication technologies. Reality, however, has strongly verified our views about the Internet. After all, the global network today operates according to a model that Shoshana Zuboff has called a ‘surveillance capitalism’.

In recent years, it has become trendy in Poland to be interested in things located far from the centre, in terms of both physical and mental distance. Such ‘peripheries’ took on the shape of an imagined province in the minds of their followers. Moving out to the countryside has become popular among professionally burnt-out corporate employees. They buy houses in the Mazury (Masuria), and Podlasie (Podlachia) regions or the Low Beskids and shape them according to their aspirations, creating, for example, an ‘English cottage in Roztocze’. Some have chosen to sell their dreams of idyllic living to others; the most original business ideas emphasise the phantasm nature of their visions: country spas, lavender plantations or glamour camp-sites. These proposals have nothing to do with the countryside as it existed in Poland until the 1990s. For this countryside, there is no place in the collective imagination, it is a blank spot. Bartosz Zaskórski’s essay published in this issue paints a picture of the countryside in terms of post-apocalyptic horror, capturing the

1 R. Kosinsky, J. Elantkowski, B. Dudás, *Droga, którą warto podążać. Rozmowa z Piotrem Piotrowskim*, 30.03.2015, <https://archiwum-obieg-u-jazdowski.pl/teksty/35105> [accessed on: 4 November 2022].

consequences of such a perspective. Aleksandra Toborowicz, on the other hand, focuses on the small-town aesthetic of the 'end of the world'.

The phantasmatic province differs from the one understood in political terms. The latter was brought by the rightward turn in politics. Aspirations of the residents of small towns and villages were then recognised and included in the plans of the authorities, who, in their narrative, attempted to pit this group against the residents of large cities. However, such an interest in Poland outside the metropolises had also several advantages. It enhanced its visibility. It turned out that, overall, this Poland is important as well. It yielded many research projects at the intersection of political science, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. A number of reportages dedicated to the economic situation (for example works by Marek Szymaniak and Filip Springer) or history (studies on serfdom, post-German heritage, emigration) were published. The interest in the rural province seen in the recent years is summarised in the current issue of *Elementy* by Waldemar Kuligowski, who focuses on the development of the 'rural history of Poland' based on the works and phenomena of literature and popular culture. Paulina Małochleb devotes her text to a similar theme, yet focusing on the folk turn in the prose from the recent years.

This wave made the cultural power of small towns and villages be recognised. The BWA Tarnów gallery is widely praised in the contemporary art world, similar visibility was also gained by other galleries such as: the Municipal Centre of Art in Gorzów Wielkopolski, BWA in Bydgoszcz, in Kalisz and the like. Nationwide critics praise them if they show similarity to the Warsaw galleries, while if they do not follow their model, they are not noticed at all. The nostalgia for the network of Art Exhibition Offices (BWAs), established in the period of the Polish People's Republic, is interesting in this context. At some point, after 2010, the name 'BWA' ceased to be an embarrassing vestige of the past. Ewa Tatar writes about the initiative she co-organised, i.e., the BWA open-air workshop project, which was launched to rethink the legacy of communist Poland, update it and come up with a new network of cooperation between contemporary art galleries, covering all of Poland.

Finally, an art strand associated with the countryside has emerged in contemporary Poland with Daniel Rycharski as the undisputed leader. Being an expressive artist gifted with charisma, he actually overshadowed the activities of other creators dealing with a similar theme, obviously in different ways. These include, for example, Marta Jamróg and Małgorzata Mycek, as well as Karol Palczak, Krzysztof Maniak and Jan Kowal. In *Elementy*, we publish a conversation with Daniel Rycharski, in which he tells Szymon Maliborski that the countryside is disappearing, and the role of the artist is to follow this inevitable process with bitter commentary.

Speaking of artistic communities operating outside of large agglomerations: Agata Sulikowska conducted a study of visual artists located in the Podkarpacie (Subcarpathia) region. In the discussion we publish, she shows a sample of this group's world-view, revealing its pride in the rather conservative identity.

The mythologisation of the province combines exaltation and disregard of everything that made up the province. In the art world, mythologisation is expressed in the belief that the 'province' would protect values under threat in large institutions and cities, where censorship and political pressure are experienced. Hence the conviction expressed in private conversations that galleries in smaller towns remain an oasis of freedom of expression. Exaltation appears in tandem with a swing of collective affect in the other direction and the perception of towns and villages as places where the evil consisting of xenophobia, backwardness, fanatical Catholicism and anti-Semitism is spreading. The landscape too has become a target for criticism. Its ugliness and chaos are recognised, same as its deviation from idyllicity towards pragmatism and the expression of the economic and social aspirations of its users and residents. In *Elementy*, however, Marcin Laberschek shows the little-known phenomenon of bottom-up monuments erected in the Polish landscape, juxtaposing them with the concept of monumental folklore. Olga Drenda shows how the fading rurality merges with the spreading urbanity to create a new landscape, which she called after Thomas Sieverts a 'Zwischenstadt'. Karolina Kolenda, on the other hand, analyses promising Polish attempts to create architectural projects that would derive from the tradition of rural construction and, by fitting into the new Polish landscape, would thus co-create it.

Finally, the very concept of the 'ends of the world', for this is the title of the current issue of *Elementy*, can refer to the question of the new art circuits under-recognised by critics as well as their participants. Monika Weychert dedicated her text to the participation of Roma artists in artistic life and the process of their ethnographisation. Wojciech Szafranski, on the other hand, analysed the contemporary art market in Poland, showing how it is dominated by tendencies towards 'magic realism' and metaphorical figuration, which are not appreciated by art historians.

The topic of the periphery and margins of art undoubtedly inspires many current attempts to map the world that is changing in front of our eyes. We invite you to read our excerpt of the reflection dedicated to it.

PART I

A LANDSCAPE



Daniel Rycharski, Szymon Maliborski

***ALL THE DEATHS OF THE VIL-
LAGE TO GIVE IT A NEW LIFE***
**INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL
RYCHARSKI ON THE OCCASION
OF HIS WORK ON THE LATEST
EXHIBITIONS**

This text is a synthetic attempt to collect the threads and sketch a map accompanying us in the preparation of the projects carried out together with Daniel Rycharski. It concerns in particular two exhibitions that will have their première in 2022: *The Dead Class* and *Love Is for Everyone. For Me Too*.¹ These two projects will present new works by Daniel Rycharski that approach the theme of the tensions created by the rapid changes in the relationship between human and land, as seen from the perspective of the Polish countryside. These changes, resulting from the intensification of industrial food production subordinated to the logic of profit, entail profound cultural transformations. They can be seen as the latest chapter in the story of the end of the peasant culture.

According to Rycharski himself, these exhibitions 'are about the social landscape, not so much focusing on my inner experiences as on the reality in which I am living'. As can be inferred from previous works, he is not so much interested in the economic transformation of the countryside (although he is aware of its importance), but rather in looking at its social and cultural consequences, as well as personal stories. It is the direct experience of observing change, sharpened by literature (by Wiesław Myśliwski rather than the most recent items dedicated to the Polish rural history), that leads the artist back to the 'peasant issue' and to new questions: How does the disappearing of family farms translate into individual status and autonomy and how does it refer to the problem of climate change? In what ways do current transformations demand an updating of ideas related to the rural culture, its religiosity, its relationship to animals and the land? (Szymon Maliborski)

Daniel Rycharski: If I wanted to locate on the map of my projects the beginning from which these two exhibitions originate, I would have to go back to *Fears*. The exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art was largely devoted to the theme of the emancipation of homosexuals and their complicated relationship with faith. These new exhibitions are very different, as you have mentioned, they are more about the social environment than about me, although they grow out of everyday observation. During the implementation of the *Family Care*² project in 2020, when I went from farm to farm asking if they would be willing to take in LGBT+ people, I realised that there were very few

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- 1 The exhibitions *The Dead Class* and *Love Is for Everyone. For Me Too* are also a development of the project submitted for the competition for the Polish pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2021, created jointly by Daniel Rycharski, Szymon Maliborski and Agnieszka Żuk.
 - 2 The *Family Care* project accompanied the 12th Warsaw Under Construction festival, referring to the theme of community. For a week, the group of LGBT+ people who volunteered for the project lived in the Sierpc area, worked during the day and spent time together on family farms, getting to know each other and discussing with the people running them.

such places left. There are no more farmers. A lot of people replied to me that they would not be able to offer them any work, that they no longer farm, they do not keep animals, they do not even have a field, so there is no chance to experience any connection with nature through agricultural work. There were also responses from industrial-scale farmers that this could not be organised, as procedures do not allow untrained people to enter, for example, a herd of four hundred cows. It was that first moment when I realised that I must have missed something. It was then that I deeply realised the scale of the rapid and unnamed changes, that had transformed the Polish countryside. I return to Kurówek and, indeed, there are only three farmers left there.

Szymon Maliborski: This is a very big social change that has taken place in a few years. After all, the life of small farms and their reality were the subject of activities we organised in Kurówek within the *Field Game* in 2014.

Field Game caught the literally last moment to see the remnants of a traditional village with family farms. Jasio Źmijewski [one of the people involved in the project – s.m.] was still alive, some of the farmers had not yet moved out and sold their land. After 2014, most people left and the remaining farms became mostly social farms, maintained by the state, thanks to subsidies from the EU, but no longer living off agricultural production. It was another impetus to return to the theme of the end of peasant culture after projects that focused on faith and engagement in the situation of the LGBT people, and to see how the present can be told from this perspective.

I began to think that the Polish cultural space needed an exhibition about the contemporary countryside. For the past two years, I have been accompanied in this thinking by various books, especially novels and essays by Wiesław Myśliwski, who raised the thesis on the end of peasant culture. I think that this great, thoroughly humanist subject has not been given due consideration in the visual arts.

Recently, however, the village has made itself comfortable in the exhibition world. We have seen significant presentations of this topic from the Venice Biennale of Architecture, where it was presented by the Polonia Pavilion, to the *Countryside* project by Rem Koolhaas at the Guggenheim Museum. Historical and anthropological publications from the folk history strand have been appearing regularly for the past two years. At the same time, I notice that we still have a breach in telling this experience on a different scale than the macro one, or that we recount the distant past.



Daniel Rycharski, Installation view 'Dorothea von Stetten Art Award 2022', Kunstmuseum Bonn, photos: David Ertl

These are very valuable exhibitions and publications, from Adam Leszczyński to Jan Wasiewicz. However, this is not something that interests me very much. Leszczyński's *Ludowa historia Polski* (Poland's Rural History) focused on the countryside from a distant past, a minimum of one hundred and fifty years ago. This is the time period covered by the open-air museum in Sierpc and I always found it a model reference on how not to talk about and perceive the countryside. Sometimes I feel that the current interest of the 'intelligentsia' in serfdom is similar to the fascination of ethnographers from a hundred years ago pulling out an object to build on its basis the idea on the essence of folk art.

And no one is interested in the profound changes the Polish countryside is undergoing at this precise moment, after joining the European Union in 2004. In a year that, from my perspective, is revolutionary and perhaps even more important than 1989. Also in the field of science, sociology, ethnography too little attention is paid to this



turning point. I thought that what happened after our accession to the EU is precisely what we needed to do an exhibition about. In his book *Toast na progu*³ (Toast on the Doorstep) Andrzej Mencwel puts forward the thesis that if we were to find the date of the final death of peasant culture, this death of small farms only feeding the farmers' families, it is precisely the moment of the accession to the EU. The revolutionary moment, when the village gets something, changes for the better along with subsidies and money. And the price for this change is small farms, on the ruins of which industrial holdings are built.

So, we are in the here and now, the story is anchored in the moment, as you like to put it, when the countryside was annexed to Poland, a nodal point in the recent social memory.

3 A. Mencwel, *Toast na Progu*, Kraków, 2017.

I think it is a good thing that we are doing our homework on the rural history and books such as Radek Rak's *Baśń o węzowym sercu* (The Tale of the Serpent's Heart), which won the Nike Literary Award, are appearing. However, I notice a lack of this other pole in theatre, literature or feature films dealing with contemporary times. My impression is that the cinematic image of the modern countryside is getting worse and worse. It is a burden that hinders us, a ballast that must be discarded in order to finally be like the Western world. This is not much different from the early 1990s, when it was also explicitly raised.

We can observe in the Polish visual arts something that can be called a folk turn. There is, for example, Karol Palczak, who paints his village with a certain tenderness, there is Małgorzata Mycek, a non-binary person who shows herself as a transgender person who does not fit in with the conservative province of the Podkarpacie (Subcarpathia) region. There are, of course, other artists as well, although it seems to me that these themes come to them through their fascination with the aforementioned folk history. In my case, it is exactly the opposite. This theme does not come from a fascination with serfdom, with discovering peasant roots. It draws from my here and now. I do not fully trust academics who dig in the archives and try to describe the reality from a few hundred years ago on the basis of source material, when I have people living here and now with whom I can work. I trust them more than these sources.

In this context, how do you perceive the sculpture-monument called *Gate* created for the round anniversary of the abolition of serfdom, which you made in 2014?

Gate made for the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the abolition of serfdom is probably my most often borrowed work. Recently it was to be presented at an exhibition in Katowice.⁴

I just had to create it because in the visual arts, there was no work treating serfdom for almost a decade. However, more than bridging the gap in the local artistic life, I was concerned to see if the subject was remembered by the countryside residents. If I establish my *Gate* for example in Kurówek, will it move the local people? Of course, it turned out that it would not. On a subconscious level, people have repressed this memory. They do not want to remember it; it is like denying the time of poverty and humiliation. The people who would directly remember the times of serfdom are no longer alive, their children's generation is dead as well. In my opinion, it will never

4 *Interior*, BWA Katowice, Katowice, 2022, curated by Marta Lisok, <http://bwa.katowice.pl/wystawy-i-wydarzenia/interior/>

be possible to artificially instil such a memory in the countryside, although on some level I understand the idea behind the initiatives aimed at such commemorations.

Is it fair to say, then, that folk history is more needed by the ‘intelligentsia’ for yet another reworking of the historical narrative than it is a tool for rural emancipation?

I have never seen this kind of story as a tool for rural emancipation. Tomek Rakowski, an anthropologist and ethnographer who has accompanied our projects starting with the Peasant Monument, said that ‘peasant is a kind of figure for thinking’, which means it is used in attempts to reconstruct the past in various ways. It is supposed to fulfil its purpose. And, by the way, when it is used to explain the past in one way or another, it projects interpretations of the current situation. We can quote here the famous words about the way people in corporations are treated like the dark mass. I think it is a misunderstanding to explicate the ‘manorial’ relations currently prevailing on the Polish labour market by serfdom. This obscures the issue more than it produces a better understanding, and certainly does not lead us to a deeper knowledge of the today’s countryside. People generally like the countryside of the past, the safe countryside, as I often say, the kind of countryside that no longer stinks of the peasant.

But let us return to current affairs, to the space of the here and now, to the emotions that pervade the latest realisations. In 2016, you created a work consisting of an empty bed pierced by a gravestone cross, strongly associated with cemetery, for an exhibition we prepared at Galeria Labirynt.⁵ Even then, the subject of loneliness, both spiritual (a gay believer) and very physical, was bothering you. Now you add to this setting a coffin, which can be passed through like a gate. It is a work entitled *The Dead Class* and we are looking at it right in Kurówek with its open interior framing the landscape.

This work is in some sense a continuation of the *Bed* and works well combined with other objects. It gets most interesting when there is a man close to it who can be seen through the open lid. It is a traumatising piece of furniture for me, I cannot stay near it for more than five minutes, I have to walk away from it so as not to see it. After a while you start to calculate: ‘OK, so it is in a coffin like this that I will spend eternity, that is quite a long time.’ This is repeated by virtually

5 *Communis. Renegotiations of the Community*, Galeria Labirynt, Lublin 2016, curated by Szymon Maliborski, Łukasz Mojsak, <http://communis.labirynt.com/>.



everyone who has seen the work. Entering the exhibition through it, one has the impression that the whole exhibition is one installation, a book broken down into individual chapters. From the material perspective, it is a converted plain coffin, lined in white satin with lace, but it opens on both sides and you can squeeze through it. Passing through you can really get the chills.

The Dead Class, on the other hand, is the generation of my grandparents, actually up to the 1950s, the generation of the last small farmers. It is with them that the centuries-old history of peasant culture ends, at least as described by Wiesław Myśliwski. This community also included doubly excluded members, such as a late dairy farmer from Kurówek, who was both a small farmer and a non-heteronormative person. *The Dead Class* is thus a class understood as a 'social class', and Mr Janek's story, which no one wrote down and listened to, became the inspiration for the project. Following Andrzej Mencwel and his book *Toast on the Doorstep*, I wanted to create just such a doorstep or threshold, a transition from one reality to another. Of course, this is just one death of the countryside from the many others

that occurred in the last century, along with the gradual ending of its isolation through reform, war, the experience of communism and the disappearance of landed gentry. However, 2004 brings a qualitative change: this threshold of capitalism crossed by the rural society means that there is no longer any room for such forms of existence. When you talk to anthropologists and sociologists, they say there is no such thing as the end to the countryside, which is probably true from the demographic point of view and around large agglomerations. But if you go much further away from the centres, for example to the vicinity of Sierpc, Kurówek or Smorzewo, you can see how these villages are becoming more and more empty. The people in the village themselves tell me that for them the village is over. Peasant culture was defined by human's closeness to nature. Industrial agriculture does not presuppose such a relationship, nature is not treated as a partner, it is exploited. *The Dead Class* is a threshold, a definitive transition from one social world to another, but of course it also has its metaphysical, existential dimension. What is the death of a village and what will its afterlife be like?

The important context for this ongoing end is that it is taking place unnoticed. In Poland, there is little need to recount it on a regular basis. Meanwhile, it is one of the motivations of your action to show this process in different dimensions.

Well, the ethnographers for sure have not launched any works on 'saving' this rural present day by building open-air museums of the current Polish countryside, as it was the case at the beginning of the last century when folklore was invented. I feel that the countryside's materiality is overlooked, a lot of things go unrecorded. We have to talk about it, make it visible, and at the same time make clear that this phenomenon has not been well recorded. I wonder to what extent my exhibitions illustrate this problem, because they are, after all, strong transformations operating in the realm of symbols and using the language of contemporary art. On the other hand, I sense that some circles may conclude that I am becoming someone who slows down the cultural progress. As long as I was dealing with the emancipation of the countryside and pointed out, for example, its non-heteronormativity, it was fine. However, the moment I start to appreciate the countryside, I stand on the side of its superficial religiosity, then the acceptance ends. Even if faith is superficial, it was at the same time the source of a great many phenomena, for example, strategies for explaining the world, making it bearable for oneself when various tragedies or sufferings happened. At the same time, I do not believe

that this kind of faith is a source of homophobia. At some level, rural residents (farmers) have something in common with other excluded people, such as the LGBT+ people. It happens that the level of contempt towards these social groups is similar. If you want to insult someone, you can say 'you faggot' or 'you redneck'; both these terms are highly stigmatising and some people would like to see these two groups disappear. Of course, the countryside is not perfect, it represents the same level of inequality and exploitation or hatred as elsewhere.

Since the topic of the open-air museum and sending specific groups to the past has come up, let us pause with it for a moment to talk about how it is included in the exhibition. It is a space created on the same principle as folk art, by intellectuals wishing to salvage what they found valuable (mainly in an aesthetic sense) from the peasant world. It plays the role of a distorting mirror of the peasant culture. It is also a place, a setting for *The Dance of Death*, a registration of the paratheatrical action you have in mind, in which you literally send the farmers back to the open-air museum, to the space of what is already past. Please tell us how this intertwining of the open-air museum and folk art as imagery of the countryside works in what you create?

The Dance of Death, one of the works I am planning, takes place right in the Sierpc open-air museum. People have not noticed, because how are they actually supposed to notice, that farmers have become a minority. It is estimated that there are between 330,000 and 550,000 people living on their own farm income in Poland. From a city perspective, I often hear that 'the peasant is power, end of story', that the countryside elects our government, our president. However, in this countryside, where about forty per cent of the population lives, farmers have become a minority, statistically they no longer are at home. Somewhat along the same lines as other minorities, whether national, religious or sexual. In *The Dance of Death*, I want to show that it is time to take the modern countryside to the open-air museum, to unseal our notions of folklore. It is there that the action of this performance takes place, where the assembled minorities collectively perform the dance of death, in the face of which it does not matter who you are, because everyone is equal. The climax features an 'ethnographic uniform', a variation on what a contemporary folk costume might look like. It is also about looking at the mechanisms of the creation of what we consider to be folk, to what extent it can be an inclusive category in the present day.

However, the moment I start to appreciate the countryside, I stand on the side of its superficial religiosity, then the acceptance ends. Even if faith is superficial, it was at the same time the source of a great many phenomena, for example, strategies for explaining the world, making it bearable for oneself when various tragedies or sufferings happened. At the same time, I do not believe that this kind of faith is a source of homophobia.



Daniel Rycharski, Installation view 'Dorothea von Stetten Art Award 2022',
Kunstmuseum Bonn, photo: David Ertl

Are you interested in using the mechanisms of 'folklorisation' to create a situation that does not degrade the countryside, does not deprive it of its contradictions, giving it a chance for social expression?

The peasant did not know what folklore was. It was only the urban intelligentsia at the end of the 19th century who began to indicate him what was folk. This is why I do not like the folklore inspiration, folklorism for sale. Which does not change the economic importance of folk art, when it used to be practised by the poorest and was a source of income for them. What interests me in folk art is not aesthetics, but its social origins and function. Folklore, folk art also emerged at the turn of the previous centuries to unify Polish society, to overcome the division between peasants and nobility. After the regaining of independence, serfdom was still very well remembered. We had to come up with something that would incorporate the villagers into the Polish nation. This is what folk art did, and in this I see an opportunity for activities like mine, or the activities of cultural activists in general. We now need again this unification of the nation, of society, and it seems to me that this can be done through art: the new folk art. This is how I like to think of my activity: as a new version of folk art.

There is a direct reference to this new folk art, to the mechanisms of its creation and circulation in your series of objects *Cepelia from the Pigsty*, the three sculptures you are about to present in Bonn. On a material level, the work incorporates what was once unworthy of being called a thing worth saving.

Cepelia from the Pigsty originated from my reading of peasant diaries. These books show what peasants went through, especially in the inter-war period, and how many things they had to deny themselves in order to establish these family farms that are disappearing today. The diaries show the price they had to pay, which was enormous. Now it is easy to see that the former farmers have already sold off their equipment. The wooden troughs remain unused. And for me, it is an object that has never been tempting to anyone, neither the intelligentsia in the past or, nowadays, as a utilitarian thing. It was not beautiful from the visual point of view, it could not be monetised, you could not actually do anything with it. The troughs have not found their way into ethnographic museums and have not been recognised as part of the culture. This unwanted object became the basis for my work. I clad the trough with thousands of coins and turn it into a precious thing. There is a bit of a joke in it too, as those allowed close to the trough can gorge themselves, so the pigsty transforms to glamour. For me, however, it is also a story about how agriculture used to be seen not

Daniel Rycharski, *Crying Horse #2*, 2022, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm,
courtesy of the artist and Gunia Nowik Gallery



as a branch of the economy but as hard work. In the dead peasant culture, it was sacralised, becoming a branch of metaphysics rather than economics. That made it bearable: this demanding work also met spiritual needs. *Cepelia from the Pigsty* thus touches on social issues, but it also has a spiritual, metaphysical layer.

I think this is the essence of these activities. Narratives on the changing countryside, as we said earlier, can be sometimes found in today's culture, but it is very rare to capture and narrate changes in the spirituality and religiosity, to go beyond a commentary on the banality of religious practice. Metaphysics is also the missing part that is not experienced in traditional folklore. In your work you point out that rejecting metaphysics leads to a loss of balance.

Modern agriculture, and therein lies the problem with modern capitalism, attempts to remove this spiritual sphere, which leads to disunity and to human tragedies. The question of balance is addressed in a key work for the exhibitions we prepare, namely the *Yin Yang*. This sculpture, which is central to me, came from the fact that I ride around the countryside on my motorbike or bicycle and

Daniel Rycharski, *Crying Horse #1*, 2022, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm,
courtesy of the artist and Gunia Nowik Gallery



look for objects, usually thrown out of the barn. This is how I found a wheel from a chaff cutter thrown away by a female farmer who told me her story. She had a farm with her husband that, after 2004, did not adapt to changes, they did not modernise it and things started to deteriorate. He became depressed, alcoholic and so his driving licence was taken away, which made him destroy police cars outside the police station in anger. As a result, he was sent to prison, which did not improve anything and he died shortly after his release. It was the wheel from this farm that I used. In its metal frame, it has inscribed a kind of Yin Yang symbol, which can be read as a symbol of balance. I read in a study by Amanda Krzyworzeka who conducts research in the Podlasie (Podlachia) region, the opinion of a farmer who said that a litre of milk should cost as much as a litre of petrol, it is one of several recurring dreams. The wheel from the chaff cutter was glazed over and I poured milk and petrol into the created reservoirs. It is a work about the search for an impossible balance. For me, it has a level of agricultural micro-history, a level of general reflection on rural modernity. Much has changed for the better after we joined the UE, but there have been costs. This man was one of



many who bore them. It is a bit of a voice of these farmers. There is also a theme of ecology in this work: the impossible balance between nature and its exploitation driving the climate catastrophe. It is the kind of general sense that is easy to read, the search for balance in a world where there is none. It is a central and ambiguous work. Very important to me.

In our conversations, various ideas for further activities often emerged, referring to significant leads from the Polish visual culture. *The Dead Class* is a quotation from Tadeusz Kantor, in the series of paintings *Horses Are Crying*⁶ one can sense an allusion to the work *Pyramid of Animals* by Katarzyna Kozyra, and in *Letter from Heaven* a reference to the popular TV series *Ojciec Mateusz* (Father Matthew), but also to the character of the alternative Artur Żmijewski. As if the

one connected to the world of critical art should be replaced by the figure of the actor bearing the same name and surname. I find this reworking of the heritage of the classics through a different sensibility incredibly interesting and important. Especially that several texts included reflections on the relationship of your practice with the tradition of critical art of the 1990s.

My art shows well the shifting of the sensibilities in artistic practice. It is critical but also empathetic. It is not about transcending, about believing that the artist can do more and that with a radical gesture – killing animals, forcing a group of people to do something they do not want to do – he or she can show some aspect of reality. We are already in a different place after twenty-five years of critical art, it is a kind of a generational response to this phenomenon. The differences lie in the understanding of the importance of empathy and an awareness of the responsibility when you act

6 A series of paintings by Wojciech Witkowski. The fireman-artist has been working with Rycharski since 2018. This time they are creating together a series of paintings depicting horses going to slaughter. It is an attempt to use a classic medium and an amateur style to alter the meanings of often romanticised representations of horses firmly incorporated in the culture.

among people. I think a very similar thing is happening in young cinema and young theatre. I look at the people who are involved in it and I see that they do not believe uncritically in their professors acting on the limit of ethics.

Apart from ethics, I am interested in what you might call your gesture towards people and working with what they know from their daily life and what they appreciate. This is the source of the strength of your work: creating from elements that are recognisable to people. This is the practical dimension of empathy; it is then easier to feel the main idea behind your realisations.

This has already happened with the *Peasant Monument*. It was simply to be a well-liked and readable monument for the villagers, something that could be understood immediately. The work *Letter from Heaven*, for which I would like to invite Artur Żmijewski, the actor widely known for his role of father Matthew, to come to the village and read out the letter by Piotr Ściegienny, originates in the same approach. It is part of the story of Ściegienny impersonating the Pope and writing a letter to the Polish peasants in the 1840s in which he was telling them to reject serfdom and fight for freedom. Today it could sound like a call for solidarity.

A kind of 'hope in the dark' project when you have to go beyond the 'suffering subject' that has dominated art?

I am currently reading Roch Sulima's latest book, where he talks about, among other things, how he gave lectures in the villages. During one of them, a peasant asked: 'why are there no nails in the commune cooperative stores?' And then Sulima does a half-hour lecture on the subject, after which the peasant says to him: 'No, actually, nails are available in the store, I just wanted to see how you would explain yourself.' And this was supposed to be the project that does not need to be explained, because people know how it is like. If you go to the countryside, everyone knows father Matthew. However, no one has heard of Artur Żmijewski, the artist. It is like creating Żmijewski for one's own purposes, using the same method as he used to, i.e., by somewhat exploiting a man, perhaps against his will. This

7 'Suffering subject', one of the fundamental themes emerging in anthropology and ethnography after the disappearance of the savages, i.e., the shift of interest from primitive peoples to the subject who suffers and experience injustice. It is also a figure very prevalent in the visual arts, one of the default themes addressed in the field of artistic production. See: J. Robins, 'Beyond suffering subject: toward an anthropology of the good', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, 2013, pp. 447–462.

would be a kind of an activist use of a well-understood cultural code. People know father Matthew, so they will trust you and listen to your letter about the need for social solidarity. Use what they know, what they accept, and someone they would really like to see. I would absolutely like to go back to the people, bring them together and give them something optimistic, something that is empowering, rather than something that may be visually interesting but at the same time has a depressing effect. This is how, one might say, I understand this movement towards the good and beyond suffering.

Since we are talking about good, let us touch further on the subject of love. Young farmer Patryk Ruszkowski, one of the people you work with, talked about the tattoo he has on his arm with a quote from the Rammstein song *Love is for everyone. For me too*. So far, it is just a wish, but simple and pertinent enough that it has stayed with us as the title of the exhibition.

As I pointed out, the death of the countryside and loneliness are themes that tell the story of life in the social stratum. At the same time, they talk about you as an individual, about the fact that everyone can be left alone. This is the biggest problem of the countryside, the desire for love is an aftermath of this. When I go to Kurówek, I remember that a year ago we still had neighbours turning up, but now I do not see them anymore. The kind of people who acted as hubs, to whom you could go to get something done, to talk to, have all moved on or gone away. What is left is the big farm of the Kikolski family, who are constantly working hard with their cows and cannot even go on holiday. But I like what Myśliwski writes: that the individualism that came after peasant culture (that you can decide for yourself without looking at the group) is perhaps worth its death. We cannot be limited to nostalgia about how it used to be. I have only now begun to seriously study this writer, who has been analysing this topic for many years. What I am now doing could be called 'queering' Myśliwski. He is, for me, the most outstanding Polish prose writer, but I miss something in his work. As usual with him, we have a modernising countryside and various people who are struggling with this reality. He describes a village of philosopher farmers, rather than filthy farmers. His literature is not breaking through to the mainstream now. When I ask my students who are interested in the theme of the countryside, they ignore this name.

Updating this heritage and bringing it back as a source of inspiration could be an interesting move, as it seems so different from current sensibilities. But, at the same time, is it good at explaining the reality we face?

The aforementioned authors, Mencwel, Sulima or Myśliwski, show me the countryside not from the nostalgic side, as it could be expected. They rather alert me to the pitfalls of such thinking. They also disagree on many issues with one other and want to argue constantly. On average, every ten years this topic is brought up and one of them has to write a text about it.

So there has to be an exhibition on this topic as well. Are we talking about the death of the countryside to give it a new life?

Definitely, yes. And the exhibition can give rise to a theatre play or a film. And that is basically the point.

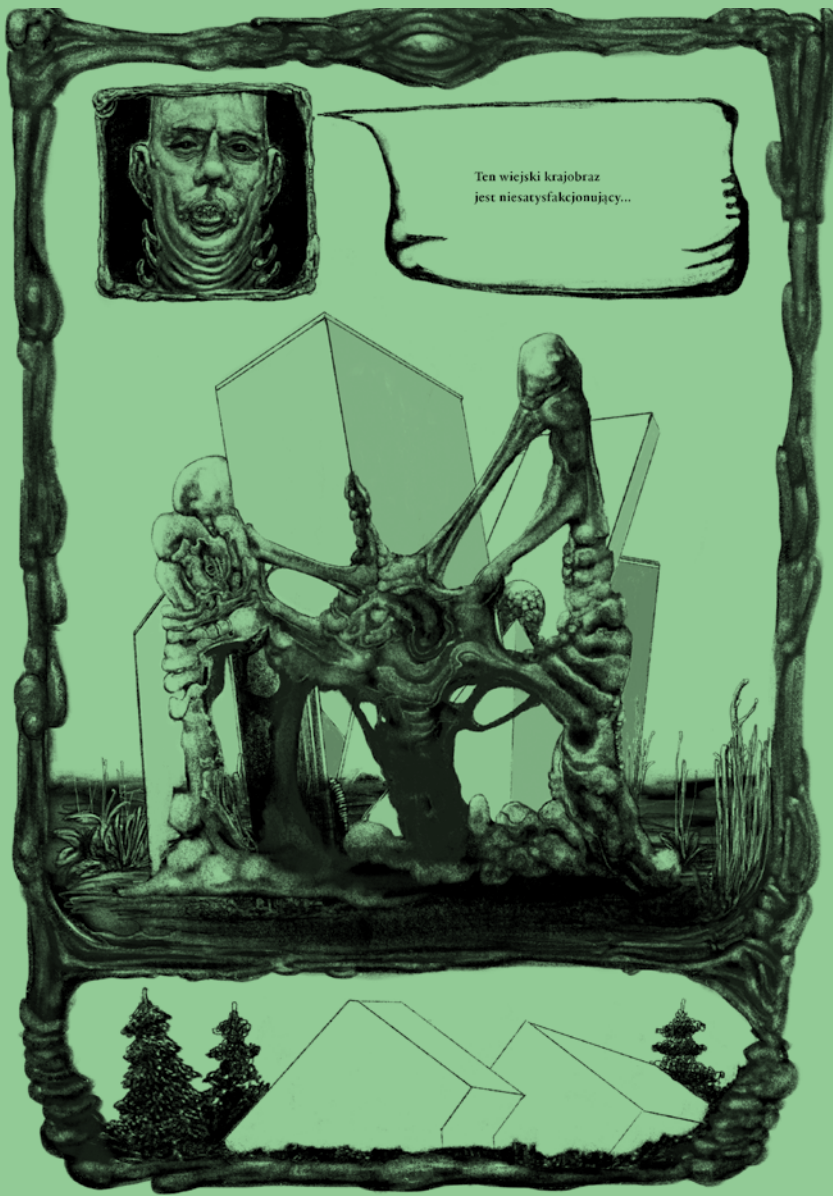
June 2022

Szymon Maliborski

historyk sztuki, kulturoznawca, doktorant w Katedrze Antropologii Literatury i Badań Kulturowych Wydziału Polonistyki UJ, kurator w Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie. Obecnie współpracuje przy organizacji festiwalu Warszawa w Budowie.

Daniel Rycharski

artysta i grafik, doktor nauk o sztukach pięknych, laureat nagrody Paszport „Polityki”. Absolwent Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Krakowie. Zajmuje się działaniami artystycznymi w przestrzeni wsi, jest twórcą wiejskiego street artu. Urodził się w 1986 roku w Sierpcu. Działa ze społecznością rodzinnej miejscowości Kurówko.



Karolina Kolenda

**ISSUES WITH THE
COUNTRYSIDE. CONTEMPORARY
ARCHITECTURE IN SEARCH OF
IDENTITY OF RURAL LANDSCAPE**

The *Trouble in Paradise* project developed as an exhibit to be showcased at the Polish Pavilion during the 17th Biennale Architettura in Venice was a response to the headline of the 2021 edition of the event – *How Will We Live Together?* This response took the form of a historical, sociological and geographical reflection on the Polish countryside, undertaken by the PROLOG +1 group and the design studios from Poland and abroad invited to take part in the project. Due to the pandemic, the exhibition was postponed until 2021. That year also saw the publication of the book *Kłopoty ze sztuką ludową* [The Folk Art Issue] by Ewa Klekot, an anthropological account of the changes in the perception, conceptualisation and exploiting of folklore and folk art in Polish culture over the past 150 years. One can therefore conclude that even though the Polish countryside is the main subject of an ever-growing body of works presenting diverging perspectives and sparking numerous discussions and debates, giving rise to new artworks, exhibitions, films and representations in popular culture, it still remains largely troublesome, and with the growing modernisation of Poland, it becomes increasingly difficult to grasp its specificity and – perhaps most importantly – to determine the directions of its development, or its or confirm its disappearance, as some would certainly prefer.

This interest is largely driven by the attempts to define our collective identity, which was and is still being shaped in terms of a negation of the rural, reflected in the wealth of derogatory terms conflating rural origin and other practices, which are sometimes referred to as an expression of *chamofobia*, which could be translated as ‘booraphobia’.¹ According to Jan Sowa and Andrzej Leder, who speak from the point of view of psychoanalysis, our ‘rural’ identity is an indelible source of collective trauma, although, understandably, this vision of the aporetic situation of Polishness sparks controversy.² On the other hand, in studies dealing with the construct of ‘folklore’ as a source of national identity, the dominant perspective indicates the appropriation of folk culture by the official culture of the state, occurring (especially in the period of the Polish People’s Republic, although it was apparent even at earlier stages) simultaneously with a pushback against folk customs and rural ‘backwardness’ as well as the push for techno-

1 Cf. “Chamofobia”: debata Kontakt, *Magazyn Kontakt*, 23 September 2013, <<https://magazynkontakt.pl/chamofobia-debata-kontakt/>> [accessed: 18.04.2022].

2 Cf. J. Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, Kraków, 2011; A. Leder, *Prześlona rewolucja: ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej*, Warsaw, 2014 and the commentary to Leder’s book by Aleksandra Bilewicz, where the author points out Leder’s one-sided assessment of the history of Polish countryside as the history of failed modernisation, as well as the characterisation of its space as ‘post-traumatic’, without taking into account any alternative development paths. A. Bilewicz, ‘Przebudźmy się!’, *Nowy Obywatel*, 2014, no. 14 (65), <<https://nowyobywatel.pl/2014/11/14/przebudzmy-sie/>> [accessed: 20.04.2022].

logical, and moral renewal.³ From this point of view, the contemporary popularisation of folk and regional motifs in commercial architecture, visual culture, music and design might be interpreted as a Leder's kind of 'self-folklorisation', to quote Ewa Klekot describing this phenomenon.⁴ The phenomenon of self-folklorisation is an attempt to play out one's own folk culture, undertaking cultural practices recognised by the official national culture as examples of folklore, as well as identification with that culture imposed by institutions, language, tourism, and the market.⁵

In this paper, the author attempts to confront the approaches that have arisen in the humanities and social sciences with the reflection present in the field of architecture – not only in theoretical analyses of its specificity and its condition, but also in architectural practice. To that end, it is an attempt at an in-depth look into the field concerned which is concerned not so much with representing but shaping the rural space. Interestingly, this is where we can see the negative assessment of the spatial and aesthetic condition of the Polish countryside, which reiterates the diagnoses stemming from the fields of sociology and anthropology, and on the other hand there are suggestions for more or less practical solutions to the issues plaguing its architecture, as well as comprehensive visions for the transformation of the rural landscape – with some bordering on a utopia. However, it should be pointed out that many of these suggestions, which are preceded by an analysis of the current state of the Polish countryside, are statements of a sociological nature offering an answer to one simple question – how do we live? How could we live? What does not work in rural communities, and why?

WHY IS THE POLISH COUNTRYSIDE UGLY?

In England, a country which is unique in all of Europe in terms of the role of rural space as an identity-forming factor, where the rural south of the country became a synecdoche of cultural 'Englishness' in the 19th century,⁶ the model of rural life was (and still is) reproduced by many urban

3 Cf. E. Klekot, *Kłopoty ze sztuką ludową. Gust, ideologie, nowoczesność*, Gdańsk, 2021; *Polska – kraj folkloru?*, ed. J. Kordjak, Warsaw, 2016; *Pany chłopy chłopy pany*, W. Szymański, M. Ujma (eds.), Nowy Sącz, 2016; P. Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż. Towarzystwo Popierania Przemysłu Ludowego, Cepelia, Instytut Wzornictwa Przemysłowego*, Warsaw, 2013.

4 E. Klekot, 'Samofolkloryzacja. Współczesna sztuka ludowa z perspektywy krytyki postkolonialnej', *Kultura Współczesna. Teorie. Interpretacje. Praktyka*, 2014, no. 1, pp. 86–99. In the paper, Klekot refers to Alexander Kiossev's concept of self-colonisation, or the cultural identification of the periphery seeking to modernise with the colonial centre. Cf. A. Kiossev, *The Self-Colonizing Metaphor*, [in:] *Atlas of Transformation*, <<http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html>> [accessed: 09.09.2022].

5 Ibidem, p. 98.

6 Cf. K. Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 175–225.

residents. Contemporary scholars also highlight the less idyllic dimensions of this space, where the beautiful landscape, dotted with quaint villages and picturesque hedgerows, masks centuries of the economic exploitation of the local populace and the colonies, exclusion, racism, policies of displacement of the masses while fencing off estates, etc.⁷ In that case, the 'dark sides of the landscape' are hidden deep beneath an idyllic picture.

In Poland, on the other hand, ugliness seems to be the biggest issue, and the rural landscape is seen as a visual manifestation of everything that is wrong with the country in terms of social relations, class disparity, as well as space management and personal tastes. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. In the Great Britain, by the mid-19th century, the urban population outnumbered the rural communities, triggering sentimental (usually only mental) returns to the countryside and an idealisation of rural life, which was no longer available to a big part of the populace.⁸ Poland, on the other hand, remains a rural and agricultural country, with about 40% of the population living in rural areas, where urban centres are also often rural in nature.⁹ Areas administratively defined as rural occupy 93% of the country's territory, while 60% of this land is devoted to agriculture.¹⁰ In addition, an increasing diversification of the economic activities undertaken there is evident, and the multiplicity of functions of rural areas goes hand in hand with the disappearance of biodiversity.¹¹

Although many peripheral rural areas are depopulating, the countryside gained half a million new residents between 2002 and 2011, indicating a growing counterurbanisation trend.¹² What is even more important, the new inhabitants of the countryside bring with them a model of life different from that typical of the countryside but which is adopted by the existing populace. The result that emerges from these practices is a rural landscape filled with buildings that spark widespread concern, which is often brought up in the trade and popular press due to their layouts and architectural forms. Researchers and scholars lament

7 Cf. W.J. Darby, *Landscape and Identity: Geographies of Nation and Class in England*, Oxford, 2000; C. Dwyer, C. Bressey, *New Geographies of Race and Racism*, London, 2008.

8 Cf. C. Berberich, 'This Green and Pleasant Land: Cultural Constructions of Englishness', [in:] *Landscape and Englishness*, R. Burden, S. Kohl (eds), Amsterdam–New York, 2006, pp. 207–224.

9 Ł. Drozda, *Dwa tysiące. Instrukcja obsługi polskiej urbanizacji w xxi wieku*, Warsaw, 2018, p. 23.

10 K. Kajdanek, 'Z punktu widzenia Drogi Mlecznej wszyscy jesteśmy ze wsi (Loesje)', [in:] *Trouble in Paradise*, ed. W. Mazan, Warsaw, 2020, p. 50.

11 PROLOG+1, 'To, co znane, niekoniecznie jest poznane', [in:] *Trouble in Paradise*, op. cit., p. 14.

12 K. Kajdanek, op. cit. p. 54.

the ‘spatial chaos’¹³ suggesting that the Polish countryside is not actually a countryside, but some variant of a phenomenon that Thomas Sieverts referred to as a *Zwischenstadt*,¹⁴ that is, an *intercity*¹⁵ or *almost-city*.¹⁶ The blame is usually placed on the lack of systemic solutions, in particular the lack of local spatial plans, and on the freedom of construction introduced by the 2003 Act on Planning and Spatial Development.¹⁷ Their particular outcomes of these processes include changing the status of farm land (from agricultural to residential) and the so-called ribbon farm construction style, which ‘precludes a rational way of shaping settlements, contributing to the production of a deeply disharmonious and non-functional urbanised space.’¹⁸ Great hopes were pinned on the so-called 2015 Landscape Act, but changes in terms of spatial management are very slow to implement.¹⁹ ‘Why is Poland so ugly?’ asked Piotr Sarzyński a decade ago.²⁰ There were many answers to that question, but the most common one concerned the need to ‘unwind’ after years of greyness and housing shortages, hence the bright colours of the façades of new and overhauled houses – giving rise to the phenomenon of the so-called *overpainted houses*,²¹ characterised by large sizes and fancy shapes.²² Filip Springer suggested that it was ‘a matter of landscape’. ‘The landscape here is usually painfully monotonous. ... Such a setting gives illusory hope that the land-

13 On the subject of ‘chaos’ as a concept, which carries negative emotions related to the experience of space in Poland, as well as expressing problems with defining the observed phenomenon, see: D. Leśniak-Rychlak, *Jesteśmy wreszcie we własnym domu*, Kraków, 2019, p. 8.

14 T. Sieverts, *Zwischenstadt: zwischen Ort und Welt, Raum und Zeit, Stadt und Land*, Wiesbaden, 1998, p. 7.

15 Ł. Drozda, op. cit., p. 23.

16 A. Bilewicz, ‘Państwo niedomiasto, czyli o prawie do wsi’, *Nowe Peryferie*, 5 August 2013, after: M. Kowalewski, ‘Niejednoznaczna odpowiedź miast na populizm i kryzys demokracji’, *Studia Socjologiczne*, 2019, no. 3 (234), p. 73.

17 Act on Planning and Spatial Development of 27 March, 2003. Dz. U. in particular [Journal of Laws] of 2003, no. 80 item 717.

18 Ł. Drozda, op. cit., p. 103.

19 Act of 24 April 2015 on amendments to certain laws in connection with the strengthening of landscape protection tools, Dz. U. [Journal of Laws] no. 2015, item 774.

20 P. Sarzyński, *Wrzask w przestrzeni. Dlaczego w Polsce jest tak brzydko?*, Warsaw, 2012.

21 M. A. Urbańska, ‘Marysia i Burek na Cejlonie: wiejska architektura egzotyczna’, [in:] *Hawaikum. W poszukiwaniu istoty piękna*, M. Kozień, M. Miskowicz, A. in particular Pankiewicz (eds.), Kraków, 2015, p. 43.

22 M. Arczyńska, ‘Polityka, prestiż i odreagowanie. Dom jednorodzinny w okresie transformacji’, [in:] *Polskie Las Vegas i szwagier z Corelem. Architektura, moda i projektowanie wobec transformacji systemowej w Polsce*, ed. L. Klein, Warsaw, 2017, p. 45.

scape can somehow be tamed or controlled, or at least that we can mark our presence in it. So we try to shout. ... This can be seen from a distance ... It resounds in the empty space ... The problem arises when the we need to provide some content in said shout.²³ Spatial chaos and flashy colours are some of the most striking and apparent features of the Polish countryside. However, it is the sham historicity of rural architecture and its stylistic cacophony that has become the subject of the most heated debates and a source of worry for proponents of a more modern or cosmopolitan architecture.

IN SEARCH OF A NATIONAL STYLE

The issue of searching for an indigenous style has been a constantly recurring theme in Polish architectural thought since at least the time of the Zakopane style, coined by Stanisław Witkiewicz. 'The Polish Block' – the communist-era design aptly named by Robert Konieczny, permanently deformed the Polish landscape. What is more, it represented a total departure from local architecture, which is why Marta A. Urbańska suggests renaming the design to 'the Exotic Block' – a visual testimony to the attempted modernisation of the countryside under the communist regime.²⁴ 'Countryside blocks of flats' – be it the Polish Blocks or larger structures erected adjacent to state farms, were harbingers of later changes that occurred in the aftermath of the political upheaval, when the modernisation of agricultural technology and improvements in general conditions went hand in hand with the adoption of architectural designs developed for the city as well as with urban and suburban lifestyles.

This modernisation also brought the attempts to reclaim the past, or at least to find a poor substitute for it. Houses built in Poland after 1989, which tried to emulate the manor house style or used often eclectic combinations of historical designs, were described by Janusz L. Dobesz as 'negative nativeness' – a concept that Marta Leśniakowska found in the architecture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.²⁵ According to Dobesz, these houses, often derided as 'gargamels' – adorned with cupolas, corner extensions, and columned porticoes – deserve respect as an expression of the needs described by Dariusz Kozłowski in his declaration *Konieczność przeszłości* [*The Necessity of the Past*].²⁶ Dobesz

23 F. Springer, 'Brakujące słowo', [in:] *Hawaikum*, op. cit., p. 8.

24 M. A. Urbańska, op. cit., p. 40.

25 M. Leśniakowska, 'rodzimości negatywnej', [in:] *Architektura XIX i początku XX wieku*, ed. T. Grygiel, pp. 127–135, after: J. L. Dobesz, *Dom polski*, Wrocław, 2008, p. 232.

26 D. Kozłowski, 'Konieczność przeszłości', [in:] *vi th International Biennale of Architecture – vi Międzynarodowe Biennale Architektury – Kraków '96*, Kraków, 1996.

considers Lech Wałęsa's villa designed by Szczepan Baum (1996-1997) to be an example of a successful attempt at eclecticism, where the character of the manor house and reference to local villa architecture are expressed in modern forms. In most cases, all kinds of forms that refer to the manor house style face criticism, just like homesteads emulating American designs showcased in various TV series, which are built to seem luxurious.²⁷ The issue with the modern rendition of the manor house is not only the scale of decorative elements, but also the omission of historical spatial arrangements of the surroundings of rural residences.²⁸ The attempts to bring back other national traditions, in particular folk ones, also face staunch criticism, with the most baffling examples being found in buildings designed for catering establishments. They showcase the issue of the superficial understanding of folklore. According to Monika Kozień: 'The phantasmatic approach to tradition is apparent from the very first glance at the architectural design of these buildings. Most of them are enormous in size. It does not matter whether they are supposed to emulate a manor house, a roadside inn or a country cottage – they are always upscaled and they utilise fanciful forms, bordering on palaces, with numerous stories, avant-corps, corner extensions, porches and mansards.'²⁹

There is a deep need for architecture that enters into dialogue with tradition, as evidenced by the design of the Licheń Basilica, described by its author – Barbara Bielecka – as both fully reflecting the *gusto Polacco* and drawing upon regional forms that appeal to a sense of local identity.³⁰ The perception of architecture referring to local traditions, aware of the inexpediency of searching for a national style that would be uniform for the whole country while drawing upon styles characteristic of a particular region, seems to be received somewhat more favourably.³¹ The 'small homelands' are thus supposed to be the spaces where – as Błażej Ciarkowski puts it – 'the dialogue between modernity, local construction culture and craftsmanship resounded most fully, often yielding interesting results', while pointing to the successful adaptations of traditional wooden architecture in the designs of churches in Pomerania, as designed by Szczepan Baum (citing the example of the church in Kąty Rybackie) and houses by Piotr Olszak and Jan Sabiniarz.³²

27 P. Sarzyński, op. cit., p. 35.

28 B. Ciarkowski, "Czas na restytucję polskiej sztuki". Architektura czasów transformacji wobec tradycji', [in:] *Polskie Las Vegas*, op. cit., p. 77.

29 M. Kozień, 'Egzotyczny koktajl z domieszką swojskości', [in:] *Hawaikum*, op. cit., p. 85.

30 M. Wiśniewski, 'W poszukiwaniu polskiego Las Vegas', [in:] *Polskie Las Vegas*, op. cit., p. 138.

31 K. Nawratek, *Ideologie w przestrzeni. Próby demistyfikacji*, Kraków, 2005, p. 97.

32 B. Ciarkowski, op. cit., p. 89.

It should be noted, however, that the widespread criticism of architecture seeking its origins in Polish tradition as an expression of national sentiment had a discouraging impact on architects, while creating a wide gap between the cosmopolitan taste of the architectural community and the needs of the general public concerning aesthetics and identity. These days, avoiding references to Polish building traditions can also be seen as an expression of the dread of the self-folklorisation, a phenomenon that rose to particular prominence in commercial architecture in the Podhale region especially, where it is mostly limited to ornamentation, detail, roof type or woodwork shapes. In these cases, the careful analysis of the local context and adaptation of the implemented project to its most important characteristics, including the spatial layout, wall colours and the materials used, is usually omitted. In other words, in the case of these designs, one can see superficial inspirations with folk style and folklore – just like in the case of ethnodesign, which is often focused on playing with traditional ornamentation, described by Ewa Klekot as ‘folkloristic interpretation of the countryside’³³ rather than searching for the ‘logic of locality’.³⁴ Just like in the case of numerous examples of ethnodesign, commercial folk-inspired architecture uses folklore only as a source of style, usually limited to ornamentation. According to Agnieszka Domańska, ethnodesign ignores ‘the contemporary culture of the countryside, while hearkening back to extinct traditions and styles, which function as a source of regional mementos.’³⁵ In addition to superficial interpretations of tradition, one can also find many designs that seemingly focus on folklore not as a product of ethnography but as a source of local architectural features and crafts as well as the materials, techniques, and spatial layouts employed in a given region. Below, the author outlines several examples of designs that were inspired by the local life, understood and interpreted as the totality of local traditions, ways of life, or spatial organisation, as opposed to folklore, which is understood as an ethnographic construct.

POLSKA ZAGRODA, OR THE POLISH FARMHOUSE

From the point of view of planning, one of the key issues of the Polish countryside is the disruption of the original spatial layouts and plans, usually stemming from the changing functions of the farmhouse.

33 E. Klekot, *Kłopoty ze sztuką ludową*, op. cit., p. 337.

34 M. Rydiger, ‘Lokalność zaprojektowana’, [in:] *Logika lokalności. Norweski i polski współczesny design*, ed. M. Daszewska, Kraków, 2016, pp. 17–26. Cf. E. Klekot, *Kłopoty ze sztuką ludową*, op. cit., p. 341.

35 A. Domańska, *Góralski etnodizajn czyli sztuka ludowa Podhala jako źródło inspiracji we współczesnym wzornictwie*, Gdańsk, 2019, p. 19.

According to Anna Górka, the resulting changes in homestead development, such as overhauls, result in the demolition of old farmhouse elements, that are replaced by suburban gardens surrounding the renovated residential buildings, which are modernised to the point of losing their traditional character.³⁶ The new developments does not relate to the local context in any way, neither from the architectural standpoint – usually simply copying the designs available in catalogues – nor in way they are embedded in the landscape and surroundings. According to Górka, these buildings are often ‘the only element on a plot of land haphazardly separated from an agricultural field.’³⁷ The author claims that these new buildings are ‘unsatisfactory’ and that they disregard the context of the location. She also believes that they are built as if they were devoid of any neighbourhood, surrounded by non-native vegetation and strange in the landscape, in many cases lacking the outbuildings that were used by countryside residents, such like woodsheds and farm outbuildings, which are replaced by a sprawling space used for parking personal vehicles.³⁸ The outcome of this trend is that this new type of development is gradually displacing traditional farmhouses, as even farmers recognise the superiority of aesthetic designs developed in cities. Given the total lack of oversight by central and local governments, the concern for preserving original layouts and designs falls onto the shoulders of newcomers from urban areas, who are pursuing their fantasy of idyllic life in the countryside and get involved in restoring old buildings, as well as to the architects whose work focuses on the issue of traditional architecture and the character of the Polish countryside.

The *Polish Farmhouse* project (2018) by BXB Studio Bogusław Barnaś³⁹ is a response to the apparent issue of the disappearance of traditional rural building layouts. In this case, the entire design stems from the adaptation of existing farmhouse buildings in such a way as to reflect the traditional layout while offering a more modern version. All that remains from the original farmhouse complex is one structure – the old house – which was preserved and restored. The other buildings, which were in poor shape, were demolished. In their stead, the studio created a single object made up of interconnected structures whose axes converge diagonally, rather than free-standing buildings reflecting the original layout of the

36 A. Górka, *Zagroda. Zagadnienia planowania i projektowania ruralistycznego*, Gdańsk, 2011, p. 23.

37 Ibidem.

38 Ibidem, p. 24.

39 Cf. description of the *Polish Farmhouse* on the BXB studio website, <<https://bxbstudio.com/project/polska-zagroda/?category=mieszkalne>> [accessed: 20.04.2022]. Cf. photographs of the project in: D. Łaski-Hamerlak, *Specjaliści od polskich stodół*, Designalive.pl, <<https://www.designalive.pl/polska-zagroda-od-bxb-studio/>> [accessed: 09.09.2022].

space. The final restored building is surrounded by a structure made up of five interconnected barns with different functions – garage, entrance area, children’s area and main hall, kitchen with offices and a two-storey living space. Each of them is characterised by a slightly different size and different wooden façade siding modules, whose style refers to the demolished farm buildings. The appearance and proportions of the fifth barn clearly imitate the form of the old barn that was located on the plot. The overall design alludes to the traditional layout and appearance of a rural home-stead, yet leaves no doubt about the contemporary character of the buildings while communicating careful consideration of the context of local buildings, terrain and vegetation. As Górká claimed, ‘successful attempts to reconcile the two trends – the traditional and the modern one – are exceedingly rare’, while noting that ‘the architectural community in Poland is clearly unable to design buildings that would fit well into the local natural, cultural and social context.’⁴⁰ Given this context, the *Polish Farmhouse* appears to be an exceptional design, just like other acclaimed projects by Barnaś’s studio, such as the *Polish House* and the award-winning *Lesser Polish Eaves Cottage* whose form alludes to the buildings in the market square of Lanckorona.⁴¹

The interest in the local aspects, which goes beyond clear references to folklore, may seem only a distant echo of post-modern returns to local context, ornamentation and regional specificity. After all, in the post-modern current of neo-vernacularism, local building traditions were also interpreted in new ways. Yet, while the motivation was often to create an environment that fit well into the familiar context, this local context was usually used superficially, and in some cases it was limited to the articulation and ornamentation of the façade (such as in the case of the famous Onder de Bogen estate project by Aldo van Eyck and Theo Bosch, completed in Zwolle between 1971 and 1975). The aforementioned projects by BXB Studio Bogusław Barnaś, however, follow a different path – the references to local building traditions are not too obvious – at least not to viewers, who are not familiar with Polish architecture and space. At first glance, the *Polish Farmhouse* takes advantage of a recognisable international idiom, which fits in with the popular trend of erecting rural home-steads and overhauling the existing ones as ‘modern barns’, including their characteristic features – exterior walls covered with wood, simple forms, dark colours, roofs without eaves; however, in the context of Polish rural space, its layout is immediately recognisable – in the case of Polish farm-

40 Ibidem, p. 38.

41 Cf. the description of the design on the BXB studio website, <<https://bxbstudio.com/project/chata-podcieniowa/>> [accessed: 20.04.2022].

houses, the outbuildings surrounding the house dominate the landscape, with the large and simple barn standing out the most.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

To conclude, let us go back to the *Trouble in Paradise* project mentioned at the beginning of the paper, which was showcased in the Polish Pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale of Architecture. The authors of the project – the PROLOG +1 group and an international team – not only pointed out the lack of architectural solutions for rural space in Poland, but also highlighted the fact that this issue is absent in the architectural discourse, as if the countryside was a space that was removed from the collective architectural consciousness.⁴² They note the absence of the issue of architecture inspired by the landed gentry and peasant tradition in professional magazines after 1989, focused almost exclusively on Western-type post-modern historicism.⁴³ Going beyond the prevalent albeit contradictory visions of the Polish countryside as a space of romantic idyll and technological utopia, the project created by PROLOG +1 asked the question of the relationship between space and models of its inhabitation, seeking material solutions and new forms of community, thus breaking with the perception of rural space as a ‘pre-modern ruin’ – a remnant of the old order, certain elements of which should be preserved in the form of an open-air museum while completely transforming the character of the remainder of it into an industrial space. The team also made an attempt to go beyond the mental patterns imposing the peripheral role of the countryside in relation to the metropolitan heart – the economic support for the urban civilisation.⁴⁴ From this point of view, the very topology of contemporary rural areas, described as ‘suburban’, ‘peripheral’, and in other terms, ultimately defines the diverse types of habitation as ‘non-urban’, thereby fostering exclusionary ideologies. Meanwhile, the changes observed in the countryside are complex and can originate at different points in the system of relations, which the authors of the project describe as horizontal – made up of a network of spatial units, such as territory, settlement, house.⁴⁵ In this system, various factors such as the state, free market or the city will never be the main drivers of change.

The exhibition showcased six proposals, which described the Polish countryside as a place of change, whose nature was not just spatial and architectural, but also social, stemming from the need to adapt to new

42 PROLOG+W, *To, co znane, niekoniecznie jest poznane*, op. cit., p. 11.

43 D. Leśniak-Rychlak, op. cit., p. 102.

44 P. Issaias, H. Khosravi, ‘Miejsce na zewnątrz: kilka refleksji na temat wiejskości, terytorium i obszarów wiejskich’, [in:] *Trouble in Paradise*, op. cit., p. 17.

45 PROLOG +1, ‘Wieś na horyzoncie’, [in:] *Trouble in Paradise*, op. cit., p. 105.



1

Fig. 1. Sacred Species, design by GUBAHÁMORI + Filip + László Demeter. Part of the design element of the *Trouble in Paradise* exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at the 2021 Biennale of Architecture.

2

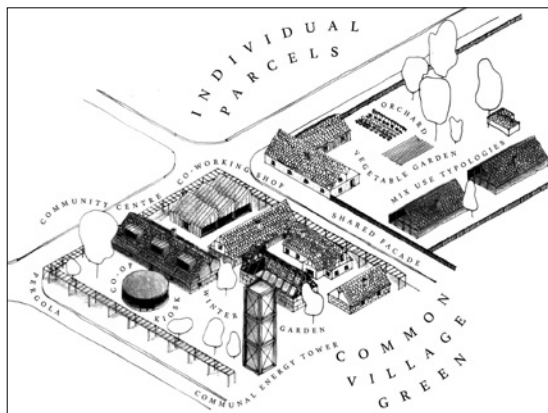


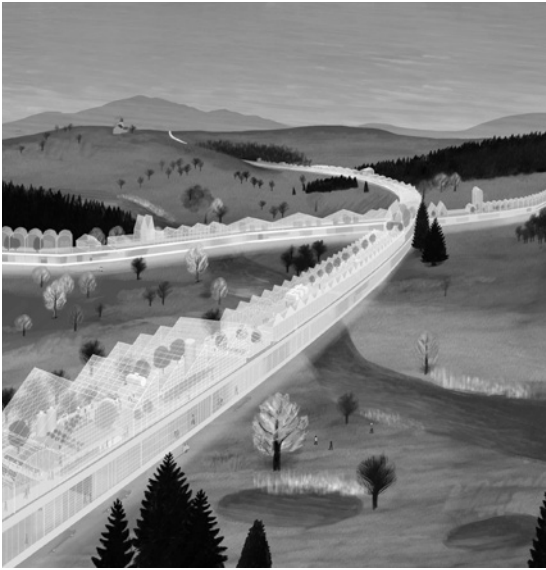
Fig. 2. Rural Communities, design by Atelier Fanelas. Part of the design element of the *Trouble in Paradise* exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at the 2021 Biennale of Architecture.

conditions resulting from climate change or the collapse of the growth-based economic development model. The *Święte gatunki* [*Sacred Species*] project (GUBAHÁMORI + Filip + László Demeter) assumes that trees will become the most privileged species on Earth, and that humans will adapt the shape and size of their habitats to them, building very tall, narrow houses on stilts to provide access to light (Fig. 1).⁴⁶ In this project, the traditional spatial arrangements of the Polish countryside are all but gone, and the thinking of architectural practice in terms of the continuation of building traditions loses its *raison d'être*. The landscape, which was predominantly anthropogenic, once again gets dominated by wilderness, where humans humbly find a place for themselves – not without the difficulties associated with it.

On the other hand, the *Wspólnoty wiejskie* [*Rural Communities*] project by Atelier Fanelas from Germany envisions the development of rural areas surrounding Szczecin, which would enable sharing communal green spaces in the heart of the village.⁴⁷ The settlement – home to three hundred residents – encompasses three types of space: a central

46 'Święte gatunki', [in:] *Trouble in Paradise*, op. cit., p. 187.

47 'Wspólnoty wiejskie', [in:] *Trouble in Paradise*, op. cit., pp. 200–201.



3

Fig. 3. Agrostructure, project by kosmos Architects. Part of the design element of the *Trouble in Paradise* exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at the 2021 Biennale of Architecture.

4

Il. 4. Social Infrastructure, project by RZUT. Part of the design element of the *Trouble in Paradise* exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at the 2021 Biennale of Architecture.

common green area, individual plots of land, as well as the surrounding fields and pastures. The buildings reflect the original structures and the traditional farmhouse layout (Fig. 2). The way of living in the countryside drives the emergence of new lifestyles based on self-sufficiency, as well as shared food and energy production. Self-sufficiency and a community-based living model is also the starting point of the *Spółem* project by the UK-based Rural Office for Architecture, which draws on the long-standing Polish tradition of collective farming and on Oskar Hansen's concept of Open Form⁴⁸ in the approach to spatial planning. It takes into account planning at the state level, construction of settlements at the cooperative level and adaptation of individual homes at the personal level, seeking a balance between the shared and the private, while taking into account needs such as access to common areas free of vegetation. Interestingly enough, the project also features the Polish practice of erecting buildings of different sizes and purposes at different stages of construction.⁴⁹

On the other hand, projects such as *Agrostruktura* [Agrostructure] by Kosmos Architects and *Infrastruktura społeczna* [Social Infrastructure] by Polish studio Rzut envisage a complete departure from traditional architecture. The former assumes that the existing road network will remain in place, entirely built up with three-storey buildings along their entire length,

48 'Spółem', [in:] *Trouble in Paradise*, op. cit., pp. 220–221.

49 Ibidem, p. 227.

with the first story designated for transport, the second for housing, and the third for common spaces and greenhouse crops (Fig. 3).⁵⁰ All the land around the residential, agricultural and transport areas would remain unused, allowing residents to get in touch with nature. This is a complete departure from the rural way of living in favour of being close to transportation and public institutions, which is characteristic of the city, and towards a closer relationship with the community, collectively engaged in farming and production. New social relations, emerging as a result of adaptation to a new type of infrastructure, also appear in the design by Rzut, where a rural space is transformed into a large green power plant (Fig. 4).⁵¹ Energy production and distribution networks are becoming a driver of change in space and its utilisation.

In her book *Wreszcie jesteśmy we własnym domu*, Dorota Leśniak-Rychlak wrote that ‘although we are talking about the spatial order ... it is not beauty that is the actual issue at hand – it is the economics’, pointing out that focusing the debate on personal tastes does not elucidate anything – it actually muddies the picture.⁵² She notes that the concern for beauty and aesthetics in Poland often conceals a longing for ‘modernist world order’,⁵³ which on many levels is nothing but a classism-motivated need to exclude the Polish/rural Other from the elite community of good taste, often shaped by Western and Nordic models. The various euphemistic descriptions of the Polish rural architectural landscape as ‘unsatisfactory’ (to whom?) or ‘chaotic’, which appear in scholarly studies and reports, as well as the mentions of ubiquitous ‘ugliness’ cited in this paper, effectively distract everybody from the most relevant aspects of the issues with the Polish countryside. Leśniak-Rychlak suggests looking at economic and ecological issues and considering whether the contemporary model of ‘spatial development is sustainable and tenable in the context of climate catastrophe’.⁵⁴ The *Trouble in Paradise* project also makes it clear that considerations about the aesthetics of the space of the Polish countryside may soon become completely irrelevant and give way to the need to adapt to a changing climate and develop new models of social life that will guarantee effective adaptation.

50 ‘Agroskultura’, [in:] *Trouble in Paradise*, op. cit., pp. 210–211.

51 ‘Infrastruktura społeczna’, [in:] *Trouble in Paradise*, op. cit., pp. 230–231.

52 D. Leśniak-Rychlak, op. cit., p. 42.

53 Ibidem, p. 112.

54 Ibidem, p. 118.

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Abstract:

The paper undertakes considerations on the contemporary condition of rural architecture. The eponymous ‘issue with the countryside’ concerns both the widely criticised character of Polish architecture and rural areas, lambasted in literature and trade magazines, as well as a reference to two publications discussed in the text, released in 2020-2021 *Kłopoty ze sztuką ludową* by Ewa Klekot and *Trouble in Paradise*, published in connection with the exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture. The paper includes a summary of the main threads of discussion surrounding the architecture of the Polish countryside and the accusations levelled against it, such as the disruption of traditional spatial order by new construction, the superficial drawing on the tradition of the Polish manor house, and the superficial character of folk inspirations. Against this background, the author discussed two designs, which are distinguished by their approach to the Polish tradition of rural architecture: the *Polska Zagroda* (Polish Farmhouse) by BXB Studio Bogusław Barnaś, inspired by traditional Polish homestead, as well as the designs presented at the *Trouble in Paradise* exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture.

Keywords:

architecture, Polish countryside, folklore, local

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Marcin Laberschek

**MONUMENTAL FOLKLORE. ON
THE SPATIAL FIGURES OF THE
POLISH PROVINCE**

INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'province' has a relational character. That means that it cannot be explained without reference to another term, namely 'centre'.¹ The province is a place beyond the centre. This can be understood from two points of view. Firstly, the province can be perceived in a physical sense as a separate geographical area located outside large urban centres, e.g., outside communication, business or industrial centres. Secondly, the province is a mental creation: something beyond the centre of attention and interest, something of less importance. In this article, I am interested in the first apprehension of the term, without entering axiological disputes around the province-centre relationship.

Therefore, the province is the area that surrounds large urban hubs, spilling over around them. If we apply a fairly simple parallel, the province could be seen as a slice of cheese and the hubs as holes: they remain in certain interdependence with the cheese without belonging to it. However, I do not consider this territorial, geographical aspect relevant in itself. It only defines the limits of the subject of my interest. The subject are various types of spatial figures (objects) (e.g., memorials, sculptures, or installations), which are currently being erected in the Polish province, i.e., in the countryside and in small towns. By 'now', I mean objects that were created in the new political and social reality, i.e., after 1989. Therefore, I do not focus on traditional folk sculptures, including religious figures called 'świętki', which were created mainly from the Middle Ages to mid-20th century but have become less popular today. Similarly, I do not consider the monumental forms created in the period of the Polish People's Republic, which illustrated the mechanisation and industrialisation of the Polish province (e.g., Wiesław Adamski's monument to the potato from 1983 in Biesiekierz or a monument to the heater (radiator) from 1978, created by the employees of the Suchedniów Cast Iron Foundry). I do not refer, either, to contemporary spatial forms located in the province, but created by renowned artists included in the pantheon of art (e.g., a monumental chair designed by Tadeusz Kantor and created in 1995 near the Kantor House in Hucisko in the Gdów commune, or Daniel Rycharski's mobile *Monument to the Peasant* created in 2015, an object that 'toured' around Poland, staying in numerous villages and small towns where it was put on public display. In the present work, I focus on monument-like objects (not necessarily monuments as such) of contemporary creation, designed and produced by amateurs, local artists, or specialised companies; objects that stand in the contemporary Polish province. It is for these objects that I use the term monumental folklore.

1 B. Witosz, *Centrum – prowincja, peryferie, marginesy: wędrówka pojęć w świecie dyskursów, znaczeń i aksjologii*, in: *Wędrówka, podróż, migracja: w języku i kulturze*, ed. E. Biłas-Pleszak, J. Przyklenk, A. Rejter, K. Sujkowska-Sobisz, Katowice 2018, p. 13.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MONUMENTAL FOLKLORE AND GLOCAL CULTURE

The adjective 'monumental' refers to the specific form of these objects (their spatiality and size), thanks to which they can be given a common name of 'monuments'. However, the use of the term folklore requires a broader discussion. It is assumed that the creator of the concept of folklore was William Thomas, who first used it in 1846. Literally, it means 'popular knowledge' (*folk-lore*). Essentially, we can talk about two perspectives for understanding what folklore is and what it is not: a narrow one and a broad one. According to the narrow one, folklore means strictly expressions of folk art 'combining the effects of musical, verbal, mimic, and dance elements'.² The broad one includes art, but also other manifestations of widely understood folk culture: taking both the performative form (e.g., customs, rituals) and the oral one (e.g., stories, proverbs). There are also more holistic concepts, e.g., the one represented by Raymond Deloy Jameson³ who also included religious or philosophical assumptions in the folklore. It is worth noting that all the above (including rituals, philosophy, art) constitute the body of intangible, non-durable culture. However, according to some scholars (e.g., Archer Taylor), the elements of material culture – like sculptures, tools, or clothing – are folklore as well. This study shares the latter standpoint: I understand the spatial figures referred to herein as an element of folklore. The folklore of the modern province.

However, the folklore of the contemporary province is not a manifestation of folk culture in its traditional sense. Along with socio-cultural and technological changes in the 20th century, related in particular to universal access to education, media and means of transport, this culture was subject to modifications. However, it does not seem to be a complete change. The shape of the contemporary province's culture appears to be a kind of hybrid: the result of a combination of what is new – external influences previously alien to this culture – and elements specific to it, testifying to its identity, including the traditional ones, remaining from the more or less remote past. It is a culture that can be called 'glocal',⁴ the manifestations of which can be identified in individual examples of monumental folklore.

Before moving on to examples of monumental folklore, however, I would like to clarify two questions. Firstly, what exactly is a glocal culture?

2 R. Sulima, *Folklor i literatura. Szkice o kulturze i literaturze współczesnej*, Warszawa 1985, p. 7.

3 Quoted from: *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, ed. M. Leach, New York 1949.

4 This concept seldom appears in Polish scientific literature. It can be found, for example, in the work edited by Marta Flisykowska, *Design w kulturze globalnej*, Gdańsk 2015 where, however, it is not defined.

Secondly, can the category of folklore be applied to a culture other than folk culture? ‘Glocal’ is a term for something that is a combination of local and global, something that is the result of the phenomenon of glocalisation. Glocalisation, in turn, means ‘the mutual interaction of globalness and localness occurring in various areas of social life, such as politics, culture, and economics’.⁵ The term glocalisation was popularised in science by Ronald Robertson who transferred it, in the mid-1990s, from the domain of economic sciences to sociology.⁶ Its first appearance dates back in the 1980s, as the definition of a Japanese strategy for adapting global products distributed on international markets to the requirements of local contractors.⁷ The global standard of these goods was modified according to local customers’ expectations. However, it is worth emphasising that glocalisation also concerns the opposite phenomenon – adapting what is local to what is global – as Piotr Piotrowski has shown in relation to museum institutions. He pointed out that museums have a ‘local dimension taking place on the ground of a specific place’, but ‘they are woven into a global network’ as well.⁸ Of course, there are many other examples of glocalness. In addition to the aforementioned adaptations of global products to local specificities or entangling of local organisations in a global network, there are also many others to be mentioned, such as combining global and local elements in architectural or design projects,⁹ adapting local laws to international solutions, but also the influence of supra-local lifestyle on the attitudes and behaviour of local communities. All these illustrations of glocalness can be seen as a kind of cultural phenomenon, as manifestations of a glocal culture. A glocal culture which can be understood as a combination of a culture with a local dimension, associated with a specific place, and a global culture that does not have any specific place.

In this article, I will be searching for manifestations of glocal culture in the Polish province, looking at examples of monumental folklore. These objects combine elements of the local culture of the Polish province with influences of external global culture. Local, reflecting specific customs, attitudes and behaviours of the Polish province, e.g., folk, ludic

5 I. Biernacka-Ligęza, *Glocalizacja – byt wyobrażony czy realna potrzeba?* in: *Antynomie polityczności: artykuły, eseje i szkice dedykowane Profesor Barbarze Goli*, ed. K. Minkner, L. Rubisz, Opole, pp. 163–170.

6 E. Rewers, *Transkulturowość czy glocalność? Dwa dyskursy o kondycji ponowoczesnej*, ‘ER(R)GO. Teoria–Literatura–Kultura’ 2003, No. 1 (6), pp. 53–65; A.B. Strawińska, *Glocalizacja. Próba kulturowej definicji zjawiska*, ‘Białostockie Archiwum Językowe’ 20: 2020, pp. 285–302.

7 D. Konopka, *Glocalizacja zaufania publicznego jako nowa kategoria socjoekonomiczna*, *Kwartalnik Nauk o Przedsiębiorstwie* 2015, No. 3, pp. 20–29.

8 P. Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne*, Poznań 2011, p. 47.

9 *Design w kulturze glocalnej*, Gdańsk 2015.

Therefore, the province is the area that surrounds large urban hubs, spilling over around them. If we apply a fairly simple parallel, the province could be seen as a slice of cheese and the hubs as holes: they remain in certain interdependence with the cheese without belonging to it. However, I do not consider this territorial, geographical aspect relevant in itself. It only defines the limits of the subject of my interest. The subject are various types of spatial figures (objects) (e.g., memorials, sculptures, or installations), which are currently being erected in the Polish province, i.e., in the countryside and in small towns.

(entertainment and fun), natural, agrarian, but also traditionalistic and identity-related, including patriotic ones. The global one, which I call, after Roch Sulima¹⁰ and Marcin Napiórkowski,¹¹ ‘the culture of everyday life’,¹² maintained by ‘standardised supporting regimes’, i.e., the same brands, characters, films, musical works, broadcasts, pieces of information and expert advice, operating instructions, and recipes that shape the same social attitudes that standardise people’s lifestyle and make this unified mechanism last. This global culture of everyday life reaches out, through the media, to local communities and unifies their way of thinking and behaviour, including creativity. These local and global cultural patterns are manifested on various levels of contemporary monumental folklore: in the themes undertaken, in creative solutions (style, form, and material used), in the function performed by these objects, as well as in the ways and places of their exposure. These figures therefore cross a modern (cosmopolitan-media) and traditional (Polish-provincial) model of life. Today’s folklore contains both components.

I asked one more question above: can the category of folklore be applied to a culture other than folk culture? I would like to answer it here. I mentioned earlier that the contemporary Polish province cannot be defined by the concept of folk culture. There is no such culture anymore. Meanwhile, folklore in its traditional understanding was associated precisely with folk culture. However, in anthropology and folklore, the term folklore is also used in relation to contemporary communities. In this sense, we talk about contemporary folklore,¹³ which is produced and reproduced not only through direct interpersonal contacts as in the past, but also through media messages. It occurs in various currently existing cultures and subcultures (e.g., sport fans or artistic circles), or in specific environments, such as urban or rural ones.¹⁴ The latter point of view is important here. This work, however, is only about contemporary rural folklore. Small cities, i.e., all areas except for large Polish agglomerations, are also the focus of my interest. Therefore, I use a broader term and talk about the folklore of the Polish province. Of course, as I pointed out at the beginning, I do not have a derogatory attitude towards the term ‘province’. On the contrary, I am fascinated by the originality of the monumental (or monumental-like) works in local Poland.

10 R. Sulima, *Moda na codzienność. Kategoria „codziennosci” w kulturze ponowoczesnej*, „Kultura Współczesna” 2001, No. 4, pp. 171–187.

11 M. Napiórkowski, *Kod kapitalizmu*, Warszawa 2019.

12 R. Sulima, *Moda na codzienność*, op. cit., p. 182.

13 J. Burszta, *Folklor*, in: *Słownik etnologiczny. Terminy ogólne*, ed. Z. Staszczak, Warszawa – Poznań 1987.

14 *Ibidem.*

ILLUSTRATIONS OF MONUMENTAL FOLKLORE

Before attempting to interpret and understand the characteristics of contemporary spatial objects erected in the Polish province and studying which of these features can be perceived as a manifestation of a glocal culture (combining local and global elements), I would like to present and briefly discuss several examples of such objects first. The choice of this dozen was not accidental. I tried to identify unique, exceptional objects: not only in terms of dimensions, but also the form, place of exposure, circumstances of creation, performed function, and communicated content. Therefore, I did not consider monuments that are commonly found and mutually copied, such as figures standing near car workshops and made of worn-out car parts, gnomes and other garden objects popular in the province, or common welcoming posts located in front of pensions and bars. Instead, I was guided by the originality of the objects, revealing what is 'behind the scenes' of the ingenuity of the Polish province and what, arouses surprise followed by various kinds of extreme sensations among observers: from astonishment to bursts of laughter, from admiration to confusion – where emotionality is much more important than aesthetic rapture. I am aware, of course, that there are more objects of this type than the ones I have described here. However, this dozen or so examples are sufficient to indicate certain characteristic and motives, important from the point of view of the present study. I also conducted an uncomplicated classification of these objects and presented them in the following four categories: human figures, plants, animals, and mythical characters.

It is worth mentioning that the present study is the first research attempt to understand what these objects are. However, there were earlier artistic projects whose authors showed interest in this kind of figures. The first one is an ongoing project in the field of visual arts, conducted by Andrzej Tobis who photographs, inter alia, these types of structures and uses them as illustrations in his work entitled *A-Z. Słownik ilustrowany języka niemieckiego i polskiego*¹⁵ [A-Z. The Illustrated Dictionary of the German and Polish Language]. The other project, a literary one, is Piotr Marecki's book *Polska przydrożna*¹⁶ [Roadside Poland]; when visiting small Polish towns and talking with locals, the author photographed unusual exhibits he would encounter during his journey.

15 A. Tobis, *A-Z. Słownik ilustrowany języka niemieckiego i polskiego*, Warszawa 2014.

16 P. Marecki, *Polska przydrożna*, Wołowiec 2020.

Fig. 1 The monument of a 'stickman' reading a book on the roof of the Primary School in Deszczno. Photo owned by: The Municipal Office in Deszczno, Courtesy of the Municipal Office in Deszczno



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I. MONUMENTAL HUMAN FIGURES

Human figures may take a more or less figurative form. In 2011, on the roof of the primary school building in the town of Deszczno in the Lubuskie Voivodeship, a 6-meter figure of a 'man', also called a *stickman* (from English) was created (Fig. 1). The figure can be called a humanoid, as it is barely a schematic representation of a human figure: it resembles a human being, although it is not one. The monumental figure looks like the ones that can be found in GIFs circulating online, it also resembles figures from road signs. Simplified human images from signs are often equipped with appropriate artifacts (e.g., a shovel) and have a clear message. The case is similar for the figure from Deszczno, holding a book; therefore, it is a symbol of a diligent student. That was, by the way, the idea conceived by the originator of the structure: the mayor of Deszczno, Jacek Wójcicki. The humorous aspect was equally important here. It is not a case of sophisticated humour, but rather its uncomplicated, light, ludic kind. The project was executed by the mayor's cousin, Agata Popiel, and the whole project was created in Janusz Tałuć's Metalwork Studio in Białystok. The stickman is made of polystyrene covered with glass fibre and resin; inside, it has a steel carcass.

Janusz Tałuć's Metalwork Studio in Białystok also made another object with a similar technique. It is a monumental, 8-metre-long, 8 ton statue of the *Demoness* standing in Będzieszyn near Pruszcz Gdański in the

Pomeranian Voivodeship. The object can be treated as an advertising monument, as it is displayed right next to the petrol station and refers to its original name Demon (currently, the station bears the name Avia). Besides, the monument has no thematic connection to the station – its function is most likely to attract the drivers' attention and encourage them to use the station. Pictures of the figure that circulate in social media are a clear manifestation that it does 'attract attention'. Through her attire and elements of armour, as well as a spade she holds in her hand, the statue resembles a character from



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Fig. 2 The figure of a DJ in front of the Energy 2000 club in Przytkowice. Photo: from the author's archive.

computer games or fantasy films. Its external appearance could therefore be the result of the influence of mass culture, inspired by its manifestations. Meanwhile, the Demon (character name and station name) is a reference to local beliefs and folk mythologies.

Two objects that follow also refer to mass culture. First of all, we are talking about the statue of Robert Lewandowski, which is another advertisement of a petrol station located in Czarna Woda near Czersk (Pomeranian Voivodeship). Lewandowski is also made of plastic and arouses the travellers' interest just the same. The other one is a monument of a DJ, standing in front of the 'Energy 2000' club and disco in Przytkowice, Małopolska Voivodeship. The figure of the DJ indicates the extent of change in the contemporary musical culture of the Polish province, where traditional bands have been outcompeted by the modern, western, urban mix culture. The monumental DJ is a figure from the future, as evidenced by the

Fig. 3. 4 The monument of a strawberry on the premises of the Sadpol Garden Centre in Wierzbica (June 2020). Photo: Katarzyna Turko, Source: blog.palaczkropki.pl, Courtesy of Katarzyna Turko



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metallic shade of his skin. Associations with the future also provide information about the cultural changes of the local Poland.

II. MONUMENTAL PLANTS

Plant objects are another category of monuments discussed here. The figures to be noticed are: a strawberry, a plum, two statues of mushrooms, a palm tree, and a Christmas tree. The strawberry of several metres (Figures 2 and 3) should be called an installation, as it is an object made of a steel carcass covered with synthetic (most likely) canvas. The Gargantuan strawberry is an advertising figure: it was installed at the Garden Centre ‘Sadpol’ in Wierzbica village near Serock in the Mazovian Voivodeship. The object is a particular type of promotional tool, as its informational function is less important here. What comes to the fore is the persuasive function where eliciting positive emotional states is a means of influencing the recipients. Currently, the strawberry is no longer standing, but is on its side and is decaying.

A sculpture of a yellow plum, located in Lipowa near Żywiec, plays a similar role. This object is also associated with the cultivation of fruit, specifically the Lipowa ‘żniwka’ [*harvest plum*] variety; however, it does not advertise any specific farm, but the entire municipality of Lipowa, called the ‘capital of the yellow plum’. The figure can therefore be treated as a

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Fig. 5 The monument of a mushroom on the premises of the Sieraków Landscape Park. Photo: mos810 Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lezczeki_monument_2001_\(2\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lezczeki_monument_2001_(2).JPG) (Creative Commons)

totem of the local community. The sculpture was unveiled in the centre of Lipowa in 2015, on the occasion of the communal Plum Festival. It is sculpted in linden or poplar wood by local artist Michał Pawlik. The use of wood as a material for the creation of a promotional object should currently be considered as exceptional. It is a different kind of materials are used more frequently; besides, such an approach does not match current environment-friendly trends. However, the wooden figure is a reference to local sculptural traditions.

It is also as specific advertisement of the region and, above all, a sort of ‘magnet’ for tourists, that we should treat the monument of a mushroom (Figure 4) standing in the Sieraków Landscape Park, near the village of Łęczeczki and the Chrzypskie Lake. Besides the connection with the local natural environment, the stone monument has yet another meaning: it refers to contemporary culture and is a symbol of the new millennium; as the inscription on the sculpture reads, it is ‘the first monument on the globe to be unveiled in the third millennium’. The slogan may well reflect reality, as the monument – designed by Jerzy Stasiewski and produced by Zbigniew Wawrzyniak – was ceremonially unveiled one minute after midnight on 1 January 2001.

Another monument of a mushroom stands in Małopolska and is also a record-breaker in its own way. In this case, it is not the moment of erecting the monument that matters: the record was associated with the mushroom to which the monument was dedicated. The structure standing in front of the ‘Oberża pod Grzybem’ [The Mushroom Inn] in Piotrkowice (Tarnów district), is a commemoration of the ‘cauliflower mushroom’ found in Piotrkowice by Henryk Witkiewicz in 1977. The mushroom weighed 15 kilograms and was over a metre in diameter. The specimen received a distinction confirmed by a special entry in the Guinness Book of Records. The monument in front of the restaurant does have a promotional meaning – it is an advertisement – but it can also be interpreted in

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Fig. 5.7 The structure of an illuminated palm tree in front of the ‘Marco Polo, Alkohole Świata’ shop in Lipno. Photo: Łukasz Klaban, Courtesy of Łukasz Klaban

Fig. 5.6 The structure of a palm tree (and of a Christmas tree in the background of the photo) in front of the ‘Marco Polo, Alkohole Świata’ shop in Lipno. Photo: Łukasz Klaban, Courtesy of Łukasz Klaban

a broader and more traditional context as it refers to the Polish custom of mushroom picking.

The last two objects in this category also need to be assigned an advertising function. The Christmas tree and palm installations (Figures 5 and 6) stand in front of the off-licence shop ‘Marco Polo. Alkohole Świata’ [Liquors of the World] in the small town of Lipno in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. In 2017, a Christmas tree over 3.5 metres tall was created, followed two years later by a palm tree almost 5 metres tall. The originator of both installations was Łukasz Klaban, the shop owner, who produced them together with his friends: Wiesio (both trees) and Alan (the Christmas tree). The main material of the structure was empty 100-ml vodka bottles (popularly [called] ‘baby monkeys’), fastened to previously prepared frameworks with silicone. The palm leaves were mounted with cable ties. Nearly 10,000 bottles were used to make the Christmas tree; for the palm, there were about 4,000 of them. As the author of the project pointed out, the objects should also be perceived in the environmental aspect, related to the re-use of glass packaging. There were also plans to apply for an entry of the structure in the Guinness Book of Records. Łukasz Klaban emphasises that the objects attract the attention of people, not only the inhabitants of Lipno. Interest is aroused not only by the form itself, but also by the coloured LED lighting, which is an integral part of both monumental plants.

III. MONUMENTAL ANIMALS

There are also monumental likenesses of animals in various places of local Poland. Four objects are particularly interesting due to their form and communicated content: a giraffe, a shark, a gorilla, and a penguin. The giraffe is standing right next to the ‘Delikatesy Albo’ shop in Rumia in the Pomeranian Voivodeship. This structure, too, should be treated as an advertising object: it attracts the eyes of travellers driving down national road No. 6 and encourages them to shop. What makes the animal stand

Fig. 5 9 A shark on the roof of the building in the Headington district of Oxford, England. Photo: Henry Flower, Source: Wikimedia Commons

Fig. 5 8 A shark on the roof of the Bryza Bar in Lubniewice. Photo: Marek Porocki, Courtesy of Marek Porocki

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out is, first of all, its height: it measures 12.6 m. The shop's former website contained the information that, owing to these dimensions, the giraffe was entered in the Guinness Book of Records. While this information could not be confirmed, it has spread as a rumour across the Internet and is treated as true. Social media contain many memes about the animal; one of them, for instance, consists of three photos of various monuments and a caption that 'Every city has its own symbol': Świebodzin – the monument to Jesus, Warsaw – the Palace of Culture, and Rumia – the giraffe. Interestingly, the giraffe was made of wicker, woven using a traditional technique on a steel carcass. Originally, the object was illuminated. The animal was created on the initiative of Stanisław Skolimowski, the owner of 'Delikatesy Albo', by Zygmunt Babiarcz's Wicker Factory in Oleśnica in Lower Silesia. It appeared in front of the store in Rumia in 2003.

No less interesting is the shark, which pierces the roof of the 'Bryza' Bar in Lubniewice in the Lubuskie Voivodeship (Fig. 7). Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine what the circumstances of the construction were or what material was used for it. We can only guess the promotional function of the object, as well as what it was inspired by. A similar shark (Fig. 8) is located on the roof of a residential building in the Headington district of Oxford, England, and was commissioned by Bill Heine, the owner of the property, in 1986 (in March 2022, the property was entered on the Oxford cultural heritage list). Heine claims his creation was motivated by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster that had taken place in April 1986. In the case of the shark from Lubniewice, the motif was probably different, although one cannot resist the impression that the Polish animal is a copy of its English counterpart, although not in the strict sense.

Another monumental animal-themed advertisement is the gorilla from Mazurowice in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. In Mazurowice, by national road No. 94 between Wrocław and Legnica, is the 'Słowianka' Inn – and it was precisely in front of it that a plastic statue of a gorilla stood. It was standing upright when – probably in 2021 – it was removed. However, coaxing and luring potential customers driving down the national road was only the most obvious function of the object. The gorilla was not an ordinary one: it was a statue of the gorilla-monster King Kong. Therefore, there is a clear combination of a homey element (the name of the inn: 'Słowianka' [The Slav Girl]) and mass culture (the figure of King Kong). However, it was not just the reference to the American ('King Kong' is an American movie) character, as it could be read on the boards next to the animal. There was also an intention of presenting Merian Caldwell Cooper, the first director of 'King Kong' from 1933, and his connection with Poland. Cooper was not only an artist, but also a pilot who served in the Polish air force during the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920. Thus, the King Kong statue combined different identities: local and traditional, global and popular.



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be read on one of the portals.¹⁷ It has a double history. Before its installation in Doły Biskupie, it was most likely an advertising statue as it represents the hero of the cartoon *Surf's Up* from 2007, a penguin named Cody Maverick.¹⁸ When the statue lost its original purpose, it was purchased by the amateur artist from Doły Biskupie, Jerzy Trojanowski. He repaired it, then painted colourful elements of clothing and put the multicoloured figure, thus prepared, on display. Jerzy Trojanowski's house in Doły Biskupie is also covered with colourful motifs and lighting. Around the house stand many different figures from fairy tales and legends. This 'motley' multi-colourism may seem original in its own way; however, it fits into the aesthetics of traditional folklore and can be found at local fairs to this day.

17 A. Rymarczyk, *No i przestało padać*, 'Świętokrzyskie Włóczęgi', <http://swietokrzyskiewloczegi.blogspot.com/2017/09/no-i-przestao-padac.html> [accessed 28 April 2022].

18 K. Turczyńska, *Ciekawe miejsca w Świętokrzyskiem – miejsca mniej popularne na szlakach turystycznych. Znasz je wszystkie?*, 'Skomplikowane', <https://skomplikowane.pl/na-trasie/ciekawe-miejsca-w-swietokrzyskiem/> [accessed 28 April 2022].

IV. MONUMENTAL MYTHICAL FIGURES

The last group of monuments located in the Polish province are representations of mythical figures, referring to symbolic stories, legends, and memories rooted in social identity and strengthening it at the same time. Two objects are interesting here: Świętowit and the Dragoness. Świętowit (Fig. 10) is located in the village of Boria, in the municipality of Ćmielów, in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship. As the name suggests, the object is a representation of Polabian Slavs' most important deity whose

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Fig. 11 The figure of Świętowit in Boria in the Świętokrzyskie Province.
Photo: Jakub Hatan, Source: *Wikimedia Commons*

characteristic feature is that it has four faces. This can also be seen in the figure of Świątowit of Boria, produced in 2006 by Stanisław Skalski, a local amateur artist. It can be said that Świątowit was created using the recycling method, as all its elements are waste, namely: used metal boilers, old blind strips, and springs obtained from old couches. These elements are attached to a decommissioned power pole. The object is therefore a combination of new (environmentalist) trends with traditional cultural influences (old beliefs). Of course, it should be noted that these traditional influences, however, do not have a local character referred to in this work. They are not a manifestation of the culture of the Polish province, but the culture of old communities inhabiting the areas of Central and Eastern Europe in pre-Christian times. This kind of localness, therefore, goes beyond the province-centre division adopted here. On the other hand, it is worth emphasising that it is not an element of the global culture of everyday life.

Another figure combining tradition with modernity is the dragoness from Baranów Sandomierski. The modernity related to here is not the environment-friendly approach, but a reference to the modernity in which the adult world mixes with the children's world. An example of such a 'mix' are cartoons targeted at both age groups at the same time or elements of adult clothing with prints of characters associated with the world of several-year-olds or teenagers. The figure of the dragoness, produced by PHU Malpol from Nowa Sól, exhibited in 2013 in the vicinity of the late Renaissance castle in Baranów Sandomierski in Podkarpackie Province, fits into the same aesthetics. The inclusion of the dragoness in the list of monumental folklore objects may raise doubts, especially as it resembles an enlarged toy, in addition to being installed in a playground. Therefore, the question may arise whether it is an object like many others in Polish parks and recreation areas for children and families. The intention of erecting the figure was, on the one hand, ludic, on the other, 'serious' and referring to two traditions: the Krakow legend of the Wawel Dragon, as Jacek Hynowski, mayor of Baranów Sandomierski, emphasised,¹⁹ and the local one, related to the local tale of a dragon that lived in the basement of the Baranów castle and fed on court maids. The Dragoness of Baranów Sandomierski should therefore be seen as a unique figure for two reasons: as an element of contemporary culture – a popular attraction for the youngest – and as an element of folklore and tradition.

19 K. Tajs, *Smok na zakończenie zmian w Baranowie Sandomierskim*, 'Echodnia.eu', <https://echodnia.eu/podkarpackie/smok-na-zakonczenie-zmian-w-baranowie-sandomierskim/ar/8709179> [accessed 28 April 2022].

MANIFESTATIONS OF GLOCAL CULTURE IN MONUMENTAL FOLKLORE

It can be noted that the presented examples of monumental folklore are a material reflection of the influence of two currents in culture: the global and the local one. They can therefore be perceived as a spatial manifestation of the phenomenon of the glocal culture: a combination of what is global (modern, fashionable, standardised and media-related, i.e., connected with the culture of everyday life) and what is local (vernacular, traditional, homey). These two currents permeate, fuse, mutually reinterpret and mutate.²⁰ Just like the case is for McDonald's food (e.g., the WieśMac burger as a combination of global and local elements), spatial objects in the Polish province also undergo this process (e.g., an object made of traditional material – wicker – that aspires to be 'global' using

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47.7 (D.A.) die Klinge

47.7 (D.W.) klinga

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190.3 (D.A.) die Weinbrandflasche

190.3 (D.W.) butelka do wódki

the alleged Guinness record). The contemporary monumental folklore is, therefore, a hybrid of sorts: its shape is influenced by two different currents. Different, but combinable.

The global culture, i.e., the modern culture of everyday life, is visible in monumental folklore in several characteristic aspects. First of all,

20 A. Dylus, *Globalizacja. Refleksje etyczne*, Wrocław 2005.

in arousing emotional sensations, sometimes even a shock. The literature emphasises that ‘design and style, as well as humour and visual surprises are important features of contemporary culture’.²¹ It takes a special approach to draw the attention of a contemporary person, immersed in the world of consumption, media and advertising. Such an approach can be seen in activities which apply the principles of the currently popular experience marketing.²² A particular type of experience can be provoked by objects which are untypical, e.g., oversized (the strawberry), surprising (e.g., the Demoness) or atypically situated (e.g., the stickman on the roof). This unusualness, but often also specific exaggeration visible in the form and manner of exposing the figures discussed here, make them original, unique. Therefore, those figures arouse general interest and become the main motif of memes, online stories, or even a source of inspiration for artists. An example – among others – may be the aforementioned Andrzej Tobis who treats objects of this type as a visual commentary on the entries for his original adaptation of the *Bildwörterbuch Deutsch und Polnisch* dictionary published in 1954. Tobis’s version, entitled *A-Z. Słownik ilustrowany języka niemieckiego i polskiego*, features some of the figures analysed here, for example: the Demoness (entry: ‘klinga’ – blade) and palm (entry: ‘butelka do wódki’ – vodka bottle) (Fig. 11 and 12).

Emotional sensations are the first dimension of global culture present in the monuments of the Polish province. Second, this culture manifests itself in their infantilism. ‘An infantile monument is one that breaks with the seriousness represented by a mature person; one in which the specific elements of children’s play, humour and light-heartedness stand out’.²³ The category of infantilism includes the figures of Robert Lewandowski, the dragoness, and the penguin. Third, the global culture of everyday life can be found in the references to the world of advertising, media, and mass culture. Many contemporary objects erected in the Polish province are advertising ones, both those related to the activities of specific companies (e.g., the ‘Słowianka’ bar with King Kong, the petrol station with the Demoness, the inn with the mushroom monument); they also promote Polish places and regions (e.g., Lipowa and the plum monument). Others refer to the content distributed through the media:

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- 21 B. Hultén, N. Broweus, M. van Dijk, *Marketing sensoryczny*, transl. G. Dąbkowski, Warszawa 2011, p. 36.
- 22 M. Kostera, *Zarządzanie na rynku doznań*, in: *Nowe kierunki w organizacji i zarządzaniu*, ed. B. Glinka, M. Kostera, Warszawa 2012, pp. 359–375; M. Boguszewicz-Kreft, *Marketing doświadczeń. Jak poruszyć zmysły, zaangażować emocje, zdobyć lojalność klientów*, Warszawa 2013.
- 23 M. Laberschek, *Znaczenie pomników przedsiębiorstw w przestrzeni społecznej*, ‘Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej’, 15: 2019, No. 3, p. 156.

sport (Robert Lewandowski), films (King Kong, the penguin), memes (the shark in the roof, the giraffe), travel (the palm and the giraffe), culture of record-breaking (the giraffe, both monuments of mushrooms, the Christmas tree). Fourth, the objects in the Polish province also contain contemporary environment-friendly motifs. We are referring here to the installations representing Świątowit, the palm tree, and the Christmas tree. Fifth, monumental folklore is also associated with modern rituals, e.g., waste segregation (the palm tree made of bottles) or New Year's ceremonies (symbolised by the stone monument of the mushroom). Sixth, some objects in the local Poland are created from sculptural materials typical of the present day, e.g., plastic or waste.

In the monumental folklore objects gathered and described here, we can also notice the manifestations of a different culture: the local (traditional) Polish one. These manifestations are present at several different levels. First, through the appearance of traditional natural motifs (in the monuments of mushrooms, for instance). Second, through the presence of elements of local farming (plum and strawberry). Third, there are references to native rituals, such as Christmas (the Christmas tree), mushroom picking (the monuments of mushrooms), and the celebrative consumption of strong liquors (the Christmas tree and the palm tree made of vodka bottles). Fourth, some objects contain visible signs of attachment to the local heritage. On the one hand, these are objects with the characteristic element of 'Polishness' (the figure of Robert Lewandowski, Dragons, or even King Kong), and of 'Slavicness' (the Świątowit installation) on the other hand. Some of the buildings, besides referring to the native tradition themselves, are also associated with buildings with familiar-sounding names such as both inns (the Piotrkowice mushroom and King Kong from Mazurowice). Fifth, the monuments are made of materials that can be considered traditional: wood (the plum), stone (one of the mushrooms) and wicker (the giraffe). Sixth and finally, some figures have an element of local ludicism (e.g., the penguin).

SUMMARY

As it results from the above comparison, monumental folklore objects contain features of the culture of everyday life (reflecting the processes of globalisation) and of local culture. The strawberry, for instance, is associated with local plant cultivation, but it is also an advertisement, not unlike the Christmas tree which is a symbol of traditional holidays and, simultaneously, an environmentally-friendly structure. However, it is worth emphasising that the manifestations of both cultures occur to varying degrees in different objects. Some figures are closer to the local culture (the plum), and those where native motifs are virtually invisible (the stickman on the school building) and localness is primarily related to the place where

they were exposed. Therefore, it seems impossible to point out an object that would be a representative of contemporary monumental folklore of the Polish province and an appropriate indicator, a point of reference for the others; one which could be said to contain the perfect proportions of elements of global and local culture.

We can also get the impression that this type of creativity is a certain process, that it is changing, and that globalisation phenomena play an important role in it. Perhaps, under the standardising influence of the media, monumental folklore objects are becoming more and more similar in terms of subject, creative methods, function and manner of exposure on the one hand – while on the other hand, they are less and less related to the identity of the place in which they are located. However, these assumptions cannot be verified without conducting appropriate research. That also means a study on the changes that these objects have undergone over the years, e.g., in the scope of topics tackled, their form, or the materials used.

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Abstract:

The category of monumental folklore, used in the article, refers to contemporary monumental spatial objects erected in the Polish province. The text presents and describes several objects from that category, classified into four groups: monumental human figures, monumental plants, monumental animals, and monumental mythical figures. An interpretation of these objects was also made, in connection with the type of contemporary provincial culture they manifest. From the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that contemporary monumental folklore objects are a manifestation of glocal culture, being at the same time ‘immersed’ in two types of culture: the local (traditional) one and the global (modern) one.

Keywords:

monumental folklore, monumental objects, culture of contemporary province, glocalisation, glocal culture

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Olga Drenda

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CIVILISATION OF OLD TIGHTS?

‘Today, we are still coping with the civilisation of septic tanks; we still have to manage, on our Polish scale, the growing civilisation of old tyres, old jumpers, old tights; all of this is still subject to spontaneous and unspecialised processing and absorption or reuse’,¹ wrote Roch Sulima in his well-known essay on the symbolism of the FSO Syrena car, in which he traced its life and death, from faithful companion of (especially) the farmer to the ‘miraculous junk or object of joyful, ritualistic destruction, when Poland was flooded by imported used cars arrived after the political transformation. The old car nicknamed ‘Sock’ literally grew into car parks, gained a new life as a chicken coop or a canopy in a timber yard, but was sometimes also set on fire or covered in graffiti – the time of the ‘burning Syrenas’ coincided with an explosion of subcultural youth activity and the peak of often aggressive expression. Visually, on the level of simple cadres- -icons, this period is perfectly illustrated by the legend of the Warsaw music club Fugazi, which operated for less than a year in the building of the former w-z cinema. It provided the setting for the explosion of underground creativity, which consisted not only of the facility (cinema) deprived of its original function, but also of the characteristic decoration in the form of souvenirs of the just-ended communist era, transformed through joyful destruction. Syrenas, East German Trabants, as well as the Jelcz buses nicknamed ‘Cucumber’ with removed equipment and painted in expressive patterns became an iconic element of the club’s décor and a symbol of the energy of Poland at the beginning of the decade called by Rafał Książek ‘a wild thing’.²

Sulima wrote down his observations in the 1990s and at the turn of the millennium. Indicating this timeframe is important, as it allows us to follow more closely the evolution of attitudes to the object and its reuse, ranging from practical necessity, imaginative ad hoc recycling, the luxury of destruction or, finally, a hobby: useful but not necessary. The sequences of smaller and larger ‘ends of the world’ that can be traced in Poland’s recent history – having a symbolic, social, economic or geographic nature – were the background but also the modelling factor for this evolution. The administrative reform and the dismantling or downsizing of numerous industrial centres redefined the relationship between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’, when once important localities lost much of their importance. At the same time, economic uncertainty, caused by protracted high unemployment and loss of financial stability, prolonged the persistence of the ‘civilisation of old tyres and tights’. Abandoning the state, industrial or state farm property made large areas of towns and villages become a ‘no-man’s land’, which was invaded by scrap collectors, DIY enthusiasts, collectors, young beer lovers or graffiti artists and, finally, by nature. In such areas, objects were given all sorts of new uses.

1 R. Sulima, *Antropologia codzienności*, Kraków 2000, p. 48.

2 Cf. R. Książek, *Dzika rzecz. Polska muzyka i transformacja 1989–1993*, Wołowiec 2020; M. Podolec, *Fugazi Music Club*, Warszawa 2013.

BOUNDARIES OF ONE'S DISTRICT

When we speak nowadays of the 'ends of the world', 'edges', 'margins', it is easy to feel ambivalence or disorientation in terms of time and space. Post-war Poland in general and post-communist Poland in particular is inextricably linked to the blurring of boundaries, the coexistence of different orders, the non-obvious. Since the times of the Polish People's Republic, following the human migration and the homogenisation of culture, the relationship between town and country has been intensely blurred, enclaves of rurality have been created in the cities and the urban lifestyle has spread to the countryside. In the 21st century in Poland, we are increasingly moving towards the inter-urban (*Zwischenstadt*),³ a space that blurs the boundaries of city, suburb and province, of the global and the local. The aforementioned Roch Sulima paid much attention to gardening at allotment gardens treated as enclaves that allow, or even invite, the re-evaluation of categories. 'Workers' Allotment Gardens are ultimately the world of degraded man, in the sense in which one can speak of man being pushed not only to the periphery of industrial civilisation, but also to the periphery of the natural world. This man, today, cannot define his identity solely in a natural environment ('rurality') or in an exclusively urban environment ('urbanity'),⁴ writes Sulima. 'Everything can turn out useful one day' is one of the principles that, according to the same author, governed the semiotic universe of allotment gardens, a 'paradoxical space': both urban and rural, neither fully belonging to the natural world nor to the culture, neither to rest nor to work, one in which 'the industrial builds the natural',⁵ and where unused objects gain new life.

Spontaneous invention and creativity in a sort of a way automatically leads to associations towards an imagined, ideal rural world, where nothing can be wasted, and where thriftiness is the exemplary attitude. Hence my call for caution in the use of the tempting – and popular in the contemporary discourse – terms of 'province' or 'periphery', as each of them is associated with the risk of a self-fulfilling prophecy of some kind of opposition, whereas the reality is sometimes more complicated. 'Let us remember: the province is the middle, my middle. Moreover: province is some kind of a close, concrete "here", contrasted with a more indefinite "there" (...) because if the inhabitant of a province knows one thing with an unshakable certainty, it is for sure that "life is elsewhere"', wrote Sławomir Mrożek, pointing to the tension made of nostalgia and claustrophobia which impregnates the discourse about the province. However, he later

3 T. Sieverts, *Cities without Cities: An interpretation of the Zwischenstadt*, London 2003, p. 49.

4 Ibidem, p. 24.

5 Ibidem, p. 26.



added that the borders of these worlds are sometimes fluid. ‘Meanwhile, every person, originating from the province or not, is a province himself. The area of each individual consciousness is a province. Wherever the man goes, he always carries the boundaries of his district with him.’⁶

So, let us stretch these boundaries a little and try to swim with the current of ambiguity. Ingenuity and recycling, whether motivated by necessity or choice, is the domain of not only the farmer or the allotment holder, but also the artist, while the spontaneous engineering, architectural or decorative activities spread across the cities, including the largest ones. This has been evidenced, among other things, by the research carried out by a team led by Marek Krajewski, later included in the collective publication *Niewidzialne miasto* [Invisible City]. The research was carried out in several localities and consisted of looking for their hidden, unprogrammed and ad hoc dimension, manifested in amateur gardens, spontaneously arranged rest and meeting places, balcony decorations. The results revealed a map of a ‘parallel world’, present in courtyards, passages, on wastelands, in the third landscape, filling the urban space in its discontinuities, breaches and gaps. Similar explorations of the ‘inter-urbanity’ can be found in the work of artists who openly admit their rurality, provincialism or at least their spiritual solidarity with this ambivalent and often misunderstood space. Andrzej Tobis in his project *a-z. Educational Displays* presents captioned objects from the eponymous dictionary encountered ‘somewhere outdoors’, everywhere and nowhere, although enthusiasts of explorations and expeditions are able to locate them. Whether in the countryside or in the city, the decision of adding an object to the *Dictionary* is usually motivated by the absurdity, the paradox, the stubborn persistence of temporary solutions, the ad hoc ingenuity. Maciej Cholewa, a native of the Silesian town of Radzionków, emphasises the uniqueness and richness of his hometown, a typical rural-urban locality, as evidenced by the alternating exclusion of the village from the boundaries of the city of Bytom and its reincorporation. Cholewa photographs local symbols and peculiarities, makes wickets inspired by the self-welded fences common in the allotment gardens, and finally makes a symbolic connection between Radzionków and the sea (using the town’s synecdoche in the form of a model of the once actually existing general cargo ship *MS Radzionków*). Bartosz Zaskórski, on the other hand, explores the incredibility of a

6 S. Mrozek, *Małe listy*, Kraków 1982, p. 15.

seemingly idyllic rural space, but also the potential for the development of the imagination of a man living in relative isolation and exposed to random inspiration. His exhibition, organised together with his father Tomasz, *Spaceship as Big as Half a Village*, presents the possibilities for the development of such an imagination and its surprising mutations, which are possible when it is left with sufficient leeway, with space for randomly chosen books from the library, computer games and the forest. Zaskórski's current artistic work is extending the uncanny to wider territory, as evidenced by his comic book with action set in the alternative Postapoland. All of these are visions of a world which is most comfortable for, on the one hand, the 'degraded' man: a scrap-collector or a rural outsider, and, on the other, a flaneur or an artist. These categories of people have different economic status, they differ in the extent of what they can afford their degree of comfort in life, but they happen to appear in one and the same person or community.

SELF-RESOURCEFUL LIFE

'Ends of the world' can represent places and non-places, but also transitions from one reality to another, caesuras in life, private apocalypses. Such fates are represented by the protagonists of Tomasz Rakowski's book *Łowcy, zbieracze, praktycy niemocy* (Hunters, Collectors, Practitioners of Impotence) – people whose stable world came to an end with the processes of privatisation after 1989 and who were condemned by the ruthless logic of narrowly understood profitability to functioning outside society, where, relying on self-reliance and mutual aid, they had to organise life on their own terms. These are farmers from the Kielce region who, faced with the liquidation of the cooperative that used to buy their crops, have turned into herbalists, miners from Walbrzych, extracting coal in illegal bootleg mining after the mines were closed, and finally scrap collectors – outsiders in one of Poland's richest municipalities (Kleszczów), living in makeshift houses on the border of a large opencast mine and living off materials found in the dumps of the Bełchatów mine. Living close to his protagonists, Rakowski consider their ways of coping as signs of entrepreneurship and resourcefulness (and not pathological behaviour or ineptitude, contrary to the one-dimensional model of the 'successful man' favoured by the spirit of the times). Forced by necessity, they became ad hoc inventors, builders, explorers.

Objects gaining second lives played a significant role in the universes of the 'degraded people'. Above all, they were a source of income, as in the case of the Walbrzych miners forced by the dramatic situation to participate in the demolition of their former workplaces in order to collect scrap metal. On occasions, however, discoveries awakened the collector, the enthusiast, and it happened that post-industrial objects from the abandoned mine facilities, which bring to mind the times when the city had

German name of Waldenburg, ended up in the miners' homes as private treasures. The life of the inhabitants of the Bełchatów mine outskirts, on the other hand, is reminiscent of typical cyberpunk plot solutions, with a division between the modern city or plant – for a select few only – and the outsiders living outside it, using – and often building self-made equipment – from the waste discarded by the 'better world'. Scrap metal from the huge mine dump, which the villagers call a stock exchange, goes to a recycling centre, waste is used for fire, while small appliances, furniture and everyday devices are collected in houses, or rather house-worlds, because, as Rakowski notes, in this 'self-resourceful' living the boundary between home and world becomes blurred. Items fill the houses and spill out, either gaining a new purpose or just waiting for it, as something that might be useful. 'I feel that this accumulation becomes more important than the need itself, it is an imperative to keep using what is, developing it',⁷ the author explains. Such 'self-resourceful' living is a constant process including both searching and reworking.

Rakowski's widely-commented book brings to mind similar records of life after a catastrophe, especially after World War II – for example, the accounts of the 'Robinson Crusoes of Warsaw' sheltering in the ruins after the suppression of the 1944 uprising and organising makeshift daily life there; one of Kazimierz Karabasz's documentaries in which we see a housewife carrying water for the animals in a German helmet she found, or in the studies of self-made architecture published by Jan Minorski. In 1963, this author analysed the houses built from found materials in the still undeveloped ('ownerless') areas of Warsaw. Despite intensive reconstruction work, the capital remained largely ruined after the war, and the need for places to stay was enormous. Architecture, which, according to Minorski, was: 'spontaneous, as the result of vivid, concrete action arising without design, changeable, Tachistic',⁸ resulted from the pure necessity arising from post-war poverty and the influx of new residents. The countryside was thus transformed into an ever-widening suburb with inhabitants working in small repair workshops, handicrafts, services and the production of plaster decorations, which were fashionable at the time. Poets Miron Białoszewski and Stanisław Swen Czachorowski described such a (no longer existing) landscape of the rural-urban Warsaw, full of makeshift cottages surrounded by well-tended gardens, with their uncouth poetics.

Moving to the outskirts of what was then Warsaw often involved changing one's lifestyle from rural to urban, although residents did not give up having their greenhouses or vegetable gardens. 'The builder, when breaking with the traditional notion of a house, is not doing so for intellectual

7 T. Rakowski, *Łowcy, zbieracze, praktycy niemocy*, Gdańsk 2009, p. 115

8 J. Minorski, *Architektura samorzutna*, "Architektura" 1963, No. 4, p. 114.



photograph by Olga Drenda

reasons. He specifically takes and simply incorporates those elements that are achievable for him. Satisfied with the lowest-grade materials, “sorted” from the state-planned construction sites, employing the least qualified labour, and following the ideas of the local site manager, usually a member of the family, he does not, however, reject technical advances, such as the use of fused panels, he intensifies the use of small spaces by using the electric washing machine or an additional window open not only to the surroundings, but to the whole world: the radio receiver or, even more so, the TV set. He can absorb also other new materials and new ideas’, wrote Minorski with kindness about the ingenuity of the inhabitants of small single-family houses, adding a reflection somehow similar to ideas raised by Rakowski: ‘The construction is never completed. It is always ready for further changes, divisions, additions.’⁹

THIRD WAVE

As mentioned in the introduction, periods of ambiguity and the blurring of boundaries have also fostered an evolution in the status and function of objects. The bootleg miner was discovering in himself a collector; the faithful FSO Syrena car was transformed into a chicken coop or an abandoned object serving for the fun of destruction. ‘The civilisation of tyres and old tights’ can have different faces: a purely utilitarian and

⁹ Ibidem.

rudimentary one, where the object plays a substitute role in a situation of economic collapse, but also one in which it transforms itself into an artefact of resourcefulness. Tyres can, unfortunately, be used as an annoying, poisonous fuel when one cannot afford cleaner, legal fuel. However, they can also be transformed into a child's swing or a garden decoration. Tights can serve as a cover for collecting leftover soap when even such a basic commodity proves too expensive or when goods are rationed. At the same time, they can suddenly turn out useful for express car repairs, to replace a v-belt, or for decoration and fun, e.g., used to braid a rug.

Today, this way of living is sometimes called 'zero waste' and is associated with a conscious choice motivated by self-sufficiency or care for the environment. In the United States, the attitude of the conscious consumer was described and recognised in the late 1970s and early 1980s; it was fostered by the economic crisis of the time, but also by the awakening environmental awareness. Alvin Toffler, in his book *The Third Wave* (1980), in which he provided a characteristic of the post-industrial society, announced the re-evaluation of manual labour. 'Where working with one's hands was looked down upon (at least by the middle class) it is now a sign of pride. People doing their own work are proud of it,'¹⁰ he explained. This change was supposed to stem from the weariness with alienation and automation of work and become a search for the added value that such effort (non-compulsory, voluntary) and the satisfaction of the visible result of one's effort can provide.

A little earlier, in 1972, Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver proposed a concept of 'ad hocism'. The book-manifesto of the same title is a reminder of the utopian optimism of the era, symbolised by the Whole Earth Catalog, Buckminster Fuller or the hippie Drop City: projects based on a belief in technology in service to environmental consciousness and, equally, in the self-control of human beings liberated from hierarchical systems. Jencks and Silver proposed solutions to what Claude Lévi-Strauss would call bricolage, i.e. the use of currently available materials, 'radical democracy and pragmatism'¹¹, creating something out of nothing.

At the time of the book's publication, unbeknownst to its authors, these principles were already put into practice by the Beskids highlanders, who on their own, using car and motorbike parts, built tractors suitable for mountain use, as the machines offered by the state-owned factory Ursus did not guarantee such a feature. Even after they had ceased to function, they were still a source of pride for the resourceful constructors portrayed by Łukasz Skąpski in his project entitled *Machines*. We can

10 A. Toffler, *Trzecia fala* (The Third Wave), Warszawa 1986, p. 318.

11 W.C. Holman, *Adhocism*, <<http://objectguerilla.com/blog/2013/9/26/ad-hocism>> [accessed on: 20 April 2022].

venture with some measure of certainty that on the other side of the Iron Curtain a similar process was taking place; the 'self-resourceful' life was somehow forced by the economic conditions, imposing a top-down modesty and reliance on the work of one's own hands, but at the same time providing a reason for pride or a pretext to develop passions. This phenomenon did not apply only to Poland, as evidenced, for example, by the Domáci umění project,¹² dedicated to DIY and grassroots artistic creativity in Czechoslovakia. The do-it-yourself enthusiast, the practical housewife, the allotment gardener – such lifestyles, although produced by economic necessity, have become part of the voluntarily assumed identity of the thrifty, inventive but also creative man. After 1989, the palette of attitudes towards the object was supplemented by the gesture of luxury, manifest extravagance or symbolic abandonment, farewell. It was no coincidence that the 'spring of burning Syrenas' came at a time when buying a used Western car on the market place became considerably easier and, above all, direct, without having to rely on a system of subscriptions and vouchers.

The exhibition at Olsztyn's BWA gallery *Where Do the Tyre Swans Fly Away* (2021) shows well the transition from pure practicality to creativity as described in *The Third Wave*. It explored the relationship between industry, in this case tyre manufacturing (for which Olsztyn is known), and creativity. It purposely features works by artists who refer to the creative upcycling of recyclable materials or individuals who document such endeavours. 'UTILITARIAN WASTE ARE AN ADDITIONAL WEALTH OF THE NATION' – such a slogan, representing 'charm' typical for the communist period, was perpetuated by Władysław Hasiór in his *Notatniki fotograficzne* [Photographic Notebooks]. In his times, used tyres were mainly turned into swings or low fences. It was not until the new millennium that an explosion of creativity involving this material took place and the garden swan made of tyres, which in the 1960s was a symbol of Australian suburbia and the idyllic life of the growing middle classes, arrived in Poland and, more broadly, in the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. Nowadays, detached from this context, it is associated with our region of Europe to the extent that it is sometimes considered an endemic rubber fauna. The case of the swan shows best the tangles of ambiguity that accompany spontaneous, voluntary invention and creativity. It crosses not only the boundaries of city and village, but also of continents. Today, the sentimental shadow of the swan hovers over the remnants of civilisation of old tyres and tights, which have been transformed into ingenious handicraft material for the 'less waste' enthusiasts.

12 <http://www.domaciumeni.cz> [accessed on: 7 October 2022].

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Abstract:

The paper explores the ambiguity and ambivalence of the terms 'ends of the world' and 'peripheries' from the perspective of spontaneous creativity as a characteristic of these locations in both geographic or symbolic terms. By pointing to instances from different places and times, as well as citing conscious, artistic references to them, the author draws attention to flows, grey areas, osmosis and dynamics: both of contractual 'peripheries' and of the spontaneous invention associated with them.

Keywords:

**vernacular aesthetics, do-it-yourself, diy,
zero waste, self-generated creativity, products,
adhocism**

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CZEŚĆ II

A STRANGE



Bartosz Zaskórski
**THE ŻYTNO CHAINSAW
MASSACRE¹**

If we look at the way the countryside functions in contemporary Polish culture, we can notice several dominant strategies. Many of them are associated with ‘processing’ one’s own rural roots, as if they were something to be ashamed of. After all, the pejorative term ‘peasant’ is something that hardly anyone finds shocking, no matter how open-minded they are... Another narrative is proposed in such books as Adam Leszczyński’s *Ludowa historia Polski* [The Folk History of Poland] or Kacper Pobłocki’s *Chamstwo* [Rabble]. It is a necessary one – however, it threatens to reduce the interest in the history of serfdom to a transitional fashion, with no influence on how the countryside and its inhabitants are perceived.¹ Therefore, I have an impression it is stories of ‘social class advancement’ – understood as escape from the countryside – and not the sense of attachment to rural reality that prevails in the sphere of culture.

But why would anyone want to flee the countryside? Is one sure that class contempt is the main reason here? Or is there something much more terrifying that lurks in the countryside? I want to approach this question in a subversive way and discuss the countryside as a space that has a much greater potential for arousing anxiety than the urban space. A place that is the gateway to the Freudian uncanny. Just like Lynch’s Twin Peaks. The eponymous village is surrounded by forests with a gateway to the Black Lodge, a passage into the world of strange and potentially sinister forces, awaiting an opportunity to invade our reality.

Let me begin by defining the phenomenon of the uncanny. The uncanny seems to appear (as a topic of inquiry) in European culture along with the disintegration of the Enlightenment narrative – when, on the one hand, earlier religion-based narratives became exhausted but, on the other hand, the new ones, referring to faith in reason, proved to be insufficient. Magic got removed from the world, but instead of strengthening people, breaking the spell brought them anxiety.² We owe one of the earliest descriptions of

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- 1 I take the liberty here to make a personal digression, related to my country background, although it is a material for a separate text. From among the peculiar comments I have met with in connection with my origin, I would like to quote some questions I was asked during interviews: ‘Do I think that people in the countryside are limited?’, ‘How does it feel to be from such a small village and exhibit in Zachęta?’. On another occasion, in a private conversation, I was asked how it was possible that my parents were from the countryside. ‘Were they sent there for punishment?’ I received all these questions from people who support and respect (and quite rightly so) religious and sexual minorities, however, due to a strange illness affecting the Polish intellectuals, this respect is not sufficient to prevent them from dehumanising the Polish countryside.
 - 2 Philosopher Ray Brassier, the author of *Nihil Unbound*, proposes a slightly different interpretation of this phenomenon. He claims that the Enlightenment Project did not fail, but, on the contrary, brought a new value to European culture; however,

the phenomenon of the *unheimlich*³ to Ernst Jentsch. In his essay *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* from 1906, he wrote: ‘Among all the psychological uncertainties that can become a cause for an uncanny feeling to arise, there is one in particular that is able to develop a fairly regular, powerful and very general effect: namely, doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate – and more precisely, when this doubt only makes itself felt obscurely in one’s consciousness.’⁴

I think that the wording ‘making itself felt obscurely in one’s consciousness’ is important for the understanding of the uncanny. The uncanny is a subtle albeit significant impression, a feeling that something does not match, something has changed, although we do not know exactly what happened and what the oddity of the situation consists of. The uncanny is connected with mystery. Let us use, as an example, the situation when we go the same way to school or work; one day, we notice an element of landscape we have never seen before, for example a tree growing in a place where it has never been before. The senses tell us: there is a tree here, but memory denies it: no tree is supposed to be here. The tree itself is not strange, there is nothing strange about the existence of a tree in the landscape. But the tree is in a place where we do not remember it. So we ask a friend: Have you ever seen this tree? They say, ‘Yes, it’s always stood here’. We begin to doubt the power of our memory; we do not understand why we remembered this part of the landscape differently. Worse still, more people whom we ask confirm the existence of a tree in this place. After some time, we get used to seeing it, but the memory of this unclear situation remains. Depending on an individual’s sensitivity and ability to cope with what-should-not-be, the thought of a tree-never-seen-before can be quickly ignored, but it can also haunt a person for weeks to the extent that they find a way around it on their way to work. The need to deal with the uncanny, to transform the experience in such a

that value was inconsistent with the Enlightenment minds’ expectations.

Instead of presenting the cognised reality as reasonable and rational, it showed that if only rationalism is used – without referring to metaphysical instances – nothing can be determined about the purposefulness of the world. The mind was unable to discover any sense (in the metaphysical meaning) or to produce – as objective – any rational rules, e.g. in the form of morality.

3 It is worth adding that the Polish equivalent of the word ‘uncanny’ (*niesamowity*) is a Ukrainianism: ‘ukr., supposedly connected to the devil, impure, devilish; discomposed, slightly sick in the body and in the mind’, M. Arcta *Słownik ilustrowany języka polskiego*, 1916[M. Arct’s Illustrated Dictionary of the Polish Language], 1916.

4 E. Jentsch, *O psychologii niesamowitego*, transl. A. Żukrowska, ‘Autoportret’, 2014, No. 4, p. 32.

way that it can be incorporated into the order of everyday life, is dictated by the need to preserve the sense of the integrity of the world.

In his work, Jentsch analyses the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann, to which Sigmund Freud will also refer – the latter is also credited with conceptualising the idea of the uncanny. Hoffmann's work not only treats about contact with the Uncanny, it arouses this very uncanniness in the reader. However, Freud criticised Jentsch's work, trying to create his own taxonomy of the Uncanny and reducing this phenomenon to the psychological scope. Freud's goal is to explain the uncanny, and therefore to tame it.

However, as Nicholas Royle, the author of the book *Uncanny*, pointed out, capturing and describing the mechanics of the uncanny is, in a sense, doomed to failure. We can multiply examples of the uncanny, write subsequent pages on this topic, but we cannot exhaust the topic – that is, we cannot reduce it to a clear explanation covering the **entire** experience. Royle describes it using the example of Freud's essay; the Viennese psychoanalyst, trying to distance himself from the described phenomenon, maintains the attitude of a rationalist – a person whom the uncanny does not affect because the methodology protects him from the irrational. He therefore tries to reduce the experience of the Uncanny to a simple psychological phenomenon that can be managed thanks to psychoanalysis. Freud tries to create an exhaustive taxonomy of the phenomenon – to devise a **safe** concept stretching from here to there, which does not have the strange power to control anything, which can be easily exorcised – by bringing it to one of many issues of psychological or, as the psychoanalyst prefers, aesthetic nature. He wants to control what is intrinsically out of control. However, according to the author of *Uncanny*, Freud gets defeated.

This does not mean, however, that nothing can be said about the Uncanny. However, there is one thing to be remembered when studying this topic. Any text that tries to get to grips with the theme of the Uncanny will itself become haunted by it. Regardless of the author's efforts, the Uncanny, referring to **everything** that is beyond control, that remains unnamed, repeated, recurring against one's will, contradicting the sense of familiarity and the idea of what is normal – thus, everything that should remain hidden – eventually overgrows and devours every effort made to characterise this phenomenon. In this sense, the uncanny remains fully resistant to the attempt to include it in the routine of everyday life, of what is normative, formatted, permanently placed in the order of things: in models, systems, in the framework of ordinary life.

Of course, there is no doubt that people who live anywhere do it: they care for the integrity of the vision of the world. I do not want to romanticise living in the countryside (romanticising is just another strategy of a bourgeois who strives to make the countryside a recognised and danger-free

phenomenon). I do not want to draw a heroic picture of the human types we will encounter outside the city (as we will encounter different ones, cruel and sensitive, as everywhere). However, in comparison with the countryside, it is precisely the city that provides a whole range of means of isolation from what constantly tries to break into our world, our idea of the world. It supports, effectively, the reenchantment of the world, enveloping it with stories that convince that the world is an ordered place. Of course, it may happen that, in the city, we'll see something that will cause us anxiety – for example, a tram that has just run over a passer-by – but it will be precisely the intrusion of what I am going to call the real in the further part of the text, into an ordered world of ideas mistaken for reality.

And although urban reality infects rurality – social media is the ultimate way to drown out anxiety, manage terror – the very structure of the rural reality: isolation, proximity to nature, much darker night – exposes us to the works of the Black Lodge.

A good illustration of this state of affairs – the technique of survival of the continuous company of the uncanny in secluded places – is the initial scene from the film *An American Werewolf in London* (1981, dir. John Landis). Two stray tourists, big city boys from the US, get lost in the moors in Scotland. However, before they encounter the Uncanny (here, in the form of imagined horror: a werewolf), which will change the life of one of them, they will find themselves at a local inn. The locals, crowded inside, talk loudly, laugh, drink. They forget the impenetrable darkness outside, the monstrosities that roam in it. It is only the intrusion of two townspeople looking for adrenaline – but also deeply convinced that nothing bad ever happens, or at least not to them – that spoils the mood, reveals the fears in 'superstitious peasants'. However, it is these 'simple' people who know that there are things to be avoided out there in the darkness. A bourgeois, and especially an intellectual one, who has cultural capital, cannot listen to them, otherwise he would consent to the destruction of his idea of the world. The boys, instead of staying at the inn, set off into the night – one of them will pay for it with his life, and the other one will turn into a beast.

The uncanny – in the context of rurality – also appears in the work of Thomas Bernhard. On the one hand, the writer often describes a certain ordinary everyday life; on the other hand, he reveals its strangeness and incoherence. He writes: 'The uncanny? It is an evening, always multidimensional darkness between the rocky walls.' His novel *Gargoyles* contains a description of experiencing the Uncanny. The whole story is about a municipal doctor and his son who visit one patient after another. However, there is something that haunts these men's ordinary life; beneath the surface of conventions and the ordinary, there is something unspeakable hiding. At some point, the heroes arrive at a cove where a mill stands. The sun never reaches the cove. Behind the mill, one of its inhabitants keeps

a cage in which exotic birds live. However, the inhabitant died and the birds, left unattended, scream continuously. The miller's sons, together with the Turkish immigrant he employed, decide to put an end to the turmoil by killing the birds. They twist their necks. The sight of dead birds in an absurd cage, in this place among the rock walls, arouses a sense of the presence of the Uncanny in the doctor's son.

That absurd, exaggerated act of cruelty can be recognised as a reflection of urban, intellectual fears associated with the countryside. The countryside haunted by the Uncanny. Such clues, fear or a sense of affinity of the countryside with darkness, appear regularly in the cinema, as exemplified by the *backwood horror* genre. In countless films of this genre, the countryside turns out to be a place that has lost its fight against the darkness. Where what is inhuman, anti-human, not only is the background and potential, but prowls actively. The Uncanny has consumed the inhabitants; what is more, it will devour every other person who ventures into these areas. According to this current, it is precisely in villages, as in Lovecraft's stories, that deformed, sick and, above all, cruel individuals live. They threaten the **ordinary life**, violate the structures of ideas about the world, about what should be. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974, Tobe Hooper), although it is an absolutely outstanding and unique work on the map of horror cinema, intensifies this image to the very end: we meet a **rural** family whose most talented descendant, Leatherface, spends his time creating furniture and gadgets made of human skin.

Another perspective can be found in the story *The Black Spider* by Jeremias Gotthelf. The story begins with a wedding in a country cottage. One of the guests asks the host why in the centre of a nice, well-maintained home there is a wooden pole that looks as if it had been pulled out of a fire. It is ugly and makes the place look ugly too, causing a vague anxiety. The host tells the story – the story of an unsuccessful trade with the devil: the villagers tried to cheat the devil who began to appear in various places as a black spider, bringing death. Finally, he was defeated – there were some victims – and locked in a hollowed-out pole in a newly built house. The pole turned black, but effectively trapped the beast inside. An act of absolute heroism: living in the immediate company of the Uncanny, or rather pure evil, the infernal spider closed **forever** in a part of the house, something that reminds at any moment of how close the darkness, the Uncanny, is.

The uncanny character of rural space is therefore associated with the lack of certain stimuli, with darkness. According to Nicholas Royle, the author of the aforementioned *Uncanny*, darkness is a paradoxical issue. It is not the darkness itself that is the source of the uncanny, but what it reveals, what is extracted from the darkness by the light. The uncanny is what comes from darkness, what should remain hidden, inaccessible to cognition. What the rational, friendly light draws out of the darkness may reveal as uncanny.

The situation of seeing a bolt of lightning at night is amazing: for a moment, an electric discharge illuminates the area where we found an uncertain shelter. For a fraction of a second, we see strange figures standing near our hideout. People wandering the moors in such a weather? Impossible. We do not know what we actually saw: was it a broken tree, or is there actually someone there? If so, then who or what? Royle quotes Paul de Man: ‘Making the invisible visible brings about the uncanny.’

At night in the city, only some places are really dark, but all the rest are lit. And although the streets can still hide danger, they **do not suggest it** – everything can be seen clear as daylight; one can succumb to the illusion that there are no secrets around. Nothing is bothering us. You can get so used to it that you don’t respond to a call for help from the street. Living in such a space must cause discomfort, but, following the lead of the terror management theory, created by Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Thomas Pyszczynski, this discomfort is the price one has to pay for isolating oneself from unpleasant thoughts.

The nights in the countryside are darker, the darkness is harder to penetrate, and unpleasant thoughts are more poignant. Andrei Platonov’s anti-utopian novel *The Foundation Pit* brings a specific idea for the management of such a space: the protagonists visit a place where the houses face one another, and the windows are so large that everyone can be seen by everyone. People look at one another and make sure that no troublesome thoughts bother us.

It is not only the darkness that induces an inquisitive mind to analyse the strange shapes seen near against the wall of the forest. Rural landscape, proximity to nature, excessive covering or exposure of the terrain. Of course, the villages are very varied – those located in the depths of the forest (like my native one) are different from those surrounded by flat farmland stretching all the way to the horizon. The former type brings mystery, the latter can activate agoraphobia.

The phenomenology of darkness interacts most strongly with silence; it is silence that strengthens the influence of darkness; both intertwine to form a synergistic pair. The mechanics of silence is similar to the mechanics of darkness, and the uncanny expresses itself in them in a similar way. Just as the darkness itself is not frightening, but what might be hidden in it is – the silence in itself is not as dangerous as the possibility of hearing something that will violate it. Nicolas Royle, in *Uncanny*, points out the death drive, which ‘works unnoticed’, remains mute, silent, pursues its goals independently of our attention. Freud, in an essay from 1919, holds his place when it comes to the death drive (the concept will not appear until a year later in the text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). Nevertheless, the topic, although not yet named, crawls somewhere in the background, above the psychoanalyst’s thought, regardless of his will:

‘But the death drive lurks, as if forbidden to speak its name, everywhere in the 1919 essay.’⁵ This is also an amazing, special feature of the death drive, which always works in a living being, but remains hidden and silent. This is precisely what the silence seems to be – unlike the hustle, it gives space not only to real (or not) auditory experiences, but also to all kinds of horrible thoughts and imaginations. Just like in the aforementioned novel *The Foundation Pit*, the authors of the terror management theory claim that: ‘Of the four most important existential problems that absorb people – freedom, bonds with other people, the meaning of life and death, the latter is particular. The first three are the object of desires, while death is the only one that arouses fear. It is a special kind of fear not only because it is strong, and sometimes even overwhelming, but also because (at least potentially) it is still present, unavoidable, and extremely difficult to remove. It is easy to see that the fear of death only actualises under certain conditions, but when it does, it becomes a source of suffering. No wonder that death is an eternal theme in literature or painting, that it is the central category of many religious systems, as well as numerous superstitions.’⁶

Silence and darkness remind us of the ultimate and inevitable: death and suffering. However, it is the proximity of nature that reveals an important feature of reality: the quantity and multitude of forms of suffering around us. Perhaps urban space isolates us from the images of suffering, drowning them out with ubiquitous noise, excessive stimuli, light.

Perhaps in the process of building cultural capital, gaining social advancement, we distance ourselves, conjure certain areas of our sensitivity using art, music, literature. We learn to be efficient machines – and preferably pleasure machines (setting themselves a goal of maintaining pleasure), machines that capably avoid worries. The space of the city supports it – but also excites, overstimulates. Both the American horror writer Thomas Ligotti and the German philosopher and neuroscientist Thomas Metzinger point out a peculiar intellectual aversion to dealing with the subject of suffering – inevitably inscribed, after all, in the fact of being alive.

In the countryside, the amount of suffering in the surrounding world becomes much more noticeable. It is hard to hide from it. From dogs howling at night, sometimes tied to chains, to cows covered with flies biting them, to all nature itself – an invasive species of snails eating chicks from nests just under the eyes of parents who cannot recognise danger. Wasps laying their eggs inside caterpillars; the hatching larvae will slowly devour

5 N. Royle, *Uncanny*, s. 86.

6 P. Aries, *Człowiek i śmierć*, transl. E. Bąkowska, Warszawa 1989, quoted from: W. Łukaszewski, J. Boguszewska, *Strategie obrony przed lękiem egzystencjalnym*, ‘Nauka’, 2008, No. 4, <http://www.nauka-pan.pl/index.php/nauka/article/view/403/397> [accessed 1 May 2022].

the host from the inside. It is enough to go to a forest or a meadow in spring to experience what Werner Herzog talked about in the documentary *Burden of Dreams* (1982): ‘The trees here are in misery, and the birds are in misery. I don’t think they – they sing. They just screech in pain. It’s an unfinished country. It’s still prehistorical. The only thing that is lacking is – is the dinosaurs here. It’s like a curse weighing on an entire landscape. (...) We have to become humble in front of this overwhelming misery and overwhelming fornication... Overwhelming growth and overwhelming lack of order.’⁷

However, instead of going to the jungle, it is enough to go to the countryside and enter a forest. For a bourgeois, the countryside is something as foreign, wild, hostile, and exotic as a jungle – although the horror of rural space remains generally unspoken and unnamed. Nature is chaotic and therefore potentially dangerous. Even inconspicuous plants conceal a desire to kill. Silent trees fight – some of them rob others of light. Mushrooms work in silence, processing the mass of dead matter. In a way, the hero of Sartre’s *Nausea* talks about it, who recognises the threat to the city: ‘When the town dies, the Vegetation will invade it, it will clamber over the stones, it will grip them, search them, burst them open with its long black pincers; it will blind the holes and hang its green paws everywhere. You must stay in the towns as long as they are alive, you must never go out alone into that great mass of hair waiting at their gates: you must let it undulate and crack all by itself. In a town, if you know how to go about it, and choose the times when the animals are digesting or sleeping in their holes, behind the heaps of organic detritus, you rarely come across anything but minerals, the least frightening of all existents.’⁸

The city creates an insulating barrier from the outside using noise, human masses, and entertainment. Here is where the category of the Real comes to mind. The real constitutes the pre-linguistic experience of the world; it is unstructured and dangerous as not related to the conceptual structures describing the world. What is described, named, and told, is no longer a threat – even if it is only an apparent conjuration of the world. Thus understood, the Real evokes a sensation of the uncanny.

In his book *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster,⁹ when describing the category of the Real, speaks of the ‘subjugation of the eye’. Such subjugation is to consist in deceiving the power of sight, in a special selection of images and meanings. Reality is not the real, reality is a conglomerate of ideas about what is real (and, perhaps, ‘ordinary’), ideas which, in them-

7 W. Herzog, *Burden of Dreams*, 1982.

8 J.P. Sartre, *Mdłości*, transl. J. Trznadel, Warszawa 1974, <http://nnk.art.pl/bujnos/blada/ocr/sartre/> [accessed 1 May 2022].

9 H. Foester, *Powrót Realnego. Awangarda u schyłku xx wieku*, transl. M. Borowski, M. Sugiera, Kraków 2012.

selves, neither reflect reality as such nor lead to the real. The city appears in this juxtaposition as a reality created to pacify the real, or rather exorcise darkness and silence – phenomena that bring the horror of mystery (hearing something, seeing a shape in the dark) – out of the world. The real comes when we lose the conceptual control (illusion of control) over the world. The real is, for example, death – we can imagine it, but just coming into contact with it in our surroundings evokes a number of emotions which will not deal with easily, unless we are sociopaths.

As a villager who has known all those terrible conceptual frameworks, I want to assure you: rural reality has much less power of pacifying the real – and the real, much more visible, invades our ideas of reality more easily and more often there. The real and the uncanny roam the countryside hand in hand, crawling on the threshold of our perception, like a Lovecraft cosmic horror movie. It waits for a neurotic bourgeois who, referring to Thomas Ligotti's words from *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*,¹⁰ would like to know and believe that 'it's ok to be alive'.

Darkness and silence, mud, dung, rotting processes, and space for unpleasant thoughts. What can be done about it, what attitude should be taken towards it? I think that, instead of a strategy of denial – although these, as the authors of the terror management theory claim, are embedded in the very essence of people's thinking – we should try to befriend darkness, silence, and unpleasant thoughts, appreciate them, and maybe even begin to affirm them. As Lev Shestov notes in the *The Philosophy of Tragedy*, Nietzsche, before becoming an apologist for the will of power, first recognised the world as a terrifying place.¹¹

We can try one more strategy – if the darkness brings lunacy upon us. It is the fight against the city, the fight against the bourgeois pursuit of calm. Maldoror, protagonist of the *Songs of Maldoror* by Comte de Lautréamont, delighted with the essence of being lice, shares his plan: 'As for me, if I may be permitted to add a few words to this hymn of glory, I shall relate that I have caused to be constructed a pit four leagues square and correspondingly deep. Therein lies in its unclean virginity, a living mine of lice. It fills the bottom of the pit and thence snakes out in great dense streams in every direction. Here is how I built this artificial mine. I snatched a female louse from the hair of humanity. I was seen to lie with her on three successive nights and then I flung her into the pit. The human fecundation, which would have been ineffective in other similar cases, was accepted this time by fate and at the end of several days thousands of monsters, swarming in a compact knot of matter, were born to the light of

10 T. Ligotti, *Spisek przeciwko ludzkiej rasie*, transl. M. Kopacz, Warszawa 2015.

11 L. Szestov, *Dostojewski i Nietzsche. Filozofia tragedii*, transl. C. Wodziński, Warszawa 2000.

day. [...] Then, with an infernal shovel that increases my strength, I dig out of that inexhaustible mine whole chunks of lice, big as mountains. I split them up with an axe and I transport them in the depths of the night to the city streets. There, in contact with human temperature, they dissolve into individuals as in the first days of their formation in the tortuous galleries of the underground mine, dig themselves a bed in the gravel and spread out in streams through human habitations like noxious spirits.’¹²

Perhaps the pressure of darkness and uncanny in the countryside does not give a choice – in order not to go mad, not to become another Maldoror, one should confront what is obscure, what cries out for denial. Never forget it, always contemplate the darkest places. Hence the title of this text, referring to the horror movie *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* from 1974. In the film, a group of students makes it to a small town, which turns out to be a pit of degenerates – a motif appearing in the cinema as ‘backwood horror’.¹³ Why, then, the Żytno massacre? The village of Żytno is where I come from.

12 C. de Lautréamont, *Pieśni Maldorora i Poezje*, transl. M. Żurowski, Warszawa 1976, pp. 88-89

13 ‘Created with early movies such as *2000 Maniacs* (1964) or *Deliverance* (1972), this unofficial sub-genre plays on the myth that backwoods and remote countryside are populated with inbred freaks and maniacs’ https://horror.fandom.com/wiki/Category:Backwoods_and_redneck_films [accessed 9 October 2022].

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- *Burden of Dreams*, dir. W. Herzog, 1982.
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Abstract:

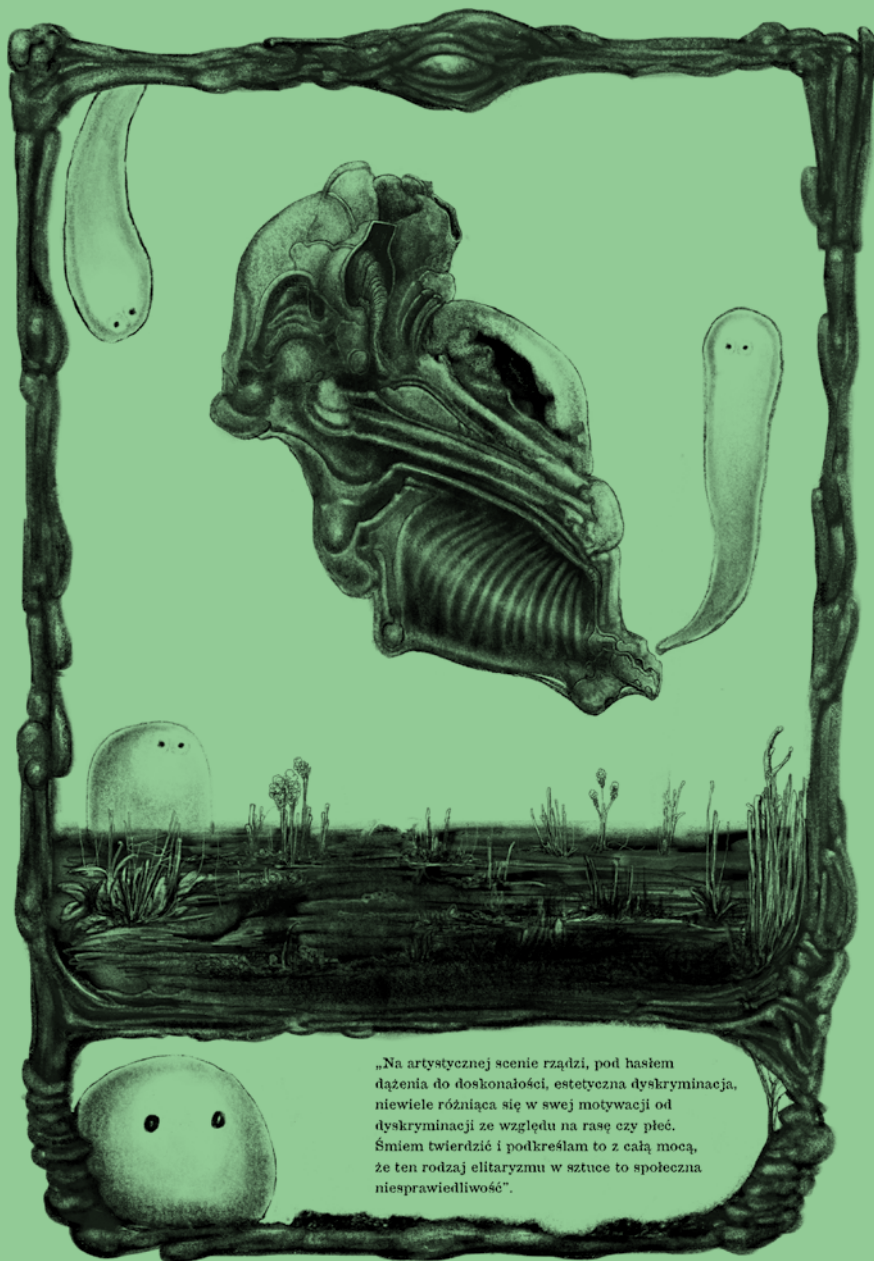
The text explores the issue of the uncanny in the context of rural and urban landscape. The question of the Uncanny is discussed in relation to the works of Jentsch, Freud, and Royle. The further part of the text refers to works from the domain of literature and cinema, by means of which the author analyses the thematic scope related to the Uncanny. It shows the countryside as a space in which it is easier to see (or more difficult to ignore) the presence of the unknown.

Keywords:

uncanny, countryside, landscape, darkness, night, anxiety

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„Na artystycznej scenie rządzi, pod hasłem dążenia do doskonałości, estetyczna dyskryminacja, niewiele różniąca się w swej motywacji od dyskryminacji ze względu na rasę czy płeć. Śmiem twierdzić i podkreślam to z całą mocą, że ten rodzaj elitaryzmu w sztuce to społeczna niesprawiedliwość”.

Monika Weychert

THE LONGSTANDING ETHNOGRAPHISATION OF THE ART OF PEOPLE WITH ROMA ROOTS

Putting works of artists with Roma roots in an ethnographic context has a long tradition. It is worth taking a closer look from a political and economic perspective: as the use of quasi-colonial procedures. For a long time, Roma visual arts – much like folk art in general – had not been put in the historical perspective by the majoritarian society at all, as Wojciech Szymański writes: ‘While professional European art was subject to the principles of historical development and changes, occurring within it as a result of clashing views and aesthetic ideas, pristine non-European art and European folk art were treated as a permanent relic of the past, a kind of living fossil; if subject to any changes, these are very slow and undesirable, distancing it from the original, primeval source, and caused by external factors (e.g., meeting other cultures, penetration of urban patterns in the countryside), not by self-reflective, immanent pursuit of originality and novelty. While professional European art became the subject of interest in art history and criticism, ‘primitive’ and folk art have found acolytes among the researchers of the folk culture: anthropologists and ethnographers.’¹ In the case of Roma, however, ethnographic descriptions, created since the 18th century, have focused mainly on the differences in physiognomy, customs, and language.² The stereotype of music as an age-long Romani artistic profession was also well maintained and frequently confirmed. Romani visual art found itself in a blind spot, a gap between the categories, and became invisible. This was primarily because no suitable description tools were found for that area. The art created by the Roma did not fit entirely in the categories of ‘folk art’ identified, for a long time, only with the work of rural communities, with traditionalism and regionalism considered to be among of its main features. At the same time, it was not considered as ‘exotic art’ either, as its producers were not separated from European researchers by geographical distance; furthermore, it had developed within the circle of European cultural influence. The ethnographisation of Roma people’s art divested it of its authorial, individual trait. In fact, it was only the development of research on art by ‘unprofessional artists’ that allowed the scientists of that time to classify the works of the Roma into a certain category.³ Therefore, let us recall that the reflection on the art of people

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- 1 W. Szymański, *Od cyganerii do sztuki post-romskiej i z powrotem*, ‘Studia Romologica’ 9: 2016, p. 34.
 - 2 As we know, inter alia, from Lech Mróz’s analyses of scientific texts on Roma-related topics in the 18th, 19th, and even 20th centuries, they were full of stereotypes and prejudices. Besides, that knowledge was not updated; scientists used an inadequate methodology; L. Mróz, *O filistynach, cyganach alias wałęsach. Z dziejów poznawania Romów w Polsce*, ‘Lud’ 78: 1995, pp. 341–356.
 - 3 Cf. A. Jackowski, *Poza modami, poza czasem*, w: *Sztuka bez granic: od sztuki ludowej do art brut: wystawa z kolekcji Leszka Macaka*, Bielsko-Biała 2008, pp. 5-6; idem, *Być artystą*, in: *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*, Warszawa 1987, pp. 359-366; M. Antliff, P.

without specialist academic education developed only after the Second World War. Jean Dubuffet's manifesto *L'Art Brut préféré aux arts culturels* saw the light of day in 1949.⁴

And what was the situation of the Roma in Europe in the post-war period? Fifty per cent of the pre-war population survived the extermination of the Roma. The Roma survivors were immersed in trauma,⁵ their traditional culture suffered serious damage as a result of the war events,⁶ internal connections had been shattered, the pre-war ties between the Roma and the non-Roma world were broken up. János Bársony and Ágnes Daróczi state: 'The social structure of the Roma broke down (...) and thus, for a long time, the Roma lacked leaders, organisations, allies, political representatives who would document their losses or speak on their behalf.'⁷ In addition, the inclusion of representatives of this minority in the civic circulation in post-war conditions did not take place. They were often not given back their citizenship (German, Austrian, Swedish, etc.), which had been taken away under the Nuremberg laws; thus, the Roma were not protected by any state. The borders of their former homelands were closed to the Roma. It seems that two strong terms that have emerged in this context are entirely justified: Sybil Milton's '*persecuting the survivors*' and Alpha Abdikeeva's '*living apartheid*'.⁸ Due to the inability to benefit from indemnities or recover pre-war property, and the lack of permissions to earn, the Roma fell into structural poverty. The survivors were often placed in the same concentration camps that had been created for them in Germany during the war. As Milton writes, 'When they found a place to live on their own, they were evicted by the authorities and forced to move [back – com-

Leighen, *Primitive*, in: *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. R.S. Nelson, R. Shiff, Chicago 1996.

- 4 J. Dubuffet, *L'art brut préféré aux arts culturels*, Paris 1949.
- 5 U. Liedtke, P. Peterson, *Zur Entschädigung Zwangssterilisierter Zigeuner: Sozialpsychologische Einflüsse auf psychische Störungen nationalsozialistisch Verfolgter*, „Nervenarzt“ 1971, pp. 197–205.
- 6 H. Krokowski, *Die Last der Vergangenheit. Auswirkungen nationalsozialistischer Verfolgung auf deutsche Sinti*, Frankfurt am Main 2001, pp. 52–53.
- 7 J. Barsony, A. Daróczi, *Pharrajimos. The Fate of the Roma during the Holocaust*, New York 2008, p. 8; S. Kapralski, *Naród z popiołów. Pamięć zagłady a tożsamość Romów*, Warszawa 2012, p. 152.
- 8 S. Milton, *Persecuting the Survivors. The continuity of 'Anty-Gypsyism' in Post-war Germany and Austria*, in: *Sinti and Roma: Gypsies in German-speaking Society and Literature*, ed. S. Tebbutt, Oxford–New York 1998, pp. 35–47; A. Abdikeeva, *Germany's Policies toward Sinti and Roma: Living Apartheid?*, The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), 7 May 2002, <http://www.errc.org/article/germanys-policies-toward-sinti-and-roma-living-apartheid/777> [accessed 15 September 2017]; idem, *Roma Poverty and the Roma National Strategies: The Cases of Albania, Greece and Serbia*, London 2006.

pleted by MW] to the camp.⁹ According to Wolfgang Wippermann, these were deliberate and coordinated activities of a mafia-like character.¹⁰ If the scale of the extermination of the Roma had been admitted and their claims for compensation accepted, an additional financial burden would fall on the German government, and the circle of people liable to punishment for Nazi crimes would have to be broadened. That situation made the Roma part of the ‘subclass’, the ‘margin of society’: they were considered unproductive, superfluous individuals living a parasitic life. They suffered severe penalties and various preventive repressions: from public humiliation (such as washing in chemicals in Hungary), forced settlement (in Poland and England), forced labour and imprisonment, to forced sterilisation (in Czechoslovakia and Sweden). In most countries (except the former Yugoslavia), the Roma were not considered an ethnic minority, they could not cultivate their own culture, develop personally, create political structures, or even, for the above-mentioned economic and political reasons, educate themselves. The formula of assimilation in Central and Eastern Europe, from 1945 to the fall of the Berlin Wall – to the period of transformation, can be presented as a formula: ‘(Gypsy) + (socialist work) + (settlement) = (socialist worker) + (Gypsy folklore).’¹¹ Folklore was accepted by the authorities; therefore, a kind of self-folklorisation was forced on the Roma as, in many countries, Romani folk groups and traditional craft cooperatives were the only possibility of creating any Roma structures.

Daniel Baker points to the unique feature of Roma visual arts. Visual works have always been directed towards the inside of the Roma environment and have not been shaped under the influence of the outside environment. It served internal communication. Coexistence of function and decoration in visual forms became a basic feature of the ‘Roma aesthetics’, regardless of the part of the world in which the Roma lived.¹² The art created by the Roma was situated outside the mainstream world of art, due to the lack of professional education of the artists. As Tímea Jung-haus writes: ‘The art scene, under the slogan of striving for excellence, is ruled by aesthetic discrimination, which differs little in its motivation from race- or gender-based discrimination. I dare to say, and I stress this with

9 S. Milton, *Persecuting the Survivors...*, op. cit., p. 37.

10 W. Wippermann, *Compensation Withheld. The denial of reparations to the Sinti and Roma*, [in: *Gypsies during the Second World War, 3: The Final Chapter*, ed. D. Kenrick, Paris–Hatfield 2006, p. 172.

11 This scheme is quoted by Sławomir Kaprański, after articles by Steward and Barany: S. Kaprański, *Naród z popiołów...*, op.cit., p. 256.

12 D. Baker, *W sprawie prowizorki: kilka uwag o estetyce Romów*, transl. I. Suchan, in: *Romano kher. O romskiej sztuce, estetyce i doświadczeniu*, ed. M. Weychert-Waluszko, Warszawa 2013, p. 47.

all my strength, that this kind of elitism in art is a social injustice.’¹³ An example can be taken from the story of the ‘discovery’ of János Balázs’ work by art historian István Kerékgyártó and ethnographer Pál Bánszky in 1968. According to these two researchers, his work and talent eluded the notions of folk art, because Balázs’ works were more contemporary, original and individual than traditional, conventional and regional.¹⁴ Interestingly, Kerékgyártó and Bánszky ignored the people living in the same village as Balázs, Jolána Oláh and András Balogh Balázs, similarly talented contemporaneous creators. It was an expression of a strategy: the researchers wanted to emphasise the uniqueness of their discovery and, at the same time, the uniqueness of Balázs’s work against the background of the Roma community. Meanwhile, later research did not confirm that — the record of Romani artists gathered by the ethnographer and librarian Zsuzsa Bódi at the Hungarian Institute of Culture and Art in 2004 counted more than two hundred people with Romani roots who worked and lived in Hungary, Austria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, and the countries of the former Yugoslavia.¹⁵

Despite economic and social exclusion, there were single determined people who attained specialist education. For example, Karol Parno Gierliński (1938–2015) studied at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Poznań in the years 1957–1963; he was a sculptor and painter as well as a poet and a prose writer. As a social activist, he dealt with popularising work and education; he worked in trade unions and founded a work cooperative protecting traditional Romani professions.¹⁶ Tamás Péli (1948–1994), in turn, studied at the Royal Dutch Academy and was the first Roma man from Hungary to graduate in painting. In the 1970s, he decided to devote himself to showing Romani culture and tradition through art; he began to teach young Romani painters. He was also a politician, activist, and an undoubted influencer on the formation of the Roma social movement in Hungary (along with other Romani intellec-

13 T. Junghaus, *Obraz i podobiństwo. Rozważania o Romach w sztuce i sztuce Romów*, transl. M. Kołaczek, „Dialog-Pheniben’ 2013, No. 12, pp. 8–25.

14 Ibidem; id., *Artyści romscy*, transl. M. Kołaczek, „Dialog-Pheniben’ 2015, No. 4, pp. 152–168; *Meet Your Neighbours. Contemporary Roma Art from Europe*, ed. T. Junghaus, Open Society Institute, New York 2006, pp. 141–147.

15 Z. Bódi, *Cigány néprajzi kutatások Közép- és Kelet-Európában = Gypsy Ethnographical Researches in Central and Eastern Europe*, Budapest 2001; idem, *Kézikönyv a kisebbségi kulturális tevékenységhez*, Budapest 2000. Bódi’s research did not encompass Poland. Hungary appears as an exceptional place in terms of recognition of these topics: earlier than in other places in the world. The Romani artist known from this period in Poland is mentioned below.

16 Parno (website devoted to the artist’s work) , <http://www.parno.polinfo.net> [accessed 6 August 2022].

tuals and activists, such as the poets József Choli Daróczi and Károly Bari, the writer Menyhért Lakatos, and the activist and researcher Ágnes Daróczi). However, the professional education of some Roma artists has not changed the perception of Roma artists *en masse*. In 1979, the first National Exhibition of Self-Taught Roma Artists took place in Hungary (organised by Ágnes Daróczi at the Pataky Cultural Centre in Budapest). Another such display – also prepared by Daróczi – took place in 1989 at the Ethnographic Museum in Budapest. Daróczi, in order to show the artists of her choice, was forced to give the exhibition a title emphasising, once again, the naivety and lack of professionalism of Roma artists, in accordance with the previous narrative about them.¹⁷ In the advertisement for the event, the public was encouraged to ‘see exotic objects belonging to an alien civilisation.’¹⁸

In Poland, an example of ethnographisation of Roma artists may be taken from the history of the Romani Art group.¹⁹ It consisted of two professional artists educated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków: Małgorzata Mirga-Tas and Krzysztof Gil; only Bogumiła Delimata was a self-taught artist. The trio was invited almost exclusively to ethnographic museums (Tarnów, Warsaw, Wrocław) and local cultural institutions remaining, until 2013, outside the institutional world of art. At the same time, it should be noted that, in that period (2007–2013), the works by Mirga-Tas, Delimata, and Gil were not subject to critical review or curatorial selection, the exhibitions of their works did not have problematised narratives and were not arranged like exhibitions of contemporary art (the works were shown on easels, in unprepared rooms). The texts accompanying the exhibitions focused mainly on the artists’ origin, not on their works. Let us recall Adam Bartosz’s text from the catalogue of the Tarnów Romani Art exhibition (2008): ‘Three Gypsies, or rather – as they have preferred to be called for some time – Roma. (...) Three Roma are presenting their work; all from a group of settled Gypsies called Carpathian Gypsies/Roma; migrant Roma – more precisely – former migrant Roma – call them Bergitka Roma (Mountain Gypsies) and treat them with great distance. However, it is precisely this group/tribe that has the largest number of educated people today. Their parents often felt their Romani origins as a burden, as an injustice of fate. Yet they have converted their parents’ ori-

17 Á. Daróczi, *Autodidakta Cigány Képzőművészek. Országos Kiállítás*, Budapest 1979; idem, *Autodidakta Cigány Képzőművészek II. Országos Kiállítás*, Budapest 1989; idem, *Roma képzőművészek III. Országos Kiállítás*, Budapest 2000.

18 T. Junghaus, *Opór nie wystarczy. Rola romskiej sztuki we współczesnym układzie sił*, transl. M. Kołaczek, ‘Dialog-Pheniben’ 2015, No. 17, pp. 54–73.

19 E. Mirga-Wójtowicz, *Od Romani Art do Jaw Dikh*, ‘Studia Romologica’ 9: 2016, p. 46.

gin, which is also their own, into a source of inspiration, a stream of creative power.²⁰ This text is characteristic because it was written from the position of an ethnographer, not a representative of the world of art.

Romani artists often critically use subversive tactics towards such classification. A good example is the attitude of Damian Le Bas and Delaine Le Bas, contemporary artists who studied at prestigious London universities and, at the same time, they consciously present themselves as representatives of 'art brut', 'outsiders' art', 'gypsy dada'. As Delaine Le Bas writes: 'I remember the first exhibition my husband and I had in London. No one liked it. I heard it was an exhibition by two outsiders, two Roma, that it could give you a heart attack. We were criticised, among other things, for hanging works with clothes pegs. And yet many people soon began to do the same, and that was all right. It is significant that something that had so far been perceived as specific to a minority is adapted by the majority, enters the mainstream and thus gains recognition. (...) This is extremely important to me because I think that art is for everyone. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to live in culture. Everyone, and not only those who can talk about art or create it in a strictly defined way.'²¹

The fact that, for a long time, art created by the Roma had been only the subject of description and interest of ethnographers can be considered as the quintessence of the colonial relationship, i.e., replacing the original voice with a discourse from the outside, which establishes the structure of power. First of all, the ethnography of the art of people with Roma roots was supported by the belief in the 'people without history', which prevented that community from developing. Or rather, from obtaining external acceptance for internal change and progress. The actual economic and social situation of the Roma was not being taken into consideration. Secondly, the category of 'originality' of works was replaced by the category of 'Romaniness'. This is also a good opportunity to point out the role of the 'discoverers': István Kerékgyártó, Pál Bánzsky, Jerzy Ficowski,²² and Adam Bartosz whose authority, on the one hand, cleared

20 *Romani Art. Katalog wystawowy artystów romskich*, Tarnów 2008, <http://www.muzeum.tarnow.pl/multimedia/katalog%20romaniart.pdf> [accessed 8 September 2022].

21 *Sztuka jest dla wszystkich. Rozmowa Moniki Popow z Delaine Le Bas*, „Szum”, <https://magazynszum.pl/sztuka-jest-dla-wszystkich-rozmowa-z-delaine-le-bas/> [accessed 11 August 2022].

22 Similarly to visual arts, literature and poetry were supposedly not the domain of the Roma, and thus something unusual in their case, something we basically owe to the 'figure' of the discoverer. M. Gliński, <Jerzy Ficowski, 'Demony cudzego strachu', <https://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/jerzy-ficowski-demony-cudzego-strachu> >

the path to the visibility of Roma artists; on the other hand, it determined what of their work should be shown to the world, where, when, and how. That imbalance in the production of knowledge was based on the fact that representatives of the majoritarian nations of Europe, usually poorly knowing the culture of the communities they studied, created descriptions derived from their images of the culture in question, exoticising the object of the description. In a word, the art created by the Roma had been either invisible or exoticised for a long time. The topics outlined above are hardly studied in relation to the art created by the Roma. That is why Tímea Junghaus and Ethel Brooks postulate writing Romani art history using the tools of post-colonial theories.²³ It would be an analysis of the artifacts and activities of Roma artists in the context of the cultural, social, and political consequences of intra-European colonialism. So far, however, no larger body of texts has been created to implement this desideratum.

[accessed 23 August 2022]; *Papusza, czyli Wielka Tajemnica*, ed. K. Kamińska, Gorzów Wielkopolski 1992; M. Sobczak, 'Czy bajką było to, czy prawdą?'. *Próba demitologizacji Bronisławy Wajs (Papuszy)*, in: *Miejsce i tożsamość. Literatura lubuska w perspektywie poetyki przestrzeni i antropologii*, ed. M. Mikołajczak, K. Gieba, M. Sobczak, Zielona Góra 2013.

- 23 E. Brooks, *Why It's Time to Reclaim Romani Art History*, 'Frieze Magazine', <https://frieze.com/article/why-its-time-reclaim-romani-art-history> [accessed 5 February 2019].

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Abstract:

Putting works of artists with Roma roots in an ethnographic context has a long tradition. It is worth taking a closer look from a political, economic, and cultural perspective: as the use of quasi-colonial procedures. In the article, the author points out several examples of ethnographisation of Roma art and the artists – people with Romani roots – themselves.

Keywords:

ethnographisation, contemporary Romani art, art of people with Romani roots

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PART III

SOURCES



Waldemar Kuligowski

**BETWEEN *TREMENDUM* AND
FASCINOSUM. ON THE SOURCES
AND CURRENTS OF THE 'FOLK
HISTORY OF POLAND'**

What made the history of the rural people an important topic in both academic and artistic circles as well as within the general social debate in the second (and third) decade of the 21st century? What are the sources of folk history? Are they determined by the logic of the *tremendum* and *fascinosum*, and if so, to what extent? Through which threads is the 'folk' history combined with the present – not only in rural but also metropolitan communities? These are the key questions, which this paper aims to answer.

SUBALTERN AND IDYLL

The so-called rural populace can be analysed using the category of the subaltern, or subjugated Other.¹ After all, for centuries it was one of the most effectively silenced and marginalised groups in Polish society. Despite the fact that historians argue that we can discover their world by analysing sources such as medieval court books, documents of this kind are very much mediated, since they belong to a different mental, linguistic and legal order than that of the rural communities, which is very crucial in this respect. The severe lack of an undistorted voice of the inhabitants of the former Polish countryside is a well-known problem. The first peasant memoirs, which were written by Jerzy Gajdzica, Kazimierz Deczyński, Wojciech Darasz and Jan Nepomucen Janowski, date back only to the early 19th century, while letters on peasant life, as well as literary attempts and poems by Maciej Szarek, published in *Pszczółka*, *Zagroda*, *Włościanin*, *Wieniec* and *Przyjaciel Ludu* were written in the last decades of that century.

What resulted from this state of affairs was the fact that the rural people became an internal Other, and their image was shaped in line with the logic of ambivalence. As Zbigniew Benedyktowicz argued, the nature of Otherness is imaginative, rather than conceptual – it combines horror and fascination,² and thus lends itself to associations with Rudolf Otto's reflections on *tremendum et fascinosum*.³ What the German philosopher related to imaginations and ideas about all beings divine can also be successfully applied, as Benedyktowicz argues, to the realm of ideas and relations concerning the Other. This is because the logic of the 'ambivalence of the Other' is present in both types of knowledge – the qualities attributed to the Other always skew towards the extremes – and instead of average income they live in extreme squalor or fabulous fortune, instead of a community of average mental abili-

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- 1 G. Ch. Spivak, 'Czy podporządkowani inni mogą przemówić?', translated by E. Majewska, *Krytyka Polityczna*, 2010, no. 24/25, pp. 196–239.
 - 2 Z. Benedyktowicz, *Portrety 'obcego'. Od stereotypu do symbolu*, Kraków, 2000, p. 192.
 - 3 R. Otto, *Świętość. Elementy irracjonalne w pojęciu bóstwa i ich stosunek do elementów racjonalnych*, translated by B. Kupis, Warsaw, 1968.

ties we have total stupidity or savants. As a result, the Other simultaneously arouses fascination and horror, repels and attracts at the same time.

The principles of the logic of the 'ambivalence of the Other' can be easily found in the images of rural populations. Literature has given rise to two opposing types – the good peasant, a child of God living in a natural paradise (*fascinosum*), as well as the evil peasant, an inherently depraved being, mentally limited and willing to do cruel deeds (*tremendum*). The former – fair-haired, blue-eyed, healthy and strong – was the embodiment of prudence and deep faith, as well as attachment to the ancestral land. The latter, on the other hand, was characterised by pallor, sickness, a propensity for abusing alcohol and getting violent as well as cursing while working in the field. As Eliza Orzeszkowa aptly noted in one of her letters: 'these peasant novels of ours are dominated by Daphnises and Chlorises, or the heartless, barbarian and victorious Barteks.'⁴

The obscuring of the actual village and its life with the cliché of *fascinosum* was present in the works of Jan Kochanowski with his *Pieśń świętojańska o Sobótce* [*St John's Day Song of Sobótka*]. It was thanks to him, among others, that the image of rural Arcadia became established in domestic literature and survived unchanged for several centuries, until the 19th century. For Adam Mickiewicz, folklore was the precursor and medium of Polishness, the *underground water* that fed the shaping of national culture in subsequent centuries.⁵ In Orzeszkowa's works we have Anzelm Bohatyrowicz – a model patriot and diligent farmer, as well as Paweł Kobycycki, the embodiment of virtues and prudence.⁶ One should also keep in mind that the thinking in terms of rural idyll and harmony was always juxtaposed with thinking about the city as a hotbed of sin, which started with the philosophers of the Antiquity – Aristophanes, Tacitus, as well as with the Old Testament.⁷ In this context, Adam Naruszewicz's idyll entitled *Folwark* (sic!) can be thought of as the quintessential piece of literature created by the owning class for the owning class: 'Oh, I would be content living in a small village / enjoying sweet life with nary a care'.⁸

These literary visions, which can legitimately be seen as the manifestation of the Herder effect, or the reification of peasant roots of national

4 E. Orzeszkowa, *Listy do J. Karłowicza*, in: eadem, *Listy zebrane*, Warsaw, 1955, vol. 3, p. 71.

5 A. Mickiewicz, *Literatura słowiańska*, translated by L. Płoszewski, [in:] idem, *Dzieła*, vol. 8, Warsaw, 1955.

6 E. Orzeszkowa, *Nad Niemnem*, Warsaw, 1888.

7 See for example: G. Cocchiara, *Dzieje folklorystyki w Europie*, translated by W. Jekiel, Warsaw, 1971.

8 *Sielanki polskie z różnych autorów zebrane, a teraz świeżo dla pożytku i zabawy czytelników po trzeci raz przedrukowane*, Warsaw, 1778, p. 492.

custom, language and culture,⁹ could not be contradicted by science, since 19th-century folklore studies essentially relied on existing notions. Zorian Dołęga-Chodakowski was just like Mickiewicz in his belief in national revival through folklore and the values contained therein.¹⁰ On the other hand, Oskar Kolberg – the heroic creator of the classic collection of sources that constitute the foundational knowledge of Polish folk culture (a total of 86 volumes with indices) perpetuated the image of the countryside filled with dancing and singing, giving rise to all later trends and fashions based on folklore and folk style.

Regarding the *tremendum* side of the matter, we also have numerous examples of persuasive imagery. The anonymous medieval work entitled *Panów na chłopcy uskarżanie się* [*Lords' Complaints about Peasants*], which enjoyed particular popularity and exists in several renditions, begins with the following stanza: 'Ah, woe to us with the peasants, who long to be under us / Who are not eager to enlist, who are pained to pay their taxes.'¹¹ The aforementioned Kochanowski warned that 'there is nothing more wretched in the world / than a greedy peasant.'¹² The poet and economist Jakub Haur, who lived at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, described a drunken peasant as 'nothing more than cattle, unaware of his own self' who would then 'get into fist fights'.¹³ In Andrzej Edward Koźmian's drama *Rok 1846* [1846] the drunken, cruel and superstitious peasants are ruthless murderers, arousing terror among the nobility: 'The people rose up ... Attacking like wild beasts, with bloody maws / Unstoppable hordes ravaging the whole country.'¹⁴ In Henryk Sienkiewicz's works, we can find both the symbolic 'stupid Bartek' (*Bartek Zwycięzca*) and mocking the rural 'Romeo and Juliet' (*Szkie węgłem*) who 'loved each other – I don't know if it was platonic but certainly ... vigorous.' Jalu Kurek (*Grypa szaleje w Naprawie*) also added to this trend: 'Did you say that we have a nice sunset? I don't see anything nice there. There are no delights on this Earth... That the sun is rising? That means the ordeal begins again.'¹⁵

9 P. Casanova, *Światowa republika literatury*, translated by E. Gałuszka and A. Turczyn, Kraków, 2017, pp. 124–129.

10 Z. Dołęga-Chodakowski, *O Sławiańszczyźnie przed chrześcijaństwem oraz inne pisma i listy*, ed. J. Maślanka, Warsaw, 1967.

11 After: G. Trościński, 'Panów na chłopcy uskarżanie się. Świadectwo popularności średniowiecznej „Satyry na chytrych kmieciów” odnalezione w rękopisie radomskich bernardynów ze zbiorów biblioteki diecezjalnej w Sandomierzu', *Ruch Literacki*, 2012, vol. 6, p. 704.

12 J. Kochanowski, *Pieśni i wybór wierszy*, Kraków, 1927, p. 119.

13 After: J.S. Bystroń, *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce. Wiek xvi–xviii*, vol. 1, Warsaw, 1976, p. 234.

14 A. E. Koźmian, *Rok 1846. Dramat w pięciu aktach wierszem*, Poznań, 1868, p. 81.

15 J. Kurek, *Grypa szaleje w Naprawie*, Warsaw, 1947, p. 19.

On the symbolic plane, taking into account the different historical contexts, *fascinosum* prevailed over *tremendum*. This was because the idealisation of the rural populace paradoxically reinforced and justified their serfdom. The condition of the Polish folk subaltern was built on references to ancient culture and the Bible: ‘The interests of master and slave go hand in hand,’ proclaimed Aristotle.¹⁶ ‘Cursed be ... The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers!’ – that was the fate of Cham in the Book of Genesis,¹⁷ whose punishment and destiny was physical labour. The legitimacy afforded by the philosophers and by the Bible, supported by the ethnogenetic Sarmatian myth, provided a sufficient cultural alibi for the feeling structures of farm serfdom.¹⁸ As strange it might sound, the idyll triumphed.

THE FARM LIVES ON

It may thus be surprising to see the anti-idyll voices, which seem more and more prominent in the second decade of the 21st century. What circumstances enabled making these judgements? First of all, new humanistic trends proved to be important for this change. Learning the post-colonial theory,¹⁹ becoming familiar with the notion of the subaltern, rethinking the concept of class and classism,²⁰ in-depth reading of the works on ‘primitive rebellion’²¹ and ‘weapons of the weak’, as well as infrapolitics²² revealed that the culture of the rural populace can be discovered anew. The basis of these concepts gave rise to widely debated scholarly

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- 16 Aristotle, *Polityka* [in:] idem, *Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 1, translated by L. Piotrowicz, Warsaw, 2003.
- 17 *Book of Genesis*, 9, 25, [in:] *Pismo Święte. Stary i Nowy Testament*, Fr. M. Peter, M. Wolniewicz, Poznań, 2008, p. 35.
- 18 E.W. Said, *Kultura i imperializm*, translated by M. Wyrwas-Wiśniewska, Kraków, 2009.
- 19 Cf.: E. Said, *Orientalizm*, translated by M. Wyrwas-Wiśniewska, Poznań, 2005; L. Gandhi, *Teoria postkolonialna. Wprowadzenie krytyczne*, translated by J. Serwański, Poznań 2008; H. Bhabha, *Miejsca kultury*, translated by T. Dobrogoszcz, Kraków, 2010; D. Chakrabarty, *Prowincjonalizacja Europy. Myśl postkolonialna i różnica historyczna*, translated by D. Kołodziejczyk, T. Dobrogoszcz, E. Domańska, Poznań 2011; A. Loomba, *Kolonializm/Postkolonializm*, translated by N. Bloch, Poznań, 2011.
- 20 Cf. M. Buchowski, *Czyścić. Antropologia neoliberalnego postsocjalizmu*, Poznań, 2018.
- 21 E. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Form of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Manchester, 1959; idem, *Bandits*, London, 1969.
- 22 J. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale, 1985; (idem) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: The Hidden Transcripts*, Yale, 1990.

works, starting with Jan Sowa's *Fantomowe ciało króla*²³ and Andrzej Leder's *Prześniona rewolucja*,²⁴ to books published in just the last three years by Adam Leszczyński, Kacper Pobłocki, Michał Rauszer, Jan Wasiewicz and Dariusz Zalega.²⁵ As a result, people began to talk about the birth of 'folk Polish history'. The Warsaw-based RM publishing house launched a new publishing series under this name, with Przemysław Wielgosz as editor-in-chief. In 2016, Poznań's *Czas Kultury* published a special issue of the magazine under the same title.

The changes in the scholarly practice resulted in a new perspective in journalism. Anna Kowalik wrote in the pages of *Forbes*: "The serfdom-based labour relations developed over centuries in Poland structure the way things work even in the most modern companies. The problem is that the slow peasant is of not much use in a business based on individualism and creativity."²⁶ The author dedicates her article to the 'cultural code of Polish companies,' attributing several key characteristics to it. These include the belief that workers are lazy and irresponsible, which is why the managing class uses authoritarian methods. Jacek Santorski, a well-known psychologist, confirms this diagnosis in an interview with *Gazeta Wyborcza*, during which he uses the analogy of a farm as a modern company. He claims that:

'the goal of a capitalist enterprise is to make profit and to increase the value of the organisation. The farm approach undermines the latter goal, as power tends to rest in the hands of one person... I saw this pattern repeat many times. It was like a xerox of a xerox. People created similar structure, there was the same nepotism... It was a recreation of the structure of the traditional noble farm. It is several hundred years old at the moment.'²⁷

After starting with recognising Polish enterprises as mental and organisational descendants of the farm and manor system, further generalisations were just a step away. In an interview with Jacek Żakowski for *Przekrój*,

23 J. Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, Kraków, 2011.

24 A. Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja*, Warsaw, 2014.

25 A. Leszczyński, *Ludowa historia Polski*, Warsaw, 2020; K. Pobłocki, *Chamstwo*, Wołowiec, 2021; M. Rauszer, *Siła podporządkowanych*, Warsaw, 2021, J. Wasiewicz, *Pamięć, chłopci, bunt*, Warsaw, 2022; D. Zalega, *Bez Pana i Plebana. 111 gawęd z ludowej historii Śląska*, Warsaw, 2020.

26 A. Kowalik, *Folwark biurowy*, <<http://kariera.forbes.pl/foiwark-biurowy-czyli-polska-kultura-korporacyjna,artykuly,182589,1,3.html>> [accessed: 10.06.2022].

27 *Polacy są głodni szacunku. Z Jackiem Santorskim rozmawia Grzegorz Sroczyński*, <<http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,127290,19382375,jacek-santorski-polacy-sa-glodni-szacunku.html>> [accessed: 10.06.2022].

poet and columnist Jan Kapela commented on the prevalence of bullying and sexism, claiming that: ‘Poles are not defending themselves. This applies to both sexes. Perhaps women are actually braver, but we are still peasants and serfs at heart.’²⁸ *Rzeczpospolita*’s journalist Bartosz Marczuk, referring to the content of overheard conversations of the politicians of the Civic Platform party, states: ‘What is most outrageous about Minister Sienkiewicz’s conversation with Chairman Belka is not that they treat Poland as their personal farm. The contempt is far worse than that. The contempt of the laws, procedures, citizens, public money. The contempt of us all.’²⁹ In turn, in an interview with *Polska The Times*, Rafał Ziemkiewicz notes: ‘Kaczyński is close to the vision of Poland as a farm, and he pictures himself as the heir overseeing it.’³⁰ Psychotherapist, journalist and screenwriter Piotr Pietchua notes in an extended interview with Katarzyna Tubylewicz: ‘For ten generations, Poland had a collective case of PTSD.’³¹ This is a tragic, almost genetic legacy. Perhaps this is what drives us to dealing with enslavement, patriotism, questions of identity, the trauma of the Partitions, wars and survival strategies.³² In the *Salon 24* portal, social activist Jan Śpiewak stated that: ‘Poland is looking more and more like one big farm, where only the managers change. We can even talk about the phenomenon of refeudalisation. After all, a farm only has room for Lords and Boors. There are no citizens, there are rulers and subjects.’³³

SUBALTERN AND ARTISTS

The scholarly diagnoses are somewhat late when compared to artistic ones, due to the historic succession. ‘The folk history of Poland’ would never take place at any time and in any shape or form without one cultural phenomenon – the band called R.U.T.A. The musicians showcased an unknown world of the rural populace to the contemporary audience – not one based on Kolberg’s views, but one standing in an opposition to simplistic idylls. ‘Once I had a green meadow / and the lords mowed it down with-

28 ‘Bądź mężczyzną, jedź kaszkę. Z Jasiem Kapelą rozmawia Jacek Żakowski’, *Przekrój*, 2017, no. 1, p. 39.

29 B. Marczuk, *Polska jak folwark*, <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1118202-Polska-jak-folwark.html> [accessed: 10.06.2022].

30 *Polska jak folwark? Jest Komendant, który jako jedyny wszystko wie i ogarnia*, <<http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/512139,ziemkiewicz-kaczynski-pis-folwark-dziedzic-komentant-prawo-i-sprawiedliwosc.html>> [accessed: 10.06.2022].

31 PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder.

32 K. Tubylewicz, *Szwedzka sztuka kochania. O miłości i seksie na północy*, Warsaw, 2022, p. 154.

33 <Śpiewak: Polska jak prywatny folwark, inteligencja rządzi jak dawna szlachta - blog Salon24 Magazyn> [accessed: 10.06.2022].

out asking me / I went to the lord to demand payment / And he beat me and chased me away' and 'Hey! Dear reverend father! / Are you untouchable because you are wearing a chasuble? / Did you shave your head to seduce children, daughters, wives? You devil!' they sang, clearly refusing to deign to idyllic themes and clichés typical of folk music. These radical lyrics have led to quite telling responses by Law and Justice-aligned city councillors from Płock. In August 2011, they rejected funding for 'cultural projects aimed at ridiculing, denigrating Christian values, faith and priests'³⁴ from the city's budget, leading to the cancellation of a planned R.U.T.A. concert.

The originator of R.U.T.A. was Maciej Szajkowski, a musician of Kapela ze Wsi Warszawa, a band widely recognised in Poland and abroad. In an attempt to find performers for old folk songs of rebellion, he turned to those who created and performed this kind of repertoire in modern times. As a result Paweł Gumola, Robert Matera, Hubert Dobaczewski and Dominika Domczyk joined the lineup – also known as Guma from the band Moskwa, Robal from Dezerter, Spięty from Lao Che and Nika from Post Regiment, respectively. The first two represent the classic Jarocin trend in Polish music – rebellious punk rock, while the other two joined the chorus of the rebellion, later, already in the post-transition period. Regardless of the genealogy, Szajkowski's goal was to combine the anger and grief of peasant song with the anger and grief of proletarian song.

R.U.T.A.'s first album – *gore – Pieśni buntu i niedoli XVI–XX w* – was released in March 2011. A year later, the second release – *Na Uschod. Wolność albo śmierć* was published. The programmatic bridge between the peasant rebellion and contemporary forms of resistance were expressed in the text accompanying the second album – a report on the activities of Ukrainian Femen, the Russian art group 'Wojna', Pussy Riot, the Anarchist Federation of Belarus and others. Another symbol of continuity or perhaps the current nature of the rebellion is the song *Mama-anarchija* – the hymn of Russian anarchists, written in the 1980s, which was added to the album.

Szajkowski equipped his musicians with instruments drawing directly from the folk traditions of the old Republic of Poland. Both albums feature the hurdy-gurdy, Płock fiddle, Bilgoraj suka, sazy, baraban drums, hoop drums, trembitas, double bass, fiddle and saw. There is no doubt that the sonisphere achieved thanks to these instruments is certainly interesting, resulting in an effect of sonic mimesis, referring to the musical past. This mimetic sonisphere became a musical background for songs – *gore* featured 17 songs from the broadly understood Polish lands,

34 R. Kowalski, *Staropolskie teksty pieśni zespołu r.u.t.a. oburzają rajców PiS*, http://plock.wyborcza.pl/plock/1,35681,10130668,Staropolskie_teksty_piesni_zespołu_R_U_T_A_oburzaja.html [accessed: 09.06.2022].

while *Na Uschod* contained repertoire related to Belarusian, Ukrainian and East Belarusian traditions.

Another issue concerns the origin of the songs on both albums. Do each of them really have folk provenance and were sung by rural folk? Or are we rather dealing with artistic versions of certain folk rudiments, or perhaps even fantasies of peasant grievances? There is no doubt that this is a very complicated issue. It is worth noting that Zygmunt Gloger, the seminal 19th-century folklore studies scholar and author of an enormous collection entitled *Pieśni ludu* [*Songs of the People*] (1892), made significant errors in his work, believing that works of literature were in fact folk songs, not to mention that some of them came from foreign sources. The small number of serf or rebel songs in earlier publications was also caused by the way they were collected, the difficulty of getting to the places where such songs were sung, and political and moral censorship.³⁵ When it comes to the selection of songs, R.U.T.A. relied on ambiguous sources – one should keep these ambiguities in mind when surrendering to the power of their message.

Shortly after the R.U.T.A.'s high-profile performance, which resonated in the society, another artist recognised the issue in a significant manner. In 2014, Daniel Rycharski, an artist and activist based in his home village of Kurówko in Mazovia, created two works intended to directly address the serfdom past. The first was an installation in the form of a rainbow gate with the inscription, 'The 150th anniversary of the abolition of serfdom.'³⁶ In form, it resembled a typical countryside gate made of metal, scaled up to the dimensions of 4 metres high by 6 metres wide. The artist placed it in the centre of the village, painting it with quasi-rainbow colours. The Gate installation referred to the anniversary of the abolition of serfdom in the Kingdom of Poland by the tsarist government.

The second work based on the anniversary theme was *Pomnik Chłopa* [*Monument to the Peasant*], created in the following year. The monument was made of materials unbecoming of a monument – on a trailer, the artist installed a three-metre elevator with a moving lectern, with a lone, sorrowful figure of a peasant sitting on an overturned milk jug. The object is surrounded by chains on all sides, and is accompanied by a peculiar coat of arms – a plucked eagle in shackles, painted by a local artist and designer Stanisław Garbaczuk, who gave it the title *Latał kiedyś choć w niewoli* [*Captive, it once flew*]. The *Peasant Monument* was inspired by a never-completed sketch by Albert Dürer. The Renaissance artist's sketch shows a peas-

35 J. Chorościński, 'Życie i walka ludu ziemi kieleckiej w pieśni', *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, 1952, no. 6, p. 301.

36 D. Rycharski. *Pomnik Chłopa*. 2015, <<https://sztukapubliczna.pl/pl/pomnik-chłopa-daniel-rycharski/czytaj/23>> [accessed: 11.06.2022].

ant in the pose of the Sorrowful Christ, pierced by a nobleman's sword, sitting on a column amid farm implements, with livestock underneath.

Immediately after its unveiling in Kurówek in September 2015, the *Peasant Monument* toured Poland. First, assisted by volunteer firefighters and local farmers, it was taken to the neighbouring towns (Gozdowo, Proboszczewice, Biała), then made its way to Kraków (Grolsch ArtBoom Visual Arts Festival), Płock, Lublin (Open City Festival) and Warsaw (where it was placed in front of the Museum of Modern Art). In May 2018, it appeared in Sierpc at the site of a burned-out synagogue. At the time, it was painted red – a colour associated with firefighters, with the addition of rescue equipment destroyed in a firefighting action. 'The monument is still relevant. It travels from village to village, from town to town, and wherever it is installed, it is always relevant. The people who see it relate it either to their lives, or to their families, the state and politics in general', Rycharski explained. 'We also put it in an open-air folk museum, where it was really relevant. It showcased the stereotypes, locking the countryside away in a ghetto, in a museum. It is a cool commentary on this very traditional museum approach.'³⁷ The transformed object, adorned with banners and slogans (such as 'In Defence of the Land' and 'Constitution') ultimately turned into a mobile tool for initiating interaction and engaging in dialogue, as much with the work itself as with the past it evokes.

Rycharski points out³⁸ that he is not so much interested in the history of serfdom, but rather in the present of the Polish countryside, since the issues that were relevant 150 years ago no longer interest contemporary villagers. In 2021, while preparing a new exhibition, he explained: 'This was the moment when the fashion for Polish folk history returned in Poland. There were books by Leszczyński, Rauszer, Pobłocki, and I wanted to do something that would stand in opposition to all of that... People in the city like the countryside when it does not stink of peasantry – as soon as it does, it ceases to interest them. I live in Sierpc, home to one of the most popular open-air museums of the Masovian countryside, and I know how people perceive the countryside. That is why I decided to make an exhibition about the modern side of the countryside. It is entitled 'Love Is for Everyone, Me Too'. One young farmer I am working with runs a modern dairy farm, but cannot find a partner. Whenever he meets a girl and she finds out that he is living in the countryside, she completely loses interest.

37 *Zgubiłem Pomnik Chłopa. Rozmowa z Danielem Rycharskim. 2016.* <https://sztukapubliczna.pl/pl/zgubilem-pomnik-chłopa-daniel-rycharski/czytaj/13> [accessed: 11.06.2022].

38 Based on the artist's statement of October 28, 2021, during the *Chłop – niewolnik* [Peasant – Slave] seminar organised by the National Museum of Agriculture and Agro-Food Industry in Szreniawa. The author was the moderator of the debate. The quote comes from the meeting.

He ended up tattooing a quote from a Rammstein song – *Liebe ist für alle da - auch für mich*, which means *love is for everyone, for me too*. And that is what I called the whole exhibition.’

CONCLUSION

The sources and currents of ‘folk Polish history’ presented in the paper certainly do not constitute an exhaustive list. There are a number of worthwhile contemporary texts, including theatrical plays: *W imię Jakuba S.* by Monika Strzępka and Paweł Demirski (December 2011, Drama Theatre/Łaźnia Nowa Theatre, Warsaw), *Słowo o Jakóbie Szeli* by Michał Kmiecik and Piotr Morawski (February 2017, Silesian Theatre, Katowice) and a narrative show *Obywatele 1918* by Małgorzata Litwinowicz-Droździel and Jolanta Kossakowska (‘Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN’ Centre, June 2018). The exhibition *Poland – a Country of Folklore?* by curator Joanna Kordjak (October 2016, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw) was also an important voice on the matter. The author would like to point out that the adequacy of artistic or scholarly works is beyond the scope of this paper, as it would require additional considerations. They were only mentioned in relation to R.U.T.A.’s releases.

There are two key conclusions that can be drawn from the findings. First, there is indeed a current that exists and is being developed, which can be referred to in both the scholarly world and in everyday conversations as the ‘folk history of Poland.’ This is evidenced by books, records, artworks, exhibitions, and performances as well as other events not included in the scope of this paper, including the ongoing work to create the first permanent museum exhibition dedicated to the culture of serfdom in the Polish countryside. Thus, we are dealing with a multiform and multimedia phenomenon, which is not confined to just a single circle or an isolated cultural milieu.

Secondly, the attempt to trace back the origins of the ‘folk history of Poland’ points to a convergence of diverse processes, which include the progressive democratisation and emancipation of cultural thought, critical analysis of the past, and an engaged attitude. The new interpretation of history as well as an attempt at a new understanding of the present are both fundamental for this current. The linking of the former farm serfdom system with the imagery of farms and serfdom apparent in the structures of power and governance at all levels, from family all the way to the state, is a curse of the long-standing structure, which can be also presented in terms of a tragic, genetic legacy. The answer to the question about the possibility of going beyond the logic of *tremendum* and *fascinosum* suggests that while peasant agency, self-organisation and the capacity for rebellion arouse joyful *fascinosum*, the idea that an economic and social system that has lasted for almost five centuries is to determine the future of Polish culture results in a grim sense of *tremendum*. The author ventures to guess that this was not supposed to be the message in R.U.T.A.’s songs, Rycharski’s objects, Demirski’s and Strzępka’s plays, or books by Leszczyński, Rauszer, Pobłocki and others.

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Abstrakt:

The first aim of this paper is to try to establish the sources and currents of the ‘folk history of Poland.’ The interest in the history of the rural populace and the farm serfdom system in artistic and scholarly circles as well as in the public debate became highly evident in the second decade of the 21st century. What sparked this interest? Which threads of history became the most popular and widely discussed?

The second goal is tied to the suggestion that the thinking about the countryside of old was determined by the logic of the ‘ambivalence of the Other’, derived from Rudolf Otto’s reflections on *tremendum et fascinatum*. Despite the fact that it has led to the formation of ambivalent images of the people, *fascinatum* clichés prevailed. Did the contemporary scholars manage to go beyond the principles indicated by Otto? The paradoxical effect of the ‘folk history of Poland’, both in its artistic and scholarly dimensions, is the conviction that the former economic and social system also significantly determines the present and future shape of Polish culture.

Keywords:

Polish folk history, serfdom, folk, *tremendum et fascinatum*, cultural criticism

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**A COMMUNITY OF MEANINGS?
EXOTICISM? THE PERIPHERY
LOOKS AT THE CENTRE**

Introduction

The subject of this article is an attempt to answer the question of how the artistic periphery in Poland perceives the artistic centre. What connects and what divides these two worlds? The centre is well recognised and described in Polish science, while few researchers are interested in the province. Therefore, in order to answer the question posed, it is necessary to show the specificity of the functioning of peripheral hubs and the art created there.

In the article, the centre will be understood as a network of avant-garde institutions and contemporary art hubs, open to the presentation of art, which, paraphrasing Grzegorz Dziamski's words, aims at the 'liberation from all limitations, including the limitations of one's own definition, to obtain absolute freedom'.¹ The periphery will be defined as hubs remote from the avant-garde ones, not so much in geographical terms but, above all, those which remain focused on artistic practices devoid of avant-garde features. An example of a peripheral hub will be the visual artists' community in the Podkarpacie [Subcarpathia] region. The article uses the results of empirical research that I conducted in 2017–2019 among visual artists who live and work in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship. The research was of a qualitative nature: it encompassed individual in-depth interviews, group interviews, participatory observation, and analysis of the content of existing materials. The text will quote the original statements from interviews with artists, all of which have been anonymised (only the interview number, information about gender and age have been included: e.g., 22K54 [where M stands for man, K for woman]). Since this community has extensive artistic contacts and cooperates with many similar hubs, it can be treated – to a certain extent – as representative of the periphery.

In order to answer the question of how the centre is perceived from the perspective of the periphery, it will be important to show how such local *art worlds* work, whether artists notice the difference between their own environment and the centre, what they think about the art presented there, and what kind of art they cultivate and recommend themselves.

ARTISTIC PRACTICES IN THE PERIPHERY

Answering the above questions, we should begin with the fact that the artistic practices associated with the centre have included them not only in the global mechanisms of art circulation, but also in the global process of knowledge production. Meanwhile, in many areas, the periphery remained faithful to the model from the times before the system transformation in 1989. It is still an area of a resilient activity of artistic associations (Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków – The Association of Polish Artists and Designers, Związek Polskich Artystów Malarzy i Grafików – The Association of Polish

1 G. Dziamski, *Sztuka po końcu sztuki. Sztuka początku XXI wieku*, Poznań 2009, p. 7.

Fine Art Painters and Printmakers), and the affiliation to them is considered as something prestigious (as evidenced by the presence of mentions about it in biographies, even in the case of young artists). Another characteristic feature is the maintenance of regionalisation of artistic environments originating from the period of the People's Republic of Poland: reviews and competitions for Podkarpackie artists and environmental plein-air trips are organised. The circulation of art around the voivodeship is, to a large extent, closed within its borders, focusing mainly on the local environment's needs.

The Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych [*Art Exhibition Bureau*] state network galleries have remained the most prestigious. The dominant number of galleries operating in the voivodeship are not adapted to the presentation of art using new media: they do not have the necessary infrastructure and do not take action to acquire it. They lack beamers, monitors, and players. It is also often impossible to interfere artistically with the state of the exhibition space. Traditional exhibitions of painting, prints or sculpture are preferred.

The analysis of the trajectories of local careers shows that, in the prevalent model, artists study at a university or at an art faculty (Academies of Fine Arts are considered to be the most prestigious), when they master their skills in the domain of traditional media (painting, printmaking, sculpture). Then, they gain a status in the local environment, participating in plein-air trips, symposia, and competitions, as well as organising their own exhibitions. They refer to exhibitions and competitions as a 'confrontation', since those are intended to assess their existing achievements.

Thinking about the art of the studied artists is thinking in institutional terms. The institutions accompany them at all stages of their careers. The high status of institutions, especially the public ones, is associated with the fact that a career confirmed by institutional certificates of 'consecration' (awards, distinctions, scholarships, publications, exhibitions in the largest local galleries or employment in institutions recognised as prestigious) is valued in the local field.

During the assessment of the rank and prestige of artistic institutions, the respondents do not refer to their program or the achievements of curators working there. The statements most often refer to two criteria: whether the institution is seated in a big city and whether it is distinguished by the size itself: 'The largest galleries. Every artist dreams of exhibiting at some big gallery in Warsaw, and a thought of an invitation for the artist immediately brings a smile on their face. Then, you don't think whether they're going to pay for it or not. Then, you don't think about money, you just think that: I can finally show my works in a big gallery, I have the whole gallery to myself.' (05M25).

In the periphery, the thinking that city galleries or the BWA network are places of meetings of local elites and presentation of high culture is still maintained. Large retrospectives of local 'masters', post-competition exhibitions, industry-specific presentations create space for ceremonial speeches, presenting flowers and congratulations letters, refreshments at lavishly set tables, and introduction to distinguished guests of title.

These galleries create an aura of their own inaccessibility (applications and requests from artists, long queues, closed access for amateurs), they pride themselves on broad and intensive cooperation with professors and artists of local and supra-local 'renown'. The artists maintain this state of affairs by submitting applications for the organisation of the exhibition and waiting for their appointed date. It is significant for this circle that its members limit the exhibition activity only to institutions designated for this purpose. They prefer individual exhibitions and they use traditional techniques. They are not interested in activities in alternative or public spaces.

The galleries avoid exhibitions that can shock someone: 'In smaller hubs, this is avoided for well-known moral reasons. Small environments, small towns are not prepared for such activities. Organisers or directors of such institutions do not want to jeopardise their own existence, their own work, their own financial stability (*Laughs*).' (26M56)

The reason for not presenting new and important phenomena is also that people responsible for creating exhibition programs do not know and do not understand contemporary art: 'It's very difficult. I don't have a clear opinion here. I don't dig into all this contemporary art so much, for which I reproach myself, because as an employee of a cultural institution I should be deeply involved in it. And I'm kind of pushing it away from me. This art has taken a path that I don't quite understand. I'm old enough, and the world that's coming around is no longer mine. There are certainly phenomena that are delightful, sincere, authentic, but there's also a lot of strange shallow stuff, or pushing for career at all costs. Only time will sift through these phenomena that are taking place.' (26M56)

In most galleries of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, the people responsible for the exhibition program are artists (they are often gallery directors as well). They also act as curators of their colleagues' exhibitions; the understanding of the task of a curator is different here than in the centre. It is usually the author who chooses the works, arranges the exhibition in the gallery space, and the curator is the person who opens the exhibition, less frequently they are the author of the text about the exhibition, agreed with the artist. The attitude towards curators working in the centre is definitely negative. Their actions are identified with manipulating and distorting art: 'Well, now it's the curator who will tell you what is art at all. On the other hand, the position of a curator is somehow

similar to law. Unfortunately, it often doesn't matter whether someone is guilty or innocent, what matters is whether we can prove it. I'm sorry to say this because it sounds very cynical and nonsense. But it's the same here.' (22K54)

Curators are also perceived as a threat to the existing order and to artists managing art institutions: 'I once heard such a voice: if you want to have curators, why are you necessary?' (51M51).

Galleries limit their role to 'hanging' exhibitions and making them available, without being interested in the theory or discourses arising in the domain of contemporary art. Local critics are popularisers of artistic events rather than an important voice in the discussion, as they write texts commissioned by the organisers. Artists, as practitioners (especially those who are professors), cast themselves as experts and highest authorities in the field of art (understood as proper handling of formal values and skills). The high position of professors is evidenced by the fact that they are jury members in art competitions; BWA galleries pride themselves on having their works in local collections, professors are especially honoured as participants of artistic open-air trips (their presence increases the rank of the event, competition, and collection).

Employment in art institutions and art schools allows the respondents to maintain the myth of selflessness of their art. Artists are distrustful of market mechanisms. The art created and exhibited in free time, when the optional sale is not the main source of livelihood, gives them a sense of freedom and a certain moral superiority.

OPINIONS ON WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE CENTRE

Analysing the beliefs of artists living in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, it can be seen that everything that is going on nowadays is looked at through the prism of art history. It is the past that provides the definition of the present, it is where the answers to all the questions are sought. It is also important that this is not the entire past, but specific traditions extracted from it: 'However, art has for centuries been such a domain that is chosen, where not everything can get. So many generations, so many canons have created this sense of aesthetics, that now at some point has got completely blurred, that there are no limits, that everything and nothing really can be art.' (20K24)

The respondents' attention is focused primarily on those trends and artistic biographies in which a romantic vision of dedication to art was fulfilled, which focuses, like a lens, the most important values for the studied community: the ethos of hard work, passion, constant search for the right form or selflessness of actions.

The respondents associate new phenomena in art with the West and the import of foreign tradition. They perceive them as activities subordi-

nate to the laws of the market, where fast success results from efficient promotion and is not so much an artistic success as a purely commercial one. In their perception, such activities penetrate Poland, to find here followers tempted by an easy career and money; however, they are something external to the history of Polish art and alien to its best traditions: 'It is also necessary to distinguish between what happens in Polish and world art. These are two completely different things. As usual, we live in a mushroom pit, imitating whatever crops up somewhere in the United States, or in London galleries, or at great art festivals in Germany, Italy, Venice. It reaches us as a bounced echo and this is our unpleasant reality. I don't understand why we haven't been able to achieve mental artistic independence for so many years. This parrot is still here with us.' (26M56)

It is also significant that artists cannot talk about contemporary phenomena, they lack historical knowledge and appropriate concepts: 'And there was silence (*laughs*). I don't know how to put it into words.' (15M35) 'We haven't been taught to talk about art. That's what critics are for. At the college, we've been taught how to do our job, art history was only general.' (35M60)

Apart from aesthetic categories, they do not know other evaluation criteria of, e.g., conceptual art or works related to the critical current, which are more intellectual constructs using non-traditional media: 'Besides painting, there are also many other media and it's difficult to say anything about them. I can't tell, for example, whether a performance is good or not, because there are no criteria for performance, or at least I don't know about them. If it triggers someone's emotions, then it's on point and good. What is good art and what is bad art is also determined by critics.' (07M40)

Most of the interviewees limit themselves to the interpretation of contemporary art in terms of scandal or teasing the viewer. In such statements, neither the names of artists nor the titles of works or exhibitions are mentioned. Most frequently, a case somebody got word of is treated as representative of the entire contemporary art and as evidence of the lack of any values in it. The statements about contemporary art highlight primarily its banality and even ridiculousness: 'Another situation has just come to my mind. A colleague from Tarnów says: Now we have a new director who... There was a fan standing in the middle. I thought it was necessary to lower the temperature, or maybe a work of art should have optimal conditions (*laughs*). It turned out that was the work of art. And she says, "I don't understand some actions, but we're now *trendy* and we're showing everything we can"' (06K42)

In the periphery, one of the main accusations formulated against artists creating installations, performances, new media art, etc. is the speed and ease of achieving the intended goal and the capacity of creating

media buzz with such activities. They are interpreted as being calculated to impress: 'At the college, well, I had to get my one hundred and sixty teaching hours done with and, for example, I saw how the paintings were made, I call it a mechanical result. It means that if I take a doll, break it, pour, let's say, some pencil shavings on it, pour red paint on it, then I attach everything to a canvas and write the stop abortion slogan, well there is a mechanical effect at this point, but is it art? It's not.' (22K54)

Crossing and blurring the boundaries between art and other fields of culture and science or social reality is perceived as a harmful phenomenon: 'Now, due to the contact of these two worlds, the one I call "false", where artists play the roles of various other disciplines, has been legitimised because such channels and such possibilities of fulfilment of these artists have been created through this art, which has ceased to refer to pure art and is based on sociology, philosophy, history, music, some para-performative actions and we are currently part of a huge insane system that has legalised fiction, inconsistency, lack of skill, ignorance... Everything is heading towards catastrophe, and while it's heading towards catastrophe, it's as if it's been completely excluded from the real, honest circuit, which would shape a man who would like to understand the language of art, make it their own and learn from it.' (25M60).

VISION OF ART AND ARTIST IN THE PERIPHERY

When determining their difference from contemporary artists present in the global circulation, the respondents primarily emphasise the aspect of the form of the work and the sincerity of actions. A common problem in the reception of contemporary art, for them, is not so much its controversial content as the insufficient formal and aesthetic qualities of the works. On the one hand, they respect 'Marcel Duchamp's gesture' and are aware of its consequences for the development of art, on the other – they still demand art created using traditional media. The criteria they use when formulating assessments of an artist's work concern almost exclusively the formal layer of works. The artists do draw on modern traditions, but in a selective way. They value abstract art. They recommend searching for new forms of expression, experimentation and resorting to chance, but in safe doses and within the limits of easel painting, printmaking, or traditionally understood sculpture.

They justify their resistance to the rapidly following changes in contemporary art with statements of respected classics, such as Vassily Kandinsky. That theorist was opposed to new trends and art reflecting its era, because 'it passes quickly and becomes morally dead as soon as the atmosphere that sustains it changes', while 'timeless art', based on purely formal values 'has in itself a fertilising and prophetic power, is capable to

have a broad and profound impact':² 'In general, a trend in art is something I consider out of place. There may have been a trend in art in the past, but it was something new. Now it is said that, in art, everything has already happened. In my opinion, art is not just about something new appearing in it. I believe that art should be true.' (19K31)

The key criterion that a work must meet in order to be classified as art is the correctness of the artistic form. The form category introduces the need to create material works that can be assessed according to aesthetic criteria. It is precisely the mastery of formal principles by students that local educators consider to be of fundamental importance: 'Form is the most important. They must master the form, because this is the basis and the starting point for other activities. Only later can you do things... once you're able to give them some form. (45M59)

In order to illustrate the process of artistic education in the discussed environment, as well as the reproduction of such a model of being an artist among young candidates, it is best to refer to the distinction made by Grzegorz Kowalski.³ The artist compared two models. He called the first of them, that which takes place in a hierarchical relationship – master-disciple and teacher-student – 'teaching art', while the other one, consisting in meeting various autonomous personalities – teachers and students, was described as 'education of artists'.⁴ In the 'teaching art' model, the student is expected to master a specific range of knowledge and manual dexterity, the rewarded features of professionalism and skilfulness (verifiable in an objective manner); the student learns well-proven things, communication takes place through a work that is concretised as a material object, the language of art is limited to general compositional and technological principles, thanks to which the applicable rules can be verbalised and described, and the language of art itself refers to forms known from the history of art. In the 'education of artists', the student is supposed to reveal their individual features, needs, and aspirations; innovation, originality and subjectivity are rewarded; communication takes place through one's own physicality, one's 'whole being', which makes the work dispersed; the language is created *ad hoc* for the needs of the moment, it refers to the existing situation, it exceeds the framework typical of visual art.⁵

The periphery appreciates the first model, they educate young people at local colleges according to such assumptions, and then present artists shaped in this way in local galleries and reward them in competitions they organise.

2 W. Kandinsky, *O duchowości w sztuce*, transl. S. Fijałkowski, Łódź 1996, p. 28.

3 G. Kowalski, *Uczyć sztuki czy kształcić artystów?* in: *Polskie szkolnictwo artystyczne. Dzieje – teoria – praktyka. Materiały LIII Ogólnopolskiej Sesji Naukowej Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*, ed. M. Poprzęcka, Warszawa 2005, pp. 21–25.

4 Ibidem, p. 22.

5 Ibidem.

The respondents, asked about important figures from the history of art, most often provided names of classics they valued (mainly for their skills and expression), such as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, Vermeer, van Gogh, Picasso,; the story ended in the second half of the 20th century, with artists such as Mark Rothko and Anselm Kiefer.

Artists are taught to express themselves primarily through the form, not the content of the works. The content is only a pretext for 'formal search' where, besides aesthetic values, truth and sincerity are also important: 'I haven't reflected too much on what is important to me. I think honesty and values that are purely aesthetic. I wouldn't like to add any message and philosophy to it, I only care about the visual side of the painting.' (28K40) 'I don't really raise any subject. The subject is in the form.' (19K31)

Formal values are appreciated for their timeless versatility. Therefore, the respondents separate their work from current social and political problems: 'For me, art is a kind of escape from what is outside, it brings me closer to what's inside me. This is the quintessence of the whole. I'm more interested in the interior than in the exterior.' (14M62)

In the community being studied, self-expression through a work is considered as the primary goal of the artist's activities. What is important, the artist expresses their hopes, emotions, states of spirit, and by doing it in an intuitive and spontaneous way, they anticipate in their intention a similar reception in the viewer. Emotional qualities are valued higher than intellectual ones.

For the respondents, a work of art is something autonomous, which does not require additional commentary. If it has been created properly, it speaks to the viewers. Direct and emotional perception of a work is clearly preferred and valued higher than engaging intellect and knowledge: 'I don't want to complain here, but there is less and less contact with pure visual art, understood as an image. A huge expansion of the so-called new media art, where the entry and understanding of the entire mechanism and cause of activities, the reason for creating a film or a project, well, that's the way it's done, require the recipient, that is, me, to take the time to understand, to come and read. Now there are a lot of interesting initiatives of this kind. On the other hand, I perceive this as a kind of functioning of the creators in the manner of their statements, because they believe this is their form of expression or communication. On the other hand, what I find more pleasant or attaching me more, is an object in the sense of an image, a print, also a film, a photograph.' (21K50)

In the category of values considered the most important in artistic practice, it is truth that holds the first place. The interviewed artists' statements suggest that it is understood as the sincerity of self-expression and compliance with one's own personality. The statements refer also to intuition and spontaneity. For the respondents, truth is achieved by surrendering to emotions, while all previously planned and deliberate strategies of actions or intellectual decisions

are considered to be something insincere and valued negatively: ‘Now, for me, it’s most important to make it some kind of truth, that I don’t want to invent things or symbolisms here, that I invent from somewhere out there, that I will paint some tendencies or something and it will be cool, eye-catching... It used to be done to get the applause, to say something, now I want it to be honest.’ (08M42)

CONCLUSION

The results of the research reveal an image of the periphery which does not form a community of meanings with the centre, but rather treats what is happening there with deep distrust. These two environments follow different models of practicing and presenting art; they engage different values in these construction processes and undertake different activities.

The Podkarpacie community, within the limits of its own model, maintains contacts with similar communities in Poland, and does so by organising and/or participating in joint plein-air trips, symposia, and competitions. The periphery creates their own *art world*, based on the acceptance of similar values, rules, and conventions. Moreover, they feel they are depositories of the best European artistic traditions.

What can be helpful in showing the difference between the periphery and the centre is French sociologist Nathalie Heinich’s distinction of the paradigms dominant in the history of Western visual art. Those paradigms include the modern and the contemporary one. The former, associated with the emergence of such currents as Impressionism, Expressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Abstraction, Surrealism, etc., broke with the classical rules, and the main task of art was to express the artist’s inner life, while the changes in the way of imaging were of a purely formal nature.⁶ Piotr Piotrowski defined Modernism as ‘an international style, based on the autonomy of the artistic object and the dominance of aesthetics’.⁷ According to the author, the main strategy of modernity was to neutralise the framework (context) and to blend the work into the ‘uniformist world of the universal *artistic idiom*’, which in turn meant that Modernism was characterised by formalism and maintaining the ‘utopia of the universal language’.⁸ In the context of the previous considerations, this paradigm can be indicated as important for the periphery, but also as a model to which it reaches quite freely, noting and quoting only what allows to justify its own artistic attitude, embed it in an important tradition and give it the appearance of modernity. It should be emphasised

6 N. Heinich, *Sztuka jako wyzwanie dla socjologii*, Gdańsk 2019, pp. 34–35.

7 P. Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, Poznań 1999, p. 266.

8 Ibidem.

that the problem is not to abide by the modern paradigm, but to choose its academic, safe versions, while completely abandoning its avant-garde ambitions. This is also how local outsiders evaluate this art: 'This is, however, more of a classic than avant-garde art. There's a lot of safe activity here that you might enjoy. There are few activities that I value in art, that is, art that has something to communicate. Most things around here are shown rather than communicated. They're supposed to look, and not to carry any content.' (04M44)

For artists operating in the contemporary paradigm, boundaries are set only to be crossed; art keeps annexing new areas, such as politics, religion, or social problems. The authors undertake activities of an intermediate nature, create in alternative spaces, outside the framework of traditional institutions, emphasise the processualism of projects, sometimes give up a material work and settle for provoking a specific situation or experience. The very structure of the world of art and the popular practices become a medium in their hands, also changing the rules of participation of the recipient who not only constitutes the meaning of works and activities, but also influences their final form and course. According to Grzegorz Dziamski, art has now become absolute, which means that it determines its own areas and forms of action.⁹

What is helpful in understanding the closure to changes in art, observed in the periphery, is the concept formulated by Niklas Luhmann who also perceived art as one of many closed social systems. In his concept, art, as an operationally closed system, produces itself all the operations it needs to continue. The history of art in this approach is 'a conversation between some works of art and others' and 'contains nothing imported from outside', and the autonomy of the art system consists in the fact that 'the artist is oriented in the world of previously created works and his own creative programs'.¹⁰ The differentiation (distinction between what is and what is not art) takes place in the context of already recognised works, theories already functioning; moreover, it requires a limitation of the social conditions for the creation of works and their reception, because an artistic work must be able to distinguish itself from something else, 'it must be able to recognise that it is about art';¹¹ the limitation of contacts with the surrounding environment is to protect the borders of its own definition of art.

This kind of concept is helpful in understanding the past, when art was a separate sphere of activity, put apart from such areas as politics, social problems, science, etc. However, it no longer suits the modernist concepts, let alone the present. Maintaining such a view in the face of

9 G. Dziamski, op. cit., p. 11.

10 N. Luhmann, *Pisma o sztuce i literaturze*, Warszawa 2016 p. 278.

11 Ibidem, p. 276.

current phenomena in art excludes from an understanding participation in what is current and important.

The attitude of closing and opening to other areas of reality (especially social reality) can also be considered, following Piotr Piotrowski's model, as a manifestation of agoraphilia or agoraphobia. The first attitude is based on the need to go into public space (agora) and participate in it, on the desire to shape public life.¹² Agoraphobia is the escape from public space, withdrawal, fear and resistance, as well as the prohibition of participation in the creation of democracy.¹³ After 1989, according to the author, a 'spatial turn' took place, and the artists undertook 'critical and design activities for the benefit and in the social area'.¹⁴ That happened in the centre, because the attitudes typical of the periphery are still those qualified by Piotrowski as manifestations of agoraphobia, which are: the use of 'censorship' activities (justified by the social interest, respect for religious feelings, customs, the interest of taxpayers or the protection of the institution's good name), the reluctance to go out into public space and participate in it.¹⁵ Fear of social space causes artists to prefer art enclaves separated from current events, strongly institutionalised, similar to those from the previous system of 'art enclaves' where no critical actions are taken.

Finally, it is worth noting that it is possible for the centre and the periphery to experience the community of meanings in the field of art. Two projects conducted in the Podkarpacie region at the BWA in Krosno should be mentioned here; both made the two environments meet and penetrate. The first of them, entitled *Moja matka, moja córka* [My Mother, My Daughter] curated by Agnieszka Bartak-Lisikiewicz and Magdalena Ujma, took place at the end of the year 2021, extending into 2022. Paweł Korbus's exhibition entitled *Zwracam się uprzejmie* [May I kindly address] was opened in February 2022. Both are connected by the fact that their authors invited local artists to cooperate.

In the first, the experience of being a mother, daughter, and artist connected women who had been working in the main circulation of art for years with those for whom this very circulation is something distant and not fully understood. Some of the local artists reached for different media than before, showing works for which they had not seen a place and justification earlier. Also, many of the artists, through the interviews conducted by curators, became aware that it is not the aesthetic qualities of the form that matter most: it is, above all, the content behind the works; not the

12 P. Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie sztuki Europy Wschodniej*, Poznań 2018, p. 171.

13 Ibidem.

14 P. Piotrowski, *Agorafilia. Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie*, Poznań 2010, p. 7.

15 Ibidem, p. 8.

'general human themes', but the women's individual biographies. Similar life experiences and social roles have created an atmosphere of openness to other artistic languages.

Paweł Korbus, in turn, invited local artists to accompany him during his artistic residence at the BWA in Krosno. The artist wanted to influence the new environment, but he also allowed the environment to influence him. The exhibition summarising the project was a record of various interactions with local artists; those interactions spontaneously took the form of performances and minor interventions in the public space.

These two exhibitions show that projects based on common experience, established friendships and personal relationships allow the two different worlds of art to establish a dialogue, learn, and tame what is alien. Moreover, such projects show the periphery an alternative to the dominant model, and participation allows the artists to verify critical, but also stereotypical beliefs about the new forms of functioning of contemporary art. Perhaps this is the best strategy for the periphery to become more open to change.

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Abstract:

The article presents the specificity of the functioning of peripheral hubs and the art created there. The subject of this article is an attempt to answer the question of how artistic periphery in Poland perceives the artistic centre, what connects and what divides these two worlds? The article uses the results of empirical research conducted in 2017–2019 among visual artists in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship. They give an insight into how local art worlds function, whether the artists belonging to them notice the difference between their own environment and the centre, what they think about the art presented there, as well as what art they themselves practice and recommend. The difference between the periphery and the centre was discussed in reference to the tension between the Modernist search for a universal, timeless language of art and the contemporary blurring of boundaries and definitions of art as well as its involvement in various social areas.

Keywords

periphery, centre, visual arts, models of action, contemporary art

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Ewa Tatar

**BWA OR A POST-WAR ATTEMPT TO
ANIMATE THE CIRCULATION OF
ART OUTSIDE THE CENTRE**

The present paper is an outline of the history of an unprecedented project: the Art Exhibitions Offices (BWAs), a network of contemporary art galleries established in the times of the Polish People's Republic. It shows the transformation of this structure, its decentralisation and the solutions applied to individual galleries in relation to historical and economic changes. The text is based on archival research conducted by the author between 2014 and 2018. BWAs can be seen as an example of the organisation of artistic life in the form of a horizontal network, based on the cooperation of its individual links.

In addition to the huge role they played in the animation of the visual arts community and the diffusion of artistic life in post-war Poland, they were also a way of managing the leisure time of a society undergoing urbanisation. Art Exhibition Office was the name given to the municipal galleries established by a decision of the then Ministry of Culture with its headquarters in the Warsaw's Zachęta Gallery in 1949.¹ The first branch of the Central Art Exhibition Office (CBWA) was established in Katowice (1 September 1949), and its activities covered the Katowice and Opole voivodeships. By the time of the first decentralisation (1962), i.e., the handing over of the administration of the galleries to the local authorities (Voivodeship National Councils), there were 11 branches in the BWA network: in Kraków, Katowice, Opole, Wrocław, Poznań, Szczecin, Gdańsk, Bydgoszcz, Łódź, Olsztyn and Piastów (known as the Capital BWA).

The tasks of each of the Offices included 'the dissemination of contemporary fine arts', as the model statute of 1962 reads.² The report of the 1967 convention of the BWAs' managers³ emphasised the need to reach out as widely as possible to the working-class communities. Dissemination was to take place through the organisation of exhibitions of Polish art in major urban centres, as well as educational actions in the provinces and cooperation linking associations of artists with social, youth or workplace organisations in order to organise exhibitions and actions to popularise art, to cooperate with the media in order for the gallery to promote its own activities and publications, but also the organisation of courses in the visual arts, supporting artists with purchases and acting as intermediaries in the sale of works of art, as well as collecting documentation of contemporary artistic life in the given area. Each office was managed by a manager (later a director) in charge of the programme, and the model institution should also have employed an educational and technical instructor, an accountant, a clerk, a cashier, a maintenance craftsman, an assembler, a maintenance worker, a central heating stoker and a

1 I used the archives of the Field Department of the BWA in the Institution Archives of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. The research was carried out before this collection was sorted out and before the archival material was assigned signatures.

2 Ibidem.

3 Ibidem.

receptionist-informant. Later, there were even ideal staff sets developed, adapted to the size of the institution.

In 1966, the CBWA Field Division (also referred to in the documents as 'Department') was established. It was in charge of providing substantive support to galleries scattered across Poland, ensuring the smooth functioning of the entire network of institutions, stimulating evaluation and collecting data from the field; Maria Domurat, who ran this department, highlighted in her notes both similarities and differences in their functioning. This is what she said about the tasks and forms of the Department's work: 'A lot of paperwork, making plans and reports. I gradually began to create collections: primarily prints. We used them to organise travelling exhibitions, which were similar but consisting of reproductions, with descriptions and texts. They travelled to distant places and were virtually the only contact with art there. In the beginning, I worked alone but the staff grew as more Offices were established. We organised art knowledge tournaments and conventions of directors. It was there that closer contacts were made, exhibitions were exchanged, and very often several Offices contributed to one decent catalogue. They were led by great people, usually visual artists, sometimes art historians, a group of enthusiasts. BWAs had a wide range of activities that involved entire voivodeships. We drew the ministry's attention to various needs. At the time, these galleries were very general in nature. We were missing authorial programmes'.⁴

Art Exhibition Offices existed in 47 of the 49 voivodeships. They had their delegations and field galleries, which, from the 1960s onwards, were gradually transformed into independent institutions. They were created up to 1988 and from 1990 onwards, they were partly liquidated by the local authorities. After the administrative reform in 1999, only those with the strongest environmental position remained. Alongside systemic and economic changes, they also underwent changes in personnel at the time. Currently, the galleries that were formerly part of the BWA network operate under different names: as municipal galleries, run by local authorities or incorporated into the structures of cultural centres. About half of the former network's sites survived the economic transformation and the administrative reform. The name itself, together with the accompanying sentiment, was adopted as early as the 2000s by two commercial galleries in Warsaw: Biuro Wystaw i Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych. Some institutions, after identity perturbations manifested in the evolution of their names, have returned to using the abbreviation BWA. Alongside

4 *Jak obcowanie z przyrodą. O walce o sztukę współczesną w trudnych czasach z kierowniczką Wydziału Terenowego CBWA (1967–1990), Marią Domurat-Krawczyk, rozmawia Ewa Tatar*, *Notes na 6 tygodni*, No. 97, 2014, p. 68.



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1. The logotype of the BWA Gallery in Białystok, according to a woodcut by Sławomir Chudzik. From the author's archive, material submitted by the gallery. 2. The façade of the BWA Gallery in Wrocław, ul. Miedziana. From the author's archive, material submitted by the gallery. 3. The façade of the BWA Gallery in Leszno. From the author's archive, material submitted by the gallery. 4. The façade of the BWA Gallery in Katowice. From the author's archive, material submitted by the gallery.

names that indicated the style of operation ('offices'), we therefore have those that focus on exhibition ('galleries') but also those that refer to the previous functions of the location, i.e., 'arsenals', which was particularly evocative in the 1990s, when institutions that changed together with the art itself had to defend freedom of expression under pressure from conservative politicians and the public.⁵ Looking at the transformation of logos, one could write a history of the aesthetics of Polish transformation in the second half of the 20th century, but also trace the evolution of each centre's identity. So, we can see the journey from the 1950s' aesthetic built in the spirit of socialist-realist formalism through the 1960s' evolution towards modernist formalism to succumbing to the aesthetic individualism of Polish capitalism, and later, after 2000, the return to modernist traditions, but with the trend for harmonious design classics and reaching for an ethos of education in the spirit of balanced propor-

⁵ Cf. K. Sienkiewicz, *Zatańczą ci, co drżeli. Polska sztuka krytyczna*, Warszawa 2014.



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5. The cover of the catalogue of an exhibition in the BWA Gallery in Opole. From the author's archive.

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6. The cover of the catalogue of an exhibition in the BWA Gallery in Olsztyn. From the author's archive.

tions, modern taste and order. I would also add that most of the BWAs did not (and do not) have their own buildings; they operated in the premises of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers or ZPAP (e.g., in Kraków in the Dom Plastyka facility) or museums (e.g., BWA in Katowice organised exhibitions in the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom). Gradually and sparsely, pavilions designed specifically for art were built in the 1960s and 1970s, including in Kraków, Olsztyn, Bydgoszcz, Katowice, Zielona Góra and Częstochowa.

At the network's beginnings, the programme includes reviews of the current activities of local artists (accompanied by black-and-white catalogues without reproductions but with a list of works), commemorative exhibitions (on patriotic or social themes), often combined with competitions for visual artists, and touring exhibitions of original works and reproductions. Most of the exhibitions at the time were managed according to the CBWA's central plan, with almost all institutions of the time hosting, for example, the posthumous exhibition of the proto-socialist-realist artist Feliks Kowarski or, after the 1956 'thaw', the exhibition of Picasso's prints. The 1960s was a moment when the centres became independent in planning their programme and when interesting exhibition and festival initiatives emerged on the initiative of local communities, including: the Kraków Meetings or the legendary Golden Grape in Zielona Góra. It was the golden age of BWAs, immortalised, for example, in Janusz Morgenstern's feature film *Jowita* (1967), where the gallery building near the Kraków's Planty Park, designed by the modernist Krystyna Tołocz-

ko-Różyska, combines historicism and modernity, and the BWA's vernissage of paintings by the magic realism painter Anna Güntner, alongside the Cracovia hotel opened in the same period, play a similar role to that of sports cars in the French New Wave cinema.

The 1970s saw the last chance to flourish, but also a gradual loss of quality to quantity: it was then that dozens more independent centres were established in the newly created voivodeships. This period was marked by the beginning of the establishment of a kind of canon of art shown at BWA, which continued in the next decade: a list of names of artists working mainly in traditional art media, often valid in smaller establishments to this day, a canon, let us add, that was heavily ridiculed by the young generation forming the language of art in the mid-1990s.⁶ The 1980s were impacted by the martial law-related boycott of state institutions, artists identifying themselves with the democratic opposition did not want to exhibit in them, and some galleries, such as the one in Lublin, in order to fulfil their obligations to the organiser (usually the Department of Culture of the Voivodeship or Municipal National Council – the equivalent of the city hall at the time), used to install for several months exhibitions made of posters and archive materials. The socio-political crisis in the country was followed by the economic crisis, and, quite interestingly, this too is evident in the profile of the galleries' programme offer. At a time when the permanent subsidy (fixed funds allocated from the organiser's budget on an annual basis and enabling basic activities to be run) is only sufficient to pay staff salaries and maintain the premises

7. The photo documentation of an exhibition of the Kolo Klipsa group, BWA Gallery in Lublin, 1987. Courtesy of the gallery.

8. The photo documentation of Leszek Przyjemski's exhibition Heartfelt Holiday Greetings, 1982. Courtesy of the gallery.



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6 Cf. J. Banasiak, *Raster, czyli historia pewnej epoki*, <https://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/prezentacje/16281> [accessed on: 11 August 2022].

Piła, dnia 14 maja 1982 r.

SZANOWNNI PAŃSTWO,

Pragniemy zaprosić Państwa na kolejną

IX już PILSKĄ AUKCJĘ DZIEŁ SZTUKI

Podobnie jak w latach ubiegłych chcemy pomóc Państwu w nabyciu oryginalnych dzieł sztuki współczesnej. Pilskie aukcje stały się już tradycyjną okazją do wzbogacenia swoich kolekcji, dają możliwość kupienia prezentów dla najbliższych, umożliwiają zakup dzieł plastycznych przeznaczonych do dekoracji pomieszczeń reprezentacyjnych itp.

IX PILSKA AUKCJA DZIEŁ SZTUKI, na którą mamy przyjemność zaprosić Państwa w dniu 23 maja odbędzie się w Galerii 4.511.000, ul. Ludowa 11 — Pawilon sektor A.

IX Aukcja będzie miała rozszerzoną formułę i składać się będzie z trzech zasadniczych części:

- aukcja dzieł sztuki współczesnych (malarstwo, grafika) artystów plastyków zrzeszonych w pilskim oddziale ZPAP,
- giełda dzieł sztuki, impreza mająca na celu umożliwienie kolekcjonerom dzieł sztuki (malarstwo, grafika, rysunek, plakat i inne) wzajemną wymianę eksponatów,
- punkt konsultacyjny, ekspert z państwowej pracowni sztuk plastycznych dokonywać będzie oceny artystycznej prac plastycznych będących w posiadaniu mieszkańców Piły.

Zapraszając Państwa na 23 maja 1982 roku łączymy pozdrowienia.

BIURO WYSTAW ARTYSTYCZNYCH
W PILE

ZG Piła 1194 82 - 400 C-18.142

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(often rented), some galleries seek sponsors and co-organisers of projects (e.g., publish full-page advertisements in exhibition catalogues), others try their chances at independent economic activity and services, selling works of art or providing exhibition services (in March 1989 the BWA in Koszalin was transformed into Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych i Usług Plastycznych [Office of Art Exhibitions and Services]; such art services had already been provided in Rzeszów and Piła), as well as transport, craft work (the BWA in Krosno opened a carpentry service), the provision of exhibition halls and equipment for a fee, as well as running cafés.⁷ The existence of state exhibition facilities is threatened by reforms, such as, for example, the

7 M. Domurat-Krawczyk, 'Co słycać w BWA', *Notes na 6 tygodni*, No. 6–7, 2015, pp. 64–65. The manuscript dates from 1990.



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9. An invitation to the 9th Art Auction in Piła. From the author's archive.

10. The photo documentation of Cezary Bodzianowski's artistic project *The Starry Sky Above Me, a Black Cat Within Me*. BWA Gallery in Lublin, 13th January 1995. Courtesy of the gallery. Tadeusz Kantor's letter to the director of the BWA Gallery in Kraków. From the author's archive, material submitted by the gallery.

reprivatisation: 'The excellent working gallery in Płock is housed in a private building whose owner (now living in Detroit) decided to donate the property to the Płock Scientific Society'.⁸

In the 1990s, the Central BWA was transformed into the Zachęta Gallery and the Field Division was liquidated. The staff managing the former network's galleries no longer meets at annual conventions. The political transformation in Poland was survived by centres run by the most charismatic and determined directors-curators, who managed to offer their most interesting programmes and thus introduce the galleries they managed to the new circulation of art works that had been emerging since the second half of the 1990s. In this new circulation, institutions financed from the state budget compete side by side, including some of the former BWAs and the Foksal Gallery, avant-garde in terms of programme, but run since 1966 from the funds of the state enterprise Pracownia Sztuk Plastycznych, as well as art centres created on the initiative of artists, such as the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, which originated from the circle of Akademia Ruchu, or the Łażnia Centre for Contemporary Art in Gdańsk, which originated from the circle of the Wyspa Gallery. The newly established art circulation also includes institutions that are independent of public funding in terms of budget: sites established on the basis of avant-garde initiatives, author galleries dating back to the 1970s, as well as completely new ones, transforming over time from critical initiatives into commercial galleries, such as Galeria Raster. The 'evaluation' of the suitability of arts institutions in cities was sealed by the 1999 administrative reform. And the contemporary BWAs are often defined by 30- and 40-year-olds brought up as viewers by the previous directors-curators of these institutions.

What were the BWAs actually doing? In addition to exhibition activities, they focused on disseminating knowledge about art. Most of the institutions, operating in small towns, faced a 'lack of the habit of going to exhibitions'⁹ and were primarily oriented towards educational activities. Lectures were organised in the field, village, workplace, youth and senior clubs (the BWA in Koszalin even cooperated with kindergartens), there were also presentations by artists, screenings of films about art, exhibitions of charts and reproductions (prepared mainly by the Field Department of the CBWA) in community centres, cafés and clubs, even the garrison clubs. The Education Department of the CBWA organised a national Art Knowledge Tournament every year in cooperation with another BWA, in which teams from all over the country took part. A lot

8 Ibidem, p. 65.

9 Annual reports from the Archives of the Field Department for 1979. Institution Archives of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

of educational art history exhibitions were created in the form of charts to be displayed in cultural centres, clubs, e.g., in housing estates or community centres, such as in working places. School galleries, field galleries, village galleries (an initiative near Nowy Sącz) were run. Local professional audiences were also looked after. The animation of local artistic communities was often carried out in collaboration with the local structures of the ZPAP; forms of this animation included reviews of current work (e.g., March Salons in Zakopane) covering a particular medium (e.g., South Poland's Sculpture of the Year in Kraków) or open-air painting events. These were often associated with the local industry, such as the ceramic open-air workshop in Bolesławiec run by the BWA in Jelenia Góra, the jewellery open-air workshop in the Copper Basin in Legnica, the stone sculpture workshop of the BWA in Kielce that was the co-initiator of the creation of the Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko, or the open-air workshop at the State Agricultural Farm (PGR), organised by the BWA in Kalisz. Sometimes the themes of the open-air workshops or reviews were dictated by the most popular branch of visual arts in the region. Some open-air workshops are still organised on a regular basis, e.g., workshops for illustrators run by the BWA in Zamość or workshops for pastel painters run by the BWA Sokół in Nowy Sącz. The animation of cooperation between artists and industrial centres resulted, for example, in the aesthetic co-creation of the surroundings, as sometimes works presented at temporary exhibitions (e.g., the Exhibition of Outdoor Sculpture in Wrocław in 1958 or the Exhibition of Sculpture in Planty Park in Kraków in 1962) remained in the city space, while, for example, the results of open-air workshops in the open-cast stone mines in Szydłowiec (Masovia Land) or Wietrzna (Kielce) were used to decorate housing estates throughout Poland. Some BWAs, such as the one in Zielona Góra, have become a permanent part of Polish art history by being co-organisers of a canonic event: the Golden Grape Symposium. The event was founded in Zielona Góra on the initiative of the institution's director, a visual artist associated with the post-constructivist avant-garde of the time, Marian Szpakowski. The most powerful editions, co-curated with the Foksal Gallery circle, introduced an original take on the most important visual art trends of the 1960s (installations, happenings) to Polish artistic life.¹⁰

BWA undertook artistic and exhibition exchanges, also in the international field (mainly working in their border region, e.g., Białystok cooperated with the National Museum in Vilnius, Przemyśl with the Ukrainian centres). Nationwide reviews with competitions were organised, usually in the biennial mode, dedicated to, among others, printmaking, land-

10 Cf. K. Schiller, *Awangarda na Dzikim Zachodzie. O Wystawach i Sympozjach Złotego Grona w Zielonej Górze*, Warszawa 2015.

scape photography, applied glass, weaving, watercolour, etc.; they were most often organised in partnership with the relevant sections of the ZPAP. Documentation of exhibitions in the region was taken care of and archives of the local artists were maintained. Care was taken to ensure the continuity of the artistic tradition by organising, for example, the Interdisciplinary Senior Open-Air Workshop in Świeradów-Zdrój (from 1978). Exhibitions included mediation in the sale of works, fairs (e.g., of artistic jewellery in Legnica) and art exchanges were organised with proceeds being transferred to the artists or to social purposes. Collections were taken up to support the artists. Some events launched in the past (sometimes of international scope) and devoted to particular media (e.g., interior architecture and graphic design in Kraków, painting in Bielsko-Biała) are still being organised. The 1960s were a golden age of Polish art co-created by state institutions. General artistic trends are collected and dictated by the CBWA with major review exhibitions or monographs of avant-garde artists such as Alina Szapocznikow, Tadeusz Kantor or Henryk Stażewski. BWAs mainly promote the formal aesthetic, but those operating in cities and towns that are also strong art centres, such as Kraków or Zakopane, or led by a charismatic individual, such as the one in Zielona Góra, allow artists to shape the programme and thus diversify the image of the era as seen from the perspective of the periphery. In the next decade, BWAs irrevocably gave way to author's galleries. Moreover, after the period of the martial law, they lost their supra-local significance. In the 1990s, they mostly remain outside the rhythm of events in the visual arts.

What remains of the tissue and idea of the BWA today, and how can they be useful in creating a horizontal network of connections of the contemporary art scene beyond the centre? This was one of the questions posed by Ewa Tatar and Ewa Łączyńska-Widz when they re-initiated the annual reunion of the programme staff of the existing BWAs in Tarnów in 2014, within the programme of the open-air workshop run by the BWA in Tarnów. They have invited all the 'descendants' of the former network to participate, including the municipal galleries established after 1989. In addition to workshops that are to help contextualise the offices' curatorial practice in relation to the environment, the organisers focused on networking between institutions and sharing experiences. The intention was to make the institutions support each other in the future. The organisers were interested in everything: what the various facilities do, what kind of infrastructure they have, what problems they have to cope with (most often in terms of space, e.g., design of the interiors adapted for galleries and not suitable to the contemporary exhibition standards), and what their budgets are. In retrospect, it can be judged that this particular part of the meeting proved to be the most exciting.

Kraków, 25.3.1973 r.

Wielce Szanowna Pani Dyrektor,

Po głębszym i dokładnym przemyśleniu propozycji Pani urzędzenia mojej wystawy w Pawilonie Wystawowym BWA w Krakowie, w sierpniu br. pozwalam sobie poniżej sformułować moje stanowisko w tej sprawie.

Istnieją w moim wypadku dwie awersyjności wystawowe: jedna, to wystawa aktualnej twórczości i druga – wystawa retrospektywna.

W pierwszym wypadku wystawy najbardziej aktualnego, nowego etapu rozwojowego – prezentuję moje idee i dzieła w Galerii Pokasz PSP w Warszawie, z którą jestem od wielu lat związany moją aktywnością artystyczną.

Aktualna faza twórczości i jej idee są z zasady najbardziej ostre i dyskusyjne i lepiej w takich wypadkach służyć małe galerie, nastawione na tego rodzaju dekonstrukcję doświadczeń, niż wielkie i reprezentacyjne galerie.

Sądzę, że Kolega Kasidaki przewodniczący sekcji malarskiej ZPAP – zwracając się do mnie z propozycją wystawy – miał na myśli wystawę retrospektywną, które mogłaby powstać, w którym pracuję już przeszło 25 lat – przedstawić moją twórczość.

Wystawa retrospektywna w moim wypadku jest jedynym sposobem na ze sprośdzeniem wielu moich dzieł ze wszystkich muzeów polskich oraz przynajmniej najważniejszych muzeów i kolekcji zagranicznych.

Kilka lat temu zaistniała propozycja Centralnego Biura Wystaw Artystycznych w Warszawie, popierana przez Dyrektora Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi R. Stachnińskiego – urzędzenia wielkiej retrospektywy mojego malarstwa. Propozycja ta nie została zrealizowana z powodu – w owym czasie – niemożliwości osiągnięcia obrazów

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z muzeów i kolekcji zagranicznych.

Pozostaje możliwość urzędzenia retrospektywy dzieł znajdujących się w muzeach polskich.

Jest rzeczą niewątpliwą, że urzędzenie wystawy retrospektywnej w szczytowym miesiącu wakacyjnym wiąże się z celem i przeznaczeniem takiej wystawy.

Argumenty Związku o wielkiej ilości turystów w owym okresie nie mogą uznać za istotne.

Z tych głęboko przeze mnie przemyślonych motywów proszę o iskawe odsunięcie mojej wystawy do momentu, gdy znajdą się normalne i realne warunki dla prezentacji mojej pracy oraz dla całego procesu związanego z trudnym i bardzo obszernym przygotowaniem, pertraktacją z dyrekcją muzeów i kolekcji, ze osiągnięciem obrazów oraz z opracowaniem naukowym i bibliograficznym katalogu.

Proszę o iskawe uwzględnienie moich argumentów, łącząc w przyszłości wysokiemu szacunku

Tadeusz Kantor

List Tadeusza Kantora do dyrekcji BWA w Krakowie.
Z archiwum autorki, materiał nadesłany przez galerię.

11

These evaluative voices were dominated by the issue of the furnishings of the gallery interiors, with particular reference to the marble floors, which, kept in shades of beige, used to be called ‘cold brawn’ by the staff (the gallery in Kalisz even realised an exhibition on this subject in 2015, together with Pola Dwurnik). Problematic issues were also raised during the open-air workshop, such as differing attitudes towards artists’ fees or ambiguity towards the ownership of works after open-air workshops funded by the galleries. These issues will certainly require setting regulations and clear standards in the future. Other recurrent problems were related to censorship and self-censorship. What was impressive was the passion with which the educational campaigns are conducted, aimed mainly at children and young people, but increasingly also at the ‘silver generation’ and the adult audience in general. However, exhibition exchanges and co-productions are rare. This is certainly linked to the authorial manner in which the institutions are run and the fact that each institution is involved in different networks. Taking into consideration the constant underfunding (at the meeting, there was only one statement indicating budgetary satisfaction! – on the part of BWA Płock), more joint initiatives would perhaps be a good thing. Obviously, not all galleries will

be interested in such an exchange. BWAs differ from one another: today, some have seamlessly integrated into the contemporary art mainstream, while others present a region-oriented attitude.¹¹ Many differences between their profiles can be noted, but the potential commonality of experience and interests seems more important. Certainly, the top-down animated network supervised by the CBWA is already a closed chapter, but the idea of galleries' meetings was welcomed with enthusiasm. After Tarnów, subsequent gatherings took place in Ustka (2015), Kielce (2016), Wałbrzych, Ciechanów (2018), Gdańsk (2019), Warsaw (2020), and Bydgoszcz (2021). The next one is planned in Bielsko-Biała.

The modified and modernised idea of the BWA still exists today, transferred to a new capitalist political system, a new social and legal context. In the years following the political transformation, however, it gradually became apparent that some of the ideas behind the BWA network had survived the communist era and are well-adapted to the current needs of cultural institutions. These include cooperation between galleries, the horizontal structure of such cooperation, treating the participants as equals, as well as enriching the galleries' activities with a popularising and educational dimension. This project, created in the reality of the Polish People's Republic, gained a democratic and egalitarian dimension during its development, which deserves a closer look and an adaptation to contemporary artistic life.

11 The research was summarised in *Notes na 6 tygodni*, No. 6–7, 2015, pp. 49–96. I also used: I. Luba, *Awangarda w cbwa*, Warszawa 2018; *Od cbwa do Galerii Miejskiej Arsenal 1949–1999*, M. Michałowska, M. Matuszak (eds), Poznań 1999; M. Meschnik, *Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych w Katowicach 1949–1999*, Katowice 2001.

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Abstrakt:

Art Exhibition Offices (BWA) are municipal galleries established since 1949 in major Polish towns and cities, initially as branches or delegations of the Central bwa in Warsaw with its headquarters in the Zachęta Gallery, and gradually as independent institutions: municipal galleries administered since 1999 by the local governments. The article outlines the history of the creation of the network, identifies the typical, top-down proposed, elements typical for all these institutions and highlights their most interesting local modifications. It also shows the transformation of the network and the solutions applied in individual galleries in relation to historical and economic changes. The text is based on archival research conducted by the author between 2014 and 2018.

Keywords:

BWA, city gallery, history of artistic life, art institutions

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PART IV

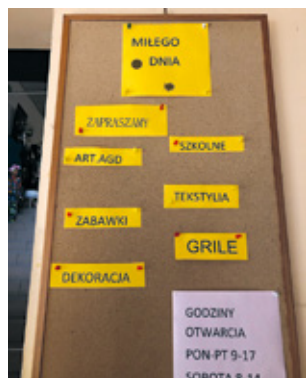
VISUALLY



Aleksandra Toborowicz
HAVE A NICE DAY!









Maciej Cholewa
ONE YEAR EARLIER



One year later, I returned to the same place. A deposed king lay amongst the haunted ruins, and the family that had survived the fire stared dispassionately at the charred remains of their world. A faceless figure turned towards Pepco. ‘Nothing has changed,’ we thought. Some kind of discount offer is always there.





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