

MONEY

TO BURN



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EDITED BY KATARZYNA KOŁODZIEJ
AND MAGDALENA KOMORNICKA

VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS
AND EXPERIENCE OF WEALTH
IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND

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In January 2010, a film appeared on the Internet by the now legendary Testoviron, under the title *Bogactwo część główna* [Wealth main part]. The original video is long gone from the net and rumour has it that the author is wanted by the prosecutor's office. The famous film had over half a million hits on YouTube. Testoviron is a Pole living in the United States. He has a thing for designer clothes, expensive cosmetics, watches and alcohol — he buys them because he 'can afford to'. In the video, inspired by the popular format of MTV CRIBS, he shows off his house, cursing every second word (and focusing extensively on the contents of his bathroom cabinets), as well as the 'six-pack' of his abs and — obviously — his 'rollies'. 'I got two toothbrushes cuz I can fuckin' afford it! Ain't seen this in Europe yet! . . . fuck, man, I tell you, wealth! . . . and here you got the toothbrush replacement heads. There's fuckin' 40 man, cuz I can fuckin' afford it! . . . No mercy for the poor!', he screams. Testoviron took the Polish Internet by storm, and the 'wealth' from the title has become a slogan, a hashtag, an attitude. For us who work for the worst paid industry, that being the sector of culture, whose wages are below the country average, #wealth has become a gesture of self-irony, and the quote from Kendrick Lamar 'dreams of living life like rappers do . . .' has become a joke, like a 'bling bling'. They say that irony is the ethos of our times, while post-irony is the experience of generation Y. Indeed, irony does help tame fears and longings. At the same time, it does help question reality as it is founded on an unintentional incompatibility, on contradiction — and it is for this reason why *Money to Burn* and the publication accompanying the exhibition have become not so much a story about a true wealth but rather about its absence. Both artists and authors have positively and happily agreed to accept our invitation.

We are also interested in the Polish context to wealth/poverty. The aim of the exhibition is to trace back the visual representation of affluence: from the moment Poles became money-crazy with the vision of making a quick buck in the 1990s, through the disenchantment with the neoliberal ideas and until this day. The exhibition comprises many parallel stories: from historical references and recontextualisations of stereotypes and symbols, through analyses of the Polish fantasies and notions of wealth, to a critique of the market and personal narratives. Transformation-era clichés or

experiences of the 2007 economic crisis mingle here with the manifestation of the joy of possession, fascination with luxury or the beauty of expensive items, as well as reflections on the real and symbolic value of works of art (which have invariably been considered as luxury goods).

The point of departure for the exhibition — and even more so for the publication — is the year 1989 or, more generally, the time of transformation, the so called Polish *duchologia* — spirituology, the birth of capitalism and the beginning of the process of the reorientation towards generating profits. As most of the artists in the exhibition and authors in the book, we do not have a very good recollection of the 1990s. For us, it was a period of growing up — and perhaps it is why we return to that decade with curiosity and sentiment, with a wish to analyse and reinterpret it (as does Olga Drenda, Magda Szcześniak and many other researchers). The fashion, the graphic design, the TV hits, the advertising, press, cinema, objects and customs of the 1990s — we find it all so inspiring again. Or maybe it all has never really left us?

The echoes of transformation are still present in the essay by Ziemowit Szczerek — writer and journalist, obsessed with history, culture and the geopolitics of Eastern Europe. Such traces are also visible in the text by the film critic Jakub Socha, who chose ‘Siara’ from the film *Kiler* to be his protagonist, or in the interview with sociologist Mateusz Halawa and in Agata Zborowska’s text on fashion. The iconography of the time is presented at the exhibition in the photographs by Monika Kmita, in the work by Janek Simon, or in the video by MISTER D.

Kitsch, fake goods, luxury Polish style, white socks and glam high heeled boots, plastic gold — all of these terms are found in the texts by Urszula Jarecka and Agata Zborowska, as well as the works of Maurycy Gomulicki, Rafał Dominik, Maria Toboła, or Dorota Masłowska’s video clip. Mateusz Halawa speaks about the adaptation of westerns standards and the idea of the American dream which is so important. Also Radek Szlaga or Piotr Uklański touch on these issues in their works. The issues of market and the crisis have been undertaken by Konrad Smoleński and Nicolas Gropierre, while politics and history — by Witek Orski, Jadwiga Sawicka, Tomasz Mróz or Zbigniew Rogalski. The cult of gold is the motif in the works by Ewa Axelrad and Łukasz Jastrubczak,

and Piotr Uklański and grupa Luxus touch on the question of the myth of the dollar. The notion of money in general is treated by Paweł Śliwiński, and Katarzyna Kołodziej writes about its dematerialisation. Tymek Borowski focuses on how we live now, and how we will live in the future. Gregor Róžański ponders on the question of waste, while Magdalena Komornicka writes about finances in the artworld. The question of success, which in Poland is still translated as family happiness, is the topic of an essay by Jolanta Gładys-Jakóbiak, while Maurycy Gomulicki focuses on the notion of the fetish and the joy of having.

A special feature of the exhibition is the video *Proposal* by the Azorro collective — a ‘proposition to participate in a prestigious no-budget project’. Dating from 2002, the piece, topical as ever, became, alongside the ones mentioned above, an inspiration for both the exhibition and the publication, and meant to lighten up an otherwise difficult and serious subject (also in the artworld).

In the era of ‘cookies’ and other such tools, both Google and Facebook monitor our every move in the Internet. They know what we like, what we click, what we buy, what we search, etc. When working on this exhibition and the publication, we have been ‘targeted’ as those who seek wealth and a way of making money on the Internet. Perhaps there is something to it?

[SPAM] Liberate yourself from the financial prison and be independent

[SPAM] You should be able to make really big money

[SPAM] Do you want to be financially independent?

[SPAM] You have a chance to make a real fortune

[SPAM] This message will change your life for the better

Just click.

Katarzyna Kołodziej, Magdalena Komornicka

**ZIEMOWIT S
SZCZEREK**



WEALTH



I'm rich, I have bling-bling, I have a house that looks like a maharajesque/sultanic palace with country-house columns in front, I have a golden Mercedes in leather and diesel, through the window of which I stick out a hand with a signet ring, and from the hand extends a leash, at the end of which is a purest-breed rott-pitt-weiler ('ja sam mala pitbull terrier'). I lead him with this hand of mine, richly adorned, Mercedes-bound, as it trots down the sidewalk, without a muzzle but with a diamond-studded collar with a big \$ sign on its muscle-bulging neck. My plates say JIMMEY. Or SHARRP666. Or SKIN01, or ROCKET, or BIGBONE.

And generally the idea of 'I scored big on a transport of Zigaretten nach Berlin, so the first thing I did was put a tiger-skin cover on my steering wheel and start ostentatiously carrying thick wads of \$100 banknotes in the front pocket of my shirt.'

Or:

I have a house, built before I got rich, but plastered and insulated afterwards, I have bare feet in leather slippers, and in them I walk around my yard, where post-Soviet immigrant workers are mowing my lawn, water from the sprinkler splashes delightfully down my bare knees and calves, and down my lower thighs too, for my shorts are short, oh short, down my bathrobe that I had monogrammed in golden thread.

In the garage, a post-Soviet is waxing my car, while my wife, a platinum blonde in tasselled slippers, selects from the catalogue of the Porta Aurea Company an iron entry gate for our property (the gate is bent in all kinds of crinkum-crankum, with sharp spikes on top so that the proles don't ever try to trespass), while I take out my phone every few minutes and call, call, call. I say, 'Mietek, buy this!' Or: 'Grzesiu, don't buy that!' Or, 'Andrzej, the train can wait till the day after tomorrow, but those trucks have to go, no fucking other way, we need to send 'em on the road, well, fuck, then pay him, what can you do? Pay him, Andrzej, let the man make some money too! What can you do?'

Big business, big world, big play. 'Big playa, big dick playa, big dick, baby, swingin' past your knees', as Les Grossman used to say.

So I'm standing in the bathrobe by the gate, which is unfinished (because my wife is only selecting the bent one from the catalogue), so it's just a chicken-wire gate, dividing our property from the profane world. The neighbours drive down the common road in their poor little Fiats and Opels, pretending not to look at my wealth, at the third floor I'd put on top of the two built before I got rich. They pretend not to be looking, but still they look, the poor fellows; look, you paupers, I'd actually pity you, were it not for the fact that I don't. Is this how you imagine Polish wealth? Siara from *Kiler* [The Hitman] in the swimming pool, eating white sausage off an epergne placed on a floating wooden board?

Like fuck. That's long gone.

This kind of Polish wealth is long gone and the notion is terribly stale, yet it continues to shape our vision of the Polish rich.

For a rich guy has to be a boor. For the boor — that is the Pole. And we descend from boors, from peasants. And the popular opinion — often boorish too. And so a boor sneers at a boor for being a boor. 'They sneer because they envy us', an opulent Polish man once told me as I was waiting for him to start lighting his cigarettes with those \$100 notes. 'They laugh because they'd love to be me. So why shouldn't I be laughing at them?'

Andrzej Stasiuk, in *Nine* I guess, has one of his protagonists enter the living room of a local bigwig. The bigwig was a housing-block guy like the protagonist himself, had his roots in the same housing-estate shit, and still owned a flat in the block (or, who knows, maybe he had two flats, maybe he'd bought all the flats on his floor, maybe he'd connected them all and now had a 16-bedroom flat, maybe he'd also bought the flats above and below, installed a staircase and now had a multi-level one, maybe he'd bought the whole block and now rides the elevator from the loo to the bathroom to wash his hands), at the flat was a young woman and a dog that was guarding her in case she wanted to flee from the bigwig. The bigwig had a big TV, a well-stocked drinks cabinet, and ice-cold vodka in the fridge. Stasiuk's protagonist sat in a big armchair, looking at the big TV, sipping the cold vodka, thinking about the woman guarded by a dog, envying the bigwig and thinking, 'This is how it should be. This is the way to be.'

'They envy us', the rich guy was telling me. 'How are they better than me? Less boorish? I'll tell you how: because they have no money.'

Because they aren't richer than myself. That makes them feel better. Morally superior for some reason. Poverty, they say, ennoble you. But I'll tell you — he pointed his finger at me — that if they had money, they'd be as boorish as we are. For what are we, aliens from space? People of some other breed? No', he was saying, 'we are from them, blood from their blood and bone from their bone. We are them, just rich. That's why they hate us and why they laugh at us.'

Then he looked me in the eye and corrected himself: 'You. You are us. And that's why you laugh at us.'

Basically I often don't know what to say and that time I definitely didn't. So I stammered out something about laughing at everyone, about different people laughing from different positions, but it sounded as if I was guilty and trying to explain myself. So instead I said, 'Oh, you motherfucker, poverty doesn't ennoble, but nor does wealth and that's for sure. Why, take that platinum card of yours and use it to clean your toenails. With everybody watching. Come on.'

He took off the shoe, the sock, and he did. And I went away, not sure whether or not I'd told him the right thing, whether I should have said anything, whether I should have started the conversation in the first place.

And then I looked at the citizens, at the so called ordinary people, riding public transportation or driving their cheap Korean cars, I looked for signs of luxury, I looked — and I saw.

This one has put Mercedes hub caps on his Daewoo; that one has added marble columns to his shed of a house. Another one has installed a plaster Venus on his apartment-block balcony, as if he were a fucking Caracalla, and yet another, speaking on a mobile in a tightly packed tram, is telling someone to stop pissing him off and being a pain in the ass because an hour of his time costs more than the other guy's family spends monthly on food. Still another has forgotten to tear the label off his jacket sleeve, 'Brilliant Edition Suit', it says, while this woman here posts to Facebook a photo of her feet and knees covered with a towel marked 'Lux Spa. Monica Verde (formerly: Monika Zieleniak), New Sącz, Poland'.

Luxury, Polish luxury. Polish, Polish, Polish common luxury, with luxury communing. Full is the Republic (and the neighbouring countries) of its splendour.

Well, but that's no more. Now it's a bit different.

Now luxury is a bit different because the times they are a-changing.

Polish luxury has become somewhat subtler.

For example, almost gone are tinted-window cars, except those that drive Andrzej Duda down Nowy Świat and Krakowskie Przedmieście to the Parliament and the government district. But Duda himself behind those tinted windows — somehow elegant. In tailor-made suits. Flowing around his body-body. With hair meticulously cut and styled. Always shaved nice and smooth. Never checked, but I bet he smells just fine.

These are no longer the times when — do you remember? — Polish politicians paraded around the Sejm like those bumpkins. In purple suits, wearing gold-bracelet watches, oozing rustic majesty, entering the royal suites holding plastic shopping bags and wearing kitsch-pink dresses printed with words like LOVE, SEXY, PINK, ROMANCE.

But now, wow, even a guy like Sławomir Nowak looks *somehow* wearing those 'borrowed' Patek watches — a nice hairdo, a smart cut, a fine discreet suit, and even if he looks like a sad-faced gigolo from a pre-war movie, it's a gigolo from a finer venue. He tries to keep up some style. He could wear all those watches at once, ticking like the heroic Red Army soldier. Ah, but now everyone's grown so subtle. New times, these. It's no longer vodka and a canned fish as it used to be in the old days at the parliament hotel, no longer XXL-sized steaks at a 'homemade' diner, but, ladies and gentlemen, wine, fine cigars and top restaurants. Remember the Tusk administration? All spick and span; even when they played football it was either in shiny soccer boots, when they happened to be opening a new pitch somewhere, or in a decent sports outfit, if they happened to be playing on that particular day. Even the rough-hewn Grzegorz Schetyna, whose body language and overall behaviour would — at first sight — agree with clothes made of thick cardboard, wears stuff that looks relatively fine and stylish. Even when exiled to his famous 'cave', he still wore a fine suit and smoked top-brand cigars. Yes, the times are a-changing. Even Jarosław Kaczyński, though this might seem impossible, can sometimes be persuaded to visit a hairdresser or — oh my — to put on a suit that won't look on him like the uniform on the good soldier Švejk. Yes, even the PiS-men, always associated with

clumsiness, sloppiness and dishevelment, look quite decent. They too have gone a few steps towards form.

Poland hasn't perhaps become subtle yet, but it's growing subtler and the wealth is different. More discreet.

It looks for example like at Warsaw's Fryderyk Chopin Airport where, searching for a lavatory, I unwittingly found myself at a place called the 'business lounge'. As soon as I entered, two toque-wearing ladies sprang up towards me, asking me to produce the right pass. I didn't have one, and I didn't even aspire to that 'lounge', I simply wanted to take a pee, so I asked where the lavatory was, to which the ladies, smiling pleasantly, replied that the lavatory was there all right, but I had to understand that it wasn't for me. I understood, of course, who am I to stay at business lounges after all – hey, even under communism there were two classes of train seats, you know — but I procrastinated to watch some wealth. Some contemporary Polish wealth.

Ah, I couldn't see enough: watching my conversation with the toque-wearing ladies, with ironic smiles on their lips, were people who were serious, dignified, and above all, originally and smartly dressed. Everything, dear readers, finely cut, fitting nicely, every outfit with a discreet 'this is me' element in some colour: a fancy zipper, a belt, a shoe detail, a stripe.

Ah, I thought, leaving under their pitiful gazes, look at the long way we've gone: from those purple suits to the elegance and discretion of business lounges!

*

Poland is again growing a wealthy class that has at least some style and form. The last time we had one, I guess, was before war: it was the ill-fated Polish landed gentry. Everyone in Poland aspired to imitate their style, from the richer peasants, through the bourgeoisie and intellectuals to the professional occupations. Signal rings, manners, collars, gorgets, manor houses, country life, neighbourly visits, servants, game hunting. And so on.

A world that is no longer, that is gone — and which had in fact created Poland and was — until the war — its head and feelers. Its destruction after the Second World War meant a kind of decapitation. And it took some time for Poland to grow back a new, relatively shapely head.

Interestingly, however, the decapitation didn't change one fundamental thing: the reference point of Poles' aspirations. It was still an imaginary nobility. Only now it was far more imaginary than before. Communist apparatchiks loved to hunt like aristocrats, and in fact the former landowners often sought employment with the state forest administration to be able to taste some of their old life, in a hunter's hat, with a rifle, a battue and an evening glass of whisky. 'We no longer hope on Mars via Sputnik to stay / But what's Mars when "former landowner" your papers say?', sang the Kabaret Starszych Panów [Cabaret of Elderly Gentlemen], a popular televised 1960s cabaret that was the last manifestation of the bygone world.

The landed gentry is gone but an aesthetic remains. The handsome 'Mr. May', a well-travelled citizen of People's Poland intended as a 'Polish version of James Bond', played by Leszek Teleszyński in the TV series *Życie na gorąco* [Living for the moment], confidently drove around the capitalist Western Europe in his Polish Fiat 125p 'Sport', hunting ex-Nazis and freeing revolutionaries from the dungeons of South-European juntas. As long as he stayed abroad, making his life visually attractive posed no problem, the style being provided by the German, Austrian, Greek or French setting, but when it came to showing May at home, things got less obvious. Where and how should a Polish socialist superhero live so that his home didn't look drastically different from the German, Austrian or French ones? The problem of location was solved by having May live in a modernist tower block at Wiejska Street, with a view of the Sejm and the place where the Democracy Defence Committee (KOD) rallies are held today. But the interiors are telling: on the walls of his home hang crossed traditional Polish sabres. What else could it have been? Well, for example flails, scythes or forks, but folk aesthetics somehow didn't catch on in Poland: the peasants adopted the style of their historical enemies as the most attractive one available, while rejecting their own as ugly and worthless. The world is full of such examples. Stanisław Dygat described how after the Second World War some Poles, their members hardening at the thought of power and might, started wearing Tyrolean hats and barking out their words in a commanding tone.

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In any case, although an aristocratic aesthetic has survived, the aristocracy itself (or an elite imitating it) has not and it had to be imagined. People started adding manor house-style porches to their homes and digging about in heraldry books. There were, of course, also notions of the West, another ideal for Poles, imitated whenever there are funds for that.

But all that was a postapocalyptic mix of projections about the Western world and aristocratic culture, with no ingrained form, resulting in an uncontrollable explosion of whatever came to mind and which today is giving Filip Springer a massive headache. And where there was wealth, the explosion was truly colourful.

Wealth, wealth. Unplastered cinder-block castles, figures from all mythologies of the world glued together and displayed on front lawns, 'Western' glass and chrome used as if children were playing with it. 'I show-off, show-off, show-off.' For if there is no form that, when skillfully imitated, can underline a rich man's status, then he has no choice but to flaunt his bling-bling, his car, phone and Italian suit, 'I have a Sony VCR at home, a Sanyo video, and I play CDs all the time.' And so on and on and on: 'I have navi in my Merc, a code card and an electric roof.'

The Romans may have been disgustingly rich, but aesthetics was something that civilisation imposed. At least in the classical era. Or at least in our notion of it, the utmost example of which is Sienkiewicz's Petronius. In their tunics and togas, in their *caligae*, with their love of the beauty of proportion, between their statues (which the Romans had in fact copied from the Greeks, but it speaks well of them that they knew what was worth copying), standing in front of their buildings, admired by the world for their perfection rather than splendour — they looked with amusement and incredulity at German envoys, so heavily laden with gold that they could hardly walk.

Polish wealth is not Roman wealth. Our law, like everyone else's, is based on Roman law, the concept of the republic is also Roman, our faith is Roman Catholic, and we use the Latin alphabet, deeming it a token of our Occidentality, for in other things we don't differ so much from Eastern Europe — we've been imitating the West for centuries, but deep inside we're still barbarians.

The Catholic Church in Poland hasn't been able to resist a barbarian wealth show-off either. Ah, the wealth of the Church, manifested

in the gilded spires and grand colour paintings of Licheń, in the Kałków Golgotha that its pious authors have unwittingly designed as a replica of the Babel tower and which draws on the Byzantine tradition of opulent grandiosity rather than on the Roman 'less is more'. The ecclesial lavishness and fulgor reflect exactly the same thing as stereotypical Polish wealth — bumpkiness.

One of the characters in Ivan Vyrypaev's play *UFO. Contact* is a Russian oligarch whom Vyrypaev approaches to ask for money for a show. The oligarch makes quite a nice impression: a good lord, humane, he will help if he can, why, he'll even donate generously. Oligarch, rich guy, lord. The oligarch feels entitled to judge the play not because he is an expert but because he's rich. 'Two and two equals fish'. The oligarch's taste and judgement will decide whether the play is staged or not. In a world where public institutions more specialised in evaluating artistic projects and funding them are becoming their own caricature, in a world where all institutions are becoming grotesque and superficial — wealth again returns to the forefront.

Wealth as part of an old, eternal order. Wealth and wealthy people as an elite gathered around an autocrat, leader, prezes, führer, duce, el caudillo, conducator, nemzetvezető, capitanul. The master and the magnates above and the plebs below. The simplest world order, which seems to be gaining popularity again, for who knows, perhaps people don't need a system that, at least in theory, is supposed to work for them, but a system they can understand. Accumulations of wealth that can be imagined, treasures that can be desired, princes and princesses whose favours can be won. A fairy-tale world.

And besides that it's 'Get rich or die trying. Get rich' and let the world collapse. 'Get rich' and after that the deluge, let empires fall, financial bubbles burst, systems collapse, for only the rich will crawl from under the ruins of the world. They will cope, for death may make equal the high and low, but in life you need to know how to cope. 'Gator boots and pimped-out Gucci suits.' Accumulation as the meaning of life: accumulation of goods, of adherents, of territories — and when reason prevails over instinct, when it turns out once again that moderation is putting a spoke in the wheel of the driving force of our species, that it doesn't actually make much sense to continue accumulating goods and territories and

that the adherents no longer want to be accumulated — the world will implode. There is a glitch in the construction of the world, an error in the equation describing it, so the world has to make a reset. Return to factory settings. And start scrimping and saving anew. And then start showing off again. Demonstrating. Wearing beads and displaying bales of calico. In Romania, Gypsies will again start building multi-story houses with tin roofs, sending chinks of light in all directions, contorted into the most fantastic shapes you can imagine: of Chinese pagodas, dragon heads, bird wings. Albanians will again start buying second-hand Mercedes cars and driving them at top speeds down bumpy roads, Russians will be getting themselves gold teeth, and Bulgarians will be wearing large gold crosses on their hairy chests. Americans will be lighting their cigars with dollar notes, and Poles will be losing golden horseshoes on the streets of Western cities in the hope of finally impressing someone, of being noticed and admired.

And then all this will again start acquiring form and shape, growing more discreet and subtle — until it resets itself yet again.

Ziemowit Szczerek — writer, journalist, man of obsessions. He is interested in Central-Eastern Europe, the past and the potentialities that never came into being

**MATEUSZ HALAWA
INTERVIEWED**

**BY ARKADIUSZ
GRUSZCZYŃSKI**



ON WEALTH



Arkadiusz Gruszczyński: Rich, meaning what?

Mateusz Halawa: I do ethnographical research about the use of money by the non-rich, and when I ask this question, I hear: a rich guy doesn't work.

Because he doesn't have to?

No, he doesn't have to. When we speak to people in Poland about wealth, what reverberates in their responses are codes of the old gentry landowners. In the times of feudalism, the 'master' and his family were often times the only in the countryside that didn't work. Their wealth came from what they owned. Rich women were fair-skinned as they never worked out in the field. There is also the additional global code of capitalist modernity in which wealth is based on finances: stock and bills of exchange. A rich person lives off the interest and dividends.

And we want to live such a life?

In the colloquial perception of wealth, such desires are suspicious. We do want wealth as we think of life as the burdensome duty to work for others and on the terms determined by others. Our ethical systems, however, assess labour positively, while wealth seems easy, hence one who does not work is simply treated with suspicion. A situation in which money breeds money has been criticised by Aristotle, or the authors of the Bible and the Koran. Value should be generated by labour. And wealth is a social relation which leads to frustration and aspirations triggered by comparisons: we go out with a friend who earns more, we can't afford to join our pals out on a vacation spree, we're ticked off seeing a better car next to ours at the traffic lights.

It is all very class-based.

Indeed, the class becomes an important reference point, though it is not limited to the financial aspects. In the class of peasants, one can be a rich farmer, and in a higher class — an impoverished aristocrat.

The middle class is not homogenous either. Not all managers earn the same money, and the differences between a shop owner and a school headmaster can also be rather significant.

Especially in countries such as Poland the situation is getting somewhat complicated, as our class system includes the so called intelligentsia, which is not compatible with the Anglo-American class

models. There are cases when representatives of a higher class enjoy a widely developed network of contacts and a cultural capital inherited from their families but have no significant financial assets. During my research I have also met representatives of the degraded landowner class — I visited them in their tiny one-bedroom flats with walls covered by seventeenth-century paintings which had been in their families for generations. I was treated to lunches of tinned soup that I ate using silver monogrammed spoons.

Is that wealth?

One can be wealthy in many different ways, also remembering the wealth gone by or dreaming about the wealth to come. Furthermore, in a world which is defined by ever new aspects of life defined by the mechanisms of market, there appear new forms of wealth. Many of the riches of today and the life styles that go with such affluence would be unrecognisable by rich people of the 19th century. In the modern world, one can enjoy a speculative wealth, as is the case with those whose assets are encumbered with the risk of specific term contracts on the financial market. One can also be rich virtually, e.g. a computer whizz kid working in a garage, whose idea for a 'market' is evaluated in billions. One can also be rich on account, living a beautiful life but with a mortgage.

New forms of wealth pose a question about whether it is possible to tell a 'genuine' richness from a 'fake' one, especially in times of financial crises and speculation bubbles. After 2008 we were told that all that money generated before the fall of the Lehman Brothers was an illusion. I was a student in NYC at the time and many of my friends waited on tables in restaurants in the Wall Street area. They made ends meet thanks to the tips they got from the brokers so the commission on the money generated in the speculative way was very real, just as the material residencies of the bankers, none of whom has as yet paid the bill for the crash. This wealth, in other words, was generated on other people's dreams about wealth and at the cost of still others.

What else is a rich person?

Free. Freedom is an extremely important category in the common perception of wealth. In a world which is monetised and commodified, there are two commonly understood ways to freedom. The first one is linked with a strategy of becoming detached from the system: take off to some remote corner of the world and build a life

in which the traditional system of money exchange does not exist. Bookstores are filled with stories of those who managed to survive a whole year without spending a dime, and who built their lives solely thanks to the friendliness of others and by building relationships. The second dimension is based on the collection of money in such amounts that they cease to be of interest anymore. A rich person marches through the world in which the reality, so resistant to others, simply succumbs to him or her. In such a perspective, the classes which are most tormented with thoughts of wealth are the ones in the middle. It particularly applies to the ever aspiring middle class which knows already that it can have more and what is valuable, but it does not have access to it. The middle class can experience the comfort, but cannot experience the freedom. We hear it in the language of bank loans which has become so common over the past twenty years in Poland: the seemingly rich city dwellers describe their lives in the terminology of enslavement.

What categories of wealth are specific to Poland, and which ones have we acquired from others in the process of globalisation?

Global phenomena live local lives of their own. Five years ago I worked in a research project for the Information Society Development Foundation which, under the auspices of the National Bank of Poland, was to promote financial knowledge by organising workshops in the libraries in small villages and towns. The Bank recognised at the time the need to improve the financial competencies of the society, much was said about the Amber Gold affair (please note the name of the company — wealth has a very consistent symbolism), the parents of young mortgage owners in Swiss Francs were afraid that they did not understand the powers that governed the future of their children, and the so called *chwilówki*¹ became very popular — we have recently seen special loan machines in the Warsaw metro. The common notion of money, value and assets management has ceased to fit the innovative measures promising an easy buck that came to replace the increasingly less comprehensible fees, charges and risks described in small print.

1 From the word 'moment' (in Polish *chwila*) — loans granted in a split moment without any additional guarantees required by the granting institution [translator's note].

Together with my associate, Paulina Wróbel, we toured some dozen of such small town libraries where the workshops had been conducted. To my surprise, all the modestly living people and the non-affluent librarians kept saying the same name (unknown to me at the time): Robert Kiyosaki. The man is an interesting phenomenon in the contemporary dreams about wealth. This charismatic global star of financial education and author of several bestsellers published in many languages, Kiyosaki offers a simple formula for wealth: first of all, one needs to change oneself, one's attitude towards the world and money. According to such understanding, wealth is the effect of the right personality which can either be trained autonomously or with the help of a coach — i.e. by playing the game titled Cash Flow. Kiyosaki travels the world round. In Poland, the organisers rent a huge auditorium and charge from 800 to 6000 zlotys for the tickets. There is something of a religious experience in this whole thing: a priest, the sins of bad money management, a collection of rules, a ritual of playing a game which is to change us, the lives of saints who had followed the good path and reached success. A feeling of community is born with the ones who share our goal — that being 'financial freedom'. And so, again, wealth is the avoidance of the necessary, it is a power over our own life and over the world.

How does the book reach the consciousness of the non-affluent people in Poland?

There are a few things which they see in it. First of all, one has to perform an audit of one's life, see it from the outside, so to speak. Just as in giving confession, or during a therapy session, or when testifying before the court. The aim is to create a situation in which work will no longer be necessary. The way to freedom leads through the right management of one's life and money. However, for Kiyosaki's small town readers who can barely make ends meet, the basic objective was to accumulate enough money to pay the heating bills. The problem is a structural one: these people were put in a situation in which they cannot guarantee a better future for either themselves or their families — the type of future that Kiyosaki writes about. They have always been frugal and thrifty but the labour markets to which they had access, or the assets that they had, simply gave them no chance for improvement. On the other hand, there was the theodicy proposed by Kiyosaki who says: anything is possible, only you are

doing something wrong. He thus opened up a new mental field of potential change. There is no coincidence in the title of the book: *Rich Dad. Poor Dad*. Kiyosaki tells the story about his two fathers: the biological one, and about his mentor, the 'adoptive' father. The first was a professor who did not know how to use money and died indebted, while the latter succeed in making a fortune out of nothing. Kiyosaki claims that though both followed the principle of St Paul that 'greed is the root of all evil', the biological father simply avoided the subject, while the adoptive one avoided the evil of money by gathering it in sufficient amounts. Thus Kiyosaki and the apostles of wealth are rooting the principle in common morality: it turns out that it's good to become rich. His book is now living a global life, I have recently had the opportunity to speak to a researcher of the impact it had on people in Argentina.

Let us speak about the American Dream.

It's in a state of crisis. The best proof is the current battle of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, who had for a long time fought against Bernie Sanders who, in turn, claimed rather directly that the promise of wealth at the reach of one's hand is illusory, and that the whole 'game is fixed'. Paradoxically, the American Dream is doing better outside of America, as it is impossible to speak about wealth without mentioning the global movement of migrants seeking better life and wealth for their families: from Mexico, Pakistan, Vietnam.

What kind of America is it? Are we speaking about the values of democracy and the free market which have become the global terms denoting the West?

Yes, though there is also the older trope connected to the mythology of the American success: *from rags to riches*. The story is transnational to the effect that people all over the world think about wealth every day by relating their life stories to the American Dream. Peasants from the eighteenth-century Galicia, who were part of the great immigration, followed a very similar dream as do the people today. The global popularity of America stems from its common image as a space filled with open potentialities, where the path to riches is not blocked by any caste, nomenclature, gender, race or class (though empirically it is not true).

Did Poles learn about it from *Dynasty*?

Much earlier than that, for example from the letters Polish peasants wrote home. They were analysed by Florian Znaniecki and William

Thomas², and are now a classic in world sociology. But indeed, recently it was *Dynasty* that gave wealth the glamour. Some years ago I watched the *Dynasty* tapes at the Polish Television archives with inserted local commercials (it was back in the times when public television could insert commercial breaks in films). They were extremely consistent with the cheesy aesthetics of this American soap op.

How did this dream translate into the common idea of wealth and the everyday?

Now that is a huge subject: the role of the visual culture in generating and sustaining a new social order after the end of socialist realism. Magda Szcześniak analyses it in her book³. In case of *Dynasty*, the important aspect was that the money there was relatively new and somewhat a result of luck: all of a sudden it turned out that one's piece of land was rich in oil.

Aspirations and promises are typical of global wealth. Does the promise of wealth sound the same to a waiter in New York as it does to a waiter in Łomża?

It sounds similar to the effect that, as it turns out, emotions, dreams or fantasies are an inseparable part capitalism. Its dominating vision stresses the fact that it is a cold and rational way of social organisation and the production of values. And as such, it is more like a machine. But such vision completely ignores the fact that the system is driven by desire, jealousy and aspiration — all that evades our notion of rationality. Sociologist Jens Beckert goes even so far as to claim that capitalism is founded on fictitious expectations and incredibly strong emotions in anticipation of the future. Thus when we research wealth, we should speak to those who are not wealthy — they are the ones who dream of being rich and it is these dreams that fuel their actions in the present. Enough to spend some time in the lottery office.

It's about dreams?

In capitalism, everybody dreams of something, regardless of whether this person is poor and lives in the Indian slums, or he or she is the CEO of Goldman Sachs. Everybody has a vision of the future

2 William Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasants in Europe and America*, Boston: Gorham Press, 1918–1920 [editor's note].

3 Magda Szcześniak, *Normy widzialności. Tożsamość w czasach transformacji*, Warsaw: Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, Instytut Kultury Polskiej UW, 2016 [editor's note].

which drives one's actions. These fictitious plans for the future drive the actions of all social classes.

Economic migration is important.

Yes, it is the global migrants and their families who serve as a confirmation of the American myth more than the Americans actually. There is an interesting economic sociology study run on the earnings sent by migrants to their countries of origin (the so called *remittances*). They are, in their mass, an extremely significant contribution to the global circulation of money — to such an extent that some economies, such as that of the Philippines, are very much dependent on them. We also have Euros and pounds in circulation in Poland. Such money is a very interesting form of wealth as it is charged with extremely strong emotions, composed of self-sacrifices. People make the very difficult decision to migrate, to leave their families behind and work in very difficult conditions.

Though the wealth stays in the family it is not really generated by the people who take advantage of it.

The ethnographies containing descriptions of migrants are full of relatively similar scenes, regardless of the region. A 17 year old son in Hanoi is skyping his dad in the United States to show him the scooter he bought with the dollars his father had sent him. This is the wealth of objects of a very special meaning. Or, say, a girl in the Philippines is showing her mother the lipstick and the school-books for her granddaughter that she had bought. Poland too has its special relationship with the dollar. I have visited a number of places in Podlasie where there was a parallel dollar-based economy due to the money flow from New York's Greenpoint⁴. The myth of an 'aunt from America' is still alive and kicking. I carried a study in Greenpoint and later tried to visit the places from which my interlocutors had come. It was fascinating to see what happens when the global circumstances change. My research took place in 2007, the year the European Union member states opened up their labour markets. In any case, this emigration wave to the States had reached its peak and now people were seeking wealth opportunities in England or Ireland, and America was no longer as attractive. Though it was also the time of the lowest purchasing power in dollars in history. And all of a sudden, I saw people on both sides of

the Atlantic whose relations were that of love and care but, in the material sense, the proverbial parcel from America was no longer as important. One could buy a car for 100 dollars once, now the 100 dollars was the equivalent of 200 zlotys. Such a situation is typical of capitalism based on emigration. One migrates for wealth, chases after it so as to find space for one's family but at the end of the day, it is all down to the global circumstances.

Are Jews a typical motif in the Polish idea of wealth?

At the beginning of my research on money in everyday life, I had not appreciated just how frequently the Jewish trope would appear. I met a friend for a meal at a typical middle class restaurant in the Warsaw district of Ursynów a few years ago (or, to be more appropriate, I should really say we met for 'lunch'). When we came in, we saw a picture of a Hassidic Jew with a coin. Not only that — the painting was hanging upside-down. Why do you have such a painting here, and why is it upside-down — my friend inquired. The waitress was really taken aback by our ignorance. What do mean, you don't know? So that the money could fall out from the Jew. An image of a Jew hanging at an entrance to a restaurant in a new housing district shows just how tightly the popular visions of wealth are connected with history, the insistent continuation of myths, but also with their new adaptations. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, who wrote a very insightful text about the popular image of the Jew with a coin, would probably also point to the décor of the restaurant which resembled that of a room in a village house, with all the magical props and objects located at the threshold, between the outside and the inside. According to Tokarska-Bakir, the figure of the Jew with the coin updates the old anti-Semitic stereotype of a bloodsucker and an usurer, whose image is treated like a talisman or a guarding spirit.

Do you encounter similar situations in your research?

I have once spoken to a veterinarian who made his money in cash and never used a bank account. He was from a family where everything — the profession, the assets and the status were inherited, but money was talked about in a surprisingly open manner, family members would even sign agreements with each other. The sister of my interlocutor refused to take over their family private practice, and was thus released from the duty to inherit the profession but, at the same time, the parents paid out her share.

They asked her for a written affidavit that she would not take a bank loan. They did not want for their assets to circulate outside the family. I asked him why that was, and my interlocutor said, 'Oh, that's because of our anti-Semitic beliefs.' When I interview people, I often hear different anti-Semitic opinions but it is my job to term them as such. Here, the guy openly declared himself an anti-Semite. The assets of the family had to stay ethnically Polish, uncontaminated. Interestingly, however, the man could not bring himself to say the word 'Jew', as if he was touching some kind of a taboo. He kept saying 'such people', or 'of certain descent', or 'those circles'. Jews? — I asked. 'Well, now that the word has been said . . .' In his head, a Jew was the rich one and also the reason why I am not rich, or at least not as rich as I deserve to be. Hence the associations of banks with usury. Jews allegedly accumulate wealth and do not let anyone else get rich because by lending money they have created a perverse mechanism in which money makes money. The perverse nature of the Jew in the imagination of my interlocutor came from the conviction that not only is a Jew rich, but that a Jew makes money on the fact that others want to be rich. He thus imposes a perpetual tax on other people's dreams of a better life.

This perverse interdependence thus created has led to many pogroms in the Polish history.

The anti-Semitic stereotype is very present in informal conversations about money, one constantly hears the words 'to Jew on people', 'to Jew out of paying'. The figure of the Jew is the epitome of the final strangeness. Marta Olcoń-Kubicka and I research how young couples from the middle class manage their finances. Even the really meticulous ones who split every single bill, sometimes keeping accounts in Excel spreadsheets, stress that what they are really after is to have a good relationship, and so they don't record every single penny 'like the Jews'.

What do we do on a daily basis to save wealth?

Wealth has got its iconography and sensuality. People who are not rich often want to have a part in it, if only symbolically. By that token, the market of collector's coins is very interesting, as are mints, treasuries, all those companies that market 'limited editions' of numismatic items. It is a whole mine of knowledge about the common perception of wealth: the custom of collecting the relatively

inexpensive and, from the points of view of the metal value, over-valued medals and coins. They are often bought as presents on the occasion of christenings or communions so as to mark an important family moment of the rite of passage, and to underline the connection between the family assets and inheritance. These coins are often like mirrors, they have been polished so well they are kept in plastic pouches. When taken out, they are contaminated with a fingerprint. And wealth is something that cannot be contaminated.

The practices pertaining to wealth that you describe are strongly related to the category of the family. Are we again living in the times of rich family dynasties?

There was the myth after the war in the West that wealth comes from meritocracy, from education and competencies. It was only talented individuals with skills who knew how to get rich. The famous book by economist Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty First Century* is just a recent publication in a row of many aiming to prove that the above is a myth. Wealth is an inherited phenomenon, and the capital accumulated by the ancestors grows faster than the economic growth. Thus it is impossible to study capitalism and wealth without taking into consideration kinship, the ideologies of marriage and family and the common understanding of dowry and financial security for children. Wealth is not connected with abstract competencies of autonomous individuals acting separate from each other, but with family ties. This brings us to the need for the strategic management of emotions in families so that the assets can flow in the desired direction. The ideals of romantic love have detached our visions of closeness from economic interests, whereas even in democratic and open societies class 'misalliances' happen very rarely. To an effect, the problems we know from Władysław Reymont's *Chłopi* [The peasants] or Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* are still pertinent: who should our son marry, who will inherit the land, how can a woman secure her future by being married off to a good estate, how can one separate a rational marriage (as a strategy of accumulating wealth in a family) from the seemingly dangerous emotions. A simple way of examining one's views on the economy and politics is to invite the person to a discussion about the inheritance tax. It will definitely show that wealth is a phenomenon which goes way beyond the biography of a single person. In the common understanding it is almost always a never-ending accumulation.

In the times of socialism in Poland, the notion of wealth was in-existent. Individual affluence was in contradiction to the official communist ideology. On the other hand, however, the 1970s saw the emergence of consumer needs. Interestingly, they were actually provided for by the then First Secretary Edward Gierek and his team. In the late 1980s, a new law was introduced by Wilczek⁵ which liberalised the market and made it possible for people to run small, sometimes family businesses.

There were rich people in the socialist times in Poland though there was no personal standard of wealth, nobody urged anybody to make money. Since there was really not that much space for wealth in the capitalist sense of the word at the time, what was really interesting in the socialist era was the 'luxury'. Judging by today's standards, it was rather modest but, at the same time, extremely important in relative terms as it violated the declared egalitarian nature of the society. The luxury was, in part, restricted to the bigwigs and associated with the so called shops behind yellow curtains. Those who had the means would combine two flats into one, the flower plantation owners⁶ built mansions, flight attendants brought better shoes and foreign magic markers for their children. In other words, luxury was measured by access to goods. So in that sense, wealth was synonymous to what several hundreds of kilometres away was the bourgeois normality. The ideological models which were to oppose wealth were important. Maciej Gdula⁷ claims that a few decades after the war, the post-war egalitarianism that had animated the global imagination disappeared. The above ties up with Pikkety who writes that the times in which the inequalities were relatively a post-war trauma should be seen more as an exception rather than the rule of capitalism.

5 Mieczysław Wilczek — the minister of industry in the last communist government in Poland [translator's note].

6 In *Polish badylarz* — flower plantations were one of the most profitable private businesses in socialist Poland; comes from the word *badył* meaning 'stem' [translator's note].

7 <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/rozmowa-dnia/20140604/gdula-4-czerwca-1989-jak-narod-nie-obalil-komuny> (accessed 30 July 2016).

The situation of equality in times of socialism in Poland should be nuanced. As you have rightly pointed out, access to luxury was diverse. What I am interested in is whether the wealth then was also a part of global wealth? Was a person who was rich in Poland also rich in Western Europe?

Being rich in socialist Poland did not mean being able to afford a trip to Paris and a stay in a good hotel and a good dinner, not to mention being able to buy an apartment there. We simply lived in worlds of different currencies. One could be a rich person in soft currency, but barely well-off in the hard one.

The difference between richness in socialist Poland and in capitalism stems from the specificity of the socialist Polish economy of many currencies at the time — wealth was conditioned by whether you had foreign currency or not. There is a great scene in *Czterdziestolatek* in which Karwowski⁸ goes with his friends to pick up a delegation from Japan. The Poles are surprised to see as many as three people — don't the Japanese have 'limited foreign currency possibilities'? Somebody there tries to explain that there is no 'foreign currency' in Japan. How so? Well, because they get paid salaries and the salaries are already in foreign currency. 'And they pay for the services, for light and gas in foreign currency? Of course, they get new foreign currency every month!'

Now that the currency systems are merging, we have rich people who are Polish and who can live a life of global wealth.

What happened after 1989?

The official state ideology regarding money and social relations mediated by money changed. In the old times, it used to promote equality hence getting rich was suspicious. The duty was to prove one's usefulness to the society by means of effective labour in factories — and not by assets. Already in the 1980s, however, the Solidarity elites read Friedrich Hayek. The theories put into effect by Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher were an appeal to the society to get rich and followed the individualist conviction that we are all masters of our fate. Contrary to the socialist vision

8 *Czterdziestolatek* [The forty-year old], a TV series extremely popular in the socialist times in Poland about a 40 year old man (Stefan Karwowski) and his family, mockingly showing the everyday reality of the People's Republic of Poland [translator's note].

of the economy, in capitalism it was the rich who were to play the important role — the more they earn, the more will trickle down to the lower social classes. The 1990s saw the emergence of a rich person as the positive role model.

Today the notion of ‘foreign currency’ in the socialist sense is something unknown.

Contemporary wealth is the type in which Poland, in terms of the currency, is part of the world. A rich person from Poland today is one that can at any time hop on the plane and get off in, say, London, New York or Tokyo, stay at a hotel and behave the same way that he/she does in Warsaw: when shopping, eating out or performing operations on the real estate market. So we are not talking about a local rich person who lives in relative luxury but is not taken into consideration in global estimates, but a person such as Jan Kulczyk whose yacht was docked in a port by the Côte d’Azur. We have a number of families in Poland who are rich to the extent that they do not have to be attached to the space in which they live. They are global, no matter where they go. This scale of wealth also lets them escape the legal and fiscal rules of a given territory. Spaces created for the rich are an interesting topic of research: private islands, tax heavens, all that we’ve read about in the Panama Papers.

In the social perception after 1989, there appears the concept of ‘enfranchised nomenklatur’, i.e. people who performed important political and symbolic roles in the previous system and who, in the wild process of transformation — particularly in the field of the economy — really made it in capitalism, most often creating fortunes in the process of privatisation.

What is specific to Poland, but also to the whole region, is that big money can be made at the intersection of incommensurate regimes of values and economies. This intersection may be temporal — between the times of socialism and capitalism — or a physical one. There is no coincidence in the fact that different types of wealth are generated at intersections or borders — with the smugglers, customs officers or petty traders crossing the border daily and making profit off the price differences.

Or there is no law. In Olga Drenda's *Duchologia polska*⁹, the turning point is when the video rental shops became legalised and the whole market of cassettes was put into order. In times when these issues were not regulated in codes or laws, anything went.

If wealth is created on borders dividing two completely incompatible systems then the effective conversion of one capital into the other constitutes the specific type of wealth for post-socialist countries. In other words, what guaranteed good life in the socialist circumstances was turned into money in the other.

Was the situation the same in the entire region?

Yes. Surprisingly, when reading ethnographic texts describing the moment of revaluation in the different countries, we come across many similarities: privatisation, the opening of borders, currency reforms, the shock therapy — when everything that had been very precious just a moment before was now discarded as rubbish. In *Antropologia codzienności* [Anthropology of the everyday], Roch Sulima¹⁰ describes the symbolic abandoning of Syrena cars¹¹. In the GDR after the fall of the Berlin wall people would hop in their Wartburg cars and then leave them in ditches after crossing the border with West Germany. They had been very valuable just a moment ago — now, they no longer are.

What does it tell us about wealth?

It tells us that wealth is dependent on the regime of values which is historically variable. In the times of war, a canister of gasoline, a golden necklace, or a cow were wealth. In socialist times, it may have been a Wartburg — meticulously taken care of and kept under a cover. This car had been awaited for 15 years, surrounded by a multitude of social relations that had to be nurtured by all sorts of different tokens of gratitude and favours so that the car was actually kept operational. One had to have a befriended car mechanic and access to spare parts. And all of a sudden, the system of values changes and the car turns out to be worthless. Something that had

9 Olga Drenda, *Duchologia polska. Rzeczy i ludzie w latach transformacji*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Karakter, 2016 [editor's note].

10 Roch Sulima, *Antropologia codzienności*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2000 [editor's note].

11 Syrena — Polish automobile model, manufactured from 1957 to 1972, quite symbolic for socialist times in Poland [translator's note].

made us stand out from the crowd and gave us mobility and prestige, and served as proof of recognition by our boss (who gave us the coupon to buy the car), has lost its validity. The process of transition from socialism to capitalism is the moment when one needs to reconsider what wealth actually is. It needs to be copied from somewhere. So we are copying it — from the West or from television. Local codes of the landowning gentry that had been denied for so long are now coming back, and so are the different ways of making money. Nobody in the whole region knew how to become rich as there was not social memory. When the rules of the game changed, irrationality stepped in. In her book, Olga Drenda describes a total outpour of energy healers and financial pyramid scams flooding the economy. In Albania, palm reading women were all of a sudden just as important as financial experts. It all makes sense, however, as to the average person the functioning of the newly established stock exchanges was just as irrational.

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desire, desire¹**

1 Sylwia Kawalerowicz, 'Kira Pietrek. Język korzyści', *Zwierciadło*, no. 5, 2016.



INTRODUCTION

Having broken away with the planned economy, Poland, like the other countries in the region, found itself at a crossroads. On the one hand, catching up with the more developed economies meant switching to a free-market philosophy. On the other, an obstacle on this path was the popular mentality, yielded by national culture and a long period of being subjected to rules that didn't necessarily promote success in the present-day meaning of the term, i.e. firstly, as the favourable outcome of a project, the achievement of goal; and secondly, as the winning of fame, wealth or high standing.²

The question arose how the pro-growth mentality of Poles, who have found themselves in a new situation, shaped itself relative to the more developed countries. What was particularly important was the way in which successful people and the sources of success were perceived. The idea was to show changes in the hitherto symbols of personal success. That mattered because for many years they had been hardly present in the general consciousness, and their social perception was clearly pejorative.

This becomes even more evident when we analyse works of literature or film. Themes affirming successful people were to be found in them relatively seldom. The protagonist was far more frequently a loser than someone who had succeeded because he had worked hard, invested, and pursued personal development. One example are canonical novels such as Bolesław Prus's *Lalka* [The doll] or Władysław Reymont's *Ziemia obiecana* [The promised land]. It is seldom too for a positive image of success to be found in required-reading books at school. 'Browsing through Polish-language textbooks for forms 1–4, published for the first time in the mid-1990s, one can find many nice pictures, a lot of patriotic elation, praise of obedience to elders, but not a single word about the importance of

believing in success, persevering, or being happy with one's own or other people's successes.³

Popular culture too is full of examples of 'careers' owing more to random chance than to hard work and talent. Asked by the OBOP polling company about their 'life goals and objectives', the majority of respondents mentioned the following:

1. family happiness;
2. interesting and likeable job;
3. clean conscience;
4. quiet life, no surprises.⁴

It is surprising how low in this hierarchy of goals ranked values such as 'knowledge and education', 'career', 'achievement and recognition at work', or 'having a democratic voice'. The least frequently selected reply was 'an eventful life, full of adventures and risk'. Values offering a sense of stability and security were clearly in greater demand. In 1979, Stefan Nowak noted the phenomenon, when he wrote that, 'tall ambitions, high aspirations or romantic role models are relatively rare among young people. The young want to advance socially beyond their parents, but seem very realistic in limiting their aspirations to what is actually possible in society. Generally, they aren't much different from their progenitors as far as aspirations and life values are concerned.'⁵

Interestingly, this hierarchy of values has hardly been changing. Research shows that 'family happiness', 'interesting and likeable job' or 'reciprocated love' still make the top of the list of Polish respondents' declared life goals, whereas 'career, achievement and recognition at work' or 'having a democratic voice' continue to occupy its very bottom. Yet the new reality of 1990s was based on individual enterprise, where notions such as success, wealth or

3 Krystyna Skarżyńska, 'Czy jesteśmy prorozwojowi? Wartości i przekonania ludzi a dobrobyt i demokracja kraju', in *Jak Polacy przegrywają, jak Polacy wygrywają*, ed. Marek Drogosz, Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2005, p. 73.

4 Quoted in 'Podstawa szczęścia? Udane życie rodzinne, czyste sumienie, ludzki szacunek — wynika z sondażu TNS Polska', <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/163081-podstawa-szczescia-udane-zycie> (accessed 30 July 2016).

5 Stefan Nowak, 'System wartości społeczeństwa polskiego', *Studia Socjologiczne*, vol. 4 (75), 1979, pp. 155–173.

career occupied a central place.⁶ It is therefore becoming increasingly important how success and people of success are perceived.

SUCCESS AND PEOPLE OF SUCCESS

In the 1960s, David McClelland convincingly argued that national economic prosperity depends on the popularity and social acceptance of a specific psychological quality: achievement motivation. Studying different cultures, McClelland demonstrated that the pace of economic development was positively correlated with the presence of achievement motivation themes in literature, art, folk traditions (legends and fables), and today also in school textbooks.⁷

So what characterises individuals and societies with strong achievement motivation and how much is the model present in Polish culture? How much is it accepted? Researchers note that highly motivated people are active in various fields of life, strive to succeed, and, importantly, believe in the possibility of success. They are also more likely to make persistent efforts to achieve their goals.

What is the place of achievement motivation in the present-day Pole's system of values? To answer the question, let us refer to the notion of attribution. In psychology, attribution is the process where we make inferences about the causes of other peoples' behaviour and the sources of events. Two types of attribution are distinguished: dispositional, which seeks the causes of events in individuals' personal dispositions, and situational, which ascribes the occurrence of a phenomenon to the external conditions of a particular situation.⁸ What matters in both cases is the process of perception, allowing us to recognise the sources of our successes and failures.

Research shows that in the late 1990s Poles attributed success to individual resources rather than to hereditary ones (wealthy parents, fine education) or those that might be termed 'collectivistic' (connections, political pull). Success was no longer a matter of random

6 Czesław Sikorski, *Między rynkiem a centralnym planowaniem: polski kierownik — jaki jest? jaki być powinien?*, Łódź: Centrum Badań i Promocji Biznesu Ekorno, 1992.

7 Skarżyńska.

8 Friedrich Forsterling, *Atrybucje. Podstawowe teorie, badania i zastosowanie*, Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2005.

chance or the intervention of external forces. That was a clear change in perceptions, especially among businesspeople, who only a few years earlier more often than other respondents interpreted their success in terms of having the right political connections.

Two decades later, in 2013, a CBOS survey of perceptions of success produced a similar picture.⁹ Eight out of ten Poles (81%) felt they had been at least partly successful in life, and close to one in six (17%) said they had been fully successful.

Respondents defined success as follows:

- family happiness — 29%
- good health — 10%
- joy, happiness, fulfilled dreams — 8%
- financial affluence — 7%
- good job — 7%
- achievement of goals — 7%
- rich inner life, self-fulfilment — 2%
- fine education — 2%
- high status, social advancement — 1%
- dignity and independence — 1%
- being kind, helpful, honest, useful — 1%
- other — 2%
- hard to say — 9%.¹⁰

For many years, as can be seen, Poles have associated success with family happiness (29%). Nearly one in five respondents (18%) define success as a combination of familial, financial and professional satisfaction; far fewer (6%) mention a mix of health, job and family. Satisfaction in family life is mentioned by a majority of respondents (52%) as an indispensable, and sometimes the sole, factor of life success. Surprisingly, only 2% of respondents perceive fine education as a condition of success.

A sense of full or partial success in life is most often felt by those respondents who combine it with family happiness (72%), followed by those who define success as good health (62%).

9 *Sukces życiowy i jego determinanty. Badania CBOS nr BS/89/2013*, Warsaw 2013, <http://docplayer.pl/6846508-Warszawa-czerwiec-2013-bs-89-2013-sukces-zyciowy-i-jego-determinanty.html> (accessed 30 July 2016).

10 Percentages don't add up to 100 because respondents were able to select more than one answer choice.

SUKCES IS:

(after CBOS research from 2013)



29%
family
happiness



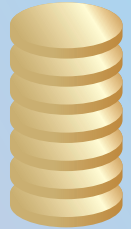
10%
good health



8%
joy,
happiness,
fulfilled
dreams



7%
financial
affluence



7%
good job



5%
achievement
of goals



2%
rich inner life,
self-fulfilment



2%
fine
education



1%
high status,
social
advancement



1%
dignity and
independence



1%
being kind,
helpful,
honest, useful



2%
other



9%
hard to say

It turns out, therefore, that for Poles financial success alone, without family happiness, isn't an example of a successful career. According to declarations, it is more often achieved by those who consider it as a mix of family happiness and having a good job than by those who identify it with financial affluence alone.

Respondents' sense of success is also correlated with the level of education they have received. Although, as has already been noted, education itself ranks low among the factors conducive to success, the higher its level, the more likely the respondent is to perceive themselves as a successful person.

The above data confirm earlier observations, including those from the European Value Survey (2000), which showed that in their perceptions of materialism (vs. postmaterialism), another factor important for modernisation and democratic processes, Polish respondents were more materialistic and financial security-oriented than other nations in Europe.¹¹ Taking into account a postmaterialistic value — social trust — Poland ranked near the very bottom in terms of development potential. Also the data published in *Social Diagnosis 2015* show that postmaterialistic values continue to be relatively unimportant for respondents.¹²

Materialism is also reflected in attitudes towards work. For employees in the developed world, the key characteristics of a good job were certainty of promotion and career continuity, whereas in Poland it was salary level and certainty of employment (minimum risk of joblessness). Despite the emergence of groups that may be called 'achievers' (young professionals, some small business owners), the other crucial growth factor — caring for the welfare of the larger community — remains largely absent.¹³

In practice, this may mean that the enterprising Poles set about multiplying their capital, others — making the ends meet, and still others — complaining about the government, the state, and the rich.

11 Skarżyńska.

12 Cf. *Diagnoza społeczna 2015. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków. Raport*, ed. Janusz Czapiński, Tomasz Panek, Warsaw: Rada Monitoringu Społecznego, 2015, http://www.diagnoza.com/pliki/raporty/Diagnoza_raport_2015.pdf (accessed 30 July 2016).

13 Ibid.

This would be a symptom of the ‘pragmatisation of consciousness’ that Marek Ziółkowski wrote about in the context of Polish society.¹⁴ Systemic change upset the tenets of social activity, for socialisation means acquiring certain competences and the ability to use various capitals, to accept the rules of their exploitation or multiplication. The very fact that an individual has been endowed with certain capitals isn’t tantamount to privilege. He also has to be equipped with knowledge about the mechanisms that make it possible to use them effectually.

One example of such upsetting may be the trend in recent years towards investing in one’s external appearance, which, given the lack of clear valuation criteria, acquires special significance. The ability to ‘build a reputation’ and ‘make a good impression’ would thus replace the — absent — actual skills.

In the new situation, what seemed the easiest to fulfil was the conversion of social and cultural capital into financial capital. The opposite direction — turning money into social and cultural capital — was mainly limited to the wealthiest. Most of the Polish nouveaux-riches sought to legitimise their fortunes. Such legitimacy couldn’t be achieved through ostentatious consumption, but sometimes it could be afforded by the right connections or prestigious competences.

The latter vector of conversion is missing from those — highly numerous — groups of Polish society that have no surplus capital. Instead, they direct their efforts towards maintaining the status quo and protecting their standard of living. This situation has remained generally unchanged for years.¹⁵

It is worth noting the emergence of increasingly numerous and socially visible groups that — by choice or out of necessity — seek to distinguish themselves not through material capital but through different values, forms of cultural behaviour and social connections. It needs to be stressed that the role of the elite in Poland has weakened and become depreciated. While there exist financial, consumerist, media or political elites, the cultural elite — standing

14 Marek Ziółkowski, ‘Kapitały społeczny, kulturowy i materialny i ich wzajemne konwersje we współczesnym społeczeństwie polskim’, *Studia Edukacyjne*, no. 22, 2012, pp. 7–27.

15 Łukasz Goryszewski, *Style konsumpcji polskiej klasy wyższej*, Kraków: Nomos, 2014.

out (through the mechanism of distinction) not with special desires, unattainable for others, but with proper competences; able not only to store and reproduce, but also to promote a higher-brow culture — has been less and less visible. In this situation, the models of legitimate culture are provided by the increasingly globalised consumer goods industry, advertising, pop culture and the mass media. It is them that educate contemporary Poles in matters of taste and trendiness. Meanwhile, members of the upper class (some 6% of Poles) 'aware of their cultural-capital shortcomings, seek to compensate for them with economic capital'.¹⁶

This confirms Marek Ziółkowski's argument about the universalisation of the monetary criterion in present-day Poland, which has been accompanied by the pluralisation and blurring of the criteria of taste, lifestyle and social belonging.¹⁷

It turns out, therefore, that in a situation of status uncertainty and risks, striving towards success, perceived mainly in terms of financial security for oneself and one's family, seems very much rational, and thus also understandable.

CAUSES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

In 2003, Polish respondents believed in themselves and their abilities. Asked who or what decided whether the past year had been good for them or not, 62.5% said it was themselves, 42.8% mentioned luck, 23.8% — other people, and 15.7% pointed to the government.¹⁸

Most of us believed in our own effectiveness; this was an important element of the shaping of a pro-growth culture. And it would have been a welcome phenomenon, were it not for the gradual decrease in the percentage of such persons in the adult population: from 69% in 1997, through 67.3% in 2000, to 62.5% in 2003.

16 Ibid., p. 263.

17 Ziółkowski.

18 *Diagnoza społeczna 2003. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków. Raport*, ed. Janusz Czapiński, Tomasz Panek, Warsaw: Rada Monitoringu Społecznego, 2003, <http://www.diagnoza.com/files/raport2003.pdf> (accessed 30 July 2016).

Another negative phenomenon was an unwillingness to try and understand other people. Researchers note that this may be a source of defensive and conservative attitudes — an element of a non-democratic personality syndrome. In the case of a Machiavellian personality, in turn, a cynical image of other people would serve to justify one's own attempts to exploit their weaknesses. It isn't worth treating other people fairly if they are malicious, disregard moral standards, are lazy and so on. If man is a wolf to man rather than a friend, it makes no sense to abide by contracts, keep one's word or speak the truth. It can be said that vague behavioural procedures promote distrustful, cynical Machiavellians.

Compared with the turn of the 1970s/1980s, in the mid-1990s a drop in authoritarian tendencies was noted only among young people. In the parent generation, the authoritarian orientation remained unchanged, and among male respondents it actually grew slightly. Hopes for change were therefore pinned on the young generation, only entering, as it was, the labour market, and on growing scholarisation levels. Were those expectations justified? Research shows a more complex situation.

SUCCESS AND SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE AS PERCEIVED BY YOUNG POLES

Contemporary culture seems to be dominated by the therapeutic discourse. The cult of a healthy, perfect body, self-perfection, self-fulfilment, rare hobbies, various addictions are its trademarks. Małgorzata Jacyno wrote interestingly about it, presenting the diverse life strategies and choices made by people in the individualistic culture characteristic for contemporary society.¹⁹ Self-experience, happiness, authenticity, success — these are but some of the concepts from its vocabulary, and in its investigations it has gone beyond previous class divisions and limitations. Health, youth, fitness, sense of happiness define the individual's goals today. A cult of nature, naturalness and natural living has been accompanied by a determined struggle against such seemingly

natural processes as ageing or death. Losing weight, rejuvenation, body building, detox therapies and a lifestyle serving all this have become the meaning of life for many of us.

The notion of success has grown increasingly complex in recent years.

A new term, 'unicorn generation', has been coined to describe the young, convinced of their own uniqueness.²⁰ Compared with the older generations, 32% of the new one believe that they will have a less satisfying life than their parents and that it doesn't make sense to chase the West to succeed. Young people believe in the causal power of passion rather than hard work (here the role model is the winner of a TV talent show).

This new generation has been aptly characterised by culture anthropologist Anna Szutowicz, who has identified five 'tribes' to which young people aged 16–19 belong to.²¹ These are: the buddies, the nesters, the regrets, the life hackers and the hipsters.

Buddies are the largest group, comprising 30% of the population. They want to look trendy, they love shopping and to spend time at shopping centres. Listening to music and being with others are important for them. Most members of this group have no siblings, hence perhaps their yearning to belong to a larger community and a quest for a quasi-family.

The second-largest group are the nesters, 23% of the surveyed population. They are traditionalistic and conservative. What matters to them is their partner, their job, family and friends, and they also want to feel important to someone.

The regrets comprise 16% of the population. This category includes the working poor; 70% of the group worry about the future, 60% declare they can't afford the basic articles. They perceive the passage to adulthood as something painful; their language is anti-systemic and anti-corporate.

Another group are the life hackers, accounting for 19% of the population. Its members are predominantly male and have a strong sense of self-esteem. They believe in career-making, are egoistic and feel in charge of their life. This is a group that probably resembles

20 'Pokolenie jednoroźców. Z Anną Marią Szutowicz, liderką projektu Świat Młodych, rozmawia Wojciech Tyimiński', *Gazeta Wyborcza* — *Duży Format*, 25 May 2016.

21 *Ibid.*

most closely the students of the Warsaw School of Commerce, polled in 2005.²² Success was manifested by them mainly through the diversity of the presented lifestyles.²³ Importantly, all members of the surveyed population shared an active life attitude.

The last group, smallest (12%) but most visible, are the hipsters. The author describes them using the category of *warszawka* ['big city elites']. They perceive themselves as citizens of the world. They are the only ones among young people who have no nationalistic views or patriotic leanings. Refusing to be 'ordinary', like others, they will do everything to stand out, hence their stylistic diversity.

What all these 'tribes' share is a quest for the meaning of life. A desire to find a secure, fixed point in an increasingly unpredictable world, to make it logical and meaningful, is common for young people not only in Poland. Many phenomena seem to confirm this.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary societies described using the category of experiences increasingly affect the behaviour of young people.²⁴ Existential issues, a growing focus on pleasure rather than duties, more leisure time, a changing attitude to consumer goods, a growing significance of peer groups at the cost of intergenerational ties — all these are phenomena that have been extensively researched.²⁵ Besides these factors, the perception of success has been influenced by the economic situation, which meant that the expectations weren't too great, and by its accompanying sense of instability, which encouraged respondents to defend their status rather than to seek ways to improve it.

The motivation described above seem to aptly illustrate the issue of personal unfulfillment and fear of the future, as experienced by

22 *Różne oblicza i uwarunkowania sukcesu we współczesnej Polsce*, ed. Jolanta Gładys-Jakóbk, Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, 2005.

23 Ibid.

24 Piotr Sieradzki, 'Teoria „społeczeństwa doznań” (erlebnissgesellschaft) u Gerharda Schulze', *Folia Sociologica*, no. 38, 2007, pp. 105–116.

25 *Wartości i zmiany. Przemiany postaw Polaków w jednoczącej się Europie*, ed. Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2012.

young Poles. Uncertainty is expressed, for example, in the externally imposed duty to create one's biography in a 'do-it-yourself' fashion rather than following previous career models.

Anna Szutowicz stresses that young people don't want another gadget; what they want is a meaningful life, but that requires work, the sense of which eludes them. The result is a kind of stalemate. So is it so that our future depends on which of the tribes gains the upper hand?

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ZBOROWSKA

AGATA



**IS THIS HOW POLAND
LOOKS LIKE?**



In April 2013, *Wysokie Obcasy*, the weekend supplement of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily, featured Joanna Bojańczyk's interview with Marta, a 26-year-old founder and moderator of the popular fashion blog Faszyn from Raszyn¹. The interview opens with a large-format photo — one of the thousands published on FfR — of a woman squatting on the beach. Captured from behind, she wears a leopard-print jacket and matching shoes, low-rise jeans showing much of her lower back, and pink G-string panties. 'Is this how Poland looks like?', Bojańczyk asks with obvious disgust.² On the one hand, Faszyn from Raszyn repeats a familiar blog formula, presenting pictures of interesting examples of street fashion. On the other, it realises the idea 'in reverse': instead of showing the best-dressed street stylists, it portrays those who, despite their best efforts, as the author says, have got it wrong. The declared goal is to document bad style, which 'attracts, inspires, intrigues' and which can be freely 'discussed' on the blog. So an advocate of good taste launches a platform for criticising 'slavish trend followers' who become 'victims of consumerism'. Marta of FfR doesn't make it a secret that the photos are meant to amuse, an effect enhanced by ironic captions (e.g. 'Hamster Man', 'Andżela in the Hall', 'Collection Carrefour Deluxe'). Rejecting accusations that she actually ridicules low-income persons, she replies, 'No. It's mental poverty that I laugh at, not the material one'. The interview in *Wysokie Obcasy* created a lot of stir. It went viral on the Polish web, with the protagonist invited to appear on a popular breakfast-TV talk show on a mainstream channel.³ In fact,

- 1 The blog's title is a pun based on the similar pronunciation of the words 'fashion' and 'Raszyn', the latter being the name of a Warsaw suburb often stereotyped as bad-taste; a further pun-within-a-pun is the fact that 'Raszyn' in Polish is pronounced very much like 'Russian' in English [translator's note].
- 2 'Autorka bloga Faszyn from Raszyn: Zły gust mnie pociąga', interview by Joanna Bojańczyk, *Wysokie Obcasy*, supplement of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22 April 2013.
- 3 *Faszyn from Raszyn*, Dzień dobry TVN, 6 May 2013, <http://dziendobry.tvn.pl/wideo,2064,n/faszyn-from-raszyn,86035.html> (accessed 30 July 2016).

while pictures from a popular blog, however many times shared and commented on, have little to tell us about the ‘line between good and bad taste’,⁴ they perfectly well poised to reflect collective emotions surrounding the category of taste. Faszyn from Raszyn highlights moot points and draws a map of Polish dress-code and fashion tensions. The very notion of bad taste (and crass) has actually been popping up regularly in public debate, and every time we witness not just a struggle with fashion, but a struggle with Polish identity as well — our desire to catch up with the West, our role-model uncertainty, and our (un)familiarity with distinguished visual codes.

‘SHOW ME YOUR SOCKS AND I’LL TELL YOU WHO YOU ARE!’⁵

‘Socks have gone out of hiding and developed an existence of their own’,⁶ Joanna Bojańczyk announced in the November issue of *Twój Styl* in 1993. The feature’s title, *The Sock Makes the Leg*, potentially applies to all socks, but in fact it was only men’s ones that had emerged from the trouser shadow. They are described with much solemnity in this perfect how-to for an elegant gentleman who — as the text suggests — now and then wears a tuxedo, but still buys his accessories from street stalls, unable to tell fake merchandise from the real thing. ‘First of all, authentic originals never have large print on them, but are always discreet’, the author warns. In his free time, the new middle-class man plays tennis, but he doesn’t know yet that the white socks should be changed when leaving the court, and not only for reasons of hygiene. Bojańczyk already knows this: ‘. . . such white terry can ruin any fine suit and any pair of decent shoes. Let’s wear white socks where they belong . . . and for a city look let’s choose something, whether seri-

4 Ibid.

5 Leopold Tyrmand, *Wędrówki i myśli porucznika Stukułki*, quoted in Piotr Szarota, *Od skarpetek Tyrmanda do krawata Leppera. Psychologia stroju dla średnio zaawansowanych*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2008, p. 31.

6 Joanna Bojańczyk, ‘Skarpetka czyni nogę’, *Twój Styl*, no. 11 (40), 1993, pp. 86–87.

ous or amusing, in one of the many nice colours'.⁷ That the latter don't include white was already known in the early 1990s.

Twój Styl is launched in 1990; of its several dozen pages, only a few are devoted to men. Even though the monthly concentrates on how the 'successful woman' should look like and patiently educates its readers in this regard, one can hardly find in it a major women's garment that would epitomise the new middle class. While women are searching for their own style, men are interested in *Sukces*; the magazine's first issue hits the newsstands a few months before *Twój Styl*. In July 1991, white socks in elegant, though heavily worn, loafers are casually revealed by Marek Profus, one of the protagonists of the 'Who Has Been Successful and Why?'⁸ feature series, then on the list of Poland's wealthiest individuals. The millionaire entrepreneur, who ran his first business as early as the 1970s, had been photographed against boxes of Blaupunkt products, which he was a major Polish distributor of in the 1990s. Thick white socks are quite obligatory for the 'young wolves, well, not so young, in their 40s', as Poland's emerging capitalists are described by one of the characters in Feliks Falk's movie *Capital, or How to Make Money in Poland* (1989). 'It is precisely the sock, covered with the trousers and demonstrated not always but only when the leg is lifted, that tells a lot of truth about man', Leopold Tyrmand noted.⁹ In the 1990s, the sock becomes less discreet and more visible, and not only because of its colour. It is not without a reason that white socks are almost always worn with leather moccasins which, unlike classic men's laced shoes, make it more conspicuous — one look and you know everything.

In August 1990, Barbara Hoff appealed in the fashion's section of *Przekrój*: 'Gentlemen, you want to be closer to Europe? Then, for God's sake, stop wearing light-coloured shoes!'¹⁰ Instead of buying new shoes, one can use a dark dye that will cover the unwanted hue: 'if the leather gets uneven, it'll look even better; leather with

7 Ibid., p. 87.

8 *Sukces*, July 1991.

9 Tyrmand, p. 31.

10 Barbara Hoff, 'Moda. Męska, kolorowa', *Przekrój*, 19 August 1990, p. 21.

special effects'.¹¹ Yet such camouflage won't always work, and the resulting flaws betray the superficiality of the effort. Inept copycatting and imitation result in body-image anxiety, fear of criticism, and constant observation of oneself and others.

Super-visibility is what identifies the transformation-era *nouveaux riches*; white socks and pirated accessories are both indiscreet. Think large logos, sometimes deviating slightly from the original brand name (Adibas, Fuma), or glaringly white socks that often roll down at the ankle, revealing too much. The stability of visual norms is attested to by another garment that a decade or so later 'develops an existence of its own'. The career of the white knee-high boot is hard to trace back, also because its beginnings, at first sight at least, don't seem connected with any particular breakthrough. It is certainly not so that they appear only in the 2000; they are already present in the 1960s and then, in a somewhat different version, in the 1980s. They will walk a long way before ending on the feet of two pop singers, Doda (Dorota Rabczewska) and Mandaryna (Marta Mandrykiewicz-Wiśniewska), whose symbolic rivalry was in fact informed by their visual look-alikeness, while being a spin-off of the 'conflict' between Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. In early 2000, white knee-high stilettos are sported by Polish actresses, pop icons and TV anchors, but they will soon disown the glitzy fashion. The internet never forgets, and images from the era are regularly brought up as evidence of not so much a 'bad' fashion trend that the celebrities succumbed to, but rather of their 'bad' taste. 'Bee-kays', a mocking English-sounding term derived from the abbreviation 'b.k.' [Polish *białe kozaczki*, 'white knee-high boots'], not only refers to the actual footwear and its users,¹² but also, and more importantly, points out to the Western origin of designs that are imitated, modified and updated over and over in the Polish context.

If white knee-high stilettos can be seen as an example of the trickle-down mechanism, where the lower classes adopt trends that the upper ones have already discarded as passé, white socks, to stick to the biographical metaphor, have had a longer and more adventurous life. This significant detail, the 'small something that changes every-

11 Ibid.

12 Bartek Chaciński, *Wyczesany słownik najmłodszej polszczyzny*, Kraków: Znak, 2005.

thing', has little to do with the 1990s discourse. Even the British complain about 'crassy' socks worn with sandals, though in another context the latter gain new life and meaning. Think Jeremy Corbyn's bad taste and his controversial sock-and-sandal antics. 'Harold Wilson, four times Labour prime minister, used to wear open-toed sandals on Scilly Isles holidays (no socks). But is post-imperial Britain ready for a major party leader who wears them to work? With socks?', the *Guardian* asked ironically (and in a tone of warning) in 2015.

As intuited by Roland Barthes, detail can spread fast and has economic potential, so ultimately '*something can signify everything*'.¹³ In this way socks are returning to the red carpet as the new trendy thing, and in their extreme version — as white terries. Still, in Poland their cultural ennoblement (or trickle-up) has gone almost unnoticed. According to the most recent Polska Strojna survey conducted for the shopping platform Allegro.pl, socks-with-sandals and white knee-high boots are still the number-one epitome of 'tastelessness' for most respondents.¹⁴

NEW ERA OF LUXURY

'We usually never permit road-verge advertising. But here the circumstances were unique. We'd have been the only country that refused a permit. Other countries said okay', explained Karolina Gałęcka, spokesperson for the municipal road authority, when in spring 2013 Louis Vuitton had placed a mammoth four-sided billboard very close to the street in front of their new boutique in Warsaw. 'The uniqueness of the situation is that LV are running this campaign all over Eastern Europe, and this shop will their first in Poland'; but 'the exception doesn't mean that another company applying for permit for a similar advertisement will necessarily get one'.¹⁵

13 Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. M. Ward, R. Howard, University of California Press, Berkeley 1983, p. 243.

14 Cf. *Polska strojna. Zainteresowanie modą i zakupy modowe Polaków 2015*, https://prowly-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/landing_page_image/image/17628/Polska_Strojna_Zainteresowanie_moda_i_zakupy_modowe_Polakow_Listopad_2015.pdf (accessed 30 July 2016).

15 Jakub Panek, 'LV otwiera sklep w stolicy. Stanął wielki kufer', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 April 2013.

The French company, if we are to believe the municipal agency's spokesperson, had prepared something truly unique for several Eastern European countries, including Poland. The four-sided 'travelling trunk' billboard was 8.5 metres high and over 28 metres long. A huge LV logo had nothing to do with the discretion recommended more than a decade earlier by Joanna Bojańczyk. Warsaw could not reject an offer from one of the world's most luxurious and expensive brands, which had adjusted the billboard's form (shape and size) to our 'Eastern' expectations, or actually to their Western notion. The question of the massive rectangular-frame billboard was actually central to the debate about the 'visual chaos' of Polish cities and the need for regulatory changes to stop the deluge of images in public space. Only selected corporate brands have the right to occupy the sidewalk at the expense of the passers-by; not everyone will get a permit to do so, as Ms. Gałęcka noted.

The controversy over the giant Louis Vuitton billboard can easily be inscribed within a broader polemic, originating in the Wolf Bracka building standing in the background. Its massive black bulk, housing the VitkAc luxury department store, caused an outcry in the neighbourhood; the dark wall devours light, and the vertical-garden plants refuse to grow. 'I really feel sorry for the residents of Bracka 13', complained the building's very designer, Stefan Kuryłowicz, 'but this is downtown Warsaw'.¹⁶ Inaccessible form corresponds here with the inaccessibility of the products sold inside by the world's top designer brands. 'We're definitely ready for luxury', declared the owner of VitkAc, Arkadiusz Likus.¹⁷

Still, the store apparently didn't carry all the fashion items coveted by Polish consumers, for several months after its opening a popular fashion blogger, Jessica Mercedes Kirschner, goes on a long voyage for her dream Chanel bag. Author of one of Poland's most influential blogs, Jemerced,¹⁸ Kirschner says that travelling and shop-

16 Filip Springer, 'VitekAc: pokaz siły. Co ma wspólnego z Pałacem Nauki?', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 7 June 2014.

17 'L jak luksus, L jak Likusowie', *Rzeczpospolita*, 21 September 2013, <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1049816-L-jak-luksus--L-jak-Likusowie.html#ap-2> (accessed 30 July 2016).

18 <http://jasonhunt.pl/ranking-najbardziej-wplywowych-blogerow-2015-roku/> (accessed 30 July 2016).

ping make her particularly happy and proud: 'I earned the money myself and with my own cash I bought a Chanel bag at the age of 20'.¹⁹ In the following posts, the author presents 'live reporting from Paris'. 'I'll write about the particular model later, in a special feature, upon my return. So please be patient! You can ask your questions about the bag in comments and I'll reply to them in the special feature', she adds.²⁰ Even though a post in the form of a travel diary entry — from a journey culminating in the purchase of a desired item — can seem strange, let's bear in mind who the blog's readers are: mostly young women, often from small towns. An in-depth product description, photos from Paris and the pledge to reply to more detailed questions — all clearly serve an educational goal. The author sketches a portrait of an original Chanel bag, an item many of her readers have never touched or actually seen. Gaining possession of the unique, top-brand accessory marks an important watershed in the life of the young Polish consumer, informing the dreams and images of luxury of thousands of others.

LESS MEANS MORE

'I think the store is great. For me as a stylist and a fashion writer, its presence in Warsaw is truly wonderful thing. So emotionally moving that yesterday I spent hours walking up and down its floors, and today I can't stop writing about it. A new era has clearly begun in Polish fashion',²¹ a popular fashion writer and stylist wrote on her blog shortly after the opening of the VitkAc. Even if being promoted in an 'Eastern' style, the moment is defined as a breakthrough one, bringing us closer to the West: 'Ladies and gentlemen! We now have a luxury fashion store of international quality'.²² Several years earlier, a similarly ecstatic tone, in this case emphasising Polish consumers'

19 Jemerced, *My First Chanel Bag + Place Vendôme*, Paris, <http://www.jemerced.com/my-first-chanel-bag-place-vendome-paris/> (accessed 30 July 2016).

20 Ibid.

21 Alicja Kowalska, *VitkAc hurRa!!!!!!*, alicjakowalska.com, 19 November 2011, <http://alicjakowalska.com/wordpress/?p=1986> (accessed 30 July 2016).

22 Ibid.

readiness to adopt a certain aesthetic and accept its price, accompanied the inauguration of the Łódź Fashion Week. Major events, described as virtual milestones in the history of Polish fashion, were in fact a direct transplantation of Western cultural patterns — the gesture, though imitative, was meant to inscribe Poland in the European, if not global, order. But the optimistic sense that the ‘crazy and colourful transition period, the era of transformation, of identity building, also in fashion and taste’²³ is past continues to be complicated by recurring debates about our not being ready yet for Western standards. Fashion, being based on the constant fluctuation of trends, suggests particularly unstable patterns of normality. This is perhaps why successful transformation is supposed to be symbolised by institutions — a luxury fashion store or a fashion week in Łódź. But institutions can be inconvenient too. ‘Let’s meet at a round table and tailor our own Fashion Week’,²⁴ a Łódź city councillor suggested when Łódź Fashion Week lost solvency, resulting in a bailiff seizure.

The visual codes of wealth continue to rely on images from abroad. Western fashion, both the ways in which it is advertised and consumed and the designs themselves, is widely regarded as superior; hence the urge to imitate. This however is accompanied by a constant fear of failure and ridicule (an example of which are white socks, and perhaps the Polish Fashion Week in Łódź too). The debate about Poles’ bad taste, their ineptitude in imitating — surplus, excess, indiscretion and super-visibility — continues to be updated in the popular media. One recently proposed remedy is minimalism — a fashion that still ‘hasn’t cured our streets of thoughtless glamour and comic exaggeration’.²⁵ Speaking in a tone of superiority, commentators bemoan the public’s lack of — visual and cultural — ‘competences’, forgetting about their sources. A language of ‘classicism’, ‘good taste’ and ‘quality’, which has

23 ‘Karolina Sulej o kondycji polskiej mody’, interview by Karolina Korwin-Piotrowska, *Fashion Post*, 4 November 2015, <http://fashionpost.pl/sulej/> (accessed 30 July 2016).

24 Dariusz Pawłowski, ‘Fashion Week 2016 w Łodzi. Moda przegrała z filozofią’, *Dziennik Łódzki*, 1 May 2016.

25 Hubert Woźniak, *Less is more, czyli moda na minimalizm*, <http://www.przylapaninamodzie.pl/street-fashion/less-is-more-czyli-moda-na-minimalizm/> (accessed 30 July 2016).

accompanied us since at least the first issue of *Twój Styl* in 1990, promotes a seemingly universal aesthetic code meant to neutralise all conflicts and blur social inequalities. It's common knowledge that the less we can afford it, the more expensive clothes we should be buying — less of them, but of better quality, discreet and versatile. According to this logic, minimalism is a neutral style, where we learn to imitate not a particular pattern but a neutralised 'good taste', the source of which in the Polish context has invariably been Paris ('Parisian chic'). This notion of the European standards of wealth is preoccupied with such visibility that will ensure transparency, non-conspicuousness, perfect mimicry; it is a visual code that recommends shedding distinct, easily recognisable wealth indicators such as logos or brand names. Doing so is a token of being mature and self-confident (rather than following recent trends, or fashion at all, which betrays our uncertainty). The point, therefore, is a 'sort of ostentatious discretion, sobriety and understatement, a refusal of everything which is "showy"',²⁶ as Pierre Bourdieu notes. Discreet wealth is not invisible; it is a wealth that only some can notice and appreciate.

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26 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 949.

JAKUB Š
SOCHA

5.

THE TIGERS

**Well, as you know, there
are many things in life . . .
that wealthy people can
afford and poor people
can't.¹**

Jimmy Carter

1 President Jimmy Carter, news conference, Washington, DC, 12 July 1977. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter, 1977, Book 2*, Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, p. 1237.



Why did Siara shave off his beard in 2010 in front of a camera? Because 40,000 internet users had signed a petition asking him to do it. The event itself had a quarter of a million views, quite an impressive figure. It was the climax of ‘Poland Shaves Siara’, an advertising campaign for a disposable razor brand. Prior to the shaving stunt itself, several short videos had been posted online. In one, a crowd storms Siara’s house, in another Siara insults his assistant over the phone and confuses ‘internet’ with ‘inter-nut’, and in the third, to accustom himself to what is going to happen, he examines portraits of clean-shaved American artists that he had stuck on a series of mirrors. The whole advertising campaign was filmed at the private home of the actor and satirist Janusz Rewiński, who in the late 1990s played a character called Siara in two movies by Juliusz Machulski, *Kiler* [The Hitman] and *Kilerów dwóch* [Hitman(s) two]. So who was actually being shaved: Siara or Rewiński? The actor must have truly identified with the role, just as he was identified with it by internet users, who sometimes credited him in their YouTube posts as Janusz ‘Siara’ Rewiński.

A crowd negotiates the fence of Siara’s house, which is part ranch, part country manor, old-Polish style mixed with American style — just as in the average Pole’s fantasies. The gangster appears on the balcony to show an offensive gesture to his unwanted guests, but soon he mingles with them, saying, ‘I’m happy you’ve started with me, but there are some other guys to be shaved too’. For ‘to shave’ means ‘to rob’ also, and that’s something you do as Robin Hood taught — by robbing the rich. If they’re rich, they most likely haven’t earned the money honestly; probably they simply stole it. So really there’s nothing here to spill tears over. That’s more or less the logic of the argument. Ironically, it is precisely Rewiński — a man with a beard — who played most of the rich guys in cinema and TV in the last twenty years, becoming a symbol of the successful man, the Polish capitalist.

But in fact everything began even earlier than that, during the People’s Poland era. A graduate of an aeronautical engineering college and the Acting Department of the Ludwik Solski Academy for the Dramatic Arts, Rewiński debuted in the 1970s at the Piwnica

pod Baranami cabaret and the *Spotkanie z balladą* TV shows, to later perform regularly with the cabaret Tey. He played in the movies from the 1980s, in small roles at first. When one looks at the roles he chose for himself or was cast in, a clear pattern emerges: a TV channel managing editor (*Sny i marzenia* [Slumbers and dreams]), the CEO of a company selling artificial honey (*Porcelana w składzie słońca* [China in a bull shop]), a political secretary 'from above' (*Cesarskie cięcie* [Caesarean section]), and finally a vice-minister in Marek Piwowski's *Urowadzenie Agaty* [Hijacking Agata]. In the latter, released in 1993, he sits sprawled on a sofa, dressed in black suit, holding all the insignia of power that he needs. Sipping brandy, he gives orders through a white cordless phone to low-rank police officers at the far end of the country who have arrested his son. He is himself, he is at home, and no one will say no to him.

2.

Juliusz Machulski's *Kiler*, which came out in 1997, became a box-office hit owing in large part to Rewiński's performance. Stefan Siarzewski, a.k.a. Siara, is a rich Warsaw gangster. He eats white sausage from silverware and, like his wife, Ryszarda 'Gabrysia' Siarzewska, wears a lot of gold: a large chain on his neck, a glitzy signet ring. Below: Bermuda shorts and multi-colour trainers; above: a baseball cap; in the closet hangs a fine formal suit. He owns a suburban house with a swimming pool and a studio downtown, where he meets his mistresses. A large TV by the swimming pool, a flock of call girls in the jacuzzi, a gun under his mattress. Modern Greek columns fronting the house. And 'Narrow', his right hand and whipping boy, dogging him attentively at all times.

Siara has been to jail several times, wrongly convicted, of course. He believes that the police want to destroy him, but when incarcerated, he enjoys excellent conditions. You can read him like an open book: the character played by Rewiński is a lout and boor. He is street-smart and, sometimes, intelligent, a brute, but a sweet one. He doesn't break legs, doesn't threaten to cut your throat, doesn't traffic in cocaine or people. A likeable type. Like most others, he likes Lady Pank music and vodka. He has no great ambitions, but he can afford anything he wants. Money doesn't spoil or change

him. He doesn't suddenly start learning English — he knows two or three expressions and that's enough for him. He doesn't try eating sushi with ketchup — he actually doesn't eat sushi at all because it's not to his taste. He is a rich guy, but a commoner. And that's why he feels most at ease in the company of a good-natured taxi driver named Jerzy Kiler. The latter is someone who knows only one attribute of modernity: water in plastic bottles. He drinks it all the time, having probably heard somewhere that it's good for your health. Like most organised-crime bosses, Siara, played by Rewiński, dreams of leaving the underworld and going legal. So he allies with one Ferdynard Lipski, a senator, and together they sell the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw to foreign investors planning to convert it into a casino.

3.

In 1999, Rewiński becomes Edward Nowak, the nouveau-riche main character in Jerzy Gruza's TV series *Tygrysy Europy* [Tigers of Europe], a filmic portrayal of Poland's post-communist socio-economic transformation. And indeed, all the protagonists of the era are here: highly-principled private tutors, sex-crazed old-age pensioners, dumb sports teachers, frustrated professionals, unsuccessful businessmen, would-be engineers, cooks with a PhD, nouveaux riches, models and stylists, children of the new era. Looming above them all is the one true tiger: Edward Nowak, president and chairman of Nowak International. If Siara confined himself to white sausage and jacuzzi, president Nowak no longer needs to confine himself at all: he owns a peacock, exotic shrubs in the garden, a cleaning lady, a gardener, and a bodyguard. His children's native tongue is polished by a private tutor, because the progeny speak English better than Polish; a butler is eventually hired. Nowak's parrot is called 'Investor'; the man himself says he made his first million on exchange rate spreads. Nowak flirts with Oriental philosophy and tests Japanese cuisine — he hates both, but knows that his position requires him to be up to date. Unlike his wife, Elizabeth, a blind follower of fashion craving every new hot gadget, Nowak maintains a healthy distance. He has everything that a rich man probably should have, but it looks like he doesn't care, like he could live without it. He is the sole character

in the series who isn't afraid of anything and looks like he doesn't need to buy anything anymore. He is a guy who has a solution for everything, whether it's a stock market crash or fiscal inspection. Whether you act carefully or carelessly, what matters is that you act — that's his guiding principle. A song he hums says it all about his life: 'Rubbing shoulders with the brass / Keeping horses at the track / Shooting game in Africa / Covered pool / Several cars / And a little bit of golf at that.' The man's car is a Volvo; some confuse it with Volga. *Tygrysy Europy* confirm the simplest truths and suppositions: the former apparatchiks are today's tycoons; who used to enjoy a Volga with a chauffeur today enjoys a Volvo with a chauffeur. At the same time, the series examines the Polish reality without fear or prejudice. No one bewailing here a collapse of the intelligentsia ethos or a crisis of values. Unlike many filmmakers his contemporary, Gruza neither tries to imitate American cinema nor brandishes the whip of moral superiority. He looks at the charred remains of the old world and the cheap quality of the new one with curiosity and ease. It's another matter that the ease is a bit old-fashioned; the series pretends to be testing new aesthetics and new techniques — fast-paced editing, eclectic soundtracks — but the effect is slightly ridiculous.

4.

Tygrysy Europy launched in 1999; two years later, Gruza directed a second season, but the public TV wouldn't screen it. When it finally did, in 2003, the series was discontinued after seven episodes. That was the end of the adventures of Edward Nowak, who as the time progresses really gets going: he buys a business, doesn't buy a python, produces a commercial, attends the Festival of Stars in Międzyzdroje.

Meanwhile, Janusz Rewiński doesn't wait idly for the TV to finally air *Tygrysy Europy*; he plays a film producer in Juliusz Machulski's *Superprodukcja* [Super-production, 2003], a comedy about an indolent film critic forced by a gangster to make a movie. After a gangster and a businessman, the producer in *Superprodukcja* is another epitome of capitalism, another epitome of wealth and power. Zdzisław Niedzielski, a.k.a. Dzidek, could be both Siara and Nowak; he operates in the shadow economy, the informal

sector, he knows how to outsmart the law, how to make a movie that will be a flop and still make money on it. Characteristically, Niedzielski is no longer the top dog. This place belongs to the gangster Jędrzej Konieczpolski, played by Piotr Fronczewski. He is a crook who smells of dry cleaning and not, like Siara, of beer and barbecue. His distinctions are aristocratic rather than plebeian — he keeps away from the common people, afraid they might stain him with their commonness.

Similar types have been successfully portrayed in recent Polish cinema by Andrzej Seweryn, an actor who spent many years performing at eminent French theatres and who, in the late 1990s, played in Łukasz Zadrzycki's famous film, *Billboard* (1998), creating a memorable role as an advertising agency chief executive who is also a tough gangster. In the 2000s, Seweryn appears in two films by Jacek Bromski: as Witold, a company president, in *Uwikłanie* [Entanglement, 2011] and as one Roman Szerepeta in *Anatomia zła* [The anatomy of evil, 2015]. These two characters are light-years away from both Siara and Nowak; if anything, they are more along the lines of the gangster in *Superprodukcja*. It's actually amazing that ten years was enough for such a metamorphosis to take place. Witold and Szerepeta ooze wealth, but there is no ostentation in that. No gold chains, a different — international — style, and international rates too. While Nowak and Siara were still agents of light, the clean-shaved characters played by Seweryn are servants of darkness: of a subterranean river, freemasons, aliens, Russians, Jewish bankers. They play for themselves, but they play broadly — they are active in politics, operate on overseas markets, and they can afford not only suburban villas but could probably buy half of the country. And that's why they remain behind the scenes, pulling the strings from there. Bromski, of course, loves to pull apart the plutocratic elites — out of touch with daily life, as they are, alienated from society — by serving populist narratives about former communist apparatchiks who made millions during the transformation and now, allied with the global forces of evil, are scheming against Poland and her people. Both characters played by Seweryn are prime beneficiaries of the post-communist neoliberal system; connected with the special services, they know their secrets, including the dirty ones; hence their wealth, hidden so thoroughly from the world that it can't even please the eye of the ordinary man in the street. It's hard

not to see that the author of *Kill Me, Cop* (1987) is fascinated with such types. Sure, we despise and reprove them as the ‘bad guys’, but deep inside we envy their style: the fact that they are no longer provincial bumpkins who need to wear tonnes of gold to show how much they mean and how powerful they are. That they have class and are true citizens of the world.

5.

Now it’s time for Marian Dziędziel and Andrzej Grabowski — if anyone has taken the place vacated by Rewiński, it’s them. They’ve played many different roles in recent years: from bankrupts, through monks and retired police officers, to gangsters. Both have also been cast as fathers: one in Wojciech Smarzowski’s *Wesele* [The wedding, 2004], the other in Marcin Wrona’s *Demon* (2015). Both films are set during a wedding, which is of course *the* moment to flaunt one’s wealth, to make sure others can see it. The two receptions — one from 2004, the other from a year ago — are perhaps not Nero’s feasts, there is no far-out sumptuousness here, but there is everything that you need: a pool of vodka, heaps of meat. Paying for all this are Polish entrepreneurs, contemporary ‘Sarmatian’². There’s a strange affinity between the characters played by Dziędziel and Grabowski: they are different from Siara, different from Seweryn’s high riders in Bromski’s movies (the moustaches!). They are haughty, impertinent, aggressive and thick-skinned, but they lack style and imagination. Their hands are soaked in blood and excrements — that’s how the rich man looks like these days; a figure you really wouldn’t want to be. He reigns in his small kingdom, a tyrant who’s made a fortune oiling shady deals. A tyrant who terrorises his family and employees, who is afraid of the world. Deep inside, he senses that his domain is a house of cards that can fall apart anytime, so he actually lives in fear. A county-level tycoon, he drowns the fear in booze, praying for time to stand still.

2 Sarmatism (or Sarmatianism) is a term designating the formation of the dominant culture and ideology of the nobility of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the 16th to the 18th centuries, see more: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarmatism> (accessed 30 July 2016) [editor’s note].

6.

We could continue searching for the successors of Siara and Nowak, developing a new typology, but I suspect that even meticulous research wouldn't yield too long a list. Polish cinema has been somehow reluctant to engage with the subject of wealth. When you look at the winners of the Gdynia Film Festival in recent years, not a single one explores the issue. These are black-and-white and colour films, art movies and commercial productions, hearkening back to the past and rummaging through the present, but there's no real money and luxury in them. It is exactly this want that they feature most frequently: poverty, living at the fringes of society, without prospects for change. Either this or the 'national average', sometimes a bit higher, sometimes a bit lower. The peaks are beyond the horizon. A new *Promised Land* is yet to be made.

It would seem that things should be better in television, but they aren't — the popular series are populated by perfectly nondescript characters, colourless representatives of median Poland, who experience their ups and downs amid Ikea furniture. Instead of discussing them, let's rather return to Gruza's series. From today's perspective, it may appear bizarre, but there's something genuine in it, something that post-1989 Polish film and TV have seldom been able to capture. I don't mean consumerist fever, local glitz or a bag of luxury products, but liberty, ease and the nonchalance afforded by wealth. Siara or Nowak are no longer in a situation where they have to do anything. But this freedom from 'have-tos' is light-years away from the one that Witek, the main protagonist of Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Blind Chance*, was fed with. Rewiński's characters go with the flow and they never really envy anyone. They have their whole life, the whole world, ahead of them. And that's perhaps why they are so cheerful, a rare disposition in Poland.

7.

Okay, but why was it Rewiński? It's simple: he fit in seamlessly with the Polish-American cliché, perfectly embodying a stereotype we all know from Hollywood and local gossip. Besides his bulky figure, Rewiński lends his characters other attributes too: his hairy chest, voice, gestures. He can also play — and this seems crucial

— bear eyes, slightly similar to those Werner Herzog looks into in the *Grizzly Man* documentary, to see in them nothing but a 'blank stare' (void as a sister of rampant capitalism). Rewiński is able to speak in a tone that brooks no argument and yet remain a jovial teddy bear of a man. His characters are a mixture of aggression and stupefaction. You never know whether they do what they do because they are under influence or because they have a screw loose. Isn't this why they have been successful and why we look at their success without envy?

*

Curiously, Janusz Rewiński has seldom been cast in recent years, as if filmmakers had no idea what to do with him. This explains, partly at least, why he's gone into advertising. Shortly after the shaving commercial he did one for a major insurance company. No longer as Siara, shaven now — which can explain a lot or nothing at all — he plays a government clerk, an epitome of the old bureaucracy, lost in a modern tower building where no one notices him nor listens to him. An actor who has come to symbolise the Polish transformation, a popular TV personality, founder of the satirical Polish Beer-Lovers' Party, which won 16 parliamentary seats in the 1991 elections with an agenda of 'overturning the image of the private entrepreneur as a swindler and second-class citizen', Janusz Rewiński today devotes himself to running his farm near Warsaw, and in the meantime grants interviews at home and speaks at political rallies, arguing that the new Poland has gone awry and explaining why he supports people who call for radical changes. Now, rather than seeking risky explanations for the man's personal transformation, let's consider whether instead of wealth we shouldn't rather be speaking of rich living.

**Jakub Socha — film critic, editor, head
of the film department at dwutygodnik.com
on-line art magazine**

JARBECKA

URSZULA



LUXURY,
POLISH-STYLE



Gold drips from advertisements of expensive perfumes and cheap shampoos as well; golden elements adorn boxes of chocolates, cigarette packs, bottles of alcohol. King Midas would probably be delighted with the 21st century's consumer reality, even if the 'gold' is just a visual reference to the actual substance, coveted since times immemorial. Ordinary people, free from the obsession of wealth or a 'gold fever' — we witnessed something of it back in 2015 in Poland when the media and amateur explorers were searching for the legendary lost 'gold train' — have to live in this reality too.

In the world of consumption, status goods undergo constant transformations; the pursuit of novelty means that we never grow attached to a particular product. Is advertising a guide here? It shows wealth within reach, luxury products for the masses. Common luxury? Impossible, luxury is precisely *not* meant for the man in the street; it is extraordinary, unusual, rare, hardly available. But in the 21st century it's become much more commonplace; even in Poland low-cost airlines offer flights to more or less exotic locations, and it's possible to explore distant parts of the world not just by watching travel documentaries on TV. The former status goods (now available for many) can make their owners feel better, but they won't elevate their social standing. Hard-to-get perfumes used to be such goods, and one needed the recommendation of an initiated person to buy a bottle of fragrance from Coco Chanel. Today, at the mammoth shopping malls, in the impersonal world of mass-displayed bottles of sophisticated perfume, luxury loses its appeal. Brands that used to be luxurious and inaccessible are now just expensive.

The notion of luxury has been changing too. In 2010, a survey on 'luxurious poverty' was conducted, under my supervision, at the Polish Academy of Sciences' Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. Respondents were asked questions about luxury as a concept, luxury goods, rich-poor distinctions and so on. They commented on the Polish realities, the Polish living conditions: the post-1989 socio-economic transformation, growing social and cultural contrasts, a clash of privation and mediocrity with a world of luxury that

is within reach. How to talk about contemporary Polish dreams? Let's start with an entry situation; I'll use references to familiar fairy tales to interpret the results of our survey.

LEAFLET GIRL.PL

The first context here is Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Match Girl*. Our contemporary 'match girl' sometimes tries to sell something, but usually, instead of matches, offers leaflets, for free, and yet no one wants them. She gets a few pennies per leaflet, but she has to actually hand them out, she can't drop them in the dustbin. She can be seen all over town, all year round, not just as the Andersen's girl on the last day of the year. Sometimes this 'girl' is a male pensioner working to earn an extra buck for his medical prescriptions, at other times a woman 50+, who had been promised big-time support by the eponymous government programme,¹ but no one wants to give her a job, or a history student in his 20s trying to survive in big city. The passers-by are indifferent, much like in the original story, preoccupied with their own affairs, ignoring the nameless leaflet people, who can't go home until they hand out their quota. 'Take those leaflets, people! Show solidarity!', one feels like shouting, and then drop them in the paper-waste container, from which it will be eventually scavenged by the trolley-pushers. Homeless? In need anyway. Rum-maging through the containers and selling what they find, they can earn a buck too.

The occupation of this 'leaflet girl' is only temporary and soon she will leave behind the nightmare of slaving away on the street but then what awaits her? The riches of her first job? Today she's more likely to get a junk contract, though there's hope this will change. The prospects young people are facing aren't bright. The unemployment rate in Poland in March 2016 stood at 10%² and in some regions of

- 1 50+ Programme, <http://www.analizy.mpips.gov.pl/index.php/raporty-i-publikacje-topmenu-58/41-pliki-programu-50/59-program-50-dokument-implementacyjny.html> (accessed 30 July 2016).
- 2 Central Statistical Office, <http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rynek-pracy/bezrobocie-rejestrowane/stopa-bezrobocia-w-latach-1990-2016,4,1.html> (accessed 30 July 2016).

the country a job is an object of dreams, while employees dream of being treated fairly. For some of our respondents, luxury includes a whole range of goods, including employment: ‘an elegant house not far from the church, a good job, a decent life, a salary, a car, and last but not least, good health’; ‘health, money, a good job, a good wife’; or ‘a job where I’ll be able to grow and do what I love’. Perhaps the ‘leaflet girl’ doesn’t freeze to death like in the Andersen story, that’s something that happens only to the homeless, but her life won’t suddenly change either if she goes abroad in search of work, without waiting for the situation in Poland to improve.³ In her new country of residence she may feel disappointed too: she’ll be washing dishes at a restaurant, with the prospect of eventually being promoted to a waitress, or she may start a cleaning business. The dream of living a decent life remains a dream.

FULL-TIME GOLDEN FISH

After 1989, the transformation of Poland’s political and economic system made possible an opening to the West and, at the same time, the arrival of the West in Poland — with banks, multinational corporations, branded goods and certain lifestyle choices. Since then, the quality of life has improved in all social classes,⁴ and once hard-to-get everyday articles have become commonplace. Yesterday’s luxuries have seen gradual ‘secularisation’; what’s more, even low-income consumers now have better access to luxury than ever. The respondents’ replies, highly diverse, mentioned a wide range of goods: from ‘a tasty sausage’ to space tourism. Polish dreams, the everyday ones, can be as simple as: ‘a secure, well-paid job, savings profitably invested, a car for 100,000 zlotys or more, a house with a paid-off mortgage and a large garden,

3 The recent wave of economic migration from Poland has amounted to over 2 million people, <http://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/GUS-w-2014-r-wzrosla-liczba-Polakow-na-emigracji-3419235.html> (accessed 30 July 2016).

4 Indicators of life quality, subjective wellbeing and living conditions are presented in GUS reports: <http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/warunki-zycia> (accessed 30 July 2016).

a private health plan'.⁵ Others believe luxury means 'living without limitations' or 'being able to indulge one's every whim'. It is worth considering what we — the tenants of communist-era housing projects, run-down old townhouses or villas not new enough to satisfy their residents — would ask the gold fish for. Over half of respondents defined luxury as some kind of 'real estate', whether a house, an apartment, a villa, a condo, a mansion, a country house, a maisonette with a garden or a bungalow with a swimming pool. The aspect of excess was noted too: 'exclusive properties too big for the actual needs'; 'a house or home with a floor area far greater than needed by its residents'.

Respondents mentioned the inaccessibility of luxury goods: 'a house with a garden, a car . . . being able to buy luxury products — unavailable to the poor man or average earner . . . in Poland we all work "for the glory of the homeland", and the actual wages are laughable'. So what can be done? 'Bow down low and ask for a cottage', the fisherman's wife insisted in the tale of the fisherman and the golden fish; similarly, today a bank client applies for a loan and the gold fish's smiling servants will actually offer you more than you asked for. Sometimes the dreams of owning a house are realised, but then other needs emerge, the most important of those having to do with prestige. Status goods remind us of the so called old luxury, for the key characteristic of positional goods is that by their very nature they are rare.⁶ Once those were private country-house zoos with exotic specimens, or 'snuffboxes inlaid with diamonds, jewel cases, rings with precious stones' and other valuables serving as symbols of luxury and social standing. In the 21st century, luxury is also available in mass quantities. According to experts, the global 'luxury goods industry' is worth an estimated \$157 billion a year; this includes designer clothes, luxury leather goods, expensive watches and

5 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the survey replies; for a full analysis of the results, cf. Urszula Jarecka, *Luksus w szarej codzienności. Społeczno-moralne konteksty konsumpcji*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 2013.

6 Cf. for example Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

perfumes.⁷ Positional goods, indicating our social standing, are also very costly, like some luxury products.

Those respondents who can't afford 'real luxury' are left, besides dreams, with substitute measures. How to provide oneself with affordable everyday luxury? Jewellery isn't a particularly important status/luxury good — it was mentioned by 11% of respondents (watches and expensive designer eyewear were also included in the category). Self-adornment needs are satisfied by various materials, not necessarily precious metals or stones. Interesting, inexpensive designs, self-made decorations and counterfeit products offer as much glitz and glamour as we need. The knock-off market is well organised, and for those in search of low-cost gadgets there are the dime stores: 'everything for 3 zlotys'.⁸ Instead of pearls we'll get plastic beads there, while 'bonnets stitched with silver and gold' can be had from one of the many second-hand clothing stores, known in Poland by the tender name of *lumpex*, from *lump* 'member of the lumpenproletariat'. The most interesting examples of knock-off brands can be found in the world of perfumes, which isn't just a Polish specialty; all over Europe street vendors offer products by 'brands' such as Hugo Boss, Lacrosta, Gabrielle Santini, Charnel no. 5, Calvin Klaus or Anmari.

Besides riches and power, today's golden fish would be asked for services such as private massage or those once unheard of, e.g. liposuction or face lifting. Plastic surgery isn't an everyday need, but in contemporary culture services related to relaxation and comfort (spa, wellness etc.) are highly desired. Asked about luxury goods, nearly one in three respondents (32.3%) mentioned spa, cosmetic treatment, hairdressing, massage, biological regeneration, swimming, sport and leisure, private healthcare and, last but not least, plastic surgery.

Health, time, culture or hobby are sought-after goods too. Some respondents dream about 'stylish old furniture with beautiful upholstery, a super TV, books, theatre, cinema', others about 'Great Master paintings, antique furniture and books, other artworks and

7 Dana Thomas, *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster*, New York: Penguin Press, 2007, p. 3.

8 They aren't a local invention; in Germany, for example, there is a chain of 1-euro stores called Euroshop.

being able to participate in world-class cultural events'. Younger respondents wrote that they couldn't afford buying a concert ticket or a gaming console, while older ones mentioned DIY tools and equipment. Culture is a good that Polish families spend little on; according to the Central Statistical Office's *Participation in Culture 2014*⁹ report, books, DVDs, theatre, cinema or zoo tickets accounted for a mere 2.7% of the average household budget. In my survey, however, only 4% of respondents said that in the previous three months they hadn't been able to go to a cinema or a restaurant as often as they wanted. It's hard to say whether people can't afford culture or are simply uninterested in it.

TABLE, COVER THYSELF! (WITH LUXURY FOOD)

Luxury food isn't an obvious category, and in the vernacular consciousness, informed by media, including by blogs and culinary magazines, can be found, besides elaborate dishes, also recipes for quick and low-cost meals. On the Polish market there are many periodicals such as *Ciasta za Grosik* [Cakes for a penny] or *Przyślij Przepis* [Submit a recipe]¹⁰ featuring, like many other women's magazines, especially popular weeklies, prices of meals or portions to encourage readers, whatever their income level, to show creativity in the kitchen. While such budget-friendly recipes exclude the cost of electricity or the time spent shopping, being able to cook 'Provençal-style pork ribs with vegetables' for as little as 3.50 zlotys per portion is certainly an impressive feat.

In the survey, foods such as caviar, champagne, truffles or seafood were perceived as luxury, even though, according to one respondent, 'caviar is a luxury, but it's uneatable'. Immediateness is important here — books claiming to show you how to

9 <http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/kultura-turystyka-sport/kultura/uczestnictwo-ludnosci-w-kulturze-w-2014-r-,6,2.html> (accessed 30 July 2016).

10 Such magazines don't necessarily rely on local reader feedback, often these are 'clones' of German titles, e.g. *Przyślij Przepis*, published by *Burda International*, with mutations available in other language versions.

cook dinner in half an hour have long beguiled novice and experienced housewives alike. What would the wishing-table cover itself with in contemporary Poland? What is the 'finest food' for respondents? Prosciutto, dry-cured ham, skilandis, kabanos, salami or generally 'fine cured meats', 'expensive blue cheeses', 'shark fin', 'alligator meat and the meat of exotic animals'. Luxury foods are 'costly', 'fine', 'of high quality', 'genuine'; the term is also understood to include organic food. But there is ambiguity: luxury goods can mean 'bread, butter, ham or caviar, but also a simple black pudding or cheap sausage'; 'what seafood is for the rich man, bread and butter are for the poor one'. For some respondents, luxury food includes 'all restaurant dishes' such as 'veal escalops in oranges', 'loin of pork in mushroom sauce' or 'lobster in calvados'. In the respondents' replies, sophisticated dishes were as popular as the plain and simple ones, e.g. 'young potatoes with dill leaves, sour milk, clean water, Polish vodka, Polish beer, homemade cured meats'. Food can be accompanied by 'select vintages of fine wine' or 'exquisite beverages'; a welcome sight on the wishing-table would be 'French wines, Spanish meats, Belgian sweets'.

The replies suggest that culinary luxury is 'about a lifestyle, about eating at expensive restaurants'; 'foodstuffs aren't a luxury in themselves — it is where you eat them and how well you are served'. But, as one respondent notes, 'served in the right way and in the right surroundings, any piece of s**t can become a unique and rare luxury'. For the less well-off who also want to eat out, there are the plain and inexpensive diners, originally vegetarian, known in Poland as 'milk bars' [*bar mleczny*].

Sweets, the dream of communist-era children (think the gingerbread house that lured Hansel and Gretel), are now commonly available. Genuine confectionery in countless forms, not the ersatz 'chocolate-like' products of the 1980s, is on sale around the clock, and you don't need to queue for hours to buy a handful of rationed candies. While only 5% of respondents mentioned sweets as luxury food, they nonetheless noticed 'fire & ice-cream, Ferrero products, Lindt chocolates', 'gilded cakes', 'expensive teas or coffees from the far ends of the world'. Another issue comes up here — wastefulness, a vice perceived as specific for the rich. According to a report from Bank Żywności, a Polish food bank, we

throw away 9 million tonnes of food annually.¹¹ A luxury of excess or simple thoughtlessness?

ON THE (IM)MORALITY AND ATTRACTION OF WEALTH

Luxury within reach. In shop displays, commercials, at online shops, but also on credit. Insatiety is inextricable from dreams about being rich, as evidenced not only by the figure of the greedy old hag in the tale of the fisherman and the gold fish, but also by the debt spirals that people like small entrepreneurs fall into. Some of these stories don't end in a return to the status quo, like in the case of the fisherman and his wife, who still live in the same poor cottage, with the broken trough in the yard. In real life, the victims of loan sharking declare bankruptcy, lose everything (even the poor old cottage), try to escape the bailiff and justice, and even, unable to withstand the pressure, commit suicide.¹²

Wealth is attractive because you can afford anything, but it also provokes envy and suspicions of dishonesty, of 'cynicism', 'wheeling-dealing', 'ruthlessness' or 'greed', as respondents put it. Rockefeller once allegedly said that 'you can't make your first million without breaking the law', and the survey participants thought similarly: 'In Poland, an honest person can't be rich because the laws and regulations favour the smooth operator. You get money not for honest and hard work, but because your cronies and party friends have landed you with a cosy sinecure'.

And yet wealth remains an object of desire. Who doesn't dream of a secure future? But the image of the rich man, whether in popular thinking or that emerging from the respondents' replies, isn't free from ambiguity. Moral judgement comes into play and the rich are ascribed more negative and less positive characteristics than poor people. Asked to characterise wealthy persons, respondents used clearly pejorative terms, such as haughtiness, avarice, dishonesty

11 *National Geographic*, March 2016, p. 40.

12 Such cases are sometimes covered by the local press or web portals, e.g. <http://www.dziennikzachodni.pl/artykul/3894169,samobojstwo-frankowicza-wpadl-w-spirale-dlugow-popelnil-samobojstwo-przez-kredyt-we-frankach,id,t.html> (accessed 30 July 2016).

and impunity, insolence, over-ambitiousness, egoism, callousness, lack of empathy, contempt or arrogance. A rich man is a 'miser who doesn't see beyond the end of his own nose', a 'mean person, indifferent to the needs of others, caring only for himself', someone who 'thinks that he can buy everything', that 'he can do whatever he wants'.

Neutral and positive characteristics, such as self-confidence, self-respect, mettle, altruism or diligence, are ascribed to rich people too; an affluent person, one respondent said, 'contributes to community work, being proud of his own success'. But the prevailing stereotype is of the rich as antipathetic and virtually antisocial, and of the poor as depressed and helpless. So why do we want to be wealthy?

Luxury continues to be associated with things exceptional: 'rare', 'unique' or 'inaccessible', 'expensive' and 'most expensive', those from the 'top price range', those of 'superior quality'. But it's also true that products have been losing their appeal of novelty and luxury faster and faster, as evidenced by the case of the mobile phone, twenty years ago a rare and costly gadget, today an omnipresent everyday article. Sociological and economic research confirms the inflation of positional goods,¹³ as well as the 'democratisation' of luxury; thus some researchers prefer to speak of expensive brands rather of luxury ones.¹⁴

If even middle-income consumers can afford prestigious brands (or their pirated copies), what is the meaning of luxury? According to respondents, service is an important indicator: a 'lavishly decorated house with a gardener and cleaning lady', a 'house with a swimming pool and servants', 'private healthcare'. 'Personal protection' was an interesting reply, as was 'hiring an architect to design and decorate a house and a garden'. What distinguishes the affluent class, therefore, is its access to all kinds of expensive services.

Social monitoring shows that we are satisfied with our quality of life, even if finances give us little reason for that (CBOS 4/2016). Some 52% of Poles say they have enough to live on, but need to save for bigger expenses (CBOS 52/2015). Saving, they can afford their

13 Raj Patel, *The Value of Nothing: How to Reshape Market Society and Redefine Democracy*, New York: Picador, 2010.

14 See Thomas; see Jarecka.

dream holidays, also abroad (CBOS 21/2016); yet 42% of my respondents mentioned tourism, especially foreign holidays, exotic, exclusive trips and hotels, as a luxury. Rich and super-rich Poles buy yachts, airplanes, helicopters.¹⁵ These are beyond the reach of the average earner, as is private healthcare or securities investments. Luxury remains an object of dreams, which can be quite simple, especially among older respondents: 'my dreams are highly limited due to my health issues'. People with modest means compensate for the heroism of daily life by rationalising their dreams: 'I've never had extravagant expectations'; 'I know what I can afford and I don't think about expensive stuff'. Dreams of wealth? Sometimes yes, for 'it's a good thing to dream when the goal is far away', but more often these are 'dreams within the limits of possibility'.

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15 A report on the Polish luxury goods market: <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2016/06/pl-rynek-dobr-luksusowych-2015-r.pdf> (accessed 30 July 2016).

KATARZYNA

KOŁODZIEJ



**VIRTUAL
WEALTH**



Wealth has become dematerialised — from the visible form of a coin, banknote or gold it has turned into a digital record. On-line banking, cashless payments, credit cards, abstract bars and graphs — all have been pushing gold bars and paper money out of circulation. Contemporary financial exchange is in fact a fully virtual process — billions of dollars flow through electronic channels at immense speed, and the international money exchange market is a global casino.¹ Money has always represented a potential value in a specific context and, as John Maynard Keynes argued, '[it] is, above all, a subtle device for linking the present to the future'.² Virtuality has become our everydayness — cyberspace, according to William Gibson is a 'consensual hallucination . . . A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity'.³

DOLAR \$ —> EURO € —> BITCOIN ₿

In 1948, a Polish worker donated to the construction of the Party House in Warsaw 'the first and only dollar he's ever had, a gift from cousins abroad'.⁴ The most precious one. Longed for. In the collective consciousness, the dollar cult dates back to the late 19th century's economic migration and its hopes for fulfilling the American dream. America offered a promise of getting rich quickly, achieving true wealth. In post-war Poland, the dollar was a remedy for hard times and, alongside gold, was considered the best investment as reflected in the saying 'uncertain times, certain dollar'. The materiality of the banknotes guaranteed financial security until the transformation, when the exchange rate became much more realistic.

- 1 Alvin Toffler, Heidi Toffler, *Revolutionary Wealth*, New York: Knopf, 2006, p. 75.
- 2 John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (1936); London: Macmillan, 1960, p. 294.
- 3 William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1989, p. 128.
- 4 Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami. Czarny rynek w Polsce 1944–1989*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2010, p. 253.

But in the collective consciousness the dollar remains a symbol of freedom, even a fetish, as in *Untitled (Pierwszy zarobiony dolar przez Piotrka, 30 August '90, New York* [First dollar earned by Piotr, 30 August '90, New York]) by Piotr Uklański — an artist who's achieved success, also commercially, precisely in the United States (the sale of his *Nazis* for 1.056 million dollars was nothing but the American dream come true). Suitcases filled with dollars or zlotys are still associated with the opportunities of quick enrichment offered by the transition to free-market economy and private ownership. It came to be symbolised by the Stock Market Exchange, housed in the former headquarters of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party (the 'Party House') at Nowy Świat Street in Warsaw. The first session took place on 16 April 1991 — five companies were traded. There were 112 buy/sell orders, with turnover reaching 19.9 million zlotys (an equivalent of \$2,000). Thus the vision of a stock-market reality portrayed in movies such *Wall Street* (1987) came true – abstract indices, graphs and bar diagrams have entered the collective consciousness, like the gradual adaptation to virtual transactions. Catching up with the West, electronic banking was introduced in Poland. In 1991, the first bank card in the country, the corporate BIG VISA Business Card, was issued by Bank Inicjatyw Gospodarczych (BIG SA); in 1990, Bank Pekao SA opened the first cash machine; the first home banking service was launched in 1993 by Bank Rozwoju Eksportu (BRE SA); online banking began in 1998, and in 2000 mBank became Poland's first virtual bank.⁵ Success!

With the introduction of the euro in 11 EU countries in 2002,⁶ the new currency quickly joined the dollar as a powerful symbol of wealth.

5 Cf. https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bankowo%C5%9B%C4%87_elektroniczna (accessed 30 July 2016).

6 The European Commission: 'As well as serving as the currency of the euro area, the euro has a strong international presence. Currencies are the means by which wealth is stored, protected and exchanged between countries, organisations and individuals. A global currency, such as the euro, does this on a global scale. Since its introduction in 1999 [initially for virtual transactions], it has firmly established itself as a major international currency, second only to the US dollar'; http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/euro/world/index_en.htm (accessed 30 July 2016).

Euro banknotes have even made to US hip hop music videos (e.g. Jay-Z's *Blue Magic*).

Doubts about the global financial system were raised by the 2007 crisis, which was the reference point of the international online project *_MON3Y AS AN 3RRROR* (2013, <http://mon3y.us>). Its authors focused on the theme of the functioning of money (dollar, euro) and its real material and virtual value. And so on the one hand, Lars Hulst's symbolic *0 €uro* is zero capital/starting point (to enrichment), disappointing with its lack of value, while Miron Tee's *Shame* shows a dollar bill with George Washington 'withdrawing' from the central oval. Despite electronic transactions and a virtual system of wealth, the materiality of banknotes is still desired, being tantamount to their tangible value and a sense of security (notwithstanding of course situations such as hyperinflation when you can literally wallpaper your home with money). And so in the online work *#MONEYBRICK (how to make money on the internet print, cut, fold, build)*, Anthony Antonellis refers to the counterfeiting of banknotes and their enduring appeal, ironically proposing to follow a 'do it yourself' approach by printing your own 'bricks' of \$100 bills. Paradoxically, invisibility and anonymity in the virtual circulation can only be guaranteed by banknotes (in a suitcase/shopping bag). Today, the bitcoin (฿) — a crypto-currency created in 2008 by Satoshi Nakamoto (pseudonym), allowing for financial transactions to be effected outside the banking system (i.e. without intermediaries) — is becoming an alternative for the dollar- or euro-dominated financial system.⁷ Artists have been exploring the idea of the independent bitcoins, turning them into a visual symbol of future wealth. *Computers and Capital* (2014, <http://x-o-x-o-x.com/press/computersandcapital/>), an online project devoted to digitalisation in the global financial system, aimed to popularise the bitcoin idea: 'This is a digital visualisation of the world's richest people

7 According to Anna Piotrowska, the birth of the bitcoin marks the beginning of a new era where advanced technology has broadened the notion of money and changed the way we perceive its functioning; cf. Anna Piotrowska, 'Bitcoin a definicja i funkcja pieniądza', *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska*, vol. 48/3, 2014, pp. 275–283, http://dlibra.umcs.lublin.pl/Content/20863/czas9547_48_3_2014_27.pdf (accessed 30 July 2016).

and their worth in bitcoins. What's your worth?', asks FELT in *Bitcoin Digibank Visualisation*. The phenomenon of the bitcoin is referred to by Dominik Podsiadły's *#dream*, a gif image visualising the possibility of quick enrichment, with bitcoin symbols endlessly floating upwards. The Goldex-Poldex collective, in turn, has created a 'lightcoin mine', alluding to its founding myth and the idea of opening a Polish gold mine in Madagascar in order to test alternative sources of financing cultural and community projects.⁸ Presented at the 9th Berlin Biennale, Simon Denny's (with Linda Kantchev) latest project, *Blockchains Visionaries* (2016), is an installation consisting of three trade-fair-like information booths for virtual startups – the digital monetary platforms Ethereum, 21 Inc. and Digital Asset Holdings. Exploiting the formula of marketing self-presentation, the work offers a vision of the future development of the world of virtual money. According to Denny himself, 'For many entrepreneurs, journalists, thinkers, and artists, the blockchain has inspired strong conclusions about the evolution of economic liberalism and the future of nation states, oversight, planning, regulation, autonomy, governance, and other fundamental topics. The idea that computer code could replace laws through an incorruptible distributed network that everybody and nobody owns is a powerful idea'.⁹ And so it can be said that the bitcoin is the 'greatest work of conceptual art of the 21st century'.¹⁰

ATTENTION AS A NEW CURRENCY

In 2014, Amalia Ulman used the social media — Instagram and Facebook — to carry out a five-month project called *Excellences and Perfections* in which she fulfilled the dreams and fantasies of a young girl aspiring to the world of luxury. The constructed image

8 Cf. <http://cowidac.artmuseum.pl/pl/artist/goldex-poldex> (accessed 30 July 2016).

9 Simon Denny's introduction to Izabella Kaminska, *Blockchain as Gosplan 2.0.*, <http://bb9.berlinbiennale.de/blockchain-as-gosplan-2-0> (accessed 30 July 2016).

10 Michelle Lhoq, *Is Bitcoin Just Conceptual Art?*, http://thecreators-project.vice.com/en_uk/blog/is-bitcoin-just-conceptual-art (accessed 30 July 2016).

of ostentatious, lavish consumption, building on wealth codes such as haute couture or haute cuisine and informed by actual profiles of rich women, seemed to be yet another such account, as further suggested by narcissistic selfies or posts such as ‘I only accept apologies in cash’. The artist revealed the project’s true nature only after its completion. A virtual ‘living the life’ attitude, aestheticising everyday life in a ‘high life’ version, attracted 89,244 followers. Today, Ulman’s profile is followed by over 122,000 people, and it is precisely this attention that has come to be perceived as a new currency of the online world.¹¹

Constructing his own image and creating illusion — #rich #richness #richlife #richkids #richie #richlifestyle #riches #richbitch #richforever #richgirl #richandfamous #wealth #wealthy #wealthylife #gold #money #moneyflip #moneyflow — the user strives to generate as much interaction as possible, including by buying likes, sponsored posts etc. What matters is visibility — or even super-visibility — which can (and does!) translate into financial gains. Any content that begins to function in virtual space carries investment potential. Those authors who succeed in drawing internauts’ attention are able to automatically generate wealth. Polish examples of such online success stories include Maffashion, a fashion blogger, (maffashion.pl, 622,000 fans on Facebook, 189,000 followers on Snapchat); reZigiusz, a lifestyle YouTuber reviewing computer games, author of www.youtube.com/user/reZiPlayGamesAgain (455 million views); or Dawid Kwiatkowski (310,000 followers on Instagram, 181,000 subscribers on YouTube, 341,000 fans on Facebook).

Statistics are one of the currencies used by opinion leaders, or influencers. Their power lies not in dry numbers that communicate selected product features for marketing purposes, but in causing the recipients of such content to do what they are asked to do. Besides statistic wealth, these ‘rulers of opinion’ win also fame, respect, recognition and admiration. Sharing content through an influencer increased purchasing conversion by up to 10 times, as

11 Gene McHugh, *The Development of Attention as Currency*, http://www.linkartcenter.eu/public/editions/Gene_McHugh_Post_Internet_Link_Editions_2011.pdf (accessed 30 July 2016).

‘92% of consumers trust recommendations from other people — even someone they don’t know — over brand content’.¹²

Every dollar can be spent on a specific action in virtual space, using official tools provided by companies such as Facebook or Google. As a result, an idea, service, product or person receive paid attention which — like at a bureau d’change — can be exchanged into various new ‘currencies’: display (on whatever device); range (the number of people we want to reach); involvement (link clicked, liked, shared or commented on); some other desired action. This mode of exchange assumes that every content in virtual space possesses a specific value. The ‘exchange office’ — the system of converting real money into online exposure — doesn’t generate wealth itself; rather, it is a tool allowing us to precisely verify whether the content we have generated is worth investing in and offers the possibility of the easy multiplication of wealth. It is the precise targeting that is the key to finding such an exchange rate that will produce a satisfying return on investment. How does the mechanism work? Both Google and Facebook monitor our every movement on the internet. They know what we like, what links we click, what we look for, what we pay for (bank card = identity card!). They aggregate such data, identifying behaviourally profiled target groups. As a result, marketing content can be delivered to the parents of children aged 0–6 who are on a journey and like bananas. The quantities of data processed are so vast that the most advanced tools make it possible to identify behavioural-demographic clones. This way of generating attention produces up to 16 times higher conversion rates. Money is exchanged into attention, attention into traffic, traffic into conversion (purchase), purchase into money.

This process of the dematerialisation of wealth was caused by rise of the Internet in the late 1990s, which accelerated wealth relocation and the generation of wealth everywhere.¹³ Many fields of life have been digitalised — yielding new social relationships, structures, values and new symbols of wealth — abstract bars and numbers,

12 Lauren Jung, *Influencer Marketing Is the New King of Content*, <http://www.theshelf.com/the-blog/2015/3/17/influencer-marketing-is-the-new-king-of-content> (accessed 30 July 2016).

13 Toffler, p. 104.

virtual gifs where animated gold glitters (bling bling), hypnotises, fascinates, deceives and beguiles. New virtual currencies have also emerged: the bitcoin and attention. And so for the Z generation, born between 1995 and 2005, virtual relationships are as significant as real ones. Individual experiences are worthless unless we are able to share them online and generate attention. It is precisely attention (the number of likes, followers etc.) that determines whether someone is a rich person today. At the same time, the Z generation has an alternative approach to reality. Aware of the rules governing the digital world, it skilfully uses the available tools to realise its own inner goals. For this is a new species of man — ignoring boundaries, doing what he wants (online).

The new, virtual, dimension of wealth is fluid, invisible and mobile — investments are made in the course of milliseconds — and at the same time inextricably bound up with smartphones and attention. Today wealth equals 'break the internet'. 'There is nothing particularly realistic about the world today. A world in which investing in fiction is more profitable than betting on reality'.¹⁴

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14 DIS (Lauren Boyle, Solomon Chase, Marco Roso, David Toro), 'The Present in Drag', in *9 Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art in Berlin*, exh. cat., Berlin: DISTANZ, 2016, p. 55.

KOMORNICKA

MAGDALENA



EVERYDAY LIFE

**IN POLISH CULTURE
IN 2009-2016**



Four artists are sitting in a room¹ and listening to an answering machine, to a message they were left by a lady from a cultural institution. She called to invite the Azorro collective to participate in a 'prestigious project with no budget'. The institution had not managed to get any funds for a catalogue, and neither can they pay the artists nor reimburse them on their travel and accommodation costs. They are counting, however, on the collective's approval of such terms and their participation in the project, as the 'exhibition will really be prestigious'. The artists break up laughing.

The joke contained in the video described, titled *Proposal* from 2002, is still true, despite some changes in recent years. It remains very suggestive, as perhaps it is more reminiscent of the humour and self-distance of the characters of *Broad City*, *2 Broke Girls* or *Girls*— representatives of the new precariat²— than of the sobriety of leftist discourses or the pompousness of neoliberal slogans through which the problems of artists or creators of culture are viewed. If I were to apply the current terminology, I would define myself as a cultural worker. I have been one for the past ten years, the six first of which I was a member of the precariat (in one of the biggest and most important institutions of culture in Poland!). Four years ago I was offered a job contract, and a year ago I signed a work agreement for an undetermined period of time. My salary is just as the papers write: below the national average, while the working time (though I am obliged to follow an 8-hour working day) is generally unlimited. All that makes me what they call in the region of Małopolska — 'a pauper of culture'. Furthermore, as I sometimes am like that lady that had left a message for the Azorro group, I am both 'the exploited', as well 'the exploiting', hence my double role in the discussion which I present henceforth.

- 1 Oskar Dawicki, Igor Krenz, Wojciech Niedzielko, and Łukasz Skąpski and are members of the Azorro group.
- 2 Adam Kruk, 'Bieda to nowe bogactwo', *Dwutygodnik*, no. 147, November 2014, <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/5573-bieda-to-nowe-bogactwo.html> (accessed 30 July 2016).

1.

In deliberations about the situation of artists, one of the most often quoted theoreticians is the Dutch artist and economist, Hans Abbing. In his book³ he poses a thesis that the artist's social status today is the consequence of beliefs dating back to the 19th century, when 'artists expanded the ethos of art by introducing the notion that self-sacrifice for it is their second nature'. And hence the rejection of commerce. The society of today believes, therefore, that poverty is good for artists and that any desire for profit has detrimental effects on their art. Abbing claims that the slogans of 19th century such as 'art for art's sake' or 'all for art', as well as the conviction that art workers devote themselves to art just as much as artists do (as these are professions based on a calling and requiring passion), are still very much present. 'Not only is the high symbolic value of art built on poverty and the self-sacrifice of artists but it is also ascribed to it' — writes Abbing in a different text.⁴ It is thus the reproduction of such ethos that is responsible for the weak position of artists and their exploitation. The author of the article further advises artists and art theoreticians to revise their negative approach to the 'moderate forms of entrepreneurship' and the possibility of generating profit from art and by artists. He believes artists venturing on business projects should no longer be perceived in negative terms, and that artistic education does bring hope of changing the *status quo*.

The discussion on the living conditions of artists taking place in Poland over the last few years is virtually limited to the assumption that different types of labour require different legal and administrative solutions, and actions for their development and implementation. Since artistic activity is not a business, only once people of art are seen as workers, and their activity is called work rather than

3 Hans Abbing, *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004.

4 Idem, 'Eksploatacja biednych artystów w świecie sztuki' [Exploitation of poor artists in the artworld], in *Czarna księga artystów polskich* [Black book of Polish artists], ed. Katarzyna Górna, Karol Sienkiewicz et al., Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Obywatelskie Forum Sztuki Współczesnej, 2015.

a product (work — artwork), will their problems be fully understood and, as a result, will the reasons for their problems be counteracted. The culture sector, often called the creative industry today, is not subject to any monitoring in Poland. Furthermore, there is no credible research nor statistics that one could refer to. Often mentioned is the term ‘precarity’, signifying the insecurity of living conditions. Just as often one hears of the so called industrialisation of culture and artistic production (creative era), or the pauperisation of and overproduction in art (repletion, overproduction, surplus). The art market is often defined as poorly developed, just learning to crawl or simply non-existent. In one his interventions, Kuba Szreder went so far as to say that ‘most artists live in poverty’, and quoted data from countries where the market does exist but still can offer revenues to only 10% of active artists. In the Netherlands, as many as 40% of artists would live below the poverty level if they were only trying to live on what they make from art, and as many as 94% earn less than manual workers. In the United States and Western Europe, the percentage of the poor among artists is estimated at some 60-80%, and in Berlin, 40% of the art people live below the social minimum⁵. Other data, which is also often quoted, come from a book by Don Thomson who has estimated that there are approximately 80 thousand artists living in New York and London, 75 of whom have star status and earns millions (the media report that Damien Hirst’s fortune, for example, is supposedly worth one billion dollars, while Jeff Koons is worth 500 million). Furthermore, 300 artists have a well-founded international career and earn in the proximity of several thousand, and another 5 thousand are recognised on the local market but have to take on additional jobs to make ends meet⁶. That leave us with the rest of 74 625 people . . .

5 *Must an Artist Be Poor and Who is Responsible for It* — recorded discussion during the general assembly of the OFSW, <http://forumsztukiwspolczesnej.blogspot.com/2012/04/czy-artyista-musi-byc-biedny-i-kto-jest.html> (accessed 30 July 2016).

6 Don Thomson, *The Supermodel and the Brillo Box: Back Stories and Peculiar Economics from the World of Contemporary Art*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

The average salary of 3000 zlotys in the culture sector in Poland⁷ generally pertains only to those who are employed on work contracts by institutions of culture. For years now, it has been the worst paid profession in the country (the highest wages are in IT, telecommunication, and banking). It is repeatedly underlined that despite their high competences and qualifications, culture professionals accept their earnings at a level below the country's average. And the number of those willing to work in the 'creative industry' is constantly rising. According to the data provided by the Central Statistical Office, the number of art graduates in the years 2008–2013 went up by 74.1%. At the same time, it is revealed that 20% of these graduates do not work in their educated profession.

2.

This story begins with the 6th Congress of Polish Culture which took place in September 2009, its essence — all that has happened afterwards. The participants of the event were to ponder on questions about Polish culture in the twenty years of the social and systemic transformation of the country. The organisers wished to start a debate on the current and foreseen state of Polish culture and, on that basis, formulate recommendations and proposals for its reforms. At the end, however, the Congress was called an attack of economists and administration officials against the foundations of what is commonly seen as culture. This, in effect, has led to the mobilisation of the entire art community.

Despite the establishment of the Civic Community for Public Media, which seemed like a harbinger of hope and whose task was to develop a draft bill on public media so that they were extracted from under political influences, the Congress was rather a disappointment. As a result, an idea emerged to gather the representatives of the visual arts and set up a group that would be the voice of artists in areas of key importance to culture. On 1 December 2009, the founding meeting of the Forum of Contemporary Art (*Obywatelskie Forum Sztuki Współczesnej*, OFSW) was organised, and in

February 2010, a social movement — Citizens of Culture (*Obywatele Kultury*) began its activities. It is these two initiatives and a number of charismatic figures that made it possible not only to launch a discussion, but to undertake specific actions aimed at improving the situation of artists, changing the cultural policy of the state, and ensuring an equal and open access to culture for all.

The Forum of Contemporary Art was initiated by a group of artists, critics, art historians, curators and directors of cultural institutions.⁸ Undoubtedly, the *spiritus movens* of the whole endeavour were from the very beginning artist, Katarzyna Górna and art critic, Karol Sienkiewicz. The Forum had formulated clear goals: to ensure transparency of the cultural policy (competitions for the positions of directors of cultural institutions), to include artists in pension schemes and a health insurance system, guarantee the unconditional payment of remuneration to artists invited by institutions to exhibit, and to work on defining the professional status of artists in Poland.

The informal movement of the Citizens of Culture, on the other hand, began a campaign in 2010 under the heading of ‘1 percent for culture’ and started collecting signatures in support of a social initiative — Pact for Culture. The Pact envisaged a raise in the funds for culture but distributed in a manner which would help broaden access to it. ‘By appropriate actions in cooperation with the signatories of the Pact, the government shall arrive at a level of at least 1% of spending on culture earmarked in the state’s budget, beginning 2012 to be achieved by 2015’⁹. The Pact stressed the need to develop language, communication, media and art skills among children, and institutions of culture were defined as the guarantors

8 The following were the initiators of OFSW: Mirosław Bałka, Waldemar Baraniewski, Łukasz Gorczyca, Piotr Krajewski, Zbigniew Libera, Dorota Monkiewicz, Agnieszka Morawińska, Joanna Mytkowska, Piotr Piotrowski, Andrzej Przywara, Anda Rottenberg, Karol Sienkiewicz, Monika Sosnowska, Jarosław Suchan, Monika Szewczyk, Aneta Szyłak, Hanna Wróblewska and Artur Żmijewski. Today the Forum is mainly dominated by artists.

9 The process turned out to be a bit longer. On 21 July 2016, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Piotr Gliński, said in an interview with TVP Kultura that the promise inscribed in the Pact for Culture will have been kept in 2017, in which the budget spending on culture will have reached 1%.

of creative freedom and thus were granted programming autonomy. Work was started on the new draft bill on the media, a free public domain was secured (digitisation of cultural heritage), as well as multiannual programmes were created for the development of readership, development of modern library infrastructure, media libraries and culture and civic centres which were to be founded in municipalities. After two years of work on the text, the document was signed by Prime Minister Donald Tusk on 14 May 2012¹⁰.

A Team for the Pact at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister (composed of representatives of the central administration, regional and local authorities, social organisations and the Citizens of Culture) and a Committee for the Pact at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (with representatives of social organisations, institutions of culture, associations of artists, local governments and the central administration) were to oversee how the Pact was being carried out and issue opinions on how the funds were spent with the observance of public control and rules of transparency. It was all a great success, sparking great hopes for a change.

The Pact was critically received by the community connected with the Forum for Contemporary Art as it did not include provisions of a social security nature for the artists and did not take into consideration the postulates formulated by the Forum. It could thus be assumed that 2012 revealed a disunity between the two structures: the priorities of the Forum (concentrated on issues of the artists) were different from those of the Citizens of Culture (underlining the role of cultural education and broad access to culture, thus being focused on the viewers). There is a certain radical streak about the Forum whose members sometimes seem to fail to see the meaning of cultural education as an element positively conditioning the living situation of artists (though everybody quotes Hans Abbing

10 The signatories of the Pact for Culture include: Donald Tusk, Michał Boni, Edwin Bendyk, Jarosław Lipszyc, Beata Chmiel, Tomasz Janowski, Krzysztof Knittel, Krzysztof Krauze, Ewa Łebno-Falęcka, Paweł Łysak, Krzysztof Materna, Dorota Olejnik, Agnieszka Holland, Piotr Frączak, Katarzyna Kozyra, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Jerzy Hausner, Andrzej Mencwel. The text of the Pact see at: http://www.mkidn.gov.pl/media/docs/2015/20150422_Tekst_Paktu_dla_Kultury.pdf (accessed 30 July 2016).

who consistently underlines the significance of education in his texts). This radicalism takes away the strength of the postulates and has put me off personally from supporting the initiatives of the Forum, my initial enthusiasm having somewhat faded.

In March 2012, the Forum organised an important debate in Zachęta, entitled: *Must an Artist Be Poor and Who Is Responsible for It?*, following which it sent a letter to the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Bogdan Zdrojewski, with a warning of a strike should the Ministry fail to start negotiations on improving the social situation of artists. As no response was received, a strike was announced on 24 May 2012 under the heading Day Without Art, during which 50 galleries were closed nationwide. The strike was an important and justified initiative, though I had the impression that its scale and dynamism were not quite sufficient.

2013 saw new protests and first exhibitions concentrating on the status of artist¹¹ and an Art Workers Commission was set up as part of the Nationwide Workers Initiative Trade Union. From then on, the Commission has become the Forum's new tool in its fight for the rights of culture and art workers.

Another important event and a success of the Forum was an agreement signed in February 2014 on the minimum wages for artists — the other side consisted of five institutions: Zachęta — National Gallery of Art, Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle and the Arsenal City Gallery in Poznań. Five more institutions signed the agreement by May of that year. The document guaranteed that artists would receive remuneration in a specific amount for their participation in group exhibitions (gross amount of 800 zlotys) as well as for solo shows (gross amount of 1200 zlotys for an exhibition in the form of a single project, and 3700 zlotys for a larger scale exhibition). There was also a moment in my own private history when I started feeling the burden of being both 'the exploited' and 'the exploiting'. I was tired of negotiating every single pay and every single invoice so as to make it within the exhibition's budget (always small). I was feeling frustrated having

11 *Freelancer*, May–August 2013, Zachęta — National Gallery of Art, curator: Ewa Toniak; *Workers of the Art World United*, October–December 2013, Kronika Gallery, Bytom, curator: Stanisław Ruksza.

to constantly explain (also to artists) the financial limitations of the institution. I felt that there we were, fighting for the artists and the viewers, but were not doing anything for ourselves, and it was only the situation of the workers of institutions of culture that stayed the same. Looking back, I see that the agreement brought benefits to all, despite my initial worries that the consequences of having to spend 5–10% of the budget for a group exhibition on salaries would be quite detrimental to the project's final shape or form. I do not know what were the motivations of other institutions but one should note that some, such as Kraków's MOCAP, refused to sign the document.

In October 2014, after the Warsaw Gallery Weekend organised by commercial galleries in September and the screening of *High Price* in the Museum of Modern Art, a polemical exchange took place in the press between members of the Commission of Art Workers and the Forum of Contemporary Art (Mikołaj Iwański¹²) and the authors of the curatorial text to the presentation, Zofia Płoska and Łukasz Ronduda¹³. 'The artistic reflection on the economy-art relations and the strategies of coping with poverty is a phenomenon which we have undertaken to analyse on the occasion of the screening of *High Price*,' the curators write. In response, Iwański says, 'when we were preparing the artists' strike in 2012, we were convinced that we were thus beginning a long march towards the execution of the most elementary postulates — we are indeed much farther today. Any proposals of individual strategies of artists' coping with the material circumstances – as put forward by Ronduda and Płoska – are actually attempts at reverting the positive process back to point zero'.

12 Mikołaj Iwański, 'Artyści nie potrzebują filantropii' [Artists do not need philanthropy], http://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,16742060,Artysci_nie_potrzebuja_filantropii.html (accessed 30 July 2016).

13 Zofia Płoska, Łukasz Ronduda, 'Ekwiwalent pieniężny. Artyści mówią o ekonomii podczas Warsaw Gallery Weekend' [The pecuniary equivalent Artist speak on economy during the Warsaw Gallery Weekend], http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,16711245,Ekwiwalent_pieniezny__Artysci_mowia_o_ekonomii_podczas.html (accessed 30 July 2016).

Many meetings of the Forum's members with representatives of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, as well as the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy were organised in the years 2014–2015, with the aim to continue talks about social security measures for artists.

3.

The breakthrough came in 2014 and 2015 with a report¹⁴, which can serve as a supplement to the *Czarna księga artystów polskich* [Black book of Polish artists]¹⁵. The book (published, by the way, thanks to the co-financing from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage) is a guide to the present situation in the area of cultural theories, sociological and economic analyses, and legislation. It was also, to an effect, a summary of the activities of the Forum (as well as the basic source of information used in this text).

On 25 October 2015, elections to the parliament took place, won by the Law and Justice party. Piotr Gliński became the new Minister of Culture and National Heritage (as well as Deputy Prime Minister), and announced changes in the cultural policy of the state.

On 5 March 2016, the Ministry published information about the donations to be granted for the purchase of artworks to the National and Regional Contemporary Art Collections. No funds were allocated for Regional Collections to institutions who had for years been consistently building very interesting sets of collected works to the benefit of the local communities¹⁶. Under the National Collections priority, none of the four eligible institutions (Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Contemporary Museum Wrocław, and MOCAK) received funds for their purchases — a fact which was very much commented on publically. It all looked as

14 *Fabryka sztuki*, ed. Michał Kozłowski, Jan Sowa, Kuba Szreder, Warsaw: Wolny Uniwersytet Warszawy, Bęc Zmiana, 2014.

15 *Czarna księga artystów polskich*.

16 Zachęta appealed against the decision to its application for funds under the Regional Collection priority (as the score allowed for such an appeal) and was granted 37% of the sum applied for. The rest of the money was raised during a crowdfunding campaign with reference to the historical traditions of public fundraising by this institution.

though one of the programmes included in the Pact was simply closed. It should be stressed that the funds for the purchase of artworks to collections also meant money for the artists from whom the works were to be bought — hence the very far-fetching consequences of the decision.

On 21 March 2016, the Ministry informed about plans to close the Team for the Pact at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, as well as the Social Committee for the Pact and the Council of Non-governmental Organisations. At the same time, it declared its wish to establish a single support entity at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (which would perform all the tasks of the former bodies). The new agency would be the effect of a dialogue of partners and public consultations. No new rules of cooperation with the social partner, which had previously been regulated by the Pact, have as yet been established.

Instead, on 1 July 2016, an announcement was published about a selection process for grants under the Collections programme (priority 5 — National Contemporary Art Collections) which had similar objectives and were addressed to the same institutions as the previous one.

‘Watch out, something just started in Lublin’ — read a post which appeared on the Facebook fan page of the Citizens of Culture on 23 May. An exhibition under the title *DE-MO-KRA-CJA* opened in Labirynt Gallery on 20 May (curated by Waldemar Tatarczuk) which posed new questions. What is democracy really? Considering the present social and political situation in Poland, can we say that it is endangered? What role does art play in democracy? The exhibition was accompanied by a spontaneous (as it was organised in a month) debate on the 21–22 May with the participation of artists, theoreticians, and art critics, philosophers, as well as directors and employees of cultural institutions. It was then that the idea of organising a Congress of Culture was born.

Congresses of Culture have been convened in the most important moments of our contemporary times . . . Congresses have always presented a diagnosis of the state of the spirit of the citizens of the Republic, and challenged politicians by expressing the lack of consent for the dismantling of what is common good. And each such Congress . . . brought about a change. . . . Feeling the dramatic

nature of the moment and being appalled by the speech of hate and contempt, the increasing xenophobia and acts of violence on grounds of cultural, religious and racial differences, conscious of the deep shock experienced by the social life and public sphere unlimited to Poland, in defence of freedoms and rights, we appeal for the support of the idea of the Congress of Culture, and for the nationwide participation in its preparations and in the Congress itself which is planned to take place in Warsaw on 7–9 October 2016.

- we read in the appeal to participate in the Congress. What will it bring and what will be its consequences — we are still to learn.

4.

My intention was to present the most important figures and events, actions, arguments, and texts on the living circumstances and problems of Polish artists, as well as the condition of culture over the past seven years. It was for reasons of necessity that only certain initiatives and steps have been selected out of the many that have actually taken place (e.g. I have omitted the many smaller and local initiatives). My report from the discussion is also a simplification as being a member of the visual art circles, I have limited myself to describing only them. I have not discussed the other artistic communities from the fields of music, dance, literature or film, neither have I referred to the issues with which the scientific circles have to deal (Citizens of Science). I have not mentioned the whole dispute about ACTA or the recent struggle of the Female Citizens of Culture for female presence in public media. Much has happened in culture and for culture! No doubt, recent years have seen an evolution in the perception of culture's functions in Poland. Much has changed, as has my personal situation as a culture worker. In the discussion mentioned, however, my position is still privileged — something we need to bear in mind. I happen to work in one of the biggest institutions of culture in Poland, in a big city. I have a work contract, social benefits, health insurance — why, I even have a private medical benefits package! Though my salary is relatively low, I still earn more than in many other institutions. The exhibition budgets I have at hand, though relatively limited, are still higher than in many other places. There is still a long way

ahead of us. If the Azorro collective were offered to participate in a 'prestigious project' now then maybe several institutions would be willing to pay them the minimum. Though it could still not be enough for the catalogue . . .

The title of the essay is a paraphrase of a book by Wilhelm Sasnal *Everyday Life in Poland in 1999–2001*, Warsaw: Raster, 2001.

Magdalena Komornicka — art historian, producer of exhibitions. From 2006, working with Zachęta — National Gallery of Art in Warsaw, and member of its curatorial team since 2012

AFTERWORD

As part of the celebrations of 220th anniversary of its founding, the National Gallery in Prague organised an exhibition under the title *Generosity. The Art of Giving*¹. The history of the institution, its development and the creation of many of its collections was shown from exactly this perspective — of generosity and the notions that it entails: giving, being together and sharing. This was shown from the philosophical, ethical and historical perspectives — from the times of the ‘founding fathers’ of the institution, i.e. the Society of Patriotic Friends of the Arts (rich aristocrats and enlightened intellectuals) who opened up their seats and collections to the public so as to improve its artistic tastes. It went on to present the donors and founders of the different artworks or entire collections, as well as the institutional generosity — thanks to which the museum and its collected works, being public property, were gifts of everybody to everybody. The exhibition finally included the artworks bestowed by the artists invited to the exhibition, who used them to comment or contextualise its fragments and, at the same time (as was the case of Joseph Kosuth), donated them as gifts.

Zachęta was established 150 years ago. It was also thanks to a set group of founders — representatives of the aristocracy and the bourgeois who shared the common will to share. As a public institution, we are now financed from a shared budget — that of the state — but we also often benefit from the generosity of our partners, sponsors, and friends, as was recently the case in a crowd-funding campaign *Whole Poland Builds* . . . And we do try to reciprocate this generosity, to the public and to the society.

Wealth is a term which remains somewhat unrealistic. As the book or the exhibition show, different people have different perceptions of the notion. To some it is money, to others it's free time, freedom of choice, attention. The terms, comprehensible and translated into

1 *220th Anniversary of the National Gallery in Prague. Generosity. The Art of Giving*, 5 February–3 July 2016, Kinský Palace (main exhibition), the Convent of St Agnes of Bohemia, Fair Trade Palace, Sternberg Palace, Salm Palace, Schwarzenberg Palace, Prague; curated by Adam Budak and curatorial representatives from each collection of the National Gallery in Prague.

the vernacular, described by sociologists and commented by artists, remain difficult to classify. The parameters of wealth are unclear, the sentiments are ambiguous: dreams intertwine with irony which is supposedly to help us accept what we have, or rather what we lack. 'Wealth – poverty' — these are the words on Radek Szlaga's drawing *B*. As history teaches us, however, all that wealth creates and all that remains to become common good with time (buildings, artworks, objects) is always in the company of one other thing — the idea of generosity.

Hanna Wróblewska

Director of Zachęta — National Gallery of Art

EXHIBITION

Money to Burn

27.08–23.10.2016

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art

pl. Małachowskiego 3

00-916 Warszawa

zacheta.art.pl

director: Hanna Wróblewska

curators: Katarzyna Kołodziej, Magdalena Komornicka

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exhibition production: Krystyna Sielska and team

exhibition-accompanying events: Karolina Iwańczyk,

Magda Szcześniak, Stanisław Welbel

BOOK

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