

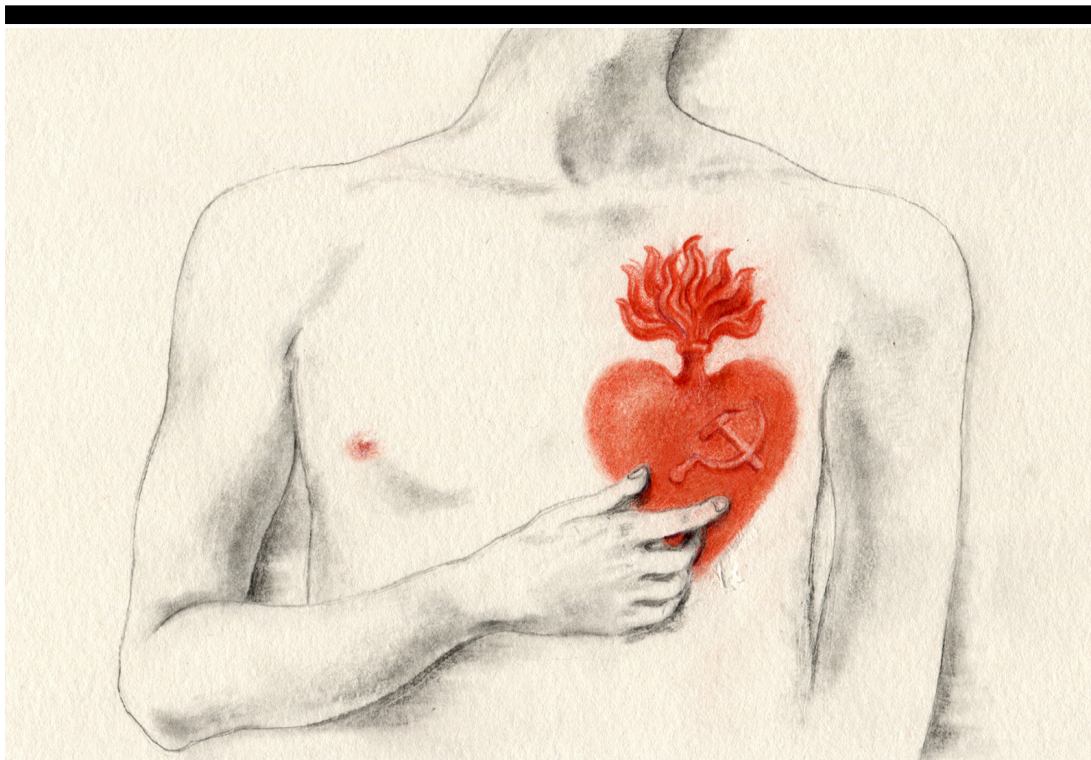


Illustration: Natalia Kulka

The Stalinist Sociogenesis of Youth Culture in the Polish People's Republic

An Attempt at a New Approach

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Abstract: The Polish sociological and anthropological literature on youth culture in the Polish People's Republic is based on the assumption about a strong impact of the political decisions of the state and of the ruling party on the styles, behavior, and attitudes of the youth during the socialist period. This reductionist assumption overlooks the fact of the spontaneous, bottom-up participation of thousands of young people in socialist organizations, events, and campaigns under the Stalinist rule. The aim of the article is to outline a new approach to the youth as a subject of the Stalinist cultural revolution and to the later youth culture as a phenomenon specific to the socialist society even as this culture appropriated forms and images from the capitalist West.

Keywords: youth; youth culture; Stalinism; socialism; cultural revolution

From the 1970s until the second half of the 1990s, Polish sociologists and anthropologists were embroiled in a lively debate about youth and youth culture. One of the common denominators in this discussion was the prevalent agreement that youth as a social group had emerged in the 1950s, and soon thereafter gave rise to youth cul-

ture. Yet the participants of this discussion surprisingly rarely referenced the tumultuous socio-cultural transformations of the 1950s, in which the youth acted as the avant-garde, as per the dominant ideological discourse of the time. Therefore, the objective of this article is to outline a new approach toward the youth as the subject of Stalinist cultural revolution and the later youth culture as a quintessential phenomenon of the socialist society, even if some of the forms and imagery employed within this culture were drawn from the capitalist West and the values and ideals known from the earlier narratives of socialist humanism served the purpose of contesting the political authorities. With this aim, following a critical discussion of the most seminal works on youth culture of the Polish People's Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, PRL), the article will propose a new perspective on the spontaneous manifestations of youth culture, emergent in Poland from the 1950s until the end of socialism, in the context of the place of youth within the socialist cultural revolution, its accompanying activist and non-conformist ethos and, finally, the official institutions and organizational forms.

Studies on Youth and Youth Culture

In his doctoral dissertation on youth culture, Jerzy Wertenstein-Żuławski adopted 1954 as the starting date for his research timeframe (Wertenstein-Żuławski, 1990, p. 11). This year was not chosen arbitrarily – the first groups that the author considered representative of youth culture, the beatniks and the hipsters, appeared in the USA around 1954 (Wertenstein-Żuławski, 1990, p. 13). The circumstances that enabled the emergence of these and subsequent groups along with their autonomous youth culture, opposed to the traditional model, were a result of the new, postwar socio-political order.

Youth, as a social group, was defined through the demographic criterion – people aged between 15 and 30, or 35 according to some researchers – but this was merely a point of departure, supplemented with psychological, socio-economic and cultural aspects. Following other authors, Wertenstein-Żuławski emphasized that after the war, and largely as a consequence of it (as well as due to a decrease in mortality of newborns and to the postwar demographic boom), people in this age bracket became an enormous, in some countries the most numerous, part of the population. What is more, this increasingly large group began to acquire social distinctiveness as a result of the growing accessibility of high-school and university education, which meant a longer period of education as an interval between childhood on the one hand and adulthood, marked by taking up employment and starting a family, on the other. At the same time, education became to the burgeoning masses of young people an aspiration in and of itself, and not merely a means to finding a well-paid or prestigious job. “In the devel-

oped society, the period between childhood and adulthood has stretched out very considerably,” wrote Wertenstein-Żuławski, referring to this phenomenon as putting the young generation on the “sidetracks of life” (Wertenstein-Żuławski, 1990, p. 20). These sidetracks, however, were duly noted by the market, as the youth, whether they were still maintained by their parents or making money at part-time or full-time jobs, could constitute an attractive consumer group.

Demographic and socio-economic changes gave rise to cultural and psychological transformations. Young people began to perceive themselves as a separate social group, detached from the worlds of children and of adults. The youth became self-aware of its distinct place within the social structure, and responded to it by creating its own, youth culture. Wertenstein-Żuławski emphasized:

It is precisely the existence of a *specific youth culture* (addressed solely to the young and accepted primarily by them) that *determines the uniqueness of the youth phenomena and movements* over the past 25 years. The phenomenon of youth culture is, in my opinion, more socially significant than youth rebellions and movements in and of themselves. Such rebellions have occurred over the course of history and were a manifestation of the impatience with which the young generation, aspiring to the society of the adults, strove to realize their own values and goals, which are at odds with the values and goals adhered to by the adult society (Żuławski, 1990, p. 21).¹

The sociologist also pointed to the “cult of youth” that accompanied the entrance that the youth had made on the social arena, visible in the arts (film, literature, etc.), and the connected personal patterns. “Youth became a value in and of itself,” he mused, explaining that even though the young in the studied period strove, just like before, to attain financial independence, it was no longer with a view to emancipate themselves from their parents and enter adulthood, but on the contrary – to stretch the time of relative freedom from obligations and duties of adult life (Wertenstein-Żuławski, 1990, p. 21). This relative freedom gave them a chance to live according to their own values and patterns, far removed from the traditional ones, and to actively question the dominant culture and the conformist models of life in an industrial society. Thus, inasmuch as youth culture came to being as a result of the emergence of youth as a collective subject, later on this culture, one might say dialectically, began to shape the young generations who joined it, and to accelerate broader socio-cultural and political transformations. This way youth culture turned into an alternative culture that reshaped the pre-existing cultural order. Ultimately, however, as Wertenstein-Żuławski posited cautiously, youth culture was to primarily soothe the consequences of the anomie that marked the specific status of youth in a modern society; in this sense, it was an anomie culture (Wertenstein-Żuławski, 1990, p. 24).

1 Original emphasis. It is important to note that although the quoted book was published in 1990, it was written in 1976–1978, and therefore when writing “over the past 25 years,” the Wertenstein-Żuławski meant the period between the mid-1950s and the late 1970s.

Wertenstein-Żuławski invoked the opinions of Polish researchers, and he supported his theses with data from various countries, in a bid to show the global character of the ongoing changes, but his book dealt mainly with youth and youth culture of the West, principally of the Great Britain and the USA. For this reason, he was able to claim that youth culture was tantamount to “rock culture” and that along with rock music “there emerges a cultural model opposite to the traditional one” (Wertenstein-Żuławski, 1990, p. 11). Thus his division of youth culture into the stages of subculture (up until 1965), counter-culture (in 1965–1970) and alternative culture (after 1971); thus also, even when the author underscored the “anti-elitist, proletarian and organic character of youth culture” (Wertenstein-Żuławski, 1990, p. 34) and the clearly leftist inclinations within it, his considerations did not refer in the least to the situation of youth and youth culture in the socialist Eastern Bloc. Therefore a question arises whether the presented set of factors and the course of development of youth as a social group and later of an autonomous youth culture, healing the consequences of the group’s anomic status and at the same time undermining the norms of the dominant culture, were characteristic only of wealthy Anglo-Saxon capitalist societies, or whether they held a universal quality and reflected also the reality of socialist societies. Since youth culture in the countries of bourgeois democracy was supposed to be of a proletarian character, it is impossible not to wonder what character it may have had in countries that were proletarian at least in declarations.

These issues are not new, of course. Barbara Fatyga situated the beginnings of youth culture in Poland in the 1960s, seeing the events of March 1968 as the first “strictly youth rebellion” (Fatyga, 1999, p. 72). Yet in another passage of the same book, she also notes earlier generational identities, or at least generational legends of different youth groups, all defined by experiences of dissent and protest, such as those of the wartime “generation of Columbuses,” the early postwar “generation of the Union of Polish Youth [ZMP]” and “generation of 1956” (Fatyga, 1999, pp. 134–135). Thus it seems that of key significance is the rebellious, if not openly revolutionary, attitude of the participants of youth culture, seeking “change instead of stabilization and continuation” (Fatyga, 1999, p. 103).

One of the authors who took up the task of juxtaposing youth and youth culture in Western countries and in Poland was Mirosław Pęczak. In his *Mały słownik subkultur młodzieżowych* [Concise Dictionary of Youth Subcultures] (Pęczak, 1992), in a manner typical of the 1990s discussions, Pęczak formulated the issues of youth and its culture in the categories of either imitation of behaviors, lifestyles, trends and attitudes, or in the categories of resistance – silent, symbolic and internal, or overt and decisive – of young people against the communist authorities that repressed them, as well as against anachronistic, prudish customs, cultural provincialism, the authority of parents, school, church, etc. In Pęczak’s model, imitation could go hand in hand with resistance, and resistance could consist of imitation, but in general the axes along which youth culture

was considered in communist Poland spanned from imitation to creativity and from resistance to conformity, creating a system of reference used for a number of decades by researchers hailing from all disciplines (not counting the absurd views that reduced the facts of youth culture to problems of social pathology, deviation or crime).

The author of *Mały słownik*, just like Wertenstein-Żuławski, pointed to the 1950s as the time of emergence of youth culture: this was the time of “transmission of the models of popular culture from the USA to Europe” and of the appearance of “the so-called youth market.” “With the advent of the 1950s, culture, both in the West and in the East, is not the same as a mere few years before, prior to the war. This is the dawn of the ‘global village’ era” (Pęczak, 1992, p. 100). Pęczak asserted that youth subcultures had existed in Poland from the 1950s. “Yet their character, reach and influence always depended on the conditions imposed or created by the official culture. Practically until 1980 youth culture was treated by the authorities as an alien formation” (Pęczak, 1992, p. 103). These first subcultures were *bikiniarze*, or the “bikini boys” [similar to the Soviet *stiliagi*; the name is said to derive from the flamboyant, tropical-themed ties they wore, cf. the French subculture of the *Zazous*] and *hooligans*. In their description, the axes of imitation and creativity and of resistance and conformism served to evaluate the degree of pressure exerted on them by the authorities, and the elbow room left to them. Pęczak wrote of the bikini boys as follows:

The heyday of the bikini boys was in 1953–1956 when, following Stalin’s death, the police repressions aimed against not only political dissidence, but also against all manifestations of fascination with Western culture, somewhat subsided. These, however, were years that preceded the proper Thaw;² the tone of the propaganda was unchanged and in practice everything Western had the taste of “the forbidden fruit.” Meanwhile, the basic *raison d’être* and distinctive feature of the bikini boys was precisely their fascination with the West, chiefly with America. [...] To be a bikini boy required a certain dose of courage in those times, especially in public places, where bikini boys were hunted by police and by voluntary ZMP militant groups, who would cut off the bikini boys’ ties and their carefully groomed hair. The communist press made the bikini boys a subject of ridicule and of harsh, principled criticism, describing them as an example of wantonness and demoralization, as the dregs of society influenced by the degenerate bourgeois culture. They were often contrasted with the positive example of an ZMP activist, who keenly participates in building socialism, sings folk and neo-folk songs and only attends dances organized by Party activists. [...]

The bikini boys style reflected not only their aesthetic tastes, but also their worldview: perhaps not overt, fully conscious rebellion, but rather automatic rejection of officially propagated models. Being “Western” was meant to be an antonym of the boring propaganda; musical and dance expression opposed the organized and controlled entertainment; informal relations within peer groups replaced the uniform collective of the school class, student group or the work brigade. The motivation was both youthful contrariety and intuitive striving toward personal freedom and independence from a society organized according to the rules of a police state. [...] Sexual relations were largely liberal, which may also be read as a counterproposal to the certain puritanism of Stalinist communist culture (Pęczak, 1992, pp. 12–14).

2 The period of political liberalization following the events of October 1956 [editor’s note].

Pęczak's description of the hooligans was starkly different:

The hooligans became an element of the "socialist city" landscape, up until 1956 passed over in embarrassed silence by the press, or at best dismissed with the formula about "capitalist and petty-bourgeois heritage." At first, the hooligans adopted the style and looks of the bikini boys and apparently shared their fascination with the West. After some time, however, they came up with their own style (including turtlenecks and flat caps), which referenced the image of the pre-war *apasz* [Apache, a pre-WWII urban gangster, thug; the name derived from the Parisian gangsters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century]. Striving to stress the distinctiveness of their own subculture played a significant role. The hooligans took badly to being confused with the bikini boys by the street opinion. Their adoption of the bikini boys style had been solely an outcome of the official condemnation of this look. It was taken on as a sign of non-conformism and of everything that was "prohibited." When the official criticism of the bikini boys eased down, the hooligans picked another model for themselves, thus keeping their aura of disobedience. The bikini boys were to the hooligans something of a competition and the most proximate negative point of reference (Pęczak, 1992, p. 20).

Pęczak goes on to quote *Niebezpieczne ulice* [Streets of Danger] by Czesław Czapów and Stanisław Manturzewski, who asserted that after 1956, when a door was cracked open toward the West, the bikini boys became to the hooligans a synonym of opportunists, while "American props" lost their appeal, as they were no longer officially disapproved, and thus the hooligans turned toward new repertoires of styles and gestures. "They probably reached the apex of this anti-bikini-boy pose when they put on the caps worn by the builders of the Palace of Culture" (Czapów & Manturzewski, 1960, p. 221). Yet Pęczak noted some common ground between the bikini boys and the hooligans:

They shared a fascination with the mass culture of the West (film, popular music) and a nascent sensation of generational identity, defined negatively rather than positively, that is mainly through the rejection of "claptrap," as the youth called the propaganda style of newspapers, speeches or school assemblies [...]. Their favorite forms of entertainment were: the cinema, sports events, music (esp. the incipient rock'n'roll), drinking alcohol, occasional street fights, as well as particular sex practices (the so-called "relay race," which consisted in an intercourse of numerous boys with a single girl, which often was nothing but group rape) (Pęczak, 1992, pp. 20–21).

What is surprising in the characteristics of the first two subcultures is that, according to Pęczak, not only fashion, music tastes (jazz contemplated by the bikini boys and rock'n'roll listened to by the hooligans), sex (between consenting partners in the case of the bikini boys and based on group violence among the hooligans) were mediated by the influence of the communist authorities, but also the mutual relations of the two enemy groups, since it was against communists that the hooligans adopted the style of the bikini boys just to abandon it later and put on "the caps worn by the builders of the Palace of Culture." Pęczak seems to fully overlook this extraordinary, affirmative, spontaneous identification of a youth subculture with the working class in its most legitimate image: that of bricklayers working to erect the most important building of the 1950s' Warsaw, and perhaps of entire Poland, a skyscraper presented to Poland by

the Soviet Union. In the same way, he leaves with no interpretation the antagonism between the bikini boys and the “voluntary ZMP militants.” The Union of Polish Youth (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, ZMP) as a form of organization and a means of shaping youth attitudes did not draw Pęczak’s attention at all, even though his dictionary includes entries on religious communities and counter-culture movements which could hardly be seen as subcultures.

The scholars’ assumption about the decisive role of the influence that communist authorities had on the styles, behaviors and attitudes of various youth groups led to discussing the phenomena of youth culture only within the spectrum spanning from imitation to creativity, and from resistance to obedience. Consequently, the fascination with the West shared by the bikini boys and by the hooligans, to take one example, was reduced to merely reaching for a fruit “forbidden” by the communists. Such reductionist approach seems rather unfair to the young people themselves, whose dreams, fantasies and desires did not necessarily have to stem from the limits imposed upon them by the authorities. Pęczak reiterated this belief about the key importance of repressiveness of the communist authorities, along with the system of reference resulting from this belief, in his later works, including in his book *Subkultury w PRL: Opór, kreacja, imitacja* [Subcultures in the PRL: Resistance, Creation, Imitation], where the main categories of description are explicitly expounded in the title (Pęczak, 2013). Pęczak’s attachment to this approach is all the more surprising since in the very first lines of *Subkultury w PRL* he wrote: “Youth subcultures would become significant for social science and cultural studies in Poland usually whenever they could be treated as a symptom of political change,” and to exemplify this statement he referred to the debate on the hooligans that took place following the political changes of October 1956 (Pęczak, 2013, p. 7). Moreover, the author explicitly wrote that “youth culture in America and in Europe from its very inception on the one hand constituted a segment of broadly understood popular and mass culture, and on the other, it manifested itself as radical social movements or subcultures” (Pęczak, 2013, p. 9). But if so, shouldn’t popular culture and social movements be the appropriate framework for understanding youth culture, and not the repressive nature of state authorities, which narrows down the interpretation of youth activity to a symptom of political change?

Although he did not write it explicitly, Pęczak went beyond a typically Western-centric perspective, pointing to the significance of the October Revolution and subsequent changes in Soviet Russia for the emergence of new, radical political and artistic trends, largely created by, and often identified with, the young generations. He also juxtaposed young American gangsters and the Russian street youth (Russian: *беспризорные*, *besprizornye*) as groups immediately preceding the proper, postwar subcultures (Pęczak, 2013, p. 11). He also noted that it had already been the French Revolution that extolled youth, as later did Romanticism and subsequent movements of social change, which, in projecting the visions of a new human and a new society, appealed to the youngest social

groups. Again, if youth as a cultural value and youth radicalism are features of revolutionary times regardless of the geographical location, then doesn't Stalinism, which certainly constituted a revolution that was not sleepwalked through (Pospiszyl, 2013, pp. 205–215), deserve an analysis as a period of heightened activity of revolutionary-minded youth, organized into mass social movements, such as the ZMP? Polish researchers of youth culture tended to avoid confrontation with this elephant in the room. In his 2013 book, Pęczak further elaborated on his earlier theses, claiming that “the antagonism between the hooligans and bikini boys, expressed also in the aesthetics of their looks, had at its roots differences in the radicalism with which both subcultures rejected the realities of the time” (Pęczak, 2013, p. 28). And although he pointed to the influence of popular culture, such as the movies shown in Polish cinemas (the popular French and Italian films are said to have contributed to the hooligans' replacing of American fashion with the French one), and to practices of daily life, such as creativity of local tailors or searching for attractive attire in street markets, ultimately, in Pęczak's view, everything boiled down to the attitude toward authorities.

This approach was not new; one of its champions was the writer Leopold Tyrmand, whose 1950s novels became frequently quoted in matters concerning the youth of the time. Today, the same approach is represented by authors such as Maciej Chłopek, who wrote that:

The bikini boys turned their clothing into a manifestation of non-conformism and resistance against reality. [...] In the mass society of the Stalinist period, all expressions of individualism were met with severe criticism of the authorities and of large parts of the society, and thus the ostentatiousness of the bikini boys, manifested in the way they dressed, had to trigger a fierce reaction (Chłopek, 2005, p. 97).

Such discourse is noticeably biased; to give one more example, another article quoted by Pęczak, published in a 1954 issue of *Nowa Kultura*, which reproached the “gross exaggeration” of the critics of the bikini boys' fashion and pointed out the “understandable need of the youth” to dress in stylish and colorful clothes, was presented by Pęczak as stemming from the authorities' desire to deprive the bikini boys of their “air of political resistance” and to testify to “symptoms of the Thaw” (Pęczak, 2013, pp. 65–66), and not simply to the press' nuanced attitude toward the bikini boys.³ This is all the

3 In films, an equivalent of the nuanced approach of the official discourse toward the youth at the time of the Thaw were the “black series” documentaries from the years 1955–1957. Some of the most important of these films – such as Jerzy Hoffman and Edward Skórzewski's *Uwaga, chuligani!* [Watch Out for the Hooligans!] as well as *Gdzie diabeł mówi dobranoc* [Remote and Restless] and *Ludzie z pustego obszaru* [People From a Vacant Area] by Kazimierz Karabasz and Władysław Ślesicki – called “film posters” owing to their interventionist character, were devoted namely the youth. The problems of youth crime, vagrancy and truancy were hardly presented with a view to stigmatize this or another subculture, but rather to point to the true “culprits”: social indifference, negligence of the authorities, lack of pedagogues, etc., and the young people were afforded subjectivity and treated with empathy by Karabasz and Ślesicki. The “black series” departed from the socialist realist poetics (scenes from *Ludzie z pustego obszaru* were not staged), but the documentaries kept its didactic tone of the commentary and the social involvement that underpinned the selection of topics. Most importantly, these films were not only tolerated by the authorities – “the Party leadership began to encourage criticism, so the ambition and talent of young documentarists suited it,” as Tadeusz Lubelski wrote (Lubelski, 2009, p. 173).

more surprising given that Pęczak began his book with words of protest against reducing youth culture to symptoms of political transformations.

Beyond the Anti-Communist Paradigm: Reconceptualization of Stalinism

The foregoing examples of academic and popular discussions of youth culture seem neither extreme nor tendentious. On the contrary, the books by Wertenstein-Żuławski, Fatyga and Pęczak are the canonic works in sociology of the Polish youth, anthropology of youth culture, sociology of popular culture and related fields, and in their time they stood out against the background of trivial, fragmentary or superficial reflections regularly made by researchers who observed the activity and lifestyle of subsequent youth groups. The above authors' statements have solid foundations as they discuss the emergence of youth culture in Poland in the second half of the 1950s or in the next decade, presenting it as an effect of the postwar demographic boom, of the processes of urbanization, industrialization, improving healthcare standards and levels of education, or of the development of popular culture and the relatively broader opening to foreign cultural imports. Their analyses are far from the ideological rabidity known from the publications of historians affiliated with the Polish National Remembrance Institute. And not only from there: overt bias and instrumental treatment of youth appears much more frequently where methodology of social science is simply lacking.

One fitting example is the work by Andrzej Krzywicki entitled *Poststalinowski karnewał radości: V Światowy Festiwal Młodzieży i Studentów o Pokój i Przyjaźń, Warszawa 1955 r.* [Post-Stalinist Carnival of Joy: 5th World Festival of Youth and Students For Peace and Friendship, Warsaw 1955] (Krzywicki, 2009). Already the phrasing of the title announces the enthusiasm and carnivalesque negation of the relationships of power brought with it by the end of Stalinism. Krzywicki juxtaposed the ideological motivations of the festival organizers with the spontaneous behaviour of its participants (much more unrestricted than during previous festivals), and the official communications – with the organisers' internal documents that pointed out the festival's shortcomings, or with memoirs and diaries by people critical of the communist authorities. "It seems indisputable that the Warsaw youth festival was one of the most significant events held in Poland of the fifties," he wrote, quickly adding an incisive remark that "the struggle for peace" was waged "in the name of somewhat abstractly understood friendship," and that the festival was "a propaganda initiative" (Krzywicki, 2009, pp. 45–46). It is hard to explain such reductionism in reference to "one of the most important events" by any methodological reasons. Krzywicki's approach is more likely to be a strategy of ostensible unmasking, in which the testimonies of success of socialist endeavors can only be presented as exceptions to the rule (a carnivalesque reversal brought by

the times of the Thaw). Another strategy Krzywicki maintains is the markedly ironic tone in his description of the visual spectacularity of the 5th Festival:

The introduction of a festive atmosphere required a decking out of Warsaw – the city of peace, liberty and prosperity. Such seemingly trivial elements of the city infrastructure as “new, convenient and aesthetic cigarette kiosks,” or elegant mobile buffets, a novelty, were to stand proud and beautiful. In order to create an air of merriness, the organizers decided to adorn the streets, parks and buildings of the Polish capital. There appeared hundreds of paper doves – symbols of world peace, as well as suns, moons, exotic monkeys, lions or Chinese dragons. It was an aesthetic shock of sorts, especially to Poles and citizens of other European people’s democracies, accustomed to socialist realist, Stalinist insipidity. A “Thaw time” breakthrough takes place in the visual sphere. A gust of liberty has imbued the streets of the capital with unique flavor (Krzywicki, 2009, p. 69).

Even though according to Krzywicki the festival was a “catalyst of Thaw transformations” that reminded Poles that they were the “hosts of this country and had the right to speak up (e.g. to make requests of the authorities) about important matters” (Krzywicki, 2009, p. 74), suggesting in fact that power in Poland was held by foreign ethnic groups, Krzywicki’s work does not provide much information about the actual attitudes, experiences and thoughts of the youth who participated in the event. Instead, the researcher focused on organizational works and the course of the festival, as well as on its perceptions by foreign journalists (but not communist ones). Paradoxically, the youth were not the main focus of a text about a youth festival. The author noted that according to the organizers’ plans, event participants from different countries, dressed in their national costumes and driven from one part of the city to another “were also to initiate a so-called flower battle and then go to a carnival event. The whole celebration was more reminiscent of the hippie Woodstock Festival than of a pro-Stalinist gathering of uniformized youth” (Krzywicki, 2009, p. 91). Yet this observation did not push him to revise the very idea of uniformization of the Stalinist era, nor to step beyond the analytical dichotomy of authorities and society.

It seems that the methodology of social sciences should have safeguarded researchers against falling into this type of contradictions. And yet, as I discussed before, they were not able to fully avoid this fallacy even when overtly criticizing the political reductionism in other studies of youth culture. By the same token, they perceived the mass-scale, often spontaneous and enthusiastic participation of revolutionary-minded youth of the 1950s in the ZMP (which at its peak had some two million members) as an issue detached from youth culture in the PRL. All these observations were made despite clear statements made elsewhere by the same authors that youth culture had emerged as an outcome of youth activism and youth movements, that it was of a proletarian character and strove for change or even utopia, and was not only shaped by young people but also provided feedback for their formation. The ZMP and other forms youth organization in the 1950s met all of these conditions.

To understand why outstanding researchers of youth culture saw its harbingers and precursors in the bikini boys and in the hooligans, but not in their contemporaries belonging to the ZMP, we must turn to the anti-communist paradigm as discussed by Anna Zawadzka (Zawadzka, 2009). Zawadzka analyzed the Polish stereotype of Judeo-Communism and the related discourse, which are based on a reversal of causes and effects. In the Judeo-Communism stereotype, antisemitism is justified by anti-communism: acts of violence perpetrated by Poles against Jews become justified with the concept of Jewish treason, allegedly real or only potential (in the latter case, the violence is supposed to be preventive). Thus, the concept of Judeo-Communism served (and continues to serve) to cover up or justify antisemitism with anti-communism, where anti-communism is a doxa: it remains self-evident; its universal and legitimate dominance obliterates all questions about its validity. As seen within the anti-communist discourse, communists in a way excluded themselves from the Polish national community, and what is more, they defined themselves as this community's enemies, which meant that there were no holds barred in fighting them. Thus, the anti-communist doxa depicts communists as personified evil, a threat to Polish interests and values, while individuals who question this belief cast a suspicion of being anti-Polish upon themselves. The anti-communist paradigm consists in cleansing the image of an imagined national community by way of stigmatizing a group arbitrarily excluded from this community (Zawadzka, 2009, pp. 218–223).

Zawadzka further discusses the anti-communist paradigm in her later works, where she stated that to follow the paradigm remains a “necessary condition for gaining legitimacy in the Polish public sphere” (Zawadzka, 2013, p. 238). “In the Polish discourse – from public, through literary one, to religious discourse – communism is currently given the role of immanent evil, to which individuals succumbed owing to some character flaw, desire for profit or stupidity” (Zawadzka, 2016, p. 91). In this respect, the paradigm does not necessarily need to apply to real or imagined Jewish communists, but is universally binding in relation to both the past and to contemporary times, making it possible to deem as alien, treacherous and threatening all groups that do not fit in with the idea that the Polish nation and its well-being are the supreme value requiring no further explanations. In a similar vein, although in reference to higher education of the PRL, Agata Zysiak discussed the Polish narrative about the evil “them” and the enslaved “us,” and noted that the domination of the category of terror and oppression in the Polish historiography of the postwar period “does not clarify much. Instead, it offers an easy division into the good and the evil; a recipe for explaining the world and an encouragement to take a convenient, and above all safe, position within this division” (Zysiak, 2016, p. 13). Instead of a narrative about “enslavement,” Zysiak proposes a look at the transformations in the academic world during socialism from the perspective of the modernizing and democratizing of higher education as a set of processes characteristic of modernity in general, although in Eastern Europe carried out in the

specific conditions of tumultuous, revolutionary transformations. Zysiak points out the “methodological nationalism” of Polish researchers, noting that the “nation-and-independence current” of Polish social science “seems to have a lot to do with the international literature about the USSR and its satellites of the Soviet studies variety” (Zysiak, 2016, p. 22). Although Zysiak wrote about the totalitarian paradigm, which she contrasted with the revisionist approach (Zysiak, 2016, pp. 21–26), in my opinion it would be more fitting here to speak of the anti-communist paradigm, as equating “the two totalitarisms” (implied to be fascism and communism) is a function of anti-communism and serves to legitimize it.

I contend that it was the anti-communist paradigm that made the above-mentioned youth culture researchers adopt, against their own methodological claims, the assumption of the key role of the communist authorities in defining the styles and activities of young people, and to interpret these styles and activities in terms of the oppositions of creativity vs. imitation and resistance vs. conformism; I also contend it was the intellectual courage and perspicacity of these researchers that lessened the imprint of the paradigm on their texts.⁴ Consequently, these authors preferred to discreetly omit rather than take up in an overtly biased and dishonest way, as some other authors have, the subjects of communist sympathies and involvement of the youth masses, of participation of thousands of young people in official organizations and events, and finally the subject of the Stalinist sociogenesis of the youth culture.⁵ I follow Norbert Elias in my understanding of sociogenesis as a process, continuous and extended in dynamic networks of interconnections, of shaping individual elements of social life: from habituses, customs and affects, through broader cultural formations, institutions and socially sanctioned norms of proper behavior, all the way to entire state organizations and civilizational forms (Elias, 2000). As Marta Bucholc wrote in the introduction to the Polish edition of *The Civilizing Process*:

4 One example of that imprint is the mocking image of “ZMP militants” and of the “ZMP activists” in Pęczak’s book, another is the surprising description of “deadbeats,” as Fatyga referred to the group of youth that remained on the “margins of the changes,” focused on survival, stuck in the “post-PRL” system and exhibiting an “entitled attitude” and “resentment” (Fatyga, 1999, p. 65).

5 The particular way that research on youth in Poland was institutionalized certainly was not without significance. A great part of this research was conducted at the ministry-sponsored Institute for Research of Youth Problems (Instytut Badań Problemów Młodzieży, IBPM), which was subordinate to the Party’s Committee for Youth and Physical Culture. The Institute dealt with youth-related subjects, highly pressing in the 1980s, producing knowledge for the use of the government, as a result of which the researchers had a tremendous liberty – what mattered were research results, and not toeing the official line. Due to the absence of theoretical and methodological restraints, the Institute employed many researchers who for various (including political) reasons could not work at universities, but at the same time it was a safe harbor for many high-ranking members of the Party. Perhaps the necessity of cooperation between independent researchers and Party dignitaries in the same institution additionally contributed to the avoidance of biased judgements about the socialist reality, also after its collapse. When IBPM was axed in 1989 by the new authorities, a group of committed researchers, including Barbara Fatyga, Małgorzata Adamska and Andrzej Andruszkiewicz, cooperated to set up the Centre for Youth Research (Ośrodek Badań Młodzieży) in 1991. Thanks to the help of Hanna Świda-Ziemia and Jacek Kurczewski, it was incorporated into the structures of the Institute of Applied Social Sciences (Instytut Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych) of the University of Warsaw. Thus the continuity of research on youth was maintained.

Elias starts from the assumption that no civilizing process occurs in a vacuum or has an absolute beginning – each stage is referred to the previous one. Each condition of the society and each civilizational standard should be considered as one of the many cross-sections of an ever-changing reality (Bucholc, 2011, p. 13).

And if “each stage is referred to the previous one,” it is essentially impossible to talk about youth culture, or any other culture, of the 1960s or later decades in detachment from the circumstances and factors of Stalinist times. It is necessary to make the reservation here that the very concept of Stalinism is of presentist nature. It became popular after Stalin’s death, while in the times of his rule, the designation of choice in the USSR and in other countries of the Eastern Bloc was rather *socialism*. This has been noted by Lewis Siegelbaum in his introduction to *Stalinism as a Way of Life*, where he writes that while the political system of the Soviet Union in the period of 1930s discussed in that book – the time of greatest social and cultural changes throughout Stalin’s reign – has been variously described as a totalitarian, Stalinist, state socialist or simply Soviet one, terms such as Stalinism and totalitarianism in fact belong to the Cold War discourse and instead of facilitating understanding, they are a reflection of the Western official image of Soviet authorities as all-powerful and monolithic (Siegelbaum, 2000, pp. 2–3).

Although the Bolsheviks encountered a strong resistance to their actions, Siegelbaum also points out that the regime enjoyed active support of various social groups, especially the young generation of workers from shock brigades, who fought for the progress of industrialization, collectivization and cultural revolution (Siegelbaum, 2000, pp. 3–4). The participation of society in exercising power also took on the form of large-scale discussions held in newspapers and in thousands of letters sent to party leaders and to top offices of the state. As an example, the president of the Executive Committee of the Soviets Mikhail Kalinin received ca. 77 thousand letters annually between 1922 and 1935, while secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) Andrei Zhdanov received 130 letters a day in 1936. Some of the letters sent to the press were published, e.g. during the great debate about the new constitution in 1936, and many were answered by officials. Responses were also given by some of the top-ranking leaders, either directly or as commentaries to be edited (Siegelbaum, 2000, pp. 7–8). The USSR society of Stalin’s time participated *en masse*, and often spontaneously, in the campaigns, institutions and organizations created or supported by the authorities, as well as in actions of overt or indirect resistance, from workers’ strikes to robberies, fraud, ridicule and laughter, and the objects of this diversely formulated resistance were also varied. A broad spectrum of topics connected to building the new order and its rules was popularly discussed in an open and critical fashion, and these voices provided useful information to the authorities, who frequently addressed the remarks, complaints, requests and postulates put forward by citizens. Of course creating the illusion of mass support for the actions taken up by the CPSU

was a crucial element of Soviet democracy, but as Siegelbaum notes, at the very same time the authorities were keenly interested in the real attitudes and opinions of various social groups, and the “participants in this conversation were determined to make their thoughts known” (Siegelbaum, 2000, p. 16).

Siegelbaum discusses the strategies pursued by peasants, workers and other social groups with a purpose of making the ends meet economically, of avoiding institutional violence, or of moving up in the remodelled social structure. Having thus broadened the spectrum of options between support of the authorities and resistance against them, having undermined the worn dichotomy of state and society, Siegelbaum takes another step by asking about the shaping of the Soviet model of the individual subject, the Soviet self. The criticized antonymous oppositions are rooted in the Western liberal philosophical discourse, which counterposes the individualized subject against forces external to it. For this reason, instead of transplanting these oppositions as if they were universal, a question should be asked about the Stalinist subject: about how Stalinist policy was internalized, and vice versa, about how the spheres of the intimate and personal became Stalinist.

Pursuing the worldview of the Stalinist subject requires a reconceptualization of subjectivity that is independent of its Western liberal moorings. It means taking seriously the importance that individuals attached to “working on” themselves so as to embody the Soviet program of modernization and bring their heterodoxical thoughts into line with what they were expected – no less by themselves than by others – to believe. In this sense, the illiberal Stalinist self was just as much a site or „carrier” of Stalinism as were formal political institutions and rituals (Siegelbaum, 2000, pp. 20–21).

Thus conceptualized, the notion of Stalinism can become a cognitively useful category, in spite of the historical burden that it took on in the Cold War discourse.

Youth as a Product and a Subject of Stalinist Cultural Revolution

As I mentioned following Pęczak, young people played an important role in the cultural transformations that occurred before and concurrently to the October Revolution, engaging in radical cultural and political movements. This engagement translated into the attention that theoreticians and leaders of the revolution paid to the youth. The state model developed in the Soviet Union after 1917 relied on factual participation of the social masses in the management and organization of the economy and of other areas, which required quick improvement of education levels, especially eradication of illiteracy, as well as the creation of a new, mass culture. The importance of this task was emphasized by Lenin; as Wiesław Adamski wrote: “Lenin was essentially the first of Marxist advocates for the mass culture in the best meaning of the word”

(Adamski, 1970, p. 5). According to Lenin, the young generation, taught and raised in accordance with new socialist principles, was to co-author the mass culture and to build the future communist society (Adamski, 1970, p. 20). Lenin's call "We should dream!," which implied opposing the stimulating force of imagining the future to the allegedly "sober" sticking to ongoing facts (Lenin, 1961, p. 509), found its extension in the demiurgic, compelling transformations endeavored by Stalin, as noted by Boris Groys (Groys, 1992, p. 52).

Unlike conservative historians confined within the anti-communist paradigm, Groys emphasizes not the repressive, but the demiurgic aspect of Stalinism as the materializing of the "avant-garde's dream of placing all art under direct party control to implement its program of life-building" (Groys, 1992, p. 34). Supremacists, constructivists and other representatives of the Soviet artistic avant-garde claimed the right to reorganize the entire cultural and political life, deriving their special role, on the one hand, from the general, universal rules applying to spatial and temporal relations that they had discovered in their studies of language, composition and movement, and on the other hand, from the inept Bolshevik culture management, which the avant-garde artists observed and viewed critically, especially regarding the concessions made by the Bolsheviks in favor of the more moderate or traditional cultural currents. Yet the stronger the conservative artists proved to be, the more keen was the avant-garde to turn toward Bolshevik leaders, who disbursed social commissions for works to be provided by avant-garde artists. Until finally, Stalin took their place.

The avant-garde's dream of placing all art under direct party control to implement its program of life-building (that is, "socialism in one country" as the true and consummate work of collective art) had now come true. The author of this program, however, was not Rodchenko or Maiakovskii, but Stalin, whose political power made him the heir to their artistic project. [...] The central issue to these artists was the unitary nature of the politico-aesthetic project rather than whether such unity would be achieved by politicizing aesthetics or aestheticizing politics, especially since it could be maintained that the aestheticization of politics was merely the party's reaction to the avant-garde's politicization of aesthetics (Groys, 1992, p. 34).

Thus Stalin took over the avant-garde's chief postulate: of total political and aesthetic transformation of life in order to form a new society by artistic means. Stalinist culture, writes Groys, was a "posthistorical culture," and thus it freely drew from those elements of historical cultures and traditions of different eras and geographical locations which it deemed progressive – this, in turn, made it much more radical than the avant-garde, which in its striving toward all things new was ready to reject all things old (Groys, 1992, pp. 41–43). Groys explains that the principle of mimesis adopted in socialist realism was to reflect the typical, and not the most universal: the essence, and not its manifestation (Groys, 2010, s. 55). The essence, in turn, was constituted by the will of the Party and of its leader along with the model of reality that resulted from it. Thanks to this, Stalin's policies acquired a creative, aesthetic character, and at the same

time socialist realism became not so much their reflection, as rather a staging or directing of reality in accordance with the visions it was to live up to: “socialism itself was regarded as the supreme measure of beauty” (Groys, 1992, p. 74).

“This was an age of utopianism. Political leaders had utopian visions, and so did many citizens, especially the younger generation,” wrote Sheila Fitzpatrick about the 1930s in the Soviet Union (Fitzpatrick, 2000, p. 67). The first Five-Year Plan and the subsequent public campaign turned all of the Soviet Union into an enormous construction site: gigantic industrial plants were being built, entire cities were redeveloped according to new urban plans, agriculture was getting mechanized, preschools were taking the burden of caring for children off the shoulders of women, and socialist palaces in the new monumental style began to tower over the roofs of houses. The country was undergoing intense industrialization, urbanization and collectivization. The changes were particularly momentous for the youth: according to Fitzpatrick, in the late 1920s only 11 million children attended school, of which only three million attended secondary schools. Ten years later, these numbers soared to 30 and 18 million, respectively. The struggle against illiteracy was effective: in 1926, only 57% of the population aged 9 to 49 was literate, while in 1939 – already 81% (Fitzpatrick, 2000, p. 70). Successes of athletes, polar explorers, aviators and Stakhanovites made futuristic images of days to come seem not so distant at all, despite the great costs and sacrifices. Even juvenile criminals, the homeless and vagabonds received a chance to go through re-education at orphanages and correction centres, so that they could become new people, upright members of the collective; the effort to reclaim these people for the Soviet society was a core aspect of Anton Makarenko’s concept of education.

Stalinist authorities offered young people of working-class and peasant backgrounds an opportunities of upward mobility, specifically of higher education, most of all in technical fields, so that the thus educated new Soviet intelligentsia could replace – especially in the industry, which was increasingly thirsty for new employees – the ideologically uncertain bourgeois intelligentsia. As for young women, the cultural revolution that accompanied the times of the first Five-Year Plan gave them also emancipation from the traditional, gendered division of labor. Sheila Fitzpatrick refers to all those who climbed the rungs of the social ladder the “Brezhnev generation,” because it was people hailing from the ranks of the beneficiaries of affirmative actions of the 1930s, usually of peasant and working-class origins, who came to form the Soviet political elites for just shy of the next fifty years (Fitzpatrick, 2000, p. 85). Yet upward mobility did not apply only to the shaping of a new political elite, but to all social strata. On an individual level, the mobility was very much aided by membership in organizations such as the Komsomol or the Stakhanovite movement. This entailed great grassroots pressure to obtain education and to raise one’s qualifications. As Fitzpatrick wrote:

Even in their spare time, after work and after class, Soviet citizens were busy improving their minds. Every visitor to the Soviet Union in the 1930s commented on the pas-

sionate love of reading and zest for learning of the Soviet population (Fitzpatrick, 2000, pp. 87–88).

The youth were hungry for education and for upward mobility as the new world was unfolding before their eyes, and the young people themselves were a collective actor in this process, its subject and its outcome all at the same time. The communists rejected essentializing concepts of the human nature, character or personality; had it been otherwise, had they adopted the belief in the existence of some unchanging features or ingredients of the human being, the revolution would not have made any sense. This translated into political and educational policies, and in consequence into the emergence of a new subject (and subjectivity), that is of youth as an empowered, self-aware social group.

In the 1940s, the development of the youth movement gained momentum globally, directed from its early years by the ideals of peace, democracy, freedom and fraternity, rather unsurprisingly for a time of war. In October 1945, a two-week World Youth Conference was organized in London and attended by hundreds of delegates from 63 countries. Based on the broadly shared ideas of anti-fascism, anti-racism and anti-militarism, in November of the same year the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) was established. It soon became quite active: one of its first endeavors was establishing the Youth Work Brigades, which took up voluntary work to help rebuild war-torn countries. For example, in 1946 young Yugoslavians helped to clear the rubble in Warsaw (Krzywicki, 2009, p. 21). Not much later, in August 1946, the International Union of Students (IUS) was established, bringing together 43 student unions from 39 countries.

Initially these two organizations united peace-oriented and democratic youth globally, but both soon saw a split on the part of groups from capitalist countries, for whom the bolder among the anti-racist and anti-colonial demands and the participation of young communists proved unacceptable. Thus, already in 1948–1949 the World Youth Assembly separated from the WFDY, and in 1950 Western student organizations formed the International Students Conference, a rival to the IUS. Despite this, both the WFDY and the IUS functioned efficiently, uniting in their ranks youth and students not only from socialist countries, but also from many members-states of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as leftist groups from the capitalist bloc, which often operated clandestinely. From the beginning, the two organizations focused on the integration of young people from all over the world by joint advocacy for peace, democracy and freedom, by doing social work for communities that had been most affected by war, persecution and colonialism, and finally, by way of brotherly and, one might add, sisterly celebration of cultural, academic and sports events. Thus emerged the idea of world youth and students' festivals, which from 1951 on were held under the motto "For Peace and Friendship." The first Youth and Student Festival was held already in 1947 in Prague, the next ones: in 1949 in Budapest, in 1951 in Berlin, in 1953 in Bucharest, in 1955 in Warsaw and in 1957 in Moscow (Krzywicki, 2009, p. 29). In subsequent years, the festivals were

held in neutral countries (from outside the Eastern Bloc) and in countries outside Europe, but the festivals' peak popularity came in the 1940s and 1950s, when the still fresh memory of the war and of the Holocaust, as well as the Cold War atmosphere marked with a threat of a global nuclear war, coupled with the increasingly present anti-colonial voices in the countries of the global South, gave the international anti-war youth movement universal support in communist countries and beyond, attracting tens of thousands of participants. This way progressive youth became an important actor globally, not only in the Soviet context.

The wave of youth activism did not bypass Poland. Of course, youth organizations had already existed earlier, also before the war. Some of them, such as the Youth Organization of the University Workers' Association (Organizacja Młodzieży Towarzystwa Uniwersytetu Robotniczego, OMTUR), the "Wici" Union of Rural Youth of the Republic of Poland (Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej RP "Wici," ZMW), Catholic youth associations, and especially the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego, ZHP), were reactivated after WWII and functioned alongside some new ones: the Union of Democratic Youth (Związek Młodzieży Demokratycznej, ZMD) and the Association of Fighting Youth (Związek Walki Młodych, ZWM). Yet the mass youth movement did not become a reality until 1948, when OMTUR, ZMW, ZMD and ZWM unified to form a single Union of Polish Youth (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, ZMP). Simultaneously, the paramilitary Service to Poland (Służba Polsce, SP) was established, which besides organizing military trainings, also engaged youth in the postwar rebuilding of the country, in work towards carrying out the Six-Year Plan, and in promotion of physical activity. All the while, the other organizations were marginalized. While the Union of Polish Youth made claims to the heritage of prewar Communist League of Youth in Poland (Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży Polskiej), in practice, in terms of the organizational model, program and directions of action, it was modelled after the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, that is the Komsomol. At the same time, the ZMP's declaration proclaimed the construction of a new "world of freedom and fraternity of peoples," unlimited progress of human thought, prosperity and well-being of all working people, complementing calls for internationalism of friendship between nations with expressions of patriotic attachment to the new, people's Poland (Król, 2011, p. 64). The functioning of ZMP was based on principles of democratic centralism and internal democracy. This is significant because, as Joanna Król wrote, "each ZMP member had not only the privilege but also the duty to criticize the organization bodies and their colleagues if they committed errors at work, or acted to the detriment of the Union or of the people's state" (Król, 2011, p. 74). Although Król expressed skepticism about the actual application of such democratic rules, their very formulation encouraged criticism and contestation, which became inseparable features of youth culture in the following decades.

Initially, the ZMP was open to all young people, but soon, in order to preserve the class character of the organization, the categories of potential new members were nar-

rowed down to the working-class youth, small- and middle-holding peasants, and the working intelligentsia. The Association was to contribute to shaping them into a new people's intelligentsia, which would replace the old prewar intelligentsia, largely averse or openly hostile to the communist authorities. Król called these efforts an attempt to "conceive a new habitus *ex nihilo*" (Król, 2011, p. 92), which was to be facilitated by intense education and self-education work conducted by members of the ZMP at schools and workplaces, at courses and trainings for Union activists, as well as during summer and winter education and leisure camps. Opportunities for shaping youth attitudes and for gaining knowledge useful in ideological activities were also provided during community work (in rural areas – at cooperatives and at State Collective Farms; in urban areas – during cleaning works, and in anti-illiteracy courses), as well as during political campaigns, such as in the 1952 nationwide discussing of the PRL's draft constitution. Such opportunities were also provided by cultural and sports events, all kinds of excursions and competitions.

In 1948, the same year that the ZMP and SP were established, a school reform was also carried out. Preceded by a verification of the teaching staff, curriculum readings and textbooks, the reform also included moving secondary schools to smaller towns or to working-class urban areas. This way, the Polish United Workers' Party allowed youth of peasant and working-class backgrounds a broad access to education, with particular emphasis on general-education high schools, up until then dominated by the old intelligentsia and subordinated to its class reproduction and to the ideals, values and attitudes of the prewar elitist culture. The pathway to upward mobility, hitherto blocked for youth masses and jealously guarded by the privileged groups, now stood wide open. The Ministry of Education made efforts to facilitate taking this path, primarily by implementing affirmative actions that gave recruitment priority to youth from underprivileged groups. The social background criterion was to help young people from peasant and working-class families to get into secondary schools. The teachers and educators, for their part, were instructed to give special care to these students, who were also offered scholarships and accommodation at boarding houses. The achievement of these goals was supervised by special commissions, made up of teachers and representatives of work brigades. Król commented that in spite of these efforts, the social makeup of secondary school students did not change considerably, which she attributed to the habitus and cultural capital of students from working-class and peasant backgrounds decreasing their educational opportunities (Król, 2011, p. 49).⁶

Wiesław Adamski, who commented on the results of the post-World War II social and cultural revolution in 1970, adopted a different perspective and reached different conclusions: he stated that the Leninist concept of culture and the related principles of

6 All in all, Król's narrative is rather astonishing, as the author of a book on ZMP activity in general-education secondary schools employed Pierre Bourdieu's critical sociology in order to defend the legitimate culture and social reproduction against the alleged communist usurpers. Within this approach, legitimate culture turns out to be a value that Stalinism took a swing at.

cultural policy exerted an influence on Marxist organizations already in prewar Poland, resulting in creation of workers' theatres, discussion clubs, community centers and press magazines. Yet it was only the postwar victory of the socialist revolution that allowed the broad-scale implementation of a cultural policy in line with Lenin's principles. "Its implementation was not disturbed by anti-Sovietism, as it had been in the interwar period, when anti-Sovietism was consciously and purposely escalated by official bodies" (Adamski, 1970, p. 41): thanks to the common interests of Poland and the USSR, as well as owing to a sense of fraternity that stemmed from the common struggle against fascism, the anti-communist prejudices in Poland eased. This made it possible to broaden the reach of education and to democratize culture, and in particular it enabled the "shaping of a new intelligentsia, whose members originated from working-class or peasant backgrounds" (Adamski, 1970, p. 44). Thus, Adamski suggested the emergence in the 1950s of the Polish equivalent of the Soviet "Brezhnev generation." He may be excused for exaggerating: a huge leap in the level of education was taking place before his eyes.

The higher education reform initiated in 1947 limited the autonomy of universities, at that point still based on the prewar, apolitical model of a liberal university, and also democratized the social composition of students, which was to be facilitated by including representatives of non-academic circles in recruitment committees. The next reform, of 1951, obliged universities to recruit candidates in accordance with the imposed social background quotas, and introduced a new requirement for the students: obligatory attendance in an extended curriculum, which was meant to end the tradition of free choice of attended courses, practiced by prewar students, who largely originated from the privileged classes. The obligatory attendance democratized the university relations. Measures were also taken to stop the cultural reproduction of the academic field: post-doctoral habilitation degrees were abolished, and scientific titles came to be conferred in a centralized manner (Zysiak, 2016, p. 79). Higher education was to create a new people's intelligentsia and a new culture instead of reproducing the old academic habitus and high culture. As Zysiak observed based on the historical analysis of the period's discourse on work:

The postwar period was supposed to be the time of approximating the academic world to the realities of everyday life, and the "society," "local inhabitants" and the "general public" were to play an active role in academic life. Collective subjects were constructed in the press articles either as points of reference or as actors who were to take up specific actions – everyone was to be mobilized to build, but also to control the university (Zysiak, 2016, p. 122).

Socialist modernization of the country required the creation of new cadres, whose social origin structure was to reflect the general social structure. Democratizing of higher education institutions required equal opportunities, which in turn required preferential treatment of working-class and peasant candidates. This change was reflected in

the discourse of the time by the concept of “a new generation,” born in the 1930s and representing a new reality, hand in hand with the workers (Zysiak, 2016, p. 141). The youth became a hero of the public discourse, represented as constructors of the new system: an egalitarian, democratic and rationalistic one. The goal was for 80% of every yearly age group to graduate from an institution of higher education; in practice, throughout the PRL period this number never reached even 10% (Zysiak, 2016, p. 164), and the share of students from working classes stood at almost 50% in the peak period, that is in the first half of the 1950s (Zysiak, 2016, p. 171). Finally, Zysiak cited estimates according to which “upward mobility, understood classically as moving up the social ladder, applied to between 24.4% and 35.6% of the postwar population” (Zysiak, 2016, p. 203). Although more and more representatives of all social classes attained higher levels of education, and income inequalities and cultural distinctions diminished, structural differences remained unchanged throughout the communist period – in this sense, the project of socialist modernization as a project of equalizing classes rather than facilitating individual mobility ended in a failure, sealed by the spread of the bourgeois lifestyle rather than of the new socialist culture. Against this background, the period of Stalinism stood out as a significant yet short-lived change. According to Zysiak, members of the traditional intelligentsia saw the postwar revolution as a time of darkness and collapse because their privileged position, and elite culture that had legitimized this position, were shaken. “What the intelligentsia describes as a time of terror to many was a time of upward mobility,” she asserts, adding: “The later political relaxation after 1956 meant a return to elite culture” (Zysiak, 2016, p. 14).

Institutions, Action Styles and Discursive Formations

The postwar empowerment of youth as a social group was intimately tied to ideas of contestation and revolution, which has been admitted even by professedly anti-communist authors, such as Hanna Świda-Ziemba:

The youth were offered the role of “contesters,” rebelling against the older generations, who were [allegedly] stilted, closed-minded and inimical to everything that was new and bold. It was suggested that the idea of “revolution” could really only be grasped by the young. They were given the opportunity to gain significance and to act out their rebellion against all those who had up until then hampered, lectured and patronized them from a position of advantage (Świda-Ziemba, 1998, p. 98).

The sarcastic tone of this quote does not invalidate what is explicitly said here: the ideas and attitudes of rebellion, contestation and revolution had been inscribed in the subjectivity of youth and youth culture from the times of Stalinism, long before they came in another relay with the counterculture and youth revolts of Western Europe and North America of the late 1960s. What is more, after the years of war and the earlier

gradual growth of fascism in prewar Poland, after the prewar tolerance for antisemitism and quashing class conflicts, the proposal to reject the old world and to collectively build a new one quite naturally became applauded by numerous young people.

This influence was discussed by Tadeusz Nyczek, who in his article “Studencki, alternatywny, otwarty: Rzecz o teatrze” [Student, Alternative, Open: On Theater] outlines the beginnings of the student theater movement during the Thaw, the political transformation of 1956, when on the wave of “post-Stalinist revolt” a number of theatres and cabarets were being formed: STS, Bim-Bom, Co To, Cyrk Rodziny Afanasjeff, Pstrąg, Cytryna, Teatr 38 (Nyczek, 2011, p. 76). Yet the author dodges the anti-communist paradigm (according to which it was not until the death of Stalin that a relative unblocking of the creative forces of the Polish nation became possible), as he discusses the times before this “revolt” and draws attention to the popular phenomenon of “official activism.” “To be an activist, especially a youth activist, an activist in really any field, was not just a profession; it was a vocation” (Nyczek, 2011, p. 76). After a few biting remarks on the profits offered by the authorities to youth activists, and on the latter’s enthusiasm for building the new system which included participation in propaganda and in social control of the masses, Nyczek recognizes in the 1950s a universal drive toward an all-encompassing and fundamental change, which was to be achieved by action, understood as “the principle of the very existence” of the Stalinist system (Nyczek, 2011, p. 76). As he explains in the following paragraphs:

I write about this because had it not been for this mania of changing everything (especially of rejecting the old, outdated Poland in favor of a new, proper one), instilled in the first decade after the war, the spontaneous intellectual, artistic and freedom movements, characteristic of Poland in 1954–1989, would have probably looked different. For example, student theaters would have been out of question, at least on such a scale. Who knows, perhaps there wouldn’t have been the entire movement that encompassed the October of 1956 formation, or the March of 1968 one. This movement, although directed against the degenerations of the system, and, in the last decade of the PRL, not infrequently against the system itself, was as much spontaneous, bottom-up, as it was organized “the activist way.”

A great majority of theater troupes or cabarets simply depended on the money and political support of youth organizations (at first the ZMP, then ZSP and SZSP⁷) and if it hadn’t been for the backing of local or central activists, the student theater movement would have ended up as an appendage of an amateur theater movement, popular on the local level but without much social significance. This was attributed to another paradox of the system: when strictly observing its own systemic rules, it was unable to consistently safeguard itself against decomposition, which in essence destroyed its ideological fabric. Quite a considerable part of youth activists, on whom the theaters’ finances depended but who also provided protection from the punishing hand of the authorities, and sided with the artists, enabling them to express their opinion that frequently contested the official doctrine (Nyczek, 2011, p. 77).

7 ZSP – Zrzeszenie Studentów Polskich, Polish Student Association; SZSP – Socjalistyczny Związek Studentów Polskich, Socialist Union of Polish Students.

In Nyczek's narrative, the motive of "paradoxes of the system," one of the popular means of ridiculing communism (parodying Marxist analyses of the contradictions of capitalism), is used to overshadow an observation expressed a moment earlier, and to facilitate a safe return to the bosom of the anti-communist doxa. The observation to be invalidated directly after being revealed is, in this case, that the youth groups and organizations of contesting, alternative or counter-cultural character functioned thanks to the infrastructure, economic means and political protection provided by public institutions and official socialist youth and student associations.

Youth culture of the 1970s and 1980s flourished primarily at student clubs, in their galleries and workshops, as well as in small district and neighborhood cultural centers. This is well illustrated by the history of punk music in Poland. Poland's first punk concert took place on April 1, 1978, at the Remont Club run by the Riviera Student Boarding House of the Warsaw University of Technology. The British band The Raincoats played as part of an international performance festival, organized by Henryk Gajewski under the name International Artists' Meeting (I AM). Almost exactly a year later, on April 7, 1979, The Boors (Robert Brylewski's early band) played at the Municipal Cultural Center in Anin on the outskirts of Warsaw, which was one of the first such performances and largely expedited the development of the Warsaw punk scene. Unlike in Western capitalist countries, where the musical and artistic underground was often developed in places abandoned or bypassed by the capital – in garages, vacant lots, post-industrial and degraded areas – in Poland and other Eastern Bloc countries, it was public institutions that provided space, equipment (even if of poor quality), technical service as well as supervision (albeit often unnecessary and incompetent) of all kinds of educators and instructors. Also the exchange of contestatory ideas availed itself of the public channels of communication, and not only its own, autonomous ones. Officially published and distributed youth and student press often served as a forum for criticizing the regime and for making requests for radical change. For example in the 1960s, this function was fulfilled by the *Student* monthly, where poets of the New Wave published, and in the 1980s ecology and pacifist content that appeared in the scout magazine *Na Przełaj* did not diverge much from the opinions voiced on these subjects in third-circuit zines and papers. The easiest way to access punk, reggae, dub or cold wave music was to tune in to Rozgłośnia Harcerska (Scout Radio), while alternative music albums were usually released by Tonpress, a label that belonged to the "Prasa-Książka-Ruch" Workers' Publishing Cooperative, which in turn was property not even of the socialist state, but directly of the Polish United Workers' Party. Lech Raczak, founder of the politically engaged Teatr Ósmego Dnia (The Eighth Day Theater), was, according to his own account, himself able to be active "both in the nomenclature and in the opposition":

I was employed as the artistic manager of a ZSP theater; after that we were subordinate to the SZSP. I held this job throughout all of the seventies, until Teatr Ósmego Dnia transferred from the SZSP to Estrada Poznańska [Poznań's municipal institution of culture] in 1979. [...] On the one hand, everyone knew I was friends with [Adam] Michnik, that

I cooperated with the oppositionist Workers' Defense Committee [Komitet Obrony Robotników, KOR]. (I had the nerve to go to the Warsaw ZSZP branch for an important organizational meeting, I'd get into a fight or a discussion, for example with Olek [Aleksander] Kwaśniewski, who was a high-ranking functionary in the organization, and then I'd go to chat with Adam Michnik, and have the police book me in front of his house). On the other hand, I still had to take care of all kinds of official business, so I wrote letters and I went to the censorship office. I had to visit the town hall and the voivodeship office to squabble for a decent space to work in. I was a man of the opposition, followed by the cops, but I also went to see the cops, for example to submit passport applications for the group members. [...] Sometimes I'd get out of the "can" [jail] and go directly to an office on some official business; it was a complete organizational paranoia. My later job at Estrada was one of nomenclature posts, and so I was both in the nomenclature and in the opposition, with both sides fully aware of this (Grupińska & Wawrzyniak, 2011, p. 105).

Raczak's account illustrates the thin line between the attitudes of a socialist youth activist and a leader of a non-conformist, anarchizing theater group – a line thin enough for one and the same person to be able to alternately play both roles. The proximity and similarity of these attitudes stemmed from their shared sociogenesis: the activist ethos discussed by Nyczek and the related style of action, both of which constituted an immanent feature of Stalinist formation of youth as a social subject. These attitudes remained typical of the entire youth culture of the PRL, including its most anti-regime currents. Similarly, the ideas connected to the Festival of Youth and Students, to the ZMP, and to socialist humanism – ideas of peace, friendship, freedom, democracy, anti-fascism, anti-racism, emancipation and protection of the natural environment – were as much part of the official, normative socialist discourse as they were the slogans adopted by youth groups and movements that contested the system, especially from anarchist-leftist positions, although in the latter case they were filled with other meanings, images and associations.

A category which proves useful here is that of late socialism, proposed by Alexei Yurchak in his book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Yurchak defined late socialism with the use of Michel Foucault's category of discursive formation. As a specific discursive formation, late socialism was composed of dispersed sentences, statements, modes and topics that co-existed in the same historical period, but neither made up a single, coherent discourse, nor were limited to common sense beliefs about a given matter. Produced by various authors, proclaimed with different voices and from different standpoints, mutually aligned or divergent, these elements still combined into a certain formation, characterized by the regularities and principles of a discourse organization, one by which new concepts and manners of understanding were shaped. "Within this discursive formation of late socialism, diverse public statements that might seem contradictory in fact coexisted as logically linked and mutually productive" (Yurchak, 2005, p. 162). Within thus understood discursive formation of late socialism, meanings were also determined to a much lesser degree than they had been in earlier years, because they were produced after the eclipse of the

ideology's metadiscourse, that is after Stalin, who remained the only individual holding access to this metadiscourse, had fallen silent.

At the very core of socialism there still remained a tension between the requirement of public explication, as per the governing doctrine of Marxism-Leninism of the state's strict supervision over the cultural production, and the simultaneous stimulation of independent, free activity, of taking up creative experiments, and of an avant-garde flair of artistic visions. Stalin as the leader of the state and of the nation occupied a position that was external in respect of the ideological discourse. Thanks to this, as well as to dialectics as the principle of historical materialism, he could freely intervene in all the areas of cultural and political life, comment on them, and thus hide the permanently existing paradox. After his death no one could take this external position, and so the ideological representations became empty – an endless replication of forms, rituals and images had to replace the content, which from then on nobody could access anymore. Yurchak notes that this was what set free social creativity, opening up spaces of surprising and unpredictable meanings and interpretations. Phenomena of youth culture can be understood as such creative, non-obvious uses of the petrified, hypernormalized discourse, uses that shifted its senses, but remained inside of it, even when they drew from the ideas of the Western world. Thinking about the youth culture in Poland from this perspective makes it possible, on the one hand, to understand gestures of over-identification with the system, gestures that surpassed mockery or parody, and on the other hand, to depart from idle perceptions of the intentions and motivations of individuals (seduction, obedience, putting on a mask, internal emigration, etc.) which are anchored in the Western, liberal and capitalist concept of subjectivity, contested by the communists.

Translated by Maja Jaros

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Stalinowska socjogeneza kultury młodzieżowej w PRL. Próba nowego ujęcia

Abstrakt: Polska literatura socjologiczna i antropologiczna na temat kultury młodzieżowej w Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej oparta jest na założeniu o silnym wpływie decyzji politycznych państwa i rządzącej partii na style, zachowania i postawy młodzieży w czasach socjalizmu. To redukcjonistyczne założenie pomija fakt spontanicznego, oddolnego udziału tysięcy młodych ludzi w socjalistycznych organizacjach, wydarzeniach i kampaniach w epoce stalinizmu. Celem artykułu jest naszkicowanie nowego ujęcia przedstawiającego młodzież jako podmiot stalinowskiej rewolucji kulturalnej oraz późniejszą kulturę młodzieżową jako zjawisko typowe dla społeczeństwa socjalistycznego, nawet gdy w obrębie tej kultury sięgano po formy i wyobrażenia zapożyczone z kapitalistycznego Zachodu.

Wyrażenia kluczowe: młodzież; kultura młodzieżowa; stalinizm; socjalizm; rewolucja kulturalna



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