

## An Independent Artistic Movement in the Last Decade of Communistic System in Poland

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### Introduction

Artistic culture in Poland after World War II, as in other countries of the Eastern Block, was subjected to strict censorship and remained either in the service of official propaganda or stayed out of the sphere of politics, remaining in the neutral theme of everyday life or autotelic modernist narrative. Over a period of more than 40 years, stylistic and thematic transformations were like changes in Western culture, however those changes were rather a result of political events than the contact with the West. The “Polish Thaw” after Stalin’s death brought the end to the doctrine of socialist realism, and the artistic community gained some autonomy and opportunity to explore formal innovations and avant-garde experiments. However, this autonomy of art in the aesthetic sphere, did not mean institutional and administrative independence nor did it mean freedom of expression. Artists were associated in unions, e.g. the Association of Polish Writers (ZLP) or the Association of Polish Artists (ZPAP), which were not only labour unions, but above all they exercised control over artistic life in Poland.<sup>1</sup> The union authorities were selected from artists devoted to the communist regime, who tried to recruit secret collaborators among the members who would denounce their colleagues. The unions provided the artists with social assistance,

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<sup>1</sup> Research on secret archives of the Security Service is ongoing quite intensively in Poland. According to them, the most-monitored community was writers, but there were also secret agents among visual artists and filmmakers. See, among others: A. CHOJNOWSKI – S. LIGARSKI (eds.), *Artyści władzy, władza artystom*, Warszawa 2010; J. JAKIMCZYK, *Najweselszy barak w obozie. Tajna policja komunistyczna jako krytyk artystyczny i kurator sztuki w PRL*, Warszawa 2015.

state patronage, a system of prizes and scholarships, open air sessions and access to stationery, art materials and studios. In the situation of the nationalization of culture and the lack of a free art market, livelihood and artistic existence of artists depended on being member of unions. This gave authorities full control over art. However, it also gave rise to conformist attitudes and increasingly clear detachment of artists from social life of an average person. Only a few artists spoke against the communist regime through their art, but their acts had little or no scope (in the case of writing works that were not supposed to be published) and were not the voice of the community.<sup>2</sup> All the more remarkable is the awakening of Polish artists in the late 1970s, socio-political commitment during *Solidarity* and the creation of an independent culture during martial law and until the collapse of the communist system.

### Solidarity and the Awakening of Artists

A wave of workers' strikes in August 1980 forced the communist authorities to sign agreements and accept 21 demands of the Interfactory Strike Committee, including in the first point the acceptance of free trade unions independent of the Communist Party and in the third point freedom of speech, press and publication, including freedom for independent publishers, and the availability of the mass media to representatives of all faiths. Intellectuals and artists collectively supported the striking workers. The Association of Polish Artists was the first to speak up, issuing a *Resolution of August 29, 1980* in which we read: "*We stand with workers and intellectuals fighting for the right to co-decide about the fate of the country*", "*Polish society without a voice and representative institutions has to defend basic human rights through spontaneous movements*", "*we are strongly joining the postulates of establishing independent trade unions.*"<sup>3</sup> This resolution was followed by further declarations of financial assistance (thanks to art auctions) and assistance in the field of visual propaganda and information. Changes also took place in the Association of Polish Writers. Jan Józef Szczepański, an activist and member of opposition who was sentenced by state censorship

<sup>2</sup> The exceptions may be writers' protests, usually in the form of letters written to the Ministry, signed by leading writers or intellectuals, e.g. *Letter of 34* in 1964, *Letter of 59* from 1975 and *Letter of 101* from 1976. The numbers indicate the number of signatories. Those were not individual protests, nor did they represent most of the environment.

<sup>3</sup> *Stanowisko Związku Polskich Artystów Plastyków wobec sytuacji w kraju – 29 sierpień 1980 rok, in: Ostatnie miesiące Związku Polskich Artystów Plastyków, Warszawa 1983, pp. 30–31.*

not to publish for many years, was elected president of Association in December 1980. These changes became the cause of the independent movement of artistic circles and August 1980 marked the beginning of a numerous movement of independent culture. In mid-September 1980, the Artistic and Academic Association's Constitutive Committee was established, which was an umbrella organization for artistic and academic associations. As historian Andrzej Paczkowski mentioned: "*The intellectual organizations that were part of the 'ideological front' very important to the [communist] party, were experiencing their own kind of revolt.*"<sup>4</sup> The artists were present in the centre of the political events. Jerzy Janiszewski, graphic designer, designed the *Solidarity* logo and filmmakers from Documentary Film Studios managed to convince the authorities that all events should be filmed.<sup>5</sup> The period of official existence of *Solidarity* from August 1980 to December 1981 was a period of great cultural revival. The artistic community tried to express their support for workers and *Solidarity* by organizing various events. Among others *Artists of Warsaw to Solidarity* concert in at the Grand Theatre in Warsaw, *The 1<sup>st</sup> True Song Review in Gdańsk*, a symposium and a huge exhibition at *The 1<sup>st</sup> National Review of Sociological Photography* in Bielsko-Biała, where photos from the events of August '80 were shown. Filmmakers from Film Group X began to record films that censorship kept hidden until 1987.<sup>6</sup> In addition to professionals, students also showed considerable commitment. Student culture was dynamically developing in the 70s, although it was not independent (it was overseen by the Socialist Union of Polish Students). For young people it was nevertheless an alternative for official art. In December 1980, *The Gdańsk Student for Workers' 80 Festival* was organized to accompany the ceremony of the presentation of the monument of the Fallen Shipyard Workers.

Avant-garde artists from around the world came to see the *Construction in Process* exhibition organized in Łódź by Ryszard Waśko and the creators of the Film Form Workshops. They did it in order to show solidarity with the Polish society fighting for the democratization of the country. The exhibition was interrupted by the introduction of martial law, and the

<sup>4</sup> A. PACZKOWSKI, *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Poland 1980–1989: Solidarity, Martial Law, and the End of Communism in Europe*, New York, 2015, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Documentary photos later became part of such films as *The Man of Iron* by Andrzej Wajda or *The Case* by Krzysztof Kieślowski.

<sup>6</sup> They were, among others: *A Lonely Woman* by Agnieszka Holland, *Interrogation* by Ryszard Bugajski, *Mother of Kings* by Janusz Zaorski. From 1981 to 1983 several films were made, which could not premiere until 1987.

artists left their works in Poland as a gift to *Solidarity*. There were many more local events and *Solidarity* usually was their patron. Martial law, announced on December 13, 1981, also interrupted the *Congress of Polish Culture* which was supposed to be the first meeting of this type to summarize post-war culture in a critical way.

### Martial Law and Boycott

Martial law, announced by General Wojciech Jaruzelski on December 13, 1981, is assessed by historians as a coup d'état. Its introduction affected the whole society and caused huge changes in the functioning of culture. Unions and associations of writers, visual artists and journalists were suspended. Having artists and intellectuals among 5,000 imprisoned people caused the official cultural life to freeze for a moment. Because of that the artists became entrenched that their attitude was not only a matter of personal choices, but a social matter, because as a community they constituted an important part of society. So, they spontaneously boycotted official cultural life, especially the regime press and television, as well as art galleries and festivals. In the community of visual artists, the boycott was confirmed by the proclamation of *Voice, which is a Silence* in April 1982: "*participation in official exhibitions organized by state institutions, both in the country and abroad, individual and collective is considered as unethical, [...] [including] participation at the Venice Biennale and the Paris Biennale, and in the country at the Poster Biennale or the Graphic Biennale. We would also consider unethical to participate in painter's open air organized by state institutions, performances in mass media and making them available for distribution through said media. These are the basic assumptions of proceedings during martial law.*"<sup>7</sup> The *Solidarity of Stage and Film Artists* also published the *Statement*, which established the actors' code of conduct: "*A collaborator is the one who lends his name, face, voice or talent for propaganda and justification of violence.*"<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the direction of further actions was set: "*we must, however, create an unofficial circulation of art, through vernissages and exhibitions in private apartments, creating discussion groups and symposia on culture and art.*"<sup>9</sup>

In 1982, the Committee of Independent Culture (KKN) was formed and consisted of artists associated with various fields of culture as well as

<sup>7</sup> A. WOJCIECHOWSKI, *Czas smutku, czas nadziei*, Warszawa 1992, p. 108.

<sup>8</sup> "Statement of Solidarity of Artists from the Scene and the Film", May 1982, in: *Wezwanie*, 2, 1982, pp. 130–131. The theatre, children's shows and film production were not boycotted. <http://encyklopediateatru.pl/hasla/264/bojkot> [2020–03–06].

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

critics and publicists. KKN inspired and organized artistic life, supported cultural initiatives such as: exhibitions, Home Theatre, Christian Culture Weeks, independent competitions, symposia, meetings of artists and publishing activities.<sup>10</sup> KKN also provided financial support to artists in the form of grants, scholarships and fees for created works. It also awarded *The Solidarity Cultural Award* in 5 categories: theatre, fine arts, literature, film and music, and collaborated with independent publishers.<sup>11</sup>

That way, the rapid development of independent, underground culture began. However, it is worth noting that, due to patronage and transmitted content two trends in underground culture can be distinguished.

### Art at the Church and “Second Circulation”

The greater part of underground culture was politically and ideologically associated with *Solidarity* and found its support in the Catholic Church. If we consider that there were about 1,700 artists who collaborated in this movement and we add writers, and intellectuals to this, we will get a huge group mastering most of Polish culture and forming opinion, political and historical awareness and moral values of a large part of society for several years. Extremely important and unheard of in other countries of the Eastern Block was the involvement of the Catholic Church in the underground culture on the one hand, but also the rapprochement of the artists with the church on the other. Church and art were far apart during the time of Polish People’s Republic (PRL). In the mid-70s the Church made the first attempt to open itself to contemporary culture, when cycles of Christian Culture Weeks were organised thanks to the initiative of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and Fr. Aleksander Niewęglowski. Nevertheless, the undoubted reason for artists’ interest in religion was the support that the church gave to *Solidarity*. The cause of the changes was also Karol Wojtyła being elected the Pope. For every Pole it was an event filled with pride and hope. The “pro-church” mood deepened even more after the first visit of John Paul II to Poland in June 1979.

Even before the declaration of martial law, opinions about the necessity of pluralizing the patronage of art appeared, and here, for the first time,

<sup>10</sup> See: A. RUCIŃSKI, Działalność Komitetu Kultury Niezależnej w latach 1982–1989, in: *Przegląd Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Społeczny*, 4, 2013, pp. 47–54; Komitet Kultury Niezależnej in: *Encyklopedia Solidarności*: [http://www.encysoł.pl/wiki/Komitet\\_Kultury\\_Niezale%BCnej](http://www.encysoł.pl/wiki/Komitet_Kultury_Niezale%BCnej) [2020-03-06].

<sup>11</sup> See: J. OLASZEK, Kultura, która nie kłamie. Szkic o Komitecie Kultury Niezależnej, in: *Wolność i Solidarność*, 10, 2017, pp. 82–116.

*Solidarity* and the Catholic Church were mentioned. In a resolution of 1981 ZPAP, responding to the growing socio-political tension, quoted the words of Pope John Paul II, calling for peaceful resolution of conflicts. It was a proof of the Church's authority in this matter. The fact, that participants and supporters of *Solidarity* took a shelter in the Church during the martial law was something natural and specific in the Polish tradition of combining religiosity with patriotism and the church with opposition to the authorities imposed from the outside. Church has become a meeting place, where help was organized for political prisoners, victims and their families, information was exchanged, and gifts sent from abroad were distributed.

The first meeting of artists with Cardinal Józef Glemp dedicated to the organization of artistic life based on the Church took place in 1983. Thanks to this initiative, the already existing cultural institutions – such as diocesan museums – as well as all free places in parish buildings: porches, basements and even church naves and chapels were made available to artists. There were so many churches where cultural events were organized, that it is difficult to list all of them as the schedules of the participants of this movement are incomplete.<sup>12</sup>

The general turn of artistic circles towards the Catholic Church was quite unexpected, but it also had a deeper than just organizational and political background. Some artists and theorists felt the vanishing of the avant-garde in the late 1970s. One wondered what the end-century art would be like, especially since news about postmodernism came from the West. Independent artistic journals published translated fragments of the writings of Daniel Bell, neoconservative sociologist, who criticized capitalist, secularized and de-sacralised society, and called for a revival of religiosity, and texts of Leszek Kołakowski's, especially *The Revenge of the sacred in secular culture*.<sup>13</sup> This way, the ground for art referred to Christian values was created.

<sup>12</sup> Among important publications containing calendars of cultural events in the 1980s are: A. WOJCIECHOWSKI, *Czas smutku, czas nadziei*, Warszawa 1992; T. BORUTA (ed), *Pokolenie. Niezależna twórczość młodych w latach 1980–1989*, Kraków 2010; J. KROKOWSKA-NAROŻNIAK – M. WASZKIEL (eds.), *Teatr drugiego obiegu. Materiały do kroniki teatru stanu wojennego 13 XII 1981–15 XI 1989*, Warszawa 2000, <http://www.encyklopediateatru.pl/ksiazka/177/teatr-drugiego-obiegu-materialy-do-kroniki-teatru-stanu-wojennego-13-xii-1981-15-xi-1989> [2020–03–06].

<sup>13</sup> L. KOŁAKOWSKI., *Odwet sacrum w kulturze świeckiej*, in: L. KOŁAKOWSKI, *Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych*, Warszawa 1990.

The advocate of bringing art closer to the sphere of the sacred in Poland was the art theoretician and curator Janusz Bogucki.<sup>14</sup> At the end of the seventies he created his theory: EZO, POP and SACRUM as a diagnosis of contemporary culture. EZO corresponded to the previous, egocentric attitude of the avant-garde – attached to the “sacrum of art”, POP was “total desacralization of art, it’s incorporation into the scientific, technological and administrative mechanisms of civilization and mass culture,”<sup>15</sup> a tendency characterized by the “civilization of haste and success”. Finally, the third attitude with which Bogucki associated his hopes was SACRUM – the desire to rediscover the relationship between the sacrum of art and the primal sacrum, manifested reflection on the timeless and non-material sense of human existence. This third way of understanding art as a meeting of two autonomous areas, in which none of them can dominate, but where both co-operate harmoniously, was supposed to rebuild universality of meanings in art, overcome the artist's alienation through community action, and finally save from insanity or exhaustion those artists who seek spiritual change on their own.<sup>16</sup>

Janusz Bogucki was the organizer of several famous artistic undertakings that set a new curatorial approach in Polish exhibitions. In 1983 exhibition *The Sign of the Cross* was arranged in the church of God’s Mercy in Warsaw, a temple ruined during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 and then being rebuilt by its parishioners.<sup>17</sup> Artists used the whole interior, including debris and construction equipment, and placed abstract works and installations in it. This way they created a coherent and extremely expressive environment, a result of negotiations and arrangements with themselves and parishioners.<sup>18</sup> This way not only a community of artists and recipients was created, but also an environment and a place for

<sup>14</sup> On the problem of the sacred in Polish art of those times see: A. GRALIŃSKA-TOBOREK, The idea of Sacrum in Polish art of 1980s, in: *Inferno. Journal of Art History*, 7, 2003, pp. 31–37.

<sup>15</sup> J. BOGUCKI, *POP – EZO – SACRUM*, Poznań 1990, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> See D. JARECKA, Janusz Bogucki, the Polish Szeemann?, in: <https://artmuseum.pl/en/publikacje-online/dorota-jarecka-janusz-bogucki-polski> [2020-03-06].

<sup>18</sup> In the 1980s, Bogucki organized other exhibitions: *The Road of Lights – ecumenical meetings* (1987) – at the Divine Mercy Church at ul. Żytnia in Warsaw, *Artists to shipyard workers* (1984) – in the Church of St. Nicholas in Gdańsk, *Apocalypse – light in the dark* (1984) – in the Church of St. Cross in Warsaw, *Labyrinth – underground space* (1989) – in the Church of the Ascension in Warsaw. The calendar of events organized by him is in the book: J. BOGUCKI, *Od rozmów ekumenicznych do Labiryntu*, Warszawa 1991.

the development of culture outside the official stream. In addition to exhibitions, also meetings with artists, symposia, concerts and theatre performances were organized there. The most famous was the performance *Wieczernik* directed by Andrzej Wajda.<sup>19</sup>

An important place in the capital was the Museum of the Archdiocese of Warsaw, where actress Hanna Skarżanka organized about 700 performances, which were shown in different parts of the country. In Poland there was around a dozen similar places although not everywhere the artistic level of organized events was equally high. Local artistic circles of Kraków, Łódź, Wrocław, Lublin, Gdańsk, Katowice organized themselves at parishes, where artists from all over the country were invited.

The church gave artists a sense of community and security – values that became particularly valuable after the proclamation of martial law. It also provided a huge audience consisting partly of people who previously did not have much experience with modern art. Church, however, was not a neutral place, it required a specific attitude and content.

The participation of artists, including actors, in cultural events organized in churches was a substitute for opposition activity. The quality of the spectacle or exhibition was less important than the very fact of undertaking such action and participation. It should be noted that especially during the boycott (which was cancelled in 1983), the artists' community stigmatized all those who were breaking the rules. Such artists were unmasked in the underground press, where their names and circumstances of their appearances in regime media were given.

The end of 1980s was the time of a crisis in the relations between the Church and the artistic community.<sup>20</sup> One could hear the discouragement and lack of faith in the further development of “church art” in the statements of the participants of the movement: “*Both sides – the artists and the Church – are already a bit tired*”<sup>21</sup> said Aleksander Wojciechowski, a participant and an attentive observer of the movement. “*An independent mass movement, demonstrating its artistic and patriotic credo in temples, has already fulfilled its role. The time has come for far-reaching selection so that what*

<sup>19</sup> Twelve performances were watched by around 6,000 viewers. E. MAŁACHOWSKA, Kościół a kultura niezależna w latach 80, in: *Pokolenie*, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> See A. GRALIŃSKA-TOBOREK, Plastyka w Kościele w latach 1981–1989: trwałe przymierze czy epizod?, in: *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 4, 7, 2005, pp. 181–201.

<sup>21</sup> W. WIERZCHOWSKA, *Sąd nieocenzurowany czyli 23 wywiady z krytykami sztuki*, Łódź 1989, p. 279.

really valuable is not present in the envelope of mediocrity.”<sup>22</sup> At the end of the 80’s, church exhibitions were getting smaller and the notorious exhibitions of young artists, the so-called “New expression” were organized in official galleries.<sup>23</sup>

There were not only church exhibitions and performances in the second circulation, but also events under the auspices of *Solidarity* and independent student organizations. Meetings with artists, performances, lectures were organized in private apartments. A special place was occupied by the so-called “Home Theatre” showing political performances in private homes for a small audience. The same name – “Home Theatre” was used by the theatre founded by actors: Ewa Dałkowska, Emilian Kamiński, Andrzej Piszczatowski and Maciej Szary, which, according to the *Encyclopedia of the Polish Theatre*, gave about 150 performances, including *Marast* by Pavel Kohout (premiered October 1984) and *Largo desolato* by Václav Havel (premiered November 1986) directed by Maciej Szary.<sup>24</sup>

Independent culture was also created by underground publishing houses and other initiatives under the auspices of *Solidarity*. Samizdat has been developing in Poland since 1976 and during the martial law, despite the repression and confiscation of some equipment, it achieved increasing expenditure and continued to expand.<sup>25</sup> Publishing houses published books and magazines, among which 77 titles were considered to be typical cultural and literary magazines.<sup>26</sup> In addition to literary and critical texts, these magazines also had translations from foreign languages of authors censored in Poland.

Illegal publishers expanded the scope of their activity in the mid-1980s by including cassette tapes with song recordings (sung poetry and ballads of “Solidarity bards” were extremely popular), lectures and video cassettes with independent documentaries and feature films. The NOWa was the largest publishing house, operating since 1977, which, until June 1990, published 294 books and a dozen or so omitting the editorial

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See J. CIESIELSKA, (ed.), *Republika bananowa. Ekspresja lat 80*, Wrocław 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Teatr Domowy, in: *Encyklopedia Teatru Polskiego*, on line: <http://encyklopediateatru.pl/hasla/265/teatr-domowy> [2020-03-05].

<sup>25</sup> See S. DOUCETTE, *Books Are Weapons: The Polish Opposition Press and the Overthrow of Communism*, Pittsborough 2017.

<sup>26</sup> See M. MARCINKIEWICZ – S. LIGARSKI (eds.), *Papierem w system. Prasa drugoobiegowa w PRL*, Szczecin 2010.

board, 144 magazine issues, 39 audio cassettes, 21 video cassettes, 4 video sets and 4 “Orwellian calendars”.<sup>27</sup>

There were some critical voices towards underground publications, as well as art exhibitions, indicating the uneven level and danger of printing everything what is oppositional rather than what is literary valuable. Publishers, editors, curators faced difficult choice: should they reject artistically weak works if those were politically involved? They were aware that this could be regarded as internal censorship and that recipients expect specific content and that any criticism of independent culture is used extensively by regime journalists. Therefore, many discussions among the creators of the second circulation focused on how to understand independence.

### What Culture? Independent, Autonomous, Alternative, or Free from Anything?

Andrea F. Bohlman in a book on independent music explains that: *“The Polish language distinguishes between state independence (niepodległość) and an individual’s autonomy (niezależność), and activists deployed both, along with the concept of ‘freedom’ (wolność). Niepodległość concerns collective sovereignty. In contrast, the niezależność flagged in the journal’s title [Kultura Niezależna] referred to individual autonomy, a core foundation of the opposition’s model of civil society.”*<sup>28</sup> The underground culture of the second circulation was independent of regime power, but not always autonomous. Critics believed that culture liberated from under the state patronage surrendered to the patronage of the Catholic Church or oppositional political organizations, and in both cases art could not be considered autonomous.<sup>29</sup> The creators of independent culture were aware of this, but they accepted this patronage gratefully. Teresa Bogucka, the head of the Committee of Independent Culture, said in 1985: *“By abandoning state patronage, independent culture would become very intimate, it would only reach elites, but for church there would be no other place which could gather several thousand people for anniversary performance, large series of exhibitions and concerts like ‘Znak Krzyża’ in the church on Żytnia in Warsaw or Gdańsk celebrations of the 4th anniversary of August. [...] Art has found its place in the Church – is it not so that while striving to*

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.encysol.pl/wiki/Niezale%C5%BCna\\_Oficyna\\_Wydawnicza](http://www.encysol.pl/wiki/Niezale%C5%BCna_Oficyna_Wydawnicza) [2020–03–06].

<sup>28</sup> A. F. BOHLMAN, *Musical Solidarities: Political Action and Music in Late Twentieth-Century Poland*, New York 2020, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Zygmunt Hubner uses term “semi-official” to describe performances in church. Z. HUBNER, *Theatre & politics*, Evanston Illinois 1992.

*be free from restrictions, there are other restrictions? So far, this is done on the basis of mutual respect: in principle, priests do not interfere in what the artists would like to show, and the artists try not to present in the church anything that could offend believers.*<sup>30</sup> The church welcomed artists and gave them space to present art, but expected their work to be in line with its hierarchy of values. Not all artists, shared the same hierarchy, though their aspirations for freedom were as strong as those of the opposition activists. As the art historian Piotr Piotrowski wrote, there were some artists who: *“rejected all that black and white political structure en globe, they rejected the language of martial law, whether it was defined by communists or by underground Solidarity as the language of power par excellence. As a consequence, they rejected the great ‘narratives’ of the political opposition and the art associated with it – art created in Catholic churches. [...] They reached for a different language, defining reality as if ‘from the side’, and in this language sought their identification.”*<sup>31</sup> Among them there were the creators of alternative theatre, young rock and punk musicians, some neo-avant-garde artists and the Orange Alternative student movement. They formed separate groups not related to each other, they were apolitical and manifesting their independence. Some of them were of anarchist nature – they proposed freedom from everything. We can call them, with no other terms, the “third circulation”.

### The “Third Circulation” – Outside the System

The alternative culture, separately to the “patriotic” trend of the Church and the political opposition was created primarily by young people, usually students. To a large extent they focused on theatrical activities born in the 70s and the influence of Western counterculture was visible in it.<sup>32</sup> However, this theatre was not only an echo of Western student performances and the result of visits of avant-garde experimental theatres in Poland, but a natural way of artistic expression, because, as Kathleen M. Cioffi notes: *“in Poland, where that heritage includes more than two hundred years of opposition to the powers that be, the theatre has often found itself at the centre of many political controversies.”*<sup>33</sup> Alternative theatre brought new means of expression, direct contact with the audience, community action,

<sup>30</sup> W świecie kultury niezależnej. Z rozmowy z członkiem Komitetu Kultury Niezależnej, in: *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, 114, 1985, quoted in: OLASZEK, p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> P. PIOTROWSKI, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku*, Poznań 1999, p. 226–227.

<sup>32</sup> See S. MAGALA, *Polski teatr studencki jako element kontrkultury*, Warszawa 1988.

<sup>33</sup> K. M. CIOFFI, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954–1989*, Amsterdam 1999, p. 4.

pursuit of authenticity and emphasizing spiritual values to this tradition. It was called contesting, countercultural, open, searching, young, experimenting. Today the term “alternative” is used because it was an alternative to mainstream theatre. But alternative theatres were active in various official youth organizations and universities, it was subject to censorship and the subject of those performances were universal, existential and not directly political, so it’s hard to call it independent.<sup>34</sup> Student theatres have been operating since the late 1950s (after the “Thaw” in 1956) and in the late 1970s they were already in most academic centres, there were even a dozen in some cities.<sup>35</sup> The repertoire of these theatres was also very different, from poetic evenings which consisted of the classics of Polish literature. The repertoire of such theatres consisted of the performances loosely based on texts created by the whole group. Those performances were largely improvised even up to the level of a cabaret. After the declaration of martial law, alternative theatres intensified their activities, and new ones were founded.

Some researchers also include the Orange Alternative movement in the alternative theatre, but it seems that these activities were less in the field of theatre and more in the field of happening. The founder and leader of this movement was Waldemar Fydrych called “Major”, who was a student of art history at the University of Wrocław.<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that Fydrych was a participant of student strikes in 1981, his activities from the beginning were more of a mockery and anti-system nature than strictly political. In April 1981 he published *Manifesto of Socialist Surrealism*, referring in his New Culture Movement to the surreal and dadaist tradition. Initially, i.e. in the first half of the eighties, the activities of P.A. boiled down to painting graffiti, mainly in the form of dwarfs. In places where municipal services painted over opposition political slogans, simple figures of dwarves were painted on spots of paint, which Fydrych’s “Major”

<sup>34</sup> See G. KONDRASIUŁ – A. GÓRA-STĘPIEŃ, Teatr studencki i alternatywny w Lublinie, Ośrodek “Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN” in: <http://teatrnn.pl/leksykon/artykuly/teatr-alternatywny-i-studencki-w-lublinie/> [2020-03-04].

<sup>35</sup> It is difficult today to provide a specific number of alternative theatres, even more so because some have ceased their activities, others have begun, and many still disappear today. Lublin was the most dynamic centre, where as many as 9 such theatres operated, including: Teatr Provisorium, Grupa Chwilowa, Ośrodek Praktyk Teatralnych Gardzienice, Scena Plastyczna KUL. The most famous theatres in other cities include: Akademia Ruchu in Warsaw, Teatr 77 in Lodz, Teatr Dnia Ósmego in Poznan, Kalambur in Wrocław, Jedyńka in Gdansk.

<sup>36</sup> See <http://www.orangealternativemuseum.pl/#homepage> [2020-03-06].

justified ironically by Marxist dialectic: “*The Thesis is the [anti-regime] Slogan, the Anti-thesis is the Spot and the Synthesis is the Dwarf.*”<sup>37</sup> The main way of artistic expression of this movement were happenings organized since 1986 in the centres of large cities – primarily Wrocław, then Warsaw, Łódź and Lublin.<sup>38</sup> They usually took the form of public celebrations of imaginary or real holidays, such as Militia Day, St. Nicholas Day, the eve of the October Revolution. Gathered participants, usually young people and students, brought some attributes and banners, chanted slogans that were a travesty of regime and opposition slogans, e.g.: “*Santa Claus is the hope for reforms*”, “*The Warsaw Pact – Vanguard of Peace*”, “*Connect Africa to the USSR*”. In these joyful manifestations reminiscent of carnival processions (hence the Bachtin’s term “carnavalesque” is often used in the description of those), a dozen or so to several thousand people took part. Happenings were difficult to control by the governmental services because the slogans raised were clearly affirmative towards the authorities and the system. So, irony turned out to be the best anti-system weapon.

Irony was also characteristic for artists associated with new media: photography, experimental film, performance.<sup>39</sup> In these circles it was called *Kultura Zrzuty* (Culture of whip-round i.e. a cash payment for publishing and organizing events). The main assumptions of this culture are intellectual nihilism, anarchism, absurdity, fun, and unproductiveness. Artists met in private apartments and created places of art and exchange of ideas, which were combined in the so-called Network. They also adapted the attic in a tenement house in Łódź, where they organized social gatherings, film festivals and performances from 1981 to 1985. The most active and the most radical, anarchist attitude was adopted by members of the Łódź

<sup>37</sup> A detailed history of Orange Alternative can be found on the official website of the Orange Alternative Foundation. Story about Dwarfs is as follows: Major and his friends were arrested twice while painting dwarfs. During one of these times Major while detained at a police station in Łódź, proclaimed yet another artistic manifesto of the so-called “dialectic painting” in reference to his own graffiti art. “*The Thesis is the [anti-regime] Slogan, the Anti-thesis is the Spot and the Synthesis is the Dwarf*” – he announced, furthermore defining himself to be the greatest successor in the Hegel and Marx tradition. – “*Quantity evolves into Quality – the more Dwarfs there are, the better it is*”, <http://www.orangealternativemuseum.pl/#homepage> [2020-03-07].

<sup>38</sup> One of the happenings took place in the summer of 1988 on the top of the Śnieżka Mountain, at the Polish-Czech border, under the code name of *Brotherly aid always alive*. It recalls a very important event – the date of marks the anniversary of the Warsaw Pact’s invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1968.

<sup>39</sup> Most of them were somehow connected with the Łódź Film School.

Kaliska group. Their para-artistic activities – interventions, happenings, actions, were aimed at causing scandal and embarrassment, ridiculing not only socio-political systems, artistic institutions but also the art itself and its tradition.

The artists from several groups: Luxus, Koło Klipsa, Gruppa took a stand against the existing reality as well as against the opposition political activity. Their art, including painting, installation, graffiti and graphics, was not literally oppositional, patriotic, nor was it nihilistic, which is why it was shown in places of the second and third circulation.

The final part of independent culture of the third circulation was rock music. Youth music in the Polish People's Republic never aroused the enthusiasm of regime – from big-beat in the 60s, through rock and roll and then rock focused under the banner of Young Generation Music in the late 70s to punk rock in the 80s, whose largest place of presentation was the Jarocin Festival (1980–1994). The festival organized in a small town attracted several thousand young people and dozens of performers every year. Songs sung and more often shouted out by bands were anti-systemic and disregarded censorship. The authorities discounted the Jarocin phenomenon, as they did not see it as a political threat.<sup>40</sup> They overlooked the fact that it shaped the views of a large number of very young people who did not join the opposition, were apolitical, but drawing patterns from the West aroused their longing for freedom. The organizers and participants of the festival said after many years that people “were caught by freedom” in Jarocin.

## Summary

Independent culture of the last decade of the Polish People's Republic was undoubtedly a phenomenon fascinating researchers. Therefore, it has received many detailed publications on specific fields: theatre, music and fine arts. There were also several exhibitions on this topic, the Jarocin Festival was reactivated, and 2009 year was declared the Year of Independent Culture. The Polish underground has to a large extent prepared the culture for functioning in the new reality. Many artistic groups continue their activity, some private galleries have survived and independent publishers have evolved into private publishing houses. Not all trends have survived. In contemporary culture, little remains of

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<sup>40</sup> See K. LESIAKOWSKI – P. PERZYNA – T. TOBOREK, *Jarocin w obiektywie bezpieki*, Warszawa 2004; T. TOBOREK, *Niezależna muzyka rockowa*, Łódź 2010.

the “church movement”, apart from activities related to Archdiocesan Museums. Sacrum is not an attractive topic for art, on the contrary, in the 90s in critical art there was a discussion with religiosity, clericalization and with superficial patriotism. There is no doubt, however, that the independent culture in both its circuits was a powerful movement and contributed to the fall of communism. Often, individual communities on the wave of veterans’ memories claim greater credit for themselves, but only seen as a whole, it gives an insight into the scale of this phenomenon and makes one aware of the resistance that Polish culture was at the end of the communist regime.

