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SILENCING *POLO*: CONTROVERSIAL MUSIC IN POST-SOCIALIST POLAND

By

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

### Silencing Polo: Controversial Music in Post-Socialist Poland

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Although, with the turn in the discipline since the 1980s, musicologists no longer assume their role to be that of arbiters of “good music”, the instruction of Boethius – “Look to the highest of the heights of heaven” – has continued to motivate musicological inquiry. By contrast, music which is popular but perceived as “bad” has generated surprisingly little interest. This dissertation looks at Polish post-socialist music through the lenses of musical phenomena that came to prominence after socialism collapsed but which are perceived as controversial, undesired, shameful, and even dangerous. They run the gamut from the perceived nadir of popular music to some works of the most renowned contemporary classical composers that are associated with the suffix *-polo*, an expression that comes from *disco polo*, the first genre that came to prominence after socialism collapsed and is commonly associated with poor taste and a business-inspired aesthetic compromise. Combining methods used in ethnomusicology and musicology, my study is guided by the questions: How does music become “bad” and why? What does it tell us about ongoing cultural discourses and social cleavages in Polish society after the fall of socialism? The dissertation is structured around three case studies: (i) disco polo, (ii) Polish hip hop and *hip-hopolo*, and (iii) application of the term *sacropolo* to music with religious content, with an emphasis on *rubikopolo*. They are followed by analysis of patterns and schemes of silencing (as defined by Thiesmeyer 2003) experienced by these musical phenomena in confrontation with the dominant discourse in contemporary Poland, exposing the double and disguised nature of such

silencing. The study is preceded by analysis of the cultural policy of the socialist state, which has profound implications for the functioning of music in Poland after its fall and provides a platform for addressing ideas about vision and mission of Polish culture, concepts regarding music and cultural hierarchies, assumptions regarding folk and popular music, and the myth of Poland. The music discussed in this dissertation was linked to a specific socio-economic context. With its change, the prominence and relevance of music altered. Moreover, all of these controversial musical phenomena challenged the organizational and conceptual framework of music making in post-socialist Poland (which stems from the previous system and has been influenced by some nineteenth century ideas) and clashed with official discourses. Although reasons behind their silencing were multiple and varied from case to case, they all interfere with the official narration about the post-socialist transformation, which pictured the current transition to capitalism and merging with Western Europe as the best and only option. They bring a different perspective to Poland's relationship to the West, both actual and desired, and emphasize a set of values alternative to the one promoted by the dominant discourse. On the other hand, music which experienced silencing in post-socialist Poland fits into categories enumerated by Lizardo and Skiles (2015) as safe for symbolic exclusion by the musically "tolerant". Therefore the same mechanism that sanctions the rejection of music associated with what cosmopolitanism is not and with communities and cultures that are perceived to promote intolerance in the discursive configuration which celebrates openness to cultural diversity, may be at play here.

## DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Paweł

and

Nanette

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## A NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND SOUND RECORDINGS

Translations are by the author unless otherwise noted. Song texts have been translated literally rather than poetically.

Unless otherwise noted, recordings and texts of the songs mentioned in this dissertation can be found online.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract of the Dissertation .....	ii
Dedication and Acknowledgements .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	vi
List of Illustrations .....	viii
Introduction .....	1
Overview .....	13
Chapter One: Cultural Policies of Socialist Poland: Music Making Under the Socialist Regime in Theory and in Practice .....	16
An overview of the cultural policies of a socialist state .....	17
Culture not subject to market laws or audience taste .....	27
No country for sheer entertainment .....	33
The socialist vision of the folk and popular culture .....	42
The difference between the official (formal) and operative (informal) levels of the socialist ideology with reference to music making .....	52
Conclusion of Chapter One .....	63
Chapter Two: Disco Polo: the Culture of the People Comes to the Marketplace .....	70
A short history of disco polo? A herald of the new system becomes its enfant terrible....	72
Bottom-up acculturation rejected: why the intelligentsia is afraid of disco polo .....	91
Unwanted identities: Polishness and the West in disco polo .....	107
“There is no village in the countryside”. Is disco polo folk music? .....	121
Conclusion of Chapter Two .....	135
Chapter Three: Where Did Polish Hip Hop Go? Polish Hip Hop: a Voice of the “Solidarity” Generation or <i>Hip-hopolo</i> ? .....	150
How to write a history of Polish hip hop .....	152
Hip hop as a misfit for the cultural needs of the Solidary movement of the 1980s .....	154

Are the elements of hip hop sufficient to speak of a “hip hop culture”?	157
Blokowisko. Hip hop’s location and its inhabitants	164
Polish hip-hop’s road to mainstream: from nielegals to <i>hip-hopolo</i> and back	167
I represent poverty? Hip hop discourse and its participants	179
Polish hip hop as a patriotic genre	200
Conclusion of Chapter Three	219
Chapter Four: <i>Sacropolo</i> : The Sacred in the Marketplace	227
From anti-systemic counterculture to the mainstream and <i>sacropolo</i> : music on religious topics in Poland after the Second World War	231
<i>Rubikopolo</i> : between popular and classical music and the issue of moral coercion	245
Sacred music, kitsch, and <i>sacropolo</i>	259
Kitsch	269
<i>Sacropolo</i>	274
Conclusion of Chapter Four	287
Conclusion: Silencing <i>Polo</i>	296
Organizational framework of music making in Poland after the fall of the socialist state and its alternative in disco polo, Polish hip hop and Christian music	300
Conceptual framework confronted with disco polo, hip hop, and <i>sacropolo</i>	306
Patterns of silencing, its double nature and disguises	313
<i>Polo</i> phenomena in confrontation with the dominant discourse	318
Bibliography	325
Filmography	345



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figures

3.1. Solidarity logo <i>Solidarność</i> .....	157
3.2. <i>Polska Walcząca</i> [Fighting Poland] .....	158
3.3. Toruń, Skarpa district, view from one of high-rise buildings. Fot. Pko., 2006.....	164
3.4. Magik's <i>Osiedle</i> . A picture from the book <i>Paktofonika</i> . by Maciej Pisuk (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2008), 102 .....	165
3.5. <i>Ławeczka</i> [Bench]. A frame from the documentary <i>Blokersi</i> by Sylwester Latkowski (2001).....	166
3.6. The cover of the album <i>Autentyk 3</i> by Vienio & Pele. Artwork & art direction: Grzegorz "FORIN" Piwnicki @ <a href="http://www.projektowanie.org">www.projektowanie.org</a> . ....	175
3.7. Cover of 39/89. <i>Zrozumieć Polskę</i> [1939/1989. To Understand Poland] by L.U.C (EMI Music PolFigureand, 2009). Project by Adam Tunikowski (Juice It, Wrocław).....	212
4.1. Statues of John Paul II in Wigry, Świebodzice, and Sieradz .....	228
4.2. Transformations of Piotr Rubik .....	247
4.3. DVD cover of <i>Świętokrzyska Głgota</i> (DUO, 2006) .....	248
4.4. DVD Cover of <i>Tu es Petrus</i> (DUO, 2005) .....	249
4.5. DVD Cover of <i>Psalterz Wrześniowy</i> (DUO, 2006) .....	249
4.6. 'The Pendereckis,' caricature by Jan Paweł Blaszek .....	263
Table 1. Teen <i>Coolture</i> v.s. Hip-Hop according to Maciej Bernasiewicz .....	185

## INTRODUCTION

Over a quarter of a century has passed since the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the first free elections in Poland in 1989. The cultural dilemmas associated with the dramatic social, economic, and political changes involved in the ongoing transformations in the former Soviet Bloc, though fundamental, still remain understudied. This dissertation will consider music in the particular context of transition from socialism to capitalism, with Poland - the first country that entered the regime transition and that has acquired a paradigmatic status in studies of post-communism - as the case study. Not aspiring to the writing of a history of music of post-socialist Poland, the study focuses instead on music which was and is likely to be marginalized, if not omitted, in traditional music history narrations, in spite of its popularity among Polish audiences. It will look at Polish post-socialist music through the lenses of musical phenomena that came into prominence after socialism collapsed but which are perceived as controversial, undesired, shameful, and even dangerous. They run the gamut from the perceived nadir of popular music to some works of the most renowned contemporary classical composers, including Penderecki.

Music has provided a medium through which diverse peoples have sought to reposition themselves and their communities within a rapidly changing socio-economic environment. It will be understood as a part of the cultural process whereby social formation is constructed within interrelating and mutually-dependent hierarchies of “high” and “low” and the ideas of who “we” and “they” are, i.e. the decisions made concerning identity, citizenship, social status and cultural value. By embracing both “classical” and popular music it will refer to the relationship between elite and mass musical culture. By focusing on music that is relegated to the margins of Polish culture, my study will offer some insight into the perspective of post-socialist reality alternative to the official discourse, which is typically further disseminated in writings on Poland in the West.

In the early 1990s at my neighbor's wedding reception in Olkusz (my Polish home town), my former high school teacher, who knew I was a student of musicology (at the Jagiellonian University of Kraków), berated "this terrible disco polo played by uneducated amateurs" at the party. When I noticed that the keyboard player was actually an accordion teacher at the local state music school (from which I had graduated a few years earlier), she immediately disputed my observation, saying "such people don't play such music".

In the early 2000s, at a private New Year's Eve party in Hunter, NY, young professionals, – the vast majority Polish – rushed to the parquet floor when "Szalona" [Crazy Girl] by the band Boys was played. Although earlier, when we had talked about musical preferences, all of them had dissociated themselves from disco polo, they happened all the same to know all the tunes and even the lyrics of the genre's hits, with which they sang along as the music played.

These encounters (and many similar ones), coupled with Simon Frith's observation that music only becomes "bad" music in an evaluative context in which music is in fact a marker of some more general social judgment, inspired me to look at music which is widely popular in post-socialist Poland but became perceived as "bad" by its critics and adherents alike.<sup>1</sup> How does music become "bad" and why? What does this tell us about ongoing cultural discourses and social cleavages in Polish post-socialist society? These questions will guide my study on controversial music in post-socialist Poland. The dissertation is structured around three case studies: (i) disco polo, (ii) Polish hip hop and *hiphopolo*, and (iii) *sacropolo*, with emphasis on *rubikopolo*. It will show how they challenge the conceptual and organizational framework of music-making in post-socialist Poland (which stems from the previous system and is influenced by some more deeply rooted, nineteenth-century ideas) and clash with official discourses.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Frith, "What is Bad Music?," in *Bad Music: The Music We Love To Hate*, ed. by Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno (New York: Routledge, 2004) 19.

Analyzing processes in which these phenomena are constructed as *-polo* will also contribute to a better understanding of disguised strategies for silencing alternative discourses.

I refer here to the Attali's idea that music can be regarded as silenced even if its sound surrounds us all the time, and Thiesmeyer's distinction between silence and silencing.<sup>2</sup> Silencing is thus understood as a process that leads to limiting, removing or undermining the legitimacy of some forms of musical expression. Being interested not only in the subject of secrecy but also in the reasons behind keeping some musical phenomena silent, I will analyze those musical dislikes, which acquired symbolic and substantive significance in the context of Polish post-socialist transformation.

In post-socialist Poland the suffix *-polo* became a marker of musical "badness". It stems from disco polo, the first genre that came to prominence after socialism collapsed and - as the first genre that experienced commercialization - that soon became synonymous with poor taste and a business-inspired esthetic compromise, experiencing more severe criticism, especially from the intelligentsia, than any other aspect of mass culture. Musical phenomena marked *-polo* - widely present yet provoking strong resistance from the musical mainstream - allow for the study of localized instances of community affiliation with what Bryson has termed as "symbolic exclusion".<sup>3</sup>

Bourdieu famously observed that no judgement of taste is innocent, and that treating elite taste as natural and any derivation from it as representing the "barbarism" of the masses reveals how art can become a "weapon in strategies of [social] distinction". His observation applies

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester University Press, 1985). Lynn Thiesmeyer (ed), *Discourse and Silencing: Representation of the Language of Displacement* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Bethany Bryson, "Anything but heavy metal: Symbolic exclusion and musical dislikes," *American Sociological Review*, 61 (1996): 884-900.

directly to the Polish context.<sup>4</sup> As he predicts, a comparison between cultural fields is used to map a distinction in preferences, which in turn is used to dismiss those with ‘less cultured’ taste.

Polish categories of *muzyka rozrywkowa* [music for entertainment] (which is considered to be of lower value and complexity than art music) and *muzyka poważna* [serious music] suggests a sharp distinction between the entertainment value of popular music and the intrinsically musical value of classical music, a concept familiar also in the West.<sup>5</sup>

However, as John Fisher and Richard Shusterman have demonstrated, objective, nonsocial criteria of distinguishing between “high” and “low” face serious obstacles.<sup>6</sup> As Gracyk has shown, the perceived value of music has little or nothing to do with listening but is the platform for evaluating the tastes, and social standing, of the listeners.<sup>7</sup> Music called ‘-polo’, and strong reaction to it, reveals as problematic not only “high”/ “low” categories in music but also other assumptions regarding music, Polish culture, and post-socialist reality.

Scholars most often use the terms “transition” and “transformation” in writings on the period from 1989 (or even from the 1980s more generally) to the present in the context of social, political, and economic transformation in the former Soviet Bloc.<sup>8</sup> However, applications of these

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<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 66.

<sup>5</sup> For its defense in the twenty-first century see Julian Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music? Cultural Choice and Musical Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Moreover, in the Polish context, Theodore Gracyk’s observation that by treating an acquired competence as a natural response, high culture generates a cultural standard for identifying and disparaging those who lack a socially sanctioned taste for fine art is also valid. Likewise his claim that aesthetic intolerance is particularly strong among professional educators, and that research on music education commonly posits a preference for popular music as evidence for a failure of music education, can be supported by Polish examples such as Elżbieta Szubertowska, “Education and the music culture of Polish adolescents,” *Psychology of Music* 33 No 3 (2005), 317-30. See Theodore Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music, or, How I learned to stop worrying and love Led Zeppelin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 29.

<sup>6</sup> John. A. Fisher, “High Art versus Low Art,” in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic Lopes (New York: Routledge, 2001), 409-21, Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwaell, 1992), 183-200.

<sup>7</sup> Gracyk, op. cit, 11-40, see in particular, 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> Application of these concepts in scholarly writings can be found in works such as Donna Buchanan, *Performing Democracy: Bulgarian Music and Musicians in Transition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

concepts do not answer the question “the transition from what to what?” nor “when the transformation will end?”. Moreover, such concepts suggest that countries of Central and Eastern Europe are in some permanent state of being “in-between”. Does this mean between socialism and capitalism, the past and the present, or maybe, East and West?

“*La Pologne? La Pologne?* Isn’t it terribly cold there?” she asked, and then sighed with relief. So many countries have been turning up lately that the safest thing to talk about is climate.

“Madame,” I want to reply, “my people’s poets do all their writing in mittens. I don’t mean to imply that they never remove them; they do, indeed, if the moon is warm enough. In stanzas composed of raucous whooping, for only such can drown the windstorm’s constant roar, they glorify the simple lives of our walrus herders. Our Classicists engrave their odes with inky icicles on trampled snowdrifts. The rest, our Decadents, bewail their fate with snowflakes instead of tears. He who wishes to drown himself must have an ax at hand to cut the ice.” Oh, madame, dearest madame.”

That’s what I mean to say. But I’ve forgotten the word for walrus in French. And I’m not sure of icicle and ax.

“*La Pologne? La Pologne?* Isn’t it terribly cold there?”

“*Pas du tout*” I answer icily.

“Vocabulary,” by Wisława Szymborska<sup>9</sup>

Analyzing the above text by a Polish poet in the preface to the insightful study on Eastern European culture *Over the Wall/After the Fall*, the editors noticed that because “Szymborska’s speaker must perform on the West’s terms and in a Western language, she cannot communicate as she wishes to change or inform the Western other. Before she can speak, she has been relegated – and has retired of her own will – to the icy isolation of internal exile.”<sup>10</sup> What would have

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2006), Jeffers Engelhardt, “Singing in ‘Transition’: Musical Practices and Ideologies of Renewal in the Orthodox Church of Estonia,” PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005, Jolanta Pekacz, “Did Rock Smash the Wall? The Role of Rock in Political Transition,” *Popular Music*, 13/1 (1994): 41-49, or Mark Slobin, ed., *Retuning Culture: Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik, eds., *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989* (New York: Central European University Press, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Wisława Szymborska, *Poems, New and Collected, 1957-1997*, translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh (Orlando: Harcourt, 2000), 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Over the Wall/After the Fall. Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze*, ed. Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), x.

happened if her reply, which “leaps from a single cliché to a bouquet of exaggeration,” had not had to remain an internal monologue? Could it have been understood as the author intended? Would it have formed part of a meaningful dialogue?

Discussing Polish music with a Western interlocutor creates a similar challenge. On the one hand Western concepts are often inadequate to the Polish experience, and their direct application to Polish music may not allow for studying various of its aspects which are important from the Polish perspective. On the other hand a discussion based solely on concepts derived from Polish culture may be opaque (and, as such, uninteresting) for somebody not familiar with them. In consequence, such discourse would prevent the potential Western interlocutor from engaging in a meaningful dialogue. Moreover, an opportunity to borrow and/ or adapt some methodological tools that would illuminate some aspects of Polish music that are obscured for the general observer by local approaches would be lost.

It is not always clear which of the relative terms “East” and “West” is more relevant with reference to Poland, a country that belongs on the one hand to Central and Eastern European countries and on the other hand to the European Union.<sup>11</sup> From the Ukrainian perspective (as discussed in Mark Andryczyk’s study<sup>12</sup>) both socialist and post-socialist Poland represent “the West”: the former as a satellite of the USSR that enjoyed a relatively greater amount of political and artistic freedom and maintained a less-obstructed contact with the West than its neighbor enclosed within Soviet Union’s borders; and the latter as an example of successful gradual integration into the West. According to Andryczyk, “Polish rock and jazz music was seen as

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<sup>11</sup> Tomasz Zarycki in *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2014), has analyzed how the countries of Eastern Europe, which were formerly part of the Soviet bloc, have developed a new ideology of their place in the world, that people in these countries no longer think of themselves as part of the “East”. Moreover, he demonstrates that there is a whole range of ideologies of “Eastness,” which change over time.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Andryczyk, “Four Bearings of West for the Lviv Bohema,” in *Over the Wall/After the Fall. Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze*, ed. Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 238-250.

something true and even radical”, and for Ukrainian artists acceptance in Poland was a prestigious achievement, which often had favorable consequences upon returning home.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the Anglo-German musicological discourses on Western music history rarely include discussion of Slavic music, and even if they do, it is situated within the context of nationalism, otherized and exoticized.<sup>14</sup>

In Poland, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, terms such as “classical music” (*muzyka klasyczna*), or “serious music” (*muzyka poważna*) are in use instead of “Western music,” and instead of the “history of Western music,” a notional “history of music” is discussed. Still “history of music” embraces only selected music categories and the unmarked term “music” implies “classical” or “art” music for Polish scholars, or for scholars writing on Polish music. Such studies as the two-volume *Historia Muzyki Polskiej* [History of Polish Music] from 1996 by Polish scholars Józef M. Chomiński and Krystyna Wilkowska-Chomińska, the ongoing twelve-volume e-book project *Historia Muzyki Polskiej* [History of Music in Poland] a study of music history embracing the period from the Middle Ages to 2000 and published by Sutkowski Edition Warsaw,<sup>15</sup> or *Polish Music since Szymanowski* from 2005 by the Western musicologist Adrian Thomas illustrate this tendency. In consequence, this was (and still is) the assumed field of musicological inquiry and music education.

Polish musicology since its origin has been linked to and strongly influenced by German musicology, following its range of musicological enquiry and methods. This is why, as Maja Trochimczyk has observed, it embraces serious and folk music but not popular music, and has

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 243-45.

<sup>14</sup> See for example “People without Power: Musical Nationalism in Europe, 1930-1920,” in Arnold Perris, *Music As Propaganda: Art to Persuade, Art to Control* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 24-44.

<sup>15</sup> Sponsored by the National Centre for Culture Poland (NCC, Narodowe Centrum Kultury) to be downloaded for free at <http://www.nck.pl/historia-muzyki-polskiej-2/>. (Accessed 22 September 2016).



been focused on the music which is regarded as representative of high culture in Germany.<sup>16</sup> In the middle of the twentieth century Leninist-Marxist thought dominated the discipline, and its Polish leader, Zofia Lissa, left her mark on the study of music as a social phenomenon. Nonetheless, her postulate to embrace all musical culture of Poland has never been fulfilled (in my opinion, partly because musical life in Poland was very different from the one envisioned in the cultural policy of the socialist state).

On one hand socialist musicologists were involved in preservation and popularization of the musical heritage of the nation, but on the other hand they were expected to contribute to the development of new contemporary music by analyzing newly composed works and providing composers with stylistic and ideological guidelines.<sup>17</sup> Being expected to engage in cultural analysis rather than structural analysis, Polish musicologists applied hermeneutics, phenomenology, or sociomusicology into their inquiries rather early (in comparison to their Western peers). At the same time, they initially treated some approaches prominent in “new musicology” (such as sex/gender studies) with more skepticism than enthusiasm, especially that Polish composers (such as Grażyna Bacewicz, Marta Ptaszyńska, or Elżbieta Sikora) have strongly resisted a feministic approach to their music and the label “female composers,” considering it a step backward in their professional position.<sup>18</sup>

Although recently popular music studies have seemed the most dynamically growing discipline of musical inquiry in the West, there is not yet a corresponding discipline in Poland. However, with the youngest generation of Polish scholars (all with a very strong command of the

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<sup>16</sup> As a consequence, troubadours are included in Polish musicologists’ inquiry but sung poetry is not. Likewise, baroque dance music is embraced but twentieth century dance music, including disco polo, is not. Maja Trochimczyk, “W stronę muzykologii narodowej: Uczeni wobec muzyki polskiej,” *Muzyka* 3-4 (2002): 138.

<sup>17</sup> Editorial article on the 4th Congress of the Polish Composers’ published in *Muzyka* 3 (1950) discusses expectations and goals for both musicologists and composers. These goals, however, were never fully realized.

<sup>18</sup> This position was reiterated in personal interviews with Marta Ptaszyńska (New York City, October 2006) and Elżbieta Sikora (New York City, May 2004)

English language), many of whom have participated in TEMPUS (Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies) or Erasmus (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) programs (especially in the United Kingdom), some changes in the methods and scope of study in Polish musicology can be observed.<sup>19</sup> In general, however, popular music still remains of interest primarily to other disciplines (including sociology, cultural studies, social sciences, anthropology, linguistics, literary science, etc). This is probably most evident in case of Polish hip hop, which in the twenty-first century became an institutionalized genre (especially after the success of the movie “Jesteś Bogiem” [You Are God], premiered in 2012), generating growing interest among Polish scholars, albeit not musicologists.<sup>20</sup>

Not only Polish approaches but also the conceptual framework developed by Anglo-American scholars is of limited usefulness for studying Polish popular music for my purposes. There is at present no satisfactory term for popular music outside the so-called Euro-American mainstream. Terms such as “world music,” “world popular music,” “world beat,” and “ethnopop” do not provide satisfactory labels for music of Central and Eastern Europe. Although

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<sup>19</sup> For example in works by the Cracovian musicologist, Anna G. Piotrowska: her books such as *Gypsy music in European culture: from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century*, trans. Guy R. Torr (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2013), *Romantyczna wizja postaci Cygana w twórczości muzycznej XIX i pierwszej połowy XX wieku* [*The Romantic Vision of the Gypsy in the Music of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*] (Kraków: Musica Iagiellonica, 2012, in Polish), *O muzyce i filmie. Wprowadzenie do muzykologii filmowej* [*On Music and Film. Introduction to film musicology*] (Musica Iagiellonica, 2014, in Polish), and articles such as “A Few Words about Alternativity - Based on Polish Popular Music,” *Musica Iagiellonica* (2013), 151-165.

<sup>20</sup> For example *Antologia Polskiego Rapu* [Anthology of Polish Rap] (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2014) by Andrzej Cała, Dominika Węclawek, Marcin Flint, Kamil Jaczyński, and Tomasz Kleyff was prepared by music journalists and a hip hop publisher. Another book sponsored by the National Center of Culture, *Raperzy kontra Filomaci* (Warszawa 2014), which juxtaposes Polish hip hop productions with disputes among the great Romantic Polish poets, including Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, was written by Tomasz Kukołowicz, a sociologist and social scientist, who is also the author of “Transkrypcja tekstów hip-hopowych (rapu) w świetle teorii wiersza” [Transcription of hip-hop lyrics in the light of the theory of the poem], *Teksty Drugie*, 6 (2012), 229-245, published by the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The language of Polish hip hop was studied in such works as *Hip-hop słownik* by Piotr Fliciński and Stanisław Wójtowicz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2008) or *Polska Kultura Hip-Hopowa* by Renata Pawlak (Poznań: Kagra, 2004). See also “Hip-hop: wybór bibliografii z lat 2000-2009” [Hip hop: selected bibliography 2000-2009] ed. by Anna Organek, *Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze*, 10 (2009), 59, 64.

geographically located in Europe and stylistically akin to its Western counterpart, popular Polish musical genres would under such rubrics be included not in the category “Euro-American” but “non-Western.”

The field of popular music study continues to grow and thrive in spite of a failure to agree on the meaning of *popular* in *popular music*.<sup>21</sup> Theodore Gracyk points out the fact that there are at least three distinct criteria of *popular* applied while music is included in this category: popular as mass, popular as folk, and popular as counterculture.<sup>22</sup> First, popular music can be understood as music that is widely liked (in consequence, stylistically similar music that fails to attract an audience does not belong to popular music; belonging to this category is constantly shifting since musical tastes change with time). Second, popular music can mean music situated at the “low” side where the distinction between “high” and “low” culture is made. Third, popular music can be synonymous with accessible music (music that is intended to be widely accepted, which nowadays is usually understood as music intended to be commercially profitable as a product). Finally, popular music is sometimes restricted to culture that people actually produce for themselves (so it is ‘by’ rather than ‘for’ the common person).

The above mentioned criteria for *popular* are not mutually exclusive, as the Polish case illustrates quite well. The adjective *popularny* [popular] in the Polish language means “widely known” and does not necessarily mean “widely liked.” Moreover, an assumption that popular music is synonymous with genres which have evolved in an inextricable relationship with their dissemination via the mass media and their marketing and sale on a mass-commodity basis,

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<sup>21</sup> For a recent survey of the field of popular music studies see Andy Bennett and Steve Waksman (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Popular Music* (London, SAGE Publications, 2014). Earlier overview collections include: Derek B. Scott (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus (eds.) *Popular Music Studies* (London: Arnold, 2002), Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rock and Pop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds.), *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word* (London, Routledge, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> Theodore Gracyk, op. cit., 7-8.

which dominates currently in Anglo-American scholarship, is inadequate to the Polish experience.<sup>23</sup> This dissertation will adapt Gracyk's approach to popular music as an open concept (without precise criteria for using the phrase, and its scope of applications continually expanding and contracting).<sup>24</sup>

Certain genres of popular music have evolved in close association with particular subaltern groups and can be (and often are) treated as the products of mutual and ongoing interaction with dominant groups. Charles Keil noticed that such interactions often involve a "stereotyping and reappropriating" dynamic, wherein dominant groups co-opt and stylize subaltern groups' music, often in ways that trivialize and exoticize it. Moreover, such appropriations by élites may involve complex mixtures of homage and parody and of patronage and exploitation.<sup>25</sup> Some have argued that élite appropriations may serve as strategies by which dominant groups reformulate hegemony and preserve core values by regulating and incorporating elements of subaltern expressive culture.<sup>26</sup>

This dissertation looks at dynamics of socio-musical interaction from a perspective of music which experienced difficulty with its institutionalization and inclusion as a legitimate component of mainstream culture. The convoluted institutionalization of Polish hip hop provides a glimpse into processes involved in the mainstreaming of a musical genre and the struggle of performers (and fans) to transcend resulting deformations and negotiate their vision of their genre. Other music discussed in this study, on the other hand, provides examples of interactions

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<sup>23</sup> First, under socialism remuneration of artists, including those associated with lighter genres, or *muzyka rozrywkowa* [music for entertainment], was not directly linked with sales (of concert tickets or recordings). Second, there were genres that were noncommercial by their nature (meant to be sung and not to be sold), such as *poezja śpiewana* [sung poetry], which circulated widely (they were sung not only at concerts but also at unofficial gatherings and were part of the "cassette culture").

<sup>24</sup> Gracyk, op. cit., 8.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Keil, "People's Music Comparatively: Style and Stereotype, Class and Hegemony," *Dialectical Anthropology* 10 (1985): 119–30.

<sup>26</sup> See Peter Manuel, "Popular music," in Grove Music Online.

with the dominant group which have hindered its institutionalization. Of particular significance here are the genres which were rejected by the mainstream music industry in spite of their guaranteed profits.

Until recently, scholarly reflections on music have rarely addressed the implications of capitalism on cultural production, and since highly influential work by Theodor Adorno in the middle of the twentieth century there has been little advancement in this area of study. As Timothy D. Taylor has noticed, there have been virtually no comprehensive studies that understand today's capitalism as a social form that profoundly shapes not only production, distribution, and consumption but also the cultures that music and listeners inhabit.<sup>27</sup> However, his study of music and capitalism is still written from a Western perspective, while capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe has had a different history and dynamics, as well as local specificity in each of the countries of the former Soviet bloc.

Taylor's book belongs to the growing number of writings on "music history of the present," and in the context of studying Polish music, Andrea Bohlman's work on activism and music in Poland in 1978-1989 provides a successful application of this approach.<sup>28</sup> Such studies involve not only methods from various disciplines (including historiography and anthropology) but also eyewitness accounts. My work is also affiliated with this approach. This dissertation is based on the research conducted in 2004-2014 in Poland and in the Polish diaspora in New Jersey and New York City, and on my autobiographic experience as a Pole who spent her childhood in the Peoples Republic of Poland (PRL), started college education in a socialist country but graduated (from the Jagiellonian University of Kraków in 1993) in a capitalist one, and left for the USA in 1998.

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<sup>27</sup> Timothy D. Taylor, *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). 1. For a list of authors addressing today's capitalism see *ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> Andrea Bohlman, "Activism and Music in Poland, 1978-1989," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2012.

In my study I employ methods used in ethnomusicology and musicology. Fieldwork (in Poland and in the Polish diaspora in New Jersey) and autobiographical experience is combined with analyzing Polish music criticism, internet discussions, and the assessment of these phenomena in the media. Sorting out the wide range of facts, feelings, ideas, and opinions I use data from books and professional journals published in Poland or by Polish authors; Polish language newspapers; internet sources in Polish; personal interviews with numerous musicians and audiences conducted in Polish; my personal experience as a participant in observations of public musical events and private social gatherings that involve music; and my analysis of audio and video materials (cassette tapes, CDs, VCDs, DVDs, mp3, online music videos, etc.).

The social implications of being affiliated with music perceived as “bad,” incline people to dissociate with it and conceal their actual musical preferences in a survey or a formal interview situation. This posed a particular challenge to my study and compelled me to rely on observations and informal interviews rather than on heavily self-censored declarations in formal interviews.

The time of this study was marked by Poland becoming a full member of the European Union, on 1 May 2004, and the Schengen Area, in 2007 (as a result of which the country's borders with other member states of the European Union have been dismantled); the death of the first Polish pope, John Paul II (on 2 April 2005), his beatification (on 1 May 2011) and canonization (on 27 April 2014); the plane crash (on 10 April 2010) near Smoleńsk (in Russia) which killed President Lech Kaczyński along with 89 other high-ranking Polish officials on their way to attend a service commemorating the victims of the Katyń massacre (of Polish officers in 1940 by NKVD); the UEFA Euro 2012 (organized along with Ukraine); and the World Youth Day (with the visit of Pope Francis to Kraków in August 2016). In the realm of music it was marked by the deaths of Henryk Mikołaj Górecki (12 November 2010) and Wojciech Kilar (on 29 December 2013).

## Overview

The post-socialist present cannot be fully understood without reference to the socialist past. The cultural policy of the socialist state, which had profound implications for the functioning of music in post-socialist Poland, will be thus be addressed first. The Introduction is thus followed by a second chapter ('Cultural Policies of Socialist Poland: Music Making under the Socialist Regime in Theory and in Practice'), which focuses on those aspects of cultural policy in socialist Poland which were key factors in the spontaneous development of disco polo, its underground character, and its "sudden eruption" when the regime changed. It provides an overview of cultural policy of the socialist state, which is followed by discussion of such matters as the separation of culture from market laws, the exclusion of sheer entertainment from the functions of culture envisioned by policy makers, and assumptions regarding folk culture and popular art. The chapter concludes by discussing the significant difference between the formal premises of cultural policy and the actual functioning of culture and music making in socialist Poland, including the formation and growth of the cultural spaces which were beyond the ideological control of the state.

While the second chapter discussed the incommensurability of disco polo with the cultural policy of the socialist state, the third chapter ('Disco Polo: the Culture of the People Comes to the Marketplace') draws attention to those aspects of the genre which are at odds with official discourses in post-socialist Poland and contribute to the genre's rejection by the mainstream culture. An outline of the spontaneous development of disco polo tracks how a herald of the new system became its *enfant terrible*. Discussion of the intellectuals' reaction to the genre is followed by examination of the ideas of national identity, tradition, and heritage as they are reflected and (re)defined in disco polo. Special attention is given to the genre's affiliation with Sarmatian tradition and its ambiguous attitude to the West. Finally, I consider the relationship of disco polo to Western popular and folk music.

Against the background of socio-economic changes, the fourth chapter ('Where Did Polish Hip Hop Go? Polish Hip Hop: a Voice of the "Solidarity" Generation or *Hip-hopolo*?') will present Polish hip-hop's convoluted path from *blokowisko* to mainstream as well as shifts in discourses within and about the genre, including the notion of *hip-hopolo*, and their role in negotiating the genre's boundaries. The reflection on reasons for delayed interest in this cultural form, which provided a means of expression for those marginalized, disenfranchised and excluded in the post-socialist transformation, is followed by a discussion of elements of Polish hip hop and its location. This is followed by a consideration of how this "voice of new others," once articulated and heard, was listened to by mainstream Poland. After analyzing hip hop discourse and its participants, the chapter shows hip hop as a patriotic genre and reflects on its vision of Poland and Polishness.

The fifth chapter ('*Sacropolo*: The Sacred in the Marketplace') is dedicated to applications of religious topics in Polish post-socialist music that are perceived as problematic and to the cultural and musical reasons for rejecting the works and styles labelled with the derogatory term *sacropolo* (also spelled *sacro polo*), a denigrating label which embraces productions by a parish youth ensemble, songs by veteran pop signers undertaking religious topics, Rubik's oratorios and cantatas, and Penderecki's *Piano Concerto*. After an overview of the development of music with religious overtones in Poland under the rubric of "classical"/"serious" music, the chapter focuses on Piotr Rubik, who is often cited as an exemplary composer of *sacropolo* and middle-brow productions. Finally, the chapter will examine the concept of sacred music in theory and related musical practices, including use of popular styles in religious music, giving special attention to the issue of kitsch as well as to the ways judgements are pronounced on kitsch and *sacropolo*.

The final chapter ('Conclusion: Silencing *Polo*') reflects on the phenomena discussed in preceding chapters in the context of the struggle over access to and control over public discourse. It discusses how the organizational framework of music making in Poland after the fall of the



socialist state forces disco polo, Polish hip-hop and Christian music to search for alternative models of operation. It also considers these musical phenomena in terms of confrontation with the perceived mission and purpose of Polish culture, divisions and hierarchies in music, and concepts regarding music making and paradigms of its study. Analysis of patterns and schemata of silencing, which emphasize the latter's double and disguised nature, is followed by reflection on music constructed as *-polo* in confrontation with the dominant discourse in contemporary Poland.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CULTURAL POLICIES OF SOCIALIST POLAND: MUSIC MAKING

#### UNDER THE SOCIALIST REGIME IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE

*"A musical picture can be dark or light but it should never be dirty."*<sup>29</sup>

Zygmunt Mycielski

In the Polish gangster comedy *Kilerów 2-ów* [Two Killers] of 1999 by Juliusz Machulski, a Polish mafioso praised for a trick, involving moving a car without using keys, says it was nothing, especially in comparison to putting a chief police officer's son into a music school.<sup>30</sup> Perception of the realm of music as something most difficult to corrupt and based on objective criteria, with national composers (such as Chopin or Penderecki) as well as Polish winners of The International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw (such as Krystian Zimerman and Rafał Blechacz) being household names, is a legacy of the cultural politics of socialist Poland.<sup>31</sup> Just as the post-socialist present cannot be fully understood without reference to the socialist past, so the functioning of music in post-socialist Poland cannot be addressed without first considering the cultural policy of the socialist state.

Cultural policy is understood as the sum of governmental strategies and activities which are intended to satisfy spiritual, aesthetic and leisure needs, or enhance the identity of the citizens of a given territorial unit, and which are implemented in the fields of the arts, heritage, humanities and cultural industries in order to support the creation, production, dissemination and distribution

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<sup>29</sup> *"Obraz muzyczny może być ciemny lub jasny, ale nie powinni być nigdy brudny."* Zygmunt Mycielski, "O kierowaniu inwencją albo: ars longa, vita brevis," *Muzyka* 1, no.1 (1950), 31. All translations from Polish sources are mine unless noted otherwise.

<sup>30</sup> Admission to state music schools in Poland is based on auditions called "entrance exams," which test musical aptitude (Pl. *słuch muzyczny*).

<sup>31</sup> Unmarked music (taught in music schools) usually means "classical" or "serious music."

as well as consumption of goods and services in those fields.<sup>32</sup> Cultural policy of the socialist state involved a set of ideological principles and values that the state sought to promote as well as a system that served “to translate these principles into the language of everyday institutional activity and into the training of cultural organizers.”<sup>33</sup>

The chapter will focus on those aspects of cultural policy in socialist Poland, which were key factors in the spontaneous development of disco polo, its underground character, and its "sudden eruption" when the regime changed. While illustrating the incommensurability of disco polo with the cultural policy of the socialist state, they will also illuminate some aspects of other musical phenomena, which are on the one hand widely present but are perceived as controversial in post-socialist Poland. An overview of cultural policy of the socialist state will be followed by discussion of such matters as the separation of culture from market laws, the exclusion of sheer entertainment from the functions of culture envisioned by policy makers, and assumptions regarding folk culture and popular art. The chapter will conclude by discussing the significant difference between the formal premises of cultural policy and the actual functioning of culture and music making in socialist Poland, including the formation and growth of the cultural spaces which were beyond the ideological control of the state.

### **An overview of the cultural policies of a socialist state**

According to the survey prepared for UNESCO in 1973, the goal of cultural policy in Poland was “to create a system of public and social institutions that would give an impulse to the process of forming a new socialist artistic culture - one that was democratic, secular and open.”<sup>34</sup> “The spread of culture” was considered “a major factor in the advancement of the working class

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<sup>32</sup> Monika Murzyn-Kupisz, "Cultural policy at the Regional Level: a Decade of Experiences of New Regions in Poland," *Cultural Trends* 19, no.1-2 (March-June 2010), 65.

<sup>33</sup> Witold Balicki, Jerzy Kossak and Mirosław Żuławski, *Cultural Policy in Poland* (Paris: Unesco, 1973), 15.

<sup>34</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 29.

and peasantry.”<sup>35</sup> Based “on the system of Marxist-Leninist values and on the experience of the Polish revolutionary movement,” it was governed by principles which were summarized as follows<sup>36</sup>:

There is an indissoluble link between politics, economics and culture; development in these three areas of social life must be subject to the single control of the Party, which is the vanguard of the working-class movement. Only unified control can secure the harmonious development of technology, civilization and culture in a society progressing towards advanced socialism and communism.

Education is a major factor in ensuring that culture is truly democratic; a cultural idiom must be evolved that is common to the whole population and everyone must be given the opportunity to play an effective part in national and world culture and in the continuing cultural development of society as a whole. (...)

The new socialist culture is not a by-product of the revolution, but one of the essential goals in the building of socialism. It is an expression of the spiritual liberation of the working class and of its true social, intellectual and artistic advancement.

In creating a new culture the working class and its vanguard do not reject the national cultural heritage nor the world heritage, but approach them in a new way, submitting intellectual and artistic traditions to a critical analysis and interpreting them from an ideological viewpoint. In new works of art not tied to the communist ideology they also look for humanist values and reject only ideas that are inimical to revolution and social justice.

State institutions and social organizations do not confine themselves to the task of elaborating a prices policy for cultural goods and services; they also seek to rouse interest in intellectual pursuits and culture.<sup>37</sup>

In Poland, as in all other socialist countries, cultural matters were taken very seriously and subordinated to socialist ideology. The establishment considered music a powerful tool in its social management schemes and in shaping a “new socialist person.” Cultural officials in newly formed socialist states after the Second World War believed that music had an exceptional power to transform individuals’ worldviews and sought to utilize its distinctive properties to help reconstruct society in line with the party’s goals.<sup>38</sup> In consequence, the framework organized for

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> David Gerard Tompkins, *Composing the Party Line: Music and Politics in Poland and East Germany, 1948-1957* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2004), 325.

music-making in the USSR was moved in the late 1940s to the “satellite countries” of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.<sup>39</sup>

After several years of establishing political control in the aftermath of the Second World War, the communist parties around 1948 sought to influence artistic production as part of a project of saturating the public space with ideas and symbols in an attempt to create and control the new socialist person.<sup>40</sup> In their attempt to dominate the symbolic terrain, parties in all former socialist states devoted considerable monetary and political capital to artistic production. In the realm of music, everywhere in Central and Eastern Europe a rule-setting bureaucracy “ruled the concert halls, airwaves, and record players of the socialist state, fostering and prohibiting musics, offering the carrot of patronage and brandishing the stick of censorship, even erasure of individual voices and whole cultural traditions”.<sup>41</sup>

Although in all countries of the Soviet Bloc the general model and framework of musical life were comparable and to a great extent based on the Soviet model, each society navigated its own way and underwent a different trajectory of development. In spite of the fact that the templates for many aspects of musical life (such as the socialist realism, the party and state cultural apparatus, the organization of festivals and concert life) were derived from those of the USSR, the outward, seemingly uniform appearance of these Soviet structures in different countries should not deceive. In fact, just as there was no single type of socialism in the former “socialist democracies” of Eastern Europe, neither was there a single musical tradition of Eastern Europe nor a single socialist musical culture in countries highly diversified in terms of ethnic composition, local traditions and music history.

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<sup>39</sup> Mark Slobin, “Introduction,” in *Retuning Culture: Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark Slobin (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>40</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 2.

<sup>41</sup> Slobin, op. cit., 3.

In Poland, as in other countries of the former Soviet Bloc, a Ministry of Culture was established to enlist the arts in the party's quest for building a socialist society. This body was responsible for supporting and supervising musical composition, performance, study and dissemination for the entire country. It oversaw not only musical institutions but also amateur groups, considering the amateur movement an important aspect of popularizing musical culture.<sup>42</sup> In the effort more effectively to control cultural life, it undertook several reorganizations. In the years of its greatest power (1948-1953), it expanded, seeking "to control every aspect of the musical world, from the composer's studio, through the opera house and concert hall, to the rural house of culture."<sup>43</sup> However, by 1956 its ideological hard-line and pushing for a cultural policy that supported the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and "fought the remains of ideologically bourgeois culture" was significantly modified and, in accordance with the Party Central Committee's recommendation, the Ministry significantly reduced its aims and area of activity. In 1957 and 1958 it reduced the number of departments and the number of officials and administered the musical world in a largely depoliticized manner thereafter.<sup>44</sup>

Not only had an extensive musical infrastructure to demonstrate that the communist parties were serious and enthusiastic wards of tradition and were committed to making that cultural patrimony available to every worker and peasant, but also the lavish support for creating contemporary new music had to attest to the progressive character of the socialist regime and its superiority over the competing regime of capitalism. In the late 1940s nearly all the ensembles were nationalized and put directly under the control of the Ministry of Culture.<sup>45</sup> The party

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<sup>42</sup> Tompkins, *op. cit.*, 105

<sup>43</sup> Tompkins, *op. cit.*, 109. House of culture - Pl. *dom kultury* (means both, a cultural organization and its building) is a state-sponsored cultural center which promotes culture and arts on a specific territory, such as a village, a town, or a district by organizing workshops, performances, exhibitions, and other professional events and amateur activities for both children and adults.

<sup>44</sup> Tompkins, *op. cit.*, 105-110.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

directed a massive expansion in the number of musical ensembles and lavished subsidies on a breathtaking number of orchestras of varying size.<sup>46</sup> At the same time their concert programs came under close review to ensure their political correctness.<sup>47</sup> The kinds of works desired by the party were primarily vocal works like cantatas and mass songs with ideological content linked to current issues (such as the struggle for peace, the Six-Year Plan<sup>48</sup>, friendship between the People's Democracies and the Soviet Union, or Nowa Huta, which was a showpiece industrial town).<sup>49</sup> In practice, however, as Tompkins observed, cultural officials acted with a relatively moderate hand when it came to the repertoire, as they called for lighter music more accessible to workers, a link between concert programs and political commemorations, and increased attention to contemporary music.<sup>50</sup>

According to the *Cultural Policy in Poland*, "The Union of Polish Composers (...) favourably responded to the proposal made in 1954-55 by the Ministry of Culture and Art to accept almost sole responsibility for the programming of the country's musical life and to act in a permanent advisory capacity to the authorities."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, compositional creativity was concentrated in the ZKP (Związek Kompozytorów Polskich - Union of Polish Composers), which, generously subsidized by the government, played a key role in commissioning works, sponsoring contests, organizing concerts both at home and abroad, publishing works, and

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<sup>46</sup> While in interwar Poland, there had been but a handful of orchestras, and only one or two significant opera companies, by 1956 nine large philharmonic orchestras and nine smaller symphony orchestras had been created, and five opera companies and two operetta ensembles were operating (After Tompkins, op. cit., 313). Such a rapid expansion, however, caused severe problems due to an inadequate number of trained musicians. It resulted in "poaching of both conductors and performers between leading orchestras, and lack of discipline and sub-par concerts among the smaller orchestras" (Tompkins, op. cit., 313).

<sup>47</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 313.

<sup>48</sup> The Six-Year Plan (1950-1955) was the second - after the Three-Year Plan (1947-1949) - centralized plan of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL).

<sup>49</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 18,

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 313-314.

<sup>51</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 41.

assisting in the education of younger composers (through its Koło Młodych –Youth Circle).<sup>52</sup> Membership in the Union was absolutely crucial to composers, offering not only access to practical resources and financial benefits but also prestige and status. As Tompkins observed, all the leading figures were members, and aspiring composers desired to join.<sup>53</sup> The inaugural Congress of the ZKP in 1945 established a six-person Qualifying Commission (*Komisja Kwalifikacyjna*) in charge of admitting new members to the Union.<sup>54</sup> Controlling the membership of the Union was a matter of paramount importance and a point of contention between different groups.<sup>55</sup> The leading composers managed finally to push through their vision of a smaller, more exclusive Union, comprised of technically qualified members, which did not take into account political considerations such as composing party-approved light music.<sup>56</sup> It allowed them to limit the party's influence, marginalize musicologists, and, in re-qualification process which started in 1952, get rid of lighter genres' composers as well as party-oriented colleagues.<sup>57</sup>

Although there were no musicologists in the pre-war Association of Polish Composers (Stowarzyszenie Kompozytorów Polskich), the predecessor of the ZKP, the Union admitted them following the model of the Composers' Union in the USSR, which included both musicologists and composers.<sup>58</sup> The role of musicologists in the Union, however, was ambiguous. They saw themselves “in the quasi-messianic role of bringing the new vision of socialist-realist music to

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<sup>52</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 124-125, 149.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 120. “ZKP membership grew steadily from 50 members in 1945 to 131 in 1957, but a much greater number desired to partake of the benefits and prestige of Union membership.” *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>54</sup> Zofia Lissa and Józef Chomiński, eds., *Kultura Muzyczna Polski Ludowej, 1944-1955* (Kraków: PWM, 1957), 53.

<sup>55</sup> Tompkins (op. cit., 120) talks about four fluctuating interest groups: cultural officials who sought compliance and support, party composers and musicologists, the broad mass of composers who were willing to work for the party's aims but who also desired a fair amount of autonomy, and a minority of composers who actively worked against the parties.

<sup>56</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 154.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-152.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.



their composer colleagues.”<sup>59</sup> The creed from the unsigned *Editorial* to the first volume of *Muzyka*, a Polish musical monthly founded in 1950, said:

We do not want our composers wading deeper and deeper into the wasteland of barren formalism, foreign to the nations. We do not want our musical output to be more and more distant from the people, more and more destined for little shrines of “connoisseurs” with degenerated taste. We wish it were more accessible for everybody, and, through this accessibility, great. We want it to be based on our great national musical traditions and our folklore, and not on cosmopolitan zest.

Only such music will be taken by the nation – a new mass listener and co-creator. Every year of the Six-Year Plan gives us new masses of intelligentsia of working-class origin, giving us a new, unmannered listener.

A fight for this audience’s level is the fight for our great socialist culture. Growing power of amateur ensembles, singing associations, club-rooms, and community music centers (ognisko muzyczne) – here is our best listener – a listener-co-creator, a listener [who is] conscious, sensitive, and demanding. Such a listener is worth composing and writing for. And if we can contribute to breaking up the distance which, in spite of all the attempts, still exists between the listener and the composer, if we can help them with mutual understanding – our goal will be largely achieved.<sup>60</sup>

David Gerard Tompkins, in his inquiry into the relationship between music and politics in the GDR and Poland, observed that “[m]ost composers were willing to engage with this new ideology in the early years, and looked to the musicologists for guidance, but soon grew increasingly frustrated by their dogmatism, and pushed for a reduction in their influence so as to have more space for compositional freedom.”<sup>61</sup> He demonstrated that initially nearly all composers, including the giants of twentieth-century music, such as Witold Lutosławski and Andrzej Panufnik, willingly cooperated in creating a new, socialist-realist music for the emerging Stalinist reality, and found significant common ground with a party that desired to educate the population about both past and present music, and – along the way - granted them a highly

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>60</sup> “Editorial,” *Muzyka* 1, nr 1 (April 1950), 3-4.

<sup>61</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 170-171. GDR – German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik, or DDR).

privileged financial position.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, they approached the new aesthetic ideas of socialist realism with interest, and responded in an astonishingly productive manner, creating countless mass songs, cantatas and orchestral works, many of which aspired to high artistic standards. Their frustration only came when the party pushed to narrow the boundaries of the acceptable, and a growing resistance to these strictures resulted in a gradual relaxation of pressure around 1953.<sup>63</sup> Only when the Stalinist period became perceived as negative did composers attempt to bury their socialist-realist compositions, and generally disavow any association with the political developments of the time.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Tompkins, 45-46, 330-331. For the measure of the state's financial support for Polish composers see Tompkins, 226-227 and Chapter 3. The Ministry of Culture had made funds available for various occasions (such as mass song contests related to important political or cultural events, including the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pushkin's birthday (Pushkin's friendship with the greatest Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz had to symbolize the friendship between the Polish and Soviet nations). One of the most generously-funded events was the Festival of Polish Music in 1951. Besides lump sums for agreed-upon works (funded by the Union's Commissions Committee), the subsidy system involved several-month stipends and vacation time for the production of Festival commissions. The stipends were in generous monthly amounts of 20,000, 30,000, or 40,000 PLN (totaling the massive sum of 6,897,967 PLN), granted for periods of two months to a year to 48 composers (including almost every major composer), with no composer being turned down or having been asked to propose something different. For comparison, the average monthly wage in August 1949 for a manual worker in state industry was just over 16,000 PLN, and for engineers and other technicians about 27,000 PLN. (Although a currency reform took place in October 1950, in the middle of the commissioning process, the amounts here are given in "old zloty"). "While this may not seem so much less than the stipends, it must be remembered that many composers were also receiving commissions from the Union and mass organizations, and also received royalty and performance fees from ZAIKS, the Polish Performing Rights Society. And all but the very top composers worked as well, as teachers, directors of musical institutions, or soloists, and thus had steady income." Quoted after Tompkins, op. cit., 227. For another examination of the Festival commissioning process, see Adrian Thomas, "File 750: Composers, Politics and the Festival of Polish Music (1951)," *Polish Music Journal* 5, no. 1 (Summer 2002), [http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish\\_music/PMJ/issue/5.1.02/thomasfile.html](http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish_music/PMJ/issue/5.1.02/thomasfile.html).

<sup>63</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 326-327.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 330. While comparing Poland with the GDR, Tompkins noticed that the ruling party in East Germany, the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands - Socialist Unity Party), enjoyed a higher level of cooperation than its Polish counterpart, the PZPR (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza - Polish United Workers' Party), in both the musical world and society more generally. Not only did East German composers hold party cards at twice the level of their Polish counterparts but also many of the influential, major composers and musicologists in the GDR were communists or strong sympathizers, while most of the leading composers in Poland held the party and its goals at a greater distance and by 1956 achieved nearly complete autonomy. By contrast, their colleagues in the GDR continued to work within the - henceforth expanded - tenets of socialist realism. Moreover, Polish composers - integrated into a Composers' Union already in the interwar period - formed a sense of autonomy that East German composers, who had been in exile or made compromises with the Nazis, had not.

In Poland, after 1957 socialist realism was scarcely mentioned again, the party and state cultural institutions rarely interfered in the musical world, composers created as they wished, and concert programs often featured music formerly discouraged. The International Festival of Contemporary Music also known as *Warsaw Autumn* (*Warszawska Jesień*, founded in 1956 and named after the *Prague Spring*) became the symbol of this freedom and a meeting platform for Western and Eastern European music.<sup>65</sup> From the mid-1950s, Poles gained access to Western culture, both high and low, including works by formerly condemned composers, jazz, and Western popular music genres.<sup>66</sup>

Socialist musicologists on the other hand were expected to contribute to the development of contemporary music by analyzing newly-composed works and providing composers with stylistic and ideological guidelines.<sup>67</sup> They were expected to engage in cultural analysis rather than structural analysis. In the middle of the century Leninist/ Marxist thought dominated the discipline, and its Polish leader, Zofia Lissa, left her mark on the study of music as a social phenomenon. In late stages of the socialist regime, however, hermeneutics and phenomenology were more popular approaches. On the other hand, musicologists were involved in shaping,

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The Union leadership in Poland was not strongly supportive of the PZPR's goals (save for a brief period in 1950-51), while in the GDR the Union was created only in 1951 and under close supervision of party officials, and its leadership was dominated by devoted party members (such as Nathan Notowicz). In addition to this, many leading East German figures in the musical world were Moscow-oriented and had engaged in the Soviet aesthetic debates, or spent time in the capital of the USSR already in the 1920s and 1930s while, in contrast, Poles traveled to Paris to study the music of the neo-classical school. After 1957 the differences between the two countries only increased. While in Poland musical world became fairly autonomous, in East Germany the increased freedoms of the thaw were somewhat restricted once again in 1957, and the SED maintained considerable influence until 1989. See Tompkins, op. cit., 327-330.

<sup>65</sup> See especially Tadeusz Kaczyński and Andrzej Zborski, *Warszawska Jesień. Warsaw Autumn* (Kraków: PWM Edition, 1983). For development of the festival in later years see Lisa Jakelski, *The Changing Seasons of the Warsaw Autumn: Contemporary Music in Poland, 1960-1990* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2009).

<sup>66</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 327.

<sup>67</sup> The editorial article on the Fourth Congress of Polish Composers, published in *Muzyka* 3-4 (April 1950): 1-4, discusses expectations and goals for both musicologists and composers. These goals, however, were never fully realized.

preservation and popularization of the musical heritage of the nation by preparing scholarly editions of Polish early music and complete editions of the works of the national composers (such editions were initiated for the works by Fryderyk Chopin, Stanisław Moniuszko, Karol Szymanowski, and Mieczysław Karłowicz, although to date none has been completed), wrote music histories and composer bibliographies, and served as experts on music in the media, actively participating in the educational mission of the Party.

The system for the identification and fostering of talents in the realm of classical music paralleled directly the system functioning for Olympic athletes.<sup>68</sup> Besides music classes in ordinary schools, special education music schools operated as filters for talent. They functioned (and still function) through a three-tier system of music schools parallel to that of general education (*szkoła muzyczna I stopnia* [primary music school] at elementary or middle school level, *szkoła muzyczna II stopnia* [secondary music school] at high school level, and *akademia muzyczna* [Academy of Music] providing undergraduate and graduate studies at university level).

*Muzyka ludowa* (the Polish term literally means “music of the ‘Folk’” and can be translated as folk or traditional music) received a status of “national music” and underwent the special care of the socialist state. It became in the center of interests of composers, ethnomusicologists, and cultural officials. Folk was believed to be the natural idiom of choice for ordinary people, especially for peasants, and the music that captures the soul of the nation. National programs were developed to collect, preserve, and maintain the traditional music in what was believed to be its purest form. There was a state-sponsored initiative to “clean up” folklore and rework it to make it “art”. Folk song and dance ensembles operated at different levels of support, proficiency and national visibility, becoming a significant ideological marker of the elevation of the *ludowe* (“folk” or “peasant”) to the realm of *narodowe* (“national” or “of the nation”).

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<sup>68</sup> Slobin, op. cit., 3.

## Culture not subject to market laws or audience taste

In accordance with undertakings that stem from the July Manifesto issued on 22 July 1944 by the Committee of National Liberation and in accordance with guarantees laid down in The Polish Constitution, **the country's entire cultural life is sponsored by the State and social organizations**. As is required by law, it is the Minister of Culture and Art who, through his ministry and the Central Co-ordinating Commission, controls and co-ordinates the activities of the central bodies directly responsible for cultural development (the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Defence, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Committee for Radio Broadcasting and Television, Central Committee for Physical Culture and Tourism, etc.) and other institutions such as trade unions, associations of creative artists, youth and other mass organizations, co-operatives, etc.

Creative artists and cultural consumers equally benefit from such assistance; its purpose is to maintain the balance between the interests of the individual and those of the community, priority being given to the interests of society.<sup>69</sup>

The "socialist assistance to art" assumed "various forms according to the new conditions that govern a planned economy" and took "into account the specific character of artistic and literary creation and the psychology of the artist."<sup>70</sup> The socialist state took responsibility for all issues related to artistic creativity, including the number of artists, social security and incomes earned by artists, the status of the artist, supplies used for artistic creativity, execution of creative projects, performance, publishing and distribution, artistic education and the cultural education of society. In its pursuit of favorable conditions for the development of artistic creation the state provided stimuli such as awards, grants and scholarships for outstanding and promising artists, and state and institutional commissioning:

The State and public organizations also assist creative workers by organizing competitions and awarding prizes, the most important of which is the State prize offered by the Committee on State Prizes. The Artistic Prize of the Minister of Culture and Art is awarded to works whose merit is recognized by the public at large and to certain avant-garde writings. The Minister of Defence, the Central Council of Trade Unions Council, the Provincial and Urban Peoples' Councils also award prizes for works of art.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Balicki et al., 47, emphasis RPM.

<sup>70</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 47.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

A provision of the 1952 Constitution declared that the Polish State “shall foster artistic and cultural activity and shape economic conditions favorable to artists.”<sup>72</sup> The copyright related issues were regulated under the Copyright Act of July 10, 1952, which replaced the Copyright Act of 1926.<sup>73</sup> “Under the Copyright Law of 1952, all creative work is paid for, whatever its nature and whatever its scale. The amount depends on the value of the work, the effort that has been put into it and its social worth. In the case of works that go through several editions, a diminishing rate is applied on the grounds that no new creative effort is involved.”<sup>74</sup> The state-imposed standard forms of agreements and remuneration schedules were generally favorable to authors.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, in accordance with the cultural policy quoted above, the remuneration for works of art did not in any way depend on the actual profits earned by disseminated work and was based instead on factors such as the value of the work, its usefulness to society and the effort needed to produce it.<sup>76</sup> These highly imprecise criteria were of a very different nature from those operating in the capitalist world. The value of the work - the most important one, and the one most difficult to measure - was usually determined by a process of peer review.

Distribution of financial means and material goods involved in cultural projects had a top-down character:

The funds required for cultural activities are provided by central and local authorities and by enterprises, co-operatives, institutions and organizations that are required to contribute by their statutes. Their contribution to cultural activities is planned on the basis of an analysis of current and future conditions and needs in the light of economic programmes, population forecasts, etc. These plans are drawn up at every level, beginning at the centre, this plan serving as a model for the others.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Jan Bleszyński, “Intellectual Property,” in *Introduction to Polish Law*, ed. Stanisław Frankowski (Hague: Kluwer Law International: 2005), 304.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>74</sup> Balicki et al, op. cit., 49.

<sup>75</sup> Bleszyński, op. cit., 304.

<sup>76</sup> See also Bleszyński, op. cit., 304, emphasis RPM.

<sup>77</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 34.

The cultural policy in Poland proudly emphasized “the fact that the market for culture has lost its commercial character.”<sup>78</sup> Freelance business and professional activity was practically non-existent, being replaced by activities based on a regular employment basis.<sup>79</sup> With reference to the performers and actors

as creative artists-which they claim to be-it can be said that the protection they enjoy is particularly well organized since they are employed by State enterprises which give them all the rights and privileges of salaried workers (social security, overtime, bonuses, scholarships, etc.). The cost of paying them is entirely borne by the State, which is sometimes even unduly indulgent in their respect.<sup>80</sup>

Although only the leading composers lived largely from their compositional efforts, most composers had steady jobs at conservatories and universities, or as directors and conductors of musical ensembles.<sup>81</sup> While the money for commissions and royalties, as well as pedagogical or conducting work, were available to all members of the ZKP, comprising most of their income, for a few top composers, such as Panufnik, other kinds of support, such as housing, money for travel, or a creative resort for composing, were also available.<sup>82</sup> Although the Ministry of Culture dismissed the notion that composers would live from state pensions (the idea brought by the composers in the 1950s), it agreed on a regulated “price-list” (*cennik*) for the different forms of composition.<sup>83</sup> The commissioning process had become standardized and considerably depoliticized (judged by artistic and not political criteria) by the mid-1950s. Composers sent in proposals to a Commissions Committee (controlled by their fellows), which accepted most of

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<sup>78</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 27.

<sup>79</sup> Bleszyński, op. cit., 304.

<sup>80</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 47-48.

<sup>81</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 171.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, note 257.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

them, though it could refuse to disburse the final 50% of the payment in the event of a work's perceived technical weakness.<sup>84</sup>

The Polish composer Marta Ptaszyńska (b. 1943), when asked about her first impressions when she came to capitalist America from socialist Poland in 1972 said:

Actually everything was a shock. I saw the composers restricted by some unthinkable impossibility. For me, who came from Poland, everything was possible. Writing for orchestra was possible. Constantly we have been getting commissions from the Ministry of Culture or from orchestras from Warsaw, Cracow or other cities. All you needed to do was to bring a finished score and PWM-Edition immediately prepared orchestral parts. And here [in the U.S.] a young person boasting of his composition being performed by an orchestra has not happened. Any orchestra, not to mention any major ones.

Another issue: music must be successful [with the public]. This incredible commercialism seemed disgusting. I have got used to the fact that whatever music I write, the music is played. However, here I am told a piece is not suitable for the audience because it is too avant-garde. As a result, composers [find themselves balancing] between what they want to write and [the fact] that it must be [acceptable] for the audience. And even if the audience has no idea about music, [a composer] must write in the way it will like it. What a horror! It seemed to me that the system in general had nothing to do with art: young people were faced with some terrible problems, not having grants to have their scores copied, and besides, nobody wanted to play their pieces and nobody wanted to listen to them...

With time, of course, I began to see some possibilities. There are various concerts where the élite can express itself. But reaching a wider audience is out of the question. In 1971 in Poland if you took a bus, a driver had been listening to an opera by Verdi; because there was no other program [available]. [laughs] It was an automatic musical education. However, here there was a choice. Moreover, we had an easy start. Here it is much more difficult for composers. The road to the top is much longer and very few can make it.<sup>85</sup>

The contrast between the socialist and capitalist systems, as reflected in the above impressions of a twenty-nine-year-old renowned socialist composer visiting America, could not be more striking, especially in terms of the social status of creative artists, regarded as “soul engineers” in the socialist system. For example, the notion of the publication of an article of

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Conversation with the author on 14 October 2006. Excerpts published as “Czy warto być kompozytorem? Z Martą Ptaszyńską rozmawia Renata Pasternak-Mazur [Is it Worth Being a Composer? Marta Ptaszyńska in Conversation with Renata Pasternak-Mazur,” *Nowy Dziennik: Przegląd Polski* (27 October 2006), 5.



several pages in the most important professional music journal, discussing a concert comprised of orchestral pieces by three young composers in their twenties performed in Warsaw Philharmonic Hall (on 15 January 1950) by the country's top orchestra and followed by a discussion of the pieces by the greatest musical authorities in the country might have sounded like science fiction to her American colleagues.<sup>86</sup> All the composers featured at the mentioned event: Kazimierz Serocki (b. 1922), Tadeusz Baird (b. 1928) and Jan Krenz (b. 1926), later became leading musical figures, the first two in the field of composition and the third in the field of conducting.

A bus driver having no choice but listening to a Verdi opera is also symptomatic of the socialist cultural policy of a socialist state. "As culture is not subject to market laws, there is consistency between the content of education and the content of what the modern mass media and cultural institutions have to offer."<sup>87</sup> Aesthetic education was considered "an important part of the process of forming the sensibilities of the whole of society."<sup>88</sup> The interdependence of education and culture was believed to be represented by the following schema: growth in education – growth in culture – transformation of the social structure.<sup>89</sup> "The aim of the educational revolution in Poland" was envisioned "to give everyone a minimum basic education so that everyone has full access to culture and those who are specially gifted can develop their talents."<sup>90</sup> The conviction that educating a competent recipient of music is possible only in a specific, well organized system based on "the inculcation of knowledge forms – on the application of symbolic violence (however radical it sounds)"<sup>91</sup> is still widely shared across the Polish cultural élite.

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<sup>86</sup> Ski, "Na przykładzie jednego koncertu," *Muzyka* 1, no. 1 (1950): 37-41.

<sup>87</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 28.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Boguła Mika, "Edukacja jako 'przemoc' w służbie rozumienia muzyki (na marginesie rozważań nad edukacją liberalną) [Education as 'violence' in the service of understanding music (on a margin of considering liberal education)]", *De Musica* 10 (2005), [http://free.art.pl/demusica/de\\_mu\\_10/10\\_09.html](http://free.art.pl/demusica/de_mu_10/10_09.html) (accessed 17 October 2010). Education understood in the categories of symbolic violence can be found in Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: SAGE,

The “fact that the market for culture has lost its commercial character” was emphasized as one of the achievements of the socialist state.<sup>92</sup> “Public control of this market and the direction given to art activities and radio and television broadcasts have made it possible to exclude from our culture everything that is **reactionary, pornographic and tawdry**.”<sup>93</sup> “State censorship was introduced so as to foil the machinations of ideological enemies, to suppress propaganda in favour of imperialist exploitation and war and hatred between nations, and to root out sado-masochistic and pornographic elements from literature and the arts.”<sup>94</sup>

Freeing culture from market constraints, although regarded as an ultimate accomplishment of the socialist system, was at the same time a source of some acknowledged problems. The fact that “intellectuals regard art as the artist’s individual means of expression (...) and as a kind of ‘personal diary’”<sup>95</sup> was not seen as a problem in itself but as a cause of “some opposition between producers and their audience,”<sup>96</sup> which was an unwelcome situation. The remedy for it was seen on the one hand in an intensified cultural education of society and on the other hand in encouraging artists to engage more fully in entertainment and educational production.

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1990). Bourdieu introduced the concept of symbolic violence as unnoticed (almost unconscious) modes of cultural/ social domination that everyday social habits maintain over conscious subjects. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (*Ibid.*, 200), the educational system is an institution for the exercise of “symbolic violence”. “In other words the legitimacy of education is such that those involved in it have no need to relate what is taught to universal principles since it is accepted as autonomous and self-perpetuating” (John Potter, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 83). According to Bogimiła Mika (op. cit.)

The school should be one of the main spaces where symbolic violence takes place and legitimate cultural content is inculcated. The education (non-liberal), taking place within its walls can provide knowledge which has an element of customer orientation in a world of cultural goods (especially high culture); knowledge, [which is] by no means identical with the information transmitted by the media.

<sup>92</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 27.

<sup>93</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 27, Emphasis RPM.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

## No Country for Sheer Entertainment

The chief aims in the planning of cultural activities are the following: to develop the national cultural heritage and to propagate the humanist content of world culture; to satisfy the cultural needs of the population and to increase them; to ensure the active and continuing participation of writers and artists in the life of the nation and in the running of the socialist system; to develop and modernize the means by which culture is produced and disseminated; to intensify the activities of cultural institutions and to ensure that they develop in step with the community.<sup>97</sup>

While those goals do not explicitly exclude entertainment as a potential “cultural need,” other statements regarding art make it clear that sheer entertainment was at odds with cultural policy in Poland.

The formulation of the cultural policy of a socialist state by means of quasi-religious rhetoric may seem surprising and paradoxical:

Art elsewhere may have won a more universal appeal - Russian literature, French painting, English poetry, for instance - but there is no culture, literature or art in the world that has helped a nation more to preserve its identity and that has done more **to save it from spiritual death**. (...) Whereas in Paris, London or Rome people would go to the theatre to be entertained, in Warsaw and Cracow people would go to see *Forefathers' Eve* by Mickiewicz or *The Wedding* by Wyspianski **to celebrate a living national mystery and to assert Poland's place on earth**.<sup>98</sup>

The uniqueness of Polish culture and its special mission were attributed to Polish history, which involved a series of national tragedies and misfortunes, including three successive partitions (1772, 1793, and 1795) of the country carried out by the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia, and Habsburg Austria, which eliminated Poland from the map until the reestablishment of the Polish nation-state in 1918.<sup>99</sup>

Yet the Polish people have survived 123 years of partition, denationalization, servitude, defeat, exile and emigration because, throughout this period, they kept their culture alive. (...) We must stress this point: five generations of Poles lived under the domination of three foreign powers. And yet if, when the time came, the nation was able

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<sup>97</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 14.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11, emphasis RPM.

<sup>99</sup> This period of Polish history is called the Partitions (*zaborzy*) and the foreign powers which controlled the territory of Poland are referred to as partitioners (*zaborcy*).

to re-establish its unity, this was due to the role that literature and art, song, dance and national dress had never ceased to play.<sup>100</sup>

It is necessary to remember the historic mission of literature and art in Poland in order to understand the part that culture has played and continues to play in the life of the Poles.”<sup>101</sup> Polish poets such as Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849), Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859), Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821-1883), and Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907) “saved the vanquished from sinking into lethargy and provided them with a weapon as powerful as dynamite - the written word,” while Chopin’s music “concealed cannon beneath the roses.”<sup>102</sup> Fryderyk Chopin, cast as a progressive of his time, received not only the status of national composer (together with Stanisław Moniuszko (1891-1872)), but also “held an elevated position in the national pantheon as a poet-prophet [*wieszcz*] whose musical statements equaled in significance the poetic proclamations of Adam Mickiewicz, expressing the true spirit of the nation.”<sup>103</sup> This interpretation was formulated in various musicological studies and then disseminated for wider consumption in books and journals on music, textbooks used in music education, press articles and concert booklets as well as in radio and television programs.

Such an approach to cultural policy, with its emphasis on the uniqueness of Polish culture and its mission as a depository of the nation’s identity and its spiritual life or soul, and as a means of assuring the country’s international position, as well as its recourse to a quasi-religious rhetoric, conjures up a kind of Polish Messianism. A trend tracing its origins to the mid-nineteenth-century, and that persists to this day, is based on a Romantic vision of Poland as “the

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

<sup>101</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 10.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Trochimczyk, op. cit., 279. See also Maja Trochimczyk, “Chopin and the ‘Polish Race’: On National Ideologies and the Chopin Reception” in *The Age of Chopin*, ed. by Halina Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 278-313, Jolanta Pekacz, “The Nation’s Property: Chopin’s Biography as a Cultural Discourse” in *Musical Biography*, ed. by Jolanta Pekacz (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006): 43-68, especially 62-63; also Tompkins, op. cit., 327.

Christ of the nations," an innocent victim crucified by foreign powers, a sacrifice for the world's sins with a potential for universal salvation and rebirth. Although such a vision is primarily associated with the great Polish Romantic literature by Adam Mickiewicz<sup>104</sup> and other poets mentioned above, messianic principles "lived in every stratum of Polish civilization, from the most sublime poetry and music to the familiar realms of religious and popular culture."<sup>105</sup> The

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<sup>104</sup> Mickiewicz is considered to be the artistic figure who captured the idea of the nation as a spiritual entity most effectively. An excerpt from his *Księgi narodu and pielgrzymstwa polskiego* [*The Polish Nation and Pilgrimage Books*], written after the manner of biblical rhetoric, illustrates a concept of the relation between politics and morality totally different from that of the West:

In the beginning, there was belief in one GOD, and there was Freedom in the world. And there were no laws, only the will of GOD, and there were no lords and slaves, only patriarchs and their children. But later the people turned aside from the Lord their GOD, and made themselves craven images, and bowed down (...). Thus GOD sent upon them the greatest punishment which is Slavery. (...)

Then the Kings, renouncing CHRIST, made new idols which they set up in the sight of the people, and made them bow down (...). So the kings made an idol for the French and called it **Honour**; and this was the same that was called (...) the Golden Calf. And for the Spaniards, their king made an idol called **Political Power**; and this was the same that the Assyrians worshipped as Baal (...) And for the English, their king made an idol called **Sea Power and Commerce**, which was the same as Mammon. And for the Germans, an idol was made called **Brotsinn** or **Prosperity**, which was the same as Moloch. (...) And the nations forgot that they had sprung from one Father (...).

Finally, in idolatrous Europe there arose three rulers (...) a Satanic Trinity, Frederic, whose name signifieth 'Friend of Peace' (...) Catherine, which in Greek signifieth 'pure' (...) and Maria Theresa, who bore the name of the immaculate Mother of the Saviour (...) Their names were thus three blasphemies, their lives three crimes, their memory three curses (...) And this Trinity fashioned a new idol, which was unknown to the ancients, and they called it **Interest** (...).

But the Polish nation alone did not bow down (...) And finally Poland said: 'Whosoever will come to me shall be free and equal, for I am FREEDOM'. But the Kings when they heard were frightened in their hearts, and said (...) 'Come, let us slay this nation'. And they conspired together (...) And they crucified the Polish Nation, and laid it in its grave, and cried out 'We have slain and buried Freedom'. But they cried out foolishly (...)

For the Polish nation did not die. Its body lieth in the grave; but its spirit has descended into the abyss, that is into the private lives of people who suffer slavery in their country (...) But on the third day the soul shall return again to the body, and the Nation shall arise, and free all the peoples of Europe from slavery.

Quoted after Norman Davis, *God's Playground. A history of Poland. Vol. II, 1795 to the Present*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 7; emphasis after Polish original, Adam Mickiewicz, *Księgi Narodu Polskiego i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego*, Wirtualna Biblioteka Literatury Polskiej [Virtual Library of Polish Literature] Instytutu Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, [http://f.polska.pl/files/27/65/28/Ksiegi\\_narodu.pdf](http://f.polska.pl/files/27/65/28/Ksiegi_narodu.pdf)

<sup>105</sup> Halina Goldberg, "'Remembering the tale of grief': The Prophetic Voice in Chopin's Music" in *The Age of Chopin*, ed. by Halina Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004): 56-57

concept was characterized by emphasis on the superiority of spiritual over physical forces, the envisioning of the nation as a means of transforming one's life and paving the way for the salvation of mankind, the articulation of the metaphysical significance of the category of the nation, and the claim that man can be completely fulfilled only within the nation understood as a communion of spirits, as well as by a historicism manifested in the assertion that nations determine human development.<sup>106</sup>

Philosophical foundations for this ideology, which developed among Polish emigrants in France and thrived in the first half of the nineteenth century, were provided by Józef Maria Hoëne-Wroński<sup>107</sup>, who was the first to use the phrase “Polish Messianism” in 1831, Józef Gołuchowski,<sup>108</sup> Andrzej Towiański,<sup>109</sup> and August Cieszkowski, whom Norman Davis considers to have been “the most original of all” and the one who had “exercised a strong influence both on Proudhon, who acknowledged his debt, and on Marx, who did not.”<sup>110</sup> According to Davies, Cieszkowski was “a left-Hegelian philosopher who turned metaphysics to the service of social action, [and] must be regarded as one of the precursors of Marxism.”<sup>111</sup>

“Polish Messianism” developed by “one of the precursors of Marxism” becomes less surprising as a basis for the cultural policy of communist Poland if we remember that, inspired by national subjects, Polish poetry and drama in the romantic period flourished as never before. Moreover, after the Second World War, Poland faced a situation parallel to the one after the Partitions: a country destroyed and reconstructed, with shifted borders, huge differences in the

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<sup>106</sup> On Polish Messianism see Andrzej Walicki, *Filozofia a mesjanizm. Studia z dziejów filozofii i myśli społeczno-religijnej romantyzmu polskiego* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970), 9-88.

<sup>107</sup> His main works included *Prodrome du Messianisme* (1831), *Métapolitique messianique* (1839), and *Messianisme ou réforme absolue du savoir humain* (1847).

<sup>108</sup> His work of statue was *Die Philosophic in ihrem Verhältniss zum Leben ganzer Völker und einzelner Menschen* (1922)

<sup>109</sup> Known as a mentor of Mickiewicz's later years.

<sup>110</sup> Davies, op. cit., 30.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

development of its regions, and mass migration. For this reason, a “natural” model would, at first glance, be the Second Polish Republic (*II Rzeczpospolita Polska*, 1918-1939). However, such a reference was impossible since the Second Polish Republic was a state which had built capitalist Poland, had very different borders (which included large regions incorporated after the Second World War into the USSR), and reaffirmed its independence after a series of military conflicts, the most important being the Polish–Soviet War (1919–1921), when Poland inflicted a crushing defeat on the Red Army. In consequence, this tradition had to remain diminished as backward or silenced. Furthermore, for the socialist state it “was necessary to devise homogeneous cultural patterns and to eliminate all forms of group particularism,”<sup>112</sup> to convert peasants “into modern industrial workers,”<sup>113</sup> and to do this without drawing on the tradition of the inter-war period. In spite of its religious overtones, Polish Messianism, which, according to Davis, expressed radical ideas of nationalism and social reform, was a better fit for the needs of socialist Poland than the tradition of the Second Republic.<sup>114</sup>

At the same time, however, a Polish nationalism based on Polish Messianism, associated primarily with the time of the Partitions, underscored political dependence on the USSR and provided a means for negotiating space for sovereignty. In countries of the former Soviet Bloc, as Katherine Verdery has observed: “national identity disrupted the Marxist discourse and thus – despite the Communist Party’s apparent appropriation of it – was a major element in destroying the Party’s legitimacy.”<sup>115</sup> Developments in Eastern Europe, where the growth of nationalism, of nations, and of national states has generated the most significant changes of the last two hundred years, obviously stands opposed to the viewpoint, which permeates much historical writing in

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<sup>112</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 19.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>114</sup> Davies, op. cit., 158.

<sup>115</sup> Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 4

English, and disproves Lord Acton's claim that "[a] state can sometimes create a nation, but for a nation to create a state is going against nature."<sup>116</sup>

The famous slogan "For our liberty and yours" (Polish: *Za naszą i waszą wolność* which is translated into English also as "For your freedom and ours") associated with Polish soldiers, exiled from partitioned Poland, fighting in various independence movements all over the world, was also co-opted by socialist cultural policy.<sup>117</sup>

In order to be able to play so important a role as this in awakening and asserting the national consciousness, art and literature had to be **progressive, revolutionary and internationalist**. The links that Polish culture and art have with European culture and art, in their finest manifestations, are just as powerful as their links with native popular tradition. The music of Chopin is universal, although it has its origin in the elegies and cradle songs of Mazovia. (...) Modern Polish culture has organic links not only with the past, but also with modern world movements in the arts, music and literature. (...) Polish music lies somewhere between the Cracow fanfare and Penderecki.<sup>118</sup>

Norman Davies observed that during the five generations when it had no concrete existence, "Poland", as an abstraction, could be remembered from the past, or aspired to for the future, but only imagined in the present<sup>119</sup>. The above premises of cultural politics suggest a similarly unreal or "in-between" existence in a socialist present, an existence of a primarily spiritual nature, with roots in native popular tradition and links with high European culture as a

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<sup>116</sup> Quoted after Davies, op. cit., 3.

In the western democracies, Nationalism has rarely commanded much respect or sympathy. In the two centuries since the concepts of nationality, of national sovereignty, and of national liberation first found coherent expression in the French Revolution, they have spread to all parts of Europe and thence to all corners of the globe, but they have carried less conviction in the English-speaking world than in most other areas.(...) Supremely confident of the universal tradition or in the American Constitution, the leaders of liberal opinion usually saw Nationalism as an unnecessary diversion from their main purposes, and tended to think of it as inherently illiberal and undemocratic. In many liberal eyes, 'nations' are selfish, irrational, and disruptive, almost by definition; whilst 'states', whatever their present defects, are all at least potentially reformable. *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Balicki et al., op. cit., 12.

<sup>118</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 12, emphasis RPM.

<sup>119</sup> Davies, op. cit., 6.



compensation or substitution for its real “flesh and blood.” The model of a Polish culture responsible for the existence of such a spiritual entity must then also be of a spiritual and “high” nature and as far from being carnal or “low” as possible:

Within the framework of national unity and the common interests of society and the State, authors and the recipients of culture are equally aware of the civic responsibility implied in their participation in the fashioning of a new society and of its destiny. Cultural policy cannot therefore accept works that are hostile to socialism, and preference is given to productions which combine a high artistic level and the universally accepted ideology of socialist humanism.<sup>120</sup>

Although the authorities recognized that a “culture of leisure and rest must be created,”<sup>121</sup> and even complained that the “the function of art as simple entertainment is not sufficiently taken into account by creative artists in Poland, whether in the cinema, in other performing arts or in literature,”<sup>122</sup> they could not emphasize sufficiently that **in “Poland, cultural activities are not regarded as something apart, intended purely to provide entertainment for leisure hours.”**<sup>123</sup> In 1950 the agenda of the Executive Committee of the Polish Composers’ Union included, in its “Specific tasks”, “Generating high-end light (entertainment) music” and “combating petty-bourgeois habits, which are dangerous for the general public taste.”<sup>124</sup> Moreover, cultural activity was understood as “a functional part of economic, educational, scientific and political planning.”<sup>125</sup> “If people are to attain this level of creative intellectual activity and to play an ever-increasing part in the management of business and political

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<sup>120</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 38.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>123</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 25. Emphasis RPM

<sup>124</sup> Witold Rudziński, “Program pracy Zarządu Związku Kompozytorów Polskich” *Muzyka* 1, no. 3-4 (1950), 10-11.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

institutions and in political life, they must possess a rich store of knowledge, sound moral principles and be people of some culture.”<sup>126</sup>

For those who were not yet ready for more serious concerts, an intermediary step, in the form of a kind of stage event known as *imprezy estradowe*, was developed in the early 1950s.

Such concerts were

a sort of lightly politicized stage revue that combined song, music and satirical theater in a staged variety show. A *konferansjer* (...) [narrator or emcee] linked the songs and sketches together and played a crucial role in communicating the political message. The idea was to produce a party-approved cabaret-like performance that would combine light entertainment with an ideological message in an attempt to attract, entertain and politically educate large numbers of workers and peasants.<sup>127</sup>

The new genre of musical performance, modeled on Soviet *Estrada* (which comprised a wide variety of staged performances), utilized local traditions of staged musical and theatrical events, from carnivals up to cabaret.<sup>128</sup> This type of performance was envisioned not as an end in itself, but as “rather a way to gradually introduce new ears to serious music, and especially contemporary music.”<sup>129</sup> In practice, however, as Tompkins observed, “the obstacles to providing quality and ideologically appropriate concerts for the masses were formidable.”<sup>130</sup>

“Houses of culture” in towns and cities, and “café clubs” in villages were envisioned as institutions to take care of the culture of leisure. The former were intended to help “stimulate the movement of ideas and artistic trends” on the one hand, and on the other hand to “serve as a link between the cultural activities carried out by the State and the local authorities and the ‘socio-cultural movement.’”<sup>131</sup> Their “flexible structure” had to enable them “to cater for every section

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<sup>126</sup> Rudziński op. cit., 25.

<sup>127</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 291.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>131</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 29.

of the population.”<sup>132</sup> The main activities of such “cultural centers” comprised: “the organization of amateur groups and clubs and of performing companies; the organization of amateur art activities; the organization of art activities with the participation of professional artists; the organization of meetings, discussions and lectures with the participation of writers.”<sup>133</sup> The “rapid organization of ‘café clubs’” and “the cultural initiatives of the young generation of Polish peasants” were to demonstrate that “in the case of young rural people”

culture has taken on a new dimension. (...) The aim is no longer just to foster traditions and local popular customs, but to keep up with the rate of social and cultural change throughout the country. The new dynamic forms of cultural activity—film clubs, photography clubs, short-wave radio clubs, small groups of singers, poetry recitals, jazz and modern-music groups—are more popular than certain old forms, especially choirs and dance groups.<sup>134</sup>

In spite of the emphasized uniqueness of Polish culture and its role, the exclusion of pure entertainment from the outright functions of socialist culture was common in the former Soviet Bloc. The culture of leisure was envisioned as a means of elevating the society or its groups onto a “higher cultural level,” and not as an end in itself. The equivalents of *Estrada* concerts were a common approach to provide ideologically-appropriate programs that combined the entertainment the audiences longed for with the pedagogical and political message desired by the socialist officials. For example, the *Estradenkonzerten* in the GDR were also aimed at “winning new listeners for good music.”<sup>135</sup> Like *imprezy estradowe*, they often fell short of in terms of planning and artistic integrity, and audience reactions to these concerts were mixed.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 29.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>135</sup> Tompkins, op. cit., 297.

<sup>136</sup> See Tompkins, op. cit., 291-299

## The Socialist vision of the folk and popular culture

In Poland today there are several contending cultural streams, which the various classes and sections of society have inherited from the past. What is especially characteristic is that the latest generation of creative artists (...) feels particularly close to the cultural traditions that go back to the very beginning of the Polish State; a period when there was a predominant popular culture of undeniable merit. (...) Original creative work of popular inspiration, mostly taking the form of songs, legends and proverbs of a moral or humorous nature and which developed in the nineteenth century in the central provinces of Poland, has been 'discovered', scientifically studied and ranked with literary forms used by professional creative writers. It has developed and still survives today in the historic provinces of Poland - throughout Silesia, in the northern territories, in Warmia and in Mazuria. The Polish population of these regions, at that time under German and Prussian rule, did not have any native élite. Folk art, therefore, served not only to express emotional and artistic needs, it also influenced the moral attitude of the population by exalting its nationalist feeling. It formed a tie with the central provinces of the homeland and checked the process of Germanization.<sup>137</sup>

Folk culture, according to the above quotation from the *Cultural Policy in Poland*, comes from a primordial past and is synonymous with traditional and popular culture. "Folk" (Polish *lud*, German *Volk*) here represents the universal spirit of a nation, while "popular" means simple, touching and universal, being used in the old, nineteenth-century sense of culture shared across classes, a genius of the people or populace, and not with its negative modern, post-Industrial Revolution connotation, which emerged in English language writings around the middle of the nineteenth century, associating "popular" with crafty manipulation for a mass audience.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, it calls to mind the reference to the pastoral mode as morally instructive (as in classical antiquity, during the later Renaissance, and throughout much of the Enlightenment period), as a sort of mirror image of the heroic, employing low-born stock type characters who learn lessons which are almost always the life lessons that were considered "universal" at the time.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 42.

<sup>138</sup> For changing meaning of "popular" see Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music". Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 256.

<sup>139</sup> See Gelbart, op. cit., 48.

Geographical regions mentioned in the quote belonged to “Western and Northern Territories” (*Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne*), also called “Recovered” or “Regained Territories” (*Ziemie Odzyskane*), which became parts of Polish territory as a result of the shift westwards of Poland’s borders after the Second World War. In the absence of a Polish élite, an idealized folk (*lud*) is claimed here as a link with central territories of the homeland and a moral compass, which through its artistic output leads to national values.

One of the objectives of cultural policy in Poland has always been to preserve memorials of popular culture and art and to create an atmosphere of respect both for the cultural heritage and for modern forms of folk art. (...) As a result of changes in rural life folk culture and art went into decline at the end of the last century. The far-reaching social and economic changes under way in the People’s Republic of Poland and the development of a modern national culture might have reduced popular culture to naught if administrative and economic decisions had not been taken to protect our popular art heritage. Cultural leaders as well as scholars and artists had been preoccupied by this as early as the beginning of the century. (...)

Popular art, as it once was and which may be termed ‘traditional’, forged the artistic needs of the people and sought to satisfy them. It constituted the most perfect expression and more specifically, the only manifestation of the artistic aspirations and achievements of the community. Owing to the collective nature of traditional art, individual creation was subjected to a permanent evaluation by the group, and it was the tastes and preferences of the community that determined, by placing a check on it, the range of individual creative research, though at the same time giving it a chance to create works of value.<sup>140</sup>

According to Aleksander Jackowski:

There was a time when local communities were concerned for the ‘purity’ of what was created, that it should conform to traditional principles. This function is now performed by ethnographic commissions. It is therefore outsiders who now protect the traditional forms of popular art and who eliminate non-traditional solutions, even if these correspond to the contemporary tastes of the people of the countryside.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 44-45.

<sup>141</sup> Aleksander Jackowski, “Funkcje Sztuki Ludowej i Twórczości Niezawodowej w Naszej Kulturze” [The Functions of Popular Art and Non-professional Creation in our Culture], *Tradycja i Współczesność* (Warsaw: Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Science, 1970) 170-1. Quoted after Balicki, et al., 45.

The socialist state acknowledged changes in popular culture due to socio-economic and political changes. Rural culture was perceived as being in decline, in need of protection, even if this ran against the “tastes of the people of the countryside,” and required of administrative intervention. “Such popular art as has survived is now protected by a law on the preservation of national cultural property.”<sup>142</sup> Evaluation by community was replaced by evaluation by outsiders: cultural leaders and scholars entrusted with the “job of bringing together, studying scientifically and exhibiting such material.”<sup>143</sup> The general attitude towards folk culture was characterized by historicism. Popular culture (synonymous with traditional or folk) was seen as “a thing of the past,” which needed to be preserved “in its purest form” for future generations.<sup>144</sup>

In 1950 the State Institute of Arts (Państwowy Instytut Sztuki, now Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk), which had absorbed the National Institute for Folk Art Studies, started a national action of collecting Polish folk music (*muzyka ludowa*). The action was envisioned in two stages: first the selection of the “more interesting songs and dances for recording” by “field teams” (*zespoły terenowe*), venturing into various regions of the country and relying on “rummagers” (*szperacze*) in the field; then recording and filming previously-observed and/or notated material. Readers of *Muzyka*, a major Polish monthly on music in which the project was announced, were asked for help: for reporting to the field teams the names and addresses of singers and dancers, “as well as all forms and manifestations of rebellious or revolutionary songs, songs which have not yet been recorded, new songs, and fusions of old [songs] with new texts”.<sup>145</sup>

Twenty-page “Guidelines for Collecting Polish Folk Song and Music” were prepared by Marian and Jadwiga Sobieski in order to capture this “primitive folk music (*prymitywna muzyka*

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<sup>142</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 44.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*...

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>145</sup> AJ, “Zbieramy Folklor Muzyczny”, *Muzyka* 1, no. 2 (1950): 29-30.

*ludowa*) in its old and contemporary sound, first of all in order to **know it** (...), and, knowing it, to bring out those melodic and rhythmic qualities that characterize the purely **Polish** music folklore which, as such, should become the foundation of Polish musical culture.”<sup>146</sup> On the one hand it provided instruction on **what and how to collect**, and on the other it emphasized that the aim “should not only be the act of making recordings, but also to inspire passion among the performers themselves to practice their music and to give them faith in the beauty of this art.” It recommended working together with an ethno-sociologist and focusing on places “located away from cities, roads, surrounded by forests, lakes, or river forks, because the best musical material can be expected there.”<sup>147</sup> It also provided characteristics of the music that should be collected:

The old folk song and music (*pieśń i muzyka ludowa*), or, rather, rural [song and music] is the music and the song, whose nameless creator is the **people** (*lud*) as a **whole**, which is not transmitted through music notation, but passed from mouth to mouth, by oral tradition, from memory and, finally, that which the people (*lud*) themselves considers its own, homegrown.<sup>148</sup>

Besides collective authorship, the most characteristic features of Polish folk song are enumerated as:

- variability (*zmiennosc*), a constant tendency to vary. (“Driven by a reservoir of creative power, each singer, each region created its own variety, the so-called variant (*variant*)”<sup>149</sup>).
- scale-related rawness of sound (resulting from the fact that “our folk melodies in many cases are still built on old, archaic, musical scales, which date back to a tribal period (anhemitonic and hemitonic pentatonic scales);”<sup>150</sup> melodies whose musical material reaches beyond the pentatonic, but which have a basis in more or less pronounced

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<sup>146</sup> Marian and Jadwiga Sobiescy, “Instrukcja w sprawie zbierania polskiej pieśni i muzyki ludowej”, *Muzyka* 1, no. 2 (1950), 30, emphasis as in the original.

<sup>147</sup> Sobiescy, op. cit., 31.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

pentatonic phrases as well as in church scales from the Middle Ages. “It is to these foreign-sounding songs that we must pay special attention, because they are the oldest and most valuable monuments of musical culture of the Polish people.”<sup>151</sup> However,

a major part of our folk music is based on major-minor scales, which, since the end of the sixteenth century, dominate in folk music, and in Polish folk music are manifested in a large number of songs that are still based on the old scales but also already have features of major-minor such as the raised the 7th grade, emphasized dominant, and its gravitation towards the tonic<sup>152</sup>

- melodic movement (Polish *melodyka*, German *Melodik*), which is “different from that used in professional music” and in general, “resembles a wavy line.”<sup>153</sup>

In Polish folk song, melodic movement is incredibly rich. That kind of mobility, maneuverability and agility within a wide range, extending sometimes to a twelfth, such shooting of bold leaps and above all, [such] embellishing with ever different ornaments cannot be found in any Western European folklore. Indeed, the entire musical dynamism of our people is fulfilled and relieved in melody, in melodic movement alone. This is why [the melodic movement] is so rich and difficult to reproduce by [those who are] not acquainted with it. (...) We come across ardent seventh jumps, descending and ascending progressions within an augmented fourth, and a lack of leading tones.<sup>154</sup>

- monophony (“for our people melody is a goal in itself,” heterophony can be found in ensemble music making)
- tempo rubato
- rhythm related to Polish folk dances.

A musical typology (typizacja) of these dances has still not been worked out. Besides, **classification of the dances is hindered by the people (lud) themselves**, who apply different names to the same dance, so that the same dance tune in one village is called kujawiak, in another oberek, and in yet another Balcerek, not to mention those – with so many different names - which derive from the circumstances in which the dance can be performed. In general, in southern parts of Poland dances in even [meter] prevail, while farther to the north a clearer predominance of rhythms in odd [meter] can be found. However, in practice there are folk dances in ambiguous meter, which can be notated either in even or in odd [meter], and those which under the same name are performed in

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<sup>151</sup> Sobiescy, op. cit., 34.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.



both even and odd [meter]. (...) Rhythmic accents distributed 'freely' (swawolnie) are characteristic for Polish rhythms.<sup>155</sup>

According to the *Guidelines* from 1950,

folk song is still being created and is linked to life and its transformations. The song expresses an attitude towards the existing social system, reflects revolutionary movements, and will undoubtedly capture the new social changes (mechanization and urbanization of the rural areas/ countryside, farm cooperatives, etc) (...) We will be interested not only in purely rural folk music, [which is] perhaps the richest in quantity and quality, but also in small-town, suburban or urban creative output. We are interested in a revolutionary song, resulted from the working class, the basis for whose development is only now coming to fruition.

Whether this was the actual belief of the authors, or just the ideological rationale for action on a national scale, “the folk” (*lud*) had clearly failed to develop “revolutionary songs” and “cultivate pure Polish folk music.”<sup>156</sup> Twenty-three years later the authors of *Cultural Policy in Poland* claimed that “The Polish countryside today has radically changed; there is no longer any distinct and spontaneous popular culture.”<sup>157</sup>

Clearly, Polish folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) was understood not as the actual music practiced in rural areas, but as a specific kind of music defined by outside authorities (ethnomusicologists, folklorists, etc.) that served their ideological purposes and needs as well as the needs of the socialist state, but not necessarily the needs of the communities themselves. Once defined, it had to be preserved and maintained. The action of collecting Polish folk music was envisioned as a kind of revised and extended edition of the nineteenth-century work of Oskar

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<sup>155</sup> Sobiescy, op. cit., 37, emphasis RPM.

<sup>156</sup> The Sobieskis did not take the existence of folk music in rural area for granted. In their guidelines, formulated before actual fieldwork took place, they suggested finding answers to the questions “**whether the people in the [specific] area make music, and if so, on which instruments; if any old rebel songs survive, or folk or religious rituals; if weddings take place, and if so, with or without the capping ceremony [oczepiny - a symbolic passage from a maidenhood to womanhood], whether [they have] the blessing ceremony at home and then go to church, or if there are any old women who once were masters of ceremonies at weddings, etc.**” Sobiescy, op. cit., 40, emphasis RPM.

<sup>157</sup> Balicki, et al., op. cit., 45.

Kolberg, the most celebrated Polish ethnomusicologist.<sup>158</sup> What was collected was not determined by the people (*lud*), but by established authorities, who decided what constituted “pure Polish folk music” and who were oriented “to **what is dying and may no longer be found in the[ir] next tour.**”<sup>159</sup> The collectors were to distance themselves from the people, to whom they should “talk cordially, but with dignity, and without too much familiarity,” because their presence, if perhaps not consciously acknowledged as such, was dictated by their own larger, paternalistic, political/ socio-scientific goals; as they put it: “[w]e are in fact in the area, which we are about to exploit and for which we are responsible.”<sup>160</sup> Collected folk music might come back to the people in the form of “secondary appropriation” through the folk ensemble.

Polish folk music provided source material not only for the national art by great masters but also for a new type of national art, which emerged in the socialist state in the form of stylized folk song and dance, and which became an important element in the national mythology. The two State Folk Song and Dance Ensembles in Poland, *Mazowsze* and *Śląsk*, were named after ideologically crucial regions of the country: *Mazowsze* (founded in 1948 and for many years led by Tadeusz Sygietyński and Mira Zimińska-Sygietyńska) was named after the country’s heartland Mazovia (*Mazowsze* in Polish) where the capital (Warsaw) is located, and *Śląsk* (founded in 1952 and directed by Stanisław Hadyna) used the Polish name of Silesia, one of the Poland’s most problematic borderline regions, alternately claimed by Germans, Poles and Czechs in the past. The ensemble’s performances presented Silesia as an “ancient Polish land”.

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<sup>158</sup> AJ, “Zbieramy Folklor Muzyczny,” 29-30.

<sup>159</sup> Sobiescy, 40, emphasis in the original.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42. The collectors were instructed how to respond to questions by the people such as:

Why are you doing it? Does it pay to go and collect such futilities? You must make good money from it, mustn’t you? So here again and again you need to say that the old songs are beautiful, that they should be maintained; that our youth dance American foxtrots, and yet we have our own, more beautiful dances, and so on, and so forth; and, finally, the State Government takes care of the folk songs that are being revived again, and therefore we were ordered to collect these songs because we know how, and as everyone in a village has his/ her own job, so we have ours. (Sobiescy, op. cit., 42.)

The State Folk Song and Dance Ensembles that emerged in the Stalinist period all around the Soviet Bloc presented professionally performed, stylized versions of traditional music (arranged by contemporary composers) in elaborate costumes and choreography (which also constituted a stylization of their folk models) and developed principles for the scenic use of folklore.<sup>161</sup> These “cultural ambassadors,” touring around the world, became perceived as the embodiment of national musical traditions. They “made repeated false claims that the folk dances, songs, and costumes that they presented were completely ‘authentic’ and transplanted practically without changes from the pristine villages” to the stage.<sup>162</sup> Anthony Shay has noticed that all of these folk ensembles “claim that specific individuals, most often the founding artistic director and/or choreographers, conduct prodigious amounts of field research in order to present the most authentic choreographic products possible.”<sup>163</sup>

The two Polish large State Ensembles well exemplify the functioning of such groups in the region. The “authentically Polish” (Mazovian or Silesian) members of the ensembles, carefully selected in very competitive audition processes, practiced and lived together in state-owned manors or castles located in the area they represented (*Mazowsze* in Karolin and *Śląsk* in Koszęcin).<sup>164</sup> In addition to suites of songs and dances representing various regional traditions, their repertoire included national dances, primarily the *mazur* and the polonaise, presented in

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<sup>161</sup> For example *Tanec* (The State Ensemble of Folklore Dances and Songs which is the official ensemble of the Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) based in Skopje) was founded 1949; *LADO* (the Croatian state ensemble) was founded in 1949 ((it was called the choir of national dances and songs); the National Honored Academic Dance Company of Ukraine, named after P. Virsky, has its roots in an ensemble founded by Virsky in Kiev in 1937. That company had been re-organized into the Song and Dance Company of Ukraine in 1940, and was re-organized again into the State Dance Company of Ukraine in October, 1951; the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble was established in 1951; the Bulgarian State Folk Ensemble was founded by Philip Koutev in 1951; the state-sponsored Albanian ensemble, The National Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances (NEFSD), was established as a professional ensemble in 1957.

<sup>162</sup> Maja Trochimczyk, *Polish Dance in Southern California* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 189.

<sup>163</sup> Anthony Shay, *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation, and Power* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 13.

<sup>164</sup> Trochimczyk, *Polish Dnace*, 44-45.

historical costumes of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (the eighteenth century being the period of Polish political decline). They employed full-scale professional symphonic orchestras and used “art music” as accompaniment for these historicized national dances.<sup>165</sup> Many of the songs of *Mazowsze* were newly composed in the “folk” style by Tadeusz Sygietyński. Colorful costumes designed by Mira Zimińska - handmade from natural fabric (wool and cotton), colored with natural dyes and adorned with embroidery and appliques of unsurpassed richness - had no connection with peasants’ “Sunday best”. Similarly, her choreography of dance suites and stage movement had very little connection with dance in the field.<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, they were perceived as displays of “authentic Polishness,” especially abroad, and became models for Polish folk dance ensembles both in the homeland and in the Polish diaspora. Attractive and accessible, stylized folk dancing and “authentic” costumes of Polish folk dance ensembles have become outward signs of Polish “ethnic” identity. Providing a counterpart to Polish jokes, they helped Polish Americans to become proud of their heritage and traditions.<sup>167</sup>

Although, as Anthony Shay noticed, the degree of authentic elements utilized by each ensemble varies widely,<sup>168</sup> they can all be considered embodiments of what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger term an “invented tradition,”<sup>169</sup> or what Richard Dorson calls “fakelore.”<sup>170</sup> On the other hand to many individuals, the state ensembles are considered an important resource for

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<sup>165</sup> They used arrangements of *mazurs* from two national operas by Stanisław Moniuszko, the *Straszny Dwór* (The Haunted Manor) and *Halka*; performed the Polonaise in *A Major, Farewell to Homeland* (*Pożegnanie Ojczyzny*) by Michał Kleofas Ogiński and various dances by Karol Kurpiński. See Trochimczyk, *Polish Dance*, 48.

<sup>166</sup> See Trochimczyk, *Polish Dance*, 58

<sup>167</sup> Trochimczyk, *Polish Dance*, 192-193.

<sup>168</sup> He contrasted *Mazowsze* and the *Moiseyev Dance Company* with LADO (the Croatian state ensemble). See Shay, 16.

<sup>169</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>170</sup> Richard Dorson, *Folklore and Fakelore: Essays toward a Discipline of Folk Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

authenticity. Shay observed that “choreographic and staging elements of the performances of the prestigious national companies are often emulated by rural groups desirous of professionalizing their performances, or merely because they are struck by the novelty of the national company’s treatment of their dances.”<sup>171</sup>

He demonstrated that many Croatians, villagers and town-dwellers alike, conceived of LADO as being the keeper of the flame of older layers of dance (for example the dancers from LADO are regularly hired by different villagers to arrange their dances in the “old style”).<sup>172</sup> Timothy Cooley, in his study on Górale music in Polish Tatras, has made similar observations on the exchange between the field and professional dance ensemble,<sup>173</sup> and Maja Trochimczyk admits that through their constant exposure on Polish radio, some of Sygietyński’s *Mazowsze* songs did indeed become “mass songs”.<sup>174</sup> Thus Shay seems to be right in seeing the exchange between the field and the professional dance ensembles as “a dynamic cycle that encompasses the appropriation of cultural and choreographic elements from field to stage and a return to the field of presentational elements.”<sup>175</sup> Paradoxically, the socialist invention of the State Folk Song and Dance Ensembles survived in the post-socialist world. *Mazowsze* thrives and continues to succeed in performing as if nothing had changed politically.

Folk music after the Second World War was still seen in the old Romantic way. Synonymous with “popular” and “traditional,” it represented “nature” understood as “the early stage of a teleological historiography in which primitive Others appear as ‘natural’ foils to modern civilized Europeans,” enlightened intelligentsia, or socialist “soul engineers.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Shay, op. cit., 17.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Timothy Cooley, “Village on Stage”, in Timothy Cooley, *Making Music in the Polish Tatras: Tourists, Ethnographers, and Mountain Musicians* (Bloomington, Indiana Press: 2005), 123-161.

<sup>174</sup> Trochimczyk, *Polish Dance*, 58.

<sup>175</sup> Shay, op. cit., 17.

<sup>176</sup> Gelbart, op. cit., 12.

Moreover, the transition from categorizing music by function to categorizing it by origin, essential for recent constructions of “folk music,” “art music,” and “popular music” in the modern Western world, had not been completed.<sup>177</sup> On the one hand the *muzyka ludowa* (folk music) was distinguished from *muzyka poważna* (“serious music”) on the basis of origin, as the output of a collective in contrast to the output of an individual composing genius, while on the other hand the distinction between *muzyka poważna* (“serious music,” German *E-Musik*) and *muzyka rozrywkowa* (“entertainment music,” German *U-Musik* or *Unterhaltungsmusik*) affirms function-based categorization. Furthermore, the category of *popular music*, understood as “commercial, corrupt, ‘low,’ and dependent only on ‘craft,’” juxtaposed with *art/ classical* music and *folk/ national* music, which are “‘pure,’ ‘authentic,’ free of the taint of commerce, and dependent on ‘genius’ (organic),”<sup>178</sup> is absent from the discourse.

### The difference between the official (formal) and operative (informal) levels of the socialist ideology with reference to music making

Arnold Perris’s claim that in the Soviet system prompt, unconditional response to state directives is obligatory because all artists are employees of the state is based on a fallacious assumption that real socialism was identical with totalitarianism.<sup>179</sup> Such a conceptualization of Eastern Europe, common in the West for a long time, resulted from two common misconceptions concerning state-socialist regimes: the belief that communist party-states were strong, characterized by a high level of institutional stability and a sufficient measure of citizens’ compliance; and the view that due to their highly repressive nature, any organized opposition was

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<sup>177</sup> Gelbart, op. cit., Chapter 8, 256-277.

<sup>178</sup> See Gelbart, op. cit., Figure. 8.1, 257.

<sup>179</sup> Arnold Perris, *Music as Propaganda: Art to Persuade, Art to Control* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 85.

impossible.<sup>180</sup> In fact, however, there was a significant difference between the official (formal) and operative (informal) levels of ideology in the former Soviet Bloc.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, the collapse of communism was not sudden but prepared by a long process of de-ideologisation, and a counterhegemonic vision developed also in the realm of music.

Although the communist parties aspired to control the music heard in all venues, from the grandest concert hall to the smallest factory clubroom, such a goal was never achieved.<sup>182</sup> In controlling repertoire cultural officials relied on persuasion rather than direct intervention. Attempts at formal requirements did not work in practice and were replaced by recommendations, “patient convincing,” and criticism in the press.<sup>183</sup> On the other hand the audiences negotiated the repertoire both with the party and with composers, and - by staying away from some concerts - prompted the development of lighter music programs with less ideological content.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, even in the early 1950s, a time of its greatest power, the Ministry of Culture’s presence in the provinces remained weak.<sup>185</sup> In the mid-1950s, “a time when cultural officials were bitterly complaining about the Union’s lack of support for their political program,” the generous support for Polish composers continued. Also the State Organization for Artistic Activities, *Artos* had a problem asserting control over its offices in the provinces.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society. Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989-1993* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>181</sup> Jolanta Pekacz, “Did Rock Smash the Wall? The Role of Rock in Political Transition,” *Popular Music*, 13/1 (1994): 41.

<sup>182</sup> Tompkins, *op. cit.*, 323-324.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104.

<sup>186</sup> Tompkins, *op. cit.*, 184. Among the examples of such problems mentioned in its internal 1953 report there is the case of Lublin’s director Tadeusz Chyla, who had been locally appointed without the Ministry of Culture’s approval. The party “considered him overly ambitious and too sympathetic to musical groups ‘with clerical and sentimental overtones.’ Despite this criticism, he was not removed, and almost two years later local government officials called again for his ousting due to his dictatorial methods, his antipathy for the party and state, and his refusal to hire party members.” Quoted after Tompkins, *op. cit.*, 304

Obstacles in the way of the creation and maintenance of the music envisioned by cultural officials involved both the constant presence of unauthorized concerts and the development of repertoires incompatible with cultural policies of the socialist state. As Mark Slobin has noticed, whether disallowed or regulated, musical diversity sprang up increasingly in the late 1970s in various forms and flowered in the 1980s as a part of the breakthrough of a grassroots discontent that culminated in song-filled demonstrations stretching from 1970s Poland to region-wide breakthrough demonstrations in the late 1980s.<sup>187</sup>

Oftentimes the system tried to absorb and adapt cultural activities which were not envisioned in its cultural policy, trying to appropriate them. From 1956, following the political “thaw,” the field of art negotiated considerable freedom. Jazz – a “folk music of North American blacks” - came out of the underground with festivals organized in Sopot (in 1956 and 1957).<sup>188</sup> In the 1960s *bigbit* [big-beat], “our reply to the rock’n’roll craze of the West” or a Polish version of the style popularized by The Beatles, developed and became very popular among the youth.<sup>189</sup> Some of the bands, such as Skaldowie or Trubadurzy, are still active.<sup>190</sup>

Assumptions concerning rock’s rebellious nature and a putatively important role in the subversion of socialism are unfounded, at least in the Polish context. Although many Western rock analysts tend to overemphasized rock’s role in the process of the political transformation in Eastern Europe, any assumption that rock music may be able to play any significant role in a

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<sup>187</sup> Slobin, op. cit., 4.

<sup>188</sup> See documentary *Był Jazz* (1984) by Feliks Falk. Jazz was being performed in Poland already before the Second World War. For more information on the history of Polish jazz see Roman Kowal *Polski Jazz: Wczesna Historia i Trzy Biografie Zamknięte: Komeda, Kosz, Seifert* [*Polish Jazz: Early History and Three Closed Biographies: Komeda, Kosz, Seifert*] (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 1995).

<sup>189</sup> The jubilee website of Czerwono-Czarni: <http://www.czerwonoczarni.pl/info-press.html>, visited August 20, 2010. For information on Polish *bigbit* bands see Leszek Gnoiński and Jan Skaradziński, *Encyklopedia polskiego rocka* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Poznań: In Rock, 2006), see also Daniel Wolak, *Archiwum polskiego rocka 1962 – 2008. Katalog płyt z kręgu muzyki popularnej* (Gdańsk: Wdaxrock, 2006)

<sup>190</sup> Official website of Trubadurzy: <http://www.trubadurzy.pl/> Accessed on 12 September 2016. Official website of Skaldowie: <http://www.skaldowie.pl/>. Accessed on 12 September 2016.



process of political change should evoke skepticism.<sup>191</sup> As Jolanta Pekacz has argued, rock was caught in the web of state patronage just as other cultural forms were, even as it proclaimed its marginality, and did not actually lead to the overthrow of communism.<sup>192</sup> The case of the Jarocin Festival, the biggest rock festival in the Soviet Bloc, which is often the focus of English-language writing on the Polish popular music of the 1980s, is no different. The announcement of the first Jarocin festival in the *Non Stop* monthly said:

On 6-8 July in Jarocin the First All-Polish Review of Music of the Young Generation (*I Ogólnopolski Przegląd Muzyki Młodej Generacji*) will take place, as a continuation of two well-known events: Greater Poland's Rhythms of Youth (*Wielkopolskie Rytmu Młodych*) and MMG concerts, which for two years have taken place within the Sopot Festival Pop Session.<sup>193</sup> The idea is simply to "catch" and present to a wider audience these young performers who deserve attention and whose creative activity is based upon widely-understood rock music. The organizers of the meeting are: the Town and District Office (*Urząd Miasta i Gminy*) in Jarocin, the local Culture Center (*Ośrodek Kultury*), [the daily] "Głos Wielkopolski", and Poznań Jazz Society (...), to which applications—tapes or cassettes with repertoire and information plus pictures etc.—should be sent. These materials will be the basis for qualifying. The participants will perform on the final concert on July 6 and 7 along with professional bands. The whole Review will be recorded by Radio Gdańsk and TV.

Although the Jarocin festival, at which blues, rock, heavy metal, punk rock, and reggae were played, was designed by the socialist state as a "safety outlet" for restless Polish youth, some of its stars try to portray themselves thirty years later as veterans of the battle with communism, as in the documentary *Beats of Freedom (Zew wolności)* by Chris Salewicz (2010). Other musicians of that time find such an attitude highly controversial. An excerpt from an

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<sup>191</sup> See for example Peter Wicke, "The Times They are a-Changin': Rock Music and Political Change in East Germany", in *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movement*, ed. Reebee Garofalo (Cambridge: South End Press 1992), 81; Tony Mitchell, "Mixing Pop and Politics: Rock Music in Czechoslovakia before and after the Velvet Revolution," *Popular Music*, 11/2 (1992), 187; Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Currents in Eastern Europe. The Sources and Consequences of the Great Transformation* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 234-261; Timothy Ryback, *Rock around the Bloc. A History of Rock Music in Eastern-Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 233.

<sup>192</sup> Jolanta Pekacz, "Did Rock Smash the Wall? The Role of Rock in Political Transition," *Popular Music*, 13/1 (1994): 41-49.

<sup>193</sup> MMG – Muzyka Młodej Generacji (Young Generation Music).

interview with Darek Dusza (a musician performing in such bands as Shakin' Dudi, Śmierć Kliniczna and Absurd (a legend of Polish punk)) for the popular Polish website Onet.pl can serve as an example:

**Sebastian Rerak: - Former favorites of state show-business present themselves today as those who overthrew the system**

Darek Dusza: - Their speeches make me laugh. Some bands were on top, had their fan clubs, worked under the auspices of public agencies, and today they argue that they were fighting the system. How and where? With vodka bottles in Orbis hotels? Bullshit.

No one liked communism - whether [it was] musicians, miners, steel workers, or professors. On this basis, everybody was anti-system. But some try to convince you that when putting a comma in the text of a song, they were thinking of Leonid Brezhnev. Meanwhile, they lived well, earned good money and drank good liquor. Independent teams such as Dezerter [Deserter], Rejestracja [Registration], Kontrola W [Inspection W], or Śmierć Kliniczna [Clinical Death] were really doomed because they were completely marginalized; however, they did not create myths years later. Returning from a rehearsal, I could be checked by the police eighteen times within a distance of a mile, but not because I was a musician, but because I wore a leather jacket and a mohawk. (...)

**SR: - Even greater mythomaniacs let you think that punks were overthrowing communism hand in hand with the Church and Solidarity.**

DD: - Punk functioned underground, but this was not an oppositional underground. We wrote texts aimed at the regime but they were an expression of a rebellion of young people, who did not like the reality around them. Equally well, they could relate to capitalism. Today, we have a time in which young people do not want to rebel - do not know whether it pays off or whether it may be better to be obedient. And when they begin to look into, to poke about in the past, legends are created. (...) Within the two and a half years of Śmierć Kliniczna's activity, I achieved a lot with the ensemble, by the standards of that time. We performed at the biggest festivals, released a single, and on the radio and television our piece "Nienormalny świat" [Insane World] was played.<sup>194</sup>

A more important role in undermining the system's legitimacy was played by the so-called "students' culture" (*kultura studencka*) which included amateur activities in the realm of poetry, songs, cabaret, and *estrada*. The most famous songs of the Solidary movement, often considered unofficial Solidarity's anthems: Jacek Kaczmarski's "Mury" ("Walls") based on the song "L'estaca" by Lluís Llach and Jan Pietrzak's "Żeby Polska była Polską" ("Let Poland be Poland") with music by Włodzimierz Korcz, came from circles associated with students'

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<sup>194</sup> Sebastian Rerak, "Historia nie składa się z legend. An Interview with Darek Dusza.", 30 July 2010. Onet.pl <http://muzyka.onet.pl/10174,1620914,wywiady.html> [Accessed 11 August 2010].

culture.<sup>195</sup> Under the state's patronage, students' culture flourished from the 1950s on, igniting the careers of many future professional artists (including Jacek Kaczmarski), music groups (such as Pod Budą, founded in 1977 and still active<sup>196</sup>) and cabarets (such as STS (Studencki Teatr Satyryków – Student Theatre of Satirists), Bim-Bom, both founded in the 1950s, Tey, or Pod Egidą (with Jan Pietrzak), both founded in the 1960s, and Potem, founded in the 1980s).<sup>197</sup>

Probably nothing uncovered paradoxes and absurdities of the socialist system better than comedic forms, including cabaret. Apart from traditional cabarets (such as *Piwnica pod Baranami* and *Wagabunda*—both founded in 1956—or *Dudek*, founded in 1965), and those originating in the students' culture, a TV and radio cabaret developed. *Kabaret Starszych Panów* (*Old Gentlemen's Cabaret*, 1958-1966) by Jerzy Wasowski and Jeremi Przybora, and *Kabaret Olgi Lipińskiej* (*Olga Lipińska Cabaret*, 1970s- 2005) were among the most popular programs broadcasted on national television.<sup>198</sup> Radio programs such as Studio 202 (founded in the 1950s) and numerous programs

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<sup>195</sup> The song "Mury" is quoted in many Polish textbooks for elementary, middle, and high schools. For example Anna Landau-Czajka and Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, *Poznajemy Świat Wokół Nas. Zeszyty Ćwiczeń. Historia i Społeczeństwo* (Warsaw: WsiP, 2004); Joanna Konowska and Iwona Mokrzan *Nasz Wspólny Świat. Język Polski Gimnazjum Klasa 2* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne VIKING, 2010); Aleksander Nawarecki and Dorota Siwicka, *Przeszłość to Dziś. Podręcznik do II Klasy Liceum i Technikum, I Romantyzm* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Stentor, 2003); Witold Bobiński, Anna Janus-Sitarz and Bogusław Kołcz *Barwy Epok. Kultura i Literatura. Podręcznik dla Liceum Ogólnokształcącego, Liceum Profilowanego i Technikum*. (Warsaw: WsiP, 2003). For more information on Jacek Kaczmarski see Krzysztof Gajda, *Jacek Kaczmarski w Świecie Tekstów*. (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2003); Krzysztof Gajda, *To Moja Droga* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2009); Karolina Sykułska, "Jacek Kaczmarski: Szkic do Portretu" in *Bardowie*, ed. by Jadwiga Sawicka and Ewa Paczoska (Łódź: Ibidem, 2001).

On "Żeby Polska była Polską" see "Prawda w żartach zawarta. Z Janem Pietrzakiem rozmawia Patrycja Gruszyńska-Ruman" [The Truth in the Jokes Contained. Jan Pietrzak in Conversation with Patrycja Gruszyńska-Ruman], *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* (90) July 2008, 17. An English translation of the song was quoted in speeches by Ronald Reagan and Queen Elizabeth II. See *ibid*, 17.

Both songs are also discussed in Andrea Bohlman, *Activism and Music in Poland, 1978-1989* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2012), 166-176.

<sup>196</sup> Official website of the group <http://www.podbuda.pl/>. Accessed 12 September 2016.

<sup>197</sup> "The State also aids independent and spontaneous student companies; these are directly sponsored by youth organizations and since the beginning of the fifties have enjoyed remarkable freedom." Quoted after Balicki et al., op. cit., 59.

<sup>198</sup> The first cabaret in the People's Republic of Poland was *Kabaret Siedem Kotów* (1946-47), in the tradition of pre-war cabarets from Kraków. For more information on the early history of cabarets in socialist Poland see Ryszard Marek Groński *Od Siedmiu Kotów do Owcy. Kabaret 1946-1968* (Warsaw:

broadcasted by the Third Program of Polish Radio starting in the 1970s (including *Ilustrowany Tygodnik Rozrywkowy* and *60 Minut na Godzinę* [60 Minutes per Hour]) were among the listeners' favorites.

Students' culture also embraced two specifically Polish phenomena: sung poetry (*poezja śpiewana*) and tourists' song (*pionsenka turystyczna*) or rather the students' tourist songs movement (*studencki ruch piosenki turystycznej*), which disprove certain assumptions about popular music and the socialist state that are common in the West. In particular they demonstrate that popular music is contingent neither on dissemination via the mass media nor on marketing and sales on a mass-commodity basis. Moreover, they are examples of the fact that under the socialist regime the realms of official and unofficial culture were not inviolably disjunctive. In fact, even in the Soviet Union, at least in the 1970s and 1980s, it was common enough for artists to lead double artistic lives and "to move back and forth between official and unofficial work, official and unofficial artistic life."<sup>199</sup> The famous Vladimir Vysotsky, whose appearances at singer-songwriter festivals were banned from television at the same time that he was officially employed as an actor at Moscow's prestigious Taganka Theatre, exemplifies such a practice.<sup>200</sup>

Sung poetry was akin to Russian guitar poetry, which was a popular grass-roots reaction to the mass song of the Soviet Union as early as the Khrushchev cultural "thaw" of the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>201</sup> It counterbalanced the performances of the huge choirs—that preached, in monumental arrangements, institutional views of happiness, sacrifice, goodness, and loyalty—with the softer voices and lightly strummed guitars of singer-songwriters or *bards* (such as Bulat

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Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1971), 127-156. On Kabaret Starszych Panów see Roman Dziwoński, *Kabaretu Starszych Panów wespół w zespół*, (Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka, 2002).

<sup>199</sup> Theodore Levin, "Dmitri Pokrovsky and the Russian Folk Music Revival Movement," in *Retuning Culture: Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark Slobin (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> See Gerald Smith, *Songs to Seven Strings. Russian Guitar Poetry and Soviet "Mass Song"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

Okudzhava, Vladimir Vysotsky, or Aleksandr Galich) in songs that referred to a huge range of human emotion and thought left untouched by the official mass song, providing instead a realistic assessment of the singers' life and environment. Russian bards, especially Okudzhava and Vysotsky, were popular in Poland, providing inspiration for Polish artists, such as Jacek Kaczmarski.<sup>202</sup>

Its Polish equivalent, called *poezja śpiewana* [sung poetry], often referred to as "gentle music," was popular especially among students. Songs each consisted of a poem and music written especially for that text, with emphasis always on the text (the singer-songwriter's own or taken from poems by renowned poets) and were usually accompanied by guitar or piano (and sometimes also by other acoustic instruments such as flute or violin). Some artists (such as Ewa Demarczyk and Marek Grechuta) were widely popular at the official level and the change of the regime did not significantly alter their status. Others (such as Wolna Grupa Bukowina) could move back and forth between the official and unofficial level, remaining on the level of the official market when the socialist state collapsed. In the post-socialist market the most successful representative of the genre is Grzegorz Turnau (whose debut was in 1984).

In discussing the movement of students' tourist songs, Karol Płudowski considers this a specific **social movement** which grew out of disappointment at and disapprobation for social relations after *March 1968*.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> "Epitafium dla Włodzimierza Wysockiego" [Epitaph for Vladimir Vysotsky] is one of the most popular songs by Kaczmarski.

<sup>203</sup> "March 1968" (Pl. *Marzec 1968*) or "March events" (Pl. *wydarzenia marcowe*) refers to the major student and intellectual protests against the communist government of the People's Republic of Poland and the reaction to the crisis by the Polish government, which involved an "anti-Zionist" campaign, which was an official or semi-official anti-Semitic campaign related to a major struggle among the leaders of the Polish Communist Party. It resulted in a wave of mass Jewish emigration from Poland. See Andrzej Friszke, "The March 1968 Protest Movement in Light of the Ministry of the Interior Reports to the Party Leadership," *Intermarium* 1 (1) (1997 [translated from Polish by Dawid Walendowski]; original 1994), <http://ece.columbia.edu/research/intermarium/vol1no1/friszke.html>. Accessed on 20 August 2010. The most complete history of these events published to date is Jerzy Eisler, *Marzec 1968. Geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje* (Warsaw: 1991).

1972 was a time when, among students from various colleges of our country, a specific exodus from the cities to God-forsaken villages and desolate mountain and forest areas could be observed. Although (...) the withdrawal was not total but only temporary, it was regularly repeated and at times was quite massive. Such escapades were usually accompanied by singing.<sup>204</sup>

In spite of that, the movement was not **against** anybody or anything. Neither was it, nor is it, any resistance or reformation movement. (...) [Its members] just proudly and calmly turned away from a world full of violence and hypocrisy. (...) At least at a certain stage, it was an alternative movement par excellence.<sup>205</sup>

Jerzy P. Duda has demonstrated that all attempts at defining “tourists’ song” (*piosenka turystyczna*) have been unsuccessful.<sup>206</sup> Płudowski attributes this failure to the fact that available definitions treated tourists’ song as a “lyric-music piece” (*utwór słowno-muzyczny*) of art, while in fact it is not an object but a **phenomenon** which not so much “**is**” as “**becomes.**” In his opinion, tourists’ song consists on the one hand of “outer” characteristics such as lyrics, music, performance manner, and situational attributes (related to a place in nature or to a community), and on the other hand of an inner sphere (of spiritual experience, feelings, and intuition). Tourist song is something more than a piece of art; it is rather something like a theatrical spectacle or a happening, which requires personal **participation**. Thanks to its amateur character, tourists’ song, something seen as selfless, highly sincere and authentic, is situated at the opposite pole from cynicism.<sup>207</sup>

In spite of the state’s efforts, rural areas in Poland operated differently than the ways the party officials envisioned. Agriculture functioned primarily through small farms left in private hands, since the process of collectivization had failed. In spite of governmental efforts and the presence of *muzyka ludowa* in prime media space, ordinary people, especially peasants, perceived

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<sup>204</sup> Karol Płudowski, “Studencki Ruch Piosenki Turystycznej [Student Tourist Song Movement],” Master’s Thesis, Warsaw University, 2006, 39.

<sup>205</sup> Płudowski, *Ibid.*, 10-11, emphasis in the original.

<sup>206</sup> Jerzy Duda, “O definicji piosenki turystycznej,” mimeograph edition, (Gorzów Wielkopolski: WDK, 1978), quoted after Płudowski, op. cit., 6.

<sup>207</sup> Płudowski, op. cit., 7-9, emphasis as in the original.

their “old customs,” promoted by cultural officialdom as “for public display only” and kept them separate from a still extant body of voluntary local practice.<sup>208</sup> In social spaces that were beyond official control, such as wedding receptions and other privately organized gatherings, they developed their own music, parallel to the sanitized “folklore” (*folklor* in Polish) structured according to central cultural policies. So-called folk “weddings” performed on stage by ensembles had little to do with actual local practices.

Local firehouses, which belonged to fairly autonomous volunteer fire departments, hosted multigenerational dancing parties, called *zabawa*, and youth-oriented discos.<sup>209</sup> These fire halls (called *remiza*) were also rented out for private wedding receptions. At such parties, local bands performed. Their repertoire involved traditional songs in contemporary arrangements as well as covers of popular music broadcast on radio and television. According to Anna Kowalczyk’s study, the local repertoire depended on the one hand on local musical preferences, and on the other hand on the skills and technical equipment of the local bands.<sup>210</sup>

Technological advancement strongly influenced the development of new or newly-arranged repertoire. Traditional instruments gave way first to accordion, guitar, and percussion, then to electronic instruments (automatic percussion and keyboards), and finally to digital synthesizers and preprogrammed sequences. According to Kowalczyk, *zabawa* was the testing field for technical novelties, while weddings usually engendered a more traditional musical

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<sup>208</sup> This was evident even for observant foreign visitors. See for example Slobin, op. cit., 7.

<sup>209</sup> Both my grandfathers were volunteer firefighters: Jan Pasternak was a chairman of The Sułoszowa II Volunteer Fire Department, and Stanisław Krawczyk was its treasurer. Renting the firehouse for private wedding receptions, *zabawas* and the annual sale of firemen calendars were major fundraisers for volunteer fire departments.

<sup>210</sup> Anna Kowalczyk, “Krótka historia disco polo” [A short history of disco polo], an article published in *Wiedza i Życie* 9 (1997), 50-54 (available online at <http://archiwum.wiz.pl/1997/97093200.asp>, accessed 13 September 2016, is based on her Master’s Thesis at Katedra Etnologii i Antropologii Kultury, Warsaw University, Poland.

setting.<sup>211</sup> Electronic synthesizers allowed more people to perform and resulted in an increased number of bands operating at local level.

However, even the most popular bands in their regions did not have opportunities for a wider exposure and/ or national recognition. The type of music they performed was incompatible with the repertoire policies of the state-owned recording industry and media. The only sound carrier excluded from the state monopoly was the “cardboard record” (*pocztówka dźwiękowa*). These cheaply-made phonograph records were issued not only by official state labels but also by small private enterprises, which recorded official artists and repertoire as well as songs performed by local folk ensembles (*zespoły*) and amateur bands, foreign hits and their Polish covers, and even pieces by Polish-American bands. In the 1980s, cassettes of Polish bands based in Chicago (such as Polskie Orły, Biało-Czerwoni, and Bobby Vinton) were available on the Polish “black market.” Those cardboard records and, later, homemade cassettes with recordings from the radio—friends’ records—provided music for unofficial parties hosted in private houses called *prywatka*, which were an essential part of youth life in urban areas.

The Church also provided social spaces that were beyond the state’s control. In spite of the atheist communist state’s efforts to confine religious life to the private sphere, the Catholic Church began to build up religious life, and after introduction of martial law in 1980s it also provided an important space for public gatherings and cultural exchange, hosting the artists who decided to boycott the state media. In the 1980s, masses for the fatherland (*msza za ojczyznę*), usually with elaborated liturgical settings which included not only songs (such as *Ojczyzno ma* – “My Fatherland,” or *Boże coś Polskę* – “God Save Poland”) but also recited poetry (often by renowned artists), attracted great crowds.<sup>212</sup> After the assassination of the priest Jerzy

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<sup>211</sup> Kowalczyk, op. cit., 51.

<sup>212</sup> The most famous masses for the fatherland were held in Warsaw, in St. Stanisław Kostka’s Church. Initiated by the Rev. Teofil Bogucki in February 1981, after 1982 they were celebrated by the Rev. Jerzy Popiełuszko. Masses for the fatherland soon spread all over the country. As a singer in *Viatores*, an



Popiełuszko, who was kidnapped, tortured and murdered by three Security Police officers in October 1984, the popularity of such masses only increased.<sup>213</sup> Tens of thousands of people, mostly young, participated in walking pilgrimages, especially to the national shrine of Our Lady of Częstochowa, developing their own song repertory. Similar repertory was developed also through the “Light-Life Movement” (*Ruch Światło-Życie*) called “Oases” (*Oaza*), which emerged as an informal, spontaneous social group centered around Rev. Franciszek Blachnicki, and after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council developed into a mass charismatic movement (with 1,000 permanent members in the 1970s, 20,000 in 1976, 40,000 in 1980, and 77,000 in 1988).<sup>214</sup>

## Conclusion of Chapter One

On the one hand the overriding attention of Marxist-Leninist thinking was not on art, or even on culture, but on economics and political control, so music and other arts were discussed only insofar as they could serve the revolution. Moreover, neither Marx nor Lenin developed a systematic policy for the arts in their writings.<sup>215</sup> On the other hand, the establishment in all socialist countries considered music a powerful tool in its social management schemes and in shaping the “new socialist person.” As Soviet communism settled into power as state socialism in the 1920s and 1930s, a national cultural policy received a high priority in the USSR. The concept of socialist realism engendered criteria for “correct art” (though its applications were changeable and ambiguous) and Stalin himself defined the dimensions of Soviet art as “cultures, national in

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acclaimed vocal-instrumental ensemble sponsored by St. Andrew’s Church in Olkusz, I participated in multiple events of this kind at different churches of the Kielce Diocese.

<sup>213</sup> For a bibliography of Jerzy Popiełuszko see Antoni Lewek, “Bibliografia” *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 143 no. 3 (2004): 536-550; also available at official website of St. Stanisław Kostka Church, <http://popieluszko.net.pl/index.php>. (Accessed on 20 August 2010). On the significance of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko and influence of his death on Polish music see “Father Jerzy Popiełuszko’s Voice and Message,” in Andrea Bohlman, op. cit., 238-263.

<sup>214</sup> Paweł Zalecki, “The Polish Light-Life Movement and the Roman Catholic Church,” *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 11 (Winter 2003), 9-10.

<sup>215</sup> Perris, op. cit., 69.

form and socialist in substance.”<sup>216</sup> The Soviet model was then adapted after the Second World War by newly established socialist countries such as Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

In Poland, as in other countries of the Soviet Bloc, a complex structure was developed in order to regulate musical culture at its various officially-defined levels. The resulting three-part system consisted of a rule-setting bureaucratic apparatus of state and party administrators to influence musical institutions (such as Composers Unions, *filharmonia* organizations, and concert agencies), a set of standardized formats and venues for music making (such as festivals, parades, competitions, local houses of culture, and amateur troupes at various levels of support, proficiency and national visibility), and official repertoires.<sup>217</sup> This system was aimed at promoting a new socialist artistic culture: democratic, secular and open, and excluding everything reactionary, pornographic and tawdry. All important musical figures initially welcomed the cultural policy of the socialist state, a generous sponsor of the arts, and engaged in socialist realism. However, the dogmatism of the system resulted in a backlash, and by 1956 the musical world achieved near-total autonomy and socialist realism was scarcely mentioned again.

The cultural policy of socialist Poland, a country with a new regime and new borders, put special emphasis on national matters. It referred to Polish Messianism, which defined Polish culture throughout the 19th century and to some degree continues to define modern Poland. With its emphasis on suffering, “chosenness,” and the perceived special mission of the Polish nation, it did not provide any space for sheer entertainment; it also envisioned folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) as a source of “pure Polishness” and as “raw material” for high culture.

In what is probably the greatest dramatic work in Polish, Wyspiański’s *The Wedding*, the action takes place in a peasant cottage in the area of Cracow during a

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<sup>216</sup> The term “Socialist Realism” first appeared as the title of an essay by the Soviet writer Maxim Gorky in 1933. The following year, at the All Union Congress of Soviet Writers, the USSR Communist Party spokesman, Andrei Zhdanov, set forth the aims of Soviet artistic expression, “to depict reality in its revolutionary development,” and called for works “attuned to the epoch.” See Perris, op. cit., 70.

<sup>217</sup> Slobin, op. cit., 2-3.

marriage ceremony, and the characters come out in pairs and carry on a dialogue, just as in the ritual peasant performances that are given at religious festivals; however, it is very quickly made clear that it is Poland which is being discussed and which, even if its name is not marked on the map, is alive in the hearts of the peasants and in all Polish hearts.<sup>218</sup>

Although folk culture became a springboard for national matters, these national issues are not entrusted to the people themselves, but taken care of by the élite, by those who, inspired by the folk (*lud*) and their culture, are capable of elevating it to higher levels and transforming the local into the national and universal. Entrusting national issues to the people themselves can only bring a disaster, as in Wyspiański's drama *The Wedding*, where a peasant given a golden horn, symbolizing the national mission, loses it. The people (*lud*), an "imagined community" created by those who did not belong to it and, in consequence, subordinated to the élite, was deprived of agency over their culture. A community necessary for the "nation's survival," and the provider of source material for the "national culture," it nonetheless needed a guideline and the supervision of its creator(s).

Folk music in socialist Poland was still perceived in the old Romantic way as synonymous with "popular" and "traditional". Believed to originate in some mythical "golden age," it represented culture shared across classes and a genius of the people or populace. Associated with "untainted nature," "popular" meant simple, touching and universal, and was not linked to "a new set of criteria revolving around the taint of the commercial, of politics, and of class."<sup>219</sup> Moreover, categorizing music by function coexisted with categorizing it by origin. On the one hand the *muzyka ludowa* (folk music) was distinguished from *muzyka poważna* ("serious music") on the basis of origin, as the output of a collective in contrast to the output of an individual composing genius, while on the other hand the distinction between *muzyka poważna* ("serious music", German *E-Musik*) and *muzyka rozrywkowa* ("entertainment music", German *U-*

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<sup>218</sup> Balicki et al., op. cit., 12.

<sup>219</sup> Gelbart, op. cit, 256.

*Musik* or *Unterhaltungsmusik*) affirmed function-based categorization; the former being associated with “high” art and the latter with “low” craft. Furthermore, although *muzyka rozrywkowa* (“music for entertainment”) is usually translated into English as popular music, these terms are hardly synonymous. The adjective *popularny* (“popular”) in the Polish language means “widely known” and does not necessarily carry the connotation of “widely liked”. Besides, the assumption that popular music is synonymous with genres whose styles have evolved in an inextricable relationship with their dissemination via the mass media and their marketing and sale on a mass-commodity basis, a model which dominates currently in Anglo-American scholarship, is inadequate to the Polish experience.

Under socialism culture was not subject to market laws. As a result, remuneration of artists, including those associated with lighter genres, or *muzyka rozrywkowa*, was not directly linked with sales (of concert tickets or recordings). On the one hand musicians’ salaries and other forms of financial gratification depended not on sales but on their position within the unions’ structures; on the other hand they were provided with a moral authority their counterparts in the West could only dream of. Moreover, there were genres noncommercial by their nature (meant to be sung and not to be sold), such as *poezja śpiewana* (“sung poetry”) or *piosenka turystyczna* (“tourists’ song”) which circulated widely (mostly through oral transmission and songbooks with lyrics and guitar chords), were sung at unofficial gatherings and, when cassette recorders became widely available, became a part of the “cassette culture.”

Contrary to their perception in the West, state-socialist regimes were not synonymous with totalitarianism. The premises of the cultural policy of socialist Poland were never fully implemented, and following the “thaw” of the 1950s, cultural spaces beyond official control widened, as part of the long process of de-ideologization which preceded the system’s collapse. On the one hand the system allowed for a wide range of repertoires, including rock music; on the other hand, repertoires incompatible with socialist policy developed in the spaces that were beyond official control, such as privately-organized social gatherings, including wedding

receptions and *prywatka* parties, the students' tourist movement, and the Church. In rural areas, sanitized "folklore" (*folklor* in Polish), structured by central cultural policies, was often treated as "for public display only," and was very different from the body of voluntary musical practice. Interestingly, musical practice in rural areas which did not fit the paradigm of *muzyka ludowa* received little attention, being ignored in fieldwork studies as irrelevant.

The utopian goal of bringing music to workers and peasants in order to shape them into cultivated individuals envisioned a culture of leisure, represented by *estrada* concerts, as a means of winning new listeners for good music. The assumption that folk music (*muzyka ludowa*), in its "purest" form, as defined by ethnomusicologists, folklorists, etc., would be a natural idiom of choice for the people in the rural areas was also proven to be a false hope. Differences between the formal premises of cultural policy and the actual functioning of culture and music-making in socialist Poland were significant from the very beginning, especially at the provincial level. Save the short Stalinist period, the gap between the official and operative level of socialist ideology only grew wider in time, allowing for development of the counterhegemonic vision of culture that would ultimately lead to socialism's collapse.

However, some premises of socialist cultural policy are still present in post-socialist Poland. While, with the state subsidies reduced, only those cultural institutions that have been granted a "national" status are entitled to receive direct financial support from the central government and special standards of material provision, and others must seek financial support at a local level and through private sponsorship, patronage for the arts is in principle taken for granted as the responsibility of the state. The state-sponsored system of music education (which involved music classes in ordinary schools for everybody and special-education music schools for especially gifted students) was preserved, although it became supplemented by private music schools.<sup>220</sup> Special-education music schools, which "operated as filters for talent in the classical

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<sup>220</sup> However, music classes in ordinary schools were affected by education reforms. Core curriculum prepared by the Ministry of Education can be found at *Podstawa programowa z komentarzami. Vol. 7*

music realm, culminating in the international-contest prizewinner clutching a state-owned Stradivarius, a system that directly paralleled the identification and fostering of Olympic athletes,” contributed to associating music with fields which require special predispositions from its practitioners and are governed by objective criteria.<sup>221</sup> The notion of an educational mission and the cultivation of artistic taste are expected to be included in the national mainstream media programming, just as, on the other hand, tawdry content is not expected to receive public support.

The confrontation of local practices, which were a legacy of functioning of culture under socialism, with requirements of the new, capitalist system and a new role of Poland as prospective member of the European Union will be the focal point of the next chapter. Disco polo, the first musical genre to have emerged and flourished after socialism collapsed, illustrates this clash particularly well. Its emergence was closely related to a free-market economy and its ability to respond to audience needs. In the 1980s it could exist only as an underground phenomenon due to its incompatibility with the premises of cultural policy of the socialist state discussed above. At the beginning of the transition to capitalism, it “suddenly erupted” gaining enormous popularity among audiences of all generations. Still, however, it has not fully integrated into Polish mainstream culture and brings social anathema to its admitted audience.

Why did this alternative to Western pop-culture invite such disdain and disapprobation? How was the genre impoverished and how did it stigmatize its audience? Is disco polo driven by the logic of Western capitalism alone? Is the new regime in post-socialist Poland driven by the free-market economy alone? These questions will guide my research on this music that first to have experienced commercialization, and soon became the synonym for bad taste, and business-inspired esthetic compromise. The study will concentrate on the process that made this original

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*Edukacja artystyczna w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i liceum*, 19-26 and 37-41, available at [http://liceum.magellanium.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/tom\\_7.pdf](http://liceum.magellanium.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/tom_7.pdf). Accessed on 13 September 2016.

<sup>221</sup> The quote from Slobin, op. cit., 3.

Polish genre of popular music, played at weddings and other dance parties, a symbol of “the worst” music and “the lowest” culture.

## CHAPTER TWO

# DISCO POLO: THE CULTURE OF THE PEOPLE COMES TO THE MARKETPLACE

*“But, please, do not write only bad things about disco-polo”<sup>1</sup>*

Andrzej Borowski

In the last week of 2012, the hit “Ona Tańczy Dla Mnie” [She’s Dancing for Me] by the disco-polo band Weekend reached number 35 on the YouTube Weekly Top Tracks chart with almost 32,800,000 views (by six months later the number of views had exceeded 66 million). Yet, like other disco polo hits, the only Polish song in the YouTube 100 was absent from the mainstream media in Poland, owing its popularity mostly to digital dissemination (including YouTube and Facebook) and oral transmission (including wedding receptions and sport events, at which it is not only frequently played to accompany spontaneous dancing but also collectively sung by the public).<sup>2</sup>

“This is such a coarseness, as to be dangerous and harmful to society,” Kora, a former rock star, commented on the song on the 2012 edition of the Polish television talent show “Must Be The Music.”<sup>3</sup> Much earlier, Tadeusz Sobolewski, a recognized film critic, in his widely resonating article “Empty beach” (1996) assigned post-socialist Poland two attributes: the supermarket and disco polo, declaring the latter “the most dangerous of the different expressions

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<sup>1</sup> Andrzej Borowski, an interview with the author on February 1, 2008 at the Valentine Concert of Disco Polo and Dance [Walentynkowy Koncert disco polo i dance] in the Polish American Cultural Center, Clifton NJ.

<sup>2</sup> One spectacular example of such a collective performance of the song by hundreds of soccer fans singing it *a cappella* happened before a game between Pogoń Szczecin and Legia Warszawa on 22 October 2012. It is featured on the video available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUC57M1I00U>. (Accessed on 6 June 2013).

<sup>3</sup> A relevant excerpt can be found at the Pudelektv YouTube channel: <http://youtu.be/C2EzJ2uHscY>. Published on 22 January 2013. (Accessed on 6 June 2013).



of contemporary mass culture”.<sup>4</sup> What makes this seemingly unthreatening music so dangerous? Why is this form of cultural expression so characteristic of the Polish transition to capitalism? For what reasons is it that disco polo, the first musical genre to have emerged and flourished after socialism collapsed in Poland in 1989, still remains outside mainstream culture and brings social anathema on its admitted audience?

When Poland began the difficult transition from socialism to a free-market economy, local practices, which were a legacy of the functioning of culture under socialism, were confronted by requirements of the new, capitalist system and the new role of Poland as a prospective member of the European Union. Disco polo illustrates this clash particularly well. In the 1980s it could exist only as an underground phenomenon due to its incompatibility with the premises of the cultural policy of the socialist state, discussed in the first chapter. When socialism dissolved, it came out of its underground existence, being the first genre that experienced commercialization.

Developed spontaneously, with the significant input of the Polish diaspora in Chicago, it circulated outside official channels of distribution, gaining enormous popularity across all generations. Played and sung at provincial fun fairs, *zabawa* parties, discos, wedding receptions, and other moments of celebration, it was aimed at giving people enjoyment, fun, and temporary relief from everyday troubles. Rejected by major labels, denied access to record stores, and deprived of mainstream media exposure, disco polo dominated the sonic space of Polish fairgrounds in the 1990s, generating sales in volumes higher than those for any other genre.

The genre's exclusion from mainstream culture and its marginalization in show-business seem paradoxical in the light of its spectacular market success. The disco-polo industry was market-driven and efficiently responded to audience needs, which were not satisfied by the

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<sup>4</sup> Tadeusz Sobolewski, "Pusta plaża (Nowy wspaniały świat disco-polo)", *Tygodnik Powszechny* 31, 4 October 1996, 1, 5.

cultural policy of the socialist state. As such, it would seem to be a perfect fit for the new capitalist system. However, it was not proclaimed its herald but its *enfant terrible*, and soon became the synonym for bad music, bad taste, and business-inspired aesthetic compromise. No other aspect of mass culture received more severe criticism, especially from the intelligentsia, and the suffix *-polo* became a symbol of something commercialized and in bad taste.

Disco-polo seems to focus many aspects and struggles of the early stages of Polish post-socialism. On the one hand it had to deal with the legacy of the socialist regime, and on the other hand, adapt to and take the opportunities offered by a new, capitalist, system. Moreover, a popular musical genre rejected by mainstream culture provides an opportunity to look at Polish post-socialism from the perspective of ordinary Poles. Such a perspective can be illuminating because the vast majority of analyses of the Polish transformation are confined to the articulated opinions of intellectuals, as presented in the media or in scholarly publications.

The chapter will focus on aspects of disco polo which are at odds with official discourses in post-socialist Poland and contribute to the genre's rejection by the mainstream culture. An outline of the spontaneous development of disco polo, of its "sudden eruption" when the regime changed, will be followed by a discussion of the intellectuals' reaction to it. The study will examine how the ideas of national identity, tradition, and heritage are reflected and (re)defined in disco polo. It will also consider the attitude of the genre to the West and its relationship to Western popular and folk music.

### A short history of disco polo? A herald of the new system becomes its *enfant terrible*

The two most extensive articles on the genre were both entitled "A Short History of Disco Polo" (in Polish "Krótka historia disco-polo").<sup>5</sup> Such a title, while indicating the

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<sup>5</sup> Karolina Dabert, "Krótka historia disco-polo" [A Short History of Disco Polo], *Zeszyty Etnologii Wrocławskiej* 1 (4) 2002, 57-70 and Anna Kowalczyk, "Krótka historia disco polo" *Wiedza i Życie* 9/1997,

introductory character of the studies, suggests at the same time a short life for the genre. Even a quick glance at the titles of press articles such as “Disco Polo’s Funeral?” (“Pogrzeb disco polo?,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 1997), “The Death of Disco Polo” (“Śmierć disco polo,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 2004), “Disco Polo Strikes Back” (*Varsaw Voice*, February 2007), or “Polo Virus Comes Back” (“Wirus polo wraca,” *Newsweek Poland*, December 2008) reveals an attempt at discrediting and burying disco polo alive.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Robert Leszczyński wrote about “Disco Polo’s Funeral?” in the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, seven years before Wojciech Orliński announced “The Death of Disco Polo” in the same paper. However, they announced its death only to have to admit its unwelcome resurrection.

The unfounded claim that disco polo is a rootless phenomenon imposed on the people by commercial activities is very often put forward by opponents of the genre as an argument supporting its “badness.” The ethnomusicologists Joanna Gienza and Jan Stęszewski suggest that disco polo did not spring from any particular subculture but became immediately popular after a large musical event in Warsaw, the Gala Piosenki Popularnej i Chodnikowej (“Gala of Popular and Sidewalk Songs”) in 1992.<sup>7</sup> In fact, as reflected in its name, the event presented music that was already popular among people. However, for the first time such music was allowed to enter the most prestigious concert venue in the capital of Poland, the Congress-Hall (Sala

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50-54, available online at <http://archiwum.wiz.pl/1997/97093200.asp> (accessed 13 September 2016). The latter article is based on Kowalczyk’s master’s thesis at the Katedra Etnologii i Antropologii Kultury, Warsaw University.

As in the titles of these articles, the genre’s name can be spelled *disco polo* or *disco-polo*. While, in general, the more common spelling *disco polo* is used in my dissertation, the original spelling is preserved in quotations from Polish texts.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Leszczyński, “Pogrzeb disco polo?” [Disco Polo’s Funeral?], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6 February 1997, 12; Wojciech Orliński, “Śmierć disco polo” [Death of Disco Polo], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 12 August 2004, 10; Marta Kruszewska, “Disco Polo Strikes Back,” *Warsaw Voice*, 14 February 2007; Igor Miecik, “Wirus polo wraca” [Polo Virus Comes Back], *Newsweek Poland* 52, 22 December 2008, 94-99.

<sup>7</sup> Joanna Gienza and Jan Stęszewski, “Disco-polo”, *Pota Glasba ob Koncu Tisočletja: Dosežki, Perspektive/ The Path of Music at the End of the Millennium: Achievements and Perspectives*. Published proceedings of the symposium, ed. Primož Kuret (Ljubljana: Festival Ljubljana, 1998), 92.

Kongresowa), and was shown on television, becoming a visible phenomenon and an acknowledged component of Polish culture.

The “sudden eruption” of the genre known as disco polo at the beginning of the transformation from socialism to capitalism is a consequence of the cultural policy of socialist Poland and its hidden development (which started a few decades before the famous Gala concert) in the cultural spaces which were beyond the official control of the state, such as wedding receptions, *zabawa* parties, and other social gatherings. As discussed in the first chapter, in spite of the cultural officials’ believe in folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) as the natural idiom of choice for ordinary people, and all the efforts to promote it, local musical practices, especially in rural areas, had little to do with sanitized “folklore”.

Ordinary Poles, including peasants, patronized a far broader spectrum of music than the one selected for study and celebrated as *muzyka ludowa*. The repertoire of local bands was modernized and expanded (incorporating not only traditional songs in contemporary arrangements but also covers of popular music broadcast on the radio and television). Their instruments were likewise modernized, allowing more people to perform (thanks to the introduction of electronic instruments, including automatic percussion and keyboards). Nevertheless, an increased number of bands operating at local level did not result in wider exposure and/ or national recognition even of the most popular of them. The type of music they performed was incompatible with the repertoire policies of the state-owned recording industry and media. This changed only with the introduction of the free-market economy in 1989.

Before 1989 the only sound carriers excluded from the state monopoly were cardboard records (*pocztówki dźwiękowe*) and, later, cassettes. *Pocztówki dźwiękowe*, cheaply-made phonograph 45-rpm single records issued by state labels as well as by small private enterprises, featured not only official artists and repertory but also songs performed by local folk ensembles and amateur bands, foreign hits (copied from the recordings brought from the West or from Radio Luxembourg broadcasts) and their Polish covers, and even pieces by Polish-American bands. All

these were issued regardless of copyright and “never mentioned in official reports on the cultural life of the nation”.<sup>8</sup>

In the Polish language, *pocztówki dźwiękowe* literally means “sound postcards” and those cardboard records often performed such a role. Sometimes, a service of recording one’s own sound message (which could supplement a song) was offered, and one could simply put such a cardboard sheet into an envelope and post it. Cardboard records launched the careers of such artists as Janusz Laskowski (known for such great Polish hits as *Beata* or *Kolorowe jarmarki*). Ireneusz Krzemiński points out that even the title of Sobolewski’s article “Pusta plaża” (“Empty Beach”) was taken from that of a song distributed on cardboard records.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1980s, cardboard records were replaced by cassettes. Boomboxes, especially radio-cassette players capable of recording onto cassette from the radio and (sometimes) other sources, were widely popular. Homemade cassettes with recordings from the radio and from friends’ records, which were distributed through private exchange, complemented by cassettes available for sale on the Polish “black market,” played a key role in the dissemination of repertory alternative to that available through official distribution. Due to the popularity of cassette players (which were also standard equipment in cars and buses), disco polo songs were initially published exclusively on cassettes. Even when disco polo albums started being issued on both CDs and cassettes, the latter generated bigger sales well into the late 1990s.

When the socialist system dissolved, newly emerging private labels turned to music that had been widely popular among the people, but hitherto hardly accessible for sale. Disco polo, previously restricted to homemade recordings, flourished throughout the country and became the basis of a cassette industry. Newly recorded cassettes were sold in hundreds of thousands of

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<sup>8</sup> Ireneusz Krzemiński, „Inteligentkie zamieszanie ducha,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 46, 17 November 1996, 9.

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

copies despite the exclusion of the genre from the airwaves, from record stores and from formal concert venues until the famous Gala of 1992.

It was not mainstream media or the music industry leaders (“The Majors”: Pomaton EMI, PolyGram Polska, BMG Ariola, Warner Music, and Sony Music PL) that provided the means for disco polo to become a fully blown commercial genre or that capitalized on its success. The genre was published by newly emergent independent private enterprises and distributed from provisional stands placed directly on sidewalks at bazaars, while major labels and established distribution channels rejected it in spite of a guaranteed profit. In 1995 the main publisher of the genre had a 12% market share, selling over a million recordings per year (virtually all on cassettes) and earning US\$1.2 million in sales; yet at the same time one would search for disco polo editions by major labels in vain. EMPiK and other major music distributors refused to sell disco polo productions.<sup>10</sup>

Although the national public radio and television tried to keep disco polo from the airwaves, it dominated the popular music domain in Poland until 1997, finding a platform for exposure in some private, low-budget, commercial stations, the private commercial television station Polsat, which broadcasted Disco Relax, and later on the internet. In an OBOP study of October 2002 disco polo ranked as the fourth most popular musical genre, with 44% of Poles admitting liking it. In a similar study from 2007, disco polo ranked as the second most popular musical genre (after pop).<sup>11</sup>

The first publisher of the genre, Blue Star, was founded by Sławomir Skreeta, a former soccer player, who started his business in the 1980s as a cassette-stand owner at a fairground in Milanówek (a small town near Warsaw). His business soon grew into a wholesale-sized

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<sup>10</sup> EMPiK, the largest Polish commercial chain (with 134 stores in Poland and 23 in Ukraine as of May 2009), sells books, international press and media products, including music).

<sup>11</sup> OBOP (Osrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej) is the most experienced research institute in Poland and Eastern Europe, specializing in market and opinion research and media measurement; since 2012 it has been a part of TNS Polska.

enterprise. One day a few of his regular customers wanted to buy a cassette by a popular local group, *Fanatic*. It was a homemade recording circulating among the band's fans. Skrepta did not have the cassette, so he sought out the band and offered them a recording session. At their disposal they had a Unitra cassette recorder (a brand popular in Poland at that time), Skrepta's car garage, and a Saturday afternoon. He made 5,000 copies of the recording, which disappeared from shelves within two days.<sup>12</sup> Skrepta recalls the early days of Blue Star as follows:

Every week a new band came. At an insolvent company, Unitra Diora in Dzierżonów, I ordered the first installment of manufacturer-modified [cassette] decks. They were capable of copying a hundred cassettes at a time. In order to print covers, I bought my own graphic arts equipment. I rented a room from an impoverished textile factory. The decks worked days and nights. The people worked in a three-shift system. Two years after *Fanatic* was published, Blue Star employed 40 people. (...) The whole business relied on selling as many copies as possible within the first three days after a premiere. It was three days before markets were flooded with pirate copies... At that time in order to stay on the market, one had to record and publish new material and a new band.<sup>13</sup>

Marcin Miller, the leader of the band Boys and one of the most popular stars of the genre, recalls the beginning of his band's career as follows:

It was pure romanticism. Our first professional instrument was an electronic percussion machine, bought for an astronomical price—at least for us at that time—of 3,5 mln PLN [3,500 new PLN or ca. 600 USD]. Already at our second concert, it was stolen from the backstage of a dance club where we played. Most of our equipment: speakers, mixer tables, and amplifiers, we made ourselves. Our first record, or rather cassette, we recorded in my car garage on a Technics [a popular maker of cassette recorders] borrowed from my friend. We simply pressed the record button before the first song and the stop button when the last one ended. A passing train and a squeak of the door, when my wife entered in with sandwiches, were heard in the recording. There was no time for a retake.<sup>14</sup>

Miller identified his potential publisher at a cassette stand at a local fairground, noticing that all disco-polo cassettes were labeled Blue Star – Żyrardów. He packed his bag and took a

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<sup>12</sup> Miecik, op. cit., 94-99.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 97

train to Żyrardów (a small town c. 30 miles south-west of the capital of Poland, Warsaw). At the Blue Star label nobody paid any attention to the passing train or the squeaking door in the background. When Skręta heard the song “Wolność” [“Freedom”] he sent the cassette to be copied immediately.<sup>15</sup> The cassette, entitled *Dziewczyna z marzeń* (“A girl from [my] dreams,” 1991), was very successful, and Boys’ second cassette *Usłysz Wołanie* (“Hear my cry,” April 1992), was recorded already in a professional studio in Warsaw.<sup>16</sup>

What we really wanted was to play like our idols of that time, Duran Duran, Depeche Mode, and INXS. However, when we played their pieces at weddings, people didn’t enjoy themselves (...) People wanted hits by Top One, Fanatic, Bayer Full [disco polo groups]. It was our level, so we did it really well, and the public went crazy.”<sup>17</sup>

Disco polo bands had different roots. In the early 1990s performers at weddings and *zabawa* parties (such as Fanatic, Atlantis, Akcent, Milano, Ex Problem, Chanel) dominated among them. Some had Polish-American experience, having performed in Polish clubs and restaurants, mostly in Chicago. There were also amateur bands that had attempted different genres first, and had later switched to disco polo (BFC was a rock band, Bayer Full participated in festivals of tourist songs and sung poetry, Top One played Italo disco).<sup>18</sup> The increasing popularity and profitability of disco polo ignited an emergence of new bands attracted to the genre not by its sonic qualities but by prospects of income.

Beginning in 1992, in rural areas, the first professional disco clubs emerged. Unlike earlier *zabawa* parties in firehouses, which did not offer professional sound and lighting equipment, they were no different from modern discothèques in big cities. According to Anna Kowalczyk, the trend was initiated by Jerzy Suszycki from Białystok, who built a club called

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<sup>15</sup> Miecik, op. cit., 97.

<sup>16</sup> The official website of Boys, <http://www.boys.art.pl>. Accessed 15 November 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Miecik, op. cit., 98.

<sup>18</sup> See Kowalczyk, op. cit., and official bands’ websites [bayerfull.pl](http://www.bayerfull.pl), [www.topone.pl](http://www.topone.pl), <http://www.boys.art.pl/>.



*Panderoza* near Janów (in the region of Białystok). Outside it looked like a barn, but it was equipped with the newest disco lighting and sound system, a modern bar, and a parking lot. *Panderoza* employed security and offered a bus shuttle extending further than 30 miles. Because Suszycki cooperated with Blue Star, only bands from this label performed at the parties he organized. His parties were so successful that within two years he developed a network of twenty disco clubs. Every Saturday and Sunday (except for Advent and Lent) from 8 pm to 3 am thousands of people had a good time to disco polo music played at each event by one band. Bands rotated in order not to play too often in a single location.<sup>19</sup>

Until the mid-1990s Blue Star, based in Rydułtowy near Warsaw, had a monopoly in disco polo productions. In 1995, Green Star was founded in Białystok (North-Eastern Poland) by Cezary Kulesza (the former partner of Sławomir Skręta), who took over most of Blue Star's artists when Skręta went out of business in 1998. Also, in 1995 Omega Music, from Żuromin (central Poland) switched to disco polo repertoire, while at the same time in Warsaw STD emerged.<sup>20</sup> Those four labels were associated with two Polsat TV shows: *Disco Relax* (which featured mostly Blue Star, STD and Omega Music's artists, such as Bayer Full, Amadeo, Mister Dex, Big Dance, New Collective, Voyager, or Bobi) and *Disco Polo Live* (which featured Green Stars's performers, such as Boys, Akcent, Classic, Milano, Skaner, Imperium, or Denis, and later Buenos Aires, Viper, Vivat, and Toples). While Blue Star specialized in dance style, which gravitated towards Western currents and allowed for English language rapping, Green Star was associated with traditional vernacular disco polo.

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<sup>19</sup> Kowalczyk, op.cit., 53; Wojciech Staszewski and Mariusz Szczygiel, "Usta są zawsze gorące" ["Lips are always hot"], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6-8 May 1995: 17.

<sup>20</sup> Omega music, founded in 1991 by Zbigniew Retkowski, initially issued cassettes (mostly unlicensed) of hit mixes by foreign stars of dance music such as Depeche Mode, Queen, Sandra, Enigma, Michael Jackson, etc. The label went out of business in 2000. Green Star has been idle since 2008 due to conflicts with its artists.

In 2004 STD was taken over by Gold Records Music Publishers [*Wydawnictwo Muzyczne Gold Records*].

Each label was linked to a network of ca. 200 discothèques. The maximum capacity of such venues ranged from a few hundred to fourteen hundred people. Offering free shuttle services, they attracted also people from big cities (including the capital of Poland, Warsaw) to grand venues in distant rural locations.<sup>21</sup> Each discothèque was linked to one label only, hosting live performances three times a week (on average) and paying only half price for them in exchange for the bands' own promotion.<sup>22</sup> At that time such stars as Shazza, Janusz Laskowski, Fanatic, Boys, Milano, Akcent, or Amadeo were selling a few hundred thousand of their recordings on cassettes and an additional few thousand on CDs. As for non-disco polo artists, only two Polish pop stars, Robert Chojnacki and the band Varius Manx, could equal that.

The mid-1990s was a time when on the one hand new bands mushroomed, attracted to the genre by a chance for media promotion, and on the other hand many bands (such as Boys or Maxel) transformed their stage image, replacing instrumental sections with dance shows using playback music. Exposure on *Disco Polo Live*, promised by its host, DJ Pietrek, to those making their first steps in the genre, resulted in many "one hit wonders". As a result of bands' restructuring, not only were instrumentalists replaced by dancers but also the leaders' positions were reinforced. Some bands also introduced to their productions rhythms and sounds of other dance genres, including hip hop.<sup>23</sup>

The presidential elections of 1995 contributed to the genre's exposure, with songs commissioned by election committees from disco polo stars. Top One recorded a hit entitled "Ole Olek" for Aleksander Kwaśniewski (from the post-communist party, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), who became president for two consecutive terms, from 1995-2005) and Bayer Full supported Waldemar Pawlak (from the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL)) with "The President".

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<sup>21</sup> Dabert, op. cit., 59-60.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>23</sup> Marcin MAX, "Droga do gwiazd" [A Road to the Stars], in *Centrum informacji o muzyce disco-polo* [Disco Polo Music Information Center], [www.disco-dance.prv.pl](http://www.disco-dance.prv.pl). Accessed on 17 December 2011.

Moreover, in 1997 Sławomir Świerzyński, the leader of Bayer Full, himself ran for parliamentary election (as a representative of the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL)), though unsuccessfully.<sup>24</sup>

Such political engagement did not associate the genre with any particular political tendency, but it did help its media exposure. Although on public radio and television disco polo could not count on anything more than incidental appearances, it was played on Polsat TV and on radio "Eska" from Warsaw (on the program *Blok polskiej muzyki tanecznej*, hosted by Mira Walecka and Tomasz Matyszewski), gaining enormous popularity with its audience. Moreover, disco-polo monthly magazines emerged: *Super Disco po Polsku* ("Super Disco in Polish," in Warsaw), *Disco Hit*, and *Disco Polo* (in Białystok). Like the teen magazine *Bravo*, they included many pictures, poster inserts with stars of the genre, and lyrics of their songs, as well as fans' letters, a broken hearts' corner, and a hit list.<sup>25</sup>

Greater exposure, however, coincided with an escalation of the devastating critique of disco polo in the mainstream media. Until 1994 the mainstream media had ignored the existence of disco polo almost completely. Its presence in radio and television ignited a heated discussion on the phenomenon in television pundit programs and documentaries (such as *Bara Bara* by Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz and Michał Arbudzki, which was broadcast by TVP 2 on 3 September 1996) as well as in the press. Following "Pusta plaża" [Empty Beach], the article by Tadeusz Sobolewski, which resonated widely, especially among Polish intellectuals, disco polo became a springboard for discussion of various issues pertaining to Polish culture.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Świerzyński claims that he was motivated more by the opportunity for media exposure than by a prospect of a political career. See an interview with Sławomir Świerzyński for the monthly magazine *Kultura* (Lonon), available at <http://bayerfull.pl/categories/view/3/46>. Accessed on 20 December 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Zofia Woźniak, "Fenomen disco polo i jego miejsce w polskiej kulturze masowej lat dziewięćdziesiątych" [Disco Polo – A Cultural Phenomenon and its Place in Polish Mass Culture of the 1990s], *Etnografia Polska* 42, no. 1-2 (1998): 192-193.

<sup>26</sup> "Pusta plaża" inspired five responses in *Tygodnik Powszechny* alone (a weekly which published Sobolewski's article and which was considered the most distinguished newspaper of official, liberal opposition in former communist Poland). They were: Sławomir Magala, "Żadna plaża," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 35, 1 September 1996, 7; Maciej Mazurek, "Intelektualista na ludowej zabawie," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 35, 1 September 1996, 7; Krzysztof Biedrzycki, "Oswajanie pustej plaży," *Tygodnik*

1996 saw the publication of a number of articles on the topic. Surprised by the presence and wide range of the phenomenon, which had spread without any media help, the authors of these articles tried to comprehend its popularity, ranging from attempts to discern links between disco polo and politics or various moral and financial scandals to attempts to analyse the phenomenon in terms of its place within the map of Polish culture.<sup>27</sup>

The tone of attacks aimed at discrediting the genre was set by articles published in 1995 (the election year) and 1996, such as "Lips Are Always Hot" [Usta sa zawsze gorace] by Wojciech Staszewski and Mariusz Szczygiel (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6-8 May 1995), "From Bazaar to the Salons: Disco Polo Attacks" [Z bazaru na salony: disco polo atakuje] by Mirosław Pęczak (*Polityka*, 4 May 1996), and "Like in a Family: Is the Mafia in Charge of the Disco Polo Business?" [Jak w rodzinie: czy mafia rządzi biznesem disco polo?] by Sławomir Mizerski and Mirosław Pęczak (*Polityka*, 17 August 1996).

Juxtaposing disco polo with some criminal references in the media was an occurrence too frequent to be accidental, and can be interpreted as an attempt to discredit the genre. For example, the band Focus took issue with the title "Thus the Music, thus the Audience" ["Jaka muzyka, taka publika"] given to a text about a charity concert they played at a prison in the Białystok by the local section of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. A prominent section of the documentary *Bara Bara* features Detention House Warsaw in the Białołęka District, which had its own music chart with disco-polo hits.

Straightforward linking of disco polo with the world of organized crime can be found in articles such as "Like in a Family: Is the Mafia in Charge of the Disco Polo Business?" ["Jak w rodzinie: czy mafia rządzi biznesem disco polo?"] by Sławomir Mizerski and Mirosław Pęczak

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*Powszechny*, 40, 6 October 1996, 14; Andrzej Stasiuk, "Kultura fajerwerku," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 44, 3 November 1996, 8; and Ireneusz Krzemiński, „Inteligentkie zamieszanie ducha," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 46 (1996), 9.

<sup>27</sup> See Woźniak op. cit., 195.

(*Polityka*, 17 August 1996), "Mafiopolo. Disco Polo was Endorsed by Gangsters" ["Mafiopolo. Disco polo wylansowali gangsterzy"] by Piotr Krysiak and Rafał Pasztelański (*Wprost*, 9/2007, February 2007), and "Mafiosos' Fortunes – Easy Come, Will Easy Go?" ["Fortuny mafiosów - łatwo przyszło, czy łatwo pójdzie?"] by Jerzy Jachowicz (*Dziennik*, 5 November 2007). Their authors claim that disco polo owes its popularity to Polish gangsters, who promoted the genre and might have controlled up to seventy percent of its market (during the peak of disco polo's popularity, 1995-1997).<sup>28</sup>

Although disco polo performers admit that their music publishers might have to deal with the Polish mafia, they deny dealing with gangsters themselves and refute suggestions that the genre was promoted by gangsters. Even if the Polish mafia capitalized on disco polo's popularity by (re)investing money in the production of CDs of the genre, or by taking control of some discothèques which played such music, the genre had developed long before organized crime became a problem in Poland. Nevertheless, Krysiak and Pasztelański link the decline in the genre's popularity with the liquidation of the largest criminal organizations in Poland. Moreover, they suggest that the resurgence of disco polo coincided with the reactivation of smaller gangs, as if warning that the growing popularity of the genre may lead to the growth of organized crime.

Shady public relations were not limited to the attempted discrediting of the genre by linking it to the world of criminals. Disco polo artists

were accused of lack of ambition regarding both music and lyrics. Their vocal performance was slated, and finally so was their audience. There were more and more voices saying that an educated person cannot listen to 'something like that' (implying: 'it cannot even be called music'). The slogan: 'Simple music for simpletons' became dominant. Right up until now fans have had to listen to such cutting remarks.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> According to Jachowicz, one of the Pruszków Mafia bosses, Pershing, planned to expand his music publishing concerns by widening the range of musical genres to encompass classical music (including Bach and Beethoven).

<sup>29</sup> Marcin MAX, "Wyjście z cienia", *Centrum Informacji o Muzyce Disco Polo* [Disco Polo Music Information Center], <http://www.disco-dance.ovh.org/felietony.htm>. Accessed 27 December 2011.

Although some attribute the mid-1990s attacks on disco polo to the envy of other genres' musicians, even proponents of the genre admit that some of the critique was not without merit and was provoked by disco-polo bands themselves.<sup>30</sup> Satisfied with commercial success, the majority of the bands did not strive for improving the quality of their productions, especially as far as lyrics were concerned, and the minority that did so was simply ignored by the critics. Moreover, as Paweł Kucharski, the leader of Top One, has observed, some bands boasted about their ability to prepare material for their albums almost overnight. Contrary to their intentions, such declarations were received as evidence of low quality of the songs rather than of exceptional talent of their creators.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, disco polo producers perceived perfection and sophistication as a threat to authenticity, and thus to the commercial potential of their productions. As Sławomir Skrepta, Blue Star's owner, said in the documentary *Bara Bara*, "Generally, we don't want the bands to make their music too professional, because their professionalism would kill their authenticity, and their audience would shrink."

Allegations regarding the sound quality of disco polo productions could not be particularly harmful to a genre within which banality and lack of sophistication is admitted and intended. In fact, disco polo cannot be ironically diminished because the result of its parody is indistinguishable from the genre itself. The case of the song "Mydełko Fa" [A Bar of Soap Called Fa] demonstrates that an intended parody can be adapted as a symbol of the genre. The song, recorded in 1991 by the famous Polish actor Marek Kondrat and the pop singer Marlena

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> See *ibid.* Such declarations were not uncommon even among megastars of the genre. For example, Sławomir Świerzyński, the leader of Bayer Full, in an interview with Małgorzata Kroczyńska gives the following story of writing a flagship hit of Bayer Full, "Majteczki w kropeczki" [Polka-dot Panties]: "I was down; I started to recall my youth, drank some vodka and some 15 minutes later the hit came into being." Małgorzata Kroczyńska, "Sławomir Świerzyński: Majteczki w kropeczki pisałem na kacu" [Sławomir Świerzyński: I Was Writing Polka-dot Panties with a Hangover]. An Interview with Sławomir Świerzyński, the leader of Bayer Full," *Nowa Trybuna Opolska*, 21 June 2009, <http://www.nton.pl/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090621/OPINIE/942676410#block2>. Accessed 7 August 2010.

Drozdowska, was meant as a parody, but was taken by audiences at face value and became one of the greatest hits of disco polo not only in Poland, but also among members of the Polish diaspora in the US.

While over-simplicity, banality, and repetitiveness are not unique to disco polo and can even factor into the attractiveness of a musical genre (such as punk for example), a particular vocal sound and white socks were considered staples of disco polo and mercilessly ridiculed by opponents of the genre. Wojciech Staszewski and Mariusz Szczygieł considered white socks and genre-specific vocals as “two elements of disco polo culture” which “are of enduring and permanent value”.<sup>32</sup> Some, like Robert Leszczyński, interpreted white socks as a crude manifestation of cleanliness, meaning “Look, boors, I’m a guy with class and can even keep my socks clean”.<sup>33</sup> Others, however, like for example Barbara Hoff, considered wearing frills and white socks to constitute a consciously manifested indifference to media attacks.<sup>34</sup> Disco polo stars testify to the latter attitude.<sup>35</sup> Leszek Nowakowski, from Fanatic, claims that boys, especially in the Białystok area, ostentatiously put on white socks with frills with shiny track suits, consciously displaying behavior characteristic of subcultures.<sup>36</sup>

Sławomir Świerzyński links disco polo vocals, criticized for “sounding like a pubescent boy’s voice” and “maximally simplified,” with the wedding provenance of the genre, and asks how a boy who started singing for eight hours at a time at wedding receptions as soon as his voice

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<sup>32</sup> Staszewski and Szczygieł, op. cit., 17.

<sup>33</sup> Leszczyński, op. cit., 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> For example Sławomir Świerzyński, in the documentary Bara Bara stated that

Journalists slate us. They say that Świerzyński and Bayer Full play at weddings and [zabawa] parities. The Beatles also played at parties. Elvis Presley performed in white socks. They have a go at us for the "frills and white socks". What can I do if people like it. (Translation after English subtitles.)

<sup>36</sup> Miecik, op. cit.

had broken could sound.<sup>37</sup> According to the article “Lips are always hot” [“Usta są zawsze gorące”], Jerzy Suszycki, Green Star’s manager, claims responsibility for disco-polo vocals, with its preference for higher registers.<sup>38</sup> He calls it *ładniutki* (a diminutive form of *ładny* [nice]), using a term derived from aesthetics of traditional music.<sup>39</sup> In order to have such a specifically sounding higher male voice on their recordings, many bands speed up the vocal track in the process of mastering.<sup>40</sup>

Accusations of the primitivism of disco polo songs or the lack of ambition of its performers, whose vocal technique is often referred to as “unbearable”, had much less impact on the genre’s popularity or its public perception than attacks on its audience. Disco polo stars often recognized the unfairness of such attacks; for example, in the documentary *Bara Bara*, Shazza (Marlena Magdalena Pańkowska) had the following to say:

I noticed a general tendency of journalists saying on their programs ‘We listen to everything except disco-polo. Disco-polo is for simpletons and villagers in white socks.’ But a lot has changed in this music and I think that if I said that someone who listens to the blues is a simpleton I’d probably be in trouble. But you can slate us and insult our dignity and especially the dignity of our fans. That’s what I think. It might sound harsh. It saddens me. The intolerance and pigeonholing - this is good, this is bad.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Staszewski and Szczygiel, op cit., 17.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Piotr Dahling, who provides one of the infrequent comprehensive discussions of the aesthetics of traditional music in Poland, considers ‘*ład*’ [harmony, order] its most important category. It

determines the basic musical order and formal outline, which folk music performers call *melodia* [melody] or *nuta* [note]. (...) In sum, a melody which preserves *ład* or order is *ładna* (nice, pleasant, fine, pretty); i.e. it is not only accessible and catchy (*wpadająca w ucho*) but also proper and correct. A *ładna* melody is familiar, one’s own (*swoja*), and nice. By contrast, ugliness in music comes from *falszowanie* (corruption, falsification, not only of melody but also of rhythm), from failure, abruptness, chaos, and, finally, from the unfamiliarity of the repertoire as well as of the manner of performance and practices.

Piotr Dahlig, *Muzyka ludowa we współczesnym społeczeństwie* (Warszawa: WSiP, 1987), 16.

<sup>40</sup> Staszewski and Szczygiel, op. cit., 17.

<sup>41</sup> Translation after English subtitles.



Moreover, disco polo musicians and fans frequently experience disrespect if not uninvited assault because of their affiliation with the genre, especially from journalists or other genres' musicians. One of the widely discussed incidents was a concert's cancellation by Wilki, a Polish rock group whose leader, Robert Gawliński, refused to play in the same event as Top One, a disco polo group.<sup>42</sup> Igor Miecik, in his article "Polo Virus Strikes Back," writes: "Almost every disco-polo musician can recall some unpleasant situation in which they have been found to be not musicians but boors".<sup>43</sup> Even here the phrasing used seems to suggest that disco polo musicians are indeed boors, and not simply that they are treated as if they are boors.

Indeed, in order to avoid the shame and public humiliation associated with being a "simpleton listening to disco polo," some people stopped listening to disco polo and others did not dare to admit they liked it. In the article "The Death of Disco Polo" Wojciech Orliński wrote: "Welcome hiphopolo! Ridiculed, despised, yet emotionally stirring and widely listened to, disco polo music has just gone into oblivion. Its stars have faded and big clubs, which once played disco polo, have flipped to techno and hip hop."<sup>44</sup> Although disco polo has never died, its popularity has suffered, especially between the autumn of 2002 and the spring of 2007, with the peak of the crisis in 2003-2005.<sup>45</sup> Already in 2000 the number of concerts given by disco polo stars decreased.<sup>46</sup> Many bands suspended their operation; some moved abroad (especially to the USA). The genre disappeared from the media.

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<sup>42</sup> Marcin MAX, "Punkt zwrotny," *Centrum Informacji o Muzyce Disco Polo* [Disco Polo Music Information Center], <http://www.disco-dance.ovh.org/felietony.htm>. Accessed on 27 December 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Miecik, op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> Orliński, op. cit., 10.

<sup>45</sup> Marcin MAX, "Jeden krok do przodu, dwa kroki do tyłu," *Centrum Informacji o Muzyce Disco Polo* [Disco Polo Music Information Center], <http://www.disco-dance.ovh.org/felietony.htm>. Accessed on 27 December 2011.

<sup>46</sup> According to Marcin MAX, Marcin Miller, the leader of Boys, called it the worst period in his career. See Marcin MAX, "Wyjście z cienia".

The reasons for this were diverse. The market was saturated with formulaic productions by numerous groups which were attracted to the genre by the prospect of a fast-paced career and financial profit, and which took the path of least resistance, oftentimes simply making over others' recordings (often in Russian).<sup>47</sup> Moreover, with the liquidation of *Disco Relax* and *Disco Polo Live* in 2002, the genre was cut off from its major means of media promotion.<sup>48</sup> This coincided with a collapse in the recording market in Poland (what was reflected in the reduced sales requirements for a gold record award).<sup>49</sup> Supporters of the genre blame also shady public relations for some audiences turning away from the genre or hiding their real musical preferences.<sup>50</sup>

The end of the genre's prosperity consolidated the disco polo market, contributed to its professionalization, and crystallized the status of its top performers, who continued to perform in spite of poor promotion and limited audience interest. The major festival, the Ogólnopolski

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<sup>47</sup> Marcin MAX, "Droga do gwiazd".

<sup>48</sup> Neither of the shows was liquidated due to decreasing popularity. According to Marcin MAX, Disco Polo Live's viewership increased six times during the last year of its existence. Marcin MAX, "Przyszłość muzyki tanecznej," *Centrum Informacji o Muzyce Disco Polo* [Disco Polo Music Information Center], <http://www.disco-dance.ovh.org/felietony.htm>. Accessed on 27 December 2011. Polsat TV ceased broadcasting *Disco Relax*, the first TV show that had featured disco polo videos and had a disco polo chart, not because the program was losing its audience but because Agora SA (a Polish media company, and owner of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a leading national daily newspaper), which in 2002 had intended to buy the channel, wished it disappear due to its not matching their programming profile. The deal fell through because of the corruption scandal known as the Rywin affair (*Afera Rywina*), which involved relations between the media and a law passing through parliament. A concise description of the affair can be found in Leszek Koczanowicz, *Politics of Time: the Dynamics of Identity in Post-Communist Poland* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 11-12.

<sup>49</sup> In the People's Republic of Poland a gold record was awarded for selling 160,000 copies of an album and 250,000 of a single. In 1994, when Western concerns came to the Polish market, the Polish Society of the Phonographic Industry (Związek Producentów Audio Video, ZPAV) was founded, and although they had a minority share of the market, they established new rules for gold record award for albums published from 1993 on. In the case of popular music it was 100,000 copies (for domestic albums) and 50,000 (for foreign). As a result of falling sales, since 1997 the gold record has been awarded for 50,000 Polish albums. In 2002 the threshold was reduced again to 35,000 copies for Polish productions and 20,000 for foreign, and in July 2006 to 15,000 and 10,000 respectively (at the same time the sales data became secret). A platinum record is awarded for selling 30,000 and 20,000 respectively, and a diamond record for 150,000 and 100,000 copies. Classical and jazz records (whether Polish or foreign) need three times fewer than Polish popular music productions to achieve the same awards.

<sup>50</sup> See Marcin MAX, "Droga do gwiazd" and "Wyjście z cienia."

Festiwal Muzyki Disco Polo i Dance [All-Polish Festival of Disco Polo and Dance] (currently the Ogólnopolski Festiwal Muzyki Tanecznej [All-Polish Festival of Dance Music]) in Ostróda continued to attract tens of thousands of people. Contrary to Wojciech Orliński's claim, disco polo never lost its popularity as wedding music, although wedding repertoire in rural areas assimilated some new hits from other genres (such as songs from the album *Nic nie boli tak jak życie* by the rock band Budka Suflera).<sup>51</sup> The internet became the primary platform for the promotion of the genre.

Articles announcing the comeback of disco polo, such as "Disco Polo Is Back in Favor and Students Love such Music" by Paweł Nowacki started in 2006. In 2007, the renaissance of the genre was acknowledged by the mainstream media, including public television and the largest Polish web portals.<sup>52</sup> The media, surprised that "even students enjoy it," admitted that the genre attracted a new generation, unaware that disco polo is for "uneducated, provincial, backward and stupid yokels."<sup>53</sup> "I was a little afraid of playing at student events, of their coming and deriding us," Marcin Miller, the leader of Boys, admitted. However, "students love [disco polo] climates. They put on white socks, golden chains made of pinchbeck, and tracksuits [often seen as indicative of disco polo fans]," Nowacki added.<sup>54</sup>

Still, the presence of the genre in the mainstream media usually means the presence of disco polo musicians (sometimes even treated as celebrities) rather than their music (which can

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<sup>51</sup> Orliński, op. cit.

<sup>52</sup> Paweł Nowacki, "Disco polo wraca do łask, a studenci uwielbiają taką muzykę" ["Disco Polo Is Back in Favor and Students Love such Music"], *Słowo Polskie Gazeta Wrocławska*, 24 June 2006. Accessed through [www.wiadomości24.pl/artykul/disco\\_polo\\_wraca\\_do\\_lask\\_a\\_studenci\\_uwielbiaja\\_taka\\_muzyke\\_1004.html](http://www.wiadomości24.pl/artykul/disco_polo_wraca_do_lask_a_studenci_uwielbiaja_taka_muzyke_1004.html) on 18 April 2007.

<sup>53</sup> For example on 17 February 2007 (which was the last Saturday of the Carnival season) the main edition of the most popular national news program "Wiadomości," on TVP1 included a three-minute spot "Disco Hit" by Mariusz Szymczuk and Jarosław Kuś, which announced the resurgence of disco polo and acknowledged its success with a new generation of young Poles.

<sup>54</sup> Nowacki, op cit.

appear occasionally, usually as a curiosity, such as Bayer Full's hit "Majteczki w kropeczki" [Polka-dot Panties] in Chinese to illustrate the band's success in China).<sup>55</sup> The increased media exposure of the genre involved its promotion by internet media (including radio and television) and local radio and television, which host programs devoted to disco polo, as well as by media dedicated to disco polo (such as Polo TV, the most dynamically growing television channel in Poland, which was founded in 2011 and since July 2012 has become the most popular music channel).<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, national channels consistently try to keep disco polo off the air, allowing for the appearance of such productions only very rarely (on New Year's Eve for example).

In 2009 in an open letter to the media (published on official websites of disco polo bands), leaders of top disco polo bands (Sławomir Świerzyński from Bayer Full, Marcin Miller from Boys, Paweł Kucharski from Top One, Zenon Martyniuk from Akcent) protested against the media boycott of disco polo and appealed for its inclusion in mainstream culture:

Which Polish pop artist has a track record comparable with such bands as Bayer Full – 196 concerts in 2007, 178 in 2008; or Boys – 189 concerts in 2007, 168 in 2008, with their calendars filled already for 2010? Open-air disco polo events attract audiences Polish pop stars can only dream about. In 2007 at the [student festival] *juvenalia*<sup>57</sup> in Wrocław 20,000 people had a good time, and the Dance Music Festival in Ostróda (organized continuously since 1996!) attracted a few thousand people. (...) Stars of the

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<sup>55</sup> For example, the great success of the song "Ona Tańczy dla Mnie" by the band Weekend resulted in multiple interviews with the band's leader, Radosław Liszewski on national radio and television and in the press, but their megahit is still absent from the mainstream media playlists.

<sup>56</sup> On 5 July 2008 the musical program *Barachołka* came back on the air (Saturday nights 9pm -2am, under the name "Nie tylko Barachołka" [Not only Barachołka], hosted by Dariusz Turecki) at Radio Lublin, a local radio station. Its first edition (aired by the same local radio station), hosted by Kaczucha (Anna Kaczkowska) and Jeżucha (Jerzy Janiszewski), was the first to play *muzyka chodnikowa* [sidewalk music] in the early 1990s. Wojciech Stepaniuk, "Nie tylko Barachołka," *Tygodnik Tomaszowski* 25 (163), 22-28 June 2010, 7. See also the *Forum of Baracholka Lovers* [Forum Miłośników Barachołki] [www.baracholka.fora.pl](http://www.baracholka.fora.pl) [visited 7 Augst 2010]. Currently disco polo is played by such internet radio stations as Discoparty.pl, Disco-Polo.fm, Discostacja, or IRN, and regional radio stations such as Radio Hit, Radio Jard, Radio Kaszëbë, Polskie Radio Kielce, Radio Leliwa, Polskie Radio Lublin, and Radio Silesia. The genre is played on such TV channels as Polo TV, TV.Disco, iTV, Polsat 2, TVS, Polonia 1, TVR, Puls 2, and Polsat Play.

<sup>57</sup> *Juvenalia* (from Latin *Iuvenalia*) is an annual students' holiday-festival in Poland which takes place in May, before summer exams. It is usually celebrated for three days, in which students take control of the city, receiving symbolic keys to the city gates from the mayor and organizing parades, concerts, parties, shows, sport competitions, and other entertainment.

genre, such as Shazza or Boys sold a few million copies and Bayer Full sold over 15 million copies of their recordings. They are produced by five large professional publishers. On the market, there are over 100 disco polo bands, which regularly perform, record, and promote their music on the internet. (...)

In spite of the media boycott, disco polo is doing great. Modern music video, high-level music, excellent productions, professional photo sessions and concert tours – this is the disco polo of today. Why is it still boycotted by Polish music scene decision bodies? Why is it denied its right to function in the mainstream? Why, for so many years, has it been marginalized in show-business? (...) Let our music finally take its due place on the Polish market.

However, not all supporters of disco polo wish for the mainstreaming of the genre. Some have observed that a crisis mobilizes artists while a time of prosperity is counterproductive. It tempts some top artists to follow the path of least resistance and record old wedding hits (such as Bayer Full's recording of "Żono moja" [My Wife]) instead of setting new trends, as a result of which the genre will regress rather than develop.<sup>58</sup> Some disco polo stars (for example Marcin Miller from Boys) see a potential danger in saturating the media with disco polo productions because the audience who can watch their favorite stars on TV every weekend will be less interested in their live concerts. They ask "why change something that works?"<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the vitality of the genre is undeniable and its potential to create megastars without the help of traditional media is unabated (as exemplified by the careers of Tomasz Niecik or Weekend).

### Bottom-up acculturation rejected: why the intelligentsia is afraid of Disco Polo

The ethnologist Karolina Dabert, in her article *A Short History of Disco-Polo* [in Polish "Krótka historia disco-polo"] notes that disco polo originated when "freedom opened the door not only to the West but also to the layers of culture which were beyond our knowledge":

Sudden and violent emergence of an entertainment of this kind was caused by the fact that it had had to remain unwillingly hidden for years. The official culture did not take into account the tastes of the public but served a homogeneous pulp whether the

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<sup>58</sup> Marcin MAX, "Jeden krok do przodu".

<sup>59</sup> Gianni, "Czy powrót disco polo do TV to dobry pomysł...?" [Is the Return of Disco Polo to TV such a Good Idea...?], *DiscoPortal.Info*, 1 June 2009, <http://www.discoportal.info/content/view/1931/213/> Accessed 28 December 2011.

people liked it or not. With freedom, followed by the free phonographic market and free media, the public could demand what they really liked and what was their own.<sup>60</sup>

As a representative of the intelligentsia uncomfortable with the phenomenon, Dabert admits: “We were not expecting this moment.”<sup>61</sup>

Such a feeling of being taken by a surprise by disco polo’s emergence is expressed frequently, both in scholarly writings (such as by Dabert or Giemza and Stęszewski) and press articles (such as by Sobolewski). However, the emergence of disco polo could be a surprise only for somebody who misidentified folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) with actual music practiced by the people and expected that the politics of shaping the people’s culture will finally result in some new cultural expression of a noble kind. As Maciej Mazurek has written:

For decades, the totalitarian system rationed everything, including entertainment. Freedom allowed for the free expression of the cultural needs of common people. Such an expression, however, clearly diverged from the vision of the people's culture (*kultura ludu*) [that had been] cherished by the intellectuals. Perhaps the most amusing fact is that for most of the Polish intelligentsia the emergence of such cultural forms as disco polo lyrics was unforeseeable. Why? Because they did not know that society. (...)

The nation’s freedom had to bring about a sublime noble culture (...), but what this culture really would be, nobody then could tell. It was a myth, cherished for too long and evolving in a confrontation with the totalitarian system, which tried to implement many sublime elements of [this culture], yet produced only their caricature. Today, whatever we say about it, the Polish people (*polski lud*) have created some culture, and it is the culture of disco polo.<sup>62</sup>

The detachment from the actual people’s culture in general, and musical practice in particular, among scholars working in disciplines devoted to studying the people’s culture may seem paradoxical and surprising. However, it should be remembered that the paradigm of their disciplines was limited to “folk culture” or “folk music” (*muzyka ludowa*) which, as discussed in the previous chapter, was not synonymous with the rural areas’ actual culture (or music).

Although people from the countryside patronized a far broader spectrum of music, fieldwork

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<sup>60</sup> Dabert, op. cit., 70

<sup>61</sup> Dabert, op. cit., 61

<sup>62</sup> Maciej Mazurek, “Intelektualista na ludowej zabawie,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 35, 1 September 1996, 7.

studies, oriented towards “the oldest layers of culture” and “what is dying,” ignored the contemporary culture of the common people.<sup>63</sup> In the first comprehensive study on the genre, which is “despised by musicologists and, in consequence, rarely dealt with,” Joanna Giemza and Jan Stęszewski seemingly felt urged to account for the emergence of disco polo “in spite of all the ‘good music’ in the media and in spite of all the music educational programs”.<sup>64</sup>

They identified five reasons allegedly responsible for its success. First, the general and profound distinction between professional classical music (*E-Musik*), especially contemporary music, and “light and entertaining music” (*U-Musik*), which made the latter closer to the tastes of an average person. Second, the poor quality of music education in Polish schools (for which they blame both the Partitions of Poland and the communist state). Third, the free market economy, which is based on economic and not value principles, and in which any profitable product, including disco polo, is good as far as show business is concerned. Fourth, media freedom, which “has been used in favor of rather than against disco polo”.<sup>65</sup> Finally, such features of disco polo as lyrics in the Polish language and on Polish subjects, as well as its adopting of local tradition, which contributed to its success with audiences searching for their own Polish musical identity in compliance with public taste.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Likewise suppressed and excluded from research were other cultural traditions which, for various reasons, did not fit into the cultural politics of the socialist state. The system change allowed on the one hand for expression of actual needs and preferences of the ordinary people and on the other hand for the coming to the fore of traditions which had had to remain hidden for decades, such as, for example, songs from Lviv (in Polish: Lwów) – a city in Western Ukraine, which historically was a major Polish cultural center but after the Second World War was incorporated into the Soviet Union – which had their renaissance at the beginning of the 1990s. However, unlike disco polo, this song tradition has been incorporated into mainstream culture.

<sup>64</sup> Giemza and Stęszewski, op. cit., 92.

<sup>65</sup> As Giemza and Stęszewski have emphasized, as long as the media stayed under state control, the presence of some music-cultural phenomena was restricted due to their perceived low aesthetic level. After the political changes the barriers were lifted. However, public media still kept disco polo off the air.

<sup>66</sup> Giemza and Stęszewski, op. cit., 92, 96.

While the first four reasons are hardly convincing, the last reason mentioned by Giemza and Stęszewski deserves particular attention.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, disco polo is in the Polish language and based on Polish subjects, and it successfully integrates local traditions with global tendencies in popular music or, in other words, it localizes some idioms of modern popular music. At the same time, a quest for Polish musical identity which complies with public taste, if accomplished by disco polo, would be particularly disturbing for the Polish intelligentsia. Not only would it call into question the myth of Polish folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) as the basis of Polish national identity but also the position of the intelligentsia as the custodian of national matters and a guardian of taste as well as an agent for transferring civilizational patterns and models.

The deep roots of disco polo in Polish traditional music are undeniable. As Krzysztof Biedrzyński has noted: "This rhythm and tone of voice were known to anyone who, at least once, came to a rural wedding or ... to a village church (how many rural organists ran after a Mass to play in a band in a firehouse ...)."<sup>68</sup> Stars of the genre are aware of its cultural affiliation. Paweł Kucharski, the leader of Top One, has said that although disco polo was structured around synthetic sound derived from Eurobeat, its harmony and melody were closely related to children's songs and patriotic songs, which in turn were a distant echo of works by romantic composers. Its characteristic vocal mannerisms were influenced by gypsy and peasant music as well as by vocal

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<sup>67</sup> First, the distinction between serious or classical music (*E-Musik*) and popular music (*U-Musik*), with the latter being more popular with the audience, is a widespread phenomenon, neither specifically Polish nor characteristic for a particular period of time. Second, one may argue that disco polo's emergence was rather a reaction to overly regulated, education-oriented cultural policies of the socialist state than to insufficient music education. Besides music schools, which were geared towards the most talented individuals, music was taught in all public schools, at least at K-8 level. Additionally, there were multiple programs offered by cultural institutions, such as houses of culture, for amateur musicians at various levels of proficiency. Disco polo clearly demonstrates the failure of cultural policies geared towards reforming the artistic taste of ordinary people and bringing them onto a "higher cultural level." Likewise, the claim about the media's favorable attitude towards disco polo is an overstatement at best. Undeniably, media freedom contributed to the genre's career. However, only some private, low-budget, commercial stations (such as Polsat TV, a television channel founded on December 5, 1992 and owned by Zygmunt Solorz-Żak) and, later, the internet provided a platform for the genre's exposure, while national public media kept disco polo off the air.

<sup>68</sup> Krzysztof Biedrzyński, "Oswajanie pustej plaży," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 40, 6 October 1996, 14.



mannerisms and intonation typical of the Eastern region of Poland, which borders with Belarus and Ukraine.<sup>69</sup> The documentary *Bara Bara* shows the link between disco polo and the sound of buskers performing at bazaars in Eastern Poland particularly well.<sup>70</sup>

Disco polo not only respects and refers to traditions which became integrated into the musical sensitivity of ordinary people but also, unlike folk music (*muzyka ludowa*), brings the agency back to the people. In the process of constructing *muzyka ludowa*, the agency was shifted from the people (*lud*) to outside experts, who decided what constituted pure Polish folk music and how it should be performed.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, music was seen not as pure entertainment but as a means of bringing the people to a higher cultural level. When the new system introduced market principles to the music business, demand stimulated productions of recordings of music that was widely popular but hardly accessible on the market. The audience could finally choose the repertory and performances they liked.

On the one hand disco polo celebrated traditions which were a part of the people's culture (even if they were not acknowledged as part of *muzyka ludowa*) and on the other hand it demonstrated a pursuit of modernity. "From the very beginning we tried to play songs corresponding to current trends in world disco music," the band Top One, whose music is considered a precursor of the genre, emphasized.<sup>72</sup> The real breakthrough in their career was their second album, *Poland Disco no.2* (1990, Polmark), which was intended as an aberration from

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<sup>69</sup> Jacek Szczepanek, "Disco Polo, czyli jak się dzisiaj robi hity" [Disco Polo or How Hits Are Made Today], <http://www.vice.com/pl/read/ostreda-disco-polo-festiwal-x-vice-x-relacja> 13 August 2012. Accessed 25 September 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz and Michał Arbudzki, *Bara Bara* [Hanky Panky] (1996), in *Polska Szkoła Dokumentu. Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz*, DVD, Polskie Wydawnictwo Audiowizualne, 2009.

<sup>71</sup> In some socialist countries (though not in Poland) folk music is taught in conservatories of music and degrees in folk music performance are offered at college level.

<sup>72</sup> Paweł Zeitz, "An Interview with Top One in 1995," available at the official website of the band [www.topone.pl](http://www.topone.pl) Accessed on 14 December 2011.

their predominant musical style (i.e. Italo disco) and a tribute to their parents.<sup>73</sup> It contained modern disco-like dance arrangements of songs well known not only to their parents' generation, such as "Santa Maria," "Biały miś" [White Teddy Bear], or "Miła moja" [My Darling], but "the songs were known to all Poles, for many years sung at campsites with a guitar [accompaniment] or at *biesiada* tables. They were simply our Polish folk songs (*przyspiewki*). As the boys say: 'Americans have their own country [music] and are not ashamed of it, so why couldn't we...'”<sup>74</sup>

Disco polo not only further distracted the ordinary people from *muzyka ludowa* but also contradicted a picture of a folk who live in harmony with nature. However, that ideal and nostalgic picture of idyllic rural life was cherished by the Polish intelligentsia rather than by villagers themselves.<sup>75</sup> Pastoral images of happy peasants living in thatched cottages, surrounded by livestock and washing their feet in a river looked romantic and picturesque only from the perspective of outsiders: tourists, who imagined a place of peace and serenity, undisturbed by the – much more real – hardships of everyday village life. Villagers themselves gladly switched their

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<sup>73</sup> The band Top One, founded in late 1980s in Warsaw, played Italo disco and made its reputation with the song "Ciao Italia" (named "the hit of summer 1989" by the music magazine *Rytm*) and a successful album marketed under the contradictory title *No Disco no. 1* (1990, Polmark, Mano, Caston). However, they became known for their disco polo productions and, in spite of the band's best efforts, became associated with the genre. The album *Poland Disco no.2* sold ca. 6 000 000 copies (mostly pirate, with only 300 000 issued by Polmark) and brought them enormous popularity not only in Poland but also among Polish emigrés in the USA. Their return to Italo disco (with the album *Coraz wyżej* [Higher and Higher] 1992) and attempts at styles other than disco polo were unsuccessful with wider audiences in spite of the fact that the band was pleased with their musical results, embracing a variety of experiments. (For example *Cios za cios* [Blow for Blow] (1992) was in English, in rap-house style. *Dzieci Europy* [Europe's Children] (1994) combined melodic songs with rap elements provided by Frank Evans from Ghana, who performed his vocal parts both in English and in his native language.)

The band was losing its popularity until they recorded "Ole Olek" in 1995, a song in disco polo style commissioned by Aleksander Kwaśniewski's election committee, which helped Kwaśniewski win the presidential election and, at the same time, brought the band back to the top. (A few years later the band recorded "Intro (listen from the end)", a piece from the album *Ye, O!*, which, when played backwards, contains a confession in an archaic quasi-biblical style: "Poland, we apologize for what we have done to you. [Being] unaware, we have changed your fate. We have been lied to and not even given a handful of silver pieces.").

<sup>74</sup> See "Historia" [History] at [www.topone.pl](http://www.topone.pl). Accessed 14 December 2011.

<sup>75</sup> See for example the blog entries "Ale wieś" [What a village] of 16 April 2007 and "Ekipa" [Team] of 19 April 2007 in the discussion following them on Agata Passent's blog <http://agatapassententer.blog.onet.pl/>. Accessed 12 January 2012.

cottages for large brick houses with modern bathrooms and welcomed a civilizational change, which brought modern goods and services they had been previously denied.

It is scarcely surprising that the guardians of traditional solutions despised the genre, which, unlike *muzyka ludowa*, did not celebrate “pure” folk music but embedded deep layers of tradition and familiar rhythms and melodies in modern electronic sound and global tendencies in popular music. The intelligentsia railed against such an approach towards tradition as well as such a cultural emancipation of the folk (*lud*), and felt compelled to bring it back onto a proper cultural path.

Karolina Dabert wrote: “This people seem to be frolicking, but there is no other way forward than strenuously to win it over to the so-called higher culture through education and the peaceful shaping of aesthetic tastes.”<sup>76</sup> The people (*lud*) are perceived by the intellectual to be like naughty children who still need to be educated and disciplined. Proposing intensified education as a remedy to disco polo, Dabert, like many other intellectuals, seems not to notice that disco polo, with its conscious rejection of any aspiration to high culture, was actually a reaction to socialist efforts to enlighten and acculturate the people, and to the attempt of intellectuals to manage people’s preferences.

In her conclusion, Dabert says that there is nothing wrong with disco-polo if the driver of the bus in which we travel (and by “we” she means the intelligentsia) does not force us to listen to a fifth mix of the hits of the Amadeo group (a popular disco-polo group).<sup>77</sup> Apparently, the intellectual objects to control over the sonic space being left to a bus driver, seemingly aspiring to such a control herself, without even asking the question as to whom it should be given and why. When, in the previous system, a bus driver (mentioned in the previous chapter) had no choice but to listen to Verdi, this seemed to be acceptable and was even praised as a cultural achievement.

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<sup>76</sup> Dabert, op. cit., 70.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.,

So, top-down acculturation is desirable and perceived as something natural while the same thing in reverse direction is rejected.

Similarly, Tadeusz Sobolewski confesses that it is not the existence of disco polo but its proximity and undertaking of the roles the intelligentsia considered its own that troubles him: “What bothers is not the existence of disco polo - why would we mind it? - but [the fact] that it is so close to us. We are crowded so close together. Too close.” He similarly complains that “our own dreams of harmony come back to us as painful caricatures - as disco polo. (...) Disco polo occupies the place abandoned by art “. <sup>78</sup> Interestingly, in his article, as in Dabert’s, a plural pronoun is used, as if intellectuals should be designated by the *pluralis maiestatis*, “we, the Intelligentsia”.

Rejection of bottom-up acculturation is an implication of social conditioning, which assumed the intelligentsia’s custody of culture. The intelligentsia, an Eastern European phenomenon which came into being in the 19th century (first in Russian-controlled territory of Poland during the Partitions era), was a social stratum, which, unlike Western “educated classes” (such as the German *Bildungsbürgertum* or the British *professions*), was deprived of leading societal roles in forms of political or economic influences (such as enterprises), yet aspired to be spiritual leaders of the country ruled by a foreign power. It was defined by the function which its members perceived for themselves, which, in case of Poland, was to guard, treasure, and expand Polish culture. <sup>79</sup>

Janusz Żarnowski defined the roles of the intelligentsia as follows: being leaders and experts, disseminating intellectual and civilizational patterns (to a smaller extent also technological and organizational ones), and preserving Polish nationality and regaining state

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<sup>78</sup> Sobolewski, op. cit., 5.

<sup>79</sup> Norman Davis, *Heart of Europe. The Past in Poland's Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1984]), 233. The peasantry and the intelligentsia in Poland are often referred to as strata, while workers, the bourgeoisie and big landowners are designated as classes. See Janusz Żarnowski, *State, Society and Intelligentsia. Modern Poland and its Regional Context* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 602.

independence.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the intelligentsia played the role of the middle class.<sup>81</sup> Adam Podgórecki called it “a social body with a ‘calling’ to represent the goodness of society as a whole; it produced recommendations appropriate to all members of society that ennobled citizens through certain ritualistic requirements.”<sup>82</sup>

Contrary to Adam Podgórecki’s claim, the intelligentsia was not unique to Polish society, although the Polish intelligentsia was peculiar.<sup>83</sup> Unlike other Eastern European countries (such as the Baltic countries, Ukraine, or Slovakia), where the intelligentsia was mainly of peasant origin, in Poland it sprang to a large extent from the propertied classes, especially from the ranks of pauperized nobility. As a consequence, it was often blamed for a nobility-like feeling of superiority and a petrifying of the feudal division of society into “masters” and the lower classes, especially the peasants. This resulted in a certain alienation of the intelligentsia from the common folk classes in the period of The Second Polish Republic (1918-1939), when the intelligentsia was at its peak.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Żarnowski, op. cit., chapter XIII, 136-137.

<sup>81</sup> Żarnowski, op. cit., chapter XI, 179.

<sup>82</sup> Adam Podgórecki, *Polish Society* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 153. Recently, however, some authors have called into question a mythologized picture of the intelligentsia as engaged in political, social, educational and cultural activities with the moral imperative to organize society and the nation, a view which has been popularized by literature, politics and propaganda, pointing out that it was a frequent, if not common, practice for representatives of the intelligentsia to work in the state machinery of the partitioners (*zaborcy*, see. note 71 of the previous chapter), especially Russia. See Ludwik Hass, *Inteligencji polskiej dole i niedole: XIX i XX wiek* [The Polish Intelligentsia in Weal or Woe. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries] (Łowicz: Mazowiecka Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczno-Pedagogiczna w Łowiczu, 1999); Andrzej Chwalba, *Polacy w służbie Moskali [Poles in the Service of Muscovites]* (Warszawa: PWN Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1999). See also Żarnowski, op. cit., chapter XIII, 137. Nevertheless, the intelligentsia’s input in shaping the state’s order as well as its national and cultural integration and a growth of national consciousness is undeniable both in the Second Republic (1918-1939), which emerged after 123 years of the Partitions, and in the Soviet-dominated, nation-state of the People’s Republic of Poland which emerged after the Second World War.

<sup>83</sup> Podgórecki, op. cit., 153.

<sup>84</sup> Żarnowski, op. cit, chapter III, 79 and chapter IX, 607. See Żarnowski, op. cit., chapter IX, 608, 610 and chapter X, 105.

Due to the non-existence of a social elite other than the intelligentsia, the prestige of this group (especially the intelligentsia *sensu stricto*: the professionals, the scientific workers, artists and specialists at university level) was relatively high (much higher than that of the bourgeoisie) in comparison with its position in the hierarchy of incomes or of its share in power. The social stratification of the Second Republic was peculiar. The majority of the petty bourgeoisie was Jewish. The haute bourgeois class was small and ethnically divided. There was also a class of hereditary landowners, called *ziemiaństwo* (Polish landed gentry). This group was small but possessed a very high social prestige and considerable economic importance, since they were in possession of about 1/4 of the land (though a considerable part of it was forest).<sup>85</sup>

As a result of the Second World War and the establishment of the socialist order, the majority of the propertied classes and of the petty bourgeoisie was destroyed, either physically or economically. In consequence, the social structure of socialist Poland consisted mostly of workers, peasants (farmers, agricultural workers [in state-owned farms], peasant-workers [*chłopo-robotnicy* - peasants also employed in factories]), and the intelligentsia (with the intellectuals as its elite).<sup>86</sup> The socialist state did not question the privileged position of the intelligentsia. As Żarnowski observed, “it was the intellectuals who were awarded the scholarships, training possibilities and prizes which in later years began to flow in streams into Poland from the West, and it was the intellectuals whom the Western papers and institutions supported in their conflicts with the party”.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See Żarnowski, op. cit., chapter IX, 608, 610 and chapter X, 105.

<sup>86</sup> Żarnowski considered the intellectuals (usually identified with the creative intelligentsia) as an autonomous group, a separate specific “quasi-class,” which took over the intelligentsia’s self-image and distinctive phraseology, and absorbed “new categories, e.g. journalists and persons employed in the new media, scientific workers of various kinds and different ranks”. Their material situation was as a rule much better than that of the broad stratum of the intelligentsia. See Żarnowski, op. cit., chapter XIII, 143, 145.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 143.

The intellectuals also took over the leading roles from the workers' leaders in the process of the system's transformation in 1989, with Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a journalist, becoming the first prime minister. In 1990, with such prominent intellectuals as Bronisław Geremek, Aleksander Hall, Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, Hanna Suchocka, and Jan Rokita, he founded the Democratic Union (*Unia Demokratyczna*). In 1994 this merged with the Liberal Democratic Congress (*Kongres Liberalno Demokratyczny*) to form the Freedom Union (*Unia Wolności*), which at that time was one of the key players on the Polish political scene and was perceived as a party of the intelligentsia.

Nevertheless, in the new reality, as Maciej Mazurek has observed, "[a] creator and an intellectual has ceased to be a hero, and – what is important for the era – has moved to another sphere: to economics and politics." Moreover "half-literate people drive better cars and have a good time to the rhythm of disco polo, while an intellectual cannot enjoy himself and hates the people with a passion, envying them deep in his heart."<sup>88</sup> It is thus unsurprising that, like Sobolewski, a large number of Polish intellectuals felt lost, helpless, deprived of their utopia and myths, and unable to make them anew.<sup>89</sup> They shared uncertainty and disarray, felt themselves to be living off the interest of "previously accumulated capital" as well as feeling nostalgia for the times when their cultural capital meant much more.<sup>90</sup>

Disco polo appears to Tadeusz Sobolewski to be a full-frontal attack on all traditional values: "Carnival? No, this is something different. Traditional carnival reinforces the values it

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<sup>88</sup> Mazurek, op. cit., 7.

<sup>89</sup> Sobolewski, op. cit., 5.

<sup>90</sup> Krzemieński, op. cit., 9. Maciej Mazurek confirms that Sobolewski's feelings were common among intellectuals:

We feel solidarity with his aversion to the culture of commercials and disco polo. We share his dismay of the fall of symbolic imagination. We share his opinion regarding the confusion of intellectuals in the world of values, resulting from the change of system. We also share his feeling of losing reality. For this feeling, Tadeusz Sobolewski blames mass culture, the supermarket and disco-polo culture, by which the intellectual's opposition is doomed to a tragic, irreversible defeat. (Mazurek, op. cit., 7.)

parodies. Here in this postmodern pageant [i.e. disco polo], all boundaries are undermined”.<sup>91</sup> For him disco polo is much more than a musical genre. He calls it a “nihilistic program of mass culture, which remains dangerously in step with our despair of any possible meaning for the roles we play, sentences we deliver, and ideas we express.”<sup>92</sup> He attributes to disco polo a program which is “a caricature of universal aspirations, an imitation of hackneyed phrases that we use ourselves, but watered-down and meaningless. Behold a program of universal and unconditional freedom which flattens meanings.”<sup>93</sup> Similar accusations are leveled against the genre by Giemza and Stęszewski: “This music might be a symptom of anomie, of a social state in which generally accepted ethical norms and standards of behavior have lapsed.”<sup>94</sup>

In fact disco polo is neither atrophied nor nihilistic but represents a set of values different from the one accepted and promoted by Western-oriented, cosmopolitan, liberal Polish intellectuals. Unlike their “messianistic” concept of culture, which envisioned music primarily in the categories of serious (or classical) music and folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) and did not provide any space for sheer entertainment, disco polo put emphasis on play and having fun. According to Skrepta, people “have a lot of problems and in order to relax they need something light-hearted and easy.”<sup>95</sup>

The forceful attacks on the genre recognize the fact that through disco-polo non-elites tried to reposition themselves in the new system and claimed a right to represent the country, which was the role the intellectual elite considered its own. Sobolewski was terrified that disco polo

has already its literature, its writers (*opisywacze*) and ideologues, its ‘philosophy’. The song “*Wszyscy Polacy to jedna rodzina*” [All Poles are One Family]

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<sup>91</sup> Sobolewski, op. cit., 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Giemza and Stęszewski, op. cit., 97.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.



has a chance to become the third Polish national anthem, after *Bogurodzica* [Mother of God] and *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego* [Dąbrowski's Mazurka] a [disco polo] spokesman seriously declares.<sup>96</sup>

“All Poles” (*Wszyscy Polacy*), one of the greatest disco-polo hits by the group Bayer Full, is in fact a paraphrase of a popular scouts’ song called “All Scouts are One Family”. The picture of Poles presented in this song includes men and women of all ages and portrays them as hardworking people living simple lives that are a source of happiness. Not only those living in Poland, but also those who for various reasons live abroad and constitute what is called ‘Polonia’ are included in the picture. Music, synonymous with singing a song, is presented here as a communal phenomenon of everyday life that brings people together and gives them enjoyment. The simple musical structure of “All Poles,” combined with echo-like or call-response repetitions, invites collective singing even more than its scouts’ prototype.

### **Wszyscy Polacy**

Wieczorem /4x/  
kiedy gwiazdy mocno śpią  
Wieczorem /4x/  
zaśpiewamy razem song

### **All Poles**

In the evening /4x/  
when stars are sound asleep  
In the evening /4x/  
let’s sing a song together

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<sup>96</sup> Sobolewski, op. cit., 5.

*Bogurodzica* (“Mother of God” – the title of the hymn is an exact translation of the Greek expression “Theotokos”) is the oldest song with Polish words. This hymn, which originated most probably in the 13th century, has a special place in Polish cultural history as the earliest example of the written Polish language and as the traditional national anthem.

*Mazurek Dąbrowskiego* (Dąbrowski's Mazurka) is the official national anthem of Poland, which originated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, shortly after the country lost its independence. Its lyrics, beginning with the words “Poland's not dead as long as we live” were written by Józef Wybicki, in July, 1795 in Italy, on the occasion of the departure of the Polish legions, led by general Jan Henryk Dąbrowski, to fight in the Napoleonic wars. Its music is a lively folk dance.

See Maja Trochimczyk, “Sacred versus Secular: The Convolution History of Polish Anthems,” in *After Chopin: Essays in Polish Music*, ed. Maja Trochimczyk, vol. 6 of Polish Music History Series (Los Angeles: Polish Music Center at USC, 2000), 263-296. Abridged version available as “National Anthems of Poland” at [http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish\\_music/repertoi/anthems.html](http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish_music/repertoi/anthems.html).

Bo wszyscy Polacy to jedna rodzina  
 Starszy czy młodszy  
 chłopak czy dziewczyna  
 Hej, hej bawmy się  
 Hej, hej śmiejmy się

For all Poles are one family  
 Older or younger  
 A boy or a girl  
 Hey, hey, let's have fun  
 Hey, hey, let's laugh

Nocą /4x/  
 gdy po pracy w domu śpisz  
 Nocą /4x/  
 każdy ma szczęśliwe sny

At night/4x/  
 when, after work, you sleep at home  
 At night/4x/  
 everybody has happy dreams

A rano /4x/  
 kiedy słońce jeszcze śpi  
 To wtedy /4x/  
 zaśpiewamy ja i ty

And in the morning/4x/  
 when the sun is still asleep  
 Then/4x/  
 you and I will sing

A kiedy /4x/  
 z Polski wyjechałeś gdzieś  
 To nawet /2x/ po latach /2x/  
 my rozpoznamy się

And when/4x/  
 you left Poland to go somewhere  
 Even /2x/ after many years /2x/  
 we will recognize each other

Inclusion of Polonia within the picture of “All Poles” in a disco polo hit was not accidental. American Polonia had a significant input in the emergence and development of the genre. Traditional songs from folk and popular repertoire which did not fit into the cultural politics of socialist Poland, which excluded “everything that is reactionary, pornographic and tawdry,” were valued by Polish emigrants. The repertoire of Polish-American bands included numerous pieces of folk origin with frivolous, even bawdy, content; sentimental and soapy love hits from the pre-war period, and patriotic songs, full of nostalgia.<sup>97</sup> Unlike their Polish counterparts, Polish-American bands had access to new recording technologies, which allowed them for wider dissemination for their productions. They were even brought to Poland via unofficial, private channels.

Songs by Mały Władzio z Chicago (Little Wes from Chicago) were available on cardboard records already in the 1970s, and since the mid-1980s productions by other Polish-American bands, such as Polskie Orły (Polish Eagles), Biało-Czerwoni (White-and-Reds), or

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<sup>97</sup> Kowalczyk, op. cit., 52.

Bobby Vinton, were available on the Polish “black market”. Polish-American bands played simple, jolly or sentimental songs in the style of wedding music, which were perfectly suitable for dancing. Oftentimes they used texts and melodies which were already well known and often sung by their audiences (such as “Panno Walerciu” [Miss Walercia], “Cyganeczka” [A Little Gipsy], or “Krakowianka” [Cracovian Girl]). Bawdy or sentimental songs by Polskie Orły [Polish Eagles] such as “Cztery razy po dwa razy” [Four Times Twice] gained enormous popularity and served as a model for Polish wedding and *zabawa* bands.<sup>98</sup>

Productions by Polish-American bands contributed to establishing such characteristics of modern disco polo as the use of electronic instruments, simple and regular harmonic progressions, typically involving no more than 4 different chords (such as for example a-C-d-E, C-d-F-G, or A-D-E), 4/4 meter or, occasionally, 6/8, and lyrics about love, often tinted with eroticism.

Moreover, many Polish disco polo stars have spent some time in the USA, learning a different economic model. For example Sławomir Świerzyński, the leader of Bayer Full, in the documentary *Bara Bara* recalls his American experience as crucial for his future musical career:

What's interesting about my stay in the US is that everything I did there, except one thing, was music-related. So from 7 am to 3 pm I would be the outstanding gardener, having to mow lawns, which was a chore... At 3 pm I'd have my dinner and the music work would start. I'd give kids piano lessons and then go to New York where I run a dance school at Polish homes. So that would be my working week. On Sundays, I played the organ at a Polish church. On top of that, I played with Bayer Full at all kinds of parties and events on Saturdays and Sundays.

Later, I said 'goodbye' to my lovely lawns and worked at the Steinway factory as a tuner. Yes, I'm a tuner by profession. A tuner of musical instruments. I attended a piano high school in Kalisz. That's my real vocation. I never wanted to be a musician.

That's what America gave me. That's what I read once in a Polish language newspaper. Five steps to success. One of them was that you should always behave as if you're already a star, even though you aren't. You should always dress well. You should speak properly and watch your manners. And so on and so forth. I took those few small

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 52-53. Although there is a disagreement as to whether Polskie Orły was actually one band or a couple of bands under the same name, they are widely considered to be a precursor of disco polo. See Dabert, op. cit., 58.

tips seriously and as soon as I arrived I waged a battle against the guys from my previous band to get them to follow those rules.<sup>99</sup>

Świerzyński transferred to Poland from the USA not only a business model but also a concept of music as means of earning one's bread and butter. Such a concept was foreign to the cultural policy of the socialist state, which assumed state sponsorship of the arts and artists. Polish Gastarbeiter brought from the West not only cultural productions of the Polish diaspora, which adapted some modern cultural patterns, but also a hierarchy of values, characteristic for capitalistic countries, according to which income and material goods are placed above cultural capital. Such import of cultural models as well as the transfer and adaptation of foreign modernization patterns undermined the intelligentsia's role as a vital mediator between the world of culture and Polish society.

Sobolewski was right in identifying disco polo not as a carnival but a herald of the changes, which have undermined the position of the intelligentsia and brought a new hierarchy of values. Disco polo was not the reason for the system changes but a harbinger and embodiment of them. As such it became a symbol of undesirable (from the intellectuals' perspective) byproducts of the regime change and a target of protests against them. Moreover, Jan Kubik's observation that cultural revolution precedes political revolution seems to be true not only on the road to post-communism but also later.<sup>100</sup> In Polish parliamentary elections in 1997 (a year after Sobolewski's article was published), the Freedom Union (the party associated with the intelligentsia) received 13.4% of the votes and 60 seats in the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish parliament, made up of 460 deputies). In the 2001 general elections, it got 3.1% of the votes and was left without seats.

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<sup>99</sup> *Bara Bara[Hanky Panky]* (1996) by Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz and Michał Arbudzki, in *Polska Szkoła Dokumentu. Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz*, DVD published by Polskie Wydawnictwo Audiowizualne, 2009. All quotations from the film are given in translation provided in English subtitles.

<sup>100</sup> See Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power. The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1994).

In 2003 Janusz Żarnowski wrote that the class of intellectuals no longer exists in Poland in the old sense of the word and they do not perform any of the functions the intelligentsia had once performed. The modernization of the country is carried out by politicians, senior political and economic officials and business circles that between them determine its new direction of development. As a modern society, Poland has no special need for a class that transfers cultural patterns and new opinions.<sup>101</sup> Cultural exchange beyond official instructions continues. During the decline of disco polo's popularity, many of its top artists (including Shazza, "the queen of disco polo") were performing primarily in Chicago. Still Polish disco polo stars often come to perform in the USA, usually at concerts which feature both Polish and Polish-American bands.

### Unwanted Identities: Polishness and the West in Disco Polo

Although a vast majority of disco polo songs are centered on vicissitudes of love, it is not the only topic the genre undertakes. Let's look at the song "This World Is Our Paradise" ["Ten świat jest naszym rajem"] (1996) by Bayer Full, a megastar of the genre. The third verse provides the following vision of this paradise:

Mazurkiem Chopinowskim  
powitać nowy dzień  
i wdychać pełną piersią wolności miły smak  
Tu wiara jest ostoją,  
jakiej nie zna cały świat  
To dla nas jest ten kraj,  
słowiański mały raj

With a Chopin mazurka  
we welcome the new day  
and sing at full volume of freedom's sweet taste.  
Here, faith is our mainstay  
the kind you won't find in the world.  
This country is for us.  
Our little Slavic paradise.

#### *Refrain*

Ten świat jest naszym rajem,  
tylko tutaj chcemy żyć  
Tu zawsze słońca blask towarzyszy w drodze nam  
Ten świat jest naszym rajem,  
tylko tutaj chcemy żyć  
Tu się zatrzymał czas, nie jest ważne nic

This world is our paradise  
Only here do we want to live.  
Here, always sunshine accompanies us on our way  
This world is our paradise  
Only here do we want to live.  
Here, time has stopped; nothing matters<sup>102</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Żarnowski, op. cit., chapter XIII, 145, 148.

<sup>102</sup> Translation of the verse quoted after the documentary *Bara Bara*. Translation of the refrain by the author.

The stereotype of Poland and Polishness found in this *disco polo* song is based on four pillars: Polish culture (represented by a Chopin's mazurka), freedom (which can be interpreted as a reference to Old-Poland's Sarmatian culture, which will be discussed later in more detail), Catholicism (as an important part of Polish tradition, differentiating Poles from their Protestant or Orthodox neighbors), and Slavic heritage. Such a world, in which "time has stopped," and not the modern West, is considered here an ideal and a "little paradise". The attitude presented in this *disco polo* song stands in clear opposition to the official politics of the state, which put Poland on trajectory of change in order to make the country institutionally converge on the Western model.

For more than two centuries attitudes towards *swójskość*, the concept, which embraces everything native, homegrown, domestic, homelike, familiar, and folksy, and its antonym, *cudzoziemszczyzna*, which embraces everything foreign and exotic, have been of paramount importance in conceptual schemes of desirable directions for Poland's transformations, including the transition from socialism to capitalism. They were closely related to the dichotomy of Poland's backwardness and modernization. *Disco polo* presents its own vision of these issues, which is often at odds with the picture presented by the mainstream media, which supports neo-liberal ideology.<sup>103</sup> By emphasizing a different tradition, it provides an alternative interpretation of the Polish past and present as well as Poland's relationship to the West and modernity.

*Disco polo* locates the myth of Poland in Old-Poland, especially in the Sarmatian tradition. In "This world is our paradise," as in many other *disco polo* songs, including one of the greatest hits, "Wolność" (*Freedom*) by the group Boys, freedom and liberty are emphasized and treated as attributes of Polishness.

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<sup>103</sup> Neo-liberalism has been accepted without too many reservations by most of the important opinion-making circles in Poland, supported by the media, including the leading Polish daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, as well as by the important weeklies *Polityka* and *Wprost*, and has dominated academic publications. See Jacek Kochanowicz, Chapter VII: "Poland and the West: In or Out?" in *Backwardness and Modernization: Poland and Eastern Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 4-5

**Wolność<sup>104</sup>****Freedom**

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 1.  | Miała matka syna, syna jedyne<br>chciała go wychować na pana wielkiego        | A mother had a son, her only son<br>She wanted to raise him to be a great lord [a gentleman].           |
| Ref | Niech żyje wolność, wolność i swoboda<br>Niech żyje zabawa i dziewczyna młoda | Long live liberty, liberty and freedom<br>Long live playfulness and a young girl                        |
| 2.  | Jak go wychowała, wypiełgnowała<br>I do poprawczaka oddać go musiała          | When she had raised him and cared for him<br>She had to give him away to the reformatory <sup>105</sup> |
| 3.  | Jak go zabierali muzyka mu grała<br>Ludziska się śmiali dziewczyna płakała    | When they were taking him, the music played<br>The people laughed and the young girl cried:             |
| 4.  | Oj wy ludzie, ludzie, co wy tu robicie<br>Zabieracie chłopca mi na całe życie | Oh people, people, what is it you are doing<br>You are taking my boy away for life                      |
| 5.  | Miała matka syna, syna jedyne<br>Chciała go wychować na pana wielkiego        | A mother had a son, her only son<br>She wanted to raise him to be a great lord [a gentleman].           |

Daphne Carr provided the following description of the song:

A synth horn fanfare, bells, and chorus pad play the melody for “And crown thy good with brotherhood/ From sea to shining sea,” the final couplet from “America the Beautiful.” The intro ends in an ominous timpani roll. A surging synth bass line carries the root of the melody, and when the vocals and synth pads come in on the verse, a keyboard catches the upbeat of each bass note. The verses tell a story sung by a boy whose voice is bathed in reverb and pushed high in the mix. (...) In the chorus, the keys double, the rhythm is more complex, and drum blasts, a synth reed run or a horn fanfare punctuate each statement. (...) Each chorus is more fiercely orchestrated, then returning to relative calm after the closing repetition of the first verse, “A mother had an only son.” The plain tone of the singer’s voice, lacking in vibrato, emphasizes his story, which is in one way the tale of a young, rural boy whose mother dreamed of his upward mobility but whose fate is sealed when he commits an unnamed crime.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>104</sup> *Wolność* translates best in this context as “freedom”; however, to differentiate it from the synonymous term *swoboda*, it was translated as “liberty” in the refrain. This is the most popular version of the song from the cassette *Miłość jak wiatr* (‘Love as Wind’, 1994). The original version of the song, entitled „Wolność I,” from the cassette *Dziewczyna z Marzeń* (1991) had two more versions of the refrain and a slightly different sound setting. “Wolność” reappears on many other recordings and “Wolność I” on the cassette *Łobuz i drań* (1996). See “Dyskografia” (*Discography*) at the official website of Boys <http://www.boys.art.pl/>. Accessed on January 7, 2012.

<sup>105</sup> Polish *poprawczak* - is a penal instruction where young offenders (minors) are sent for discipline and corrective training.

<sup>106</sup> Daphne Carr, “Dancing, Democracy, and Kitsch. Poland’s Disco Polo,” *Listen Again. A Momentary History of Pop Music*, ed. Eric Weisbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 277-278.

While the description Carr provides is accurate (although it matches the most popular version of the song from 1994, and not the original version from 1991 that she refers to in her article<sup>107</sup>) her interpretation of the song is less convincing when she writes:

Given the framework of “America the Beautiful,” however, the song can also be read as the metaphorical lament of a mother who did raise her son to success. Unfortunately, this means he must leave the village to take part in a new economy overseas or in the Westernized Polish cities. The final line of the chorus, then, is a nostalgic statement, calling for the long life of playfulness and youthful innocence of the village troubled in the transformation to modernity.<sup>108</sup>

The original version of 1991, called “Wolność I,” had different synth effects, did not contain the quotation from “America the Beautiful,” and had two additional versions of the refrain, after the first and the fourth verse respectively:

Niech żyje wolność, wolność i swoboda	Long live liberty, liberty and freedom
Niech nam żyją <b>Prostki</b> i dziewczyna młoda	Long live <b>Prostki</b> <sup>109</sup> and a young girl.

Niech żyje wolność, wolność i swoboda	Long live liberty, liberty and freedom
Niech żyją nam <b>wszyscy</b> i dziewczyna młoda	Long live <b>everybody</b> and a young girl.

There was also a continuation of the song entitled “Gdzie moja wolność” [Where is my freedom] to the same musical setting (the cassette *Łobuz i drań*, 1996), except for replacing “America the Beautiful” with the “Ode to Joy,” which pictured the imprisoned boy, longing for his girlfriend. Its video features an imprisoned boy (played by the leader of the group), who finally gets his freedom back only to find out that his girlfriend is already with another man.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> She also gives an inaccurate title “Wolność i swoboda” instead of “Wolność I”).

<sup>108</sup> Carr, op. cit., 278.

<sup>109</sup> Prostki is a village in North-Eastern Poland, in which band’s members were born and the band was founded.

<sup>110</sup> There was also a version called “Wolność II”, performed by Boys at a concert in the Congress Hall (*Sala Kongresowa*) in Warsaw 1995, which was broadcasted by television. This version, popular at weddings, while preserving the musical setting of “Wolność”, had some changes in the lyrics of the first and the last verse:

Miała matka syna, syna jedynego	A mother had a son, her only son
chciała go wychować na <b>pana młodego</b>	She wanted to raise him to be a <b>bridegroom</b> .



All these versions of the song seem to be calls for celebrating freedom here and now, even for some excess, rather than a nostalgic statement, referring to loss of idyllic rural life. As already noted, the latter attitude was typical for the visiting intellectuals rather than the villagers. Moreover, at the beginning of the 1990s the migration to cities was neither as large as in the 1950s (which was the time of heavy industry's rapid development), nor was it a one-way movement. For the first time in contemporary Polish history, many people have left cities for surrounding villages to build houses and commute to work from there, and in the last few years the internal migration from big cities into villages has exceeded the one in the opposite direction.

Although replacing "America the Beautiful" with the "Ode to Joy" (the hymn of the European Union) could be interpreted as a change to a symbol of the modern West and a recent destination of a new wave of Polish emigration, one must remember that the new version of the song was written in 1996, eight years before Poland joined the EU and the emigration intensified significantly, while the first version of the song originated when the transformation had just started and its outcomes were still unknown. At that time Polish migration overseas not only did not intensify, but significantly diminished in comparison to the 1980s, when many Poles left the country in the aftermath of the Martial law (introduced in 1981 to suppress political opposition).

On the one hand "Freedom" explores a rather common topic in Polish folk music of a mother mourning her son's departure;<sup>111</sup> on the other hand it can be interpreted as a reference to "Golden Liberty" or "Golden Freedom" (*Aurea Libertas*), one of the most central topics in the history of Polish culture. It was one of the basic principles of the Polish nobility's ideology called

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Miała matka syna, **Millera Marcina**

A mother had a son, **Marcin Miller**

Chciała go wychować **niejedną blondyną**

**Many a blonde** wanted to raise him

(Marcin Miller is the leader and the vocalist of the band).

<sup>111</sup> However, it is rather ambiguous whether the cry in verse 4 is uttered by the boy's mother or his girlfriend.

Sarmatism (*sarmatyzm*), which was the centerpiece of the culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>112</sup>

Sarmatism was based on a belief that the Polish gentry (*szlachta*) descended from the ancient Sarmatians, who conquered local Slavs, and from whom it inherited their love of freedom, hospitality, kindness, bravery, and courage. It was a unique cultural mix of Eastern, Western, and native traditions.<sup>113</sup> Until almost the end of the 18th century the adjective Sarmatian (*sarmacki*) evoked pride and referred to healthy indigenous, patriotic, and chivalric traditions, as opposed to foreign influences, which led to indifference to the state's priorities, softness, and effeminacy. Attacked and ridiculed during the Polish Enlightenment, it started being associated with uneducated and unenlightened ideas, and with those who opposed the reforms of the "progressives".<sup>114</sup> Today, some scholars consider the Sarmatian mentality, with its disregard for trade and craft, as an obstacle to the development of capitalism.<sup>115</sup>

Sarmatism was rehabilitated by Polish Romanticism, becoming a staple of Polish national culture, and illustrated by such masterpieces as the epic poem *Pan Tadeusz* by Adam Mickiewicz

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<sup>112</sup> Another principle was staying faithful to ancestral traditions (*Mores Maiorum*).

<sup>113</sup> Polish costume (which took its uniform shape in 1630s and 1640s), which differentiated Polish gentry from its Western counterparts, exemplifies such a combination of Eastern and Western elements. Its most characteristic element, *Kontusz* (a man's or woman's coat, influenced by oriental fashions, which was tied with a long, wide woven belt called *pas kontuszowy*), together with a mustache, and a sable became an emblem of Sarmatians. On canonic beauty and fashion in Old Poland see Marek Ferenc, "Czasy nowożytnie" [Modern Times] in *Obyczaje w Polsce od Średniowiecza do Czasów Współczesnych*, ed. Andrzej Chwalba (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2004), 121-123.

<sup>114</sup> Negative connotations of the word started with the play *Sarmatyzm* ("Sarmatian Ways," 1785) by Franciszek Zabłocki. See Andrzej Wasko, "Sarmatism or the Enlightenment: The Dilemma of Polish Culture," *Sarmatian Review* vol. XVII no. 2 (1997), <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~sarmatia/497/wasko.html>. Accessed 17 February 2015.

<sup>115</sup> For example Jacek Kochanowicz in his article "Could a Polish Noble become an Entrepreneur? Mentality, Market and Capital" in *Backwardness and Modernization: Poland and Eastern Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Chapter IV: 934-36 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), answers "no" to the question posed in the title because profits from grain export were used for luxury consumption, and not reinvested. Other scholars, such as Immanuel Wallerstein, regard the Polish noble landowner as a capitalist, because he was interested in profits. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *Modern World System*, vol. II: *Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (New York, Academic Press, 1980). Moreover, one can argue that profits spent on luxury consumption were actually reinvested – albeit not in production but in social status.

or the opera *Starszny Dwór* (*The Haunted Manor*) by Stanisław Moniuszko. It enjoyed a triumphant comeback with *The Trilogy* (*Ogniem i Mieczem* [*With Fire and Sword*], *Potop* [*The Deluge*], *Pan Wolodyjowski* [*Colonel Wolodyjowski*]<sup>116</sup>) by Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916), Poland's first Nobel Prize laureate in literature. In the twentieth century, its popularity continued with the film versions of Sienkiewicz's trilogy, inspiring books (for example by Jacek Komuda), songs (for example by Jacek Kaczmarski or Jacek Kowalski) and even role-playing games (such as *Dzikie Pola* [*Wild Fields*]).

In contemporary Poland, the perception of Sarmatism varies widely and depends on one's perception of Polishness: as an asset or as a burden. However, in both cases the vision of Sarmatism is ahistorical and very selective, being rooted in Sienkiewicz's fantasy rather than historical tradition. For "patriots" it is associated with a glorious past, pride of indigenous traditions, faithfulness to local customs, and commitment to Poland's wellbeing. For "progressives" it is synonymous with backwardness, provincialism, and narrow-mindedness, typified by squabbling uneducated drunken brawlers, and ridiculed as unenlightened.

Likewise, the vision of Sarmatism in *disco polo* is ahistorical and very selective. Historical costume in *disco polo* videos (such as "Wiatr miłości" [*Wind of Love*] by Bayer Full) serves to build a stereotype of Poles as attributed with cultivation of tradition, romanticism, Uhlan fantasy,<sup>117</sup> joyfulness, hospitality, patriotism, and tolerance towards all nations and religions.<sup>118</sup> Even vices, such as alcohol abuse, are interpreted as rather innocent (as in "Polski Duch" [*Polish*

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<sup>116</sup> The novel is known in English also as *Fire in the Steppe* or *Sir Michael*.

<sup>117</sup> Uhlan fantasy (also known as "cavalry fantasy") – associated with Uhlans, Polish light cavalry, means audacity and refers to behavior, which is characterized by boldness and ingenuity. In *disco polo* videos (especially to Bayer Full songs) it is represented by horseback riding or jumping over a fire, sometimes in Uhlan historical costumes (as in the video to Bayer Full's version of the Polish traditional songs "*Sokoły*").

<sup>118</sup> Leszek Koczanowicz and Agnieszka Zembruska ("Post-Communism and Pop Music: Annihilation or Restoration of Memory in Disco-Polo." *Focaal: Tijdschrift voor antropologie* 33 (1999), 121) draw attention to the paradox that lies in the fact that the genre ascribed tolerance to Poles while it was experiencing so much hatred and critique in the media.

Spirit] by Bayer Full).<sup>119</sup> Linked with Old-Poland's glory, the Sarmatian stereotype of a Pole and Polish life is associated with simplicity, hard work, agrarianism, freedom, family values, honor, and authenticity as well as with sumptuous feasts with large amount of alcohol.

For more than two centuries, attitudes towards *swojskość* - the concept which embraces everything native, homegrown, domestic, homelike, familiar, and folksy - and its antonym, *cudzoziemszczyzna* - which embraces everything foreign and exotic - have been of paramount importance in conceptual schemes of desirable directions of reforms in Poland, including the transition from socialism to capitalism.<sup>120</sup> They were closely related to the dichotomy of Poland's backwardness and modernization. *Disco polo* offers its own vision of these issues, often at odds with the picture presented by the mainstream media, which supports neo-liberal ideology.<sup>121</sup> By emphasizing a different tradition, it provides an alternative interpretation of the Polish past and present as well as of Poland's relationship to the West and modernity.

One of the prominent issues in post-socialist Poland has been its relationship to the West: is it in or out? Historically, as Jacek Kochanowicz points out, on the one hand, Poland's religion, ideas, legal institutions and scholarly traditions came predominantly from the West, and on the other hand, from the sixteenth century up to the end of communism neither the economic systems nor the social structures, nor the political systems, developed according to Western patterns.<sup>122</sup>

In the context of Poland's potential membership of the European Union the slogan "Coming back to Europe" was repeated over and over again, and the Western aspirations of the country were emphasized in the official discourse, which was confined to the articulated opinions

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<sup>119</sup> In Poland drinking is always a social experience. Solitary drinking is perceived as a symptom of alcoholism.

<sup>120</sup> See Zofia Stefanowska (ed.), *Swojskość i cudzoziemszczyzna w dziejach kultury polskiej* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawn. Naukowe, 1973).

<sup>121</sup> See note 103.

<sup>122</sup> Jacek Kochanowicz, *Backwardness and Modernization: Poland and Eastern Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), Chapter VII, 2, 10.

of intellectuals, as presented in the media and scholarly publications. If we could consider disco polo as a voice (or one of the voices) of the general public, the perception of Poland's relationship to the West, and the West itself, would look different. To the postulated "coming back to Europe" it replies "we do not need to come back to Europe because we have always been there," or, as Sławomir Świerzyński commented in the documentary *Bara Bara*, "we forget that we have been in Europe for 2,000 years".

Disco polo tries to be homegrown and cosmopolitan at the same time. Its Western façade hides the Polish inside. It indicates a certain fascination with the West. The names of disco-polo artists are foreign to the Polish language or at least sound Western, to name only the most popular as examples: Akcent, Bayer Full, Boys, Classic, Etna, Focus, Milano, Shazza, Top One, Toples. Some of those names seem to be misspelled, being Polish phonetic transcriptions rather than original Western words or phrases.

Cases such as Selawi (the name of the band is a Polish phonetic transliteration of "C'est la vie"), however, may suggest a deliberate misspelling, especially since it implies also mispronunciation (in Polish there is a fixed accent on the penultimate syllable). The chosen spelling (instead of a simple phonetic transcription such as 'se la wi' or 'SeLaWi'), being hyper-incorrect and free from a desire to seem formal or educated, can be seen as auto-ironic and deliberately ignoring prescribed foreign rules, as if saying "OK, it's incorrect, it's TOTALLY incorrect; we not only don't know how to spell it but also couldn't care less: we spell it our way."

Moreover, although disco polo seems to have appropriated a Western musical idiom, it reveals some Slavic characteristics underneath its surface. At first glance many of the musical elements used in disco polo, which come from Western popular music and from the sound options available on drum machines and synthesizers, may not seem traditional or locally conventional. Although they may initially sound like ordinary Western uses or untutored experimentation, they still serve to emphasize rhythmic structure and build specific "rich" texture with sound effects and accentuation, features which conform to Polish preferences in dance

music. The following statement by Sławomir Świerzyński, the leader of Bayer Full, from the documentary *Bara, Bara* demonstrates that disco polo musicians are aware of specific tastes of their audience and craft their songs accordingly:

Let's not forget that it's not real disco. It's a polka. As we say, snare drum and pedals. [*stopa, werbel i przebitka*]. (...) . We, Poles, (...) like it when there are all kinds of other sounds mixed in there. As I said before, some uhlan or Cossack spirit and some of that janissary clinking and clanking. What we really like is in fact a mass of sound. And in all of that there are the lyrics, which should be down-to-earth, simple, pleasant and easy to remember.

And for people to like the song, it is crucial that it talks about a woman. And when you sing about a woman, you should always sing about her long hair, her devotion to her family, and about how lovely, tender, and generally wonderful she is. And for men to like a song, it must have a kind of national character. There should be some uhlan spirit, a bit of feistiness, or a sort of Polish country. All of it should be topped with a few drops of vodka.

While reaching for an idiom of Western popular music, disco polo ignores its paradigm. It demonstrates reservations towards cultural patterns imported from Western Europe, considering them destructive or nothing more than a passing fad. Among negative phenomena disseminated by the “rotten West,” drugs, violence, vulgarity, progressive selfishness, the decline of tradition, and human loneliness are enumerated.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, what differentiates Poles from the West would be the Slavic soul, with its romanticism and idealism.

Although disco-polo artists have assimilated modern technology and some sonic patterns of Western pop music, they contrast themselves to Western rock and pop musicians by stressing their ordinariness, with modest hairdos and clothes and dislike of extravagance, as if saying “we are one of you”.<sup>124</sup> One of the greatest stars of the genre, Shazza (Marlena Magdalena Pańkowska) says:

There's been gossip that I drive a Jaguar, live in a villa with a swimming pool, wear fur coats, and what not ... All kinds of lies. Perhaps the information journalists had about me was too ambiguous. But my friends say sometimes, ‘Magda, now that you're a

<sup>123</sup> Koczanowicz and Zembruska, op. cit., 119. See also *Bara, Bara*, especially comments by Tomasz Samborski and Sławomir Świerzyński.

<sup>124</sup> Koczanowicz and Zembruska, op. cit., 117.

singer, maybe that's the way to go. Turn up at a concert in a gold Mercedes, walk down a red carpet, pretend you don't notice your fans and walk with your chin up.' It makes me laugh. I don't get it at all.<sup>125</sup>

Although top disco polo stars are among the most affluent artists in Poland, the distance between them and their audience remains at a wedding-reception level. For example, at the Valentine Concert of Disco Polo and Dance I attended on February 1, 2008 in Clifton NJ, which featured such bands as Bayer Full, Milano, Toples, Tsoonami, and Viper, most artists mingled with the audience after their sets were finished.<sup>126</sup> Even the megastar, Bayer Full, was easily approachable, and the bands' musicians patiently posed for pictures with fans. Moreover, disco polo concerts, like wedding receptions, are not centered around a music band. What happens on stage is of paramount importance but not central to the event. It has to stimulate having fun and does not assume contemplative listening or celebrating a pop star.

Not only the model of stardom promoted by Western popular music but also its ideology and promoted lifestyle are rejected by disco polo. Disco polo adherents criticize the media for promoting only Western culture in its worst form and deprecating Polish culture. For example, Sławomir Świerzyński says in the documentary *Bara Bara*:

I'm averse to journalists who don't promote the Polish character [*Polskość*], but rather promote some Western culture and ignore our own. I really try to do all I can, and that's why my songs often contain words like Poland, Polish character [*Polskość*, *Polacy*] and hospitality, to dispel the myth of the bad Poles going for each other's throats as soon as they find themselves abroad.

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<sup>125</sup> *Bara Bara* [*Hanky, Panky*]. Translation after English subtitles.

<sup>126</sup> Of all artists I contacted during my research, disco polo musicians were the most approachable and helpful, replying immediately to all my requests. Moreover, it was musicians themselves who replied, and not their managers, even if they were megastars such as Marcin Miller. In the cases of other genres, especially in the realm of popular music (including hip hop), there was a tendency to involve a third person with contacts, even among beginning amateur bands, as if having a manager would make them look more professional.

Disco polo is seen by its supporters as an alternative to Western mass culture, which, as they rightly observe, has found conditions more than favorable in Central and Eastern Europe where under the communist regime it was suppressed.<sup>127</sup> They claim that Western musical genres, such as rock, blues, rap or techno, cannot give Poles what disco polo can give them. Although some disco polo bands are fond of rock music and even record their own versions of Polish rock productions (such as for example *Rock'n Dance* by Top One from 1993), the majority of them set disco polo against rock, like Tomasz Samborski, in the documentary *Bara Bara*:

Rock is the music of rebellion. People rebel and everything's a 'no'. That's understandable. But is it understandable that we should listen to that every day? I wake up in the morning, the sun is shining, birds are singing, everything's green, I switch on the radio and hear, "Kill me, kill me". Is this how I should start my day? Why? Can't I choose to listen to something optimistic? After all, life is so wretched for most of us nowadays.

On the one hand, the genre reflects a general tendency of significantly declined interest in politics in Poland after 1989 and the people's focus on their own economy and private life.<sup>128</sup> On the other hand, disco polo, which emerged in a time of political unrest and economic crisis, restores the world's mythical order. The genre is not interested in a current situation in contemporary Poland (or the world) and dismisses the political dimension from the songs' lyrics. Even the participation of some disco polo artists in election campaigns did not change that. In disco polo, the complex outside world is presented as simple and as the world it should be rather than as it is. In this chaotic world, the genre provides a cure, a simple and beautiful shelter, in which a man and a woman know their culturally determined places and are free from real world controversies.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Koczanowicz and Zembruska, op. cit., 120.

<sup>128</sup> In the 1990s, one third of youth declared that they did not like any party, and did not see one they could identify with. See Tadeusz Czekalski, "Czasy współczesne [Present Time]" in *Obyczaje w Polsce od Średniowiecza do Czasów Współczesnych*, ed. Andrzej Chwalba (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2004), 419.

<sup>129</sup> Dariusz Galasiński, "Prosty świat disco-polo," *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze*, 3-4 (1996), 107-116.



The world presented in disco polo songs is ideal, with no violence, no death, or even strongly negative feelings, and centered around the relationship between a man and a woman. This relationship is presented in various aspects and stages (themes of songs embrace erotic relationships, falling in love, longtime faithful happy love, unfulfilled love, etc.). Its breaking up is the only potential negative event that happens. Still, as Dariusz Galasiński has observed, even if it does happen, it is caused by fate or some other outside force and not because of infidelity.<sup>130</sup>

Addressing the average Pole, disco polo uses a simple, comprehensible language, traditional elements of Polish culture, popular symbols, as well as national and religious notions.<sup>131</sup> As Galasiński has observed, disco polo seems to reproduce and reinforce well-known and culturally sanctioned values and status attributed to women. Men in disco polo songs are situated in the perspective of a positive stereotype of “a real man,” referring to the myth of a knight and a gentleman. Female ambiguity is contrasted to male unambiguousness. The man is the principal figure of the disco polo world, and it is his view that dominates and wins.<sup>132</sup>

Although disco polo lyrics present the world mostly from a male perspective, they are populated mostly by women, and most attention is given to them. Men in disco polo songs are either characters talking about women of their dreams or addressees of women’s feelings and desires. In disco polo songs, Galasiński distinguishes two types of female character, which are polar opposites: an ideal woman, who is distant and inaccessible (in songs sung by men) and “an eager slave,” a woman subjected (or wanting to be subjected) to her man-lord (in songs sung by women).<sup>133</sup> Clearly, such a cultural perspective, promoting a very conservative vision of society, does not match the vision promoted in the official discourse of the modern West.

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<sup>130</sup> Galasiński, op. cit., 108.

<sup>131</sup> Koczanowicz and Zembruska, op. cit., 116.

<sup>132</sup> Galasiński, op. cit., 111.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-15.

Not only the cultural perspective but also the prospect of economic growth offered by disco polo is not in accord with official discourse. As Waldemer Pawlak, the leader of the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL), observed in the documentary *Bara, Bara*, "disco polo shows that without Western capital, sponsors, banks, and loans you can get through the constrictions which are imposed on you by the outside world." He also noted that although connections between political parties and disco polo bands which participated in their campaigns were rather accidental, disco polo was employed by the politicians who focused on domestic solutions. The genre thus stood in clear opposition to the neo-liberal ideology, which was the most visible in the media, while another competing paradigm for reform, labeled as the "Third Way," was marginalized.<sup>134</sup>

Development of disco polo has been based on a business model different from the one used in Western popular music. Unlike Western 'indies', which are independent from the major labels (at least in terms of artist acquisition, recording, and promotion) but still reliant on them for distribution and more extensive marketing, disco polo labels developed their own channels of distribution and promotion. Their releases were sold not through retail music stores but through cassette stands at fairgrounds in towns and cities. The leading labels, such as Blue Star and Green Star, developed chains of modern discos at which their signed bands performed, and even organized transportation to their concerts from distant locations.

Moreover, disco polo does not celebrate originality or authorship the way Western music does. In Western popular music, the reproducing of existing songs is usually seen as a form of musical apprenticeship, while songwriting and the "working up" of an original composition is by

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<sup>134</sup> Kochanowicz, op. cit. Chapter VI, 5-6. The "Third Way," or "social democrat" was a paradigm for reform represented by a number of experts from Solidarity, arguing for a mixed economy, combined with workers' participation as well as substantial measures of welfare protection. However, after the Round Table talks of 1989, with Balcerowicz talking responsibility for the economic reform package in the Mazowiecki government, the social-democratic ideas were abandoned and replaced by a much more radical, pro-market approach. In the media discourse and in academic publications, this type of "Third Way" approach was marginalized, as its adherents had not succeeded in organizing think tanks, research institutions, or journals in which they could propagate their views. See *Ibid.*

contrast seen as a manifestation of individual creativity. This distinction, frequently used by musicians themselves, as well as critics and fans, to label various performers and determine their status, is important from the point of view of the music industry in the West.<sup>135</sup> It does not, however, determine the status of disco polo musicians.

Western popular music's business model, which is based primarily on recorded music produced in commodity form for a mass, predominantly youth, market, depends on disproportionately large returns from licensing and revenue from copyright. Therefore, copyright is central to the music industry, which is seeking the extension and consolidation of copyright legislation, both domestically and internationally, in order to maintain market control. In the case of disco polo, weaker copyright protection stimulated the genre's development because publishers had to record new material and new bands in order to stay on the market.

### **"There is no village in the countryside". Is disco polo folk music?**

In the DVD booklet to the documentary *Bara Bara* [Hanky Panky] we read:

According to managers of disco-polo bands, this music was a sign of a lack of "complex problems", the reaction of homeliness against the expansion of Western culture. The film, however, shows that this artificial, catchy, pseudo-folklore is nothing more than the expression of national inferiority complexes – it was supposed to be the product which would "make Poland famous the world over". (...) This disco-polo extravaganza is streaked with sadness: why must something that is considered homely be so primitive and stupid?

One may wonder why disco polo is called here "artificial pseudo-folklore". Is it more artificial than any other form of art (if one dares to grant it "art" status)? Isn't it an expression of the culture of the people, a vital part of rural rituals? Why is it denied the name *folklore* then?

Polish scholars' approaches to the question of the relationship between disco polo and folk music vary and seem to be related to their academic discipline. For example, ethnomusicologists Joanna Giemza and Jan Stęszewski, in spite of recognizing its function, deny

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<sup>135</sup>Roy Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music Culture*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 47.

disco polo the status of a new Polish folklore, saying that “it has virtually no connection with the peasant tradition, its circulation is not limited to villages, and it is only passively received”.<sup>136</sup> They disagree with the sociologist Mirosław Pęczak and others, for whom disco polo “fills the gap left after dwindling folk song,” which peasants “ceased to cultivate”.<sup>137</sup> The ethnologist Karolina Dabert admits that disco polo grew out of traditional dance and folk song and perceives the genre as belonging to the folk culture as much as to mass culture.<sup>138</sup> It appears that disco polo is non-folklore for an ethnomusicologist, post-folklore for a sociologist, and for an ethnologist an intersection of folk and mass culture, the two realms usually considered disjunctive.

Contrary to Giemza and Stęszewski’s claim, disco polo grows out of traditional or folk culture, although in a different way than *muzyka ludowa* (discussed in the previous chapter) does, and can be considered modernized folk or traditional music. It is associated with a specific style of musical arrangement (in terms of harmony, orchestration, and so on) and can adopt various repertoires. It assimilated many traditional folk and patriotic songs as well as old disco hits (for example by the group Boney M). Disco-polo arrangements of traditional children’s songs can be found in Polish supermarkets. Furthermore, newly created disco polo songs are being transformed when they are recorded by different artists, or performed by wedding bands. Also fans provide their own interpretations of songs, record them using karaoke, and put them on YouTube.

Moreover, while Western popular music is associated primarily with recorded sound (a feature often listed among its defining characteristics<sup>139</sup>), in disco polo the role of oral transmission cannot be ignored. Disco polo is related to *biesiada*, a kind of party associated with a mixture of eating, drinking, singing and dancing. Parties of this kind are “to unite people and

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<sup>136</sup> Giemza and Stęszewski, op. cit., 96.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Dabert, op. cit., 57-70.

<sup>139</sup> Shuker, op. cit., 6

give them an optimistic view of life and symbolize a brighter future”.<sup>140</sup> Such celebrations assume live music and communal participation in singing and dancing. No disco polo song can be called a hit until it is played at weddings by local bands and sung along to by dancing couples.

Disco polo’s affiliation with peasant tradition is undeniable and the reasons given by Giemza and Stęszewski for its exclusion from the realm of folklore are unsustainable. Its reception is by no means more passive than that of *muzyka ludowa* played on stage or aired on the radio, especially when disco polo is a vital part of a ritual such as a village wedding. Moreover, dissemination of *muzyka ludowa* through events organized for an urban audience is taken for granted by ethnomusicologists and other folk music enthusiasts. Nevertheless, the exclusion of the genre from the realm of folk music is not accidental: disco polo does not fit into established concepts (such as folk music, mass culture, or Western popular music) and challenges some conceptual schemes.

Folk music, representing traditional culture (associated with “purity,” “authenticity” and perceived as free of the taint of commerce) and popular music, representing mass culture (which brings to mind commercial connotations and apparently manipulative use of craft), are usually considered incommensurable, representing two paradigms which cannot be reconciled with each other because they cannot be subjected to the same common standard of comparison. Disco polo ignores the norms of both categories while, at the same time, sharing some of their characteristics. On the one hand, the genre grows out of the people’s culture and can be considered modernized folk or traditional music. On the other hand, it adheres to the logic of capitalism (the pursuit of maximum profit), being available for sale in the form of a commodity, and developing its own channels of distribution and promotion.

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<sup>140</sup> *Polish Wedding Blog*, <http://polishwedding.blogspot.com>, post of January 22, 2009 [Visited 16 January 2010].

Recognizing disco polo as contemporary folk music, challenges the established folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) concept. Following Romantic ideals, Polish intellectuals had specific standards of behavior that they felt to be appropriate for "the folk" (*lud*), seen as a basis upon which to define national character and identity. They accorded high value to some of the music of ordinary Poles, especially to "rural folklore" and "obsolescent ritual folklore," which they documented in villages from the beginning of the nineteenth century on, defined it as folk music (*muzyka ludowa*), and attributed to it the character of "true national culture". Collected music was treated as "folkloristic material" to be arranged and exploited by ensembles and composers.

Although Polish folk music is well documented only since the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was constructed as a phenomenon representing "Old Slavonic culture of prehistoric times" and a legacy of communities from some past "golden age" which conformed to traditional principles. The phenomenon of folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) was celebrated as something universal, eternal, unchangeable in its nature. Not only did folk music lose its social function as a subsidiary to rituals and social practices but also its traditional authorities were deprived of their agency, and its aesthetic criteria and concepts were replaced by the new ones, elaborated by outside experts.

With its history transformed into nature as well as its form deprived of its social meaning and celebrated as art, folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) functioned as a myth (as defined by Barthes<sup>141</sup>), which served the country's cultural and national identity. Disco polo has questioned this myth and, as an alternative, provided its own. Interestingly, the intelligentsia, which established the concept of folk music, based its myth on peasant tradition, while the ordinary people, in building a mythology for their disco polo, reached for Sarmatian culture, the tradition of the Polish nobility (*szlachta*), i.e. the elite.

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<sup>141</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill & Wang [1957] 1987), 116.

Disco polo is marginalized in Polish ethnomusicological discourse because it disturbs its paradigm. Ewa Wróbel, in her article “Folk niejedno ma imię” [Folk Has Many Names], in which she considers the folkloric movement in Poland at the beginning of the 1990s through the prism of the terminology used, excludes disco polo from her discussion because “[w]e do not discuss closer mass cultural phenomena of negligible artistic value, and therefore do not discuss disco polo bands and their terminology”.<sup>142</sup> However, if we look more closely at the phenomena embraced in her discussion we can see that disco polo does not fit there for reasons other than “negligible artistic value”.

She writes about “new forms of folkloric movement” in Poland after 1989, which were “under Western influence, especially Anglo-Celtic and Anglo-American”:

In youth students’ circles in big cities, groups of people interested in traditional art of their own and other nations started to form. Polish and Slavic folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) was at the center of their attention. Initially informal, such groups have formalized over time into bands performing music inspired, to a greater or lesser degree, by village music (*muzyka wsi*). Some of them tried to reproduce the music faithfully; others made arrangements with significant changes dictated by their own youth aesthetics.<sup>143</sup>

As Wróbel has observed, Polish terminology related to the phenomenon reflects Western influences on the folk movement. The basic term used in reference to folk-related music is *muzyka folkowa* (folk music) or *folk*; a term borrowed from the English language, although understood in a German way, as “music inspired by folklore”.<sup>144</sup> Nowadays, the term *muzyka folkowa* is usually used with reference to “contemporary music based on folk models, which transforms traditional music according to **new urban youth aesthetics**,” to “music which is **not a**

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<sup>142</sup> Ewa Wróbel, “Folk niejedno ma imię” [Folk has many names], *Gadki z Chatki* nr 31 (2000). [http://www.gadki.lublin.pl/gadki/artukul.php?nr\\_art=459](http://www.gadki.lublin.pl/gadki/artukul.php?nr_art=459). Accessed 30 January 2012.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> According to Maria Baliszewska, the term *folk* was used for the first time in 1977 on Polish Radio with reference to Delibab, a band reconstructing traditional Hungarian music, in order not to discourage the audience by labeling it as *muzyka ludowa*. See Wróbel, op. cit.

**continuation but a reference, and not utilitarian** but created for the scene”. Baliszewska defines *folk* as “all possible forms of transforming and recreating Polish folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) by new performers, who **do not have any direct link with the living tradition,**” and thus excludes *Górale* music (traditional music from the Tatra mountains) from it.<sup>145</sup>

Clearly, multigenerational, homegrown disco polo does not belong to the realm of *muzyka folkowa* as defined by Baliszewska and Wróbel. It has not been inspired by Western trends (although it utilizes Western idioms); is not governed by new aesthetic canons of urban youth but directly continues the living tradition of the Polish village and, last but not least, disco polo accompanies actual social gatherings and family rituals. Its position as the most popular wedding music in Poland, especially in rural areas, is indisputable.

Interestingly, disco polo sometimes uses the same songs as *muzyka folkowa*. Moreover, features considered characteristic of Polish folk music (*muzyka ludowa*), such as metric ambiguity, can be found in disco polo hits. For example Bayer Full has in its repertory the song “Lipka” [Green Linden], which can be found in the repertory of many established *folk* ensembles, such as Czeremszyzna, Orkiestra Dni Naszych, Staśki from Starachowice, or ich troLe.<sup>146</sup> Marcin Miller acknowledges that the first great hit of Boys, “Wolność” [Freedom], is a remake (*przeróbka*), which takes advantage of such a metric ambiguity: “We played in duple meter something that was formerly a little waltz, and it was the key to our success.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* My emphasis. There are also other terms used by the mass media. *Muzyka etniczna* (ethnic music) is used in two different meanings: following Anglo-American use of the term “ethnic,” as synonymous with *muzyka źródła* [music of the sources] or *muzyka korzeni* [music of the roots] to label traditional music of a given culture; and, following French use of the term “musique ethnique,” as electric and electronic music with ethnic elements. Another term in use is *world music*, borrowed from the English language to label music which links mainstream popular music with selective treatment of characteristic elements of traditional music. In Poland, however, the term *world music* is used with reference to experimental treatments of Polish folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) in different styles of popular music (for example Zbigniew Namysłowski linked *Górale* music with jazz, and Grzegorz Ciechowski with disco music), yet the term still refers to linking folk music with a mainstream popular music.

<sup>146</sup> The name *ich troLe* (with its awkward spelling) is a reference to *Ich Troje*, a Polish pop music band.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted after Miecik, op. cit., 98.



The sublime “folk” (*lud*) as the representatives of a traditional way of life, which determines the group character of Poles and preserves their noble customs from one generation to the next, is another concept challenged by disco polo. The differentiation between the shrieking “rabble” (*Pöbel*) and the noble “folk” (*Volk*), representing the universal spirit of a nation, which was adumbrated already in the eighteenth century, remains at the core of the concept of folk music.<sup>148</sup> Disco polo brings the “rabble” back into the picture and demonstrates that the noble “folk” is nothing more than a construct deriving from wishful thinking.

In the acclaimed movie *The Wedding* (*Wesele*, 2004) by Wojciech Smarzowski (which in its aim and concept refers to the great drama of the same title by Stanisław Wyspiański) a provincial wedding reception becomes a platform to portray a society since the advances of capitalism. The people depicted in the film are Polish hillbillies who would best be described as rude, crude, and lewd, and their lifestyle is as far apart from the pastoral rural life of the idealized *lud* (the folk) as disco polo is from *muzyka ludowa* (folk music). The most important thing for its main protagonist, Wiesław Wojnar, is to have his daughter’s wedding with a man from the same village come out splendidly, but as cheaply as possible. A wedding he organizes has to show off his position and strengthen his prestige.

Disco polo provides a perfect musical illustration of the movie, not only because it is a “natural” choice for a wedding reception in Polish villages but also because it is governed by the same principles as Wojnar’s wedding reception: being splendid at the lowest possible cost as well as being up to date while relying on traditional and long-standing elements. The goods and services in the wedding are obtained as cheaply as possible, even if it involves questionable methods and results in a stolen car presented as a wedding gift.

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<sup>148</sup> Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music". Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagne*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 257.

Likewise, disco polo does not care about origin of its songs, acknowledging their authors, or proper licensing. Its attitude towards concepts of ownership and originality in music does not fit into conceptual schemes associated with popular music in the West. It embraces even productions impersonating those by disco polo stars, such as *Old Disco 3* performed by Top-1, which appeared soon after the great success of *Poland Disco* by Top One.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, synthesizers allow for obtaining multiple effects at minimum expense. Providing rhythm (with given patterns and percussion effects), harmony, and melody, they allow for “rich” sound while saving on the number of band members and their skills.

Disco polo is an omnivorous genre, which treats all songs as folk songs. Many of the genre’s hits are based on existing material. Disco polo bands introduced to their repertoire not only songs related to weddings, *zabawa* and *biesiada* parties but also religious songs, scout songs, tourist songs and even sung poetry or rock music.<sup>150</sup> Disco polo musicians often talk about their songs in terms of reworking, recasting or making existing material over. Their success depends not so much on producing an original piece but on repackaging existing material in a form attractive to the audience.

Celebrating authorship as the highest stage of creativity, which is so characteristic of classical music, and to some degree also popular music, is neither the case in traditional music nor in disco polo, at least in earlier stages of the genre’s history. As Daphne Carr observed, when disco polo artists produce albums, it is label and genre compilations of their hits that drive the industry. This suggests that disco polo is largely song-, not artist-, driven, resembling in this (as

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<sup>149</sup> For more examples of impersonating (aimed to deceive fans who wanted to buy Top One productions) see the Top One official website [www.topone.pl](http://www.topone.pl).

<sup>150</sup> For example Bayer Full recorded a cassette *Któż jak Bóg* [Who’s Like God] (1997) and many groups recorded their own versions of traditional Christmas carols and newly composed seasonal productions. Bayer Full recorded cassettes with scout songs, or with tourist songs, such as *Krajobrazy* [Landscapes] (1994) or *Biesiada Turystyczna: Gdzie ta keja* (1999). Akcent’s song “Między nami” [Between Us] uses a poem by Adam Asnyk (1838–1897), a great Polish poet and dramatist, “Między nami nic nie było”. Rock music is utilized in such albums as *Rock’n Dance* by Top One from 1993 and *Rock Boys* from 2010 by Boys.

in other things) both folk and country music.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, like tourist songs, disco polo songs are “sung by everybody but nobody knows where they come from or who their author is.”<sup>152</sup>

Misattribution of songs or omission of authors in disco polo productions were common practice, especially before the *Act on copyright and related (neighboring) rights* was enacted in 1994.<sup>153</sup> Covers of disco polo cassettes from the early 1990s typically included only titles of songs and names of their performers (usually a band’s name) but not their authors. (Usually the year of the publication was also omitted.) Even when the authors’ names appeared, they were very often incorrect.<sup>154</sup> In public perception, disco polo hits became linked with the performers who made them popular, not with their authors. For example, it is said that “Szalona” [A crazy girl] is by Boys in spite of the fact that the lyrics and music of the song are written by Janusz Konopla from the band Mirage (1992). Yet it became one of the greatest disco polo hits due to the cover by Marcin Miller with the group Boys from the album *O.K.* (1997).

Recently, however, a tendency to reclaim authorship of disco polo songs can be observed, although in some cases the authorship is rather ambiguous. “I would like people to remember that I have written ‘Jasnowłosa’ [Farihair gir]” Andrzej Borowski, the leader of Milano, admitted during an informal interview.<sup>155</sup> The most famous example of a reclaimed authorship is of the

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<sup>151</sup> Carr, op. cit., 275.

<sup>152</sup> See Płudowski, op. cit.

<sup>153</sup> *Act on copyright and related (neighboring) rights (Ustawa o prawie autorskim i prawach pokrewnych)*, available at [http://www.mkidn.gov.pl/media/docs/PrawoautorskieiDz\\_U\\_2006\\_90\\_631wersja2007\\_11\\_01.pdf](http://www.mkidn.gov.pl/media/docs/PrawoautorskieiDz_U_2006_90_631wersja2007_11_01.pdf). Accessed 18 November 2011.

<sup>154</sup> The cassette *Krajobrazy* (Blue Star 174, 1994) by Bayer Full provides a good illustration of the practice. Only a minority of the songs, including “Pechowy dzień” by Waldemar Chyliński are labeled correctly. “Jaworzyna” is attributed to Wojciech Bellon instead of Jerzy Rejzer; “Tawerna pod pijaną zgrają” to B. Marcinkiewicz instead of Grzegorz Bukała; “Krajobrazy,” better known under the title “Letni wieczór,” which is the original title of the poem by Adam Asnyk, which provides the lyrics for the song, is attributed to AKTR Olsztyn (sic). “Pociąg” (Tysiąc mil [Thousand miles]), attributed to B. Marcinkiewicz, is known in scout songbooks as “900 miles” (by an unknown author).

<sup>155</sup> An interview with the author on February 1, 2008 at the Valentine Concert of Disco Polo and Dance [Walentyńkowy Koncert disco polo i dance] at the Polish American Cultural Center, Clifton NJ.

song “White Teddy Bear” which, popularized by the group Top One, became one of the staples of the genre. At the famous Popular and Sidewalk Songs Gala in 1992 it was presented in Janusz Laskowski’s version, performed by an anonymous band dressed as white teddy bears, which even further de-emphasized not only its authors but also its performers. The song was considered to be a folk song until 2005, when Maria Górską, at Piski Portal Internetowy ([www.piszanin.pl](http://www.piszanin.pl)), revealed that it was written by her husband, Mirosław Górski, in 1970, during his service in the army. The title “White Teddy Bear” was to refer to their little son, Andrzej, whose hair was as white as milk.<sup>156</sup> Soon, the touching story about the song being written by a soldier longing for his wife and their toddler boy was covered by national press and television.<sup>157</sup> In July 2007, Pisz,

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In the spring of 1970, I heard the song, dedicated to me, for the first time. Then it was played by the band Dowcipnisie, [later] Dobosze, at dancing parties (*dancingi*) in the restaurant Myśliwska, where the band gigged, and at weddings in the immediate vicinity of Pisz. Very often, it was also sung and played at camps at lakes Brzozolasek, Mały Wiartel and Roś. In 1975 the band was hired for the summer season at the bar "Pod Sosnami" in Wiartel by Mrs. M. Dusza. (...). There it was heard by some professional band from Łódź.

Imagine our surprise when the following year we heard the song performed at a dancing party in Łowicz (Łódź province), then broadcasted by *Lato z Radiem* ["Summer with the Radio" - one of the most popular Polish radio programs], which was even looking for the author of the song. Since my husband has treated this melody as something very private, he did not really want to lose that privacy.

My husband's cousin, Ryszard Kozikowski (a band member and a witness of the song's origin) gave us a much bigger surprise after returning from the USA. From America, he brought a cassette with a recording of "White Teddy Bear".

Quoted after Maria Górską, “Biały Miś był dla mnie,” *Piski Porta Internetowy*, <http://www.piszanin.pl/1,258,bialy-mis-byl-dla-mnie.html> 9 December 2005, Accessed on July 15, 2010.

However, the process of the song’s registration with Polish Society of Authors and Composers (*Związek Autorów i Kompozytorów Scenicznych, ZAiKS*) has not been completed. Some question Górski’s authorship, claiming that they knew the song already in the 1960s. In commentaries under articles on the song published by Polish websites various bands are enumerated as its original performers. See for example commentaries under “Tajemnica ‘Białego misia’” [The White Teddy Bear’s Mystery] at *Wirtualna Polska*, 23 February 2012, <http://muzyka.wp.pl/gid,651496,title,Tajemnica-Bialego-misia,galeria.html#opinie>. Accessed 1 November 2013.

<sup>157</sup> Pdf files with scanned articles of some press releases are available at Festiwal Białego Misia [White Teddy Bear Festival] <http://www.pisz.home.pl/bialymis/prasa.html> (Accessed on July 15 2010). *Kulisy sławy. Biały Miś*, an article of 16 April 2006 on the television program broadcast by TVN Television can be found at [http://uwaga.onet.pl/1857,info,,bialy\\_mis,slawa.html](http://uwaga.onet.pl/1857,info,,bialy_mis,slawa.html). (Accessed on July 15 2010).

the hometown of the Górskis family (who now live in London) even organized a four-day long White Teddy Bear Festival (*Festiwal Białego Misia*).<sup>158</sup>

While performing songs by others is a norm at disco polo concerts and not giving the authors' names on covers has not been perceived as something controversial, attributing the authorship of songs to people who have made relatively small contribution to them raises controversy. Cases in which disco polo musicians have been named as authors of songs which utilize work by unacknowledged others (such as "Tibu tabu" by Akcent), with possible inserts into original lyrics and changes in musical structure of the verses or refrain, have been considered objectionable.<sup>159</sup>

The most spectacular authorship issue has been the conflict between Sławomir Świerzyński, the leader of Bayer Full, an author of the great hit "Moja muzyka" [My Music] and Karol Płudowski, the author of the tourist song "Taka piosenka" [Such a song], on which the disco polo hit is based, which culminated in a lawsuit. "Moja Muzyka" [My Music] was registered for copyright protection with the Polish Society of Authors and Composers (*Związek Autorów i Kompozytorów Scenicznych, ZAiKS*) by the leader of Bayer Full, Sławomir Świerzyński as his own composition. However, the song, which originated in 1980 and was recorded in 1992 by its author Karol Płudowski, was earlier published by Pomaton (1993) and registered for copyright protection with ZAiKS as "Taka piosenka" [Such a song].

The argument started when Bayer Full's performance of the song won the second prize at the Polish Television contest "Plebiscyt Muzycznej Jedyńki," and Karol Płudowski questioned originality of the piece. Sławomir Świerzyński, the leader of Bayer Full, admits that he heard

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<sup>158</sup> See the official website of Festiwal Białego Misia (The White Teddy Bear Festival) <http://www.pisz.home.pl/bialymis/index.html> (Accessed on July 15 2010).

<sup>159</sup> On the cassette *Gold* (Green Star, 1997) the song is labeled "Tabu tibu". Zenon Martyniuk and Andrzej Anikiej (the musicians of the band) are given as its authors, although their production is in fact a tourist song "Biegłaś z boczem" to the poem by Adam Asnyk, with music by Andrzej Mróz with which it was originally performed by the band Kociołek. To this was added a refrain of repeated utterances, "tibu tabu".

Płudowski's song at a scouts' camp in Łeba in 1981 but when he tried to sing it later he could remember "only scraps of [its] lyrics and snippets of music". In 1992, with Jacek Koszewski, he put together the version of the song known as "Moja Muzyka". According to Świerzyński:

After analyzing the pieces "Moja Muzyka" and "Taka piosenka" by independent authors and composers, the [Polish Society of Authors and Composers] ZAIKS arbitration chaired by R[yszard] Pozankowski declared S[ławomir] Świerzyński the composer of the music to the verses of the song "Moja Muzyka," K[arol] Płudowski the composer of the music to the refrain, K[arol] Płudowski the author of the lyrics of the refrain and two verses, and S[ławomir] Świerzyński the author [of the lyrics] of one verse. Because K[arol] Płudowski disagrees with the conclusion of the body, the [Authors] Association ZAIKS has blocked the accounts of both pieces and since that time none of us receives any royalties.<sup>160</sup>

Contrary to Świerzyński's claim, Płudowski and Świerzyński were not always given as the authors of "Moja muzyka" on inserts to their CDs and cassettes. Moreover, some Bayer Full recordings contain only two verses, which correspond to Płudowski's song "Taka piosenka".<sup>161</sup> Closely similar lyrics and the melody of the refrain leave no doubts that "Moja muzyka" is in fact a remodeled version of "Taka piosenka". What differentiates the two songs is the melody of the verse, its harmonic rhythm, and a relationship between verses and the refrain. Świerzyński's version is intended as danceable, with a prominent rhythmic section played by electronic

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<sup>160</sup> Sławomir Świerzyński, the post of 15 December 2007 at the Official Forum of Bayer Full <http://forum.bayerfull.pl>. Accessed on July 28, 2010.

<sup>161</sup> Versions with two verses appeared at the following issues:

Bayer Full, *Wakacyjna dziewczyna* (Blue Star 115, 1993) – no authors given.

Bayer Full, *Moja Muzyka* (Blue Star, Ryszard Music CD0006, 1994) – music and lyrics K. Płudowski, S. Świerzyński

Mix *Disco Polo Greatest Hits* (Blue Star) – music and lyrics S. Świerzyński.

Mix *Gwiazdy Disco Polo 4* (GM Records GMM 286-2, 1999) - music. K. Płudowski, lyrics S. Świerzyński.

Mix *Kolekcja przebojów 3* (Blue Star) - music K. Płudowski, lyrics S. Świerzyński.

Versions with three verses:

Mix *The best of disco polo 4* (Blue Star) – no authors given.

Bayer Full, *Złote przeboje* (Omega Music, 1995) – music and lyrics S. Świerzyński.

Bayer Full, 1984-1999 - *Czyste melodyjne brzmienie* (PPT, 2000) – music and lyrics S. Świerzyński.

percussion. As a consequence, the melody is smoother and simplified, and the harmonic rhythm is much slower. Moreover, it lacks the contrast in tempo between the verses and the refrain of the original, as well as the *accelerando* at the beginning of the refrain of “Taka Piosenka,” which was sung originally with a guitar accompaniment, with audiences joining the singer at the refrain.

Karol Płudowski brought suit to the court. The criminal case was dismissed (due to a statute of limitations), but the civil case is pending. Although a ZAIKS (the Polish Society of Authors and Composers) official admitted that the registration of “Moja muzyka” was an oversight on the part of the institution, it formally took place, what further complicated the legal issue. Świerzyński’s statement after being accused of stealing Płudowski’s song ends with the question: **“Which song do you remember and sing? ‘Taka piosenka’ by K. Płudowski or ‘Moja muzyka’ by S. Świerzyński?”** and the conclusion: **“Even the most beautiful song is dead when nobody remembers it or sings it.”**<sup>162</sup>

“D[isco] P[olo] is kitschy, worthless, primitive, ‘bio-physiologic’ art, which, unfortunately, has found many followers, and many carry the responsibility for this state [of affairs] and for a long time.”<sup>163</sup> Thus Joanna Giemza and Jan Stęszewski concluded one of the first studies of the genre. The paradigm of folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) implied vitality and, at the same time, the sublime, noble, spiritual culture of the people (*lud*). Disco polo offered the former without the latter. Maciej Mazurek wrote that from the high-culture point of view disco polo’s music is downright rough and its lyrics refer to the lowest human instincts, yet it is difficult not to see in it, even at a biological level, some folk robustness. “For it is in fact a folk culture, contemporary folklore, the only one we have today.” Moreover, he disagrees with the thesis that disco polo perpetuates negative stereotypes of behavior because “disco polo lyrics refer to the

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<sup>162</sup> Emphasis as in the original.

<sup>163</sup> Giemza and Stęszewski, op. cit., 97.

Romantic myth in a popular guise, in a sentimental and soapy form. (...) Undoubtedly it is kitsch, but kitsch is something ordinary in everyday life.”<sup>164</sup>

Disco polo, so different from the culture of Polish villages envisioned by the Polish intellectuals, was a herald of the changes in the Polish countryside which were about to happen after the system change. “Culture in the Polish countryside is completely different than in a big city, but it has nothing to do with the stereotype of rusticity, province and locality that dwells in the minds of the metropolis’ inhabitants,” Mirosław Pęczak wrote, in his account of the research on the condition of the culture of villages and small towns in Poland (conducted in Summer and Autumn 2010 under the direction of Wojciech Burszta and founded by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage).<sup>165</sup>

According to Burszta’s research, the agricultural village, known from the People’s Republic of Poland (PRL), is a thing of the past, with peasants becoming “food producers,” large-scale enterprises emerging besides small farms, and inhabitants of non-agricultural settlements, commuting to work in neighboring cities. There is no difference in clothing style between the countryside and urban areas, and rural weddings differ from the urban ones mostly in their use of more disco polo songs. In villages and small towns there is often a clash of contrasting elements: church and discothèque, tradition and pop culture, the past and the present. Although the relationship between *sacrum* and *profanum* is evolving within local culture, the rhythm of secular time is linked to sacred time. Moreover, people emphasize their connection to tradition. At the same time, the local cultural offer prepared by official institutions usually ignores the needs of local communities, being crafted for the visitors or even for cultural officials themselves but not for the residents. “Maybe our villages do not know their own folklore, but they are more and

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<sup>164</sup> Mazurek, op. cit., 7.

<sup>165</sup> Mirosław Pęczak, “Na wsi nie ma wsi” [There is no village in the countryside], *Polityka* 41, 2 April 2011, 90.



more global villages, even if at local festivals the hymn of the Polish province, the disco-polo megahit ‘Szalona,’ always has to be played,” Pęczak concludes.<sup>166</sup>

“There is no village in the countryside” [*Na wsi nie ma wsi*], the title of Pęczak’s article, summarizes his findings, which present a picture of Polish village life very different not only from its colloquial image but also incongruent with theoretical concepts regarding Polish local culture. Likewise, disco polo is very different from the traditionally expected music of the folk (*lud*) and incompatible with concepts of *muzyka ludowa* or *muzyka folkowa*. It indicates a problem with the concept of folk music and with the paradigm of its study. Yet this does not deter ethnomusicologists who study traditional music in Poland from separating disco polo from “pure” folk music and skipping “the modern” portion of music at contemporary rural weddings, focusing instead entirely on the “traditional” one.<sup>167</sup>

## Conclusion of Chapter Two

The accepted names of many cultural movements or phenomena began as pejorative terms which only over time acquired positive meaning. In the case of disco polo (also spelled disco-polo, Disco Polo or DP) the situation is little different. In the 1980s, the phenomenon was unnamed (my father called it “wedding music”). After 1989 it was called “sidewalk music” (*muzyka chodnikowa*) or “sidewalk song” (*piosenka chodnikowa*), referring to cassette sales from provisional stands placed directly on sidewalks at fairgrounds. The musical program “Baracholka,” aired by a local radio station, Radio Lublin, was the first to play *muzyka*

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, 91.

<sup>167</sup> Such an approach appeared even in Timothy J. Cooley’s presentation “Dance in the Polish Tatras: An Instructional DVD,” a film presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology’s 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, November 17, 2005.

*chodnikowa* in the early 1990s. The name of the program, “barachółka,” means “bazaar,” and this was initially the only forum where this type of music was available for sale.<sup>168</sup>

Ola (an administrator of the official website of Bayer Full) draws attention to the fact that only this genre’s name was derived from a mode of sale, although marketing via cassettes on sidewalks was not unique to disco polo:

Personally, I don’t like the name “sidewalk music”. They say it came from selling cassettes and CDs at bazaars from sidewalks (or something like that) at the very beginning. One thing makes me think: It was not the only music available this way. Other musical genres likewise were sold at bazaars. So why did only this music, and no other, get this name? The present name [disco polo] perfectly reflects the mood of the music: disco climates, only in Polish.<sup>169</sup>

Indeed, “sidewalk music,” through the reference to the genre’s mode of sale, evokes associations with something very low, if not the lowest possible (can you get any lower than a sidewalk?).<sup>170</sup>

The change of the genre’s name is attributed to Sławomir Skręta, the owner of Blue Star, the first disco-polo label. Since the autumn of 1993, Skręta had included concert organization in his business operation and wanted some “more noble-sounding” name than “sidewalk music,” which had widespread negative connotations.<sup>171</sup> The vast majority of sources give Skręta as the

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<sup>168</sup> The program, hosted by Kaczucha (Anna Kaczowska) and Jeżucha (Jerzy Janiszewski), was aired first on Thursday, then, by popular demand, on Friday nights, from 11pm-5am. Stepaniuk, op. cit., 7.

<sup>169</sup> A comment of 26 August 2008 by the site administrator Ola on the discussion forum about music on the official Bayer Full website <http://forum.bayerfull.pl>. Accessed on 5 August 2010.

<sup>170</sup> As Anna Kowalczy has observed, the name “sidewalk music” also calls to mind urban Polish songs (*piosenki*) from the beginning of the twentieth century, which were known as pavement (*brukowe*), yard (*podwórzowe*), or sidewalk (*chodnikowe*) songs. Popular in big cities before the Second World War, some of these songs were written by home-grown poets or singers, while others entered the public repertory from cabarets, operettas, and theatre. Like hits from phonograph records, radio and films, they became public property in versions issued by interwar stars and sung by various yard or street ensembles (*zespoły podwórzowe* and *uliczne*); nobody remembered or cared whether they were written by a famous lyricist or came from a penny songbook, containing popular songs of unknown authorship. Those pre-war songs addressed the everyday life of cities and suburbs, street heroes, and even an economic crisis; however, most of them were sentimental and frivolous songs about love, just like disco polo songs. Kowalczyk, op. cit, 50-51. Disco polo shares with them the same attitude towards authorship and ownership.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

originator of the new name.<sup>172</sup> However, other accounts suggest that Skręta did not coin the term “disco polo” himself, but rather that it arose, during a brainstorming session at a meeting of the leading bands (which Skręta organized), as an idea of Sławomir Świerzyński (the leader of Bayer Full) in reference to Italo-disco.<sup>173</sup> Whether or not Skręta coined the term himself, he fully deserves his title as the Godfather of disco polo, since he was responsible for implementing and popularizing the new name.

However, this new “noble-sounding name” soon acquired negative connotations. There have been proposals to change the name of the genre again, into “Polish dance music” (*Polska muzyka taneczna*), but the proposed new name is not popular among disco polo fans. They would rather just have their genre respected without any cosmetic name changes. Some websites devoted to disco polo music (including DiscoStacja’s radio Disco Polo <http://www.discostacja.pl/>) use the term “disco polo and dance,” which is also found in CD collections (such as Sexy Babe’s *Disco Polo and Dance Hits*, 2CDs, 2010 and VA’s *Przebojowa Kolekcja Disco Polo And Dance Vols.1 and 2*, 2009).<sup>174</sup>

In her essay “Dancing, Democracy, and Kitsch. Poland’s Disco Polo” Daphne Carr considers “Polish disco” to be “*the ultimate sonic oxymoron*.”

First, there’s the Polish. Polka-dancing, pierogie-eating, and Pope-loving Poles in the United States have for over a hundred years been the besotted and bumbling protagonists to all manner of blonde, light bulb-turning, boat-sinking jokes and other abuses not so funny. To be Polish in the United States today is to be part of a history of arguably incomplete assimilation, from the marked ethnicity of the dumb Polack to a less conspicuous shade of white. Then there is disco. Thanks to a great crop of relatively new books, disco has been well documented as preternaturally cosmopolitan as well as big, gay, black, and proud of it. So disco polo, a 1990s post-musical hybrid by new Poles, seems not only a sonic smash-up but potentially an intercultural carnal sin.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> These include the documentary *Bara Bara* (1996), which is usually given as the source of information.

<sup>173</sup> See for example “O muzyce” on the “Forum Bayer Full” at the official website of the group at <http://forum.bayerfull.pl>. Accessed 27 July 2010.

<sup>174</sup> Centrum Informacji o Muzyce Disco-Polo: <http://www.disco-dance.ovh.org>, albums: Sexy Babe – Disco Polo and Dance Hits 2CD’s (2010); VA-Przebojowa Kolekcja Disco Polo And Dance Vol.1-PL-2009. Accessed 2 August 2010.

<sup>175</sup> Carr, op. cit., 272. Misspelling “pierogie” instead of “pierogi,” as in the original.

Such a perception of “Polish” and “disco,” however, would be highly surprising not only for Poles in Poland but also for Polonia (i.e. the American communities of Poles, Polish Americans and Americans of Polish descent; or, more generally, Poles or people of Polish descent living abroad). First, the conceptual construct of “Polish” based on stereotypes coming from outside the ethnic community itself does not reflect the way Polish people see themselves, or how they imagine themselves to be seen by others. Although outsiders may not be surprised to find that Poles neither consider themselves “dumb Polacks” nor tell Polish jokes, they probably would be surprised to discover that the polka is not popular in Poland or that *pierogi* are absent from weddings and other parties at which disco polo is played.<sup>176</sup> Second, racial references which dominate the above perceived characteristics do not belong to central discourses within the Polish perspective, which perceives its society as largely homogeneous, and in which race (at least as understood in America) is not a prominent issue. Third, the books about disco mentioned above are unknown in Poland and, in consequence, “disco” has not been (re)defined there the way Carr sees it.

Discrepancies between attributes of Polishness constructed by outsiders and their equivalents coming from within the Polish community are no less significant than those between symbolic representations constructed by Polonia and by Poles living in Poland. Moreover, even within Polonia, perception of some symbols associated with Polishness varies widely. The polka,

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<sup>176</sup> In a popular Polish cookbook (Sabina Witkowska, *Nastolatki gotują* [‘Teenagers Cook’], (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, 1982)) *pierogi* are described as “belonging to dishes generally liked but nowadays rarely prepared at home because of the labor-intensity of the dish.” Quoted after the 5th ed., 1989, p.226. Moreover, in Poland their popularity varies widely, depending on geographical region and class. Being an inexpensive “poverty meal,” they do not belong to a wedding menu in Poland. Even in the U.S., although outsiders identify Polish-Americans—and they identify themselves—with *pierogi*, often such a self-identification is more a consequence of outside identification than a practice within the community. Deborah Anders Silverman (*Polish-American Folklore* (University of Illinois Press, 2000), 160, 166), emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between ethnic foods intended for consumption within the group and those prepared for the public, considers *pierogi* among public markers of ethnic identity and not among “esoteric foods intended primarily for consumption within a family or larger ethnic group rather than by outsiders”.

a lively couple-dance in a moderately fast duple meter, illustrates these discrepancies especially well.<sup>177</sup> Being actually a Czech dance, its name deriving from Czech words for “field” or “half”<sup>178</sup> but coinciding with the Polish word for “Polish woman,” it is not a meaningful symbol of Polish national culture in Poland.<sup>179</sup> Like the tango or waltz, it may be danced in a social event, but carries no marker of ethnic identity. It is neither recognized as a national dance by Polish scholars<sup>180</sup> nor treated as an important element of Polish and Polish-American cultures by Polonian scholars.<sup>181</sup> Although the polka has been incorporated into Polish-American culture, there is a significant class and generational difference in attitudes towards the dance. While dancing the polka has been a popular recreational activity for second and third generation working-class Polish-Americans who do not speak Polish,<sup>182</sup> middle-class Polonia “hates polka with a passion,”<sup>183</sup> and this symbol of ethnic Polonia does not resonate with the new immigrants who, watching the parade, joke when “polka floats” pass.<sup>184</sup>

Joanna Giemza and Jan Stęszewski observed in the early 1990s that dictionaries were of little help in capturing the meaning of disco polo (or its components), defining it very imprecisely as a kind of Polish popular music or ignoring it altogether.<sup>185</sup> Polish dictionaries in 1988 (a year before the transformation of the regime began) did not even mention such words as *disco*, or

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<sup>177</sup> Charles Keil, Angeliki V. Keil, and Dick Blau, *Polka Happiness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992). See also Maja Trochimczyk, *Polish Dance in Southern California* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 178.

<sup>178</sup> Trochimczyk, op.cit., 179.

<sup>179</sup> Mary Patrice Erdmans, *Opposite Poles: Immigrants and Ethnics in Polish Chicago* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 120-122

<sup>180</sup> Trochimczyk, *Polish Dance*, 134. There are five dances constructed as “national”: oberek, kujawiak, mazur, polonaise, and krakowiak. These are discussed by Trochimczyk in Chapter 5, “Polish Dances in California and Their Models”. See especially pp. 131-159.

<sup>181</sup> Keil et al., op. cit., 3.

<sup>182</sup> Trochimczyk, *Polish Dance*, 181; Erdmans, op. cit, 114.

<sup>183</sup> Keil,et al., op. cit, 3.

<sup>184</sup> Erdmans, op. cit., 121.

<sup>185</sup> Giemza and Stęszewski, op. cit., 92.

*dysko*, and only *dyskoteka* was defined (as a record archive), albeit in a way which did not correspond to the general usage of the term. At the same time only two meanings of *polo* were provided: a shirt and a game similar to hockey played on horseback. In fact, however, at that time, i.e. some three years before the genre was named *disco polo*, both its components—*disco* and *polo*—were already current in the Polish language: “polo” was to be found in the context of *Prince Polo* (popular chocolate waffles), *Polo-Cocta* (a Coca-Cola-like drink) and *Polopiryna* (a Polish aspirin or acetylsalicylic acid), while “disco” was found in *Disco tech* (technical article), *disco* (office equipment) and, *Dysk-Bilard*.<sup>186</sup>

Stating that compound words of that kind are rather uncommon in Polish, the authors ascribe to them three basic characteristics: they refer to Poland (Polo), and to music and dance, enjoyment, pleasure, joy, and hedonism (disco); moreover, they signify merchandise or particular logos.<sup>187</sup> The products denoted by the above mentioned “*polo* words” can also be seen as Polish (or socialist) equivalents of Western (or capitalist) goods. *Polo-Cocta*, being a socialist *ersatz* form of a capitalist drink, became defunct when original Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola became available at will. By contrast, however, *Prince Polo* or *polopiryna*, being genuine Polish products (although modeled on Western goods), are still on the market.

Although from a Polish perspective *disco polo* may not seem “an ultimate sonic oxymoron” in quite the way Carr suggests, it aligns some conflicting concepts and conjoins seemingly contradictory ideas. She is right in calling it “an intercultural carnal sin,” as it is perceived as such by the Polish intelligentsia: by linking hedonism and sheer entertainment (disco) with reference to Polishness (polo), *disco polo* transgresses an ideal, spiritual realm, in which – for them – Polish culture is to be located.

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

“Disco polo (...) ignores. It ignores culture altogether with the canon of urban intelligentsia aspiring to govern the emancipation of the common people” concluded Piotr Bratkowski.<sup>188</sup> Indeed, disco polo manifests the intelligentsia’s inability to reform the taste of the common people. It shows their aspiration and ability to govern their emancipation themselves. It does without the intelligentsia’s mediation in terms of the latter’s modern cultural patterns and hierarchy of values. It also calls into question the intelligentsia’s position as a custodian of national matters and a guardian of taste.

Adopting a local tradition, disco polo provides Polish audiences, longing for a musical identity which complies with public taste, with a popular music genre which many can consider their own. Moreover, it confronts the canon of the urban intelligentsia with a rural, provincial repertory at a time when references to the village (in Polish *wieś*), such as “wiocha,” “wieśniactwo,” “wieśniackie” [lame], “wieśniak/wieśniara,” “wsiok” [yokel], or even “wieś” itself (as in the phrase “Ale wieś!”) are all derogatory terms, used to belittle something or someone.

However, disco polo ignores even more than Bratkowski has observed. First, it ignores the premises of the cultural politics of socialist Poland. It was sponsored by ordinary Poles and not the state; it introduced commercial values into the realm of culture; it ignored the concept of *muzyka ludowa* and the paradigm of its functioning; and it disregarded the messianic vision of Polish culture (and its socialist parallel). It shifted the emphasis from the spiritual realm to bodily, earthy pleasures; from ideal to pragmatic. The aim of having fun and making money replaced the mission of Polish culture as a depository of the nation’s identity and a means of asserting Poland’s place on earth.

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<sup>188</sup> Piotr Bratkowski, “Wenus and Tarzan na Sylwestra [Venus and Tarzan at a New Year’s party], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31 December 1996. Translation quoted after Koczanowicz and Zembruska, op. cit., 121.

Second, with its ambiguous attitude towards the West, disco polo ignored “European” aspirations cherished by the Polish elites and disturbed the dominant discourse controlled by the Western-oriented, cosmopolitan, liberal intelligentsia. In spite of its fascination with the West and assimilation of Western pop music idioms, disco polo was grounded in Polish tradition and often situated itself in opposition to the West. It offered a different perception of Poland’s relationship to the West, both actual and desired. Its concept of Polish spirit or Polishness reached for the Sarmatian tradition, which was rejected by “progressives” and ridiculed as backward and unenlightened. Moreover, it offered not only an alternative cultural perspective but also a prospect of economic growth based on domestic solutions rather than on Western business models and foreign capital.

Third, although disco polo reaches for an idiom of Western popular music, it ignores its paradigm. It does not celebrate authorship and originality as the highest stage of creativity. Instead, it regards all songs as folk songs and operates mainly via reworkings of existing material. Treating culture as the public domain, it does not share the concept of ownership of music so essential for the popular music business model, which relies on disproportionately large returns from licensing and revenue from copyright.<sup>189</sup> Unlike Western popular music, disco polo is multigenerational and associated with the Polish provinces (and as such located at the periphery), and not with youth urban culture (the center). As opposed to rock and pop stars, disco polo musicians refuse the concept of stardom, keeping the distance between them and their audience at a wedding-reception level. They stress their ordinariness, modest hairdos and clothes, and avoid extravagance, as if saying “we are one of you and not unapproachable creatures from another planet”. They also reject ideology and lifestyle associated with Western rock and pop music. Just

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<sup>189</sup> Although disco polo musicians have benefited from the *Act on copyright and related (neighboring) rights (Ustawa o prawie autorskim i prawach pokrewnych)* and disco polo business has had to adjust to the requirements of the law, the premises on which the law is based are foreign to the ideology of the genre and to practices which stimulated its emergence and development.



like other successful “polo” products, disco polo is genuinely Polish although based on Western models (by assimilating modern technology and some idioms of Western pop music).

Disco polo ignores boundaries and links concepts which are perceived as opposite poles. It ignores boundaries between folk and mass culture, between rural and urban, between “primitive” and “modern,” traditional and contemporary, between an ideal realm of culture and a pragmatic world of merchandise, between romantic and bawdy sides of love as well as between Western and Slavic, hiding under a Western façade its Slavic soul. And it does it in its own way.

Not only the paradigm of *muzyka ludowa*, but also the paradigm of *muzyka folkowa* are ignored in disco polo. Not caring for “purity” or the aesthetic canons of modern urban youth, it provides a modernized version of traditional music, which is still made by musicians from within the community for the community it comes from, and according to its own aesthetic preferences. As Karolina Dabert has observed, stylization along the lines of Italo-disco or use of electric instruments and keyboards, which allowed for various new sounds, have changed the accompaniments of traditional melodies but not their character: these are still the songs which accompany weddings and other rural celebrations.<sup>190</sup>

For an impassioned observer, such ignorance seems to be irritating and provoking. According to Zofia Woźniak it is impossible to write about disco polo without putting a value judgment on it, and she, like other authors of scholarly articles, takes time to distance herself from the genre and its audience.<sup>191</sup> Even the makers of the documentary *Bara Bara* [Hanky Panky] make their position clear. In the DVD booklet we read:

Zmarz-Koczanowicz spies on a self-contained world, manipulated by dodgers, but unaware of its own ridiculousness. This time, however, the scale is far grander: we are concerned with the makers and fans of disco-polo music, which at the beginning of the 90s, at the time of regime change, entered the mainstream. Brought over from American Polish-immigrant folklore, it left market stalls and entered the country’s largest concert halls with its hits: “Hanky Panky” (“Bara Bara”), “Because All Poles Are One Big Family” (“Bo wszyscy Polacy to wielka rodzina”), “Polka-dot Panties” (“Majteczki

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<sup>190</sup> Dabert, op. cit., 58.

<sup>191</sup> Woźniak, op. cit., 187-203.

w kropeczki”), and – alongside this – “Mother of God” (“Matko Boga”). (...) In this ironic documentary by Zmarz-Koczanowicz and Michał Arabudzki kitsch reveals itself, although it is not lacking in charm – one may presume that the crew had a lot of fun filming disco-polo weddings. (...) Discussions about disco have long died out, but the film “Hanky Panky” touches upon something current: the career of populism in Polish culture and politics.

The authors of the “ironic documentary” distance themselves from the world of disco polo so much that they explicitly acknowledge looking at it from the perspective of a spy. Even when they are having fun at a disco-polo wedding, they film “the others” and take care not to be seen as participants in the party. Locating disco polo in a realm of cultural populism, they carefully position themselves outside of it. Self-contained disco polo irritates them, so they take the role of the one who exposes its true face and make the effort to realize “its own ridiculousness,” its primitivism, and stupidity. The patronizing attitude towards disco polo has to be justified by the fact that disco polo is “manipulated by dodgers,” and stands as artificial pseudo-folklore.

The above description of the documentary reproduces the myth of disco polo’s original sin as a rootless phenomenon imposed on people by dodgers, while in fact the genre developed spontaneously, as a response to the people’s needs, which were ignored by the official cultural politics. It also exemplifies a longing for disco polo’s death and the intelligentsia’s imperative to educate the people about its “badness” and win them for “good” music. A self-contained and self-sufficient world irritates the intellectuals, especially when it trespasses on a cultural terrain they consider their own. They particularly object to bottom-up acculturation, embodied by a bus driver who plays a cassette by the Amadeo band instead of listening to Verdi.

Country music, another favorite for long distance driving, is given most often as a parallel to disco polo, and not only by disco polo fans and musicians. For example, Krzysztof Beśka, a writer and ex-vocalist in a band that plays sea shanty style music, states:

Strange as it sounds, the disco polo phenomenon has the same source as masterpieces by Chopin do. It draws on folklore, the great book of folk songs. It ranges

from humor to melancholy, when necessary. Country music is a powerful industry in the United States, and Poland is copying that. Cowboys just mind cows, you could call them farmers. Specifically updated, farmers' music becomes disco polo.<sup>192</sup>

Zbigniew Hołdys, one of the most popular Polish rock stars, in the TV program *Rozmowy w toku* (a talk-show hosted by Ewa Drzyzga, aired in April 2006) said “we admire American country music and spit on our own country at the same time”.

According to Timothy Taylor, although this might not appear obvious on the surface, country music perhaps problematizes contemporary notions of culture, genre, politics, race, and class more than other musics do.<sup>193</sup> In Poland such a reflection could refer equally to disco polo. As Richard Peterson has observed, country music and its performers “seemed to break all the conventions of what made for success in the world of urbane, sophisticated commercial popular music of the time” and “relied on untrained, high-pitched, nasal voices and simple musical accompaniments, evoking images of farm, family, and old-fashioned mores along with more than a dash of sexual double entendre.”<sup>194</sup> Disco polo shares these characteristics. Moreover, while both genres are based on traditional songs, they do not equate authenticity (understood as being credible to the contemporary audience) with historical accuracy, offering familiar tunes in a form attractive for the contemporary audience.

Country music was similar in its origin to blues and jazz.<sup>195</sup> However, while today blues and jazz are not appreciated much by the working-class Southern black communities that

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<sup>192</sup> Quoted after Marta Kruszewska, op. cit.

<sup>193</sup> Timothy Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism. Western Music and the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 161.

<sup>194</sup> Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music. Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>195</sup> Peterson, noticing the similarity in origin, emphasizes their different paths of institutionalization: jazz, which began in the marching band music of black New Orleans, is now often performed in classical music concert halls, is taught in conservatories of music, and is played along with classical music on “good music” radio stations, with the result that much jazz has become *art music*. The blues, which was created by rural blacks in the Mississippi delta, is now primarily the province of folk music experts, record

originated them, country music, despite the diversity of its audience, still relies primarily on “the children and grandchildren of the poor rural Southerners that gave commercial country music its birth”.<sup>196</sup> At the same time the place of jazz and blues “in the musical life of working-class blacks has been taken by a succession of styles including rhythm and blues, soul, funk, and rap music.”<sup>197</sup> Likewise, both disco polo and *muzyka ludowa* have roots in Polish folk culture but only the former is still a vital part of it, while the latter is now primarily the domain of folk music experts or enthusiasts who try to preserve it and revitalize it through recordings, festivals and *zespoły*. Although both country and disco polo have become elements of commercial popular music rather than art music or folk music, they have not simply merged and melded into mainstream popular music like other styles.

Poles seem to be unaware of the fact that country music in the United States is often considered “a music for morons”<sup>198</sup> and “occupies a privileged place in the pantheon of American musical badness, a place reserved for (white) trash.”<sup>199</sup> According to Aaron Fox

[c]ountry may seem, like a school orchestra performance, to index, dimly, a deeply valued tradition (in this case, of “folk” vernacular expression) but the hierarchies of value country embraces are anything but elitist. In that sense, its badness is not only an index, but an icon of the abject status of its fans and creators.

Peterson attributes the prolonged institutionalization of country music primarily to prejudices of those in the entertainment business, who “were urbane, middle-class sophisticates or recent rural-to-urban migrants who were trying to disguise their own rural origins” and “did not see country music in its own terms but considered it simply the antithesis of their own aesthetics

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collectors, and a wide range of entrepreneurs devoted to renewing the music through festivals and recorded performances. It is now, for the most part, a *commercial folk music*. (op. cit., 8)

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>198</sup> See Peterson, op. cit., 6-8.

<sup>199</sup> Aaron Fox, “White Trash Alchemies of the Abject Sublime. Country as ‘Bad’ Music,” in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, ed. Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno (New York: Routledge, 2004), 43.

and worldview because it evoked the image of rural poverty and small-town morality that so many in the rapidly urbanizing American society were trying to escape”.<sup>200</sup>

For Polish intellectuals the antithesis of their own worldview and aesthetics is disco polo, which brought *wieś* (village) to the city; traditionalism to their liberalism and modernism; Slavic and homegrown to their Western and cosmopolitan; simplistic and provincial to their sophisticated and refined. The genre’s status and prolonged institutionalization totally recall the situation of country music presented above. The following observation, which Peterson made in reference to country music, can also be applied to disco polo’s context without any changes; “The music’s maker was the country bumpkin, rube, linthead, cracker, or hillbilly to their up-to-date city sophisticate.”<sup>201</sup>

Aaron Fox relates country music’s “badness” to its affiliation to whiteness:

For many cosmopolitan Americans, especially, country is "bad" music precisely because it is widely understood to signify an explicit claim to *whiteness*, not as an unmarked, neutral condition of lacking (or trying to shed) race, but as a marked, foregrounded claim of cultural identity - a bad whiteness. As "white" music, unredeemed by ethnicity, folkloric authenticity, progressive politics, or the *noblesse oblige* of elite musical culture, country frequently stands for the cultural badness of its adherents. Country is, in this sense, "contaminated" culture (Stewart 1991), mere proximity to which entails ideological danger (...) The taint of whiteness in country aligns with the taint of rural idiocy and working-class psychopathology.”<sup>202</sup>

In case of disco polo, which is likewise “contaminated” culture, the genre’s “badness” can be linked with Polishness, especially when it reintegrates the concept with the Sarmatian tradition.

As a phenomenon disturbing dominant discourse, disco polo trod a path from invisibility to (attempted) erasure. Initially ignored by the mainstream media, it came under attack when it became a visible cultural phenomenon. Greater exposure in the election year (1995) coincided

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<sup>200</sup> Peterson, op. cit., 6.

<sup>201</sup> Peterson, op. cit., 6.

<sup>202</sup> Fox, op. cit., 44.

with an escalation of devastating critique of the genre. Such criticisms as over-simplicity, banality, repetitiveness, etc., however, could easily have been negated and could not threaten disco polo's position because its banality and lack of sophistication were acknowledged and intended. Moreover, other genres (such as for example punk, heavy metal, or pop) constructed from similarly banal sounds became accepted musical styles.

The situation has changed when the attacks have shifted from the music itself to the musicians and the genre's admitted audiences. Disco polo fans have been stigmatized as uneducated, provincial, backward and stupid yokels, and the genre has become perceived as bringing shame and disrespect on its listeners and performers alike. Disco polo became "bad" music not only for its opponents but also for its adherents, who internalized such a perception of the genre. In order to avoid the stigma associated with disco polo, people often try to conceal their musical preference to avoid humiliation and shame. Media discussions about disco polo take place among various "experts". Musicians and fans of the genre are objects rather than subjects in such discussions. Even if they are present and allowed to speak, they are there only to illustrate a given thesis rather than to provide their own analysis of the situation.

At first glance, disco polo seems to be a perfect candidate for a symbol of the rebellious cassette-culture that eroded the socialist regime: a spontaneous grassroots movement that undermined cultural policies of the socialist state, and which did not allow for modernization of Polish traditional music. It was the first truly capitalist genre, which brought power over music back to the people. The disco polo industry was market-driven and efficiently responded to audience needs. Moreover, musicians with no education, publishers without money (both without any links to show business), garage recording sessions, oral agreements, home-made equipment, production, distribution, and promotion outside official music industry structures – don't these things resemble the recollections of musical movements (such as rock or punk) which are perceived as "authentic," revolutionary, progressive, rebellious, and are widely discussed in literature?

Nevertheless, disco polo is denied such attributes and does not attract similar attention, either in its native Poland or abroad. It has been relegated to the margins of Polish culture. “Ona tańczy dla mnie” by Weekend, the greatest hit at dance parties in Poland, shows that disco polo’s path to become merely a musical style is still not complete (and one may wonder if it ever will be). Radosław Liszewski, its author and performer, has been frequently interviewed and celebrated by the mainstream media. At the same time, only cover versions, especially cabaret parodies, of his song have been played by it, while the original has been confined primarily to the internet and Polo TV, and small broadcasters dedicated to the genre.

However, it is not alone in its fate. Such mundane and formerly private forms of vernacular creativity, which, as part of public culture, became immensely popular, yet still operate outside the mainstream culture, are numerous, to mention only genres such as Balkan *Turbo folk*, Romanian *manele*, Hungarian *lakodalmás rock*, or Swedish *Dansbandsmusik*. All being modern versions of some traditional expression and a vital part of contemporary rituals (such as weddings), they represent “low” music for the body (as dance forms) rather than “high” music for the spirit. However, one may wonder if their perceived “badness” can be related to the fact that, unlike the carnivalesque rebellion of accepted rock ideology, which in fact reinforces the dominant discourse, they actually disrupt official discourses and widely accepted conceptual schemes.

The suffix *-polo* entered Polish language, signifying “bad” music, “bad” taste, and business-inspired esthetic compromise. Examination of other controversial phenomena marked – polo, namely *hip-hopolo* and *sacropol*, hopefully will further illuminate the nature of such musical “badness.”

## CHAPTER THREE

# WHERE DID POLISH HIP HOP GO? POLISH HIP HOP: A VOICE OF THE “SOLIDARITY” GENERATION OR *HIP-HOPOLO*?

*Black music, I hold a silver mike  
and with my white hand I write verses like no one before!*<sup>1</sup>  
2cztery7 featuring Pezet

*Jesteś Bogiem* [You Are God], the movie on a legendary Polish hip hop group, Paktofonika, had the best box office opening of any Polish film (other than film adaptations of compulsory school readings) for over 20 years. Premiered on 21 September 2012 (with many Polish celebrities present), it attracted a larger audience during its first weekend than any other production in 2012 (including Hollywood hits), was acclaimed by critics, and was proclaimed the story of the “Solidarity” generation, which was born during the Solidarity movement at the beginning of the 1980s and entered adulthood at the turn of the century. According to Maciej Pisuk, its scriptwriter: “Hip hop is so interlocked with that generation that telling their story without hip hop is like telling the story of the Vietnam War generation without rock.”<sup>2</sup> One may, however, ask the question as to who is actually telling/ should be the one to tell the story of the generation which was the first to grow up in the new, post-socialist environment, of their hopes and disappointments. How much is the story fictionalized? And for whom is the story told?

In the past three decades, hip hop culture has become one of the most far-reaching art movements, a global phenomenon with distinctive local versions that combine models and idioms derived from U.S. hip hop with indigenous elements. It has become a contested form and a serious business which goes far beyond selling music. Nevertheless, in scholarly writing it is

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<sup>1</sup> “Czarna muzyka, ja trzymam srebrny mikrofon/a białą ręką piszę wersy, jak nikt dotąd!” 2cztery7 featuring Pezet, the song “Pieprzyć szary beton [Fuck grey concrete]” from the mix *JuNouMi* vol. 2 (JuNouMi Records 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Maciej Pisuk, *Paktofonika. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2008), 18.



usually approached as a form of African American resistance, which becomes the grounds for resistance elsewhere and an expression of “blackness”.<sup>3</sup> In his study of rap and hip hop outside the USA (published in 2001), Tony Mitchell draws attention to the fact that U.S. academic commentaries continue to emphasize the socially marginal and politically oppositional aspects of U.S. hip-hop, regarding it as a coherent, cohesive and unproblematic expression of an emancipatory African American culture of resistance.<sup>4</sup> Over ten years later, this observation is still valid. To Polish hip-hop, and to other manifestations of the genre around the world, however, such an approach is inadequate.

In Poland, fans of hip hop call their genre *czarna muza* (“black muse”), applying this name to African American as well as to Polish hip-hop.<sup>5</sup> *Muza* [muse] functions in this context both as a word for “an inspiration” and as an abbreviated form of *muzyka* [music]. Asking about a person’s musical preferences, people say “*Jakiej słuchasz muzy?*” [What muse do you listen to?]. The term “black muse” can be interpreted as recognition of the genre’s African American origin and of its Polish appropriation. At the same time, it indicates that Polish hip hop is conceived of

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<sup>3</sup> As Matt Sakakeeny observed (in his post of 4 January 2012 on the Popular Music Section of the Society for Ethnomusicology listserve):

Much in hip-hop studies either focuses on the brief period when politically conscious rap was commercially successful, or excavates the residue of that resistance narrative in contemporary underground hip-hop, or decries mainstream hip-hop as a destructive force emanating from the culture industry, or attempts to recuperate resistance in mainstream hip-hop. (...) In global hip-hop studies, this scholarly approach is often duplicated or extended: a form of African American resistance becomes the grounds for resistance or place-making with other others elsewhere.

Exceptions to such an approach include: Geoffrey Baker, “iHip Hop, Revolución! Nationalizing Rap in Cuba,” *Ethnomusicology* 49, no. 3 (2005), 368-402; Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2005); Jeff Chang, “It’s A Hip-Hop World,” *Foreign Policy*, 163, November/December (2007), 58-65; Ian Maxwell, *Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes: Hip Hop Down Under Comin’ Upper* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003); Marc D. Perry, “Global Black Self-Fashionings: Hip Hop as Diasporic Space,” *Identities* 15(6) (2008), 635-664; Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop – and Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2008); Gavin Steingo, “South African Music After Apartheid: Kwaito, the ‘Party Politic,’ and the Appropriation of Gold as a Sign of Success,” *Popular Music and Society*, 28 no. 3 (2005), 333-358.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Mitchell, ed., *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>5</sup> The term *czarna muzyka* [black music] can be used interchangeably with “black muse”.

as a fully-fledged musical genre with its own ethnic and linguistic specificity. On the one hand Polish hip hop allows for looking at the genre in a rather homogeneous society, in which race (at least as it is understood in America) is not central to societal discourses, and on the other hand it creates an opportunity to look at the post-socialist transformation from the perspective of its “loser”.

Unlike American hip-hop, Polish hip hop cannot be traced back to a particular geographic location and particular time. It appeared simultaneously in a few Polish cities (at a time when U.S. hip hop was already a part of mainstream culture) and was linked with a type of settlement called *blokowisko* (an agglomeration of apartment buildings) that is not exclusive to large industrial cities but can be found throughout the urban-rural continuum. In Poland, as in America, hip hop provided means of expression for those marginalized, disenfranchised and excluded, becoming the voice of “new others” of the post-socialist transformation. However, one may wonder how this voice, once articulated and heard, was listened to by mainstream Poland. What happened to it in the process of mainstreaming the genre?

The beginnings of Polish hip hop in the late 1980s coincided with the country’s transition from socialism to democracy and a free-market economy and it cannot be fully understood outside this context. Against the background of socio-economic changes, the chapter will present Polish hip-hop’s convoluted path from *blokowisko* to mainstream as well as shifts in discourses within and about the genre, including the notion of *hip-hopolo*, and their role in negotiating the genre’s boundaries. The chapter will also consider hip hop as a patriotic genre and its vision of Poland and Polishness.

## How to Write a History of Polish Hip Hop

It is not easy to write a concise history of any cultural phenomenon but Polish hip hop makes such a quest particularly difficult. Where to start such a narration? What should it embrace? On the one hand, the history of Polish hip hop could be approached as

a history of rap music because the term *hip-hop* (also spelled *hip hop*) is most commonly associated with a music genre and used as a synonym for rap music. Such an approach would suggest discussion of Polish hip hop in three stages: 1995-1999, the early stage, marked by the first published recordings (by Liroy, Wzgórze Yapa 3, Kaliber 44, Molesta, Trzyha, Warszawski Deszcz) and characterized by experimentation; 2000-2005, the period of its greatest popularity and productivity, characterized by a strong presence of the genre in mainstream culture; and the period from 2006 on, which is characterized by hip-hop's (partial) retreat from mainstream culture and finding its niche. The fourth stage, which could be delineated, would involve increased interest in the genre after 2012 (which followed the success of the movie *Jesteś Bogiem*)

On the other hand, following its American development, hip hop is usually considered as culture (or subculture) embracing four original elements: MCing (or rapping/ speaking in rhymes over a DJ's beat),<sup>6</sup> DJing, breakdancing and graffiti. However, in Poland these elements for a long time functioned in isolation, to merge only in the late 1990s, and diverged again when the commercial success of music overshadowed other aspects of hip hop culture.<sup>7</sup> Besides, a discussion of Polish hip hop would be incomplete without considering its location, *blokowisko*, with that setting's inhabitants. Moreover, the dynamics of Polish hip-hop's development cannot be understood without the historical and social context in which it originated and exists, and

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<sup>6</sup> MC (also M.C. or emcee) stands for a Master of Ceremonies a rapper who usually creates and performs vocals for his/her own original material.

<sup>7</sup> Although "hip-hop" is considered a broader term, synonymous with hip hop culture, authors writing about it as well as its practitioners (both in the USA and in Poland) also use the term "hip-hop" interchangeably with "rap" music. It is usually the context that determines if the term "hip-hop" refers to music or to a cultural phenomenon.

which determined the delayed (in comparison to America) emergence of Polish hip hop and its uniqueness.

### **Hip hop as a misfit for the cultural needs of the Solidary movement of the 1980s**

In the 1980s, as hip hop in the USA experienced its “golden age,” the Solidarity movement in Poland was eroding the dominance of the Communist Party. An extremely strong wave of strikes in June and August 1980 resulted in the emergence of an independent trade union organization headed by Lech Wałęsa, which quickly became a widespread social movement involving over nine million people (a quarter of the entire population of Poland) and including workers, intellectual dissidents, people associated with the Roman Catholic Church, and even members of the ruling Communist Party. Although Solidarity called for the rationalization of the existing system and not for a political revolution, and adhered to a policy of nonviolent resistance, it became a major political force in opposition to the regime.<sup>8</sup>

The communist government, led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, sought a solution for the growing economic crisis and intensified social tensions through martial law (imposed on December 13, 1981) and the outlawing of Solidarity. Martial law, however, did not resolve Poland’s problems and amidst the deepening crisis, the so-called Round Table Talks (February 6—April 4, 1989) between party leaders and representatives of the then unofficial opposition led to partially free parliamentary elections in June 1989, in which Solidarity triumphed and, as the first non-communist government in Central and Eastern Europe, initiated the difficult process of reform.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In Poland, communist rule has always been resisted because it was Russian (thus foreign) and not just because it was Marxist. See Stephen White, *Communism and its Collapse* (London: Routledge, 2001), 53.

<sup>9</sup> For further information regarding “the most paradoxical of European revolutions that began in the Lenin Shipyard (in Gdansk),” see Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

Hip hop was a misfit in the cultural politics of the socialist state in Poland in the 1980s and also could not fulfill the specific needs of the oppositional counter-culture. The heroic Solidarity ethos of a noble struggle found its musical expression primarily through protest songs, growing out of the tradition of the bards, which criticized the regime and appealed to traditions of patriotic resistance against the oppression of the Polish people. Jacek Kaczmarski became a symbol of Polish guitar poetry, and his song *Mury* (“Walls”) functioned as an unofficial Solidarity anthem. Przemysław Gintrowski and Paweł Orkisz were also among the respected bards of that time. Their lyrics frequently employed metaphors such as walls (that will fall down one day), captured white eagles, sieges, wounds, stones that can initiate an avalanche, a coming dawn, etc.<sup>10</sup> They referred to different forms of oppression and to the hope that the oppressed would rise one day. These songs were not commercial (they were written to be sung and not to be sold) and circulated outside official distribution channels (usually on homemade cassettes). They were closely related to a specifically Polish genre called *poezja śpiewana* [sung poetry].<sup>11</sup> Although most of these songs did not lose their meaning with the collapse of socialism, they did lose their significance.

The transfer of power was followed by comprehensive reforms in the economy, political institutions, and local administrations. State-controlled industry began to be privatized, prices were freed, subsidies were reduced, and Poland's currency (the *złoty*) was made convertible as the country began the difficult transition towards democracy and a free-market economy. The price for such radical reforms (referred to as the “shock therapy” or “Balcerowicz plan”) was very high

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<sup>10</sup> A white eagle is a symbol of Poland. A White Eagle (“*Orzeł Biały*” written always in capital letters) on a red shield is Poland's Coat of Arms.

<sup>11</sup> The genre *poezja śpiewana* refers to songs consisting of poems and music written especially for those texts, with emphasis always on the text. Such songs are often referred to as “gentle music,” and are typically accompanied by guitar or piano, although other acoustic instruments (for example flute or violin) can also be used. The performers (a soloist or a group) are either singer-songwriters or write their own music to texts by renowned poets. The primary audiences for this genre were students. This is also a commerce-free genre, though occasionally some artists (for example, Ewa Demarczyk, Marek Grechuta, Wolna Grupa Bukowina, and Grzegorz Turnau) have achieved wider popularity.

and has been the subject of many controversies.<sup>12</sup> Industrial output and real wages declined dramatically, the poverty rate increased, and a gap opened between the rich and the poor, but the most painful and undesired by-product of the reforms was rapidly and constantly growing unemployment, the highest among all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup>

Although the cost of reform was immense, the early 1990s was a time of optimism and great expectations from the new system. In popular imagery, Western democracy and capitalism were simply identified with an affluent lifestyle. People believed that the drop in living standards was only temporary, especially if they could see some positive results of the “shock therapy.” Inflation was reduced, firms came up against hard budget constraints for the first time, the black market was eliminated, and the universal shortage of consumer goods abated.<sup>14</sup> In a society tired of social unrest and the deep economic crisis of the previous decade, these signs of stabilization and prospects of economic growth were perceived as promises of a bright future.

Hip hop did not fit into this optimistic context either. Although restrictions limiting travel and exchange of information were lifted and Polish youth was able to become acquainted with hip-hop, the genre did not gain popularity in Poland.<sup>15</sup> The early 1990s belonged to disco polo (discussed in the previous chapter). At the beginning of the period of transformation hip hop

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<sup>12</sup> See Leszek Balcerowicz, *Socialism, Capitalism, Transformation* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1995); George Blazyca and Ryszard Rapacki, eds. *Poland into the 1990s: Economy and Society in Transition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Grzegorz Kołodko, “Transition from Socialism and Stabilization Policies: The Polish Experience,” in *Trials of Transition: Economic Reform in the Former Communist Block*, ed. Michael Karen and Gur Ofer (Boulder: Westview, 1992), 129–50; Kazimierz Poznanski, ed., *Stabilization and Privatization in Poland: An Economic Evaluation of the Shock Therapy Program* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Press, 1993); Jeffrey Sachs, *Poland's Jump to the Market Economy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993); Ben Slay, *The Polish Economy: Crisis, Reform, and Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> The unemployment rates during the first years of transformation in Poland were 6.1 percent in 1990, 11.8 percent in 1991, 13.6 percent in 1992, and 15.7 percent in 1993. Quoted after Ekiert and Kubik, op. cit., 66.

<sup>14</sup> Blazyca and Rapacki, op. cit., 2–3.

<sup>15</sup> In the early 1990s hip-hop could only be heard on “Yo! Raps,” a program broadcast by MTV at midnight on Saturdays through satellite TV, which was not yet widely available in Poland.

seemed destined to share the fate of other musical genres that were not well suited to Polish culture.

### **Are the elements of hip hop sufficient to speak of a “hip hop culture”?**

Polish hip hop provokes a question as to whether the elements of hip hop are sufficient to speak of a “hip hop culture”. Although in the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s there was no Polish genre corresponding to American hip-hop, the elements defining American hip hop did exist in Poland. However, they functioned in isolation and were reinvented from different angles. While breakdancing and MCing were imported phenomena, graffiti and DJing evolved from local practices.

There is a long tradition in Poland of using graffiti as a symbol of protest and resistance. The famous “Solidarność” (the Polish word for “solidarity”) logo, which laid the foundations of the international visual legacy of the 1980s in Poland, is a particularly potent example.



Figure 3.1. Solidarity logo *Solidarność*

Unmistakably a graffiti tag, this symbol of the movement that initiated civil awakening all over Central and Eastern Europe appeared on walls in all Polish cities during the 1980s. Painted secretly and usually anonymously, it was diligently covered over by administrators of public buildings, and eagerly suppressed by communist authorities, especially during the harsh time of martial law (from December 13, 1981 to July 22, 1983). The letters, written in a red color and subversive-looking font with a white and red flag above the letter “N,” appeared during the

last week of the legendary time of August 1980, and spread from the Gdansk Shipyard throughout the country as a symbol of the civil disobedience that was paralyzing the communist regime. According to an urban legend, it was first painted in red paint on the shipyard wall at night and was later copied onto paper. In fact, the logo was created by Jerzy Janiszewski, a renowned graphic designer and creator of many acclaimed posters, who supported the workers on strike from the very beginning and wanted to provide them with something that would give them a group identity.<sup>16</sup> He intended it to resemble people leaning on each other as if giving each other support. The “Solidarity” tag became a model of a specific lettering style called *solidaryca*, which was perceived as spontaneous, vivid, and somewhat indocile. Being so different from the grayish tint of the PRL it gained immediate popular appeal, and became a standard type of lettering for bold political graffiti during the 1980s.<sup>17</sup>

Another example is the symbol of “Fighting Poland:”



Figure 3.2. *Polska Walcząca* [Fighting Poland]

<sup>16</sup> Władysław Serwatowski, “Exhibition ‘Images of “Solidarity.” Solid Art’.” Instytut Adama Mickiewicza Polish culture over the world. [http://www.culture.pl/en/culture/artykuly/wy\\_in\\_wy\\_solid\\_art\\_bruksela\\_barcelona](http://www.culture.pl/en/culture/artykuly/wy_in_wy_solid_art_bruksela_barcelona). Accessed 22 October 2012.

<sup>17</sup> PRL—*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa* (The People’s Republic of Poland)—was the official name of Poland from 1952 to 1989.



The letters P (for “Poland”) and W (for “*Walcząca*,” which translates as “fighting”) are combined to make a stylized anchor. This symbol of hope was drawn on walls as a manifestation of resistance. Such a use of graffiti was socially acceptable and even supported as an act of disobedience towards an establishment collectively disapproved of by the people. Because of the shortage of goods, the graffiti of the 1980s were painted exclusively with simple tools such as brushes, rollers, and stencils.

Moreover, there were also state-sponsored monumental graffiti, especially in the 1970s. The growing numbers of blocks of flats and in consequence grey, concrete spaces, inspired officially organized outdoor art meetings, which resulted in sculptures on lawns, mosaics on the entrances and passages, and paintings on buildings’ walls. The Mexican mural movement, which started in the 1920s and was associated with the Mexican Revolution, had a good reputation in socialist states and provided inspiration for some local initiative. Unfortunately, very few such paintings have survived due to the poor quality of the paints. Shortages of paint and tools as well as their poor quality did not allow for further development of graffiti at that time.

All this changed in post-communist Poland. Spray paints became easily available (although expensive), but the socially-sanctioned rationale for graffiti disappeared with freedom of speech and the emergence of an independent media as well as the cutting short of state sponsoring of the arts. Painting on walls came to be regarded as an act of vandalism. From the mid-1990s, graffiti became more colorful and came to be practiced by young people from urban areas not only on walls but also—as in other countries—on trains. It took almost a decade for graffiti to receive public recognition as a visual art and for the practice of officially painted, monumental graffiti to be renewed, now, however, sponsored more often by private than public money.

Whereas in the USA, hip hop musical events (parties, park jams, club events) were DJ-driven and DJ-centric (and focused on getting the crowd to move, especially the b-boys and b-girls), in Poland DJs (spelled also dj or didżej) did not played a similar role, although DJs were

part of the disco landscape for decades. They were also an element of so-called *prywatka*, i.e., unofficial parties hosted in private houses, an essential part of youth life in urban areas. The DJ's role at a party would be to respond to the mood of audiences, choosing mixes, often pre-created, that would keep the audience interested. Early DJs were often friends of party hosts who just happened to have the needed equipment or recordings.

Unlike American DJing, which was based on the practice of manipulating multiple record tables, which originated in Jamaican dancehall culture, in order to provide continuous background for dancers, Polish DJs often relied on pre-created mixes. Such a practice resulted from a very practical necessity: a cassette player was the most widely used audio equipment, often being the only one available. Pre-created mixes and DJing were connected with various musical genres: for example such mixes marked the most popular program on music in Poland in the 1980s, *Lista Przebojów Programu Trzeciego* ("The Hit List of Channel 3 of Polish Radio"). Its author, Marek Niedźwiecki, promoted mostly rock music, both Polish and Western, and the public could vote for any song aired on this channel.

Not being associated with performing skills, DJs in Poland more often than not have been seen as artisans rather than artists, as their work has been considered to be of a technical rather than musical nature. Moreover, those who provide beats for hip hop pieces call themselves simply producers.<sup>18</sup> Due to the twenty-year delay in interest in hip hop in Poland (when compared with its emergence in the US), the first Polish hip hop producers had already at their disposal computers as a primary tool of playing with samples. Turntable manipulation was incorporated

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, an interview with O.S.T.R., one of the most respected artists of Polish hip-hop, Radek Nałęcz. "O.S.T.R. – Rozmowa," *Mobilizacja. Magazyn Rapowy*, [http://mobilizacja.pl/index.php?akcja=teksty&podstrona=4&id\\_nr=5](http://mobilizacja.pl/index.php?akcja=teksty&podstrona=4&id_nr=5). (Accessed 11 May 2008) Most producers are engaged only in beat production but some are also MCs (for example O.S.T.R. or Doniu) or DJs (for example DJ Decks or DJ Volt). Producers prepare single accompaniments ordered by MCs (who seek more sound diversity for their albums) or produce all the beats for an album (if musical cohesion is sought). The latter situation results in rapper/producer duets such as Dizkret/Praktik, Małolat/Ajron, or Pezet/Noon. Producers' albums, in which various MCs rap to beats by a single producer are also not uncommon.

later as a part of conventional hip hop display and to show off DJs' skills. Only in the 2000s did vinyl records and gramophones come back into play, and vinyl editions of successful albums, which had been previously published on CDs, appeared as more prestigious versions.

What we know as breakdancing reached Poland for the first time in the mid-1980s. Its appearance is usually attributed to Stan Lathan's movie *Beat Street*, which circulated widely in Europe after its success at the Cannes Film Festival in 1984. Be-Bop, founded in 1986, is considered to be the first breakdancing group in Poland. Among other early hip hop groups there were Broken Steps (from Szczecin) and Scrap Beat (from Włocławek). There were even National Championships in Breakdance in 1985-1998, which were called the "championship in disco, rap, and break dance". Polish youth could practice breakdance in houses of culture and it functioned for a long time as an acrobatic dance for teenagers.

It is significant that the name "breakdancing" took on a different connotation in Poland. A TV program, *Jarmark*, introduced its Polish name, which translated "break-dancing" from English as *taniec-połamaniec*. Still today, the "break" in breakdancing is associated not with the idea of "the cut," or interlude, but is specifically linked to the act of breaking one's joints when dancing. Such misinterpretation resulted not only from an unawareness of the origins of breakdancing, but also from its initial functioning outside hip hop culture.

Multiple examples of breakdancing outside hip hop culture can be found in disco polo videos and concerts. One such video, *Szalona* ([You Are a] Crazy [Girl], 1997) by the group Boys, a classic of disco polo, features five young men dancing on a beach in matching shirts, pants, and shoes.<sup>19</sup> The video presents the whole crew in coordinated moves in a standing position with a soloist doing *power moves* (acrobatic moves). A dancing episode also comes back later in the clip. Other disco polo groups, especially based on the same model involving a male soloist

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<sup>19</sup> The video of "Szalona" is accessible at:  
<http://www.music.ucsb.edu/projects/musicandpolitics/m/pasternak-m.html>

with accompanying group of male dancers (such as for example Toples,<sup>20</sup> or Tomasz Niecik,<sup>21</sup> a new disco polo star called the King of Disco Polo), also employ elements of break dancing in their concert shows and music videos.

Alongside breakdancing, skateboarding became a physical activity associated with hip hop culture in Poland. It had a paramount importance in developing hip hop style. Skate shops sold not only clothing but also recordings with hip hop music. They played a very important role in distributing music issued by small independent labels or produced by hip-hoppers themselves without any label.

MCing presents a different case. Called “rapping,” it too is an imported phenomenon, involving rhythmically-delivered rhyming. This distinguishing feature of hip hop music was neither confined to hip hop in Poland, nor linked directly to hip hop themes. Improvised rhythmic spoken or chanted rhyming became popular among young people in the 1990s, but it was done simply for fun, and was usually not engaged with any profound topics.

A particularly striking example of Polish rap comes from the group T-Raperzy znad Wisły [TV Rappers from the Vistula River]. Its members were well-known in Poland as cabaret entertainers, providing satirical commentary on Polish life. Their most famous rap album, *Poczet królów polskich* (“The Gallery of Polish Kings”), from 1995, contains thematic songs (written by Grzegorz Wasowski, b. 1949) which summarize and comment on the reigns of particular Kings of Poland. While their accounts of past events are historically accurate, their highly colloquial language stands in contrast to the seriousness of the topic and the accuracy of the historical data, contributing to the overall comic effect of the show.

The entire series was broadcast by Polish public television as a part of a very popular cabaret show *KOC: Komiczny Odcinek Cykliczny*. It started with the song *Mieszko*, named for the

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<sup>20</sup> In 2008, Marcin Siegieńczuk, the leader of the group, started (with the same dancers) a new project called Tsoonami. It is inspired by European techno.

<sup>21</sup> See music videos at the official website of Tomasz Niecik: [www.tomasznecik.pl/](http://www.tomasznecik.pl/)

first historical ruler of Poland (reign c. 963? – 992), who converted to Christianity in 966 and was the father of Bolesław Chrobry, the first crowned king. As in all other songs from the series, the two artists (Grzegorz Wasowski and Sławomir Szczęśniak), dressed in historical costume and sitting in front of a background featuring a current map of Poland, removed historical layers of their clothes as the song progressed. The four-measure refrain of *Mieszko* was “Mieszko, Mieszko, nasz koleżko” [Mieszko, Mieszko, our buddy].<sup>22</sup>

The group’s next rap album, *Lektury literatury* (“Literature Set Books”), from 1997, was devoted to the most important books of Polish literature, providing skillful summaries of their plots combined with insightful interpretations.<sup>23</sup> All these songs were featured on *KOC: Komiczny Odcinek Cykliczny* [A Comic Cyclic Episode] on public television in the 1990s.

On November 20, 2012 T-Raperzy znad Wisły published another album, *Ekshumacja2* [Exhumation2], which is actually a revised and extended edition of the *Gallery of Polish Kings*, issued by *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a leading Polish newspaper. All eighteen songs, which were originally performed to one musical background, have gained new beats (prepared by Polish rock musicians Marcin and Michał Barycki) and are interspersed with spoken commentaries. This “historapy” or “a set of therapeutic historical raps” features not only Grzegorz Wasowski and Sławomir Szczęśniak but also well-known Polish artists associated with a wide variety of musical genres (ranging from hip hop to punk rock, pop, and jazz), such as Edyta Gepert, Stanisław Soyka, Aga Zaryan, Fish, Kasia Nosowska, Łona, Anna Maria Jopek, Muniek Staszczyk, Dorota Miśkiewicz, Lech Janerka and Marek Kondrat.

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<sup>22</sup> The video “Mieszko” is accessible at:  
<http://www.music.ucsb.edu/projects/musicandpolitics/m/pasternak-m.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Tracklist: 01. Potop, 02. Pan Tadeusz, 03. Chłopi, 04. Balladyna, 05. Lalka, 06. Nad Niemnem, 07. Zemsta, 08. Krzyżacy, 09. Popioły.

### Blokowisko. Hip Hop's location and its inhabitants



Figure 3.3. Toruń, Skarpa district, view from one of high-rise buildings. Fot. Pko., 2006.

Apart from the four original elements defining American hip-hop, hip hop in Poland is associated with particular type of settlement called *blokowisko* (agglomeration of blocks of flats). Such agglomerations of apartment buildings are not exclusive to large industrial cities but are to be found all through the urban-rural continuum. They were intended as a solution to a housing shortage which, since the Second World War, had been a permanent problem in Poland. While adapting Le Corbusier's ideas, the communist party leaders focused on the basic needs of potential inhabitants. In consequence, those housing estates were deprived of anything considered luxurious. Built of pre-fabricated, pre-stressed concrete panels called *wielka płyta*, they were criticized for their characterless, mind-numbing appearance as well as their low-quality design. In the 1980s, the time of economic crisis, second-rate construction materials and shoddy construction practices contributed to the discomfort of their inhabitants.

There was little or no social stigma associated with living in *blokowisko*, called *osiedle* by their inhabitants.<sup>24</sup> In socialist Poland *bloki* (blocks of flats) symbolized industrialization and

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<sup>24</sup> *Osiedle mieszkaniowe* means in Polish a "housing development" or "housing estate".

progress. Unlike government-built housing developments in the United States and some other Western countries, *bloki* were home to a mix of social classes. Often, especially in smaller cities and towns, they were connected to a specific industrial enterprise, housing the workers and their families. Even in some villages, smaller apartment buildings accompanied state farms. In a very popular Polish social comedy series *Alternatywy 4* by Stanisław Bareja, a block of flats at a new residential complex in Warsaw - in which a petty thief lives next door to a professor of law, and a building superintendent rules - provides a metaphor for Poland of the 1980s, illustrating everyday life under socialism in all its absurdity and problems.

A collapse of all state farms and most of the state-owned industrial enterprises (which often supplied the vast majority of jobs in a given area) at the beginning of the transformation resulted in the dramatic degradation of the socio-economic status of the inhabitants of *blokowisko* and a lack of prospects for their children. Soon *blokowisko* came to symbolize the habitat of the new system's losers, especially since the growth and deregulation of the housing market enabled many beneficiaries of capitalism to flee to other locations.

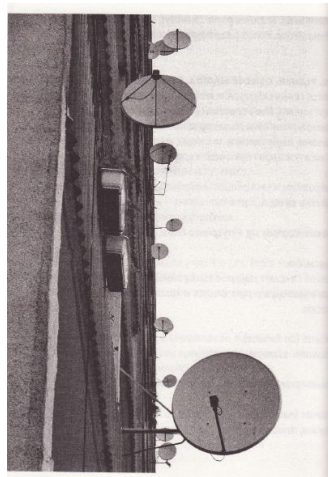


Figure 3.4. Magik's *Osiedle*. A picture from the book *Paktofonika*, by Maciej Pisuk (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2008), 102

The *Blokowisko* seems to be a perfect environment for hip-hop. *Bloki* represent modern urban space - gray and concrete - marked by rows of identical flats arranged in uniform,

minimalistic patterns. Roughness of angular, unrefined forms, utilitarian rather than decorative, dominates on a macro level. Efforts at adorning individual apartments are hardly noticeable on a building level. OnŁ this grey and concrete soil grows nothing but TV antennas, which in the 1990 turned into satellite dishes - an affordable modern technology, a link with “the global village” and a big world. Likewise, hip hop is modern, current, repetitive, stripped down from superfluous ornaments, and global. At the same time hip hop emphasizes the local as much as *blokowisko* does.



Figure 3.5. *Ławeczka* [Bench]. A frame from the documentary *Blokersi* by Sylwester Latkowski (2001).

Local social life of *blokowisko* is associated with *ławeczka* (or *ławka*) - a bench usually placed next to a building entrance or alongside *osiedle*'s sidewalks. It provides a meeting space for inhabitants and epitomizes a community of its regulars. “Sitting on a bench” became synonymous with *blokowisko*'s social life. As hip hop allows young people from *blokowisko* to participate without substantial financial resources in cultural production, *ławeczka* does so for their social life. *Ławeczka* as a local meeting space and a specific community has been portrayed in a popular TV comedy series “Rancho” (2006-2016): in a peripheral little town four men with lots of time and little money spend their time sitting on a bench in front of a grocery store, talking and drinking cheap wine. There, they try to find answers to their questions, which usually are



local current concerns but also touch upon philosophical issues. In urban youth circles cheap wine has been replaced by drugs, especially marijuana.

*Ławeczka* plays a role similar to the one played by chorus in the ancient Greek theatre, offering a variety of background and summary information to help the audience follow the performance. Like chorus, it represents the community (contrasted with individual heroes). In the ancient plays, the chorus expressed to the audience what the main characters could not say, such as their hidden fears or secrets. In post-socialist Poland, *ławeczka* became a space in which fears, concerns, and other matters which were either absent from or presented differently by the dominant discourse were discussed. Like the chorus, which often provided other characters with the insight they needed, *ławeczka* offered such insight to the young people from *blokowisko*.

Both chorus in the ancient theatre and young regulars of *ławeczka* not only commented with a collective voice but also used similar means of expression, including singing, gesturing, dancing and narrating. Unlike contemporary language, that of ancient Greek was very musical. Moreover, theatrical drama was treated like poetry, and a tone of voice appropriate for its articulation was situated between song and speech. Similarly, rappers perform their rhymes using melodeclamation. The meter of the text performed by the chorus was frequently adapted to the action's mood and tension building. Likewise, rappers adjust their flow to the mood and meaning of the text they perform. Even some analogy between the MC and coryphaeus, the leader of the chorus, can be drawn, as both speak for all the rest and were to lead the performance. The MC battles to establish only one leader in a given community.

### **Polish hip-hop's road to mainstream: from *nielegals* to *hip-hopolo* and back**

As the preceding discussion has shown, versions of all four original defining elements of American hip hop existed in Poland in the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, but as separate entities. A genre corresponding to American hip hop as well as hip hop culture came into

being in the mid-1990s in Poland. This coincided with the significant change in the socio-economic context. In 1998, compared to 1988, social perceptions of the most severe conflicts turned from “rulers versus ruled“ (1988 - 60.0 %) to “rich versus poor“ (1998 - 68.7 %).<sup>25</sup>

What became the catalyst that brought the elements of hip hop together and created the conditions enabling the emergence of Polish hip hop was a “new margin” that appeared as a result of the transition to capitalism. The first communities in Poland attracted to hip hop as a culture were those young people from *blokowisko* who were among the first to suffer economic and social deprivation as a result of the move to capitalism and who became, together with former state farm employees and many workers and peasants, the “new others” of the transition. However, it took a few years before Polish hip hop came to be recognized as an artistic expression of persons and groups marginalized by the new system.

On the one hand, perception of the social margin was inherited from the previous system, in which unemployment was not an issue and belonging to the social margin was considered more a matter of a personal lifestyle choice than a predetermined situation of an individual, and on the other hand, the new system, associated with democratically elected government, had been expected to be a win-win situation. Under late socialism, social exclusion was in general related to normative rather than structural factors.<sup>26</sup> Disproportions of wealth were insignificant and by

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<sup>25</sup> Bart Reszuta, “The Eclipse of Christian Socialist Utopia in Polish Rap”, a paper presented at the Conference *Jugend und Musik: Politik, Geschichte(n) und Utopie(n)*, Essen, July 2007, 4.

<sup>26</sup> In Janusz Czapiński’s study *Social Diagnosis*, social exclusion is defined as a multidimensional phenomenon of non-participation in various aspects of social life that can result from poverty, cultural conditions, or health problems. Czapiński identifies three types of social exclusion caused by different factors: structural exclusion (depending primarily on location/address, father’s education and income), physical exclusion (correlated with age and disability) and normative exclusion (linked with lifestyle choices and associated with drug and alcohol abuse, criminal histories, loneliness, or being a victim of discrimination). Czapiński’s analyses indicate that, in contrast to normative exclusion, structural exclusion tends to be permanent, and is directly linked to poverty resulting from unemployment. See Janusz Czapiński and Tomasz Panek, *Diagnoza Społeczna 2003: Warunki i Jakość Życia Polaków* [Social Diagnosis 2003. Conditions and Quality of Life of the Polish People] (Warszawa: Wyższa Szkoła Bankowości, Finansów i Zarządzania, 2004). For more detail discussion of social exclusion in Poland see Renata Pasternak-Mazur, “The Black Muse: Polish Hip-Hop as the Voice of ‘New Others’ in the Post-Socialist Transition,” *Music & Politics* 3, no. 1 (2009), 8-11.

the 1980s Polish society was polarized primarily into “us” (society) and “them” (the state).<sup>27</sup> This situation altered after 1989 and in time the new division between the winners and losers of the regime change became visible as a cleavage between the rich/powerful and the poor/powerless. However, the role of structural factors in the new division has not been immediately recognized.

From the perspective of liberal economists and the new elite (coming from the intelligentsia) that dominated the mainstream ideology and grand narratives in the new system, division into winners and losers ultimately translated into those who were wise and able to adapt and those who were half-witted and unable to adapt; in other words, the latter were deemed to be victims of their own fate.<sup>28</sup> In this binary opposition, it is the first group that defines what people should adapt to and how they should do it, and if individuals and groups cannot adapt they have by definition proven themselves to be “civilizationally incompetent.”<sup>29</sup> Their ineptitude was attributed to old mental habits that were characterized by the famous figure of *homo sovieticus*, whose attitude was shaped by egalitarianism and a demand for state support, by “disinterested envy,” anti-intellectualism and an aversion towards the elite, by double standards for public and private life and an acceptance of inadequate performance.<sup>30</sup>

As Buchowski noticed, this view ignored the paradox that it was the Communists who, as members of the *nomenklatura*,<sup>31</sup> should have been most profoundly imbued with the old system’s *habitus* but proved to be one of the quickest in switching to a new symbolic system, in mastering

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<sup>27</sup> See Ekiert and Kubik, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Michał Buchowski, *Rethinking Transformation: An Anthropological Perspective on Post-Socialism* (Poznań: Humaniora, 2001), 15–16.

<sup>29</sup> See Piotr Sztompka, *The Sociology of Social Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> See Piotr Sztompka, *Trauma wielkiej zmiany. Społeczne koszty transformacji* [Big Change Trauma. Social Costs of the Transformation] (Warszawa: ISP PAN, 2000), 55.

<sup>31</sup> The Russian term *nomenklatura* (номенклатура), deriving from the Latin *nomenclatura* meaning a list of names, was originally the list of powerful positions or jobs whose occupants needed to be approved by the Party; later it was also applied to the people who occupied these positions.

“civilizational competence.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the powerless and the poor need to resort to radical methods if they want to articulate their interests. When they do, however, they are described as uncouth and ignorant of the new socio-economic reality.<sup>33</sup> Polish hip hop was the new radical musical genre, which used controversial language and significantly challenged local paradigms of music making, replacing a musician’s skills and the gifts of a singer with the computer’s ability and rhyme-making skills. For many its poetics were unacceptable.

Hip-hop’s anti-system message initially confused and perplexed many commentators, since the new system was associated with democracy and a free market economy, which were considered achievements of the post-socialist transformation. If the system losers were not victims of their own fate, this fact would – and did – call for reconsideration of the evaluation of the post-1989 situation in Poland. Moreover, it meant that winners of the Solidarity revolution of the 1980s could become losers in the new system. Polish commentators still feel compelled to explain such a situation to a foreign audience.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to its anti-system message, the association of hip hop with subcultures of *blokersi* and *dresiarze*, which were often considered as tending to produce crime or criminality, contributed to negative perceptions of the genre. These communities abandoned disco polo (and other genres of popular music such as techno), of which they were previously fans, in favor of a musical genre that was seen as a very radical one. Called *uliczny hip hop* [street hip-hop], it was modeled around traits perceived in gangsta rap, such as drugs, crime, and hopelessness.

*Blokersi* is a term coined by Robert Leszczyński in the article “Manifest Blokersów”<sup>35</sup> and popularized by journalists as a label for young unemployed, and often uneducated, people

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<sup>32</sup> Buchowski, op. cit., 17.

<sup>33</sup> Buchowski, op. cit., 15.

<sup>34</sup> See for example Andrzej Antoszek, “Indigenized Representations in Glocalised Spaces. African-American Hip Hop Culture in East-Central Europe,” in *Intercultural Relations in a Global World*, ed by Michele Lobo, Vince Marotta and Nicole Oke (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Publishing, 2011), 203.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Leszczyński, “Manifest Blokersów,” *Gazeta Wyborcza. Magazyn* 35, 2 September 1998.

from *blokowisko*, frustrated by the lack of prospects, for whom a staircase of their block or a bench outside was a center of their social life, and who often smoked joints and abused alcohol.<sup>36</sup> They were often associated with hip hop culture, although in hip-hop circles the term *blokers* [in Polish a singular from *blokersi*] was rather pejorative. Hip-hoppers consider the term offensive because it is the labeling of their culture by the people who see them as the group associated with the social margin. Even in a police handbook for teachers, there is a warning against misidentifying hip-hoppers as *blokersi*.<sup>37</sup>

Sylwester Latkowski explained the title *Blokersi* of his documentary on Polish hip hop (2001) as follows:

This title is a bit provocative; it refers to the way in which media and official culture talk about people from hip hop culture circles. “Blokery” for them is a disparaging term, which means a man brought up in *blokowisko*, who spends whole days sitting on a bench, listens to weird music, wears crotch-at-knee-level pants, uses vulgarisms, and is always junked up. The term “blokery” is identified with the term hip-hopper [*hiphopowiec* in Polish]. It indicates the terrible ignorance of the sections of society that make such judgments.”<sup>38</sup>

However, even if unintentionally, Latkowski’s documentary widely popularized the term *blokersi* and contributed to its misidentification with hip-hoppers (as much as the discussions in the media contributed to associating, in public perception, the subcultures of *blokersi* and *dresiarze* with hip-hop, and in particular with gangsta rap).

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<sup>36</sup> In articles such as Agnieszka Filas, “Ludzie z wielkiej płyty,” *Wprost* 37, 10 September 2000.

<sup>37</sup> However, both *blokersi* and rappers (as well as *dresiarze*) are considered as belonging to criminogenic subcultures, while skaters, who are also associated with hip hop culture, are not. See Jarosław Kaleta and Ewa Mizera-Skrzyńska, *Poradnik dla nauczycieli – zasady postępowania z dziećmi i młodzieżą* [A Guide for Teachers - Rules of Conduct with Children and Youth] (Katowice, 2005), 13.

<sup>38</sup> Sylwester Latkowski in an interview with Marta Olszewska for FilmWeb “W swoim filmie starałem się pokazać, jacy naprawdę są hip-hopowcy” [In my film I wanted to show what hip-hopers really are] 27 September 2001

<http://www.filmweb.pl/%22W+swoim+filmie+staralem+sie+pokazac,+jacy+naprawde+są+hip-hopowcy%22,News,id=15481> (Accessed on 2 July 2009), available also at <http://www.latkowski.com/film/blokersi/>

*Dresiarze*, stereotypically associated with hip-hop, was a youth subculture which emerged in Poland in the 1990s. It was associated with materialism (love of brand-name sports clothing, and affection for automobiles), disrespect of social norms, profane language and engagement in violence and crime in order to satisfy ambitions or desires, and related to hooliganism. The attributes of such individuals were gym-fit bodies, very short hair, sports shoes and tracksuits. Initially they were also known for listening to specific musical genres: disco or techno, disco polo and then rap. Tracksuits, trainers, and haircuts blurred the distinction between *dresiarze* and hip-hoppers until hip hop developed its own dress code after becoming a part of mainstream culture, with its own magazines, sponsored mostly by clothing companies

Although pioneers of Polish hip hop experimented with various styles and topics, from the beginning “street hip-hop” was a driving force of the genre. Its links to gangsta rap, with its controversial poetics and topics, reproduced and amplified the derogatory stereotypes about the phenomenon and its public. Hip-hop’s narratives on drugs and crime associated the genre with these issues, which grew after 1989 but which had not been considered to be a major problem until that time.<sup>39</sup> As a result, early Polish hip hop existed primarily as an underground phenomenon, centering around three cities: Kielce, Katowice, and Warsaw.

Disillusionment with capitalism, a significant slowing of the economy, and a growing unemployment rate that reached almost 20 percent at the beginning of the new century created a new social context. With it hip hop finally gained a popular appeal, particularly among recent college graduates (born in the 1980s and thus hardly coming under the definition of *homo sovieticus*), who found themselves suddenly representing a “generation of unemployed masters.” hip hop became the voice of a generation of which even the most gifted and energetic were not able to make their mark due to the prolonged economic recession. Artists such as Hemp Gru,

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<sup>39</sup> See Emil W. Pływaczewski, “The Russian and Polish Mafia in Central Europe,” in *Global Organized Crime: Trends and Developments*, ed. Dina Siegel, Henk van de Bunt, and Damian Zaitch (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 63–72.

Molesta, Pezet, Warszawski Deszcz (with Tede), WWO, ZIP Skład, DJ 600 V (all from Warsaw), Slums Attack, with its leader Peja, or Gural (both from Poznań), became nationally recognized. Great national success was achieved by the album *Księga Tajemnicza. Prolog* [A Mysterious Book. Prologue] by the Silesian group Kaliber 44 (Magik, Joka and Abradab) that exemplified hardcore-psycho rap (a psychedelic type of Polish rap), but the genre did not attract prominent followers.

A new stream in Polish hip hop emerged that was labeled by journalists *inteligentny hip hop* (“intelligent hip-hop”), standing in clear opposition to *uliczny hip hop* (“street hip-hop”). Whereas the latter was modeled on gangsta rap and often borrowed directly from American hits, *inteligentny hip hop* turned towards local production and lyrics rooted in Polish culture and local reality.<sup>40</sup> Linguistically very creative, it drew inspiration from three sources: *grypsera* (language developed by criminals), American hip hop (however, Americanisms were often deformed) and the old-Polish language (words that had dropped out of common usage long ago).<sup>41</sup> This new wave created new-found respect for hip-hop, igniting the careers of Paktofonika, Eldo (with his group Grammatik), Fisz (also his brother Emade, sons of renowned Polish musician Wojciech Waglewski), and Łona, or O.S.T.R. Since 1998, local hip hop productions have prevailed over foreign hits, and most fans listen to Polish hip hop exclusively.<sup>42</sup>

In late 1990s, hip hop also became visible in the media. Hip hop magazines (*Klan* and *Hip-hop Magazine*) were published, professional websites were launched, a radio station—*Radiostacja*—began a large-scale promotion of hip hop culture, and VIVA Polska! began

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<sup>40</sup> For specific examples of such borrowings from and covers of well-known American hits, see Bart Reszuta, “Global Identities—Local Choices; A Case Study of Hip-hop, Poland,” paper presented at the *Internationalen Kongressens der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Semiotik (DGS)* (Frankfurt an der Oder, 2006), 8. <http://www.sw2.euv-frankfurt-o.de/downloads/dgs11/pdf/Reszuta.pdf>. The paper is in English.

<sup>41</sup> Examples of Polish hip-hop slang can be found in Reszuta, op. cit., 10.

<sup>42</sup> According to *Klan* magazine’s survey from 2000, 89 percent of its readers listened to Polish hip-hop only. See Andrzej Buda, *Historia kultury hip hop w Polsce 1977-2002* [The History of Hip-Hop Culture in Poland 1977-2002] (Głogów, Andrzej Buda Wydawnictwo Niezależne, 2001), 3; cited in Reszuta, op. cit., 9.

broadcasting and sponsoring hip hop videos. By 2000, hip hop had earned a place in mainstream music in Poland. The album *Kinematografia* (“Cinematography”) by the group Paktofonika, was the first to reach the hit lists, though the group’s career was cut short by the death of its leader, Magik, a legendary Polish MC widely considered to be unsurpassed.

In addition to those groups for whom wide recognition was followed by financial success, there is also a large underground hip hop movement—groups involved in the genre for their own satisfaction, looking (or not) for a record label and known usually only to local fans. Although most of the people engaged in the underground scene hope for a future mainstream career, some deliberately choose the underground networks as the only platform for their creative activities, regarding popularity and financial success as a betrayal of hip hop ideals. Some underground artists, such as Tetris (recognized especially for his freestyle skills<sup>43</sup>), Jimson, Reno, Smarki, Zkiboj, CeHa, or Klimat, have built up considerable reputations among hip hop fans.

These artists release homemade albums that are called *nielegal* in hip hop slang. *Nielegal* means “illegal” in English, a noun derived from the adjective *nielegalny*, literally translating as “an illegal,” but in this context meaning an album that is perfectly legal but issued without a label and circulated “unofficially” via CDR copies burned on PCs with photocopied covers, which passed from hand to hand or were sold at skate shops. Later, they came to be made available for downloading from the internet.<sup>44</sup> The cover of the album *Autentyk 3* by Vienio&Pele, designed by Forin (a graphic designer and recognized graffiti artist), is stylized as such an underground issue.

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<sup>43</sup> “Freestyle” in hip-hop is usually defined as lyrical improvisation (over any random beats or *a cappella*) and is an important element in building an MC’s reputation. Freestyle rap is essential to MCs’ battles, in which the contestants “diss” their opponents through clever lyrics.

<sup>44</sup> Underground Polish hip-hop can be found at the following websites: Polskie Podziemie! [www.polskie-podziemie.com/](http://www.polskie-podziemie.com/); Metropolia. Niezależna Scena Hip-Hop <http://www.metropolia.net/>; Hip-Hop.pl <http://www.hip-hop.pl/podziemie/>



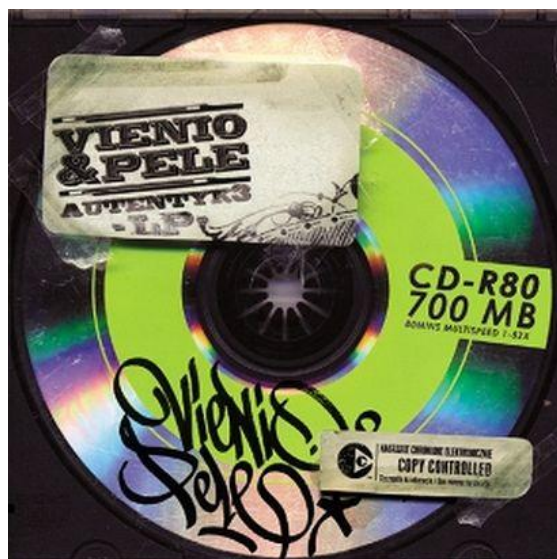


Figure 3.6. The cover of the album *Autentyk 3* by Vienio & Pele. Artwork & art direction:

Grzegorz “FORIN” Piwnicki @ [www.projektowanie.org](http://www.projektowanie.org).

Praising *nielegals*, Da Blaze, in the documentary *Blokersi*, says:

We make it ourselves from the beginning to the end, and, you know, nobody tells us what, how and when to do, how much we’ll get, and when and where it will be published. (...) *Nielegals* are appreciated by us. If you issue a *nielegal* you are proud of yourself. I issued remixes as *nielegals*, and I’m glad I did.

In contrast, albums issued by record companies are called *legal* (literally translated as “a legal”). The terms *legal* and *nielegal* are also used with reference to graffiti. The former means an official elaborated large-scale graffiti painted in a space specifically reserved for it, while the latter refers to a graffiti painted without permission.

While 1995-1999 was a time of experimentation and testing of possible presence of hip hop culture in Polish conditions, 2000-2005 was the time of its most dynamic development and abundant recordings, which defined stylistic frameworks of Polish rap. Hip-hop became an acknowledged mainstream phenomenon. It came to radio, television, press, and even schools (becoming a popular forum for an oral presentation at the high-school exit exam, *matura*). Moreover, at that time Polish hip hop diversified stylistically. Party-oriented bounce style was

gaining popularity, equaling in 2004 street hip-hop's market share.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, so called "melodic rap" or "pop-rap" have brought hip hop closer to mainstream popular music.

In 2004 the piece "Jak zapomnieć" by Jeden Osiem L was on a playlist of Radio Eska (which was the first to represent the CHR [Contemporary Hit Radio] format in Poland). Soon, it (and other Polish hip hop pieces) was played by RMF FM and Radio Zet, which specialize in mainstream popular music. Insiders, however, did not consider such productions to represent "authentic" Polish hip hop and referred to them pejoratively as *hip-hopolo*, in which the suffix "-polo" again indicates something commercialized and in bad taste. It was thought of as a second-hand style which, like disco polo, was said to attract youth hoping for an instant career but who did not have anything original to say.

The transition from underground to mainstream in Polish hip-hop—as in American hip hop itself—involved commercialization, with young teenagers (13–15 year olds) now a targeted audience. Hip-hop became fashionable. Paradoxically, however, the hip hop presence in mainstream media coincided with a fall in hip hop record sales. This resulted in part from the increasing popularity of MP3s, and in part from the fact that attention soon shifted from music to clothing and accessories. Style was emphasized. In fact, in Warsaw in 2005 there were twenty-seven stores that specialized in hip hop clothing, yet their clients were not hard-core hip hop fans but kids buying what was currently in fashion.

Since 2004, Polish hip hop has been criticized for repeating itself, for duplicating the same old rhymes, the same complaints, and the same negative images modeled on MTV hits. The questionable authenticity of *hip-hopolo* contributed to hip-hop's retreat from the pop music domain and its return to a primarily underground existence. Since 2005, hip-hop's presence in the mainstream media has significantly declined. MTV and VIVA Polska! have ceased broadcasting

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<sup>45</sup> According to Bart Reszuta (op. cit., 11), in 2000, 2002, and 2004 "street hip-hop" represented respectively 12%, 14%, and 16% of radio broadcasts.

programs hosted by rappers, some hip hop magazines and web sites have disappeared, and artists—even very prominent ones—have turned back to *nielegals* available on the internet for free downloading or through paid services.

Andrzej Buda attributes hip-hop's retreat from the mainstream to top-down orders of the media decision bodies, which discovered that hip hop is beyond their control.<sup>46</sup> In my opinion, however, another change in social and political circumstances contributed to hip-hop's decline. After Poland's admission to the European Union in May 2004, the country's economy became stronger, instigating a more optimistic outlook. Rapid economic growth combined with the large wave of work-based emigration (which also included hip hop fans and artists) to the so-called "old" EU member states resulted in a significant decline in unemployment. With these altered conditions, a comeback of ludic music including disco polo could have been observed. Conversely, renewed interest in hip-hop, which can be observed since 2009, coincided with a further reversal in the socio-political context (the economic crisis in the EU).

Moreover, as Bart Reszuta has observed, when the parliamentary election in 2005 gave power to a political party whose program significantly resembled postulates found in hip hop lyrics, politically-engaged hip hop suddenly "got speechless" and the genre gravitated towards lighter, party-oriented productions and rap for rap's sake, which shifted the emphasis from the message onto skills and technical perfection. In a way it was coming back to its beginnings, when rapping was associated with fun rather than a profound message.

The most spectacular example of this tendency was the piece "W aucie" [In a car]" by TPWC (*Teraz pieniądze w cenie* [What Counts Now is Money], Prosto, 2007), with its refrain "Będę brał cię w aucie, cię, ehe", based on repeated endings, as in Rihanna's hit "Umbrella", which inspired Polish authors. The song features Franek Kimono (Piotr Fronczewski, a renowned

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<sup>46</sup> Andrzej Buda, *Historia Kultury Hip-hop w Polsce 1977-2013* (Głogów: Wydawnictwo Niezależne, 2013), 346.

Polish actor, b. 1946), who in 1983 recorded a very successful musical joke, which used melo-recitation and which mocked disco. This music video, featuring Franek Kimono rapping

I am a bartender at this dancing party (*Jestem barmanem na tym dancingu*)  
the first rapper (*pierwszy raper*)  
there were no thongs yet (*nie było jeszcze stringów*)

became one of the most popular hip hop videos in Poland.<sup>47</sup>

Hip-hop's retreat from the mainstream culture implied its coming back to the underground rather than its spectacular decline. Andrzej Buda called the period 2005-2009 "the times of *illegals* [*czas nielegali*]", in which the majority of interesting productions functioned underground.<sup>48</sup> It was not only the only available platform for the newcomers, but also an alternative space for stars of the genre. As Buda observed, limited promotion of hip hop in the mainstream media did not affect established rappers, who started to communicate with their fans primarily over the internet and were able to keep their concert rates at a rather stable level.<sup>49</sup>

Coming back to the underground transformed hip-hop's business model. Most leading hip hop artists founded their own music labels, which publish their own productions and sometimes also debuts of the genre's newcomers. Lowering costs of making music videos (with a budget for a hip hop music video in Poland oscillating from a few hundred to slightly over 1,000

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<sup>47</sup> The piece differs stylistically from the rest of the album, which as a whole was not that successful. Its total sales did not exceed 23,000 (which is still a respectable result by Polish standards) despite millions of views of "W aucie" on YouTube.

<sup>48</sup> Buda (2013), 361. For detailed information on such productions see *ibid.*, 361-366.

<sup>49</sup> In 2009, the standard concert rates were as follows (all numbers refer to PLN, with the currency rate 1 USA = ca. 3 PLN): Liber and Doniu – 14,000 PLN, Mezo – 14,000, Sokół and Pono – 12,000, Verba – 12,000, O.S.T.R. – 6,500 (with his band 12,000), Pezet/Małolat – 12,000 (including the band), Tede – 9,000 (including the band), Peja – 8,000, Grupa Operacyjna – 8,000, Molesta – 7,000, Pokahontaz – 7,000, Donguralesko – 6,000, Nowator – 6,000, Grubson – 5,000, Trzeci Wymiar – 5,000, Eldo – 5,000, Red i Spinacz – 5,000, Hi-Fi Banda – 4,000, 2 Cztery 7 – 3,000-4,000, Pih – 3,000-4,000, Chada – 3,000, VNM – 1,300 (in 2012 – 3,000), Małpa – 2,500, Hurragunz – 2,500, PTP – 2000, Tetris – 2000, Wena – 1,500, B.O.K. – 1,200 + transportation, Zeus – 1,000, Bisz – 700 + transportation, PeeRzet – 400. Quoted after Buda (2013), 361. Interestingly, the highest paid were performers associated with *hip-hopolo*.

USD<sup>50</sup>) have allowed rappers to promote their productions on YouTube and through social media. Unlike other popular music genres, which experienced significant decline in sales, sales of hip hop recordings increased. Nevertheless, sales of recordings do not bring enough profit to be the primary source of income. Giving regular concerts or having a clothing brand associated with a rapper's name (such as Prosto Wear (associated with Sokół), Koka (Pezet), Outsidewear (Mazsa, Fenomen), Dill (Hemp Gru), Respect (Molesta), Terroryzm (Peja), or PLNY (Tede)) are economic necessities for those who have made hip hop their profession.

Hip-hop's independence from the major labels and traditional music business model transformed in turn the power relationship between the mass media and hip hop during its recent wave of popularity. Hip-hoppers are aware of that fact. Sokół (Wojciech Sosnowski), one of the most popular rappers, an owner of Prosto label and Prosto Wear clothing brand, noted:

Music television wants us again? Radio stations, which shunned us, want to play [our music]? That's great but today we give them our recordings only if they help us to promote young artists and newcomers by throwing in their singles, even at the lowest rotation. (...). We don't have to beg for anything. Once we were petitioners, who were looked down upon; today, we hold all the cards. The world of the media and music distribution has changed. Once the distributors were the most important; today, the most important individuals are those who generate the content and have it at their disposal. Thanks to the internet you can reach people easily. Now it is up to them what they choose to listen to or what is important to them.<sup>51</sup>

I represent poverty? Hip Hop Discourse and its participants.

*Another day, another lecture in rapology  
Practice [taken] not from books  
Such things don't happen in theory  
You call me a blockers? Fuck off  
Do you know who I am? A witness of pathology.  
You have good intentions  
You want to help  
So Don't Disturb  
You give labels*

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<sup>50</sup> The cost of the most expensive hip-hop music video, "U Ciebie w mieście" (2004), was 35 000 PLN. See Buda (2013), 361. According to Tede (An Interview in *gazeta.tv*, 25 August 2011), a good hip-hop music video can be made for 10,000 PLN, and a low budget one for merely 1,000 PLN.

<sup>51</sup> Andrzej Cała, "Wyjście z bloków [Blocks of Flats Exit]", *Przekrój* 2 February 2012, Accessed through. <http://www.przekroj.pl/artukul/956938.html> on 8 March 2013.

*You are gunning for me  
Fuck off*<sup>52</sup>

(Pih (Adam Piechocki))

*There is a demand for hip-hops [sic]  
I know you listen to the black muse too  
Naughty By Nature? Come on, I also like them.  
I'll invite you on my boat, if you give [me] a kiss,  
a cruise on the bay, jacuzzi, just crusin'*<sup>53</sup>

(Mezo (Jacek Mejer))

Polish hip hop can be assigned the following characteristics: **materialistic** (interested in the material conditions of human existence rather than with the world of spirit or ideas), **proactive** (condemning passivity and laziness), **alternative** (situating itself in opposition to the official and mass culture), **hermetic** (requiring insiders' knowledge, commitment and following on a regular basis), **autotelic** (focused on itself and self-reflective), **autobiographic** (referring to specific life experiences of its creators), **didactic** (attempting to influence the attitudes, beliefs, and sensitivities held by the audience), **linguistic** (putting great emphasis on formal and sonic qualities of the text), **anti-ideological** and **dialogic** (being a platform for a discussion rather than representing some ideology), **masculine** (created mostly by men and representing a male worldview), **urban** and **youth** (with most of its audience being 15-40 years old).<sup>54</sup>

Polish hip hop does not represent any coherent ideology. Instead, it is a platform for discussing issues pertaining to Polish urban youth. If we survey prominent themes in Polish hip-hop, such as attitudes towards money, authority (especially the police), drugs, and male/female relationships, we can observe that there is no agreement within the hip hop community on them.

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<sup>52</sup> "Kolejny dzień, kolejny wykład z rapologii/ Praktyka nie z książek, tych zdarzeń nie ma w teorii/ Nazywasz mnie blokersem? Weź do kurwy odbij!/ Wiesz, kim jestem? Świadkiem patologii./ Masz dobre intencje, chcesz pomóc to nie przeszkadzaj/ Przyczepiasz metki, szukasz na mnie haka/ wypierdalaj" The song "I Give Rap-Music" [Daję rap-muzykę] by Pih (*Boisz się alarmów*, RRX 2002).

<sup>53</sup> "Jest popyt na hip-hopy/ wiem, że też słuchasz czarną muzę,/ Naughty By Nature, no co ty? Ja też ich lubię./Zaproszę cię na mój jacht, jeśli dasz buzi,/ rejs zatoką, jacuzzi, just crusin'." "Aniele" by Mezo feat. Liber (*Mezokracja*, UMC Records 2003).

<sup>54</sup> See Stanisław Wójtowicz, "Hip-hop Jako Głos Pokolenia", *Poradnik Bibliograficzno-Metodyczny Wojewódzka Biblioteka Puliczna i Centrum Animacji Kultury w Poznaniu*. 3/174 (2011): 25-26.

While some productions by Polish rappers would talk about compromises necessary in capitalistic reality, others would call for staying true to principles.

Some hip hop pieces praise hedonism and encourage using drugs, especially marijuana, while other call for self-discipline, disapprove of drug use, and warn against dangers they involve. Many texts express an aversion or even hatred directed at the police; however, there are also examples which consider this childish.<sup>55</sup> Many texts reduce the male/female relationship to its sexual aspect and display a cynical attitude towards love; however, others criticize such an attitude as well as hip hop misogyny. According to Sokół, one of the most distinguished Polish rappers, the only ideological issue common for Polish hip-hoppers is homophobia.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, even within a single rapper's output contradictory views on some issues can be found.

In Polish hip-hop, as in American, pieces which address material aspects of life far outnumber those which refer to existential issues. Hip-hop is down to earth, and its productions come from a specific thing or instance. Its reflection is backed by common sense rather than philosophical speculation. The local reality of everyday life is put before the world of ideas, "high culture" or the virtual reality of the media. Stanisław Wójtowicz attributes the materialistic attitude expressed in hip hop productions to the financial instability experienced by the families of Polish urban youth which entered adulthood under the capitalist system.<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, many hip hop productions are loaded with didacticism and moralizing content. Moral instructions come from personal experiences of the rappers, and the people who went wrong in their lives are not condemned. Moreover, although Polish hip hop is highly diversified as far as ideology and political views are concerned, it postulates a proactive attitude

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<sup>55</sup> CHWDP, sometimes also (mis)spelled as HWDP, an acronym for *Chuj W Dupe Policji*, which means "fuck the police" is one of the most common tags used within Polish hip hop culture.

<sup>56</sup> See for example an interview with Sokół and Marysia Starosta by Marcin Tomaszewski at the official [facebook.com/sokolmarysiastarosta](https://www.facebook.com/sokolmarysiastarosta), uploaded also on YouTube on 29 June 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Wójtowicz, op. cit., 25.

from an individual, and requires sincerity and originality from rappers and hip hop producers. Apathy, laziness, and passivity are condemned as much as copying other artists. As Bart Reszuta observed, hip hop texts are saturated with Christian symbols, abounding in references to the Bible (such as “God’s gift,” “destiny,” “throwing stones,” “Eden,” “the promised land,” “Jericho’s trumpets,” “Armageddon,” and – most of all – the idea of a “mission,” where rappers define themselves as “the Apostles”), and God is often called “the highest instance”.<sup>58</sup>

On the one hand, hip hop is associated with socially engaged forms of artistic expression and this aspect of hip hop is most often undertaken in various commentaries about the genre, including academic studies. Also the general public associates hip hop with complains about harsh reality. On the other hand, hip hop can be considered as an autotelic culture, which is focused on itself, with ongoing discussion on its form, actual and ideal shape as well as current and desired existence. Such a discussion continuous not only in hip hop online forums and the media but also in hip hop productions.

Very many hip hop pieces are about, or at least refer to, hip hop itself. As Stanisław Wójtowicz has observed, pieces of this kind usually refer to (1) the situation of hip hop culture in Poland (the perception of hip hop in the media and society, the relationship between hip hop and other realms of culture, etc.), (2) the situation within hip hop culture (analysis of positive and negative tendencies within hip hop culture), (3) hip hop culture’s role in shaping the identity of rappers and their audience, (4) the positioning of particular rappers within the culture (rappers formulate their views on hip-hop, present their artistic credos). According to Wójtowicz, this trend, which can be called “hip-hop about hip-hop,” is so strong because both rappers and their audience see this culture as their best opportunity for self-expression and “a common good” which should be cared for.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Reszuta, “Global identities”, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Wójtowicz, op. cit., 20-21



The autotelic nature of hip hop is related to its hermetic character. Only those who actively participate in it and continuously follow hip hop artistic life can fully understand productions of such a self-concerned culture. Rap texts are often very difficult, if not impossible, to understand for the uninitiated because they use hip hop slang and specific forms and conventions of the genre, refer to the reality of the hip hop community, and are full of intertextual references to other hip hop productions (both Polish and American).<sup>60</sup> As a result, many hip hop texts are not only highly incomprehensible for Polish audiences from outside the culture but also their meaning is opaque and compromised by translation into foreign languages.

Such autotelic, hermetic hip hop is well exemplified by Ten Typ Mes's verse from the song "Życzenia śmierci" [Wish of Death] from the album *Dzielo Sztuki* [Work of Art, 2009] by Fabuła:

To wszystko było jak sen, czytałem o tym w <i>Klan</i> magazynie	It was all like a dream, I read about it in <i>Klan</i> magazine
moro ciuchy, cu-bina na limuzynie	camo clothes, cu-bina on a limousine
Właściwie był to nowy fiat	Actually, it was a new fiat
lecz nie wieszałem plakatów na ścianach, chciałem zdobyć świat	But I didn't put posters on the walls; I wanted to conquer the world
A dziś DJ-ów więcej niż grzybów po deszczu chyba	And today there are more DJs than mushrooms after the rain
ale żaden nie zagra jak Deszczu, nawet po grzybach	but none of them will play like Deszcz, even after magic mushrooms
Raperzy? No comment	Rappers? No comment!
Chcesz beefu? Nagram coś tak jak "My," tylko pod Twoim domem	Do you want a beef? I will record something like "My," only in front of your house
Ale zasłuż na to, bo kurwa ten badziew nie motywuje mnie do disu nawet w wywiadzie	But you have to deserve it, because this crap does not motivate me to a dis, even in an interview

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<sup>60</sup> Multiple examples of references to specific verses, songs, or albums of prominent Polish (and also some American) hip-hop artists can be found at the hip-hop forum "Pogadajmy o hip hopie" [Let's Talk about Hip Hop] <http://rapstrefa.pl/viewtopic.php?t=7069>. Accessed 21 September 2016.

As Wójtowicz observed, already its first lines, which refer to Polish hip-hop's development, contain intertextual reference to the piece "Juicy" by the legendary American rapper the Notorious BIG. Smoothly, it flows into reflection on the role hip hop played in the rapper's life. Then, there is a word-play related to the nickname of a well-known Polish DJ, Deszcz, which means "rain," allowing for a critique of current tendencies in rap culture. Elements of hip hop slang (*beef* and *dis*<sup>61</sup>) and references to another piece by the rapper ("My" [We], ) hinder the understanding of the text even further.<sup>62</sup>

While autotelic aspects of hip hop – which require knowledge of cultural insiders – are rarely undertaken in scholarly discussions (in spite of their prominence in various online forums on Polish hip-hop), its alternative aspects are emphasized by many commentators. Maciej Bernasiewicz, in the most comprehensive academic study of Polish hip hop discourse, juxtaposes hip hop discourse with a worldview which is characteristic of pop songs' lyrics and the content of Polish (or Polish-language) teen magazines (such as *Bravo*, *Bravo Girl*, *Victor Gimnazjalista*, *Twist*, *Filipinka*, *Dziewczyna*, *Popcorn*), called by him "teenager *coolture* discourse (*dyskurs cooltury nastolatka*)".<sup>63</sup> Although Bernasiewicz admits that hip hop style identified with hip hop culture may be nothing more than a fashion statement (like a Christian cross may be a piece of jewelry), it usually manifests a specific worldview grounded in *blokowisko* life, with loose clothes presented as metaphorical longing for freedom and liberty.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> In hip-hop, "beef" is a feud, in which hip-hop artists engage by "dissing" each other through songs. "Diss" is a song aimed at disparaging or insulting another person (usually a rapper) or group.

<sup>62</sup> See Wójtowicz, op. cit., 21.

<sup>63</sup> *cooltura* is a neologism combining the words *cool* and *kultura*, which means "culture" in Polish. Maciej Bernasiewicz, *Młodzież i popkultura: dyskursy światopoglądowe, recepcja i opór* [Young People and Pop-culture. Worldview Discourses, Reception and Resistance] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 38. In understanding the notion of world view (*Weltanschauung*), he follows Wilhelm Dilthey who distinguished its three components: life experience, world image and life ideal.

Bernasiewicz is not interested in subcultures but in popular culture discourses and the influence they may have on young receivers, and his analysis is based on lyrics from best-selling Polish hip hop albums of 2006 from OLiS charts.<sup>65</sup> According to his study, teenagers who read teen magazines clearly outnumber those who listen to hip-hop.<sup>66</sup> He considers teen *coolture* discourse a *postculture* statement because it does not relate to any specific worldview and is characterized by moral permissiveness, relativity, a kind of Machiavellianism, and an affirmation of consumerism, while hip hop discourse emphasizes values. He summarizes both discourses as follows:<sup>67</sup>

<b>Table 1. Teen <i>Coolture</i> v.s. Hip-Hop according to Maciej Bernasiewicz</b>	
<b>Teen <i>coolture</i> discourse</b>	<b>Hip-hop discourse</b>
Female discourse features	Male discourse features (in spite of the presence of some female rappers)
Postmodern discourse (heterogenic, fragmented identity, fascination with image, apolitical, post-subcultural)	Modern discourse (homogenic, holistic identity, emphasis on view and values, missionary, subcultural)
Personal identity	Collective identity
One's own body as the primary source of life experience (internal attribution)	Outside world as the primary source of life experience (external attribution)
Optimistic worldview	Pessimistic worldview

<sup>65</sup> The albums were by Abra Dab (*Emisja spalin*), WWO (*Życie na kredycie* and *Witam Was w Rzeczywistości*), Trzeci Wymiar (*Inni niż wszyscy*), O.S.T.R (7), Peja (*Flirtując*), Eldo and Bitnix (*Człowiek, który chciał ukraść alfabet*), Skazani na Sukcezz (*Na Linii Ognia*), Pono (*Tak to widzę*), Tede (*Esende Mylffon*), Jeden Osiem L (*Słuchowisko*), DKA (*Stawiam sobie pomnik*), Fisz i Emade (*Piątek 13*), Mezo, Kasia Wilk, Tabb (*Eudaimonia*), Molesta Ewenement (*Nigdy nie mów nigdy*), Peja/Slums Attack (*Szacunek ludzi ulicy*), Liroy (*L Nino Vol. 1*). OLiS - Oficjalna Lista Sprzedaży (Official Sales Chart) is a chart of the highest selling music albums in Poland provided by ZPAV (Związek Producentów Audio Video, the Polish Society of the Phonographic Industry), and based on data from the largest retail chains in Poland (EMPiK, Real, Media Markt, and Saturn) and two of the largest Polish internet stores (Merlin.pl, Rockserwis.pl)

<sup>66</sup> Bernasiewicz, op. cit., 218

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

Intimate relationships are defined by sex and love. Sex is subjected to fears (of its procreative function and viral infections). Love is the theme dominated by problems related to partner acquisition strategies.	Intimate relations are introduced by a concept of “woman”. Women for men are also a source of threats, especially related to financial expenses. At the same time women are heavily objectified.
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For hip-hop, as for other “rebellious” genres, mainstreaming and commercialization created a challenge to preserving its credibility as counter-culture. Locating hip-hop’s discourse in opposition to pop culture discourse in general and in particular to what Bernasiewicz called teen *coolture* discourse seemed an option for sustaining its “alternative” character. As a consequence, rappers’ presence in the media, their collaboration with representatives of other genres, and their brand-related commercial engagement became the most sensitive issues. Criteria for judging hip-hoppers’ media exposure and musical cooperation, however, seem unclear.<sup>68</sup>

Commercial hip hop productions unapproved in hip hop circles were labeled as *hip-hopolo* (also spelled *hiphopolo*). Although it was actually a common accusation that stigmatized

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<sup>68</sup> While Mezo was criticized for his exposure in the mainstream media, O.S.T.R. as a host of *Yo! MTV Raps* did not stir controversies. *Kuba Wojewódzki Show* featured a variety of hip-hoppers (Jeden Osieł L (23 May 2004), Liroy (30 May 2004, 26 November 2006, 25 March 2007), Mezo (6 June 2004), Number Raz (10 April 2005), Peja (17 December 2006, 14 September 2010, 13 November 2012), Pezet (6 November 2012), or Donatan (12 March 2013)) but affected the reputation only of those associated with *hip-hopolo* and not those associated with “trueschool”.

Likewise, in the case of so-called “exotic cooperation” actual evaluation rarely (if at all) refers to the outcome of such productions but rather to “who cooperates with whom” and “who the judge is”. For example, Sylwester Latkowski, who himself has arranged the cooperation between Gramatik and Leszek Możdżer, a recognized Polish jazz pianist and a film music composer, criticized Tede’s cooperation with the pop singer Natalia Kukulska. Also Robert Sankowski, a music journalist of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, objected to Tede’s cooperation with Natalia Kukulska, “one of the on-duty stars of Polish show-business, a protagonist of articles in color magazines, a face well-known from women’s magazines, and a vocalist entirely associated with commercial work”. At the same time he considered the cooperation of Vienio from Molesta with Cool Kids of Death and of Peja with Sweet Noise “somehow natural (engaged rappers cooperate with equally engaged rockmen).” Mezo was attacked for recording together with Katarzyna Wilk, a vocalist associated with pop, rock and soul, and with Mieczysław Szczęśniak, associated with pop, Gospel, and Christian Contemporary Music (who appears as Miecz Szczęśniak in the production “Wstawaj” [Get Up] recorded with Mezo/Tabb (2006)). See Sylwester Latkowski, “Papa Dance polskiego hip-hopu,” *Muza*, November 2003. Also available at [http://latkowski.home.pl/felietony/papa\\_dance\\_polskiego\\_hip-hopu/](http://latkowski.home.pl/felietony/papa_dance_polskiego_hip-hopu/) Accessed on 12 March 2012, Robert Sankowski, “Rap na salonach [Rap at Hight Society],” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13 October 2003, 14.

some hip-hoppers as representatives of *hip-hopolo* (from which there was no redemption), they were widely accused of “selling out,” of serving “pseudo hip-hop” with a “smoothed face,” and catering for massive radio play, instead of the “real thing.” As a consequence they were ostracized in hip hop circles.<sup>69</sup> As Tomasz Gezela observed, “there is no performer who would openly say – yes, I do play *hip-hopolo* and I am happy with that”.<sup>70</sup>

The rapper Ten Typ Mes (Piotr Szmidt) from Flexxip is credited with coining the term.<sup>71</sup> However, its public career started with the press article by Bartek Chaciński “Jeden Osiem L – hip hop or disco-polo?” (*Przekrój*, 2004).<sup>72</sup> The article is an attack on the group Jeden Osiem L (also spelled 18L) from Płock for using, in their hit “Jak zapomniec” [How to Forget], a 10-second-long sample from the piece “Overcome” by Live (without asking for permission), while, according to the author of the article, hip hop is moving away from sampling. Moreover, the denigrating term *hiphopolo* is applied to the group for having their hit played by pop-music radio channels such as Radio Eska and Radio Zet, for participating in a TV show, “Bar,” which is associated with mass entertainment, for “smoothing hip-hop’s face” by refraining from vulgarisms and leaning towards dance music, but first of all for appealing not only to the audiences from large cities but also from small towns and villages.

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<sup>69</sup> According to Jakub Żulczyk:

At many concerts eggs and tomatoes are thrown at rappers from UMC records, and at hip-hop festivals artists from other labels do not want to perform with them on the same stage. Concert invitations for Doniu, Liber, or Mezo are coming now exclusively from small towns, except for their native Poznań. They almost do not perform in big cities at all.

Jakub Żulczyk, “Hiphopolo, HiphOpole,” <http://relaz.pl/magazyn,hiphopolo-hiphopole,414>. Accessed on 17 June 2005.

<sup>70</sup> Tomasz Gezela, “Hip-hopolo,” *Doza Kultury*, 6 May 2005 <http://doza.o2.pl/?s=4108&t=3060>. Accessed on 17 June 2005.

<sup>71</sup> Andrzej Cała and Radek Mischczak, *Beaty, rymy, życie. Leksykon muzyki hip-hop* (Poznań: Kurpisz S.A., 2005), 590.

<sup>72</sup> Bartek Chaciński and Dawid Muszyński, “Jeden Osiem L - hip-hop czy disco polo?”, *Przekrój*, 25 March 2004.

Although there is no agreement as to what actually constitutes *hip-hopolo*, hip hop fans often describe it as “mainstream (s)hit”<sup>73</sup> or “pseudo hip-hop.” The term *hip-hopolo* is commonly associated with the label UMC (Underground Music Center<sup>74</sup>) Records and its artists—18L, Ascetoholix, 52 Dębiec, Owai, or Mezo, whose first *legals* became immediately successful with the support of the mass media such as TV VIVA, radio ESKA, or the magazine *hip-hop.pl*. Pieces such as “Aniele” [Angel] and “Żeby Nie Było” by Mezo, “Suczki” [Little Bitches] and “Na spidzie” by Ascetoholix, “To my!” [It’s us!] by 52 Dębiec, and “Jak zapomnieć” [How to forget] by Jeden Osiem L stirred the hip hop community. Their authors have been criticized for turning away from social problems to party-oriented productions that lean towards mainstream commercial popular music in search of commercial success. Besides rappers associated with UMC Records (Jeden Osiem L, Mezo, Verba, Ascetoholic, or Doniu), the term *hip-hopolo* has been also used with reference to such rappers as Teka (Tomasz Kucharski), the group Trzeci Wymiar, and DKA (Daniel Kaczmarczyk).

Such productions were condemned by rappers (such as Peja or Tede), music journalists and the people associated with hip hop circles. Respected hip hop artists tried to distinguish themselves from this trend and reproach it in their pieces such as “Inny niż wy” [Different from you] by Eldo (Grammatik), “Odzyskamy hip-hop” [We’ll get hip hop back] by O.S.T.R., “Straciłeś wątek” [You’ve Lost Your Thread] by Vienio and Pele, “Wirus hiphopolo” [Hip-hopolo Virus] by Firma, “Za szybcy się wściekli” [Too Fast, Too Furious] by Pokoahontaz, and multiple songs by Peja (for example “Nie - kocham hip-hop” [No – I love hip-hop] and “Seks dragi rap” [Sex, drugs, rap]) mock pseudo hip-hop, accusing it of being self-serving, and claiming their authority over the genre.

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<sup>73</sup> This spelling was found on Internet discussion forums. The pun can be found also in spoken language. In Polish pronunciation “hit” sounds more like the English “heat.” When it is accented and pronounced like the English “hit,” it suggests “shit.”

<sup>74</sup> In 2006 it was took over by My Music label, which was founded by the owners of UMC Records, Remigiusz Łupicki (DJ Remik) and Dominik Urbański.

In spite of the widespread contempt in which they were held, productions by UMC Records (such as *Mezokracja* [Mezocraton] (2003) by Mezo, *Bógmacher* [Godmaker] (2004) by Liber (Marcin Priotrowski), *Ósmy marca* [8 March] (2005) by Verba, or *Wideoteka* [Video Library] (2003) by Jeden Osiem L) were very successful. Moreover, in fans' Polish hip hop collections (for example at [chomikuj.pl](http://chomikuj.pl)), they can be found next to productions by Molesta, O.S.T.R., Eldo, Peja, and other rappers associated with “true” or “real” hip hop (*prawdziwy hip-hop*). For many fans, especially those who do not listen primarily (or exclusively) to hip-hop, the distinction between “real hip-hop” and *hip-hopolo* is of little or no importance.

The example of Mezo (Jacek Mejer, known also as Łajner), however, demonstrates that positioning someone in the realm of *hip-hopolo* can exclude a rapper from the hip hop community in spite of his earlier respected productions, and can have a profound impact on his career. Mezo built his reputation with three *nielegals* as Łajner (*Demo* (1999), *Mezo* (2000), and *Słowem* [In a Word] (2001)). He was featured in reputable productions, such as “Pełen pokus” [Full of Temptations] from the album *Epizod II: Rapnastyk* (2002) by Owal/Emcedwa (Jacek Wiecek), which is considered one of the most successful débuts on the Polish hip hop scene, as well as in “I moje miasto złą sławą owiane” (together with Ascetoholix and 52 Dębiec) from the album *Na Legalu* by Peja/Slums Attack (2002).

Mezo was an uncontroversial figure until the great commercial success of his first *legal*, *Mezokracja* (UMC Records, 2003), which contained “Aniele” [Angel] its most popular and most controversial song. Stylistically very different from his other pieces and intended as a parody, it was taken as a genuine production by the general public as well as by many hip-hoppers, becoming a standard by which Mezo was judged.<sup>75</sup> With the shift of his positioning from that of

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<sup>75</sup> Among the critics there were Pele (Tomasz Władysław Szczepanek) from Molesta, O.S.T.R. (Adam Ostrowski, who said: “it hurts me because it is not a real rap. ‘Aniele jak wiele’ [Angel, how much] sounds like disco polo texts. (...) One damfoolish piece is enough to be a damfool.” Quoted after Buda (2013, 269)), and Peja (Ryszard Andrzejewski). According to Andrzej Buda (2013, 257), it was the total sale of Mezo’s album, which exceeded 20,000 copies, that made Peja angry, because his album *Wspólne zdanie*

an underground/alternative artist to a part of Polish mainstream popular culture, Mezo became one of the most criticized hip hop stars, accused of selling himself out, betraying hip hop ideals, and substituting *hip-hopolo* or hip-pop for “true” hip-hop. Neither his future productions nor explanations on his blog or in interviews changed his status within the hip hop community.

Although Mezo continues a very successful career, his current self-description is as a “melo-reciter” (*melorecytator*) or even “pop-rapper”. When asked if pigeonholing him as *hip-hopolo* makes him uncomfortable, Mezo replied: “For hip-hoppers, I am too pop; pop fans consider me a pure rapper. (...) I started as a hip-hopper but I’ve gone out of it. Partly, it was my own choice and partly it was the ostracism of this whole [hip-hop] community.”<sup>76</sup> He had been experiencing the strongest “hatred” for two-three years since his debut album *Mezokracja*, but now only part of the hip hop community, which he calls “ultra,” objects to him for having songs in pop music charts, receiving music industry rewards, or participating in the Polish version of the *Clash of the Choirs* (*Bitwa na głosy*) in 2012.

On the one hand, constructing some productions as *hip-hopolo* can be seen as a result of the envy of less commercially successful hip hop producers, and on the other hand those productions can be seen as incongruous within hip-hop’s discourse. While Polish hip hop located itself in opposition to pop culture, especially to what Bernasiewicz has called “teen *coolture*,” *hip-hopolo* blurred the boundaries between the two realms, especially in songs which gravitated towards party music and gave attention to women/ girls as addressees of men’s desire. Love and sex (but not marriage) were categories central to teen *coolture* discourse and marginalized in hip hop discourse. Unsurprisingly those hip hop narrations, which did not follow the pattern (such as “Aniele” [Angel] or “Suczki” [Little Bitches]) brought contempt on their producers.

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[*Common Opinion*] (recorded with Wiśnia as SKI Skład, T-1 Teraz, 2003) sold only 11,000, which was disappointing, especially in the context of the success of his former album *Na legalu*, which sold 70,000.

<sup>76</sup> Paweł Piotrowicz, “Nie rapuję błahych tekstów” [I Don’t Rap Trivial Texts]. An Interview with Mezo, 21 March 2012, *OnetMuzyka*, <http://muzyka.onet.pl/publikacje/nie-rapuje-blahych-tekstow,1,5065195,wiadomosc.html>. Accessed on 26 April 2012.



Although the challenging and complex gender aspect of Polish hip hop goes beyond the scope of this study and deserves a detailed, separate analysis, it is worth mentioning that hip hop emphasizes a distinction between “good women” and “bitches”. As summarized in the piece “Dobre dziewczyny” [Good Girls] by Firma (*Nasza Broń To Nasza Pasja* [Our Passion Is Our Weapon], Fonografika, 2011),

a good girl is not a treacherous bitch  
She'll go through fire and water for you when you'll get into trouble  
She loves you/ she's genuine (...)  
Nobody will sacrifice for you like her, remember  
your beautiful lady; love her wholeheartedly  
She is your precious, your beauty  
She is the person who may give you your child  
She is your most loyal life partner (...)  
She won't sell you or leave you (...)  
She loves you and not your money<sup>77</sup>

while “a whore, a materialist,”

an ordinary dick with tits [sic<sup>78</sup>]  
will beguile you fast (...)  
will divide you from your family, and your own brother.<sup>79</sup>

Because, according to rappers, “bitches” abound, even among teens, and “good women/ girls” are hard to find, the more so since they

appreciate those beautiful and honest Poles  
who chose children over party or career  
who go for a walk in the park, and not a drinking affair. (...)  
So look for and you will eventually find  
this only one, a fit for you  
Let her be the most important [thing] in the world (...)  
And you, treacherous bitches better go away  
I'm very busy today; I'm taking my wife somewhere.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> “Dobra dziewczyna, nie dziwka fałszywa/ Pójdzie z Tobą w ogień, kiedy Ty nawarzysz piwa/ Ona Ciebie kocha, ona jest prawdziwa (...)/ Nikt dla Ciebie nie poświęci się tak, pamiętaj/ Twoja piękna dama, całym sercem ją kochaj/ To jest Twój skarb, to jest Twoje piękno/ To jest ta osoba, która może da Ci dziecko/ To jest najwierniejszy Twój towarzysz życia (...)/ Ona kocha Ciebie, a nie Twoją kasę.”

<sup>78</sup> “dick with tits” - in Polish “*chuj z cyckami*,” “chuj” is a vulgar word for penis while “cycki” for (female) breast.

<sup>79</sup> “zwykły chuj z cyckami/ Bardzo szybko Cię omami (...)/ Skłóci Cię z rodziną, skłóci Cię z rodzonym bratem.”

<sup>80</sup> “Tym bardziej doceniam te piękne Polki szczerze/ Które wybierają dzieci, a nie melanz i karierę/ Idą na spacer do parku, a nie w pijacką aferę, (...)/Więc szukajcie do skutku, aż w końcu znajdziecie,

Hip-hop circles are aware that “[p]opularization of hip hop culture is multi-sided and affects the culture in many different ways.”<sup>81</sup> The dilemma as to whether it results in a positive or rather negative outcome seems undecided. Whether mainstreaming of hip hop is “unnecessary commercialization” or “a driving force behind its development,” it is considered an irreversible process.<sup>82</sup> The discussion concerns not so much the presence of hip hop in the media (which as such is usually considered a positive thing) but the manner of its presentation (what, how, where and by whom it is/ should be exposed).

Productions devoted to hip hop on music television and other media are criticized in hip hop circles for exposing “what sells best” instead of showing “interesting events and introducing to the audience new artists and the underground (*nielegalna scena*)”. Their authors are criticized for lack of knowledge and inadequate insight into the hip hop scene as well as for focusing only on the brightest stars and presenting hip hop culture as if they were talking about “a different race of civilization”. The most criticized are “professors of various sciences,” especially psychologists and sociologists, for “their inept attempts to pigeonhole hip hop in some ridiculous conventions, as if for the good of the nation they wanted to explain to the people how a hip-hopper looks and behaves”.<sup>83</sup>

The mainstreaming of hip hop involved establishing emblematic characteristics, allowing for immediate identification of the genre. In *Mówią Bloki*, Rahim from Paktofonika illustrated this tendency to generalization in the mass media as follows:

Where would you have put a rapper: on the cover page of a paper, on the last page, or in some crime section? A rapper would have been a gangsta rapper, wouldn't

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Tą jedną, do której naprawdę pasujecie/ Niech będzie dla was najważniejsza na świecie (...)/ A wy fałszywe dziwki idźcie lepiej w inną stronę/ Jestem dziś bardzo zajęty, gdzieś zabieram swoją żonę.”

All quotes from the song “Dobre dziewczyny” [Good Girls] by Firma.

<sup>81</sup> Wodzu, “Popularyzacja kultury hip-hop” [Popularization of Hip-Hop Culture], *Metropolia*, 29 August 2004, [http://metropolia.bpweb.net/i/artykuly/27,Popularyzacja\\_kultury\\_hip-hop.html](http://metropolia.bpweb.net/i/artykuly/27,Popularyzacja_kultury_hip-hop.html). Accessed 16 October 2012.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

he? Similarly, what would the background have been: a wall, or a wall with graffiti, or maybe a brick wall with graffiti? – A brick wall with graffiti. It was a template used in newspapers. I can remember even the first picture of Wzgórze,<sup>84</sup> which was actually on the cover page of some local newspaper from Kielce, but that was it: three boys in front of a brick wall with a sign ‘breakdance,’ one of them in a baseball cap, another one in a baseball cap put backward, and one in a hooded sweatshirt. It was a certain stereotype.

Moreover, although some outstanding hip hop artists were ready to take advantage of professional producers in order to enhance their artistic output, longing for the professional support of personal image consultants, music video directors and managers, they considered construction of Polish hip hop as a “hardcore,” socially engaged genre of a youth subculture from large industrial cities as artificial and having a detrimental effect on their creativity. “One can’t talk all the time about how bad things are, because everybody knows how it is. You can say that five times, and that’s it,” said Fokus and Rahim from Paktofonika.<sup>85</sup> Tede complained that not everybody recognized that the power of hip hop lay in its inner diversity: “if this is hip-hop, we go with street style because it dominates now. Actually, no, we shouldn’t. There is space for street style, for the reflexive style of Fisz, for the bounce style of Gibon, and for Gramatik. There is space for all of that. You know, all together, they should complement each other.”

Similar opinion was voiced by Eldo (Leszek Kazimierczak):

You know, the first hip hop pieces were not about how hard it is on the street. They were about a friend having a TV set, on which he watches the Knicks playing basketball, and bragging about owning transcontinental airlines, which he surely didn’t have. For me, it [hip-hop] is a play, and for Polish listeners I don’t know what. For me, in Poland there is some punk-hop and not hip-hop, because everybody fights with the system, tries to impose some hate of the police, who knows why, and wants to pass some terribly wise message. While in fact, you know, when a fifteen-year-old tries to teach me about some truths he knows nothing about, I can do nothing but smile.

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<sup>84</sup> Wzgórze Ya-Pa 3 - a group from Kielce which published the first hip-hop album in Poland with a record company

<sup>85</sup> This statement and rappers’ opinions that follows come from the MTV program *Mówią Bloki, Człowieku* [Blocks of Flats Are Speaking, Man] 2 (2001), which was an overview of the Polish hip-hop music scene by Joanna Rechnio and featured its most prominent artists (from such groups as WWO, Grammatik, Molesta Ewenement, Warszawski Deszcz, Kaliber 44, Paktofonika, DJ 600V, and RHX).

The spectrum of producers and interpreters, which significantly widened in the process of incorporating hip hop into mainstream culture, involved a shift in agency and authority. Initially, Polish hip-hop's discourse was dominated by participants from within hip hop circles. Among producers there were practitioners of rap music, graffiti, and break-dancing, as well as skaters and journalists such as Bogna Świątkowska (called the Godmother of Polish hip-hop) and Druh Sławek (Sławomir Jabrzemski), who presented hip hop classics as well as new productions, albeit to a very limited audience of local radio stations. Their productions were addressed to a circle of people with similar aesthetic preferences and interests, who provided immediate feedback. Increased interest in hip hop culture ignited productions intended as quick introductory courses in hip hop for the uninitiated. Such productions were blamed for misrepresenting hip hop culture by presenting its simplified, deficient, and distorted portrait, which contributed to misconceptions and stereotypes about its practitioners.

The documentary *Blokersi* (2001) by Sylwester Latkowski was one of the most significant productions of this kind. Its director did not belong to hip hop circles. One of the reviewers called him an interpreter who knew both languages: the language of hip-hoppers and “our language”.<sup>86</sup> Although the documentary had rave reviews,<sup>87</sup> it sparked controversies, not only in hip hop circles, accused of presenting a one-sided, and thus distorted, picture of hip hop as the music created by the “poor kids from the street” and associating “real hip-hop” with street hip-hop. Even Peja (Ryszard Andrzejewski), one of the film's main protagonists, has observed that the voice was given very selectively:

If in a film about hip hop there are only traces of graffiti, and graffiti is presented more like an act of demolition than an art, there are [only] traces of breakdance from

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<sup>86</sup> Robert Leszczyński, “Blokersi”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19 October 2001.

<sup>87</sup> Such as Marek Mikos, “Krzyk z blokowisk” [Cry from Blokowskoes], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2 October 2001, 17. A list of reviews can be found at FilmPolski, <http://filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php/rec/49730>. Accessed 12 January 2013. Selected reviews and other articles on the documentary can also be found at Sylwester Latkowski's website: [www.latkowski.com/projekty/92/blokersi](http://www.latkowski.com/projekty/92/blokersi). Accessed 12 January 2013.

Konin,<sup>88</sup> [there is] nothing from recording studios, no talks with recognized music producers (...), and half of the most important MCs are absent, it can hardly be claimed that the film is about hip-hop.<sup>89</sup>

Latkowski denies allegations that his documentary is one sided (although he admits that it shows only a partial truth) and that his marveling at the hip hop subculture obscures socially undesired hip-hoppers' behaviors such as "isolation from the 'enemies' and a kind of xenophobia".<sup>90</sup> Claiming that he tried to make an honest film which shows bright as well as dark sides of hip hop culture, the director, at the same time, admits that he did not allow any voices of people who are critical about hip hop: "These people (...) have mass media at their disposal and deny hip-hoppers access to them. So, I decided to give voice exclusively to the people associated with hip-hop."<sup>91</sup>

The most widely resonating debate was that between Sylwester Latkowski and Mirosław Pęczak,<sup>92</sup> The sociologist pointed out that although Latkowski claims that he showed the truth about Polish hip-hop, in fact he made a film with a thesis.

His thesis is surprisingly simple: the youth, even if it seems bad and aggressive, is actually good. Only its social surrounding and background are bad. (...) In the film, hip-hoppers tell stories about gloomy street life and their difficult childhood. They say they would have gone completely bad if they had not rhymed.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> A town hosting the national championships in breakdance.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted after Buda (2013), 151.

<sup>90</sup> Wojciech Wysocki. An Interview with Sylwester Latkowski. *Nuta.pl*, 3 October 2001. Available at Sylwester Latkowski's website: <http://www.latkowski.com/projekty/92/blokiersi>. Accessed 15 January 2012.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Mirosław Pęczak is one of the most prominent Polish sociologists, whose article "Rebel's Costume" [Kostium buntownika] (*Polityka*, 10 March 2001, 48-49) had been ridiculed in the film *Blokiersi* by the group Gramatik as a nonsense written by someone "w'ho had never sat on a bench". As a result, Pęczak was nicknamed MA Blokiersi. See Grzegorz Brzozowicz, "Magister Blokiersi," *Machina* 12 (2001). Reprinted in e-zine *Hip-Hop.pl* No.14, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Mirosław Pęczak, "Hip-hop, jestem dobry chłop", *Polityka*, 43, 27 October 2001, 55-56. Indeed, in the documentary *Blokiersi* hip-hop is presented as an alternative to hooliganism and drinking, and a way of self-esteem building. According to Eldo, a rapper involved also in graffiti, it is better when some guys go

Moreover,

Latkowski seems not to notice that some time ago hip hop emerged out of garages: the majors are interested in recording it; it is even promoted by the public television; and journalists supporting hip hop (including the author), have far outnumbered its opponents.<sup>94</sup>

As Pęczak noticed, the documentary was partly filmed at a hip hop concert, which took place within the largest Polish music festival in Opole and was later re-transmitted by TVP2 (the Polish public television). Hence it is no longer an underground phenomenon but an acknowledged part of mainstream culture. The sociologist also pointed out that he had never mentioned hip hop in his article (while he was talking about “pathological subcultures” such as *blokersi* or *dresiarze*), and that Latkowski himself (by the title of his documentary) equates hip-hoppers with *blokersi*, only amplifying stereotypes and “*blokowisko* mythology”, even if unwittingly.

The documentary *Blokersi* contributed to associating hip hop with gangsta rap and street culture. It featured Peja (Ryszard Andrzejewski), making him an exemplary guttersnipe of Polish hip hop (who, at the age of 12, had to cope with his mother’s death, then with his father’s alcoholism, and, in 1996, with his death from cancer). Although Peja was already well-known in hip hop circles for his gangsta rap, the film boosted his popularity among a wider audience, making him almost an iconic figure of Polish rap, and pushing his record *Na legalu?* (T1, 2001). He continued to explore “street themes” after his commercial success, recording songs such as

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into the night with paint spray rather than with a knife or a bottle of cheap wine. Jarosław Staniek, a choreographer and a former Polish champion in breakdance notes:

It allows you to find a moment in your life when you were really the best. A boy knows (...) that on a particular day he was really the best in something. And it gives him such an energy and power. (...) It is a little bit like sport because you do win the first place. But it’s also unlike sport because not only the first three places count. He can pass unrecognized and not qualify to the final, but everybody will remember him performing a particular figure, let’s say as the first one. And he will be remembered for it. He is aware of that. And he makes a history. You were sitting on a bench and didn’t know what to do, and then you got the message: if you really want something and you work hard, you know you can stand out of the crowd and be somebody, even if for a moment.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

“Reprezentuję biedę” [I Represent Poverty] (*Najlepszą obroną jest atak* [Attack Is the Best Defense], 2005) and “Szacunek Ludzi Ulicy” [Street people respect] (*Szacunek ludzi ulicy*, 2006).

Attributing the criticism of such an approach to envy of its authors, he wrote, in “I represent poverty”:

Most of my life wasn't an Eden	Większość mego życia to nie był rajski eden
So, son of a bitch, I'll repeat - I represent poverty!	Więc powtórzę skurwysynu - reprezentuję biedę!
7 thin years by 3? 21!	7 lat chudych razy 3? 21!
Do you hear, son of a bitch? I represent poverty!	Słyszysz skurwysynu? Reprezentuję biedę!
I'm 28. How many fat [years]? Maybe 7!	Mam 28 lat ile tłustych? Może z 7!
In spite of this, motherfucker, I still represent poverty!	Mimo to skurwysynu wciąż reprezentuję biedę!
I'm not a hypocrite, I know very well where my roots [are]	Nie jestem hipokrytą, dobrze wiem gdzie me korzenie
Peja comes from poverty, so he represents poverty!	Z biedy Peja się wywodzi, więc reprezentuję biedę!
I come from [poverty]; [it's] true, I got out of it	Stamtąd się wywodzę; prawda, że się z niej wyrwałem
But the most important is that I've never forgotten	Ale najważniejsze to, że nigdy nie zapomniałem
But the most important is that I've never sold my skin	Ale najważniejsze to, że swej skóry nie sprzedałem
But the most important is that I've kept my identity	Ale najważniejsze to, że tożsamość zachowałem
But the most important is that I haven't wasted my time!	Ale najważniejsze to, czasu nie zmarnowałem!
I haven't broken my contacts and I'm still associated with my friends.	Kontaktów nie zerwałem i nie wstydzę się znajomych

Many fans, however, have questioned the authenticity of productions in which rappers, while allegedly representing poverty, wear clothes worth a few thousand PLN (1 USD equaling

ca. 3 PLN) in their music videos, and make jokes about them such as: “-What does Peja do in a Porsche? – He represents poverty.”

Nevertheless, establishing a link between poverty and hip hop was so important for building its general image in mainstream culture that an article about the genre in the Polish version of *Newsweek* was entitled “As Much Poverty as Much Rap” (2002).<sup>95</sup> While Latkowski’s documentary, *Blokersi*, can be considered guilty of manipulating the picture of Polish hip hop by focusing entirely on street hip hop and omitting its other faces, the latest film portrayal of Polish hip hop (*Jesteś Bogiem*) is accused of manipulating the facts, including the alleged poverty of Magik (Piotr Łuszcz). At the time of Paktofonika’s story, Magik was already a successful MC, known for his productions with the group Kaliber 44, members of which point out that his poverty presented in the movie is highly exaggerated.<sup>96</sup> However, the producers decided to paint a picture of a “poor” brilliant boy from *blokowisko* confronted by merciless show business.<sup>97</sup>

In fact the background and education of Polish hip-hoppers was as diversified as were people populating *blokowisko*, and associating them with the street is an overstatement at best. For example, Sokół (Wojciech Sosnowski), a great-grandson of Stanisław Wyspiański (a famous playwright, painter, and poet, the author of *The Wedding*, the drama discussed in the first chapter), comes from an affluent, though broken family; Tede (Jacek Maciej Graniecki) is a son of Maciej Graniecki, a recognized lawyer, holding important offices in the Civil Service (both in the PRL and after 1989); while Fisz (Bartosz Waglewski) and Emade (Piotr Waglewski) are sons

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<sup>95</sup> Malcolm Beith and Katy M. Spencer, “Ile biedy tyle rapu” [As Much Poverty, as Much Rap], *Newsweek Polska*, nr 51/52 (2002), 186-190.

<sup>96</sup> Mariusz Wiatrak, “AbradAb o ‘Jesteś Bogiem’: Ważny film, ale rozmija się z prawdą” [An Important Movie but Detached from the Truth]. AbradAb (Marcin Marten) in an Interview with Mariusz Wiatrak. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 September 2012.

<sup>97</sup> The article “Teraz go zarymuję” by Lida Ostałowska (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 December 2001) which inspired the scriptwriter of the movie *Jesteś Bogiem*, Maciej Pisuk, even suggests that the class difference might be the reason for Magik’s (who came from a working class family) split with Kaliber 44 (whose co-creators, the Marten brothers, Joka and AbradAb, were from a “good family”) and, according to the article, made fun of Magik, envious of his rhyming skills.



of a recognized musician, Wojciech Waglewski. Among the most successful rappers, many are college graduates. For example, Łona (Adam Zieliński), L.U.C. (Łukasz Rostkowski), and Pih (Adam Piechociński) graduated in law, Tede in journalism, Eldo in philosophy, Peerzet (Przemysław Zakościelny) in computer science, Diox (Paweł Skoczylas) in graphic design, Rahim (Sebastian Salbert) in marketing and management, and O.S.T.R. (Adam Ostrowski) even graduated in violin from the Academy of Music in Łódź (Akademia Muzyczna im. Grażyny i Kiejstuta Bacewiczów w Łodzi).

Bernasiewicz has observed that Polish youth, regardless of its social background, education, and sensitivity, sees Poland in the same way, has similar ideals, expresses similar frustrations and hopes as well as represents mostly material aspirations.<sup>98</sup> Interestingly, a general situation of young Poles, conditioned by the post-socialist transformation – as seen by the better-off, well-educated part of Polish youth (whose identity was analyzed by Tomasz Piróg<sup>99</sup>) – is analogous to the one expressed in hip hop lyrics. A similar distaste for the public sphere (especially politics) accompanies the perception of contemporary Poland as a country which lacks daily order and transparent rules, is full of violence, aggression, and corruption, and is populated by “*dresiarze*”. Likewise, the youth complains about a lack of aesthetic appeal in public places, ugly architecture, dirt, or inadequate infrastructure. Nevertheless, young people do not want to leave Poland, unless for a short period of time, and believe they are Poland’s hope for a better future. They want to build a new work ethic and new aesthetic surroundings, a characteristic that Bernasiewicz finds a novelty in understanding patriotism in Poland.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Bernasiewicz, op. cit., 49.

<sup>99</sup> Tomasz Piróg, *Młodzież w Polsce. Analiza przekazów młodzieżowych obecnych w polskiej kulturze na przykładzie debaty młodych w "Gazecie Wyborczej" (styczeń-marzec 2004)* (Kraków: Impuls, 2006), 47

<sup>100</sup> Bernasiewicz, op. cit., 48.

## Polish Hip Hop as a Patriotic Genre

It may be surprising to observe that Polish hip hop is at the same time liberal and patriotic. Although a patriotic tendency has been present from the beginning of the genre, in recent years, especially since 2009, it has only intensified. Judging by commentaries under such songs on YouTube, their reception is very positive. This may be considered part of a wider bottom-up movement among young Poles, who, in search for their identity, values, and authorities, look for inspiration to Polish history and cultural traditions.

References to established Polish culture, both popular and classical, which are present in mainstream as well as in underground hip hop, call for a reconsideration of the widely accepted view that samples in hip hop are chosen solely for their sonic qualities.

A classic of Polish hip hop, the piece “Ja mam to co ty” [I Have What You Have] (*Trzy*, RRX 1998), by Wzgórze Ya-Pa-3 from Kielce (considered pioneers of the genre) and Warszawski Deszcz from Warsaw, has as its leitmotif an excerpt from “Sen o Warszawie” [A Dream about Warsaw] (1966), a great hit by Czesław Niemen (with lyrics by Marek Gaszyński).<sup>101</sup> The musical layer of the song is based on an instrumental interlude from Niemen’s hit, with its characteristic string section exploring the opening theme. Moreover, the refrain quotes twice the opening of Niemen’s song:

*Mam tak samo jak ty* [Just like you I have]  
*miasto moje, a w nim* [my city and there],

completing it with the rappers’s text: “*swoich ludzi*” [my people] (the first time) and “*swoje sprawy*” [my business] (the second time). The song allows for three layers of identity: local identity with one’s own city, universal urban identity, and national/ Polish identity (emphasized

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<sup>101</sup> Czesław Niemen (real name Czesław Juliusz Wydrzycki, 1939-2004) was one of the most famous and original Polish singer-songwriters, known for an unusually wide voice range and equally rich tone. He was also a composer and a multi-instrumentalist, associated with such genres as rock ‘n’ roll, progressive rock, avant-garde, jazz-rock, and electronic music.

by referring to a song which is well established in Polish popular culture and recognized by people of many generations and various background).

A compelling example is provided by the song “*Portret*” (“Portrait”) from the *nielegal Pandemonium* by Klimat. Its very powerful story is a tribute to a girl from a good family who becomes pregnant in high school and decides not to have an abortion.<sup>102</sup> Abandoned by her boyfriend, and not supported at home, she literally lands on the street. However, she does not give up and withstands all hardships. She finally finds a man who loves and respects her, but she dies in a car accident soon after they are married.

The piece starts with a quotation from Chopin’s *Funeral March* (from the Sonata No. 2 Op. 35) that becomes the basis for the beat of the entire piece. Chopin’s work, recognized immediately by Polish people regardless of their age and social status, effectively signals a tragic and heroic theme and determines the solemn character of the song. As a refrain the song uses a sample from “*Could It Be Magic*” by Take That.

Whereas the music of Chopin, Poland’s national composer, is affiliated in Poland with symbols of Polishness, heroism and struggle and Polish hip hop amplifies this association, classical music in general gained a new signification in the post-socialist world. In the piece “*List Otworthy*” [An Open Letter] (1997) by the group Nagły Atak Spawacza [Welder’s Sudden Attack], Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana* is used as background to an interview with a representative of the intelligentsia who compares Polish hip hop to the products of people who are mentally ill or under the influence of drugs.<sup>103</sup> The interviewee protests against referring to hip hop as if it were an artistic production and advocates ignoring it in the media. Here, classical music, representing high culture (but not specifically Polish culture), signifies the new elite and

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<sup>102</sup> Audio example with the song *Portret* (“Portrait”) is accessible at:  
<http://www.music.ucsb.edu/projects/musicandpolitics/m/pasternak-m.html>

<sup>103</sup> Audio example with the song *List otworthy* [An Open Letter] is accessible at: at:  
<http://www.music.ucsb.edu/projects/musicandpolitics/m/pasternak-m.html>.

contributes to building the binary opposition between the world of the elite—personified by the eloquent intellectual speaking polished language—and the world and language of the “new others,” symbolized by harsh hip hop beats and full of swear words, rapping about the hard reality in which they have to live.

It is significant that hip hop artists in Poland identify themselves not only with their local space but also with their country, negotiating a wide national space within the global genre. *The Gallery of Polish Kings* was not a unique phenomenon, but rather a sign that the genre can benefit from utilizing the potential offered by Polish history and culture. The video clip *Patriota* [A Patriot] by Zipera (2004) well characterizes this tendency in Polish hip hop from the years 2002–2005. Juxtaposing pictures from Polish history that became symbols of the heroic struggle for national independence with pictures of contemporary Poland, it asks the question “what does it mean nowadays to be a Polish patriot?”<sup>104</sup> It presents Polish hip hop as a unifying force that tells the cleansing truth, calling us to look into the future (which is now in our hands) while simultaneously remembering the painful past:

I think in Polish, precisely, because what is Polish is good	Myśle po polsku ściśle bo co polskie to dobre
The Polish golden autumn will bring me happiness, ah	złota polska jesień szczęście mi przyniesie ach
golden beautiful September, I love this country, I love for no reason,	złoty piękny wrzesień, kocham ten kraj kocham bez przyczyny
that carries me on its shoulders, bears pain and dirty deeds	który na barkach swych nosi znosi ból i brudne czyny
where corruption and thieves' talk do not make news	gdzie korupcja i blat to nie nowiny
because we adore our own and despise the foreign	gdyż swoje ubóstwiamy a obcym gardzimy

<sup>104</sup> The vast majority of the material was shot in The Warsaw Rising Museum. For further information about the uprising see The Warsaw Rising Museum, <http://www.1944.pl/>.

a country in the shape of a heart, where we always are	kraj w kształcie serca tu zawsze tkwimy
this piece is for Poles, for a Polish family	ten kawałek dla Polaków dla Polskiej rodziny
here is a Patriot, his statue is as precious as gold	to Patriota jego posąg na wagę złota
here is a Patriot – an anecdote	to Patriota – anegdota
<i>Refrain</i>	
<i>Not one not once tried to destroy our country</i>	<i>Nie jeden nie raz nasz kraj próbował zniszczyć</i>
<i>not once we rose from ashes</i>	<i>nie jeden raz powstaliśmy ze zgliszczy</i>
<i>now our time has come, the crown is shining</i>	<i>teraz nasz czas nadszedł korona błyszczy</i>
<i>and I am looking at it with pride so wipe your eyes – this is important</i>	<i>a ja z dumą na nią patrzę więc wytrzyj łzy - to ważne</i>
Rap, Polish rap will bring falsehood to its knees, will unify us	Rap polski rap rzuci na kolana fałsz prowadzi nas do jedności
to have the whole Polish nation rise and look into the future to change	by cały naród polski powstał w całości spojrzał w przyszłość by zmienić
this whole grey reality, now everything is in our hands	tą całą szarą rzeczywistość teraz wszystko w naszych rękach
shared pain, shared suffering, one should beautify one's life	wspólny ból wspólna męka trzeba życie se upiększać
one should not become down-hearted in spite of the cruel fate	nie ma co się pogłębiać mimo to że nasz los był okrutny
of the sad voice of our history, this is POLAND – my country	głos historii smutny to jest POLSKA - moja ojczyzna!

This explicit declaration of love for country had a very positive reception in Poland and had many followers.

Even in productions less openly patriotic than *Patriota* or “*Kochana Polsko*” [Beloved Poland] by O.S.T.R., artists manifest their sense of belonging to the nation by rapping in Polish, by frequent allusions to Polish history or culture, by wearing clothing in the white and red colors of the national flag, and by the self-identification claimed in narratives such as “I, a Pole” as opposed to “them,” who are usually “government pigs,” or elites. “I represent myself, the family, a local space, respect, pride, faith, and good intentions” declares a rapper in the longest Polish hip hop video, “*Reprezentuję siebie*” [I represent myself] featuring the group Bez cenzury [Uncensored] with the most prominent Warsaw rappers as its guests.

No other genre of contemporary popular music in Poland demonstrates such a strong patriotic tendency, often combined with severe criticism of the political and economic establishment, because of which “Poles are poor and the Polish family oppressed,” in the words of the WuHae group’s song “*Po co ja się męczę*” [For what do I take pains]. Frustration with the real world is usually accompanied by exhortations to take responsibility for one’s life despite the situation. Hip hop also reflects the importance of family values in Poland, which are typically put before personal fulfillment and professional success.

At first sight such strong national self-identification in Polish hip hop may seem surprising. The collapse of the Soviet-imposed communist regime was interpreted as a trigger for full sovereignty, manifested in the change of official state symbols. National/ patriotic issues seemed to be no longer relevant and disappeared from the mainstream media and public discourse at the beginning of the 1990s. Moreover, as Poland, after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, aspired to play an active role within the sphere of Western civilization and become a member of the European Union (in May 2004), the nationalist topic was de-emphasized in official discourses. Against the strong cosmopolitan tendency, hip hop emphasized domestic values and brought Polishness back to public attention.

However, when we look at Polish hip hop as an anti-elitist genre, its nationalist inclination becomes fully understandable. Bart Reszuta sees Polish hip hop as a new cultural form

that “emerged to challenge whatever bad came to be associated with liberalism, and to awaken morally wrong enthusiasts and beneficiaries of the transformation.”<sup>105</sup> Standing in opposition to the pro-European and pro-market intelligentsia, hip hop gave voice to various fears and anxieties that accompanied regime transition and Poland’s entry into the EU. It adapted values and symbols that were deeply rooted in Polish tradition but were questioned by the new, liberal elites as burdens rather than assets in the ongoing transformations.

Neither the functioning of nationalism as a form of counter-culture nor the linking of social and moral justice with the national agenda was unique to hip hop in Poland. The nationalistic/ patriotic attitude has been perceived as a manifestation of protest and resistance from the time of the Partitions of the country in the last decade of the eighteenth century until the Solidarity movement of the 1990s. The idea of nationalism as a solution to problems generated by capitalism can already be observed in the 1920s and the 1930s (when sovereign Poland first encountered capitalism). According to Joanna Kurczewska’s studies on national concepts in Polish sociology, national principles and national solidarity were, at that time, often seen as factors that could reduce the moral and social consequences of industrialization in general and the costs of the free-market economy in particular. Identification with a national community functioned to restrict individualism, injustice in the distribution of goods, and the feeling of hierarchical dependency, as well as regional, class, and more particular local interests.<sup>106</sup>

When, as the result of parliamentary elections in 2005 (a year after the admission of Poland to the European community), power was transferred to right-wing populist and anti-European parties, political hip hop suddenly lost its credibility as a counter-culture and “was

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<sup>105</sup> Reszuta, “The Eclipse,” 3.

<sup>106</sup> Joanna Kurczewska, “Naród w Socjologii Polskiej” [Nation in Polish Sociology] in *Dusza społeczeństwa. Naród w polskiej myśli socjologicznej* [The Soul of a Society. Nation in Polish Sociological Reflection] (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2002), 22-23.

caught chanting pro-government songs.”<sup>107</sup> As a result, politically involved rap disappeared rather suddenly. Moreover, soon thereafter hip hop’s presence in mainstream culture significantly declined. The political context had changed again. Social fears and concerns, which accompanied Poland’s access to the European Union, gave way to the optimism generated by economic growth and declining unemployment, related to a strong wave of economic emigration to the countries which opened their job markets to the new members of the EU.

The aftermath of the parliamentary elections in 2005 exposed a very deep division in perceptions of Poland, regarding both its past and present situation and its desirable future. The anticipated coalition of two parties of the center-right – the liberal-conservative Civic Platform (PO) and the conservative Law and Justice (PiS), called POPiS has not happened.<sup>108</sup> The surprising victory of Law and Justice (155 seats out of 460 in the Sejm, the lower chamber of the parliament; 49 seats out of 100 in the Senate), enhanced a few months later by the presidential election win by Lech Kaczyński (the twin brother of Jarosław Kaczyński, Law and Justice’s leader), with the Civic Platform taking second place (133 seats out of 460 in the Sejm; 34 seats out of 100 in Senate) changed the power balance. The attempted negotiations between the two parties to create a coalition agreement fell through, situating them as bitter opponents. It resulted in a minority government, which depended on the support of the radical Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (Samoobrona, which took 56 seats in the Sejm) and the deeply conservative League of Polish Families (LPR, which took 34 seats in the Sejm) and an uneasy situation for numerous supporters of the PiS/ PO coalition. In 2007, the Civic Platform took power, taking the Polish Peasants’ Party (PSL) as its governing coalition partner.

The 2005 election campaign, in which both center-right parties competed mostly against each other rather than parties on the left, accentuated differences and created an antagonistic

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<sup>107</sup> Reszuta, “Eclipse,” 19.

<sup>108</sup> a term, coined by the media during Polish local elections campaign in 2002, refers to the word “popis”, which in Polish means a “show” or “display”.



relationship between them. Interestingly, such a divided Poland was pictured already in the music video for “*Kochana Polsko*” [Beloved Poland] by O.S.T.R., which was a big hit in 2002/03. The video’s screen is divided vertically into two parts in the colors of the national flag (the white on the left and the red on the right), which show two different stories. The white part of the screen shows (in black-and white) a story of a politician or a well-off businessman, who is successful, yet unhappy and lonely, especially when he sees his boy occupied with drawing a Polish flag rather than playing with a toy he bought him. The red one shows a peasant in his daily routine, who alone, yet happily, lives close to nature and prays in front of the icon of Our Lady.

The viewer can only see one story at a time, depending on which one he or she chooses to focus on. The binary opposition here goes between Western/ European and Polish; the prosperous and the impoverished; the modern and the backward; the city-based and the country-based; the sinful, who betray the national tradition for money and the faithful who keep the tradition and national heritage. The rapper’s face, appearing in the middle, on both screens, seems to suggest that he can embrace the full picture but, at the same time, does not fully belong to any part of it. Although the rapper dislikes Poland’s current situation, the implications of the social stratification of Polish society, the social injustice, and double standards and hypocrisy of politicians, he concludes his song: “This is my place because I love this place”.

The crisis in the European Union coincided with hip hop’s comeback in Poland. As Andrzej Buda has observed, after 2009, there was a shift in emphasis from technical skills and production mastery towards the message: “Rappers are excellent observers and they bet on patriotism”.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, young artists chose rapping about Poland for their debuts (for example Z.B.U.K.U., a twenty-year old from Prudnik caused a stir with his first single “Witam Cię w Polsce” [I Welcome You to Poland], published by Step Records, 2012). Veterans of commercial

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<sup>109</sup> “Historia kultury Hip-Hop w Polsce 1977-2013” [History of Hip-Hop Culture in Poland 1977-2013]. An interview with Andrzej Buda for Hip-Hop.pl. 26 January 2013. <http://www.hip-hop.pl/teksty/projector.php?id=1358853625>. Accessed on 1 March 2013.

hip hop surprised their audiences with productions such as “Dokąd idziesz Polsko” [Where are you going, Poland?] (*Fuck Tede/Glam Rap*, Wielkie Joł, 2010), The strength of the patriotic tendency in Polish hip-hop can be illustrated by various compilations on YouTube entitled “Patriotic Rap” or “Patriotic Hip Hop”, some of which provide up to three hours of music. They attract hundreds of thousands of viewers, who leave very enthusiastic commentaries.

Poland, as pictured in hip hop songs, is not a perfect place to live; however, hip-hoppers love her, are ready to give their life for her, and are proud to be Polish. Some of the songs are very personal, such as “Nie pytaj o nią” [Don’t Ask about Her] by Eldo (2008), (with references to the rock song “Nie pytaj o Polskę” [Don’t Ask about Poland] by Obywatel G.C. (1988)), which treats Poland like a dear woman, without, however, mentioning her name. Poland-woman sometimes (for example in the song “Mam biało-czerwone serce” [I Have a White-and-Red Heart] by 4p (Przemysław Majewski), 2007) can be identified as mother, Virgin Mary-like, who had to mourn the death of her son (or children), and who has scars (as does the most holy Polish icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa). Oftentimes the rhetoric of these songs, with Poland as an innocent victim, brings to mind Polish Messianism.

All the productions mentioned above refer to Polish tradition but emphasize the present. They call for due respect and honor to those who gave their lives for Poland’s freedom and sovereignty. Their sacrifice, however, is intended to inspire the self-development of contemporary young Poles, on whose hard work the country’s prosperity and bright future depends. In the song “Młody Polak” [A Young Pole] (2010), *Pokój z Widokiem na Wojnę* reminds young Poles:

So many years our ancestors fought for the freedom of Poland,  
so that we would not be slaves of other nations. (...)  
The world is at war, a war for influence; over interests  
If we do not become the army of our own country in this economic war  
who will take care of the future of Poland?<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> “Tyle lat nasi przodkowie walczyli o wolność Polski/ Byśmy nie byli niewolnikami innych narodów (...)/

Polish hip hop emphasizes bonds between the Poles living in Poland and abroad. Due to recent mobility and emigration of young Poles, everybody has some friends living abroad. Not surprisingly, rappers send them their greetings (see for example “A Young Pole”). Moreover, Polish rappers who have left the country express similar sentiments as their peers in Poland. The most famous example of such productions is the song “Pamiętaj (synu mój)” [Remember (my son)] (2007) by Funky Polak (a rapper born in 1975 in Kielce, Poland, who since 1995 lives in the USA). Its lyrical ego talks to his son about his beginnings in Chicago and calls him in the refrain:

Do not forget where I came from  
Do not forget where I was born  
Because there is strength in memory  
So, remember, my son  
About the white and red colors  
About the eagle and the crown.<sup>111</sup>

The melody of the refrain is taken from a popular scout song, “Płonie ognisko (i szumią knieje)”. Funky Polak’s song (coming from the album *Emigrologia*, 2007) was popularized by Tomasz Adamek, an accomplished professional heavyweight Polish-American boxer, who enters the ring to it and welcomes visitors to his official website with it.<sup>112</sup> It is also played before the games of the Polish national handball team.

In the last few years, besides this present-oriented trend, in which historical memory and tradition are seen as an inspiration and strength in the contemporary struggle for a better future, a new trend is growing in popularity which can be called historical or historiographical and is inspired by specific historical figures or events. Rappers, who oftentimes learned history through

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Świat jest w stanie wojny, trwa wojna o wpływy, o interesy/ Jeżeli my nie staniemy się armią własnego kraju/ W tej ekonomicznej wojnie to kto zadba o przyszłość Polski?”

<sup>111</sup> “Nie zapomnij, skąd tutaj przybyłem/ nie zapomnij, gdzie się urodziłem/ bo w pamięci jest siła zaklęta/ więc pamiętaj synu mój/ O kolorach białym i czerwonym/ o symbolach orła i korony.”

<sup>112</sup> Tomasz Adamek official website: <http://www.tomaszadamek.eu/en/>. Accessed 4 March 2013.

oral transmission from their grandparents, study sources and take upon themselves an educational mission because “communism fell but the system [is] still the same”<sup>113</sup> and “today’s political elites in the media, [which are] ostensibly Polish, continue their efforts in order to falsify history”.<sup>114</sup> They consider it outrageous that almost a quarter of a century after the fall of communism, crimes of the former regime have not been adjudicated and beneficiaries of them (or their children) still hold lucrative posts, while real heroes have not been given honors they deserve. Interestingly, the number of young people interested in history has increased while the number of history lessons in school curricula has decreased.

Such productions focus mostly on history from the Second World War on, witnesses of which are still alive, but crimes have not been punished or heroes acknowledged. For example, “Katyń” (2010) by Hagen & Kylo commemorates the 1940 Katyn massacre of Polish officers, ca. 22,000 prisoners of war executed by the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), prompted by Lavrienty Beria and approved by Stalin. “Czerwiec’56” [June 1956] (2006) by Mezo and Owai is devoted to “Poznań 1956,” or “Poznań June,” the first of the massive protests of the Polish people against the communist dictatorial government of the People’s Republic of Poland, in which tanks and soldiers were sent against demonstrating workers, killing tens of people, including a 13-year-old boy, Roman Strzałkowski.

Among other historical events explored by rappers are moments of victory and glory that Poles can be proud of. For example the Wielkopolska Uprising (Polish: *powstanie wielkopolskie*, German: *Großpolnischer Aufstand*) of 1918-1919, one of three victorious military uprisings in the history of Poland, inspired the song “Poznańczyk” (2008) by Peja.

The most frequently explored topic is the Warsaw Rising (1 August - 2 October 1944), commemorated in such productions as “63 dni chwały” [63 Days of Glory] (2009) by HEMP

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<sup>113</sup> “Komuna padła lecz układy wciąż te same”, song “Zapomniani bohaterowie” [Forgotten Heroes] by Hemp Gru (*Lojalność*, Dill Records 2011).

<sup>114</sup> Song “Rotmistrz Witold Pilecki” by Tadek (*Niewygodna Prawda*, Radio Wnet 2012).

GRU (recipients of the European Border Breakers Awards (EBBA) for their album *Klucz* [Key], 2004). A very original and personal tribute, “Głośniej od bomb” [Louder than Bombs] (2009), was made by Pious (Karol Nowakowski), a rapper who lost his hearing and can hear only through implants, to the Deaf-and-Dumb Platoon, which fought in the rising. In the piece “Miasto Fenixa” [Fenix City] (2010), Projekt Kedyw incorporated archival recordings of the voice of Stefan Starzyński, President of Warsaw, known for his heroism during the Siege of Warsaw by the German Army in September 1939.

Rappers devote to Poland and Polish history not only specific pieces but also entire albums (such as *Królestwo Polskie* [Polish Kingdom] by Zjednoczony Ursynów). Unprecedented is the album *39/89. Zrozumieć Polskę* [1939/1989. To Understand Poland] by the rapper and producer L.U.C. (Łukasz Rostowski). This highly acclaimed audio drama presents Polish history from the outbreak of the Second World War on 1 September 1939 to the fall of communism in 1989. The history is told by archival recordings, which incorporate voices of historical figures, including Józef Beck,<sup>115</sup> Adolf Hitler, Stefan Starzyński, Ignacy Jan Paderewski, John Paul II, Lech Wałęsa, and communist party dignitaries. The musical background combines techniques characteristic of hip hop (such as scratching) with film music, jazz, electronic, and concrete music.

The album was premiered on 17 September 2009, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1939 Soviet invasion of Poland, which ended on 6 October 1939 with the division and annexing of the entire territory of the Second Polish Republic by Germany and the Soviet Union. On its cover, the Soviet red eagle hammers its claws into the back of the Polish white eagle, which is already occupied with a fight with the German black eagle and bleeding.

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<sup>115</sup> Józef Beck (1894 – 1944) was Polish foreign minister in the 1930s, at the time of the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany, which started the Second World War.



Figure 3.7. Cover of 39/89. *Zrozumieć Polskę* [1939/1989. To Understand Poland] by L.U.C (EMI Music Poland, 2009). Project by Adam Tunikowski (Juice It, Wrocław)

The Cracovian rapper Tadek (Tadeusz Polkowski), known for his earlier productions with the crew Firma (such as “Honor i Ojczyzna” [Honor and Homeland]), recently published his first solo album *Niewygodna prawda* [Inconvenient Truth] (Radio Wnet, 2011), devoted to “great and tragic events in Polish history,” and declared his ongoing interest in history:

“Oftentimes, I have the impression that most people do not see the current reality in a historical context, as if the history has stopped at some point and then has started anew.”<sup>116</sup> In the title song, he speaks about his intents and motivations:

Do you understand the message of this CD      Czy rozumiesz przekaz, który ta płyta niesie?

<sup>116</sup> Arkadiusz Meller, „Wywiad *konserwatyzm.pl* z Tadkiem z krakowskiej Firmy nt. patriotyzmu i polskiej historii [Tadek from Cracovian Firma in an Interview for *konserwatyzm.pl* about Patriotism and Polish History],” 13 July 2012, *Portal Myśli Konserwatywnej*, <http://www.konserwatyzm.pl/artukul/4822/wywiad-konserwatyzmpl-z-tadkiem-z-krakowskiej-firmy-nt-patri>. Accessed on 6 March 2013.

Tadek from Firma now in his latest solo project	Tadek z Firmy teraz solo w najnowszym projekcie,
Be willing to learn about the world, which surrounds you	miej chęć poznania świata, który Cie otacza,
Intrigues behind the scenes, the system, which corners us	za kulisowych intryg, jak system nas osacza,
Know those who did not give in, those who sacrificed themselves,	poznaj tych co się nie dali, tych co się poświęcali,
Gave lives for honor and fatherland	za honor i ojczyznę, życie oddawali,
Those who survived and stayed the same	tych co przetrwali i niezmienni pozostali,
Those who got through and those who died	tych co przeżyli i tych co skonali,
Truth, memory, and justice	prawda, pamięć i sprawiedliwość,
Without each other those values have to perish	bez siebie nawzajem te wartości muszą zginąć,
When those up there hear inconvenient words	a kiedy Ci na górze słyszą niewygodne słowa,
Immediately they try to label the author	zaraz ich autora próbują zaszufładować.
I'm not a Nazi, Bolshevik, or Trotskyist	Ja nie jestem nazistą, bolszewikiem czy trockistą,
[nor] any other communist, fascist, or anarchist	żadnym innym komunistą, faszystą czy anarchistą.
I am a young Pole, who believes in values	Jestem młodym Polakiem, który wierzy w wartości,
Does not insult the Church although does not visit it too often	nie pluje na kościół choć za często w nim nie gości.
The message of this CD is an inconvenient truth	A przekaz na tej płycie to prawda niewygodna,
For those scavengers who destroy this country from within.	dla tych szmaciarzy, co ten kraj niszczą od środka.

The first piece recorded, “Żołnierze wyklęci” [Cursed Soldiers] (2011), commemorates anticommunist underground resistance movements, active after the end of the Second World

War.<sup>117</sup> “Rotmistrz Witold Pilecki” is a tribute to an Auschwitz volunteer, whose report on the concentration camp enabled the Polish government-in-exile to convince the Allies that the Holocaust was taking place. Although he survived the war, he was imprisoned by the Stalinist secret police (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB), sentenced to death and executed in 1948 at the Warsaw Mokotów Prison.<sup>118</sup> “Inka” is a tribute to Danuta Siedzikówna (1928-1946), a medical orderly of the Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) who was arrested by the UB and tortured, but refused to give up any information about her contacts in the anti-communist underground or their meeting points. She was executed six days before her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday on 28 August 1946 in a Gdańsk prison.<sup>119</sup> “Generał Nil” is a tribute to general August Emil Fieldorf (1895-1953) a Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army (AK), imprisoned by the communist regime, tortured, sentenced to death for being a “fascist-Hitlerite criminal” and executed at the infamous Warsaw Mokotów Prison.<sup>120</sup>

There is a wide range of figures commemorated in hip-hop productions, not necessarily banned by the communist regime or oppressed by it. In “Zapomniani bohaterowie” [Forgotten

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<sup>117</sup> The term „cursed soldiers” (*żołnierze wyklęci*) refers to a variety of Polish resistance movements which, after the Second World War, continued their armed struggle against the Stalinist government of Poland well into 1950s, with the last known of them, Józef Frańczak, being killed as late as 1963. According to communist propaganda they were “fascists” and “bandits”. On 3 February 2011 the Polish parliament established March 1 as Narodowy Dzień Pamięci “Żołnierzy Wyklętych” [“Cursed Soldiers” National Day of Remembrance]. On “cursed soldiers” see, Jerzy Ślaski, *Żołnierze wyklęci* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 1996).

<sup>118</sup> Witold Pilecki (1901-1948) was a Polish army officer, who in 1940 volunteered to be imprisoned at Auschwitz in order to gather intelligence. He organized a resistance movement there, and escaped from the camp in 1943. He took part in the Warsaw Rising and remained loyal to the Polish government-in-exile based in London. Pilecki’s place of burial has never been found and until 1989 any information on his exploits and fate was suppressed by the Polish communist regime. On Witold Pilecki see Marco Patricelli, *Il volontario* [The Volunteer] (Roma: Laterza, 2010). On his report from Auschwitz in translation into English see Witold Pilecki, *The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery*, tr. Jarek Garlinski (Los Angeles: Aquila Polonica, 2012).

<sup>119</sup> On Danuta Siedzikówna „Inka” see Piotr Szubarczyk, *Danuta Siedzikówna “Inka”* (Gdynia: Biuro Edukacji Publicznej Gdańskiego Oddziału IPN, 2006). Pdf version available at <http://www.elknet.pl/~annatertel/inka/Inka-broszura.pdf>

<sup>120</sup> On August Emil Fieldorf “Nil” see Stanisław Marat and Jacek Snopkiewicz, *Zbrodnia. Sprawa generała Fieldorfa-Nila* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Alfa, 1989).



Heroes] (*Lojalność* [Loyalty], Dill Records 2011) by Hemp Gru, they range from the Hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski<sup>121</sup> (1547-1620) “a Polish soldier/ the only man who occupied Moscow/ No one remembers, no one will say” to Janusz Korczak<sup>122</sup> (1878 or 1879-1942) “Old Doctor” who “did not leave his children to the very end.” What they have in common is faithfulness, loyalty, selflessness, and steadfastness. As such, they are in opposition to the traitors, including Western countries, the allies of Poland, who did not deliver the promised help during the German invasion in 1939 and gave away Poland to Stalin in Yalta and Potsdam. In conclusion, Poland should learn its lesson from history and not trust the West too much.

In Polish hip hop, a growth of such anti-Western and pro-Slavic sentiments can be observed recently. On the one hand, warnings against the West – which watches its own, and not Polish interests – are present, and on the other hand, references to Poland’s Slavic heritage and an affiliation with other Slavic countries can be found. Unlike “indifferent and decadent Europe,” which ignored the Ukrainian Orange Revolution anthem “Razom Nas Bahato, Nas Ne Podolaty” [Together We Are Many, We will Never Be Defeated] in the 2005 Eurovision contest, Polish rappers not only listened to their Ukrainian peers but also “sang to the tune,” and “reworked and promoted the pro-democratic manifesto” (although their production was not very successful).<sup>123</sup>

Slavic sentiments are expressed in projects that correspond to (or support) other Slavic productions or joint projects of artists from different Slavic countries. The most spectacular is the song “Nie lekceważ nas” [Do not Underestimate Us] by Sokół feat. Pono (*Teraz pieniądze w*

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<sup>121</sup> Hetman (from German *Hauptmann*) - the office and title of the commander of the permanent body of mercenary troops in 15<sup>th</sup>- to 18<sup>th</sup>-century Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Grand Hetman of the Crown, the office held by Stanisław Żółkiewski, was the second-highest military commander (after the monarch). On Stanisław Żółkiewski see Jerzy Besala, *Stanisław Żółkiewski* (Warsaw: PIW, 1988).

<sup>122</sup> Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszit) was a Polish-Jewish educator, children’s author, and pediatrician who refused freedom and stayed with his orphans when the institution was sent from the Ghetto to Treblinka extermination camp in 1942. See Joanna Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2011).

<sup>123</sup> Reszuta, “The Eclipse”, 12.

*cenie*, Prosto 2007) performed by rappers from all Slavic countries, except for Montenegro.<sup>124</sup>

Within eight minutes one can hear almost all Slavic languages. Here, Slavic identity is put in opposition to cosmopolitanism and Slavic unity is presented as something powerful: underestimated as well as surprising to and unwanted by various governments.

References to Slavishness can be found not only in the verbal but also in the musical layer of hip hop productions in Poland. The most conspicuous example, which combines Slavic music with rap, is *Równonoc. Słowiańska dusza* [Equinox. Slavic Soul] (Urban Rec 2012), a platinum album by Donatan (Witold Czamara), which two weeks after its premiere (26 October 2012) was the best-selling Polish album.<sup>125</sup> Donatan, a music producer and sound engineer, known for his use of live instruments in his productions, this time joined together a variety of established Polish rappers with music played by Percival Schuttenbach, a group which combines sounds of contemporary instruments (such as acoustic, electric, and bass guitar, percussion, and acoustic or electric cello), with traditional, folk or ethnic instruments (such as saz, davul, bodhrán, darabuka, mandolin, accordion, sopiłka, gusle, kemence) as well as reconstructions or replicas of medieval instruments.<sup>126</sup> Music videos which promote the album mix old-Slavic plots, medieval costumes, and rituals with folklore and contemporary elements.

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<sup>124</sup> Belarus: Mih, Bazyl; Bosnia: Frenkie; Bulgaria: Spens; Croatia: Remi; Czech: Vladimír, Orion; Macedonia: SAF; Poland: Sokol, Pono, Martina; Russia: Lugalize, Berezin; Slovakia: Ego, Cistychov; Slovenia: Sharks, Koff; Serbia: Ill G, Komplex; Ukraine: Vova zi Lvova, XL Deluxe.

<sup>125</sup> OLIS. Sales 11/05/2012-11/11/2012, <http://olis.onyx.pl/listy/index.asp?idlisty=776&lang=pl>. Accessed 8 March 2012.

<sup>126</sup> The track list: "Wstęp" [Introduction] (feat. Tomasz Knapik), "Słowianin" [Slav] (feat. VNM), "Budź się" [Wake Up] (feat. Pezet, Gural, PIH), "Z samym sobą" [Alone with Myself] (feat. Sokół), "Nie lubimy robić" [We Don't Like to Work] (feat. Borixon, Kajman), "To jest takie nasze" [It Is So Very Ours] (feat. Onar), "Z dziada pradziada" [From My Forefathers] (feat. Trzeci Wymiar), "Będą Cię nienawidzić" [I Will Hate You] (feat. Mes), "Szukaj jej tu" [Find Her Here] (feat. Paluch), "Niespokojna dusza" [Restless Soul] (feat. Chada, Sobota, Słoń), "Pij wódkę" [Drink Vodka] (feat. Jarecki/DJ BRK), "Słowiańska krew" [Slavic Blood] (feat. Gural, Kaczor, Rafi, Ry23, Shellerini), "Jestem stąd jestem sobą" [I'm from Here, I'm myself] (feat. Ero, Małpa, Miuosh, Pelson), "Noc kupały" [Midsummer Night] (feat. Tede), "Zew" [The Call] (feat. B.R.O, Sitek, Zbuku), "Niech obdarzy niech obrodzi" [Let It Give, Let It Birth] (feat. Cira, Hukos).

According to Donatan, combining modern rap with folk music, with lyrics about Polish history, Slavs' origins, pagan rites, and national vices was an attempt to resist the pro-Western tendency, which leads to total unification:

The album *Equinox* has clearly demonstrated that you can adapt early music and show it in modern, contemporary style. This way, I wanted to show people, music producers or designers that you can reach for folk models not only in music but also with clothing design. Everything can be intertwined with modernity and contemporary models, and then it will be cool, fresh, and first of all, ours.

Moreover, he sees no contradiction between pagan rites and Christianity as elements of Polish identity.<sup>127</sup>

Searching for various historical sources and old-Slavic inspirations is an attempt at building Polish-Old-Slavic mythology (a myth of origin) and a pantheon of national heroes, which can provide a basis for contemporary Polish identity. This brings to mind the search for Polish identity in disco polo. Like disco polo, hip hop puts Polishness on a pedestal, and never insults the nation, nor attacks traditional values, nor the Catholic Church. Likewise, it emphasizes similarities and bonds between Poles not only regardless of their current location but also of generations. Such a tendency is expressed in lyrics and musical references as well as being shown in music videos (in which oftentimes not only rappers' peers but also people from their grandparents' generation are shown). It builds a very similar stereotype of a Polish character, associating it with freedom, hospitality, cultivation of tradition, and tolerance. Like disco polo, it praises Poland's glorious past and the Slavic soul, but also calls for learning of Polish history, especially from the last century, and remembering historical events and Polish heroes, eradicated from or falsified in historical narrations of the communist system. Although in hip hop texts Poland is idealized, as a beloved woman would be, the current Polish situation is not.

Unlike disco polo, which utilizes only some stereotypical references to the history of Poland, hip hop supports education, is involved in historiography, and requires language mastery.

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<sup>127</sup> Kinga Rękawiczna, "Hip-hop patriotyczny. An interview with Donatan," *Gezeta Wroclawska*, 2 February 2013.

When it uses phrases from contemporary Western languages or Latin sentences, it takes care to spell them out correctly. Misspellings in hip hop's names are always provocative hyper-misspellings, which are so obvious and deliberate that they cannot be taken for careless or ignorant writing. While disco polo searches for the origin myth in Sarmatian tradition and mythology, hip hop turns to the early medieval, Old-Slavic (pre-Christian) world, though to a fantasy rather than to its strict historical reconstruction. This fantasy brings to mind the world, heavily influenced by Slavic mythology, of *Wiedźmin* [The Witcher] created by Andrzej Sapkowski, the best-known fantasy author in Poland.<sup>128</sup> Like hip-hoppers, its main character, Geralt, lives in a morally ambiguous world, yet he maintains his own coherent code of ethics. From this world also comes the character of Percival Schuttenbach, after whom the group performing in the album *Equinox* was named.

Poland's location is more specific in hip hop than in disco polo (which uses mostly landmarks such as the Vistula River, the Baltic Sea, or the Tatra mountains) and refers to the city (or town), where someone was born, or even to its specific district where

everything is familiar  
 Dirty streets, misty eyes  
 here you are the king of the world  
 Bench is your throne.<sup>129</sup>

Oftentimes this hometown or district is named by lexemes, understood only by insiders, such as: 71, LDZ (Eudezet), Eموke, KRK, WLKP, or WWA. However, its primary residence, as in disco polo, is in Poles' hearts.

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<sup>128</sup> *Wiedźmin* [The Witcher] is a series of fantasy short stories and five novels about the witcher Geralt of Rivia. They have been adapted into a movie and television series (under English title *The Hexer*), a role-playing video game series, and a graphic novel series. Many bands in Russia and Poland name themselves or their songs after its motives or characters.

<sup>129</sup> "wszystko jest znajome/ Brudne ulice, oczy zamglone/ tutaj jesteś królem tego świata/ ławka jest Twoim tronem." ("Nie zapomnij skąd jesteś" [Do Not Forget Where You Are From] by Mioush, 2011).

## Conclusion of Chapter Three

Listening to Polish “black muse” as to a response to the voice of “black resistance” is as tempting as it is deceptive. In Poland hip hop took root only in the late 1990s, when American “journalists have been debating the “death” of hip hop, inferring that the cultural diversity, optimism, and social consciousness of hip hop’s earliest days have been replaced by crass commercialism, misogyny, and violence.”<sup>130</sup> When pioneers of Polish hip hop first encountered American hip hop, it was already a multi-million-dollar mainstream phenomenon of the 1990s and not the voice of “black resistance” of the 1970s or the politically conscious rap of the late 1980s. They were enchanted by MTV hits featuring black rappers. Although they did not understand the lyrics due to the language barrier, they felt the flow of this music, which they found appealing and inspiring. Their interest in hip hop’s history was a result of fascination with mainstream hip hop productions and not the other way around.

Moreover, performances by legends of American hip hop in Poland did not resonate much among Polish audiences. The sets by African-American hip hop stars were neither very successful nor particularly influential on Polish productions.<sup>131</sup> The approval of African-American artists, although highly desired and actively sought after by Polish hip hop artists, is

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<sup>130</sup> Felicia M. Miyakawa, “Hip hop,” in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, accessed January 19, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

<sup>131</sup> For example performances by RUN DMC or Afrika Bambaataa were only local events, and 50 Cent’s concert in Gorzów Wielkopolski (which was scheduled for 30 August 2008) was cancelled because the organizers sold only 3,500 tickets (to Polish and German fans, with only 450 sold in Gorzów itself), while the minimum number contracted for was 12,000. See Piotr Żytnicki, “Nie sprzedały się bilety, 50 Cent nie wystąpi” [Tickets Have Not Sold; 50 Cent Will Not Perform], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 28 August 2008. Accessed through [http://gorzow.gazeta.pl/gorzow/1,36844,5638278,Nie\\_sprzedaly\\_sie\\_bilety\\_\\_50\\_Cent\\_nie\\_wystapi.html](http://gorzow.gazeta.pl/gorzow/1,36844,5638278,Nie_sprzedaly_sie_bilety__50_Cent_nie_wystapi.html) on 29 August 2008. According to fans’ commentaries under the concert announcements, they found 50 Cent unappealing because he “sings only about whores and dough”. Similarly, announcements about Afrika Bambaataa, the “Grandfather of hip-hop” coming to Poland in 2005 also generated limited interest. Comments such as “I wish him a nice stay but I’m not interested in it” were rather common on hip hop forums. See for example commentaries under the announcement “Afrika Bambaataa w Polsce! Ojciec Chrzestny hip hopu!” [Afrika Bambaataa in Poland! Godfather of Hip-Hop] at [www.ostr.net/viewtopic.php](http://www.ostr.net/viewtopic.php). Accessed 12 March 2013.

neither sufficient nor necessary for a good reputation among the Polish hip hop community. It should also be remembered that most fans listen to Polish hip hop exclusively.

The case of Liroy (Piotr Marzec), in retrospect often considered the first Polish rapper and the founder of Polish gangsta rap, shows that the metaphorical “blackness” claimed by Polish hip hop does not mean that Polish artists copy African-American artists by singing about the black ghetto in the USA. The power of Liroy’s first bestselling album *Alboom* is attributed to its ghetto sound, but it appealed as something exotic, both fascinating and unreal, and, as such, was denied authenticity.<sup>132</sup> Liroy was not acclaimed as a prophet of the genre even though he was called “the real O.G.” [“Original Gangsta”] by Ice-T.<sup>133</sup> The most famous product of the anti-Liroy campaign, *Antyliroy* by Nagły Atak Spawacza, contains seventy to eighty swear words and samples taken directly from Bodycount, House of Pain, and Snoop Doggy Dog to demonstrate that “Liroy’s gangsta is easy to fake and definitely not the answer to local needs.”<sup>134</sup>

Lack of acceptance for such fantasies in Polish hip hop contributed to the fiasco of the attempted transfer of American bounce style to Poland. Hedonistic party rap, based on a scheme: money – partying – girls was rejected as inauthentic. The most spectacular example of this fiasco was the album *Poszło w biznes* [It Went into Business] by Elmer (T1 Teraz, 2001). Fans completely misunderstood such a convention and collectively ridiculed the texts by MC Eis.<sup>135</sup> Disapproval of such fantasies in Polish hip hop was pointed out by Eldo in *Mówią Bloki* (2001): “Here, if for the piece’s sake you say you had twenty girls in spite of the fact that, for example, you have been with the same girl for six years, everybody will jump on you immediately. You know, people here do not have any distance and take everything seriously.”

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<sup>132</sup> Reszuta, “Global Identities,” 8.

<sup>133</sup> During the Marlborough Rock Festival in Sopot 1995; Reszuta, “Global Identities,” 8.

<sup>134</sup> Bart Reszuta, “The Eclipse”, 4. Liroy was renowned for using thirty-three swear words in one song and for direct borrowings from American productions.

<sup>135</sup> Andrzej Cała, “Wyjście z bloków [Blocks of Flats Exit]”, *Przekrój* 2 February 2012, Accessed through <http://www.przekroj.pl/artykul/956938.html> on 8 March 2013.

Authenticity, a predominant value in hip hop, assumes sincerity of a rap's message and is associated with straightforward narration. Productions that do not comply with this assumption are vulnerable to misinterpretations. The issue of taking hip hop lyrics seriously was particularly striking in the case of the reception of "To my!" [It's Us!] by 52 Dębiec (*P-Ń VI*, UMC Records, 2003), a satire on the national vices of Poles. The irony of the piece, which seemed to be obvious and was emphasized additionally in the music video by bouncing buildings, was unrecognized by such a large part of the audience that the authors were compelled to add a blackboard with a definition of a satire at the beginning of the video.

Unlike its American forerunner, Polish hip hop has not developed as a result of a long (r)evolution and has been associated with a particular type of settlement, *blokowisko*, rather than a specific geographic location. Moreover, in Poland the elements of hip hop had been functioning in isolation and merged into hip hop culture only when a specific social context provided favorable conditions for its development. Within two years hip hop came out of the underground and situated itself next to pop and rock. However, with commercialization, its elements diverged again and hip hop became associated primarily with a musical genre.<sup>136</sup>

On the one hand, mainstreaming of hip hop allowed for a wider exposure of the creative output restricted previously to local exchange. On the other hand, increased interest in hip hop culture ignited productions intended as quick introductory courses in hip hop for the uninitiated as well as significantly widening the spectrum of its producers, shifting agency and authority over the genre. This resulted in establishing emblematic characteristics of the genre derived primarily from street hip hop as well as in practices and productions which were considered inauthentic within hip hop circles.

According to the vast majority of hip hop communities in Poland, hip hop can be competently judged only from within, and they blame the ignorance of media decision-making

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<sup>136</sup> Similar divergence followed the commercial success of rap music in the USA.

bodies for a falsified picture of Polish hip hop and *hip-hopolo* among the general public.<sup>137</sup> Music journalists in the mainstream media mostly did not hear of hip-hop until it became part of popular culture, and even then their understanding of the phenomenon was only superficial. Such mainstream attention resulted in self-perpetuating media over-exposure of artists associated with *hip-hopolo*, generating a distorted picture of the genre among both music critics and audiences, who were unaware of the existence of a different hip hop, regarded by its fans as true, non-commercial, genuine and worthwhile.

Hip hop significantly changed and challenged the local paradigm of music making, with the emphasis shifted from a musician's skills and the gifts of a singer or an instrumentalist to one's computer ability and an art of rhyme making. Rhyming as well as playing with sound qualities and meanings of words became the most important stylistic features of hip hop texts. Like Polish poets of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, Polish rappers call their works *rymy* (*rhymes*) and not *wiersze* (*poems*), and employ highly complex rhyming techniques, which attracted scholarly attention.<sup>138</sup> Still, such a paradigm of music making has not been widely accepted and in many commentaries hip hop is treated as a sociological or linguistic rather than a musical phenomenon.

Polish hip hop worked out its own business model. As an underground phenomenon, it functioned primarily through *nielegals*: home-produced albums, involving CDR copies burned on PCs with photocopied covers, passed from hand to hand, which were sold at skate shops, sent by post in reply to individual orders and, later, made available for downloading from the internet.

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<sup>137</sup> Tomasz Gezela, "Hip-hopolo," *Doza kultury*, 6 May 2005, <http://doza.o2.pl/?s=4108&t=3060>.

<sup>138</sup> See Wójtowicz, op. cit. 19-20. For a detailed analysis of the poetics of Polish hip-hop see Arkadiusz Sylwester Mastalski, "Poetyka Tekstu Hiphopowego A Aktualizacja Systemu Prozodyjnego", Master Thesis (Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny: Kraków, 2011). Tomasz Kukołowicz, "Transkrypcja tekstów hip-hopowych (rapu) w świetle teorii wiersza" [Transcription of Hip-Hop Lyrics in the Light of the Theory of the Poem], *Teksty Drugie*, 6 (2012), 229-245.



When hip hop became incorporated into mainstream musical culture, some of its productions were published by major labels; however, the majority of recordings were published by small independent labels (some of which, like RXX, specialized in hip hop) but, like Western indies, were distributed by the majors. The retreat from the mainstream resulted in a revival of *nielegals*. Today, hip hop in Poland is produced mostly through small independent labels owned and operated by rappers themselves and distributed through their online stores (exclusively or in addition to the traditional music distribution).

Very few Polish rappers are able to live exclusively on hip hop (on recording sales and concerts). Many leading Polish hip-hoppers own not only record labels but also clothing lines and could be called businessmen; however, none of them can be compared to African-American moguls. Although Polish youth became interested in hip hop when it was already a multimillion-dollar business, a prospect of money as their motivation is highly unlikely, simply because performing Polish hip hop has not been a way to become a millionaire.<sup>139</sup> What attracted young Poles to hip hop, besides its aesthetic appeal, was an opportunity it offered to express oneself without substantial financial engagement or years of professional training.

Following Tricia Rose's widely acclaimed study *Black Noise*, hip hop is often considered a voice from the margins.<sup>140</sup> In Poland, hip hop has become, to use Maciej Bernasiewicz's expression, "a voice not only of the working subclass of Polish society but also a voice of people whose personal resources (for example higher education) have been unused and wasted; a cry of despair and an expression of frustration, experienced by many young people."<sup>141</sup> It is related to

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<sup>139</sup> The most profitable production, *Na legalu* (Peja/Slums Attack, T1 2002), brought Peja 250,000 PLN (1 USD = ca. 3 PLN) in 2003, including income from concerts. *Business Week's* estimation of 700,000 PLN as Peja's annual income in 2003 must be a big overestimate, taking into account 4,000 PLN as a standard concert rate of Peja/Slums Attack. See Buda (2013), 261.

<sup>140</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

<sup>141</sup> Bernasiewicz, op. cit., 64.

negative aspects of the transformation of the system, a result of which has been that the social potential of youth in Poland remains unused. As the most disturbing aspect of this, Krystyna Szafraniec names the delayed and increasingly difficult transition to independent living and adulthood, which is due to a growing unemployment rate (with young people constituting 40% of all unemployed) and has significant demographic implications (such as population decline due to the extremely low birth rate and emigration<sup>142</sup>), a growing aggressiveness and sense of discouragement among many, as well as a striking absence of young people in the public sphere.<sup>143</sup>

With Polish hip hop, as with rock music, one should, however, bear in mind that it is easy to overemphasize its rebellious nature and subversive potential. Although Polish hip hop attempts to maintain its status as an alternative culture (situated in opposition to pop culture), it does not represent any particular ideology. Present hip hop discourse, as discussed by Bernasiewicz, is a part of popular mainstream culture and was established during the mainstreaming process, while early productions were much more diversified and less socially engaged. Moreover, its popularity among Polish youth (not to mention other generations) has never been comparable to that of its counterpart in the USA. While in the USA hip hop's share in the music market is estimated at 10-12%, in France at 5%, in Poland it is 1-3%.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, as Bernasiewicz has demonstrated, hip hop addressees are not passive receivers but actively and competently participate in the negotiation of meaning.

Interestingly, commentaries under various texts about the movie "Jesteś Bogiem" (for example on such popular web portals as onet.pl or interia.pl) oftentimes emphasized hip hop as

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<sup>142</sup> In 2012 the population growth rate was -0.08, with the total fertility rate only 1.31.

<sup>143</sup> Karolina Szafraniec, "Społeczny potencjał młodości a procesy transformacji systemowej. Z perspektywy społecznego usytuowania młodego pokolenia wsi," in *W obliczu zmiany: wybrane strategie działania mieszkańców polskiej wsi*, ed. Krzysztof Gorlach and Grzegorz Forys (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005), 126. Quoted after Bernasiewicz, op. cit. 65.

<sup>144</sup> Beith and Spencer., op. cit., 190.

just another musical genre and considered it something that actually contributes to the system's stability. Surprisingly high were a number of commentators who saw it as an outlet for youth's energy, which allowed them to voice their frustrations and complaints but detracted them from asking questions such as "who is responsible for their miserable situation? Why do they actually get minimal wages or are forced to emigrate?"<sup>145</sup> or from attempting change: "You can try to change the world, starting from your neighborhood, but it requires work. It's easier to say – the system is sick, I can do nothing, I'll do drugs, I'll be an artist because nothing can be done".<sup>146</sup> Indeed, proactive calls in Polish hip hop operate only on individuals' level and do not promote active participation in public life.

Many recognize hip hop as a voice of the first generation to grow up in the new, democratic, capitalist system. Others (such as Wójtowicz) point to the fact that the generation was too diversified to allow any single area of culture to express their worldview. According to Jakub Dymek, hip hop did not improve the fate of *blokowisko* inhabitants, except for a few artists, whom it allowed financial independence.<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, it ignited reconsideration of the new system and the situation of young Poles who became the system's losers, igniting a change in their perception as people with problems and not as the problem itself.

Polish hip hop takes inspiration from a modern global genre but embeds it very strongly in Polish culture and history. Like disco polo, it is linked to modern, global popular culture of Western origin but, at the same time, situates itself in opposition to the Western world and puts Polishness on a pedestal. However, while disco polo is associated with moments of celebration

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<sup>145</sup> A commentary by Ole from 24 September 2012 11.38 from web portal Interia.pl, <http://film.interia.pl/gwiazdy/gwiazda//komentarze,1814951,,,3,3>. Accessed on 24 September 2012.

<sup>146</sup> A commentary by AntyHipHop from 24 September 2012 10.59 from web portal Interia.pl, <http://film.interia.pl/gwiazdy/gwiazda//komentarze,1814951,,,3,3>. Accessed on 24 September 2012.

<sup>147</sup> Jakub Dymek, "Hip-hop jako instrument walki politycznej" [Hip-Hop as an Instrument of Political Struggle], *Krytyka Polityczna*, 5 July 2013. Accessed through <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/kultura/20130705/hip-hop-jako-instrument-walki-politycznej> on 12 December 2013.

and presents Poland in its “Sunday best,” hip hop refers to everyday life and focuses on depicting various facets of ordinary reality. Another controversial phenomenon, *sacropolo*, which came to prominence in 2005, when hip-hop retreated from the mainstream media, has shifted attention to spiritual matters. This phenomenon will be discussed in the next chapter in with the aim that spiritual *sacropolo* will supplement the picture painted by ludic disco polo and mundane hip hop.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Sacropolo: The Sacred in the Marketplace

*“Only under the cross, only under this sign/ a Pole is a Pole and Poland [is] Poland”<sup>1</sup>*

*- Where are you from?*

*- From Poland.*

*-Aha, John Paul II!*

Like other Poles, I have experienced this conversation wherever I have gone. Whether on Hawaiian beaches or Alpine slopes, in Mexico or Newfoundland, John Paul II has been the first and foremost association with Polishness and the point of reference which allows most people to locate my national identity, even a decade after Karol Wojtyła's death. Identification with the late pope emphasizes the spiritual and religious aspects of Polishness. Although such aspects have been intertwined with the idea of Polishness since the conversion to Christianity of Mieszko I in 966 which marked the establishment of a Polish state, in the twentieth century they assumed new overtones, especially under communist rule and after its fall. Karol Wojtyła's election as pope inspired many pieces of music in realms both classical and popular, and the peak of media visibility and discussion around music with religious overtones coincided with the end of his pontificate.

On the one hand, Poles love their Pope and treat him as an unquestioned authority. On the other hand he has been listened to selectively, and in many respects his teachings have been ignored. Although the pope disapproved of being honored with statues (though he understood that people needed a sign, a symbol, which can provide support to them), and asked for “living

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<sup>1</sup> “Tylko pod krzyżem, tylko pod tym znakiem/ Polska jest Polską, a Polak Polakiem”. Erroneously attributed to Adam Mickiewicz, the greatest Polish poet.

monuments,” 230 statues devoted to John Paul II were raised during his lifetime, and after his death their number tripled as if every Polish town and village wanted “a pope” of their own, regardless of its aesthetic value.<sup>2</sup>

Such productions are being criticized for their overabundance as well as for being inappropriate (as a tribute to the Pope) due to their form, look, the shoddy material they are made of, and for being works of poor artists or serial productions. There are even contests for the ugliest pope statue; however, they usually fail to determine the winner due to the large number of qualifying candidates (such as pictured in Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1. Statues of John Paul II in Wigry, Świebodzice, and Sieradz

In the critique of those statues, as much as in the reason for their erection, aesthetic evaluation is never separated from moral judgement. Their ugliness, as Kazimierz Ożóg has observed, does not count because they are treated as an expression of Polishness and religiosity, and many people do not see them in a wider context because those monuments are for them, in

<sup>2</sup> Sylwia Mróz, “Pomniki papieża, czyli ‘koszmarny sen rzeźbiarza na kacu’”. An interview with Sławomir Ożóg, *Wirtualna Polska*, 16 October 2009, wiadomosci.wp.pl. Accessed 22 March 2014.

their towns, their parishes.<sup>3</sup> Although many people are annoyed and irritated by them, for a significant part of society they have educational value and are a sign of their connection with the Church. The overabundance of pope monuments, as well as of memorials devoted to the Katyn massacre, Armia Krajowa, or other aspects of Polish history, which were falsified and silenced in the official discourse under the communist regime, can be seen as a reaction to the suppressing of such content and an attempt to “catch up” with their memorialization.

Those monuments were often produced by prominent artists of the socialist culture. For example Marian Konieczny, the author of the famous Lenin monument in Nowa Huta, made the pope monument in Licheń (the site of Poland's largest church, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Licheń, which is often considered exemplary of religious kitsch). The surfeit of pope monuments brings to mind the oversaturation of public space in socialist Poland with various “war monuments” and similar modernist productions, which could be given as examples of “sour kitsch” or abstract kitsch (which will be discussed later in this chapter). Such monuments contributed to the people’s getting used to ugliness and clichés as well as to not questioning the aesthetic value of modern art. Similar tendencies can be seen in music.

Polish contemporary music is often characterized as religious and, in the realm of classical music, works by Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Wojciech Kilar and Krzysztof Penderecki are given as examples of this tendency, while the composers are often referred to as the “Holy Trinity”. Remarkably, in order to prove that Andrzej Panufnik in Great Britain remained a Polish composer, Jacek Marczyński, a renowned Polish music critic, named such compositions as the *Sinfonia Sacra*, *Song to the Virgin Mary*, and *Bassoon Concerto* dedicated to the priest Jerzy Popiełuszko.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the continuing growth of interest in sacred music in Poland ran parallel

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Jacek Marczyński, “Jego Muzyka Goła” [His Music [Is] Naked], *Rzeczpospolita*, 4 February 2014.

with political transformations, and was treated as an opportunity to manifest oppositional views on political and social issues.

Although after 1989 the use of texts with religious overtones became even more popular, the reception of works based on them has changed. Unlike the earlier output that established the international reputations of the “Holy Trinity,” some of their recent works on religious topics have been perceived in Poland as controversial. Some critics labelled them *sacropolo*, accusing the composers of an inclination towards mass culture and popular music. However, the exemplary composer of *sacropolo*, Piotr Rubik, has become the best-known and best-paid musician of the last few years, one whose popularity owes as much to his dyed stylish haircut and the exposure of his relationship with a model almost twenty years his junior in colour magazines (featured on the covers of *Gala* or *Viva Poland*) as it does to his music. His works, often dubbed *rubikopolo*, are on the one hand commented on by classical music critics and on the other hand included in the pop sections of music stores. In the realm of popular culture the term *sacropolo* (or its synonyms such as *sacropop*, *kato-polo*, *kato-disco*, etc.) is also used with reference to the Polish equivalent of so called Contemporary Christian Music (CCM).

In this chapter I will focus on applications of religious topics in Polish post-socialist music that are perceived as problematic and on the cultural and musical reasons for rejecting the works and styles labelled with the derogatory term *sacropolo* (also spelled *sacro polo*). The pieces concerned run the gamut from the perceived nadir of popular music to some works on religious topics written by the most renowned contemporary classical composers. My study will be guided by the question: What circumstances allow for the embracing under the same denigrating label productions by a parish youth ensemble, songs by veteran pop signers undertaking religious topics, Rubik’s oratorios and cantatas, and Penderecki’s *Piano Concerto*?

After an overview of the development of music with religious overtones in Poland under the rubric of “classical”/ “serious” music, the chapter will focus on Piotr Rubik, who is oftentimes cited as an exemplary composer of *sacropolo* and middle-brow productions. Finally, the chapter



will examine the concept of sacred music in theory and related musical practices, including use of popular styles in religious music, giving special attention to the issue of kitsch as well as to the way judgements are pronounced on kitsch and *sacropolo*.

While disco polo primarily confronted the category of folk music and *hip-hopolo* the category of popular music, *sacropolo* confronts the category of classical music and high art, which is traditionally associated with the spiritual and the sublime as the means to transcend the worldly matters. At the same time, it provides an opportunity to look at the idea of Polishness from yet another angle.

### From anti-systemic counterculture to the mainstream and *sacropolo*: music on religious topics in Poland after the Second World War

How is it possible that “the new socialist artistic culture,” which was envisioned as “democratic, secular and open” became associated with music which is considered religious? In order to understand this seemingly paradoxical situation, one needs to be aware of the messianistic vision of the Polish culture (which was discussed in greater detail in the first chapter) as well as some ideas, which are characteristic for the conceptualization of music in Poland. Moreover, due to the specific relationship between the communist party and the Catholic Church, compositions with religious overtones were not merely pieces of music but also a platform, which allowed their composers (as well as their performers and the audience) to make statements on political and social issues.

Charles Bodman Rae considers characteristically Polish, the idea of music as not only conveying an emotional message but also “being able to, and perhaps even having a duty to

communicate an ethical message”. As an example of “the notion of music being able to convey a sense of truth” he gives Leszek Polony’s statement:<sup>5</sup>

Music is a reflection of the harmony of the universe, but it nevertheless remains particularly connected to the human soul, and is furthermore an ethical and emotional message of fundamental significance to the human collective.<sup>6</sup>

The above statement echoes the ancient framing of music as not only audible but also as a harmonic and/or religious concept, though it seems to combine Boethian *musica mundana*, *musica humana*, and *musica instrumentalis* into one.

Another Polish idea that permeates the conceptualization of music in the twentieth and twenty-first century was expressed in Szymanowski’s plea for music that is national but not provincial, and carrying “universal human values”. Rae emphasizes the specific understanding of the “national,” which is linked to “generous patriotism” and not “selfish nationalism,” as in the distinction made by Karol Wojtyła:

Whereas nationalism involves recognizing and pursuing the good of one’s own nation alone, without regard for the rights of others, patriotism, on the other hand, is a love of one’s native land that accords rights to all other nations equal to those claimed for one’s own. Patriotism, in other words, leads to a properly ordered social love.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, the perception of Polish music as religious is a particular penchant of foreign commentators. As Adrian Thomas has observed, although Polish music is pluralistic, with noteworthy abstract and secular streams, it is the sacred and the programmatic that dominate discussion of musical Polishness. Composers such as Grażyna Bacewicz, Witold Lutosławski, Kazimierz Serocki, Tadeusz Baird, or Witold Szalonek remained resolutely secular and/ or

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Bodman Rae, “The Polish musical psyche: From the Second Republic into the Third” in *Polish Music since 1945*, ed. by Eva Mantzourani (Kraków: Musica Jagiellonica, 2013), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Leszek Polony, “Powikłania ideologii estetycznych w powojennym pięćdziesięcioleciu,” in *Muzyka Polska 1945-1995*, Materiały Sesji Naukowej, Kraków 6-10 grudnia 1995, ed. by Krzysztof Droba, Teresa Malecka and Krzysztof Sz wajgier (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 1996). English version: “Polish Controversies about the Essence of Music after the Second World War”, in Ray Robinson (ed.), *Studies in Penderecki*, Vol. 2. (New Jersey: Prestige Publications, 2003). Quoted after Rae, op. cit. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), 75. Quoted after Rae, op. cit., 25.

modernist throughout their careers. However, other than Lutosławski they did not experience major recognition and their work somehow did not resonate outside Poland.<sup>8</sup>

Polish commentators rarely focus on the spiritual or religious dimensions of Polish music and usually talk about them “incidentally” while discussing other issues.<sup>9</sup> Still, such compositions are prominent in their discussions. Remarkably, the survey carried out by Krzysztof Droba at the conference “Polish Music 1945-1995” (convened by the Kraków Academy of Music in 1995), which was aimed at identifying “the most important works of the fifty-year period,” was topped by the Symphony no. 3, “Symphony of Sorrowful Songs” by Henryk Mikołaj Górecki and the *St. Luke Passion* by Krzysztof Penderecki, and included choices less obvious for non-Polish audiences, such as *Miserere* (1993) by Paweł Szymański (b. 1954). Krzysztof Droba himself listed, as the most significant works in terms of their social function (i.e. ranked according to their place in the public awareness), the *St. Luke's Passion*, *Te Deum*, and *Polish Requiem* by Penderecki, *Krzesany*, *Angelus*, and *Exodus* by Kilar, and *Beatus Vir* by Górecki. Except *Krzesany*, all works belonging to the realm of religious/ spiritual music.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Adrian Thomas, “Locating Polish music”, in *Polish Music since 1945*, ed. by Eva Mantzourani (Kraków: Musica Jagiellonica, 2013), 35-36.

<sup>9</sup> As Marcin Łukaszewski has observed, although writings on the musical output of Polish composers after the Second World War have proliferated, religious music has not attracted attention proportional to its abundance. Many authors completely ignore the phenomenon, while others consider it only in context of particular styles or compositional techniques. Music on religious topics is usually discussed in articles or collected works rather than in monographs devoted to the topic. Many publications (mostly published proceedings from symposia organized by Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, KUL, and Uniwersytet Opolski) are written from a theological perspective and refer to music in the context of the contemporary liturgy of the Catholic Church, especially the quality of music used in the liturgy. Moreover, while there are numerous studies on specific composers and their works, syntheses are rather rare. The most extensive work on the topic is Ireneusz Pawlak, *Muzyka liturgiczna po Soborze Watykańskim II w świetle dokumentów Kościoła* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Polihymnia, 2001). There is also Ireneusz Pawlak (ed.), *Słownik Polskich Muzyków Kościelnych* (Lublin: KUL, in preparation). For a detailed survey of such literature see Marcin Tadeusz Łukaszewski, *Twórczość o tematyce religijnej na chór a cappell kompozytorów warszawskich w latach 1945-2000* (Lublin: Polihymnia, 2006), 43-45.

<sup>10</sup> Krzysztof Droba, “Najwybitniejsze utwory pięćdziesięciolecia” in *Muzyka Polska 1945-1995*, ed. by Krzysztof Droba, Teresa Malecka and Krzysztof Sz wajgier (Kraków, Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 1996), 343.

Significance and specific meaning of religious music in Poland is assigned not only to the role of the Catholic Church in the history of Poland (especially during the Polish state's building, the Partitions, and the German occupation) but also to the opposition between the socialist state and the Church. The socialist system, totalitarian and atheist, sought to gradually liquidate the Church's structures and eliminate its social influence.

In Poland, as in other countries under the communist regime, the Church faced persecution and the communist party, after assuming governmental control, introduced legal regulations aimed at the Church. Already on 12 September 1945, the 1925 concordat between the Holy See and the Second Republic of Poland was cancelled by the communist-dominant Polish Provisional Government, and the communist state began to confiscate Church properties. By late 1947, Catholic educational institutes, kindergartens, schools, or orphanages were expropriated. Starting in 1948, mass arrest and mock trials began to take place against Catholic bishops and clergy, culminating in the incarceration of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland (which took place from 25 September 1953 to 26 October 1956).<sup>11</sup>

At that time, which was highly unfavourable for the development of religious music, small-scale religious pieces predominated, such as arrangements of Christmas carols or small masses and litanies, written in a neo-Romantic or neo-Classical style.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, from that period are the second version of the *Lacrimosa* for soprano and organ (1948) and *Twenty Christmas Carols* for voice and piano (1946) by Witold Lutosławski, who otherwise stayed away from religious music.

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<sup>11</sup> For more information on the relationship between the PRL and the Catholic Church see Bartłomiej Noszczak, *Polityka państwa wobec Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego w Polsce w okresie internowania prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego 1953–1956* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2008) and Jan Żaryn, *Dzieje Kościoła Katolickiego w Polsce 1944–1989* (Warszawa: Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed discussion and a list of compositions see Marcin Łukaszewski, "Polish Religious Music after World War Two," *Artes* (Romania) nr 8 (2009): 215–216.

After the “thaw” of 1956 and gradual de-Stalinization in various spheres of political and social life (including the state-Church relationship), which brought significant changes in cultural politics of the state, Polish religious music started to come out of obscurity. The composers took up religious themes in large-scale works, which were performed by the state philharmonics. Examples include the *Cantata in praise of St Hyacinth* by Kazimierz Wiłkomirski, premiered by the Kraków Philharmonic in 1957, the *Requiem* by Roman Palester, premiered by the National Philharmonic in Warsaw in 1957, *Tales of St Hyacinth*, premiered at the Poznań Philharmonic in 1958, and the monumental *Missa pro defunctis* by Roman Maciejewski (who lived at that time in Sweden), premiered at the Warsaw Autumn Festival in 1960.

However, the conspicuous return of devotional music is associated with 1965, and Penderecki’s *St Luke Passion*, tremendously successful ever since its premiere at Münster cathedral in Germany in 1966 (the Polish premiere took place only in 1999).<sup>13</sup> Although it was not the first work he undertook on a religious topic, it was a turning point in his career. Together with *Utrenya*, which draws on the liturgy of the Orthodox Church and which consists of *The Entombment of Christ* (1970) and *The Resurrection* (1971), it forms a grand triptych about the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. Penderecki’s work was a milestone in the history of Polish music, encouraging many composers to explore religious themes.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This eighty-minute-long work, written for boys’ choir, three mixed choirs, three solo voices (soprano, baritone and bass), reciter and symphony orchestra, uses the Latin text of the Gospel according to St Luke, with insertions from Lenten hymns, psalms and lamentations. It combines modern language with traditional elements, integrating ‘sonoristics’ (*sonorystyka*, which in Poland designates the reversed hierarchy of musical elements, in which the timbre gained structural functions in a composition) in both choral and orchestral parts with stylizations of Gregorian chant and polychoral writing, and including sections recited by the Evangelist.

<sup>14</sup> According to Łukaszewski (2009, 218-219), between 1957 and 1970 there were over thirty Polish composers writing religious pieces, including Romuald Twardowski (b. 1930), Edward Bogusławski, Hieronim Feicht, Andrzej Koszewski, Andrzej Nikodemowicz, Juliusz Łuciuk as well as composers living abroad such as Aleksander Tansman (*Psalms* for tenor solo, mixed choir and orchestra, 1961), Andrzej Panufnik (*Sinfonia sacra* for orchestra, 1962; *Song to the Virgin Mary* for a cappella mixed choir, 1964) and Roman Maciejewski (*Missa brevis* for a cappella mixed choir, 1964; *Resurrection Mass* for mixed choir and orchestra, 1967).

In works of Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, a peer of Penderecki, links with sacred music can be found in less obvious forms and combined with Old Polish and folk inspirations. Movements of his *Symphony No. 1* (1959) are given suggestive titles such as *Invocation*, *Antiphon*, *Chorale*, *Lauda*. Moreover, in the *Antiphon* there are references to the opening notes of *Bogurodzica* ("Mother of God"), an early medieval hymn of Polish knights going into battle. In *Old Polish Music* (1969), Górecki used a medieval organum, "Benedicamus Domino," one of the earliest Polish polyphonic compositions.<sup>15</sup> In his *Symphony No. 2* "Copernican" (1972) for soprano, baritone, mixed choir and orchestra, Górecki used secular texts (from Book I "De revolutionibus orbium coelestium" by Nicolaus Copernicus) and two psalms (Nos 135 and 145). Combination of sacred and secular texts can also be found in his best-known composition, the *Symphony No. 3* "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs" for soprano and orchestra. The work integrates three types of stimuli characteristic of the composer: the Old Polish, the religious and the folk. According to Adrian Thomas, Górecki sees his folk and sacred impulses as being two sides of the same coin.<sup>16</sup>

The remarkable development of music on religious topics since mid-1960s was not accidental and coincided with the spectacular increase in the Church's prestige. The Letter of Reconciliation of the Polish Bishops to the German Bishops issued by the Conference of Polish Bishops in 1965 was a breakthrough in the Polish-German relationship. However, the power and popularity of the Church manifested themselves most evidently during the celebrations of the 1,000th anniversary of the Baptism of Poland (which marked the beginning of the Polish state) in 1966 led by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and other bishops, which attracted huge crowds, while the state celebrations were a failure due to low attendance. Moreover, in the 1970s the position of the Catholic Church strengthened even further, and it attained unrivaled moral authority in the country.

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<sup>15</sup> Other religious works from that period by Górecki are *Ad Matrem* (1971), set to the four words which open the *Stabat Mater* sequence, and *Amen* (1975) for a *cappella* mixed choir.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, op. cit., 31.

The election of Karol Wojtyła as pope on 16 October 1978 and his visit to Poland the following year was a catalyst for significant social changes as well as a source of inspiration for many musical pieces, not only in the realm of classical music.<sup>17</sup> One of the earliest tributes to the pope was the *Sonata d'Octobre* by Joanna Bruzdowicz from November 1978, in which the composer associated the election of the Polish Pope with the new “October Revolution,” which was to be “the revolution of hope and the true revolution of freedom, a fight for democracy”.<sup>18</sup>

Compositions dedicated to John Paul II written in 1979 alone included the *Beatus Vir* for baritone, mixed choir and orchestra by Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, the *Fanfare in honor of Pope John Paul II* for mixed choir and orchestra by Wojciech Kilar, *Anenaiki* by Augustyn Bloch (premiered at the Warsaw Autumn festival), and the *Hymnus pro gratiarum actione (Te Deum)* for two mixed choirs, children’s choir and instrumental ensemble by Roman Palester.<sup>19</sup> Krzysztof Penderecki finished his neo-Romantic *Te Deum* for solo voices, mixed choir and symphony orchestra, dedicated to John Paul II, in 1980. In later years works dedicated to the pope proliferated, as did settings of texts by Karol Wojtyła (for example by Andrzej Cwojdzinski, Juliusz Łuciuk, Irena Pfeiffer, and Maria Pokrzywińska).<sup>20</sup> The Pope’s pilgrimages to Poland ignited such works as the songs by Edward Pałasz entitled *Pastor et Magister*, and by Romuald Twardowski, entitled *Pastor et Superemus* (issued on records entitled *In Honorem Beatissimi Patris Joannie Pauli II*), *O Polish Land* (1987), a miniature for a cappella mixed choir set to the

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<sup>17</sup> Krystyna Bielska, in her analysis of the works inspired by the pontificate of John Paul II, groups them into three categories: 1) settings of words by John Paul II, 2) works about him, and 3) works dedicated to him. See Krystyna Bielska, *John Paul II in Musical Compositions, Bibliography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Rome: Fundacja Jana Pawła II, Ośrodek Dokumentacji Pontyfikatu, 1993), 175.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted after Hieronim Sieński, “Kompozytorzy polscy w hołdzie Ojcu Świętemu Janowi Pawłowi II”, *Biuletyn AGH* nr 39 (March 2011), 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Beatus Vir* was commissioned by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła before his election as pope.

<sup>20</sup> Tadeusz Burchacki’s collection of musical autographs of works dedicated to Pope John Paul II by Polish composers contains over sixty scores. For more details see Sieński, op. cit., 28-29.

Pope's address during the welcoming ceremony at Warsaw Airport (in the same year) by Łuciuk, and *Totus Tuus* (1987) for a *cappella* mixed choir by Górecki.<sup>21</sup>

The anointing of Karol Wojtyła as the first Polish pope and his first visit to Poland in 1979, which are considered catalysts of the Solidarity movement in 1980 as well as the repressive period of martial law from 1981 to 1984, resonate in the *Polish Requiem* (1980-84, 1993, 2005) by Krzysztof Penderecki. This impressive sacred monument is the most spectacular example of what Adrian Thomas calls memorialization, with a patriotic intensity quite possibly unique to Poland and a feature striking to an outsider.<sup>22</sup>

The *Polish Requiem* is not only a musical composition but also an ideological statement. All movements of the work are dedicated to important figures of the recent past, which are significant for the present. *Lacrimosa* (1980) for soprano, choir and symphony orchestra, written for Solidarity and Lech Wałęsa, commemorates the victims of 1970's "December events" (*wydrzenia grudniowe*), during which the socialist government used armed forces against the civilian population protesting against major increases in food and fuel prices.<sup>23</sup> It was performed on 16th December 1980 during the ceremony of the unveiling of the Three Crosses monument dedicated to the December events' victims in Gdańsk. *Agnus Dei* (1981) for a *cappella* choir is dedicated to the Primate Stefan Wyszyński, and was performed during his funeral. *Recordare* (1982) was written for the canonization of the Franciscan Maximilian Kolbe, who volunteered to die in place of a stranger in the Nazi German concentration camp of Auschwitz. *Dies irae* is devoted to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, while *Libera me, Domine* commemorates the victims of the Katyn massacre. *Recordare Jesu pie* (1983), the climax of the *Requiem*, combines the Latin

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<sup>21</sup> Łukaszewski (2009), 220-221. He also mentions pieces written for the Pope's jubilees and settings of *Tu es Petrus*, a liturgical prayer for the Pope (by Marek Jasiński, Paweł Łukaszewski, or Marian Sawa). For more details see Bielska, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, op. cit., 31-32.

<sup>23</sup> See "December Events of 1970" in Piotr Wróbel, *Historical Dictionary of Poland 1945-1996* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 71-73.



"Recordare" with the Polish supplication "Święty Boże" ["Holy God"]. In 1993 the composer added *Sanctus* and in 2005 *Ciaccona* "in memoriam Giovanni Paolo II per archi".

Adrian Thomas draws attention to the gulf of understanding between Polish and non-Polish reception of the work. While in Poland the work was received with great enthusiasm (one may wonder how much of its success was due to extra-musical factors such as specific people or events with which it was linked or for which it was written), outside of Poland it met with little empathy on the part of the critics, who picked up on its local significance as being an alienating factor.<sup>24</sup> Paul Griffiths called it "not a musical composition, not a religious event, but a national act of remembrance," in what Thomas called "one of the most scathing reviews I have ever read of a Polish piece".<sup>25</sup> Similar discrepancies of perception characterized the reception of Penderecki's *Te Deum* (1980). Stephen Pettit accused it of being "scarcely less ambitious and no less occasional. (...) But, just as the *Polish Requiem* means much simply for being Polish, so this work's reflection of a religious nation's cry to God for help gives it infinite excuse" for musical inconsequentiality.<sup>26</sup>

With the transfer of power in 1989, the relationship between the state and the Church changed. Religious symbols have been reintroduced into public spaces and religious elements (re)incorporated into public ceremonies. In 1993 a concordat was signed (although it was ratified only in 1998) reintroducing religious education into public schools, reinstalling educational (and other) institutions run by the Church, and beginning the process of restituting the properties confiscated by the communist regime.

With the change of the Church's position from a force in opposition to the socialist state to a part of the new democratic system, the cultural productions which refer to religious themes

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas, op. cit., 32-33.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Griffiths, "Cracow RSO/Penderecki," *The Times*, 16 May 1984, 13; Thomas, op. cit., 32.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Pettit, "Diversity all too ill at case," *The Times*, 18 May 1984, 9. Quoted after Thomas, op. cit., 33.

have lost their counter-cultural dimension and political significance. Nevertheless, the interest in sacred music has continued among both old masters and those of the younger generations. According to Łukaszewski, the use of religious texts became particularly popular during the 1990s. The Book of psalms provides a continuous inspiration for Polish composers, who use both Latin texts and Polish translations, of which two are especially popular: those by Jan Kochanowski, a great poet from the Renaissance period, and by Czesław Miłosz, the 1980 Nobel Prize winner. The Passion of Christ has been explored in a wide range of settings of the *Stabat Mater*, the *Passion* and *Way of the Cross*. Compositions on Marian themes (including numerous settings of the canticle *Ave Maria*, the antiphons *Ave Regina caelorum* and *Regina caeli*, as well as *Magnificat*), already very popular in the 1980s, continue to proliferate, as do compositions on themes concerning Polish saints.<sup>27</sup>

The millennium of the martyrdom of St Adalbert, a patron of Poland, in 1997, engendered over a dozen musical compositions, including the cantata *Salve Sidus Polonorum* for large mixed choir, two pianos, organ and percussion ensemble (1997-2000) by Henryk Mikołaj Górecki and the *Hymn to St. Adalbert* for mixed choir and orchestra (1997) by Krzysztof Penderecki. Mass settings have continued to be produced, including the *Missa pro pace* by Wojciech Kilar and the *Missa brevis* (2012) by Krzysztof Penderecki, as well as his mass sections *Benedictum Dominum* (1992) for a cappella choir and monumental *Credo* (1998) for five solo voices, children's choir, mixed choir and orchestra.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Łukaszewski (2009), 226. For a list of composers and works see Łukaszewski (2009), 221-222.

<sup>28</sup> For lists of compositions see Łukaszewski (2009), 221-222. On mass settings see Stanisław Dąbek, *Twórczość mszalna kompozytorów polskich XXw.* [Mass Settings by 20<sup>th</sup>-century Polish Composers] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1996).

Religious music was written also by the composers of middle-age and younger generations, such as for example Miłosz Bembinow (b. 1978),<sup>29</sup> Marcel Chyrzyński (b. 1971),<sup>30</sup> Paweł Łukaszewski (b. 1968),<sup>31</sup> and Wojciech Wiślak. (b. 1971).<sup>32</sup> The widely resonating *Passion according to St Mark* (2008) for soprano, reciting voice, natural voice, choir and chamber orchestra by Paweł Mykietyn (b.1971) is usually considered the most significant contribution to this field. This work, by one of the most original composers of his generation, in many respects breaks with the tradition of the genre. It uses fragments of all the gospels and the Book of Isaiah, which are arranged in two parallel timelines, chronological and retrograde. Instead of traditional Latin, Hebrew and Polish (in Pilate's part) are used. Christ is embodied in a female voice. Traditional sounds are encrusted with the aggressive sound of rock music, recorded cicadas, and microtonal structures.

The 2000s were marked by the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Paul II's pontificate in 2003 and his death in 2005, coinciding with an increased interest in sacred music, which was visible not only in the realm of high art. On the other hand, it was a time of seditious artistic productions of various kinds, including blasphemous provocations.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, recent compositions by the

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<sup>29</sup> *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (1996), *Ave maris stella* (1999), *dust and shadow we are...* (2000), oratorio *Res Tua* (2002).

<sup>30</sup> *Psalm 88* (1996), *...similes esse bestiis* (1997), or *Per diem clamavi in nocte coram te*, (1996-1997).

<sup>31</sup> *Vesperae pro defunctis* (1995), *Gaudium et spes* (1997), *Missa pro Patria* (1997), *Via Crucis* (1999), *Messa per voci e fiati* (2004), *Symphony No. 2 "Fesinemus amare homines"* (2002-2005), and numerous choral pieces, including *Stabat Mater* (1994), *Two motets for Lent* (1995), and *Seven Anaphoras for Advent* (1995-1999).

<sup>32</sup> *Concerto laudativo* (1996), *Psalmus 150* (1996), *Psalms for Children Small and Big* (2002), *Psalmi latini* (2003), *Stabat Mater* (2005), *Daniel* (2006), *Kyrie* (2010), *Misericordias Domini* (2012), or *Salve Regina* (2004).

<sup>33</sup> They included works by Dorota Nieznalska, Marek Sobczyk, and Krzysztof Wałaszek, and the presentation of Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture *La Nona Ora* (The Ninth Hour), depicting the Pope John Paul II struck down by a meteorite. In the realm of pop culture acts and statements by Nergal (Adam Darski) and Doda (Dorota Rabczewska) ignited a discussion on the limits of artistic freedom (whether there are any) and the legal protection against such offenses. The major points of the discussion were summarized in a book by Andrzej Dragula, *Bluźnierstwo. Między grzechem a przestępstwem* (Warszawa: Więź, 2013), who also considers the question as to whether a human being or a work of art can really offend God or it is people who actually feel/ are offended.

“Holy Trinity” have raised controversies and divided Polish musical circles. While some critics accused them of representing *socialist realism* and *sacropolo*, others protested against such attacks on the “unquestioned authorities,” considering them sacrilege and evidence of “social irresponsibility”. The premiere of *Penderecki’s Piano Concerto “Resurrection”* at the 45<sup>th</sup> Warsaw Autumn Festival was booed by a large part of the audience. The piece was attacked by the young critic Jan Topolski in a review entitled “Love me Pender” characterizing it as a kitsch “even more serious (pompous) and even more cloying candidate for a hit (masterpiece) than Elvis Presley’s evergreen “Love me Tender”.<sup>34</sup>

The most heated controversies were sparked by the article on the *Piano Concerto “Resurrection,”* “Socrealistic Penderecki [Socrealistyczny Penderecki]” by Andrzej Chłopecki, in the largest Polish newspaper (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 12 October 2002). Although it was not the first time he had criticized the most accomplished Polish composers for flirting with mass audiences, commercialization, and moral coercion (a few weeks earlier he had criticized Kilar), this roast ignited protests (which included an open letter written by Mieczysław Tomaszewski and signed by 20 composers, performers and musicologists) and polemics.<sup>35</sup> Chłopecki’s attackers accused him of “social irresponsibility,” while his defenders argued that the freedom of criticism should not be limited and intimidated by the “greatness” of the criticized author.

Chłopecki emphasizes the aesthetic difference between Górecki’s *Symphony No. 3* and his *Hymn to St. Adalbert*, between Kilar’s *Exodus* or *Krzesany* and his *Piano Concerto* or *Mass*, between Penderecki’s *Passion* or *Devils of Loudun* and his *Credo, Seven Gates of Jerusalem*, or

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<sup>34</sup> The review is available online at <http://magiel.com/lovemepe.html>. Accessed 7 March 2014.

<sup>35</sup> An open letter of 18 October 2002 to *Gazeta Wyborcza* regarding the music column by Andrzej Chłopecki was signed by Mieczysław Tomaszewski, Zbigniew Bujarski, Regina Chłopicka, Gabriel Chmura, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Zofia Helman, Jacek Kasprzyk, Kazimierz Kord, Jan Krenz, Teresa Małecka, Jerzy Marchwiński, Elżbieta Markowska, Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar, Wiesław Ochman, Janusz Olejniczak, Ewa Podleś, Irena Poniatowska, Marek Stachowski, Jan Stęszewski, Antoni Wit, and Joanna Wnuk-Nazarowa. The polemics involved such local authorities as the writer Jerzy Pilch (*Polityka*, 16 November 2002) and music theorists Krystyna Tarnawska-Kaczorowska and Leszek Polony (*Ruch Muzyczny*, 2 February 2003).

*Piano Concerto*, and regrets that other critics, such as Leszek Polony, cannot see it. Calling those works *sacro-polo*, he thinks that the greatest authorities in Polish contemporary music (except Górecki) lean towards the simplified and listener-friendly aesthetics of socialist realism for commercial reasons, as to something the wider audience would buy.<sup>36</sup>

Interestingly, the term “liturgical socialist realism” (*socrealizm liturgiczny*) was coined over three decades earlier by Stefan Kisielewski (1911-1991) and referred to the grand vocal-instrumental works of the Polish religious tradition from the late 1970s on by Górecki, Kilar, and Penderecki, whom the critic, being a composer himself, could not forgive for abandoning the avant-garde.<sup>37</sup> Those works, thanks to their simplified form and language, can more easily reach a wider audience and extra-musical references are of paramount importance in their perception. The label “liturgical socialist realism” has been attached to the *Polish Requiem* by Penderecki. Although with the end of the Stalinist period socialist realism ceased to be an abiding doctrine, this does not mean that its aesthetic ideas disappeared completely. However, there are no studies on the existence of socialist realism in Polish music after 1956.

Lack of such studies may be linked to the fact that in Poland socialist realism has been associated with ideology disavowed by Polish composers as an instrument of political control rather than aesthetics. Taint with the doctrine so strongly opposed by Polish society, socialist realist art has been perceived as toxic and unworthy of appreciation. Moreover, since 1956 Polish composers have emphasized oppositional narratives and attempted to bury their socialist-realist compositions. Still socialist realism is associated with a cultural ideology that was relatively short-lived in Poland and much less with a musical style that went with it.

At the first sight socialist realism, which stemmed from a materialist ideology hostile to religion and was the manner of reinforcing a socialist agenda, should be farthest away from music

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<sup>36</sup> Andrzej Chłopecki, “Czy o to nam szło?!” , *Ruch Muzyczny*, nr 2 (2003), 10.

<sup>37</sup> See Dorota Szwarzman, *Czas Warszawskich Jesieni. O muzyce polskiej 1945-2007* (Warszawa: Stentor, 2008), 74.

with religious overtones. On the other hand the Catholic Church treated music with similar seriousness, expected dogmatic commitment, demanded clarity and consonance, and, in evaluating a piece, put its message first. Monumental approach and exalted rhetoric based on optimism were welcomed also in the church style. Some forms, such as cantata, which were well grounded in religious music, were no less favoured by the socialist realism style. Moreover, like other musical styles, the socialist realism's aesthetics influenced religious compositions of that period, being apparent in works such as Marian Cantata *Ze Świtaniem Rannej Zorzy* (*With the Morning Dawn*, 1953) for two choirs, trumpets and organ by Rev. Idzi Ogierman Mański (1900-1966). However, the influence of social realism on Polish religious music (especially by lesser known composers) did not attract much scholarly attention.

According to Paul Cadrin socialist realism, which fostered neoclassicism, was alienating Polish composers from contemporary European trends, while religious music allowed them to bring original contribution.<sup>38</sup> Neoclassicism, while allowing for passing the ideological censure, was a potential entrapment of falling into academism, and, on the other hand, it promoted national culture based on folklore precisely at the time when the interest of composers in folk traditions was waning. It is noteworthy that, as Zofia Helman observed those pitfalls applying also to émigré composers, unthreatened by the censorship.<sup>39</sup> Paul Cadrin thus sees religious music as the only field to which émigré composers were free to bring an original contribution, thus acting as a bridge between Szymanowski and Penderecki.<sup>40</sup>

In the 1980s (and even in the 1990s) works on religious topics by renowned Polish composers were rarely deprecated by Polish critics. This changed in the 2000s. Although the critique of Penderecki attracted particular attention, it was Kilar who was criticized most and

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Cadrin, "Influence of Szymanowski on Polish Music", in *The Szymanowski Companion*, ed. Paul Cadrin and Stephen Downes (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 128

<sup>39</sup> Zofia Helman, "Musique en exil," *Polish Art Studies* vol. 14 (1992), 187-202.

<sup>40</sup> Cadrin, op. cit., 128.

whose late output has been most saturated with large scale works with religious overtones.<sup>41</sup> According to Adrian Thomas, “[t]he musical emptiness of Kilar’s recent music is particularly puzzling and dismaying, no less than the public response to and acceptance, even adulation, of the recent slew of sacred and other pieces that has poured, like a lazy Balzac novel, from his pen (*Magnificat*, 2007; *Te Deum*, 2008). Nothing, however, can be worse than his *Missa pro pace* (2000).”<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, the music of the “Holy Trinity” since 1989 sets no new aesthetic trends in either European or Polish music. One may wonder whether the composers simply take the line of the least resistance in obtaining and fulfilling lucrative commissions, or whether they answer to some specific, deeply rooted needs of their audiences.<sup>43</sup> The demand for large-scale works with religious overtones, written in simplified, traditional language would seem surprising in the context of political changes which were supposed to have freed music from any need to fulfil a profound cultural mission. However, the abundance of such works in recent years could hardly be accidental, especially given that it embraces not only classical music but also middlebrow productions (which started with the oratorio *Nieszpory Ludzimierskie* [Ludzimierz Verspers] (1992) by Jan Kanty Pawluśkiewicz to texts by Leszek Aleksander Moczulski), most notably in the spectacularly successful output of Piotr Rubik.

### Rubikopolo: between popular and classical music and the issue of moral coercion

According to Paweł Franczak

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<sup>41</sup> His works from the 21st century include the *Missa pro pace* (2000) for orchestra, chorus, and soloists; *Symphony No. 3. “September Symphony”* (2003), which is linked with 9/11 and refers to gospel music and contains a mournful chorale in the first movement; *Symphony No. 4 “Sinfonia de Motu”* (Symphony of Motion, 2005) for orchestra, chorus, and soloists, with references to the “Dies irae” and “Gloria” in its finale; *Magnificat* (2007) for orchestra, chorus, and soloists; *Symphony No. 5 “Advent Symphony”* (2007) for orchestra, chorus, and soloists; *Te Deum* (2008) for orchestra, chorus, and soloists; and *Veni Creator* (2008) for mixed chorus and strings.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas, op. cit., 33.

<sup>43</sup> Not all the aforementioned works by Kilar were commissioned.

artists can be divided into four categories: good and popular (in the milieu of contemporary composers there are for example Kilar or Penderecki), good but not popular (to mention only Tomasz Sikorski and Hanna Kulenty), bad and not popular (we do not even talk about them), and finally, the most interesting category: bad but popular.<sup>44</sup>

The last category is exemplified by Piotr Rubik, whom Franczak calls “a rock” and “a monolith” because “a music critic cannot bite him.”

What can he be accused of? Having no talent? It is not true. Rubik is a terrible composer but he is quite a good cellist [...]. Being uneducated? Like any real musician, he graduated from a real music conservatory (the Fryderyk Chopin Music Academy in Warsaw). [...] So, maybe of selling too few records? Ha! A diamond record for *Psalterz Wrześniowy*, gold for *Tu es Petrus*, and an honorary platinum. If only, at least, he were ugly. But no, he is too tough for that: a gym and a diet transformed him from a comical sybarite into a Californian type: ‘I feel as good as I look.’ So, a flop.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, neither he nor other music critics can give up baiting “Rubik and his sacro polo” (to use the title of Karolina Pasternak’s article<sup>46</sup>). However, non-music critics take the lead. A journalist specializing in linguistics, Bartek Chaciński, in his review of *Psalterz Wrześniowy* [The September Psalter] calls Rubik’s oratorios “a kind of emotional equivalent of pornography” because “listening to those lengthy psalms can be equally shameful”.<sup>47</sup>

What makes Rubik worthy of so much zeal, vehemence, and acrimony? Piotr Rubik, an artist appealing to some and appalling to others, has acquired a paradigmatic status in the realm of *sacro polo*, and even been graced by his very own *polo* label: *rubikopolo*. Born in 1968, a classically trained cellist, a graduate of the prestigious Fryderyk Chopin Music Academy in Warsaw, who performed with such accomplished orchestras as Jeunesses Musicales and Sinfonia

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<sup>44</sup> Paweł Frańczak, “Prima Aprilis: Musica alternativa: Rubik – anioł zniszczenia,” *Magazyn Kultury Popularnej ‘Esensja’*, 1 April 2008. Available from: <http://esensja.pl/muzyka/publicystyka/tekst.html?id=5143>. Accessed 16 April 2009.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Karolina Pasternak, “Rubik i jego sacro polo,” *Dziennik*, 6 February 2009, available at <http://kultura.dziennik.pl/artykuly/86866,piotr-rubik-i-jego-sacro-polo.html>. Accessed 19 April 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Bartek Chaciński, “Rzewna pompa. A review of Piotr Rubik, Zbigniew Książek ‘Psalterz wrześniowy’,” *Przekrój*, 7 October 2006.



Varsovia, Rubik deliberately abandoned the realm of classical music for the sake of less serious genres.

Rubik's success in building his personal brand has been spectacular. Within a very short time, from a person of secondary importance in the music business (an author and producer of works associated primarily with performers such as Michał Bajor, Małgorzata Walewska, and Edyta Górniak, and an author of music for TV signals) and a host (with Monika Bral) of a thirty-minute program on computer games - *Multimedialny Odłot* (broadcasted by Polsat TV in 1997) – he has become one of the most recognizable personal brands in Poland: a celebrity composer, recognized as “Gentleman of The Year“ by the magazine *Gentleman* in 2008.

The following set of pictures demonstrates how Rubik's image has evolved over the last fifteen years. The curve of his popularity coincides with his changing hairstyle, with its peak marked by the platinum blond straight hair. Although he recently came back to a dark wavy hairstyle, he keeps the slim figure and follows current trends in fashion.



Figure 4.2. Transformations of Piotr Rubik

“It is a great satisfaction and joy (...) that I managed to transform myself from somebody who stood somewhere in the background, was inconspicuous, fat, and ‘looked hopeless’ into somebody in the forefront and successful” – he said in an interview for *Interia.pl* (April 2006). In his opinion, the success of a piece of music “depends on a great number of factors: not only on

the piece itself, but also on the time when it is presented, the mood of the audience, and its promotion”.<sup>48</sup>

He goes on:

Fame came to me incidentally, as for the rest of the things happening in music. It was a series of fortunate events. Suddenly, I came out of the shadows; people associated my image with famous pieces and liked me as a media figure. The fact that I appear on stage together with the performers was definitely helpful too. And what we created in oratorios was so characteristic and different from everything else on the Polish market that this style became associated with Rubik. (...) My hair color was a coincidence. Before New Year's Eve, my hairstylist talked me into platinum. I was in a good mood, so I went for it – and so it stayed. I felt good like that. More cheerful. It had nothing to do with music, but it contributed to my self-confidence. I think it was instrumental in my no longer staying in the shadows. I started conducting my own pieces, and as a result became visible. When I conduct I always go all out, I get excited, become energetic and visible. I think the audience felt I have something worthy of a following.<sup>49</sup>

Milestones in his career were three oratorios written to librettos by Zbigniew Książek:

*Świątokrzyska Gulgota* (*Holy Cross of Golgotha*, premiered 6 April 2004), *Tu es Petrus* (*You Are Peter*, premiered 14 May 2005) and *Psalterz Wrześniowy* (*The September Psalter*, premiered 11 September 2006). All premiered in Kielce, they constitute the *Holy Cross Triptych* (*Tryptyk Świątokrzyski*). Their live recordings sold in the hundreds of thousands of copies on a market in which a gold album is awarded for merely 15,000 copies.



Figure 4.3. DVD cover of *Świątokrzyska Gulgota* (DUO, 2006)

<sup>48</sup> Magdalena Mądrzak and Mariusz Pujso, “An Interview with Piotr Rubik”, *Gentelman*, 1 February 2008.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 4.4. DVD Cover of *Tu es Petrus* (DUO, 2005)



Figure 4.5. DVD Cover of *Psalterz Wrześniowy* (DUO, 2006)

Covers of DVDs of those works (all live recordings) demonstrate a significant shift in Piotr Rubik's role and position. On the cover of the recording of the first oratorio (Figure 4.3.) his picture (the second left) appears in a row together with soloists and the author of the libretto (the first left). On the second cover (Figure 4.4.) he (on the right) is singled out, facing the soloists (on

the left) and holding a baton, yet his figure is of the same size as that of the others. On the third cover (Figure 4.5.), however, his figure, again with a baton but this time facing the viewer (as if conducting the audience?), is in the foreground and significantly larger than the soloists in the background. The black color, characteristic for the first two covers, has been changed to lurid pink and purple (over a white background). Moreover, the picture of the libretto's author has disappeared from the last two covers.

Indeed, the oratorios became associated primarily (if not exclusively) with their composer, and people “go for Rubik” (who performs now with a new set of soloists). Their librettos intersperse quotes from the *Bible* and Pope John Paul II, read by a narrator, with songs to Książek's lyrics sung by soloists and/ or the choir. The most popular pieces from these oratorios are songs about love, which is idealistic, romantic and always between a man and a woman. For some of them, studio versions were recorded and music videos produced, and they occupied popular music charts for a long time. Ostinatos clapped by the choir, featured in “Let Them Say This Isn't Love” (“Niech mówią, że to nie jest miłość”) from *Tu es Petrus*, became almost his signature.

His popularity is often attributed to the niche market he has found. According to Rubik's fans, his music is free from violence and vulgarisms, brings positive emotions, is melodic, is touching, transports its listeners to a better world, and provides a safe space, in which the sorrows of life suddenly well up and dissolve into tears. Unlike pop stars, his soloists look like everyday people and are perceived as “natural”. Many of them are former finalists of the Polish version of the “Got Talent” program, while some are actors. A performance by artists facing each other instead of the audience and singing to each other contributes to the perceived truthfulness of the feelings expressed by the songs.

Moreover, in Rubik's work the realm of art seems intimately entwined with real life. The composer's relationship with a young model, Agata Paskudzka, whom he married on June 21, 2008, was portrayed in the videos to such songs as “Psalm dla Ciebie” [A Psalm for You] and

“Świat się nie kończy” [The World Is Not Ending’). The song “Let Them Say This Isn’t Love” (“Niech mówią, że to nie jest miłość”) is also interpreted as being about them. Moreover, in 2009 Rubik recorded a song dedicated to his unborn child “Kiedy mężczyzna płacze” [When a Man Cries], in which he not only plays the piano, but also sings. It became a single promoting his album *RubikOne* (EMI 2009), which otherwise features female artists. When his daughter was two-and-a-half years old, Rubik wrote “Piosenka dla Helenki” (“Song for Little Helen” from the album *Opisanie świata*, EMI 2011), in which he sings together with his little daughter, and in the video to the song, his entire family is pictured. In 2010 there were even announcements about Rubik working with the librettist Zbigniew Książek on a musical that was to tell the story of their collaboration, and contain the character of Piotr Rubik played by ... Piotr Rubik himself.<sup>50</sup>

Such a tendency for balancing between real emotions and performance, for linking real life with fiction and blurring the boundaries between the two is very characteristic for contemporary culture. One might point not only to modern film documentaries and reality shows but also such productions as the movie by Andrzej Wajda *Tatarak* [*Sweet Rush*], which was awarded a prize at the Berlin International Film Festival in February 2009 for "developing new ways of film making". This film confronts fiction with reality, intertwining the fictitious story based upon a novel by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz with monologues by the actress Krystyna Janda about the death of her real-life husband, Edward Kłosiński, to whom the film is dedicated.

A shadow on the squeaky-clean image of Rubik appeared in 2007 as a result of his conflict with his librettist and the so-called “original ensemble” represented by the DUO entertainment agency, which was covered widely in the mass media under such headings as “Praying Artists Are Quarreling over Money” (“*Rozmodleni artyści kłócą się o pieniądze*”).<sup>51</sup> Selling the exclusive rights to publishing pictures from his wedding with Agata Paskudzka (on 21

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<sup>50</sup> Wacław Krupiński, “Połączył ich musical [Joined by the Musical]”, *Dziennik Polski*, 5 May 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Jacek Cieślík, “Rozmodleni artyści kłócą się o pieniądze,” *Reczpospolita*, 3 November 2007.

June 2008) to the color magazine *Viva!* for 200,000 PLN (ca. 70,000 USD) was another issue widely commented upon.<sup>52</sup>

The central controversy over Rubik, however, concerned the publically-funded commissioning of monumental pieces to celebrate the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of Gorzów and Kraków. This coincided with a wave of venomous attacks on the composer and his work in the artistic community and the highbrow press. The article “Rubik Like Gershwin” (“*Rubik jak Gershwin*”) by Anna Szulc from *Przekrój*, in which artistic circles of Kraków doomed his cantata *Zakochani w Krakowie* [*In Love with Krakow*] long before it was premiered, is credited with the first application of the label *sacropolo* to Rubik and his music.<sup>53</sup> Together with the article “Rubik, czyli tryumf hucpy” [Rubik or the Cheek’s Triumph] by Andrzej Chłopecki, it set the standard for the composer’s future critique.<sup>54</sup>

Rubik is accused of being uncreative and unoriginal, of repeating himself, of composing music that borrows excessively from various sources (mostly from outside of classical music) but fails to transform its source material in a sophisticated way to create a unified whole; music that is disappointingly obvious and provides very little challenge to the ear. Although his materials are often arresting, they quickly wear out their welcome but continue to come at the listener – relentlessly. His works give the impression of a series of disjointed musical interludes tenuously bound together by a textual narrative, which itself is nothing more than a set of seemingly profound statements combined into philosophical or historical gibberish. They have “the feel of a hit-parade or classic-lite evening designed for those unable to appreciate the subtleties in the

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<sup>52</sup> See for example “Rubik zarobił miliony i wystarczy” [Rubik Made Millions and That’s Enough] <http://www.efakt.pl/artykuly/artykul.asp?Artykul=35206>. Accessed 21 November 2011.

<sup>53</sup> She uses the phrase “grandiloquent-tawdry classical-sacro-polo” [“pompatyczno-jarmarczne classical-sacro-polo”]. Anna Szulc, “Rubik jak Gershwin,” *Przekrój*, 18 January 2007.

<sup>54</sup> He uses the phrase ‘model “sacro-polo”’. Andrzej Chłopecki, “Rubik, czyli tryumf hucpy,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 4, 22 January 2007.

works of a more critically acclaimed composer, such as Krzysztof Penderecki”<sup>55</sup> Well, exactly the same accusations were leveled by American critics against ... Krzysztof Penderecki and his works on religious topics.<sup>56</sup>

“There is an entrepreneurial air to Mr. Penderecki's highly successful composing career. He has a knack for large issues, weighty subjects and timely events.” – writes Bernard Holland in his review of “Seven Gates of Jerusalem”<sup>57</sup> for the *New York Times*. Other quotes from the same article include “Mr. Penderecki has sought to discover what a halfway cultured yet excitement-seeking listener wishes a solemn and religious piece to sound like and then has assiduously obliged.” Elsewhere the same article notes that the work “made us wonder about bigness as a source of beauty and power. It is an immense piece, not in length nor, I am afraid, in depth but in the almost intimidating number of singers and orchestra players it directs toward its listeners.” The replacement of Penderecki’s name with Rubik’s would render examples typical also of his criticism.

Rubik’s critics contend that it is disingenuous of him to bill himself as a classical composer. Surprisingly, I have not found a single statement by him or his fans claiming that he is a classical composer. He says his dream is to write for big Hollywood productions. Yet his adversaries are often worried that he serves up an *ersatz* form of classical music that prevents his fans from listening to the “real” thing.

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<sup>55</sup> Phillip Palmer, “Controversy over choice of Piotr Rubik as composer of ceremony,” *Kraków Post*, 22 July 2007, <http://www.krakowpost.com/article/110>. Accessed 24 July 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Anthony Tommasini wrote for *The New York Times* (14 May 2002) on Penderecki’s *Piano Concerto*: “Mr. Penderecki, 68, has a penchant for lugubrious music that can seem like the musical equivalent of philosophical mumbo jumbo”. “There are outbursts of soaring, cinematic themes that skirt close to the syrupy, but which are then jostled by weird harmonies and restless inner busyness.”

<sup>57</sup> Bernard Holland, “A Grand Gesture for 3,000 Years of History,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/20/arts/festival-review-music-a-grand-gesture-for-3000-years-of-history.html?n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/Subjects/L/Lincoln%20Center%20Festival>. Accessed 26 September 2016.

One may wonder what made Andrzej Chłopecki, one of his harshest critics, not only using fiery rhetoric but also stretching the facts in his article (claiming for example that none of the songs from the album *Rubicon* is capable of being a pop hit, while “Dotyk” [The Touch], performed by Edyta Górniak, was indeed a big hit in 1995). He blames Penderecki and Kilar for writing down to the public and pursuing popularity among the bourgeois-philharmonic and mass audiences which ignore “new and contemporary music”.<sup>58</sup> While Chłopecki and other critics were able to ignore earlier middlebrow productions, such as *Nieszpory Ludzimierskie* by Jan Kanty Pawluśkiewicz of 1995, the aesthetics of recent works by Kilar and Penderecki challenged the paradigm of contemporary classical music and forced them to address Rubik’s works. In consequence, we need to rethink such questions as: What motivates aesthetic judgment? What makes music “serious,” “classical” or “high”? How should we distinguish “real” from “fake” art, and who gets to decide?

Let us look at statements denouncing Rubik’s cantata *Zakochani w Krakowie* (*In Love with Krakow*) for which he was paid 100,000 PLN (1 USD = ca. 3 PLN):<sup>59</sup>

It is a real scandal to commission such a great work as a cantata or oratorio from an amateur. Kraków simply ignores its own creative circles

(Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar, a composer from Kraków)

The Kraków School of composers is the most distinguished group in Poland. An attempt to omit it, I consider scandalous.

(Stanisław Krawczyński, the rector of the Academy of Music in Kraków)

A man who cultivates musical hutzpah, larded with pseudo-pathos and foreign-sounding names is promoted in my city. Let Mr. Rubik write his psalms, oratorios,

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<sup>58</sup> He accused the most eminent Polish composers of the older generation of flirting with mass culture, commercialization, and insincerity. He has questioned the content that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was promulgated under the umbrella of music’s “humanization,” and that campaigned for ambitious work aimed at discovering the order of the Universe. In his opinion, the latest scores by Penderecki, Górecki, and Kilar demonstrate an arrogant superiority of the believer over the subject of the faith. Chłopecki also diagnoses a creative crisis in Górecki. See Andrzej Chłopecki, “Czy o to nam szło?!” *Ruch Muzyczny*, nr 2 (2003), 10. See Also, Leszek Polony, “Adorno dla ubogich,” *Ruch Muzyczny*, Nr 4, February 2003, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted after Tomasz Handzlik, “Sting i Penderecki przegrali z Rubikiem” [Sting and Penderecki Have Lost to Rubik], *Gazeta Wyborcza/Gazeta w Krakowie*, 6 January 2007, 1. These quotes were repeated in various articles and on various websites including Interia.pl and Wikipedia.



cantatas, and even fugues and toccatas. But for God's sake, why is his work paid for with my money?

(Artur "Baron" Więcek, a director from Kraków)

In these statements (all made by artists), public support for the arts is taken for granted. Moreover, the money should be directed to eminent local artists and its distribution should be supervised, if not decided upon, by the local artistic authorities. These statements express longing for the time when commissioning music was a top-down process governed by the Polish Composers' Union. Such a process was aimed at giving the composers (at least the most outstanding of them) financial resources which enabled them to focus entirely on writing music. It was composer-oriented, i.e. aimed at producing the best pieces in the opinion of composers and critics (not necessarily of performers or audiences).

Under the new system, however, the goals of commissioners are not necessary identical with the needs of composers, nor oriented towards making substantial contributions to the national heritage. According to Adolf Weltschek, the artistic director of the Jubilee Program Committee, the initial plans of commissioning a work from Penderecki (who is a Cracovian composer) were changed in favor of Rubik (who is from Warsaw) for the following reasons: "Piotr Rubik and Zbigniew Książek (lyricist) are real media stars. Their music will effectively promote our city. Kraków will finally open to the widest possible audience across Poland." So the rationale for commissioning a work with Rubik was not to produce a masterpiece but to get the widest possible media exposure and to attract the largest audiences for the public money spent. Rubik's cantata surely provided the desired publicity.

Rubik was denied a composer's status and called an amateur. He did not study composition at a music academy, nor had he presented the Polish Composers' Union with work substantial enough to be granted membership in this elite organization. One may, however, wonder if the criteria of the old system are still applicable in judging artists' professional status. The book *Polish Composers 1918-2010 (Kompozytorzy polscy 1918-2000)* seeks a set of criteria

to define who is a Polish composer.<sup>60</sup> According to its editor, Marek Podhajski, answers to two apparently simple questions “Who do we call a composer?” and “Who do we consider to be a Polish composer?” are not as clear as they might seem to be.

Podhajski’s understanding of the concept of a composer had been influenced by his work on the *Dictionary of Icelandic Composers*. He was confronted by the fact that a list of all the members of the Composers’ Milieu in Iceland did not coincide in many cases with writers whose pieces were known to him, or whose pieces were broadcast on the radio or recorded.

The list of professions of those composers was very long and diverse (...). However, it would be wrong to conclude that the environment of Icelandic composers consists mainly of amateurs. It is a fact that the main body of this group consists of trained, professional musicians. This includes not only people who had actually studied composition but also violinists, cellists, organists, double bass players, singers, flautists, pianists, conductors, etc. However, it is worth underlining that there are many pieces written by amateur musician composers that enjoy great popularity. Their music is alive, it is played and recorded, performed and sung. How could one ignore this creative output?<sup>61</sup>

Would Piotr Rubik, a trained cellist, whose music is alive, recorded, performed and sung, have been included in this book had his compositions come into the spotlight before 2000?

Although Podhajski decided that formal education, guild or union membership, etc. would not be defining characteristics when describing somebody as a composer. He concentrated on composers of so-called classical music “understood intuitively” and included “writers who write this type of music alongside other genres, such as music for the theatre, film music, and attempts to synthesize classical music with other genres such as jazz.”<sup>62</sup> Does this include Rubik?

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<sup>60</sup> *Kompozytorzy polscy 1918-2000 [Polish Composers 1918-2000]* ed. by Marek Podhajski (Warszawa-Gdańsk, Akademia Muzyczna im. F. Chopina, Akademia Muzyczna im. S. Moniuszki, 2005). The English version, *Polish Music, Polish Composers 1918-2010*, ed. by Marek Podhajski (Lublin-Gdańsk: KUL, Akademia Muzyczna im. S. Moniuszki, 2013), while closely related to the Polish original, is not its simple translation.

<sup>61</sup> Marek Podhajski, “Polish music, Polish composers 1918-2007”, in *Polish Music since 1945*, ed. by Eva Mantzourani (Kraków: Musica Jagiellonica, 2013), 44.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

According to my interlocutors, Rubik ignores the border between classical and popular music and his pieces are situated exactly between the two realms. Moreover, although he wears a tuxedo, he does not have an air of solemnity and majesty about him. With dyed hair, and with computer games and motorcycles as his hobbies, a young model as a wife, interviews in color magazines, the status of a celebrity star – are these attributes of a “serious” composer?

Since 2008 some decline in Rubik’s popularity can be observed. His song “Most dwojga serc” [Two Hearts’ Bridge] did not make it into the Sopot Festival.<sup>63</sup> While his record *Habitat* (2008) received a status of double platinum, the next record, *RubikOne* (2009), attained “only” gold.<sup>64</sup> Although the presence of his music on the radio and television has significantly declined, Rubik still has the status of a celebrity star. In 2012 he was a celebrity leading a choir in a Polish version of the reality talent contest “Clash of the Choirs” (for the network TVP2). Moreover, he still has a devoted audience and tours not only in Poland but also in the USA and Canada. On 27 April 2014 in the Wrocław City Square he performed his *Canto Subito* and the premiere of his *Te Deum* for choir and symphony orchestra written especially to celebrate the canonization of John Paul II. His latest album *Pieśni Szczęścia* (*Songs of Happiness*, Universal Music Polska, 2015), although comes back to Zbigniew Książek lyrics, departs from religious topics.

The popularity of middlebrow religious productions continues in spite of their limited presence in the mainstream media. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century successful productions of this kind proliferate and represent a wide range of styles. Many are devoted to the Polish pope or written to his poetry (for example *Roman Tryptych* [*Tryptyk rzymski*] (2003) by Stanisław Soyka, a

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<sup>63</sup> The Sopot International Song Festival, an annual international song contest held in Sopot since 1961, is the biggest Polish music festival altogether with the National Festival of Polish Song in Opole, and one of the biggest song contests in Europe, with a multimillion audience thanks to live broadcasts by national Polish television.

<sup>64</sup> Of his latest records, *Santo Subito* (EMI 2009), which is described as a musical biography of the pope John Paul II, achieved platinum, and *Opisanie świata* (*World’s Description* EMI 2011) attained gold.

renowned jazz and pop singer, pianist and composer), and a new wave of them was inspired by the canonization of John Paul II in 2014.<sup>65</sup>

Works on other religious topics heighten various official celebrations.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, numerous religious cantatas are being written by lay people and clergy, and a special genre of pop-oratorio (for soloists (usually pop or jazz singers), choir, orchestra and rhythm section, which involves instruments characteristic of popular music genres, such as guitars (acoustic, bass, electric), percussion, or keyboards) has developed.<sup>67</sup> The stylistic diversity of such productions makes the division of art into “high” and “low” unsustainable. While some of them approximate productions associated with eminent Polish composers, others clearly tend towards popular music.

It is striking that the intensified criticism of such music took place only when widely acclaimed composers of classical music started to write music more accessible for the audience and leaned toward a lighter style. It was the critics’ fear of potential problems with separating classical/ serious music from other styles and not the audience’s claims of experiencing classical music at Rubik’s concerts that motivated attacks on *sacropolo*. Difficulty in distinguishing classical music from middlebrow productions and popular music styles in general would challenge the claim that the language of classical music differs fundamentally from other musical languages. This would be devastating for the idea of classical/ art music’s intrinsic aesthetic value or meaning, on which its elevation to the highest status in cultural hierarchies is grounded.

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<sup>65</sup> Those works include the symphonic oratorio *Szukam Was* (“I’m Looking for You”, with music by Bartosz Tomaszek, text Michał Zabłocki), written for the opening of the new museum, the Holy Father John Paul II Family Home in Wadowice on 9 April 2014. Some other pieces are mentioned in Sieński, op. cit., 29.

<sup>66</sup> For example, for the occasion of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Franciscan Order an oratorio on St. Francis, *Transitus* (2009) was composed by Joachim Mencil, a renowned jazz pianist and composer (lyrics by Beata Mencil). It was premiered in the Main Square in Kraków on 3 October 2009, with its live recording published on CD (Inspirafon 2010).

<sup>67</sup> For example the Sacred Music Ensemble “Lumen” has in its repertory three works under such a label (*David’s Psalms* [*Psalmi Davida*], *God’s Mercy* [*Miłosierdzie Boże*], and *My Love* [*Moja Miłość*]); all with music by Zbigniew Małkiewicz. See [www.pop-oratorium.pl](http://www.pop-oratorium.pl). Accessed on 12 March 2014.

*Sacropolo* has thus been perceived as fundamentally different from various popular music productions arranged and performed with symphony orchestras, which could be called luxury pop. Popular music productions of this kind, such as orchestral arrangement of *muzyka rozrywkowa* hits, symphonic editions of Polish rock or punk (such as, for example, *Perfect Symfonicznie*, Polskie Radio 2002 or *Lady Pank Symfonicznie*, Universal Music Group 2012) or even symphonic disco polo (such as the song “Szalona” performed by Marcin Miller with Adam Sztaba Orchestra), have been seen simply as popular music played by the symphony orchestra, which does not disturb music categories or hierarchies.

Earlier middlebrow productions were also unthreatening because they were stylistically distinct from classical/ serious music pieces. When the “serious music” compositions, however, started to gravitate in apparent proximity to Rubik’s productions, both “serious composers” and Rubik were attacked. The problem with *rubikopolo* was not so much its existence or its style per se but its proximity to the supposedly unique language of serious music, which had to justify its elevated position in the realm of the most culturally sacred high culture. Moreover, what provoked the attacks was not the audience’s labeling Rubik’s compositions as classical works (which did not happen) nor his billing himself as a classical music composer (which he did not do) but a potential danger of mistaking *rubikopolo* for “real classical music” which his critics (who assumed the duty of guardians of “real classical music”) have tried to prevent.

### Sacred Music, Kitsch, and *Sacropolo*

What is sacred music? What makes music sacred or profane? Responses to these questions vary, and with respect to actual musical practices they become even more unclear. Moreover, musical practices raise the issue of profaning the sacred or sacralizing the profane, while discussions about music show also a division of music into worthy and unworthy of support, promotion, or even evaluation. Additionally, the sacred/ profane and worthy/ unworthy distinction functions not only in religious but also in cultural context.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *sacred music* as “music which accompanies sacred words or which has a certain solemn character of its own.” In the former case the sacred lies outside music, while in the later one, it is intrinsic to music itself. So, the first understanding of the term would allow for applying it to any music linked with “sacred words” (as soon as “sacred words” are determined), regardless of its style or aesthetic value. The second, on the other hand, would disqualify certain types of music (which are considered frivolous, light-hearted, informal, or irreverent), allowing, at the same time, for extension of the term to instrumental music in cases in which it is considered dignified, serious, sober, sincere, formal, or impressive.

The term *sacred music* (*muzyka sakralna*) is related to such terms as *religious music* (*muzyka religijna*), *liturgical music* (*muzyka liturgiczna*), and *church music* (*muzyka kościelna*). Not being very precise, they are used interchangeably, although they are not synonymous. According to Hanna Kostrzewska, “religious music” is the broadest category of the four, referring to all pieces on religious subjects, which are defined by text (in the case of vocal or vocal-instrumental music), title, or some other link to a religious cult (such as for example tradition) and which are intended (in their composition and performance) to express and evoke religious sentiments.<sup>68</sup> *Liturgical music* is the most specific term and, in Polish writings, it is assumed to be a part of the Catholic Mass. Documents of the Catholic Church emphasize the distinction between liturgical and non-liturgical music.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Hanna Kostrzewska, “Muzyka sakralna – próba definicji,” *Musica Sacra Nova*, 1 (2007): 1-12.

<sup>69</sup> Contemporary official policy of the Catholic Church on music is stated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council *Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963 (items 112-121); and most particularly *Musicae sacrae, the Instruction on Music In The Liturgy*, from the Sacred Congregation for Rites, on March 5, 1967. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the general guiding principles of the Church were expressed in the *Motu proprio* of Pius X (22 Nov. 1903) as follows:

Sacred music should possess, in the highest degree, the qualities proper to the liturgy, or more precisely, sanctity and purity of form from which its other character of universality spontaneously springs. It must be holy, and must therefore exclude all profanity, not only from itself but also from the manner in which it is presented by those who execute it. It must be true art, for otherwise it cannot exercise on the minds of the hearers that influence which the Church meditates on when she welcomes into her liturgy the art of music. But it must also be universal,

Polish commentators often refer to the sacred/ profane dichotomy. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *profane*, literally “before (i.e. outside) the temple” (from latin *pro-* + *fānum*), means not dedicated to religious use, secular, not initiated into a religious rite, unconsecrated, ceremonially unclean, impious, unholy, or desecrating what is holy or sacred; unhallowed; ritually unclean or polluted; (esp. of religious rites) heathen, pagan, uninitiated, lay. *Sacred*, by contrast, means set apart for or dedicated to some religious purpose, and hence entitled to veneration or religious respect; made holy by association with a god or other object of worship; consecrated, hallowed, esteemed especially dear or acceptable to a deity; exclusively appropriated to some person or some special purpose.

On the questions as to whether the sacred can be embedded into musical structure (as seen by Jan Pikulik or Andrzej Nikodemowicz) or whether it is acquired by extra-musical factors (such as a function played by music), opinions are divided among Polish composers, musicologists, and music theorists, although the latter view seems to be more common. Mirosław Perz or Karol Mrowiec question the sacred-profane opposition or the oppositional existence of sacred and profane music. According to Teresa Malecka, in the language of music there are no specific models which would allow for defining a musical structure as sacred, and any good, authentic art (including music) can bring one closer to God. Regina Chłopicka sees the border between the sacred and profane as fluid, yet not all musical pieces can acquire the function of sacred music.<sup>70</sup>

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in the sense that, while every nation is permitted to admit into its ecclesiastical compositions those special forms which may be said to constitute its native music, still these forms must be subordinated in such a manner to the general characteristics of sacred music, that no one of any nation may receive an impression other than good on hearing them.

Pope Pius XII expanded upon these guidelines in his *Musicae Sacrae* (1955).

<sup>70</sup> See the published proceedings of the symposium *Współczesna polska religijna kultura muzyczna jako przedmiot badań muzykologii* [Contemporary Polish Religious Musical Culture as a Subject of Musicological Research] ed. by Bolesław Bartkowski, Stanisław Dąbek and Antoni Zola (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1992), 121-128. For a summary of the discussion see Łukaszewski, op. cit., 55-57.

While most often sacred music is identified with music to religious texts, there are also opinions that works unrelated to religious topics can be sacred as well. In Poland, such understanding is characteristic especially for composers. For example, in Kilar's opinion "sacred music" does not need to be intended as religious: "any music [which is] pure, good, beautiful, and elevating is sacred music. That is why Mozart's little minuet or Chopin's prelude can be sacred".<sup>71</sup> Also Henryk Mikołaj Górecki considered dividing music into sacred and profane as artificial: "I do not see the profane in any normal, decent, human creativity. Are Schubert's pieces profane? Is Mozart's music profane? Is Chopin's "Prelude in A minor" less sacred than the "Kyrie" from Beethoven's *Missa solennis*? For me, it isn't."<sup>72</sup>

Even though those statements can theoretically embrace "any" good, beautiful, authentic music, the implication is that the discussion actually refers to music known as "serious" or "classical". While some authors (for example Górecki) could indeed have in mind a broader spectrum of music, usually music without any qualifiers is synonymous with "classical"/"serious", which is treated as the only one worthy of reflection and regarded as "sacred" in a cultural sense. Esteemed especially by cultural elites, such music is elevated as "real," "pure" art, often being treated with almost religious reverence as if it were an object of worship (not only at philharmonic concerts, which are in fact highly ritualistic and take place in "temples of art").

Although such an attitude, reflecting a nineteenth-century treatment of art as religion, is not universal, it is characteristic of a prominent part of Polish musical circles and is especially apparent in various open letters of protest written in reaction to perceived instances of music-

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<sup>71</sup> Kaludia Podobińska and Leszek Polony, *Cieszę się darem życia. Rozmowy z Wojciechem Kilem* (Kraków: PWM, 1997), 59.

<sup>72</sup> "Spotkanie z [Meeting with] Henryk Mikołaj Górecki" in *Dźwięk – Słowo – Obraz – Myśl. Rozmowy artystów, teoretyków i krytyków sztuki w Muzeum im. A. i J. Iwaszkiewiczów w Stawisku*, vol. 1 ed. by Alicja Matracka-Kościelny (Podkowa Leśna: Muzeum im. A. i J. Iwaszkiewiczów w Stawisku, 1997), 43. Quoted after Łukaszewski, op. cit., 55.



related sacrilege.<sup>73</sup> Remarkably, the letter written against Chłopecki's review of Penderecki's *Piano Concerto "Resurrection"* was not an attempt to demonstrate that the piece of music attacked in the review is a masterpiece but rather a statement implicitly condemning attacks on a work by an icon of Polish contemporary music as impermissible. Others, however, consider such an attitude towards classical music and its iconic composers obsolete and recently have even tried to ridicule it, as in a series of caricatures by Jan Paweł Blaszek.<sup>74</sup>



Figure 4.6. 'The Pendereckis,' caricature by Jan Paweł Blaszek

<sup>73</sup> For example, naming a vodka after Chopin, the greatest Polish composer and a national icon, ignited loud protests, which culminated in a legal battle, in which the Fryderyk Chopin Institute lost to Polmos Siedlce, the vodka's producer. Multiple letters of protest were also triggered by the cover of a CD entitled *Polish Spirit* (with Polish late-Romantic violin concertos by Emil Młynarski and Mieczysław Karłowicz performed by Nigel Kennedy), which pictures bottles and glasses of some spirit and on the reverse also a cigarette burning in an ash tray and a jersey of Cracovia, a soccer club from Kraków, of which the British violinist, like the late pope, is a fan.

<sup>74</sup> For the whole series of caricatures "Pender in pictures" see <http://magiel.com/glowna.html>.

One of Blaszek's caricatures pictures a monument to Krzysztof Penderecki, whose head is defiled by a little bird. The monument is signed "To the Nation – K[rzysztof]. P[enderecki]." [*Narodowi K. P.*], which is a clear reference to the famous monument of the greatest Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz on the Town Square in Kraków, which is signed "To Adam Mickiewicz – The Nation" [*Adamowi Mickiewiczowi – Naród*] and on which pigeons (plentiful on the square) sit almost constantly. The guard in front of the Penderecki's statue is kept by Elżbieta Penderecka, his wife and manager, who holds a large sign "For Keeping the Monument Clean" [*Na utrzymanie pomnika w czystości*] next to a large hat (taken off her head?) put on the pavement upside-down to collect money.

Among numerous acts of "cultural sacrilege", those aimed at treasures of national culture have provoked the strongest reaction and even triggered legal action.<sup>75</sup> For example, the consent granted by the Fryderyk Chopin Society (TIFC) to a producer of alcoholic drinks that was seeking to obtain an exclusive right to a trade-mark containing the name of Chopin ignited the unprecedented Parliamentary Act "On the protection of Fryderyk Chopin's heritage". According to Article 1 of the "Chopin Law" "[t]he works of Fryderyk Chopin and objects connected with him are nation-wide values subject to special protection. The name of Fryderyk Chopin and his image, respectively, are protected under the rules concerning personal interests."<sup>76</sup> On the basis of the Act, in 2001 the Fryderyk Chopin Institute (NIFC) was appointed as a steward of the most holy icon of Polish music and, since 2005, took over a part of the Fryderyk Chopin Society's (TIFC) mission, including the organization of the International Frederic Chopin Piano Competition.

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<sup>75</sup> Among the most resonating were protests against directorial politics of Jan Klata, which started with his controversial performances of August Strindberg's *To Damascus* at The Helena Modrzejewska National Stary Theater in Krakow in 2013. According to its opponents, who demanded the director's dismissal, a "national stage" is not a proper place for an experimental theatre and performances there not be based on a scandal.

<sup>76</sup> The English version of the Act can be found at The Fryderyk Chopin Institute website: [http://en.chopin.nifc.pl/institute/organization/legal\\_act](http://en.chopin.nifc.pl/institute/organization/legal_act) [Accessed 7 September 2015].

Besides ensuring safety and promotion of cultural heritage of the great Polish composer, the Act has been aimed at eliminating potential depreciation of the Chopin's name by the use of symbols connected with the composer in business transactions. An imagined toilet paper with the name or representation of Chopin is frequently given as an example of such a potential depreciation of the national composer. In practice, the Fryderyk Chopin Institute refused its consent, for example, to a producer of neckties who wanted to mark their products with the name of Chopin, arguing that in the time of Chopin neckties were not commonly used.<sup>77</sup>

While music regarded as national treasure is clearly treated as the most sacred in cultural sense, one may wonder how far such cultural sacredness reaches and whether its borders can be identified. According to the organizer of the Sacrum Profanum Festival (which takes place in Kraków every year since 2003), the festival:

presents newest music and is aimed at blurring the line between contemporary music, often treated as difficult and incomprehensible, and the developments of ambitious entertainment and the experimental scene. Its importance is created, on one hand, by the participation of the best ensembles playing contemporary music, e.g. Ensemble Modern, Alarm Will Sound, Bang on a Can All-Stars, Kronos Quartet, and, on the other hand, by the presence of stars of the world alternative scene, including Aphex Twin, Jónsi, Jonny Greenwood (Radiohead), Adrian Utley (Portishead), Kraftwerk and Sigur Rós.

The prestige of Sacrum Profanum Festival is enhanced by the presence of artists regarded as icons of contemporary music – in 2011 Steve Reich, the master of minimalism, celebrated his 75th birthday in Krakow. In 2011, for the first time in its history, the American edition of the festival was heralded by a joint performance by Steve Reich and Krzysztof Penderecki, which was organised in one of the most prestigious concert halls of the world – the Alice Tully Hall of New York's Lincoln Center.<sup>78</sup>

According to this description, contemporary music, identified as “difficult and incomprehensible”, has its icons, masters, and temples (prestigious concert halls) and clearly represents the sacred, while “ambitious entertainment and the experimental scene” represents the

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<sup>77</sup> Michał Kruk, “Chopin i ‘jego’ ustawa [Chopin and ‘His’ Law]”, *Kwartalnik Urzędu Patentowego RP*, Special Edition, March (2011), 18.

<sup>78</sup> See “About Festival” at the official website of Sacrum Profanum Festival <http://sacrumprofanum.com/en> (Accessed March 8 March 2016).

profane. The line between the two can be blurred because the profane part is located close enough to the sacred one, being suitable for contemplating listening and “performed by the world’s leading musicians and prominent Polish artists”. It meets the criteria of purity of form and universality, which are required from sacred music in the *Motu proprio*. Blurring of boundaries here only seemingly brings the two realms of music together, when in fact it imposes the criteria of the sacred realm of contemporary (serious) music onto the pieces, which belong to the profane realm of entertainment music in order to distinguish the “worthy” ones.

While the festival sanctifies “ambitious entertainment” music by initiating it into rites appropriate for the (culturally) sacred contemporary music, it does not embrace the whole realm of the “profane”. On the contrary, it actually emphasizes the hierarchies within the realm of entertainment music (*muzyka rozrywkowa*), downgrading genres which are not considered ambitious or experimental outside the scope of “cultural worthiness”. Genres of *muzyka rozrywkowa* (which are too frivolous, light-hearted, informal, or local) are relegated to the realm of the profane that cannot be redeemed by a close contact with the sacred. Thus the boundaries between the serious and entertainment music are not erased but only relocated.

Do genres and styles play equally important role when sacred texts are involved? In contemporary Poland, the problem of the relationship between the sacred and the profane and the styles in which they should be addressed is particularly apparent in discussions about religious language.<sup>79</sup> The Council for the Polish Language considers Biblical style a value in itself, and postulates keeping it separate from the ordinary language people experience on a daily basis (in advertising, politics, and the media) in order to give the Biblical text the desired dignity.<sup>80</sup> However, as Tomasz Węclawski has observed, the style of Polish translations of the Bible is

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<sup>79</sup> See for example a series of articles published on the topic in *Res Publica Nowa* nr 2 (2004).

<sup>80</sup> The Council for the Polish Language [Rada Języka Polskiego], “Uwagi o współczesnych przekładach Biblii [‘Notes on the modern translations of the Bible’]”, Official website of the Council for the Polish Language, [www.rjp.pan.pl/index2.php](http://www.rjp.pan.pl/index2.php), accessed 24 May 2013.

often “higher” than the original biblical texts. He warns that today’s solemnity can betray the original message with an artificially “sacralised” translation no less than a “desacralized” translation can.<sup>81</sup>

Andrzej Dragula even asks “Is it really impossible to say anything about God in the language of advertising?”<sup>82</sup> On the one hand, he underscores that there is no single universal “canonical” religious language which can be used in every religious situation by everybody, and on the other hand he considers a coexistence of the Gospel with pop-culture and slang to be as dangerous as its coexistence with folk or chromographic religiosity (*dewocja rodem z oleodruku*).<sup>83</sup> While all these modes of discourse “domesticate” the Gospel, they are at the same time able to defame it. For this reason the Church rightly disallows such translations of the Gospel (including folk carols, the Gospels in comic-book style, etc.) in the Liturgy, which should remain a source of uncontaminated faith.<sup>84</sup>

Presence of music in popular music styles in the Liturgy is a controversial issue in Poland. Proponents of the total disqualification of such music assume that secular and sacred phenomena come from two different orders and should therefore be addressed in separate styles. Such stylistic differentiation into the “high” style, which is inspired and suitable for expression of the sacred, and the “low” style, which is impoverished, primitive, and which should stay away from holiness, however, implies, as Dragula, has observed, a certain duality of the world, which

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<sup>81</sup> Tomasz Węclawski, “Tłumacze i Prorocy,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 50, 11 December 2005.

<sup>82</sup> Andrzej Dragula, “Biblia pierwszego kontaktu,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 47, 20 November 2005.

<sup>83</sup> Andrzej Dragula, “Między Wieżą Babel a Pięćdziesiątnicą,” *Więź* nr 7 (2007). [http://laboratorium.wiez.pl/teksty.php?o\\_wspolczesnym\\_jezyku\\_religijnym&p=3](http://laboratorium.wiez.pl/teksty.php?o_wspolczesnym_jezyku_religijnym&p=3). Accessed 17 May 2013. Chromographic religiosity refers to mass produced pictures using chromolithography (Pl. *oleodruk*) on religious topics. Popular in Poland since the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, they often depicted biblical scenes in a naïve and unsophisticated way and were used to decorate mostly peasants and workers’ homes. See Halina Gerlich, *Oleodruk - Rzecz Święta* (Katowice: Muzeum Historii Katowic, 2007).

<sup>84</sup> Andrzej Dragula, “Ewangelia dla Ziomałi,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 9, 21 February 2006, 11.

breaks down into two discontinuous worlds: the sacred and the profane, secular and religious, godly and ungodly.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, Polish popular Christian music abounds and even the controversial practice of using it during liturgical services is widespread. It is supported and stimulated by many priests who justify it on the basis that the liturgy somehow “automatically” sanctifies such music. Even many opponents of Christian popular music, especially of its use during the liturgy, allow for its presence in settings which they consider special occasions (such as the pope’s pilgrimages). Occasional or festive aspects are also raised by supporters of such music as a justification for it. Its concerts, like other concerts of popular music, are a kind of celebration for the public, “a kind of ‘magic’ place marked by the time and the space and separated from the everyday, from the ordinary”.<sup>86</sup> Its use during the liturgy is often also justified as occasional splendour added by a youth ensemble, whose performance during the mass is announced beforehand.

At the same time opponents of using popular music in liturgical rites raise the issue of its association with the ordinary/ everyday and discothèques or other dance parties. They view instruments transferred to the liturgy from popular music as embedding a sense of the everyday instead of festivity and uniqueness of the liturgical celebration.<sup>87</sup> One might argue, however, that partying is in fact linked with festivity rather than the everyday, and that the objections raised are actually grounded in a perceived body-spirit dichotomy and refer to the bodily associations with popular music.

Papal pilgrimages and other large outdoor religious celebrations bring up, in turn, the issue of sacred rites, which take place outside of designated “houses of God.” How does such a

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Tomasz Smółka, *Inwazja decybeli czyli muzyka rockowa i okolice* (Tychy: Maternus Media, 2003), 82. Quoted after Poźniak, op. cit., 187.

<sup>87</sup> Pietrzyk, “Młodzieżowe zespoły instrumentalne i wokально-instrumentalne animatorem życia liturgiczno-muzycznego w Polsce,” *Muzyka w liturgii-op* 5 (1990), nr2 (11), p.13. Quoted after Poźniak, op. cit., 79.

transfer affect the sacred (if indeed it does)? Does the liturgy somehow sanctify those spaces or is it somehow “de-sanctified” by them? If sanctification takes place, how long does it last? For the duration of the rite or longer? Such questions are, however, rarely considered in spite of the fact that such transferring of the liturgy outside churches (to large outdoor areas, sport stadiums, woods, or buildings, which are not designated “houses of God”) is a widespread practice in the context not only of the pope’s pilgrimages but also of the activities of various charismatic movements, as well as summer youth days and similar occasions. Such outdoor celebrations are accounted for by the development of Christian popular music in Poland, and regarded as the proper setting for it. For practical reasons they exclude use of pipe organs and encourage use of amplified music. Are there other criteria that make popular music a good fit for such liturgical settings?

### Kitsch

Although rarely admitted as such, the declaration of specific music as sacred, or its denial of such a status, gives the issue of taste paramount importance. *Sacropolo*, whether used to label Penderecki’s *Piano Concerto* or Rubik’s oratorios, is considered synonymous with kitsch. Since the mid-nineteenth century, when the term “kitsch” first came into use among German painters and art dealers in Munich, it has designated “cheap artistic *stuff*”.<sup>88</sup> According to Frank Burch Brown, kitsch is art that appeals to many people, but for reasons that others find objectionable. Usually, it is well crafted and generally heartwarming, filled with memories and dreams, is felt to be touching, and is associated with sweet or sentimental effects.

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<sup>88</sup> See Matei Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 234; see also Tomas Kulka, *Kitsch and Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 18-19. According to Frank Burch Brown, the exact etymology of the term “kitsch” is disputable. One possibility is that it derives from the German verb *verkitschen*, meaning “to make cheap”; another that it comes from a German mispronunciation of the English “sketch.” or else from an inversion of the French *chic*. Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 286. See also Kulka, op. cit., 17-19.

Kitsch is associated with art that is beloved by bourgeois taste and by the masses of people who may not know or notice the difference between genuine art and its imitations. However, as Brown has observed, the idea that there is always a clear-cut difference between genuine art and its imitation is illusory. Moreover, to make general pronouncements about bourgeois taste and the tastes of the unsophisticated masses is quickly to dehumanize a very human subject.<sup>89</sup>

“Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: how nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.” - The oft-quoted definition of kitsch from Kundera’s novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) emphasizes the comforting, consolidating nature of kitsch and its link with the acceptance of reality, with an “agreement with being”. For Kundera, kitsch is a beautiful lie that tries to hide the existence of “shit” and, as such, is amenable to political and religious uses.<sup>90</sup> In other words kitsch involves being manipulative while appearing sincere and alluring.

In his novel, Kundera, as Brown has observed, makes it sound as though religious art, like the political art of totalitarian regimes, must be kitsch by definition - a beautiful lie, a contrived sentiment, a false hope. However, this would also mean that Beethoven’s *Missa solemnis*, Mozart’s *Requiem*, Bach’s cantatas and passions, the majority of Renaissance polyphony, and Gregorian chant fall under the umbrella of kitsch (a possibility that Kundera seems not actually to consider). As Brown has noticed, Kundera, who labels as kitsch anything that smacks of traditional values or loyalties, fails to notice a different sort of kitsch and, ironically, his very novel is itself not immune to charges of propagating kitsch, although of a

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<sup>89</sup> Brown, op. cit., 129.

<sup>90</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 252.



different kind. Its pervasive cynicism being seen as “mannered and pretentious - marred by pseudo-profundities” and its female characters as schematic.<sup>91</sup>

Not all kitsch is sweet, and, as Karsten Harries has pointed out, modern art, including abstraction, has produced its own clichés and its own brand of kitsch, called “sour”, which distorts reality for the sake of indulging not our softer feelings but those harsher ones. As an example of such kitsch, Mary Midgley gives thrillers, which distort reality and manipulate emotion to let the reader feel “pleasingly tough and ruthless”.<sup>92</sup> Harries warns against the easiness of waxing lyrical over despair, wallowing in it, and enjoying it, noticing that while the nineteenth century preferred the sweet the twentieth preferred the sour.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, there is also abstract kitsch. This kind of modern kitsch becomes downright sour by taking itself too seriously in an effort to compensate for having lost religious weight.<sup>94</sup> Some commentators (such as Colleen McDannell) relate a modern allergy to any art perceived as “soft” or “weak” or “sentimental” (demonstrated by educated critics, predominantly male) given its perceived “effeminate” qualities.<sup>95</sup> Robert Solomon even suggests that the attack on sentimentality has not only gender but also class and ethnic bias.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, 131.

<sup>92</sup> Mary Midgley, “Brutality and Sentimentality”, *Philosophy*, vol. 54 (1979): 385.

<sup>93</sup> Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 82.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> See Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). 193-97. See also Brown, 146-147.

<sup>96</sup> Solomon has observed that the “high” class of many societies associate themselves with emotional control and reject sentimentality as an expression of inferior, ill-bred beings, and male society has long used such a view to demean the “emotionality” of women. He suggests that the attack on sentimentality also has an ethnic bias, Northern (associated with cold and controlled) against Southern (associated with hot and emotional) Europe and (rational) West against (emotional, spiritual) East, with only a few geographical modifications for ethical and aesthetic prejudice in North America. Robert C. Solomon, “On Kitsch and Sentimentality.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49/1 (Winter 1991), 9. Indeed, restraining of emotions associated with the societies of the former components of the perceived dichotomies is seen as a sign of rationality and maturity, thus more emotional societies are bound to be immature.

These days, as Solomon notes, “better shocking or sour than sweet,” has become something of a rule of thumb for artists and a criterion of a good taste for connoisseurs.<sup>97</sup> However, the need to shock or disgust can become an affectation in itself, a perverse sort of kitsch. Kundera’s novel has been accused of these very flaws.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, Solomon’s observation that it is often safer to be shocking or disgusting than sweet or emotional is still valid. For example, allegations of ugliness and shock as being hardly more than a cover for emptiness or shallowness were brought against *St. Mark’s Passion* by Mykietyn rarely, while many others marveled at the shocking novelty of the work.<sup>99</sup>

Moreover, driven by fear of a “sweet kitsch,” some artists are ready to give in to manipulation. “I tried to wash any sentimentality out of this story” admits Agnieszka Holland about her movie *In Darkness* (*W ciemności*, 2011), which is based on a true story of Leopold Socha, a Polish sewer worker and petty thief who gave refuge to a group of Jews for 14 months in the sewers of the Nazi-occupied city of Lvov. In her adaptation, Holland decided to cleanse the story (known as *In The Sewers of Lvov: The Last Sanctuary from the Holocaust* by Robert Marshall and from an autobiographical book *The Girl in the Green Sweater: A Life in Holocaust’s Shadow*<sup>100</sup>) of anything she considered “sweet” or sentimental, including an episode in which Socha was crawling for two hours in the sewers to bring a little girl a bouquet of daisies.<sup>101</sup> Yet such a manipulation was not found objectionable and the movie was nominated for an Oscar in the foreign film category.

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<sup>97</sup> Solomon, op. cit., 1.

<sup>98</sup> Brown, op. cit., 131.

<sup>99</sup> One such example was Stefan Banasiak’s extensive review of the CD of *St. Mark’s Passion* (published by the National Audiovisual Institute in 2011) in *Muzyka* 21 12 (2011), in which the author calls Mykietyn’s work “the trash of 2008”.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Marshall, *In The Sewers of Lvov: The Last Sanctuary from the Holocaust* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990); Krystyna Chiger and Daniel Paisner, *The Girl in the Green Sweater: A Life in Holocaust’s Shadow* (New York: Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>101</sup> Stanisław Błaszczyna, “Bez sentymentalizmu [Without Sentimentality]. An Interview with Agnieszka Holland”, *Nowy Dziennik: Przegląd Polski* (25 November 2011).

The accusation of kitsch, as Brown noted, rarely does the target of the accusation full justice. It usually replaces an aesthetic evaluation with some dismissive labeling. For example, Marxist critics associated with the Frankfurt School rejected popular music (as an art of “mass culture” corrupted by the economic conditions of its production and the commercial motivations of its aims) as “the contemptible trash of the day” and placed in direct opposition to the exalted realm of “high” or “autonomous” art.<sup>102</sup> Many Polish theorists, including Chłopecki, remained under the strong influence of Theodor Adorno and shared such a point of view. However, even art that is widely seen as “high” has not been exempt from being labeled kitsch and can be, to use Brown’s words, “swallowed up indiscriminately into the catch-all concept of ‘kitsch’.”<sup>103</sup>

Karsten Harries argues that religious kitsch “seeks to elicit religious emotion without an authentic encounter with God.”<sup>104</sup> So kitsch is condemned for being false and dishonest art, which manipulates emotions. Interestingly, art that hides the existence of “shit” (to use Kundera’s expression) is considered dishonest while art that hides the existence of tender affections is likely to escape such accusations. Moreover, one could ask, after Solomon, whether it is legitimate to

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<sup>102</sup> Max Horkheimer, “Art and Mass Culture” (1941), in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1972). 273–290. Quoted after Brown, 132

<sup>103</sup>

The charge of “kitsch” has sometimes been leveled at the eminently approachable but accomplished church music of John Rutter; at the ethereal “*In Paradiso*” section that concludes the ever popular *Requiem* of Gabriel Fauré (with which Rutter’s *Requiem* has been compared unfavorably, however); and at the same section of the Benjamin Britten *War Requiem*. It has likewise been leveled at Leonard Bernstein’s eclectic *Mass*, at Gustav Mahler’s music in general (as heard, for instance, by Ralph Vaughan Williams), at Ralph Vaughan Williams’s music in general (as heard by more avant-garde composers), at the more orgiastic sections of Maurice Ravel’s ballet music for *Daphnis and Chloe*, and at such certifiably avant-garde products as Krzysztof Penderecki’s *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*, the Golden calf portion of Arnold Schoenberg’s opera *Moses and Aaron*, and the entirety of Olivier Messiaen’s *Turangalila* Symphony—all “high class kitsch,” according to certain reputable sources. The game is popular. It is a game of big kitsch eats little kitsch, the object being to see whose kitsch is the last to be eaten, and what (if anything) is left.

Brown, op. cit., 132.

<sup>104</sup> Harries, op. cit., 80.

condemn a work of art for being false or dishonest.<sup>105</sup> Although kitsch is associated with bad taste, its “badness” here is understood more in a moral than in an aesthetic sense. Yet, moral arguments are often confused with aesthetic criteria in judging art as “bad”.

Solomon suggests that much of the contempt for kitsch

is not the product of personal or cultivated taste at all but rather the ‘superficial’ criterion that teaches us that kitsch – immediately recognizable by its play on the tender sentiments – is unacceptable. Those sentiments are “cheap” not just because kitsch is cheap but because the person who feels them is, emotionally speaking, cheap as well.”<sup>106</sup>

“Badness” judged on the basis of non-aesthetic criteria as well as on the transfer of

condemnation from a “bad” work of art to its audience is also very characteristic for the notion of *sacropolo*.

## Sacropolo

*Miejski Słownik Słangu i Mowy Potocznej* (“The Urban Dictionary of Slang and Ordinary Speech”) defines *sacropolo* as follows:

Rubik’s music; a mixture of religious music with disco polo to enable the pieces to faster catch the ear of the masses; a plastic commercialism under the cover of a conductor’s baton and a little choir, which gives the audience the impression that they are imbibing something ambitious.

– This Psalter is so beautiful...:>

– Pfff, come on, such a piece of sacropolo.

The very name—“sacropolo”—given to the phenomenon already carries a negative judgment in itself. It combines *sacred* (lat. *sacrum*) with the suffix *-polo*, which stems from the popular music genre called *disco polo* (discussed in the second chapter) and is chiefly used in neologisms designed to evoke pejorative associations with disco polo or bad music in general. It is applied to phenomena (such as *hiphopolo*, *sacropolo*) that are widely present but perceived as controversial, undesirable, shameful, and even dangerous. As a depreciative affix, it resembles

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<sup>105</sup> Solomon, op. cit., 12.

<sup>106</sup> Solomon, op. cit., 9.

the American prefix *Mc*, derived from McDonald restaurant chain, which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is applied chiefly “to form nouns with the sense ‘something that is of mass appeal, a standardized or bland variety or alternative to --’”.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to *sacropolo*, the phenomenon is occasionally referred to as *kato polo*, *kato pop*, *sacro disco* or *orchestral pop* and the like. All these terms are oxymora based on contradictions of terms from two disjunct realms (*sacro*– from *sacrum* or sacred, with *-polo* from disco polo; *kato*– from catholic, with *-disco*, a dance music genre; *orchestral* – from classical music, with *-pop* from popular music). Such crossbreeding suggests a degenerate offspring: a hybrid, a bastard, or a mongrel. Moreover, the *sacropolo* phenomenon involves another binary opposition: while *sacro* is associated with music for the spirit or the soul, *polo*, by its affiliation with a dance genre, disco polo, implies music for the body. Bringing together spiritual/ ethereal with mundane/ worldly/ fleshy, *sacropolo* (and its synonyms) proportions its constituent elements evenly or positions them horizontally, disallowing traditional categorizations or hierarchical arrangements.

The deprecatory term *sacropolo* (or its synonym) is applied by opponents of the phenomenon and never by the artists it embraces or their audiences. If fans use the term, they say something like “you (or they) may call it *sacropolo*, but I like it anyway,” distancing themselves from those who imply a negative judgment of their music. Piotr Rubik, when asked about his reaction to harsh criticism, said: “All [journalists] constantly repeat the same terms, well-worn slogans – ‘sacro polo’. What does it mean? For me, it is completely incomprehensible. Very many composers write pieces on religious subjects and somehow nobody minds them.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Under the definition “chiefly somewhat depreciative” the dictionary gives also McMansion as “a modern house built on a large and imposing scale, but regarded as ostentatious and lacking architectural integrity”. However, the prefix *Mc* has a broader meaning. Its other application (listed as the first in the dictionary) is “to create mock names denoting a person who (or occasionally a thing that) is considered an exemplar or personification of the specified class, interest, association, etc.”

<sup>108</sup> An Interview with Piotr Rubik, *Gala* 5/2007 (29 January-4 February). Available also through Onet.Uroda, <http://m.onet.pl/styl-zycia/uroda,csbv2>. Accessed 21 March 2013.

Labelling music as “good” or “bad” implies a moral judgment. Simon Frith observed that music only becomes “bad” music in an evaluative context in which music is in fact a marker of some more general social judgment. Moreover, most *judgments* of bad music are simultaneously explanations of bad music: the judgment is the explanation, the explanation is the judgment.<sup>109</sup> The entanglement of aesthetic judgments with ethical judgments is also characteristic of the reception of music referred to as *sacropolo*. Furthermore, judgements of *sacropolo* often include opinions presented as facts and unquestionable truths. A claim about Rubik’s music by the sociologist Mirosław Pęczak, quoted by the leading Polish daily news *Gazeta Wyborcza*, can be given as an exemplary statement of that kind:

This is low art – this is not a judgment, still less an attack, but an objective fact. Rubik is an artist for the masses, for the unrefined audience, and it is for that reason that he is so popular. [...] The power of Rubik relies on creating an impression of higher art: people think that they are experiencing something higher. But the fact that something is played by a symphony orchestra does not mean it immediately becomes classical [music].<sup>110</sup>

This opinion, repeated by one of the most popular Polish websites, Interia.pl, can be found quoted on over twenty websites, including *Wikipedia*, as an authoritative critical judgment and a reason for considering Rubik’s music to be “objectively bad”.

More specific objections to *sacropolo* are related to its linking of various perceived incompatibilities, which in the opinions of opponents of the phenomenon should remain binary oppositions rather than opposite poles on a continuum. Katarzyna Góral (2008) sees *sacropolo* as an answer to religious needs in a consumer society in which people still long to commune with the divine, but which, however, require neither any deep reflection nor any feelings of remorse: a kind of merchandise of sacredness. Troubled by the mixing of the fun with the useful and

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<sup>109</sup> Simon Frith, “What is Bad Music?” in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, ed. by Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno (New York: Routledge, 2004), 19-20.

<sup>110</sup> Monika Margraf, “Rubik: drugi Penderecki czy drugi Wiśniewski?” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 January 2007.

entertainment with something like a prayer, she calls *sacropolo* “a profaned sacred, or the profane with a hint of the sacred”.<sup>111</sup>

What profanes the sacred, besides “the aesthetics of church festivals and village fairs,” is its transmission and promotion by mass media: religious television and radio stations. Not naming names, the critic implies Radio Maryja and TV Trwam – Polish Roman Catholic media founded by the Redemptorist Tadeusz Rydzyk, a figure demonised as nationalist, conservative, and anti-post-communist. In fact such broadcasting and promotion alone can be sufficient to qualify some artists for inclusion in the *sacropolo* category, and, as a consequence, to disqualify them from broadcasting by other media.<sup>112</sup> What makes music “bad” in this case is not its artistic value *per se* but the modes of its dissemination.

The most fierce and straightforward attack on the music disseminated by Radio Maryja and TV Trwam can be found in the article “Dyskoteka ojca Rydzyka. Sacro polo lansowane przez Radio Maryja i telewizję Trwam zastąpiło disco polo” [Father Rydzyk’s Discotheque. Sacropolo Promoted by Radio Maryja and TV Trwam Has Replaced Disco Polo] by Marta Nadzieja in the weekly *Wprost*, which claims even that “Trends in the Polish music market are now set by Radio Maryja and TV Trwam. Father Rydzyk’s stations endorse sacro disco, a genre that is a simple continuation of disco polo. Sacro disco is a product aimed at exactly the same recipient as disco polo was a decade ago.”<sup>113</sup>

Specific attacks are aimed at performers who owe their careers to the media associated with the Rev. Rydzyk. Monika Grajewska is called in the article “Radio Maryja chick”, who is now “a star of TV Trwam as she once was a star of Soviet song festivals”. In fact, she was a star

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<sup>111</sup> Katarzyna Góral, “Sacro co?,” *Plus Ratio Pismo Studentów Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego* 4 (102) (2008), 15.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Marta Nadzieja, “Dyskoteka ojca Rydzyka,” *Wprost*, 10/2006 (1213). Online access: <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/87563/Dyskoteka-ojca-Rydzyka/>. Accessed 25 January 2012.

not of Soviet but of French song festivals and was a member of the State Folk Song and Dance Ensemble “Mazowsze”. Only at high school did she represent her school at a regional Soviet song festival in Lublin but without any success.<sup>114</sup> Similar manipulation of the facts concerns the group Trim, which came under fire as “one of the most intensely supported stars by Father Rydzyk for the last five years.”<sup>115</sup> Although “Trim consists of the soloists of the Opera NOVA in Bydgoszcz”, it disgusts the author of the article because “[m]usically educated singers promote their rather trashy work as ‘an innovative combination of pop sound with operatic voices’. It is enough to listen to their hit ‘Let me, Lord’ to understand that what Trim offers is ‘sidewalk Bocelli’ [‘*chodnikowy Bocelli*’]”. Magda Anioł is called in the article “a star of a more noble variety of sacropolo” whose band “derives freely from jazz or Cuban music”. One may wonder if she would have passed muster if her pieces had not been played by Radio Maryja.

Among Radio Maryja’s stars, both critics – Marta Nadzieja and Katarzyna Góral – specifically reject the category of priests as pop singers, such as Janusz Jezusek, Paweł Szerlowski, and, most popular among them, Stefan Ceberek. Other critics point out that a priest who performs a pop song during the liturgy confuses his role as a mediator between God and men with the role of a pop singer. Confusing the liturgy with a concert, a priest-pop singer puts himself in the spotlight and makes music itself the centre of attention, while during the liturgy the focus is supposed to be on the music’s message, which should send the listener to the sacrifice happening on the altar; to the mysterium, which is a pathway to transcendency.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Based on Monika Grajewska’s official website and e-mail correspondence with the singer (e-mails I received on 21 February 2014).

<sup>115</sup> According to the article, the group started at the beginning of the 1980s “as the choir *De Profundis*, run by Rydzyk himself”. In fact the choir was founded and conducted by Irena Maculewicz-Żejmo, a teacher of singing at the Music Academy of Bydgoszcz. See faculty profiles at the official website of the Music Academy of Bydgoszcz, <http://www.amuz.bydgoszcz.pl/nauczyciele-akademicy/wspopracownicy-oraz-byli-pracownicy.html?view=osoba&id=182>. Accessed 15 May 2013.

<sup>116</sup> See for example Jakub Żmizdiński, “Pełnym głosem,” *Ruah* nr 22 (2002), 58-60.



Disapproval of engagement with two roles which are irreconcilable in the critics' opinion is extended to old stars of popular music who address religious topics and professional musicians who "deliberately flatten their work for the sake of commercial, short-lived success".<sup>117</sup> Marta Nadzieja calls Father Rydzyk's media "a shelter for yesterday's stars," naming Eleni, Czerwone Gitary, and Andrzej Rosiewicz among them.<sup>118</sup> She also disqualifies *sacropolo* music videos presented on TV Trwam because they praise "the beauty of the world," a "child's smile," and the "youth" as well as being occasionally saturated with patriotic themes. Very similar charges were raised against kitsch as an affirmation of traditional values and sentiments.

The unsuitability for analytical or descriptive writing imposed on music by the term *sacropolo* can be illustrated by the only attempt I have found at using the term in a descriptive and non-judgmental context. It comes from a short online report from a concert entitled "Shanties, Gospel, and Sacro-polo at the Maria Magdalena Church" ("Szanty, gospel, sacro-polo w Kościele Marii Magdaleny") published on a local Wrocław website:

Yesterday at 7 pm at the Mary Magdalene Church, sailors' music sounded. The Wrocław shanty days have started. (...) The band Ryczące Dwudziestki ('Roaring Twenties') performed, singing not only shanties but also gospel pieces and sakro-polo. This is a group of four men and four beautiful male voices, which perform every piece a cappella. The first shanty concert has been appreciated by the public. Thunderous applause after each song testified to the great interest not only in shanties but also in gospel and sacro-polo, which were heard at the concert.<sup>119</sup>

The meaning of the term *sacropolo*, used in the title and twice in the body of the text (with two different spellings), is unclear. From the text we only learn that the public enjoyed *sacropolo* pieces as much as shanties and gospel. This example demonstrates how limited the

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<sup>117</sup> Góral, op. cit.

<sup>118</sup> Nadzieja, op. cit.

<sup>119</sup> Agnieszka Nesterowicz, "Szanty, gospel, sacro-polo w Kościele Marii Magdaleny," *Tu Wrocław*, 18 February 2010, <http://www.tuwroclaw.com/www.tuwroclaw.com//wiadomosci,szanty-gospel-sacro-polo-w-kościele-marii-magdaleny,wia5-3267-1551.html>. Accessed 6 May 2013. Spelling of *sacropolo/sakropolo* as in the original.

semantic content of the term *sacropolo* is without a negative evaluative context. It is very difficult to infer from the text what kind of music it refers to, except something with religious overtones. Does *sacropolo* refer here to “religious shanties,” gospel songs in Polish, or some other type of music (another musical genre)? The author of the text (who clearly is not an expert on music) has failed to communicate her intended meaning to her readers. However, enlisting the term next to two rather contrasting musical genres, shanties and gospel, would suggest the latter option.

Indeed, *sacropolo* is sometimes referred to as a musical genre (mostly in online dictionaries on collaborative websites of the wiki type such as [encyklopedia.servis.pl](http://encyklopedia.servis.pl) or [pl.wikipedia.org](http://pl.wikipedia.org)), and described as

a sarcastic name for a musical genre, which is characterized by a simple form (acoustic guitar, electric organ, children choruses), simple, catchy melody, and a religious topic. This term originated as analogous to the name disco polo [which is] on the love and idyll theme, and was coined by opponents and critics of the genre.<sup>120</sup>

Such a generic characterization, however, does not match the style of the group Ryczące Dwudziestki, which is discussed in the article and which consists of five men singing a cappella or with the accompaniment of an acoustic guitar, specializing in shanties and gospel music but also performing some pieces considered classical.<sup>121</sup>

The concert of “shanties, gospel, and sacro-polo” brings up the issue of using a church as a concert hall, and the scope of musical genres acceptable in (or appropriate for) such venues. Although the temple has been admitting musical performances outside of and unrelated to sacred rituals for a long time, they have nonetheless been associated with spiritual experience.<sup>122</sup> While

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<sup>120</sup> Both [pl.wikipedia.org](http://pl.wikipedia.org) and [encyklopedia.servis.pl](http://encyklopedia.servis.pl) (accessed on 15 May 2013) give the same definition for the entry “sacro polo,” with the latter service linking it also with a synonymous entry, “kato polo”.

<sup>121</sup> The group actually consists of five men and not four, as mentioned in the text (although the picture supplied with the article shows five). According to the English version of their official website ([www.ryczace20.pl](http://www.ryczace20.pl) Accessed 6 May 2013) their “repertoire encompasses romantic Irish ballads, and original songs, new versions of shanties, songs for children with the theme of ecology, humorous miniatures of classical music and finishing with gospel repertoire”.

<sup>122</sup> In his letter to church musicians (written in November 2011 on the occasion of St. Cecilia’s Day) Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, Archbishop of Kraków, emphasized that a church is not a space for secular

non-religious music's presence in churches may be seen to be a consequence of the Romantic idea of music as the form of art which reveals before the listener the sphere of metaphysical experience, one may wonder how far such a view of music goes. Can it be extended to popular music? What (and what kind) are the limits to it (if there are any)? What (if anything) happens when shanties, work songs related to manual labour, and, as such, to something bodily/ physical and mundane, are sung at a concert in a church (next to gospel and *sacropolo*, whatever religious music this may refer to)? Can the bodily and mundane be transformed into the spiritual and extraordinary through such an aesthetic experience? Or, maybe, on the contrary, can it somehow desecralize the sacred space and spiritual experience?

A combination of prayer with entertainment, implied by the name *sacropolo*, on the one hand invokes the old question of incorporating sensual pleasure generated by music into religious practices, and on the other hand refers to transferring a spiritual experience outside the realm of religious practices. The presence of non-liturgical music in the temple is related to the performance of pieces written to liturgical texts but going beyond the frame of the Catholic liturgy and to performances of Protestant musical settings of the Passion. The presence of religious music in non-religious spaces is not new either. We can hardly imagine the concert repertoire without such works as Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, Bach's passions, or Brahms's *Requiem*, and are as accustomed to hearing them in churches as in concert halls.

In the twentieth century the tendency for religious music to depart from the liturgy and be devoid of its confessional dimension only intensified. As Stanisław Dąbek has observed, modern religious music tends to lose its genetic, normative elements by renouncing its function of *Kultmusik*, as in the works by Olivier Messiaen or Sofia Gubaidulina. In Polish music this

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music and that concerts with secular repertoire should not take place in it (although he strongly supported concerts with religious repertoire). At the same time, he admitted that concerts with secular repertoire are a widespread practice and that the declaration "On Concerts in Churches" issued on 5 November 1987 by the Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments is being widely ignored.

tendency is exemplified by works by Krzysztof Penderecki (starting from *St Luke's Passion*, 1963-66), which emphasize the universal and humanistic quality of music rather than its confessional dimension.<sup>123</sup>

As religious music has transgressed the walls of the temple and reached the concert hall while the temple itself started to be treated as a concert hall, the audience no longer associates a performance of sacred music with a religious experience but rather with aesthetic contemplation. Yet within the realm of classical music, such aesthetic contemplation is still considered to be of a spiritual nature. However, while the realm of classical music is associated with “serious entertainment” (to use another oxymoron) and “high” culture, which is often believed to be capable of providing an experience of catharsis or illumination, *sacropolo* suggests a combination of sacred with bodily pleasures and very “low” culture.

In the realm of popular culture the term *sacropolo* is most often used with reference to the Polish equivalent of so called Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), which utilizes a variety of stylistic idioms (from jazz and sung poetry to pop and disco polo). As Grzegorz Poźniak has observed, such music eludes any precise definition. Everything performed as communal singing (*Gemeindegesang*) since the 1960s, from songs based on folk modality to meditative polyphonic singing developed in Taizé Community, from songs rooted in jazz and *bigbeat* to folk has been put under such an umbrella.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, oftentimes the boundaries between songs viewed as popular music and church hymns have been unclear. Yet such music has been excluded from serious discussion on religious music in Poland and, at the same time, totally disqualified by opponents of the “low” culture, sometimes with various, inconsistent, exceptions made.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Likewise the pursuit of religious music that would unite the feelings of humanity is manifested in the *Universal Prayer* (1968–69) by Andrzej Panufnik. See Stanisław Dąbek, “Współczesna muzyka,” 77-79.

<sup>124</sup> Grzegorz Poźniak, *Popularna Muzyka Chrześcijańska w Polsce* (Opole: Wydawnictwa Wydziału Teologicznego UP, 2009), 62

<sup>125</sup> Among the exceptions, singing from the Taizé Community is mentioned most often, being considered a bridge between popular and liturgical music. Many of those songs have been included in the liturgical repertoire and published in official liturgical songbooks. See Poźniak, op. cit., 172. Other exceptions,

Natalia Budzyńska accused the organizers of the Liturgical Music Congress “Musicam Sacram Promovere,” which took place in 2003 in Kraków, of total disinterest in popular Christian music and purposeful alienation of composers and performers of such music:

The Congress has shown that in the Church there is a stereotypical division of music into “worthy” and “unworthy”, which makes any dialog impossible. (...) It is a pity that the organizers did not invite any representatives of ‘trivialized popular music,’ which they criticize so much, because they would have learned that you can efficiently evangelize with it. (...) However, if Professor Dyżewski says that putting religious content into a pop music form does not make sense, he really closes any debate. According to the Congress, the Church divides artists into the “high” ones and the “low” ones, who create banal, kitschy, popular music, which – horror of horrors - desacralizes churches. Was John Paul II aware of that when he invited Bob Dylan and Arka Noego to Vatican? (...) Can one say in the era of postmodernism that the sacred belongs only to high culture?, she asks.<sup>126</sup>

Such disinterest in and disregard for popular music styles may be attributed to the fact that in Poland religious music (especially music of the Catholic Church) is a subject of study mostly by musicologists linked with the Catholic University of Lublin (in Polish *Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II*, or KUL).<sup>127</sup> Its Institute of Musicology is located within the Faculty of Theology. Unlike programs in musicology at other Polish universities, musicology at the KUL combines theoretical studies with performance studies and is focused on training church musicians (music directors, organists, choir directors, etc.). “Trivialized popular music,” which is

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however, seem to depend more on the personal taste and musical preferences of the author than on the suitability of particular repertoire for liturgical purposes. For example Stanisław Dąbek (op cit., 80) deplores the emergence of *religious song* (*piosenka religijna*) as a substitute for sacredness: “Usually rubbish and worthless, it competed hard and, unfortunately, has been winning against the traditional church hymn. However, it should not be confused with or compared to the religious rock of that time, which could be called the ‘music of the biblical rockman’, and which was usually authentic and stylish like the entire genre of rock.” See also Stanisław Dąbek, “Biblijny rockman”, in *Sacrum i kultura. Chrześcijańskie korzenie przyszłości*, ed. by R. Rubinkiewicz and S. Zięba (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2000), 315-319. Here, the criteria by which the music is judged are the notions of authenticity and stylishness (based on personal aesthetic preferences), in spite of the fact that the understanding and association of such notions with particular musical genres varies widely among both critics and audiences.

<sup>126</sup> Quoted after Poźniak, op. cit., 64.

<sup>127</sup> a private Catholic university established in 1918, the only private college in Poland with a “university” status. It was the only independent Catholic university in the entire Soviet bloc during the communist regime.

present in abundance at Polish parishes, does not fit into the paradigm of liturgical music cultivated at the KUL Institute of Musicology. Being performed not by musicians employed by the Church but by others (both amateurs and professionals), it can be seen as a competition or even a threat to “proper” liturgical music.<sup>128</sup>

Other reasons for total disqualification of popular music styles are linked with generic characteristics of popular music such as a short lifespan of its hits or its involvement in mundane individual concerns, while sacred music is associated with something lasting, even eternal and representing unity of the group and its communal interests. Yet, church hymns also become obsolete and in time stop resonating with succeeding generations while many songs in styles of popular music function successfully as congregational hymns. Moreover, youth ministries use Christian popular music just to build the community, and even "Blessed are the Merciful," the official theme song of XXXI World Youth Day, which took place in Krakow in July 2016 (gathering youth from all over the world together with their catechists, priests, bishops and the pope) reaches for Christian popular music idiom.

Still other concerns are related to the development of Christian popular music in new socio-economic conditions after the fall of the socialist state, which include its professionalization, festival existence, and commercial potential. In Poland after 1989, its growth has accelerated thanks to its unrestricted access to recording, publishing, and addressing listeners through radio, television and the internet (though its presence in the public media is negligible and it can hardly make its way even into diocesan Catholic radio stations).<sup>129</sup> At the same time, it has lost its anti-regime overtones, although – due to its marginalization from mainstream culture – it still has a countercultural dimension of a kind.

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<sup>128</sup> Personally I am not aware of any “youth ensemble” being directed by a church organist. Even if there are such cases, they are only exceptions from the rule.

<sup>129</sup> See Poźniak, *op. cit.*, 200.

Poźniak has observed that, in a way, Christian popular music in Poland has come full circle, from its beginnings in the late 1960s and early 1970s marked by high artistry and musical professionalism, through the amateur productions that dominated until 1989 to the new professional tone that has been set since the 1990s with the transformation of the system.<sup>130</sup> Christian popular music in Poland was pioneered with professional productions such as *Msza jazzowa [Jazz Mass]* by Tomasz Stańko (premiered in 1967) and the highly influential *Msza beatowa "Pan przyjacielem moim"* (*Pop Mass "The Lord Is My Friend"*) by Katarzyna Gärtner (lyrics by Kazimierz Grześkowiak, premiered in 1968).<sup>131</sup> Soon, however, professionals retreated (mostly due to the political situation and disregard for such music among musicologists), and until 1989 the genre had a predominantly amateur character. With the demise of the regime, the amateurs were joined by professional musicians, who immediately established a platform of exchange with the amateurs.<sup>132</sup>

With a hugely enhanced wave of conversions to Christianity among musicians in Poland, which had no parallel in other former socialist states (nor in Western countries), the number of professional musicians turning to religious repertory has mushroomed. The band New Life Music, founded in 1992 by recognized artists (pianist Joachim Mencil, percussionist Piotr Jankowski, guitarist Marcin Pospieszalski, and vocalist Mieczysław Szczepniak, dubbed the "Polish George Michael", and who at that time was already a star and award-winner at prestigious

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<sup>130</sup> Poźniak, op. cit., 193.

<sup>131</sup> It was recorded by Czerwono Czarni (Polskie Nagrania Muza, XL-0475, 1968) and published as *Msza beatowa/Pop Mass* for instrumental band, organ, and singing (Kraków: PWM Edition, 1970). According to Lucjan Kydryński, the socialist officials permitted the work – by a popular composer, linked with the Catholic liturgy and intended to be performed by a youth band at church – on the one hand because of the established position of Katarzyna Gärtner as a leading composer of the socialist state's flag festivals, and on the other hand because they hoped (in vain) that such a piece would be too shocking and unacceptable for the vast majority of churchgoers. See Lucjan Kydryński, an insert to the CD edition of Czerwono Czarni, *Msza beatowa "Pan przycielem moim"* (PNCD 292, Warszawa 1995).

<sup>132</sup> Poźniak, op. cit., 192.

national and international festivals) pioneered professional Christian popular music in Poland, which now is estimated to comprise around a hundred artistic entities.<sup>133</sup>

The market potential of religious music of this kind, demonstrated by the spectacular success of the children's band Arka Noego, and then by Rubik's oratorios, is perceived by some commentators, such as Szymon Babuchowski, see a danger because "what used to be an authentic testimony may become subject to commercial strategies."<sup>134</sup> He is particularly concerned about productions such as the album *Seven Deadly Sins (Siedem grzechów głównych)*, Sony Music 2007) by the pop band Ich Troje, in which – even within a single song – quotes from the Bible are mixed with a completely opposite message, and the only hope he sees in the audience's ability "to distinguish an authentic creed from commercial tricks".<sup>135</sup>

Festivals devoted to Christian popular music called *sacrosongs* (the number of which multiplied after 1989, and which are the primarily platform for wider exposure of "youth ensembles") also raise controversies. First, their critics point out that at such festivals "the music's and songs' message is overshadowed by the flickering lights and dance show, which rarely correspond to the message".<sup>136</sup> Second, although festivals are the most visible, spectacular and effective way of promoting popular Christian music, they have failed as hoped-for stimuli for the emergence of new liturgical hymns because "songs performed at *sacrosongs* are rewarded not for their suitability for the liturgy but for their stage effect, musical form and beautiful

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<sup>133</sup> Although the first spectacular conversion (of Jan Budziaszak, the percussionist of Skaldowie) was in 1984, most of them took place after 1989. Probably most famous were the conversions of musicians associated with the hardest varieties of rock music: Tomasz Budzyński, the leader of the post-punk band Armia, Dariusz Malejonek, the leader of the hard-core band Houk, and Robert "Litza" Friedrich, the leader of the heavy metal band Acid Drinkers, who in 1997 founded the band 2 Tm 2,3 (often called "Tymoteusz"). For a list of spectacular conversions of famous musician see Poźniak, op. cit., 127. There is also a book devoted to them: Marcin Jakimowicz, *Radykalni* (Katowice: Księgarnia św. Jacka, 1997).

<sup>134</sup> The children band Arka Noego ("Noah's Ark"), founded in 1999 by Robert "Litza" Friedrich for the visit of Pope John Paul II, sold ca. 600,000 copies of its first album *A gu gu* (2000) (initially planned to be issued in only 1,000 copies). Arka Noego from the very beginning has waived its royalties.

<sup>135</sup> Szymon Babuchowski, "Między wiarą a komercją," *Gość Niedzielny*, 22 February 2007, 47.

<sup>136</sup> Poźniak, op. cit., 76 For details on festivals see *ibid.*, 144-148



performances.”<sup>137</sup> Third, pursuit of excellence and an emphasis on artistic quality contribute to the exclusion from youth ensembles of people who do not demonstrate the desired artistic level.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, music of youth ensembles, as intended for performance, is often accused of discouraging communal singing. Does such a performance, however, differ in this respect from a performance by a cathedral choir?

Although religious music in styles of popular music is widely practiced and even frequently performed at liturgical services, its aesthetic value is rarely discussed. Dismissed by its opponents as unworthy of attention and consideration, it is embraced by its enthusiasts as a useful evangelical tool rather than an aesthetic phenomenon. As a consequence, the debate on the topic takes place primarily in the press, while in scholarly writings it is present only as a *marginalium* (usually *per negationem*) in reference to academic symposia on liturgical music and its formal regulations.<sup>139</sup> Even Grzegorz Poźniak, the author of the only comprehensive study on such music, avoids its aesthetic evaluation.

## Conclusion of Chapter Four

*Sacropolo* challenges binary oppositions such as sacred vs. profane, spiritual vs. bodily, classical/art/serious vs. popular music, high vs. low culture, and real vs. fake art, discarding them as simplistic and in fact untenable. Its success with audiences demonstrates a universal demand for spiritual experience as well as the inability of traditional forms to fulfill it for contemporary people (at least for Poles). Smash-hit Rubik oratorios suggest that the twentieth century’s

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<sup>137</sup> Stanisław Ziemiański, “Kompozytor a nowa pieśń kościelna,” in *Śpiew wiernych w odnowionej liturgii*, ed. by Remigiusz Pośpiech and Piotr Tarliński (Opole: Wydawnictwo Św. Krzyża, 1993), 38. Quoted after Poźniak, op. cit., 103.

<sup>138</sup> Such exclusiveness of youth ensembles stands in opposition to the practices in liturgical *scholas* and is admitted as problematic even by ecclesiastical patrons with whom I spoke (who are aware that the message “no, you can’t sing with us” when delivered to a child, usually a girl in her early teens, can be devastating to that person and can alienate her from the Church).

<sup>139</sup> Poźniak, op. cit., 64.

tendency for religious music devoid of its confessional dimension has only intensified in the twenty-first.

As Jacek Marczyński has observed, religious works become contemporary pop music, which listeners characterize as relaxing, calming, or meditative (not necessarily in a religious sense).<sup>140</sup> The reception of Górecki's *Symphony No. 3* outside Poland might also be interpreted in these terms. Are these the qualities that the contemporary listener looks for (in religious or classical music)? Moreover, the distinction between spiritual and aesthetic experience may not be obvious, just as the boundaries between a concert and a religious ritual may not always be apparent.<sup>141</sup>

On the one hand, the denigrating label *sacropolo* is being used in an aesthetic sense in the elitist manner, to condemn popular art as a cheap imitation of “the real thing,” and, on the other hand, in an ethical sense, to point to a betrayal of some higher values. A messianic vision of Polish culture, which developed in the nineteenth century and was incorporated into the cultural politics of the socialist state, still permeates post-socialist Poland. Similarly, so does the notion of music as being able to convey a sense of truth and having perhaps even a duty to communicate an

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<sup>140</sup> As an example, he gives the CD *Choral works* for a cappella choir by Tomasz Kaznowski (Megavox 2012). It consists of *Mass in Old Style (Msza w dawnym stylu)*, inspired by “old masters” such as Mozart and the Polish late-Baroque composer Grzegorz Gerwazy Gorczycki; “Ave Maria,” “Cantate Domino,” “Amen,” and “Save me Lord”. Jacek Marczyński, “Msza sprzyjająca relaksowi,” A review of the CD *Muzyka chóralna* by Tomasz Kaznowski (Megavox 2012), *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 June 2012.

<sup>141</sup> For example, the a cappella group Ryczące Dwudziestki (‘Roaring Twenties,’ which performed at the aforementioned shanties, gospel, and *sacropolo* concert) mentions as its most memorable experience singing at a Methodist church in Asheville, NC in 1994 (which I quote with original spelling and grammar after the English version of the official website of the Ryczące Dwudziestki, <http://www.ryczace20.pl/index.php>. Accessed 13 May 2013):

Captured by the pastor and Afro-American community to spontaneously take part in Sunday church service, they have forgotten whether they were giving a concert (Gospel & Spirituals repertoire from their record *By The Waters*) or whether they were praying by singing. Today, they all agree that it has been their most important spiritual-musical experience, together with a sailing mass, at which they sang right in front of the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa at the Jasna Góra Monastery.

ethical message. Likewise, Szymanowski's call for music which is "national but not provincial," and carrying universal human values still resonates among Polish musical authorities.

While, with the proclamation of the Third Republic, the mission of Polish music as a cultural expression of national identity that supports struggles for independence seems to have come to an end, its calling for being national/ patriotic and at the same time universal has become even stronger. The regained freedom was expected to engender a sublime noble culture, which, freed from a domestic mission, would have a strong universal appeal. When the religious engagement of Polish music started being perceived as an alienating factor, such music had to be condemned. In this context, it is not surprising that the late works by the "Holy Trinity," which does not stand up to the requirements of universal appeal, have been criticized not only on aesthetic but also on moral grounds.

Was 1989 a turning point in Polish music's history? The term *sacropolo*, which originated in the Third Republic, emphasizes a difference between the recent output of the eminent composers and their pre-1989 productions on religious topics, the ones which contributed to their international acclaim. Occasionally, however, Kisielewski's term *liturgical socialist realism* (*socrealizm liturgiczny*) is being used to describe their current output, which, in turn, points to a continuity of such tendencies rather than a change. According to many commentators (including Teresa Malecka and Charles Bodman Rae), 1989 did not bring any stylistic breakthrough in Polish music.<sup>142</sup> Such a breakthrough happened earlier, in the mid-1970s, when the composers abandoned the avant-garde and started writing in new simplified "romantic" language inspired by religious and folk themes. With the election of Cardinal Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II in 1978 and his visit to Poland in 1979, this tendency only intensified.

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<sup>142</sup> See for example Teresa Malecka "Henryk Mikołaj Górecki wobec myśli Jana Pawła II," *Ruch Muzyczny* nr 9 (2011): 6-9 and Rae, op. cit.

1989, however, brought systemic changes in the functioning of music (in terms of its sponsorship and institutional organization), which especially affected the youngest generation of Polish composers. According to Andrzej Kosowski, this generation, numerous and aesthetically highly diversified, demonstrates some common characteristics which differentiate it from older generations. Its representatives all share excellent compositional skills, yet they write their “serious” works “on the side,” between writing utilitarian music (for the entertainment industry, especially the theatre and the cabaret, as well as for commercials). They use traditional music notation, prefer rather traditional settings, and rarely utilize modern instrumental techniques. They care if their music is performed and listened to, so they work with performers and their technical abilities as well as often being ready to make concessions for the audience by incorporating into their “serious” works elements of popular music or jazz and flirting with tonality. Experimental writing takes place in their electronic music exclusively.<sup>143</sup>

*Sacropolo* illustrates the end of the monopoly of centrally controlled state institutions in commissioning, organizing performances, and recording music. The socialist system relegated pieces on religious topics to the margin of the popular music domain and did not allow for local commissioning of large-scale middle-brow productions. The new system not only enabled local governments to sponsor Rubik’s oratorios and cantatas, but also opened up recording studios to popular music artists, both professional and amateur, who performed religious music. Moreover, it empowered the audience to demand what they wanted. However, Polish Christian popular music still remains on the margin of the mainstream culture. It can barely make its way not only to the public media but also into diocesan Catholic radio stations and cannot rely on leading music retailers for distribution of its recordings.

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<sup>143</sup> Andrzej Kosowski’s comments in a discussion, in *Muzyka Polska 1945-1995. Materiały Sesji Naukowej*, Kraków 6-10 grudnia 1995, ed. by Krzysztof Droba, Teresa Malecka and Krzysztof Sz wajgier (Kraków, Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 1996), 405.

In his discussion of the Polish musical psyche, Rae considers spiritualism as one of the general, psychological characteristics of national identity that emerge through much of Poland's recent music. The other four he identifies are: individualism; dislike or distrust of systems and theories; whimsical, often sardonic humor; and being haunted by tragedies, both individual (personal) and collective. As characteristics of expression of Polish national identity through music, he identifies: expressions of deep sadness and sorrow; expression at the extremes (of gesture, dynamics, etc.); emotional turbulence and expansiveness; conflict (often unresolved); and flexibility and freedom in, and through, performance.<sup>144</sup>

Rae's concept of psyche refers to Carl Gustav Jung, who observed that "The mass State has no intention of promoting mutual understanding and the relation of man to man; it strives, rather, for atomization, for the psychic isolation of the individual. The more unrelated individuals are, the more consolidated the State becomes, and vice versa."<sup>145</sup> As Rae has observed, in Poland (particularly in the 1980s) this consolidation came through a shared religion and a shared church (besides shared language and shared history (shared knowledge and shared experience of the tragedies of Polish history)).<sup>146</sup> Critics of *sacropolito* set against this the genre's perceived prevalence of the horizontal over the vertical dimension and its emphasis on community building instead of raising souls to God. Such consolidation of community, however, would be a force working against not just the socialist state but any system, which promotes individualism and atomization.

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<sup>144</sup> Rae, op. cit., 21.

<sup>145</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Zurich: Rascher-Verlag, 1957), 72. Quoted after Rae, op. cit., 19. Moreover, in his late essays, Jung devoted much attention to the balancing roles of religion, church and "creed" (his preferred term), and emphasized the importance of the moral authority and responsibility of the church in opposing the move towards psychic isolation of the individual. See Rae, op. cit., 19.

<sup>146</sup> Rae, op. cit., 19.

Rae, a non-Catholic himself, considers John Paul II's late reflections as particularly insightful, and agrees with the late Pope that the struggle against totalitarianism resulted in a strengthening of the fundamental values by which the people lived and to which they wished to remain faithful. These fundamental values refer to freedom, family, spirituality (as opposed to consumerism) as well as patriotism (as opposed to nationalism). Are these not the same values that the critics of *sacropolo* (such as Marta Nadzieja) have found objectionable? Are these not values emphasized also by other controversial musical phenomena: disco polo and Polish hip-hop?

Standing in opposition to consumerism and individualism, they can be seen as obstacles to building capitalism based on the Western model. It is thus not surprising that, they have been marginalized in official discourse. In that sense, therefore, *sacropolo* situates itself in the realm of counterculture. Such positioning of the phenomenon might not be obvious in the light of the political transformation, as a result of which the Church ceased being a force oppositional to the party and the socialist state and started being seen as a triumphant rather than oppressed institution. While perceptions of the Church as an institution have been changing in post-socialist Poland, the attachment to the values expressed in *sacropolo*, which should not be identified with any particular denomination, have remained very strong in Polish society.

Another issue that links *sacropolo* with other *-polo* phenomena is its attitude towards the West and disapproval of uncritical submission to the influence of Western cultural models, especially those seen in negative terms (such as progressive selfishness, the decline of tradition, human loneliness, vulgarity, violence, and drugs). Also the notion "coming back to Europe" is perceived as false, as argued in "Back to Europe?" by the late Pope:

After the fall of Communism, a number of voices were heard in Poland in support of the thesis that the nation needed to re-enter Europe (...) but (...) the thesis of the 'return to Europe', even in relation to the most recent period of our history, did not appear correct (...) She was already in Europe, having actively participated in its formation. I have spoken of this on numerous occasions, protesting against the injustice

that has been done to Poland and to the Poles by the misleading thesis of a ‘return’ to Europe.<sup>147</sup>

In the case of *sacropolo*, as in case of kitsch, the entanglement of aesthetic judgment with moral judgment (which can be found in the evaluation of any music considered “bad”), refers to emotions and sentiments the music is considered to convey or evoke in its listeners. While critics object to *sacropolo* for praising “the beauty of the world,” a “child’s smile,” the “youth” or referring to patriotic themes, its supporters value it exactly for the same reasons. Moreover, the label *sacropolo* (as in the case of *Rubikopolo*, *hiphopolo* and the like) is always imposed from the outside. The artists and audiences associated with it never use the label themselves and strongly dislike it, but are put on the defensive since the discourse is about and not by them.

Chłopecki and other critics, such as Dorota Szwarcman or Jan Topolski, accuse Rubik’s oratorios and the latest works by Penderecki (*Piano Concerto “Resurrection”*) Górecki (*Kantata o Św. Wojciechu*) and Kilar (*Missa pro pace*) of moral coercion, of opportunism, and of using profound topics in order to conceal banalities of the music and to prevent criticism. Paradoxically, profound topics or references to the Polish religious and patriotic tradition not only do not prevent them (and many others) from criticizing the works and their composers but also become the very reason for their attacks.

The critics are, however, right that putting the sacred (both in a metaphysical and in a cultural sense) in the marketplace imperils its message. This is particularly apparent in the case of the Polish Pope, John Paul II, who is notoriously treated as a marketing platform for various activities which have very little to do with his teaching.<sup>148</sup> It prompts such questions as: how

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<sup>147</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), 153-154. Quoted after Rae, op. cit. 26

<sup>148</sup> For example, his home town, Wadowice, is saturated with pope-related commercial materials from pictures, posters, magnets and stickers, through clocks and lamps to “pope cream puffs” (*kremówki papieskie*) and red wine Carlum (produced in Italy especially for Wadowice), not to mention books and records such as *Santo Subito* by Piotr Rubik and Jacek Cygan, or *JPII. Abba Father* by the pop singer

should one protect the sacred against corruption and treatment as a marketing platform, and who should be in charge of it? Where is the border between the promotion and popularization of culture and its instrumental treatment? How should one reach out without dumbing down?

Moreover, there is also the question of who is the actual addressee of sacred/ religious music. Is it God or the people who listen to it? How can people know what God's aesthetic preferences are? Does not the "high" style (which changes over time) actually reflect the aesthetic preferences of some cultural elites or the Church's leaders rather than God's? What if music in the "high" style fails in elevating/ bringing some people closer to God? What if the "low," popular music succeeds in doing it? Although *sacropolo* provokes such questions, they are, however, avoided in studies on the topic of sacred music as much as popular music is.

Such questions remain unaddressed because they fit neither into the paradigm of musicological inquiry nor into the paradigm of church music (which in Poland is synonymous with music of the Catholic Church) established by the Institute of Musicology at the KUL and followed by other church music programs offered at Polish colleges (which all are geared towards preparing future organists/ choral directors, etc.). Likewise, religious music in popular styles is excluded from any serious discussions and aesthetic evaluations although it becomes the style preferred by a significant (and increasing) number of churchgoers and clergy.

What is put into the spotlight by *sacropolo* is the question of abuse of the sacred in both cultural and religious sense, even if it is not explicitly addressed as such. On the one hand the harsh critique of Penderecki's recent works provoked protests against attacks on an icon of Polish contemporary music and a venerated symbol of Polish culture while commercial use of Chopin's name and image were considered such a misuse and insult on the national composer that it required legal intervention (implementation of the "Chopin's Law" and establishing a new

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Krzysztof Krawczyk or *Holy – Artists in Tribute to John Paul II*, featuring Polish pop music stars such as Alicja Majewska and Zbigniew Wodecki.



cultural institution, the Fryderyk Chopin Institute). Therefore, censure or misuse of internationally recognized symbols of Polish culture seem to be acts of cultural sacrilege.

On the other hand contemporary Polish music should be kept pure and disallow works, which endanger its sacred status of internationally recognized great art and a symbol of Polish culture. Works of Polish eminent composers, which neither match the standards set by their earlier output (which established their reputation) nor resonate among national and international critics and audiences are condemned and treated as acts of cultural sacrilege. So, Penderecki's *Piano Concerto* is as much a sacrilege as attacks on it and his composer are. Moreover, Rubik's works, which blur the boundaries between the scared realm of contemporary serious/ classical music and the profane/ entertainment music (*muzyka rozrywkowa*) also are condemned. They disturb the claim that the language of classical music differs fundamentally from other musical languages, the claim that supports the idea of classical/ art music intrinsic aesthetic value or meaning, on which its elevation to the highest status in cultural hierarchies is grounded.<sup>149</sup>

Polish religious music in popular styles also represents a double sacrilege, albeit of a different kind: one against the most sacred liturgical music and one against popular music. Disqualified as liturgical music for being too trivial and, as such, "unworthy," Polish Christian popular music is theologically suspicious as something often created without theological supervision and accused of confusing a religious service with a concert. At the same time popular music with religious references is considered at odds with popular culture and labeled as kitsch for its emphasis on positive message and promotion of traditional values and sentiments (such as freedom, family, and spirituality as opposed to individuality and consumerism).

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<sup>149</sup> For recent formulation of the argument see Julian Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

## Conclusion: Silencing *Polo*

The transition from socialism to democracy has not involved a free market of ideas but instead a struggle over access to and control over public discourse, which, as Teun van Dijk has observed, are primary ways of controlling the mechanisms of the public mind in modern societies.<sup>1</sup> The shared knowledge and values in Polish post-socialist society, which determine the structures and strategies of access to discourse (who controls the preparation, the participants, the goals, the language, the genre, the speech acts, the topics, the schemata, the style, and the rhetoric of communicative events, etc.), have been deeply rooted in the previous system and affected by Polish Messianism, which originated in the Romantic period. With the fall of socialism, they were confronted by requirements of the new capitalist system and the new role of Poland as a prospective member of the European Union (and its full member since 2004).

The fall of socialism in Poland ended the state's monopoly in cultural production and freed music from many restrictions imposed by the communist regime and its cultural politics. Traditions, such as songs from Lviv (the Polish city Lwów, which was incorporated into the Soviet Union after the Second World War and became part of independent Ukraine in 1991), which had to remain hidden for decades as incompatible with the official discourses of socialist Poland, could come to the fore and become incorporated into mainstream culture. Actual needs and preferences of ordinary people, who were not satisfied by the cultural productions sponsored by the socialist state, stimulated new forms of cultural expression. At the same time, some forms of musical expression have been relegated to the margins of mainstream culture and/ or constructed as "bad" music and have experienced various forms of silencing (understood as a

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<sup>1</sup> See Teun A. van Dijk, "Discourse, power and access", in Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Malcolm Coulthard (Eds.), *Texts and Practices. Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 102. He also noticed that given knowledge in discourse, as a general rule, tends to be implicit, presupposed, reduced (as in pronouns) and unstressed (as in initial sentence topics). Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Knowledge. A Sociocognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 307.

process that leads to limiting, removing or undermining the legitimacy of some forms of musical expression).

As Thiesmeyer noticed, silencing works best when disguised, that is, when it displaces the silenced material by means of another discourse, or conceals or filters the unacceptable material through a discourse that is more acceptable.<sup>2</sup> I share her view that what is most interesting is not necessarily the subject of the secrecy but the reasons behind keeping silent about something.<sup>3</sup> My study was also informed by what Bryson has termed “symbolic exclusion”, and which Lizardo and Skiles have summarized as “the (differential) propensity of persons to direct dislikes at clusters of cultural forms identified at the style or ‘genre’ category level.”<sup>4</sup>

In the Polish People's Republic (Polish: Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, PRL), as in other socialist countries, the state, in the form of the communist party and communist-led government, tried to exercise an all-encompassing role in the life of society and did not allow the public existence of discourses competitive to its politics. It attempted to silence oppositional discourses, not only from the mainstream, but from the public sphere altogether. Cultural matters were taken very seriously and subjected to the single control of the communist party. However, as discussed in the first chapter, the socialist ideology operated differently at official (formal) and operative (informal) levels. Moreover, this discrepancy, which existed from the beginning, only widened over time.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Thiesmeyer, discourse consists of publicly accessible language and other forms of expression that circulate widely and consistently throughout society. They include straightforward uses of language in exchanges of information as well as forms that comment on, analyze, entertain, or criticize other forms and their social contexts, for example literary and artistic expression, scholarly work, and legal and editorial decisions. Such publicly learned and publicly used language has social frameworks and functions. Thiesmeyer, op. cit., 1.

<sup>3</sup> Thiesmeyer, op. cit., 277.

<sup>4</sup> Bethany Bryson, “Anything but heavy metal: Symbolic exclusion and musical dislikes,” *American Sociological Review*, 61 (1996): 884-900. Omar Lizardo and Sara Skiles, “Musical taste and patterns of symbolic exclusion in the United States 1993-2012: Generational dynamics of differentiation and continuity,” *Poetics* (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2015.08.003>, 2. Accessed 20 August 2016.

A law entitled the *Ustawa o kontroli publikacji i widowisk* ("Publications and Performances Control Act"), which was introduced in Poland on July 31, 1981 (lifted in 1990), illustrates the disguised nature of such silencing particularly well. As Dariusz Galasiński has observed, the Act of censorship participated in two kinds of silencing: one was the literal, physical silencing of unwanted texts that the law was meant to enact; the other, more significant, was the linguistic manipulation of its legal discourse, which created the pretense that the Act in question was introduced in order to protect and regulate freedom of speech. Galasiński's analysis demonstrated that the Act of censorship silenced its own purpose by using a discourse of freedom of speech that displaced any direct mention of the real purpose of the Act.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the Act of censorship, which was introduced in the final period of communist rule, can be considered an act of resistance against the silencing of oppositional discourses, being actually forced by the growing "Solidarity" movement. It might seem paradoxical that the anti-communist opposition demanded to have the Act of censorship introduced; however, it was the first time Polish communist authorities agreed to subject the act of censoring of the Polish media to the letter of the law, providing clear and overt regulations about what (and how) things could or could not be published. The purpose of the Act was to expose the censoring practices, limiting them to texts (and not their authors) and subjecting the censor's decisions to the appeal of a court.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dariusz Galasiński, "Silencing by law: the 1981 Polish 'performances and publications control act'", in *Discourse and Silencing: Representation of the Language of Displacement*, ed. by Lynn Thiesmeyer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003), 211.

<sup>6</sup> Before the introduction of the Act in question, censorship of published texts had functioned through the semi-clandestine operation of the Censorship Office (the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows [*Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk*], in which internal regulations were kept secret. By articulating and codifying the objects of censorship as well as making a censor's cuts visible (thanks to the sign "[—]", which was used together with the indication of the legal basis upon which a text was struck out), the law made censorship in Poland visible. Moreover, the press - but not television, which was still subject to internal censorship regulations - acquired the right to appeal against a decision banning a text or part of a text in a court of law. Galasiński (2003, 212)

For the functioning of official censorship in Poland during the final years of communist rule as well as for the effect of the 1981 censorship bill upon publishing and censorship itself see John M. Bates, "From State

Formal censorship was the most obvious form of silencing. More subtle forms of silencing were executed through the state's sponsoring system and institutions developed in order to support and, at the same time, regulate culture at its various officially-defined levels. The state influenced music not only at the production level (its commissioning, performing, publishing, and recording) but also controlled its distribution and promotion in the media. Music was influenced through institutions such as Composers Unions, *filharmonia* organizations, and concert agencies, as well as through standardized formats and venues for music making such as festivals, parades, competitions, local houses of culture, amateur troupes, and finally through official repertoires.

Phenomena discussed in this dissertation seemed invisible from the perspective of official discourse and mainstream culture as if they were efficiently silenced by the organizational framework of music-making in socialist Poland. Disco polo entirely and Christian popular music mostly could exist only underground, and were never mentioned in official cultural statistics. Also hip hop, which in the 1980s was already a part of American mainstream culture, had no place within official Polish socialist culture, even if it was of interest to Polish audiences at that time.

Facing obstacles on their paths to institutionalization, these musical styles worked out their own cultural forms and organizational structures, relying on communities which were ready to sponsor them in place of the socialist state. Thanks to private or local communities' sponsorship, disco polo could develop within wedding and *zabawa* parties. The communities within the Catholic Church, especially youth ministries, supported popular Christian music, which accompanied various forms of non-traditional religious services (especially outdoor events) and leisure-time activities. The transformation of the regime, which significantly modified the socialist organizational framework, allowed these types of music to become visible

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Monopoly to a Free Market of Ideas? Censorship in Poland, 1976-1989," in *Censorship and Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*, ed. by Beate Müller (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 141-168.

components of Polish culture. At the same time, however, they experienced other forms of silencing, aimed at their validity rather than their fundamental existence.

The premises of the governing communist party and cultural politics of the People's Republic of Poland (discussed in the first chapter), although ambiguous, changeable, and never fully implemented, were readily identifiable. With the fall of the socialist state the situation became more complex and acceptable discourse less explicit. Marxist/ communist party discourse ceased to be an official ideology as the country headed towards integration with Western Europe. The formal censorship dissolved and repressive state control has been replaced by what is referred to as "constitutive" or "structural censorship".<sup>7</sup>

### Organizational framework of music making in Poland after the fall of the socialist state and its alternative in disco polo, Polish hip hop and Christian music

With the fall of the socialist state, the centrally-governed organization of musical life and generous top-down funding were shaken. The state has withdrawn from the popular music domain (*muzyka rozrywkowa*), leaving its development to market forces. Moreover, with the introduction of the new copyright law in 1994, global corporations came into play. All major music labels established their local branches, and international corporations invested in the mass media in Poland, incorporating their own formats and business models. Although they have sponsored some local productions, they have been more interested in promoting their global stars on the Polish market.

Although in the new system the state's patronage for the arts is in principle still taken for granted, the state subsidies have been reduced, forms of support have changed from institution-oriented to project-oriented, and funding of culture and supervision of musical institutions have

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<sup>7</sup> Beate Müller, "Censorship and Cultural Regulation: Mapping the Territory", in *Censorship and Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*, ed. by Beate Müller (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 5.

been transferred from central to local administration to a considerable extent. Only those cultural institutions that have been granted "national" status can rely on direct financing from the central government, while others must seek financial support at a regional or local level as well as through various regional, national, and European programs or through private sponsorship.<sup>8</sup>

The new system preserved the state-sponsored system of music education, with special-education music schools for especially gifted students and music classes for everybody in school curricula (although decreased in number), supplementing it by private music schools at all levels of proficiency. State music schools (with 73,655 students as of 30 September 2012, higher education excluded) remain the primary way of learning music in Poland, and recently the state's greater engagement in modernization of their infrastructure can be observed.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Ministry of Culture (since 31 October 2005 the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage) continues to function as the key institution, and organizations such as the Union of Polish Composers still play an important role in musical life in Poland. Moreover, the trend of the state's withdrawal from cultural matters, which manifested itself strongly at the beginning of the transition into the free-market economy, has seemed to reverse in the last decade.

In addition to the institutions which operated in the socialist state, new ones, such as the Fryderyk Chopin Institute (founded in 2001), the Institute of Music and Dance (founded in 2010), or the National Audiovisual Institute (established in 2009 and growing out of the Polish

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<sup>8</sup> The legal framework for state culture institutions is provided by the provisions of the Law of October 25, 1991 on organizing and conducting of cultural activities (Dziennik Ustaw [Journal of Laws] 1997, No. 110, Item 721 and No. 141, Item 943, of 1998 No. 106, Item 668, of 1999 No. 101, Item 1178 and of 2000 No. 12, Item 136).

<sup>9</sup> Number of students given after "Edukacja w liczbach" ("Education in numbers") at <http://edubaza.pl>. Accessed on 18 February 2016.

Many investments were included in the Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment 2007-2013 (approved by the European Commission), supported by the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund: for example, expansion of music schools in Sosnowiec, Gdynia, Kraków, Zbąszyń, Łódź, or Elbląg, and a new house of the Karol Szymanowski State Music School in Wrocław. As for music schools at the university level, The Grażyna and Kiejstut Bacewicz Academy of Music in Łódź and Karol Lipiński University of Music in Wrocław were equipped with modern new concert halls.

Audiovisual Publishers, founded in 2005) have been added to support the mission of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Such institutions have been supplemented by nongovernmental organizations and programs. Moreover, European funding programs have provided new opportunities since Poland's access to the EU. It is still the case, however, that they are oriented towards "the most valuable manifestations of Polish culture" and "ambitious projects" and echo, in their mission statements, some premises of the cultural policy of the socialist state.<sup>10</sup>

Recent revitalization of Polish concert halls (ca. eighty of which can host concerts for over 600 attendees) is an especially salient manifestation of the state's support for music. Only since 2010, ten new philharmonic halls and opera houses, seven conservatoire concert halls, and four multi-purpose complexes, which can house classical music concerts for over two thousand people, have opened to the public.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, there are some spectacular projects in progress (such as the Krzysztof Penderecki European Music Center) or in planning (such as the Music Center in Kraków). This boom for modern musical infrastructure was stimulated by the generous assistance of the European Union's cultural funds.

The state's engagement in matters of music is reflected not only in new modern concert halls and opera houses but also in parliamentary acts commemorating anniversaries of Polish

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<sup>10</sup> For example "The National Audiovisual Institute is a public cultural institution established in 2009 to record, digitise, archive, and facilitate the dissemination of **the most valuable manifestations of Polish culture**, including film, music, theater, and art. (...) NInA records **valuable cultural events** and publishes unique DVD series containing famous Polish animated movies and documentaries, as well as DVDs and CDs containing the latest musical, theater, and opera productions. The Institute also implements **ambitious projects** aimed at broad audiences." Quoted after the official website <http://www.nina.gov.pl/en/article/2014/03/04/about-nina>. Accessed 18 May 2014. Emphasis by me.

<sup>11</sup> The most spectacular projects include the National Music Forum in Wrocław (2015), the Stanisław Moniuszko Philharmonic Hall in Koszalin (2013), the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic – European Art Centre in Białystok (2013), Oskar Kolberg Saint-Cross Philharmonic Hall in Kielce (2012), Mieczysław Karłowicz Philharmonic Hall in Szczecin (2014), Józef Elsner Philharmonic Hall in Opole (2012), the new NOSPR (The Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra) Seat in Katowice, Feliks Nowowiejski Warmian-Mazurian Philharmonic Hall in Olsztyn (2011), Kashubian Philharmonic Hall in Wejherowo (2012), Gdańsk Music and Congress Centre (the seat of the Polish Baltic Philharmonic) (2006), Multifunctional Concert Hall "Jordanki" in Toruń (2015), ICE Congress Centre in Kraków (2014), and the opera houses in Bydgoszcz (Opera Nova, 2006) and Kraków (2008)



musical giants (such as Fryderyk Chopin, Witold Lutosławski, or Oskar Kolberg), or in the “Chopin Law”.<sup>12</sup> Chopin’s position as the national composer has even been reinforced when compared to the one he had in socialist Poland. The two-hundredth anniversary of his birth was celebrated conspicuously. The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage alone spent 50 million PLN (over 17 million USD) on the Chopin Year, through its program “Fryderyk Chopin 2010 – Promesa,” not to mention the expenses of local institutions or private sponsors.<sup>13</sup>

The capitalist system introduced a new concept of Chopin as a trade-mark, which challenged the established conceptual framework for Polish culture of the great national composer. Entrepreneurs recognized the commercial potential of the name and representations of the composer, given that he is both widely known and associated with sophisticated classical music. The registry of the Patent Office of the Republic of Poland shows “Chopin trade-marks” used to identify not only piano competitions but also, among others, alcoholic beverages, chocolate and confectionary, cologne water, toilet water or perfumed water, paper, magazines and books, as well as advertising services. So far almost 100 applications have been filed before the Patent Office with the name or image of Chopin.<sup>14</sup>

In reply to such an indiscriminate treatment of the national composer, the Polish parliament passed the unprecedented Act “On the protection of Fryderyk Chopin's heritage”, which made the works of Fryderyk Chopin and objects connected with him national values

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<sup>12</sup> The Polish parliament proclaimed 2010 Fryderyk Chopin Year (the bicentenary of the composer’s birth), 2013 Witold Lutosławski Year (the centenary of the composer’s birth), and 2014 Oskar Kolberg Year (the bicentenary of the birth of the ethnographer, folklorist, and composer). In 2001, the parliament passed the Act “On the protection of Fryderyk Chopin’s heritage (*o ochronie dziedzictwa Fryderyka Chopina*)” (*Dziennik Ustaw* 2001 No. 16 Item 168, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20010160168> [Accessed 4 October 2016]).

<sup>13</sup> The detailed program of the Chopin Year celebrations can be found at <http://chopin2010.pl/en.html> [Accessed 7 September 2015]. For a concise summary of the Chopin Year with examples of awarded grants see Dorota Szwarzman, “Szopka z Chopinem”, *Polityka* 11 February 2011. Online access: <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/1511988,1,rok-chopinowski---podsumowanie.read> [Accessed 20 September 2015].

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

subject to special protection, establishing the Fryderyk Chopin Institute (NIFC) as their steward. The “Chopin Law”, which requires the consent of the Fryderyk Chopin Institute in order to register “Chopin” trade-marks with the Patent Office of the Republic of Poland, has brought power over the use of the composer’s name and image back to a cultural institution.

While the fall of the socialist state ended restrictions in music production such as access to recording studios and the state’s monopoly in music publishing, it is still the case that traditional distribution channels and the media function as gatekeepers and filters for cultural discourse. The phenomena discussed in this dissertation, which developed outside of the organizational framework determined by the cultural policy of the socialist state, took advantage of new opportunities in music production offered by the new socio-economic system and technological advancement, which made them widely available and affordable. At the same time, they could not rely on distribution and promotion provided by the major labels and traditional media, and had to develop their own distribution and promotion channels and models of operation.

Disco polo productions were sold through cassette stands at fairgrounds in towns and cities, not through retail music stores. Its leading labels (Blue Star and Green Star) developed chains of modern discos at which their signed bands performed and even organized transportation to their concerts from distant locations. With the national public radio and television trying to keep disco polo from the airwaves, it found a platform for exposure in some private, low-budget, commercial stations, the private commercial television station Polsat, and later on in the internet media (including radio and television) and local radio and television which host programs devoted to disco polo, as well as in media dedicated to disco polo (such as Polo TV). Another form of promotion comprised festivals devoted to the genre.

An alternative business model of Polish hip hop was inspired by homemade albums called *nielegals*. They played a key role in early stages of its development as well as providing an alternative space for stars of the genre after 2005, at a time of hip hop’s limited promotion in

mainstream media. Issued without a label, they circulated via CDR copies burned on PCs with photocopied covers, which passed from hand to hand or were sold at skate shops or, later, were made available on the internet for downloading either freely or through paid services.

With the lowering costs of making music videos, which have allowed rappers to promote their productions on YouTube and through social media, most leading hip-hop artists in Poland founded their own music labels, which publish their own productions and sometimes also debuts of the genre's newcomers. Because sales of recordings do not bring enough profit to be the primary source of income, those who have made hip hop their profession give regular concerts or have a clothing brand associated with a rapper's name (such as Prosto Wear associated with Sokół, Koka with Pezet, Outsidewear with Mazsa and Fenomen, Dill with Hemp Gru, Respect with Molesta, Terroryzm with Peja, or PLNY with Tede). This business model not only brought the power over the genre back to its creators but also transformed the power relationship between the mass media and hip hop during its recent wave of popularity.

Rubik's works (like other pop oratorios) took advantage of local patronage (and not the traditional top-down commissioning programs sponsored by the Ministry of Culture), which envisioned them as means of adding splendor to important local events and promotion of the sponsoring cities. Spectacular settings (with soloists, symphony orchestra and choir), combined with Rubik's highly energetic, extravagant style of conducting and the popular music style in the soloists' performance, allowed for more showy (yet still solemn) events than traditional classical music concerts, attracting wider audiences and publicity. Such works are performed not only in large churches but also in large halls or outside spaces capable of hosting a few thousand people.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For example the premiere of *Tu Es Petrus* by Rubik took place in *Szyndzielnia* Amphitheater in Kielce, which accommodated over five thousand.

The development of Christian popular music has depended on cultural spaces provided by the Catholic Church and has been stimulated by charismatic movements (especially the Light-Life Movement known as Oasis), walking pilgrimages to Marian shrines (especially to the famous icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa), and papal pilgrimages to Poland.<sup>16</sup> Besides non-traditional religious services, festivals called *sacrosogs* remain the most visible, spectacular, and effective way of promoting Christian popular music, both amateur and professional. Only after the fall of socialism were amateur bands performing religious music able to publish their own records and even get access to some media exposure.<sup>17</sup> Circulation of their recordings is, however, limited, as they are often issued without ZAiKS licencing (due to cost), which disallows their official distribution (even within Church channels), restricting their sales to concerts and private distribution.<sup>18</sup>

### Conceptual framework confronted with disco polo, hip hop, and *sacropolo*

Not only the organizational framework of Polish culture and its perceived mission and purpose, but also divisions and hierarchies in music are deeply rooted in conceptualizations formulated in the previous system or earlier (in the nineteenth century). The conceptual

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<sup>16</sup> The Light-Life Movement (widely known as the Oasis Movement or Oasis) originated in Poland as one of the movements of renewal in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council. Its characteristic methods include retreats called “oasis” and small formation groups, which usually form a community in a parish. Founded by Rev. Franciszek Blachnicki, the movement consists of both laymen (especially young people) and ecclesiastics and operates in thirty countries. See its official website at <http://www.light-life.oaza.pl> [Accessed on 4 March 2016]

<sup>17</sup> For example there is a TV program “Stworzeni do miłości [Made for Love]” on Telewizja Trwam, which invites youth or children ensembles which, after sending their demos, are selected for live performance. They may even be offered the opportunity to make a professional music video by the television free of charge (in exchange for the exclusive rights to broadcast it). One example of such a production was the video “Drogi Boże” performed by Skrzydła Nadziei, which can be found at Gloria.tv or YouTube.pl

<sup>18</sup> Such productions are expensive due to the studio time they consume (because of a lack of professional experience and skill among the musicians) and are published with the help of sponsors (ranging from parents to church officials to local businesses). Many amateur ensembles treat their CDs as mementos of performances rather than as elements of a marketing strategy, and make every effort to make them sound as professional as possible.

framework regarding music is grounded in the differentiation between *muzyka poważna* (“serious music,” German *E-Musik*), *muzyka rozrywkowa* (“entertainment music,” German *U-Musik* or *Unterhaltungsmusik*), and *muzyka ludowa* or *muzyka folkowa* (“music of the Folk”). It should be remembered that the Polish terms are both dynamic and not synonymous with the contemporary Western categories of classical, popular, and folk music.

The lower status of *muzyka rozrywkowa* in the cultural hierarchy resulted from seeing the culture of leisure not as an end in itself but as a means of elevating society or individuals onto a “higher cultural level” and envisioning popular culture as an intermediary step for those who were not yet ready for more serious works. For example Chopin Year abounded in *muzyka rozrywkowa* (and other popular culture) projects, which (like drama, film, or visual arts projects linked to the composer) were justified as intended to bring closer to Chopin and his music those who were not yet ready for classical music concerts.

It is significant that even Chopin’s music itself is not seen as “music for music’s sake” but as a vital part of Polish culture, which constitutes the spiritual core of the nation. The Chopin 2010 Celebrations Office coordinated “a pool of artistic and educational projects”, which “display top artistic quality,” are “highly appealing to the public,” and “use a multitude of artistic forms”. They were also expected to “promote Polish culture through Fryderyk Chopin and his work”.<sup>19</sup> These criteria, formulated in 2010, clearly resemble the criteria for national culture specified in the cultural policy of the socialist state.

The notion of *muzyka rozrywkowa* as some intermediary rather than a full member of Polish music also stems from the “messianistic” concept of culture, which envisioned music primarily in the categories of serious (or classical) music and folk music (*muzyka ludowa*), and did not provide any space for sheer entertainment. In such conceptualization, folk music was to play the role of popular music (understood in the old sense of the shared culture, which is simple,

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<sup>19</sup> Chopin 2010. Celebrations of Chopin Year, <http://chopin2010.pl/en.html>. Accessed on 10 March 2016.

touching and universal, and which comes from a genius of the people or populace). Only with the introduction of market principles into the realm of culture has the category of *popular* music started to evolve towards an Anglo-American conceptualization, which Gelbart summarized as commercial, corrupt, “low,” and dependent only on “craft,” which is juxtaposed with *art/ classical* music and *folk/ national* music, which are “pure,” “authentic,” free of the taint of commerce, and dependent on “genius” (organic).<sup>20</sup>

Under socialism culture was not subject to market laws, with a prices policy for cultural goods and services, as well as remuneration of artists, set by state institutions and social organizations. Musicians (including those associated with *muzyka rozrywkowa*) were paid according to a regulated “price-list” (*cennik*), which was based on factors such as the value of the work, its usefulness to society and the effort needed to produce it. On the one hand musicians’ salaries and other forms of financial gratification depended not on their popularity with the audiences but on their position within the unions’ structures; and on the other hand they were provided with a moral authority that their counterparts in the West could only dream of. The introduction of democracy, the free market economy, and the new copyright law (the Act No. 83 of February 4, 1994, on Copyright and Neighboring Rights) have changed the artists’ social standing and system of remuneration, especially in the realm of popular music.

Even now, however, the concept of music as business is treated with suspicion and financial success can discredit artists or even entire genres, being considered an argument against their authenticity. This happened to Rubik’s works as well as to hip-hop artists who, with their commercial success, were accused of betraying “real hip hop” for the sake of *hip-hopolo*, or to the entire genre of disco polo. Although that kind of discourse about “selling out” is not unique to Poland, its prominence in the Polish context can hardly pass unnoticed. The critics of *sacropolo* are particularly sensitive to potential dangers brought by the commercialization of culture, i.e. the

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<sup>20</sup> See Gelbart, op. cit., Figure. 8.1, 257.

possible shift from music in the service of God/ culture/ spiritual wellbeing of the nation to music in the service of profit.

Interestingly, commercial success in general is seen to deprecate artists (or genres) whose popularity is based on Polish audiences (in Poland or abroad). Commercial success with foreign audiences, however, not only contributes to popularity but strengthens the status of an artist in Poland, regardless of the genre. This happened in the case of the classical music composer Henryk Mikołaj Górecki as well as to the death metal group Behemoth. Commercial success with international audiences is thus seen as a form of international recognition and manifestation of the music's universal appeal, which has been seen as an essential element of Polish national culture alongside its rootedness in Polish traditional culture.

The conceptualization of Polish culture as a depository of the nation's identity and spiritual being as well as a means of assuring the country's international position comes from Polish Messianism, a nineteenth-century concept to which the cultural policy of the socialist state referred, and which still resonates in contemporary Poland. Moreover, international recognition could be seen as a desirable motion towards the center in the center-periphery dyad, and some evidence against comprehending Polish culture as marginal or colonial.<sup>21</sup>

The nineteenth-century idea of folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) as the embodiment of the spirit of the nation, which was central to the cultural policy of the socialist state, still resonates in post-socialist Poland. Folk music (*muzyka ludowa*) has become an emblem of Polish traditional

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<sup>21</sup> According to Maja Trochimczyk ("W stronę muzykologii narodowej: Uczeni wobec muzyki polskiej," *Muzyka*, 3-4 (2002), 137, 142), Polish musicologists too often placed themselves within the position that could be described as the periphery in the dyad "center-periphery," which characterizes colonial cultures. She uses the conceptual framework for the syndrome of colonialism borrowed from the writings of Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer ("Canadian Culture: Colonial Culture" in R. Murray Schafer, *On Canadian Music* (Bancroft: Arcana Editions, 1984), reprinted in *Canadian Music: Issues of Hegemony and Identity*, ed. by Beverly Diamond and Robert Witmer (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1994)). In this view, colonial cultures, located at peripheries, are characterized by importing and imitating stylistic tendencies from the center while lacking movement of ideas and styles in the other direction. Moreover, the peripheries are isolated from each other and related to each other not directly but through the prism of the center.

culture and has functioned as a myth which serves the country's cultural and national identity. As the music of the noble *lud* ("folk," German *Volk*), which adheres to a traditional way of life and preserves their noble customs from one generation to the next, it was celebrated as something universal, eternal, unchangeable in its nature. Granted a status of "national music," *muzyka ludowa*, enjoyed the special care of the socialist state, which developed national programs aimed at collecting, preserving, and maintaining "the oldest layers" of the traditional music in what was believed to be its purest form. As a result, folk music became the domain of professionals (composers, ethnomusicologists, cultural officials, directors of folk music state ensembles, etc.), who shaped it in accordance with their own aesthetic criteria, concepts, and needs.

When ordinary people, deprived of their agency over the traditional music of Polish village, distanced themselves from the petrified idiom of *muzyka ludowa*, the term *muzyka folkowa* was introduced in the 1970s to label "music inspired by folklore". While the term *muzyka ludowa* is associated with traditional music "purified" according to the aesthetics of ethnomusicologists, folklorists, or artists who learned it through research and fieldwork and is used by composers as "source material" in order to make "art," the term *muzyka folkowa* is usually used with reference to traditional music which is transformed according to new urban youth aesthetics. In both cases traditional music is transformed and recreated by new performers who do not have any direct link with the living tradition. Moreover, it is not utilitarian but is created to be performed on stage, disconnected from the rituals it used to be a part of.

As the preceding chapters have shown, the musical phenomena which have been conceptualized as "bad music", and as a consequence experienced silencing, undermine these schemata and clash with official discourses. *Sacropolo* called into question the distinction between *muzyka poważna* (serious music) and *muzyka rozrywkowa* (entertainment music), problematizing especially the category of classical/ art music. Polish hip hop (including *hiphopolo*) reinterpreted the notion of popular music (*muzyka rozrywkowa*) and the idea of music making as an activity requiring not only special gifts but also skills acquired through years of



professional training. Disco polo ventured to gainsay folk music (both *muzyka ludowa* and *muzyka folkowa*) as the music of the ordinary people and their “natural idiom of choice”, exposed it as a romantic myth and, thus, questioned the paradigm of its study.

Accordingly, disco polo questioned the myth of the sublime “folk” (*Volk*), associated with a pastoral rural life, which, in contrary to the shrieking “rabble” (*Pöbel*), had to personify the universal spirit of the Polish nation from which its noble culture stems. As disco polo showed, Polish peasants supported a far broader spectrum of music than that presented in the official discourse. They were not concerned with preserving “the oldest layers of culture” or keeping their tradition “pure”; instead, they wanted their traditional music updated in order to accommodate their current needs, abilities, and tastes. Besides, in following this path they handled the transferring and adapting of foreign patterns of modernization without the intelligentsia’s assistance.

For Polish national composers, the traditional music of the Polish village was a source of inspiration and folkloristic material; in other words, it was a springboard for composing original works designed to appeal to both Polish and foreign audiences of Western classical music. Disco polo artists (who often were villagers), on the contrary, turned for inspiration to a global urban phenomenon (disco music). Moreover, as source material they used not only songs related to weddings, *zabawa*, and *biesiada* parties but also religious songs, scout songs, tourist songs, and even sung poetry or rock music, treating them all as folk songs, which belong to everyone and can be reworked according to one’s needs and preferences.

Like disco polo, other *-polo* phenomena (*hiphopolo* and *sacropolo*) ignored Szymanowski’s call for music which is “national but not provincial” and carries universal human values, although this postulate still strongly resonates among Polish musical authorities and no artist or work can be granted a “national” status without international recognition. The *-polo* phenomena seem not only to disregard this postulate but in a way to reverse it. They do not merely copy Western music idioms (as for example Polish pop music does) but transform them

and incorporate them into Polish culture in such a way that some of their universality (or global appeal) is lost for the sake of local preferences. Localization (or Polishness) of this kind is thus perceived as an alienating factor, and, as such, condemned by Polish critics.

Aimed at sheer entertainment, disco polo challenged the concept of popular music as a means of elevating the people onto a higher cultural level and proved as futile all the educational efforts to “win” the ordinary people for “good” music. Hip hop as music, which did without primary musical elements such as melody or harmony, questioned traditional musical hierarchies. Moreover, it did not require years of practice or special aptitude for music (like that tested during entrance exams to state music schools), and skills associated with playing an instrument or singing.

Interestingly, *sacropolo*, especially *rubikopolo*, could have been seen as a bridge between popular (entertainment) and classical (serious) music, which prepares the audience for more complex classical pieces. Instead, however, Rubik music (unlike earlier middle-brow productions) was condemned as something potentially dangerous: a fake or sham which can be taken for classical music by inexperienced listeners and, as such, prevents them from reaching for “real art”. One could doubt, however, if such audiences would actually be more willing to engage in “serious”/ “classical” music had they not listened to Rubik.

The intensified criticism of such music took place only when widely acclaimed composers of classical music started to write music more accessible for the audience and leaned toward a lighter style. Attacks on *sacropolo*, which were aimed at “serious composers” and Rubik alike, can thus be interpreted as motivated not by the audience’s labeling Rubik’s compositions as classical works (which did not happen) nor his billing of himself as a classical music composer (which he did not do), but by the critics’ fear of potential problems with separating classical music from other styles. Difficulty in distinguishing classical music from other styles would be devastating for the claim about uniqueness of its language and would disturb musical categories and cultural hierarchies. Earlier middlebrow productions or orchestral arrangements of popular

music hits, which were stylistically distinct from classical music, did not threaten the privileged status of classical music (*muzyka poważna*).

*Sacropolo* (especially in applications of the term to middlebrow productions and to religious music performed in popular music styles, but to a certain extent also to works of classical music on religious topics which disappointed music critics) has been distancing religious music not only from the traditional liturgy of the Catholic Church but also from the Catholic denomination more generally. It challenged the division into serious music (which Church music is assumed to belong to) and entertainment music (which is supposed to embrace popular music styles). Moreover, it threatened the paradigm of Church music (and its study) worked out at the Musicology Institute at the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), which aspired to be synonymous with religious music in Poland.

### Patterns of silencing, its double nature and disguises

The organizational framework has prevented *-polo* phenomena from development within the structures of mainstream culture, relegating them to its margins. Even when they became visible components of culture, they were ignored as incompatible with the conceptual framework and paradigms of studying music in Poland. As such, they were dismissed as unworthy of attention and consideration. As a consequence, the debate on them took place primarily in the media, while in scholarly writings their presence was negligible. For a long time they have been considered sociological rather than musical phenomena, and the authors of commentaries were careful to distance themselves from such kinds of music and felt compelled to account for the emergence of them.

All (few and far between) studies on *disco polo* have been undertaken from the perspective of the outside observer, and only years after Polish hip hop had become an established component of Polish mainstream music did a more emic perspective start to be incorporated into its linguistic analysis. Middlebrow productions are present in scholarly writings

only as *marginalia*, and the only comprehensive study devoted to Polish Christian popular music has been written from a position whereby the author emphasized the descriptive character of his study, while carefully avoiding aesthetic evaluation.<sup>22</sup>

The discussed *-polo* phenomena experienced attempted removal from the Polish culture by both organizational framework of music making (in the socialist state and after its fall) and conceptual schemes (concerning the mission and purpose of Polish culture as well as divisions and hierarchies in music). Moreover, the discourse on them in mainstream media also involved double silencing: the discussion was not with the musicians or their audiences themselves but about them, while the critique of musical phenomena actually referred to their media representations and not to the musical phenomena as such. For example, as discussed in the third chapter, disco polo has been perceived through the prism of the TV broadcast of the Gala of Popular and Sidewalk Music, the documentary *Bara Bara*, various press articles (such as the widely resonating “Empty Beach [Pusta Plaża]” by Tadeusz Sobolewski, which was the author’s reaction to the *Bara Bara* documentary and the Gala), and the commentaries of TV pundits,, whose knowledge of the genre was based on what they learned about it from the mainstream media. In order to further discredit the genre, in the press and scholarly articles disco polo usually appears as a rootless phenomenon imposed on people by commercial manipulation or even endorsed by gangsters.

The next stage of silencing was the shift in the attacks from the music itself to the musicians and the genre’s admitted audiences, who frequently experienced disrespect if not uninvited assault because of their affiliation with the genre, especially from journalists or other genres’ musicians. Disco polo fans and musicians have been stigmatized as uneducated, provincial, backward and stupid yokels, and the genre has become perceived as bringing shame

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<sup>22</sup> See Grzegorz Poźniak, *Popularna Muzyka Chrześcijańska w Polsce* (Opole: Wydawnictwa Wydziału Teologicznego UP, 2009).

and disrespect on its listeners and performers alike. It did not matter that musicians involved in the genre were not unlikely to have had more formal musical training than performers of other genres of popular music (since wedding receptions were a source of additional income for many professional musicians). Disco polo became “bad” music not only for its opponents but also for its adherents, who internalized such a perception of the genre. In order to avoid the stigma associated with disco polo, people often tried to conceal their musical preference to avoid humiliation and shame.

The same patterns and stages of double silencing can also be observed with regard to other *-polo* phenomena on their way to becoming “bad” music. First, institutional barriers, combined with conceptual schemata, keep a musical phenomenon underground. After overcoming them (by finding some alternative cultural space for its development and working out its own operating model) and becoming a visible component of culture, a musical phenomenon is confronted by mainstream culture. Such a confrontation involves music industry attempts at taking control over the genre in the process of mainstreaming it (when possible) and/ or mainstream media attempts at shaping its public perception. The discourse takes place among various “experts”, while musicians and fans of the music in question tend to be treated like objects rather than subjects in such discussions. Even if they are present and allowed to speak, they are there only to illustrate a given thesis rather than to provide their own analysis of the situation. What is more, the discussion is actually not about the musical phenomenon as such but about its representation in mainstream media.

Attacks on the music, however, may not be sufficient to discredit it. Their power is particularly limited when the lack of music’s sophistication is admitted and intended, and its conformity to music industry rules is not an option. In such a case, attacks tend to be shifted from the music to its adherents (musicians and fans) until they internalize “badness” of their music. Once this happens, the most efficient double silencing takes effect: the voices of discredited adherents of a musical phenomenon (musicians and fans) do not count in the discourse and, what

is more, defense of their music is unlikely to come from the audience of a genre now made aware of its “badness”.

The above stages of silencing of undesirable musical phenomena can be summarized as **preventative** (or **prophylactic**, in which the organizational and conceptual framework enables and supports the growth of desired musical – or more general cultural - forms of expression, at the same time hindering and suppressing undesired ones), **active** (or **operational**, in which an undesired phenomenon is diagnosed and measures are taken in order to conquer it by assuming agency over it or pushing it back underground), and **aggressive** (or **interventional**, in which vigorous and intensive attacks are aimed at the legitimacy of a phenomenon which has become prominent but has not integrated into the dominant discourse). The predominant response to the first stage of silencing seems to be to search for alternatives, to the second one, resistance, and to the third one, decision to remain silent about one’s musical preferences and resignation from defending one’s favorite music.

All these stages involve double silencing in disguise. Organizational framework is associated with fostering music’s development and not with suppressing it. Concepts regarding music and paradigms of its study are assumed to reflect music making rather than shape it. The mainstreaming process conceals the agency transfer from musicians to producers, labels and media decision bodies as well as the introduction of intermediaries between music and its audience with their own agendas and preferences. Likewise, the presence of music in the mainstream media, under the guise of its promotion, conceals or filters the music and allows the audience only a highly mediated experience of pre-selected options. Critics of a musical phenomenon also tend to mask the actual object of their concern. Moreover, an authoritative voice is frequently given to experts who actually know the subject of their criticism primarily (or even exclusively) from its representation in mass media.

In the same way, the attacks on “bad” music in the third stage discussed above obscure the fact that the music became “bad” not by reason of how it sounds but for who listens to and

supports it. Besides, as seen in the discussed *-polo* phenomena, the “unworthy” audience of “bad” music is constituted not of its actual adherents but of their stereotypical representation as constructed in mainstream media. Although specific characteristics of such stereotypical representation have varied from genre to genre, they are all in their different ways antitheses of what was associated with “cool” audiences and actual or aspiring elites.

Polish hip hop provides an excellent example of the struggle for agency and power over music and its public perception. Its business model, transferred from that of Western popular music, which was based on artist acquisition and recording production by small local labels dedicated to the genre, but relying on major labels for distribution and more extensive marketing, resulted in a fast-paced mainstreaming and commercialization of the genre. A significant proportion of Polish hip hop creators and devoted audiences, however, perceived such business involvement as a threat. Feeling deprived of the agency over their music, they started a campaign against what they referred to as *hiphopolo*.

Artists published by UMC Records, whose recordings were distributed by Sony and promoted by TV VIVA Polska and Radio Eska (which was the first to represent the CHR [Contemporary Hit Radio] format in Poland) were ostracized, and some of them (like Mezo) even outcast from the hip-hop community, while their compromised label had to rebrand (in 2006) as My Music (which switched from Sony to Universal for a distribution partner), a publisher of pop, electronic dance music, and rock besides rap. *Hip-hopolo* was discredited as music listened to by tweenies as well as “mothers and grandmas”, in other words the audience which is not supposed to listen to “real” hip hop.

Struggle over authority in hip hop can also be observed among the media experts and authors of quick introductory courses in hip hop for the uninitiated, which mushroomed at the beginning of the 2000s. The most prominent dispute over the true face of Polish hip hop featured two people from outside of the hip hop culture: Sylwester Latkowski, the author of the highly influential documentary *Blokersi*, and Mirosław Pęczak, a sociologist whose article was ridiculed

in the documentary. The discussion, and in particular the documentary, by focusing on street hip hop, contributed to associating Polish hip hop with gangsta rap and street culture, and only amplified stereotypes about the genre and misidentification of hip-hoppers with *blokersi* subculture, even if unwillingly.

The disguised nature of criticism, with its characteristic entanglement of aesthetic judgement with moral judgement, and opinions presented as facts and unquestionable truths is particularly apparent in the reception of *sacropolo*. For example, *sacropolo* was accused of moral coercion, of opportunism, and of focusing on profound topics in order to cover banalities of the music and to prevent criticism. However, for its critics, profound topics or references to the Polish religious and patriotic tradition were not only not obstacles but actually the very reasons for their attacks on some works and their composers. The sociologist Mirosław Pęczak, who called Piotr Rubik “an artist for the masses, for the unrefined audience” and his music “low art”, supported his claim (repeated by many as evidence for the “badness” of Rubik’s music) by simply stating that “this is not a judgment, still less an attack, but an objective fact”.

“The unrefined audience” of *sacropolo*, “uneducated, provincial, backward and stupid yokels” listening to disco polo, “kids”, “mothers and grandmas” listening to *hiphopolo*, or losers from *blokowisko* engaged in Polish hip hop are not legitimate participants in the discourse, being disqualified by their (inadequate) education, location, age, social standing, and worldview. They are apparently present in discussions of the music with which they identify themselves and are identified by others with, but only as objects. As such, they are subjected to judgement by the dominant discourse (instead of pronouncing it themselves) and subjected to reeducation, converting them to “good” music. When they internalize the “badness” of their music, they seem permanently disabled from valid participation in the dominant discourse. The third stage of silencing is particularly efficient because its consequence is that only the next generation of fans, unaware of the “badness” of the music in question, is able to support it openly and fight for its place in the mainstream culture.



### ***Polo* phenomena in confrontation with the dominant discourse**

Although reasons behind the silencing of the discussed musical phenomena were multiple and varied from case to case, there is a number of shared characteristics among them, which disturb the dominant discourse (besides already mentioned incompatibilities with the organizational and conceptual framework of Polish culture). They all interfere with the official narration about the post-socialist transformation, which pictured the current transition to capitalism and merging with Western Europe as the best and only option and a win-win situation for all (except the few who did not deserve it). They bring a different perspective to Poland's relationship to the West, both actual and desired, and emphasize a set of values alternative to the one promoted by the dominant discourse.

They brought Polishness back to public attention at the time when national/ patriotic issues seemed no longer to be relevant, and, since the early 1990s have been marginalized in the official discourse. The change of official state symbols after the collapse of the Soviet-imposed communist regime was to indicate full sovereignty of the country. With dynamic replacement of communist symbols (such as names of streets and institutions, holidays, historical narration in school curricula, etc.) with those commemorating historical events, national matters seemed to be settled. Moreover, as Poland, after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, aspired to play an active role within the sphere of Western civilization as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (since 1999) and the European Union (since 2004), the nationalist topic was further de-emphasized in official discourses. Against the strong tendency in the official discourse to celebrate cosmopolitan and progressive values commonly associated with the West, disco polo, Polish hip hop, and *sacropolo* emphasized domestic and traditional values, demonstrating that Polishness is still an important issue for a considerable part of Polish society.

All these genres questioned the "coming back to Europe" notion, which saturated the official discourse, saying that Poland has always been in Europe. Although they utilized Western

musical idioms, they did not follow the West's business model. Moreover, they demonstrated ambiguous attitude towards the West and sometimes even situated themselves in opposition to it. They perceived the West not so much as the source of progress but as a source of negative influences such as drugs, violence, vulgarity, progressive selfishness, the decline of tradition, and human loneliness. At the same time, they celebrated values and symbols that were deeply rooted in Polish tradition but were questioned by the new, liberal elites as burdens rather than assets in the ongoing transformations. Unlike artists such as Maria Peszek, an actress and singer-songwriter who made provocation central to her musical carrier, they do not insult the nation, nor do they attack traditional values, or the Catholic Church. Instead, they build a stereotype of a Polish character, associating it with freedom, family, hospitality, cultivation of tradition, and tolerance (in spite of the intolerance they experienced themselves).

They emphasize similarities and bonds between Poles regardless not only of their current location but also of generation. In their narrations, Poland is idealized, as a beloved woman would be, even if the current situation in the country is disappointing and criticized. They all search for an origin myth alternative to the myth of folk culture (constructed by the Polish intelligentsia), although each of them turns to a different tradition: disco polo to Sarmatian tradition and mythology, hip hop to the early medieval, Old-Slavic (pre-Christian) world (though to a fantasy version of it rather than to its historical reconstruction), and *sacropolo* to the history of Christianity, introduced by the baptism of Mieszko I (the first ruler of Poland) in 966.

The discussed phenomena have offered an alternative, far broader perspective on the Polish post-socialist transformation than that conventionally understood, and exposed a very deep division in perceptions of Poland, regarding both its past and present situation and its desirable future. Pragmatic disco polo carried out its own transformation of cultural models, demonstrating that the transfer and adaptation of foreign modernization patterns can happen without the intelligentsia's assistance and mediation. It shifted the emphasis from the spiritual realm to bodily, earthy pleasures, treating music as a source of entertainment and income, and not as a

depository of the nation's identity and a means of asserting Poland's place on earth. Last but not least, it demonstrated that Polish peasants did not care for keeping their traditional culture and old customs "pure" but aspired to having their music and lifestyle modernized.

Polish hip-hop, a genre created by the first generation which grew up in a democratic and capitalistic country, gave voice to various fears and anxieties that accompanied regime transition and Poland's entry into the EU, expressing the frustration of many young people whose potential and personal resources (for example higher education) have been unused and wasted. While hip hop did not improve the lot of *blokowisko* inhabitants (except for a few artists, whom it allowed financial independence), it ignited reconsideration of the new system and the situation of young Poles who became the system's losers, igniting a change in their perception as people with problems and not as the problem itself.

*Sacropolo* oftentimes paid tribute to those aspects of Polish history which were falsified and silenced in the official discourse under the communist regime. It can be seen as a reaction to the suppressing of such content and an attempt to "catch up" with its memorialization. Although all musical phenomena discussed in this dissertation reproduced and reinforced the fundamental values by which the people lived and to which they wished to remain faithful, *sacropolo* emphasized a positive message and promoted traditional values and sentiments (such as freedom, family, and spirituality) with the greatest intensity. Standing in opposition to consumerism and individualism, it can thus be considered an obstacle in building capitalism based on the Western model.

The music discussed in this dissertation was linked to a specific socio-economic context. With its change, the prominence and relevance of the music altered. The early 1990s, a time of optimism and great expectations from the new system (in spite of the fact that the cost of reform was immense), belonged to disco polo. The late 1990s and early 2000s, when the disappointment with the new system and lack of prospects for Polish youth was clearly visible, gave rise to Polish hip hop. The mid-2000d, when Poles celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Paul II's pontificate

(in 2003) and mourned his death (in 2005), coincided with the greatest popularity of Rubik's music. After Poland's admission to the European Union (in May 2004), when the country's economy became stronger, a more optimistic outlook was accompanied by a comeback of ludic music, including disco polo. Conversely, renewed interest in hip hop, which could be observed since 2009, coincided with a further reversal in the socio-political context (the economic crisis in the EU).

In each case the music was both a harbinger and embodiment of socio-economic changes. Moreover, Jan Kubik's observation that cultural revolution precedes political revolution seems to have been true not only on the road to post-communism but also later. For example, the rise of disco polo, a symbol of undesirable (from the intellectuals' perspective) byproducts of regime change and a target of protests against them, preceded the decline of the Freedom Union, the party associated with the intelligentsia, which was left outside the Polish parliament after the elections in 1995. Likewise, the picture of Poland presented by Polish hip hop has shown cleavages in Polish society which were later reflected in the 2005 elections, which changed the power balance in favor of the conservative Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*).

Disco polo, which rapidly modernized traditional music of the folk (*lud*) into a direction very different from the concepts of *muzyka ludowa* or *muzyka folkowa*, anticipated the transformation of Polish village life into something very different not only from its colloquial image but also incongruent with theoretical concepts regarding Polish local culture. Interest in patriotic topics, especially in forgotten heroes, became visible in Polish hip hop before such issues gained prominence in the official discourse, and the "Cursed Soldiers" National Day of Remembrance was established by the Polish parliament. *Sacropolo* could be seen on the one hand as a herald of the tendency among Poles to disconnect from institutional religiosity and on the other hand as evidence of the affirmation of traditional values and sentiments in Polish society.

The classic theorists on cultural taste, such as Bourdieu, Veblen, and Weber, suggested that high-status individuals perceive cultural forms other than elite culture as crude, vulgar, or dishonorable.<sup>23</sup> Although more recent studies indicate an omnivorous tendency among the elite in the realm of cultural consumption, musical dislikes continue to be a tool of class distinction in spite of the differences in local or generational strategies of symbolic exclusion.<sup>24</sup>

According to Bethany Bryson's studies on social exclusion, while the educated seem to adopt more "tolerant" attitudes than the less-educated not only in the socio-political realm but also in the realm of culture, their tolerance is selective and patterned in a specific way: the genres most disliked by "tolerant" people are those appreciated by people with the lowest levels of education.<sup>25</sup> As Michèle Ollivier observed, while the educated were keen to display cultural tolerance (in Bryson's terms *multicultural capital*), they did so in a way that still allowed for the drawing of symbolic boundaries in relation to less privileged groups.<sup>26</sup>

In 1993, the US elite disliked most rap, heavy metal, country, and gospel music: the genres most strongly associated with low education. What was surprising and striking for Bryson was that country and gospel music, two of the three most favored genres among the general population, were the two genres most likely to be rejected by "tolerant" respondents.<sup>27</sup> When in 2012 Lizardo and Skiles replicated Bryson's studies on musical dislikes (using the same General Social Survey data for their analysis), they found that, while overall Americans were less likely to express dislikes across most musical categories, with the most substantial declines observed for rap and heavy metal (especially among college-educated young adults), rejection of country, folk,

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<sup>23</sup> Bourdieu, op. cit., Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899), Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, trans. G. Roth and C. Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press Inc., 1968).

<sup>24</sup> For a concise survey of recent studies on musical dislikes see Lizardo and Skiles, op. cit., 2-4.

<sup>25</sup> Bryson, op. cit., 892-893

<sup>26</sup> Michèle Ollivier, "Modes of openness to cultural diversity: Humanist, populist, practical, and indifferent," *Poetics*, 36 (2008), 120-147.

<sup>27</sup> Bryson, op. cit., 894.

and religious styles by high-status individuals had actually increased.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, they found their conclusions consistent with research outside of the U.S. that shows that members of putatively “tolerant” high-status classes have no problem expressing high levels of intolerance for those persons (and associated cultural objects) that they themselves see as connected to intolerance.<sup>29</sup>

Lizardo and Skiles consider country, folk, and religious styles a safe target for symbolic rejection at a time when symbolic exclusion becomes a rarer (and normatively proscribed) practice, and acquires more symbolic and substantive significance because of the association of country music, along with folk and religious music, with intolerance, xenophobia, and localist jingoism. Following Ollivier, they believe that the very institutionalization of conspicuous openness to diversity as the most legitimate form of taste also legitimates the selective rejection of those persons and cultures that are associated with what cosmopolitanism is not.<sup>30</sup>

While the studies on symbolic exclusion mentioned above analyzed musical dislikes expressed in survey interview situations, and my study was focused on other forms of symbolic rejection of specific musical phenomena, the reasons behind symbolic exclusion of disco polo and *sacropolo* as well as the ambiguous status of Polish hip hop seem to be consistent with these others scholars’ findings. Musical genres which experienced silencing in post-socialist Poland fit

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<sup>28</sup> Lizardo and Skiles, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 12. See also Skjøtt-Larsen, J., “Cultural and moral class boundaries in Nordic context: Findings from a city in Denmark, *European Societies*, 14 (2012): 660-683.

<sup>30</sup> Lizardo and Skiles, op. cit., 12. They observed that “politicization” of certain musical styles in the United States, which has seen a de facto institutionalized association of country music and religion with unpalatable - from the point of view of the logic of conspicuous openness to diversity - political themes (“uncritical” patriotism, misogyny, xenophobia, racism, intolerance) may be identical with the mechanism that sanctions the rejection of those groups which are themselves perceived to promote intolerance. *Ibid.* Ollivier (op. cit., 120-121) points to a new discursive configuration in the popular press and scholarly work, which celebrates openness to cultural diversity and is based on a series of binary oppositions which juxtapose diverse, open, hybrid, fluid, eclectic, global, and cosmopolitan (which tend to be associated together and have positive connotations) with unitary, homogeneous, local, static, permanent, and closed (which tend have negative connotations).

into categories enumerated by Lizardo and Skiles as safe for symbolic exclusion by the musically “tolerant”.

On the one hand, reasons behind perceived “badness” of musical phenomena discussed in this dissertation were rooted in local, specific conditioning related to post-socialist reality or earlier conceptualizations on Polish culture as well as to organizational and conceptual frameworks on music making in Poland. Profound transformation of the Polish village signaled by disco polo, fears and frustrations of the transformation’s losers expressed in Polish hip hop or “catching up” with memorialization of previously suppressed aspects of Polish history in *sacropolo* were at odds with the expectations from the new system and with the official discourse of the Third Republic, which pictured the current transition to capitalism and merging with Western Europe as the best and only option. Instead of offering music with a strong universal appeal, disco polo, Polish hip, and *sacropolo* transformed Western music idioms in such a way that they lost some of their global appeal for the sake of local preferences. Moreover, these phenomena challenged established concepts regarding music (including categories of *muzyka poważna*, *muzyka rozrywkowa*, and *muzyka ludowa*), threatened established cultural hierarchies, and presented myths of Poland alternative to the officially recognized one, which was built around the folk culture by the intelligentsia.

On the other hand, the same mechanism that sanctions the rejection of music associated with what cosmopolitanism is not and with communities and cultures that are perceived to promote intolerance in the discursive configuration which celebrates openness to cultural diversity, may be at play here. As the preceding discussion has demonstrated, disco polo, Polish hip hop, and *sacropolo* clearly represent what cosmopolitanism is not. With their focus on appealing to Polish and not foreign audiences, ambiguous attitude towards the West and celebration of Polishness as well as traditional and domestic values, they disturb the dominant discourse (controlled by the Western-oriented, liberal intelligentsia), which celebrates cosmopolitan and progressive values commonly associated with the West. “European” aspirations

cherished by the Polish elites (but questioned by the phenomena which experienced silencing) seem to be reflected also in symbolic exclusion. Disco polo and *sacropolo*, through their affiliation with country, folk, and religious styles, constitute a safe target for symbolic rejection for those who consider themselves (and want to be considered by others) as “tolerant” and who, at the same time, ascribe intolerance and xenophobia to the communities associated with the rejected music.



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