ACTA UNIVERSITATIS UPSALIENSIS

Studia Slavica Upsaliensia 50
Editors: Ingrid Maier & Jussi Nuorluoto
‘A Machine for Living’


My Svensson
Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to study urban domesticity in Polish film and literature against the background of the political and social transformations that have taken place in recent decades. The study begins with the so-called belle époque of the Polish People’s Republic and the decade of Edward Gierek, continues through the political upheavals, the period of martial law, and the system transformation of 1989 and the two following decades, which have been marked by the introduction of democracy, global capitalism, consumerism etc.

The primary sources consist of almost thirty literary and cinematic works from various genres covering a period of forty years – twenty before the system change, and twenty after. Their common denominator is their setting in the socialist housing projects (blokowisko). The dissertation places itself in the field of geocriticism and literary/cinematic spatiality. The object of the study is the ‘social space’ (Henri Lefebvre) of the urban home, and the main analytical frames are spatial representations and narrative space, which are viewed as important in shaping both character and plot. The analysis also draws from cultural theory by Michel Foucault, Marc Augé, Mikhail Bakhtin, Mircea Eliade, and Loïc Wacquant.

The dissertation detects a shift in the representations of the urban home that indicates that the home has become more private and secluded after 1989, also suggesting that a spatial and social marginalization of the socialist housing projects has occurred. These findings are interpreted as consistent with theories in human geography on changes in the perception and experience of space due to global paradigm shifts and changes in the production system.

Keywords: urbanism, the idea of home, Polish literature, Polish cinema, narrative space, heterotopia, non-places, social space, the city, geocriticism, apartments in motion pictures, Henri Lefebvre, cities and town life in motion pictures, cities and towns in literature, system transformation

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ISSN 0562-3030
ISBN 978-91-554-9286-1
urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-259415 (http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-259415)

Cover Design: Melina Grundel (madebymelina.se)

Printed in Sweden by Kph Trycksaksbolaget, Uppsala 2015

Distribution: Uppsala University Library, Box 510, SE-751 20 Uppsala, Sweden
www.uu.se, Acta@ub.uu.se
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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I sincerely want to thank my advisor M. Anna Packalén Parkman and my co-advisor Stefan Helgesson. Your guidance along this winding road of thesis writing has been invaluable.

Gratitude is also due to my colleagues at the Department for Modern Languages that have attended the Slavic seminars, and especially my fellow graduate students: Daniela Assenova, Carles Magriña Badiella, Johan Muskala, and Pontus Lindgren; and my former colleagues at SWPS in Warsaw: Witold Maciejewski, Lech Sokół, Agnieszka Stróżyk, Paulina Rosińska, Małgorzata Kłoś, Dominika Skrzypek, and Magdalena Domeradzka.


I also wish to thank Rektors resebidrag från Wallenbergsstiftelsen and Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundet i Uppsala for the generous travel grants.

Last but not least, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my friends and family for supporting me during these years, especially my beloved Johan and Nikolaj.

Uppsala, June 2015

My Svensson
1 Introduction

Idzie o wielką sprawę – o to, aby w okresie życia jednego pokolenia zbudować drugą Polskę – Polskę zasobniejszą, odpowiadającą aspiracjom obywateli nowoczesnego kraju przemysłowego (Gierek, V Plenum KC PZPR, 10–11 May, 1972: 22)

[It concerns a great cause – about how, in the cause of the life of one generation, to build a second Poland – a more affluent Poland, responding to the aspirations of the citizens of a modern industrial country.]

In 1966 Poland reached an urbanization degree of 50 percent; from this point on a majority of the population lived in cities. Four years later, Edward Gierek was elected first secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party. The decade that followed under his reign became known for its strong focus on construction – a “concrete-ization” of Poland.

Urbanization in Poland in general and Warsaw in particular grew rapidly after the Second World War. Between 1946 and 1991 the percentage of the population living in cities doubled, from 31.8% to 62% (Demografia Polski n.d.).\(^2\) The increasing urbanization went hand in hand with the rapid demographic growth. To meet the urgent needs for housing, Edward Gierek launched the ambitious plan to build “a second (another) Poland,” which was to be achieved through the modern industrial technology of prefabrication. In effect, during the 1970s, 2.4 million apartments were constructed. Although this was more than any previous or subsequent decade, the waiting queue was only reduced to six years, which was not enough to satisfy a growing urban population (Rolicki 1990: 75). The changes taking place in the physical landscape certainly affected the residents and their experience of the city.

An episode of the Polish Film Chronicle from 1974 is dedicated precisely to this new – modern – urban living. The film clip begins with camera shots of pulsating city life. The setting is central Warsaw: a busy Marszałkowska Street full of passing cars, buses, and trams in the foreground. The camera switches focus to the newly built steel facades of the Wars and Sawa shopping

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\(^1\) My translation. If not stated otherwise, all following translations are my own.

\(^2\) The urbanization that followed industrialism began rather late in Poland – in the mid 19\(^{th}\) century. In 1842 the urbanization degree reached 20% (while in 1578 it was 28.8%) (Węclawowicz, Łotocka et al. 2010: 8). In the years to come urbanization developed as follows: 1921: 24.6%, 1946: 31.8%, 1960: 48.3%, 1978: 57.5%, 1991: 62.0%, 2009: 61.1% (Demografia Polski n.d.).
center; from there it descends into the rushing crowds of the sidewalk where mannequins in the shop display windows are glimpsed in the background. The camera again shifts between shots of different central locations: a movie theater, a café in a modern building, a busy crossing, a four-lane street, and the facades of modern high-rise buildings. The voice-over explains:


The rapid development of the cities – that is the most synthetic characteristic of contemporary Poland (...). During the thirty years of post-war Poland, the population increased by almost 12 million. Almost all of this growth came to the cities. Metropolitan centers lured with the specificity of new lifestyles. Newcomers who flocked to the cities as a result of the post-war changes had to be provided with a roof over their head, but at the same time modern living conditions.

The camera continues to show shots of high-rises and housing estates, but these are clearly located in more peripheral areas of the city. The transfer is smooth however and obviously suggests an affinity between the city center and the housing projects. The speaker voice continues:

Zasadą nowego budownictwa od początku stało się nie tylko dbanie o architektoniczny wyraz nowych domów, ale przede wszystkim świadome realizowanie koncepcji społecznego osiedla mieszkaniowego.

The principle of the new constructions was from the beginning not only to care about the architectural expression of new homes but most of all a conscious realization of the concept of the social housing estate.

Today it is probably hard to imagine a Polish city or town without the large, often gray, prefabricated housing projects. And it might even be as hard to imagine a Polish home without thinking of the same buildings. As sociologist Bohdan Jałowiecki writes just a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall: “Estetyka miasta, na której wychowały się dwa pokolenia Polaków to estetyka blokowisk, anonimowych domów pozbawionych społecznych znaczeń i indywidualnego wyrazu” [The aesthetics of the city, in which two generations of Poles grew up, that is the aesthetics of concrete housing projects, anonymous buildings deprived of social meaning and individual expression] (Jałowiecki 1991: 10).

After the Second World War, Polish homes were literally demolished. With the new ideology introduced after the war, a new idea of home, based on the
principles of democracy and collectivity, was created, in part breaking with the previous traditional view of home as a private protective sphere. All over Poland almost identical, enormous multi-family housing estates were constructed, where a majority of Poles moved and thus came to experience. Polish architects Szymon and Helena Syrkus wrote in a text from 1946 for the office for the reconstruction of the capital city (Biuro odbudowy stolicy, BOS) and the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa, WSM) on the importance of the social housing projects as the basic unit of the future Warsaw:

Angielska zasada My Home is My Castle: dom mój jest moją twierdzą, czy zdanie św. Augustyna: ‘Nie chodź na rynek, wejdź w siebie, we wnętrzu człowieka mieszka prawda’, tak bardzo respektowane przez urbanistykę minio-

genego okresu, straciły już sens w Polsce. Nowe place zebrań, tereny dziecięce staną się własnością ogółu i każdy będzie mógł z nich korzystać (Syrkus 1976: 399).

[The English concept My Home is My Castle (…), or the opinion of Saint Augustine: “Do not look outside; return to yourself. In our interior the truth resides,” so well-respected by the urbanists of the past epoque, has now lost its meaning in Poland. New meeting places, children’s playgrounds will be common property and everyone will be able to use them.]

They thus denounce the secluded, private and inward visions of home, opting instead for an open and social vision. Half a century later this vision of home was referred to as abnormal. As the literary critic Anna Legeżyńska writes:

W czasach stalinowskich wszelkie normy zadomowienia zostały pogwałcone. (...) przede wszystkim dlatego, że narzucono im anormalne pojęcie Domu, który przestał być prywatnym schronieniem, a stał się miejscem kolek-

tywnego, nieskończenie tymczasowego zakwaterowania (Legeżyńska 1996: 85).

[During the Stalinist times all norms concerning dwelling were violated (…) most of all because of the imposed abnormal idea of the home, which stopped being a private asylum and became a place of collective infinitely temporary housing.]

However, Gierek’s speech at the fifth plenum of the central committee of the Polish Communist Party in 1972 partly broke with the previous regime’s view on the home and stressed its important functions, thus upgrading its role within (the socialist) society: “Mieszkanie nie jest tylko miejscem spania. Wpływa ono na spójność rodziny, stwarza warunki do regeneracji sił ludzkich i rozwoju młodego pokolenia.” [The apartment is not only a sleeping place. It affects the family’s cohesion, creates the conditions for regeneration of human powers and the development of the young generation] (V Plenum 10–11 maja,
The results of Gierek’s reign were certainly large quantities of prefabricated multi-family housing estates, although with common shortcomings concerning quality.

As Zofia Mioduszewska (2006: 155) observed, these new mass-housing homes were illustrated in the 1974 edition of the Polish children’s elementary reading textbook entitled Elementarz by Ewa and Feliks Przyłubski, where domy [houses, homes] now were depicted as prefabricated housing estates next to the traditional single-family houses and cottages (Przyłubcy 1987).

The connection between home and the concrete high-rise is also illustrated in the Polish Thesaurus Słownik synonimów polskich, where the key word dom in the meaning “tam, gdzie się mieszka lub pracuje” [there, where you live or work], besides blok [high-rise], among others both wieżowiec [high-rise] and mrówkowiec ['high-rise’ pejoratively] are stated as synonyms (Kurzowa 1998: s.v. /dom/).

The definitions of blokowisko given by Polish dictionaries also indicate a pejorative view: Inny słownik języka polskiego from 2000 states “to osiedle składające się z dużych i często brzydkich bloków. Słowo używane z dezaprobowaną ...blokowiska polskie lat osiemdziesiątych” [it is a neighborhood consisting of large and often ugly high-rises. The word is used with disapproval ...Polish housing estates from the 1980s] (Szymczak 2000: s.v. blokowisko). PWN’s Słownik języka polskiego defines it as “osiedle składające się z wielkich bloków mieszkalnych’: Szare, przytłaczające blokowisko. Dzielnica blokowisk” [a housing estate consisting of large high-rise dwellings’: Gray, oppressive housing estate. A neighborhood of housing projects] (Szymczak 1999 & Dubisz 2003, s.v. blokowisko). The PWN online dictionary Słownik języka polskiego of 2014 is more neutral, as it defines blokowisko simply as “osiedle wielkich bloków mieszkalnych” [a neighborhood of big housing blocks] (Szymczak 2014: s.v. blokowisko, web). The word blokowisko first entered a supplement to Mieczysław Szymczak’s dictionary in 1992, but Mirosław Bańko (2012) assumes it began to be used in the 1970s, as the adjective “blokowiskowy” was found in press clips between the years 1985–1992.

Outside the dictionary definitions, the architecture of the prefabricated housing estates has received rather negative opinions among Polish post-2000 cultural critics. Izabela Kalinowska (2005) referred to them as “grim, depersonalized and alienating, (...) universally oppressive” and journalist Agnieszka Kołodyńska (2007) as “(...) bezosobowe, brzydkie, niebezpieczne. Ludzie z reguły mieszkają tam z konieczności” [impersonal, ugly, dangerous. People usually live there out of necessity]. Writer Lidia Amejko moreover says that the “concrete-ization” of Poland was a kind of “aesthetic crime” by

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3 It is worth noting that the dictionary from the same publishing house, Nowy słownik języka polskiego from the same year, does not contain the word blokowisko. See Elżbieta Sobol (2003).
the communists: “Bardzo źle znoszę taką architekturę, taką unifikację. (...) Mam wrażenie, że to bycie w betonie wygenerowało stracone betonowe pokolenia (...)” [I dislike that kind of architecture, that kind of unification. (...) I have the impression that the dwelling in concrete created a lost concrete generation (...)], Amejko continues (Kołodyńska 2007).

And in a book on Polish cinema, blokowisko is described as “nazwa dużego skupiska bloków mieszkalnych, czyli wielopiętrowych, wielorodzinnych budynków, o prostej formie. Współcześnie takie osiedla uważa się za ‘przekleństwo’ przestrzeni miejskiej, miejsce, gdzie powstaje wiele patologii, w tym dotyczących młodzieży” [the name for big agglomerations of housing estates, i.e. multi-storied, multi-family buildings of simple form. Today such neighborhoods are commonly considered a ‘curse’ in urban landscape, a place, where many pathologies are formed, related to the youth] (Tambor 2012: 106).

However, neither the new mass housing nor the critical voices and associations attached to them are unique to Poland. In her essay I litteraturens förorter [In the Literary Suburbs] about the Swedish literary concrete suburbs, Marie Peterson asks herself what she means by “förort” (which means suburb). She writes that she thinks of “recent agglomerations of rental housing, in a row, protruding raw elements in the landscape, hardly rooted in earth, with desolate accompanying parking lots. The association tracks go via boredom, ugliness, loneliness, and a feeling of being ‘outside’/alienated” (Peterson 1992: 183).

Besides the commonly expressed negative opinions of the aesthetics of the prefabricated housing estates and their negative associations, they have also been connected with the Polish nation. In his review, aptly entitled “Wszyscy jesteśmy z bloku” [We are all from the bloc] of the 2007 art exhibition Betonowe dziedzictwo. Od Le Corbusier’a do blokersów [The Concrete Heritage: From Le Corbusier to Blokersi] Marcin Teodorczyk writes that blokowisko is “w jakimś stopniu składową tożsamości Polki i Polaka” [to some degree the collective identity of Poles] (Teodorczyk 2007). This view was somewhat supported by the British photographer Mark Power’s contribution to the photo exhibition Eurowizje at the Center for Contemporary Art in Warsaw the year before (2006), where a selection of photographers were to portray the new EU member states. Mark Power illustrated Poland with a photo of a twelve-story (prefabricated) apartment building, with a repainted facade in Rzeszów. The picture shows a gray sky, no people, and a foreground consisting of a worn-out lawn (Power 2004). It is the relation between housing projects, home, and the city that this dissertation addresses – the urban home. And as a result the study presents a history of the city viewed from the perspective of apartment

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4 “(…) sentida ansamlingar av hyreshus i rad, som avstickande råa inslag i landskapet, knappt rotade i jorden, med tillhörande ödsliga parkeringsplatser och långa resor. Associationsbanor som går via tristess, fulhet, ensamhet och en känsla av att vara utanför.”
homes, or more precisely the housing projects (*blokowisko* in Polish) depicted in film and literature across forty years of rapid urban change.

### 1.1 Study Objectives

In his recent book on place and geography in literature, Eric Prieto argues that:

[Our era] is characterized by an uncommonly rapid pace of cultural and technological evolution. Demographic upheaval, migratory circulation, economic liberalization, technological innovation, environmental change, and all the other motors of geo-cultural flux have disrupted many of the practices and institutions that have traditionally given us a sense of belonging to a place or community, and they have done so in a spectacularly short period of time (Prieto 2013: 8–9).

This applies not least to the specific case of Poland, which has seen thoroughgoing social, economic and cultural changes after 1989. Polish sociologist Marcin Jewdokimow indeed points to similar changes in Poland: “(...) przemian[a] gospodarki na gospodarkę opartą na konsumpcji i dematerializację pracy, tryb życia – migracje i podróże, rozwój nowych technologii i postępującą technologiczność domu, proces indywidualizacji oraz rozwój systemów eksperckich.” [the transformation of the economy to an economy based on consumption and dematerialization of work, lifestyles – migration and travel, the development of new technologies and a progressive technologization of home, the process of individualization and the development of expert systems]. Jewdokimow further emphasizes how these changes in Poland are related to wider global phenomena, “late modernism” and changes such as “globalization, consumerism, technologization, the development of new media, and individualization” (Jewdokimow 2011: 12). Prieto continues:

These transformative processes have necessarily generated new modes of spatial organization, new kinds of habitats, and new ways of living together, some of which are destined to become an enduring part of the physical and cultural landscape even if they are not yet fully understood or accepted (Prieto 2013: 8–9).

These transformations are the point of departure for this dissertation, which aims to study their effects and imprints on the urban domestic experience depicted in various genres in Polish film and literature during the course of four decades – twenty years before the system change of 1989 and twenty after. I view the works as voices in an ongoing debate on urbanism and the home that shed light on the urban and socio-cultural changes that took place both before and after 1989. Of primary concern is the spatiality of the works studied and the social space represented. I want to stress that the object of study is the
representation of a certain type of space, not the real-world space or place. These representations, however, – and here I want to draw on Prieto again – are not viewed as “passive or imitative depiction[s] of such places, judged in terms of accuracy and conformity to the original, but (…) as a creative, performative act, part of the process that brings places into being as places” (Prieto 2013: 11).

Time has traditionally been the dominating perspective in narrative studies. In the last few decades, however, we have seen a ‘spatial turn’ not only in literary studies but in humanities and social sciences. The term was first used by human geographer Edward Soja in his Postmodern Geographies (1989: 39); a couple of years later literary critic Fredric Jameson also stated that “[a] certain spatial turn has often seemed to offer one of the more productive ways of distinguishing postmodernism from modernism proper (…)” (Jameson 1992: 162). But it was as early as 1967 that French philosopher Michel Foucault noted in a lecture entitled Des Espace Autres [Of Other Spaces]:

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, to the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein (Foucault [1967] 1986: 22).

The shift of interest towards space was also supported by French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre’s La production de l’espace [The Production of Space] (1974), which argued for the concept of “social space.” In literary studies, the Russian critics Yury Lotman (1971) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1989) introduced their analytical instruments for the study of literary space, the semiosphere and the chronotope respectively. The spatial turn and its responses in different academic disciplines were also assessed in the 2009 anthology The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives (eds. Barney Warf & Santa Arias). The editors of the volume explain:

[T]he spatial turn (…) involv[es] a reworking of the very notion and significance of spatiality to offer a perspective in which space is every bit as important as time in the unfolding of human affairs, a view in which geography is not relegated to an afterthought of social relations, but is intimately involved in their construction. Geography matters, not for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because where things happen is critical to knowing how and why they happen (Warf & Arias 2009: 1).

In Poland the ‘spatial turn’ (Pol. zwrot przestrzenny) within the field of cultural studies was most recently given a comprehensive examination in Elżbieta Rybicka’s Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich [Geopoetics. Space and Place in Contemporary Theories and Literary Practices] (2014). Some of the earliest examples of Polish-
language publications in the field include Tadeusz Sławek’s *Wnętrze: z problemów doświadczenia przestrzeni w poezji* [Interiors: of the problems of the experience of space in poetry], (1984), Ewa Rewers’ *Język i przestrzeń w poststrukturalistycznej filozofii kultury* [Language and space: the poststructuralist turn in the philosophy of culture], (1996 – Eng. trans. 1999), or else her *Postpolis: wstęp do filozofii ponowoczesnego miasta* [Post-polis: introduction to the philosophy of the postmodern city], (2005), and Stefan Symotiuik’s *Filozofia i genius loci* [Philosophy and genius loci] (1997).

The present study thus places itself within the field of literary and cinematic spatiality, as it connects geography and architecture with literature and film. Of key importance in the analysis is the narrative category space; therefore important questions that the analysis will revolve around are how the narrative space is depicted and how it is perceived and experienced by the fictional characters. The analysis will pay special attention to the works’ ‘spatial frames.’ Other questions guiding the investigation explore the idea of the home and the city: How is this urban home portrayed and what idea of the home is transposed? How is the city depicted and what idea of the city is transmitted? Further questions framing the analysis concern the themes and motifs conveyed, as well as what symbolic, allegoric or narrative role the setting takes.

1.2 Primary Sources

In order to give the most comprehensive picture possible of the urban home, the material for this study is broad. It is diachronic, encompassing forty years (1969–2008), and consists of multiple genres and media: film (documentaries, feature films, and TV series), and literature (theater plays, novels, short stories, diary notes). I have included texts from both ‘popular’ and ‘high’ culture. The common denominator is their, to different extent, residential setting, which consists of the housing projects (*blokowisko*) whose idea emanated from the Athens Charter of 1933. The works are viewed and treated as narrative genres. By including a variety of genres the study can offer a thorough picture of the artistic expressions and a diachronic comparison of the urban home. The inclusion of different genres is also motivated by the works themselves, several of which have been adapted to different genres. The rationale behind such a wide selection of material is to frame a specific period in Polish history – a time of political, social, and cultural transformation. The advantage of such an approach is the ability to trace changes in the perception of space from the so-called belle époque of the 1970s state socialism through politically precarious times of martial law, system transformation and the introduction of democracy, to a liberal global market economy and the aftereffects thereof. This study traces the representations of urban domesticity in a specific habitat.
– the housing projects. It thus does not include a general analysis of all fictional depictions (from TV, film, and literature) of urban domesticity from the period under study.

The obvious dominance of the film medium among the material of this study is explained by the ‘spatial bias’ of this genre. As film critic Mark Shiel writes:

[C]inema operates and is best understood in terms of organization of space; both space in films – the space of the shot; the space of the narrative setting; the geographical relationship of various settings in sequence in a film; the mapping of a lived environment on film; and films in space – the shaping of lived urban spaces by cinema as a cultural practice; the spatial organization of its industry at the levels of production, distribution, and exhibition; the role of cinema in globalization (Shiel 2001: 5).

Since several of these works have been adapted into different genres, it is noted within the parenthesis after the work title which genre has been used in the analysis.

Other genres, such as song lyrics, art works, poetry or other works not mentioned here will be used in the discussion as point of reference but not as the main focus.

Not long after the concrete high-rise had appeared in the geographical landscape, so did their depictions in visual and literary arts. Outside Poland some of the earliest examples include Eldar Ryazanov’s 1975 Soviet comedy Ирония судьбы, или С лёгким паром! [The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath], the Czechoslovak director Vera Chytilova’s 1980 Panelstory, Hungarian Bela Tarr’s Panelkapcsolat [The Prefab People] (1982), the Estonian Mati Unt’s novel Süstisball [Autumn Ball] (1979), just to mention the most exemplary titles from other Slavic or East European cultures. In Sweden poets such as Bodil Malmsten, Göran Greider, Göran Sonnevi, Jaques Werup, C-G Thosteman, Ulf Erikkson, Gunnar Lundin, and Kristina Lugn have written some of the earlier portrayals of the similar housing projects.5

The present study is interdisciplinary as it combines theory from the field of human geography and cultural studies with literary and cinematic theory. Urbanity and domestic urbanism in film and literature have previously been studied in Elżbieta Rybicka’s Modernizowanie miasta: zarys problematyki urbanistycznej w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej [Modernization of the City: An Outline of the Question of the Urban in Modern Polish Literature] (2003), Sharon Marcus’ Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London (1999), Pamela Robertson Wojcik’s The Apartment Plot. Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945 to 1975 (2010), and Alexandra Borg’s En vildmark av sten. Stockholm i litteraturen 1897-1916 [Paved Wilderness: The Prose of Stockholm 1897–1916] (2011). Although these studies focus on different genres and different time periods as well as different cultural spheres, they all concentrate on various experiences of the “city.” Carrie Tarr’s study Reframing difference: beur and banlieu filmmaking in France (2005) in part focuses on films set in the outskirts of the (French) city, “the rundown multi-ethnic working-class estates (the cités)” (Tarr 2005: 2).

Single or a couple of selected primary sources have been the object of (or constituted a part of a) study in previous research, such as Monika Talarczyk-Gubała’s PRL się śmieje! Polska komedia filmowa lat 1945-1989 (2007), Izabella Adamczewska’s monograph “Krajobraz po Masłowskiej”. Evolucja powieści środowiskowej w najmłodszej polskiej literaturze (2011), Izabela Kalinowska’s article “Generation 2000 and the Transformating Landscape of New Polish Cinema” (2005), Zofia Mioduszewska’s article “Spoleczna architektura blokowisk ‘40-latek’ Jerzego Gruzy i ‘Alternatywy 4’ Stanislawa

5 I owe these examples to Marie Peterson’s essay I litteraturens förorter (1992).
Barei” (2006), Jarosław Pietrzak’s article “Cześć, Tereska Roberta Glińskiego, czyli defraudacja poetyki kina społecznego” (2010). Within the field of Geography, Ewa Klima’s study (2013) of some residents’ view of their homes in a Łódź housing project, which concluded that the respondents referred to their homes in “universal” terms, is perhaps the most noteworthy.

While previous research has focused either on other more limited time frames, single genres or single works, the present study is the first comprehensive genre-transgressive and diachronic study of the fictional and artistic representations of housing estates as urban homes in Polish culture. This diachronic broad approach, which includes works of both ‘popular’ and ‘high-brow’ culture, enables a mapping of the shifts in the perception of space; moreover, it has the advantage of giving a synthesizing picture of the urban home and its development. The study thus connects fictional works of various genres by emphasizing their setting and its centrality in the narrative, and by underscoring how their motifs and themes reflect the ongoing urban transformations. An important aspect of the study is moreover the emphasis on the works’ productive role in shaping readers’ and viewers’ attitudes towards their surrounding.

1.2.1 Outline

The study, then, traces the history of the socialist housing projects in Polish cinema and literature, from the early depictions of such housing during the late 1960s and the 1970s, through their more elaborate artistic representations in the forty years to follow. The chapters are arranged chronologically but certain thematic and stylistic features are also taken into consideration. The study consists of six main parts. Chapter 2 offers a brief historical overview of 20th-century urban planning (the idea of the city) and modernist architecture theory, as well as a brief history of the idea of home and its artistic representations in Polish literature and cinema. This chapter thus develops the theoretical concepts of space and setting.

The third chapter analyzes the works written and produced up to 1989, i.e. before the fall of communism.

The fourth chapter discusses the literary and cinematic works released at the turn of the millennium. Of specific interest in this chapter are concepts of marginality, non-places and heterotopias.

The fifth chapter also studies post-2000 sources, paying special attention to genres utilizing humor and comic stylistic devices.

The sixth and final chapter concludes the analysis, summarizing the major findings and indicating possible avenues and approaches for further research.
1.2.2 Terminology

*Moloch*, *wielkopłytowiec*, *mrówkowiec*, * płytowce*, *pudełka*, and *wielka płyta* are some of the more colloquial Polish synonyms for the prefabricated high-rises. *Blok* means high-rise and has become synonymous with the prefabricated high-rises that were constructed foremostly during the 1960s, 70s and 80s in Poland. *Wielkie zespoły mieszkaniowe, blokowisko* and *osiedle* (literally multi-family housing estates and neighborhood or dwelling area) have become more frequent denotations. The original modernist term was *osiedle społeczne* [social housing estates]. And, as noted above, the Polish dictionary definition of *blokowisko* reads: “a housing estate consisting of large high-rise dwellings”: Gray, oppressive housing estate. A neighborhood of housing projects” (Szymczak 1995: s.v. *blokowisko*).

In Swedish these areas are called *betongförort* [concrete suburb], or *miljöprogrammet* [the million program] (named after the Swedish government’s decision to build a million dwellings in the course of ten years, 1965–1974). Some of the pejorative connotations are *betongklump* [concrete clump] and *skokartong* [shoe box]. In English, descriptions such as “socialist housing projects,” “Soviet-style apartment building complex” (Kalinowska 2005), “high-rise apartment building,” and “multi-family housing units” are common. These more or less pejorative/formal/customary connotations point out the buildings’ architectural origin, their location, and also their common negative perception. Sociologist Marek S. Szczepański prefers the term *blokowisko* in Polish because it lacks specific social connotations; it depersonalizes the living space: “Takie właśnie blokowiska, bo ta nazwa wydaje się najbardziej adekwatną na ich oznaczenie, są w minimalnym stopniu wyposażone w infrastrukturę społeczną.” [This kind of blokowiska indicates no social infrastructure, and that is why blokowisko seems the most adequate term to describe them] (Szczepański 1991: 158).

Writing about a specific Polish cultural context, this dissertation will use both Polish and English terminology. The Polish terms that will be used are those mentioned above; in English, I will use such terms as housing projects, socialist housing projects, the concrete housing projects, prefabricated housing apartments, multi-family housing, multi-family housing units, multi-family housing developments, concrete suburb, housing estate(s) interchangeably when I refer to the whole “planned urban unit” (“the unit of the neighborhood,” “the larger residential unit,” *Unité d’habitation* using Le Corbusier’s terminology – or *mikroraion* as David M. Smith (1996: 70) calls them). Referring to a single high-rise, a single building implicitly part of the “planned urban unit,” I will either use concrete high-rise, prefabricated high-rise, high-rise apartment building, housing unit or simply apartment building or high-rise.

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6 *Raiony* is also the common Russian name for these areas.
1.3 Theoretical Springboard: Narrative Space

This dissertation studies the space where the action unfolds. This includes ‘the setting,’ “the general socio-historico-geographical environment in which the action takes place,” ‘story space,’ “the space relevant to the plot, as mapped by the actions and thoughts of the characters,” and ‘the spatial frames,’ “the immediate surroundings of actual events, the various locations shown by the narrative discourse or by the image (…). Spatial frames are shifting scenes of action (…)” (Ryan 2012/2014, my italics).

In their study of the cinematic American suburb, Douglas Muzzio and Thomas Halper introduced the distinction between films that were “suburban set” and those that were “suburban centered.” In the latter, the setting is “essential to a film’s nature that it could not take place elsewhere without being fundamentally altered” (Muzzio & Halper 2002: 547). On a similar note, Blanche Housman Gelfant distinguished between “the city novel” and “urban local color fiction” in that in the former the city is active in “shaping character and plot” (Housman Gelfant 1954: 5). For Housman Gelfant there are three types of “city novels”: the first is “the portrait study,” in which the city is narrated from a single character’s perspective, commonly from the countryside (a naïve newcomer to the city). This type belongs to the literary tradition of “novels of initiation,” “built upon a series of educating incidents in which the city impresses upon the hero its meanings, values, and manners. As the hero responds to the insistent pressures of city life, his character undergoes a change” (Housman Gelfant 1954: 11). The second type defined as “the synoptic study” is a narrative without a hero – the city is a character itself. “Sometimes (…) as a vital personality with an identity and life of its own, distinct from that of its people” (Housman Gelfant 1954: 5). The third and final category refers to “the ecological study” and “focuses upon one small spatial unit such as a neighborhood or city block” (Housman Gelfant 1954: 11).

The physical setting is more than just a background; as literary critic Alexandra Borg observes:

The place where a story is set affects the narrative and decides which actions or characters are possible or impossible. The description of space might be part of the psychological character of a hero or it might foreshadow a personality. A story is different depending if it is set on a ship, in a large town, on an island or in a monastery. The description of space not only precedes the intrigue, but it also contributes to specifying the perspective and attitude of the narrator as well as the fictional characters (Borg 2011: 26).  

In his study of the literary geography, or the narrative geography of the European novel, Franco Moretti (2007: 70) writes that “each space determines, or at least encourages, its own kind of story.” He continues: “Space is not the ‘outside’ of the narrative, then, but an internal force, that shapes it from within. Or in other words: in modern European novels, what happens depends a lot on where it happens.”

The housing estate in the works of this study is thus not only a backdrop but rather “motivates or shapes the narrative in some key way” to borrow Robertson Wojcik’s definition of the apartment plot (Robertson Wojcik 2010: 3), or as Bettina Matthias wrote in her study of the hotel as a setting: it structures “lives, movement and time” (Matthias 2006: 53).

Following Rick Altman, Robertson Wojcik further writes that: “choice of setting, on a semantic level (…) would be closely aligned with the syntactic meaning and that just as certain semantic elements (such as guns) imply certain actions (e.g., shooting), certain spaces (e.g., a Broadway stage) entail certain sets of actions, certain plots (e.g., singing, dancing) that are not readily or as typically generated in other spaces (e.g., a hospital)” (Robertson Wojcik 2010: 8). And she continues:

(…) space and place are more than just one lexical choice among many; they are imbricated in signifying structures that are historically determined and that carry tremendous connotative and ideological weight related to issues of sex, gender, class, race, the body, individuality, family, community, work, pleasure, and more” (Robertson Wojcik 2010: 8).

In film theory, Martin Lefebvre (2006) discusses the spatial categories of setting and landscape. He underscores cinema’s ability to transform our experience of certain landscapes, how film, drawing on Simon Schama, “participates in the process of ‘imaginative projection’ (…) all the while being haunted as well by layers of past landscape projections” (M. Lefebvre 2006: xvi).

In Cinema and Landscape (2010), Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner underscore the “landscape’s presence as a role, as another performative element” rather than perceiving it “purely as a realist record.” They also point to a paradox of the cinematic medium:

the apparent realist certainty of the unmediated, mechanical reproduction on film of whatever falls within the boundaries of the frame, and the interpretative truth of the inevitably partial selection, construction and inclination of an image, serving implicit or explicit purposes (Harper & Rayner 2010: 22).

While the majority of cinematic landscapes are metonymic, they may also be “the landscape of suggestion,” i.e. a metaphorical landscape (Harper & Rayner 2010: 20).
In *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945 to 1975* (2010), Pamela Robertson Wojcik argues that the “apartment plot,” i.e. “any narrative in which the apartment figures as a central device” is a genre of its own (Robertson Wojcik 2010: 3). She considers the apartment as “a narrative device rather than as mere setting” (Robertson Wojcik 2010: 6) and later adds: “the apartment not only hosts but motivates action; it entails certain sets of relationships; it involves formal and thematic elements; it conveys ideologies of urbanism” (Robertson Wojcik 2010: 7).

In *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (1999) Sharon Marcus analyzes a variety of 19th-century texts, and argues that the apartment house serves as a microcosm of the city: “(...) the apartment in the nineteenth century ‘embodied the continuity between domestic and urban, private and public spaces’” (Marcus 1999: 2). She suggests a literary subgenre to the realist novel, which takes place in or around an apartment house: the apartment-house plot. It links novels “identified with spaces of the home” and novels connected with “urban sites” (Marcus 1999: 11). The novels “situate the city’s flow and multiplicity inside the home” (Marcus 1999: 11–12):

> The apartment-house plot thus combines the salon novel’s emphasis on domestic interiors and microscopic social networks (...) with the urban novel’s emphasis on chance encounters, the interplay between isolation and community, and the sudden transformation of strangers into kin (...) (Marcus 1999: 11).

Bakhtin borrowed the concept of the chronotope from physics and Einstein’s theory of relativity. It literally means time-space. The chronotope, in the field of literary studies, is what he calls a content-based category determined by the inseparability of time and space, as this, he writes, “determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well” (Bakhtin 2002: 15–16).

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (Bakhtin 2002: 15).

On the relationship between the real historical chronotope and the literary, Bakhtin notes that only parts were incorporated, reflected in the literary one (Bakhtin 2002: 16). He analyzes historically the chronotopes of the novel, beginning with the three chronotopes created in ancient Greece: “Adventure Time,” “Adventure time of everyday life,” “biographical time” which lasted long after the context they were created (Clark & Holquist 1984: 281–86). He further discusses Balzac’s saloon as “the place where the major spatial and temporal sequences of the novel intersect” (Bakhtin 2002: 19) and writes that
Balzac’s ability to see time in space was remarkable (Bakhtin 2002: 20). Other nineteenth-century chronotopes that he mentions are Flaubert’s small town, the threshold and the chronotope of crisis and return. In Dostoyevsky, for example, he considers the chronotopes of the threshold, the staircase, the front hall, the corridor, the street and the square being the places where “crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of man” (Bakhtin 2002: 21).

Bakhtin discusses the meaning of the chronotope in relation to “narrative”: “An event can be communicated, it becomes information, one can give precise data on the place and time of its occurrence. But the event does not become a figure [obraz]. It is precisely the chronotope that provides the ground essential for the showing-forth, the representability of events.” The chronotope is “the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel’s abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imagining power of art to do its work” (Bakhtin 2002: 22). For Bakhtin, chronotopes have importance for determining genres, although their functions change during their development (Bakhtin 2002: 22–23).

Although borrowed from physics, Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope was developed out of neo-Kantian philosophy and Kant’s philosophical anthropology – the study of what it means and has meant to be human through different world views. Their focus on cognition and the human brain’s fundamental way of organizing its perceptions and experiences through the categories time and space was recognized by Bakhtin. Different cultures and times have had different views on time and space which reflect their views on humans (Clark & Holquist 1984: 278).

This study will make use of Ryan’s concepts. It asserts and foregrounds the setting and its narrative importance stressed by Borg, Moretti, Robertson Wojcik, and Marcus. It will examine “the apartment (house) plot,” and it will consider the housing project as an artistic chronotope, where time “thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible (…)” and “(…) space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history” (Bakhtin 2002: 15).

1.3.1 Social Space and Urbanism

Every society – and hence every mode of production with its subvariants (…) – produces a space, its own space (Lefebvre 2013: 31).

Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) made a name for himself in the 20th century for his work on everyday life, urbanism and his theory on the production of space.
Lefebvre was an active scholar for over seven decades (1920s–1990s). His work on everyday life, urbanism, and the production of space echoed in the French intellectual and political (activist) debate in the 1960s, as well as among scholars such as Guy Debord, Michel de Certeau, David Harvey, Edward Soja, to mention just a few. His work gained a wider audience after his *La production de l’espace* [The Production of Space] was translated into English in 1991.

Lefebvre approached the concept of space in several of his texts, but it was foremost developed in *La production de l’espace* [The Production of Space] (1991, [1974]) as well as in *Le Droit à la ville* [The Right to the City] (1968) and further in *Writings on Cities* (1996) and his three-volume *Critique de la vie quotidienne* [Critique of Everyday Life] (1947/1961/1981).

Lefebvre saw how the historic city had been transformed by capitalism:

> The city historically constructed is no longer lived and is no longer understood practically. It is only an object of cultural consumption for tourists, for aestheticism, avid for spectacles and the picturesque. (…) Yet, the urban remains in a state of dispersed and alienated actuality (Lefebvre 1996: 148).

During the urbanization of the 19th century when the bourgeois class gained (economic) influence of the city, “the oeuvre” (use value) was replaced by the product (exchange value) (Lefebvre 1996: 75).

Lefebvre criticized the suburbanization caused by the industrialization of the French cities during the 20th century. He considered the creation of the large-scale housing estates after the Second World War a “habitat established in its purest form, as a burden of constraints”; they where a reduction of “to inhabit” to “habitat” (Lefebvre 1996: 79). Although the architecture of Bauhaus was self-proclaimed as revolutionary, Lefebvre was skeptical:

> When it comes to the question of what the Bauhaus’s audacity produced in the long run, one is obliged to answer: the worldwide, homogenous and monotonous architecture of the state, whether capitalist or socialist (Lefebvre 2013: 126).

He viewed them as being against the urban: “All perceptible, legible urban reality has disappeared: streets, squares, monuments, meeting places” (Lefebvre 1996: 79). “Urban life,” Lefebvre writes: “suggests meetings, the confrontation of differences, reciprocal knowledge and acknowledgement (including ideological and political confrontation), ways of living, ‘patterns’ which coexist in the city” (Lefebvre 1996: 75). Urban life also “gave the right to inhabit,” which meant “to take part in a social life, a community, village or city” (Lefebvre 1996: 76).

For Lefebvre, it is the street that is the core of urban life, a sort of microcosm of modern life (Lefebvre 2002: 309–310):
A place of passage, of interaction, of movement and communication, it becomes, via an astonishing volte-face, the reflection of the things it links together, something with more life in it than those things themselves. (...) The street takes whatever is happening somewhere else, in secret, and makes it public. It changes its shape, and inserts it into the social text (Lefebvre 2002: 310).

And he compares the street with everyday life as it “is constantly changing and always repeats itself” (Lefebvre 2002: 310).

Lefebvre’s most groundbreaking scholarly contribution concerns his concept of space. He rejects the idea of space as an empty container. Instead he views space as a product of a constant (dialectical) process of human practices, perceptions and conceptions. In *The Production of Space* (1974) he develops his theory on space further.

(Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object. At the same time there is nothing imagined, unreal or ‘ideal’ about it as compared, for example, with science, representations, ideas or dreams. Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others (Lefebvre 2013: 73).

And moreover he describes it as:

[s]ubjectively (...) the environment of the group and of the individual within the group; it is the horizon at the centre of which they place themselves and in which they live. The extent of this horizon differs from group to group, according to their situation and their particular activities. Objectively, the idea of social space (...) is made up of a relatively dense fabric of networks and channels. This fabric is an integral part of the everyday (Lefebvre 2002: 231).

Lefebvre asserts that there are three aspects to our spatial existence that exist in a kind of conceptual triad, consisting of (1) Spatial practice, (2) Representations of space, (3) Representational spaces (Lefebvre 2013: 33).

Gareth Millington describes Lefebvre’s three-leveled “production of space” as on one level perceived space or spatial practices (*l’espace perçu*), where “[e]very space is already in place before the appearance in it of actors, and the pre-existence of space conditions the subject’s presence, action and discourse. At the same time as practices presuppose space they also negate it” (Millington 2011: 6; Lefebvre 2013: 57). The second level is conceived space or representations of space (*l’espace conçu*), where “ideology, power and  

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8 “The pre-existence of space conditions the subject’s presence, action and discourse, his competence and performance; yet the subject’s presence, action and discourse, at the same time as they presuppose this space, also negate it” (Lefebvre 2013: 57).
knowledge are embedded” and “where capital exerts most influence.” The third level is lived space or representational space (l’espace vécu), which is “the space of everyday experience and often passively experienced in the sense that it is generally dreamt rather than ‘thought about.’”

[It contains the potential to resist rules of consistency and cohesiveness and the capability to oppose the rationalistic conceptions of space purveyed by architects, planners and developers. Representational space is accessed through symbolic, artistic and aesthetic works that describe space as it is actually lived (Millington 2011: 7).

This third level of the spatial triad was developed out of what Lefebvre’s considered an unsatisfactory dualism in the conception of space: as an abstract and material, or a mental/imagined and a lived/concrete space. Eric Prieto’s (2013: 93) explanation elucidates this level further as he connects it with Foucault’s concept of heterotopias:

The goal of this third level of representation is to cobble together a representation that will make the individual’s experience meaningful to him or her – not to provide universally valid explanations or definitions. It is for this reason that Lefebvre associates such representations with the ‘clandestine or underground’ and with modernist experimentation in the arts. In this sense, Lefebvre’s spaces of representation have a critical role comparable to Foucault’s heterotopias: They provide a potential base of resistance against the hegemonic representations imposed on us from above by the representatives of the state and its power.

The British geographer Doreen Massey’s view of space is similar to Lefebvre’s: “instead of space being this flat surface it’s like a pincushion of million stories: if you stop at any point in that walk there will be a house with a story… I want to see space as a cut through the myriad stories in which we are all living at any one moment. Space and time become intimately connected,” Massey explains in a radio interview. She further stresses how space is the dimension of simultaneity and multiplicity: “space is the dimension that presents us with the existence of the other (…) it is space that presents us with the question of the social,” she continues. Massey sees two dimensions of space: one material and one abstract: “Space concerns our relations with each other and in fact social space, I would say, is a product of our relations with each other, our connections with each other” (Massey 2013).

Following Lefebvre’s definition of the ‘spatial triad,’ this dissertation reads urban fictional space as the lived space but at the same time bears in mind that the three aspects of space are interconnected:

It is not (…) as though one had global (or conceived) space to one side and fragmented (or directly experienced) space to the other – rather as one might have an intact glass here and a broken glass or mirror over there. For space ‘is’
whole and broken, global and fractured, at one and the same time. Just as it is
at once conceived, perceived, and directly lived (Lefebvre 2013: 355–356).

Thus, in Eric Prieto’s words: “[literary texts] can change the ways their readers
view the world around them, making possible new ways of understanding
what is actually there and catalyzing new ideas about what might be” (Prieto
2013: 9).

1.3.2 The Setting
The following section will introduce the characteristic elements of the setting,
the different well-known spaces that constitute the universe of blokowisko, the
‘spatial frames’ of the narratives, where the lives of the protagonists’ unfold,
a generic space in which the writers and film makers have set their narratives.

Literary critic Franco Moretti wrote that “space and tropes are entwined; rhet-
oric is dependent upon space,” and he exemplified this with how some spatial
“frontiers” possesses a special “metaphorical intensity,” such as the staircase
of the Gothic novel, the window in Wuthering Heights, the threshold in Dosto-
veyevsky, and the pit in Germainal (Moretti 2007: 46). We shall see later in the
analysis of the works that some of these “frontiers” will return. This section
suffices to describe the corner stones of the setting. Next chapter will provide
further history to the architecture and urban-planning ideas.

Waldemar Siemiński (2011: 107–108) noted the absence of a common def-
inition of osiedle mieszkaniowe [residential housing development] among the
modernist urbanists. He explained this lack as a result of the “experimental”
desires among its creators. Architect Helena Syrkus however described it in
these words in her Ku idei osiedla społecznego [Towards the Concept of the
Social Housing Estates] from 1976:

Pod słowem osiedle mieszkaniowe rozumiemy zespół domów, wy-
budowanych na wolnych terenach, w celu rozwiązania kwestii mieszkaniowej
dla pracowników umysłowych i robotników. (…) Osiedle liczyć będzie ok. 3,5
tys. mieszkań przy liczbie 12,5 tys. mieszkańców. Urządzenia społeczne w
osiedlu tego typu muszą iść po linii zapewnienia najlepszych warunków
fizycznej i pedagogicznej opieki nad dziećmi i młodzieżą, organizacji gospo-
darstwa domowego oraz organizacji samokształcenia, odpoczynku i rozrywki
dorosłych. Strukturę organizacyjną opieramy na spółdzielczych formach pracy

We understand the term residential housing estate as a group of buildings,
built on free terrains, with the objective to resolve the housing question for
industrial and other workers. (…) The residential housing estate will count
around 3.5 thousand apartments in the area inhabited by 12.5 thousand resi-
dents. The social institutions in the residential housing estate must guarantee
the best physical conditions and pedagogical care for children and teenagers,
leisurely activities and places to rest for adults. The service structure of the estate is based on collective forms of work.]

Her definition thus includes both the estate’s size and the main purposes behind its creation. Which parts of the housing projects can be considered private and which public? My premise is that the division between private and public space is not natural, it is ideological, but even as such, the separation is not total. For Le Corbusier and the ideas proclaimed in the Athens Charter, the housing projects were to contain both private and public spaces. The apartments would give room for a private sphere, while the surrounding places, public institutions and services, were to be the common space for social encounters and cultural activities, where the residents would spend their free time (cf. Chapter 2.1.1).

Sociologist Marek S. Szczepański bases his classification of the osiedle spaces on their ‘usage,’ the practices of the residents. Those areas with neither physical nor symbolic borders are public space. Within this category he includes service institutions and commercial establishments (grocery shops, outdoor markets etc.), as well as green spaces and recreational areas (including playgrounds and walking routes) (Szczepański 1991: 131ff.). What he defines as semi-public space are the areas to which there is a symbolic restricted access. Here he includes parts of lawns, recreational areas and other spaces that to some extent have been appropriated by some of the residents – such as alcoholics “appropriating” space on lawns, “private” parking lots set up on the common green areas, or those parts used to hang laundry. The semi-private space is the space closest to the buildings, with a higher level of “privatization/domestication,” to which access is even more limited (both physically and symbolically). Here Szczepański includes “private” gardens (usually fenced in) or the space closest to the apartments inside the stairwells. Spaces adjacent to the blokowisko but existing as “integral parts and functional extensions,” such as a nearby church, health center, a park etc. Szczepański refers to as “spatial extensions” (1991: 134–157). Thus his categorization is based on how residents utilize and domesticate the space around them. Ewa Klima’s (2013: 82) classification somewhat departs from Szczepański’s as she views the apartment as private space, the common spaces in the building as “quasi-public space,” and the surrounding spaces such as the playground, parking lot, and the entrance as public space.

Drawing on both Klima’s and Szczepański’s observations, but with a reduction of the public sphere in the osiedle, I suggest a slightly different point of departure concerning the public and the private spaces of the housing estate that will be used rather as a framework – not as static definitions – in the analysis of the works. The inside of the apartments are private in character, but the yard and the stairways, the basement or roof terrace are semi-private as they are spaces foremost intended for the residents of the high-rise neighborhood but simultaneously open for anyone (thus only symbolically closed). The
school, church and grocery store located in the neighborhood I would characterize as semi-public, because although they are public institutions by definition, they are spaces mainly inhabited/experienced by the local residents. Following Szczepański, both the semi-private and the semi-public spaces may be subjected to different degrees of privatization, or for that matter “made public” depending on the residents’ practices.

*Mieszkania: the Apartments*

There was not only a housing deficit during PRL, there was also a deficit in consumer goods such as furniture, which resulted in a uniformity of apartment interiors: “[W]nętrza meblowane były podobnymi meblami, a przestrzenie o podobnych wymiarach nie posiadały historii” [The interiors were furnished with similar furniture, and the space of similar size did not have its own unique history], anthropologist Barbara Klich-Kluczewska (2005) observed in her study of private life in the Polish People’s Republic (cited in Jewdokimow 2011: 140). Architectural historian Andrzej Basista (2001:90) however points to the sharp contrast between the rich decoration of the apartments and their balconies compared with the common areas’ “tandetnym wykonaniem” [tacky execution]. The reason for this, he suggests, lies in mutual ownership as opposed to individual ownership.

The apartments were often small – as illustrated by the Polish proverb ciasne ale własne [cramped but my own] which can be used when referring to one’s apartment. The limited size was a result of the housing regulations that were one of the means to cope with the housing deficit. In 1959 the spatial norms for a one-room apartment (M1) was 17–20 m², for an (M2) 24–30 m², (M3) 33–38 m², and (M4) 42–48 m². In 1974 the spatial norms were somewhat increased: a one-room apartment was to have the size 25–28 m², a (M2) 25–28 m², a (M3) 44–48 m², and a (M4) 56–61 m² (Jewdokimow 2011: 139).

Another characteristic of the apartments was their defects due to ill-execution: parts of the interior decoration were lacking, unfinished or simply of poor quality.

In Klima’s study of the residents’ view of their home in a block of flats in Łódź, conducted in 2011–2012, she found that the respondents’ view of their dwelling was limited to their actual apartments, thus excluding the common areas – the quasi-public space and the public spaces – which they only viewed as places for meeting the neighbors (Klima 2013: 88).

The spaces in-between: klatka, schody, okna, drzwi

In most of the works, at some point the action takes place in the staircase, the elevator or in front of the stairway entrance. Most works also include characters that look out a window. These are spaces of connection and transfer.

Windows and doors have a symbolic significance in the history of literature and arts as marking a “threshold experience” (cf. Bakhtin 2002: 21; Lotman 1977: 229; Matthias 2006: 63). Lotman stresses the boundary’s organizing
function – as a “dividing line within the cultural-literary universe” – both separ- 
arating and connecting (Lotman 2001: 136). Examples of this are doors, win-
dows and thresholds and the meaning ascribed to the spaces on respective 
sides are of oppositional (inversal) character (Hansen Löve 1994: 34).

In the Neighborhood: podwórko, sklep, szkoła, kościół
Most of the works analyzed have several scenes that take place somewhere in 
the yard. Some of the common semantic elements, props, are the rug beater 
(trzepak), the playground (plac zabaw), flowerpots (donice), the bench 
(ławka). There are also several social services and institutions located in the 
area: the grocery store, the school, and the church. They are common places, 
spaces for everyday activities, and places where people meet. They are also 
other spaces (like the church), and places to play.

A majority of the churches erected during the communist period were con-
structed on the border to the housing estate neighborhood or outside. This was 
a conscious decision by the authorities. The sacral architecture during PRL 
was acclaimed for its originality, for its contrast with the surrounding, and for 
its heterogeneity concerning materials, architectural shapes, spatial layout etc. 
As a consequence, the churches constructed nearby or within a neighborhood 
of housing estates often “dominated” the surroundings through their “origin-
ality in form, quality of materials and the precision of execution” (Basista 
2001: 150). Basista further writes that the construction of the – architecturally 
diverging – churches was a reaction against the boredom and gloom of the 
imposed world (Basista 2001: 154).

Another characteristic of the Polish housing projects mentioned by Basista 
(2001: 128) is “the open space” (otwarte przestrzenie) which, as he observes, 
was an element never lacking in the housing estates. The open space was a 
counterpole to the dense urban construction of the 19th century, but often for 
many years consisted of “undeveloped desert” and even when the area was 
taken care of it was frequently exposed to vandalism or destruction by chil-
dren, playing wherever they wanted and could. The terrain was however 
mostly viewed as ‘no man’s land’ and left unattended.

Za blokami: outside the housing projects
As the narratives are not exclusively set within the blokowisko, the analysis of 
the spatiality will also focus on how the ‘outside world’ is deployed and rep-
resented. What constitutes the world outside the housing projects? Is it the 
heap (hałda), the nearby hill (pagórek), shopping malls or the public spaces of 
the city center? Is the backdrop constituted by historical monuments or shady 
backyards? Or perhaps the countryside? How integrated is the ‘outside’ with 
the blokowiskas and its residents? How is it, or more precisely, how are those 
spaces valorized? These are some of the questions that will guide the discus-
sion of the works’ spatiality.
2 The Modern City and the Home: A Historical Background

2.1 To Throng upon Rooftops: Architecture and Urban Planning under Modernism

Having introduced the most essential parts of the setting, this section will provide a more elaborate background to the different modernist architectural and urban-planning theories that led to the construction of the multi-family housing projects and “the landmark of the 20th century” – the high-rises and their multiples, whose “Purist style, its clean, salubrious hospital metaphor, was meant to instill, by good example, corresponding virtues in the inhabitants,” as the architectural theoretician Charles Jencks (1984: 9) describes it: “Good form was to lead to good content, or at least good conduct; the intelligent planning of abstract space was to promote healthy behaviour.” These ideas were part of the modernist and revolutionary (in the USSR) movements where architecture and urban planning were viewed as means through which a new socialist society and a new socialist man would be constructed. The new “utopian modern space” was to be separated from “the degraded and fallen city fabric” (Jameson 1992: 49).

The common denominator running through this first section and the chapter as a whole is the preoccupation with dwelling. How should man live? What is it to dwell? And what is a home? Those are the fundamental questions that the modernist architects and urban planners were engaging in. The purpose of this first section is however not to provide an in-depth critical analysis of the different modernist theories, but rather to give an overview to the specific characteristics of the urbanist and architectural ideas and their implementation.

In his 1915 essay My i doma, [Ourselves and Our Buildings] the Russian futurist Velimir Khlebnikov expressed his high-reaching dreams about the urban planning of the future:
People will no longer gather in the vicious streets, whose dirty desire reduces human beings to residue in a washbasin; rather they will throng upon rooftops, beautiful young rooftops, waving their handkerchiefs after a giant levitating air-cloud, sending goodbyes and farewells after their departing friends (1987: 348).

Furthermore:

People throng the rooftops, while the ground is left for the transport of goods; the city becomes a network of intersecting bridges, whose inhabited arches connect the residential towers that serve as their supports; the residential buildings serve the bridge as piers and as walls for shaft areas. The city crowds will no longer move about on foot or on their four-legged colleagues; they will have learned to fly above the city, raining their glances upon the place below; above the city will hover a cloud that will test its builder’s work, a threat to weak roofs, like a thunderstorm or tornado (Khlebnikov 1987: 348).

These poetically expressed utopian visions were never intended as more than precisely that – visions. But they do give a hint at the prevailing creative atmosphere and fearless attitudes among the modernist urbanists and architects in the early 20th century. From the 1920s and forward, however, it was the Swiss architect Le Corbusier and his modernist ideas that gained world influence in the field of urban planning. In the manifests La Ville radieuse [The Radiant City] (1933) and Vers une architecture [Towards an Architecture] (1923) and Charte d’Athènes [The Athens Charter] (1942) he developed the concepts of “the green city” and “the larger residential unit” [unité d’habitation] – concepts that became influential in the construction of the prefabricated multi-family housing units during the second half of the twentieth century, “especially in context with large-scale urban renewal schemes,” as architect historian Norbert Schoenauer (2000: 435) noted. Le Corbusier wanted to go beyond the traditional concept of the home, and introduced his idea of the “House Machine”:

We must create the mass-production spirit./ The spirit of constructing mass-production houses./ The spirit of living in mass-production houses./ The spirit of conceiving mass-production houses/If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the house, and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view, we shall arrive at the ‘House Machine,’ the mass-production house, healthy (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are beautiful (Le Corbusier 1986 [1931]: 6–7).

After CIAM’s (Congrès internationaux d’architecture moderne) fourth congress aboard the cruise ship SS Patris II in the Mediterranean in 1933, its “results” were first published as Constatations in 1933 and later in the so-called Athens Charter (1943) (Mumford 2000: 73). The charter contained the new modern ideas within urbanism and architecture, which also came to inspire
future Polish dwelling construction. The program opposed the urbanism of the 19th century and the social injustices with respect to the unequal access to the city space. The solution to the problems of the city, and the main topic of the conference, was the functional city. The city had four main functions: dwelling (which they considered the “primordial element of urbanization”), work, leisure, and circulation (communication) (Mumford 2000: 79, 90). In the functional city the individual unit’s needs should be balanced against those of the collective. The main task of the city planner is to satisfy people’s needs – light, a view, and a green surrounding. Dwellings, where the unit of the neighborhood (osiedle in Polish) is the core, and leisure areas should be placed around the city in a favorable way; industry should be located in separate areas (Borowik 2003: 22). Eric Mumford (2000: 89) summarizes some of the conclusions of Constatations:

CIAM demanded that housing districts should occupy the best sites, and a minimum amount of solar exposure should be required in all dwellings. For hygienic reasons, buildings should not be built along transportation routes, and modern techniques should be used to construct high apartment buildings spaced widely apart, to free the soil for large green parks.

The conclusions also included a wish to reduce commuting time between dwellings and workplace. Workplaces should moreover be placed close to transportation routes. Housing was also to be separated from traffic by green parks, and statistical methods to settle “rational street widths” were proposed (Mumford 2000: 90). The conference participants consisted of delegations from many European countries. Poland was represented by the architects Szymon and Helena Syrkus, Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, as well as Roman Piotrowski (Mumford 2000: 78, 81). Szymon Syrkus introduced a plan for a functional Warsaw, which he presented the following year at a meeting of the International Committee to Resolve Problems of Modern Architecture together with Jan Chmielewski. David Crowley describes the utopian plan as follows:

The city’s functions were to be distributed along an extensive strip with nodes indicating the sites for growth of future smaller centers. (…) Rather than conceive the city in terms of fixed elements, ‘Warszawa funkcjonalna’ envisaged the dissolution of city and national boundaries in an extensive network of road, rail, and river routes and junctions. Warsaw was not simply projected as a European city: it was to become Europe itself (Crowley 2008: 769).

Just a year earlier, in 1932, the Soviet architect Nikolay Milyutin had published his The Problem of Building Socialist Cities, in which he developed an idea similar to Syrkus’ – the linear city: “industry should be built in a linear manner with a parallel residential strip separated from it by a green belt a few hundred yards wide” (Curtis 1996: 253).
One of the most prominent aspects of Le Corbusier’s urbanist ideas was the park, or more precisely – parks. Le Corbusier’s plan for Stockholm is a good example of his concept of the green city: twelve percent of the urban landscape would be dwellings, the rest, eighty eight percent, would be left for “parks for relaxation and to playing fields:” “constructing edifices 50 meters high on the average; they form redents of housing without a single courtyard. Quiet the contrary: each side of the redent looks over extensive parks,” wrote Le Corbusier (1967 [1933]: 299).

The idea of the house will have lost its present form. People will live in apartment houses (…) a ribbon of housing winding in an unbroken pattern across the city (Le Corbusier 1967 [1933]: 113).

In the programmatic book from 1933, The Radiant City, he elaborates his ideas on parks and dwelling further. The model for the Radiant city was an “anthropomorphic image,” consisting of a head, spine, arms, and heart. The majority of the dwellings were skyscrapers and apartment houses; the former located in ‘the head,’ while the latter “were laid out in long strips à redent” (Curtis 1996: 324). In his vision for the Radiant city, Le Corbusier’s much criticized view on the street also comes forward: “The ‘street’ as we know it now has disappeared. All the various sporting activities take place directly outside people’s homes, in the midst of parks – trees, lawns, lakes. The city is entirely green; it is a Green City” (1967 [1933]: 94).

In The Radiant City, the main building type was the larger residential unit, Unité d’habitation, which “combined individual rationalized apartments and communal functions like gymnasiums and child-care centres.” (Curtis 1996: 324). The prototype for “collective living,” the larger residential unit, was the Unité d’habitation in Marseille (Curtis 1996: 437). It housed 1 800 residents, 23 different apartment types made out of standardized elements but combined variously, an interior street with communal services, and a public roof terrace (Curtis 1996: 437, 441). The inspiration for this utopian “village” has been referred to, among others, the utopian socialist Charles Fourier’s Phalanstère developed in the early 19th century. Le Corbusier’s plan, although never realized, was to spread the Unités all over France to give housing to the millions of homeless in France after the war (Jencks 1987: 15).

Le Corbusier’s conscious integration of the public in the private in his designs, with the interior street containing shops, restaurants etc. in his Unité in Marseille, was a means to create community among the residents (Clericuzio 2010: 58). Charles Jencks notes how the Unité consists of several “unusual combinations of past traditions” such as that “the landscape and garden are on the roof instead of the ground, the streets are in the air and internal instead of being external and on the ground, and the shopping centre is on the seventh floor instead of being connected with the commercial life of Marseilles.” He further observes how Le Corbusier’s ideal city was an inversion of the division
of private and public stemming from Ancient Greece: “[F]amily life, the domestic everyday life of the home, is elevated to the level of a public monument” (Jencks 1987: 15–16). William Curtis (1996: 440) moreover writes on how Le Corbusier’s Unité would dissolve “the old distinction between country and city” as the new construction techniques would concentrate populations and “liberate the ground for traffic and greenery (…)”

What I want to emphasize here is how Le Corbusier’s multi-family architecture attempted to blur the spatial boundaries of private and public, city and countryside, perhaps to an extent not previously achieved in urban dwellings. While the 19th-century apartment house blurred the distinction between the outdoor street and the building interior, the Unité incorporated the street internally. And while the apartment house was essentially urban, the Unité invited the countryside in.

The concept of the Unité was adopted into several cultures and geographical locations. French and Hamilton (1979: 11) observe how the Soviet version, the micro-district (mikrorayon) is a “major element of socialist urban planning.” In the Soviet Union, Academician Strumlin (1961) viewed the mikrorayon as the basis of communal living in the socialist city:

(...: a self-contained community of residential quarters, including dormitories, communal eating and recreation places, crèches, kindergartens, schools and local medical facilities, shopping and other service provision. Each micro-district would be linked, through locational proximity and through employment of its inhabitants, with an industrial plant or other major activity (French & Hamilton 1979: 10–11).

The authors further note how the similar theoretical concepts combined with the difficulties of their practical implementation have led to “a certain degree of uniformity in cities throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe” (1979: 14):

Everywhere the apartment blocks are grouped in neighbourhoods of closely similar layouts. Indeed, if one were transported into any residential area built since the Second World War in the socialist countries, it would be easier at first glance to tell when it was constructed than to determine in which country it was (French & Hamilton 1979: 15).

2.1.1 Implementation and Criticism

Similar observations have been made by many others. The Polish sociologist Iwona Borowik (2003) also notes the massive spread and uniformity of the high-rise complexes:

Szary, betonowy, kubistyczny blok – synonim współczesnej architektury i nowej jakości zbiorowego zamieszkiwania, wyrósł w niemal każdym zakątku
Borowik further writes that the fragmentary, unconsidered implementations of the ideas of the so-called Athens Charter were a disadvantage for the city. The too orthodox interpretations of the separation of functions of the city resulted in that the “city pulse” disappeared from some areas at certain times (Borowik 2003: 23). What had to suffer were the aesthetic qualities of the buildings: “They where schematic and monotonous,” Borowik continues. And the thrifty infrastructure led to a “deficit in, among other things, parking spaces and recreational areas” (Borowik 2003: 42).

As already indicated above, the implementation of the utopian architecture was not always possible, and material and economic conditions had to be given priority (cf. Czepczyński 2008: 69). Architecture historian Norbert Schoenauer (2000: 437) notes that the failure of the adoption of high-rise buildings for public housing “is attributable primarily to the lack of security and safety as well as to poor maintenance of the few collective amenities provided in these buildings.” Schoenauer (2000: 440) further observes for example that the (in)famous high-rise project in Pruitt-Igoe, whose demolition Charles Jencks named the end of modernism in architecture (see below), lacked “basic social infrastructure, such as daycare nurseries, kindergartens” and that the attraction of the project started decreasing when “criminals discovered security in the labyrinthine corridor system of the building.”

The sociologist Matti Kortteinen does not make the same observations in the Polish housing projects. In a study conducted in 1979, Kortteinen however notes their inadequate size, and that the Polish “cement suburbs” in that respect are much different from the Finnish: the smallest high-rise area had 26 000 inhabitants and the largest were “almost ten times as large” and the high-rises were at “at least twice as high” with 12–14 floors being common (Kortteinen 1987: 180).

For Le Corbusier, his Unité was the answer to the “social disruptions caused by industrialization – uprootedness, chaos (...)” and they “(...) would be answered primarily by re-establishing the harmony of daily life and the home.” Many of his critics, however, Jencks notes (1987: 18), saw the Unité precisely as the quintessence of uprootedness.

The French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre went even further, calling the large housing projects a reduction of inhabit to habitat, as he regarded them as being against the urban (Lefebvre 1996: 79). Stuart Elden compares Lefebvre’s critique with Heidegger’s “crisis in dwelling” (Elden: 2004: 190, cf. 1.2.1): “[Lefebvre] suggests that the space of dwelling, of...
habiter is not separated from urban and social space, whereas habitat is merely a box, a cadre. Habiter is an activity, a situation, whereas habitat is a function, a brutal material reality” (Elden 2004: 190).

The next section will take a closer look at urban planning and modernist architecture ideas in Poland as they were expressed from the interwar-period and forward.

2.1.2 The Block and the Straight Line: Modernism, Dwelling, and Urban Planning in Poland

At a lecture entitled Six-Year Plan for the Reconstruction of Warsaw (Sześcioletni plan odbudowy Warszawy) given in 1949, president and party first secretary Bolesław Bierut talked about the prewar capitalist social injustices expressed in the deep disparities of the housing condition between the rich and the poor: “The main task was ‘the creation of new, improved, and more rational living conditions for the working man’” (Crowley 2008: 774–775; cf. Bierut 1951).

In his discussion on landscaping socialist cities, Mariusz Czepczyński (2008: 95) describes two phases of developments in Poland after the Second World War: the Stalinist phase, focusing on the reconstruction after the war, heavy industry and triumphalistic construction, and the constructivist phase with influences from the International style and a privileging of functionality instead of ideology.

Two forms become dominant during the second phase, which started after the death of Stalin: the block and the straight line.

Citing Andrzej Basista (2001), he considers the block “a permanent imprint of the Zeitgeist of the second half of the 20th century” (Czepczyński 2008: 97). Czepczyński stresses the ideological character of the landscaping during the period and writes that the architecture was socialist not because it was constructed during that time but because it “was or was supposed to be socialist in meaning” and because of the “ideological texts attached to almost every project.” He sees the Central European socialist landscape as particular in its influence over the landscape and demonstration of power because of the abolishment of private ownership and the system’s totalitarian character (Czepczyński 2008: 59–60). He further considers that “the absolute hegemony triggered totalization of landscape to an extent very seldom seen in any other developed countries” (Czepczyński 2008: 107). Socialist space came to have a dichotomical structure – with a division of space into good (socialist and
progressive) and bad (pre-socialist and backward) (Czepczyński 2008: 65). Notwithstanding this totalization he also emphasizes that people’s interpretation often deviated from the official one and their own meanings, often through ridicule, were attached to the constructed environment (Czepczyński 2008: 85).

In 1954 Nikita Khrushchev emphasized efficiency, new building technology, and economy as crucial knowledge for the architect (Crowley 2008: 786). And there was a shift of focus in the architecture debate:

Designs were to be based on the offsite manufacture of elements like load-bearing walls with readymade apertures for windows. The aim was to reduce the number of ‘parts’ from which an apartment could be made and the number of movements of the crane on the building side. In such ways, architecture became closer to engineering (Crowley 2008: 790).

The following year, the prominent Polish architect Jerzy Wierzbicki criticizes the urbanism produced by the MDM housing in central Warsaw, for its lack of “liveliness” and “diversity” (Crowley 2008: 784). In 1956 a group of Polish architects, including Wierzbicki travelled through Western Europe. On this trip they visited Le Corbusier’s recently completed unité d’habitation in Nantes (La maison radieuse) (Crowley 2008: 784–85), whose exterior he considered “immensely interesting” but “its interior streets, poorly ventilated and gloomy, do not encourage use.” (Wierzbicki 1957: 38 cited in Crowley 2008: 785).

In 1957, the architect Oskar Hansen (1922–2005), who during his stay in Paris in the first half of the 1950s had both become acquainted with Le Corbusier, and studied under Ferdinand Léger and Pierre Jeanneret, published his ideas on architectural space, the Linear Continuous System (Linearny System Ciągły, LSC) and Open Form, which:

argued for spatial forms that were incomplete, forms that by their incompleteness required the creativity or participation of viewers or users. This was fundamentally a social and decentered conception of space and creativity. Space, according to Hansen, should be considered terms of movement, whether in terms of a synchronic potential to be reorganized by those who occupy it or in its diachronic capacity to change over time (Crowley 2008: 796).9

The ideas were used in the realization of such housing estates as Przyczółek Grochowski (1963) and Rakowiec WSM (1964) in Warsaw. The LSC method turned against the centric expansion system of cities and was to consist of three “simultaneously developed zones” (strefy/pasma): a “housing-and-service zone,” a “farming-and-forest zone” and a zone of heavy industry (Hansen

Hansen refers to the sociologist Jan Szczepański in his view of space and society, underscoring nature, the individual, and the collective:

\[ Z \] jednej strony chodzi o zdefiniowanie warunków umożliwienia budowy i przebudowy własnego otoczenia, nie kolidującej z interesami sąsiadów, z drugiej strony chodzi o taką organizację przestrzeni, w której ten jednostkowy wkład stawalby się glosem polemicznym w formie zbiorowej. Każdy mieszkaniec powinien mieć możliwość oglądania ze swego domu wielkiego pejzażu natury, możliwość współżycia z nią, oddychania jej powietrzem (Hansen 1977 (3–4): 16).

On the one hand, the point is to define the proper conditions to afford possibilities for building and rebuilding somebody’s own environment, not being in collision with neighbours’ interests, on the other hand however, the point is to create such an organization of space, in which that individual contribution, would become a polemic voice in a community. Every dweller should be able to see a vast landscape from his own house, be able to co-exist with nature, to breathe fresh air (Hansen 1977 (3–4): 22).]

The housing policies changed during Gierek’s reign; dwelling construction increased rapidly. In the five-year plan of 1971, 1 075 000 new apartments were to be constructed, i.e. 25 % more than in the previous plan (Gierek 1971). In total between the years 1971–1980 a total of 2.4 million new apartments were constructed. In the previous decade 1.7 million and in the succeeding decade around 1.8 million. In 1978 annual construction peaked at a total of 284 000 apartments. At this time more than half of the population had a separate bathroom and a water closet.


[People simply want good apartments, even if it means having to wait for them slightly longer. (...) Today’s constructed apartments, housing estates, neighborhoods and cities also have to serve coming generations. So we have to do it in such a way that we do not have to be ashamed, passing on to them our achievements.]

In Gierek’s famous speech from 1972, he also stresses the importance of quality housing as well as the importance of its surroundings: “Nie można doprowadzić do powstania w miastach ‘kamiennych pustyni’, pozbawionych zieleni, uniemożliwiających wypoczynek po pracy i pogarszających warunki klimatyczne.” [You cannot cause the creation of ‘stone deserts’ in the cities,

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10 Original translation with some minor adjustments.
devoid of greenery, making it impossible to rest after work and worsening climate conditions] (V Plenum, Gierek 1972: 28).

In spite of the rapid construction, the buildings and their surroundings were often left “raw” and their actual completion often took many more years (Trybúś 2011b: 15). In the 1970s the so-called satellite housing estate, which was located farther from the city center, became more frequent (Trybuś 2011b: 14). A majority of these housing constructions were constituted using prefabrication technology (Jarosz 2010b: 69). As the Polish historian Dariusz Jarosz also notes, Gierek’s reign also suggested a different view, a valorization, on dwelling compared with the reign of Gomułka, which had regarded “mieszkalnictwa jako uciążliwej konieczności towarzyszącej uprzemysłowieniu” [housing as a burdensome necessity accompanying industrialization]. At the fifth plenum of the central committee of the Polish Communist Party in May 1972 there was also a stronger focus on the importance of dwelling: “Mieszkanie warunkuje założenie i prawidłowy rozwój rodziny, ma niezwykle istotne znaczenie dla realizacji społecznych funkcji wychowawczych i dla rozwoju kulturalnego (...)” [The dwelling conditions the establishment and the proper development of the family, is of paramount importance for the realization of social educational functions and for cultural functions] (V Plenum KC PZPR, May 1972 cited in Jarosz 2010b: 68).

The sociologist Marek S. Szczepański reads these enormous housing projects as an expression of the regime’s prioritization of the interest of society over that of the individual. The large housing projects, which were built using the new technology that prefabricated parts for so-called home factories (fabryki domów), dominated the cityscape (Szczepański 1994: 186 cited in Borowik 2003: 41). Szczepański calls it an “akulturowy proces” [acultural process] since it created spaces “nie skorelowanych z tradycją kulturową regionu czy miasta” [that did not correspond to the cultural tradition of the region or the city]. He continues: “Zburzano wielce istotną harmonię krajobrazu z formą miasta, co sprawiło, że zamiast miasta idealnego powstał twór urbanistyczno-architektoniczny, którego wstydzą się teraz nawet jego autorzy” [The basic harmony between the landscape and the city’s form was destroyed, which entailed that, instead of the ideal city, an urbanist-architectural formation arose that even its creators are ashamed of] (Szczepański 1994: 187 cited in Borowik 2003: 41).

According to the Polish architecture historian Andrzej Basista, the influence of the design of the areas of housing projects came from Sweden and England, while the design of the buildings was influenced by France, Italy, and Germany (Basista 2001: 121).

The idea of the housing estate originating from the Athens Charter was continued in pre-war Poland by avant-garde architects and urban planners connected with WSM (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkanioniwa, [The Warsaw Housing Cooperative], such as Szymon Syrkus, Helena Syrkus, Barbara Brukalska, and Stanislaw Brukalski (some of the co-founders of the artistic
group “Praesens,” which constituted the Polish section of CIAM). Their housing estates called *kolonie* [colonies] incorporated the ideas of the Athens Charter and included social services such as a kindergarten, laundry room, canteen, bathhouse, and library (Trybuś 2011b: 8; Siemiński 2011: 109).

After being set aside by the authorities during the socialist realist period, the idea of the housing estate was again revived with the influence of the international style that gained prominence after the death of Stalin. And as Trybuś notes: “Przez kilkadziesiąt lat teoria osiedla stanowiła podstawę projektowania zespołów mieszkaniowych.” [For a couple of decades, the theory of the social housing projects constituted the foundations for the construction of housing projects] (Trybuś 2011b: 8). Helena Syrkus published two books on the housing projects: *Ku idei osiedla społecznego 1925–1975* (1976) and *Społeczne cele urbanizacji. Człowiek i środowisko* (1984).

During the times of communism 4 million apartments were constructed by the state, a majority of which were in so-called “blokach wielorodzinnych, tworzących osiedla położone na obrzeżach miast” [multi-family housing estates, creating neighborhoods located on the periphery of the cities] (Basista 2001: 120). Basista adds that one fifth of the Polish population now lives in so-called *blokowiska*. During the 1970s, 2.6 million apartments were constructed, and although the goal of “a second Poland” was not reached, the number of apartments was almost doubled in the decade (Rolicki 1990: 75). The differences between these prefabricated high-rises in the West and in the East were for example scale and size. In the East the high-rise areas were much larger, and they continued to be constructed long after they were discontinued in the West. In addition the Polish high-rises were more monotonous than those in the West, where the design and height varied more. Basista also writes that because there was no freedom to choose where you wanted to live, there was greater social variety within the high-rises (Basista 2001: 121). Moreover, the standard of the apartments and the constructions was lower in Poland than in the West.

Mieszkania były małe i nigdy nie miały odpowiedniego wyposażenia, a przestrzenie przeznaczone do wspólnego użytku, takie jak klatki schodowe, hole i windy, jeszcze przed zasiedleniem wyglądały dramatycznie (Basista 2001: 122).

[The apartments were small and never had adequate equipment, and the spaces designated to common use, like the stairs, corridors and elevators, already before the settlement looked dramatic.]

Another difference between the Polish housing projects and many of the Western European ones is their location in direct connection with the city compared to the separate close-to-nature location of the Western concrete “suburbs.” As Kortteinen notes: the residents “feel that they are living in a new part of the
city, an area typified by modern architecture” and “[s]ince ‘everybody’ lives in suburbs, suburban life is considered natural” (Kortteinen 1987: 183).

However, the main characteristic according to Basista is the anonymity of the dwelling areas, regarding the apartments (within the building), the buildings (within the neighborhood) and the neighborhoods (within the city).

Jeśli widok z okna lub z placu między budynkami nie otwiera się na dalsze perspektywy, innymi słowy, jeśli w polu widzenia nie pojawiają się historyczne lub krajobrazowe fragmenty miasta, nie sposób powiedzieć, w jakim mieście, ani tym bardziej w jakiej jego dzielnicy, człowiek się znajduje (Basista 2001: 122).

[If the view from the window or from the yard between the buildings does not open to further perspectives, in other words, if there are no historic or landscape fragments of the city, there is no way to tell which city or even less in which part of the city, you are.]

Only in the beginning and in the end of the period were houses with a somewhat different appearance erected. Basista (2001: 122) describes the typical high-rise appearance as:

prostych, pudełkowych bloków wielorodzinnych, które tylko w wyjątkowych przypadkach wyłamują się ze standardowej wysokości pięciu lub jedenastu kondygnacji wymaganych przez władze jako najbardziej ekonomiczne (...).

[straight, square multi-family high-rises, which only in exceptional cases stand out from the standard height of five or eleven floors that were demanded by the government as the most economic (...)].

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the housing situation during PRL was the housing deficit. This in turn led to regulations on apartment sizes and a collective experience of overcrowding and “mikrometraż” (“compact living”). The constructed dwellings were limited in size: 7–10 m² per person, and during the beginning of the 1960s even less: 5–7 m² per person (Basista 2001: 69). In the 1970 the norms were loosened; a living room could be 18 m², and a bedroom 8 m² (Trybuś 2011b: 14). The standard of the apartments deteriorated with time, Basista (2001: 69) writes: apartments without windows in the kitchen, common bathrooms, PVC floors instead of parquetted and in the 1980s without any floor covering at all.

This shortage of both dwellings but also consumer goods such as furniture, which was a result of both the destruction caused by the world war and the prioritization of so-called heavy industry, led to monotonous dwellings both on the exterior and in the interior (Jewdokimow 2011: 140).

Wszystkie nasze mieszkania były prawie takie same. Z małego korytarza wkraczło się do największego pokoju, w którym obok wersalki, dwóch foteli
Jewdokimow notes however that even though interiors and furnishing were alike, the different objects and furniture of the interior were individualized through anecdotes or stories about them and how they were purchased (Jewdokimow 2011: 150–151).

The size of the areas led to anonymity, because it complicated neighborhood bonds. But resistance against this monotony could be seen in the the different decorations of the balconies. No two balconies were alike, Basista (2001: 124) notes.

Basista (2001: 95) also observes how nobody felt responsible for the common areas of the housing projects:

The monotony and the lack of identity of the housing projects was the object of several architectural discussions and also received much criticism during the 1970s. In early 1975, the editors of the monthly periodical Architektura publish what they call a “credo” devoted to the 12th World Congress of the International Union of Architects Creativity. They conclude:

At the same time they do not hide their critique of the results, pointing specifically at the monotony and the “common space” between the buildings:

Uniform houses, arranged in uniform pattern, produced depressing monotony. The results of losing the correct scale were becoming increasingly noticeable.
Often we could not correctly manage the space between the houses, which became a sort of ‘no man’s land’ (Gliński, Skrzydlewski, Smolarz 1975: 13, original trans.).

They continue on the same note, adding the problem of identification in the “place-less places”:

The uniformity and monotony of housing areas is becoming intensively felt. The identical lay-outs, consisting of identical houses identical detail, are becoming increasingly anonymous, lacking individual identity. This is responsible for the disappearance of the feeling of identification between man and the place he lives in (Gliński, Skrzydlewski, Smolarz 1975: 14, original trans.).

They considered the housing estates inadequate as they had become “dormitories with little connection to the town’s organism” (Gliński, Skrzydlewski, Smolarz 1975: 18). The critique of the anonymity and monotony of the housing projects was expressed in various articles in the periodical throughout the 1970s. The architect Wacław Celadyn (1973: 179) concludes that “W większości nasze osiedla to zespoły identycznych, nie różniących się kształtem ani barwą, mniejszych lub większych pudełkowych bloków mieszkalnych.” [The majority of our housing projects are identical, not diverging in shape or color, smaller or larger boxlike multi-family high-rises]. He acknowledges the monotonous outcome as a result of the enormous growth in dwelling construction, but proposes color as a way to prevent it.

The anonymity concerned not only the actual constructions but also their authors, the architects. The Soviet architect, Feliks Nowikow writes that “[W]e ourselves at a time when obliterating the personality, we – the architects – reduced the meaning of the terms ‘author,’ ‘master.’ Numerous housing projects were created, in which the talent of creative people was lost. Architecture became anonymous...” (Nowikow 1974: 115). Or as Jarosław Trybuś writes:


[As much as the residents of pre-war apartment houses generally know their history and creators, as much among the residents of the housing projects such knowledge is rare. (...) [E]specially those [housing projects] from the late sixties and the next decade, exist anonymously in the collective awareness.]

In 1974 an architecture student raises a critical voice towards the prefab technology of “wielka płyta”: “Mam dwadzieścia lat, należę do pokolenia wielkiej
szansy, mam budować ‘drugą Polskę’” [“I’m twenty years old, I belong to the generation of great opportunity, I should build the ‘second Poland’”] she begins, referring to Edward Gierek’s famous slogan. “Jak długo biura projektów (...) będą (...) powielać w nieskończoność osiedla z wielkiej płyty? Mam nadzieję, że taka sytuacja nie będzie już trwała długo.” [How long will architectural firms be (...) reproducing indefinitely prefabricated housing estates? I hope that this situation will not last long now], she quite critically continues (Zakrzewska 1974: 336).

Another characteristic of the Polish housing projects was their “unfinishedness:” schools, kindergartens, shopping and green areas were commonly missing, Basita writes. On these planned places, often located in the middle of the neighborhoods, empty places with bewildering vegetation arose (Basista 2001: 124).

And since playgrounds were one of the elements commonly missing, the children played on the streets, on lawns between the houses and in the stairwells and corridors, which accelerated the damage (Basista 2001: 95). Kortteinen’s study also notes several flaws and deficits in construction: cracks and holes both outdoors and indoors, dirt and poor painting – and lack of water in the morning (Kortteinen 1987: 181–182). These errors were also noted in a retrospective article from 1974 about the achievements of Polish architecture during the previous 30 years. The author calls on the new W-75 prefab technology as a solution to the constructional errors (“bunkrowate wejścia do budynków, niedopracowane rozwiązania kuchni, Łazienek czy bezsensownie zaprojektowane zsypy… nierówne i odpadające tynki, niechlujnie nachlapane lastrica, niedomykające się drzwi” [Bunker-like building entrances, underdeveloped solutions for kitchens, bathrooms or senselessly designed chutes … rough and flaking plaster, messily splashed terrazzo tiles, doors that would not close]) (Popławski 1974: 281). In the article “Dokąd idziesz, Wielka Płyto?” [Where are you going, Great Slab?] the prefab technology and the housing factories, rather than the architects, are criticized for determining the conditions of the housing constructions:

Oczywiście musimy pogodzić się z uprzemysłowionym sposobem produkcji mieszkań – nie można jednak doprowadzać do tego, aby produkcja domów zdeterminowała architekturę. Fabryki powinny być na służbie projektantów, a nie odwrotnie (Filipowicz 1975: 214).

[Of course we have to reconcile with the industrial mode of dwelling production – it cannot however lead to the production of buildings determining architecture. Factories should be at service for the architects, and not vice versa.]

Occasionally some residents took care of the common areas that were viewed as “ziemia nieczyja” [no-man’s land] (Basista 2001: 95). As noted in section 1.3.2, Szczepański divides the area around the houses into semi-public and semi-private. The semi-public came to be “privatized” by car owners, who
parked there, by housewives, who hung laundry there, and by alcoholics, who drank there. The area he calls semi-private was the one closest to the buildings. It was “organized” by the residents with gardens, which where usually looked after with much care (Szczepański 1991: 144–151 & 175).

The lack of choice of location for your dwelling also had as a consequence long commuting routes to work but also “kontakty z osobami o odmiennych stylach życia” [contact with people with different life styles]. Jewdokimow adds, however, that the latter has partly changed since 1989 when inhabitants are rather grouped “według zasobności portfela” [according to the size of their wallets] (Jewdokimow 2011: 144).

Against the background of the basically constant housing deficit, Jarosz analyzes the inhabitants’ different strategies on the housing market. He underscores the strong ability to adjust to the prevailing situation. Jarosz’s understanding of adjustment follows Andrzej Rychard, who described it as an active process:


[a process in which the transformation not only affects the individual or group, but also ‘the system,’ which is modified by the adjusting (...). In the post-war period, in a double-sided process of adjustment, both system and society was changed]

The social and economic spatial segregation that existed in Poland prior to the Second World War was not eliminated by the housing policies during the forty years of communist rule. It was however reduced significantly, Jarosz notes (2010a: 364). And the people who made the greatest advance were the people from the lower social classes (Jarosz 2010a: 364).

2.1.3 Polish Housing today

Charles Jencks dated the end of modernist architecture to “July 15, 1972 at 3.32 (or thereabouts)” when the award-winning housing projects Pruitt-Igoe in St.Louis, Missouri, were demolished twenty one years after they had been designed, based on Le Corbusier’s ideas (Jencks 1984: 9). Elsewhere its death was not as sudden as in St. Louis; its design ideals implemented in the many concrete housing projects continued to live on into the 1980s in many parts of the world. After that and still today, the remnants of the socialist-modernist ideas remain visible in the prefabricated housing blocks.

Opinions about the housing projects today are quite diverse. Iwona Borowik among others writes that the main question is what to do with the “(...)
przestarzała, minimalistyczna, nieestetyczna struktura mieszkaniowa (…). Burzyć czy poprawiać?” [outdated, minimalistic, non-aesthetic housing structure (…) Demolish or adjust?] (Borowik 2003: 43–44), while Mariusz Czepczyński (2008: 132) stresses the changing reinterpretation of the socialist landscape: “New layers of interpretation and landscape solutions will be implemented. The ‘unbalanced’ landscape will either physically disappear or will be reinterpreted and disappear mentally from social memories.”

According to the architectural historian and author of Przewodnik po warszawskich blokowiskach [A Guide to the Warsaw Housing Projects] (2011), Jarosław Trybuś, Polish housing projects differ from the Western European in that they are inhabited by a cross-section of the population, which can be ascribed to the social dynamic of the communist period. One important difference he points to is that the Polish projects have been integrated with the cities and not only built as suburbs (Trybuś & Kowalska 2011). Today close to 50 % of the Warsaw population lives in so-called blokowiska (Trybuś 2011a).

Pod tym względem nasze blokowiska nie mają nic wspólnego z tymi w zachodniej Europie. Bo o ile tam są rzeczywiście miejscem zamieszkiwania tych, którym w życiu nie wyszło, to u nas jest całkiem inaczej. W blokach żyją wszyscy, przekrój społeczny jest pełen (…). [M]ało jest enklaw samego bogactwa czy samej biedy (…). Warszawskie blokowiska to nie są getta, nie są więc wylegarnią narastającej frustracji i samonapędzającej się agresji (Trybuś & Kowalska 2011).

[In that sense our housing projects do not have anything in common with those in the west. Because as much as there they are a place of dwelling for those who did not manage in life, here it is completely different. Everyone lives in the housing projects, a total social cross-section (…). There are few enclaves of rich or poor alone (…). The Warsaw housing projects are not ghettoes; they are not a hotbed for growing frustration and self-perpetuating aggressions.]

However, Iwona Borowik (2003: 42) writes that unlike the housing projects in the West, there have not been any “slamsowienia” [”ghettofication”] of the Polish. An apartment in a housing project is still desireable because “(…) w naszym kraju mieszkanie samo w sobie jest wartością i prestiżowym dobrem.” [in our country an apartment is in itself a value and a prestigious good].

Architect and writer Krzysztof Bizio on the other hand maintains that the housing ideal for the average Pole changed together with the fall of the former system; the suburban villa replaced the prefabricated apartment building, which came to be seen pejoratively and as a sign of the new poverty (Bizio 2006: 50). The elitist manor house, which previously represented the national style of architecture, and functioned as a symbol for the Polish nation during the years of partition, again became popular for the well-off after the system transformation. Shallcross views this as a result of the “revulsion” towards the modernist architecture of PRL as well as a certain nostalgia towards prewar Polish culture and society: “Le Corbusier’s purism and love of straight lines,
which degenerated during communism into unimaginative box-like houses, is
now being replaced by columns, round arches, and materials of good quality”
(Shallcross 1999: 439).

Segregation and Changes in Dwelling Practices
According to a survey conducted by the public opinion research institute,
CBOS (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej) in September 2010, 50 % of
Poles live in buildings constructed in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The most
common decade was not surprisingly the 1970s, which 20 % of the questioned
said their building was from (CBOS 2010). The type of housing differs be-
tween countryside, smaller, and larger cities. In the largest cities, for example,
almost one third now live in a house constructed after 1989 (in general 19 %)
(CBOS 2010: 8). The survey also shows that it is from the apartments built in
the 1970s that people move out most (CBOS 2010: 4). The revitalization of
the housing projects also shows in the survey: 70% of the questioned answer
that they live in a building renovated during the last ten years (CBOS 2010:
4). The survey also revealed that the most desirable housing is the newly built
stock: 81% answered they would prefer to live in a newly built house or apart-
ment (CBOS 2010: 5).

According to statistics from Eurostat, 51.9 % of the Poles live in a single
family house and 47.8 % in apartments. The corresponding numbers for Swe-
den are quite similar, although in Sweden slightly fewer people live in apart-
ments (40.1 % and 59.5 in single-family house). In other Western countries
such as Great Britain and France a significantly higher proportion live in
houses than in apartments (85.7 % of Brits live in houses and 14.2 % in apart-
ments and 65.9 % of the French live in houses and 34 % in apartments). The
European average is 43 % apartment dwellers (Turek 2011). Statistics from
2009 also show that 49.1 % of Poles live over-crowded, as compared with the
EU average of 17.7 %. In Poland (together with some other states of the former
Eastern bloc, Lithuania, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Latvia) over 15 % suffered
from “severe housing deprivation” compared with the EU average of 5.9 %.
(Eurostat 2009a)11.

According to Węcławowicz and Kozłowski et al. (2003: 19) housing deficit
is one of the most important social and economic problems in Poland. The
deficit is persistent, and as they observe: “Only on two occasions in the past –
directly after World War II, and in the 1970s (…) were industrialisation and

11 “Severe housing deprivation” included both overcrowdedness and at least one of the aspects
of housing deficit such as “those households with a leaking roof, no bath/shower and no indoor
toilet, or a dwelling considered too dark” (Eurostat 2009b). An overcrowded household is de-

defined as a household that does not fulfill any of the following criteria: a) “one room for the
household” b) “one room per couple in the household” c) “one room for each single person
aged 18 or more” d) “one room per pair of single people of the same gender between 12 and 17
years of age” e) “one room for each single person between 12 and 17 years of age and not
included in the previous category” f) “one room per pair of children under 12 years of age”
(Eurostat 2009c).
urbanization accompanied by intensive housing construction.” Another problem with the housing stock is its condition. A census from 2002 showed that 23.3 % lived in housing of “poor quality” and 12.2 % in housing of “very poor quality,” which in total meant 4.6 million people.

In a closer study of the housing situation in Warsaw, Węcławowicz et al. note that when comparing housing situations in 1931, 1970 and 1988 the “general socio-spatial structure of Warsaw” has been preserved. They also observe that although the market regulation of the housing market has led to better-quality dwellings, these are not affordable by the majority, and they contend that “nearly 30 percent of Warsaw’s residents still live in prefabricated apartment blocks erected on large housing estates in all districts” (Węcławowicz et al. 2003: 32). The authors also note that a gentrification process has taken place in the center of Warsaw so that “elite enclaves” are located next to or within poorer and deteriorating housing. In the suburban regions both wealthy areas and “highly segregated areas of poverty” are in formation (Węcławowicz et al. 2003: 35–36).

The widening of the poverty strata in Warsaw has been very evident; it includes the homeless and elderly pensioners. In addition, a huge share of people employed in administration, or dependent on the State budget is very differentiated and generally badly paid. Warsaw has gradually become a very expensive place to live for an increasing share of its citizens (Węcławowicz et al. 2003: 35).

The perception and valorization of the Warsaw housing projects depend on their location: “The Warsaw housing estates located in the city suburbs are generally perceived as dangerous places (…) even in the eyes of its inhabitants” (Węcławowicz et al. 2003: 71). Their study shows how the housing projects in Ursynów have become attractive dwelling places while the ones in Wrzeciono are unpopular. They find the reasons for this in transportation (Ursynów has a metro station)\(^\text{12}\), and in the quality of the construction of the housing. Ursynów still has a larger degree of inhabitants with higher education.

Besides the transformation of the city in accordance with the income of the population, the largest dwelling changes after 1989 have been made by the population within the highest ranks of society, and the intelligentsia, migrants and the young (Jewdokimow 2011: 165, 181). Changes in dwelling practices after the system change thus depends on income; for a majority of the population, the changes are not very noticeable (Jewdokimow 2011: 210).

An analysis of the interior decorations in homes in Polish TV series shows that the type of interior decoration most common in PRL, is now in the minority and in those cases belong to “gorzej sytuowanych i w nieco starszym

\(^{12}\) Since 2008, however, Wrzeciono is located near the Warsaw metro, which is continuously being extended.
wieku” (the worse situated and somewhat older population), thus supporting Jewdokimow’s claims (Łaciak 2007: 184).

On changes in the dwelling practices Jewdokimow also observes how there is a tendency of dwelling to be seen as a “task” rather than a “problem,” and the apartment interior has become a question of aesthetics rather than function: “mieszkańcy powinni starać się, aby było ono [mieszkanie] ładne i odzwierciedlało ich samych” [the residents should strive for a beautiful apartment and for it to reflect themselves] (Jewdokimow 2011: 167, 170). Jewdokimow refers to Wojciech Burszta, who described the increasing influence of consumerism on identity formations in Polish society:

[Currently in Poland we can observe the same dependencies between consumerism and the proces of individualization that grew strong in the West in the 1960s. Consumerism offers a view of ‘the consumer as individuality that can define its identity through the things that he or she decides to buy and manifest the possession of’] Jewdokimow suggests that today’s mobility and increasing individualization have resulted in the idea of the home being redefined or even undermined. And because of new technology the boundaries between private and public spheres are being reformulated: “Granice domu stają się coraz bardziej przepraszalne, co przeformułuje sam podział na przestrzeń prywatną i publiczną” [The boundaries of the home are becoming more permeable, which reformulates the division of private and public space] (Jewdokimow 2011: 214).

The next section will take a closer look at the history of the idea of the home and its different meanings. But first, to conclude: This section has drawn a picture of the current housing situation in Poland. This picture reveals increasing segregation, a residual housing deficit and overcrowding, as well as changes in housing ideals and in dwelling practices (although the latter foremost among the economically well-off).
2.2 The Idea of the Home

Home is a good place to begin. Whether it is a tenement, a barrio, a ghetto, a neighborhood, the project, the block, the stoop, the backyard, the tenant farm, the corner, four walls, or hallowed ground, finding a place in the world where one can be at home is crucial. Home is literal: a place where you struggle together to survive; or a dream: ‘a real home,’ something just out of one’s grasp; or a nightmare: a place to escape in order to survive as an individual. Home is an idea: an inner geography where the ache to belong finally quits, where there is no sense of ‘otherness,’ where there is, at last, a community (Zandy 1993:1).

This section is introduced with a quote by Janet Zandy because it stresses how essential dwelling is to man; it foregrounds how home is both real and imagined. In the previous section (2.1), mass-housing and modernist architecture ideas were in focus. During the 20th century and the breakthrough of modernism, however, the ability of the high-rise to be a home has been questioned. In the cities of the Anglo-Saxon world, high-rise areas were constructed in former slum areas to provide new homes for the working class. This was part of a modernist idea that architecture could shape morality. The “homeliness” of these high-rise areas was questioned and “high-density living” was seen as the cause of criminality and family problems. The perception of the architecture was closely connected with its residents (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 107–108).

The architectural historian Norbert Schoenauer (2000: 473) writes that during the 19th century, but foremost between the world wars, high-density apartments/tenements, on the one hand, and single-family dwellings, on the other, were debated. In the US the latter gained the most support while in Europe the former (“in a parklike setting a more attractive solution and also more efficient in its land use” as Le Corbusier saw it) was preferred. But contrary to Great Britain, a home in for example France during the 19th century was more associated with an apartment because the home was not separated from the public sphere to the same extent. In France, neither the interior nor the exterior differed from the public or corporative buildings (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 109).

The idea of home, what constitutes a ‘true’ home is what this section will discuss. As will be revealed, and as suggested by Zandy’s quote above, the concept is multifaceted and both history and culture-dependent. In focus here will be the various views and definitions of the home provided by academic disciplines and philosophical schools, such as anthropology, ethnology, sociology, religion, phenomenology, existentialism, and human geography. The section concludes with a brief historical overview of home and its relation to private life, and the home as a metonym for the nation. Thereafter I will give an account of the idea of the home in the context of Polish culture and literature (2.2.3 and 2.2.4).

13 For more on the American suburban single-family “dream home,” see Dolores Hayden (2003).
One of the most influential texts on the home (and dwelling) written in the 20th century is probably the existentialist Martin Heidegger’s “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” from 1954 in which he discusses the questions: “What is it to dwell?” and “How does building belong to dwelling?” In this essay, which connects dwelling with both cultivation and construction, he traces the etymology of the German word “bauen” [to build] which in the Old English and High German “buon” meant “to dwell,” “to remain,” “to stay in a place.” In the contemporary German’s verb forms “bin” [I am] and “bist” [you are] traces of the original meaning of building, to dwell, is left. He continues:

The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is Buan, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell (Heidegger 1975: 147).

Heidegger further traces an original double meaning of building – to cultivate and to construct. Today, the former, “to cultivate” has been lost (Heidegger 1975: 148).

The rich symbolism of the home appears in cultural anthropologists Danuta and Zbigniew Benedyktowicz’s analysis of the image of the home in folk art from the Polish and Slavic area:


[The image of the home belongs to one of those exceptional, unique and ir-replacable word-images that concentrate a plentitude of experience: it aims also to become a picture of almost everything that exists.]

Among the symbolism of the home, Benedyktowicz and Benedyktowicz includes a heavenly palace (a temple, paradise), cosmos, the world, the holy book, a holy place (a place for saints), a tree (the tree of life), man, family, a place for the soul of the dead, a grave, and a demonic space (Benedyktowicz & Benedyktowicz 1992: 131). Moreover they emphasize the connection between home and the myth of creation: “symbolizm centrum i kreacyjonistyczny aspekt symboliki domu (na nieustanne nawiązywanie do mitu stworzenia)” [symbolism of the center and creation of the home (of an incessantly connection to the myth of creation)] (Benedyktowicz & Benedyktowicz 1992: 131).

The idea of the home as a microcosm also occurs in ethnographical re-search:

Człowiek kultur archaicznych, człowiek społeczeństw tradycyjnych, człowiek religijny pragnie żyć w świecie mocnym, czystym, pełnym i uporządkowanych, w Kosmosie. Pragnie żyć w świecie świętym, w Kosmosie takim, jakim był na początku, gdy wyszedł z rąk Stwórcy. Pragnąc przebywać w tym
świecie, odtwarza rytualnie i symbolicznie ów Kosmos takim, jakim był in principio, w mitycznej chwili stworzenia (Benedyktowicz 1992: 21).

[Man of archaic cultures, man of traditional societies, religious man longs to live in the strong, pure, full and orderly world, in cosmos. He longs to live in a holy world, in cosmos, as it was in the beginning, when it came out of the hands of the Creator. Longing to dwell in this world, he recreates ritually and symbolically cosmos as it was in principio, in the mythical moment of creation.]

The phenomenologist of religion Gerardus van der Leeuw also emphasizes the connection between home and the temple: “Dom i świątynia są więc tym samym (…) ‘domem bóstwa.’ Także ołtarz i ognisko są tym samym – ołtarz jest w świątyni stołem i ogniskiem bogów” [The home and the temple are therefore the same ‘home of gods.’ The altar and hearth/stove are also the same – in the temple, the altar is both the table and hearth/stove of the gods] (van der Leeuw 1978: 443 cited in Benedyktowicz 1992: 21).

Benedyktowicz and Benedyktowicz continue on the same note, writing that within the “cosmic-sacral symbolism” of the home, the table was especially important: “Stół ma tu, dzięki swej mocy sakralnej, moc stwarzającą, ochraniającą utrzymującą Kosmos przeciw Chaosowi.” [The table has here, because of its sacral power, a creational power, protecting and retaining Cosmos against Chaos] (Benedyktowicz & Benedyktowicz 1992: 58, 63). Drawing on the historian of religion Mircea Eliade, Anna Legeżyńska (1996: 12–13) writes that doors and windows were considered “miejsca otwarcia” [places of accessibility] through which “(…) bogowie mogą schodzić na ziemię, a człowiek wstępuwać w niebiosa” [Gods could come down to earth, and man could come up to heaven]. Eliade (1959: 25) suggests that “[t]he threshold, the door [of the human habitation] show the solution of continuity in space immediately and concretely; (…) for they are symbols and at the same time vehicles of passage from the one space to the other.”

Traces of this archaic and folkloric symbolism of the home still remain in modern culture, Legeżyńska (1996: 13–14) further argues: On the one hand, in the collective memory in which the home is associated with “paradise, the heavenly palace, cosmos, (...) family” etc. according to the popular tradition, and, on the other hand, as part of the individual, personal experience, of “private mythologies.”

In The Poetics of Space, the French phenomenologist philosopher Gaston Bachelard explores the personal experience of space further through the images of what he calls felicitous space, “the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love” (Bachelard 1969: xxxi). This view of domestic space has in turn clear analogies with Lefebvre’s representational space (cf. Chapter 1):
For diverse reasons, and with the differences entailed by poetic shadings, this is eulogized space. Attached to its protective value, which can be a positive one, are also imagined values, which soon become dominant. Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination (Bachelard 1969: xxxi–xxxii).

It is thus in our intimate experiences of the home and its imprints in poetry and prose – the imaginary home, the oneiric home of our memories, fantasy and dreams – that Bachelard is interested in:

[T]he sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams. It is no longer in its positive aspects that the house is really ‘lived,’ nor is it only in the passing hour that we recognize its benefits. An entire past comes to dwell in a new house (Bachelard 1969: 5).

The sociological and human geographical definitions of home and domestic space are more dynamic and thus closer to Henri Lefebvre’s dialectical (or rather trialectical) views on space.

The sociologist Andrzej Ściński views the home as a social institution consisting of three parts that fill needs on the level of the species, society and the individual. The three parts of the social institution of the home are material, social, and axiological (cultural); in other words a place, a social formation in a broader sense than family, and a value covering material, social, and symbolical needs. As a social institution of this kind, the home has always and everywhere been a part of man’s life, Siciński writes. Within the needs of society, he underscores the role of the home as part of the “organization of everyday life,” its socializing function as well as an “economic subject” for both production and consumption. On the level of the individual, the home fills the needs of physical protection and safety (Ściński 1992: 9–10).

Drawing on sociologists Peter Saunders and Peter Williams (1988), Jacek Gądecki understands home as a tripartite spatial unit: “(…) Dom należy postraktować raczej jako hybrydę – zależnie od perspektywy jako jednostkę społeczno-przestrzenną, psycho-przestrzenną, przestrzeń emocjonalną czy wreszcie jako kombinację wszystkich tych trzech aspektów.” [Home has to be viewed rather as a hybrid – depending on perspective as a socio-spatial unit, psycho-spatial, an emotional space or as a combination of those three aspects] (Gądecki 2010: 37). As a place, he views the home dynamically:

Dom (…) jest zarówno miejscem, jak i procesem tworzenia miejsca, jest procesem interaktywnym i długotrwałym, obejmującym tworzenie i nieustanne odtwarzanie miejsce w trakcie życia jednostki (Gądecki 2010: 41).
The home (…) is both a place and the process of creating place; it is an interactive process, long-lasting, comprising creation and constant recreation of places in the life of an individual.

The home is considered both a physical and imaginative place by many scholars. Geographers Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling for example write that:

[O]ne of the defining features of home is that it is both material and imaginative, a site and a set of meanings/emotions. Home is a material dwelling and it is also an affective space, shaped by emotions and feelings of belonging. (…) Home is neither the dwelling nor the feeling, but the relation between the two (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 22).

They stress however that the feelings of “belonging” and “alienation” or “isolation” can be experienced at the same time (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 25, 26, 108). And they underscore the double existence of the home: on the one hand, it is created politically, socially, and culturally; on the other hand, it is experienced on a personal level (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 32).

The meaning of home and the ideal image of the home is dependent on culture and time as well as class, gender and race (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 50, 101). These “dominant ideologies of home” decide place/location, appearance, and which social relations and feelings are connected with the ideal version of the home (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 89, 100ff.). These ideologies, however, are continuously reproduced, subverted, and resisted through the “home-making practices” of inhabitants (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 89).

As opposed to Marxism, which either marginalized the home or viewed it as an obstacle for social development, human geography puts the home in the center with its focus on “human agency and creativity,” and analyzes “the ways in which places are meaningful and full of significance for people.” For humanistic geographers, Blunt and Dowling (2006: 11) further write, the idea of the home is “grounding of identity, an essential place.”

2.2.1 The Home and Private Life

The housing policies’ effect on the notion of the home under Communism have been claimed to attack the “defining factors” behind the idea of the home – private life and individuality (Rybczynski 1986 cited in Shallcross 2002: 5). The communal apartment was to replace the individual home of the bourgeois ideal (Jarzębski 2002: 165; Shallcross 2002: 6). Lynne Attwood’s analysis of gender and housing in Soviet Russia (with the telling subtitle “private life in a public space”) also supports this opinion:

The blurring of boundaries between public and private space combined with the overcrowding, meant that the Soviet home had little in common with its counterpart in capitalist countries.
Attwood contrasts the idea of the Soviet home, for which she considers “living space” a better term, with the idea of the home in the liberal democracies of the West, where the home is placed in the private realm, and connected with a “place of refuge” and “security and happiness,” as English-language dictionaries refer to it (Attwood 2010: 2):

The Soviet authorities seem to have made a conscious attempt to develop in citizens a broader sense of home; they encouraged them to look beyond the confines of their own room or portion of a room and see their ‘socialist city’ in its entirety as their home (Attwood 2010: 4).

In pre-industrial societies, however, there was no division between home and work. The modern idea of the home, with comfort, privacy and domesticity as central pillars, evolved during the 18th and 19th century when work was separated from the home (Rybczynski 1988: 97). According to Jürgen Habermas this division of private and public space emerged at the end of the 17th century when capitalism started to replace feudalism. Public places (such as cafés, theatres etc.) appeared where the emerging bourgeoisie met and thus a public opinion developed (Attwood 2010: 7). But private life remained an exclusivity for those who “owned property or lived on private incomes” (Vincent 1991: 148 cited in Attwood 2010: 8).

Although Walter Benjamin famously noted how the Bolsheviks had abolished private life, Gérard Vincent observe that in totalitarian societies “all barriers between private life and public life seem to be broken down” but that “[e]ven in extreme situations (…) people find ways to ‘preserve their secrets,’ and to exercise some degree of choice, however small” (Vincent 1991: 147 cited in Attwood 2010: 10).

However, as much as private life was challenged in the Soviet Union, even before, private life did not have a “strong adherence” in Russia (Boym 1994: 73 cited in Attwood 2010: 11). And thus Attwood concludes: “[I]ntimacy, domesticity, and the chance of achieving some sense of solitude are not necessarily confined to a separate private sphere” (Attwood 2010: 11).

2.2.2 Home and Nation

The metonymic bonds between home and nation, the nation conceptualized as the home, has been pointed out by several scholars (Blunt & Dowling 2006; Hayden 2003). In Germanic languages we see the connection in the words Heimat – Heim and homeland – home or domestic which refers to both the nation and the home. In her study of American suburbia, Dolores Hayden observed that the American suburban dream home, was a “landscape of imagination,” of “upward mobility and economic security, ideals about freedom and private property, and longings for social harmony and spiritual uplift” (Hayden 2003: 3). Blunt and Dowling further show how the domestic sphere is
politicized, asserting that the home both as a “lived place” and a “spatial imaginary” creates and reproduces “discourses, everyday practices and material cultures of the nation” (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 141ff.).

Drawing on Greg Noble’s study (2002) on how national symbols in domestic spaces are a way to “domesticate ideas of the nation” (“banal nationalism”) (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 167–69), we may contend that the same “banal nationalism” was present in Polish homes during the partition. And as David Crowley writes: “When explicit national expression was denied, venerable, artistic and commonplace artefacts were potential patriotic trophies capable of speaking of the nation to the nation under partition.” The Polish home was a “private world in which to escape from the humiliation of the loss of political sovereignty, but also a museum of national history filled with ancient artefacts and ‘souvenirs’” (Crowley 1992: 6). The gendered aspects of home as an expression of the nation, as noted by Hayden (2003) and Blunt & Dowling (2006), constitute a significant part of Polish national history, where the ideal figure of “Matka Polka” [Mother Poland] had an active influence on the Polish home:

Gdy Polska zniknęła z mapy Europy, przeniosła się do domu, a rodzina stała się gwarantem narodowej tożsamości. Macierzyństwo i wychowanie dzieci nie było już sprawą prywatną, ale polityczną. (…) Matki Polki realizowały postulat “prywatne jest polityczne” na długo zanim wymyśśiły go zachodnie feministki. W domach pielęgnowały polskość, kultywowały tradycję, religię, obyczaj (Ksieniewicz 2004: 95).

[When Poland disappeared from the map of Europe, she moved to the home, and the family became the warrantor for the national identity. Motherhood and the education of children was now not just a private matter, but political. (…) Mother Polands realized the postulate ‘the private is political’ long before the Western feminists thought of it. In the homes, they nurtured Polishness, cultivated tradition, religion, customs.]

2.2.3 The House as Home: Polish Ideas of the Home

Polish dictionaries from the mid-20th century up until today state either six or seven meanings of the word dom. Mieczysław Szymczak’s dictionary Słownik języka polskiego (1995: s.v. dom), gives it the following seven meanings:

1) “budynek przeznaczony na mieszkania, na pomieszczenia dla zakładów pracy, instytucji itp. [building designated for living, for a space for work establishments, institutions etc.]”
2) “pomieszczenie mieszkalne, miejsce stałego zamieszkania“ [living space, a place for permanent residency]
3) “rodzina, domownicy; mieszkanie wraz z jego mieszkańcami” [the family, household members, the home together with its inhabitants]
4) “ogół spraw rodzinnych, domowych; gospodarstwo domowe” [general family, household matters, the household]
5) “ród, rodzina, dynastia” [kin, family, dynasty]
6) “instytucja państwowa, społeczna, handlowa itp, mieszcząca się zwykle w oddzielnym lokalu lub budynku; budynek, w którym się ona znajduje; zakład, przedsiębiorstwo” [a state or social or business institution etc, normally located in a separate room or building; the building where it is located; an institution or a company]
7) “miejsce skąd się rozpoczyna niektóre gry, np. w bilardzie strona stołu, w halmie pierwsze pole” [the place where some games have their starting point, for example in billiard the side of the table, in halma the first camp]

Karłowicz, Kryński and Niedźwiedzki’s Polish dictionary from 1900 (s.v. dom) includes no less than thirteen separate meanings including meanings related to the nation/fatherland, astrology, and “dom drewniany” [a wooden house]. For this last meaning a quite telling example is given, which indicates how home was considered a house and not an apartment building: “Piotr mieszka w domu, a Paweł w murze (= w kamienicy)” [Piotr lives in a house, but Pawel in an apartment building].

Doroszewski’s dictionary of 1965 (s.v. dom) is the last to include the connection between the home and the fatherland (ojczyzna) or nation (naród polski), as well as its reference to astrology. Szymczak’s dictionary, little more than a decade later (1978: s.v. dom), includes no mention of those, but has included, quite appropriately for its time, an example of house factories (fabryka domów) under the meaning house/building.

Some of the emotional meanings and values associated with the Polish idea of the home are suggested by the proverbs that include the home. Its positive connotations are indicated by such proverbs as Wszędzie dobrze, ale w domu najlepiej [Home Sweet Home] or Nie ma to jak we własnym domu [There is no place like home], which emphasize the uniqueness and importance of the home as a place.¹⁴ The proverb Chłodno, głodno i do domu daleko [when it rains, it pours] also suggest the positive connotations of home. The home associated with freedom, as an asylum, comes forward in the idiomatic expression Czuć się/zachowywać się jak w (swoim) domu [To feel/act like at (your own) home, “to feel at home”] or Każdy jest panem we własnym domu [Everybody is the master of his own home] or Wolnoć Tomku w swoim domku [A man’s home is his castle] (Szymczak 2000: 291). In Bez rodziny, ni domu niepotrzebnyś nikomu [Without family, no home is necessary], Bez matki nie ma chatki [Without mother there is no home], Tam gdzie dom tam rodzina (where home is there is family) the strong connection between the idea of

¹⁴ Compare also with other languages such as the Swedish “Borta bra men hemma bäst,” or Spanish “Hogar, dulce hogar” or German “trautes Heim.”
home and family is illustrated. The expression *Po domu/ na po domu* means “w swoim mieszkaniu, u siebie; na co dzień” [at home, at your place, for everyday] (Skorupka et al. 1968: 126) and connects home to the everyday. The expression *Jestem w domu* [I am home], on the other hand, means that you have understood something, that something has become clear to you. So here home is compared with insight, understanding and awakening (Skorupka et al. 1968: 126). The meaning of the proverb *Gość w dom, Bóg w dom* [A guest in the house, God in the house] regards hospitality but perhaps also quite simply shows the openness of the Polish home. The Polish proverbial home also displays its private character as in *Nie mów nikomu co się dzieje w domu* [Do not tell anyone what goes on at home].

The meanings of home suggested by the Polish proverbs and dictionaries are supported by the answers given in a more recent survey conducted by the Polish public opinion research institute CBOS in 1998. On the question “What is home to you?” [Czym jest dla Pana/i dom?] the most common answer (32 %) was that home is “miejscem, gdzie jest bezpiecznie, ostoją, oazą, azylem, schronieniem” [where it is safe, a refuge, an oasis, asylum, a shelter]. Some 29 % connected home with emotional bonds, where it is “ogniskiem, miejscem pełnym ciepła (...) to śmiech i zabawa dzieci” [hearth, a place full of warmth (...) it is the laughter and play of children]. Moreover 21 % associate home with family: “gdzie się mieszka z rodziną, dom to rodzina” [where you live with your family, home is family]. 18 % underscored the uniqueness of home as a place (CBOS 1998 cited in Jewdokimow 2011: 176). Jewdokimow notes that his own research on the contemporary idea of the home has shown that it does not differ much from the idea of the 19th century, as the home is associated with “poczucie pewności i bezpieczeństwa, możliwość odcięcia się od innych ludzi i problemów świata, relaks” [a feeling of safety and security, a possibility to disconnect from other people and the problems of the world, a relaxation] (Jewdokimow 2011: 176).

Etymological dictionaries write that the word *dom* in Polish has existed with quite similar meanings as it has today since the 14th century (Sławski 1983; Boryś 2005; Długosz-Kurczabowa 2005; Malmor 2009). The word has Indo-European roots and exists in similar forms in Latin (domus), ancient Greek (dómos) as well as in other Slavic languages, and is assumed to have existed in the Proto-Slavic language as well as in the Proto-Indo-European. Its Indo-European root is considered to be *dem*, which according to Długosz-Kurczabowa (2005) and Bańkowski (2000) had the meaning “to build” (budować) while Malmor (2009) and Boryś (2005) assign its meaning as “home: family” (dom; rodzina).

Aleksander Brückner (1993 [1927]: s.v. *dom*) writes that *dom* was the most general meaning of home and therefore in Proto-Slavic parallell terms existed, such as *katja*, out of which for example *kuća* [home, Serb.] and the Polish *kucza* [tent, shelter] remain. “Cechą domu mieszkalnego był piec; domostwa bez niego były klecią (do spania, do przechowywania wszelakich rzeczy czy
zasobów)” [A home was characterized by the stove; households without it were small, narrow rooms].

2.2.4 Paradox and Contradiction: The Home as a Motif in Polish Literature

The Home is one of the most common literary motifs, and one can get a hint of its many guises in Polish culture by glimpsing into the encyclopedia of literary motifs Słownik motywów literackich (2008). Author Dorota Nosowska divides the literary motif of the home into the subcategories the peasant home, the bourgeois home, the bachelor home, the poor city home, the aristocratic home, the mythical home of the Kresy territories, the magical merchant home, home as a metaphor for the fatherland, but also the toxic home, the unconventional home and the grotesque or parody versions of the aristocratic, bourgeois and peasant homes (which are satires of narrow-minded family traditions) (Nosowska 2008: 73–87).

This section will provide a general overview of the home as a literary motif in Polish literature. In the introduction to the anthology Framing the Polish Home. Postwar Cultural Constructions of Hearth, Nation, and Self (2002), the editor Bożena Shallcross observes:

[For the Poles (…) [home] has been a concept of paradox and contradiction through the past two centuries of national striving, war, homelessness and exile, foreign occupation, and nation-building (Shallcross 2002: ix).]

The volume examines the idea of the home and its representational development in Polish prose and literature during the post-war period. Shallcross (2001: 2) notes the absence of a distinction between the words home and house in Polish, where dom can refer to them both. This means it is both a place of identification and of habitation, Shallcross concludes.

After the partition, the Polish manor house (dworek szlachecki), came to be a symbolic home of Poland and Polishness and a vision of the ideal family home (Rybicka 2003: 51). This home, with its location in the countryside was the antipode of the foreignness of the city (Rybicka 2003: 49). However, at the turn of the century the polarization between the city and the countryside, with its value-based dichotomy of foreign/own, civilization/culture, modernization/tradition, reached its climax (Rybicka 2003: 81):

15 The Borderlands, the former Polish territories.
16 Some of the manors that were nationalized during the communist period “served as museums, orphanages, schools, kindergartens, and offices for collective farms” Shallcross notes. “This reinventive usefulness was a part of the official communist policy, which ridiculed the manor as an outmoded relic of the past and representative of the owners’ hedonistic style of living” (Shallcross 1999: 441).
During the 18th and 19th centuries there was a prevailing anti-urbanist myth in Poland, as well as in other European cultures. The origins of this myth have been traced to Rousseau’s anti-civilization, the propaganda of the counter-reformation, and national and religious prejudice against the “foreign” in the cities (common phobias in the Sarmatian mentality). This anti-urbanist myth was affected and empowered by threats of social change and destabilization in society, political and jurisdicational reforms, in which the city was considered the generator of the changes (Rybicka 2003: 46–47).

Even in the literature of the Positivists, an opposition between the dwór [the manor house] or dwór miejski [urban manor house] and the kamienica [apartment house] to a large extent remains, where the manor house represents the collective and a “harmonious household” while the apartment house on the contrary is a “disharmonious place” and not a representation of the collective. Ewa Ihnatowicz further observes that in the authorship of Prus, the residents of the apartment house do not represent a cross-section of society but different moral stances (Ihnatowicz 1997: 93). “To miejski dworek, a nie kamienica, często okazuje się prawdziwą przystanią eks-ziemian” [It is the aristocratic private townhouse, not the apartment house, that often is the real harbor of former landowners]. The contact between the residents in Łęckis’ apartment house are “a caricature of neighborly bonds”: “to wzajemne podglądanie, oskarżanie się i donoszenie, procesowanie się i oszukiwanie, obelgi, krzyki i awantury. Panuje tu tymczasowość, przypadkowość, bałagan i zaduch” [a mutual peeping, accusing, whistle blowing, cheating, insults, screams and fights. Temporariness, randomness, a mess, and frowziness dominate], which Ihnatowicz interprets as an image of the homelessness of Poles during the partition (Ihnatowicz 1997: 95). Jadwiga Zacharska continues on the same note in her analysis of the homes in Polish literature after the January uprising: “Najczęściej szczęśliwe, harmonijne domy egzystują już tylko w marzeniach postaci literackich i autorów, podczas gdy prawdziwe domy ulegają ruinie lub rozpadowi” [Most often happy, harmonious homes only exist in the dreams of the literary characters or writers, while the real homes are ruined or disintegrated] (Zacharska 1997: 98).

In the literature of Young Poland (Młoda Polska), the home never represented “bezpieczne schronienie, azyl, bazę intymności i radości wspólnego bytowania” [a safe shelter, asylum, a base of intimacy and joy of cohabitation], as Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska writes. Only in memories and in dreams
of the future or the past was the home idealized. This, she adds, only underscored the lack of a “real home.”

A common motif among the Young Poland writers was the wanderer and homelessness. And the artist’s home was depicted with satire as a critique of the philistine (Podraza-Kwiatkowska 1997: 107, 112): “Prezentacja miejskiego mieszkania zbiegła się w polskiej literaturze (...) z ostrą krytyką ideałów mieszczańsko-filisterskich.” [The presentation of urban dwelling coincided in Polish literature with a sharp critique of bourgeoisie-philistine ideals]. The interior depictions, she writes further, “stają się pułapką, więzieniem, męczą się w nich niedobrane małżeństwa, nie rozumiane córki, kłóczący się z ojcdami synowie. Jedynym wyjściem staje się nierzadko ucieczka” [become a trap, a prison, mismathed marriages, misunderstood daughters, sons fighting with their fathers. The only way out is often an escape] (Podraza-Kwiatkowska 1997: 114).

For the symbolists, the home had a catastrophist aspect: a “walący się dom (...) jako symboliczny obraz upadku wartości oraz braku nadziei na dalszy rozwój europejskiej kultury, zagrożonej komercjalizacją i pozbawionej sacrum.” [a collapsing home (...) as a symbolic image of the breakdown of values and the lack of hope for the future development of European culture, threatened by commercialization and depraved sacrum]. The subconscious was another symbolism: “wędrówki po korytarzach, krużgankach, labiryntach i – przede wszystkim – o schodzenie w głąb: do podziemi, lochów, krypt itp.” [wandering the corridors, cloisters, labyrinths and – foremost – about a descent into the underworld, dungeons, crypts etc.] (Podraza-Kwiatkowska 1997: 115–116).

The resettling from the manor house in the countryside to an apartment in the city was also thematized by the writers of Young Poland: “Własny dom zostaje coraz częściej zastąpiony przez mieszkanie w obcym domu, w kamienicy” [The own home is more often replaced by an apartment in a foreign house, in an apartment house] (Podraza-Kwiatkowska 1997: 111, my italics).

As previously mentioned, the Polish home has had many different literary expressions. The manor house of the 19th century was the “archetypal Polish abode,” and a symbol of the partitioned Poland. The Second World War and the experiences of the ghetto, eliminated the home in its traditional meaning, leading to homelessness. After the war, the new borders, repatriation and the genocide led to a mythologization of the home(land) (Shallcross 2002: 2, 5). And many writers’ experience of exile in the decades after the war gave rise to a nostalgic representation of the home.

Henryk Dasko observes that the representations of the Polish urban home between the Second World War and the 1980s are few, and those that do exist paint a dark picture of it. His own analysis of the urban home of three post-war novels, Ścibor-Ryłski’s Węgiel [Coal] (1948), Hłasko’sÓsmy dzień tygodnia [The Eighth Day of the Week] (1956), and Głowacki’s Polowanie
na muchy [Hunting Flies] (1968) leads to the same conclusion regarding all the novels’ homes:

[T]he characteristics of such a home are predominantly negative: lack of privacy, feeling of physical and psychological confinement, of emotional, and even physical, violence. The protagonists’ lives are dominated by feelings of alienation and estrangement. The notion of a family in the traditional sense is nonexistent; emotional ties between family members have disintegrated (Dasko 2002: 158).

Dasko’s further analysis of the homes as “the ultimate place of estrangement” draws on home as a metonym for the nation: “Viewed in a broader sense, the literary representation of a home can be seen not just as a literary vehicle, but rather as a reflection of the author’s own vision of Poland” (Dasko 2002: 158).

Against the background of the Communist regime and its urban development policies, Jerzy Jarzębski examines the homes and the urban spaces, especially in Warsaw, of the protagonists of novels and short stories by authors such as Leopold Tyrmand, Tadeusz Konwicki, Marek Hłasko, Marek Nowakowski, and Janusz Anderman. Jarzębski describes the communist ideological visions as creating a disease “that ravaged urban space.” And he is critical of the urban projects under communism and points to the lack of an authentic center as a main problem. The focus on the periphery in literature is a result of their objection to the center (Jarzębski 2002: 171–172).

Although Tyrmand’s Zły was the first “unorthodox” representation of Warsaw, Jarzębski (2002: 170–171) regards the prose of the 1970s as conveying the most negative images of the city – an interesting conclusion to bare in mind through Chapter 3 and the examination of the works written or produced in the 1970s. He describes the characters of Konwicki’s novels *Mała apokalipsa* [Minor Apocalypse] (1979), *Wniebowstąpienie* [The Ascension] (1967), *Rzeka podzienna, odzienne ptaki* [Underground river, underground birds] (1985), and Janusz Anderman’s *Gra na zwłokę* [Playing for Time] (1979) as homeless. Jarzębski further observes how Konwicki’s and Nowakowski’s protagonists are drawn to “unofficial precincts of the city, its most seedy places, or even the system of cellars under the city center.” These are places where “the character’s lives become more authentic,” because of their distance to official hierarchies and closeness to each other (Jarzębski 2002: 170–171). Leopold Tyrmand’s characters in *Zły* (1955) are also drawn to “unofficial spaces,” more precisely to the flea markets in “the courtyards of ruined houses” where people go who “have decided to take their fate in their own hands and make sovereign choices about their lives.” Jarzębski sees this as a way for the Varsovians to show their disapproval of the official ideology, thus “choosing those places that are buzzing with life, places where one can buy and sell things and do business – even if those places are an insult to the aesthetic sense (...)” (Jarzębski 2002: 168).
Jarzębski also draws on the writers’ own experiences of repatriation:

[F]or postwar Polish writers the archetypal ‘true home,’ the home from the time of childhood, was located beyond the eastern border, in the countryside or in a nobleman’s manor – that is, ‘elsewhere,’ outside the realm of experience available here and now (Jarzębski 2002: 172).

Another analysis of the Polish literary home was conducted by Anna Legeżyńska in Dom i poetycka bezdomność w liryce współczesnej [Home and poetic homelessness in modern poetry] (1996), where she examines the home as a motif in modern Polish poetry between the world wars and after the Second World War. Legeżyńska focuses her analysis on the awareness of the loss of home, which she sees as a result of “przemian filozoficznych, politycznych, społecznych, ale nade wszystko – artystycznych w kulturze XX wieku” [philosophical, political, social, and foremost – artistic changes in the 20th century culture]. Therefore, quite in line with previous research, the home in the poetry of those years is “a history of poetic homelessness” (Legeżyńska 1996: 6).

She divides poetic homelessness into three categories. The first type, (1) “existential homelessness,” is characterized by a sense of loss of “(...) więzi człowieka z transcendencją, brak możliwości uporządkowania świata wokół Domu-centrum oraz zburzenie tradycyjnej aksjologii.” [ties between man and transcendence, the inability to organize the world around home-center and the demolition of the traditional axiology.] Absurdity and a feeling of disorientation regarding the universal value system characterized the hero of those works. The second category, (2) “emigrational homelessness” includes the symbolism of home as the fatherland, the Polish home or the private fatherland, together with the concepts of exile and rooting. Emigré writers as well as writers within Poland questioned this archaic myth, replacing it with symbols of home-hell/jail, hospital, or waiting room. The last category, (3) “socio-political homelessness” implies an alienation of the hero in the current socio-ideological order, or as a rejection of the ruling political system. However, these different types of homelessness in poetry were usually accompanied by a more optimistic view of an attempt to build a “new” home, Legeżyńska writes (Legeżyńska 1996: 37–38).

In the next chapters, I shall draw on these representations, focusing on the urban home, and expand the picture of the fictional Polish home and its representational development.
As mentioned in the introduction to this book, party first secretary Edward Gierek proclaimed the intention of building a “second Poland” during a meeting with the Central Committee in May 1972. This was a reference to the number of apartments that they were planning for, but the phrase “second Poland” came however to have a wider meaning: “Druga Polska miała być nowocześniejsza, bogatsza i ludniejsza” [Second Poland was supposed to be more modern, richer, and more populous] (Ośęka 2010: 52).

During the 1970s and the first years of the 1980s, around 220,000 apartments were constructed annually, mainly prefabricated houses in the so-called “fabryki domów” [home factories]. The quality of these houses was poor, however, commonly evincing defects in construction (cf. Chapter 2).

Despite the constructional flaws, to receive a new apartment was in general experienced as something “natural” and modern. Although the informants of Kortteinen’s study, (referred to in Chapter 2) had complaints about the building administration and its physical flaws, the residents felt that they were “living in a new part of the city, (…) typified by ‘modern architecture,’” Kortteinen noted in his 1979 study (Kortteinen 1987: 183, cf. Chapter 2).

During the so-called belle époque of PRL, the first years of the 1970s in Poland, the cultural politics were characterized by a reasonable liberalism; censorship was to be relieved and consumption, which included TV (including comedies) and film entertainment, was to increase (Talarczyk-Gubała 2007: 92–95).


[Even the first years of the decade brought picturesque comedies, which undervalued the authentic social ills and changes in customs – an excellent material for the satirist – focusing on male-female relations, love affairs in the big city, the rise of modernity – in other words, the beauty of life in Socialism.]

66
This chapter analyzes Polish fictional portraits, from their first artistic representations in the late 1960s until the last years of the Communist rule. These works represent voices of an ongoing discourse on urbanity and the home during a period of rapid urban change in Poland. The modernization is reflected in the common motif of challenged traditional family life, where the characters strive to live a “normal” traditional (family) life and try to protect their private sphere, which is being prevented or disturbed in various ways. Although the majority of the protagonists of these comedies represent a person in a traditional nuclear Polish family (usually a man), this character is surrounded by others representing alternative life styles that to some extent challenge the traditional.

The aim of this chapter is thus to show how the works address the changing ideas of the city and the home. Of core concern in the analysis is how the urban modernization is reflected in the narratives, in motifs, themes, and most of all in the representations of space. The first section (3.1) addresses the humorous works and focuses on how clashes between spatial dichotomies such as private/public, center/periphery, city/countryside, and nature/culture-civilization as well as the challenges to the nuclear family (old/new) work as a source of comedy. The interest in the clashes or differences between these spatial and temporal categories reflects both the urban and social changes that are taking place in the Polish society.

The home in focus here is inseparable from the city, as it is shown to be a new form of (mass) urban dwelling that both continues and breaks with the prevailing idea of the urban home constituted by the kamienica (Pol. 19th- and early 20th-century apartment house) or the aristocratic urban town house (cf. Chapter 2). The second section (3.2) continues to discuss the spatial dichotomies as they are depicted in the works of Miron Białoszewski and Tomek Tryzna. This section further analyzes the spatiality of Kieślowski’s Dekalog, more specifically the functions of the threshold chronotope and the recurring motif of glass. Finally, I discern a shift in the representation of the urban home toward more introversion and closedness.

The capital city, Warsaw, is an important part of the setting in the works – either referred to as the central parts of the city, or as a reference point. Monika Talarczyk-Gubała proposed a specific subgenre within film comedy – “the Warsaw comedy” – that was developed during the four decades of Communist rule in Poland. She viewed those works as part of the shaping of a Warsaw myth (Talarczyk-Gubała 2007: 226–227ff.), in which she considered the surge of the blokowisko in these comedies as “one of the elements of the Dud city phenomenon” (Talarczyk-Gubała 2007: 255). Moreover Jarzębski observes how the cities Kraków and Warsaw were mythologized differently during the communist period: “In the literary images from the postwar period, Kraków is predominantly described as old, traditional, conservative, while Warsaw is presented as new, modern, but also, and inevitably, tawdry and phony” (Jarzębski 2002: 164).
3.1 An Apartment of Their Own in Warsaw

The prefabricated high-rise made its entry into the fictional world in Poland as a highly desirable and modern object. It contained the sought after M-3 – a two-room apartment with kitchen and bathroom. This was in 1969 in the film Człowiek z M-3 [Man with an Apartment].

Although mostly not set in the actual housing projects, the difficult housing situation during PRL becomes the backdrop of Leon Jeannot’s film Człowiek z M-3. The film begins the day the protagonist, Doctor Tomasz Piechocki, a bachelor and a womanizer, who still lives with his mother, receives a letter stating he has been “given” an apartment, a so-called M-3 in one of the new housing projects. Due to the scarce housing situation that places constraints on the dwelling space, the problem is that he can only receive the apartment if he finds someone to share it with within a month. Accordingly, he decides to find a wife and get married as quickly as possible. The extraordinariness and joy of receiving an apartment also comes across as the omniscient narrator describes the day as the happiest day of the life of a Pole. The importance is further underscored as the protagonist is reading an article in the newspaper Stolica [The Capital City] with the title: “Kto ma szanse na M-3 w Warszawie?” [Who has a chance for an M-3 in Warsaw?].

Central Warsaw, often with the backdrop of the Palace of Culture and Science and newly built high-rises in the new center of Warsaw (i.e. not the old town), is the main setting. The film is aestheticized, and the built environment, both interiors and exteriors, look very clean, new and modern. Materials such as glass, steel and concrete are prominent, emphasizing the modern and urban feeling. Although Człowiek z M-3 depicts certain chaos as the residents are moving in the newly-built apartment building, and an unfinished cabinet in Piechocki’s future apartment, the high-rise, where the protagonist’s new apartment is located, is also displayed as modern with a glassed-in stairway and located centrally as a part of the city fabric. The modern urban apartment also implies independence from his mother, who quite appropriately lives in a Kamienica – a detail that further underscores how the apartment represents a new life-style (opposed to the traditional of Piechocki’s mother). The constructional defects that are shown rather forecast the ‘false promise’ – a motif we shall see recurs in the works of this chapter – of the apartment home. And unlike later films that feature the prefabricated high-rises, this film is not centered on the protagonist’s everyday life, nor does it show any of the typical everyday signs of the communist period such as queues to grocery shops. This is also noted by a critic in the review after the premiere in 1969: Maria Oleksiewicz, writes that “Byłby to niewątpliwie film rzeczywiście komediowy, z nerwem, gdyby umieszczono go w realnym świecie, realnym szpitalu, realnej Warszawy.” [It would indubitably be a really comic film, of nerve, if it would have ben set in the real world, in a real hospital, in real
Warsaw]. The film critic writes that over-polished films like this become unintentionally close to caricature. The same reviewer notes however that the manuscript is interesting and “aktualny” [of the moment] and typically Polish: “w końcu wszyscy wiemy, jak trudne są zabiegi o uzyskanie własnych 37 czy 48 metrów kwadratowych.” [In the end, we all know how difficult the steps to attain your own 37 or 48 square meters are] (Oleksiewicz 1969: 5). The reviewer of Magazyn Filmowy (Koniczek 1969: 8–9) is contrary very enthusiastic and describes the film as a satirical comedy, “naprawdę śmieszna komedia” [a truly funny comedy] with “ostrze jadowitej satyry” [sharp poisonous satire]. On the scenography he writes (much less critically than Oleksiewicz):


[The scenography admittedly not shabby – to not risk the voices of the critics – but very elegant and with good taste. Modern Varsovian landscapes, cleverly photographed, maintains the true coloring of the capital.]

This reviewer also hardly mentions the realities behind the film, the scarce housing situation and neither does he imply any recognition with the situation.

Like Oleksiewicz, the co-screen writer of the manuscript, Jerzy Janicki also stresses the Polishness and the topicality of the film: “Chciałbym, żeby wyszła z tego bardzo polska komedia. Już samo zawiązanie intrygi jest typowe dla dzisiejszych stosunków i bardzo aktualne: zabiegi wokół otrzymania spółdzielczego mieszkania.” [I would like that the result of this was a very Polish comedy. The very ties of the plot are typical of today’s relations and very up to date: the steps around retrieving a co-operative apartment], Janicki explains in an interview. In the same interview the director Leon Jeannot explains less explicitly that he wants to make “a psychological comedy about our current events” (Zagroba 1968: 14).

The film’s urbanism resembles the male urbanism of the 19th century, where city space is a male arena and the streets a “territory to be conquered” (cf. Borg 2011: 69). “Many of the men view the city as an arena for masculinity, where women appear as objects, either for pleasure or as an instrument to achieve success,” Alexandra Borg writes on how the male flaneur’s (or “urban wanderer” a term she prefers to use) gaze differs from that of the female (Borg 2011: 69)\(^\text{17}\). The climax of Piechocki’s hunt is both the conquest of a woman and an apartment in Warsaw. The city thus becomes the backdrop of a theater stage that the male actor occupies. Of the film’s celebratory view of

\(^{17}\)”Många av männen ser staden som en maskulinitetens arena, där kvinnor uppträder som objekt, antingen för njutning eller som ett instrument för att nå framgång.”
Warsaw, the high-rise estate of *Za żelazną bramą* [Behind the Iron Gate] is an inseparable part.

The residential estate *Za żelazną bramą* that plays one of the background roles as the alluring prize in *Człowiek z M-3* is featured in several Polish films of the 1970s and onward, such as *Dziecioł* [The Woodpecker] (Jerzy Gruza, 1970), *Godzina szczytu* [Rush Hour] (Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, 1973), the television film *Najważniejszy dzień życia: Gra* [The Most Important Day of Life: The Game] (1974), *Miś* [Teddy Bear] (Stanisław Bareja, 1980), as well as the later *W labiryncie* [In the Labyrinth] (TV series 1988–1991). The housing projects *Za żelazną bramą* were constructed in the years 1965 to 1972 and consist of 19 high-rises of 15 stories, built to accommodate 25 000 people. It is located in the central part of Warsaw between the districts of Wola and Śródmieście, an area where the Jewish ghetto was located during the war (Majewski 2010: 180). The housing estates, or perhaps more correctly, the construction of them, was also berhymed by Iga Cembrzyńska in the song *Co będzie za żelazną bramą?* [What Will Be Behind the Iron Gate] 18:

Co będzie za Żelazną Bramą?/ Wieżowce tutaj staną wkrótce,/ na Starym Placu, na Wołówce,/ w Warszawie, za Żelazną Bramą.

[What will be behind the Iron Gate?/ The high-rises will stand here in short/ on the Old Square, on Wołówka / in Warsaw, behind the Iron Gate]

And the final verse:

Co będzie za Żelazną Bramą?/ Zamieszkam tutaj razem z tobą/ na siódmym piętrze – tam, gdzie obłok,/ w Warszawie za Żelazną Bramą.

[What will be behind the Iron Gate?/ I will settle here together with you/ on the seventh floor – there where there’s a cloud/ in Warsaw behind the Iron Gate]

In the song, the construction of the new high-rises evokes the nostalgic memory of “stary Warszawski czas” [the old Varsovian times] and the middle verses refer to the lively street life with food stands and their loud vendors that used to occupy the place. Despite the nostalgia of the lyrics, it breathes optimism at the same time as it looks into the future.

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18 Music by Jerzy Abratowski and lyrics by Stanisław Werner.
3.1.1 An Everyman of His Times: *Czterdziestolatek*

The housing projects of *Za żelazną bramą* featured in *Człowiek z M-3* gained a more prominent and central role in the television series *Czterdziestolatek* [The Forty-Year-Old] by director Jerzy Gruza. The show is a comedy broadcast between 1975 and 1978 with its premiere in May 1975.\(^{19}\)

It follows engineer Stefan Karwowski who works at the large construction sites\(^ {20}\) in Warsaw, has a Fiat and a so-called M-4 (a three-room apartment) that he shares with his wife and their two children. Critics have described Karwowski as average and “(…) uosobieniem socjalistycznych cnót lat siedemdziesiątych.” [an embodiment of the socialist ideal of the 1970s] (Talarczyk-Gubała 2007: 98) and an “everymanem swych czasów” [an everyman of his times] (Majer 2005: 221 cited in Lubelski 2009: 359–360). In the series, the family lives in the Warsaw housing projects Osiedle Pańska on Pańska Street. The TV series, which has been described as “(…) doskonałym prześmiewczym obrazem życia PRL-u.” [an excellent mockery of life in the Peoples’ Republic of Poland] (Tambor 2012: 181), gained considerable success among viewers at the same time as it, as film critic Tadeusz Lubelski writes, had an “educating function” and therefore suited the media standards of “the propaganda of success” (Lubelski 2009: 360). As a result of the show’s popularity, the feature film *Motylem jestem, czyli romans 40-latka* [I Am a Butterfly. The Forty-Year-Old’s Love Affair] (1976) with the same characters, was filmed a couple of years later.

The protagonist’s “wcielenie socjalistycznego ideału” [incarnation of the socialist ideal] (Talarczyk-Gubała 2007: 98) as a citizen of Socialist Poland is also alluded to in one of the first episodes that show a glimpse of how Karwowski took part in the reconstruction of Warsaw after the war. The clip shows Karwowski standing together with other men on the ruins digging against the background of the tune of Chór Czejanda’s song, or perhaps “Warsaw Ode” would be a more proper description, “Budujemy Nowy Dom” [We Are Building a New Home] from the early post-war years, whose lyrics include the verses:

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Budujemy nowy dom/Jeszcze jeden nowy dom,/ Naszym przyszłym, lepszym dniom,/ Warszawo!

Od piwnicy aż po dach/Niech radośnie rośnie gmach/ Naszym snom i twoim snom,/ Warszawo!
```
Niech się mury pną do góry,/ Kiedy dłonie chętne są,/ Budujemy betonowy, nowy dom./

[We are building a new home/Just another new home/ For our future better days/ Warsaw!]

From the basement to the roof/Let the edifice happily grow/ For our dreams and your dreams/ Warsaw!

Let the walls rise to the top/ When the hands are willing/ We are building a new concrete home/”]

Besides at the construction sites, Karwowski’s work place (which are quite centrally located in Warsaw as well) and his home, as in Człowiek z M-3, the show mainly takes place in central Warsaw. Many outside shots are from well-known central locations of Warsaw that often have heavy traffic and many pedestrians moving in a constant flow. A recurring motif is traffic in some way: the first shot during the credits shows the protagonist riding his bike in the middle of the heavily trafficked streets of the center of Warsaw, and many scenes begin by showing a vehicle of some sort that enters or leaves the scene, either with or without one of the characters. This emphasis on traffic sets the tone of the series on movement, motion, and activity, which are also some of the meanings of the Polish word for traffic, ruch. During the final credits of each episode a still picture of a part of Łazienkowska freeway is shown. The picture shows an almost finished freeway crossing the Vistula River. The base is there and the main direction of the road is set, and only patches of the road still need work. The road here suggests an allusion of the road to the future in a wider sense. This symbolism, enforced by the emphasis on construction, also reflects the film’s optimism towards the future. Stefan Karwowski and his family live an urban life style. He is often shown driving (not strolling) around the city in his car, surrounded by images of vibrant city life. Camera shots reveal that the view from his apartment is sometimes the other concrete high-rises in the area, and sometimes the neon signs of the city center, which underscores both the openness of their home as their apartment interior is visually connected with the city center and the centrality and urbanity of their home; their home is a continuous part of the city.

The 1970s in Poland, when Edward Gierek was first party secretary, have been referred to as “okres cywilizacyjnego skoku” [the time of the civilizational leap] or when the foundations of Polish modernity were laid. Although the decade ended with a financial crisis, it has usually been viewed in a positive note compared with Gomułka’s preceding gray reign. The living standard for the average Pole was raised through increased incomes and consumption. And as noted previously, the plan for a “second Poland” was launched, and the “house factories” that produced the prefabricated homes were set up. The infrastructure was modernized and the first motorways were constructed, as
well as hospitals, railway stations and harbors. Commerce and export trade with/to Western countries also increased. However, the increased growth of the Polish economy was built on foreign loans, which in the second half of the decade became more obvious (cf. Talarczyk-Gubala 2007: 92–93).

*Czterdziestolatek* follows the pattern of the apartment-house plot with an “emphasis on domestic interiors and microscopic social networks (…) with the urban novel’s emphasis on chance encounters, the interplay between isolation and community, and the sudden transformation of strangers into kin (…),” as Marcus (1999: 11) wrote but includes to a larger extent external urban sites of its setting, which underscores the city in the setting even more: the fluidity between home and street.

The shots from Karwowski’s housing estate, either his apartment, the common spaces of the house (elevator, corridor, stairs) or the “yard” in front of the building have a generally positive tone. Children are playing seemingly happily together in front of the house, on the carpet beater. And although exaggerated with a comic twist (in the semi-private space, to use Szczepański’s terminology) the residents socialize from their balconies to the courtyard (as in the first episode when the character of the working woman explains how Armenian cognac should be drunk while the balconies serve as bleachers). This emphasizes the connection between the individual apartments with the common semi-private space (using Szczepański’s spatial divisions) in front of the building. Karwowski’s best friend, a bachelor doctor, with whom he has frequent contact, also lives in the building. Other less wanted neighborly contacts, “chance encounters,” also occur, such as when neighbors need favors and pull Karwowski into their apartments, or when he is mistaken for a janitor expected to fix flaws in the plumbing. Intrusions to his own apartment usually come from the working woman (kobieta pracująca) who shows up at their home in various disguises at the most improper times. Her visits are initially unwelcomed but soon she has the authority on almost every topic and shares wisdoms that both Karwowski and the other characters listen to with interest and respect. This character has the traditional sitcom role of the sage or mentor, the Colombina (Pierrette/Arlecchina) character in Commedia dell’arte and rather begins to take on the role of an extended family member. But she is also unique to the Polish realities of the time. As Talarczyk-Gubała writes:


*[This type of character – was not subject to ‘international’ influences from popular culture. The working woman could not freely be transferred to, let us say, French or American drama comedies (…).]*
Talarczyk-Gubała further observes that there was a resentment in the comedy of this character, as it was located on the border between her “realness” and “unrealness”: “Filmowy żart pozwalał odreagować zarówno społeczną niechęć do kobiety bez rodziny, jak i podejrzliwość w stosunku do natrętnie propagowanych wzorców.” [The film joke allowed a relief both of the social reluctance to women without family, and of the suspiciousness of the persistently propagated models] (Talarczyk-Gubała 2007: 165).

In general, however, Karwowski’s home is depicted as a traditional domestic sphere for relaxation and family life. At the same time it is relatively open to strangers, and some of the neighbors seem to be part of the “extended family.” This is significant, as it underscores how the Karwowski family is a traditional nuclear family but nonetheless open-minded, not rigid and narrow-minded.

The view from their balcony is the center of Warsaw and the many neon lights, which underscores the urban setting of the series and their home’s link with the city.

The celebratory view of the city shown in both Człowiek z M-3 and Czterdziesiolyatek is gone in Jerzy Ziarnik’s film Kłopotliwy gość [Troublesome Visitor] (1971), but it does revolve around the motif of the false promise and the search for private space. The protagonists, the Piotrowski family, who after receiving a highly sought-after, and long-awaited apartment, a so-called M-4, in a new housing project, find out that some sort of non-human invisible creature lives there. The “ghost” uses their electricity and thus increases their electricity bill. Their new home does not become the awaited abode but is haunted by this creature that literally drains them of energy. Unlike the other films discussed in this chapter, Piotrowskis’ apartment does not suffer from any visible construction flaws, such as leakage or broken interior devices, but is instead haunted.

Besides Piotrowskis’ apartment, most of the scenes in the film take place in different administrative offices where Mr Piotrowski is sent to solve his dwelling problems. The heavy bureaucracy is however incapable of resolving any of the housing problems caused by a “creature,” since it does not fit into their strict and fixed written regulations. In the film, Piotrowskis’ world (i.e. the story space) consists of the housing project, where he lives, and the different administrative offices that he frequents. The “ghost” illustrates the absurdities, the inflexibility and weight of the bureaucracy. And the film shows an obvious affinity with the Gogolian story of the “little man” who is trapped under the weight of the state administration. The end is pessimistic and shows no optimism regarding relief from the administration.

Stanisław Bareja’s comedy film Nie ma róży bez ognia [A Jungle Book of Regulations] (1974), is also based on the scarce housing situation. Like Kłopotliwy gość, the plot revolves around the desperate search for private space. But instead of a non-human intrusion, their quest for private space is prevented by the quite absurd regulations of the housing market. The motif of
the false promise also returns here. A young married couple, Jan and Wanda, who live in a small room in a house in Warsaw that they share with several other residents are by happy coincidence offered to exchange their room for a two-room apartment in a newly built housing project (Osiedle Piaski in the city district Żoliborz). Tired of their cramped dwelling situation, they happily accept the offer. But, where there’s smoke there’s fire, and all that glitters is not gold (“There is no gold without fire” would be a literal translation of the film title): the apartment has several physical construction flaws, which the man of the couple, Jan Filikiewicz, encounters on his first visit. And because of various tenant regulations, Wanda’s ex-husband (and further people related to him and so on) has the right to live with them, causing much trouble and inconvenience for the couple.

The construction flaws of the housing projects are only present in the beginning of the film to foreshadow the coming problems (the apartment change is simply too good to be true) – the motif of the false promise. Neighborly contacts (although sometimes unwanted) are frequent and the characters often walk in and out of their apartments, underscoring the fluidity between the interiors of the apartments and the exteriors. The housing projects are also depicted as part of the city of Warsaw; the characters are often viewed in the city center (although it is not as aesthetically celebratorily depicted as in Człowiek z M-3 and Czterdziestolatek), and in the scene when the married couple dance happily on the roof when they have received the new apartment, the Warsaw center skyline is obviously emphasized in the background, suggesting a connection between receiving an apartment and receiving access to Warsaw. The lure of Warsaw is also the reason Wanda’s “relatives” are so eager to move into the married couple’s cramped apartment.

3.1.2 Like in the Desert: Filip z konopi

Warsaw constitutes the background for Józef Gębski’s feature film Filip z konopi (1981) as well. But here the relationship between the housing-estate setting and the city center is more distant. The first scene shows an older woman walking in what looks like a setting in the countryside. Folk music is playing in the background and a rooster crows. In the background another woman is pumping up water from an old mechanical water pump, and a couple of cows are grazing. As the older woman continues to walk, blocks of tall high-rise apartment buildings loom, and we see that the actual setting is a housing project area, although seemingly located far off in the countryside. This beginning, besides creating a comic effect by contrasting the modern dwelling with the country setting, of course also emphasizes the detachment of the modernist housing projects from their “natural” surroundings.

Filip z konopi was originally shot in 1981 but the premiere, due to the censorship at the time, was delayed two years. The film takes place during one day in the newly built housing projects on Gogol Street in a Varsovian suburb.
where everybody lives in identical apartments, drives identical cars etc. The film mainly follows the architect Andrzej Leski and his pregnant wife, but simultaneously shows the everyday life of the other residents. It was filmed in the housing projects “Osiedle Wawrzyszew” in Bielany, or “daleki Żoliborz” [far Żoliborz] as it is humorously referred to in the film.

The Polish film portal Filmpolski.pl writes that “Mrówkowiec...zdaje się żyć swoim własnym życiem, w którym mieszkańcy podobni są bezwolnym elementom wielkiej odhumanizowanej maszyny” [The Ant-tower seems to live its own life, in which the residents seem to be passive parts of a large dehumanized machine] (Filmpolski.pl Filip z konopi). This, in my opinion, quite accurate remark most of all also points to the important role of the housing estate in the narrative. And in Housman Gelfant’s terminology, the film would clearly be considered ‘a synoptic study.’

The film openly satirizes the malfunctions of the housing projects and even more “the plans” of their construction. In the very first scene when a man gives directions to a certain house for the older woman, he points out all the flaws and mistakes when implementing the plan:

Pójdzie pani tędy, gdzie miał być pasaż handlowy, ale go zdali z planu. Potem skręci pani na prawo. Tam miała być szkoła. No też spadła z planu. I dojdzie pani do skrzyżowania z tą pękniętą rurą. Nie było jej w planie, więc zostawili, ale pękła i w zimie tam jest ślizgawka… ale pewnie też likwidują. Potem przejdzie pani przez te deski, przez ten rozkop i jak pani nie spadnie to ten drugi dom powinien być Gogola 7, ale tego bloku w ogóle nie ma, bo też spadł z planu.

[Take that path where there was supposed to be a shopping arcade but they deleted it from the plan. Then you turn to the right, where a school was supposed to be. Well it was also dropped from the plan. And then you will reach an intersection with that broken pipe. That was not in the plan so they let it be, but it broke and in the winter there is an ice rink there... but they will probably also liquidate it. Then you will walk though the planking, through that crater and if you do not fall the second building should be 7 Gogol Street but that high-rise does not exist either because it was dropped from the plan.]

Other flaws of the actual housing constructions, such as lack of water and winding floors are revealed soon thereafter.

Andrzej Leski works as an architect and designs “bloki eksperymentalne” [experimental high-rises]. Because of their similarity, at his office the architect colleagues confuse the different housing projects from different cities and countries. His manager also offers him the opportunity to go abroad to Hungary to work because we do design for them there and they design for us here ("My im a oni nam" [We for them and they for us]), he explains showing
photos of almost identical housing projects located in different Eastern bloc countries.

In *Filip z konopi*, the new housing projects become a symbol of a new form of dwelling, a new (socialist) life style that is imposed on the residents that hardly seem to fit into it. The kitchen is too narrow; the cars are too small and are parked too close in the parking lot.

The inhabitants of the high-rise also have synchronized lives. They walk their dogs at the same time in the morning at the same place (wearing identical or very similar robes), they drive their identical cars at the same time to work in the morning. Even the garbage men empty the trash bins synchronically. Besides ridiculing the similarities of the *blokowisko* and its effects on the citizens, it also undoubtedly emphasizes the collectivity of the residents. The apartment homes are further depicted as open and porous, as residents (and non-residents) visit each other.

Contrary to the films *Czterdziestolatek* and *Człowiek z M-3*, as well as to some extent, *Kłopotliwy Gość*, where the housing projects were portrayed as part of the urban setting, *Filip z Konopi* emphasizes their distant location in relation to the city center. Warsaw is constantly present as a point of reference but residents refer to their neighborhood as “na wsi” [on the countryside] or “jak w pustyni” [like in the desert] and when looking at the view from one of the balconies, they point to the horizon and the blurry skyline of the Palace of Culture and Science and exclaim “tam jest Warszawa” [there is Warsaw]. Besides in the first scene, the “countryside” returns later as a farmer rides into the housing projects on a horse and carriage to sell vegetables. The crowd of residents standing in one of the commonly viewed cues to a neighborhood grocery shop all run up to the farmer, but the landlord forces the farmer to leave because he does not have a license to sell. This clash between “nature” and “civilization” also returns in the TV series *Alternatywy 4* (see 3.1.3). The dissatisfaction with the dwelling that is expressed in the film is however only the voices of some of the characters (such as the wife of the architect and the eccentric woman returning from Japan) and these characters are themselves depicted less favorably, which limits the criticism. The housekeeper who works at the Leskis for example never complains, and she even moves into one of the apartments herself, where she also houses her wedding celebrations.

3.1.3 In the Backwoods of *Alternatywy 4*

The same year that *Filip z konopi* premiered, 1981, started the filming of the next TV series that took place in the concrete high-rises, *Alternatywy 4*, directed by Stanisław Bareja. The nine-episode comedy drama, which was shot in the Warsaw suburb Ursynów, was not screened until 1986 because of the censorship (Filmpolski.pl *Alternatywy 4*). The TV series, which are considered an excellent satire of Polish communist realities, “(...) niezastąpionym świadectwem epoki.” [an irreplaceable witness to the epoch.] (Lubelski 2009:
78

491) follows the newly arrived residents and their despotic landlord. The setting, the recently built housing projects, came to represent “pars pro toto, communist Poland in general,” as Izabela Kalinowska (2005) described it. And as for Czterdziestolatek, critics stress the commonness of the characters and that the high-rise of Alternatywy 4 contains a “cross-section of the society of the Polish People’s Republic” (Lubelski 2009: 491). The individual apartment interiors of the prefabricated high-rise setting seem to underscore this diversity among the residents further. Although there is one instance of a mix-up of furniture between two of the neighbors when the residents have just moved in, they are not represented as confusingly similar as has been expressed by some scholars of dwelling practices (cf. Chapter 2; Klich-Kluczevska 2005: 206; Jewdokimow 2011: 146).

Talarczyk-Gubała (2007: 260) uses the metaphor “uwięzieni w mrówkowcu” [imprisoned in the ant tower] as she describes Stanisław Bareja’s comedy of the 1980s, which she considers a mockery of the absurdities of collective dwelling, to which “life in the high-rise forced one.” The films portrayed living in the “mrówkowiec” [ant tower] as a “smutna konieczność” [sad inevitability], she continues.

The plan to build a residential area in the southern part of Warsaw called Ursynów began in 1971 when SARP (The Polish Architect Association) announced an architectural competition. The construction began in 1975, and the first residents moved in in 1977 but the construction of the area continued another ten years (Urząd Dzielnicy Ursynów, web; Mazur 2010; Trybuś 2011b: 189). Although the housing projects of Ursynów were supposed to be different from other prefabricated residential estates – more differentiated and more integrated with Warsaw – problems persisted during the initial years:

Na osiedlu nie brakowało tylko mieszkań, poza tym nie było nic. Przez pierwsze lata nie było sklepów, aptek, przychodni ani telefonów, a dzieci trzeba było dowozić do szkół w pobliskich wsiach. Nie było dobrej łączności z odległym o kilka kilometrów centrum miasta (Trybuś 2011b: 189).

[Not only apartments were lacking in the neighborhood, besides them there was nothing. During the first years there were no grocery stores, pharmacies, clinics, no telephones, and the children had to be driven to schools in the closest villages. There were no good connections with the distant center of the city, located a couple of kilometres away.]

The setting for Alternatywy 4 was therefore quite authentic, and the series openly displays, although with humor, the flaws of the construction, the corruption, and the arbitrariness of the decisions and surveillance by the landlord. The TV drama, with its setting of the fragile, error-ridden and flawed high-rise, the seemingly powerless residents left in the hands of the power yearning

22 “Blok na Ursynowie przedstawia przekrój peerelowskiego społeczeństwa.”
landlord, has been viewed as an allegory for the communist system. In order to create the perfect high-rise so that he as a landlord would be acknowledged by the higher party officials and possibly climb in his career, the landlord harasses the residents by reading their mail, eavesdropping, conspiring with them against each other and forcing them to spy on each other. However, in the final episode the residents collaborate and revolt against the unknowing landlord.

Film critic Ewa Mazierska compares the two portraits painted of Ursynów by Kieślowski (cf. Chapter 3.2.2), on the one hand, and Bareja, on the other:

Obraz tych osiedli proponowany przez Kieślowskiego i Bareję, jest bardzo krytyczny. Reżyserzy ukazują niewygodne, klaustrofobiczne mieszkania, gdzie stale wyłączana jest ciepła woda, a niekiedy także prąd, winda się psuje, a z korytarzy dobywają się hałasy. Same osiedla to zaledwie gigantyczne sypialnie; nie ma tu restauracji, kin, kawiareń, nie wspominając już o parkach (Mazierska 2006: 22–23).

[The picture of those neighborhoods proposed by Kieślowski and Bareja is very critical. The directors show uncomfortable, claustrophobic apartments, where hot water is constantly turned off and from time to time also electricity, where the elevator breaks, and with noise from the corridors. The neighborhoods are merely gigantic bedrooms; there are no restaurants, movie theaters, not to mention parks.]

Following the steps of Człowiek z M-3, Kłopotliwy gość and Nie ma róży bez ognia, Alternatywy 4 also portrays with great sharpness the dire housing situation of PRL. The first scene is from the city office for management of housing cooperatives, which shows the desperation of the people waiting for an apartment. One older man says he has been waiting for eleven years but says he has now given up hope. This scene also shows the arbitrariness of the assigning of apartments. A team from public television wants to film at the announcement of the “new tenants” and the TV journalist, after finding out that the list of tenants is not ready, decides on his own (very randomly) who will receive an apartment – just to be able to get a good shot for TV. Another example of how the severe housing situation is addressed in the series comes at the end of the series when it is discovered that the daughter of one of the families in the building, Ewa, works as an exotic dancer downtown only in order to save up for the down payment for her own apartment.

As an allegory, Alternatywy 4 has clear symbolic ingredients: the high-rise as the Polish state enclosed in the communist system, the residents as the citizens, and the landlord as a governing politician. As critic Ewa Mazierska quite aptly writes:
[It is difficult not to recognize the relationship between Anioł and the residents of the high-rise as a metaphor of the relationships prevailing in the socialist state, and the final revolt that the residents carry out – as an allegory for the solidarity revolution.]

**Homeyness and the Social Space**

*Alternatywy 4* could also be read as an example of a sitcom using the “fish out of water” formula, where the main characters of a sitcom are put into an unfamiliar environment and their adjustment, or attempt at adjustment, creates the comic effects. The show could then be seen as depicting the strategies and tactics of the residents. In the article “Społeczna architektura blokowisk. ‘40-latek’ Jerzego Gruzy i ‘Alternatywy 4’ Stanisława Barej” [The Social Architecture of High-rise Apartment Blocks: Jerzy Gruza’s *A Forty-Year-Old* and Stanisław Bareja’s *Alternatywy Street*] (2006), Zofia Mioduszewska writes that the humor in *Alternatywy 4* is “based on the stressing of institutionalistic everyday life and its surrealist manifestations of the Peoples’ Republic” (Mioduszewska 2006: 154). And that the political aspect of the series consists of exposing the defects of the political rule through the everyday misfortunes, where “the system is collapsing like the high-rise.” According to Mioduszewska the homeyness (domowość) of the high-rises is challenged in both *Czterdziestolatek* and *Alternatywy 4*. But her comparison also reveals that the high-rise of the more political *Alternatywy 4* is a less “functional home” than the one in the 1970s *Czterdziestolatek*, where home, as she writes, is a private protective sphere without constant intrusions and visits by annoying neighbors, the landlord, and construction workers, or problems with “plumbing, heating, elevators” (Mioduszewska 2006: 159–160, 163).

I agree with Mioduszewska to some extent. On the one hand, *Alternatywy 4* shows the flaws and problems with the new, “socialist” concept of dwelling: besides the constructional flaws, the neighbors are disturbed by each other, workers (carpenters, plumbers etc.) and the landlord; they argue, report and spy on each other. But, on the other hand, even though they refuse or at least resist working collectively as the landlord wants them to, that is exactly what they do when they in the end start to cooperate against the landlord. One example of this is how two of the residents, Zdzisław Kołek and Zygmunt Kotek who initially were in a dispute over the right to an apartment, later collaborate quite elaborately against the landlord, reaching a compromise and even sharing the achieved goods. And in the end all residents work collectively to ruin

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23 “Komizm ten polega na wydobywaniu instytucjonalnego aspektu codziennej rzeczywistości PRL w jej absurdalnych, surrealistycznych przejawach” (Mioduszewska 2006: 154).
– for the good of the collective – the important festive reception planned by the landlord.

Besides providing this collective work of the residents, the high-rise is also a space creating more positive relations among the residents. Romantic relations are initiated by at least six residents, as well as another adulterous relationship. Friendships and community are displayed for example in the participation in the wedding celebration, in watching the soccer game together, and around the creation of a house-chore robot (that could potentially stand in queues for grocery shopping). As Talarczyk-Gubała notes:

Z odcinka na odcinek rozwijają się formy współżycia lokatorów: sąd nad złodziejem mleka, spiskowanie na śmietniku, spontaniczny udział w przyjęciu weselnym, wspólne oglądanie meczu. (Talarczyk-Gubala 2007: 257)

[From episode to episode the forms of cohabitation between the residents develop: the jury for the milk thief, the conspiracy around the dustbins, spontaneous participation in the wedding reception, the joint watching of the soccer game.]

The shots during the credits introduce the setting. They begin by showing an aerial view of the whole neighborhood Ursynów, i.e. a vast area with gray prefabricated apartment buildings, but this also illustrates or at least hints at the priorities of the construction workers – careful with their liquor, less careful on the construction site: The camera zooms out and shows a topping-out ceremony on a roof at one of the high-rises. The construction workers make a toast in vodka and one of the men throws a bottle to another and warns him to be careful and not to break the glass bottle. Just as the other construction worker responds that he never breaks glass bottles, he falls backwards off the roof, through a glass window that is being carried to the new construction site, and lands on a wooden plate in a pond. He then quickly gets up on his feet, drinks out of the bottle and screams to the workers on the roof: “Did I not tell you – I never break a glass bottle!”

The scenes also ridicule the real problem of alcoholism among workers at the time. Blood tests on the constructions workers of large construction sites at the end of the 1970s for example showed that 34 percent had traces of alcohol (Kosiński 2010: 84).

As a contrast to the initial aerial view of the neighborhood, the rest of the credits show short extractions of the most chaotic scenes from the series as a way to foreshadow the coming events: a fire, explosions, leaking water spouting, trees falling, a man climbing the house facade, a “woman” picking up her head from the ground. In the end of the credits the camera zooms in on the fire.
Center versus Periphery

Although the scenes from the credits reveal nothing about in which city the action takes place, it becomes apparent in the very first scene of the first episode that takes place in The Central administration for housing co-operatives in Warsaw, as a sign on a building reads that the camera shows before cutting to the interior of the building. The actual neighborhood of the setting (Ursynów) is also mentioned. The first episodes revolve around the reception and the move to the new apartments. Warsaw is mentioned by the different new residents as they express their views on the capital. The ways the residents refer to Warsaw or Ursynów differ. The characters who moved against their will refer to the residential estate as not being part of the city: Mrs Balcerowicz refers to her home in the Praga district in Warsaw as “miasto” [the city] suggesting that Ursynów is not part of it. Mr. Kierka’s co-residents exclaim: “Na takim odludziu?” [In the backwoods?] after being informed about the coming move. Other more thrilled characters do not express doubts about its (distant) location. Mrs. Anioł from the small town Połtusk, for example, talks with fascination about moving to the capital city.

Besides this, only in one of the final episodes (ep. 8) is there a glimpse of central Warsaw as the resident Dr. Furman goes to a restaurant in the emblematic Warsaw building, the Palace of Culture and Science. At the same time as Warsaw is pushed into the background of the action, the high-rise area of Ursynów is depicted as being located outside of civilization in the outback or complete wilderness. Around the high-rises there is only a bare landscape of raw ground or mud. Although the housing projects are depicted as located outside of civilization, the buildings are ascribed “stadsmässiga egenskaper” [urban characteristics] – to use Borg’s wordings; both apartments and the semi-public and semi-private space around them “are places for random meetings, discussions and disputes as well as commercial and sexual exchanges” (Borg 2011: 260). Like the previous works discussed in this chapter, Alternatywy 4 develops the housing-estate plot, as the space of the blokowisko is central in shaping the plot. A characteristic of this type of apartment-house plot is the fluidity between private and public spaces and the focus on semi-private interiors and semi-public exteriors. The barriers between private and public within the building are blurred. Adding to this is also the fact that many of the residents work at home or are rarely seen to work elsewhere. The housing projects are represented as a ‘miniature city’ in Marcus’ wordings.

The Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, a representation of a socialist vision and perhaps the communist system in general, is depicted as home to a decadent restaurant and bar for foreign businessmen, with striptease and

25 Talarczyk-Gubała (2007: 250) writes, however, that the cultural palace did not appear in a geopolitical context (as a symbol of power) in comedy films until the end of the 1970s. Before then it was a landmark, a sight to be seen, or a place for lovers to meet.
prostitutes, thus unveiling the hypocrisy of communist power. So the few images of Warsaw portray it as ambivalent and “other.” However, when Furman visits the exclusive and luxurious restaurant in the cultural palace, he is entering a different world, as the luxury and atmosphere contrasts sharply with his everyday life. Seemingly unknowing about this other place, he is amazed and pleased with its almost surreal appearance. As a symbol of political power and state socialism, the center of Warsaw is thus represented, on the one hand, as undesireable, corrupt, and degenerate, and, on the other hand, it is “other” and exclusive. Despite the seemingly abnormal life and events of the Ursynów blokowisko, it is the center that is “othered.” Besides reflecting that the center is associated both with communist power and bureaucracy, and with decadence, this ambiguous relationship to the city center emphasizes the otherness as well as the isolation of the blokowisko.

3.2 Introspection, Isolation, and Morality

3.2.1 Białoszewski’s Lighthouse

During the second half of the 1970s and in the 1980s, the tone of some of the artistic expressions shifted. Although with quite different perspectives, the poetry of Miron Białoszewski and Stanisław Barańczak focused on the impact of the high-rise apartment blocks on an existential level. A critique of the monotony of the concrete urban landscape was also voiced by the punk rock band Brygada Kryzys:

Beton, beton/ Dom, dom/ Winda, dom/ Dom, beton
Ściana, beton/ Beton, dom/ Sklep, beton/ Praca, dom
Radioaktywny blok!
Beton, dom/ Dzień, beton/ Praca beton/ Dom, dom
Winda, sklep/ Beton, dom/ Balkon, beton, dom, dom
Radioaktywny blok! (Brygada Kryzys, Radioaktywny blok, 1982)

[Concrete, concrete/ House, house/ Elevator, house/ House, concrete
Wall, concrete/ Concrete, house/ Shop, concrete/ Work, house
Radioactive concrete high-rise!
Concrete, house/ Day, concrete/ Work, concrete/ House, house
Elevator, shop/ Concrete, house/ Balcony, concrete/ House, house
Radioactive concrete high-rise!]

Poet Miron Białoszewski (1922–1983), who himself moved quite reluctantly into a new high-rise neighborhood on Lizbońska Street in Saską Kępa in Warsaw in June 1975, described his experience in his diary notes from 1975 to

Literary critic Anna Legeżyńska draws on Yuri Lotman in her analysis of Białoszewski’s poetic home, which she views as an “anti-home”:

Nie należy do porządku biologicznego (gdyż nie jest Gniazdem), ani kulturowego (nie jest prefiguracją jakiegoś nowego mitu Domu). Mieści się jedynie w sferze dewiacji, cywilizacyjnej i architektonicznej. (...) Schron w blokowisku nie tyle chroni, co izoluje człowieka (Legeżyńska 1996: 93, cf. Section 2.2.4).

[It does not belong to the biological order (since it is not a nest), neither to the cultural order (it is not a foreshadow of some new myth of the home). It only has a place in the civilizational and architectural deviation sphere. (...) The shelter in the blokowisko does not protect as much as it isolates man.]

Lotman analyzes the homes in Mikhail Bulgakov’s The Master and Margarita, and he views the communal flat as the antipode of home:

In Bulgakov the home is an internal, closed space, the source of security, harmony and creativity. Beyond its walls lie chaos, destruction and death. A flat, and especially a communal flat, is chaos masquerading as home and making a real home impossible. The home and the communal flat are antipodes: this means that the common feature they share – being a dwelling space, living quarters – loses its significance, and all that remains are the semiotic qualities. The home becomes a semiotic element of the cultural space (Lotman 1990: 191).

The origin of this theme harks back to the folkloric opposition between home and forest, which remains up to modern times: “‘home’ being the place which is one’s own, a place of safety, culture and divine protection, while ‘forest’ is somewhere alien, where the Devil dwells, a place of temporary death and to go there is the equivalent to a journey to the afterlife” (Lotman 1990: 185).

The anti-home, the false home, or pseudo-home is usually the communal flat – the “centre of an abnormal world” and “a place where rationality is abandoned,” Lotman writes. The anti-homes are not places “to live in,” but from where they “run away, fly away, walk away or disappear without a trace”

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26 Fragments of the work have previously been published in Rozkurz (1980), Przepowiadanie sobie (1981), and Stara proza, nowe wiersze (1984).
(Lotman 1990: 186–187). What makes a place for dwelling a home is its spir-

(Legeżyńska 1996: 85–86). What makes a place for dwelling a home is its spir-

itual value and “its cultured and intimate atmosphere,” he continues (Lotman 1990: 190).

Legeżyńska also observes that Białoszewski rarely characterizes his high-

rise as home, instead using the term “apartment.” The high-rise he calls “mrówkowiec” [ant house or ant tower], “ilościowiec” [amount tower] or “latarnia morska” [lighthouse]. He pejoratively calls the whole neighborhood “Chamowo” (from “cham” boor, rascal and “chamieć” to coarsen or brutalize) (Legeżyńska 1996: 85–86).

Within the poetry of the new wave, which was given the epithet of the “po-

eytry of grayness” because “the poems were written in the name of the so-called ‘gray man’” (Szulc Packalén 1997: 219)—the housing projects were depicted by Stanisław Barańczak in the poetry cycle Kątem u siebie (Wiersze mieszkkalne) (1980—but written during the last years of the 1970s) [Under my own roof: verses for a new apartment] from the collection Tryptyk z betonu, zmęczenia i śniegu [Triptychs with Concrete, Fatigue, and Snow]. The critique in his poetry was directed at the similarity, the grayness, and the lack of iden-
tity—of the neighborhoods—and of their residents.

Każdy z nas ma schronienie w betonie,
opórco tego po jednym balkonie,
na nim skrzynkę, gdzie sadzi begonie;

odbymamy śmierci i porody,
oglądamy prognozę pogody,
aby żyć, mamy ważne powody;

jednocześnie nam bją godziny,
jednakowo się klóčimy, godzimy,

In Legeżyńska’s view the high-rise of Barańczak is a “home-trap,” “mieszkanie, które nie chroni swego lokatora, lecz przeciwnie; izoluje” [an apartment that does not protect its locator, but on the contrary, isolates] (Legeżyńska 1996: 171), and in Lotman’s sense, it too, like the home of Białoszewski, is a false home, “niczym hotel” [like a hotel] or at best an apart-

ment “całkowicie pozbawione kulturowej symboliki schronienia” [completely bereft of the cultural symbolism of protection], she writes. And the portrayed reality is “monochromatic (although in different nuances of gray)” (Legeżyńska 1996: 172).

28 “(…) wiersze te pisane są w imieniu tak zwanego ‘szarego’ człowieka.”
29 All of us have a shelter in concrete./ besides that a balcony each./ on it a box, where we plant
begonias;/ we undergo deaths and births;/ we watch the weather report;/ we have important reas-
sons to live;/ the bells are ringing for us at the same time;/ we quarrel, reconcile, uniformly;/
how is our rest? suitable; (...) (My raw trans., 2015).
My analysis of Białoszewski, however, focuses on his diary notes, which as will be shown reveal a strong focus on his experience of space and movement through space. He describes his daily movements and routes in his apartment, up and down his apartment house, his ways through his new neighborhood and his trips into different parts of the center of the city and back.


The distance to his old home in the center of Warsaw is emphasized repeatedly as he describes the shifting appearance of the view over Warsaw as he looks out a window in his building. Warsaw is equated with and limited to the city center. And he refers to his new neighborhood as a “przedmieście” [suburb], miasteczko [small town], “nasza wieś” [our village] and talks about it in terms of periphery (in contrast with Śródmieście – the center of Warsaw) and countryside (Białoszewski 2009: 5).

Jest tu ścieżka. Topól cały rząd. Idzie się w zapachach, w cieniu, jak na wsi. Ludzie, ci nowi, ci my, ośmieliły się, już chodzą tedy z psami, z dziećmi, a nawet widziałem panią w kostiumie kąpielowym. To nasza łączka, nasza wieś (Białoszewski 2009: 14–15).

One of the first days he even draws a parallel to Robinson Crusoe’s island. And he equates “miasto” [the city] with the center (2009: 14) and at another part the city center is equated with “świat” [the world]. His almost daily trips
to the center of Warsaw, however, show his integration with the city: the
neighborhood is part – albeit a new part – of the urban fabric.

A major focus in his diary notes consists of descriptions of his view, and
the view from the staircase and the “galeria widokowa” [look-out gallery] lo-
cated on the eleventh floor. The many accounts of the view are both his own
and his friends’ comments on the view as they visit him. His descriptions of
the view, but also elsewhere as he experiences the neighborhood, contain
many observations of nature and natural phenomena: besides the state of the
sun and moon, the temperature, the weather, and color nuances of the sky, he
mentions what plants are blooming and the birds he sees, and his focus repeat-
edly returns to the Wisła River – which separates him from the center of town.
The many nature descriptions stand as a contrast to the new modern construc-
tions in the area: the concrete housing projects, the motorway and the many
roads that cross it, and the bridges over the river.

His observations of nature and natural phenomena seem to function as a
comfort, as something stable and recognizable, in his unfamiliar new sur-
roundings.

Białoszewski often returns to the bridges over the Wisła: he watches them
from his building, he crosses them and he goes there to look at the view from
them. This preoccupation with the bridges of the Wisła becomes a symbolic
reflection of Białoszewski’s ambivalence towards his new home and his old.
“Przyzwyczaiłem się do nowego mieszkania? Nie wiem. Jeszcze mniej wiem,
na ile odzwyczaiłem się od starego.” [Did I get accustomed to the new apart-
ment? I don’t know. I know even less how much I have grown de-accustomed
from the old apartment], he asks himself (Białoszewski 2009: 34) and later he
continues: “Źle nie jest. Ale wciąż nie wierzę w to wszystko” [It is not bad.
But I still don’t believe in it all] (Białoszewski 2009: 43). Białoszewski is
trying to get accustomed to his new home and tries to get used to, “oswoić,”
the space of his apartment and his building and the new surroundings. He vac-
illates, and at first he mentions how everything feels “obce” [foreign] and
“niesolidne” [unsolid] (Białoszewski 2009: 8), and he feels like he is on vaca-
tion (Białoszewski 2009: 25), later he writes that somehow he likes it there
(Białoszewski 2009: 34) and later again “Raz tu dobrze, raz źle” [sometimes

His ample descriptions of his experiences of his new domestic surroundings
and his frequent trips and walks in the city also connect him with the 19th-
century urban figure of the flaneur: “Hessel projects the landscape of the past
on the landscape of the present. The result is a past city in the middle of the
emerging one,” Borg writes on Franz Hessel’s idea of the flaneur (Borg 2011:
61).30 Walter Benjamin’s flaneur, Borg continues, “is a transitional character,

30 “På samtidens stadslandskap projicerar Hessel förflytenhetens. Resultatet blir en dårta stad
mitt i den framväxande.”
with one foot in the old world and one in the new. He stops at the threshold, doubtful towards the modern mass society” (Borg 2011: 66).

Białoszewski’s apartment home is porous and permeable in the sense that he often receives visits there from his friends, he is interviewed there, he works there, different workers visit to repair the interior decorations, and neighbors ring the doorbell. He hears sounds and noise from neighboring apartments, the stairways, people walking on the stairs, and the elevator running, and he hears noise from outside – children playing, the traffic from the street, and the sound of the rain. Białoszewski himself walks in and out of the apartment constantly – up to the eleventh floor, through the stairways, up and down the elevator, through the corridor. He habitually watches his surrounding through the windows – and he describes how sunlight fills the apartment. These descriptions of the view include the surroundings of the apartment and widen it. He often visits the “galeria widokowa” on the eleventh floor, both alone and taking his visiting friends there to show them the view. This gives a broadening sense of home that is not limited to the apartment interior. And it emphasizes the blurry border between the apartment interior and the exterior, private and public space. At one point he notices that someone has moved in on the eleventh floor: “Na jedenastym piętrze palilo się światlo w dwóch pomieszczeniach. Galeria widokowa, widać z tego, będzie częściowo zamieszkania. Szkoda. Ale z niej nie zrezygnuję.” [On the eleventh floor the light was on in two rooms. The look-out gallery, was obviously being partly settled. Too bad. But I will not give it up.] (Białoszewski 2009: 38).

Besides sporadic encounters in the common areas, his interaction with his neighbors is limited. Their presence is nevertheless noticeable: he sees them, or their traces, and hears them. He complains about the noise they make although it also resembles his former apartment: “Kłótnie też tam miałem, w nocy. Mimo niewygody, to mnie uspokaja. To podobieństwo. Do złudzenia.” [Quarrels I had there too, at night. Despite the discomfort it calms me. It is similarity. Deceptively] (Białoszewski 2009: 43).

Alongside Białoszewski’s movement around the city, his experience of his new home in the apartment building also shows how the “city flows” (to borrow Marcus’ words) are present, despite the author’s own doubts regarding the location of the apartment in the city. As mentioned above, Białoszewski also perceives his new home as “foreign,” as alienating and isolating – experiences also connected with urban living.

Gradually Białoszewski is acclimatized to his new home. In one episode as he is walking home at night, he loses his orientation for a while and wonders where he will come out:

Ukazują mi się wielkie drzewa, bariera, podniesienie jakiejś jezdni.

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31 “(…) är en övergångsgestalt, med ena foten i den gamla världen och den andra i den nya. Han stannar på tröskeln, är tveksam till det moderna massamhället (…)”

[I see enormous trees, a barrier and the elevation of some road.

– It is nothing else, only the Wisła. But a house. A huge one, long, gray. After a couple of steps of orientation it turns out it is my house from the shortest side and my poplar trees. And the road to the bridge.]

As we have seen Białoszewski’s diary notes display the porousness of his high-rise home as well as its inclusion of both “city flows” and in the urban fabric. Next section attends to Kieślowski’s housing estate, where the analysis will demonstrate similar urban characteristics.

3.2.2 An Interesting Building: Kieślowski’s Threshold

During the 1980s the production of Krzysztof Kieślowski’s ten-episode TV drama Dekalog [The Decalogue] also began. The stories revolve around the residents of a high-rise in the same Warsaw suburb as Alternatywy 4, Ursynów. The chosen high-rise setting has attracted the attention of several critics. Polish film historian Tadeusz Lubelski suggests that the setting contributes to creating “credibility” and “cohesion between the episodes” (Lubelski 2009: 457), while Monika Maurer underscores its aesthetic-technical function since it suited “his camera’s love of windows, mirrors and reflections.” She also associates the high-rises with the Polish authoritarian system of the time since they “bear the unmistakable concrete facade of totalitarian rule” (Maurer 2000: 38–39). Izabela Kalinowska described the housing project setting as “a metaphor of the human condition.” According to the director, he and screenplay writer Krzysztof Piesiewicz wanted to tell ten universal stories in Dekalog, “takich, które zawsze mogą się zdarzyć w każdym życiu” [the kind that could happen to anyone] (Kieślowski 1997: 113). Therefore they wanted to begin each film by zooming in on a random person in a crowd, at a stadium, or among pedestrians on a sidewalk.


32 “Dbając o wiarygodność, a zarazem spójność cyklu, autorzy umieścili akcję dziesięciu filmów w tym samym miejscu: bohaterami są mieszkańcy jednego bloku na warszawskim osiedlu Ursynów.”
[In the end, we decided to set the Decalogue in a large multi-family housing estate with thousands of similar windows visible in the camera shot. That is one of the most beautiful of the new housing estates in Warsaw, which is why I chose it. It looks pretty awful. You can imagine what the others are like. The protagonists are connected through living in the same area. Sometimes they meet. They ask: ‘May I borrow a cup of sugar?’]⁴³

The physical setting, as we shall see, play a crucial role in the drama. Unlike the majority of the TV and film productions from this time, Dekalog is not primarily a comedy (although it certainly has humoristic traits). And as opposed to the focus on everyday life and its characteristics of the period in the comedies, Alternatywy 4, Czterdziestolatek, and Filip z konopi, in Dekalog there is no sign of them.

We ignored very Polish specifics, in other words, the daily grind of life around us: queues, meat ration cards, petrol shortages, a bureaucracy which reared its ugly head in even the most trivial of matters, the noisy public on the buses, the price increases as a constant topic of conversation, the ill dying in hospital corridors and so on. Everyday life was unbearably monotonous and terribly uninteresting (Kieślowski 1991: xii).⁴⁴

The TV series premiered in 1989, while the filmversions of episode five, Krótki film o zabijaniu [A Short Film about Killing] and six, Krótki film o miłości [A Short Film about Love] premiered in 1988. Each episode is connected with one of the ten commandments of Judaism and Christianity: “[Z]adają pytania o kondycję moralną współczesnego człowieka.” [They ask questions about the moral condition of contemporary man], as Agnieszka Tambor writes (Tambor 2012: 156).

The Dekalog films are a good example of Kieślowski’s exceptional use of film space. Besides the anonymous housing complex (which might have been located almost anywhere) which, as mentioned above, foregrounds the universality of the stories, its different parts (spaces) are used elaborately. Dekalog 4, for example, takes place in almost all rooms of the apartment interior (living room, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, entrance hall) as well as on the apartment balcony, in the elevator, in the basement, on the open space in front of their building – to mention only the spaces around the housing complex.

Many of the shots in the film show the characters passing through doors, gates or entering or exiting rooms or houses, which adds a sense of fluidity.

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³³ Or in similar wordings: “Finally we decided to place the action of Decalogue in a large housing estate, with thousands of similar windows framed within the establishing shot. Behind each of these windows, we said to ourselves, is a living human being, whose mind, whose heart and, even better, whose stomach is worthy of investigations” (Kieślowski 1991: xiii).
The number of complex moral questions and decisions that Kieślowski’s characters face can explain the prominence of the threshold chronotope in The Dekalog series. Mikhail Bakhtin described the threshold chronotope as “highly charged with emotion and value” (Bakhtin 2002: 21):

The word ‘threshold’ itself already has a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage (together with its literal meaning), and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold) (Bakhtin 2002: 21).

Bakhtin notes that the most important places in Dostoyevski’s novels are the threshold and its related chronotopes – the stairs, the hall, the corridor (and also the square and the street) places where “crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of man” (Bakhtin 2002: 21).

Critics have previously noted the presence of the motifs of voyeurism and eavesdropping in Dekalog, which according to Mazierska might be read as a “komentarz do życia w socjalistycznym wielkim mieście – ludzie tu sobie na-wzajem nie ufają, nie potrafiają się zjednoczyć, są samotni i wyalienowani, a zarazem rozpaczliwie łakną kontaktu, bliskości, przyjaźni i miłości.” [comment on life in the socialist big city – people do not trust each other here, they cannot unite, they are solitary and alienated, at the same time they hunger for contacts, intimacy, friendship and love] (Mazierska 2006: 23). I would like to go beyond Mazierska’s political interpretation of the voyeurism and instead connect it with another recurring motif: glass.

The motif of glass throughout the Dekalog is present in many different forms: apartment windows, car windows, glassed doors, shop display windows, concrete glass, window by the counter at the post office, but also glass of a computer and TV screen, mirror glass, binocular and microscope, as well as drinking glass (tumblers), bottles and aquarium. However, the glass present in this TV drama does not have the same function as in Człowiek z M-3, as a symbol of modernity and progress. It is not the pulsating city life that is seen through the windows or the modern architecture. The characters of Dekalog seem to be drawn to windows, whether transparent, blurred, or partly covered, that shed lights on them or through which they look out. Mircea Eliade considered both windows and doors to be “miejsca otwarcia” [places of accessibility] through which “Gods could come down to earth, and man could come up to heaven” (cf. Chapter 2.2).

Transparent glass also has a connotation of truth or clairvoyance (lucidity) as it does not hide, blur or shadow. But the glass in the films is, as mentioned, not always transparent, but blurred or partly covered (as for example by drawn blinds, the concrete glass, or by liquid). This reflects the characters’ uncertainty or their lack of knowledge. Glass is also a fragile material, however,
which suggests how easily and quickly one truth can replace another. In Dekalog 4, for example, the glass in one of the interior doors with frosted glass is broken by the father after the “truth” has been revealed regarding his relationship to his daughter. And in Dekalog 2, Dorota pushes her glass of tea off the table edge, which causes it to break into pieces on the floor after her meeting with the doctor that resulted in a quite pessimistic view, although still uncertain, of her husband’s survival chances. The glass breaks, and we see a subtle smile on Dorota’s face, suggesting she has reached a decision. The following day Dorota makes an appointment for an abortion, which implies that she has resolved her dilemma and has decided to have faith in her husband’s survival. The broken tea glass thus represents Dorota’s clairvoyance. In Dekalog 1, the young boy Pawel, experiments with an old milk bottle, which he has filled with water and measures its time to freeze outside. The water freezes in an hour, and the glass bottle is also cracked, which foreshadows the events at the end of that film, when the ice on the lake breaks and the boy drowns. That it is the ice – a material with quite obvious visual similarities to glass – that breaks is significant, as it also illustrates how the (scientific) truths are shown to be uncertain and unreliable.

Windows connect us as they allow visual communication, but they also separate as they provide a barrier for oral and physical communication. Glass is also a material that reflects light, which means it is not always transparent from all perspectives. The visual communication through glass can therefore be one-sided, or simply interrupted, returning (reflecting) an image of oneself.

In Dekalog 8, the universality of the episode stories is stressed. The professor reveals to the visiting Elżbieta that the doctor and the wife of the dying husband of the story they had discussed in her class earlier (and also the main characters of Dekalog 2) live in her building. Elżbieta’s response to this information: “Ciekawy dom” [An interesting building] is however met with the professor’s emphasis on its non-uniqueness as she says: “Jak każdy. W każdym domu, w każdym mieszkaniu jacyś ludzie, i tak dalej, tak dalej...” [As all of them. In every house, in every apartment, there are some people, and so on, and so on...].

The universality of the issues raised in the films is also stressed by how the use of glass as windows involves the spectator: the spectator, watching Dekalog on the screen, watches the characters looking at other screens or through windows. This is especially prominent in Dekalog 6, where the viewer watches Pawel looking in his binoculars through both his window and Magda’s window at Magda, as well as in Dekalog 2, where we watch the doctor looking in a microscope at samples (also incapsulated in glass). This involvement, or raising the awareness, of the spectator as a part of the film actions, connects (and thus emphasizes the identification of) the spectator with the film drama.

The films contain many chance encounters facilitated by the setting: neighbors meet in the yard outside, in the corridors, in the elevator, walking in or
out of the building. The residents also run into non-neighbors such as the mailman, milkman, janitor or landlord. In this sense the housing projects of Ursynów are depicted as a part of city life, i.e. the urban experience takes place at home and its vicinity (the housing estates). In Dekalog 4 this is particularly evident as the neighbors or more distant characters participate and affect the unfolding of the narrative: they ring the doorbell, telephone and send the elevator (containing the main characters) to different floors.

Several of the characters live alone, but their apartments never seem isolated among the many others of the huge housing complex of Ursynów. Besides the prominent role of windows as “miejsca otwarcia” [places of accessibility] where either the resident looks out/through or other residents can look in (as analyzed above), the apartments themselves serve as meeting places for the characters, the doorbells often ring, friends visit, the telephone rings, and they receive letters or notes. The apartments thus never seem enclosed or isolated but porous, and they do not promote home as a private intimate sphere. None of the characters live in a traditional (nuclear) family constellation – which also shows how Kieślowski separates the apartments from the home of traditional family life.

Quite in opposition to Kieślowski’s Dekalog, the home in Marek Koterski’s Życie wewnętrzne [Inner Life] (1986) is that of the nuclear family, a closed private sphere, but never an asylum. It resembles the critical depictions of the bourgeoisie of Young Poland. As Podraza-Kwiatkowska writes: those depicted interiors “stają się pułapką, więzieniem, męczą się w nich niedobrane małżeństwa, nie rozumiane córki, kłóczący się z ojcami synowie. Jedynym wyjściem staje się nierzadko ucieczka.” [become a trap, a prison, mismatched marriages, misunderstood daughters, sons fighting with their fathers. The only way out is often an escape] (Podraza-Kwiatkowska 1997: 114, cf. Section 2.2.4).

The feature film Życie wewnętrzne is part of Marek Koterski’s film cycle, which began with Dom wariatów [The House of Fools] (1984) and the latest release of which was in 2011 (Baby są jakieś inne [Man, Chicks Are Just Different]). All revolve around the frustrated intellectual main character – Adaś (or sometimes Michał) Miauczyński, who lives in a blokowisko. Miauczyński has been described as the alter ego of the director, but he is commonly also described as the average Pole (Rupszel 2007; Sobolewski 2006).35 The director himself described his protagonist with the following words:

Niezborny i przegrany, dosyć nawet sympatyczny polski mazgaj i nieudacznik będący bardziej produktem zdarzeń niż ich kreatorem, niemal po obłomowsku bierny, ale pełen pretensji do życia (Hollender 1995).

35 “Adaś Miauczyński to żywa emanacja ciemnej strony i podświadomosci przeciętnego Polaka” (Rupszel 2007).
Koterski’s films take place to a varying degree in the blokowisko. Życie wewnętrzne [Inner life] (1986) and Dzień Świra [Day of the Wacko] (2002) are films where most part of the action takes place there and where the setting has a more prominent and structuring role in the story.

In line with the title of the film – Życie wewnętrzne – the film almost exclusively takes place inside a high-rise, where the protagonist lives with his wife and son. Shot in very pale coloring, which almost borders on black-and-white, the film consists of several monotonous repetitions of everyday life: the married couple eat soup in the kitchen, they eat dinner in front of the TV, the main character does chores (saws) in the hallway, he rides the elevator, smokes in his car. This monotony, together with the virtual lack of colors, reflects the lack of feelings and the protagonist’s opinion towards his marriage. Although there are repeated shots of Miauczyński as he rides up and down in the elevator in the film, he never gets farther than his car, parked just outside the building entrance. The high-rise setting thus functions as a metaphor for his feelings of “entrapment” in his marriage. In one of the last scenes, shortly before the couple file for divorce, Miauczyński, in his pyjamas, suddenly runs out of the bedroom, down the stairs and stops at the foot of the building, gazing terrified at it. The camera moves slowly upwards on the façade, which has the visual effect of the building leaning over him. This shot is especially noticeable as the film has no other scenes that include any kind of view from the high-rise.

Despite the fact that the home in the film is that of the nuclear family, it is undoubtedly an unhappy home for a deteriorating family. It is a private sphere, but never an asylum, rather suffocating and prison-like.

Although the film scenes never extend beyond the high-rise and its nearest vicinity, there is a fluidity between the apartment and the high-rise interiors as Miauczyński and his neighbors often meet and interact in the common areas. Thus, although the film represents the home as a private sphere, the focus on spatiality and movement remains.

3.2.3 A Hole in the Wall: Panna Nikt

In Tomek Tryzna’s novel Panna Nikt [Girl Nobody] (1994), written originally in 1988, a story about the coming of age of the teen-age girl Marysia, the motif of a shift of location returns. This time it coincides with what Housman Gel- fant termed “the portrait study” in the tradition of “novels of initiation” (Housman Gelfant 1954: 11). Marysia’s family, which besides herself consists of her parents, her two younger brothers and her two younger sisters, moves from the countryside into the newly built housing projects in Piaskowa Góra outside
Walbrzych. There she befriends her two new classmates Ewa and Kasia, who come to open doors to new worlds that have previously not been available or visible to her.

Tryzna’s novel constitutes a turning point among the urban narratives of this survey. The novel is the first to give a closer working-class perspective on the housing projects, which Alternatywy 4 and Filip z konopi only touched upon. Her family perceives the change of residence to the new concrete high-rise neighborhood generally optimistically, and it is clear what an improvement of living standards the relocation means to them:

To właśnie dzięki kopalni dostaliśmy nowe mieszkanie w Walbrzychu, na osiedlu Piaskowa Góra. Jeszcze w nim nie byłem. Za to mamusia była i opowiadała, że jest bardzo ładne, że są tam aż trzy pokoje. Jeden duży i dwa małutkie. I kuchnia, i łazienka, i osobno ubikacja, z czego mamusia bardzo się cieszy, bo jak ktoś będzie chciał się załatwić, to nie będzie przeszkadzał temu, kto akurat będzie się mył (Tryzna 1997: 13).

Initially Marysia compares the new apartment with the old “baracks” where they have lived before. She sees advantages and disadvantages with them both: “We had our own garden there and a chunk of field, but here instead there are so many rooms and a lift and a bathroom and even our own half-bath inside the flat” (Tryzna 1999: 43).

She further compares the new bathroom with their old one, using the word “luxury” to describe the new one:

Jak tu czysto i przyjemnie. W Jawiszów mieliśmy jedną budkę z serduszkim na cały barak, okropnie śmierdziało i latały muchy. (...) A tu mamy tylko dla siebie i ubikację i umywalkę i łazienkę z wanną o krok. No i zawsze jest ciepła woda. (...) I można się kąpać, kiedy się chce. (...) Boże, jak to się człowiek szybko przyzwyczaja do luksusu (Tryzna 1997: 73).

[It’s so nice and clean here. In Jawiszów we had only one outhouse with a heart-shaped hole in the wooden door for the entire frame-house unit. It smelt really bad and there were flies buzzing around. (...) Here we have it all to ourselves — a loo, a sink and a bathroom with a bath just a step away. We always have hot water. (...) You can also have a bath whenever you want. (...) God, how quickly one gets used to luxury] (Tryzna 1999: 43–44).
However, Marysia’s mother is more ambivalent towards the new apartment. In a conversation with Marysia’s friend Kasia, who compliments the neighborhood, Marysia’s mother answers with contempt: “– Eee, wygwizdów – mówi mamusia pogardliwie. - Posadzili naród do bloków, niech siedzi. To siedzi człowiek jak na słupie, co ma zrobić. Nawet do okna strach podejść” (Tryzna 1997: 151) [‘Ah, it’s just a hole in the wall.’ Mum shrugs her shoulders. ‘They stick people in a high-rise and let them sit. So you sit, like you’re on a pole, what’re you going to do? You’re even afraid to go up to the window’] (Tryzna 1999: 90).

Unlike the homes in the works discussed previously, Marysia’s home is clearly a closed private family sphere; there is a clear divide between the sphere of the home and the city. Marysia’s mother’s skepticism towards this new urban apartment home is illustrated by her eagerness to hang curtains to prevent neighbors from looking in. She even compares the apartment with an aquarium: “Człowiek miota się po domu jak po akwarium” (Tryzna 1997: 135) [Here you are, scurrying around like you were in an aquarium] (Tryzna 1999: 81).

In Panna Nikt we see a resurgence of the “anti-urban myth.” Most parts of the novel take place far from the family-centered home in the high-rises of Piaskowa Góra. Marysia’s school is located in the center of the city, and it is in the center or at Ewa’s and Kasia’s homes – places represented as another world in the eyes of Marysia – where Marysia spends most of her time. For Marysia, the new high-rise area becomes a symbolic gateway or a threshold to the city and modern life, as well as to adulthood. In the center of Wałbrzych, Marysia enjoys city life with her new friends: there she is free from the surveillance of her parents, she frequents cafés and restaurants, and she and her friends sit by the market square fountain; she travels by taxi. It is a life that allures her. These attractions, however, are revealed to be false invitations (false promises). The city is depicted as tempting, demoralizing, and finally unavailable and leading to the final fall of the heroine. The novel depicts Piaskowa Góra as a suburb to the city, of lower status.

3.3 Chapter Conclusions

The scarce housing situation was the backdrop as early as 1948, in Leonard Buczkowski’s drama comedy film Skarb. The protagonists, a married couple, strive to find a place ‘of their own’ in the ruins of post-war Warsaw, but because of a misunderstanding they have to share a room with some quite eccentric characters. Like many of the works discussed in this chapter, Skarb shows characteristics of the apartment plot with its open homes, and it contains the motifs of a false promise and a shift of location. An obvious difference arises in the endings where Skarb in accordance with the norms of its time – and quite in opposition to the works of the 1970s – ends with optimism:
the couple and their fellow residents are saved by the “socialist heroes,” i.e. construction workers that are constructing the new W-Z highway through Warsaw, after which they receive their own apartment in a newly built house.

A common denominator among almost all of the works discussed in this chapter is that they revolve around a shift (in location). This together with the search for private space and the foregrounded constructional flaws are characteristic of the apartment-house plot of this period, as they “shape the narrative in some key way” (Robertson Wojcik 2010: 3). The motif of the shift of location is accompanied by the motif of the false promise – a motif common in the type of city novels Housman Gelfant named “the portrait study” and “novels of initiation.” In these works however, it is not the whole city that lures and promises, but rather the blokowisko.

Two of the first works from the period, Człowiek z M-3 and Czterdziesiątatek depict a romanticized view of the city, one that is modern and moving forward with bright future perspectives. The housing projects are the new urban (modern) dwelling. Although placed in the Polish socialist context of the 1970s, both male protagonists have traces of the 19th-century city wanderer in their experience of the city, displaying the emblematic sites of central, socialist Warsaw as well as the new parts under construction. Czterdziesiątatek revolves around a modern urban nuclear family and their urban home, which is depicted as open and porous. The protagonist of Człowiek z M-3 is moreover a modern bachelor who assimilates his conquest of the city with the conquest of women. Poet Miron Białoszewski’s diary notes could likewise be described as the observations of a “city wanderer.”

Although Warsaw has a specific role as a setting in the films, the works discussed include information about both city and city district. Talarczyk-Gubała observes however:

Warszawa anonimowych, identycznych osiedli mieszkaniowych nie różniła się niczym od innych polskich miast, może jedynie skalą problemu (Talarczyk-Gubała 2007: 246).

[The city of Warsaw of anonymous, identical housing projects did not differ from other Polish cities, maybe only in the scale of the problem.]

In two of the works, part of the story revolves around how a nuclear family is prevented from achieving their own private space. In Klopotliwy gość a non-human intruder invades their new apartment home, and in Nie ma róży bez ognia the young married couple is likewise disturbed in their privacy because of rules in the bureaucratic housing system. In both these works, the concrete apartment houses come to symbolize a false promise – a symbolism that also returns in the novel Panna Nikt. There, however, the main promise consists of the city (as it also to some extent does in Nie ma róży bez ognia) rather than private space.
The two comedy films/TV series from the 1980s, *Filip z konopi* and *Alternatywy 4*, display, on the one hand, the most harsh political critique of the corruption and capriciousness of the system using the housing projects as political allegories. The constructional flaws are never as evident, and their location is never as peripheral as in those works. On the other hand, the housing projects are also depicted here in an idyllic manner, with neighborly bonds reflecting a strong community. The porousness and permeability, or even the constructional flaws also take part in the creation of relations (love, friendship or cooperations) between the residents.

In *Dekalog*, although filmed at the same location as *Alternatywy 4*, the housing projects are never portrayed as peripheral. Here they are depicted as being more urban, which is shown in how the characters take a natural part in the city-center life and in the frequent chance encounters between both anonymous strangers and neighbors, which reflects “the city flows.”

This chapter has shown that the ‘representational space’ of the housing projects – the blockowisko chronotope – is conceived as lingering between the city and the countryside. On the one hand, they were perceived as urban, as they were ascribed negative characteristics commonly assigned to the city (cf. the anti-urban myth): the lack of privacy, immorality, as a threat to the traditional family, inauthenticity or illusoriness (the buildings are full of flaws or fall apart). At the same time the critical representations also drew from the negative aspects commonly ascribed to the countryside: besides underscoring the distance to the city center, they were depicted as located in the countryside.

But the characters also emphasized their location outside of civilization, “jak w pustyni” [as in the desert] or as in *Alternatywy 4* or *Kłopotliwy gość*, where the blockowisko was located on bare ground (with no signs of neither city nor nature). This has several connotations: on the one hand, it signifies “nothingness” or “absence”; on the other hand, it implies something else, something which is neither city nor nature. Białoszewski, for example, writes about feeling like a tourist, which suggests he is residing in a foreign place. However, the lack of anonymity, the familiarity and the neighborly relationships that develop, where the characters interfere in each other’s lives, intrude, eavesdrop, but also help each other, are rather characteristic of “urban localism,” as Robertson Wojcik noted.
4 In a World Apart: Fatalism, Non-Places, and Heterotopia

Chapter 3 concluded with a discussion on Tryzna’s novel *Panna Nikt*, which represented a change of perspective in the depiction of the housing projects as it begun to represent them as homes to a segregated working class, and with this the “anti-urban myth” was revived. This chapter will continue on this topic and concentrate on the literary and cinematic works that at the turn of the new millennium placed its main focus on the new social and economic realities in Poland. As we shall see, there are both new motifs and another spatiality present in these works. The motif of escape, fatalist narratives, and the spatial representations of “non-places” and heterotopias are now the center of attention. The chapter begins with a brief outline of the history of the political and economic transformation in Poland in order to provide a historical context to the social changes after 1989, followed by an introduction to the renewed interest during the first years of the 21st century in the concrete housing projects by the artistic sphere.

After the system change in 1989, Poland, like the other former Soviet satellite states, went through several economic structural changes, directed by finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz and the neoliberal politics of the World Bank. Historian Peter Johnsson describes the economic changes as “characterized by harsh austerity measures and an almost total liberation of market forces” (Johnsson 2010: 5). Among the East European transition states, Poland has usually been seen as a success story with steady positive GDP growth, increased life expectancy, decreased infant mortality etc. (Johnsson 2010: 5). At the same time, this economic growth has been accompanied by an escalation of social and economic disparities, Peter Johnson continues. The income gap in Poland has doubled since the fall of communism, and it is now one of the highest in the EU (Johnsson 2009: 452; Johnsson 2010: 6; Toynbee 2011). Relative poverty, defined by the EU and OECD as 60 percent or less of the median income, increased during the 1990s until Poland joined the EU, when it slowly declined, today being around seventeen to twenty percent (Johnsson 2010: 8).

The political economist Jane Hardy describes the reforms accordingly:

Since 1990, social policies have undergone many reforms by consecutive Polish governments of different political persuasions. All of these reforms have
been marked by drastic budget cuts and reduced welfare, and accompanied by decentralisation of state responsibility for social and family policy (Hardy 2009: 115).

When the transformation to a democratic and a free market system began in 1989, Poland was an industrial society with a high degree of workers (Ost 2005: 13–15). During the transformation and in the “dominant postcommunist ‘democratization’ narrative” (Ost 2005: 17) labor has been marginalized, and the status of workers has been reduced. The political scientist David Ost compares this with the democratization processes that took place about a hundred years earlier, which to a large extent focused on the inclusion of workers.

Isn’t it a blight on postcommunist democratization that the chief losers were those who made the transformation possible? That those whose solidarity strikes had helped make capitalist democracy possible would soon find themselves working in firms whose managers tolerated neither unions nor collective bargaining, or perhaps working as ‘independent contractors’ without benefits or legal protection and subject to dismissal at any time? (Ost 2005: 17)

Several scholars have observed how poverty has spread after the transformation. The political scientist Jakub Majmurek and the sociologist Piotr Szumlewicz write that:

"Bieda, rozwarstwienie, blokady w możliwościach awansu społecznego olbrzymich grup ludności nie są jedynie pozostałościami po pierwszej fazie transformacji. Pomimo wysokiego wzrostu PKB w ostatnich latach, w Polsce wciąż bardzo wielu ludzi żyje poniżej minimum socjalnego i egzystencjalnego, utrzymuje się wysoki wskaźnik długoterminowego bezrobocia, a jakość edukacji i służby zdrowia pozostaje na bardzo niskim poziomie (Majmurek & Szumlewicz 2009: 9).

[Poverty, social stratification, blockades in the possibilities of social advancement for an enormous group of people are not just residues after the first phase of the transformation. Despite the high GDP growth, many people still live below the social and economic subsistence level, and the high level of long term unemployment maintains, and the quality of education and health institutions remains on a very low level.]

Jane Hardy continues on the same note:

"Since 1990 poverty has become an intrinsic reality of transformation and is highly visible in public places. The sharp end of neoliberalism is homeless people living in railway stations, the proliferation of begging and reports in newspapers of the tragedy of old people unable to survive on pensions (Hardy 2009: 118).

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36 According to David Ost (2005) around 60%.
The most disadvantaged group in the transition is the working class. Their relative income has decreased during the 1990s (from 91 % to 76 % of the average income). Johnsson continues:

As a consequence of the permanently high unemployment and the increased social gaps within Polish society, a new social group has come into being: the extremely poor, the outcast, a group sociologists (…) usually call ‘lumpenproletariat’ (Johnsson 2009: 453).37

From the Artistic Perspective
In 2001 Polish journalist Zdzisław Pietrasik (2001) notes in the article “Człowiek z bloku” [Man of the high-rise] in the weekly periodical Polityka how Polish film has begun to foreground the concrete high-rise. On the one hand, it is the home of “dzieci gorszej Polski” [the children of the lesser Poland] and that “życie toczy się w ponurych osiedlach, gdzie rodzi się zło i znikąd nie ma nadziei.” [life is set in the gloomy housing projects, where evil is born and hope is nowhere]; on the other hand, the high-rise is a metaphor for Poland, he writes.

The interest in the concrete high-rises that Pietrasik observed within Polish cinema was also visible on the Polish art scene. Besides the earlier renovations of the prefabricated apartment buildings and the re-painting of the facades, revitalization projects were launched in different districts of the larger cities during the first decade of the new millennium. Some of them had an artistic angle, such as artist Paweł Althamer’s “art for social change,” whose work Bródno (2000) consisted in an eleven-story multi-family housing estate in Bródno, whose residents after certain instructions, created the number “2000” across the facade through the lights in their apartments. Althamer has continued his local participation-based work in projects such as “RE-BLOK. Blokowiska. Reaktywacja.” [RE-BLOCK. Concrete high-rises. Reactivation] in the suburb Targówek outside Warsaw. Other “revitalization” projects have focused more on urban planning and sociological aspects, such as the organization Odblokuj’s projects around Warsaw, for example in Rakowiec and Służew. Common among these projects is the participation of local residents. Another characteristic is the focus on and re-evaluation of the common space (wspólna przestrzeń) of the housing projects, which in that sense is a revitalization of the original ideas behind the modernists’ construction (cf. www.odblokuj.org; Kowalska 2013).

In the 2007 the art exhibition at the Center for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, Betonowe dziedzictwo. Od le Corbusier’a do blokersów [The Concrete Heritage. From Le Corbusier to Blokersi], discussed the blokowisko from a

37 “I spåren av den permanent höga arbetslösheten och de ökade sociala skillnaderna i det polska samhället har en helt ny social grupp börjat uppstå: de riktigt fattiga, de utstagna, en grupp som [av] sociologer (…) brukar betecknas som ‘underklassen.’”
historical perspective. The exhibition showed the housing projects from different angles: architectural, artistic, and ideological.

In the artistic production of the first decade of the new millennium, the fascination with the physical surroundings and the concrete housing projects became manifest. Besides the above-mentioned artist Paweł Althamer and the exhibition Betonowe dziedzictwo, Julita Wójcik (Falowiec, 2005/2006), Katarzyna Józefowicz (Habitat, 1993–1996), Józef Robakowski (Z mojego okna 1978–1999, 2000), Jarosław Kozakiewicz (Natura (do) mieszkania, 2007) are just some of the examples of artists who have incorporated the housing projects in their work. As the art historian Gabriela Świtek writes: “many works by Polish artists draw their inspiration (...) from the actual daily reality, which in the Polish context usually means living in minimal dwellings in megalomaniac-sized housing estates” (Świtek 2011: 49). “Inspiration,” Świtek continues, “does not mean affirmation, and artists often engage in criticism of architecture as an everyday environment, or introduce an element of irony, playing with scale, surprising material illusions (...)” (Świtek 2011: 51).

4.1 Escape from Here

The first years of the twenty-first century also saw the emergence of several Polish films and novels dealing with the new social realities that had followed the fall of the communist system and the introduction of a capitalist market economy. These works usually focused on social and economic exclusion, with a certain emphasis on the youth, the men who have come to be known as blokersi38 (from the Polish word blok – referring to their home) or dresiarze (from the Polish word for tracksuit, dres – referring to their look). Independent films such as Że życie ma sens [That Life Is Meaningful] (2000, Grzegorz Lipieć) and Uciec stąd [Escape from Here] (2005, Mathias Mezler), the feature film Cześć Tereska! [Hi Tereska!] (2001, Robert Gliński), and the documentary Blokersi [The homeboys] (2001, Sylwester Latkowski), represent this new current. Common among these works is the autobiographical and “realist” elements as well as the fatalism surrounding the protagonists. Another common trait among several works is the motif of (frustrated) escape. This

38 Blokersi/dresiarze are commonly considered to be alcoholics, drug abusers, and criminals.
39 According to Jarosław Trybuś (2011b: 229), it was the journalist Maria Zbąska who first used the term blokersi in an article in Gazeta Wyborcza in 1997 about the murder of a young resident in the Warsaw area Gocław. In a study of the housing estates in the Warsaw area Wrzeciono from 2003, the authors do not use the term blokersi, but write that: “In Wrzeciono we can observe groups of young people spending their afternoons hanging around stairwells or cellars. Most of these youngsters are perceived as dangerous. They have nothing to do, because of the lack of infrastructure on the one hand, and on the other from the lack of routines and money for them to spend their free time in a more productive way. In fact, they are not as dangerous as they are perceived to be” (Węclawowicz et al. 2003b: 68).
motif is especially interesting considering that one of the most common motifs of the works discussed in Chapter 3 was that of the shift of location. Similar to that motif, the “escape” is usually accompanied by a “false promise.”

The independent film Że życie ma sens is set in the housing projects of Osiedle Piastowskie in Zielona Góra, which is also where director Grzegorz Lipiec and the co-founders of the film production company Sky Piastowskie are from. The autobiographical traits of the film also come forward in the story, which revolves around a couple of friends from the same neighborhood, who have received the opportunity to make a film together. But, through an old friend, Vincent, the young men are instead drawn into the world of drug abuse. The motif of the (frustrated) escape is present both in the opportunity of filmmaking and in the ‘escape’ offered by the drug intoxication. In the beginning of the film there is a focus on the community among the friends. They meet and socialize in their homes or on the benches outside the blok, where they are depicted as, although using drugs, happily interacting. As the drug abuse increases the community shrinks: their families are shown to split up, and their group of friends is also disintegrated.

The action of the film is set almost exclusively in the housing projects (in the apartment homes or in the courtyard in front of the buildings). The center of Zielona Góra is shown only as the characters have a meeting with a drug dealer. Although the apartment homes are the main meeting place for the characters, they are sealed off from the surrounding society, as the random meetings are limited to their group of friends or their (known) “enemies.” There is a fluidity between the apartments and the osiedle as the characters are shown to move freely between those places, but never farther than that. The director refers to his and other independent films as “truthful”:


[[I]ndependent film is truer. (...) We tell simple and true stories (...). We try to create stories that are close to us, close to young people and speak about them. I think that is where the strength is. Independent films are true.]

The film Uciec stąd, according to its director Mathias Mezler, is a story “(...) o malej grupce przyjaciół z jednego z szarych poznańskich osiedli, takiego

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40 In an interview, Grzegorz Lipiec says they started making films out of boredom in their neighborhood: “W tamtych czasach oprócz kopania piłki i kilku innych normalnych rzeczy jakie robią nastoletkowie nie mieliśmy zbyt wiele do wyboru i w zasadzie trochę nudziliśmy się na naszym osiedlu (...). Siedzieliśmy przed blokiem i strasznie się nudziliśmy, więc wynajęliśmy go [faceta] i postanowiliśmy zapłacić mu pieniżki, żeby sfilmował nasze wygłypy przed kamerą” (Marach 2000).

41 Pseudonym for Mateusz Górny.
najbardziej niebezpiecznego.” [about a small group of friends from one of the gray neighborhoods of Poznań, one of the most dangerous] (Marecki 2009: 343). The film is shot in the district called Komandoria in Poznań. “Kiedy jesteś na tym osiedlu, to widzisz tylko szarość.” [When you are in that neighborhood you only see grayness], Mezler explains (Marecki 2009: 343). The film follows Darek and his two friends Rogalo and Bubu Oxford. The blokowisko here represents the whole Polish society, as their dreams to escape are directed towards work abroad. In the first scene the camera sweeps along the facades of the housing projects while the main protagonist Darek is speaking about them, underscoring their homogeneity:

Blok. Wytwór komunistycznego myślenia, który miał na celu skupienia jak największej liczby ludzi na jak najmniejszym terenie i propagowanie komunistycznych idei ludności wszystkich klas społecznych przez umieszczenie ich w jednakowych lokalach. Tak to są właśnie bloki (…). I bez względu na to w jakiej części Polski się znajdujemy (…) zawsze są takie same, tak szare, że szkoda robić o nich kolorowy film.

[Blok. A creation of Communist thinking whose goal was to concentrate the most number of people in the smallest possible terrain and to promote the Communist idea of a common people of all social classes through placing them in identical places. That is precisely bloki (…). No matter in what part of Poland we are (…) they are always the same, so gray, that there is no use making a color film about them.]

Darek has received a work visa for the United States but is impeded by a policeman who uses him to catch his drug-dealing friend Bubu Oxford. The characters’ homes are decadent, but closed, safe meeting places for the friends, and assaults take place outside on the streets. Neither in Że życie ma sens nor in Uciec stąd are there any views, or glimpses of the outside surroundings, shown from the apartment windows. The windows are either covered with curtains or blinds or it is dark outside, which shows the lack of any visual connection between the home interiors and the exterior surroundings. The protagonists of the films go out on their balconies only once, and there is a shot of the view. Lipa looks down at the empty courtyard, and the shot is one of the shots adumbrating suicide. When the camera sweeps over Darek’s view, it shows a gray landscape of housing estates and trafficked roads. The main action takes place on the outskirts of the city; only one scene is set in the center. Darek and Rogalo walk around and only stop to look at the travelling adverts in the window of a travel agency. Both Uciec stąd and Że życie ma sens have elements of Christian religiosity. As a sign of his remorse, Lipa in Że życie ma sens goes to a church, as he is experiencing the downfall of his drug abuse. In Uciec stąd, the symbol of the cross recurs as Darek battles with his own moral behavior. Both films also focus primarily on closed social groupings with almost no connections to the society outside. This means that the
films only point to personal causes of the protagonists’ downfall and marginality.

Mezler explains that the film has obvious autobiographical elements such as the hopelessness after high school, his father’s mortal disease, how his friends emigrated, and how he himself felt hatred towards the surroundings for not giving him a chance, and his own wish to escape (Marecki 2009: 348).

The Forgotten Housing Projects of *Moje miasto*

Marek Lechki’s film *Moje miasto* [My Town] (2002) offers a rather optimistic counter image to the disruption of the traditional family and the anonymer portrayed in many other films and literature of this time. The film is set against the collapse of the mining industry in the Upper Silesia region of Poland. The high-rise of the setting is located on the outskirts of an anonymous town, bordering on empty fields. The protagonist, a 25-year-old man, Goździk, who lives with his mother, walks around the house and the nearby area observing and helping his neighbors. His father, an unemployed alcoholic, has escaped the apartment building and sits by a nearby pond, fishing. The protagonist, who is himself unemployed, also explains that all his friends but one have left, and the film ends with the protagonist’s family’s decision to move to the countryside. But in contrast with the other works discussed in this chapter, the family unites and takes an active decision to move away, i.e. escape.

The housing project of the film seems to be stuck in time, as if it has been forgotten in the system transformation and the recent modernization of Poland: there are no signs of any modern technology – no phones, no televisions, and no computers. In one scene some residents follow a sports game through an old radio in the kitchen. Goździk’s only friend, “all the others have left,” has a vintage car – the only car, besides an ambulance, shown in the film. And beneath the building are the stairs to one of the closed mines. The protagonist’s childlike appearance also adds to the anachronism. His movement around in the house and area, exploring and observing the whole surrounding with an almost naïve curiosity, as well as two neighboring young men, who, like school children, throw gum in Goździk’s hair as they try to tease him as he passes them in the stairs, adds to this. The pace of life of the characters is not that of the hectic city, but of a village in the countryside.

The rather optimistic take in this film – it does not end tragically nor without hope – is also emphasized by the cheerful accompanying music.

The social life between the neighbors is well developed: they help each other, engaging in each other’s problems, and they unite in social gatherings. They run into each other in the common hallways and stairways. The common space of the stairs has a homey/domestic appearance, as it is decorated with print wallpaper and plants, which further emphasizes the fluidity between the

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42 Lechki’s film was part of the Polish TVP’s (Telewizja Polska, TVP) project “Generation 2000.”
private apartments and semi-private common space of the stairways. Except for the unfortunate burglary by Uncle Jan (which is later sorted out), the residents receive friendly visits in their apartments, and the sounds they hear from their neighbors are never annoying. When they see, watch (or peek at) each other, it is done quite innocently or caringly.

The dichotomy between the city and the countryside resurges as a motif in the film. The housing projects of *Moje miasto* are never presented as part of the urban fabric. Only in one scene does the main character go to the city center, and what he sees is only a blurry view of the neon signs along the streets, suggesting its unavailability. Instead it is the presence of nature that is significant. It seems to surround them completely; the father of the protagonist has escaped to the nearby lake, where he sits alone all day fishing, hoping for a nibble. When the neighbors gather in a party, it is also by the lake and around a hearth. Nature is depicted as a joyful place and the source of hope. The camera close-ups on animals underscore the attraction nature has on the protagonist. The film begins with a rat entering the apartment of one of the neighbors. Later the camera follows a bird flock flying by, and the protagonist closely studies an ant on the floor. And in the end of the film, the protagonist and his family decide to move (escape) to a house in the countryside. The village-like appearance of the film’s housing estate serves to illustrate its abandonness and status as a remnant of the Polish (economic) system transformation.

*Moje miasto* goes against the grain compared with other contemporary films as it depicts the concrete suburb as homey: the apartments are porous, the social bonds strong. As demonstrated by the fluidity of the protagonist’s movement, the home of the characters is not limited to the individual apartment. However, this apartment building is not the locus for chance encounters with strangers or any “city flow,” as Marcus called it. The building and its surroundings rather resemble a small village – where everybody knows each other. The vertical use of space has symbolic significance. The protagonist explores both the basement and the roof of the building. The basement and below it is the past – the old mine; from the roof the view is of the empty frost-ridden fields that suggest his future perspectives. In one of the last scenes, as he goes down to the basement to investigate what is hidden in the old mine, he stops and changes his mind about going further. An act that underscores the impossibility of reviving the past and the protagonists’ will to move forward. The young male protagonist Goździk also follows a different model of characterization compared with other contemporaneous portraits of unemployed young men, who are commonly described as violent, disillusioned, drug abusing or criminal. Goździk, on the contrary, is a naïve optimist with a friendly and helpful personality.
4.2 Everyone Steals Here: *Cześć Tereska*

Like *Moje Miasto*, Robert Gliński’s feature film *Cześć Tereska* [Hi Tereska] (2001) also almost exclusively takes place within or in the vicinity of the housing projects. The setting of Gliński’s film however is shown as being surrounded not by nature, but by the non-places of supermodernity.

*Cześć Tereska* follows the rite of passage into adulthood of a teenage girl, Tereska, who lives with her parents and her younger sister in an apartment in a *blokowisko*. Tereska is interested in fashion and supposedly has an artistic talent, but she is not admitted into the dream designer art school and settles for a tailoring school instead. There she meets girls who have no illusions about their future and who smoke, drink, and steal from each other. When Tereska’s wallet is stolen, she simply gets the response: “Take someone else’s. Everyone steals here.” After initial resistance, Tereska adopts her new friends’ life style. At the same time, her family’s financial hardships and her father’s alcoholism and violence become more prominent in the film. The film ends tragically: Tereska is raped and then she beats to death an innocent wheelchair-bound older man, Edzio – an act that may be read as marking Tereska’s complete moral decay.

The film critic Ewa Mazierska classified *Cześć Tereska* as being part of what she named “The New Cinema of Moral Concern” – namely films “have in common their setting in contemporary Poland and sensitivity to social issues that are nevertheless represented from the perspective of an individual faced with important moral choices” (Mazierska 2007: 143). She points out that the films of the Cinema of Moral Concern of the 1970s were usually set in provincial Poland in “order to show the helplessness and alienation of the character and dysfunctionality of the socialist state” (Mazierska 2007: 145).

**The Past versus the Present**

The movie’s opening scenes are flashbacks from Tereska’s innocent and happy childhood: the playground in front of the *blokowisko* is full of joyful children, and the scenes show Tereska’s First Communion and her taking an oath on the first day of school. The oath includes promises of good behavior, respectful treatment of other people and service the fatherland; during the First Communion ceremony, the children are singing a song saluting their parents:

O mamo droga, chcę ci jedno powiedzieć, rzecz bardzo prostą, co wywoła twój uśmiech, miłuję ciebie przecież jesteś mą mamą, o tobie śnię, tak pragnę cię, tak kocham cię.

O tato drogi, chcę ci jedno powiedzieć, rzecz bardzo prostą co wywoła twój uśmiech, miłuję ciebie jesteś przecież moim tatą, o tobie śnię tak pragnę cię, tak kocham cię.
Dear mother, I want to tell you something, something quite sincere that will make you smile, I cherish you, you are my mother, I dream of you, I need you, I love you.

Dear father, I want to tell you something, something quite sincere that will make you smile, I cherish you, you are my father, I dream of you, I need you so, I love you so.

These scenes set the ground for the innocence and values still intact in Tereska’s childhood. When the viewer is introduced to Tereska’s present life, the innocent allure of the childhood scenes is replaced by a tense family atmosphere. Even in that first scene with the teenage Tereska, the viewer gets a hint of the incoming frustration of her dreams and aspirations. And throughout the film, the innocent, happy past is contrasted with the confusing and insecure present of the blokowisko and the unattainable consumerist present outside of the blokowisko.

Tereska’s encounter with teenage reality includes several clashes between the “old” values and the “new” values of “the street.” We shall see later that these clashes are expressed in the film’s use of space. Tereska is torn between her new friend Renata, who represents the new values, and her mother, who represents the old traditional values of Catholic morality. Throughout the film, the tension between tradition and modernity is repeatedly emphasized. In a scene at a mall where Tereska is looking at the fashion displayed in a shop window, Renata calls Tereska old-fashioned for liking dresses because no one wears them anymore. Tereska nevertheless tries on a dress, which makes Renata and the neighborhood boys burst into laughter. Later in the film when Tereska is in Jasio’s apartment, one of the blokersi, the conflict between tradition and modernity resurfaces again. Jasio seduces Tereska by impressing her with the modern kitchen supplies that she obviously has never seen in her life. Tereska turns on the stereo and an older song starts playing which she seems to like. Jasio, however, turns it off and tells her that it is the music of his parents. This act suggests the past and values attached to it is rejected. Jasio does not change it for something else; what follows is Jasio’s rape of Tereska. The present has two sides: one of technology and of fashion, which attract Tereska, and one of immorality, towards which she is more reluctant.

If we read Cześć Tereska purely as a coming-of-age story in which the protagonist loses her initial innocence and idealism in the harsh reality of “the streets,” then the character Edzio, who is neither one of her teenage friends, nor, at least in Tereska’s view, a part of the adult world, represents Tereska’s uncertainty and confusion between the two worlds. The final scene of the film in which Tereska murders Edzio and walks home, symbolizes the end of her uncertainty and her entrance into the adult world.
Tereska’s Spaces: Confinement and Heterotopias

Cześc Tereska is shot entirely in black and white, a feature that enhances the gloom of the setting and establishes the depressing tone of the story. The film has six main spatial frames, none of which is the city center: Tereska’s home (her apartment), the playground in front of the apartment building, the school, Edzio’s room, the cemetery and the mall. Except for the mall, all of the other places are confined within or in the vicinity of the blokowisko. Tereska’s home quickly becomes a place that she wants to escape because of her father’s alcoholism and violence and her mother’s emotional coldness and strictness. In the playground, Tereska first finds refuge from her parents. There she hangs out with Renata but soon finds herself under the pressure of the teenage blokersi and Renata’s expectations. In the playground scenes, the camera often zooms in on the area surrounding the characters: the blokowisko’s facades, which look like walls incarcerating the teenagers, a lonely man collecting empty cans, a man transporting garbage in a wheel-barrow, a woman looking out for her children. The liveliness of the early scenes of Tereska’s childhood is gone, and the decadence of the area has settled in.

The use of space in the film has a narrative function, as it reflects Tereska’s frustration and change. The happy spaces of her childhood, her home and the playground have become places where she feels insecure and uncomfortable. In several scenes the teenagers are shown to “reappropriate,” to use Michel de Certeau’s term, and transgress some of the spaces in their surrounding: they use the school bathroom as “palarnia” [a smoking room], the cemetery and the bleachers by the soccer field as a picnic site.

In Michel de Certeau’s study of the practice of everyday life (1984) he enhances the ordinary man and his everyday practices and their possible tactics as ways of getting around totalizing discourses. He writes about walking as one of those practices of the “individual mode of reappropriation” that, in its unpredictability, creates space and interrupts the accepted order (discipline) (de Certeau 1984: 96). de Certeau draws on both Foucault’s discourses and discipline and Bourdieu’s habitus as he argues for the potential of everyday practices to create “local authority” that challenges the univocal discourses and creates a space of play (“Spielraum”) within “the system of defined places” and makes the city livable (de Certeau 1984: 106). In “Walking in the City,” de Certeau talks of the concept-city, “the machinery and hero of modernity” and its decay, which he wants to contrast with the everyday “singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress, but which have outlived its decay (…)” (de Certeau 1984: 95–96).

The cemetery is depicted as a place to which Tereska reluctantly follows Renata and which marks her increasing distance to the Catholic faith and moral code. The sacred space of the cemetery is transgressed by the girls and turned into a space of leisure where Tereska takes her first lessons in smoking and drinking. Another space of religious significance that Tereska distances
herself from is the church. Her disengagement starts with Tereska’s missing a trip with the church choir. Later she skips choir practice or, while at practice, she mimes instead of singing. When she watches some children practice for their First Communion, she starts crying and runs out of the church. Tereska’s reaction upon seeing the children underscores her sadness at the loss of her innocent childhood and the impossibility of returning to it.

Two places stand out because of their difference, their “otherness” in relation to the blokowisko: the mall and Edzio’s room.

At the mall, Tereska finds a space to dream while looking at the women’s fashion displayed in the fancy shops. The “otherness” and even unreality of this space is emphasized by the music that accompanies this scene in contrast to the lack of music in the other scenes. The architectural contrast between the mall and the blokowisko further highlights the difference in the experiences. The dream space is however violated by the neighborhood boys’ and Renata’s laughter at Tereska trying on a dress. The mall, as a non-place and a capitalist product, becomes the only world outside the blokowisko in the film. However, the function of the mall as a non-place is here shown to be ambivalent: on the one hand, it becomes a temporary space of play for the teenagers who use the mall as an amusement park by “riding” the escalators and glassed elevators; on the other hand, its temporary nature and how the boys and Renata laugh at Tereska suggest that the world of consumerism is and will not be available to her. The “otherness” of Tereska’s experience at the mall can be better understood through Foucault’s concept of heterotopias:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. (…) Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias (Foucault 1986: 24).

The French philosopher first developed his concept of heterotopias in a lecture from 1967 entitled “Of Other Spaces. Heterotopias.” In this discussion of the Socialist housing projects in the post-1989 era, it is perhaps somewhat ironic to refer to Foucault’s theory, which was conceived during the Cold War and considered a reaction to the authoritarianism and oppressiveness of Soviet Stalinism. But its ideas about space in general and the function of ‘other spaces’ specifically have certainly proved influential on cultural theory in other cultures and other political and economic systems. In the final part of his essay, Foucault stresses the anti-authoritarian function of heterotopias, using the ship as a metaphor for the most extreme heterotopia: “In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates” (Foucault 1986: 27). Its relationship with utopia, he describes with the mirror:
The mirror is after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy (Foucault 1986: 24).

In an anthology published in 2008, Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society, Foucault’s concept is further developed. The editors, Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter describe heterotopias as those “other places,” as “a world off-center with respect to normal or everyday spaces, one that possesses multiple, fragmented, or even incompatible meanings.” They stress the mediation function, the centrality and semi-public character of the heterotopia. Moreover, they argue, drawing on Hippodamus’ threefold division of the city into a private, public and a sacral sphere, that heterotopias would be the third sphere which “in our terminology today would be closest to what we commonly describe as the ‘cultural sphere,’” and they define Johan Huizinga’s “space of play” as the activity of heterotopia.

It gives space to everything that has no place either in the public or the private sphere. It is the sacred space where the remainder rests. By remembering this third sphere, whose autonomy is largely forgotten in the relentless economization of everything, we can understand and articulate the relevance of heterotopia today (Dehaene & De Cauter 2008: 91).

In history, the sacral sphere constituted by churches offered refuge for people persecuted by the law. In Cześć Tereska, the church building stands in the middle of the blokowisko, where it still offers refuge from the demoralizing surroundings. But as Tereska’s beliefs have been questioned, she rejects the sanctuary of the church. The place where she seeks refuge from the pressures of her parents and her friends in the neighborhood becomes Edzio’s room. Bound to a wheel chair, Edzio does not represent a physical threat to Tereska, as is the case with both her father and the neighborhood boys. He does not try to educate or discipline her. This is one of the few places apart from the childhood scenes where we see Tereska smiling. And besides being a place where Tereska dreams and smiles, Edzio’s room is also the place where she channels her sadistic frustration as she burns Edzio’s numb legs with cigarettes or hits him for fun. This is a place where Tereska can experiment and be “other,” in the sense of Michel Foucault’s heterotopia. Here she is outside the regulatory influence of her parents and the teenagers in the neighborhood; she enters and leaves as she wishes and she does not have to be either a child or an adult. Dehaene och De Cauter consider the structure of heterotopia to be the structure of the sanctuary:
The sanctuary, then, is the ultimate heterotopia, the absolute discontinuity of normality, of the nomos, for those who flee the nomos: the homines sacri, the bandits. It is a safe haven against the violence of society, legal or illegal. The sanctuary-like character of heterotopian space is, in other words, a direct consequence of the very definition of heterotopia as ‘neither political nor economical.’ Heterotopian spaces provide a shelter from the strongholds of oikos and agora, and interrupt the conventional order of public and private space (Dehaene & De Cauter 2008: 97).

They emphasize heterotopia’s relation to time, as it is temporal, and in its relation to play, they stress its instability, fragility, but also its ability to create a sense of community.

This temenos or magic circle creates a fundamental distinction between those in the enclosure and those outside it. Entering the game, entering the circle, requires some sort of initiation into the rules of the game. Play, therefore, has the capacity to establish a sense of community. (…) The particular condition created within the space of play is fragile and unstable and can at any time be dispelled, when someone decides to break the rules of the game and thereby betrays the bond that holds the club together (Dehaene & De Cauter 2008: 96).

In Tereska’s experiences both at the mall and in Edzio’s room, the aspect of temporariness and space of play comes forward. The fragility is shown as Renata and the neighborhood boys laugh at her trying on a dress; and as Edzio interrupts Tereska’s imagined story after she has been raped.

In the end the conflict between tradition and the present becomes irresolvable, and Tereska’s final act could be read as her reaction to this impossibility of combining the different forces of the present, which leads to her the elimination of her future. After Tereska is raped, she escapes to Edzio’s place. There, she starts telling him her imagined version of what has just happened, which sharply contrasts with reality. Edzio, however, interrupts her story with questions about the actual act, which aggravates Tereska, and she begins to beat him frantically. The final brutal act marks the end of Tereska’s frustrated dreams.

The motives behind Tereska’s brutal beating and killing of Edzio in the film’s end are far from clear. The deed and its brutality seem unrelated and disproportional to Tereska’s frustration. The Polish film and cultural critic Jarosław Pietrzak accused the film Cześć Tereska of classism (Pol. rasizm klasowy) because it naturalizes the protagonist’s and her poor surroundings’ self-destructive behavior. Pietrzak further criticized the director of the film, Robert Gliński for not being on the side of the socially vulnerable like the Italian neorealists and the contemporary British Social Realists (like Ken Loach and Mike Leigh) or like French director Mathieu Kassovitz, but, on the contrary, on the side of “neo-conservative neoliberal moralists” (Pietrzak 2010: 117). He even calls the film emblematic of the blindness of contemporary Polish film toward capitalism’s downsides (Pietrzak 2010: 123).
*Cześć Tereska* gained success both abroad and in its native Poland. In an article on Polish cinema and architecture, Krzysztof Bizio called the film the crown jewel of the films released at the turn of the millennium that reflected a new pejorative view of the housing projects.

Film ten [*Cześć Tereska*] rysuje obraz zdegradowanych postaw moralnych, które połączone są bezpośrednio ze zdegradowaną przestrzenią architektoniczną. Filmy te zdają się wyraźać szerszy problem społeczny, jaki wytworzył się wokół wielorodzinnej architektury mieszkaniowej powstałej do 1989 roku, związany ze społecznym odrzuceniem tej przestrzeni (Bizio 2006: 51).

[That film draws a picture of morally degraded characters that are directly connected to the degraded architectural space. Those films manage to express a wider social problem that was created around the multi-family housing built until 1989, related to society’s rejection of that space.]

In September 2001 at the Polish Film Festival, FPFF (Festiwal Poliskich Filmów Fabularnych), *Cześć Tereska* won a Golden Lion for best film of the year, the audience’s award and the journalists’ award for best film of the year. The same year it was also awarded the Golden Duck by the Polish film journal *Film*, and at that year’s Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, it was awarded the special prize of the Jury, just to mention some of the film’s reach and success. In 2001, Robert Gliński was already an experienced filmmaker who had worked with film for twenty years and had already received awards for his previous films, such as *Łabędzi śpiew* (1988), *Wszystko, co najważniejsze* (1992), and *Niedzielne Igraszki* (1983).

[G]est to film, który pokazuje naszą współczesność i prawdę o szarym, nędznym życiu w tych blokach (Wojtowicz 2000).

[It is a film that shows our contemporaneity and the truth about the bleak poor life in those housing projects.]

Gliński considers the “ogromna prawda” [great truth] to be what best characterizes the film (Wojtowicz 2000). The film has aspects of a para-documentary in, for example, the two young female protagonists, Tereska (Aleksandra Gietner) and Renata (Karolina Sobczak), who are non-professional and partly natural actors, as they have backgrounds similar to those of the characters they play, and the dialogue was often improvised to get the girls to use their own expressions. The film was shot in the housing projects around Ostrobramska Street in Warsaw (Wojtowicz 2000).43 When asked what *Cześć Tereska* is about, Gliński responds:

43 Not far from the home of Miron Białoszewski that was described in his *Chamowo* (cf. Section 3.2.1).
A World of Non-Places

As a point of reference, the Swedish film *Lilya 4-ever* (Lukas Moodyson, 2002), which is quite similar to *Cześć Tereska*, also follows a teenage girl and has a fatalist narrative that ends with the protagonist’s ‘fall.’ Moreover, the films’ settings and their protagonists’ experiences of space in the films display further similarities. This section aims at further exploring the concepts of non-places and heterotopias in relation to the idea of home. A comparative outlook also serves to emphasize the global aspects of these phenomena.

*Lilya* lives with her mother in an area of prefabricated housing projects somewhere in what was once the Soviet Union. Lilya quickly loses both her mother, who moves to the United States, and her home. With no money, friends or family, and surrounded by hostile and indifferent neighbors, Lilya eventually starts to prostitute herself. Taken on false promises of work to Sweden, she becomes a victim of trafficking, locked in an apartment in a Swedish housing project. Her life becomes divided between the apartment, clients’ homes, her “employer” Witek’s car as he drives her between clients’ homes, and fast-food restaurants.

*Lilya 4-ever* has two main settings: somewhere in the former Soviet Union and Malmö in Sweden. The similarity between the places is striking: both places consist of old socialist housing projects and several so-called non-places. Similar to *Cześć Tereska*, *Lilya 4-ever* also avoids any city center; in Malmö, the center is experienced only at night through the car windows so what is left visible are the neon signs from the shops and restaurants. Besides in the housing projects or in a vehicle, the main scenes are shot in places such as a nightclub, game arcade, McDonald’s, an airport duty-free shop – places that would be defined as non-places, which according to the anthropologist Marc Augé is the space produced by supermodernity. These spaces are different to the modern spaces because of their disintegration from the past (like city centers), which comes to exist only as a historical site, “places of memory” or as a spectacle (Augé 2006: 78 & 103).

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44 The actual filming location is Estonia, but this is never mentioned in the film.
A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (...); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the habitué of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly, through gestures (...), a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral (...) (Augé 2006: 78).

In the end of the film, when Lilya manages to escape out of the apartment, she runs along a motorway. She looks around and sees a landscape of non-places: a gas station, a motorway, a factory, and some high-rise apartment buildings. She looks down on the ground and sees old empty cans and litter; she looks up at the clouds where a white bird is flying. Lilya chooses the sky and “the white bird.” so she runs up on the bridge. Before she jumps, there is a shot of Lilya, showing how her body forms a cross together with a lamppost and the bridge rail; Lilya’s suicide is thus a sacrifice.

Although Lilya constantly meets obstacles, is rejected and thrown out, she persistently tries to find her place. In both apartments where Lilya is sent, she cleans them up as a way to make them livable, as a way to “reappropriate” them. In the end this attempt at reappropriation also applies to her own body, as she cuts her hair and smears her face with makeup. None of her attempts work: the apartment does not become her home but a prison or container, and her body is still the propriety of Witek. Lilya and Volodya construct a hut together, which functions both as an escape and as a place to express their dreams. In his phenomenological studies of the house, Gaston Bachelard regarded the house, and especially the house we are born in, to be a special place for our dreams: “(...) if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (Bachelard 1969: 6). The hut for Lilya and Volodya has a heterotopic significance similar to the one Edzio’s room has for Tereska.

These counter-spaces, these localized utopias, children know them perfectly well. Of course, it is the end of the garden, of course it is the attic, or even better the Indian tent set up in the middle of the attic, or else, it is – on a Thursday afternoon – the large bed of the parents (Foucault 2004: 40 cited in Dehaene & De Cauter 2008: 95).

When Lilya and Volodya construct a hut, they create a magic circle of spatial enclosure for play; in Edzio’s room, Tereska and Edzio similarly create a space of play. The function of those two places is their “replacement” of the most archetypal “place of refuge,” a home, which, as Lynne Attwood points out, “functions as a protective barrier between its members and the outside world” (Attwood 2010: 2): Lilya loses her home in the beginning of the film, and for Tereska the home environment in her family’s apartment becomes an
insecure place, and at one point she says that she is going home when she actually is going to Edzio’s room.

Mircea Eliade (1959: 50–51) notes how man’s home has slowly been desacralized, a process that was preceded by the desacralization of cosmos. And he is critical towards Le Corbusier’s strictly functional notion of the home: “The house is not an object, a ‘machine to live in’; it is the universe that man constructs for himself by imitating the paradigmatic creation of the gods, the cosmogony” (Eliade 1959: 56–57).

The loss and search for a home recurs as a motif in both Lilya 4-ever and Cześć Tereska. The first image of Lilya’s home is warm and colorful, and its atmosphere contrasts sharply with the previous gloomy scenery consisting of old factories and socialist housing projects. Gradually her home as a space of refuge diminishes: she is first thrown out of her mother’s apartment and forced to move into a much more run-down and smaller apartment. This home fails to provide protection, as electricity is cut off and a group of men from the neighborhood break in and rape Lilya. Her final apartment in the Swedish housing projects has lost most of the characteristics and functions of a home and ironically seems to have become nothing more than a “machine for living.” Tereska is never physically thrown out of her home like Lilya; but from being a safe and happy site when she is a child, it turns into an unsafe and violent place in the present with a tense and frustrated atmosphere. Returning to a home or finding a home, in Attwood’s meaning of a “protective barrier,” thus becomes an objective for both protagonists.

Religious man’s profound nostalgia is to inhabit a ‘divine world,’ is his desire that his house shall be like the house of the gods, as it was later represented in temples and sanctuaries. In short, this religious nostalgia expresses the desire to live in a pure and holy cosmos, as it was in the beginning, when it came fresh from the Creator’s hands (Eliade 1959: 65).

The close relationship between the idea of home and the Christian idea of paradise as the eternal home is expressed in Lilya 4-ever. Lilya’s hopeless search as a homeless person in a world of non-places for an earthly home finally comes to an end in heaven.

Even though Lilya repeatedly tries to reappropriate the space around her, she finally sees no way out on this earth. Moodyson’s film displays a harsh critique of the society of non-places created by supermodernity. Although Lilya escapes her “native” blokowisko, the place where she arrives looks the same. This suggests that Lilya’s situation has nothing to do with the physical environment, her nationality, or post-communism.
4.3 In the Wastelands of hip-hop: *Blokersi*

It’s [hip-hop] the only thing that reflects what young people really feel (Green 2002).

The gloomy picture drawn of the housing projects in the works discussed above continues in *Blokersi*, a documentary about Polish hip-hop. The film title, *Blokersi* (as mentioned above) evokes unambiguous negative connotations. The term refers to young men from the housing projects (from the Polish word for high-rise apartment building, *blok*), who are usually unemployed or, if employed, active on the black market, who drink alcohol on park benches, and who are violent and criminal. The director, Sylwester Latkowski’s intention with the realization of the documentary was to break the stereotype of *blokersi* and to present in a positive light the Polish hip-hop culture, whose home is the *blokowisko*. Latkowski describes the film as a reaction against an article published in the weekly periodical *Polityka* in 2001, written by the cultural anthropologist Mirosław Pęczak, who refers to hip-hop as a pathological culture (Olszewska 2001a).

Latkowski’s aim with the documentary *Blokersi* was to give a voice to those who are often referred to as “garbage” in the Polish public sphere:

> Ja autentycznie chcę wykrzyczeć kilka rzeczy i pokazać coś establishmentowi. Stawiam się po stronie tych, których nazywa się patologią lub marginesem. Chciałem dać głos ludziom, których Ludwik Stomma, chyba (…) nazwał gównem (…). Niech się zastanowią, że może to otoczenie jest patologiczne (Rokick 2001).

[I authentically want to voice some matters and show the establishment something. I stand on the side of those who are named pathological or marginal. I wanted to give voice to the people who Ludwik Stomma (...) called garbage (...). Let them consider that maybe it is the surroundings that are pathological.]

*Bokersi* was director Sylwester Latkowski’s second documentary film. His first, *To my, rugbiści* (2000) was about the soccer hooligans Arka Gdynia, who started to play rugby. The film emphasized how practicing sports may have positive affects on sports hooligans: “przestają być chuliganami, kierują się ku działaniom pozytywnym” [they stop being hooligans; they are driven to positive actions]. It was screened on Polish Public TV, TVP 1 in a somewhat cut version and received some negative criticism for “advertising hooliganism and criminals” (Tuzimek, n.d.). The soundtrack consisted of Polish hip-hop, and it became the first documentary film to release a separate soundtrack.

From sports, as a positive activity away from the gloom and negative outlooks of the *blokowisko*, Latkowski’s next project turned to the Polish hip-hop
culture. He said that he wanted to show the realities of the Polish street: “zamierzam pokazywać uczciwie polską młodzież. Nie mogę udawać, że jest ona inna, grzeczniejsza” [I intend to honestly show the Polish youth. I cannot pretend that it is different, nicer] (Tuzimek, n.d.). But, as he insists: “Nie zrobiłem filmu o hip hopie. To jest historia o młodych ludziach, którzy przyłączyli się do kultury hip hopu, bo ona najlepiej oddaje to, co czują” [I did not make a film about hip-hop. It is a story about young people who joined the hip-hop culture, because it best reflects what they feel] (Kłoś 2001).

The film consists of a series of interviews with people engaged in the Polish hip-hop industry: some of the best-known Polish hip-hop celebrities including break dancers and choreographers, graffiti artists, music editors and journalists, chief editors of hip-hop magazines. It tells the history of hip-hop in Poland and introduces some of the active hip-hop artists today.

In the first scene, but also in some later scenes, the camera shots switch between color and black and white. The camera sweeps across a house facade in black-and-white and shows older men drinking on the sidewalk. The changes between color and non-color are not drastic and seem to highlight the gloom of the surroundings by minimizing the difference between the grayness of the reality and that of the camera. In the interviews, the hip-hop artists refer to their surroundings as “szarość” [grayness].

Since the blokowisko is considered the home of Polish hip-hop, the majority of the scenes take place either in a blokowisko or in the nearby areas. They are usually shot at run-down places; the film team follows and interviews the hip-hoppers when they are either hanging out or walking through places that seem abandoned: concrete ruins, grassy spaces, park benches. In the background loom the gray bodies of the high-rise apartment buildings that in combination with the deserted spaces somewhat resemble tombstones. The first place where we meet one of the film’s protagonists, the hip-hop artist Peja, is at an old shopping arcade in Świt in Poznań. He and his friends are sitting on some concrete blocks supposed to contain plants; in the background are the housing projects. The camera, in black-and-white, sweeps across the empty area: one shot shows a statue with a sign next to it with the letters: “Zakaz wszelkich gier i zabaw, jazdy na rolkach, wrotkach, łyżworolkach i deskorolkach na płytach wokół pomnika.” [All Games and play, rollerblades, inlines and skateboards around the statue forbidden.]; the next shot shows an older man drinking alone on a park bench. Peja explains that this is the “miejsce naszych spotkań” [our meeting place] and another person explains how the police keep following them and how they do not have anywhere to be:

[There aren’t any damn parks here where you could sit down. Where should I go? To the blok? That would even be worse. They don’t do anything for the youth and they charge you for everything. So what should we do?]

The space of the blokersi seems to have diminished to the extent that their space is either in the “desolate” fields next to the high-rises or the empty area outside the old shopping arcade. On the one hand, the places that these young men are at are “abandoned,” and they complain about not having anywhere else to go (they have even escaped the area closest to the housing projects); on the other hand, these “abandoned” spaces of the former planned space of socialism have become a space for refuge and a creative space for hip-hop. These areas might be described as the un-planned, wild part of the blokowisko, spaces left unattended, or spaces in-between. This is also the space where the young men can be “other,” and where their hip-hop community can gather; it is a space that blurs boundaries between the housing projects and the city centers, and blurs fixed meanings such as between private and public space. These “wastelands” – unfinished or abandoned – have previously been discussed by scholars from different disciplines. In his study of the concrete suburb Ligovo in St. Petersburg, the humanistic geographer Thomas Borén, includes a description of “the greenery, the benches, and other spatial details” that he found particular to the suburb. He writes that the spaces around the houses “lend themselves to be described as growing wild” and mentions how people drive their cars on what was intended as paths through the yards (Borén 2005: 101–102). This space, the unfinished greenery, the urban wastelands, Mariusz Czepczyński (2008: 69) considers particular to the socialist landscape as material and financial shortages and changes in political prioritizations often led to unfinished construction projects. Tim Edensor stressed the importance of spaces of ruination and dereliction in the otherwise all-encompassing planned landscape of today:

[The ruins] present opportunities for carrying out leisure practices which would be frowned upon in more regulated urban space, activities characteristically based around physical expressiveness, the transgression of normative relations between people, space and things, and around affective collective endeavours that tend towards the carnivalesque (Edensor 2005: 30).

In discussing the role of the blokowisko in Polish feature films, Izabela Kalinowska notices the presence of these spaces with “non-urban appearance that contrast with the sharp outlines of the blok” and she describes them as pre-modern interventions into the modern space that constitutes the blok. For her, their presence in the films makes a comment on “Poland’s imperfect modernization” (Kalinowska 2005).
Hip-hop as Heterotopia

In an interview Latkowski clarified that he sees the hip-hop culture as “sposobem wyjścia z blokowisk, oderwania się od szarzyzny i braku perspektyw towarzyszących egzystencji młodzieży z wielkich osiedli polskich miast” [a way to get out of the housing projects, to get rid of the gloom and lack of perspectives that accompany the existence of the youth from the big projects of the Polish cities] (Olszewska 2001a). In their analysis of the heterotopia Dehaene and De Cauter (2008: 91) claim that “many, perhaps most, heterotopias are based on ‘societies’ in the original meaning of alliance or club, an association of common interest and establish alternative and collective forms of sharing property or its enjoyment” thus giving us grounds to interpret the hip-hop community itself as a “heterotopical space.” The “way out” Latkowski talks about is therefore an interruption through the time-space of the heterotopia, in which the heterotopia of hip-hop has a clear aspect of compensation as it is the space where the otherwise marginalized can express themselves.

The presence in Cześć Tereska of transgression and reappropriation returns in Blokersi. Except for the transgression of space demonstrated by the young men in the film, one of the main “elements” of hip-hop culture is the appropriation of urban space, more explicitly shown in using the streets for break dancing and graffiti painting. The hip-hop artists break the boundaries between legal and illegal. Eldo, one of the interviewed graffiti artists clearly suggests that no one would paint the trains if it were legal. He describes this illegal act as liberating:

Momencik, w którym widzisz na stacji pociąg pomalowany przez ciebie, i moment w którym on odjeżdża, i widzisz, że twój obraz jedzie razem z nim. To jest takie poczucie niesamowitej wolności (Blokersi).

[The moment you see a train painted by yourself, and the moment it leaves and you see your painting leaving with it. That is a feeling of incredible freedom.]

Although Latkowski’s documentary does not strike one as sensationalist or fatalistic, it makes a rather sad statement by presenting hip-hop as Blokersi’s only alternative to alcoholism. The film opens and closes with scenes with older drinking men. In the first scene, the interviewee is asked why people drink at this time of the day (mid-day) and he simply responds that “Wszędzie się pije!” [People drink everywhere!]. The last scene shows Peja walking in the yard in front of the apartment building. The camera zooms in on three older men sitting on a bench in front of a soccer field and drinking. Peja looks at them and says that he hopes that he would never end up like them. The presence of alcoholism and the frustration connected with the inhabitants’ economic situation is never avoided or hidden; on the contrary Latkowski openly
displays it throughout the film. In an interview he points to the spatiality of the social and economic problems that have occurred in the post-1989 era:

Throughout the period of transition, neighborhoods come up that are black holes—bad schools, no cops, no playgrounds, graffiti, drugs, (...). The only thing the government has done is proposed lowering the age of criminal responsibility so they can be sent to jail sooner (Green 2002).

Latkowski here refers to the emergence of marginalized and neglected areas, whose description is reminiscent of the Swedish “concrete suburbs,” the Latin American “barrios marginales,” the French “banlieus,” and the American “ghettoes.”

4.4 Solitude and Anonymity: Krzysztof Bizio’s Short Stories

If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place (Augé 2006: 77–78).

In Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, the French anthropologist Marc Augé suggests that the non-places are the “real measure of our time” (Augé 2006: 79). The non-places are a product of supermodernity, which in turn is characterized by its three figures of excess – overabundance of events, spatial overabundance, and the excess of the individual (Augé 2006: 109). Augé contrasts the non-places with anthropological places in binary terms such as dwelling with transit, interchange (“where nobody crosses anyone else’s path”) with crossroads, and housing estate (“where people do not live together and which is never situated in the centre”) with monument (Augé 2006: 107–108). The experience of these places – in “solitary individuality combined with non-human mediation” – has no precedence in history, Augé writes (2006: 118).

Krzysztof Bizio’s literary sociological dissection from 2003 (the collection was originally written in 1994), his debut short story collection Zresztą latem wszystkie kwiaty są takie piękne [Besides in Summer All Flowers Are Beautiful], takes place in a high-rise, which like in The Decalogue, poses an anonymous background that underscores the universality of the stories.

As the author’s commentary on the back cover reveals, the stories are not about the Blokersi subculture but simply “Zbiór opowiadania, które łączy zdegradowana rzeczywistość blokowiska” [A collection of short stories connected by the degraded reality of the Blokowisko]. Unlike some of the works discussed above, Bizio’s stories do not have sensationalist plots and do not
make a spectacle of poverty and violence. The protagonists’ social backgrounds exhibit great diversity: a teenage middle-class girl and her physician parents, a university student, businessmen, a truck driver, a mechanic, a housewife, and a military officer all cohabit in the blok. The length of the story lines ranges from one hour to a couple of weeks during which the reader witnesses a large variety of “everyday problems” whose solutions often remain unclear. The stories are grounded in strong physicality, as illustrated by the description of the garbage container.

Ceglany bunkier ze stalowym dachem, a obok trzepak i ławeczka. Najlepsze miejsce na miłość, gwałt i bijatyki. Raj dla kotów, pcheł i meneli. (...) Śmietnik to centrum kultury i życia towarzystkiego osiedla. Widać stąd prawie wszystkie budynki (Bizio 2003: 20).

[A bunker out of brick with a steel roof, next to it a carpet-beating stand and a bench. It is the best place for love, rape, and fights. A paradise for cats, fleas and bums. (...) The garbage container is the cultural and social center of the neighborhood. From there you can see almost all of the buildings.]

The everyday habits of the protagonists, their physical needs, and details of their ordinary and filthy surroundings have an overwhelming, almost grotesque, presence in the narratives. Social phenomena such as homelessness, adolescent prostitution, family violence, and suicide are depicted as ordinary events. This becomes evident especially in the endings of the stories, which usually switch the focus from the social malady to some banal detail or an ordinary action, which emphasizes the everydayness and repetitiveness of the situation, and downplays the importance of the problem, implying that it had no real impact and potential for change. The insignificance of the protagonists’ lives is further alluded to in the titles of the stories, which are simply apartment numbers “001,” “002,” “015,” suggesting anonymity, alienation, but also emphasizing the commonness of these human experiences. This anonymity resembles Augé’s understanding of the non-place as a space that “creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude” (Augé 2006: 103). In non-places, communication with “codes, images and strategies” prevails over the spoken oral language and the world surrenders “to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral” (Augé 2006: 78, 108). The non-place, however, never exists in a pure form and the “possibility of non-place is never absent from any place. Place becomes a refuge to the habitué of non-places,” Augé observes (Augé 2006: 107). Inside the apartment of Anita and Paweł, the main characters of the collection’s first story, entitled “002,” voices from the TV set echo in the background: “Tak, tak, to wszystko może należeć do państwa!” [Yes, of course, everything can be yours!], (Bizio 2003: 5) and “To wszystko jest już wasze” [It’s all already yours] (Bizio 2003: 9). Such sunny TV promises contrast sharply with the tense and desperate atmosphere in the young couple’s home. Paweł “escapes” the entrapment of the
apartment to the local pub, where he and his friend watch a boxing match: “Obaj spojrżeli w telewizor. Wiedzieli, że oglądają wielki świat” [Both looked at the TV screen. They knew they were watching the big world] (Bizio 2003: 13). When the friend tells Paweł about his bad luck in different failed businesses, Paweł responds with dejection: “To nie pech, to coś więcej. Ostatnio nic nikomu nie wychodzi” [That’s not bad luck, it’s something more. Lately nothing goes well for anyone] (Bizio 2003: 12).

In Bizio’s literary world, the housing projects are a place saturated with unhappiness, immorality, disillusion, feeling of entrapment, and frustration. Looming in the background, besides the TV set trying to sell divorced-from-reality recipes for happiness and success, is the church. Bizio’s characters do not go to church but they occasionally glimpse the church building from the windows of their apartments; they do not participate in religious rituals but accidentally witness religious processions from the bus window. The Christian faith – the former provider of moral norms – has been pushed into the background and marginalized, while immorality has advanced to the foreground.

A recurring motif in the short story collection is a character staring through a window. The description of Anna, the main protagonist of “012” looking out of her window alludes to her despair: “spójrzała na rzędy okien w przeciwległym budynku i poczuła się jeszcze bardziej samotna niż zwykle” [she looked at the rows of windows in the opposite buildings, and she felt even lonelier than usual] (Bizio 2003: 77). The window reflects the character’s unhappiness and frustration as its transparency holds a false promise of an escape to a better world. As Augé observes, this is a form of isolation made all the more ironic because of the apparent proximity of others. Although the inhabitants of Bizio’s housing project speak openly about their loneliness, their alienation is also implied in their interactions with the neighbors whom they seemingly know, hearing them through the walls and seeing them on the street or in the courtyard, but with whom they do not have any personal contact or meaningful communication. Bizio’s descriptions echo Auge’s interpretation of the modern landscape-induced alienation and solitude:

The only face to be seen, the only voice to be heard, in the silent dialogue he holds with the landscape-text addressed to him along with others, are his own: the face and voice of solitude made all the more baffling by the fact that it echoes millions of others (Augé 2006: 103).

The anonymous exteriors of the non-places of modernity – the housing projects – seem to be reflected in the interiors of Bizio’s characters, whose solitary experience of the blokowisko resembles that of Augé’s non-place of supermodernity. Only the last story in the collection, which takes place in a truck on the road, has a different, more optimistic, atmosphere. The protagonist, named Młody [Young], hitchhikes with the truck driver Stary [Old], a cynical
man who has come to terms with his ordinary, meaningless life. Confident in his Christian faith, Młody resists Stary’s attempts at persuading him to procure a prostitute because his girlfriend might have been unfaithful. Młody refuses even to contemplate this thought and instead imagines the flowers he would buy his beloved. The overwhelming sensation of life in the housing project as depicted in the short stories, however, remains, contrary to the collection’s last story, predominantly immersed in disillusionment.

The last work to be discussed in this chapter is Grażyna Plebanek’s novel *Dziewczyny z Portofino* [The Girls from Portofino] (2005), which unlike the previous works is not set in contemporary Poland; it takes place from the 1970s and forward in one of the housing projects in Warsaw. The title alludes to the novel *Dziewczęta z Nowolipek* (1935) by Pola Gojawiczyńska, which follows girls from Nowolipie Street. The novel follows four girls who grow up on the same street, ulica Portofino. It has been praised for giving an “obraz PRL z kobiecej perspektywy” [a female perspective on PRL]. This novel is unique in this context since it also gives a child’s perspective on the experience of the housing projects. For the young female characters, the blokowisko is their whole world. This is where they first meet and where they continue to socialize, and this is where they take their first steps into adulthood. Besides reflecting a cross-section of society, the novel is also one of the few existing portrayals that provide a female perspective and depict the female experience of the Polish housing projects. The area is never depicted as gray or dull, but not celebratory or idyllic either. It is rather the everyday sphere of the characters. *Dziewczyny z Portofino* thus departs from the other post-2000 works analyzed in this chapter as it represents the narrative spaces within the blokowisko as fluid and the apartment homes as open and porous. The girls play or meet in private and semi-private as well as in public or semi-public spaces of the blokowisko. They are acquainted with all areas and familiar with the neighbors.

4.5 Chapter Conclusions

Almost a century ago, the Russian futurist Velimir Khlebnikov dreamt about the housing of the future, one that would reach towards the clouds so that man would dwell far away from the filthy, degenerated ground.

People will no longer gather in the vicious streets, whose dirty desire reduces human beings to residue in a washbasin; rather they will throng upon rooftops, beautiful young rooftops (...). The city crowds will no longer move about on foot or on their four-legged colleagues; they will have learned to fly above the city, raining their glances upon the place below (Velimir Khlebnikov 1987 [1915]: 348).
Half a century later, the construction of the prefabricated housing apartments that later came to be known as blokowisko had begun. In the 21st-century literary and cinematic narratives that this chapter has discussed, people do not “throng upon roof tops,” as Khlebnikov had dreamt; they still gather in the vicious streets, or the bewildered abandoned backyards or inside their apartments.

This chapter has discussed the predominantly fatalist narratives of the first years of the new millennium. The works have emphasized, on the one hand, the seclusion of the blokowisko, as a ‘world apart’ among the non-places of supermodernity. On the other hand, despite the fatalism and the world of non-places that surrounds them, the protagonists manage to find places of refuge of heterotopical character. Unlike the preceding chapter, these works display the anonymity of the settings, where the names of the actual neighborhood or city are unknown, or the lack of national landmarks that these works display. Andrzej Kolodynski (1997) noted in a discussion of Polish films of the 1990s that those also lacked “recognizable Polish features:” “it is hardly possible to recognize the town or even the country where the story was set. It could be ‘any place, any town’” (Kolodynski 1997: 33 cited in Mazierska 2003: 96). While for Kolodynski the anonymity was a way to avoid “parochialism” and to compete with “American mainstream movies” (Mazierska 2003: 96), for the works analyzed in this chapter it is more likely to be related to the universality of the stories, while “slums” or run-down neighborhoods have commonly been depicted as anonymous areas within literature precisely as a way to stress the universality and the global causes behind the poverty (cf. Borg 2011: 280). This chapter’s analysis of Lilya 4-ever further supports this claim.

A recurring motif among these works is the frustrated escape. The wish to leave or escape lingers within the characters, or the narratives revolve around an active decision to escape. The motifs of motion and traffic that were common in the narratives before 1989 seem long gone. This suggests that the blokowisko becomes synonymous with an undesirable place and a feeling of unhappiness and dissatisfaction. As Mazierska notes (2005), the motif of escape has been present in all periods of the history of Polish cinema (18). During the 1970s the escape (either internal or external) went to a Western country, to “a miniature consumerist paradise for oneself and one’s friends,” or a peripheral location within Poland, or the escape took place within the characters’ minds (18–19). Mazierska further observes, that the motif of escape in some contemporary Polish films is rooted in disappointment with the new Polish realities. Her protagonists, however, do not believe in “long-term happiness by changing location” (24) and the recipe prescribed for the characters

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is spiritual: “Do not follow others, but try to find happiness in yourself,” Mазierska writes (25).

In Że życie ma sens, Uciec stąd, and Cześć Tereska (as well as in Lilya 4-ever) the protagonists in different ways have the opportunity to “leave” – either physically or imaginatively. Their escapes are impeded, however, largely due to their social surrounding’s illegal and immoral behavior in which the characters become involved, but also due to the characters’ own passivity. The negative spiral has begun, and in the end we are quite certain that there are now no more opportunities for the characters.

The documentary Blokersi differs because, although the protagonist are shut off from mainstream society, they have managed to create an “escape” of their own.

In Moje miasto, it is the reunion of the family that in the end enables an escape – an escape that turns down the new system in favor of a life in the countryside.

In his study of beur fiction and the banlieu crisis, Eric Prieto (2013: 126) writes about “the place effect,” which “suggests that the stultifying material conditions of the cité, symbolized by its grey concrete landscape, play a crucial role in explaining the stultified outlooks of young people like Madjid and Pat.” The fatalist narratives of Że życie ma sens, Uciec stąd, and Cześć Tereska all begin with panoramic images of the setting’s housing projects. In Uciec stąd, the images of the gray facades are even accompanied by a monologue about their origin and gloom. In Lilya 4-ever, the initial shots are also of a desolate landscape that includes housing projects, and quite significantly for the film’s emphasis on non-places, the shots are filmed from a vehicle driving by on a road. Although the protagonists of these narratives do not, like the ones of Prieto’s study, display “a deep bond” with their home neighborhood (Prieto 2013: 124), there is a clear emphasis on the role of the physical surrounding – as a signal of their fatalism.

Thus, while Pietrzak saw “classism” in Cześć Tereska, I would like to add, drawing on Prieto, the dimension of “geographical determinism” (or the place effect) as an important factor of the fatalist narratives of Chapter 4.

The blokowisko in these works is a confined space, a home for the socially and economically excluded. But unlike the works discussed in Chapter 3, the housing projects are never referred to as located far away from the city center (or in the countryside); neither are they presented as an integrated part of the city fabric. Here they are rather viewed as a separate world apart. In Lilya 4-ever this was especially visible as the housing projects became a non-place among the other non-places of supermodernity. The eavesdropping, voyeurism or curiosity among neighbors that was common in the works before 1989 is almost never present here (with the exception of Moje Miasto). Nor are there any connotations of modernity or the “city flow” of the housing projects. Like the earlier portraits, immorality is one association; isolation, violence and criminality are new associations.
A large part of the action in the works analyzed is set in the areas close to the blokowisko buildings, the “public” or “semi-public” spaces. Compared to the works discussed in Chapter 3, besides the almost absent city center, we can thus discern a shift in the main setting (i.e. the main ‘spatial frames’) as these works are less set in the semi-private spaces such as the staircase. This shift in spatial focus suggests an increased seclusion of the apartment homes and underscores the protagonists’ exclusion and feeling of homelessness. Most homes in the works discussed in this chapter are thus depicted as closed homes for family and friends. The random meetings or the “strangers into kin” components of the apartment-house plot are now rare (with the obvious exception being Plebanek’s novel) or only connected with an assault. Both apartment homes and the streets outside are places for meetings, but the exterior spaces are also the primary place where violence occurs (such as in Uciec stąd and Że życie ma sens). At the same time immorality and violence are also depicted as taking place inside the apartment homes, as in some of Bizio’s short stories, and in Tereska’s father’s violent behavior, Jaś’s rape, and in the drug abuse of Że życie ma sens.

As an exception to the other discussed works, the filmmakers behind the documentary Blokersi set out precise names for their different filming locations. This is in accordance with the genre praxis, but the multiple locations, spread all over Poland nevertheless show the non-uniqueness of their characters and the spread of hip-hop. As in the other works, however, none of the settings were in a city center. And as a document of the hip-hop culture, the film underscores the global aspect of that culture as a subculture of the socially excluded.
The new “subculture” of Blokersi and the, often sad, fatalistic and pessimistic blokowisko stories that were analyzed in Chapter 4 soon received their parodic and grotesque literary and cinematic versions. Some of the most popular literary representations of this are featured in Dorota Masłowska’s 2002 novel Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną [White and Red] and Marek Kochan’s 2005 short story Ballada o dobrym dresiarzu [Ballad of the Good Dresiarz]. The parodic and caricature versions of the blokowisko and its vicinity also serve as a setting in the Polish independent films Wożonko (2003, Abelard Giza) and Krew z nosa (2004, Dominik Matwiejczyk), or else in Przemysław Wojcieszek’s theater play Made in Poland (2004).


At the beginning of the 21st century the housing projects thus again became the setting for humoristic stories where grotesque, caricature, and parodic modes were used to portray the new Polish realities of social and economic marginality and consumerism, but also more traditional topics such as religiosity, the family, and Polishness.

This chapter addresses the literary and cinematic works set in the blokowisko in the years after 2000 that have in common their use of the humoristic stylistic modes. Among these narratives we observe a deeper engagement with the specifically “Polish,” as the works are either allegories of contemporary Poland, depict typical Polish traditions, or contain explicit intertextual references to Polish literary and cultural history. Titles such as Made in Poland and Blok.pl also point to the “Polishness” of their content. And unlike the works of the previous chapter, some of these works have specified the actual setting (neighborhood and/or city). As in Chapter 3, the housing projects are again represented as a cross-section, and humor is used to ridicule various aspects of Polish society. However, the humor based on clashes between spatial dichotomies is not present here, where the grotesque mode dominates instead. This chapter will further show that the housing projects are still an important narrative device, but that the ‘housing estate plot’ diverges vastly from that of
the 1970s and 80s, and that the apartment homes are not rendered as open and porous, but as closed and private.

The analysis will furthermore direct attention to the relationship between stylistic mode and the representation of (domestic) space. The first section of this chapter (5.1) introduces various theoretical perspectives on the grotesque as a stylistic mode, and its history in the Polish context. It also provides a brief introduction to some theories on caricature, parody and pastiche. The aim of the second section (5.2) is to contextualize the grotesque and other humoristic modes deployed by the literary and cinematic works discussed later in this chapter (5.3–5.5).

5.1 Comic Literary Modes

5.1.1 Amusement and Disgust: Grotesque Realism

Throughout history and in fiction, humor has traditionally been used as a tool to discuss taboo topics and as a way to get around censorship in authoritative societies. Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin developed the concept of grotesque realism, the carnival, and the related concept of the grotesque body in *Rabelais and His World* [Творчество Франсуа Рабле и народная культура средневековья и Ренессанса] (1965). For Bakhtin, grotesque realism was born out of the “culture of folk humor,” and had its golden age during the Renaissance (Bakhtin 1968: 30–31). He traces the historical development of the meaning of the concept. During the 17th and 18th century, the grotesque came to be included in lower-range comedy since it was related to the “culture of folk humor,” and the carnival of popular culture came to be nationalized into the parade and placed in the private sphere of the family. “The feast ceased almost entirely to be the people’s second life, their temporary renaissance and renewal,” Bakhtin writes (1984: 33). The function of the carnivalesque-grotesque form, he continues, is to:

consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things (Bakhtin 1968: 34).

The grotesque “discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life,” Bakhtin (1984: 48) explains in another place.

During the Romantic period the grotesque acquired a “private chamber character” and ceased to be concrete and bodily, in favor of a more “subjective, idealistic philosophy.” And laughter had been reduced to “cold humor,
irony, sarcasm,” which according to Bakhtin meant a reduction of its regenerating power, although the liberating force was still celebrated. Unlike the grotesque of the medieval and Renaissance periods, where the terrifying had been connected with “comic monsters,” the grotesque world of romanticism was terrifying and foreign – “Our own world becomes an alien world.” And “[i]mages of bodily life, such as eating, drinking, copulation, defecation, almost entirely lost their regenerating power and were turned into ‘vulgarities’” (Bakhtin 1984: 37–39).

The grotesque of the medieval times and the renaissance, however, was:

filled with the spirit of carnival, liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying; it takes away all fears and is therefore completely gay and bright. All that was frightening in ordinary life is turned into amusing or ludicrous monstrosities (Bakhtin 1984: 47).

Literary modes closely related to the grotesque are caricature, satire, and parody. Philip Thomson describes the first as “the ludicrous exaggeration of characteristic or peculiar features” (Thomson 1972: 38). The separation between caricature and the grotesque mode might seem fine, but as Thomson underscores, a caricature may create a comic reaction and be ridiculous, but in contrast to the grotesque it is harmless and not threatening or disgusting. These related modes are often used together or might contain elements of one another, creating for example a “grotesque parody” (when “the conflict between parody and original, or between content and form, becomes intolerable”) or “grotesque satire” (Thomson 1972: 40–41). Separating satire from the grotesque, Thomson mainly focuses on the confusion of incompatibles pertinent to the grotesque – disharmony.

The most consistently distinguished characteristic of the grotesque has been the fundamental element of disharmony, whether this is referred to as conflict, clash, mixture of the heterogeneous, or conflation of disparates (Thomson 1972: 20).

Thomson comes to a definition of the grotesque as “the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response:” while satire wants to create laughter and anger or disgust separately, the grotesque shows their inseparability, therefore creating confusion (Thomson 1972: 27, 42). He further stresses the confusion and ambivalence in the reaction to the grotesque “between a sense of the comic and something – revulsion, horror, fear – which is incompatible with the comic” (1972: 7).

He moreover distinguishes the grotesque as “an appropriate expression of the problematical nature of existence” and that it is therefore “no accident that the grotesque mode in art and literature tends to be prevalent in societies and eras marked by strife, radical change or disorientation” (Thomson 1972: 11). And perhaps this explains why the grotesque mode has had a rather prominent
presence in Polish literature especially during the 20th century, marked by wars, occupation, political upheavals, population transfers, etc.

5.1.2 The Polish Grotesque

For the grotesque in contemporary Polish literature there are in principle no inaccessible areas: the field of its penetration is unusually wide. It ranges from history to the present and its tones are the most varied – from catastrophic horror to playful indifference, from polemics to entertainment. In grotesque works there are constructed extraordinary worlds, worlds far removed from ordinary experience, but in addition everyday life is shown in the categories of grotesque smallness (Głowiński 1978: 184).

The Polish literary critic Michał Głowiński’s words in the quote above hint at the variety, depth and multitude of the Polish literary grotesque. This section intends to give a summary of the history of the grotesque in Polish literature. The main sources for this are Włodzimierz Bolecki’s “Groteska” in Słownik Literatury polskiej XX wieku (1993) and Michał Głowiński’s “The Grotesque in Contemporary Polish Literature” in Fiction and drama in Eastern and Southeastern Europe: evolution and experiment in the postwar period (1978).

Although grotesque elements existed in Polish romantic literature, critics commonly assume that the grotesque mode was not introduced in Poland until late modernism by Roman Jaworski’s novels (Bolecki 1993: 349). By then its popularity grew, and the literary critic Michał Głowiński considers the grotesque one of the most important phenomena in Polish literature of the twentieth century. He sees the escalation of the grotesque in especially the interwar period as related to the newly acquired freedom of literature (Głowiński 1978: 178).

The grotesque in Polish modernism drew from all historical periods. One of the most common motifs was grotesque mythological elements and mythological hybrids such as the Sphinx, the Chimera, and the Minotaur, which became common themes and titles of the works of the modernists. Medieval grotesque motifs that returned were Satan and death, and different motifs from commedia dell’arte, such as masks, marionettes, the circus, the pierrot, dance, and puppets (for example in Wyspiański’s Wesele, and in the works by Jaworski, Wojtkiewicz, and Lemański) (Bolecki 1993: 350).

The greatest change in the Polish grotesque took place during the two decades between the wars when new avant-garde ideas were introduced. Artistic experiments and the break with the old artistic conventions resulted in different forms of parody, irreverence, and provocations, and there was a new focus on playful art; catastrophism was the most frequent grotesque device (Głowiński 1978: 179). Although many artists during this period used grotesque elements, the most characteristic and most well-known are Aleksander Wat, Roman Jaworski, “the programmatic grotesque writer,” who united the
The grotesque of Bruno Schulz is characterized quite differently, as a “dehierarchization of everything” and containing traditional grotesque motifs of dolls, mannequins, anthropomorphism, metamorphos, and mythological hybrids (Bolecki 1993: 356). Głowinski writes that “[w]ith Gombrowicz the grotesque is a matter of language, of the relationship of one text to another, thus, of parody,” (Głowinski 1978: 181). He stresses the role of parody in Gombrowicz’s grotesque:

His whole oeuvre from beginning to end is built on parody. (...) Gombrowicz parodizes the great works of world and Polish literature, Shakespeare and Proust, Mickiewicz and romantic drama. More than that, he also parodies the forms of ‘lower’ literature, the forms of the popular story or of Old Polish literature of the nobility such as the gawęda (tale) or the ‘village story’ (Głowinski 1978: 182).

During the Second World War, “the experience of the contrasts of the everyday: heroism and cynicism, terror and laughter, the nightmare of organized terror and the absurdity of accident” led to a new manifestation of the grotesque, with Witkiewicz’ catastrophism and Schulz’ fantastic elements as examples (Bolecki 1993: 357). The grotesque in the decades after the war was mainly represented by Witold Gombrowicz, Sławomir Mrożek, Miron Białoszewski, and Tadeusz Różewicz. While the grotesque in Gombrowicz’ works is present on all levels – “language, narration, dialogue, events, composition” – the grotesque of Mrożek was more concerned with questions of truth, loneliness, and death, and was expressed in the narration and events. Mrożek’s grotesque is also known for its parody of “stylów potocznych, środowiskowych i literackich” [colloquial, social environments, and literary styles], as well as disclosing national myths. Różewicz’ literary world is described as grotesquely deformed “tworzą go sztucznosc i automatyzm zachowań ludzkich, ludzie/manekiny, przypadkowość zdarzeń i sytuacji” [it is created by artificiality and automatism of human behavior, mannequins, randomness of events and situations] and in which “zdezorientowany człowiek, pozbawiony tożsamości, świadomości i pamięci” [a disoriented man, devoid of identity, consciousness and memory] lives. The grotesque of Białoszewski is based on viewing the whole culture as “a collection of ‘empty signs’” and
he uses “animizacja przedmiotów i słów, kalambury, (...) zabawy lingwistyczne” [anthropomorphism of objects and words, charades, (...) language games] (Bolecki 1993: 358–359). Głowiński further calls the grotesque of Białoszewski “the grotesque of everyday life” because his “language [is] crippled in its very root” about topics that had earlier been considered unworthy of description. “This is the smallness of the grotesque: its grotesqueness emerges precisely from telling about that which, it would seem, is not worth telling.” And Głowiński continues: “Writing about shallow banality in a consciously crippled language, Białoszewski in a grotesque manner denied the very idea of literariness” (Głowiński 1978: 184).

The Polish literary grotesque after 1956 turned against the Stalinist totalitarian era and the doctrines of socialist realism. For many authors the grotesque device became a way to create their own fantasy world outside the oppression and a chance to use parody and mockery. Grotesque became common in drama and cabaret. In the after-war period, there was a general shift of focus in the grotesque from mythological and gothic grotesque hybrids and fantastic mutations to parody and linguistic word games (Bolecki 1993: 359–360).

At the end of Głowiński’s article on the grotesque in Polish literature, he compares the function of the grotesque to the function of the jester at the royal court, who had more freedom to speak “bitter truths” and “retained its independence from official ideologies and visions of the world while subjecting them to doubt.” And he sees Wolfgang Kayser’s view of the grotesque as an expression of the alienated world, but which by depicting it overcomes it, as suitable for the Polish situation. The function of the grotesque is compared to the role of tragedy in antiquity: catharsis (Głowiński 1978: 188).

5.1.3 Caricature, Parody, and Pastiche

Literary modes related to the grotesque are pastiche, caricature, and parody. The question of parody was actualized in discussions on postmodernism by scholars such as Linda Hutcheon and Fredric Jameson. Jameson described “the general effect of parody” as “whether in sympathy or with malice – to cast ridicule on the private nature of these stylistic mannerisms and their excessiveness and eccentricity with respect to the way people normally speak or write” (Jameson 1998:4). He contrasts it with the related mode of pastiche:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody’s ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared with which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour (...) (Jameson 1998: 5).
Parody may be divided into a specific and a general form. The specific refers to or alludes to a specific “precursor text” and the general alludes to “a whole body of texts or kind of discourse” (Dentith 2000: 7). Simon Dentith prefers a wider intertextual definition of parody, and states: “Parody includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice” (Dentith 2000: 9). He thus stresses, in accordance with Linda Hutcheon, that the polemic does not have to be in relation with the original text, but might be directed “to the world” (Dentith 2000: 18).

Dentith discusses the cultural politics of parody, whether it is “to be thought of as an essentially conservative or essentially subversive mode” (Dentith 2000: 10), and he comes to the conclusion that the social and political value of parody cannot be decided in advance (Dentith 2000: 188). Referring to Bakhtin’s analysis of the changing function of the grotesque in history, he concludes that one has to consider the specific “social and discursive formations” in which the parody works; “the sacred word” changes through different times and cultures. “[We] have to ask just what is being parodied and from what perspective” (Dentith 2000: 187). The “parodic energies” can come both from the elite and popular culture; it may be “broadly subversive of authority acting to relativise all artificial or sacred languages” or “broadly conservative in the way that it constantly monitors and ridicules the formally innovative” (Dentith 2000: 27, 188).

Ryszard Nycz recounts six different functions of parody: playfulness, satire, criticism, constructivism, autoreferentiality, and intertextuality. The object of parody was commonly specific literary works, literary styles of specific literary currents, the poetics of a specific author, different conventions, forms of “lower” literature, such as romances and crime novels, and non-fictional styles such as academic writing, theater and literary reviews, journalist prose, calendars, guidebooks, bibliographies. Especially characteristic of modern parody, Nycz writes, was the interest in sociolects, political, work, and other social environments in which the “immanent critique of language and style” leads to a “demaskacji i krytycznej oceny związanych z nimi typów mentalności, wzorców kulturowych, postaw światopoglądowych” [disclosing and critical evaluation of the mentalities related to them, of the cultural norms, and world views] (Nycz 1993: 773–774).
5.2 The Umbilical Cord to Earth: Polish post-1989 Literature and Film

The editors of a Swedish anthology of Polish contemporary short stories, borrowed the title, *Navelsträngen i jorden* (2005) [The Umbilical Cord to Earth /Pępowina do ziemi], from the Polish literary critic Kinga Dunin who used the expression to describe the new orientation in Polish literature, as a contrast to the literature – “pępowina do nieba” [The Umbilical Cord to Heaven] – written during the years of national subordination (Grönberg & Ingvarsson 2005: foreword; Dunin 2004: 255, 259, 278).

This “new orientation” in Polish literature has been the object of much discussion, and opinions have certainly been diverse. “Wieczna kontestacja i narzekać na wszystko to ulubione zajęcie twórców młodej prozy,” [Eternal questioning and complaining about everything is the favorite occupation of the creators of the young prose] the weekly periodical *Wprost*’s Marta Sawicka (2005) wrote in the article “Literatura Nic” [Nothing Literature]. The literary critic Aleksander Fiut continues on the same quite critical note: “I must say that in my view the Polish literature of the last decade failed artistically to interpret and analyse its time” (Fiut 2007: 557). In the article “Between the Scylla of ‘Little Homeland’ and the Charybdis of Globalisation” (2007), he describes two major trends in Polish literature of the decades after the system change: on the one hand, the nostalgic returns to idyllic “little homelands” of the East and, on the other, “the vivid visions of the inferno of globalization.” As examples of the latter he mentions authors such as Dorota Masłowska, Dawid Bieńkowski, Edward Redliński, and Sławomir Shuty (whose works will be discussed in this chapter). Although this literature shows great diversity concerning social class, age etc., he writes, the portrait of Polish society in the novels is misleading because of “simplified journalistic approaches that place more emphasis on the negative than on the beneficial results of the transformation process.” And he concludes: “Modern Polish literature thus conveys little hope and much fear” (Fiut 2007: 558–559).

Fiut is moreover critical of the biased picture, the lack of “socially acceptable options” presented, and of the tendency in the works to blame the current misfortunes on outside forces, on the “mythical ‘them.’” “The assessments offered in these novels are without doubt simplistic, based on shallow, biased observations, too concentrated on anomalies of all kinds.” The rebelliousness of these novels lacks force since it lacks an address, he writes further (Fiut 2007: 559). Contrary to the critical views of Fiut, the literary critic Jarosław Klejnocki (2006) acknowledges that the works of Shuty and his contemporary Polish writer colleagues, “uncover problems there, where we cannot see them.” Literary critic Paweł Dunin-Wąsowicz discerns two recurring themes in the most recent Polish literature that relate to Fiut’s “vivid visions of the inferno of globalization”: the frustration of unemployment, and the frustration with employment, the latter being the more dominant. They both unite in
Shuty’s novel Zwal (2004). This literature goes under names such as “literatura antykapitalistyczna, antykonsumpcyjna, antykoroporacyjna” [anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist, anti-corporate literature] (Dunin-Wąsowicz 2005).

Fiut nevertheless praises the younger generation of writers for their innovative literary language, which he, unlike their social analysis and narrative originality, considers highly sensitive to the transformations of Polish society.

All of these writers have not only perfectly mastered all registers of Polish, but have also introduced into it, enriched with English neologisms, technical vocabularies, commercial expressions, mass-media slang, postmodern functional styles and milieu-generated dialects (Fiut 2007: 561).

The linguistic aspect of the post-1989 Polish prose, including the works of Sławomir Shuty, is also what Małgorzata Warchol-Schlottmann focuses on in her book Polnische Sprache nach der Wende 1989 (2009), where one of the chapters is completely dedicated to the literary language in the prose published by Polish authors who first emerged after the system change. She uses authors such as Sławomir Shuty to demonstrate the dominance of the spoken language (“Umgangssprache”) in this literature. The role of this language is for example to describe socially marginal groups (the different sociolects) and to deconstruct myths and stereotypes (Warchol-Schlottmann 2009: 561). She categorizes Shuty’s works under the title “the new literature as a mirror of the times after the transformation” and more specifically under “the sight of the winner of the transformation” (Warchol-Schlottmann 2009: 246 & 253). “Die Konsumgier macht die Menschen zu kranken, widerlichen Fressmaschinen, die alle inneren, auch religiösen, Werte verloren haben” [The consumerist greed has turned people into sick, disgusting eating machines, that have lost all other, also religious, values], she writes on the effect that consumerism has on Shuty’s characters. “Die Degradierung der Menschen spiegelt sich in einer degradierten, fehlerhaften Sprache, die zum Teil phonetisch wiedergegeben wird” [The degradation of people is reflected in a degraded, erroneous language, which is partly reproduced phonetically], she continues, pointing to the role of the spoken language in Shuty’s short story Komunia (Warchol-Schlottmann 2009: 255).

Warchol-Schlottmann places Shuty’s writing among the works of other contemporary Polish writers, such as Maciej Ostaszewski’s Do Amsterdamu (2005), Mariusz Sieniewicz’s Czwarte niebo (2004), Piotr Czerwinski’s Pokalanie (2005), and Dawid Bieńkowski’s Nic (2004) (Warchol-Schlottmann 2009: 253). These authors, she writes:

wenden sich gegen gefährlichen Entwicklungstendenzen in der polnischen Gesellschaft, die nach der Wende im Konsumrausch und dem Streben nach materiellem Gewinn jegliche moralische, religiöse und kulturelle Orientierung

And moreover:

Die zeitgenössische Literatur attackiert die polnische Variante des Kapitalismus, seinen schlechten Einfluss auf die Gesellschaft, die mit dem plötzlichen Wohlstand nicht umgehen kann (Warchol-Schlottmann 2009: 253).

More critical in his view of this “newest Polish literature” is the sociologist and editor in chief of Krytyka Polityczna, Sławomir Sierakowski, who sees the protest in the works as harmless: “krytyka zawarta w błyskotliwych książkach Shutego, Kuczoka (…) jest krytyką objawową, nie chce sięgać przyczyn” [The criticism present in the witty books by Shuty, Kuczok (…) is a criticism of symptoms, and it does not want to reach for the causes] (Sierakowski 2005a). He criticizes how it seems that everything is ridiculed: Not only Polishness but also everything that might replace it, how there seems to be a necessity to undermine all forms (Sierakowski 2005b). Referring to the role of ridiculing and joking during Communism, he concludes that a joke in general has no “political color,” but “Dziś – w świecie ironii i groteski – żart częściej jednak stoi po stronie systemu” [Today, in the world of irony and grotesque, the joke is more frequently on the side of the system] (Sierakowski 2005b). He continues:

A co z Polską, w której wszyscy śmieją się z tradycji, z nowoczesności i z ponowoczesności zarazem? Co z Polską tak specyficznie osadzoną w świecie „konca ideologii”? Tu i teraz mieć jakieś poglądy i poważnie ich bronić, oznacza narazić się na śmieszność. Jesteś katolikiem, feministką, wegetarianinem, ekologiem, konserwatystą, lewakiem, idziesz na demonstrację, będziesz głosował w wyborach? Żartujesz?! (...) Bo dziś wolno, a nawet należałoby się wyśmiewać, a bardzo nietwarzowe jest mówienie czegokolwiek na poważnie (Sierakowski 2005b).

[What about Poland, where everyone laughs at tradition, modernity, post-modernity at the same time? What about Poland grounded in the world of ‘the end of ideology’? To here and now have some views and seriously defend them, means to expose oneself to ridicule. Are you Catholic, feminist, vegetarian, ecologist, conservative, leftist, going to a demonstration, are you voting in the elections? Are you kidding?! (...) Because today you may, or even should, be ridiculed, and it is very inappropriate to say something seriously]

Sierakowski’s questions might certainly be posed with regards to the works discussed in this chapter, in which the humor is directed at quite disparate targets.
The comedy genre has also been popular in Polish cinema after 1989, where the number of comedies has increased. The reasons behind this Ewa Mazierska (2007: 92) considers to be as a response to viewers’ demands, as a ‘small narrative’ representing life from the “pavement level” and its suitability to “convey on screen critical views that since 1989 have dominated Polish culture at large.” Mazierska further underscores its critical potential: “Criticism is imbedded in comedy, and some of its sub-genres, such as satire, are perfect vehicles to denounce the sins of individuals and institutions.”

Polish post-communist cinema, like its fellow textual genre, has been criticized for not meeting the expectations that came with the fall of the communist system. The Polish cinema of the 1990s and first years of the 21st century has been characterized, on the one hand, as “heterogeneous”: While previous popular genres such as the comedy and cinema of moral concern continue to be popular after 1989, new genres, such as the police and gangster film, heritage cinema (historical or costume dramas), and biographical films have risen in popularity (Mazierska 2007: 16).

The common traits among the films of the last two decades are “autobiography, the vernacular and (...) the ‘small narrative,’” which Mazierska relates to the general tendency in postmodernism to oppose modernism’s grand narratives. Fellow cultural critic Piotr Marecki, on the other hand, describes Polish post-communist cinema during the transformation as either have given the priority to tradition “wybór wiernego tradycji słownika, ideologii i zestawu ikonograficznego” [the choice of a vocabulary true to tradition, ideology and the iconographic set] or to liberal market forces “formatowanie dzieł na potrzeby wolnego rynku, bardzo szybkie nadrabianie zaległości w stosunku do Zachodu, co najczęściej kończyło się kopiowaniem 1:1 wzorów i rozwiązań” [formatting the works according to the needs of the free market, very quick making up the distance to the West, which mostly ended in copying 1:1 patterns and solutions] (Marecki 2010: 13).

Mazierska also points to the films’ pessimism and criticism of the new social realities as another common trait of new Polish cinema: “The world represented is typically drab, the characters more often lose than win, the police, the church, school and society at large fail them rather than helping them” (Mazierska 2007: 14–15).

Jarosław Pietrzak is of another view, however, regarding the criticism of the new social realities. He writes that Polish cinema has stood helpless in the face of political poverty. “Biedę zaczęto poddawać procesom intensywnego ideologicznego odpolityczniania” [Poverty has been subjected to processes of intensive ideological depoliticization] (Pietrzak 2010: 123). He identifies seven strategies of ideologization of poverty in Polish film: mystification, aestheticization, psychologization, sentimentalization, criminalization, or blaming

46 Widespread pessimism has been noted as a common feature among films from post-communist Europe. Cf. Dina Iordanova (2003: 151–52).
PRL (Pietrzak 2010: 125). Drawing on Slavoj Žižek, Pietrzak goes as far as to accuse Polish cinema during the last two decades to be under an almost complete “neo-liberal-neoconservative Denkverbot” (Pietrzak 2010: 124).

5.3 The Comic Outcasts

The humoristic tone in Kochan’s short story *Ballada o dobrym dresiarzu* is set already in the title, which indicates a parody: a classical form (the ballad) combined with a new content (the *dresiarz*). The short story also has features from 19th-century Polish positivist fiction: an omniscient narrator and the fatalism surrounding the poor. Drawing on both common stereotypical views of *blokersi/dresiarze* and their fictional depictions, the short story exaggerates the dichotomy between the city center and the concrete suburb.

Kochan’s protagonist, Rysiek, grew up and lives in the Warsaw suburb of Gocław, which in the short story is described as a separate world and a home for only the socially and economically marginalized. Rysiek works as a guard at an electronics store; his mother is a cleaner, and his father is an unemployed welder. Rysiek’s parents discourage him from university studies because they find them unnecessary. By lucky coincidence Rysiek was exposed to literature as a young boy, while his mother was cleaning the library. Eventually this leads him as an adult to secretly start working as a cultural critic. This is however an ‘escape’ that in the end becomes impossible. The insuperable difference between the housing projects of the short story and the city center is expressed through cultural codes and through physical appearance. When Rysiek for example does not dress in the usual tracksuit he is physically abused, because he is assumed to be from “the outside” – from another part of the city.

The apartment home is never an asylum for Rysiek; it is a place of violence because of his father’s violent behavior when drunk; also it is a place for lies and charades, because Rysiek cannot reveal either to his parents or his landlord that he is working as a cultural critic. Only his own private room is a slight refuge, because there he is free to write. In this short story we thus see a continuation of the “homelessness” of the protagonists depicted in Chapter 4. In *Ballada o dobrym dresiarzu* this homelessness is expressed even more explicitly as the sad end of the story – Rysiek’s inability to unite his origin with the “center” of the intelligentsia – implies that he ends up in the anti-home par excellence – prison.

Although Dominik Matwiejczyk’s independent film *Krew z nosa* (2004) and Abelard Giza’s *Wożonko* (2003) depict space very differently, they both depart from Kochan’s representation of “homelessness” and instead portray the homes of their protagonists in broader terms. Unlike their precursors, the

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47 Gocław is the area that was first described as having *blokersi* according to Jarosław Trybuś (2011b: 229).
protagonists’ will to escape is ridiculed in these films; the characters are themselves portrayed as stupid, and the obstacles they face come from within the concrete suburb – from other subcultures.

*Krew z nosa* is probably best described as a caricature of the (stereo)typical depictions of *blokersi* and other fatalist narratives set in the housing projects. Shot in black and white in one of the Wrocław housing projects, the film follows the young man, Pablo and his two friends Sieja and Mario. Wanting to “zerwać z marazmem życia na blokowym osiedlu” [break with the stagnation of life in the housing projects] as the text on the back of the DVD reads, Pablo, without any previous experience, decides to record a hip-hop record. However – and in line with the overall caricature – to cover the costs of the recording studio, Pablo instead starts to deal drugs.

The first scene sets the spatial parameters for the film: the three friends are standing next to a fence that separates the housing projects from a heavily trafficked road and the “outside” world. In the other direction we see a row of high-rises. The film’s action takes place exclusively in the housing projects, where the three friends meet in their apartment homes or outside, in more or less abandoned places: the empty playground, the stairs to what seems to be an abandoned shopping arcade, etc. The homes are a closed sphere, but both apartments and the outdoor places in the *blokowisko* vicinity serve as places of socialization (meeting places) for the young men. The “street” and the apartment homes are thus not depicted as that different regarding the protagonists’ activities. They seem to be just as much ‘at home’ in the exterior spaces as in the interior. This is where *Krew z nosa* (and *Wożonko* too as we shall see below) departs from its ‘object of caricature,’ which instead rather emphasized the homelessness of the protagonists. The only random meetings are those between the *dresiarze* and the rival gangs; no other meetings are presented. The ‘street’ is thus only different in that it is where the violent acts and assaults take place.

Besides the more direct, initial reference to Kassovitz’ *La Haine* (1995), the film draws on several genre conventions and stereotypes about the *blokowisko* such as the multiplicity of subcultures, competing criminal and violent gangs, fatalism and negative spirals around a protagonist of well-meaning intentions, as well as a pregnant girlfriend as another obstacle in the protagonists efforts to “escape.” The disillusioned friends of the protagonists respond with pessimism to Pablo’s intentions to “escape.” As Pablo reveals his interest in a local actress, Sieja says he is aiming too high and that he only has “spacer po dachach” [a walk on the roofs] to offer her. The film’s emphasis on the physical environment also returns in the characters’ conversations and the negative opinions they express towards it, as they show an awareness of the obstacles it poses to them.

Pablo: Ty chyba nie myślisz, że tu do końca życia będę siedział?
The pessimistic and fatalist opinions of the characters are also reflected in how they refer to the housing projects – as “ponure” [gloomy] or “jebane” [fucking], and on several occasions the protagonist talks about “wyrwać się stąd” [breaking away from here] or “wydostać się stąd” [getting away from here].

The director of the independent film Krew z nosa (2004), Dominik Matwiejczyk explains in an interview that his intention with the film was to make “(…) parodia filmów, które mówią o blokowiskach.” [a parody of films that talk about the housing projects] (Marecki 2009: 102). But he also stresses his intention to show something more: “Ludzie, oglądając Krew z nosa, mieli się śmiać, ale też dostrzec w tej opowieści rąbek historii społeczeństwa tego okresu, dzieje pewnego środowiska, może pokolenia” [When watching Krew z nosa people were supposed to laugh, but also see a part of society of that time, the activity of a certain social environment, maybe a generation] (Marecki 2009: 113).

The film Krew z nosa was compared with both Że życie ma sens and Kasowitz La Haine, but Matwiejczyk, who grew up in the countryside, was accused of not knowing anything ”o życiu na osiedlu z wielkiej płyty” [about life in the prefabricated housing projects] (Marecki 2009: 102, 350). However, like Mezler and Lipiec, Matwiejczyk also stresses his film’s autobiographical traits in the film’s protagonist’s ability to “wyjść poza schemat życia” [escape the scheme of life] through creativity (hip-hop in the case of the protagonist – filmmaking in the case of Matwiejczyk) (Marecki 2009: 112).

The broader view of the home returns in the independent comedy film Wożonko, which is rather a parody than a caricature. The film follows a group of young men, dresiarze/dresy, who, wanting to finance their vacation, decide to kidnap a child from a nearby kindergarten but by mistake kidnap one from an orphanage instead. Adding to their “misfortune,” two criminals are on a mission to do exactly the same thing. The film parodies gangster films, dresiarze and the prejudiced view of life in the housing projects as hopeless and violent. The setting is not limited to the blokowisko, but it is the central setting. The other locations, spatial frames, are commonly (in line with the gangster film genre) in the city outskirts. The main characters often meet in the courtyard, on a bench or by a playground, and the streets in front of the apartment buildings. Unlike the fatalist narratives discussed in Chapter 4, the courtyard between the high-rises in Wożonko is sunny, lively and colorful. This works to ridicule the protagonists and their wish to escape even more.
The physical environment – typically depicted as full of decay and gloom – here becomes its sunny opposite – and a part of the film’s parodic elements. Unlike Krew z nosa and the works discussed in Chapter 4, these are not just spaces for violence and assaults but also random meetings. The border between inside and outside seems fluid; the characters move freely between these spaces and a more significant part of the action also take place in the semi-private spaces of the blokowisko. As in Krew z nosa, the protagonists seem just as much at home on the inside of the apartments as on the outside. The apartment homes to some extent also figure as (random) meeting places for the characters. In that sense, Wożonko is more similar to the apartment-house plots of the 1970s and 1980s. The film also departs from the other films revolving around blokersi, in that the actual city of the setting, Gdańsk, is mentioned (although never the neighborhood).

So perhaps not surprisingly, in an interview Giza admits that he is a great admirer of the Polish directors Stanisław Bareja (Alternatywy 4) and Marek Koterski (Dzień Świra): “Oni potrafili w taki sposób uchwycić i pokazać rzeczywistość, że człowiek cały czas się śmieje, ale potem wychodzi z kina i czuje się zniszczony” [They managed to capture and show reality in such a way that you laugh all the time but when you walk out of the movie theater you feel crushed] (Ambrosiewicz & Marecki 2009: 265).

The author of Kino niezależne w Polsce 1989–2009. Historia mówiona [Polish Independent film 1989–2009. An Oral History], Piotr Marecki, observes how Polish independent film seems to be a comedy although it is commonly considered a “difficult” genre. The reason behind this, he writes, is that the genre (comedy) is more forgiving toward mistakes and imperfections. Independent film, he adds, also allows filmmakers to discuss topics less frequently addressed in professional cinema (Marecki 2009: 14).

5.4 A New Poland

Among the humorous portrayals of the blokowisko home, there is a group of works that more specifically discuss contemporary Poland and Polishness. The non-places of Chapter 4 are thus exchanged for a backdrop undoubtedly situated in contemporary Poland and in Polish cultural and literary history. Przemysław Wojcieszek’s play Made in Poland (2004) resembles the other blokersi-centered narratives that feature young criminal and violent men, and depict the blokowisko as a secluded, separate world, marked by social problems. The play was compared with Dorota Masłowska’s novel Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną, with a similar young, frustrated dresiarz protagonist and written around the same time. But unlike the other “blokersi narratives,” Made in Poland does not contain the motif of escape.

Przemysław Wojcieszek’s theater debut centers on a young man, a blokers, Boguś, who one day decides to quit his job as a church ministrant and starts
to vandalize cars, tattoos the words “Fuck off” on his forehead and calls for a revolution. However, the ending is not tragic nor does it involve an escape; it is romantic. The play has obvious traces of the bildungsroman as it focuses on the young protagonist’s moral development and his relation to society. In that sense, notwithstanding the very diverging endings, Made in Poland has the most in common with Cześć Tereska among the previously discussed works, as the protagonists “leave” the Catholic Church and turn their frustration into immoral and violent behavior.

Made in Poland challenges the stereotypes of the blokersi narratives: although the play contains a young protagonist with immoral and violent behavior and the typical gloomy blokowisko setting with the characteristic ‘spatial frames’ of the local pub, the church (as an asylum), the unsafe, but open, apartment homes, the street and courtyard (violent but also a meeting space), the embankment close to the blokowisko as a threshold, Wojcieszek combines them with “new” content of politics and romance as well as a seriousness and an official tone in the dialogues and conversations. And unlike the works discussed in Chapter 4, the play is distinctly situated in Polish realities, as it contains several explicit intertextual references to Polish literary and cultural history. Besides the references to popular singer Krzysztof Krawczyk (whose portrait the protagonist’s mother has hung on her kitchen wall above the portraits of Lech Wałęsa and Jan Paweł II) and left-wing poet Władysław Broniewski, one of the main characters, Wiktor, is a former Polish teacher (now an alcoholic). The end of the play – the wedding party celebrating the matrimony between Boguś and Monika held in Boguś’s apartment home – is also a common motif in Polish literature, denoting, as in Wyspiański’s drama Wesele, for example, national passivity, but it is also an occasion for people of different classes and world views to meet. This happy, romantic ending, which literally cures the protagonist of his frustration, is illusory, however, as the wedding party hear sounds of beatings from the outside street, while The Clash’s song White Riot plays in the background. The “happy end” is thus limited to the private sphere, but as the end also suggests this is not a solution for Poland, as the frustration still exists, it also insinuates that their private happiness will not stand protected.

The play premiered at Teatr im. Modrzejewskiej in Legnica and became one of the greatest theater successes of that year. It received the Konrad Prize at Festiwal interpretacji in Katowice, and first prize in a competition for contemporary Polish theater plays. The following year, the play was filmed for Polish Public TV. The screenplay, which was originally written for cinema in 2001, was also eventually adapted for the screen in 2010 by the same director (Piekarska 2010). As we saw in Krew z nosa, there is a strong focus on the physical setting in Made in Poland that points to the geographical determinism that surrounds the protagonists. The orginal production, part of the theater director Jacek Głomb’s project, was set in a closed Supersam supermarket in the
real world *blokowisko* “Piekary” in Legnica. We may assume that this choice of theater scene was a way to enhance the authenticity of the play.

The high-rise area, where the protagonist lives in an apartment with his mother, is his whole world, and it is where he spends most of his time. This is where the church where he worked is located; this is where his old “master,” his elementary schoolteacher Wiktor lives. This is also where he vandalizes cars, calls for a revolution, and where he finds love. Even when Boguś’s mother talks about her youth, the high-rises are synonymous with home (Wojcieszek 2006: 434).

In one scene Wiktor even reminds Boguś of the world that exists outside the concrete suburb:


[Do you know there are places in this country where there are no high-rises? Can you imagine that? Have you ever seen a house, a normal house? With four walls, an upper floor and a chimney? Have you ever seen a house, you bastard. Have you ever lost such a home?]

Wiktor continues: “Przepraszam, Boguś. Chciałem ci tylko powiedzieć, że gdzieś tam jest inny świat, inne życie”[I am sorry I just wanted to tell you that somewhere out there is another world, another life] (Wojcieszek 2006: 441), thus emphasizing how *bloki* are equated with a separate world and a certain life style. The “normal” home Wiktor refers to is a single-family home, and not located in the housing projects.

In the play, the setting of the high-rise neighborhood is also viewed pejoratively. The priest Edmund describes it as a neighborhood “dla szczurów” [for rats], and the former teacher Wiktor says that the social mission is especially important “na takich blokowiskach jak to” [in a concrete neighborhoods like this one] (Wojcieszek 2006: 460–61).

The symbolically charged character of the Polish teacher returns as the protagonist in Marek Koterski’s comedy film *Dzień Świra* [Day of the Wacko] (2003), which revolves around the neurotic intellectual Adaś Miauczyński’s daily life and habits. This everyday life is far from the protagonist’s ideal, in which he writes poetry in the spirit of the national bard Adam Mickiewicz, something he is constantly prevented from doing in his contemporary life. Miauczyński daydreams of his first love, who in his nostalgic memory has become the perfect and flawless woman.

The screenplay was also published and received a nomination for the prestigious literary award NIKE in 2003. The protagonist of the film is seemingly the same as in *Życie wewnętrzne* (his ex-wife is played by the same actress, Joanna Sienkiewicz, although in *Życie wewnętrzne* the protagonist’s name
was Michał). The Polish teacher has obviously lost his former position in society and is now bitter about life and angry with everything and everyone in his surroundings. He dislikes his neighbors, who only disturb him in all his activities.

In the apartment interior the protagonist has created a perfectly neat and ordered world that he tries to control, but as it turns out it is not sufficiently protected from the outside world, which constantly tries to intrude through noise from neighbors or workers outside. The home of Miauczyński is the typical fortress – but with very thin and weak walls – which the protagonist is desperately trying to defend.

The film does not represent the blokowisko as a secluded sphere; the protagonist is portrayed in several places outside of it (although none of the ‘spatial frames’ are in the central public parts of the city). But, nowhere does there seem to be an asylum for him; instead everything seems to be a source of frustration. The housing projects\(^48\) underscore the protagonist’s averageness; like in Kieślowski’s Dekalog, the opening shot follows the camera hovering the facades of the housing projects, finally selecting Miauczyński’s window. Besides that, neither the protagonist nor any of the other characters even mention or talk about the housing projects specifically. The blokowisko setting also emphasizes the diminished social status of the protagonist in today’s Poland.

Questions about contemporary Poland and Polishness continue to be at the center of attention in the independent film Blok.pl (Marek Bukowski, 2001), which has usually been described as a dark absurd comedy. Here the high-rise and its vicinity as the film’s only setting becomes a symbol for contemporary Poland. Without a linear plot, the film shows short episodes from the diverse lives of the residents of the same high-rise apartment building. The director stresses the disorientation present in Poland as the source of inspiration for the film:

> Polska rzeczywistość jest niesłychanie nieuporządkowana, pozbawiona punktów odniesienia, autorytetów. Ja sam jestem zagubiony, a wokół siebie widzę wielu takich ludzi, którzy niespecjalnie orientują się o co chodzi w życiu. O tym właśnie chcieliśmy opowiedzieć (Olszewska 2001b).

[Polish realities are extremely unordered, deprived of points of orientation, authorities. I am myself lost, and around I see the kind of people that do not really orient themselves about what is happening in life. Precisely that was what we wanted to tell.]

The interior of the blok is depicted as rather frightening. The corridors and the stairways are represented as dark and empty. The shots, switching between

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\(^{48}\) The actual setting is also Ursynów.
different angles of the spaces of the stairways, suggest that a non-visible danger (the wanted rapist) is luring. The apartment interiors are depicted as secluded private worlds, just as mysterious and frightening as the semi-private space. One apartment resembles a museum of kitsch; in another a lonely man is absorbed in computer games, while a third is full of stuffed toys and plastic inflatable "family members." Most part of the action, however, is set in the vicinity of the high-rise apartment building and its interiors. The residents seem to be drawn to the surrounding prodigious nature and an adjacent neighborhood bar as if they wanted to escape their own "private worlds."

The first scene shows an almost paradise-like setting: in front of a meadow, with bushes and trees in full bloom, the sun is shining, the sky is blue and birds are singing. A sales man is talking about dreams, dreams that can be fulfilled by buying one of his pocket lamps. The extraordinary brightness of the picture enhances its surrealness. In the bar located in the midst of this nature setting, the parasols are up, the tables are occupied with merry guests, and the whole scene resembles a tourist resort. This resemblance with a resort suggests a temporariness to the situation. The film is also interrupted several times by quick shots of how the high-rise facade is cracking, and in the end a gas leak leads to an explosion. This preoccupation with a fragile surface recurs in other parts of the film: Zosia receives a pair of Levi’s jeans as a means to seduce Roman. The jeans are too small and only fit her if she alters them, which she does and catches Roman’s attention. The bridesmaid’s Ewa’s wedding dress is also too small for her, but she uses it anyway. The symbolism of these ill-fitting outfits – strój – in Polish alludes to the “strój polityczny” [political system]. The local bar has EU flags and a poster encouraging young Poles, with a rhetoric very similar to the rhetoric used during the communist period in Poland, to enter the European Union – suggesting that no deep change has taken place.

The characters of this world resemble mannequins without complex personalities, who are all solemnly engaged in their own private business. But neither humans nor nature seem to be suited for this world. The adjustments and efforts to fit in return in the characters’ obsessions with their bodies: Zosia wants to lose weight, the dresiarze are lifting weight in the gym, and Henryk cuts a tree in order to shape it “even” so it will be accepted by the norms of the European Union. In the end, Barbara tears off her blond wig and “kills” her plastic family-member dolls; what is left of the tree Henryk has been cutting is just a bare stem without leaves or branches; and the altered jeans Zosia wears cannot be opened, so Roman leaves her.

As with the other post-2000 works, the state is hardly visible. Here it is represented only through the (corrupt) police circulating the neighborhood, and an empty, abandoned post office. The bright sunshine and the adjusted facades are indeed temporary, as suggested by the initial scenes. Compared with the faulty interiors and constructional flaws depicted in for example Alternatywy 4, about which Mioduszewska wrote “the system is collapsing like
the high-rise” (Mioduszewska 2006: 154), the physical flaws of the high-rise in Block.pl are limited to the facade, to the exterior. While the interior flaws of Alternatywy 4 do not lead to a complete breakdown, the exterior flaws of Block.pl finally do. The decay and the final literal gas explosion show the impossibility of this adjustment to, and the unreliability and inauthenticity of the new political and social discourses.

The novel Żywoty świętych osiedlowych [Lives of the Saints from The Housing Projects] (2007) by Lidia Amejko also depicts the housing projects as a cross-section with a humoristic tone and with both grotesque and magical elements. The form of her stories takes its inspiration from the Dominican monk Jacobus de Voragine’s medieval The Golden Legend, which is a collection of biographies of Christian saints and martyrs (hagiography). In an interview, the author stresses the universality of her stories: “Dekoracje są polskie, betonowo-osiedlowe, bo tylko takie znam.” [The décor is Polish, concrete-neighborhood blocks, because that is the only one I know] but that her characters might be found anywhere else in the world, because they describe “(…) uniwersalne problemy egzystencjalne.” [universal existential problems] (Kołodyńska 2007). Although Amejko is critical of the concrete housing projects aesthetically, she also sees some hope in them, calling them “łatwą metafortą wszelkich gnostyckich poglądów” [an easy metaphor for all Gnostic views] (Kołodyńska 2007).

The collection takes the well-known and most familiar housing projects and their anonymity as its starting point. The osiedle is here depicted as a microcosm. What connects the short stories are not so much causal relationships as their common location, the blokowisko and its vicinity, which the characters of the stories never leave.

The inhabitants of the blokowisko, i.e. the protagonists of the stories, are saints and martyrs. Amejko emphasizes their negative characteristics or their sinful aspects. One of the stories begins with the words: “Złych ludzi na Osiedlu naszym nigdy nie brakowało (…)” [We never lacked bad people in our Neighborhood (…) ] (Amejko 2007: 20). Another starts with: “Wielu takich na Osiedlu, co by dobrzy być chcieli! Ale ci od razu powiem, człowieku: trudne to jest” [There are many in the Neighborhood that would like to be good. But I will tell you right away, man: It is not easy] (Amejko 2007: 26). Moreover, although the stories contain cross-references to each other, the focus in the stories lies on the individual destinies of residents, who are often portrayed as lonely, either alone in their apartment homes, or as they move around in the neighborhood. At the same time, the narrator of the blokowisko legends is one of the residents of the neighborhood, who spends his time in front of the local liquor store “Pod Jerichem” [At Jericho]. He narrates the stories in either the first-person singular or plural, and the neighborhood is referred to as “nasze Osiedle” [our Neighborhood] with a capital O. The partial narration in first-person plural and the main attempt to create a
“golden legend” for their neighborhood also have a socializing, uniting function that underscores the collectivity of the residents and neighborhood’s identity against the ‘non-placeness’ of the area.

5.5 From Gloom to Colorful Consumerism

5.5.1 Kaczmarek’s Fortress

The grotesque as a literary device returns in Tomasz Kaczmarek’s theater plays Matka cierpiąca [Suffering Mother] (2004) and Wchodzenia i schodzenia Rysia [Ryś’s Walking Up and Down] (2004). Religiosity and faith are also a theme here, but not in the form of divine intervention or epiphanies as in Amejko’s short-story collection. Here it is rather portrayed in its cultural expression through the values and beliefs of the protagonists. Kaczmarek’s grotesque is directed at the institution of the family and pusta religijność [empty religiosity]. Like the protagonist of Dzień świra, the characters of Kaczmarek’s plays want to create a safe castle out of their apartment homes in order to protect themselves from the moral decay and the decadence of the surrounding society. The ‘spatial frames’ are almost exclusively the apartment interiors, from which the characters do not move; there is also no contact between the apartment, the blokowisko vicinity or the city or town. The closed homes emphasize the narrow-mindedness of its residents as the characters display a deep intolerance towards the surroundings’ inability to correspond to their ideals, which are based on Catholic morality. Through the grotesque, however, Kaczmarek shifts the focus, depicting the actions and views of the characters as deeply immoral and even evil.

Wchodzenia i schodzenia Rysia takes place exclusively inside a blok of an anonymous housing project. The protagonists are a retired couple, Jadzia and Ryś, who spend all their time spying on their neighbours by eavesdropping and peeping. They guard their flower bed of roses in the yard and harass their neighbors which they view as enemies with whom they are at war. In the beginning of the play, they live in an apartment on the bottom floor. Unhappy with the limited view (caused by a wide, dense tree) and the noisy neighbor above (an old widow), they fight until they get rid of her and possess her apartment themselves. In the end, after both murdering and physically hurting their enemy neighbors (making them slip in the stairways, turning off the electricity, or else throwing boiling water on children walking in their flowerbed of roses), they live on the fourth floor, and Ryś has finally become chairman of the board of the housing association. At that point the couple is happy and satisfied with their new apartment, but their paranoia has grown even greater.

RYSIU: Mam złe przeczucia. Ludzie są źli.
JADZIA: Podli i kłamliwi.
RYSIU: Mściwi i bezwzględní.
([Kaczmarek 2004: 29]

[RYSIU: I have a bad presentiment. People are evil.
JADZIA: Despicable and deceitful.
RYSIU: Vindictive and ruthless.]

After each accomplished “apartment climb” they talk about “nadać nieco du-
chowości” [adding some spirituality] to the apartment and hanging up more

Kaczmarek’s plays have been viewed as unveiling “pustą polską
religijność” [empty Polish religiosity] (Jarosław Tumidajski cited in Paw-

The realities of the Polish blokowiska here encounter Catholic customs and metaphysics, which manifest themselves in
the life of the ordinary, naïve protagonists. The author Kaczmarek, like many
other authors and directors discussed in this thesis, has himself lived in a
blokowisko and admits that he “doskonale zna blokową mentalność” [knows
perfectly well the mentality of the concrete high-rise] (Pawłowski 2006: 196).
The closed home of the protagonists consists of their own apartment, which
resembles a fortress that they have to protect from the enemies of the outside
world. The stairways are referred to as “public” by Jadwiga (Kaczmarek 2004:
24) at the same time as the roses she has planted in the garden outside are her
“home” (Kaczmarek 2004: 28).

Like the main characters of Wchodzenia i schodzenia Rysia, the prote-
gnist, the “suffering mother” of Matka cierpiąca, is extremely xenophobic (and
racist), afraid of everything and everyone in the world outside the closed apart-
ment. The threats of the outside world are the degenerates, decadence, mech-

anization, drug abusers, computerization, “[m]urzyni, żółci, skośnoocy, cała
ta komunistyczna zgraja, pederaści, muzułmanie i buddyści” [niggers, yel-
lows, slant-eyed, the whole pack of Communist pederasts, muslims and bud-
dhists] (Kaczmarek 2006: 210), as well as insects and microbes. Kaczmarek’s

Besides the explicit Brechtian influence, Kaczmarek’s play – or more

Kaczmarek’s grotesque play Matka cierpiąca was inspired by Bertolt Brecht’s Mother
Courage and Her Children (1939). It solemly takes place inside an apartment
in a concrete high-rise, “kiczowato urządzony, wypełniony tandetnymi de-
wocjonaliami” [decorated kitschly with cheap religious items] (Pawłowski
2006: 196 & 203), as it is described in the first stage directions.

Besides the explicit Brechtian influence, Kaczmarek’s play – or more

critique of ‘Polishness’ itself, i.e. what it is considered to com-
prise.
The xenophobic mother is persistent in protecting her home from foreign influences (which she views as satanical): “(...) tutaj w maminym domku, żadna zła moc się nie ustanie. Po moim trupie!” [here, in mother’s house no evil force will settle. Over my dead body!] (Kaczmarek 2006: 212–213). She disinfects their apartment with chlorine, and forbids her husband to open any windows because of the risk of their catching a cold or of a bug entering. The paranoia progresses from an unwillingness to let her daughter go out and preventing her own niece to enter, to locking up herself and her own family inside their apartment, and in the end to murdering her niece, her two children as well as her husband.

“Wszyscy o dobrym sercu siedzą w domu i dumają. Nie krzątają się jak bezpańskie psy.” [Everyone of a good heart sits at home and contemplates. They do not hustle around like stray dogs.] (Pawłowski 2006: 218), the mother exclaims to the niece, who wants to come inside.

The evil that the mother projects on the outside world is thus unveiled to exist within her own home, and in herself: “Matka jest także według Kaczmareka dowodem na istnienie przemocy i zła tam, gdzie go nie dostrzegali autorzy brutalistycznych sztuk o blokersach i urodzonych mordercach” [Matka is also according to Kaczmarek a proof of the existence of violence and evil where the authors of brutalist works about blokersi and born murderers did not see it], the theater critic Roman Pawłowski writes (Pawłowski 2006: 197). Tomasz Kaczmarek, however, points beyond the figure of the mother, at common Polish anxieties related to the Catholic culture:


[For sure, the anxieties of the Mother come from our Polish anxieties and concern us all. Every Pole, even if he wants it or not, is immersed in a certain type of Catholicism. Those mothers, who do not drink or smoke, but systematically finish off family members, are millions.]

5.5.2 Sławomir Shuty’s Blok

The grotesque as a literary device and a thematic focus on “pusta religijność” and consumerism resurge in Sławomir Shuty’s short stories. As in Kaczmarek’s plays, the contact between the neighbors of the high-rise is limited to eavesdropping and voyeurism. In the stairways children meet for play, but never the adults, who have immersed themselves in consumption orgies.
Shuty opisał życie: trochę bloków, osiedla, dzielnicy, miasta. We wszystkich było podobnie – spotkania z ludźmi na klatce albo niespotykanie na klatce nikogo, szarość, nieobecność, nuda, zmęczenie, przygnębienie. Klimat miejski (Radłowska 2004).

[Shuty described life: some high-rises, housing projects, neighborhoods, the city. In all it was the same – meetings with people in the stairwell or not meeting anyone there, grayness, absence, boredom, tiredness, gloom. An urban climate.]

Sławomir Shuty’s hypertext Blok [The high-rise apartment building] (2002) and short-story collections Cukier w normie [Sugar Level Normal] (2002) and later with some additions, Cukier w normie z ekstrabonusem [Sugar Level Normal with an Extra Bonus] (2005) are cross-sections of Polish society, but with grotesque and parodic twists. But unlike the satire of Alternatywy 4, Shuty’s high-rise has no sign of the socialist ideology or the state and its representatives. The stories provide insights into both the everyday life of the residents and the celebrations of Polish religious traditions. Both types have a focus on consumption, and the traditions have been emptied of their original meaning.

The name Sławomir Shuty (1973–) is a pseudonym for Sławomir Mateja. The surname is constructed out of the Polish phrase “z huty” [from the ironworks] which refers to the city or nowadays more accurately the Cracovian suburb of Nowa Huta [the new ironworks], where the author grew up and also the setting of many of his works. „Szkoła, sklepy, magiel, boisko sportowe, budowlanka – osiedle było mikroświatem. Nie było potrzeby się stamtąd ruszyć” [School, shops, mangle, a sport field, vocational school – the neighborhood was a microcosm], Shuty explains in an interview (Janowska 2004).

Besides the titles mentioned above, Shuty is also the author of Nowy Wspaniały Smak (1999), Belkot (2001), Zwal (2004), Produkt Polski (2005), Ruchy (2008), and Nowy Baton (2010). He has also directed the films W drodze (2003), Luna (2005), and Panoptikon (2010).

After resigning from his work at a bank, where he had been employed for a couple of years, he “engaged in a radical critique of socio-economic relations” (Nowacki 2004) and for the novel Zwal, which draws on his own work experiences at the bank office, he received the literary prize “Paszport ‘Polityki’” in 2004 “za literacki słuch, za pasję i odwagę w portretowaniu polskiej rzeczywistości” [for a literary ear, for passion and courage in the portrayal of the Polish realities] (Pietrasik 2005). One critic described the novel as a “metaphor for the condition of today’s young Poles in the modes of capitalist enterprising” (Zaleski 2004).

49 The short stories from Shuty’s Cukier w normie were adapted into a theater play by Piotr Waligórski that premiered at Teatr Łaźnia Nowa in Nowa Huta in April 2005.
Shuty has been involved in the alternative artistic Cracow-based group Ha!art and has taken an active stance against consumerism in other fields besides literature. In the essay *W paszczy konsumpcji* [In the jaws of consumerism] in the “generational manifesto,” a collection of essays by people born in the 1970s *(Frustration. The Young about the Brave New World)* (2003, P. Marecki, ed.) he criticized consumerism and the powers of the media, claiming that we are living under siege from the media and that the cultural weight of both Polish and American societies has shifted towards the centers for entertainment and consumption (Shuty 2003: 20).

The stylistic modes of Shuty’s literary works are the comic modes: parody, the grotesque, irony. In an interview for the weekly periodical *Polityka*, he explains:

Śmieję się z Polaków, z polskości, bo w tym kraju żyję. Śmieszy mnie ta gwałtowna polska przemiana: z szarości w kolorową konsumpcję. Wkurza mnie, kiedy widzę, jacy ludzie nami rządzą, bo w tym kraju będą żyły moje dzieci. Chciałbym czuć się w Polsce jak u siebie w domu (Janowska 2004).

[I laugh at Poles, at Polishness, because it is in this country I live. I’m amused by that violent Polish transformation: from grayness to colorful consumption. I become annoyed when I see which people are ruling us, because in this country my children will live. I would like to feel at home in Poland.]

In the hypertext novel *Blok* (2002) we follow the residents living in a ten-story high-rise apartment building (blok) with thirty apartments. The hypertext thus consists of thirty short stories, one for each apartment (and resident). The residents of the house are both families with children, older and younger couples, lonely old women and men, teenage gangs, *blokersi*. The language of the short stories is close to spoken language, and consists both of slang and dialectal variants.

Seweryna Wysłouch (2014) pointed to the “common territory” as the basic link between the stories (like in Amejko’s short story collection), and she further emphasized the spatial nature of *Blok* compared with its almost identical printed short-story collection: “Wyeliminowane są relacje przyczynowo-skutkowe między wydarzeniami, (...) Powiązania fabularne zastępuje jedność przestrzeni, przy czym spacjalizacja następuje tu kosztem czasu” [The causal relationships between events are eliminated (...) The unity of space replaces the chronological relationships, by which spatiality occurs at the expense of time]. Within each short story in the hypertext, a word, a sentence or parts of sentences are hyperlinks that lead the reader either to one of the other short stories that also in some way relates to the same topic or to a short text that expands the topic further by giving a description of it, which thus connects the residents of the different stories.
The characters become caricature-like in the exaggeration of their behavior, and the stories have clear parodic elements. The parodic effect stands out for example in how the stories show how religious traditions have become saturated with consumerism – the form is the same but the content is new.

Shuty’s colleague at H!art, the sociologist Jan Sowa said that Shuty “intuitively feels the meaning of political and sociological theory” (Janowska 2004). In the article “Dezerterzy społeczeństwa konsumpcji” [Deserters from the society of consumerism] Sowa criticizes the new consumerist society that has seized Poland after the fall of communism. He writes that Herbert Marcuse’s one-dimensional man, “pozbawiony jest krytycznego wymiaru refleksji o świecie społecznym” [devoid of the critical dimension of reflection about society], has come to triumph (Sowa 2003: 113). And in Shuty’s short stories Marcuse’s one-dimensional man easily comes to mind as Shuty’s characters often resemble puppets uncritically exclaiming messages from different media.

5.5.3 Shuty’s Home: Grotesque Parody and Hypermodernity
As mentioned above, in Sławomir Shuty’s short stories, the home is the site of both everyday life and celebrations; we follow the habits, chores, desires, conversations, family traditions, and celebrations of holidays etc. of the residents of a common Polish blok. In many respects, Shuty’s literary world also displays characteristics of what the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky named hypermodernity. Lipovetsky describes hypermodernity as a “consummate modernity, “the age of the hyper” where “the cult of technocratic modernization has won out over the glorification of ends and ideals” (Lipovetsky 2005: 34). It is “characterized by hyperconsumption and the “hedonization of life.”

The homes of Shuty’s characters are places for consumption, overindulgence, and fulfillment of primary needs at the same time as the facade to the outside is carefully maintained. This focus on the bodily, material and physical world – far away from the metaphysical and spiritual (as noted by Grönberg & Ingvarsson (2005) and Dunin (2004)) – has in part grotesque elements. In the stories, the honorable and spiritual level, such as the family and religion, is lowered to a material level consistent with grotesque realism. A characteristic that several of the stories share is how the “new” discourses saturate the “old” (but perhaps also how the old cling to the new). Traditional forms remain, but they are filled with a content of the “new” and create what Philip Thomson called “grotesque parody” – “when the conflict (…) between content and form becomes intolerable” (Thomson 1972: 40–41). This type of grotesque is not the liberating and regenerating force that Bakhtin saw in Rabelais, but rather private in nature as during the 17th and 18th centuries when “the

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50 As discussed in Chapter 4, Marc Augé called this phase supermodernity.
feast ceased almost entirely to be the people’s second life, their temporary renascence and renewal” (Bakhtin 1984: 33).

The short story *Z tysiąca i jednej choroby* [One Thousand and One Illnesses], whose title is derived from the well-known Arabic folk tale collection, works with the parodic contrast between form and content: a child’s good-night story told by a father to his daughter becomes explicit medical descriptions of the digestion processes in the body after indulgence.

Jacek pocałował ją w czoło i zaczął opowiadać dalej.


The daughter is enthusiastic for more medical descriptions of overeating, and the father goes on to also explain the possible long-term dangers and how they can be counteracted. In the middle of his good night story the father starts dreaming of food himself “przez moment zobaczył w myślach wspaniałe piec-zyste i do tego kilka pikantnych sosów, mnam mnam…” [for a moment he could see in his thoughts an amazing steak and beside it a couple of spicy sauces, mnam mnam…] (Shuty 2005: 8).

The clinical descriptions of the digestion processes have thus become a good-night story, and in the end of the story the reader finds out that tomorrow’s story will continue on the topic of medicine, as it will be about the bladder. The explicit “medical” descriptions do not interfere or exclude dreams of indulgence; they exist simultaneously. On the one hand, it is an example of how oppositional trends coexist in hypermodernity: excess in consumption and a firm obsession with “health and hygiene” on the part of the individual and where “health has imposed itself as a mass obsession” (Lipovetsky 2005: 39). The daughter has no problem listening to explicit, and very realistic, medical descriptions instead of fantastic fairy tales; she even displays just as much or even more enthusiasm than one would have expected for an average fairy tale. On the other hand, this conflation of seemingly incompatible elements of the good-night story, explicit medical descriptions and indulgence gives the story a Bakhtinian grotesque twist.
In his analysis of the grotesque, Bakhtin separated the popular banquet from the banquet of the modern bourgeoisie. The latter took place in the private home and the body represented was a classical closed and complete body without any “grotesque disorder” (Ashley & Hollows 2004: 45): “images of excess (...) simply represent a gluttonous celebration of abundance, rather than a collective celebration of the achievements of productive labor” (Ashley & Hollows 2004: 44; Bakhtin 1984: 301–302). Although described in clinical language, Shuty’s “dissected” body is open and dynamic, and possibly filled with disease.

The grotesque body is in focus also in the short story Nowe pożycie [New Cohabitation]. We follow the couple Magda and Jurek, who out of pressure from their neighbors’ expectations on a young couple start discussing having a child. The grotesque in the story also comes forward in the contrast between the ordinary everyday language and the extraordinary abusive activities and the distorted bodily images. Their discussions sound as if they were planning to make an investment or buy a new household commodity. They weigh pros and cons against each other, and they calculate the possible profits. The grotesqueness of the story is made explicit in the end after they have made the decision, and at the time of birth, instead of a child an old tape recorder comes out.

The story is also told in a non-spectacular, everyday language, about Jurek’s habit of physically violating Magda, how he dreams of a child and how he would raise it authoritatively, and how Magda imagines how she would exercise influence on the child, how bored they both are, and also how they, as a remedy for that, indulge in sexual experiments where “Na dodatek po tych szalonych milosnych eksperymentach Magda musiała godzinami wyjmować z pochwy różne przypadkowe przedmioty” [In addition, after those wild love experiments, Magda had to pull out different random objects from her vagina for hours] (Shuty 2005: 121). The contrast between the ordinary language of the descriptions and the explicitness of the bodily, surprising, extraordinary content enhances the grotesque element.

In Za kulisami [Behind the Curtains], written in a stream-of-consciousness mode, we closely follow the trivial thoughts and household chores of an older woman walking around in her home, worrying about the dog, how and where she cleans the apartment, how she decides to watch a soap opera, what she wants to watch on TV today, her reactions to different TV commercials. The existence “behind the curtains” is not only the “pusta religijność” [empty religiosity] but a one-dimensional (wo)man who seems fully immersed in both traditional discourses and consumerism. Herbert Marcuse’s “one-dimensional man” again comes to mind when reading the stream-of-thoughts of the housewife. Her thoughts around her chores are expressed in a language immersed in the consumerist ideology that seem blue printed from a weekly magazine or TV commercials. She constantly explains to herself why she has to clean, why she has to take out the garbage (possible diseases), and why she should
watch a certain TV program or the TV news, constantly stressing its “usefulness.”

[D]zięki oglądaniu tego programu będę wiedziała, jak żyją ludzie w innych częściach świata, jakie mają zwyczaje i kulturę, a także jakim posługują się językiem, co pozwoli mi lepiej zrozumieć tego rodzaju ludzi, dzięki czemu też być może stanę się tolerancyjna w stosunku do różnych prymitywnych religii i dziwnych zachowań społecznych (...) (Shuty 2005: 97).

[Thanks to watching this program I will know how people live in other parts of the world, what habits and culture they have, and what language they use, which will help me to better understand that type of people, thanks to that maybe I will be tolerant towards different primitive religions and strange social behaviors (...)]

And furthermore about the TV news:

[I]nformacje bowiem w nich zawarte dadzą mi ogólne pojęcie o sytuacji gospodarczej i politycznej współczesnego świata (...) nie można bowiem egzystować w społeczeństwie otwartym, nie wiedząc, co się wokół dzieje, człowiek, który nie zna bieżących faktów, staje się wyobcowany i zaczyna nienaturalnie żyć swoim życiem (Shuty 2005: 98).

[The information they contain gives me a general understanding of the financial and political situation of the contemporary world (...) you can hardly exist in an open society, not knowing what is happening around you, a man who does not know the current facts becomes alienated and starts to live his life unnaturally.]

The lady’s dog is old and tired, so she also questions his usefulness: “jaki z niego pożytek? Leży tylko całymi dniami w kącie i patrzy się w jeden punkt, będę musiała zwrócić uwagę na ten fakt mężowi” [What is his usefulness? He only lies all days in the corner and stares at one point, I have to tell my husband about that] (Shuty 2005: 101). She justifies watching a TV game show by stressing its positive effects on our memory: “teleturniej pozwala uaktywnić się tym częściami mózgu, które zazwyczaj nie są uaktywniane, tego rodzaju ćwiczenia pamięci są niezwykle korzystne dla pamięci” [The TV game show helps activate parts of the brain that are usually not activated, that type of memory practice is extremely beneficial for the memory] (Shuty 2005: 102).

The story might be said to mock the daily activities of housewives, including cleaning, cooking, shopping, watching TV, dieting, and reading gossip magazines. She never questions her routines; on the contrary, she explicitly justifies their usefulness (which might seem as a way to convince herself of her own contribution and “utility”). Self-improvement and avoiding diseases seem to be the main justifications for her activities. On the one hand, we have a traditional image of the housewife doing housework, who takes her duties very seriously; on the other hand, we see how this woman is immersed in the
hypermodern discourses of the media that emphasize the individual (and his/her improvement) and “the fear of disease” (Lipovetsky 2005: 13). Lipovetsky describes the individual of hypermodernity as hypernarcissistic, oriented both toward pleasure and hedonism and toward tension and anxiety. Hyperconsumption is the third phase of consumerism that absorbs and integrates more spheres of social life: “The last phase [of consumption] has led to a boundless extension of the reign of consumption” (Lipovetsky 2005: 15). Lipovetsky points to the paradoxes and the conflicting norms of hypermodernity: “(...) more than ever, individuals are taking care of their bodies, are obsessed by health and hygiene, and obey medical guidelines. On the other hand, individual pathologies are proliferating, together with the consumption characteristic of anomie, and anarchic behavior” (Lipovetsky 2005: 33). He writes that this new modernity follows “the tune of excess:” “Even the individual behavior is caught up in the machinery of excess: witness the mania for consumption, (...), bulimia and anorexia, obesity, compulsions and addictions” (Lipovetsky 2005: 32–33).

The topic of “pusta religijność” returns in the end of the story and suggests that religious faith has become a question of personal physical appearance: the housewife prays to God that she will not gain weight before a dinner at her husband’s workplace.

– O, Boże miłosierny i sprawiedliwy, który jesteś, jeśli jesteś, pomóż mi – wyszeptała – nie mogę przytyć przed zbliżającym się koktajlem zorganizowanym przez pracodawców męża, po prostu nie mogę, ty wiesz dlaczego!

(Shuty 2005: 104).

[– Dear merciful and righteous, that you are, if you are, help me – she whispered – I must not gain weight before the upcoming cocktail party organized by my husband’s employer, I simply cannot, you know why!]}

Religion has a presence in several of Shuty’s short stories, but in its expression, either in the celebrations of religious holidays and ceremonies, or in individual characters personal communication with God, the sacred and existential meaning has been exchanged (or to a large extent downplayed) for the material and bodily aspects.

In the short story Święta [The Holidays], the Christmas celebrations are reduced into the trivial preparations and quarrels of the couple Zosia and Staś. Their celebrations are limited to their apartment home, and their emphasis lie on eating, drinking, and watching TV. Even as children singing Christmas carols ring the doorbell, they refuse to open. And when they share Christmas wafers and exchange the blessings with each other, instead of wishing each other well, they wish improvements of each other: Staś wishes that Zosia wouldn’t pick fights as much and that Zosia would talk less on the phone because it costs too much, and Zosia wishes that Staś would stop wearing such
foolish clothing (Shuty 2005: 48–49). The story’s explicit elements of grotesque imagery are especially evident in their focus on indulgence. Staś suddenly asks his wife, while putting a piece of fish into his mouth, to remind him to take a bottle of urine to the doctor for examination after the holidays. And after the holidays Staś has eaten so much that he starts imagining the sausage on the table is talking. “Napił się, najadł jeszcze raz, zasycił plackami i wędliną, i leż przy stoliku, a kiedy tak leżał objedzony jak bąk i majaczył, posłyszał, że ulokowane na talerzu resztki wędliny mówią do niego ludzkim głosem” [He drank up, ate another round, filled up with pies and the cured meat, lay down by the table, and when he laid stuffed raving like a turkey, he heard how the leftovers of the cured meat on the plate started talking to him in a human voice] (Shuty 2005: 51).

In the story Komunia Shuty again describes a religious celebration almost devoid of sacred content. As the title indicates, Komunia revolves around the events surrounding the religious tradition of the first Holy Communion [the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist], but despite the title, the focus of the story is shifted from the religious rituals towards “rituals” of consumption.

The little boy receiving communion, Janusz, can only think about the computer game he will buy with the money he has received as a Communion gift. His family and relatives indulge in a feast of dishes, which is compared to the size of a small wedding (Shuty 2005: 26). They do not spare the vodka, and the family members keep eating and eating. Their indulgence is thoroughly and explicitly described: “Ciotka Baśka waliła szóstą kawę ze śmietanką w proszku i z cukrem / już nie mogła, ale jak się bawić to się bawić” [Aunt Baśka guzzled the sixth cup of coffee with cream and sugar/ she was already full, but when you’re having a good time, you’re having a good time] (Shuty 2005: 26) and: “krzesny zaś już cały czerwony jak świnia, po drugim zawale, a przecież nie będzie sobie niczego odmawiał, galaretka świńska przed nim pływa w nocie, że musi łyżką ją jeść” [Godfather was red as a pig, after the second infarct, but it is not like he is going to turn down anything for himself, the pork jelly is swimming in vinegar in front of him, so he had to eat it with a spoon] (Shuty 2005: 26–27). The guests’ drinking and eating also start to show physically on them as they sweat and their faces become red. While the adults are absorbed by the indulgence, the little boy Janusz (whose first Communion we are witnessing) is absorbed by the money he has received; he sits in his room counting the money “patrząc na nie jak na mannę z nieba” [looking at it as it was manna lichen] (Shuty 2005: 28). During the actual ceremony, Janusz remains absorbed in his thoughts on the presents he will receive:

[The priest repeated like a wind-up toy – Dear children, in a while you will receive Lord Jesus in your awaiting hearts – but in Januszek’s heart a Sony battle was taking place, as he was planning to buy for that money (…).]

In *Wizyta domowa* [The House Call], the “pusta religijność” is again conveyed. Here the annual home visit by the local priest is carefully described from the practical (non-holy) perspective of a family receiving the visit. The story shows how bothered the family is by the visit as they quarrel and pretend to be religious. The holy, sacred significance of the visit seems to have been lost, and the focus is turned to the primal needs of the priest (food) and to the preferences in TV entertainment.

For the occasion the family not only clean their home, and add and fake religious details to the interior; they also exchange the regular landscape painting hanging on the living room wall for a painting of the Pope, and they mix holy water with tap water. “Tylko się Biblii nie udało pożyczyć na czas, trudno” [Only the Bible they didn’t manage to borrow in time, too bad] (Shuty 2005: 32). The priest is not especially interested in the visit either. He is described as bored and involuntarily walking to the living room since he is actually tempted to go to the kitchen and “otworzyć lodówkę, wyjąć kawał swojskiej, jeżeli akurat by się tam znajdowała, zanurzyć w niej zęby i z pełnymi ustami powiedzieć: gość w dom, Bóg w dom” [open the refrigerator, take out a piece of sausage, if there should actually be some, dive his teeth into it and with a full mouth say: a guest in the house, God in the house] (Shuty 2005: 34). After the visit the father quickly turns on the TV in order to “miss as little as possible” (Shuty 2005: 36).

5.6 Chapter Conclusions

Like the works discussed in Chapter 4, almost all the narratives have portrayed the housing projects as a separate world; the works’ setting is almost exclusively the housing projects. A majority of the apartment homes are also closed, private spheres. However, the works criticize this inward and private tendency.

The works discussed in “The Comic Outcasts” both follow and challenge the spatial representations of the fatalist narratives analyzed in Chapter 4, where the semi-public and public spaces in the *blokowiško* vicinity and the apartment interiors were the main ‘spatial frames,’ while the city center and the semi-private space are less prominent. In *Krew z nosa*, which utilizes caricature as a stylistic device, the spatial depictions are similar to the works of Chapter 4, in *Ballada o dobrym dresiarzu*, where the parody is not directed at the form of the ‘*blokersi* narratives,’ but the ballad form, the spatial representation is also in line with, or perhaps even more exaggerated than, the works of Chapter 4 (it underscores the protagonists’ ‘homelessness’). In *Woźonko,*
on the other hand, where the parody is at least on the one hand directed at the stereotypical fictional portrayals of the *blokowisko*; the apartment homes are depicted as open, and there is fluidity between the interiors and exteriors.

However, in both *Wożonko* and *Krew z nosa*, in terms of value, ‘the street’ and the apartment homes are portrayed as equal. For the protagonists, both spaces are meeting places, and it is often not clear, or of little importance who lives where. The individual home is depicted as being of less importance to the characters. And the protagonists seem to equate home with the street and vice versa. As in Chapter 4, on the one hand, this emphasizes the social and economic marginality of the protagonists. On the other, it rather serves to broaden their concept of home. This might be better understood through film critic Christian León’s description of marginality:

> At the same time as the marginalized are a necessary part of the ‘system,’ of the modern totalizing discourse, their practice constitutes a threat against it and ‘the discursive polarities’: the private and the public, home and the street, family and the gang, the citizen and the criminal, morality and immorality, similarity and otherness, the included and the excluded (León 2005: 13).

The inability to leave, or the frustrated escape that was a common motif in the works in Chapter 4, resurges in “The Comic Outcasts” in the narratives of *Krew z nosa* and *Wożonko*. But here, the innocence or passivity of the protagonists is turned into an imbecility; the main characters’ choices of means to escape are simply not that particularly well thought out. Besides that, they are also impeded by rival violent gangs in their suburb.

A difference among the “tragic” and “comic” narratives is thus found in the causes of the immobility of the characters, where the “tragic” ones point to the surroundings and the “comic” mainly to the characters themselves.

*Ballada o dobrym dresiarzu* plays with the fixed stereotype of the *dresiarz*, who in this short story first manages to “escape,” but in the end fails to combine the two worlds of mainstream society and the secluded concrete suburb.

Unlike any of the works discussed in Chapter 4, *Made in Poland*, *Blok.pl* and *Dzień Świra* are all more directly immersed in the Polish national context with explicit references to Polish national symbols and Polish cultural history. Like the other works, with the exception of *Wożonko*, the name of the city is never mentioned, but Polish cultural, social and literary history is nevertheless frequently referred to.

The traditional Polish home of the closed nuclear family, of Catholic morality, as a safe “castle,” present in Kaczmarek’s and Shuty’s works, is uncovered and ridiculed for its hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness.

Shuty’s apartment home is a grotesque home, saturated in consumerism, inhabited by uncritical consumer puppets, controlled by both the old and new discourses. In Chapter 2 we saw that historically, the Polish literary home has
been depicted as grotesque or as a parody version of both aristocratic, bourgeois, and peasant homes. Gombrowicz disclosed the “empty rituals of the bourgeois homes,” whose inhabitants seemed to have become “caricatures of themselves,” while Zapolska showed the bourgeoisie to “only care about appearance.” Shuty’s homes follow this tradition but he goes further because his critique is not limited to the bourgeoisie – the middle class – but a wider spectrum of Polish society and its ‘one-dimensionality.’

In Shuty’s and Kaczmarek’s works, the ‘spatial frames’ are different from those of “The Comic Outcasts.” Here it is the apartment interior and the semi-private space of the stairways that are in focus. Eavesdropping and voyeurism are moreover common ingredients of the narratives. A significant difference among these works and those discussed in Chapter 3, however, is the lack of “strangers” turning “into kin.” Although the space of the stairways function as a meeting place for children, a playground, it is devoid of such practice for the adults, for whom this space more has the character of a buffer zone for espionage, eavesdropping, and voyeurism, but never random meetings.
6 Conclusion

The Polish manor house [dworek szlachecki] was for centuries the home of the Polish nobility and its customs and thereby provided a dominant image of Polishness itself. In literary portrayals from the 16th century to the beginning of the 20th century, the manor house as a home has been viewed from various perspectives, from the Renaissance poet Jan Kochanowski’s manor house Czarnolas to one of the most permeating and vivid images that also have come to shape the view of the ideal home in Poland, namely the Soplicowo manor house depicted in Adam Mickiewicz’s national epic Pan Tadeusz:

Amid such fields years ago, by the border of a brook, on a low hill, in a grove of birches, stood a gentleman’s mansion, of wood, but with a stone foundation; the white walls shone from afar, the whiter since they were relieved against the dark green of the poplars that sheltered it against the winds of autumn. The dwelling-house was not large, but it was spotlessly neat, and it had a mighty barn, and near it were three stacks of hay that could not be contained beneath the roof; one could see that the neighbourhood was rich and fertile. And one could see from the number of sheaves that up and down the meadows shone thick as stars—one could see from the number of ploughs turning up early the immense tracts of black fallow land that evidently belonged to the mansion, and were tilled well like garden beds, that in that house dwelt plenty and order. The gate wide-open proclaimed to passers-by that it was hospitable, and invited all to enter as guests (Mickiewicz 1917: 2).

However, the manor house, a synecdochal representation of the Polish nation, Polishness and for Polish nobility in general also became the object of critique and grotesque versions in the literature of Young Poland, where virtues as well as vices were depicted.

The concrete high-rise became the home for “anyone” in the 1960s and forward. Soon thereafter it entered Polish cinema and literature. Although far from the noble, Arcadian connotations of the manor house, the prefabricated

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51 Polish original: “Śród takich pól przed laty, nad brzegiem ruczaju./Na pagórku niewielkim, we brzozowym gaju./Stał dwór szlachecki, z drzewa, lecz podmurowany;/Świeciły się z daleka pobielane ściany./Tym bielsze, że odbite od ciemnej zieleni/Topoli, co go bronią od wiatrów jesieni./Dom mieszkalny niewielki, lecz zewsząd chędogi./I stodołę miał wielką, i przy niej trzy stogi/Użtku, co pod strzechą zmieścić się nie może;/Widać, że okolica obfita we zboże./I widać z liczby kopic, co wzdłuż i wszczeg smugów/Świecą gęsto jak gwiazdy, widać z liczby pługów/Orzających wcześniej lany ogromne ugoru./Czarnoziemne, zapewne należne do dworu,/Uprawnie dobrze na kształt ogrodowych grządnek./Ze w tym domu dostatek mieszka i porządek./Brama na wciąż otwarta przechodniom oгласza,/Że gościnna i wszystkich w gościnę zaprasza.”
The high-rise has also come to symbolize “Poland.” The housing project, as a symbol of Poland or home to the average Pole, is in evidence throughout the period (as in Czterdziestolatek, Koterski’s film cycle, and Blok.pl). These national connotations emphasize the differences between the Polish blokovisko and its “Western” counterparts, where artistic representations, very much in contrast with the Polish buildings, have been viewed as an “an allegory for the post-colonial present” (Siciliano 2007: 214) or, as for example in France, as a sub-version of “hegemonic representations of ‘Frenchness’” (Siciliano 2007: 214).

In this perspective, the Swedish film Lilja 4-ever is not representative of the “Western counterparts” as it rather emphasizes the post-Soviet and global capitalist present.

Through these literary and cinematic portrayals of the concrete high-rise, a version of the history of Poland during the last four decades has become visible: from Czterdziestolatek’s socialist “ideal” and “everyman” of the 1970s through the existential questions and political comedies of the 1980s to the high-rise of the first decade of the 21st century, absorbed in consumerism and the marginal blokersi.

In the portrayals of housing projects that have been studied here, there are some similarities with the depictions of the Polish apartment house [kamienica] in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. During the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, the “anti-urban myth” is reversed, or rather replaced by “pro-urbanism” and a celebratory view of the city. With the novel Panna nikt, which I consider to be a turning point among the works analyzed, the anti-urbanist view returns and is again revived at the turn of the new millennium. This time, however, it is reshaped into an “anti-concrete suburb” myth, as it is the prefabricated housing projects that are depicted as degenerating, demoralizing and criminalizing. In works from the whole period, like the kamienica, the concrete high-rise represents the collective, a cross-section of the Polish society. Moreover, as the kamienica, the concrete high-rise also became the setting for a critique of the middle-class. In some of the post-2000 works the petty bourgeoisie and its narrow-mindedness is ridiculed and portrayed in a grotesque manner, as in Kaczmarek’s plays Matka cierpiąca, Wchodzenia i schodzenia Rysia as well as in some short stories by Sławomir Shuty, and to some extent in Koterski’s Dzień świru. The protagonist of the latter, Miauczyński, sometimes described as “the average Pole” is quite symptomatic of how the system transformation affected the intellectuals. Miauczyński seems to look with horror at the surrounding world, asking himself what has happened. This hero, whose ideal goes back to Polish Romanticism, also has been marginalized and has lost his importance in this new society. The general critique of the middle class and its habits or values in these works does not have any equivalents in the socialist blokovisko portraits, but has roots in early twentieth-century Polish literature, in works by authors such as Julian Tuwim (Mieszkańcy [The Residents]) or Gabriela Zapolska (Moralność
Pani Dulskiej [The Morality of Mrs Dulska]), which articulated a harsh criticism of the petty bourgeoisie. Moreover, the symbolism of the “collapsing home” common in the portraits of Young Poland returned in the film *blok.pl*.

The present dissertation ‘*A Machine for Living*: Urban Domesticity in Polish Literature and Cinema 1969–2008” has charted the entry of the modernist prefabricated high-rise into Polish film and literature and its first forty years as a setting. I have argued that the concrete high-rise as a setting in the works “motivates or shapes the narrative in some key way” (Robertson Wojcik 2010: 3) and is active in “shaping character and plot” (Housman Gelfant 1954: 5), i.e. they are *blokowisko* “centered” (Muzzio & Halper 2002). In the later works of the study the housing projects serve to underscore either the marginality or the averageness of the characters. There is also no change of “strangers into kin” nor does the *osiedle* work as a “microcosm of the city” (Marcus 1999: 11).

The study traces the evolution of the housing projects as a narrative device in Polish film and literature, in which key analytical concepts have been home and city, which intersect in the setting of the Polish housing projects. The texts are witnesses to a unique period of urban change in Polish history as well as to crucial political changes.

During the forty years that this study covers, the prefabricated high-rise has been the setting for various genres and narratives revolving around various themes. Initially the influence of the high-rise on the narratives was quite literal, as it was connected in the 1970s with the widespread housing deficit and the specificity of the Polish housing market, and the absurd practices and strategies that arose as a consequence thereof. In these works a motif of movement or motion is detectable. Different means of transportation are more frequent in the early works, underscoring, besides the factual mobility of the characters, also the connection of the *blokowisko* with the rest of the city. ‘The road’ is a common motif during the whole period of investigation. But its assigned meaning changes from initially (during the 1970s till the 1980s) being a symbol of modernity, connoting future optimism of a society in change. As Berman wrote “the hallmark of twentieth-century urbanism has been the highway” (Berman 1985: 165 cited in Smart 1994: 161). Unlike the roads in the later works, these roads connect places. The roads of the later works tend rather to function as borders/limits or non-places. The aims of the travelers are often unclear. For Bakhtin, the chronotope of the road usually coincided with the chronotope of the meeting (Bachtin 1997: 152–153). In the early works of this study this connection between the random meetings and the road is detectable.

In these early works of the corpus, there is an emphasis of the fluidity of the spaces of the housing estate: the characters’ movement in the corridors, running into neighbors in the elevator, walking the stairs, ringing the door-
bells, visiting neighbors or watching or talking to each other from their windows or balconies. In the post-2000 works, the spatial fluidity is lost, and there is no motif of traffic or motion.

During the martial law of the 1980s and the precarious political situation in Poland at the time, the narratives became more introverted, psychological and existentially tinged. Thereafter, a combination of factors, including the blokowisko’s socialist origin, the increasing socially and economically based housing segregation that had become more visible in Polish cities after the transformation as well as intertextual influences, which associated the high-rise complexes with social and economic marginality, began to depict the Polish housing projects as marginalized neighborhoods. This made the motif of escape increasingly common. Moreover, the high-rise of the post-2000 portraits continues to be the home of the average Pole (as for example in Dzień Świra), as well as it is connected with characteristics of the new system such as consumerism (as in Shuty’s short stories).

Unlike the depictions of the 1980s and 1990s, the narratives of the 1970s and 2000s include more current social and political issues. However, the borders between the decades should not be interpreted as definite, but approximate and porous. In this way the Polish writers’ and directors’ use of the high-rise as a setting during the 1980s reflects the non-political stance taken by the rest of the official cultural sphere at the time. The political force of the portrayals during the 2000s was criticized, however, and the political satire of the 1970s and 80s was also limited. The latter case was “naturally” constrained by official censorship, which restricted the release and production of manuscripts that were too critical of the regime. The almost complete absence of the housing projects from both film and literature during the 1990s should also be interpreted against how the literature of that decade turned to other times and places. The focus of the literature of the first decade after the system change, described as “czas prywatności” [the time of privacy] (Sulikovski 2012) was not so much on the ‘here and now’ but instead rediscovered the past in a “privatization of history” or in a “mythologization of reality” (Stala 1999: 61ff.). That the high-rises for many years have been a center for political issues must be understood partly against their rootedness in the everyday as well as in their political background (as part of the conscious policies of the socialist regime) and partly against their perceived connotations.

This thesis has shown how the portrayals of the high-rises from 1968 to the first decade of the 21st century illustrate an increasing marginalization of the space of the prefabricated housing complexes within the city. The ‘spatial frames’ of the works can be divided into four general, broader, spaces: (1) the apartment (private space), (2) the high-rise building (semi-private), (3) the neighborhood of concrete high-rises (blokowisko, a semi-private and semi-public space), or (4) the city or other public spaces. Almost all works of the study at some point and for at least a minor period of time take place inside an apartment. A difference arises as we compare the works from the perspective
of the other three possible broader ‘frames.’ There is a clear shift in the distribution of these ‘spatial frames’ in the works before 1989 and those after. On the one hand, the post-2000 narratives take part in the city to a much lesser extent (4) and inside the high-rise building (2); on the other hand, they take more place within the neighborhood (the blokowisko). The housing projects are thus represented as less a part of the city and more as a separate sphere. In the early works the inclusion of the city, its public spheres as the busy street, cafés and other cultural or public institutions is common, while in the later works these urban public sites are rendered almost invisible, replaced by sites within or nearby the blokowisko. The reduction of the semi-private spaces such as the stairways in the setting also point to how the apartment homes have become more secluded. This resonates with Klima’s (2013) results, in which she notes the lack of common spaces in the respondents’ depictions of their homes: “no one took any photographs of the staircase, attic or elevator, nor did anyone take a photograph of their neighbor” (Klima 2013: 88).

The increasing spatial marginalization is also followed by a social marginalization, as is illustrated by the presence of the state in the narratives before and after 1989. In the early narratives, the presence of the state is palpable as a metaphor for state power, as it is represented through administrative offices of government officials and bureaucrats. In the latter portrayals the state is more or less absent except for the presence of the police.

In the depictions of the 1970s and 1980s, there are several national and local landmarks. The characters may talk about the (capital) city Warsaw, and in the films and TV series from the time we see typical landmarks in the setting. Even if the name of the city district or the suburb where the housing projects are located is not mentioned, in most of the early works at least the city where the housing projects of the work is set is named or obvious to the audience (this is generally Warsaw). This inclusion of the city I view as supportive of the general socialist idea of broadening the idea of home to include the whole city (cf. Chapter 2.2). The prominent role of the city in the early works also emerges in how receiving an apartment is equated with receiving a piece of the city (Warsaw).

In the post-2000 works, neither the neighborhood in question nor the city is known. The city center is thus less part of these new portraits as the housing projects are depicted as more peripheral, isolated and less integrated in the city. Similarly, in the post-2000 portraits both national and local landmarks are absent from the setting. This emphasizes the universality of the narratives and reflects a shift from a national era to a post-national, as well as showing how the critique in the works has shifted from being aimed specifically at the Polish regime, to, in the depictions of the 2000s, being aimed towards wider, transnational phenomenons such as consumerism and the limitations of capitalism. It further presents the housing projects as non-places.

Another example of this marginalization concerns the protagonists of the works. In the early depictions, the characters were mainly professionals and
intellectuals – the protagonist of *Czterdziestolatek* is an engineer, in *Człowiek z M-3* a doctor, in *Filip z Konopi* an architect, and in *Dekalog* the majority of the characters are intellectuals. Or else, as in *Alternatywy 4* and many of the supporting characters of *Filip z konopi* – the residents of the high-rise were depicted as a social mixture. After 1989 a new character becomes a focus in the depictions – the youth – or more precisely mostly young men. The youth are the protagonists of the new narratives of social and economic marginalization.

One obvious divide between the pre- and post-1989 portrayals, which also contributes to the discursive marginalization, concerns the family. In the portraits of the 1970s and 1980s the residents are mostly part of a visible nuclear family or a heterosexual couple, but this traditional family image is also to some extent challenged by alternative family constellations (bachelors, unmarried singles, working women etc.) that are nevertheless represented in a positive light. In the film and literature of the 2000s the emerging picture is quite different. Except for the young marginalized men, the nuclear family is depicted as broken or pathological or as in the case of Shuty’s short stories – saturated in consumerism. Most striking, however, is probably the family’s invisibility in many of the works.

These findings, the development of marginal neighborhoods that to some extent are rendered as *non-places*, I argue, are relatively consistent with the results of the French sociologist Loïc Wacquant’s comparative study of “neighbourhoods of relegation,” the French *banlieus* and the American *ghettos*, where he describes the occurrence of an “erosion of place”: “the loss of a humanized, culturally familiar and socially filtered locale with which marginalized urban populations identify and in which they feel ‘at home’ and in relative security” (Wacquant 2008: 241). He writes that a difference between these neighborhoods in the 1960s and in the 2000s is that in the 1960s, the American ghetto (which he exemplifies) was still a:

‘place’, a collective *oekoumene*, a humanized urban landscape with which blacks felt a strong positive identification. (...) Today’s hyperghetto is a ‘space’, and this denuded space is no longer a shared resource that African Americans can mobilize and deploy to shelter themselves from white domination and where they hope to find collective support for their strategies of mobility (Wacquant 2008: 242).

Wacquant draws on theories of post-Fordism to explain this shift from place to space:

Theories of post-Fordism intimate that the current reconfiguration of capitalism involves not only a vast reshuffling of firms and economic flows, jobs and people *in space* but also a sea-change in the organization and experience of *space* itself (...) (Wacquant 2008: 241).
In explaining this shift, Wacquant also draws on Dennis Smith (1987), who wrote that it is:

encouraged by the weakening of bonds founded upon a territorial community inside the city. It is also fostered by the tendency of individuals to retreat into the privatized sphere of the household, the strengthening of feelings of vulnerability arising in the course of the pursuit of economic security, and the generalized weakening of social collectives (Wacquant 2008: 242).

The social, economic and political history of Poland during the 20th century certainly diverges vastly from both French and American history. However after 1989, post-industrialism and the neoliberal global market are now forces affecting them all (cf. Chapter 4). The Polish “typowe blokowiska” [average housing projects] are not the same as the French/Western housing projects. Some of them are still quite socially mixed, and depending foremost on their location in the city, some of them have been or are being revitalized, popular residential areas (in some cases gentrified); others, however, are, or becoming, marginalized “neighbourhoods of relegation” or “zones reserved for the urban outcasts” (to use the terminology of Wacquant 2008: 239, 247). Or to recall the words of the director Sylwester Latkowski:

Throughout the period of transition, neighborhoods come up that are black holes—bad schools, no cops, no playgrounds, graffiti, drugs, (...). The only thing the government has done is proposed lowering the age of criminal responsibility so they can be sent to jail sooner (Green 2002).

A crucial part of the analysis of the development of the housing projects in Polish film and literature in this study is its status as a home, or more precisely as an urban home. This study detects both recurring themes as well as new themes that are connected with the Polish home.

The *blokowisko* home transposed in the works produced before the system change is ambiguous and contradictory – it is *urban* in Marcus’ sense. This reflects how new socialist ideas of the home are introduced that begin to alter the traditional visions. The home is not limited to the closed private family sphere, an asylum, but open, permeable, semi-public and partly connected with alternative family constellations (such as bachelors). The homes are open (porous) both to intrusions and visits at the same time as they are closed (incarcerated); it is modern yet deficient; it is central and peripheral; it is private and semi-public; it is isolated and social; it is home for the traditional nuclear family, and it is home for alternative family constellations; it is viewed as a dream home, and it is viewed as an enforcement. The homes in the high-rises are either depicted as connected with the city, as in *Człowiek z M-3* and *Czterdziestolatek*, or as a “miniature city,” as in *Alternatywy 4*, *Dekalog* and *Filip z konopi* (Marcus 1999: 2).
This ambiguous portrayal of the home in the modernist high-rises that contains characteristics of both the traditional idea of home and of a new “Socialist” home shows how the new ideas of the home are introduced and both rejected and affirmatively received, which includes clashes, resistance but also acceptance. This more open and porous portrait of the home is also linked with the city and city life, in its “emphasis on chance encounters, the interplay between isolation and community, and the sudden transformation of strangers into kin,” to use the words of Sharon Marcus (1999: 11).

The social life and interaction between neighbors (welcomed or not) is more palpable in the films and TV series from the 1970s and 1980s than in the post-2000 narratives, where it is significantly reduced.

The homes of the post-2000 housing projects are less porous and permeable; the home interiors are rendered as more separate in relation to the exterior spaces. The city center, as mentioned above, is absent, and the positive connotations of the “city’s flow and multiplicity” (Marcus 1999: 11) – quite visible inside the apartment houses of the early works – now seems diminished. The social bonds between neighbors in the later works are limited to contact between children and teenagers, or to eavesdropping. This new closing home is not a happy home, however; many of the characters are instead shown to be lonely or even isolated.

The “interplay between isolation and community” is lost, and their homes are rarely experienced as refuges. The home was never equated with an asylum in the early works (except for in Czterdziestolatek, where the apartment home is the protagonist’s refuge from work). However, in the post-2000 works, where the home and the traditional (nuclear) family are rendered almost invisible (or depicted as “pathological”), the characters to some extent do find asylum and security (and happiness) in spaces of heterotopical significance outside their own apartment homes.

As mentioned above, in some of the works after 1989, or perhaps more correctly, after 2000, a large part of the action is set outside, in the vicinity of the housing complex. As in Jarzębski’s analysis of the characters in Polish post-war literature, the protagonists of Cześć Tereska, Blokersi, Krew z nosa, Uciec stąd, or Made in Poland are drawn to “unofficial precincts of the city, its most seedy places, or even the system of cellars under the city center” (cf. Section 2.2.4). But in contrast to Jarzębski’s analysis, the characters of the post-2000 narratives have not actively chosen these spaces as a sign of their disapproval of the “center”/the current state regime, but are rather forced there as a spatial reflection of their marginalization. At the same time, these spaces are also a locus of social interaction. In that sense, these places are not simply “black holes” or “eroded places,” but a “social process” (as Harvey put it) or a space of “social practices” (as Lefebvre put it). Some of the characteristics of the dark representations of the urban home in the prose of Ścibor-Rylski (1948), Hłasko (1956) and Głowacki (1968) (cf. Dasko 2002: 158) resurge in the works of this study. However, before 1989, only the film Życie wewnętrzne
suits Dasko’s descriptions fully. The majority of the other early works of this study also revolve around the lack of privacy, but they are otherwise not depicted as darkly.

Unlike Legeżyńska’s threefold division of the homelessness in Polish literature between and after the world wars of the 20th century – existential, emigrational and socio-political (cf. Chapter 2.2.4) – the homelessness that is displayed in some of these narratives is, with the exception of Dzień Świra’s existential homelessness, foremost socio-economic as the characters are the victims of the economic and political transformation in Poland.

In Pamela Robertson Wojcik’s analysis of the apartment plot in American film and TV, she found that after 1975 more alarmist views of the city affected the apartment plot towards a more “dystopic strain,” which “tended to emphasize crime, poverty, filth, and the inherent dangers of the city.” This dystopic strain occurred decades later in the works of my analysis, and unlike Robertson Wojcik’s works, which depicted “the apartment’s inherent porousness” as menacing, this is not the case among the Polish “dystopic” works, but instead of the earlier works of the 1970s and 1980s. Another contrast with the American apartment plot is that no parallel current to the dystopic, a reanimation of “a utopian version of urban localism” ever occurred among the Polish blokowisko narratives (Robertson Wojcik 2010: 268). If such a “utopian” current exists in Polish film or TV, it is not set among the housing projects.

While the works of Robertson Wojcik’s study show a rather constant focus on the white, middle class, with non-nuclear family constellations (but which “often cross class lines and touch on marginalized communities” (2010: 5), the present examination illustrates a shift over time, as the majority of the early works show a clear predominance of the nuclear family, or at least heterosexual couples, as protagonists, which admittedly are subjected to some threats. The later works of this study revolve around single characters with either no visible family or with visible pathologies. On this point my analysis converges with Carrie Tarr’s study of French banlieu and beur cinema, where she found the “absence of family life” distinguishing the post-1995 films from the earlier works of her corpus (first years of 1980s) (Tarr 2005: 100).

Some of the works discussed in Chapter 4, which revolved around young marginalized men (blokersi) also display obvious affinities in their relationship to the blokowisko, with Tarr’s analysis of the protagonists’ homes: “they are both confined to the estate (there are no scenes shot outside the banlieu) and unsettled there (they are regularly disturbed by the police or rival youths)” (Tarr 2005: 101).

However, while the beur cinema is a comment on France’s colonial past and its post-colonial present national identity, the Polish “blokowisko cinema” today comments on its post-communist, capitalist present.

Regarding resemblances with and influences from the American “’hood” movies of the early 1990s” in their emphasis on “the voices of the disadvantaged,” as Tarr notices in her analysis, there are certainly such influences on
the Polish works; the first scene of Uciec stąd contained a direct reference to Kassovitz’ La Haine. Both banlieue/beur cinema and the Polish films have been compared with British filmmakers such as Ken Loach for their sensitivity to social and economic exclusion and “naturalist style and low-key social realism” (See Tarr 2005: 15).

Just as Marcus’ “apartment stories” from the 19th-century Paris and London questioned the discourses separating “the home” from the city, with women being relegated to private spheres and men to public ones, and emphasized the fluidity of the apartment house, the ‘housing estate stories’ of the works until the end of the 1980s in this study display a fluidity between the apartment homes and the spaces of the city’s central locations. The housing estate and the apartment are places for “chance encounters, the interplay between isolation and community, and the sudden transformation of strangers into kin.” However, the later works of the corpus, especially the post-2000 works, do not display the same fluidity between the osiedle and the central parts of the city. The porousness between the apartment interiors and the surrounding osiedle still exists to some extent. There are chance encounters, although no “transformation of strangers into kin.” In that sense, the housing estate has become less an integral part of the urban fabric and the works are less “urban” in character.

Elżbieta Rybicka (2003) discerned four literary responses in the Polish literature of the first decades of the 20th century to the experience of modernism through the city: the perceptive poetics, the parable novel, the constructivist poetics, and the poetics of social document. Among the works of this study, we have seen variants of ‘the parable novel’ (such as Alternatywy 4, blok.pl) and ‘the social document’ (as in Blokersi, Cześć Tereska, Uciec stąd). Literary critic Alexandra Borg’s object of study is located within the same time period as Rybicka’s. Comparing the results of my study with Borg’s analysis of both another cultural and historical context, Swedish fin-de-siècle urban literature, some similarities might, as with Rybicka, however be discerned. Like the works in her study, the narratives of this present study are published or released in a period of political, economic and urban transition. This is, as Borg also showed, reflected in the themes conveyed (such as the “fear of the reduction of private space” (cf. Borg 2011: 304), and especially the change of themes during the period, from the troublesome housing situation in the 1970s to alienation and marginality in the early 2000s. This ‘period of transition’ is also reflected in the recurring motif of traffic in some of the works before 1989. The motif of traffic and movement should not be confused with the motif of walking or of the 19th-century flaneur, whose walks were epistemological in nature, as a way to “interpret the city” (cf. Borg 2011: 306). The movement, either pedestrian or by means of transportation, is rather of the panoramic perspective, and emphasizes the modernizing socialist city. In the post-2000 works, the depicted wandering is rather roaming and although the characters appropriate their surroundings, the intent is never “to interpret the city,”
nor is its main purpose to “make oneself at home.” Their roaming of the (back)streets are rather a result of social marginalization expressed spatially (Borg 2011: 306).

Besides the works’ thematic expressions of the urban transition, I argue that it yielded the upswing of the apartment house plot (or rather housing estate plot) in Polish film, TV and literature.

In a time when the majority of the world’s inhabitants live in cities, a moment Mike Davis (2007: 1) famously called “a watershed in human history,” the question of the urban, its manifold experiences and imaginaries, continues to be an important field of study. The home, we may thus conclude, is now mainly urban for the average inhabitant on earth. This study has traced a representational space of the Polish urban habitat through the second half of the Polish People’s Republic into the 21st century and two decades of democracy and global market economy. Although my focus has been on the urban home in the blokowisko, the theoretical frames could provide a basis for further research into the urban and non-urban homes in other fictional settings. Further comparative transnational studies of urban homes – in both marginal neighborhoods and in more affluent ones – could deepen our understanding of the effects of globalization and local tradition. Studies including newer textual genres, such as computer games, blogs, etc. would enrich our knowledge further. The results of this present study also call for further investigations of our experiences of both non-places and ‘felicitous space’ or spaces of heterotopic significance.
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Sammanfattning


I avhandlingens inledande kapitel presenteras ämnet med dess teoretiska ramar och historiska bakgrund. Begrepp som den rumsliga vändningen (spatial turn) eller rummets återkomst inom humanioraforskningen introduceras tillsammans med narratologiska termer såsom det narrativa rummet och rumsliga ramar, samt ”flerfamiljshushistorien” (apartment-house plot).

I studiens andra kapitel ges en historisk bakgrund till avhandlingens två ämnesmässiga grundvalar: idén om hemmet och idén om staden. Centralt för kapitlet är således hemmets skiftande betydelse och dess fysiska uttryck – bostaden. Inledningsvis ges en bakgrund till de modernistiska idéer och teorier som kom att utvecklas årtiondena efter första världskriget framförallt bland arkitekter knutna till CIAM. Le Corbusiers idéer om framtidens stad och boende – den gröna staden och bostadsh使用
faktiska bostadsbyggandet såg ut i Polen efter andra världskriget och under kommunistperioden.

Kapitlets andra del ägnas en historisk och teoretisk introduktion till hemmets mångfacetterade betydelse. Vid sidan av den teoretiska genomgången ges en översikt över hemmet som motiv i polsk litteratur.


Avhandlingens femte kapitel, Parodins och groteskens hem, ägnas också det verk som utkommit efter 2000. Dessa kännetecknas av sin humoristiska stil, där stilgrepp som grotesk, parodi och karikatyr är vanliga. Dessa stilgrepp används i porträtterandet av det nya konsumtionssamhället, social och ekonomisk marginalisering, men också religiositet, familjen och polskhet. Bland dessa verk återfinns den nya ”subkulturen” blokersi och flera av verken

Sammantaget spårar avhandlingen dels en ökad rumslig marginalisering och dels en social marginalisering av ”förorten” i staden. Detta återspeglar globala tendenser förknippade med den sena kapitalismens effekter på den rumsliga organisationen av staden. Avhandlingen pekar dessutom på förändrade tendenser i erfarenheten av rummet, ”från plats till rum”, som Wacquant skrev. Hemmets skiftande karaktär under tidsperioden reflekterar även det ett paradigmskifte där fokus förflyttats från ”kollektivet” till ”individnen”.

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