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## A Phantom of the Centre of the World. A Contribution to the Anthropology of Contemporaneity

*From the corner of Raclawicka and Miłobędzka  
streets  
(I live nearby)  
Every day, if I'm up to it,  
I look at the Palace of Culture...*

*Its architecture is unimportant  
It is the architecture of my imagination that is signifi-  
cant  
The architecture of my of blood and heart  
Life and death  
Sun and mist. (...)*  
(Eugeniusz Żytomirski, *Pałac Kultury*,  
in: *Liryczne okienko Stolicy*, "Stolica",  
15 May 1963)

*In the perspective of a moment the past day is seen dif-  
ferently than the past millennia.*  
(Stanisław Cichowicz, *Skąd ten kanon?*,  
*Polska Sztuka Ludowa*", no. 1, 1990)

Much has been written about the Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture and Science.<sup>1</sup> Hundreds of reportages and articles. It has been the topic of poems and songs, poetry and prose. Its image became a permanent part of contemporary literature and has intrigued and inspired the cinema.<sup>2</sup> It appeared in youth subculture, in fanzines, special-occasion texts of rock bands, and Rastafarian texts, and is discernible as a motif of graffiti on the walls of Warsaw houses.<sup>3</sup> It has been discussed by journalists, publicists, men of science, architects, and historians, historians of architecture and art, and men of letters.

The Palace of Culture has been the theme of writings by Hanna Krall, Stefan Kisielewski, Leopold Tyrmand, Jerzy Kosiński, and its foremost bard - Tadeusz Konwicki.

A thorough survey must (perhaps without undue astonishment) lead us to the declaration that the Palace of Culture belongs to the quite possibly non-cohesive, scattered, and at times concealed or (shame-

fully?) hidden collective imagination of the past decades, and that it is a prominent part of the latter. On the other hand, the Palace has not been discussed by ethnographers. The reasons for embarking upon this topic and the motives, which inspired me, are much more numerous and I shall thus mention only several most essential ones.

Start from the least important. This article was to appear in a monographic issue of "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" about the symbolism of the centre. In reference to this category, described by Eliade, the issue in question was to embrace reflections concerning the symbolic of the home conceived as mythical space, the mythology of the place in a sequence characteristic for the symbolic of the centre: home - village - town; these deliberations pertain to the small (local) homeland, the mythology of the town. A sketch on the Palace of Culture was to be published next to an article evoking images of the homeland in reminiscences by Wieniawa-Długoszowski, the poems of émigré poets, and images of the "small homeland" recorded in folk poetry; alongside images-plans by Surowiak; next to reflections on the world of allotments, and, finally, combined with an essay by Ludwik Stomma on the significance of the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower – the mythical sites of Paris. According to the principle of the counterpoint these assorted reflections on the symbolic and mythical structures of the home were to be accompanied by yet another contemporary symptom, another variant and *sui-generis* extension of the symbolic of the centre. This concept was complemented by discernibly lively interest in the category of the home upon the basis of reflections about culture, expressed by parallel research into the conception of the home conducted by sociologists and sociologists of culture,<sup>4</sup> or the extraordinary success of Witold Rybczyński's *Home. A Short History of an Idea*,<sup>5</sup> a best-seller on the American, Canadian and English-speaking market. This Canadian architect of Polish descent devoted special attention in his study about the Home and a brief history of the idea of the Home to such concepts as: "intimacy", "privacy" and "domesticity" by following their historical moulding up to this very day. With images of homes in contemporary film as well as those launched by fashion, advertisements, photography, and magazines on interior design as his point of departure Rybczyński recorded the phenomenon present in particular phases of fashion in recent years, i.e. a special nostalgia and longing for the past, and the complementary phenomenon of discovered (devised) "tradition" created for the sake of contemporaneity; in doing so, he descended more and more into the past. For all practical purposes, the book is a publication not so much from the range of the history of architecture, as the title and the name of the author could suggest, but from the domain of the history of

culture, written with extensive anthropological impetus. The transformations and moulding of the conceits of “domesticity”, “intimacy” and “privacy” are discussed in reference to the language, culture, mentality and changes occurring therein during particular eras, times and places. The book is dominated by the principle to which the author referred in the introduction and which is contained in a maxim by Milan Kundera, namely, that the task of the writer and writing does not consist of proclaiming the truth but its discovery. The force of the publication in question is also determined by the fact that the reflections amassed therein were inspired by the author’s personal experiences and were closely intertwined with the extraordinary adventure of building and shaping his home.<sup>6</sup> Despite this extensive anthropological perception and frequent reference to examples borrowed from assorted distant and frequently exotic cultural situations, the characteristic feature of Rybczyński’s book, concentrated mainly on American, Anglo-Saxon culture, is a distinctively Occidentalistic attitude. This holds true predominantly for experiences recorded either in the history of West European culture or those belonging to contemporaneity. We are dealing with a brief history of the idea of the home written from the Western point of view.

In other words, the planned monographic “home” issue of “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” could, together with a text about the Palace of Culture, become a contribution from this part of the world together with its rather different complications, from this part of the “other Europe”, a contribution to the theme of the home appearing and discussed in present-day humanities and stirring the interest of the most varied milieus. This original conception, however, was partly thwarted and the issue was split into several fascicles. Nonetheless, the problem remained.

For many years, ethnography and anthropology of culture wrote about the “disappearance of the traditional object” of those domains. This trend was recently mentioned most conspicuously by Clifford Geertz in his essay: *Be There, Write Here: The world, examined chiefly by anthropologists and once known as primeval, tribal, traditional or folk, and today emergent, undergoing modernisation, peripheral or still concealed, has changed immensely as has the world of the scientific institutions from which these researchers originate.*<sup>7</sup> A similar course was followed by James Clifford, whose reflections concentrate on the problematic nature of the description of culture shown against the backdrop of relations between twentieth-century ethnography, art, and, literature (*The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*).<sup>8</sup> Observing the changes to which ethnography was, and continues to be subjected, Clifford placed greatest emphasis on the one that occurred in experiencing the journey and residing, the change and shift of the meaning and

sense of such concepts as: “centre” (“Metropolis”) and “Peripheries”. If the task of ethnography is to search for a way of understanding and approaching a different world, which since the sixteenth century has been unified in cartography, and one of the fundamental functions of ethnography is “orientation” (a term dating back to the time when Europe travelled and was engaged in self-discovery in relation to the fantastically unified “East”) then it could be said about twentieth-century ethnography involved in reflecting “new spatial praxis”, new forms of residence and circulation, that it is accompanied by a *sui generis* experience of “disorientation”. When we take a look at our century through the prism of a drastic expansion of mobility - including tourism, economic migration, immigration, throngs of polyglot refugees, emigrants, and asylum seekers, when we take into account urban scattering and the blending of foreign populations in towns on six continents, and, finally, the very fact that “habitation” takes place with the assistance of mass-scale transport, automobiles, and airplanes - then all this is the reason why in the contemporary world the two experiences of “habitation” and “travelling” are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish. Apparently, there is no such a distant place on the planet where the presence of modern products, the mass media and their power would not be palpable. Old topography is exhausted, Clifford concluded.<sup>9</sup> No one any more (and the ethnographer in particular) leaves home in the hope that he will discover something radically different, new, or strange. The feeling of nativeness can be discovered at the ends of the world. At the same time, differences, cultural distinctness, alienness, and foreignness are becoming part of the closest environment. The anticipation of authenticity in culture and art is doubted. The old topography is exhausted, wrote James Clifford. *Why go to the Trobriands?*<sup>10</sup> - Polish sociologists seem to be echoing him - when one can come across the closed world of consciousness isolation in a contemporary village some 200 kms from Warsaw. Within this context the Palace of Culture and Science could appear to be an extremely attractive and intriguing object for an ethnographer. In its capacity as an example of *sui generis* (domesticated (?)) exotica within the range of our outstretched hand it poses assorted questions, tempts, and outright challenges to embark upon an attempted description and to take the risk of interpretation. It seems odd that ethnographers, sensitive to the strangeness of the surrounding world and cultural phenomena, and accentuating the importance of astonishment in cognitive experience inscribed into anthropology have so far paid insufficient attention to it, and that simply nothing has been written about it. Meanwhile, the Palace of Culture makes it possible to transgress this traditional situation and condition of the ethnographer,

not very clearly outlined in the contemporary world (*be there and write here*) and makes it possible "to be here and write here" and thus to realise the essence of the task of present-day anthropology as understood by Geertz. While attempting to locate this text within its current, and speaking about the anthropology of contemporaneity I accept its comprehension by following the example of the American anthropologist: *The risks are worth running because running them leads to a thoroughgoing revision of our understanding of what it is to open (a bit) the consciousness of one group of people to (something of) the life-form of another [...]. What it is (a task at which no one ever does more than not utterly fail) is to inscribe a present – to convey in words "what it is like" to be somewhere specific in the lifeline of the world: Here, as Pascal famously said, rather than There; Now rather than Then. Whatever else ethnography might be – Malinowskian experience seeking, Levis-Straussian rage for order, Benedictine cultural irony, or Evans-Pritchardish cultural reassurance – it is above all a rendering of the actual, a vitality phrased.*<sup>11</sup>

I would be not quite honest if I were to insist that ethnographers had never written about the Palace of Culture and Science, appearing in a polemical form in: *Przyczynek do powinności przemyśleń perypatetycznych*<sup>12</sup> by Jacek Olędzki. Recall the essence of the dispute: the heart of the matter was hopscotch, or, more precisely, an interpretation of this game, full of question marks and referring to its archaic ritual-belief motif of "wandering to the netherworld" discussed by Jerzy Sławomir Wasilewski in: *Podróże do piekieł. Rzecz o szamańskich misteriach* (Warszawa 1979).

*Not to be groundless, let us cite a hazardous, but tempting owing to the symbolic of a journey to the netherworld, example of hopscotch. Is jumping between "hell" and "heaven" not the echo of some sort of ritual journey to those regions? Note, that jumping on one leg (similarly to limping) is associated universally with the demonic, with the spheres of the subterranean. Does the schematic figure of the "person" drawn in chalk not resemble a shaman's drum, shaped like a human figure with a monstrous head, or an anthropomorphic cosmic tree painted on its surface?*

Rejecting this interpretation Olędzki declared: *In this manner we might explain everything, including the first skyscrapers together with the most recent ones, more than 400 meters tall. After all, these are simply non-anthropomorphic cosmic trees, "axes linking the bottom and the top" (or trees of life, a term obsessively applied by many researchers). I cannot tell whether the Palace of Culture and Science may be regarded as a cosmic tree but it was certainly the first highest building in Poland (today this rank is held by the Warszawa Hotel). Not without reason was its called "Prudential".*<sup>13</sup> By resorting to irony and derision Olędzki urged us to resort to Prudence (after all, the first Warsaw skyscraper belonging to an Insurance Society was known as "Prudential"). Rejecting this in-

terpretation and its archaic religious-ritual foundation Olędzki proposed his own common sense presentation of hopscotch. Employing peripatetic detailed analysis he tried (despite serious gaps in the documentation – once again, ethnographers had failed) to insert hopscotch into history, connecting it with the idea of universal education developing across the world from the second half of the nineteenth century, the production of flagstones, the urban environment, and closely with a certain old fashioned model of elementary schooling. Hopscotch is to contain *the idea of labour and the outright onerous passage from grade to grade, from the most difficult or worst remembered first grade - HELL, to the last – HEAVEN*. Without delving further into the details of this unilinear, historical interpretation, and without becoming involved in a dispute about it, because this is not the occasion, let us return to the Palace of Culture and Science. I cannot tell whether the proposed sketch will be capable of helping Jacek Olędzki and other researchers in solving doubts (if they were to experience them), getting rid of uncertainties and discovering a response to the question: *Should the Palace of Culture be included amongst cosmic trees?* (In my opinion, it will prove to be of little use since these are not the intentions of this study, nor is it possible, seeing that uncertainty and doubts, as the gathered material will show, are part of the allure of the Palace and one of its constitutive features). Nonetheless, as regards the Palace I would be inclined, in contrast to Olędzki's proposal, to choose the part of interpretation he rejected. In order to do so, I seek the support of the earlier-cited Geertz: *Ex ante prescriptive criticism – this is what you must do, this is what you must not – is as absurd in anthropology as it is in any other intellectual enterprise not dogmatically based.*<sup>14</sup> I shall, therefore, select the first of the two manners of interpretation: the "farsighted" one, whose horizon consists of the archaic-religious-ritual (Wasilewski), and the "short-sighted" historical-genetic one, peripatetically interested in the details of daily life, our closest contemporaneity (Olędzki) ... I was prepared to write: I choose the former, which I find closest. But is any sort of a choice actually necessary? In the case of the Palace of Culture we are in the opportune situation of not being forced to investigate or present its historical origin (i.e. Joseph Vissarinowicz Stalin), and have at our disposal extensive and varied documentation spanning from the emergence of the idea of building the Palace in Warsaw, the erection of the first foundations, and the particular phases of its growth and expansion all the way to the present day. In the case of the Palace of Culture both approaches could exist as parallel without one excluding the other (i.e. in our conventional division: the second excluding the first). The Palace of Culture offers us the wonderful opportunity of being longsighted and myopic at the same

time. That this is a division far from perfect is demonstrated by the earlier cited example of hopscotch. At the end of his article Olędzki reconstructed meticulously a scenario of the “ritual-theatre” accompanying hopscotch and returned to the “rashly” criticised thesis proposed by Wasilewski about the existence of an archaic hinterland of this children’s game. More, both interpretations, the one closing Olędzki’s article and the one suggested by him at the beginning of his text, do not undermine the course followed by Wasilewski. The “laborious and onerous transition from class to class” and “the mood of intensifying the awareness of the difficulty and demonization of the task” present in the game remain within the aura of the initiation rite; it was to its background and archaic foundation that Wasilewski made references. To make things clear: the difference between those two approaches consists of the fact that the interpretation proposed by Wasilewski is “understanding” and, in my opinion, did not harbour the ambition of “explaining” in the way in which Olędzki comprehended it, while its historical-genetic interpretation could be described precisely as “explanatory”.<sup>15</sup>

I must admit that in ethnology and ethnography I had been always attracted and enchanted not only by a predilection for the concrete (presented in a masterly manner in texts by Jacek Olędzki), but also by the fact that sometimes distant cultural phenomena are considered not in isolation, and that for the sake of their more complete comprehension (without obliterating differences and specific contours) they are contrasted on a more universal scale, where (as in the case of Wasilewski) archaic shamanic ritual scenarios of “wandering to the netherworld”, the initiation ritual, and the contemporary game of hopscotch involving hell and heaven can exist side by side, encompassed within a single glance.

Just like the Lascaux cave paintings can be examined within their palaeolithic temporal and cultural horizon, and the work executed by a contemporary artist on Big Salt Lake in Utah can be viewed separately, so it is possible to perceive them jointly. In our periodical this was the theme of reflections by Stanisław Cichowicz, which can be referred also to other cultural phenomena, both the children’s game of hopscotch drawn in chalk on a sidewalk and the example of the Palace of Culture, of interest to us: *Art has its expanse, which establishes the artist’s gesture from and for him, it has its temporality ruled by the mystery of the existence of mankind. In him and in it one must contrast artistic documents left on the walls of European caves by the Palaeolithic culture and on the dry bed of an American lake by contemporary culture; this double scale, especially the temporal one, contains a proximity incomprehensible for man; true, eyewitness familiarity with history is alive but historical retrospection erects a memory carrier: from the*

*viewpoint of a moment one sees rather yesterday than past millennia.*<sup>16</sup>

I am well aware of the fact that there are numerous possible interpretations of the Palace of Culture – architectural, historical (historiosophic), ideological-political, reference to the world of the language and phenomena of propaganda, and many others. I, however, am most interested in the Palace of Culture envisaged as an unusual “strong” reality, by no means part of daily life, a reality “existing *par excellence*”, or, to cite M. Eliade – sacral reality, an element of the contemporary secular *sacrum*. We face a question similar to the one Claude-Henri Rocquet asked Eliade about the Lenin mausoleum – is it a sacral object? <sup>17</sup> To what extent can the *profanum* turn into the *sacrum*? We are concerned also with recognition of the expression and structures of the *sacrum* in a world, which presents itself decidedly as *profanum*. I am interested in the Palace of Culture as an element of symbolic imagination, a structure of long-term duration. This is the reason why I wish to examine the Palace in reference to the complex and symbolic cycles of the “centre”, the symbolic of the centre of the Earth <sup>18</sup>, with such images belonging to it as: “holy mountain”, “cosmic mountain”, *axis mundi* and parallel visions of *columna universalis*, “a pillar of the world upholding almost everything that is”, a column of the heavens, a pillar, a ladder, a “stairway to heaven”, a tree, “the tree of the world” and “the tree of life”. I intend to search for those images characteristic for archaic conceptions and systems of religious imagery in contemporary testimonies about the Palace of Culture, making it possible to perceive a community (and difference) in the experiencing of space and place by contemporary man and a member of primeval societies. This is the experience described by Eliade: (...) *The religious man sought to live as near as possible to the Center of the World. He knew that his country constituted the navel of the universe, and, above all, that the temple or the palace were veritably Centers of the World.*<sup>19</sup>

I shall be the interested in the Palace of Culture as reality brimming with meanings and amassing assorted, frequently contrary emotions. In a word: a contemporary myth of the Palace of Culture and the Palace as a myth. A symbol that concentrates both contents referring to the archaic symbolic of the world and stressing - here I slightly precede the analysis – its phantom-like, unreal character. Speaking about the Palace of Culture as a symbol and about the symbol, its polyphonic and polysemantic nature, <sup>20</sup> I refer directly to the comprehension of the symbol mentioned by Yuri Lotman,<sup>21</sup> accentuating its “unclear”, “allusive” character: *The content only flickers through the expression and the latter only indicates the content by means of allusion.* The example of the Palace of Culture makes it possible to follow all the essential features of the

symbol as a condensator of cultural memory, also described by Lotman:

1. *The symbol always features something archaic. Each culture requires strata of texts realising the function of the archaic.*

2. *Symbols preserved the ability to store exceptionally copious and important texts in a rolled-up form.*

3. *The symbol never belongs to a single synchronic cross section of culture – it always cuts across this cross section vertically, coming from the past and departing into the future. The memory of the symbol is always older than the memory of its non-symbolical textual surrounding.*

4. *As an important mechanism of the memory of culture symbols transfer texts, schemes and other semiotic products from one stratum of culture to another.*

5. *The symbol occurs as irregular in relation to the surrounding textual space as a messenger of other cultural epochs (= other cultures), as a reminder about the ancient (= "eternal") foundations of culture. On the other hand, the symbol actively correlates with the cultural context, transforms itself under its impact and itself transforms it.*

6. *An element most essential in the case of our "text-expression", i.e. the Palace of Culture, is indefiniteness in the relation between text-expression and text-content. The latter always belongs to a more multi-dimensional space of significance. This is why the expression does not fully coincide with the content, but only as if alludes to it. In a given case it is irrelevant whether the expression is merely a brief mnemonic sign of the diluted text-content or whether the former belongs to a secular, open and demonstrated sphere of culture, while the latter – to sacral, esoteric and mysterious culture (...).*

The sources on which I am basing my analysis call for a brief commentary and are of various quality and origin. In this case, I made use of press notes from "Trybuna Luda", "Express Wieczorny", "Zycie Warszawy", and "Stolica", and to a lesser extent of weeklies and dailies issued outside Warsaw. I also benefited from the Palace Chronicle and supplementary material,<sup>22</sup> special-occasion poetry, literary works, diaries, and recollections. In press accounts one is immediately struck by ceremonial, "uplifting", festivity stylistics as well as the fact that information is offered in certain language or propaganda schemes and clichés, copied and repeated outside the central press; this is the reason why first texts about the Palace of Culture create a specific set of canons. Already upon the level of the language used for writing about the Palace and the creation of its tradition we may observe *sui generis* sacralisation. Also upon the level of sources, the central problem of ethnographic description, which today, in the opinion of Geertz, faces anthropology and demands to be solved by the latter (It is not quite clear just what "faction", imaginative writing about real people in real places at real times, exactly comes to beyond a clever coinage<sup>23</sup>), has found

itself outside our range and resolved without our greater participation.<sup>24</sup> Upon this occasion, we may note and warn the reader that in some of the cited texts the uplifting mood is accompanied by specific infantilisation, often the outcome of the pedagogical functions of a text intended for youngest readers (children, adolescents); this mixture of the lofty with the infantile is, however, also to be encountered in official texts addressed to adults. This is one of the most characteristic traits of the canon and ambiance of the period. In my analysis I try to maintain as much as possible a chronological sequence enabling better observation of the stratification of meanings and symbolic motifs. On the other hand, I cannot assure the reader that I shall be able to maintain suitable research distance and relegate my emotions. The Palace of Culture makes it feasible not only to descend to the archaic basis of symbolic and cultural memory. For a resident connected with this town since birth – and I am such a resident – and looking at the Palace since childhood this is also a journey to that part of one's personal past, which I do not encompass within living memory or awareness. Listen to the statements made by the witnesses of this world, already part of the past.

### *Flower of stone*

We are introduced to the afore-mentioned unusual ambiance of the Palace, stressed in all texts, by a reporter's account. Here, we encounter other delineated motifs developed also in remaining evidence – elements of light (steel), splendour, brilliance, loftiness, and the Palace as a constant orientation point.

*The author of this book is a reporter, i.e. the sort of person who jots down everything he notices and then passes on to others all that he takes down. In other words, to You. And you are members of a strange excursion who without leaving their homes in Stalinogród, Gdańsk, Szczecin or Łódź, assorted small towns and villagers shall tour the Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. This reporter has been observing the Palace for the past three years, from the day of its birth when the first streams of concrete flowed into its foundations (...).*

*It was 21 July, the eve of our national holiday, when members of the government of People's Poland stood on a ramp. The ceremonious moment began: Prime Minister Premier Józef Cyrankiewicz leaned across a barrier and threw a złoty piece while workers tore caps off their heads and throwing them high into the air cried out: "Na shchastie! For good luck!" (...). The steel colossus grew. Yes, steel, because today, when we admire the glowing floors, magnificent marbles, and fine upholstery we have to keep in mind that the Palace of Culture is predominantly made of steel. Each of the 32 storeys is steel, the dome of the Congress hall is steel, and the shaft of the colossal spire is steel. (...)*

*On that day people stopped in the streets and lifted their heads high: will they make it or not? The globe of the spire glistened brightly in the sunlight, covered with 1 4000 colourful pieces of glass.*

*From that day, regardless in which district of Warsaw we find ourselves - Wola, Bielany or Mokotów - we shall see the glowing spire of the Palace.*

(Jerzy Janicki, *O Pałacu Kultury i Nauki im. Józefa Stalina*, TWP, Warszawa 1955).

Attention to the extraordinary nature of the Palace, and to the gift which it was intended to be for Warsaw, is drawn in another text. The Palace's unusual qualities could be summed up in the formula: "it existed before it came into being" and: "it was still not there and yet it already was". There also appears an oneiric motif: *We glance at newspapers from February, March, April – there it is! All the first pages feature enormous headlines: "A great gift from the Soviet Union to Warsaw", "The most magnificent building in Warsaw - the Palace of Culture and Science". Yes, it was 5 April 1952. A year ago no one even dreamed of a Friendship Palace. On the contrary, quite a few who read the papers on 6 April could have been thinking that he was dreaming. After all, History had not accustomed us to such gifts. This is particularly true of Warsaw. Our town had been plundered by all of Europe – the Swedes, the Saxons, Rakoczy of Transylvania and Catherine of St. Petersburg, the Austrian "invader" and the Napoleonic "ally". It was looted by generations of Prussian soldiers, from Friedrich to Hitler. History certainly did not acquaint us with such gifts as a Friendship Palace. And today? At present it is probably the only edifice in Warsaw that is still uncompleted but with which we are familiar and which we love and admire<sup>25</sup>. Konstytucji Square achieved the feat of blending with Warsaw immediately after construction, but in this respect the Palace of Culture and Science outdid the MDM [Marszalkowska Residential District] by becoming an inseparable part of Warsaw already before it was erected. Are we not already familiar with a panorama of Warsaw, with the lower tower of the largest Palace by this time so much a part of Warsaw, soaring above the outline of Nowy Świat and Krakowskie Przedmieście streets, the Zygmunt Column and the dome of Staszica Palace, the solid of the Party House and the angular box of Prudential? (Karol Małcużyński, *Nasza Stolica*, "Trybuna Ludu", 17 January 1953).*

The extraordinary character of the enterprise, i.e. raising the Palace, was described by Alexander Zakharovich Antonov, constructor of Friendship Palace:

*When I read the agreement signed by our governments about the gift for People's Poland I was overcome with pride for my country, government, and Stalin. Nowhere and never has anyone built something of the sort, with walls made of friendship. It is a great honour to participate in this magnificent deed (ibidem.)*

A poem about the growth of the Palace of Culture also features a discernible epiphany of technology and includes a classical image of kratophany (*Mighty like a rock*). The Palace combines opposites and constitutes a specific *coincidentia oppositorum* captured in an oxymoron formula ("flower of stone"):

*On their way to Poland,  
boards and bars,  
lime and cement,  
glass and machines.*

*Cars and cranes,  
bronze and marble  
to build a magnificent  
Palace of Culture.*

*A long train  
is already travelling to Poland  
with powerful excavators  
in the front.*

*On their way - resourceful  
Soviet diggers,  
drivers,  
welders.*

*A hundred engineers,  
masters, masons,  
carpenters and fitters  
have already arrived.*

*Work has  
started in Warsaw.*

*They have boldly  
embarked upon the deed.*

*Wheelbarrows are not needed  
to transport soil:*

*the work of excavators  
will make things easier.*

*These machines  
are veritable dragons;  
they instantly encompass  
a wide range. (...)*

*Such work  
renders all problems insignificant:*

*the earthworks  
are already completed!*

*The foundations  
are ready,  
the great construction  
has began!*

*Mighty walls  
ascend higher:  
the Palace of Culture  
emerges from its foundations!*

*It boldly grows  
and rapidly rises  
like a flower of stone  
on the flowerbed of the city!  
Higher and higher  
it expands.*

*A pleasure for the eyes!  
A joy for the heart!  
Look, soon  
it will catch up with the clouds  
this multi-storey  
Palace of Culture!  
Beautiful like a smile!  
Mighty like a rock!  
Tall like a tower!  
Eternal like glory!  
A magnificent monument  
of Soviet glory:  
a symbol of friendship  
in the heart of Warsaw!*

(R. Piwarski, *Rośnie w Warszawie Pałac Kultury*)

Next to images stressing might, permanence, duration, images and symbols known in the history of religious ideas from the time of megalithic civilisations, which developed a complex lithic and religious valorisation of stones and rocks (The rock, the stone slab, the granite block prove to be eternally durable and resilient to damage and ultimately *e x i s t* independently of becoming in time, cf. M. Eliade, *Historia wierzeń i idei religijnych*, Warszawa 1988, vol. 1, chapter V, p. 82 sq.), next to images of a tower (*tall like a tower*), among images of rising, growth, and entering the sky – here we once again perceive *coincidentia oppositorum*, the unification of the opposites: static and durability together with dynamic becoming, motion (*it will catch up with the clouds*), overcoming weight, the motif of flight (*it will reach the clouds/*

*Where birds and clouds abound*), in other words, amidst imagery from the symbolic *axis mundi*<sup>26</sup>, there appears in descriptions of the Palace the image of the *M o u n t a i n*, also typical for the symbolism of the centre. Naturally, this is not a pure image of the “cosmic mountain” linking Earth and Heaven (although it is located in the centre: *Seen from afar in the very heart of Poland*). The emergent image of a mountain is tainted with another archaic motif belonging to folklore and folk imagination, intertwined with fairy-tale convention and stylistic, in which the afore-mentioned oneiric ambiance returns:

*The mountain peak soared into the clouds  
A tall castle stood on top  
With a girl imprisoned therein...  
Everyone certainly recalls this tale.*

*That what the peasant storyteller wrote  
What the people imagined  
We shall all soon see while awake!  
A fairy-tale palace is being built in Warsaw.*

*It will reach the clouds  
Where birds and clouds abound*

*Just like in a fairy tale, our Palace of Culture.*

*That what our people could only dream of  
They received as a gift from a nation-friend.*

*The girl is imprisoned no more  
And does not recollect the bad years.  
Glistening with red ribbons,  
This girl is simply a book  
From which wisdom and knowledge flow,  
Preceding the march of culture.*

*Seen from afar in the very heart of Poland  
It will last like faith in man,  
It will last like love for a child,  
It will last like Soviet friendship.  
(Jan Brzechwa, *Pałac Kultury*)*

This fairy-tale motif, together with reaching the sky, growth, and height (*barely discernible to the human eye*), was developed also in other texts:

*The first foundations have already risen above the ground,  
The spans of steel scaffolding climb upwards,  
The canvas of a Palace more magnificent than that of  
An enchanted princess is growing higher and higher.*

*There, high up, next to that cloud, the pinnacle of the spire  
will glitter barely discernible to the human eye.  
And a thousand windows will light up  
And a torch shall burn endlessly  
A symbol of profound and sincere friendship,  
The most splendid ornament of a magnificent Capital.  
(Adam Nowak, *Pałac Kultury i Nauki*)*

Here, the most often recurring motif is that of power, radiance, an epiphany of light and lustre, as well as upward growth:

*(...) Trains carrying rocks travel from the Union.  
The engine glows like a heart.  
A palace is rising from the history of friendship  
From a joint battle for freedom!*

*Look how it adorns heights with a lace ornament,  
How it climbs upward, ever slimmer!  
So that the victory of labour below  
Could merge the mason and the inspired writer!*

*So that the Palace could become evidence in a battle  
For the happiness of the people, for labour and peace,  
So that the sons of factories and peasants  
Could handle books.*

(Grzegorz Timofiejew, *Na budowę Pałacu Kultury i Nauki w Warszawie*)

A dialogue of two clouds resounds with a cosmic symbolic of the Palace, an image of a column of the heavens (a tower leaning on stars):

(...) *The mother cloud answers:*  
*I'm not laughing*  
*I heard, after all,*  
*Boria, "żhmi bistrিয়ে".*  
*And it's a good thing when*  
*Boria "żhmi bistrিয়ে".*

*I know them, each smiling*  
*But determined.*  
*They will build towers, pedestals*  
*And lean them against the stars.*  
*This is what the mother-cloud*  
*Said tearfully:*

*- Flee, daughter-cloud,*  
*I don't want to be scraped.*  
*They floated away listlessly, far beyond the Vistula,*  
*Over Warsaw*  
*The sky is clear.*  
 (Józef Prutkowski, *Mówi chmura córce chmurce...*)

We come across cosmic symbolic also in a poem about a "crystal ball" shining from afar and topping the Palace spire, with the Sun and the Moon bending over it, an opportunity for communication and contact established between Heaven and Earth. This image becomes expanded in a magical (magic ball, seer, fortune-teller), romantic and fairy-tale mood.

On the Palace spire, where only the wind carouses,  
 a crystal ball high up shines in the Sun.  
 And the day - like a seer - cradles it in its hands  
 casts spells and seeks the future.  
 Tell me, ray of Sun, kindly,  
 what do you see in that magic Warsaw ball?  
 I see the completed Palace, MDM growing  
 with each building looking at its reflection in the  
 ball with joy!  
 I see people, vehicles, gardens, streets,  
 the Vistula, bridges, boulevards - the whole capital!  
 I see how it is going to look tomorrow:  
 larger, more populous and even lovelier!  
 On the Palace spire, where only the wind carouses,  
 a crystal ball shines brightly in the moonlight.  
 And the night - the best fortune-teller - raises its  
 hand above it,  
 casts starry spells and peers into it.  
 Tell me, lovely, romantic moonlight,  
 what do you see in that Warsaw magic ball?

I see how it glows above, sparkles among the  
 stars  
 and below reflects the constellations of the town.  
 I feel the breath of Warsaw deep in slumber  
 and hear how early in the morning it hurries to  
 work.  
 Beauty will reside here and joy will make itself at  
 home -  
 and while aging it will grow younger!  
 On the Palace spire, where only wind the wind carouses,  
 a crystal ball predicts happiness for Warsaw.  
 May all the radiance of the capital sparkle within  
 it!  
 We believe our seers: our days and nights.  
 (Witold Degler, *Kryształowa kula Pałacu Kultury*)

The poetic images and experiences of the Palace of Culture concentrate motifs so characteristic for the symbolic of the centre (a permanent, strong and constant orientation point enabling transition between assorted levels of the reality of the cosmos: heaven - earth - underworld; we shall observe elements of this level also in a further part of this analysis) as well as the symbolic of the home, together with its value of the centre enabling a transition between different temporal dimensions (withdrawal and descent into the past; exit and entry into the future). The home provides an image of the past. More, ideally, the home is situated in the centre of human life and the centre (as we have seen) delineates the point of departure and the beginning (cf. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Przestrzeń i miejsce*, Warszawa 1987, p. 164). In images of the Palace of Culture we also come across symbols of the "interior of the land", "the source", "the centre", and "the heart", connected with the mythical evaluation of space and place, all of which indicate the idea of the time of the past (cf. Yi-Fu Tuan, *ibid.*, p. 161). In the case of the Palace of Culture if we are not to speak about a *sui generis* inversion of meanings (apart from the ideological premise of an architectural project), then we are certainly dealing with a much stronger accentuation of the past, and the recalled images and symbols (the home, the centre, the heart) are linked with the idea of the future tense, the new and the different, and focus predominantly on the future. Even the poem by Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski, setting into motion a Romantic, Mickiewicz-like topos of the "home river" and in this manner inscribing the Palace into tradition and turning towards the future, appears to be new, together with its cosmic "natural-religious" symbolic (*A house as enormous as Mt. Kościelec*).

*Vistula, native river, have you ever seen*  
*Such houses?*  
*A tower soaring over the city to reach the Moon,*

*A house as enormous as Mt. Kościelec.*

(Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski, "Express Wieczorny", 22 July 1954)

This focus on the future, together with the Palace as an orientation point - once again with an epiphany of light - is to be discovered in a poem by Second Lieutenant Mieczysław Michalak:

*Of all the Warsaw roads the best known  
leads to the site where the Palace is growing,  
where the white wall shines like a bright torch  
and the town's pride glimmers with light bulb eyes.*

*The hands of cranes send kind greetings  
and speak to human hearts  
the crane, iron but alive, speaks powerfully,  
and just like man stretches its arms to the future.*

*Gazing at the people and the walls – a fraternal gift,  
on the marble slab I distinctly feel  
the warm hand of a worker – this is the touch of  
Friendship –  
and thus I send to you, Moscow, my soldierly salute.  
(Z wycieczką na budowie Pałacu Kultury i Nauki)*

The Palace of Culture also appears to be a source of truth (the Palace of Truth), together with its exhilarating and rejuvenating force.

*Steel giraffes had been brought over,  
steel arms have been stretched out,  
steel constructions are growing upwards,  
Storeys are rising in steel hands.  
Two hundred metres!  
Two hundred metres!  
The palace is growing,  
And climbing upwards!  
Two hundred meters above the town!  
This is friendship stretching out its arms,  
it is friendship crowning the city centre!  
Higher, higher! Like joy! Like a bird!  
The storeys are growing just like friendship did!  
The palace is growing just like friendship –  
Workers', soldiers', the simplest possible!  
Here, the worker and the peasant will meet,  
Here truth is as straightforward as rye growing tall.  
Here Moscow presents Warsaw  
with its ever fresh youth and beauty.*

.

(Stanisław Czachorowski, *Pałac prawdy*)

In a poem by the Hungarian Ferenc Pákozdy the Palace of Culture is not merely a fount of life but alongside the already mentioned symbols and motifs it appears to be an almost holy, miraculous site (*Here is the new miracle of life*). The epiphany of light, glow, and luminescence reaches its culmination. The poem acts as testimony of mystical experiences within the range of the Palace, the site of an ecstatic transformation of the author (the lyrical subject) into sheer light (*Today, I bathe my soul in the glow (...) And change into sparkling radiance*).

*Palace of Culture and Science,  
Already on my way I watched it.  
Its steel climbing upwards above Warsaw.  
A foretaste! A symbol! It storms the sky...*

*Rubble and ruins still all around.  
Your foot still touches the past,  
But friendship already glows above all  
And proudly grows mightier.*

*I observe the history of the expanding construction,  
A daily pilgrim to this site.  
Here, thunders constantly  
The pounding heart of the city.*

*On a platform - a multitude of spectators.  
In their eyes I notice zeal and reflection.  
Words spoken in deep thought:  
This is Stalin's priceless gift!*

*This lovely palace brings such joy  
As if it was being built for me.  
Peace springs forth here, hearts are set alight:  
Proletarian internationalism.*

*Here in each motion you feel  
The Soviet touch, thought and tempo;  
Here stretches a vision of the world:  
A communist epoch of beauty.*

*Famous communist constructions ...  
I owe their image to books;  
Today, they bathe my soul in radiance  
And insert the glow of the future into the present.*

*When in the evening the sky above the construction  
Glimmers with sparks,  
A song and thrill grow in me,  
And I too change into sparkling brightness.*

*Palace of Culture and Science...  
I greet it shedding tears of happiness.*

*I am full of joy. Here is a new miracle of life:  
The key to the future. I feel I am growing.*

(Ferenc Pakozdy, *Pałac Kultury i Nauki*, transl. from the Hungarian Tadeusz Fangrat)

The poem by Pakozdy is the most vivid expression of an aggressive image of the Palace envisaged as a challenge addressed to the heavens and an image containing the recognisable motif of the Tower of Babel (*It storms the sky*).

This image is a reference to the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel as interpreted by Marxist-communist ideology. The motif in question, conceived as an example of the symbol's transformation, was broached by Lotman, who with its assistance showed its essence as a copious text that in a rolled up form transfers the memory of culture. *Already the formula conceived by Marx, which was (...) immensely popular - "the people storm the sky" - contained a reference to the myth of the Tower of Babel subjected to dual inversion: first, the assessments of heaven and the Earth attacking it changed places, and, second, the myth about the split of the nations was replaced by an image of their merger, i.e. the International* (cf. Y. Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, op. cit., p. 154). At this point it is worth recalling yet another interpretation of the story of the Tower of Babel, which perceives in the "punishment" consisting of mingling languages a blessing that offers protection against the temptations of totalitarianism (a single tongue, *we shall resemble the gods*): hampering the construction of the Tower and the mixture of languages are seen as a preservation of the diversity, differences, and pluralism of identity and thus freedom offered to mankind.

Features invariably stressed in all texts and evidence of experiences connected with the Palace include its height, soaring shape, and skywardness. The Palace's extraordinariness and power are summed up in its stature and dimension. The lofty Palace fascinates, attracts, and exudes magnetic allure. This was the situation from the very onset, the moment of announcing news about the gift:

*The largest square of the capital, located in Marszałkowska Street, will become the site of a gigantic construction some 28-30 storeys tall (...). Polish creative thought will radiate from here across the whole country.* Response to this piece of news could bring to mind associations with mass-scale reactions to a miracle: *The whole of Warsaw immediately found out about the magnificent gift of friendship, which the capital of People's Poland received from the Soviet Union – the tallest building in Poland, the Palace of Culture and Science. The inhabitants of the Capital made their way towards the construction site between Marszałkowska Street and Jerolimskie Avenue, and Sosnowa and Świętokrzyska streets, discussing on the spot the assumed appearance of the colossus*

*and its purpose... (...). Happy news stir the imagination of all residents of the Capital – declared the writer Leon Kruczkowski. This noble gift of one nation to another will be not only a durable monument of our eternal friendship. Already the very process of erecting it will affect us day after day more strongly than any word can do (...)* ("Express Wieczorny", 7 April 1952).

Such was also the situation after the completion of work, when starting in January 1955 "Życie Warszawy" published voices in a discussion on the edifice growing in Stalina Square:

*It is necessary to erect buildings, which in the manner of a beautiful setting will comprise a uniform whole together with the sky-high palace. The white and slender edifice stands in all its magnificence. Its soaring outline, so inseparably and for ever connected with the image of Warsaw, visible from a distance of tens of kilometres, towers above the town and daily attracts the gazes of thousands and thousands of residents of Warsaw* ("Express Wieczorny", 21 January 1954). *From a 132 metres-high terrace the Saxon Garden resembles a lettuce leaf - reports "Express" (Jerzy Ciszewski, 28/29 July 1954, no. 205). How often while walking along the streets of Warsaw you turn your gaze towards the colossal outline of the Palace of Culture and Science. High up, the spire glistens in the sunlight ... the enormous white stone columns of the entrance portals beckon from afar. Our Palace is beautiful, proudly declare the inhabitants of the capital and interrupt their daily strolls for a moment to enjoy its view. Resembling a priceless pearl in its setting the white palace glows amidst sprawling green lawns.*

The special significance of this vertical dimension of the Palace, directing all sight upwards, was stressed by architect Rozhnev already at the stage of discussing the project:

*The grand solid should be seen from the viewpoint of the height of a person and his raised head. People on their way to work tend to stoop; otherwise, they walk with their heads held high. Such a building is part of life – the base should be connected with man* (*Jak powstał projekt Pałacu Kultury*, prep. M. Kledź, "Stolica", no. 23, 9 June 1985).

Fascination with height was also shared by Polish architects in the course of attempts at determining the proportions of the Palace in relation to the outline of the capital: *Architects were assisted by airmen. In order to establish the highest parts of the future palace a pilot was asked to perform a number of flights 160 and 220 metres above Warsaw. Polish and Soviet architects in assorted parts of the city and along the banks of the Vistula in the district of Praga observed the plane and in this fashion defined the height of the building while taking into consideration the general outline of the capital's architecture. Next, standing on roofs of houses adjoining the future construction site they made necessary measurements and finally arrived at a joint conclusion, namely, that the most suitable*

would be a building about 220 meters tall (J. Dąbrowski, *Podniebny pomnik przyjaźni*, Warszawa 1953, pp. 7-8).

Architect J. Sigalin recalled:

*Soviet architects, especially Rudnev, said: That's enough: this should be just fine for the outline of Warsaw: 100-200 metres. We, the Varsovians, however (...) became victims of a height frenzy and after each turnabout of the plane issued the order: "Higher!" (the side towers were to be 60 metres tall, just like the Warszawa Hotel, and quite possibly we were more or less consciously concerned with creating a new Warsaw on a scale larger than the one delineated before the war by the Prudential or Cedergrén buildings (J. Sigalin, Warszawa 1944-1980. Z archiwum architekta, Warszawa 1986, vol. 2, p. 429).*

The sacral (quasi-sacral) reality of the Palace could be testified not only by the irrational and often mystical nature of experiences associated with it, but also the language of architecture in which it speaks to us. Wojciech Włodarczyk, author of an interesting study about socialist realism (in which, unfortunately, the Palace of Culture is treated in a rather fragmentary and marginal fashion, with the author discussing only the portal of the main entrance and focusing his attention on the candelabras in Konstytucji Square), devoted much attention to the mystical dimension of this architecture (cf. W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka Polska w latach 1950-54*, Libella, Paris 1986, in particular chapter 3 - *Mysticism architektury*, pp. 39-53). Noting that alongside military terminology architectural vocabulary comprises the prime material of the speeches, Włodarczyk drew attention that the ideological obligations imposed upon architecture as well as socialist realistic architecture as such created a mystical communication of sorts between, and with the public. Such architecture was supposed to be a pretext for members of the public who were thus to become capable of experiencing the greatness of the epoch. The theses proposed by Włodarczyk about the mystical experience provided by the architecture of socialist realism, speaking a language characteristic for such experiences - expressed in *coincidentia oppositorum*, a union and combination of opposites - find their particular confirmation in the example of the Palace of Culture. One could say that the latter was one great *coincidentia oppositorum*, whose different dimensions on assorted levels merged contradictions and opposites. The Palace is a blend of high art and tradition with their folk counterparts, force and lightness, sound and silence, the old and the new, the local and the global, the foreign and the native. What features had not been ascribed to the Palace? They include the voice of Ewa Bandrowska-Turska and Nike from the Louvre; naturally, it had been described as the "Warsaw Eiffel Tower". The Palace, as we shall see, often combines the contradictory ambiance of fascination and horror, and for some it remains an example of order and har-

mony while for others - of chaos; it is a foretaste of freedom:

*In a town closest to my heart*

*I shall see slender towers,*

*A fort, of which only*

*a free man is worthy.*

*A lantern that glows*

*with beauty and science.*

(T. Kubiak, *Na budowę Pałacu Kultury i Nauki*),

or of rude enslavement.

All those *a m b i g u o u s* moods and meanings amassed by the Palace best demonstrate its *a m b i g u i t y* as a symbol. They also display the different dimensions and levels (either in the positive or the negative part of the Palace myth) in which it realises the fundamental function of the myth, i.e. an attempt at "expressing the inexpressible".

Testimonies of this mystical experience offered by the Palace, that unification of contradictions, are to be found in the following selected statements:

*Academician Rudnev: (...) The purpose of this project is to create a uniform image of beauty that would blend with architecture into a single architectural entity with Old Warsaw (...) The uppermost part of the building seems to dissolve in the air; just like the voice of Ewa Bandrowska-Turska spans from silence to uppermost crystal clear sounds so we too, in the construction of this building, must strive towards creating a lightness of form, a magnificence of the forms of the erected edifice in a transition from the monumental lower parts... (J. Sigalin, Warszawa..., op. cit., vol. 2, p. 435).<sup>27</sup>*

*The Palace of Culture and Science is a work of the Soviet architectural school, exceptionally apt in its location, dimension, and fragmentation of the solid. (...) The impression made by the building is lightness, joyfulness, nativeness, and the feeling that it almost has been a part of Warsaw (J. Minorski, O projekcie szkicowym Pałacu Kultury i Nauki, "Architektura" 1952, no. 7-8).*

Helena Syrkusowa spoke during a discussion held at a meeting of architects:

*The Palace of Culture and Science has become a part of Warsaw. It was feared that it might be a stranger but it turned into a tuning fork of New Warsaw (J. Sigalin, Warszawa..., op. cit., vol. 3, p. 83).*

The synthesis of high and low (folk) tradition was also considered: *The Palace of Culture and Science is not supposed to be merely great - it is to be beautiful. As the central building in Warsaw, the socialist capital of Poland, it should possess the characteristic features of Polish architecture, elements borrowed from the treasury of Polish architectural culture. Soviet designers thus went on a trip across Poland. They examined the historical monuments of Cracow and the buildings of Zamość, raised in the magnificent Renaissance style. Their sketchbooks recorded successive fragments of the pearls of architecture in Kazimierz, Chełmno, Kielce and Toruń. They noticed*

and noted all the distinctive traits of our architecture, all the most splendid fragments of buildings-remnants of the epoch of the zenith of this art in our country. Finally, they departed and once again the studios of Moscow became the site of busy work. A project was made. This work, whose outcome was the emergence of a project of the Palace, is described by Lev Rudnev, member of the Academy of Architecture of the USSR.

"We spent much time examining the special features of Polish national architecture before we chose a variant of the project and definitely established the architecture of the building. We reached for Polish folk art, travelled across Polish towns, observed Warsaw rising from the ruins, sought the advice of Polish architects. We discovered a common language with Polish architecture – and this proved decisive for the success of our project. The style of the Palace is synchronised with the most beautiful examples of Polish architecture and, at the same time, it is quite new. It must be stressed that the foundation of Polish architecture is – if one eliminates foreign borrowings - associated with the people, with life. It is light and airy, does not encumber man but elevates him" (...).

Premises similar to those that inspired the construction of Moscow skyscrapers lie at the basis of the conceptions of the Warsaw Palace of Culture. We saw how it is possible to adapt it to the words of a resolution pertaining to Moscow skyscrapers, which are to be "original in their architectural-artistic composition and connected with the historical architecture of the town". Just as in their case, the Palace of Culture should not be, and will not be "a repetition of models of multi-storey buildings known abroad". (J. Dąbrowski, *Pałac Kultury i Nauki*, Mała Biblioteka TWP, Warszawa 1953, pp. 7-8 and 25-26).

**This whole enormous edifice will be raised in the spirit of Polish masterpieces of architecture. (...) In the Palace of Culture and Science we see dynamics characteristic for Polish architectural models: the massive main building is topped by a boldly soaring, much narrower spire. The architectural solution of the lower fragments of the Palace brings to mind somewhat the Cracow Cloth Halls, while the congress hall, a semi-rotunda, contains elements of the Barbican, so typical for Polish architecture.**

The outstanding artistic assets of the building were jointly accentuated by Polish architects requested to assess the project. They declared that the building is a harmonious part of the development of Warsaw and excellently composed into its panorama (J. Dąbrowski, *Podniebny ...*, op. cit., pp. 9-10).

It was also said that the Palace of Culture is a combination of the Cracow Renaissance and Warsaw Classicism.

Engineer architect Skibniewski asserted that the in the stylisation of the building Soviet architects resorted to the examples of the most outstanding works of the Cracow Renaissance. The building also reflects the tranquil Clas-

sicism of Warsaw architecture. Prof. Biegański drew attention to certain features of the architectural similarity of the Palace to Polish historical architecture. (...) Engineer architect Stepiński, discussing the **harmonious blend** of the architectural elements of **Cracow Renaissance and Warsaw Classicism**, declared that it is precisely this feature that grants the Palace the qualities of equanimity (...). Academician Rudnev discussed the guidelines of the work performed by the architects and accentuated that "they strove towards creating an atmosphere of warmth, love and respect for man, so that everyone, both a child and an adult, would want to come and relax here". (J. Dąbrowski, *Podniebny...*, op. cit., pp. 10-12).

### **The phantom centre of the world**

The above-cited texts showing the Palace of Culture as a unity of contradictions outline the successive motif of our reflections and inevitably lead towards the symbolism of the centre. This involves questions about the extent to which it is a constant point enabling orientation in the world, the degree to which it amasses echoes and is the reverse of traditional, archaic conceptions of the "centre of the world" described by Eliade (cf. M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*, Warszawa 1978, chapter II: *Element rzeczywistości mitycznej*). The extent to which it is not only that constant "absolute" point of support enabling orientation but also a centre that established "our world", the "Cosmos", whose order opposes "chaos", the same "centre of the world" as each temple and palace that summarise the world and act as its image. These issues are directly connected with the way in which the Palace of Culture preserves and contains the structure and character of a sacred site.

While responding to those questions, which can be reduced to a single query concerning the manner in which the symbolism of the centre is recorded in the Palace of Culture, we are compelled to preserve additional caution.

First, we must remember about the "frame" of the Palace, the specific site in which it had been situated. Marta Zielińska wrote in *Studium o Placu Defilad*:

At the northern and southern edge of the square, more or less at the level of Poznańska Street, the pavement features two commemorative plaques. There used to be a third one, but I did not find it - it had vanished behind the fencing around the construction site. Probably no other city has similar tablets, which do not commemorate people or events but mark ordinary street crossings. The inscription on one of them says: "Here was the crossing of Chmielna and Wielka streets". "Was" – now these are the ghosts of crossings, symbolic gravestones – so popular here. (...) Nor do I know who came across this idea but I do know that it enabled the spirit of Warsaw to speak, the spirit of a town deprived of a sufficiently solid and unchanged material foundation that now seeks refuge in ideal be-

ings, namely, in words and letters.<sup>28</sup> This is expressed by the protagonist of Tadeusz Konwicki's film *How Far Away, How Near*, setting out on his way home into the past or the future (he obviously finds it difficult to define the direction) from the main entrance of the Palace of Culture, against a current of a group of visitors, late and dashing into the Palace interior.<sup>29</sup> He is the protagonist of a film in which the Palace plays a considerable role, is shown from time to time, and is used as a setting for events transpiring in the course of the journey: *The towering outline of the Palace of Culture conceals the setting Sun*. Above it, in the memorable scene opening the film, the figure of a Hassidic Jew (the Eternal Wanderer?) flies amidst clouds – an image of a condemned soul cast into the void of Hell or lifted into the heavens, high above the Palace and the crossing of Jerozolimskie Avenue and Marszałkowska Street.<sup>30</sup> The protagonist of the film turns to the ghost of a friend who had committed suicide: *You see, Maks, this is our whole town. So often occupied by foreigners, tortured, and razed to the ground. Our town. Sometimes in the centre of Europe, upon other occasions East European.*<sup>31</sup> Keep in mind the city's specific and unclear, phantom-like character and status, this exclusive ambiguity of the "centre" and "heart" of Poland.

Secondly, remember the principle accompanying assorted symbols, namely, that just as in the case of heretofore considered themes and symbolic motifs associated with the Palace so in this case, when we are talking about the Palace and the symbolism of the centre, *the content only flickers through the expression and the latter only indicates the content by means of allusion*.

This phenomenal and illusory nature of the Palace and its phantom-like quality are stressed in numerous texts:

*It was spring, probably May, at sunrise, wrote Gustaw Morcinek. I leaned out of the train arriving in Warsaw and suddenly I saw the soaring, white outline of the Palace of Culture in the rising Sun. The sky was deep blue, and in it - the immersed white silhouette of the Palace of Culture. It resembled a phantom and mainly brought to my mind Nike from the Parisian Louvre. It cast a spell on me with its extraordinarily slim, towering, skyward shape, and just like the other Nike it spoke of victory and faith in man ("Trybuna Robotnicza", 12 April 1972).*

Attention to this phenomenal quality and dematerialisation of socialist realistic architecture was drawn by Włodarczyk – the inclination to encumber architecture with ideological obligations and duties occurred parallel with a tendency towards a "dematerialisation" of the building, erecting it in a painterly fashion, concealing its geometry and tectonics underneath expanded ornaments (cf. W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm*, op. cit., p. 41).

Whenever the idea of the centre of the world is being considered it is simply impossible to omit citing a poem by Tadeusz Kubiak, which alongside home motifs (a nest,

a swallow nesting next to a beam) contains an outright inversion of this idea. In traditional versions, the "centre" is an orientation point and marks four parts of the world, but in the case of the Palace *the diversity of parts of the world vanishes* in its beauty. The pinnacle of the Palace directs our sight (in accordance with the original meaning of the word in Polish) only to the East whence one can see the Don, the Volga. and an outline of the Ural Mts.

*Only love for daily objects as simple  
as a chisel, a masonry hammer, or  
a trowel, and belief in works produced by the human  
hand*

*can attach us in an hour of the greatest heat wave  
or even in the downpour rustling among leaves,  
will not allow us to abandon the scaffolding that con-  
ceals walls.*

*This poem passed the test, my friend,  
when we recently traversed  
the storeys of the Palace of Culture.  
I have often watched labour and great toil,  
the busy swallow carrying in its beak  
a lump of soil to a nest next to a beam,  
or human hands like swallow wings,  
hovering over work and love  
that fills your heart.*

*Friend, recall -*

*This is what I spoke to you about -  
when the Palace of Culture stood  
in front of us, like a nest. Like a monument.  
I know how much heart is needed to build as if for  
oneself  
in a city whose name differs so much from  
that of your hometown. When the night puts out the  
star*

*and day lights the Sun  
– to submerge oneself like a deep sea diver  
with a diving suit and a blowtorch  
into the artificial stars of fire  
into the vertical steel construction, or to climb up-  
wards  
along a wall as steep as a precipice.*

*My friend. The  
diversity of parts of the world will vanish  
in the beauty of the Palace of Culture.  
I am familiar with longing for that wondrous moment  
when hands rest on a completed work.  
Those on the highest storey, with hands  
raised to their forehead, may see scrubs along the Don,  
green birches along the Volga and the outline of the  
Ural Mts.  
while I shall be entering interiors of marble in War-  
saw.*

*Friend, thus each day links us with the distant  
and each brick of the Palace of Culture - with each  
other.*

(Tadeusz Kubiak, *Rozmowa na budowie Pałacu Kultury w Warszawie wiosną 1953 roku*, from the cycle: *Miłość prawdziwa*).

*The Palace of Culture is also an untypical centre because it lies... to the side. This eccentricity was stressed upon numerous occasions: in Warsaw all large streets lead towards the sky. None ends with some sort of an architectural accent - apart from the unfortunate candelabras in Konstytucji Square. Situating the Palace of Culture and Science eccentrically vis a vis the largest municipal arteries is yet more proof that architects do not fear draughts and are fond of endless street vistas. (...) The Palace does not close any large artery of the capital. Its outline is distinctly seen from Służewiec or Stara Miłosa, but at the crossing of Nowy Świat Street with the Avenue, or Marszałkowska Street with Wspólna Street it disappears, concealed by nondescript town houses (Jerzy Putrament, O 'elewactwie' i innych sprawach warszawskich, "Życie Warszawy", 15 January 1955).*

This strange centre, better noticeable in the town peripheries and along its edges - expressed by the poetic intuition of Adam Nowak as "the most magnificent ornament of a splendid capital" - concentrated attention and disturbed serious architects who while discussing the solution of Stalina (Defilad) Square, the centre and the East Wall, stressed the inconsistency of the Palace, *which already has a place of its own in the panorama of Warsaw (...) but the accessibility of this central location of the Palace of Culture is simultaneously rather limited* (cf. J. Sigalin, *Warszawa*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 77). At the same time, references were made to exemplary models of such superb solutions as Place de la Concorde in Paris, where arteries connected the central square with the whole town, rue Rapalle, Place de la Madeleine, and all the other reasons why: *When in Paris, it is impossible not to cross Place de la Concorde and to ignore the obelisk brought by Napoleon I from Luxor, whilst when we observe the Palace of Culture we rarely see it, and its location in the centre of Warsaw appears to be some sort of a paradox* (J. Sigalin, *ibid.*). In order to prevent this, other Parisian models were evoked, and the Palace of Culture was compared to the Eiffel Tower: *Together with my colleagues at the studio we tried to insert the outline of the Palace of Culture into that of the Eiffel Tower because there is a certain affiliation between those two monuments* (*ibid.*). It was also suggested to turn to the legacy left behind by Le Notre, the esplanade of the magnificent solution of the Versailles Park next to the palace (*ibid.*, p. 85).

Apparently, the Palace of Culture links opposites and assorted motifs constituting its "absence of clarity" and ambivalence. It connected motifs of the South and the North (Cracow Renaissance and Warsaw Classi-

cism), the East and the West (scrubland along the Don and an outline of the Ural Mts.; the Eiffel Tower and the Versailles gardens), reflecting the following principles of a town: *Sometimes in the centre of Europe, upon other occasions East European*. It appears to be either a non-integrated particle or a synthesis of national architecture, according to all the rules of the Barthesian principle of the myth as its "natural centre". (*Studying the national features of Polish architecture... finally made it possible to create a project that will be completely new for the town and merge with it organically, creating a natural centre of the Capital* - cf. J. Dąbrowski, *Pałac...*, op. cit., p. 9). Paradoxically, the Palace of Culture also blends within itself the order of the "Cosmos" and "Chaos". We come across two competing experiences: Chaos and Order, the native "Cosmos", in the already cited study by Marta Zielińska. First, when she wrote:

*Today, the square is fading more and more. The chaos of this site is astounding considering that this is the centre of, after all, a European capital and vividly negates the name it was once granted. Scarce passers-by vanish in the distance, following some sort of invisible trails playing the part of streets; cars circulate just as helplessly, while large trucks and buses park nearby. From the side of the Avenue one sees fences and digs, and from Świętokrzyska Street - the remnants of stalls with few haphazard traders; all this is encircled along the edges with quite young but already sickly trees. Recently, there appeared a pickled whale, probably to supplement the chaos. This text was written several years ago and today the described mayhem is increased even further by an international, free-market "bazaar" and one of the first "sex-shops" situated in a stall maintained in a camping-Mazovian-Podhale style, all amplified with the lowing of suffering cattle left for the night with no water in trucks parked in the square - as the press and radio informed recently. Describing Defilad Square, Zielińska noticed: *Strangely and even symbolically it reflects the plight of Warsaw, the entire convoluted history of the last 150 years. History (...) has made a circle: the square was once a meadow with chaotically scattered wooden houses and planted trees, and now, contrary to all architects' plans, it once again comes close to this appearance.**

*True, the Palace stands but one has to look up in order to see it, because normally from the vantage point of a pedestrian only its particular wings detached from each other and not comprising a sensible whole can be seen in the distance. It is much too large to be embraced, and thus has disintegrated into pieces: the bottom and the top are separate, and in addition the bottom has collapsed into several fragments. He who finds himself at the foot of the Palace gazes mainly at empty space on all three sides of the world.*

Alongside this Cubist experience of the Palace, enhancing the associated feeling of chaos, we find an

entirely different confession. The author, a contemporary of the Palace, added:

*I appreciated the Palace's height and was uninterested in the contents. Whenever I returned to Warsaw from my vacations I always waited for the moment when a tiny Palace of Culture would appear from afar. "Oh, the Palace" - we would call out and enjoy the pleasant awareness that home was near. In other words, a semblance of a lighthouse effect. I cannot say that I did not experience sympathy of sorts, especially towards the Palace swiderviewed from a distance, for example, from the banks of the Vistula in Świder. As long as I remained within its range I knew that I would not get lost and if anything should happen I would always find my way – I even tried to traverse this route in my childish imagination (p. 124).*

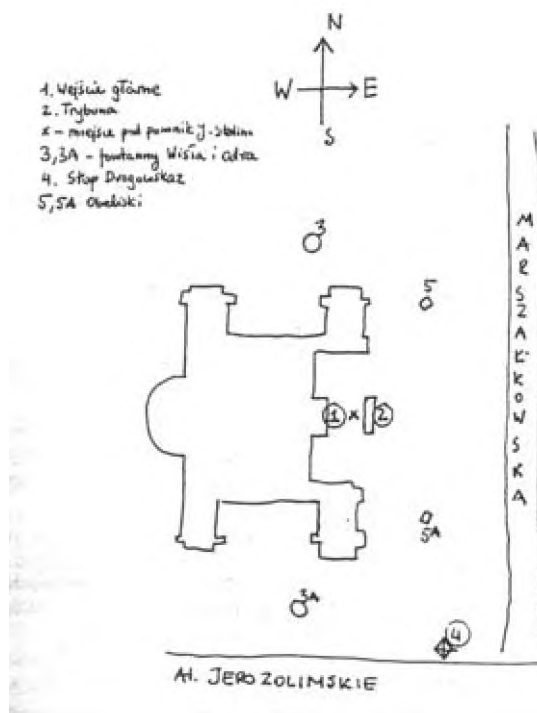
Having recorded all these paradoxes and *sui generis* splits in the perception of the Palace now let us go back to the original ideological premise at its basis and pay some attention to the symbolism of the centre recorded within. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the Palace constituted an essential novelty on the city plan. Situated along a former edge, on the site of former chaos, the Palace, together with the sequence of Marszałkowska Street starting from the MDM, the planned centre (today: the East Wall), and Stalina (Defilad) Square, created a parallel and simultaneously competing sequence to the Old Warsaw Route, the Royal Route running from the Old Town, the Royal Castle, Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, Nowy Świat Street, Ujazdowskie Avenue, "across" Łazienki Park and Belweder Palace all the way to Wilanów – a sequence marked by history and the extensive symbolics connected with the history of the town and country. Warsaw is a specific city, whose "centre", brimming with historical symbols, stretches parallel to the Vistula along the Royal Route and the North-South axis. The location of the Palace not only created a competitive, new centre progressing parallel along the same axis but accentuated the East-West direction, insignificant apart from the Saxon, Stanisławowska, and Ujazdowska axes.

Architects and observers often complained that the town "runs away from the Vistula", that it does not descend towards the river and remains unconnected with its right-bank part as if unaware of certain logic in such an accentuation of the North-South axis reflecting the course of the Vistula connecting Cracow, Warsaw, and Gdańsk (since, as Piotr Skrzynecki repeated after Wiesław Dymny: *We have friends on three sides, but the sea only on one*). It is precisely along the Vistula and upon the basis of anthropological research and measurements that Talko-Hryncewicz determined the ethnographic boundary between Asia and Europe, the East and the West.

Placing the Palace of Culture in the western part of the town not only emphasised the direction towards

which the city turned its back, but also realised the rule of a temple, sacral orientation. The less important side walls of the Palace sprawled between the South and the North, while its "altar", ritual part, if this is how we may describe the platform from which all parades and marches were to be watched, the statues in front of the façade, and the portal of the main entrance faced the East. (It is here, to the East Wall, that it was planned to transfer the "town hall" and administration offices while discussing solutions concerning the new centre and the best way to display the Palace - whether to introduce arches and colonnades or leave wider open space).

In order to illustrate this new valorisation in the mythical geography of the town here is a plan making it possible to better follow its symbolic-centric contents:



1. Main entrance
2. Stand
3. Site of planned statue of J. Stalin
4. Odra and Vistula fountains
5. Pillar-road sign
- 5A. Obelisks

Marszałkowska Street

In 1953 the Palace of Culture and Science was granted the name of Joseph Stalin (*When in distant Moscow the great heart of Comrade Stalin, friend of the Polish people, leader of the working masses all over the world, ceased to beat, the Government of People's Poland passed a resolution... - J. Dąbrowski, Podniebny..., op.*

cit.). It was also decided to place in front of the main entrance a monument (on the competition for the design cf. the reminiscences of Henryk Urbanowicz: *The most eccentric was a statue of Stalin by Xawery Dunikowski – the Master proposed a granite sculpture made of great blocks comprising the whole figure, including the head. The direct intervention of the artist was to be limited to a minimum. Enormous legs-shoes, built of slabs, trampled the ground, and the figure, usually depicted while breathing out, this time inhaled deeply, slightly swelling the cheeks and, indifferent and menacing, appeared to be spitting on the whole world* – “Stolica”, 14 November 1988; cf. Grażyna Stankiewicz, *Jak powstał PKiN*, “Res Publica”, 1990, no. 3).

The project was never implemented but the importance of the undertaking is testified by a discussion held by sculptors and architects deliberating whether the remaining statues from the Palace facade should be sitting or standing. *I can imagine Mickiewicz sitting. But for Kościuszko to sit?; the figures were to include men of science, artists, freedom fighters, and heroes. The pantheon was to be composed of Chopin, Curie-Skłodowska, Copernicus, Mickiewicz, Lelewel, Matejko, and “couples”: Bogusławski - Staszic, Kollątaj - Śniadecki, Kościuszko - Świerczewski or Marchlewski - Waryński, as well as Frycz-Modrzewski, Wit Stwos, and Jan of Kolno, albeit the last three gave rise to doubts: There are no photographs (cf. Większego wyboru pozycji nie ma – minutes from a discussion, prep. Jacek Królak, “Res Publica” 1990, no. 3, pp. 34-40). The only remnants of those projects are two executed sculptures (both of sitting figures) at the sides of the main entrance: Adam Mickiewicz (by Ludwika Nitschowa) and Copernicus (by Stanisław Horno-Popławski). Next to a synthesis and a quintessence of the masterpieces of Polish architecture (*We showed then all the historical monuments of Warsaw, Cracow, Toruń, Kazimierz on the Vistula, Puławy, Płock, Czerwińsk, Nieborów, and Kielce - and they kept taking photographs... . They became acquainted with the Tatra Mts., Żelazowa Wola, Nieszawa (...). We presented them with albums showing Krasiczyn, Baranów, Sandomierz, and Gdańsk. They admired paintings by Canaletto - cf. J. Sigalin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 430*), elements of the symbolism of the centre and the image of the world contained in the ideological premises of the Palace and the square include:*

1. The above mentioned sitting figures of Copernicus and Mickiewicz, and 29 sculptures standing in semi-circular niches in the Palace walls and portraying figures from all over the world (cf. Jerzy Janicki, op. cit., p. 28).

2. The government stand with an eagle (the emblem of the People's Republic of Poland); originally, it was planned to display the eagle above the platform, next to, i.a. semi-reclining figures personifying the

Vistula and the Odra (cf. Grażyna Stankiewicz, *Jak powstał Pałac Kultury*, typescript, p. 71).

3. A granite obelisk (at the corner of Jerozolimskie Avenue and Marszałkowska Street, at present disassembled for the duration of redesigning an underground passage and the construction of the metro) indicating directions and distances to all European capitals and more important Polish cities - of slight usefulness for drivers but what symbolics! *The heart of the matter lies in distances to Warsaw, its centre, and the central square. And from here - a window onto the world!* (cf. Sigalin, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 147), that celebrated pillar of laughter mentioned by L. Stomma in a fragment concerning the mythical dimension of geography (in: *Z zapisków etnologa*, a letter send by L. Stomma to the editors: *Słoń a sprawa etnologii*, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” 1982, no. 1-4). *The construction of this road sign historically refers to Polish road signs - a granite road sign in Konin dating from 1511 and still extant, measuring the precise distance between Konin and Kruszwica* (“Życie Warszawy”, 18 July 1955).

4. Two colour water walls separate Defilad Square from Jerozolimskie Avenue and Świętokrzyska Street. *Nine metre-high streams will be produced by fountains symbolising the Vistula and the Odra* (“Express Wieczorny”, 20/21 July 1955).

(In other words, the Vistula and the Odra were situated along the East-West axis – sic! Z. B.).

5. *A sundial without dials, in which a ray of the Sun is to measure man's time on Earth* (Jerzy Janicki, op. cit.). Actually, there were to be two such dials, one, lemniscate-type, near the Pavilions of the Śródmieście (City Centre) Train Station, and the other, analematic, in a park in Świętokrzyska Street. Or rather ... a complete explanation is offered by the Master, Docent Przepkowski, in connection with the damage incurred by vandals: *In 1954 I measured, and a year later outlined eight sundials next to the Palace of Culture. A large, analematic dial, in whose case man himself is the dial (so that no one may steal it again), and seven lemniscate-type ones, which were to show time from dawn to twilight. This is one of the few sundials in the world to indicate user time. Unfortunately, the face was executed on a frail pivot. Consequently, it was supplemented already several times and all told in the past 15 years the dial worked for perhaps half a year. I can present the documentation on a subbotnik basis* (“Express Wieczorny”, 30/31 May 1970).

6. Garden, 3,6 hectares.

Trees and shrubs came from all over Poland. *Magnificent oaks were offered by Szczecin, maples - by Śrem, spruce and rhododendrons came from Wrocław, linden trees - from the voivodeship of Lublin, with the whole of Poland contributing to arranging the Palace Park* (Jerzy Janicki, op. cit.). 20 000 trees according to specially selected species: linden, hornbeam, beeches, plane trees, rowan trees, poplars, apple trees, birch, spruce,

firs and oaks, Japanese cherry, yews, and about 10 000 shrubs and perennials representing sixty species, including rhododendrons and azaleas, were brought from all over the country (cf. J. Sigalin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 146).

7. *The Congress Hall – here future peace congresses will be held, words about peace will be spoken in all languages of the world* [and addressed to the West – Z. B.]. *The Palace is to become a centre of science and culture, a site radiating the wisdom and beauty of our nation* (Jerzy Janicki, op. cit.).

8. One of the largest squares in Europe, *the site of demonstrations held by 700 000 people* (“Express Wieczorny”, 18 January 1954); two vertical obelisks (see: explanation further on).

9. Tables with brass letters: “Here stood the clock tower of the Warsaw-Vienna Rail Station”, “Pańska Street”, “Złota Street”, “Wielka Street”, “Śliska Street”, “Chmielna Street”.

Owing to the symbolic of the centre (next to allusive traditional elements: mountains, cliffs, towers, water, trees-garden, columns - all characteristic for a holy site) just as important are calculations made by statisticians creating a *sui generis* tradition of the central character of the Palace, whose reference points are Vladivostok and Madrid:

*Placed one next to another the bricks used for building the Palace of Culture and Science would take up space from Warsaw to Vladivostok* (“Express Wieczorny”, 5 April 1955).

*Stretched out, the electric, water main, and air-conditioning ducts would achieve a length of 2 500 000 m = 2 500 km, i.e. more or less the distance from Warsaw to Madrid* (“Express Wieczorny”, 27 April 1955).

*If we were to remove the floor in each interior and place it on the ground we would create a square with sides 400 m = 160 000 m<sup>2</sup> large; such a square, which does not exist in Warsaw, could accommodate four Ujazdowski Parks and serve enormous demonstrations attended by hundreds of thousands* (“Express Wieczorny”, 27 April 1955).

*If a child were born in the Palace and without leaving it slept there every night in a different room it would exit the building at the age of 22* (ibidem).

*Six days are needed to tour the whole Palace, stopping only for a single minute in each interior* (“Express Wieczorny”, 5 April 1955).

A May Day demonstration was first held in front of the Palace on 1 May 1955. Next to drawings and photographs of the Palace there also appeared a special occasion poem reflecting the ambiance of the Central Square:

*North, South,  
West and East  
The Pole and the equator  
The village and the town*

*A tiny cottage and a skyscraper  
A French port and the Chinese Wall  
The worker, the peasant, our friend and brother  
And the whole globe  
And the whole world  
Celebrate May Day  
In Spain provocateurs and spies  
Will go out to roam  
The prison will be filled  
With political prisoners  
But a piece of red fabric hangs  
Even from the thickest grates  
On the fresh grave of Belojanis  
Someone placed a red flower  
Fathers, mothers,  
Sons, daughters,  
Soldiers, six year-olds  
Arranged into fours  
Or better still into tens!  
Wider, wider, wider  
The spinners of Łódź  
The dockers of Gdańsk  
Or better still in hundreds  
More, more, more!  
Peasants and workers  
a hundred thousands each!  
More, more. More!  
Peasants and workers  
A hundred thousand each!  
On this day with red flags,  
that socialist nerve system  
The world makes a fraternal sign:  
Peace – Victory – Redness  
A ship, an airplane, an automobile  
Together with us! With us!  
Soldiers of peace – join the march  
Of millions!  
We shall put an end to all scoundrels.  
Tear off the heads of hydras.  
Across Asia, Europe, America*

*We carry the colour Red -  
Black Negroes  
Yellow Chinese  
Brown Hindus - all red  
The banner is raised by the Russians  
Red in every land  
Red enhancing the streets  
Red must win  
Overcome the reactionary black!*

(J. Prutkowski, *1 Maja*, “Express Wieczorny”, 1 May 1955)

Newspapers announced in connection with the emergence of the Palace of Culture and the progress of the construction work, nearing its end: *In ten years*

*Warsaw will be the most beautiful city in the world* ("Express Wieczorny", 21/22 July 1954).

Already in 1955 in a letter from Silesia Gustaw Morcinek, having toured the "Warsaw" cinema, the MDM, Marszałkowska Street and the Old Town, wrote: ... *When I saw the Palace of Culture I thought - Farona Kandego* [a Silesian expletive]! *Today Warsaw is already the loveliest town in the world* ("Życie Warszawy", 15 January 1955).

The ceremonial opening of the Palace took place on 22 July 1955 in connection with celebrations of the state holiday of the People's Republic of Poland.

*Three years ago we stood in this square with our Soviet friends, builders (...) and together with the Soviet comrades we threw kopeks and groszy pieces into the still soft concrete for luck, according to an old builders' custom* (from a speech given by Prime Minister J. Cyrankiewicz, Palace Chronicle, 1955). The Fifth World Festival of Youth and Students took place in Warsaw in August 1955, thus making a specific contribution to experiencing the symbolism of the centre associated with the Palace, next to which assorted events, festivities, and the closing march-demonstration were held. Alongside information about the festival being attended by representatives of almost every nation in the world mention was also made of such symbolic accents as placing next to a clock, *in the middle of a large circle with a diameter of 5,4 metres, a compass rose situated according to parts of the world* ("Express Wieczorny", 11 July 1955), while the banners of all nations were affixed on a mast at the corner of Jerozolimskie Avenue and Marszałkowska Street, near a granite signpost, ("Express Wieczorny", 31 July/1 August 1955). The Palace of Culture became an essential emblem of the festival - *vide* a special-occasion poster showing the globe and on it a map of Europe featuring in the centre the rising Palace; above, a white dove of peace soars, below - inscriptions: "Pax, Pokój, Frieden", and underneath - three heads: pale with "European" features, yellow with slanting eyes, and black (cf. "Express Wieczorny", 31 July/1 August 1955).

The Palace of Culture seems to have been an extraordinary place, the source of admiration and fascination. Its descriptions and testimonies contain a conspicuous element of *mirum* (the marvellous). The ceremonial mood was embedded already in the ideological premises of the building, turning it into a *sui generis* holy site:

*The approach of a noisy group of citizens intending to enter the Palace of Culture and Science requires a democratic openness of forms to be fulfilled by the entrance porticos and portals, whose artistic message introduced those entering to an elevated mood of anticipating the important experiences awaiting them* (Jan Minorski, op. cit.).

The visitors remained under a great impression of the Palace and faced it with admiration and fascination:

*During our tour it was impossible to examine everything. Our heads are already spinning from an excess of impressions. We saw the enormous halls of the Museum of Technology (...). We walked on oaken stairs, touched profiled doorknobs cast in bronze, noiselessly shut behind us scores of splendid doors. We passed whole brigades of stucco masters, carpenters, and fitters. It seemed that all those people are caressing each fragment* (Jerzy Ciszewski, *Z tarasu...*, "Express Wieczorny", 28/29 July 1954).

*The microclimate is watched over by an invisible keeper protecting the interior against an influx of cold air. Special filters provide the whole building with fresh mountain air devoid of dust* ("Express Wieczorny", 1 January 1954).

Fascination does not become obliterated with the passage of time; on the contrary, such experiences grew more vivid. The vulnerable adoration produced by the Palace was described by Kazimierz Koźniewski, who called the Palace the symbol of our times:

*When one and a half years ago I toured the interior the impression of space was not all that great. Today, its enormity simply overwhelms: I face this quantity of rooms full of helpless admiration. I have the impression that one can explore the entire Palace not more than once in a lifetime* (*Symbol naszego czasu*, "Życie Warszawy", 2 May 1955).

At the same time, the Palace is a symbol of new relations between free nations (*ibid.*).

This symbolic and sacral character intended by the authors of the Palace and its decorations was often expressed directly:

(Director Motyka): *I told engineer Sigalin that my reservations pertain to the form of the allegories and that symbols would be more appropriate. It is irrelevant whether they are to be portrayed with the help of angels or the muses. For me they are all sculptures. We can depict Polish-Soviet friendship as an angel bestowing a blessing, etc.*

(...) *It is necessary to reflect whether certain abstract phenomena cannot be really expressed in any other way than only according to the conventions of the Baroque or the Renaissance. Everyone was struck by the fact that these sculptures are so old-fashioned while the Palace is thoroughly modern.*

(Colleague Wiśniewski): *The sculptures must be deified and depict extraordinary figures. The Palace of Culture is not an ordinary residential house, but there is talk of featuring ordinary people. These must be metaphorically sanctified figures.*

(Director Motyka): *You executed the statue Peacetime Frontier – a girl wearing an ordinary dress, and still no one claims that she is a mere worker. This is a symbol, a synthesis of the convictions of certain people. This must be a synthesis of our times, and, simultaneously, sanctified. Otherwise, we would be forced to draw the conclusion that*

*we are incapable of creating new forms for sanctifying new times (Więszego wyboru pozycji nie ma, "Res Publica" 1990, no. 3.)*

Experiences connected with the Palace interiors and symbolics also reflect its sacral dimension. The Palace tradition knows of numerous visitors behaving as if they were worshipping in church, as in the case described by Hanna Krall:

(Mr. Klein, head of order-keeping services): *A medical doctor is summoned, in my opinion quite incorrectly, to people kneeling, just like in church, in front of a bas-relief symbolising peace and prosperity. This enormous statue, dripping with gilt, shows a female symbolising the motherland, a dove (peace), an ear of grain (good harvest), a child (motherhood), and many other symbols, and to all intents and purposes, as the Palace architect engineer Adamkiewicz says, no one really knows what it depicts because the builders did not leave any pertinent instructions. When behind the figure, further on, a door opens and a brightly lit hall is seen the mood becomes so splendid and uplifting that everyone feels the urge to kneel; why call the doctor immediately?* ("Polityka", 19 July 1975).

Not only did the Palace spire draw the gazes of the local residents, fascinate, and attract but it possessed a specific magnetic force. This magnetism and sacral dimension of the Palace are evidenced by ... a portfolio of "untypical correspondence" in the possession of Hanna Szczubelek, who keeps the Palace Chronicle. All sorts of letters personify the Palace, addressed as: "Dear Palace", and make miscellaneous requests. Faith in power capable of resolving mundane needs is intermixed with a *sui generis* symbolism of the centre - the Palace was envisaged as the seat of the government and the residence of Party first secretaries (probably due to associations produced by the Congress Hall). Here, all local and world issues converge and the correspondence constitutes a unique votive body. Naturally, the letters are full of symptoms of sheer pathology (also in the more profound meaning of the word, i.e. suffering) and madness, which so often adjoins the *sacrum*. Apparently, the Palace, in the manner of every *sacrum*, attracted also insanity. The correspondence comes from different periods; note that the last letter was written in 1989. Whenever possible, I add dates in parentheses.

The best example of the sacral can be the conviction that the Palace is the residence of Santa Claus; Ania from Sokółka wrote: *Dear Santa, I know that you live in Warsaw on the uppermost storey of the Palace of Culture. Pay me a visit this Christmas and bring me an inflatable mattress.*

2. Authors of the letters turned to the Palace for assistance in resolving property disputes: *Dear Palace, help me: a neighbour has seized my balk.*<sup>32</sup>

3. The omnipotence of the Palace of Culture was also connected with a conviction that it contained

some sort of a special archive, a thesaurus of information, as indicated by the address on one of the letters: **Fortified Archive at the Palace of Culture**, whose author, an owner of an old model of a Sonatina radio set, sought bulb wire unavailable on the market.

4. Belief in the demonic power of the Palace is reflected in a letter addressed to: **The State Palace of Culture. Department of employment and destruction: Please destroy (...) and her three children, named (...).** *These superfluous people are condemned to be annihilated. Starve them as soon as possible.*

5. The letters also include offers, with one of the authors proposing (1980): *To the Director of the Palace of Culture. I, the above mentioned, inform that I am in the possession of items worth about half a million zlotys, all for sale, including a palace, a church and museum exhibits.* (The letter also requests transport facilities since the objects do not fit into a passenger car).

6. The Palace of Culture was the addressee of an artist wishing to open a Museum of Matchstick Art, the only of its sort in Poland; the author, *a winner of numerous prizes and with many accomplishments, including, naturally, international ones, would like to win a world record in vertical construction* and proposed to make a model of the Palace.

7. Here is Wanda TL, ready to work as:

1. *A personal office boy of the Secretary General.* 2. *a flat-rate fee employee.* 3. *Chief of the Security Service of Poland.* 4. *a Polish TV collaborator (independent office boy) offering the following services: electronic protection of diplomatic outposts accredited in Poland and their residences..., electronic protection of foreign guests – heads of state, protection of international congresses and meetings in the so-called antipodes.*

8. The author of a letter from Ząbkowice Śląskie asked for help concerning a lack of response to a previous letter on the same topic, *which must have been seized by a mentally ill civil servant. I am not surprised that You keep such workers. Socialist youth as a whole suffers from mental disorders.*

9. One of the letters is addressed to: *First Secretary Comrade Edward Gierek – Congress Hall* (and contains an invitation to the 1978 Poznań Fair).

10. The healing powers of the Palace or its special climatic properties were indicated in 1982 in a request for temporary accommodation. The author, on his way to Szczyrk to a Fund of Workers Vacation centre, asked whether for health reasons he could obtain accommodation for several years: *I was at the Stalin Palace some ten years ago, but could not find out anything since everyone was queuing up for food, "Trojka" was closed, all were hungry and drank scalding tea – quite unacceptable. I was, therefore, forced to send a letter to my son from the Palace post office telling him "what is happening at the Palace".*

11. The Palace was also perceived as a centre of power, as in a letter addressed to: **The Ideological President of the All-Russia Communist Party Bolsheviks of the Republic of Poland** (1989), and containing sheer gibberish, starting with: *On the eve of the third five-year plan ...*

12. The letters also reflect an eschatological dimension and ambiance:

**To the Kind Government of the Palace of Culture**  
I, Leo, Son of the First Creator,  
Write to You, the genuine Government,  
The great troublemaker will overturn the globe  
Since it is high time  
To send me part of my dues through a postman (...).

13. We also come across a complaint full of concern and addressed to the **Central Council of Trade Unions Congress Hall** (1974), informing: *Young people go coatless, and postulating to create a 5% unemployment Fund for citizens aged from 16 to 70. A negative response will cause war or an atom bomb raid against Warsaw, against which the "Residents of Warsaw", signed below, protest.*

14. The file contains requests and selfless letters about scientific research, written by a retired professor from Gdańsk involved in conducting studies on the verge of physics and electrodynamics, *particularly about lightning and the electrodynamics of the electron: since I would like to initiate a register of lightning striking the Palace of Culture and Science I ask for permission to install on the Palace an insulated spire, from which a concentric cable would be connected with a measurement apparatus on the highest storey of the Palace. A flat next to the observatory would be required due to night shifts and two full time employees.*

A female author of a letter addressed to: **The Palace of the Culture the Indian Sepulchre at the corners of Zielna, Wielka, Złota, Chmielna, and Śliska streets and Jerozolimskie Avenue** (1976) sent a poem to an African tune, a song dedicated to the Warsaw Month:

From Warsaw to Szprotawa  
One heart beats about our Warsaw  
Lovely Warsaw with its panorama!  
Here the picturesque Vistula flows by  
And the thirty-storey Palace of Culture stands.  
Our symbol and source of joy.

A letter written in 1971 includes a poem about Lenin, with an obstinately recurring refrain:

Although I am a Pole  
And precisely for this reason  
I worship and love the Great Lenin.

The cited texts and evidence comprise predominantly a positive myth of the Palace of Culture and Science. Up to now, we omitted antithetical moods and experiences linked with the Palace, which create its *sui generis* anti-myth. On the other hand, the el-

ements and contents of the positive myth extracted from the quoted texts do not correspond to antitheses according to the principle of a simple game of binary oppositions. If we were to make a list of values associated with the Palace and belonging to the positive myth, such as power, might, force, duration, luminescence, glow, light, truth, nativeness, harmony, life-giving force, friendship, love, youth, freedom, life, etc., it would be impossible to deduce from it, and arrange according to the principle of contrariness, a suitable anti-list composed exclusively of anti-theses. The same holds true for the anti-myth of the Palace, in which the dominating experience is horror accompanied by specific fascination. Only after taking into consideration both parts of the tradition can we see just how deeply the Palace combined both those inseparable feelings of horror and fascination, characteristic for the primeval experience of the *sacrum*. The Palace may be perceived as a profound unity of contradictions: *coincidentia tremendum et fascinorum*.

The above mentioned "bright" values of the Palace are closely connected with its ideological-propaganda official message and only upon this level is it possible to observe the game played by those simple reverses and antitheses. The beauty of the Palace and its height were contrasted with the ugliness of "old tenement houses" or the ghastliness of capitalist skyscrapers. Owing to insufficient space I shall not delve deeper into this motif, but concentrate only on several synthetic examples. According to the propaganda-ideological interpretation, the construction of the Palace delineated and established a new time, a new epoch, contrasted with the old. Just as Leszek Mech wrote in his poem: *Once, history shared a national/ Gamut of dates stretched across fires/ Or love was stirred in the hearts of those longing for peace by an anaemic saint. / Today, it is not history or winged saints (...) Today, the people proudly / erect for the people (...) a construction of attained friendship.*

The same motif of new times and values offered by the Palace is to be encountered in a poem by Adam Wazyk:

The walls of our architecture  
did not belong to us,  
palaces bonded by blood,  
the work of the poor,  
the Gothic of our toil  
the Renaissance accomplishment of the people,  
the Baroque erected for the lords,  
deformed tenement houses  
of a merchants' democracy  
calculated to last a year,  
the house-phantom of the speculator,  
an inhuman style  
straight from a failed venture,  
without heart and beauty.

Now, from the ruins there grows  
to become part of socialism,  
for day centres and libraries -  
our Old Town Gothic,  
our Renaissance and Baroque,  
our unadorned monument,  
a fronton out of lace,  
as if just completed by embroiderers,  
above them, roof tiles dear to our heart  
shine differently...

The construction and growth of the new, socialist Palace were contrasted not only with wartime devastation but also with the downfall produced by capitalism. It has to be kept in mind, Edmund Goldzamt stressed, that:

*The creation of the Palace of Culture and Science started at a time when the nations of Western Europe experienced all the "blessings" of so-called American aid, and when after five years of the Marshal Plan they have already become acquainted with the outcome of such help: the liquidation of entire branches of industry, a further rapid rise of unemployment, a pauperisation of the masses, stagnation and torpor affecting construction, the elimination of the political and economic independence of their countries (cf. E. Goldzamt, *Wieżowce Radzieckie*, Warszawa 1953).*

The socialist Palace connected with "pacific construction", peace, freedom, and life was juxtaposed against capitalism, imperialism, fascism, war, destruction, and death. Summing up these reflections let us turn to another poem by Tadeusz Kubiak, which not only contains this motif but also the probably most apt characteristic of the Palace enhanced with scarce plant hierophanies and allusive references to the symbolic motif of the tree of life in the tradition linked with the Palace:

*It is socialism that builds  
despite death and crime.  
It is the nation that gives to a nation  
and man to man,  
what they had won  
during that October night.  
Like the hardworking gardener  
offering his son  
fruit grown in the Michurin manner.*

**On the side of the anti-myth. A growth..., and I would agree to forget all about Suworov**

Embarking upon testimonies and documents comprising the negative myth of the Palace it is simply impossible to omit accounts in the diary of Leopold Tyrmand. On 1 February 1954 this first antagonist and determined oppositionist, an outsider highly sensitive to the rhythm of the social life of Warsaw, recorded:

*Merciless cold weather and people wandering across Warsaw absurdly wrapped against the cold, so that even the shapeliest female resembles a parcel. The sheer martyrdom of waiting for city transport: I suspect that an armed revolt against the regime, if it ever takes place, will start on tram stops in weather such as this. (...) The press drips with lackey tones writing about the "magnificent gift of the Soviet Union for Warsaw". A skyscraper totally useless to anyone. If they had really wanted to send a gift they would have supplied several hundred tramcars. But then their intention is to make an impression and not to offer gifts, and for that particular purpose a skyscraper is just perfect. (*Dziennik* 1954, Warszawa 1989, p. 167).*

The unemotional and architectural interpretation proposed by Tyrmand once again accentuated the fascination and horror merged in the Palace: **Some see in it a Russian fist, others stammer with delight**; the author also registered an attempt at taming (ridiculing) this appalling gift: 13 February. Another exhibition of projects for the town planning and architectural solutions of Stalina Square, the centre of future Warsaw. In the middle: the Palace of Culture and Science - this is its name - a gift from Russia for Warsaw. **Some see in it a Russian fist, others stammer with delight.** The people have named it "Peking" - which apart from an anagram contains a subtext: this was the name of a large tenement house thus described with scathing contempt in pre-war Warsaw, at the corner of Złota and Żelazna streets, the seat of backstreet brothels. It is easy to guess that from the moment when the construction was announced I was one of its most fervent opponents. As a would-be expert I skilfully criticised its size, anti-Warsaw scale, and bombastic style. But. (...) The Soviet skyscraper with its lofty steel construction would have been passable as a powerful solid which, if it had been left alone and covered with glass, would have been of use and I would agree to forget all about Suworov. When it received a ready-made facing the colour of beige sand I was not pleased, but the facade, colour, and texture looked good and acceptable. Then they started to add: a pseudo-Renaissance helmet tower topped with a spire, confectionary attics and crowning, motifs straight from Kazimierz on the Vistula, and pedestals. **This socialist realistic horror emerged in the very centre of the town** in the manner of a growth on the nose of a drunkard. And now plans are made for a Polish show of socialist realistic imagination surrounding this Russian architectural dissolution (ibid., p. 210).

Hence, even such an unruffled and decisive critic as the author of *Dziennik* and *Zły* experienced ambivalent and competing feelings and doubts produced by the Palace. Despite his categorical opinion: *Where is the nationality of this architecture, why is it supposed to be Polish considering that its elements are at home both in Cadix and Helsinki?* (ibid., p. 215), and despite the deep conviction about the madness of the whole idea:

*The leitmotif of socialist realism in architecture – that, which is being built today is supposed to look, for the sake of the wellbeing of man, like something built yesterday, the day before yesterday, and four centuries ago - contains some sort of unconcealed madness* (ibid., p. 211) Tyrmand shared qualms whether the Palace might actually become part of the city's tradition:

*A town is a culmination. That which ages in it properly ages nicely. After centuries of serving ugly buildings become inevitably beautiful and surrounded with something that we are accustomed to call an ambiance, a climate, a mood, a style; they gather strata of events and experiences, individual and collective, which in time blend the decorations and details of the façade with contents of existence to yield inimitable monuments and symbols. (...) The creation of something new, which is supposed to look old, is doomed to parody and kitsch. (...) Quite possibly, in a hundred years, communist gigantomachy, pathos "close to each man", as they put it, the tawdriness of artificial ornaments, the medley of decorations, and thus nouveau riche and trivial wastefulness will become patinated with time, just like neo-Gothic skyscrapers in fin de siècle Manhattan. We shall have to wait long for this to happen, and, furthermore, the outcome is by no means certain* (ibid., p. 212).

The notes in *Dziennik* are accompanied by an image of the Place in *Zły*, in which Tyrmand, contrary to the "new" centre – *Why are a pedestal and gravity to become the emblems and ambiance of Warsaw?* (*Dziennik*, p. 215) – attempted to conduct a remythicisation of urban space in which the largest square in Europe emerges from the chaos of conflagration and the battlefield of the construction site of a new skyscraper. The resultant Palace enlivens and stirs the memory of a city of the past. Since remythicisation is the topic of the above-cited study by Marta Zielińska we shall only note this function of the new and undomesticated Palace evoking the past, as well as yet another ironic name to be placed in its onomastic alongside the already mentioned "tuning fork", i.e. "little finger". *It is simply impossible to walk around this town. The capital is being turned into a quarry. (...) Not to mention that little finger (...) - who needs such large houses?*" (L. Tyrmand, *Zły*, Warszawa 1965, p. 165; cf. M. Zielińska, op. cit.)

### **Playground of Satan**

The Palace of Culture appears occasionally in novels by Stefan Kisielewski (*Przygoda w Warszawie*, *Podróż w czasie* – the cover of the 1989 edition published by Iskry features the Palace together with a red flag affixed to it as if to a mast), but the most complete interpretation is to be found in this author's *Cienie w pieczarze*. Here, the Palace and the surrounding enormous and strange Defilad Square are the meeting place of lovers - the chief protagonist, Roman, who remembers the town and the world prior to their anni-

hilation, and Bluzeczka, a representative of an already new epoch - a place where (*at the foot of the enormous thirty-storeys tall building*) love turned into hatred, and which is compared to a tree: *Each side of this square is different, since it originates from a different epoch of Warsaw; Roman deciphered in this variety history, just like the past of a tree is read from the cross-section of its rings, but for Bluzeczka this interpretation was totally unattainable* (p. 123). Next to this micro-cosmic scale of the Palace inscribed into the love story, alongside the local history of the town, the Palace and the square reflect each other and the micro-history of this stretch of no man's land, where borders, assuming that some sort actually existed, shifted in one way or another, stretched and shrunk as if they were made of rubber. *Neither the West nor the East* (p. 134). Kisielewski, as no one before, embarked upon a historiosophic interpretation of the Palace, seeking a specific logic of Chaos for the indefinite and chaotic moods creating and moulding the character of the site: *It is here that this palace, a mixture of styles, a monster of naïve monumentality and tasteless ornamentality devoid of the instinct of exaggeration, managed to defend itself quite successfully and even attained the significance and rank of a symbol. After all, if all sorts of things took place in this city since 1939, if all the madness and ordinary kinks of the East and the West arranged to meet here, if life became excessively strange and intends to preserve that state and in all respects grew even more embedded in it, then why should a GOD KNOWS WHAT, a symbol of eccentricity so curiously attached to assorted psychic and chronological worlds that it is impossible to express it in brief or long words, not dominate in the centre of a sprawling square emptied in all directions* (p. 181).

For Roman the Square surrounding the Palace evokes, to an extent greater than for the protagonists of *Zły*, the memory of a town once crushed, and stirs and produces increasingly profound introspections: *This place, which he, after all, had known for the past fifty years, now spoke to him suddenly because it became the site of his secretive walks with Bluzeczka. (...) It is impossible to deduce when the past or the present spoke to him, or which particular past since there were so many, arranged in strata and gathered vertically and horizontally, because Defilad Square was simultaneously a junk room and a synthesis, the old and the new, a mixture of various sorts of the past and curious proposals formulated by the present. A tangle of traces and ciphers as well as the emptiness of whole districts razed to the ground. A peculiar place, the largest square in Europe and, at the same time, quite underrated!* (p. 177).

*Each side of the square was different, and this dissimilarity grew across the decades and contained the curious and unique history of the town* (p. 208).

In Kisielewski's historiosophic perspective Warsaw appears to be a special city, an under-appreciated

centre of the world, a genuine centre. It is in this unknown (provincial) Warsaw that *the cruel and the insane dilemmas of the world were always understood more rapidly than the whole world was capable of doing, here Stalin, Hitler, and other great and merciless magi of the world were deciphered ahead of time (...). The Western world never understood that it is here, in Warsaw, that everything is known ahead of time, and thus it never benefitted from this knowledge. Now, this was the scene of a historical comedy of totalitarianism, which the world treated quite seriously thinking that it is some sort of a people's revolution (...). Due to mistakes, one's own or those committed by others, by the world, this was the scene of things that had never transpired elsewhere. After all, contrary to logic, Warsaw resisted all alone, and upon quite a few occasions, the surging tides of the East and the West (a turnstile antemurale!) (...) with a demonstration of silent absence it greeted the parade of the victorious armies of Hitler; here, the largest number of Jews was murdered in history, here, the Germans set up a horribly crowded ghetto for 600 000 residents, here, in the autumn of 1944 a solitary battle was waged along two fronts: political with Russia and face to face with the foolish Germans fighting for their greater defeat, here, after the fall of the Uprising the whole population was driven out, the first such case in world history, and the town was left alone to itself and conflagrations* (p. 209).

The whole square, the streets, and the pavements - wrote Józef Sigalin - all are built on a "tombstone" placed on the foundations of old basements, former houses inhabited by thousands. This is a truth that we, the older generation, cannot forget (J. Sigalin, op. cit., p. 146). The awareness of this truth, however, was shared also by the younger generations. An English-language fanzine issued by a rock group in 1981 and displaying a graphic motif of the Palace declares: they all live in Warsaw, a city of lunatic Surrealism, a dead city, a city-cemetery, a city built anew but never revived.

For the protagonist of *Cienie w pieczarze* the Palace and this strange square, that "sorcerer's retort", in which a frenzied history of art is mixed up with the past and the present, stirred memory and became the reason why in this strange square the old regained its youth and the new disclosed is hopeless barren old age. This is the Palace that chased the world of dreams to the other side of Marszałkowska Street, and this is the Square, which once and for all banished the world of old movie theatres: the "Apollo" and the "Stylowy", those genuine illusion cinemas together with their asylum of international dreams, living side by side in the memory and interior of the protagonist together with images of Mae West, Jean Harlow, Franchot Tone or Gary Cooper, who existed and performed for all, accessible for a paltry fifty or eighty groszy, proof that in their dreams are not controlled or rationed. The Palace adjoins, and merges with, images of unassuming Jewish shops, unkempt

but full of commodities, an likeness of the Russian Orthodox church in Saski Square, and a scene, recalled from childhood, of the latter's demolition, when several score men pulled a cable tied around one of the domes (...) the poor onion-shaped dome - so inadequately installed in its base, which cannot be said about the present-day Marxist temple in Warsaw: sacrosanct and undeconstructable; it will stand and tower over the city for centuries to come. The Palace and the Square are located next to the church of All Souls in Grzybów, which during the Nazi occupation found itself within the closed ghetto, with images of empty gates and basements, where in the courtyards and on wooden stairs there lurks and sleeps the echo of old voices, the breath of murdered and forgotten Jews. The protagonist now sees this strange Square as a "Land of Wandering Love" (just like Spain, which in the imagination of Don Quixote appeared to be a land of knights errant, or rather erring), and with time assumed a new name borrowed from the title of an old film: *A Roundabout of Torment*.

No other book, with the possible exception of *Mala Apokalipsa*, had amassed so many epithets, invectives and derisive words addressed to the Palace. In *Cienie w pieczarze* the Palace of Culture is portrayed as confectionary white, with jagged stalactites of ornaments (...) an artificial growth originating from nowhere, outside life, evolution, development and normalcy, similarly to two meaningless, nonsensical, and pretentious obelisks thrusting in front of the Palace in honour of an unknown victory; an enormously expensive whole, of little use; supposed modernity, or a superfluous miracle; each column of outright elephantine thickness; simply "Russian Greece"; the nightmare of a pastry chef, as it was universally teased in Warsaw; a shiny spire straight out of Leningrad or, in other words, St. Petersburg; pure madness, and in addition free of charge to all, with fountains recalling a feudal folly imitated by the tsars of the North; socialist opium for the masses; a Marxist church of Warsaw; a gigantic piece of ugliness; a soulless Moloch devouring the town and covering half of the sky; a 300 meters-tall town hall, conspicuously devoid of all style; a symbol of a gigantic fracas; intentionally indifferent, whose primitive mixture and enormous lack of contents will continue to cry out for centuries in this largest square in Europe; surrounded with niches featuring sculptures depicting heroic workers (as a certain reactionary said: one really has to be a hero to work here); a Rhodes colossus of our times; a magic edifice raised by magi from the East, between whose glass and thus ostensibly invisible walls the old and the new will continue to hang around for centuries to come. Do those exclamations and strong words not reflect, as in curses, the domain of the *sacrum* and, at the same time, an attempt at profanisation and desacralisation committed so as to tame the terrifying and inexplicable element of *tremendum*, an attempt opposing (and in this way revealing) its demonic might. On the other

extreme, this process of taming encountered derision, a spontaneously flourishing tradition of more or less scornful jokes about the Palace of Culture: "Small but in good taste", "The old Warsaw-Vienna railway station in a state of erection" (cf. Z. Raszewski, *Wstęp do teorii kawahu*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa", no. 2/1990), "Little Polish architecture", "What is the most beautiful place in Warsaw? – The thirtieth storey of the Palace of Culture. - Why? – Because the Palace of Culture cannot be seen from there". To the strains of the national anthem local jokers sang: *What the alien power has given us, we shall pull down at night*.

At the same time, it is characteristic that in the case of a such a critically inclined author we come across also contrary testimony of positive experiences and even specific beauty veiling the ambivalence of the Palace and the ambiance amassed therein; this is testimony of taming the Palace and its growing enrootment in the city: *It no longer annoys anyone, visitors like it, the panorama from the top storey is magnificent, the ground-floor stately interiors are spatial and comfortable (...). On the upper storeys everything seemed to be misconceived but the ground-floor halls featured representative grandeur and excellent acoustics*. It became apparent that the enormous naivete of the very notion deprives it of all demonic features and renders it possible to make its close acquaintance on a daily basis. Finally, it is here that the protagonists find their asylum: *The Palace was surrounded by idyllic green lanes (...) why should Roman not drink beer at a stand in his favourite windswept and sunwarmed West Side - that, which is part of the landscape cannot be ugly and must discover its concealed beauty*. By means of such a mental operation connecting common sense with imagination Roman removed from Defilad Square that unfortunate palace, whose stairs, balustrades, projections, and colonnade pavilions he pleasantly albeit unselfishly used. In Kisielewski's book we find a confirmation of an already familiar phenomenon, a practice characteristic for numerous Varsovians screwing up their eyes and ignoring the Palace: *How different it looked close-up – the square without the palace remained curiously beautiful (...) a real square and yet altered by efforts of the imagination*. The same phenomenon of ignoring the Palace was scrupulously recorded by the oft-mentioned Marta Zielińska, who noticed that the Palace appears only six times in the works of an author strongly connected with Warsaw, namely, Miron Białoszewski:

*(...) In all of Białoszewski's prose the Palace together with the square are present upon six occasions, including three in passing: during a Sun eclipse, while getting into a bus at the square, and in a description of the sky, which assumed an interesting hue exactly on the side of the Palace. The other three times are mere mentions albeit significant. Actually, they contain the whole quintessence of the Palace. We first come across it in a description of a certain Satur-*

*day in Marszałkowska Street: "(...) The Lord God rests in heaven, the Mother of God dries diapers on the Palace of Culture..." – At first glance, nothing of importance and yet such copious contents – Zielińska commented. – Ordinary white clouds near the spire bring to mind a home, perhaps somewhat largeish but suitable for Our Lady (M. Zielińska op. cit., p. 126). The other two important images are those of the Palace seen in a dream: Tadzio flying around the spire with Ania and someone else, and mention of fires breaking out in Warsaw: The Cedet shop, a bridge. What next? The Palace of Culture?*

Once again, the Palace considered against a backdrop of the symbolism of the centre appears in a special way as strong, permanent, and conspicuous - it is difficult to ignore it – but also as an unnoticed and strange centre around which there emerge not Order and Cosmos but Chaos or, more precisely, Order and Cosmos that is Chaos:

*Because it constituted, after all, an organic component of the town, that transit Warsaw for red armies on the move between Moscow and Berlin. Here one lives as if on a volcano, in a passage, on the eve; it is simply impossible to exist outside history. Defilad Square was proof – a complex, style-less, periphery opened to four parts of the world, unprotected against the roar of trains and lorries, against menacingly chaotic motion, ostensibly urban but possessing something affiliated with Nature and spontaneous (...). Perhaps the alienness of the square, so vividly accentuated, is the outcome of a chaotic and haphazard process of someone putting things together (or rather no one or a coincidence of "fate", as working-class Warsaw was in the habit of saying), assorted elements of the past and the present, thus becoming a strangely monumental reference point for collective premonitions, hypotheses, and fears about the future? (S. Kisielewski, *Cienie w pieczarze*, p. 221, 223).*

### Axis Mundi, the Valley of Josaphat, Golgotha

*Just as there is no Wyspiański without Wawel Castle so there is no Konwicki without the Palace of Culture*, wrote Marta Fik (cf. J. Lerska /M. Fik/, *Bardzo mała apokalipsa*, "Kultura niezależna", April 1990, no. 60, p. 53). *A writer whom the palace hypnotises as if it were a basilisk – claims another opinion about Tadeusz Konwicki (cf. M. Zielińska, op. cit., p. 126). The Palace of Culture appears in Konwicki's last film: Lava, a screen version of Mickiewicz's Forefathers' Eve, seen from Konrad's prison cell and behind the Angel (played by Grażyna Szapołowska) walking among a crowd of pedestrians along the main passageway next to the Centrum shopping centre, on the "other" side of Marszałkowska Street.*

I am well aware of the fact that in view of the existence of assorted interpretation perspectives proposed by numerous scholars examining the writings of Kon-

wicki, such as Maria Janion, Jan Walc, Tadeusz Lubelski, Marta Zielińska, and Anna Sobolewska, speaking about the Palace of Culture, or about any other motif without an opportunity for a more thorough consideration of its inner-textual references and place within the entire *oeuvre* must result in an incomplete image. Even in the latter, however, and in a restricted approach to the symbolism of the centre, a problem of interest to us, the Palace still displays a multitude of meanings. Among their variability and evolution, observed starting with *Wniebowstąpienie*, *Jak daleko stąd, jak blisko* and *Mała Apokalipsa* to *Rzeka podziemna*, *podziemne ptaki*, the classical structures of the symbolics of the centre come to the fore in the most distinctive and evident fashion. Upon numerous occasions emphasis had been placed on the oneiric or outright magical dimensions and ambiance of Konwicki's writings and simultaneous immersion in concrete daily reality, the author's sensitivity to the concrete and the pulse and rhythm of daily life. Works by the author of *Sennik współczesny* are a combination of several currents and dimensions: absolute realism, oneirism, and magical qualities, and this is the reason why we may perceive in them an outright reflection and example of Lotman's principle governing the tension between expression and the contents of the symbol, a situation in which *the former belongs to a secular, open and demonstrated sphere of culture, while the latter – to sacral, esoteric and mysterious culture* (cf. Y. Lotman, *Symbol...*, op. cit., p. 152). The secular, profane, mundane existence of realistically depicted contemporaneity, in the case of Konwicki with an extraordinary underpinning of the *sacrum*, does not lose any of its cosmic and sacral dimensions. The same holds true for the Palace of Culture. The mentioned duality, so frequently recorded by the interpreters and exegetes of Konwicki, is still decisive for difficulties with the "classification" of his works. The author frequently complained about their reduction to a purely political dimension: *One cannot look at literature exclusively through a prism of the poetical here and now. I am of the opinion that in my books it is possible to come across more permanent and universal strata* (cf. M. Fik, op. cit., p. 53; cf. also Stanisław Nowicki, *Pół wieku czyśćca. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim*, London 1986). On the other hand, Konwicki kept a distance towards attempts at enclosing his writings within the "magical realism" formula. [*This brings to my mind Marquez and South America, which I do not understand, cannot bear, and find totally foreign. I am a "Catholic Protestant" for whom all is true and palpable* (cf. S. Nowicki, op. cit., p. 101)].

This is why while observing the presence of the structures of the symbolics of the centre we should always keep in mind the character of this literature with its Janus-like face, evading all classification. At the same time, we have to remember the original testimo-

ny of its time, evidence of the contemporaneity contained in Konwicki's works (I have in mind the already mentioned titles, spanning from *Wniebowstąpienie* to *Rzeka podziemna*) that could be described analogously to rejected "magical realism" as some sort of specific realism – **HyperPRLrealism** (PRL = People's Poland), or more precisely, and not merely for the sake of easier pronunciation but also to capture the meaning of the described reality of People's Poland – **Hyper-PRLSurrealism**.

In all those works the Palace appears surrounded with an aura of festivity, an unusual time, a time of special tension, a time with eschatological dimension and ambiance, which for all the protagonists is simultaneously a time-rite of passage. In *Wniebowstąpienie* it is a desacralized holiday (the official harvest festivity) and a time of unrest caused by a new world crisis: *The shops were emptied of all commodities already by noon, the army is in a state of battle readiness – something is in the air, perhaps they had already dropped the atom sausage, the town is full of pageants of "faux peasants" dressed in folk costumes: A huge group of Cracovians and Kaszubians poured down the main avenue to the accompaniment of the hoarse glissandos of an accordion. Many had the pale, bloated faces of city dwellers-civil servants. I was somewhat surprised that they were not ashamed of this masquerade* (T. Konwicki, *Wniebowstąpienie*, Warszawa 1967, p. 13, further on: pages from this edition). The main protagonist awakens under a bridge with a bleeding puncture in his head and suffering from amnesia; he cannot recall even his name and later his accidentally newly met friends call him Charon. The first thing he sees is *two inhabitants of Kurpie or Fishermen spitting across a rusty balustrade into the river*. The Palace of Culture is an orientation point, a place where the protagonist has a date with an unfamiliar girl dressed up as a native of Łowicz-Opoczno; the whole plot takes place around the Palace, which is almost the lead protagonist of the novel. In *Wniebowstąpienie* (whose title is literally evoked by its German translation: *Auf der Spitze des Kulturpalastes*) the Palace of Culture is a central point, the axis and centre of the world, making possible a passage and a transition between three levels of reality: the underworld, the Earth, and Heaven. *Above them hung a constellation of blood-red lights from the palace tower. Higher, there were only stars, a void of sparklers, the glimmer of an unknown, eternal campsite* (p. 54). The "pyramid" towering over the city or the "red Christmas tree of the Palace of Culture" seen from afar in the manner of a cosmic tree is an axis encircled by ghosts and the dead. The author complained that apart from the political tissue *no one seemed to notice that the plot takes place amidst the dead* (cf. S. Nowicki, op. cit., p. 101). Here, next to the axis, in this centre of the world, there is a passageway and an entrance to the innermost recesses of a subter-

anean inferno. Here begins a voyage to Hell undertaken by protagonists with an unclear ontological status (ghouls, ghosts, and vampires, like the lead protagonist with his numerous life histories, a potential writer feeding on the blood of someone else's life and sucking out of reality as much as he possibly can): *Behind us the terrible trembling of the walls increased and resembled an earthquake. Mr Lilek tugged at something that resounded like a cast iron cover of a tomb. We set off into stifling darkness...* (p. 40). The entrance to those subterranean labyrinths of the Palace resembles a sepulchral niche in monastic crypts. The journey to the netherworld, the land of death, the descent into the underworld, and the ascent to heaven along the vertical axis of the Palace of Culture are accompanied by wanderings undertaken by the protagonists along the horizontal level of the town and the afore-mentioned East-West axis, a plunge into the inferno of the shady joints of Warsaw, a trip to the other bank of the Vistula along the following route: the Poniatowski Bridge - the St. Vincent cemetery in the Bródno district - the two-level bridge - back via Krakowskie Przedmieście Street to the Palace of Culture, accompanied by a vigil next to the coffin of a deceased man, a stay in a speakeasy, and a night spent at a militia station. The motif of the labyrinth expanded by Konwicki in *Wniebowstąpienie* is closely intertwined with the All Souls' Day and sepulchral motif. Descending into the Palace basement and making his way in the darkness, the protagonist seeks support and stretches out his hand to touch the wall: *It's a waste of time - he said. - We're walking inside a long pipe. - What sort of a pipe? - God knows, even those who built it had no idea. You know, Misiu, how it is. Some guys dug a ditch, others brought the building material, still others poured the concrete and covered it with soil, while the designer vanished somewhere, like a stone cast into water, in other words, like a true individual among the collective masses. Only the deceased probably knew something. - What deceased? In the enormous silence something resounded in the distance, resembling bells stifled by a strong wind. - You know, Joseph Vissarionovich. This is a passageway from his times. Everyone already forgot about it because this detail is absent on city maps* (p. 40). Konwicki introduced into *Wniebowstąpienie* a motif (subsequently expanded in *Mała Apokalipsa* and *Rzeka podziemna*) kept alive in the folklore and tradition of post-war Warsaw and relating to underground corridors and passages between the Party Central Committee and the Palace of Culture, a system of nuclear bomb shelters. Just how deeply was this motif embedded in reality and not merely a theme of the folklore tradition of legends and stories belonging to the backdrop of the symbolism of the centre of the world was evidenced by the dramatic events of the Romanian '89 revolution, disclosing a whole subterranean town in the centre of Bucharest.

In Poland too, the presence of underground interiors under the Government Stand in Defilad Square was not mentioned until after 1989, when it was proposed to open there an underground café; up to that time it was a strict secret kept by censorship. *I'll interrupt you because I want to say - confessed the writer - that my tragedy consists of the fact that I am simply a realist. After the publication of Mała Apokalipsa for eight months the route from café "Melodia" (before: "Paradis") to the Central Committee was out of bounds. Everything was dug up. When Wniebowstąpienie appeared I received a phone call from someone who I suspect worked for the security service, pretending to be a Polish philologist wanting to know whether I possessed a plan of the underground part of the Palace of Culture. In other words, my emotionalism contains some sort of a rational core. (...) There is something real and genuine in what I write. I describe Warsaw the way it really looks like. This is a town of dead-end streets, a town-cripple full of dumps, passageways, and dens teeming with drunks and drug addicts. Below my house there is a fifteen-storey bomb shelter. And you tell me that this is an abstract vision of a labyrinth* (cf. S. Nowicki, op. cit., p. 142). The protagonists making their way in the dark subterranean interiors of the Palace finally reach a sanctuary cum junk room from an epoch described in Tyrmand's diaries and rapidly becoming part of a past doomed to oblivion: *We found ourselves in an interior as high as a church and windowless. Old ladders, buckets, broken banners, some sort of fabric stretched on frames facing the wall. Lilek opened a white door and I saw an enormous, magnificent toilet. (...) Full of sophisticated columns and almost Baroque stucco, it was neglected and on the washbasin I noticed a thick layer of black dust* (p. 41). In the closing sequence of *Wniebowstąpienie* the protagonist, in the wake of all his adventures and mishaps, after working in a cold storage room resembling a morgue where he carried enormous slabs of meat; after a visit to a church while holding a parcel full of animal hearts received as payment for his work; after an almost ritual purifying bath in the fountain in front of the Palace, takes the elevator just before the break of dawn and rides to the top storey where all the ghosts, phantoms, and the dead encountered that night had already gathered. Once again, the Palace discloses its concealed, indistinct, and sacral nature and ambiance: *Misiu, you're departing through purgatory. Tomorrow you'll see God... I don't know why I went to the hall where enormous figures made of stone stood (...) Three brightly lit lifts invited me in the manner of cathedral confession stalls* (p. 233, 235). The space stretching around this cosmic axis of the Palace, that murky centre of the world, that aged obelisk damaged by the passage of time - *featuring blackened brass names of distant capitals, with many letters missing; only the numbers of kilometres separating us from those towns were untouched; the collectors honoured the brass num-*

bers – is the site of final accounts and Judgement Day. The Palace resembled the Valley of Josaphat. A curious light, extremely dense and amber-coloured, illuminated the Palace pedestal.

The structure of the Palace outlined in *Wniebowstąpienie* and envisaged as the centre of the world, was developed in successive Konwicki stories and close-ups. The Palace changes, its portrayal is dynamic, but the basic core of the structure remains invariable. An amazing construction, a source of multiple associations, Charon, ghosts seeking a passage to the other side: *We have to go back. – Go back where? – What do you mean: where? To return there or there?* Marta Zielińska interpreted the edifice according to the Romantic tradition: *Around it soars a spirit before departure to the unknown, here is the station between this world and the other, a caricature of a chapel of sorts, where the Seer celebrated his rituals. Here, the Palace plays a part totally unforeseen by its builders: a cross between a man-eating monster and a haunted Gothic castle.*

The Palace deciphered by Anna Sobolewska in the light of the initiation rite, that *grotesque axis of the world*, appears to be a place of incomplete initiation into death and suffering, where *transcendence is cheap and full of holes, just like the whole reality of People's Poland. This reality cannot be redeemed in any way* (W. Sobolewska, *Współczesna powieść inicjacyjna: Tadeusz Konwicki, Hugh Walpole, Tarjei Vesas, "Twórczość"* 1991). Even in such an interpretation and reality, *images from this range of the profanum mysteriously touch the sacrum and demonstrate their concealed purification force.* In *Mała Apokalipsa* the crumbling Palace is not only desecralized but cursed by almost all sides, *a statue of pride, a statue of servitude, a stone cake of warning, formerly a source of fear, hatred, and magic horror, a cosmic shed erected vertically, an old outhouse devoured by fungi and mould, forgotten in the middle of a Central European crossroad, a terrifying tumulus, a wilderness, and turns into an artificial altar, a site for self-immolation: I was preceded along this path by Buddhist monks, a certain Czech, some Lithuanians, all on their way to the pyre. I was preceded by people of assorted races and religions walking along this fiery route.* The Palace turns into Golgotha: *I have a terrible urge to tempt fate. So much that I can feel the flesh on my back crawl. And then we shall meet, right? I'll be waiting for you some fifty kilometres directly above the spire of the Palace of Culture, there where our atmosphere, our pleasant earthly existence, comes to an end. But you will not do this, because 2 000 years ago a certain Aramean said to his cruel contemporaries: "Instead of slaughtering a lamb, a neighbour or your brother, make a sacrifice of yourself". I contain seven atoms of the Antichrist but you – at least 77. - He took a brick from my hand and weighed it in his hand. – I shall take this as a souvenir. (...) Perhaps you're hungry, I have two lumps of sugar. – What are you talking about? – I should wipe your*

*face with a piece of cloth, but I don't have one. – Was this the last station of our passion? – Yes, we're facing the sacrificial altar. - He pointed to the iconostasis of the palace reaching the sky and white in the snow flurry.*

In *Rzeka podziemna* the image of the Palace-Golgotha appears briefly before the suicide committed by Siódmy with the assistance of natural death:

*The great Square opened up before him. In the centre stood that famous Palace, a souvenir of Joseph Vissarionovich. It stood immersed almost halfway in clouds or actually in a single huge cloud... Siódmy suddenly experienced absurd relief. This enormous amount of air, free space, the grey sky, which before evening will split above the horizon showing a red glow, and those black jagged clouds halted in their wild rush, the same as those that appeared above the horizon when Christ was crucified.*

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Owing to insufficient space I have not included a complete bibliography, which I managed to establish in the course of surveys, and present bibliographic information about used sources in the text. I would like to express my thanks to Ms Hanna Szczubelek, who rendered available material in the Administrative Head Office of the Palace of Culture and Science and made it possible to for me to work for several days in her office. Using the Chronicle I was able to reach in the course of further surveys less known sources (cf. n. 22).
- <sup>2</sup> Mention is due predominantly to the film by Tadeusz Konwicki: *How Far Away, How Near*. The Palace also appears in this director's *Lava* and plays a considerable part in *Grand Picnic*, directed by Krzysztof Rogulski (cf. Bożena Sycówna, *Raj odnaleziony*, (in:) *Film i kontekst*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 55-83); cf also: *Labirynt*, a film directed by Andrzej S. Kałużko ("Filmowy Serwis Prasowy" 1-31 December 1988); the film by Piotr Łazarkiewicz: *Soc*, shot on the margin of an exhibition of socialist realistic art, contains a special effects scene showing the Palace of Culture being blown up. *Great joy for the eyes*, wrote Tadeusz Szyma (cf. "Tygodnik Powszechny" no. 22, 28 May 1989).
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. sprayed-on graffito showing a foot wearing a large "punk-style" shoe and kicking the Palace of Culture, which I saw on the wall of the "Iluzjon" cinema in October 1990, and which was used as an emblem and graphic motif in the fanzine of the "Brygada Kryzys" band, no. 0, Warsaw, August 1981 – I owe the latter information to Ryszard Ciarka.
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. *Dom we współczesnej Polsce. Szkice*, ed. Andrzej Siciński and Piotr Łukasiewicz (in print) - the outcome of a years-long research programme and a conversatorium conducted by the authors in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences (IFIS PAN); the publication contains, i.a. Andrzej Siciński, *O idei domu i jego roli w Polsce*; Anna Zadrożyńska, *Ludzie / przestrzeń domowa. Przyczynek do antropologii schronienia*; Jan Prokop, *Dom polski*; Piotr Łukasiewicz, *Dom jako społeczne minimum. Spojrzenie na okres okupacji niemieckiej w Polsce*; Michał Boni, *Funkcje życia domowo-rodzinnego w doktrynie komunistów polskich (1945-1950)*; Danuta Markowska, *Dom - twierdza tożsa-*

- mości; cf. material from the I international conference: "Home: Its Contemporary Material, Social and Value Aspects", Zaborów, Poland, 11-13 October 1990, organised by A. Siciński and P. Łukasiewicz, in the Department of Lifestyle Studies IFiS PAN.
- 5 Witold Rybczyński, *Home. A Short History of an Idea*, Viking Penguin Inc., New York 1986.
  - 6 Initially, Rybczyński intended to build only a shed for a boat, but then in order to be able to spend the night there it was necessary to make some sort of sleeping arrangement, add a kitchen, a work room, etc. and in this way instead of a hangar he erected a home; this process of a gradual construction of a home became the source of meditation, reflection, and subsequently studies on the idea of the home.
  - 7 Clifford Geertz, *Być tam, pisać tu*, "Ameryka", winter 1989, p. 60.
  - 8 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography. Literature and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1988.
  - 9 *Ibid.*, p. 9, 13-14.
  - 10 Jadwiga Siemaszko, Barbara Fatyga, *Po co jechać na Trobriandy*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1989, no. 3, pp. 177-181.
  - 11 Clifford Geertz, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
  - 12 Jacek Olędzki, „Skuš baba na dziada”. *Przyczynek do powinności przemysłów perypatetycznych*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1987, no. 1-4, pp. 142-149.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
  - 14 Clifford Geertz, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
  - 15 On this differentiation, derived from Dilthey, between comprehension and explanation cf. James Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 22, 36 sqq., where the author, accepting the general stand claiming that ethnography is an art of interpretation, an interpretation process and not an explanation, presented the pertinent discussion conducted in contemporary anthropology; cf. also on this differentiation: Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty. The Holy in Art*, London 1963, pp. 5-6; idem, *Fenomenologia religii*, Warszawa 1978, pp. 717-719; cf. comments by Y. Lotman about the symbolising and desymbolising reading of texts: the former makes it possible to read texts or their particles as symbols, which in their natural context were not intended for this sort of reception. The latter transforms symbols into commonplace *communiqués*; Y. Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3, p. 152.
  - 16 Stanisław Cichowicz, *Skąd ten kanon?*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1990, no. 1, p. 50.
  - 17 Cf. M. Eliade, *Doświadczenie Labiryntu*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3.
  - 18 Cf. M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*. Warszawa 1970; idem, *Traktat o historii religii*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 361-379.
  - 19 M. Eliade, *Sacrum...*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
  - 20 On the polysemantic and multi-dimensional nature of the symbol cf. "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3; here, an extensive bibliography.
  - 21 Y. Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3, pp. 151-154.
  - 22 Apart from a source survey I made use of the Palace Chronicle arranged by Ms Hanna Szczubełek and a collection of untypical correspondence and poems, comprising an appendix to the Chronicle; not in all cases was it possible to establish the place of the publication of particular texts. The absence of more exact bibliographical data denotes that the given text originates from the above collections.
- 23 Clifford Geertz, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
  - 24 The situation is rendered even more complicated by a philosophical statement made by the former Prime Minister of People's Poland at a reception held at the "Holiday Inn" upon the occasion of a promotion of a book written by the former First Secretary of the Polish United Worker's Party Edward Gierek. The quotation comes from Polish TV: "Sometimes reality becomes fiction, and fiction – reality".
  - 25 This and subsequent emphasis - Z. B.
  - 26 On the symbolic of *axis mundi* cf. M. Eliade, *Brancusi i mitologia*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3, pp. 181-182.
  - 27 This comparison reflects Rudnev's European stance and greater sensitivity in contrast to the remaining members of the Soviet team: *...These people were in the West for the first time! Only old Rudnev had been in his youth in Warsaw in 1913. He recalled this fact* (cf. J. Sigalin, *Warszawa...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 428).
  - 28 Marta Zielińska, *Największy Plac w Europie*, "Kronika Warszawy", no. 4/1989.
  - 29 On the significance of this film in the cinematic oeuvre of T. Konwicki and a more detailed analysis against the background of the motif of the home in the Polish cinema cf. Z. Benedyktowicz, *Przestrzenie Pamięci*, in: *Film i kontekst*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 151-203.
  - 30 Cf. scenario of *How Far Away, How Near*, in: T. Konwicki, *Ostatni dzień lata. Scenariusze filmowe*. Warszawa 1973: *I do not know why I remembered this for the first time in my life, the memory of a person carried to Hell. Now I think that he could have been slowly ascending to Heaven.*
  - 31 T. Konwicki, *Ostatni...*, *op. cit.*, p. 250.
  - 32 During my survey I did not come across this note and thus cite it after: Mariusz Szczygieł, *Kochany Pałacu*, "Na Przelaj", 10 September 1989.

