

***A Way of Life* Exhibition: The Invisibility of Artistic Labour after the Period of State Socialism in Poland**

Jakub Banasiak

Faculty of Artistic Research and Curatorial Studies

Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw

ul. Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie 37/39, 00-379 Warsaw

jakub.banasiak@asp.waw.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-0954-1079

The article examines the invisibility of artistic labour in neoliberal Poland after 1989. It focuses on the exhibition *A Way of Life* (*Sposób na życie*), which took place at Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art in Gdańsk in 2002. Rather than presenting traditional works of art, the exhibition showcased the outcomes of commercial commissions created solely for profit. The article considers *A Way of Life* not only as a reflection of understanding artistic labour as non-work, but also as a starting point for reflecting on the cultural model lost after the fall of communism.

Keywords: artistic labour, invisible labour, CCA Łaźnia, neoliberalism, state socialism.

Introduction: after the loss

In the autumn of 2025, when this issue of *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* appears, the anthology entitled *Artistic Labor Now* will likely already be published by Sternberg Press. It is difficult to say whether this marks a peak of interest in the subject of artistic labour or merely its next iteration. What is certain, however, is that this topic has become a lasting part of debates in art history, curating, or activism. At the same time, there is little doubt that these discussions remain primarily framed by the narrative of the Global North. Artistic labour is thus viewed in relation to the development of Western capitalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: from Fordism to neoliberalism or the so-called New Economy. In this context, scholars consider both the commodification of the (neo-)avant-garde and contemporary issues such as the relationship between artistic labour and other forms of invisible labour, the precarization of employment, the creative industries, and more.¹

The situation in the former Eastern Bloc countries is often described using a similar perspective.² In this case, however, it is not so much the process of a relatively smooth transition from one model of capitalism to another that needs to be analyzed, but rather the displacement of the socialist model of culture by the neoliberal one. This shift is significant not only for historical reasons but also for political ones: in the context of artistic labour, the experience of socialist countries offers important lessons.

- 1 See, for example, Alberto López Cuenca, "Artistic Labour, Enclosure and the New Economy," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, no. 30 (2012): 4–13; Zoran Erić, Stevan Vuković, eds., "The Precarious Labour in the Field of Art," *OnCurating.org*, no. 16 (2013), <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-16.html>; Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray, and Ulf Wuggenig, *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the "Creative Industries"* (MayFlyBooks, 2011); Rosalind Gill and Andy C. Pratt, "In the Social Factory? Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work," *Theory, Culture & Society*, no. 25 (2008): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276408097794>; Andrew Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (New York University Press, 2009). For a broader (though still Western-centric) perspective on economic history, see Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* (Brill, 2015).
- 2 For Poland see, for example, Kuba Szreder, *The ABC of the Projectariat: Living and Working in a Precarious Art World* (Manchester University Press, 2021); *Czarna księga polskich artystów* [The Black Book of Polish Artists], ed. Katarzyna Górna et al. (Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2015).

Katja Praznik's groundbreaking book *Art Work: Invisible Labor and the Legacy of Yugoslav Socialism* provides valuable insight into this issue.³ Her analysis of artistic labour in Yugoslavia reveals that the defining of art-making as non-work—what Praznik calls “the paradox of art”—is not a universal phenomenon, but a historical one. As she argues, the institutionalization of artistic labour as a form of invisible labour “is the flip side of establishing the autonomy of art as a depoliticized bourgeois category that disavows the economy and neutralizes the class dimension of art production.”⁴ This framework made it possible to separate art from labour and to idealize it as an expression of “creativity” emanating from artistic genius.

As Praznik points out, the ideology of the autonomy of art overshadows class interests, resulting in the exploitation of artists in the capitalist mode of production, including its neoliberal strain. However, her focus on artistic labour in socialist Yugoslavia also allows us to recognize that “the ubiquitous understanding of art as non-work reinforces an amnesia about times and places where art was seen as work in the best sense of the word.”⁵ I argue here that the perspective offered by Praznik makes it possible to perceive the post-communist transition of the 1990s as a time after loss. As the Polish sociologist Malgorzata Jacyno put it in an interview, following the breakthrough of 1989, we became “a society in mourning”—mourning the loss of the socialist welfare state. Under neoliberalism, the state “stopped working and stopped taking responsibility for our welfare.”⁶ An analysis of artistic labour in the Central and Eastern European countries must therefore consider not only what came after 1989 (or 1991), but also what was lost.

This article offers such an analysis in the context of post-socialist Poland. Its focus is the archive of the exhibition *A Way of Life* (*Sposób na życie*) [Fig. 1], held at Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art (Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, CCA Łaźnia) in Gdańsk from December 13, 2002, to January 17, 2003. The exhibition did not present traditional works of art, but rather, as described, “unofficial artistic production and

3 Katja Praznik, *Art Work: Invisible Labor and the Legacy of Yugoslav Socialism* (University of Toronto Press, 2021).

4 Ibid., 18.

5 Ibid., 5.

6 “Polska poszuka nowej drogi” [Poland will Look for a New Path], *Wirtualna Polska*, accessed February 1, 2025, <https://magazyn.wp.pl/informacje/artykul/polska-poszuka-nowej-drogi>.



1. *Sposób na życie*, exhibition banner, Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art, Gdańsk, 2002, courtesy of Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art

Sposób na życie (*Gyvenimo būdas*), parodos plakatas, Šiuolaikinio meno centras „Łaźnia“, Gdanskas, 2002, su Šiuolaikinio meno centro „Łaźnia“ sutikimu

its documentation”⁷—the result of work created solely for profit. In other words, it showcased the effects of treating art as invisible labour. Twenty-six artists of different generations participated in the exhibition: the oldest was born in 1930, the youngest in 1974. This range allows us to trace how artistic labour under neoliberalism was perceived both by artists who worked most of their lives in the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) and by those who began their careers in the 1980s and 1990s. *A Way of Life* was the first—and remains the only—exhibition of its kind in Poland.

I propose a working division of the *A Way of Life* exhibition archive into three parts: documentary (photographs of the exhibition), evaluative (surveys conducted in conjunction with the exhibition), and discursive (in-depth interviews with artists published in the catalogue). All of these components, as I will demonstrate, testify to the artists’ near-total

7 “Sposób na życie” [A Way of Life], Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, accessed February 1, 2025, <https://www.laznia.pl/wystawy/sposob-na-zycie-39/>.

acceptance of the “paradox of art” as both non-alternative and necessary, although they employed various strategies to negotiate the conditions of their practice within this new context.⁸ At the same time, the archive also contains testimonies that allow us to imagine a potential history (in the sense proposed by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay⁹) of art in post-communist Poland: a history in which the memory of loss is capable of overriding neo-liberal hegemony.

Free market behind the red sign, or the (slow) end of the socialist model of culture

Praznik is certainly aware of the specificities of Yugoslavia’s socialist model of culture. Yet, she also emphasizes that the case she analyzes “can be treated as the proverbial canary in a coal mine because it points to some of the more general insidious processes underway globally—most notably the impact of the rising neoliberal socio-economic and political processes taking place across the globe starting in the late 1970s and still taking place today.”¹⁰

A comparison of the situation in Yugoslavia and the Polish People’s Republic confirms this observation. At the same time, it is important to remember that Yugoslavia occupied a unique position compared to other Eastern Bloc countries. Its degree of independence from the USSR was unprecedented, and as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, it maintained relatively well-developed trade relations with capitalist countries, including the United States. By contrast, the situation in Poland was directly shaped by Soviet policies, although it must also be understood within a broader global context. In this part of the paper, I will briefly outline that relationship and its impact on the formation of the socialist model of culture in the late Polish People’s Republic.

In 1970, the USSR entered a new post-industrial phase of the global economy known as the “scientific-technical revolution.”¹¹ Managers of state-owned enterprises, previously mere executors of central plans, began

8 Only a few works out of several dozen served addressed the new economic conditions faced by artists following the systemic transformation. I will return to these in the section “A Way of Life Exhibition: After a Shock Lesson in Self-Reliance.”

9 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019).

10 Praznik, *Art Work*, 5.

11 A comprehensive new study on the subject has been published by Yakov Feygin, *Building a Ruin: The Cold War Politics on Soviet Economic Reform* (Harvard University Press, 2024).

to be replaced by a new type of technocratic manager—independent, flexible, and inventive. At the same time, the production of consumer goods came to be considered as just as important as the production of industrial goods. As a result, economics shifted from the realm of ideology to that of “objective” expert knowledge. As Yakov Feygin notes, this transformation was the economic equivalent of the geopolitical policy of détente. Equally important was the stabilization of domestic politics, which is why Leonid Brezhnev considered the maintenance of social peace on the one hand, and the stability of the party apparatus on the other, to be overriding goals.¹²

Against this background, the culture of the so-called “late socialism” era, as Alexei Yurchak termed it, emerged.¹³ It was characterized by the depoliticization of everyday life and the rise of individualism. The resulting ideological vacuum was quickly filled by Western mass culture and its accompanying lifestyle, which proved especially attractive to the younger and middle generations.¹⁴

Similar processes were taking place in Poland, which had been governed since 1970 by Edward Gierek, a representative of the party’s liberal wing.¹⁵ However, the liberalization of the system in the Polish People’s Republic—both economically and socially—appears to have been considerably deeper than in the USSR. It is particularly evident in the cultural sphere. Whereas Polish art in the 1960s had been actively engaged in legitimizing

12 See *ibid.*, chaps. 5 and 6. Brezhnev recalled not only the geopolitical tensions of Khrushchev’s time, but also the unraveling of the system caused by the open discussion of the liberal Kosygin Reforms (1965–1969).

13 The Brezhnev era is commonly referred to as the period of “stagnation” (Russian: *zastoi*). However, as Alexey Yurchak argues, this negative term was coined retrospectively from the perspective of the 1980s and 1990s. See Alexey Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 7. Feygin, on the other hand, points out that the term is more closely tied to the political strategy of détente initiated in 1970 than to any real decline in economic performance. Kosygin’s reforms, he notes, continued—only “quietly.” See Feygin, *Building a Ruin*, 129.

14 See Yurchak, chap. 5. As Yurchak shows, this happened not only despite the Party’s aggressive anti-Western propaganda, but also as a reaction to it.

15 In the Polish People’s Republic, the 1960s were also a time of intense political upheaval: conflicts with the Catholic Church, the anti-Semitic campaign launched by the Communist Party, internal splits within the Party, and finally, the massacre of protesting workers in Gdańsk in December 1970. Equally significant was the end of forced industrialization and the entry into the era of the “scientific-technical revolution.” It was against this background that Gierek’s conciliatory and liberal policy emerged.

industrialization (through plein-air in factories, industrial biennials, and so forth), by the 1970s it was almost completely dominated by the ideology of art's autonomy. This shift established what Praznik terms the "socialist paradox of art": the coexistence of the institutionalization of art as labour alongside its perception by artists as an autonomous activity.¹⁶

In 1970s Poland, this model was further encouraged by relatively liberal economic policies. In 1974, the hiring of non-family workers by small private companies was legalized, becoming an important factor in the development of the socialist middle class. In 1976, the private art trade was legalized, fulfilling a key demand of the art community. As early as 1972, state-run art fairs were organized, and state-run commercial galleries for contemporary art were also established. The Western art market became a new point of reference in the art press. Art began to serve a new function: it affirmed the social status and cultural capital of the emerging petty bourgeoisie and the new elite—such as managers of state enterprises, professionals in the media and entertainment industries. Thus, while the formal principles of the institutionalization of art as labour remained unchanged, the ideological basis of the system was being undermined. In this way, the egalitarian model of cultural policy, aimed at disseminating culture and making it more accessible to the working class, was gradually dismantled.¹⁷

From the late 1970s onward, the social and material conditions of artists who did not participate in the art market began to deteriorate. The intensifying economic crisis led to a decline in state commissions and reduced rates; free studios and materials became scarce, and state fairs were discontinued. In 1980, the Cultural Department of the Communist Party reported that "the visual arts community is in a critical material situation."¹⁸

16 Praznik, *Art Work*, 49–50.

17 I analyze this process in detail in Jakub Banasiak, "Przeżniona dekada. Próby modernizacji państwowego systemu sztuki 1971–1980" [A Dreamed Decade: Attempts at Modernizing the State Art System 1971–1980], in *Awangarda i państwo* [Avant-Garde and the State], ed. Dorota Monkiewicz (Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2018).

18 I discuss this situation further in Jakub Banasiak, "'Pozycja prawie idealna': Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków wobec przemian politycznych, kryzysu gospodarczego i napięć środowiskowych w latach 1980–1981" ['Almost Perfect Position': The Union of Polish Artists in the Face of Political Changes, Economic Crisis, and Tensions in the Art Community, 1980–1981], *Artium Quaestiones* 32 (2021): 301, <https://doi.org/10.14746/aq.2021.32.11>.

The collapse of the socialist model of culture was part of the structural crisis facing the Eastern Bloc headed by the USSR. As a result of the global crisis of the late 1970s, the debts of socialist countries to Western states and financial markets increased dramatically. For Poland, the effects of this process were extremely far-reaching. In 1979, social optimism in the Polish People's Republic stood at just 32%, compared to 87% in 1971.¹⁹ In 1980, the Solidarity movement—the first independent trade union in the Eastern Bloc—was founded. Its members demanded, above all, an improvement in living conditions in the spirit of genuine egalitarian socialism.²⁰ A similar stance was voiced by the Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków (Union of Polish Artists and Designers) (ZPAP), which called for the restoration of the socialist model of culture.

The Solidarity revolution ultimately failed. In December 1981, the authorities imposed martial law, leading to the radical delegitimization of the Communist Party and state institutions. The vast majority of the artistic community (approximately 82%) did not support martial law, prompting the authorities to dissolve ZPAP, the largest union in the cultural sector with over 11,000 members. In its place, so-called “neo-unions” fully dependent on the party were established, which attracted the remaining 18% of artists.²¹ While their motives were primarily economic, the authorities were unable to improve living conditions even for this small group. However, the rights resulting from the institutionalization of art as labour continued to function.

At that time, the Polish economy was almost entirely dependent on Western creditors. As Michael de Groot has shown, Moscow's refusing to provide military support for imposing martial law in 1981—unlike its interventions in Budapest in 1956 or Prague in 1968—illustrated the USSR's

19 Marcin Zaremba, “Zimno, ciepło, gorąco. Nastroje Polaków od ‘zimy stulecia’ do lata ‘80” [Cold, Warm, Hot: The Moods of Poles from the “Winter of the Century” to the Summer of ‘80], in *„Solidarność” od wewnątrz 1980–1981*, ed. Andrzej Friszke, Krzysztof Persak, Paweł Sowiński (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2013), 17.

20 On this subject, see Jan Sowa, *Inna Rzeczpospolita jest możliwa. Widma przeszłości, wizje przyszłości* [Another Polish Republic is Possible. Specters of the Past, Visions of the Future] (W.A.B., 2015).

21 Jakub Banasiak, *Proteuszowe czasy. Rozpad państwowego systemu sztuki 1982–1993* [Proteus Times. The Decay of the State Art System, 1982–1993] (Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2020), 90.

political and economic weakness and was interpreted as such by the West.²² In 1986, after fulfilling a series of strict criteria, Poland joined the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, soon embarking on free-market reforms. The pace and scope of these reforms far exceeded Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika. The changes were already of a characteristically neoliberal nature: policies of deregulation, employment "optimization," restructuring, and support for the private sector were initiated.

Similar processes were taking place in the cultural sector. In 1987, art institutions—as well as the Ministry of Culture itself—reduced staff, cut budgets, and allowed commercial activities. The status of artistic labour shifted as well. In May 1988, the art profession was marketized, marginalizing the inefficient state commission system. The dominant figure became the "socialist art entrepreneur,"²³ to use Praznik's term.²⁴

At that time, artistic labour began to be treated as non-work, in part due to legislative changes. A decree of the Ministry of Finance introducing market rules for artistic labour distinguished between producers of applied art and others—painters, sculptors, conceptual artists, and so on.²⁵ The new regulations favoured the former group, setting deductible costs at 70%. For other artists, the legislator assumed that they did not incur any costs related to their activities, setting their deductible costs at 0%. In this way, "autonomous" art became literally invisible.

Such a radical shift required legitimacy from the conservative wing of the Communist Party. Accordingly, in mid-1988, the front page of the weekly *Odrodzenie* (Revival) featured an interview with Włodzimierz Sokorski, Minister of Culture under Stalinism and one of the architects of Polish Socialist Realism in the 1950s. This might have been unremarkable, except that Sokorski advocated the full marketization of the cultural sector. As he argued, the new cultural policy should retain only "as much socialism

22 Michael de Groot, *Disruption. The Global Economic Shock of the 1970s and the End of the Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 2024), chap. 6, Kindle.

23 Praznik, *Art Work*, 110–11.

24 Banasiak, *Proteuszowe czasy*, 329–30.

25 Ibid. The decree was titled *Regulation of the Minister of Finance of May 14, 1988 on the Implementation of Certain Provisions of the Act on the Wage Tax* [Rozporządzenie ministra finansów z dnia 14 maja 1988 r. w sprawie wykonania niektórych przepisów ustawy o podatku od wynagrodzeń].

as for the red sign.” Behind the sign, however, “normal economic laws” should prevail.²⁶ The free market was now the new norm.

A Way of Life exhibition: after a shock lesson in self-reliance

After 1989, the new democratic government continued to implement neoliberal reforms. Following World Bank guidelines, funding for culture was explicitly reduced, justified by the argument that its recipients were generally high earners anyway. By 1992, spending on culture was 45% lower than in 1989—already a dramatically low baseline.²⁷

It should be emphasized that this happened despite protests from the artistic community, which had hoped that the authorities, originating from the Solidarity movement, would safeguard key elements of state patronage. Instead, the years 1990–1993 witnessed the definitive dismantling of the institutional and legal gains of the socialist model of culture: state enterprises were privatized, social security benefits including health insurance, retirement rights, and preferential studio rents were abolished, a system of grants for selected artists replaced universal subsidies, and finally, the Department of Visual Arts in the Ministry of Culture itself was abolished. As cultural studies scholar Teresa Kostyrko summarized, the visual arts community received a “shock lesson in self-reliance.”²⁸

In 1993, shortly after Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz’s most drastic neoliberal reforms were completed, the authorities announced the first post-1989 cultural policy program.²⁹ The document promoted a “market” and “democratic” model of culture, in which “the judge” was “both the art critic and the taxpayer.”³⁰ In practice, this meant minimizing state patronage and placing culture within the logic of neoliberal competition. The artist became an entrepreneur, selling their products on the free market.

26 Ibid., 321.

27 Dorota Ilczuk, Anna Wieczorek, “Finansowanie kultury ze środków publicznych” [Public Funding of Culture], in *Kultura polska w dekadzie przemian* [Polish Culture in the Decade of Change], eds. Teresa Kostyrko and Marcin Czerwiński (Instytut Kultury, 1999), 189.

28 Teresa Kostyrko, “Sztuki plastyczne i ich odbiorcy” [Visual Arts and Their Audience], in *ibid.*, 39.

29 *Polityka kulturalna państwa. Założenia. Warszawa, 10 sierpnia 1993* [State Cultural Policy: Foundations. Warsaw, August 10, 1993] (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki, 1993).

30 Banasiak, *Proteuszowe czasy*, 478.



2. Grzegorz Sztwiertnia, Piotr Jaros, and Marta Deskur, pastel paintings made for McDonald's in Kraków, *Sposób na życie*, exhibition view, 2002, courtesy of Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art

Grzegorz Sztwiertnia, Piotr Jaros, Marta Deskur, piešiniai pasteles, sukurti užkandinei „McDonald's“ Krokuvoje, *Sposób na życie*, parodos vaizdas, 2002, su Šiuolaikinio meno centro „Łaźnia“ sutikimu

Nevertheless, according to the logic of the “paradox of art,” creating art was no longer considered labour but rather a lifestyle. However, as Praznik points out, “a paradoxical consequence of this logic was that not everyone was free to choose art as a way of living.”³¹

The exhibition at the CCA Łaźnia in Gdańsk was titled *A Way of Life*—not *A Way of Living*—and can be seen as a confirmation of Praznik's thesis: a rising tide does not lift all boats, to borrow neoliberal jargon. The topic was so unusual for the public that the exhibition's curator, Małgorzata Lisiewicz, chose to approach it through the popular theme of the relationship between art and reality. However, while this relationship is usually considered through the prism of how artists interpret reality in their works, the curator explained that “*A Way of Life* proposes a different way of looking at it, making reality—not that which the artists themselves choose,

31 Praznik, *Art Work*, 142.



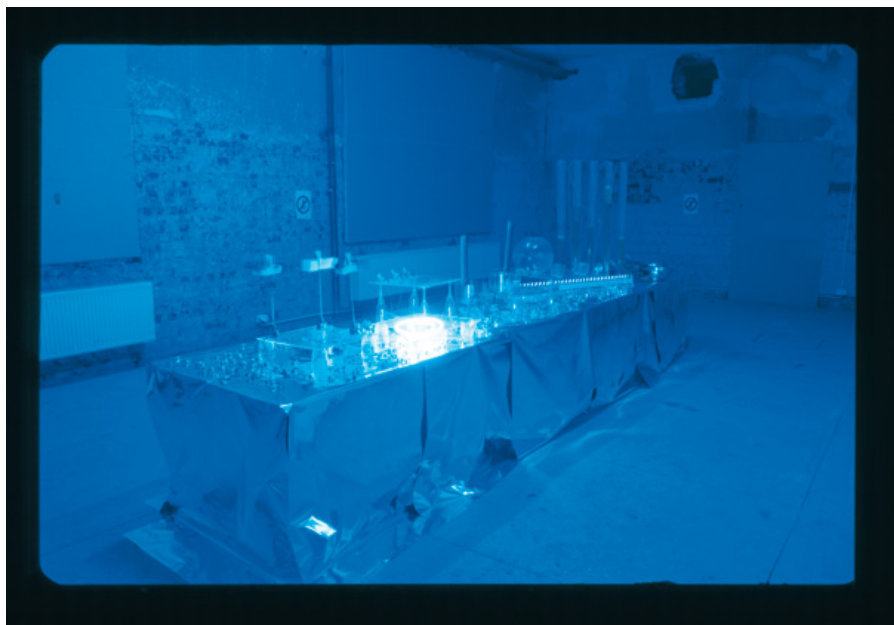
3. Paweł Althamer, statuette of Fryderyk (left), and Edward Dwurnik, commissioned portrait (right), *Sposób na życie*, exhibition view, 2002, courtesy of Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art

Paweł Althamer, Fryderyko statulėlė (kairėje), Edward Dwurnik, užsakytas portretas (dešinėje), *Sposób na życie*, parodos vaizdas, 2002, su Šiuolaikinio meno centro „Łaźnia“ sutikimu

but ‘that which chooses them’—the object of reflection.”³² In other words, artists were treated as objects rather than subjects of the socio-economic changes during the post-communist transition. Hence the curatorial idea of presenting “art for profit,” as Lisiewicz called it. In this way, what had been the outcome of treating artistic labour as invisible became visible.

The exhibition presented a full spectrum of “ways of life.” Painters showed custom-made portraits (Edward Dwurnik, Bożena Grzyb-Jarodzka) as well as pastel paintings of flowers created for the McDonald’s branch in Cracow (Grzegorz Sztwiertnia, Piotr Jaros, Marta Deskur). Artists with a background in photography (Łukasz Skąpski, Łódź Kaliska) presented portraits of businessmen and advertising photos of events and products. [Fig. 2] Paweł Althamer exhibited statuettes of Fryderyk and Cash, designed at the request of the organizers of the famous Polish music competition *Fryderyki*

32 Małgorzata Lisiewicz, “Wstęp. Sztuka i rzeczywistość: z notatek kuratora” [Introduction. Art and Reality: From the Curator’s Notes] in *Sposób na życie* [A Way of Life], ed. Piotr Juszkiewicz (Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, 2002), 5.



4. Katarzyna Górna, catering table, *Sposób na życie*, exhibition view, 2002, courtesy of Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art

Katarzyna Górna, furšeto stalas, *Sposób na życie*, parodos vaizdas, 2002, su Šiuolaikinio meno centro „Łaźnia“ sutikimu

and the magazine *Cash*, which was published in the 1990s and promoted neoliberalism. [Fig. 3] Katarzyna Górna, a radical feminist artist, opened a catering business for financial reasons and displayed an elegantly decorated table at the exhibition. [Fig. 4] Jacek Markiewicz, part of the so-called “critical art” movement, founded a plastic packaging wholesale in the early 1990s to support his family. The exhibition featured a live broadcast from its headquarters in Płock alongside a rack of plastic products. [Fig. 5] Jerzy Kosalka, a member of the neo-dadaist group *Luxus* in the 1980s and early 1990s, showed a mock-up commissioned by an industrial plant. [Fig. 6] Oskar Dawicki, a post-conceptual artist employed by one of Warsaw’s advertising agencies, exhibited works commissioned by the agency that contained microscopic self-portraits—visitors could look for them using a magnifying glass. Anna Baumgart and Roman Dziadkiewicz, co-owners of clubs in Warsaw (Café Baumgart) and Cracow (SAOZ), transformed the



5. Jacek Markiewicz, live broadcast from the artist's company in Płock and a rack of products, *Sposób na życie*, exhibition view, 2002, courtesy of Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art

Jacek Markiewicz, tiesioginė transliacija iš menininko įmonės Plocko mieste ir produktų lentyna, *Sposób na życie*, parodos vaizdas, 2002, su Šiuolaikinio meno centro „Łaźnia“ sutikimu



6. Jerzy Kosalka, mock-up commissioned by an industrial plant, *Sposób na życie*, exhibition view, 2002, courtesy of Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art

Jerzy Kosalka, pramoninės gamyklos užsakytas maketas, *Sposób na życie*, parodos vaizdas, 2002, su Šiuolaikinio meno centro „Łaźnia“ sutikimu



7. Wilhelm Sasnal, mural, *Sposób na życie*, exhibition view, 2002, courtesy of Łaźnia Center for Contemporary Art

Wilhelm Sasnal, piešinys ant sienos, *Sposób na życie*, parodos vaizdas, 2002, su Šiuolaikinio meno centro „Łaźnia“ sutikimu

industrial spaces of CCA Łaźnia³³ into bars. The exhibition also included documents such as artists' applications for higher retirement benefits.

Works critically or ironically commenting on the realities of the free market were a clear minority (Wilhelm Sasnal, Paweł Susid, Przemysław Kwiek). Sasnal painted a humorous cartoon on the wall: the artist's wife, Anka, asks, "When will you look for a real job?" The artist replies, "I don't know, Anka. Today I will paint a little more." [Fig. 7]. It serves as a sharp illustration of Praznik's thesis about the internalization of artistic labour as non-work. A similar perspective can be applied to the exhibition as a whole. However, it is the surveys and interviews conducted with artists for the exhibition that reveal this issue in all its complexity.

33 "Łaźnia" means "bathhouse" in Polish. The gallery is indeed located in the building of a former municipal bathhouse, constructed in 1908 and abandoned after 1989, before being repurposed as a gallery in 1998.

Statistics: the survey

The anonymous survey prepared by CCA Łaźnia prior to the exhibition included twenty-six questions.³⁴ Forty-one artists participated—fifteen more than the number who took part in the exhibition. Among the respondents were seven born in the 1930s (aged 60–70 in 2002), six born in the 1940s (50–60 years old), nine born in the 1950s (40–50 years old), twelve born in the 1960s (30–40 years old), and seven born in the 1970s (20–30 years old).

This was not a scientific study, but it can be considered largely representative. The artistic scene in the early 2000s in Poland was dominated by artists who debuted in the 1980s (notably new expression) and the 1990s (critical art and so-called pop-banalism, including new painting). The exhibition *A Way of Life*—and thus the survey—featured the most important representatives of these trends. As Boris Buden has shown, the transition in Central and Eastern Europe was grounded in the myth of a new beginning and anti-communism.³⁵ This also applied to art. In the 1990s, so-called “young Polish art” was on the radar, while the art of the 1980s was retrospectively valorised as “oppositional,” regardless of the artists’ original intentions. The selection of survey participants reflects this pattern: over 68% were born in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

What was the financial status of artists in Poland in 2002? How many and to what extent had they to work because the neoliberal state did not recognize artistic labour as work? Of the forty-one respondents, twenty-nine reported receiving some income from selling art, but for only eight did this income exceed 50% of their monthly earnings—including three who received between 75% and 100%. For the majority, however, art sales accounted for no more than 25% (twenty people) or between 25% and 50% (one person) of their monthly income. Thus, artistic labour did not provide a sufficient livelihood.

Not surprisingly, many artists had to take other types of jobs unrelated to art-making. Twenty-eight respondents confirmed that they had

34 All references to the survey are based on the Institutional Archive of CCA Łaźnia, where the original questionnaires are preserved.

35 See Boris Buden, *Strefa przejścia. O końcu postkomunizmu* [The Zone of Transition. On the End of Post-Communism], trans. Michał Sutowski (Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2012).

held a permanent job for at least one year. In eighteen of these cases, this employment occurred during the 1990s, suggesting that additional work was a necessity for many artists at the time. Of those eighteen, only seven retained permanent employment after 2000. This trend aligns with the numerous studies indicating that the cultural sector has experienced rapidly growing precarization with the rise of neoliberalism.³⁶ The remaining thirteen respondents reported never having had a permanent job, including seven of the youngest respondents, born in the 1960s and 1970s.

However, even permanent employment did not guarantee financial stability. As many as thirty out of forty-one respondents (about 73%) reported having a side job. Among the “ways of life” listed, artists mentioned a wide range of occupations. Notably, only thirteen found work within the cultural sector; others engaged in manual labour or found employment in entertainment, advertising, and service industries. This diversity was also reflected in the exhibition.

In neoliberal cultural policy, widespread state support for artists, including workers’ rights, has been replaced by the art market, philanthropy, and the grant system. In the case of contemporary art, however, the first two were marginal in the 1990s. As a result, state grants became the primary source of additional income. But as Praznik notes, under neoliberalism only artworks deemed “excellent” can receive state support.³⁷ Similarly, in Poland after 1989, grants were targeted at the “best” artists; they were also short-term (usually annual or semi-annual) and relatively small. The application process was complicated and tiring, especially for older artists. However, due to widespread pauperization, applying was often necessary. Of the forty-one respondents, twenty regularly applied for grants, but for only three did grants constitute more than 75% of their monthly income. For six respondents, grants accounted for 25% to 50%, for five, below 25%, and for two, between 50% and 75%. The rest declined to answer.

Additionally, four respondents born in the 1930s and one born in the 1940s were receiving retirement benefits, made possible by the classification of artistic labour as work during the Polish People’s Republic. All of these individuals remained artistically active. Moreover, six respondents

36 See footnote 1.

37 Praznik, *Art Work*, 142.

reported claiming unemployment benefits, five of whom also declared having side jobs.

However, making art also generates costs that bourgeois ideology tends to ignore, as the aforementioned May 1988 decree vividly illustrates. The law did not change in the 1990s. For eleven respondents, the cost of artistic practice accounted for between 25% and 50% of their monthly budget; for eight, it exceeded 50%; for two, more than 75%; and for the remainder, less than 25%. In total, 21 people had expenses exceeding 25% of their monthly income. Not surprisingly, eleven reported using credit. It should be noted that the question referred not simply to “having” credit, but specifically to “using” it, which—in Polish—suggests consumer credit rather than mortgages. This, in turn, implies that many artists lacked funds for larger purchases such as household appliances.

What do these data reveal? First, only eleven respondents said that their income—all sources, not just art sales—covered 100% of their needs; seven said that it did not cover their needs at all; four reported coverage up to 25%; and 18, up to 50% (one person declined to answer). This means that 43% of the artists surveyed faced serious financial difficulties, and 26% were living at or below the poverty line. One artist and exhibition participant, Przemysław Kwiek, explained in a 2004 interview: “My impassable daily budget with fees is 10 Polish złotych” (about 2.30 euros). He described this situation as “chronic, pathological deprivation.”³⁸

The survey also took into account the dynamics of income—both from artistic and non-artistic labour—before and after 2000. Thus, twenty-one respondents indicated that their income had increased after 2000, twelve said that it had remained the same, and six reported a decrease (two declined to answer). Notably, only one person born in the 1970s reported a decrease in income. However, this does not appear to be the result of the post-2000 boom in young art, as that phenomenon was more prominent in the institutional sphere than in the art market (with the exception of a few young

38 Przemysław Kwiek, “Nie mam środków na korzystanie z Internetu (Norwid też by nie miał), czyli autoryzowana wymiana e-mail pomiędzy Przemysławem Kwiekiem i Sebastianem Cichockim” [I Don’t Have the Means to Use the Internet (Nor Would Norwid): The Authorized Email Exchange between Przemysław Kwiek and Sebastian Cichocki], in *Radykalne poetyki rewizjonizmu*, interviewed by Sebastian Cichocki (Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Kronika, 2004), 8.

painters such as Wilhelm Sasnal). This is confirmed by data on income from art: among the seven respondents born in the 1970s, one declared earning no income from art, while four said that art income comprised between 0% and 25% of their total earnings. Thus, relative financial stability was more likely associated with work outside the art sector: six out of the seven in this cohort reported having side jobs. A similar pattern emerged among artists born in the 1960s. After 2000, ten from this generation experienced income increase and two saw no change, but again, it was not linked to gains in the art market: only two reported art income accounting for between 50% and 75% of their total earnings, five reported between 25% and 50%, and five said they made no money from art at all. Thus, the emerging generations were those who had to sustain themselves through non-art work in order to continue practicing art.

The level of income allowed only fourteen respondents (34%) to accumulate savings—just one of whom was born in the 1970s. Families provided financial support to nineteen respondents (46%), including four who were fully supported; none of the youngest artists fell into this latter group.

Twenty-eight out of forty-one respondents declared that they had health insurance, but the vast majority had to pay for it privately—since only seven reported having a permanent job after 2000, which would obligate the employer to provide insurance. Twenty-three people reported paying retirement contributions, although the majority did so privately. Some artists were self-employed (e.g., Anna Baumgart, Katarzyna Górna, Jacek Markiewicz) and thus paid the contributions themselves.

Against this backdrop, the answers to the question, “From which funds do you think artistic activities should be financed?” are particularly revealing. Respondents could choose among three options: state funding only, private funding only, or public-private funding. Three people chose the first option, two the second, and the rest—87%—favoured a mixed system. Two respondents declined to answer. Of course, the survey could not determine the actual shape of this mixed model— that is, the balance between private sector and state patronage, and the scale and specifics of the latter. However, it is clear that the vast majority of respondents considered active state participation an indispensable component of cultural funding.

"I do not live, in fact": the interviews

The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue, with interviews playing a crucial role. Interviews were conducted with Jerzy Bereś (b. 1930), Przemysław Kwiek (b. 1945), Paweł Althamer (b. 1967), Julita Wójcik (b. 1971), Roman Dziadkiewicz (b. 1972), and Bogna Burska (b. 1974). These artist testimonies allow us to reconstruct their attitudes toward state patronage and the art market, and consequently, toward artistic labour. In turn, they also provide a means to contrast the dry survey data (unpublished) with the artists' subjective experiences of their own position within the realities of neoliberalism.

Before analyzing the artists' statements, I would like to return to sociologist Małgorzata Jacyno's observation of the post-communist transition as a "time after loss." Sociology has long employed the concept of trauma to describe social transformations in Central and Eastern Europe. In this framework, the trauma of transition is associated, on the one hand, with the depreciation of values such as egalitarianism or collectivism, along with the resulting loss of social security and disruption of former social ties; on the other hand, it entails a persistent sense of danger brought on by participation in a culture dominated by risk, uncertainty, and competition. Responses to social trauma can take many forms but always involve a relationship to what has been lost and what has been imposed. When the new reality is difficult to accept, feelings of sadness, longing, helplessness, or rebellion prevail, mirroring individual trauma. These feelings were also characteristic of Polish society during the transition. Acceptance of the new order, in turn, presupposes the adoption of various adaptation strategies, which tend to be more accessible to younger individuals with sufficient social and cultural capital.³⁹

It is worth applying this heuristic model to the trauma associated with the loss of the socialist model of culture and the rise of neoliberalism. Jerzy Bereś, a classic figure in Polish modern art and the oldest participant in the exhibition *A Way of Life*, responded to a question about the new realities of life after 1989 by stating, "After participating in numerous exhibitions, especially abroad, I was asked how I live. I answer them that I do not live, in

39 For a detailed discussion on this issue and the current state of the research, see Piotr Długosz, "Trauma transformacji w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej" [The Trauma of the Transition in Central and Eastern Europe], *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne*, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssp.2019.1.6>.

fact.”⁴⁰ Further remarks reveal that Bereś regularly wrote letters to successive ministers of culture asking for financial relief, but to no avail. As he summarized, “in Poland, aged artists of this class, such as the *Grupa Krakowska*⁴¹ [The Cracow Group], are generally poor people, while in the West they are very rich people.”⁴² Bereś attributed the wealth of Western artists solely to the art market, overlooking the extensive state patronage that operated in postwar Western Europe. This reflects a dominant narrative in Polish public discourse during the transition period, which linked artistic success to financial gain, arguing that “this is how it is in the West.” However, Bereś also acknowledged the limitations of the art market and criticized the commodification of art. He lamented the “degeneration” of art dealers who, in his opinion, were once more nonconformist but had become primarily focused on quick profits. At the same time, Bereś pointed out that the financial situation of artists worsened after the fall of communism, as museums ceased regular acquisitions. More importantly, however, the *Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych* (Social Insurance Institution) invalidated his retirement contributions from the Polish People’s Republic era because he was unable to continue payments after 1989. As a result, in 1995, Bereś received a retirement benefit of 212 Polish złoty per month (approximately 50 euros; for context, the average monthly wage in Poland in 1995 was 702 Polish złoty, or about 164 euros). “It was a huge shock for me,”⁴³ he told Małgorzata Lisiewicz. Only after direct intervention with the Minister of Culture was he granted a special social retirement of 800 Polish złoty per month.

While Bereś recognized the flaws of the new economic order but did not complain about the collapse of the socialist welfare state (although he also acknowledged its positive aspects), Przemysław Kwiek experienced both elements of the social trauma associated with the transition far more acutely. Kwiek was a socialist who, in the 1970s—when he was still part

40 “Jerzy Bereś, “Z Jerzym Beresiem rozmawia Małgorzata Lisiewicz” [Małgorzata Lisiewicz in Conversation with Jerzy Bereś], interview by Małgorzata Lisiewicz, in *Sposób na życie*, ed. Piotr Juszkiewicz (Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, 2002), 46.

41 Grupa Krakowska II [The Cracow Group II] (est. 1957) is perhaps the most important artistic collective of Polish post-Thaw modernism. Among its members were Jerzy Bereś, Wanda Czelkowska, Tadeusz Kantor, Jadwiga Maziarska, Erna Rosenstein, or Zbigniew Warpechowski.

42 Bereś, interview, 47.

43 Ibid.

of the duo KwieKulik—attempted to negotiate with the authorities of the Polish People’s Republic to establish a form of “neo-avant-garde official art,” known as New Red Art. Although the authorities listened to the proposal, they did not share the artists’ enthusiasm. Thus, Kwiek was keenly aware of the importance of socialist patronage. He described the situation after 1989 as “bad, tragic,”⁴⁴ while expressing high regard for the socialist model of culture. Kwiek emphasized that the system of state commissions and the politics of full employment ensured that all artists could work, even if it meant producing artistic potboilers. “I wasn’t afraid that I wouldn’t get a job,” he said, emphasizing that this was a direct consequence of the doctrine of the socialist state, “for which a lot of blood was shed.”⁴⁵ For Kwiek, the guarantee of employment was immeasurably preferable to the hegemony of the market and the reduction of state patronage. As he put it: “I believe that the state should fund art. Without it, there is no individual freedom.”⁴⁶ This position was the opposite of the dominant stance during the transition. In the 1990s, Kwiek received unemployment benefits, and his work consistently challenged the neoliberalization of the art system and the resulting impoverishment of artists.⁴⁷

Younger artists who did not work during the period of the Polish People’s Republic internalized the rules of the neoliberal state while developing various strategies of adaptation. This does not mean that they failed to recognize the harshness of the new system. Paweł Althamer (MA, 1993) recalled that the difficult economic conditions (“I experienced ruthlessness”⁴⁸) forced him to sell handmade dolls on the street. At the same time, Althamer never regarded commissioned work as non-art but rather as an integral part of his artistic practice, embracing the inseparability of artistic and life attitudes. In this respect, Althamer’s artistic approach dissolved the

44 “Wypowiedź Przemysław Kwieka (z rozmowy z Małgorzatą Lisiewicz)” [Statement by Przemysław Kwiek (from an interview by Małgorzata Lisiewicz)], in *Sposób na życie*, ed. Piotr Juszkiewicz (Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, 2002), 52.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 53.

47 For Kwiek’s anti-capitalist works from the 1990s, see Jakub Banasiak, “Diogenes from Łomianki-Dąbrowa,” *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture* 37 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.36854/widok/2023.37.2825>.

48 Paweł Althamer, “Z Pawłem Althamerem rozmawia Małgorzata Lisiewicz” [Małgorzata Lisiewicz in Conversation with Paweł Althamer], interview by Małgorzata Lisiewicz, in *Sposób na życie*, ed. Piotr Juszkiewicz (Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, 2002), 54.

boundary between artistic labour and work *per se*, a stance unique among the exhibition participants (although it should be emphasized that this was somewhat accidental rather than a deliberate aim). It is also worth noting that Althamer had already gained recognition on the international art market a few years after graduation, as he openly stated in an interview with Małgorzata Lisiewicz. In a way, this allowed him to incorporate commissioned works (and select those that suited him) into a broader artistic project. At the same time, he was aware of the pathologies of the art market, such as payment in symbolic capital—for example, “payment” through participation in an exhibition, valued because it advanced one’s career. Nonetheless, he rejected state patronage: “State money does not give freedom, because that is where political manipulation begins.”⁴⁹ Equating state patronage with a restriction on artistic freedom was typical of the transition discourse, which drew on the recent memory of censorship. This discourse enabled the association of state involvement—not only in the cultural sphere—with a form of oppression, while presenting capitalism as unrestricted and “free.” The positioning of art as non-work, supposedly created without any restrictions, rested on similar arguments.

The situation was different for the youngest artists (Wójcik, Dziadkiewicz, and Burska). All three accepted the neoliberal rules of artistic life as normal. If they voiced any criticism, it was not the dismantling of state patronage, but rather the underdeveloped art market. At the same time, they all acknowledged that money was a limiting factor for creative freedom. Therefore, their goal was to cooperate with the system in some way or to use it on their own terms, as they believed. Julita Wójcik considered starting a business but, for the time being, applied for grants. She also quit her permanent job at the theatre to devote herself fully to art as a “way of life.” Wójcik embodied the figure of the capitalist self-made individual: resourceful and willing to make many sacrifices. At the end of this path, as the new myth of upward social mobility promised, awaited a reward—wealth and, with it, freedom. For now, however, as the artist said, “I am in search of forms thanks to which my art can be for sale.”⁵⁰

49 Ibid., 57.

50 Julita Wójcik, “Z Julitą Wójcik rozmawiają Ewa Grzegorzcyk i Magdalena Korcz” [Ewa Grzegorzcyk and Magdalena Korcz in Conversation with Julita Wójcik], interview by Ewa Grzegorzcyk and Magdalena Korcz, in *Sposób na życie*, ed. Piotr Juszkiewicz (Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, 2002), 60.

Roman Dziadkiewicz went one step further: he co-founded a limited liability company. The main investor was a German businessman “with organizational and social ambitions, interested in contemporary art in general.”⁵¹ This reflects a key theme in the transition discourse—that financial stability, and thus artistic freedom, should come from private investors or philanthropists. Dziadkiewicz’s company rented an entire tenement house in Cracow, where the business—comprising a club, rental services, and graphic design studio—was meant to generate funds for artistic activities. Dziadkiewicz pointed out that in his case, the line between artistic labour and paid work was blurred, but unlike Althamer, this was not by choice, but by necessity. “It’s not a ‘game,’” he stated, noting that he had to borrow from his family to enter the partnership.⁵² Ultimately, the business failed and was dissolved in 2003.

Bogna Burska, the youngest of the artists interviewed and the only painter, defended her MA degree in 2001 but, as she explained, has not sold a single painting since. She attributed this to the fact that the sums offered for her works, to which she is very attached, were too insignificant. She equated earning money from art with a restriction of her freedom and therefore did not want to give up her non-artistic job. To explain her stance, Burska used a market metaphor: as an artist, she said, she commissions works “from herself” and therefore feels free. On the other hand, when someone commissions a piece, they demand specific solutions, limiting creative freedom. For Burska, the separation of artistic labour and paid work was natural: “I am a person who wants to make art and pays a price for it—I have to make money in another way, and do it very quickly and effectively. I have to make money not only for myself, but also for these expensive works, and do it fast enough to have enough time to complete them. It has nothing to do with each other. And I don’t see why it should.”⁵³ One factor that could change the situation, according to Burska, was success in the art market. Then, she told

51 “Roman Dziadkiewicz, “Z Romanem Dziadkiewiczem – prezesem Stowarzyszenia Artystycznego Ośrodek Zdrowia – rozmawia Ryszard Ziarkiewicz” [Ryszard Ziarkiewicz in Conversation with Roman Dziadkiewicz, President of the Artistic Association *Ośrodek Zdrowia*], interview by Ryszard Ziarkiewicz, in *Sposób na życie*, ed. Piotr Juskiewicz (Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, 2002), 64.

52 *Ibid.*, 65.

53 Bogna Burska, “Z Bogną Burską rozmawia Małgorzata Lisiewicz” [Małgorzata Lisiewicz in Conversation with Bogna Burska], interview by Małgorzata Lisiewicz, in *Sposób na życie*, ed. Piotr Juskiewicz (Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, 2002), 68.

Małgorzata Lisiewicz, “I would have gone on vacation after many years.”⁵⁴ For the time being, however, she was working 10–12 hours a day. Nevertheless, she admitted that she could not afford social security: “600 Polish złoty a month is too much for me.”⁵⁵ At the same time, she normalized this situation as non-alternative: “Everything has a price, we live in a world where it is impossible to be clean.”⁵⁶ It seems symptomatic that the artist treated earning money as “dirty”—a necessity that makes it possible to practice art fully “independently.” Overall, Burska inscribed herself in the figure of the “master of your own fate,” one of the most frequently reproduced capitalist topoi in the public debate of the 1990s. Here lies the paradox of art in bourgeois culture: it is supposed to remain “pure,” but without systemic state support this is impossible—the artist must earn somehow, and in doing so, inevitably “gets dirty.”

Conclusions

A letter from Magdalena Abakanowicz’s assistant to Małgorzata Lisiewicz, the curator of the exhibition *A Way of Life*, is preserved in the archives of CCA Łaźnia. The letter reveals that Abakanowicz refused to participate in the exhibition. By that time, Abakanowicz was already one of Poland’s most internationally recognized artists, yet she considered *A Way of Life* a project that “serves neither artists nor art. It is a misleading method of communicating the complex problems of the art community.”⁵⁷

Interestingly, the curator intended to present Abakanowicz’s work as an exception to the rule: an example of success both artistic and financial. Nevertheless, the artist declined, despite the fact that she could have embraced artistic labour as labour *per se*—she earned her living through creating art. But what if her refusal was precisely because of this? After all, the ideology of art’s autonomy and exclusivity removes artistic labour from view—in other words, it makes it invisible. The success of artists like Abakanowicz—statistically extremely rare—was essential to sustaining this ideology’s legitimacy.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., 69.

56 Ibid.

57 Letter from Magdalena Grabowska to Małgorzata Lisiewicz, November 28, 2002, CCA Łaźnia.

The archive of the exhibition *A Way of Life* allows us to trace the effects of the “paradox of art” in neoliberal Poland of the 1990s and early 2000s on artists who, for the most part, were not “free to choose art as a way of living.” The perspective adopted here, however, also recalls what has been lost: the socialist welfare state, which—even if imperfect and sometimes necessitating additional jobs—provided basic social and material security. In Poland, this memory seems more difficult to reclaim than in the former Yugoslav countries, as analyzed by Katja Praznik, whose work has served as the main theoretical reference here. The events of the 1980s, outlined in the first section of this paper, contributed post factum to identifying the socialist state with both repression and economic inefficiency. This nexus—lack of freedom coupled with lack of prosperity—was instrumentalized by the neoliberal discourse in the 1990s to delegitimize any form of welfare state. Nevertheless, it was the socialist model of culture that institutionalized art as labour and, as the history of the 1970s shows, was able to coexist with the private art market. The exhibition *A Way of Life* may have served as a reminder of this, but its impact was very limited: despite being one of the most radical and original curatorial projects in Poland after 1989, the hegemonic ideology of the transition consigned it to oblivion soon after it closed. This paper has attempted to address that oversight.

The catalogue of *A Way of Life* remains available on the CCA Łaźnia website. After twenty-two years, it costs 1 Polish złoty—about 25 euro cents—still more than the monthly state-granted retirement pension of artists who began their careers after 1989.

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Santrauka

Paroda *Gyvenimo būdas*: menininkų darbo nematomumas po valstybinio socializmo laikotarpio Lenkijoje

Jakub Banasiak

Reikšminiai žodžiai: meninė veikla, nematomas darbas, Šiuolaikinio meno centras „Łaźnia“, neoliberalizmas, valstybinis socializmas.

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama meninės veiklos problema Lenkijoje pereinamuoju į neoliberalizmą laikotarpiu, analizuojant 2002 m. parodą *Sposób na życie* (*Gyvenimo būdas*) Gdanskio šiuolaikinio meno centre „Łaźnia“. Remiantis 41 menininko apklausa ir išsamiais interviu, straipsnyje atskleidžiama, kaip sisteminiai ekonominiai pokyčiai po 1989 m. paveikė menininkų materialines sąlygas ir simbolinį statusą. Analizė grindžiama Katjos Praznik meninės veiklos nematomumo kapitalizmo sąlygomis teorija, pagal kurią menas yra ideologiškai atskirtas nuo darbo srities.

Straipsnyje aptariamas ir XX a. 8–9 deš. Lenkijos Liaudies Respublikos politinis ir ekonominis kontekstas. Autorius parodo, kaip ekonominė krizė, didėjantis nedarbas ir decentralizacija pradėjo ardyti valstybės finansavimą ir infrastruktūrą dar valstybinio socializmo laikotarpiu. Užtikrintos paramos menininkams mažėjimas buvo įtvirtintas po 1989 m., kai neoliberalioji ideologija faktiškai delegitimizavo visas sisteminės paramos kultūrai formas. Ši virsmą lydėjo dominuojantis viešasis naratyvas, kuris valstybės paramą siejo su cenzūra ir neefektyvumu, o rinką pateikė kaip vienintelį „laisvą“ ir teisėtą meno egzistavimo kontekstą.

Remiantis surinktais duomenimis, straipsnyje parodoma, kaip naujasis ekonominis režimas naujai apibrėžė meną kaip verslį, individualistinę veiklą, atėmusią iš menininkų darbo apsaugą ir socialines garantijas. Analizė atskleidžia plačiai paplitusį menininkų nestabilumą: tik maža dalis galėjo išgyventi vien iš savo meno, dauguma turėjo papildomus darbus, o nemažai jų turėjo privačiai mokėti socialinio draudimo ir pensijos įmokas. Pats meno kūrinio kūrimo procesas tapo didele finansine našta, o beveik pusė respondentų gaudavo finansinę paramą iš šeimos. Tokios sąlygos iliustruoja

Praznik įvardytą neoliberalų meninės veiklos sumenkinimą: nors pats menas yra šlovinamas, už jo slypintis darbas lieka nuvertintas ir nematomas.

Interviu su skirtingų kartų menininkais atskleidžia įvairias reakcijas į šias sąlygas. Vyresni menininkai, tokie kaip Jerzy Bereśas ir Przemysławas Kwiekas, apgailestavo dėl socialinių garantijų bei stiprios valstybės globos žlugimo. Jaunesni menininkai, tarp jų Pawełas Althameris, Julita Wójcik ir Bogna Burska, prisitaikė perimdami rinkos logiką ir kurdami verslumo principais pagrįstas išlikimo strategijas.

Paroda *Gyvenimo būdas* tapo retai pasitaikančia vieša refleksija apie posocialistinės Lenkijos meninio gyvenimo socialines ir ekonomines realijas. Straipsnyje ši paroda pristatoma kaip svarbus to laikotarpio dokumentas, pabrėžiantis būtinybę konceptualizuoti meną kaip darbą ir permąstyti kultūros politiką už neoliberalaus modelio ribų.