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Künstlerstube

Introduction

In the post-war history of the National Museum in Warsaw, Jan Białostocki (1921–88) was the *spiritus movens* of its modern academic and museological format. To this day, research pursued by this world-class scholar as well as the exhibitions and permanent galleries he prepared still serve as the founding myth of the Museum, where he worked as a curator between 1956 and 1988.[1]

In the words of its author, the text presented below, written between 1987 and 1988 and published in Fermentum massae mundi. *Jackowi Woźniakowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin* [*Fermentum massae mundi*. To Jacek Woźniakowski on his 70th birthday],[2] "is not an academic treatise. Nor is it a scholarly reconstruction of past events, but an account of [his] own experience." But is this really the case? Is this really nothing more than a friendly *cadeau* that follows the conventions of a perfunctory tribute in a "festschrift" guest book? A regular

[1] Jan Białostocki started working at the National Museum in Warsaw in the autumn of 1945. Initially, he performed various delegated tasks, but later became a full-time employee and Michał Walicki's assistant. In 1955, he was promoted to custodian, and in 1956, to curator of the Gallery of Foreign Art. In 1961, he became the academic editor and editor-in-chief of *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie*. He remained a curator at the NMW until his death in 1988 – see Antoni Ziemba, "Jan Białostocki," *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, vol. 36 (2011), pp. 157–71. Jan Białostocki's academic achievements in various fields and disciplines of art history (theory, history of theory, iconography, iconology, museology, monographic research of artists and works, etc.) were discussed by Piotr Skubiszewski, Sergiusz Michalski and Bożena Steinborn in *Ars longa. Prace dedykowane pamięci profesora Jana Białostockiego* (Materials from the session of the Association of Art Historians, Warsaw, November 1998), Maria Poprzęcka, ed. (Warsaw, 1999); and in: Juliusz A. Chrościcki, "Jan Białostocki 1921–1988," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, vol. 51, no. 2 (1989), pp. 208–15; id., "In memoriam Jan Białostocki 1921–1988," *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 10, no. 20 (1989), pp. 9–14; Franco Bernabei, "Jan Bialostocki. Formalism and Iconology," *Artibus et Historiae*, 12 (1990), pp. 9–23; Lech Kalinowski, "Jan Białostocki jako historyk sztuki," *Folia Historiae Atrium*, 25 (1992), pp. 5–11. See also *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, vol. 10 (1991) (devoted to the memory of Jan Białostocki, with papers by: Janina Michałkowa, Stanisław Lorenz, Andrzej Vincenz, Irena Jakimowicz, Juliusz A. Chrościcki, Tadeusz Chrzanowski, Anna Dobrzycka, Paulina Ratkowska, Marek Rostworowski, Andrzej Rottermund, Jacek Woźniakowski, André Chastel, Justyna Guze, Jirina Hořejši, Jarmila Vacková, Rüdiger Klessmann, Jerzy Z. Łoziński, Sergiusz Michalski, Maria Poprzęcka, Mieczysław Porębski, Willibald Sauerländer, Piotr Skubiszewski, Lyckle de Vries, and Wilfried Wiegand). A critical analysis of Białostocki's beliefs and approaches may be found in texts published in *Białostocki. Materiały Seminarium Metodologicznego Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki. Jan Białostocki – między tradycją a innowacją*, Nieborów, October 23rd–25th, 2008, Magdalena Wróblewska, ed. (Warsaw, 2009) (with papers by: Ryszard Kasperowicz, Michał Haake, Maria Poprzęcka, Ingrid Ciulisová, Ján Bakoš, Wojciech Bałus, Mateusz Salwa, Gabriela Świtek, Stanisław Czekalski, Joanna Kilian, Agnieszka Rosales Rodríguez, and Grażyna Bastek). For a critical view of Białostocki's conservative role vis-à-vis the emerging new art history, in its Poznań branch – see Mariusz Bryl, *Suwerenność dyscypliny. Polemiczna historia historii sztuki od 1970 roku* (Poznań, 2008), pp. 16–21, 199–200 and passim. Bibliographies of Białostocki's works may be found in *Ars auro prior. Studia Ioanni Białostocki Sexagenario dicata* (Warsaw, 1981), pp. 757–68 and *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego*, 35 (1991), pp. 311–18.

[2] Fermentum massae mundi. *Jackowi Woźniakowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, Piotr Rudziński, eds (Warsaw, 1990).

memorial essay, a mere gesture of respect and friendship for the septuagenarian? No. There is more to it.[3]

The text is thoroughly unique within the body of Jan Białostocki's academic and written works. Białostocki – a paragon of modesty, yet modesty underpinned with an awareness of his own scholarly worth that need not be manifested (an "Olympian scholar," as we used to say, residing on Mount Olympus of world science) – never spoke or wrote about himself, his personal history and experience.[4] This is Białostocki's only personal testimony; a breach in the wall of distance to himself and his own life story, in the objectivism required – as he believed – to maintain the neo-Kantian (and Popperian) paradigm of science understood as studying the external world and its History, universal history.

His essay contains an overt – albeit not explicitly stated – allusion to the figure of its addressee, Jacek Woźniakowski (1920–2012), art historian, writer, essayist, publisher, literary translator, professor at the Catholic University of Lublin and opposition activist in communist Poland. Woźniakowski – heir to the knightly ethos carried forward by the nobility and aristocracy – was one of the uhlans fighting in the September 1939 Campaign. Severely wounded, this is how he gained the legendary scar on his cheek – although masked with a carefully trimmed beard, it gave him an air of noble solemnity and mystery that inevitably excited romantic feelings in women, infatuated with the handsome man. During the occupation, Woźniakowski was active in the resistance. He worked in the clandestine organization "Uprawa" (Cultivation), later renamed "Tarcza" (Shield), and served as adjutant to the commander of the Mielec Home Army unit. "Shield" was an underground association of noblemen and aristocrats (one of its founders was Karol Hilary Tarnowski) – Woźniakowski, who was related to the Tarnowskis, the Platers, the Czapskis and the Stadnickis, also belonged to this elite. Members of "Shield" maintained ties with the Polish Underground State: they collected funds for its operations, gathered information in the field, gave shelter to Home Army soldiers, organized the purchase and transport of weapons, raised ransom funds for Gestapo prisoners, provided first-aid trainings and medical supplies. After the war, Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski summed it up thus: "Had it not been for 'Cultivation-Shield,' the Home Army would have been unable to fulfil many of its fundamental tasks [...] 'Shield' protected a number of guerrilla units, which sprung up like mushrooms after 1943, from hunger, moral corruption and plunder."[5] A fragment of this assessment merits emphasis: "protected from hunger, moral corruption [...]," saved members of the resistance from physical and spiritual destruction. The words "protect" and "save" are crucial here.

With his text about the *Künstlerstube* in a German concentration camp, Białostocki seems to compare Woźniakowski's war-time fate with his own traumatic experience. In a way, he does so in response to Woźniakowski's question of whether culture indeed represents a prerequisite for salvation, laid out in the title of his book *Czy kultura jest do zbawienia koniecznie potrzebna?* (Krakow, 1988). Białostocki knew that the book was in the making, and was probably familiar with the first version of the title essay from 1980.

[3] My understanding of Białostocki's essay is partly based on having observed his approach (also towards Woźniakowski) and heard his statements about science and scholars during my time as his assistant at the University of Warsaw between 1984 and 1988.

[4] His private conversation from October 1973, recalled by Piotr Skubiszewski, is unique in this respect – see "Jan Białostocki. Fragmenty wspomnień," *Zeszyty Literackie*, Ann. 34, no. 4 (136) (2016), pp. 192–200, esp. p. 199.

[5] See <https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uprawa_(organizacja_konspiracyjna)#cite_ref-2>, [retrieved: 15 October 2019].

To this question, Białostocki responds with a wholehearted: yes! we need it! Not just for the purpose of salvation, but for existential survival; to preserve life, to save ourselves. Save our physical, but also spiritual being; salvage our humanistic and cultural values. In the context of extreme danger, in a world that exterminates all life, culture is there to save lives – in a world of "bare life," revealed carnality, and naked physicality, a world that oppressively deprives victims of any values of the spirit and any humanistic identity.[6] Białostocki writes with his seemingly cool, yet chilling words: "[...] one autumn day I was taken [...] to the bath-house, given a fresh striped uniform and transferred to Block No. 12, which housed an art workshop [...] the *Künstlerstube*. [...] For the first time in my life, I felt the benefits resulting from one's association with art. [...] In this vale of wretchedness, devastation, misery and barbarism embodied by the concentration camp, I had found myself in [...] an oasis established on a whim of the authorities. Under the auspices of art."[7]

Behind (rather than within) the text are the fundamental, traditional formulas of historico-philosophical and politico-historical discourse in the sphere of art history and imaging. Protecting the meaning of art in spite of the surroundings, in spite of the "wretchedness, devastation, misery and barbarism" that ruled this upside-down world ("the SS officers – although they decided on the life and death of artists, like all other *Häftlings* – were also customers. They had to acknowledge the competence of *Häftling*-artists [...]"), is an expression of absolute faith in the saving power of art (the power of beauty topos, traced by Białostocki in Alberti's writings[8]) and in the saving power of humanist culture, which enables the oppressed to preserve their humanity. Białostocki's essay is rooted in the paradigm (or mere myth) of being saved by culture at a time when people and culture are being annihilated. This is how Białostocki understood the figure and work of Erwin Panofsky, who, "having been exiled from Germany in 1933 [...], [when] he decided to visit his homeland – the same one that had once exiled him and the one he renounced – the year before he died, after thirty-three years, [...] he proudly acknowledged the great traditions of German science, [and] dissociated himself from [...] the remnants of retrogressive German patriotism."[9] It could be argued that through their continuation of the Great Tradition of humanistic culture, both Panofsky and Białostocki (whose fate the former scholar avoided, having emigrated to the United States) in fact – particularly in their studies of Dürer – defended this tradition, also in its German incarnation, against the *abusus*: against deformation, degeneration of norms, uprooting, and savagery instigated by barbarism and hostility towards the rational logos, the most extreme manifestation thereof being Nazi nationalism. The Nazism of concentration camps experienced by Białostocki – paradoxically, and all the more cruelly – turned this *abusus* not into *anomie*, a condition where norms and values are suspended, but into the norm, *nomos*, legalization of the "inhuman," the authorization of anti-humanism as policy.

[6] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, transl. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, 1998).

[7] For a description of camp "institutions" that were similar to the *Künstlerstube* experienced by Białostocki and his fellow inmates in Konzentrazionslager Linz III, such as the Lagermuseum in Auschwitz – see Agnieszka Sieradzka, *Twarzą w twarz. Sztuka w Auschwitz. W 70. rocznicę utworzenia Muzeum na terenie byłego niemieckiego nazistowskiego obozu koncentracyjnego i zagłady / Face to face. Art in Auschwitz. On the 70th anniversary of creating the Museum on the site of the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp*, transl. by Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, William Brandt, exh. cat., The National Museum in Krakow, 2017 (Krakow, 2017).

[8] Jan Białostocki, "Potęga piękna. O utopijnej idei L.B. Albertiego," *Estetyka*, 4 (1963), pp. 127–37. See also a reprint of this paper in id., *Sztuka i myśl humanistyczna. Studia z dziejów sztuki i myśli o sztuce* (Warsaw, 1966), pp. 53–58.

[9] Id., "Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968), myśliciel, historyk, człowiek," in Erwin Panofsky, *Studia z historii sztuki*, compiled by Jan Białostocki (Warsaw, 1971), pp. 387–417, cited on p. 388.

In his ground-breaking books *The Practice of Theory* (1994) and *The Practice of Persuasion* (2001),[10] Keith Moxey contained a brilliant review of Panofsky's thought and approach manifested in his worldview, effectively confirming Białostocki's earlier diagnosis. The scholar's insistence – within the iconological method – on treating historical phenomena as part of the normal course of events, as the source of modern humanist civilization, undoubtedly resulted from his own personal situation. Throughout his entire oeuvre, he maintained a covert debate with the German tradition of idealist philosophy – from the old humanism, through Hegel and Kant, to Cassirer and Heidegger, his adversary; and with the great tradition of writing about art and its history – from Dürer's Renaissance theory of art, through Heinrich Wölfflin and Alois Riegel, to Aby Warburg. Panofsky was historically excluded from this tradition, having been exiled from Germany by Nazism and forced to renounce and reject his Germanness. Nevertheless, he subconsciously treated this tradition as part of his identity and strove to cherish it, treating it as a guarantee of European culture being "saved" and "redeemed" from the sin of Hitlerism. As has been demonstrated by Moxey, who analysed Panofsky's historiographic theory in one of the chapters of *The Practice of Theory*,[11] this "saviour" concept of humanist culture was fuelled by his structuring of Dürer's persona and work, presented in papers and monograph *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (1943). There, writing from the standpoint of an American university scholar, he created the artist's image as that of a genius who maintained contacts with German humanists and adapted the Italian Renaissance to the northern culture of burghers and trade guilds.

In a number of his works, Białostocki also shaped the image of Dürer as a man rooted in the North European world of artists-craftsmen, of manufacturers united in guilds, yet aspiring to the status enjoyed by Italian artists – as a scholar of antiquity, learned humanist and refined *gentiluomo* – belonging to the universal community of the European humanist tradition.[12] He also showed Dürer's later myth, where the ideas of universal humanism and enlightened rationalism clashed with the dangerous idea of German nationalism and Teutonic pan-Germanism (Dürer as the German Raphael).[13]

This belief in the saving, redeeming power of art and culture, unwavering even at a time of civilizational and humanitarian collapse, is the putative key required to interpret the moving confession made to Jacek Woźniakowski. We publish it again in Polish and, for the first time, also in English. We believe it will reiterate the scholar's attitude and position in the line of thinkers defending the great humanist tradition: Riegel, Cassirer, Warburg, and Panofsky, with him – Białostocki – irrevocably (?) concluding this procession.

Antoni Ziemba

[10] Keith Moxey, *The Practice of Theory. Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History* (New York, 1994); id., *The Practice of Persuasion. Paradoxes and Power in Art History* (New York, 2001).

[11] Keith Moxey, "Panofsky's Melancolia," in id., *The Practice of Theory*..., op. cit., pp. 65–78.

[12] Jan Białostocki, *Albrecht Dürer jako pisarz i teoretyk sztuki* (Warsaw, 1956); id., "O teorii sztuki Albrechta Dürera," in id., *Pięć wieków myśli o sztuce*, 2nd ed. (Warsaw, 1976), pp. 32–73; id., "*Opus quinque dierum*. Obraz Dürera *Chrystus wśród mędrców żydowskich* i jego źródła," in id., *Teoria i twórczość. O tradycji i inwencji w teorii sztuki i ikonografii* (Poznań, 1961), pp. 81– 104; id., "Dürer i Reformacja," in id., *Symbole i obrazy w świecie sztuki* (Warsaw, 1982), pp. 234–67; id., "Mit i alegoria w miedziorytach i akwafortach Dürera," in *Symbole i obrazy*..., op. cit., pp. 141–48; id., "Dürer i humaniści," in id., *Refleksje i syntezy ze świata sztuki. Cykl drugi* (Warsaw, 1987), pp. 112–26.

[13] Jan Białostocki, *Dürer and His Critics, 1500–1971. Chapters in the History of Ideas, Including a Collection of Texts* (Baden-Baden, 1986).

A LITTLE KNOWN FORM of "patronage of the arts" involved artists being used by German concentration camp officials. Without a doubt, this phenomenon was of a marginal nature, yet its significance for the sociology of art is not negligible, as in it, one may observe certain more general mechanisms. Art was able to establish its place even in the inhuman world of concentration camps, although its value may be assessed in many different ways.

Individual camp commandants were most likely free to choose whether or not to use any talents the inmates could have possessed. Of course, to what extent they did so and with what results depended on a number of circumstances. I have no insight into the statistical side of this phenomenon. The following observations are based on but one example, yet one I have learned through personal experience. Hence I think it would be worthwhile to share whatever remains in my memory after more than forty years, as it may serve as material for potential generalizations or provoke the publication of similar observations.

My gift for our dear septuagenarian is not an academic treatise. Nor is it a scholarly reconstruction of past events, but an account of my own experience.

In early September 1944, after the fall of Warsaw's Old Town, along with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants of the capital, I was deported deep into Germany, where I found myself in the Gross-Rosen concentration camp (today's Rogoźnica in Lower Silesia), and – when asked about my profession upon registration – I gave the only one to which, at that time, I could confess: *Kunstgraphiker*. During the occupation, I started studying philosophy under the guidance of Władysław Tatarkiewicz and Tadeusz Kotarbiński, and – having passed most of my exams – I was preparing to begin work on my master's thesis. Yet it did not seem wise to inform the German clerk that I was a "student," let alone a "philosopher." Nevertheless, given that I had occasionally made a living by making prints or designing paper advertisements even before the war, and starting from 1942 – in parallel to academic courses – I took up graphic arts (between 1943 and 1944, I studied xylography under the tutelage of Tadeusz Cieślewski Jr.), achieving proficiency in the use of a woodcutter's burin, I thought that stating an artistic profession would not contradict the truth, and could prove beneficial.

During my brief stay at Gross-Rosen, this proved of no consequence for my fate. Two weeks later, new transports were formed in Gross-Rosen, and after another journey, from which I remember a distant view of the Regensburg cathedral (seen through grated windows), I found myself in the Mauthasen concentration camp in Upper Austria. There, too, I was to spend but a short while (long enough, though, to forever remember the Dantesque crater of the quarry and the procession of stone-carrying inmates climbing its never-ending stairs), and after two further weeks, I was sent to Linz III concentration camp, one of the many branches of the Mauthausen headquarters. Linz I had already been wiped out in an Allied bombing, Linz II was a small camp, but Linz III, situated on a plain between the Danube and the river Enns, was enlarged to concentrate the workforce required for the vast Hermann Göring Werke, an ammunition and armament factory that manufactured Tiger tanks. Because of the camp's location, there were multiple air-raid warnings every day, and bombings took place almost on a daily – or nightly – basis.

Here it is worth reminding that the structure of concentration camps was based on theoretical autonomy supervised by a group of SS officers and non-commissioned officers as well as a unit of soldiers of the same formation acting as guardsmen. Inmates were divided into blocks, each of which had its "elder" (*Blockältester*) and secretary (*Blockschreiber*), responsible for the block's headcount, administration and order. Each block had its own chancellery (*Blockschreibstube*). The entire camp was headed by a "camp elder" (*Lagerältester*). All these

functions were appointed by SS authorities. Administration of the whole camp as well as matters concerning employment and cooperation with industrial plants were concentrated in the camp secretariat (*Lagerschreibstube*), which was run by a few inmates with the rank of *Lagerschreiber* who were responsible for the headcount of the entire camp, the composition and proper number of work teams (*Kommando*) that completed various tasks (under the directions of kapos that headed them).

Soon after arriving in Linz, I was called to the aforementioned *Lagerschreibstube*. Having noticed the profession stated in my card, one of the camp's central secretaries, who was interested in matters of art, had me brought before him and started asking about my experience and skills. His name was Herbert Jentzen, he was – if I remember correctly – a theatre critic, and he ended up in the camp for neither political nor criminal reasons.[14] He was also the person to whom I owed my further, relatively favourable fate in the concentration world. At the outset, I had worked in ad hoc work teams – such as *Kommando Zaunbau* or *Kommando Fachdecker* (it was then, as I was laying tiles on the tall roof of the camp's supply centre, that I learned to walk on a steep roof in clogs) – and I spent a day or two at the aforementioned tank factory, which gave me a foretaste of what my artistic profession was to spare me from. After a few weeks, Jentzen's efforts yielded results, and one autumn day I was taken from Block No. 2, to which I belonged, brought to the bath-house, given a fresh striped uniform and transferred to Block No. 12, which housed an art workshop – the proper subject of this sketch: the *Künstlerstube*.

For the first time in my life, I felt the benefits resulting from one's association with art. I had entered a different, better world. In this vale of wretchedness, devastation, misery and barbarism embodied by the concentration camp, I had found myself in the best possible place, an oasis established on a whim of the authorities. Under the auspices of art.

When I arrived at this temple of art within the camp, I found three visual artists and two musicians. One of them, violinist Henryk Splewiński from Sosnowiec, saved himself from annihilation there in an amazing twist of fate. He wore the Star of David on his chest until the end and happily lived to see liberation. The second one, named Brauner, was an elderly man; his image is blurred in my memory. Portraitist Eugeniusz Zajdner was also of Jewish origin and also came from Poland, from Upper Silesia. The two remaining ones, Alexei Remiga and Alosha, whose surname I forgot, were Russian. All three worked with drawing and painting – with Zajdner almost exclusively making portraits. Remiga did watercolours: landscapes or flowers. The young Alosha is blurred in my memory; I think he was not part of the group throughout my entire stay.

Yet I do not mean to recall memories of myself or other specific people here, but to provide a short description of this phenomenon – to what extent was it an isolated case, I do not know. It is a known fact that orchestras operated in a number of concentration camps: the scene from Andrzej Munk's *Passenger*, where the camp orchestra and soloist perform the second part of Bach's violin concerto in E major in front of an auditorium of SS murderers, has certainly become etched in the memory of many viewers of this film. Splewiński led precisely such an ensemble, although it was less ambitious and performed a rather popular programme. It rehearsed in the *Künstlerstube*; it was then that I had the unwarranted opportunity of memorizing the overture to Franz von Suppé's *Light Cavalry*. However, the musical aspect

[14] After liberation, Herbert Jentzen spent a few years running the Linz theatre.

of this endeavour does not seem to merit too much attention. On the other hand, I do not know whether art workshops – painting or printmaking ones – were a frequent feature of concentration camps.

With me, the three painters employed in the Linz *Künstlerstube* gained a printmaker. Of course, graphic art was out of the question. My activity focused, above all, on design. My clients included both SS officers and camp aristocracy: block leaders, secretaries, the occasional kapo, and employees of the main secretariat. Jentzen, who oversaw the *Künstlerstube*, visited it almost every day. Of course, he acted with permission from the camp's commandant, SS Oberscharführer from Stuttgart named Schepperle, whose alleged civilian profession was principal of an arts and crafts school. In any case, he was interested in the *Künstlerstube*'s work and occasionally visited it. Whoever was the first to see an SS-man enter was supposed to shout "Achtung!" Everyone would jump up from their seats, interrupting their work. In that respect, the *Künstlerstube* was no different from the rest of the camp. Yet the SS officers – although they decided on the life and death of artists, like all other *Häftlings* – were also customers. They had to acknowledge the competence of *Häftling*-artists as well as their talent, which enabled them to create evocative portraits with the use of pencil and paper. Some wanted to send home a portrait with new insignias, others – New Year's wishes, others still – condolences, which were becoming increasingly frequent. The latter tasks fell to me. It so happened that I was the only artist in the *Künstlerstube* with any experience or routine in terms of lettering or graphic layout. I was practically without competition.

When New Year 1945 approached, my one-person workshop was hopelessly overburdened. Almost all of the twelve block leaders wanted to send wishes to colleagues from other blocks, then came secretaries, kapos and, last but not least, customers *hors concours*, SS officers, whose orders obviously had to be completed outside the normal order. Countless times, I found myself calligraphing *Herzliche Teilnahme*, seeing it as an indication of frontline defeats and evidence of bombs falling on German cities.

Some tasks were special, difficult even, for instance when one of the patrons with a Totenkopf skull on his cap wanted me to make a copy of Hans Thoma's *Taunustal*. I had no experience in that respect, but – relying on a large reproduction – I had to produce a passable repetition of this otherwise pretty landscape with a vast valley opening up towards the distance.

Work for SS personnel was our duty. What we did for other inmates, even the so-called prominent ones, block leaders or kapos, was against compensation. As is generally known, the camp currency were cigarettes. Since I did not smoke, I soon became rather well-off for camp conditions, despite having started from scratch. I earned around five to fifteen cigarettes on individual commissions, which – during the holiday peak – gave rather substantial earnings (for comparison, forty cigarettes were enough to buy good shoes manufactured by a good Warsaw-based company). Having lifted me from the deepest wretchedness, danger and misery, my relationship with art gave me an opportunity to attain relative camp affluence and help others with whom I came in contact.

Of course, we had technical problems concerning supplies of materials and tools. However, these were relatively easy to overcome. Zajdner, who was head of the team, demonstrated his organizational skills in that respect. Once he notified the relevant need, there came a delegated SS officer, under whose supervision Zajdner (with his Star of David on the striped uniform) went to town and bought everything we needed to work in the *Künstlerstube* in a shop in Linz (in any case, whatever could be obtained there without greater difficulties just months before the end of the war). This is how the workshop operated throughout the autumn and winter of 1944 and the spring of 1945.

Artists often come into contact with the higher echelons of power and money. This, too, proved to be the case in the concentration camp. Yet our contacts in the *Künstlerstube* also stretched to those who secretly represented the camp's clandestine brain, mostly gathered in its Secretariat. They had ties to secret organizations within other camps of the Mauthausen system, they had news, and they even dared to listen to foreign radio undercover – something unthinkable in camp conditions. When the frontlines advanced – and Linz was in the centre, so it was not clear which direction the army liberating the camp would come from – not long before the end, in the final days of April, the Russian major employed in the *Lagerschreibstube* escaped. Great alarm was raised, but the fugitive – who, thanks to his contacts with the factory, was able to hide in a private apartment of one of its civilian employees – survived in his hideout until liberation. Eugeniusz Zalewski,[15] the youngest member of the camp's secretariat, was promoted to his place. Zalewski's position – upon his initiative and thanks to the camp's main secretary Vaclavik – was then taken by myself. Thus, because of art, I had entered the camp's supreme elite, without making any steps to this end and even fearing such a situation. This entry into a world that was almost foreign to me removed me from the *Künstlerstube*, but by then, it was only a matter of days. On 5 May 1945, I watched the American Eighth Army liberating the camp already from a different – perhaps more interesting – perspective.

Although I remained forever tied to the world of art, with hindsight, this early experience in such unique conditions seems particularly valuable, as it brought to light certain mechanisms of this world that remained unchanged even in the inhumane circumstances of the war years.

Translated by Aleksandra Szkudłapska

[15] Eugeniusz Zalewski, with whom we set up the Polish Centre in Linz after the camp's liberation, was responsible, among others, for organizing the return of thousands of Poles deported to Upper Austria; he currently works as a professor of economics in Paris.