Agata Szydłowska
ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS IN WARSAW

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"Lambrequins Are a No-Go!" Critics', Artists', and Journalists' Interior-Design Discourses During the "Small Stabilization" Era[1]

In 1960, the first issue of the *Ty i Ja* [You and Me] monthly hit the newsstands.[2] It was a late child of the post-Stalin "Thaw" era – a modern colour magazine devoted to material culture (design, fashion), everyday life (health, parenting, pets, beauty and so on), food, and also popularizing science and art (literature, film, visual arts); the layout was highly sophisticated and almost as important as text. The art director from the 2nd issue onwards was Roman Cieślewicz, in 1963 briefly replaced by Franciszek Starowieyski and then by Elżbieta Strzałecka and Bogdan Żochowski, who remained on the job until the magazine's closure in 1973. Already in the 2nd issue the readers were treated to some specific advice on how to inhabit. In a piece called, "How to Reconcile Furniture at Odds," Tadeusz Reindl asks the fundamental question of whether one should buy a dark- or light-coloured set. And he replies slyly, "First of all, not a set at all. I firmly advise against buying sets, which are both expensive and no longer en vogue. It's far more reasonable to buy single pieces, which, as our family grows or we move to a larger home, can be gradually added, without splashing out on a whole set."[3] He then goes on to recommend, for small homes, bright furniture with large surfaces (which makes the room look bigger) and dark openwork styles. He suggests two particular dark-and-light designs: a chair by Maria

[1] This essay has been written under the research commission no. ASP/WW/3/PB in the Chair of Design History and Theory, Faculty of Design, Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

[2] Various aspects of the *Ty i Ja* monthly have been discussed by both cultural studies scholars and design historians, e.g., Szymon Bojko, "'Ty i Ja'. Miesięcznik spod lady," *2+3D*, no. II (2003), pp. 23–27; David Crowley, "Applied fantastic (on the Polish Women's League magazine *Ty i Ja*)," *Dot Dot Dot*, no. 9 (2015), pp. 41–49; Klara Czerniewska, "Pragnienie rzeczy. Rozmowa z Teresą Kuczyńską" [online], *Dwutygodnik.com*, at: <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/3649-pragnienie-rzeczy.html>, [retrieved: 28 February 2019]; Justyna Jaworska, "Konsumeryzm po polsku. Reklama na łamach 'Ty i Ja'," in *Słowo/Obraz*, Agnieszka Karpowicz, Iwona Kurz, eds (Warsaw, 2010); ead., "Między modą a habitusem. Mieszkania polskiej inteligencji z lat sześćdziesiątych w magazynie 'Ty i Ja,'" *Kultura Współczesna*, no. 4 (2013), pp. 87–96; ead., "Moje hobby to mieszkanie" [online], *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej*, no. 1 (2013), at: <http://pismowidok.org/index.php/one/article/view/27/20>, [retrieved: 15 May 2018]; ead., "Roman Cieślewicz. Double Player. The Case of the *Ty i Ja* Magazine," in *Means ir politika: rytų Europos atvejai*, Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto Leidykla, Linara Dovydaitytė, ed. (Kaunas, 2007), pp. 152–57; Piotr Korduba, "Pomieszanie Ładu z Desą," *Wysokie Obcasy*, no. 48 (2014), pp. 38–41; Iwona Kurz, "Obiecanki-wycinanki, czyli „Ty i Ja" jako katalog rzeczy niespełnionych" [online], *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej*, no. 1 (2013), at: <http://pismowidok.org/index.php/one/article/view/14/19>, [retrieved: 12 February 2019]; Lidia Pańków, "Pięknoduchy, pies ich trącał," *Wysokie Obcasy*, no. 52 (2012), pp. 16–21; "Ty. Ja. Rzeczy," *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej*, no. 1 (2013), at: <http://pismowidok.org/index.php/one/article/view/14/19>, [retrieved: 12 February 2019]. See also Agata Szydłowska, *Paryż domowym sposobem. O kreowaniu stylu życia w czasopismach PRL* (Warsaw, 2019).

[3] Tadeusz Reindl, "Jak godzić pokłócone meble," *Ty i Ja*, no. 2 (1960), p. 49.

Chomętowska and a table by Zdzisław Wróblewski, but explains that, "Unfortunately, neither is available as of yet." There is, however, a solution for that: we can repaint the furniture we already have. In the article "Something Nice for Everyone," Irena Lange and Alicja Babicz bring the reader's attention to ceramics, which, they say, have utterly supplanted outmoded, "cold" crystalware, once the main décor highlight of bourgeois homes. They stress, however, that earthenware needs to be matched to the ambience and background; for example, a ceramic piece can be placed on a bookshelf to make it appear more lightweight. "A tall earthen pot or clay jug with a uniform glaze is an excellent decoration. You place it on the floor in an empty corner or by the wall. Dried branches arranged inside fill space nicely, forming a delicate ornament against the bare wall."[4] Do not, however, mix folk pottery with modern ceramics. In the same issue, readers receive another categorical warning: "Lambrequins are a no-go!"[5] It's better to use brightly-coloured small curtains instead.

Already this cursory review of the interior-design themes of the 2nd issue of *Ty i Ja* allows us to make some general conclusions about trends in stylish-home advice at the outset of the "small stabilization" era. The key issue was furnishing small homes. Modern, bright furniture was recommended, with DIY strategies encouraged to cope with market shortages. Readers were warned against imitating bourgeois interiors, which were associated with heavy furniture sets, crystal glassware, and lambrequins; instead, folk motifs were cited as trending. Similar tips could be found in other magazines (e.g., *Kobieta i Życie* or *Stolica*), in how-to books, and in home décor exhibitions; film was another medium through which ideas spread.

The purpose of this essay is to examine interior-design discourses formed by experts and aimed at the general reader, while reconstructing their implicit assumptions about class-determined hierarchy of tastes. Magazines, how-to books, exhibitions, and films are considered here as mediators not so much – as is the case in a market economy – between manufacturers and consumers as between authority (meant literally as the Party and its ideologues, but also less literally as experts vested with symbolic and cultural capital) and citizens-consumers susceptible to disciplining.

Design historian Grace Lees-Maffei has noted that besides research into production and consumption, a third trend has emerged in design history studies, namely one focused on mediation.[6] The first strand of research, most firmly rooted in art history, preoccupies itself with objects and their makers. The second one shifts attention to the consumers and users, to the ways – as historian Matthew Hilton writes – in which identity is established in a commodified world, whether actively by the consumers themselves, by marketing and sales experts manipulating their desires, or through interaction with objects whose function is hidden under layers of symbolic meaning.[7] According to Lees-Maffei, the third stream of research deals with mediation, combining aspects of production and consumption, not, however, by studying designers' or consumers' intentions, but rather by analyzing the cultural and social meaning of designed objects, spaces, and processes that bespeak of shared ideas and ideals. "Within the [production–consumption–mediation] paradigm, the term 'mediation'

[4] Irena Lange, Alicja Babicz, "Dla każdego coś miłego," *Ty i Ja*, no. 2 (1960), p. 50.

[5] "Do chrzanu z takim oknem," *Ty i Ja*, no. 2 (1960), pp. 51–52.

[6] Grace Lees-Maffei, "The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm," *Journal of Design History*, no. 4 (2009), pp. 351–76.

[7] Ibid.

encompasses at least three mutually constitutive phenomena: first, the mediation emphasis continues the consumption turn within design history by exploring the role of channels such as television, magazines, corporate literature, advice literature and so on in mediating between producers and consumers, forming consumption practices and ideas about design; second, the mediation emphasis examines the extent to which mediating channels are themselves designed and therefore open to design historical analysis [...] third, the mediation emphasis investigates the role of designed goods themselves as mediating devices – designed objects mediate between producer and consumer, just as they are used to mediate relations between individuals."[8] The researcher notes, however, that the methodology so described applies to the analysis of production, consumption, and mediation in Great Britain and possibly also in the United States, and she herself is unable to say to what extent her observations can be useful with respect to other geographical and cultural areas. Indeed, as she defines it, the "production–consumption–mediation paradigm" may be best applicable to researching design discourses in developed capitalist economies, and the very definition of mediation as intercession between the producer and the consumer can preclude the method's usefulness in reflecting on design within a centrally-planned economy. However, as design historian Kjetil Fallan notes, researching mediation areas can be an inspiring strategy for gaining a better understanding of the negotiation not only between production and consumption, but also between ideology and pragmatism, or between theory and practice.[9] As far as expert discourses from the "small stabilization" era are concerned, the tensions between ideology and pragmatism, between aspirations and possibilities, seem crucial.

Browsing through lifestyle magazines, women's magazines, or popular weeklies from the late 1950s and early 1960s, one may get the impression that the entire society started settling down, and among the key issues faced by citizens of People's Poland were those related to the furnishing of small and cramped apartments and the limited supply of consumer goods. Indeed, after the "Thaw" privacy was back in favour, and there was a new focus on weaving a cosy nest as an enclave to protect oneself from the not very friendly public sphere. The authorities sanctioned that: a heightened interest in domestic life could serve to keep women at home, which – after the era of employing them as factory workers and tractor drivers – was becoming increasingly desirable, with the post-"Thaw" labour policy resulting in a shortage of jobs for women.[10] At the same time, the authorities knew that those citizens who would get hold of their eagerly awaited own home and then furnish it with domestic appliances would be unwilling to give up the newly achieved comfort and, consequently, would set store by family bonds.[11] In other words, the hard-won refrigerators or TV sets were meant to serve as agents of the model of the traditional nuclear family, confined within their four walls and isolated from the rest of society. Giving a green light to a consumerist turn and offering citizens a limited – but still far greater than during the Stalinist era – range of consumer goods was also a bargaining chip, used deliberately at a time when Nikita Khrushchev revealed Stalin's crimes in the "Secret Speech." The Soviet-bloc regimes knew that they needed a new legitima-

[8] Ibid., p. 351.

[9] Kjetil Fallan, *Design history. Understanding theory and method* (London–New York, 2014), p. 18.

[10] Małgorzata Fidelis, *Kobiety, komunizm i industrializacja w powojennej Polsce* (Warsaw, 2010), p. 22.

[11] Kacper Pobłocki, "'Knife in the Water.' The Struggle over Collective Consumption in Urbanizing Poland," in *Communism Unwrapped. Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe,* Paulina Bren, Mary Neuburger, eds (Oxford, 2012), p. 73.

cy other than terror.[12] After the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 and the Poznań protests in June that year, the authorities were afraid of further unrest and assumed – probably not without a reason – that the public, worn by war, poverty, and Stalinism, would gladly accept wider access to consumer goods and permission to celebrate privacy, security, entertainment, and leisure.

The enthusiasm that consumption was now feted with was directly proportional to the hostility meted out by the regime when – only a few years earlier in the Stalinist era, even the slightest interest in everyday life was discouraged. The visual synecdoche of Stalinism would be a marching crowd. Rather than consisting of individuals, it is an efficient human machine, driven by a particular political goal that is not to be questioned or modified. The individual wasn't considered a value; what mattered was the crowd, the collective: a society focused around the overriding goal of building socialism. Individual needs had to be subordinated to, or even suppressed on behalf of, higher goals. The family was meant to serve for the purpose of procreation (to ensure healthy natural growth and produce new builders of socialism), but emotional bonds between its members were not considered as being of import. The familial was subordinated to the social, so settling snugly within four walls was simply out of the question. Individual consumption needs mattered less than the task of post-war reconstruction, so the bulk of investment went into developing heavy industry at the expense of manufacturing everyday articles. During the period of intense industrialization and under the Stalinist Soviet model of distribution, the service role of retail trade was considered as unproductive, and therefore redundant.[13]

The first harbingers of change appeared shortly after Stalin's death in 1953. The *Przekrój* weekly published an infographic with drawings by Eugeniusz Bożyk, titled "For the Better Fulfilment of Daily Needs."[14] The author of the text explained to readers thirsting for basic products that without sufficient development of heavy industry it wouldn't be "possible to lift up the consumer goods industry, to launch a mass-scale production of bicycles, radios, kitchenware, or furniture [...]."[15] He promised, however, that the phase of intense industrialization was coming to an end and thanks to the successes achieved so far, the growing power of the "peace camp," and "invaluable help from the USSR," citizens' consumer needs would soon be satisfied. In the following issue, *Przekrój* brought further good news from the accessories and tropical fruit markets. A feature titled "What We'll Bring from Abroad"[16] envisaged the import of all kinds of delicacies as well as materials for the production of clothing and footwear – all that thanks to robust heavy-industry exports. Several issues later, in a report "I Visited a Pots and Pans Factory," Roman Burzyński asked a truly revolutionary question: "Will life become more enjoyable when we are able to buy a nicer set of kitchenware? Of course it will! For life consists not only of great and wise things, of high-brow culture, but also of trivial things, of small concerns and pleasures. The pleasure of frying eggs on a pan whose handle doesn't get your fingers burned occupies too a place in the hierarchy of existential matters."[17]

[12] David Crowley, "Thaw Modern. Design in Eastern Europe after 1956," in *Cold War Modern. Design 1945–1970*, David Crowley, Jane Pavitt, eds (London, 2008), pp. 131–32.

[13] Małgorzata Mazurek, *Społeczeństwo kolejki. O doświadczeniach niedoboru 1945–1989* (Warsaw, 2010), pp. 72–75.

[14] "O lepsze zaspokojenie potrzeb codziennych," *Przekrój*, no. 450 (1953), pp. 8–9.

[15] Ibid., p. 14.

[16] Olgierd Budrewicz, "Co sprowadzimy z zagranicy," *Przekrój*, no. 463 (1954), p. 4.

[17] Roman Burzyński, "Byłem w fabryce garnków," *Przekrój*, no. 466 (1954), p. 3.

In this context, the watershed event from the world of global politics and household appliances, i.e., the 1959 "Kitchen Debate" between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev, was a culmination of processes already in motion rather than their initiation. During the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, the same one during which he presented the report *On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences*, Khrushchev announced: "In setting ourselves the task of overtaking and surpassing the capitalist countries in per capita output, we are setting ourselves the task of overtaking and surpassing the richest capitalist countries in the matter of per capita consumption, of achieving a complete abundance in our country of every type of consumers' goods."[18] In 1959, when the US organized the American National Exhibition in Moscow – recruiting some of the top designers, such as George Nelson or Charles and Ray Eames, to work on it – the Americans were aware that they could impress the Soviets with their technological advancement in nothing but household appliances. Two years earlier, the USSR successfully placed the Earth's first artificial satellite, the Sputnik 1, in orbit. That came as a major blow to the Americans. They were not only losing the space race, but also suspected that the same rocket that launched the Sputnik into space could be used to carry nuclear weapons. The only area where the US dominated over its Cold-War foe at the time was the sphere of private life. Hence the show was an impressive display of the achievements of domesticated modernity: TV sets, washing machines, refrigerators. The event's climax was a series of exchanges between the hostile powers' leaders, held against the background of an American "miracle kitchen." Khrushchev bluffed, assuring Vice-President Nixon that Soviet citizens also had access to all kinds of modern home equipment, and while it was true that the Americans were ahead of the USSR in many respects, that, he stressed, was merely a temporary lead. At the same time, he sought to get the better of Nixon by arguing that the spacious, high-tech American "miracle kitchen" was in fact a "golden cage" for a professional housewife, while the compact (read: cramped) Soviet kitchen advanced the goal of women's emancipation.[19]

Władysław Gomułka, who in 1956 took over as First Secretary of the Polish communist party, was, of course, far from the sybaritism of Khrushchev, but in Poland too the mood for individual consumption became more favourable. Fixed-capital investment in the retail sector and light industry grew. In 1957, as advocated by economists such as Oskar Lange, some market-economy regulations were introduced to stimulate the production of consumer goods.[20] But as living conditions improved and new aspirations emerged, supply shortages remained acute.[21] The state-run economy was unable to satisfy growing consumer demand. The case of the furniture industry was symptomatic. There was a pressure to reduce costs, so quality deteriorated. Furniture was hard to get and expensive, but people still queued up in front of stores in anticipation of supplies. Even though the furniture industry gained pace in the 1960s and product series came in many varieties, the most successful models were still slated for

[18] Quoted in Crowley, op. cit., p. 133.

[19] Susan E. Reid, "The Khrushchev Kitchen. Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution," in *The Design History Reader*, Grace Lees-Maffei, Rebecca Houze, eds (Oxford–New York, 2010), p. 162.

[20] David Crowley, "Warsaw's Shops, Stalinism and the Thaw," in *Style and Socialism, Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, David Crowley, Susan E. Reid, eds (Oxford–New York, 2000), pp. 39–40.

[21] Błażej Brzostek, "Wokół Emilii," in *Emilia. Meble, muzeum, modernizm*, Katarzyna Szotkowska-Beylin, ed. (Krakow–Warsaw, 2016), pp. 78–79.

export. At the same time, stores were left with large stocks of unwanted goods, suggesting that manufacturers struggled to adapt to changing consumer tastes.[22] Retailers weren't consulted about trends in demand and had little say over the product shipments they received.

Contrary to appearances, consumer choices were not determined solely by supply. Roughly until the end of the 1960s, i.e., the end of the "small stabilization" era, bourgeois sets competed for market primacy with modern multifunctional designs supported by folk elements.[23] As early as 1948 architect Jerzy Hryniewiecki wrote that the good and solid furniture from the formerly German territories in the west, which now served to fill in home-furnishing gaps left by the war, was "imbued with a bourgeois spirit" and should be consigned to oblivion.[24] Homes were now smaller, social structure and lifestyle had changed. All that suggested the need for mass-market, lightweight and functional, modern furniture. Hryniewiecki postulated also that new furniture for the new citizen should be made of plastic and aluminium rather than of wood. The most urgent task at hand, however, was to free domestic carpentry from "pompous" designs, serving to re-enact the "good old times." Those postulates resonated with ideas promoted at the time by many left-leaning (although not necessarily regime-aligned) intellectuals.[25] There was no denying the fact that the social structure had changed dramatically. The war, the Holocaust, and Stalinist purges had physically eliminated or socially degraded the Jews and the landed gentry, the resulting void filled by members of the lower classes.[26] The new "democratic" system promoted social mobility, facilitated social advancement, created the illusion that a modern egalitarian society could be built from scratch. Material culture reminiscent of the pre-war elites had to be relegated alongside them on the rubbish heap of history. This idea didn't necessarily have to be political. Many members of the liberal intelligentsia were clearly relieved to be able to say goodbye to the musty, stilted social customs of yore, whose material expression were veneered furniture sets, glazed cabinets, cut-crystal glassware, and crochet doilies.

Paradoxically, Stalinism legitimated bourgeois tastes.[27] The reason for that was twofold. Firstly, the Socialist Realist doctrine opposed modernism. Suffice it to mention how brutally Constructivism, accused of damnable "formalism," was dealt with in the early 1930s in the Soviet Union.[28] Even though in itself the Socialist Realist doctrine made relatively little im-

[22] Ibid., p. 82.

[23] In the 1970s, a far more luxurious neo-bourgeois style emerged. The denomination served to distinguish it from the prewar bourgeois or petit-bourgeois style that I discuss here. The neo-bourgeois style found adherents among members of the well-off intelligentsia who attached significance to the culture of living. Its characteristic features included ostentation, a penchant for antiques or custom-made faux-antiques, accompanied by a fascination with the high-tech. Followers of this style liked to emphasize their prestige with imported household appliances. See Piotr Korduba, "Mieszkać luksusowo. Rozważania nad kulturą mieszkalną zamożnych poznaniaków ostatnich dziesięcioleci Peerelu," *Kronika Miasta Poznania*, no. 4 (2017), pp. 223–24.

[24] Brzostek, op. cit., pp. 78–79.

[25] On the liberal civilizing agenda advanced in the popular weekly, see Justyna Jaworska, *Cywilizacja „Przekroju". Misja obyczajowa w magazynie ilustrowanym* (Warsaw, 2008).

[26] On the social transformations brought about by the Holocaust and the 1944 land reform, see Andrzej Leder, *Prześniona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej* (Warsaw, 2014).

[27] Brzostek, op. cit., p. 79.

[28] Elena Barchatowa, "Fotomontaż i typografia w konstruktywizmie rosyjskim," in *Maszyna do komunikacji. Wokół awangardowej idei Nowej Typografii*, Paulina Kurc-Maj, Daniel Muzyczuk, eds (Łódź, 2015), pp. 209–10.

pact in the field of design,[29] the character of the few preserved examples of "Socialist Realist" furniture, e.g., the furnishings of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, is definitely more historicizing than modern. Secondly, genuine social need – the desire to revive the old times, to return to bourgeois salons – played an important role.[30] Catering to this need was furniture distributed by the Wood Industry Sales Centre [Centrala Handlowa Przemysłu Drzewnego], which conformed to the idea of how a decent bourgeois salon should look. An alternative preferred by members of the intelligentsia were simple, often unique designs from the "Ład" Artist Cooperative [Spółdzielnia Artystów "Ład"], which in the 1950 was forcibly merged with the "Cepelia" Central Office of Folk and Artistic Crafts [Centrala Przemysłu Ludowego i Artystycznego "Cepelia"].

The "Thaw" brought a return to modernity. In an editorial for the 1st issue of the periodical *Projekt*, Jerzy Hryniewiecki wrote, "We want to be modern. [...] We've been too tolerant towards the ugliness that manifests itself every day and at every step – at home, at work, in the street – with anachronistic non-contemporaneity."[31] Yet Polish urbanites kept stuffing their cramped one- and two-bedroom flats with heavy furniture sets, whether inherited or contemporary. In the early Gomułka era, faux art deco came into fashion: solid three-door wardrobes, cupboards with a glazed top, round tables on thick legs.[32] Worker families aspired to the aesthetics of classes one rung higher, imitating bourgeois interiors. Asked about her family home and that of her grandmother, Janina Fawrel, who was a designer with the "Ład" Artist Cooperative, interior designer Barbara Dereń-Marzec replied, "It was an intelligentsia home, a "Ład"-style home. My grandmother's apartment at Krasińskiego Street in Żoliborz, Warsaw, was amazing: "Ład" jacquard textiles, simple bright wooden furniture of her design. At that time I thought it was austere and poor. Having grown up, I realized it was simply unique. [...] I went to school with kids whose homes were arranged according to the prevailing parameters of taste. Crystal vases filled with sweets stood on the cupboard on white crochet doilies. On the sofa, amid pillows, sat a dressed-up doll. You weren't supposed to play with it, of course, not even touch it." The traditional countryside division of the home into white and black rooms was applied to flats in the newly built blocks, so there was a presentable living room and a sleeping room that everyone shared. Meals were eaten in the usually cramped kitchen. The author of *How to Furnish Your Home*, a guide book published by the Institute of Industrial Design [Instytut Wzornictwa Przemysłowego], commented ruthlessly on the aspirations of those taken with bourgeois-style interiors: "Sumptuous furniture sets were probably favoured by many who, rather than seeking a lifestyle of their own, strove for comfort by imitating upper-class homes of the bygone era."[33]

Members of the intelligentsia, in turn, avoided rigid functional divisions. They often assigned separate spaces for different family members and different activities, slept in sepa-

[29] The Institute of Industrial Design was established in 1950; its founder pursued an ideological agenda that sought to privilege the rural and urban working classes through experiments combining folk art with modern design, with what would prove to be artistically very good results.

[30] Brzostek, op. cit., p. 79.

[31] Jerzy Hryniewiecki, "Kształt przyszłości," *Projekt*, no. 1 (1956), p. 5, quoted in Anna Frąckiewicz, "Chcemy być nowocześni. Kształt przyszłości czyli styl lat 50. i 60," in Anna Demska, Anna Frąckiewicz, Anna Maga, *Chcemy być nowocześni. Polski design 1955–1968 z kolekcji Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, ed. Anna Kiełczewska, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, 2011 (Warsaw, 2011), p. 14.

[32] Brzostek, op. cit., p. 80.

[33] Jadwiga Putowska, *Jak urządzić mieszkanie* (Warsaw, 1958), p. 7.

rate rooms, or combined leisure and work spaces in the same room. Designers and, to some extent, retailers came to the aid of those who wanted to furnish their home in a modern and functional way. Modular furniture was presented as a solution to the problem of furnishing small spaces. It was manufactured from the 1950s, but a breakthrough came in 1961, when the Union of Polish Artists and Designers [Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków, ZPAP] and the Furniture Industry Association [Zjednoczenie Przemysłu Meblarskiego] organized a competition for small-home furniture designs.[34] The shortlisted entries were put on display at a furniture store opened in 1963 at Przeskok Street in Warsaw. Visitors selected the best ones (including sets by Mieczysław Puchała, Bogusława Kowalska and Czesław Kowalski,[35] and Olgierd Szlekys), which were then, in the second half of that year, manufactured and quickly sold out. The exhibition *Furniture for Small Homes* featured designs that addressed in the first place the issue of small-space storage. Those were standardized designs that could be adapted to changing needs, extended or modified. The constructions, consisting mostly of simple elements, were flexible, allowing for easy assembly and disassembly, and vertically extendable to increase usable space. An author writing about modular furniture in *Projekt* pinned great hopes on them, suggesting they would help to undo the "mainstay of traditionalism" and cause domestic industry to open up to the "logic and demands of the present."[36]

In the mid-1950s, an army of experts joined the struggle for modern living: designers, specialists, arbiters of taste, operating through the mass media, relevant institutions, and advice literature. Bourgeois tastes became a subject of criticism. Even though in Stalinist times bourgeois furniture was, paradoxically, approved of, a criticism of outdated fancies was in order. In 1950s, an author in *Odrodzenie* fulminated that middle-class aesthetic tastes were "probably the perishing bourgeoisie's most lasting success with the victorious proletariat."[37] Sets and glazed cabinets were also criticized for being out of touch with the national tradition and associated with a petit-bourgeois penchant for conspicuous consumption. Ill-construed desire of social advancement, experts argued, was a root cause of the ugliness and poor arrangement of homes.[38] With the "Thaw," the language of criticism and argumentation changed, but the foe remained the same. The "class-enemy" and "victorious-proletariat" rhetoric was gone, as was concern with preserving a national style. In their stead came references on the one hand to functionality and common sense, and on the other to arbitrarily defined good taste. It was argued – and rightly – that crammed into a low, small tower-block flat, a stately furniture set designed for a five-bedroom townhouse apartment could only be a nuisance. It was noted that vestiges of bygone wealth, trimmed to the modest housing conditions of "small stabilization," were merely pretentious.

[34] Paradoxically, the competition was for furniture for the working class. The Kowalskis themselves lived comfortably in a bourgeois townhouse in Jeżyce, Poznań. It soon turned out, however, that modern modular furniture appealed more to the intelligentsia.

[35] The Kowalskis' panel furniture (the so called wall unit) premiered a year earlier, at the 17th Poznań International Fair, where the results of a competition for furniture for a working-class (Łódź weavers) small home were announced; the Kowalskis won the 1st honorary mention. As Bogusława Kowalska reminisced, "The pieces consisted of several elements, like children's toys, and could be assembled as furniture for the sleeping room, the living room, the children's room, for the kitchen and the hall. In other words, for the whole home..."; see Jacek Kowalski, *Meble Kowalskich. Ludzie i rzeczy* (Poznań, 2014), p. 176.

[36] Danuta Wróblewska, "Nowe typy umeblowania," *Projekt*, no. 2 (1963), p. 9.

[37] Quoted in Piotr Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż. Towarzystwo Popierania Przemysłu Ludowego, Cepelia, Instytut Wzornictwa Przemysłowego* (Warsaw, 2013), p. 230.

[38] Ibid.

In 1957, the All-Polish Exhibition of Interior Design opened at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw, featuring, in rooms titled "Syntheses," propositions of standard-home furniture, designed specially for the occasion by some of the leading interior designers of the era. Besides that, the exhibition included an ideological introduction, aimed at providing spectators with simple means to help them properly interpret the designs on show.[39] This was the "Analyses" room, staged by Wojciech Zamecznik and Oskar Hansen. The catalogue reads, "Besides charts dealing with more general matters, one should stress the final sections of the informational charts, those bound up directly with the character of this exhibition, its purpose and vector. Those are charts that clearly oppose the old with the new. Instead of added frills – synthetic, practical, and simple form; the functional simplicity of modern designs as opposed to the overcrowding of the old-style home with redundant details – those are examples of representations through which the authors of the 'Analyses' room, O. Hansen and W. Zamecznik, seek to introduce the spectators to the essence of the issues addressed by the objects exhibited in the 'Syntheses' room."[40] Apart from general topics, descriptions of architecture and spatial relationships in its context, the show used pairs of oppositions to conduct a propaganda of modernity versus the traditional bourgeois interior. The "Analyses" room featured quite literal examples of what was discouraged, such as Zbyszko Siemaszko's 1953 photograph from the Koło housing estate in Warsaw, showing a family in an apartment (an incomplete family, in fact: two generations of women and two kids, with no men – was a non-working woman supposed to represent a vestige of the pre-war society here?). The picture doesn't appear to have been taken for educational purposes: it's a simple family scene in a neat home. In the foreground can be seen a round table draped with a cloth and a crochet doily. The protagonists in the background are partly obscured by the table and a lush potted fern – one of two placed on tall stands covered with doilies. The women sit in armchairs by a small table that is also draped with a cloth. A large chandelier hangs under the ceiling, and there are paintings on the walls – are they heirlooms? The curtained windows are decorated with a lambrequin. The room is low, typical for modern development in Koło, and the furnishings are most likely contemporary.

In 1967, ten years after the Zachęta exhibition, a new film by Stanisław Bareja, *The Marriage of Convenience* (*Małżeństwo z rozsądku*), went into release. Here, too, a bourgeois interior can be seen. The family inhabiting it in no way resembles the two women quietly conversing in the Siemaszko photograph, but the room is furnished with virtually all the staple items associated with bourgeois tastes. The film's comedic convention or the fact that after ten years the propaganda aimed against furniture sets and lambrequins could have turned into its own caricature – something that the set designer captured brilliantly – implies that the bourgeois interior is shown here as an anti-model in a manner so literal that it verges on the absurd. Filled with old-fashioned and shoddy bric-a-brac, the home is inhabited by the main protagonist Joanna's antipathetic parents who have made a lot of money selling imported clothes in a stall at an open-air market while hiding their revenue from the taxman. Among other props, their home features a round table covered with a crochet doily and a tapestry hung over the bed on a lavender, roller-painted wall; above the tapestry hangs a kitschy hand-tinted wedding portrait photo and two oval paintings, probably oleographs[41] – the presence of these two kinds

[39] Karolina Ziębińska-Lewandowska, "Siła widzenia," in *Wojciech Zamecznik. Foto-graficznie*, Karolina Puchała-Rojek, Karolina Ziębińska-Lewandowska, eds (Warsaw, 2016), p. 14.

[40] *Ogólnopolska wystawa architektury wnętrz*, Józef Grabowski, ed. (Warsaw, 1958).

[41] Olga Drenda, *Wyroby. Pomysłowość wokół nas* (Krakow, 2018), pp. 33–41.

of wall decorations indicates inferior, petit-bourgeois or provincial tastes, schmaltziness, and kitschy excess in décor. All that is accompanied by a tile stove, a tripartite mirror, and a shiny velvet tasselled bedspread with matching pillows. On the console stands a potted fern, there are heavy drapes and lace curtains in the windows, the furniture is veneered, and there is a carpet on the floor. The cultural codes so conveyed must have been clear to the 1960s audience. Inserting into this scenery a pair of obviously dislikeable characters, gauche nouveau-riche representing an almost textbook example of the thesis that post-war social climbers gladly surrounded themselves with tokens of bygone prestige, must have been all the funnier. The only mismatch are the oleographs and the wedding portrait, commonly associated with low-brow culture. Did the protagonists bring heirlooms from their past life over to a far more impressive interior? Whether the edge of Bareja's satire is directed against the parvenu or against anti-bourgeois propaganda, the presence of these pictures suggests that the criticism of showcases and doilies must have been common and well recognizable at the time. The above-described interior is contrasted with a decor in which the modern couple that are Andrzej and Joanna sing Agnieszka Osiecka's song *The World Has Changed So Much*. The scene was filmed at the furniture store at Przeskok Street, which the protagonists visit to admire a wall unit designed by the Kowalski duo; the unit (in an instance of quite overt criticism of the domestic economy's ineptitude) turns out to be unavailable, merely a demonstration model. The song's lyrics too offer a contrast between the old style and modern:

> When our grandparents got married
> They took a long time furnishing their home.
> They bought ash and oak tables and wardrobes
> That would shine for years sixty or more.
> Today this custom seems banal
> And it's the functional piece that you buy.
> [...]
> I may sometimes speak nonsense
> But take care not to be devoured by things
> Avoid the blunder of the old times
> Where a wardrobe made you blind to the world.
> By such trifles we won't be disheartened
> Things will fall apart anyway.

Like with the ridiculing of bourgeois interiors, so the praise of modern furniture and "installment plans" that were widely advertised at the time is here far from being serious or literal. Towards the end of the "small stabilization" era, everyone already knows the "functional piece" is of poor quality and unavailable anyway. Bareja's comedy can thus be interpreted as a satire on the post-"Thaw" engineering of tastes.

Geared towards the intelligentsia as it was, there was no end in *Ty i Ja* of sarcastic comments targeted at bourgeois trends and fashions, but at the same time the magazine spared no criticism of poor-quality domestic production and the inefficiency of "industry" and "trade." Authors slammed abstractionist designs (associated with mediocre pseudo-modernity), lauded fitted "laboratory kitchens," praised creativity and practicality, encouraged DIY solutions and ingenious substitutes. In the 3rd issue from 1960, Tadeusz Reindl decried the custom of placing the (presumably round and cloth-covered) table in the middle of the room. "Where did the impractical habit come from?" he asks, and then follows up with an answer: "From

snobbery. That's right! [...] In magnates' palaces, in manor houses, in the large apartments of the wealthy bourgeoisie, the dining table was usually placed in the middle of the room. Those, however, were large spaces, serving the sole purpose of dining, where auxiliary furnishings, such as cupboards, were also placed. The petit-bourgeois arranged their smaller homes in the image of the upper classes. And thus we have inherited the bad habit of arranging the dining room with a table in the middle."[42] In the January-February issue, the same author offered advice on what to do when you have no table to receive your guests (a reasonable question since a few months earlier he encouraged his readers to get rid of the table). The answer: "[...] the rationalization of hosting consists in receiving your guests without getting them seated at a table."[43] This way, guests can move about, talk in groups, walk around the room freely. And what if chairs have disappeared along with the table? Reindl suggests a "Japanese-style" party, with guests seated on pillows and low stools. Importantly, if so much as a single chair remains, it has to be removed from the room so that no one feels tempted to elevate themselves above the others. In 1960, the magazine wages a war against knick-knacks and cut-crystal glassware: "[...] glazed cabinets in which various useless cut-crystal glassware items puff themselves, proud of their idleness, with the middle of the room barricaded by a monstrous table and a huddle of chairs."[44] Crystal glassware and other trinkets are ascribed here the human traits of idleness and puffiness, inevitably bringing to mind the "leisure class," i.e. the recent class enemy: the wealthy bourgeoisie and the landed gentry, which were thought to enjoy such decorations. An approved alternative, suitable for modern interiors and modular furniture, were decorations from Cepelia.[45]

In 1965, Jerzy Olkiewicz praised functional kitchens using the rhetoric of emancipation: "The kitchen too is increasingly turning into a laboratory, sporting more and more appliances that offend no one's aesthetic feelings. Why, therefore [...] shouldn't we too think about integrating it with the rest of the home. Instead of treating it as an oasis where the overworked housewife reigns, designing it as an annex, a kitchenette connected without false shame with the living room. Why, the summoning of the husband to help with the saucepan or the absence of a maid fiddling with the pots contribute too to the emancipation of this until now isolated space."[46] The preferred setup – contrasting with the traditional trio, criticized in *Ty i Ja*, of a tall cupboard, a table, and a cabinet – was modelled after pre-war functional kitchens, such as Grete Schütte-Lihotzky's Frankfurt Kitchen or Barbara Brukalska's kitchen at the WSM housing estate in Żoliborz, Warsaw. Their idea was to design the space in such a way that – analogically to the worker in the Taylorist factory – the lady of the house could save time and effort. Such a kitchen could be integrated on equal terms with the rest of the living space, ceasing to be merely an embarrassing back-up facility. This was probably Khrushchev's reasoning when he said that the Soviet compact kitchen was conducive to emancipation. Moreover, the author of the article in *Ty i Ja* mentioned the obsolete custom of keeping servants, suggesting that a more modern household contributed to social progress.

[42] Tadeusz Reindl, "Co tu u was tak pusto? Posprzedawaliście jakieś meble? Jakim cudem tak się wam pokój powiększył?," *Ty i Ja*, no. 3 (1960), p. 69.

[43] Id., "Goście mile widziani," *Ty i Ja*, no. 1–2 (1961), pp. 31–33.

[44] Id., "Gość w dom...," *Ty i Ja*, no. 6 (1960), p. 55.

[45] Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż...*, op. cit., p. 238.

[46] Jerzy Olkiewicz, "Z wizytą w mieszkaniu mało typowym," *Ty i Ja*, no. 5 (1965), pp. 34–35.

Ty i Ja encouraged readers to show initiative in remaking, customizing, and home improvement. Articles explained how to make a modern lamp out of cardboard and how to modify uninspiring furniture. In the early 1960s, the spending of more time at home phenomenon emerged as men began to practice DIY as a hobby.[47] Until then, it was women who were responsible for making up for the "shortages resulting from shortcomings." It was them who were encouraged to pickle food for winter and tailor clothes with leftover fabrics. The do-it-yourself phenomenon was fuelled by necessity because household appliances frequently malfunctioned. Often, it was also the only way to decorate your home according to your preferences and needs. Stimulated by mass-market how-to books as well as tips and tutorials published in the popular press, domestic hobbies and home improvement skills served often to make up for the inefficiency of public services.

A different kind of creativity, meant to help you decorate your home the way you wanted (despite the highly limited and unattractive market offer), was promoted by the column *My Home Is My Hobby*, run in *Ty i Ja* by Felicja Uniechowska. An art historian, interior designer, and film set designer, Uniechowska's column presented the homes of the era's artistic and intellectual elites, of celebrities who shared an imaginative approach with a penchant for retro items, not necessarily highly valuable, but antique and distinct in character. Seemingly full of knick-knacks and "charming trinkets," the homes featured in the column belie *Ty i Ja*'s frequent diatribes against crystal glassware and other useless decorations. In reality, the protagonists of the *My Home Is My Hobby* series were a community of taste, as it were, celebrating reminiscences of an earlier time not as tokens of lost glory, but rather as an expression of a yearning for a lost sense of continuity and security. Surrounding oneself with antiques can be interpreted as escapism from an unfriendly and simply unattractive outside world as well as a sort of snobbery, an expression of expertise and hobbyism. As cultural studies scholar Justyna Jaworska notes, "Interestingly, for all their postulated originality, these 'homes with a soul' appear surprisingly alike today; it is clear in hindsight how aesthetic taste adheres to cultural formation, how it becomes (to quote Pierre Bourdieu) a marker of 'cultural nobility'."[48] In fact, Uniechowska warned very categorically against imitating the interiors she showed, drawing a clear line between the artistic elites and "ordinary" readers. For everyone their own style – retro for artists, modernity, "Ład," and Cepelia for the intelligentsia. What all home decor commentary featured in *Ty i Ja* had in common was contempt for heavy, full-gloss furniture sets as synonymous with bad taste and petit-bourgeois aspirations. Uniechowska wasn't an enthusiast of modernity and was sceptical of Cepelia, "Ład," and other contemporary trends. She had even less respect, however, for the custom of buying ready-made living-room sets. Chaotic assortments of retro pieces were a better way to go, possibly attesting to a cultural pedigree ("every chair from a different aunt").[49]

Already before the war, criticism of the bourgeois style featured highly in the manifestos of modernist designers. Cluttered interiors, where too much attention was paid to individual pieces, were considered a symptom of commodity fetishism. Functionality and spaciousness, in turn, were seen as not only healthy and hygienic, but also appropriate for the new citizen of the machine age as well as just and egalitarian. Furniture was reduced to pure functionality,

[47] Brzostek, op. cit., p. 81.

[48] Jaworska, "Moje hobby to mieszkanie," op. cit.

[49] Ibid.

and built-in designs were embraced as corresponding with small, but well-lit and well-aired living spaces. Similar views were inherited by post-war designers and experts, who also postulated rationally that folding sofas and floor-to-ceiling cabinets were better suited for small homes than mammoth cupboards and massive tables. At the same time, in the new reality the petty bourgeoisie became an easy target for propaganda attacks. In Stalinist times, the petit-bourgeois man embodied the public enemy, the counterrevolutionary, the snug, egoistic loafer focused on satisfying his own needs. Bourgeois aesthetic tastes were criticized as a relic of the *ancien régime* and a contradiction of the national style. After the "Thaw," bourgeois accessories were still imputed to convey idleness and flatulence. At the same time, experts and arbiters of taste were aware that the working class still craved for veneered sets. The *My Home Is My Hobby* column, with its appreciation of knick-knackery and unyielding criticism of high-gloss sets, suggests that repugning clutter and old-time relics wasn't necessarily the point. Rather, campaigns against "bourgeois style" may have been a means of disciplining groups adhering to inferior and popular tastes, and at the same time of maintaining class distinction in an allegedly classless society. Most perversely perhaps, it was the rhetoric of class struggle, sanctioned by socialist newspeak, that was used to preserve divides between social classes. In other words, contempt for rural tastes was promoted under the guise of a campaign against the bourgeoisie.

Translated by Marcin Wawrzyńczak