Space, Class and the Geography of Poland's Champagne (Post-)Socialism

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One of the most perceptive analyses of how class and leftist politics have been inexorably intertwined in the 20th century can be found in George Orwell's magnificent *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The issue tackled by Orwell is the stark difficulty, if not impossibility, of middle class intellectuals and the working classes forging a genuine and enduring class alliance. The main impediment seemed to be the "ugly fact that most middle-class Socialists, while theoretically pining for a classless society, cling like glue to their miserable fragments of social prestige" (Orwell 2001, 162). Although they easily muster sympathy for the imputed proletariat, had they been confronted by an actual worker "they would have been embarrassed, angry, and disgusted; some, I should think, would have fled holding their noses" (ibid., 163). This enmity, to be sure, was mutual. "One sometimes gets the impression," Orwell explained, "that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist" (ibid., 161). Many working-class people told Orwell they did not object to socialism *per se*, but that they did object to socialists on personal grounds, and often perceived them as cranks. Orwell concluded that overcoming these prejudices is exceedingly hard—even unmanageably so—because "to abolish class distinction means abolishing a part of yourself" (ibid., 149).

Beyond the "placial turn"

Although Orwell's analysis is firmly anchored in the social and political realities of pre-war Britain, this conundrum of class, to borrow Martin Burke's (1995) phrase, soon became a global phenomenon. Communism

did the same (Priestland 2010) and consequently the question of the relation between leftist elites and the rank-and-file, or the phenomenon of "champagne socialism", as it is often described, spread globally. There are many variations on this theme, including "parlor pink", "limousine liberal", "gauche caviar", or "Bollinger Bolshevik". This concept has also been applied outside of strictly leftist politics—for example Jonathan Friedman (2004) has written extensively on global neo-liberalism in this vein.

Since Orwell's times, this problem, as well as going global, also gained a peculiar urban, or spatial, twist. The two are, of course, related. Suketu Mehta (2005), for example, compellingly described the rift between the old cosmopolitan elites in Mumbai and the "new barbarians", swarming to, and slowly overtaking, the city, even altering its name in the process. Although as James Ferguson (1999) compellingly showed, "cosmopolitanism" is not necessarily an exclusively high-brow endeavor, just as "localism" can be espoused by the elites, the two strategies, or urban styles as he called them, are usually contrasted. In the Polish case, however, they are not. The most intriguing Polish equivalent of "champagne socialism" is *Warszawka*—i.e. diminutive or petty Warsaw and one of the derogatory terms used today (as well as in the past) to criticize Polish elites. It encapsulates the idea of detachment, cosmopolitanism and lifestyle revolving around consumption which remains thoroughly local, or even parochial, at the same time. Unlike *gauche caviar* and the like, *Warszawka* has a very tangible geographical dimension; and it this aspect of Poland's champagne (post-) socialism to which I wish to turn my attention.

Warszawka is a vernacular term, and of course it is multi-layered in its meaning.[1] It can be used to denote a vast array of social groups, themselves often barely related, beginning with Poland's political and cultural elite, and including the *nouveau riche* and even the mafia (Kusiak 2012). But, as I wish to argue in this chapter, although it explicitly identifies Warsaw as the city that both produces and hosts those alienated elites, to fully understand this phenomenon we need to analyze it not in terms of a "place" but in terms of "space". The so-called "spatial turn" in the social sciences has been by and large superficial and, as Edward Soja recently noted, has been confined to proliferation of "a few pertinent spatial metaphors such as mapping this or that or using such words like cartography, region or landscape" so as to

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1 It is not a term that one can find in a dictionary, and hence it can be spelled in a number of ways, including Warszafka, or Warszaffka.

create the appearance that these authors are "moving with the times" (Soja 2010, 14). The so-called "spatial turn" has in many ways been, in fact, a "placial" turn, if I may be forgiven for using such a maladroit neologism. As David Harvey (2009, 2010, 2012) argued, space as a political problem and as a research agenda is much more difficult to grapple. Unlike the alienating, distant, and anonymous space, place often manifests itself as authentic, intimate, and meaningful. Even if treated with all the usual caveats (see Keith and Pile 1993, Gupta and Ferguson 1997 or Burawoy 2009 for classical approaches in this vein) place remains a rather static concept (see Chu 2010). One can easily be "in" place while space remains a fugitive research object since it is characterized by processes of "becoming" and not those of "being". Writing about space remains to be a methodological challenge.

What is interesting about *Warszawka* is precisely that it has shifted from a "placial" to a "spatial" phenomenon. Seen as a problem of space and not of place, *Warszawka* is not as much about the city of Warsaw as it is about the relationship between Warsaw and the outside world. Cities are bounded entities only in the narrow, administrative sense; it would be a fatal mistake to accept these boundaries on the intellectual level. The relational reading of Warsaw's "structured urban coherence" (Harvey 1989) that I undertake in this chapter has to transcend Warsaw's territory. Only as an integral part of a larger, spatial whole can we begin to "make sense" of Warsaw as a distinct phenomenon in the spatial, cultural, social and other senses. Warsaw is not only a city in its own right but is also, perhaps primarily, the national capital. Thus, I argue that one cannot understand contemporary Warsaw without understanding both the "rolling back of the nation-state", the accelerating centralization of spatial regimes, and the phenomenon Jonathan Friedman (2004) called the "double polarization" between the metropolitan and cosmopolitan elites and the increasingly parochial and "localized" rank-and-file citizens. This is compounded by the uneven development (Smith 2011) between rapidly developing and rapidly deteriorating urban regions, global urbanization and neo-liberalization, class-formation processes and withering away of the urban–rural divide. All these processes come together in the concept of *Warszawka* and this is why I unravel it in this chapter.

Consumption and class formation

Most people assume that *Warszawka* is a new post-socialist phenomenon. In many ways, the heyday of *Warszawka*, i.e. the period when it served as one of the "key symbols" (Ortner 1973) of Poland's transition to capitalism, spanned the late 1990s and the early 2000s. *Fin de millénaire* Warsaw was in many ways the pinnacle of Poland's aspirations. While many small towns and especially the countryside plunged into dire straits, Warsaw was dynamically developing and was becoming the crucible of Polish-style capitalism (Dunn 2004). The very first crisis that immediately followed the "shock therapy" of 1989 was largely narrated and understood in the language that germinated during the 1980s. Much of the public debate throughout the 1990s revolved around the ongoing struggle, with all its corollaries, between the former communists and the erstwhile *Solidarność* movement. The second crisis that unfolded between 1998 and 2003 was, as David Ost put it, "the first crisis *of* capitalism itself rather than of the transition *to* capitalism" (Ost 2004, 166; original emphasis), and paved the way for a new reality. While most other Polish cities actually reindustrialized in the 2000s (see Kalb 2009), Warsaw followed the "Spanish model" of late semi-peripheral capitalism (López and Rodríguez 2011). It was based on the influx of foreign-based, highly financialized investments, large infrastructural projects, high levels of residential construction, the ideology of home-ownership, low-paid migrant labor and conspicuous consumption (see also Drahokoupil 2008). All this ushered in a new language in which Polish capitalism was talked about.

Although 1989 is usually seen as the starting point of Poland's road to capitalism, in many ways, and especially from the urban perspective, the real watershed moment occurred around the year 2004. The financialized, metropolitan, corporate and cosmopolitan capitalism of the 2000s differed quite radically from the small-scale, entrepreneurial and "car-boot sale" capitalism of the 1990s. The return to the urban is particularly pertinent. Most of Poland's urban built environment was formed during a period I have described elsewhere (Pobłocki 2012) as the "long Sixties" (1956–1979), in which Poland changed from a rural to an urban society, or, to be more precise, when Poland became a suburban society by way of the socialist building boom, which predominantly manifested itself in the construction of public housing coronas surrounding the historic inner cities. The "long Sixties" were followed by a period of protracted urban crisis,

roughly lasting between 1980 and 2003, when the number of new constructions plummeted, at its nadir matching the construction levels of the early 1950s, and the existing urban infrastructure became increasingly under-financed and under-maintained. After the long hiatus, the project of urban expansion picked up during the 2000s building boom and Polish cities, Warsaw included, again became an object of interest and public debate.

The return to urbanization was a return to employing consumption, both individual and collective, in the redrawing of social boundaries. Usually "classes" are seen as a static and descriptive phenomenon. Yet, as E.P. Thompson once put it, "classes do not exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and then start to struggle" (in Joyce 1995, 136). Instead, class struggle and class formation always resurface when there is social mobility, both upward and downward, at work, and when we see "transitional" moments between various socio-economic regimes—like in Poland at the turn of the millennium. Concepts like *Warszawka* are among critical elements of contemporary class struggles—*Warszawka* does not denote a single class, or even social group, but instead expresses the highly complex, dynamic and conflictual aspect of the class phenomenon. It is so because class struggles on the urban turf have a peculiar, consumption-centered nature. As a response to the under-consumption of the 1930s, post-war cities turned increasingly "Keynesian", and, as David Harvey insisted, their "social, economic and political life [was] organized around the theme of state-backed, debt-financed consumption" (Harvey 1989, 37). Thus in both East and West "the urban question", as Manuel Castells once argued, referred "to the organization of the means of collective consumption at the basis of the daily life of all social groups: housing, education, health, culture, commerce, transport" (Castells 1982, 3). Thus, *Warszawka* swiftly captures the fact that metropolitan life is a class phenomenon: although consumption, the linchpin of financial capitalism, is universally desired it can be accessible only to the limited few.

There is a poignant scene in the documentary *Warsaw Up For Grabs* (*Warszawa do wzięcia,* 2009) where a girl from one of the most derelict post-socialist rural areas tries to "make it or break it" in Warsaw, looks at the city's landscape and sights "Warszawka"—and the uncanny combination of hope and disappointment is captured in this single word. The title of this documentary is a reference to a feature film *Homemakers Up for Grabs* (*Dziewczyny do wzięcia,* 1972) which became one of the most popular films

around the turn of the millennium when "nostalgia" for socialism germi-
nated (Sarkisova and Apor 2007). Although most commentators under-
stood the revived interest in the socialist cultural heritage as mainly a po-
litical phenomenon (often as a misguided form of resistance toward the
harsh realities of the post-socialist transition), it seems that nostalgia for
the socialist past was also, or even especially, about reviving the somehow
forlorn heritage of Poland's "urban way of life".

   The film tells the story of three teenage girls going to Warsaw in search
of romance. They are picked up by two working-class boys who pose as
successful professionals. They take the girls first to a coffeehouse and then
to an apartment which they borrowed from a friend. There is a compelling
moment in which the group drinks cognac taken from the apartment's bar,
which turns out to be colored water. This scene captures the idea that the
brave new world of urban consumption is there only to be looked at but
not to be had—a neat parallel with Warsaw itself. Warsaw is the pinnacle
of Poland's metropolitan ambitions, the springboard for upward class mo-
bility and the only city where one can rub shoulders with celebrities and
steal a glimpse of that make-believe world of urban consumption. Another
scene from the film that became very popular in the early 2000s is where
one of the girls eats an extravagantly large and obviously very sweet des-
sert. As she goes along, enjoying the treat becomes increasingly difficult,
and we see how she struggles to keep up the appearances. Eventually she
bursts out in tears, and finally throws up. It is no accident that this feature
became popular in the early 2000s; the three untoward girls, incapable of
being truly urban and making all sorts of cultural *faux pas* in 1972, strug-
gling to be metropolitan but being ridiculous in the process, returned with
a vengeance thirty years later as an object of mockery. At this exact time
Warsaw was experiencing another urban boom and was being swarmed by
such "culturally incompetent" young migrants, just as was shown in the
2009 documentary.

Space and vertical encompassment

It is hardly surprising that in 2003, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland's leading news-
paper, published a series of interviews with a number of Warsaw's influen-
tial figures on the topic of *Warszawka*. This material helps in explaining

why "petty Warsaw" became the nickname for Poland's post-socialist elites. The diminutive aspect of *Warszawka* alludes to the cronyism of Poland's elites. The idea is that "they" are on familiar terms with one another, but distant, aloof or even hostile to those who are outside their circle of friends or acquaintances. *Warszawka*, in the most narrow sense, referred to a group of friends who would meet regularly in one of Warsaw's posh bars, cafés or restaurants, many of which were private members-only clubs. Sometimes *Warszawka* was used to describe the children of Poland's elites from the communist period who in the 1990s made spectacular careers in show business, mass media, advertising, and so on (see Zmarz-Koczanowicz 2002 for their collective portrait). They often knew each other from prestigious Warsaw high schools and therefore had a competitive advantage in terms of their "social capital" over people living in Warsaw but growing up elsewhere.

At the same time, however, because Warsaw is a migrant city *par excellence*, and because the "transition" years are those of both upward and downward social mobility, *Warszawka* can also be rather porous. It has a strong *nouveau riche* connotation—*Warszawka* is often employed to describe the emergent power nexus between business, large corporations and politics. A graduate of a prestigious Warsaw high school described *Warszawka* thus: "It's a group of snobs, vain people, those who do not want to have fun, but instead show off" (Sadowska 2003). The phenomenon of *Warszawka*, she argued,

"is actually most visible outside of Warsaw. I remember when I attended an advertising festival in Cracow. I was sitting in a bar, and suddenly there they were: money and showing-off. Laughing loud, being totally boorish. They were trying to pick up girls by saying they were from Warsaw. Awful!" (ibid.)

Dorota Masłowska, then a teenage writer from a small town whose debut became a literary sensation, described *Warszawka* in a similar vein:

"When I was a kid, we saw cars with Warsaw number plates passing through our towns. They had their windows open and were playing loud music. They ran over small animals and left us covered in dust. They behaved like noblemen amongst the peasantry." (Masłowska 2003)

Both Sadowska and Masłowska show that *Warszawka*, apart from being a question of "place" (that is, one describing the tensions between older and newer elites *within* Warsaw), it is also a problem of "space" and of what Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (2002) have described as the "vertical

encompassment" of spatialized state structures. This concept describes the popular notion that the state is both "up there", i.e. far away, distant and alienating, and that it is simultaneously "everywhere" in the sense that it somehow permeates people's everyday lives and routines. Although it is unlikely that people from Warsaw are the only ones who display "rude" behavior while on holidays, the fact that encounters between them and people from the "hinterland" have found a cultural expression in the idea of *Warszawka* is quite telling. These unexpected encounters with distant "elites" demonstrate the realness and truthfulness of the idea that Warsaw exists as a space, or extends to the whole country as a spatialized state. In other words, when rank-and-file citizens are confronted with *Warszawka*, they experience for themselves the "vertical encompassment" of the spatialized state; they realize that a "concrete abstraction" such as the state actually exists and is sufficiently real. *Warszawka*, to put it another way, is the "human face" that Poles attribute to the alienating, exploitative, and currently shrinking, post-socialist state structures, and it is the way they narrate the changing geography of centrality and marginality in contemporary Poland.

Urbanization without cities

One of the problems with the "placial turn" in the social sciences is that the formerly rigid distinction between the country and the city, between the rural and urban ways of life, has recently become obsolete. The "global 1968" (Horn and Kenney 2004) was in many ways the watershed moment that paved the way for what David Harvey (2012) described as the third critical moment in the modern history of cities when urbanization reached a new level. The first one was the remaking of Paris by Baron Haussmann in the middle of the 19th century. The second one was the rebuilding of the New York metropolitan region by Robert Moses after 1945. The third one has been associated with global neo-liberalization. As a consequence, the city is no longer a "central place," surrounded by and opposed to a rural world, but rather a space, or a continuous sprawl. "The clear distinction," wrote Harvey, "that once existed between the urban and the rural was gradually fading into a set of porous spaces of uneven geographical development under the hegemonic command of capital and state" (2012, 19).

Hence, the "urban revolution" that Henri Lefebvre (2003) once wrote about, and his "hypothesis" that the world will one day be one hundred per cent urbanized, materialized. "Urban society can only be described as global" (Lefebvre 2003, 167) not because everybody lives in a place defined as a city in the administrative sense, but because the reach of urbanization as a cultural and social phenomenon is today entirely universal. Thus we should no longer treat the city as a "placial" phenomenon, and instead talk about spatial regimes and the various forms of emergent "cityness" (Simone 2010) they engender.

The bellwether of the globalization of urbanization has been, as Harvey (2012) mentioned, communist China. But for a long time researchers have not recognized the fact that, in Lefebvre's words, "socialist countries have shown as much initiative (more or less successful) in urbanization as they have in industrialization" (2003, 138; see Kotkin 1996 and Collier 2011 for notable exceptions). On both sides of the Iron Curtain there was a trend to move from "supply-side" (production-driven) to "demand-side" (consumption-based) urbanization (Poblocki 2012). As a consequence, "the locus of urban politics shifted from away from alliances of classes" forged in the workplace toward "more diffuse coalitions of interests around themes of consumption, distribution, and the production and control of space. The 'urban crisis' of the 1960s bore all the marks of that transition" (Harvey 1989, 37f.). In the West, as Alain Touraine noted, the social movements of 1968 manifested themselves as "a new form of the class struggle. More than any other collective action of the last decades, this movement revealed and thus constituted the fundamental conflict of our society" (in Tilly 1975, 23). 1968 in Poland also revealed the emergent new fundamental social cleavage, or one of the key class divisions in the new, urban society, but it did so in a very different way.

The critical transition of the "long Sixties" can also be understood as a move away from a "place-centered" regime to a "space-centered" way of exercising power. It was also around the Polish 1968 that the contemporary meaning of *Warszawka* germinated. The very idea of *Warszawka* harks back to at least the interwar period and was initially a very local phenomenon—it denoted the group of literati that frequented Warsaw's most important literary coffeehouse, the Ziemiańska (Kusiak and Kacperski this volume). This whole echelon of left-leaning intellectuals was brilliantly portrayed by Marci Shore (2006) in her generational biography. The very first use of the word *Warszawka* I came across was in a somewhat gleeful

passage on the passing away of the pre-war bourgeois culture published in 1946: "*Warszawka*—pink and glittering with dancing halls' neons, vulgarized in jazz staccatos, driving around in furious taxis and gorging on Wiener schnitzels—has been charred to ashes" (in Brzostek 2007, 173). This line of critique, however, was already quite old. In 1923, a Polish poet, Mieczysław Braun, described his recent visit to "that terrible city" thus: "Ziemiańska breathes poison on me with its badly disguised distaste and ill will" (in Shore 2006, 30f.). The "light" and playful aesthetic of the Skamander poetry group that constituted the core of the Ziemiańska regulars was, according to him, unfitted for the modern world. He was particularly scornful of:

"[…] those whitened sepulchers, those insipid mediocrities, heads without talent, for whom everything is easy, who have an answer for everything, who sniff out and go after 'catchy words' and 'sayings', not knowing that it's necessary to mature into every poem, to reach the poem by hard, internal labor, who finally in the fact of the matter are equally distant from poetry as they are from ethics." (ibid.)

I surveyed a number of literary works from the pre-war period that were both based in Warsaw and dealt with the issue of elite life, but none of them contained the term "Warszawka". It seems that it was most probably a colloquial word used only among the very narrow circle of the Warsaw literati and it gained broader purchase only after the Second World War. In fact, in 1959, a budding literary magazine *Współczesność* that became the trumpet for a new generation of leftist poets—those who had no roots in pre-war Polish Marxism and were too young to have colluded with Stalinism—employed the idea of *Warszawka* to critique an older generation of Polish writers. Although the Skamander poetry "drew upon the spoken language and in this sense reflected the more general impulse of leftist intellectuals to liberate themselves from bourgeoisie elitism," their young post-war critics emphasized that Skamander's playful and cabaret-like aesthetic was gullible, elitist and inadequate for the modern world (Współczesność 1959, 5).

This debate resonated across the country, and even local dailies referred to it. Soon, *Warszawka* was used to denote all of Warsaw's leftist intellectuals, including the younger generation from *Współczesność*. This idea was quickly picked up by the local media in other cities and in 1966, for example, *Odgłosy*, a weekly magazine from Łódź published an editorial which spitefully described Warsaw intellectuals:

"Just take a look at photographs published in the latest *Kultura*, […] these refined gentlemen are our top pundits debating pornography. Please look carefully at these ties, at this wonderful play of countenances and hands, at Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz holding a wine glass. What a truly European grace, what a refined nonchalance and self-assertion!" (Jażdżyński 1966)

Their style was, *Odgłosy* commented, a blend of feigned modesty and cryptic language, "unintelligible to a common citizen from the cultural hinterland" (ibid.). Teoplitz argued that sexual revolution was far more advanced in Poland than in, say, Sweden. For Swedes, he claimed, sexual intercourse was merely a hygienic affair, whereas Poles engaged in their love life more emotionally. This was summed up by *Odgłosy* sarcastically:

"A Warsaw-like discussion always unfolds thus: first readers find out that they are completely incompetent in what is being talked about and then they receive in compensation some lousy compliment—that, for example, their conduct is more edifying than that of the Swedes. No wonder then the Swedes raided us in the 17th century, and not the other way around!" (ibid.)

Thus we see a shift from *Warszawka* being a local, Varsovian notion to being a notion that described the relationship between Polish elites, based in Warsaw, to the rest of the country. What is also important to bear in mind is that there was a touch of what could easily be interpreted as anti-Semitism in that critique. Many of the Skamander poets who frequented the Ziemiańska café were of Jewish descent, and despite the fact that most of them abjured Jewish culture as overly traditional and embraced Polish culture, the critique of their "light-hearted" and playful register was sometimes couched in racial terms. For example in his reply to Braun quoted above, a leading poet Władysław Broniewski confessed: "I'm fed up with those Jewish literati from Ziemiańska." The Slavs, he argued, have a very different "relationship to truth in life, in creative work, in everything." The Jews "are masters of outcry, of a noisy-gloomy passion entangled in itself, of boasting," while the Slavs have "an intellect that is heavier qualitatively and with deeper, farther-flowing current" (in Shore 2006, 30f.). Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz, like many of the towering figures of Polish culture of the 1960s, was of Jewish descent, and together with many other people accused in 1968 of being "hidden Jews" was sacked. Yet, as I argue below, the Polish 1968 was much more than only a sudden outburst of virulent anti-Semitism.

The new geography of centrality

Much has been written about both the Polish 1968 and Polish anti-Semitism (Gross 2006; Osęka 2008; Eisler 2006). What interests me here is how these events revealed the ulterior rules underpinning the incipient Polish urban regime and latent class hierarchies embedded in it. It is instructive to realize that in Poland 1968 is remembered, narrated, and encoded in historiography in temporal terms as the "March events" (*wydarzenia marcowe*). Contrast this to the previous outburst of post-war anti-Semitism—the so-called Kielce pogrom of 1946. The Kielce pogrom was a three-day long, city-wide spree of looting, killing and appropriation of the "former Jewish" and "former German" property (Gross 2006). The "March events" on the other hand were a country-wide exercise in "state capture". Unlike in 1946, the main dynamo of the anti-Semitic upsurge was not looting but purging state apparatus. The "effluvia of hatred", as Adam Michnik (1999) described it, erupted in all of Poland's major cities, and especially at key institutions—such as the military, universities, and factories. The fast pace at which events unfolded, as well as their enormous scope, contributed to the sense of a certain placelessness of the "March events". While the strikes of 1945–1947and the upheavals of 1956 were rather "place-bound"—because in 1968 taking over the entire state apparatus was at stake (via purging the party of unwanted members)—the "March events" unfolded more in "space" rather than in "a place".

In other words, Poland in 1968 was a very different country from that from two decades earlier. The communist rule, as Kenney (1996) brilliantly described, was being established on the shop floors of Łódź—the city that served as Poland's de facto capital until circa 1950, when Warsaw was eventually rebuilt. Kenney brilliantly demonstrated the weakness of both state structures and Polish communists—instead of imposing their will onto the people, they had to accommodate to the working-class moral economy and tinker numerous means of swaying and cajoling workers into "amicable co-operation". By 1948 the communists, mainly by instigating a conflict between the young unskilled rural migrants and shop stewards of the older generation, had established a firm grip over the industry. Yet, they were unable to control the city—the youth was fairly disciplined in the workplace, but proved entirely "unruly" outside the factory gates. This is how "hooliganism" (a high-brow word for spontaneous proletarian urban life) became the bane of Stalinism; the new urban working-class cultures

served in turn as the basis for 1956 demands for more direct democracy in the workplace. The solution to the 1956 crisis lay in urbanization. Once the authorities realized that many unruly boys and girls were happy to become fathers and mothers, and move into their own apartment furnished with home appliances and so forth, the urban expansion coupled with socialist consumerism began. As a consequence Poland, for the first time in history, became a majority-urban country (for more see Poblocki 2010).

The socialist urbanization, however, was very different from the previous wave of urban growth associated with industrialization (this is also true of the Soviet Union—see Collier 2011). Industrial cities like Łódź (but also Warsaw) grew in the 19th century at the expense of the surrounding countryside and small towns. Most of the urban growth after 1956, however, was channeled not to the largest cities but rather to second or even third-tier towns. Urbanization thus became the method of extending the communist rule from the largest cities to the country at large. As Poland was becoming an entirely urbanized country (in Lefebvre's understanding), cities like Warsaw or Cracow ceased being urban islands in a rural ocean, but instead became key nodes in the new urban hierarchy. Many of them, including industrial hubs like Łódź, started deindustrializing and moved factories from the inner cities to the suburban fringe or even to smaller towns.

In other words, the largest cities were no longer opposed to the countryside, but instead started competing with one another, and did so also on the cultural turf (Poblocki 2011).

Warsaw was the leader of this "metropolitanization", or, as the phrase of the time had it, "Europeanization" of Polish cities (Brzostek 2007, 136f.). The rebuilding of Warsaw's historical center was officially completed in 1963. Very quickly it became a site of tourism and consumption. But, together with the no longer existing Ziemiańska café, it also became an uncanny reminder of pre-war Warsaw that had been long gone (ibid., 142). Warsaw's center turned from a place of elite cultural life to an administrative quarter. When strolling on its main thoroughfare, the Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, a literati was shocked to discover that he no longer met friends and acquaintances there, but instead was surrounded by an anonymous crowd. In a spirit truly reminiscent of Jane Jacobs, he lamented the passing away of Warsaw as an urban place and its new role as part and parcel of the anonymous space shaped by administrative logic and complained that inner-city streets resemble now "empty office corridors"

teeming with "faceless supplicants" instead of sophisticated flaneurs (in ibid., 141).

Thus, the new overarching dichotomy in post-war Poland was no longer the urban–rural divide, but instead the cleavage between the largest cities, places that had the most "metropolitan" outlook, and the rest of the country. This is how the urban makeover was often assessed: for example when in 1955 some of the Warsaw cafés set up tables on the streets, one pundit remarked that "they want to turn Warsaw into Paris, but they forget that we cannot even afford the Koluszki standards" (in Brzostek 2007, 196). Koluszki is a small town, and here it served as the yardstick of a quintessential hicks-ville that in the emergent city–town continuum stood at the opposite end to Warsaw.

Figure 1: Banner "The most beautiful Varsovian women are commuters" mounted outside the Łódź Fabryczna train station; a project by local artist Cezary Bodzianowski[2]

(Photo: Andrzej Grzelak / Galeria Manhattan)

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2 The project wittily commented the fact that over 500.000 people commute every day to Warsaw for work. Among them, 150.000 come from the Łódź region, which may be and is often seen as sucking out the most valuable human resources from the city of Łódź. The banner was part of the project "Binary City. Łódź-Warszawa: Utopia and Reality".

All this was hardly a frictionless process. Even within Warsaw conflicts between residents and the new metropolitan consumer class erupted (Brzostek 2007, 196). The changing geography of centrality and marginality produced discontents especially outside of the capital. Just as in the United States 1968 saw an alliance between the impoverished, racially discriminated and disfranchised black inhabitants of the inner cities and white youth rebelling against the callous suburban lifestyles of their parents, the Polish 1968 brought together the various social groups that shared the sentiment of being left behind in the national stampede to "get established materially" (*dorobić się*)—as the popular phrase of the 1960s had it (Poblocki 2012).

Thus, the roots of the Polish 1968 lay at the conflation of urban and class transformations. Zygmunt Bauman, only a few months after he had been expelled from Poland, interpreted the "March events" thus:

"Following the post-war revolutionary transformations, the ladder in most of the Polish administration, in the army and amongst the middle rungs of the party apparatus had become overly flat. The problem of professional advancement—the most acute of problems in all bureaucracies—was not solved by the automatic mechanism of seniority [*wysługa lat*]. In the old days, this problem was thus resolved either by mass purges or by artificial multiplication of state jobs [*rozdmuchiwanie etatów*]. For the past twelve years, none of these methods were in use. It was long enough for increasingly larger swathes of the ambitious and the frustrated to coalesce together." (in Eisler 2006, 54f.)

The 1968 anti-Semitism was unlike the traditional "production-based nationalism" of the Polish workers (Crago 2000). Instead, it was consumption-based, and dealt with state-administered redistribution of goods, privileges and, more generally, with the issue of collective consumption. In 1967 an anonymous letter sent to one of the newspapers read: "After twenty years of austerity, people expect that we can now afford to have free public transit." Not only were the trams and buses overcrowded, but "it turns out that the price for fares have recently been doubled." Many actually blamed this on the "automobile-driving Jews" and the "red aristocracy". The idea was that the Jews could afford to buy and drive cars "thanks to our money" and by appropriating the common property "they exploit the rest of us" (in Brzostek 2007, 319). Such anti-Semitism was often coupled with anti-Warsaw sentiments. Soon after the purges withered away, the Łódź weekly *Odgłosy* wrote that now

"[…] we will perceive the problem of centralization differently. It has been criticized for decades, but it has only become further aggravated. I think it is time to re-examine Warsaw's privileged status as the capital city. The 'other Poland' [*Polska B*], i.e. cities and provinces perceived from Warsaw as utter backwaters and places of hopeless exile have demonstrated their political maturity far better than Warsaw—the capital of the 'privileged Poland' [*Polska A*]." (Biliński 1968, 1)

The most important lesson drawn from the March events, they stressed, was

"[…] not that the police clashed with protesting students, or that the working class showed its loyalty to the Party at the critical moment. At last we ceased feeling disempowered by the conviction that everything was being decided upon somewhere in Warsaw, or, to be more precise, in some highly clandestine Varsovian circles. We realized that Poland's affairs can be settled in Poland. Let's hope that this will become the decisive element for the positive evaluation of the March events in the longer run." (ibid.)

Although the March events have been coded in historiography as one of the murkiest and most shameful events in Poland's recent history, 1968 is in many ways the founding moment for contemporary and even post-socialist Poland. In 1971, another turbulence at the commanding heights of the Polish state brought a new, "technocratic" echelon to power. The "consumer" 1970s are usually contrasted to the "coarse" 1960s, and the 1970s leader Edward Gierek is described as the "generous father" as opposed to the previous leader running the country like a "stingy mother". Yet it is often forgotten that in 1968 Gierek was in the front line of anti-Semitic rallies, and that many of his policies were actually a continuation of either blueprints or intentions drafted in the 1960s. One of the most enduring effects of the 1968 campaign against nascent "centralization" was the administrative reform completed by 1975. The former three-tier system was replaced with a two-tier one, and 17 large regions with 49 smaller ones. It was the final step in the ensuing policy of urbanization of the countryside and bringing "power" closer to the people. Its effects were exactly the opposite—the communists lost their grip over local administration which was one of the reasons for the 1979–1980 debacle (Poznanski 1996, 61f.).

One of the consequences of Poland's new spatial division was a relative empowerment of second-tier cities which managed to offset the emergence of the new centralities. Still in the 1980s moving to a small town from a city like Warsaw was not seen as a suicidal move to one's career and life—it was actually a viable option considered by many. Yet this decade also saw

a return to centralization of both resources and the power structure, although this was executed in an informal or even clandestine way (see Grala 2005 for an informed analysis). By the end of the 1980s the sentiments that all the important decisions were again only being taken in Warsaw was paramount again. In 1988, for example, *Odgłosy* published another front-page article that sounded the alarm that "the specter of redundancies is haunting Łódź" and it described, in a rather matter-of-factly register, all the cultural institutions that were either being closed down or moved to Warsaw. Only "banging one's fist on the desks of Warsaw bureaucrats", it was argued, could mitigate the trend (Koprowski 1988). But that trend was only exacerbated—and soon the idea spread that the "winners" of Poland's protracted transition to capitalism, as Kazimierz Poznanski (1996) once dubbed it, are to be found in the capital city, while the rest are the "losers" of various kinds. Anti-Warsaw sentiments, as already discussed, returned too. In 1998 the two-tier administrative system was scraped, and Poland, just as between 1957 and 1975, was again divided into a dozen of large regions. In this way too, the 2000s, as I already argued, were actually an uncanny return to the "long Sixties".

Conclusion: the protean nature of class

As Orwell put it, the class issue is like a stone wall or rather "the plate-glass pane of an aquarium", since it is "so easy to pretend it isn't there, and so impossible to get through it" (2001, 145). Seen as a relational (Tilly 2001) rather than a descriptive phenomenon, the class issue is as elusive as it is fundamental to our society. As Ira Katznelson (1994) demonstrated, the industrial city, with its novel spatial separation between the place of residence and the place of work, ushered in modern classes as distinct status groups. Culturally speaking, these classes (so well described by Orwell) are long gone, however. In fact, the moments when "class" manifests itself as culturally coherent groups are the exception rather than the rule in history. As Eric Hobsbawm argued, for example, the English working class was not "made" during the period it matured politically—as was described by E.P. Thompson (1980) in his classic study—but only as late as between the 1870s and 1914 (Katznelson 1986, 3). It quickly perished too. As Paul Mason (2008, 241) described, "probably the most successful example of con-

centrated community organization in the history of the working class" were the Jewish towns in Poland organized by Bund—a left wing union. But, again, this is a rarity. Classes are a very messy business: "the finest-meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class, any more than it can give us one of deference or love" (Thompson 1980, 8). Thus we should not treat class as a descriptive concept, as it often is for example in Bourdieu's tradition—merely an intellectual tool employed for describing the uneven distribution of various forms of capital: social, economic or cultural, and so forth. Class is much more than social or economic stratification. Instead, class should be understood as a relationship, or, to borrow Eric Wolf's phase, a "bundle of relationships"—an abstract entity that, in order to be properly understood, has to be placed "back into the field from which [it] was abstracted" (Wolf 2010, 3). Such was the aim of this chapter.

The "retreat from class" (Wood 1999) stems largely from a static understanding of this concept. It is obvious that "classes" are no longer forged only in the hidden abode of production, as was long maintained in the Marxian tradition wedded to the image and theory of capitalism derived from the industrial era. Of course it needs to be stressed that the last few decades were not only witness to the globalization of urbanization but also to the most spectacular industrial revolution in human history. The Chinese and Indian proletariat is a clear outcome of this—but like its European and American counterparts, it is far from being culturally and socially homogeneous, and it probably never will be (Silver 2003; Lee 2007; Mason 2008). Class is enormously protean, and it always reinvents itself in new social and cultural guises. As a theoretical entity, it is actually independent from its empirical manifestations. David Graeber (2011), for example, recently showed that if we understand class as a relationship, and in this case as a relationship between debtors and creditors, then class transcends the wage labor relationship and industrial capitalism; thus we can begin the history of capitalism and class struggle in the Bronze Age and not in the age of Satanic Mills, as it usually is. We can employ such a relational idea of class for understanding societies as distinct as contemporary Unites States, medieval China and ancient Rome. Social landscapes, cultural systems, political and economic regimes—all these imponderabilia of human life—eventually melt into air. Class, however, seems to persists.

Class struggle is not really about a conflict between two social groups with a distinct *lebenswelt*, such as the proletariat in dirty overalls and with soot-stained faces and the capitalists in top hats and with cigars, but rather

it is a struggle over certain key concepts. *Warszawka* is certainly one of them. To understand why this and no other concept became so crucial, we need to turn to analyze spatial transformations. Since the "long Sixties", space became the critical factor for the class phenomenon. Not in the banal sense that all human activity inevitably unfolds in space (as well as in time), or that the human experience of reality is somehow "emplaced", but in the sense that place has been eclipsed by the "production of space" as the main instrument of capitalist uneven development and the class formation process (Smith 2011). It would be foolish, of course, to argue that the division between Warsaw and the rest of Poland is the new fundamental class rift. Instead, I argued that, with the urban–rural division largely obsolete today, the city–town divide is a critical component of the "bundle of relationships" that underpins the class phenomenon in contemporary Poland. Today very few people would voluntarily move from Warsaw to Koluszki and consider this a way of moving up on the social ladder. The very idea of *Warszawka* serves here as gateway to a better understanding of how class and space are intertwined in this new, post-1968, chapter of Polish history.

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