

Sex, Communism, and Videotapes. Polish Sexual
(R)evolutions, 1956-1989



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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Abstract	8
Extended Abstract	9
Introduction	15
<i>Sexual Revolutions?</i>	16
<i>Methodology</i>	18
<i>Sources</i>	26
<i>Chapter Outline</i>	28
Chapter One: Sexual (R)evolution? Methodological Approaches to Post-World War II Sexual Histories	34
<i>The World They Have Won?</i>	35
<i>Revolutionary Genealogies</i>	38
<i>Critical Approaches to the Sexual Revolution</i>	41
<i>Perspectives from the East</i>	50
<i>Polish History and the Question of Sexual Liberation</i>	59
<i>Conclusion</i>	63
Chapter Two: Is There a Third Way? Polish Responses to the Sexual Revolution	65
<i>Post-War Revolutions</i>	68
<i>Family Planning, Abortion, and the October Thaw</i>	74
<i>Youth Culture on the ‘Other’ Side of the Iron Curtain</i>	79
‘ <i>Their Revolution</i> ’	84
<i>Official Ideology and Everyday Life</i>	91
‘ <i>Polish Sexual Revolution</i> ’ in the Press	97
‘ <i>Sexual Upbringing</i> ’ and the ‘ <i>Third Way</i> ’	100
Chapter Three: The Male Gaze. Nude Photography and its Role in Negotiating the Limits of Sexual Representation in the 1970s	106
<i>Sex, Nudity, and Visual Discourse of Late State Socialism</i>	108
<i>A Short History of Success: ‘Venus’</i>	111
<i>Forces of ‘Backwardness’ and the Paper Crisis</i>	115
<i>Visitors’ Voices</i>	120
‘ <i>Unique Appeal and Charm</i> ’	126
<i>Feminist Critique and ‘Sexual Modernity’</i>	135

Chapter Four: ‘All hope in Venus’. In Search of Socialist Erotica.	146
<i>Art or Entertainment?</i>	147
<i>Pornography, Education and Socialist ‘Sexual Upbringing’</i>	158
<i>Official Declarations versus Popular Desires</i>	162
<i>From ‘Venus’ to Commercial Erotica</i>	169
Chapter Five: From ‘Kittens’ to ‘Playboy’. Sexuality and Entertainment in People’s Poland	180
‘Sexual Thaw’?	182
‘Where There Is Entertainment, There Is Strip-Tease’	187
<i>Gendered Spectatorship and the Heteronormative Gaze</i>	194
<i>Striptease in Popular Culture</i>	198
<i>Late State Socialism and the Sense of Crisis</i>	204
<i>Sexuality in Post-Martial Law Polish Film</i>	208
<i>Late State-Socialist Porno Chic</i>	211
<i>Ribald Porno Chic on Public TV: Sexcesy</i>	214
<i>Toward a New Type of Erotica: Pan and Playboy</i>	224
‘Touch My Heart’. <i>Erotic Capital and Migration in Late State Socialism</i>	231
Chapter Six: Illegal Bodies. Pornography, Homophobia, and the Limits of Sexual Liberation	239
<i>Debating Pornography in the Media</i>	242
<i>Defining Pornography in Criminological Discourse</i>	249
<i>Prosecuting Pornography: Case Studies</i>	260
<i>Visual Revolution: Videotapes and the Demise of the Surveillance State</i>	270
Chapter Seven: Coca-Cola and Socialist Morality. Nude Activism in Late State Socialism	283
<i>Grudziądz, Chalupy, Yugoslavia: The Early History of Nude Sunbathing</i>	288
<i>From Beach Parties to Sex Parties</i>	293
<i>Nude Sunbathing and Socialist Morality</i>	301
<i>Naturist Escapes from State-Socialist Reality</i>	307
<i>Erotic Capital, Heteronormativity, and Sexualisation of Naturism</i>	313
<i>Profits and Conflicts within the Naturist Movement</i>	321
<i>The Demise of Naturism after 1989</i>	325
Conclusion	330
Figures	336

Abbreviations	337
Bibliography	338
<i>Primary Sources</i>	338
<i>Secondary Literature</i>	341

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Abstract

The thesis investigates the history of state-socialist sexualities in Poland through the lens of visual culture. By focusing on phenomena such as striptease shows, nude photography exhibitions, beauty pageants, and pornographic videotapes, the thesis examines the changing approaches toward nudity and sex in Polish public discourse between 1956 and 1989. Thus, the dissertation seeks to uncover the forgotten history of state-socialist sexual (r)evolutions and engages critically with the scholarship on the global sexual revolution to complicate our understanding of this phenomenon beyond the usual Cold War stereotypes.

Methodologically, this dissertation focuses on the role sexuality played in dominant discourses that attempted to redefine, modernise, and control both male and female bodies. Inspired by Michel Foucault's approach to the history of sexuality, this thesis focuses on discourse and perceives it as a primary field in which sexuality, norms, and transgressions of norms are constructed and defined.

The dissertation surveys a wide array of sources – from official documents, through articles printed in popular press, up to the first sexualised advertisements. On the one hand, the thesis focuses on the role of communist ideology and official regulations in creating space where new sexual identities could emerge, as well as in limiting their scope. On the other, it also analyses the role consumerist aspirations played in modernising sexual behaviours toward the end of state socialism and how sexuality came to be used as a metaphor to narrate the sense of late state-socialist crisis. In many regards the 'Eastern' example teaches us that sexual liberation is not a straightforward and one-dimensional process but, rather, that it can denote quite different things depending on its geographical and social context.

Extended Abstract

‘Sexual revolution’ has proved to be a powerful concept. It has been frequently re-used and re-defined over the course of the last century. However, most of the academics writing about the topic have explicitly or implicitly assumed that the ‘sexual revolution’ was a solely Western phenomenon. As a consequence, the developments in the history of sexuality of the countries on the other side of the ‘Iron Curtain’ have either been downplayed or overlooked. This dissertation bridges this gap in the scholarship by analysing the ‘Eastern’ sexual revolution using Poland as its case study.

The thesis investigates the history of state-socialist sexualities in Poland through the lens of visual culture. By focusing on phenomena such as striptease shows, nude photography exhibitions, beauty pageants, and pornographic videotapes, the thesis examines the changing approaches toward nudity and sex in Polish public discourse between 1956 and 1989. Thus, the dissertation seeks to uncover the forgotten history of state-socialist sexual (r)evolutions and engages critically with the scholarship on the global sexual revolution to complicate our understanding of this phenomenon beyond the usual Cold War stereotypes.

Moreover, the thesis aims to problematise the idea of sexual revolution in twentieth century Poland, set against changing attitudes towards sexuality between 1956 and 1989. Contrary to a dominant narrative that normalises the contemporary Polish reproductive regime as something natural and traditional to Polish society, the dissertation historicises these categories. Instead of following simplistic dichotomies that portray the East as sexually ‘backward’ and the West as ‘progressive’, the thesis explores processes that do not fit into such frameworks and complicate our understanding of state-socialist sexualities. On the one hand, the thesis focuses on the role of communist

ideology and official regulations in creating space where new sexual identities could emerge, as well as in limiting their scope. On the other, it also analyses the role consumerist aspirations played in modernising sexual behaviours toward the end of state socialism and how sexuality came to be used as a metaphor to narrate the sense of late state-socialist crisis. As the thesis argues, the ‘sexual revolution’ in Poland started long before the end of communism, and in fact the march towards ‘sexual modernity’ (however we define it) is still far from over.

Methodologically, this dissertation focuses on the role sexuality played in dominant discourses that attempted to redefine, modernise, and control both male and female bodies. Inspired by Michel Foucault’s approach to the history of sexuality, this thesis focuses on discourse and perceives it as a primary field in which sexuality, norms, and transgressions of norms are constructed and defined. Furthermore, it aims to deepen our understanding of the sexual revolution as a truly global yet ambiguous phenomenon. In many regards the ‘Eastern’ example can show us that sexual liberation is not a straightforward and one-dimensional process but, rather, that it can denote quite different things depending on its geographical and social context. By bringing sexuality into the study of Polish state socialism the thesis complicates the ‘totalitarian paradigm’ dominant in the study of post-war Polish history. This narrative has too often been structured around a simplistic totalitarian paradigm which does not reflect the complexities of the social and cultural changes that occurred between 1945 and 1989. Although the communist regime was hardly welcomed by the majority of Polish society, the modernisation project associated with it significantly transformed the social landscape of the country. Sexual modernity, however we choose to define it, played an important role in this process.

The dissertation surveys a wide array of sources – from official documents, through articles printed in popular press, up to the first sexualised advertisements.

Contrary to popular stereotypes, one can find an abundance of material concerning nudity and sexuality under state socialism. First, I analyse official documents: the Citizens' Militia and Security Service records, archival documents of various state institutions such as the Ministry of the Interior, the Censorship Office, and the Public Opinion Research Centre. Second, I follow the development of expert sexological and criminological discourses in both specialist and popular press. Finally, a large part of the analysis focuses on visual discourse and various representations of naked female bodies in the press, TV, and works of art.

The thesis consists of seven chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. Due to the elusive and fluid character of the topics studied in the thesis, the structure of the chapters does not fully follow the chronological outline. Rather, they are arranged thematically but try to follow internal chronological structures to guide the reader through the development of the discourses on sexuality in People's Poland.

The first chapter analyses the historical scholarship on the sexual revolution and the history of sexuality in state socialism. Its primary focus is on the historical lineage of the sexual revolution and its role in feminist and scholarly debates. By analysing different conceptualisations of the category, I argue that there can hardly be one sexual revolution, whether in the West or in the East. Therefore, it should rather be treated as a rhetorical device, employed by historical actors to make sense of the ambiguous past and to campaign for social change. The second part of the chapter offers a survey of the relevant literature on the history of sexuality in Poland and in the region. Thus, the chapter situates the dissertation in this blooming field of study and argues for a more transnational approach to studying state-socialist sexualities.

The goal of the second chapter is twofold. On the one hand, it analyses how attitudes towards sexuality changed in the first two post-war decades and how state-led

policies (such as labour market reforms, official endorsement of family planning, legal abortions) influenced how regular people understood and performed their sexualities. It argues that many factors commonly considered to form a part of the Western sexual revolution had been present in Poland long before the ‘revolution’ began on the other side of the Iron Curtain. On the other hand, the second chapter investigates how sexual liberation was portrayed in the Polish media in the 1960s and 1970s, crystallising a set of ideas, phenomena and events that would come to be labelled as part of the sexual revolution. It focuses on the moment when a Polish version of the sexual revolution began to be identified and observed in the media and argues that experts were actively engaged in the search for a ‘Third Way’, a socialist vision of sexual liberation.

To further explore how this ‘Third Way’ toward sexual liberation could be defined under state socialism, the next two chapters focus on the ‘Venus’ female nude photographic exhibitions organised annually in Cracow between 1970 and 1991. The third chapter traces the history of the exhibit and analyses the visual language employed to argue for greater representation of naked female bodies in the public sphere. While to many the nudes exhibited in Cracow could signify a radical shift in the discourse on sexuality, I argue that it was still a revolution within well-established patriarchal boundaries in which the female body was primarily an object of male, heteronormative gaze. To support this argument, the chapter analyses a few examples of feminist art projects from the 1970s and their attempts to criticise and dismantle existing gender hierarchies. Even if the works of artists such as Ewa Partum or Natalia L.L. never made it to the mainstream, the history of early feminist art in Poland offers evidence that competing visions of sexual liberation could be developed and discussed under state socialism.

Chapter Four traces the legacies of ‘Venus’ and its impact on redefining state-socialist approaches toward nudity. The chapter analyses media discussions surrounding ‘Venus’ to show how journalists and experts attempted to redefine the boundary between worthy erotic art and pornography. In such debates they lamented the poor level of Polish ‘sexual culture’ and saw socialist erotica as a tool for educating society and promoting good sexual behaviour. Yet, as the examples of sexualised advertising and nudes published in the press seem to suggest, this ‘Third Way’ toward sexual liberation was a bumpy road to follow.

The fifth chapter explores how erotic contents came to be seen as a form of entertainment in the final decade of state socialism. From striptease shows, through beauty pageants, up to the first Polish erotic magazines such as *Playtboy* and *Pan (Gentleman)*, the last decade of state socialism witnessed a significant relaxation of sexual mores which was noticeable in visual media. The chapter brings together such different phenomena to showcase how in the 1980s socialist sexual modernity came to be redefined once again, to serve the purposes of male heterosexual desires. Yet, the chapter also sheds some light on the ways in which ‘erotic capital’ could be used by women themselves for the purpose of advancing their own, often transnational careers (as in the case of actress Danuta Lato). Thus, the chapter aims to problematise the sexual revolution of late state socialism as both oppressive to women but also opening new spheres of agency and emancipation.

Drawing on the previous sections, the sixth chapter analyses how expert discourses on sexuality influenced how pornography was defined, debated, and criminalised in state-socialist Poland from 1956 to 1989. By analysing anti-pornography legislation and criminological discourse, as well as actual investigations into alleged pornography distribution, the chapter argues that the approach towards ‘indecent’ images

under communist rule was rather lenient (as the low number of prosecuted cases may suggest) and that control lessened over time. Yet, the chapter observes a significant disparity in the treatment of heterosexual and homosexual pornography, with the latter being perceived as more dangerous and thus in need of stricter control. The chapter also traces the emergence of a new technology – videotapes – and its impact on the landscape of illegal erotica in 1980s Poland.

The final chapter concentrates on the last decade of state socialism and follows the emergence, development, and demise of the Polish naturist movement. I argue that the sudden popularity of naked sunbathing in the 1980s reveals a lot about changing attitudes toward consumption, leisure, and gender in late socialism. By focusing on the role of sex in this declaratively asexual movement, the chapter highlights the ambiguities and contradictions of socialist sexual modernisation. Thus, I argue, the history of state-socialist naturism can offer an invaluable lens through which to view Polish society in the process of profound and perhaps unfinished transformation.

In my conclusion, I argue that the sexual (r)evolutions in post-war Poland were neither unidirectional nor comprehensive, yet their impact on transforming approaches toward sex should not be underestimated. Images of naked women circulating in the socialist press; illicit videotapes with pornographic films sold at open-air market stands; finally, naked beauty pageants organised at naturist beaches – all such artifacts and events greatly influenced the ways in which sex was being redefined in Poland throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Identifying three ‘waves’ of Polish sexual revolution in relation to the cases laid out in previous chapters, I conclude by reflecting on the amnesia surrounding communist period in debates on sexuality and its significance for present-day debates.

Introduction

In 2017 the film *Sztuka kochania* (*The Art of Loving*, dir. M. Sadowska) suddenly became a blockbuster in Polish cinemas. The film portrayed Michalina Wisłocka (played by Magdalena Boczarska), the famous sexologist, as a solitary heroine fighting for the Polish sexual revolution. On the one hand, the plot focuses on Wisłocka's private life and her own troubled path toward sexual self-fulfilment. On the other, it follows her medical career and numerous attempts to publish a sex manual that would respond to the needs and concerns voiced by her female gynaecological patients. In the film Wisłocka rebels against her sexist work environment, the prudishness of state authorities, and the conservative academic community. Her goal is to bring good sex to all women – and she succeeds. The film was applauded for the screenplay and scenography, as well as for cultivating the memory of the most famous Polish sexual revolutionary. Indeed, Wisłocka's book *The Art of Loving*, which was published by the state publishing press Iskry [Sparks] in 1978, sold in millions of copies and symbolically marked the advent of the new, modern discourse on human sexuality under state socialism.¹ Yet, was Wisłocka really the only force behind modernising Polish approaches to sex?

Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe (henceforth: CEE) are too often believed to have been prudish, and sexual liberation is usually associated with post-World War II Western history and thus rarely looked at in the communist context.² Yet, as the example of Wisłocka's sex manual demonstrates, the picture is much more ambiguous than these Cold War stereotypes make us think. To further challenge such

¹ R. Ingrbrant, 'Michalina Wisłocka's *The Art of Loving* and the Legacy of Polish Sexology', *Sexuality and Culture*, 24/2 (2020), 371–88.

² I explore this topic in greater detail in Chapter One.

notions, this thesis aims to uncover the forgotten histories of state-socialist sexual revolutions. In the end, I argue, the ways in which people explored and enjoyed their sexual identities on the two sides of the Iron Curtain did not differ that much. And by focusing on stories and discourses about socialist sexualities, we can better understand the transnational character of post-war European culture and the complicated relationship between sex, socialism, and capitalism.

The goal of this dissertation, therefore, is to look at the Polish sexual (r)evolutions between 1956 and 1989 beyond the usual binaries and stereotypes. Instead of contrasting the East and the West, I want to focus on similarities and transnational transfers. Rather than attributing too much agency to single historical events or actors such as Wisłocka, I want to understand transformations in Polish sexualities in their broader and more ambiguous contexts, hence the use of plural form in the thesis title. Thus, this dissertation studies how sex was employed in discussions of the modernisation of Polish society and how various actors defined what ‘modern sex’ meant under state socialism. Finally, the dissertation to a large extent focuses on visual culture and shifting norms of sexual representation in the media. By observing how female nudity was gradually normalised in public discourse I want to show that Wisłocka’s sex manual was not the only modernising force. If anything, it responded to changes that were already well underway in Polish society.

Sexual Revolutions?

Sexual revolution is popularly portrayed as an essentially Western phenomenon. Yet, as I explore further in Chapter One, such a claim is problematic for several reasons. First, it rests on the assumption that the ‘West’ holds the ultimate formula for sexual progress and other regions of the world simply need to ‘catch up’ with it. Thus, equally

valid experiences and discourses originating in the peripheries are ignored or diminished. As such, this approach reinforces colonial hierarchies instead of critically dismantling them. On the other hand, this paradigm essentialises the West as well, and ignores various contradictions and conflicting trajectories of sexual liberation. Therefore, the Western-centric model of ‘sexual revolution’ produces stereotypes instead of knowledge and does little to help us understand the multitude of approaches to sexuality in post-war Europe and beyond.

Yet, sexual revolution is such a potent category that it can hardly be abandoned. For decades, it has informed our understanding of crucial categories such as ‘emancipation’ and ‘modernity’. Therefore, instead of ignoring the term, this thesis aims to redefine and decentre it. By taking the category of ‘sexual revolution’ to the semi-peripheries and beyond the Cold War divide, I argue that we can learn much more about the role sexuality plays in people’s lives if we abandon easy binary oppositions and instead focus on ambiguity. Thus, by writing Eastern Europe back into the global history of sexuality, this thesis proposes to redefine the understanding of sexual progress to account for a multitude of often conflicting discourses and strategies associated with ‘sexual revolution’. As I demonstrate in the case of the Polish People’s Republic (henceforth: PRL), such a new definition of sexual revolution helps us better understand not only the past, but also the present.

To conclude, this dissertation does not employ the sexual revolution category in its literal sense (whatever that would be, as Chapter One explores). Rather, it focuses on the ways it inspired and influenced debates on sexuality under state socialism. By looking at how historical actors defined sexual revolution I argue that this ‘travelling concept’ can shed light on the character of public discussions and moral panics that would remain

obscure had we decided to stick to the ‘original’ definition of the sexual revolution.³ Moreover, I intentionally leave aside discussion on the revolutionary or evolutionary character of sexual transformations in People’s Poland – hence the use of parentheses in the thesis title. Instead of supporting an argument for or against (r)evolution, I attempt to analyse the discourses on sexuality under state socialism in their entirety and ambiguity. In the end, sex is such a personal matter (even if discussed publicly) that revolution and evolution can mean very different things depending on whom one asks. What is however beyond doubt, is that sexual revolution was being actively discussed in both popular and expert discourse of the period and therefore necessitates closer examination.

Methodology

Methodologically, this dissertation draws on a rich body of literature in the history of sexuality and gender history. It focuses on the role sexuality played in dominant discourses that attempted to redefine, modernise, and control both male and female bodies. As Joan Wallach Scott famously phrased it, ‘gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power’ and thus the study of gender and sexuality is inherently a study of power and hierarchy.⁴ Inspired by Michel Foucault’s approach to the history of sexuality, this thesis focuses on discourse and perceives it as a primary field in which sexuality, norms, and transgressions of norms are constructed and defined.⁵ Yet, there is hardly one discourse on sexuality – rather, the dissertation studies a multiplicity of them,

³ M. Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto, 2002).

⁴ J.W. Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, *The American Historical Review*, 91/5 (1986), 1068.

⁵ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Harmondsworth, 1990).

distinguishing between institutional, expert, and media discourses, and paying particular attention to the role played by visual culture.

The main object of study in this thesis is heterosexuality and its historical transformations. The problem of naturalising heterosexuality as the unchangeable 'norm' is usually counteracted by research projects focused on queering the history of sex. However, I decided to take an alternative route. Rather than focusing on queer sexualities, I want to problematise heterosexuality as such and show how it was historically produced and negotiated. Naturally, this does not mean that non-heteronormative experiences are ignored. On the contrary, when given the chance, I try to uncover forgotten histories of queer striptease performances and situate anti-pornography legislation in the wider context of homophobic discourses of the 1980s. Yet, at the core of my research is a focus on heterosexuality and its role in redefining modernity and sex under state socialism. I believe that through historicising heterosexuality and uncovering hidden structures of its reproduction, we can better understand the oppression of queer identities.

To analyse such processes fully, this thesis employs the categories of heteropatriarchy and homosociality. The first term can be defined as 'an overarching system of male dominance through the institution of compulsory heterosexuality'.⁶ Heteropatriarchy prioritises male desires and reaffirms male power, while defining them solely in terms of heterosexual relationships. Thus, gay identities are scrutinised while the existence of lesbians is ignored or mocked. The heteropatriarchal model rests on profoundly binary oppositions, and therefore excludes queer and trans identities. Most importantly, the category of heteropatriarchy is broader than just patriarchy as it

⁶ G.A. Yep, 'The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies: Notes on Injury, Healing, and Queer World-Making', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45/2-4 (2003), 31.

encompasses not only gendered hierarchies of power, but also problematises the domination of heterosexuality as the only available norm. By observing how the discrimination against women and against non-heteronormative desires intertwine and reinforce each other we can better understand how in seemingly equal socialist societies such unequal structures could persist and in fact develop despite ideological proclamations.

On the other hand, the category of homosociality allows me to closely analyse how such heterosexual desires were performed in social settings. Homosociality is usually employed to describe relations between people of the same sex, especially within all-male social groups.⁷ Although such forms of male bonding can be often characterised by ‘intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality’,⁸ Eve Sedgwick famously argued for the use of the term ‘male homosocial desire’ to include the full continuum of men’s relations with other men.⁹ This thesis employs the category of homosociality in its most basic understanding, to explore how all-male communities could serve as spaces in which heterosexual desires were being socially constructed and reaffirmed. Yet, the queer potential of the term is also quite inspirational for my argument. For instance, when writing about the history of the naturist movement, I explore the limits of male homosociality through the lenses of entrenched social homophobia and argue that nudity could only be accepted if the structures of heterosexual power remained uncontested. Male-to-male naked bonding was thus deemed unacceptable because of its potential for invoking homosexual desires.

⁷ N. Hammarén and T. Johansson, ‘Homosociality: In between Power and Intimacy’, *SAGE Open*, 4/1 (2014), 1–11.

⁸ E.K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, NY, 1985), 1.

⁹ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 2.

Although critical discourse analysis forms the core of my research methodology,¹⁰ the dissertation is also inspired by Alf Lüdtke's *Alltagsgeschichte* and the category of *Eigen-Sinn*. On the one hand, my goal is to uncover structures of power and to study the top-down process of redefining state-socialist sexualities. On the other, I do not want to ignore individual experiences and the role of grassroots activism in creating news spheres for performing sexual identities and contesting traditional values. By focusing on individual agency, I aim to highlight different and often unexpected ways in which people could perform their subjectivity in seemingly unwelcoming circumstances.¹¹ Therefore, some of the chapters are illustrated with individual case studies that best showcase the ambiguities and conflicting trajectories of people's sexual biographies. Only by writing them into the history of dominant discourses can we grasp the multidimensionality of the Polish sexual revolution under state socialism.

This dissertation also traces how the liberalisation of Polish sexual mores under state socialism coincided with the advent of neo-liberal capitalist discourse. I argue that sexuality and nudity played an important role in mainstreaming consumer identities as well as proto-capitalist approaches toward economic exchange. The commodification of female bodies in the media, the emergence of public striptease, and the activities of the naturist movement attest to the significance of erotic capital in late state-socialist public discourse. Erotic capital, as defined by Catherine Hakim, is a fourth type of capital added to the seminal classification developed by Pierre Bourdieu in which he distinguishes among social, economic, and cultural capital and explores their role in social mobility

¹⁰ See R. Wodak and M. Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London, 2001); T.A. Van Dijk, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', in D. Tannen and others (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Chichester, 2015), 466–85.

¹¹ A. Lüdtke, 'What Is the History of Everyday Life and Who Are Its Practitioners?', in A. Lüdtke (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life* (Princeton, 2018), 3–40.

and interaction in capitalist societies.¹² Hakim argues that Bourdieu's typology ignores the ways in which sexual attractiveness and competence can affect one's social status and abilities. As she puts it, 'erotic capital has been overlooked because it is held mostly by women, and the social sciences have generally overlooked or disregarded women in their focus on male activities, values and interests'.¹³ Moreover, even some feminists have drawn a false opposition between 'worthy' human capital and unworthy erotic capital and disregarded the pleasure and agency that women can derive from their own sexual attractiveness.¹⁴ Thus, to fully understand the role sex can play in social mobility, erotic capital has to be included in social research and the anti-sex bias needs to be confronted and problematised.

What I argue in this thesis is that erotic capital can be a source of agency and empowerment, especially for women, but it can also be easily appropriated, especially in the realities of heteropatriarchal society. As I demonstrate in the case of the 'Miss Nature' beauty pageants (Chapter Seven), it is perhaps impossible to distinguish between authentically or inauthentically emancipatory uses of erotic capital. Yet, observing such appropriation does not necessarily invalidate the experiences of women who felt empowered thanks to their sexual attractiveness. Therefore, rather than judging historical actors against some artificial definition of 'sexual emancipation', I focus on ambiguities and individual experiences. While several arguments in the thesis are inspired by feminist and queer critiques of the 'sexual revolution',¹⁵ I also attempt to complicate our

¹² P. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in J.G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, N.Y., 1986), 241–58.

¹³ C. Hakim, 'Erotic Capital', *European Sociological Review*, 26/5 (2010), 510.

¹⁴ Hakim, 'Erotic Capital', 511–2.

¹⁵ See S. Jeffreys, *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (London, 1990); K. Wiedlack, S. Shoshanova and M. Godovannaya, eds., *Queer-Feminist Solidarity and the East/West Divide* (Oxford, 2020).

assessment of state-socialist sexualities and look at them in the context of language and terminology available to people at the time. While for us erotic images in the press are nothing new, and in fact are often criticised as a form of objectification of women's bodies, for Polish audiences in the 1970s they could denote modernity and participation in the global consumer culture. Acknowledging this fact does not justify or excuse the heteropatriarchal character of state-socialist culture, but rather helps us to better understand the ambiguous past.

As the history of sexuality is such a broad field of study, this thesis focuses primarily on visual culture and changing approaches to nudity in state-socialist Poland. Undoubtedly, the history of the Polish sexual revolution could be written through the lenses of sexology, contraception, family planning or family history, and scholars such as Agnieszka Kościańska, Agata Ignaciuk, and Barbara Klich-Kluczewska have already contributed to this area of inquiry.¹⁶ However, I want to argue that it was exactly visual culture where the changes were most radical and noticeable. While in all the other above-mentioned fields the key developments happened within expert discourses and thus their numbers of recipients were rather limited, the increased eroticisation of popular culture affected all social groups, if not equally. Female nudes were published in both student and local magazines; erotic scenes featured in many types of films; striptease shows were organised in big and small cities alike. Although all such representations of nudity had their own unique audiences, and this diversity necessitates a separate study, one thing can

¹⁶ A. Kościańska, *Gender, Pleasure, and Violence: The Construction of Expert Knowledge of Sexuality in Poland* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2020); A. Ignaciuk, 'No Man's Land? Gendering Contraception in Family Planning Advice Literature in State-Socialist Poland (1950s–1980s)', *Social History Of Medicine*, 2019, 1–23; B. Klich-Kluczewska, *Family, Taboo and Communism in Poland, 1956-1989* (Berlin, 2021). For a more detailed overview of the state of research in the field see Chapter One.

be argued for certain – that visual culture proved to be a transmission belt of sexual revolution in Poland of unparalleled breadth, variety, and reach.

Following scholars such as Kenneth Clark and Philippa Levine, I see nudity as a social and cultural construct. As Clark observes in his seminal study of the nude, the distinction between ‘nudity’ and ‘nakedness’ in the English language is itself of a paramount importance. While the latter relates to the lack of clothing and ‘implies embarrassment’, the former invokes much more noble connotations – that of prosperity and confidence.¹⁷ This distinction is then put to work to justify colonial hierarchies, as Levine’s research on the British Empire convincingly demonstrates.¹⁸ According to Levine ‘nakedness was never merely description of the state of unclothedness, but a set of cultural artifacts, a set of cultural determinants [...]’, which in turn served to justify the colonial gaze over the bodies of ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’ unclothed subjects.¹⁹ While in the Polish language the distinction between nudity and nakedness is not so apparent, the definition of the nude has definitely been a contested one. By focusing on state-socialist debates over appropriate sexual representation and the boundary between ‘artistic’ and ‘pornographic’ nudity I analyse how such values were construed and redefined for the purposes of socialist media discourse. Even if colonial hierarchies were not so visible in the Polish discussions of nakedness (although not completely irrelevant, as the example of the song ‘Chałupy Welcome To’ from Chapter Seven teaches us), the distinction between ‘noble’ and ‘indecent’ nakedness occupied the minds of

¹⁷ K. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton, N.J., 1990), 3.

¹⁸ P. Levine, ‘Naked Truths: Bodies, Knowledge, and the Erotics of Colonial Power’, *Journal of British Studies*, 52/1 (2013), 5–25.

¹⁹ Levine, ‘Naked Truths’, 25.

commentators and was employed to justify gendered hierarchies and the heteronormative gaze.

To better understand the framing of female nudity in the media discourse of state-socialist Poland, I refer to the category of voyeurism. The term was originally developed by psychiatrists to define the sexual paraphilia characterised by ‘sexual interest in or the practice of spying on people engaged in intimate behaviours, such as undressing, engaging in sex, or other actions usually considered to be of a private nature’.²⁰ Yet, Jonathan Metzl observes that, as the psychiatric use of the category grew narrower over the course of the twentieth century, its prevalence in popular culture signified a profound shift in American history. Metzl concludes that development of reality TV, talk shows, webcams and other new technologies and media meant that in late twentieth century America ‘the ready availability of voyeurism marked not society’s deviants, but society itself’.²¹

This process of mainstreaming voyeurism was analysed by Clay Calvert, whose definition of mediated voyeurism has been a great inspiration for my argument in this thesis. Going beyond the narrow psychoanalytic interpretation of voyeurism as simply a sexual paraphilia, Calvert proposes to define mediated voyeurism as primarily a social phenomenon, namely ‘the consumption of revealing images and information about others’ apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for the purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of mass media and Internet’.²² While many of the phenomena analysed by Calvert

²⁰ S.P. Green, *Criminalizing Sex*, 2020, 195.

²¹ J.M. Metzl, ‘Voyeur Nation? Changing Definitions of Voyeurism, 1950-2004’, *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 12/2 (2004), 130.

²² C. Calvert, *Voyeur Nation: Media, Privacy, and Peering in Modern Culture* (Boulder, Colo., 2000), 2–3.

certainly had their origins in American commercial culture, some aspects of mediated voyeurism can also be observed in the development of media discourse in state-socialist Poland. The changing approaches to female nudity in socialist media serve as a perfect lens through which to observe the growing importance of voyeurism in Polish culture. If anything, encounters with nudity in state-socialist media such as TV, calendars, and the popular press had more to do with the voyeuristic desire to clandestinely observe, rather than to openly assert one's sexual desires. Moreover, as I explore in this thesis, catering to the male gaze may have been more acceptable to censors than allowing an open discussion of non-normative sexual behaviours. Nonetheless, this thesis analyses how mediated voyeurism grew increasingly visible in the visual culture of late state-socialist Poland and demonstrates that in the end, consumer desires were not so different on the two sides of the Iron Curtain.

Sources

As my research is situated at the intersection of different methodologies, the sources I am using in the dissertation are also quite varied. Contrary to popular stereotypes, one can find an abundance of material concerning nudity and sexuality under state socialism. The problem however is finding the right method for interpreting them as well as accounting for several 'blank spots' in our knowledge. Therefore, instead of focusing on one set of sources I look at the history of sexuality from many different perspectives. First, I analyse institutional discourse through official documents: the Citizens' Militia and Security Service police records (hosted in the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw), archival documents of various state institutions such as the Ministry of the Interior and Censorship Office (stored in the Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw), and the on-line archives of the Public Opinion Research Centre (OBOP).

Second, I follow the development of expert sexological and criminological discourses in both specialist publications and the popular press. Finally, a large part of the analysis focuses on visual discourse and various representations of naked female bodies in the press, TV, and works of art.²³

This set of sources is by no means an exhaustive one – and in many instances I suggest avenues for future research which I had to abandon due to time and space constraints. In other cases, I explore previously uncharted territories such as song lyrics, advertisements, and TV shows. In the end, this dissertation is to a large extent a methodological experiment which aims to open up new areas of research rather than close them with some definite conclusions.

Most of this thesis was written during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdowns in Poland and the United Kingdom forced me to rearrange my research plans and restricted access to archives and libraries. As a result, some sets of sources have been left largely unexplored despite my best intentions. I was not able to access judicial records other than investigation files held in the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw. Thus, my account of anti-pornography persecution is most likely incomplete. Moreover, due to time constraints I was not able to finish my research in the censorship files in the Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw. My conclusions regarding the influence of censorship over the discourse on sexuality in state-socialist Poland are therefore tentative and require further investigation.

However, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic also inspired me to look beyond the usual source material. For instance, I have conducted research in on-line

²³ More on photography and desire see J. V. Evans, 'Seeing Subjectivity: Erotic Photography and the Optics of Desire', *The American Historical Review*, 118/2 (2013), 430–62.

archives of press agencies and discovered surprisingly rich collections of photographs documenting the history of the Polish naturist movement and striptease shows, as well as the first uses of nudity in advertising.²⁴ Moreover, through on-line auctioning sites such as Allegro.pl I was able to collect some artifacts of state-socialist sexual culture, such as a soft-porn calendar from the 1980s. Moreover, I have also explored the archives of past auctions, discovering a rich set of erotic memorabilia from the epoch. Such artifacts certainly offer a new perspective which would be impossible to grasp through traditional archives, but also demonstrate that the memory of state-socialist sexualities is much more alive in the Polish society than we are used to thinking.

Practically all my sources have been written or recorded in Polish. When I found it helpful for supporting my argument, I translated larger chunks of text to offer readers the chance to follow narratives as they were articulated by historical actors. It should however be noted that such translations are per definition imperfect as some hidden meanings and contexts are impossible to translate. As many sexuality-related linguistic terms and phrases are crucial for my argument, I usually provide the Polish original in brackets so that readers can catch a glimpse of the authentic language and verify the accuracy of my translation.

Chapter Outline

The dissertation follows transformations in discourses on sexuality in Poland between 1956 and 1989. While the latter caesura is to some extent self-explanatory, as it marks the end of state socialism in CEE, the former requires justification. Generally, 1956 is widely believed to symbolise the profound shift from Stalinism to post-Stalinism in the

²⁴ For example: the Polish Press Agency, East News Agency, Forum Agency.

entire region. While usually remembered for the political thaw, release of political prisoners and liberalisation in public debates, the year was also important for discussions of morality and sex. It was in April 1956 that abortion law was liberalised in Poland, radically changing the reproductive regime for 30 years to come. Moreover, 1956 also saw notable debates on matters such as sexual services, striptease, and women's position in society, and an observable sexualisation of the media, with images of attractive young women – so-called 'kittens' – entering the popular imagination (see Chapters Two and Five). Therefore, 1956 is a good place to begin to analyse the changing discourse on sexuality in People's Poland.

Due to the elusive and fluid character of the topics studied in the thesis, the structure of the chapters does not fully follow the chronological outline. Personally, in the process of researching and writing this thesis I have been constantly surprised by the level of interconnectedness that manifested itself in the analysed topics and sources, making it virtually impossible to divide the chapters according to neat chronological criteria. Therefore, the chapters are arranged thematically but try to follow internal chronological structures to guide the reader through the development of the discourses on sexuality in People's Poland.

The first chapter analyses the historical scholarship on the sexual revolution and the history of sexuality in state socialism. Its primary focus is on the historical lineage of the sexual revolution and its role in feminist and scholarly debates. By analysing different conceptualisations of the category, I argue that there can hardly be one sexual revolution, whether in the West or in the East. Therefore, it should rather be treated as a rhetorical device, employed by historical actors to make sense of the ambiguous past and to campaign for social change. The second part of the chapter offers a survey of the relevant literature on the history of sexuality in Poland and in the region. Thus, the chapter situates

the dissertation in this blooming field of study and argues for a more transnational approach to studying state-socialist sexualities.

The goal of the second chapter is twofold. On the one hand, it analyses how attitudes towards sexuality changed in the first two post-war decades and how state-led policies (such as labour market reforms, official endorsement of family planning, legal abortions) influenced how regular people understood and performed their sexualities. It argues that many factors commonly considered to form a part of the Western sexual revolution had been present in Poland long before the ‘revolution’ began on the other side of the Iron Curtain. On the other hand, the second chapter investigates how sexual liberation was portrayed in the Polish media in the 1960s and 1970s, crystallising a set of ideas, phenomena and events that would come to be labelled as part of the sexual revolution. It focuses on the moment when a Polish version of the sexual revolution began to be identified and observed in the media and argues that experts were actively engaged in the search for a ‘Third Way’, a socialist vision of sexual liberation.

To further explore how this ‘Third Way’ toward sexual liberation could be defined under state socialism, the next two chapters focus on the ‘Venus’ female nude photographic exhibitions organised annually in Cracow between 1970 and 1991. The third chapter traces the history of the exhibit and analyses the visual language employed to argue for greater representation of naked female bodies in the public sphere. While to many the nudes exhibited in Cracow could signify a radical shift in the discourse on sexuality, I argue that it was still a revolution within well-established patriarchal boundaries in which the female body was primarily an object of male, heteronormative gaze. To support this argument, the chapter analyses a few examples of feminist art projects from the 1970s and their attempts to criticise and dismantle existing gender hierarchies. Even if the works of artists such as Ewa Partum or Natalia L.L. never made

it to the mainstream, the history of early feminist art in Poland offers evidence that competing visions of sexual liberation could be developed and discussed under state socialism.

Chapter Four traces the legacies of ‘Venus’ and its impact on redefining state-socialist approaches toward nudity. The chapter analyses media discussions surrounding ‘Venus’ to show how journalists and experts attempted to redefine the boundary between worthy erotic art and pornography. In such debates they lamented the poor level of Polish ‘sexual culture’ and saw socialist erotica as a tool for educating society and promoting good sexual behaviour. Yet, as the examples of sexualised advertising and nudes published in the press seem to suggest, this ‘Third Way’ toward sexual liberation was a bumpy road to follow.

The fifth chapter explores how erotic contents came to be seen as a form of entertainment in the final decade of state socialism. From striptease shows, through beauty pageants, up to the first Polish erotic magazines such as *Playboy* and *Pan (Gentleman)*, the last decade of state socialism witnessed a significant relaxation of sexual mores which was noticeable in visual media. The chapter brings together such different phenomena to showcase how in the 1980s socialist sexual modernity came to be redefined once again, to serve the purposes of male heterosexual desires. Yet, the chapter also sheds some light on the ways in which ‘erotic capital’ could be used by women themselves for the purpose of advancing their own, often transnational careers (as in the case of actress Danuta Lato). Thus, the chapter aims to problematise the sexual revolution of late state socialism as both oppressive to women but also opening new spheres of agency and emancipation.

Drawing on the previous sections, the sixth chapter analyses how expert discourses on sexuality influenced how pornography was defined, debated, and

criminalised in state-socialist Poland from 1956 to 1989. By analysing anti-pornography legislation and criminological discourse, as well as actual investigations into alleged pornography distribution, the chapter argues that the approach towards ‘indecent’ images under communist rule was rather lenient (as the low number of prosecuted cases may suggest) and that control lessened over time. Yet, the chapter observes a significant disparity in the treatment of heterosexual and homosexual pornography, with the latter being perceived as more dangerous and thus in need of stricter control. The chapter also traces the emergence of a new technology – videotapes – and its impact on the landscape of illegal erotica in 1980s Poland.

The final chapter concentrates on the last decade of state socialism and follows the emergence, development, and demise of the Polish naturist movement. I argue that the sudden popularity of naked sunbathing in the 1980s reveals a lot about changing attitudes toward consumption, leisure, and gender in late socialism. By focusing on the role of sex in this declaratively asexual movement, the chapter highlights the ambiguities and contradictions of socialist sexual modernisation. Thus, I argue, the history of state-socialist naturism can offer an invaluable lens through which to view Polish society in the process of profound and perhaps unfinished transformation.

In my conclusion, I argue that the sexual (r)evolutions in post-war Poland were neither unidirectional nor comprehensive, yet their impact on transforming approaches toward sex should not be underestimated. Images of naked women circulating in the socialist press; illicit videotapes with pornographic films sold at open-air market stands; finally, naked beauty pageants organised at naturist beaches – all such artifacts and events greatly influenced the ways in which sex was being redefined in Poland throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Identifying three ‘waves’ of Polish sexual revolution in relation to the cases laid out in previous chapters, I conclude by reflecting on the

amnesia surrounding communist period in debates on sexuality and its significance for present-day debates.

Chapter One: Sexual (R)evolution? Methodological Approaches to Post-World War II Sexual Histories

‘Sexual revolution’ has proved itself to be a powerful concept. It has been frequently re-used and re-defined over the course of the last century. Many pages have been written on the impact the changes in sexual mores had on the societies of Western Europe and America. Yet, most academics writing about the topic have explicitly or implicitly assumed that the ‘sexual revolution’ was a solely Western phenomenon. For instance, David Allyn claimed that it was ‘a deeply American revolution, filled with the contradictions of American life’.²⁵ As a consequence, the developments in the history of sexuality in other parts of the world, most importantly in the countries on the ‘other side of the Iron Curtain’ have either been downplayed or overlooked. ‘There could not have been any sexual revolution in the communist bloc’ – that is what many of these publications seem to be implying. But does the East vs. West dichotomy move us forward in understanding the ambiguous sexual histories of the twentieth century?

The goal of this chapter is to investigate how the ‘sexual revolution’ came into being as a category used to narrate transformations of sexuality in the post-WWII world. Firstly, I explore the main events and phenomena that constituted the ‘Western’ sexual revolution. Then I put this category into historical context to show how it was born and how this concept developed over time. Moreover, the chapter provides a critical re-evaluation of the assumptions underlying the use of this term in historical research. I demonstrate how the sexual revolution has been contested from different viewpoints and

²⁵ D. Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, an Unfettered History* (Boston, 2000), 8.

how it is embedded in some problematic generalisations about sexuality. Next, I move to examining how the ‘sexual revolution’ (or evolution) has been conceptualised in the studies on the history of CEE and the benefits of broadening the scope of the research on the global history of sexuality to include this region. Drawing on the existing research, I propose to understand the sexual revolution as first and foremost a rhetorical tool employed to make sense of complicated pasts, to create and reaffirm differences and to justify certain ideological positions. Thus, I argue, a critical reassessment of this category is crucial for a better understanding of both the history and the present, in the West and the East alike.

The World They Have Won?

It is perhaps impossible to point to one main event that initiated the sexual revolution. However, there are undoubtedly a number of phenomena that need to be considered when speaking about it. Usually, the histories of the sexual revolution in the West begin with the introduction of the contraceptive pill in the early 1960s. As many people have argued, by separating sexual intercourse from reproduction, the pill offered women greater sexual freedom as well as more reliable control over their own fertility.²⁶ The debates around the pill quickly began to question the norms of sexual behaviour and society’s attitude towards them in general. The sexual double standard, anti-contraception laws, unequal position of men and women in society – these are just a few examples of the issues tackled at the time.²⁷

²⁶ J. Weeks, *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life* (London, 2007), 68–72.

²⁷ Allyn, *Make Love*, 12-16, 50–2.

Not all campaigns for sexual freedom achieved success in the 1960s. But the scale of debates on these matters was unprecedented and once the topics began to be discussed it was not so simple to silence them again – especially with consumer capitalism discovering that ‘sex sells’. It was not without some help from science – there was a surge of interest in sexological research in the 1960s, let us just take Alfred Kinsey or William Masters and Virginia Johnson’s research as examples. Furthermore, the picture of the sexual revolution would certainly be incomplete if we ignored the rising popularity of ‘Playboy’ or the growing market of sex manuals, toys, and pornography. In fact, as Dagmar Herzog argued, it would not have been the same revolution had it not been for the prevalence of sexuality both in the media and on the market. The sexual revolution was therefore also a media revolution, as the media created spaces in which new sexual identities could be performed, but also converted into tangible economic profits.²⁸ In Herzog’s opinion, the sexualisation of the media contributed to unmasking the hypocrisies and taboos, as the new discourse ‘exposed the gap between the loosening popular behaviors and the inherited official norms still enshrined in legislation’ – and thus lay foundations on which radical movement could campaign for social and legal change.²⁹

Therefore, the sexual revolution was not only about discourses. It was perceived as revolutionary exactly because certain groups of people revolted and demanded immediate change.³⁰ These included marginal movements such as the American Sexual Freedom League or some unstructured forms of opposition like students who protested against double standards in university accommodation halls.³¹ The role of these small

²⁸ E. Schaefer, (ed.), *Sex Scene: Media and the Sexual Revolution* (Durham; London, 2014).

²⁹ D. Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, 2011), 134.

³⁰ G.Hekma and A. Giami, ‘Sexual Revolutions: An Introduction’, in Gert Hekma and Alain Giami (eds.), *Sexual Revolutions* (Basingstoke, 2014), 10.

³¹ Allyn, *Make Love*, 41–53, 93–107.

grassroots organisations should not pass unnoticed, but it was the nationwide (or even global) movements fighting for women's and gay liberation that in the end contributed greatly to our understanding of the sexual revolution.

Second-wave feminism questioned the role of sex in the patriarchal society and the boundaries between private and political matters. Soon, the feminist movement was divided into two strands. While radical feminist groups staged protests against pornography and commodification of the female body (as for example during the 1968 Miss America pageant)³², sex-positive feminism was also coming to the fore and campaigning for the recognition of sex workers' rights.³³ One of the crucial campaigns was however the one for the most basic rights – the right to decide about one's own body. The abortion laws were liberalised for instance in Britain (1967), France (1975) and Italy (1978) with the most famous being the USA and the *Roe v. Wade* case of 1973.³⁴ On the other hand, the sexual revolution was not only about heterosexuality. The new frameworks for understanding sexuality resulted in the growing visibility of non-heterosexual (particularly gay) identities. What is worth noting is that it was not until 1967 and 1969 when homosexuality was decriminalised in the UK and West Germany respectively.³⁵ And, even if overt legal oppression disappeared, there was still much to be done in terms of transforming essentially homophobic cultures. The gay liberation movement is often believed to have been born after the Stonewall riots of June 1969. These events marked a breakthrough because their participants for the first time voiced

³² Allyn, *Make Love*, 105.

³³ C. Leigh, 'Inventing Sex Work', in J. Nagle (ed.), *Whores and Other Feminists* (New York, NY, 1998), 225–31.

³⁴ Allyn, *Make Love*, 265-6; Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe*, 156–160.

³⁵ Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe*, 169.

open opposition to previously unquestioned discriminatory practices.³⁶ Stonewall was a turning point for people's consciousness and for the movement's identity. s

However, there can hardly be any revolution without its opponents and in fact the 'golden years' of sexual liberation did not last very long. Not surprisingly, the counterrevolutionaries recruited from conservative circles, which saw the sexual revolution as a threat to traditional 'family values'. Combined with the economic crisis of the mid-1970s and the emergence of the AIDS epidemic a couple of years later, the favourable time to openly discuss and perform one's sexuality ended abruptly. The backlash against sexual liberation affected public opinion but could not reverse all of the changes initiated by the revolution. Paraphrasing Jeffrey Weeks' book title: the (new) world had been won.³⁷ And the notion that there had been some kind of revolution has since then dominated both the scholarship on sexuality and the popular memory of that time. Yet, the closer we look, the more complicated this picture gets.

Revolutionary Genealogies

As we have seen, the term 'sexual revolution' has been popularly used to describe the profound transformation of sexual practices and discourses that took place in the 1960s and 1970s in the West (particularly in the USA, but also in Western Europe). But the phrase itself is much older and dates back to the 1920s. It seems to have first appeared in 1921 in the book *Die Sexual-Revolution* by Wilhelm Heinrich Dreuw, a German doctor who called for a transformation of legislation regarding prostitution and venereal

³⁶ Allyn, *Make Love*, 145–6.

³⁷ Weeks, *The World We Have Won*.

disease.³⁸ However, his work was not so influential as a later publication by another German sex reformer Wilhelm Reich, who has been commonly perceived to be a ‘father’ to the concept of a sexual revolution. His book *Sexualität im Kulturkampf* was first published in Germany in 1930 and then translated into English in 1945 under the title *The Sexual Revolution. Toward a self-governing character structure*.³⁹ Influenced by Marxist thought, Reich perceived overhauling the patriarchal family to be the key to destroying capitalist structures of oppression. In a deeply Freudian way he believed that natural, healthy sexual instincts were repressed by authoritarian and capitalist regimes.⁴⁰ Interestingly, the book also featured a detailed analysis of the Soviet sexual revolution and the later Stalinist backlash against progressive policies.⁴¹ The Germans and Russians were not the only ones to debate about the need for sexual reforms. Similar (and to some extent related) discussions were held in the USA by radical leftist groups (for instance those who published in the *Modern Quarterly*).⁴²

The fact that such a debate on sexuality was happening in the interwar period was not accidental. The aftermath of World War I in the West saw rising numbers of women on the job market, the culmination of the first wave of feminism, improved contraception methods and youth emancipation.⁴³ Weimar Germany came to be seen as a symbol of sexual progressiveness of the interwar period. But the ‘first’ sexual revolution had its ‘Eastern’ roots as well, perhaps the most significant ones. Particularly radical developments in the sphere of sexuality took place in the Soviet Union where progressive

³⁸ J. L. Martin, ‘Structuring the Sexual Revolution’, *Theory and Society*, 25/1 (1996), 107.

³⁹ W. Reich, *The Sexual Revolution* (New York, 1945), XI.

⁴⁰ D. Bennet, ‘Sexual Revolutions: Towards a Brief History, from the Fall of Man to the Present’, in Gottfried Heuer (ed.), *Sexual Revolutions: Psychoanalysis, History and the Father* (London, 2011), 41–3.

⁴¹ Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, 153–269.

⁴² Martin, ‘Structuring the Sexual Revolution’, 108–10.

⁴³ Martin, ‘Structuring the Sexual Revolution’, 130.

sexual politics were in full swing in the immediate post-revolutionary years. Right after they had seized power the Bolsheviks began reforming the family law and as a result abolished church wedding, introduced divorce, and legalised abortion. They campaigned for sexual education and proclaimed legal equality between men and women. The goal was to break with the hypocrisies of bourgeois society; to fight ‘double standards’.⁴⁴ The Western intellectuals observed these developments: some, especially those with leftist leanings welcomed them as a step towards more equal and free societies; others, particularly conservative circles saw them as a threat to traditional morality and gender order epitomised by the communist revolution.⁴⁵ These reactions were in no way unambiguous, but they prove an important point – that the term ‘sexual revolution’ was in operation long before the 1960s. And, although the Stalinist policies of the 1930s quickly shifted towards conservative, prudish, and pro-natalist approach,⁴⁶ the importance of the ‘Eastern’ revolutionary experiment in the history of sexuality cannot be overlooked.

The ‘sexual revolution’ was therefore not invented in the 1960s – it had been an already existing category that just started to be eagerly applied to narrate the new circumstances. Nor was it the first time when certain types of phenomena were labelled as being sexually revolutionary. The journalists, writers, and public intellectuals who had been writing and debating about the necessity of a new sexual revolution for years could happily welcome the advent of a new era. Moreover, as one of the crucial features of the sexual revolution included heated debates on sexuality in the media, the popularity and

⁴⁴ G. Carleton, *Sexual Revolution in Bolshevik Russia* (Pittsburgh, P.A., 2005), 3–4.

⁴⁵ Carleton, *Sexual Revolution in Bolshevik Russia*, 5–11.

⁴⁶ Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe*, 100; David L. Hoffman, ‘Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context’, *Journal of Social History*, 34/1 (2000), 36.

recognition of the term had risen long before any scholarly works on the nature of these social transformations were published. What is more, the term ‘sexual revolution’ embarked on an international career, reaching the other side of the Iron Curtain as well. For instance, as early as in 1966 the term ‘sexual revolution’ was used in an article in the Polish weekly *Forum* (see Chapter Two).⁴⁷ As a consequence, the fact that the transformations in sexual mores in the 1960s and 1970s could be understood as a sexual revolution had for a long time been taken for granted (and in popular opinion still quite often is).

Critical Approaches to the Sexual Revolution

Having established the genealogy of the sexual revolution, let us turn to methodological challenges this term poses for historical research. Over the last decades there has been growing criticism towards the unreflective use of the category. It has come from many different angles: some scholars have criticised insufficient causal relationships; others have looked into how various social inequalities differentiated the experience people had during the so-called ‘sexual revolution’ Moreover, feminists have clashed with each other over the interpretation of this process and its aftermaths. All such debates have shown that there simply is no single definition or understanding of what the sexual revolution was. Yet, these arguments enrich research on the history of sexuality and make us understand better the ambiguities of the ways people experienced sexuality in the second half of the twentieth century. Hence, I explore them further in the next paragraphs.

⁴⁷ S. Haffner, ‘Purytanizm postawiony na głowie’, *Forum*, 9 (1966), 20–1.

Perhaps we should start with the problem of definitions already signalled on the previous pages. As shown, the use of the term ‘sexual revolution’ can be criticised because of its social and historical embeddedness. But the deconstruction does not stop there. As Gert Hekma and Alain Giami noted: ‘The sexual revolution was a patchwork of ideas, events, controversies and (broken) dreams, which makes it difficult to give a singular definition or to identify its main characteristics’.⁴⁸ Thus, each researcher writing about the topic applies the term in their own and distinct way. As we look closer into the literature it thus becomes clear that we can hardly speak of one sexual revolution, even in the Western context. Moreover, it is far from obvious that the events and phenomena of the 1960s were in fact so revolutionary. Many scholars argue that there was neither a particularly deep effect nor a single sexual culture that would emerge as a result of the ‘revolution’.⁴⁹ Some researchers are more inclined to understand these transformations as a part of a ‘long sexual revolution’, lasting from the early twentieth century or even longer.⁵⁰ Others argue that the 1960s were so special because the scale and openness of debates about sexuality in the media was unprecedented. These discussions were structured around the idea (or some may say panic) that the revolution was underway. Some researchers argue that precisely for this reason, many minor events that would have otherwise gone unnoticed were put together to fit into one explanatory framework. As Beth Bailey phrased it, ‘in subsuming a diverse set of changes under the term ‘revolution’, Americans conflated changes that had very different origins, intentions, and outcomes’.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Hekma and Giami, ‘Sexual Revolutions’, 2.

⁴⁹ S. Garton, *Histories of Sexuality* (London, 2004), 211–2.

⁵⁰ See: H. Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800-1975* (Oxford, 2004); F. Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London, 2012).

⁵¹ B. Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 2.

Such a definition brings about significant methodological consequences. For instance, this ‘revolutionary’ framework implies a certain causality of the historical process. It has been commonly believed that the sexual revolution started with the invention of the contraceptive pill in 1960 as it challenged the previously inextricable relation between sex and procreation, allowing women to independently shape their own reproductive decisions which in turn led to higher rates of premarital sex.⁵² Although the significance of oral contraceptives for the transformation of sexual culture is evident, the claim that it was the sole cause for the rising frequency of premarital intercourse should be reconsidered. According to Alan Petigny the data on premarital pregnancies (and thus indirectly on premarital sex) demonstrates that the rates had already been rising in the 1940s and 1950s, and therefore our conventional understanding of the sexual revolution is deeply flawed.⁵³ Similar concerns should be raised about the seemingly obvious relation between an increasingly sexualised consumer culture and changes in sexual behaviour. As Petigny argues, such an approach confuses cause with effect, as the rates of premarital sex suggest that sexual mores were changing long before the popular culture caught up.⁵⁴ On the other hand, many historians have assumed that it was radical movements (such as the US League for Sexual Reform) that were instrumental for the sexual revolution to take place. Therefore, the causality would be as follows: from these radical movements to the broader public; from grass-root activism (i.e., for overthrowing discriminatory laws) to general legal changes on the national level.

⁵² L. Marks, *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill* (New Haven, Conn., 2010).

⁵³ A. Petigny, ‘Illegitimacy, Postwar Psychology, and the Reperiodization of the Sexual Revolution’, *Journal of Social History*, 38/1 (2004), 63–70.

⁵⁴ Petigny, ‘Illegitimacy’, 70–2.

However, such assumptions need to come under close scrutiny. First, as Beth Bailey has emphasised, even in the American case the real transformative power came from ordinary people who transformed their everyday sexual practices. As she writes, the sexual revolution was ‘forged in America’s heartland as well, shaped not only by committed revolutionaries but by people who had absolutely no intention of abetting a revolution in sex’.⁵⁵ Moreover, it is also not true that pressure for sexual reforms has always come from below. For instance, a lot of the changes known as the ‘Soviet sexual revolution’ actually resulted from state-led actions (such as civil marriage laws). In the US, a significant boost for the pornography industry came from the judiciary when liberal court verdicts provided precedents which would later be used by activists.⁵⁶ Therefore, the inextricable relation between radical social movements and the sexual revolution is far from evident after all.

Revolution by its nature implies some kind of modernisation. However, what exactly does sexual modernity mean? At first glance the answer may seem obvious: sexual revolution entailed liberalisation in various areas of social life such as equal rights to sexual pleasure or public emergence of non-heterosexual identities.⁵⁷ But, as Dagmar Herzog puts it, the process of modernising sexualities was far from straightforward. In her opinion, one of the main problems with the existing scholarship on the history of sexuality has been its overreliance on the assumption of sexual modernity. As Herzog argued, ‘For too long, writing about sex in the second half of the twentieth century has operated within a paradigm that assumed steady liberalization and the gradual

⁵⁵ Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 3.

⁵⁶ Allyn, *Make Love*, 54–70.

⁵⁷ Garton, *Histories of Sexuality*, 211.

overcoming of obstacles to sexual freedom'.⁵⁸ Why is then such an approach problematic? Firstly, employing the narration of steady sexual modernisation poses a great risk of undervaluing (or even overlooking) the significance of events that run in a counter-direction. We cannot understand the sexual revolution without looking into the dynamics of the counter-revolution, particularly in the 1980s. Secondly, the idea that there is a single and straight path towards modernity (and that this 'modernity' should be perceived as something unquestionably positive) paves the way for simplistic and harmful dichotomies. The rhetorical patterns are simple: modernity and its actors require an opposing figure of backwardness and underdevelopment. To fit the narrative this role is too often subscribed to the 'others' (labelled as such because of class, geography or political leanings). However, rarely does such a dichotomy accurately reflect the intricate developments in the history of sexuality. This is particularly true, as we shall see below, if we look at the scholarship on the sexual history of Central and Eastern Europe.

The idea that the sexual revolution brought freedom for everyone has been criticised by anti-pornography feminists as well. Again, the underlying assumptions that are derived from the 'revolutionary' framework have been scrutinised. As Sheila Jeffreys argued in 1990: 'The language of liberation was so loud in connection with the new sexual prescriptions for women that commentators have assumed some obvious relationship between the "sexual revolution" and progress in women's condition'.⁵⁹ However, many of the revolution's features did in fact reinforce the subordinated position of women, the greatest example being pornography. As many feminists claimed, commercial sex industry in which (female) body was treated solely as a commodity to be sold to male

⁵⁸ D. Herzog, 'Syncopated Sex: Transforming European Sexual Cultures', *American Historical Review*, 114/5 (2009), 1295.

⁵⁹ S. Jeffreys, *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (London, 1990), 2.

customers did not offer any perspectives of liberation for women. To showcase this line of critique, let us turn to the famous magazine perceived to have been a beacon of the sexual revolution: *Playboy*. Although its editors (Hugh Hefner in particular) prided themselves in being the proponents of women's emancipation, the content of the magazine sent quite the opposite message. Its central features included nude photos of 'playmates' and the portrayal of women as sexual objects, waiting to be conquered. Even though *Playboy* supported some liberal causes (such as the campaign for legal and safe abortions), such objectification and degradation of women could not go unnoticed by feminists.⁶⁰ Since the 1970s writers such as Andrea Dworkin have claimed that pornography poses great harm to women through facilitating and promoting violence as well as unrealistic expectations of sexual performance.⁶¹

Anti-pornography feminism played a significant role in uncovering the hidden costs of the sexual revolution. Such criticism was based on the notion that heterosexual sex had been founded on the submissive position of women and thus it had served as a tool of male dominance. The sexual revolution was formed by the rise of sexological literature and more generally of public interest into sexual matters, which did not undermine these assumptions in any way. On the contrary, it told women to be open to sex (i.e., readily available to fulfil male desires), fight their 'frigidity', and take sole responsibility for contraceptive decisions (as the pill allowed one to separate contraception from sexual intercourse)⁶². Therefore, as Jeffreys argued, the sexual

⁶⁰ C. Pitzulo, 'The Battle in Every Man's Bed: "Playboy" and the Fiery Feminists', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 17/2 (2008), 259–61.

⁶¹ A. Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London, 1981).

⁶² Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, 193–200.

revolution did not liberate women from the structures of patriarchal oppression but, on the contrary, strengthened them.⁶³

The division between the feminists who welcomed the sexual revolution and those who saw it as a threat to women's emancipation eventually evolved into what we know under the name of 'sex wars' of the 1980s and 1990s.⁶⁴ Perhaps because of their easy affinity with neo-conservative forces, the arguments voiced by Dworkin and her associates came to play a very powerful role in defining the legacy of the sexual revolution.⁶⁵ However, it would be impossible to write the history of feminist debates on the sexual revolution without including the other side: sex-positive feminism.⁶⁶ While anti-pornography feminism perceived pornography and sex in general to be a tool of oppression toward women, sex-positive feminists argued that there could be no true liberation of women without sexual liberation.⁶⁷ Thus, sex-positive feminists campaigned for the redefinition of patriarchal morality and for the right to sexual pleasure for all.

What is the lesson we can draw from the feminist 'sex wars' for the study of the sexual revolution? First, feminist criticism teaches us to question seemingly obvious notions about the modernising and liberalising character of the 'revolution' and about the role it played in the emancipation of women. In fact, it again proves that there is no one sexual revolution and we should rather see it as a multiway and multispeed process. Moreover, the arguments raised in the 'sex wars' demonstrate how crucial intersectionality is for researching the history of sexuality. For instance, the debates on

⁶³ Jeffreys, *Anticlimax*, 91–4.

⁶⁴ L. Duggan and N. D Hunter, *Sex Wars. Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York, 2006), 1.

⁶⁵ E. Willis, 'Toward a Feminist Sexual Revolution', in E. Willis (ed.), *No More Nice Girls* (Minneapolis, 2012), 20.

⁶⁶ E. Willis, 'Lust Horizons: Is the Women's Movement Pro-Sex?', in E. Willis (ed.), *No More Nice Girls* (Minneapolis, 2012), 3–14.

⁶⁷ Willis, 'Toward a Feminist Sexual Revolution', 48.

sex work have shown how the meaning of categories such as freedom of choice or subjectivity depends greatly on one's social class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or cultural capital.⁶⁸ In the end, contemporary perspectives on the sexual revolution have undoubtedly been influenced by the arguments raised during the 'sex wars'. Our knowledge about the history of sexuality in the second half of the twentieth century is by no means pure or objective – it has been shaped by these debates and therefore should not be understood in isolation.

Finally, we have to acknowledge that the history of sexuality as a scholarly discipline is to a large extent itself a 'child' of the sexual revolution (regardless of the definition applied). There would not have been the field of the history of sexuality as we know it if it had not been for the increased interest in the topic sparked by the revolutionary events of the 1960s. As Stephen Garton put it, for the first time 'history became a critique of modern Western sexual culture and a weapon in a variety of reform struggles rather than an area of historical enquiry marked by a diversity of viewpoints and approaches'.⁶⁹ This legacy has influenced the history of sexuality up to this day. On the one hand, the discipline emerged as more than 'just' history – in its first years it was above all a tool of revolutionary activism. It was employed by feminist and gay activists who, according to Garton, aimed at 'uncovering the endemic oppression of women and gays across time'.⁷⁰ However, these early historiographies did not question the idea of sexuality itself but rather saw it as 'a biological instinct shaped by culture'.⁷¹

⁶⁸ See: R. Weitzer, 'Sociology of Sex Work', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35/1 (2009), 213–34.

⁶⁹ Garton, *Histories of Sexuality*, 2.

⁷⁰ Garton, *Histories of Sexuality*, 8.

⁷¹ Garton, *Histories of Sexuality*, 9–10.

It is commonly thought that it was not until Michel Foucault's seminal work *History of Sexuality* that sexuality became historicised as such.⁷² Although Foucault was certainly not the first one to see sexuality as a social construct,⁷³ he offered a powerful narrative that denaturalised it and challenged widespread assumptions of linearity and homogeneity.⁷⁴ According to Jeffrey Weeks, Foucault 'challenged the easy ideology of early sex radicalism' and provided a framework for a growing critique of 'liberationist rhetoric'.⁷⁵ This example quite neatly illustrates how the development of the history of sexuality as an academic discipline has been formed in response and thanks to the sexual revolution. Thus, the two – sexual revolution and history of sexuality – seem to be inseparable.

This observation combined with other critical approaches presented above leads us to a broader conclusion: that the meaning of the sexual revolution and the 'proper' way in which it should be employed in historical enquiry are far from established. The sexual revolution has been contested on so many levels that one can hardly provide any definition that would do justice to all these concerns. However, it does not necessarily imply that the category is redundant and should be abandoned altogether. What I am arguing here is that the revolutionary paradigm has been far too influential for our understanding of sexuality to leave it aside. On the contrary, it needs to be confronted and redefined. Sexual histories from the 'East' may serve as a useful tool for achieving this goal.

⁷² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

⁷³ J. Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (Cambridge, 2000), 6–7.

⁷⁴ J. Weeks, 'Remembering Foucault', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14/1/2 (2005), 191.

⁷⁵ Weeks, 'Remembering Foucault', 190.

Perspectives from the East

‘In Sweden, the revolution was already over when it started elsewhere [...]. Spain, Portugal, Greece and the Eastern European countries where “real socialism” governed had to wait until the end of dictatorship before a sexual revolution could begin’.⁷⁶ This quote from the introduction to the edited volume titled *Sexual Revolutions* summarises quite well the arguments prevalent in the scholarship. Undoubtedly, it reflects the popular image of sexuality in the state-socialist period: it must have been prudish, oppressed and backward. How can we explain the prevalence of similar stereotypes? On the one hand, there has not been much research on the history of sexuality in Central and Eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, in particular when it comes to works published in English.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the stereotypes too often supplement ignorance caused by a lack of interest in the region or insufficient critical understanding of the categories applied.

However fragmentary it is, the scholarship on Central and Eastern European histories of sexuality has been growing over the past few years and has engaged quite effectively with the problem of the West-East sexual divide. Therefore, in the rest of this chapter I would like to provide an overview of the perspectives and theories present in the research on the history of sexuality in CEE and the prominent questions that still remain to be answered. Perhaps the most thought-provoking has been the debate on the sexual history of the German Democratic Republic, where the question of whether there was a sexual revolution under state socialism has been quite central. Two sides of this debate are very accurately represented by the works of Dagmar Herzog and Josie

⁷⁶ Hekma and Giami, ‘Sexual Revolutions’, 10.

⁷⁷ Herzog, ‘Syncopated Sex’, 1294.

McLellan.⁷⁸ Although not entirely contradictory, the authors present two rather different visions of the developments in the history of sexuality. What is worth pointing out though is that neither of them questions the fact that there had been profound changes of sexual norms and behaviours before the reunification of Germany. On the contrary, they rather engage critically with the category of ‘sexual revolution’, attempting to conceptualise its Eastern dimension.

In her 2008 article Herzog argued that the changes in sexual mores had been by no means revolutionary in the GDR and they should rather be understood as an evolution. She claimed that the developments in East German society had begun right after the WWII and were spurred by the legal provisions introduced by the communist government. Therefore, the transformations in the GDR had a much more gradual character than in the West. Herzog’s interpretation emphasised the role played by state regulations and strengthened the narration of top-down developments as opposed to the Western grassroots movements for sexual freedom.⁷⁹ Josie McLellan in her 2011 book *Love in the Time of Communism* called these arguments into question, suggesting that in East Germany ‘the sexual evolution from above needs to be understood alongside the revolution from below: these two developments intertwined with and fed off each other’.⁸⁰ She argued that even in the West the revolution was ‘patchy and localised’ and therefore drawing a sharp distinction between sexual histories on the two sides of the Iron Curtain would lead to false dichotomies. Moreover, these macro-narrations had not included the every-day life experience of individuals and overlooked the significance of

⁷⁸ D. Herzog, ‘East Germany’s Sexual Evolution’, in K. Pence and P. Betts (eds.), *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor, 2008), 71–95; J. McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁷⁹ Herzog, ‘East Germany’s Sexual Evolution’, 71.

⁸⁰ McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 9.

(often revolutionary) decisions that ordinary people had made in their private lives.⁸¹ In the end, as McLellan concluded, ‘like all sexual revolutions, the East German one involved elements of evolution and, like all revolutions, it was unfinished, uneven, and stunted in places’.⁸²

The debates on the sexual history of the GDR are certainly far from comprehensive and representative for the whole Soviet bloc. However, they showcase how important language and definitions are for our understanding of historical phenomena. Herzog’s and McLellan’s attempts to critically employ the category of ‘sexual (r)evolution’ in historical studies of the region are valuable in at least two dimensions. First, such historiographies further challenge the stereotypes about homogeneity or simple causality of the sexual revolution and thus deepen our understanding of the global history of sexuality in the twentieth century. What they show is that there was no single global revolution but rather a multitude of them, with different speeds and trajectories.⁸³ Second, they bring CEE back into scholarship, showcasing the limitations of simplistic dichotomies and challenging Cold War stereotypes.⁸⁴

Recently, there has been growing criticism of the idea that CEE can be studied as a homogeneous region. According to Łukasz Szulc, the problem is that ‘both CEE and the West are all too frequently created as relatively uniform geopolitical entities adopting relatively uniform approaches to gender- and sexuality-related issues’.⁸⁵ This ‘myth of

⁸¹ McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 9–10.

⁸² McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 11.

⁸³ See as well: Dan Healey, ‘The Sexual Revolution in the USSR: Dynamics Beneath the Ice’, in Gert Hekma and Alain Giami (eds.), *Sexual Revolutions* (Basingstoke, 2014), 236.

⁸⁴ K. Ghodsee and K. Lisková, ‘Bumbling Idiots or Evil Masterminds? Challenging Cold War Stereotypes about Women, Sexuality and State Socialism’, *Filozofija i Društvo*, 27/3 (2016), 489–503.

⁸⁵ Łukasz Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland: Cross-Border Flows in Gay and Lesbian Magazines* (London, 2018), 5.

homogeneity', as Szulc phrased it, pervades the scholarship and contributes to a narration about a 'cultural Cold War' which allegedly took place during the state-socialist period. Such a way of defining the region leaves little room for more nuanced interpretations and assumes the existence of some essential regional features that are not subject to any geographic or historical variations. A perfect illustration of this fallacy can be found in a widespread assumption that the sexually conservative and repressive Soviet Stalinist policies of the 1930s can be extrapolated for other countries of the communist bloc and for the entire duration of state socialism.⁸⁶ Such generalisations fit well into the binary vision of the Cold War world. Such a dichotomy is later employed to justify differentiated approaches to both regions, both conceptual and political. The difference between the 'East' and the 'West' is thus produced and reaffirmed through sexuality and its discourses.

Scholars have also criticised the omnipresent belief that CEE needed to 'catch up' with the West after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Such an approach rarely considers the historical specificity of the region. As Szulc characterised it: 'only by dehistoricizing homosexuality in CEE it is possible to view the region as homogenous, essentially homophobic and in need of transition after 1989'.⁸⁷ Although Szulc concentrates on the history of gay activism, similar (or even stronger) conclusions can be drawn for the history of sexuality as a whole. The dehistoricisation of sexuality lays ground for understanding the region as backward and unmodern. Such a framework implies that the political (as well as economic) transformation brought about by the revolutions of 1989 was a starting point for a process of sexual and cultural liberation which could not have

⁸⁶ Kateřina Lišková, *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style. Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945-1989* (New York, 2018), 5.

⁸⁷ Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals*, 7.

happened under communist rule. However, as Szulc points out, in these discourses such a transition from ‘backwardness’ to sexual modernity can never be fully attained. CEE is understood and portrayed as essentially backward to reaffirm the division between the West and the East (even after the Iron Curtain ceased to exist) and thus validate the contemporary perception of CEE as sexually or politically conservative. Naturally, neither Szulc nor other scholars aim to negate the diverse institutional and social contexts that influence the way sexuality is understood, performed, and controlled in different national contexts.⁸⁸ But they call into question oversimplified interpretations and show how history writing has been entangled in the process of reproducing structures of power and geopolitical hierarchies.⁸⁹

Finally, the ambiguities surrounding the definition of sexual liberation have been scrutinised as well. The idea that there was one single path to sexual modernity, although repeatedly criticised (as this chapter has already argued), still haunts the scholarship. However, historians of CEE point out that the developments in sexual history on the two sides of the Iron Curtain were asynchronous and different in their character. For instance, Hana Havelková and Libora Oates-Indruchová emphasised that both the modernisation of gender-related legislation and the backlash against progressive policies in Czechoslovakia took place 20 years earlier than in the West (as the cases of abortion legislation and female participation in the workforce before and after the Normalisation suggest).⁹⁰ If we acknowledge this perspective, we must then reconsider the categories of

⁸⁸ See also Małgorzata Fidelis, ‘Jugend, Moderne und die Welt. Die polnische Jugend an der Schwelle der Long Sixties. Historische Betrachtungen’, in Margarete Wach (ed.), *Nouvelle Vague Polonaise? Auf der Suche nach einem flüchtigen Phänomen der Filmgeschichte* (Marburg, 2015), 88.

⁸⁹ See K. Wiedlack, S. Shoshanova and M. Godovannaya (eds.), *Queer-Feminist Solidarity and the East/West Divide* (Oxford, 2020).

⁹⁰ Hana Havelková and Libora Oates-Indruchová, ‘Expropriated Voice. Transformations of Gender Culture under State Socialism; Czech Society, 1948-1989’, in Hana Havelková and Libora Oates-

backwardness. Abortion was legalised in Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1956, while French women had to wait until 1975 for a similar legislation to be passed in their country. As a matter of fact, who was catching up with whom?

Linear stories of progress and emancipation pose other challenges for researchers as well. For instance, the scholarship on the history of sexuality in the West has been dominated by the recurring argument that ‘proper’ liberation needs to come from below and cannot be steered by the authorities. As I have already argued, this is not entirely true even in the Western context. Perhaps, this reflects an unexamined liberal bias mistrustful of state intervention into the private sphere. But above all, such a simplistic perspective fails to explain the transformations in sexual mores that took place in the context of state socialism and even discounts them as ‘inauthentic’ forms of sexual liberation. Therefore, many historians of the region suggest that we should broaden our definition of liberation to include the impact that state-led policies had on private life and choices. Although not unambiguous, they formed a significant part of reality in which people lived. As Kateřina Lišková argues ‘there are always fissures between normative discourses and lived practices. Yet, normative discourses tend to be potent, particularly when they are backed by the power of the state that translates them into laws and policies’.⁹¹ Finally, if we perceive emancipation as solely imposed from the above, then the people’s agency tends to be overlooked and minimised.⁹² This is yet another binary opposition which simplifies and thus harms our understanding of historical process.

Indruchová (eds.), *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism: An Expropriated Voice* (London, 2014), 7.

⁹¹ Lišková, *Sexual Liberation*, 4.

⁹² Havelková and Oates-Indruchová, ‘Expropriated Voice’, 5.

How do these theoretical discussions translate into research practice? The scholarship on the history of sexuality in CEE has been growing in recent years and provides an intellectually probing counter-narrative which challenges the dominant, ‘Western’ scholarship on many levels. A closer look into this literature reveals several topics which reappear frequently in the research on sexuality in state-socialist CEE and thus form a particular school of thinking about sexuality. First, shifting the focus of research on sexual history from grassroots movements to top-down policies resulted in more attention being paid to institutional discourses and their impact on people’s sexual behaviours. Certainly, the rise of sexology appears to one of the most intriguing phenomena of the state-socialist period, at least as the research on Poland, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic suggests. The abovementioned works unmask the misled beliefs that had for long been taken for granted. For instance, there has been an assumption that sexology in the East was essentially underdeveloped and lagging behind its Western counterparts. However, as Agnieszka Kościańska’s work has shown, Polish sexologists adapted humanistic and holistic understanding of sex and sex therapy while American sex science was dominated by biomedical and commoditised approaches which are quite often critiqued nowadays.⁹³ Furthermore, the research on the history of sexology has demonstrated that the debates on sexuality had been present in the media and by no means suppressed.⁹⁴ This dismantles yet another myth of a total silence on sexual matters which is said to have prevailed in CEE under the communist rule.

⁹³ A. Kościańska, ‘Beyond Viagra: Sex Therapy in Poland’, *Sociologický Časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 50/6 (2014), 926–31.

⁹⁴ A. Kościańska, *Płeć, przyjemność i przemoc: kształtowanie wiedzy eksperckiej o seksualności w Polsce* (Warszawa, 2014), 81–3.

The interpretation of these processes is further complicated if we look at the impact the state-initiated legal reforms had for the understanding of gender and sexuality. The relation between state-imposed modernisation and gender equality appears to be far from unambiguous. On the one hand, scholars such as Dagmar Herzog and Małgorzata Fidelis have argued that women in CEE benefited from a wide range of equality-oriented policies much earlier than in the West.⁹⁵ Examples included a right to divorce their husbands, to freely choose their occupation or to access safe and legal abortions. However, all these provisions were embedded in a larger governmental agenda in which the emancipation of women formed only a small part. For instance, women's participation in the workforce was essential for the early state-socialist projects of industrialisation. As the political goals transformed over the years, so did the attitude to female presence in the labour market.⁹⁶ These fluctuations (as well as their national characteristics) have to be taken into account, but the argument seems to be quite clear here – the policies of state-socialist regimes enabled some extent of women's liberation in their own, distinct way. And they often had done so much earlier than similar progressive policies were even being discussed in the West. These debates on the relation between the socialist modernisation project and gender equality have also led to interesting arguments regarding sexuality as such. Their core message was quite well summarised by the title of Kristen Ghodsee's recent book *Why Women Have Better Sex under Socialism*.⁹⁷

The relation between economic system and sexual pleasure has been debated for years. A survey conducted in 1990 reported that women from East Germany were much

⁹⁵ Herzog, 'East Germany's Sexual Evolution', 72–3.

⁹⁶ M. Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge, 2010).

⁹⁷ K. Ghodsee, *Why Women Have Better Sex under Socialism and Other Arguments for Economic Independence* (London, 2018).

more likely to feel satisfied after sex compared to those from the West (75% and 46% respectively).⁹⁸ This reflected the arguments that had already appeared before and insisted that the more economic independence and equal opportunities women have (as allegedly in state-socialist realities of the GDR), the better their sexual life is.⁹⁹ Of course, the reliability of such surveys can be questioned and the influence of propaganda over the proclamations of equality and sexual freedom should also be considered. Yet, no matter how biased these results were, they showcased opposing discourses on sexuality (a socialist and a capitalist one) and thus reflected a conflict between the two Germanies. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that after the reunification the debates on sexuality became more political than ever. As Ingrid Sharp put it, ‘the context was the ideological battle between East and West, the Cold War being slogged out in the arena of sexuality, with orgasmic potential replacing nuclear capacity’.¹⁰⁰ This entanglement of politics, economy, and sexuality proves again that it is far from obvious that a sexual revolution requires liberal market conditions to thrive.¹⁰¹ In fact, as some authors argue, it may be the other way round – that the capitalist economy suppresses sexuality and commodifies it in a way that is harmful to many groups, in particular women.¹⁰²

What conclusions can be drawn from these debates on CEE sexualities altogether? The above-presented are just a few examples of how critical studies on sexuality can be employed to study CEE and how such an approach enriches our understanding of the global history of sexuality as a whole. As these works demonstrate, moving away from easy dichotomies and black-and-white narrations can offer new interpretations and reveal

⁹⁸ I. Sharp, ‘The Sexual Unification of Germany’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 13/3 (2004), 354.

⁹⁹ Sharp, ‘The Sexual Unification of Germany’, 349–51.

¹⁰⁰ Sharp, ‘The Sexual Unification of Germany’, 356.

¹⁰¹ See as well: McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 10.

¹⁰² Ghodsee, *Why Women Have Better Sex*, 107–25.

previously neglected tensions. It is also a potent source of criticism toward neoliberal narrations, historical, political, and economic. Moreover, the scholarship on sexuality in CEE forms a vital part of a new, intellectually compelling wave of studies on state socialism which aim to subvert the established narrations and complicate the ways in which we interpret communism and its actors. Thus, the history of sexuality in CEE contributes to broader debates on the character of state socialism in the region and its impacts on the present political and social situation.

Polish History and the Question of Sexual Liberation

The fact that there has not been much focus on the history of sexuality (and almost none on the ‘sexual revolution’) in the Polish historiography of the post-war period should come as no surprise. Political history plays a dominant role in the discipline and relatively little attention is given to more social aspects of the past.¹⁰³ The historiography of communism in Poland is still guided by the totalitarian paradigm and therefore little attention has been given to histories that do not fit into such a framework. As a result, the scholarship on women’s and gender history, although it has achieved considerable growth over the past few years, is still rather marginal.¹⁰⁴ History of sexuality, commonly considered to be a sub-discipline of gender history, is therefore doubly marginalised. This weakness is particularly striking when it comes to theoretical and methodological reflection - or, to be precise, the lack of it. Sexuality is usually treated as a biological function and thus not subject to critical historical evaluation. However, it would be

¹⁰³ D. Kałwa, ‘Na Peryferiach Peryferii? Codziennosc PRL w Polskiej Historiografii - Przegląd Badań’, *Rocznik Antropologii Historii*, II/1 (2012), 176.

¹⁰⁴ S. Kuźma-Markowska, ‘Why There Is No Gender History in Poland?’, *Dialogue and Universalism*, 5–6 (2010), 14–5.

premature to conclude that we know nothing about the history of sexuality in the post-WWII period. In fact, the most recent publications have indicated how important gender and sexuality have been for the transformation of Polish society under state socialism. The existing literature has also opened up crucial questions about trajectories of modernisation and liberation which are central to my own research.

The history of sexuality under state socialism has so far developed as an interdisciplinary field. Interest in the topic has been spurred by non-historians (i.e., anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of cultural studies) and this has affected both the methods they have employed and the phenomena they have been interested in. State-socialist sexualities have been considered mainly in reference to the period of transition after 1989, not as a topic in and of itself.¹⁰⁵ This has led to a series of generalisations. For instance, the restrictive abortion law introduced in 1993 has been interpreted as a consequence of an essentially Polish conservatism and rarely contextualised. Furthermore, the struggle for sexual liberation has been said to begin in 1989 as if there had not been any emancipatory attempts before this date. As two sociologists wrote in 2016: ‘The sexual revolution bypassed Poland. [...] It was not until 1989 that mores began to transform, sex began to mean something more than just procreation, topics such as homo-, bi- and fluid sexuality appeared, and minority rights, teenage sex, rape or sexual education were debated publicly’.¹⁰⁶ Thus, to interpret the 1990s as a time of (sexual)

¹⁰⁵ As Havelková and Oates-Indruchová argue a similar problem can be observed in Czech literature on gender and sexuality. See: Havelková and Oates-Indruchová, ‘Expropriated Voice’, 4.

¹⁰⁶ A. Jawor and A. Kurowicka, ‘Polska transformacja seksualna. Wprowadzenie’, in A. Jawor and A. Kurowicka (eds.), *Polska transformacja seksualna* (Warszawa, 2016), 7. Translation is my own. See also Z. Grębecka, ‘Erotyka i seksualność w polskiej socjalistycznej powieści młodzieżowej’, in K. Stańczak-Wiślicz (ed.), *Kultura popularna w Polsce w latach 1944-1989: problemy i perspektywy badawcze* (Warszawa, 2012), 134–161; M. Dąbrowska, ‘“Dać dowód miłości” Dyskursy inicjacji seksualnej w polskiej prasie młodzieżowej lat osiemdziesiątych’, in K. Stańczak-Wiślicz (ed.), *Kultura popularna w Polsce w latach 1944-1989: problemy i perspektywy badawcze* (Warszawa, 2012), 152–74.

transition and liberation, the importance of state-socialist developments is downplayed. If the previously analysed approach of scholars who perceive the sexual revolution to be solely a Western phenomenon is orientalising towards the East, then in this case we can speak of auto-orientalising strategies.

On the other hand, such interdisciplinary encounters have had a positive impact as well. Pioneering work in the field has been done by Agnieszka Kościańska, an anthropologist whose research focuses on sexological discourses in state-socialist Poland. Her book *Gender, Pleasure, and Violence: The Construction of Expert Knowledge of Sexuality in Poland* (published in Polish in 2014, English translation 2020) traces the development of modern expert knowledge in the realm of sexuality.¹⁰⁷ As already mentioned, one of her central areas of inquiry is the participation of Polish sexologists in global debates on sexual health and the development of what Kościańska calls ‘the Polish school of sexology’. Moreover, in her analysis of popular magazines and readers’ correspondence, Kościańska proved that, contrary to dominant stereotypes, there had been a vivid public debate on sexual matters before 1989 and people eagerly adopted the new sexological language to voice concerns and questions about their sexual lives.

Similar arguments were developed by Łukasz Szulc in his 2018 book *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland: Cross-Border Flows in Gay and Lesbian Magazines*.¹⁰⁸ His research on gay activism and culture in the late state-socialist period has demonstrated transnational flows of information and practices between the West and the East before 1989. Thus, the Iron Curtain was rather a ‘Nylon Curtain’ when

¹⁰⁷ Kościańska, *Gender, Pleasure, and Violence: The Construction of Expert Knowledge of Sexuality in Poland*.

¹⁰⁸ Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals*.

it came to culture and sexuality.¹⁰⁹ As already mentioned, Szulc has criticised essentialising interpretations, showing that homosexual life in communist Poland was much more diverse than commonly assumed and that only by historicising homosexuality can we fully understand the diverse experiences of queer people under state socialism.

However, this is not to say that there has been no research into the history of sexuality under state socialism conducted by trained historians. On the contrary, in the recent years there have been several new publications taking up topics such as family history (Barbara Klich-Kluczevska), contraception (Agata Ignaciuk), and masculinity and gender roles (Natalia Jarska), to mention just a few.¹¹⁰ This thesis builds upon their research and Chapter Two surveys the most important developments in the historiography of state-socialist sexualities in greater detail. The above-mentioned researchers have however rarely been explicitly interested in the question of sexual liberation. As a result, Polish historiography has still not engaged in discussion about the potentiality of socialist sexual revolutions and the ways of including this category in historical research. Therefore, this thesis aims to bridge this gap and offer a reconceptualization of state-socialist sexualities, probing areas in which the category of sexual revolution can be useful.

¹⁰⁹ See G. Péteri, 'Nylon Curtain — Transnational And Transsystemic Tendencies In The Cultural Life Of State-Socialist Russia And East-Central Europe', *Slavonica*, 10/2 (2004), 113–23.

¹¹⁰ B. Klich-Kluczevska, *Family, Taboo and Communism in Poland, 1956-1989* (Berlin, 2021); A. Ignaciuk, 'No Man's Land? Gendering Contraception in Family Planning Advice Literature in State-Socialist Poland (1950s–1980s)', *Social History Of Medicine*, 2019, 1–23; N. Jarska, 'Men as Husbands and Fathers in Postwar Poland (1956-1975): Towards New Masculine Identities?', *Men and Masculinities* (Mar. 2020), 1–22.

Conclusion

As the scholarship surveyed in this chapter demonstrates, neither state socialism nor sexual revolution are self-explanatory categories in historical research. Rather than assuming one steady set of meanings associated with either, this dissertation concentrates on their ambiguities and frictions. For the purposes of this thesis, I propose to treat sexual revolution not as an easily measurable historical event, but rather as a discursive phenomenon used by historical actors to make sense of the complicated and fast-changing reality surrounding them. Therefore, instead of applying ‘Western’ definitions of sexual revolution to the socialist context, this thesis aims to discover what the sexual revolution actually meant to those participating in discussions of sexuality in state-socialist Poland. Focusing on changing definitions of sexual modernity, the following chapters investigate the profound transformation of discourse on sexuality in Poland. The breadth and scale of such transformation warrants the conclusion that a sexual revolution indeed took place under state socialism.

This thesis therefore engages with two primary sets of literature. First, it challenges some of the notions prevalent in scholarship on ‘global’ sexual revolutions and argues that focusing on socialist attempts at sexual liberation can greatly broaden our understanding of categories such as emancipation or sexual modernity. Second, it engages with Polish historiography of the post-WWII period to demonstrate that sexuality formed an important part of the socialist modernisation project and should not be dismissed simply because it concerned the private sphere instead of politics. By focusing on culture, sexuality, and individual stories, my research challenges the totalitarian paradigm still prominent in the studies of Polish state socialism.

Finally, as this review of historiography clearly suggests, a transnational perspective is essential in understanding the history of sexuality in post-WWII Europe.

Instead of reaffirming stereotypes about the otherness of Eastern Europe, this thesis places Poland in a transnational context and aims to uncover transfers of ideas and behaviour that have previously been overlooked because of inaccurate methodologies. Thus, working with the category of ‘sexual revolution’ rather than ignoring it appears necessary in dismantling a Western-centric understanding of sexual liberation. In the end, what really matters is not academic definitions but how regular people transformed their understandings of sexual freedom. And, as the following chapters demonstrate, for many people, state-socialist approaches to sex were indeed revolutionary.

Chapter Two: Is There a Third Way? Polish Responses to the Sexual Revolution

In April 1965, a rare ‘window to the West’ opened in Poland when a new state-sponsored weekly, *Forum*, entered the media scene. The magazine, advertised as a foreign press review, quickly turned out to be a potent force in creating the image of the West in the eyes of Polish readers. In the first issue of the journal, the editorial board declared ‘[o]ur goal is to include, as far as possible, the full array of issues of the contemporary international scene and to recapture them from the Polish perspective’.¹¹¹ Such proclamations could be interpreted as evidence that *Forum* had been designed as a political outlet rather than an independent news provider. As the communist state owned and controlled all media in the country, a certain degree of political influence over publications could be taken for granted.

However, dismissing *Forum* as simply a propaganda tool would leave out a large part of the story. Throughout the second half of the 1960s the magazine served as one of the first transmission belts thanks to which information about ‘Western’ cultural phenomena reached a broader Polish audience.¹¹² Most importantly, because of the magazine’s ‘press review’ character, it reprinted Western publications with very little commentary from the editorial board. Thus, it allowed its readers to draw their conclusions independently. Moreover, and perhaps inadvertently, journals such as *Forum* promoted ‘Western’ lifestyle and patterns of consumption in the state-socialist reality.

¹¹¹ ‘Witajcie czytelnicy!’, *Forum* (11 Apr. 1965), 3.

¹¹² Other magazines with similar profile included: *Dookoła świata*, *Przekrój*, *Ty i Ja*, *Świat*. See M. Wach, ‘Life – Paris Match – Świat: East/West Image Transfer in the Weekly Magazine Świat (1951–1969) and the Impact of the Magnum Style on Photo-Reportage in Poland’, *International Journal for History, Culture And Modernity*, 5/1 (2017), 101–29.

Not only did they publicise the ‘Western’ sexual revolution but also abetted the development of a new discourse on sexuality in Poland.

As many scholars have argued, the sexual revolution of 1960s and 1970s was largely a media revolution with a new language of speaking about sexuality being one of its most distinctive features.¹¹³ Similarly, in the Soviet Bloc, too, the 1960s were marked by the rise of mass media and popular culture that in many ways contributed to the emergence of new youth cultures and transformed public debate.¹¹⁴ Poland was not an exception. As this chapter argues, *Forum* served as the first influential transmission belt for new information about the sexual revolution. Yet, it was not the only one. From the mid-1960s onwards various newspapers regularly published pieces on the transformations of Western sexualities, which soon provoked discussion about Poland’s place in these processes. And, as I demonstrate in the following paragraphs, the answers to such questions were far from straightforward. As a result, Polish commentators and experts in sexology started looking for a distinct, socialist approach to sex: a ‘Third Way’ toward sexual liberation.

Polish media responses to the ‘Western’ youth movements in the 1960s have been analysed by Małgorzata Fidelis. As she observed, after the political Thaw of 1956 and relaxation of cultural and economic policies, communist propaganda could no longer portray the West as ‘a monolithic imperialist power’.¹¹⁵ Rather, portrayals varied greatly over the course of the decade: from somewhat positive depictions of anti-capitalist movements or popular culture to alarming narrations of disruption. Such variations had

¹¹³ See E. Schaefer (ed.), *Sex Scene: Media and the Sexual Revolution* (Durham; London, 2014).

¹¹⁴ A.E. Gorsuch and D. Koenker, ‘Introduction: The Socialist 1960s in Global Perspective’, in A.E. Gorsuch and D. Koenker (eds.), *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Bloomington, 2013), 1–21.

¹¹⁵ M. Fidelis, ‘The Other Marxists: Making Sense of International Student Revolts in Poland in the Global Sixties’, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 62/3 (2013), 426.

deeply political origins, and the student protests of March 1968 in Poland further contributed to the transformation of these discourses. According to Fidelis, in the late 1960s the ‘image of threatening Western youth was used to redefine the terms of Cold War competition and to articulate the moral superiority of Communist societies’.¹¹⁶ As she demonstrated, two discursive strategies were employed to delegitimise student movements on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Their main point of focus was nationalism and morality. For example, the alleged sexual promiscuity of Western activists served as evidence that they were not interested in serious political agenda or ‘real’ Marxism but had purely hedonistic aspirations.¹¹⁷

Building upon Fidelis’ research, my goal in this chapter is twofold. First, I survey the social and cultural history of the two post-war decades to show how Polish sexualities were transformed by state legislation and influenced by the developments in the West. Thus, I argue that many of the phenomena usually associated with sexual revolution had in fact been present in Poland long before the news of Western sexual liberation movements reached the country. Second, the chapter analyses how sexual liberation was portrayed in the Polish media, focusing not only on Western youth movements but on the whole set of ideas, phenomena and events labelled by Polish journalists and experts as part of the ‘sexual revolution’. As the final section of this chapter argues, the question of sexual modernity was often taken up by Polish commentators as they searched for a ‘third’, socialist way toward sexual liberation. The subsequent debates on changing sexual mores in Poland were profoundly shaped by this preoccupation with finding a way

¹¹⁶ Fidelis, ‘The Other Marxists’, 427.

¹¹⁷ Fidelis, ‘The Other Marxists’, 439-40.

to translate the values of socialist morality into the realities of an increasingly complex and fast-changing world.

Post-War Revolutions

To fully understand the context of debates on the sexual revolution in the West, let us first turn to Poland's very own post-war revolution and its impact for the social and cultural landscape of the Sixties. In 1960s Poland, similarly to the countries of Western Europe, a generation of post-war baby boomers was coming of age.¹¹⁸ However, unlike their Western peers, they did not have to call for a revolution of social norms and practices. Rather, they (and their parents) had already lived through it. As acclaimed sociologist Marcin Czerwiński argued in his 1969 book *Przemiany obyczaju* [*The Transformations of Morals*]:

People older than forty who live in Poland have witnessed one of the greatest, if not the greatest, revolutions in morals that have taken place in our country since the very distant past. [...] Undoubtedly, this revolution in morals that I am speaking of, began with a range of partial changes and a number of somewhat initial, preparatory acts. Nevertheless, the war tremors and the post-war social and cultural revolution contributed to a complete transformation. Its speed and radicality suggest that the word 'revolution' should be used.¹¹⁹

What did Czerwiński actually mean by that? Certainly, not a sexual revolution, although changing patterns of pre-marital behaviour (so-called 'chodzenie' [going out together, dating]) occupied a prominent place in his analysis.¹²⁰ Rather, he was interested in different ways in which changing political and economic conditions affected how people organised their private lives and relationships.

¹¹⁸ B. Klich-Kluczevska, 'Making Up for the Losses of War. Reproduction Politics in Post-War Poland', in M. Röger and R. Leiserowitz (eds.), *Women and Men at War: A Gender Perspective on World War II and Its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe* (Osnabrück, 2012), 314–5.

¹¹⁹ M. Czerwiński, *Przemiany obyczaju*, (Warszawa, 1969), 5.

¹²⁰ Czerwiński, *Przemiany*, 126–31.

One of the most profound transformations observed by Czerwiński was that in the sphere of gender order. He optimistically claimed that ‘in contemporary Poland legal equality between men and women is so pervasive that the last traces of patriarchy are disappearing’.¹²¹ Even if such optimism may seem premature (and Czerwiński himself admitted that there was a huge disparity between legal provisions and reality),¹²² there certainly was a degree of truth in it. On the one hand, gender equality was inscribed into law, the most prominent example being the 1952 Constitution. In Article 66 it pronounced that ‘women in the Polish People's Republic have equal rights with men in all spheres of public, political, economic, social and cultural life’.¹²³ Greatly influenced by the Soviet law (and in fact by Stalin himself)¹²⁴, the 1952 Constitution set out crucial ideological challenges for the new communist state. Mobilisation of the female labour force for the purposes of strenuous industrialisation was certainly at the very core of this project.

When the communists seized power in 1945, Poland was a predominantly rural country, profoundly ravaged by both German and Soviet occupation. Therefore, in the immediate post-war years, aside from eliminating political opposition and consolidating power, the efforts of the Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, henceforth PZPR)¹²⁵ concentrated on rebuilding the country and transforming it into a Soviet-like industrial economy. To achieve this goal, in 1950 the Six-Year-Plan was launched with the aim of expanding heavy industry and increasing

¹²¹ Czerwiński, *Przemiany*, 92.

¹²² Czerwiński, *Przemiany*, 93, 96–107.

¹²³ ‘Constitution of the Polish People's Republic’ (1952) <http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/kpol/e1952a-spis.html> (24 July 2019).

¹²⁴ K. Persak, ‘Stalin As Editor: The Soviet Dictator’s Secret Changes to the Polish Constitution of 1952’, *Bulletin. Cold War International History Project*, 11 (1998), 149–54.

¹²⁵ In December 1948 the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR) ‘united’ with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) to create the Polish United Workers’ Party. This act of political ‘unification’ was a symbolical opening of the Stalinist period.

employment by as much as 60 percent.¹²⁶ Needless to say, such plans could not be realised without significant mobilisation of the female labour force. This was to be achieved by both increasing the overall proportion of female workers (a number that grew to 33 percent of the labour force in 1954)¹²⁷ as well as encouraging women to enter male-dominated occupations.¹²⁸ Figures of female tractor-drivers or Nowa Huta's shock workers featured prominently in Stalinist propaganda, serving as evidence of the communist state's commitment to gender equality.¹²⁹ Yet, as Małgorzata Fidelis has argued, the new opportunities turned out to be rather limited and women were rarely promoted to higher, better-paid positions, predominantly occupied by men.¹³⁰ As she put it, 'traditional prejudice, displayed by both men and women, and poor education put limits on women's advancement to managerial and skilled positions, while the inflated production targets contributed to hard work conditions'.¹³¹

It is often claimed that 'productivisation' of women had purely practical reasons as a tool to achieve the Six-Year-Plan's goals and was thus just another face of communist exploitation.¹³² From this point of view there would be a 'natural' conflict between the regime's orientation toward production and women's concentration on family life.¹³³ However, such an assessment rarely takes into account women's personal experiences. As Katherine Lebow argued in her study of Nowa Huta, 'for all the difficulties they encountered in Nowa Huta, many women subjectively experienced a vast improvement

¹²⁶ K. Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949-56*, (Ithaca, 2013), 22–5.

¹²⁷ Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 98.

¹²⁸ M. Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge, 2010), 74–7.

¹²⁹ Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 99–101. See also K. Stańczak-Wiślicz, 'Traktorzystka - O Potężde Wizerunku', *Teksty Drugie*, 3, 2013, 150–63.

¹³⁰ Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*, 77–81.

¹³¹ Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*, 81.

¹³² This motif has been especially dominant in the social memory. Stańczak-Wiślicz, 'Traktorzystka', 152–4.

¹³³ Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*, 11.

in their lives in the new town. Indeed, in women's narratives of life in Nowa Huta, as in men's, hardships serve the narrative function of underlining authors' ultimate successes'.¹³⁴ For them, the work in a factory offered previously unattainable financial independence, a way out of poverty as well as personal self-realisation. And, even if the political thaw of 1956 brought about a backlash against the Stalinist policies, the trend could not be fully reversed.¹³⁵ As a result, in 1960 women constituted 34 percent of the labour force.¹³⁶ Such a transformation in itself was a visible effect of the social revolution that took place in 1950s Poland.

What contributed greatly to this picture was also the new family law, implemented by the communist government right after the war. As early as September 1945 a Decree on Marriage Law was issued by the State National Council and, as a result, civil divorces were introduced into Polish law.¹³⁷ For the first time in history marriage was conceptualised as a primarily secular institution, with the state having exclusive jurisdiction over marital regulations. Such an approach was further entrenched in the 1950 Family Law Code.¹³⁸ The legal regulations were combined with new social policy provisions such as state-sponsored crèches, kindergartens and paid maternity leave.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, 102.

¹³⁵ D. Kałwa, 'Post-Stalinist Backlash in Poland | Backlash Post-Stalinien En Pologne', *Clio: Histoire, Femmes et Societes*, 41/1 (2015), 165–74; See as well N. Jarska, 'Gender and Labour in Post-War Communist Poland: Female Unemployment 1945-1970', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 110 (2014), 49–85.

¹³⁶ Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*, 235.

¹³⁷ Dziennik Ustaw (Polish Government Gazette, henceforth Dz. U.) 1945 nr 48 poz. 270, 'Dekret z dnia 25 września 1945 r. Prawo małżeńskie',

<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19450480270> (24 July 2019). The institution of civil divorced did not exist in the interwar legal code, which left this matter to be resolved within denominations (and, as a result, Catholics could only get divorced if they converted to Protestantism).

¹³⁸ B. Łobodzinska, 'Divorce in Poland: Its Legislation, Distribution and Social Context', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 45/4 (1983), 927–42; See as well B. Klich-Kluczevska, *Rodzina, Tabu i Komunizm w Polsce, 1956-1989* (Kraków, 2015), 121–43.

¹³⁹ Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*, 58–60; B. Klich-Kluczevska, 'Social Policy and Social Practice in the People's Republic of Poland', in S. Hering (ed.), *Social Care under State Socialism (1945-1989). Ambitions, Ambiguities, and Mismanagement* (Opladen; Farmington Hills, 2009), 161–74.

Again, bold proclamations of state support for women and their families did not always translate into everyday practice. They did however greatly impact the public discourse. Social rights began to be treated as an inherent element of the state-socialist regime and even employed as a tool of political critique against its deficiencies¹⁴⁰.

Yet, the new legal framework had a profound impact on the ways in which people conceptualised marriage and relationships. According to statistical data, divorce rates had been rising continuously throughout the 1950s and 1960s. While in 1949 there were only 4.10 divorces per 100 contracted marriages, 20 years later the figure rose almost threefold (up to 12.19 in 1969). However, divorce remained a predominantly urban phenomenon (the rates were four times higher in cities than in rural areas).¹⁴¹ Such disparity between urban and rural attitudes towards marriage and sex would remain a characteristic feature throughout the state-socialist period.¹⁴²

Rising divorce rates did not necessarily mean that marriage as an institution lost its popularity. On the contrary, as sociologist Barbara Łobodzińska claimed, the majority of young people wanted to marry, and divorced spouses sought happiness in subsequent marriages.¹⁴³ It was rather the definition of marital happiness that was changing over the years. Emotional involvement rose as an increasingly important factor in marital decisions, contributing to a shifting perception of marriage as a private matter (contrary

¹⁴⁰A great example of such practice can be found in the Żyrardów female workers' strikes. See Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*, 61-98. M. Fidelis, 'Przodownice Pracy i Buntowniczkki: Strajki Kobiet w Żyrardowie (1945-1951)', in N. Jarska and J. Ołazek (eds.), *Płeć Buntu. Kobiety w Oporze Społecznym i Opozycji w Polsce w Latach 1944-1989 Na Tle Porównawczym* (Warszawa, 2014), 120-38. See also P. Betts, 'Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights: The Case of East Germany', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 3/3 (2012), 407-26.

¹⁴¹ Łobodzińska, 'Divorce in Poland', 933.

¹⁴² See for instance M. Trawińska, 'Obyczajowość współczesnej młodzieży wiejskiej', *Problemy Rodziny*, 2 (1970), 8-13. Warsaw, Archive of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, henceforth AAN), 2/2212/0/13.1/502, Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej, 'Trawińska Maria „Obyczajowość młodzieży robotniczej i chłopskiej ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem obyczajowości seksualnej”'.

¹⁴³ Łobodzińska, 'Divorce in Poland', 937.

to the traditional model in which economic status and family pressure played a primary role).¹⁴⁴ However, as sociologists observed, men and women differed in their perception of marital roles and duties. Generally, women put more emphasis on partnership in marriage, while the majority of men still adhered to patriarchal patterns. Such disparities, Łobodzińska argued, contributed to marital conflicts and could lead to divorce.¹⁴⁵

Further evidence of changing attitudes towards marriage and sexuality could be found in the rates of premarital sex and sexual initiation. For instance, in 1967 as many as 26,4 percent of brides were pregnant at the moment of marriage.¹⁴⁶ If only indirectly, such data reflected a general relaxation of sexual mores among the youngest generation. Sexological research conducted in the 1960s further confirmed such a diagnosis. According to Mikołaj Kozakiewicz, 46,6 % of girls and 46,8% of boys had their first intercourse between the age of 18 and 20. For young members of Warsaw intelligentsia the rates were even higher: as Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz argued, in 1969-1970 56% of women and 68% of men had their first intercourse before the age of 20.¹⁴⁷ Even if the data quoted above was not complete or methodologically consistent it did however showcase important trends in changing attitudes towards sexuality and the transformation of public discourse that made discussions of such matters possible.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ B. Łobodzinska, 'Love As a Factor in Marital Decisions in Contemporary Poland', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 6/1 (1975), 72-3.

¹⁴⁵ Łobodzinska, 'Divorce in Poland', 938.

¹⁴⁶ Łobodzinska, 'Divorce in Poland', 939.

¹⁴⁷ Z. Lew-Starowicz, 'Przemiany obyczaju seksualnego młodzieży', *Wiadomości Lekarskie*, 10 (1971), 997.

¹⁴⁸ More on the discourses on sexual initiation in twentieth century Poland see A. Kościańska, *Zobaczyć Łosia. Historia Polskiej Edukacji Seksualnej Od Pierwszej Lekcji Do Internetu* (Wołowiec, 2017), 92-126.

Family Planning, Abortion, and the October Thaw

The events of 1956 brought about changes in almost all spheres of life. In political terms the crucial moment should perhaps be seen in the Poznań workers' strikes (June) or Władysław Gomułka's return to power (October). However, the 'revolutionary' 1956 had its socio-cultural face as well. When in summer 1955 the Fifth World Festival of Youth and Students was held in Warsaw, the first signs of dissent against stiff, monolithic youth culture could be observed.¹⁴⁹ Only a couple of weeks later, the press debates around Adam Ważyk's *Poem for Adults* [Poemat dla dorosłych] proved that new areas of political critique had opened and the public debate could not easily return to the *status quo ante*.¹⁵⁰ Ważyk's poem included vivid depictions of sexual promiscuity that in his opinion flourished in the new socialist settlements such as Nowa Huta. Subsequent press publications followed this pattern and the mid-1950s witnessed unprecedented debates about female sexuality, prostitution, and family planning, not without a twinge of moral panic. On the other hand, first striptease shows and beauty pageants were taking place at that time as well and first signs of commercialised sexualities in state-socialist Poland could be noticed (see Chapter Five for more details).¹⁵¹ Therefore, even if according to some scholars the thaw and its relative freedom did not last very long,¹⁵² the new language influenced Polish culture for the decades to come and sexuality played an important role in this discourse.

¹⁴⁹ A. Krzywicki, *Poststalinowski karnawał radości: V Światowy Festiwal Młodzieży i Studentów o Pokój i Przyjaźń, Warszawa 1955 r.: przygotowania, przebieg, znaczenie* (Warszawa, 2009).

¹⁵⁰ M. Shore, 'Some Words for Grown-Up Marxists: "A Poem for Adults" and the Revolt from Within', *The Polish Review*, 42/2 (1997), 131–54.

¹⁵¹ M. Fidelis, 'Młode Robotnice w Mieście: Percepcja Kobiecej Seksualności w Polsce w Latach Pięćdziesiątych XX Wieku', in A. Żarnowska and A. Szwarc (eds.), *Kobieta i Małżeństwo. Społeczno-Kulturowe Aspekty Seksualności. Wiek XIX i XX*, 2004, 453–75; J. Kochanowski, *Rewolucja Międzypaździernikowa: Polska 1956-1957* (Kraków, 2017), 65–78, 80–94; See as well A. Dobrowolska, 'Problem, Którego Miało Nie Być. Język Milicyjnych Dokumentów Poświęconych Prostytycji w Latach 1956 – 1969', *Polska 1944/45-1989. Studia i Materiały*, XV (2017), 217–39.

¹⁵² See Kochanowski, *Rewolucja Międzypaździernikowa*, 18–21.

The issues of family planning are particularly worth noting here as 1956 brought about a true revolution in this regard. Shortly after the war, the communist regime followed the Soviet, pro-natalist approach towards reproduction. As Barbara Klich-Kluczevska has put it, ‘the concept of the numerical strength of the national community and (related directly to it) the need to replace the casualties from World War II had become an axiom of public discourse in post-war Poland’.¹⁵³ Interestingly, the interwar criminal code was still in place, making abortion illegal except in two cases: when pregnancy resulted from a crime or when a woman’s life was in danger. The law, introduced in 1932 after heated debates and a campaign for sex reform led by Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, was one of the most liberal in Europe at that time.¹⁵⁴ It did, however, impose up to 3 years of prison sentence for women who terminated their pregnancies (and up to 5 years for people who assisted them).¹⁵⁵ In the post-war years the law was enforced to combat underground abortions and ensure rapid population growth. On the other hand, there were also attempts to further limit access to abortion (i.e., by removing the ‘life threat’ clause) following the Soviet example but they were not successful.¹⁵⁶

The new abortion law was introduced in Poland in April 1956 (whilst British and French women had to wait until 1967 and 1975 respectively for a similar bill to be put forward in their countries). Following analogous developments in the Soviet Union where abortion was legalised in 1955, the new Polish law stressed the importance of preventing

¹⁵³ Klich-Kluczevska, ‘Making Up for the Losses of War’, 308.

¹⁵⁴ See M. Gawin, ‘The Sex Reform Movement and Eugenics in Interwar Poland’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biol & Biomed Sci*, 39/2 (2008), 181–86.

¹⁵⁵ A. Czajkowska, ‘O Dopuszczalności Przerwywania Ciąży. Ustawa z 27 Kwietnia 1956 r. i Towarzystwo Jej Dyskusje’, in M. Kula (ed.), *Kłopoty z Seksem w PRL. Rodzenie Nie Całkiem Po Ludzku, Aborcja, Choroby, Odmienności* (Warszawa, 2012), 109–10.

¹⁵⁶ Klich-Kluczevska, ‘Making Up for the Losses of War’, 321–6; See also B. Klich-Kluczevska, ‘Przypadek Marii Spod Bochni: Próba Analizy Mikrohistorycznej Procesu o Aborcję z 1949 Roku’, *Rocznik Antropologii Historii*, II/1 (2) (2012), 195–209.

clandestine and thus dangerous abortions and protecting women's health.¹⁵⁷ As it was estimated during the parliamentary debates in 1956, over 300 thousands illegal abortions were being performed each year, primarily by unqualified "babki" (rural midwives).¹⁵⁸ Therefore, as Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska has pointed out, the new policy contributed to the pathologisation and medicalisation of abortion and was perceived as a step towards socialist modernisation. Most importantly, the law (passed in 1956 and then further liberalised in 1959) legalised abortion for socio-economic reasons (i.e., for women, who 'found themselves in difficult life circumstances').¹⁵⁹ As a result, 121,274 registered abortions were performed in 1957 and nine years later the figure rose up to 222,159.¹⁶⁰

As both publicists and politicians agreed, legalising abortion was only the first step in modernising Polish sexual mores. The real problem to be tackled was the low level of awareness about contraception and family planning. In response to this problem, the Society for Conscious Motherhood (Towarzystwo Świadomego Macierzyństwa, henceforth TSM) was founded in 1957. Drawing on interwar ideological traditions, the TSM's ultimate goal was to limit the number of abortions through promoting reliable contraceptive methods and raising public awareness about birth control and family planning.¹⁶¹ The Society was theoretically independent from authorities, which, as Agata

¹⁵⁷ S. Kuźma-Markowska, 'Walka z „babkami” o Zdrowie Kobiet: Medykalizacja Przerwywania Ciąży w Polsce w Latach Pięćdziesiątych i Sześćdziesiątych XX Wieku', *Polska 1944/45-1989. Studia i Materiały*, XV (2017), 189–215; A.E. Randall, "'Abortion Will Deprive You of Happiness!': Soviet Reproductive Politics in the Post-Stalin Era', *Journal of Women's History*, 23/3 (2011), 13–38.

¹⁵⁸ Kuźma-Markowska, 'Walka z „babkami”', 198; See also A. Konopka, 'Sejm PRL I Kadencji a Przerwywanie Ciąży. Analiza Relacji „Trybuny Ludu” z Dyskusji Sejmowej Na Temat Ustawy o Warunkach Dopuszczalności Przerwywania Ciąży z 1956 Roku', *Władza Sądzenia*, 9 (2016), 94–5.

¹⁵⁹ Czajkowska, 'O Dopuszczalności Przerwywania Ciąży', 157–60; Ignaciuk, 'No Man's Land?', 5; N. Jarska, 'Modern Marriage and the Culture of Sexuality: Experts between the State and the Church in Poland, 1956–1970', *European History Quarterly*, 49/3 (2019), 471, 482.

¹⁶⁰ Czajkowska, 'O Dopuszczalności Przerwywania Ciąży', 180.

¹⁶¹ See Gawin, 'The Sex Reform Movement', 181–86; S. Kuźma-Markowska, 'An Unexpected Continuity: Voluntary and Compulsory Sterilization in the Rhetoric of the Pre- and Post-World War II Polish Birth Control Movement', *East Central Europe*, 38/1 (2011), 97–114.

Ignaciuk has argued, might have been a deliberate strategy of keeping a safe distance between state institutions and this controversial project.¹⁶² Nonetheless, the mid-1950s undoubtedly brought about a substantive change. The network of TSM clinics provided counselling all over the country and its experts contributed to a variety of publications in popular press and advice literature.¹⁶³ Moreover, the TSM's sister company – Securitas, founded in 1958 – produced its own contraceptives such as diaphragms, cervical caps, and spermicides.¹⁶⁴

Yet, the TSM's activities and agenda were deeply rooted in the Polish context and the Church position on family planning should not be disregarded when writing about these developments in the post-Thaw Poland.¹⁶⁵ As Ignaciuk has demonstrated, the TSM's publications presented women as primarily responsible for contraception and framed birth control foremost as a modernising tool for family wellbeing. The positive impact of contraception on a woman's or the couple's sex life was rarely mentioned and only in the context of alleviating the fear of unwanted pregnancies.¹⁶⁶ Both in print media and expert publications birth control was framed as a pro-family measure rather than a means to achieve personal fulfilment. Thus, such discourses differed greatly from what

¹⁶² Ignaciuk, 'No Man's Land?', 6.

¹⁶³ Jarska, 'Modern Marriage', 473. See as well A. Ignaciuk, '„Ten Szkodliwy Zabieg”. Dyskursy Na Temat Aborcji w Publikacjach Towarzystwa Świadomego Macierzyństwa / Towarzystwa Planowania Rodziny (1956–1980)', *Zeszyty Etnologii Wrocławskiej*, 20/1 (2014), 75–97; Ignaciuk, 'No Man's Land?', 1–23; A. Kościańska, *Płeć, przyjemność i przemoc: kształtowanie wiedzy eksperckiej o seksualności w Polsce* (Warszawa, 2014); A. Kościańska, 'Sex on Equal Terms? Polish Sexology on Women's Emancipation and "Good Sex" from the 1970s to the Present', *Sexualities*, 19/1–2 (2016), 236–56; B. Klich-Kluczevska, "'Continuities and Discontinuities. Educational Program of The Planned Parenthood Association in Krakow (1957 – 1993)'", *Mesto a Dejiny*, 2014, 81–92.

¹⁶⁴ Ignaciuk, 'No Man's Land?', 6.

¹⁶⁵ See A. Kościańska, 'Humanae Vitae, Birth Control and the Forgotten History of the Catholic Church in Poland', in A. Harris (ed.), *The Schism of '68: Catholicism, Contraception and Humanae Vitae in Europe, 1945–1975* (London, 2018), 187–208; J.Z. Mishtal, 'How the Church Became the State: The Catholic Regime and Reproductive Rights in Socialist Poland', in S. Penn and J. Massino (eds.), *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (New York, 2009), 133–49.

¹⁶⁶ Ignaciuk, 'No Man's Land? Gendering Contraception in Family Planning Advice Literature in State-Socialist Poland (1950s–1980s)', 14.

would soon become a defining characteristic of the ‘Western’ sexual revolution in the late 1960s and 1970s – a belief in (or, alternatively, fear of) the emancipative effects of the contraceptive pill for women.

This is not to say that Polish women could not access information about modern methods of contraception. The pill was available in Poland from 1967 onwards (imported from the Netherlands and later East Germany) and in 1969 Femigen Forte, the Polish version of the pill, entered the market.¹⁶⁷ The quantity of pills produced in Poland grew systematically from the late 1960s, but the supply could not possibly meet potential demand. For instance, roughly 1,700,000 boxes produced in 1976 could fulfil the needs of only 140,000 women per year.¹⁶⁸ Hence, the pill, although theoretically available, remained a niche contraceptive method, primarily used by well-educated women from urban areas. In 1969 only 2.5 per 1000 women relied on the pill as a form of contraception (in 1976 the figure rose to 15.6).¹⁶⁹

The low availability of modern contraceptives as well as poor knowledge about birth control led to unreliable methods such as withdrawal and cycle observation being the most popular strategies of family planning up to the late 1970s.¹⁷⁰ This, combined with easy access to legal abortions, resulted in growing numbers of terminated pregnancies, despite widespread disapproval for this kind of birth control method by both the Church and the Communist Party.¹⁷¹ According to Agata Ignaciuk, ‘abortion, contraception, premarital sex and its potential consequences were all situated in the

¹⁶⁷ A. Ignaciuk, “‘Clueless about Contraception’”: The Introduction and Circulation of the Contraceptive Pill in State-Socialist Poland (1960s-1970s)’, *Medicina Nei Secoli Arte e Scienza*, 26/2 (2014), 517–9.

¹⁶⁸ Ignaciuk, “‘Clueless about Contraception’”, 521.

¹⁶⁹ M. Okólski, ‘Abortion and Contraception in Poland’, *Studies in Family Planning*, 14/11 (1983), 269.

¹⁷⁰ Okólski, ‘Abortion and Contraception in Poland’, 269–71.

¹⁷¹ More on the Catholic Church’s position on abortion in the 1960s see K. Jarkiewicz, ‘„W Obronie Życia Nienarodzonych”. Głos Kościoła i Środowisk Katolickich w Debacie Okołoaborecyjnej w Okresie Wielkiej Nowenny (1956-1966)’, *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 29, 2017, 137–75.

blurred areas between what was legally permitted, widely practiced and socially accepted in a still very patriarchal society, which observed, officially at least, the Catholic Church's teachings on human life'.¹⁷² Therefore, there hardly was one discourse on family planning and sexuality that would dominate the way people conceptualised this sphere of life. Rather, we should speak of a variety of discourses and practices which together formed an unambiguous and multidimensional picture of state-socialist sexualities.¹⁷³

Youth Culture on the 'Other' Side of the Iron Curtain

1968 was marked by youth revolts all over the world. In Poland they reached their peak on 8 March, when protests at the University of Warsaw were brutally suppressed by police forces. These revolts, as many scholars believe, were a generational experience for the post-war baby boomers.¹⁷⁴ Yet, there were significant differences between protesters in Western capitalist democracies and their peers who had grown up in socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe. While in Paris student protests relied heavily on Marxist rhetoric, in Warsaw young people rebelled against communist structures of power.¹⁷⁵ Thus, their take on Marxism was substantially different, as they rather employed it to call for reforms of the communist system itself.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, both slogans and repertoires of

¹⁷² A. Ignaciuk, 'Reproductive Policies and Women's Birth Control. Practices in State-Socialist Poland (1960s-1980s)', in L. Niethammer and S. Satjukow (eds.), *'Wenn Die Chemie Stimmt ...': Geschlechterbeziehungen Und Geburtenkontrolle Im Zeitalter Der 'Pille' - Gender Relations and Birth Control in the Age of the 'Pill'* (Göttingen, 2016), 328.

¹⁷³ More on conceptualisation of state-socialist sexual histories in other CEE countries, see Lišková, *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style. Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945-1989*; McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*.

¹⁷⁴ See for example R. Gildea and J. Mark, 'Introduction: Voices Of Europe's '68', *Cultural and Social History*, 8/4 (2011), 441–48; M. Klimke and M. Nolan, 'Introduction: The Globalization of the Sixties', in J. Chen and others (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (Abingdon, 2018), 1–6; P. Osęka, *My, ludzie z Marca: autoportret pokolenia '68* (Warszawa: Wołowiec, 2015).

¹⁷⁵ M. Zaremba, '1968 in Poland: The Rebellion on the Other Side of the Looking Glass', *American Historical Review*, 123/3 (2018), 770–1.

¹⁷⁶ Fidelis, 'The Other Marxists', 432–3.

protest often referred to national, anti-Russian sentiments and the legacy of Polish romanticism. Their demands were mainly political and made little mention of sexuality or culture.¹⁷⁷ There seemed to be no place for (or even need of) sexual liberation, at least at a first glance. Such a view has been further entrenched by the historiography on 1968 in Poland which has rarely touched upon the issues of gender or sexuality.¹⁷⁸

It is impossible to assess to what extent liberal attitudes towards sexuality influenced the Polish youth in 1968. Certainly, there was no ‘sexual revolution’ in terms of the politicisation of sexuality and private life. This absence can however easily be explained by the fact that many of the usual protest movements’ causes such as gender equality or access to abortion had already been promoted by the state. Moreover, a lack of such demands in the political sphere does not necessarily imply that people’s practices were also prudish or constrained. As sexological research already discussed in this chapter suggests, pre-marital sex was no longer a taboo for the generation that began their studies in the second half of the sixties.¹⁷⁹ ‘We were practising free love instead of theorising about it’ joked some participants of the March 1968 student protests interviewed by Piotr Osęka.¹⁸⁰

Furthermore, fascination with the West shaped the youth culture of that decade. Such transfers of cultural patterns would not have been possible had it not been for the peculiar political climate of the 1960s. The period of relative liberalisation that began in

¹⁷⁷ Zaremba, ‘1968 in Poland’, 771–2. More on the relations between sexuality and politics in the ‘global 1968’, see L.J. Frazier and D. Cohen, *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination* (New York, 2009); S. Levsen, ‘Sexualität Und Politik Um 1968: Eine Transnationale Geschichte?’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 17/1 (2019), 98–115.

¹⁷⁸ Osęka, *My, ludzie z Marca*, 301. See for example J. Eisler, *Polski Rok 1968* (Warszawa, 2006). Małgorzata Fidelis’ work is a notable exception in this context, see Fidelis, ‘Jugend, Moderne und die Welt. Die polnische Jugend an der Schwelle der Long Sixties. Historische Betrachtungen’, 80–100.

¹⁷⁹ See Lew-Starowicz, ‘Przemiany obyczaju’, 997.

¹⁸⁰ P. Osęka, ‘Polish March’, in M. Cunta (ed.), *In Search of Freedom: 1968 and Its Legacy* (Ljubljana, 2018), 98

Poland in 1956 continued up to the 1968 student protests.¹⁸¹ As a result, various forms of cultural transfers occurred through the Iron Curtain and new opportunities for participation in mass culture emerged.¹⁸² For instance, Polish youth eagerly listened to rock music through both official and unofficial channels (such as Radio Free Europe). Beatlemania could be observed on Polish streets and in clubs. A remarkable concert of the Rolling Stones took place in 1967 in Warsaw, causing excitement among young people which led to riots outside the venue.¹⁸³ Moreover, as Anna Pełka has demonstrated, the late 1960s were revolutionary for fashion both in the West and in Poland and defined by an upsurge in youth fashion.¹⁸⁴ Designers and journalists eagerly followed developments in Paris or London. Although constrained by economic shortages and a centrally planned economy, they managed to quickly absorb and promote latest trends. Perhaps the most symbolic one was the miniskirt, inspired by Mary Quant's designs and popularised in Poland by Barbara Hoff.¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, one of her most controversial designs included Halina Frąckowiak's outfit for the 1970 Festival of Polish Song in Opole (Fig. 2.1¹⁸⁶). The dress was so revealing that the national television decided to film Frąckowiak only from a distance.¹⁸⁷

Alongside miniskirts young Poles eagerly adopted other elements of Western youth culture and counterculture. The late 1960s witnessed the emergence of the Polish

¹⁸¹ The period is known in the historiography under the name of 'little stabilisation' [*mała stabilizacja*], however, some historians argue that this category is flawed and does not fully reflect all the complexities of that decade. See M. Zaremba, 'Społeczeństwo Polskie Lat Sześćdziesiątych – Między "Małą Stabilizacją" a "Małą Destabilizacją"', in K. Rokicki and S. Stępień (eds.), *Oblicza Marca 1968* (Warszawa, 2004), 24–51.

¹⁸² See Fidelis, 'Jugend', 80–100.

¹⁸³ T. Junes, *Student Politics in Communist Poland: Generations of Consent and Dissent* (Lanham, 2015), 88.

¹⁸⁴ A. Pełka, *Z (Politycznym) Fasonem: Moda Młodzieżowa w PRL i w NRD* (Gdańsk, 2013), 81.

¹⁸⁵ A. Pełka, *Teksas-Land: Moda Młodzieżowa w PRL* (Warszawa, 2007), 71–90.

¹⁸⁶ Fig. 2.1, Halina Frąckowiak at the 1970 Festival of Polish Song in Opole (28 June 1970) Ryszard Okoński/PAP.

¹⁸⁷ Pełka, *Z (Politycznym) Fasonem*, 86.

hippie movement, especially in big student cities such as Cracow and Warsaw.¹⁸⁸ Even though the scale could not be compared with what was happening in the USA, the phenomenon attracted attention of both media and state institutions and was often presented as a threat to public order and wellbeing of Polish youth. According to the Citizen's Militia's statistics, in 1969 there were around 1,000 people identified as hippies all over the country.¹⁸⁹ Although they did not have a consistent ideological profile, some common features could be observed. Generally, Polish hippies distinguished themselves through their outfits (long hair in particular), pacifism, Maoist leanings and experimentation with drugs.¹⁹⁰ In the public discourse they were however presented primarily through the lens of sexual promiscuity, as agents of the degenerate West.¹⁹¹ As one of major women's magazines warned in 1968:

[They] wear colourful, flowery clothes and a lot of trinkets and bells. They grow long hair and paint their faces in Indian patterns. [...] They take drugs and organise 'erotic feasts'. [...] They proclaim universal love (according to the saying 'make love not war'). They often suffer from venereal diseases.¹⁹²

Marek, a hippie, countered such arguments: 'We are often accused of sexual promiscuity. But, in fact, it is happening all over the world, even among people who are married. Sexual freedom is a feature of our generation, not only of the hippie movement'.¹⁹³

Marek's generation, people born in the late 1940s and early 1950s, definitely perceived sexuality in a different way than their parents. However, was Marcin Czerwiński right in his diagnosis quoted at the beginning of this chapter? Undoubtedly, the post-war years brought about an unparalleled social revolution. At a first glance,

¹⁸⁸ Junes, *Student Politics*, 89–90.

¹⁸⁹ B. Tracz, *Hippiesi, Kudłacze, Chwasty: Hipisi w Polsce w Latach 1967-1975, Hipisi w Polsce w Latach 1967-1975* (Katowice, 2014), 150.

¹⁹⁰ Tracz, *Hippiesi*, 149–190, 291–326.

¹⁹¹ Tracz, *Hippiesi*, 284–289.

¹⁹² 'HIPPISI – co to jest', *Kobieta i Życie*, (29 Sept. 1968), 9.

¹⁹³ 'Hippiesi, Dyskusja w redakcji „Perspektyw”', B. Gardowska (ed.), *Perspektywy*, 7 (1969), 23.

everything had changed: social structure, gender order, youth culture, as well as family planning practices. Yet, if we take a closer look, we may notice several areas of friction within that revolution. Despite modernising efforts undertaken by the communist government, large parts of rural Poland remained under strong influence of the Catholic Church. As Joanna Mishtal put it ‘the uniquely strong affiliation of Poles with Roman Catholicism (over 89 percent of the population) forced the state to use tactics that were adapted to this power dynamic’.¹⁹⁴ Unlike in other countries of the bloc, the position of the clergy was subject to far-reaching negotiations with communist officials. Examples included brief reintroduction of religious education into public schools and a certain degree of autonomy for the Catholic University in Lublin as well as religious periodicals.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, even in PZPR itself opinions on topics such as women’s emancipation, abortion or new media phenomena varied greatly.¹⁹⁶ Conservative voices remained influential both in the public debate and in the policy-making process and, as a consequence, responses to social transformations had often been conflicting and ambiguous.

It is perhaps impossible to analyse how ordinary Poles responded to new phenomena labelled by the media as the ‘sexual revolution’. Yet, the information about this ‘revolution’ had reached them somehow and this process as such is worth investigating. Therefore, the rest of this chapter is devoted to analysing various responses of the Polish media to the ‘Western’ sexual revolution. As I am showing in the next paragraphs, it met with an array of reactions, varying from utter condemnation to a more

¹⁹⁴ Mishtal, ‘How the Church Became the State’, 135.

¹⁹⁵ Mishtal, ‘How the Church Became the State’, 136.

¹⁹⁶ See for instance N. Jarska, ‘A Patriarchal Marriage? The Women’s Movement and the Communist Party in Poland (1945-1989)’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, CXXXV/2 (2018), 7–37.

welcoming reception. Not all the phenomena associated with the sexual revolution were perceived as foreign or distant. On the contrary, in some cases commentators observed similarities or even echoes of the revolution in the Polish context. Thus, they crafted their own definitions of sexual liberation and modernisation and debated their applicability in state-socialist Poland. Such negotiations are the main focus of the rest of the chapter.

‘Their Revolution’

Sexual boom, sex wave, sexpllosion, sexual rebellion - these are just a few examples of terminology used by Polish journalists to narrate the ‘Western’ sexual revolution. Such language was however far from unique – in fact many of the metaphors were simply borrowed from American media and reapplied in Polish publications.¹⁹⁷ Not surprisingly in this context, some of the first accounts of the sexual revolution appeared in reprints from the Western press (some of them as early as in 1965).¹⁹⁸ As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, most issues of *Forum* devoted at least a page to topics such as popular culture or sexual mores. In 1969 one commentator observed not without a touch of irony: ‘The Polish reader is acquainted with [publications on sexual matters] partially thanks to the tireless, pioneering work done by *Forum* which in almost every issue, step-by-step augments our meager knowledge of sex’.¹⁹⁹ Thanks to these ‘pioneering’ efforts, Polish readers could familiarise themselves with new phenomena

¹⁹⁷ As Tom Smith observed, “Sexual Revolution” became the metaphor of choice to describe the changes in sexual attitudes and behaviors during the 1960s. It triumphed over such other revolutionary standards as the “morals revolution” (Newsweek, Apr. 6, 1964), the “moral revolution” (New York Times, May 7, 1965), the “sex revolution” (Glenn and Weaver, 1979; Sorokin, 1956), and the “sexpllosion” (Christian Century, January 29, 1964). T. Smith, ‘Report: The Sexual Revolution?’, *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 54/3 (1990), 415.

¹⁹⁸ See S. Haffner, ‘Purytanizm postawiony na głowie’, *Forum* (27 Feb. 1966) 20–1; M. Muggeridge, ‘Precz z seksem! Czyli próbki amerykańskiego way of life’, *Forum* (3 Oct. 1965), 18–9; ‘Sztuka i seks’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, 24 (1969) 2, 12.

¹⁹⁹ K. Krzyszkowski, ‘Tajemnice seksu’, *Tygodnik Demokratyczny*, 27 (1969), 6.

such as sexualized advertising,²⁰⁰ Kinsey's and Master and Johnson's sexological research, pornography or new trends in topless fashion,²⁰¹ and even read articles reprinted directly from the American *Playboy*.²⁰²

How was such an overt flow of information from the 'degenerate West' even possible in a state-controlled media outlet? One could explain it as a long-term effect of the 1956 political thaw, in line with the general relaxation of cultural policy in the following decade.²⁰³ However, this is not to claim that there was a total freedom of speech. On the contrary, censorship and self-censorship still heavily influenced press publications both in formal and informal ways. One measure, employed by the *Forum*'s editors to avoid censors' interference, was to supplement the article with an editorial commentary, suggesting the 'right' interpretation of the text. Such strategy had already proved successful in other magazines with focus on Western lifestyles and fashion.²⁰⁴ Moreover, in 1968 a following postscript was included on the last page of the magazine: 'All texts published in *Forum* are solely translations of foreign press publications'.²⁰⁵ Through such reminder editors tried to further distance themselves from contents of reprinted texts and counteract both censors' and readers' criticism.

Forum was the first but by no means the only channel through which information about what was happening in the West reached Poland. Quickly, 'sexual revolution' began to be discussed in various other journals, such as *Tygodnik Demokratyczny* (the Alliance of Democrats' [Stowarzyszenie Demokratyczne] weekly), *Prawo i Życie* (a

²⁰⁰ 'Reklama dźwignią handlu', *Forum* (30 May 1965), 17.

²⁰¹ W. Schneider, 'Seksofala', *Forum*, (22 Dec. 1968), 28.

²⁰² 'Jean Paul Sartre: Stałem się optymistą...', *Forum* (4 July 1965), 20.

²⁰³ Fidelis, 'The Other Marxists', 434–5.

²⁰⁴ For instance the case of 'Przekrój', see A. Szydłowska, *Paryż Domowym Sposobem: O Kreowaniu Stylu Życia w Czasopiśmie PRL* (Warszawa, 2019), 145–52.

²⁰⁵ *Forum*, 12 (1968), 24.

biweekly magazine for lawyers) and even catholic intelligentsia's monthly *Znak*. The primary goal of such publications was to familiarise Polish audience with a general overview of the events as well as to provide ideologized interpretation of them. The publications concentrated on aspects of public morality, health, and modernity. For instance, Franciszek Ryszka in his, otherwise sympathetic, article on youth protest movements characterised sexual liberation in a following way:

We can discuss the sexual revolution indefinitely. It is being talked and written about a lot, but very little do we still know and understand [...] it is impossible to determine what is normal in relations between two sexes (or one!). If anything is being confirmed, it is the general moral crisis, neutralisation of ethical impulses (not without influences from press, television, and radio). Only greater scandals can truly mobilise the public opinion and lead to some reflection on what is good and bad.²⁰⁶

The picture painted by commentators was that of chaos and crisis. They feared unexpected consequences of recent cultural transformations and wanted their readers to be terrified as well. The language of moral panic was clearly visible in the publications as they invoked images of 'avalanches' destroying existing moral order. Omnipresent pornography, decriminalisation of same-sex relations,²⁰⁷ and lenient approach towards non-marital sexual intercourses served as dramatic examples of what was yet to come if the sexual revolution was to succeed.²⁰⁸

Preoccupation with inherent dangers posed by the sexual revolution was often combined with strong emphasis on potential health threats. Medicalised discourse could easily be noticed in Stanisław Sterkowicz's article published in *Tygodnik Kulturalny* (a weekly targeted for rural audiences) under a very telling title 'Should we fear the sexual

²⁰⁶ F. Ryszka, 'Idea szczęścia i rewolucja seksualna', *Polityka*, 6 (1968), 11.

²⁰⁷ What is worth noting here is that homosexual relations had been legal in Poland since 1932 (with the exception of homosexual prostitution). Usage of such an example is therefore a further sign of moral panic rather than a sober assessment of the reality.

²⁰⁸ M. Ziemiński, 'Nowa obyczajowość czy stara nieobyczajność', *Prawo i Życie*, 3 (1969), 8.

revolution?’. This physician from Northern Poland argued that ‘Together with the sexual revolution we witness a rise in sex crimes as well as in venereal diseases. [...] Today we can observe a rise in such infections again. It is increasingly hard to find effective control measures. Venereologists are sounding the alarm’.²⁰⁹ Sterkowicz was not the only one to make such observations. Medicalised language was, apart from the moral crisis discourse, one of the very first narrations on sexual revolution employed by Polish media. Besides venereal diseases, authors focused on potential psychological and sexological disorders. For instance, in 1968 *Znak* summarised results of psychiatric research by American scientists to prove that sexual promiscuity leads to low self-esteem, emotional dysfunctions and subordinate social position of women.²¹⁰ Other authors critically referred to the American boom in sex research to argue that sexological disorders were an inextricable effect of sexual liberation and thus Americans were treating symptoms rather than the true cause.²¹¹ Others stressed that American sexology was nothing more than a hoax, ‘a dirty talk’ rather than regular science.²¹²

Fortunately, the ‘crisis’ was taking place only in the West. Although the publications rarely evoked discourses of ‘rotten capitalism’ which had been in circulation in the years of Stalinism, they did nonetheless eagerly remind the readers of essential differences between the two blocs. Hence, the countries ‘affected’ by sexual liberation were in the first place the two great ideological enemies of Polish communists – the USA as well as the West Germany. Some publications mentioned the role of Scandinavia, France, Italy, or the Netherlands as well, but the main focus was on American and German

²⁰⁹ S. Sterkowicz, ‘Czy grozi nam rewolucja seksualna?’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, 34 (1973), 11.

²¹⁰ A.T., ‘Zdrowie psychiczne a sprawy seksualne, Rewolucja seksualna wśród studentów amerykańskich’, *Znak*, 1968, 1595–1602.

²¹¹ E. Morska, ‘Zwierzzenia sex-asystentki’, *Tygodnik Demokratyczny*, 4 (1974), 19.

²¹² M. Ziemiński, ‘Rewolucja seksualna’, *Prawo i Życie*, 24 (1968), 8.

examples.²¹³ Not surprisingly in this context, the political system was considered to be the root of all evil. As yet another article from *Tygodnik Kulturalny* argued: ‘the origins [of the sexual revolution] lie in the very essence of social, political and economic relations prevailing in those countries; in the Western establishment that has led to crisis even in the most intimate sphere of individual’s life’.²¹⁴ Moreover, the author stressed that the project of sexual liberation in the West was itself flawed and contradictory: ‘Contraceptive pill is popularised in a country [West Germany] where it is illegal to terminate pregnancies’.²¹⁵ Other commentator mocked the discourses of modernisation arguing that: ‘civilizational immaturity does not allow us to take naked photos of each other. We simply cannot keep up with the modernity march’.²¹⁶

Criticism towards Western models of sexual liberation was therefore not simply conservative or prudish. Rather, it attempted to negotiate the very definition of sexual modernity and to situate the communist bloc on the map of such developments. To argue that it was the West not the East that needed catching up, the authors compared access to abortion and argued that Western approaches to sex were marked by hypocrisy. Furthermore, the category of ‘revolution’ itself was put under close scrutiny. Not surprisingly, for declared Marxists this term was essential to analysing and understanding social reality (and even despite censorship lessened after the 1956 political thaw, the ideological influence remained strong in most of the state-sanctioned press titles). Therefore, the concerns raised in the following excerpt seem to reflect general attitudes

²¹³ See for instance press correspondence from France, Denmark and Sweden: Z. Broniarek, ‘Seksplodzja’, *Perspektywy*, 11 (1970), 19–21, A. Wysocki, ‘Sex z automat. Korespondencja z Danii’, *Tygodnik Demokratyczny*, 2 (1970), 3, A. Wysocki, ‘Seks zmierzchu czy zmierzchu seksu? Korespondencja ze Skandynawii’, *Tygodnik Demokratyczny*, 17 (1970), 6.

²¹⁴ L. Hewan, ‘Pigułka, seks, moralność’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, 31 (1969), 10.

²¹⁵ Hewan, ‘Pigułka’, 10.

²¹⁶ K. Krzyszkowski, ‘Tajemnice seksu’, *Tygodnik Demokratyczny*, 27 (1969), 6.

towards the ‘pseudo-revolution’ taking place in the West: ‘[a]ren’t the sexual revolution’s slogans only ersatz of ideology, distracting the Western youth from matters far more significant for the future of nations?’²¹⁷

Even if publicists were somewhat sympathetic to some demands of student movements in the West (such as protests against the Vietnam War or anti-capitalist slogans²¹⁸), their portrayal of the sexual revolution was at best distanced. They believed it to be a result of ‘false consciousness’ and a manifestation of almost savage impulses. As Janusz Wilhelmi put it in his article for the Party’s magazine *Nowe Drogi*:

It [the sexual revolution – A.D.] violates traditional conventions – that goes without saying. However, by violating them – it falls within the mechanisms of capitalist profit. It supports pornography financiers and creates an illusion of radical ideology. If it facilitates any revolution or evolution of values, it is a revolution or evolution backwards, to more primitive forms.²¹⁹

Such anti-capitalist rhetoric was very dominant in the early accounts of the sexual revolution published in Polish press. Most of the publications concentrated on various commercial phenomena to show how sex could be observed in any sphere of life of Western societies. A lot of attention was devoted to thriving pornography industry (movies as well as magazines) and generally commercial use of nudity in advertisements or popular culture. Examples included entrepreneurs such as Beate Uhse, owner of German sex shops chain, or Rudi Gernreich, an American fashion designer who invented so-called ‘topless fashion’.²²⁰ *Playboy* and its editor-in-chief, Hugh Hefner, became an ultimate symbol of commercialised Western sexualities (also in terms of visual language as I am showing later in this chapter).²²¹

²¹⁷ W. Egon, ‘Rebelia seksualna’, *Magazyn Pomorze. Fakty i Myśli*, 10 (1973), 5.

²¹⁸ See Fidelis, ‘The Other Marxists’, 437.

²¹⁹ J. Wilhelmi, ‘Rozumne, ludzkie - nie pozwalam...’, *Nowe Drogi*, 9 (1973), 153.

²²⁰ Krzyszkowski, ‘Tajemnice’. N. Honsza, ‘Sex-boom 1971. Producenci i klienci’, *Odra*, 3 (1972), 77–80. ‘Sztuka i seks’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, 24 (1969), 2, 12. T. Parteka, ‘Seksofala’, *Student*, 18 (1973), 5.

²²¹ K. Starczewska, ‘„Rewolucja seksualna” i moralność’, *Człowiek i Światopogląd*, 10 (1974), 9–11.

Who was at fault for such a situation? Once again, Marxism offered a suitable answer to this question and blamed it on the non-productive middle class. As the foreign correspondent Zygmunt Broniarek (see Chapter Five) explained ‘[t]hey do not see any other goal in life than consumption. Full. Unlimited. Total. Sex, forbidden for many ages, has now [...] become a symbol of full liberation of human nature’.²²² Such approach toward sex – the publicists argued – resulted in commodification of sexual pleasure and depersonalisation of relationships between humans. Another magazine reprinted excerpts from the book *Fear in Capitalism* (published in 1972) by the German Marxist sociologist Dieter Duhm in which he claimed that: ‘Apart from an apparent gap between love and sexuality, the contemporary sexwave entails elements of former repression, still not combated. Marriage and family remain intact, as well as the bourgeois understanding of “fidelity”.’²²³

As we can clearly see, nineteenth century discourses of degenerated, bored bourgeoisie and its double standards fitted well into the Cold War rhetoric. Hence, critics of the sexual revolution attacked it not only for its promiscuous character, but rather for its commercial and capitalist aspects, profoundly contradictory to the principles of state socialism. Naturally, such strategies can partially be explained by the influence of censorship and its demands for more politically engaged journalism.²²⁴ Yet, this situation led to perhaps unintended consequences. Ideological critique of capitalist sexual revolution left some space for discussions on proper, socialist way to sexual liberation.

²²² Broniarek, ‘Seksplozja’, 21.

²²³ D. Duhm, ‘Targowisko miłości’, *Fakty* 73, 37 (1973), 9.

²²⁴ R. Jankowski, ‘Media, Censorship and the Church in the People’s Republic of Poland’, *History of Communism in Europe*, 7 (2016), 63–80. See as well J.L. Curry, *The Black Book of Polish Censorship* (New York, 1984).

As I argue later in this chapter, such themes would become prominent in Polish media discourse over the next decade.

Official Ideology and Everyday Life

The above-discussed critique of the sexual revolution had its ambiguities as well. Popular demand for news on changing sexual mores undoubtedly existed and publicists needed to satisfy it at least to some extent. Hence, the articles were full of examples, sometimes very vivid and even explicit. As already explained, *Forum* led the way by providing its readers with the latest information about the developments in the West. To quote just another example, a 1970 article in *Tygodnik Demokratyczny* offered a detailed overview of pornographic movies screened in Scandinavian theatres, emphasising their sexual contents.²²⁵ As we can see, the ‘Western degeneracy’ was often described with such a great attention to details that one can hardly argue that it was only disgust and indignation that guided the journalists. Rather, I propose to understand it as a voyeuristic strategy. In the 1970s such tendencies could also be noticed in the visual language accompanying the media publications. Photos or drawings with explicit sexual content quite often complemented publications on the sexual revolution. This fact should not go unnoticed in the context of state-regulated media market and far-reaching censorship. Even despite the scarcity of funds and extremely low quality of paper, for some reason editors decided that this kind of publications could not have done without visuals (see Fig. 2.2²²⁶).

²²⁵ Wysocki, ‘Seks zmierzchu’.

²²⁶ Fig. 2.2, T. Parteka, ‘Seksofala’, *Student*, 18 (1973), 5.

A great illustration of this phenomenon can be found in Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz's 1974 article on *Playboy* in the cultural monthly *Miesięcznik Kulturalny Literary*.²²⁷ The photos accompanying his text included a half-naked woman with bare breast and bottom, as well as a couple consisting of a fully dressed male and a nude female. They were nothing more than reprints from the original *Playboy*, most likely without any official permission from American editors. As we can see, even though officially pornographic magazines were not available on the Polish market (and copies of such publications smuggled through the border were quite often seized by the Customs Office), there were other means through which Polish readers could get acquainted with their contents.²²⁸

The tensions between official proclamations and popular attitudes did not go unnoticed. Jerzy Urban, a liberal journalist who over a decade later would become a spokesman for the government, characterised the situation in a following way:

When we consider the place occupied by Poland in the world fascinated by sex and modern approaches to erotica, one good thing can be said for certain: in this particular domain we do much more than we speak of. What I understand by this is that mores quickly and spontaneously evolve under the influence of economic and social transformations, civilizational progress and youth education. Conventions, even if still accepted by the society, to a lesser extent dictate actual behaviour.²²⁹

What prompted Urban to offer such a diagnosis? His article was a response to the vivid debate around a collection of memoirs *My boyfriend, my girlfriend* [*Mój chłopiec, moja dziewczyna*].²³⁰ The volume, published in 1968 as a result of competition organized by

²²⁷ K.T. Toeplitz, 'Filozofia Playboya', *Miesięcznik Kulturalny Literary*, 1 (1974), 8.

²²⁸ Kościańska, *Zobaczyć Łosia*, 190-1.

²²⁹ J. Urban, 'Z seksem, z nadwiślańskim', *Polityka*, 8 (1969), 12.

²³⁰ More on the Polish tradition of memoir competitions, see: K. Lebow, 'Conscience of the Skin: Interwar Polish Memoir and Social Rights', *Humanity: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 3/3 (2012); K. Lebow, 'Autobiography as Complaint: Polish Social Memoir Between the Two World Wars', *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research*, 6/3 (2014), 13-26.

youth magazine *Dookoła Świata* [*Around the World*], featured short love stories authored by young people and based on their own experiences.²³¹ Interestingly, many of the contestants openly admitted to premarital intercourses or other sexual experiences.

One of them, hiding under a pseudonym Sarenka, [Fawn], attracted unparalleled attention of the public. In her memoir she described her experiences with casual sex, homelessness and being a kept woman.²³² Although in the end Sarenka found a ‘decent’ man who forgave her sins, the commentators were not so lenient with her. A teacher from Dąbrowa Górnicza wrote a furious letter in which she accused the journalists who published the memoir of demoralising Polish youth and diverting their attention from socialist goals.²³³ Notably, she met with strong opposition from both young readers of *Dookoła Świata* and experts invited by the magazine to comment on the case.²³⁴ Generally, they did not approve of Sarenka’s actions. However, many letters pointed out that premarital sexual activity among young people was a fact rather than a theoretical threat and as such called for real actions from teachers, parents, and state institutions rather than silence and tabooisation proposed by the opening letter.

The debate provoked by Sarenka’s memoir provides an excellent introduction into a new discourse on sexual revolution which gained momentum from the beginning of the 1970s onwards. Frictions between official ideology and everyday life choices attracted growing attention of both the media and experts at the beginning of that decade. Not without the twinge of moral panic, they observed that patterns similar to the ‘Western’ sexual revolution were increasingly popular among the Polish youth. On the one hand,

²³¹ A. Berkowicz (ed.), *Mój Chłopiec, Moja Dziewczyna* (Warszawa, 1968).

²³² *Mój Chłopiec, Moja Dziewczyna*, 139–147.

²³³ *Mój Chłopiec, Moja Dziewczyna*, 299–300.

²³⁴ According to the editorial board only 8% of readers’ letters were in favour of the opinions expressed by the teacher from Dąbrowa Górnicza. See *Mój Chłopiec, Moja Dziewczyna*, 312.

pathological aspects of such behaviours were underlined. As *Student* warned in 1973: 'Sex in Poland is not as available [as in the West – A.D.], but in many cases the situation is far from moderate. We face various pathological symptoms: a wave of gang rapes, accelerated spread of venereal diseases.'²³⁵ Such language fitted well into the discourses on the degenerate Western sexualities which inevitably affected behaviours of Polish citizens. It built upon the well-established discourse linking liberal approaches towards sexuality with social and public health threats. However, there was something more to it than simply moral panic. For a number of Polish sexologists such observations served as a departing point to a broader reflection on changing sexual mores of the youth.

Rather than subscribing to the moral panic promoted by mainstream media, experts criticised the ambiguities surrounding the term 'sexual revolution' as well as the atmosphere of scandal surrounding it. Mikołaj Kozakiewicz, invoking his experience in international organisations such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation, argued that 'sexplosion' was invented by journalists and no expert used such a term.²³⁶ In his opinion the much-feared transformations in sexual behaviour had been occurring for the past 50 years. The only thing that was specific to the late 1960s was the role of mass culture and media in promoting and debating the new phenomena. Other experts seemed to support this opinion. For example, a psychologist Kazimierz Pospiszyl claimed that there was no historical period in which various moralists and preachers would not be afraid of loosened morals in their societies.²³⁷ Such arguments were supported by

²³⁵ Parteka, 'Seksofala', 5. More on sexual violence in that period, see A. Kościańska, 'Gender on Trial: Changes in Legal and Discursive Practices Concerning Sexual Violence in Poland from the 1970s to the Present', *Ethnologia Europaea*, 50/1 (2020), 111–27; P. Perkowski, 'Przemoc Seksualna i Niuanse Wrażliwości Społecznej Względem Kobiet w Świetle Źródeł Okresu PRL', in K. Stańczak-Wiślicz (ed.), *Zapisy Cierpienia* (Wrocław, 2011), 277–95.

²³⁶ M. Kozakiewicz, 'Seksplodzja', *Miesięcznik Literacki*, 4 (1971), 120.

²³⁷ K. Pospiszyl, 'Rewolucja seksualna a cywilizacja współczesna', *Zdrowie Psychiczne*, 1–2 (1974), 60.

sexological research as well. In fact, when it came to male students, the average age of sexual initiation was higher in the 1960s than it used to be half a century earlier. Therefore, Kazimierz Imieliński and Julian Godlewski argued, the issue of sexual revolution needed to be investigated in greater depth and without unhealthy sensationalism.²³⁸

Yet, there was certainly some truth in the widespread belief that the Polish youth's sexual morals were transforming. As the case of Sarenka has already demonstrated the data on premarital sexual activity was pivotal to these new interpretations of state-socialist sexualities. A prominent sexologist, Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz, pessimistically diagnosed the situation in the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*: 'Practice precedes theory; a widespread psychosexual immaturity can be observed [...]. Year by year the size of sexual and moral pathologies is growing'.²³⁹ He also warned of 'depreciation of virginity' and premature sexual initiation that in his opinion was widespread among young people.

Lew-Starowicz was not alone in this judgement. His conclusions were based on his own research as well as on the results published by other sexologists, sociologists, and pedagogues. According to Hanna Malewska, who had researched Polish women's sexual activity, over 40% of women under 18 had had regular sexual intercourses. On the other hand, Andrzej Jaczewski's research on male students had showed that 46,5% of surveyed students had their first sexual experiences before they turned 18. As I have already mentioned, these and other results led Lew-Starowicz to conclude that between 80 and

²³⁸ K. Imieliński, J. Godlewski, 'W cieniu „rewolucji seksualnej”', *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, 1 (1976), 5.

²³⁹ Z. Lew-Starowicz, 'Rewolucja seksualna wśród młodzieży polskiej', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 18 (1971), 1.

90 percent of Polish youth engaged in premarital sexual activity.²⁴⁰ Moreover, according to his research 87% of boys and 49% of girls admitted to having had experiences with masturbation (in his words: self-rape [samogwałt]), while all respondents had engaged in petting. As Lew-Starowicz summed up, not without a condescending tone, ‘*homo sapiens* is being transformed into *homo ludens*’.²⁴¹ Similarly, other researchers warned that among the youngest generation sex started to be perceived as a sign of modern attitudes, detached from deeper emotional involvement and a source of simple pleasures.²⁴²

Young people wanted to know more about sex and for the first time in history they had people to turn to with such questions. Lew-Starowicz, although himself rather conservative,²⁴³ ran an extremely popular rubric in the student magazine *Ita* where he answered all types of questions relating to sexual life and relationships. As he concluded from his readers’ letters, most of young people welcomed what he called the ‘invasion of eroticism’. They demanded that he wrote more about ‘pornography, nudism, lowering the age of sexual initiation, and even acknowledged that homosexuality is normal and beneficial, as well as French love and group sex’.²⁴⁴ Such a situation, Lew-Starowicz argued, was possible even despite the fact that eroticisation of official mass culture in Poland was rather limited. According to him, a huge cultural underground was thriving. There, sexual novelties imported from the West, pornographic magazines, drugs, and

²⁴⁰ Z. Lew-Starowicz, ‘Rewolucja seksualna. Młodzież – małżeństwo’, *Życie i Myśl*, 2 (1973), 23.

²⁴¹ Z. Lew-Starowicz, ‘Przemiany obyczaju seksualnego młodzieży’, *Wiadomości Lekarskie*, 10 (1971), 995, 997.

²⁴² Lew-Starowicz referred to Maria Trawińska’s research on rural youth, see M. Trawińska, ‘Obyczajowość współczesnej młodzieży wiejskiej’, *Problemy Rodziny*, 2 (1970), 8–13.

²⁴³ More on Lew-Starowicz’s links to the Catholic Church and cardinal Karol Wojtyła, see Kościańska, ‘*Humanae Vitae*’, 199–201.

²⁴⁴ Z. Lew-Starowicz, ‘Przemiany obyczaju’, 998.

group sex were easily available.²⁴⁵ As we shall see in the next chapters, he was not so far from the truth, especially concerning the illegal flow of pornographic magazines.

‘Polish Sexual Revolution’ in the Press

Not all experts shared Lew-Starowicz’s concern with detrimental effects sexual revolution could have on the Polish youth. Especially towards the end of the decade, when new trends in sexuality were to some extent normalised, sexologists offered more nuanced interpretations. When Kazmierz Imieliński was asked in 1977 whether the sexual revolution had reached Poland, he answered:

It has reached Poland, undoubtedly, even if in the Polish case it would perhaps be more appropriate to use the word ‘sexual evolution’ than revolution. [...] For sure [our revolution] is more subdued. We have avoided the phase of great excitement with sexual matters and passionate fascination with new possibilities. However, naturally, we pay the price for these novelties as well.²⁴⁶

It is no coincidence that Imieliński as well as other people whom I quoted in the previous sections were either sexologists²⁴⁷ or experts affiliated with Society for Family Planning (until 1971 Society for Conscious Motherhood).²⁴⁸ From the 1960s onwards these two groups cooperated closely in promoting progressive sexual agendas to the Polish public and officials. Hence, it is crucial to understand their ideological background and distinct approaches to human sexuality. In the following paragraphs I argue that it was no accident that more nuanced interpretations of the Polish youth’s sexual behaviour appeared at the

²⁴⁵ Z. Lew-Starowicz, ‘Kultura masowa a seks’, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 9 (1972), 5.

²⁴⁶ M. Szulc., ‘Rewolucja seksualna, a nawet dwie. Rozmowa z Kazimierzem Imielińskim’, *Student*, 4 (1977), 6.

²⁴⁷ Kazmierz Imieliński, Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz, Julian Godlewski.

²⁴⁸ Mikołaj Kozakiewicz, Maria Trawińska See B. Klich-Kluczevska, ‘Biopolitics and (Non-)Modernity. Population Micro-Policy, Expert Knowledge and Family in Late-Communist Poland’, *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 115 (2017), 154.

beginning of the 1970s. On the contrary, the new discourses on sexual transformations coincided with the birth of the so-called ‘Polish school of sexology’.

According to Agnieszka Kościańska, the new way of understanding human sexuality developed in Poland from the late 1960s onwards under the influence of Kazimierz Imieliński.²⁴⁹ As Kościańska has demonstrated in her numerous works, the strategies of Polish sexologists differed greatly from their American counterparts.²⁵⁰ Instead of medicalised approach which at the time dominated the field in the West, Imieliński proposed interdisciplinary and holistic strategies. His approach is well summarised by the term ‘social sexology’ which he understood as: ‘all kinds of phenomena related to humans and differences between people, conditioned by their gender and their influence on human personality, life, health, marriage and family, wage work and general psycho-physiological capacity and the entirety of human relations’.²⁵¹

Interestingly, while Western sexologists such as William Masters and Virginia Johnson in their conclusions about human sexual life relied primarily on laboratory research, Imieliński and his colleagues never conducted such studies. On the contrary, their main source of knowledge were direct conversations with their patients as well as letters from readers.²⁵² Both Imieliński and Lew-Starowicz published extensively – not only in academic journals or books but in the popular press as well. There, they offered advice on various aspects of sexual life and provided people with a brand-new language

²⁴⁹ A. Kościańska, ‘Beyond Viagra: Sex Therapy in Poland’, *Sociologický Časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 50/6 (2014), 921.

²⁵⁰ See as well Kościańska, ‘Sex on Equal Terms? Polish Sexology on Women’s Emancipation and “Good Sex” from the 1970s to the Present’, 236–56; H.Z. Renkin and A. Kościańska, ‘The Science of Sex in a Space of Uncertainty: Naturalizing and Modernizing Europe’s East, Past and Present’, *Sexualities*, 19/1–2 (2016), 159–67.

²⁵¹ K. Imieliński, ‘Przedmowa’ in K. Imieliński (ed.) *Seksuologia społeczna*, (Warsaw, 1984), 6. Quoted in Kościańska, ‘Beyond Viagra’, 927.

²⁵² Kościańska, ‘Beyond Viagra’, 928.

of speaking about sexuality.²⁵³ As a result, the role of sexologists as experts that one can turn to grew significantly over the course of the 1970s, even despite (or maybe exactly because) of the lack of commercial market of sexological advice. In fact, Kościańska has stressed the relative independence of sexologists in shaping their field of research and concluded that ‘Polish sexology under socialism developed as an interdisciplinary field, perceiving sexuality as dependent on physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural settings’.²⁵⁴

Most of the research conducted by the Polish school of sexology relied on direct interactions with patients. Here, the case of Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz is particularly worth noting. His weekly column published in the student magazine *Itd* was extremely popular with readers, attracting hundreds of letters each year.²⁵⁵ Moreover, he was an active consultant for the Society for Conscious Motherhood and a vast proportion of his research was based on meetings with young people who sought help in TSM clinics. Similarly, Michalina Wisłocka who would later publish a bestselling sex advice book *The Art of Loving* (*Sztuka kochania*, first published in 1978, although earlier excerpts were published in the press) closely cooperated with the TSM and most of her advices and theories resulted from experiences of her patients in TSM’s clinics.²⁵⁶ Therefore, the data on premarital sexual activity presented by sexologists can be deemed indicative even if in no way complete or representative. And this data suggested, at the beginning of the 1970s some form of a sexual revolution was underway among the Polish youth, at least those from major urban centres.

²⁵³ Kościańska, *Pleć, przyjemność i przemoc*, 69–126.

²⁵⁴ Kościańska, ‘Beyond Viagra’, 934.

²⁵⁵ Kościańska, *Pleć, przyjemność i przemoc*, 70–1.

²⁵⁶ Kościańska, ‘Beyond Viagra’, 928-929.

‘Sexual Upbringing’ and the ‘Third Way’

Above-quoted sexologists were far from proponents of the sexual revolution, at least in its most common understanding. They stressed the importance of sexual abstinence, relationships based on romantic love as well as traditional gender roles in relations between sexual partners.²⁵⁷ However, facts could not be overlooked anymore. As publicists warned, the education was increasingly detached from reality and the influence of the Church was still very strong when it came to sexual matters.²⁵⁸ As a result, sexuality remained a taboo topic and young people did not have the information they needed to lead fully satisfying and responsible sex lives.

The new patterns of sexual behaviour observed among the Polish youth led sexologists to call for new pedagogical methods. Instead of traditional, condescending approach, experts wanted to build their educational strategies on dialogue with the youngest generation. Jaczewski argued that ‘young people are even healthier, better nourished. They are raised in sex approving spirit and they will feel sexual desires even sooner. [...] If we want to solve them [youth problems – A.D.], we must base our solutions not on wishful thinking or traditions, but rather on a true awareness of youth issues’.²⁵⁹

The sexual revolution was thus portrayed as a chance for promoting modern approaches towards sexual education and alleviating long-held taboos. In line with holistic approach initiated by Imieliński the educators understood sexuality as a

²⁵⁷ See for instance Kościańska, ‘Sex on Equal Terms?’, 236–56; Ignaciuk, ‘No Man’s Land?’, 1–23.

²⁵⁸ R. Dyoniziak, ‘Seks i miłość’, *Polityka*, 12 (1969), 12. Urban, ‘Z seksem’, 12. See as well A. Kazior, ‘Wyzysk seksualny’, *Pobrzeże*, 67 (1974), 24.

²⁵⁹ A. Jaczewski, ‘Erotyzm współczesnego człowieka’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny: Miłość, Małżeństwo, Rodzina*, 18 (1974), 3.

combination of various medical, social, and cultural factors. Yet, the term sexual education was not used by sexologists. Instead, they developed their own category of ‘sexual upbringing’ [wychowanie seksualne] by which they understood a pursuit of ‘full and harmonious development of entire personality in which sex is a precious value but subordinate to supreme emotions and sense of responsibility’.²⁶⁰ However, such upbringing should not have been detached from everyday practice but rather follow young people and offer them appropriate guidance. The strategy of adjusting moral requirements to changing social conditions could be risky, Mikołaj Kozakiewicz admitted, but it was unavoidable. Otherwise, sexual upbringing would be ‘doomed to failure, affirming principles [...] that no one wants to follow nowadays’.²⁶¹

Nevertheless, experts’ approach to sexual revolution was ambiguous. On the one hand, new patterns of sexual behaviour could in their opinion jeopardise family values or public health. On the other, media attention and new discourse on sexuality that developed alongside could prove very helpful in promoting modern approaches towards these matters. As Imieliński claimed, people were increasingly aware that sexual disfunctions could be treated just as any other medical condition and the taboo surrounding the topic had lessened.²⁶² Therefore, some aspects of the sexual revolution were welcomed and even embraced: ‘Shall we then fear the great sexual revolution?’ – asked Sterkowicz in *Tygodnik Kulturalny*. The answer was however far from straightforward. ‘If it [sexual revolution – A.D.] fosters sexual pathologies, promiscuity and the beauty of human love gets lost for the price of copulation pleasure – then

²⁶⁰ Starowicz, ‘Rewolucja seksualna wśród młodzieży polskiej’, 7.

²⁶¹ M. Kozakiewicz, ‘Czy rewolucja seksualna?’, *Litery*, 3 (1973), 32

²⁶² Imieliński and Godlewski, ‘W cieniu’, 5.

undoubtedly, we should fear it. But, if it [the revolution] only results in a reform of morals, then we should welcome it with approval' concluded Sterkowicz.²⁶³

This dual understanding of sexual liberation was highlighted by other authors as well. Krystyna Starczewska, one of the very few women writing about the topic, in her 1974 essay distinguished between two types of sexual revolution, too often mistaken for each other. The first one brought about abolition of all moral norms and as such should be criticised. The second type of revolution occurred in relations between partners and should be recognised for its modern and emancipatory character.²⁶⁴ In line with Western feminists Starczewska criticised the sexual revolution for its patriarchal character. Quoting Kate Millet's book *Sexual Politics*, she argued that no liberation can be achieved by pornographic magazines such as *Playboy* as they objectify women and reaffirm patriarchal structures.²⁶⁵

Yet, social and economic emancipation of women could result in a 'proper' revolution by which she understood a proliferation of a new type of partner relations which could put an end to double standards. To support this argument, Starczewska discussed data on premarital sexual activity. As she observed, the sexual revolution in the West did not bring any substantive change when it came to young men. Rather, it was the rate of female premarital sexual experiences that had risen significantly in the post-war years.²⁶⁶ The more economically independent, educated, and self-aware women were, the better and more equal were the sexual relations between partners. This kind of revolution, Starczewska argued, should not only be welcomed but also abetted.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ Sterkowicz, 'Czy grozi nam', 11.

²⁶⁴ Starczewska, '„Rewolucja seksualna” i moralność', 9.

²⁶⁵ Starczewska, '„Rewolucja seksualna” i moralność', 10–3.

²⁶⁶ Starczewska, '„Rewolucja seksualna” i moralność', 17–8.

²⁶⁷ Starczewska, '„Rewolucja seksualna” i moralność', 21.

As the above examples have demonstrated, the criticism directed towards the ‘Western’ sexual revolution did not always result simply from moral panic. On the contrary, quite often publicists and experts developed their own ideas about what a ‘proper’ sexual liberation should look like. Opposing both conservative agendas and extreme liberal stances, they called for a ‘Third Way’ – Poland’s very own version of sexual revolution:

It is more and more essential to find a third way that would at the same time dismiss demands of the nineteenth century puritanism as well the twentieth century shallow hedonism. For proponents of the third way sexual contact is neither a demonstration of proverbial evil [...] nor a manifestation of complete moral freedom, but a moment of comprehensive emotional test. It is a necessary, yet insufficient, condition of love that is neither sentimental nor openly cynical.²⁶⁸

Perhaps it is the category of a ‘Third Way’ that should be used to explain ambiguous reactions of Polish media and experts to the new developments in sexual mores. Such approach acknowledged the need for more relaxed and open attitudes towards sexuality but at the same time remained very critical towards Western models of sexual liberation. On the one hand, from the Communist Party’s perspective certain liberalisation was much needed to the extent in which it mitigated the Catholic Church’s teaching on sexuality. Thus, it was encouraged by the state through means such as liberal legislation on abortion or financial support for sexological research and counselling. Yet, the Western sexual revolution was too embedded in the capitalist economy to be a viable option for the Polish commentators, even the most progressive ones. Therefore, they needed to come up with their own ideas on how to modernise Polish sexualities.

Interestingly, the ‘Third Way’ was not the only (and perhaps not even the most influential) attempt to offer such alternative development pathways. Similar patterns

²⁶⁸ A. Kornalski, ‘Seks - i co dalej?’, *Magazyn Pomorze. Fakty i Myśli*, 12 (1973), 5.

could be observed in socialist visions of ‘new consumerism’ developed in the USSR under Khrushchev. They underlined the importance of satisfying consumers’ needs without subscribing to the decadent logic of capitalist profit. As Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger have argued, it ‘was a Stalinist-Leninist hybrid of consumer practices, where abundance (and even luxury) for workers was embraced, but amid official pronouncements of austerity and attempts to “manage” needs and desires through “rational” consumption’.²⁶⁹ Likewise, in state-socialist Poland new approaches towards sexuality were promoted as a consequence of socialist modernisation. Access to family-planning counselling, social security provisions, and progressive post-war legislation were often presented as an element of rational, humanistic modernisation of sexual behaviours, driven by social needs rather than economic calculations or prejudices.

Sexual modernity, as understood by Imieliński and other sexologists, was a combination of various factors – social and legal equality, modern sexual culture, widespread sexual education – and methods of achieving sexual satisfaction were only one of them. Consequently, what they observed in post-war Poland was an evolution rather than a revolution in sexual mores.²⁷⁰ According to sexologists, a process of modernising Polish sexualities had started long before the sexual revolution in the West and needed to continue throughout the following decades.²⁷¹ Without doubt, in the eyes of the sexologists Polish society desperately needed to follow the ‘Third Way’ toward sexual liberation.

²⁶⁹ See P. Bren and M. Neuburger, ‘Introduction’, in P. Bren and M. Neuburger (eds.), *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (New York, 2012), 9-10.

²⁷⁰ See as well Herzog, ‘East Germany’s Sexual Evolution’, 71–95.

²⁷¹ Szulc, ‘Rewolucja seksualna’, 6. See as well E. Lewandowski, E. Rokicka, ‘Rewolucja czy ewolucja seksualna’, *Pokolenia*, 2 (1988), 62–72.

As we shall see in the next chapters, no matter how hard some commentators tried to deny it, sexual mores were changing in Poland just as they were in the West. The more Poland opened to the West in the 1970s, the more potential spheres for sexual emancipation arose. Yet, from the very beginning the Polish sexual (r)evolution was marked by several contradictions. On the one hand, sexologists and educators developed theories about the proper ‘Third Way’ of liberalising Polish sexualities in line with socialist morality. On the other, more commercial approaches toward sex were gaining momentum along with the growing acceptance of female nudity in the public sphere. Therefore, the following chapters explore how the boundaries of acceptable sexual representation were transformed in the last two decades of state socialism and how visual culture influenced the ways in which socialist sexual revolution could be conceptualised by contemporaries.

Chapter Three: The Male Gaze. Nude Photography and its Role in Negotiating the Limits of Sexual Representation in the 1970s

Cracow can hardly be called a progressive city. This former capital city of Poland has worked hard for its reputation as conservative and traditional – or prudish, as some of this chapter’s protagonists would say. Therefore, it may come as a surprise that one of the first battles to renegotiate the boundaries of ‘decent’ sexual representation in post-war Polish history took place in this city. In May 1970 the first exhibition of female nude photography, “Venus”, was inaugurated by Władysław Klimczak, president of the Cracow Photographic Society (Krakowskie Towarzystwo Fotograficzne: henceforth KTF). The organisation had just celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary and probably no one could have expected that an anniversary exhibition at such a noble institution would cause so many controversies and so deeply divide Cracow’s public opinion.

A brief look at the exhibition’s guest book provides a glimpse into the spectrum of reactions that the event provoked.²⁷² One of the visitors complained: ‘Great exhibition, but far too timid’²⁷³ while a guest quoted by the Polish Newsreel expressed a dramatically opposing view: ‘[...] there are a few good photos here, but the rest is just plain pornography’.²⁷⁴ Most of the visitors were impressed with the artistic quality of female nudes presented at the exhibit but a few expressed dissatisfaction that the authors

²⁷² Some entries from the guest book were later reprinted in the photo album *Wenus Polska* [Polish Venus]. Unfortunately, the book itself has been lost so Anna Gogut’s album offers a rare insight into visitors’ reactions. See A. Gogut, (ed.), *Wenus Polska* (Warsaw, 1973), no pagination.

²⁷³ Quoted in: Warsaw, AAN, Telewizja Polska S.A. Zbiór wycinków prasowych (henceforth TVP), 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, B. Sawa, ‘W poszukiwaniu "prawdziwej Wenus"’, *Sztandar Młodych* (13 Jan. 1972)

²⁷⁴ Polish Newsreel (Polska Kronika Filmowa, henceforth: PKF), 06b/72, ‘Venus – 71’, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l221aczT_sE (19 Jan. 2021)

concentrated on only one of the sexes. As ‘Gaga’ commented: ‘We demand male nudes! We want to be aroused as well!’.²⁷⁵

As the above quotes suggest, the female nudity presented at ‘Venus’ met with a variety of reactions, ranging from utter disapproval to enthusiastic acceptance. As the exhibition was organised annually between 1970 until 1991 and attracted large crowds of visitors, its impact on the Polish discussions on sexuality cannot be overlooked. Especially at the beginning of the 1970s the event provoked heated debates in the media. Such controversies led to several attempts at closing or censoring the exhibition both by state officials and by conservative circles. Yet, thanks to support from journalists and public intellectuals ‘Venus’ was able to thrive as one of the very few international cultural events in Poland at the time and the only one explicitly focused on sexuality.²⁷⁶

To highlight ambiguities surrounding the growing acceptance of female nudity in the public sphere of the 1970s, the following two chapters combine textual and visual analysis. On the one hand, I focus on media debates and expert discourses; on the other, I look closer into the ways in which nudity was actually represented in the public sphere, for instance in photo albums, magazines, and in the said exhibition. Thus, I not only reconstruct how historical actors defined nudity and argued for its (de)legitimisation in the public sphere, but also confront their declarations with the ‘real’ visuals that circulated at that time. The sources reveal several unspoken assumptions about female sexuality, gender order, and public decency. Therefore, I argue that there was a notable and, most

²⁷⁵ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

²⁷⁶ Other regular international events were for example: Frederic Chopin International Piano Competition, Henryk Wieniawski International Violin Competition, and the International Fair in Poznań.

importantly, growing gap between how experts and public intellectuals viewed acceptable public nudity and its reception among the public.

This chapter looks at the debates on female nudity from two different angles. First, it focuses on the dominant discourse that the organisers of ‘Venus’ developed together with sexologists, educators, and journalists. In this discourse female nudity and sexual ‘progressiveness’ were perceived as an element of socialist modernity, but the boundaries of this project were clearly set. Neither gender roles, nor heteronormative frameworks could be subverted in this vision of sexual modernity. However, the 1970s also witnessed the emergence of feminist art with young artists such as Natalia L.L., Teresa Murak, and Ewa Partum entering the gallery scene. Nudity (often their own) was a powerful artistic tool in their work, but its purpose was not to reaffirm existing sexual hierarchies but to criticise and dismantle them. Although they did not receive as much media attention as ‘Venus’, the history of early feminist art in Poland proves that even under state-socialist censorship there could have been competing and contradictory visions of sexual liberation. Yet, the feminist artists were nowhere near as successful as ‘Venus’ organisers in mainstreaming their visions of nudity. The modernisation of state-socialist sexualities had very clear boundaries and subversive feminist discourse could not possibly fit into them.

Sex, Nudity, and Visual Discourse of Late State Socialism

Visual discourse in state-socialist CEE has at first sight been analysed quite thoroughly. The visual language of Stalinist propaganda as well as modernist architecture

and design of the 1960s have both received well-deserved scholarly attention.²⁷⁷ Yet, perhaps not surprisingly, we still know very little about the sexualisation of visual discourses in late state socialism. As Biljana Žikić argues in the case of Yugoslavia, the failure of scholars to engage with sexual imagery of the late state-socialist public sphere can be explained by an uncritical approach assuming (as communist propaganda insisted) that pornography was a solely Western phenomenon. However, if we abandon overly narrow and localised definitions of ‘pornography’ and instead begin looking for its broader meaning, then as Žikić writes ‘we have to acknowledge the existence of numerous pornographic images on the pages of not only specialized magazines with “erotic content”, but of many daily newspapers and current affairs journals’.²⁷⁸

The study of East German sexual imagery by Josie McLellan warrants similar conclusions. Focusing on the popular media outlet *Das Magazin*, McLellan demonstrates that the regime was willing to make significant concessions to provide GDR citizens with the desired products. This applied also to erotic goods as the state ‘authorized the printing of nude photographs both for export and for the domestic market’, while at the same time proclaiming pornography to be alien to socialism.²⁷⁹ The longer such visuals were present in the public sphere, the more overtly sexual they became.²⁸⁰ Thus, a new definition of acceptable socialist erotica was coined: the female nude was to be young, beautiful, and

²⁷⁷ See for instance K. Jeżowska, ‘Imagined Poland. Representations of the Nation State at the Exhibitions of Industry, Craft and Design, 1948–1974’ (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2018); A. Skrodzka, X. Lu and K. Marciniak, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Communist Visual Cultures* (New York, 2020). There is also a significant body of scholarship in the history of art under state socialism which I analyse in further detail in the second section of this chapter.

²⁷⁸ B. Žikić, ‘Dissidents Liked Pretty Girls: Nudity, Pornography and Quality Press in Socialism’, *Medijska Istrazivanja*, 16/1 (2010), 55.

²⁷⁹ J. McLellan, “‘Even Under Socialism, We Don’t Want to Do Without Love’: East German Erotica”, in D. Crowley and S.E. Reid (eds.), *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, Ill., 2010), 221.

²⁸⁰ McLellan, “‘Even Under Socialism’”, 225.

heterosexual, always photographed in unspoiled natural settings.²⁸¹ As McLellan stresses, this type of imagery was profoundly conservative and expressed underlying assumptions about heterosexual reproduction being the only available norm.²⁸² Therefore, one can hardly analyse it within a simple ‘liberationist’ framework.

Ultimately, what both of the authors argue, is that instead of dismissing state-socialist erotica as ‘non-pornographic’ and therefore not related to sexual liberation, we should examine these visuals closely to uncover their hidden meanings and agendas. In the end, it is the effect they had on the audiences and the public discourse that really matters from a historical point of view. Such an understanding of the problem guides my arguments in this chapter as well. My goal is to analyse the history of nude photography as a social phenomenon, deeply embedded in the socio-political context of its time. Therefore, the focus is on the frameworks of understanding that enabled nudity to function in the public sphere and ensured its growing acceptance. The visual representations analysed in this chapter all rest on a set of assumptions about ‘natural’ ‘feminine’ beauty. In this sense, the visual (sexual) revolution brought by ‘Venus’ was clearly heterosexual in its focus, in a manner quite similar to the East German case analysed by McLellan. The visual discourse catered to the male gaze and dismissed female attempts to subvert this relation. It also portrayed women as passive objects of the photographer’s attention and thus passive objects of male desires. In the words of John Berger: ‘*men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at*’.²⁸³

²⁸¹ McLellan, “‘Even Under Socialism’”, 231–2.

²⁸² McLellan, “‘Even Under Socialism...’”, 232.

²⁸³ J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series with John Berger* (London, 1972), 47.

A Short History of Success: 'Venus'

The first 'Venus' exhibition was organised in May 1970, as a part of KTF's seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations. However, it was neither the first nor the last attempt to showcase nude photography in KTF gallery space. As the organisers claimed in the 1979 catalogue, the first attempts to exhibit naked bodies could be dated as far as to 1903 and in the 1930s nudes were featured in almost every KTF exhibit and 'did not cause any unhealthy sensationalism'.²⁸⁴

However, it was not until the 1960s that the idea gained momentum. First, in 1964 the Jagiellonian University's three hundred anniversary was celebrated with a photo exhibit entitled 'Student 64'. There, visitors were surprised to encounter the so-called 'wall of Werner', a display of nudes authored by the established professor Jerzy Werner, a painter and photographer from the University of Fine Arts in Cracow.²⁸⁵ The exhibition, probably due to its controversial contents, attracted as many as thirty-five thousands visitors and became the most successful exhibit in the KTF's history.²⁸⁶ Such a positive response of the audience only encouraged KTF to further explore the boundaries of public decency. Two years later a solo exhibit of Kazimiera Dyakowska was organised under the title 'Girlish impressions' ('Impresje dziewczęce') with several nudes on display. This stirred sensation in the noble city of Cracow as the exhibit was advertised as restricted to

²⁸⁴ A. Głowacz, 'Krakowskie Towarzystwo Fotograficzne. Jego historia i działalność' in A. Głowacz, and L. Jesionkowski, (eds.), *Trzy Lata Międzynarodowych Salonów Venus: 1971-1973* (Kraków, 1979), 9, 11.

²⁸⁵ S. M. Jankowski, 'Posiadać Wenus', *Ekspres Reporterów*, 6 (1977), 53-4.

²⁸⁶ Jankowski, 'Posiadać Wenus', 55.

visitors over 16 years old. In result, the exhibition attracted large crowds as well profits for the KTF (over eighty thousand Polish zlotys, according to the organisers).²⁸⁷

With this context in mind, one can clearly see the reasoning behind the 1970 decision to organise an anniversary exhibition devoted solely to female nudes. Although it may sound like a cliché, the slogan ‘sex sells’ was certainly true in the eyes of ‘Venus’ organisers. Financial considerations were important, but the most sought-after currency was popularity and recognition. Here, as the press coverage of the event may suggest, the personal ambitions of Władysław Klimczak were not irrelevant.²⁸⁸ His goals included elevating his amateur photographic society to international level and competing with professional photographers from the Association of Polish Art Photographers (Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików, henceforth ZPAF). Financial profits from nude photography exhibitions as well as the media attention they received helped Klimczak to build his (and KTF’s) public profile. As he stressed in several interviews, profits from ‘Venus’ enabled the Society to organise educational exhibitions on topics such as military and patriotic photography (‘Polish Scouting 1911-1945’, ‘Polish Air Forces’ etc.).²⁸⁹ Thus, Klimczak could present himself as the saviour of Polish photography and a lone fighter against the forces of ‘backwardness’.²⁹⁰

On 21 May 1970 a group of thieves broke into the gallery and stole several photographs from the exhibition. That was the moment when the media started to be

²⁸⁷ Jankowski, ‘Posiadać Wenus’, 58-61.

²⁸⁸ See for instance R. Jabłoński, ‘Genialny plan prezesa’, *Tygodnik Demokratyczny* (20 Jan. 1974), 7; S. M. Jankowski, ‘Posiadać Wenus’, 46; B. Gładych, ‘Rozmowa z Władysławem Klimczakiem’, *Foto*, 11–12 (1986) 307–9.

²⁸⁹ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, W. Jurzyk, ‘„Venus” nadal atrakcyjna. Rozmowa z Władysławem Klimczakiem’, *Perspektywy* (7 Oct. 1983).

²⁹⁰ R. Jabłoński, ‘Genialny plan’, Z. Chomicz, ‘“Venus” triumfująca. Rozmowa z Władysławem Klimczakiem’, *Pan*, 10 (1988), 8–9, 35.

really interested in the event.²⁹¹ On 19 June the PKF published the first film chronicle on the exhibition reporting that such a sensational burglary happened for the first time in the history of photography. They also praised ‘Venus’ for the beauty of the female bodies pictured by photographers. ‘Cracow once again overtook Warsaw’ announced the excited narrator.²⁹²

The sensation stirred by the burglary undoubtedly helped to promote ‘Venus’ countrywide. However, the organisers and sympathetic commentators were – at least declaratively – unhappy at such a turn of events. Juliusz Garztecki²⁹³ lamented that ‘such a trivial event [...] was exaggerated to be a big affair, presented as a sensation and a scandal’.²⁹⁴ As he explained, every photographic exhibition experienced similar problems with nude photos being stolen. However, in the case of ‘Venus’ the media attention was unparalleled and created ‘giggly atmosphere’ around the exhibition.²⁹⁵ This did not help the cause which, according to Garztecki, was to offer reflection on the transformation of sexual mores and customs that the Polish society was experiencing at the time. Referring to Marcin Czerwiński (whom I quoted in Chapter Two) Garztecki argued that ‘Venus’ showcased changing attitudes towards nudity, prudery, sexual taboo, and was inextricably linked with the ‘sexual revolution of our days’.²⁹⁶ As the next section of this chapter demonstrates, his observations were surprisingly accurate.

²⁹¹ [ZD], ‘Włamali się na wystawę, aby ukraść kobiece akty’, *Dziennik Polski* (23 May 1970), 4.

²⁹² PKF, 24b/70, ‘Głód sztuki’, Repozytorium Cyfrowe Filmoteki Narodowej, <http://www.repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/11490> (13 Jan. 2021).

²⁹³ Juliusz Garztecki (1920-2017) – a Polish photographer, translator, and literary critic. Co-founder of the Crooked Circle Club (Klub Krzywego Koła) and a secret informant of Security Service. As photographer, he presented his work at ‘Venus’ exhibitions as well as served on its jury.

²⁹⁴ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, J. Garztecki, ‘Wenus 70. Rodzaj skandalu?’, *Panorama Północy* (23 Aug. 1970)

²⁹⁵ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, J. Garztecki, ‘Wenus 70...’

²⁹⁶ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, J. Garztecki, ‘Wenus 70...’

The first exhibit in 1970 proved to be such a success, that Klimczak and his affiliates decided to expand the program of the exhibition to include authors from all over the world. Next year 'Venus' became an international salon of female nude photography and portraiture. Over three thousand photos by 805 authors from 42 countries were submitted for the 1971 competition²⁹⁷ and the Grand Prix was awarded to the US photographer James Fee.²⁹⁸ The organisers proudly claimed that:

At the time when almost the entire world is witnessing a growing vulgarization of this topic; when the female body, which had for centuries had a great inspiration for art masters, in many countries becomes a commodity of porno-industry, the VENUS 71 exhibition has demonstrated that the real art will always remain art and that a lot still remains to be said about female nudes and portraits in artistic photography.²⁹⁹

Whether it was the artistic dimension of the photographs or the atmosphere of sensation, the exhibition attracted large crowds of visitors. As many as 200 guests visited each day, and the organisers estimated that over 600 thousand visitors saw 'Venus' in 1971 alone.³⁰⁰ The exhibit was displayed not only in Cracow but travelled around Poland and abroad (the photographs were allegedly shown in Dresden).³⁰¹ Even if some of the numbers sound exaggerated, KTF's success in mainstreaming this type of artistic photography in Poland seems indisputable.

This success was to some extent recognised internationally as well. 'Venus 72' was the first edition of the exhibit to receive honorary patronage from the International Federation of Photographic Art (Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique,

²⁹⁷ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, [ba], 'Wawel czy... "Venus"', *Kurier Szczeciński* (26 Sept. 1971)

²⁹⁸ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, B. Sawa, 'W poszukiwaniu...'

²⁹⁹ Głowacz and Jesionkowski, *Trzy Lata...*, 39.

³⁰⁰ Głowacz and Jesionkowski, *Trzy Lata...*, 43; Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, (rok), 'Udział opolskich fotografików w salonie "Venus-71"', *Trybuna Opolska* (6 June 1971).

³⁰¹ A. Zachuta, 'Pornografia czy sztuka', *Gazeta Sądowa i Penitencyjarna* (1 Mar. 1972), 10.

henceforth FIAP) and the jury had three golden FIAP medals at their disposal.³⁰² In 1972 800 artists from 46 countries submitted their works for the competition.³⁰³ Moreover, the jury of the 1973 competition was chaired by Willy Hengl, the Austrian photographer and painter. FIAP once again offered patronage over the exhibition and six golden medals for the best artworks.³⁰⁴ In 1974 the number of medals at the jury's disposal rose to nine and as Juliusz Garztecki argued it was not only because the KTF paid the required fee, but above all as a recognition of 'the competition's importance, reception and artistic and social resonance'.³⁰⁵

Forces of 'Backwardness' and the Paper Crisis

Most of the journalists were sympathetic (even if they often used satirical language) to the cause promoted by the exhibit and the long list of acknowledgements in the 1979 exhibition catalogue demonstrates how important media relations were for the organisers of 'Venus'.³⁰⁶ This support from the media proved especially useful when a number of groups and institutions waged a war against the KTF and its president.

First, not surprisingly, the attack came from Catholic priests who warned against the demoralising effects 'Venus' could have on the youngest generation.³⁰⁷ With their encouragement, groups of picketers staged protests against the exhibition. Perhaps the most colourful one was the one-woman hunger strike in June 1972. She sat on the bench in front of the building where 'indecent' photographs were being displayed with a banner

³⁰² Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, M. Rymuszko, "'Venus" w opałach', [newspaper unknown] (2 May 1972).

³⁰³ A. Osiońska, 'Venus 72', *Perspektywy* (26 May 1972), 19.

³⁰⁴ S. Urbański, '„Wenus" czy „Playboy"??', *Kierunki* (5 Aug. 1973), 8.

³⁰⁵ J. Garztecki, 'Venus dziś, Venus jutro', *Perspektywy* (12 July 1974), 30.

³⁰⁶ Głowacz and Jesionkowski, *Trzy Lata...*, 31-3.

³⁰⁷ Jankowski, 'Posiadać Wenus', 80.

declaring that she was fasting as a form of public penance for the sins committed by the exhibition organisers.³⁰⁸ The sins included: the return to pagan customs, the cult of Venus, and the demoralisation of minors through ‘degenerate art’.³⁰⁹ However, this was hardly a unified front and I managed to find no source that would confirm that the Catholic Church in Cracow (at that time led by archbishop Karol Wojtyła, who would soon become Pope John Paul II) took any formal actions to close the exhibit. Even Wanda Póltawska, a great friend of Wojtyła and one of his closest advisors on sexual ethics, at first took a favourable stance regarding nude photography and revoked it only afterwards.³¹⁰ On the other hand, Władysław Klimczak recalled that some priests quickly realised that ‘Venus’ was art, not pornography. He took great pride in the fact that some Dominicans even started recommending ‘Venus’ to their parishioners as an example of how to responsibly familiarise their children with nudity.³¹¹ This suggests that there was hardly one response that conservative circles had to this new phenomenon that ‘Venus’ embodied.

The biggest opposition to ‘Venus’ was therefore not from the Catholic Church but rather from bureaucratic forces. Large crowds at the exhibition meant large profits from tickets – and the local authorities quickly connected the dots. Because of its international character, the exhibit attracted the attention of SB officers who even attempted to recruit Klimczak as a secret informant.³¹² In 1972, despite the approval from the Ministry of Culture, the municipal department of culture tried to ban the exhibition entirely and later

³⁰⁸ Fig. 3.1, A. Strońska, ‘Duży ubaw’, *Polityka* (24 June 1972), 12.

³⁰⁹ Z. Moszkowicz, ‘Veni, vidi..., Venus’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny* (3 May 1987), 11.

³¹⁰ Bywalec [D. Passent], ‘Sztuka i seks’, *Polityka* (12 Feb. 1972), 12; W. Póltawska, ‘Wenus na serio’, *Polityka* (3 June 1972), 10. More on Póltawska’s relationship with Karol Wojtyła, see Kościańska, ‘Humanae Vitae, Birth Control and the Forgotten History of the Catholic Church in Poland’, 187–208.

³¹¹ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, A. Zawaniecki, ‘Prawda jest naga, rozmowa z Władysławem Klimczakiem’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny* (18 Nov. 1979), k. 2

³¹² Cracow, Institute of National Remembrance Archive (henceforth: AIPN KR), 062/4, Notatka służbowa z dn. 22 kwietnia 1974, k. 496; IPN Kr 062/4, Notatka służbowa z dn. 27 kwietnia 1974, Tajne, k. 501.

to limit it to only three weeks.³¹³ However, the KTF was able to mobilize the media in its support. This strategy proved successful and the press soon announced that ‘reason has prevailed’ and the exhibition could be organised as planned.³¹⁴ Then, in 1975 the municipal financial department imposed overdue taxes on KTF and demanded that over 600 thousand zlotys should be paid for the profits the Society had made for the past five years.³¹⁵ This demand was again quickly ridiculed by the media who scorned the clerks for confusing real art with ‘amusement parks, lotteries, and potboilers [chałtura]’.³¹⁶ Moreover, the journalists underlined several irregularities during the control procedure and feared that the authorities’ reaction was an attempt to suppress social activism.³¹⁷ In the end, the pressure from the media and accusations of clerkish prudishness led the city of Cracow’s mayor, Jerzy Pękała, to revoke the decision of his financial department.³¹⁸

As some of the journalists argued, this enhanced scrutiny from the local authorities was encouraged by the opponents of Klimczak from ZPAF. Interestingly, the conflict between ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ photographers was portrayed by the media as a conflict between Klimczak’s activism, enthusiasm and creativity versus the dullness and stiffness of the photographic ‘establishment’. The photographers from ZAPF were said to envy the success of ‘Venus’, especially its international character, and therefore to campaign against its organisers in the municipal office and in the local media. Almost each year, the press reported new obstacles and opposition that ‘Venus’ and Klimczak

³¹³ Warsaw, Institute of National Remembrance Archive (henceforth: AIPN BU), 1585/18809, Krakowskie Towarzystwo Fotograficzne - protokół z kontroli, skargi, wyjaśnienia, notatki, korespondencja.

³¹⁴ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, [azet], ‘Wystawa „Venus 72” w Krakowie’, *Express Wieczorny* (11 May 1972); Rymuszko, “Venus” w opałach’. See also Jankowski, ‘Posiadać Wenus’, 88–101.

³¹⁵ B. Rajca, ‘Listy do Warszawy. „Venus” na szafot’, *Szpilki* (8 June 1975), 19.

³¹⁶ J. Łaniewski, ‘Komu zależy na likwidacji KTF’, *Prawo i Życie* (15 June 1975), 15.

³¹⁷ J. Garzdecki, ‘Ostatni raz Venus?’, *Perspektywy* (20 June 1975), 31.

³¹⁸ Jankowski, ‘Posiadać Wenus’, 117.

had to overcome, and every year the journalists announced victory against the forces of ‘backwardness’.³¹⁹

This victory was however not always so straightforward. Another problem that the organisers faced at first sight had nothing to do with conservative society but rather resulted from the realities of shortage economy. Despite several attempts it was not until 1979 that the first (and the last) exhibition catalogue was published. The organisers explained that it was because of the alleged ‘global crisis in paper production’³²⁰ but certainly the delay in the catalogue’s release was also a result of institutional opposition that they faced. Following the conflict over KTF finances in 1975, Garztecki lamented: ‘[...] the Ministry of Culture approved the printing of catalogues. The search for the appropriate type of paper continues. Yet, everything indicates that perhaps not only the catalogue will not be published, but also the “Venus” will itself vanish [as a result of the overdue taxes – A.D.] as well’.³²¹

Such an interpretation is even more convincing if we take into account the fact that in 1973 the album *Polish Venus (Wenus Polska)* was published without any greater scandal or problems with paper allocation. The volume featured photographs from the ‘Venus’ exhibits taken by Polish photographers as well as a satirical preface by Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz and reprints of some pages from the exhibitions’ guest book.³²² The album was printed in over twenty thousand copies and cost 90 złotych. It was edited by Anna Gogut, an art history editor, most likely with some authorisation from Klimeczak or

³¹⁹ See for example P. Rachtan, ‘Awantura o „Venus”’, *Literatura* (26 June 1975), 14; R. Jabłoński, ‘Rozkwitająca Venus’, *Tygodnik Demokratyczny* (24 Oct. 1976), 18; J. Garztecki, ‘Agonia Venus’, *Perpektywy* (22 May 1981), 29.

³²⁰ Garztecki ‘Ostatni raz...’; Jankowski, ‘Posiadać Wenus’, 116.

³²¹ Garztecki, ‘Ostatni raz...’

³²² Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

the KTF. Although Garztecki scorned it for the low quality of print, kitsch and prudery in approaching the topic of nudity,³²³ it is worth noting that despite all the organisational skills that KTF was so much praised for, it did not manage to print its own official exhibition catalogue until six years later. Moreover, the 1979 catalogue covered only the first three international exhibitions (Venus 71, 72, and 73) and was printed just in eight thousand copies which were sent to exhibition participants and jurors in the first place. The catalogue was also quite expensive (it costed 2 000 zlotys).³²⁴ Thus, it could not have possibly met the demand of the public, and in fact, as I am arguing later in this thesis, was already lagging behind societal avant-garde.

In 1984 Anna Gogut edited a second album of nude photography, this time under the simple title *Akt* [*The nude*] which was printed in seventy-two thousand copies and sold at the price of 1000 zlotys.³²⁵ In the preface to the volume Mikołaj Kozakiewicz, a renowned sociologist and sex educator, explained the roots of controversies surrounding the first ‘Venus’ exhibitions. In his view, the sensation it provoked in the 1970s would be difficult to understand from the perspective of the 1980s when nudity was much more widely accepted and to some extent normalised:

In modern civilisation – including the socialist bloc – nudity exposed by bathing suits and innovation in film, ballet, and theatre, not to mention strip-tease or nudist beaches, has far crossed the boundaries of modesty that the authors in this album have set for themselves.³²⁶

Thus, he argued nudes presented in the album were nowhere near pornography and their revolutionary character in the 1970s lay not in the manner in which they portrayed nudity

³²³ J. Garztecki, ‘Wenus Polska. Chała postna lukrowana’, *Perspektywy* (5 Apr. 1974), 30.

³²⁴ J. Garztecki, ‘Kupa szczęścia’, *Perspektywy* (28 Dec. 1979), 30–31.

³²⁵ A. Gogut, (ed.), *Akt. Album Fotograficzny* (Warsaw, 1984).

³²⁶ M. Kozakiewicz, ‘Wstęp’ in A. Gogut (ed.), *Akt. Album Fotograficzny* (Warsaw, 1984), 10.

but rather in the fact that they dared to portray it at all.³²⁷ However, almost fifteen years later such a high level of social prudery seemed so exotic that it called for a separate explanation. The transformation of public debate on nudity abetted by ‘Venus’ was much faster than its organisers may have expected at the beginning of the 1970s.

Visitors’ Voices

The sheer numbers of visitors indicate that ‘Venus’ offered a new and attractive language for speaking about (or rather visualising) sexuality. When we look closer into the comments in the exhibition guestbooks, this picture is further complicated. Here, it must be noted that to my best knowledge the original guestbooks have not survived up to this day, and even if they had, their location is unknown. It is due to the ongoing conflict between the late Władysław Klimczak (and now his son) and the Museum of Photography in Cracow.³²⁸ We are however lucky to be able to reconstruct some of the entries based on their reprints in Anna Gogut’s album, as well as various press publications that quoted the contents of the guestbook.

When analysing the entries, we should however remember that guestbooks were not a representative selection of visitors’ responses and reactions. First, the album offers only a hand in selection of the pages with visitors’ comments. Moreover, guestbooks generally tend to favour extreme views and we may assume that people who were moved neither positively or negatively by what they had seen were significantly less likely to leave a comment upon exiting the gallery. Rather, the guestbooks convey varied (but not comprehensive) interpretative frameworks through which the exhibition contents could

³²⁷ Kozakiewicz, ‘Wstęp’, 9.

³²⁸ K. Jakubowski, ‘Jasna Strona „Venus”’, *Kraków. Miesięcznik Społeczno-Kulturalny*, 7–8, (2020), 18.

be understood and engaged with. Moreover, as sometimes the comments interact directly with each other, we may catch a glimpse of what kind of opinions could resonate with the wider public.

Certainly, one of the topics that the visitors pondered most was whether ‘Venus’ was a pornographic exhibition. As I already indicated in the introduction, there was no simple answer to this question. Some of the visitors were actually disappointed with the too-shy character of the display. For example, Andrzej complained about the quality of photographs exhibited at ‘Venus’. ‘The ticket costs as much as a ticket to a pornographic exhibition, but it doesn’t offer even that’³²⁹ he wrote. His comment must have resonated with other visitors because someone else added ‘That’s right’ on the margin of Andrzej’s entry.

Not all visitors agreed with this approach. A significant number of comments implied that nudity presented by ‘Venus’ was either pornographic or paving the way for pornography in the future. One of the entries was puzzled about the purpose of displaying ‘naked buttocks’ [gołe tyłki] as if there was no other way to experiment with photographic techniques. ‘In fact – the author asked – whom was this exhibition organized for?’ The comment on the margin hinted ‘for perverts’.³³⁰ Another entry, by someone clearly familiar with the sex fair that opened in Copenhagen in 1969, read: ‘If we allow it any longer, our country will also witness sex fairs, where we would sell not only photos, but also live wares [żywy towar³³¹]’.³³² Similar moral panic was also clearly noticeable in a comment by a female teacher who expressed her indignation with the promotion of

³²⁹ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

³³⁰ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

³³¹ ‘Handel żywym towarem’ (Trade in live wares/stock) is the Polish term for human trafficking, to some extent similar to the nineteenth century English phrase ‘white slavery’.

³³² Quoted in: Zachuta, ‘Pornografia czy sztuka’.

pornographic images which ‘encourage the lowest instincts’ and lead to prostitution, venereal diseases and mass rapes.³³³ Her entry was ridiculed by one of other visitors with a comment ‘Boy, she’s got quite an imagination!!!’.

On the other hand, there were also visitors that accepted the artistic framework and enjoyed the aesthetics proposed by the photographers, treating it as an interesting alternative to Western-style pornography. The following quote illustrates this approach quite well:

It is a pleasure to visit ‘Venus 70’ after returning straight from Denmark. Here you can find no pornography... no photography of meat. It may sound surprising to some people, but when you encounter pornography and lewdness daily.... then ‘Venus 70’ is an example of art and good taste. Similar exhibitions should be organized regularly, then maybe the prudery would disappear, as now we still have a lot of it.³³⁴

The acceptance of ‘Venus’ as art was strongly intertwined with awareness of the forms in which naked bodies were presented abroad, particularly in the West. Travelling between the two blocs was not so common at the time this comment was written (though the situation changed noticeably when Edward Gierek assumed power in December 1970), but one may conclude that the more people were acquainted with what ‘pornography’ meant in the West, the more likely they were to accept the visions of nudity offered by ‘Venus’.

What is striking about these guestbook entries is how the evaluation of the exhibit differed based on the gender of the spectator.³³⁵ Men were generally more enthusiastic

³³³ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

³³⁴ Quoted in: Zachuta, ‘Pornografia czy sztuka’.

³³⁵ In the following paragraphs I am relying on the guestbook entries’ authors’ self-identification. If they sign their comments with male/female names or use male/female grammar forms, I am assuming for the purposes of this analysis that this is the gender the authors identify with. Naturally, visitors could have played with this convention or intentionally obscure their gender identity. My goal is however to analyse how gendered desires functioned in the discourse.

about 'Venus' while women voiced their criticism or distance. A woman interviewed by the PKF in 1971 said: 'I have to tell you that I absolutely do not like this exhibition. I think that 7/8 of what I have seen is just perversion'.³³⁶ Perhaps such an evaluation had something to do with the fact that only female nudes were displayed. For example, a group of self-named 'thrifty' Cracovians ('Krakowianki' – the female noun form implies they were women) put forward an idea to reduce ticket prices for women by a half because 'men have two times bigger satisfaction from seeing the exhibit than women'. Their motion was seconded on the guestbook's margin by 'Łodzianki' (female inhabitants of Łódź)³³⁷. Another entry signed simply by 'Women' enquired when an exhibition of male nudes would be organised. Notably, another visitor (presumably male) replied to this comment by writing 'never' and accusing women of petty jealousy.³³⁸

The gendered reception of the exhibit received more media attention in December 1975, when 35-year-old Stanisława R. destroyed a number of photographs by pouring acid on them. According to the offender, this was her protest against the objectification of female bodies and inequalities between men and women that the exhibit perpetuated. As the press reported, during the court proceedings she asked the judge 'Why don't they display male nudes?'.³³⁹ In her act of protest Stanisława stressed that, since the United Nations announced 1975 to be the International Year of Women, she wanted to conclude the celebrations accordingly. 'My goal was to protest against the injustice, violence and cunning that men display toward women. I demand an exhibition Apollo 76 to be

³³⁶ PKF, 06b/72, 'Venus – 71', Youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l221aczT_sE (19 Jan. 2021)

³³⁷ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

³³⁸ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

³³⁹ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, M. Słomczyński, 'Czy pancerne płyty i strażnik z karabinem uchronią najpiękniejsze akty?', *Kurier Polski* (21 Apr. 1978).

organised alongside Venus' she elaborated in the Citizen's Militia protocol quoted in *Kultura*.³⁴⁰

Such arguments did not meet with understanding and the court sentenced Stanisława to six months imprisonment suspended for four years.³⁴¹ Notably, the only voices in the media sympathetic to Stanisława came from two female journalists – Małgorzata Szejnert and Ewa Berberyusz. Szejnert argued that Stanisława's act of protest, although not recommended, was a form of art critique and as such should not be silenced. In her opinion the 'balding gentlemen organisers' [podłysiali panowie organizatorzy] of 'Venus' should be grateful to Stanisława for the free media attention they received and for reviving the long-forgotten 'controversial atmosphere' around the exhibit.³⁴² Berberyusz painted a psychological portrait of Stanisława – a young, 'likeable girl' whose commitment to the issues of gender equality was sometimes too serious because of her mental illness. Yet, Berberyusz agreed that 'Venus' catered to bourgeois male tastes and offered little artistic quality.³⁴³

With these two notable exceptions, the press coverage of Stanisława's trial was intensely misogynistic and sexist.³⁴⁴ Male commentators scorned Szejnert and Berberyusz for their support for Stanisława and lack of compassion for 'Venus' organisers. By portraying her as a lunatic, conservative fanatic, 'suffragist' or even a dangerous terrorist the press avoided discussing the uncomfortable truth about 'Venus' –

³⁴⁰ E. Berberyusz, 'S.O.S. dla Venus. Sytuacje krytyczne', *Kultura* (16 May 1976), 9.

³⁴¹ W. Bodnicki, 'Pani Venus. Spotkania Krakowskie', *Kierunki* (30 May 1976), 12

³⁴² M. Szejnert, 'Venus w zajzajerze', *Literatura* (27 May 1976), 13.

³⁴³ Berberyusz, 'S.O.S. dla Venus'.

³⁴⁴ See B. Rajca., 'Malowanie okien', *Życie Literackie* (6 June 1976), 20; O. Terlecki, 'Pomyśleć nie zaszkodzi', *Życie Literackie* (13 June 1976), 16.

that men were its key audience.³⁴⁵ Even if the organisers rejected the accusations of catering to male erotic desires, guestbook entries by male visitors suggest quite the opposite. In their comments, men expressed admiration for the bodies displayed at 'Venus'. 'Very titillating' wrote Adam.³⁴⁶ Another author voiced his satisfaction with how openly nudity was presented: 'finally one does not have to look at this type of things through a keyhole'.³⁴⁷ Others explicitly compared the models' bodies with their own sexual encounters and assessed their value. Some were impressed by the beauty of the models and wrote that they were no longer afraid of getting married.³⁴⁸

However, there were also visitors who did not perceive 'Venus' to be attractive enough. In rather obnoxious words they commented on the size of breasts presented in the photos as well as about how stupid and wicked ['głupie i podłe'] were the women who agreed to be photographed like that.³⁴⁹ As one of the visitors summed up: 'The exhibition is very beautiful, but not very sexy, I have kicked better ones out of my bed'.³⁵⁰ Such a combination of sexism, misogyny, but also voyeurism would become a dominant feature of most of the debates on nudity in the following years.

Male desires did not necessarily need to be expressed by an individual. As many of the comments seem to suggest, visiting 'Venus' offered a way for men to bond with their peers. Let us take a look at just a few examples. Students from the Warsaw University of Technology (up to this day very much a male-dominated school) expressed

³⁴⁵ In the letter Stanisława left at the crime scene she mentioned Lynette Fromms as her role model. Fromme was a member of the Manson Family who in September 1975 attempted to kill the US President Gerald Ford. Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, E. Iwanicki, 'Trwa wojna o "Venus"', *Odgłosy* (2 grudnia 1979).

³⁴⁶ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

³⁴⁷ Zachuta, 'Pornografia czy sztuka'.

³⁴⁸ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

³⁴⁹ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

³⁵⁰ AAN, TVP E. Iwanicki, 'Z gołą Venus na śniegu', *Odgłosy* (31 Jan. 1987).

their satisfaction with the exhibition contents and proposed to move it from Cracow to Warsaw.³⁵¹ Another guest complained that ‘Venus’ only partially catered to his taste and he argued that his opinion was important because he was the first sailor to visit the exhibition (implying that other sailors, experts in assessing the quality of women’s bodies, would hold similar views).³⁵² Other entries were signed by students from the Citizens’ Militia School in Wrocław and by soldiers. One of the latter, Krzysztof, wrote:

Please organise a travelling exhibition for us [soldiers – A.D.], because they don’t want to give us passes to see it. After a year of military service I enjoyed this exhibition very much, if it is possible I will come again with my squad.³⁵³

Heterosexual desires were not only to be experienced by men individually but above all defined, performed, and reaffirmed within their homosocial communities. In this sense, ‘Venus’ certainly offered new spaces for discussing sexuality, but such discussions still conformed to the old patriarchal framework. As a result, the new discourse excluded and silenced women’s experiences. Women’s bodies were watched and assessed, but women’s voices were ridiculed and ignored.

‘Unique Appeal and Charm’

Indeed, male homosocial communities seem to be the key to analysing ‘Venus’ as a cultural and social phenomenon. The vast majority of photographers whose works entered the competition were male. Similarly, men dominated in the organising committee (the only women mentioned in the press accounts were secretaries and cashiers) and in the jury. Not surprisingly in this context the ‘male gaze’ was the dominant

³⁵¹ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

³⁵² Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

³⁵³ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*.

framework through which photographs could be classified as beautiful and worth displaying. Władysław Klimczak himself explained:

I believe it to be a natural pattern that a young woman in her flowering period, in the rose scent period [w okresie zapachu róży], affects us, men, with her unique appeal and charm. The entire world and the future of the nation depends on this. It has been my intention to stress in the competition's regulation that only the beautiful woman, the woman in her most charming age could be presented, regardless of under which latitude she lives, regardless of her skin colour or her religion. I believe this is a noble assumption, not a perversion.³⁵⁴

As the above quote demonstrates the criteria of beauty were both inclusive and exclusionary at the same time. In line with official propaganda proclamations, the organisers announced that all women of the world could be beautiful and admired. Yet, the lines along which this beauty was to be defined and assessed suggest quite the opposite.

First, the quoted material illustrates that only young women could be perceived as attractive. This definition of youthfulness relied not so much on the age of the models, but rather on their appearances. Women needed to have aesthetically pleasing and slim bodies.³⁵⁵ Young meant fresh and unspoiled, but also innocent.³⁵⁶ Hence, the proponents of 'Venus' seemed to argue that if the models were unaware of the sexual potential of their bodies, the photographs could be classified as art, not erotica. Perhaps such a focus on young women, girls as they were often called [Polish: *dziewczyny, dziewczęta*], offered a way to escape the accusations of pornography.

Another strategy that allowed the commentators to differentiate between 'Venus' and pornography was to concentrate on 'natural' and 'pristine' bodies. To explore this

³⁵⁴ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, Zawaniecki, 'Prawda jest naga...', k. 1

³⁵⁵ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, [J.R.], 'Krakowska Wenus,' *Panorama Północy* (2 Mar. 1980).

³⁵⁶ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, J. Garzdecki, 'Wenus 70...'

problem further, I have surveyed the two photo albums printed in 1973 and in 1979 respectively to analyse what types of visuals were displayed at ‘Venus’ exhibitions.³⁵⁷ The wealth of material included in these publications offers a unique glimpse into the visual discourse that ‘Venus’ facilitated. However, one should keep in mind that the albums consist of a selection of pictures and therefore may convey a message slightly different than the photographs at the exhibition would if they were to be analysed.³⁵⁸ Moreover, the first volume (1973) consists only of photographs authored by Polish contestants, while the second one (1979) was more international in focus. Comparative analysis between Polish and non-Polish photographers allows me to argue that foreign authors were slightly more likely to present full nudity while in the Polish photos nudity appears more subtle, perhaps intentionally obscured. This phenomenon is well illustrated by Table 3.1 which compares the proportion between various types of visuals in the two publications.

³⁵⁷ Gogut, *Wenus Polska*; Głowacz and Jesionkowski, *Trzy Lata Międzynarodowych Salonów Venus: 1971-1973*.

³⁵⁸ One should also consider the fact that some of the photographs were cut out from the album – at least from the copy that I managed to buy on-line. This is not a significant number (around 1-2% on the photos), but I did not include the cut-out photographs in the overall count of the analysed pictures. Perhaps once the pandemic is over I will be able to locate a library copy of the albums and compare the copies to see which photographs have been cut out by readers.

Table 3.1		
	<i>Wenus Polska</i> (Warszawa, 1973) = 101 nude photos	<i>Trzy Lata Międzynarodowych Salonów Venus: 1971-1973</i> (Kraków, 1979) = 117 nude photos
Model's face recognisable	10%	26%
Model looks into the camera	2%	10%
Only parts of the body exposed	97%	91%
Naked breasts (nipples)	56%	62%
Exposed genital areas	4%	12%
Pubic hair	7%	21%
Exposed buttocks	19%	21%

As Table 3.1 demonstrates, the majority of the photographs in both albums conformed to the 'artistic' framework of representing nudity. Women's bodies were rarely portrayed in full and the models usually covered their faces with hair or through the use of light. Even if their face was recognisable, they did not look straight into the camera, a gesture that would suggest more intimate and provoking relationship with the photographer and/or the viewer. In terms of portraying nudity, most of the photographs were modest even for the early 1970s standards. A majority of the nudes presented only partial nudity (i.e., some parts of the models' bodies were intentionally covered or obscured). In such cases, the majority of the photos only presented naked female breasts. If the exposition was from the back, the camera's attention focused on naked buttocks. Only very rarely did the photographs show genital areas and they were never portrayed at the centre of the picture. Interestingly, as the example of the 1979 album demonstrates, pubic and body hair was not such a taboo as one might expect. Women were presented with hair visible both in their genital areas and in their armpits.

Contrary to official proclamations, the exhibition did not portray the ‘beauty of women of all races’. Almost all models were white and only 4 photographs in the 1979 album presented women of colour. Needless to say, the photographers focused solely on female nudes.³⁵⁹ Men were pictured only in four analysed nudes from ‘Venus 72’. In two works of Janusz Przytkowski (‘Impresja II’ and ‘III’) a man is presented hiding behind a naked woman. While her breasts, body, and pubic hair are clearly visible, only his naked legs and arms are portrayed in the picture. A similar strategy can be noticed in the photograph ‘Portret współczesny’ [Modern portrait] by Adam Możdżeń. In this picture a fully naked woman stands in the centre of the picture while a man is sitting on the floor, depicted from his waist up. With his head he covers her genital areas. Interestingly, he is also depicted with deer antlers hung next to his head. As the antlers are often a metaphor for female infidelity, the woman’s nudity can perhaps be interpreted as an accusation towards all ‘flirtatious’ women. Finally, the fourth photograph that depicts both a man and a woman is Nikolajs Brivlauks’ (USSR) work ‘Fang’. The picture shows a clothed man in sunglasses who carries a young naked woman out from a lake. Again, the imbalance is striking. While the man is fully clothed, the woman’s nakedness stands at the centre of the photographers’ attention. Clearly, it was female nudity that was to be looked at and appreciated.

Both the authors and exhibition organisers wanted to avoid accusations of pornography. As the analysed albums suggest, this preoccupation clearly influenced the visual strategies they employed. Models were extremely rarely photographed indoors, and when they were, the setting was clearly that of an artist’s studio. In both albums over

³⁵⁹ Paweł Leszkowicz argues that the socialist nude was a female nude, and that male naked bodies were intentionally obscured in the art of that period. P. Leszkowicz, *Nagi Mężczyzna: Akt Męski w Sztuce Polskiej Po 1945 Roku, Akt Męski w Sztuce Polskiej Po 1945 Roku* (Poznań, 2012), 109.

one third of the photographs was shot outdoors (35% in 1973 and 38% in 1979). The usual settings included natural sceneries such as sand dunes, beaches, meadows, fields, and forests. Moreover, many of the photographers clearly experimented with photographic techniques such as grain effects, density of colour and multiplication (over 26% of photos in both analysed albums). As a result, many of the photographs had little in common with classic or erotic nudes but were rather a show of photographers' technical skills.

Such strategies did not necessarily meet with understanding from the audience. For instance, one of the guestbook entries from a 'Silesian hitchhiker' criticised the exhibit for offering 'too little naturalness, too many unnecessary quirks [udziwnienia]'.³⁶⁰ Similar views were voiced by Stanisław Urbański in the PAX catholic weekly *Kierunki*. As he argued, there were two dominant types of photographs in the exhibition. The first one presented women in a natural and unpretentious way. Although some of the images were dangerously close to *Playboy*, others, he argued, attracted viewers with their 'poetic atmosphere'.³⁶¹ The second group, however, experimented too much with artistic techniques and as a result offered trivial interpretations of female beauty. Moreover, such a strategy according to Urbański objectified women and offered no 'truth about humanity'. Therefore, even though the idea behind 'Venus' was worth applauding, the artistic quality of the photographs needed to 'catch up' with its noble goals.³⁶²

What was the truth about humanity that the journalists and organisers sought so tirelessly? In 1974 the Grand Prix was awarded to Witold Michalik for his series of

³⁶⁰ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, Sawa, 'W poszukiwaniu...'

³⁶¹ Urbański, '„Wenus” czy „Playboy”?'

³⁶² Urbański, '„Wenus” czy „Playboy”?'

photographs contemplating the stages of pregnancy. As the president of the jury, Czechoslovak photographer Miroslav Stibor, explained: ‘many other pictures portray woman as a beautiful creature, but [Michalik’s photos -AD] are the only ones that show her role in the life of humankind, they are most humanistic’.³⁶³ Therefore, the jurors seemed to argue that beauty and ‘humanism’ could be best observed when women fulfilled their traditionally ascribed gender roles. Similar notions could be observed in guestbook entries and in the way the press commented on the exhibition.

The artistic quality of the photographs was thus assessed based on the number of criteria closely related with traits traditionally perceived as ‘feminine’ such as tenderness, fragility and – as I already analysed – innocence. The following excerpt from *Dziennik Łódzki* [*Łódź Daily*] review of the 1981 exhibit illustrates this quite aptly:

Modern girls [...] do not have to shout or provoke. We see shots that are beautiful, poetic, in pastel colours and in soft diffused light. Their protagonists read, sew, look through the window with grace and natural charm; there are dreamlike, mysterious and as pretty as a picture.³⁶⁴

Here the two visions of femininity stand in sharp contrast. The new, ‘modern’ model – in which women can be independent, outspoken, and sexually assertive – comes under fierce criticism. It is contrasted with the type of female beauty that ‘Venus’ represents – nice, charming girls who fulfil conservative ideals about womanhood. They neither voice their opinion (‘shout’) nor express their sexuality (‘provoke’). Rather, they occupy themselves with traditional feminine activities like sewing or simply being ‘pretty’. Hence, their key role is to satisfy the male viewer. As objects of the male gaze, they have little subjectivity

³⁶³ Quoted in: Garztecki, ‘Venus dziś...’.

³⁶⁴ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, R. Gołębiowska, ‘Krakowska „Wenus” wyskromniała’, *Dziennik Łódzki*, (3-4 Apr. 1982)

of their own – they are metaphors, symbolising the ‘mystery’ of womanhood rather than the embodied and subjective experience of being a woman.

Thus, the framework of ‘feminine charm’ was deeply engrained in patriarchal and misogynistic assumptions about gender roles. As the taboo surrounding female nudity was being questioned, there was a need to create new boundaries within which this ‘modern’ approach to sexuality could be performed. Women were assigned the role of passive objects and criteria such as ‘naturalness’, ‘charm’, and ‘poeticity’ further essentialised their role alongside traditional gendered lines. Sexist language was also very much present in the discussions on photo modelling. Instead of praising young women who decided to pose naked for their courage and openness, the photographers and journalists either ignored their role at all (as if it was something natural that women would like to be photographed naked) or portrayed them as naïve and silly. A photographer explained his strategy of recruiting models in the following way: ‘Before I take nude photos, I have a long conversation with the young miss [panienka], I want to get to know her, understand how she approaches the topic, to see if she is going to later run around crying and I am going to have to destroy the footage’.³⁶⁵

In 1985 the photography magazine *Foto* published a satirical article about the recruitment of models for an open-air photography workshop devoted to female nudes. The workshop was to be organised in Lower Silesia, a region that at the time arose as a serious contender for Cracow in the realm of photographic nudes. The author in indiscriminate words commented on the bodies of the women who took part in the casting. As he suggested, some of them looked better when dressed because then

³⁶⁵ Bywalec, ‘Sztuka i seks’.

‘imagination works wonders’. When they undressed, the ‘truth was naked’.³⁶⁶ He also ridiculed two women who backed out of the casting quickly as ‘illiterate’ because they did not understand what ‘nude’ meant. Finally, he complained that even striptease dancers were poor candidates for naked modelling because they were ‘jaded’. The article concluded that the times were not easy for men, implying that women were neither as attractive nor as readily available as they had been before.³⁶⁷

The visual and textual sources analysed in this chapter clearly demonstrate that the space in which female nudity could be accepted publicly was extremely narrow. Partially, it was due to still existing social taboos and (self)censorship. On the other hand, it had a lot to do with patriarchal frameworks of understanding femininity in general. Although towards the end of the 1970s nudity was increasingly normalised, even in more conservative circles, the visuals still had to conform to traditional visions of womanhood. As a result, women could only be portrayed as passive objects of photographers’ attention. Their sexual appeal had to be mitigated by the frameworks of representation, for example by presenting only parts of the body, highlighting the alleged ‘innocence’ of the models, or setting the photographs in natural landscapes. Finally, naked male bodies were still excluded from display. The argument was that they were not as ‘attractive’ as female,³⁶⁸ which clearly attests to the fact that the definition of beauty accepted by both proponents and opponents of the exhibit was profoundly gendered as was the viewing of the images.³⁶⁹ All these factors contributed to misogynistic language but also reaffirmed the assumption that female bodies were to be watched by men, not the other way round.

³⁶⁶ W. Jurzyk, ‘Rozbieranka’, *Foto*, 9 (1985), 244.

³⁶⁷ Jurzyk, ‘Rozbieranka’.

³⁶⁸ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, J.R., ‘Krakowska Wenus’.

³⁶⁹ See B.A. Eck, ‘Men Are Much Harder: Gendered Viewing of Nude Images’, *Gender and Society*, 17/5 (2003), 691–710.

The sexual ‘modernisation’ that the new visual language seemed to offer was therefore intensely sexist – women could be ‘emancipated’ only as objects of male desire and only within the boundaries set by the patriarchal structures of society.

Feminist Critique and ‘Sexual Modernity’

‘Venus’ was created by men for other men to appreciate. Hence, its main focus was on female beauty and sexual attractiveness seen through the lenses of male heterosexual desires. But what if the women could take the camera over? How would our interpretation of nakedness change? And what does it tell us about social understanding of nudity and sexuality? To answer such questions, the rest of this chapter analyses some aspects of the history of feminist art in 1970s Poland.³⁷⁰

First, it is necessary to consider the implications of the term ‘feminist art’ when used to describe the realities of state-socialist art production. At first sight, this term appears to be inextricably linked with the Western feminist movement and discussions about women’s role in art and society that took place in the 1970s.³⁷¹ In this sense there could not have been any ‘feminist art’ under state socialism just as there could be no ‘feminist movement’ either.³⁷² In the eyes of many it was only after 1989 that the

³⁷⁰ Feminist artists were not the only one to explore possibilities for other visual language on nudity and sexuality. One should mention here the works of Amateur Film Clubs, a grassroots movement of alternative film enthusiasts. See M. Wach, ‘Qualität(en) des Laien-Blicks. Amateurfilmklubs in Polen, 1953-1989’, *Cinema*, 64, 2019, 94–108.

³⁷¹ See M. Pachmanová, ‘From Within, From Without: Configurations of Feminism, Gender and Art in Post-Wall Europe’, in H. Robinson and M.E. Buszek (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Art* (Newark, 2019), 111–26.

³⁷² ‘Natalia LL said that there was no feminist art in Poland in that time. There were single artists who were interested in these issues, but the feminist movement was impossible, because it was foremost a social movement, and that was possible only in the democratic states.’ A. Leśniak, ‘Action Art as a Way of Emancipation. Women’s Performance Art Practices in the Context of the Totalitarian Regime Based on Communist Ideology and the Young Democracy in Poland’, *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, 22 (2020), 104.

women's movement could emerge and 'catch up with the West'.³⁷³ Both these evaluations are however based on very Western-centric definitions of feminism and women's liberation that are in itself problematic and contested. As Magdalena Grabowska observes, actions of socialist women's organisations are often not interpreted as feminist because they contradict the very definition of feminist agency centred around 'free will' and 'active resistance' to the patriarchal system of oppression.³⁷⁴ Similarly, works of women artists under state socialism cannot be interpreted as 'feminist' because their theories and actions did not fit into frameworks developed for the art scene in the West nor in the chronology and cartography developed to analyse feminist art in the Anglo-Saxon world.³⁷⁵ To complicate things further, many of the artists whose works could be interpreted as 'feminist' opposed this title and distanced themselves from feminism and women's art altogether.³⁷⁶

Having highlighted such ambiguities surrounding the category of 'feminist art', I want to argue that we should not abandon this term completely, but rather try to redefine it so that we can better respond to the challenges and questions the historical material poses. Instead of hopelessly looking for a unified movement of 'feminist art', let us focus on what the artists actually had to say. As this section of the chapter is going to demonstrate, visions of female nudity presented by women artists stood in stark contrast to the visuals displayed at the 'Venus' exhibitions. If only indirectly, this suggests that

³⁷³ M. Grabowska, 'Bringing the Second World In: Conservative Revolution(s), Socialist Legacies, and Transnational Silences in the Trajectories of Polish Feminism', *Signs*, 37/2 (2012), 385–411.

³⁷⁴ M. Grabowska, 'Bits of Freedom: Demystifying Women's Activism under State Socialism in Poland and Georgia', *Feminist Studies*, 43/1 (2017), 142. See also N. Funk, 'A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 21/4 (2014), 344–60.

³⁷⁵ See A. Jakubowska, 'The Circulation of Feminist Ideas in Communist Poland', in B. Hoek and A. Allas (eds.), *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present* (London, 2018), 136.

³⁷⁶ On the complicated relation of Natalia L.L. with feminism see A. Jakubowska, 'The Attractive Banality of Natalia LL "Consumer Art" (1972-1975)', *Nordlit*, 21 (2007), 243–4.

there was a distinct, ‘feminist’ way of portraying naked female bodies, even if not explicitly grounded in feminist theory. Just as scholars of women’s movements uncover forgotten areas of women’s agency under state socialism,³⁷⁷ historians of art point to various ways in which women’s art in state-socialist Poland engaged and interacted with feminism, even if not always directly.³⁷⁸ For example, in her 2018 paper Agata Jakubowska examines the transnational flows of people, ideas, and artworks beyond the Iron Curtain and studies the complicated reception of ‘Western’ feminist ideas among Polish artists. According to her, even though feminist art theory texts may not have been directly translated into Polish, they still circulated in other ways, distributed privately in their original language or summarised and cited in magazine articles.³⁷⁹

A good example of Jakubowska’s argument is Natalia L.L.’s (Natalia Lach-Lachowicz) participation in exhibitions of women’s art in Austria and the Netherlands in the 1970s.³⁸⁰ She was not the only female Polish artist who exhibited her works internationally (to mention just a few names such as Magdalena Abakanowicz, Maria Pinińska-Bereś), but one of the very few who attempted to disseminate feminist ideas in their home country. According to Jakubowska, in 1977 Natalia L.L. wrote a text titled *Feminist tendencies in the arts*, later presented in galleries in Lublin and Katowice.³⁸¹ A year later she organised a small exhibition of feminist art in her home city of Wrocław. The show presented works by herself and women artists from the USA and introduced the audience to the issues discussed in feminist art at the time.³⁸² From this example we

³⁷⁷ Grabowska, ‘Bits of Freedom...’, 143–4.

³⁷⁸ S. Altman, ‘Feminist Art in Poland—Between Censorship and Activism’, *Signs*, 33/2 (2008), 413–18.

³⁷⁹ Jakubowska, ‘The Circulation of Feminist Ideas...’, 137.

³⁸⁰ Jakubowska, ‘The Circulation of Feminist Ideas...’, 137–9.

³⁸¹ The same year philosopher Stefan Morawski published his article on feminist art in the bimonthly *Sztuka*, see S. Morawski, ‘Neofeminizm w sztuce’, *Sztuka*, 4 (1977), 57–63.

³⁸² Jakubowska, ‘The Circulation of Feminist Ideas...’, 139–40.

can clearly see how feminist theories could circulate among Polish artists, even if their adoption was ambiguous and not always straightforward.

It would be a mistake to limit our understanding of feminist art only to the works that explicitly deal with the topics of sexuality and naked bodies. There are many other lenses through which women's art in state-socialist Poland can be analysed but my goal here is different.³⁸³ I would like to focus on female artists' approaches toward nudity to show how differently it could be conceptualised in seemingly the same historical context. Thus, I want to argue that the 'sexual liberation' symbolised by 'Venus' exhibitions was not the only path available and indeed the fact that it influenced the mainstream culture to such an extent can tell us a lot about spheres of emancipation that were (not) opening up for women in the 1970s.

One of the first attempts to discuss female sexuality in art was Natalia L.L.'s 1969 *Strefa intymna* [*Intimate Sphere*].³⁸⁴ This collage of photographs depicts a heterosexual couple having sex on white sheets. The artist does not try to conceal or mitigate the erotic character of this encounter. Such an approach to the matters of sex in visual arts was already quite innovative at the time. However, what is particularly striking about the image is the active role assumed by the woman. As Jakubowska observes, contrary to the dominant European frameworks of representation, the woman is portrayed as an active participant of the sexual intercourse, not simply an object of male desire.³⁸⁵ According to

³⁸³ On other issues taken up by women artists at that time see A. Jakubowska, 'Meetings: Exhibitions of Women's Art Curated by Izabella Gustowska', *Ikonotheke*, 26 (2016), 291–311; D. Rode, 'Women's Experimental Filmmaking in Poland in the 1970s and Early 1980s', *Baltic Screen Media Review*, 3 (2015), 30–43..

³⁸⁴ 'Natalia LL. Twórczość: lata 60.', <https://nataliall.com/pl/lata-60-te/> (19 Jan. 2021).

³⁸⁵ A. Jakubowska, 'Kobieta Wobec Seksualności - Podporządkowana, Uwikłana Czy Wyzwolona?', *Artium Quaestiones*, VIII (1997), 116.

her, *Intimate Sphere* is a call for equal access to sexual fulfilment but also a challenge issued to patriarchal society that sees women only as passive objects of men's actions.³⁸⁶

The topic of women's (in)activity returns in other works of Natalia L.L., notably one of her most renowned series, *Consumer Art* (1972-1975).³⁸⁷ Often a-historically interpreted as simply a critique of consumerist society, the series of photographs and videoclips picture women eating bananas, pudding, and sausages.³⁸⁸ All the consumed products have clear phallic connotations and closely resemble frameworks of representation characteristic for erotic imagery. Bananas and sausages symbolise penises, while the pudding simulates sperm swallowed after oral sex. The models are blond, attractive, and clearly enjoying themselves. They look straight into the camera and provoke the viewer. One could hardly think of a picture more contradictory to the nudes displayed at 'Venus' exhibitions. Not only can it be interpreted as overtly erotic, but it first and foremost poses a challenge to the dominance of the male viewer so characteristic for patriarchal frameworks of representation. Natalia L.L. subverts this relation, putting the female protagonist and her satisfaction at the centre of the picture.³⁸⁹ By clearly referring to the frameworks of pornographic representations, she also challenges the boundaries of acceptable erotic art of the early 1970s.³⁹⁰

For other female artists nudity was a tool for speaking about women's position in society. The social perception of the female body was one of the recurring motifs in the

³⁸⁶ Jakubowska, 'Kobieta Wobec Seksualności...', 115.

³⁸⁷ Polish Performance Archive, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (henceforth PPA, MoMA Warsaw), 'Natalia LL, Sztuka konsumpcyjna, 1972, 1974, 1975', <https://artmuseum.pl/pl/filmoteka/praca/ll-natalia-sztuka-konsumpcyjna> (19 Jan. 2021).

³⁸⁸ Jakubowska, 'The Attractive Banality...', 241–48.

³⁸⁹ Jakubowska, 'Kobieta Wobec Seksualności...', 123–6.

³⁹⁰ Leszkowicz, *Nagi Mężczyzna...*, 112.

work of Ewa Partum in the 1970s.³⁹¹ In her 1974 performance *Zmiana. Mój problem jest problemem kobiety* [*Change. My problem is the problem of a woman*] half of her face was intentionally aged by a professional makeup artist to resemble the face of an old woman.³⁹² In 1979 she repeated the performance in Łódź, this time appearing fully naked with half of her body transformed to look old.³⁹³ In the performance Partum explored the limits of women's participation in cultural and social life and protested against the objectification of female bodies.³⁹⁴ Again, the use of nudity by Partum stood in stark contrast to the visual language of nude photography exhibited at 'Venus'. Instead of presenting an aesthetically pleasing silhouette, she intentionally obscured her attractiveness. Most importantly, Partum worked with her own body, rebelling against male objectification of women's (models') bodies. This in itself was an artistic statement of women's agency and independence, contrasted with passivity and anonymity of models posing for traditional nude photographs.

The issue of self-identification and artistic identity is central to Ewa Partum's work of that period. In 1980 her exhibition *Self-identification* opened in a Warsaw gallery. It consisted of a number of photomontages in which the artists' naked figure was inserted into pictures of public spaces in Warsaw (such as shops, streets, pedestrian crossings).³⁹⁵ During the opening night Partum appeared naked and presented a manifesto in which she claimed that feminist art offers a way towards self-realisation for women.³⁹⁶ She also

³⁹¹ On Ewa Partum, see K. Majewska-Güde, *Ewa Partum's Artistic Practice: An Atlas of Continuity in Different Locations* (Bielefeld, 2021).

³⁹² Jakubowska, 'The Circulation of Feminist Ideas...', 141.

³⁹³ PPA, MoMA Warsaw, 'E. Partum, *Zmiana. Mój problem jest problemem kobiety*, 1979', <https://artmuseum.pl/pl/archiwum/archiwum-polskiego-performansu/2516/126965> (19 Jan. 2021).

³⁹⁴ E. Majewska, 'Feminist Art of Failure, Ewa Partum and the Avant-Garde of the Weak', *Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej*, 16/16 (2016), 10.

³⁹⁵ PPA, MoMA Warsaw, 'E. Partum, *Samoidentyfikacja*, 1980', <https://artmuseum.pl/pl/archiwum/archiwum-polskiego-performansu/2521/127178> (19 Jan. 2021)

³⁹⁶ Jakubowska, 'The Circulation of Feminist Ideas in Communist Poland', 135.

criticised patriarchal culture and the gender roles it imposed for ‘impairing women’.³⁹⁷ According to Ewa Majewska it was around the same time that Partum made the decision to always perform naked. It was an act of protest against invisibility of women artists ‘since there was no place for women in art and art history except for as a model or an artist’s wife’.³⁹⁸ One can hardly think of a more accurate criticism of male-centred art and exhibitions such as ‘Venus’ in particular.

Similarly to Partum, Teresa Murak’s performances also took up the topic of female bodies in relation to patriarchal social structures. As Anka Leśniak argues, Murak’s performances expressed her longing for ‘the primordial order of mother nature, when the woman was a goddess, a birth giver’.³⁹⁹ In her art she focused on redefining typically feminine traits such as fertility and tenderness in search of women’s power and agency. Already in the 1970s Murak experimented with body art, sowing garden cress seeds on herself or on models’ bodies. Thus, her art can be interpreted as an early example of ecofeminism in the Polish context, even if Murak did not make direct references to feminist theory. However, Murak’s art is worth mentioning here not only for its possible feminist interpretations, but because the use of nudity in her performances attracted the attention of the Censorship Office (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk, henceforth GUKPPiW). In March 1976 they suspended the catalogue of Murak’s exhibition *Sowing 31 – calendar of a woman* [*Zasiew 31 - kalendarz kobiety*] organised at Labirynt Gallery in Lublin.⁴⁰⁰ The censors challenged the publication on ‘moral

³⁹⁷ PPA, MoMA Warsaw, ‘E. Partum, Samoidentyfikacja, 1980’,

<https://artmuseum.pl/pl/archiwum/archiwum-polskiego-performansu/2521/127178> (19 Jan. 2021)

³⁹⁸ Majewska, ‘Feminist Art of Failure...’, 4.

³⁹⁹ Leśniak, ‘Action Art ...’, 108.

⁴⁰⁰ Warsaw, AAN, Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk w Warszawie (henceforth GUKPPiW), 2/1102/0/7.2.3/3445, Informacja nr 67 o bieżących ingerencjach, Warszawa, 23 marca 1976, k. 80.

grounds' and, as the photographs attached to the report suggest, their main objection was the nakedness of the model.⁴⁰¹

This is one of the very rare occasions when I managed to find direct evidence of censorship motivated by 'moral objections', especially when it comes to visual material.⁴⁰² The archives of the Censorship Office are vast and without some guidance searching for examples of moral censorship is like looking for a needle in a haystack.⁴⁰³ Hence, drawing any substantive conclusions from such a small pool of sources would be premature. We can however hypothesise about the reasons Murak's exhibit attracted attention of the censors. At first sight, one may assume that it was simply the controversies surrounding female nudity. Yet, if we consider that by March 1976 six editions of 'Venus' had already taken place, as well as that many magazines regularly published female nudes (see Chapter Four), the picture seems much more complicated. The problem with Murak's performance lay therefore not in the use of nudity, but rather in the interpretation of the naked female body that she proposed. Her concentration on primaeval matriarchy and subversion of the patriarchal structures of representation were much more politically dangerous to the system than simply showing some 'naked ladies' in the popular press. While nude photography such as 'Venus' to some extent helped to appease public emotions and legitimise the communist system as modern and

⁴⁰¹ Warsaw, AAN, GUKPPiW, 2/1102/0/7.2.3/3445, Informacja nr 67 o bieżących ingerencjach, Warszawa, 23 marca 1976, k. 84.

⁴⁰² More extensive studies have so far been conducted on the censorship of literature and press publications. See K. Budrowska, 'Cenzura, Tabu i Wstyd. Cenzura Obyczajowa PRL-u (1948-1958)', *Napis Pismo Poświęcone Literaturze Okolicznościowej i Użytkowej*, XVIII (2012), 229–44; M. Świstak, 'Niepolityczne Tabu PRL, Czyli o Cenzurze Obyczajowej Lat 80.', in E. Skorupa (ed.), *Przeskoczyć Tę Studnię Strachu. Autor i Dzieło a Cenzura PRL* (Kraków, 2010), 115–31.

⁴⁰³ I would like to express my gratitude to Konrad Knoch, without whom I would have not been able to locate this file in the Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw.

progressive, feminist artists such as Murak attacked the very foundation of the system – the patriarchy.

Early feminist artists used nudity and erotic codes to make a statement about social position of women and to challenge the boundaries between private and public. Yet, I argue it is a misunderstanding to interpret their use of naked bodies as simply a challenge issued to prudish sexual norms reinforced in Polish society by the alliance between the Catholic Church and the communists. Such interpretations are offered by art critics, based on a very weak understanding of the changing discourse of sexuality under state socialism. For example, Leśniak in her recent article on the history of feminist performance art in Poland argues that: ‘Sex in that time was a taboo and there was a kind of consent between the Church and the Communist authorities in this matter. If any sexual discourse existed, it was only medical. Thus the naked female body used to express a feminist message became political.’⁴⁰⁴ Notably, Leśniak does not provide any citation to support her strong claims (in the footnote she cites Anna Grzymała-Busse who is a political scientist working on the Church-State relations and mentions sexuality only in the context of the contemporary Church’s opposition towards same-sex marriage, LGBTQ rights, and contraception).⁴⁰⁵ In such a-historical accounts, the prudish character of the communist regime is taken for granted, treated as a natural phenomenon that does not require any evidence or justification.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ Leśniak, ‘Action Art ...’, 107.

⁴⁰⁵ A. Grzymała-Busse, ‘Poland as an Anomaly in Church–State Relations?’, *Concilium Civitas*, <http://conciliumcivitas.pl/poland-as-an-anomaly-in-church-state-relations/> (19 Jan. 2021).

⁴⁰⁶ On stereotypical approaches to the history of sexuality under communism, see Ghodsee and Lisková, ‘Bumbling Idiots or Evil Masterminds? Challenging Cold War Stereotypes about Women, Sexuality and State Socialism’, 489–503.

Here, I would like to offer an alternative (or rather complementary) interpretation of the potential political message sent by feminist artists in the 1970s. This is not to say that they were not protesting against patriarchal structures and restrictive norms regulating female behaviour. Rather, I would like to argue that they were opposing not only sexual conservatism, but also the visions of sexual modernisation that events such as 'Venus' promoted. As this chapter has demonstrated, the sexual discourse (that Leśniak pronounces non-existent) was being construed precisely in the 1970s. Of course, for some sex was still a taboo, but one cannot ignore the important political and social forces that contributed to more open discussions on sexuality in that decade. The Polish school of sexology (as analysed in Chapter Two) and 'Venus' exhibitions are just two examples, and the next chapter is going to provide further evidence.

Therefore, nudity in the works of Lach-Lachowicz, Partum, and Murak is an intervention into the new discourse on female sexuality and offers an alternative language to what mainstream projects such as 'Venus' promoted. Paweł Leszkowicz goes so far as to conclude that these proto-feminist artistic performances were a response to the proliferation of female nudes both in popular culture and in neo-avant-garde art.⁴⁰⁷ Whether it was a direct polemic with this new type of visuals or not, is however a separate question. What is crucial from the perspective of my argument in this chapter is that feminist artists developed their own way of approaching female sexuality in the 1970s. Their art portrayed women as self-reliant agents and their bodies as independent works of art not just objects of the male gaze. The challenge issued to patriarchal norms was not simply a challenge to sexual taboos, but also an opposition to the visions of sexual 'modernity' that excluded and silenced women. As the next two chapters are arguing,

⁴⁰⁷ Leszkowicz, *Nagi Mężczyzna...*, 126–8.

however, this feminist language remained a niche phenomenon and did not substantially influence the frameworks in which female nudity was discussed in late state-socialist period. The Polish sexual revolution of the 1970s and 80s was profoundly shaped by male heterosexual desires and it offered little or no space for women to speak about their own sexual needs and experiences.

Chapter Four: 'All hope in Venus'. In Search of Socialist Erotica.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, in 1970 exhibiting nude photography could be perceived as both controversial and intriguing. The vivid discussions provoked by 'Venus' illustrate just how ambiguous the approach toward naked bodies in the public sphere could be at the time. Yet, by the end of the decade nude images were commonplace in various media outlets as well as in advertising. What was once perceived as innovative and brave became the new normal, accepted by media consumers as part of the regular visual landscape. How was such a quick transformation of popular attitudes possible? The goal of this chapter is to explore this transformation of public opinion as well as the frameworks that enabled the new discourses on nudity to emerge.

Departing from the case study of 'Venus' this chapter focuses on debates in the Polish media (the press in particular) that attempted to negotiate the boundaries of public decency and morality. Asking questions such as 'Venus or Playboy?' journalists tried to define the boundary between acceptable (erotic) art and pornography. In their arguments they diagnosed the state of Polish society's sexual mores and lamented the poor level of sexual education. By doing so, they portrayed 'Venus' as yet another attempt to modernise Polish attitudes toward sex and the language they used bore striking resemblance to the language of the Polish school of sexology, as analysed in Chapter Two. In this sense 'Venus', and nude photography in general, was not only a clear manifestation that the Polish sexual revolution was underway, but it was also perceived as a crucial step that needed to be taken if Polish sexual mores were to be modernised in a desirable socialist way.

Thus, the chapter explores the ways in which discussions on nude photography contributed to the reflection on the socialist 'Third Way' toward sexual liberation. Such

noble ideas did not always easily translate into practice and public opinion polls analysed toward the end of this chapter demonstrate that social understandings of sexuality remained ambiguous and multidimensional. Individual practices differed greatly from desired patterns of behaviour promoted in expert discourse. However, even the approach of the state institutions was far from monolithic. As the last section of this chapter demonstrates, the visual language developed thanks to 'Venus' lay the groundwork upon which more commercial uses of nudity could flourish in advertising and popular media. In the end, the 'Third Way' towards socialist erotica turned out to be a bumpy and uneasy road even for its ideological proponents.

Art or Entertainment?

The previous chapter has already signalled that the growing popularity of nude photography in the early 1970s provoked discussions about the boundaries of acceptable representations of nudity and sexuality in the public sphere. To deal with the accusations of pornography, the Cracow Photographic Society (KTF) tried to mobilise experts and journalists in its defence. One such attempt was the symposium 'Art and Sex' organised in Cracow in February 1972. Its key purpose was to once and for all resolve whether nude artistic photography could be pornographic. The hidden aim was also to protect 'Venus' from authorities' censorship and promote the cause of breaking off with old taboos.

As the press reported, among invited guests were sexologists, journalists, photographers, educators, and artists. The names included Jerzy Lovell, Julian Godlewski, Alina Skotnicka, Daniel Passent, Agnieszka Osiecka, and many others.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁸ S. M. Jankowski, 'Posiadać Wenus', *Ekspres Reporterów*, 6 (1977), 84.

Even Wanda Póltawska, a conservative psychiatrist and a close friend of cardinal Karol Wojtyła, joined the debate. Although the press mocked the event, many of the comments raised during the discussion are symptomatic of the broader debate on nudity and sex in the public sphere.⁴⁰⁹ Hence, in the following paragraphs I use the 1972 discussion as a departure point to analyse more general discussions of nudity in the media.

Most of the ‘Art and Sex’ symposium’s participants agreed that nudity presented by ‘Venus’ was not pornographic, although some voiced concerns over particular photographs. The critics of the exhibition worried that promoting this type of photography could result in vulgarisation of the public sphere: ‘What if this triumphant march of nude photography in Poland is in fact just a display, under the form of art, of the types of visuals that we usually see in public restrooms?’⁴¹⁰ Others worried that ‘popularisation of sex’ could be dangerous and lead to tragedies and confusion among the audience.⁴¹¹ The dominant view however was that artistic nude in itself could not be pornographic. The artistic character of the exhibition protected it from accusations of indecency, even in Póltawska’s opinion.⁴¹²

Therefore, the first argument used to legitimise nude photography in the public sphere was that of art. Artistic qualities of ‘Venus’ were stressed in most of the media coverage of the exhibition. Organisers and sympathetic journalists repeatedly assured public opinion that:

The goal of the ‘Venus’ exhibitions is to portray beautiful, naked women of all races and skin colours in an artistic manner. Each year the jury reviews around 400 works by 1000 authors from over 56 countries. They choose the best

⁴⁰⁹ S. Kozicki, ‘Seks, obserwacja prawie naukowa’, *Kultura* (13 Feb. 1972), 12, 11.

⁴¹⁰ Bywalec [D. Passent], ‘Sztuka i seks’, *Polityka* (12 Feb. 1972), 12.

⁴¹¹ A. Zachuta, ‘Pornografia czy sztuka’, *Gazeta Sądowa i Penitencjarna* (1 Mar. 1972), 10.

⁴¹² ‘Artistic nude is obviously not pornographic for me, and nude photography exhibition cannot be pornographic’. W. Póltawska, quoted in: Zachuta, ‘Pornografia...’, 10.

photographs, rejecting the ones that reek of pornography or banalisation of the topic.⁴¹³

Rigorous selection criteria, renowned jury members as well as the international scope of the competition were presented as reassurance that photographs would have nothing in common with pornography. International recognition served as another source of legitimisation. 'Venus' was said to be one of the most important photographic exhibitions in the world, paving the way for the new understanding of nudes and approach towards human body in photography.⁴¹⁴

The organisers of 'Venus' were not the only ones to justify nudity with its appearance in an artistic context. In September 1969 a new weekly entitled *Perspektywy* [*Perspectives*] appeared on the newsstands. The magazine's target was clearly young intelligentsia, as it focused on the latest political, social, technological, and economic news with extensive photographic coverage, often in colour (which was still quite rare at the time).⁴¹⁵ But the true innovation was the fact that on page 29 in the section *Fotografika* [Polish term for Photographic Art] the magazine reprinted a nude photograph. In the first issue the illustration was Andrzej Krynicki's work 'Na diunach IV' [On the dunes IV], later exhibited in Cracow.⁴¹⁶ Apart from the photo there was no commentary, which suggested that nudes were to be admired as a separate kind of art, not as an illustration of a story or an opinion piece. From 1974 onwards the rubric expanded and apart from one (or more) nudes it also featured a longer article on the artistic aspects of photography, nude and otherwise. The author of the majority of articles was Juliusz Garztecki, a

⁴¹³ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, J.R., 'Krakowska Wenus', *Panorama Północy* (2 Mar. 1980).

⁴¹⁴ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, M. Kuczewski, 'Venus 1973. Od zachwytu do sprzeciwu', *Profile* (11 May 1973), 12–3.

⁴¹⁵ *Perspektywy* replaced the weekly *Świat*, which was closed after the 1968 student protests.

⁴¹⁶ Fig. 4.1, *Perspektywy* (1 Sept. 1969), 29; see A. Gogut, ed., *Wenus Polska* (Warsaw, 1973), Fig. 101.

photographer and member of the jury of some of the ‘Venus’ competitions. Not surprisingly in this context, he often used the column to promote the exhibit and reflect on its social resonance or artistic qualities. In fact, many of his opinions that I have quoted in the last two chapters come from this very column.

Other media outlets soon followed in *Perspektywy*’s footsteps. In 1971 *Panorama Północy* [*Northern Panorama*], most likely under Garztecki’s influence, started publishing photographs from ‘Venus’ exhibitions.⁴¹⁷ As the illustrations from the Łódź weekly *Odgłosy* [*Echoes*] suggest (Fig. 4.2 and 4.3)⁴¹⁸, ‘Venus’ was an important inspiration for editors. Its artistic quality and social recognition offered a language that could justify admiring naked female bodies in the public sphere, in this case in popular magazines. Similar columns appeared in other regional newspapers such as *Zbliżenia* [*Encounters*].⁴¹⁹ In the latter example artistic nudes were printed on one of the last pages together with a short romantic poem.⁴²⁰

However, the process of mainstreaming female nudes was more multidimensional, and ‘Venus’ was not the only inspiration for editors who decided to publish this type of visuals. In fact, *Perspektywy* was not the first magazine to publish female nudes, but the first to present it as an artistic endeavour rather than pure entertainment. Already in 1965 photographs of naked women started appearing on the last page of the literary biweekly *Współczesność* [*Modernity*] in the humorous section

⁴¹⁷ ‘Venus 70’, *Panorama Północy* (24 Jan. 1971), 13; ‘Venus 71’, *Panorama Północy* (28 Feb. 1971), 13. Garztecki was a columnist for the magazine. See J. Garztecki, ‘Przemiana obyczaju, przemiana widzenia’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny* (2 Jan. 1972), 12; M. Żmijkowska, *Magazyn Ilustrowany ‘Panorama Północy’ (1957-1981): Analiza Treści i Formy* (Olsztyn, 2013).

⁴¹⁸ Fig. 4.2 and 4.3, *Odgłosy* (14 Nov. 1974), 10; *Odgłosy* (2 Jan. 1975), 15.

⁴¹⁹ The official weekly of PZPR committee in Koszalin, published from 1979.

⁴²⁰ *Zbliżenia* (20 Dec. 1979), 15

‘Wykrzykniki’ [‘Exclamation marks’].⁴²¹ This was a continuation of the much older tradition of publishing pictures of attractive young women (so called *kociaki* [kittens]) on the covers and last pages of several magazines such as *Po Prostu* [Simply] and *Przekrój* [Cross-section]. This trend originated in the time of political Thaw of 1956-1957 and contested moral constraints set by Stalinist propaganda (See Chapter Five). Although models were dressed, the focus was clearly on their sexual attractiveness.⁴²² Thus, the magazines had paved the way for more explicit visuals such as the ones published in *Współczesność*. The column, edited by Mirosław Machlarek, offered a review of gossip, bloopers, and funny news from other media. Advertised as an ‘ornately decorated organ of Mirosław Machlarek’, the section aimed to entertain readers with satirical commentary of cultural and literary life. Yet, the wordplay in the column’s subtitle may reveal its hidden agenda. In Polish ‘organ’ means both an element of a human body as well as an official media outlet (as in ‘organ prasowy’). Thus, while the section’s subtitle played with the sexual connotations of the word, the illustrations attached made it very clear that the purpose of the column was not only to gossip, but also to admire the beauty of naked female bodies (see Fig. 4.4 and 4.5).⁴²³

What is particularly striking about the nudes published in *Współczesność* is how openly sexual these images were, especially for the standards of the late 1960s. While *Perspektywy* published works of Polish photographers such as Andrzej Krynicki and Renard Dudley who followed the frameworks of artistic nudity, Machlarek’s column

⁴²¹ ‘Wykrzykniki’, *Współczesność* (1 Dec. 1965), 12.

⁴²² I. Kurz, *Twarze w Tłumie: Wizerunki Bohaterów Wyobraźni Zbiorowej w Kulturze Polskiej Lat 1955-1969* (Izabelin, 2005), 119–25. K. Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945-1989. Nowoczesność, Równouprawnienie, Komunizm* (Kraków, 2020), 422–6.

⁴²³ Fig. 4.4, ‘Wykrzykniki’, *Współczesność* (29 Jan. 1969), 12; Fig. 4.5, ‘Wykrzykniki’, *Współczesność* (9 Dec. 1970), 12

employed a different strategy. Its justification for nudity was pure entertainment and the visuals had more in common with what was being published in *Playboy* at the time than with artistic modesty of the ‘Venus’ photographs. For example, as figures 4.4 and 4.5 demonstrate, the models often looked straight at the camera and their bodies were fully exposed, not obscured by any photographic techniques. Their sexual attractiveness was highlighted by their shiny and well-tanned skin. In the photograph from January 1969 a naked model licks a huge lollipop looking straight into the camera, which evokes phallic connotations and encourages the viewer to engage in sexual fantasy (Fig. 4.4).

Similar types of visuals also appeared on the final page of student magazines such as the Cracow monthly (and then biweekly) *Student* and the Warsaw weekly *Itd.[Etc.]* The latter, apart from publishing this type of images, also contributed greatly to the process of mainstreaming sexological expert knowledge in a regular column ‘Sexological Answers’, edited first by Kazimierz Imieliński and later by Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz.⁴²⁴ Both magazines started publishing nude images towards the end of the 1960s as a part of their satirical column on the final page. The photographs, most likely reprints from the Western press, were usually accompanied by no commentary which suggested that they should be appreciated on their own (see Fig. 4.6).⁴²⁵ Sometimes the nude pictures were photomontaged to suggest some distance from their sexual contents (see Fig. 4.7).⁴²⁶ Naked images were supposed to be a form of a joke, pure entertainment. This is well showcased in one of the very few examples of male nudes that I managed to find in the press. In March 1970, in celebration of the International Women’s Day, *Student* published

⁴²⁴ See Kościańska, *Gender, Pleasure, and Violence*.

⁴²⁵ Fig. 4.6, *Student*, 10 (1970), 24

⁴²⁶ Fig. 4.7, *Itd* (17 Aug. 1969), 16

a photo of a young, muscular naked man with exposed genitals (Fig. 4.8).⁴²⁷ The photo was accompanied by the comment ‘sic!’ highlighting its humorous character.

How were these new types of visuals interpreted by commentators? Garztecki argued that female nudes in the press revolutionised popular attitudes towards nude photography.⁴²⁸ According to him, this type of visuals was no longer confined to gallery spaces or cultural elites but could now freely circulate among a wider public and reach mass audiences.⁴²⁹ However, this mass circulation had its downsides as well. Even Garztecki remarked that the decision to publish nudes in *Perspektywy* may have been just a strategy to raise readership for the new magazine.⁴³⁰ Other commentators were not so lenient. In 1970 the Catholic weekly *Kierunki* published a discussion on sexual mores and the demoralisation of Polish youth. In the opening piece Kazimierz Kretowicz argued that the rising numbers of sexual assaults and gang rapes resulted from too liberal an approach toward sexual matters.⁴³¹ He criticised the sexual revolution and the people who were responsible for spreading it in the Polish context. One of the culprits was – in his words – the ‘popular illustrated weekly [...] that presents a naked lady [goła baba] under the code-name “Photographics”.’⁴³²

In response to Kretowicz’s piece Wiesław Aleksandrowicz offered a slightly more nuanced vision of sexual morality. Although he did agree that commercialized nudity was morally dubious, he criticized Kretowicz for offering little evidence for his claims on the

⁴²⁷ Fig. 4.8, *Student*, 3 (1970), 24.

⁴²⁸ Garztecki, ‘Przemiana obyczajju’, 12.

⁴²⁹ Garztecki, ‘Przemiana obyczajju’, 12.

⁴³⁰ Garztecki, ‘Przemiana obyczajju’, 12.

⁴³¹ On the changing discourse on sexual violence at that time, see Kościańska, ‘Gender on Trial: Changes in Legal and Discursive Practices Concerning Sexual Violence in Poland from the 1970s to the Present’, 111–27.

⁴³² K. Kretowicz, ‘Seks i paragraf’, *Kierunki* (16 Aug. 1970), 6.

connections between sexual violence and relaxed attitudes towards nudity. He appealed to 'reasonable' readers who did not believe that sexual matters should be a taboo. In his opinion, artistic nudes could actually offer a great alternative to the pornographic imagery that was increasingly popular with young people who 'may not travel to Sweden or Denmark, but many of whom speak foreign languages, read foreign press'.⁴³³ Prudery was in his opinion no response to the quickly changing morals of Polish youth: 'A beautiful nude, as it emphasises and brings out beauty, may be a form of artistic counterargument to pornographic photos that undress and instil disgust for this very beauty'.⁴³⁴ This was the best chance to prevent 'undesirable and negative' patterns of behaviour from spreading in Polish society. Aleksandrowicz however distinguished between artistic photographs from *Perspektywy* and the type of visuals that one 'biweekly literary magazine from Warsaw' (*Współczesność*) published.⁴³⁵ In his opinion nudity could be justified by its artistic or educational qualities, but by no means could serve as a pure entertainment or a simulation of the Western type of erotic visuals.

Such arguments seem to have received some support from readers. One of them wrote in a letter to the editor of *Kierunki* that nude photography in the press should not be banned but controlled to ensure the highest aesthetic and artistic quality. In a letter titled 'I defend the right to sex' ['Bronię prawa do seksu'] the author explained that youth 'feels the urge' to view this type of visuals.⁴³⁶ According to him, pornographic publications circulated freely in school restrooms, which led to vulgarization of the topic. Hence, in his opinion it was better to print artistic nudes and, in this way, positively

⁴³³ W. Aleksandrowicz, 'Ten odwieczny upadek obyczajów', *Kierunki* (16 Aug. 1970), 7.

⁴³⁴ Aleksandrowicz, 'Ten odwieczny...', 7.

⁴³⁵ Aleksandrowicz, 'Ten odwieczny...', 7.

⁴³⁶ K. Ostańkiewicz, 'Bronię prawa do seksu', *Kierunki* (20 Sep. 1970), 6.

influence sexual culture. This was, however, not an easy task. 'In a country where even miniskirts can offend public morals, it is difficult to talk about such sensitive matters as sex' he concluded.⁴³⁷

Indeed, several opinion pieces published by *Kierunki* demonstrate that there was hardly one unified front on this topic. Another letter to the editors criticised Aleksandrowicz's arguments and argued that sexuality should remain an intimate and private matter for a married couple.⁴³⁸ Even if there was a need to build sexual culture in the society, the right way to do it was not through nude photography. 'Do we want to raise sexual culture or just to obsessively propagate sex?'⁴³⁹ wondered an anonymous reader. Even though nude photographs in the press claimed to offer an artistic experience, it was easy to mock this type of 'education'. In March 1971 another article from *Kierunki* scorned editors of *Ita* for the sexological advice rubric and their 'cut-and-paste creativity'. The latter referred to the nude photographs (most likely cut out from Western press) that appeared on one of the last pages of the weekly: '[...] the cover offers a verse from Broniewski⁴⁴⁰ or someone equally distinguished, but the last page only wants to move us with a naked lady [rozebraną babą]'.⁴⁴¹

Entertainment was therefore not enough to justify the presence of naked female bodies in the state-socialist press, at least for the time being. While *Ita* supplemented its visual programme with sexological advices, claiming to offer much needed education in matters of 'sexual upbringing',⁴⁴² *Student* followed the path paved by *Perspektywy* and

⁴³⁷ Ostańkiewicz, 'Bronię...', 6.

⁴³⁸ El-Hakim, 'Fotoakty', *Kierunki* (6 Sep. 1970), 10.

⁴³⁹ El-Hakim, 'Fotoakty', 10.

⁴⁴⁰ Władysław Broniewski (1897-1962) was a Polish poet and translator of Vladimir Mayakovsky.

⁴⁴¹ Obserwator [Józef Szczyпка?], 'Misja dziejowa rozpoczęta', *Kierunki* (14 Mar. 1971), 12.

⁴⁴² 'Pół żartem, pół serio czyli misja dziejowa obskuranta', *Ita* (28 Mar. 1971), 16.

from 1971 started publishing female nudes under the title 'Venus'.⁴⁴³ Thus, they could claim to offer not only entertainment, but also artistic experiences. One may also assume that the artistic character of *Współczesność* offered a handy excuse for publishing explicitly erotic visuals under the cover of satire. Yet, this excuse may have been insufficient. Notably, after the magazine was closed in December 1971, its successor, *Literatura*, did not continue publishing nudes.⁴⁴⁴

Whether the nudes were artistic or not, the use that readers made of this type of visuals may have been quite different from what the editors and public commentators had imagined for them in the first place. In numerous copies of *Perspektywy*, *Panorama Północy* and *Itd* that I accessed in the Warsaw Public Library the images of naked women were cut or ripped out. In fact, it was so common that in some volumes as many as over half of the issues had the pictures cut out and I needed to stop documenting every single case.⁴⁴⁵ It is highly unlikely that this was an attempt to censor 'immoral' visuals on the part of the librarians. First, they would censor all such images, not only selected ones, and second, they would do it more meticulously, so as not to rip apart other pages of the magazine. If we take into account that erotic magazines were officially unavailable in Poland at that time, we may assume that ripping female nudes from colour magazines may have been a grassroots method of obtaining nude visuals. However, readers were fascinated not only by images. In another issue of *Itd* I discovered that apart from the

⁴⁴³ 'Z wystawy "Venus 71"', *Student*, 7-8 (1971), 32.

⁴⁴⁴ The last nudes appeared in the issue published on 14 November. See 'Wykrzykniki', *Współczesność* (14 Nov. 1971), 12. See also 'Od „Współczesności” do „Literatury”', *Współczesność* (26 Dec. 1971), 1.

⁴⁴⁵ Examples *Itd* (16 July 1972), 16; *Panorama Północy* (28 Feb. 1971), 15; *Perspektywy* (9 Jan. 1970), 38 (Warsaw Public Library Collections, accessed in January 2021).

photograph on the last page, the curious reader had also ripped out a passage from the ‘Sexological advice’ section in which Lew-Starowicz discussed different sex positions.⁴⁴⁶

Some readers openly expressed their fascination with the nudes in their letters to editors. An anonymous reader from Tomaszów Mazowiecki, clearly impressed with the visuals published in the magazine, inquired *Panorama Północy* when an album from ‘Venus’ exhibitions would become available.⁴⁴⁷ *Itd* also received letters from readers who demanded that more explicit nude photographs be published in the magazine.⁴⁴⁸ In September 1970 the editors published two letters from readers. Zbigniew from Warsaw wondered why *Itd* did not publish female nudes similar to the ones from *Perspektywy* and *Współczesność*. ‘It is not pornography, these are simply photographs of naked women’ he explained and added that people have different preferences: ‘some don’t like female nudes and big-beat music, but there are others who love it’.⁴⁴⁹ The second letter, signed by a reader from Cracow, recommended a visit to the ‘Venus’ exhibition. The author admired women who ‘despite all responsibilities in the household and beyond’ manage to look so beautiful. In the commentary published next to the letters, the editors scorned them as examples of ‘erotomania’.⁴⁵⁰ Yet, even though the editorial team in theory distanced itself from possible sexual interpretations of the images they printed, in reality they published increasingly explicit images. Only a week after these letters were published, the final page of *Itd* featured a female nude that could easily have been part of the ‘Venus’ exhibition.⁴⁵¹ This shows how contradictory such declarations were. In the

⁴⁴⁶ Z.L. Starowicz, ‘Pozycje’, *Itd* (16 July 1972), 14 (Warsaw Public Library Collections, accessed in January 2021).

⁴⁴⁷ ‘Seks czy coś więcej?’, *Panorama Północy* (28 Feb. 1971), 15.

⁴⁴⁸ *Itd* (13 Sept. 1970), 16.

⁴⁴⁹ *Itd* (13 Sept. 1970), 16.

⁴⁵⁰ *Itd* (13 Sept. 1970), 16. See also *Itd* (29 Mar. 1970), 16.

⁴⁵¹ *Itd* (20 Sept. 1970), 16.

end, the readers, especially the young generation, clearly expected that the magazines should be a platform where a ‘modern’ approach to sexuality could be performed. Visual discourse formed an important part of this process.

Pornography, Education and Socialist ‘Sexual Upbringing’

The above-analysed discussions in the Catholic *Kierunki* showcase ambiguities surrounding the evaluation of nude photography in the press, even among conservatives. Although the framework of ‘art’ was often invoked to legitimise this type of imagery, not everyone easily accepted such a justification. Accusations of the ‘pornographic’ or ‘demoralising’ character of nude photography were raised repeatedly. This frame could however be used by both sides of the discussion, as the sources quoted in this section have already demonstrated. For some, nude photography was a way to introduce pornographic visuals to the Polish audience. Yet for others artistic nudity was exactly a way to prevent pornography from spreading. Similar voices could also be heard in the debates about ‘Venus’.

Let us go back for a moment to the 1972 discussion on ‘Art and Sex’ organised by the KTF in Cracow. Its participants also believed that the relation between nude photography and the transformation of sexual mores demanded further investigation. As J. Krasicki⁴⁵² argued, sex should not be a taboo, whether in state socialism or among Christians. Moreover, he stressed that even despite restrictive regulations, pornographic publications imported from abroad circulated among Polish audiences.⁴⁵³ His argument was further developed by a sexologist, Julian Godlewski, who added ‘Sexual interests

⁴⁵² Most likely Ignacy Krasicki, a *Gazeta Krakowska* journalist.

⁴⁵³ Bywalec, ‘Sztuka...’, 12.

should not be inhibited by tabooisation [...] but they also should not be overly excited. Therefore, exhibiting nude photography can prevent pornography'.⁴⁵⁴ Thus, 'Venus' was not only not pornographic but in fact offered a weapon against indecent images that were already in circulation among the public. We can clearly see how similar this discourse is to the arguments in favour of artistic nudes that appeared in *Kierunki* less than two years before.

In several of his interviews Władysław Klimczak remembered that the idea of exhibiting artistic nudes was inspired by his experience as a vocational school teacher. He observed how pornography circulated among the pupils and distorted their views on sexuality as well as causing pedagogical problems. Hence, Klimczak decided that the only way to fight it was by an open approach towards sexual matters and exhibiting beautiful, artistic photographs of naked bodies instead of the commodified, vulgar images that Western pornographic magazines promoted.⁴⁵⁵ 'From its very beginning 'Venus' has been a great method of fighting prudery on the one hand and pornography on the other' he concluded in his 1983 interview.⁴⁵⁶

Here we touch upon the third and perhaps most important framework for legitimising nudity in the public sphere – that of information. The educational mission of 'Venus' was repeatedly stressed by both organisers and commentators. There were two key areas of this education. First, the audience needed to be educated aesthetically so that they could tell bad photographs from good ones and avoid unhealthy sensationalism.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁴ J. Godlewski, Quoted in: Zachuta, 'Pornografia...', 10.

⁴⁵⁵ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, A. Zawaniecki, 'Prawda jest naga. Rozmowa z Władysławem Klimczakiem', *Tygodnik Kulturalny* (18 Nov. 1979); E. Iwanicki, 'Z gołą Venus na śniegu', *Odgłosy* (31 Jan. 1987).

⁴⁵⁶ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, W. Jurzyk, '„Venus” nadal atrakcyjna. Rozmowa z Władysławem Klimczakiem', *Perspektywy* (7 Oct. 1983).

⁴⁵⁷ J. Garzdecki, 'Venus wychowuje', *Perspektywy* (23 May 1975), 31.

Visitors were expected to admire the artistic qualities of the exhibit, not its sexual aspects. More ‘mature’ comments in the guestbooks were said to be a sign of success in this field.⁴⁵⁸ However, the fact that each year the journalists lamented the low level of these entries while simultaneously announcing successes in ‘educating’ the public may suggest that the effects were not as long-lasting or deep as the organisers wished for.⁴⁵⁹ If only indirectly it also demonstrates how important the framework of ‘education’ was in legitimising ‘Venus’ in the public sphere.

The second part of the educational mission championed by ‘Venus’ concentrated on sex education, or rather ‘sexual upbringing’ as defined by Polish sexologists and pedagogues (see Chapter Two). As I have already argued, there was a general consensus that changes in sexual morality could not be held back. Moreover, a new language of speaking about sexuality was very much needed, as even adults – public intellectuals and journalists – often struggled to discuss sexuality. In June 1972 Anna Strońska wrote in *Polityka* that the giggly atmosphere provoked by ‘Venus’ (she referred to the ‘Art and Sex’ symposium in Cracow) clearly demonstrated how little people knew how to talk about sexuality. ‘All hope in Venus’ she concluded, expressing a desire that events such as the ‘Venus’ exhibition would contribute to the modernisation of popular attitudes towards sex.⁴⁶⁰

Above all, these discussions focused on young people and the impact that nude visuals could have on their sexual upbringing. On the one hand, during the 1972

⁴⁵⁸ See for example W. Bodnicki, ‘Pani Venus. Spotkania Krakowskie’, *Kierunki* (30 May 1976), 12.

⁴⁵⁹ ‘After reading the last entries I must add, that it is evident how uncultured, ignorant, and degenerated some of the visitors are. According to the ushers, in the past such entries were very rare and the number started growing only recently’. Z. Moszkowicz., ‘Veni, vidi..., Venus’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny* (3 May 1987), 11.

⁴⁶⁰ A. Strońska, ‘Duży ubaw’, *Polityka* (24 June 1972), 12.

symposium Wanda Póltawska worried that unaccompanied young people could be harmed by nude photographs. Therefore, they needed to see the exhibit assisted by a teacher who would only show them the most 'educational' nudes.⁴⁶¹ On the other hand, experts stressed that young people themselves sought this kind of knowledge, for instance by calling Youth Helpline [Młodzieżowy Telefon Zaufania].⁴⁶² Julian Godlewski even argued that 'the exhibition paves the way toward promoting sexological knowledge, especially among the youth that needs such education'.⁴⁶³

Therefore, there was a need to address questions young people had about sex in an open and straightforward manner and 'Venus' could offer a way to speak about these concerns. This opinion was especially evident among the most progressive sexologists and educators associated with the Society for Family Development (TRR, former Society for Conscious Motherhood, then Society for Planned Parenthood). In 1984 Mikołaj Kozakiewicz, the president of the Society, wrote:

The only answer to the ongoing transformation of morals especially among young people is to create new, sex-positive [przychylne seksualizmowi] and humanistic patterns of behaviour in this regard. It is much more reasonable than hopeless attempts to prevent the transformation of morals itself, as we have little influence over that.⁴⁶⁴

Thus, he hoped that socialist countries would soon develop their own type of erotic art, one that would not ignore the sexual aspects of love while at the same time focusing on the 'unique value and beauty' of the entire relationship between two loving persons.⁴⁶⁵

As the above quote demonstrates, this definition of appropriate erotic art was closely related to new visions of a socialist and humanistic approach to sexuality

⁴⁶¹ Bywalec, 'Sztuka...', 12; Kozicki, 'Seks, obserwacja...' 12.

⁴⁶² Zachuta, 'Pornografia...', 10.

⁴⁶³ J. Godlewski, Quoted in: Zachuta, 'Pornografia...', 10.

⁴⁶⁴ M. Kozakiewicz, 'Wstęp' in A. Gogut (ed.) *Akt. Album fotograficzny* (Warsaw, 1984), 11.

⁴⁶⁵ Kozakiewicz, 'Wstęp', 11.

developed in expert discourse. ‘Venus’ was neither pornographic nor prudish, and similarly – the experts argued – a socialist approach towards sex should neither follow the nineteenth century conservative patterns nor try to ‘catch up’ with the sexualised western culture. Rather, Polish society should focus on conceptualising a ‘Third Way’ of sexual modernisation and hence a ‘Third Way’ of approaching naked bodies. Chapter Two focused on sexological expert knowledge and discussions of changing morals. The case of ‘Venus’, I argue, demonstrates that the quest for the socialist version of sexual revolution had its visual strand as well. Nude visuals had to conform to a set of criteria such as beauty, good taste, ‘decency’, and ‘feminine charm’. Through this framework, the boundaries of acceptable nudity could be set and discussed, contributing to the definition of the socialist ‘Third Way’. The public uses and perception of nudity however had little in common with these noble assumptions, and the next section explores this in greater detail.

Official Declarations versus Popular Desires

By the end of the 1970s it was quite clear that ‘Venus’ had had a noticeable impact on the liberalisation of art and media. As Klimczak claimed in one of the interviews, ‘Venus’ had helped to fight false shame and modernise traditional upbringing. ‘We simply became more universal [uniwersalni] and open to the world’ he concluded.⁴⁶⁶ Although his words should be taken with a pinch of salt, as Klimczak certainly had his own agenda in promoting himself and ‘Venus’ as forerunners in the battle against backwardness, he was not alone in such a judgement. For example, a 1987 article in

⁴⁶⁶ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, A. Zawaniecki, ‘Prawda...’, k. 2.

Tygodnik Kulturalny argued that thanks to ‘Venus’ many societal taboos could finally be confronted. Apart from female nudity, the author mentioned other topics such as sexual upbringing, sexological counselling, and ‘sexual deviations’.⁴⁶⁷ Clearly, many saw ‘Venus’ as the main force behind the liberalisation of public discourse on sexuality.

Whether we accept the claim of ‘Venus’s’ special role or not, the growing normalisation of female nudity in the public sphere was a fact. Two public opinion polls on popular approaches toward nudity conducted by Polish Television in 1971 and 1972 show that there was a significant gap between declarations and everyday practices, as well as between younger and older generations.⁴⁶⁸ The surveys revealed that, although many respondents still opposed nudity on the screen, their evaluation of ‘harmful scenes’ was much more ambiguous than previously assumed. Although the researchers stressed that Polish attitudes towards sex were still strongly influenced by Catholic customs, they also noticed several inconsistencies within this picture. For instance, respondents were much more likely to accept female nudity on screen in cinemas than in television (73% said ‘yes’ to nudity in cinemas, while only 53% accepted such scenes on TV). According to the Public Opinion Research Centre (Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej, henceforth OBOP) researchers this disparity could be explained by the different audiences of the two media. As they argued, one could ‘choose’ to see a particular movie in a cinema on their own, while TV was watched by entire families (children included) in the confines of one’s private sphere.⁴⁶⁹ Moreover, the evaluation of naked scenes depended on age, education

⁴⁶⁷ Moszkowicz, ‘Veni, vidi...’, 11.

⁴⁶⁸ More on methodological challenges of using OBOP public opinion surveys as sources see D. Jarosz, ‘Sondaże Ośrodka Badań Opinii Publicznej (OBOP) w Latach 1957–1989. Refleksje Historyka’, *Polska 1944/45-1989. Studia i Materiały*, VI (2003), 65–95.

⁴⁶⁹ Public Opinion Research Centre (Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej, henceforth OBOP), ‘The viewers’ attitude to the presentation of nudity and sex in televisions programmes. GEAR 1973’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0221d.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 2.

level, and residence. Young, educated people from major cities expressed more favourable views on nudity in the public sphere, while the older generation and inhabitants of the countryside remained sceptical.⁴⁷⁰

What is worth noting is that in the polls the researchers asked explicitly about female nudity, leaving aside the question of male naked bodies and their acceptance. Again, even the research design reveals unspoken assumptions about gendered approaches towards nudity. The report noted that ‘the view of a naked woman both in the cinema and on television is much better accepted by men than women which is an understandable fact’.⁴⁷¹ 24% of interviewed women opposed naked scenes in cinema and as many as 45% rejected them in television. On the contrary, men were much more liberal in this regard: only 13% of male respondents opposed nudity in cinemas compared to 27% in television.⁴⁷² Such a disparity may have been ‘understandable’ for the researchers but calls for further explanation. On the one hand, one can argue that women are generally less likely to enjoy viewing female nudity in the same way as men do, as such images cater primarily to male heterosexual desires and objectify female bodies.⁴⁷³ On the other hand, women are traditionally expected to act as protectors of the sanctity of the ‘domestic hearth-fire’, especially in Poland.⁴⁷⁴ Therefore, their stronger opposition to naked scenes on TV compared to cinema can perhaps be explained by the ‘private’ character of the medium and its more direct influence on the youngest generation.

⁴⁷⁰ OBOP, ‘The viewers’ attitude to the presentation of nudity and sex in televisions programmes. GEAR 1973’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0221d.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 2.

⁴⁷¹ OBOP, ‘The viewers’ attitude to the presentation of nudity and sex in televisions programmes. GEAR 1973’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0221d.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 2.

⁴⁷² OBOP, ‘The viewers’ attitude to the presentation of nudity and sex in televisions programmes. GEAR 1973’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0221d.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 2.

⁴⁷³ See Eck, ‘Men Are Much Harder: Gendered Viewing of Nude Images’, 691–710.

⁴⁷⁴ See K. Stańczak-Wiślicz, ‘Od Neomatriarchatu Do Szpitala-Pomnika Matki Polki. Ideologie Macierzyństwa w Dyskursach Władzy i Opozycji w Polsce (1945-1989)’, in R.E. Hryciuk and E. Korolczuk (eds.), *Niebezpieczne Związki. Macierzyństwo, Ojcostwo i Polityka* (Warszawa, 2015), 45–74.

Another opinion poll conducted by OBOP in May 1971 focused on the evaluation of ‘harmful scenes’ in TV programmes.⁴⁷⁵ Again, the viewers’ opinions on nudity were much less conservative than one might have expected. The results presented in Table 4.1 suggest that nudity and erotic scenes were seen as less controversial and morally harmful than violence and ostentatious wealth. Not surprisingly, young people tended to be more liberal than the general audience when it came to nudity on screen. On the other hand, they were also slightly more likely to condemn violent scenes and representations of luxury. In both groups there was however a significant gap between the number of respondents who perceived representations of violence and luxury as dangerous and between the number of people who believed eroticism and nudity could harm young viewers as well.

Table 4.1 *Scenes or topics in TV programmes that can have especially harmful effect on young people*⁴⁷⁶

Types of topics:	Youth (16-24 years old) /N=266/	General TV audience /N=1440/
‘Robberies, banditry, scams’	40,6%	38,7%
‘Violence, tortures, murders, aggressive behaviour’	39,8%	35,5%
‘Wealth, luxury, expensive cars’	33,1%	26,7%
‘Extramarital affairs, unmarried people living together’	15,4%	18,0%
‘Erotic scenes’	13,5%	21,9%
‘Big-beat music stars: their behaviour and appearances’	11,3%	16,5%

⁴⁷⁵ OBOP, ‘Czy telewizja demoralizuje?, 1971’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0112.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 1.

⁴⁷⁶ OBOP, ‘Czy telewizja demoralizuje?, 1971’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0112.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 4.

'Nudity: too much exposed body'	6,8%	13,7%
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Another question in that survey asked about the preferred way of approaching love in TV programmes. Respondents could choose between the following options: 'love as a deep but sometimes difficult emotion', 'sentimental and romantic love', 'erotic love', 'love as mutual help in everyday life', and 'other answers or no opinion'. They could also decide which types of programmes they like to watch themselves and which they would recommend to young people. Most notably, young people were significantly more likely to declare that they enjoy watching erotic scenes (22,2% compared to 14,0% among general audience). Regardless of the age group respondents were unlikely to recommend erotic scenes to young people (this option was chosen by only 5,6% of young people and 3,5% of the general audience).⁴⁷⁷ Such numbers suggest that the young generation was slightly more liberal in their approach towards erotica and nudity on the TV screen, yet still perceived it as inappropriate for younger viewers. Alternatively – as the OBOP researchers suggested – young people were less 'prudish' when speaking about sexuality and thus they more easily admitted they enjoyed erotic scenes.⁴⁷⁸

The disparity between the two responses (individual preferences versus recommendations for young people) in both age groups seems to suggest that there was a notable gap between lived practices and normative proclamations. Although respondents enjoyed watching erotic scenes themselves, they would hesitate to admit it in the survey and most importantly, they would not consider them 'appropriate' for young

⁴⁷⁷ OBOP, 'Czy telewizja demoralizuje?', 1971', http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0112.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 6.

⁴⁷⁸ OBOP, 'Czy telewizja demoralizuje?', 1971', http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0112.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 6.

viewers. The OBOP researchers went as far as to conclude that ‘in light of these data, the much more numerous voices of those people who previously opposed the presentation of nudity (as such) in any film scenes presented on TV do not seem as powerful. They rather seem to be a stereotypical declaration of mores than a more profound conviction or moral evaluation’.⁴⁷⁹ Naturally, for many older and more religious respondents nudity in the public sphere was still a taboo.⁴⁸⁰ Erotic contents were still deemed ‘demoralising’ and dangerous for young viewers, who required special introduction into the matters of sex. But the OBOP reports seem to suggest that for a growing number of viewers nudity and erotica was increasingly a matter of context and appropriate presentation.

This hypothesis is further supported by data from the OBOP’s October 1988 poll in which respondents were asked about their perception of ‘graphic scenes’ [sceny drastyczne] in TV. A representative group of one thousand respondents aged over 15 from all over the country was interviewed.⁴⁸¹ Only 2% of respondents said that they were ‘often’ offended by sex scenes in the TV, while 84% of people interviewed said that they were offended ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ (24% and 60% respectively). This data was again contrasted with the evaluation of ‘brutal scenes’ and the results indicated that viewers were slightly more inclined to be offended by scenes of violence or aggression than erotica.⁴⁸² When asked about their evaluation of the TV programme, 31% of the interviewees said that they wanted to see erotic scenes on the TV more frequently and

⁴⁷⁹ OBOP, ‘The viewers’ attitude to the presentation of nudity and sex in televisions programmes. GEAR 1973’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0221d.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 4.

⁴⁸⁰ OBOP, ‘The viewers’ attitude to the presentation of nudity and sex in televisions programmes. GEAR 1973’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0221d.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 3–4.

⁴⁸¹ OBOP, ‘Sceny drastyczne w telewizji, kwiecień 1989’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0886.pdf (5 Jan. 2021).

⁴⁸² ⁴⁸² OBOP, ‘Sceny drastyczne w telewizji, kwiecień 1989’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0886.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 1.

only 10% agreed that no such scenes should be aired at all (compared to 4% and 40% respectively when asked about scenes with ‘vulgar language’).

As the above responses suggest, many viewers wanted to see more erotic scenes in the TV programme. Another question in the same survey asked about a hypothetical situation in which the television station had a ‘particularly valuable film’ at its disposal but it contained erotic scenes (see Table 4.2). The vast majority of the respondents agreed that the film should not be aired without some previous warnings/editing (only 6% wanted it to be treated ‘like all other films’). Yet not many interviewees agreed that censorship should intervene either (5% believed this kind of a film should be banned and 10% wanted the erotic scenes to be censored). Over half of the respondents believed that such films should be available for adults, either by being labelled as such (53%) or by being aired after 10 p.m. (63%). One fourth of the respondents also believed that such films were acceptable if accompanied by an appropriate preface (the survey does not specify what type of a preface, but we may assume that the researcher had some kind of an expert lecture or a discussion of invited guests in mind).⁴⁸³

Table 4.2⁴⁸⁴

What should the TV do if they possess a particularly valuable film, but it contains hardcore erotic scenes?	
It should be aired, like all other films	6%
It should include a special preface	24%
It should be marked as ‘for adults only’	53%
It should be aired only at night	63%
The sex scenes should be removed/cut out	10%
The film should not be aired at all	5%
Difficult to say	2%

⁴⁸³ OBOP, ‘Sceny drastyczne w telewizji, kwiecień 1989’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0886.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 2.

⁴⁸⁴ OBOP, ‘Sceny drastyczne w telewizji, kwiecień 1989’, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0886.pdf (5 Jan. 2021), 2.

There are obviously limitations to using this type of opinion poll as an indicator of changing social attitudes. First, unfortunately the questions asked in 1971 and 1988 surveys differed significantly, so it is impossible to compare them directly. Moreover, we do not have access to the raw data but only to the reports written and calculated by the researchers. They could have manipulated the responses (un)intentionally, to produce results desired by their superiors or simply fitting their vision of the society. For example, the very question in Table 4.2 suggests that an erotic film needed to have special value in order to be considered. For many of the respondents such a framing of the question may have been a signal that if they disagreed with showing erotic scenes on TV they would appear ‘unmodern’ or ‘uncultured’ in the eyes of interviewers.

However, even considering the possibility of skewed results, what seems clear is that by the end of the 1980s the vast majority of the TV viewers accepted erotic scenes in particular contexts or with appropriate warnings. This complements the data from 1971 and suggests that the process of growing acceptance for nudity and erotica in the public sphere that started then continued until the end of the state-socialist period. Moreover, by the end of the 1980s people grew significantly more likely to openly declare their own interest in watching erotic scenes. If only indirectly, this suggests a relaxation of social taboos surrounding sexuality. Thanks to the work of sexologists and educators, the palette of acceptable attitudes had widened and a new generation of adults had been supplied with significantly richer language of speaking about sexuality.

From ‘Venus’ to Commercial Erotica

The growing acceptance of erotica in the public sphere was undoubtedly supported by the visuals that flourished in popular magazines. Many started publishing

female nudes already in the 1970s with the notable, but not surprising, exception of women's magazines like *Przyjaciółka* [*Girlfriend*] or *Kobieta i Życie* [*Woman and Life*].⁴⁸⁵ By the second half of the decade nude female bodies seemed no longer to have been controversial and as journalists claimed, even *Playboy* could now make it through customs control.⁴⁸⁶ However, the domestic production of erotica was still in its nascent stage. Nude photographs in the press were either reprints of 'Venus' photographs or 'cut outs' from the Western press. Yet, with the growing popularity of nude photography, new types of visuals started to emerge.

The 'boom' in amateur nude photography and its potential dangers were portrayed in the 1974 TV series *S.O.S.*⁴⁸⁷ The series follows a radio journalist Rafał Kostroń as he uncovers an elaborate criminal scheme and discovers that his daughter, Elżbieta, is involved in it. In episode five Kostroń discovers that a group of three men were blackmailing young women using pornographic pictures. Women were first invited to the studio by Marek, Elżbieta's boyfriend. He introduced himself as an amateur photographer looking for models for the photographs that he wanted to submit for the 'Venus 73' competition. Then, Marek seduced his models and photographed them with a hidden camera when having sex. They were later blackmailed by his colleagues to take part in further photo shoots. The photos were sent abroad in Elżbieta's mother's suitcase (as an acclaimed doctor she travelled to the West to give lectures) and the money was deposited on a foreign bank account.⁴⁸⁸ After being captured by the Citizens' Militia Marek explains his motivations:

⁴⁸⁵ B. Popielski, 'Pornografia w świetle prawa', *Tygodnik Kulturalny: Miłość, Małżeństwo, Rodzina* (18 Aug. 1974), 1, 4.

⁴⁸⁶ J. Janowski, 'Porno - moda czy zjawisko kulturowe?', *Tygodnik Demokratyczny* (8 Sept. 1974), 13.

⁴⁸⁷ *S.O.S* (1974–1975), dir. J. Morgenstern (release date: 27 February 1975)

⁴⁸⁸ *S.O.S: Venus 73*, Episode 5 (1974–1975), dir. J. Morgenstern.

We started decently. [...] We took artistic photographs. But then, the sexual revolution came, and we had to adjust. Do you know how difficult it is to produce good pornography? You have to be like Einstein and have the best stock.⁴⁸⁹ But where to recruit it?⁴⁹⁰

In the next episode we learn that his career began from copying Danish pornographic magazines. Marek also mentions that not all women were perceived as good candidates for his pornographic images. They needed to be young and not ‘vulgar’. Their business partners wanted models to be ‘more innocent, to look as if they were ashamed of what they were doing’.⁴⁹¹

As the last episode of *S.O.S.* reveals, the photographs have never left the country and in fact they were being taken over by another character, Hubert Stańczyk, who later kidnapped, sexually assaulted, and killed some of the models. When the truth is revealed, he kidnaps Elżbieta and tries to flee to Denmark and claim political asylum there. Fortunately, thanks to the cleverness of the Citizens’ Militia officers his motorboat is stopped and Stańczyk is brought to justice.⁴⁹²

S.O.S. was not a very successful TV production and it has been largely forgotten.⁴⁹³ Yet, it aptly showcases the moral panics and ambiguities surrounding the surge in amateur nude photography in the first half of the 1970s. As *S.O.S.* seems to argue, although nude photography in itself is not dangerous, its noble goals can easily be manipulated by people wanting to profiteer from young women’s naivety and innocence. Moreover, the TV series explores moral uncertainties caused by the wave of ‘sexual

⁴⁸⁹ This is a clear reference to the term ‘trade in live stock’, a Polish equivalent of ‘white slavery’ or ‘human trafficking’.

⁴⁹⁰ *S.O.S.: Venus 73*, Episode 5 (1974–1975), dir. J. Morgenstern.

⁴⁹¹ *S.O.S.: Twarz mordercy*, Episode 6 (1974–1975), dir. J. Morgenstern.

⁴⁹² *S.O.S.: Pętla*, Episode 7 (1974–1975), dir. J. Morgenstern.

⁴⁹³ For example, *S.O.S.* is not available in the archival programmes section on the Polish public television website (vod.tvp.pl) while other series and films directed by Morgenstern have undergone digital remastering and are now available on-line (*Polskie drogi, Stawka większa niż życie*).

revolution' reaching Poland. New, relaxed sexual behaviours are a manifestation of the 'Westernisation' of Polish society, especially the youth. Yet, there is a moral lesson to be learned as such behaviours are portrayed as dangerous and closely related to sexual abuse and violence. Finally, the evaluation of transnational transfers of (sexual) goods is also ambiguous. Danish pornographic magazines lead young people astray, Polish women are sexually exploited for the profit of Western clients, and the culprits plan to flee to the West, where they expect to be free from prosecution. Thus, the only defense of the moral integrity of Polish women is Polish men, and especially the brave officers of the Citizens' Militia, whose moral compass remains unmoved by either Western influences or greed.

As we shall see in Chapter Six, the transnational circulation of pornographic images is crucial to understanding the development of sexual imagery in the late state-socialist period. The example of *S.O.S.* is also an early example of how the erotic capital of Polish women came to be observed and defined. Yet, there are other examples that suggest that erotic contents started to be used as a marketing strategy around the same time. The idea that female sexual attractiveness could be converted into tangible economic profits was naturally first not developed in 1970s Poland.⁴⁹⁴ Neither was this strategy employed systematically and universally, at least at the beginning. Yet, the phenomenon of sexualised advertising in the realities of seemingly socialist economy undoubtedly calls for further investigation.

The source material on this type of advertising in late state socialism is rather scant and difficult to obtain.⁴⁹⁵ Likewise, there has been very little research on state-

⁴⁹⁴ J. Sivulka, 'Historical and Psychological Perspectives of the Erotic Appeal in Advertising', in T. Reichert and J. Lambiase (eds.), *Sex in Advertising: Perspectives on the Erotic Appeal* (Mahwah, New Jersey, 2003), 39–63.

⁴⁹⁵ My main sources come from Internet archives: press agencies (Agencja Forum), Archiwum Allegro (Polish counterpart of E-Bay) and on-line design stores (Patyna.pl and Yestersen.pl). Additionally, some

socialist advertising and virtually no scholarly literature on the use of nude/erotic images in marketing of that period.⁴⁹⁶ Even if researchers acknowledge that some forms of advertising indeed existed in the realities of the planned economy, they still do not notice the use of nude images in the marketing strategies of state-socialist companies.⁴⁹⁷ Therefore, this section does not have ambitions to provide any overarching argument about the use of erotic capital in the advertising of that period. Rather, it simply explores visual evidence in an attempt to better understand the context in which the female naked body could be used in advertising various products and how this changed over time. Hopefully, this is the first step toward writing the history of sexualised advertising under state socialism.

The first examples I found of nude photography used for advertising consumer products were in the 1970 issues of *Perspektywy* (see Fig. 4.9 and 4.10).⁴⁹⁸ As already mentioned, the magazine attempted to familiarise its readers with global issues, covering in addition to politics a wide range of topics such as popular culture, fashion, leisure time, and even sexual education.⁴⁹⁹ The goal was to educate the reader and simulate the experience of ‘Western’ illustrated magazines. This was greatly supported by the colourful visuals included in every issue of the magazine – which was still very rare at

of the advertisements were printed in magazines and I managed to locate a number of them in libraries. My research in the University of Warsaw Library’s special collections of Social Life Documents did not return any useful results.

⁴⁹⁶ See P.H. Patterson, ‘Truth Half Told: Finding the Perfect Pitch for Advertising and Marketing in Socialist Yugoslavia, 1950-1991’, *Enterprise and Society*, 4/2 (2003), 179–225. On the history of Polish advertising under state socialism see A. Jakóbczak, *Transformersi: Superbohaterowie Polskiej Reklamy 80.-90.*, (Kraków, 2018); J.E. Perczak, *Polska Reklama Prasowa w Latach 1945-1989: O Reklamie, Której Nie Było?* (Warszawa, 2010); T. Lachowski, *Permanentny Remanent: Polska Grafika Reklamowa w Czasach PRL-U* (Warszawa, 2006).

⁴⁹⁷ J.E. Perczak, ‘Polish Socialist Advertising in 1945 – 1989: Status and Sources of and Outlooks for the Research’, *Media Biznes Kultura*, 2 (2020), 131–48.

⁴⁹⁸ Fig. 4.9 and 4.10, ‘Pollena-Lechia reklama kremu do opalania Sombbrero i olejku Solex’, *Perspektywy* (31 July 1970), 28; ‘Pollena-Lechia. Reklama mydła Fascinata’, *Perspektywy* (11 Dec. 1970), 3.

⁴⁹⁹ See for instance M. Wislocka, ‘Wychowanie seksualne’, *Perspektywy* (24 Apr. 1970), 24, 33.

the beginning of the 1970s. Not every newspaper could afford to print illustrations in colour and even if they did, the quality of print and paper was very low. Therefore, it is not surprising that *Perspektywy* was one of the first outlets where large, coloured advertisements could be published. As it turns out, the use of colour print also encouraged a new type of advertising photography.

The first image from July 1970 advertised sunscreen creams and oils produced by Pollena-Lechia, a Poznań-based cosmetics factory (Fig. 4.9). In the foreground we can see a bottle of the cosmetic. What is really drawing the attention of the viewer however is the beautiful woman sunbathing naked in the background. The quality of print and the distant perspective of the photography makes it difficult to decide for certain if she is naked or just dressed in a beige swimming suit. Yet, what matters is the first impression that one gets when browsing through the magazine. And this impression is that of a naked female body used in advertising. In the case of the second advertisement (Fig. 4.10) there is no doubt that the model is photographed naked, only with a towel casually wrapped around her buttocks (but leaving their upper part exposed). She is photographed from behind with foam on her body, clearly having a shower. The advert persuades the consumer that Pollena-Lechia's soap 'Facinata' will ensure they have the 'great pleasure of washing with luxury soaps'.⁵⁰⁰

At first, nude advertising seemed to be reserved for cosmetics companies such as Pollena. Yet, by 1973 other enterprises also followed suit. State-owned companies such as United Fishing Enterprises (Zjednoczenie Gospodarki Rybnej, henceforth: ZGR) or

⁵⁰⁰ 'Pollena-Lechia. Reklama mydła Fascinata', *Perspektywy* (11 Dec. 1970), 3.

Fat Industry Enterprises (Zakłady Przemysłu Tłuszczowego, henceforth ZPT)⁵⁰¹ employed nude images to appeal to consumers of both sexes (see Fig. 4.11, 4.12).⁵⁰² In this case the role of the advertisements may have been to redirect consumer attention from scarce products such as meat towards substitutes like fish. Similarly, promoting margarine may have been a way to encourage consumption of new types of fats to relieve the pressure on the meat industry.⁵⁰³ Naked bodies were also used in advertisements of the cotton industry (Fig. 4.13 and 4.14)⁵⁰⁴, promising colourful dreams with figures of reclining female nudes wrapped in cotton cloths.

On the one hand, nude advertisements with attractive young women were likely intended to attract the attention of male customers. As there was not much choice on the market, it was not about competition between different brands but more about creating a new type of modern socialist consumer and imitating lifestyles associated with advertising.⁵⁰⁵ By emulating the visual style of capitalist marketing, the companies may have wanted to make the consumers feel more 'Western' and 'modern' by using this type of products. However, at least in a couple of examples the advertisements included a message targeted directly at a female audience, and not only in their capacity as consumers and suppliers of their households. By showing a picture of an attractive young

⁵⁰¹ It should be noted here that I did not manage to locate any physical copy of the advertisement, so I have to rely on the images that I found on-line. Although it is unlikely, one should entertain the possibility that the image is not a true advertisement of the ZPT.

⁵⁰² Fig. 4.11, 'Fish dishes are your silhouette's best chance', United Fishing Enterprises (Zjednoczenie Gospodarki Rybnej) 1973 advertisement. Author's Collection; Fig. 4.12, 'In the past it was corset that improved the silhouette, today its vegetable butter' (Oil Industry Enterprises, Zakłady Przemysłu Tłuszczowego, 1970s?); 'Reklamy prasowe z czasów PRL' (5 Apr. 2009), <https://www.zeberka.pl/lifestyle/reklamy-prasowe-z-czasow-prl/> (8 Jan. 2021).

⁵⁰³ See M. Mazurek and M. Hilton, 'Consumerism, Solidarity and Communism: Consumer Protection and the Consumer Movement in Poland', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42/2 (2007), 328.

⁵⁰⁴ Fig. 4.13, (Yestersen.pl), 'Dreams in cotton sheets are always colourful', 1973; Fig. 4.14, (Patyna.pl), 'Cotton for the summer', *Ty i Ja*, 3 (1973)

⁵⁰⁵ J. Zalewska, 'Consumer Revolution in People's Poland: Technologies in Everyday Life and the Negotiation between Custom and Fashion (1945-1980)', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 17/2 (2017), 321–39.

woman, the advertisers encouraged female consumers to compare their bodies with the model's. Then, they offered an immediate solution to their complexes: 'fish dishes' or 'margarine' as a recipe for a body as attractive as in the advertisement.

These early advertisements are far from overtly sexual. They play with convention and obscure naked bodies rather than reveal them. As a result, nudity presented in the pictures closely follows the criteria outlined by 'Venus' exhibitions. Nakedness needs to be justified by the context – models are photographed in cotton bed sheets, a natural environment, a bathroom. Female bodies are rarely exposed in full; nudity is more of a suggestion than a direct representation. As usual in advertising, women's bodies need to conform to general beauty standards – they are always young and of 'ideal' size, neither too fat nor too thin. The femininity pictured in the advertisements is also quite conventional – women are portrayed as delicate, subtle creatures, unaware of the photographer's attention.

Such frameworks of visual representation are not the only thing that connects these advertisements with the 'Venus' exhibitions. Much more telling is the personal connection as some of the pictures analysed in this chapter were authored by Władysław Pawelec and Jan Raczyński.⁵⁰⁶ They both participated in 'Venus' exhibits as contestants. Pawelec received high praises for his cycles *Flirt* and *Monika*.⁵⁰⁷ Raczyński's photographs were included in all three exhibitions and in 1973 he received a Golden KTF Medal for his black-and-white work 'Punkt widzenia' [Point of view]. Perhaps as a result of this success a year afterwards he was commissioned to take photographs for the

⁵⁰⁶ More on Władysław Pawelec see K. Sulej, 'Koci Koci Łapci', *Exclusiv*, 90–91 (2010), 48–53.

⁵⁰⁷ See Głowacz and Jesionkowski, 'Trzy Lata...', 60; J. Garztecki, 'Monika', *Perspektywy* (8 Mar. 1974), 30.

advertising calendar of Pollena, a state-owned cosmetics company.⁵⁰⁸ A couple of years later, the very same company hired Pawelec to produce a similar calendar (Fig. 4.17 and 4.18).⁵⁰⁹ In the 1980s Pollena commissioned Raczyński to produce at least one other advertising campaign, including posters with a naked woman standing on a beach (Fig. 4.16).⁵¹⁰ If we look closer at the pictures, we may notice that both the poster and Pawelec's calendar were printed in English. This is because they were commissioned by Ciech Pollena, a chemistry industry export company (Centrala Handlu Zagranicznego: Foreign Trade Organisation, henceforth CHZ). They were intended for non-Polish speaking audiences, perhaps as a form of marketing among foreign contractors. The erotic capital of Polish women was thus to be used for attracting foreign clients and promoting the state-socialist economy.

Again, the new use of nudity in the public discourse of state-socialist Poland needed to have its justification, to avoid being confused with Western advertising. In 1974 Garztecki wrote in *Perspektywy* that advertising cosmetics with a female nude was a 'logical motif'. He praised Jan Raczyński for his photographs in Pollena's calendar and made a distinction between reasonable and 'far-fetched' uses of the nude. According to him, in Western marketing strategies, nudity was so omnipresent that it became boring. However, in the Polish case nude photographs in advertisements of beauty products could be justified. As the products offered a promise of beauty, an advert featuring a young, beautiful, naked woman was by all means appropriate.⁵¹¹ Apart from offering a positive

⁵⁰⁸ J. Garztecki, 'Kobieta jako temat', *Perspektywy* (1 Nov. 1974), 30. Unfortunately, I did not manage to locate a copy of this calendar.

⁵⁰⁹ Fig. 4.17 and 4.18, (Archiwum Allegro), 'Ciech Pollena advertising calendar', author Władysław Pawelec (1979/80)

⁵¹⁰ Fig. 4.16, (Yestersen.pl) 'Pollena Cosmetics', author Jan Raczyński (1980s)

⁵¹¹ Garztecki, 'Kobieta...', 30.

review of a fellow photographer's work, Garztecki's article also presents an interesting reconceptualization of nude advertising for the purposes of the state-socialist economy. If only indirectly, he suggested that in the right framing female nudity could be appreciated not only in an art gallery, but also in a more commercial context.

A similar process of reconceptualization occurred in the KTF's strategy as well. Although at first 'Venus' organisers wanted to distance themselves from commercial uses of nudity, it seems that the popular demand for this type of visuals could not be ignored. Back in 1979 Klimczak categorically rejected any suggestions of commercialising 'Venus' and refused his permission for reprinting the photographs in the form of postcards or calendars.⁵¹² Just five years later, in 1984, he was not so strict. After yet another burglary he admitted that the demand for nudes was very high. Although he still opposed 'commercial' nudity, he agreed that some methods of popularising 'Venus' photographs could be useful. As Klimczak confessed, the KTF attempted to print out their own nude calendars in cooperation with the National Publishing Agency (Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, henceforth KAW) but the project met with organisational obstacles.⁵¹³

In fact, problems with publishing a nude calendar were not the only challenge that the KTF faced in the mid-1980s. By that time it was clear that the fame and popularity of 'Venus' was not set in stone. First, the exhibition was hit hard by the economic crisis which prevented the organisers from printing catalogues and limited the exhibit's scale. Second, 'Venus' was also badly affected by the political turmoil following the

⁵¹² Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, Zawaniecki, 'Prawda...', k. 2.

⁵¹³ Warsaw, AAN, TVP, 2/2514/0/-/26/1128, K. Wójcik, '„Venus” to potęga. Rozmowa z Władysławem Klimczakiem', *Perspektywy* (8 June 1984).

introduction of Martial Law in December 1981. It limited the international scope of the exhibit as borders were closed, Polish events were boycotted on the international arena and the FIAP withdrew its honorary patronage over the exhibition.⁵¹⁴ However, ‘Venus’ lost its social impact also because much more powerful contenders in the field of erotic visuals entered the scene.

At that time ‘Venus’ was no longer the only supplier of nude pictures to Polish audiences. In fact, in the mid-1980s there were many other sources from which one could obtain nude photographs, often much more explicitly sexual than visuals displayed at ‘Venus’. Pornography was easily available at open-air market [bazar] stands and the circulation of videotapes was ever-growing.⁵¹⁵ Nudity was openly discussed and visualised thanks to the ‘boom’ in naked sunbathing and the birth of the organised naturist movement.⁵¹⁶ In such a social landscape, nude artistic photography ceased to be the only venue through which erotica could be accessed and legitimised in the public sphere. A completely new, commercial erotica was entering the scene and it was there to stay for longer, long after the Iron Curtain had disappeared. The following three chapters explore these phenomena in greater detail.

⁵¹⁴ J. Jackowski, ‘Naprawdę jaka jesteś nie wie nikt...’, *Foto*, 11–12 (1984), 348; J. Jackowski, ‘Akty, fakty i kontakty’, *Foto*, 7 (1986), 208.

⁵¹⁵ Moszkowicz, ‘Veni, vidi...’, 11.

⁵¹⁶ Jackowski, ‘Akty...’, 208.

Chapter Five: From 'Kittens' to 'Playtboy'. Sexuality and Entertainment in People's Poland

As the three previous chapters explored, expert discourses and photographic art were two powerful forces behind the mainstreaming of female nudity in the public sphere as well as behind the renegotiation of boundaries of acceptable sexual representation in state-socialist Poland. By focusing on issues of sexual 'upbringing' as well as the artistic frameworks of representing nudity in photography, experts and journalists argued for a liberalisation of popular attitudes toward sex, albeit within certain tightly-controlled boundaries.

The limits within which socialist sexual liberalisation could take place were clearly set in the course of these debates. First, it had to conform to the heteropatriarchal structures of sexual desire, remaining within the boundaries of monogamous heterosexual relationship and emphasising male agency and gaze. Second, the areas in which such liberalisation could manifest itself were also clearly limited. While art or expert publications were considered the appropriate venues in which new approaches to sexuality could be discussed, criticism was directed toward more 'entertaining' uses of sexuality, for example in films, striptease shows or the popular press. As the examples of nudes in the popular press analysed in Chapter Four seem to suggest, at least in the early 1970s publishers still needed to have an 'excuse' to show naked female bodies and avoid accusations of pornography. Hence, the popularity of artistic nudes rose significantly over the course of the decade, with 'Venus' exhibitions in Cracow being the most prominent example of this trend.

However, already in the 1970s one could clearly notice several frictions in this discourse on the socialist ‘Third Way’ toward sexual liberation (as explored in Chapter Two). Even though sexologists and educators lamented the low level of Polish sexual mores, their audiences were not interested in education, at least not in the first instance. This chapter argues that in the last two decades of state socialism Poland witnessed a significant democratisation and popularisation of sexual desires. What was once confined only to illegal pornographic publications or elite cultural events became a part of everyday leisure and entertainment, easily accessible through the state-controlled media and in public venues such as restaurants and clubs. Paradoxically, it was voyeurism and entertainment, not sexual education, that came to dominate discussions of sexuality in the 1970s and 1980s. The goal of this chapter is to explore the origins of this paradox.

In her study of American striptease culture Katherine Liepe-Levinson notes that ‘strip shows are strange cultural artifacts because they both uphold and break traditional female and male sex roles and other related cultural rubrics [...]’.⁵¹⁷ Perhaps this strangeness is even more striking in the case of state-socialist Poland, where sexual entertainment fit neither economically (as Marxism rejected commercial sex in principle) nor culturally (because of the traditional conservatism of the Polish society).⁵¹⁸ Therefore, sexual commerce symbolised by striptease shows can offer insight into the paradoxes of state-socialist entertainment as well as the transformation that it underwent between the 1950s and the 1980s.

⁵¹⁷ K. Liepe-Levinson, *Strip Show: Performances of Gender and Desire* (London, 2002), 6.

⁵¹⁸ See J. Weeks, ‘Un-/Re-Productive Maternal Labor: Marxist Feminism and Chapter Fifteen of Marx’s Capital’, *Rethinking Marxism*, 23/1 (2011), 31–40.

This chapter explores how erotic contents came to be seen as a form of entertainment in state-socialist Poland. To fully understand the origins of the phenomenon, I first focus on the period of the so-called October Thaw of 1956-1957 to analyse how sexuality could be used to narrate the political and cultural liberalisation of the post-Stalinist period. It is no coincidence that the first post-war beauty pageants and striptease shows were organised in that period. Then, the chapter investigates the cultural history of striptease from the late-1950s up to the end of state socialism to argue that the changing attitudes toward erotic dance epitomised changing approaches toward sex and consumption. Finally, the chapter focuses on various appropriations of female sexuality in the entertainment industry of the last decade of PRL, namely in TV shows and the first soft-pornographic magazines targeted at male readers. Contrary to the popular stereotype, the sexual revolution did not begin in Poland in 1989. As this chapter demonstrates, both the fascination with pornography and eroticisation of popular culture, so often associated with the 1990s, had their roots in the state-socialist entertainment industry.

‘Sexual Thaw’?

In February 1957 the satirical weekly *Karuzela* published the caricature *Parliamentary strip tease* (see Fig. 5.1) on its cover.⁵¹⁹ In the picture, an attractive woman named ‘Prawda’ (Truth) takes off pieces of clothing with code-names such as ‘professional secrecy’, ‘secret’, and ‘top secret’. The subtitle reads ‘The truth is undressing herself in the eyes of the nation’ which was a clear reference to the political

⁵¹⁹ Fig. 5.1, S.J. Gratkowski [Ibis], ‘Sejmowy Strip-Tease’, *Karuzela* (27 Feb. 1957), 1.

discussions spurred by the so-called October thaw of 1956.⁵²⁰ As Chapter Two already explored, the mid-1950s opened up new areas of public debate, including on previously taboo issues of sexuality. Abortion became legal and sex could be discussed as something more than just procreation in the service of rebuilding the Polish nation. However, de-Stalinisation also implied a return to the patriarchal gender order in which women were supposed to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers, not assert their sexual freedoms.⁵²¹ For example, discussions about the pathologies of ‘prostitution’ clearly demonstrate that women who transgressed traditional boundaries of sexual behaviour were perceived as deviant and dangerous.⁵²² Women’s sexual respectability seemed to be the key to restoring the gender order allegedly destroyed by the Stalinist modernisation project. Yet, not all sex was deemed evil and in need of control. Exactly at the same time images of young attractive ladies flooded the newspapers and cinema screens. The new road toward socialism pronounced by Władysław Gomułka required a redefinition of popular and consumer culture. Thus, in the midst of the political Thaw ‘kittens’ and ‘strippers’ entered the scene.

In the second half of the 1950s ‘kittens’ became a visual manifestation of the political and social de-Stalinisation. The word had its origins in the Stalinist period and at first denoted female partners of ‘bikini boys’ [bikiniarz], members of youth counterculture fascinated with the West and famous for their ties depicting a scantily clad woman in a bikini swimsuit.⁵²³ Their girlfriends, ‘kittens’ [kociaki] followed Western

⁵²⁰ More on Poland in 1956 see P. Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland, 1956* (Washington, D.C. : Stanford, Calif., 2009).

⁵²¹ Kałwa, ‘Post-Stalinist Backlash in Poland | Backlash Post-Stalinien En Pologne’, 151–60.

⁵²² See A. Dobrowolska, ‘Social Pathology or Freelance Occupation? The Debates on Prostitution and Sex Work in State-Socialist Poland’, in S. Dolinsek, M. Saryusz-Wolska (eds.) *Histories of Prostitution in Central and South-Eastern Europe* (Paderborn, 2021), forthcoming.

⁵²³ K. Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949-56* (Ithaca, 2013), 142–5.

fashion styles, occupied themselves with their appearances and sought fun and entertainment, not fulfilment as factory workers. Both of these models of behaviours were criticised in the early 1950s propaganda, but they experienced a sudden revival and rehabilitation once the cultural constraints of the Stalinist period were lifted. As Małgorzata Fidelis and Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz point out, contrary to the Stalinist role models of female shock workers, after the Thaw ‘kittens’ became the ultimate symbol of womanhood defined by their beauty and erotic appeal. Thus, they symbolised the return to the ‘natural’ order, in which women were to be defined through their traditional gender roles and sexuality.⁵²⁴ As Chapter Four already explored, images of attractive young women flooded the pages of popular newspapers. For instance, from 1957 onwards *Przekrój* published ‘kitten crosswords’, which always featured a photograph of an attractive woman.⁵²⁵ Many magazines regularly published such photographs on their covers as a form of advertising and raising their readership numbers.⁵²⁶

Therefore, the ‘sexual thaw’ of 1956-7 manifested itself in the constant assessment of women’s beauty and sexual appeal. Many magazines organised photographic contests, for example ‘the most beautiful student smile’ (*Po Prostu*, 1955) or ‘beautiful girls to the screen’ (*Film*, 1958).⁵²⁷ Such a fascination with women’s bodies is also clearly noticeable in the documentary *Sopot 1957*, as the camera observes female

⁵²⁴ K. Stańczak-Wiślicz et. al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945-1989. Nowoczesność, Równouprawnienie, Komunizm* (Kraków, 2020), 424–5.

⁵²⁵ I. Kurz, *Twarze w Tłumie: Wizerunki Bohaterów Wyobraźni Zbiorowej w Kulturze Polskiej Lat 1955-1969* (Izabelin, 2005), 133.

⁵²⁶ J. Kochanowski, *Rewolucja Międzypaździernikowa: Polska 1956-1957* (Kraków, 2017), 68.

⁵²⁷ M. Fidelis, ‘Are You a Modern Girl? Consumer Culture and Young Women in 1960s Poland’, in S. Penn and J. Massino (eds.), *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (New York, 2009), 176. Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce*, 428–30.

vacationers in skimpy swimming suits. The commentary clearly suggests voyeuristic purpose of the images:

Sopot is famous for its beautiful views [the camera shows a young sunbather rubbing her body with a towel – A.D.]. What a landscape! [zoom on a woman brushing her hair – A.D.] What a location! [zoom on a woman sunbathing in a deck chair – A.D.]. Young researchers are conducting studies in the field of legology [zoom on young men looking at the legs of women who pass them – A.D.]⁵²⁸

Interestingly, later part of the documentary features footage from the Miss Polonia beauty pageant which took place in Sopot in 1957. Young women in swimming suits parade in front of the room full of enthusiastically cheering male crowd.

The first unofficial beauty pageant was organised at the beach in Sopot during the Jazz Festival in summer 1956. The event attracted large crowds of observers and other Polish cities soon followed the suit.⁵²⁹ It is hardly a coincidence that the rare beauty pageants in state-socialist Poland were organised first during the Thaw period. The only two editions of Miss Polonia organised in the 1950s took place in 1957 (Sopot) and in 1958 (Warsaw). Once the Thaw faded away, the enthusiasm for such events on the side of cultural authorities lessened and no countrywide beauty pageants were organised until 1983.⁵³⁰ As the second part of this chapter argues, the revival of Miss Polonia contest in the 1980s was also not accidental as it reflected the post-Martial Law cultural politics of the communist regime and the new approach toward sexualised entertainment.

As the images of ‘kittens’ and beauty pageants contestants dominated in the mid-1950s media discussions of femininity, the importance of female sex appeal and erotic capital in the entertainment industry also grew noticeably. If we were to look for the roots

⁵²⁸ *Sopot 1957* (1957), dir. J. Hoffman, E. Skórzyński.

⁵²⁹ Kochanowski, *Rewolucja Międzypaździernikowa*, 72–7.

⁵³⁰ Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce*, 430–31.

of the visual sexual revolution that Chapters Three and Four explored, the ‘sexual thaw’ of the mid-1950s would be the place to start the search. In the voyeuristic atmosphere fuelled by the press publications, feature films, and documentaries, striptease performances came to symbolise the new freedoms brought by the destalinisation.⁵³¹ Although the role of striptease in narrating the Thaw requires further research which is beyond the scope of this thesis, one thing can be said for certain: 1957 was the year when this new type of entertainment entered the popular imagination for good.

At first the motif of striptease recurred in satirical poems, caricatures and even cabaret performances, but there were very few attempts to actually organise a striptease show, probably due to the lack of eager performers. As Jerzy Kochanowski argues the first ‘proper’ striptease show took place in the Warsaw club Stodoła [the barn] in May 1957.⁵³² The striptease was performed as a part of a cabaret show by a model from the Academy of Fine Arts and provoked fierce discussions in the press.⁵³³ I managed to find some press announcements suggesting that striptease dances were a part of cabaret shows also in other Polish cities, for example in Gdańsk, possibly even earlier than the Stodoła performance.⁵³⁴ The January 1957 Polish Newsreel report from the carnival ball in Warsaw also featured a short striptease scene, performed behind a white curtain (so that the viewers could only see the silhouette of the strippers, not their actual nudity).⁵³⁵ In all of the abovementioned examples, striptease was presented satirically, not as a serious form of entertainment. Perhaps it was exactly the convention of cabaret performance that

⁵³¹ J. Kochanowski, *Rewolucja Międzypaździernikowa*, 70–1.

⁵³² Kochanowski, *Rewolucja Międzypaździernikowa*, 71.

⁵³³ Kocz, ‘Letnie sprawy’, *Dziennik Łódzki* (29 June 1957), 3; J. Szeląg, ‘Nasza kronika’, *Świat* (23 June 1957), 3. See also KTT, ‘Nowa Sybilla czyli jak sobie pościesz...’, *Nowa Kultura* (19 May 1957), 6.

⁵³⁴ *Dziennik Bałtycki* (16 Apr. 1957), 4

⁵³⁵ PKF, 6/57, ‘Gałganiarze’, Repozytorium Cyfrowe Filmoteki Narodowej, <http://www.repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/10324> (19 Apr. 2021).

enabled the organisers to introduce striptease into the public venues. However, as it quickly turned out, even if the organisers designed the shows as satirical performances, the audiences were in the first place concerned with the erotic and voyeuristic potential of the show.

‘Where There Is Entertainment, There Is Strip-Tease’⁵³⁶

The next stages in the history of Polish striptease remain somehow obscure. In 1959 the Łódź weekly *Odgłosy* printed a short satirical report from the striptease show in the Savoy restaurant. If only indirectly, this suggests that by the end of the 1950s this form of night-time entertainment was already present in some of the major cities.⁵³⁷ However, the true peak in popularity of strip dances was yet to come. Later journalistic reports mention that striptease entered Polish bars and restaurants in the 1960s as a strategy to boost profits for state-owned venues.⁵³⁸ Interestingly, although I did not manage to find any direct discussion of this type of performances in the archival documents of the Warsaw Entertainment Enterprise (Stołeczne Przedsiębiorstwo Imprez Estradowych, henceforth Stołeczna Estrada), there are some more subtle clues. For instance, the 1965 protocol mentions that among other accessories and outfits destroyed because of their bad condition were two striptease costumes.⁵³⁹ Interestingly, the documents are rather inconsistent in spelling the word ‘striptease’ as it is first called ‘striptess’ and later ‘streptess’. If only indirectly, this suggests that although striptease

⁵³⁶ E. Berberyusz, ‘Rozpruć lalkę’, *Kultura* (21-28 Dec. 1975), 13

⁵³⁷ S. Michałowski, ‘Szlagier tygodnia’, *Odgłosy* (15 Mar. 1959), 6.

⁵³⁸ M. Czarnecki, ‘6 minut nagiej Pauli’, *Profile*, 6 (1986). 16.

⁵³⁹ Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie (State Archives in Warsaw, henceforth AP), Warsaw Entertainment Enterprise (henceforth Stołeczna Estrada w Warszawie), 72/3325/0/3.1/10, Protokół nr 1 z dn. 20 kwietnia 1965, k. 86, 88.

shows were already performed in some of the venues in the mid-1960s, there was little consensus on how to evaluate such performances or even how to translate the term into Polish. Notably, it was not until the 1980s that the Polish term ‘striptiz’ entered the discourse for good. Before that, the journalists used anglicisms such as ‘strip-tease’ or simply ‘striptease’.⁵⁴⁰ Such linguistic transformations serve as evidence of the gradual yet growing normalisation of this type of performances in the late state-socialist period.

The real ‘boom’ for striptease came in the 1970s as the consumerist modernisation championed by Edward Gierek gained momentum. On the one hand, the regime encouraged new types of consumption and leisure. New hotels, holiday resorts, restaurants and clubs all needed to offer engaging entertainment.⁵⁴¹ Many of them were managed by private franchise holders [ajenci], preoccupied with profit and high attendance rather than with socialist ideology. On the other hand, the early 1970s were also a time of intensified transnational transfers of people but also lifestyles. Western business visitors expected attractive entertainment in the Polish cities they visited. As a result a new type of ‘hard currency’ commercial sex began to flourish and striptease shows became commonplace in clubs and restaurants.⁵⁴²

Polish audience also grew more accustomed to striptease as many people were now allowed to travel West for work or holiday purposes. Tadeusz Myślik, a member of the Catholic Intelligentsia Club (sic!), remembered that during a study visit to France in 1958 he frequented striptease shows:

⁵⁴⁰ See for example H. Leszczyńska, ‘Stołeczne życie nocne’, *Ekspres Reporterów*, 9 (1977), 61–105; Ł. Wyrzkowski, ‘Prawda jest naga’, *Ekspres Reporterów*, 5 (1983), 53–92; J. Hańderek, ‘Stripteaserka’, *Gazeta Krakowska: Magazyn Od środy do środy* (25 July 1973), 6.

⁵⁴¹ A. Szczerski, ‘The Decade of Luxury: The People’s Republic of Poland and Hotels in the 1970s’, *Art in Translation*, 3/2 (2011), 179–212.

⁵⁴² See A. Dobrowolska, ‘Social Pathology’.

When I was in Paris, I obviously went to see some striptease and I watched it for some time, until I realised that the same ladies perform in all the clubs. Then I had enough because the same ladies were getting undressed in all of the clubs.⁵⁴³

As this oral testimony demonstrates, for many Poles first encounters with striptease were connected with foreign travels. Also, they had less to do with sexual desire and rather they were treated as a must-see ‘curiosity from the West’. Although in the late 1950s it was only the lucky few that were able to obtain passports, by the mid-1970s such travels became much more common.⁵⁴⁴ Consequently, people who were familiar with ‘Western’ types of entertainment were more likely to expect similar attractions at home.

This trend was quickly appropriated by various state-owned entertainment enterprises such as already mentioned Stołeczna Estrada in Warsaw and Baltic Artistic Agency [Bałtycka Agencja Artystyczna, BART] in Sopot. As the press reported, in January 1972 Stołeczna Estrada organised an open audition for striptease dancers in the Warsaw restaurant ‘Kongresowa’ (located in the Stalinist Palace of Culture and Science). The audition, that would have perhaps otherwise gone unnoticed, was allegedly advertised in *Życie Warszawy* and attracted large crowds of journalists who expected to witness naked performances as part of the recruitment.⁵⁴⁵ Allegedly, the audition was also filmed by the Polish Newsreel, but I have not managed to find any copy of the footage yet. As Joanna, a striptease dancer interviewed by Łukasz Wyżkowski in 1983, remembered, the ‘Kongresowa’ audition was very popular among candidates for dancers and for many opened the door to careers as strippers.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴³ Oral History Archive, History Meeting House in Warsaw (Archiwum Historii Mówionej, henceforth AHM), AHM_1638, Tadeusz Myślik, Testimony recorded in 2009 by Przemysław Iwanek, <https://relacjebiograficzne.pl/audio/319-tadeusz-myslik> (11 Aug. 2021)

⁵⁴⁴ See D. Stola, ‘Opening a Non-Exit State: The Passport Policy of Communist Poland, 1949-1980’, *East European Politics and Societies*, 29/1 (2015), 96–119.

⁵⁴⁵ [Ryszard], ‘Korespondencja z Warszawy’, *Widnokrąg* (4 Mar. 1972), 5.

⁵⁴⁶ Wyżkowski, ‘Prawda jest naga’, 56–7.

In the 1974 *Alfabet polskiej rozrywki* [*Dictionary of Polish Entertainment*] the authors ironically recounted that ‘The venues in Warsaw that do not support their budget with strip-tease are milk bars, the vegetarian canteen “Saluś” at Marszałkowska Street and “Wars” restaurant at the East Railway Station’.⁵⁴⁷ Such an assessment of the Warsaw striptease scene was an intended exaggeration, but one thing can be said for certain: by the mid-1970s striptease became a natural part of night-time entertainment. Unfortunately, due to the unregulated character of the profession, it is difficult to assess its scale. As the journalists reported, no one knew actually how many women worked as striptease dancers at the time.⁵⁴⁸ In the companies’ registries they were listed as ‘dancers’ and employed only on temporary contracts, without any form of social security or pension scheme.⁵⁴⁹ For many of the women striptease was just a temporary job, allowing them to save up a significant sum of money and later get married or start their own small business.⁵⁵⁰ The journalists estimated that there were around 1000 striptease dancers in Poland in 1983, but the numbers fluctuated as some of the women only performed topless shows while others worked only during the summer months.⁵⁵¹

However, it would be a misunderstanding to assume that striptease was unanimously accepted by the entire society. Some media mocked striptease as a form of ‘social parasitism’ (a legal term developed in the late 1960s to scorn citizens who avoided working and were thus deemed ‘socially worthless’)⁵⁵² and a first step toward introducing

⁵⁴⁷ W. Filler, R.M. Groński and J. Wittlin, *Alfabet Polskiej Rozrywki* (Warsaw, 1974), 81.

⁵⁴⁸ Wyrzkowski, ‘Prawda jest naga’, 54.

⁵⁴⁹ J. Włosek, ‘Improwizacja bez majtek’, *Tygodnik Demokratyczny* (30 July 1989), 24.

⁵⁵⁰ M. Olbromski, ‘Strip-teaserki’, *Rzeczywistość* (28 Aug. 1983), 9.

⁵⁵¹ Wyrzkowski, ‘Prawda jest naga’, 54. Another source mentions the number of 100 dancers but considering the proliferation of striptease shows across the country this number is likely too small, see M. Marcińczak, ‘Trzy "S" czyli striptease i...’, *TIM. Tygodniowy Ilustrowany Magazyn* (3 July 1987), 11.

⁵⁵² B. Szamota, ‘Problematyka Pasożytnictwa Społecznego: Aspekty Prawne’, *Archiwum Kryminologii*, XII (1985), 101–12.

state-controlled economy in sectors of commercial sex.⁵⁵³ Others criticised striptease for pandering to low tastes and following Western, business approaches to sex.⁵⁵⁴ The Catholic Church warned against harmful effects of ‘lewdness’, and even if striptease was not mentioned specifically, everyone could connect the dots.⁵⁵⁵ Some dancers remembered that they were even attacked during shows by more conservative audiences.⁵⁵⁶

The ambiguities surrounding the acceptance of striptease as a form of entertainment were well showcased in a discussion that took place on the pages of *Gazeta Krakowska*, the official daily newspaper of the Cracow PZPR committee. In July 1973 it published an article about striptease dancers. The piece was centred around a first-person testimony of Diana (pseudonym), a striptease dancer.⁵⁵⁷ As she recounted, striptease provided for her an opportunity to escape the dull life of a clerk. She perceived the job to be foremostly artistic and the dancer’s role was to offer encounters with beauty and art to her audiences. Diana frankly admitted that:

The work is difficult. Constantly new cities, new hotels, new clubs. Yet, it is very profitable. I have already bought myself a flat from PKO⁵⁵⁸ [pekaowskie mieszkanie], I have a Fiat and an ever-growing savings account. In three, four years I am going to quit the artistic life. I will get married, have children and, most importantly, money. Who will then ask me how I earned them?⁵⁵⁹

Even if Diana (or the journalist who quoted her) exaggerated when describing her wealth, all the consumer goods she mentioned were certainly objects of desire for many regular

⁵⁵³ ‘W walce z pasożytnictwem’, *Student* (15 Jan. 1972), 32.

⁵⁵⁴ ‘W sprawie "rozbieractwa"', *Student* (15 Mar. 1972), 16; See as well T. Jerko, ‘Z kanarkiem na wakacje’, *Dziennik Bałtycki* (4 June 1976), 4.

⁵⁵⁵ *Listy pasterskie Prymasa Polski oraz Episkopatu, 1975-1981* (Paris, 1988), 309, 486.

⁵⁵⁶ Wyrzkowski, ‘Prawda jest naga’, 85; See as well M. Prandota, ‘Byłem jurorem’, *Odrodzenie* (24 June 1989), 13.

⁵⁵⁷ J. Hańderek, ‘Stripteaserka’, *Gazeta Krakowska: Magazyn Od środy do środy* (25 July 1973), 6.

⁵⁵⁸ PKO – Powszechna Kasa Oszczędności [General Savings Bank]

⁵⁵⁹ Hańderek, ‘Stripteaserka’.

citizens. Thus, striptease as a form of entertainment was not only the embodiment of consumerist modernisation that was underway in the 1970s, but also offered women a chance to fully participate in the new market of consumer goods thanks to their erotic capital. Their unique economic situation provoked envy and resentment among the public, as the letters from readers soon revealed. This was also clearly visible in the article's conclusion which offered a moral evaluation of Diana's testimony. As the author emphasised, Diana would have to pay for her 'double life' in a couple of years.

Diana's story was also remarkable because of the way in which she opposed the double moral standards set by the society. 'I work just as everyone else, I am not a parasite' she asserted and explained that the real problem was the intolerant, bourgeois character of the society, not her occupation itself.⁵⁶⁰ She also pointed out that if people deemed her work immoral, then they should also condemn people who attended striptease shows. 'Our job would not exist had it not been for the people who come to watch us' she concludes.⁵⁶¹ Therefore, according to Diana, if anyone was doing something primitive or immoral, it was the audience not the striptease dancers. She was performing artistic dance, while the people who watched were only interested in her body: 'my breasts, my buttocks, my pubic mound'.⁵⁶²

The article provoked heated responses from *Gazeta Krakowska* readers. Although Janusz Hańderek, the author of the piece, clearly condemned Diana's lifestyle and motivations, some readers did not find it enough. Maria Hessel from Cracow was outraged by the fact that the editors decided to publish the story with such little

⁵⁶⁰ Hańderek, 'Stripteaserka'.

⁵⁶¹ Hańderek, 'Stripteaserka'.

⁵⁶² Hańderek, 'Stripteaserka'.

commentary. In her opinion what Diana said could have demoralising effect on other young girls that would be tempted to start this type of a career.⁵⁶³ Moreover, she believed that Diana was responsible for the men's reactions to striptease. By invoking the analogy with alcoholism ('it exists because alcohol is available'), she argued that it was in fact Diana who was responsible for arousing male desires and exploiting men's vulnerability. Therefore, Hessel believed that publishing Diana's testimony was a promotion of 'evil' and called for a public discussion on striptease and its moral implications.

Other voices in this debate were published in subsequent issues of *Gazeta Krakowska*. Many of the readers agreed with Maria Hessel in their evaluation of striptease as something immoral and foreign to the socialist society.⁵⁶⁴ Yet, some of the letters presented more nuanced opinions. An anonymous reader from Krzeszowice wondered if striptease was not a natural manifestation of modernity. To support this claim they mentioned that 'in the West striptease is completely normal'.⁵⁶⁵ Adam from Jaworzno also invoked the argument of 'moving forward', pointing out that explicit naked scenes could by then be seen in movie theatres on a daily basis, so striptease in clubs should not have shocked anyone. 'Whether you like it or not, we watch such films and theatre plays, we visit exhibitions such as "Venus" and we go to clubs [...]' he concluded, expressing the intergenerational conflict in approaches to sexuality.⁵⁶⁶ Witold Zakrzewski from Nowy Targ seconded this opinion, adding that in Poland the society was not used to this type of entertainment and there were powerful forces of 'philistinism' [kołtuneria] that wanted to prevent all novelty. As he argued, the opposition toward striptease could be

⁵⁶³ 'Korespondencja: Stripteaserka', *Gazeta Krakowska: Magazyn Od środy do środy* (8 Aug. 1973), 2.

⁵⁶⁴ 'Jeszcze o stripteaserce', *Gazeta Krakowska: Magazyn Od środy do środy* (29 Aug. 1973), 2.

⁵⁶⁵ 'Jeszcze o stripteaserce'.

⁵⁶⁶ 'Jeszcze o stripteaserce'.

read as a part of yet another battle in the war against backwardness that Władysław Klimczak waged in 1970: ‘we all remember how much courage it took to organize the “Venus” exhibitions in Cracow. Striptease and nakedness all too often are connected with prostitution by narrow-minded people’.⁵⁶⁷

Such voices of opposition and critique did not however prevent striptease from spreading in Poland, not only in Warsaw, but also in smaller cities, holiday resorts in particular.⁵⁶⁸ As Ewa Berberyusz summed up in 1975, ‘where there is entertainment, there is strip-tease. No matter if it is a city, or a countryside’.⁵⁶⁹ We can only assume that such a proliferation of striptease shows in the 1970s was a result of economic calculation on the side of the people (directors and franchise holders) responsible for restaurant entertainment. Striptease shows generated profits, but they also offered a simulation of modern, ‘Western’ style of leisure and as such were in high demand among consumers, not only male. The press could have mocked it, but the audience desired new types of entertainment and even socialist enterprises could not ignore such needs.

Gendered Spectatorship and the Heteronormative Gaze

As this chapter has already explored, audience reactions to striptease varied from utter disapproval through voyeurism to open enthusiasm. Reports in the press mentioned that people were gathering around the dancefloor in excitement when the striptease performance was announced.⁵⁷⁰ But some dancers also complained that their audience

⁵⁶⁷ ‘Jeszcze o stripteeserce’.

⁵⁶⁸ See J. Kolczak, ‘Striptis w barze samoobsługowym’, *Pobrzeże*, 9 (1972), 26.

⁵⁶⁹ Berberyusz, ‘Rozpruć lalkę’.

⁵⁷⁰ See Michałowski, ‘Szlagier tygodnia’; Kolczak, ‘Striptis’.

was too drunk to appreciate the show or made vulgar comments.⁵⁷¹ The oral history testimony by Tadeusz Oratowski provides a glimpse into the emotions that people who watched such shows may have felt. He remembered that he had first seen striptease in 1973 in one of Warsaw restaurants in the district of Powiśle:

It was so much fun, because we were young men and watching such a show warmed up our blood a little bit and made our hearts beat faster. But I also surreptitiously observed other visitors of this dancing. And I want to say with astonishment that the ladies who were also there, they were curiously watching this naked dance.⁵⁷²

Watching striptease could have offered an exciting new sexual experience, as the above quote seems to suggest. Men frequented strip shows together with their male colleagues and thus performed their heterosexual desires in such homosocial settings (just as they did with the ‘Venus’ exhibitions as analysed in Chapter Three). Yet, contrary to popular stereotypes that place this type of entertainment solely in male homosocial environments, there is some evidence that women also attended such shows. Whether they did so voluntarily, or just as a result of striptease shows being the core component of entertainment in all night clubs, this fact requires further investigation. How did women see and respond to striptease shows? And what does it tell us about the gender order of the late state-socialist period?

In the narratives of the dancers recorded by the media, female audiences played two main roles. On the one hand, strippers complained about contemptuous smiles they received from other women when dancing.⁵⁷³ On the other, some interpreted women’s presence at the shows as a sign of female solidarity. Paula, the dancer interviewed by

⁵⁷¹ T. Jasiński, ‘Po prostu chodzi o szmal’, *Rzeczywistość* (18 May 1986), 5.

⁵⁷² AHM_3609, Tadeusz Oratowski, Testimony recorded in 2018 by Jarosław Pałka, <https://relacjebiograficzne.pl/audio/382-tadeusz-oratowski> (11 Aug. 2021).

⁵⁷³ Olbromski, ‘Strip-teaserki’.

Marek Czarnecki, confessed that she often noticed women's jealousy, but also sympathy. As she explained, 'I am their advertisement, their spice, I am teasing the men and these ladies can later relieve their tension.'⁵⁷⁴ Thus, women needed to support each other in their common goal: that of satisfying the men.

Clearly, all the above-mentioned press reports reflected and reaffirmed the dominant discourse of heteropatriarchy. Therefore, women's participation in striptease shows could be read only in relation to male satisfaction. Either they were jealous of the attention the stripper received from the audience, or they observed the dance to learn new techniques of satisfying male needs. One way or another, women's participation in a striptease show could not be explained by their own sexual desires. If the press accounts mentioned women enjoying watching female striptease, the claims of non-heteronormative sexual attraction were instantly invalidated and explained by their desire to become more attractive for men.⁵⁷⁵

The history of male striptease further supports my argument here. Although there is some visual evidence that men worked as strippers already in the 1970s, their performances were not necessarily designed to satisfy female audiences. The pictures that I found in the East News Press Agency Archives suggest that male striptease in fact had more in common with cross-dressing and drag shows than with a 'Chippendales' type of stripping.⁵⁷⁶ In the photographs taken by Wojciech Łaski the male stripper wears stockings, high heels, and jewellery and holds a feather boa in his hands. If we are to believe archival labels, the photo was taken in 1976 in 'Kongresowa' Concert Hall in

⁵⁷⁴ Czarnecki, '6 minut', 17.

⁵⁷⁵ M. Czarnecki, 'Szalona Pigi', *Profile*, 2 (1989), 20.

⁵⁷⁶ East News Press Agency Archive, EN_00132727_0031, East News/Wojtek Łaski, Pierwszy striptizer meski w Polsce. Sala Kongresowa, Warszawa, 1976, <https://bit.ly/2SsHg14> (27 May 2021).

Warsaw. Perhaps it is one of the earliest visual sources documenting public queer (?) life in state-socialist Poland.⁵⁷⁷ However, the queerness of erotic dance did not necessarily have power to subvert or question the heteronormative hierarchy of sexual desires.

A year later a documentary movie titled *Pan Andrzej* was directed by Michał Tarkowski as a student etude at the Film School in Łódź.⁵⁷⁸ The documentary tells the story of a professional magician who performs in the Łódź restaurant ‘Kaskada’. The camera follows Andrzej and his colleagues during one night of performances. Not surprisingly, the entertainment programme includes female striptease (and the movie is most likely one of the very rare footages of authentic, not staged, striptease dances from that period). However, what is most fascinating is the performance of the other dancer dressed in a Marlene Dietrich costume. The dance, performed to the Edith Piaf’s song *Milord*, clearly plays with the conventions of gendered spectatorship of striptease shows. The dancer undresses slowly, displaying only small parts of their naked body. In the final sequences of the dance the stripper sits on the laps of one of the male viewers and kisses him gently on the mouth. Finally, as the dancer takes off their clothes, their gender identity is revealed, and it turns out that they are male. The audience laughs, the man who has just been kissed blushes in embarrassment. Thus, as the documentary seems to suggest, male striptease can be a joke, a subversion of the gendered convention of the performance. Although male striptease certainly could have had some queer potential, in such a framing the dance primarily reaffirmed heterosexual hierarchies of desire. The message was therefore clear: the only appropriate convention of striptease was when an

⁵⁷⁷ More on the history of queer life in state-socialist Poland see T. Basiuk and J. Burszta, eds., *Queers in State Socialism* (London, 2020).

⁵⁷⁸ *Pan Andrzej* (1977), dir. M. Tarkowski, https://etiudy.filmschool.lodz.pl/material/Pan_Andrzej (10 Feb. 2021)

attractive woman undressed for men. Any attempt to subvert this relation was to be mocked and ridiculed.

The Cracow daily newspaper *Dziennik Polski* reminded its readers in 1985 that performances of male strippers were occasionally organised in the mid-1970s in restaurants ‘Feniks’ and ‘Kaprys’. Yet, they were not welcomed by the audience, ‘perhaps because they lacked artistic taste’ the journalists implied.⁵⁷⁹ As I have already argued on the case of the ‘Venus’ exhibitions, artistic framework was crucial for legitimising nudity in the public sphere. Yet, the very definition of art and beauty rested on gendered assumptions. In order to fit in the artistic framework performances or images needed to conform to patriarchal hierarchies of sexual desire in which women’s role was to satisfy the male gaze. Male strippers could be allowed to perform as a part of a cabaret programme but accepting that their naked bodies could provoke women’s desires or, even worse, could be an object of non-heteronormative gaze, was clearly beyond comprehension. Thus, both male and female striptease in state-socialist Poland was a tool of reaffirming dominant hierarchies and had little power to actually subvert them.

Striptease in Popular Culture

In her 1977 reportage about night life in Warsaw Halina Leszczyńska is asked by an Italian man whom she guides around the city to show him something ‘very Polish’. ‘Do you need some night-time sensations, or would a regular striptease do?’ she answers, suggesting that nude dancing was not only a normal part of night’s entertainment but also that it was a typically Polish form of entertainment that one could demonstrate to a

⁵⁷⁹ ‘Czy w Krakowie będzie męski striptiz?’, *Dziennik Polski* (5–8 Apr. 1985), 2.

foreigner.⁵⁸⁰ Although this excerpt can be interpreted as a rhetorical device whose purpose is to make the reportage more appealing or shocking, there is plenty of other evidence that by the early 1980s striptease was to a great extent normalised in Polish society.

This growing normalisation of striptease could best be observed in visual culture, for instance in films and TV series. As many scholars argue, gradual relaxation of moral constraints could be observed in the Polish cinema from the beginning of the 1970s and striptease scenes provide evidence to support such claims.⁵⁸¹ In 1973 a striptease scene was featured in the film *Siedem czerwonych róż, czyli Benek Kwiciarz o sobie i o innych* [*Seven Red Roses: Benek Kwiciarz About Himself and Others*].⁵⁸² In the scene the main character Władek, while on official delegation, visits a restaurant with his friend. There, they drink, eat, and enjoy themselves. When Władek wants to leave, his colleague stops him by saying that ‘the best is yet to come’. In a minute, a striptease show, announced as an ‘artistic program’ begins. This is an early example of a striptease scene, as the dancer’s nakedness is not yet exposed in full, but the suggestion there is clear: nude dancing is an exciting part of night entertainment.

Even Andrzej Wajda’s cinematic classic *Człowiek z marmuru* [*Man of Marble*] (1977) makes a clear reference to striptease auditions in the ‘Kongresowa’ restaurant in the scene in which Agnieszka interviews Michalak, a former secret police agent, about the fate of the Stalinist shock worker Mateusz Birkut. Striptease is not portrayed in full, but forms an important part of the background, suggesting a complete transformation of

⁵⁸⁰ Leszczyńska, ‘Stołeczne życie nocne’, 78.

⁵⁸¹ K. Jachymek, ‘Seks w Kinie Polskim Okresu PRL. Wprowadzenie’, *Pleograf. Kwartalnik Akademii Polskiego Filmu*, 1 (2018).

⁵⁸² *Siedem czerwonych róż, czyli Benek Kwiciarz o sobie i o innych*, (1973), dir. J. Szwed.

Michalak, from a devoted Stalinist into a director in an entertainment company who organises striptease performances. Thus, striptease becomes a metaphor of the new, modern society of the 1970s, contrasted with the ‘mistakes and distortions’ of the Stalinist period. However, the scene can also be understood a form of moral criticism toward Michalak who abandons his declared communist ideals and instead becomes a manager of an ‘immoral’ enterprise. The evaluation of striptease is undoubtedly ambiguous.

In the 1974 comedy *Nie ma róży bez ognia* [*There Is No Rose Without a Fire*] nudity played a much more exposed role.⁵⁸³ The leading character, Jan, looks for a way to get rid of an unwanted lodger, who also happens to be his wife’s ex-husband. In despair he designs an elaborate plan that involves hiring a ‘prostitute’. To find the right candidate for the job, Jan visits one of the Warsaw restaurants famous for its unofficial market of sexual commerce. As he sits in the restaurant, he watches the topless dance performed by a dancer dressed in an exotic costume. The purpose of the scene is simply voyeuristic. On the one hand, Jan enjoys the performance from a distance, only observing and not participating. On the other, the filmmakers clearly aim to satisfy the audience’s voyeuristic desires as well. This time the camera is less shy about displaying nudity and the dancer’s breasts are exposed in full. This scene also serves as an introduction into the night life of sexual entertainment, as then the camera focuses on various women who can easily be identified by the viewers as ‘prostitutes’.

These two motifs: voyeurism and striptease as an ultimate symbol of night entertainment, seem to have dominated the cultural representations of erotic dance toward the second half of the 1970s. A great illustration of this trend can be found in the crime

⁵⁸³ *Nie ma róży bez ognia* (1974), dir. S. Bareja.

series *07 zgłoś się* [*07 Call In*] produced by the Polish television between 1976 and 1989. The TV series follows adventures of lieutenant Sławomir Borewicz, a brave MO officer who fights crime but also enjoys his playboy-type lifestyle. As Robert Dudziński rightly observes, eroticism became an important strategy to attract viewers in the television series from the late 1960s onward, but the first attempts were rather subtle.⁵⁸⁴ In this regard *07 zgłoś się* was undoubtedly revolutionary, as it was the first TV series to display nudity and sex so openly. Far from pornographic, the sex scenes in *07 zgłoś się* rather suggested intercourse than explicitly portrayed it.⁵⁸⁵ Yet, the scenes of nudity were clearly designed to satisfy voyeuristic desires of the viewers. First, naked female breasts appeared in most scenes which portrayed Borewicz's erotic encounters with women. Second, there are several episodes with various erotic items: calendars,⁵⁸⁶ pornographic videotapes and magazines,⁵⁸⁷ and even jigsaw puzzle with naked women owned by lieutenant Zubek.⁵⁸⁸ All such scenes clearly legitimised heterosexual erotic desires and connected them with modernity and progress as symbolised by the figure of lieutenant Borewicz.⁵⁸⁹

Most importantly, some episodes of *07 zgłoś się* included noteworthy striptease scenes. They served as a metaphor of after-hours entertainment in general and, similarly to *Nie ma róży bez ognia* were inextricably linked to the world of commercial sex. Yet, contrary to the figures of sex workers, the striptease scenes in *07 zgłoś się* are just

⁵⁸⁴ R. Dudziński, 'Seks, Zbrodnie i Seriale Telewizyjne. Erotyka w Produkcjach Sensacyjno-Kryminalnych Telewizji Polskiej w Latach 1976 – 1989', *Literatura i Kultura Popularna*, 21 (2015), 100.

⁵⁸⁵ Dudziński, 'Seks, Zbrodnie...', 102–3.

⁵⁸⁶ *07 zgłoś się: Rozkład jazdy*, Episode 9 (6 Oct. 1979), dir. A. J. Piotrowski; *07 zgłoś się: Ślad rękawiczki*, Episode 16 (26 Sept. 1985), dir. K. Szmagier; *07 zgłoś się: Morderca działa nocą*, Episode 17 (3 Oct. 1985), dir. K. Szmagier.

⁵⁸⁷ *07 zgłoś się: Złocisty* Episode 20 (18 May 1989), dir. K. Szmagier.

⁵⁸⁸ *07 zgłoś się: Wisiory*, Episode 2 (2 Dec. 1976), dir. K. Szmagier.

⁵⁸⁹ See also R. Dudziński, 'Wszystkie Kobiety Porucznika Borewicza. Kobiecość i Męskość w Serialu 07 Zgłoś Się w Kontekście Jego Literackiego Pierwowzoru', in K. Jewtuch, K. Kowalczyk, and J. Płoszaj (eds.), *Kobieca Strona Popkultury* (Wrocław, 2016), 52–66.

elements of the background and they rarely have any other purpose in the plot than just exposing naked female bodies.⁵⁹⁰ For example, in episode 7 striptease show opens the scene in the night club, indicating that it is the space where commercial sex flourishes (and indeed the rest of the episode is devoted to solving the case of a murder of one of the sex workers).⁵⁹¹ In episode 17 the business guests from Hungary are invited to an ‘erotic dance’ by the director of a fashion company.⁵⁹² There, striptease is portrayed as a sign of modern, international lifestyle, something that every foreigner visiting Warsaw should experience. Yet, the strippers never become characters in the series plot and their role is purely visual.

In other popular TV series, *Alternatywy 4*, produced in 1983 but due to the censorship problems aired in late 1986, striptease plays much more prominent role in the plotline. Again, the topic of housing shortages and economic paradoxes is taken up. The TV series tells the story of a group of tenants of a newly built housing block in the Warsaw district of Ursynów. The building is managed by a bossy and despotic janitor, Stanisław Anioł [Angel] who takes advantage of his position to interfere into personal lives of the tenants. In Episode 8 he sends his accomplice, Furman, to spy on one of the female tenants, Ewa Majewska.⁵⁹³ When Furman follows her to the ‘Kongresowa’ restaurant, he discovers that Ewa earns her living as a stripper. Furman watches her performance with amazement and later tries to sexually assault Ewa, assuming that she must work as a ‘prostitute’.⁵⁹⁴ In the final episode, after Furman tells Anioł about what he saw, the janitor tries to exploit this knowledge to turn the tenants against each other. Yet, to his surprise,

⁵⁹⁰ *07 zgłoś się*: Episodes 7, 14, 15 and 17.

⁵⁹¹ *07 zgłoś się*: *Brudna sprawa*, Episode 7 (22 Sept. 1979), dir. K. Szmagier.

⁵⁹² *07 zgłoś się*: *Morderca działa nocą*, Episode 17 (3 Oct. 1985), dir. K. Szmagier.

⁵⁹³ *Alternatywy 4*: *Wesele*, Episode 8 (11 Jan. 1987), dir. S. Bareja.

⁵⁹⁴ *Alternatywy 4*: *Upadek*, Episode 9 (18 Jan. 1987), dir. S. Bareja.

no one seems to care about their neighbour's profession. 'I knew she was some kind of an artist' concludes Mr Kołek. Other express their dissatisfaction only with the fact that Ewa did not offer discounted tickets to them. 'This is a good job. These artists earn quite well, don't they?' sums up another tenant.⁵⁹⁵

Therefore, one can clearly see that in the two final episodes of *Alternatywy 4* striptease serves more than just voyeuristic functions. On the one hand, the role of Ewa's story is to expose Anioł's dishonesty and malicious intentions. His instrumentalised bourgeois morality is ridiculed by the reasonable tenants who do not see anything wrong in striptease dances. If we read between the lines, such a presentation of the janitor is a camouflaged critique of the stiff late state-socialist bureaucracy. On the other hand, Ewa's story allows the show to introduce some critique of the economic system under the cover of voyeurism and comedy. This is clearly noticeable in the scene when Ewa tells her life story to the neighbour, Krzysztof Manc, who also happens to be madly in love with her:

I have been saving for a flat. I started working right after my high school exams when I was 18 and in two years I saved enough to cover own contribution [wkład własny], but they raised the prices so I continued working. And this is an awfully unhealthy job, because there's a lot of smoke and you have to work at night and I had colds regularly. Then after three years I managed to save enough... and the prices went up again. Now I almost have sufficient money, but people started saying that there will again be price increases soon.⁵⁹⁶

As Krzysztof is an avid inventor, he immediately proposes that he would build a robot that would perform in striptease shows instead of Ewa and assures her that this robot could help her save money not only for a flat, but also for a car. This part of the plot clearly has humorous purposes but the economic context should not be ignored. In the end, this is not the first innovation that Krzysztof designs in the series. His previous

⁵⁹⁵ *Alternatywy 4: Upadek*, Episode 9 (18 Jan. 1987), dir. S. Bareja.

⁵⁹⁶ *Alternatywy 4: Upadek*, Episode 9 (18 Jan. 1987), dir. S. Bareja.

project, the ‘queueing robot’ was also meant to counteract the burdensome realities of shortage economy.⁵⁹⁷

Late State Socialism and the Sense of Crisis

Ewa’s testimony offers a surprisingly blatant critique of the late state-socialist ‘welfare system’. The realities of life are far from what the official propaganda promises: due to the housing shortages young people have troubles with saving up for their own apartment and the economic instability negatively affects their savings due to skyrocketing prices. Therefore, erotic dancing, even if not the most noble of professions, offers at least a chance for fulfilling one’s basic consumerist aspirations and as such should not be criticized. In the late state-socialist period striptease became a metaphor of the lack of opportunities in the face of the acute economic and social crisis.

Many of the press reports on striptease that I quote in this chapter closely resembled the ways in which commercial sex (‘prostitution’ in the sources’ language) was narrated in the media at that time. The journalists on the one hand criticised this type of entertainment as immoral, but on the other displayed clear fascination with women who worked as strippers and with their lifestyle. Voyeuristic accounts of striptease shows were often accompanied by more or less explicit nudes and first-person narratives from strippers themselves. Similarly, when writing about ‘prostitution’ the media showed clear fascination with the new lifestyle and earning opportunities that commercial sex offered thanks to the black-market currency exchange rates. On the one hand, strippers (and sex workers as well) were portrayed as emancipated individuals who knew very well what

⁵⁹⁷ *Alternatywy 4: Gołębie*, Episode 6 (28 Dec. 1986), dir. S. Bareja.

they wanted to achieve in life. On the other, they were also often presented as lost individuals, constantly on the verge of mental breakdown and highly likely to end up on the ‘margins’ of the society.⁵⁹⁸ Therefore, one can hardly treat the press publications as credible sources to write about the life and experiences of women who worked as striptease dancers in the 1970s and 1980s. Rather, we can analyse various ways in which their stories were appropriated in the media discourse to speak about Polish society in the process of a profound social and economic transformation.

As already indicated, in the 1970s media striptease came to symbolise the modernisation of the Polish society in the decade of Gierek. On the one hand, this was clearly a consumerist modernisation symbolised by the new types of leisure and entertainment, as well as by growing economic aspirations. On the other, the women who worked as strippers were attractive because of their perceived sexual openness and thus came to symbolise the imagined sexual revolution that some parts of the Polish society aspired to. It is no accident that the discussions on striptease published in *Gazeta Krakowska* mentioned erotic dancing alongside ‘Venus’ exhibitions. For similar reasons the scenes of striptease were so often featured in the *07 zgłoś się*, as the TV series had the ambition to present a ‘modern’ and ‘Western’ face of Poland. For many of the commentators the visibility of naked female bodies in the public sphere was a clear manifestation of the liberalisation which slowly but inevitably impacted the sexual mores in Poland.

After Martial Law was introduced in December 1981 and the economy plummeted, naked female bodies acquired yet another set of meanings in the public

⁵⁹⁸ See A. Dobrowolska, ‘Social Pathology’, forthcoming.

discourse. First, the consumerist aspirations awakened during the previous decade remained unsatisfied and this encouraged many people to leave Poland and seek fulfilment elsewhere. According to Dariusz Stola, the number of labour migrants rose significantly in the 1980s and ‘between 70 and 85 percent of respondents in public opinion polls declared their readiness to migrate for a short or a long period’.⁵⁹⁹ It is therefore hardly surprising that in such a context the ‘human trafficking’ affair made public in April 1981 provoked heated and ambiguous responses.

As the media revealed, the so-called ‘Dziwex’ affair [‘dziwka’ meaning ‘whore’ in Polish while -ex was a common suffix of export enterprises], was a criminal scheme between employees of one of the Polish entertainment enterprises and the Italian Mafia, designed to ‘traffic’ young women to work in clubs and brothels on the Apennine Peninsula.⁶⁰⁰ The women were offered jobs as dancers, while in reality many of them were coerced to perform sexual services. In the press accounts about the affair and the later court trial the boundaries between striptease and ‘prostitution’ were blurred, similarly as there was little distinction made between voluntary and involuntary migration for sex work.⁶⁰¹

However, what is important for my argument here is how the erotic capital of Polish women was employed to discuss the realities of the Polish economic and political

⁵⁹⁹ D. Stola, ‘Opting out of Socialism: For-Profit Mobility from Communist Poland’, *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, (September 2020), 13–5.

⁶⁰⁰ [b.a.], ‘„Dziwex” i mafia’, *Antena* (13 Apr. 1981), 31; J. Śpiewak, ‘Dziwex i mafia’, *Antena* (21–26 Apr. 1981), 8–9; W. Markiewicz, ‘Wyzysk człowieka przez człowieka’, *Życie Warszawy* (3 June 1981), 3; J. Lewandowski, ‘Blondynki na sprzedaż’, *Ekspres Reporterów*, 1 (1982), 107–47.

⁶⁰¹ I am exploring these ambiguities in my forthcoming paper: A. Dobrowolska, “‘Everyone dreams of leaving’”. Debates on human trafficking in state-socialist Poland’, *Journal of Women’s History*, forthcoming in December 2021.

crisis. Basia, one of the ‘trafficked’ women interviewed by Mieczysław Olbromski confessed:

Everyone dreams of leaving. Because it means money. Men want the same things. But they have to slave away, do this hard work that the local people do not want. Girls are in a better position. They have their own body, it is a marketable product, you can make a lot of easy cash, as long as you are young.⁶⁰²

On the one hand, the journalists used the opportunity to criticise the management of state-owned enterprises and call for a verification of their employees.⁶⁰³ On the other, some of the press reports noticed the economic calculation that may have led some of the women to migrate, even if the moral evaluation of their choices was still negative.⁶⁰⁴ Even more so, the fact that women ‘were the only profitable Polish export product apart from coal’⁶⁰⁵ was perceived as a symbolic manifestation of how deep the economic and moral crisis was.

Yet, the appropriation of striptease in the public sphere served less metaphorical functions as well. Admiring the beauty of naked female bodies was also one of the very few entertainments available in the realities of scarcity economy. As one of the naturist publications put it in 1985, ‘only beautifully tanned women and girls are not yet rationed [na kartki]...’.⁶⁰⁶ The officials responsible for cultural production seemed to have noticed this trend and the 1980s witnessed an unparalleled eroticisation of popular culture. The following sections of this chapter explore this phenomenon in greater detail.

⁶⁰² M. Olbromski, ‘Komu dziewczynkę?’, *Rzeczywistość*, 5 (1984), 7.

⁶⁰³ K. Świątecka, ‘Panienci do wynajęcia’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, 28 (1982), 10.

⁶⁰⁴ Markiewicz, ‘Wyzysk człowieka’.

⁶⁰⁵ Olbromski, ‘Komu dziewczynkę?’.

⁶⁰⁶ Agata, ‘Wielki bal "Veto" dla naturystów’, *Veto* (18 Aug. 1985), 16. More on the naturist movement, see Chapter Seven.

Sexuality in Post-Martial Law Polish Film

The history of sexual liberalisation in the film culture of the 1980s is perhaps the most thoroughly researched aspect of the history of sexuality in post-war Poland. As many scholars have argued, the last decade of state socialism witnessed a significant loosening of moral censorship by authorities to the extent that, as Piotr Zwierzchowski put it, nudity became a ‘promotional strategy’ of the Polish cinema.⁶⁰⁷ To give just a few examples, in the 1980s explicit erotic scenes appeared in films such as *Konopielka* (1982, dir. W. Leszczyński), *Thais* (1984, dir. R. Ber), *Widziadło* (1984, dir. M. Nowicki), *Pociąg do Hollywood* (1987, dir. R. Piwowarski), *Co lubią tygrysy* (1989, dir. K. Nowak), *Sztuka kochania* (1989, dir. J. Bromski) and many others.⁶⁰⁸ Film critics lamented that erotic scenes – so called ‘moments’ [momenty] – were sometimes the only reason why many people attended the screening of, otherwise rather mediocre, films.⁶⁰⁹

It should be noted here that it was much earlier than the 1980s that erotic scenes started appearing on the Polish cinema screens. The first cinematic ‘naked breast’ can be dated to the 1951 film *Młodość Chopina* [*Chopin’s Youth*], directed by Aleksander Ford. In the 1960s the number of ‘erotic scenes’ rose notably on the wave of the post-1956 relaxation of cultural and moral censorship. Naked female bodies could be shown from a distance, but the censors still opposed more realistic portrayals of erotic encounters.⁶¹⁰ It was not until the 1970s that more explicit erotic scenes made it to the screens. In 1975

⁶⁰⁷ P. Zwierzchowski, ‘Nagość Jako Strategia Promocyjna Kina Polskiego Lat 80.’, *Images (Poland)*, 23/32 (2018), 170–76. See also P. Zwierzchowski, ‘Oswajanie Tabu Seksualnego w Kinie PRL’, *Przegląd Historyczny*, CIX/2 (2018), 225–37.

⁶⁰⁸ All years are release dates.

⁶⁰⁹ Stankusz [S. Kuszewski], ‘Seks po polsku’, *Kino*, 1 (1986), 16.

⁶¹⁰ K. Kornacki, ‘Naga Władza. Polskie Kino Erotyczne (Schyłkowego PRL-U)’, *Studia Filmoznawcze*, 29 (2008), 197; See also K. Jachymek, *Film - Ciało - Historia. Kino Polskie Lat Sześćdziesiątych* (Gdańsk, 2016).

Walerian Borowczyk produced his adaptation of *Dzieje grzechu* [*The Story of Sin*], based on the novel by Stefan Żeromski. The critics pronounced the film to be ‘overtly erotic’ and ‘melodramatic’ which in turn attracted large audiences to the cinema. This was the only feature film produced by Borowczyk in Poland; he emigrated to France and made a career as a director of erotic movies, including *Emanuelle 5* (1987).⁶¹¹

If there was one topic that dominated the discussions on sex and cinema in state-socialist Poland, it was the problem of the low quality of Polish eroticism. The film critics and journalists constantly lamented about the appalling level of Polish ‘sexual culture’, exemplified in their opinion in the poor quality of erotic scenes. Already in the 1967 special issue of the *Kino* [*Cinema*] monthly Alicja Helman lamented that Polish cinema had no tradition of portraying sexuality and as a result the erotic scenes were never properly developed by filmmakers.⁶¹² Another article in the same issue summarised a discussion of experts whom the editors asked to evaluate the ‘erotic wave’ in cinema.⁶¹³ Notably, none of them said that eroticism should be banned from cinema. Rather, they used the opportunity to complain about the low level of sex education in Poland and the impact it had on the quality of people’s sexual lives, in particular women. This is hardly surprising given that among the surveyed experts was Hanna Malewska, the author of the book on sexual relations in marriage,⁶¹⁴ as well as the educator Elżbieta Jackiewiczowa. Therefore, the discussion captured by *Kino* closely resembled the expert discourses on the Polish ‘Third Way’ toward sexual liberation which I analysed in Chapter Two.

⁶¹¹ E. Mazierska, ‘Borowczyk as Pornographer’, in E. Mazierska, M. Mroz, and E. Ostrowska (eds.), *The Cinematic Bodies of Eastern Europe and Russia: Between Pain and Pleasure* (Edinburgh, 2016), 114–31.

⁶¹² A Helman, ‘Polskie marginesy’, *Kino*, 9 (1967), 13. See also Z. Kałużyński, *Wenus automobilowa. Obyczaje współczesne na ekranie* (Warsaw, 1976).

⁶¹³ ‘Erotyzm w filmie i w życiu’, ed. B. Mruklik, *Kino*, 9 (1967), 29–33.

⁶¹⁴ H. Malewska, *Kulturowe i Psychospołeczne Determinanty Życia Seksualnego* (Warsaw, 1967).

Almost twenty years later Maria Kornacka offered a strikingly similar diagnosis. In her 1986 study *Eros i film* [*Eros and Film*] she argued that ‘the Polish cinema suffers from the lack of erotic sensibility which is compensated with “courageous nakedness”, most often without any motivation, or various “moments” that are generously employed to attract viewers’.⁶¹⁵ In her opinion erotic scenes were used only as ornaments and were not treated as a topic in itself neither by the cinematic characters, nor by the filmmakers.⁶¹⁶ The fact that such arguments about the Polish cinema culture remained unchanged despite being two decades apart, suggests that it was not a deep cultural experience nor sexual education that viewers sought in this type of productions. Rather, the popularity of ‘moments’ and erotic scenes in Polish cinema resulted from voyeuristic desires of the audience and the filmmakers knew it very well. As the sexologist Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz diagnosed in 1984, the Polish society was still going through the phase of ‘ribald sex’ [seks rubaszny]. The interest in erotic images did not necessarily mean that the knowledge of sex and so-called ‘sexual culture’ were improving. Some liberalisation was visible, but there was still a long way from ‘sophisticated and playful sex’, Lew-Starowicz argued.⁶¹⁷

In explaining the roots of the eroticisation of the public sphere in the 1980s, most of the scholars have so far concentrated on arguments of a political nature. According to Krzysztof Kornacki, eroticised film entertainment was employed by the authoritarian state to destroy social ties and demobilise the society after the Solidarity’s carnival.⁶¹⁸ On

⁶¹⁵ M. Kornatowska, *Eros i Film* (Łódź, 1986), 22–3.

⁶¹⁶ Kornatowska, *Eros i Film*, 23.

⁶¹⁷ W. Markiewicz, ‘Ręczna forma dotyku. Rozmowa ze Z. Lwem Starowiczem’, *Polityka* (5 May 1984), 9.

⁶¹⁸ K. Kornacki, ‘Naga Władza. Polskie Kino Erotyczne (Schyłkowego PRL-U)’, *Studia Filmoznawcze*, 29 (2008), 202–4.

the other hand, Izabela Kalinowska argues that some of the movies used erotic scenes to ‘cover’ their true message and enable contents foreign to the dominant ideology such as in the movie *Seksmisja* [*Sex Mission*] (1983, dir. J. Machulski).⁶¹⁹ In this sci-fi comedy the totalitarian world ruled by women serves as a cover-up to criticise the communist rule. As the ending suggests, the only way to restore the ‘natural’ order is through heterosexual intercourse and return to the subjugated position of women in the society. The misogynistic and sexist message of the film was received well among the audiences at the time and the film was a box office hit both in Poland and in the USSR.⁶²⁰ Although the film was clearly critical of the communist regime (and from today’s perspective it may be surprising that the censorship did not halt it), its reaffirmation of the heteropatriarchy is noteworthy. Hence, even though *Seksmisja* criticised the system on the political level, it offered no critique of the dominant, conservative gender order and perhaps this explains why its anti-communist message may have first gone unnoticed.

Late State-Socialist Porno Chic

Explaining the roots of eroticisation of the 1980s popular culture solely through the lenses of politics is however problematic for several reasons. First, it assumes that Polish consumers of popular and erotic culture were just passive objects of the regime’s actions and had no agency in their decisions regarding the consumption of erotica. This is not only questionable on the ethical level but also methodologically contradictory as the very same approach often overestimates the opposition of the Polish audiences

⁶¹⁹ I. Kalinowska, ‘Seks, polityka i koniec PRL-u: o cielesności w polskim kinie lat osiemdziesiątych’, in S. Jagielski and A. Morstin-Poplawska (eds.), *Ciało i seksualność w kinie polskim* (Kraków, 2009), 73.

⁶²⁰ E. Mazierska and E. Närípea, ‘Gender Discourse in Eastern European SF Cinema’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 41/1 (2014), 164, 176.

towards the official communist culture imposed over them. If people were wise enough to reject the communist propaganda, why would they be so easily manipulated into watching erotic movies? Too often our understanding of the popular culture of the period is guided by stereotypes: whether anti-communist or anti-sexual, prematurely assuming the low cultural value of all erotic production. It also ignores the international context, as similar processes were underway in other countries of the bloc, namely the GDR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia.⁶²¹

Therefore, the rest of this chapter argues that eroticism in the popular culture of late state-socialist Poland was not simply a tool of managing social behaviours on the side of the authorities. Instead of taking the top-down, authoritarian perspective, I am trying to complicate our understanding of this decade and show how new representations of nudity and sexuality resulted from the deep social transformation that was underway in the Polish society. Of course, this is not to say that the state authorities (the Television, the censorship, the customs office etc.) were irrelevant, but rather to argue that considering other actors and their decentralised actions may help us better grasp the multifaceted character of the transformation of popular attitudes. The state may have noticed these changes and even react to them but by that time it was far from omnipotent. The influences of Western culture, transnational transfers of practices and aspirations as

⁶²¹ J. McLellan, “‘Even Under Socialism, We Don’t Want to Do Without Love’: East German Erotica”, in D. Crowley and S.E. Reid (eds.), *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, Ill., 2010), 219–37; J. McLellan, ‘Did Communists Have Better Sex? Sex and the Body in German Reunification’, in D. Clarke and U. Wölfel (eds.), *Remembering the German Democratic Republic. Divided Memory in a United Germany* (Basingstoke, 2011), 119–30; B. Žikić, ‘Dissidents Liked Pretty Girls: Nudity, Pornography and Quality Press in Socialism’, *Medijska Istrazivanja*, 16/1 (2010), 53–71; A. Gjuríčová, ‘Naked Democracy: Eroticism and Nudity in Czech Public Space after 1989’, in D. Ondřej, T. Kavka, and J. Machek (eds.), *Popular Culture and Subcultures of Czech Post-Socialism. Listening to the Wind of Change* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2017), 44.

well as the proliferation of new means of cultural transmission (videotapes, see Chapter Six) all meant that in the 1980s sex acquired new and often uncontrolled meanings.

Karol Jachymek proposes that we understand the eroticisation of Polish cinema in the 1980s as an element of the global porno chic wave.⁶²² According to Brian McNair, porno chic is ‘the representation of porn in non-pornographic art and culture; the pastiche and parody of, the homage to and investigation of porn; the postmodern transformation of porn into mainstream cultural artefact for a variety of purposes including [...] advertising, art, comedy and education’.⁶²³ The first wave of porno chic can be dated to the 1970s when, on the wave of the sexual revolution, pornography entered the mainstream culture and was perceived as an element of counter-cultural dissidence.⁶²⁴ As McNair argues, the second wave of porno chic started in the late 1980s with works of artists such as Madonna or Jeff Koons who built up on the transgressive and taboo-breaking qualities associated with pornography, but were not exactly interested in arousing the viewer, as is the goal of ‘regular’ pornographic productions.⁶²⁵

Drawing on Jachymek’s and McNair’s works I argue that the concept of porno chic can be taken further in analysing the Polish 1980s. It was not only the cinema, but also visual culture (TV, the popular press), advertising, and expert discourse that were clearly fascinated with pornography at that time. People were captivated by pornography because it symbolised the Western world but also because it allowed them to say and do things that were otherwise scrutinised in the Polish society. Perhaps, analysing the porno chic of the Polish 1980s will help us better understand the pornographic boom which was

⁶²² K. Jachymek, ‘A Train to Hollywood : Porno chic in the Polish Cinema of the Late 1980s’, *European Journal of American Studies*, 13/3 (2018), 1–10.

⁶²³ B. McNair, *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratization of Desire* (London, 2002), 61.

⁶²⁴ Jachymek, ‘A Train to Hollywood’, 2.

⁶²⁵ McNair, *Striptease Culture*, 62-87.

so emblematic in the following decade and until recently has been interpreted purely as the result of the post-1989 economic transformation.⁶²⁶ However, the term porno chic may sound too glamorous and not always reflect the low quality of jokes and sexual references present in the late state-socialist public sphere. From today's perspective they often sound too sexist or homophobic to be treated seriously, yet they reflect the dominant discourse of that historical period. Therefore, following Lew-Starowicz's observation quoted earlier, I propose to use the term 'ribald porno chic' [rubaszny porno chic] which in my opinion better reflects the character of the discussions on sexuality in the last decade of state socialism (and beyond).

Ribald Porno Chic on Public TV: *Sexcesy*

It is hardly surprising that explicitly erotic scenes entered cinema screens much earlier than the TV screens. This can be explained by the different status of the two media, as showcased by the OBOP opinion polls analysed in Chapter Four. In the surveys conducted at the beginning of the 1970s respondents, regardless of their gender, were generally more permissive of nudity on cinema screen than in the TV.⁶²⁷ Other explanation can be once again the artistic framework, that served as a justification for eroticism in many works of culture. While TV was connected to everyday entertainment and the private sphere, cinemas represented higher artistic values as well as social control of the public theatre space and therefore 'protected' the filmmakers from the possible accusations of pornography.

⁶²⁶ E. Stusińska, *Miła Robótka: Polskie Świerszczyki, Harlekiny i Porno z Satelity* (Wołowiec, 2021).

⁶²⁷ OBOP, The viewers' attitude to the presentation of nudity and sex in televisions programmes. GEAR 1973, http://tnsglobal.pl/archiw_files/M.0221d.pdf (5 Jan.2021).

However, by the early 1980s erotic scenes had reached the TV productions as well. The examples of TV series *07 zgłoś się* and *Alternatywy 4* have already been mentioned. These productions should not however be seen as disconnected phenomena but rather as a part of a wider turn of the Polish TV toward more commercial culture. The political context of such changes should not be disregarded. During the Martial Law period (1981-1983) the Public Television was subject to enhanced political control. The presenters of the daily news show were dressed in military uniforms and many of the journalists and actors were fired or boycotted the public TV. The TV was not a highly esteemed institution (the popular slogan warned that ‘The TV is lying’) and its social legitimacy was extremely low. Therefore, after the Martial Law was first suspended (December 1982) and then lifted in July 1983, the need to restore the trust in the public broadcaster was evident.⁶²⁸

To achieve this goal, the officials responsible for the TV programme turned to genres generally considered popular among the TV audiences. The greatest example of this strategy is the popularity of the Brazilian telenovela *Niewolnica Isaura* [*Isaura the Slave Girl*], aired in the Polish TV in fifteen episodes from February to May 1985. Even despite the critical reception among film critics and journalists, the audience numbers skyrocketed, demonstrating a notable gap between the opinions of the experts and the preferred type of entertainment among the broader public.⁶²⁹ As Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz points out, the kitsch epitomised by *Niewolnica Isaura* symbolised the failure of the post-war ‘civilisational project’ and the beginning of the new, commercial version of

⁶²⁸ Kornacki, ‘Naga Władza...’, 203.

⁶²⁹ K. Stańczak-Wiślicz, ‘O Zwycięstwie Niewolnicy Isaury Nad Dyrektorami - Kryzysowe Debaty o Kulturze Popularnej w Polsce Lat 80. XX Wieku’, in K. Stańczak-Wiślicz (ed.), *Kultura Popularna w Polsce w Latach 1944-1989. Między Projektem Ideologicznym a Kontestacją* (Warszawa, 2015), 154–7.

popular culture.⁶³⁰ Not long after the success of *Isaura*, the TVP commissioned another TV series targeted directly at popular audiences. *Tulipan* was based on the life of Jerzy Kalibabka, a seducer and conman, famous for deceiving and robbing several women between 1977 and 1982.⁶³¹ His story was widely publicised in the press in a sensational tone.⁶³² The TV series broadcasted in six episodes in 1987 concentrated on the sexual encounters of Tulipan (TV alter-ego of Kalibabka), his relationships with women, among them sex workers. As the series' plotline evolved around Kalibabka's sex life, repeated appearance of naked female bodies was more than justified. Clearly, the new type of TV entertainment took voyeuristic desires of TV audiences seriously.

The talk-show *Sexcesy* [*Sexcesses*] is perhaps one of the most peculiar TV productions of that period and the greatest illustration of how ribald porno chic had penetrated the visual culture in the 1980s. This show was produced by the TVP in 1985 and aired in four episodes over the course of the year. Its first episode was aired in January, the second in April, the third in May and then the special final episode was broadcast as a part of the New Year's Eve programme. All of the episodes were broadcast late at night and marked as 'for adults only'.⁶³³ Because of the closed character of the TVP archives the show has not yet been analysed by the scholars and remains largely forgotten in the popular memory. Although, due to the coronavirus pandemic, I did not manage to conduct thorough archival research into the context in which the show was

⁶³⁰ Stańczak-Wiślicz, 'O Zwycięstwie', 168.

⁶³¹ *Tulipan* (1987), dir. J. Dymek, six episodes.

⁶³² L. Konarski, 'Wszystko z miłości?', *Ekspres Reporterów*, 8 (1983), 50-96.

⁶³³ 'Tydzień w TVP', *Dziennik Bałtycki* (8 Feb. 1985), 7; 'Tydzień w telewizji 16-22 V', *Zbliżenia* (16 May 1985), 10; 'Telewizja', *Głos Pomorza*, (24 May 1985), 7; 'Telewizja', *Trybuna Robotnicza*, (31 Dec. 1985 - 1 Jan. 1986), 5.

produced and aired, the analysis of the recordings themselves allows me to study the unique ribald porno chic of this production.⁶³⁴

The host of the show, Tadeusz Drozda, was a comedian who would later become famous for his comedy show *Śmiechu warte* [*Laughable*] (1994-2009). According to Drozda, the idea was not originally his, but came from Feridun Erol, who became the director of *Sexcesy* and acted as the host of the last episode aired on New Year's Eve.⁶³⁵ The character of the show is difficult to describe as the producers combined different formats – talk-show with live audience, dance and music performances, foreign media review as well as discussions with invited guests. Not long after the first episode was aired Drozda started touring Poland with his own cabaret programme, also titled *Sexcesy*. According to the SB documents, he hired female naturists to perform striptease dances during the shows and he made a nice sum of money out of it (see Chapter Seven).⁶³⁶ Some of the songs and sketches performed by Drozda during the programme were recorded in May 1985 in Warsaw and sold on audio cassettes. Moreover, a striptease dance from Drozda's live show was also shown on TV in the final episode of *Sexcesy*: strangely enough while the woman danced, Drozda sighed and groaned in the background, imitating the sounds of an intimate intercourse.

Although the fascination with eroticism was evident, the show's producers attempted to present it as something more than entertainment. The guests in the studio were supposed to discuss the changing sexual mores in a professional, yet humorous

⁶³⁴ Warsaw, Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Zbiorów Programowych Telewizji Polskiej (Polish Television Archives, henceforth ATVP) SK20991, SK20992, SK20993, SK20994, *Sexcesy* (1985), dir. F. Erol, four episodes.

⁶³⁵ M. Różycki, 'Dostawca uśmiechu. Rozmowa z Tadeuszem Drozdą', *TIM. Tygodniowy Magazyn Ilustrowany* (17 Apr. 1987), 3, 6.

⁶³⁶ Warsaw, AIPN BU 01134/4563/J, Notatka służbowa z dn. 10 września 1986, k. 26.

manner. The list of participants included the following journalists: Krystyna Zielińska (Polish Radio), Marek Rymuszko (*Prawo i Życie*), Zygmunt Broniarek (foreign correspondent of *Trybuna Ludu* and TVP), Witold Jackiewicz (*Kurier Polski*) and Tadeusz Tarkowski (TVP). In the second and third episode they were joined by the actors Gabriela Kownacka and Roman Wilhelmi, as well as by the sexologist and psychiatrist Anna Sierzpowska-Ketner and the journalists Janusz Atlas (*Sztandar Młodych*) and Zygmunt Kałużyński (*Polityka*). Some of these names may appear familiar to the careful reader of this thesis – this is because many of these people were active participants of the debates on sexuality analysed in other chapters. This fact in itself makes *Sexcesy* a fascinating source to study the evolution of media discourses on sexuality in PRL.

In the first episode the audience in the studio was divided into two groups. On Drozda's right hand sat the group of 'conservatives', old people dressed elegantly in evening dresses, black suits and cylinder hats. They were supposed to represent the opposition toward sexual 'novelties' from the older generations. On his left sat the group of (clothed) naturists with their informal leader, Sylwester Marczak. This reflected the dominant topic of the first broadcast which was devoted to the changing attitudes toward nudity exemplified by the rise of naked sunbathing. During the show short fragments of Antoni Orwiński's 1984 documentary *Naturyści* [*Naturists*] were presented and Drozda conducted a short interview with Marczak. The topic returned also in the second broadcast about the status of naked beaches and the details of joining the naturist movement. One should note here that Marczak's participation in *Sexcesy* would soon provoke outrage

among his fellow naturists and result in a serious conflict within the movement (see Chapter Seven for details).⁶³⁷

Each show concluded with a theme-song ‘Sexcesy’, with lyrics written by Marcin Wolski to the music composed by Jerzy Woy. Strangely enough, in the second episode of the show the song is performed by Drozda accompanied by a folk music assemble in traditional costumes. Therefore, the producers seemed to suggest, sex had not only foreign connotations but could also be enjoyed in a more familiar, Polish context. The lyrics are such a great illustration of the ribald porno chic in the discourse on sexuality, that I decided to translate them here in full (unfortunately losing the original rhymes).

<p>Wiedzą to niektóre kraje Seks łagodzi obyczaje Trudno groźnie marszczyć czoło Kiedy widać prawdę gołą</p> <p>Refren: Dla nas golizna nie pierwszozna Może to przyznać nie jeden z nas Choć grzmi starszozna ‘Seks – zgnilizna’ Spada bielizna co jakiś czas</p> <p>Słyszać głosy poniektórych Pora wracać – rozumiecie – do natury prawda</p> <p>Gdy nie trzeba nawet listka Zdrowiej wiecej jest dla środowiska</p> <p>Refren: Dla nas...</p> <p>Od teatru do Gieesu Coraz więcej jest sexcesów Podziwiamy więc do spółki Gołe girlsy to znów półki</p> <p>Refren: Dla nas...</p>	<p>Some countries know it very well Sex soothes our morals It is difficult to frown angrily When you see the naked truth</p> <p>Chorus: For us nakedness is nothing new Many of us can agree Even though the elderly thunder ‘Sex is rotten’ From time to time our pants come down</p> <p>You can hear some people say We need to go back to, you know, nature, yes?</p> <p>Where you don’t need even a leaf It’s healthier for the environment</p> <p>Chorus: For us...</p> <p>From theatre to the local shop We have more and more sexcesses So we admire together Naked girls and then bare shelves</p> <p>Chorus: For us...</p>
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⁶³⁷ ‘Secesja wśród naturystów’, *Odgłosy* (4 May 1985), 11; (sb), ‘Naturyści się wstydzają...’, *Dziennik Łódzki* (25 Apr. 1985), 6.

<p>Głosy zmienne są jak zebra Raz ubierać, raz rozebrać Wniosek chyba każdy zgadnie Wszystko dobre, jeśli ładne</p> <p>Refren: Dla nas...</p>	<p>Arguments are varied just like zebras First, 'get dressed', then 'undress' The conclusion should be clear to everyone It's all good if it's pretty</p> <p>Chorus: For us...⁶³⁸</p>
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As the lyrics suggested, sex was a form of entertainment that every modern, easy-going, and young person should enjoy. Moreover, in the song the fascination with naked female bodies was clearly connected with the realities of economic crisis ('bare shelves'). Sexuality could thus become a useful 'safety valve' in the realities of scarcity economy. While consumption of certain consumer products was limited, visual consumption of naked female bodies could offer an attractive and easily available alternative. Yet, as the final verse openly declared, the boundaries of sexual tolerance were also clearly demarcated. 'Everything is good if it is pretty' referred to the gendered definition of sex appeal. Female bodies could be appreciated if they were young and attractive and such forms of sexual attraction were to be encouraged. Thus, there was still little room for liberation outside the dominant, heteropatriarchal frame.

As the producers declared in the first episode, *Sexcesy* had the ambition to encourage the discussion on the ongoing transformation of sexual mores. The large proportion of the programme was devoted to new phenomena such as naturism or eroticism in the movies. Many of the materials heavily focused on sexuality in the West – the audience could enjoy reports from strip clubs in Paris and Vienna, Miss World beauty pageant in London, as well as the footage from the convention of sex workers in Amsterdam. Yet, after carefully watching the show, one cannot resist the conclusion that

⁶³⁸ *Sexcesy* (song, 1985), lyrics M. Wolski, music J. Woy, performed by T. Drozda.

the real purpose of it was to show as many naked and scantily clad women as possible. Each episode of *Sexcesy* featured at least one striptease dance, some of them apparently produced specially for the purposes of the programme. As Drozda emphasised in the first episode, striptease and topless shows were present in almost every restaurant in the country. ‘And it is great that such a topless is served. You know, we have beautiful girls, but the restaurant menu leaves much room for improvement’ he added, suggesting once again that admiring naked female bodies was a form of *ersatz* consumption and a response to the crisis reality of the 1980s.

Perhaps the best evidence of how porno chic manifested itself in the Polish media discourse is the use of pornographic clips in *Sexcesy*. The images of naked women were omnipresent – from the opening credits to short clips accompanying discussions on other topics (for example a pianist with her naked breasts exposed in the material about classical music in Episode Three). Many of them were direct copies from Western TV or videotapes. Most notably, in the first episode of the show the discussion on moral censorship was facilitated with excerpts from a pornographic movie. Drozda admitted between the lines that the movie was re-recorded from a videotape smuggled from the West and therefore the quality was not ideal. To assess its suitability for the Polish audiences, the ‘experts’ in the studio were asked to shout ‘stop’ whenever they felt that the movie was breaching the standards of the public socialist TV. This scene reveals a lot about how pornography was being re-defined for the purposes of TV entertainment. While some of the guests complained that the pornographic clip was ‘disgusting’ (in the words of Krystyna Zielińska), Drozda openly admitted that he enjoyed this type of entertainment (‘Awful, awful. And then I wanted to watch another one’).

The broadcast clip involved scenes of heterosexual petting, but only naked female breasts were exposed. The guests interrupted the film several times when the camera focused on male genitalia, as well as when the male actor started licking his partner's nipples. Whether this material could really be called pornographic is debatable as no genitals were exposed and the clip did not actually portray the intercourse. In fact, many of the erotic scenes from Polish movies that were presented in the very same episode of *Sexcesy* (such as scenes from *Thais*, *Konopielka* and *Widziadło*) portrayed sexual intercourse much more openly. Yet, it was not the actual eroticism that mattered the most, but rather the framing of the erotic scene in itself. Through the way in which the film fragment was introduced (as an illegal videotape smuggled from the West), the producers of *Sexcesy* recreated the *experience* of enjoying illicit pornography. By watching the show, the TV audience could participate in the taboo practice and I argue that the excitement provoked by the 'forbidden' material was much more important than the erotic contents of the movie themselves. Such a fascination was very clear in the letters the TVP received after the first broadcast. The viewers inquired whether it would be possible to get rid of the 'stop' sign in the next broadcast as well as whether the producers of *Sexcesy* could make sure that 'pornography is legalised in Poland'.⁶³⁹

Indeed, not long afterwards, the TVP made yet another step on the way to mainstreaming soft pornography among Polish audiences. In December 1985, probably on the wave of *Sexcesy*'s popularity, the magazine *Antena* announced that the national broadcaster was planning to develop its portfolio of programmes and begin airing erotic movies as a part of so-called 'Night Cinema' intended for adult audiences.⁶⁴⁰ At first, the

⁶³⁹ The letters were quoted in Episode Two of *Sexcesy*.

⁶⁴⁰ E. Królikowska, 'Bomba na Woronicza', *Antena* (2 Dec. 1985), 1, 14.

idea did not meet with enthusiasm of film critics and Stanisław Kuszewski scorned it on the pages of *Kino* for catering to low tastes.⁶⁴¹ His criticism was most likely shared by other commentators and decision-makers, because the series of soft-pornographic movies did not make it to the TV screens until early 1988 (although the exact decision process still remains to be researched). They were broadcast as part of the series 'Literature and Eros' and the TV audiences could watch the first film on Saturday, 23 January 1988 at 11:45 p.m..⁶⁴² The last film from the series, known also under the title 'Pink Series', aired on 26 March.⁶⁴³

Tomasz Raczek recounted in *Ekran* [*Screen*] that the new addition to the TV programme met with enthusiasm of the audience, although the TV also received many calls from the viewers disappointed with the 'modest' character of the movies. 'Give us something proper' they asked, suggesting that the degree of eroticism was not sufficient to their tastes. As Raczek concluded, by the time the 'Pink Series' was aired, many Poles had seen much more openly erotic or even pornographic productions thanks to the unofficial circulation of videotapes.⁶⁴⁴ There was certainly a grain of truth in Raczek's observation, yet one thing can be said for certain: the 'Pink Series' marked a symbolic surrender of the socialist TV to the wave of porno chic that had by then penetrated many other areas of popular culture. The two men's lifestyle magazines that appeared on the newsstands at roughly the same time offer great evidence to further explore this phenomenon.

⁶⁴¹ Stankusz [S. Kuszewski], 'Niewypał', *Kino*, 3 (1986), 18.

⁶⁴² 'TV Program', *Ekran* (21 Jan. 1988), 28.

⁶⁴³ (jn), 'Różgi', *Ekran* (24 Mar. 1988), 21; 'TV Program', *Ekran* (24 Mar. 1988), 28.

⁶⁴⁴ T. Raczek, 'Bał różowych zmysłów', *Ekran* (3 Mar. 1988), 5.

Toward a New Type of Erotica: *Pan* and *Playboy*

Increasingly eroticised images of naked women had been present in the state-socialist media from the 1970s onwards. Yet, it was not until 1987 that the first magazines openly dedicated to this topic appeared on the newsstands. First, in January 1987 the satirical weekly *Szpilki* [*Pins*] started publishing a monthly supplement under the title *Playboy*. The magazine was printed as a part of the regular *Szpilki* issue and usually covered pages 5 to 12, but it had its own cover and logo, fashioned after the American original. Indeed, the references to the original magazine were omnipresent – starting with the title (*Playtboy* with a letter ‘t’ inserted in the middle of the word), typography, and the type of topics covered. Every issue of the magazine included a centrefold (pages 8 and 9) featuring photographs of an attractive, naked model, fashioned after the famous Playmates. The section was titled ‘Miss of the month’ which discursively connected the centrefolds with the culture of beauty pageants revived after 1983. It should also be noted that, at least in the first issues, the visuals were authored by Polish photographers: Marek Łebkowski and Jurek Łapiński.⁶⁴⁵

The demand for this type of publications must have been high, as only ten months later the new magazine *Pan* [*Gentleman*] entered the market. This time the magazine was devoted entirely to men’s lifestyle with strong emphasis on sexuality. Contrary to *Playboy* it was available in newsagents as a separate publication, so the covers of the magazine rarely featured explicitly erotic images. Yet, the inside of the magazine bore striking similarities to *Playboy* and Western lifestyle magazines for men. In particular *Pan* was also famous for its centrefold (pages 39, 40 and 41) published under the title ‘Dziewczyna Pan-a’ [*Gentleman’s girlfriend*]. The centrefold almost always included a

⁶⁴⁵ See for example ‘Magda’, *Playtboy*, 8 (1987), 8–9; ‘Kama’, *Playtboy*, 5 (1987), 8–9.

poster-size photograph of a naked model in an erotic pose (see Fig. 5.2, 5.3).⁶⁴⁶ Notably, in one of the copies of the magazine that I encountered in the Warsaw Public Library, the centrefold had been ripped out, in a manner similar to the female nudes cut out of popular press as analysed in Chapter Four.⁶⁴⁷ If only indirectly this suggests that some of the readers wanted to maintain closer relation with the visuals published in *Pan*, for example through sticking them on the walls of their bedrooms or workplaces.

Both magazines targeted male readers in particular, although their publishing strategies differed significantly. While *Playboy* legitimised its erotic contents with a framework of comedy and satire, *Pan* had the ambition to actually represent the Polish men in their struggle for ‘male liberation’. As the editor-in-chief, Zbigniew Chomicz, argued in the first issue, the magazine’s goal was to present the male views on the world issues and to defend male rights. ‘We do not have our own League, our Day, a representative in the government or dedicated press titles...’ he complained.⁶⁴⁸ What was the place of women then in this publishing strategy? ‘Girls and more mature ladies are and will be a constant subject of our attention, as our centrefold attests – there we try to discover the best side of a woman’ explained Chomicz in the first editorial. Thus, *Pan* aimed to restore the traditional gender order and female nudity was a tool of achieving this goal.

Chomicz’s claims were largely ill-founded as men held the vast majority of governmental positions and dominated in both political and economic life of state-socialist Poland, even despite the ideological pronouncements of gender equality.

⁶⁴⁶ Fig. 5.2, ‘Dziewczyna pan-a’, *Pan*, 3 (1987), 40–1; Fig. 5.3, ‘Dziewczyna pan-a’, *Pan*, 12 (1988), 40–1.

⁶⁴⁷ *Pan*, 1 (1988), (Warsaw Public Library, accessed in Jan. 2021).

⁶⁴⁸ Z. Chomicz, ‘Od redakcji’, *Pan*, 1 (1987), 2.

Therefore, the publishing strategy championed by the editors of *Pan* should rather be interpreted as a sign of conservative backlash against the emancipatory communist project than a reflection of any existing discrimination against men in the social and political life. The discourse on the crisis of masculinity – a topic which returned between the lines in many of the articles published by *Pan* – can also be seen as a reaction to the crisis reality of the 1980s. The political crisis, restrictions imposed during the Martial Law, as well as the aggravating economic shortages could deprive men of the sense of agency over their own lives. Men's magazines tried to combat such harmful influences by an imagined return to the traditional gender order in which men were the ones who achieved success, made careers, and in their leisure time enjoyed looking at attractive naked female bodies.

Undoubtedly, if investigated thoroughly, *Pan* and *Playboy* would offer a fascinating lens to study the discourse on masculinity in late state socialism. Similarly, the investigation of the history behind these magazines' publication would undoubtedly reveal a lot about the realities of media production in that period as well as the gradual relaxation of censorship. Both of these topics are however beyond the scope of this chapter which wants to analyse how discussions on and visualisations of sexuality were appropriated for the purposes of late state-socialist entertainment. Therefore, I am going to focus here on the topics already explored in the chapter such as voyeurism, ribald pornographic, fascination with the West, and the consumption of erotica in the realities of scarcity economy. Based on these examples I argue that both *Pan* and *Playboy* epitomised the unique sexual liberalisation that occurred in the last decade of PRL. I hope to be able to explore all other aspects of this fascinating history in my future research.

The first *Pan*'s girlfriend was Marzena, a stripper and a naturist. Alongside her naked picture on the centrefold, *Pan* also published an interview with her in which she revealed secrets of her work as an erotic dancer.⁶⁴⁹ Thus, the editors invited the readers to take a peek behind the scenes and satisfy their curiosity. Close reading of both *Pan* and *Playboy* early issues reveals that voyeurism was the one of the dominant narrative strategies employed by the editors. Both striptease and artistic nudes, to a large extent already accepted by the society, were used to legitimise the appearances of naked models on the pages of the magazine. Both of the magazines invited women to submit their candidacy in elections of 'Miss Striptease', 'Miss of the month' or in the competitions for the most beautiful female nude.⁶⁵⁰ This constant assessment of female bodies is best visible in the *Playboy*'s June 1987 centrefold which depicts Bogna, a naked model, whose bodily qualities are rated by a group of men. They assess her body with a tape measure and a medical spatula. The joy of looking is emphasised through the group of a photographers and a man with an Arab-looking headdress who holds binoculars by his face (see Fig. 5.4).⁶⁵¹

Sexism and objectification of women's bodies were a recognisable feature of Western men's magazines, to which *Pan* and *Playboy* clearly aspired. The aesthetics of porno chic were extremely important for the way in which the contents of the magazines were structured (with the soft-pornographic centrefold in the centre). Yet, the visuals in both magazines were also rooted in the Polish context and frameworks of representing naked female bodies developed under state socialism. First, the visual language

⁶⁴⁹ A. Kołodziejcki, 'Czysta sprawa. Rozmowa z dziewczyną z rozkładówki', *Pan*, 1 (1987), 39.

⁶⁵⁰ 'Miss Playboya'87', *Playboy*, 4 (1987), 16; 'Miss Striptizu'88', *Pan*, 2 (1988), 38; E. R., 'Konkurs na akt'88', *Pan*, 6 (1988), 60–1.

⁶⁵¹ 'Bogna', *Playboy*, 6 (1987), 8–9.

established by 'Venus' exhibitions (see Chapters Three and Four) formed an important reference point for the editors of *Pan*. The magazine published interviews with Władysław Klimczak and the photographers who exhibited their works in Cracow such as Władysław Pawelec and Andrzej Krynicki.⁶⁵² This fascination with the aesthetic championed by 'Venus' was especially clear in the images published by *Pan*. The March 1988 centrefold was photographed by Pawelec, while in October that year the 'Pan's girlfriend' section featured pictures from the Venus exhibition.⁶⁵³ As such examples demonstrate, the boundary between artistic and erotic nudes grew increasingly blurred toward the end of the 1980s.

Second, many of the texts and visuals found in *Playtboy* were in clear dialogue with the aesthetics of ribald porno chic, as already analysed in the case of the TV show *Sexcesy*. Its host, Tadeusz Drozda, had his own column in *Playtboy* (under the pseudonym Dr. Ozda). The early centrefolds in this magazine are also a particularly good example of how ribald porno chic penetrated the visual discourse. On the one hand, the 'Miss of the month' section was clearly modelled after *Playboy's* 'Playmate of the month' centrefold. Yet, the images of a naked model in an eroticised pose bore a number of distinct features, making them essentially Polish and visibly late socialist. Women were presented in familiar scenarios: at home, in an office, at a nudist beach or working in agriculture. The Miss of January 1987 mopped the floor and hung the laundry while completely naked.⁶⁵⁴ In March that year the centrefold portrayed Kasia, an office worker, who rode a kneeling

⁶⁵² Z. Chomicz, "'Venus' triumfująca. Rozmowa z Władysławem Klimczakiem', *Pan*, 10 (1988), 8–9, 35; E.R., 'Zaplanowana lekkość. Wywiad z Władysławem Pawelcem', *Pan*, 3 (1988), 20–1; E. R., 'Czar deformacji. Rozmowa z Andrzejem Krynickim', *Pan*, 12 (1988), 72–4.

⁶⁵³ 'Dziewczyna pan-a', *Pan*, 3 (1988), 39, 40–1; 'Dziewczyna pan-a', *Pan*, 10 (1988), 39, 40–1.

⁶⁵⁴ 'Iza,' *Playtboy*, 1 (1987), 8–9.

man in a suit.⁶⁵⁵ The visuals were far from glamorous, with models presented in their ‘daily’ environments not artificial scenography. As such the images suggested that sexual openness could have a distinctly local flavour. Therefore, I argue the centrefolds could be understood as a form of fantasy about access to erotica in one’s daily life and foremost about the sexual availability of Polish women.

Both of the magazines were also clearly fascinated with Western culture in general, not only its pornographic components. The readers of *Pan* could become acquainted with Western fashion, cars, alcohols. The magazine aimed to educate them on how to become a successful Western-style gentleman. As the contents of the magazine suggested, in order to achieve success one needed to adopt a modern approach toward sex. In *Playtboy* the video-tapes column educated readers on which productions of the Western porno-industry circulating in Poland were worth watching.⁶⁵⁶ Consumption of erotica clearly fitted into the picture of a modern, cultured person. Through consuming erotic goods, men could participate in the Western lifestyle to which they so badly aspired.

Yet, the importance of consumption in the discourse on sexuality went beyond the fascination with the West. The first cover of *Playtboy* featured a naked woman depicted with two bags of groceries in her hands and a band of toilet paper wrapped around her body (see Fig. 5.5).⁶⁵⁷ As toilet paper was one of the most sought-after consumer goods in 1980s Poland, the allusion to socialist shortages could not be clearer. Tadeusz Drozda went even further in his satirical column published in the next issue of *Playtboy* and

⁶⁵⁵ ‘Kasia’, *Playtboy*, 3 (1987), 8–9.

⁶⁵⁶ ‘Video’, *Playtboy*, 1 (1987), 7; ‘Video’, *Playtboy*, 7 (1987), 10.

⁶⁵⁷ Fig. 5.5, *Playtboy*, 1 (1987), 5.

imagined possible plotlines for pornographic films that could be set in Poland. In his opinion, queuing for meat offered a ready-made scenario for an erotic film in which desperate and tired customers engage in sexual encounters in an empty shop. Similarly, a story about a gas station ‘that sells petrol above the allowance’ in exchange for sexual services would in Drozda’s opinion make a great screenplay.⁶⁵⁸ Although the focus of *Pan* was less satirical than *Playtboy*’s, the editors of the second magazine did not refrain from allusions to the dire economic situation either. For example, in May 1988 they reprinted a picture of a naked bride with only a veil in her hair from the French erotic magazine *Lui*, with a comment that such an outfit is ‘very cute and very much applicable to our own crisis conditions’.⁶⁵⁹

Sex was undoubtedly a form of escaping late state-socialist reality, at least for heterosexual men. The preoccupation with erotica also offered a way of avoiding more politically divisive issues. The words of Drozda’s cabaret song summarise this sense of general crisis and escape into the ‘erotic’: ‘What’s left is always sex / When you are left without a punch line / When everything loses meaning / Give moments, give moments, give moments’.⁶⁶⁰ Yet, the access to such escapes was in no way equal. While men indulged themselves by watching pornographic videotapes and erotic magazines, women had to face economic scarcities and everyday sexism. The ‘double burden’ of having to combine professional work and household chores (as analysed by Małgorzata Fidelis in the case of female workers in the 1950s and 1960s) became a ‘triple burden’ by the final decade of state socialism.⁶⁶¹ Following the general relaxation of sexual mores, women

⁶⁵⁸ [Dr. Ozda], ‘Sexcesy, Playtboy, Pornopol’, *Playtboy*, 2 (1987), 7.

⁶⁵⁹ ‘Przegląd prasy’, *Pan*, 5 (1988), 74.

⁶⁶⁰ Polish original: ‘Zawsze nam zostanie sex, / kiedy całkiem braknie pointy, / Jak już wszystko straci sens: / dać momenty, dać momenty, dać momenty’ T. Drozda, ‘Dać te rzeczy’, *Playtboy*, 8 (1987), 7.

⁶⁶¹ Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*.

now had to fulfil other's needs in all three spheres: at home caring for their families, in the workplace, and finally in the bedroom. The expectation of female sexual availability was largely shaped by the visual culture of the 1980s as the examples of *Pan* and *Playboy* demonstrate. The proliferation of sexist and misogynist imagery in that decade in turn contributed to the backlash against women's rights after 1989. It was not only the Church that wanted to see women at home (as mothers and wives). The project of sexual liberation championed by men's magazines was also in general contradictory with the ideas of women's emancipation. It was not until much later that women could really assert their own voice in the debates about sexuality.

'Touch My Heart'. Erotic Capital and Migration in Late State Socialism

This chapter could easily finish here with the conclusion that the eroticisation of popular culture in the last decade of state socialism had a profoundly sexist character and therefore was oppressive and exploitative toward women. Deprived of their agency and objectified in the eyes of male observers, naked models and striptease dancers could hardly play the roles of feminist heroines. The discourse on sexuality in late state socialism was certainly guided by sexist and misogynist stereotypes and there was little room for women to actively pursue their sexual pleasure, especially outside heterosexual marriage.⁶⁶² However, in order to fully understand the complicated history behind the images of naked models, we should entertain the possibility that there were women who could exercise agency through taking part in the production of erotica. They did not have to be feminists and, in fact, many may have subscribed to the patriarchal discourse on

⁶⁶² Kościańska, 'Sex on Equal Terms? Polish Sexology on Women's Emancipation and "Good Sex" from the 1970s to the Present', 236–56.

sexuality. Yet, bringing their experiences and life stories to the fore is an act of feminist subversion in itself. Such an argument does not invalidate the claims that traditional pornography is often oppressive to women and tends to promote violence and exploitation. Rather, what I argue here, is that the experiences of women who participated in the production of erotica in late state socialism might have been more ambiguous than the ‘victimhood’ model presupposes. In turn, the ambiguities that such life stories highlight can serve as a departure point for studying broader transformations that Polish society underwent at the time.

There are at least two names that should be mentioned in this context. Teresa Orłowski was one of the biggest porn stars in Europe in the 1980s. In 1979 she emigrated from Poland to West Germany for economic purposes (as many other Polish ‘Gastarbeiter’ did in that period⁶⁶³) and soon began a career as an erotic model and an actress in adult films. As West Germany was at that time experiencing a boom in pornographic production, she quickly made her way up the professional ladder. In 1984 she founded a company in her name (VTO: Verlag [Publishing House] Teresa Orłowski or Video Teresa Orłowski) and entered the market of pornographic video tapes with a great success.⁶⁶⁴ In the second half of the 1980s VTO was the largest producer of pornography in Europe. As Ewa Stusińska demonstrates, Orłowski’s videotapes quickly made their way to Poland.⁶⁶⁵ She became the symbol of Western pornography and, as *Playboy* recounted not without a pinch of irony, a point of pride for Poland.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶³ Stola, ‘Opting out of Socialism’, 10–5.

⁶⁶⁴ Stusińska, *Miła Robótka*, 33.

⁶⁶⁵ Stusińska, *Miła Robótka*, 36–9.

⁶⁶⁶ J.Z. Karczemny, ‘Uścisk Teresy’, *Playboy*, 6 (1987), 11.

However, Orłowski was not as celebrated by the Polish media as the other porno chic figure of that period: Danuta Lato. Perhaps this discrepancy can be explained by the character of erotic production that both of the women engaged in. While Orłowski was clearly associated with hard-core pornography, that was still illegal in Poland, Lato's career centred around soft-erotica, naked modelling, and popular culture. She was certainly an erotic figure, but her public image fitted well into the framework of sexual liberalisation that evolved under state socialism. By taking a closer look at her biography we can discover how erotic capital possessed by women could help the advance their social position and fulfil dreams about fame and recognition. In return, the way her life story was used by the media also highlights what role Western-style porno chic played in shaping popular perceptions of sexuality in late state socialism.

Danuta Lato was born in 1963 in Szufnarowa in the south-east of Poland as Danuta Irzyk. According to Krystyna Pytlakowska Danuta's childhood dream was to become an actress or a model and she kept notebooks with photographs cut out from magazines, including the female nudes from *Panorama*.⁶⁶⁷ As a teenager, she was mocked by her peers for her large breasts. Yet, as it would later turn out, it was exactly Danuta's unusual body measurements that would open her door to international career. In 1983 she was met Gregor, a West German businessman, who was fascinated by her beauty and invited her to come with him to Germany. At first, Danuta declined, as she was already engaged to another man. Yet, after five days of marriage she abandoned her husband and sued for a divorce.⁶⁶⁸ Soon afterwards she visited Gregor in Bamberg and decide to move in with him. According to Pytlakowska, Danuta's career as a model started in a public sauna in

⁶⁶⁷ K. Pytlakowska, 'Ballada o Danuśce', *Ekspres Reporterów*, 4 (1989), 37–8.

⁶⁶⁸ K. Pytlakowska, 'Listy do Danuty', *Panorama* (12 Nov. 1989), 18.

Bamberg where her unusual silhouette (she was only 150 cm high with her bust measuring 105 cm) was noticed by a photographer who invited her to pose for topless photos.⁶⁶⁹ These pictures were published in the October 1984 issue of the German edition of *Penthouse*.⁶⁷⁰

Up to this moment the story of Danuta is rather standard. A young, attractive woman spotted by a foreign businessman who offers her a chance to fulfil her dreams. As the example of Teresa Orłowski suggests, Lato was not the only woman who emigrated from state-socialist Poland to pursue a career in the erotic industry. Yet, what is truly unique about Danuta's story is the response it provoked in the Polish media. Already in November 1984 *Perspektywy* printed a short note about the *Penthouse* publication together with a picture in which Danuta holds her large naked breasts and looks straight into the camera.⁶⁷¹ The tone of the publication was openly critical, but it has to be noted that the editors did not miss the chance to reprint the nude photograph, which suggests that their concern was not only with morality, but also with appeasing the voyeuristic tastes of their readers. Therefore, the criticism voiced by the editors of *Perspektywy* was at best hypocritical, especially taking into account the fact that the magazine had been regularly publishing female nudes from its inception in 1969 (see Chapter Four).⁶⁷²

Despite the initially critical reception from the Polish press, Danuta Lato continued her career as an actress and model in the West. In the coming years she appeared on the covers of pornographic and erotic magazines such as: *High Society*

⁶⁶⁹ Pytlakowska, 'Ballada', 56–7.

⁶⁷⁰ *Penthouse* [German edition] (10 Oct. 1984).

⁶⁷¹ [pik], 'Marzenia krakowskiej "sex-bomby"', *Perspektywy* (9 Nov. 1984), 13.

⁶⁷² This hypocrisy was pointed out by the editors of *Polityka*. See [P.Ad.], 'Z daleka i bliska', *Polityka* (17 Nov. 1984), 15.

[German edition], *Playboy* [Spanish edition], and even the U.S. *Gent*.⁶⁷³ In 1985 she made her acting debut in the German comedy *Drei und eine halbe Portion* where she played a stripper.⁶⁷⁴ Danuta's later roles also evolved around her sex appeal, with movie cameras eagerly exposing her large breasts.⁶⁷⁵ Yet, in the response letter sent to the editors of *Perspektywy* in 1985 Danuta distanced herself from the claims of the pornographic character of her work and argued that the Polish press should be proud of such accomplishments of a compatriot.⁶⁷⁶ Interestingly, even though most of her photographs and film roles could easily be classified as at least soft-pornographic, she was quite successful in convincing the Polish audience that her career was worthy of attention. Most of the later publications about Danuta do not mention the erotic component of her work or downplay it, introducing her as simply a successful actress and singer. Such a transformation attests to the growing fascination with the porno chic aesthetics both in the media and in the society more generally.

In March 1988 Danuta made it onto the cover of the *Ekran* [Screen] weekly and although the cover photograph exposed her large breasts to the extent previously unseen in the officially circulating publications (see Fig. 5.6),⁶⁷⁷ in the accompanying editorial her life was portrayed as an exemplary success story with barely any mention of the erotic component of her career.⁶⁷⁸ Similarly, in a profile printed in *TIM. Tygodniowy Ilustrowany Magazyn* [Weekly Illustrated Magazine] she was portrayed as a 'Cinderella',

⁶⁷³ *High Society* [German edition] (Dec. 1984); *High Society* [German edition] (Feb. 1986); *Playboy* [Spanish edition] (June 1988); *Gent*, (Aug. 1985).

⁶⁷⁴ *Drei und eine halbe Portion* (1985), dir. S. Rothmund.

⁶⁷⁵ For example, two Israeli hidden-camera comedies: *Nipagesh Basivuv* (1987), dir. J. Barkan, E. Szem-Tow; *Nipagesh Bachof* (1987), dir. J. Barkan, J. Szilon.

⁶⁷⁶ D. Lato, 'List z Bambergu', *Perspektywy* (22 Mar. 1985), 14.

⁶⁷⁷ Fig. 5.6, *Ekran* (24 Mar. 1988), 1

⁶⁷⁸ (jas), 'Danuta', *Ekran* (24 Mar. 1988), 18–9.

who was able to fulfil her childhood dreams thanks to her honesty and hard work.⁶⁷⁹ In such publications Danuta's life story was a fairy-tale in which the ugly duckling is discovered by a prince from a far-away land and transformed into a beautiful swan. Such a framing allowed Danuta to become a role-model for young women. One of articles in *Panorama* reprinted letters that Lato received from girls in Poland.⁶⁸⁰ As the letters revealed Danuta's example encouraged them to pursue their dreams but also to look more positively at their bodies. Girls complained that they were mocked because of the size of their bras and that they felt ashamed for not fitting into the beauty stereotype.⁶⁸¹ The article was published in November 1989, after the democratic transformation began in Poland, but as other sources analysed in this chapter confirm, the letters can reveal a lot about the attitudes and aspirations characteristic to the late state-socialist period.

Apart from photo modelling and starring in a few erotic films, Danuta Lato embarked on a career as a singer. Her first song, 'Touch My Heart' premiered in 1987 and was quite successful all over Europe. In the second half of the 1980s Danuta was mentioned along other stars of Italo disco such as Samantha Fox and Sabrina.⁶⁸² It is however difficult to decide whether the success of 'Touch My Heart' was due to Danuta's musical talent or rather the accompanying videoclip in which she performed naked in a bathtub full of foam. This Italo disco inspired number made use of the porno chic poetics both visually and textually. In the chorus Danuta asks her male listeners to touch her, promising them future happiness and never-ending commitment: 'Touch, my heart / Where's the man / Who will hold me and love me forever? / Touch, my love / Let me

⁶⁷⁹ D. Małysa, 'Kopciuszek z dużym biustem', *TIM. Tygodniowy Ilustrowany Magazyn* (20 Nov. 1987), 9.

⁶⁸⁰ Her photo was also featured on the cover of that issue, see *Panorama* (12 Nov. 1989), 1.

⁶⁸¹ Pytlakowska, *Listy do Danuty...*, 18–9, 26.

⁶⁸² *Panorama* (8 Jan. 1989), 22–3.

know that you want me/ And let's stay together / Touch, my heart, / Touch, my love'.⁶⁸³

While singing, she (not surprisingly) touches herself, inviting the observers to imagine they as well could engage in this erotic encounter.

A clear reference to the bathtub scene from the 'Touch My Heart' videoclip can be observed in the Polish TV series *W labiryncie* [*In Labyrinth*].⁶⁸⁴ In this first Polish telenovela produced by the TVP Danuta Lato made a guest appearance as Barbara, a fiancé of Grzegorz Białek (episodes 35 to 43). Barbara is a fashion model, making a successful career in the West. Therefore, as Karol Jachymek observes, Danuta Lato impersonates herself⁶⁸⁵ and in fact her appearance on the show is just an attractive ornament and an excuse to show Danuta's 'excessive body' on the TV screen.⁶⁸⁶ In episode 41 when Barbara is taking a bath, the TV producers recreate the scene from the 'Touch My Heart' videoclip, only that the bathroom is a little less luxurious.⁶⁸⁷ The allusion to Danuta Lato's career is also clear in the next episode when Barbara meets a friend at a swimming pool. They both sit by a bar in swimming suits and discuss Barbara's work plans. She explains with a clearly foreign accent that she has to return to New York to play in an advertisement film that will 'make use of her greatest talent'. As Barbara says these words, she points to her ample bosom, suggesting that she owes the success to her sex appeal. 'Americans are crazy when it comes to breasts' she adds.⁶⁸⁸ Thus, again,

⁶⁸³ *Touch My Heart* (song and videoclip, 1987) produced by ZYX Records, performed by D. Lato.

⁶⁸⁴ *W labiryncie* (1988-1991), dir. P. Karpiński.

⁶⁸⁵ The pictures of Barbara watched by Piotrek in Episode 40 are in fact exactly the same photographs that appeared in Danuta Lato's promotional materials, including the cover of her first vinyl record. See *W labiryncie: Dlaczego?*, Episode 40 (1989), dir. P. Karpiński.

⁶⁸⁶ K. Jachymek, 'Danuta Lato – Ekscesywne Ciało Przełomu', *Kultura Popularna*, 1 (2019), 145–6.

⁶⁸⁷ *W labiryncie: Dla siebie przeznaczeni*, Episode 41 (1989), dir. P. Karpiński.

⁶⁸⁸ *W labiryncie: Operacja*, Episode 42 (1989), dir. P. Karpiński.

the boundary between Barbara and Danuta becomes blurred. The audience is left to wonder whether she just plays the role or speaks about her personal experiences.

Danuta's appearance in *W labiryncie* offers evidence to argue that she held celebrity status in the eyes of late state-socialist audiences. She embodied dreams and aspirations of many: successful career in the West, sexual openness, and wealth. Perhaps this explains why the porno chic aesthetics epitomised by Lato were so easily accepted by consumers of popular culture in the last decade of PRL. Commercial sex – symbolised by porno-stars, striptease, and adult films on video-tapes – was clearly a Western phenomenon. The Western sex industry fascinated many because it was foreign but also because it epitomised the capitalist version of 'modernity'. Thus, the porno chic aesthetics enabled the Polish audiences to participate in the transnational community of consumers of erotic goods. Danuta Lato symbolised Poland's participation in the global sexual market, even before the neo-liberal transformation gained momentum in Central and Eastern Europe. Perhaps her rise to fame could only take place in this very liminal moment. As Danuta Lato travelled back and forth between Poland and West Germany, Polish society was also somehow suspended in-between: between socialism and capitalism; East and West; and finally, sexual 'backwardness' and 'modernity'.

Chapter Six: Illegal Bodies. Pornography, Homophobia, and the Limits of Sexual Liberation

The 1953 Polish Newsreel (PKF) episode *Oto Ameryka* [*This is America*] portrays the USA as the source of ultimate evil: of racism, fascism, and imperialism. The ‘American way of life’ is defined by violence and the sexual exploitation of women. As the camera focuses on artifacts of American culture – ties with images of scantily clad women [bikiniarskie krawaty] and comic books – the narrator accuses American literature of ‘savagery, sadism, pornography’.⁶⁸⁹ This short film is quite emblematic of the early communist portrayal of erotica and commercial sex. Defined as a remnant of ‘bourgeois morality’ and a feature characteristic of the rotten capitalist culture in the West, pornography became a symbol of the approach to sexuality that would be eradicated once the new socialist morality was fully entrenched in Poland. Yet, as the previous chapter already demonstrated, not long after this episode was produced, eroticised images flooded the popular press on the wave of post-Stalinist liberalisation. Hence, the definition of pornography and the institutional approach toward illicit erotica needed to change as well. The goal of this chapter is to trace this evolution and explore how pornography was increasingly normalised in both expert and popular discourses.

The previous chapters focused on how contestations over the limits of acceptable sexual representation played out in the popular press of state-socialist Poland. To fully understand the complicated landscape of visual erotic culture under state socialism this chapter approaches the problem from a slightly different angle. Instead of looking at

⁶⁸⁹ PKF, 3/53, ‘Oto Ameryka’, Repozytorium Cyfrowe Filmoteki Narodowej, <http://repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/7255> (23 May 2021)

visuals that were acceptable in the public sphere, the analysis concentrates on the images that were still deemed illegal and improper. Although questions of how to define pornography have hovered in the background throughout this thesis, this chapter focuses explicitly on changing approaches toward pornographic images between 1956 and 1989.

The definition of pornography remains intentionally blurred in this chapter. Instead of providing one coherent explanation of the term and assessing the sources according to a predefined framework, I want to focus on how social actors understood pornography at the time. Such an approach, I believe, allows us better to understand the contested understanding of sexual freedoms and its development over time. As I argue, the problematic definition of pornography stood at the very centre of scholarly and institutional debates on illegal erotica. Therefore, the negotiated character of this definition is in fact one of the key objects of study in this chapter.

On the other hand, the goal of this chapter is also to investigate how the legislation on pornography was applied in the day-to-day functioning of police institutions such as the Citizens' Militia (*Milicja Obywatelska*, henceforth MO) and the Security Service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*, henceforth SB). By focusing on case studies of pornography investigations, I analyse how expert criminological discourses on illegal erotica translated into the operations of Citizens' Militia functionaries. In this way, we can catch a rare glimpse into the process of redefining socialist morality at the grassroots level. Furthermore, by comparing archival documents on hetero- and homosexual pornography I demonstrate that the institutional approach toward erotic materials was profoundly heteronormative. While heterosexual pornography was increasingly normalised (as the porno-chic wave analysed in Chapter Five demonstrates), homosexual erotica was still perceived as 'deviant' and in need of control. This process of discursive 'othering' of queer desires formed an indispensable part of heteronormative sexual liberalisation and

as such set the scene in which the struggle for gay liberation could only begin in the late 1980s (and in fact is still far from over).⁶⁹⁰

Finally, this chapter also investigates the impact of new technologies on the transformation of social approaches toward pornography. As videotapes reached Polish audiences in the mid-1980s, the controlling gaze of the state over the sexual lives of its citizens was seriously impaired. The proliferation of video recorders challenged the domination of state-controlled media outlets in the production and transmission of erotic materials. Polish consumers could now familiarise themselves with the newest productions of the Western pornographic industry, and despite all the efforts of the censors and Customs Office, they could not prevent the illegal videotapes from spreading. This illicit character of pornographic videotapes gave them not only sexual, but also political allure. The consumption of pornographic images on VCRs became another way of participating in the global community of consumers. Therefore, although sex was undoubtedly important, watching pornography acquired many different and often contradictory meanings in this period of economic and social transition.

There are two areas of analysis that this chapter purposefully ignores. First, I do not analyse debates around literary pornography. The development of pornographic aesthetics in literature has already been analysed by Ewa Stusińska and the attempts to censor immoral literary texts have also attracted some attention by scholars.⁶⁹¹ As this thesis focuses on visual culture and treats nudity as a departure point for the study of Polish sexual (r)evolutions, literature plays a less significant role for my argument here.

⁶⁹⁰ See Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland: Cross-Border Flows in Gay and Lesbian Magazines*.

⁶⁹¹ E. Stusińska, *Dzieje Grzechu. Dyskurs Pornograficzny w Polskiej Prozie XX Wieku (Na Wybranych Przykładach)* (Gdańsk, 2018); K. Budrowska, 'Cenzura, Tabu i Wstyd. Cenzura Obyczajowa PRL-u (1948-1958)', *Napis Pismo Poświęcone Literaturze Okolicznościowej i Użytkowej*, XVIII (2012), 229–44.

Second, the chapter intentionally overlooks the role of official censorship in producing the definition of what was pornographic and what was not. I am fully aware that censors were important actors in discussions of illegal erotica. As the archives of the Censorship Office are vast and remain largely uncatalogued, however, searching through them thoroughly would require years of additional research which was simply not possible in the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. Undoubtedly, a separate study will be needed to determine the precise role played by the censors in defining and policing illegal erotica in state-socialist Poland.

Debating Pornography in the Media

Just like prostitution and human trafficking, the problem of pornography and its distribution was officially resolved once the communists had taken power in Poland.⁶⁹² In the Stalinist period the topic was associated with the ‘rotten West’, as we have already seen in the example of *Oto Ameryka*. However, once the thaw of 1956 brought about more relaxed attitudes toward sexuality and redefined the boundaries of acceptable erotica, both media and criminological discourse had to respond accordingly.

Post-1956 social and political liberalisation provided the first spur for discussing pornography and its impact on young people. However, if we examine these debates closely, it becomes clear that the definition of what counted as pornography was far from settled. In the tone of moral panic characteristic of the post-thaw discussions of sexuality journalists conflated all types of popular culture with erotica. The images of ‘kittens’ in the press; the popularity of Brigitte Bardot, James Dean and Françoise Sagan as role

⁶⁹² Warsaw, AIPN BU 1550/4509, Pismo Komendy Głównej MO do Ministerstwa Pracy i Opieki Społecznej, 1949, k. 5.

models— all such cultural phenomena came to be closely associated with demoralisation of the youth and therefore, ‘pornography’.⁶⁹³ In January 1958 a public debate was organised in Warsaw by the Association of Polish Teachers (Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego, henceforth ZNP). The discussants believed that ‘morally healthy’ art and culture was necessary to educate young people to become obedient socialist citizens.⁶⁹⁴ Therefore, the eradication of dangerous patterns of cultural consumption (perceived as synonymous with Western popular culture) was necessary to protect the Polish youth.

Such reasoning would easily gone uncriticised only a couple years earlier. Yet, in 1958 the state of the public debate was much more complex and such easy generalisations immediately attracted criticism. As Maria Paschalska pointed out in *Życie Warszawy* [*Warsaw Daily*] the cultural dogmatism represented by the fierce opponents of ‘pornography’ was too similar to the wrongdoings of the Stalinist period. ‘This is exactly the type of atmosphere that has so tragically failed our young people’ lamented Paschalska,⁶⁹⁵ referring to the debates on the failure of the Stalinist project in the field of youth culture.⁶⁹⁶ In her opinion, the solution to the problem of ‘vulgarisation’ of young people’s language or their fascination for sexually explicit images did not lay in

⁶⁹³ E. Etler, ‘Okopy jejmość pornografii’, *Odgłosy* (4 May 1958), 4. See also P. Horoszowski, ‘Pornografia - trudny problem’, *Prawo i Życie*, 7 (1958), 1, 4–5; Skiz, ‘Znaj proporcje mocium panie’, *Trybuna Literacka*, 12 (1958), 1.

⁶⁹⁴ M. Paschalska, ‘Bójcie się słowa’, *Życie Warszawy* (4 Feb. 1958), 3–4.

⁶⁹⁵ Paschalska, ‘Bójcie się’, 3.

⁶⁹⁶ See for example the discussions on the ‘Youth of the Nuclear Age’ in J. Kochanowski, *Rewolucja Międzypaździernikowa: Polska 1956-1957* (Kraków, 2017), 155–95. On the other hand, the second half of the 1950s also saw the outburst of youth organizing and significant transformations in the state-controlled youth organisations such as the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP) which was dissolved in 1957 and reborn as the Union of Socialist Youth (ZMS), see J. Sadowska, *Sercem i Myślą Związani z Partią: Związek Młodzieży Socjalistycznej (1957-1976). Polityczne Aspekty Działalności* (Warszawa, 2010), 42–71.

ensorship, but rather in well thought out educational policies and embrace of higher cultural norms by editors of popular magazines.⁶⁹⁷

It was not only teachers who were concerned with the morality of Polish youth. Another important voice in the debate came from intellectuals gathered around the *Kierunki* weekly and PAX association (a Catholic organisation officially approved by the Communist Party). Their concern with morality differed notably from the one presented by other journalists. While most of the above-quoted sources were concerned with socialist morality, discussants who participated in the debate organised by *Kierunki* in April 1958 were worried about the endangered position of Catholicism and Polish national values. Dr Maria Kaczyńska argued fiercely that the fight with pornography was just the first step on the road toward ‘moral reconstruction of the nation’.⁶⁹⁸ Yet, not all participants presented such an unambiguous stance against pornography. For example, Zygmunt Lichniak stressed that the only way to fight pornography was through ethical and aesthetic education, not backwardness and prudery.⁶⁹⁹ If only indirectly this suggests that even among conservatives there were attempts to search for a new language of approaching erotica in the years following the October thaw.

As I already explored in Chapter Two, in the 1960s the press discussions on pornography took place primarily in response to the Western sexual revolution.⁷⁰⁰ The commentators and experts eagerly analysed the role erotic images played in the transformation of sexual mores in the West, but there was little connection between such

⁶⁹⁷ M. Paschalska, ‘Ręce opadają. Po pewnej dyskusji nad pornografią’, *Życie Warszawy* (21 Feb. 1958), 3. See also Marek, ‘Moje trzy grosze’, *Polityka* (12 Apr. 1958), 2.

⁶⁹⁸ M. Kaczyńska in: ‘Dyskusja o pornografii’, *Kierunki* (29 June 1958), 6.

⁶⁹⁹ Z. Lichniak in: ‘Dyskusja o pornografii’, 7.

⁷⁰⁰ The discussions continued well into the 1970s, see M. Karpiński, ‘Pornografia. Korespondencja własna z Danii’, *Kultura* (25 Apr. 1971), 12; W.O., ‘Zmierzch ery pornografii?’, *Kultura* (19 Aug. 1973), 11.

phenomena and the Polish case.⁷⁰¹ At least for some time, socialist morality (or rather the censors and customs officers) seemed to offer protection from the wave of ‘indecent’ images that flooded the public discourse in the West. This is well illustrated by the philosopher Stefan Morawski’s analysis of the relation between art and pornography and the place of culture in Marxist ideology published in 1965 in the scholarly journal *Studia Socjologiczne* [*Sociological Studies*]. According to Morawski, whose academic interests evolved around art and aesthetics, pornography should not be conflated with erotic art, as it was the product of the capitalist system and bourgeois dual morality. Under socialism, where everyone regardless of their class background had access to high culture, pornographic productions should simply cease to exist.⁷⁰²

The discourse shifted radically in 1970, when the first ‘Venus’ exhibition was organised in Cracow. On the one hand, one could no longer deny that nude images were easily accessible in the socialist public sphere, especially as many popular magazines followed in ‘Venus’’s footsteps and started publishing female nudes on their pages (see Chapter Four). On the other hand, ‘Venus’ encouraged discussions about the boundary between ‘artistic’ and ‘pornographic’, as well as about the role played by erotic visuals in educating young people about sex. Therefore, the preoccupation with pornography in the public debate of the 1970s is clearly an element of the transformation started by ‘Venus’.

In her recent book *To See a Moose...* Agnieszka Kościańska convincingly demonstrates that the discussions of pornography in Polish sexology have long been intertwined with the preoccupation with sex education and alleged ‘demoralisation’ of

⁷⁰¹ See for instance H. Z., ‘Plaga’, *Polityka* (23 Apr. 1960), 9.

⁷⁰² S. Morawski, ‘Sztuka i pornografia’, *Studia Socjologiczne*, 4 (1965), 197–233.

the youngest generation.⁷⁰³ I already explored this topic in Chapter Four, investigating how proponents and opponents of ‘Venus’ exhibitions used pornography as an argument both for and against the proliferation of artistic nudes. From such examples we clearly see that the moral panic surrounding pornography in the 1970s opened discussions about the effects erotic imagery could have on young people and their sexual upbringing.⁷⁰⁴

The surge in ‘pornography debates’ in the 1970s can also be explained in the context of increased transnational contacts facilitated by Gierek’s project of opening Poland to the world. As already explored in Chapter Five, Poles started travelling West and acquainted themselves with pornography. Travel within the bloc also facilitated the exchange of erotic materials, especially in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. In reverse, returning travellers as well as foreign visitors brought back erotic souvenirs. As Jerzy Janowski recounted in *Tygodnik Demokratyczny*, the control imposed by custom officers lessened over time. In 1974 one could easily get away with smuggling *Playboy* into Poland. ‘Who knows what else will be allowed in a couple of years’ wondered the journalist, suggesting that the moral constraints in 1970s Poland were very much in flux.⁷⁰⁵

In April 1975 *Kultura* published an expert survey under the very telling title *Seks heroiczny, czyli polski* [*Heroic Polish Sex*].⁷⁰⁶ Renowned sexologists, educators and doctors answered several questions about the role of sex in Polish society, for example about nudism, censorship, homosexuality, and other social taboos. They complained about the low level of sexual awareness and culture in Polish society, hence the term

⁷⁰³ A. Kościańska, *To See a Moose: The History of Polish Sex Education* (New York, N.Y., 2021), 151–64.

⁷⁰⁴ See for example B. Popielski, ‘Pornografia w świetle prawa’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny: Miłość, Małżeństwo, Rodzina* (18 Aug. 1974), 1, 4.

⁷⁰⁵ J. Janowski, ‘Porno - moda czy zjawisko kulturowe?’, *Tygodnik Demokratyczny* (8 Sept. 1974), 13.

⁷⁰⁶ E. Berberyusz, ‘Seks heroiczny czyli polski’, *Kultura* (27 Apr. 1975), 7, 10.

‘heroic sex’ in the article’s title. One of the questions concerned the possibility of liberalising pornography legislation in Poland. Interestingly, the sexologist Julian Godlewski openly admitted that the legal framework was outdated and should be reconsidered. Andrzej Jaczewski went even further by asserting that pornography should ‘obviously’ no longer be banned, and that the government should provide an attractive alternative by importing *Playboy* and *Playgirl* to Poland. Although Mikołaj Kozakiewicz was not so liberal in his answer, fearing that society could be shocked by such a development, he recommended promotion of ‘worthy’ literature and erotic art as a way of improving Polish sexual culture. The only voice openly critical of pornography came from Elżbieta Sujak, a psychiatrist, who compared erotic images to drugs and explosive materials.⁷⁰⁷

We clearly see that for some of the most influential Polish sexologists the evaluation of ‘pornography’ and its illegal character was very much up for debate. This definition depended on many factors such as the artistic and educational potential of ‘pornographic’ materials, the distinction between private (intimate) and public consumption of them, and finally the role they could play in sexological therapies.⁷⁰⁸ Therefore, by 1975 pornography came to be the lens through which experts viewed and analysed Polish sexual culture rather than one coherent phenomenon that could easily be defined or classified. This, as the rest of this chapter explores, in turn affected criminological discourses and the prosecution of illegal erotica in the late state-socialist period.

⁷⁰⁷ Berberysz, ‘Seks heroiczny’, 10.

⁷⁰⁸ Berberysz, ‘Seks heroiczny’, 10.

As the attitudes toward sexuality relaxed in the last decade of state socialism, the definition of pornography for the purposes of public debate grew even more complicated. Interestingly, in the 1980s hardly anyone denied the fact that pornography circulated freely in Poland.⁷⁰⁹ It is not exactly surprising given the fact that both television and film producers appropriated the public interest in porno-chic for the purposes of state-controlled entertainment, as Chapter Five already explored. The moral censorship constraints lessened significantly in the 1980s as well. ‘We have to act wisely’ declared Przemysław Marcisz, the director of the Warsaw censorship office interviewed by Ilona Łepkowska in 1983. Erotic images could be accepted if they served artistic purposes in the film and the censors had to act in the interest of mass audiences, not film critics, Marcisz argued.⁷¹⁰

Therefore, in the public debate of the 1980s we can observe a notable redefinition of ‘pornography’ and its social impact. From this example we can observe what Alexei Yurchak describes as the Soviet ‘hegemony of form’, namely the growing gap between the official discourse and the lived experiences of people under late state socialism.⁷¹¹ Although the ideological framework in which language operated remained vastly unchanged (especially within the official state discourse) and pornography was perceived as something foreign to socialist morality, the discussions in the press as well as people’s everyday practices revealed that porno-chic transformed Polish attitudes toward erotic commerce. One could be an active member of the Party and still enjoy watching a

⁷⁰⁹ See W. Grzędzielski, ‘Pornografia’, *Polityka* (11 Dec. 1982), 12; M. Olbromski, ‘Nagość i pornografia’, *Rzeczywistość* (4 Mar. 1984), 6; H. Nowogródzki, ‘Art 173 K.K.’, *Szpilki* (8 Jan. 1987), 7.

⁷¹⁰ I. Łepkowska, ‘Starać się działać mądrze. Rozmowa z Przemysławem Marciszem’, *Film* (6 Nov. 1983), 18.

⁷¹¹ A. Yurchak, ‘Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45/3 (2003), 480–510.

pornographic videotape in one's free time.⁷¹² Calendars and other objects with naked women were used by many state institutions to promote their products and maintain good relations with consumers and contractors. Even on the public TV Tadeusz Drozda in the same sentence could condemn pornography as something 'awful' but then admit that he greatly enjoyed watching it.⁷¹³

Defining Pornography in Criminological Discourse

Until 1969 the approach of state institutions toward pornography had primarily been defined by the pre-war Penal Code. Its article 214 criminalised distribution, production, and trafficking of pornographic images, writings, and objects. A person guilty of such wrongdoings could face up to 2 years of imprisonment. The provisions on pornography were included in Chapter 32 of the Penal Code, which bore the telling title 'Lasciviousness' [Nierząd] and prosecuted distribution of erotic images in line with other 'indecent crimes' such as homosexual prostitution, pimping, sexual assault, and demoralisation of minors.⁷¹⁴ The interwar legislation on pornography had greatly been influenced by the International Convention for the Suppression of the Circulation of and Traffic in Obscene Publications signed in Geneva in September 1923 and ratified by the Polish government in January 1927.⁷¹⁵ From that moment the Polish legislation on pornography was shaped in accordance with the Geneva convention.

⁷¹² See Z. Kałużyński, 'Tysiąc procent pornografii', *Polityka* (5 Feb. 1983), 1, 6–11.

⁷¹³ ATVP, SK20991, *Sexcesy*, Episode 1 (1985), dir. F. Erol.

⁷¹⁴ Dz. U. 1932 nr 60 poz. 571, Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 11 lipca 1932 r. - Kodeks karny. <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu19320600571> (23 May 2021). See R. Lemkin and M. McDermott (transl.), *The Polish Penal Code of 1932 and the Law of Minor Offenses* (Durham, N.C., 1939), 65–7.

⁷¹⁵ Dz.U. 1927 nr 71 poz. 621 Międzynarodowa Konwencja w sprawie zwalczania obiegu i handlu wydawnictwami pornograficznymi, podpisana dnia 12 września 1923 r. w Genewie <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19270710621> (23 May 2021).

In the 1969 Penal Code the chapter on sexually motivated crimes was renamed ‘Crimes against decency’ [Przestępstwa przeciwko obyczajności]. Apart from the decriminalisation of homosexual prostitution the new Penal Code did not significantly transform other regulations. The new article 173 now emphasised photography as one of the methods of distributing ‘indecent images’ (which perhaps was a sign of technological advancement). Moreover, the 1969 Code also extended the range of possible punishments for pornography offenders – besides imprisonment, the judge could now rely on more lenient forms of punishment such as fines or restricting freedom of movement.⁷¹⁶ Therefore, one could argue that the new codification took a slightly more liberal stance on the matters of sexual relations and behaviour and as such reflected the notable transformation in public morals that had occurred in Poland between 1932 and 1969.

Yet, it would be an overstatement to speak of liberalisation in pornography regulations. While at roughly the same time pornography was being legalised in Denmark, Sweden, and West Germany,⁷¹⁷ in People’s Poland the production of erotic images was still a taboo, at least in the eyes of lawmakers. The situation was however quite different at the grassroots level. Interestingly, the statistical data (see Table 6.1) from that period seems to demonstrate a notable relaxation in the institutional approach toward prosecuting pornography between the 1950s and 1980s. The number of people convicted from articles 214 and later 173 of the Penal Code fell from sixty-two at the height of the Stalinist period to as little as two in 1984. Similarly, the number of crimes revealed annually also decreased observably, from 104 in 1973 to around forty in the

⁷¹⁶ Dz.U. 1969 nr 13 poz. 94, Ustawa z dnia 19 kwietnia 1969 r. Kodeks karny. <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19690130094> (23 May 2021).

⁷¹⁷ K. Arnberg, ‘Under the Counter, under the Radar? The Business and Regulation of the Pornographic Press in Sweden 1950-1971’, *Enterprise and Society*, 13/2 (2012), 350–77.

1980s.⁷¹⁸ As Marian Filar observed, compared to other sexual crimes pornography had the highest rate of ‘conditional dismissal’ [warunkowe umorzenie], meaning that the cases rarely even made it to the court and even if they did, the judge was likely to choose the minimum available punishment.⁷¹⁹ As a result, in most of the cases analysed by Filar in the 1970s the offenders received fines between one and five thousand zlotys or a year in prison, but the latter was in most cases conditionally suspended [warunkowe zawieszenie].⁷²⁰

Table 6.1 The number of people convicted for distributing pornography in Poland (selected years)⁷²¹

Year	Number of convicts
1954	62
1955	27
1956	11
1957	19
1960	36
1961	36
1962	31
1963	16
1964	11
1965	13
1975	14
1977	6
1978	10
1980	11
1981	5
1982	12
1983	18
1984	2
1985	12

⁷¹⁸ M. Filar, ‘Pornografia w Polsce w świetle prawa’, *Problemy Rodziny*, 3 (1989), 28.

⁷¹⁹ Filar, ‘Pornografia w Polsce’, 28.

⁷²⁰ M. Filar, *Pornografia: Studium z Dziedziny Polityki Kryminalnej* (Toruń, 1977), 159.

⁷²¹ Source: Filar, *Pornografia: Studium...*, 157–8., Filar, ‘Pornografia w Polsce’, 27–8.

Therefore, we can clearly see that pornography was not at the centre of attention for either policymakers or criminologists in People's Poland. The scale of pornography trade was so minimal in the eyes of the authorities that the criminologists rarely concentrated simply on 'indecent images'. Except for Filar, whose exceptional contribution to the understanding of illegal erotica in socialist Poland is analysed later in this chapter, other experts and police officers understood pornography primarily in connection with other crimes and behaviours classified as socially dangerous. For example, the topic was often discussed in police materials concerning prostitution, as the officers perceived the two forms of sex trade to go hand in hand and reinforce each other.⁷²² Interestingly, as some of the sources from the Stalinist period suggest, the trade in pornographic images was also commonly connected with illegal political activity, such as espionage for Western capitalist powers.⁷²³ Yet, although the scale of the commercial sex market certainly worried the officers, the trade in pornography was usually perceived as much less of a threat.⁷²⁴ The 1959 Citizens' Militia report on the fight against 'lasciviousness' noted that 'almost all investigations into pornography distribution concern matters of little importance. During the last four years we have not encountered a case that would entail mass production or mass distribution of such [pornographic – A.D.] objects.'⁷²⁵

Such a 'pathological' understanding of pornography continued in the next decades as well. The 1978 film *Marginesy wielkich miast* [Big City Lowlife] conflated all sort of

⁷²² J. Bielecki, 'Z praktyki jednostek MO. Proytucja i nierząd karalny w Warszawie', *Śłużba MO*, 3 (1959), 453.

⁷²³ Katowice, AIPN Ka 410/4, Sprawozdanie po linii walki z nierządem i przestępstwami seksualnymi za miesiąc czerwiec 1953 r. na terenie m. Stalinogrodu, k. 20.

⁷²⁴ More on the history of the fight against prostitution, see A. Dobrowolska, *Zawodowe dziewczyny. Proytucja i praca seksualna w PRL* (Warszawa, 2020).

⁷²⁵ Warsaw, AIPN BU 01253/36, Sprawozdanie dot. walki z nierządem karalnym przez KWMO w Szczecinie, Wrocławiu i Katowicach, Warszawa, 3 grudnia 1959, k. 78

unacceptable social behaviours and presented it as a serious challenge for police institutions. This instructional film was produced by the Citizens' Militia for party officials [aktyw partyjny] and the judiciary, and its goal was to alert decisionmakers to all the social problems that the Militia officers had to deal with in their daily work. The footage was authentic and unedited, with the aim to shock the audience and encourage decisive action. The list of social pathologies that needed to be tackled immediately included alcoholism, prostitution, illegal hard currency trade, recidivism, and juvenile delinquency. As the commentary suggested, Western 'big-beat craziness' [szaleństwo bigbeatu] was to blame for such a demoralisation of the youth. To illustrate their point, they used the example of a young girl kidnapped by two 'hooligans', violently raped, and forced to pose for pornographic pictures. 'Who encourages such deviations?' rhetorically concluded the commentary.⁷²⁶

Pornography trade was also one of the main concerns for officers whose main task was to survey the 'homosexual milieu'. At the beginning of the 1970s the Citizens' Militia and Security Service officers started observing undesired development of the male same-sex social and cultural circles.⁷²⁷ Even though the 1969 Penal Code abolished the last remnants of legal persecution of same-sex desires, at roughly the same time the police institutions grew increasingly interested in controlling men who enjoyed sex with other men.⁷²⁸ To justify their growing preoccupation with homosexual men, the officers often referred to the existence of illegal homosexual pornography as the ultimate evidence of

⁷²⁶ Łódź, AIPN Ld 378/6 CD, Margines wielkich miast, 1978.

⁷²⁷ K. Morawska, "'No Authorities Are Interested in Us, No One Interferes in Our Affairs?'" Policing Homosexual Men in the People's Republic of Poland', in T. Basiuk and J. Burszta (eds.), *Queers in State Socialism* (London, 2020), 88–101.

⁷²⁸ See Warsaw, Archiwum Komendy Stołecznej Policji (Warsaw Police Archives, henceforth: AKSP), ADM-1796, Sprawozdanie z działalności w 1969 r. Sekcji d/w z Nierządem Komendy Stołecznej MO w Warszawie w zakresie ścigania przestępstw nierządu karalnego i ograniczania prostytucji z dn. 17 lutego 1970 roku, k. 21.

the threat posed by the development of the homosexual community.⁷²⁹ This process reached its peak in 1985 in the infamous country-wide operation ‘Hyacinth’, the goal of which was to register and intimidate all homosexual men living in Poland, allegedly for AIDS-prevention purposes.⁷³⁰ For reasons that are beyond the scope of this thesis, state institutions were preoccupied only with male homosexuality, basically ignoring the existence of woman-to-woman sex or transgender identities.⁷³¹

As these examples demonstrate, social pathology was one of the recurring motifs in definitions of pornography employed by state institutions and criminological experts, especially in the discourse developed by the Citizens’ Militia. People who were engaged in pornography trade and consumption were portrayed as ‘deviants’ and ‘homosexuals’, posing a threat to social stability and public order. Yet, the number of full investigations into pornography seem to suggest that not all types of illegal erotica were deemed equally threatening and thus worthy of attention by the MO. For example, already in 1959, the MO Commander in Chief’s order explained that pornographic objects were to be defined as having to be purposefully created to affect someone’s sexual desires ‘provided that it is not a work of art’.⁷³² A similar definition can be found in Jan Bielecki’s article for *Śłużba MO* [*Citizens’ Militia Service*] which stressed that in defining pornography author’s intentions were crucial, as art should not be considered pornographic by default.

⁷²⁹ Warsaw, AIPN BU 03404/28, Opracowanie - Prostyucja. Homoseksualizm. Materiały kursokonferencji w Szklarskiej Porębie pod red. Mieczysława Stępnika. Warszawa: Departament Szkolenia i Doskonalenia Zawodowego MSW, 1974. Niedaszkowski Z., Homoseksualizm i prostytucja homoseksualna w Polsce. Zadania organów MO w tym zakresie, 41; See also J. St. Giza, ‘Wielkomijskie środowisko homoseksualne. Studium kryminologiczne’ *Śłużba MO*, 6 (1969), 735.

⁷³⁰ E. Majewska, ‘Public against Our Will? The Caring Gaze of Leviathan, " Pink Files " from the 1980s Poland and the Issue of Privacy’, *InterAlia*, 13 (2018), 54–77.

⁷³¹ M. Staroszczyk, “‘No One Talked about It’: The Paradoxes of Lesbian Identity in Pre-1989 Poland’, in T. Basiuk and J. Burszta (eds.), *Queers in State Socialism* (London, 2020), 105–15.

⁷³² Warsaw, Archiwum Główne Policji w Warszawie (Central Police Archives, henceforth AGP), 74x/4, Rozkaz nr 3/59 z dnia 5 lutego 1959, Wytoczne ws. ścigania przestępstw nierządu karalnego, przeciwdziałania prostytucji oraz współdziałania organów MO w zwalczaniu chorób wenerycznych, 5.

As Bielecki added, one could distinguish between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ erotic images, which further suggests that a heteronormative framework was crucial to assessing the possible threat of pornography.⁷³³

As images of naked women became more prevalent in the public sphere, the ambiguities surrounding the definition of the ‘pornographic’ rose. One illustration of this process can be found in the pages of *Prawo i Życie* [*Law and Life*], the biweekly journal of the Polish Lawyers Association. In 1973 the journal published a letter from a worried reader who inquired about the potentially pornographic character of certain types of images that recently started spreading in Poland.⁷³⁴ The examples of ‘doubtful’ objects included female nudes published in magazines such as *Forum* (see Chapter Two), film posters and promotional materials with scantily clad actresses, as well as erotic objects (postcards, pens). Moreover, the author was also appalled by calendars and pictures of naked women decorating walls in state institutions and other enterprises.⁷³⁵ If only indirectly, the very fact that such questions needed to be asked demonstrates that attitudes toward erotica were shifting observably. Only a decade earlier an answer to such questions would have been obvious, not to mention the fact that there would have been no public images of nudity to inquire about in the first place.

In the subsequent issue of the journal, the lawyer Tadeusz Cyprian offered a detailed explanation of what he believed to be the boundary between pornography and legal erotica. As he argued, to count as pornographic, objects needed to be produced with the clear purpose of invoking sexual desires. Yet, as attitudes toward sexuality were in constant flux, defining what counted as pornography was increasingly difficult. ‘Our

⁷³³ Bielecki, ‘Z praktyki’, 453.

⁷³⁴ J. Geppert, ‘Co jest a co nie jest pornografią’, *Prawo i Życie* (15 July 1973), 1–2.

⁷³⁵ Geppert, ‘Co jest’, 1.

society is mature enough to move with the times [...] and accept that the issues of sex have been greatly transformed and that such transformations have largely been beneficial as they [sex matters -A.D.] are free from prudery now...' argued Cyprian and explained that images of scantily clad women published in the press were nothing to be afraid of and rather a sign of a modern attitude toward life, just like miniskirts or young people kissing each other in public.⁷³⁶ As long the images did not encourage people to follow their 'lowest instincts' and were not motivated by greed, the penal law should not be involved. Erotic images, Cyprian emphasised, should be judged on aesthetic, not moral or legal grounds.⁷³⁷

As Cyprian's article suggested, socialist morality played an important role in redefining pornography in the 1970s. While the erotic industry in the West was still scrutinised, the growing availability of naked images in the Polish public sphere demonstrates that not all erotica was deemed equally harmful. As Chapter Two already explored, the idea that there was a socialist 'Third Way' toward sexual liberalisation became quite popular among sex experts and journalists in the first half of the 1970s. Therefore, erotic art (such as 'Venus') could play a prominent role in the much-needed process of modernising Polish attitudes toward sex and educating the broader public on 'sexual culture'.⁷³⁸ This led to a notable reformulation of 'indecent' images in the legal discourse. By definition, if erotic images appeared in socialist press, their publication was not motivated by 'greed' (or at least the theoreticians wanted to believe so) but rather by a genuine interest in raising the audience's 'sexual culture'. Moreover, as all media outlets were owned by the state, accepting that they distributed 'pornography' would have meant

⁷³⁶ T. Cyprian, 'Co to jest pornografia', *Prawo i Życie* (29 July 1973), 9.

⁷³⁷ Cyprian, 'Co to jest pornografia', 9.

⁷³⁸ See M. Bereźnicki, 'Pornografia a erotyka', *Prawo i Życie* (20 Jan. 1974), 8, 12–3.

that the state needed to prosecute itself. Therefore, the redefinition of the ‘pornographic’ in the 1970s resulted both from changing sexual mores in the general society, as well as from more practical considerations on the side of state institutions.

As already mentioned, Marian Filar was one of the very few people interested in theoretical and criminological aspects of anti-pornography legislation. As a lawyer, he was primarily concerned with the practical implications of the pornography legislation on people’s behaviours and the relationship between moral and legal norms. His 1977 monograph *Pornography: A Study in Criminal Policy* surveyed the most recent developments in pornography legislation all over the world as well as in Poland. Moreover, the book challenged existing notions about the desired model of pornography prevention and proposed to restructure the Penal Code so that it would better respond to modern times. Filar’s contribution to the debate on legal aspects of erotica was so influential that his book was quoted by Tadeusz Drozda in the 1985 TV show *Sexcesy* (see Chapter Five) to demonstrate how ambiguous the definition of pornography was.⁷³⁹ After 1989 Filar took an active part in writing the new Penal Code (1997), which effectively decriminalised consensual adult pornography in Poland.⁷⁴⁰

In his 1977 book Filar distinguished between two types of pornography. The first, ‘classic pornography’ was defined as portraying natural and ‘socially tolerated’ heterosexual intercourse and petting. The second, ‘deviant and perverse pornography’ included representations of sex that ‘contradicted biology’ and was not tolerated by the society, for example ‘homosexual and lesbian sex’, ‘paedophilia’, ‘incest’, and others.⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁹ ATVP, SK20991, *Sexcesy*, Episode 1 (1985), dir. F. Erol.

⁷⁴⁰ Dz.U. 1997 nr 88 poz. 553, Ustawa z dnia 6 czerwca 1997 r. - Kodeks karny, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19970880553> (14 Aug. 2021).

⁷⁴¹ Filar, *Pornografia: Studium...*, 140.

Based on this distinction, Filar proposed that ‘classic pornography’ that followed the rules of ‘aesthetic presentation’ should be decriminalised. To substantiate his point, he compared classical nude sculptures with images of naked women published in *Playboy*. ‘People who rave about the beauty of marble, but despise live and beautiful bodies, are tragically crippled’ concluded Filar.⁷⁴² Therefore, his theories demonstrate once again how in state socialism the definition of pornography was deeply entrenched in heteronormative and gendered frameworks of understanding and justifying sexual desire.

One of Filar’s most notable contributions to the understanding of pornography in state-socialist Poland was the reframing of the figure of the pornography consumer. In his portrayal of the typical recipient of pornography Filar departed from simplistic criminological interpretations. As he argued, there was no empirical evidence that people (men) who watched pornographic images were more likely to commit crimes. If anything, the research conducted in the West suggested that in countries with more relaxed pornography regulations (Denmark, Sweden), the number of sexually motivated crimes dropped instead of growing after pornography was legalised.⁷⁴³

To verify if similar mechanisms could occur in the Polish context, Marian Filar and Alina Walaszek-Henzel conducted empirical research in Cracow. It was the only attempt to empirically study pornography consumption in Poland, at least from what I have managed to gather. The study surveyed 72 randomly selected respondents, divided into three groups. The first group consisted of 30 visitors of the ‘Venus’ female nude exhibition (see Chapter Three), while the other two were recruited among patients treated in the Cracow’s university hospital surgical ward (experimental and control groups). All

⁷⁴² Filar, *Pornografia: Studium...*, 145.

⁷⁴³ See M. Filar, ‘Psychosocjalne aspekty pornografii’, *Studia Kryminologiczne, Kryminalistyczne i Penitencjarne*, 9 (1979), 129–152.

the respondents were asked questions about their opinions on pornography, its definition and declared use of such materials. The two experimental groups – ‘Venus’ visitors and the first group of hospital patients – were also surveyed about their reactions after watching female nudes and pornographic images.

Although their research was in no way representative, the conclusions drawn by Filar and Walaszek-Henzel require further attention here. As they argued, the research confirmed that Poland was not so different from the West when it came to people’s interaction with pornography and therefore the results from Western psychological studies could be used as a basis for liberalising the Polish law as well.⁷⁴⁴ Moreover, their studies also argued that heteronormative framework was one of the most important tools for distinguishing between decent and indecent erotic images. ‘Traditional, natural, and modest sex combined with high technical quality of the representation’ were in the researchers’ opinion the most important factors behind people’s classification of certain images as ‘more pornographic or less pornographic’.⁷⁴⁵

Such experiments and engagement with Western scholarly literature certainly formed a backbone of Filar’s position on decriminalisation of pornography in Poland. As he argued, the typical pornography offender was a man, between 30 and 49 years old, with no previous criminal record and operating alone. Moreover, Filar pointed out that for many ‘amateur’ consumers of pornography among young people erotic images were a way of simply satisfying their curiosity and obtaining sex education, otherwise inaccessible.⁷⁴⁶ Even if there were instances in which pornography was used by ‘deviants’

⁷⁴⁴ A. Walaszek-Henzel, M. Filar, ‘Psychospołeczne determinanty oraz dynamika postaw wobec pornografii’, *Studia Kryminologiczne, Kryminalistyczne i Penitencjarne*, 14 (1983), 71–2.

⁷⁴⁵ Walaszek-Henzel and Filar, ‘Psychospołeczne determinanty’, 59.

⁷⁴⁶ See also J. Witczak, ‘Kto jest odbiorca pornografii?’, *Problemy Rodziny*, 3 (1989), 18–9.

to sexually assault children, Filar concluded that such examples constituted a small number and pornography as such belonged to the ‘margins of social life’ that should be of interest for psychiatrists and pedagogues, not lawmakers.⁷⁴⁷

In line with modern legal thought, Filar believed that pornography was not dangerous as such, but rather only if people were confronted with it unwillingly. Therefore, it did not constitute a crime against decency (as defined in the existing Penal Code), but rather a crime against sexual freedom of an individual. Drawing on this assumption, Filar argued that ‘the isolated cases of pornography distribution in Poland should not be penalised as the recipients confront themselves with pornography absolutely willingly, in some cases even thanks to their strenuous efforts.’⁷⁴⁸ His redefinition of pornography’s crime-inducing potential rested on the assumption that the unique social conditions in state-socialist Poland made it impossible both to produce and distribute pornography. Therefore, people could obtain ‘indecent’ material solely through so-called ‘private-import’ and thus the consumers were fully aware of its contents.⁷⁴⁹ Given the fact that the state had full monopoly over TV, film, and print industry as well as the existence of far-reaching censorship, the danger of being confronted with pornography unwillingly was not significant, Filar concluded.⁷⁵⁰

Prosecuting Pornography: Case Studies

How did such theoretical discussions translate into the everyday practice of police institutions? In the following sections I explore two case-studies of anti-pornography

⁷⁴⁷ Filar, *Pornografia: Studium...*, 160. See also M. Filar, ‘Współczesne tendencje kryminalno-polityczne w zakresie reglamentacji pornografii’, *Państwo i Prawo*, 1 (1979), 107.

⁷⁴⁸ Filar, *Pornografia: Studium...*, 161.

⁷⁴⁹ See also M. Rymuszko, ‘Feralna trzynastka’, *Prawo i Życie* (8 Apr. 1989), 14.

⁷⁵⁰ Filar, ‘Pornografia w Polsce’, 32.

investigations. As the statistical data analysed above suggests, prosecution of pornography was not at the centre of attention of Citizens' Militia officers. The cases of production or distribution of 'indecent images' were rarely made public, and even if the investigation was conducted, it very often concluded with a dismissal or a lenient verdict. Therefore, the rare cases of pornography investigations that I managed to locate in the Institute of National Remembrance Archives are even more valuable, as they offer a unique insight into the daily operations of police institutions and their approach toward erotic images.

Out of less than fifteen pornography investigations I found in the IPN archives, two cases stand out as both fascinating and symptomatic of the wider trends in pornography policing under state socialism.⁷⁵¹ On the one hand, they demonstrate very well the importance of cross-border exchange in both distribution and production of pornography in state-socialist Poland. Moreover, they suggest that heteronormative definitions of erotica coined in the expert discourse guided the actions of police institutions and resulted in differential treatment of hetero- and homosexual pornography, especially toward the end of the 1980s. Naturally, due to the micro-historical character of my analysis all conclusions should be approached with a certain degree of caution. Yet, one can observe notable similarities between the definitions and approaches promoted in the expert discourse and the pornography investigations as observed in the two case-studies. Therefore, even if not entirely representative, the investigation files offer valuable insight into the process of translating expert knowledge into everyday police practice.

⁷⁵¹ Other cases: Warsaw, AIPN BU 0332/162, AIPN BU 0332/154; Gdańsk, AIPN Gd 0046/683/8/2, AIPN Gd 013/150; Bydgoszcz, AIPN By 4987/KZ; Łódź, IPN Ld PF39/43.

On 16 October 1971 a local Citizens' Militia station in the centre of Cracow received a tip that an unidentified man attempted to sell pornographic brochures at Manifest Lipcowy [July Manifesto] Street.⁷⁵² When the officers arrived at the scene, they discovered that the said man indeed had over 600 pornographic brochures at his disposal which was more than enough to substantiate his arrest. To make things even more interesting, Karol [name changed] turned out to be an American citizen of Polish origin. He visited Poland for family reasons with his wife and a small child. As it was revealed during the investigation, before the arrest he managed to sell around 30 brochures at 150 zlotys each.⁷⁵³ Moreover, he also admitted of having been in possession of 'narcotic cigarettes' that he stored at his wife's uncle's place.⁷⁵⁴ Given these facts, it is not exactly surprising that both MO and SB officers grew increasingly interested in the man's operations and contacts in Poland.

This case study demonstrates how important a role transnational transfers played in the development of pornography trade in state-socialist Poland. First, it is the foreigner coming from the capitalist West who brings the 'indecent' brochures to the country. Not surprisingly in this context, the pornography itself is also foreign. The police documents define the materials as Danish pornographic magazines and the list of items of evidence also leaves no doubt as to the language of the production (with titles such as 'Honey Bun', 'Colorsperma', and 'Carnaby Kinks').⁷⁵⁵ Finally, the investigation revealed that the customs control was far from omnipotent as Karol had managed to go through customs

⁷⁵² Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Postanowienie o przedstawieniu zarzutów z dn. 18 października 1971, k. 6

⁷⁵³ Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Sprawozdanie z przeprowadzonego dochodzenia, Kraków, 15 listopada 1971 r., k. 51–53.

⁷⁵⁴ Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Notatka urzędowa z dn. 18 października 1971, k. 13.

⁷⁵⁵ Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Notatka urzędowa z dn. 18 października 1971, k. 13; Wykaz nr 1 dowodów rzeczowych, Kraków, 4 listopada 1971 r., k. 46–47.

at the Warsaw Airport unbothered.⁷⁵⁶ Thus, we may conclude, the increased numbers of foreign visitors in Gierek's Poland inevitably led to an uncontrolled influx of non-socialist publications such as pornographic magazines. Most likely, Karol was just one of many travellers whose luggage remained uninspected by the customs officers upon their entry to Poland.

On the other hand, the investigation offers interesting insight into the operations of MO and SB officers concerning pornography. As already mentioned, it was initiated by the local Citizen's Militia in Cracow. Yet, most likely because the suspect held an American passport, the case was soon transferred to the SB.⁷⁵⁷ The SB was also interested in Karol because of his potential contacts in Poland (the file contains a list of over 60 names and addresses that were found in his notebook).⁷⁵⁸ Moreover, the officers got interested in the alleged contacts between Karol and employees of the Polish national air carrier, LOT. Although this turned out to be a red herring (Karol indeed worked as a steward, but for one of the American airlines), it points to another noteworthy area of interest of the SB. LOT employees (female flight attendants in particular) were stereotypically perceived as sexually promiscuous and suspicious because of their frequent travels and contacts with foreigners.⁷⁵⁹

If only indirectly, such a framing of Karol's case suggests that the SB officers were not interested in combatting pornography as such. Rather, the case served as a

⁷⁵⁶ Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Meldunek dla Wydziału Inspekcji Biura Śledczego MSW o przejęciu dochodzenia, przedstawieniu zarzutów i przyjęciu poręczenia majątkowego z dn. 22 października 1971, k. 11.

⁷⁵⁷ Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Notatka urzędowa z dn. 18 października 1971, k. 13; Informacja z dn. 18 października 1971, k. 15-16.

⁷⁵⁸ Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Informacja z dn. 18 października 1971, k. 16; Wykaz osób i adresów, Kraków 26 października 1971, k. 22-4.

⁷⁵⁹ See Warsaw, AIPN BU 1509/1545, Banasiak Mirosław. Prostyucja jako czynnik kryminogenny. Praca dyplomowa napisana pod kierunkiem kpt. dr. Janusza Stecia. Legionowo: WSO, 1981, k. 105-6.

vehicle for pursuing another political agenda, for instance gathering intel on the suspect's contacts in Poland or forcing him to become a secret informant for the SB. This becomes even more evident when we consider how the investigation concluded. Karol was quickly released from arrest after paying 200 dollars bail.⁷⁶⁰ Although the officers had warned he would soon escape Poland, the bail was granted.⁷⁶¹ Soon thereafter Karol left the country promising never to come back.⁷⁶² As the offender had disappeared, the case was soon closed and the impressive number of almost 800 pornographic brochures were destroyed in the police furnace.⁷⁶³ Overall, the entire investigation did not last longer than a month, ending inconclusively in November that year.⁷⁶⁴ Apparently, as long as the offender was out of the country, the MO and SB were not much interested in continuing the pornography investigation case.

However, the second case study, the story of Wilhelm [name changed], demonstrates that not all pornography traders could benefit from such lenient treatment. In January 1986 he was apprehended at the Polish-German border after the customs officers found several pornographic photos and film tapes that he wanted to smuggle out of Poland hidden in his car.⁷⁶⁵ Similarly to Karol, Wilhelm was also a holder of a foreign passport – born in Silesia of a German mother, he emigrated to West Germany in 1981 on a tourist visa and applied for German citizenship there. He spoke good Polish and maintained close relations with some of his friends and family members in Poland,

⁷⁶⁰ Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Meldunek dla Wydziału Inspekcji Biura Śledczego MSW o przejęciu dochodzenia, przedstawieniu zarzutów i przyjęciu poręczenia majątkowego z dn. 22 października 1971, k. 11.

⁷⁶¹ Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Wniosek o areszt tymczasowy z dn. 18 października 1971 r., k. 17–8.

⁷⁶² Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Notatka urzędowa z dn. 28 października 1971 r., k. 54.

⁷⁶³ Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Protokół zniszczenia dowodów rzeczowych do sprawy 2 Ds. 1832/71 z dn. 6 listopada 1971 r., k. 48

⁷⁶⁴ Cracow, AIPN Kr 07/4477, Sprawozdanie z przeprowadzonego dochodzenia, Kraków, 15 listopada 1971 r., k. 51–3.

⁷⁶⁵ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół z przekazania materiałów, Kudowa Zdrój, 4 stycznia 1986, k. 7.

regularly travelling across the border. Although between 1983 and 1986 he had repeatedly smuggled pornographic materials in his luggage, his first encounters with pornography production had taken place much earlier in the 1970s, when Wilhelm had still been residing in Poland.⁷⁶⁶ There, as he admitted, he first experienced homosexual desire which led him to a fascination with same-sex erotica and subsequently to emigrating to West Germany.⁷⁶⁷

As the investigation unfolded, new details of Wilhelm's acquaintances and sexual encounters in Poland were revealed. Most of the photographs and films found in his luggage were his own amateur production and presented young men and boys naked, masturbating and in scenes of petting. As Wilhelm explained, these were the acquaintances he made in Warsaw in gay meeting places such as the sauna at Krakowskie Przedmieście Street as well as young boys whom he met through work and friends.⁷⁶⁸ The age of his actors was not irrelevant, as the Penal Code set the age of consent at fifteen and in the 1960s the criminologists had debated about whether it should not be higher for homosexual acts, due to the fear of 'demoralisation' of young boys by older men.⁷⁶⁹ Although Wilhelm repeatedly insisted that the boys he had been in contact with were either over sixteen or attended secondary school (so had to be older than that), the officers were not convinced and started digging deeper. As a result, they discovered that one of the boys, Leszek [name changed], was less than fourteen years old when he acted in one of Wilhelm's films.⁷⁷⁰ Thus, the crime that Wilhelm was charged with was not only article

⁷⁶⁶ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół przesłuchania podejrzanego z dn. 4 stycznia 1986, k. 14–8.

⁷⁶⁷ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół przesłuchania podejrzanego z dn. 11 stycznia 1986, k. 38.

⁷⁶⁸ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół oględzin z dn. 29 stycznia 1986 r., k. 105–112. More about public bathhouses as gay meeting places see J. Burszta, 'Three Circles of Male Homosexual Life in State-Socialist Poland', in T. Basiuk and J. Burszta (eds.), *Queers in State Socialism* (London, 2020), 11–22.

⁷⁶⁹ See J. St. Giza, 'Uwagi do rozdziału XXIV projektu KK', *Nowe Prawo*, 7–8 (1962), 799; J. St Giza, 'Wielkomięjskie środowisko homoseksualne', 739–40.

⁷⁷⁰ Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół przesłuchania świadka z dn. 25 lutego 1986, k. 184–9.

173 (production and distribution of pornography) but also article 176 of the Penal Code – a lewd act [czyn lubieżny] with a minor, punishable with up to ten years of imprisonment.⁷⁷¹

Wilhelm was released from arrest on 21 March and his Nissan car was detained as a form of bail (with its value assessed at two million zlotys).⁷⁷² Although his German passport was also confiscated, he somehow managed to cross the border and escape Poland. Due to his absence during the court proceedings in July and the letter that Wilhelm sent to his lawyer announcing that he had no intention of attending the trial, the case was suspended by the judge on 13 September 1986.⁷⁷³ I managed to find no evidence that any further actions were taken in Wilhelm's case. Yet, despite this seemingly positive ending (at least for Wilhelm) the story is worth considering as evidence of how differently the state approached non-heteronormative sexual desires and how the homosexual subject was stigmatised at every stage of the investigation process.

First, one should ask why the customs officers became so interested with the contents of Wilhelm's trunk. As this chapter has already explored, by the mid-1980s both Citizens' Militia and Custom officers became observably more lenient toward pornographic materials smuggled into and out of Poland. For instance, in March 1988 the SB stopped a Swedish citizen in possession of pornographic images in the Warsaw hotel 'Forum'. The officers noted: 'He perceived his visit in Poland as a form of entertainment. Because both his visa and passport were valid and he behaved properly, he was released. We only asked him to leave us a few pictures and he agreed to that'.⁷⁷⁴ Clearly,

⁷⁷¹ Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Akt oskarżenia z dn. 29 marca 1986, k. 235–41.

⁷⁷² Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Telegram nr 1992/86, k. 231.

⁷⁷³ Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Pismo z Sądu Rejonowego w Katowicach do Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Spraw Wewnętrznych w Wałbrzychu, Katowice dn. 26 marca 1987, k. 250.

⁷⁷⁴ Warsaw, AIPN BU 003172/57 t. 2, Notatka z dn. 30 marca 1988, k. 172.

pornography as such was no longer perceived to be a viable threat to the extent to which some officers felt so at ease that they officially admitted to enjoying this type of images.

As Wilhelm's example showcases very well, it was clearly the homosexual desire that was scrutinised by the police officers. Only a few months before Wilhelm was detained at the border the Citizens' Militia launched the country-wide operation 'Hyacinth' (15 and 16 November 1985; the operation was repeated at least twice, on 26–27 September 1986 and 16–17 November 1987).⁷⁷⁵ Given this fact, it is hardly surprising that the interrogation questions focused on Wilhelm's contacts within the 'homosexual milieu'. Even though one of the challenged films portrayed two men and a woman having sex, the officers were not really interested in finding the actress but instead interrogated Wilhelm about his male acquaintances.⁷⁷⁶ Clearly it was the homosexual character of the acts rather than the pornographic framing that interested the officers the most.

Furthermore, the language of the investigation reveals many unspoken assumptions about the 'normal' and 'abnormal' character of sexual acts. 'I knew back then that I was not normal' confessed Wilhelm when asked about his early sexual encounters.⁷⁷⁷ In other protocol he refers to his sexual identity as 'my perversion' [moje zboczenie].⁷⁷⁸ One of the witnesses characterised Wilhelm as an 'erotomaniac who acts it out by watching pornographic films and pictures'.⁷⁷⁹ Moreover, the officers who interrogated Wilhelm also employed a highly charged language of sexual deviation, using phrases such as 'homosexual leanings' [skłonności homoseksualne],⁷⁸⁰ 'onanism', and

⁷⁷⁵ Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals*, 106.

⁷⁷⁶ Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół oględzin z 29 stycznia 1986 r., k. 106.

⁷⁷⁷ Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół przesłuchania podejrzanego z dn. 17 stycznia 1986, k. 72.

⁷⁷⁸ Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół przesłuchania podejrzanego z dn. 18 stycznia 1986, k. 78.

⁷⁷⁹ Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół przesłuchania świadka z dn. 4 lutego 1986, k. 134.

⁷⁸⁰ Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Akt oskarżenia z dn. 29 marca 1986, k. 237.

‘self-rape’ [samogwałt] to describe the activities portrayed in Wilhelm’s films.⁷⁸¹ All of the above examples suggest that from the very beginning the investigation into Wilhelm’s activities was marked by a preoccupation with his ‘deviant’ sexual behaviour. The discursive frame of ‘perversion’ and ‘abnormality’ had been so strong that it was even imposed on the defendant’s own confession.

Yet, it would certainly be problematic to look at the story of Wilhelm solely through the lens of the unfair persecution of non-heteronormative sexual desires. In the end, many of the boys with whom he produced his pornographic films were teenagers (16 or 17 at the time he met them) and he openly admitted to being ‘attracted to younger people’ and not checking their IDs before they had sex.⁷⁸² One of the boys, Leszek, was under fourteen when he posed for Wilhelm’s pictures and films. Naturally, the defendant declined having had any knowledge of the boy’s age and insisted that Leszek looked like an adult.⁷⁸³ But is this really a convincing explanation? Could he possibly not have noticed that a boy who still attended primary school was evidently underage? The court trial did not take place so we will never know if the judge believed Wilhelm’s argument. However, the question remains: is this ultimately a story of prosecution against gay desires or rather a story of sexual exploitation and assault? How should a historian untangle such complicated histories and give justice both to the sexually exploited underage boy and the man persecuted for his non-heteronormative identity? What if the offender is at the same time a victim in this case?

Therefore, while acknowledging the seriousness of sexual abuse charges and the potentially traumatic impact these events could have had on the young boy, we should

⁷⁸¹ Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół oględzin z dn. 29 stycznia 1986 r., k. 107–8.

⁷⁸² Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół przesłuchania podejrzanego z dn. 17 stycznia 1986, k. 73.

⁷⁸³ Wrocław, AIPN IPN Wr 0/28/155, Protokół przesłuchania podejrzanego z dn. 11 lutego 1986, k. 165.

also inquire whether the abuse would even have been revealed had it not been for the homosexual character of the pornographic materials. In this context, it may be useful to refer to another anti-pornography investigation conducted by the Citizens' Militia in 1972 in Warsaw. Although the male suspect produced home-made pornography with young women, the officers were at no point interested in checking if the actresses were in fact adults. Soon, the case was conditionally dismissed, and the suspect walked free.⁷⁸⁴ As other sources analysed in this chapter also suggest, homophobia was so entrenched in the definitions of pornography employed by both experts and law practitioners that any activity performed by a non-heteronormative suspect was automatically scrutinised, while the same actions taken in the heteronormative context could be normalised or dismissed as less harmful.⁷⁸⁵

Furthermore, Wilhelm's case also demonstrates how careful we need to be in writing the histories of sexual non-conformity. On the one hand, we may be aware of how illicit sexual desires are framed in legal and criminological discourse and how this language has contributed to othering queer identities and non-normative sexual behaviours. The very same is true for the discourses on pornography in general. The dominant discourse frames pornography as harmful and dangerous even if there is not much evidence that the sexist and violent character of pornographic productions is their distinctive trait rather than simply an element of the generally sexist and violence-driven culture that we all live in.⁷⁸⁶ Yet, both of these realisations should not obscure the fact that there is indeed a large sphere of exploitation and sexual violence that can be a part

⁷⁸⁴ Warszawa, AIPN BU 0332/154, Postanowienie o warunkowym umorzeniu postępowania karnego, Warszawa 27 maja 1972, k. 108-110.

⁷⁸⁵ See Morawska, "No Authorities...", 91-3.

⁷⁸⁶ R. Sullivan and A. McKee, *Pornography: Structures, Agency and Performance* (Cambridge, 2015), 104-5.

of pornography production, in queer and heterosexual pornography alike. This is true especially in societies where sex is a taboo and where insufficient sexual education does not offer people tools to speak about consent and sexual integrity as fundamental values. Wilhelm's story shows how the marginalisation of homosexual desire, lack of sex education, and lack of awareness about sexual consent could (and still can) be a source of pain and trauma. In many regards, this is not only a story about state-socialist entanglements with pornography, but more generally about the ambiguities that such sexual histories reveal regardless of historical period.

Visual Revolution: Videotapes and the Demise of the Surveillance State

In the 1980s state institutions had to face a novel threat to socialist morality – videotapes. According to Patryk Wasiak, ‘the VCR was the first appliance that emerged from outside of th[e] system’ and thus challenged the state monopoly over information and culture.⁷⁸⁷ The exceptional role played by VCRs in late state-socialist culture can be explained by several factors. First, VCRs were a grassroots method of culture distribution, unlike other illicit foreign media imports (such as radio broadcasts like Radio Free Europe, for example). One could watch whichever videotape whenever one wanted. VCRs allowed consumers unprecedented agency in their choice of media, and thus it is hardly surprising that for many, videotapes served primarily as a form of entertainment and easy access to Western popular culture. Second, the copying technology allowed for much faster distribution of videotapes, especially compared to other *samizdat* methods of underground publishing. Because of its scale and the high tempo of reproduction the black

⁷⁸⁷ P. Wasiak, ‘VCRs, Modernity, and Consumer Culture in Late State Socialist Poland’, in C. Scarborough, D. Mincyte, and Z. Gille (eds.), *The Socialist Good Life: Desire, Development, and Standards of Living in Eastern Europe* (Bloomington, IN, 2020), 139.

market was almost impossible to control by the state. Finally, VCRs as a new technology came to be associated with a modern form of cultural consumption. This, in turn, contributed to the normalisation of certain film genres previously inaccessible in the centralised media system. Being modern in late 1980s Poland meant watching videotapes with Western films, and pornography was no exception.

Despite its crucial role for the transformation of popular culture in the last decade of state socialism, the history of VCRs is a fairly new theme in research on culture and communication under state socialism.⁷⁸⁸ As a result, the role that videotapes played in mainstreaming pornography among Polish audiences has still received relatively little attention in the scholarly literature.⁷⁸⁹ While it is impossible to provide a full account of the history of pornographic videotape distribution in Poland here, the rest of this chapter will survey the dominant frameworks in which these new erotic artifacts were being discussed in public discourse and in the everyday practices of police institutions.

It is estimated that by the late 1980s Polish consumers owned over five hundred thousand VCR players. As Wasiak notes, this made Poland exceptional as it was the first country in the bloc to experience a ‘video revolution’.⁷⁹⁰ This revolution was commented upon in the 1988 Polish Newsreel episode *Pod każdą strzechą* [*Under every roof*]. The newsreel concentrated on the proliferation of videotapes among Polish audiences. According to the commentary, there were almost a million videorecorders in Polish households, and it counted as a sign of technological revolution.⁷⁹¹ Interestingly, although

⁷⁸⁸ See P. Wasiak, M. Filiciak, „*Weź Pan Rambo!*” *Spoleczna historia magnetowidu w Polsce*, forthcoming.

⁷⁸⁹ P. Wasiak, ‘Filmy Akcji, Magnetowidy i Autorytet Krytyków Kulturalnych’, in K. Stańczak-Wiślicz (ed.), *Kultura Popularna w Polsce w Latach 1944-1989. Między Projektem Ideologicznym a Kontestacją* (Warszawa, 2015), 174.

⁷⁹⁰ Wasiak, ‘VCRs, Modernity...’, 133.

⁷⁹¹ PKF, 3/88, ‘Pod każdą strzechą’, Repozytorium Cyfrowe Filмотeki Narodowej, <http://repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/8748> (2 June 2021).

the number of one million recorders is almost certainly an exaggeration, it recurred in other media reports as well.⁷⁹² If only indirectly, this suggest that the discussion on ‘video-mania’ conveyed much more than just a fascination with the new technology. Rather, it offered a useful language with which to speak about broader transformations that were underway in Polish society, including when it came to sexuality.

Apart from informing the audience of increased numbers of VCRs in Polish homes, the newsreel singled out erotic films as an example of the new cultural practices enjoyed by VCRs’ owners. As the camera focuses on a customs officer, the narrator explains:

Work on the border has just gotten more interesting. The Customs Service keeps an eye out for the truth, *sauté*. Grasshoppers [świerszczyk – slang for porn magazine] can be found only in the luggage of old pensioners [renciści starego portfela].⁷⁹³

The newsreel showcases the ambiguities surrounding the evaluation of pornographic videotapes. The meanings associated with the new medium epitomise generational shift between the old consumers of porn (‘grasshoppers’ magazines) and the younger generation which prefers videotapes. Again, the disparity between the commentary and the visual material is very telling. On the one hand, the narrator warns that impotence could result from watching pornography. On the other, the editors do not hesitate to include excerpts from a soft-porn videotape watched by two older men, with a focus on a naked woman touching her breasts. Hence, voyeuristic desire is legitimised, if only indirectly. Such voyeurism and the male gaze find its ultimate realisation in the new medium: videotapes.

⁷⁹² [f], ‘Milionowy magnetowid’, *Ekran* (18 Feb. 1988), 5.

⁷⁹³ PKF, 3/88, ‘Pod każdą strzechą’, Repozytorium Cyfrowe Filmoteki Narodowej, <http://repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/8748> (2 June 2021).

Pornographic videotapes featured prominently in the media discussions on VCRs in general. Yet their evaluation was far from unambiguous. In 1986 *Profile* warned that illicit screenings of pornographic videotapes were becoming widespread in Poland.⁷⁹⁴ Some feared the impact such videotapes could have on sexual mores, but as commentator Piotr Cegłowski noted in *Polityka*, ‘There is no point in crying about the illegal distribution on porn films [pornusów] because it is already a fact. The phenomenon should be demythologised instead of being made a “public secret”’.⁷⁹⁵ Journalist Małgorzata Piotrowska even argued in *Ekran* that pornography could have beneficial effects on sexual education in Polish society. ‘Porn enjoys social recognition and widespread respect. Some even argue that we would still lag behind when it comes to progress in sexual matters, had it not been for the videotapes,’ explained Piotrowska.⁷⁹⁶ According to her, video challenged the taboos surrounding sex on the screen and made TV productions such as the Pink Series (see Chapter Five) possible.⁷⁹⁷ Although more eroticised TV programmes were made possible by broader transformations in cinematic language, as argued in the previous chapter, videotapes undoubtedly played a crucial role in accelerating the transformation of consumer tastes in late state-socialist period.

Toward the second half of the 1980s, videocassettes came to be seen as ultimate symbols of individual consumption and consumerism. Wasiak argues that practices of media consumption were an important form of social distinction in late state-socialist society, fostering the transformation of values and attitudes that contributed to the

⁷⁹⁴ J.P., ‘Video-szok,’ *Profile*, 2 (1986), 33.

⁷⁹⁵ P. Cegłowski, ‘Groźne jak Coca-Cola’, *Polityka* (29 Nov. 1986), 7. See also P. Wasiak, ‘„Zwoje Muskulów Monstrualnych Rozmiarów i Dużo Nagiego Ciała.” Kultura Popularna, Nowe Technologie Medialne i Legitymizacja Socjalistycznego Projektu Kulturowego’, *Kultura Popularna*, 40/2 (2014), 71.

⁷⁹⁶ M. Piotrowska, ‘Wszystkie barwy kaset’, *Ekran* (10 Mar. 1988), 10–1.

⁷⁹⁷ Piotrowska, ‘Wszystkie barwy kaset’, 11.

formation of a new entrepreneurial class.⁷⁹⁸ In this context, the association between videotapes and the imagined ‘West’ appears crucial to understanding the skyrocketing popularity of this new medium in 1980s Poland. A quick look at the titles of the most popular films reveals that audiences were fascinated by the productions that portrayed a lifestyle foreign to socialism. Rambo, James Bond, and Bruce Lee were the heroes that any avid video-maniac had to know. Similarly, watching pornography on videotapes allowed consumers to assert their independence in the choice of entertainment that socialist TV simply could not offer.⁷⁹⁹ Such repertoire preferences are summed up in the following quote from the 1986 song by the Polish electro-rock singer Kapitan Nemo: ‘In the morning – [music]clips, in the afternoon a bunch of cowboy scenes. And after Bruce Lee a pinch of sex before you fall asleep. (Video, video, video) Video-addiction (Video, video, video)’.⁸⁰⁰

Videotapes had a Western allure not only due to the films’ contents, but also because of how the medium reached Poland. As Wasiak demonstrates, the first VCRs were brought to the country by Polish *Gastarbeiter* returning from the West. Even later, one could only buy a recorder in a state-owned hard currency shop such as Pewex or Baltona, so dollars were necessary to make the transaction.⁸⁰¹ Furthermore, the vast majority of videocassettes circulating in Poland was also smuggled from the West. According to Wasiak, West Germany was the main source of bootlegged copies, as the titles of the films translated directly from German may suggest.⁸⁰² Thus, consumers

⁷⁹⁸ P. Wasiak, ‘The Video Boom in Socialist Poland’, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 61/1 (2012), 31. See also Wasiak, ‘VCRs, Modernity...’, 141–2.

⁷⁹⁹ See Wasiak, ‘The Video Boom’, 34.

⁸⁰⁰ *Wideonarkomania* (song, 1986), lyrics A. Mogielnicki, music B. Gajkowski, performed by Kapitan Nemo (B. Gajkowski).

⁸⁰¹ Wasiak, ‘The Video Boom’, 33–4.

⁸⁰² For example, as Wasiak demonstrates, the Italian production *Hands of Steel*, distributed in Germany under the title *Paco – Kampfmaschine des Todes* circulated in Poland under the name *Paco – Maszyna*

perceived watching such videotapes as a sign of modernity and participation in the global VCR culture.

Not surprisingly, cultural critics and media experts heavily criticised the new medium. VCRs were stigmatised for their promotion of Western lifestyles, violence, colonialism, pornography, and poor taste.⁸⁰³ This association can also be observed in one of the episodes of *W labiryncie*, the first Polish soap opera (see Chapter Five). There, Marta Białek and her teenage boyfriend are caught by Marta's stepfather watching a West German soft-porn video. As the episode implies, the boy intended to use the video to seduce and sexually abuse Marta.⁸⁰⁴ The easy availability of foreign videotapes is thus portrayed as a potential threat to young people's safety.

Yet audiences seemed neither convinced nor deterred by such warnings and the black market of 'morally foreign' videocassettes rose exponentially. The control over cultural production, previously unquestionably held by the state, now began to crumble. Even though the authorities attempted to regulate the market through licensed rental services, the scale of illicit operations was so great that there was no way to control them.⁸⁰⁵ The technology posed new challenges as well. According to *Trybuna Ludu* 1122 videocassettes were withheld at the border in 1986 alone.⁸⁰⁶ As Wasiak mentions, in Szczecin, at the Polish-East German border, custom officers confiscated 20 percent of imported videotapes. Out of the seized cassettes, over 60 percent was challenged as inconsistent with 'Polish moral norms' which alone demonstrates how important role

śmierci, which was a literal translation of the German title [*Paco – Machine of Death*]. See Wasiak, 'The Video Boom', 38.

⁸⁰³ Wasiak, 'Filmy Akcji', 173–94. See also Wasiak, 'Zwoje Muskulów', 66–79.

⁸⁰⁴ *W labiryncie: Pocałunek na powitanie*, Episode 20 (1989), dir. P. Karpiński.

⁸⁰⁵ F. Skwierkowski, 'Polskie video w punkcie zwrotnym', *Ekran* (3 Mar. 1988), 10–1.

⁸⁰⁶ (PAP), 'Wideokasety a celnicy', *Trybuna Ludu* (18 Feb. 1987), 2. See also (PAP), 'Główny Urząd Cel komunikuje', *Trybuna Ludu* (5 Feb. 1987), 3.

pornography played in the development of the early market of videotapes.⁸⁰⁷ Yet, the measures taken by the Customs Office were hardly sufficient given how widespread the copying technology was. Even one videocassette missed by officers was quickly reproduced and distributed in several new copies.⁸⁰⁸

To better understand how authorities reacted to the new medium, let us focus on two case studies of SB investigations into illegal videotapes distribution in the Lower Silesia region. The first investigation, appropriately code-named ‘Rambo’, was initiated in 1986 by the local SB unit in Jelenia Góra. SB officers opened the case after they received several anonymous tips about the distribution of ‘anti-communist, anti-Soviet, and pornographic films’.⁸⁰⁹ In the officers’ opinion, illegal distribution of such videocassettes was closely connected to private video rental services and therefore required further surveillance. Although some of the developments and problems were specific to the region (because of its proximity to both Czech and East German border, as well as the tourist character of some villages), the case allows us to better understand how the unofficial market of videotapes could develop so quickly and what role pornography played in the process.

First, the files from operation ‘Rambo’ offer a glimpse into the everyday functioning of video rental services in late state-socialist Poland. On the one hand, people rented videocassettes and watched them on their home video cassette players. In April 1987 there were at least two ‘legally’ operating rental services in Jelenia Góra alone,

⁸⁰⁷ Wasiak, ‘Filmy Akcji’, 187.

⁸⁰⁸ T. Umer, ‘Opanować wideo żywioł’, *Tygodnik Polski*, 48 (1986), 8–9. Quoted in B. Kluska, ‘„Nie ma silnych, by to zlikwidować”. Służba Bezpieczeństwa wobec wideorewolucji’, *Przegląd Archiwalny Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, 9 (2016), 187.

⁸⁰⁹ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Wniosek o wszczęcie sprawy operacyjnego sprawdzenia krypt. "Rambo", Jelenia Góra dn. 9 stycznia 1986, k. 3.

although officially they rented electronic hardware as a cover for video distribution.⁸¹⁰ Moreover, four people had permits for distributing films from the Przedsiębiorstwo Rozpowszechniania Filmów (Film Distribution Enterprise, henceforth PRF) in Wrocław, meaning that they could organise public screenings of videotapes, but only for specific types of productions such as feature films, children's cartoons, and music videoclips.⁸¹¹ Therefore, apart from individual consumption within the confines of one's home, videotapes were also often viewed during such public screenings, for example in hotels [domy czasowe] and local community centres.⁸¹²

Apart from officially distributed films (obtained from state-controlled distribution systems through institutions such as PRF), franchise holders also offered films that were not allowed to circulate in Poland – so called *bezdebitowe* films, not approved for distribution by censors. One of the rental services in Jelenia Góra was reported to have two lists of videotapes available for rent: one verified by the local censor and a second unofficial one that was available only to the most trusted clients.⁸¹³

The lists of circulating videotapes collected by the officers offer interesting insight into consumer tastes as well as the types of films that were deemed 'dangerous' by the authorities. For instance, after surveying the catalogue of the rental service 'Mao Mar' in Jelenia Góra, the SB officers distinguished between three types of suspicious videotapes. The first group included James Bond films, as they portrayed the KGB and other socialist intelligence organisations in a bad light. Second, the officers listed 'anti-Soviet and anti-

⁸¹⁰ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Informacja z ustnej relacji tw "Bolesław", Jelenia Góra, dn. 1 kwietnia 1987, k. 31.

⁸¹¹ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Uzupełnienie meldunku nr 68, Jelenia Góra, dn. 27 marca 1987, k. 30.

⁸¹² See for example Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Informacja z ustnej relacji tw "Bolesław", Jelenia Góra dn. 13 lutego 1987, k. 23.

⁸¹³ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Notatka dla Naczelnika Wydz. dw. z PG WUSW w Jeleniej Górze, Jelenia Góra, dn. 6 czerwca 1987, k. 51.

Vietnamese films' such as *Airwolf* and *The Deer Hunter*. Finally, the following titles were listed as pornographic or containing graphic violence: *Greetings from Leather Pants* [*Pozdrowienia ze skórzanych spodni*], *Caligula*, *Emanuelle 4*, *Emanuelle in America*, and *Hot Dogs*.⁸¹⁴ The secret informants also warned against illicit distribution of politically charged videotapes produced by the 'Solidarity' underground publishing house. These *samizdat* videotapes included Andrzej Wajda's films as well as the film adaptation of George Orwell's book *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, officially banned by the censorship.⁸¹⁵ Clearly, videotapes became a way of accessing productions that would not otherwise make it through the censor's control. Watching previously inaccessible titles became a way of asserting one's role as an individual consumer of mass culture and thus independence from the controlling and paternalistic gaze of the state.

Undoubtedly, videotapes revolutionised the ways in which people interacted with culture. Even though censorship still existed, the access to uncensored materials was now easier than ever, as the documents collected during the 'Rambo' investigation demonstrate. The new type of entertainment quickly entered people's homes and thus the private sphere. Yet, what was perhaps most characteristic to the mid-1980s video-culture was the growing role played by videotapes in the public sphere. As not many people could still afford their own VCR, watching videotapes became a collective entertainment. People invited their neighbours and friends over to watch video together but also to show off their social status. On the other hand, creative entrepreneurs started using the new

⁸¹⁴ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Pismo do naczelnika Wydziału III WUSW w Jeleniej Górze, Wałbrzych, dn. 21 listopada 1986, k. 16.

⁸¹⁵ Most likely the underground publishing house mentioned in the source was NOWa, Independent Publishing House (Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza). Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Informacja z ustnej relacji tw ps. "Mieczysław", Jelenia Góra, dn. 18 listopada 1986, k. 14.

medium to make money by organising public screenings of videotapes and selling tickets to such shows.⁸¹⁶

Pornography was no exception and public screenings of erotic films were organised both in private homes as well as in public spaces, as a part of other entertainment events. As one video franchise holder interviewed by the SB confessed ‘at workplace parties I am almost always asked to screen pornographic films. I have never presented such films because I know it is forbidden.’⁸¹⁷ Yet, not all VCR owners were such obedient followers of the anti-pornographic law. For instance, in November 1986 a youth disco dance was organised by a 22-year-old Marek [name changed] in the local culture centre in Szklarska Poręba. As a secret informant reported to SB, the dance was accompanied by a screening of pornographic videotapes ‘behind closed doors’. According to the informant, around 25 people aged between 16 and 19 took part in the event and after the screening had finished Marek ‘invited five underage girls over to his place with a well-known purpose in mind’.⁸¹⁸ As other evidence suggests, such screenings of erotic films were in fact quite common and the SB informants reported that similar events took place in other villages in the region, for example in Cieplice and Zieleniec.

819

The latter example is particularly worth mentioning here, as the entire investigation was focused on the alleged public screenings of pornographic videotapes in

⁸¹⁶ For example, in Apr. 1987 Tadeusz [name changed] organised a screening of videotapes in the local culture centre in Świeradów. First, at 10 a.m. the screened children’s cartoons such as *Alice in the Wonderland*, *Donald the Duck* and *Mickey Mouse*. The ticket costed 100 zlotys. Then, in the afternoon the audience could for 150 zlotys buy tickets to watch adventure films such as *Karate Kid*. Finally, in the evening the screening of the American violent action film *Commando* was combined with a disco dance and the tickets cost 300 zlotys. Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Informacja dla Naczelnika Wydziału III WUSW w Jeleniej Górze, Lwówek Śląski, d. 30 kwietnia 1987, k. 42.

⁸¹⁷ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 0/28/184, Protokół przesłuchania świadka z dn. 23 kwietnia 1986, k. 93.

⁸¹⁸ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Wyciąg z informacji TW, Jelenia Góra, dn. 5 grudnia 1986, k. 17.

⁸¹⁹ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Informacja z ustnej relacji tw "Bolesław", Jelenia Góra, dn. 13 lutego 1987, k. 23. See also Wrocław, AIPN Wr 0/28/184, Akt oskarżenia, Kłodzko, czerwiec 1986, k. 220-224.

Zieleniec. In March 1986 Janusz [name changed] was accused of disseminating pornographic films in the Wrocław Academy of Physical Education's holiday resort in Zieleniec. As the officers discovered during the investigation, he was in possession of over 100 videotapes, at least 14 of which were classified by the censors as pornographic.⁸²⁰ Numerous witnesses reported that Janusz organised public screenings of the said videotapes and charged between 75 and 120 zlotys per ticket.⁸²¹ However, what really interested the prosecutor and the officers was not the pornographic character of videotapes as such, but rather the fact that the defendant did not possess necessary permits to organise ticketed public screenings and therefore infringed the relevant tax regulations. As the officers estimated, it may have cost the state treasury up to 84,525 zlotys.⁸²² In the end, Janusz was acquitted of all the pornography charges based on the amnesty law from July 1986 but found guilty of tax evasion and charged with a financial fine and forfeiture of his VCRs and videotapes.⁸²³

If only indirectly, the files from both operation 'Rambo' and the Zieleniec investigation demonstrate that the 1980s witnessed a gradual loosening of the state's grip over culture production. As the unofficial market of videotapes grew exponentially, the measures employed to counteract this process failed miserably. For example, the SB officers reported that one of the censors in Jelenia Góra accepted films for distribution without even watching the tapes and thus ignored their potentially 'threatening' contents. 'The situation becomes paradoxical as anti-Soviet films now have the censors' approval and it is difficult to hold people accountable for screening and distributing such materials

⁸²⁰ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 0/28/184, Pismo OUKPiW we Wrocławiu do WUSW w Wałbrzychu, Wrocław, dn. 22 kwietnia 1986, k. 96–7.

⁸²¹ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 0/28/184, Akt oskarżenia, Kłodzko, czerwiec 1986, k. 221.

⁸²² Wrocław, AIPN Wr 0/28/184, Akt oskarżenia, Kłodzko, czerwiec 1986, k. 221.

⁸²³ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 0/28/184, Wyrok w imieniu Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej, dn. 28 listopada 1986, k. 232.

if the “law” is on their side’ complained the officers.⁸²⁴ Moreover, the networks of informal relations between the local clerks, politicians, party members, and police officers often protected the people engaged in illegal video distribution and the hands of regular SB officers, despite their declared best intentions, were tied.⁸²⁵ Even if the offenders were caught red-handed, at best they were charged for breaching tax regulations, as the case of Janusz demonstrates.⁸²⁶ Significantly, the ‘Rambo’ investigation closed inconclusively in April 1989, just a few months before the system collapsed. As it turned out soon thereafter, once all the legal constraints on videotapes and pornography distribution were lifted, the scale of the market expanded beyond imagination.⁸²⁷

Videotapes are the perfect lens through which to view Polish society in the process of far-reaching social and economic transformation. First, the history of VCRs in Poland reminds us how important modern technologies were for creating new consumer identities and undermining the monopoly of the state in the field of culture. Moreover, the history of sharing pornographic video-content also suggests that the technological transformation affected people’s attitudes toward erotica in general. As the sources analysed in this chapter demonstrate, toward the end of the 1980s pornography and erotic contents became normalised as part of leisure, enjoyed both in one’s private sphere and in the public. Due to the activities of socialist censorship pornography became to be viewed as the ‘forbidden fruit’: the more attractive, the less widely available it was. This,

⁸²⁴ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Pismo do naczelnika Wydziału III WUSW w Jeleniej Górze, Wałbrzych, 21 listopada 1986, k. 16.

⁸²⁵ Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Notatka służbowa, Jelenia Góra, dn. 27 lutego 1987, k. 25-26; Informacja z ustnej relacji tw "Bolesław", Jelenia Góra, dn. 1 kwietnia 1987, k. 31

⁸²⁶ See also Wrocław, AIPN Wr 020/924, Uzupełnienie meldunku nr 109, Jelenia Góra, dn. 13 maja 1987, k. 43

⁸²⁷ E. Stusińska, *Miła Robótka: Polskie Świerszczyki, Harlekiny i Porno z Satelity* (Wołowiec, 2021), 132–47.

combined with the state's inability to prevent the spread of illegal, contributed to the notable revalorisation of pornography in the public discourse witnessed toward the end of the decade. The pornographic boom did not start in 1989 after the system collapsed. If anything, the increased popularity and availability of erotica was a direct result of the very sociological and economic changes that contributed to the demise of the socialist state in the 1980s.

Finally, all the case studies analysed in this chapter indicate that the approach of the socialist state toward pornography was far from uniform long before videotapes entered the scene. On the one hand, the discourse on illicit erotica changed over time as general attitudes toward sexuality relaxed. On the other, the strategy of state institutions toward the prosecution of pornography also varied greatly depending on the context. However, in hardly any case was pornography was prosecuted as such. Rather, it served as a useful excuse for surveillance of foreigners and homosexual men, as well as possibly an extortion measure. As the examples of videotapes demonstrate quite well, by the mid-1980s the state control over flourishing pornography market was illusionary and even if some rare cases were brought to court, the offenders were acquitted. The anti-pornography law was a dead letter long before the open discussion on changing regulations began in the 1990s.

Chapter Seven: Coca-Cola and Socialist Morality. Nude Activism in Late State Socialism

‘Female strippers – as commodities and trade objects – are popularly accepted in our society while a naked man on a beach is not! Every intelligent and cultured person should know who is on the right side of this issue’.⁸²⁸

As the previous chapters argued, by the end of the 1970s nudity became commercialised in the Polish public sphere, one example being striptease shows in restaurants and clubs. Yet, not everyone welcomed such developments. On the one hand, the Polish Episcopate warned in its pastoral letters against the detrimental effects of ‘demoralising press publications’ and ‘over-eroticised mass culture’.⁸²⁹ However, commercial nudity also met with opposition on the other side of political spectrum, as the opening quotation of this chapter shows. It comes from the ideological declaration of Polish naturists written in 1979 by their leader, Sylwester Marczak.⁸³⁰ In line with nudist ideology Polish activists perceived asexual nudity to be a cure for all societal ills. However, only a couple of years later Marczak himself was the one to organise commercial nude photography sessions as well as public shows featuring naked women.

⁸²⁸ S. Marczak, ‘Ideological Declaration of Polish Naturists’ (1979). Quoted in: M. Bołtryk, ‘Ruch gołych’, *Ekspres Reporterów*, 2 (1987), 5.

⁸²⁹ *Listy pasterskie Prymasa Polski oraz Episkopatu, 1975-1981* (Paris, 1988), 261, 410.

⁸³⁰ The sources from the 1980s consistently use the term ‘naturism’ [naturyzm] instead of ‘nudism’ [nudyzm, which is more often used in the English-speaking contexts. I decided to follow the sources’ language and I use the word ‘naturism’ when I refer to the semi-organized movement and its ideology, while I speak of nudism when referring to the practices of nude sunbathing in general, especially before the organised naturist movement emerged in Poland.

Instead of promoting asexual nudity, Polish nude activism took an active part in mainstreaming more commercial approaches toward sex. How was this paradox possible?

This chapter analyses the emergence, development, and demise of the Polish naturist movement in the last two decades of state socialism. Although most evidence suggests that nude sunbathing never became as popular and widespread as the leaders of the movement claimed, one thing can be said for certain: throughout the 1980s naturism was enjoying unparalleled media attention. Therefore, the role it came to play in the Polish debates on sexuality at that time should not be underestimated. On the one hand, as this chapter argues, the publicity around the movement further contributed to the process of mainstreaming expert-led discussions on sexuality originating in the late 1960s with the Polish school of sexology (see Chapter Two). Yet, the popularity of nude sunbathing could undoubtedly be explained by other factors. As a leisure activity nudism enabled people to escape, at least for a moment, the dire reality of late state socialism. Furthermore, the vast network of transnational contacts maintained by Polish naturists made them essentially ‘Western’ or at least ‘international’ – a quality highly esteemed in a country in which even plastic bags with foreign brands’ logos were carried around with great pride.

As the second part of this chapter demonstrates, even if naturist activists occasionally tried to portray themselves as obedient followers of socialist doctrine, most commentators rightfully observed that their approaches towards sexuality had more in common with capitalism than they had with the communist ideology. Therefore, the history of the naturist movement perfectly showcases the multidimensional character of the Polish 1980s, trapped in-between two powerful discourses: fading socialist ideology and an emerging language of neoliberal capitalism. By analysing the history of nude sunbathing, I hope to shed more light not only on this under-researched episode in Polish

sexual history, but also to uncover new spheres of negotiation which were opening up in Polish society more generally in the 1980s.

We are used to thinking of the 1980s in terms of exacerbating political and economic crisis.⁸³¹ Yet, this does not have to be the only lens through which to analyse social (in)activism in that period. In fact, as Alexei Yurchak points out through the example of the USSR, ‘late socialism became marked by an explosion of various styles of living that were simultaneously inside and outside the system’.⁸³² According to him, late Soviet culture was characterised by its *detrterritorialization*. New cultural milieus were not ‘carved out’ of the system, as we are too often made to think, but rather were ‘actively engaged in and productive of a shifting socialist system’.⁸³³ As this chapter demonstrates, a similar argument can be made for the Polish naturist movement in the late state-socialist period. Naked activism was made possible thanks to the economic, spatial, and temporal conditions unique to the late state-socialist period. At the same time naturism produced a new discourse on sexuality and abetted a gradual, yet significant transformation of socialist identities and subjectivities.

Over the course of the twentieth century nudism became increasingly popular in some European societies as well as in the USA. Nude sunbathing and exercising were first promoted at the end of the nineteenth century as part of the German *Lebensreform* (life reform) movement and an answer to both medical and civilizational problems. Early nudists stressed that close connection with nature was indispensable for a healthy life and could only be achieved through going naked as well as regular exercises, vegetarianism,

⁸³¹ See A. Paczkowski, *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Poland, 1980-1989: Solidarity, Martial Law, and the End of Communism in Europe* (Rochester, 2015).

⁸³² A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, N.J., 2006), 127.

⁸³³ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 157.

and abstinence from alcohol. In their view full nudity was also an answer to social prudery as it allowed people to feel comfortable with their bodies and instead of shame and taboo it promoted true understanding between the sexes.⁸³⁴ As the movement spread beyond Germany, the emphasis on social reform lessened and instead the importance of going naked in nature as a healthy leisure activity grew. After the Second World War, with the expansion of tourist industry and consumer societies in Europe,⁸³⁵ the popularity of nude sunbathing grew further as did opportunities for making profit out of it.⁸³⁶

In terms of historical scholarship there have been some national studies on the history of nudism in Germany, France, Great Britain, and the USA.⁸³⁷ Perhaps the most noteworthy is the case of East Germany where nudism became a nation-wide activity, officially sanctioned, and even supported by the authorities. As Josie McLellan has argued ‘Nudity, once vilified by the state as immoral, was co-opted by the regime and recast in a specifically East German light’.⁸³⁸ According to McLellan what was the most remarkable about East German nudism was the fact that nude bathing was not confined to designated spaces (as was the case in the West) and therefore ‘nude and clothed bathers

⁸³⁴ B. Hoffman, *Naked: A Cultural History of American Nudism* (New York, 2015), 1-4.

⁸³⁵ See S. Baranowski and E. Furlough (eds.), *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America* (Ann Arbor, 2001).

⁸³⁶ S.L. Harp, ‘Demanding Vacation Au Naturel: European Nudism and Postwar Municipal Development on the French Riviera’, *Journal of Modern History*, 83/3 (2011), 513–43.

⁸³⁷ See for instance Hoffman, *Naked: A Cultural History of American Nudism*; S.L. Harp, *Au Naturel: Naturism, Nudism, and Tourism in Twentieth-Century France* (Baton Rouge, 2013); N.J. Morris, ‘Naked in Nature: Naturism, Nature and the Senses in Early 20th Century Britain’, *Cultural Geographies*, 16/3 (2009), 283–308; M. Jefferies, ‘“For a Genuine and Noble Nakedness”? German Naturism in the Third Reich’, *German History*, 24/1 (2006), 62–84.

⁸³⁸ J. McLellan, ‘State Socialist Bodies: East German Nudism from Ban to Boom’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 79/1 (2007), 78.

mingled freely'.⁸³⁹ Yet, the East German case was exceptional and other countries of the communist bloc took a more conservative approach towards nude bathing.⁸⁴⁰

We still do not know much about the transnational character of nudism and the naturist movement in the post-war period. As Stephen Harp has pointed out, 'taking a solely national perspective has caused historians of Europe to focus on Germany, with its larger nudist movement, and that has made it easy to miss the fact that the demand for nude tourism crossed national borders'.⁸⁴¹ Moreover, most of the scholarship has so far been informed by Cold War divisions and thus treated 'Eastern' and 'Western' nudism as two separate phenomena. I argue in this chapter, however, that the Iron Curtain was far from sealed, including in the case of nudism.⁸⁴² On the one hand, visitors from outside the bloc played a significant role in creating demand for nude beaches in tourist destinations such as Yugoslavia or Hungary.⁸⁴³ On the other hand, nudists from the East travelled westward to take part in international naturist congresses or simply for leisure purposes and were inspired by the developments on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Such travels occurred in the imagination as well, as naturist publications circulated unofficially across the Cold War divide thanks to international contacts maintained among activists.⁸⁴⁴ The Polish naturist movement offers a useful lens through which this transnational history can be observed.

⁸³⁹ McLellan, 'State Socialist Bodies', 49.

⁸⁴⁰ I. Costache, 'From the Party to the Beach Party Nudism and Artistic Expression in the People's Republic of Romania', in C.M. Giustino, C.J. Plum, and A. Vari (eds.), *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (New York, 2013), 127-44.

⁸⁴¹ S.L. Harp, 'Demanding Vacation Au Naturel', 542.

⁸⁴² More broadly on tourism across the Iron Curtain see S.B. Pedersen and C. Noack, 'Crossing the Iron Curtain: An Introduction', in S.B. Pedersen and C. Noack (eds.), *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences across the Iron Curtain* (London, 2019), 1-20.

⁸⁴³ B. Newman, 'Dressing for Dinner Remains an Issue In the Naked City', *Wall Street Journal. Eastern Edition* (9 Sept. 1988), 1.

⁸⁴⁴ Fabjan, 'Naturista Rondo', *Veto* (4 Oct. 1987), 11.

Grudziądz, Chalupy, Yugoslavia: The Early History of Nude Sunbathing

The first 'naturist' organisation in the Polish lands was established in 1897 in Grudziądz under the name Society for Natural Living (*Towarzystwo Naturalnego Sposobu Życia*).⁸⁴⁵ Its main goal was to create a space where members of the Society could freely sunbathe half-naked and thus develop closer connection with nature.⁸⁴⁶ At that time Grudziądz (or rather Graudenz) lay within borders of the German Empire. Hence, the Society's foundation may have been inspired by works of German doctors and ideologues such as Heinrich Pudor and Richard Ungewitter, who published their books on the benefits of nakedness in the 1890s and early 1900s.⁸⁴⁷ At the beginning of the century the so-called *Nacktkultur* (Naked culture) or *Freikörperkultur* (free body culture) spread in Germany and beyond, attracting attention of groups of social reformers across Europe and leading to the foundation of the first nudist clubs and beaches.⁸⁴⁸

Although in the Polish lands (and then in independent Poland) nakedness was still a taboo and no official nudist organisation had been formed before the Second World War, there were most likely groups of people who practiced full or partial nude sunbathing in their homes or on private beaches. A renowned, yet unofficial, nude beach was supposedly located in Zaleszczyki, a town on the Polish-Romanian border said to have the highest number of sunny days in a year, as well as in Otwock near Warsaw.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁵ M. Wełyczko, 'Naga Radość PRL-u. Wrocławianie - Naturyzm - Polityka', *Pamięć i Przyszłość*, 4/2 (2009), 41.

⁸⁴⁶ 'Historia Ogrodu', <https://kapielesloneczne.pl/tl/Historia-Ogrodu.htm> (12 Aug. 2021).

⁸⁴⁷ K.E. Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935* (Berkeley, 1997), 30-39.

⁸⁴⁸ S.L. Harp, *Au Naturel: Naturism, Nudism, and Tourism in Twentieth-Century France* (Baton Rouge, 2013), 24–54; N.J. Morris, 'Naked in Nature: Naturism, Nature and the Senses in Early 20th Century Britain', *Cultural Geographies*, 16/3 (2009), 283–308.

⁸⁴⁹ A. Herman, 'Nagość Naturystyczna Jako Nagość (Nie)Obyczajna?', *Societas/Communitas*, 17/1 (2014), 126. See as well 'Najpiękniejsze plaże przedwojennej polski', <https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/najpiękniejsze-plaże-przedwojennej-polski> (12 Aug. 2021).

Similar practices continued after the war. As photos suggest (see Fig. 7.1 and 7.2),⁸⁵⁰ nude sunbathing was practiced by intellectual elites in the 1950s and 1960s in private houses or on isolated beaches near Krynica Morska and on the Hel peninsula.⁸⁵¹

However, it was not until the 1970s that naked sunbathing turned into a more popular activity and demanded more attention from state authorities. Again, the influence of transnational transfers proved to be of paramount importance. In January 1972 the so-called 'Border of Friendship' opened between Poland and East Germany. The project allowed the citizens of these countries to travel passport- and visa-free to the neighbouring country as well as to exchange unlimited amounts of the foreign currency (either Polish złoty or East German marks).⁸⁵² As Mark Keck-Szajbel stresses, the uniqueness of the project lay in the unique level of travel for which it allowed.⁸⁵³ As a result, the number of visitors from socialist countries in Poland rose from 1.6 million in 1971 to over 8 million a year after.⁸⁵⁴ Yet another sign of a consumerist revolution offered by Edward Gierek's regime, the unprecedented scale of transnational travels facilitated not only the exchange of economic goods (as Polish clients emptied shelves in East German shops) but also encouraged new forms of leisure and tourism within the bloc.⁸⁵⁵

Once the borders opened, East German tourists rushed to spend their vacation in Polish villages on the Baltic Coast. As *Freikörperkultur* was already widely practiced in

⁸⁵⁰ Fig. 7.1 and 7.2, Ośrodek Karta, OK_0500_0020_0020_001, Irena Jarosińska sunbathing in the nude on her rooftop, Photo by S. Pieniążek

⁸⁵¹ Bołtryk, 'Ruch gołych', 26–7; M. Hauszyld, 'Nudyzm to nie naturyzm', *Veto* (14 Aug. 1983), 16.

⁸⁵² The border between East Germany and Poland remained open until 1980.

⁸⁵³ M. Keck-Szajbel, 'Shop Around the Bloc. Trader Tourism and Its Discontents on the East German–Polish Border', in P. Bren and M. Neuburger (eds.), *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (2012), 375.

⁸⁵⁴ Keck-Szajbel, 'Shop Around the Bloc', 374.

⁸⁵⁵ See P. Sowiński, 'Turystyka Zagraniczna w Polsce w Latach 1956-1980', *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 34/1 (2002), 135–44. On the earlier history of transnational travels within the bloc see J. Kochanowski, '„Jesteśmy Za Biedni, Aby Urlop Spędzać w Kraju” Masowa Turystyka i Nielegalny Handel w Latach Sześćdziesiątych XX w. Perspektywa Polska', *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych*, LXVIII (2008), 125–50.

the GDR, sunbathing in the nude became an irrevocable part of holiday leisure, also abroad. Polish tourists soon followed their footsteps and also took off their clothes on Baltic beaches. This created unprecedented challenges to Citizens' Militia units which patrolled the beaches and coastal towns. The first famous confrontation between nude vacationers and clothed Militia officers took place in July 1972 in Chałupy on the Hel Peninsula. Janusz Głowacki, a writer and one of the protagonists of the 'July events',⁸⁵⁶ remembered that the officers came out of the bushes by surprise and asked naked sunbathers for identification because of their offence against public decency. A group of protesters (after dressing up quickly) gathered around them and tried to argue against this persecution. As they observed, a group of nude East Germans, who sunbathed around 100 meters from the epicentre of the events, was not bothered by the officers and that was a clear manifestation of injustice. 'They belong to our bloc; they should not be discriminated against and they deserve the same care of the state as we are receiving' argued one of the protesters. Głowacki ironically recounted that they avoided international conflict only because the Militia officer 'reacted like a mature statesman' and did not fall for this provocation.⁸⁵⁷ Yet, Polish nudists could not escape fines so easily as tourists from the GDR and were soon charged by the local court for offending the laws on public decency.⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁵⁶ Głowacki uses the term 'wypadki lipcowe' which clearly refers to the language of communist propaganda which used the category of 'events' to describe citizens' protests in Gdańsk and Gdynia in December 1970 (so-called 'wypadki grudniowe'). The purpose of such language was clearly to minimise the impact of social protests, but it is highly unlikely that Głowacki was referring to this subdued meaning of the category.

⁸⁵⁷ J. Głowacki, 'Polowanie na rozbierańca', *Kultura* (13 Aug. 1972), 12.

⁸⁵⁸ According to Michał Bołtryk in other cases that year tourists from countries of the bloc were not treated so leniently and received a fine as well. See Bołtryk, 'Ruch gołych', 12.

Głowacki published his story in *Kultura* [*Culture*] and other commentators soon took up the topic.⁸⁵⁹ This was probably the first time when nude sunbathing was discussed by the media and undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of Chałupy as the symbol of nudism and an important meeting place for the years to come. Despite the ongoing hostility from the authorities and the Citizens' Militia who invoked the public morality clause, nudism grew increasingly popular throughout the 1970s.⁸⁶⁰ Nude sunbathing gradually became understood as an indispensable element of modern, socialist consumerism. In his report from the nudist beach in Warsaw Andrzej Gass predicted that: 'I think we will not avoid nudist beaches, just as we have not avoided motorisation, Coca-Cola, and a couple of other things'.⁸⁶¹ As the rest of this chapter demonstrates, he was quite right in his prophecy.

East German tourists on the Baltic coast were not the only source of inspiration for the early Polish naturists. As border controls relaxed at the beginning of the 1970s, Polish citizens started travelling abroad for their holidays as well. Not surprisingly, the majority of these travels still occurred within the bloc, but it was enough to facilitate transnational encounters and encourage new types of leisure. Polish nudists were even invited to international naturist events, such as the 1976 congress in West Germany, portrayed by Andrzej Gass in his reportage for the satirical weekly *Szpilki* [*Pins*].⁸⁶² Therefore, from the very beginning, the Polish media portrayed nudism as an essentially transnational phenomenon, a way for Polish vacationers to join the European (but also socialist) culture of leisure.

⁸⁵⁹ A. Osęka, 'Ściganie golasów malowanych', *Kultura* (20 Aug. 1972), 10. See also 'Korespondencja', *Kultura* (27 Aug. 1972), 11.

⁸⁶⁰ See 'Zima blisko a goli idą', *Kultura*, 42 (1976), 10.

⁸⁶¹ A. Gass, 'Reportaż o niesłusznej nagości', *Kultura*, 37 (1975), 8.

⁸⁶² A. Gass, 'Naga prawda', *Szpilki* (22 Aug. 1976), 16–7. See also A. Gass, 'Prawda o nagiej prawdzie', *Szpilki* (26 Sept. 1976), 7.

In 1983 Ewa from Kołobrzeg remembered in her letter to the *Veto* weekly that her fascination with naturism began during holidays spent in Yugoslavia. ‘Since then, I sunbathe without textiles together with my husband and our two children’ she confessed.⁸⁶³ Another reader, Marian, who lived in Gryfin on the Polish-GDR border recounted:

A couple of years ago I visited East German Baltic beaches and encountered naturists there. I felt like I had finally regained my freedom and chill [pelen luz]. The atmosphere there is fantastic, everybody is friends with each other. There is no way nude sunbathing could upset anyone or offend someone’s morality. What is more – the naturist movement is officially propagated. The TV often presents documentaries from naked beaches and other naturist meeting places.⁸⁶⁴

Both Marian and Ewa referred to these foreign examples to argue that Polish attitudes towards nudism should be relaxed and that the authorities should support the movement in creating more areas for nude leisure. They were not the only ones to demand this.

At the beginning of the 1980s the popularity of nude sunbathing grew significantly and attracted new groups of enthusiasts who started organising themselves and demanding recognition. Let us consider a few possible explanations for the surge in popularity (or at least publicity) of nude sunbathing at the beginning of the 1980s. On the one hand, as I have already argued, the preceding decade was marked by a notable sexual liberalisation. Nude photography exhibitions, striptease shows or naked scenes in popular movies contributed to a gradual normalisation of female nudity in the public discourse. Moreover, such a relaxation of moral norms regarding naked bodies was further supported by consumerist aspirations of the society. Holiday travels within Poland became a norm, while a growing number of citizens was able to travel abroad to major

⁸⁶³ M. Hauszyl, ‘Naturyści i “Veto”’, *Veto* (17 July 1983), 12.

⁸⁶⁴ M. Hauszyl, ‘Nietolerancji ciąg dalszy’, *Veto* (7 Aug. 1983), 16.

tourist destinations such as Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Bulgaria.⁸⁶⁵ People got used to having time and opportunities for leisure and started seeking new, thrilling ways to spend their free time.

When the economic and political crisis reached its peak after the Martial Law was introduced in 1981, the desire to find one's own space became even more urgent. In this context naturism offered an easy way to escape the everyday life. It was cheap and did not require travelling far away or acquiring any hard-to-access equipment (in fact, one even did not need a bathing suit). On another level, it offered a sense of belonging and activism very much desired after the 'Solidarity Carnival' had so abruptly ended. Finally, becoming a 'naturist' was a rare chance to perform one's sexual progressiveness; to meet like-minded people; or simply to look at and admire naked female bodies. All these factors influenced the movement's immense popularity in the last decade of state socialism but also resulted in its quick demise after the Iron Curtain had all of a sudden fallen down.

From Beach Parties to Sex Parties

It is not perfectly clear how exactly the idea of organising a naturist movement in state-socialist Poland came into being. Undoubtedly, two locations played a significant role in this process. By the late 1970s Chałupy became a meeting place for enthusiasts of nude sunbathing. Allegedly it was also the where the first 'naturist congress' took place in the late 1970s. Simultaneously, groups of nudists were meeting in Świdry near Otwock (around thirty kilometres from Warsaw) where Sylwester Marczak, a teacher from the

⁸⁶⁵ D. Stola, 'Opening a Non-Exit State: The Passport Policy of Communist Poland, 1949-1980', *East European Politics and Societies*, 29/1 (2015), 112.

local medical high school, played a key role in the nude community. As many sources attest, both places were frequented by similar groups of people and Marczak together with his friends spent their holidays in Chałupy.⁸⁶⁶

As the popularity of unofficial naked beaches grew, Marczak and his community started thinking about formalising the movement and setting out rules of behaviour at nudist beaches. Their first ideological declaration was announced in 1979. Already quoted at the beginning of this chapter, it outlined the ideological background of the first naturist groups. The early naturists claimed that their activity was an act of opposition against backwardness in some sections of the Polish society. According to them, nudity on the beach was modern, asexual, and dignified in contrast to commercialised striptease shows. On the other hand, the declaration targeted long held societal taboos as well, pronouncing them to be unmodern and against the spirit of socialist modernisation. 'Philistinism, prudery and obscurantism are not yet dead in our society. There are people who perceive beach nudity as evil and immoral behaviour. Even though the Dark Ages (*ciemnogród*) are long gone, the philistine is still alive'⁸⁶⁷ they added.

Yet, the true boom in the popularity of naked beaches came in 1983 when the *Veto* weekly began to actively publicise the movement. As this former Federation of Consumers' weekly moved from its initial profile as a consumers' magazine, the contents of the weekly increasingly focused on tabloid-like news.⁸⁶⁸ The editor-in-chief, Andrzej Nałęcz-Jawiecki, was himself an avid fan of nude sunbathing and was often present at many of the naturist events. However, it was perhaps not only personal sympathy that

⁸⁶⁶ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, Protokół przesłuchania strony z 10 lutego 1984, k. 12–3.

⁸⁶⁷ Marczak, 'Ideological declaration'.

⁸⁶⁸ See M. Mazurek and M. Hilton, 'Consumerism, Solidarity and Communism: Consumer Protection and the Consumer Movement in Poland', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42/2 (2007), 333.

stood behind the decision to promote the naturist movement on the pages of *Veto*. The magazine sought to attract new readers and erotic contents and nude bodies of attractive female naturists seemed like a perfect combination.

In June 1983 the first ‘Naked Beach’ [Naga plaża] column was published in the magazine. Its anonymous author praised ‘going off the beaten track’ as a holiday strategy to avoid expensive and ‘snobbish’ holiday destinations and presented nude sunbathing as a novel and casual alternative to these forms of leisure.⁸⁶⁹ To further encourage nudism the article ended with addresses of three naked beaches (in Łeba, Chałupy, and Łomianki near Warsaw) together with driving directions and a picture of a sunbathing woman with exposed naked breasts (see Fig. 7.3 and 7.4).⁸⁷⁰ The column also discussed a list of rules governing behaviour on nude beaches. First, no single men were allowed there. Moreover, alcohol and picture taking were prohibited at all times. Groups of naturists were not supposed to mingle with strangers and those who were sick (with ulcerated skin, as the author clarified) should avoid such beaches ‘for aesthetic reasons [...] and for their own good’.⁸⁷¹

Thanks to *Veto* we know quite a lot about the activities of Polish naturists in summer 1983. On the one hand, new unofficial beaches were popping up across Poland and *Veto* updated their list regularly. Apart from traditional locations in Chałupy or Otwock nude sunbathing was now possible near Cracow⁸⁷² and in various locations along the Baltic coast (in Piaski, Dębki, Ustka, to mention just a few of them).⁸⁷³ Apart from beaches naturists met in public swimming pools, saunas, as well as in cafes

⁸⁶⁹ M. ReM., ‘Naga plaża’, *Veto* (12 June 1983), 16.

⁸⁷⁰ Fig. 7.3 and 7.4, M. ReM., ‘Naga plaża’, *Veto* (12 June 1983), 16.

⁸⁷¹ ReM., ‘Naga plaża’.

⁸⁷² M. Hauszyld, ‘Panie górą!’, *Veto* (24 July 1983), 16

⁸⁷³ M. Hauszyld, ‘Nietolerancja czy głupota?’, *Veto* (3 July 1983), 16; M. Hauszyld, ‘Naga plaża’, *Veto* (10 July 1983), 12.

(‘unfortunately in textiles instead of organisational outfits’ Marek Hauszyld lamented).⁸⁷⁴

To cater to the needs of single naturists, Sylwester Marczak even started a Lonely Hearts Club, which according to its organisers had over six hundred members while sixteen couples had met at the club’s meetings by January 1984.⁸⁷⁵

The key event in the calendar of Polish naturists was without doubt the summer congress in Chałupy. As already mentioned, the first such ‘congresses’ were organised from the mid-1970s onwards, but it was not until 1983 that the event received so much publicity and attention. According to the organisers the 1983 summer congress hosted over ten thousand enthusiasts of nude sunbathing.⁸⁷⁶ What drew them there? The beautiful nature around Chałupy was certainly one of the factors. Moreover, according to Sylwester Marczak the role of *Veto* in spreading the information was instrumental for this success.⁸⁷⁷ Finally, the programme of the congress was packed with exciting events such as sport competitions, quizzes, and nude beauty pageants.

The most important contest took place on Sunday, 7 August, when good weather allowed Miss Polonia ‘Natura’83’ elections to finally take place. Notably, the nudist competition was organised only a month before the major ‘clothed’ Miss Polonia beauty pageant was organised in Warsaw on 7 September 1983, after 25 years on pause.⁸⁷⁸ The only two previous beauty pageants in state-socialist Poland were in 1957 and 1958, on the wave of the political and cultural thaw (see Chapter Five). Therefore, it is not surprising that the beauty pageants provoked enthusiastic reactions as a sign of the post-Martial Law relaxation of cultural constraints (Martial Law was lifted in July 1983). As

⁸⁷⁴ M. Hauszyld, ‘Oni i “tekstylni”’, *Veto* (19 June 1983), 16.

⁸⁷⁵ M. Hauszyld, ‘To nie naturyzm’, *Veto* (8 Jan. 1984), 12.

⁸⁷⁶ M. Hauszyld, ‘Czy grozi nam bezkrólewie?’, *Veto* (21 Aug. 1983), 16.

⁸⁷⁷ Hauszyld, ‘Czy grozi’.

⁸⁷⁸ M. Goliszewski, ‘MISS-terium’, *Veto* (16 Oct. 1983), 12. See also W. Markiewicz, ‘Musimy zobaczyć zęby. Wybory Miss Mazowsza’, *Polityka* (4 June 1983), 10.

Chapter Five has already explored, sexual liberalisation was an important strategy of appeasing public emotions and diverting attention from the economic and political crisis of the 1980s. Official beauty pageants undoubtedly played an important role in this strategy. On the other hand, they also had an observable influence over the popular culture of that time, as the popularity of nude beauty contests suggests.

As the journalist recounted, ‘a dozen or so young and beautifully tanned naked ladies’ entered the Miss Natura competition and it overall gathered ‘over two thousand nudists as well as a group of textiled scouts [tekstylni harcerze].’⁸⁷⁹ As usual in *Veto*, the coverage of the event would not be complete without illustrations that emphasised the sexual and voyeuristic character of the event. The picture of two nude contestants kissing each other was accompanied by a short comment ‘...to be in-between them...’ (see Fig. 7.5 and 7.6).⁸⁸⁰ In spite of the previous announcements, only a female beauty pageant was organised. There were no candidates willing to take part in the ‘Mister Natura’ competition and apparently no one was dedicated enough to convince men to enter such a contest. Female bodies remained at the centre of attention, even though the movement officially declared its commitment to equality of the sexes.

However, the 1983 congress was also important as the moment when the decision to officially apply for registration of the Polish Naturist Association (Polskie Towarzystwo Naturystyczne, henceforth PTN) was taken. Not surprisingly, the naturists elected Sylwester Marczak to be the president of the Association. Wiesław Niedzielski from Łódź and Kazimierz Tokarski from Cracow were appointed to join him on the managerial board and to officially apply for registration with the Warsaw local

⁸⁷⁹ M. Hauszyld, ‘Przyjdzie zima – zobaczymy’, *Veto* (28 Aug. 1983), 16.

⁸⁸⁰ Fig. 7.5 and 7.6., M. Hauszyld, ‘Przyjdzie zima – zobaczymy’, *Veto* (28 Aug. 1983), 16 (Photo by R. Komuda).

authorities.⁸⁸¹ The 1983 summer season finished with a sense of optimism about the future. Journalist Marek Hauszyld ensured the readers of *Veto* that the naturists' energy and resilience would soon lead to the official registration of the PTN and further development of this noble cause in Poland.⁸⁸² Although the forces of prudery and backwardness in Polish society could not be ignored, the future of the naturist movement seemed bright and promising.

The enthusiastic development of the naturist movement was not hindered during the coming winter months. Nudists met in saunas and swimming pools, exchanged letters through the Lonely Hearts Club and partied together in private apartments and at carnival balls.⁸⁸³ In January 1984 *Veto* shocked its readers with the article about the 'naked party' organised by a group of alleged naturists from Warsaw. As the piece included quite detailed and vivid descriptions of group sex, we may assume that the story's purpose was to stir sensation and scandal, as well as to cater to voyeuristic tastes of the readers.⁸⁸⁴ At roughly the same time the magazine published a series of semi-pornographic stories such as *The Lustful Turk* or *The Lascivious Clerk* (accompanied by explicitly sexual collages).⁸⁸⁵ *Veto* readers wanted to read about sex, and the editors knew this very well.⁸⁸⁶

Whether the 'sex party' really took place or it was just invented by the editors of *Veto* to boost the magazine's readership cannot be decided here. However, what is crucial is the role that the 'sex party' literary trope played in narrating changing public attitudes

⁸⁸¹ Hauszyld, 'Czy grozi'.

⁸⁸² M. Hauszyld, 'Do zobaczenia... w saunie', *Veto* (4 Sept. 1983), 16.

⁸⁸³ M. Hauszyld, 'To nie naturyzm'; H. Zwoleń, 'Tekstylny bal naturystów', *Veto* (4 Mar. 1984), 12.

⁸⁸⁴ H. Zwoleń, 'Goła prywatka', *Veto* (8 Jan. 1984), 12.

⁸⁸⁵ 'Lubieżny Turek. Figle naszych pradziadów', *Veto* (22 Jan. 1984), 12; 'Lubieżny Turek, cz. II', *Veto* (12 Feb. 1984), 12; 'Chutliwy subiekt', *Veto* (29 Jan. 1984), 12.

⁸⁸⁶ In 1987 *Veto* published immensely popular series of stories about the life of Ritta, 'the most expensive prostitute in People's Poland', in 1992 published as a book. See A. Cempel, Ritta, *Veto* (15 Nov. 1987), 18.

towards sexuality and nudism in particular. Although the journalists tried to distinguish between ‘good’ (naturism) and ‘bad’ (sex parties) uses of sexual freedom, the letters *Veto* received after the publication seemed to suggest that the moral evaluation of such new types of sexual behaviour was much more ambiguous than the official discourse may have indicated. In letters the readers not only admitted that they themselves enjoyed threesomes or looking at female nudes, but they also argued that such leisure use of sexual freedoms should be more welcomed than other widely accepted phenomena such as commercial sex with foreigners.⁸⁸⁷ Moreover, the discussion spurred by the ‘sex party’ article clearly shifted the attention of the public towards more sexual aspects of the naturist movement and its complicated relation to other aspects of sexual liberation. As we have already seen in the case study of videotapes, the boundaries between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ in approaches toward sexual freedom grew increasingly blurred.

In its search for legitimisation of the movement *Veto* tried to portray nude sunbathing as a model of modern socialist morality, distant from the commercialised visions of sexuality promoted in the West. Yet, the distinction was not that obvious to other commentators and the party organised by the naturists in February 1984 did certainly not help to change this image. At first, the carnival ball organised in the Warsaw club ‘Tip-Top’ did not provoke much sensation. *Veto* enthusiastically reported that the party was a success, even though the majority of the participants appeared in ‘textiles’. The ball culminated with a nude beauty pageant, again only with female contestants. The candidates had to undress in front of the audience and their ‘striptease’ was welcomed with loud applause. ‘Obviously, in celebration of the elections a lot of champagne was

⁸⁸⁷ M. Hauszyl, ‘No i komu dogodzić?’, *Veto* (19 Feb. 1984), 12.

poured. Not only into the glasses but also on the already dressed Miss' summed up *Veto*.⁸⁸⁸

Such joyous celebrations did not exactly fit into the picture of a post-Martial Law Poland burdened with economic and political crisis. Somehow, the pictures from the party (especially the naked ones) made it to the West and in summer 1984 they were published in the Belgian magazine *Revelation*. The weekly *Rzeczywistość*, the outlet of the conservative wing of the PZPR, quickly followed on the topic.⁸⁸⁹ In the article 'Dolce vita of Polish naturists' their Brussels correspondent reported about the publication and the reactions it provoked in Belgium. Allegedly, a hotel concierge asked the journalist:

You speak about the crisis, but they pour champagne on the whores [dziwki]; you write about the renewal in social life, at the same time promoting such things – things that in the West have caused family decay, problems with youth, scandals and tragedies.⁸⁹⁰

Rzeczywistość had already had a notable history of writing critical reports on the changing sexual mores so their reaction needs to be taken with a pinch of salt.⁸⁹¹ The articles were usually authored by Mieczysław Olbromski who portrayed sexual liberalisation (exemplified by striptease, nudism, pornography, and general 'promiscuity') as a result of the crisis that Poland was experiencing in the 1980s but also as a manifestation of certain lifestyles that were foreign to the socialist morality. For his publications Olbromski was even awarded a special prize at the naturist congress in 1984 'so that he would never again write about naturism'.⁸⁹²

⁸⁸⁸ Zwolen, 'Tekstylny bal'.

⁸⁸⁹ P. Gasztold-Seń, *Koncesjonowany Nacjonalizm. Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne Grunwald 1980-1990* (Warszawa, 2012), 232–40.

⁸⁹⁰ A. Domieniecki, 'Dolce vita polskich naturystów', *Rzeczywistość* (30 Sept. 1984), 7.

⁸⁹¹ See for example M. Olbromski, 'Raj nudystów', *Rzeczywistość* (5 June 1983), 8; M. Olbromski, 'Strip-teaserki', *Rzeczywistość* (28 Aug. 1983), 9; M. Olbromski, 'Śmierć kandydatki na miss nagości', *Rzeczywistość* (8 Jan. 1984), 6; M. Olbromski, 'Nagość i pornografia', *Rzeczywistość* (4 Mar. 1984), 6.

⁸⁹² M. Hauszylid, H. Zwolen, 'Naturyści przed sezonem', *Veto* (29 Apr. 1984), 12.

Similar criticism of naturist parties was voiced by an anonymous reader of *Profile* (*Profiles*, the Rzeszów monthly cultural magazine). In a 1986 letter sent to the editors they argued that:

Unfortunately, our novice naturists understood it [nudism – A.D.] wrongly and thought that it is some kind of a ‘sex party’. [...] [They organise - AD] completely redundant beach activities, games, beauty pageants, and in the end a naked ball in some night club. The latter is nothing but a scandal, a complete antithesis of naturism.⁸⁹³

Although nude sunbathing was not evil in itself, the author argued (interestingly by invoking Cardinal Glemp’s position on the issue), it should only be enjoyed in private or in a small group of friends. Wanting to enjoy nature naked was not wrong and in fact in line with socialist morality but turning it into entertainment closely resembling the Western ‘pornographic industry’ should be avoided at all costs. Therefore, he argued against the official recognition of the PTN in order to preserve the noble cause of real naturism.⁸⁹⁴

Nude Sunbathing and Socialist Morality

As we have already seen, the notion of socialist morality was a broad concept that could be used by both proponents and opponents of the organised naturist movement. The disputed definition of this term strongly influenced the relationship between naturists and state authorities. Therefore, it is crucial to untangle the complicated history of multiple attempts to register an official naturist association, both the country-wide one and the local branches. This history reveals a lot about the limits of citizens’ activism in late state-socialist Poland.

⁸⁹³ See also Kryspin, ‘Listy: Naturyzm czy seksparty’, *Profile*, 5 (1986), 31.

⁸⁹⁴ See also Kryspin, ‘Listy’.

The first attempts to officially register a naturist organisation were taken before the summer congress in Chałupy. In May 1983 the first (?) naturist group applied for registration in Wrocław and at first the local authorities did not see any reason to reject their application and even allowed for the founding meeting to take place.⁸⁹⁵ Yet, when the documents were sent to Warsaw to the Ministry of the Interior, it quickly turned out that naturism did not enhance the ‘public good’ and therefore should not be registered.⁸⁹⁶ The Naturist Association in Gdańsk received almost an identical response to their application in October 1983 (and, as the archival documents suggest, such a decision was made under pressure from the local Catholic bishop).⁸⁹⁷ Over the coming years the authorities rejected the subsequent applications to register a Naturist Sailing Club (1984)⁸⁹⁸ and a naturist organisation in Poznań (1986).⁸⁹⁹ However, the naturists did not give up without a fight.

‘We recognise the leading role of the Party as well as the constitutional principles of the Polish People’s Republic’s foreign policy’. With these words the group of nude activists from Wrocław addressed General Czesław Kiszczak (Minister of the Interior) in September 1983 and encouraged him to revoke the decision of his clerks.⁹⁰⁰ As they emphasized in their letter, the goal of an official naturist organization would be to organise spaces for ‘physical and psychological’ leisure.⁹⁰¹ Such places and organisations already existed in other countries of the communist bloc such as the GDR, Hungary,

⁸⁹⁵ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/22739 Pismo do dyrektora wydziału spraw społeczno-administracyjnych urzędu województwa wrocławskiego i Miasta Wrocławia z dn. 27 stycznia 1983 r., k. 4.

⁸⁹⁶ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, Pismo z dn. 4 sierpnia 1983, k. 4.

⁸⁹⁷ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/19042, Pismo z dn. 21 października 1983, k. 2; Pismo z dn. 23 listopada 1983, k. 4.

⁸⁹⁸ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/20036, Naturystyczny Klub Żeglarski.

⁸⁹⁹ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21308 Poznańskie Towarzystwo Naturystyczne; AIPN BU 1585/21245, Pismo w sprawie założenia klubu naturystycznego przy Oddziale PTTK „Rataje” z dn. 11 listopada 1986, k. 1.

⁹⁰⁰ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, List naturystów do Czesława Kiszczaka, 15 września 1983, k. 6.

⁹⁰¹ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, List naturystów do Czesława Kiszczaka, 15 września 1983, k. 6.

Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia and therefore, the authors of the letter argued, the Polish government should follow suit.⁹⁰² In their view, the role of the naturist association was to promote culture and tolerance in interpersonal relations as well as to uphold the ‘socialist morality, which does not collide with naturism in any way’.⁹⁰³ Similar arguments were used by the group of naturists from Gdańsk who in their letter of appeal tried to convince the authorities that nude sunbathing was an essential element of a secular society and the state should support such secular initiatives. They also complained about the threats they received from some ‘reactionary priests’.⁹⁰⁴

As it quickly turned out, the officials did not seem so convinced that nude activism was an element of socialist morality or a step necessary in building a secular society. In October 1983 the Ministry maintained the negative decision in force. As the official decision letter explained, ‘the goals and means of action can be realised without creating an official organizational framework for the community of naturists’.⁹⁰⁵ Almost identical reasoning was included in the letter received by the Gdańsk group in January 1984. Additionally, in the explanatory statement the Ministry argued that the association’s goals were not supported by the local community and therefore did not fulfil the premise of ‘public good’.⁹⁰⁶

However, the lack of official recognition seemed not to have discouraged the activists. The meetings and balls continued, and Sylwester Marczak officially introduced himself as the president of the association. This disobedience attracted the attention of

⁹⁰² Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, List naturystów do Czesława Kiszczaka, 15 września 1983, k. 7.

⁹⁰³ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, List naturystów do Czesława Kiszczaka, 15 września 1983, k. 7.

⁹⁰⁴ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/19042, Odwołanie od decyzji Wojewody Gdańskiego z dn. 23 listopada 1983, k. 4.

⁹⁰⁵ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, Decyzja Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych nr D.112/S/VIIIh/83 z dn. 19 października 1983, k. 8.

⁹⁰⁶ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/19042, Decyzja Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych nr D.559/S/VIIIh/83 z dn. 16 stycznia 1984, k. 6.

the authorities. In February 1984 Marczak was summoned to the municipal office in Warsaw and questioned about his activity as the president of the ‘so-called’ PTN.⁹⁰⁷ According to Marczak, the movement already had around fifty thousand sympathisers and prospects to develop beyond this number. Notably, in the protocol the word ‘members’ that Marczak used had been crossed out and replaced with less formal ‘sympathisers’, suggesting that if the association was not registered, it could not have any members.⁹⁰⁸ This minor linguistic detail reveals a lot about the concerns the authorities had about the naturist movement. The clerks who interviewed Marczak were primarily occupied with the illegal activity of the PTN i.e. that it called itself an association while it was not officially registered by the authorities.⁹⁰⁹ By doing so, the naturists endangered the state’s monopoly over citizens’ activity. In line with this reasoning, on 15 February the Municipal Office in Warsaw officially forbade any activities of the Naturist Association.⁹¹⁰ Finally, in June 1984, after another round of appeals and registration attempts, the Ministry of the Interior once again confirmed that it saw no point in registering the PTN, again invoking the ‘public good’ clause.⁹¹¹

Perhaps the most important chapter in the history of the naturist movement’s campaign for recognition took place in Chałupy in summer 1984.⁹¹² This little village on the Hel Peninsula was famous for its naked beach from at least the early 1970s. However, as the popularity of naked sunbathing grew, the inhabitants of the village started to feel uncomfortable about nude vacationers. According to Jerzy Budzisz, who led the protest

⁹⁰⁷ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, Protokół przesłuchania strony z dn. 10 lutego 1984, k. 12–4.

⁹⁰⁸ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, Protokół przesłuchania strony z dn. 10 lutego 1984, k. 14.

⁹⁰⁹ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, Protokół przesłuchania strony z dn. 10 lutego 1984, k. 12.

⁹¹⁰ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, Pismo z dn. 15 lutego 1984, k. 11.

⁹¹¹ Warsaw, AIPN BU 1585/21309, Pismo z dn. 28 czerwca 1984, k. 24.

⁹¹² The history of Chałupy conflict also closely resembled the challenges the naturists had to face a year earlier in Ldzań near Łódź (although on a smaller scale). M. Hauszylid, ‘Nietolerancji ciąg dalszy’, *Veto* (7 Aug. 1983), 16

against the nudist beach, in the 1980s the number of naturists visiting Chałupy grew noticeably and the boundaries of respectable behaviour became blurred. Again, the distinction between the private and the public spheres appeared crucial in defining acceptable behaviour. As long as the nudists sunbathed privately at the beach, the local community had nothing against them. However, with the growing popularity of the naturist movement led by Marczak, naked tourists started to ‘invade’ the public spaces of the village.⁹¹³ ‘Women from Chałupy approached me, complained that they [naturists – A.D.] walk around the village without bathing suits, that they provoke, they bother people. That they are no nudists, but rather perverts’ explained Budzisz, invoking the framework of women’s sexual respectability to argue against the naked tourists.⁹¹⁴

The conflict between the inhabitants of Chałupy and the naturist movement reached its peak in May 1984, when over 100 people signed a letter to the regional authorities in Gdańsk, demanding that the permission for organising a ‘naturalist beach’ [sic!] in Chałupy should be revoked.⁹¹⁵ The timing was not a coincidence. The elections to the local and regional national councils [rady narodowe] were scheduled to take place on 17 June. As these were the first elections after Martial Law was lifted, the regime was desperate to gain some legitimacy in the society. The elections were certainly not free in the democratic sense of the word, as the regime could easily tamper with the results, but high attendance was crucial for propagandistic purposes. Therefore, when the protesters from Chałupy threatened that they would boycott the elections, the local authorities had no other choice than to fulfil their demands. On 14 June the decision of the Urząd Wojewódzki [Voivodeship Office] in Gdańsk was announced. Naked beaches were

⁹¹³ Bołtryk, ‘Ruch gołych’, 26–7.

⁹¹⁴ M. Jędrzejewski, ‘Nudyści czy zboczeńcy?’, *Argumenty*, 25 (1984), 1.

⁹¹⁵ A. Zwoleń, H. Zwoleń, ‘Golasom - wstęp wzbroniony’, *Veto* (22 July 1984), 12.

deemed illegal in the entire length of the Hel peninsula and such a decision was explained as made out of consideration for the local community, but also to protect the natural environment.⁹¹⁶ As *Veto* reported in the following month, a special information board was placed at the road leading to the peninsula: ‘No naturist beaches are demarcated on the Hel peninsula’.⁹¹⁷

The naturists had to change the location of their summer congress. In the end, the 1984 edition of the event took place in Rowy, in the central part of the Polish Baltic coast.⁹¹⁸ Yet, it would be premature to draw the conclusion that the authorities persecuted the naturist movement and wanted to eradicate it completely. It is certainly true, as the examples here demonstrate, that the regime was afraid of the civic potential of independent, non-governmental organisations, especially the ones with sexual agenda, and therefore wanted to limit their social influence.⁹¹⁹ Moreover, the opposition among local communities (such as in Chałupy) or from the Church (as was the case in Gdańsk) strongly influenced the regime’s position as it certainly did not want to trade its weak social legitimacy for the support of nude sunbathing.

The naturist movement had to wait until 1988 for the first independent naturist organisation to be officially recognised by the authorities (Stowarzyszenie Naturystów Polskich w Łodzi, Association of Polish Naturists in Łódź).⁹²⁰ However, in many other instances the state (or state-controlled) institutions seemed to have more or less openly supported the naturist movement. The Łódź branch operated under the umbrella of the

⁹¹⁶ Zwoleń and Zwoleń, ‘Golasom’.

⁹¹⁷ H. Zwoleń, ‘I co dalej?’, *Veto* (29 July 1984), 16.

⁹¹⁸ H. Zwoleń, ‘Smak nagości’, *Veto* (19 Aug. 1984), 12.

⁹¹⁹ On the problems faced by homosexual associations see Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals*, 110–5. Szulc mentions the opposition from the Church as one of the unofficial reasons for the authorities’ reluctance towards registering any homosexual organisation.

⁹²⁰ [b.w], ‘Zarejestrowani!’, *Veto* (9 Oct. 1988), 2.

local cultural centre in the district of Polesie⁹²¹ and in Wrocław the naturist section was formed in the local sport and recreation centre in the district of Krzyki.⁹²² In addition to that, nude activists managed to garner support from the most peculiar organisations. In Bydgoszcz and Zielona Góra naturist groups were registered as a part of the Polish Esperanto Union (Polski Związek Esperantystów)⁹²³, while in Nowa Sól they met as a part of the cycling club of the Polish Socialist Youth Union (Związek Socjalistycznej Młodzieży Polskiej, henceforth: ZSMP).⁹²⁴ In this way, a network of more or less official naturist organisations operated in Poland despite unsuccessful attempts to register the PTN. In the end, even Sylwester Marczak abandoned his ambitions to lead an officially recognised association and instead, from 1986 onwards, started introducing himself as the chief [naczelnik] of the (informal) Federation of Naturist Clubs.⁹²⁵

Naturist Escapes from State-Socialist Reality

Funnily enough, despite the protests, Chałupy became the ultimate symbol of nude sunbathing under state socialism thanks to the 1985 song ‘Chałupy Welcome To’ [sic] performed by Zbigniew Wodecki. When the artist died in 2017, the local community represented by the village administrator [sołtys], Marcin Budzisz, expressed its gratitude to Wodecki for making Chałupy the most popular summer resort in Poland.⁹²⁶ Notably, the article in *Gazeta Wyborcza* did not even mention the war waged by the local

⁹²¹ Hauszyld, ‘Nietolerancji’,

⁹²² Welyczko, ‘Naga Radość PRL-u’, 45.

⁹²³ Fabjan, ‘Naturista Rondo’.

⁹²⁴ Agata, ‘Sekrety naturystek’, *Veto* (26 July 1985), 12.

⁹²⁵ Bernard, ‘Federacja’, *Veto* (27 Apr. 1986), 16.

⁹²⁶ D. Gałązka, ‘Zbigniew Wodecki nie żyje. Sołtys Chałup: wielu przyjezdnych kojarzy nas z piosenki’, *Gazeta Wyborcza: Trójmiasto* (22 May 2017) <https://trojmiasto.wyborcza.pl/trojmiasto/7,35612,21849266,soltys-chalup-wielu-przyjezdnych-kojarzy-nas-z-piosenki.html> (10 Mar 2021).

community against the naturist beach. Times had changed and the legendary naturist beach had become a source of profit and fame, not moral disgust. Yet, such a transformation would not have been possible had it not been for the growing appropriation of naturism in the popular culture of 1980s. Therefore, the following paragraphs look at how the naturist movement functioned in the mainstream discourse. On the one hand, discussions of naturism abetted the transformation of Polish sexual mores. On the other, nude sunbathing played an important role in narrating the sense of late state-socialist crisis and uncertainty.

During the summer 1984 congress in Rowy, the naturists were accompanied by a film crew from the Łódź Educational Films Studio (Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych, henceforth WFO).⁹²⁷ The short documentary *Naturyści* [*Naturists*] directed by Antoni Orwiński was produced soon thereafter. As the WFO was a state-owned film studio, the decision to produce a documentary movie about naturism must have been approved by the authorities in the Ministry of Culture and undergone the process of so-called co-laudation (acceptance by the censorship).⁹²⁸ Therefore, it may be somehow surprising that such permission was granted right after the PTN was denied official registration twice. Moreover, Sylwester Marczak became the official consultant for the film. If only indirectly, this demonstrates further that there was hardly one coordinated approach of the state authorities toward the naturist movement and that in fact in some contexts the evaluation of nude sunbathing might have been rather positive.

⁹²⁷ A. Zwoleń, H. Zwoleń, 'Miss-ki w Rowach', *Veto* (26 Aug. 1984), 12.

⁹²⁸ WFO, 1985/7/85, Protokół kołaudacji w Wojewódzkim Urzędzie Kontroli Prasy Publikacji i Widowisk z dn. 30 października 1984, no pagination.

The documentary begins at the beach in Rowy as the camera follows a young naked heterosexual couple running happily along the seashore.⁹²⁹ ‘Today naturism is a social, cultural and moral fact. It is, it exists’ announces the narrator in the introduction. Then, the camera focuses on the leisure at the naturist beach. Families sunbathe together, children play in the sand or swim in the sea. One of the nude vacationers explains that naked sunbathing is a family activity for her, her husband, and their 10-year-old son. ‘Here a person can feel really free of all the everyday prudery and insecurities’ she emphasises. Thus, the naturists are portrayed as happy, relaxed individuals and the naked beaches in Rowy and Świder as places where people exercise their freedom and spend quality leisure time close to nature. The documentary also quotes the naturist ideological declaration, emphasising the non-erotic and anti-pornographic character of the movement. Overall, without knowing the historical context in which the documentary was produced, one could easily conclude that the film was a state-approved advertisement of naturism as an activity closely connected to the ideals of socialist morality.

As the archival documents suggest, Orwiński’s film was intended as an educational and informational project and was supposed to be available to audiences in small artistic cinemas and in film discussion clubs.⁹³⁰ The documentary was screened at least twice at the local cultural centre in the district of Polesie in Łódź.⁹³¹ This was the same place where the above-mentioned semi-registered naturist club was operating, which suggests that the documentary may have played an important role in the recruitment and teambuilding among the naturists. Yet, it was not the only role the footage

⁹²⁹ *Naturyści* (1984), dir. A. Orwiński.

⁹³⁰ WFO, 1985/7/85, Pismo z Departamentu Programowego Naczelnego Zarządu Kinematografii do Przedsiębiorstwa Dystrybucji Filmów z dn. 12 grudnia 1984, no pagination.

⁹³¹ WFO, 1985/7/85, Karta filmu *Naturyści* nr 3670, no pagination.

from the film came to play in the popular imaginary. Some of the scenes became iconic thanks to Zbigniew Wodecki's song which unexpectedly became the summer hit of 1985.

One of the last scenes in *Naturyści* features a group of naked contestants of the 'Miss Natura' beauty pageant enjoying a boat cruise. The nude, attractive women sunbathe on the deck of a small boat. Such footage could have very well been shot at one of the beaches of Côte d'Azur and had little in common with the patterns of state-socialist leisure. Yet, this very scene was used in the video for the song 'Chałupy Welcome To' produced by public television in 1985. Perhaps it was exactly this escapist character of nude sunbathing that made it so appealing both to the late state-socialist public, but also to the people responsible for culture production at the time. A closer look at the lyrics of Wodecki's song reveals further ambiguities surrounding the idea of socialist leisure and the role naturist beaches could play in a time of economic and social crisis.

Even the song's title itself suggests that the naturist beach at the Baltic Coast could serve as *ersatz* foreign travel. This longing is also clearly visible in the chorus as Wodecki sings 'Chałupy welcome to / Bahama mama loose / Savage Africa is long discovered / Chałupy welcome to / Sun of Jamaica blues / Polish Barbados and Galapagos / Chałupy welcome to!'.⁹³² This section of the lyrics is in fact impossible to translate into English, as the original text was composed in a simplified and quite confusing combination of English and Polish.⁹³³ The role of the lyrics is therefore not to be grammatically correct in either language, but rather to create the atmosphere of exoticism and internationalism. In this way the song provides a glimpse into the exciting and colourful life associated

⁹³² *Chałupy Welcome To* (song and videoclip, 1985), lyrics G. Orlińska, music R. Poznakowski, performed by Z. Wodecki.

⁹³³ The original lyrics of the chorus read 'Chałupy welcome to / Bahama mama luz / Afryka dzika dawno odkryta / Chałupy welcome to! / Chałupy welcome to / sun of Yamaica blues / Polish Barbados i Galapagos / Chałupy welcome to!'.

with holidays in faraway lands.⁹³⁴ If only indirectly, the lyrics also imply that a naturist beach is a good substitute for foreign travels and ‘Western-style’ entertainment, unavailable otherwise due to shortages and the political isolation of the country. In 1988 *Veto* summed up this approach with a short poem by Edward Kuczyński: ‘When high prices / Leave me naked / The only solution is / To become a naturist’.⁹³⁵

Apart from the chorus, the song’s lyrics focus on the conflict between the locals and the naturists in Chałupy. Nude vacationers are portrayed as an eccentric yet positive group. They are chilled and relaxed, and the naturist beach is a place where people enjoy their time ‘like in the Bermuda Islands’. On the contrary, the ‘textiled bores’ (which, as already mentioned, was a term coined and mainstreamed by the naturist movement) are prudish, old-fashioned, and afraid to have fun. As the song lyrics explain, this group dreams of covering nudity with a ‘fig leaf’ and banishing nude sunbathers from the village. Therefore, the song seems to imply that if people want to feel as they would on foreign holidays, they need to abandon such petty prejudices and join the crowd of nude vacationers.

‘Chałupy Welcome To’ immediately became a summer hit in the radio and in fact has remained quite popular up to this day. It is hardly surprising given the fact that the song has easy-to-remember lyrics and a very appealing rhythm. Overall, the message is very optimistic, and this was the quality very much sought after in the mid-1980s when the general sense of crisis was at its peak. Yet, all such factors should not prevent us from approaching this summer hit more critically. First, the lyrics orientalise nudity as

⁹³⁴ Interestingly, all the locations (except for the African continent) mentioned in the chorus are islands belonging to the British Commonwealth, but I have not yet managed to discover whether this was a conscious strategy.

⁹³⁵ „Gdy wysokie ceny / Szyszczą mnie na czysto, / Jedyne ratunek... / Zostać naturystą!”. ‘Miss Świdra’, *Veto* (28 Aug. 1988), 10.

something belonging at the 'beach in Mombasa'. Although the song is overall sympathetic to the naturist movement, it clearly portrays nude sunbathing as simply a leisure activity and not a serious ideological project. Moreover, the repetition of terms such as 'savage Africa' perpetuates the stereotype of non-white parts of the world being less civilised. Thus, the song further entrenches racial stereotypes which emphasise so-called 'primitive' behaviours of people of colour. For white vacationers at the Polish coast nudity can be a leisure activity, yet for the inhabitants of Africa it is the essence of their 'savage' identity. In this way the song drew upon and reinforced persistent structures of racism in the Polish dominant discourse.⁹³⁶

To add another layer to the critical re-evaluation of 'Chałupy Welcome To', let us focus on the portrayal of women in the song's lyrics and, most importantly, in the video broadcast on public television. When the lyrics mention the 'Miss Natura' beauty pageant organised at the beach, the video includes footage from the elections that took place in Rowy (not Chałupy!) in 1984. The large crowd of naked vacationers sits in a circle around the group of naked female contestants (12 women and one girl). Each of them holds a heart-shaped card with a number so that the audience can assess their bodies and vote for the most beautiful naturist. Again, men look at women and rate their attractiveness while women are passive objects of the male gaze. Through the video, the TV audience joins in this act of voyeurism. This scene alone reveals a lot about the frameworks in which naturism and nakedness in general could be discussed in late state-socialist Poland. The next section of this chapter explores this topic in greater detail.

⁹³⁶ On racism in CEE see A. Zimmerman, 'Race against Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe', *East Central Europe*, 43/1–2 (2016), 14–40.

Erotic Capital, Heteronormativity, and Sexualisation of Naturism

While in the previous decade the naturists protested against objectification of female bodies in the entertainment industry, by 1985 the role of sexual appeal in the movement had transformed significantly. The same year Marczak and his associates organised the exhibition of naturist photography in the Warsaw student club ‘Stodoła’. According to *Veto*, the exhibit was inaugurated by Marczak himself who cut the bra of the model at the entrance to the gallery.⁹³⁷ The exhibition, clearly modelled after ‘Venus’, was later transformed into the International Competition of Naturist Photography under the title ‘Nature – Human – Naturism’ (from 1987).⁹³⁸ During the opening night of the exhibition in February 1988 the guests could witness one of the Miss Polonia Natura’87 contestants, Claudia, undressing herself in front of the audience.⁹³⁹ The boundary between naturism and commercial striptease grew increasingly blurred.

For some of the naturists naked sunbathing was undoubtedly just a fun leisure activity, growing even more attractive as the economic crisis exacerbated in the 1980s. As many of the letters published in *Veto* attest, there were people who took naturist ideology seriously, participated in international nudist events, and wanted to promote ‘Western’ type of organised naturism in Poland.⁹⁴⁰ However, to fully understand the social impact naturism had in the last decade of state socialism, one cannot ignore the ways in which naturism was interpreted and appropriated in the media discourse. In a country where pornography was officially illegal (see Chapter Six), and all official means of publication were controlled by the censors, ‘naturism’ was used as a cover-up to speak

⁹³⁷ [Bi.] ‘Bal w „Parku”’, *Veto* (10 Nov. 1985), 2.

⁹³⁸ Bernard, ‘Foto’, *Veto* (3 May 1987), 12.

⁹³⁹ Bernard, ‘Foto natura’, *Veto* (6 Mar. 1988), 16.

⁹⁴⁰ See Stanisław, ‘Nie wypaczać...’, *Veto* (13 Sept. 1987), 18.

about sexuality and publish eroticised visuals in many state-controlled media outlets. While in theory following the rules of socialist morality, in practice such images were used as *ersatz* pornographic publications. ‘Naturism’ became a code-name for sexual liberalisation, but this liberalisation had a very narrow and deeply heteronormative character. This process was unique to the 1980s and as such requires further investigation.

‘Chałupy Welcome To’ was not the only attempt to appropriate the popularity of naturism for the purposes of entertainment in the media. For example, attractive female naturists were featured in the TV programme *Sexcesy* [*Sexcesses*] which also aired in 1985 and discussed nude sunbathing alongside pornography, striptease, and the sex industry (see Chapter Five). The producers of the movie *Thais* (1984, dir. R. Ber) recruited their naked female extras from the naturist movement.⁹⁴¹ Such a strategy had already been championed by *Veto* for a number of years. In 1987 the editors of this ‘consumer’ magazine made a step forward in publishing erotic images when they introduced a new section of the magazine: so-called ‘crosswords for naturists’. As the editors emphasised, the crosswords were for adults only, clearly suggesting they were to be viewed as sexual artifacts not just images of asexual bodies.⁹⁴² Indeed, the crosswords were often illustrated with a female nude, portrayed in natural, summer-like settings. While their answers usually included some kind of a naturist motto such as ‘Naturists don’t drink alcohol’,⁹⁴³ some of the slogans more openly referred to women’s sex appeal (‘A naked back is a woman’s jewel’ or ‘Miss Natura this is it’).⁹⁴⁴ Other catchphrases clearly made references to the political reality of the late 1980s, for example ‘Female

⁹⁴¹ Agata, ‘Oskarżony Sylwester Marczak’, *Veto* (7 July 1985), 12.

⁹⁴² *Veto* (7 June 1987), 2.

⁹⁴³ ‘Krzyżówka nr 160 dla naturystów’, *Veto* (17 Jan. 1988), 19.

⁹⁴⁴ ‘Krzyżówka nr 159 dla naturystów’, *Veto* (10 Jan. 1988), 19; ‘Krzyżówka nr 149 dla naturystów’, *Veto* (25 Oct. 1987), 19.

naturists are already done with their reforms' (in Polish 'reforms' means both a set of legal and administrative changes but also an old fashioned type of underwear).⁹⁴⁵ Notably, while the vast majority of photographs depicted female 'naturists', the rare images of naked men were always edited so that their genital areas would be covered (for instance with a leaf).⁹⁴⁶ Clearly, even though *Veto* challenged the boundaries of sexual representation in the media discourse, the gendered character of visual norms remained uncontested.

The sexualisation of female naturist bodies became even more evident as similar images started appearing in magazines that had nothing to do with popularisation of this type of leisure. Most notably, pictures of naked models described as 'naturists' were published in the first openly erotic magazines such as *Pan* and *Playboy*, analysed in greater depth in Chapter Five. The very first issue of *Pan* in October 1987 included an interview with Marzena, who was introduced as both a Miss Natura and a striptease dancer.⁹⁴⁷ The interview was accompanied by a centrefold with her naked picture.⁹⁴⁸ 'Naturist' photographs appeared also in the next issue of the magazine, yet this time the pictures were not introduced by any text, which suggested that their purpose was pure titillation of male readers and had little to do with the promotion of nude leisure itself (see Fig. 7.7).⁹⁴⁹

Similarly, images of women identified as 'naturists' were also often printed in the second semi-pornographic magazine, *Playboy*.⁹⁵⁰ In September 1988 a photo of 'Miss

⁹⁴⁵ 'Krzyżówka nr 165 dla naturystów', *Veto* (21 Feb. 1988), 19.

⁹⁴⁶ 'Krzyżówka nr 167 dla naturystów', *Veto* (6 Mar. 1988), 19; 'Krzyżówka nr 169 dla naturystów', *Veto* (20 Mar. 1988), 19.

⁹⁴⁷ A. Kołodziejcki, 'Czysta sprawa. Rozmowa z dziewczyną z rozkładówki', *Pan*, 1 (1987), 39.

⁹⁴⁸ 'Dziewczyna pan-a', *Pan*, 1 (1987), 40–1.

⁹⁴⁹ 'Dziewczyna pan-a', *Pan*, 2 (1987), 39.

⁹⁵⁰ Similar images appeared in the following issues of *Playboy*: July and September 1988, March, Apr., and May 1989.

Polonia Natura' was featured on the cover as well as inside the magazine (see Fig. 7.8).⁹⁵¹ The April 1989 centrefold with two female 'naturists' was accompanied by the declaration that 'they love naturism controlled by men'.⁹⁵² This description alongside with the openly erotic photographs clearly demonstrated that for the editors 'naturism' was just a cover-up for erotic images which had little in common with socialist morality. In the end, the framework in which naturism could be discussed was deeply sexualised and inherently gendered. Women could appear as passive objects of male attention and their acceptance of male domination was clearly an erotic quality in itself. Thus, although naturism undoubtedly signified a notable transformation in the visual discourse of late state socialism, this was hardly a revolution that would subvert or transgress heterosexual hierarchies of sexual desire.

The flip-side of the deeply heteronormative discourse on naturism was homophobia. As *Veto* explained in its naturist column, Mister Natura competitions had never been organised because 'many people believe that male bodies are not attractive... that charm and beauty are reserved for women and girls'.⁹⁵³ As this thesis has already explored, such a gendered understanding of beauty and the role of nakedness in satisfying visual desires was clearly rooted in patriarchal visions of sexuality and gender order. Yet, the archival documents and other publications allow us to add another layer to this interpretation. Drawing on them, I argue that such a restrictive focus on female bodies within the naturist movement was also a way of avoiding any accusations of non-heteronormativity.

⁹⁵¹ *Playtboy*, 9 (1988), 5; 'Agata', *Playtboy*, 9 (1988), 8–9.

⁹⁵² 'Madzia i Władzia', *Playtboy*, 4 (1989), 8–9.

⁹⁵³ Bernard, 'Jeszcze z Łeby', *Veto* (6 Sept. 1987), 10.

In January 1986 *Veto* devoted an entire issue of the naturist column to discussing the problem of ‘pederasty’ (by which they meant homosexuality) in naturist circles. As the anonymous author argued:

Unfortunately, naturism, as it offers a lot of liberty, attracts to the beaches, among others, crowds of homosexuals. Perhaps it is due to the fact that pederasts are not organised in any way (like in other countries), that they have not developed their own means of communication etc.⁹⁵⁴

According to the article the presence of homosexual men at the naturist beaches greatly endangered the reputation of the naturist movement. The author argued that the naturists should act quickly as otherwise all the hostility and suspicion associated with homosexuality would soon become associated with naturism as well. To further support their argument, alongside the article *Veto* published a photograph of a naked heterosexual couple holding hands. Such a concern was shared by other naturist groups as well. In the letter sent to the editors of *Veto* in 1986 a group from Łódź expressed their outrage with the fact that in many of the magazine’s publications naturism was discussed alongside ‘homosexuals, erotomaniacs, and other types of sex groups’.⁹⁵⁵ During one of his meetings with SB officers Marczak confessed that he was greatly concerned about ‘mentally ill people, homosexuals, flashers and other types of perverts who want to join the movement’.⁹⁵⁶

Not surprisingly, this hostility towards homosexual sunbathers grew even more visible as the HIV/AIDS pandemic was gaining momentum in the second half of the 1980s.⁹⁵⁷ On the one hand, the naturists feared that people would associate naked leisure

⁹⁵⁴ [xyz], ‘O pederastach’, *Veto* (12 Jan. 1986), 14.

⁹⁵⁵ Bołtryk, ‘Ruch gołych’, 43

⁹⁵⁶ Warsaw, AIPN BU 01134/4563/J, Notatka służbowa z dn. 9 maja 1986, k. 21.

⁹⁵⁷ More on the responses of the Polish media to the HIV/AIDS pandemic see: M. Bołtryk, ‘Plaga’, *Ekspres Reporterów*, 9 (1988), 3–48

with the new virus.⁹⁵⁸ On the other, as Łukasz Szulc argues, it was also the time of growing visibility and mobilisation of the homosexual community.⁹⁵⁹ The topic that had not previously been taken up by the media was now discussed more openly and the awareness of non-heteronormative identities was growing in society. In 1985 the Citizens' Militia launched the operation code-named 'Hyacinth' which in turn encouraged self-organising efforts within the community. As a result, the first attempts to register an official homosexual organisation (Warsaw Homosexual Association, Warszawskie Towarzystwo Homoseksualne) were made in 1988.⁹⁶⁰ As with naturist organisations, the state was unwilling to approve an independent civic organisation with an openly sexual agenda. Yet, despite seeming similarities in their struggle, there seemed to be little sense of solidarity between the naturists and gay activists.

The naturist movement wanted to portray itself as a force of social and sexual liberalisation – but their understanding of this concept was profoundly heteronormative. Therefore, there was no space for cooperation between the two movements. At best, homosexual men could be tolerated if they stayed in separate zones at the beach.⁹⁶¹ The inherent homophobia of the naturist movement became even more visible after their first official organisation was registered in 1988. Shortly afterwards an anonymous reader complained in the letter to the editors of *Prawo i Życie* that the naturists officially forbade homosexuals from attending their meetings and therefore homosexual men were pushed to the margins of the society. Hence, the author argued, a separate homosexual

⁹⁵⁸ See Bernard, 'Na całość', *Veto* (10 May 1987), 12; Bernard, 'Na gołych plażach...', *Veto* (24 Aug. 1986), 12.

⁹⁵⁹ Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals*, 106–10. See also Morawska, "'No Authorities...'", 88–101.

⁹⁶⁰ A. Fiedotow, 'Początki Ruchu Gejowskiego w Polsce (1981-1990)', in M. Kula (ed.), *Kłopoty z Seksem w PRL. Rodzenie Nie Całkiem Po Ludzku, Aborcja, Choroby, Odmienności* (Warszawa, 2012), 241–358; K. Tomasik, *Gejereł: mniejszości seksualne w PRL-u* (Warszawa, 2018), 336–40.

⁹⁶¹ See Bernard, 'Naturyzm', *Veto* (17 Apr. 1988), 18.

organization was indispensable.⁹⁶² Although at first naturism had seemed to open up new spaces for performing sexual progressiveness, by 1988 it was very clear that the project was deeply heteronormative in its focus.

What is remarkable in this context, is the (in)visibility of female homosexuality in the press publications about the naturist movement. *Veto* regularly printed warnings about ‘brutal’ homosexuals who posed a threat to young boys who sunbathed or attended naturist saunas on their own.⁹⁶³ All such publications referred only to male homosexuality and women’s non-heteronormativity was not taken up as a topic at all. This is hardly surprising given the fact that female homosexuality had generally been absent from all the discussions on non-heteronormativity in state-socialist Poland or at best mentioned as a marginal curiosity.⁹⁶⁴

There was however one notable exception in which ‘lesbianism’ could be mentioned. In 1986 *Veto* started publishing a section of commercial ads in every issue of the magazine. Although, as the editors declared, the goal was to connect amateurs of naked leisure with likeminded people and to advertise naturist services such as saunas and pools,⁹⁶⁵ in the end the majority of the ads was published by matchmaking bureaus.⁹⁶⁶ Yet, some of the adverts actually came from self-declared naturists who were seeking new acquaintances. Among them, a number of ‘lesbian’ ads are particularly worth mentioning here.

1. A young naturist [naturystka] wants to meet an imaginative girlfriend.⁹⁶⁷
2. A 25-years-old naturist from Warsaw wants to meet a tolerant girlfriend.⁹⁶⁸

⁹⁶² ‘Listy do redakcji: Ruch homoseksualistów’, *Prawo i Życie* (20 May 1989), 11.

⁹⁶³ See for instance Bernard, ‘W stadzie’, *Veto* (22 June 1986), 12; Bernard, ‘Ekscesy’, *Veto* (14 Aug. 1988), 18.

⁹⁶⁴ Staroszczyk, “‘No One Talked about It’”, 105–15.

⁹⁶⁵ [xyz], ‘Ogłoszenia...’, *Veto* (23 Mar. 1986), 12.

⁹⁶⁶ See ‘Ogłoszenia drobne’, *Veto* (8 Jan. 1989), 17.

⁹⁶⁷ ‘Ogłoszenia drobne’, *Veto* (21 Sept. 1986), 15.

⁹⁶⁸ ‘Ogłoszenia drobne’, *Veto* (17 Aug. 1986), 15.

3. A lonely naturist wants to meet a lady.⁹⁶⁹

All three above-quoted ads used the female form of the word ‘naturist’ [naturystka] which made it very clear that the author of the ad meant a same-sex relation. Of course, there is a chance that such ads were posted by homosexual women themselves – and in fact there is some evidence that personal ads sections in other newspapers (most important *Relaks i Kolekcjoner Polski*) were used as a space for queer encounters for both men and women at that time.⁹⁷⁰ We should also entertain the possibility that such ads were posted by men who fantasised about ‘lesbian’ sex or in fact by the editors themselves to entertain the readers or simply keep up appearances as a force of sexual liberalisation.

What however remains certain is that, one way or another, such ‘lesbian’ ads made it through the editor’s censorship process while no entry suggesting male homosexual encounters was ever published in the personal adverts section of *Veto*.⁹⁷¹ Thus, we can conclude that female homosexuality was somehow more attractive and less threatening in the eyes of *Veto* editors. As ‘lesbianism’ did not endanger heteronormative masculinity as much as male homosexuality, it was treated less seriously by the public opinion of that time. Moreover, suggestions of woman-to-woman sex also fitted well into voyeuristic sexual fantasies promoted by the pornographic culture in the West. As Heather Butler observes, in 1970s US pornography ‘the “lesbian” number serves as a warm-up for the “real” thing, that is, sex with a penis that will eventually ejaculate’.⁹⁷² Therefore, lesbian

⁹⁶⁹ ‘Ogłoszenia drobne’, *Veto* (7 Dec. 1986), 15

⁹⁷⁰ K. Morawska, ‘„Którego Serdeczna, Uczciwa Przyjaźń Będzie Motorem Mojego Życia...” – Anonse Towarzyskie w „Relaksie” z Lat 1984–1988’, *InterAlia*, 14 (2019), 51–72.

⁹⁷¹ To avoid obscenity, the journalists reserved the right to censor the ads’ contents. ‘Real naturists will know how to formulate the ads, they will use them with noble goals in mind and they will avoid any ambiguous situations. We will also accept ads from naturist swimming pools and saunas’ assured *Veto*. [xyz], ‘Ogłoszenia...’.

⁹⁷² H. Butler, ‘What Do You Call a Lesbian with Long Fingers? The Development of Lesbian and Dyke Pornography’, in L. Williams (ed.), *Porn Studies* (Durham NC; London, 2004), 167–97.

sexuality was hardly portrayed as a proper form of fulfilling sexual needs, but its purpose was rather to offer titillation and voyeuristic pleasure before the actual, heterosexual intercourse took place. Such a structure of sexual desires partially explains why the suggestions of woman-to-woman sex could be accepted in the discussions of naturism while male homosexuality was openly condemned. In the end, female bodies were there to satisfy the male gaze, not to assert their own sexual independence.

Profits and Conflicts within the Naturist Movement

The availability of naked female bodies for men to watch and assess may have attracted many to the movement, and the naturist movement certainly used it for the promotion of naked leisure. On the other hand, the archival sources indicate that the erotic capital of female nakedness was skilfully conveyed into measurable economic profit by some of the nude activists. For example, in the anonymous letter sent to the local Citizens' Militia station in Otwock a group of naturists accused Marczak of producing and selling emblems of the naturist movement and keeping the profits to himself.⁹⁷³ Moreover, when interrogated by the SB officer, Marczak openly admitted that during some of the Miss Natura beauty pageants the contestants collected money from the audience, but according to him the profits were spent only on the prizes or supported noble causes such as donations for children living in foster homes.⁹⁷⁴

The voyeuristic allure of naturist nudity was also without question appropriated by the media. People may not have had enough courage or interest in taking the clothes off themselves, but watching undressed women was a great form of entertainment. During

⁹⁷³ Warsaw, AIPN BU 01134/4563/J, List anonimowy ws. sprzeniewierzenia pieniędzy społecznych przez Prezesa Klubu Naturystów ob. Sylwestra Marczaka z dn. 25 sierpnia 1986, k. 31-32.

⁹⁷⁴ Warsaw, AIPN BU 01134/4563/J, Notatka służbowa z dn. 10 września 1986, k. 25.

the very same interrogation Marczak also claimed that he was not the one who profited most from the popularity of naturism in Poland. According to him it was Tadeusz Drozda (the TV presenter) who was touring Poland with *Sexcesy*-branded shows featuring striptease dances performed by women who had previously been awarded the titles of Miss Natura (see Chapter Five). If we are to believe Marczak's testimony, Drozda was making around 11,200 zlotys per show.⁹⁷⁵ As in 1986 the average monthly salary was 24,095 zlotys, this sum of money was not negligible.⁹⁷⁶ Marczak also admitted that he was himself thinking about a naturist cabaret show and already received offers from the Warsaw restaurant 'Sofia' and the student club 'Hybrydy'.⁹⁷⁷ He was able to finalise his plans after 1989 when he started touring the country with the striptease show *Golo i wesolo* [*Naked and funny*].⁹⁷⁸

Undoubtedly, the appropriation of women's erotic capital in the naturist movement objectified female bodies and strengthened the patriarchal hierarchies of sexual desires in which heterosexual men could enjoy full freedom while women still had to conform to certain patterns of sexual behaviour. Yet, even though the rampant sexism of 1980s Poland should not be ignored, one should entertain the possibility that for some women such a situation was not entirely oppressive and, on the contrary, they could have enjoyed men's attention and use it to achieve their own goals. This topic has already been explored in Chapter Five, so here I want to focus only on the women who could capitalise on their erotic qualities as 'naturists'.

⁹⁷⁵ Warsaw, AIPN BU 01134/4563/J, Notatka służbowa z dn. 10 września 1986, k. 26.

⁹⁷⁶ 'Przeciętne miesięczne wynagrodzenie w gospodarce narodowej w latach 1950-2020', Główny Urząd Statystyczny, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rynek-pracy/pracujacy-zatrudnieni-wynagrodzenia-koszty-pracy/przecietne-miesieczne-wynagrodzenie-w-gospodarce-narodowej-w-latach-1950-2020,2,1.html> (12 Aug. 2021).

⁹⁷⁷ Warsaw, AIPN BU 01134/4563/J, Notatka służbowa z dn. 10 września 1986, k. 26.

⁹⁷⁸ See Herman, 'Nagość Naturystyczna', 121.

First, sex appeal could earn tangible economic profits. Marczak estimated that strippers who performed in Tadeusz Drozda's shows each received 4.600 zlotys per show.⁹⁷⁹ Moreover, through participating in Miss Natura contests women could win attractive prizes. For instance, in 1986 the winner of the competition held at the beach in Lubiewo⁹⁸⁰ near Międzyzdroje was invited to Miami by a pair of American naturists.⁹⁸¹ In the 1989 pageant, *Veto* reported, the most beautiful naturists had a chance of winning silver jewellery, holidays in Turkey and Bulgaria, as well as a cash prize of 100.000 zlotys.⁹⁸²

Finally, many of the contestants believed that being elected a Miss Natura was just a first step to becoming actresses or fashion models.⁹⁸³ For Krystyna, who took part in the pageant in Rowy in 1984, it was the beginning of her career as a photo-model for nude calendars. Krystyna's story, published in 1989 by *Zbliżenia*, demonstrates how aware of her erotic capital she must have been. 'In this industry you sell your own beauty and the impression of your sexual openness' she confessed very frankly, adding that the job was difficult, but she was hoping for a foreign job contract soon.⁹⁸⁴ Naturally the testimony could have been fabricated by the journalists and Krystyna's career may have not been as successful as she claimed. Yet, the fact that such stories were repeatedly published in the press demonstrates that the dream of achieving fame and popularity through becoming a 'naked miss' was very much alive among women who decided to participate in nude beauty pageants. Even if generally oppressive towards women,

⁹⁷⁹ Warsaw, AIPN BU 01134/4563/J, Notatka służbowa z dn. 10 września 1986, k. 26.

⁹⁸⁰ Lubiewo was famous for its 'regular' naturist beach but also as a queer meeting place. Interestingly, it is also a title of the seminal book by Michał Witkowski (*Lubiewo*, Kraków 2006) in which the author explores the past and present identities of the Polish gay community.

⁹⁸¹ Bernard, [kącik N], *Veto* (17 Aug. 1986), 12; See also Warsaw, AIPN BU 01134/4563/J, Notatka służbowa z dn. 10 września 1986, k. 25.

⁹⁸² beata, 'Fracja w natarciu', *Veto* (9 July 1989), 8.

⁹⁸³ See for example Bernard, 'Na luzie', *Veto* (8 Nov. 1987), 18; Agata, 'Miss Międzyzdrojów', *Veto* (25 Aug. 1985), 12.

⁹⁸⁴ E. Pawlak, 'Modelka z kalendarza', *Zbliżenia* (8 Dec. 1988), 9.

sexualised discourse around naturism in the 1980s could create some unexpected areas for women's agency.

As we have already seen, the sexualisation of the naturist movement (or at least its branch led by Sylwester Marczak) had a profoundly ambiguous character. While for some it opened up new and rare spaces for performing one's sexual identity, for others it was just a source of profit. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that there were serious conflicts and controversies within the naturist movement itself.⁹⁸⁵ Already in 1985, some groups of naturists started attacking Marczak for his strategy of popularising naturism to the masses. In April that year the Łódź group issued an official statement condemning Marczak's participation in *Sexcesy* as well as his other initiatives such as 'loud parties' and a naked photo modelling agency.⁹⁸⁶ In their manifesto published on the pages of *Veto*, they explained that:

We are deeply concerned with the fact that naturism is so often wrongly interpreted. The goal of authentic naturism is to heal humankind psychologically and physically through connecting closely with nature. Too often naturism is identified with sexual libertinism, rampant eroticism, promiscuity, a total absence of any moral inhibitions.⁹⁸⁷

By appealing to the readers of *Veto*, the 'true' naturists wanted to define acceptable uses of nakedness as well as limit the audience of naturist events. Many of the naturists demanded that separate naked beaches should be demarcated with fences to avoid conflicts with 'textiled' sunbathers and local communities such as in Chałupy or Ldzań.⁹⁸⁸ To achieve this goal, they needed an officially recognised and socially respected

⁹⁸⁵ See A. Herman, 'Eksces Społecznej Nagości', in J. Kurczewski (ed.), *Praktyki Cieleśne* (Warszawa, 2006), 113–68.

⁹⁸⁶ Agata, 'Oskarżony Sylwester Marczak', *Veto* (7 July 1985), 12.

⁹⁸⁷ 'Manifest aktywu naturystycznego zebranego w Łodzi 18 kwietnia 1985'. Quoted in: Agata, 'Oskarżony'. See also 'Secesja wśród naturystów', *Odgłosy* (4 May 1985), 11; (sb), 'Naturyści się wstydzają...', *Dziennik Łódzki* (25 Apr. 1985), 6.

⁹⁸⁸ H. Zwoleń, 'Elitarne czy zamknięte', *Veto* (15 July 1984), 16.

organisation and the Federation of Naturist Clubs led by Marczak did not offer prospects of this happening. This seemed to lie at the core of the conflict between Łódź activists led by Józef Kubicki and Marczak's group.⁹⁸⁹

Yet, it would be premature to conclude that the divisions in the naturist movement could so easily be defined as a conflict between 'honest', 'ideological' naturism and its degenerated, 'show-business like' version.⁹⁹⁰ Rather, due to the informal and grassroots character of the movement everyone seemed to participate in the process of gradual popularisation and commercialisation of naturism. As people were joining the movement spontaneously and for many different reasons, it was difficult to maintain ideological consistency. Naturally, Marczak was at the forefront of this campaign, but other naturists groups also profited from *Veto*'s support and publicity in the media. Therefore, oral history interviews with the activists appear necessary to shed more light on the character of these tangled and ambiguous relations. It is beyond the scope of this thesis but may be a fruitful research strategy to pursue in the future.

The Demise of Naturism after 1989

The transformation that the naturist movement underwent aptly reflects the ambiguous history of the two last decades of state socialism. What started out as an attractive form of summer leisure and an ideological project of redefining socialist morality by the mid 1980s largely turned into a form of sexualised entertainment and source of profit for its leaders. As the faith in the supremacy of the communist system was fading away, more capitalist approaches were gaining momentum, including in the

⁹⁸⁹ Bernard, 'Naturyzm', *Veto* (17 Apr. 1988), 18.

⁹⁹⁰ Stanisław, 'Nie wypaczać...'

realm of sexuality. The gradual relaxation of sexual mores also demonstrated the inability or unwillingness on the side of the state to fight these new phenomena. Thus, in many regards, the late state-socialist regime abetted the process of gradual transformation of citizens' identities, as Izabela Kalinowska put it, from socialist subjects into 'consumers of popular culture'.⁹⁹¹

A quick look into the history of naturism after 1989 underlines the fragile and context-specific foundations on which it flourished in the 1980s. Shortly after the first partially free elections were organised in June 1989, the relaxation of censorship and legal constraints on economic activity contributed to the so-called 'pornographic boom'. Erotic magazines, previously smuggled from the West, now could be sold officially. In May 1990 the first sex-shop opened up in Warsaw and this marked the end of the era of *ersatz* erotica.⁹⁹² This new landscape of unconstrained market economy and erotic boom had its impact on the naturist movement as well. Although Sylwester Marczak tried to capitalise on the popularity of naturism in the new reality, his attempts were largely unsuccessful. As already mentioned, he toured Poland with a striptease show, but since new strip-bars, escort agencies, and other erotic enterprises were popping out across the country, his show was no longer as attractive as it would have been before 1989.

The other branch of the naturist movement, led by Kubicki, started publishing its own magazine called *Natura-Naturyzm*,⁹⁹³ which as Aleksandra Herman observes, also heavily relied on erotic contents quite foreign to the ideological frameworks of nudist magazines published elsewhere in Europe.⁹⁹⁴ The magazine did not last very long, and its

⁹⁹¹ I. Kalinowska, 'Seks, polityka i koniec PRL-u: o cielesności w polskim kinie lat osiemdziesiątych', in S. Jagielski and A. Morstin-Poplawska (eds.), *Ciało i seksualność w kinie polskim* (Kraków, 2009), 78.

⁹⁹² Stusińska, *Miła Robótka*, 42.

⁹⁹³ beata, 'Fracja'.

⁹⁹⁴ Herman, 'Eksces', 156–58.

last issue was published in 1991. By that time, a significant number of erotic magazines was already enjoying popularity on the Polish market (to mention just a few examples: *Cats*, *Sekskrety*, *Magazyn Foto Sex*).⁹⁹⁵ Finally, in December 1992 the first issue of the Polish *Playboy* appeared at the newsstands.⁹⁹⁶ Apparently, the naturist cover-up for erotic contents was no longer needed.

The last issue of *Natura-Naturyzm* promoted the new initiative of Sylwester Marczak who wanted to enter the political scene with his new party: Polska Partia Erotyczna (Polish Erotic Party, henceforth PPE).⁹⁹⁷ Although this idea may sound bizarre at first sight, the proliferation of similar political organisation was in fact quite symptomatic of the political landscape of the early 1990s. Before the parliamentary elections of 1991 Poland had over 100 registered parties due to the new law which removed practically all requirements for registering a political entity.⁹⁹⁸ One of them, the Polish Friends of Beer Party, even won 16 seats in the newly elected parliament which demonstrates that such ‘political’ initiatives could actually garner tangible popular support at the time.⁹⁹⁹

The transition from socialism to neo-liberal capitalism had some influence on the programme and demands of the naturists. In their manifesto published in *Natura-Naturyzm* the PPE declared that:

We will fight prudery and the Dark Ages [ciemnogród], carry out educational activities to foster the culture of sexual relationships and tolerance in all spheres of life. [...] We will support the processes of democratisation of social life, market

⁹⁹⁵ More on the history of the Polish erotic industry in the 1990s, see Stusińska, *Miła Robótka*.

⁹⁹⁶ *Playboy* [Polska], 1 (1992).

⁹⁹⁷ Janina Żak, ‘Zakładam Partię Erotyczną’, *Natura – Naturyzm*, 3 (1991), 14; ‘Sylwester Marczak proponuje PPE’, *Natura – Naturyzm*, 3 (1991), 5. Quoted from: Herman, ‘Eksces’, 159.

⁹⁹⁸ A.A. Michta, ‘Democratic Consolidation in Poland after 1989’, in B. Parrott and K. Dawisha (eds.), *The Consolidation of Democracy in East-Central Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), 78.

⁹⁹⁹ Michta, ‘Democratic Consolidation’, 79.

economy and privatisation. We are joining the Erotic International. Happy people of the world – unite! ¹⁰⁰⁰

Marczak tried to adapt to the new post-communist reality. On the one hand, the manifesto repeated word for word ideological proclamations from the declaration of Polish naturists which I quoted at the beginning of this chapter. On the other, it tried to fit into the new political landscape, declaring the party's full support for democracy and capitalist economy. What is remarkable is also how the manifesto still balanced the two discourses, drawing from the language of communist propaganda as much as from the new discourse of democratic transition.

Such a camouflage did not however help much in reviving the past popularity of naturism in Poland. The party did not get into parliament and the crowds at nudist beaches started to fade away. ¹⁰⁰¹ As naturism lost its appeal as one of the rare spaces for experiencing sexual freedom, its popularity plummeted. The PPE failed to attract people to the movement and other naturist organisations also experienced decline in their membership numbers. As holidays abroad became more accessible, the beaches on the Baltic coast lost most of their allure. Right now, no more than 130 people are registered members of the official *Federacja Naturystów Polskich* (Federation of Polish Naturists). ¹⁰⁰² Moreover, as the interviews conducted by Aleksandra Herman suggested, after 1989 the amateurs of nude sun-bathing did not feel the need to participate in any formal associations and perceived their hobby to be simply an individual leisure

¹⁰⁰⁰ 'Deklaracja programowa Polskiej Partii Erotycznej', *Natura – Naturyzm*, 3 (1991), 5. Quoted from: Herman, 'Eksces', 159.

¹⁰⁰¹ K. Szałańska, 'Dla każdego coś partyjnego'. *Gazeta Wyborcza: wydanie warszawskie* (27 July 1993). 4.

¹⁰⁰² Federation of Polish Naturists' Website, <http://fednat.pl/info.html> (12 Aug. 2021).

activity.¹⁰⁰³ The social meanings associated with naturism have undergone a remarkable transformation between the 1980s and the early 2000s.

The unique popularity enjoyed by the naturist movement in the last decade of state socialism was therefore a product of a specific historical moment. The peculiar combination of economic and political crisis as well as the growing need for sexual voyeurism created the conditions in which naturism could flourish, despite the lack of official recognition. Yet, although the new spaces of sexual freedom were opening up, the history of the naturist movement presented in this chapter demonstrates quite clearly that the sexual revolution in state-socialist Poland had its limits. The visibility of naked female bodies in the public sphere did not necessarily promote causes such as women's emancipation but rather further entrenched gendered stereotypes and heteronormative hierarchies of sexual desires. Therefore, the sexual revolution experienced by Polish society in late state socialism had a profoundly heteropatriarchal character. But this is exactly why it should not be overlooked or dismissed as irrelevant. The attitudes of Polish society toward sex were shaped in that very decade and their legacies influence discussions on sexuality and gender up to this day.

¹⁰⁰³ Herman, 'Eksces', 161.

Conclusion

If there is anything that unites liberals and conservatives in their perception of sexual mores in Poland, it is the notion that a sexual revolution began in the country after 1989. In August 2019, for instance, Marek Jędraszewski, the Archbishop of Cracow, warned that ‘the red plague no longer stalks the earth. But this does not mean that we don’t have a new one which is trying to occupy our souls, hearts, and minds a rainbow-coloured plague.’¹⁰⁰⁴ As Jędraszewski implied, sexual novelties such as LGBTQ+ rights were imported to Poland from the West after 1989. Meanwhile, liberal intellectuals and activists have also claimed that 1989 brought about a sexual revolution, but a much needed one.¹⁰⁰⁵ As Chapter One explored, the global scholarship on the history of sexuality has been dominated by similar interpretations.

However, the belief that 1989 somehow ‘sexually liberated’ CEE has been based on two premises which have rarely been problematised. On the one hand, there is a widespread assumption that there was no sexual liberation before 1989 and that in state socialism, political repression went hand in hand with sexual repression. On the other, the 1990s are often uncritically presented as a time of sexual freedom and progress. The transition from state socialism, in this regard, is portrayed as a simple, unidirectional process.¹⁰⁰⁶ This dissertation has aimed to problematise both assumptions, focusing mostly on the forgotten history of state-socialist sexualities.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Poland In, ‘Polish Episcopate responds to storm over Bishop’s remark on LGBT’ (8 August 2019) <https://polandin.com/43856184/polish-episcopate-responds-to-storm-over-bishops-remark-on-lgbt> (17 August 2021).

¹⁰⁰⁵ See A. Jawor and A. Kurowicka, ‘Polska transformacja seksualna. Wprowadzenie’, in A. Jawor and A. Kurowicka (eds.), *Polska transformacja seksualna* (Warszawa, 2016), 7–12.

¹⁰⁰⁶ This has been very aptly criticised by Łukasz Szulc in his book on late-communist gay activism, See Szulc, *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland: Cross-Border Flows in Gay and Lesbian Magazines*.

As this thesis has argued, there was indeed a sexual revolution under state socialism, but it was neither obvious nor comprehensive. To better understand this process, I propose to speak of three waves of sexual revolution under state socialism. First, right after WWII, state-initiated policies such as civil divorce and the legalisation of abortion (in 1956) profoundly transformed the context in which people performed their sexual identities. Although sexuality was still understood primarily through the lens of heterosexual marriage, the space in which people could independently perform their sexualities expanded significantly. Gradually, sex became a value in itself, understood as an aspect of a modern and cultured relationship between socialist subjects.

The second wave of the revolution could be observed in the 1970s when the discourse surrounding sexuality changed noticeably. As sexological expert knowledge became more available and nude female bodies were increasingly visible in the public sphere, many commentators started speaking of a ‘sexplosion’ and analysing the impact of such transformations on Polish ‘sexual culture’. ‘Venus’ nude photography exhibitions and heated discussions in the press suggested that the need for a socialist ‘Third Way’ toward sexual liberation could not be more urgent. What worried conservative commentators as a manifestation of ‘westernisation’ was welcomed by others as a sign of socialist modernity and progress. Thus, from the very onset of discussions of the Polish ‘sexual revolution’, the evaluation of the term was highly divisive and remains so until today. Therefore, rather than studying how the sexual revolution happened in Poland, this dissertation has focused on how it was narrated at different ends of the political spectrum and how its contested definition was being coined.

The third wave of the Polish sexual revolution took place in the 1980s and early 1990s. Notably, it was not only a sexual revolution, but foremost a profound consumerist transformation. Despite the best efforts made by sexologists, Polish audiences were

increasingly interested in sex as a form of entertainment, not self-fulfilment and education. This was reflected in the growing popularity of striptease, erotic consumer items and magazines, and pornographic videotapes. The more intertwined with consumerism sexuality became, the less influential socialist morality turned out to be in shaping people's attitudes toward sex. The expansion of commercial erotica was further accelerated after 1989 once censorship and constraints on private business disappeared. However, as this dissertation has argued, this revolution did not take place overnight in 1989 but rather resulted from the processes and transformations that had their roots in the late state-socialist period. Naturally, one could not buy the original *Playboy* from newsstands until 1992, but the desire to engage with this type of visuals originated much earlier and was legitimised by late socialist popular culture as epitomised by the *Sexcesy* TV show.

As this dissertation has also highlighted, the socialist sexual revolution in Poland did not necessarily mean liberation for everyone. While male heterosexual desires were increasingly normalised, behaviours that did not conform to that norm were scrutinised and prosecuted. As homophobia shaped the state's response to pornography or naturism, the discourse remained largely discriminatory toward non-heteronormative desires. Moreover, the possibilities for women to benefit from the newly gained sexual freedom were also rather limited. Rarely were they portrayed by the media as asserting their own sexual independence. Rather, media representations of nudity catered to the male gaze and viewed sex as a yet another field in which heteropatriarchal structures were to be reaffirmed. In the absence of organised feminist and gay rights movements the relaxation of attitudes toward sex further strengthened a patriarchal hierarchy of sexual desires rather than dismantled it. This, in turn, affected the gender regime in post-1989 Poland.

The history of state-socialist sexual revolutions grows even more complicated if we situate it in the context of post-1989 events. The neo-liberal transformation certainly opened new areas of freedom, for example for entrepreneurship or citizen activism. Yet, for others the evaluation of the new order turned out much more ambiguous, as the case of women's reproductive rights showcases very clearly. Throughout the last two decades of state socialism the Catholic Church managed to position itself as the chief force opposing the communist regime. When the regime collapsed, it quickly became clear that the Church needed to be repaid and restricting access to abortion was one of the measures.¹⁰⁰⁷ As early as March 1989 the first legal attempts to criminalise abortion were initiated in Parliament. According to Wanda Nowicka, between 1989 and 1991 eleven drafts of such restrictive legislation were proposed.¹⁰⁰⁸ In the end, in January 1993 a new law was passed, and abortion was de facto delegalized in Poland. Yet, as women's rights organisations estimate, over 100 thousand abortions are conducted each year while only a few hundred of these are legal.¹⁰⁰⁹ The disparity between the legal system and people's personal choices could not be more striking.

Reproductive rights are a contested issue in Poland to today. Most recently, in October 2020 the so-called Constitutional Tribunal ruled out that one of the three premises on which legal abortions had been performed in Poland was unconstitutional. Until 2020 the embryo-pathological premise accounted for over 90% of legal abortions

¹⁰⁰⁷ Mishtal, 'How the Church Became the State: The Catholic Regime and Reproductive Rights in Socialist Poland', 133–49. See also M. Zok, 'Wider die „angeborene und nationale Mission der Frau“? Gesellschaftliche Auseinandersetzungen um Abtreibungen in Polen seit der Entstalinisierung', *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 68/2 (2019), 249–78.

¹⁰⁰⁸ W. Nowicka, "The Struggle for Abortion Rights in Poland." (2007), https://www.sxpolitics.org/frontlines/book/pdf/capitulo5_poland.pdf (21 July 2021).

¹⁰⁰⁹ K. Kacpura and others, *Twenty Years of Anti-Abortion Law in Poland* (Warszawa, 2013), 19, https://en.federa.org.pl/20-years-anti-abortion-law/report_federa_20_years_polands_abortion_law/ (22 July 2021).

in Poland, and thus the ‘verdict’ made abortion virtually illegal and inaccessible.¹⁰¹⁰ The ‘ruling’ provoked outrage among thousands of Polish women who stormed the streets under the banners of ‘Women’s Strike’, yet to no avail. As I finish writing this thesis, Poland is among the European countries with effectively the most restrictive abortion laws (others include Malta and the Vatican), and anti-choice activists are waging new campaigns to introduce criminal charges for women who terminate their own pregnancies. They will most likely not stop there, while the ‘LGBT-free zones’ declared in some Polish cities provide evidence of other areas of social life that are simultaneously under attack.

What fascinates me as a historian is that in the abortion debates, neither pro-choice nor anti-choice activists seem to refer to the (not so distant) past, when abortion was available on demand and held as one of the most popular ‘contraceptive’ measures.¹⁰¹¹ For the first group, reproductive rights are a matter of modernity and European standards and therefore the communist experience is rarely mentioned. Conversely, anti-choice campaigners portray the current reproductive regime as the only ‘natural’ and ‘right’ system.¹⁰¹² Thus, the experiences of thousands of Polish women who legally terminated their pregnancies under the previous regime find no place in this narrative either.

¹⁰¹⁰ ‘Sprawozdanie Rady Ministrów z wykonywania oraz o skutkach stosowania w 2018 r. ustawy z dnia 7 stycznia 1993 r. o planowaniu rodziny, ochronie płodu ludzkiego i warunkach dopuszczalności przerywania ciąży (Dz. U. poz. 78, z późn. zm.)’, (9 Apr. 2020), 116, <https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Druki9ka.nsf/0/87A2E0C9C942E854C125854B0035C032/%24File/339.pdf> (22 July 2021). See as well A. Gliszczyńska-Grabias and W. Sadurski, ‘The Judgment That Wasn’t (But Which Nearly Brought Poland to a Standstill)’, *European Constitutional Law Review*, 17/1 (2021), 130–53.

¹⁰¹¹ A. Ignaciuk, ‘Reproductive Policies and Women’s Birth Control. Practices in State-Socialist Poland (1960s-1980s)’, in L. Niethammer and S. Satjukow (eds.), *Wenn die Chemie stimmt ...’. Geschlechterbeziehungen und Geburtenkontrolle im Zeitalter der ‘Pille’ - Gender Relations and Birth Control in the Age of the ‘Pill’* (Göttingen, 2016), 305–28.

¹⁰¹² I. Koralewska and K. Zielińska, ‘“Defending the Unborn”, “Protecting Women” and “Preserving Culture and Nation”: Anti-Abortion Discourse in the Polish Right-Wing Press’, *Culture, Health and Sexuality* (2021), 1–15.

If only indirectly, the amnesia surrounding the state-socialist past in abortion debates demonstrates how fateful the erasure of state-socialist sexual revolution from the cultural memory has been. By dehistoricising sexuality in present-day Poland, conservative activists portray Polish sexual mores as essentially traditional and antagonistic toward all sexual ‘novelties’ imported from the West. Therefore, looking closer at state-socialist sexualities is a necessary step toward problematising this narrative and enquiring about potential alternatives to the conservative gender and reproductive regime. The history of sexual revolutions under state socialism demonstrates that more liberal approaches toward sex could indeed function in Poland and, with sufficient action from the state, conservative influences of the Catholic Church could be counteracted.

Ultimately, what the example of state-socialist Poland demonstrates is that the relation between sexual liberalisation and sexual emancipation is much more ambiguous than we are accustomed to thinking. The sole fact that eroticised images appear in the public sphere does not mean that all recipients of such visuals are able to explore their sexual identities and enjoy sex to the same extent. On the other hand, ‘progressive’ legislation such as decriminalisation of homosexuality or civil divorce laws do not necessarily imply that people’s private lives are transformed as much as the propaganda or expert discourses would suggest. Finally, as the case of abortion legislation teaches us, not all changes imposed from above can be long-lasting, and therefore effective social change needs to be enacted as a combination of top-down and grassroots initiatives. In the end, as this thesis has aimed to demonstrate, both sex and the state-socialist past are far too important for the Polish contemporary debates to be ignored.

Figures

Abbreviations

CEE – Central and Eastern Europe

CHZ – Centrala Handlu Zagranicznego (Foreign Trade Organisation)

GDR – German Democratic Republic

GUKPPIW – Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk (Censorship Office)

KAW – Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza (National Publishing Agency)

KTF – Krakowskie Towarzystwo Fotograficzne (Cracow Photographic Society)

MO – Milicja Obywatelska (Citizens' Militia)

OBOP – Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej (Public Opinion Research Centre)

PKF – Polska Kronika Filmowa (Polish Newsreel)

PPE – Polska Partia Erotyczna (Polish Erotic Party)

PRF – Przedsiębiorstwo Rozpowszechniania Filmów (Film Distribution Enterprise)

PRL – Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (Polish People's Republic)

PTN – Polskie Towarzystwo Naturystyczne (Polish Naturist Association)

PZPR – Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party)

SB – Służba Bezpieczeństwa (Security Service)

Stołeczna Estrada – Stołeczne Przedsiębiorstwo Imprez Estradowych (Warsaw Entertainment Enterprise)

TRR – Towarzystwo Rozwoju Rodziny (Society for Family Development)

TSM – Towarzystwo Świadomego Macierzyństwa (Society for Conscious Motherhood)

WFO – Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych w Łodzi (Łódź Educational Films Studi)

ZGR – Zjednoczenie Gospodarki Rybnej (United Fishing Enterprises)

ZNP - Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego (Association of Polish Teachers)

ZPAF – Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików (Association of Polish Art Photographers)

ZPT – Zakłady Przemysłu Tłuszczowego (Fat Industry Enterprises)

ZSMP – Związek Socjalistycznej Młodzieży Polskiej (Polish Socialist Youth Union)

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Bydgoszcz:

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Cracow:

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