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CHAPTER VII

PARADOXES OF IDEOLOGICAL PRIVILEGES – A CASE STUDY OF A FEMALE TEXTILE WORKER FROM ŁÓDŹ

Introduction

This chapter¹ presents a particular case study of Łódź as a working-class town, and a biography of a textile worker, who was working in one of the weaving manufacturing plants in Łódź from 1975 to 1998. The material² gathered in the research process will be utilized to consider one of the key ideological issues in the People's Republic of Poland, namely the initiation of a process of modernizing the post-war society, and in particular workers' participation in this process, who became both the subject and object. It is one of the many paradoxes of real socialism which could be formulated as follows: ideological objectification of the privileged social class, which the working class was to

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² This chapter also utilizes materials gathered in the research project *Four Discourses of Modernity – Modernism of Periphery on the Example of Łódź (XIX–XX Centuries)* – funded by the National Science Center (2012–2015). The common feature of our project and this one is the intention to analyze macro processes by using micro perspective. In the case of this study: A paradigmatic example of problematic dealing with modernity – understood as a chance for a better future, a gesture of actuality, modernization project, but also a social handicap and economic imbalance – is the city of Łódź. The project has been focused on a paradigmatic case study of a central-European city, incorporating and intensifying features of industrial and subsequently post-industrial *milieu*, in order to present logics of construction of modernity discourses in four threshold moments of Polish history: – rapid capitalist modernization and industrialization in the late XIX century; – regaining independence after I World War; – the new political regime after II World War; the fall of real socialism in 1989 (Piskala, Śmiechowski et al. 2018).

be in the time of the People's Republic of Poland. According to the declared ideology of the post-war order, laborers were to constitute a new social power. They were assigned the role of the system's avant-garde, particularly of processes of the country's modernization, which was to manifest itself not only in rapid industrialization and the resulting reconstruction of the Polish society structure from the impoverished – rural to the working class – urban. It was also related to the broadly-defined emancipation and social advancement. Evaluating those objectives from the contemporary perspective is inconclusive in view of a diagnosis of causes and effects of the changes (Zaremba 2012, Leder 2013), their dynamics in political, economic, but also social dimensions, social costs related specifically to the era of Stalin's terror, though not exclusively. That assessment is also frequently related to the author's own views. Notwithstanding preferred ideologies it seems appropriate to agree on the following points: firstly, we can only hypothetically determine the condition of the Polish economy and society were they not subject to the Soviet hegemony; secondly, although the processes of modernizing the country to a large degree were at odds with declarations, and were deemed hardly avant-garde particularly in comparison to Western Europe, the era of the People's Republic of Poland may be also analyzed with reference to modernization, breaking social barriers, social policy; thirdly, ideological declarations of the system did not usually translate into the social reality, which gave rise to a number of ambivalences, tensions, and paradoxes, which I will discuss in more detail now.

The primary slogan of real socialism pointing to the working class as the leading power of the nation found its way not only to declarations, manifestos, and speeches of political activists, but it also reached the public discourse. For example, as early as in 1945³ a local newspaper in Łódź talked about leading workers and the joint effort in rebuilding the country resting chiefly on the shoulders of working class masses. Laborers were to build the new order as an ideological and socially privileged class, while the authorities were to represent their interests. From this point of view, "protests of the working class, which were treated by political authorities as their social base, were embarrassing at least: representing workers' interests was formal legitimization of the ruling of the communist party" (Gardawski 1996: 49). In light of the above, numerous post-war strikes of workers between 1945 and 1947 did not only spoil that image, but also showed that assigning workers an avant-garde role in the planning of social changes was differently defined by them. Therefore in subsequent years the authorities wanted, using contemporary sociological parlance, to deprive workers of agency, particularly with reference to their

³ Obviously, postulates of this sort were expressed before the war, especially by communists, but only after 1945 they started to dominate public discourse.

work environment, the related biographical dimension and social experience, which was constitutive for the system's favored attributes of the collective/class identification. "Totalitarianism recognized neither individual nor group interests" (Lesiakowski 2008: 167), and workers' protests resulting from low wages and high prices of necessities and outrageous conditions of work, were defined as group interests. Essentially, the sticking point did not concern workers' standard of life, but it had precisely to do with divergent definitions of their role in the post-war scenario. To put it differently, a fundamental cause of the conflicts between 1945 and 1947 was depriving workers of a chance to independently manage a plant and of influence on organizing their work (Kenney 2012: 80) – "What kind of socialism is it, where workers have no say, only apparatchiks" (Świda-Ziemba 1997: 231).⁴ These tensions were manifested in intense local protests lasting continuously in the late 1940s and early 1950s, reaching its peak in 1956, when their resistance was not only an economic or social manifestation, but most of all political. As Hanna Świda-Ziemba argues (1997: 211), the protests of 1956 showed that "workers radically crossed the line drawn in the scenario of destalinization which led to a bloody tragedy in Poznań," yet this perspective of authority was maintained at reactions to subsequent protests (1970, 1976, 1980).

Another paradox may be determined as a tension between the declared by the system and the experienced opportunity structure. Belonging to the favored class gave an impression that other (higher) classes are not legitimized in the social system particularly in view of dismantling the pre-war social order (Leder 2013). Put differently, the existence of classes prevailing over workers was illegitimate. As noted by Julian Gardawski (1996: 57), "[t]hat comfort was strictly limited – and ended brutally when higher social aspirations appeared, for example, when laboring elites wanted to obtain real influence over managing a company."

This phenomenon could be also presented with reference to individual professional or educational careers. On one hand, channels for social advancement were opened mainly through more dynamic, though sometimes forced, spatial mobility⁵ from the country to the city, which entailed social mobility. On the other hand, the system "rewarded stabilization of aspirations at a low level, lack of initiative, abandoning thoughts of success, career, high income, reluctance to occupy managerial positions" (Gardawski 1996: 57). One of the strategies which were strengthening these characteristics was a conviction that achieving professional success depends on the party membership – therefore those who wanted to avoid ideological implications did not develop their professional

⁴ A worker's statement obtained in 1949 while doing research in a manufacturing plant in Łódź.

⁵ I will return to the question of forced mobility later.

aspirations.⁶ Mirosława Marody (1987: 93) refers in this context to the attitude of *envious egalitarianism* resulting from the social equality principle “perceived rather as a point of arrival than a point of departure of individual careers,” accordingly blocking potential opportunities to stand out. Adopting this strategy, reinforced by ‘the little stabilization’, blurred both the recognition of the working class as a leading force and quality of modernization processes.

However, the biggest paradox of the system was the fact that social changes which entailed modernization changes manifesting themselves specifically in industrialization and urbanization processes took place in fact at the expense of workers, not thanks to them. So although the People’s Republic of Poland “rhetorically and symbolically appealed to ordinary people” (Leder 2013: 192);

[w]orkers completely deprived of any influence on the social order, but also free from responsibility, in their civil status hardly differed from old landless peasants – a social strata which they usually came from and which they quite closely resembled in their mindset (Leder 201: 193).

Although, as argued by Świda-Ziemba (1997: 207), workers constituted a material base of the new state, were its productive force participating “in the enormous collective work of building socialism,” it was not them, but the party functionaries who set the plans and production norms, working goals, and pays. Comparing workers from the turn of the 1940s and 50s to landless peasants refers not only to the fact of depriving them of agency, but also their bad conditions of work, material conditions, and frequent poverty wages. Accordingly, workers were treated like a slave labor force, but that fact, as demonstrated by Świda-Ziemba, was concealed behind the façade of the collective enthusiasm towards the new, jointly built order. The elements of this façade included, for example, the so called labor race personified by labor leaders and the collective work of whole factories, related to apparently enthusiastic and voluntary, yet in practice forced acceptance of obligations to exceed the set plan or its quicker implementation. In the case of acceptance of such obligations, civic responsibility of workers was emphasized, particularly in the press. However, when workers refused to work beyond their strength

⁶ To a large degree it was precisely like that; on the other hand, a phenomenon (and also a paradox) of the Polish version of socialism is the fact that many people refusing to meet that requirement (sometimes taking the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy), that is, not belonging to the party, succeeded in developing their professional careers in spite of less favorable circumstances than in the case of the party members. Such instances could be found in biographical interviews of retired professors of the University of Łódź gathered in the Department of Sociology of Culture of UŁ in the project *Academic Łódź in Biographies* (Każmierska, Waniek, Zysiak 2015).

and their objections to implementing thoughtless organizational changes, they were attributed to a lack of awareness of the working class, which was often discussed at meetings of the party committees. In both cases we deal with specific social engineering. “Influencing people, shaping desired attitudes and awareness was to diminish the gap between the communist party’s official propaganda and the existing reality and to lower »the threshold of internal self-control of individuals«” (Sielezin 2008: 189). Another element of the façade was high norms which were supposed to be exceeded anyway, not only in the name of ideological requirements, but also under economic duress (when failed to exceed the norm, the worker was paid a paltry sum for work). Still another example of the façade was “ritual manifestations of enthusiasm for the new era,” namely seminars, mass gatherings, workers’ meetings (Świda-Ziemba 1997: 208–209). Recapitulating the situation of workers from the turn of the 1940s and 50s, Świda-Ziemba (1997: 212) highlights three parameters: “1) total submission and subjugation to their work area, 2) work beyond their strength in miserable conditions, 3) abject living conditions, or to put simply, misery.”⁷

The briefly discussed question here related to the paradox of the privileged and objectified working class is by no means a new problem. Conversely – it constitutes one of the frequently researched issues both by sociologists and historians, when it comes to characteristic features of real socialism (see Malanowski 1981, Gardawski 1996, Ślabek 2004). It should also be noted that the long history of the People’s Republic of Poland, marked by the turning points in 1956, 1970, 1976, 1980,⁸ which were initiated by workers (repeatedly breaking out of their assigned role in the scenario), is not homogenous from the point of view of the subject in question. Postulated and real egalitarianism (e.g., in the form of “envious egalitarianism”) intertwined with strongly varied situations of workers, for example, through standing out professional groups clearly favored by the system, like miners for instance, or through uneven distribution of benefits in terms of social support (e.g., through developing holiday resorts, ministerial healthcare infrastructure, state service housing, company onsite retail outlets, etc.). Yet, this chapter does not aim at presenting the whole range of phenomena and processes related to the situation of workers as a social class, but it focuses on, to use a term by Clifford Geertz, *microscopic* – a description concerning a specific case: *social space* – Łódź as a working class city, and *social milieu* – local female laborers working in weaving factories. The choice of Łódź

⁷ In Łódź, most weaving machines were made before WWI, they had not been modernized, production halls had no ventilation, there was a lack of space, no sanitary facilities, the machinery was unsecure (Lesiakowski 2008: 44).

⁸ I leave out 1968 here, because its significant events concern a slightly different social context.

as ‘a case study’⁹ is determined by the character of the city on one hand, and on the other hand, by research studies which produce empirical materials and their potential references to other studies on Łódź of a similar character. By this I mean particularly unique research conducted by Świda-Ziembra (1997) at the turn of the 1940s and 50s, but also a series of documentary films devoted to female workers, which were made in the 60s, 70s and 80s thanks to directors such as Krystyna Gryczalkowska, Danuta Halladin, or Irena Kamieńska, who contributed to the establishing of the Polish school of documentaries. These films perfectly fit in the *microscopic* perspective. “The authors adopt the attitude of a ‘delicate observer’, who looks at the world penetratingly and warmly. The lenses of their cameras attentively observe private issues, discovering in them an exciting microcosm of human problems. They peep under covers of events with a special sensitivity towards the fates of the filmed individuals,” particularly women, whose portraits constitute a separate current among documentaries produced by the above directors.¹⁰

The aforementioned analysis of a case study imposes another paradox on the ones highlighted before, which results from a peripheral character of Łódź and female weaving workers being a peripheral professional group among Polish laborers. Łódź, for many years the second largest city in Poland, a big industrial center, developed as a result of the unusually rapid pace of modernization at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, was labelled peripheral – paradoxically also in relation to its working class character. The city was also associated with workers, but actually female workers, who in real terms could constitute a large social force, for example, in a fourteen-thousand-worker Uniontex, where Mrs. Adela used to work – a weaving worker whose case will be analyzed here.

Let’s recapitulate preliminary comments. The primary empirical frame of reference is Łódź as a special case of a working class city and the work of local weaving plant workers shown in the context of specific biographical experiences of one of them. Mrs. Adela’s narration refers to the time from the 70s to the 90s, while she was working in the largest weaving plant in Łódź and one of the largest in Europe. Using other materials – studies on the social history of Łódź and sociological studies of Świda-Ziembra, I would like to place Mrs. Adela’s case in chronological and social contexts in order to reconstruct possibly a complete image of Łódź, as an industrial city which weathered World War II unscathed and where (in the view of the then authorities) the plans of the new system could be successfully implemented, which (from an analytical perspective)

⁹ I use this term in inverted commas, because it is not methodological in the strict sense of case study. It is mostly about reference to an example which displays some specific characteristics.

¹⁰ The text written by Mikołaj Jazdon is derived from an informational brochure attached to a series of films released by the Polish Audiovisual Institute.

perfectly exposed its paradoxes. Therefore I will attempt to first characterize the situation of Łódź workers in the decades preceding Mrs. Adela's story to present her narration as the next in a chronological order, but also a socially defined phase of experiences of Łódź female workers. Accordingly, I am going to combine a dimension of individual biographical experiences with a dimension of collective experiences of weaving laborers in Łódź – female workers.

Łódź – case study

Łódź might be treated as one of many Polish cities, which in the communist era were identified as a chiefly working class city.¹¹ Nevertheless its specificity was preserved in the pre-war industrial infrastructure (thanks to insignificant war damage the city had the widest and best developed industrial base in 1945) (Kenney 2012: 75), particularly the weaving industry and the feminization of the labor market.

With reference to the former feature we should emphasize apparent ambivalence between the continuation and initiation of the new order, whose construction of reality relied on rejecting the previous system. The continuation is related to the fact that after the war factory jobs were taken by mature workers who assessed reality through their pre-war experiences; put simply, they compared the capitalistic and socialistic systems. I will return to this topic later. The continuation was also visible in the linguistic dimension – in the post-war, highly ideological press of the 1940s, initially the pre-war factory names were used, that is the owners' names such as Scheibler and Grohmann, Poznański, Biedermann et cetera.¹² Finally, it is a paradox that it was the pre-war industrial infrastructure of Łódź, the then modern weaving machines adjusted to processing high quality raw materials (which turns out to be a major problem

¹¹ Promoting Łódź as an academic city is highlighted in a study by Agata Zysiak (2010).

¹² Initially, nationalized factories preserved original names, that is, surnames of their pre-war owners. It was only later when they were changed, in the first stage eliminating the original names, and then introducing names relating to the new system. For example, in the case of Scheibler and Grohmann's factory, in 1945 its name was changed into the state owned Scheibler and Grohmann's Zjednoczone Zakłady Włókiennicze (United Weaving Company). In 1946 this company was nationalized under the name of Państwowe Zakłady Przemysłu Bawełnianego (State Textile Company no 1). In 1962 it was renamed to Obrońców Pokoju Zakłady Przemysłu Bawełnianego (the Peace Defenders' Textile Company), and Uniontex finally. The article "It is time to find other names for Łódź factories" from *Kurier Popularny* in 1946 referred to national and ideological arguments: "Neither Germans nor capitalists will return to Łódź factories. Memories after them in the form of names are redundant."

soon), the pre-war stocks of high quality paints and other materials, enabled the launching of production and implementation of economic plans of the new system, which in subsequent years will not be able to initiate modernization processes within this scope. Acquiring property and production means was ideologically justified in the 1940s,¹³ but it was hardly successful in the 1970s, when Łódź weavers still operated the same pre-war machines.

With reference to the latter feature, feminization of the labor market in Łódź, first of all, it should be recalled that the question of the place ascribed to women in socialism is one of the key problems of this system. On one hand, women's rapid emancipation in the 1940s and 1950s might be regarded as an avant-garde process in comparison to Western Europe then.¹⁴ On the other hand, this emancipation in socialistic countries was rather superficially framed by patterns of traditionally constructed roles of women as wives and mothers and from then also workers.

The specificity of the weaving industry bolstered by post-war demographic characteristic¹⁵ resulted in women making up a majority of the workers shortly after the war, particularly in the weaving industry. While in Poland women comprised a quarter of the labor force, in Łódź they made up more than half of the workers (Kenney 2012: 77). Women dominated most of all weaving, textile, and paper industries. Weaving and textile industries were dominated by women from the beginning due to activities typically done by them (Zarzycka 1966: 354, after Lesiakowski 2008: 42). This tendency continued also in subsequent decades, for example, in the first half of the 1970s "the degree of professional activity among women was the highest in the country and amounted to 87% of the labor force resources." It was related to the fact that the working class character of the city was still being built by the crews of weaving, textile, clothing, and woolen manufacturing plants (Lesiakowski

¹³ For example, in an opinion column entitled "In the old Eisenbraun's factory: Good and bad points of the worker's life" in *Kurier Popularny* from 1946 within a series "Exploring our industrial facilities" we can read: "When we think that this garden, this spacious palace, and the lot serve those today who adored the world and natural beauty only in a piece of the sky, looking at it from a smelly large city backyard, the chest fills up with joy. In the tycoon's palace hall we are greeted by workers. We look through the Venetian window – in the broad park path run two children of workers. In the shine of their laughing eyes, in the joy of their loud laughter, ghosts of the past disappear – a new life is born."

¹⁴ Sometimes it took quite grotesque forms, which is well-exemplified by the slogan "Women on tractors."

¹⁵ A number of women per 100 men was as follows: 1945 – 134.6, 1946 – 129.5, 1950 – 122.7, 1955 – 120.3, 1960 – 117.4, 1965 – 115.8, 1970 – 115.9, 1975 – 116.3, 1980 – 116.9.

2008: 261). There is a good reason why Łódź as a working class city was labeled a city of female workers which was indicative of its specificity¹⁶ – on one hand, the “red” labor Łódź, on the other hand, a city of women who did not quite fit in particularly with the subsequent image of the working class as a subject challenging the socialist system in later protests, particularly those which were attributed with the character of political mutiny.¹⁷ However, an analysis of source materials on workers’ strikes which was carried out mainly by historians particularly concerning the latter half of the 1940s and from 1971 shows that women did not only take an active part in protests, but they were a special challenge to the authorities. Their postulates were frequently free from direct political references, particularly exposed paradoxes of the system. Ideas of emancipation and equality in the case of Łódź female workers were easy to set against the fact that although women constituted a majority they belonged to the least privileged group, which demanded controlling their work environment in connection to such fundamental questions as continual work in an upright standing posture, lack of a variety of tasks, lack of breaks, piecework, high norms, et cetera.

These issues posed to the factory management and authorities as a ‘simple’ question ‘why?’ were particularly embarrassing to the party apparatus (Kenney 2012: 102). These questions were further supplemented with equally specific dilemmas in regards to other social roles of women, for example, “Why didn’t the factory produce children’s clothes? Why were nonproduction workers being fired when factory administration was growing? Why must even pregnant women exhaust themselves working night shifts? Why couldn’t child care be more convenient so that women working the morning shift would not have to leave for work as early as 4 am bringing their children to deposit at the factory day-care center? (Kenney 2012: 103).

In this context it is legitimate to recall the research which was conducted in 1949–51 in Łódź weaving manufacturing plants by Świda-Ziemia while

¹⁶ Looking at the latest social history of Łódź from the contemporary perspective it may be noticed that this social demographic characteristic affected not only an idiosyncratic character of Łódź as a city of workers, but there is also a range of other phenomena and social processes such as, for example, wretched health conditions of residents of Łódź and the region, forms of family life, force of attachment to tradition, ratios of religiousness showing higher secularization than in other parts of Poland, political involvement, et cetera.

¹⁷ It may be claimed that to some degree those labels were overstated. Ideological involvement of workers was not so obvious and had to be only constructed by the new state authority. In 1946 the ratio of workers’ membership in the party (PPR and PPS) amounted to about 8%, in 1948 it increased to about 14% (Kenney 2012: 84). Strike activity must not be overlooked either. I elaborate on it later on.

she was still a student of sociology of the University of Łódź.¹⁸ Particularly from today's perspective this material, first published at the beginning of the 1990s, is an invaluable and unique source of knowledge on life and attitudes of workers in Łódź at the turn of the 1940s and 50s. From 1949 to 1951 the author was able to meet pre-war laborers, whose comparative perspective on the new system was pre-war capitalism, oftentimes the same workplace in the same factory – once managed by its owner, and after the war by a director and party functionaries. Świda-Ziemia (1997: 215–219) differentiated a few categories of workers, I will bring up some of them. The first consisted of skilled workers endowed with pre-war professional experience, respected in their community, with local roots (in Łódź). The second category was made up of unskilled workers – quickly trained to their profession, who occupied a lower rank in an unwritten hierarchy, were frequently treated instrumentally by decision-makers, had their roots in the country – and ‘opened’ the mass migration process from the country to the city. On one hand, they were avant-garde of the new system, on the other hand, this group were badly treated, earned less, and were often illiterate. Their position in the social structure was probably a reason, that along with pre-war workers, they were fighting for their rights in the wave of strikes in Łódź factories from 1945 to 1947. Thus in the light of propaganda, insubordination (defined as defiance to the scenario established to the working class) in the case of skilled workers was imputed to their pre-war (capitalistic) habits, yet in the case of young workers it was diagnosed that they were made up of a “[v]ery high percentage of new workers, who had not worked before the war and therefore they did not go through the class struggle. A high percentage of the youth grew up during the Nazi demoralization and brought that experience to factories” (“KW PPR report,” after Lesiakowski 2008, 46). Another category is women – wives of skilled and unskilled workers and single women – typically members of unskilled workers’ groups. Most of them started working only after the war on account of economic necessity, not emancipation ambitions. Those who also performed roles of mothers and wives

¹⁸ Paradoxes of the former system should also include organizing research within sociology as this science was relegated from the Polish universities during the Stalin era as it was deemed bourgeois science. Nevertheless the Ministry of Culture ordered sociology students of the University of Łódź (those who were allowed to finish off their studies) to conduct research on the “activity of workers’ clubrooms within an operating manufacturing factory” (Świda-Ziemia 1997: 200). The goal was to show budding workers’ culture as opposed to bourgeois culture. In spite of her openly declared skepticism to the new system, Hanna Świda-Ziemia was accepted as one of the researchers which led to her collecting unique material for her own use (interviews and free talks conducted on her own account, observations, notes), which were permitted to be published only after 1989.

had to keep houses according to the common cultural pattern existing not only in the working class environment. For that reason, frequently after a twelve-hour shift in a factory, they had to continue working doing the housework in overcrowded flats without any conveniences,¹⁹ but they also had to struggle with difficulties with regards to food provision, but also household cleaning products or clothes availability. Finally a separate category was created by the author for the so called ‘creators of the system’ – they were people who focused on the development of their professional career through social advancement guaranteed thanks to the party membership, unrelated, though, to genuine ideological commitment (e.g., supporting the pre-war communist ideology or post-war conviction of the system’s mission), but rather to instrumental or opportunistic attitudes. They aimed at the fastest possible achievement: leaving physical labor for administrative jobs and management structures.²⁰

Comparing the author’s categories with Mrs. Adela’s biographical situation who took a job in the same factory thirty years later, we can notice that that categorization remained valid; there were only changes in proportions. Consequently the group of pre-war workers substantially diminished due to the passage of time. Importantly, women started to outnumber men in the weaving industry (it is confirmed by previously presented statistics, as well as Mrs. Adela’s account, which I will highlight later on), the distinction between native, local, and migrating/commuting workers, predominantly unskilled, still remained. Mrs. Adela belongs to the latter category and points to the labeling character of that identification. It is clear that the emancipation character of structures of opportunities created by the new system and modernization mechanisms related, for example, to increasing dynamics of people’s migration from the country to the city, which was the cause and effect of urbanization and industrialization processes of the country, was understood by the grass roots rather in the context of traditional perception of the social structure and division for the better and the worse:

¹⁹ 63% of the post-war housing stock consisted of unicameral premises. The local press during that period published many articles describing miserable housing conditions in Łódź. It is necessary to note that they were changing very slowly. Documentary films, which I refer to later, showing the reality in Łódź at the turn of the 1960s and 70s portray everyday life where women had to tackle wretched housing conditions, face difficulties in food and clothing provisions, and they, without a husband’s assistance, deal with all houseworks.

²⁰ While in 1947 63% of people occupying managerial positions had higher education, this percentage dropped to 30% in the years of 1948–1949 for the benefit of politically engaged workers (Kenney 2012: 31). Świda-Ziemba (1997: 218) presents statements such as “Madam ... I won’t stay here too long, they are to take me to the HR,” “I’m going to take an internship in the Soviet Union, so when I come back – you understand.”

Residents of Łódź chose other, lighter jobs while here on the bale – I was working on the middle one – so... so, here it was only village people mostly worked. Mostly only village people worked. Or such ‘false’ Łódź women, cause they treated themselves as women from Łódź, but they all came from the country! The same. But, you know... but, you know, you had a hard time too when you decided to go there. I just got/, I was still a young woman, when I went to work, wasn’t I? And, you know, I got my machines right away. So they were grumbling there too, that ‘I have just come and have my own machines, and so on’, something like that, you experienced different things with people there. Cause/ as I say, all came from the country. So they also added work on the farm err, to that/ to the pension, so they could leave, and then it turned out that nearly everyone is from the country. But [...], you know, they called us differently: ‘Mazowsze’²¹ (laughter), or for a bus, you know, they teased simply that Mazowsze arrived’ or something else (laughter). They also teased us, you know, but [...] you had to [...] you had to work, didn’t you? ‘Cause what?

Returning to the study by Świda-Ziemba, who, on the basis of conducted conversations²² and observations, describes opinions and attitudes of the then workers both to work and the new system. Apart from the abovementioned dissatisfaction of women – wives, particularly of pre-war workers, who had to take jobs on account of material conditions, there are quotes of opinions on the possibility of realizing work ethos. Older workers made comparisons to the pre-war period, when they felt their work was appreciated and they could see its positive effects in the high quality of products. In the 1940s high required norms coupled with clumsy organization of work, frequent lack of raw materials, and their low quality resulted in workers’ frustration. Weaving machines were adjusted to process high quality raw materials, but after termination of supplies from the UNRRA (Egyptian and American cotton), low quality raw materials were imported from the USSR (Lesiakowski 2008: 120). Weaving workers perceived those conditions as depriving them of workers’ dignity: “Working with such tools and such materials is like an insult to me”; “Although I am a specialist, because of the work race, because of this crap,²³ I finally produce trash. And, although I’m not to blame for it, I eventually feel like a failure” (Świda-Ziemba 1997: 223). Consequently we deal here with another paradox which could be named the lack of reciprocity of perspectives: the New system’s

²¹ State Folk Song and Dance Ensemble “Mazowsze” established in 1948, very popular in the era of the People’s Republic of Poland, was treated as the hallmark of folk culture.

²² On purpose I do not use the term interviews as these conversations were conducted unofficially, that is, not in the mode of official sociological research in which Świda-Ziemba took part. See footnote 18.

²³ As explained by Świda-Ziemba, it was related to tools and materials.

declaration of aiming at dignifying the working class premised on rejecting capitalism resulted in another definition of ‘good job’ – relying on quantity, not quality. This measure also turned out to pose problems in light of multi-year shortages in supply. Put differently, while experienced, pre-war workers grew frustrated because of their awareness of ‘messing up’ the job, in subsequent years it would relate to a lack of translatability of their commitment to potentially positive verification of effects of their work. It is appropriate here to recall Mrs. Adela’s narration where she refers to the 1970s and 80s:

It was/it was probably/ it was a time when cotton was coming from Russia.

I: Hmm.

N: From the Soviet Union [...] it was coming. Err it was/ to the Soviet Union. You can’t know how much you could make, but they would take it all! One couldn’t buy any material in Poland even though we worked day and night, in the three-shift system. So, for example, in the medium one, here at us, it was/ cause I worked/ it was in the teasel division, so for a start, four rooms, four rooms, fifty six machines in each, you can imagine how much machinery there was, four, so there were two hundred machines, and on each machine four combs, for example, you placed them here, then it made sixteen kilos every forty minutes. It is possible to count how much, how many tons we made, for, for, if it worked in three shifts. And it was constantly too little, too little, and too little. It wasn’t only about the quality, it was about the quantity! It was constantly too little of it all. Constantly too little.

The time when Świda-Ziemba carried out her research was after a stormy wave of protests and strikes which lasted from 1945 and reached their peak in 1947. All the aforementioned circumstances and particularly multitasking (operating several machines at the same time by one worker) added to the growing dissatisfaction of workers. The strongest wave of strikes struck Łódź weaving factories in September 1947. Approximately 27,000 workers from eleven large factories participated in the strikes which amounted to over 70% of all employed (Lesiakowski 2008: 155).

Such a big protest of Łódź weaving workers certainly exposed tough conditions in factories, violent dissatisfaction of workers, their fears before implemented changes, and low awareness among the existing authorities, party structures, managements of factories, and trade unions of the workers’ state of mind” (Lesiakowski 2008: 155).

A considerable role in those protests was played by women, who were not politically active, did not occupy posts in factory administrative structures, but presented high determination and constituted “a leading element of the strike” (Lesiakowski 2008: 156–159). One of the consequences of the 1947

strikes was a political recommendation of intensive ideological indoctrination of women who demonstrated high activity during the strike – it was attributed to insufficient political agitation by the party activists. The issue of raising work efficiency was ‘solved’ by stressing competition among workers and introducing bonuses for exceeding high production plans, which actually took multitasking for granted and were supposed to substitute proper modernization. For instance, in 1948 an article “Small rationalization meaning big tasks for industrial Łódź” from *Dziennik Łódzki* (1948: 5) says:

Full rationalization of the Polish industry, meaning thorough modernization of production resources, replacing outdated machines with modern ones, is a long-term goal in the current conditions [...] Rationalization (hereinafter referred to as small rationalization – KK) will be accomplished by raising work efficiency and refining work organization methods.

Rationalization replaces modernization here. Again, although in roundabout terms the burden of increasing work output is pushed on the workers’ shoulders, who, facing a lack of real modernization of the factory have to ‘rationalize’ their actions, which in euphemistic terms means demands of elevated work efficiency. A further section of this article explains that small rationalization comprises “technological and production processes, work station organization, adjusting machines to increased norms,” and leading workers as models for its realization.

However, the most significant consequence of the 1947 strike wave was setting up Secret Service units which received wide-ranging prerogatives. Functionaries should freely move about the factory facilities, check documents, demand explanations of the administrative structures, and talk to workers. They exerted pressure on the environment through their daily presence, could encourage workers to collaborate, could control social moods, and identify potential protest instigators (Lesiakowski 2008: 163). After the 1947 strike wave, manufacturing plants started to be concentrated. In the second half of 1945 there were about 900 of them, in 1946 their number declined to 400 and in 1949 the weaving industry consisted of 20 factories out of all factories in Łódź. Breaking territorial and environmental bonds, focusing production in large companies which enabled higher anonymity, and contributed to the disintegration of crews (Lesiakowski 2008: 168). Accordingly, it became easier to implement standards relating to, for example, work competition with regards to an individual, not a collective approach to accomplished tasks. Undermining group loyalty and introducing rules of supervision reliant on a lack of trust gave rise to another paradox of the system, which in their declarations was supposed to be built on collective actions and group/class sense of responsibility, but in practice it aimed at breaking up social solidarity.

Subsequent years (1948–1952) did not bring about substantial improvement in workers' conditions, on the contrary, it might be inferred from the materials gathered by Świda-Ziemba that their situation actually deteriorated. Although the Stalinism era associated with the fiercest terror led to a decrease in the number of strikes, altogether 258 strikes broke out in Łódź and its region,²⁴ most of them in the city. It was the highest number in Poland (Świda-Ziemba 1997, 200). As the research of Świda-Ziemba (1997: 231) indicates, in spite of rising terror, workers constantly showed their dissatisfaction. The author managed to collect many critical and ironic statements: "It's new slavery, and our obligations! An 8-hour workday is the worker's right! We were fighting for it, as were our fathers for years!"; "Is the difference between capitalism and socialism that in capitalism threads were good and in socialism they tear? These norms are ridiculous, it's exploitation. It's about cutting our wages! Perhaps someone from the party and management should take the trouble and see how we live."

The subsequent years did not result in significant changes in work conditions of female weavers in Łódź. In the early 70s they were still operating the same outdated machines, in the facilities whose condition was described as 'technical death',²⁵ with no social or material support, in horrid noise, enormous dust, and high temperature (Mianowska, Tyłski 2008: 10). Workers' dissatisfaction, strengthened by prices raised by the government in December 1970 and activated by the events of December 1970 on the Baltic coast, led to widespread strikes in Łódź in February 1971. Workers of weaving factories in Łódź demanded pay raises and solving problems of bad organization of work, miserable conditions of machine park, low-quality materials, weak healthcare, and excess administrative structures (Mianowska, Tyłski 2008: 14). The prospect of higher prices of food raised justified concern, because wages in Łódź weaving factories were rising at half the rate of other cities, 41% of workers received social allowances for the lowest earners, wages in 64% depended on number of pieces produced, so frequent downtimes on account of the condition of old machines which often broke down, resulted in lower pays (Lesiakowski 2008: 262–264). 40 factories in Łódź went on strike in February

²⁴ Other estimations indicate that the number of all incidents of even several hour work stoppages amounted in Łódź and its region to 519 (Lesiakowski 2008: 200).

²⁵ About 40% of the machines were made before World War II, 20% before World War I, there were changing rooms in 85% of the factories, canteens in every fifth, and showers in limited numbers in every other (Lesiakowski 2008: 262). When in the early 1970s "Andrzej Wajda was making *Ziemia Obiecana* (*Promised Land*) in Łódź factories, American critics thought that factory facilities were built specially for the purpose of the film." However, real workers, dressed in 19th century outfits, operating their machines were used as extras (Mianowska, Tyłski 2008: 10).

1971, of which 24 were weaving factories. 60,469 people out of 107,420 employed took part in them (Mianowska, Tyłski 2008: 30). Considering that in the next strikes in 1976 the number of people on strike was estimated to be between 55,000 and 71,000 nationwide, the scope of the protest in Łódź in 1971 was considerable (Lesiakowski 2008: 313).

It is worth highlighting that there is little known about the strikes in Łódź perhaps because they did not have overtones of a political rebellion, but they predominantly had economic and social dimensions (Mianowska, Tyłski 2008: 16), which to a large degree showed paradoxes of the system – protests were directed against miserable living conditions of workers, who continually appeared to be a privileged and leading force of the nation²⁶ in propagandistic slogans. The specificity of strikes in Łódź was related to the fact that an active role in them was performed by women, who were probably not as concerned with political issues as with material ones. While protesting they played roles of workers, but also wives and mothers running the houses.

Having to keep house, working in a three-shift system in the context of persistently increasing difficulties in food and clothes provisions, they gave vent to their frustration in strikes: “Emotional sensitivity of women brought nervous excitement and determination in sustaining proposed demands and postulates, which in some cases involved desperate forms of behavior. It was one of the causes why arguments of impossibility of pay rises and immediate acknowledgement of postulates were hard to accept.” However, it was their desperate resistance, not directly rebellion on the Baltic coast, which made the government withdraw disastrous price rises in December 1970 (Lesiakowski 2008: 314).

It is legitimate at this point to return to the earlier mentioned question of periphery. As it results from the data quoted and the description of form and scope of the protest, female workers represented a huge social force. However, they did not have that force in social perception and social narration. Padaric Kenney describes this phenomenon as the “gender of resistance” (Kenney 1999). The power of workers’ protests (even though their origins were in economic and social dimensions) was usually measured by the system in terms of political rebellion. Yet as the strikes of female workers of weaving factories in Łódź in 1971 showed, it was those “peripheral” forms of contestation, which in a way broke out of typical actions by “subversive

²⁶ Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for the lack of knowledge on strikes is a lack of research conducted at the time or inability to publish them. Jan Lutyński points to the 1971 strikes as one of the researched subjects, whose results were not published, “accordingly they were not included in the circulation of sociological information” (Lutyński 1990: 88).

factors,” that proved effective.²⁷ From this perspective, the case of Łódź is instructive – it demonstrates the strength of periphery on one hand, but on the other hand, it shows how it could be utilized as a social engineering strategy which neutralizes or trivializes forms of protests, which in the public discourse (both official and underground ones)²⁸ might be diagnosed as less significant.²⁹

Following the strike wave on the Baltic coast and in Łódź, a new strategy of development was adopted, which aimed at economic modernization. It brought about tangible effects between 1972 and 1974 when the pace of economic growth reached its peak, however, in subsequent years stagnation tendencies prevailed caused by both global processes (rising crude prices and the oil crisis), and local ones – a quarter of the export income was allocated to paying back foreign credit, facing difficulties in satisfying previous obligations the government took new loans (Sielezin 2008: 199).

A specific exemplification of the above situation is Mrs. Adela's narration. As I have noted, this case, as interesting as it is per se, kind of continues the hitherto presented story, because the story of Mrs. Adela about her work in a weaving factory begins in the middle of the 1970s.

The case of a female worker in Łódź

The two-hour autobiographical narrative interview with Mrs. Adela was conducted in 2012 in her flat in a location near Łódź. Mrs. Adela was born in the country about 40 km away from Łódź in 1943. Her childhood was severely

²⁷ For example, during the talks with strikers, when the authorities' representative argued that due to 'price regulations' in December 1970 although prices of many food products were raised, some prices declined, for example, tights for children, "one of the angry female workers responded »Mr. minister, don't you talk about cotton [...] Should I feed my child with tights and pull them like a chewing gum«" (Lesiakowski 2008: 296).

²⁸ For example, Andrzej Paczkowski (2003) in a small book on strikes in the communism era in Poland, in the 12-page chapter on the years 1968–1971, devotes five verses to the strikes in Łódź in 1971.

²⁹ *Nota bene* students' strike in Łódź in 1981 was also similarly perceived. The protest, regarded as the longest sit-down strike of students in the 1980s in Europe, involved about 10,000 participants. According to relations of the leading participants of those events, the protest was initially underestimated by the authorities on account of recognizing the University of Łódź as a peripheral university. From the perspective of well-esteemed academic centers, such as Jagiellonian or Warsaw University, the rebellion of Łódź students was perceived as insignificant or even a provocation of the Secret Service (see the film *Bunt na Łodzi* (Rebellion in Łódź), directed by Jacek Talczewski, a biographical narrative interview with Barbara).

stigmatized with war – her father was killed in an execution, her mother was transported to compulsory work in Germany. Mrs. Adela, together with her siblings, was taken and was being raised by her mother's brother's family. After the war, her mother luckily returned home, but as a result of her abject poverty could not take care of the children. In time Mrs. Adela's elder sister went back to her mother while her sister and brother stayed on the uncle's farm. Mrs. Adela's childhood bears a close resemblance to Cinderella's – although her aunt did not have her own children, she hated her sister-in-law's daughter: Mrs. Adela was humiliated by her aunt, neglected, she was not able to continue her education in secondary school because she had no means to commute and no clothes to wear. She got married early, treating this change of status as a remedy for her family situation. However, as she noted it did not result in substantial improvement of her life situation – her husband's parents lived in poverty because of their own incompetence and inability (they were the only farm without electricity supply due to her father-in-law's objection), her husband started to drink heavily soon after and developed an alcoholic habit, following a typical pattern of development of state-owned farm workers. Mrs. Adela gave birth to and raised three daughters and when the youngest one started to attend kindergarten she took a weaver job in Uniontex – the largest weaving factory in Łódź, which employed about 14,000 people. She took that job in an action of factories seeking new workers in nearby villages. Workers paid a minimal fare for being transported to the factory in Łódź. Mrs. Adela was working in the factory for 23 years till 1998, when, aged 55, she took early retirement. On account of hard work conditions she wanted to quit earlier, but she had no alternative. Her daughters attended schools during that time. The eldest was studying in Warsaw, the middle one graduated from a technical secondary school, and then graduated from part-time studies while working already. The youngest one studied in the late 1980s. As explained by Mrs. Adela, working on a state-owned farm, her husband was entitled to receive free allowances of potatoes, milk, and vegetables, which prevented her daughters from obtaining student social allowance. Money was in short supply. After her husband's death, the narrator lived through a particularly tough time when she alone had to support herself and her youngest daughter at the university. Thus, all three daughters have full university education and developed stable professional careers. She now lives with one of them. Her grandchildren also graduated from the university or are about to graduate. When asked to sum up her life she exposes the experience of poverty, only now she can enjoy a stable life, she even started to travel with her daughter.

Mrs. Adela's narration comprises many interesting thematic threads and analytical dimensions. They cannot be discussed in detail here, but it is worth mentioning them. The most important includes the war impact and

war experiences of her parents on her biography, experience of abject poverty bordering on destitution, which was widespread particularly in the country, poignant trajectory of suffering, characteristic for nearly all the narrator's life, which resulted from an unhappy childhood (social orphanage and cruel treatment by her foster family), hard marriage and her husband's alcoholism (even though Mrs. Adela did not define her marriage as unhappy, but as ordinary, which is symptomatic *per se*), and, finally, an extremely harsh experience of working as a weaving worker. In the whole story the trajectory of suffering is the main biographical experience (Riemann, Schütze 1991). The individual trajectory is caused by a complicated constellation of life experiences – her family fate and difficult marriage. The collective level of trajectory relates to the experience of postwar poverty and then the experience of exhausting, slave-resembling work in the textile factory. That last thread, thanks to the theme of the chapter, deserves more space. The description of work in the weaving factory takes 156 verses altogether. Below are abridged quotes from that part of her narration.

(1) It was hard work, very hard work. Everybody always said it was a “white mine,” “white mine” simply...

I: Hmm.

N: Cause, you know, it was awful, terrible dust! Dust and even more dust. Maybe later, 'cause it was a few stages there, maybe further on, at the very/ at the threads they made, maybe there wasn't, but where I was working in earlier stages, it was abominable. When/ even, even there wasn't/ you had to be there: teasels – they raise dust, so [...] it settled on the face, hands [...] It had to be humid, it had to be humid and suitable temperature so, so that it could go on some way, you know. So it was sometimes that overalls often got stuck to your back, 'cause, 'cause it was so humid. Overalls stuck to your back and here you/ your face was stuck in dust (laughter) and settled on your hands, that dust was so horrible. The dust was everywhere! So, everybody was picking their noses (laughter) 'cause, 'cause it was a reflex, and that dust settled everywhere on your head, in your hair, in your eyes, in your ears, everywhere. So, if I worked in three shifts, for instance, from the morning, then the afternoons and the nights. And the nights. Five nights. But, on Saturdays we worked also in the afternoon for six hours, so there were afternoon shifts, 'cause later on, probably after *Solidarność* was established, they cancelled those afternoons, there weren't afternoon shifts on Saturdays.

(2) Anyways, the machine park was also trashy. For instance, in the early laundry there were machines from 1936. That machine park was out-dated. It was breaking down all the time. And it was... Maybe further on at the end itself they had a little/ cause there was/ where threads were, perhaps they had a bit more modern/ those machines were also, but also, [...] too, too, all the time, like ours. And it was there where women kept hands in the air all the time. Arms in the air all the time. Right. It was the same/ it was also/ perhaps they had less dust, but

again, they had the same hard work, and we were complaining we had lots of dust, and we had to lift lots of loads, and carry them, but they there [...] had such as if spools, you know, and they made such thin [...] but it was, I'm telling you, all the time, you know, arms were in the air and it was like that all the time. You know how it is, how much can you take? Ok. So, it was horrible.

Both of the quotes describe various aspects of work, which particularly from the current perspective, evokes associations of strenuous, back-breaking toil. It may be argued that the message expressed by means of a restricted code³⁰ is most gripping and does not require additional commentary. Let us try, however, to juxtapose it with the previously presented story of work in Łódź weaving factories. In the first quote Mrs. Adela focuses on work conditions related to her job, that is carding. Similarly to subsequent parts of the narration, it is dominated by physical experiences: dust and sweat, lifting heavy loads, working in a standing position with arms raised up, lack of time to relax and eat proper meals, which translates into another tangible dimension – unhealthy diet that leads to being overweight. Although research (Sokołowska 1986) confirms that an instrumental relation to one's own body is related to education – the lower the education the higher probability to treat one's body as a tool, which is subject to using up the longer it is exploited, in the presented pieces that body exploitation is experienced rather as obligatory than 'normative'. It is worth juxtaposing Mrs. Adela's narration with a short report "This is Łódź" published in *Dziennik Łódzki* from 1945, in the section "Factory reports":

This young, fair-haired female worker, whose face is so serene as if she did not hear piercing noise produced by the loom, as if she was not disturbed by the noise of all the machines in the hall. That noise is her element. The factory and her became one. She came to work here (supportive job) when she was 15. She is so intimately close to the loom that her fingers play on the warp like a pianist's fingers on the instrument" (Paszko 1945: 5).

The author of the text, Halina Paszko, visited the Zjednoczone Zakłady Włókiennicze (United Weaving Company) – formerly known as the Scheibler and Grohmann's factory, and subsequently Uniontex, where Mrs. Adela was working. The report presents a rhetorical figure diverse from Mrs. Adela's description, nevertheless it also relates to corporality. Noise is neutralized

³⁰ I refer here to Basil Bernstein's distinction of two language codes: the restricted code and elaborated code. An ability to use them is typically shaped by an individual's position in the social structure. The elaborated code is highly individual and unbound on a verbal level, requires a broader competence gained, for example, in the family environment and educational institutions. The restricted code reduces abilities of verbally expressed differences between individuals (Bernstein 1980: 58).

by characterizing it as an element with a positive meaning, working at the looms (described by Mrs. Adela as equally physically exhausting as her job) is not related to excess exploitation, but is dignified: it becomes a sort of art – a masterly crafted body. The instrument metaphor seems to neutralize the noise which appears to be a tune pleasing to the ear.

Therefore we deal here with two descriptions – an ideological one, made at the beginning of the new system era, which builds the figure of a worker as enthusiastically committed to the ethos of (socialist) work, and a biographical narration relying on experiences about 30 years later, concentrated on the hardship of work, which borders on the suffering experience. Both descriptions concern the same factory and both of them – in spite of different rhetoric – are quite similar when it comes to the description of work conditions. Mrs. Adela's report from the middle of the 1970s indicates that little had changed in the meantime. Remember, Uniontex was the largest weaving factory in Łódź (and one of the largest employers in Poland).

The degree of dramatic work conditions is not neutralized by social amenities described by Mrs. Adela:

(3) But if, for example, [...] what kind of policy it was, you know, they made bathrooms, bathrooms aaand that, and locked them! I don't know what it was, but it was, what kind of politics it was! They built bathrooms and locked them, and in fact, there were sinks here, there were sinks and it was/ there was a big bath to wash, but who used that bath if [you hardly finished your work and then had to run to catch a bus], and anyways, there was another shift coming in, so who was to go to that bath to wash? So you just ran there, you know, washed feet and face here a little and hands and quickly did it. Ok. So there were those baths, but they were miserable [...] When you worked in the morning, when I worked in the morning, then then [...] it was that [...] at four, at three I got up so where was I to eat breakfast?. I drank something and went to work. Aaand then at work too, when you came to the factory room you didn't know what to do, cause one was standing next to another, take dust out, sweep here, sweep and something, so about nine, what we had in the bag, how much you were/ had sandwiches in the bag, so you ate it at once, cause later there was no time anyway. Whatever there was to eat you ate at once and only when you arrived home, so as late as about 3 pm or so, you could eat something... anyways, you got used to it, cause what else could you do. So we laughed, then we were covered with that thick dust, and I was always this very thin, and then in that factory, cause when you stuffed yourself, so quickly, on the run/ you ate here, you looked there, you put a pot here, 'cause here we go, here is the manager coming, so you mustn't quietly sit down there to eat quietly, so you grabbed something to eat quickly, aaand you know [...], so [...] and we had drinks, yeah. It's the first category of employment, only later, you didn't get anything for it... You didn't get anything for it, 'cause, you know, there was no/ there was no/ there were bonuses, then they were taken

away and so you know. At first there was even milk, milk and soft drinks. And then gradually milk disappeared (laughter) and we had some water, some lousy water they brought, but whatever [...] OK. So it was, it was hard work.

In the excerpt describing possibilities of using the bath two issues need highlighting. Firstly, using irony the narrator stresses paradoxes of the work organization system – there are baths, but they are locked. Restricted access aimed, as might be guessed from the report, at protecting these amenities from exploitation and maintaining smoothness of work. Mrs. Adela distinctly points out that in the existing organization of work it was not possible for her to use the bath because she would either incur sanctions of the management (for leaving the work station too early), or she could disorganize her private time as she would miss the company bus. Secondly, introducing an aspect of gender is a most interesting element in this excerpt. While describing her work in collective terms, Mrs. Adela uses the first person plural in the feminine form all the time, alternatively she simply speaks about other women.³¹ The topic of men working in the same factory is first introduced in the narration in the excerpt quoted above (then it appears again when Mrs. Adela describes activities of *Solidarność* trade unions) in the context of their greater possibility of organizing their own working time. There appears a sentence: “well, men there had perhaps more leeway there” and it is contrasted with a statement indicating nearly physical ties to the work station: “for us, we couldn’t leave the machine. We couldn’t.” Leaving the work station could result in an ‘internal’ consequence (from this perspective, a woman sort of became a part of the machine) – it could disturb the rhythm of the machine work which raised implications – and an ‘external’ one – an omission could be noticed by a foreman.

One more excerpt deserves observation, which concerns the company transport.

And the worst was [...] it was/ nights were horrible, they were, nights were terrible, so very tiring, nights. But, mornings too, from the morning, as well. For example, in the morning when I here, err we were leaving before 4 am, half past three, twenty to four, and buses were running at will. So at half past five I started my work, but often as early as ten past four I arrived at the factory. So you were sitting on a bench in the changing room, you were sitting and waiting, till half past five you were sitting, as one depended on the bus here, as there was no other transport, one had to wait only for this bus cause there was no other bus and only this bus took you back and forth. And then how much, actually, practically was it? Thirteen, fourteen hours at work.

³¹ Verbs’ endings in the Polish language are subject to conjugation in feminine, masculine, or neuter genders.

The rules of Mrs. Adela's work did not only govern her lifestyle (e.g., previously mentioned irrational eating habits which led to being overweight), comprised not only hours spent at the machine, but also encroached her spare time, for example, spent on sleeping at night (natural, physiologically essential body recovery). The description above perfectly illustrates the previously mentioned scheme of 'landless peasants'. Managing personal and social time in diverse dimensions is one of cultural and ideological tools for exercising control (Guriewicz 2001). In the quoted excerpt it stands out clearly in the linguistic layer highlighting a contrast between impersonal passivity: "one was sitting and waiting" and anthropomorphism of the system: "buses carried us at will." We deal here with forced twofold mobility: in the literal sense, as described in the quote above, and in a deeper social sense, when in the context of the whole story the company transport to the factories of the recruited 'Mazowsze' is more suited to the figure of 'landless peasant' than class-privileged beneficiaries of the system. The excerpts presented above strike with their simplicity and potent imagery. Set against previously described work conditions of Łódź female weavers they show that actually little had changed about the weaving industry in the several decades of the People's Republic of Poland (perhaps except higher wages, particularly when working overtime, that is on Saturdays, and occasionally even on Sundays). Although the story of Mrs. Adela is set in the 1970s and 80s, so in the time of rapid modernization of the country thanks to the new economic strategy in the so called Gierek's era, it may as well be set in the research of Hanna Świdzińska from the turn of the 1940s and 50s. Mrs. Adela's narration also proves that the situation of female laborers, who also had to perform family roles, take care of daily provisions – difficulties in getting essential goods, even if changeable, remained an element of the socialist landscape. This picture, built from the perspective of a single biography, which is at the same time representative of the collective experience of Łódź female workers, may be contrasted with an external perception of the city's modernization, which can be embodied in huge industrial factories, thus described by Mrs. Adela:

Uniontex, that is the Obrońców Pokoju, you know, Tymienieckiego and Piotrkowska Streets.

I: Hmm.

N: It was the largest factory in Europe. Twelve, when I started to work there, there worked 12,000 people (2) and there was an entrance/ there were twelve porter's gates. Twelve porter's gates. Because it was...

I: I didn't know that.

N: Yes, there were twelve porter's gates. To get in, you know. It was, you know, a very large factory, 'cause it was: it was from there er Fabr-/err that Targowa

– entrances, here from Piotrkowska this whole area and here. It was a factory A, B, C and D. A – was a weaving plant, D – it was – ‘cause it is here from Kilińskiego in the direction to Piotrkowska there were A and D, and C here, it was a weaving and finishing plant, dyery plant, it was here. And here was A – it was a medium weaving plant/ thin-/ thin-/ I’m sorry, it was thin weaving, and I was working in the medium one, in weaving plant B, it was in Tymienieckiego here, the corner of Przędzalniana and Tymienieckiego.

While describing the layout of the factory Mrs. Adela refers to the knowledge and spatial imagination of the interviewer who, she knows, lives in Łódź. Additional explanations are therefore unnecessary. Marking the space by giving street names and meticulous recreation of the topography of the factory indicates not just its huge size, but also her preservation of the mental map of the place, where for over twenty years Mrs. Adela was working, and whose topography she probably had to learn as a Łódź non-native, which, as claimed before, in the context of the work environment of female weavers had degrading overtones. I will return to the thread of the narrator’s relation to space later.

The presentation of Mrs. Adela’s story of her work could be supplemented by a visual image created in documentary films devoted to women’s work. In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, a series of documentary films dedicated to working women, which were made by female directors who co-created the Polish school of documentary films. It suffices to refer to two films directed by Krystyna Gryczelowska.³² *Our Friends from Łódź*, is a 16-minute film presenting three women at three points of their biographies, namely in the second, third, and fourth decade of their lives. They may be used to building pictures of the life of a Łódź female weaver from her twenties, who after graduating from a vocational school works in a factory, attends a secondary technical school in the evenings, but the three-shift system of work prevents her from reconciling work and further education (her shift foreman does not agree to it in spite of his former promises). A young girl is full of dreams and aspirations – we do not know if she will accomplish them.³³ The second woman is a mother to three children. Her story exposes endurance of everyday hardships – her family (although her husband does not appear in the film) lives in a wing of an ordinary shabby tenement house with no conveniences in Łódź. We do not listen to the woman’s narration, we only observe scenes of her work and feeding children with bread

³² *The 24 Hours of Jadwiga L.*, 1967, directed by Krystyna Gryczelowska, produced by WFD, 14 min.; *Our Friends from Łódź*, 1971, directed by Krystyna Gryczelowska, produced by WFD, 16 min.

³³ In the gathered research material there is a narration of another Łódź female weaver, who had to quit her secondary technical school due to similar reasons.

and jam and tea in the kitchen, where they could hardly squeeze in. Finally, we watch the third female weaver during her visit at the doctor's – she is 44, and has already been working for over 20 years. Her emaciated body suffers due to back-breaking work (she suffers from arthritis, gastrointestinal disorders caused by irregularly eating proper meals resulting from the three-shift system of work). Then we observe her in the factory hall and listen to her narration from behind the camcorder, which almost drowns in the noise of machines, about hard work, a cold living space without conveniences, her husband, who does not join in any housework. Her hope is in her daughters, who attend schools, all her efforts aim at investing in their future, to ensure a better life thanks to education.

The second film, *The 24 Hours of Jadwiga L.*, shows one day in the life of a woman, who has three children and works in a factory in Łódź. The film begins with the scene when she leaves home and goes to work the night shift. After returning home, her space is a flat, where she regularly and systematically moves between the kitchen, where she stirs soup every now and then, and the room, where she irons her clothes, where her bed is, where her resting time is governed by the precisely set alarm clock. The viewer gets an impression that all activities are executed in rhythm, well-planned in advance, determined by the layout of the flat, and the way to and from work.³⁴ The other members of the household, two younger children, husband and a teenage daughter (who scatters her clothes around and makeup in front of the mirror), are, all in their own ways, as it were, from other worlds. A seemingly different world than the monotonous everyday life of Jadwiga L., who is systematically 'against the flow' of normal life, as it is at odds with a biological rhythm of life. The film starts in the evening, when Jadwiga L. prepares to leave home for work when the others prepare to go to bed. The author "used staging, so that the static and ordered stills would underline the monotony and banality of the daily grind: legs onto which hands pull stockings, the chair from which hands remove a shirt, a silhouette in the kitchen, the face at work, repeated actions of wire drawing in the factory, getting on a bus, standing in a queue, ironing, sitting down at a laid table. In this way the film maker creates a picture of an anonymous woman,

³⁴ That picture seems to be a quite lasting cultural figure pointing to the closed women's world in spite of the system's change. I found a similar description of the pre-war time and life of a pre-war female worker in other biographical materials. One of the professors describing his university study time at the turn of the 1940s and 50s thus recalls her classmate: "It was a classmate of mine who came from a beautiful social background of the time as he was a son of Łódź workers. His mother, both parents were working in Poznański's factory then, *his mother, as he wrote in his CV, knew only two ways: she left home only for the factory or church* [emphasis added by K.K.]. He was so very loyal to the party. Very strictly devoted to the party, he stuck to it."

broken into a dozen repetitive gestures and actions, that say almost nothing about her individuality, yet a lot about the role she plays in life.”³⁵

While collecting autobiographical narrations in various scientific and methodological contexts we may face a question of the authenticity of stories and the truth of description. There is too little place here to discuss this issue – it would require an extended methodological commentary. We should note though that coherence in the case of the presented materials herein by Mrs. Adela and the picture shown in the documentary films is rather striking. As a matter of fact, the narration of a Łódź female weaver could constitute a commentary accompanying all of these documentaries, both in the esthetic and chronological dimensions – the films above were made at the turn of the 1960s and 70s, we can also add to them Irena Kamieńska’s *Female Workers*³⁶ documentary film, made in 1981, depicting female weavers’ work in a factory in Krosno, which is a faithful reflection of Mrs. Adela’s narration.

The description of work in the textile factory, belongs to the main part of the narrative. In the questioning part Mrs. Adela is asked about the strike in August 1980 which she does not mention herself, but she probably must have witnessed. The narrator did take part in the strike, when asked, Mrs. Adela talks about her experiences formulating a long and very dense recount. It is worth quoting it in its whole length:

It was/ it was/ the time of strike. There were strikes, it was/ we didn’t work, we weren’t allowed to leave the room. And it was, I don’t know, fear,³⁷ it was such **anxiety** [...], there was some **dread** (shows the atmosphere of terror). It was silent in the rooms, **dark everywhere**, kind of **twilight**. And we were **afraid**, we had a **fear**. Even in the streets, when we were leaving, it was like that in the town/ it was in Łódź/ trams, all, you know, was at a standstill, and it was **horribly hollow**, it was **hollow all around**, it was **very unpleasant**. There was a **fear**. There was simply a **fear**. And that Solidarność – how did they appear here? In that Uniontex. It was that they chose the unions for/ that, that Solidarność and selected one such man, and later he was even for the whole Uniontex. But, I saw him [...] frankly speaking, I saw him as [...] (looking for a word) a quirt, I would define him. ‘Cause he was maybe about thirty, maybe over thirty. And he enjoyed drinking. So he began his work as/ he came to work and began work in our room and I knew him for that. And then he was working only on one shift, ‘cause he was like as if he was cleaning machines, repaired them, ‘cause when you worked from the morning then one-two machines were standing idle, because they were/ thoroughly cleaned and greased. So he had this kind of job. So he worked only on one shift, from the morning. So it was him,

³⁵ The text written by Mikołaj Jazdon is derived from an informational brochure attached to a series of films released by the Polish Audiovisual Institute.

³⁶ *Female Workers*, directed by Irena Kamieńska, produced by WFD, 16 min.

³⁷ The words are bolded by the author.

they said, that had those rationing cards, there they were, you know, there were such meetings, and there he spoke, and another guy as well that rationing cards, sugar, and it was probably about two kilos per person of that sugar. And those rationing cards, it couldn't be like that, and you know, to improve working conditions, make free Saturdays, so we could have free Saturdays and you know it all. But, enrolling on the list of those trade unions?? I didn't enroll because I didn't belong to either side, so I didn't enroll in *Solidarność* either. I just didn't like that man. Perhaps if it was somebody different, and if I didn't know him, but I recognized and knew him, that he seduced young mistresses, you know, he ran away and got married theeeere/ there were other such young girls working in other rooms so he presented himself as a bachelor, but he had been married, and he was fooling around, because it was too little/ you know. While he was working with us he was dependent on the foreman so he had to stay in the room, but later when he was only cleaning those machines then the foreman didn't pick on him so he was running around the whole factory at will, right? So I know that, you know. So he didn't have a very interesting reputation and so, I don't know, I believed and I didn't believe what he did there, you know. Here on TV they also said that, you know, then it just happened that it was such/ probably it was a rainy summer err summer/ you know/ it was rainy and here err, you know/ people couldn't bring in all their crops from the fields, OK? And, you know, they again on the radio were saying and they were blaming the weather, but not that everything was carried away to Russia, right? So you kind of believed in it, too. And there was *Solidarność*, and when that one of *Solidarność*/ they established those unions, and you know, wanted us to enroll, and how goooooood it would be, and that there were bad conditions there, and wanted better working conditions, you know, they offered, that they would cancel rationing cards, you know, so some people believed them, others didn't believe them, 'cause, you know, what it was like then, don't you? But, it was simply/ it was this kind of period, it was [...] err, you know [...] **fear, fear, fear**. Because we were staying at those machines and there was, you know, **fear**, generally there was **fear**. But, then when they went on strike, they went on strike about anything. Somebody said to change err that shop assistant. You know, that shop assistant in that, 'cause there was such a shop, right? At the factory. So about the shop assistant. "We strike to change the shop assistant!" so it didn't make much sense either [...] So, I don't know... What freedom of speech?? Anyways, err what could they say there? To whom? The manager?? When the manager came, then what? Were you to tell on somebody? On the foreman or on something else? Then he/ he wouldn't be behind me, but he would be behind the foreman [still...]. Then whom? [...] Who could you go and complain to? The manager, when he was coming in from afar, all took to work and everybody stood at the machines, 'cause/ 'cause sitting at the machine wasn't welcome, even if they had a spare moment, to sit down or something.

As we can see, Mrs. Adela presents the description of the strike as one of the phases of establishing a *Solidarność* trade union movement. Her perspective is very intriguing.

Firstly, her way of experiencing the strike does not correspond with commonly known images of the strike atmosphere of those days which, especially from the perspective of the results (victory of the *Solidarność* movement in 1980 and the so called *Solidarność Spring*), are usually created in a collective memory as a festivity of freedom, social enthusiasm, and a great achievement introducing future democratic changes; whereas Mrs. Adela recalls her experiences as mainly associated with a feeling of fear. We can see it in the text by accumulation of words describing the mood of dread. Although the restricted code dominates the narrator's story, yet, here her language is very expressive. She uses different words to describe fear, applies different linguistic means in order to reconstruct the atmosphere, like specifying the tone of her voice, describing emotions by recounting them, using various expressions and emphasizing words, drawing a gloomy picture of both the factory and the whole city. Although the narrator does not allude to such associations, the Polish reader can easily build them, for example, referring to the described atmosphere to sayings like "silence before the storm" or a commonly known poem "silent everywhere, hollow everywhere, what will be, what will be."³⁸ Mrs. Adela's description is also based on the double contrast: the image of a noisy and dusty workshop hall is contrasted with terrible silence and a lack of any motion and activity – "horribly hollow." It is as if she wanted to stress that a factory which is not working becomes socially defined as a *worse* reality than noisy and dusty conditions of work, though so difficult to manage. We may treat this ambivalence as a metaphor of the future liquidation of the textile industry in Łódź in the late 90s when all textile factories were sold, then quickly bankrupted and thousands of people lost their jobs. The second contrast has been already mentioned; it is related to the discrepancy between her experiences and interpretations evoked by stereotypical images of workers' strikes in 1980, which were rather associated with action and agency.

Secondly, Mrs. Adela constructs her narration about strikes in a very interesting way. She starts with a short description concentrated on emotions (fear) and a gloomy image of hopeless waiting. Then she introduces an extended commentary on the local context of the social movement represented by the person/man with doubtful moral legitimacy and not fully representative of female textile workers' professional life. From the very beginning the man is placed on the side of a privileged group of workers.³⁹ When flirting with women he uses a closed awareness context (Strauss) by presenting himself as

³⁸ This phrase comes from a very well-known romantic piece *Dziady* by Adam Mickiewicz.

³⁹ See the previous fragment of the narrative when Mrs. Adela describes the division into men's and women's worlds of work.

a bachelor. The strategy of building this asymmetric relationship (by a closed awareness context) and playing with women puts them in the position of objects, a very similar one to their world of work. Mrs. Adela estimates the man's behavior by relating to moral values, but her lack of trust in this respect is transmitted onto the man as a Solidarność activist whose aim would be to fight for workers' rights and democracy. In Mrs. Adela's perspective, the basic distribution of power had not changed that much because her position as a labor worker remained the same – she was still dependent on others placed higher in the working hierarchy. Thus Mrs. Adela does not expose collective values promoted by Solidarność. She alludes neither to democratic values, noble ideas like freedom nor the chance to regain the dignity of a worker. To the contrary, she shows how the development of careers was based on local power relations, not necessarily associated with noble ideas of "Solidarity," how new channels of social upgrading (this time being an activist in a democratic social movement) were occupied by people not representing her as a worker. Again, gender differences discriminating between women's and men's worlds of work are coming to the forefront. The Solidarność movement is described from the perspective of rootedness in *milieu* and not history.⁴⁰ After this comment Mrs. Adela comes back to the rhetoric of fear in order to close this fragment with the comment about having no agency also in a new situation officially defined as a new social agreement – Mrs. Adela "simply" confirms her status. The power related positions were in part newly distributed, partly remained the same, but nevertheless, this did not change her/the workers' position.

In Mrs. Adela's story, positive changes introduced by Solidarność merge with the developing crisis in the early 80s and gradually worsen work conditions as we could see in one of the earlier quoted fragments. She does not see positive effects of the workers' revolt, especially on a collective level. Social changes introduced by Solidarność are as if a herald of future economic and social changes that from Mrs. Adela's view were experienced as a lower income, increasing difficulties with availability of work, and finally privatization.⁴¹ In the narrator's case, she retired so she did not experience the fate of thousands of

⁴⁰ I allude to the concept of rootedness in *milieu* and rootedness in history coined out in the project *Biography and National Identity* based on the life stories of Poles who experienced World War II. The research was conducted in early 1990. In the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Łódź. One of the results of the narrative analysis was identification of two different modes of interpretations of one's biographical experiences when presenting them in frames of local *milieu* or in a broader historical context (Czyżewski 1996).

⁴¹ Although she does not mention it directly both the narrator and the listener, who come from Łódź, know the fate of the local textile industry, which after the crash of the Eastern market in the early 90s, totally collapsed.

female workers who lost their jobs and in many cases they became permanently unemployed. Therefore the stigmatization of these kinds of workers continued, yet in a different decorum of capitalism. In this respect, moving from one system to another appeared to be a very painful process.

An analysis of Mrs. Adela's biography perfectly shows mechanisms of losing agency in the world of work. That is probably the reason for not drawing an enthusiastic or at least positive picture of *Solidarność* times. It is worth referring here to the concept of *homo sovieticus* elaborated by Józef Tischner (1992).⁴² Among other features he exposes especially three values appreciated by *homo sovieticus*: work, power, and dignity. They were framed by the communist ideology and provided background for the described paradoxes of socialism. Work in these terms was defined as the main social value of the system upgrading "men of work," mainly workers, giving them power and a sense of dignity coming from both: appreciation of the world of work and positioning workers as a leading social class. People were taught that these values were guaranteed by the communist system and as a result an attitude of *homo sovieticus* was constructed as a slave-minded man passively accepting the system's expectations. He started revolting against the system when it stopped respecting *his* values. When entering capitalism, *homo sovieticus* was used to his mentality and expected the new system to respect values defined in the previous one. Post-communist societies experienced so many difficulties in the new democratic civil society because people continued to passively expect the mentioned values to be guaranteed privileges, but not individually gained achievements.

Moving from socialism to capitalism has been a long and painful process. I gave this comment to put more light to the discussed problem, but also to show that Mrs. Adela – although she fulfilled the main features of a working class member – did not have a chance to make use of the two mentioned values: power and dignity. Obviously, the discussion of what these values really meant can be considered as one of the key points in contemporary studies on the socialist system. There is no space to present it here, but I tried to show in this chapter to what extent this ideological construction of reality appeared to be false in the face of social construction of reality. Coming from the beginning of this chapter we can see here the double paradox built on the collective social level, as well as on the peripheral level of specificity of the textile industry and female workers.

⁴² The very notion was introduced by Aleksandr Zinowjew, then discussed by Leszek Kołakowski and developed by Józef Tischner. There is no space for reconstructing its meaning elaborated by the above thinkers. Here I refer only to some aspects of Tischner's *homo sovieticus* concept.

Conclusions

My goal was to confront frequently discussed paradoxes of real socialism in sociological and historical literature through a specific case. This, in my view, is not only a good exemplification of those paradoxes, but it also shows how within their framework subsequent paradoxes intrinsic to the place locality might be constructed. In the case in question the measure of this locality is peripherality, whose various aspects were discussed herein. As a reminder, the starting point is the peripherality of Łódź as an industrial city and peripherality of female weavers in their world of work, which also in the time of the People's Republic of Poland was diversified and hierarchical. One of the effects of that peripherality was striking invariability of the world of work, which comprised the work environment, work conditions, and distribution of knowledge and power in subsequent decades of the socialist era. An analysis of the press articles from the 1940s and contemporary narrations, supplemented with documentary films from the 1970s and 1980s, shows changes only in the rhetoric of presenting the world of work, but not its real (r)evolution.

In regards to Mrs. Adela, one can pose a question if her case should be interpreted as a uniquely unlucky confluence of life circumstances. Or, should it be interpreted as an exemplification of not a single, but somehow a significant biographical profile of the period of the People's Republic of Poland? The *microscopic* perspective of description, relying not only on presenting this biography, but equally as important Łódź and its local female laborers, was aiming at expanding the range of analyses on more universal contexts and interpretations of phenomena and social processes (Geertz 2005: 36). Either of the two strategies could be utilized here: recreating my reasoning from details to generalities, or conversely, showing the cases of Łódź and Mrs. Adela against a broader context. The choice of the latter strategy, perhaps misleading in regards to established methodological premises, enables us to fit the case in question in specific chronology and dynamics of (anti)changes during the socialism era, which were contextualized in specific social space and therefore, on the whole, seemed more interesting to me.

The biographical method uses, for example, a distinction between a *life story* built by the narrator and a *life history* – put differently, between life as related and life as lived (Rosenthal 2012: 49). This distinction proves to be very instructive in regards to Mrs. Adela's narration, where certain elements of her life history might indicate potentially alternative interpretations of this biography. They include, for example, taking quite a well-paid job in the city, spatial mobility enabling a perspective beyond the little community of the village, and social advancement of her daughters, who gained higher education. These facts from Mrs. Adela's life allows us to fit in her biography,

in a positive image of the post-war system, the opening of channels for social advancement and creating new structures of opportunities. However, although it was undoubtedly true in other biographical contexts, Mrs. Adela's narration does not substantiate this interpretation. It is hard to perceive her biography as a result of social advancement while it was dominated by the trajectory of suffering inherent in the subsequent stages of her life (social orphanage, tough childhood, living with an alcoholic husband, back-breaking slave labor against the backdrop of her family and everyday life difficulties). The higher education of her daughters is presented in the narration not from a perspective of open structures of opportunities, but as an effect of their own motivation and hardship of their mother's work to gain money to maintain the children. In her story there are no elements indicative of her own sense of advancement. On the contrary – quite a well-paid employment was described in the light of slave-like work conditions, a sense of deprivation with regard to satisfying daily needs: provision shortages, never-ending struggle for existence, and her family and the narrator's invariable sense of tiredness:

[W]hen I come to think about it and say: "How could you stand it? [...] How could you put up with it?, Right?" And, remember you couldn't buy anything then. Here in the country, you couldn't buy anything, you had to stay in Łódź and buy there/ you had to shop around in Łódź, you always managed to hunt for something and buy it. And then you had to come back home, I had three kids/ three daughters, and you had to buy something and/ I could sew, so I did (laughter), and I did something more, and I don't really know. However, two elder daughters could clean and you know, they gave me a hand, but the youngest one, the one I live with here, was six years old, so she was like: after the night shift, she covered me, covered and kissed me. She thought she was doing something good to me, wasn't she? (laughter), but she woke me up, and I was so tired from that, you know. And when you wake up after the night then you often slept [...] and you were tired, anyway. Nights were terrible. Terrible nights for work.

Although Mrs. Adela does not use this term, in many images presented, both she and other female weavers are deprived of dignity in regards to various contexts of their biographies, which on account of the system's considerations were dominated by the world of work. With reference to such cases the paradox of ideological privilege is particularly tangible.

Post scriptum completing this image is nearly a total liquidation of the weaving industry in Łódź. The complex of Uniontex, the Obrońców Pokoju State-owned Textile Company no 2, was partly revitalized, partly fell into ruin. The building of the great Scheibler's factory, so precisely where Mrs. Adela was working, comprises luxury lofts, and their developers and owners willingly refer to the pre-war narration of tycoons rather than the socialist era history of

the facilities – the spinning mill B located on the corner of Przędzalniana and Tymienieckiego streets. Thus the peripherality is enriched with a new meaning – this time in the dimension of a generational history of Łódź female weavers. To a certain extent, their personal biography, whose considerable part was spent working in a production hall, is symbolically invalidated by eliminating it from the fixed reality. Just like Mrs. Adela many years ago could not see effects of her work (endless bales of material disappeared ‘somewhere’), now she cannot build a sense of continuity of the biography through references to sites which disappeared from the topographic and symbolic map of the city.