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An Apartment as a National Issue: On the Exhibitions of the Polish Applied Art Society at the Zachęta Gallery in 1902 and 1908

The Polish Applied Art Society (Towarzystwo Polska Sztuka Stosowana; henceforward: TPSS), founded in Cracow in 1901, began its activity by diagnosing a crisis in culture. We live in hideous boxes, our tastes have become pretentious, we are enfeebled – they wrote. The lack of ease in expression, which is so characteristic of the modern human, testifies to a debilitation of our will and our capability for self-determination. Since the greatest influence on personal development may be attributed to everyday surroundings, any reform ought to begin with changes in the living space. One of the co-founders of the Society, Jerzy Warchałowski, offered the following advice:

Let us burn or discard all the eyesores and the superfluous, useless furnishings in which we live; all those tacky folding screens, stools, lampshades, coverings, shelves full of knick-knacks, fripperies, plush cords, undusted festoons, counterfeit Louis- and Empire-style pieces, made-up habits, silly fads and pretentious trinkets. Who cannot do otherwise should make do with pinewood furniture, but made according to personal needs and comforts, in line with personal thought and will. May people of moderate means no longer emulate lords of the land or clothe themselves in imitations of royal styles, but create an honest, artistic environment out of their own circumstances and preferences.¹

How, then, should people shape the space around them and distinguish authentic needs from artificially imposed fashions? The solutions put forward by the TPSS were to justify consumer choices in the national vein. The Society intended to offer advice on how to make purchases in order not to diminish the value of identity. In that period of European history, the language of economy became one of the means for describing the subjectiveness of the developing nations. The market – which is still believed to reflect the most

1 J. Warchałowski, "Polska sztuka stosowana" [Polish applied art], *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 1908, no. 6, p. 106.

“natural” collective needs – appeared to testify to their tastes and desires, their imagined community of will. Stanisław Witkiewicz, who analysed the same issues that the TPSS did, could therefore prove the organic connection between the Zakopane style and the needs of the nation simply by stating that from the very beginning the demand for Zakopane-style items exceeded the supply.² Thus, the matter of using local design in applied art appears to be related to the development of an international economy, the challenge of competition and the search for expressing identity within this framework.

The two exhibitions organised by the TPSS at the Zachęta Gallery in the first decade of the 20th century focused on these very issues. Interestingly, each of them was designed with very different methods of exhibit presentation. A comparison between the two serves as an illustration of the changes in the perception of living space, reception practices and their connection to commercialism. In this context, the present article shall discuss the layout of the exhibitions and the critical categories that were prevalent in the related press reviews.

Assemblages and dioramas of domesticity

The TPSS exhibition opened at the Zachęta in 1902 was dominated by “assemblages of isolated objects”³ – a phrase used by Richard Etlin in his description of the exhibition in Turin that was organised in that same year. The Italian exhibition juxtaposed two types of presentational “rhetoric”, i.e. that of museum spaces and that of commerce. The former used traditional means such as display cases, whereas the latter lured visitors with carefully arranged interiors – “dioramas of domesticity”.⁴ The same principle is visible in the differences between the two TPSS exhibitions which constitute the topic of the present analysis. The exhibition space at the Zachęta in 1902 did indeed feature a number of niches for displaying furniture, yet these were designed to be viewed by a motionless visitor standing as if in front of a painting. Mieczysław Limanowski, who offered a critical opinion of the exhibition, took note of this impression: “spoon holders were treated as daubs of substance and nailed to Buczacz tapestries (nonsense)”.⁵ One of the niches was filled with a regular composition of papercuts and fabrics placed against a dark, uniformly-coloured

2 S. Witkiewicz, “Styl zakopiański – pokój jadalny” [The Zakopane style – dining room], in: S. Witkiewicz, *Wybór pism estetycznych* [Selected texts on aesthetics], ed. J. Tarnowski, Cracow, 2009, p. 263.

3 R. A. Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture (1890–1940)*, London, 1990, p. 29.

4 M. O’Neill, “Rhetorics of Display: Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau at the Turin Exhibition of 1902”, *Journal of Design History*, 2007, no. 3, pp. 210–213.

5 M. Limanowski, “Zakopane na I wystawie TPSS” [Zakopane at the 1st TPSS exhibition], *Przegląd Zakopiański*, 1902, no. 7, p. 66.



Fig. 1. Niche with exhibits from the “Folk art and artefacts of wooden architecture” section at the TPSS exhibition at Zachęta in 1902, photo by Łukasz Dobrzański, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/5

background (Fig. 1). Numerous specimens of similar items were placed next to one another; pieces of furniture were often arranged in a row, facing the viewer (Fig. 2). The surface of the furniture was also used as a display space for an array of unrelated items – the exposition was composed of intricate compositions of exhibits rather than models of specific rooms (Fig. 3). The underlying idea was to arrive at a symmetrical, aesthetically deliberate layout that reduced the presented items to their visual form. The very same principle was applied during the Exhibition of Industrially Applied Art that was organised in Warsaw in 1881⁶ and then twenty years later in the design of the booths of furniture manufacturers displaying their products at the international exhibition in Glasgow (Fig. 4).

By 1908, however, the TPSS was no longer the same organisation that had designed the first exhibition at the Zachęta. The activity of its members was

6 *Album dzieł sztuki zastosowanej do przemysłu z wystawy urządzanej przez Muzeum Przemysłu i Rolnictwa w Warszawie 1881 roku* [Album of artworks applied in the industry from the exhibition at the Museum of Industry and Agriculture in Warsaw, 1881], Warsaw, 1883, Fig. 96.



Fig. 2. “Folk art and artefacts of wooden architecture” section at the TPSS exhibition at the Zachęta in 1902, photo by Łukasz Dobrzański, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/1



Fig. 3. Niche with exhibits from the “Folk art and artefacts of wooden architecture” section at the TPSS exhibition at the Zachęta in 1902, photo by Łukasz Dobrzański, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/4

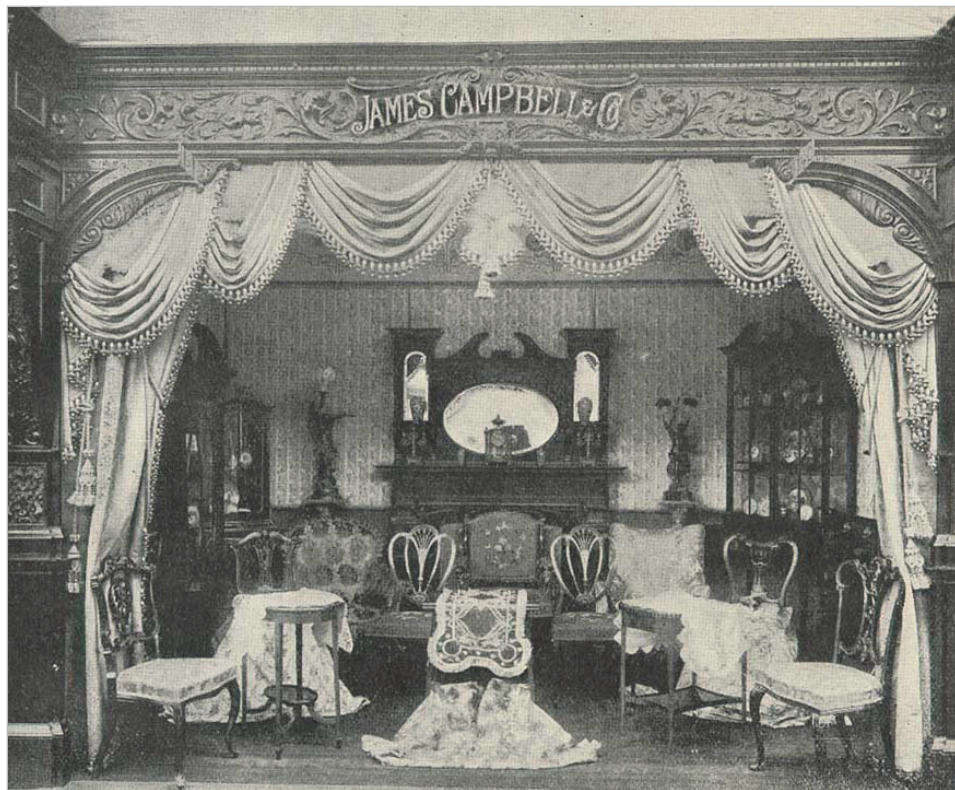


Fig. 4. Stand of James Campbell & Co. at the Glasgow International Exhibition in 1901, http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/images/century/bh12a26_283.jpg [accessed 30 November 2015]

becoming increasingly specialised – most of them were experts in applied art and not artists dabbling in the field in order to broaden the array of means of artistic expression. The organisation also underwent some personnel changes. Włodzimierz Tetmajer, for instance, was among the Society's founders and had helped design the first exhibition in 1902 alongside Jerzy Warchałowski, yet by 1909 relations between the two had become antagonistic enough to involve a duel.⁷ The authority of established specialists in applied art and honorary members of the TPSS also began to fade. Wyspiański died in 1907 and one year later the ailing Stanisław Witkiewicz left for Lovran. In the meantime, Jerzy Warchałowski introduced and promoted new experts, e.g. architects from the circles of the Werkbund that had been established in 1907. When Warchałowski became the editor of *Architekt*, the periodical started to feature

⁷ The conflict arose from a disagreement about the historical landmarks of Cracow. No blood was spilt in the confrontation. See "Estetyczna wojna" [Aesthetic war], *Nowiny*, 27 October 1909.

a growing number of citations from Paul Schultze-Naumburg, an active member of the *Heimatschutz* movement. In 1909 the Technical and Industrial Museum in Cracow published a Polish-language version of *Kunstgewerbe und Architektur* by Hermann Muthesius, who was a reformer of artisan education in Germany and a proponent of the revival of arts and crafts. The translation was the work of the president of the TPSS.

The first exhibition organised at the Zachęta by the TPSS could be regarded as a meeting of two conflicting sides (Warsaw was stereotypically perceived as rational and commerce-oriented while Cracow was viewed as the “cradle of Polish national identity”), yet in 1908 the division was no longer as striking. Some members of the TPSS, such as Edward Trojanowski, Karol Tichy and Józef Czajkowski, were working at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw at the time. The emphasis on utilitarian properties, craftsmanship and the social significance of art in the programme of the Academy may, in turn, be attributed to the influence of Muthesius’s views as expressed in his publication.⁸ Thus the Society had a lasting impact on artistic circles in Warsaw, and this time Warsaw was not following the lead of Cracow but shaping its own culture of habitation.

One of the symptoms of fundamental changes in the perception of architecture that Muthesius had mentioned in his book was a new formula of displaying items that was employed, for example, at the exhibitions in Darmstadt in 1904 and in Dresden in 1906. The focus of the exposition lay not in specific exhibits but in comprehensively designed interiors. These were “exhibitions of houses, not stools, sideboards, cushions and so on”,⁹ which served as an illustration to the groundbreaking conclusion that architecture is an art related to space. The TPSS also rejected the simple perception of an exhibition as a display of exhibits. The exhibition in 1908 focused on categories of living space and interior (replacing that of style and ornament). In order to emphasise the relations between aesthetics, function and the material of which a given item was made, the exhibits were placed as if in an open-air museum, i.e. in their actual, natural surroundings (as opposed to an abstracted museum space). The ceilings in the halls on the upper floors of the Zachęta Gallery were deliberately lowered and the rooms themselves were divided into smaller interiors in which spaces of an apartment were arranged.

In the early 20th century such “natural habitats” were an increasingly frequent presence at various exhibitions. The so-called *interieurs* became an indispensable feature of ethnographic exhibitions. Dioramas were also included in natural history museums, although initially these featured animals from very different geographical environments. The TPSS already had some experience

8 A. Demska, A. Frackiewicz, „Sztuka stosowana w Szkole Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie w latach 1904–1939”, in: *W kręgu sztuki przedmiotu. Studia ofiarowane profesor Irenie Huml przez przyjaciół, kolegów i uczniów*, ed. by Maria Dłutek, Warsaw, 2011, pp. 291–292.

9 H. Muthesius, *Kunstgewerbe und Architektur*, Jena, 1907, pp. 19–20.



Fig. 5. Dining room of Stefan Dziewulski and Antonina Maria Dziewulska née Natanson, designed by Ludwik Wojtyczko, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/16

in designing such an installation, as some of its members were involved in the preparation of “a Cracow dwelling, almost a room furnished as an *interieur*, and exceedingly handsome”¹⁰ at the National Museum in Cracow.

With their second exhibition, the TPSS spared no effort to maintain the illusion of domesticity, caring about such details as window curtains, potted plants on windowsills, food on the table (Fig. 5) and papers scattered about on shelves. One aspect that proved to work in favour of the organisers was the anachronistic architecture of the Zachęta building, whose interior is lit mainly by light coming in through windows in the side walls – Warchałowski suggested that overhead lighting should be avoided at exhibitions of furniture as it ruins the mood of domesticity.¹¹ Searching for measures to reinforce the impression of “cosiness”, the TPSS could also draw from the long tradition of German *Wohnstuben*, which was one of the more popular elements of arts and crafts exhibitions since the one in Munich in 1876. The chief designer involved in the preparation of this exhibition was Gabriel von Seidl, who was also the author of the German chamber at the Turin fair. Stefan Muthesius noted that these exhibitions were meant to present not works of art but entire lifestyles; visitors did not come there looking for historical knowledge but for sensual impressions and immersion in a distinct

10 “Z Muzeum Narodowego” [From the National Museum], *Czas*, 1903, no. 294 (evening edition), p. 1.

11 J. Warchałowski, *Wnętrza i meble* [Interiors and furnishings], Cracow, 1920, pp. 5–6.

atmosphere related to a given model of living expressing the culture of their forebears.¹² It may be argued that the above-mentioned changes in exhibition design indicate the development of a phenomenon that Jonathan Crary labelled as “a model of the human subject in which perception is no longer conceived in terms of the classical model of acquiring knowledge but is instead synonymous with the possibilities of motor activity”.¹³

The assemblage-like arrangement of items at the 1902 exhibition offered no spatial or tactile experience to the visitor, prompted no questions regarding the functionality of the pieces and did not encourage him to try them out to see if they were comfortable. And although the exhibits presented by the TPSS in 1908 could not be touched, their spatial arrangement created the impression of tangibility and evoked sensations that the audience knew from elsewhere. Corroboration for this assumption may be found in press reviews, the analysis of which facilitates the identification of a fundamental change in the parlance of design criticism. In 1902 the language was dominated by categories used to describe representational art, in line with views reinforced by the profound influence of such personages as Rudolf von Eitelberger, the director of the Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Vienna. The quality of the line and colour of artistic craft was meant to teach aesthetics and to constitute a gateway to higher art.¹⁴ At the end of the first decade of the 20th century this approach was overshadowed by the increasingly prominent tendency to ascribe moral value to aesthetic choices. In accordance with the burgher principle of *mehr sein als scheinen* (more substance than semblance), the tradition of architectural historicism was denounced as “parvenu deceit”,¹⁵ while the authenticity of a given lifestyle became the sought quality. New display methods, postulating a deeper involvement of the audience, were introduced to serve that purpose. The following sections of this article shall illustrate this on the basis of press

12 S. Muthesius, “The ‘altdeutsche Zimmer’, or Cosiness in Plain Pine: An 1870s Munich Contribution to the Definition of Interior Design”, *Journal of Design History*, 2003, no. 4, pp. 269–290.

13 J. Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Cambridge MA, 2001, p. 352.

14 The relevant discussion between Zenon Przesmycki and Eligiusz Niewiadomski, held in the context of the 1902 exhibition by the TPSS, was described by Irena Huml in her work entitled “Zachęta eksponuje sztukę stosowaną (wokół wystawy 1902 roku)” [The Zachęta exhibits applied art (on the 1902 exhibition)], in: *Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych. Materiały z sesji* [Association for the Encouragement of Fine Arts: Session materials], ed. by J. Sosnowska, Warsaw, 1993, pp. 59–66. See also M. Rampley, “Design Reform in the Habsburg Empire: Technology, Aesthetics and Ideology”, *Journal of Design Reform*, 2010, no. 3, pp. 249–250.

15 G. Bandmann, “Der Wandel der Materialbewertung in der Kunsttheorie des 19. Jahrhunderts”, in: *Beiträge zur Theorie der Künste im 19. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. von H. Koopmann, J. A. Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth, Frankfurt am Main, 1971, p. 133. Cf. T. Nipperdey, “War die Wilhelminische Gesellschaft eine Untertanen-Gesellschaft?”, in: idem, *Nachdenken über die deutsche Geschichte*, Munich, 1986, p. 174.

materials pertaining to both exhibitions and shall present the changes in the context of early 20th-century views on methods of influencing the consumer.

1902: *pêle-mêle*

The second exhibition by the TPSS, opened at the Zachęta Gallery on 30 September 1902, may be described as a fiasco. Its reviewers noted the paramount importance of the development of applied art yet considered the exposition unsatisfactory. This was due to the fact that TPSS members and the intended audience represented two different approaches in terms of the function of exhibitions and the favoured critical categories. Organising an event of this type at a time when controversies surrounding the Zakopane style had not yet abated must have been an unrewarding task. Stanisław Witkiewicz himself condemned the enterprise as undermining the significance of the Zakopane style;¹⁶ another of its champions, the already mentioned Mieczysław Limanowski, became involved in a debate with Jerzy Warchałowski that was published in *Przegląd Zakopiański*. The debate focused on the issue of the first TPSS exhibition that had been organised at the National Museum in Cracow – the very same set of exhibits, with minor changes, was later presented at the Zachęta. Limanowski claimed that “the impact of the only valuable items presented at this exhibition, namely those from Zakopane, was much belittled”.¹⁷

On the other hand, an even more significant number of reviewers stated that the Zakopane-style exhibits were overrepresented at the exhibition which, in their estimation, suggested a biased and simplified view of folk arts and crafts. Some even claimed that the entire exhibition was devoted to art “from the Tatra regions”.¹⁸ This opinion cannot be regarded as fully accurate, since the list of exhibits indicates that items from the Podhale region constituted ca. 17% of all objects on display and that the TPSS attempted to present a relatively diverse image of “indigenous” art. The exhibition featured items from the entire Kingdom of Poland and the regions under Austrian rule. The catalogue mentions, for instance, the vicinity of Cracow, the Kuiavia and Kurpie regions, Łowicz, Sieradz, effectively all governorates from Kielce to Vilnius, but also Upper Silesia, Austrian Silesia and the Duchy of Teschen. This diversity reflected the dense network of ethnographic collections (both institutional and private¹⁹)

16 “The name of the Zakopane style was removed from the catalogues of the exhibition by the Polish Applied Art Society and replaced with the label ‘contemporary efforts’, which instantly reduced our entire oeuvre to floundering, fruitless efforts [...]”, S. Witkiewicz, op. cit., p. 264.

17 M. Limanowski, op. cit., p. 66.

18 *Kurier Poranny*, 1902, no. 272, p. 1.

19 The owners of all exhibits were carefully listed in the catalogue, see *Katalog II-ej wystawy krakowskiego Towarzystwa Sztuki Stosowanej* [Catalogue of the 2nd TPSS exhibition], Warsaw, 1902.

that existed at that period, even though the organisers of the exhibition made no attempt to explain the lack of items from lands under Prussian administration.

The heterogeneity of the exhibits made it more difficult for the audience to assess the content of the exposition. Confusion surrounded the exhibition; opinions varied even as to the number of sections into which it was divided. Press reviewers expressed uncertainty regarding the primary subject of the exhibition – was it devoted to history, ethnography, the Zakopane style, national styles or arts and crafts? The weekly *Gazeta Rzemieślnicza* was asking whether “this is supposed to be an exhibition of ethnographic material, bringing together items produced in the past (Slutsk sashes) or at present [...] among common people? Or is it a general arts and crafts exhibition of items in the indigenous style [...]”.²⁰ The TPSS assembled exhibits matching all of these categories. A substantial portion of the exhibition was taken up by *kontusz* sashes, whose connection to the multitude of exhibited examples of folk arts and crafts remained unclear to the visitors. The above-mentioned folk items, in turn, included Easter eggs, household objects and garments, but also photographs of wooden architecture (this section took up nearly 60% of the exhibition). The section labelled as “Contemporary Efforts”, in turn, was much smaller than expected. Among other exhibits, it included a desk by Wojciech Brzega, a Sèvres porcelain tea set designed by Stanisław Witkiewicz, the famous model of the Pod Jedłami villa rejected from the Galician pavilion at the Paris fair in 1900, but also less known designs by Józef Witkiewicz promoting the style of Kuiavia and Masuria,²¹ as well as pieces of furniture designed by the TPSS members. In her article for *Bluszcz*, Zofia Seidlerowa noted that the title of the exhibition was therefore inaccurate:

Although the Cracow Society elected to call the exhibition they organised very generally as “applied arts”, I shall be bold enough to offer a word of correction. The section of the exhibition devoted to applied arts is actually exceedingly modest, while the majority of the items amassed by the Cracow Society is composed of highly valuable ethnographic material, works of folk art and examples of Polish wooden architecture.²²

What is more, the bilingual catalogue of the exhibition contained no explanatory notes pertaining to the items – a flaw that was noticed by Zofia Skorobohata-Stankiewicz.²³ The publication consisted of a rather unwieldy list of numbered exhibits adorned with several vignette frames inspired by folk

20 Rzemieślnik, “Wystawa sztuki stosowanej w Warszawie” [The exhibition of applied art in Warsaw], *Gazeta Rzemieślnicza*, 1902, no. 38, p. 299.

21 See “Nowy styl swojski. Rozmowa z p. Józefem Witkiewiczem” [The new native style. A conversation with Józef Witkiewicz], *Życie i Sztuka*, 1902, no. 41, pp. 424–425.

22 Z. Seidlerowa, “Wystawa Krakowskiego Towarzystwa sztuki stosowanej” [The exhibition of the Cracow society of applied art], *Bluszcz*, 1902, no. 43, p. 512.

23 Z. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, “Nasza sztuka stosowana” [Our applied art], *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 1902, no. 45, p. 556.

ornamentation.²⁴ Despite the criticism, the items were not listed in an entirely random order but according to the region of origin – the division was not, however, marked in the catalogue layout. In her review for *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, Zofia Skorobohata-Stankiewicz wrote:

Published with much attention to external form, the catalogue nevertheless fails to fulfil its function, which is to make it easier for visitors to regard the items on display. The catalogue does not divide the exhibits into specific groups, but assigns them ordinal numbers in an entirely random fashion. At the exhibition itself visitors also need to devote much time and attention in order to arrive at some necessary logical pattern of the display.²⁵

The exhibition did not conform to the expositional model the audience came to expect, as its organisation did not resemble that of museum exhibitions – the items were said to be “mixed up *pêle-mêle*”.²⁶ This was not conducive to isolating a “logical pattern” accordant with what was known about styles at that time, i.e. observing supra-regional similarities in ornamentation that were intended to prove the historical uniformity of Polish art. Zofia Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, for instance, found the decorative motifs from Zakopane interestingly similar to those from Samogitia, while Zofia Seidlerowa noted the resemblance between Kurpian and Silesian art. Both reviewers agreed, however, that the chaotic layout of the exhibition hindered an analysis of this kind. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz was also interested in comparing the degree to which the folk motifs were present in the works of artists, yet the spatial arrangement of the exhibits did not emphasise that either. In some sections of the exposition, items from various regions were grouped according to their function – “spoon to spoon, lace to lace, chest to chest”,²⁷ as Limanowski ironically observed (Fig. 3). In his view, such a layout erased all traces of the connection between the Zakopane style and art from the Podhale region. He proposed that specimens of highlander arts and crafts be displayed next to the designs by Witkiewicz and alongside figures from Władysław Matlakowski’s publication in order to explain the “logic behind the Zakopane style”.²⁸

Thus, the disputes regarding the 1902 exhibition revolved primarily around the spatial arrangement of the items, as it was not in line with established views on the history of the Zakopane style and did not offer favourable

24 According to a note in *Kurier Warszawski*, 1902, no. 270, p. 4, the catalogue was accompanied by more than ten illustrations, yet I was unable to corroborate this information.

25 Z. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, op. cit., p. 556.

26 Albertus, “Wystawa sztuki stosowanej” [The exhibition of applied art], *Życie i Sztuka*, 1902, no. 43, pp. 430–431.

27 M. Limanowski, op. cit., p. 66.

28 M. Limanowski, “O Zakopane na I wystawie Tow. Polskiej Sztuki Stos. w Krakowie” [Zakopane at the 1st exhibition of the Polish Applied Art Society in Cracow], *Przegląd Zakopiański*, 1902, no. 10, p. 96.

conditions for systematising ethnographical knowledge. Jerzy Warchałowski addressed these issues and refuted Limanowski's accusations in *Przegląd Zakopiański*:

In principle, the exhibition was not intended to [...] tutor artists, but to "bedazzle" them with fresh and new material which, if it struck a chord within them, must have held something of their own bloodline [...]. As far as visitors are concerned, that first exhibition aimed to inspire them to provide enthusiastic and wholehearted support for our endeavours. Thus, a strictly geographical arrangement of the items would not have fulfilled that aim.²⁹

The TPSS wished to arrive at an expositional model which would, first and foremost, amplify the emotional and aesthetic impact of the exhibits. Warchałowski explained that, educational as it may have been, he could not display sketches next to the chests that had inspired them, as this would diminish the expressive power of the artistic designs. In his estimation, works on paper paled in juxtaposition with full-dimensional objects which, in turn, would not look favourable under large-scale drawings. Moreover, the designers of the exhibition sought to break away from the method of creation that was prevalent in native applied arts which, in turn, did not necessarily have to be based on "the common denominator in style" or on superficial copying of decorative motifs. Defending the TPSS exhibition, Edward Trojanowski added that the "character lies in the shape, never in *leluja* motifs or hearts glued to the surface of teacups".³⁰ Indigenouseousness was to be sought in the manner of emotional influence as effected by basic artistic means and not by simple imitation of folk decorative patterns.³¹

By experimenting – still ineptly – with methods of exposition, the TPSS wished to avoid ingrained habits of perception, i.e. comparative and historical analysis of ornaments. Although still prevalent in popularising articles published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, this approach was already under criticism based on Gottfried Semper's theory of the origins of style.³² Early attempts at defining

29 J. Warchałowski, "Alarm z powodu I wystawy TPSS w Krakowie" [The upheaval regarding the 1st TPSS exhibition in Cracow], *Przegląd Zakopiański*, 1902, no. 9, pp. 83–84.

30 E. Trojanowski, "Pierwsza wystawa Towarzystwa Polska Sztuka Stosowana" [The first exhibition of the Polish Applied Art Society], *Czas*, 1902, no. 25 (evening edition), p. 1.

31 This paradigm shift in the theory of architecture and applied arts was analysed in a slightly different context by Marta Leśniakowska, "Jan Koszczyc Witkiewicz (1881–1958) i styl zakopiański" [Jan Koszczyc Witkiewicz (1881–1958) and the Zakopane style], in: *Stanisław Witkiewicz. Człowiek – artysta – myśliciel* [Stanisław Witkiewicz: the man – the artist – the thinker], ed. Z. Moździeż, Zakopane, 1997.

32 A meaningful example may be found in the article entitled "Źródła stylu zakopiańskiego" [Sources of the Zakopane style] by the painter Julian Maszyński, published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 1901, no. 8, pp. 145–146. Maszyński noted the following: "Upon comparing the similarities between the Zakopane style with these 17th-century relics [from Lublin], I hypothesised that at that time the style was widespread in the

their collective standpoint as undertaken by the TPSS members referred to the categories introduced by Semper, thus constituting the first steps in the realm of discourse of functionalism and truth to materials. In their view the character of an object ought to be associated not with the ornamentation which covers it but with its shape and the strength of expression stemming from the method of processing the material and adjusting the form to the substance, which, in turn, was to be emphasised by juxtaposing items with a similar function. The unsuccessful exhibition was therefore an attempt at finding ways of display that would amplify this emotional effect and lead to new ways of describing applied arts.

1908: where are the roosters?

In accordance with the new expectations, the audience of the 1908 exhibition was much more impressed by the charming rooms of the apartments than by pieces made by Józef Mehoffer and examples of traditionally displayed arts and crafts, i.e. designs of polychrome ornaments and stained glass, posters, tapestries, woodcuts, book covers and illustrations, but also works of the Warsaw School of Photography.³³ It was repeatedly emphasised that the rooms arranged in the exhibition space had “a pleasant, residential air”.³⁴ Interestingly, the exposition recreated actual interiors from the apartments of well-known personages.³⁵ Particularly strong emotions were inspired by Władysław Reymont’s study designed by Edward Trojanowski – *Lato* was then being published in instalments in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*. The exhibition showcased one more interior from Reymont’s Warsaw home, namely the dining room by Józef Czajkowski. The same designer was the author of the hall from the apartment of the President of Cracow, also presented at the Zachęta. Other works from Cracow included furniture owned by Tadeusz Żeleński and his

entire country and that its remnants survived only in places where they were not ousted by the drive towards modernity, new styles and new fashions”. It was such opinions that Marian Wawrzeński responded to by clarifying that Zakopane was not a cultural enclave that had engaged in any international trade, arguing that the striking similarities in regional folk ornamentation stem from the methods of processing wood and the limited spectrum of effects that could be produced with the appropriate tools. See “Wyjaśnienie w sprawie stylu zwanego zakopiańskim” [A word of clarification regarding the so-called Zakopane style], *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 1902, no. 35, pp. 435–437.

33 See the catalogue *Wystawa Krakowskiego Towarzystwa „Polska Sztuka Stosowana”*, Warsaw, 1908.

34 “Ze sztuki” [On art], *Kurier Warszawski*, 1908, no. 32, pp. 4–5.

35 The 1902 exhibition also featured this element – furniture from the study of Karol Potkański, item 257, in: *Katalog II-ej wystawy krakowskiego Towarzystwa Sztuki Stosowanej*, op. cit., p. 37.

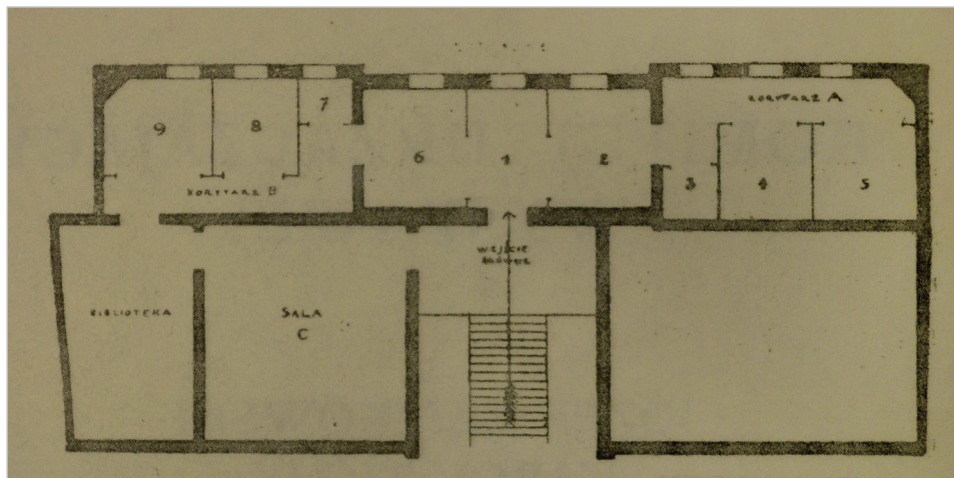


Fig. 6. Floor plan of the 1908 TPSS exhibition at the Zachęta, after: *Wystawa Krakowskiego Towarzystwa „Polska Sztuka Stosowana”*, Warsaw, 1908, p. 5

Key:

1. Antechamber, designed by Karol Tichy
 2. Władysław Reymont's study, designed by Edward Trojanowski
 3. Fragment of a room in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Żeleński, designed by Stanisław Wyspiański
 4. Dining room of Mr. and Mrs. Dziewulski, designed by Ludwik Wojtyczko
 5. Bedroom of Mrs. Leon Papieski, designed by Edward Trojanowski
 6. Antechamber from the apartment of the President of Cracow, designed by Józef Czajkowski
 7. Fragment of the living room of Mr. and Mrs. Żeleński, designed by Stanisław Wyspiański
 8. Władysław Reymont's dining room, designed by Józef Czajkowski
 9. Room with decorative works by Józef Mehoffer
- Corridors A and B displaying "miscellaneous items"
- Room C: prints and decorative designs

wife Zofia, while the Warsaw interiors were represented by a dining room from the home of Stefan Dziewulski and Antonina Maria née Natanson, designed by Ludwik Wojtyczko, and the bedroom of Maria Papieska née Berent, outlined by Edward Trojanowski (exhibition plan: Fig. 6).

Jerzy Warchałowski speculated that visitors coming to the Zachęta would ask in astonishment "Where are the roosters?",³⁶ thus expecting to see a typical exhibition of folk ornamentation, while the "quotational" method of drawing inspiration, typical of national styles, had already been abandoned; for example, the desk designed by Wojciech Brzega (Fig. 7, on the right) presented at the exhibition in 1902 combined the constructional elements of many different types of objects from the Zakopane region: the legs were modelled after those of a decorative table (Fig. 3), whereas the top section

³⁶ J. Warchałowski, "Polska sztuka stosowana" [Polish applied art], op. cit.



Fig. 7. “Contemporary Efforts” section at the 1902 TPSS exhibition at the Zachęta, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/3

resembled kitchen appliances such as shelves and spoon holders. In 1908 such an approach was already deemed unacceptable. The table designed by Edward Trojanowski for Reymont’s apartment (Fig. 4) evoked equally clear associations with Zakopane, yet the effect was achieved only by the use of characteristic notches which emphasised the features of the material and drew attention to significant elements of the construction – anticipating the crystal shapes of “native” *art déco*.

The audience of the second TPSS exhibition spoke using the same language as that of the members of the Society; the categories of function and truth to materials had already become familiar to a more general public. Reviewers commented on both the harmony of colour and proportions (in line with traditional formal analysis) and on the logic of construction or the choice of material; thus, pieces of furniture were still described by means of terms known from analyses of painting and visual arts; this, however, did not prevent the critics from identifying new issues. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, for instance, found Czajkowski’s design of a dining room “rather unfortunate” in terms of colour, yet interesting in the “linework”. In her description of Papieska’s bedroom (Fig. 8), the reviewer noted that the decoration did not match the material used (“motifs borrowed from some ancient works of art from Babylon or



Fig. 8. Bedroom of Maria Papieska née Berent (fragment), designed by Edward Trojanowski, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/14

Assyria, with no consideration for the difference in material”) and suggested that the ornaments should be adjusted to fit “utilitarian needs”.³⁷

The modernist form of the furniture was no longer contested. In 1902 the scantiness of references to folk art in furniture design by Trojanowski and Tichy was noted with reproach and regarded as proof that this style was not “national” enough. The reviewers of the next exhibition, however, appreciated the fact that the designers had avoided the temptation to copy motifs directly. The new style was recognised as containing Biedermeier, “manorial” inspirations,³⁸ identified, as it would seem, not as a result of an analysis of the form but – as the organisers of the exhibition expected – through “empathising with” and feeling the “atmosphere” of the entire composition. Eligiusz Niewiadomski highly praised the exhibition, writing that the furniture on display evoked “half-forgotten sunny memories of early childhood”

37 Z. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, “Polska sztuka stosowana” [Polish applied art], *Bluszcz*, 1908, no. 9, pp. 92–93.

38 Such associations could be corroborated by comparing photographs from the exhibition and the designs for the manor in Opinogóra as published in the 9th annual publication by the TPSS.

and contained something “of those pleasant times when our grandmothers – then still young and beautiful – sat at the spinet and sang that memorable song about Philo to comely lancers”.³⁹

The review in *Świat* was similar in tone. The rooms at the exhibition supposedly “made one want to stay and live there”.⁴⁰ The audience took pleasure in succumbing to impressions and interpreting the mood evoked by each of the interiors. When looking at Reymont’s study, Adolf Nowaczyński felt “creative serenity and peaceful prosperity”, hypothesising that such furniture transforms a writer from a “flying Dutchman” into a “settled citizen”.⁴¹ Skorobohata-Stankiewicz appreciated the careful planning of the room’s layout, placing herself in the position of its occupant:

The author of *The Peasants* must feel tranquil and serene when surrounded by such unobtrusive harmony of quiet, gentle hues with slightly cold, blueish undertones. The furniture is rather heavy in shape, straight-backed semicircular armchairs, a sober round table and close to it – almost within arm’s reach – two beautifully comfortable bookcases of grey-coloured wood decorated in the Zakopane style. The entire room seems sombre, focused and conducive to intellectual pursuits.⁴²

It must, however, be noted that all remarks on the comfort of furniture or its “bourgeois unseatability” – a phrase used by Nowaczyński in reference to Wyspiański’s furniture – were made on the basis of visual impressions. Inviting as the display space may have seemed, the neatly arranged furniture could not be sat on, as it was protected and closed off by museum lines (Fig. 9). Thus the actual possibility of viewing the exhibits was rather similar at both the TPSS exhibitions. What changed was the repertoire of descriptive categories and the model of exhibiting, which brought to the foreground those features of the items on display that had hitherto remained unnoticed. These attempts at employing notions of a new paradigm illustrate how the logic of construction and functionality became elements of “tectonic” aesthetics.⁴³

39 E. Niewiadomski, “O polskiej sztuce stosowanej i jej przyjęciu w Warszawie” [On Polish applied art and its reception in Warsaw], *Witcz*, 1 May 1908, pp. 364–365.

40 W., “Wystawa krakowskiego Tow. ‘Polska Sztuka Stosowana’” [The exhibition of the Polish Applied Art Society from Cracow], *Świat*, 1908, no. 5, p. 19.

41 A. Nowaczyński, “‘Sztuka stosowana’ w Warszawie” [‘Applied art’ in Warsaw], *Prawda*, 1908, no. 6, p. 70. In fact, Reymont rarely made use of his Warsaw apartment, having spent the first years of the 20th century abroad. His letters and writings contained no reference to the interior presented at the Zachęta, yet it might be surmised that it suited his tastes and needs, as well as his ideas on what the workplace of a proponent of nationalist ideas should look – given the fact that he was said to write clad in a lounging robe from Zakopane. See J. Tabencki, *Reymont w Otwocku*, Otwock, 2005, p. 4.

42 Z. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, “Polska sztuka stosowana” [Polish applied art], op. cit., p. 92.

43 On debates regarding the relation between function and style in modernism, see M. Bushart, *Adolf Behne, Walter Gropius und die Stildebatte*, in: *Nation, Style, Modernism*,



Fig. 9. Władysław Reymont's study, designed by Edward Trojanowski, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/15

The audience gradually learnt to notice and label them and to identify them – to use contemporaneous expressions – with rationality, robustness, energy, hygiene, boldness, fraternity or vitality. This created a particular set of associations for constructional clarity and simplicity of form, which shaped what Zofia Skorobohata-Stankiewicz labelled as “the ethics of decorative arts”.

Schaufenster-Qualität

The organisation of the first exhibition by the TPSS at the Zachęta was affected by animosities between Warsaw and Cracow, the analysis of which may perhaps be useful in presenting a broader context for contemporaneous discussions regarding the layout of the exhibitions. The Warsaw periodical *Gazeta Rzemieślnicza* accused the exhibition's organisers of “provincial machinations”; the time for submitting works allegedly amounted to only five days while the

eds. J. Purchla, W. Tegethoff, Cracow–Munich, 2006, pp. 201–220 and F. Passanti, “The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 1997, no. 4, pp. 438–451.

criteria of assessment were deemed unclear.⁴⁴ In response to such criticism, *Kurier Poranny* explained that the entries could qualify if “they did not show signs of imitating foreign art”⁴⁵ – in other words, they were judged on the basis of their originality, understood according to the new marketing strategy which was then being introduced in various centres of artistic industry. Jerzy Warchałowski clarified this approach by referring to Muthesius’s view that a recognisable national style translates into economic success.⁴⁶ In practice, the application of academic rules of good taste and the principle of *mimesis* to applied arts led to copying foreign products; domestic art could only compete with those in terms of price. It was therefore deemed advisable to search for aesthetic originality – the reform of artistic and vocational education in Germany as postulated by Muthesius was meant to institutionalise manufacture that would be free of imitation. From then on, a craftsman’s choices were to be inspired not by drawings but by his knowledge of the material.⁴⁷

Such ideals were not propagated during courses at the Warsaw Museum of Crafts and Applied Art that were promoted by *Gazeta Rzemieślnicza*. The periodical’s opinion on the TPSS exhibition most likely came from the representatives of the museum. To them, copying reputable models constituted the basis for the “aesthetic amelioration” of Warsaw’s arts and crafts, which entailed a “philological” knowledge of historical styles that was in line with the positivist philosophy equating good taste with civilisational development. Bolesław Prus had frequently voiced his opinion on applied arts, arguing that the quality of domestic products could be improved through systematisation of knowledge regarding existing styles. He stated that one of the more comprehensive pattern books – for instance *La composition décorative* by Pierre-Henri Mayeux – should be translated into Polish so that people working in the “domain of ornamentation” could answer the needs of the market with full professionalism.⁴⁸

The collection of the Museum of Crafts and Applied Art, which was intended to serve this very purpose, resembled what Warchałowski referred to as *Schreckenskammer*.⁴⁹ The photographs show a repository of knick-knacks representing a wide array of styles from various epochs (Fig. 10). A sleigh decorated with a Neo-Rococo motif stands next to a chair from Zakopane, a cabinet for displaying porcelain vessels, some weaponry and an *all’antica* vase

44 Rzemieślnik, op. cit., p. 299.

45 *Kurier Poranny*, 1902, no. 257, p. 2.

46 J. Warchałowski, *O sztuce stosowanej* [On applied art.], Cracow, 1904, pp. 9–10. Cf. H. Muthesius, op. cit., p. 142.

47 J. V. Maciuka, “Art in the Age of Government Intervention: Hermann Muthesius, Sachlichkeit, and the State, 1897–1907”, *German Studies Review*, 1998, no. 2, pp. 285–308.

48 B. Prus, *Kroniki*, compiled by Z. Szweykowski, Warsaw, 1964, vol. 13, p. 329.

49 Warchałowski used the term in his criticism of a Lvov exhibition of ecclesiastical art, which was similar in character. J. Warchałowski, “Wystawa kościelna we Lwowie” [Exhibition of ecclesiastical art in Lvov], *Architekt*, 1909, no. 8, p. 140.

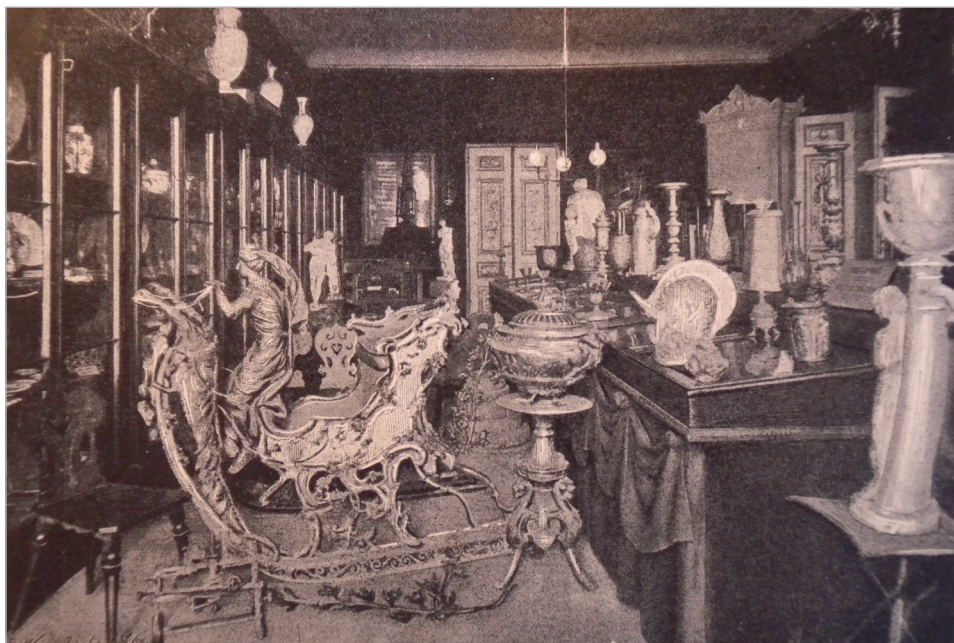


Fig. 10. Collection of the Warsaw Museum of Crafts and Applied Art, after: *Dziesięciolecie Muzeum Rzemiosł i Sztuki Stosowanej 1891–1901*, Warsaw, 1902

supported by a female figure. Further in the background one can see small copies of the Venus de Milo and the Farnese Hercules – tools for educating in accordance with classical ideals and thus useless in the search for originality. Warchałowski borrowed the German term denoting a collection of bad examples from the exposition designed by Gustav Edmund Pazaurek for the Landesgewerbemuseum in Stuttgart and modelled after the Chamber of Horrors exhibited at the London Museum of Manufacturers. Pazaurek, a member of the Werkbund, had introduced a classification of kitsch based on principles of Muthesius's tectonic art. Categories such as *Material-Pimpeleien*, *Hochzeitsgeschenke-Kitsch* or *Hurra-Kitsch* (e.g. a stein in the shape of Bismarck's head) were used to stigmatise illogical construction and disregard for the properties of the material or the functionality of the items, and thus to propagate the "sincerity" of expression and rational needs.⁵⁰

Thus, the rather trivial discord between the organisers of the exhibition and the circles of Warsaw's craftsmen may be portrayed against the background of wide-ranging discussions regarding the role of applied arts. The criticism formulated in the parlance of the German *Kunstgewerbe* circles introduced moral considerations into the discussion on the form of the commodities and their

50 G. E. Pazaurek, *Geschmacksverirrungen im Kunstgewerbe*, Stuttgart, 1919 (first edition 1909).

manufacture as well as on the methods of exhibiting them. The stakes were high, since the new way of designing interiors – “sincere, with no claptrap, no duplication” – was to lead to the emergence of a “stronger culture”.⁵¹

Jerzy Warchałowski wondered, therefore, how simple designs could compete with a “shop window hung with trinkets”,⁵² which drew the attention of passers-by, with the trivial attractiveness of the hitherto prevailing models of arts and crafts. The primary recipients of applied arts should have no longer been sought among sophisticated gallery-goers, but among the crowds in the street, as they were hungry for novelty and susceptible to marketing tricks. Thus, a movement aimed at the restoration of crafts strove to change the habits of the consumers and to introduce a new style into the realm of commerce. The early years of the 20th century were a period of an intense struggle against *Schaufenster-Qualität*. This term was used by Georg Simmel to indicate the connection between the form of an item and the principles of free-market economics. He associated the appearance of the aesthetic surplus with competition and the prevalence of supply over demand.⁵³ This led to attempts at distinguishing a product from all others by making it more visible via the simplest means available: a more complex form, greater concentration of the ornaments, more vivid hues, etc.

Such practices were apparent in design, leading to the above-mentioned “horrors”, as well as in architecture, at various kinds of exhibitions both domestic and international. A model criticism of these was expressed by Warchałowski in his review of the Exhibition of Industry and Agriculture organised in Częstochowa in 1909. He accused the architects of “non-constructural patterns”, of using motifs associated with brick or stone edifices to wooden ones, of “illogical formwork” and of obscuring the functions of buildings with an unclear form. He also railed at “the aesthetics of advertising” which manifested itself, for instance, in “seas of flags” or constructions such as “the inevitable kiosk made of barrels”.⁵⁴ The same features were mentioned in the debate regarding the aesthetics of shop windows – another topic in which Warchałowski was keenly interested. Commentators advised that displays be arranged in a more tasteful manner, since a cluttered window made even quality goods appear cheap and tacky. “Outlandish” ideas such as building obelisks or pyramids of canned fish or boxes of soap were fiercely criticised; it was argued that such effects may seem impressive to some yet do not conform to the modern tendency towards displaying each item individually by exposing its basic properties. Recounting the progress that the Germans had made

51 J. Warchałowski, “O sztuce stosowanej”, op. cit., p. 106.

52 Ibid., p. 1.

53 G. Simmel, “Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung”, *Die Zeit* (Wien), 25 Juli 1896, p. 60. On Simmel’s impact on the Werkbund, see F. J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War*, New Haven–London, 1996, e.g. pp. 52–54, 64–66.

54 J. Warchałowski, “Z powodu wystawy w Częstochowie” [In reference to the exhibition in Częstochowa], *Architekt*, 1909, no. 10, pp. 179–180.

in this respect, the Berlin correspondent of *Przegląd Tygodniowy* stated that “one should most of all strive for harmony between the form and the character of the items on display. Bolts of cloth used to be arranged in pillars, piles and pyramids, which testified to the skill of the decorator but fell short of demonstrating the use of linen, batiste or velvet”.⁵⁵ Warchałowski summarised his thoughts in this respect by stating that chaos, tumult and gaudiness tire onlookers with too many stimuli and ruin their tastes.⁵⁶

This may be perceived as a twisted reply to Karl Marx’s proposition regarding a “clear and rational” form reflecting the utilitarian aspects of everyday life and supplanting the falseness upon which the fetishism of commodities is based.⁵⁷ The commercial means that had developed in the 19th century were already deemed distasteful, whereas “clarity and systematicity” seemed appealing. These were the new methods of drawing attention, a form of advertising which “beckons the busy passer-by with its siren song, making him stop for a moment”.⁵⁸

A cursory look at the list of owners of the furniture displayed in 1908 at the Zachęta shows that the interiors presented at the exhibition came from the apartments of the intelligentsia, mainly members of the Warsaw elite. The remarkable nature of such a solution becomes apparent when the exposition is compared to the exhibition of Architecture and Interiors in Horticultural Surroundings that was organised in Cracow in 1912. It featured model apartments, perfect examples aimed at various social groups. The exhibition in Zachęta, in turn, offered a glimpse into the house of the burgher, even though limiting access to such interiors belonged to the more important methods of maintaining the social hierarchy. The organisers’ choice of display, infringing on crucial distinctions between the private and the public, was justified by the noble ideal of propagating the national culture of living.

It is therefore possible to isolate the moment in time in which the aesthetics of everyday objects (commodities) began to be associated with a certain set of morals. The dining room in the home of the young Dziewulski⁵⁹ couple or the bedroom of Leon Papieski’s⁶⁰ wife testified to a distinct consumer approach that emerged in early 20th century in connection with the development of the

55 T., “Konkurs wystaw sklepowych” [The shop window contest], *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 1902, no. 35, p. 432.

56 J. Warchałowski, “Z powodu wystawy...”, op. cit., p. 178.

57 K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 81, quoted after: T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, London, 1988, p. 18.

58 T., “Konkurs wystaw sklepowych”, op. cit., pp. 431–432.

59 Stefan Dziewulski was a lawyer and an economist famous for his patriotic and charitable activity. See *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. 6, pp. 176–177.

60 Papieski was a lawyer and a committee member of the Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts [Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych]. The son of an industrialist from Słuck (*PSB*, vol. 25, pp. 169–171), he legitimised his social status not only by his education and professional work but also by his impeccable taste.

international market and the search for new strategies for fighting off competition. By purchasing products of local interior design, the patriotic intelligentsia wished to support the economic sovereignty of their nation and to portray their reluctance in following fashions in interior design as a question of ethics. Sincerity of expression and originality of style were meant to indicate the autonomy of taste, thus legitimising the sovereignty of the entire nation as possessing a distinct character and preferences. The rational simplicity of construction was a metaphor for non-pretentious mores that were free of the artifice of the upper classes. As Warchałowski observed, “combating artifice” and putting a stop to the mindless tendency to follow fashion would cause consumers – who had acted like mannequins – to regain the strength of will that was lost to modern people who were unable to show boldness in shaping their reality.⁶¹ For this reason, applied art was perceived as the “anvil on which characters are forged”, and new methods of displaying exhibits were to reinforce this influence.

(Translated by Julita Mastalerz)

Abstract

Towarzystwo Polska Sztuka Stosowana (TPSS) organised two exhibitions at the Zachęta Gallery. Their aim was to shape the national culture of living and to propagate ornamental design inspired by indigenous motifs. The 1902 exposition was arranged in accordance with the traditional perception of arts and crafts, which disregarded their function and construction in favour of the external form. New critical categories, borrowed from the language of functionalism and from ideas regarding living space as developed by the German *Kunstgewerbe* circles, induced the members of the TPSS to arrange their 1908 exhibition differently – as fully designed interiors rather than groups of independent items. Similar changes were then observed in the of shop-window design and in commercial expositions. The fact that they were explicated in terms of ethics reveals a combination of consumerism, aesthetics and morality characteristic of the early 20th century.

61 J. Warchałowski, “O sztuce stosowanej”, op. cit., pp. 8–11.