

THE ARCHITECTURE OF WARSAW IN STALINIST TIMES. MARSZAŁKOWSKA DZIELNICA MIESZKANIOWA – SYMBOLIC CAMOUFLAGE

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In memory of prof. Anders Åman

„That day I had some excellent ice-cream at one of the wonderful cafes on this square and I admired the system of street lights, regulating the traffic. Not even rubbish bins were missing. (...) And so I do declare, that not even in France, or any other ‘Western’ country, is there a square of the nature of Warsaw’s Constitution Square. In none of these countries is there such a monumental complex of buildings intended to house working people”¹.

The street myth created within the sphere of socialist ideology, of the street-wise person, associated with the street via demonstrations, parades or riots, was deeply rooted in the city-building culture of the nineteenth century. We will be interested in a specific reflection of the myth, brought over into contemporary times by socialist realism. It is difficult to indicate precisely the origin of the cult of the street, route, distant urban perspective. Perhaps it derives from the dynamic language, with the assistance of which a dedicated historicist learns about the world. The continuous struggle of new and old might com-

pare to a neverending and inevitable forward march. Everything that „stays still”, develops into permanent values, is perceived as retrograde, since it does not participate in the „road”².

In the time of socialist realism, street space was to become the true place of activity of the dwellers of new Warsaw. The people „entered the centre”, marched and manifested, and architecture was to provide the setting for these processes.

Such dynamic values are given to the vision of new Warsaw sketched in an address by Bolesław Bierut³ concerning „The Six-Year-Plan for the Reconstruction of Warsaw”. The urban space was to be created by a complex of squares connected with one another by „appropriately widened arteries (...) pulsating with the fullness of a rich, multi-coloured life, places of great mass meets and demonstrations on days of ceremony and importance for the whole society”⁴.

„The backbone of construction” in this arrangement was to be the new Great Street - Marszałkowska, which connects the so-called Acropolis of Żoliborz-Marymont (northern part of Warsaw) and the

¹ J. Guillemont, *Konstytucji Square in the eyes of a Parisian*, in: „Stolica”, 1952, no 16, p. 8.

² There is extensive literature devoted to the problems of valorizing urban space. In studies on versions of the city as perceived by socialist realism it is not always useful. At this point one should mention such works as: A. Åman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era. An Aspect of Cold War History*, transl. from Swedish by R. and K. Tanner, Cambridge (Mass.) 1992; *The Culture of the Stalin Period*, ed. by H. Gunther, London 1990; W. Decholin, *Die Straße in der Stadt als architektonisches Thema*, in: „Daidalos” 1983, no 10, pp.70-74; A. Reinle, *Zeichensprache der Architektur*, Zürich und München 1976; A. Wallis, *Informacja i gwar: o miejskim centrum (Information and bustle: the city centre)*, Warsaw 1979; W. Tomasiak, *Inżynieria dusz. Literatura realizmu socjalistycznego w planie „propagandy monumentalnej” (Soul engineering. The literature*

of social realism in the plan of „monumental propaganda”), Wrocław 1999.

³ Bolesław Bierut (1892-1956), communist party activist, President of Poland (from 1947), from 1948 First Secretary of the communist Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR).

⁴ B. Bierut, *Sześćoletni Plan Odbudowy Warszawy (Six-Year Plan for the Reconstruction of Warsaw)*, Warsaw 1949, p. 24. For the ideological sources of Bierut’s text and their connections with concepts of the city formulated by the avant-garde CIAM milieu and the Athens Charter see my: W. Baraniewski, *Wizja lepszego miasta (A vision of a better city)*, in: *De Gustibus. Studia ofiarowane przez przyjaciół Tadeuszowi Stefanowi Jaroszewskiemu z okazji 65 rocznicy urodzin (Studies offered by friends to Tadeusz Stefan Jaroszewski on his 65 birthday)*, Warsaw 1996, pp.121-127.

„Olympic” sports complex at Służewiec (southern part of Warsaw) with the city centre⁵.

The decision to start converting Marszałkowska street was a political one, linked with intentions to change the image of this part of the city from „street-level, small shops” to working. The decision was also encouraged by purely practical considerations, the underground installations in place there and the transport system. „This area was chosen” claimed architect Zygmunt Stepiński, „to avoid the risk of building immediately in the middle part of Marszałkowska street. We were told: let’s try, then we’ll move into the centre”⁶.

There were disputes, however, over the exact place where construction should begin. Bolesław Bierut, as well as Hilary Minc⁷ believed that the first works should start between Unii Lubelskiej square and Zbawiciela square. On a site, it was said, that was easier, that did not create transport problems and was, to a large extent, free of buildings (fig.1). Bierut believed that „the southern part of Marszałkowska should be built as soon as possible” and that „the ruins at Marszałkowska are a particular eyesore” (fig. 2). Taking into consideration the preserved memo of architect Stanisław Jankowski, he was not pleased with the idea of construction northwards of Zbawiciela square and expressed doubts over the necessity of drafting a square in this place: „right behind it will be all of Marszałkowska in the form of a giant square”. Saying this, he had in mind the area past the intersection with Jerozolimskie avenue. It was important for Bierut to „produce good dwelling architecture”, he claimed that „there won’t be

much effect on Marszałkowska anyway”, while under difficult conditions „mistakes will necessarily be made”⁸.

The author of the idea to arrange an expansive piazza north of Zbawiciela square, was probably chairman of the Workers’ Housing Enterprise⁹ Aleksander Wolski, intent on the propaganda „concentration of effect” and to start reconstruction on prestigious sites. The southern section did not present such possibilities, as the preserved buildings in the area of Unii square obstructed the necessary widening of the street. Also the existence of the church at Zbawiciela square posed a considerable problem. There were plans to tear it down, but „the authorities did not want to aggravate relations with the Church”, Stepiński commented.

The controversy which arose over where to start construction Sigalin solved with the conclusion that „Construction should start immediately along the whole section from Wilcza street to Unii square, in this way reconciling the ideas of Bierut and Minc with Wolski and ours”. The function of main investor was filled by the Workers’ Housing Enterprise (ZOR) headed by Wolski. „It is not by accident”, he claimed „that precisely ZOR, being the institution formed to deal with building homes for working people, is realizing M.D.M as its head project (...)”. The construction of this „is a revolutionary attempt to drive new principles of socialist building construction into the centre of an existing big city”¹⁰.

The MDM workshop was officially created on 1 March 1950. It comprised a team which had already worked together on the W-Z (East-West) route

5 *Materiały urbanistyczne do planu perspektywicznego i 6-letniego Warszawy (Urbanist materials for the long-term plan and the 6-year plan for Warsaw)*, Warsaw 1949; text by architects: W. Ostrowski, S. Dziewulski, S. Jankowski, Z. Skibniewski, in: *Odbudowa Warszawy w latach 1944-1949 (Reconstruction of Warsaw in the years 1944-1949)*, edited by J. Górski, Warsaw 1977, pp. 340-361.

⁶ I use information provided to me in the course of several conversations (10.07.1978, 3.01.1979, 8.03.1979) by Zygmunt Stepiński and documents from the private archives of Józef Sigalin: *Teczka 1950-1952. Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa. (File 1950-1952.)* These documents were handed over to the Warsaw City Archives. The number of items, mainly press articles concerning MDM, is vast. In this place it is worth mentioning the substantial information on progress of works on subsequent MDM buildings published in „Stolica” over the years 1951 and 1952. See also T. Domański, A. Majorek, *Budownictwo urzędzeń komunalnych w Marszałkowskiej Dzielnicy Mieszkaniowej, (Construction of communal structures in MDM)* in: „Miasto” 1952, no 7, pp. 13-17; M. Weinfeld, *Koreferat do referatu Viceministra Juliusza Żakowskiego (Polemic with the*

report by Vice-minister Juliusz Żakowski), in: „Architektura” 1951, no 5/6, pp. 199-201; *Wmurowanie Aktu Erekcyjnego pod budowę Marszałkowskiej Dzielnicy Mieszkaniowej (Setting the Act of Erection for the construction of MDM)*, in: „Stolica” 1950, no 39, p.2, therein the text of the address by Jerzy Albrecht; *MDM Marszałkowska 1730-1954*, ed. S. Jankowski, Warsaw 1955. Separate attention is deserved by the chapter devoted to MDM in the book by W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950-1954 (Social realism. Polish art in the years 1950-1954)*, Paris 1986, pp. 82-95.

⁷ Hilary Minc (1905-1976), communist activist, deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Minister for Industry and Commerce, one of the authors of the Six-Year Plan for development of state economy and industry.

⁸ J. Sigalin, op.cit., pp.9-13

⁹ The Workers Housing Enterprise (ZOR), was created in 1948 at the Ministry for Reconstruction as the central investor for the national housing construction industry. ZOR implemented the state policy on housing, initiated and built large housing complexes.

¹⁰ A. Wolski, *Z.O.R rozpoczyna budowę M.D.M. (Z.O.R begins to build M.D.M)*, in: „Stolica”, 1950, no 35, p. 6.

and the Mariensztat estate. Their connections and friendships, the position held by Józef Sigalin¹¹ and the enthusiastic reception of the W-Z route, readily perceived by the authorities to be a harbinger of socialist realism if not its first creation - all of this endowed the „Sigalin team” with a special aura¹². The team was asked to prepare initial sketches of the future project.

The principal idea behind the draft designs was a mid-town square, which would answer the function of a forum for the people, venue of mass parades, marches and demonstrations. Simultaneously, within the transport and communications system of central Warsaw, it would close widened Marszałkowska street and divide traffic between the traditional route towards Unii square and the new road on the west side, through Mokotowskie fields to Puławska street. All of these procedures resulted not merely from an attempt to recall the old, royal concept of radially positioned open places around the King’s residence in Ujazdów, but the necessity to preserve the church at Zbawiciela square. The original idea was to widen Marszałkowska street towards Unii square and, as I mentioned, to demolish the church. The widened street would end at Zbawiciela square with the monumental accent of the church, which was unacceptable for ideological reasons. Hence the attempt to hide the church, remove the spires and neutralize its symbolic function within the urban composition, to which I will yet return (fig. 3).

In the first version, the drafted square had a slightly slanted shape, as the east side of Marszałkowska street from Jerozolimskie avenue through to Unii square preserved one line of buildings. During the discussion on this version of the design, it was suggested to the authors to „shift slightly” the east side of the square and aim for a symmetrical composition, straightening the angles and introducing a rectangular layout (fig. 4). Stępiński commented it was „a search for symmetry in the urban arrangement”¹³. A new version of the project was completed on 22 July 1950, some days later the draft was approved for realization (25.07) and on August 1, 1950 the

ground was broken for the foundations of the first blocks, while on 16 September the erection act of the Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa was laid in the foundations of the house at Śniadeckich street. The construction of MDM had all the priorities, there were practically no restrictions on its realization. Apart from time. The political leadership wanted at least the central part of the quarter completed as soon as possible. In February 1951, the Presidium of the Government set down the deadline for completion of this part of MDM, along with the „central square”, for 22 July 1952.

The design project elaborated in July 1950 widened Marszałkowska street almost thrice in comparison to the situation from before World War 2. This called for a new type of building, with appropriate scale and mass. „I had the task of drawing the first element” claimed Zygmunt Stępiński, „it was a wall of seven-eight storeys, with application of the forms of the architecture of social realism. And I could not answer that”. An architect educated in a spirit of respect for tradition, an excellent craftsman, stylistically remaining under the influence of the late works of Auguste Perret, he does undertake the task that is new to him (fig. 5). He wants to - he confesses - try „I could have said thank you, I resign, there was no political pressure”. To Stępiński, with his aesthetic preferences and creative temperament, the slogans used by the social realist doctrine did not sound alien. He was wont to treat them as a continuation of the nationalist traditionalism of the nineteen-twenties. His first sketches of designs for the main buildings in the new square repeated the composition and general outline of the Krasiński house raised at Małachowskiego square after a draft by Jan Heurich the Younger in 1907-1910. Stępiński, searching for a model for MDM buildings in the designs of Heurich, concentrated on the architectural outline, the attention to detail and primarily, as he believed, on „big city character”. He treated Heurich’s designs as „examples of monumental architecture of the big city”¹⁴. Ideological motivations (he did not belong to the communist party) were not the deciding

¹¹ Józef Sigalin (1909-1983), architect, urbanist, co-creator of the Bureau for the Reconstruction of the Capital (BOS), first head architect of Warsaw (1951-56).

¹² As well as Sigalin, the team included: Stanisław Jankowski (1911-2002), Jan Knothe (1912-1977) and Zygmunt Stępiński (1908-1982).

¹³ Information from Z. Stępiński.

¹⁴ *Dyskusja na temat Marszałkowskiej Dzielnicy Mieszkaniowej* (Discussion on MDM), in: „Architektura” no 7, 1951, pp. 234-

239. In the course of the discussion Stępiński strongly defended his decision: „We reached the conclusion that if we are to take a piece of architecture on a large scale, then we should reach for the example of the architecture of Heurich. These are elements of great architecture – which depend on the fundamental composition of a large form and start with a well-designed frontage, where the architectonic theme has been just as well resolved”, op.cit., p. 238.

factor for him. Anyhow, the obscure provisions of the doctrine did not precise either the character or the area, where examples of „national form” were to be sourced. Stepiński took Heurich’s architecture as a fundament, on grounds of which he devised his own compositions, studded with historical references, also applying elements plucked from elsewhere (e.g. the window framings on the fifth and sixth floors are a remake of forms from the house of Franciszek Maria Lanci at Krakowskie Przedmieście no.17 - fig. 6). The expression of the whole was decided by the scale of the buildings, which converged all discussions on reference to tradition, and the specific and hitherto unheard-of in Warsaw stony bulk of the constructions.

The complicated urban layout, created in the south part of the square, required an accent to organize the space and at the same time complete the vista of Marszałkowska street. The square did not have, as it was expressed „a target point”. One way to remedy this was initially to arrange three sculptures in this part of the square, the theme, shape and execution of which would be decided in a competition. The sculptures were to function as „urbanistic accents”, ordering the composition of the square and also becoming the main ideological element of the new conception. Their placement against the south side was intended to neutralize the ideological and symbolic meaning of the church steeples from Zbawiciela square visible in the background (fig. 7). In another variant, it was planned to build a high-rise building on the axis of the church which would hide the steeples (fig. 8). This idea was given up because of a lack of a final decision on the location and shape of the main dominating tall element of the city, i.e. the building of the „Central Cultural Institution” as announced in Bierut’s plan for the reconstruction of Warsaw¹⁵.

In the discussion on the MDM drafts, open criticism was fielded against the „screenlike” south side of the new square, which „does not close anything neither functionally, nor artistically. Marszałkow-

ska still remains Marszałkowska, unless it could be equipped with a screen, like Koszykowa. This would improve conditions for the three statues, which anyway then would become to a large degree superfluous. However, it would not improve the whole. More than the remaining unwidened stretch of Marszałkowska, the concept is affected by the disregard for the role of Zbawiciela square and church. It is unforgivable that the model omits the part with the church, which whether we want it, or not, has impact on here. The estate complex is burdened with the part of the church at Zbawiciela, a part too strong to be masked by MDM square, but too weak for the opposite to happen”¹⁶.

The issue what to „mask” with what was to be decided by the said three monuments, initially conceived as figural sculptures, placed on high pedestals (fig. 9). To highlight their monumental character, a correction of the architectural design was made, pushing blocks 6E and 6F towards the arcades of Marszałkowska in its narrower part, which optically made the street seem even narrower (fig. 10)¹⁷.

In February and March 1951, meetings were held („conferences”) of the MDM Architectonic Workshop with sculptors (among others Franciszek Strykiewicz and Marian Wnuk, a result of which was that the Main Board of the Polish Artists (ZPAP) announced on 10 April 1951 the „MDM sculpture contest”¹⁸. It envisaged the expected shape and artistic effect of the new square which was to be bright, illuminated, glittering. „The floor of the square patterned, in multicoloured flagstones. The square is to be strongly lit by artistically detailed lamps. Shop windows and bright neons will frame the whole square in light”. This „nocturnal” vision of a light-filled expanse was to fulfil expectations of spatial order and harmonious brilliance of a new, socialist image of the city. „The size and location of sculptures in the square is left to the decision of competition participants. The objective of the sculptures is to close the north part of the square and divide it into a representative northern area and an area for utilities and

¹⁵ The alternative to hide the Church of Christ the Saviour behind a high-rise building was considered during the mentioned discussion: „extending the scale of the MDM square to dimensions which would mask the complex of the church, so that only the tip of the spire is visible from the side of Saski Garden, together with a closure of narrow Marszałkowska. In this instance there may arise some doubt that the MDM accent would impact on the concept of the city functionally as well as graphically, with much exaggeration for the role and significance of one housing estate”, as above, p. 235.

¹⁶ op.cit.

¹⁷ Z. Stepiński mentioned that the composition arrangement of this part of Marszałkowska, designed by Jan Knothe, was based on the Bernini colonnade in front of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

¹⁸ The MDM sculpture competition, duplicated typescript, Archives of the Ministry of Culture and Art, Department of Cultural Policy, file no 10/3563, further quotes from therein.

transport that starts with the bend in the axis towards the south. Architects, authors of the square design, envisaged three sculptures arranged as indicated on the situational plan. Some sculptors support the idea of just one sculpture as a dominating accent on the square and in this case the three given themes should be considered in the composition". These were: Silesia, Sea, Capital City. The competition was resolved in October with the first prize not awarded and no binding decisions taken. The uniqueness of the task, a lack of formal models, the spatial and ideological rank of the project as well as tempo of work meant that none of the entries received an absolutely positive assessment. In the discussions following the competition the concept of „one statue of architectonic sculpted form" began to dominate, but was just as imprecise and obscure as the previous ones. It was most difficult (claimed Stępiński) to find a proper theme for the sculptures. One, perhaps, but three! What could they symbolize?¹⁹. According to him, at one of the sessions with Bierut present, he was critical of the ideas for the monuments and „mentioned that he had once seen in Odessa some tall candelabras and perhaps to think of something like that". Eventually, drawings of the suggested candelabras were to be made by Jan Knothe (fig. 11). The candelabras demarcated three new axes of the square and offset the asymmetry of the layout. But their realization weakened the ideological impact of the new square. In place of the planned ideological themes, competitive to the former arrangement of the city, symbolized by the church spires, what emerged

were abstract, oversized monuments-lamps. It is significant that with such a prestigious undertaking as MDM, there was no cohesive programme of decoration, expounding the new symbolic universe. Perhaps some of the reason lay in the „experimental" nature of MDM, a „trial run" for the new centre. Or it was the pressure of time and fear of making an explicit decision concerning ideological symbolism? „The figural sculptures of MDM" commented Bohdan Urbanowicz²⁰, „concentrated principally on the side streets. I think that the decisive factor was fear that a bad sculpture might negatively affect the architecture. Judging by some of the sculpted works - the fear was grounded"²¹.

The realized decorations, being an ideological exponent of the new socialist city area, do not come together in a comprehensive, uniform complex. The set of decorations most ideologically important was to be mounted on the south side. Apart from the monuments which were not realized, placed in niches in the columns of blocks 6A and 6B were monumental bas-reliefs, personifications of „the people" who were taking possession of the city centre. Eight figures symbolized, through allegories of different professions, the lack of class divisions in the new society. They were: a miner, a steelworker, a railwayman, a mason, a farmer, a woman kindergarten teacher, a woman teacher and a woman textile worker (fig. 12, 13)²². And so: the heavy industry, transport, building construction, the alliance of workers and farmers, and the „female" sphere of concern for welfare, clothing, education²³. This complex is the

¹⁹ Information from Z. Stępiński. He also mentioned discussion on other themes, where the requirement of three sculpted groups was a serious problem. For instance: „peasant", „worker" and what third subject? Or: Marx, Engels, Lenin, but what about Stalin? Stępiński's testimony is confirmed by R. Piotrowski in an interview with W. Włodarczyk, when he says that the sculpture subjects discussed were peasant-worker-soldier and mentions plans to raise a monument to Stalin in the square; see: W. Włodarczyk, op.cit., p. 94, note 26. More personalized draft designs for the monuments, modelled on figures from the pantheon of „progressive traditions" of the workers' movement, are mentioned in a later memo by Sigalin. In the letter addressed: „First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party Comrade Bolesław Bierut", of 10 May 1955 he writes about the „due' monuments in Warsaw", citing the figures of e.g. Ludwik Waryński, Jarosław Dąbrowski and Karol Świerczewski. As he writes „there were ideas that these monuments should be raised in Warsaw. The ideas were not more closely defined, nor were proposals, where to put them /with the exception of Waryński, in respect of whom there was at one time /1951/ the proposal – Konstytucji square?"; typescript, Sigalin's Archive, file 389, p.56.

²⁰ Bohdan Urbanowicz (1911-1994), painter, cultural activist, critic and art teacher, author of new polychromies in the reconstructed Old Town in Warsaw (1953).

²¹ B. Urbanowicz, *Dyskusyjne zagadnienia malarstwa i rzeźby M.D.M.*, (*Disputed issues of painting and sculpture in MDM*) in: „Przegląd Artystyczny" 1952, no 4, p. 20.

²² The sculptures were arranged in pairs but it is difficult to find any relationship between them. On block 6B, looking on to Konstytucji square there are: Textile worker (T. Breyer, S. Momot) and Steelworker (J. Jarnuszkiewicz), from Zbawiciela square: Teacher (J. Jarnuszkiewicz) and Rail worker (T. Łodziana). On block 6A there are from Konstytucji square: Miner (J. Gazy) and Farmer, and from Zbawiciela square: Pre-School Teacher (K. Tchorek) and Builder.

²³ See the interpretation of these sculptures from a feminist perspective, done by E. Toniak, *Olbrzymki. Kobiety i socrealizm, (Giantesses. Women and social realism)* Cracow 2008, pp. 41-57. The author writes, i.a.: „what is then, in this context, the unexpected aestheticisation of the heroes of People's Poland, symbolizing the people entering the city centre? The people, i.e. men. Is the cultural reinscription of manhood of a *soft* variety, tender and visually attractive, carried out on their bodies, not an attempt to appropriate and colonize things female? Yet another restitution of power?", op.cit., p.55.

only realization of its kind in Poland, portraying the principles of the new ideological symbolism, the new „founding myths”²⁴. Their function boiled down to creating a cohesive system of concepts that would replace those implanted by history, literature, tradition. Contemporary times gave a harsh evaluation to the attempt. Nonetheless the assessment did not concern (it could not) the ideological sources, only the formal aspects. „The giant protruding reliefs of workers” wrote Urbanowicz „fitted in the base of buildings between Konstytucji and Zbawiciela square, alas also arouse a host of doubts. The size of these sculptures, the slip below the cornice of the arcades, the too-deep relief, the schematicism of subjects might, I believe, only to some degree be excused by haste of execution. The sculpture seen in architecture so directly and so closely should answer all criteria of an absolute work of art”²⁵. The sculpted decoration between Zbawiciela and Konstytucji square represents a heroic form of the new symbolics. It is expressed through scale, sternness and a singular aggressiveness or, so to speak „military stylization” of the reliefs²⁶. Placed in the end pillars of the arcade, they resemble „sentries” standing guard at the gates of the socialist city. Even the figure of the railwayman, target of contemporary ridicule, „the lone conductor of PKP, the Polish National Railways”²⁷, or the cariatid-like figures of the women, still preserve their threatening hieratic nature.

The remaining elements of decoration of MDM and Konstytucji square fall within the sphere of lyrical symbolism. Neobaroque sculpted groups crowning the blocks at Piękna street follow fairly popular patterns, referring to personifications of the Arts (fig. 14). Their elaborate, dynamic form and obscure allegorics aroused decided responses. They were criticised for „overaccented depth in modelling of

the figures” and multiplication of accidental planes creating „restlessness, lack of clarity and unexpected foreshortening of figures as well as entire sculpture profiles”²⁸.

A similar lyrical theme is introduced by the mosaics of Hanna Żuławska²⁹ mounted in the arcades of the main blocks around Konstytucji square. The subject of these, expressed in figural scenes and surrounded with the proper emblems, are the seasons. The pastoral themes are shown with the used of ideologized formulas but in a way far removed from ideological intensity. „Spring” is a joyous Mayday parade, „Summer” - a harvest wreath surrounded by reapers, „Autumn” - focused work and „Winter” - a working family on skis (fig.15, 16). The mosaics were very well received and were very highly evaluated as „very good pieces, with refined colour schemes, excellent technique”³⁰. Discussion arose over their somewhat unfortunate placement, high up and in the four corners of the big blocks which close the square on the west and east side. This lyrical element of the decoration was highlighted by small forms such as stone portals, frontals or metalwork that represented the excellent craftsmanship traditions of the age (candelabra finials, wrought gates, flagposts), as well as the widely applied sgraffito. Quintessential to the lyrical character of the decoration is a medallion in relief, with a bucolic grape picking scene, placed on the block at Wilcza street. It would be hard to explain in the sense of this kind of scene, apart from a general relationship with the symbolics of abundance, affluence, a generous harvest. It would be difficult to presume that the author had had in mind Dionysian traditions or the Eucharistic symbolism.

This lyrical group also has an unquestionably ideological accent, that is the „founding” relief, commemorating the placement of the act of erection.

²⁴ J. Prokop, *Mity fundatorskie Polski Ludowej (Founding myths of People's Poland)*, in: *Wyobrażenia pod nadzorem. Z dziejów literatury i polityki w PRL (Imagination under surveillance. From the history of literature and politics in the People's Republic of Poland)*, Cracow 1994; see M. Głowiński, *Polska literatura współczesna i paradygmaty symboliczne (1945-1995)*, (*Polish contemporary literature and symbolic paradigms*), in: same, *Dzień Ulissesa i inne szkice na tematy niemitologiczne (The Day of Ulysses and other sketches on non-mythological themes)*, Cracow 2000.

²⁵ B. Urbanowicz, op.cit., p. 22.

²⁶ The military metaphoric of the Six-Year Pland is mentioned by W. Tomasik, *Inżynieria dusz. Literatura realizmu socjalistycznego w planie „propagandy monumentalnej” (Soul engineering. The literature of social realism in the plan of 'monumental propaganda')*, Wrocław 1999, p. 134.

²⁷ See *Dyskusja architektów o Placu Konstytucji 8.10.1952. Zebranie dyskusyjne SARP (Architects' discussion on Konstytucji square)*, in: „Przegląd Artystyczny” 1953, no 1, p. 8.

²⁸ B. Urbanowicz, op.cit., p. 22, writes: „Three symbolic sculptures on top of the side frontage of the building at Piękna street portray 'Painting', 'Music' and 'Literature'. The sculptors have executed these figures particularly well (Gosławski, Bieńkowski), sadly one can only see them properly from one storey, one house at Koszykowa street. And, sadly, in this age of realism we are experiencing inability to read outdated allegories”.

²⁹ Hanna Żóławska (1908-1989), painter, ceramic artist and teacher; author of many decorations in the domain of monumental art and decorative ceramics.

³⁰ B. Urbanowicz, op.cit.

It represents a demonstration on the finished Konstytucji square. Just as the sculptures which documented the history of MDM, it introduces an interesting autothematic aspect (fig. 17). Bohdan Urbanowicz who had a rather harsh opinion on the MDM sculptures this time expressed himself with enthusiasm, writing: „However, we will all agree that the relief sculpture by Habdas ‘The Opening of MDM’ is the most serious sculptural treatment of MDM. The subject is obvious, the composition lucid, it stands apart from the other works in respect of its well-placed planes, proper treatment of the relief”³¹. This favourable appraisal (considering the noticeable weaknesses of technique) could have been brought forth by the „lyricism” of the pictured scene and the „human” scale of the piece. Mounted a little above street level, the relief actively comes into its space. The architectonic background of the relief we can see in a perspective of the square.

The lack of clear-cut ideological reference in the decoration remains in contradiction to declarations and the initiators’ expected symbolic „breakthrough” that was to happen with MDM. The allegories of arts and seasons can hardly be endowed with revolutionary meanings. They relate to the canon of symbolic notions, banalized and weakly ideologically „active”, therefore - not antagonistic. Even the founding relief, „thematically legible”, that showed a scene of mass, joyful demonstration, does not carry any persuasion and is closer to rhetorics of concord and joy than ideological heroics.

The programme of decorations realized on MDM, in its general outline, was intended not to arouse controversy or objections on the part of popular opinion. The decision not to realize three groups of sculptures and the lyrical character of most of the effected decorations shows the most important feature of the entire MDM space - allegorical fuzziness and obscurity. Space which is aggressive and destructive to the urban tissue is camouflaged in a lyricized symbolics,

in serene, affirmative functions, harmony, symmetry and shining candelabra illuminations³². MDM is a camouflage of the city, its disposition, functions and meanings. Enough to pass through on to the back of the MDM blocks to see the screen-like structure of the camouflage³³.

While on the south side the square was not given a definite composition accent, the north side was dominated by two huge buildings, raised at Koszykowa street. They were the scenographic opening of the Great Street towards the planned Central Palace of Culture. In times more contemporary they gained the title of the „big tollgate” (fig. 18, 19). On their walls, above the high windows at street level, there are six reliefs on subjects connected to the history of the construction of MDM. Their small scale and specific modelling contrast to the monumentalism of the other decorations. However, the subject matter and the method of representation make these one of the more interesting fragments of the MDM complex. The reliefs were executed by teams of artists, headed among others by Adam Smolana³⁴ and Ludwika Nitschowa³⁵, and show in six sequences the history of the MDM quarter. From the initial meetings of engineers and architects over a project model and stonemasons working on details (west side block 1C, fig. 20), to laying foundations, bricks and constructing the steel skeleton (east side block 2A, fig. 21). The iconography of these reliefs combines historic themes and patterns with realistic staffage elements to create idealized visions of common, concerted effort. Mounted on scenographically-arranged „tollgates” which open the vista towards New Marszałkowska street, they were a message, a specific visual indicative, how the city should be transformed. Here, at the gates of the new aesthetics, the new city, was placed the message to future creators and at the same time a historic, almost journalistic report on the most recent past. The MDM decoration visualized new myths and made history the stuff of myth³⁶.

³¹ B. Urbanowicz, op.cit., p.20.

³² A similar process of departing from revolutionary symbolics can be observed in the discussions on the planned decorations of the Palace of Culture and Science. See W. Baraniewski, *Kopernik i Stalin. Treści ideowe dekoracji Pałacu Kultury i Nauki w Warszawie (Copernicus and Stalin. Ideological themes in the decoration of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw)*. in: „Kronika Warszawy”, 2005, no 4, pp. 53-69.

³³ See the meaning of the concept ‘camouflage’ in the concept of public space by R. Deutsche, *Evictions. Art and Spatial Politics*, Cambridge, London 1996.

³⁴ Adam Smolana (1921-1987), sculptor, professor at the State Higher School of Art in Gdańsk.

³⁵ Ludwika Nitschowa (1889-1989), sculptor, author i.a. of the monument to Marie Curie-Skłodowska (1934) and the Warsaw Mermaid (1939).

³⁶ See a fairly inconsistent interpretation of this decoration which refers to religious models, done by E. Przybył, *Pałac Kultury i Nauki jako socjalistyczna sakralizacja przestrzeni (The Palace of Culture and Science as a socialist sacralization of space)*, in: *Pałac Kultury i Nauki. Między ideologią a masową wyobraźnią, (Palace of Culture and Science. Between ideology and mass imagination.)* edited by Z. Grębecka and J. Sadowski, Cracow 2007, pp. 89-124.

All interpretations of the ideological sense of the MDM quarter highlight its working character, as the realization of the ideological postulate of Bierut to „bring workers in to the city centre”. The poetic interpretation of the idea was formulated by Adam Ważyk, in a verse on MDM titled „And the People shall enter the city”. It was to open eyes to the scale of the breakthrough which had happened in the centre of Warsaw with the new quarter. „MDM has shown us perhaps more clearly than any other building construction, the social revolution and the resultant revolution in spatial planning”³⁷. But MDM had also appeared as a reaction to the disliked „street-level Marszałkowska”, with its rapidly rebuilt houses, vast amounts of shops and flourishing trade³⁸. The completed part of MDM saw the first big state-owned shops and restaurants. Their rich fittings, size and splendour were to deal a blow to private enterprise and become the image of the triumph of state initiative³⁹. The functions of space and interiors, as well as architecture itself arise as evidence of a singular „trade war” fought by Hilary Minc. The expanse of MDM swept away private commerce, demolished shops and hundreds of small individual workshops (an almost symbolic expression of this was the

„farewell” prepared by Warsaw press, not without a hint of sadness, to Pomianowski’s cafe and bakery). The new form of building construction almost wiped away all memories of such activity, introducing great expanses of wonderful shopping space. Hence the great importance of huge street level areas, because they were the means for the state to take over the city centre. They composed the crucial element of the exhibition salon that was to be MDM and Konstytucji square.

In the difficult housing conditions of erstwhile Warsaw, when a home achieved the rank of political argument, it also became an excellent commodity in the hands of the state. The image of MDM as a workers’ quarter was never true. Workers constituted a small percentage of its residents. Research carried out in 1952 of the first finished blocks of the quarter showed that out of 150 apartments, physical labourers were allocated 30 and white-collar staff - 120⁴⁰. Out of this group, a majority held higher or managerial positions. Workers were assigned relatively worse homes, with an average of 4.8 persons per household, 3.1 for office employees. Nonetheless, this did not prevent MDM to be promoted as the first magnificent workers’ quarter. Ideological interpretations are not related to material fact.

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³⁷ S. Jankowski, *Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa*, in: „Miasto”, 1952, pp. 27-29.

³⁸ See J. Waldorff, *Warszawa*, in: „Tygodnik Powszechny”, 1949, no 19, p. 4: „Marszałkowska street, looking down its perspective from Jerozolimskie avenue towards the Church of Christ the Saviour, resembles the capital of some exotic island, some Madagascar or Borneo. As far as the eye can see stretch houses which do not rise above the first floor. The only difference is that in Warsaw these houses shelter shops, arranged as sumptuously as never before the war. One feels that the owners have spent money on fitting out the interiors, because they didn’t know what to do with that money. If they could have, they would rather have used it towards building some storeys over their shops. But they’re afraid!”

³⁹ See Alfa, *Piszemy wiele o MDM (We write much of MDM)*, in: „Stolica” 1952, no 16, p.12: „Brother, dear little brother (...) so

you really thought that we’re having a revolution, not sleeping at nights and not knowing rest in the day, every day demolishing stuffy, bourgeois life, to rebuild ‘your Marszałkowska’ (...) Why do we wrestle adversity every day to resurrect ‘The Satyr Bar’, excellent sausagemaker Herbst, and the greasy local cinema, as such ‘wonders’ there had been on this stretch of the street”.

⁴⁰ *Wyniki badań w trzech pierwszych budynkach MDM (The results of research in the first three buildings of MDM)*, by the Institute of Housing Construction. Materials and documentation, series B, issue 2 (14), 1952, on the rights of a manuscript. Out of the total number of 134 flats, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers allocated 28, the Housing Department 26, the National Committee for Economic Planning 9, the Central Committee of the Worker’s Party 8. In the conclusions we read: „Intelligentsia families are preferred over physical labourers, both in respect of the number of allocations as well as density”.