

Hoża in color: At home in the avant-garde

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Black, white, and red

I wish to start by referring to Paweł Susid's *Untitled (colors already used by the artists)*, a work of art from 2005 whose subtitle seems to be almost a joke. Indeed, it allows one to conclude that the color palette limited to the contrasts of black and white complemented by dynamic red has clear connotations. White, black, and red, the so-called poster colors, automatically trigger associations with the constructivist compositions and typographic designs of the first avant-gardists, such as Alexander Rodchenko (to whom Susid attributed, among others, red) and El Lissitzky. The colors in question also make one think about Polish works inspired by Russian constructivism, such as the cover of the sixth issue of the *Zwrotnica* [Switch] magazine from 1923, designed by Władysław Strzemiński, or the ad for the Mechano Advertising Office (1924) and a poster for the

first exhibition of Mechano-faktura designed by Henryk Berlewi (1924).¹ This color palette that was “already used” was used once again, almost a hundred years later, by Paweł Kłudkiewicz in *Hoża. Moja Ulica / My street*.² As a logovisual work of art, it combines text and drawings.

In the printed book, the play of black, white, and red is an even stronger reminder of the avant-garde tradition. “The combination of black, white, and red which was dominant in the innovative art of the time”³ is inevitably associated with interwar *livres d’art*, for example with the works of Mieczysław Szczuka, such as the cover of Brunon Jasioński and Anatol Stern’s poem *Ziemia na Lewo* [Earth to the Left] (1924), the graphic layout of Anatol Stern’s *Europa* [Europa: A Poem] (1929), and the cover thereof designed by Teresa Żarnower.

The references to interwar aesthetics are easily explained by the concept behind Kłudkiewicz’s book, which combines words and images into an organic whole. This experiment is in itself avant-garde;⁴ it refers to logovisual experiments whose creators understood that printed “WORDS have their graphic weight, sound, color, pattern, THEY TAKE UP SPACE. [...] the main values of the book are its format and typesetting [...] that is why a poet should be both a typesetter and a book-binder [...]”⁵ New art, called “poesiography” by Strzemiński, was thus established. It relied on the “[i]ntegral cooperation between text and graphic art” as well as on the contrast between “painting (space) and poetry (time).”⁶ Kłudkiewicz’s idea of both writing and drawing his book is deeply rooted in this tradition. It is part of the avant-garde history of *livre d’art*: “Unlike traditional illustrations, graphic art in avant-garde books did not illustrate but instead gave rise to a parallel aesthetic plane;” “a *livre d’art*, an autonomous work of art, is created as an independent artistic work;” it is intended to “break the division into text (time) and graphic art (space).”⁷

¹ On avant-garde typography and *livre d’art* design, see: among others: Bożena Lewandowska, “U źródeł grafiki funkcjonalnej w Polsce” [The origins of functional graphic art in Poland], in: *Ze studiów nad genezą plastyki nowoczesnej w Polsce* [Studies on the origins of modern art in Poland], ed. Juliusz Starzyński (Wrocław – Warsaw – Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1966); Piotr Rudziński, “Konstruktywistyczna typografia wobec poezji. Dwa przykłady” [Constructivist typography and poetry. Two examples], *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 1 (1984); Piotr Rypson, *Książki i strony. Polska książka awangardowa i artystyczna 1919–1992* [Books and pages. Polish avant-garde and livres d’art 1919–1992] (Warsaw: CSW Zamek Ujazdowski, 2000); Piotr Rypson, *Nie gęsi. Polskie projektowanie graficzne 1919–1949* [Polish graphic design 1919–1949] (Kraków: Karakter, 2011); Janusz Zagrodzki, “Władysław Strzemiński – obrazy słów” [Władysław Strzemiński – images of words], *Sztuka Europy Wschodniej* 2 (2014); *Maszyna do komunikacji. Wokół awangardowej idei Nowej Typografii* [Communication machine. The avant-garde idea of New Typography], ed. Paulina Kurc-Maj, Daniel Muzyczuk (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2015); Barbara Karasińska, “Główne idee polskiej typografii funkcjonalnej lat 20. XX wieku na wybranych przykładach” [Main trends in Polish functional typography of the 1920s: Selected examples], *Toruńskie Studia Bibliologiczne* 2 (2017); Jacek Mrowczyk, Zdeno Kolesár, *Historia projektowania graficznego* [History of graphic design], trans. Joanna Goszczyńska (Kraków: Karakter, 2018); Anna Kałuża, “Szczuka, Strzemiński, Themersonowie i polska poezja XX wieku” [Szczuka, Strzemiński, the Themersons and Polish 20th-century poetry], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2022).

² Paweł Kłudkiewicz, *Hoża. Moja ulica / My street* (Warsaw: Schulewicz Publisher, 2022). Henceforth, I use the abbreviation “H” and provide page number in brackets.

³ Aleksander Wójtowicz, “«Europę». O edycjach poematu Anatola Sterna” [‘Europes.’ The editions of Anatol Stern’s poem], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2022): 168.

⁴ On avant-garde relations between words and images see: Beata Śniecikowska, *Słowo – obraz – dźwięk. Literatura i sztuka wizualne w koncepcjach polskiej awangardy 1918–1939* [Word – image – sound. Literature and the visual arts in the concepts of the Polish avant-garde 1918–1939] (Kraków: Universitas, 2005).

⁵ Anatol Stern, Aleksander Wat, “Prymitywiści do narodów świata i do Polski” [Primitivists to the nations of the world and to Poland], in: *Antologia polskiego futurizmu i Nowej Sztuki* [Anthology of Polish Futurism and New Art], ed. Zbigniew Jarosiński, Helena Zaworska (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1978), 5–6 (original spelling).

⁶ Władysław Strzemiński, “Wystawa Nowej Sztuki w Wilnie” [Exhibition of New Art in Vilnius], *Zwrotnica* 6 (1923): 193.

⁷ Rypson, *Książki i strony*, 11.

Does it all boil down to the comprehensive logovisual artistic form(at)? Or perhaps the avant-garde clues that Kłudkiewicz gives us in his autobiographical story about a Warsaw street can lead us somewhere else?

New Europa?

The opening pages of the book dedicated to Hoża show Europe drawn in an aesthetic style similar to the one used by Szczuka in Stern's *Europa*.⁸ In Kłudkiewicz's drawing, located right next to the title page, white spots emerge from a black background – gradually, we see the outline of Warsaw, then Europe, then the Earth, and finally space emerge before our eyes. The geographical location of Hoża is marked on each outline with a red dot. Importantly, in the avant-garde map of Europe in Stern's poem, Europe is black, the background is white, and "S.O.S." in capital red letters looms over the drawing. A big part of Europe is occupied by Russia, whose vast territory is largely not included in Kłudkiewicz's map. Black in Szczuka's work corresponds to the vision of "the death of Europe" – "its inevitable destruction," as described in Stern's poem: "Ostatecznie Europa ginie, pożarta przez dionizyjskie bachantki, a jej wszelkie bezcenne wartości, wśród nich także jej nowoczesność, zostają zakwestionowane" [Ultimately, Europe perishes, devoured by Dionysian bacchantes, and all its priceless values, including its modernity, are questioned].⁹ The white spots which emerge from the black background in Kłudkiewicz's book are not as ominous. They are associated with a brightly-lit, friendly, recognizable and familiar place. It stands out from the darkness of indifference, and the red dot marking the location of the titular street makes it the center of the world, its beating heart.

These two shifts – changes in geographical context and color – prove that Kłudkiewicz's book, although it certainly refers to avant-garde aesthetics, does not adopt the same ideology. Nobody calls for a revolution. The message is not enhanced by the clarity of graphic forms. The color red does not refer to the utopia of a "brave new world" that drives a wedge into the old decaying one, symbolized by a white circle, as in El Lissitzky's famous propaganda poster *Beat the whites with the red wedge*.¹⁰ However, in the 2021/22 Design of the Year competition of the Polish Association of Applied Graphic Designers, *Hoża. Moja ulica / My street* received an award in the "Social Impact" category, and not, for example, in the "Form" category, which suggests that it was read/viewed through the prism of social activism. And it is with social activism that we usually associate interwar (typo)graphic projects, especially those which use the so-called poster colors, explore extreme contrasts between them (as symptomatic of extreme social tensions), and do not shy away from the powerful revolutionary red.

⁸ Anatol Stern, *Europa* [Europe: A poem] (Warsaw: Księgarnia F. Hoesik 1929).

⁹ Adam Dziadek, "Atopia – stadność i jednostkowość" [Atopy – the group and the individual], in: *Wizerunki wspólnoty. Studia i szkice z literatury i antropologii porównawczej* [Images of the community. Studies and sketches in comparative literature and anthropology], ed. Zbigniew Kadłubek, Tadeusz Sławek (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2008), 174.

¹⁰ See: Artur Kamczycki, "Czerwonym klinem bij białych. Rewolucyjno-mesjanistyczne znaczenia dzieła El Lissitzky'ego" [Beat the whites with the red wedge. Revolutionary-messianic meanings in El Lissitzky's work], *Sztuka i Dokumentacja* 19 (2018).

Kłudkiewicz writes in the introduction that the local and urban everyday life that he talks about and draws in his book is not, by any means, apolitical: “[...] polityka, która i tak jest wszędzie – kupowanie pizzy jest aktem politycznym, kształty budynków i ulic są pochodną polityki” [politics is everywhere anyway – buying a pizza is a political act, the way buildings and streets look depends on politics] (H 10). The same can also be said about the colors: black, white, and red in *livre d’art* refer directly to the leftist involvement of the first visual and literary avant-garde. Black and red, in turn, as Aleksander Wójtowicz argues, are deeply rooted in the artistic imagination of the interwar period. They are associated with the masses, workers, and lower social classes. “The revolt against the inequalities generated by capitalism” is part of “left-wing iconography” which refers “to class divisions and the idea of the revolution.”¹¹ The special status of the color red could be first noticed in Polish futurist poetry: “red dominated (there was more and more red over time).”¹² This was partly inspired by politically engaged Soviet artists. The links between constructivist graphic design and leftist ideas (and the Russian revolution)¹³ were strong in the interwar period. Certain colors and typographic layouts were considered political – and not just formal – choices and left-wing publishing houses began to use them so often that censors would confiscate new publications without reading them.¹⁴

Apart from the three colors which were dominant in modern graphic design in the interwar period, the avant-garde also manifests itself at the level of the story that is being told about Hoża. “Na mojej ulicy przetrwało tylko kilka domów sprzed 1939 roku. Przedwojenne kamienice są w Warszawie na tyle rzadkie, że budzą sentyment” [Only a few pre-1939 houses survived on my street. Pre-war tenement houses are so rare in Warsaw that they arouse sentiment] (H 23), we read in chapter *C. Kilka starych domów* [C. A few old houses]. Their decorative gates and façades are associated with the charm of the pre-war world, in the mythology of which, however, Kłudkiewicz does not believe, calling the pre-1939 world “rzekomo lepszy[m]” [supposedly better] (H 23). Questioning the myth of interwar Warsaw is linked to a black rectangle placed under a short text (in both the Polish and English versions, and in all the chapters). Only white, lit, windows and a part of a building, seen from below, emerge from the dark background, which heightens the impression that the apartments in tenement houses are “wspaniałe, wysokie” [beautiful, with high ceilings] (H 23). Concurrently, the drawing evokes claustrophobia and anxiety: the lines come together to form a triangle at the top. Smoke, a red form on a white background, rises towards it. It may also be associated with clouds seen against a red sky, evoking brightness (of the sky or artificial lighting). Only the two following pages show elegant and ornate tenement houses, in keeping with the myth of pre-1939 Warsaw as “Paris of the East.” Kłudkiewicz is, however, critical of the plans to revitalize Hoża in that vein. He makes it clear in the next chapter *Ć. Kamienica za 50 zł* [Ć. A tenement house for PLN 50]. It is a drawing of a building which has seen better days.

¹¹Aleksander Wójtowicz, “Czarne i czerwone. Masy ludzkie w poezji polskiego futuryzmu” [Black and red. The masses in the poetry of Polish futurism], *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2019), 42.

¹²Wójtowicz, “Czarne i czerwone”, 41.

¹³For more on Polish constructivism and its connections with Soviet art see: Andrzej Turowski, *Konstruktywizm polski. Próba rekonstrukcji nurtu (1921–1934)* [Polish constructivism. An attempt at reconstructing the trend (1921–1934)] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1981).

¹⁴Andrzej Stawar, “Idee i działalność Mieczysława Szczuki” [Mieczysław Szczuka’s ideas and work], in idem: *Szkice literackie* [Literary sketches] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1957), 618–625. Specifically, Teresa Żarnower’s projects are discussed.



Fig. 1.
Paweł Kłudkiewicz,
Hoża. Moja ulica /
My street (Warsaw:
Schulewicz Publisher,
2022), 82

The drawings reinforce the duality of the narrative, which on the one hand talks about elegant pre-1939 tenement houses and magnificent apartments, and on the other hand emphasizes that: “[...] właściwie dotyczy to głównie tych położonych od frontu – tymczasem studnie podwórka to przestrzenie zastygłe i ponure [actually, it mainly pertains to those apartments which face the street – the dark courtyards are stagnant and gloomy spaces] (H 23). Indeed, the stuffy, dark, and airless courtyards were criticized by the constructivist and functionalist modernizers of contemporary cities. Strzemiński writes:

The natural tendency of using a plot of land is to build the tallest houses possible around its outer edges, leaving a dark courtyard in the middle. Such a courtyard, closed on all sides and deprived of fresh air, becomes a never-ventilated reservoir of moisture, putrefying bacteria, and polluted air coming from the apartments which surround it. There is no way that apartments overlooking such a courtyard can be ventilated or have access to fresh air. There is also no way sunbeams will reach them, except for a few apartments on the top floors and apartments facing the street, unless they face north.¹⁵

Although such impressive tenement houses are a product of the so-called *belle époque*, its beauty seems relative: “Jeśli miało się kapitał, melonik na głowie i jechało się dorożką do lupanaru, wszystko dookoła mogło się podobać. Gorzej, jeśli było się zużytym ludzkim AGD tamtych lat, na przykład starą służącą” [If you had the money, if you had a bowler hat and rode in a carriage to a park, everything around you was pretty. If you were a worn-out human household appliance of the era, for example an old maid, things looked less optimistic] (H 23). For the latter, the *belle époque* was a time of hard work. They experienced the city from the perspective of basement apartments, almshouses, and cobblestones.

On a two-page spread, a section of *Hoża* closely resembles an elegant Parisian Street, but the text that follows describes ruthless reprivatization and illegal eviction of tenants. Hired goons would forcefully make people move out of their apartments and then tenement houses would be sold for the price of “trz[ech] pacz[ek] papierosów” [three packs of cigarettes] (H 26). On the last page of chapter *Ć. Kamienica za 50 zł*, the history of reprivatization in Warsaw is illustrated by a drawing of a white tenement house whose outline and windows are black (they bring to mind darkness and empty apartments as well as the darkness of what is happening inside). Banners on the building read “SPRAWIEDLIWOŚĆ / DLA JOLI BRZESKIEJ” [JUSTICE / FOR JOLA BRZESKA] who was “ZABITEJ W WALCE / O PRAWO / DO MIESZKANIA / 1 MARCA 2011” [KILLED FIGHTING / FOR THE RIGHT / TO HOUSING / MARCH 1, 2011] (H 28). The first part of the slogan is in red letters and the second part is in black letters. In the center there is a portrait of Jola Brzeska – she was a victim of ruthless reprivatization; after her tragic and still unexplained death, she became a symbol of the tenants’ fight for the right to housing. In Kludkiewicz’s book, black, white, and red still semantically refer to the ideas of the first avant-garde.

Many thematic threads of the story about *Hoża* resonate with them, illustrating the numerous aberrations of capitalism that leave their mark on the city. The walls of old factories are absorbed by apartment buildings (*Ś. Stare fabryki* [*Ś. Old Factories*]): “Może nie od razu pojawią się tu szklane windy, klimatyzacja i aromat syntetycznej wanilii” [Maybe glass elevators, air conditioning, and the aroma of synthetic vanilla will not appear right away] (H 78). Abandoned and dilapidated tenement houses listed in the Municipal Register of Monuments of the Capital City of Warsaw are unlawfully demolished, such as the one with a mural showing a one-zloty coin and an inscription which reads “FREE HOMES / FOR / FREE PEOPLE” (Fig. 1). Residents who have been walking around their neighborhoods using well-known routes, such as an old woman with a shopping cart in a drawing in chapter *Ą. Przestrzały* [*Ą. Clearances*], are forced to change their ways because new construction sites pop up everywhere. Today, capitalist property law

¹⁵Władysław Strzemiński, “Łódź sfunkcjonalizowana” [Łódź functionalized], in idem: *Pisma* [Writings], selected and edited by Zofia Baranowicz (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975), 324.

protects development land, just as did the plot in the past. It is “podstawow[a] jednostk[a] wszelkich planów budowlanych” [the basic unit of all construction plans], “system prywatnej własności w stosunku do terenów miejskich” [a system of private property of urban areas].¹⁶

“Every square meter of a tenement house was supposed to yield profit [...]. At the same time, ‘industrial barons’¹⁷ [...] decorated their homes with anything as long as it was aesthetic, turning their apartments into a hot mess,”¹⁸ one scholar writes about the motivations behind Szczuka’s art. In Kłudkiewicz’s book, the new driving force behind old problems turns out to be, above all, revitalization, an aesthetic revitalization, symbolized by an elegant and decorative façade of an interwar tenement house. Hoża is transformed into a charming metropolitan street, complete with gardens, restaurants, cafes, and tourists. At the same time, it undergoes progressive gentrification, as seen in other streets in Warsaw’s downtown district. From Kłudkiewicz’s perspective, Hoża is a space of urban contrasts, housing problems, and social inequalities. Similar problems were described in avant-garde poems from the 1920s:

Pomimo tych wszystkich śródmiejskich luksusów, restauracji, apartamentów i loftów nieraz minimy tu kogoś z listy stu najbiedniejszych Polaków. Robią się widoczni na wiosnę, to właśnie wtedy pojawiają się skądś zbieracze puszek, parkingowi stacze i panowie sępiący piwo. W tym oceanie nieszczęść, brudnych ciuchów, alkoholu, chorób i samotności niektórzy wydają się prawdziwymi ulicznymi osobowościami [Despite all the luxuries, restaurants, apartments, and lofts found downtown, we may still come across one of the hundred poorest Poles. They become visible in the spring, that’s when can collectors, parking lot attendants, and people drinking beer appear out of nowhere. In this ocean of misery, dirty clothes, alcohol, disease, and loneliness, some people appear to be real street characters] (H 88).

The difference is that Kłudkiewicz, unlike interwar artists, already knows that the urban and social utopias inspired by the avant-garde of the 1920s, such as the nationalization of real estate after WW2 and the modernist reconstruction of Warsaw, did not solve the pressing problems of modernity. On the contrary, they generated new tensions and injustices.

The author also observes how Hoża’s avant-garde modernist architecture gives way to the tendency to revive the atmosphere of the *belle époque*. It is sometimes achieved through superficial operations performed on modernist buildings from the 1950s, inspired by the likes of Le Corbusier, Oscar Niemeyer, and Walter Gropius. The interwar period is idealized, seen through the prism of a gentleman in a bowler hat riding in a horse-drawn carriage to a park:

Jest tu kilka takich domów jak mój – to trochę Jednostki Marsylskie, a trochę kamienice. Na dole są sklepy, ale kształt bryły jest mocno, po modernistycznym, wyeksponowany. Elewacja miała kiedyś coś z De Stijl, z gry płaszczyzn – niebieskich, białych i żółtych. Teraz blok jest pastelowo-słomkowy, udaje więc kamienicę już na dobre [Some houses are like my house – a crossover between the Marseille Housing Unit and a tenement house. There are shops downstairs, but the

¹⁶Strzemiński, “Łódź sfunkcjonalizowana”, 325.

¹⁷Mieczysław Szczuka, “Sztuka a rzeczywistość” [Art and reality], *Dźwignia* 4 (1927): 13.

¹⁸Aleksandra Więcek-Gigla, “Rewolucje Mieczysława Szczuki” [Mieczysław Szczuka’s revolutions], *Śląskie Studia Polonistyczne* 2 (2022): 4.



Fig. 2.
Paweł Kłudkiewicz,
Hoża. Moja ulica /
My street (Warsaw:
Schulewicz Publisher,
2022), 89

shape of the building is exposed, in a modernist fashion. The façade was once reminiscent of De Stijl – a creative arrangement of blue, white and yellow planes. Now the building is pastel, yellowish, and it pretends to be a tenement house for good] (H 29).

The modernist housing estates that still exist today “ze szkołą, przedszkolem i przychodnią” [with a school, a kindergarten, and a clinic] and “tanie i egalitarne” [cheap and egalitarian] government-subsidized cafeterias (H 90) prove, however, that sometimes architectural “socialist slogans” promoted by the interwar avant-garde were taken seriously.

At home

People who evict tenants in the 21st century, people who “odcinając ludziom wodę i prąd, a potem nasyłając zbirów” [cut off people’s water and electricity supply, and then send in thugs] (H 26), appeared, as Kłudkiewicz emphasizes, when capitalism returned to Poland. It is significant that concurrently, black, white, and red began to dominate in Polish public space again, although this time thanks to street art, which is one of the topics of the book (*R. Street art*). The constructivist colors used by Kłudkiewicz seem to also be a reference to the works of the art duo Twożywo, which reacted critically to the return of capitalism to Poland in the 1990s. The duo is also important as regards the autobiographical context of the book:

On the one hand, people were desperately hungry for “splendid Western flavors,” which is completely understandable considering the bleakness and forced asceticism of the 1980s. On the other hand, the first milk teeth of the new order were growing, perhaps best illustrated by the ubiquitous “market stalls,” which were ultimately replaced by towering skyscrapers penetrating the sky.¹⁹

The artists openly admit that “constructivist, Soviet avant-garde”²⁰ was an important point of reference in their art. Such inspirations can be very direct:

Constructivist language of graphic art – geometric shapes and the use of black, white, and red – played an important role in their visual vocabulary. [...]. In El Lissitzky’s famous poster a red wedge was driven into a white circle and in one of Twożywo’s murals two typographic figures collided – a red circle [...] and a black square [...]. The artists used propaganda language to create an anti-propaganda and ambiguous message. At the same time, they seemed to best implement the ideals of the Soviet avant-garde, actually acting in social space and never turning into an artistic brand locked in the golden cage of the art market.²¹

Such avant-garde and street art references also suggest that Hoża is once again in a transitional period, just like Europe in Stern’s catastrophic poem, and the city during the Polish political transformation of the early 1990s, as shown by Twożywo. We are witnessing crisis and change. Kłudkiewicz associates it with the time of the pandemic, foreseeing that what he described and drew would be, by the time the book was published, largely “fragmentem staroego świata” [a particle of the old world] (H 9).

It is therefore clear that the longevity of avant-garde aesthetics results not so much (or not only) from its aesthetic values but also from its function: avant-garde art points to and comments on social problems. Red in avant-garde art may be read in those terms as well: red is

¹⁹Mariusz Libel, “Nie ma jednej odpowiedzi – z Mariuszem Libelem rozmawiają Konrad Kubala oraz Przemysław Pluciński” [There is no single answer – Konrad Kubala and Przemysław Pluciński interview Mariusz Libel], *Władza Sądzenia* 19 (2020): 204.

²⁰Libel, 207.

²¹Karol Sienkiewicz, *Twożywo*, <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/twozywo>, date of access 10 Dec. 2023. See also: Mariusz Libel, Krzysztof Sidorek, Katarzyna Tórz, *Plądrujemy ruiny rzeczywistości* [We are plundering the ruins of reality], ed. Katarzyna Tórz (Warsaw: Osman Djajadisastra, 2020); Magdalena Lachman, “Dynamika reaktywacji: Uwie(r)żyć na słowo... grupie Twożywo?” [The dynamics of reactivation: Do you trust ... the Twożywo group?], *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis* 41 (2022).

a color of warning. It attracts attention but it also says: “be careful.” Indeed, road signs also use red. Associating red with the masses in the interwar period indicated a problematic tension. If avant-garde colors still prove to be relevant and necessary in the 21st century, it is perhaps because the same social problems are still relevant.

However, in Kłudkiewicz’s book, red does not carry class connotations. Red is, for the most part, the color of the sky and the trees. The latter are an important element of the cityscape, as one of the opening chapters informs us that a “tunel gałęzi” [tunnel formed by tree branches] is a symbol of Hoża. Below the text Kłudkiewicz drew a sidewalk. Plants grow in the cracks and leaves may be seen lying around. This image, respectively, calls to mind the poem *Europa*: “Ten zielony kiel trawki / ściśniętej dwiema płytami trotuaru” [This green tusk of grass / squeezed in-between two sidewalk slabs].²² Red tree crowns which become one with the sky are disturbing. They seem to signal danger and attract attention. They are a warning sign. Red also symbolizes a distractive noise, such as the sounds of ambulance sirens (H 51–52).

Ecological concerns are thus incorporated into the visual layer of the book. They are rarely expressed directly: “Wśród gałęzi latarni powiewają foliowe torebki – śmieci, które produkujemy, są piekielnie trwałe” [Plastic bags are flying among the branches of streetlamps – the garbage we produce will not decompose for a very long time] (H 81). Cars, which are an integral part of cityscapes drawn by Kłudkiewicz, are also part of the problem: “I samochody – są uciążliwe, jest ich za dużo, trąbią i robią dużo chamskiego hałasu. Może kiedyś znikną? Tak jak nie ma już przecież w miastach odoru nawozu i umęczonych miejskich koni” [And cars – they are a nuisance, there are too many of them, they honk and make a lot of noise. Maybe they will disappear someday? The smell of manure and tired city horses are, after all, a thing of the past] (H 32).

Pollution that Kłudkiewicz writes about in chapter *T. New pollution* also concerns information technology and urban communication (Fig. 3). It brings to mind Stern’s *Europa* once again: “życie miasta / o wszelkiej porze / koncert polifoniczny / drutów / stuków / „Pacyfik” / rur kanalizacyjnych” [city life / at any time / a polyphonic concert / of wires / clicks / the “Pacific” / of sewage pipes].²³

Na całym świecie, a więc także na ulicy Hożej, trwa nieskończony przyrost infrastruktury. Trudno wyobrazić sobie miasto bez śmieciowego ekosystemu z tabliczek, lian-rur i metalowych drzew-słupów. Ulice wciąż obrastają kolejnymi znakami, sygnalizatorami, tabliczkami i odsyłaczami. Na dachach domów niczym syreny na dziobach okrętów prężą się konstrukcje telefonicznych masztów. [...] Sploty rur wentylacyjnych na tyłach restauracji to żywe obrazy H. R. Giger [All over the world, including Hoża, there is an endless increase in infrastructure. It is difficult to imagine a city without a garbage ecosystem of signs, lianas-pipes, and metal trees-poles. The streets are constantly being covered with new signs, traffic lights, plaques, and marks. Phone masts on the roofs are like sirens on the bows of ships. [...] Ventilation pipes in the back of restaurants are living paintings by H. R. Giger] (H 81).

²²Anatol Stern, “Europa”, *Reflektor* 3 (1925): 100.

²³Stern, 99.



Fig. 3.
Paweł Kłudkiewicz, *Hoża*.
Moja ulica / My street
(Warsaw: Schulewicz
Publisher, 2022), 73

The writer-illustrator organizes his chapters using the alphabet, which may directly refer to the opening line of the avant-garde poem *Europa*: A, B, C. However, in the story about Hoża, the alphabetical order is arbitrary. It fails to tame city life with its logic. Since there is no direct connection between the letter and the title of the chapter – *Ą. Przestrzały* [*Ą. Clearances*], *D. Mój blok* [*D. My block of flats*], *O. Początek ulicy* [*O. The beginning of the street*] (except for *P. Parę osób na Hożej* [*P. People on Hoża*] which only emphasizes the randomness of other pairings). *Europa* and *Hoża. Moja ulica / My Street* demonstrate that modern life does not easily lend itself to logical ordering. Respectively, both works – in their respective timeframes

– show that it is impossible to talk about the contemporary city using only words: “ja tego nie mogę / ja tego nie chcę wyrazić słowami” [I can’t do it / I don’t want to express it in words].²⁴ Combining language and image, writing and drawing, is more functional: “I kiedyś właśnie wracając z hałasu ulicy w ciszę klatki schodowej, zacząłem się zastanawiać: jak podzielić się tym moim doświadczeniem okolicy? Jasne, niech będą fakty i historie, ale przede wszystkim niech pojawi się smak, wrażenia – tej ulicy i tego miasta” [One day, when I was returning from the noise of the street into the silence of the staircase, I began to wonder: how to share my experience of my neighborhood? Sure, let me use facts and stories, but above all, let me share tastes and impressions – of this street and this city] (H 10).

The modern urban iconosphere as communication chaos; the chaos of signs, ads, and slogans; the polyphony of noises; and a deafening excess of information seem to be a persistent *topos*, at least since the times of the avant-garde. The poem *Europa* and its film adaptation by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson (1928) symbolize a breakthrough in the imagination of the Polish avant-garde art – the moment when the modern city ceases to be an object of admiration and hope for a better tomorrow and becomes an object of criticism. “Silent yards are no more. We can no longer enter spaces where it is possible to think, to ignore the noise of the nightmare of the society of the spectacle that has come true. The logorrhea of word-images keeps one awake. All meaning is lost in multiplied messages,”²⁵ wrote one scholar about the context in which the street art of *Twożywo* should be interpreted at the threshold of this century. However, logorrhea, both capitalist and political, was already described in Stern’s *Europa*. Immersed in modern urban imagination, the works of *Twożywo* and Kłudkiewicz, in its poster-like aesthetics, seem to find a way back to those other, silent, spaces.

Hoża. Moja ulica / My street is an authorial book. It was written and drawn by one person and not created by an artistic and literary collective, as many avant-garde logovisual works. Kłudkiewicz does not mention *Europa* as one of his inspirations in the introduction to the book. Instead, he writes about the images of New York on the covers of *The New Yorker*, the images of Paris, Rome, or Istanbul in a Czech children’s book, or the images of Brooklyn in Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*. As in *Europa* in the 1920s,²⁶ the visual layer of the book plays with many logovisual genres characteristic of the modern urban iconosphere: maps, posters, placards, signs, logos, comics, spatial planning models, picture books, movie stills (for example, from Andrzej Barański’s *Parę osób, mały czas* [A Few People, a Little Time] which talks about the relationship between Jadwiga Stańczakowa, who lived at Hoża, and Miron Białoszewski). Importantly, Kłudkiewicz consistently draws by hand and does not use montages or photocollages. He also emphasizes this fact in the introduction, writing about “maniakaln[e] sesj[e] temperowania ołówka” [maniacal pencil-sharpening sessions] (H 9). The hand-drawn line contrasts with the black and red computer font used to write the short lyrical reportages about Hoża. Thanks to the hand-drawn, this urban reality, this “architektoniczny patchwork” [architectural patchwork] (H 14), which Hoża has become as a result of WW2 and, respectively,

²⁴Stern, 100.

²⁵Wojciech Burszta, “W ruinach sensu”, in: Libel, Sidorek, Tórz, 52.

²⁶Kałuża, 13.

as a result of (un)realized or unfinished modernization projects (such as “[p]lac, którego nie ma” [a square that does not exist] which would embody the style of the “stalinowski barok” [Stalinist baroque] [H 38]), seems to be an intimate, inhabited, and individualized space.

Although modernist housing estates were designed as rectangles or squares (which is also clearly visible in Kłudkiewicz’s drawings) – and thus subordinated to modernist straight lines²⁷ – Hoża, as Kłudkiewicz writes, can be explored using shortcuts. One can circle around the neighborhood: “Strukturze tej bliżej do kształtu ameby niż kwadratu” [This structure is more like an amoeba than a square] (H 18). Shabby walls and dilapidated tenement houses can give rise to creativity, street festivals, galleries, and publishing houses (H 58). The power of stories can bring back Witkacy, Białoszewski, and Zadie Smith, all of whom were or are associated with Hoża. Instead of a utopia or a revolution, Kłudkiewicz wants us to feel at home in the world of modernist architecture and its relics. At the same time, he wants us to still find inspiration in the avant-garde. Developing and transforming the world is not about tearing down and building something completely new. It is about using gaps, free spaces, and “clearances” (H 18) in a creative way.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

²⁷Tim Ingold, *Lines. A Brief History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 167.

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KEYWORDS

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Hoża. Moja ulica / My Street

CONSTRUCTIVISM

the interwar period

ABSTRACT:

The present article examines the avant-garde inspirations behind Paweł Kłudkiewicz's book *Hoża. Moja ulica / My Street* (2022). Particular attention is paid to the role of logovisuality in the urban context as well as to the function of the colors black, red, and white which refer to the constructivist and socially engaged projects of the first avant-garde. Direct references to Anatol Stern, Mieczysław Szczuka and Teresa Żarnower's *Europa: A Poem* and references to the aesthetics of the art duo Twożywo, drawing directly from constructivist art, are also discussed. The article argues that such aesthetics conveys a social and political message in Kłudkiewicz's book (as regards social inequalities, distortions of capitalism, and modern urbanism in contemporary and interwar Warsaw).

E u r o p a

LOGOVISUALITY

city

RED

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