

## A Concise History of Women Originating from the City of Lodz Acting either as Flâneuses or Women Artists, at the Beginning of Modern Era until the End of World War II. An Attempt of Re-interpretation of the Literary and Art History Canon

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The purpose of this paper is an attempt of re-interpretation of the literary and art history canon in the context of female writers and visual artists living in Lodz. The idea of the flâneur was developed by a German Walter Benjamin in the 1920s and 1930s during Modernism time, when the “surreal” potential of the industrial urban space was intensively explored. The concept has exerted considerable impact on the way how we now interpret 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century depictions of the city. I will analyze the meanings of the texts written by Waleria Marrené-Morzowska (*Wśród kąkolu* 1890), the memoirs of Anna Clare and also the creative output of the female artists from Young Yiddish Group (1918–1921) as well as the sculptures and memoirs of Katarzyna Kobro (1898–1951) – the most intriguing female artist connected with Lodz. She was an accomplished sculptor who was under great influence of Constructivism, she strongly rejected individualism, subjectivism and expressionism, and she postulated instead an absolute objectivism of form. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Museum of Modern Art in Lodz. [Flâneur; Modernism; Art; Lodz; Katarzyna Kobro; Waleria Marrené-Morzowska]

In<sup>1</sup> 1971 an American Art Historian – Linda Nochlin, in her now classic essay, posed an important question: “*Why Have There Been No Great*

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*Women Artists?*<sup>2</sup> According to Linda Nochlin, art is a “social institution”. Thus, for women to become great artists, society must provide for them opportunities and greater support. Her explanation for this unfavorable situation of the female artists was the existence of clear discrimination of all women who wanted to gain any education in the field of art. If a woman managed somehow to obtain access to “higher art”, usually her representation on the market was quite limited. This situation was obviously maintained, especially within the cultural area and in the academic world – which was (and still is!) dominated by male supremacy and often unconscious, patriarchal attitudes, based on the male paradigm, functioning throughout most social institutions.

I believe that a similar situation is reflected in the phenomenon of women who can today be called by a French name – *flâneuse*.<sup>3</sup> Although this trend of *flâneuse*, can be found universally, strictly for the purpose of this paper I have decided to limit my investigation mainly to the area of the city of Lodz and its surroundings.

First, we should define the meaning of the *flâneur*. The idea was developed by Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), in the 1920s and 1930s during modernism time, when the “surreal” potential of the industrial urban space was intensively explored.<sup>4</sup> The concept has exerted considerable impact on the way in which we now interpret the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century depictions of the city. It has gained unquestionable cognitive status – a sum of insights to be taken for granted – in contemporary cultural theory. Benjamin’s idea of the *flâneur* is not only appreciated for its understanding of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century urban experience, but it can be regarded also as having a positive influence on it. The *flâneur* concept binds together different meanings from urban space, thereby adding meaning to the space itself, and it can be viewed as a symbolic representation of “modernity and personifica-

<sup>2</sup> L. NOCHLIN, *Women Art and Power and Other Essays*, New York 1988, pp. 147–158.

<sup>3</sup> Subject of a woman as the *flâneuse*, was discussed by J. Wolff, E. Dreyer, E. McDowall and M. Malone. To see more J. WOLFF, Janet The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity, in: *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2, 3, 1985, pp. 37–46; E. DREYER – E. MCDOWALL, Imagining the flâneur as a Woman, in: *Communicatio*, 38, 1, 2012, pp. 80–113.

<sup>4</sup> W. BENJAMIN, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, New York 1969, pp. 69–78.

tion of contemporary urbanity”, specifically in the sphere of social and literary analysis.<sup>5</sup>

An important figure in the discourse surrounding modernity and urbanization, the flâneur is and was represented by a “mythological or allegorical figure” on the streets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European cities.<sup>6</sup> The origin of the concept of the flâneur can be traced back to the writings of Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) and more specifically to its additional interpretation by Walter Benjamin, who identified Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* [*The Flowers of Evil*] (1857) as the basis of the flâneur theory.<sup>7</sup> But it was Walter Benjamin who made the flâneur figure an object of scholarly interest in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following Benjamin, the flâneur has become an important symbol for scholars, artists and writers. It should also be mentioned that Benjamin adopted the concept of the urban observer both as an analytical tool and as a lifestyle.<sup>8</sup>

Starting from the 1990’s some women scholars (e. g., Anke Gleber, Susan Buch-Morss, Janet Wolff, Lauren Rabinovitz) have aroused new debate – whether female flâneuse, in fact exists. Many of them have argued that because of their gender, women are excluded from the position of the wandering spectator, and by extension, this modern subjectivity, despite their presence on the street. Even though the expectation that all women must be escorted while outside had declined by the turn of the century, American feminist scholars like Mary Ryan and Sarah Deutsch have documented the ways in which women’s mere presence in the streets still drew social disapproval and even police surveillance due to the clear social association of single women in public with prostitution. Lauren Rabinovitz asserts that a prostitute could never “assume the cloak of anonymity associated with the flâneur” because “the flâneur maintained a purposeless gaze whereas the prostitute’s gaze needs always to be purposeful”.<sup>9</sup> Janet Wolff, revisiting her foundational article “The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity”, recently reiterated her claim that “the role of flâneuse

<sup>5</sup> P. P. FERGUSON, *The Flâneur On and Off the Streets of Paris*, in: K. TESTER (ed.), *The Flâneur*, London – New York 1994, pp. 22–42.

<sup>6</sup> E. WILSON, *The Invisible Flâneur*, in: *New Left Review*, 191, 1992, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> BENJAMIN, *Illuminations*, p. 158; W. BENJAMIN, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London 1973.

<sup>8</sup> BENJAMIN, *Illuminations*, p. 158.

<sup>9</sup> L. RABINOVITZ, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, New Brunswick – New York 1998, pp. 15–46.

remained impossible despite the expansion of women's public activities, and despite the newer activities of shopping and cinema-going".<sup>10</sup> Anke Gleber concurs that shopping is actually a "derivative", "bourgeois variant of domesticized flânerie" rather than the wide-ranging freedom and disinterest of true flânerie.<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, Rabinovitz states that the new feminine consciousness created in cities "is less connected to flânerie and a radical subjectivity and more to the rituals of urban commodity consumption".<sup>12</sup> In other words, in American and West European countries the female flâneur might theoretically exist as a subject position, these critics argue, but it was irrelevant to women's actual experiences out in public.

In my article, I will try to concentrate on re-interpreting the literary and art history canon, taking into serious consideration female writers and artists in some way connected with the city of Lodz. Many of these women have been forgotten or marginalized until the contemporary times. The closing date of my investigation is the beginning of World War II, as the turning point of the early modern days of Lodz.

I would like to underline that, some of the more recent research on women and the public in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Kingdom of Poland under Russian Tsarist rule confirms that all type of women occupied public spaces and especially the streets. However, scholars reconstructing historical womanhood construe women's publicity as qualified; women's public actions seem very often to be accompanied by the moralizations and reprimands of the conservative part of the society. Presumably such criticism would make the idea of a female Polish flâneur or flâneuse quite unlikely to be an anonymous bourgeois stranger as was described by Baudelaire and Benjamin and others as masculine. Yet, women clearly walked alone the streets and had done so since the beginning of the modern city era, circa 1789.<sup>13</sup> Still, there is a suspicion that "the female bohemian who strolled and looked with freedom could not exist in the nineteenth century".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> WOLFF, pp. 37–46.

<sup>11</sup> A. GLEBER, *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flânerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture*, Princeton – New York 1999, p. 174.

<sup>12</sup> RABINOVITZ, p. 181.

<sup>13</sup> Ch. STANSELL, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860*, Chicago 1987, pp. 217–221.

<sup>14</sup> P.G. MACKINTOSH – G. NORCLIFFE, *Flânerie on Bicycles: Acquiescence to*

### Lodz as a Modern City

The city of Lodz which is located only 120 km southwest of Warsaw was promoted by Tsarist decree in 1820 from an obscure village with only 767 inhabitants to a “factory city”, the center of the capitalist textile industry of the Polish Kingdom, soon to serve the needs of the enormous Russian market. The development of Lodz was forced upon the city very late, in a programmatic and swift way that turned the city into an unquestionable symbol for hasty urbanization, extreme capitalism, and cosmopolitanism. German settlers were encouraged to settle in Lodz, followed closely by Polish villagers as well as Jewish artisans and petty merchants. Each of these groups was tempted into the “promised land” of Lodz, which could provide mass and cheap labor. The town attracted newcomers like a magnet, and grew like a mushroom on sand.<sup>15</sup> The rapid growth resulted in the rise of a huge industrial city with an extremely diverse urban fabric, where industrialists such as the Jewish “magnate” Israel Kalmanowicz Poznanski (1833 to 1900) and the Germans Ludwik Ferdynand Geyer (1805–1869) as well as Karl Scheibler (1888–1934), built elaborate homes, factories, and housing for staff and thousands of workers on the same grounds.<sup>16</sup> Construction was chaotic and a lack of city planning created a heteroclit disorder so that manufacturing and residential zones, palaces, middle class tenement houses, and slums were all within close range of each other.<sup>17</sup> New districts grew overnight next to the old city’s market place and prestigious Piotrkowska Avenue with its upper-class dwellings. The new areas contained mansions and villas built in eclectic styles: neo-Renaissance often for educational institutions, neo-Gothic or neo-Roman for sacral buildings, and neo-Baroque or Art Nouveau (Secession) for housing. The mixture of styles often depended on the ethnic and cultural background of the proprietor or architect, a sizable number of whom were Jewish. In the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

Women in Public in the 1890s, in: *The Canadian Geographer*, 50, 1, 2006, pp. 17–18.

<sup>15</sup> K. BADZIAK, *Gospodarka Łodzi w okresie kapitalistycznym (do 1918 r.)*, in: B. BARANOWSKI – J. FIJAŁEK (eds.), *Łódź. Dzieje miasta, t. 1. Do 1918 r.*, Warszawa – Łódź 1980, pp. 267–300.

<sup>16</sup> K. BADZIAK, *Great Capitalist Fortunes in the Polish Lands before 1939 (The Case of the Poznański Family)*, in: *Polin. A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies*, 6, 1991, pp. 57–88.

<sup>17</sup> K. STEFAŃSKI, *Jak zbudowano przemysłową Łódź. Architektura i urbanistyka miasta w latach 1821–1914, Łódź 2001 and Idem, Ludzie, którzy zbudowali Łódź. Leksykon architektów i budowniczych miasta (do 1939 r.)*, Łódź 2009.

Lodz was thus both revolutionary and modern, as well as miserably backward.<sup>18</sup>

### The Experience of Male Writers of Lodz

No wonder that Lodz as a model modern city and extreme urban phenomenon was attractive for many writers and essayists, particularly at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period simultaneously grasping with realism, naturalism, and decadence. Indeed, the city's essence raised many questions; foremost among issues was the presence of Jews in a multiethnic society, itself strongly linked to modern capitalism. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Lodz was described in literature by several names (such as: "city of factories", "city of chimneys", "evil city", "promised land"), which even today still reflect the common attitudes towards the city. The most famous among the names is undoubtedly the biblical metaphor of *Promised Land* used by Władysław Reymont (1867–1925), as well as a contrary phrase – *The Evil City* coined by Zygmunt Bartkiewicz (1867–1944) – the author of reports entitled *The Evil City. Images from 1907* (1911). These phrases "promised land" and "evil city" are the two expressions that perfectly characterized Lodz at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> Another important point was presented by Joseph Roth (1894–1939) in *Hotel Savoy* (1924). Although the name of the city is never mentioned, but Roth acknowledged later that his model was Lodz, where the Hotel Savoy with its Jugendstil facade had been erected at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, the structure was hailed as one of the first high-rise (actually seven floors) buildings in the city, and it still stands, recently renovated, on narrow Traugutta Street. The unnamed city forms are the social background to the plot. The city is constantly gray and soaked under steady rain, there are occasional mentions of "decrepit and tumbledown" buildings that appear eerie and odd.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, it describes beautifully lit and long Piotrkowska Avenue, where one can observe many incredibly elegant women walking the street, who are on the southern tea in Paris, have been imported by

<sup>18</sup> STEFAŃSKI, *Jak zbudowano przemysłową Łódź*, p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> K. KOŁODZIEJ, Między "ziemią obiecaną" a "złym miastem" – cała (?) prawda o Łodzi w publicystyce i prasie warszawskiej, [cz. 2], in: *Acta Universitatis Lodziesis. Folia Litteraria Polonica*, 13, 2010, pp. 177–188.

<sup>20</sup> J. ROTH, *Hotel Savoy*, New York 2003, p. 10.

air and scattered Lodz. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the poet Julian Tuwim (1894–1953), described Lodz as a city characterized by all those simultaneously existing oppositions and contrasts, a city of nothing but chimneys and mud, palaces and wooden sheds, misery and big money, hunger and affluence, a city in which the silence was as deafening as the sound from the factories, a promised city for one hundred and a pure hell for hundreds of thousands.<sup>21</sup> In other words, without any distinct cultural or national identity but wide open for a great variety of differences, contradictions, and paradoxes the city would become the melting-pot of the most radical forms of art during the first decades of the new century.

In the interwar period, we can easily find topics which describe the city of Lodz by many Jewish authors. The fascinating book *The Brothers Ashkenazi* was published by Israel Joshua Singer (1893–1944) in Poland in 1935. Another intriguing novel *Reise in Polen [Journey to Poland]* (1925) was published by Bruno Alfred Döblin (1878–1957), who noted “*Ich bin in Lodz: Fabriken, Wildwest, Provinz*” [“I’m in Lodz: factories, the Wild West, the sticks”].<sup>22</sup> Many believe that Döblin caught in these powerful and clashing images the essence of that most exasperating and also intriguing of cities – a city where the Jewish poet Julian Tuwim (who wrote only in Polish) felt at home. “*Let others debate the merits / Of the Ganges Sorrento or the Crimea / Give me Lodz! Her dirt and smoke / Bring happiness and delight to me.*”<sup>23</sup>

### Women Writers and Visual Artists about Lodz

I would like to stress that the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was in the Polish Kingdom a time of social feminism, aimed at building the strengths of the Polish women as a part of society. Among the most prominent writers and activists were Maria Ilnicka (1821–1897), Maria Konopnicka (1842–1920), Eliza Orzeszkowa (1842–1910) and Gabriela Zapolska (1857–1921). Among the most important magazines that promoted this limited idea of women’s liberation were: *The Ivy [Bluszcz]*, and *The Dawn [Świt]*.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> J. TUWIM, *Kwiaty polskie*, Warszawa 1973, pp. 51–52.

<sup>22</sup> A. DÖBLIN, *Journey to Poland*, London – New York 1991, p. 247.

<sup>23</sup> Tuwim in: R. J. VAN PELT, *Lodz and Getto Litzmannstadt: Promised Land and Croaking Hole of Europe*, Ontario 2015, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> U. CHOWANIEC – U. PHILLIPS, *Women’s Voices and Feminism in Polish Cultural*

It must be mentioned here that the public realm, controlled by a hostile Tsarist state, was perceived as alien, while the private sphere was a source of freedom and independence in need of defiance against state-imposed laws. When the female poet Maria Konopnicka wrote “our homes will be our fortresses” she expressed the widespread perception that a Polish household was a state unto itself, a bastion of resistance against political and cultural domination by partitioning powers. The late Positivist idea of women’s emancipation has to be seen as a form of juggling between the demands for economic and social liberation, and duty toward the nation. Patriotic duties were still guided by Romantic literature that idealized a woman and situated her within the domestic sphere. This idealization of the private sphere was accompanied by the idealization of the mother-figure or Mother-Patriot as depicted in the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz’s poems. In the Polish literature at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there is no presentation from a feminist perspective that focuses on a woman’s “search for herself” (i. e. as a woman) but only conventional models of Polish patriotic activity such as organic work within the entire social body.<sup>25</sup> Issues surrounding female authorship from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century such as negative public perceptions of female writers of books and novels, prejudices against woman’s intellectual and artistic capabilities, associated difficulties in finding supportive publishers and reviewers often stemmed women creative output. The interwar period was without a doubt a time of greater women’s liberation: women gained the right to vote, obtained better access to education, and started to play leading roles in the nation’s vibrant artistic, academic and political life. Women’s writing underwent a time of real eruption and growth during this time and left a permanent mark in Polish literature, with key authors such as Zofia Nałkowska (1884–1954), Maria Dąbrowska (1889–1965), Maria Kuncewiczowa (1895–1989), Irena Krzywicka (1899–1994), and many others.<sup>26</sup>

*Memory*, Newcastle 2012, pp. 32–35.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many Polish women were involved in organizing public demonstrations, publishing feminist newspapers and engaging in open social and political debates on an unprecedented scale. They not only demanded the unlimited right to education, work, and political participation, they also became



The way that women authors have mapped the city of Lodz, its urban system and architecture, its population and diversity of cultures, is at the same time very personal and marked by the historical and aesthetical contexts in which they could develop their creativity. Their personal preferences, as well as history, equally shaped the way they imagined and negotiated modern urban identities. They wrote belletteristic works just at the time that sociologists and ideologists started to write about the city in analytic terms.

First, I would like to shed some light on a Waleria Marrené-Morzowska (1832–1903), a Polish novelist, feminist and translator of Ibsen and Balzac. She was the very first female writer who had taken under serious consideration the city of Lodz. Starting from the 1880s Marrené-Morzowska worked for the many Warsaw and Lodz newspapers (such as *Lodzer Zeitung*, *Gazeta Łódzka*, *Dziennik Łódzki*). Her novel about Lodz entitled *Among the Cockle* [*Wśród kąkolu*], was printed in *Biesiada Literacka* (1890). Unfortunately, it was never published as a book, therefore it passed away without an echo. Although the author concentrated on the mutually difficult and full of conflicts Polish German relations than on the presentation of the city, she managed somehow to show the first image of the industrial city of Lodz.

Marrené-Morzowska describes the medical doctor Jan Krzesławski – the main character of the novel just after his arrival to Lodz. He used to live in many big and fashionable European capitals and noted with dismay that the city, which raved most of his traveling companions, seemed to him rather ugly (the writer even used a few times the epithet “repulsive”) and scruffy.<sup>27</sup> In the words of Marrené-Morzowska Lodz marks its presence in the landscape with high chimneys, which: “dominated the surrounding forests. From a distance, the city sparkled many colors, from gray plaster houses bright spots stand out against the red factories, emerging from the green forest”.<sup>28</sup>

involved in a critique of the unjustified, patriarchal construction of femininity, unfair conventions thrust on women’s sexuality, and the roles imposed on women’s bodies. In 1906, a very young Polish writer, Zofia Nałkowska presented in her novel *Women* a new model of a woman liberated from the limitations of the male world. CHOWANIEC – PHILLIPS, pp. 36–38.

<sup>27</sup> W. MARRENÉ-MORZKOWSKA, *Among the Cockle* [*Wśród kąkolu*], *Biesiada Literacka*, July 4, 1890, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

Another woman of Polish-Jewish descent Rosa Luxemburg (1871 to 1919) who was a Marxist theorist and revolutionary socialist wrote (similarly to Marrené-Morzowska) under a false pen name of Maciej Rózga or “Matthew Rod”. Luxemburg wrote extensively about the Revolution of 1905 and often mentioned Lodz in this context. She wrote in her own words: “So far, Lodz is a city that is reminiscent of the settlements that were quickly built next to the gold mines in Australia and America”<sup>29</sup> and “Lodz was also the center of permanent demonstrations, strikes universal clashes with the soldiery – for five days Lodz boiled with uninterrupted fight.”<sup>30</sup> After First World War Poland regained independence and The Second Polish Republic, was established in 1918. At this stage, it can be said that Lodz slid economically into depression. Some information about this time we can find in Anna Clarke’s prose. She was a young Jewess and translator of the eminent Jewish writer – Yashaia Trunk (1887–1961). Anna Clark was a Lodz inhabitant in the interwar period. She recalls her life in this town in her foreword to Trunk’s book.<sup>31</sup> She clearly describes the place and situation of women in her wealthy Jewish family in Lodz as limited solely to their house on Gdanska Street, the so-called “Palace with a glass roof”. Clarke mentioned also her mother who was devoted to breeding flowers in pots and having conversations with different peddlers of various goods. Thus, the space of the wealthy Jewish women was usually limited to domestic matters such as sewing garments, ordering dresses and school uniforms for children and shoes from the shoemaker. Most of the work was done by craftsmen who came directly to the house so there was no need for women to appear in the city. As Clarke wrote in her foreword: “It never occurred to me to enter the shop alone. Going to the store, not to even mention to the restaurant was not a part of my life.”<sup>32</sup> In this world, “the mangle or the old-fashioned laundry was the agora, was the equivalent of an inn and fair, a place for meeting and exchanging gossip and jokes”.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> PELT, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>31</sup> Y. Y. TRUNK – A. CLARKE, *Pojln – obrazy i wspomnienia z Lodzi. Biblioteka “Tygla Kultury”*, Łódź 1997, pp. 3–38.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

Another important point in the *flâneurism* in Lodz was the creative output of the many female artists from Young Yiddish Group (1918 to 1921). The founding of the Young Yiddish, the first Jewish artistic avant-garde group in Poland, grew out of a meeting in 1918 between poet Moyshe Broderzon (1890–1956) and a group of visual artists gathered around Yitskhok Broynier (1887–1944), Jankiel Adler (1895–1949), and Marek Szwarz (1892–1958). Eventually, the group included about 20-odd members together with some women artists such as Ida Brauner (1892–1949), Zofia Gutentag (1899–1933), Pola Lindenfeld (1894 to 1942), Dina Matus (1899–c. 1941). The group emerged out of the Jewish community of Lodz during the time of the First World War and was associated with both the Bunt group in Poznan and the so-called Formists in Cracow. In my opinion it is very symptomatic that the socially radical Young Yiddish was established, in this incomprehensibly fast growing industrial city. Nevertheless, Jakub Appenzlak (1894 to 1950) – a publicist from Warsaw was astonished that “*Young Yiddish artists prefer to stay in chic cafes, away from the hustle and bustle, misery and naked truth of the ghetto*”.<sup>34</sup>

Many of the Young Yiddish works dealt with the Jewish and early Christian themes and motifs, often in linocut and with certain similarities to the works of Ludwig Meidner in Berlin and Marc Chagall. Based on existing data concerning the Young Yiddish women artists, it may be said that they dealt mostly with the subjects of landscapes or flowers motives and portraits. Their pictures and paintings were very seldom concerned with the problems of the city of Lodz. Two uncommon examples are the artist Pola Lindenfeld’s linocuts depicting most probably the city of Lodz: *Corner of a Town*, and *The landscape* both reproduced in the “*Young Yiddish Almanac*” 4–6 from 1919. In my opinion the linocut *Corner of a Town* is particularly interesting. It juxtaposes or brings together a row of houses with sharply pitched roofs against a sky filled with curvilinear clouds presented in expressionist manner. By using a semicircular frame motif that mimics the shape of a Jewish tombstone – matzevah, Pola Lindenfeld created a strong sense of danger. The landscape in her work is miserable and abandoned, but it is charged with ghostly marks of human presence.

<sup>34</sup> J. MALINOWSKI, *Malarstwo i rzeźba Żydów Polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa 2000, p. 169.

If we study closely the artistic output of the women from the Young Yiddish group, it can be observed that the artists often manipulated the Expressionist idiom of prismatic forms which were arranged in a figurative pattern, while at the same time exploring the theme of female presence in the world. In opinion Marek Bartelik: “*the prismatic pattern of Dina Matus’s work might be viewed as reflecting the ‘prismatic identity’ of Jews, which, according to Zygmunt Bauman, resulted in a distorted perception of them by others ethnic groups*”.<sup>35</sup>

It is generally assumed that whilst the concept of the woman in the philosophy of the Young Yiddish art was rather abstract, still it was occasionally applied by them in their artistic and social practices to the portraits of authentic women. The Young Yiddish Group was unjustifiably neglected by many Polish scholars, who devoted more attention to the cities of Cracow and Warsaw. It only confirms the existence of multidirectional “*histoire croisée*” in Europe, an alternative to the stereotype of unidirectional cultural transfer from the center to the periphery.<sup>36</sup>

As far as I am concerned the most intriguing woman artist connected with Lodz is Katarzyna Kobro (1898–1951).<sup>37</sup> She was one of the most distinguished female sculptors of the interwar period. For a long period of time she was marginalized by the shadow of her famous husband Władysław Strzemiński (1893–1952), who was an outstanding painter and was regarded by many as a prominent and leading figure of the Polish Constructivism movement.<sup>38</sup> Kobro’s artistic

<sup>35</sup> M. BARTELIK, “Models of Freedom. The Young Yiddish. Group from Lodz, 1919–1921”, in: R.-C. WASHINGTON – M. LONG (eds.), *Jewish Dimensions in Modern Visual Culture: Antisemitism, Assimilation, Affirmation*, Hannover – London 2009, p. 234.

<sup>36</sup> M. WERNE – B. ZIMMERMANN, *De la comparaison à l’histoire croisée*, Paris 2004, pp. 30–50.

<sup>37</sup> In 1931, K. Kobro published *Kompozycja przestrzeni. Obliczenia rytmu czasoprzestrzennego* [*Spatial Composition: Calculating the Spacetime Rhythm*], a book co-written with Strzemiński, as the second volume of the “a.r.” Library [Biblioteka a.r.]. In 1932, she joined the Abstraction Creation group and in 1933 became a member of the Forma editorial staff, the magazine of the Polish Artists Trade Union. J. ŁADNOWSKA et al., *Katarzyna Kobro 1898–1951*, Leeds – Łódź 1999.

<sup>38</sup> W. Strzemiński was a Polish avant-garde painter of international renown. In 1922 he moved to Wilno, and in the following year supported Vytautas Kairiūkštis in creating the first avant-garde art exhibition in Lithuania (then under Polish rule). In November 1923 he moved to Warsaw, where with Henryk Berlewi he founded the constructivist group *Blok*. During the 1920s he formulated his theory of *Unism*

career was interrupted by motherhood, forced immigration, a turbulent divorce and various political obstacles she had to face as a Polish citizen with Russian-German roots after World War II. During this time most of her work was destroyed or lost, and only posthumously partially reconstructed and reevaluated. The Museum of Art in Lodz (initiated in 1930's by a group of artists of the "a.r." group, among them Strzemiński and Kobra herself) possesses the largest collection of her remaining works. Kobra moved to Lodz with her husband in 1931. In the memoirs of her daughter Nika Strzemińska, we find some information about how Kobra perceived contemporary Lodz. In her opinion Lodz was a city: "With great wealth of factory owners and indescribable misery of the workers."<sup>39</sup> In 1931, Kobra taught "Aesthetics of Interiors" in the Economic College and Economic School for Girls in Lodz.<sup>40</sup> Her daughter Nika recalls: "Through lectures and practical activity, young girls gained familiarity with the art and knowledge of the respective home appliances [...] composing not only the color but the food on the plate. Thanks to these lectures the future housewives [...] changed their petty-bourgeois tastes."<sup>41</sup> Thus, once again, it appears that the only space for a woman was in the close circle of home. A notebook-diary was kept for a certain period by Katarzyna Kobra. In this diary there were many descriptions about her deteriorating relationship with her famous husband and her deep concerns about the well-being of her daughter Nika.<sup>42</sup> However, there are no references to the strolls and walks on the streets of Lodz and there are no descriptions of her impressions of the city.

To summarize this topic of a women flâneuses and artists in Lodz, we can say that at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one could find all types of women occupying

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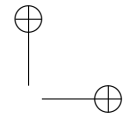
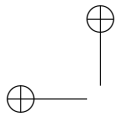
(Unizm in Polish). He is an author of a revolutionary book titled *The theory of vision*. He was co creator of unique avant-garde art collection in Lodz gathered thanks to the enthusiasm of members of the "a.r." group as Katarzyna Kobra, Henryk Stażewski (the artists) and the poets – Julian Przyboś and Jan Brzękowski. In postwar Łódź, Strzemiński was a lecturer at the Higher School of Plastic Arts and design *Noeoplastic Room* in Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. To see more J. ŁADNOWSKA et al., p. XX.

<sup>39</sup> N. STRZEMIŃSKA, *Miłość, sztuka i nienawiść: o Katarzynie Kobra i Władysławie Strzemińskim*, Warszawa 2001, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> M. BOMANOWSKA, *7 rozmów o Katarzynie Kobra*, Łódź 2011, p. 50.



public spaces and walking or strolling on the streets of the city of Lodz. Although some of them like Waleria Marrené-Morzowska, Pola Lindenfeld, Dina Matus and Katarzyna Kobro – dared to become successful artists and in many ways, they were independent women. However, none of them we can truly call a Polish *flâneuse*, because none of them was regarded as a “mythological or allegorical figure” on the streets of the city of Lodz. These women were excluded from the position of the disinterested wandering spectator and they were marginalized in the domestic sphere. As Griselda Pollock, a feminist art historian, elaborates: “Women did not enjoy the freedom of incognito in the crowd. They were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm. They did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, women in turn-of-the-century Lodz did not look. They were positioned as the object of the *flâneurs* gaze!

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<sup>43</sup> G. POLLOCK, *Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity*, in: N. MIRZOEFF (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, London – New York 1998, p. 77.

