

# Political Protest and Snobbery

## Fashion among Cracow Students in the Early 1950s

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The ethnological research on the everyday life of big Polish cities has only commenced. The author describes a series of customary behaviours connected with the dress of the students of Cracow in the years 1945–1956. Basing on the newspapers of those times and on his own memories, the author discusses the fashion of that period, the ways of obtaining the clothing and its alteration necessary since a considerable part of it came from the military stores of the Western armies. A proper haircut and a special way of bearing were chosen to match the dress. It was a demonstration in opposition to the uniform propagated by the Communist youth organisation, a manifestation of the philosophy of life. According to the author that fashion was a conscious form of the protest expressed by the academic youth against the cultural unification introduced by the totalitarian system formed in Poland in the period following World War II.

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For centuries the student community has been an essential component of Cracow's cultural environment. The life and customs of old-time students have often provided a rewarding field of exploration for novelists, poets, playwrights and scholars. The last-mentioned group has been exhibiting a particularly keen interest in the distant past, which has acquired a nostalgic patina of centuries gone by (Stepanova 1996:82–93), undergoing an ever increasing mythologization and distortion in the process. On the other hand, everyday life and popular customs in more recent times have received much less scholarly attention, even though a lot of written sources and iconographic materials are available, to say nothing of the remembrances of people who began studies in Cracow less than half a century ago. Ethnological and anthropological reflection on the everyday life of big cities in Poland in the 20th century is still at the beginning stage. Scholars who deal with those matters have often relied so far on the popular-culture model and concentrated on the analysis of various manifestations of so-called "plebeian

customs". This is certainly the case in Cracow, where the favourite topics include the annual Emaus fairs at Easter, the antics of Lajkonik (a man dressed up as a Tartar rider during a popular festival in summer), solemn religious processions, parades of craftsmen's guilds etc. Some attention has also been given to the city's market places, particularly in connection with the contacts between Cracow and the neighbouring villages. Incidentally, the suburban village has sometimes offered a convenient and "safe" subject of research for an ethnologist venturing for the first time into the domain of "urban anthropology".

The life of students and the young generation of educated people in present-day Cracow is usually viewed in an artistic or hedonistic perspective (Godula (ed.) 1995:239–290). Other aspects of everyday life have usually been absent from the literature, or at least from publications about Cracow.

The late 1940s and the first half of the 1950s present a particularly interesting period for a historian of Polish culture or an ethnologist, in

view of the political circumstances of those days. The programmes of forced "re-education" of society took particularly drastic forms in big cities, such as Cracow, Warsaw or Poznań. The generation of adolescents and young adults, being a category traditionally opposed to all forms of pressure and any attempts to impose by decree uniform patterns of daily life, reacted by specific forms of protest, escapism and rejection of the officially approved way of life. Under the peculiar circumstances of Stalinist Poland, this protest against ideologically determined, forced uniformity did not lead to pluralism in preferences and tastes. At least in the field of popular fashion and entertainment it gave rise to a more or less uniform type of popular culture, which was simply the negation of the model officially professed by the simple-minded social engineers. The ideological war in the field of popular culture in post-war Poland that the communist system waged against society and lost constitutes an extensive area of exploration for students of customs, not only in Poland, but in entire Central and Eastern Europe. So far, however, this area has been sadly neglected (Dzięgiel 1995).

Issues of fashion, clothes, entertainment and resistance to ideological pressure in daily life were dealt with by Leopold Tyrmand (who died in the United States a couple of years ago) in his columns, novels and essays (Tyrmand 1955, 1980). We owe him at least some fairly adequate accounts of cultural situations. His observations, however, were usually made from the point of view of well-to-do or even elitist circles of Warsaw of the 1950s and the Warsaw underworld, linked with that first group by various kinds of dealings. Tyrmand's position in Warsaw society did not exactly place him in close contact with the student circles of Warsaw, with all their social, financial and cultural differentiation. He was, however, one of the few authors fascinated by this aspect of contemporary culture.

The intention of the present essay is simply to acknowledge the existence of a new research area, using as an example the popular student fashion in an old, big-city academic centre. The description of cultural elements presented below results from the author's own experience

and observations made during his studies at the Jagellonian University in the years 1950–1955 among a group of fellow students of both sexes. Additional reflection was made possible by the author's field studies in ethnography carried out in those years in various rural regions of Poland.

In the early 1950s, fashion – as well as entertainment – played a principal role in the bizarre war the object of which was to promote an ideologically appropriate lifestyle. Today, after all those years, the official attempts to bring into uniformity the fashion of trousers or skirts may seem ridiculous – reminiscent of those rare instances of crazy regimes where ideological totalitarianism still reigns supreme. One might wonder how the dogmatic official propagandists could fail to see the futility of their fierce and frenzied attacks. Back then, however, things looked different.

For many people, the defence of their individual tastes in the field of clothing became a surrogate battlefield where they fought for their right to privacy and to individual preferences. It was a struggle for personal liberty.

Unimportant and trivial issues of hairstyle and clothing were often blown up out of all proportion. It was a strategy of the system to provoke hysteria over matters of no consequence. When, many years later, the system itself resigned from some of its ideological incantations and symbols, it left behind an often idolatrous cult of the very lifestyle it had vainly tried to eradicate. The artificially maintained isolation of millions of young people from everyday elements of the Western civilization left society in a state of infantilism. One of its manifestations was the attitude of young Poles – but also Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians or Russians – towards modern fashion. The ideological war of the early 1950s in the field of entertainment and fashion has long since ended, but until now it remains an area where reactions of society are devoid of all criticism and objective reflection. This is highly typical of civilizationally retarded neophytes who have lived in a state of cultural isolation.

Jazz, chewing gum, Coca-Cola – these were the symbols of the alleged corruption of the non-communist world and at the same time ele-

ments of an extremely naively construed mythology of the West. Having banned Western novelties, the regime forfeited the chance to gain popularity even among the most primitive groups of the youth, whose support it tried to win in the first place. The officially extolled drabness would soon lose any appeal, while things attacked by the state propaganda as manifestations of bourgeois, Western tastes were promoted to the rank of forbidden fruit. In some young people, however, the authorities managed to reinforce complexes and the sense of powerlessness. Those people had come to believe that stagnation, drabness and banality constituted a virtue. They let themselves be persuaded that novelty and change in everyday life signified an attempt to destroy their world.

The East, on the other hand, had little to offer that could really impress the thousands of young people who yearned for civilizational advancement. What made things even worse, post-war Poland, deliberately impoverished and reduced to the status of a cultural backwater, had likewise ceased to appeal to the greater part of the youth in the long run, despite the noisy propaganda. This was also the case with clothing, which usually plays a very important role in the life of young people of both sexes, as a means of expressing one's personality, aspirations, expectations and sense of membership of the group which one accepts.

The offer of the state-owned shops was out of fashion and in poor taste, both in terms of design and colours. Ladies' garments could make even the most beautiful girl look ugly. The shapeless coats and jackets, heavily padded at the shoulders, gave everyone a squat look. The shoulder padding was seen in those years as an epitome of conservatism and bad taste. Awkward, mass-produced dresses were neither short, nor long, neither loose, nor tight, and had a lot of pretentious frills around the neckline. Women's footwear imitated the kitschy designs of the late 1930s. Only private boutiques, whose number dwindled rapidly, would offer a limited selection of stylish fashions at exorbitant prices.

Looking back today, nearly half a century later, at the official fashion and goods sold in state-owned shops in those times, one can see

that it was an impoverished and vulgarized variety of the type of clothing worn in the years 1939–1940 (Dziekońska-Kozłowska 1964:271–296).

Modern fashion would reach the cordoned-off Poland of the 1950s slowly and selectively. The so-called “new look”, which marked the reaction of the West against the wartime restrictions and military requirements that even women had had to comply with, came to Poland only much later, half-heartedly and, occasionally, in highly distorted forms (Dziekońska-Kozłowska 1964:297–356). The witty, illustrated guide to modern dress by Barbara Hoff and Jan Kamyczek, *Jak oni się mają ubierać* [The way they should dress] had yet to appear, in the wake of the fundamental political and ideological changes of 1956 (Hoff & Kamyczek:1956). Meanwhile, inspiration had to be derived from Western films, shown in ever decreasing numbers, and sometimes from old copies of Western magazines. This unnatural isolation left the young generation with a nearly pathological craving for novelties, ideas or gimmicks of all kinds originating from the mythical land of well-being, where life was supposed to run smoothly and colourfully to the rhythmical sound of music. And in the Stalinist era no one would make the young generation any promises of a “speedy accession to Europe”! On the contrary, society was told daily that very soon the revolutionary anger of the masses was going to erupt, plunging the rest of the world in the drab reality. On hearing this, many a young man would think that if the worst came to the worst, it would nevertheless be nicer to be on the other side of the Iron Curtain when that mythical revolutionary eruption took place... Or, meanwhile, to get to a place where one could at least enjoy the material goods denied to the people at home.

As in the case of women's fashion, also men's wear showed the same boring styles in every shop selling factory-made clothes. Likewise, an air of dead seriousness emanated from the official photographs of the highest-ranking dignitaries. I remember a visit of a group of Soviet experts on power industry, after which the baggy, awkward-looking double-breasted jackets they wore received the epithet “high-powered”

in student parlance. Decades would have to pass before party activists started to read fashion magazines, use the services of beauticians and masseuses, or play tennis in order to get slim. In the 1950s, men's fashion promoted by the official elite reflected the tastes from the first years of World War II. This becomes quite apparent when one confronts it with old American films or with archive photographs taken at conferences and meetings of statesmen from the East and the West.

Navy blue or dark brown double-breasted pinstripe suits were popular with people of unrefined taste, be they rich or poor. Men wore oversized jackets stiff with padding at the shoulders, with very narrow lapels. Trousers creased at the waistband with numerous seamings. A factory-made shirt could be recognized at a mile's distance by its pale hue and pointed collar.

The conformist's neck was adorned by a narrow tie, the shape and design of which brought to mind its pre-war antecedent. Anyway, it differed radically from the broad, florid fashions popular in the West, whose appearance in Poland was in a way the first sign of protest against the officially accepted style in clothing.

In warmer seasons, people usually wore greenish canvas coats with side pockets and a belt, called "Canadians", although they had nothing to do with Canada. In winter these were replaced by homespun coats of a similar design, usually herringbone patterned. Some people, though not many, still preferred the "partisan" style, with breeches and long boots (so-called "officer boots"). Hats were rare among students. In contrast, clerks and, generally, persons of rank enjoyed wearing their "felts". The young generation, on the other hand, often wore homespun caps. City hoodlums would often stuff newspaper underneath for elegance; this type of headgear earned the nickname "thug caps", first used by Warsaw newspapers and then adopted in Cracow. In winter, pre-war style ski-caps were still in use.

In the area of footwear, black leather dominated. Brown shoes appeared in shops on a more substantial scale only after the so-called "October transformations". Impecunious students usually wore black shoes or ankle-high

laced boots with flat toccaps and leather or rubber soles, ugly and styleless. On hot days, some put on broad-strapped sandals, while others wore tennis shoes, usually of a "dark white" colour. They were restored to their original appearance with the use of chalk, hence chalk marks were not an infrequent sight on the pavements.

The first livelier addition to the otherwise drab and shapeless attire of a student from the country who had just enrolled at the university could have been a peaked velvet cap the colour of which symbolized the particular faculty of the university, or an angular, cream-coloured *rogatywka* cap (the traditional design worn by the Polish army). Officials from the party and the ZMP youth organization viewed those kinds of headgear with suspicion, as alleged "relics of the bourgeois and corporatist past" ("corporations" were pre-war student societies). But the favourite among young men on the threshold of adulthood was a black, felt beret. Being of poor quality, it quickly lost shape in the rain and bulged like a mushroom cap. It was said that young men in black berets sometimes fell victim to the aggression of street gangs, hostile to students. I cannot say how true these rumours were.

A student freshly admitted to the university would usually shun carrying his notes and textbooks in a briefcase: that would have been too much like at school or in an office. Instead, he would go to a "sports shop" (which was not exactly what we would expect it to be today ...) and buy a shoulder bag of yellow leather. Students who did some fieldwork particularly favoured those quasi-military-style bags, in addition to which they often put on in winter a brown "aviator's cap" made of artificial leather. The same kind of headgear was also used by official functionaries dispatched to the countryside to perform their duties, and, of course, by motorcyclists. Crash helmets were not yet mandatory in those days. For us, the clerks from the revenue board or the PZU insurance company wrapped up in their trench coats, speeding by on their company-owned motorcycles on the way to the countryside, briefcases dangling from their shoulders on a narrow strap – or returning home in a state of utter exhaustion –

made delightful figures of fun.

Students of the Academy of the Fine Arts and of the faculty of architecture at the Technical University proudly carried around their huge sketch pads or cardboard tubes for tracing paper. It was a matter of nobilitation and chick for them. Malicious tongues would say, however, that the very fact of showing off one's sketch pad did not necessarily amount to much: after all even pre-war maidservants had been known to dress up as secondary school students!

In winter, the sports fashion that the poor young man from the country could afford was a pair of pipe-legged skiing trousers let into old-fashioned skiing boots with straps covering the laces. In this outfit he would trudge boldly through the puddles in Cracow's Main Market Place, even though he had never in his lifetime gone skiing. He neither knew how to, nor could afford it. A true skiing snob from the slopes of Kasprowy Wierch would no longer dare to show up in the Tatra Mountains dressed like that. Also weekend tourists and mountaineers observed their own dress codes in order to express their aspirations and emphasize their participation in particular youth groups. This issue deserves a more extensive treatment (Dzięgiel 1994).

Whenever the everyday style of dress worn by young people in the early 1950s went beyond the most primitive and banal patterns proposed by the clothes stores, it began to reflect the yearnings, aspirations, petty triumphs, and frustrations of the generation. Simultaneously, it opened up – inevitably – the way for various, often ridiculous forms of affectation and snobbery.

The war had ended only five years before. The shabby victors from the East made themselves seen everywhere, and yet the myth of the other victorious army was still alive: the army whose arrival from the West and from across the ocean had been awaited for so many years. An efficient, elegant and at the same time friendly army, which for reasons best known to itself had stopped somewhere halfway across occupied Germany and remained immobile, leaving us to become prey to primitive barbarians. In that period of frustrated expectations and lingering hopes, the demand for clothing

from American military stores acquired first of all a symbolic dimension. Aesthetic considerations played a secondary role here and practical utility was the least important (Kantor 1982).

Interestingly enough, in the same years Polish peasants set a high value on items of clothing used by the Polish People's Army. On the weekly market in the town of Nowy Targ, uniforms with buttons covered with olive-coloured fabric and fatigue caps of the *rogatywka* type were lined up on the stalls, invariably attracting crowds of buyers. Fashion dictated that a young farmhand or shepherd should be wearing a khaki jacket, nonchalantly unbuttoned to reveal underneath a home-knit sweater of coarse wool, adorned with silhouettes of deer. Other attributes of the highland dandy included a *rogatywka* cap, boisterously tilted backwards and homespun trousers (*portki*) adorned in front with an ornate embroidered pattern (*parzenice*), let into ankle-high rubber boots of the kind used for spreading manure. By contrast, Cracow students of those days, who had to undergo mandatory military training at the university, did not think much of the style of the uniforms of their commanding officers, to say nothing of the faded dungarees they had to wear in the field, which were an object of constant ridicule.

Thus in big-city market-places, the Polish People's Army outfit occupied only a marginal position, unlike Western military garments.

Clothes of the latter type were much sought after for many years after the war, despite their high prices and signs of wear and tear. Jackets with frayed collars, patched battle-dress blouses or windbreakers with greasy folds had their dedicated fans who painstakingly washed, cleaned and repaired them. In those years, filth, tatters, rags and studied sloppiness were not yet in fashion. What did matter was the design and the unequalled touch of the types of fabrics invented by the leading British and American military labs. Buyers paid attention to colour, but the main thing was the comfortable and clever design of every article of military clothing produced overseas.

The greater part of those garments came from Britain, brought to Poland by former Polish soldiers returning home from the West. For

many years they could be seen wearing old, sand-coloured battle-dress and black berets. Sometimes they might sell you a worn-out, tight-fitting military overcoat made of cloth or a neat, brown trench-coat of the type called – nobody knew why – “Major Belt coat”. Despite the wear and the passing of years, they were particularly elegant.

Even better-fitting, however, were American military clothes. Comparing the outfit of the two armies, one would notice the British inability to combine chic with comfort and functionality in the design of special-purpose garments. British military boots, for instance, were extremely comfortable and offered ideal protection against water. But their colour and shape left much to be desired and sometimes provoked scorn. It was not so with the American outfit. Likewise, the short British battle-dress blouses that could be cleverly fastened to the trousers did not prove functional for civilian use. The American olive-coloured, hip-length uniform blouses, on the other hand, were more comfortable. Among the many different jackets from the U.S., the veritable legend of those times was the lightweight canvas type with a woollen lining, of the kind worn by General Patton. It was also in those times that the first four-pocketed blouses with a waistband made their appearance. After the Korean War they were adopted by most armies of the world, except in the Communist block. In winter, the brown airmen’s sheepskin coats, narrow at the hips and fitted with big collars, sold for outrageous prices.

Another big hit with young dandies was military trousers: tight-fitting, made of sand-coloured cotton. An appropriate complement to these was a dark olive-coloured pullover. Some, though not many, would don in addition a close fitting canvas cap with a large, square peak. It was either turned upwards, in the style favoured by the heroes of wartime films about crews of the B-17 Flying Fortresses, or tilted down so as to screen the forehead and eyes. Dark, rectangular sunglasses à la General MacArthur were also a much coveted object that most people could only dream of.

In wintertime, military fashion enthusiasts hunted not only for the aforementioned airforce

sheepskin coats, but also for the popular navy-type duffel coats. In this way the outfit worn by the seamen of the allied forces sailing across the icy waters of the North Sea or Atlantic had become a status symbol for those Poles who could afford it. Many years later, the hooded coat became so popular that even state-owned manufacturers started to turn out garments of a similar fashion, although of a much poorer quality. The design thus became commonplace and finally went out of fashion.

The attraction of the military outfit was its 100-per-cent authenticity. That was the real thing, not an imitation suited to the liking of the youngsters of the kind you can see in “army shops” today. Back then, no one would have thought of wearing colourful badges of imaginary units or an admiral’s epaulets.

The type of clothing I am writing about was available, although in a very narrow selection, from second-hand commission-sale shops, so called *komisy*, which charged ridiculous prices. Those who ventured to market places in small towns had a chance to get Western clothes at a fraction of that cost. This was particularly true about regions from which the most peasants had once emigrated to America as, for instance, the Carpathians, but also the Kurpie region in northern Poland. Descendants of the one-time village paupers whom hunger had driven to America now showered their Polish relatives with hand-me-downs. Overseas fashion did not suit the local, provincial tastes. Thus clothes one could see in a fashion magazine were often used around the house or farm for the dirtiest chores. We often observed, much to our horror, good-natured farmers digging potatoes or spreading manure dressed in rags that had once been the most elegant suits or jackets. More and more often, however, pedlars would call at peasants’ cottages: the Western clothes they would buy there dirt cheap could be resold in town at a huge profit. Some of those salesmen were regular visitors at student hostels, always carrying a bag of attractive merchandise. They were eagerly awaited by their regular customers. Others, however, went straight to the market place.

For several decades, Cracow’s flea market, called *tandeta* in the local idiom, was constantly

being relocated from one place in the outskirts of the town to another. The communist authorities had hoped it would wither away; it grew, instead, out of all proportions. The funny thing is it keeps expanding now, in the wake of the stormy political transformations going on in Central and Eastern Europe. A whole new type of small private shops selling second-hand clothes of Western origin has sprung up. They are popularly called "*lumpexy*" – an ironic reference to the Pewex network of stores that until 1990 sold luxury goods for hard currencies, and to the Lumpenproletariat, the alleged clientele of those new shops, who buy such luxuries as they can afford. In the times I am writing about no such shops existed. The commission-sale second-hand shops – *komisy* – were of an entirely different character.

In the early 1950s, Cracow's main *tandeta* was situated in the Podgórze borough: off Kalwaryjska street, not far from present-day Krasickiego-Boczna street. All the buyers and sellers were Polish. The only slightly more exotic ethnic element was a very small group of local Gypsies. Twice a week, the trams bound for Podgórze were bursting at the seams in the morning hours. Riding to the *tandeta* were all kinds of strange and dubious characters. It was rumoured that the city authorities, hostile to the bazaar and to anything that did not fit into the economic patterns imposed upon the city, deliberately took some trams off the route on those days. I don't know whether that was really the case. Anyway, experienced bazaar-goers would remind you to take good care of your wallet in the cramped vehicle rolling down Kalwaryjska street.

A muddy path led from the shabby and ugly street to an enclosure surrounded partly by a wall and partly by a fence. At the entrance swarmed groups of individuals of both sexes, dressed in drab clothes, who were trying to dupe the newcomers into a deal. They would offer to buy goods brought by others – at ridiculously low prices – only to try to sell the same thing at a profit a couple of metres away. *Tandeta* regulars treated those petty tricksters with a haughty indifference. They steered carefully, clothes-filled bags in hand, among the rows of sellers proffering their wares. Usually,

they did not feel like mixing with that marketplace proletariat, although they did look around to see what was being sold and for how much. Finally, they would make their way to the central part of the *tandeta*, where displayed on tarpaulin sheets lying on the ground (plastic was not used for such purposes in those times: it was too scarce and precious) were heaps of clothes of foreign origin, guarded by the tradesmen. Depending on the season, those people would stamp about to keep off either the cold, or the boredom. Their faces had become roughened after the hundreds of days spent in the heat or frost. Cigarettes in their mouths, they would smile ingratiatingly at you, displaying yellow teeth. In winter, they would put on – over all the other warm clothes – an additional green or once-white raincoat, so greasy with dirt that every fold of it shone. Women wrapped kerchiefs or shawls – draped turban – like as had been fashionable in the wartime years – around their heads. Experienced buyers would nonchalantly examine the piles of clothes lying on the sheets and ask about the prices with an ostentatious disgust. People who regularly frequented the market place in order to convert goods received from the West into cash were often well known among the *tandeta* elites. Every so often someone would accost them to inquire about the contents of the bags they carried. It was typical for such a seller to have a close circle of regular buyers. Some customers, however, were best avoided as potential informers.

To the left, next to the wall, there operated sellers of the worst kind of rags and totally worn-out shoes. Those items, offered for sale for a song, had often been extracted from the spacious wardrobes of old Cracow flats, for the purpose of being thrown away. All kinds of goods found buyers in that section of the *tandeta*, but then the amounts of money that changed hands in the process were negligible. Shoes and boots that were worn-out beyond repair were often bought by some country shoemaker who would use them as material for mending other shoes, or, alternatively, would patch them up somehow and sell them to a village beggar. Such was the condition of the merchandise that some prospective clients were inclined to poke about it with a stick. On the other hand, the interest

aroused by this section of the *tandeta* speaks volumes about the economic situation of the Poland in those years. No owner of a “lumpex” shop in Cracow, selling used clothes by the kilogram, would dare to include this kind of stuff in his offer.

The Cracow *tandeta*, like all public gatherings, must have been routinely observed by the secret police. However, the number of pickpockets operating there no doubt exceeded the number of informers.

Most students visited the *tandeta* for social rather than mercantile reasons. Their miserable scholarships would hardly allow them to buy things there, even though many an item of clothing aroused an unbearable desire. And yet the style-conscious youngsters were regular visitors in Kalwaryjska street, if only to keep abreast of the latest fashions. For many years it was a fitting thing to do to boast about some supposedly excellent bargain one had made at the *tandeta*. Nobody, even the swankiest person of either sex, felt embarrassed about wearing second-hand and often well-worn clothes, which nevertheless conjured the magic of overseas fashion. It was not just a matter of design. People were fascinated also by the touch of the fabrics, their softness, smoothness and strength. Those clothes felt astonishingly light to wear. The earliest synthetics rustled seductively and no matter how hard you crumpled them, they would return to shape in a second all by themselves, as if by magic. Many years had to pass before the impecunious neophytes of plastic modernity rediscovered the true merits of the despised natural fibres. *Komis* shops with second-hand goods prospered, bazaars expanded. All the while the sorry products of the domestic industry were held in utter contempt. Girls were particularly disgusted with those of their friends who apprehensively altered clothes sent to them from abroad to make them match the traditional, “quiet” designs.

Apart from military outfit, whose flow into Poland had by now shrunk to a trickle, more and more civilian clothes began to reach the market and became the decisive influence on the avant-garde of the early 1950s. It is not true that the most widely followed style in those days was that of *dżolersi*, that is, “jolly boys”,

whom the official propaganda soon dubbed *bikinniarze*, or “*bikinniks*”. A “bikinnik” wore rather shortish trousers, so tight-fitting that they almost required a shoehorn to put on, striped socks and extremely thick-soled shoes. Other attributes included a broad, florid tie, a jacket with padded shoulders but narrow in the waist, and a very broad-brimmed hat with a small crown, called a “pancake hat”. A “bikinnik’s” hair would be carefully swept back so as to form a so-called “pleureuse” covering his neck. But in the days I am writing about that kind of fashion was popular mostly with Cracow’s underworld – the “street-corner society” in which students had no intention to be included. In Western Europe, that rather decadent style had had its followers – thuggish dandies called *zazou* – already during the war and it must have been there and then that Leopold Tyrmand picked up his extravagant style, which shocked his Polish friends so much in the late 1940s (Szarota 1995:81–86, Fig. 28 and 29).

How, then, should a young citizen of Cracow have chosen his clothes and hairstyle in 1951, that is, assuming that apart from the desire to look good, he had access to gift parcels from abroad or, alternatively, enough cash to visit the *tandeta* and the *komis* shops for other purposes than purely cognitive?

First of all, he should have chosen a well-fitted, soft, single-breasted jacket with relatively short but wide lapels, unpadded on the shoulders. Such jackets had, apart from the regular flap pockets, also an additional small pocket at the waist, on the left-hand side – a freak of fashion from a far-off land. Trousers, in their turn, which never had any tucks, had to fit tightly at the hips and then the legs narrowed down, to reach a width of some 20–23 cm at the bottom. They either had a 3-to-4-cm cuff or no cuff at all – that was a hallmark of elegant design. Yet another was the presence of two pockets at the back. Short, pipe-legged, “jolly-boy-style” trousers were left to hooligans to wear – and to official cartoonists to portray in their attempts, as fierce as they were futile, to eradicate the “bikinnik” subculture. Shirt collars had to be small and narrow. Ties had broad fronts and a newly devised, heart-shaped knot had come into fashion. Vulgar images – of the

kind of a nude Hawaiian girl under a palm tree – were no longer the vogue.

Light suede shoes on thick rubber soles began to give way to brown and yellow moccasins, which you could easily jump into and out of. Shoes on corrugated soles of thick, hard rubber (popularly called “tractor shoes”), so popular in the subsequent years, had not made their appearance yet.

In view of Cracow’s poor climate, an elegant inhabitant of that town would often wear a soft, black beret which admirably withstood rain, unlike its predecessor made of felt. Boys and girls were desperately trying to find one, but private manufacturers somehow could not keep up with the demand, while the giant state-owned producers stuck to the old fashions and ways. When the inexorable Central European frost set in, those who did not shun some eccentricity put on small, woollen caps from military stocks or shapeless commando-style headgear fashioned from double-layered, army-issue scarves. The most stylish thing to do, however, was to go about bareheaded for as long as it was possible.

Girls doing artistic or quasi-artistic studies – particularly if they were well-off – were more ambitious, as far as clothing was concerned, than ones from other milieux and schools. They preferred sports clothes of Western origin. On their heads, they usually wore red headscarves, imprinted with a pattern and bearing a “FAST COLORED” notice; these could also be used as neckerchiefs. Their clothes were colourful, unpretentious – and expensive. On cold days, it was fashionable to wear bright yellow three-quarter coats of camel wool or ladies’ duffel coats. In 1950, if not earlier, the long-lasting craze began for bright-coloured, striped synthetic sweaters and enormous, colourful nylon kerchiefs which could be worn on the head or tied around the neck. Yet another item which gained great popularity was the zip fastener. It was used everywhere, whether it was necessary or not. Some circles of the Cracow intelligentsia had a penchant for broad, chequered skirts, tight, black, synthetic sweaters and hunter’s shoulder bags of yellow leather. This kind of fashion was sometimes perceived as a nostalgic form of protest against the evil times and it

endured for many years. Embroidered sheepskin coats of a pre-war design, taken in at the waist, combined with fur caps, were characteristic of the circles of “former landowners”, genuine ones and others.

One could not afford to buy fashionable clothes only in expensive *komis* shops or at the nearly equally expensive *tandeta*. People tried to sew their garments themselves or commissioned tailors to do the job. This was made easier by the fact that the early 1950s saw the comeback of a once popular and commonplace type of fabric: corduroy. Initially, people used the standard variety, available in the state-owned stores. Soon, however, the arbiters of fashion declared it banal and ugly. The vogue now was delicate, fine-textured corduroy. It was used first of all for trousers. To be sure, it quickly bulged at the knees and trouser legs were becoming short and baggy. At the folds on the back it crumbled hopelessly, leaving large bald patches. But it was fashionable.

As I said before, trousers had to be well fitted at the hips and back. Today, with all kinds of baggies being in, one finds it hard to believe. In the 1950s, however, people exchanged, with a glint in the eye, addresses of tailors who would undertake to sew trousers of such a design, or, better still, alter an old pair. It was not easy. The Cracow craftsmen of the early 1950s simply could not adjust to the new demands. Usually they refused to do things the way their young clients wished. “What outdated fashions they’ve got there in America,” marvelled a tailor examining a pair of trousers whose design he was supposed to duplicate, borrowed from a friend who had received them in a parcel. Indeed, the new style was reminiscent of the days of Count von Zeppelin’s first experiments with airships and the Meyerling tragedy (Banach 1965). Therefore, commissions to alter a pair of trousers or sew a new one usually ended in a miserable failure even of the masters of the art: The tailor had botched the job again! But we were soon to find out that in a narrow passage off the Main Market Place in Cracow there was an “emergency repair shop” run by a truly competent man. He gladly undertook to make all kinds of alterations and even difficult repairs and quickly became our sartorial patron

saint of last resort. He never rejected any order, even though its execution was not always perfect. At any rate, among the fashion-conscious students of Cracow, he enjoyed for a while the position of a monopolist.

Gradually, the blue jeans came to be perceived as the best-loved type of trousers of the latter half of the century. In the early 1950s, however, they were only beginning to make their appearance in Poland – creating an unparalleled sensation, both because of the texture of denim, unknown in Poland before, and of their indigo colour (Davis 1992). Their price soon soared to unprecedented levels. Originally, the design and finish of “cowboy trousers” were very traditional. They were lockstitched with a white thread and hardly ever adorned with studs. The first lucky owners proudly rolled up the cuffless legs an inch or two. People were in for another shock when denim jackets arrived. At the bazaar stalls, they were even harder to get and still more expensive.

On warm days, it was fashionable to wear striped synthetic T-shirts, let out loosely over the trousers. This was also the way to wear flannelette sports shirts, which, in accordance with the overseas fashion, should never be tucked in. But what were we to do here, in Central Europe, where shirt buttoning did not usually extend below the waist? Their length was not suited to that fashion, either, as they often ended a little above the knees.

Those who despised the banal pre-war hairstyles while leaving the “pleureuse” to be worn by the shady figures prowling the streets of the Zwierzyniec borough, chose a new type of haircut which was like a crew cut, but longer at the top and sides of the head and shorter at the back. Nowadays you can get this kind of haircut at any barber’s shop in Cracow, but in 1950 or 1951 an average hairdresser neither knew nor cared about this style. Fortunately, on the corner of Warszawska and Szlak streets there was a barber who would cut our hair exactly the way we liked. All we had to do was to tell the man at the very outset we wanted our hair cut “weirdo style”. He was not an old man yet, but he knew all the tricks of the trade so the customers were always satisfied.

Some female students in those years had

their hair cut short with a halo of curls round the face, à la Claudette Colbert. A few girls began to wear their hair tied in a pony tail. Others preferred a permanent wave flowing over the shoulders in the style of Rita Hayworth. In contrast, all kinds of pigtails, buns or plaits running across the shoulder were seen as terribly outdated. On the other hand, hairstyles “à la Fanfan” or “à la Simone” inspired by the new Italian and French cinema were only to appear later.

It is interesting to note that the authorities, so furiously attacking all Western influences in fashion, seemed totally ignorant of the preferences of students and the dress subculture based on *komis* and *tandeta* buys. They invariably assailed the “jolly boy” in a “pancake hat” (Dzięgiel 1993:76–77). The official guards of ideological morality must have thought that clothes received in parcels or purchased at the *tandeta* were worn by poor people who could not afford to buy “decent” dress in normal shops. And a pauper was, in those days, automatically viewed as a worthy, or at least harmless, citizen. Besides, bosses of the ZMP youth organization would sometimes appropriate clothes sent from the West as a gift for the poorest. And as far as hairstyles were concerned, the official propaganda still fought the battle against the “pleureuse” of the “bikinnik”, never mind the crew cut. But as a matter of fact, to arouse the least political suspicions, one ought to have been bald.

For decades after World War II, beards or moustache were out of favour with the young generation in Poland. A venerable, old professor might be wearing a moustache, but not a student. Our unforgettable professor of ethnology, for instance, had a grey English moustache à la Clark Gable. Young people were always clean-shaven.

Today the barber’s shop at the corner of Warszawska and Szlak streets has given way to a paint shop. The *tandeta* square in Podgórze has long since been built up. Its youthful clientele of the 1950s is approaching retirement.

A separate treatment should be given to the developments in everyday student fashion in the days immediately before the political breakthrough of October 1956. Advocates of tradi-

tional- and ZMP-style dress were clearly losing their zeal. The domestic clothing market, weak and inadequate as it was, finally started to imitate Western designs, albeit awkwardly and faint-heartedly. The scanty import of more attractive footwear or clothes from the adjacent countries bred a naive conviction about civilizational advancement of our close neighbours, e.g. Czechoslovakia and Hungary – those mysterious and inaccessible lands which it was only now becoming possible (for the select few) to visit. Nothing, however, could erode the position of the Cracow *tandeta*. For many, many years it was a source of goods that boosted the morale and self-esteem of the frustrated young generation of People's Poland, whom the authorities were trying, with less and less success, to imbue with the only correct ideology.

*Translated by Krzysztof Kwaśniewicz*

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