

## BETWEEN THE AVANT-GARDE AND TRADITION IN SHAPING THE ARCHITECTURE OF SOCIAL TENEMENT HOUSING DURING THE LODZ INTERWAR PERIOD

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### MIĘDZY AWANGARDĄ A TRADYCJĄ W KSZTAŁTOWANIU ARCHITEKTURY MIEJSKIEGO DOMU MIESZKALNEGO ŁODZI OKRESU MIĘDZYWOJENNEGO

#### Abstract

Lodz is a relatively young city – it was developed into a large city mostly during the interwar period. The administrative promotion to the rank of regional centre started the process of developing the city space (public, urban, single houses and tenements). Which of these buildings were designed to be traditional and which modern? Can we find avant-garde social housing among them? The author is searching for answers: How attractive are the presented buildings and can they be added to the process of shaping the present identity of post-industrial Lodz?

*Keywords: tradition, avant-garde, residential houses, Lodz*

#### Streszczenie

Łódź jest miastem stosunkowo młodym, które swą wielkomiejskość budowało między innymi w okresie międzywojennym. Ówczesny awans administracyjny miasta do rangi ośrodka wojewódzkiego spowodował olbrzymi rozwój jego przestrzeni o charakterze publicznym, jak i miejskich założeń czy obiektów o przeznaczeniu mieszkalnym. Wśród tych ostatnich budowano zarówno domy wielo- i jednorodzinne. Które z tych realizacji były wznoszone zgodnie z tradycją, a przy których kierowano się zasadami nowatorstwa? Czy możemy wśród nich odnaleźć awangardowe domy miejskie? Autorka szuka odpowiedzi na ile zaprezentowane w toku wywodu obiekty są obecnie atrakcyjne i mogą być włączone w proces kształtowania dzisiejszej tożsamości poprzemysłowej Łodzi?

*Słowa kluczowe: tradycja, awangarda, domy mieszkalne, Łódź*

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Lodz is a relatively young city – it developed into a large city mostly during the interwar period. The administrative promotion to the rank of regional centre started the process of developing the city space (public, urban, single houses and tenements).<sup>1</sup> Many were not constructed with tradition in mind – the all-encompassing modernism (at the time) was the goal.

A traditional villa (alluding to academic classicism) is located at 84 Jaracza St. (118/120 Cegielniana St.).<sup>2</sup> (ill. 1). Eugeniusz Glezer, the owner of the “Wyroby Bawełniane i Półwełniane” Company, built a ground floor building (1920), which was expanded in 1927 by adding the western gable end. Adolf Goldberg was the architect behind both designs (fig.1). In 1983, the new owners – Philip and Wanda Hoffman – overbuilt the first floor (Francis Hessner’s design). The building was constructed on a large, rectangular lot, bordering S. Jaracza St. in the south, opposite the S. Staszic Park. The north-west corner of the lot has a bevelled edge. The front fence is made of marble – the upper part of the middle arch is openwork, wood; the outer arch made of bricks to the full height. Next to the lodge building, erected in the south-east corner, is the entrance double full steel leaf gate. A tool shed was situated along the north lot border. The residential house (with a small front garden) was arranged to be a free-standing building. The projection was created on a rectangular shaped design. It consists of a 2.5 middle part with two single ones in a cross section projection (upper wing parts). The middle and western wing consists of utility and living rooms along with a rear stairwell (cross section) which connects every floor and exits to the courtyard. The entry arcade and the central stairwell is located in the eastern wing (the ground floor). There is a deep loggia over the arcade with a top terrace along the entire wing (attic level). Another similar terrace is over the west wing. The middle front side consists of a half-oval loggia accessible from the first floor (originally a bay window), with a ground floor arcade and an attic terrace. The usable floor space is around 1000 m<sup>2</sup>. This one-storey (with an attic and basement), building consists of a half-oval projection in the middle of the facade and rectangular projections in the wing area. The projections were topped with terraces (cornice topped level). The roof consists of uniaxial garrets and triaxial frontage with a triangle shaped tympanum. The roof was originally tiled (ceramic), the terrace balustrade is ornamental. The stairwell window is closed (half circle). The building is enclosed with a floor and top parapet. The corners were accented with pilasters. The cubic measure of the building – around 5150 m<sup>3</sup>, traditional construction structure.

The city villa at 67 Rewolucji 1905 St. is a similar interesting example of classical construction (former Południowa St.).<sup>3</sup> (ill.2). It was erected between 1925–27, Mieczysław Lewinson and Paweł Lewy design, who were co-owners (1919–1923) of an architectural office at Przejazd St. in Lodz. The first studied at the Warsaw Science University, and the second at the Dresden Science University. The building (called the Karol Reisfeld villa) consists of: first floor owner apartment, attic guest rooms, ground floor offices and cellar storerooms. In 1948 the building became a kindergarten. It is mostly a free standing building, connected to the neighbouring structure with the western top wall. It is located on the southern line of

<sup>1</sup> See: Olenderek Joanna, *Proces kształtowania przestrzeni w Łodzi II Rzeczypospolitej a awans administracyjny miasta*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Łódzkiej. Łódź 2004.

<sup>2</sup> See: Olenderek Joanna, *Łódzki modernizm i inne nurty przedwojennego budownictwa*, Tom II *Osiedla i obiekty mieszkalne*, Dom Wydawniczy Księży Młyn, Łódź 2012, p. 148–149.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 161.

buildings at Rewolucji 1905 St. (formerly Południowa St.). The front fence is laid with stone, with oval shaped barred openings, steel gate and gateway next to the guardhouse situated at the street regulatory line on the north-east lot corner. A factory floor was located deeper on the property. The design of the front building was similar to the letter “L” – the front made of three parts, with a crosswise stairwell in the most eastern area. A representative driveway entrance and hall passage lead to the stairwell. The western facade is made of a single part, with a prominent secondary stairwell, accessible from the courtyard. The front building consists of basement, one storey and an attic. At the storey level (from the street) is a half-round bay window with a terrace above (accessible from the attic). The main stairwell, with half-oval outer stairs, was protruded (the driveway side). The annex is one storey higher. The corner (where the front building and annex meet) was rounded. The front building roof consists of a half-round tympanum from the street side (the annex has a penthouse roof). The middle part of the facade consists of a round bay window, a stone laid balustrade and topped with a half-round tympanum (with two facades at the sides). The facade is ornate – in Ionic order, benches under windows and top cornice. The pedestal and pilaster base was covered with sandstone slabs. A representative entrance to the building was situated on ground floor in the middle axis through a wooden double door (panelled, entablatured and with bas-relief). There is a stone laid balcony over the entrance. The building consists of a pedestal, cornices (second storey and top) and is constructed in a traditional way.

The villa of Helena Brodzka (79 Gdańska St.)<sup>4</sup>, design by Wiesław Lisowski (ill.3), was the most innovative building of the times. Helena Brodzka was the daughter of Elijah Pański, the owner of the “Parowych Zakładów Drukarskich E. Pański”, established in 1870 in Piotrków Trybunalski. Since 1900 the paper-mill was a part of the building at Gdańska 79. The house (erected in 1928) was occupied by Helena Brodzka, her mother, son, daughter and son-in-law Charles Rimler, a famous Lodz lawyer and industrialist. Since 1933 the villa was occupied by S. and R. Lande (couple), who ran “Esla” – a stocking factory. During the occupation, the building was taken over by the Germans, and later it became the NKWD headquarters. After nationalization, the Zakłady Dziewiarskie “Iwona” took the building over. Currently, the building is the property of “BEES”, a clothing company. The building is located in the far front area, western frontage of the Gdańska St. It is partly freestanding, connected with the north top wall to the neighbouring tenement. The driveway, located next to the guard house (connected with south border utility buildings) led to the factory at the rear. The cross section of the residential house was drawn on an elongated, multi projected rectangle. The interior is two-bay in a crosswise setting. The main entrance leads to the front garden. The rear entrance is from the courtyard on the same axis. The exit from the elevated cellar is from the passage side. The utility room area consists of a two-part stairwell connecting all floors. In a two-level hall accessible from the front, there is a three-part stairwell, leading to the first floor. The ground floor includes: two living rooms, study, office and bathroom. The first floor includes: three rooms with balconies, library, kitchen, bathroom with balcony and a restroom. The basement consists of: utility rooms and servant quarters. This building is dynamically pieced, with many offsets, full stone laid balustrade balconies, made of varied (in height) cuboids, topped with a protruding, shaped and tabular cornice. The roofs are flat. A two-layered, wood-steel-glass skylight is situated above the hall. The inner layer of the

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 150–151.



- III.1. City villa at 84 Jaracza St.
- III.2. City villa at 67 Rewolucji 1905 Roku St.
- III.3. City villa at Gdańska 79 St.
- III.4. Corner villa at 95 Narutowicza St.
- III.5. Villa at 30 J. Matejki St.
- III.6. Villa at 2 Świętokrzyska St.
- III.7. City house at 93 G. Narutowicza St.
- III.8. Residential house at 3 Świętokrzyska St.

skylight, in the shape of a geometrical raster filled with milk glass, uses electric illumination. The facades are non-symmetrical, with rectangular door and window openings, arranged according to the location and function of the inner rooms; the outer plaster is smooth and coloured (pink). The outer entrance stairs are flanked with a low wall and cuboid lawn. There is a glass roof (steel construction) over the front entrance and a reinforced concrete roof over the rear entrance. The original furnishings are almost entirely preserved. These are: oak stairs and upper gallery balustrades, the door wings with crystal glass, wooden parts of the permanent study furnishings, oak and terracotta mosaic floors – shaped into geometric forms, they allude to art deco ornamental motifs.

The corner villa at 95 G. Narutowicza St. (Paweł Lewy 1929 design)<sup>5</sup> (ill.4) can be listed among the innovative residential city houses. Finished in early 1930, owned by Anna and Henry Korman, the western top part was expanded (1937), with an additional stairwell enabling independent access to the first floor apartment. The author of the expansion was also Paweł Lewy. Due to this the building maintained a stylistic unity. It is a free standing building (in a garden), on a rectangular corner lot (openwork pattern fence) at the crossing of G. Narutowicza and L. Solski St. opposite the J. Matejka Park. The front fence is located in the northern part of G. Narutowicza St. with the gate in the centre. The entrance gate (the furthest arch) was situated directly towards the garage (eastern lot border). The cross section was designed on a plan of two rectangles. The villa consists of older two-bay main building and a later one-bay western wing with a stairwell. At the ground floor level (north) is an entrance porch to the main building, access to the western wing stairwell and outer exit from the basement. From the south there is a large terrace (connected to the dining hall) with the exit to the garden. On the first floor level there is the front balcony over the entrance porch, half-round balcony in the south-west wing corner and rectangular shaped balcony over the stairs leading from the south terrace to the garden. On the attic level, over the west wing, are the utility rooms. The utility space of the villa is around 500 m<sup>2</sup>. This one storey building (with basement), with partial utility attic (higher west wing area) consists of a penthouse and low pitched roofs (hidden behind the attic wall). The front north facade (in the main building area) is symmetrical (five-axis); in the west wing area it is asymmetrical (three-axis). The balcony balustrade (over the entrance porch) is full, made of stone and with a rectangular, ornately grated opening on the main entrance axis. The southern facade (four-axis) is asymmetrical, with a single axis western wing avant-corps, ground floor terrace and first floor balconies with full balustrades made of stone. The western facade (three-axis) is asymmetrical with avant-corps stairwell in the northernmost axis. The eastern facade (single axis) is also asymmetrical with a vertical window section swerved towards the edge. The building is ornate (entire length) with horizontal half rollers, ground and first floor string courses and first floor ledge. Double and triple-part windows (sash bars) were covered with outer roller shutters. The cubature of the building is around 2100 m<sup>3</sup>.

The villa at 30 J. Matejki St. (demolished to make room for the Lodz University Library expansion), built between 1935–1937 using Paweł Lewy's design<sup>6</sup> (ill.5) was also innovative at the time. Stefan Konorski, a lawyer, was the original owner. This free standing building was located in the eastern street part, opposite the J. Matejka Park, on a rectangular deep lot surrounded with a link fence on a foundation. The front fence (with a pedestrian and entrance gate),

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

was located within the street border line. The main building entrance was located in the northernmost part of the facade, the side utility entrance was accessible from the driveway along the north border. There was a terrace from the east side, with the exit to a wide garden in the back of the property. The cross section was established on an extended rectangle (three-bay), with a protruding half-round avant-corps from the front (study) and single arch (on a square plan), side wing from the garden, contiguous to the terrace. From the direction of the driveway, the side entrance led to the stairwell which connected the ground level to the basements and the attic. The ground level consisted of a three-room apartment with a kitchen, bathroom, toilet and servants' quarters, as well as a waiting room and lawyer's office in the front area. This ground floor basement building (with a partially usable attic), covered with a pitched roof (with attic wall). The front facade (west) was asymmetrical (three-axis) with ground floor entrance on the first axis and protruding office avant-corps on the third. The avant-corps was half cylindrical, with sectional, single level windows. The north facade was also asymmetrical (six-axis) with ground level side entrance on the second axis. There was a concrete roof over the entrance. The outer stairs balustrade was full and made of stone. The east garden facade was asymmetrical (two-axis) with a single axis side wing avant-corps and tripartite terrace window; the terrace balustrade was full and made of stone. The south facade (four-axis) was asymmetrical. The attic wall contained small windows. The structure of the villa was innovative.

Let us now take a look at selected city residential houses with signs of the avant-garde. There are single and multi-family buildings. In the author's view, the place should go to the Mieczysław Neufeld villa at 2 Świętokrzyska St.<sup>7</sup> (ill.6). The first owner was probably a designer who took a place in a competition for the Polish Kingdom postage stamp, announced by the German authorities in 1917. Mieczysław Neufeld hired known Lodz architects (1937) to design a house (lot at Świętokrzyska St) which would reflect the spirit of modernity and luxury of the thirties. Due to the understanding of the idea of modernism and cooperation with the architects, the investor was able to create a residential house (centre of the city) of unique beauty and value. One of the authors was Jerzy Berliner, born in 1901 and died during the Second World War. Known and respected in Lodz (architect and urban planner), he was very involved in creating the architect environment. In 1928 he was the co-founder of The Lodz Architect Association, he represented it during the meeting of the Representatives of The Society of The Polish Architect Association Union in Warsaw; he was a member of the Lodz Urban Polish Society branch. In late 1930 he was the co-owner (with Mieczysław Łęczycki) of an architectural design office. Between 1937–1939 he was a member of the Lodz SARP branch. One of his architectural achievements was the winning the third prize in a housing complex competition in Polesie Konstantynowskie (1928), with a team: Witold Szereszewski, Jerzy Łukasik and Miruta (Tomira) Słońska. The team was commissioned by the Lodz Municipality to design a final version of the Housing Colony in Polesie Konstantynowskie. In cooperation with Mieczysław Łęczycki he is the author of interwar period residential house designs. The architect Mieczysław Łęczycki (Markus) was born in 1897. There is no information about his education or biography. He worked together with Józef Łęczycki, his alleged brother. He won the first prize in the Warsaw Stadium Design competition (1927). He also worked with Luzer Oli, an architect. Between 1937–1939 he was a member of the Lodz SARP branch. The villa at

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<sup>7</sup> See: *Słynne wille Polskie*, oprac. zbiorowe, red. Ryszard Nakownieczny, FOIBOS BOOKS s. r. o., Praha 2013, p. 171–173.



2 Świętokrzyska St. (1937–1938), which he designed with Jerzy Berliner, is an example of one of the most interesting creations of Lodz modernist architecture during the interwar period. It is a free standing building, located in the south frontage of Komuny Paryskiej Square (crosswise to Świętokrzyska St.). This rectangular deep closed lot was fenced from the square (openwork wave shaped steel bars) with an entrance gate to the eastern courtyard, which connects to the neighbouring corner tenement yard (facing H. Sienkiewicza St.). A garden was built from the western side. The main building entrance was situated in the northernmost part of the east courtyard facade. The outline was made on a rectangle, with flat avant-corps from the courtyard and garden side, where the main and garden entrances are located, along with stairwells connecting two separate apartments with basements and an attic. The ground floor apartment has a garden terrace and a square bay window. The first floor apartment has square bay windows (courtyard and garden side) and western side balcony. It is a one-storey building with a basement and partially usable attic. It has a flat roof with attic wall and top cornice. The building is a geometrical shell with cylindrical corners, flat avant-corps and bay windows. The facades (except for the south and north which is single axis symmetrical, located in the square frontage) are asymmetrical. The building is covered with rectangular sandstone slabs – hammerblow surface in the foundation area, polished surface higher up. Different sized windows were used, in order to highlight the representativeness of the first floor apartment. There were small, regularly arranged windows added to the attic wall (retracted frontage). The construction structure of the villa is innovative of the time. The main structure is made of reinforced concrete (round pillars, mullion and transom system), a large glazed area and Swedish type composite windows. The front wall of the main stairwell was made of glass blocks. There is a reinforced concrete roof over the main area (wavy shape slab on four round columns). The building interior was re-designed to meet the requirements of the kindergarten (the current owner).

Between 1937–39 a compact residential house was constructed in the south frontage of G. Narutowicza St. (rectangular lot with a garden)<sup>8</sup>. The authors were the aforementioned architects Jerzy Berliner and Mieczysław Łęczycki, who designed buildings in the spirit of modernism. The villa at 2 Świętokrzyska St. which was concurrently designed by the same architects (1937–1938) is the best example of “1937 style” of interwar Lodz villa architecture. The city house at 93 Narutowicza St. is an example of luxurious functionalism (ill. 7). It was constructed in the south frontage of G. Narutowicza St. (almost opposite the Jan Matejka Park) on a rectangular fenced lot with a garden. The fenced courtyard encompasses the garden, which is accessible from the terrace. The outline of the building – three-axis, five-axis in the front area and four-axis in the garden – was designed on a rectangle. On the ground floor, along the western top wall, is the entrance gate to a partially recessed garage (adjacent to the building from the garden side). A terrace, accessible from the first floor is located on the garage roof. The side entrance to the apartment on the raised ground floor is accessible from the driveway gate. There is an inner passage from the basement garage to the front stairwell in the middle bay. The stairwell provides access to two raised ground floor apartments (terrace from the garden side) and two on the first floor (four balconies from the garden side). In the easternmost middle bay is a courtyard-well providing light to the apartment bathrooms. The building contains a basement, one storey, no attic with a gabled roof (lightly angled). There is a skylight (steel construction) over the “well”. The front north facade is symmetric over

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 174–176.

the ground floor. In the farthest ground floor area is the two wing steel and glass entrance gate, with one level four-part window. The front entrance door (two wings, steel and glass) was centrally situated inside two supports and under a reinforced concrete roof. Higher up is a four part steel window (stairwell). The first floor window openings have flower containers (held by five supports) and forged balustrades, which shelter the lower four part windows. The roof is hidden behind the attic wall (with metopes and top cornice). The facade (plinth area) is lined with rough, dark sandstone slabs; the higher part is lined with polished, light sandstone slabs. The structure of the building is innovative. The inner bearing skeleton system (reinforced concrete) is set on reinforced concrete basements ("free plan"); the relatively flat roof lies on a reinforced concrete ceiling slab (ventilated flat roof). The entrance door, gate, skylight, stairwell window and roof window have steel construction. The stairwell floor (to the raised ground floor level) is made of marble, with terrazzo used higher up.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning a typical, multifamily tenement house, almost next to Mieczysław Neufeld villa at 3 Świętokrzyska St.<sup>9</sup> (ill.8). The house was designed in 1937 by architect, Paweł Lewy. It was built by the construction company of the architect Stanisław Kowalski. It is a free standing building, situated in the southern facade of the Komuna Paryska Square, crosswise to the Świętokrzyska St. on a deep, fenced, rectangular lot. The entrance and driveway gates were situated in the western courtyard approach. The eastern side provides a view of the neighbouring villa. The north facade is in the frontage. The outline was made on a rectangle with many avant-corps and bay windows, which highlight the room layout. The flat avant-corps of the middle arch contains a stairwell with the main entrance from the west courtyard. Next to the entrance is a ramp to the basement garage. Over the basement are entrances to four apartments. The apartments are designed for comfort, with bay windows and corner balconies. The building has four floors with a basement and partially usable attic. Its geometrical shape is dynamically designed, with many avant-corps, bay windows and balconies. The roofs are flat. The attic area is extended over the central one (with slab cornice). The corners and balcony slabs are partially curved. The vertical form of the stairwell avant-corps is highlighted (over the main entrance) with seven lesenes and glazing through all floors. The north facade is symmetrical with small round openings in the main axis. The other facades are asymmetrical. The big, rectangular window openings were arranged in a regular fashion (the window shape is varied but regular). The windows are sectional, single level in a vertical setting; the attic windows were arranged in a stripe fashion. The facades were plastered – plaster (stucco) is darker on ground floor and lighter over the cornice. Both areas were covered with rectangular stone relief slabs. The construction was innovative at the time. The inner bearing structure is skeletal, transom, reinforced concrete ("free plan"). Swedish sealed windows were used. The building was luxuriously furnished.

In conclusion – from the examples presented of residential houses (from the huge number of architectural achievements during the Lodz interwar period) it is clear that they are still valuable, should be protected and included in the present shaping of post-industrial Lodz's identity. Among the current inhabitants and tourists through regular meetings (on the example of Gdynia) under the slogan: "On the trail of Lodz modernism". The timeless rule: "primum non nocere" should be followed during the present revitalization efforts (protection of stylistic and functional values).

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<sup>9</sup> See: J. Olenderek, *Łódzki modernizm i inne nurty przedwojennego budownictwa*, Tom II *Osiedla i obiekty mieszkalne*, Dom Wydawniczy Księży Młyn, Łódź 2012, p. 68–69.



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