

Between
Connotation
and Denotation.
Posters
Announcing the

*Warsaw Autumn International
Festival of Contemporary Music
in 1956-2015*

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ABSTRACT

The posters that accompany the successive Warsaw Autumn Festival editions are a unique collection of works, mostly of outstanding quality. One might venture the thesis that their artistic value – living up to the high demands of the topic – exceeds the typical standards of representation characteristic of popular art. Formally speaking, they abandon the conventions of egalitarian iconographic art in favour of a more elite-oriented visual formula, addressed to a competent audience knowledgeable about contemporary music and its qualities. The authors of these WA posters include many artists associated with the Polish school, such as Jan Lenica, Jan Młodożeniec, Julian Palka, Waldemar Świerzy, Henryk Tomaszewski, and Wojciech Zamecznik. Their graphic representations of the achievements of the musical avant-garde do not, however, situate this poster series within the well-sanctioned canon of the “Polish poster school”, mostly associated with the film and theatre – generally considered as more “democratic” and entertainment-oriented disciplines of art.

The WA posters point to an evident polarisation of visual culture, corresponding to the division between high and low culture and between two types of audiences, differing in expectations. These posters form a largely autonomous collection and may be viewed as supplementary to the music they refer to, which determined the choice of expressive means appropriate to this topic. The whole collection is a display of its authors’ evident skills and their ability to live up to the high demands placed on these works.

The task of translating one medium into another (in this case – a visual one) requires intellectual discipline. Some kind of (at least formal) similarity between the two media needs to be discovered, and shared semantic elements ought to be traced. On the verbal level, such similarities are presented in terms of related distinctive features, ways of describing phenomena, and intuitions. The 19th-century Romantic concept of the *correspondance des arts* was based on similar assumptions. The Romantics attempted to systematise the emotions accompanying the experience of different arts, looking for affinities and similar form-building strategies.

Keywords: poster, Polish poster school, Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music, contemporary graphic art, contemporary music, ‘*correspondance des arts*’ theory, visual culture

I.

1956 marked a breakthrough in Polish culture. It was then that processes were initiated which changed the earlier cultural policies and their underlying political principles. The aim of these transformations was to change Poland’s image abroad, and at the same time – ensure a broader participation in culture of groups previously discriminated against, and of previously excluded disciplines. Despite the political upheaval and re-evaluations, “real socialism” was looking for a new formula of social participation. This trend was facilitated

by the euphoria that accompanied the “thaw”, anticipated by Ilya Erenburg’s eponymous novel. This new direction of activity was mostly targeted at the intelligentsia, particularly – the younger generations, which could give the projected metamorphosis a proper momentum and lend credibility to the new state patronage and its open character.

As it unfortunately soon turned out, reality could not live up to these excessive expectations, and the postulated “revival” (in Polish *odnowa*, which some sarcastic commentators spelt separately as *od nowa* – “all over again”, *da capo al fine*) soon suffocated in the clouds of dogmatism. All the same, the fruits of the spontaneous remodelling that took place around the time of the “Polish October” can hardly be overestimated. Though the system – despite symptoms of bankruptcy – remained intact from over three decades more, and liberal tendencies were suppressed, some of the changes became so deeply rooted in the social awareness that there was no way to back out from them. The old order had been eroded, compromised and definitively lost its monolithic unity. In retrospect, the work of undermining the old system was mainly performed by the artistic environment, as a result of collaboration and collective experience.

A clear caesura separates these two conditions of the artistic imagination – previously brutally enslaved and subjugated, but now gradually shaking off apathy and aspiring to independence – in harmony with the universal spirit of elation, a bit naïve as it later turned out. Dialogue was temporarily approved of by the communist authorities, and artists skilfully took advantage of this consent. An undoubtable achievement of Polish culture in that period was that it managed to demonstrate its latent creative potential. Escape from the constrictions of doctrine released the accumulated creative energy. The key objective was to diminish the civilizational distance from the so-called “free world”, which in practice meant that the previously hostile and separate worlds should come closer, contacts and exchange should renewed between artists who for reasons they had no influence on found themselves on the opposite sides of the Iron Curtain that had divided Europe for the previous ten years.

II.

The political turmoil caused unrest in the artistic circles, which did all they could to free themselves

from the tight corset of socialist-realist doctrine. One manifestation of this revival was the exhibition held at Warsaw Arsenal (1955). It was an eruption of suppressed expression and the generation's demonstration of its previously concealed aspirations. It ploughed across the barren field of Stalinist art, which was withering anyway, entangled in insoluble internal contradictions. Art was thus restored to a relatively autonomous status after years of forced service to the political system and of illustrating ideological viewpoints.

This period of enthusiasm was also the time of return of the avant-garde, which had lain dormant since the late 1940s, and was only beginning its underground activity in the early 1950s. Both jazz (with the 1st Nationwide Jazz Music Festival in Sopot) and new music (with the 1st International Festival of Contemporary Music in Warsaw) now emerged out of oblivion. These two events took place in 1956. Previously discriminated against, labelled as "bourgeois", "formalist", "cosmopolitan", "degenerate", "products of an alien class" – these music worlds, suddenly no longer banned, won their own wide and faithful audiences, which foreshadowed a return to relative normality. The Polish music circles came up with the idea of creating a platform for international artistic confrontations in the form of a cyclic event (originally conceived as a biennial). Notably, the project had already been put forward before the spontaneous outburst of the "Polish October". Looking back at the history of the Festival, it was arguably Poland's most spectacular return to the global scene of high art, but also – in a sense – an act of heroic courage. The Warsaw Autumn's evident and immediate success, its appeal and its ability to attract well established artists, as well as its reception in the foreign media – could not be ignored, passed over or discredited ever since.

The format of the Warsaw Autumn Festival (hereinafter referred to as WA) provides for the annual presentation of composers and works that make up the canon of new music. In principle, the Festival was also conceived as a forum for the manifestation of new aesthetic trends and the evolution of new music. Initially those new trends were based on the twelve-note technique. The next step was the development of an unconventional technique referred to in Poland as sonorism, which was based on the supremacy of sound colour over all the other components of the music work. The large symphonic forms experienced a renaissance as well. Some composers continued to write in the traditional styles, or sought to create syntheses of various extreme approaches. Polish composers who achieved worldwide recognition and international renown in that period included Grażyna Bacewicz, Witold Lutosławski, Kazimierz Serocki, Tadeusz

Baird, Krzysztof Penderecki, Wojciech Kilar, and Henryk Mikołaj Górecki. Soon nearly the entire international pantheon of composers and their works (now considered as part of the canon) came to be presented on the Warsaw Philharmonic stages.

This bold initiative led before long (in the early 1960s) to the emergence of the critical concept of a "Polish school of composition". Its inseparable attributes were aleatoricism and the already mentioned sonorism. The latter term describes the tendency – dominant in Polish music at that time – to base the music work on sound colour as the supreme principle. Sound is frequently produced by experimental means, not directly from the "inside" of the instrument, but from the "outside", e.g. on the instrument body. All this throwing of objects on the strings, scratching, creaking and other acoustic effects resulting from the use of the instrument as a sort of prop – are products of an in-depth exploration of expressive possibilities and of transgressing previously established limits. The journey into the very heart of sound, the violent and brutal experiments with the prepared piano, etc. – became the daily bread of new music. Rhythm and harmony in the classical sense were disappearing, and the melodic line no longer organised the whole. Dynamic contrasts and sudden turns disrupted linear melodic development. New phenomena included improvised music narration, previously unknown types of dramatic forms, and atonal structures. In this pioneering period, most works were based on a specific sound concept, which was used as the foundation for the whole piece. The structure of the music work was based on the gradual accumulation of expressive qualities, which led to a monumental culmination, bordering on chaos. In later years, the formal radicalism of sonoristic music was tempered to some extent, and electronic instruments entered the stage with their synthesised sound.

In progressive new music, many sonoristic scores assumed a graphic form akin to visual artistic forms of expression. Rather than the orderly classical music notation with its clearly codified structure, they resembled a spontaneous and impulsive sketch or visual note in the vein of "action painting".

III.

In the same period when contemporary music was undergoing a revolutionary metamorphosis, the Polish poster art achieved a high status and international renown. The poster – a graphic form that serves other disciplines of culture – attained a state of anarchic freedom, breaking all the conventions previously accepted in the plastic

arts. The author's individuality and his or her own, often extremely subjective approach to the subject became the determinants of the phenomenon described as the "Polish poster school". Also the "physiognomy" of the work itself underwent radical transformations. Posters now reflected their authors' individual style rather than providing neutral visual information. This brought poster art closer to painting in terms of expressive and graphic qualities. Freed from the constraints of an orthodox approach to the genre, the Polish poster also disposed of the limitations of geometrical discipline. Visual expression, coupled with free projections of the imagination, meant that posters no longer had to represent their topic directly. Instead, artists interpreted their topics by means of symbols and metaphors, sometimes in a highly complex manner. The choice of means of expression, the selection of stylistic figures – extended the scope of possible associations. Nonchalance and disrespect for academic rules resulted in daring exploits bordering on extravagance. From the viewers' perspective, such art required active participation, intrigued the viewers with its aura of mystery, and provoked them to look for hidden, concealed senses, extravagant hyperboles, subversive associations, rather than providing a merely passive aesthetic experience. One might even suggest a certain (albeit verbally indefinable) similarity between the poetics of new music and that of the modern graphic arts. Both are undoubtedly rooted in similar types of action – form-building and transgressive at the same time. The poster art derived plenty of inspirations from the current trends and tendencies in contemporary painting, but graphic artists were also not indifferent to processes taking place in other artistic disciplines of the time, cautiously entering the sphere of analytic abstraction, of *art informel* and of abstract expressionism (the New York school), as well as photomontage. They explored previously uncharted territories, taking advantage of experiences derived from other artistic disciplines – a tendency which found its pure expression in their works. What they all undoubtedly had in common was the spirit of creative rebellion, the awareness that they created modern values in line with the expansive modernism which had finally reached Poland and found its expression in the declaration: "we want to be modern."

Taking up a previously unknown topic, the Polish poster artists found themselves in the position of pioneers exploring new (though already partly discovered) territories. There was no local tradition and no well-tested

models to fall back on. For obvious ideological reasons, the avant-garde trends had previously been unknown to the wide audience and banned as contrary to the preferred aesthetic values. The isolation of all the artistic milieux on this side of the Iron Curtain meant that they had had no access to works, publications, and the broadly conceived exchange of ideas. Personal contacts, membership of professional associations, participation in various fora for the confrontation of artistic views, the circulation of works and their presentations at exhibitions – all this had not been possible.

Ever since the time of the modernist breakthrough in typography, associated with the publication of Jan Tschichold's epoch-making work *Neue Typographie* (1928), the opportunity arose to bring closer together such disciplines as modern graphic art and new music. The principles of modern plastic arts developed by the Bauhaus circle seemed to provide an ideal symbiosis that could be used as a starting point for further experimentation. Unfortunately in the 1930s and 40s there were no specific works representing or even foreshadowing a radical avant-garde form of visual information in Poland. Other disciplines – such as advertising and the cinema – took advantage of the artistic revolution, producing many interesting works characterised by a radically transformed concept. However, in Polish poster art the foundations for a new modern form of artistic poster were only laid in the 1950s. This new poster art mainly followed the principles of the so-called *Neue Graphik*, also described as the international Swiss style (due to its widespread popularity). A leading role in this trend was played by graphic artists and typographers from German-speaking countries, such as Otl Aicher, Josef Müller-Brockman, Armin Hoffman, and others. In Poland, their works only became available from 1956 onward, when the first copies of the magazines "Graphis" (est. 1944) and "Graphis Annual" (est. 1952) reached our country. Both magazines were published by Walter Herdeg, who had close friendly contacts with many Polish graphic artists. His opinion-forming magazines also functioned as anthologies informing about current trends in the world's graphic design, which helped Polish artists overcome their isolation and take part in the international exchange and cooperation. It is in that period that the first modest attempts at imitating global tendencies were made. Imitation, however, became more common only in the late 1960s, when the "Polish school" was already on the wane.

IV.

The posters that accompany the successive Warsaw Autumn Festival editions are a unique collection of works, mostly of outstanding quality. One might venture the thesis that their artistic value – living up to the high demands of the topic – exceeds the typical standards of representation characteristic of popular art. Formally speaking, they abandon the conventions of egalitarian iconographic art in favour of a more elite-oriented visual formula, addressed to a competent audience knowledgeable about contemporary music and its qualities. The authors of these WA posters include many artists associated with the Polish school, such as Jan Lenica, Jan Młodożeniec, Julian Pałka, Waldemar Świerzy, Henryk Tomaszewski, and Wojciech Zamecznik. Their graphic representations of the achievements of the musical avant-garde do not, however, situate this poster series within the well-sanctioned canon of the “Polish poster school”, mostly associated with the film and theatre – generally considered as more “democratic” and entertainment-oriented disciplines of art.

The WA posters point to an evident polarisation of visual culture, corresponding to the division between high and low culture and between two types of audiences, differing in expectations. These posters form a largely autonomous collection and may be viewed as supplementary to the music they refer to, which determined the choice of expressive means appropriate to this topic. The whole collection is a display of its authors’ evident skills and their ability to live up to the high demands placed on these works. It is in the nature of the profession to reconcile the intentions of their employer with the expectations of their audience, subordinating their artistic individuality completely to the communicative function in order to ensure a proper understanding of their visual message, whose poetics corresponds to the topic of the given poster. Our initial thesis is that the task of illustrating musical form was approached by the graphic artists with respect and reserve. Unfettered imagination and exuberant temperament were subordinated to the necessary rigour of representation, and as a result – self-expression was consciously limited. The task of translating one medium into another (in this case – a visual one) requires intellectual discipline. Some kind of (at least formal) similarity between the two media needs to be discovered, and shared semantic elements ought to be traced. On the verbal level, such similarities are presented in terms of related distinctive

features, ways of describing phenomena, and intuitions. The 19th-century Romantic concept of the *correspondance des arts* was based on similar assumptions. The Romantics attempted to systematise the emotions accompanying the experience of different arts, looking for affinities and points of similarity. In the early years of modernity, this aspiration took the form of the theory of synaesthesia, whose best known (though much simplified) example is the oxymoron of “hearing the colours” (an ability Scriabin claimed to possess). In painting, synesthetic experience is exemplified by the works of the eminent composer and painter Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis.

To an artist, the greatest challenge of this attempt at translating musical experience into image is that the musical art, amorphous by nature, experienced solely by the ear, is not easily visualised, because it only exists in the auditory sphere. Admittedly, music can be translated into a graphic representation of sound waves, whose changes in time can be registered by technical equipment. Such records show the amplitude of sound, its phasic structures, the mutual modulations of multiphonics, etc., in a form similar to an electrocardiogram or a recorded film. This kind of representation is mechanical, basically horizontal, and rather soulless, i.e. devoid of emotional content. It could be registered e.g. by a polygraph. It is a type of notation that can be followed and even secondarily reinterpreted on the level of visual perception. In a similar way, we can even view the entire score at one go – its complex construction, its instrumental and vocal parts (as in the already mentioned graphic scores). All this, however, is only a poor substitute for the true substance of music – not its essence. Music, apart from its poly-dimensional shape, also involves the spiritual component – the interaction of sublime emotions, which by nature cannot assume any unequivocal shape. In relation to sound, image can only be an allusion to, or a simulation of, its presence, but image is not capable of creating an equivalent of sound. We may represent nothingness and non-existence by means of infinite darkness and the related silence (lack of sound), existence – as bright, radiant whiteness (probably also silent) – but these are only conventional representations or poetic metaphors. This kind of opposition is meant to provide the framework for a suggestive image. There seem to be many options, just as there are many types of articulation. An ideal, perfect form of transcription does not exist, though we cannot exclude the possibility of discovering such a form in the future. From this perspective one might claim (with tongue in cheek) that the only piece of music which can

be translated into image without much difficulty is John Cage's 4'33", which could be represented as a perfectly black canvas.

Similarly conventional is the belief that music and the graphic arts can be studied by means of one and the same cognitive model – of the kind that ancient philosophers from the time of Pythagoras tried to build when they looked for mathematical relations between number, geometry and music, also in their cosmological dimension. The heritage of this ancient quest is the use by music and visual arts of the same basic notions and concepts related to composition and its constituent parts: point, line, harmony, symmetry, and finally – form. Two other concepts that music and visual arts have in common are those of colour and texture – though, as pointed out above, there is no simple translation between the two disciplines, and these concepts are mere vehicles of description. They form *connotations* – i.e. features co-designated by a given word, adding to its content and meaning, associated with its main meaning as a secondary sense. They thus constitute the associational level of meaning, an attempt at a deeper or better understanding of the given concept.

I have included this digression concerning connotations here because it can help us reconstruct the treatment of musical topics by a graphic artist endowed (presumably) with a musical imagination. That this is not a mere theoretical model should become clear in a moment, when we come to specific WA posters.

Specific treatments of the subject – as represented by the posters of the successive editions of the WA festival – can be viewed as *denotations*, i.e. designates which aimed at the visual identification of the given WA edition. We may assume that each of them represents a form most adequate to the presented task. Each of them separately, as well as the whole poster series, form something that we can refer to as the *image* of the event – its iconic representation or optical signal.

Still, if direct mimetic representation is not possible, it would be tempting to escape into abstraction and the related non-representational forms – which broaden the field of possible semantic interpretation. The process of the development of the WA poster forms was by no means unidirectional, but a simple typology could be attempted. In 1956-1999 the binding standard was an image in the form of an autonomous emblem which served to identify the event. Some posters were created by individual artists. Others formed series created by one and the same artist, year after year or at not-too-long

intervals. It would be hard to reconstruct the reasons for such a choice of authors, but quite likely the Polish Composers' Union was aware of the value and artistic significance of these "trademarks" of the Festival, which always made the event highly identifiable, and therefore commissioned the posters from artists considered as unquestionable authorities in the field, who already boasted considerable achievements, demonstrated powers of empathy and – naturally – were known for their love of music. Such predispositions guaranteed a positive attitude to the musical subject matter, and an in-depth exploration of the essence of music, resulting in a visual product that could help to promote the Festival itself.

V.

A closer look at the WA posters under study reveals, at first glance, a similar choice of background against which the interplay of forms takes place. Notably, in the early period black alternates with white in nearly equal proportions. Both the black and the white are uniform and are presumably meant to reflect depth of perspective. After Stefan Bernaciński's dignified and technically "correct" calligraphic design that inaugurated the WA iconography (with a remarkable shift in the contour of the Festival initials, corresponding to the musical vibration effect), Tadeusz Gronowski's poster was the first to introduce a diagonal composition and a cluster of colourful *impasti*. They impetuously invade the blackness, from behind which the white colour shows through. Jan Lenica – the most musically competent of the poster designers (due to his music education and family traditions) upholds the motif of a music score in which the notes and chords form bands of marks. They are characterised by irregular shapes and diversity of colours, with a distinct illusion of being embedded in the depth of the white background – as though they were placed at right angles to the surface. The designs by Wojciech Zamecznik – a music connoisseur and exuberant improviser – form an interesting set and represent a "substantially" different approach altogether. They make use of experimental photographic techniques as their design material. His WA poster of 1961 looks a bit like a bird's-eye view of an archipelago or an unknown continent's coastline with irregular contours – a rediscovered *terra incognita* emerging from within the infinite black. His 1963 poster illustrates a cascade of sounds flowing down from the top edge and contrasted with a vanishing horizontal

band in the lower sections. The graphic equivalent of these elements is a blurry, blown-up point that stands out alone in the lower part of the poster. In the poster of 1965, three concentric overlapping phosphorescent groups of circles, likewise emerging out of the “limbo”, reflect an effect of vibration.

Waldemar Świerzy’s 1961 poster betrays the author’s distinct fascination with op-art in that period. The diagonal composition features a magnified section of a halftone image. This poster also features a point in both negative and positive, placed where the halftone texture fades away. Another legitimate association is that with perforated tape as a carrier of data – a now forgotten relic of the early age of Odra computers, which were then synonymous with modernity. Świerzy’s 1976 WA poster shows a surface marked out by vertical lines whose rhythm is distinctly disturbed at one point by an impulse that causes a deviation from the linear pattern. A concavity and a protuberance appear, lending a third dimension to the flat surface. A year later the WA poster represented a quasi-mandala with a strongly accented circle of white in the centre, surrounded by a halo formed by the light spectrum. It could bring to mind the mystical experience of epiphany, of contact with the Absolute.

The 1969 WA poster – by the same artist – draws on other inspirations, those of pop-art. It is ostensibly nothing more than an interplay of organic forms with strongly underlined axes of symmetry which mutually interact in a mirror image, disappearing beyond the frame of the composition. What we witness is only the beginning of the process – a moment in time, a metaphor of the origins of the world or of the act of initiation into a mystery of some kind.

The eleven WA posters by Hubert Hilscher (created in 1970-1985) can hardly be overlooked. They form the longest cycle of Festival posters, extremely consistent, though the interpretation of the topic is different in each case. In Hilscher’s designs, personal musical fascinations likewise combine with intellectual, rational concepts. His earliest WA posters include graphic representations of sound wave modulation (a phasor diagram). The band of sound has been framed in the form of the top section of the light spectrum with axial symmetry. The luminous colours are distorted in some way. The next design features an oblique view of a crystal structure penetrating deep into the background, formed of coloured cuboids. In accordance with the principles of visual illusion, this structure can be “read” from every angle and from alternating perspectives – a classic optical trick which

suggests many legitimate co-existent visions or points of view. The 1972 poster represents a minimalist vision of a space framed by a black *bordure*. The diagonal lines cast a shadow on a distant background. The lines are of different lengths, which suggests different slopes (gradients) of these lines. The majestic 1973 poster represents an abstract spindle-shaped figure concealed behind a set of parallel horizontal lines. The design of 1976 makes use of a neon effect. Phosphorescent sections of a circle form an archetypal, tree-like shape, whose structure grows progressively complex in its upper sections, while preserving iron logic in the sequence of elements. 1978 saw a different concept altogether: Muddled forms that resemble peacock feathers or a forest which grows dense in the distance. This is apparently a representation of sounds arranged in space – resounding and dying away. Likewise in the 1979 poster the coloured rectangles are suggestive of music notes hovering above the stand, drifting freely in space. The stand support serves as a sharp line of symmetry. The 1980 poster brings a distinct concept altogether – a red spot that brings to mind the Rorschach test applied in psychoanalytic diagnostics to study the patient’s associations, which later provide the basis for creating the so-called psychogram.

Henryk Tomaszewski’s approach to the WA topic is rather subversive. His poster shows a schematic school-type image of the act of insemination, whose sense becomes ambiguous and metaphorical in this context.

Andrzej Nowaczyk’s poster of 1986 bears the mark of the traumatic experience of the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster. It reiterates the motif of whirling circles known from Zamecznik’s design, but modified using the solarisation technique, which introduces an element of unrest and a “radiation alert”.

Symmetry returns as a principle of space organisation in the 1987 WA poster by Lech Majewski. A dotted line made up of coloured points hovers directly above the background. Light falls in two directions, which means that the top section of the line casts a tinted shadow to the right, and the bottom section – to the left, suggesting accepted ambivalence of perspective, or even alternative-complementary visions, leading to optical disorientation.

A screen ruling imposed on a neutral surface (vertically) or on a landscape (horizontally) provides the basis for the posters designed by respectively Jan Bokiewicz and Wojciech Freudenreich. In both cases, the rhythm of the lines is disturbed by one diagonal line, introducing a dissonance.

From 2000 onward, “Warsaw Autumn” posters no longer constituted independent works, but became an element in a complex Festival identification profile, consisting of a website (interactive in some contexts), occasional publications, etc. The poster itself became a graphic prop and a key element of a branding system, of which it was an integral, interdependent component, not more important than the other instruments of Festival promotion. The illustrative function is no longer present in the foreground; it has made room for refined, elegant typographic patterns. Can we assess this a degradation of the posters and of their artistic status? Objective judgment is not possible. The new approach certainly corresponds to the spirit of the times, since marketing strategies now concentrate on the brand itself and on its proper positioning, while paying less attention to artistic imagination – even though some artists still manage to smuggle some universal ideas into their designs.

Most of these more recent designs represent a high level of graphic culture. They frequently make use of computer-generated colouristic wallpapers, which provide a kind of set scene for strictly typographic compositions. Of especially high standard are the works of the Dutch graphic artist Martin Majoor, who created more than a dozen WA posters of highly unified character. The new tendencies are also evident in the posters by Tomasz Lec and Adam Dudek, though they do not demonstrate individual style or point to any ambiguous interpretations. They represent perfectly homogeneous visual systems which no longer explore connotations from the field of contemporary music, but constitute closed, accomplished compositions in themselves. Unfortunately in retrospect they refer less to the spiritual experience, and more – to the narcissistic tendencies of their authors. This, however, by no means diminishes their value. On the contrary, they do cultivate the established tradition, paying due respect to earlier WA designs.

A certain field of reference for the WA poster collection is provided by the vinyl records with contemporary music which were released simultaneously with the posters – from the late 1950s – by Polskie Nagrania “Muza” state record company. Their graphic designs represent similar tendencies. These designs are amorphous or abstract in their majority, and they take advantage of the “alchemy” of photographic and polygraphic techniques. This is especially evident in the jubilee edition (8LPs in one box) released for the Festival’s 25 years, with cover designs by Stanisław Żakowski (1981).

The topic calls for a separate study, but methodologically the above-presented approach and assumptions seem to work well for this subject.

It is an unwritten but well known principle that a system for the visual identification of an event ought to constitute a homogeneous pattern complementing the immanent qualities of that event. This has also been the case with the graphic images that have accompanied the Warsaw Autumn festival for more than half a century. They enhance the image of the event, stress the value of the brand, and form an autonomous field within the universal repository of signs. Naturally, the task has also placed equally high demands on the successive designers as heirs to the respected heritage which represents an “aristocratic” line in the (not only local-Polish) history of poster art. *Noblesse oblige*.

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His research interests and publications comprise problems of visual arts, graphic design, visual communication, advertising, art in public space, sculpture and the broadly conceived contemporary art.

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He has served as curator of exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Sculpture – Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko (e.g. “Utopia and Vision”, 1999), The Zachęta National Gallery of Art (2000), as well as single-artist exhibitions by Adam Myjak, Barbara Falender, Sylwester Ambroziak, Magdalena Abakanowicz, and many others.