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Rainbow Solidarity

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The Tricity, and especially Sopot, has been dubbed the gay summer capital of Poland, being able to boast [a vibrant queer scene abundant with] numerous legendary hotspots. Importantly, it was also the breeding ground for many organisations crucial to the development of the Polish LGBTQ movement. Now, it witnesses the dawn of Polish lesbian activism and creativity.

‘It All Started in Gdańsk’ is one of the slogans used by the local council to promote the city – it refers, of course, to the Solidarity movement. However, in the 1980s the Tricity was also one of the first places in Poland where the ‘homosexual movement’ started¹. Unfortunately, we are yet to find such information in traditional tourist guides to the region. One reason for this could be the fact that the LGBTQ minority does not seem to be welcome either in Gdańsk or anywhere else in Poland, as at best we are invisible to the authorities.

Therefore, as activists, during various demos, we proudly carry a banner that reads ‘Rainbow Solidarity’, [a slogan] which is also the motto of a local division of the *Campaign Against Homophobia [CAH]* (Kampania Przeciw Homofobii), a [queer rights] organisation, that has been present in the Tricity for eight years. We are also proud of the fact that the LGBTQ movement in Poland can claim to have its own history, [traceable] roots and a [distinct] identity. [Contrary to popular belief, queer figures have been discretely present in the public life of Poland, and Gdańsk, for a long time. One example being] Maria Konopnicka², the author of the lyrics to *Rota*, [an important patriotic hymn] that is played every day by the bells of the Gdańsk Town Hall in Długa street. Most people are unaware of the fact that Konopnicka, who also wrote *Mendel Gdański*³, was in a relationship with another woman for twenty-one years. [Gdańsk honoured Konopnicka with a] monument, located by a busy street,

¹ Initially, this movement involved only gay men, which triggered the mechanism of double exclusion of lesbians, on the grounds of both their sex and gender.

² Maria Konopnicka was a 19th century Polish poet, novelist, children’s author, translator and journalist. She is appreciated for her engagement in patriotic circles, as well as her efforts to cultivate the Polish language and identity during the period of Poland’s struggle for independence.

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³*Mendel Gdański* is a moralistic novella written by Konopnicka, touching upon the issue of Polish anti-Semitism.

Waty Jagiellońskie, directly opposite the landmark LOT building. The monument has become one of the most popular meeting spots for dating couples (as well as same-sex ones) in the Tricity. *CAH* [picked up on this fact and] are planning to plant [a floral tribute in the form of] a violet rainbow of pansies at the base of the monument, which is part of a wider project called ‘Tolerance Blooms in Gdańsk’.

Just one block away from Konopnicka’s statue stands the building of Gdańsk city council. Most probably the councillors – including the few female ones – do not know that the building they reside in, once housed the headquarters of one of the first Polish gay organisations established in the 1990s, *The Gdańsk Initiative* (Inicjatywa Gdańska). However, long before the rise of this movement, a nearby park surrounding the famous student club, *Żak*, had been recognised as one of the most popular cruising spots in the Tricity, which it probably continues to be to this day. Also, several meters from this spot, in the public toilets inside the Gdańsk Główny train station, there was another major ‘*pikieta*’ (which in Polish gay slang describes a public place where one can pursue a partner for casual sex.)⁴

Considering all this, for the past few months, with a group of enthusiast-friends, we have been researching and writing a ‘pink’ history of the Tricity, as part of a project, ‘*The Gdańsk Closet. The Tricity Queer Story*’.

The Sumer Capital of Poland

There is a lot to write about, as the untold history was, and still is, being created by a [queer] community in the Tricity numbering between 40,000-100,000 people, in a city whose [overall] population reaches one million. [It is commonly acknowledged that] non-heterosexual people tend to settle down in urban areas. A big city offers anonymity, as well as a greater likelihood of finding a suitable partner. Also, it is clear that Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia attract the gay and lesbian community by offering a plethora of nightclubs, cruising spots, sauna rooms and an informal gay beach in Gdańsk Stogi. Therefore, the Tricity is considered to be Poland’s summer gay capital – and it has been the case for many years.

⁴ Information about a cruising spot, or ‘*pikieta*’, spread by word of mouth. Usually, such spots had to offer both privacy and a steady flow of people, which increased the chances of meeting another homosexual person. In the pre-internet era, as well as under communism, when the details of regulars at gay clubs were often taken down by the militia and used as grounds for [political] blackmail, visiting such places was the only way of meeting another person of similar sexual orientation.

The earliest accounts of [the local gay scene] we came across, date back to the 1960s, and make references to a certain pavilion in Sopot, where Marta Stebniecka⁵ performed. She sang chansons from Parisian cabarets about men who dress up as women. Today the building belongs to the new *Dom Zdrojowy*, [a local landmark]. A bit further away, behind the [famous] *Rotunda* restaurant, there was a small establishment, humorously nicknamed *Cafe Trumna* (literally, ‘Cafe Coffin’), where people used to meet over vodka. Another place considered to be a gay hotspot was the *Złoty Ul* restaurant (*The Golden Hive*), situated on Sopot’s [busy central precinct,] Bohaterów Monte Cassino street.

In 1976 *Sezam* was opened – located on 3 Maja street, [away from the hustle and bustle of Sopot’s city centre,] it survived until the 1990s. Also in 1976, *Vega* club was established on Podmurze Street in Gdańsk – today, on the same premises, there is [another venue,] *Cafe Szafa* (*Cafe Closet*). [Interestingly,] *Sezam* was a predominantly gay club [in its time] – only men were allowed in; nowadays the building is occupied by a local convenience shop. However, before 1989, the main meeting spots for Gdańsk’s gay community were public bathhouses in 1 Jaskółcza Street [, just a few paces from the Old Town] and 5 Strajku Dokerów Street in Nowy Port, [a seaside working-class neighbourhood]. Nowadays, both buildings are used by the *Łażnia* Centre for Modern Art for hosting (among others, queer-themed) visual art exhibitions. Also, there were numerous cruising spots and hangouts, such as those in Gdańsk Główny, Gdańsk Wrzeszcz and Sopot train stations, or the [leafy] Oliwa Park and Uphagen Park in Wrzeszcz, as well as many others.

Following the fall of communism, many new [gay] venues sprang up – *Szalanda* on Jelitkowska Street (today *Parkowa* [a seaside beer hangout]) or *Lord*, located in the building of a university student hall of residence on Hallera Street in Gdańsk. In the centre of Gdynia, right on the corner of Abrahama and 10 Lutego Street, there was *Romira*, whereas [suburban] Gdynia-Orłowo had *U Ireny*, a club [discretely] set up in the basement of a villa in Folwarczna Street. Then, there was Sopot’s *GoGo Land*, and the extremely popular *Mezzo*. Finally, [in the heart of Gdańsk’s Old Town] on Piwna Street, there was *Hubertus*. Apparently, the venue had a mirror operated with a secret button. If you knew how to use it, a secret passage opened and led you into a ‘dark room’.

[One witness reminisces:]

⁵ Marta Stebniecka (born 22 March 1925) is a Polish actress, theatre director, *chanteuse* and lecturer at the Ludwik Solski State Academy of Performing Arts in Krakow.

“[...] The venue *U Ireny* was located in Gdynia-Orłowo. In those days we would go to and fro from *Irena* to *Mezzo*. You could go dancing in ‘*Irka*’, as they had a [proper] dance floor, whereas *Mezzo* was tiny and you couldn’t really make out when you were dancing. To top it all, on the edge of Sopot, on the very turn heading towards Kamienny Potok, there was a striptease bar, where guys used to come to look at pole dancing girls, however, it was converted into ‘our’ kind of venue, that is *GoGo Land*. Although, the first hotspot I can remember, and where I started, was *Sezam*. Of course, it wasn’t an openly gay club. Sometimes you would see a large militia van pulling up outside, and then, lots of lads dressed up as lassies being crammed into the back of the vehicle. They were held for questioning for 24 or 48 hours and [usually] let off without any charges, because, to be honest, the militia had nothing on them. Some time later *Szalanda*, a big disco club, was opened.”⁶

These venues mostly attracted [queer] men, however, in the following years new clubs were established whose clientele was increasingly female, as well as heterosexual. In the past two decades the following venues have been opened: the extremely popular *Kogiel Mogiel* and *Enzym*, as well as *Safona* in Gdańsk, *Enter Pub*, *Niebieski Kot*, *Pompon*, *Faktoria*, *Pestka*, *Camel sauna Inferno* in Sopot, *Club No.11* and the re-launched *Romira* in Gdynia. The most recent additions are Sopot’s *Pepe*, *Elton* and *Sixty9*, as well as *Que Pasa* in Gdańsk.

Moreover, after years of experiencing ‘invisibility’, the Tricity’s non-heteronormative women took matters into their own hands and started organising ‘women only’ events. [For example,] local lesbian [circles] put on events such as beach football tournaments, advertised on LGBTQ portals. Also, female-only events have become an increasingly important part of the local scene. The most recent ones have included *Ladies’ Night* and *Playgirl* – the latter was organised in the Sopot clubs *Camel* and *Elton* by an informal group of girls calling themselves ‘*Pomoże*’. Whereas Gdynia can boast its own gay amateur volleyball team.

Beginnings

[For a long time] ‘rainbow communities’, both abroad and in Poland, have been joining their efforts to fight for equal rights. The beginnings of the LGBTQ movement in the Tricity date

⁶ This is a fragment of an interview with a Gdańsk resident, conducted as part of ‘*The Gdańsk Closet. The Tricity Queer Story*’ project.

back to the 1980s, which was a difficult time in the context of the outburst of the AIDS epidemic, unfairly considered as a threat associated [only] with gay communities. [Nevertheless,] the first articles on homosexuality were published in such an [unfavourable] climate. [Not being able to carry out] any ‘rainbow initiatives’, the members of Polish LGBTQ communities sought help from organisations based in Western Europe. Outside Poland such [queer] circles have a [long-established] history of activism, going back even as far as the interwar period. Organisations dealing with issues concerning non-heterosexual people were created after the end of the Second World War. The first registered organisation of this type was the Dutch *COC*⁷, established in 1946.

Subsequently, during a meeting of *The International Lesbian and Gay Association* (ILGA), it was decided that letters from communist countries should be dealt with by one particular institution. An Austrian-based organisation, *HOSI Wien*, was chosen for this purpose because of its close proximity to the countries from behind the Iron Curtain. In 1982 *The Eastern Europe Information Pool* (EEIP) was created and worked closely with Andrzej Selerowicz⁸, a Pole permanently living in Austria, who made regular trips back to Poland in order to coordinate budding LGBTQ initiatives.⁹

The Tricity-based person who made contact with Selerowicz was Ryszard Kisiel¹⁰, an incredibly active and widely recognised figure within the local area. Kisiel also worked with other nascent LGBTQ circles around Poland. He participated in and organised the cultural life of gay people in the 1970s; for example, during the *Hamburg Days* held in Gdańsk in 1977, he promoted gay cinema and organised outings to film viewings. This is how Kisiel himself remembers that time:

[...] In *Cinema Leningrad* [in Gdańsk], there was scheduled a screening of a gay-themed German film – it was about a composer who invited a young man from somewhere around Hamburg to meet

⁷ *COC Nederland* did not operate as an openly gay organisation in the beginning. Its original name, *C.O.C.* stands for *Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum* - ‘Centre for Culture and Recreation’ - and was supposed to disguise the real purpose of the institution.

⁸ Selerowicz (born in 1948) is an activist working with gay and lesbian communities in Eastern Europe. He has also worked as a publicist and translator of LGBT literature into Polish.

⁹ Robert Biedroń, ‘Historia Homoseksualności’ in *Queer Studies. Podręcznik Kursu*, M. Abramowicz, R. Biedroń, J. Kochanowski, KPH, Warszawa 2010, pp. 57-96.

¹⁰ Kisiel (also born in 1948) edited the first Polish gay magazine, *Filo*, which was hugely important in the process of consolidating and mobilizing gay circles in Poland. In time it has gained the status of a chronicle of the Polish gay movement.

him in his villa, and got murdered by his guest. For some reason the censor's office agreed to show the film at the festival. I organised fifteen guys and we booked tickets in bulk for that show. Just before the screening we handed out all the tickets to people outside the cinema. As we were doing this, some German tourist filmed us with his camera, thinking that Polish gay activists are really well organised.¹¹

Operation 'Hyacinth'

However, between 1985 and 1987, before Polish LGBTQ circles became active, the militia conducted an operation named 'Hyacinth'. General Czesław Kiszczak, then the interior affairs minister, ordered the militia to arrest people who were allegedly homosexual and set up a 'Homosexual's File' for every such person. The official reason for this was preventing the AIDS epidemic and controlling the so-called 'criminal environment', as well as fighting prostitution. However, activists remember that the reason might also have been the LGBTQ community's increased exchange of correspondence [and ideas?] with the West and, subsequently, the development of a new movement. Another significant reason [why the regime persecuted gay people], also mentioned by Robert Biedroń in his essay, was the opportunity it created to collect information about the anti-communist opposition, including members of the *Solidarity* movement.¹² It has been estimated that around 11,000 people were affected by operation 'Hyacinth'. Importantly though, members of the anti-communist opposition often were unaware of this form of persecution, because those people who were classified with a 'Homosexual's File' [by the militia] were reluctant to talk about this fact, even to opposition activists, as it meant revealing their sexual orientation. This made the whole operation even more painful for the gay community. The Tricity activist, Ryszard Kisiel, was arrested and questioned by the militia on 15 November 1985:

[...] Militia officers took me to the militia-station. I knew I had the right to refuse to give a statement or let them take my fingerprints or photograph me. My status could be either a 'suspect' or a 'witness' – a witness couldn't refuse [to cooperate], whereas a

¹¹ This is part of an interview with Ryszard Kisiel, conducted in July 2009 as part of the *Gdańsk Closet. The Tricity Queer Story* project. All the other quotations by Kisiel in this essay come from the same interview.

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* R. Biedroń, *ibid*, pp. 81-82.

suspect could. [Nevertheless,] I gave up, but on the same day I still managed to see some friends and instruct them on how to behave. The following day I visited some friends who were entertaining a couple of professors from the Medical Academy in Gdańsk. I told all of them what happened to me. The next thing, the militia came. [When confronted with the militia] the older of the two friends – he worked at a tourist office – who was braver and more *au fait* with such situations, denied [any cooperation], whereas the other friend succumbed. We thought that the two [academics], given their status, would oppose or somehow intervene. Unfortunately, in those days society was threatened [by the communist regime].

Letter to a Friend

Kisiel's immediate response to the questioning was to contact a well-known Solidarity activist¹³, who helped him to compile a compendium of legal advice for gay people held for questioning by the militia. Kisiel himself prepared an information leaflet on safe gay sex. They produced multiple copies of these materials using equipment in the photocopying shop where Kisiel worked, and distributed them among friends. The shop, situated on the corner of Piwna and Lektykarska Street [in Gdańsk's Old Town], was nicknamed *Iweta*, after Kisiel's stage pseudonym.

[...] Yvette Guilbert was a French cabaret singer who performed in the 1920s, even on occasion in Poland. In the 1960s, Marta Stebnicka sang renditions of Guilbert's songs in Sopot, where I first heard them. These were songs about Parisian transvestites. I was fascinated by them and dreamed of having such cabarets established in Poland. Later, I performed in drag as Yvette at various parties and on trips to other communist countries.¹⁴

Tactically, it was a good move to distribute the materials [prepared by Kisiel] in December, as the security bureau was unable to control all of the mail [processed by post offices], due to the large amount of correspondence exchanged over the Christmas period.

¹³ The person wishes to remain anonymous.

¹⁴

After this initiative, Kisiel started distributing books, translated by Andrzej Selerowicz (under the pseudonym Marek Jaworski), which he photocopied in *Iweta*. From then on, Kisiel began to think [seriously] about getting into publishing permanently. As a result, on 3 November 1987 the first issue of the *Gay Cultural Bulletin 'Filo Express'* was published.

It was a reference to my own experiences. Filo is a Greek word with many meanings. It can mean 'friend', 'lover' or 'enthusiast'. In my student times I wrote letters to a friend-lover. Then I lived in Poznań and he lived in Gdańsk. I addressed him 'my friend' [in those letters]. His aunt got her hands on those letters. At that time, I studied [ancient] Greek at university. I started sending him messages coded in the Greek alphabet and I addressed him in that language.¹⁵

Initially, the magazine started off as [a one-page leaflet], however, the final issues swelled up to several dozen pages. The first issues were prepared in collaboration with a graphic designer, who produced pictures inspired by the work of Aubrey Beardsley, best known for his illustrations to Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. The magazine included a thorough information section, covering information both from Poland and abroad, made possible by [Kisiel's] contacts with HOSI Wien and Selerowicz. There were also interviews, articles with a cultural and social focus – [including] updates on HIV/ AIDS [issues], there were publications touching upon queer themes in history, and the work of young artists was also published. However, the most exciting section was the gossip column.

Kisiel's house became the magazine's editorial office and his mailbox was turned into a pigeonhole. Contributors to the magazine came from different parts of Poland, as well as from abroad. In order to avoid any difficulties with registering *Filo*, [Kisiel] operated under the law on privately issued magazines – [it stated that if] the circulation of a magazine was under one hundred copies, it did not need to be officially registered. Therefore, up to October 1990 the number of printed copies of *Filo* was always 99.

After the democratic changes that occurred in Poland, the editors [of the magazine] initiated a collaboration with a Swedish organisation, the *RFSL [Riksförbundet för homosexuellas, bisexuellas och transpersoners rättigheter]* (The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights)]. Thanks to the collaboration, [*Filo*] received funding for formal registration and from June it operated legally - [also] a contract was signed with [a

¹⁵ Ibid

nation-wide distributor, *Ruch*,] which meant that the magazine was available in most Tricity newsagents. The magazine functioned in this form until 1997. Then the editors' [board] decided to change its name to *Facet* (Polish for 'Guy').

Unfortunately, after 1989, the LGBTQ movement was unable to develop openly either in the pro-Solidarity north of Poland or elsewhere in the country. The achievements of [different] organisations – despite being legal – went unnoticed. A similar thing happened to feminists, including Solidarity's women's section, as well as the pro-choice movement. Małgorzata Tarasiewicz [, director of the *Towarzystwo Współpracy Kobiet NEWW-Polska* (The Society for Women's Collaboration NEWW-Poland)] comments:

'Freedom' turned out to be heterosexual and masculine, contrary to the expectations of feminists and LGBTQ people, not all human rights were fully implemented after 1989. Solidarity's Women's Section was an expression of some naive hopes to guarantee women their rights after the democratic changes in Poland. It turned out that some rights would not be guaranteed, because they were politically inconvenient.

Let Them See Us!

Nevertheless, the period subsequent to the change of political system was a crucial stepping stone for the LGBTQ community. This was the time when the first organisations working for our community were established. Finally, we became 'visible' [to society], which [on the other hand] does not mean that our demands are recognised enough for basic legal acts to be passed. In Warsaw on 16 and 17 April 1988, the second conference of lesbian and gay people from socialist countries was held, which was facilitated by the *Warsaw Homosexual Movement*. The official venue for this event was the headquarters of the *Patriotyczny Ruch Odrodzenia Polski – PRON* (*The Patriotic Movement for the Renewal of Poland*) – an organisation inspired by the Polish Communist Party under martial law [in the 1980s]. However, the capacity of the venue turned out to be insufficient, as many guests from all over the world arrived. Luckily, one of the participants [of the conference] was a gay man who worked as a porter in the [building of the] district Communist Party committee for Warszawa Mokotów. He happened to have the keys to the conference room [in that building], and, subsequently, the meeting took place in the grand surroundings [of the Communist Party building]. [Importantly,] it became the site of the discussion on setting up a national gay

organisation. Finally, just such an organisation – *Lambda* – was established on 23 February 1990. Two years later a Gdańsk division of *Lambda* was created, which then became *The Gdańsk Initiative*. The organisation set up and ran gay Information and Consultation Centres – the first of their type in Poland and only the third in Eastern Europe – in their headquarters, which changed locations several times. One site was in the previously mentioned City Council building (the then *Żak* student club) on 1 Wały Jagiellońskie Street [in Gdańsk]. The organisation also issued and distributed magazines, such as *Różowy Plus* ('The Pink Plus') targeted at gay men, and *Fioletowy Plus – Biuletyn dla Gej-Dziewczyn Inicjatywy Gdańskiej* ('Gdańsk Initiative's Purple Plus – a Magazine for Gay Girls'). The organisation continued to operate until the year 2000.

The Gdańsk Initiative was a recognised, non-governmental organisation in the Tricity. For example, it was a member of the *Regional Forum of Non-Governmental Initiatives*. During the first forum, which took place in May 1994 in *Wybrzeże* Theatre in Gdańsk, Catholic organisations protested against the participation of a gay movement. The person who mediated between the two sides was the honorary patron of the meeting, Jacek Kuroń¹⁶. Thanks to the support of the organisers, *The Gdańsk Initiative* remained a member of the forum.¹⁷

The organisation was part of the *International Lesbian and Gay Youth Organisation* (ILGYO); it collaborated with the Swedish *RFSL* on a regular basis and managed to raise funds to finance their initiatives.

The Tricity can also boast the first Polish organisation for transsexual people. The *Society for the Defence and Aid of People Suffering from [Gender] Transposition LOS*, whose president was Zdzisław Malina, was active between 1998 and 2001¹⁸. The organisation was, to a large extent, based on the concept of self-help. Interestingly, before the Polish health care system was reformed in 1999, sex change operations were fully covered [by health insurance]. Nowadays, patients have to pay for such medical procedures from their own pocket.

In 2001 *Kampania Przeciw Homofobii – KPH* (*Campaign Against Homophobia*) was established; currently, it is the biggest LGBTQ organisation in Poland. It became significant

¹⁶ Kuroń was one of the leaders of anti-communist opposition in Poland. He was an important political and social figure, as well as the Minister of Labour and Social Policy.

¹⁷

Gazeta Morska, Issue 111, 14 May 1994, p. 1.

¹⁸

* 'Obce Ciało' in *Polityka* 40/1999, Paweł Wawelski.

after the so-called ‘Polish Stonewall’, that is, the first social campaign raising awareness about the LGBTQ community. The campaign, whose title and motto was ‘Let them see us!’, also brought into existence the Tricity KPH branch. The campaign was supposed to take the form of a series of photographic exhibitions and posters by the artist Karolina Berguła, displayed in urban spaces.¹⁹

The KPH Warsaw head office initially planned to put up the posters on bus and tram stops in four Polish cities, including Gdańsk. Unfortunately, the photographs were never displayed in Gdańsk’s urban space. Two months before the project was due to be launched, the Cracow branch of *Liga Polskich Rodzin* (*The League of Polish Families*), [a radical, Catholic-nationalist political movement], carried out a counter-campaign, which aimed to ban the public display of the project. After the mayor of Cracow made negative comments about the photographs, and *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (*The All-Polish Youth*) [, a militant youth division of *Liga Polskich Rodzin*,] threatened to vandalise bus stops, AMS, an outdoor advertising company contracted to carry out the project, decided to pull out of the deal with KPH just a week before the planned start date of the campaign. Nevertheless, exhibitions were held in some Polish cities. On 23 April 2003, during the opening of the ‘Let them see us’ exhibition at *Łaźnia*, Gdańsk’s Centre for Modern Art, the first meeting of the Tricity KPH branch took place.

The Tricity branch of the KPH organises events such as issuing and distributing Valentine’s Day cards, street events on the Day of Silence, the International Day against Homophobia and the Coming Out Day, as well as running educational projects and workshops, including those for the police, panel discussions, debates, film viewings and support groups. KPH closely collaborates with local groups who deal with human rights and women’s issues. The 2003 *Manifa*²⁰ was the first demonstration in the Tricity where KPH carried rainbow flags. In subsequent years, non-heteronormative women have expressed their demands on banners and in speeches during *Manifa* events and [others, such as the] *Women’s March*.

So far, the largest LGBTQ event in the Tricity has been the 2005 rally, ‘*Resuscitating Democracy. The Equality March Goes Forward*’, which attracted several thousand supporters

¹⁹ ‘Let them see us’ is a cycle of thirty photographs portraying same-sex couples, who decided to reveal their identity to a wider audience.

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* The annual peaceful demonstration organised in many Polish cities on 8 March and celebrated in many ex-Soviet countries as ‘Women’s Day’.

who met on Długa and Długi Targ street in Gdańsk. However, LGBTQ people were denied the right to protest on Solidarity Square in Gdańsk, just outside the [famous] shipyard gate, considered to be the cradle of [modern] democracy in Central Europe.

The Gdańsk Shipyard is a place of particular significance on the world map. This is the place where Gdańsk shipyard workers were pioneers in the struggle for freedom of speech, the freedom to organise public gatherings, as well as for tolerance and human dignity. Gdańsk shipyard workers to this day respect the ideals of fighting for democracy and the right to organise public demonstrations. They also respect the ideals of the organisers of the ‘*Resuscitating Democracy*’ rally. However, [the shipyard workers] do not wish the square, which is the site of the Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers, to become an arena of uncivil confrontation, fights or name calling, which could be instigated by counter-demonstrations to the peaceful ‘*Resuscitating Democracy*’ rally. The organisers of the rally understand the shipyard workers’ concern about this [special] site. They also stress that the choice of place [for the demonstration] was not supposed to be a deliberate provocation, but was suggested by a member of staff at Gdańsk City Hall.

As a consequence of this agreement, the organisers [of the rally] have decided not to hold the event outside the gates of the Gdańsk Shipyard, and to move it to the original planned site on Długi Targ street, where a peaceful demonstration will take place. Shipyard workers and anyone who supports the ideals of freedom, tolerance and democracy are welcome to join the rally.

Signed:

Roman Gałęzewski

Head of the Cross-Company Solidarność Union Committee

Beata Maciejewska

Zieloni 2004²¹, Solidarity with Poznań Committee

²¹ *Zieloni 2004* is a Green party active in Poland.

It is clear that members of the Tricity gay, lesbian, bi- and trans-sexual community, as well as their friends, have committed acts of civil disobedience. [For example,] in the summer of 2009, Wojciech Cejrowski visited the Tricity. Cejrowski is a celebrity travel writer, who uses his popularity to spread hatred towards homosexuals and non-Catholics, as well as to promote sexist attitudes towards women. [In protest, groups of] ‘night guerrillas’ put up messages over the posters advertising events at which Cejrowski was due to appear, which read ‘CANCELLED. Greetings from lesbians and gays from the Tricity’ or ‘CANCELLED. Greetings from women from the Tricity’. No one claimed responsibility for this.

Culture

LGBTQ themes in art are often described by the word ‘queer’. The Tricity is the venue for numerous cultural events of this kind, and it is also the home of many homosexual artists.

An installation entitled *Cisza (Silence)*, by Krzysztof Malec, a pioneer of Polish homoerotic art, was exhibited in 1992 in an office in the Old Town City Hall in Gdańsk (the project was curated by Ryszard Ziarkiewicz). An important venue [for queer art] is the Centre for Contemporary Art *Łaźnia*, where in 2006 Paweł Leszkowicz curated the exhibition, *Miłość i Demokracja (Love and Democracy)*. Up to 2010, it was the largest exhibition of queer art in Poland. At the same venue, Leszkowicz has also presented an exhibition entitled *Vogue*. Clearly, *Łaźnia* is an important place for the ‘rainbow community’, and not only because of the sentiment connected to this former gay meeting place.

Homoerotic themes are also present in the Tricity’s theatre productions. The cult of the naked male body was the premise of [many] dance performances by Wojciech Misiura of the *Theatre of Expression*, which was active in northern Poland in the 1980s and 1990s. An ex-dancer and assistant choreographer, Leon Dziemaszkiewicz, is a leading figure in a local theatre, *Patrz mi na Usta (Watch My Lips)*, which constantly touches upon queer themes in its plays. What is more, he is recognisable as an [eccentric and] colourful resident of Sopot.

Homoerotic art has been presented on stage by Maciej Nowak, the openly gay director of the *Wybrzeże* Theatre in Gdańsk. In 2005, Nowak took part in a photo shoot for *Lifestyle* magazine, where he appeared sporting [only] boxer shorts and a belt of sausages. Subsequently, in 2006, he was forced to resign by Jan Kozłowski, the leader of the Pomeranian Voivodeship [administrative district], after a public debate lasting several months.

The fact that Nowak was supported by the majority of those active in artistic circles, as well as the liberal media, did not help. The unofficial reason for sacking Nowak was the cover picture of *Lifestyle* magazine, which was interpreted by some as an expression of his homosexuality.

Sopot's *Faktoria* club has inspired several important events. For one thing, it has hosted the amateur queer theatre, *Faktoria Milorda*. More recently, in 2006, the current deputy mayor of Sopot, Joanna Cichocka-Gula, made a documentary entitled *Faktoria story* about the regulars of this queer club. It won a prestigious local cultural award, *Sztorm Roku (Storm of the Year)*.

Increasingly, the creative work of the Tricity's non-heteronormative women has been recognised. It is the birthplace, and after many travels, the chosen home of Izabela Filipiak (the author of novels such as *Śmierć i Spirala (Death and the Spiral)*, *Absolutna Amnezja (Absolute Amnesia)* and *Księga Em (The Book of Em)*); in February 1998 she was the first Polish lesbian to publicly out herself. Currently, she works at the University of Gdańsk and the *Writers for Peace* foundation. Another resident of Gdańsk, Beata Sosnowska, who created the illustrations for Anna Laszuk's *Mala Książka o Homofobii (A Small Book on Homophobia)*, draws comics [graphic novels?] and makes [other forms of] lesbian-themed art. [Another example] is Ewa Tomaszewicz, an activist and blogger, originally from the Tricity, she was one of the co-founders of a lesbian cabaret group, *Barbie Girls*. Another Gdańsk resident, Magdalena Czajkowska, is a painter who touches upon lesbian themes in her art. She has had the following exhibitions of her art: *Namiętności (Passions)*, *Gdyby Lichtenstein był kobietą (If Lichtenstein Was a Woman)* and *Interpretacja Dowolna (Free Interpretation)*.

The Tricity's 'rainbow history' is still waiting to be discovered. Our project, *The Gdańsk Closet. The Tricity Queer Story* is [an oral history project] based on interviews conducted with people who wish to share their memories related to [local] LGBTQ themes, as well as collecting artefacts, such as photographs, newspaper articles, etc. The Tricity's 'rainbow history' will be presented in book form (a historical-memoir), on a map and as an exhibition.

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