

Modern Architecture in Gdynia – Modern Architecture in Łódź In Search of Stylistic References in Architecture

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Łódź is an older city than Gdynia. Its spatial pattern was shaped when it was developing as an industrial centre, yet the period between WWI and WWII also left a lasting and valuable trace in its architectural landscape. This was because another driving force emerged, apart from the industry – Łódź became the capital of a province of the 2nd Polish Republic. This administrative promotion started a process of investing in both, the previously neglected public spaces and in housing. When one searches for stylistic associations with what was built in Gdynia at the same time, one should look at the houses built in the 1930s in the first place. It is a striking coincidence that we find numerous references to the “stately” or “luxurious” Modern Architecture of Gdynia, with its expressive cubistic and streamlined forms, with examples of the so-called naval style, derived from the international tendency among architects to seek inspiration in a product of the human mind and technology, i.e. the transatlantic liner. Maria Jolanta Sołtysik quotes a pre-war critic and current affairs writer Henryk Chudziński as calling such structures “vessels of brick and mortar on land”.¹ Despite its name (Łódź means a boat in Polish), Łódź is not situated on the sea, but there are 11 watercourses flowing across it and many ponds. They are nothing like navigable rivers or vast reservoirs – the only vessels moving there are canoes, and small

boats – yet architectural structures inspired by transatlantic liners in the two cities are comparable, both in terms of size and quality.

Maria Jolanta Sołtysik mentions the social insurance institution building (ZUPU) at 24, 10 Lutego street (1934) and a residential building of Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego at 27-31, 3 Maja street (1935).² as the flagships of *Streamline* architecture in Gdynia.

In Łódź, an insurance building (PZUW) at 57, Kościuszki, designed by Waław Rytzel in 1929, from the very beginning was considered to be representative of the naval-style architecture. It was erected in 1929-30, according to the original design, as a detached high-rise. By July 1932, the space on the right had been filled to fit in the frontage of the street, and later the same happened on the left, thus creating compact development along Kościuszki. The construction work was done by “Przedsiębiorstwo Konstrukcyjne” with its offices at No. 1 in the same street, and managed by engineer Franciszek Karpiński. Structural analysis was done by an eminent Polish researcher from Warsaw Technical University – professor Stefan Bryła. Instead of an attic, the eighth storey was built, making the building 2.78 metres higher than planned. Because of this, the builders contractors were sued by the building inspectorate. Construction was swiftly completed and the 32-metre office tower became, together with the Savoy hotel, the highest building in Łódź. The building is

1. Sołtysik Maria Jolanta, *Na styku dwóch epok. Architektura gdyńskich kamienic okresu międzywojennego*, Gdynia 2003, p. 177.

2. Ibidem.

still used by an insurance company – PZU S.A. transformed in 1992 from the PZU (established in 1952 as a continuator of the pre-war PZUW).

The plan of the PZUW building in Łódź is irregularly polygonal. The main entrance is along the main axis, preceded by a three-pillar arcade. Through the entrance you get to a rectangular hall with a three-flight stairway and a lift. There are offices around the hall and, along the axis, an octagonal front office – very interesting. The spatial articulation of the building is not uniform – the eight-storey main tower of the structure juts with its triangular bows into the four-storey side structures, all three built on a basement. The styling of the elevations makes the shapes of the volumes more conspicuous. Formal expression is reinforced by the roof terraces and the lift engine room – reminiscent of the crow's nest. The evenly-distributed windows are placed between slightly inverse or protruding wall surfaces. There are large windows near the entrance. Corner windows, characteristic of Modern Architecture of the 1918-1939 period, have been installed at the rear.

The structure of the building was really innovative. It was built as a reinforced concrete frame filled with brick, and with fireproof floors. Monolithic technology was applied to make the ferroconcrete staircase, solid balustrades and roof slabs. Until the recent refurbishment (2005), one could still admire coloured terazzo floors, glazed steel doors, wooden framed-panel doors with nickel-plated steel fittings, as well as elements of interior decoration, like pull handles, lamps and built-in furniture styled like details of a ship's interior.

If we compare the PZUW building in Łódź with the ZUPU in Gdynia we must notice that the former is neither streamlined, nor does it have a corner location. Nevertheless, its expressive volume, "moored to the frontage," brings associations with the architecture originating in the modernist fascination with the "sailing machine" – the transatlantic liner.

Streamline forms do occur in another construction project of an insurance institution in Łódź – a settlement of apartment blocks between the streets of Sanocka and Bednarska, built between 1930 and 1932 by the ZUS, as part of a larger estate built by the company for its employees. The design by Jan Kukulski was prepared in Józef Szanajca's studio at ZUS

Design Office in Warsaw. Of particular interest here are the expressive tall part of a multi-staircase block of flats, containing a water tower, and a block of flats with galleries.³

It might be difficult to find among housing projects of the period in Łódź a match for the construction to the design of Stanisław Ziółowski for the Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (at 27-31, 3 Maja street in Gdynia). However, the house built in 1929-1932 for the staff of Bank Polski in Łódź, at the corner of Wierzbowa and Narutowicza, may be seen as a counterpart in terms of size and location. It was designed by architect Stanisław Filasiewicz (the author of Bank Polski building in Gdynia, 1929) and structural engineer W. Boldirett – both employed in Warsaw to design Bank Polski branch offices. The structure they used was innovative and was based on prefabricated, reinforced concrete elements, like spot footing, frames, hoarding beams and roof slabs. This large layout, with certain streamlined elements (the rounding of the corner part, terraces on the roof), may be perceived as a structure resembling "brick-and-cement ships ashore," mostly owing to its location in the "sea of the surrounding traffic." (Fig. 1)

It is the junction location that inspired modern architects to create structures like transatlantic liners. We see this both in Gdynia and in Łódź. Of such constructions in Łódź, a few with corner location deserve mention, at the crossroads of Jaracza – Uniwersytecka, Uniwersytecka – Kamińskiego, Kilińskiego – Tuwima, Gdańska – Więckowskiego, Gdańska – Zielona, Narutowicza – Lindley'a, Piotrkowska – Wigury, and Kościuszki – Mickiewicza.

The possible counterpart of the building in Gdynia at 78a, Świętojańska (1931) is the corner tenement built in 1935-37 at 97, Kościuszki. In both, the corner part is one storey higher and, above the ground floor level, is encircled with balconies.⁴ The vertical elements of façade articulation used in Gdynia at 44, Świętojańska (1934) can be found in Łódź, among others, in the corner tenement at 71, Jaracza designed in 1928 by Rudolf Sunderland.⁵ The investors were Jakób Fuks and Abram Sztajnsznajder – owners of a lace

3. Olenderek Joanna, *Spolecznie najpotrzebniejsza architektura mieszkaniowa Łodzi II Rzeczypospolitej*, "Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki", T. XLV, R. 2000, z. 2, pp. 120-140.

4. Sołtysik Maria Jolanta, *Na styku dwóch epok. Architektura gdyńskich...*, op. cit., p. 151.

5. Ibidem, p. 192.



1. a. PZUW building at 57 Kościuszki in Łódź; **b.** ZUS housing estate for its employees; **c.** A house for Bank Polski staff at 40 Wierzbowa, the corner of Narutowicza. Photo by the author. Aerial photo by W. Stępień

and embroidery factory "Trójkąt" in Kalisz. The contractor was a firm run by Józef Tyller. On behalf of the city, construction work was supervised by Władysław Kwapiszewski, the head of the relevant unit at the city hall. In 1934, the building was acquired by Mojżesz Fereina. The dynamic volume of the house perfectly underlines the entourage, as the building is located on a triangular, corner plot within the southern frontage of Jaracza street (previously Cegielniana) and the south-western frontage of Uniwersytecka street (previously Trębacka). The building was founded on a V-shaped plan and its corner part of 5 axes is symmetrical, though highly articulated.

Equally expressive, owing to its surroundings, is the tenement house right across the junction, at 36, Kamińskiego (previously Magistracka), built at the same time. To design the building, architect Franciszek Karpiński cooperated with builder A. Kramer. In 1928, only the foundations were laid and construction work was resumed in the early 1930s. The

house was completed in 1933. It was originally built for and owned by Stefan Dłużnikowski. The house situated within the eastern frontage of Kamińskiego street and the north-western frontage of Uniwersytecka was also founded on a V-shaped plan. The polygonal front corner however, is concave, not convex (Fig. 2).

One of the elements of visible façade arrangement eagerly used by Modern Movement architects in order to make their configuration less regular and give more expression to the corner zone was the balconies. This type of formal operation was performed in Gdynia buildings at 42, Świętojańska (1936), at 7, Starowiejska (1932) or at 32, 10 Lutego street (1934).⁶

Looking for a counterpart of the first of the three in Łódź we should note the tenement at 39, Gdańska, the crossroads with Więckowskiego, built in the late 1930s. Elongated rounded balconies, unevenly

6. Ibidem, pp. 223, 153 and 161.

arranged, can also be found in the corner part of the 1936 tenement at 94, Narutowicza, crossroads of Kopcińskiego.

Certain similarities to the stylistic arrangement of the tenement at 7, Starowiejska in Gdynia can be found in several houses built in Łódź between 1918-1939. The earliest is the corner tenement in square Dąbrowskiego, the corner of Jaracza street – built in 1927-30 to the design of Karol Folkierski and originally owned by Izrael Tyller. Interesting to notice is the detail, characteristic of the late 1920s, representing the Polish variety of the geometrical Art Déco. An even closer similarity is demonstrated by the 1936 tenement at 15, Mickiewicza, the crossroads of Kościuszki. In this building, commonly known as *Dom Literata* (*The House of the Writers*), architect Paweł Lewy used an innovative structure, largely based on structural elements of reinforced concrete.

The third of the Gdynia examples, at 32, 10 Lutego street, is to some extent formally copied by the corner tenement at 67, Narutowicza in Łódź. It was built in 1937-38, to the design of Jerzy Müntz, for the married couple of Dziwiński. It is situated within the southern frontage of Narutowicza and the eastern frontage of Lindley'a street, where you can see a drive-through hallway supported by four pillars. The tenement, founded on an L-shaped plan, has interesting streamlined volumes not only at the front of the corner zone, but also at the rear. The rounded elements of the staircases and balconies with solid balustrades were tiled. The 'lying' windows of the attic and the bas relief in the stucco stress the horizontal articulation (Fig. 3).

Another formal device frequently used by pre-WWII architects for buildings in junction areas, in Gdynia and in Łódź alike, was

2. a. Corner tenement building in Łódź at 97 Kościuszki, the corner of Mickiewicza; **b.** Corner tenement in Łódź at 71 Jaracza the corner of Uniwersytecka; **c.** Corner tenement in Łódź at 36. Kamińskiego, the corner of Uniwersytecka. Photo by the author





3. a. Corner tenement in Łódź at 39 Gdańska the corner of Więckowskiego; **b.** Corner tenement in Łódź at 94 Narutowicza, the corner of Kopcińskiego; **c.** Corner tenement in Łódź at 1 square Dąbrowskiego, the corner of Jaracza; **d.** Corner tenement in Łódź at 15 Mickiewicza, the corner of Kościuszki; **e.** Corner tenement in Łódź at 67 Narutowicza, the corner of Lindley'a. Photo by the author

underlying the corner zone with the rounding of projections or jetties. In Gdynia, buildings of this type are found in Świętojańska street at 68, 89 and 122 – all three erected in 1935.⁷ Their counterparts in Łódź are corner tenements at 196, Piotrkowska, at 82, Kilińskiego and at 55, Gdańska. The first of them is situated within the eastern frontage of Piotrkowska, at the corner of Wigury and was designed in 1937 by Radosław Hans – a very popular architect renowned for quality city tenements. The architect worked to the order of two brothers, Fryderyk and Gustaw Ignatowicz, who had purchased the land from Brunon Hahn. According to the original design, a two-storey corner house was to be built, eventually a four-storey building was erected on an L-shaped plan. The building had

a drive-through hallway in the northern wall in Piotrkowska. The main entrance is situated in Wigury. The slightly recessed ground floor with a characteristic crowning hosts commercial premises with cast glass windows. Cast glass panes were also put in the would-be bow window at the corner, of which only one has survived.

Streamlined shop windows of cast glass have been used in another tenement house in Łódź – the ground floor of the house built in 1936-38 at 82, Kilińskiego and 21, Tuwima crossroads. Before 1936, the property with a wooden house was owned by Leib Katz and Zajnwel Festenberg. It was then bought by Mojżesz Szmul Bronowski, who had a corner luxury tenement built, with commercial premises and a garage. The designer was Izydor Fajnbert. The building situated within the

7. Ibidem, pp. 209, 217 and 215.

eastern frontage of Kilińskiego and the southern of Tuwima was founded on an L-shaped plan, the sides of which meet at an acute angle, as do the streets. In Kilińskiego, the central part of the building is moved back from the frontage. This is why in the southern outermost part of the building a strong projection was designed to fit in the frontage, while the corner zone is a bow-cornered jetty above the ground floor level. The gateway to the backyard is in Tuwima street, in the eastern wall. The cladding is polished sandstone for the elevations and raw sandstone for the base course. The protruding slab crowning shades rectangular ribbon windows of the attic.

One of the best corner tenements built in Łódź during the fascination with naval architecture is the structure at 55, Gdańska and 25, Zielona (previously Legionów) crossroads. It was built on an empty plot that was part of a factory estate owned by R. Keller and later by E. Eisert. The construction was ordered by the owner of the property, Juda Salmonowicz, under a permit issued by the city authorities in May 1936. The original design by Paweł Lewy was for a three- and four-storey building, with two projections in the front part and two in the elevation at the rear. The house was re-designed in June 1936 – it was to have six storeys and only one projection at the rear. In 1938 the central part of the façade was changed, and the new design was signed by Henryk Lewinson. This house, surrounded by the “sea of traffic,” owes much of its expression to the layout and articulation of the volumes. On one side they surround the *cour d'honneur*, with the main entrance in Zielona street, on the other they fill the corner and the frontage of Gdańska. All this is supplemented by conspicuous *Streamline* elements like streamlined bays, of which those with *porte fenêtre* windows in the central, recessed southern façade deserve special attention (conservatories). The elevations have a red imitation-sandstone cladding, while the ground floor is decorated with plaster grooving up to the string course. The original exterior decoration was destroyed as the building obtained Dryvit insulation cladding (Fig. 4).

So far, we have been mostly discussing structures situated at junctions, surrounded by streams of traffic. Let us now move to buildings located within frontages. They also

show architectural details reminiscent of naval styling. Architects of the day eagerly used roof terraces, band finials, jetties and rounded balcony slabs, round windows and perhaps less ‘transatlantic’ but very popular vertical band windows. There are a lot of examples in the architectural landscape of Łódź, particularly in the streets of Kościuszki, Narutowicza and even Piotrkowska.

Vertical band windows, which in Gdynia can be seen, for example, in the tenement house at 35/35a, 10 Lutego street, can be found in Łódź in the houses at 56, Kościuszki, and at 69 and 91, Narutowicza⁸. The design of the former was made by Witold Szereszewski for Dawid and Lajba Klajman and presented to the city authorities for approval in 1936. The Klajman brothers were the owners of a textile factory, which had its head office at 54, Piotrkowska. In 1939 the brothers applied for a document certifying the completion of construction work. The layout of a five-axis façade is symmetrical. The entrance, along the central axis, is stressed with two granite semicolumns, a small, flat roof, and a lintel with three oblong openings. Above the entrance, there was a vertical band window, providing light to the staircase and forming an axis along which the façade is composed. A double gate was placed in the outermost axis, while lighting to the attic in the central part is provided by seven small windows, separated by granite semicolumns. The ground floor has a polished granite cladding, while the cladding of the façade above is of shiny sandstone. The backyard eastern elevation has a yellow-tile cladding (the colour characteristic of Gdynia).

Slightly different types of vertical band windows can be seen in tenements at 69 and 91, Narutowicza. Both were designed in 1937 by Ludwik Kirszbaum. The 69 was jointly owned by a couple of Tobi and Mariem Cytryn and by Małka Hammerowa. In June 1939 the house was sold to Alfred and Luiza Grohman, as brokered by Domy Czyszowe – a joint stock company in Łódź. The original owner of the 91 was Jakub Sztajnsznajder. He was a building contractor, so it is not surprising that the standard of finish and fittings of the house he built were higher than usual; the house was also innovative in structural and stylistic terms (Fig. 5).

Equally interesting specimens of front-

8. Cf.: *ibidem*, p. 159.



4. a. Corner tenement in Łódź at 196 Piotrkowska street, the corner of Wigury; b. Corner tenement in Łódź at 82 Kilińskiego, the corner of Tuwima; c. Corner tenement in Łódź at 55 Gdańska, the corner of Zielona. Photo by the author

age houses built between 1934-36 are the ones at 17, Więckowskiego, at 12, Brzeźna, at 36 a and b, Jaracza, at 8 and 46, Kościuszki, at 52, Narutowicza and, last but not least, at 134, Piotrkowska⁹ (Fig. 6). They all have details in the naval styling and are somewhat similar to tenements in Gdynia, including the one at 87, Świętojańska (1934).

Among the buildings in Piotrkowska street, special attention should be given to the building erected on two properties – at 203 and 205. Its compact façade with sandstone cladding stylistically resembles the tenement at 54, Starowiejska in Gdynia (1934). The backyard elevation surprises us with its expression and the richness of the wavy forms of a perfectly articulated volume, all with ceramic tile cladding.¹⁰

9. See: *ibidem*, p. 162. Cf.: Olenderek Joanna, *Proces kształtowania przestrzeni w Łodzi II Rzeczypospolitej a awans administracyjny miasta*, Łódź 2004, pp. 322, 303-304, 295-296, 301-302, 320, 284-285.

10. See: Olenderek Joanna, *Proces kształtowania...*, op. cit., pp. 312-313. Cf.: Sołtysik Maria Jolanta, *Na styku dwóch epok. Architektura gdyńskich...*, op. cit., p. 162.

The house was completed in 1937-38, to the design by a renowned studio, "Izaak Gutman and Luzer Oli – Architects." Previously, there were 2 two-storey wooden houses at the front of the property, one- and two-storey factory buildings on the northern side, some outbuildings on the southern and a factory chimney in the centre. In June 1937, the owner of the property – an artificial silk company – began the construction of a house for its shareholders and suppliers, within the frontage of Piotrkowska. Construction work on the office and a warehouse building situated in the middle of the plot began in September. The southern boundary wall carries a brilliant bas-relief showing a dining pegasus.

A unique volume articulation, reinforced by streamlined forms in the front part of the building, is characteristic of the tenement at 74, Gdańska, built in 1932-34 to the design

chitektura gdyńskich..., op. cit., p. 162.



5. **a.** Frontage tenement in Łódź at 56 Kościuszki; **b.** Frontage tenement in Łódź at 69 Narutowicza; **c.** Frontage tenement in Łódź at 91 Narutowicza. Photo by the author)

of Jerzy Rozenberg. The building had been commissioned by hosiery manufacturer Juda Salomonowicz, whose plant was situated at 57 of the same street, *vis-à-vis* the luxury

corner tenement described above, also owned by Salomonowicz. The house at 74, which is an earlier construction (early 1930s), has a lower standard of finish, but is just as unique and intriguing formally as the one at the corner of Gdańska and Zielona (Fig. 7).

As has been said before, Łódź has no vast water reservoirs. This may be metaphorically compensated by the sea of green, both in city centre and in its outskirts. It is no wonder, therefore, that among many of the detached buildings surrounded by gardens we find numerous examples of *Streamline*. The most representative are houses in square Komuny Paryskiej and the villa, no longer existing, near Jan Matejko park. The two buildings on the southern side of square Komuny Paryskiej, which are of interest to us, are at 2 and 3, Świętokrzyska, crosswise to the frontage, with a garden between them. Typologically different, they are of equal value in formal terms. They have different functions, too –

6. **a.** Frontage tenement in Łódź at 17 Więckowskiego; **b.** Frontage tenement in Łódź at 12 Brzeźna; **c.** Frontage tenement in Łódź at 36 a-b Jaracza; **d.** Frontage tenement in Łódź at 8 Kościuszki; **e.** Frontage tenement in Łódź at 46 Kościuszki; **f.** Frontage tenement in Łódź at 52 Narutowicza; **g.** Frontage tenement in Łódź at 134 Piotrkowska. Photo by the author





7. a. Frontage tenement in Łódź at 203/205 Piotrkowska; b. Frontage tenement in Łódź at 74 Gdańska. Photo by the author

one is a city tenement, while the other is an urban villa – but they both display creativity in the use of structural elements and stylistic articulation characteristic of *Streamline*. The intriguing closeness of the two structures (both have underground garages – *sic!*) prompts us to compare them to a transatlantic liner and a luxurious yacht, sailing side-by-side across the sea of green. Whether this closeness was intended, or incidental – it is difficult to say today. Both were designed in 1937, but the author of the “transatlantic liner” commissioned by Jakub Lando was Paweł Lewy, while the “yacht” was designed by Jerzy Berliner and Mieczysław Łęczycki for a well-known barrister Mieczysław Neufeld. Nevertheless, the role they play in the spatial layout of Łódź and the shaping of its urban landscape, makes them a unique duo – an avantgarde spatial phenomenon of international dimension, both in terms of urban planning and architecture. (Fig. 8)

Continuing with the metaphores, we should mention the 1935-36 villa of lawyer

Stefan Konorski, erected at 30, Matejki – *vis-à-vis* the park, to the design by Paweł Lewy. In this case we might compare it to a sailboat moored for a while in a yachting harbour. For a while, because alongside the quay (the driveway and the kitchen door) and with the bow (the main entrance and the streamlined part of the volume housing the owner’s study) towards the promenade (the street and park named after Jan Matejko). For a while, because due to the demolition in connection with the extension of the university library, it sailed out to the sea of oblivion in 2005.

The examples of architecture in the city of Łódź chosen and presented here are, in the author’s opinion, representative of the trends of 1918-1939, inspired by the broadly understood motif of a “sailing machine.” A stylistical comparison with what was built at the same time in Gdynia shows the presence of quality structures – ships, yachts, sailboats – in both cities. These structures are still used today, earning admiration of both by-



8. a. Tenement house in Łódź, at 3 Świątokrzyska; **b.** Residential city villa in Łódź, at 2 Świątokrzyska. Photo by the author. Aerial photo by W. Stępień

passers and architectural professionals. Owing to them, we can promote internationally the achievement of Polish architects and urban planners – the creators of the space of the 2nd Polish Republic. We may also seek inspiration for new architectural forms – in the spirit of everlasting Modern Movement architecture of Polish, transatlantic, Łódź-and-Gdynia origins.

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