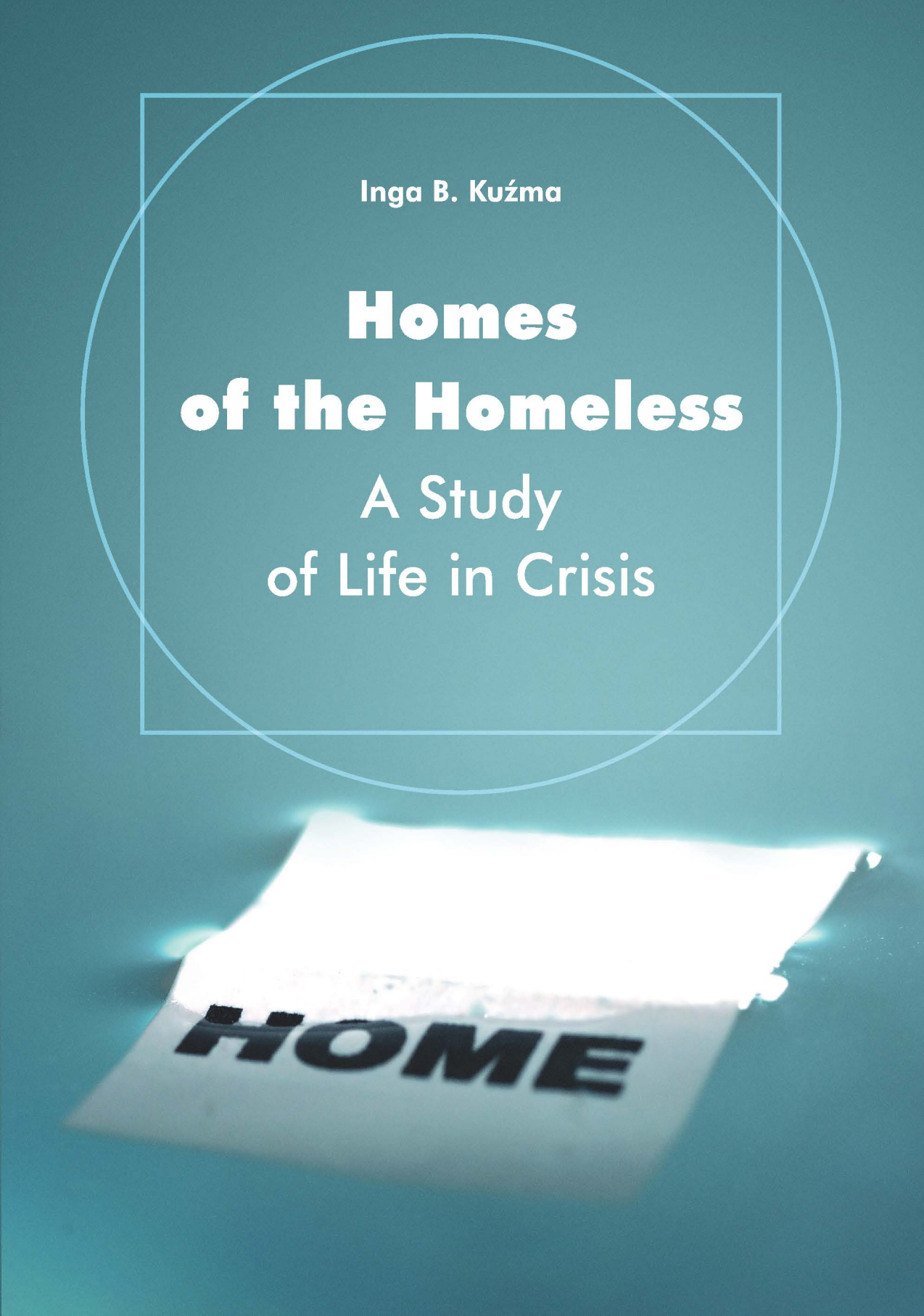
Inga B. Kuźma

Homes of the Homeless

A Study of Life in Crisis



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I don't think ethnologists have
a well-defined social responsibility.
I believe everyone should decide
for himself

(Goody 1996)

1. ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES ON PREDICAMENTS AND CRISES: HOMELESSNESS AND 'HOMEFULNESS'

I decided to look into the crisis problem of homelessness, which I also regard as a predicament.[1] I also wanted to present as much as possible of my way of conducting research in a field that I also consider to be a difficult one. I worked in places which could be regarded as total institutions (Goffman 1961), i.e. in centers providing aid to homeless people. 'The crisis' refers to borderline and related experiences. It refers to obstacles such as breakdowns or illnesses that may affect individuals and larger groups. These can be internal conflicts, i.e. those that relate to one's emotional state, or to community issues such as economic or political problems. The term crisis could also be used to describe life in a special (socio)therapeutic facility, such as a refuge of a night shelter. The earliest appearance of the notion of 'crisis' can presumably be tracked down to Erik Erikson's (1994) research on the dynamics of human existence and the biographical processes that he conducted to describe the theory of psychosocial development. Erickson saw development as a series of successive conflicts and ways of dealing with them.

'The crisis' need not be considered only in a negative sense, even though it usually involves losing control over a situation and having no idea how to handle it. A change in a state of affairs translates into a life breakthrough, which sometimes results in improving the situation. There are no fixed and verifiable scenarios that would facilitate surviving such a moment. However, some phases may be distinguished. The first is denial of the events, which are usually unexpected, and this is followed by an evaluation of the situation, marking the beginning of the 'process of coping' with difficulties. An evaluation of the re-

[1] In other words, they are 'minefields', taboo subjects, sensitive issues. They are challenging and sometimes provoke scientific and human transgression as regards the research procedures and methodology, and to some extent the researcher, too. This also includes situations the studied subjects have found themselves in and the research area, which consists of the issues that are socially problematic and marginalized (Kuźma 2013a: 8–9).

sources, opportunities and measures available to the group of person then takes place. This leads to the third phase: deciding what can be done. Any challenges faced at this moment help to reveal resilience or lack thereof (Skłodowski 2010: 12–13). Entering into a crisis may also bring an awareness of the degree to which previous life experience is incompatible with new circumstances and requirements, resulting in confusion and calls for reorganization of life. Before the decision-taking process starts, the person or group may feel as if they have lived a life in "suspension". The few feelings which are available at that phase include a sense of inability, nonsense and meaninglessness (Sacuk 2010: 63).

In this study, I discuss the social concept regarding excluded people. My interpretations have also a diagnostic function. I do not hide my criticism toward the studied situation and I try to describe the cultural background which underlies it. This situation is fraught with strong stereotypes about poverty, homelessness and gender.

During my research on the crisis of homelessness and the situation brought about by staying in shelters and other facilities, I became interested in what 'home' meant to the people who lived in such places. I wanted to show the attitude that people experiencing homelessness took toward habitation, and I wanted to explore whether, and how, the concept of home and their experience of it influenced their view on the situation they were facing. I also wanted to describe the cultural projection and social training they underwent to become a 'full-fledged' member of the group, where the image of home and habitation-related skills serve as a kind of 'testing ground'. This means that the correct habitation practices – as required of the residents in the facilities concerned – become tantamount to independence and a manifestation of their social 'health'.

For me, this entailed the need to take a transdisciplinary approach, i.e. to construct a conceptual and interpretive framework encompassing various scientific and non-scientific perspectives, even though my starting point was that of ethnology and anthropology. In this way, I was able to study the highly complex issue in question. It was due to the complexity of the field of study, i.e. homelessness and home, that I opted for transdisciplinarity.

> In contrast to interdisciplinarity, which does not affect the field of study of the included disciplines, transdisciplinarity deals with problems that are impossible to solve within any of the disciplines and leads to establishing a new field of study. A study that was designed as transdisciplinary research often does not have any specific new area but it rather depends on the issues to be explored (Domańska 2011: 56).

'Homelessness' is a 'bad abstraction' or 'chaotic conception' (Sayer 1992: 138). Patrick Declerck notes that many researchers (including Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss)

> had skimmed over […] the questions it provoked. As if this issue was not worthy of being studied, dirty and dim, because how can you do research based on something that only barely exists or does not exist at all? What can you say about the epistemological status of ethnography of disorder, chaos and nothingness? The situation is aggravated by the fact that tramps are not a community that you could define easily. […] Communities of unstable, […] silent people and/or ones that call each other names in delirious fits (Declerck 2004: 13–14).

When attempting to approach and define 'homelessness', one must therefore bear in mind that it is a complicated phenomenon, or in other words, an intricate one, as it encompasses many reasons and factors which are independent of one another and have different properties. Homelessness is also complex, because it functions as a system of interconnections between these factors (Fitzpatrick 2005: 11). The existing definitions and typologies of homelessness and the people whom it affects are overlapping and complementary, with none of them being exhaustive (Szluz 2010b: 113). The situation of homelessness may affect adults, the young, the elderly, children, persons living on their own or in families. Among homeless people, it is possible to distinguish a subgroup with problems of a mental or emotional nature (Toro, Janisse 2004: 245). Such groups are also found among prisoners, potentially homeless people, those threatened with eviction, those staying in hospitals or those with no contact with their families (including persons with mental disorders) (Szluz 2010b: 114). In other words, these groups may include the actual and potential homeless alike: people who experience homelessness entirely or those who do so partially. The latter can include those who live in temporary accommodation and do not have their own place of residence, or may a place to live, but for some reason do not want to stay there, or persons on whom homelessness was imposed and are either able or unable to live their lives independently, or those who chose to be homeless and again, are able or unable to live independently. Within this group, it is possible to distinguish people from shelters, the street, the voluntarily homeless (to some extent this category overlaps with homelessness by choice,[2] which some researchers also believe to exist) and people who suffer from forced homelessness. They include both the long-term and short-term homeless, and those who are 'frictional', i.e. those who find temporary accommodation in residential areas, e.g. during seasonal work (see also Toro, Janisse 2004: 244–245). When discussing its duration, homelessness can

[2] This issue raises objections, also in myself; I do not know anyone who is homeless by choice. Another issue is the strategy of reconciling the *status quo*. For example, in Beata Januchta's documentary *Wyobcowani* (Alienated), the then head of the Albert Chmielowski Aid Society (TPBA) in Wrocław stresses that homelessness takes place out of necessity rather than by choice.

be described either in a strict sense, i.e. real or apparent homelessness (when a person does not have any accommodation or other premises of residential nature), and in a broad sense; this can be further subdivided into hidden and social homelessness – for example, when the owned place does not meet housing conditions, i.e. when it does not comply with the minimum standards (Szluz, 2010b: 115). The perspective adopted in a given discipline or in practice, e.g. local, experience can also have an influence on the way homelessness is understood (Stankiewicz 2002: 20).

Many organizations in Europe have adopted the view proposed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA). The FEANTSA view highlights the dynamic nature of homelessness. Some people who experience homelessness very often change their place of residence, while others recursively show up in all sorts of places, making use of help provided by their friends or family. They also end up in shelters, prisons and hospitals. A group seeking to escape violence experiences "only" episodes of homelessness and then finds refuge in a variety of locations, sometimes also at their close relatives and friends. Usually, they leave home for a short time, and if there is no change in their situation (i.e. they do not break their violence-based relationships), they return to the well-known paradigm within the four walls of their houses. The FEANTSA highlight the need to inquire into the causes of homelessness, be it episodic, short-term, scarce or shelter-free. The reasons for homelessness are often hard to determine; in this case prevention, or prophylaxis would be of key importance. In 2004, to standardize the collection of data and make it comparable and usable for creating aid programs in various countries, FEANTSA developed the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS). The ETHOS typology puts emphasis on the lack of housing and shelters and on their types and quality. Based on this classification, it is possible to be endangered with homelessness and excluded in terms of housing, but not be homeless yet. FEANTSA distinguishes three basic types of exclusion, i.e. exclusion from the physical,[3] legal and social areas, and these need to occur jointly to result in homelessness. Physical exclusion means deprivation of space to live in. Legal exclusion is the lack of an exclusive right to the occupied area, while social exclusion means a lack of privacy, which is needed to ensure security and to develop social relationships. Homelessness can also occur when someone has a place to live in that in accordance with housing standards, and so is not excluded physically, but does not have the exclusive legal right to the occupied space, which implies legal exclusion. At the same time, such persons may be deprived of the privacy that would give them

[3] See also eg. Dambuyant-Wargny 2004.

a sense of security and the chance to shape their relationships freely (therefore they are affected by social exclusion). The conditions 'without any roof over your head' and 'no place of residence' force those affected by either a triple exclusion (legal, physical and social) or double exclusion (legal and social) to look for places in refuges and night shelters, on the street and elsewhere.

The contemporary discourse used in aid organizations, including non-profit ones, and the State administration institutions that are meant to handle social problems is built around 'evidence' and 'facts'. It is based on calculating various parameters to describe people in need as accurately as possible. This gives us hope to control the unpredictability of homelessness. Although many of the factors that cause homelessness and facilitate it, such as unemployment, alcoholism, domestic violence or economic crises, are already well recognized (Dębski 2010: 52–94, Abucewicz-Szcześniak: http://www.ipsir.uw.edu…), this does not mean that it is possible to eliminate them. Michel Foucault asserts that there is no power which would not be linked with knowledge (Foucault 1995; see also Bińczyk 1999). An example of such ordering and systemizing initiatives to make homelessness more controllable and to facilitate and enhance the effectiveness of support actions is that based on counting the homeless, including the subgroup that lives in shelters (http://www.mops.lodz.pl …).[4] Data about the number of people resident in shelters during the census, and the residences and numbers of homeless staying outside of such facilities reflects the size of the group that receives support and the number of people who are not covered yet. One of the most tangible forms of the aid system accepted in Poland, as part of the current approach to solving problems of homeless people, is the creation of specialized institutions, financed from public funds or by NGOs.

For the system, it is therefore very important to determine the number of persons residing inside and outside of shelters, because it would define the scale and scope of support.[5] When people reside in such facilities, it is possible to include them in programs intended to take them out of homelessness. In many institutions, undergoing such a program adjusted to the individual situation of the person concerned is almost a prerequisite for getting any assistance.

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[4] Additional data on the number of homeless people in Poland, was also provided by the *Polish National Census of Population and Housing* from 2011. It should be noted, however, that census was carried out in the spring, when very many people without a fixed home decide to live outside the institutions for the homeless. For this reason, it is a flawed tool for studying this group. It does not take into account their life dynamics, which is based on their seasonal and spatial mobility.

[5] In accordance with the Polish Act on Social Assistance of 12 March 2004 – see Article 16, 17 and 48.

These actions provide continual updates of the official data on homelessness. Despite their wide dispersion in urban areas, people without a home are included in various official statistics. EU Member States are obliged to implement this methodology pursuant to the Resolution of the European Parliament of 14 September 2011 (para. 6), which reads as follows: "the following key elements of homelessness strategies should be monitored and reported upon: […] proper data collection" (http://www.europarl.europa…). This is due to the fact that people without a home must be provided with support, and such activities require funds that are calculated based on the number of people in need.

The scope of the notions of 'home' and 'homefulness' is as wide as that of 'homelessness', and equally varying in historic and cultural terms. They are all marked emotionally, even in Western research culture, as reflected in their definitions and research procedures, also with regard to various forms of housing. The concept of 'home' is connected with 'homefulness', a term used mostly in the jargon of non-governmental organizations and persons under their care (see, for example, Łojewska 2006). In a way, this term is opposed to homelessness. It introduces a marked qualitative difference between the two ways of functioning, i.e. with and without a home. 'Homefulness', a word coined to describe having your own roof over your head, draws attention to the aspect of life which is commonly considered to be natural. According to the non-reflective view of reality, it is homelessness that should be treated as something abnormal. The creation of the term 'homefulness' reverses the 'natural' logic and demonstrates the specific nature of life under the roof of one's own place of residence called home, and why it requires certain cultural resources. For this reason, such a life should not be taken for granted, for it requires skills that are acquired by operating in a specific environment. The observation of those experiencing homelessness, especially in aid centers, reveals the behaviors and actions that are used to create their own environment, to delimit borders, to recognize who they are and what they belong to. Among other things, this is what creating a home and living there are all about. The implementation of this type of idea has its own phases and takes place with various intensity, which may be seen in the institutions.

Entering an area where homelessness is subject to repair practices and various restrictions, as is the case of aid institutions, I did not stop only at the individual experiences of people experiencing homelessness. They led me further on to the so-called *hidden curriculum*.[6] This principle underlies the organization of

[6] The concept of '*hidden curriculum*' is related to research in the educational system. It concerned the role that the school and educational system play in socialization. The researchers were interested not only in what was transferred, but also to whom, by whom and in what manner, what was the rationale behind the knowledge, its form, objectives and the style of communication—see Jackson

the institutions, i.e. all the assumptions needed to provide the aid, and therefore the idea of what homelessness is, how to 'unlearn' it and 'lead out of it', and how to include the people who experience it in the *mainstream* of society.

Both aid center employees and welfare recipients, as well as other members of society who are not directly involved in these areas, all act within the framework of a broader social concept that makes the current aid ideology. It shapes the Polish legislation, the social welfare sector and the common attitude towards the so-called 'excluded people'. The *homo sacer* is still treated ambivalently, with a mixture of fear and disgust on the one hand, and regret and compassion on the other (Bauman 2006b). In relation to such individuals and groups, living in the environment of "the culture of consumption and individual success", attitudes of "contempt, a sense of alienation and rejection" prevail (Tarkowska 2012: 122).

Support can be grouped into several basic schemes or ideologies of aid (Frieske 2001: http://www.bratalbert.org/tl_files/brat_albert/pdf/konferencja%202001/frieske.pdf). They stem from two approaches. The first one asserts that there is no point in taking action, including supportive action, without systematic knowledge of the world or adequate procedures to use that knowledge, whereas any action should be reasonably justified (this would in a way be compliant with FEANSTA's activity). The second approach favors 'roadmap' actions, so it is preferable to break procedures and adapt to circumstances. The procedures are not treated as definitive and determining factors, as this could increase the costs, also the costs related to support provision. Acting in a schematic way provokes mistakes—it does not facilitate an adequate reaction to the situation, which in the case of homelessness, for example, is variable, uncertain and diverse; it is structural and individual at the same time.

These two approaches have resulted in ideologies of aid given above. The first type of aid ideology focuses on mercy. It is not important, therefore, how homelessness is defined, apart from a simple indication that it is connected with "human suffering, […] so severe that it induces people to ask for help. And, according to the proponents of this way of thinking, it would be very bad if anyone was to find out that there was no one to turn to" (Frieske 2001: http://www.bratalbert.org/tl_files/brat_albert/pdf/konferencja%202001/frieske.pdf). The aim of this ideology is to protect the homeless from degradation (deprivation). It is also about proving that homelessness is not a reason for being rejected. Most often, the merciful attitude occurs during spontaneous actions,

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1968 (this researcher introduced the concept of *hidden curriculum*) and Giroux, Purpel 1983 (who developed the critical current in pedagogy); Janowski 1995 (the first Polish researcher to introduce the term *hidden curriculum* in the literature of the field and educational research). The issue of the *hidden curriculum*, also construed in a broader sense, was also studied by researchers such as Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich and bell hooks.

e.g. carried out at the outbreak of a crisis, during suffering or associated with a difficult condition. This includes initiatives such as "Food not bombs" and all other nutrition and medical actions carried out by various organizations. Such aid is typically provided unconditionally. This ideology includes individual gestures, spontaneous reactions to remedy someone's misfortune, and is driven by compassion or empathy.

The other ideology draws on the concept of reintegration. Is based on the view that homelessness is "atrophy of the basic relationships with others" (Frieske 2001: http://www.bratalbert.org/tl_files/brat_albert/pdf/konferencja%202001/frieske.pdf). The proponents of this concept do not delve into the reasons for disappearance of such bonds. They merely assume "the lack of basic social skills, disregard for the duties that arise from any conceivable form of human coexistence, excessive drinking, helplessness, etc." (Frieske 2001: http://http://www.bratalbert.org/tl_files/brat_albert/pdf/konferencja%202001/frieske.pdf). In such a situation, the aid consists in subjecting the charges to "some sort of order of collective life. Sometimes this order reflects the order of society at large" (Frieske 2001: http://www.bratalbert.org/tl_files/brat_albert/pdf/konferencja%202001/frieske.pdf). Beneficiaries of such forms of aid should then demonstrate their willingness to live in this way. They must deal with various issues related to their lives and act to improve their own situation. This aid ideology is based on the principle that to change one's life, it is necessary to set one's own goal, and, for example, that those affected by homelessness should strive to stop being homeless. Reintegration is most vividly present in public institutions and, to a varying extent, in the majority of institutions run by competent associations and foundations.

The third ideology of aid is related to the autonomy of the 'exclude persons'. They begin to create "their own social order which, due to its structural characteristics, does not necessarily coincide with the order of society at large" (Frieske 2001: http://www.bratalbert.org/tl_files/brat_albert/pdf/konferencja%202001/frieske.pdf). This is how the ideology of "the community of the rejected ones" is born, i.e. they form alternative groups, social micro-worlds or specific co-operatives. In this way, they show socialization, but this does not necessarily lead them on to enter the wider social system. The features of this aid system are most visible in the centres run, for example, by MONAR, Barka or Community "Chleb Życia". In a sense, these are self-sufficient communities. They prove that rejected individuals, for whom there was and perhaps still is no place in the current mainstream value system, are capable of creating a world for themselves to "recover". However, they do not separate themselves from "the outside world" entirely and they enter into coalitions with it, draw on it, (re)adapt to a certain extent, but full integration is not their only goal. For the members of such groups, it is not so important to go back to their former place

or find a new niche in the system from which they once came, were thrown out or never belonged to; they aim at making a change for a deeply internalized reason that motivates them to strive to transform themselves. These groups are characterized by attitudes similar to those of converts, and those who find their vocation in life. This can also be seen in the members of the Anonymous Alcoholics, where some of the aid centres residents that I met had been recruited.

By including some elements of collaborative anthropology in my work, I aimed to highlight the aspects of cooperation and partnership, which according to this approach, lie at the core of the 'research contact' (Fluehr-Lobban 2013: 8. see also Rappaport 2013). One of the most important forms of research activity within participatory anthropology is conversation (*cf.* Fluehr-Lobban 2013, Rappaport 2013). It can take place as a free talk or a deliberate discussion to reach a consensus or to arrive at a compromise on a given issue. A conversation can be conducted to establish a position or share one's opinion, present experience and exchange knowledge, be it everyday or expert. However, the meetings at which people talk are considered activities because they give the participants an opportunity to express themselves and to define their positions. They consist in determining the speaker's standing (see Haraway 2008). This means that a person perceives the world, interprets it and works within it in a certain way. In the context of aid institutions, a conversation can also to some extent be a liberating practice, and this is particularly important while working with excluded people and those who are regarded by the *mainstream* as the *underclass*.[7]

One of such conversations was my interview with "Dominika", an 18-year-old resident of a women's shelter at that time. She is the author of the key concept I adopted, which allows me to understand what it means to live in an institution and what a "home" is. She also posed another problem which became the fundamental axis of this book.

First of all, she used the phrase "an imitation of home", which I have adopted and now apply in my study with the whole context in which she used it. With this expression, she described the rules of staying in the shelter. For me, this expression has become the basic category to explain the "homeness" of these institutions and the meaning of the ideology underlying the aid system there. Another source of inspiration for interpreting shelters as imitations of home was the concept of "unhome" by Magdalena Łukasik and Marcin Jewdokimow (2012).

Secondly, "Dominika" concluded that society was not adapted to people experiencing homelessness. Although the community requires specific behavior from such individuals, the expectations are not implemented effectively,

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[7] Other activities that I undertook were connected with *participatory action research* (Greenwood 2012: 116, 199), especially when the topic concerned women's cultural issues and when the activities were oriented at women.

in many cases integration does not take place and the aid is ineffective. Thus "Dominika" raised the issue of responsibility of the dominant culture, which in her opinion, was not compliant with the people whom it excluded. How could, then, the *mainstream* evolve when trying to change the excluded persons in order to incorporate them? This, in turn, is the aim of the current aid system.

My interlocutor suggested a route by which I could overcome this lack of adaptation. She felt that some beneficiaries of the aid should be compelled to implement the process of changing themselves and their lives, particularly those women living in shelters who, in her opinion, were in fact satisfied with their situation and eagerly used the means offered to them, failing to change anything about themselves or to learn from their own mistakes; she referred to them as "cheeky claimants". Her views were based on several years of watching the lives of various women there. She did not accept such people's attitude. She did not want to be like them and be content with the received support. She believed that the system was not strict enough and that it does not make people improve themselves. Thus she arrived at an idea to apply repressive methods, because the methods used so far failed to mobilize many people's effort.

The problem that "Dominika" raised was very important, but I objected to her idea, since I in turn could see how rigorously such institutions operated at the level of their *hidden curriculum*. This rigorous approach concerns the dimension of symbolic violence rather than physical repression. It is primarily based on creating a sense of shame and guilt in aid beneficiaries. These attitudes are confused with taking responsibility for themselves as expected by the *mainstream* of society and its idea of what it means to be responsible and independent. The employees of the studied facilities become fully dependent on this approach, rather than use any alternative solution. They work under a system which, in the name of eliminating the problem, breaks it down into sub-categories, i.e. it selects and segregates those in need into different varieties in order to better adapt aid measures. In addition, the aid work is subject to parameterization, which favors secondary victimization and division of the poor into 'better' and 'worse' groups. This system has not kept pace with the changing economic, social or mental reality, but it reflects low levels of trust and social solidarity.

My reflection was influenced by the following questions that "Dominika" asked: How does the rest of society deal with the excluded? Is it ready to include them? Or is it able to adapt itself? However, I have declined "Dominika's" viewpoint on the system improvement. What she points out as the cause for ineffectiveness is, in my opinion, the reason for advancing the idea of system support, not only in terms of statutory provisions, as legal acts merely reflect a more general attitude of society.

During my work on this book it became crucial to me to find an appropriate way to write and talk about the people in the studied group who became my male and female companions at some stage of my research. I refer to them as persons affected by homelessness, people who experience or suffer from homelessness, those living in the state of crisis, and those in a situation of homelessness. I tend to avoid terms such as "the homeless" and "homeless people", even though such phrases have appeared in my earlier publications. This more descriptive, and also more complex, wording reflects a fairer attitude to the highly diverse group of people who undergo such exclusion.

This kind of wording emphasizes the fact that homelessness is both an experience and crisis. It has evolved in a way similar to the discourse about people with disabilities. In the latter case, it had been earlier pointed out that stereotypes may be dispelled by changing the way we name things. Such a change was to show that no dysfunction or incapacity in any respect should determine and depreciate any person's (self)identification and place in the community. Thus the hidden belief was undermined that (self-)identification tended to be based on the characteristics indicated by the *mainstream* of society. In this way a given person is "totalized" arbitrarily.[8] Names which indicate the complexity of features, and the fragmentation thereof, open up more possibilities, both for the *mainstream* and the people named, to identify who they are, what they are like, and why they are in this situation. Such a description reveals only one facet of someone's characteristics, but it should not be treated as a determining feature. My decision to introduce this type of concept resulted from my interviews with several protagonists of the book and their tutors working in shelters. I met them during the first stage of writing this book to discuss the idea of my work and the conclusions I had reached; however a dispute then arose between us as to how stereotypes about homelessness become fossilized in language. Some people affected by homelessness, and some of their tutors, objected to the descriptive terms. One of the residents of the center stated that "when someone is homeless it is just a fact, there is nothing to be ashamed of and hide, we should talk about it directly." Others, including myself, were in favor of the 'new' way of referring to the people experiencing homelessness, which resulted in my choice of the descriptive discourse.

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[8] This way was originally associated with a change in the definition of disability. The WHO presented a new biopsychosocial approach to disability in 2000. It is a holistic concept whereby disability is a "deviation from normal function" at the biological, psychological and social levels (Palak, Bujnowska, Pawlak 2010: 7). Degrees of deviation may vary and need not apply to all levels, but only to particular levels and their combinations. Contextual factors are also of importance, i.e. "the environment and individual features that may facilitate, hinder or limit the functioning of a person with disabilities" (Palak, Bujnowska, Pawlak 2010: 7–8).

The fact that I disagreed with some of my respondents does not, however, diminish the significance of their opinions or the idea of cooperation. As I listened to what the people involved in the problem had to say, I assume that I can stick to my own views rather than those of my respondents in the case of any objections. I am in favor of a research/action-building dialogue which facilitates "coming to timely decisions […] and reforming oneself or the conversation from time to time" (Reason, Torbert 2001: 10). However, this does not mean the need to conform and relinquish one's opinions. In Reason and Torbert's view, the research paper is a form that shows polyphony, which also includes contradictory views, via its rhizomatic layer (Reason, Torbert 2001: 149). I understand this as preserving one's autonomy.

For this reason, I decided to do follow the example of those who write about people with disabilities. Thanks to this method being fixed in writing, it will foster change, and perhaps multiply it. This approach is intended to alter the situation by changing the language behavior of the *mainstream* of society. Everyone succumbs to some rules of language use, even those who are pushed away by the *mainstream* of society and those who pursue the path of self-exclusion, as shown by the above-mentioned resident of the shelter.

The ways in which the male and female residents experience home and life in the studied institutions are part of my field of interest, i.e. the ways to cope with difficulty,[9] and to emancipate, understood as obtaining the status of a subject, which translates into agency. I asked whether and how it was possible to learn this or to regain this status when someone stayed in a place that shows the characteristics of a total institution. These institutions require the resident to abide by the rules and attempt to "stand on his/her feet", thus becoming independent. This in turn means not only ceasing to use the system of aid, but also quitting homelessness and poverty, as if they were an addiction, or becoming healed from them, as if they were an illness. Finding one's way within these

[9] The idea of 'coping', or getting by, is derived from the psychological concept of stress. It is a kind of activity aimed at restoring the balance between requirements and possibilities and at improving the emotional state (Heszen-Niejodek 2000: 475). This category describes the deliberate activities of human beings, as well as the variability of their efforts under the circumstances which required them to take action. 'Coping' is not only a response to a burdensome issue that requires some effort and is brought about by one's unconscious internal capabilities, but it is also a process based on making a cognitive evaluation of the situation. Several types of coping may be distinguished. These include an active approach, withdrawal (e.g. escaping into dreams instead of taking action), planning, seeking social support (in order to gain knowledge useful for the task strategy or to obtain emotional support), denial, emotional discharge. Such reactions were closely related to stigmatization (Goffman 2005), which affects people under homelessness. This situation requires such people to deal with what each of them does according to their capabilities (cultural resources, relevant interpretation of experience and access to social facilities).

institutions is a specific type of training for independence and a test of this skill: the residents are tested for living an organized life, subject to the rules and based on caring for oneself and one's space. Home is the symbol of such practices. The institutions provide a cultural representation of specifically designed 'homeness' and 'homefulness', which are exercised by the beneficiaries of the aid. They reproduce cultural projections of the 'appropriate' life, the 'homed' life, thus adopting and submitting (though to a varying extent) to the imposed rules.

My understanding of agency is based on the works of Chris Barker (2005), who regards agency as a kind of action where, firstly, people establish themselves and nothing limits them in it and, secondly, where the action is backed up by social conditions. Barker believes that agency manifests itself in actions associated with a pragmatic change. It consists in choosing between the options that are available to us. The options are various ways to act. Since the shape and course of the causative action are influenced by social forces, and as a result, these actions are of a varied nature, some people may act in more areas than others. Some people have more freedom of action, i.e. they can make choices and, to some extent, develop their own solutions. Barker associates such greater opportunity and freedom to the larger cultural resources available to some individuals, such as education and wealth. However, Barker claims that causative actions often tend to result from coincidence, indicating that an individual has an incomplete and unclear view of the situation and conditions, despite having greater resources. Many of such causative actions are the result of habits or socially sanctioned routine, which do not leave any room for choice. What constitutes agency are the actions of the individual, which are based on calculations and estimates of how best to act (Barker 2005: 269–271).

What is home then? What makes a home, how is it created, what is necessary for it, how to make it? How is a temporary space, such as the institutions described in my study, inhabited? In this context, what does it mean to experience homelessness if the residents living in places of their organized but temporary stay create their private micro-refuge based on the model of 'homelike homeness'? They can hide there mentally and emotionally, although their life in these institutions may be watched by others almost incessantly. What prevails there is Foucaldian Panopticism (Foucault 1995). In these institutions, the full reconstruction of home, i.e. the reconstruction by living "as if at home", does not take place. However, the practices of living in shelters originate from the image of 'homelikeness' that my interlocutors had and experienced and that are imposed on them in the form of the rules that govern the institutions.

The above issues were increasingly important to me as my relationships with the respondents grew closer and as I learned how various institutions op-

erated. The studied institutions also revealed the universality[10] of the need to have a home and to live in one's own place. I devote a part of this book to this issue, presenting materials from my field research in these institutions. For the purposes of this presentation, I selected only some of the stories told by men and women about their homes, including their lives in the shelters. My conversations with them were held as in-depth and free-form interviews. They revolved around three themes: what home means to the respondents, how they arrived in the shelter and what their lives in the aid institutions looked like.

The homes which emerged from their stories were places that very often had been their starting point into homelessness. For this reason, my interlocutors might be referred to as foreigners in their own lives or migrants through their own lives. Both attitudes are also connected with the effort of rebuilding or creating one's life anew and from time to time. The underlying idea is to reconstruct the past by providing a different interpretation of one's own life. This aims at transforming oneself in a way which will allow a given person to enter the path of 'homelike' and homed life.

It would be difficult to establish a common background for these stories. Any similarities between them should only be considered to be indicative. The individual stories reveal different worlds, although one might try to see them from a broader perspective and point out the recurring features. However, it is difficult to talk about a common culture or community of homeless people, for example, as their 'kinship' is too weak (see e.g. Zalewska 2009 and Miller 2008). I chose only a few out of many stories, because the selected experiences 'illustrate personal reactions' more clearly (Zalewska 2009: 61). I believe that reflection on individual experience allows a fuller discussion of the mechanisms of experiencing the situations, needs and emotions (Zalewska 2009: 61) characteristic of the state of homelessness and of life in the institutions concerned.

I strived to show the individuality of people who lived homeless lives, even though they were united by similar circumstances which put them in situations that were very much alike. Firstly, they were affected by homelessness, and secondly, they were sent to a specific institution governed by internal regulations. To get there, they had to meet certain criteria, but the principles of aiding are

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[10] The universality of home and living somewhere was mentioned by Anna Zadrożyńska, who postulated the idea of 'anthropology of shelter' (Zadrożyńska 1992). The subject of this anthropology was to be 'a special type of space, namely the shelter in the broadest sense' (Zadrożyńska 1992: 35). Zadrożyńska considered it culturally universal to categorize time, space and other people at the same time because of their proximity or distance (Zadrożyńska 1992: 40). This is the sense of home or being at home. In other words, it means separating ourselves from others. Zadrożyńska added that in all the cultures known to ethnology there appear some conventions binding the moment one enters the house, which emphasizes the principle of the inviolability of this space, the sense of privacy and ownership.

focused only on selected aspects of life which determine whether a person is referred to a given institution and granted some support. Thus, such persons are treated as representatives of a specific category of the needy, they are given a label which affects the way they define themselves over time. Only at this level can one find the common denominator, attributed to the studied group by the aid system which 'manages' poverty and homelessness.

A place does not exist without a dweller, and dwelling is impossible without a place

(Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 6)[1]

[1] Unless indicated otherwise, quotations from Polish were provided by the translator.

2. HOME IN CULTURAL AND SOCIAL STUDIES

The implications of **being at home** have a continued presence in culture and research, despite the broad recognition of theoretical concepts such as nomadic subjects (Braidotti 1994) or risk society (Beck 1999), which are both rooted in the idea of postmodern identity (Bauman 1997, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2011). Although the academic lexicon has changed and such new approaches have emerged, the notion of home provokes a number of considerations — even if only indirectly — such as what it means to be oneself, who is denied the privilege, its price tag and its uses. Although home is sometimes understood literally and sometimes metaphorically, both meanings imply the experience of feeling at home in its own right.

The concept of home has engendered many definitions and many suggestions for research. Easthope (2004) provides three basic understandings of home based on literature. The first approach tends to describe the home as a socio-spatial structure, the second as a psycho-spatial whole, the third as 'an emotional repository'. While the first approach assumes home to be a physical and material structure that serves as a household, the second views it as a particular mindset of an individual who experiences home as an area of safety, comfort and the familiar. According to J. Douglas Porteous, this understanding is very much akin to how animals perceive their territory, i.e. the territory defines their identity, provides a safe environment, and acts as a stimulus (as cited in: Jewdokimow 2011: 25). Thus, home may be experienced as a prefiguration of 'paradise on earth', and it engenders contrasting notions of homeliness and the public sphere, the latter being strange and inducing a different set of behaviours.

The third approach, which describes home as an 'emotional repository', focuses on individual links and personal relationships with a particular setting. Gurney suggests that home serves as a container for all feelings, including those which may be negative, such as grief, sadness, sorrow and guilt. Feelings belong in the home space, in its recesses and artefacts (as cited in: Jewdokimow 2011: 26). Hence the emergence of 'domestic geography', which is crucial for memory, identification and self-identification.

All the three approaches celebrate home as something special and unique, and they describe it as a platform for self-expression. Home also serves as a ref-

uge from society and external control. This approach emphasizes the individual experience of home.

Mallett (2004) offers a completely different taxonomy. Rather than developing a typology of homes and their respective descriptions, she highlights figures and metaphors that tend to intersect in relevant literature, while not excluding one another. According to Mallett, home may be understood as a place or places, a space or spaces, a symbol of self, being-in-the-world, a heaven, family, a tangible reality, but also as mobility, as well as feelings or practices.

I propose a different four-category taxonomy based on literature. First, one of the classical understandings of *home*, which is based on phenomenology, favours hermeneutic approaches focused both on space and place, most notably Heidegger's (1971) and Bachelard's (1994, 2011). A combination of phenomenology and hermeneutics can be found in a study by Bourdieu (1972), who attempts to capture the essence of home and its core principle.

The second approach describes home as an element of tangible culture. Accordingly, home is described as a technical structure, including various types of artefacts and the activities in which these artefacts are used. This approach focuses on the functions of the home and the changes in its material fabric and dwelling customs. They have produced a variety of works that elucidate the important tasks attributed to home, including the cultivation of privacy and intimacy, both emerging as part of the evolution of the quotidian, which was reflected in the domestic space and domestic topography (*cf.* Bieńko 2013 and Prost 2000; Body-Gendrot, Orfali 2000; Charter 2003; Corbin 2006; Perrot, Geurrand 2006; Perrot, Hunt, Hall 2006; also Tuan 1977). Studies by Dant (1999) and Edensor (2002).

The third approach belongs in a sub-discipline called housing studies. It strives to combine the two perspectives given above, which are not mutually exclusive, while also extending them. Housing studies is an interdisciplinary branch of research combining a functional, material and historical outlook with that of symbolism, phenomenology and hermeneutics, but they also draw upon militant and critical approaches. Researchers in housing studies explore housing rules and regulations in various countries and cultures, the accessibility of housing, and the housing conditions available to different social groups. They seek to address global challenges. One such contemporary challenge is that of mobility and its economic determinants, which are also affected by social mobility. This reveals the universal nature of housing studies and their central role in research, whose findings are published in a range of journals, including *Housing, Theory and Society* (since 1984) and *Housing Studies* (since 1986).

The fourth approach to be described in this book is inspired by the feminist turn in home studies.

2.1. Phenomenology of Home

Being at home, or being immersed in a particular existential state, is accessible through immediate intuition. The concept of being at home is an intersubjective one, and is reflected in abundant accounts and expressed in the arts. Bachelard harnessed immediate intuition to reconstruct the archetypal experience of house and home as a place of safety and the familiar (Bachelard 2011). Bachelard's notion of spatiality goes well beyond its physical understanding, with the focus being on the spiritual. For Bachelard, the most important space is that of intimacy, i.e. a subjective sense of what one may call a private setting. As everyone has a capacity for intuition and awareness of this kind, this is a universal phenomenon, and yet one that always occurs in individual form, as it unfolds inside a human being, in what Bachelard calls the soul. This is not a matter of psyche or logic, but values and emotions. Bachelard's focus is on the idyllic space, with a particular emphasis on house and home. Bachelard regards home as belonging in the human. No measurable space can embody home. Dwelling is primarily spiritual. Bodily presence and the creation of a material environment are synonymous with dwelling. Bachelard's theory uses oneirism to highlight the supramaterial meaning of house and home, thus arguing that the sense of domesticity, or homelikeness, requires no literal or physical factuality, as imagined homes belong in the psyche as the residences of dreams and desires. The process of dwelling unfolds in a domestic, or homelike, space. According to Bachelard, home is very much akin to a primordial universe, or the true cosmos. This is where the primordial dynamic between self and non-self occurs, which balances the sense of security with that of freedom. Hence the metaphor of home as a cradle.

Bachelard expands on the inner topography of house and home: the house is vertical in structure, and extends from the cellar to the garret. Although the description uses spatial terms, Bachelard nonetheless explores spiritual verticality and its symbolism inherent in the physical structure of house and home. Accordingly, Bachelard identifies its upper storeys with clarity and rationality, and its lower storeys with darkness and fears, namely, the irrational. Home is as bipolar as human psyche. It has a centre, which guarantees peace of mind and confidence.

Home as a centre is modelled on the individual self, which is the core of our being and individuality. Given its vertical and centripetal structure, home also represents a spatial experience as an enclosed area and a precondition for happiness. With the sense of security they provide, boundaries play an important role in Bachelard's home. He deploys the image of a 'corner' to render the home as one's place on earth. The 'corner' is the very germ of house and home. Home is also depicted as a 'nest', shell' and 'burrow', symbolizing the idea

of shelter and seclusion, which is a precondition for privacy and intimacy, two concepts that epitomize the freedom to be oneself, since without one's place on earth, there is no home. This freedom is also symbolized by objects used to enclose and hide something (drawers, wardrobes, chests and cubbyholes, as well as locks and keys).

According to Heidegger (1971), a human being must develop a bond with a place for the sense of home to emerge, with home developing as a part of this dynamic. Home is created by a human being, but a place is never empty. A human being awaits things, as it were, and 'persists through things', for things 'allow a site for the fourfold'. Heidegger describes home as a place in which a human being dwells among things that are in his or her immediate reach and create a homely and familiar setting. His thoughts on dwelling and home encapsulate the sense of being human, whereby the human condition emerges through building and dwelling rather than everyday activities such as the practical and technical tasks of the present. Dwelling is a way of being, not a technical competence or manual activity. A human being dwells in the world through thinking. For Heidegger, 'home' and 'dwelling' are suitable terms with which to express the truth of being. Following Heidegger and Bachelard, 'the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing' (Bachelard 1994: 7).

In one of his studies, Bourdieu (1972) demonstrates that the metaphysics and ontology of the habitus are made possible through the examination of deep structures; these are the equivalent of the myths which underlie a particular society and shape individual dwellings. By analyzing the idea of the habitus, one is able to reconstruct the deep principles of culture. Habitus is accorded a central role in the emerging structure, and it is treated as homologous with the universe. However, Bourdieu points out that the position of a habitus in both measurable physical space and cultural space results from the combination of 'symbolic and social necessities with those of a technical nature' (Bourdieu 1972: 194).[2]

2.2. Home as an Object

Some words and concepts such as 'self-love', 'self-confidence', 'melancholy', and a trait known as 'sentimentality' came into use in the 17th and 18th centuries. They exemplify changes in human self-perception. Individuals began to stand out as separate entities, and they recognized their inner worlds as com-

[2] The reference based on the French original and Polish translation. The chapter in question does not exist in the English translation of Bourdieu's study.

fort zones. The development of individualism entailed a search for comfort and a change in the status attributed to home. Home emerged as a place to celebrate one's customs, habits, and manias, namely, one's personality (Rybczyński 1996: 43). This was reinforced by the gradual specialization of domestic interiors, whereby home space was divided into particular rooms: bedrooms, dining rooms, etc. Families also gradually developed a custom to spend time with their intimates. The moments they spent in each other's company were not only devoted to work, but also leisure. Ever since then, these moments have developed and strengthened bonding in the family. Family members began to read, play, talk, or mend something in the home and for one another. These duties also included cooking and looking after one another, that is, caring for the welfare of other family members.

As domestic interiors grew more specialized, they also became more customized. They began to reflect the nature of their dwellers through the arrangement, choice, purpose and distribution of particular objects (Rybczyński 1996: 51). Not only did this trend make the home increasingly customized, but it also mirrored the nature of the human as an autonomous individual. This also had implications for the attitudes towards children and childhood. Even working children from professional families, performing the same tasks as those of journeymen, i.e., other minors or young people inhabiting the same space, were gradually accorded a separate sleeping area. Such areas were separated from those of their peers, who were strangers and not part of the family. The concept of sleeping space began to narrow in the 16th and 17th centuries. The growing sense of intimacy and domesticity was followed by the development of hygiene-related domestic technologies, namely, cleaning and washing. These practices and needs were increasingly associated with privacy and intimacy (Rybczyński 1996: 55–56).

Domesticity, or homelikeness, emerged 'casually, unnoticed, as a response, as it were, to the shifting conditions of urban life' (Rybczyński 1996: 57; see also Elias 2012). Seventeenth-century Dutch dwellings may serve as a model for domesticity: they were typical living quarters for nuclear families, in the contemporary understanding of the word. Several factors contributed to this. One of which was the wealth of the Dutch society of the time, which allowed a single family to afford a separate house without lodgers. In addition, homes ceased to serve as workplaces, and servants were almost non-existent because of heavy taxation imposed on those who would choose to employ them. This absence of servants contributed to the emergence of a modern home, i.e. one inhabited by a single family, in which household chores were performed by a housewife, or the lady of the house, whose role as a mother was also strengthened. With the newly-developed system, mothers began to raise children without needing help from outside the family. Thus, one of the symbolic aspects of a modern home

emerged: home as a female space (kingdom). This was also reflected in domestic architecture. Houses were divided into ground floors, which served as an extension of the street, and upper floors, which were accessed through the stairs. Those who entered the upper floors were required to change their footwear. In addition, only family members were usually allowed to enter upstairs. As a result, domesticity became manifested as an enclosed area separated from the rest of the household. This enclave of the family affairs has developed into a home in its contemporary understanding. Additionally, kitchens came into use. This is one more symbol of an increasingly feminized home space in an urban modern society (Rybczyński 1996: 77–80). Dutch housewives cooked and served other family members on their own. The men left the house to earn a living, whereas the women stayed at home, and this became their workplace: domestic work may be unpaid, but it nonetheless represents a very important form of sustaining provisions and care. Domesticity emerged in the process.

This complex versatility of the home began to define the wealthier members of Western societies, and other societies had been westernized. Privacy has become a component part of domestic comfort, which may be described as 'the absence of drama and peaceful existence' (Rybczyński 1996: 124). However, this outlook on home is primarily that of the affluent and the masculine. The concept of home as a refuge and safe haven has been developed by those who retreat into home as they finish their daily activities in the outside world, these traditionally being the men, who worked outside of the home. In contrast, the women tended to have a more dynamic perception of home; however, depending on their priorities and approach, home may also be described as oppressive.

Given his anthropologist perspective, Dant's (1999) reflections fit in with the concept of home as a place meeting certain cultural and social parameters. He defines home as a phenomenon deeply ingrained in tangible culture, but in a unique way. Dant proposes that lodgers share their lives the way they share plates, a bathroom, household appliances, and domestic space. Even if one is home alone, it is impossible not to attach a social value to it, as home exists also through interaction, including social roles and social personae. Dant examines social militancy, as reflected in the presence of various mass media in the home (television, the Internet, and radio). Using media in the home, one is drawn into the outside world and into affairs broader than mere private life, albeit encountered in the intimate space of one's living quarters. Academic research benefits from home studies in that homes as dwellings are long-lasting subjects and compounds of objects and relationships. Homes can endure through generations: they are subject to change over time, but in a sense they always abide. Home is also valued as central to human feelings, events and relationships, or may perhaps serve as their very core. Dant follows in the footsteps of McLuhan and Oliver in that he examines the relationship between the ways

various communities develop their dwellings and their attitude to the earth, their sustenance, and population size. The shapes and layouts of their dwellings reflect values upheld by particular cultures and the way they understand the world, perceive it through the senses, and shape their experience. The climate, structure and materials play a secondary role in determining the shape of a dwelling, and in fact they act as limitations to choice. However, one factor that counts and affects the way dwellings are developed in a particular culture is the ethos, values, and responses to basic needs, including the meaning attached to family life, the outlook on women's roles, the perception of privacy, and the values underlying social relations.

According to Dant, living quarters should be treated as extensions of the human inhabitants, insofar as separate spaces are provided in the home for various dwelling activities. These activities include work, leisure, eating, and sleep. Thus, home comprises the customs and conventions of a particular culture inasmuch as it contains dwellers and their objects.

Edensor's (2002) approach is similar to that of many other contemporary researchers in that he equals home with comfort and the search for, and attainment of, stability. Objects and activities play an auxiliary role in the process. For Edensor, home is primarily a metonym of contemporary nations and ethnic and political communities. Acculturation practices, which are very much akin to domestication, strive to eliminate the other in order to achieve desired comfort. The same purpose is served by domestic routine. Thus, home becomes a 'taskscape', which promotes unreflexive modes of action, whereby bodily habits are reinforced by the surrounding objects (Edensor 2002: 54–57). Home constitutes a unity of experience, where a kinaesthetic experience is combined with a memory of particular sensations. This memory can be carried over to other spaces, where they can help to establish a place of one's own outside of home in its literal meaning. Edensor argues that home is far from static, and it is exposed to continuous process, activities, reproduction, gestures, production, and repetition.

Home also acts as a trap, an oppressive space where control and violence prevail, and 'a site for the transcendence of the mundane' (Edensor 2002: 61). Edensor points out that nowadays, home emerges through the practices of contemporary nomads, who travel for a variety of reasons. The focus of a mobile home is on 'routes' rather than 'roots', and 'the ways in which people increasingly set up home in different places over a lifetime does not necessarily mean that a sense of home becomes dissipated. Rather, a form of domestic seriality is achieved, where familiar routines are reintegrated with place, familiar reference points are sought, and well-known networks are plugged into once more' (Edensor 2002: 63). According to Edensor, identity and the sense of home can be both mobile and deeply rooted.

2.3. Housing Studies

Housing studies tend to be rather broad.[3] The interests of the researchers focus on gender, poverty, exclusion, and inequality, including homelessness. Housing studies straddle politics and practice, and are not strictly speaking an academic pursuit. Research of this kind examines social policies and economics, as well as spatial planning and management. Their paramount ambition is to demonstrate how social and urban policies affect housing and dwelling practices in various social groups, including those at risk of exclusion. Major branches of housing studies examine social housing, regeneration, revitalization, and gentrification. Much of the focus is also placed on neighbourly relations and the real estate market.

Arguably, housing studies have not been able to develop an original theory of home and dwelling. Housing studies are not a self-contained academic field with concepts and methodology exclusively of its own, and hence the issues it strives to explore may also be examined by other theories and disciplines that happen to also explore the concepts of home and dwelling.

There is some doubt whether this view is still a legitimate one. King (2009) draws attention to the fact that 'dwelling' and 'housing' denote two distinct phenomena. 'Dwelling', or having a place of one's own and a separate habitus, is linked to 'home' or one's place on earth or where one feels welcome and accepted. This in turn implies the sense of privacy, best exemplified by a dwelling of one's own, or Bachelard's nooks and corners (Bachelard 1994: 136, 140–141). A corner of one's own serves personal goals and interests. Dwelling carries a unique meaning. Everyone experiences dwelling in one way or another; those individuals who fail to do so are considered weaker.

The term 'housing' implies particular housing policies: the development of the policies, types of residential housing, and the availability and maintenance of housing resources. Housing policies may be scrutinized at a variety of levels. In general, the issue of housing is quite exact, and its parameters are easy to measure. However, King (2009: 43) refuses to accept housing as something more profound than individual dwelling practices. Housing has an advantage over dwelling in that the latter may be perceived as trivial and private, and therefore too personal and embarrassing. This may be one of the reasons it is difficult to systematize and describe dwelling in the language of academia. Dwelling is associated with meanings and feelings, whereas buildings have shapes, measures, and material presence. The sense of being at home is diffi-

[3] Housing studies borrow from gender studies and feminist approaches in their depiction of homes and dwelling practices. Feminism provides a set of trusted tools to critique the notion of home in patriarchal societies. See Eisenstein 1984, Massey 1994, Oakley 1976.

cult to demonstrate and describe. This becomes even more difficult if places, attitudes, and behaviours are described together with emotions, which I nonetheless consider vital to the meaning of dwelling in a home (King 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008).

King points out that people with a home are not concerned with housing policies, even though they are subject to these policies, for instance, residents of social housing (King 2009: 44). What one does in the privacy of one's home seems to go beyond the scope of such policies. This is because policies of this kind are attributed with instruments that have little or no impact on dwelling practices. According to King, dwelling is something people 'simply' do, but it is also true that although it entails customized measures, it is also exposed to broader public and cultural processes that are embedded in a particular culture. That said, housing policies, in the strictest sense of the word, are but a small fragment of the dwelling experience. Hence, Kemeney, also a major researcher in housing studies, argues that it makes no sense to pursue dwelling and housing theories as two distinct disciplines (1992).

In general, King agrees with Kemeney, while advising against the automatic application of certain theories, even if this seems to be indispensable (King 2009: 45–46). What he advises against is constructivism and Foucauldian approaches. His suggestion is to counteract constructivist tendencies and offer a new angle with a methodology of his own design. His approach is deeply ingrained in phenomenology, which he believes is more useful in studying both these phenomena, the processes that define typical and classical housing concepts, and those that constitute dwelling and home-making practices at symbolic, emotional, and psychological levels. King proposes that changes be made to how housing studies perceives itself as a discipline, i.e., it should not regard itself as material to be developed with existing theories, but as a basis for a new theory, namely, the thing itself. King argues that researchers in housing studies should be developing their own metaphors rather than using ready-made concepts. The approach he developed is called 'theory building' (King 2009: 47), which brings to mind both theory creation (concepts are developed like houses) and **grounded theory**. New theories and concepts do not operate in a social vacuum. Thus, the first step should be to establish the nature of a phenomenon, and find out how it operates and what it does, to whom and for whom, by a process of phenomenological reduction (bracketing). King propounds that researchers should turn increasingly towards the experiential domain of housing, home, and dwelling, and only then should they develop a matching corpus of concepts and theories to describe it much better than external approaches. They may follow in the footsteps of Foucault, insofar as they imitate the way he conceptualized the problem rather than merely copy his terminology. Foucault's methodology aimed to examine a particular historical space and its underly-

ing mentality, and only then proceeded to its possible interpretations. A better understanding of concepts such as dwelling and home requires that particular contexts are selected in order to scrutinize their meaning and the way they operate in particular situations. There is no need to develop a new language, just as Foucault has never developed one. Preferably, an analysis should be provided to establish key areas in a particular research field (by analogy to Foucault, who used the term 'discipline' and 'gaze' as a form of surveillance and control in his description of the notion of punishment in Enlightenment France).

King furnishes an operational concept that he developed for his own research: accommodation. The notion is representative of the experience of domesticity, or homelikeness, which appears in King's research. For him, accommodation concerns the manner in which one can, and does, live sustainably with others in a particular place, while finding an acceptance of oneself in that place. It is expressive of coming to terms with one's environment, or feeling at home in it. The presence of others, who one lives in acquiescence with, also plays a major role in this context. This opens up a field for experiencing various feelings, especially love. Love generates selflessness, and places such as home are necessary to keep a community together. Love-driven singular unconditionality goes beyond romantic or spousal relationships. The unconditionality may be present in a relationship with one's parents, children, siblings or friends, or whoever. For many people, the notion of domesticity is tantamount to the very possibility of developing unconditional bonding and sustaining it in the refuge of their homes.

In order for 'home' to encapsulate the contemporary meaning of the word, a special approach had to be developed which enabled the perception of home as a private space, namely, one filled with emotions and relations of a particular type, intensity, and quality. As such, 'home' began to function both as an 'emotional repository' and a psychological and social space. 'Home' emerged in the 16th century, its evolution continued over the 19th century and ever since. The 19th century 'home, sweet home' best epitomizes this particular understanding of home. However, the privacy of home is more of a myth than a predominant model in the distributive approach to culture (Jewdokimow 2001: 27). Notwithstanding this, a desire to have a corner of one's own, as well as seeking it and creating it as a value, is a predominant factor structuring the space of institutions for homeless people. Individuals affected by homelessness share this desire. As a result, places intended to imitate home are created at homeless institutions. These practices serve as notable reminders of a deeply marginal position accorded to people who, for a number of reasons, are excluded from society. Any 'home' created in such circumstances only reminds them of their homely' home from the past or imagined future. However, even imitations are 'places', as they are possessed of characteristics that their creators introduce and

build into a particular space, as noted by Tuan in his considerations on space and place (1977).

A place called home was invested with its domestic qualities through the modernization of lifestyle and the rise of the urban middle class in the 18th century. The middle class began to treat home as an antithesis of the public sphere, which by the way is a continuation of ancient concepts and *oikos-polis* division. Home may also be described as a place where the heterogeneity of space is being disclosed (Eliade 1961).

2.4. Gender Perspectives in Home Studies

The approach I am now going to discuss is primarily concerned with the Western world and the values that are also present in Polish culture.

The emotional idealization of home as a refuge of safety has been refuted by feminist interpretations, which explore women's outlook on home. Feminist researchers depart from perceptions inherent in 'the happy phenomenology of the home' (Morley 2000: 56), which may be attributed to Bachelard's theory (1994, 2011). With the feminist turn,[4] the image of home took on a completely different hue as a place of conflict, power struggle, violence, oppression, as well as exploitation and risk. Feminist depictions of home also began to account for the conflicting sets of interests of its dwellers. Family dynamics ceased to be considered natural, and they are now more thought of as social constructs and conflicting ideas that are subject to negotiations. The family and home space became genderized, as it were. This derived from the critique of Heidegger's concepts. Feminist discourse equals Heidegger's approach and that of Bachelard's with an androcentric perspective. In their expectations of home, men acted as beneficiaries of domestic culture prevalent in the West (Morley 2000: 59). Men returned from the outside world to their dwellings, which they believed to be their refuge and shelter. This standpoint ignored other perspectives, including those of women, who spent more of their time at home (or exclusively at home) as their workplace. Women are still burdened with much of the time- and labour-intensive household chores. They also provide care in the home to people who may be dependent on others in different ways (minor, chronically ill, or elderly family members, as well as pets and domestic animals):[5]

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[4] One of the authors who pioneered the feminist turn is Oakley: 1974a (later known under an altered title, see Oakley 1976) and 1974b. Bourdieu is also a prominent author in this respect (1998).

[5] An average housekeeping time is ca. 3 hours per person. Genderwise, 'a disparity in housekeeping time turns out to be significant. Women devote 4 hours 30 minutes for household chores daily. […] [For – I.B.K.] men, it is only 2 hours and 36 minutes. Thus, an average disparity between the two genders is nearly 2 hours daily, 14 hours weekly, over 50 hours monthly, and 700

> Women perform between 62% and 84% of all the work such as laundry, ironing, cooking, doing dishes, tidying up, and thorough or spring cleaning. Men are more likely to arrange for maintenance and repair services in the home, e.g. by calling a plumber. Dealing with administrative formalities or rubbish disposal are distributed rather evenly […] (Świątkiewicz 2011: 17).

A commonplace notion of home provides for normalized and stable roles to be performed by its dwellers. This also concerns the interpersonal dynamic in the home, comprising behaviours and attitudes, emotions, experiences, activities, duties, and relations with the material world. Stability is best seen in the attribution of particular domestic spheres and symbols to particular genders. The staple association of home was that of women and femininity (following a stereotypical notion of women as 'most suitable' guardians of the hearth and home, or the very core of the domestic). Given these cultural precepts, home would be something different than the public sphere. Propounded by second-wave feminism, the slogan 'private is political' had a number of implications, including a widespread reflection on the cultural logic and costs (from literal, or economic, to metaphorical, or symbolic) of the gender-variegated distribution of household chores. A tendency emerged to treat feminine-attributed household duties and care as unpaid work: performed exclusively or additionally, pursued in parallel to a professional career, and strictly determined by the understanding of 'femininity'.

This only revealed the ambiguity of certain concepts inherent in the home and dwelling context. On the one hand, the rise of gender studies brought a revival in research on the family, parenthood, upbringing, etc., in the domestic context, including studies on spatial and tangible dimensions of home. On the other, they also redefined priorities. They revisited various notions, including those of home, family, the roles of parents and carers, and the sense of being a child.

Different genders may attribute different qualities to their homes. People affected by homelessness also differ in their perception of home according to their gender.[6] It is assumed that 'male' and 'female' types of homelessness stand apart.

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hours annually' (Świątkiewicz 2011: 15–16). Świątkieiwcz points out that family circumstances tend to shift the burden onto women: 'Women under 45 years of age, living with parents and without children under 18 years of age, spend 2 hours and 20 minutes on housekeeping daily. Women from the same age group, also without minor children, but in matrimony, spend 3 hours and 48 minutes on household chores daily. For women over 45 years of age, housekeeping time grows to over 5 hours daily' (15–16).

[6] For women affected by homelessness in Polish, see mainly Dębski 2008 (a study from Pomerania in northern Poland) and Szluz 2010a.

> This is not only to say that men and women experience homelessness in different ways, but most of all that they were drawn into homelessness for different reasons and they may also leave homelessness in different ways. The fact that men and women may vary in their experience of homelessness means that suitable instruments for social care must be adjusted to both genders. Not surprisingly, these instruments may be and often are different for homeless men and women (Dębski 2008: 5).

Bowpitt et al. studied how the gender-variegated experience of homelessness may be reflected in selected areas of homeless life (2011). They studied three variables in more detail: causes of homelessness, coping (the authors used the term management of homelessness'), and the adequacy of care provided to homeless people according to their gender (Bowpitt et al. 2011: 540). The study revealed differences in the perceptions of homelessness and coping strategies for both genders. It worked on the assumption that any kind of experience, even as harsh as homelessness, reflects social principles and ideas imposed on men and women by all cultures. The life of homeless people is also determined by gender-variegated social reality.

As causes of their homelessness, men and women mentioned family and domestic problems, such as various forms of violence, poverty, helplessness and addiction, which only led to gradual exclusion, resulting in homelessness.

Homeless men and women differed in the linguistic accounts of their experience. Women's focus was on severed bonds, dysfunctional attachment, and abuse from their intimates. Men told their domestic accounts from the perspective of someone who was gradually ousted from family life, or someone who was no longer the rightful member of the family and who had lost control over his life. Men would leave home when they felt they were overwhelmed by the complexity of their domestic problems. Women would leave in an effort to protect themselves (and children) and break free from violence. These two different perspectives have a similar root cause, however.

Speaking of 'the management of homelessness', one particular aspect, namely, that of homeless corporeality, was pointed out by researchers who specialized solely in female homelessness, e.g. Wardhaugh (1999). These researchers explored the way homeless men and women treat their bodies, and the kinds of instruments, signs and meaning they and their environment attribute it with, assuming that the body is the major 'experiential unit' and bodily safety a priority. According to Wardhaugh, women strive to disguise their homeless bodies, especially if they enter the public sphere. They do not want to be labelled as homeless. Men treat their bodies differently. As pointed out by Bowpitt et al., their bodies 'expand, […] seeking to colonise the streets and other public spaces to construct an alternative hard exterior' (Bowpitt et al. 2011: 540). Their practices differ from those of women, who are less likely

to sleep rough. Admittedly, some women are affected by street homelessness, which nonetheless manifests in a different way (according to Polish statistics, ca. 10–20% of homeless are women which is also reflected in global research, see Dębski 2008). Women strive to keep out of sight, and they keep up the appearance of 'having a home' longer and more often. This is particularly reflected in their looks and public conduct. That said, both men and women are similar in the way they experience the challenges of life without a home or outside of an institution, namely, cold and hygiene (additionally, women are also exposed to menstruation, potential pregnancy, and sexual violence) (Bowpitt et al. 2011: 541). Women are more likely to resort to prostitution, whereas men tend to commit various sorts of crime. Some researchers, e.g. Bowpitt et al. referring to recent British research, argue that prostitutes are not solely victimized, since prostitution serves as one of the coping strategies in the face of homelessness. Some women and an increasingly minor percentage of men become prostitutes.

Research has demonstrated that single women have more difficulty than men or women with children in obtaining help (including information) from specialized welfare institutions for homeless men and women. This may be due to the commonplace perception of which group are more worthy of help (society is more inclined to choose a mother), or which group are more troublesome with regard to their numbers or public conduct (the stereotypical perception of a homeless man). The difficulties of single homeless women are treated as merely personal rather than structural, and women are often defined as those in need of care. Following this social 'logic', men should be able to cope on their own, and if they drink, for example, it is their own fault. A stereotype of addiction also enters the picture.

Fitzpatrick believes that the social skills men and women are equipped with by their culture have a bearing on the way they cope with homelessness, but this nonetheless must be considered in the patriarchal context. Thus, women are exposed to violence from men (structural violence ingrained in gender inequality), which leads to their homelessness. However, a predominant number of homeless people are men. As suggested by Fitzpatrick, 'some gendered factors associated with homelessness almost certainly disproportionately affect men' (Fitzpatrick 2005: 9). Men also fall victim to the patriarchal model of gender dynamics, especially when they attempt to live up to the idea of manhood, i.e. stiff upper lip and competition for prestige. As a result, they find it more difficult than women to form spontaneous support groups. Women in turn are socialized to collaborate and to be open to other people, which only helps them to cope in a crisis. They also find it easier to survive because of their ability to verbalize feelings and express emotions, which is yet another skill they learn during the socialization process. The patriarchal culture equips

women with other qualities, including obedience, submissiveness, keeping everything to oneself, or a tendency to appease, and they play a similar role in the process. When exposed to homelessness, women may find it relatively easier (or different than men) to cope with new challenges. Even though they are awarded more freedom (especially in public), men are also more dependent on care from other people (usually women), which only makes them less flexible. At the same time, they are more accustomed to the individualistic outlook on the world, whereas women are trained to accommodate the needs of others. Hence, women are more likely to choose strategies such as remaining unobtrusive or disguising their homelessness so as not to irritate anyone or provoke any responses.

These conclusions may seem to be subversive. One possible interpretation is that women are victimized only ostensibly. In fact, they can arguably deal with problems much better than men because they are not focused on winning, success, demonstrations of power or the struggle for independence, which is something taught to men by patriarchal cultures. Obviously, Fitzpatrick neither glorifies women nor does she deprecate their experience of homelessness.

That said, she reveals a characteristic trait of 'female' homelessness. The tactic women choose is that of wait-and-see, and so they are less inclined to choose extremes, including suicide, street homelessness, or addiction. Even if they do, they always leave their options open, and they often get rescued, obtain help, and benefit from change. They choose weaker instruments of suicide, they develop greater bonds with others (if they become homeless, they are less likely to be sleeping rough), and are more willing to talk about their problems. That is why they seek support, which is a practical skill they have learnt in the socialization process; in other words, they know how to open up and develop and sustain a rapport with others. Greater numbers of men have been found to choose extreme means and solutions to their problems, and men are faster and more effective than women in reaching a state of deprivation, anaemia and death.[7]

The best way to investigate Fitzpatrick's ideas is to treat them as an attempt at an in-depth analysis of the homelessness-gender dynamic. Accordingly, no component part in the system that a homeless person is exposed to, including

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[7] For suicide in men and women, see Girard 1993; Canetto, Sakinofsky 1998; Murphy 1998; Möller-Leimkühler 2003; Rudmin, Ferrada-Noli, Skolbekken 2003; Landburg 2008; Payne 2008; Värnik et al. 2008 and reports by the Polish police, http://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/samobojstwa (last retrieved: March 2013). Over the last five years of sustained contact with direct access hostels and night shelters, two suicides of homeless men have come to my attention (death by hanging). Both were committed at the premises.

gender inequality, is more or less important than the other; it can only have a greater or lesser effect depending on individual circumstances. It is impossible to explain homelessness, let alone leave it, by elevating one of the factors over others. Each situation involving homeless people should be investigated individually, and all possible variables must be taken into account, including gender.

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The depictions of home inspired by symbolism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics; those focused on historical and tangible dimensions; as well as those derived from housing studies and following the feminist turn and gender studies, share one particular feature. They are concerned with creation, activity, and process. Home 'belongs in the experienced world' (Rakowski 2009: 205). This means that 'each particular cultural object usually exists in a dual manner: it performs its immediate function whereby it serves a particular sphere of social needs, and it also plays a metaphorical role whereby its characteristic traits are transferred on a wider circle of social facts that are modelled on it' (Łotman 1978: 46).[8]

One suggestion of mine is that one should treat 'home' as a mode of dwelling and creating a communal space with others. Home is a space where one can be true and authentic with others (and with oneself). Home serves as a place to celebrate privacy and family values, and it also protects against anything that may be unwanted or undesired. This generates particular emotions, which are usually positive. These emotions include a sense of security, freedom from shame, liberty, intimacy, well-being, leisure, relaxation and calm, closeness, familiarity, and authenticity. This fits in with a concept that equates home with a sense of being at home, which was propounded by Hage (1997). Hage argues that the notion of home is based on four fundamental feelings and attitudes: familiarity, communality, safety, and self-agency. This is because home develops as a visible sign of self-realization; however, in order to develop, home must first take physical shape. This is impossible without means, location, materials, suitable infrastructure, and economic base. The sense of home may be described as one of the universal values that defines classical reflection on anthropology and the attitude to others, since the availability of home varies depending on social barriers, divisions, and the politicization (understood more narrowly, as the prevalence of one group and their ideology) of social rights.

[8] Lotman's paper is not available in English. The quotation has been provided based on the Polish translation.

In Western cultures, the right to a home is one of the basic human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates in Article 12: 'No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, **home** […]', and in Article 25: 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, **housing** […]'.

I'm happy to be here. We can have a chat, and we laugh together
('Hanna')

I'm fine, I have somewhere to stay. Not like previously, when I slept rough. The thing is, though, it's not mine. If you live on your own, you do as you please. You have to abide by the rules here
('Józef')

Nobody cares about you. Forget about kindness if you're elderly or ill
('Zofia')

There's no freedom, no registered address, no way to complete any formalities. This is a transition period
('Piotr')

I've heard about such places. [A homeless shelter] is like a business trip, only longer. Not a home you'd like to have. You have to stick to the rules until you get your own place. Obey and survive. Don't make matters worse
('Małgorzata')

I knew there were animal shelters, but I didn't know there are people shelters. The shelter taught me humility. I didn't realize this but… I may have pitied them, but from a safe distance, as in a film, as if that's none of my business. And then I was up to here [in this]. Misery, stench, filth, all of this all around me. It wouldn't cross my mind that I'm [no] different. I'm just like them
('Tomasz')

You need to fit in. Lone wolves stand no chance of survival. Communal life is not as bad as you might think it is. There's always someone to speak to. You can always have a tiny imitation of home; you can always create a little fragment, and develop it into something larger. Nothing typical, though. There's no way you can feel at home [here]. There's no privacy. You can get used to it if you have a likely prospect of a home
('Dominika')

3. LIFE AT INSTITUTIONS

3.1. Historical Reality

Facilities designed to provide care, aid and specific lifesaving services[1] were developed by hospitals. It was not until the 18th century that hospitals achieved the status of health care facilities. Previously, they had operated as charitable institutions providing a variety of services, including medical care. They served a variety of needs. The beginnings of the modern hospital service go back to the Ancient Greek *asklepieia*, a place by temples devoted to Asclepius where people in need of medical care were accommodated. Over time, specialized night shelters were created, where those awaiting medical advice could be referred (Lipiński 2010: 7). During the Middle Ages, poverty and mendicancy grew, and doss houses were only able to contain the problem to a limited degree. Hospitals embarked on a mission to promote Christian charity. Attitudes elevating penury served as an indirect way to tackle the problem. Mediaeval society strove to accept poverty and vagrancy by creating a discourse that helped to come to terms with their presence. As Stanisław Lipiński puts it, 'a pauper turned into a sanctity' (Lipiński 2010: 8). For a long time, hospitals were managed by religious organizations, including the Catholic Church, which is why hospital 'residents', as patients were formerly called (Bystroń 1976: 440), were obliged and even forced (when they resisted) to participate in religious rituals. Over time, hospitals became more accommodating to lay persons, who were accepted as members of the board. That said, first evidence of lay people as hospital sponsors dates back to the 5th century (Raś 2011: 15).

Doss houses followed different sets of rules depending on the decisions of their boards. Most of all, the boards decided whom to admit to an institution. If a hospital attended to the needs of their residents, provided meals, and refrained from using any stringent measures, it would enjoy much popularity, also

[1] According to Radlińska, the three items in the list serve as a basis for comprehensive medical help, even though each of the items, i.e., aid, care, and lifesaving, vary both in the range and focus of their services (as cited in: Zbyrad 2012: 55).

among freeloaders, who reported at hospitals in search of free bed and board. Monasteries and other fraternities in charge of hospitals admitted those in need of care, the monks roaming the vicinity to find the vagabonds (once a week, for example). They sought the ill, the infirm, the poor, the lonely, and the pregnant, and they brought them to their premises. Already in the Middle Ages, hospitals ran what we now call 'windows of life', where unwanted children were left by their parents. Hospitals became increasingly medicalized over time. Efforts were made to differentiate between people who tried to obtain care under false pretences and those who were unable to function without support (both one-off and long-term assistance). From the 13th century, especially following the rise of the Reformation, countries in the West of Europe forced beggars into labour: one such workhouse for beggars was created in Bridewell, England, in the 16th century. Very much like a prison, the facility operated as a guarded pre-industrial manufacture. It is believed that Bridewell Prison was the first one to use 'forced labour as the most successful way to punish fit beggars and vagrants' (Raś 2011: 18). The house of correction in Bridewell ran a forced recruitment process: the ill were referred for hospital treatment, while flogging was administered to the convalescents as a prevention method.

Prison-like confinement only aggravated and sustained all the characteristic traits and habits in those living on the fringes of society. Ca. 200 similar houses were established across England at the time (Kępski 1993: 19). House rules from Bridewell were adopted by similar institutions that later emerged in the Netherlands and Germany (Raś 2010: 18). Over time, workhouses expanded to admit as many as several hundred people, who were employed to perform various types of handicraft and manual labour. In 17th century France, the poor were exposed to what we know as Great Closure, which swept the beggars off the public places and turned them into a cheap workforce. If they were unable to meet their daily labour quota, they were punished with fasting and imprisoned (Raś 2010: 19). The next stage in the process came in 1656, when pursuant to a royal decree, the General Hospital was established in Paris. The facility was able to accommodate as many as six thousand vagrants.

Assistance of this kind ceased to draw upon Christian charity as its guiding idea. In modern times, i.e., throughout the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, welfare was provided through labour, which was believed to be an efficient remedy. Beggars were treated like objects: they did not work to provide for themselves as a means of self-repair to escape poverty, but they worked to provide for others.

However, the policy began to provoke criticism. Protests were made against the fact that paupers were exposed to confinement, forced labour (workhouses served as a prototype of labour camps), and punishment for not meeting their imposed obligations. The policy where beggars were imprisoned and sent to the

galleys as criminals was also faced with protests (Raś 2010: 19). Welfare provisions were allocated to those who were deemed unfit for work, while motivation and access to suitable jobs were offered to those who were able to make a living. The latter was intended as a stimulus to their moral development and a way to prevent undesired habits and instil appropriate behaviours (Kępski 1993: 39). In mediaeval, modern and postmodern Europe, a discussion developed across the centuries on who might be deemed fit for work or not, how to recognize a 'real beggar', and how not be deceived by fraudsters (Raś 2010: 10). This discussion continues to shape welfare policies and ideologies, including the ideas of poverty and the representations of the poor (general and specialist knowledge).

In the 19th century, it was believed that the adequate definition of poverty and its typology could facilitate the organization of aid. In 1827, Fryderyk Skarbek, a Polish economist and social activist, published *O ubóstwie i ubogich* [*On Poverty and the Poor*], a programmatic text in which he attributed the word 'poor' to those individuals who were unable to meet their needs and remained dependent on others. He identified four different types: 1. Unable to work, 2. Deprived of work, 3. Unwilling to work, and 4. In employment yet unable to make a living (Mazur 1999: 7). Typologies of this kind entailed a system of solutions for each of the groups. In 1830, Skarbek submitted a motion to draft a new bill on homeless and 'wandering' individuals (Fijałek 1962: 102). He opposed the idea of special homes and welfare institutions. He argued that the facilities of this kind only corrupted their dwellers and attracted people who merely pretended to be poor (Fijałek 1962: 102). Skarbek was more inclined to adopt the Elberfeld model, which was developed by Daniel von der Heydt of Elberfeld (active at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries). Von der Heydt propounded that more personalized forms of care should be provided and that qualified carers should be employed to do so. The carers were required to consider individual circumstances before they decided on suitable welfare support. Each was in charge of individual districts within a city or town. To allow the carers to know their charges and understand their living conditions, each could only be responsible for a maximum number of 40 people in their district. Carers were also expected to monitor their charges at least once a fortnight (see Lipiński 2010: 323). This type of welfare support was called voluntary, and it served as a complement to the assistance provided in doss houses. Von der Heydt's individual approach also allowed the assessment of those who applied for assistance, namely, if they had a moral right to do so. Assistance was intended to facilitate their return to employment (Strasburger 1915: 30).

From the 18th century, charity began to transform into philanthropy. Religious imperatives were gradually losing in importance, and the focus was shifted to the interplay between poverty and the particular forms of the economy and social life. The interpretations of poverty began to incorporate the arguments of the state

and public interest (see Geremek 1989a). The value of work was consolidated as a remedy to poverty.[2]

The management of hospitals and welfare support became gradually centralized. The centralized model was adopted by the state authorities of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth after its First Partition in 1773. In 1774, the Crown Chancellor Bishop Andrzej Stanisław Młodziejowski put forward for parliamentary debate a motion to centralize the governance of hospitals in order to eliminate mendicancy in the cities (Lipiński 2010: 316). The idea successfully garnered support. In 1775, a hospital committee was established both in the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Hospital Constitution act stipulated that the holders of poverty certificates were eligible for gratuitous hospital treatment and those without them would be charged for it. Those beggars who were fit for work were captured and forced into public works; however, since no public works were performed at the time, they were mainly sent to workshops and factories. The chronically ill were referred to hospitals (Lipiński 2010: 316–317). The idea of centralized welfare transpired to be ineffective, and it only entailed growing bureaucracy. The Elberfeld model was admittedly recognized for all its strengths (outside of Germany, the system was soon adopted in Switzerland and Austria), but it failed to convince the Polish-Lithuanian state authorities as being worthy of implementation.

In the 19th century, progressing industrialization created new areas of poverty, which turned out to be a challenge for individual and communal philanthropy. The emerging perception of state authorities was that of a necessary groundwork for the welfare system. Consequently, state administration began to develop social policies as a subsequent stage in the centralization process. The United Kingdom was one of the countries that adopted somewhat extreme measures: the New Poor Law was passed in 1834.[3] The act was very much based on the 16th century Bridewell model. The New Poor Law initiated a process whereby half of the beggars of London were forced into special workhouses. Other charity organizations, such as local parishes, limited the welfare support they provided to the paupers. The founders of the New Poor Law also intended to solve the challenge of poverty by subjecting it to market forces. Forcing the poor into labour was intended

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[2] In 1783, the free masons of Warsaw established the Charitable Society, which ran the Poor House in the city. Its main role was to provide employment to vagrants and beggars (they earned their living in hosiery and spinning). Over time, the Poor House transformed into a workhouse (the House of Industry, which followed the Bridewell model). Vagrants captured in street round-ups across Warsaw were taken away and forcedly admitted to the house. Three years into its activity, the free masons' Charitable Society and its workhouses were dissolved due to malfeasance on the part of their managers (Kępski 1993: 45–47).

[3] Charles Dickens's novels from the time describe the effects of the New Poor Law and provide its critique.

as assistance and a reality check: an opportunity to demonstrate that their lives were meaningful and contribute to society through employment. Gratuitous welfare was considered harmful, especially if it were to make the living conditions of the unemployed poor comparably better than those of hired workers; such welfare was considered illegitimate and unfair for the latter.

In 19th century Congress Poland, numerous charitable societies developed.[4] Charity activists were not required to imprison vagabonds. The task of dealing with fit vagrants was delegated to the police; in Warsaw, for example, vagabonds were expelled from the city. Once verified, the poor were treated like the sick, and admitted to their appropriate institution.[5] In principle, the structure and division of competence among specialized welfare institutions resembled those dating back to the Middle Ages or which had been developed in the 18th century. Welfare institutions handled the following groups: the ill (hospitals), the deaf, the blind; the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and little children (orphanages); fit beggars and vagrants and former prostitutes (doss houses), and orphans and abandoned and neglected children (Kępski 1993: 100).[6] Welfare programmes at state institutions began to counterpoise those of private charity institutions. The latter often set high moral standards to their clients and chose their target groups at will. Over time, the obligation to provide welfare was assigned to neighbourhoods, which later developed into communes (Kępski 1993: 101). Welfare support became gradually professionalized, which reflected the general perception of the poor and their needs. In some cities in Western Europe (e.g. Paris and Antwerp) and the United States (New York and Chicago), homeless shelters began to emerge (mendicancy being no longer on the agenda), as well as free clinics for the poor and reading rooms. Child nutrition programmes became increasingly widespread.

Attempts were also made at modernizing the welfare system in Poland, despite the fact that reading rooms and labour agencies were mainly set up by private

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[4] Charitable societies in Warsaw (1814), Lublin (1815), Radom (1815), Płock (1881) and Łódź, including the Łódź Christian Charitable Society in 1877, Jewish Charitable Society in 1899, and Evangelical Charitable Society in 1901.

[5] From 1842, pursuant to the ukase of Emperor Nicholas I, any and all charitable societies in Congress Poland came under the authority of the Central Welfare Council (material aid and welfare services) and the central inspectorate for health care services (medical aid). The Council held a permanent board of administrators who were professionally delegated to monitor the welfare institutions of the time; previously, monitoring and control had been performed by randomly selected civil servants (Kępski 1993: 98).

[6] Special programmes to support single mothers began to develop in the latter half of the 19th century, not only in Europe (e.g. in France, namely, in Paris), but also in the US (e.g. in New York) in an attempt to prevent mothers from abandoning their children. Charitable organizations ceased to moralize the mothers, who would only increasingly abandon their children as a result, and material aid was provided instead. The system of foster parenting was also developed in the US.

philanthropists and employers. The idea of a welfare state in Poland became a feasible prospect only after 1918. The existing regulations defined the internal hierarchy of the shelters for the poor, the elderly and the sick. All were provided with nutrition, accommodation and clothing, mostly uniforms. Additionally, a separate set of regulations defined who could leave the shelter. A furlough was required. A one-off permission was obtained from a person in charge of the shelter. This was intended as a precaution against alcohol abuse among the residents and their return to begging (Kępski 1993: 123–124). In the 19th century, the largest number of doss houses were registered across Congress Poland. They provided temporary aid and emergency medical care to ill and elderly individuals. The establishments were notorious for having a high mortality rate, which was attributed to the poor sanitary and housing conditions they offered (Fijałek 1962: 110).

The first doss house in Łódź was set up at ul Cegielniana 44, today's Jaracza. It was located in a rented house. In 1897, the facility moved to ul Dzielna, today's Narutowicza 60, which now houses the Medical University of Łódź. The institution was designed to suit the needs of its residents (Fijałek 1962: 114–115). The building had a capacity of ca. 300 people, and the interiors were provided with gas lighting. Running water was also available, as was a dining room and Protestant chapel. From 1925, the shelter was officially called the Home of the Elderly and Infirm, and it came under the authority of the Welfare Department of Łódź City Council.

The institution was modelled on a hospital intended to serve the elderly and chronically-ill. It was founded by the Łódź parish church in the 16th century on the orders of Bishop HieronimRozdrażewski, and operated until its liquidation or collapse though to be in 1748 (Lipiński 2010: 178). The first mentions of the institution come from the 18th century. The hospital was provided with a garden (Lipiński 2010: 178).

Staff at the shelters provided their residents with cheapest and simplest nutrition; wherever possible and donations permitting, the meals were more varied during Christmas and Easter. The residents were also provided with clothing. In general, they wore uniform clothing, namely, identical coats or cloaks with white- or black-cloth crosses sewn onto the side. The crosses served as stigmata of mercy: 'with such outfits, […] the paupers stood out from the crowd […], but were also humiliated' (Fijałek 1962: 132). Outfits of this kind were in universal use across Europe in the 19th century, a tradition deriving from late mediaeval stigmata of poverty, which positively 'verified' paupers were brandished with as 'true' paupers, as opposed to vagrants only pretending to be poor.

Doss houses and shelters were partially financed from government subsidies, which were nonetheless insufficient. The institutions were often damp, dark, dirty and cold, without proper flooring, and devoid of glazed windows. Their furnishings included bedding and plates, as well as food storage, cleaning, laundry, and

cooking utensils and facilities.[7] The paupers earned their place at the doss house with the work they were able to perform. Their limitations due to old age or poor health were taken into account. They performed tasks such as gardening, animal grazing, ministering at a parish, and household chores at the shelter. They buried the dead, mended hospital linen, and manufactured lint; they also begged in the streets, but only with formal permission (Fijałek 1962: 135).

The poverty in 19th century Łódź became aggravated during the periods of economic downturn, which were determined by industrial development and the availability of employment in the largest city of the region and its surrounding towns and villages. During the periods 1844–1845 (the time of overproduction crisis), 1847–1848, 1852–1854, and 1861–1865 (otherwise known as cotton famine), those in the textile industry of Łódź and the local area and its suppliers experienced impoverishment (Fijałek 1962: 200–201). The crises entailed dismissals and lower wages. Seeking lower labour costs, businesses employed the cheapest workforce, that is, women, children and villagers. The growth of food prices also added to the crisis. Famished, sick and jobless individuals had no one to turn to, since no forms of organized welfare were available at the time. The earliest-dating institution of this kind in Łódź, namely, the Łódź Christian Charitable Society, was not founded until 1877. Previously, only temporary charity had been provided, with various groups and committees distributing the aid across the city. The victims of the crises were assigned to perform public works; they were also eligible for nutrition and fuel supplies. For fear of protests, unemployment registers were kept, the police monitoring unemployed individuals at manufacturing plants, workshops, public places and homes. The paupers indeed rioted against the authorities and businesses: in 1845, the poor occupied the Town Hall; in 1854, a group of journeymen raided the village of Widzew, stealing bread and firewood from the residents (Fijałek 1962: 204). In the 1860s, charitable organizations began to attract factory owners, who were encouraged by community workers and city authorities to curtail redundancies, organize public works and distribute food for free. Workers and their families could easily slide into homelessness and were pushed to the fringes of society at the times of economic downturn.

In 1912 or 1914, on the initiative of the Łódź Christian Charitable Society, the Citizens' Committee for the Welfare of the Poor (Lipiński, 2010: 186)[8] was established, which operated throughout World War I. Homeless shelters were established at the time on the initiative of the local church authorities (Bishop Wincenty Tymieniecki). One such institution located in Rokicie catered for adults (Zwoliński fails to provide the address; Zwoliński 2006: 41). In 1927–28, the Association for

[7] As demonstrated by Fijałek, who discovered archive records on typical furnishings at doss houses in the Region of Łódź in the 19th century (Fijałek 1962: 134–135).

[8] Lipiński argues it was 1912, whereas Zwoliński suggests 1914 (*cf.* Zwoliński 2006: 40).

the Relief of Extreme Poverty was established in Łódź, and it operated under the auspices of the local Catholic Church. The Association was assigned the task to provide aid to various groups that were denied welfare support by the regulations (Zwoliński 2006: 41).

Before World War II, the poor were served at eating places run by the Congregation of the Servants of the Immaculate Conception at 6 Czerwona St. and 49 Pabianicka St. (on a temporary basis). Open mainly in the winter season, they operated through donations. From 1937, the Albertine Brothers also made their presence felt in the city. They were invited to Łódź to establish and manage a shelter for homeless men, and the Welfare Department purchased a plot of land in Kątna St. for this purpose. Prior to this, the Albertine Brothers had taken over the existing Municipal Night Shelter for Men at 8/10 Cmentarna St., which could serve 200 people; however, the property no longer exists. While open, the shelter refused to admit persons with infectious diseases, drunken individuals or professional beggars or vagabonds, as stipulated by the Order of the President of the Republic of Poland of 1927. The institution charged for accommodation (5 *groszes* per night). The Albertine Brothers ran their Night Shelter on an all-year-round basis. The residents were admitted from 7 pm until 8 am in spring and summer, and from 5 pm until 9 am in autumn and winter. The candidates were separated into two groups: those who were not subject to delousing, and so were offered wooden bunks, and those who successfully completed it, and were offered bunks lined with a mattress, a pillow filled with shredded straw, and sheets. The Albertine Brothers (only three monks worked at the shelter) required strict sobriety at the premises, which sometimes resulted in conflict with their homeless residents.

In 1938, the Albertine Brothers took over an institution in Cmentarna St. for permanent use, but the outbreak of World War II put a stop to their initiative; the same happened to the Albertine Sisters (Zwoliński 2006: 246–248). The Albertine Sisters arrived in Łódź in 1938 and began operating the Night Shelter for Women at 32 28th Pułku Strzelców Kaniowskich St. The facility was able to handle 180 people. According to records, Police Station Seven was established near the building to prevent riots in the vicinity (Zwoliński 2006: 245).[9] On 1st September 1939, the facility was taken over by the Łódź City Council. The shelter operated until 24th February 1940, when the Gestapo entered the building. The soldiers took away 140 women to an unknown destination, and two days later the Albertine Sisters

[9] After World War II, when St. Brother Albert's Aid Society opened their first shelter in Wrocław, the organization chose a suitable location in the vicinity of a Civic Militia station. The founders considered it a means of support, and a mutual one at that, rather than oppression. Militiamen were clear about the benefits of the shelter, as they had somewhere to lodge those individuals who were denied hospital treatment, the problem of the latter being homelessness rather than poor health (Marszałkiewicz 2011).

were ordered to leave the facility (Zwoliński 2006: 234–236). The Albertine Sisters' shelters admitted candidates by referral from the Łódź Society for the Prevention of Begging, which was bound by various regulations including the legal provisions of inter-war Poland, including the Order of the Ministry of Labour and Welfare of 1923. The order addressed the problems of gamblers, drug users, beggars, and vagrants. Arguably, these categories also denote homeless individuals in the contemporary understanding of the term. People living in social exclusion were offered social rehabilitation programmes and inclusion-through-work opportunities. They were incorporated into voluntary and forced labour homes and a network of doss houses. The residents were forced to stay at the premises, and they were released only if they found a paid occupation other than begging.

The everyday reality of the shelters is virtually unknown. The collection of the Academic Archive at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of Culture, University of Łódź (hereinafter: AIEiAK), features several photograph reproductions from other archives; they were incorporated into the ethnology collection, as they showcase various social groups in Łódź and their living conditions, including pre-1939 homeless shelters. One such reproduction is called 'Night shelter for homeless men, 1925' (item no. AIEiAK 6671/L.5797 – item no. 21/32 of the Łódź Province State Archive 21/32, hereinafter: WAPŁ). With no address provided, the photograph probably features the shelter in Cmentarna St. or at Rokicie. The photograph documents not only the interior, with the bunk beds and windows visible, but also the residents: Young, middle-aged, and older men in their outer garments can be seen sitting on the bunks or leaning against the walls, with most of them wearing hats or flat-top peaked caps. The walls in the room seem to be whitewashed, with wooden planks on the floor and no curtains in the windows. Another photograph represents 'The interior of the barracks for homeless families, 1925' (AIEiAK 6673/L.5799 – WAPŁ 21/40). Likewise, no information on the address has been provided. The photograph depicts an empty interior, appearing newly completed. The interior is capacious enough to accommodate three rows of wooden bunks (with bolsters slightly tilted upwards). Windows extending to one side, a beamed ceiling is supported by posts running in two rows across the entire length of the building. The entire structure is made of wood. The posts are painted from the bottom to roughly one-third of their height. The bunks are standing back to back, their number ranging from seventy-two to seventy-eight, with twenty-four to twenty-six bunks in a single row.

In the two following photographs, the interior of a barrack, either the same or a different one, can be seen once the residents had settled in. The photograph bears the same title as the previous one, namely 'The interior of the barracks for homeless working families, 1925' (AIEiAK 6675/L.5801 – WAPŁ Ł-I 21/40), and it represents the homeless barrack in its quotidian. The author chose to photo-

graph one of the families. They are sat by a window. At the mid height of the window, a pipe runs across the entire length of the building. A pipe, which is nowhere to be found in previous photographs, may be carrying smoke from a stove located in a corner of the building. A somewhat thick rope extends underneath the pipe. The rope was used to hang fabric curtains, which is best documented by the following photograph (AIEiAK 6670/L.5796 – WAPŁ 21/333). The curtains were used as partitions, both in between the beds and along the aisle, which created something of a cubicle. The front curtain has been raised for a photograph to be taken. The photographer takes a long shot of a single cubicle. The picture represents the residents, who instead of bunks use their own beds and other furnishings. The people are sitting behind a table lined with a tablecloth. Extending in between the windows, the wall behind them features three paintings and an overhanging clock. The window in their cubicle has been covered with net curtains. They are suspended from a string, which extends in the mid height of the window and is tied to a nail in the wall. Through the side curtain, a young man is peeping into his neighbours' cubicle. The second photograph in the series 'The interior of the barracks for homeless working families, 1925' (item no. AIEiAK 66780/L.5796 – WAPŁ 21/33) provides a long shot of an already inhabited interior. It reveals curtain partitions in more detail. The curtains are suspended from one or several ropes, as mentioned previously. The ropes are tied around wooden posts, which stand every few metres to support the ceiling, or around nails sticking out from the posts.

The two following photographs depict the interior of the night shelter for homeless women in Łódź at 62 Główna St. The location is indicated by their title. Both bear the same date as the previous photographs, that is, 1925 (first: AIEiAK 6676/L.5802 – WAPŁ Ł-I 21/48; second: AIEiAK 66/76/L.5798 – WAPŁ Ł 21/30). The interiors featured in the photographs were arranged in different ways than those for homeless families. Women inhabited a common space with no partitions visible. It is likely that the photographs reveal two different interiors, with posts visible in one (AIEiAK 676/L.5802) and absent in the other (AIEiAK 6672/L.5798). The presence of children or the lack thereof in the two photographs seems to suggest that they represent two different groups of women in different rooms or different buildings. Children are featured only in AIEiAK 6672/L.5798. The rooms, being intended for women, feature only few furnishings other than bunks or beds. At first glance, the room for single mothers seems to be better furnished. Nails or hooks must have been driven into the walls, a mesh of strings suspended in between. Clothing is suspended from the strings. Suspended high on the wall looms an oil lamp, a bed visible underneath. Other furnishings include an overhanging clock, a stove (suggested by the pipe), and a picture. In the background, a piece of furniture (?) covered with a throw (?) can be seen next to a stove in the corner. One of the beds is lined with a lace bedspread.

This type of spatial arrangement is typical of how night shelters and doss houses were furnished in previous times. Evidence can be found in newspaper prints from the 19th century and older. An illustration from 1870 represents an interior in one of Warsaw's poor houses. Human figures lie on beds on the floor, other people sit or recline on benches, while some others lean against a table or higher bench, probably sleeping (see Mazur 1999: 66). Another print from the same year shows tea time for the poor at one of Warsaw's doss houses, with the scene set in a room that served as a waiting room, day room and dining room. The only organizing element in the picture is a line of people queuing to a table at the back of the room. The table is laden with tea utensils. Other people (mainly women), who have already had their tea or are about to, are sitting tightly on one of the benches, while others are standing alone or in huddled groups (see Mazur 1999: 67). Another print comes from 1897: a photograph representing a bedroom interior at the Warsaw Charitable Society doss house for homeless women. A large room is lined with three rows of uniformly made beds. With no residents inside, the room looks tidy and abandoned (Mazur 1999: 119).

Later, attempts were made in Łódź in 1986 to revive the idea promoted by St Brother Albert's Aid Society to support homeless individuals. A local group of activists established a Łódź branch of the Society and applied to the local authorities for registration. The application was denied twice, despite an appeal to a higher authority. Their endeavours came to a successful end only after 1989. Currently, St Brother Albert's Aid Society runs one shelter for women and children and three shelters for men. Initially, the women's institution was launched in 1991. One shelter for men was established in 1994, another one in 1999, and a centre with move-on flats in the years to follow. In the autumn and winter season, the Society also runs a day room in the city centre. The day room operates from 8 am to 4 pm, when the night shelters are closed. The City of Łódź also runs the Municipal Homeless Shelter for Women. The institution was established in 1991 under a resolution by the Łódź City Council. Launched in 1992, the municipal shelter is housed in a former nursery building, which was readjusted to serve the needs of fifty women and children.[10] The institution offers typical sleeping facilities for 27 people (the night shelter for women has an entrance separated from the rest of the shelter). Other groups, including associations and foundations or parish, monastery, and church groups (Caritas, Missionaries of Charity, Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God, prayer groups at parishes and religious groups across the city, as well as Catholic and various Protestant believers), usually serve meals and offer various form of religious and voluntary service, and they provide medical aid on

[10] The everyday reality of the institution eleven months into its service was described by Pisarska (1993).

rare occasions. Additionally, Caritas has been running a day room (open several hours a day on working days) since 2016. The Caritas facility fills in a slot between the morning closing and afternoon opening of the night shelter operated by St Brother Albert's Aid Society.

3.2. Contemporary Institutions from Within

This section elaborates on the notes and photographs recording my research visits at two selected institutions that provide welfare services on a 24-hour basis. One facility offers move-on flats for homeless men, the other operates as a night shelter and direct access hostel for women. They provide therapy intended as an extended process of tackling exclusion such as homelessness. I spoke to the residents of both institutions and their staff. I had been collecting research material since 2009. Apart from my notes and personal observations, I also made conclusions based on informal conversations. The conversations were made with various people working or residing at the two establishments.

The initial identity I was attributed with in the research was that of an outsider. My personal insights may be defined as direct non-participant observations, which is a regular procedure in conducting research in organizations and on organizations (Ciesielska, Wolapik Boström, Öhlander 2012: 53). An outsider has a strictly defined role in research, i.e., they are not 'disguised' as informers and do not assimilate with the group. That said, they do take part in the life of a place, group, and its individual members, and as deeply as possible. At times they may successfully merge with the surrounding environment. They are like a fly on the wall, as it were. Insiders in turn conduct direct participant observations: they share life with the participants, explore their customs and behaviours, and also adopt them to a certain degree (at least throughout the research, or when dealing with their own identification group).

Most of the time, I performed non-participant observations. However, my role and conduct as a researcher went much beyond what one would call an outsider. I came from the outside: I was neither a resident nor a member of staff. My ideas and action points were often different from those of the insiders. They were sometimes accepted and sometimes refused by the residents and the staff. Both groups would make a shared decision in each case. My goal (as part of the research and voluntary work) was open for discussion, negotiation, and even modification. I took stock of the suggestions, rationales, and refusals from both groups. However, I did not have to abide by the rules for professional staff, and I did not participate in formalities typical of the welfare system. That said, I had to join in the formalities to act and be tolerated at both establishments. For this reason, I may have been regarded as a member of staff both by the staff and the residents. Conversations with the staff are some kind of evidence that they treated me like their colleague.

Most of the time they would share with me or in my presence the opinions and stories about challenges in working with the 'clients'; however, without sharing the details of therapy or personal stories. Some members of staff were convinced I knew what their job was all about. However, they phrased it in such a way that it was difficult to pick up their clues. They would hint at something: 'you know', 'now you realize', 'you've seen/heard/witnessed/met someone yourself', which they did to tell a story, express emotions, or refer to a particular person. This type of communication was a visible sign that I managed to become an insider for some staff members, albeit without losing the properties of an outsider.

The residents were more likely to treat me like staff. I may have looked similar to staff when I came up with an agenda for meetings and activities (including babysitting). At times, they would partially treat me as an insider; in other words, I was not part of the group, but I was made privy to their life because the interpersonal dynamic they shared with me was different than the one they had with the staff. The residents shared with me a variety of insights on their own lives and that of the establishment. They complained about the staff, neighbours, or room-mates, and some of them even tried to draw me into their fights.

I was partially subject to the rules of the institutions. Essentially, I had to fit in with their timetable. I had to negotiate the time of my visits and activities with that of other activities that the residents were obliged to perform by the staff, were willing to perform on their own, or had to perform, as well as the activities of the staff. I enjoyed more freedom than the residents and performed different activities than the staff. Above all, it was not my job to monitor the residents, which the staff were obliged to do by the house rules.

Depending on the context, I manoeuvred between two roles: that of an insider and that of an outsider. The tactic allowed me to collect the 'best possible' data (Ciesielska et al. 2012: 47). However, the quality of the data is not merely determined by a particular technique, but by 'the degree of participation' (Ciesielska et al. 2012: 47) that a particular person may achieve in particular circumstances. My observations may render an insider's perspective on the machinery of welfare centres.

Most of these establishments resort to surveillance and discipline. This policy is reflected in time and space management affecting the residents. The bodies of the residents and the proxemic territories that are treated as private or buffer zones serve as the fields for discipline and corrective procedures to take hold (Schmidt 2009: 93). As such they may be treated as the extensions of the body. The body is an important object of self-care and the care of others. It is measured with somewhat peculiar parameters. They fit in with the system of values prevalent at welfare institutions (see Shusterman 2008, especially Chapter 1: Somaesthetics and Care of the Self: The Case of Foucault). The body is an 'object' in that it embodies the process of change which involves the residents of an institution. The goal of their

metamorphosis is to leave homelessness and work the problem through. Accordingly, the institutions teach their residents to perform dwelling practices, or foster 'feeling at home'. This may be subject to internal regulations that define the nature and rhythm of daily existence. The rules may stipulate in more detail what it means to 'feel at home'. The institutions are not strictly speaking homes. That said, they witness a variety of activities that recreate the domestic *decorum*, as well as emotions, relationships, and spaces (e.g. during Christmas, when decorations are created both by the staff and the residents to create a festive and homely atmosphere).

The activities regulated by the institutional framework affect kinaesthetic experience. The residents of the institutions negotiate their kinaesthetic and physical abilities with the requirements of the institutions. The requirements regulate what must be done, how fast, and with what tools and utensils (especially cleaning). The tasks are performed with the body. By learning particular behaviours, individuals incorporate the rules. Residents in their corporeality are almost always (except for sleep) engaged in a quasi-dwelling process that unravels at the institutions. Accordingly, they meet their obligations, such as submission, self-correction, and self-discipline. These are considered synonymous with social maturity and a sign that the residents are becoming increasingly self-reliant. Household activity at the institutions may be described as a form of dwelling. By performing household activities, individuals create their own living spaces that imitate homes and draw upon the idea of domesticity, or homelikeness, as it were. However, an institution only being a semblance of home, their living spaces essentially serve only their basic physiological needs.

Broadly speaking, this belongs in the area of proxemics, a branch of research concerned with territories, space management and organization, and distances. Distances may be considered from two angles: by those who demarcate and those who violate them. This has particular implications, especially in places as cramped and confined as direct access hostels (see Hall 1997, Knapp, Hall 2000, Schmidt 2012).

The course of my observations was adjusted to the local rhythm. This allowed me to collect 'direct sensations' (Ciesielska et al. 2012: 50). Informal conversations with the staff and residents were concerned with the 'here and now'. I used them to find out more about the goals of particular activities (the findings have been incorporated into the book). The value attached to bodily, spatial, and symbolic practices at the institutions is very different from that attributed to similar pursuits at home, notwithstanding the fact that they all perform basic functions, e.g. relieving hunger. Similarly, institutional and domestic environments attach different values to washing and laundry, as well as other hygienic practices, including cleaning, spending time outdoors, leisure and self-care.

The behaviours, activities and attitudes of the residents are very much shaped by the requirements of the institutions. The same applies to the activities that are

ostensibly concerned only with physiology. Shusterman argues that people are equipped with 'somatic consciousness', namely a type of experience in which the body figures as both the subject and object of an experience. The body in the world experiences itself by transcending the physiological aspects of its material existence, i.e., being innervated tissue. Shusterman proposes to treat bodies as living, feeling, sentient beings. His suggestion is intended to improve self-use, i.e. being present in the body and through the body (Shusterman 2008: 1). Shusterman highlights the importance of various bodily practices that were pursued in culture and across history, their task being to incorporate and internalize ideals, views, attitudes, and values. The experience of the body at homeless shelters, which only provides an imitation of home, produces a unique type of consciousness.

3.2.1. Order, Hygiene Regime, and Search for Intimacy

An overview of doss houses, night shelters, hospitals and contemporary institutions reveals they all share order and routine. These establishments followed a peculiar regime in the past, and they still do today.

Essentially, the rules I have observed during this study regulate hygiene, cleanliness, and organization standards. Until the 19th century, the West maintained 'rough equality between the classes' (Ashenburg 2008: 121). The Industrial Revolution brought an end to it. This gave rise to a disparity between the propertied class and workers or paupers in their cleanliness standards regarding the body, clothing, and living quarters. Katherine Ashenburg cites Somerset Maugham, who noted in 1922: 'the matutinal tub divides the classes more effectually than birth, wealth or education' (Ashenburg 2008: 123). Similar comments were made in France in the 19th century:

> Those who do not wash their hands will always hate those who wash their hands, and those who wash their hands will always despise those who do not wash their hands. You will never be able to bring them together, […] because there is one thing which cannot be overcome and that is disgust; because there is another thing that cannot be tolerated, and that is humiliation (Corbin 1986: 270).

Members of marginalized groups were particularly encouraged to maintain hygiene as a means of joining (or imitating, rather) the mainstream. In the US, for example, groups of socially emancipated African Americans acquiesced to the sanitary propaganda of the 1870s. Physical cleanliness was treated as a sign of progress and enlightenment. Booker T. Washington, a leader of freed American slaves and the most prominent African American of his time, preached 'self- reliance through "the gospel of the toothbrush."' He wrote that 'people would excuse us for our poverty, […] but that they would not excuse us for dirt' (Ashenburg 2008: 148).

The sanitization of the paupers was also intended to contain other risks, including immoral conduct and promiscuity, or the illness of the soul, not only the body.[11] The poor were expected to succeed with washing, but even in the 1930s the British establishment shared a belief that 'the lower classes smell' (Ashenburg 2008: 163). At the start of the 20th century, with the arrival of plumbing and fixtures, unwashed, odoriferous people, who had been a regular part of the urban landscape for a long time, were 'increasingly seen as obnoxious' (Ashenburg 2008: 156), while 'smelling someone's real body or allowing your own real body to be smelled has become an intrusion, a breach of a crucial boundary' (Ashenburg 2008: 183). Ashenburg also quotes Ivan Ilich (2008: 195), who argues that when the idea circulated that every man deserved a private space to sleep, defecate, and be buried, citizens began to seek buffer zones that protected them from the odour of others, while keeping their own smells to themselves. The emerging tactics of public health policy symbolically assimilated 'disinfection and submission', since '"the enormous fetidity of social catastrophes," whether riots or epidemics, gave rise to the notion that making the proletariat odorless would promote discipline and work among them' (Corbin 1986: 143). Deodorizing the poor, that is, getting rid of their smell (which was representative of their social status), was designed to obliterate the material evidence of poverty. Care of the self began to symbolize a higher status, also financially. Besides, keeping public spaces in order was intended to deter those individuals who were (and are) culturally seen as filthy. Corbin cites Chauvet, who noted the absence of prostitutes in 18th century Florence. He linked it to the fact that 'the streets were paved, roads strewn with odoriferous flowers, drains covered, rubbish contained behind screens' (Corbin 1986: 145). Neat and tidy, this newly emergent environment left no room for streetwalkers as embodiments of disorder, who as suggested by the etymology, were roaming the streets.

Illich revisited a provision from the Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen of 1789; this is very important one for homeless individuals, in that it stipulates that every man has a right to sleep in a separate bed (Ashenburg 2008: 121). The approach heralded a social revolution in thinking about an identity that gradually gained in self-reliance. That said, spatial and material provisions were

[11] Roughly at the same time in Congress Poland, physicians contributing to one of the specialist hygiene periodicals were also developing programmes intended to raise the awareness of the salubrious effect of cleanliness. They were not repressed by Russian authorities, which scrutinized social and medical experiments of this kind in search of solutions they could transfer to the Russian Empire. Their sanitization programme involved promoting some of the ideas developed in western Europe, including factory clinics, school surgeries, counselling services for expectant and young mothers, city gardens, playgrounds, public conveniences, sanatoriums, emergency ambulance services, out-patient clinics, and TB clinics for the poor. Their interests also included healthy lifestyle, namely, suitable diet, outdoor activities, sports, hygienic food storage, body and clothing hygiene, fighting alcoholism and prostitution (Płonka-Syroka 2012: 310).

necessary to secure the privacy and intimacy of individual and authentic existence. Thus, politics flagrantly encroached daily existence, including an individual's right to obtain and organize material means that were necessary for meeting basic human needs such as safety, sleep, leisure, and nutrition. Vindicated by the Declaration, a bed of one's own became a symbol of the revolution. Hitherto only the rich enjoyed the privilege of sleeping in a separate bed. It also symbolized 'civilized' life, which went beyond a mere struggle for survival that paupers were believed to be condemned to.

The precepts of hygienism, which underlies the hidden curriculum of an institution, are one thing its residents have to respect. The other is a stringent timetable that regulates the hours for residents to leave and return to the premises. The injunction applies if they fail to account for their absence or the length of absence is impossible to define. Periods of absenteeism are strictly defined at welfare institutions. This differs very little from the rules or regulations governing the life of mediaeval and 19th century doss houses. Modern 'paupers' are also expected to manage their own affairs, that is, make sure that their housing application is suitably processed for them to leave a hostel, night shelter, or move-on flat and settle in a flat of their own. They are held accountable for it by the staff. They attend intermittent meetings with the staff (usually a social worker and therapist) to share their achievements and next steps. The obligation to undergo administrative procedures and settle in a flat or straighten out other issues associated with family, work or health may be regarded as a modern transmutation of enforced labour for the poor or cleaning duties to be performed by each and every resident of an institution (save for ill and elderly individuals). If unemployed, they now pursue a full time job as they perform pilgrimages to offices, learn the regulations, and monitor their applications in courts and offices. They have to attend particular places at particular hours, and they seek to learn about new developments in their cases. If employed, their administrative proceedings become their second job.

The life of an institution is regulated by various activities performed at various times of day. This includes kitchen use, a lights-out period, and daytime activities, the general rule being not to disturb other residents. Unemployed residents usually spend their time at an institution. They usually read, solve crossword puzzles, watch TV, cook meals, sometimes speak to each other, smoke cigarettes, do shopping, run errands, and spend time outdoors on their own or with their intimates. Each room has a TV (some of them owned by residents). Some of the residents also have computers, especially mothers with preschool and school children; some other use mobile phones or smart phones, etc.

The rules also regulate the range and dynamic of children's play at the premises. Children are allowed to play only when supervised by adults, that is, their mothers or persons authorized by their mothers. Children are allowed to play in their rooms, a common area, and a lawn in front of an institution.

The times and frequency of visits are also regulated. The women's shelter admits visitors twice a week in the afternoon upon signing a visitor register. Visiting times are not strictly determined at the establishment for men. Visitors (both genders, adults and children) are received at various times; however, the lights-out period must be respected and there is no tradition of putting up visitors for the night.[12]

Drinking alcohol at the premises or returning intoxicated is strictly prohibited under penalty of expulsion. Residents pursue their love life outside of an institution. The institutions involved in the study did not cater to couples (married or not).

The men's institution, which provided move-on or training flats (several flats in the building), offered most freedom and imposed least routine on the residents in planning their daily activities. Their dwellings were very much like private homes. Provided with a domestic environment, the residents were able to behave accordingly. This meant they could freely choose their lifestyle. However, common regulations also applied: move-on flats are not self-contained, and the residents used common areas such as bathrooms or kitchens. They also managed to preserve and cultivate privacy and intimacy. Thus, accommodated in twin or single rooms, men were secluded from the gaze of others in a manner relatively more effective than elsewhere. Approximately ten men lived in the building. Thus, the residents had their own daily routines and most of them followed their own individual rhythm. This was reflected in their appearance. For want of a better word, one might call it a pyjama-sweatpants style. Despite being a question of individual taste, the appearance was also regulated by the cultural and social regime governing a place that in many ways remained public. Men's rooms (and women's dorms, too, for that matter) were not exactly private. One could become close with people one shared a room with, and yet they still did remain strangers to one another. At the women's institution, female residents were not able to indulge in a more private dress code. That said, some ill and lonely individuals felt no embarrassment in sporting sweatpants or pyjamas precisely because they were ill or lonely.

Men were able to retain the intimate aspects of their lives in single rooms and their private space in twin rooms. This was reflected in their time management and the way they practised self-care. They enjoyed more freedom in choosing their activities, and they had more possibilities to extend their private buffer zones. They were able to do so because of their living space (i.e. private or shared with a roommate). They could furnish the rooms according to their needs and capabilities; they could also paint the walls a colour of their choice (they paid for materials on their own).

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[12] At night shelters, no visiting regulations apply, their residents leaving the premises for the day. Unless they are ill, they spend more than ten hours pursuing activities (from socializing to work) entirely outside of an institution.

At the women's institution, intimacy was preserved rather than cultivated. The difference was determined by the number of people in the room: with fewer room-mates, it was easier to feel free and build a good rapport with them (best demonstrated by move-on flats for men). Residents of multi-bed dorms felt the presence of their room-mates and enforced intimacy more intensely, which resulted from mutual, if not universal, surveillance.

A particular living space may be felt as personal and intimate with the aesthetic choices made when organizing it in a room or its corner, including types of objects selected and their arrangement.

As mentioned previously, single rooms were available at the institutions, albeit only rarely. The establishments involved in the study offered poor living conditions. Women's institutions were least likely to offer single rooms. Only single mothers with several little children (three or more) had a chance to obtain one. One dorm was usually inhabited by two or three mothers and their children, which resulted in relatively cramped living conditions.

Multi-bed dorms allowed only limited buffer zones, which covered only a resident's personal corner. A corner of one's own, that is an individual place to sleep, was made up of a bed and its immediate surrounding. A place to sleep aside, the corner of one's own also covered a bedside table, floor, chair, and window sill, namely all types of furniture or its substitutes that served as rests, shelves, work surfaces, and real or nominal lockers for personal belongings. Residents strove to keep their personal belongings as closely as possible. Places such as these, including beds and their immediate surroundings, serve as primary proxemic territories. These elementary zones define the spatial, kinetic and behavioural arrangement of direct access hostels and night shelters (featured in the 19th century and inter-war photographs described in previous sections). They can be found in multi-bed dorms catering to three residents and more. These primary proxemic territories were more blurred and more akin to circles in twin rooms inhabited by adult males without children. At times, personal furnishings and objects such as TV sets and some kitchen utensils, were used interchangeably and personal boundaries became blurred, especially those with a lower emotional or intimate charge (as opposed to clothing, cosmetics, personal memorabilia, etc.).

The domestic effect may also be produced by the way one's corner has been managed or domesticated, regardless of its size and the number of room-mates. The spaces involved in the study became increasingly intimate and homelike if their residents were able to hide away from the prying eyes and presence of other people. They also sought to avoid the sight of others. Female residents, who lived in cramped and crowded conditions, would do so by having a cigarette in front of the building, but they rarely had a smoke entirely on their own. Men used a special smoking room at the entrance, and weather permitting they also smoked in the yard. Ostensibly, smoking may be regarded as a collective activity given its

repetitive nature and the fact that almost all smokers make identical gestures while smoking. In the end, it failed to promote bonding even if women went smoking in pairs or in larger groups living in particular rooms. A shared cigarette could be suggestive of some bonding.

Seeking privacy and taking refuge in it could also take other forms, e.g. saving crossword puzzles, rolling cigarettes, watching TV, and playing with a mobile phone. Symbolically, these activities produced a distancing effect, and their agents were excused from interaction. Such people seemed preoccupied. They were immersed in activities that attracted little interest from other people. This reduced verbal communication. Similarly, auditory participation in the life around them was reduced to a minimum. They felt excused from the need to follow their surroundings: they did not have to wonder whether to respond to what was happening around them. Those who wished to enter into contact with them felt as if they were a nuisance.

Where direct access hostels or shelters were less crowded and their residents had more space to develop their comfort zones, they chose to pursue their interpersonal relationships more freely. Given their architecture, establishments of this kind left little room for spatial and emotional well-being.

If one was unable to literally lock the door behind them, they locked themselves up from the inside. As a result, they isolated themselves from others: they avoided interaction, favoured silence, avoided chatting, shunned discussion, and observed one another closely. They only stole quick glances at others. The female residents of multi-bed dorms tried not stare at one another. Eye contact was maintained, albeit without nagging or penetrating stares, but intent gazing was avoided. Men demonstrated similar behaviour, but were less expressive. Move-on flats for men were increasingly less crowded, including common areas; this explains why men put much less effort than women in avoiding one another physically, visually and verbally.

The women's establishment offered living conditions that discouraged efforts towards building or preserving intimacy. Women rarely showed and verbalized their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. For this reason, one of the first impressions I had when I arrived was that of 'confinement'. The 'boundary lines' between people were almost tangible and demarcated by their bodies. Residents at multi-bed dorms moved as little as possible, which was not only due to the limited room available in their cramped and crowded living quarters. Kinaesthetic minimalism was seen in restricted gestures, movements, and activities, which were performed only when necessary. There was no kinetic noise. Women curtailed their expression: they left their personal belongings in common areas only if necessary, and these displays were only temporary.

Men did not seem to be embarrassed by each other's company and yet they sought shelter from one another. One reason for this was they wanted to preserve

autonomy while accommodating (if necessary) the needs and desires of other people. The fact they lived in single or twin rooms and rarely met one another (in the corridor, near the bathroom, and in the kitchen) is a likely reason why their movements and behaviours were less constrained, and they were less self-conscious and self-controlling. Additionally, as they lived in a smaller community, men found it easier to settle into a collective routine. Only some of the residents met one another in common areas at particular times of day, that is, only at those times when their daily routines overlapped. Arranged group meetings served as an opportunity to interact as a community. Living in crowded conditions and with children, women found it more difficult to add their own rhythm and routine to the interaction. They crossed paths more frequently than men, and things were more likely to escalate as they constantly watched and took heed of one another, submitting to the unwritten law of not 'disturbing one another'.

Accordingly, separation and the 'experience' of intimacy were rather short-lived and insignificant. 'Intimacy', as I understand it, denotes a deeply personal attitude whereby one remains authentic and true to oneself, which is also the case in one's inner life and when secluded (physically and emotionally) from others. The residents of the institutions were rarely graced with this kind feeling: a sense of breaking free from others and relaxing their stringent self-control levels. For them, intimacy might be symbolized by objects, smells, shapes, colours, in other words, anything and everything that shaped residential interiors and represented individual tastes, interests, memories, personal history and the present moment. That said, shelters left very little room for this. The men's establishment was more likely to reveal the signs of intimacy in their material form given its less crowded living conditions. The more intimate the space became, the more it invited individual presence. It lent itself easier to individual agency, which found symbolic extensions in memorabilia, books, ornaments, religious symbols, and other objects. They added to what may be called 'a place of one's own'.

Crowded and cramped quarters, such as the women's shelter, produced almost no manifestations of individual presence save for single objects. Soft toys were one such exception to the rule, and a remarkable one at that. Snuggies and toys, some of them gifts or memorabilia, were used for decoration. That said, rooms filled with soft toys seemed as if someone had tried to repress a sense of *horror vacui* haunting the place. Possessions were kept out of sight and were almost absent from multi-bed dorms and common areas. Few items achieved the status of individual symbols for particular persons, e.g. soft toys, lamps, or tea or coffee cups. The cups were kept at bedside tables. They marked a primary proxemic territory in multi-bed dorms for women.

Intimacy may also develop through gestures and behaviours that are free, genuine, and true. This is possible only when people feel they are not controlled by others or controlled only to a limited degree. As a result, the rules cease to be a nui-

sance and become a way to keep things in order. They are designed to preserve mutual distance and prevent the intrusion of private space.

In multi-bed dorms, inhabited by around six single women or three mothers with two children each, the rules applied to the same set of issues as in single or twin rooms inhabited by men. These included cleanliness, silence and respect for others. However, the rules worked differently in rooms with a larger number of residents than in move-on flats, where residents were separated in a physical sense, i.e., not with symbols but with walls and doors.

In multi-bed dorms, silence, cleanliness and limited movement were intended to respect general order and the well-being of other people. Given the number of people, the space was too limited to secure more comfortable conditions. The rules were intended to maintain order, so that some individualistically-minded residents did not disturb their neighbours. In a proxemic arrangement whereby spaces were more densely populated and served almost entirely as shared areas,[13] the rules were intended to preserve general order. In this case residents put more effort to adjust, which they did by deprecating themselves in the name of general harmony.

The requirements described above were almost non-existent in spaces that invited individual expression: such spatial arrangements allowed a greater presence of individual personality and privacy. Accordingly, the rules that required silence, cleanliness and respect for other people shifted in focus to preserving individual well-being. The rules favoured the individual, i.e., they maintained peace and protected residents as autonomous human beings. In this proxemic arrangement, rules served as protective measures against unwanted contact that might be potentially disturbing to the intimate world of individual residents.

The rules presented above demonstrate that the seemingly outdated component values of intimacy such as secrecy and confidentiality remain alive and well (as cited in Musiał, *cf.* Musiał 2014). Arguably, they tipped the scales towards greater domestic intimacy in homeless shelters. 'Domesticity', or homelikeness, in homeless institutions means individuals can isolate themselves from others and avoid unwanted sights, words, faces, things, smells and sounds to enjoy their solitude. This is not necessarily to indulge in secrecy, but to spend some time on their own. The notion of 'domesticity' meshes with the concept of home in that it denotes an inner experience of home, or the sensations and atmosphere produced by the space and place called 'home'. Essentially, 'domesticity' and 'home' are tautologies. 'Home' emerges through dwelling, or 'domesticating' a particular space. As 'domesticity' became distorted by their institution, some of the unemployed women I spoke to preferred to leave the direct access hostel for the day even if they did not have to run any errands. They refused to stay in a place where they felt constantly watched.

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[13] Only in toilets and bathrooms is it possible to secure real isolation.

As they vacated the building and spent time in public places, they sought anonymity rather than privacy. Even so, they were able to relax. Their need to leave (or 'break free', as they said) was just as pressing when the hostel began to empty on work days, with most of the residents going to work or pursuing other activities.

The residents of the night shelter had different desires. Some were applying for a bed in the shelter, as a way of seeking some sort of stability. Sick and elderly residents were particularly keen not to leave the shelter for the day.

The difference between hostel and shelter residents lay in what they could and could not do. No matter how much they despised their neighbours and interpersonal dynamics, the residents of the direct access hostel were able to leave the premises and return at will, but no later than 10 pm.[14] The residents of the night shelter had to vacate the premises for more than ten hours a day. What did they do throughout this time? When a homeless person enters an institution, they have to respect a number of requirements. The residents of the night shelter told me about some of the practices intended to meet these requirements. They were allowed to hand wash their clothes and were obliged to take care of their hygiene. Whenever necessary or possible, they were provided with new and clean clothing (extremely dirty or tattered items were taken away and burnt on arrival).

Good health permitting, the residents were required to leave the shelter at 8 am and return roughly ten hours later. As most of them were unemployed due to age, health, and addictions, they sought a place to spend their time during the day, which became particularly urgent in bad weather and the winter and autumn season. Most chose shopping malls to while away their time. They had to be particularly careful not to fall asleep in walking alleys and catering areas; security staff paid no interest to homeless individuals unless they fell asleep. They would do window shopping, walk along the arcades, sit somewhere, read, or solve crossword puzzles to while away the time in a place that was located near free toilets and guarded by security staff. In order not to attract security or shop assistants, women from the shelter tried not to enter the shops or supermarkets or overstay in places near catering areas. Most of them had no money to do shopping, and their presence may have provoked a disturbance, which would only lead to their being expelled not only from an individual shop but the mall in general.

On returning to the shelter, they first had cleaning duty before they could go about their business. Their names on a roster, they were obliged to clean and tidy up common areas. A similar procedure applied in the direct access hostel. They

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[14] One may elucidate on the theme (mentioned previously) as follows: in order to leave the hostel for a day or longer, residents need to obtain a pass from staff, specify the reason, and provide the date and hour of their return. Most of the residents use their passes at weekends and holidays. Extended periods of truancy are considered a breach of the regulations and may result in dismissal from an institution.

had a relatively shorter time and more limited space for arranging their private life than the residents of the hostel. Life at the night shelter went on in the company of others and before their very eyes. It is worth noting that the residents spent their days in public places, and when they returned they spent time among their neighbours.

Rules at the two institutions were enforced by the staff, and at the women's shelter, also by shelter prefects elected by the residents. The shelter prefects were responsible for arranging cleaning timetables and seeing that they were observed. They would also supervise cleanliness standards in common areas (kitchen, toilets, and corridors). In theory, they were also authorized to settle minor disputes. Compared to other residents, they were on relatively good terms with the managers and staff. They would also acquaint new residents with house rules. They observed a lights-out period and admonished mothers to keep an eye on their children, who were banned from running around and playing in the corridors.

Depending on the needs and usually on the initiative of the staff, general meetings were held. They were either for all residents or selected groups. Sometimes the initiative came from the residents who wanted to hold a larger meeting with the managers to discuss cases that were impossible to resolve though individual efforts. The meetings were usually held to discuss poor personal hygiene standards in the rooms, the conduct and treatment of children (both by mothers and other people), loud behaviour, swearing, poor respect for personal boundaries, and the use of personal belongings.

At the men's institution, community meetings were held every week, although the intervals may be longer due to the absence of the house manager, who supervised all the residents. Some of the residents of the move-on flats participated in anti-addiction programmes or were trying to obtain a flat of their own. That said, save for as appointments such as therapy, they managed most of their time on their own, i.e. they went to work, organized their leisure, performed cleaning duties in common areas including the bathroom, kitchen, corridors and yard; they also heated the building in the cold season. Arguments also happened, which is only natural if ten people share one kitchen and bathroom.

Community gatherings were held to discuss daily issues, develop shared solutions, arrange cleaning duty timetables, and simply get together; they were also intended as positive reinforcement, the majority of the residents being non-drinking alcoholics. For this reason, they attended individual and group therapy of various kinds (in-house and elsewhere).

The daily life of homeless shelters was very much akin to that of other collective living quarters such as dormitories. Their residents stayed there on a voluntary basis, and they were allowed to move out at will. If they decided to stay, they were obliged to follow the house rules, which were the same for all residents. In general, the residents abided by the rules concerning order, cleanliness, and organization.

The rules applied to primary personal space, namely, the body, i.e. those of the residents and their children. They also regulated private surroundings: beds and various personal belongings such as bedding (which was provided by the institution or the residents), clothing, cutlery, pots and pans, toiletries, cosmetics, books, electronic devices and documents. Newly-arrived residents, with few or no utensils or furnishings of their own, relied on temporary loans from the institution or other residents. They either returned them or paid in kind when they were finally able to purchase necessary cleaning and hygiene products and basic pots and pans. Residents received bedding on entering the institution, and they could later replace it with their own. However, furniture, fridges, and washing machines were provided. The residents' possessions most often included clothes, bedding, pots and pans, and consumer electronics such as TVs and computers.

Although the night shelters and direct access hostels were not free of charge, the charges did not represent more than a few percent of the residents' monthly income, while unemployed and financially challenged residents were relieved from payment. Each case was addressed individually. Men received more support, including the furnishings and materials necessary to settle in an institution. A different set of rules applied to the place they were staying (they were also provided with cleaning products and pots and pans). Over time they were allowed to furnish or paint the rooms according to their liking. Those with a regular job and who met the appropriate criteria were offered the chance to leave shared living quarters and move to rooms (ca. 200 PLN per month), which were located in a separate section of the building; these were almost like separate flats, albeit meeting the standards of social housing, with a shared bathroom and kitchen. These people had been allocated council housing and were intending to move on in the next couple of months after the renovation process was complete. This final stage of their residence at the establishment required a considerable degree of self-reliance, although some rules and regulations still had to be met; it offered not so much 'training' for self-reliance and 'homefulness', but a 'test' on their progress in a protected yet controlled environment.

The residents of the night shelter were offered the least space for their personal belongings. As cutlery, cups and plates were available only during breakfast and dinner, the residents produced their own using soda bottles or yoghurt pots, cream cheese cartons, and margarine tubs of various shapes and sizes; however all had resealable lids. If they vacated the shelter for a day or longer, they were allowed to leave their possessions inside. They stored food in a shared fridge. Personal belongings were discarded if someone failed to return to the shelter for an extended period of time (ca. one year; the residents and new arrivals were registered in a logbook). These belongings were mainly clothes stored in plastic bags.

Men and women at both establishments were offered donated clothing.

Cleanliness and order were strictly required in kitchens, bathrooms, corridors, day rooms and other common areas. The residents maintained order and eliminated any traces of their presence, mainly individual smells. The kitchen was virtually odourless when nobody cooked. Cooking smells disappeared quickly, as pots, plates and leftovers were cleaned, discarded or stored in a fridge. The residents of the women's shelter were unable to prepare complex or two-course meals: They would mostly cook soup, fry chops or sausages, boil potatoes, make scrambled eggs and cook pasta. I often heard their conversations as I helped them in the kitchen. They said they wanted to stay out of each other's way, and they were not exactly keen on cooking and dining as a result. The residents, individually or in groups, were able to get together and bake a cake only on rare occasions. On rare occasions, they cooked for a larger group of people, either on working days or at weekends. If they knew and trusted each other better, they would sometimes cook together or share meals, if someone fell ill, for example. However, this was very much dependent on the make-up of each group. Some residents were good cooks, while some other cared little for cooking and preferred convenience foods instead.

Interestingly, bodily hygiene appeared to be regarded as more important than food preparation and consumption, with hygiene practices being more prominent, despite their greater intimacy. Bodies were washed regularly, and clothes changed quickly. Access to bathrooms was also an important issue, with a single bathroom handling from several to several dozen people. Ablutions were performed according to an unwritten timetable: the residents had to negotiate their daily needs with the needs of others, and their timetable both with the timetables of other people and the daily or weekly timetable of the institution (e.g. cleaning duty). They also had to register to do the laundry (one washing machine serving the entire community). Unless agreed otherwise or allowed by the size of the common areas, the traces of their presence were thoroughly removed once they had completed their chores. Personal belongings, including kitchen utensils, were taken to the rooms and stored in lockers, shelves or cupboards.

Personal hygiene and spatial hygiene were a priority. Cleaning duty in common areas was held in the evenings. Cleaning was performed daily (except for public holidays, where discipline relaxed, but only for a day or two). Cleaning duty was the highest point of each day; it was performed at regular times in the evening, roughly from 7 or 8 pm until 9.30 pm. Additionally, personal hygiene was maintained by residents and their children whenever bathrooms, showers, toilets, washing basins or washing machines were available.

In my view, the resulting hygiene regime, regarding both personal space and the body, might be compared to the pre-industrial 'rough equality' mentioned in previous sections. The institutions involved in the study adhered to 'cleanliness equality', which plays a significant role in perpetuating the stereotypical notion of homelessness.

The institutions provided neither separate dining tables nor dining rooms. The residents would eat in their rooms, where they could use tables, coffee tables and desks. In the hallway of the women's institution there was a table on which residents used to roll cigarettes, solve crossword puzzles or read. They would sometimes eat at the table, but only rarely and on their own. Mothers with children had no such table (an empty space near the kitchen was occupied by drying racks). Men, too, had nowhere to eat. The night shelter offered a table and two coffee tables and chairs. This is where the residents had their evening meals, including those provided by the institution; they received two sandwiches each for breakfast and dinner and also ate whatever they could afford. Breakfasts were more organized, as almost all the healthy residents of the night shelter were obliged to vacate the building by the same time, i.e., around 8 am at the latest. Dinner was distributed in succession, with the first residents turning up at 7 pm. Dinner time came to an end with cleaning duty and the lights-out period.

It was a done thing at the shelter that hot water for coffee or tea or instant soups was provided by the janitors. The kitchen was located at the other side of the building, already occupied by the direct access hostel. As they waited for water together and shared it, as it were, they felt encouraged to exchange words and gestures: where and who to pour the water, say when, etc. They would ask each other to leave some water for somebody else. Consequently, their get-together at one table turned into a shared meal. They began to collaborate, share and cater to one another's needs. However, the atmosphere would vanish quickly, each person returning to their own business. They would leave the table one by one to make room for new people. At quiet moments, some residents played cards or dice at the table; they gambled for matches, at least officially.

As mentioned, cooking involved getting things dirty, spreading smells and performing activities that required a lot of utensils and a lot of space. Everything was cleaned immediately after the meal at both the men's and women's establishments.

Kitchen use provoked more disputes than bathroom use. Arguments arose about leaving products and pots and pans or (mis)using those of other people. Most of the men and women kept their kitchen stuff in the rooms, partly to keep it safe and partly to leave enough space in common areas such as kitchens for the utensils. Leaving shared utensils dirty, creating a general mess (scattered salt, spilled milk, crumbs, and stains), leaving a meal unattended, which either boiled away or burnt or failing to leave the hobs or pots available for other people to use tended to provoke gripes.

Bathroom and kitchen use involved a pecking order, as it were: those with a job had to leave earlier than others and were keen to obtain priority access; those who returned later were keen to obtain kitchen and bathroom access after cleaning duty. Daily cleaning duty was expected to finish before 10 pm to allow the persons on duty to wash and return to their rooms before the lights-out period (10 pm).

Although they respected both the written and unwritten rules of conduct, the residents practised their newly acquired habits on a daily basis. The habits were instilled to maintain order. Habits are actions that help individuals to fully incarnate various cultural dispositions, i.e. realize them through their bodies. They may be conscious or unconscious. They involve a particular space, object, activity or person. They are a quintessential part of daily life. According to Jewdokimow, who draws upon Edensor (2002) and Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk (2004), habits are not equivalent of the automation of the agents. Habits must not be treated as irreflexive even if they are unconscious. The quotidian is labile, as it is immersed in a particular framework. The performance of a repetitive, and hence trivial, action is nonetheless unique. Habitual actions may be treated as responses to a particular context, its content changing and boundaries shifting. These transformations do not need to be large, as the quotidian, e.g. according to Edensor, partakes neither in state nor entity. The quotidian is a process and becoming (as cited in Jewdokimow 2011: 47). Transformation affects individuals who strive to understand their environment and meet their needs accordingly. Individuals may act as they always do or they may act differently. One mode of action or the other may be selected based on the unconscious analysis of the factors that promote one type of practice or the other. This approach is in accordance with Kaufmann (2001), who argues that individuals respond when exposed to stimuli which also affect the body. Stimuli arise through an interaction with images and objects that fill and shape one's environment. The emerging factors organize individual thoughts, actions and perceptions. They form transient networks, and their functioning remains largely unknown to most individuals. Actions are thus performed in an intuitive manner, especially when individuals follow their daily habits, and this is also the case in a domestic environment. According to Jewdokimow, domestic habits are developed for practical reasons. Kaufmann indicates that habits may become a subject of reflection when they undergo metamorphosis, e.g., when unforeseeable circumstances occur or individuals make attempts at changing the routine course of their daily life. This is exemplified by domesticity, or homelikeness. One catalyst of change is when individuals leave their place of residence or residents change their housing needs. (Jewdokimow 2011: 71–72).

Shared living quarters (Jewdokimow studied houses inhabited by immigrants; see Jewdokimow 2011) encourage reflection on individual habits that emerge in an interaction with other people and their habits. Increased reflexivity shows through discussions and individual thoughts on fellow residents and their behaviours. Individual behaviours serve as mirror reflections of one another. That said, reflexivity, especially the sense that various habits may be incompatible, makes it more difficult for the residents to develop or adjust to a shared quotidian. Total institutions such as direct access hostels or night shelters developed a quotidian that allows only little individual presence. By default, welfare institutions left no room

for celebrating individual habits. They operated as spatial social projects and pursue their 'hidden agenda'.

That said, institutions were very much akin to individual homes, as they both performed a socializing function whereby residents both socialize others and are socialized by them. This dual role was played by parents raising children in a communal home: by providing an upbringing, they transferred and sustained ideas they had previously obtained in their individual home environments. Mothers with children at welfare institutions followed a similar mode: they provided an upbringing according to what they chose (most often unwittingly) as the best practice for their children (that is, the best they knew). At the same time, they were exposed to both overt and covert institutional practices, which aimed at exerting a 'correctional' influence as part of the activities performed at the institutions. Women were exposed to regulations, formal and informal appraisals, and feedback from both staff and other residents. All of these verbal and non-verbal messages concerned their life, choices, characteristic traits, the past and future, and their idea of 'home', which symbolized normalcy, health, regularity, and a happy life of theirs and their children. Homeless men were exposed to a similar phenomenon.

Habits are instilled at home or the imitations thereof. The institutions I have studied treated habits as sets of behaviours which (in line with the enforced ideology of care) their residents used to become fully responsible individuals in a culture, namely, its institutionalized universe (Berger, Luckmann 1991). Berger and Luckmann argue that what we call therapy serves as machinery that perpetuates a coherent vision of social reality. It is sometimes coupled with 'nihilation' (Berger, Luckmann 1991: 130–134). 'Therapy' makes potential 'deviants' stay within a community. In order to do so, it offers a wide array of practices (ranging from shamanistic rituals to various schools of psychology). All these practices are designed to discipline individuals who for one reason or another fail to share in the socially acceptable concept of reality and define it on their own. Consequently, they are banished from the community. 'Therapy' is intended to keep them under control. The technique it uses delves into the underlying causes of their 'pathology' and develops a theory to suggest various remedial measures against it. This involves a familiarity with marginalized individuals, which only helps to discipline them. 'Deviants' are brought to specially designed locations and exposed to suitably selected practices. Thus, 'therapy' serves as a correctional measure that nonetheless legitimizes the peripheries. By contract, 'nihilation' denies 'positive legitamation' to those who do not fit into that universe (Berger, Luckmann 1991: 131–132). 'Nihilation' produces a 'negative ontological status'. The nihilating application is used to address 'anormal' cases with conceptual machinery from within the universe. Thus, the language of 'pathology' finds an interpretation in prevailing discourse: the language of the mainstream invalidates 'deviant' discourse by revealing its misconceptions.

Berger and Luckmann furnish a better understanding of the processes that shape the habits of residents at welfare institutions. The system draws upon the conceptualizations of domesticity that are suggestive of a 'real' home. Accordingly, it follows a hidden curriculum to remedy and instil socially acceptable behaviours, and it also teaches and penalizes not only for deviations, but also for the lack of progress (by means of symbolic violence, which is presented in more detail below). Immersed in the system, residents of institutions verify, as it were, often unwittingly, their interpretative capabilities: who they are, what they do, and how. As a result, both the residents and the staff find it easier to define (likewise, most often unwittingly) if the methods they use are still working or whether they should be adjusted to newly emerging circumstances. Life at institutions, predictable as it is, may be derailed by sudden and unexpected developments.

3.2.2. Panopticism in a Total Institution

The spheres believed to be greatly charged with intimacy (such as the body or primary proxemic territories) often lost their defining characteristics in the shelters. They were exposed to the gaze of others, namely, the staff and other residents. People other than regular residents, especially the staff, could access or demand access to individual rooms to see how the residents managed, if they kept the space clean and tidy, etc.

Both staff and residents strove to keep things, people (themselves included), and space in check, and they maintained order understood as cleanliness, hygiene regime, and being neat. That said, these spaces were heterogeneous, which produced a lot of commotion (Para 2012: 29). They were not designed solely for private use, staff being allowed to enter the premises. At the women's institution, at least one member of staff was present 24/7 (a carer or janitor), and they were authorized to enter the rooms to keep watch of cleanliness standards, remind of the lights-out period, and take action if necessary. A full-time psychologist 'paid a visit' to the residents, but she met them in her office. She did not carry out inspections the way janitors or carers did, who acted as guards or wardens when on duty.

At the men's institution, staff were present only eight hours a day, and students visited the premises to attend a variety of workshops. Similarly, staff could enter the rooms. Both groups were there to maintain order, which came to the fore whenever someone failed to meet the requirements. Joint action was taken, that is, both staff and residents tried to reason with a troublesome individual to abide by the rules. If their comments, pleas, and appeals were to no avail, the whole process might result in expulsion

Both institutions provided multi-purpose accommodation. The rooms witnessed a variety of overlapping activities. Residents in multi-bed dorms might be doing other things than their neighbours. Different people in a room could simul-

taneously eat, listen to the music or radio (with headphones on), watch TV (with sound on), do a manicure, tidying up, read, do laundry, text, be under the weather, take a nap, etc. The sheer variety of activities and the way they were carried out was striking: they ranged from brewing tea and doing dishes through eating in bed to yelling at children playing in the room.

Whatever happened was exposed to the gaze of others. Watching and being watched was a fact of life at both institutions. The shelters embodied the classical idea of the Panopticon, as described by Foucault (1995). He drew the idea from Bentham's architectural design of 1787, which was created to suit the needs of penitentiaries, doss houses, hospitals, and schools. The design was intended as a means of extending surveillance over their residents. The concept provided for inner and outer windows, the whole structure developed on a circular plan with a watchtower in the centre. Guards in the tower were able to peep through the windows into the rooms to monitor the inmates. In so doing, they would exercise control over the entire community. The inmates would have no secrets, constantly exposed to the gaze of others (as if on stage). Bentham argued that guards in the Panopticon should be invisible to the inmates. The latter, as they were unable to say if and when they were watched, should behave as if they were under constant surveillance. They would develop 'behavioural self-regulation' habits (Nowel-Śmigaj 2012: 27), or 'guard themselves against themselves' (Nowel-Śmigaj 2012: 27). Accordingly, those who watched brought the watched under their power.

Contemporary welfare facilities are no longer built based on Bentham's precepts, but the idea of power whereby the residents are exposed to the gaze of others is still present at their premises. This is accounted for by the necessity to provide aid, safety, and security.

Panopticism continues to exist formally and takes several manifestations. First, staff are authorized to inspect the rooms (also without prior invitation). Second, staff are encouraged to leave comments on the personal hygiene, cleanliness, and conduct of the residents. Staff have daily access to the comments of their colleagues.

Panopticism also continues to exist informally, and this is where it takes its more versatile and penetrating form. The gaze of power is more selective than that of the residents, who watch one another on a total, mutual, and daily basis. Power is on the lookout for breaches in the regulations, whereas neighbours watch to get to know one another. That said, informal watching may result in formal proceedings if one residents files a complaint against the other to the staff. Comments on somebody's conduct and behavioural patterns may also be made to a shelter prefect, other residents, a community, or directly to the managers of an institution.

Panopticism belongs in the machinery of (self)control that is typical of a system which Erving Goffman calls a total institution (Goffman 1961). He includes direct access hostels and night shelters in the first out five categories he designed.

He defines them as institutions 'established to care for persons felt to be both incapable and harmless' (Goffman 1961: 4).[15] 'A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable amount of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life' (Goffman, 1961: xxi). The totality of an institution may also be determined by its accessibility of the lack thereof. The first implication it brings is that of social isolation among the inmates of an institution: they are denied the possibility to fulfil their needs, develop their capacities, and enter interpersonal relationships of their choice. The second is that an enclosed life is symbolized by physical barriers and boundaries such as gates, bars, fences, etc., which deny access from without and enclose from within.

Given the context of homeless institutions, boundaries may also be enforced by porter's lodges, visitor registers, and administrative procedures, which I had to endure to enter their premises. Prior to conducting the research, I held conversations with the managers of the institutions, who were authorized to decide whether to let me in, notwithstanding the fact that it was up to the residents to either agree or refuse to participate in the study. My research visits had to be approved by officials at director level in city council departments or associations boards. My request provided an overview of my research goals and methodology, including an explanation and proviso that the dwellers of an institution would be respected in their right for privacy and refusal to take part in the study. The set of documents also featured a letter of reference from my supervisors, who requested a selected representative of an institution to provide me with assistance during the project. One-to-one meetings soon followed, first with staff working at the institutions and later with their residents.

Goffman points out that 'what is distinctive about total institutions is that each exhibits to an intense degree many items in this family of attributes' (Goffman 1961: 5). Although direct access hostels and night shelters or move-on flats, etc. may be defined as total institutions, they are far from being their prototypes. However, they exhibit the central feature of total institutions, namely, a breakdown of the barriers separating three basic spheres such as work, privacy (which Goffman equals with sleep), and play. According to Goffman, none of these aspects follows an enforced plan in their natural environment. They occur in different places with

[15] In the Polish literature on the subject, the theory of a total institution, together with panopticism and proxemics, was used in research projects on spaces in institutions such as nursing homes, prisons, correctional facilities and hospitals (see Borowski 2013a, 2013b, Chomczyński 2012, 2013a, 2013b, Dąbrowska 2012, Ferenc 2013, Nowakowski 2013, Schmidt 2009, Tarkowski 2008, Zbyrad 2012). I have not been able to find any depictions of former and contemporary homeless shelters, either based on Goffman's theory or other perspectives, including those of Masters, Declerck, Łojewska and Rodak (2011).

different people involved. The barriers separating these spheres are eliminated in total institutions. They are conducted in the same place and under the authority of staff. Everyone lives in the immediate company of others, all of whom are treated alike and required to do the same thing together. Activities are tightly scheduled, the whole sequence yielding a result imposed from above by a body of officials. In so doing, a total institution fulfils its aim (Goffman 1961: 6).

On entering an institution, one brings their own behavioural patterns, which allow for seeking alternative solutions and coping with a new situation in a system of enforced rules and regulations. Additionally, one important thing Goffman says about homeless institutions and a system for the prevention of social exclusion is that total institutions are not able:

> to substitute their own unique culture for something already formed. We deal with something more restricted than acculturation or assimilation. If cultural change does occur, it has to do, perhaps, with the removal of certain behaviour opportunities […] (highlighted by the author: I.B.K.) (Goffman 1961: 13).

Besides, if someone lives 'long enough' at an institution, they are exposed to disculturation processes in which they lose their previous social and cultural skills, customs, and habits. They may become completely cut off from new knowledge and new experiences. This may be more or less painful depending on the type of an institution. Arguably, it is most relevant for inmates and bedridden patients. On leaving an institution, people heavily affected by disculturation may find it temporarily impossible to fulfil their daily tasks. Goffman fails to provide an appreciable amount of time for the effect to take hold. As mentioned, he only says the period is long. I do not think this is an easy calculation to perform. Disculturation among homeless people is also determined by extra-institutional factors, including the cause of homelessness, its length, whether a homeless individual sleeps rough or uses shelter services, what type of shelter they use, how close and stringent their shelter is, etc. It is worth noting that homeless people stay at institutions for a longer period of time not because they are lazy, but because the local council and social housing systems are inept, offering an insufficient number of flats or taking ineffective measures to address the issue of mounting debt among council tenants. Accordingly, the number of people at risk of homelessness is on the rise.

The residents of direct access hostels and night shelters were reluctant to share their life stories with people who had never experienced homelessness. This topic has been covered in previous sections. Although they preferred not to speak about their homelessness, the condition must not be ignored, as the residents of the institutions were obliged to adjust their activities outside of the shelter to the regulations within. As a result, they were not fully responsible for the timing and nature of their activities. A similar rule applied to their bodies: they could have

been in possession of their bodies as an integral part of their selves, but it was institutions that indirectly came into charge of their bodies by teaching them suitable bodily habits. Goffman argues this may result in a violation of the self's boundaries (Goffman 1961: 48). He describes it as one of the possible forms of the self's mortification.

When I spoke about the body and private and common spaces in previous sections, my focus was on the validity of written and unwritten codes regulating hygiene, order, and tidiness. I am far from saying that these types of discipline are tantamount to powerful forms of oppression such as mortification. Keeping high cleanliness standards, which is one of the major rules at homeless shelters, belonged in the training scheme, as it were, for residents, who could face expulsion if they failed it. The goal of the training was to foster change. As the scheme involved the body and corporeality, it perpetuated biopower and constituted biopolitics in Foucault's understanding of the term (Dominiak 2012: 253). According to Foucault, biopolitics may be described as 'the attempt […] to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, race, etc.' (2008: 317). For Foucault, biopower and biopolitics provide measures and techniques for the machinery of power to extend control over individuals, including their biology. They serve as a means to subjugate the bodies, or their individual properties. The body is exposed to ideological valorization and training. Since biopolitics constitutes a set of ideas developed across history, biopower is its instrument. It furnishes techniques that turn the ideas of the body into a reality. Bodily discipline proves vital in the process, and as such it also shapes self-identity.[16]

Care of the self and keeping things in order symbolize the metamorphosis of the residents their carers so greatly desire (some of the residents, too, desired the metamorphosis). This can be expressed as follows: 'Start to take care of yourself, be preoccupied with yourself, look at yourself through the eyes of other people, be what other people want to see you, that is, a neat and good-looking individual despite your homelessness; think of your life as a mess you need to tidy up'. This is how I tend to interpret the underlying principle of behavioural training for residents of institutions. One important context in this respect is that of dirt and impurity. The two are often attributed to — if not identified with — the experience of homelessness. The implications of cleaning, laundry, and washing, that is, a hygiene regime in welfare centres for homeless individuals, go beyond rational concerns for hygiene in shelters and shared living quarters.

One manifestation of the hygiene regime in such centres is when people exchange ragged and dirty clothes with new items. This is a common phenomenon

[16] Foucault examined the subject in detail in his *Discipline and Punish* (1995).

across the system. The exchange somehow fits in with Goffman's account of stripping away personal belongings from individuals on their entering a total institution. As they are deprived of individual possessions and bodily characteristics such as clothing (underwear and shoes) or hair (by cutting or shaving), which represent an 'old' way of life, individuals are dispossessed of their self-identity. The circulation of things and corrective measures applied to the body on entering an institution may be described as gestures of exchange that serve as metaphorical manifestations of homeless life. This kind of existence occurs anywhere and nowhere in particular, at temporary shelter provided by an institution, which is neither home nor street. Institutions provide living spaces that are public and yet enclosed, and they allow no permanent belongings, which are either replaced or at risk of decay, loss, or theft, and as such are never truly personal. Subject to exchange, these possessions are nonetheless important and serve as equipment for life. The rotation process most often involves clothing, which is only natural. This is facilitated by frequent donations.

Residents at total institutions and their self-identity may also be interfered with in a more profound way. The process of teaching particular attitudes and gestures among residents of institutions (which is most striking in the army, penitentiaries, and convents or monasteries) changes their self-esteem and self-perception (Goffman 1961: 46). Self-esteem usually wanes in the process. Self-acceptance suffers when exposed to verbal and non-verbal assaults from other residents, which often happens at institutions of this kind (Goffman 1961: 48). I, too, have been made privy to complaints from some residents about the poor manners of the others. Both men and women spoke about discomfort they had to endure when sharing lodgings with people they barely knew and found difficult to communicate with. Staff tried to change composition in the rooms in case — despite endeavours to the contrary — petty squabbles, arguments, and disputes proved to be unavoidable. Reshuffles were sometimes difficult to make where only four multi-bed dorms (six-bed each) were available to residents of a particular kind, e.g. homeless women without children.

Homeless institutions are also faced with permeability, i.e., whether and how intra-institutional standards are affected by extra-institutional standards, and vice versa. Goffman argues that if the phenomenon does occur, it is suggestive of a tendency to play down differences between the worlds inside and outside of an institution. That said, direct access hostels and night shelters fail to shape the outer world and only perpetuate stereotypical attitudes to homelessness. Thus, homelessness is regarded as misery, and the burden of responsibility is transferred to homeless individuals. They are required to strive (more than previously or in general) towards self-improvement. One way to do this is by accepting personal responsibility. It is vital for welfare institutions that they make up for their insufficient acculturation levels and address the challenge of learned disculturation, a deficiency already

described in previous sections. These move-on practices are based on a premise inherent in the hidden curricula of these institutions, namely, that their clients are marked by a deficiency. As a remedy they are obliged to abide by the rules regulating various levels, issues, and categories.

Goffman also touches on institutional rituals. They prove helpful whenever opportunities arise to stage staff or resident displays either for insiders or visitors. The goal of such events and initiatives is to promote the positive image of an institution. A similar role may be fulfilled by pamphlets, newsletters, radio networks, special interest clubs, common rooms, or Christmas or Thanksgiving parties (Goffman 1961: 93 and following.). Nearly all of these forms except for pamphlets, the media, and special interest clubs are present at the institutions I have been able to research. That said, Christmas ceremonies were once suspended at one of the establishments (mentioned previously). However, Goffman suggests that the decision of an institution to abandon shared celebrations may be treated as its weakness. Festivities provide an opportunity for staff and residents to socialize, which adds to the coherence of an institution. The regime of institutional life relaxes, and 'staff are likely to play more than a supervisory role' (Goffman 1961: 108). These practices fit in with a Durkheimian analysis: a community powerfully split into two groups can hold itself together through these ceremonies (including those of institutional nature). According to Max Gluckman, also cited by Goffman, staff's toleration of play and the fact that they often initiate it themselves demonstrate the strength of an institution (Goffman 1961: 108). Playful ceremonies serve as a means of channelling rebellion, gripe, and skittishness towards staff and regulations. The fact that staff indulge in a brief spell of controlled weakness only shows their increased perceptiveness, as the temporary carnivalesque of an establishment governed by formal rules and regulations allows a discharge of negative emotions among the residents, which only makes them easier to manage later.

My goal was to describe key moments in the activities of the residents of the institutions involved in the study. In their activities they strove to cope, as it were, as dwellers in something that was only a semblance of home and yet aspired to provide shelter and a home-like environment. Their activities were governed by the underlying logic of institutions that might be described as spaces promoting social order based on a particular system of values. One such value was a belief in the possibility of 'social rehabilitation' among homeless individuals. In practice, this took shape as individual and group counselling. This was its formal side, which also included requirements stipulated by move-on contracts. The contracts were intended to facilitate homeless individuals in their efforts to obtain a flat and leave the institution. The informal side was best expressed by the belief in the power of social rehabilitation, which provided a structured timetable and space to foster a sense of self-agency in homeless individuals. The welfare system is based on the network of institutions that have their own order and 'stage-designed space'

(Franta 2004). The upkeep of these places is very much dependent on the hygiene regime (which governs both private and shared spaces).

The process whereby residents, their possessions, and their space were made and kept clean involves ceaseless household activity. Individuals kept hiding, folding, and tidying up their possessions in dorms, on themselves, around themselves, and in common areas such as kitchens and bathrooms. Household activity almost never stopped at the women's institution, which was particularly cramped and overpopulated. Activity of this kind proved to be less frequent at the establishment for men, who enjoyed much more freedom and lived in single or twin rooms.

The hygiene regime could be accounted for by the commonsensical concerns that were already expounded in previous sections. The regime would help to keep in check the possible risks of living in an institution, where a large number of people, some of them in poor health, share their living quarters. However, these reasonable explanations fail to provide a rationale for enforcing stringent cleanliness standards on residents of institutions. My intention was to show the implications of the regime, or what one might call its hidden curriculum, as described by Goffman and Foucault.

I contend that enforced labour, which used to be the daily reality of welfare centres, has transmogrified into cleanliness policies. The efforts to keep things neat and tidy symbolize home and domesticity; however, they are understood from a peculiar angle. This peculiar understanding is present in welfare services and their hidden curriculum. In their endeavours to obtain a dwelling of one's own, homeless individuals have to first slough off the stigma of homelessness and prove they have a 'right' to home. That is why they are encouraged to keep things clean and tidy on, in, and around themselves. This is the actual purpose of acculturation training and moving-on practices carried out at welfare centres.

3.2.3. Dwelling in an Institution

For researchers, the concept of home and a need for home are something universal yet debatable. The understanding of home and various meanings attached to it, including those prevalent at welfare institutions, are shaped by various cultural and social factors, which also determine the furnishings and physical substance of individual homes. This tangible aspect encompasses interpersonal dynamics, feelings, and things one can do at home, as well as who is culturally attributed the right or capacity to do so.

The cultural system defines boundaries for individuals, who are allowed a smaller or greater freedom of choice. Accordingly, they may be described as 'agents', not only 'actors' (or 'performers', that is, actors of a particular kind). They use shared social resources of various kinds to develop their life coping strategies. No undertaking of this kind occurs in a social vacuum. Behaviours and attitudes

are also accommodated to the goals of other people. 'The immersion in a system/culture' is a sufficient precondition for 'the occurrence of the actions and practices that are comparably similar' to those of other people living in the system (Jewdokimow 2011: 41). These processes do not develop as part of rational and pragmatic calculations, negotiations, or considerations, as the system fails to determine human behaviours, choices, and tactics. The system is flexible, and as such is subject to interpretation. Interpretation emerges through 'improvisations', or individual experiences. Individual choices and decisions may be treated as variants in an invariant. The diversity and similarity of experience are determined by the power of bonding that ties an individual to a system and the place he or she occupies within it. This constitutes an attitude that is very much like a sense of agency.[17]

The meanings attributed to actions and spaces are shared with others. This is based on an assumption that the concepts and beliefs which define principles, obligations, and ideas are shared by other members of society. Although individuals may be responsible for certain actions, these actions do not occur solely as a result of their decisions. Actions may be relational, referential, or relevant. They convey an attitude to the tangible world. The tangible aspect is suggested by the incarnation of practice, or its embodiment. With its substance, physicality, and spatiality, corporeality may be treated as a particular aspect of the tangible world. The body determines the course and meaning of social 'training' for various aspects and dimensions of life, but it is also moulded by it. Corporeality plays an active part in shaping the actions, which are manifested by the body, through the body, and in the body.

Welfare institutions strive to imitate homes. They use a variety of instruments, including body training, to instil particular habits in their residents, which is intended to facilitate their return to a social universe. The machinery it deploys is modelled on that developed by total institutions. These habits are expressive of the idea of home as a shelter and a place where one satisfies his or her needs. The idea is transferred onto the body and through the body with various practices aimed at tidying up and arranging the surrounding environment; these practices are to be followed by the residents and defined by regulations and unwritten laws. At welfare institutions, activities, attitudes, and behaviours are imposed by the existing organization, and they enter the daily repertoire of their residents. Individuals embody these activities, attitudes, and behaviours for some time (at least when they live there), thus complementing the cognitive and behavioural domestic structure they previously acquired.

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[17] This attitude, which is expressive of the active aspect of life, and even invested with a certain degree of agency, was expounded by Barker (2005), who was presented in Part I. The theory of self-agency was also developed by Bourdieu (see 1972), Giddens (see 1990, 1991) and Foucault (e.g. 1995). Similar ideas are expressed by the theories of inner containment and inner direction, which were propounded by Douglas (2005), Barth (2002), and de Certeau (2008).

The residents of the institutions act 'as if' they were at home, notwithstanding the fact that their sense of home does not derive only from their experiences, but also from the ideas imposed from without. That said, they partially succeed in domesticating the space at the institutions. They usually do so by arranging the space around them as their own. This may involve painting the rooms a particular colour, organizing things in a particular order, adding things of one's choice to the surrounding environment, developing interpersonal relationships in line with one's principles, and assigning particular functions to particular rooms according to one's needs. That said, behaviours of this kind are kept to a minimum at welfare institutions, and they usually involve one's body and immediate environment, but only in some areas and to a limited degree. The residents at the institutions are required to follow the idea of putting things in order. Organizing oneself, one's immediate environment, and extended surroundings serves as a metaphor of putting one's life in order. This may be tantamount to leaving homelessness, i.e., the gestures and practices shape attitudes that facilitate the process of entering one's 'homefulness'. Entering one's 'homefulness', which is practised at the institutions under their staff's tutelage, may mark either a return or the first contact with a home. What some residents treat as 'dwelling in a home' is sometimes disapproved of by other residents or the staff. Remedial measures are used as a result.

Getting used to a discipline dominated by putting things in order also means developing an ability to set oneself goals and prioritize them, as the underlying principle of the institutional imitations of 'homefulness' and 'homelikeness' is to reshape the life of their residents.

Building a home begins with a fundamental gesture (mentioned previously) that creates a space of one's own. An individual separates oneself from others and the rest of the world. This move establishes a centre inhabited by a dweller, or someone who takes over the space, i.e., uses it in a particular way. The division into the internal and the external occurs, or the familiar and the strange.[18]

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[18] In her memoir from the Warsaw Uprising, Zachwatowicz-Wajda shares intriguing observations on the tactics of survival deployed by the residents of Warsaw. They did various things to survive both physically and mentally. One useful thing they did was to develop their own living place, even if only temporary. According to Zachwatowicz-Wajda, it was their home: 'I saw people who lived in underground shelters during the Uprising. They would always try to carve up a space with a mattress or a pillow, build a partition with a suitcase, they would hang something […] separation was vital: an attempt to create a space of one's own' (Zachwatowicz-Wajda, Komorowska 2010: 6) (highlighted by the author: I.B.K.). A similar 'centripetal' move, both symbolically and behaviourally, was described by Masters in his account of a street protest. Protesters took to occupying a section of public space: 'Because we do not have a place of our own, nor will have for the next three days, we must invent one. I catch myself […] searching for a section of the pavement with which we might want to become familiar. We are looking among the concrete slabs for the outline of a home' (Masters 2005: 70) (highlighted by the author: I.B.K.).

Taking over the space as one's own, or using a gesture that turns the space into a dwelling, has an apotropaic and identity-fostering value. One can separate from their immediate environment by using a particular object, choosing a particular spatial arrangement, or adopting a particular poise. These and many other behaviours seem to say 'I am here'. However, they do not build a literal home, even though they are expressive of its meaning. When the place is taken over and the daily hustle and bustle of a household appears, it increasingly becomes a place of one's own and may transform into a home: a place that is organized and sustained, also by tidying up and putting things in order.

Institutions are not homes by nature, even though they serve as a substitute of one for many. Institutions are similar to 'real' dwellings in that they can also be domesticated to some extent. One of their goals is also to 'domesticate' the 'homeless'. Institutions oversee the process in which homeless people are getting used to 'homefulness' (learning a 'home'), or getting used to the 'world'. By promoting 'dwelling' activities in their residents, institutions try to impersonate real homes.

That said, 'hostels are nor right for most people', and 'street life is testimony to man's self-defeating powers of adaptation', since 'people get used to the outrage of the new circumstances — they give up trying to fight back' (Masters 2005: 45). For this reason, although some of the tactics used by the staff of these institutions may seem oppressive, the imitation of home-like gestures and behaviours they promote is intended to help some of the homeless people in the shelter to regain the sense of their selves and their bodies. Their bodies become a field for activity. Some homeless people may lose their sense of the body, which means they are out of touch with themselves. Declerck scrutinized the process in homeless people sleeping rough for many years. They would stop taking care of themselves when they lost their future and past time perspectives. They renounced their selves, namely, the body. They refused to accept health care. They were oblivious to bodily ailments, and they sought no assistance (Declerck 2004: 371).[19]

The objectification may also affect the residents of institutions, albeit through different manifestations. Their bodies do not belong only to themselves, and it is not only to reconnect with their selves that they seek to regain the sense of the body. They primarily have to learn how to define themselves. Their new self, including their corporal self, is projected by the order of the homeless shelter. As suggested by Declerck:

> the sad thing is […] that most of the people […] are unable to endure strict discipline in the shelter. Thus, most of the available solutions, given the balance between the benefits they get and the requirements they have to meet, hit either above or below their needs and capabilities (Declerck 2004: 417).

[19] The quotation based on the Polish translation (B.S.).

One key to provide suitable care is by adjusting the ways and means to the needs and capabilities of each individual. Their sense of agency must be part of the picture. It may be regained and revived provided homeless people rediscover their capacity for (self)reflection, which vanished when they lost touch with themselves. Homeless people experience it as a process, which was pointed out by Declerck.

The training they receive in the shelters and that I am trying to describe consists in teaching certain habits, including regularity, which ifs equivalent of having a permanent address. With the address, an individual is officially bound to a place. Not only does this impart credibility to an individual, but in a sense it also turns them into legitimate members of society. Without the address, an individual is in fact deprived of citizens' rights. Legal regulations in some countries grant more rights to those with a permanent address. Individuals with a permanent address and permanent abode have always been treated more favourably. Thus, 'the moral order has in effect been spatialized' (Morley 2000: 26). Residents of homeless shelters have usually no registered address of their own. The only way to prove they exist is by showing obedience to the 'moral order' imposed by an institution.

4. LIFE STORIES: THE EXPERIENCE OF 'HOMEFULNESS' AND HOMELESSNESS

The establishments were studied from 2009, each during a slightly different time period. I had a varying rapport with their residents, and I gradually discovered various contexts to their individual circumstances. My visits at the premises also opened up new possibilities for research in cultural anthropology. The study was conducted in cycles of varied length, with longer or shorter intervals in between.[1]

The residents were informed by the staff or myself about who I was, what my interests were and why I'd come; they were aware of the fact that these apparently private (informal) conversations might be later used as research material. It was by no means possible to expect or assume that the residents of night shelters and direct access hostels would be willing to speak openly to a researcher. Over the course of five years, I managed to exchange at least several sentences with more than one hundred individuals, which is not a large group considering the number of people assisted by the institutions (more than a thousand people in the high season, that is, winter). The establishments ran registers and log-books; however, I was denied access to this kind of data due to personal data protection requirements.

The residents are allowed to stay at an institution until they are allocated a flat. The rules stipulate they may be admitted for a year. However, it takes months or years to complete the administrative procedures that are necessary to

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[1] The study also involved my workshops, even though the book is not concerned with the subject. They, too, provided me with material for analysis, which was described in other publications (Kuźma 2013b, 2013c). I left the premises to formulate preliminary conclusions, but when running workshops I was present at an institution for a period of several consecutive weeks. I also attended scheduled conversations and ran observations. My technique was to be 'merely present'. Notes were subsequently made after each visit. The notes helped me to explore particular areas with particular individuals. My visits at the premises ranged from one visit in several weeks to several visits in a week, and they extended from one hour or an hour and a half to three or four hours and even longer. The intensity depended on who I met and how things went at the establishments. I had (and still do) relatively free access to their premises.

allocate a flat: the candidates must meet specific criteria and the local authorities must have suitable flats and funding for their renovation. The same applies to legal procedures, including awarding child support, divorce proceedings, awarding a medical retirement, repayment of debts, penal and civil proceedings (serving the sentence, probation, etc.). For this reason, the residents stay at institutions for a period much longer than stipulated in the provisions. The women I met spent six years there at the longest, while single mothers with little children were first in line to receive a flat (they obtain a subsidized flat 'already' after a year or a year and a half from their successful application). Men at shelters wait an average of eight years to obtain housing. Both male and female residents who are either elderly or infirm apply for accommodation in public nursing homes. Some residents move out on their own, which nonetheless happens only rarely. They do so if they have a partner with a flat of their own.

The majority of the residents were unwilling to speak and refused to do so. The residents of the night shelter felt particularly strongly about this. Eventually, I managed to encourage between ten and twenty people to give an interview on homelessness: eleven such profiles are presented in the book. The limited number is due to the fact that I sought the informed consent of the speakers, who were neither delegated or encouraged by the staff. I sought interviews from people who were 'ready for emotional commitment and had time to spare' (Stanisz 2011: 86). However, in some cases, support from local therapists and counsellors was necessary to understand my interviewees and their individual circumstances. They helped me to understand why some residents refused to engage in one type of interaction or another or why our conversation developed in a particular way. This very much depended on their individual frame of mind, advances in therapy and various development needs.

Conversations were designed as free and in-depth interviews, which were tape-recorded upon consent. My focus was on three dispositions exclusively: how they understood the meaning of home, what made them seek assistance from an institution, and what life at an institution was like.

Each meeting developed differently depending on how open the speakers were, how proficient they were as story-tellers, what their health was, and so on. We met for our conversations at the premises: in common areas, kitchens, dorms or private rooms – wherever there was space offering some seclusion and intimacy. I failed to touch on or delve deeper into some of the themes, even though I found them closely related to the issues I wanted to pursue. I did so whenever I felt the participants were uncomfortable to speak about them. Some of them were reluctant to examine their painful memories. One thing that remains unknown, however, is whether the issues they left out had occurred in previous conversations, e.g. with social workers. It is likely that these stories became stigmatized, as it were, as the participants had been made to speak about their painful or dramatic

circumstances to officials as part of official interviews. That is why some of the participants were unwilling to revisit certain issues. This hypothesis seems rather weak, however, and it is not the only one possible. As I saw different reactions and felt they might have concealed something, I failed to ask if the question was too difficult or too painful or if they had spoken about it previously and in what circumstances. I tried not to delve deeper into these issues, as I strove not to offend anyone. Now I know I might have explored the things they were trying to conceal and their reasons.

Speaking about challenges, including the people one speaks to and the means one employs to do so, belongs in the concept of social training for 'normalcy' which I have adopted and which is pursued by the existing welfare system. Some of the speakers might be described as 'professional life story-tellers', as they have participated repeatedly in self-analysis practices with various experts and have been trained for them.

Our conversations developed a dynamic based on mutual interaction. Throughout the meetings, I asked additional questions to explore the context, as well as the needs and desires of my interlocutors. As a result, our exchanges often developed into free conversations. My role was not of a mere listener, and the participants were also free to ask questions.

The method I adopted was to avoid any technique at all, just as I chose to be 'merely present' at the premises. My goal was not to produce a feeling that we took part in a therapeutic process, which some residents might be familiar with (that said, some of the residents behaved as if they had taken part in therapy; *cf.* Hryciuk 2008). I also wanted to avoid a feeling that we were completing a community interview, which is intended to diagnose participants and their social challenges. People who are offered various forms of welfare are often exposed to conversations of this kind. Our conversations were intended to be less controlled than they could have been had I followed more detailed guidelines or questions combined into a survey. That is why the interviews were later edited while preparing the interviews for publication. The way they have been arranged does not necessarily mirror the course of live conversations and their transcripts. The first reason is that I had to edit out my questions and contributions and numerous digressions that interspersed our conversations. The second reason was that since our conversations were rather loose in structure, they often revealed supplementary themes which developed from the primary theme (like Chinese boxes). The principle here was that the participants were guided with questions and problems to solve. This encouraged them to develop a wide array of supplementary associations and revisit memories I could relate to throughout the conversation. For this reason, I divided the interviews into smaller blocks, each devoted to a particular theme and provided with a title. They developed a particular context and elucidated on subsequent issues and circumstances.

Douglas argues that home is structured on rules and requirements.[2] She also points out that nostalgia for home often coincides with strivings to abandon it (Douglas 1991). The stories I have heard are suggestive of similar ideas. Idealized and stereotypical depictions of home as a family nest come to the fore in the stories. However, the cliché association of home as family is eroded by the reality my speakers know all too well. When they begin to reminisce on the past, it turns out that they often had, and had often lost, their families, suggesting that their positive notion of home is a culturally-induced phenomenon. The homes they speak about are revealed as places of exile, abandonment, rejection and violence. They either had to run away from home or were cast out. The theme often recurs in the interviews. The notion of home inherent in the stories is imbued with people and relationships.

Material possessions, too, often recur in the stories. Some of the speakers offer peculiar perceptions of things, which again may be explained by the fact that they had moved house numerous times, run away from home, shared quarters with other people or lived at various institutions. It is no wonder they attach little importance to material possessions. It is not impossible, however, that despite all these harsh experiences, when they finally settle in a flat of their own, their declared disregard for material objects may gradually disappear. This is because material possessions are a regular feature in the plans they make for the future and in the stories they share about the past.

It was pointed out above that most of the speakers had been in therapy (prior to or in parallel with the interviews) and had spoken to social workers about their personal circumstances. Thus, one might say they had been professionally trained to tell their life stories. The most important task they had been given while speaking to social workers was to discover an interest for change, survival and setting their goals. For this reason, the conversations we had revealed their high self-awareness. Several speakers went so far as to offer a summary of their lives and personal reviews (not the first time and not the last). As we spoke, they also 'envisioned' their plans and dreams, harnessing their self-awareness and the awareness of the processes they were and still are exposed to; this awareness is particularly striking in the way non-drinking alcoholics speak once they have completed therapy. The present study seems to corroborate Goffman's claim on increased self-concern among people who were exposed to total institutions (Goffman 1961: 66).

The terms used in the study include 'story', 'story-telling' (as an activity) and 'tale'. One term I am trying to avoid is 'narrative', as it implies approaches based on biographical or biography-inspired methodology. None of these methods and techniques were used in the study. I strove to make a conversation instead of an

[2] According to Douglas, this may explain why young people in the West rebel against the home.

interview. The reasons why these meetings were 'conversations' rather than 'interviews' and why they were so loose in structure were provided in the paragraphs above, describing types of verbal contact my speakers were already familiar with.

Our conversations touched on the events and happenings from their lives. They were trying to describe their experience by sharing life stories. One reservation must be made: 'a story from one's life', 'a tale from one's life', 'a story about life', 'a story about life events' are not the same thing as a research method known as 'life story'. The speakers used both the form and activity that might be called a narrative or story in the simplest understanding of the term, which denotes a verbal account of life experience, arranged according to some cultural precepts the speakers knew and were educated to follow. This was the only context in which terms such as 'story', 'tale' or 'life' were used in the study.

I started from the assumption that my task was not to provide a typology of the 'cases' to create an overview of homelessness and life at the shelters. Typologies belong in the logic of tidiness, which informs the hidden agenda of welfare centres. My goal was to avoid it.

As mentioned previously, some of the speakers were addicted to alcohol (mainly men): alcohol therapy, with its story-telling philosophy, affected the way they perceived their lives and shared stories about them. Other speakers were exposed to abuse, which also affected their lives and stories, including techniques they used to avoid sharing a story on a particular experience. For example, one person might be very cautious in her story (a young woman), while the other elaborated on particular situations and feelings and shared his own interpretations of the past (a man exposed to abuse from his previous partners).

The speakers varied in age and social status. The status was not erased by homelessness; it lingered and differentiated the speakers. This became all the more striking as I learnt more about them and their interpersonal dynamics. Pre-homeless life permeated and structured the life of the individuals going through a crisis of homelessness, which was reflected in their stories, attitudes to life, plans for the future and interpersonal dynamics.

This only corroborates the view that homelessness is not a life 'upside-down'. To the contrary, homeless individuals continue their 'previous' lives, the one they had prior to the crisis. Homelessness does not level anybody out, notwithstanding the fact that the welfare system unifies and typifies its clients. Homeless individuals experience their lives on their own, which takes fairly characteristic forms when living at institutions and in contact with their staff and other residents. The forms may be described as modes of adaptation (see Goffman 1961; Leufgen, Snow 2004). Some of these strategies were used by the homeless individuals I spoke to.

Goffman mentions four such modes of adaptation (1961: 60–63). The first mode is that of 'situational withdrawal'. Individuals reduce attention to their own life, and see this in a perspective exclusively of their own; they care little for other

people's problems. The process often occurs at homeless institutions. Their residents declare little to no interest in the affairs of other people. The second is that of the 'intransigent line', whereby individuals rebel, defy and negate the rules. The phenomenon almost never occurs at homeless institutions, which are not institutions of coerced residence. Those individuals who refuse to accept the rules, especially the abstinence rule, may leave an institution, and in fact some of them do. The 'intransigent line' may also take more benign forms, including complaining and passive resistance to the rules.

The third mode of adaptation is that of 'colonization', whereby individuals develop their perspective on the outside world and themselves based on the life inside of an institution. The world of an institution becomes the actual world: an environment that is secure, stable and attractive at times. The feedback from the staff regarding some of the female residents fits in with this context: they would describe the residents as 'lazy', i.e. reluctant to apply for their own flat, as they would have to leave an institution and change their lives. Apparently, they felt happy about their lives. However, the therapists pointed out that the 'colonizing' attitude might be driven by the anxiety of self-reliance. For some people, life outside of an institution implies a lack of support guaranteed by professional welfare institutions. This becomes particularly important for those struggling with an addiction.

The fourth mode is that of 'conversion'. The phenomenon occurs when residents adopt the line of an institution and begin to perform the role of a perfect inmate. This means they strive to leave an institution as quickly as possible. 'Converts' do not break the rules to be expelled; on the contrary, they stay at an institution on a voluntary basis. However, they do not feel at home there: they speak about it with more detachment and find it difficult to empathize with other people facing similar problems. They may display hostile attitudes to the welfare system and its officials. That said, they also make ideal 'clients', as they seek aid on their own. External motivation is not necessary: they have high inner motivation levels. 'Converts' believe that the system, which in principle is intended to help them, nonetheless thwarts change, as public offices only require that they submit more and more documents. Getting paperwork done takes time and so does waiting for a flat. Job or placement offers, which also bring a chance of self-reliance, are not likely to appear immediately. Although people who have high inner motivation levels for change are often frustrated with administrative requirements and red tape, they do cooperate with the system. The aim of welfare programmes is after all to teach 'clients' self-reliance. This very much fits in with the attitudes of the 'converts', who can also be found among homeless individuals.

Leufgen and Snow studied various activities of people going through homelessness (Leufgen, Snow 2004: 548–555). These included practical activities taken up in order to survive, which might also be called strategic solutions. They helped individuals to develop their self-concept and organize the knowledge they might

later use in their immediate environment. Leufgen and Snow have also defined identity-oriented strategies characteristic of the intangible aspects (mental and spiritual) of homeless life. They argue that this particular aspect of self-identification is based on three types of identity talk.

The first strategy is based on distancing or separating oneself from roles attributed to homeless people. This is best embodied by the following attitude: 'I can tell you about the homeless, but I am not one of them'. In doing so, they separate themselves from negative and stigmatizing stereotypes and self-stereotypes. The second strategy is the embracement of self and one's circumstances as a homeless person, which may even lead to adopting an expert role on homelessness. As a result, self-image overlaps with an image reflected in the eyes of other people. The embracement of oneself helps homeless individuals to develop a true image of themselves. This often motivates them to change their lives, e.g. they go to therapy (they are most likely to join Alcoholics Anonymous). The third strategy is fictive story-telling. Those who adopt it fabricate stories in which they recreate non-existent circumstances. They choose to do so as a way of protecting themselves, by negating their status of homeless individuals. The effect they achieve is very much like that of the first strategy, but they accomplish it in a different way.

Leufgen and Snow also point out that the modes of story-telling may affect the social life and interpersonal dynamics of homeless people. Homeless individuals are most likely to interact with people of a similar standing. Their interpersonal dynamics are defined by conditional trust, while their friendships are rare and often replaced by temporary alliances. In order to develop, friendship or emotional ties require intimacy, privacy and trust, which are difficult to find in the street, at random shelters or welfare institutions, Poverty and crisis do not foster solidarity or a sense of community with other people in similar or identical circumstances. Temporary alliances are quintessentially about the exchange of services, which also happen to foster mutual emotional support.

The accounts have been presented in an alternate manner: a woman's story is followed by a man's story, which is again followed by a woman's story, and so forth. In so doing, an attempt has been made at juxtaposing life stories prior to and during homelessness with the implications of gender for home and homelessness. I tend to agree with the view that the accounts are differentiated by the gender perspectives adopted by men and women respectively. Their gender roles affect the way they perform their social roles and experience reality as a whole: there is no ultimate role for a particular individual; they change depending on time, life stage and self-awareness levels. This also affects their attitudes to home. That said, the ways in which men and women experience 'homefulness' and homelessness differ only slightly in the present study. The understanding of 'home' revealed in their stories is similar and fairly coherent. 'Home' is quintessentially about tranquillity, family, love, community and being at ease. Arguably, their predominant idea of

home was shaped by the experience of homelessness. Homeless people tend to idealize home and thus perpetuate stereotypes, irrespective of their gender and individual levels of identification with their gender.

Additionally, each and every speaker offered a different understanding and experience of homelessness. They became homeless in different ways. They used different coping strategies and differed in their attitudes to institutions. Some of them were able to discern the hidden institutional agenda they were exposed to, and they differed in their responses to it. Men seem to have negated the system in a more pronounced way. That said, several women were also aware of institutional procedures and their ramifications. They also showed, in a manner I would say was more open than that used by the men, how they yielded to the requirements of the system and why, as they expected the cost of submission would be counterbalanced by its benefits.

Life stories serve as interpretations of reality and coping strategies (*cf*. Trzebiński 2001: 17–42). People share stories to make life meaningful and more organized; they express themselves, which means they examine themselves, their individual stories, and life in general. The story about life and oneself 'is not about spinning a yarn, but about functioning in society' (Burek 2013: 207):

> each and every story about oneself, true of not, is useful in that it serves an individual. However, with distortions and misrepresentations of facts, a story may go beyond mere story-telling and become a clue to understanding one's 'Self'. With self-stories, individuals have a chance to gain a more critical insight into themselves, select information they want to pass on to their listeners and disguise details they are uncomfortable to share. Telling a self-story may be a difficult experience as it brings back the traumatic memories of the past. That said, it also has a soothing effect and is a worthwhile pursuit (Burek 2013: 208).

'Marta'

She was in her thirties. I had known her for a year and a half before I asked her for an interview. She had no children, which is why she was accommodated in a group with other single women. We first spoke when she attended a meeting with a law student. The student was an active member of the 'Law Clinic', and she came to make a presentation on housing regulations. 'Marta' spoke about the housing issues she had. We would briefly speak whenever I visited her. She managed to get into training and later a placement programme. As she'd completed her placement and no job offer had come up, I saw her energy drop gradually every week. Initially, the prospect of training and employment had made her very enthusiastic. She was waiting to obtain a council flat, even though she was aware that as a childless person she would have to wait longer for a positive decision.

For 'Marta', home was the equivalent of

family. The way we were raised, family always came first for my mother. Father died when I was nine. [I was] with my sister. My sister understood very little. She didn't know him and wasn't attached to him.

[Home is] where your upbringing is.

My parents changed address very often. Eventually, they were offered a council flat. Our stop-over before we could move to better housing. My parents had a building society book and had a flat secured somewhere. When dad died […] mum lost her job. We had to pay 80 million. We had no one to rely on, mum was jobless […] we lost everything. And so we stayed at X. We lived in a tenement house. […] two flats […] combined into one. […] The deal was we lived in a private tenement managed by public administrators.

Entering homelessness:

Everything changed when mum died. […] she died in October. In November, my sister and I wanted to sort out our housing situation. Mum was the main tenant. We submitted an application to continue the lease. We never bot behind with the rent. We were waiting for the answer. The answer came after Christmas. I received a phone call. The heir to the property was found. We were told to leave the flat immediately. At first, we were told the owner had agreed to sign a contract provided that we paid a deposit, around five thousand *zloty*. Obviously, the rent went up. In mid-December we were called again. We were told nothing could be done. […]

My lawyer told me it couldn't be helped. We had no legal right to the property. All we could do was wait. […] The heir […] sold the tenement. They had the locks replaced, and they put the flat for sale. I lived there for some time, not too long, though, as the rent went up to 24 *zloty* per square metre. We had no legal title to the property. We had to pay 1,200 *zloty* for 48 square metres, the utilities included. Unfortunately, there was no way I could afford this […] things were getting nasty. I moved out. He offered me a round sum to leave. The money was in fact enough to pay a deposit and have a flat […] renovated. My sister stayed there [in their 'home' – I.B.K.]. He had the electricity cut off. The utility providers had no say on the issue. He had the water cut off. It was probably October last year. The situation became unbearable, and my sister decided to move out. She has been […] renting a flat since then. She has it rough. She lives with a partner. She's the main provider. I wonder how long she's gonna keep it like that.

I'm here because at some point […] I had no job to pay the rent. Unfortunately, […] I had to move out. I just didn't want to sponge off the owner. Be a freeloader and that. That's how I ended up here. My friend told me about the place. For her it was a stop-over before subsidized housing. Her situation was completely different, though. She got the flat very quickly. It took her only a week. She had been applying for […] the flat for some time. This only speeded up the process.

[The decision to turn up at the institution – I.B.K.] in fact it came […] suddenly. I simply came here one day. I spoke to the manager. The same day I came here. I still

kept my stuff in the flat. I left it on 20 December so as not to inconvenience the owner before Christmas. Some [things were left – I.B. K.] at my previous job, including a dinner set and bedding. I had to get rid of the furniture. [I don't keep things – I.B.K.] at my sister's. She wasn't allowed to move in with her stuff.

Stay at the institution:

[She entered the institution] on 22 June [2013 – I.B.K.]. Contrary to what you might expect, I'm fine [with the place – I.B.K.]. I have finally started to do something. There are moments [of breakdown – I.B.K.]; yesterday, for instance. The counsellor shook me up without my knowing it. I got embarrassed a little, my hair was messed up, still in my pyjamas. I felt embarrassed. The placement came to an end last month. There was no way I could get a job through the local employment office. It's not easy to find one. Today, the first steps have been taken.

I have no hopes for a subsidized flat. I know how long the girls have been waiting. They've been waiting for four years now. Some of them here, some other in other places; they came here to speed things up […]. There's no way I can stay here for four years. As soon as I get a job, me and two girls from my room are going to rent a flat. It's nice we can get along. We're going to wait there. Our situation here is not that great. Sadly, it's people who add to this.

I've changed my room […], people have changed. Some get drunk, some others get a flat. We have no say on who we're going to live with. You can [bear it], that's true. I'm fine where I am. I don't always see eye to eye with some of the women. I was really surprised how easy it was [to get used to the place – I.B.K.]. I got used to it so easily. I was really surprised.

I miss privacy […] a lot. There are moments of rebellion, but without conflict. I tend to avoid conflict. We can always settle things peacefully. At one point, the Welfare Office made us enter our residence address in the passes [used when leaving for the night or a longer period of time – I.B.K.]. Defiance came as a result […]; I don't speak about this outside of the premises.

Some [curfews] are good, for instance, a ban on being drunk or […] a lights-out period after 10 pm. We have internal regulations of some sort. Those who live upstairs have their own. Our section and the night shelter, too, have different regulations [she is accommodated in a section for women without children]. I sometimes wonder why I got used to them so easily. I've always been a contrarian. We're allowed to discuss [the regulations]. Some things are non-negotiable, though, for instance, cleanliness, personal hygiene and your surroundings.

Personal circumstances:

[…] I sometimes blab I'm going back home. It's usually among people who don't know where I live, for instance, the people from the placement have learnt. I have a sense, though, that I'm happy I have somewhere to return. You have to lie sometimes. I met a lot of nice people during placement. Great women. I wished I had told them. [She believes they would] pity [her] at first. I don't know what would come next. […]

I don't know if they would stigmatize me. I met really nice people during placement. There would be pity, surely. I don't know what would happen next.

Future:

[…] there's […] stress when you think about […] renting a flat. Obviously, there are three of us; we can make it together [she later explains who these three people are – I.B.K]. If the rent is too high, there's always someone to help. I wouldn't dare to rent a flat on my own. I can lose a job any time, and it's any time I can return here. Surely, I wouldn't rent a flat on my own. Unless I get a council flat, which is highly unlikely because you have to meet a lot of criteria. This is 720 *zloty*.[3] So, I wouldn't take in on me to rent a flat.

She made friends with two women she met at the hostel:

One of them have been here for more than a year, the other came one month after me. Not exactly a month. One in her sixties and the other in her forties. You can rely on both, that's for sure.

They support one another, which is unique:

[…] some people seem to be afraid. That's part of their experience. I don't understand this pattern: you're on friendly terms with someone, and you forget about it as soon as they close the door behind them. It makes me wonder, all this hatred, everything. Instead of turning this terrible experience into something positive. Only tension instead of learning.

On change:

I'd change a lot in my life. I was a spiteful and naughty child. I regret this a lot. I regret a lot of things. Previously, I had little confidence in myself. I have attended competence training and a placement programme. They helped me to realize I can actually do a good job […]. I tend to forget about this, just like yesterday. The training is only for the better. I'm a good driver. If you only want it and there's a possibility [you can change]. On the other hand, if I had stayed home, I would have never learnt about this, the projects and the placement. It's quite likely I would have never learnt.

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[3] A rate of income that when calculated per capita does not exceed 80% of the lowest old-age pension benefit in a single-person household (the figure and percentage are defined by the Łódź Municipality: §6 of the Resolution of the Łódź City Council of 6 March 2002 on the Rules Governing the Lease of Housing Resources of the Łódź Municipality, No. LXXV/1765/02, as cited in: Robaczyński, Kozińska, Wojtczak: 2006, http://wpia.uni.lodz.pl/klinika/Programy_Pliki/stol/Mieszkania%20Socjalne.pdf). The lowest guaranteed pension benefit was 799.89 *zloty* in 2012, and 844.45 *zloty* in 2014. This is gross income.

'Arkadiusz'

He was in his fifties. He had entered the welfare system three years before we met when he was admitted to one of the shelters. However, he never gave up his job. What comes to the fore in his account is the story about his job and professional skills, about his occupations, and the dreams about education. 'Arkadiusz' had relatively high professional skills and a fairly stable job. Several months after we met, his life took another turn as he was diagnosed with chronic illness. As a result, he ended up in hospital. After treatment he returned to the institution. Despite his illness, he never gave up hope for a flat of his own. He also returned to his job.

Home:

> Family home, life at its best. With the parents. When I was a child, […] because I left home quickly. I became independent when I was nineteen: after vocational school, a year before the military service. […] Life was different in those times. I had a job, and I had a career. I used to rent a flat on Lelewela Street, not so far from here, at Górna [one of the districts in Łódź].[4] I later had a flat on Lutomierska Street and on Klonowa Street. I lived there with my family: with a wife and a child. We moved to Drewnowska Street later on. Those were the days. I was with my family. Not everything went the way I wanted to. It had to finish like that. I just couldn't let the money I earned, while the other party didn't work at all, four people in the family, and one breadwinner, working my fingers to the bone, I just couldn't let this happen. There was never enough for her. I have to admit, though, that despite her addiction [she is an alcoholic – I.B.K.], she had enough reason and logic to take care of the children; they were neat, never hungry and had sandwiches at school. I can't say she didn't take care of the home. But she also took much care to find something to drink.

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[4] The city of Łódź comprises five major districts, *viz.* Śródmieście, Bałuty, Górna, Polesie and Widzew, which are divided into a number of smaller residential areas. All districts have areas which vary in their attractiveness and price to certain degrees, which is due to the housing conditions they offer, i.e. the quality of the facilities and their general upkeep. Some of the areas in Łódź (e.g. Śródmieście or Bałuty) still feature buildings typical of 19th century multi-family residential housing. However, with their legal status (heirs to their rightful pre-1939 owners, mostly Jews, are impossible to find) and Polish legal regulations, the buildings are condemned to gradual dilapidation. As a result, the market value and housing conditions they offer are poor. However, they are still in use. Their low quality makes them affordable to keep, which is why they are easily available to people with low rates of income or in poverty. Another type of housing in Łódź is that of high-rise prefabricated housing estates, which are typical of Eastern bloc countries. The streets, estates and neighbourhoods vary in reputation, which has a bearing on the way their residents are perceived by the rest of the city and the way they perceive themselves. This perpetuates a number of stereotypes regarding who typically resides in which areas in the city, which districts and estates and 'better' and 'worse,' and which may be considered suitable for particular types of people. The address serves as a social stigma, as it were. That said, the phenomenon is not that pronounced.

Other homes:

[Before he became] a fully homeless person, I lived with a lady friend for four years and lost my flat at the time. The flat was in arrears when I was still married. There was never enough money, but enough to buy vodka. My wife is such an alcoholic that she's forty-six, and she's had seizures for five or six years now [alcoholic epilepsy – I.B.K.]. We divorced because of her drinking problem. During divorce proceedings I learnt that the flat was in arrears of more than 20 thousand *zloty*. I was simply unable to pay off such debt. That's why I lost the flat.

[…] I had some suspicions previously. I kept begging her to do something about it. I wanted her to go to rehab, but she said she wasn't alcoholic, she wasn't drunk. I said: 'You're not drunk, but you are inebriated.' Our everyday reality. Arguments, debates. I once ran a business of my own. A thriving business […], a grocery and an accounting office. I employed a chartered accountant part-time. They earn between 2.5 and 4 thousand *zloty* part time. We handled between ten and twenty companies with my accountant. She did accounting for the staff, and I did remuneration and income tax. I did recordings within the accounts and VAT, she did social security contributions. […] I did income tax and VAT declarations, and she would only sign it, as she was the one certified, but the calculations were mine. And so we ran the business with my accountant, as well as the grocery. I employed a man and a woman at the grocery. The business wasn't bad, until some time, that is. As we divorced, I had to fold the business, sell everything and make a balance sheet. We divided the property, and the business came to an end.

[His former wife] has a friend. His liver is in shambles, second disability class. He's forty-five, one year her junior. I know the guy, he used to be our friend. I once met his mother because I know his mother very well. 'How are B. and P. [his former wife and her friend – I.B.K.] doing?' I asked. She shrugs and says that everybody's got what they deserve. I said: 'P. wanted B., and he's got her now. I have a lady friend, she's a teacher; she has a university degree, a job, she works in Piotrków, we're a couple now.' She was gobsmacked.

Work:

I'm an electromechanical technician by education. I've completed a vocational school. I also got my B and C driving licenses when in the army. When I left the service I drove heavy-duty vehicles. I could drive vehicles without trailers, single-piece lorries with rigid bodies, without any cargo weight limits. They weighed up to twelve or fourteen tonnes. When I last lived at my lady friend's in Piotrków [Trybunalski; a town], I drove a Scania for two years. Thirteen-tonne carriers full of groceries. I *worked* for a private operator. I drove supplies to Carrefour, and later to Biedronka stores. We were dispatched by E. He would tell us where to go and when. It wasn't bad, but initially my boss agreed he would pay 100 *zloty* for a run up to 300 km. He kept his word for several months. Several months later he started paying 80 *zloty* for the same run. I put up with it, but something broke in me when I came to a depot near Częstochowa [a city]. There were two of us driving two Scanias. We had a deal with

E. that we would call two days in advance if we were running out of petrol and then we were dispatched to Częstochowa. We would run on empty to fill up in Częstochowa. Or we were dispatched to Wrocław [a city]. And so we drove to Częstochowa, pulled over at the depot, and then continued to Wrocław to fill up, and then we got our monthly wages. And so I came after twenty-two runs, and he gave me 1,320 *zloty* net, that is, 60 *zloty* per run. My boss, S. was his name. 'We agreed 100 *zloty* for a run,' I told him. You paid 80 *zloty* and I said OK, but there's no way I can accept 60 *zloty*. He could have suggested, let's speak about this tomorrow… but no, he says it's not his fault I'm delivering something cheap. I said: 'Listen, S., I don't care, I don't know what's loaded in the vehicle, no matter if it's parsley, potatoes or booze. I can deliver only booze if you like. Booze is expensive. Would you pay me 150 *zloty* for a run?' He doesn't say a word. And so without telling him I go to the driver's cabin, take everything and put it in my bag. 12.5 tonnes of groceries in the lorry, mind you. The lorry must be in Wrocław in three or four hours, ready for unloading at the local Carrefour store. I leave the cabin, lock the door, return the keys, and say: 'Good bye, I'm going back home, hitch-hiking.' And that was that, nearly two years of my life at this place. I couldn't complain, though, we had a contract of employment, payments were almost ideal, social security contributions, everything. You can't cheat the system if you work with drivers. Suppose there is an accident, who's going to pay for your treatment? These are heavy-duty vehicles, though. There's too much surveillance and control, I'm not speaking about the police. It was only three years ago when the State Road Inspection started to control smaller vehicles. Heavy-duty vehicles had been inspected long before this. Even as we drove to Częstochowa from Piotrków Trybunalski, where we had our lorries loaded, there were two places where we had to stop for inspection. I got inspected almost every week. They didn't always wait at the same places. There's one point near Pszczonów [a town], as you drive the *Gierkówka* route to Warsaw. There are two lanes as you drive to Warsaw, and in the middle above the route there's a road sign with a speed limit of 50 km/h. Those who drive lorries and passenger vehicles know what's going to happen next. There's another road sign several hundred metres later with a heavy-duty vehicle on it: you have to switch to the right lane. All lorries have to switch to the right lane, where there's a speed limit of 20 km/h, and all of a sudden 20 metres later there's a built-in scale in the lane. Your vehicle passes the scale as you keep to the speed limit. You can't go any faster while the load is being weighed in the process. If you've exceeded the weight limit — and they can see the vehicle and asses the load it can carry — the lorry is pulled over to the side and inspected. That's the procedure. The vehicle isn't going to stop if you keep the weight limit, that is, an authorized axle load or authorized weight. They stopped me once because they were curious They ask me for transit documents. And I say fine. Here you are. Please open the trailer. Why should I? Let's see the back first. You see, everything's sealed. Can you reseal it afterwards? I know what I'm carrying, but I didn't attend the loading. The documents say what's in the trailer. You can check who I am going to and where the loading was completed. The driver can't enter the trailer, I'm sitting in the cabin during loading. If you're asked to pull back 15 metres, you pull back 15 metres, the security comes up, and so does the storage manager, they close the trailer and seal it, and give you transit documents with the seal number. All

you are authorized to do is check if the numbers match. If they don't this means I have possibly tampered with the load. And if you really need to check the load, you're welcome, call the company, and you can unseal the vehicle as soon as the inspector arrives. Please bear in mind the refrigerating unit is on while we're standing and talking. I'm carrying groceries, it's 20 degrees centigrade outside, and I have to keep the load at 3. I said: 'The road inspection is going to reimburse the cost of fuel.' Likewise, my working hours and my idle time, my boss and my company are not going to pay for it. He checks the seal number and says thank you, have a safe journey, everything's fine. That's what you do at hypermarket stores. As a driver you're not even allowed to enter the storage area. You can't see the loading process. You seal it and depart. Let's say I've got two stores to handle. I arrive at the store, and the storage guy opens the seal with me. I take the transit documents, because I'm responsible for the goods in the vehicle. I later do the unloading, I read pallet numbers from the transit documents, only numbers are available, I find them and unload the goods. I put empty pallets back in, or put them to the side if they have new pallets, as I have to carry the goods to the other store. We close the trailer, the storage guy seals it, he enters new seal numbers in the documents and I drive away to the other store. We repeat the procedure at the other store. Once they've unloaded the goods, they seal the vehicle so that the seal numbers match when I carry the pallets, as they are the company's property. When I leave the last shop the storage guy calls the depot in Piotrków that the vehicle has just left. Then you calculate the time, for instance, it takes three hours to travel from Warsaw to Rokszyce [a town] near Piotrków Trybunalski. When I'm about to reach the limit they call me to find out where I am, how long it's going to take me to arrive. I say that there's been a traffic jam in Janki [a town] or Warsaw, or that there are other reasons why I couldn't reach the authorized speed. The average speed? 50 km per hour. I'm reaching Piotrków, will be arriving in 15–20 minutes' time. We're strictly controlled. They're bound to call you if you don't have a diagram.

[…] I had a different job when I ended up at the shelter two or three years ago in July. I would renew a weekly employment contract with a temporary work agency. I worked like that for a month […], we were assembling Dell computers for dispatch. They sent a daily order by email to the managers [at the temporary work agency]. The managers sent the order to the assembly line […]. It was shipped to Dell by lorry. Several hundred computer sets daily. […] everything at the assembly lines. The job was done at three such lines. After a month's busy time in July, idle time came in August. Permanent workers were first to do the job, and we were call workers [temporary – I.B.K.]: you come on that day, you stay home on the other. I finally got pissed. […] I couldn't work and I couldn't register at the labour office. And so I decided to terminate the contract. I told the shelter manager I was going to leave the job as there wasn't enough work. The manager told me that this place [a centre with move-on flats – I.B.K.] runs a group called 'Break the Barriers' [an exclusion prevention programme – I.B.K.]. […], there were places available. I spoke to G., and she admitted me to the group. That was in September. The group had been working since May. I could choose two courses I wanted to attend. I chose a course for chartered accountants (second degree) and a placement at the Municipal Office. […]. I worked from door to door. I served residents […] in their homes. I distributed administrative decisions concern-

ing their property […]. I later worked for two months under manager Z. […] I also distributed administrative decisions concerning private businesses, because entries into the Business Activity Register had to be modified by 15 December. The entry featured an item number from the Polish catalogue, which specified the type of business activity […] The range of activity, that is. The entrepreneurs were bound to receive the decisions by the end of February. The decision, however, was based on the EU catalogue. The range of business activity was defined by the EU catalogue. Some items had to be replaced. I distributed decisions to those who had forgotten to receive them. And later, as it all finished, I ended up at the general department for two months, where I helped my colleague with […] xerox and printing machines, depending on how much there was to print or copy. We did smaller quantities with a xerox machine. If there were larger quantities, we used massive printers. They produced roughly three hundred copies per minute. The paper was literally flying in the air. No sooner had one copy dropped than the other left the machine. And then [when the first contract with the local authorities came to an end – I.B.K.], no [more – I.B.K.] opportunities arose […]. I ended up here in the meantime. So I immediately called him [manager Z. – I.B.K.]. I said: 'Is there any opportunity for a free placement? I'll be working for free. The wages will be covered from EU subsidies, through the NGO.' He said: 'Sort out the paperwork and everything.' And so I returned to the office on 15 October 2011. I've been working there ever since. The placement came to an end in February or thereabouts, I was jobless for two months, and returned after two months. Since then, we've had the following deal: I lose employment every six months for a few days, and then return to the office. This is because my wages are not covered by the local authorities. They're from a separate budget for the prevention of unemployment. The money comes from the state budget, not from local authorities. A different pool of money. I've been working there ever since. And I came here because the training [for chartered accountants – I.B.K.] was so massive I told myself there was no way I could make it [at shelter X – I.B.K.] to study effectively. […] And R. [in charge of the trainees on behalf of the St. Brother Albert's Aid Society – I.B.K.] suggested that the managers should give me priority access [to move-on flats – I.B.K.]. The phone call came two days after I had called and spoken to R.; the manager and I agreed I would come as soon as I start the placement and get the first salary. I came here on 7 or 8 October. It's been two years since. I've been doing fine ever since. Even when I was on the dole for two months, I was able to earn some extra. […]

I've heard on the grapevine that if all the customer desks are refurbished at all resident service points for the districts, there is a likelihood we will eventually sign a permanent contract. We also have signed a permanent contract with the office. We have benefits like regular employees. We also get similar perks at similar times, including a privately arranged holiday in the country. That's what you call a leisure refund these days. We also have Christmas perks. Mine is a bit lower than those of regular employees. They get 400 or 350 *zloty* net, and I get 250. We also get a regular end-of-year bonus. […] Always a few bob more. Some extra money. We don't have a mutual assistance and loan fund. We don't have a repair and renovation reserve, either. I'm now in the application process, I'm having an eye test on Tuesday or Wednesday, I need a prescription to buy glasses; they'll be covered from a special fund for employees who spend at

> least four hours working with a computer. […] These are some of the benefits of working at a public office. No good news about the flat, though. I've made an application and have to wait now. By the way, I spoke to councillor K. […]; he's accepted the invitation and is going to have a meeting with us. He's going to advise on the best ways to obtain a flat. I'm hoping I'll benefit from it […] with a new committee for council housing applications. I've submitted all the required documents; we'll see what happens. I wish I could get a flat of my own in six months, next spring at the latest.

These plans were put to a halt by serious illness, with a possible relapse and long-term treatment. That said, a stable job and regular income helped 'Arkadiusz' to meet his other obligations such as child support. This is an important issue for many a homeless man, as they tend to lose contact with children if they fail to pay alimony. They remain silent on their unpaid child support. This is an embarrassing issue, especially as some of the fathers who fall back with child support have been previously sentenced for their debt (suspended sentences and not only). That said, 'Arkadiusz' has managed to avoid this:

> I have been able to settle all my arrears. I have got things straight since I came here. I can take it easy with child support because my daughter is an adult now and there's no maintenance relationship. I have a younger son. He's seventeen now and at technical college. There's a maintenance relationship, but I pay regular child support, without any delays. So I can finally move on and have a flat of my own provided that I get one.

'Arkadiusz' is not an alcoholic. However, alcohol features in the lives of women he has met and remains close with, which undermines their rapport.

> In the meantime [after the divorce – I.B.K.] I lived in Piotrków [Trybunalski; a town] with my lady friend. Things didn't turn out well, [but] we do meet once or twice a month. We respect each other, but I had to leave her because she had married off her two sons. She had married them off and they bounced like an uncovered cheque. Their wives got rid of them, they're both alcoholics. They keep picking fights with her [his friend, their mother – I.B.K.]. I would snap whenever I saw this. I finally said no. We're going to kill each other. I'm not going to put up with this. I grew up without neither of the parents [and] I couldn't stand the way they humiliated their mother and the woman I love. I just couldn't let this happen. I told her I was going back to Łódź. […]
>
> And so it went. We'll see what the future brings. We've agreed that if I get a flat in Łódź, and she has her thirty-fifth work anniversary next year and gets a health pension as a teacher, we might be able to move in together. She does realize now she has to rent a flat on her own so as not to live with her sons. […] she had been renting a flat for two or three months last year but she returned. I said; 'Don't go back there, it's going to be only worse.' But she returned and learnt it the hard way. Indeed, it was only worse. […] Her heart aches, any mother's would. They are no baby toddlers, these adult blokes: thirty-two or thirty-one years of age, they have long finished schools and

should be working now. One of them made a fine career in the police. He was even appointed a chief constable […]. A terrible life, indeed. Eight years' seniority. […] He was fired two years ago for drinking, on disciplinary grounds. How much drinking does it take to be fired from the police? The police have […] a special hospital for alcohol addicts in the vicinity of Warsaw. They do whatever it takes to save them, […] to draw them away from alcohol, to help them return to service. He had been there twice, and was denied treatment on the third occasion. He lost his right to police retirement. He had training completed. He completed one or two courses when we lived together. One course took five months. The other […] almost a year. These were massive courses. He was granted five or six days off in a month to see his family: his wife and children. He could either take three days off twice a month or a week once to visit his family. He got a good pay, like working time. The police made an investment in this guy […]. He was made superintendent at CSU [a company]. […]

In the section below 'Arkadiusz' provides reasons for seeking assistance at homeless shelters. It is important to note that it was his own initiative. The decision seemed rational considering his circumstances at the time. He strives to organize his life, or as he himself puts it, to 'straighten things out':

Initially [when he left his lady friend in Piotrków [Trybunalski; a cityI rented a flat, but as jobs would come and go, I wasn't able to manage. Finally, I went [to shelter X]. I was hoping to straighten out things. And I was lucky I did. […] A friend told me [about the shelter – I.B.K.] because he lived nearby with his lady friend. I was interested and so he told me to go and visit the place, speak to the staff, arrange the date and everything. I came and met one of the social workers. We spoke, he put my name down in his notebook. We agreed the admission date to prepare the place, and so it happened, I was finally admitted. […] I paid the rent [for a flat – I.B.K.] until 20 July, and I wanted to stay as long as possible to make the most of it. I didn't arrive [at the shelter – I.B.K.] until 20–21 July. […]

I left some of the things at my daughter's, in her wardrobe. The other half is at my sister's. The essentials and clothes, these I took with me.

[…] I slept at different dorms. With six or twelve people. There were twelve of us. It was cramped, much worse than here. Filth, stench, you know what it's like. There were about one hundred and forty men at the premises. And seven or eight disabled people in the corridor. You get the picture. [He remembers a man who feigned illness – I.B.K.] he could walk to have a cigarette, but he went all over himself instead of going to the toilet. He had it rough with all the residents and the staff. […]

Cleaning duty was performed in each room. Every one performed the duty, all twelve residents. Those who were present, that is. Those who were at work, they were at work, but those who didn't, there was no way they could have some fun on the town, no. Duty first, pleasure later. If there was duty, you had to turn up. If you couldn't make it, the only legitimate excuse was work or illness.

Everyone had to do their dorm. There were also common areas to clean such as the lobby or the stairs. We had to do the kitchen and the dining room. Come rain or shine, snow or ice, we had to sweep all the pavements. Cleaning was done between

6 pm and 7 pm, every one in the room cleaned the premises, and the duty was passed on at 7 pm to another room. If something went wrong, you had to tweak this and that. The other room took over duty an hour later.

[…] I'm an easy-going person. I don't snitch or sneak on anybody. I'm into compromise, and we were doing all right. […]

I saw them as they came tipsy or drank vodka straight from the bottle somewhere behind the corner. It gave me the creeps all over my body. They returned sober, then there was a lights-out period, the staff turned off the lights, only a dimmed light was on. They got up and drank straight from the bottle. It still gives me the creeps when I think about it. I don't have a drinking problem, and never had and […] I'm not attracted to alcohol. If I want to have a beer or a shot of vodka, I go to my lady friend and we buy a bottle of wine or a jigger to enjoy the evening. We fix ourselves a drink, we savour it, but no alcohol the next day, no alcohol the next day. I return peacefully to Łódź the next day or a day after that. I don't have a drinking problem. Thanks God, I never had. And I do everything I can not to […].

From day one, he resided in the same dorm at the shelter. His room-mates would come and go:

My former room-mate passed away. I literally saw him die. One W. rest in peace. An older bloke, he was seventy-two or seventy-three years old. He died last year. I came back from work and saw he was livid and pale. His bed stood over there. I called an ambulance. He didn't want me, but I did. The room-mates also helped. Two resuscitation teams came, two ambulances back to back, because we called them twice. They were trying to save him but to no avail. He had varicose veins, he was about to see a vascular surgeon. He died in August or thereabouts. Late July or early August. The anniversary of his death is coming soon. He would have been seeing his doctor in September. He had myocardial ischemia, the doctors said. The bloke was older than me, but we joked and laughed, almost ten months in one room. He was privy to my problems I was to his. And that's what life is like, you see.

M. came [next]. He lived next door. [The manager] asked at the community meeting if anyone would like to join me, as I was going through a difficult patch, and M. agreed. He got a flat of his own in January. Z. came soon after. We've been living [here] since January.

His stay at the institution (his living conditions and daily life):

Both beds are replaced. They were old. We spoke to the manager and they gave us [St Brother Albert's Aid Society] five or six beds. They're not brand new; they've been previously used at a children's home or a rest home, but they are fairly nice, neat and, most of all, clean.

We don't keep things separate. Z. uses this shelf, and I keep things in this or that wardrobe. He's got this wardrobe to himself, and I have just one shelf for paperwork. We get along and respect our needs. I'm an easy-going person. And so is Z. The guys say that we get along best out of four twin rooms. I've heard it myself, they really do.

When I'm on duty, Z. helps me. When he's on duty, I, too, help him. When you perform cleaning duty on your own it takes two and a half hours to complete it. We do it in an hour and a half together. And it's just as clean as if it was done by one person for more than two hours. When it's my duty, I do the bathroom, the kitchen, and I mop the floors. Z. only sweeps the floors. When it's his duty, he starts with sweeping, and I clean the bathroom and the kitchen. He sweeps the floors in the meantime. Then he enters and mops the floors, and he's double quick. We start duty at 9 pm and finish at 11 or 11.15 pm. Everything is ready and clean by then. Everybody does exactly the same thing, they start at 9 pm and finish by 11 pm. We have as many rounds of duty as there are people. There are ten of us altogether. There have been ten actually, T. is leaving today. So you have cleaning duty once every ten days. One day you have duty inside, and the other outside [the street in front of the premises and the yard]. You have to sweep the leaves, but the worst bit comes in winter when you have to clear snow. That's a hard day's work. If you have a job, you have to do your bit in the morning before you leave for work and in the evening when you return. But we often help others. If you don't have a job or work in the afternoon and see there's already a lot of snow to clear at noontime, you clear as much as you can. When those who work in the afternoon return and see there's a lot of snow, they lend a hand to their colleagues. Likewise, I tend to help others. We always help if there's heavy snowfall, like last year. If a new supply of coal arrives, you can't pass the buck to the guy on duty. Everyone's involved. One guy can put one-third or a half away to the coal-hole. Those after work come and put the rest away, and they sweep the pavement to remove the traces of coal. You can't keep it too long on the outside in winter. Snow may come any time, and it all gets wet.

[…] The rule we follow is that if you work on a given day you clean the day before. You clean in the evening. You go to work the next day, then you return. Your duty in the evening involves cleaning and doing the dishes, which you put on the drying rack, and once they're dry, the guy on duty puts them away, stacks them and stores them. He takes the rubbish bag from the bin, looks up the toilet at the second floor, looks up the visitor's toilet and takes the rubbish out if necessary. He goes to the smoking room, chucks the cigarette butts to the bag, and takes them away. That's the end of duty. You pass on duty to the next in line. This is all about mutual trust. You trust the others are going to do the job. If you botch your duty, you're going to talk about this with the community. If it happens once or twice or three times, you can speak one-to-one, but if nothing changes, there's going to be a meeting.

I had hernia this year. I was so sick I couldn't manage. I was absent for two weeks after surgery. I spent a week and a half at my sister's. I returned after surgery and told the manager I had hernia. He knew it anyway; he knew my whereabouts and everything. He told me to show a doctor's certificate. I was relieved from duty. End of story. I was on the roster throughout this time, but the guys stood in for me. They helped me a lot. I told them I wasn't going to slack off, I was going to clean, but I needed help, someone would have to lift a bucket or move it for me. It was 8 or 9 kilos. I couldn't lift that much after surgery. The first three months were the worst, but the guys helped me a lot, honestly. This is our rule: if you're sick, the other guy is going to stand in for you.

[…] Just the other day, Z. and me painted the room. We had a long weekend to do so. Corpus Christi, 26 or 28 May. We had four days off. I took time off at work and we knocked it off in three days. Then I left for two days because I had almost a week off. I spent three or four days in S., with friends of mine.

[…] The colour I like [purple]. I thought it would be a little bit darker, just a little, but it isn't. This bright lilac is what we got in the end. […] You don't have to tape the walls so that the white paint doesn't drip from the ceiling; likewise, you don't have to tape the ceiling so as not cover it with colour. We had very little time. We had two or three days to do everything. We had to empty the room and plaster all the cracks over in the walls and the ceiling. We did everything nice and smooth, handmade, the walls, the ceiling, everything. Then we covered the walls with primer and two coats of paint, for the old paint not to show through. Previously, the room had been painted blue. This wall and the one behind Z.'s bed were actually green. That one was blue instead. The walls were so grimy that you felt as they had never been painted new, except for the launch of the centre. The walls were grimy and grey. The room is now nice and fresh. The only thing left to do is to refresh the door, which we're going to do once our colleagues paint the smoking room downstairs. [The manager] organized paint, and if there's some left, we're going to use it.

[…] We kept the picture on the wall, left by previous residents. And the holy picture, too. Left by W. It's going to stay. […]

We got the furniture from the association. They're not brand new either. You see, the wardrobe has no back wall. You can see the wear and tear, after so many shifts and rearrangements.

We inherited the TV set from W., rest in peace, he left it. Z. has brought a video recorder. I have only bare essentials, something you can put into a bag or keep in a wardrobe. What if I buy some furniture? Where am I going to keep it? There's a drying room, but it's packed. Two fridges and a washing machine, kept by the guys who may soon leave the centre once they've got their own flat. They gradually buy stuff.

Plans and dreams:

I have a certificate of disability. It wasn't easy to get it, already back Piotrków. I'm lucky to have one. The HR told me that people my age at the office, if they performed public works for four years [like he did by joining a special EU programme – I.B.K.] and turned fifty in the meantime, would be eligible for the 50+ programme. The labour office is keen to secure jobs for candidates like me holding a certificate of disability. The lady from HR said [to me], you are eligible for the 50+, and if the government pulls back from the programme because of lower unemployment, you might be eligible for assistance due to disability; you're bound to have a job and will be referred to us. The worst case scenario is that until you retire you'll be going back and forth, [that is – I.B.K.] you'll be going through the labour office every six months and then back to work. The most important thing is, however, that it will be included in your pension scheme. We'll see what happens, health permitting. I'm going to take my matriculation exam. Not this year, though. [I only have] a technical degree. Perhaps I'd be able to do a follow-up and go to university. You know, a foreign language is a must. I might

be able to take up Russian. I'm no good at other languages. I'd have to do Russian to pass the matriculation exam. It's been ten years now since I completed a part time secondary school. We'll see what happens. One thing that drives me is to have a job and get a promotion. That's one thing. The other is that [you need] a university degree to get some of the jobs posted in the public information bulletin. Inspectors or deputy inspectors are required to have a university degree, whereas officer or junior officer a secondary school certificate, but these offers are rather rare. I've only seen a job advert for officer once. But I was unlucky. I made an application. The reply came with an invitation to an interview, but I was straight after surgery. On the same day and hour I had a job interview and the first check-up with a surgeon, a control check-up in hospital after surgery. I had to be there, I couldn't let this go [the surgeon – I.B.K.]. There was no way I could reschedule [the interview – I.B.K.]. The date was fixed, I was given a day and hour. You lose your chance if you can't make it. They wished me luck with new ads and application. They saw my application and they knew I was in my element. I had a contract with a public office, after all. I had been in employment for more than twenty months. An obvious asset. But I couldn't. I had to choose […]. We'll see what the future brings. […] I prefer to keep the money in the bank. I opened a deposit at Getin Bank. I got a hot deal, 8% interest for three months. I paid in another three thousand, that's how much I was able to save. You can now get a special offer, 3.5% in the savings account for a year after opening. I need to set some money aside. Should I get a flat from the municipality, it will be cheaply renovated. With no new windows; they will only be painted and insulated. So you have to have new windows and doors installed. You have to buy a fridge, a washing machine and a shower. You need to have money to do so. I reckon ten thousand will do.

Ideally, I would like to get a one-bedroom flat. One room with a kitchen annex, with a toilet and a shower. Ten thousand should do. It's obvious you'll get the cheapest bathtub, so you have to put in a shower instead. It's obvious the toilet seat will be either used or renovated, so you have to buy a new one. It's still open if I'm going to buy furniture to the kitchen annex and the bedroom. I'm dreaming of two rooms. One with a kitchen annex, somewhere to have my children when they come to visit me with the kids. The other would be a bedroom, just for me. I just wish it would be Łódź, from the council pool. I already know it won't be Widzew. I can get either Polesie or Górna or Bałuty. I have made an application at Polesie. I'm living at Górna now. My last registered address was at Bałuty. I can get a flat in these three areas. You get the area where you used to live or had a registered address or had your latest domicile. There's a possibility I might get Polesie, where my office is located. […]

But I don't even know if I can make it to sixty. People in my family usually don't. Dad died at fifty-six. His mum died when almost sixty. My mum died at sixty. She retired in January and died in April, a week after the Pope had died, just like he did, on Friday. That's not everything: I have a hereditary illness. I had a stroke at twenty-five, just like my grandma. There are also other things and other forms of treatment. The spine, just like my mother's, is failing. Just counting, the mean age in the family. This is pure statistics. My mum's sister died of cancer. That's one person. The other's in treatment for thyroid cancer. My sister has already had her thyroid gland removed. My mum has cancer. I went to the doctor's and said I needed a referral for cancer test.

She asked me why. I said because of the family history. My closest relatives. My mum and my mum's sister. The doctor says the next time you come you'll get a referral to a genetic clinic to find out if you're at risk of cancer. They say one child is always at risk of cancer. There were three of us. I don't know one of my sisters. She was a year and a half older than me. She died of meningitis. The other sister, three years my junior, has thyroid issues. Hopefully, I'm going to be spared all this. I've already had two family conditions.

'Hanna'

She was in her sixties, in poor health after several heart attacks and strokes she had suffered in a span of few years. She was settled in a shelter, but was waiting for a vacancy at a public nursing home. She had been applying for a place in a public nursing home before.

She was referred to a six-bed dorm, and one of her room-mates offered help. She showed a lot of sympathy: she took care of her, looked after her on a daily basis, did shopping and cooked for her with other room-mates. She helped 'Hanna' to get back on her own two feet. For 'Hanna', the shelter brought an end to insecurity.

'Hanna' made friends easily. She immediately agreed to have a conversation. She was not keen to find out more about the topic or the purpose of the conversation. As a post-stroke patient she had difficulty speaking and walking.

She had lived in the shelter for several months. When I returned to the shelter two weeks after our conversation, she was gone. There had been a vacancy at a public nursing home, and she had immediately moved in there. She literally left the shelter on her own two feet. The walking stick she had used before was no longer necessary. Her exposure to homelessness came in an old age, which is not at all rare. Her circumstances were aggravated by the conflict with her husband's family, which brought on an inevitable loss of her flat.

She had made a decision to apply for a place at a public nursing home a long time before her conflict with the family. She was intent on spending the rest of her life in a nursing home due to poor health and little support from children.

Her understanding of 'home':

My family home and my parents. In other words, a room of your own. Your home is where you dwell. Initially, my parents and I lived in a high-rise building at Dąbrowa, on Nałkowska Street. The parents bought a flat. Dad was active in the community. He was president of the housing estate at Kurak [one of the housing estates in Łódź]. They bought the flat on an instalment plan, ten years or more it took to complete. And they paid every instalment. The flat was theirs. A little house with a garden. A one-bedroom flat with a kitchen, bathroom and toilet. Here, on O Street. Number 45 or 47. We had previously lived on N Street. Also at Górna. In a high-rise

building, at the eighth floor. Our neighbour was a cardiologist or neurologist, I don't remember. He told mum it would be advisable to switch to the first floor or ground floor. It would be good for her health. It was mum's job actually, I also went there to school, we went to the seaside to get some iodine. That's what I remember it by. I had always been together with my parents.

When they moved, I lived on Z. Street. At my husband's. […] I was on my own, but could rely on my parents. I had issues with kidneys and with ovaries. I would spend more time at hospital than at home. […]

My parents had always been together since I could remember. They never argued. […]. They had no time to argue. Mum worked really hard, on two shifts. Dad too, by the way [he was a car mechanic and ran his own garage – I.B.K.]. Come winter, there was snow to clear, to make mum's life and mine easier. Mum had diabetes and psoriasis. We would go to the country to bring our grandma for Christmas. She had sciatica. No arguments or quarrels. We never had time for it. Each had a job to do. I was older, not much, just three years, but I had to see off my sister to school, a vocational school, that was a priority. School came first, pleasure only alter. That's how I remember my home.

Her past:

I was very keen on knitting. Not like mum, mum was more into sewing [her mother worked at the LIDO textile factory – I.B.K.]. I liked it the way my grandma did. I started to shadow her when I was ten. I did my first top. Mum would say to dad, give her a break. She gets over it as soon as she sees the machinery. I didn't. I finished vocational school, and I'm a knitwear technician, both hand-made and for machinery. But I was more into motorbikes and scooters. Mum never smoked, but I did. Dad would never smell it but she always did, and she would tell me off [for smoking – I.B.K.]. I did jogging because I was much into track and field. […] I never went into farming the way [my grandparents] wanted me to; they brought me up until I was seven or eight. I would go to L. Both granddads had an orchard. They wanted me to go into farming. And I only ran and read. Where all this interest came from? Dad would never smell cigarettes or anything. I always helped him in the garage. I was a bit of a crawler. He would give me a few bob to leave him alone. Dad gave me the money so that mum wouldn't. I'd badger him on and on. I didn't want a bicycle. I wanted an Osa scooter. I was saving for it. And spent time in dad's company. I'd have bought it but for my mum. She said: 'Look how she rides a bicycle. Without holding the handlebars. She's gonna get hurt, and she's gonna hurt others too.' She said I was like the Roadrunner. I was here, there and everywhere. […] Dad repaired cars, some of them decrepit old wrecks. I learnt a lot with my dad. I knew he smoked fags, and he couldn't smell anything of me. That's how I remember my home.

[…] [When parents were ill] we would take turns to take care of them. Me or my sister at mum's every day. We later visited dad at hospital. […]. My parents had been together since I could remember. They remained together until the end. They joined each other in heaven. Dad was seventy-five when he died. I don't remember them quarrel or separate, even for a week. My home is my parents.

Professional life:

[She completed a vocational school affiliated to the LIDO textile factory – I.B.K.] I wasn't working in my profession because both mum and day worked overtime and I did trading instead. My friends told me that I would get a 5–10 *zloty* margin for a top or suit. I made 10–20 *zloty* for each set, each day, there were weeks I made 200 *zloty* daily. Flexible hours, which is why my son and daughter didn't have to go to preschool. I was registered at my husband's place as an artisan.

Marital life:

My parents helped me. When fights began at home, mum and dad were my foster family. They thought these fights were because of Kasia ['Hanna's' daughter – I.B.K.]. So she was registered at N. because my parents were her foster family. […] We [her husband and she] had a tailor's shop on T. Street. I first lived at N. at my parents', then at Z. at 'Ilona's', my husband's sister. The flat belongs to 'Krystian', my son. We fitted it out, did the toilet and everything. My dad did that, and we would travel to a tailor's shop at T. to work. 'Władysław' [the husband] may also have earned the certificate [mater tailor's]. I don't remember really. I wasn't bothered. My father-in-law, who's still alive, and my mother-in-law, they ran a tailor's shop at 8 L. Street at T. We had one at 3 M. Street. We mainly did underwear. We did the work ourselves. My husband, 'Władysław', worked at his brother's. He also ran a tailor's shop. 'Wiktor', my husband's brother, would later switch to tailoring dog outfits. It was because of the sewing machines, my husband was always fighting with his mother about this. The machines were taken by my in-laws and 'Wiktor' with his wife. I paid for everything. They took away the machines and everything [they took away her property]. My husband demanded them back. I had filed a divorce case five or six times previously. I was beaten and had forensic examinations. I didn't sue him for child support. I wanted him to vanish, him and his child support. Both judges and bankers said I should have. I told them I didn't want to have anything to do with him. All I wanted was divorce and eviction.

But 'Władek' was my second husband. I had a daughter with the first. He was my first man. I was young, foolish and I thought I'd be better off with him. I got up the duff. I was a minor. I had a divorce and a wedding. I had a wedding and a reception. That's why I didn't want to marry 'Władek'. My parents pressed me to marry. They wanted me to spare the embarrassment to the family. My first husband remarried. His wife was also called 'Hanna' and his son 'Mateusz'. That's why he said: 'Władek', you brought up my daughter, and I will bring up your son. He called his son 'Mateusz', the way I did mine. 'Robert' and me had been married for four years. We were too young. I was only seventeen. We were able to manage. But he later met his second wife. When I was with 'Władek' and he picked fights with me, [the parents] they thought it was because of my daughter. He would stop when we lived with my parents. Forensic examinations came later as he became violent. I had skull trepanation. I filed for divorce, there was one sitting and another. Things got so ugly that dad said he would ask the neighbours from the high-rise building to testify. They knew the truth. He said they would file the case if I only wanted to.

The marital conflict made her parents intervene. They were appointed foster parents by the court. 'Hanna' failed to divorce her husband. Her marriage with an abusive alcoholic came to an end when he died (she tended him in his illness).

They rented a flat from her sister-in-law, who decided to throw her out at some point. Her husband's belongings were taken over by the family (including sewing machines). They also appropriated 'Hanna's' belongings.

Conflict:

> My sister-in-law came [she told her to leave the flat]. I lost my medical history, everything. She gave me forty minutes to leave. How much can you pack in forty minutes? I only took a blanket and two pillows. I have nothing now. I am the rightful owner of the washing machine and the TV set. I bought them all. I bought a washing machine and a fridge so as not squander the money. Add silver spoons and crystal saucers to this. I have no keys. They took away the keys.

Her sister-in-law would visit her to collect the rent. 'Hanna' paid it, but 'they never made it square with me. The money I've got is really nothing, but it's mine. I've had a health pension since my husband's death.' Since her husband, not Hanna, was the only registered tenant in the flat, her sister-in-law decided to throw her out after her brother's death. Previously, shortly after 'Hanna's' husband had died, his family began to appropriate his and her belongings. They eventually made her move out. Not only that, but she was also beaten.

At some point you were made to vacate the flat. [I. B. K.]
That's correct. […] They took away the keys. ['Hanna']
What did you do then?
Nothing. I came here.
Did you come here immediately after this?
That's correct.
Who helped you?
Kasia, she lived at one story below. I asked her. And the social worker helping 'Władek'. […] [The sister-in-law] took away my health pension and cut off the electricity, running water, everything.
And she wanted to throw you out.
That's correct. And she did in the end. All my documents are there and my entire medical history.
Is there any chance she could give it back?
No way. I have no phone and no contact details.
Perhaps you might contact the current tenant? Isn't it her son maybe?
It's his domicile.
Does he actually live there or have they rented off to someone?
I don't know, I got a knock on my head and had my pension taken away.
It happened on the same day the postman came with the pension?

That's correct.
Did they rob you?
That's correct. That's why I wanted the community support officer to come on the same day. I told him about the whole affair. The community support officer called the prosecutor's office and they came. They said it was a penal case when I told them I got a knock on my head. Who did you get it from? I told them it was [her sister's-in-law] son, which was true. […] The lights were off and he hit me on the head. They entered. They took everything, my mother's coral jewellery too.
And they left you like that?
That's correct. I was penniless when I came here. My room-mates helped me.
Are they going to catch them?
I don't think so.
But you've notified the prosecutor's office?
That's correct. They wrote down my details, I gave them my ID and a pensioner's book. One is not valid without the other. They took my details from the book. The madame prosecutor told me not to cry, they were not going to vanish into thin air. Wait, that was a private matter.
But you filed a case and it's now in progress?
That's correct. I've been told to wait.
When was this?
I came here in September. It was July or August [2012].
Did you stay in the flat or did they bring you here.
They brought me here [a social worker]. She told me she found a flat for me and if I was interested. Since all utilities were cut off, I agreed. I had 40 minutes to pack [threatened by the sister-in-law – I.B.K.]. She told me to take a blanket and two pillows. I told her I bought a new top in the market. I wanted to take some stuff I'd need in a rest home. I asked if I could. If I could take my stuff. They left me, my head in pain. When I came here and strangers began to help, I started to cry. By the way, the postman, the one who saw me a month earlier, said: 'Love, if they told me it was you, I'd refuse to believe.' Total strangers here. Love, I just couldn't put anything in my mouth. Strangers but with a heart. I'll never forget this.

This section concluded an extended part in the conversation in which I tried to retrace the whole incident. 'Hanna' mentioned the assault and the fact that she had been made to vacate the flat. She also told me about the big heart the women from the shelter had shown her. She mentioned the postman, who came with her pension a month after the incident, when she had already settled in the shelter. He was impressed by the way she had changed since the assault.

Her husband's final moments:

'Władek' had been bedridden for two months. He was unable to move, and his neighbours refused to help. He lived in awful filth. [He had] spine issues. A recurring problem. He disowned his parents [they showed no interest when he fell ill – I.B.K.]. The

neighbours knew; there was gossip. He wanted me to make a promise [not to contact his parents on her own or on his behalf – I.B.K.]. I told him they were his parents after all […]. 'Promise me to be always with me, no matter how bad or drunk I'd be.'

There were fights [when he was ill – I.B.K.]. He didn't want to hit me. I wouldn't let him. My dad once told me: you, too, have a pair of hands to stand for yourself. I once smacked him in the face and he wouldn't dare.

[…] he called his mother and sister the worst names just before he died.

He had been jailed for sixteen years. My parents [knew], but I didn't want to listen. I thought they were just talking. They were still alive when I wanted to return to maiden name after the divorce. I had enough all this. Each time I went to the market, […] I didn't have to tell them my name, they all knew me. A husband in prison for many years, the name like a stigma.

Regaining balance:

When I found out [about her husband's criminal past – I.B.K.] and realized, my parents were both ill. Dad in hospital, mum at home. I once said to dad, I'm going to return to my maiden name. Dad agreed and so did mum. Madame prosecutor later tried to reason with me: 'You're only going to run into unnecessary costs. He's no longer alive, after all [her husband]. Painful memories. You don't need to revisit any. It's not worth the money. He's no longer around. He won't do you any harm. Wallowing in all this, calling witnesses. There are better ways to spend your money.' She said: 'You need more luck and more self-confidence. Start to believe in yourself. Trust me, you can start from scratch.'

I told you how badly I was crying when I came here. Penniless, pain in the head, only two pillows and a blanket. [My clothes] covered in blood. How could I wash if the lights were off? I was crying: so many strangers and they were so friendly. I'll never forget this. Just the other day the postman brought the pension and he told me and the manager: 'Hania', I can barely recognize you. Why are you crying? I said these were tears of joy. This is a miracle, really.

The manager told me I'd improved a lot and should try [walking without a stick – I.B.K.]. I had a heart attack or two fifteen years ago. I had a stroke back in 1984. And skull trepanation. Dad would sign everything. I loved dad a lot. I went to a private physiotherapist. He charged 80 *zloty* per session. I couldn't afford it. When I got better, the doctor said […] I wouldn't need the stick any more. I initially thought I was fit for bed or wheelchair only. Physical therapy helped me so much. I can now walk, and it makes me happy. People praise me. I'm literally growing now. The women I met here are absolutely incredible! I once told the manager I was so happy when the pension arrived. […] The doctor told me that pigs might fly [when I start walking without a stick – I.B.K.]. But I didn't see any pigs flying. I said: doctor, you'll have seen me without the stick in six months' or a year's time […].

[…] You can't be a calamity if you've made your journey all the way from hell to heavens. I might have been spared the knock on my head had it not been for the lights. To add insult to injury, […] they took away the pension from my pocket. I borrowed money from L. to buy some bread.

They bought me wool at the shelter. I asked them when the pension arrived. The doctor told my dad to make me practise knitting. Dad told him: doctor, I thought it was one of her whims. But she made a jumper on her own. She wasn't even ten when she did that. The doctor smiled and said: let her carry on. Let her exercise.

I have a tracksuit. I have new things. Entirely my own. One of my room-mates bought me pyjamas. She said: Just don't cry. I said I would simply strangle them with joy. They welcomed me so warmly. It's all that matters. When they speak I tend to listen. I like to follow someone wise. [They say] don't worry about one person or the other. She'll get over it, everybody snaps from time to time. I'm happy to be here. We can have a chat, and we laugh together.

Contact with children:

My son and daughter would visit me every Christmas or Easter. Dad was first to pass away, mum soon followed. Children didn't want me to be sad, and we celebrated Christmas Eve and Easter at the other flat [her parents']. But it was a little bit lousy anyway. My daughter once said: 'Mum don't worry, the grandpa and the grandma are looking at us.' We would spend every Christmas and Easter together. My daughter lives in Łódź […]. She used to visit me, but the grandson is now ill. She goes to physical therapy with him.

The son kept in touch with the sister. But he plays football, coaches young people and he left. For Germany. He even worked abroad.

[…] Mum and dad passed away without any last will or testament. I had to file a case. There was no last will and testament. I don't want to be a nuisance [to her own children – I.B.K.]. We don't need any disagreements. I've had enough already. I don't want to be an impediment. They may later say it would have been different but for the mother.

I want them to be happy. Every man is the architect of their happiness. I might have been a bad mother, but I've always wanted them to have a happy life and home. I can't really criticize either of the children. My son chose football, and it's entirely his business. I don't have any issues with the children. I don't want to be a burden. I had a stroke, skull trepanation and a heart attack. I'm old anyway, fifty-nine years of age. They're young. All I want is that they make a happy life for themselves.

'Józef'

He was almost sixty years old and a non-drinking alcoholic. He lost his job and home because of addiction. He slept rough in the street, but refused to speak about it. He later settled in one of the shelters. He moved from one shelter to the other. After a dozen or so months he completed alcohol addiction therapy and was offered a move-on flat. He was divorced. He lost touch with his children (they are adults and have children) and other relatives. A year after the successful completion of therapy, he landed a place in a move-on flat and started rebuilding his contacts with relatives: he had a good rapport with his brother.

He was known to be excellent at cooking and baking (he used his former wife's recipes, he came up with his own, he would shadow other people cook and watched TV). He also liked gardening and DIY. He kept a lot of plants in his room. He would have had more if he only could. However, he shared a twin room with a room-mate who cared very little for the plants. When we met to speak, he would share stories on particular flowers of his: where he got them from, how they looked when he got them, how he took care of them, what their names were and so on. He worked as a property manager at one of the housing estates in Łódź. The job allowed him to reuse things others were about to dispose. Those who wanted to get rid of furniture or plants would contact him as the first in line to obtain them (the goods were offered free of charge, for a nominal charge or as a barter for taking them away). When they failed to contact him, 'Józef' would watch the goods to estimate whether he needed the furniture others wanted to dispose. However, he was careful not to follow the logic: 'I don't have A, but might need it; someone is getting rid of A, so I'll take it.' His welfare centre offered too little room to store all the things that might come in handy in his own flat. 'Józef' was most likely to take things he could later repair, just like flowers other people ceased to like, as they began to wilt, became ill, grew too large — in other words, they lost their decorative value. He liked to take care of things, that is, cleaning, renovating and repairing them. I witnessed it many times as he continued deliberating, also during our conversations, about how to replace a missing ornament in a wardrobe that had just arrived at the centre. 'Józef' was the only man at the centre to take interest in the wardrobe, despite damage. 'Józef' was not at all discouraged: he took care of the wardrobe the way he did with the plants. He was the only resident I spoke to who kept books in his room.

What home is:

> My family taught me [to work together and share]. I had three siblings. One sister and the other, too, would later invite us to celebrate Christmas Eve. We gathered at one table, it was fun, and we felt the family atmosphere. I remember it [was] different when father passed away. Everything broke into pieces. Every man for himself. I liked it when we were all together. That's family.
>
> […] It was different with my wife: when she started baking a cake and the boys, my sons, that is, would start [making fun of her] 'mum what kind of cake is this?' 'You can always do it yourselves.' Father, they said. They would never call me dad. They called me father. 'Father, let's make some cake, why don't we have something sweet.' I told them I had never baked a cake and didn't have clue. [The younger son said] 'come on, there are recipes, I'm gonna help you.' The elder son was different. That's how it all started. We made it once, we made it again. [My wife] said later, 'since you're so successful, you're going to bake cakes from now on.' […] I would later take to cooking because of life necessities. I had to manage on my own. […] I hadn't been very keen

on cooking [previously]. I worked as a storage guy at Cefarm [a Polish pharmaceutical company] because they closed down transportation and we were all transferred to the storage area, where we cooked different soups. There were eight or nine guys on a shift: seven working and two cooking in the kitchen. The seven guys stood in for the two cooking the meal. That was our deal. We cooked after lunch, to have something warm to eat. The same at home, I got used to being a housewife because of our regime at work. I had no problem here [at a move-on flat] to start. […] I bought a rolling pin, a proper truncheon this is. And cutlery, we've got everything we need. The managers gave us some pots and pans the other day. We've got lots of pans now. […] I've got some spices. Each time I visit a friend of mine […] his wife says, 'Take it if you need it, I've got some more to spare.' If you go to the shops, there's always something you want to buy. Then you come home and realize you've already bought it. […]

I like it when I cook something nice and tasty. I don't always cook things I like, and I cook all the time. One thing I don't like is when I've botched it. [He likes doing new things – I.B.K.]. […] When I last visited my brother, he was doing pancakes with young cabbage. He was rendering pork fat in a pan. He later put the fat and pork scratchings and the cabbage into a meatball machine. He used it as filling. […]. I said: 'Why don't we add some dill? Next time I'll try it with dill.' You add something at random and it works. […] A friend of mine, I remember, gave me a recipe for pancake wraps with hot sausages. You only slice the sausage lengthways and add different veg. You wrap the pancake in cheese, dip it in dough and bake it in the oven. Two pancakes are enough to fill your stomach.

[When he cooks in the common kitchen] try it, tell me if the taste is right. Let them taste if they want to. I'm not a scrounger on food.

Contact with relatives:

[…] I was simply ashamed. I met my sister on All Saints' Day at the graveyard. We spoke. She gave me the phone number and I reached out to my brother. We take cycling trips every Sunday. I'm trying to do my best. [He thought] the brother would keep asking questions, but he wasn't that pushy to badger and know everything. We went to Z. on the Sunday; we almost made it, 70 kilometres. We like to go somewhere and relax. My brother likes to go mushroom hunting a lot. He's into mushrooms As we cycle, he says, look, this is a good mushroom spot. He has a country garden, his in-laws actually, it's past G. He says it's his wife's, but his in-laws like to spend their time there. My brother said: 'I don't really like going there, my father-in-law bosses around when I'm there.' He said: 'I wish I could sit and relax, have a barbecue, have a pint. He only wants me to dig in the ground.'

Living at the institution:

[At first] I was at the hostel on N. Street. I left it with a friend of mine. We rented a flat, but he started drinking and didn't feel like working. I wasn't going to pay for both of us and I left. I had spoken to the manager previously and said I wanted to come here. Then there came a phone call and they told me there was a vacancy.

[…] As soon as I came here I told the manager I needed one more week to finish the business with the other flat.

I had my personal belongings and clothes [in the flat]. I had been there for a month only. Fifty-two square metres in a block of flats, 1200 *zloty* a month. Initially, my flatmate went to work. I paid the rent and he gave up his job in the meantime. We had to pay again and he wanted me to pay for him. I told him I was going to call it quits because I saw he wasn't very keen to work.

[When he settled in the centre] I met some of the guys: P., 'Tomasz' and 'Piotr', 'Arek'. There was W., he got a flat at R., it's nearby. He was even older than I am. He passed away. We attended the funeral.

Domestic aspects of the institution:

Not the kitchen, surely. I had all the things in order back at home. I knew where to find them. [He had an idea to install a rack to keep lids in one place] You just have to fix this strip of wood to a wall. Move it away from the wall a little to hang the lids. You do it [the others said]. It's the same with cakes. I baked a cake, and they came and asked if they could have some. None of them [said], 'Let's do it together, let's bake a cake, I'll buy some of the ingredients.' I would if I were in their shoes. We had some potato leftovers. We agreed to make some *kopytka* [a kind of potato dumplings]. But there was no one [to help]. I'm not going to do everything on my own. There's no press, so I can knead it, the other can roll it and yet another can cut into slices. That's a different kind of work. I'll scoff it down myself. I have no problem with that. Sometimes I feel like cooking, I boil some potatoes, make *kopytka* and put them in a freezer. It's the same when I feel like having some *pyzy* [a kind of potato dumplings] or *kluski* with strawberries. I felt like it, I bought strawberries and made some *kluski* [soft mushy dumplings]. Is it fair that I do everything on my own and others come when all the work's been done? Why don't you do just a little, you do this, I do that, and we can do something together. It doesn't matter how much each of us will do. What matters is that we do it together. It's like the cleaning guy from my work. The pavements are just inches away. But he won't clear the other of snow in winter. I said: 'Why didn't you clear the snow so that we could walk.' 'That's not my area,' and he's not going to do this. You move the shovel a couple of times and there's enough space to walk.

[His domestic area is epitomized by his room] Nobody's going to come in and boss me around. Nobody's going to tell me which bedding to use.

Room at the institution:

The room was empty when I came here. Only two cupboards, a wardrobe and a shelf. Even beds were different.

But I want to feel at home wherever I go, no matter whether it's a few days or a month. I don't want it to be like hospital or hotel. I don't want to be a total stranger. That's just the way I am. I was staying at a single mother's centre, there were two of us, we were handling the boiler room, and we both furnished the room to have a home of some kind.

First, we needed a TV, but W. had already had one, a 19-inch TV, he lent it to me. If he had said he wanted to sell it, I'd have bought it. He wanted only 50 *zloty*. But he hadn't. I thought he'd take it as soon as he got a flat of his own, but he sold it later. So I had to organize another one. I can't help it without a TV. That's a habit. I simply have to watch something.

Then there was painting. I once asked the manager — because I didn't like the colour in the room — if I could paint it to my liking. The manager said: 'Go on.' He even suggested we could renovate the room. I bought pigment, chose the colour [lilac – I.B.K.] and did the cupboard. I bought a can of paint. That's how it all started. […]

The first thing I saw was this makeshift lock in the wardrobe. I had to go to a DIY store to buy a lock. That's what it's like when you have no workshop, no tools, nothing to work with. It's all hectic and disorganized.

[…] One lady changed furniture at my estate. She sold it for 20 *zloty*. It was good, easy to dismantle. I dismantled it, carried by bus and put it together. I got a mirror from a friend of mine. I needed one. If he has a piece to spare he'll always offer one.

I got a cupboard. I saw him the other day [the friend]. He was buying a bicycle and wanted a new lock in the shed; he wanted me to help him change the lock. I noticed a narrow unit He said he didn't need it. I thought I might take it. The colour matches the cupboard.

I was even thinking of buying one, but then I realized it made no sense, all this buying things. As I was staying at S. [one of the men's shelter's – I.B.K.], I bought a flat-screen TV, 19 inches with a DVD. And so what? Alcohol was more important. There's no TV now. However, if I knew I'd get a flat in six months or a year, I'd get on with it [buying things]. […] When you […] get a flat, you're always short of money. You'd like to do or buy this and that. But there's no money. You'd have to be a millionaire.

[…] I've found some flower stands. People get rid of so many useful things. A friend of mine came and asked if I could give him a hand. One lady asked him to help. She was having new furniture delivered. She wanted us to carry it. Eighth floor, with a lift. We went there and asked for the phone number. We didn't want to stand there and wait. We didn't know the hour. [So] we told her to call us as soon as they arrived. She showed us two sofa bends, her daughter and son-in-law moved in, the daughter was expecting a child. The lady said there was no room and she was about to replace furniture and sofa beds. She said the beds were in fine condition and it would be a pity to leave them in front of the building. She asked us if we knew anyone who'd take them. She wanted to give it for free. Otherwise someone would cut them into pieces if they left them in front of the building. I saw the beds. Both in fine condition. New furniture to a new flat. To start the ball rolling. [He did not take them, and there was no one else who would – I.B.K]. She wanted to put out [the old furniture] in the corridor. It was in boxes. She may find someone. I haven't noticed any furniture in front of the building.

[…] We have two washing machines. I have also brought a little Frania machine [a type of washing machine manufactured in Communist Poland] with me. An antique, but it's still working. So we can do the laundry easily. If it's a day off and nobody does the laundry [you can do it]. [Bedding and towels] new things

are available. The last time I saw the manager there was bedding available. He said I could choose the one I liked. If central heating is failing in winter, they let us take extra blankets.

[The net curtain in the room] it's my room-mate's. The lady we helped to move house, she was carrying curtain rods downstairs, I had to bring them in. It's odd, this one, the rod is covered in something; it looks like wood. There's also a runner. A double rod, one with wooden rings, the other with a runner and curtain hooks. […]

[When he brings the curtain rod] I'll take it upstairs, let it stand there. Someone might need it in the future. We had a curtain rod, DIY style, a frame made with planks and two metal rods. That was all. I'd have to grease the rods at times, otherwise the curtain hooks wouldn't move.

[…] Some of the stuff, you just have to buy it. [One of the flowers] would go to waste, […] and I bought a flowerpot. […] I think I might have been watering it too much. Just like this blue plant outside. I have to water it day in, day out, If I don't, it gets dry and starts to shed flowers. Is it the time to shed blossom? Then I noticed the soil was dry and I watered it. A week later it went into bud again. […] My parents had an allotment garden. You don't care about gardening when you're young. When I married, we bought an allotment at L., but we didn't like it. And later at W. That was a fine garden, I liked it a lot. I liked to keep flowers at home.

[…] If there's nowhere [to take the flowers], I'll leave them. But that would be a pity. If I only knew someone would take care of them. I don't want to leave them. I'd take them if I got a flat.

[…] I've bought some of the books, and some of them are from my brother's. Speculative fiction and adventure. I used to like Paukszta's books a lot. Adventure, for young people, right after the war, harsh reality. Young people going to the Mazury lake region. I liked his books a lot.

Belongings:

[His section of the room is stashed with bags and boxes] You know what it's like. It's like home. There's a bookshelf and cupboards. But you can't see things if you store them away. If you move or anything, when you start packing things, you start to wonder how could I collect so many things? […] You think you might need it, and then it only gathers dust. I don't like when I'm doing something and have to run errands all the time to buy or borrow this or that. I don't like it. I like to be independent.

[…] I'm fine, I have somewhere to stay. Not like previously, when I slept rough or in the shelters. We have a different atmosphere. The thing is, though, it's not mine. If you live on your own, you do as you please. You have to abide by the rules here. Take cleaning duty, for example. I'm not going to do this in my home. You may be tired, but you have to do it. These are the rules. On the other hand, it motivates you to do it. Otherwise you'd [say to yourself], fine, some other time. But you can't or you face the consequences. You just have to, and it keeps you motivated.

'Zofia'

She was in her seventies. She had been at the shelter for several months when we spoke. 'Zofia' was faced with the loss of virtually everything, especially her family ties. As her conflict with an adult daughter escalated, she was forced to seek aid outside of her family. She decided to find refuge at an institution.

She was accommodated in a four-bed dorm, in the corner of the building. I noticed during the study that the room was offered to the eldest residents, who were also in poor health. The room offered more peace and quiet than other rooms, mainly because it was not a connecting room. That said, its residents had the furthest to go to reach the bathroom or the kitchen.

'Zofia' neither isolated herself from others nor she would fraternize with them. She adopted the role of an observer, without getting involved much into the life of the community. She was comfortable to share her thoughts in public, e.g. when she saw other women quarrel. She would comment on the behaviour of both parties. She refused to side with anyone while sharing thoughts on the situation.

Her idea of home:

> The first thing that comes to my mind is family. This includes closest relatives and remote relatives; they are also part of the family. Friends do meet. An open home is what I like best, so that others can visit and we're not isolated. I once had such a home, people would come and be for me. I would sometimes leave things so that they could do the job. I was sure nothing was going to disappear. I trusted them. We trusted each other. […] I got on well with other people. I don't think people are a problem. People are driven apart, some of them are better, some are worse. This is down to your personality. […] Once I had a home, at my mum's, when I was little. I was very little, perhaps two or three or four. I don't remember exactly. I was at my grandma's when I was five. Mum had epilepsy. She had a fit when we went to draw water from a well. I ran to rescue her, I was screaming, I was in a shock of some kind. She lived a very short life. My sister and I stayed at my grandma's. My grandma was wonderful. She didn't want us to separate. Then my aunt came, mum's sister; she wanted to take away my sister. Grandma refused to let her. [Aunt, however,] did it on the sly. Grandma left the house, she was in the yard or in the fields, and aunt took my sister away. My sister was younger than I; she was four. Grandma was looking for her; she was so upset. She was upset with her daughter, who stole the child away. So we were driven apart. I have fond memories of my grandma, […]
>
> I was still at my grandma's when I was twelve. [Then] grandma's son came and took us to Łódź. I remember a room, seven beds, a large family. The parents and five children. Anyway, I was one too many, and they sent me to a children's home. I was in grief. I was grieving when they left me. Grandma was comfortably off. She inherited this and that. No one provided for grandma. Grandma was the sponsor, actually. We couldn't [she and her sister, at her grandma's], she wasn't able to manage on her own. She was old and sick. That was beyond my grasp. I came to visit her often.

I spent only three months at the children's home, on K. Street. Then I went through a three-month quarantine period at a girls' home at … I was only twelve. There was a friend of mine, Zosia was her name. We were both transferred to a home on Kr. Street. I went to school, sixth form. I was extremely well behaved. I was from a girls' home after all. I did well at school. I had a very good conduct grade. I had good grades in general. I spent two or three years there. The secondary school I went to was a telecommunications college, but I didn't like it, we had to do metal work. Three years later my paternal cousin came and asked if I'd like to live with her. She had an only son. She said I'd be taken care of and wouldn't have to attend the college I hated so much. I wouldn't have to do anything. And I wouldn't lack anything. She kept her word. I agreed and she came a week later to take me away.

I liked it at her place. I didn't have to do anything. When I was bored, I tried clothes on; they were in abundance. Clothes, beautiful hats, shoes and a marvellous golden pitcher. Her husband liked to drink, not to socialize but to get drunk. Their son would send me [on errands to buy vodka]; he was five years my junior. Either he would go [on his own] or he would send me. He drank in our company. I was fifteen. He poured me this much, and a smaller shot [for his son]. Two drinking sessions later I snapped and told my cousin as I thought he might have wanted something of me. Nothing happened, but there were thoughts.

I had to take care of myself. I had had to since I was twelve. As I was on my own I had to be prudent and avoid harm.

[The cousin] she took me to her mum's, my dad's sister. It was our new home [hers and her ten-year-old brother's]. She took us and all the belongings. We went there by tram. She went to meetings at the [Jehovah's Witnesses] congregation. She also taught me how to read the Bible. That's how I learnt more about religion. I learnt gradually. They wanted me to convert, but I refused. I was a faithful Catholic […]. I told them I wasn't ready. I was stalling.

My cousin ran a tailor's shop. The made coats and jackets, short jackets with dandy lapels. She would buy scarves, tops and belts. I asked her to give me everything she bought. I promised to go to our aunt's in the country near Koszalin [a city] and sell it with profit. The way she did, when she sold them at an open market on Lutomierska Street. I knew it was good business when she told me to market her stuff. There were police officers and chased us away. I would bring the merchandise. She would come and take it. No large volumes. Only small quantities.

[The cousin] she was resourceful and knew how to keep her life together.

I once took her merchandise and went [with it] to my aunt's, mum's sister. It sold like hotcakes at a local state agricultural farm. The women wanted me to return. There was one chairman that recruited students to a business school. I came forward. I was lucky. I enrolled and made one more trip with the merchandise [to her aunt's in the country].

I brought the money, but she [the cousin] she couldn't believe her eyes. She said: 'This is just plain wrong. To bargain so much from poor people.' I tried to reason with her, 'auntie, that's just business.' [She said] 'You have no fear of God.' 'Auntie, they could have bargained with me, after all, but they didn't.' My cousin, the one who took me from a girls' home, asked me about the location. My aunt, her mother, said: 'You're after her buyers, aren't you?' They were honest. There was no cheating, no importuning, no thieving. […]

Learning – work – housing:

I completed business school. Then I continued at business college, which I also completed. I passed one matriculation exam and then another. I got a job. I was independent. I rented a flat, but with no furnishings. I had nothing. [The flat was virtually empty]. The first flat was in the area of Koszalin [a city], in C, five thousand inhabitants overall. Great people these were. I had no furniture. Auntie gave me bedding, a sheepskin's coat, an eiderdown and coal to burn in a furnace. But I couldn't keep the place warm. I got up early and went to work. I was an accountant. If there was a balance sheet to do I worked until midnight. In the meantime I did training. I was developing. There was no time to keep the furnace warm. The only day for chores and laundry was Sunday. In winter, I do remember this, my eyebrows and eyelashes frosted up while I was asleep. If there was a balance sheet to do, I would share the bed with our chief accountant. She would come to Cz. to complete the balance sheet. There was glazed frost and you had to walk in zigzags and water would freeze in the morning. She slipped, and her large hat fell off her head. I could have helped her but I began to laugh instead. I apologized later. Sheer black comedy. […] I [later] worked in Sz. At first, I worked as an accountant in C, and later in Sz. as transport manager. I knew very little, but I was reliable and did the job. The manager returned a month later and I left his position. I went to our boss and got promoted to supply manager. I met a friend of mine whose mother worked as a washerwoman at a children's home. She invited me over; she married a doctor. But I never visited her; I left for Łódź. A completely new life.

I was twenty-three when I left for Łódź; I lived with an aunt, the one who had stolen my sister. I lived there for some time. I met a cousin through her. Sort of match-making, but I wouldn't let him touch me. I moved out. How could he dare to suggest anything like this? I was independent and I paid my share of the rent. I lived at other people's places.

That was opposite the theatre at L. […]. I lived at Basia's. Basia had a heart of gold. The flat was fully furnished. Bedding was also there.

Then I lived on O. Street. It was very much like when I met my cousin, when I got mad with him, I'd get mad so badly that when I went to work […], I worked as an accountant at the television, I'd cry at the bar. Anyway, I briefly stayed at another auntie […]. These people were also great. I had a separate room. We didn't keep close. We rarely saw each other. I was there only at night. I'd sometimes read a book.

Personal life – pregnancy and marriage – home:

Here [in Łódź] I worked at Zenit [a company]. Then there was a mishap. I was hopping off the tram after 5 pm […]. A man approached me, a soldier, he ran into me and grabbed me from the back. I was so terrified that I lost my voice and couldn't scream. I couldn't make a sound. As luck would have it, a lady was closing the basement. Sz. was her name. I heard the creaking of the closing door. He turned his back on me and I started to chase him instead of running away. I was so shocked. I came home and told about everything. I was shaking, both hands and feet. I opened a newspaper in

the morning and read the guy was a pervert. A pervert on the loose in military uniform. I was always lucky. The people around me were mainly my friend's company. We both worked as accountants. We had a nice bunch of friends […]. We had a regular social life. We were shopping together. We lunched at a canteen in the Municipal Office. I wanted to start a family life. I was already twenty-five at the time. I fell in love. Unhappily. A mishap. I was pregnant. He told me I should have an abortion. Right opposite the Empik Store. I smacked him in the face. It was like a betrayal. I left him, tears in my eyes. I told his mother. I visited her. I knew her. He was divorced. His wife was an alcoholic. I believed him. His mother, too, treated me as her future daughter-in-law. She liked me a lot. Come to think of it, she was like a mother to me […].

[After what happened], I confided in [to a friend] and we started meeting more often. I visited her on Saturday. Her friend called and said he was coming with a companion: 'I'm coming, let's get together and have some fun.' She said a friend was with her. I told her not to mention me because I came straight from wok and didn't feel attractive. [She said] "Open the wardrobe and choose what you fancy. I refused, but he was there in a jiffy. He came by taxi. She found the clothes, I put them on and we went out together. I met this man [her friend's date's companion] and I said hello. We spoke. I was just keen to meet someone quickly. I would end up on my own and the housing issues… He took to the idea the same evening. He had been a widower for three months. He was available. He proposed to me the same evening.

I told him I was three months pregnant. My friend confirmed. He trusted us both. We had never seen each other before. Her date said the guy was all right. He told about his virtues. That was like a guarantee. He told me his wife passed away. Her date told me he was thrifty, took care of the home, of the children, he didn't drink, but he was a smoker.

He had three adult children and was twenty-two years my senior. He knew who I was. He was a very wise man. […] He was of Jewish origin. You could see it in his looks. Or perhaps the other guy told me. I don't remember. I took a liking to him. His hair and eyes were dark. He wasn't too tall but he was clever. He was an articulate person. He lived in Łódź, but was from Warsaw. They were repatriated to Łódź from Uzbekistan. His parents lived in Warsaw. He showed me his whereabouts, close to the local community centre. She showed me his marriage certificate so that I could trust him. He was a good man. He had a secondary education. He completed his professional training and we started a business. When the baby was born, I had to take care of it. The baby was very ill, it had a problem with its leg. He saw this and got scared. The doctors came instantly. There was hospital and massages. Then there was a plaster cast.

[His children] There was sixteen-year-old M. He lived with us. The eldest was eighteen or nineteen and had a Jewish mother. M.'s mother was Polish. I was twenty-five. J. was the youngest and he lived at his grandma's. I was his third wife. […]

Right after he proposed to me and after the dance, we went to his flat to see his place. My friend and her date [too]. The flat was in disarray, torn curtains, the wear and tear on the table. Painted floors, though. The flat was really spacious and we stayed there until the morning. We slept there, the four of us. No one was drunk. A meeting like in a film. 'Do come next week to take my stuff. You promised.' And he said: 'There's no way I'm going to wait this long. I'm coming right after work.' He drove a van and

made some extra as a taxi driver. He was a resourceful man. He came and took all my books. He would later reproach me about the books. He said it was my dowry. Sz. told me, 'Oh dear, you're leaving us. We thought you might be our daughter-in-law.' You could have told me earlier. They had a son. They liked me there; they even introduced me to their family upstairs. I've been lucky to meet good people in my life. […] People from L. Street also treated me as a family. Good fortune was with me.

[…] I said [to M. – her husband's middle son], 'Good morning, I'll be your dad's wife soon. If you want us to get along, to be a happy family, please think twice before you say what you want to say. We'll understand each other better if you do so. We'll be like partners.' I said that right at the start. It was spontaneous. M. helped me with everything. My husband was busy at work, and would help me at home. My husband loved his mother a lot. He had a heart of gold, but he cheated on me. There were moments of breakdown. We even split up for a while. I took my baby and went to my would-be mother-in-law [the mother of her former partner, the biological father of her child]. I told her not to tell her son that I was at her place. He paid us a visit once. She didn't say a word. The child was also there. If the baby had cried, he would have heard. He never found out. […]

Family business:

[The husband] He was made redundant. He came home and I saw something terrible happened. He was as white as a sheet. 'I was made redundant.' [She said] 'I'll go to your boss and speak to him. Maybe they'll give you the job back.' He couldn't. Everyone would disapprove of him and his indulgent ways [she is talking about the anti-Semitic campaign in Poland at the end of the 1960s]. There was no way we could change this. He told me […] he'd run a business once. Leather-working. I thought we might have a go at this. I didn't have the money but I could speak to K., the accounting manager and I'd borrow some money for a month. To start the ball rolling. Then a rumour came I couldn't go back to work because my baby was ill or something. […] She came with the money, I accepted it and said thank you. […] I'll pay you back as soon as I make a pile. That's how it all started. He would make the money. I was the driving force. I was the only one in the market. I can proudly say I was good looking. I was well groomed. I still have beautiful eyes. I was chic and smart. I worked as an accountant and had a good pay. I made some extra after work. I was resourceful. I always had something new. Clothes and beautiful hats. I was different.

[…] I organized a stand. My husband said: 'Are you really going to run a stand in the market?' I said: 'Why shouldn't I? I've already had a word with the manager and he agreed. I'll give in if the business doesn't get off the ground.' I was reasoning with him. The manger would give me looks. He smiled and I smiled back. He helped me to take the table from my office. There was coffee in the office. He would bring a cup each time he had one. Coffee was just a beginning. He wanted to have a date with me. He was trying to pick me up. We never dated. But I was always in his good graces. […]. He'd seen my husband previously. He was young and handsome. He had an MA. My husband was short and older than me. He thought he had some room for manoeuvre. Plain clothes policemen would come to talk at my stand. First moments

in the market were rather shocking. I refused to speak with them. Now I do. I'm fine with them. I got used to these people. They were polite and well-behaved. Everything was all right. […]

I also took trips with merchandise. The husband only manufactured stuff. My first destination was K. This is where I brought the merchandise. The husband warned me not to tell anybody I was his wife. I said fine. I brought the money and the cardboard boxes. I had a smart-looking coat, a pink one with a mandarin collar, flared and beautiful. The handbag in a matching colour. I'd have looked really smart but for these boxes. 'You could have chucked these in the bin,' [the husband]. I said I'd paid five *zloty* for the boxes. We gradually saved up a nest egg. I was taking these trips so long as I could buy our first car. […] I travelled by coach. [I would take] a box as large as a TV set. Or even larger. I asked others for help. I wanted to pay them, but they refused to accept the money. They helped me to carry it or carried it themselves. A coach driver asked if I was going to visit Miss B? I confirmed. I'll take you by coach. He pulled over by the road […]. That was near a bus stop, of course. It was all interesting. And nice.

Subsequent stages in marital life:

[…] I never checked up on this [the husband's life]. People were saying he was a thief. The workshop was doing fine. There's not much to talk about this. He asked me about this child, the youngest, 'is it OK if he joined us.' I said: 'I married you with your children.' J. soon joined 'us. He admired me lot. He liked me better than his grandma. 'Mum is so nice. I'm not going to see grandma at all.' […]. A girl or a woman once called and [J. – her husband's youngest son] he said: 'Another whore is after dad.' I told him it must have been one of his friends. I'd never use the word he did. In the company of neither, be it M. or J. You never do in the company of children. […] We never quarrelled. They knew, but they didn't learn it from me.

[…] [The daughter] she was in regular treatment. She was only five months old. I took her to hospital. We did with M, the teenage son, who stood in for the father. He helped me a lot. He always assisted me when going to a doctor's; he did all the carrying. He was always out to help me. When she was five months old, the doctor said the illness had gone. I bathed the baby every day. M. would prepare the table, we had a bathtub and he helped me in the process. I was bathing the baby, J. was looking, he often said: 'Auntie when is my time to bathe her?' We were one big family. There was no jealousy. Everything was on the right track, me and my baby. My husband was happy for us both. She used to sing when she was three. He said she was going to repeat anything he wanted her to. Baby, repeat after me: "home. 'Home fucking smells.' She repeated it. She took a liking to the word. She was with other children in the yard, she ran around and played and she said the word. The children came upstairs and said she was using the f-word. What is she using? She's using the f-word. She doesn't understand it. She would later sing a song with the word. He was delighted. 'My daughter is going to marry an ambassador, […]. She's going to be a somebody.' He was thrilled. He had three sons and a daughter. He liked girls a lot. My daughter loved him to bits. […]

When my husband died, another son of his came up, the one who reportedly left for Israel. He didn't leave, but no one knew his whereabouts. I was absent, travelling

with merchandise. I took over the whole business after his death. He died in 1980. I took over the workshop in the same location. I was absent, and the daughter asked about his details or telephone number. She didn't write anything down. She was jealous. She was jealous of virtually everyone. She was so selfish. We lost touch afterwards. He came to the workshop and said hello. My employee came to the counter. His son said: 'I've finally met you. I've been looking for you so long. I couldn't find you anywhere.' 'Who are you looking for, sir?' 'My father.' The employee was bewildered and said: 'I'm not your father.' 'Where's my father then?' 'Your father passed away.' He didn't know about this. We never heard from him. He came once and disappeared. He didn't know he had stepbrothers. They should have stuck together, they were all of one father. He was looking for him. He wanted to find out. He was a little tipsy. The daughter told me he may have drunk something to boost his courage. He never showed up again. He was the one to lose. I would have told him a lot about his father. His mum said that my husband's first wife was Jewish. I was on very good terms with the Jews. They all wanted to have me over, but my husband refused because he had converted to the Catholic faith.

He stayed away from them [the Jews]. They didn't even want to buy his stuff. One Jew, rest in peace, thought very little of my husband, […] 'He's got a wife, like I do, and he meets other women. He doesn't respect his wife. I'll call the driver. He will take you back home. I want you to be happy. You don't need a rogue for a husband.' They hated him for his christening. I mattered to them a lot. They liked me also after his death. They would invite me over when he was still around. They invited me over, the Jews, all of them. I was on good terms with them because I liked one of their people. I still do have a lot of respect for the Jews. […]

Turning point:

[…] My good fortune left me half a year after my husband's death. I remarried six months later. Nothing new happened. I worked at the tax office and took care of everything by myself. I invested a lot of time and effort into the workshop. I was hyperactive at the time. I was running round in circles, with no time to relax. I worked all day long. People think office work is something easy. Each type of work is different. Add housework, the daughter and the dog to this. I didn't sell the dog. It was a pity to lose it. The daughter and me were really attached to the dog. I often walked the dog at 2 am, I cleaned the bathroom with methylated spirit. We had no cleaning products like today. I used to clean the floor in the bathroom. We renovated the whole flat. Spick and span it was! There were two storerooms, a kitchen and two rooms. We kept two rooms. We converted the kitchen into a studio. One storeroom was converted into a bathroom and the other into a kitchen. We also had a hall. It was all a matter of money and money we made. I actually made the money. I liked making money a lot. The business belonged to my husband. My husband achieved a lot. He ran the whole business. He learnt the trade at the Cooperative Council. He ran meetings. The funeral was full of people. Lots of strangers, but there were also a priest and friends. There were speeches. I also arranged for a brass orchestra. I remember everyone helped me.

He died of a heart attack. Everything happened at home. I tried to save him, I called an ambulance, but it was too late. His braces dropped to the floor. I didn't realize. I only did when he was gone. He wet himself and was gone. It was too late to save him. […] He once played dead with us. He rolled his eyes. My daughter and I were both in tears. He was a real prankster He read crime stories before going to bed. He liked dancing a lot. One guy ran a dancing school. He could have found me alluring. You never know. I went dancing back at business school. We used to go dancing together when we met. We did even when I was pregnant. We started at 6 pm and finished at 6 am. We always went to Casanova. Twelve hours of dancing. We would tip the janitor to let us in at six. That was a brief episode. When we set up a business, we stopped the parties. I remember a nice evening. We were partying at Casanova. Then there was a young man in military uniform. I don't know if he was a soldier, but he was wearing a uniform. One guy from Zgierz [a town]. A flirtatious type. First, he asked me to dance. I said: 'Why should I? What is it exactly that you want from me?' 'I'd like to have a dance with you.' […] My husband agreed. We danced to this tune by Boney M. You saw the video. She lies on the floor and dances to the music. I could copy the moves easily. I practised gymnastics at school. [The teacher] she taught us all this very patiently. I just had this in me. I still do. The moves and everything. I can still do this. I used to be the teacher's pet. She wanted me to go to a sports school. I didn't want to. She saw I was a promising student. Then I went to a technical college.

Second marriage and a new home:

[Second husband's] his wife was an alcoholic. Everything was arranged by my customer [the match-making]. I put on a nice dress and dyed my hair black. I came to her place with merchandise. He was there too. I told her I was going to call it quits. She said it was too late. He'd already been there. […] I came and he got scared. We was sitting next to me, shaking. He was scared. I later returned to my natural colour. […] I didn't want him. I was in my taxi. I often travelled by taxi. The driver said: 'Why don't we go and see him.' 'Leave me alone or I'll change the driver.' […] He was so thin. I didn't want him. I later went to buy a TV set. He was the manager. We were going somewhere. He drove me off to the hotel. He said goodbye and he left. He kissed me on the hand. That was all. It was rather formal. […] I just didn't have the heart to. I later saw his brother. The brother said I was quite a catch. Where did he meet me? He happened to be in Łódź and rented a car […]. He came to my place. There was little intimacy at home. My friend called, the one who helped me and my first husband to meet. 'Why don't you come to my place. You can speak with I. at my place.' We took precautions because of my daughter. The friend invited me over. We met at her place. He told me he was not going to leave me. I told him not to make a fool of himself. That's how it all started.

I was afraid of his young age. He was nine years my junior. He was only twenty-two. Nine years younger than me. My friend told me: 'You can afford it. I can't.' I took up her suggestion. We moved in together. He came to Łódź, we shared a home. We were once walking and he said: 'Let's go to the office to set up the wedding date.' We entered and it was October. I told him to choose December instead. We chose the date. We

were happy together. But the daughter was jealous. She was twenty-two. He wasn't her dad; he was a stranger. My husband's sons left when he was still around. He wasn't at all good to them. He was extremely strict, especially to the boys. He knew how to put his foot down. […] I saw one of the boys [her stepsons] off to the railway station. We were in touch, he would send supplies. For me, obviously. He visited me several years later; he lived in Denmark.

[However, her second husband] he wasn't happy about our rapport [with her previous family]. He was extremely possessive. But I had a wonderful mother-in-law instead. I was the better of the two. She had a second son, but she barely praised his wife. I helped to arrange for the coffin when she died. The size of a sarcophagus.

[…] We moved out […] we wanted to do business. He was reluctant to pay child support. I wish I had paid it. The police wouldn't have chased us. We left at night, carrying our luggage and everything. I remember we took furniture at night. I was keen to do business with the Russians. I had an intermediary, but tariff regulations changed. The Russians had to pay 30% tariff and they vanished. The business failed. We came back to Łódź. My husband took to repairing household appliances. […] a jack of all trades, he could repair virtually anything. He completed a technical college. We did really well financially. We rented flats.

There was a house in S. 300 sqm in size. We paid five million monthly rent. We paid millions to live there. The house was large and beautiful. No one had lived there before. We were the first to enter it. There were parquet floors, a bathroom and a studio. There weren't enough people to work. We found it hard to sell the merchandise. We came back to Łódź. He worked in the city and we rented a flat there. I don't remember our first flat. One-bedroom flats these were. No, wait. We rented a two-bedroom flat. That was at A., I don't remember the other locations. […] We stayed at my daughter's for some time. They had a drinking problem. My daughter married an employee of mine, who was an alcoholic. There was no way we could go on like that. We searched the classified ads. It was a sheer stroke of luck. I found a property agent. It was probably through an ad. I called the number in the ad and she found a flat for us. We agreed to leave her [the daughter] on New Year's Eve 1985. She made a terrible scene. We had to take our luggage and leave at night. It was unbearably freezing. The same story with the money. My husband and I would sell mistletoe in an open market before Christmas or palms before Easter. We had the money to pay the rent, to but merchandise at W. We were dealing with merchandise all the time. To make a living. We found an ad in a newspaper, and so the husband would work as a driver […]. Another ad, and he did tape repair. He did all this by himself […]. I saw one more ad, one about toner cartridges. You had to drive all the way to S. We were interested nonetheless. But how can you get around to it? We thought we might try. We started a new business. […]. We took 200 *zloty* per item. He didn't do the thinking. He was the doer, I was the thinker […]. It all went into pieces at some point. The machines got dirty, and we had to stop. There was also cheaper competition. The business didn't pay. […] We bought toner cartridges and sold them to our buyers. These were mainly institutions, including tax offices. Courts didn't do the printing, public transport and insurance businesses had their own suppliers. We thought we might target the Social Insurance Institution. We did

all kinds of institutions. Together […] Never apart, we always worked together. We had always been together, since our first meeting. [It was different than with the previous husband] We were never apart. He was a completely different kind of man. He wasn't very fond of Israel. We spent twenty-five years together. It all went as it had been only five or twenty-five days. It was so short.

He had a stroke. He complained about headaches, and his leg hurt. Both to the right side of his body. He left to visit a client. He collapsed by his car. He was away for a long time and I tried to reach him. He was taken in an ambulance. He went to hospital. He was in a coma. They weren't able to save him. I was angry with him. He took pills. I was looking for the pills but couldn't find them. He promised to go to the pharmacy after leaving the client but he didn't. He would have been safe. Had he taken the pills, he would have recovered. He had untreated hypertension. A real tragedy. My daughter later moved in. She left her husband. Her husband died when mine was still around ['Zofia's' second husband]. He died at fifty-two. She lived at our place. She had abstained from drinking for four years and a half. When my husband died, there was nothing to stop her. He wasn't stringent, but he was a man. He commanded respect.

Daughter:

Her husband was an alcoholic. My former employee. His wife ditched him because of drinking. She left for Germany. She worked there. When she returned, she refused to come back home. She rented a flat. She didn't want to be with him.

[The daughter] she was jealous, she couldn't find a boyfriend. I haven't told you she was seriously ill. She had endocrine disruption. She was unable to menstruate. She had a difficult operation […]. It didn't look very promising. When I spoke to the surgeon, he wasn't sure of the result. It was a godsend, everything went well. She suffered a great deal. She didn't have a boyfriend. She eventually found one. […] She also had a lot of hair all over her body. This was an embarrassment, not only to her, but also to her boyfriend. Someone mature would have understood, someone young didn't. Then the daughter lived with me. I complained to my sister about her drinking, her debt, her disobedience. I was all out to help her so that she could finish a leather-working college. She would have learnt to make handbags and stuff. She didn't want to. She drank her way through the money. I gave her the money. You always give a second chance. Her husband died. But all she did was drink and pick fights. There was police at home. Things took a wrong turn. She picked fights with me. She reproached me for the husband. She'd say he died like a dog. She was insanely jealous.

[…] she had a flat. We moved out to a flat she inherited from her husband's father. His father died and so she moved in. They didn't pay the rent, and they ended up in arrears. They stripped the floors. The flat was in poor condition. They were offered temporary accommodation. They had a child. Eviction was not an option. She is living at D. now, but she doesn't pay the rent; she's unemployed. Her housing conditions are worse now. An old tenement. This is also my registered address. She wanted me to register after my husband's death. I didn't ask her, it was her initiative. It was a private tenement.

How she ended up in the shelter:

I left my daughter's tenement and went to my sister's. I complained to my sister about the daughter: her mean ways, drinking and fights. The sister came in a large taxi. I took some of the stuff with me, but I also left some for my child. My child was so busy entertaining her company that she refused to take anything. Their company took it. They took everything away from me. They stole everything away.

My sister is a mother of ten. One child has a drinking problem. The child came [to her] in winter. She told me: 'Why don't you go to your daughter's.' Of course I could. I went to my daughter's. But she wasn't there. She was with her company. I went to my neighbour. The neighbour told me about the night shelter. I came here at 11 pm. I pressed the buzzer but no one answered. I don't know why there was no one to answer at night. Perhaps they don't let strangers in at night. I was standing by the gate. I called the police and they gave me the phone number. I called the shelter, they opened the gate and I entered. D. verified my ID and checked my cleanliness. Everything was all right. She offered me tea and some sandwiches. I told her I had some with me because I was on the move. I was on the move, I came there right away. […] I came there in an instant. She didn't like the fact that I had a registered address. I had to leave the place the next day. I ended up in the street again. It was freezing.

[…] I brought up my granddaughter because of her parents' addiction. The granddaughter is twenty now. She left for the Netherlands. The granddaughter drank with her mother, and she shattered all the windows in the flat. It was so cold in there. When I returned to the flat, the neighbours […] called the Municipal Welfare Centre and told them the whole story. I didn't go to the shelter. The social worker told me it was necessary […]. I came once and they didn't want to let me in. I came there again. The social worker got upset; she didn't know how to deal with the situation. She refused to take responsibility should anything bad happen. She called the police. I had to speak to the officers. They were told to come and take me. The social worker said it was their duty. There was no way they wouldn't come. I was ill and unable to roam the streets the whole day. I could walk for no more than two hours. I had blisters on my feet. My bladder was also failing. I had to wash my knickers; they were all wet, and it was November. I had cystitis. I had no clothes to change. I didn't know they'd give me some. I did great harm to myself. There was no way I could have it my way. They told me I had to obey. And I stayed here. They turned a blind eye to my registered address. I had a referral to a public nursing home. I wanted to sort this out immediately.

Stay at the shelter:

Nobody cares about you. Forget about kindness if you're elderly or ill. I spoke the other day to the manager. I needed assistance. I tend to lag behind. It takes me longer to bathe. I'm getting weaker. My youth is gone. We've got people of all ages here. Only few individuals are civilized and polite. There's a teacher in our room. She knows how to behave. I say 'hello' and she replies 'good morning'. I'm a sensitive person. […] I've been here for more than a year. I've been here since November. [Concerning the public nursing home] I'm going to see a committee. [There might be a vacancy in 2014]

I'm in line for a vacancy at P., K. or R. The previous social worker told me that K. is just beautiful. I've heard that P. is also good. I heard it the other day. People were praising it. I haven't heard anything about R. […]

[Christmas ans Easter at the shelter] were extremely sad. We exchanged wishes with P., she's a girl, she's only twenty. And with those in the dorm. She does have a heart. […] She's a good girl. She's only twenty. She's well-behaved.

Her personal circumstances:

I'm seriously ill and have no money. I'm not going to speak to the social worker. [Anyway] I already did. I spoke to a counsellor. I wish she could help me… The social worker promised me to write an application to the nursing home. That's all she could do. My pay is 20 *zloty* too high. This is simply unfair. […]

I'm going to fight to get the assistance I deserve. I wish I could get free lunches back. They took this away. They told me my pay was too high. Around 20 *zloty* too much. They don't care I might get ill and have to spend most of the money on treatment. They don't give a fig. One size fits all, that's their policy. If you're fit you have enough money to buy groceries. The balance doesn't provide for the medicines and the supplements you take to provide all these nutrients and elements that vanish from your body.

They offered me a one-off payment. They're all talk. One-off aid, maybe. That's not the answer. […] I wish I could get some aid, even financial support would do. That would be something for a start. 'You don't need assistance of this kind. You're not going to cook, after all.' [she quotes one of the clerks]. That was disgraceful. I get my health pension by the fifth every month. I've bought medicines and there's very little left. I'm in debt, I have too little money to make a living. It's sad to admit, but I ate leftovers. P. brought me some [the twenty-year-old girl she mentioned]. She had meat, potatoes and coleslaw for lunch. She ate the meat and the coleslaw; she left me the potatoes. Only the potatoes were left […]. I ate the potatoes. How long am I going to eat other people's leftovers?

Life philosophy:

[…] We choose the life we live. Some people think it's because of fate or coincidence. Our good fortune may be coincidental. Happiness is ephemeral; it doesn't last very long. Fond memories are all there is. It's not very nice to go through a difficult patch. We reject happiness because we start thinking differently. One thing you need to do is boost your mind and relax. This is theory and practice. It all depends on who does it and why. I do it to improve my health. I have to. There's no other way. […] I do a lot to improve my health. I tell my mind to do the right thing. And it does sometimes. It rarely does as it's told. It lasts only a few seconds if something goes wrong. Then there's a signal, and I know everything. […]

They're now surprised I'm no longer infirm and I can walk freely. It's all in your mind. One hundred per cent in your mind. My body is ill. It hurts, but I try to keep my poise. Sometimes you just need to spend money like there's no tomorrow. This

corset is for my slipped disc, it doesn't support the entire spine. I'm still using the stick to keep the spine straight as it bends at my buttocks. They all think I'm doing great. They don't see my disability. I can barely walk. I can barely walk without the stick. I'm all in pain. They don't believe in my pain. This is paradoxical and even funny. This is annoying but also funny.

'Piotr'

He was around thirty-five years old and a non-drinking alcoholic. Shortly after our conversation, he left the institution and moved in with his lady friend. He had been occupying a single room at the institution for some time. For this reason, he met other residents only occasionally. This mainly had to do with his cleaning duty and other tasks. He failed to develop a deeper rapport with any of the residents. The space he had only to himself was kept in a different kind of (dis)order than those of the twin rooms. His room was very small and measured around four square metres (that said, twin rooms were not much larger and measured 1.5 square metres more). The room was furnished with a bed, chest of drawers, narrow standing cupboard, cupboard, bookshelf, mirror, TV set and microwave oven (which only showed that he preferred not to use the kitchen at the time). The furnishings were covered with objects: mainly cosmetics, drinks (water and juice) and medicines; towels were hanging from lines. In twin rooms or dorms, the bits and pieces were kept in little piles in a section attributed to their owner. They were often kept out of sight, and only those in regular use (cosmetics, cups or towels) were visible. Stashed away or kept in little piles, these objects seemed as if they had been fewer in quantity, as they took less space and were less likely to catch anybody's attention. Scattered around the room, the objects in his room produced an impression of profuse quantities.

There were also religious symbols: a rosary and holy pictures. He was careful not to speak about it during our conversation, but I learnt off the record from other people that he belonged to a group of active pilgrims. However, he preferred not to speak about it.

Home:

Family home comes to mind; when I was little. I wish I could have something entirely my own, a place I know I can return to. I don't want to live at other people's places. I want to be on my own. My property. Something I can lock and return to any time I want. Not a place you share with or rent from someone. Everything in writing. I'm a practical person. I'm not into things that may vanish into thin air. Yesterday we spoke with the manager about personal change [to be] more like myself. […] There's an inhibition in me. I have dreams, but there are people, there's no money and I'm stuck. I can't make my dreams come true because I'm not able to. If you don't change

your life, your life will take its course without you. But if you take a decision and change something, you have to stick to your guns, I might not be ready for it yet. It's difficult to say. […] I don't think I am. […]

I miss it [home]. I can still see it, the place I was born. A three-bedroom flat at R. My father and sister still live there. Mum passed away. There's a desire to go there. This is where my thoughts go to whenever I'm thinking about home. To have a place of my own. And the people to share it with. My daughter or some other woman in my life. […] surely, I want to have a place of my own. I'll do anything not to lose it.

[…] I'm doing my best to leave this place. It's nice and fine here, especially as I live in a single room, there are no distractions, but because of the children and what's ahead of me, I'm simply jammed. I'm stuck. By the way, K. said exactly the same thing to the manager. There are many things we're unable to do because we're here and we're barely free.

Suppose a decision has been made and there's a flat available, the location doesn't matter much since I'm here anyway. I should get one. I have it in writing. The location doesn't matter. What matters is to move out. […] you can't go on like this forever, but I think everything's going to settle in a year or a year and a half. […] I started the procedure a year ago. When I came here in March two years ago, I filed an application either in May or June. I got a reply in July saying I should provide more documents for consideration. As I wrote this application I also made an appeal to the previous application so that this period [in jail] was also included […]. The property manager won't be back from holidays until the sixteenth, they are now private operators [he is speaking about the property manager at the tenement he once lived in and run into debt at]. The termination of the lease must be delivered to the town office. I have a certificate saying that I have no legal title to any flat and that my former flat is in debt and the lease agreement has been terminated […].

Family – alcohol addiction – disease – sobriety:

My life got complicated because of my grandmother. I met my future wife. She moved in and we married. When she got pregnant, we bought a flat in a private tenement. We moved in when our daughter was born. We lived there in a one-bedroom flat. The room was 32 square metres in size. I knew I was going to inherit the flat when grandma dies [hers]. We had more space and I didn't have to struggle with grandma. Two years later, though, as grandma was getting weaker, father asked me to move in at her place. Grandma didn't feel like dying. She also liked to have a drink, at dinner parties or family get-togethers. I descended into alcoholism. I was lost. That's for sure. I had no ambitions, no goals, I was stuck in a rut or even moving backwards. That's what it is in hindsight. […] When I lived here [with the wife, in the tenement], the brother- and sister-in-law lived several numbers away and we often met [to drink]. We could afford it [to drink] at weekends. There was beer on weekdays, but that was just the beginning. I had problems. I wasn't cut out for this woman [his wife]. The only time I could stand her was when I was drunk. I was finally calm. I was fine with everything. That was one of the reasons of my drinking problem. She only needed a shot or two to get plastered. She seldom drank. There were times, on New Year's Eve, when she

drank two and was doing fine. She once told my sister she liked me drunk because I was different, my behaviour was different and more flexible. She never told me that. […] When I was on the wagon and we were still seeing each other, as I was visiting the children, she told me I was stiff, not like previously, not the life of the party.

One cared little about the money back then. There was no tomorrow. Only the present moment. Just to have a drink and have some fun. Tomorrow was tomorrow. When you descend into an addiction, you can't go on with small doses, [that is], it doesn't have to be much. You can have a drink or two. But it keeps you going. I have to admit, I mean, honestly, in small quantities alcohol actually helped me at work. I worked as a sales guy. I found it easier to get on with people at corporate outings and get-togethers. Alcohol helped me to relax and talk.

Alcohol has always been present in my life. I started to abuse alcohol after the wedding in 2003. […] I can't criticize her, she was a good wife. […] It was a different kind of problem, that's why she looked at the situation differently. It's quite likely because her father drank and she saw him drunk.

[…] [Until then] life was normal, work, home, summer holidays. On the face of it everything was normal, but in hindsight it wasn't a home of my dreams. There was too much alcohol, and some things didn't go the way I wanted to because I gave in. He went to have something to drink. It was only too late. I have bad memories [of all this].

You have to move on and have a new beginning. I left everything on M. Street [where he lived with his wife and children], my stuff […], I've cut off myself, there's no past, I have a new start. I have one pair of shoes but I'll manage, I'm moving on.

It doesn't matter what it's going to be like [the new house] the size doesn't matter at all. […] [It should be] open, so that the children could come any time, have a get-together or a chat or stay overnight so long as they are little and don't have their own families.

[…] My life is in my hands only, but children do help me to keep sober; they lost a family home because of my drinking problem; this my debt I'm trying to repay. I'm here for my children. I'm trying to add some variety to their Thursdays and Sundays, so there's no boredom and they know a father, not a drunkard. […] they know I was drinking, I did a lot of harm. What's done can't be undone, and they are still little children, their imagination is only fired by what my wife has told them.

[Daughters] are allowed to come and they do. They can't stay overnight, that's against the rules. The court rejected the idea because of my housing conditions. There's only one bed and it's a men's institution. The girls have nowhere to relieve themselves [there is only one toilet at the institution, without any separate toilet for the ladies]. A probation office came and she said […] she was going to write how nice, fresh and clean the place was. I actually saw the interview, but the judges rejected the idea and so did my ex-wife. Most likely, they are going to wait until I move out from here… [the daughters are going to spend more time with him].

I want them to have something nice to remember me by. Anything bad may happen any time soon, I have issues with my pancreas, God forbid, I once literally escaped surgery. 2% [this much] chance I had [to survive]. The next seizure may come any time. I may not be able to pull through.

My drinking problem started in 2003, and a year later I ended up in a very bad condition on an operating table. I scraped through and continued drinking. Nothing would help, no doctor, nothing. My diet was white milk only, I was on a drip the whole day. There was nothing to eat or drink and I went down from 87 kilos to only 65. [The nurse told me] 'There's no way you could go to a McDonald's again, no fat, no alcohol either.' What's the point then? There is one, but you have to make an effort.. […] But when I was released from hospital, I was still wearing drains, and it couldn't stop me from having a beer on the sly. There was pain at first, but it gradually disappeared.

I needed a real shake-up [to stop drinking], [but] this [can only happen] when you're a conscious human being. I had a check-up, and then got a seizure when I left. I was in Pabianice [a town]. I took a newspaper, found an ad and called the guy. 'My surgery is on Z. Street. You can come any time you like.' I'd have travel across the entire city. I didn't know I would manage. But he did give me a check-up when I came. 'That's correct. You have an acute pancreatic necrosis. I would suggest you leave your car here and go straight to hospital.' I'm not going anywhere. I only need medicines and an injection and I'm going home. He gave me an injection, no too strong, though; he said it was because of the car. He gave me a prescription and said: 'You need a test, just to be on the safe side. […] a blood and urine test and we'll know everything there is to know.' I did the test, paid for it and received the results. I read the results out to the guy. I was weak, extremely weak. There was no way I could have a drink. I would vomit almost instantly. The injection reduced the pain, but I felt bad anyway. On second thoughts, after I spoke to the doctor, I went home, left the car and went to hospital, where they put me in bed, put me on a drip and told to stay. I had an ultrasound scan on Saturday and it turned out I had an abscess to remove. I was for regular surgery. Then it turned out that the pancreas had melted, this lead to peritonitis and other complications. I don't know how long they kept me there exactly, two or three days maybe. I was released on Friday.

[…] I'm speaking about this as if it happened to someone else. I had been struggling with pancreas for three more years. I was drinking, I had aches and pains, I had seizures. I had been admitted to hospital three times in a month, for five to seven days each, then I was released. That wasn't a true me, I can't explain all this. My mind was disconnected from the body. Come to think of it, about my life in general, there must have been some guardian angel above me. I'm of a sound and sober mind now. I know what I do and what I eat. I stick to my diet. […]

[I also had] an Esperal implant. […] I don't remember when it was put in exactly, probably in between therapies. I had been able to resist for three months. That was as much as I could make. I went yellow because of the implant. I went to the doctor's and he told me that there was no way they could help if the liver and the heart begin to fail. […] I mutilated myself at some point, I was admitted to hospital twice, three weeks each, because of depression. I was able to resist the drink for a month or two. There were moments I actually could. The longest I could resist was three months, when I had the Esperal implant. But I wasn't sober. I've been explaining to virtually anyone that I wasn't sober back then. I wasn't drinking, but I wasn't sober either.

His way to a move-on flat – the loss of his flat:

Everything started when I had my second round of therapy. I completed the first round of therapy at the Babiński hospital, and then I had a second round a year and a half later.

[…] You started with a session every morning. A lunch break and another session. Your leisure time started at 5 pm. Just like after work, but there were more people, there was a common area and other stuff. I smoked back then and spent a lot of time in the smoking room. I no longer smoke because of the money. […] I didn't smoke a lot, a pack of cigarettes would last for two days, sometimes even three, which made up around 50 to 70 *zloty* monthly; that's enough to make a living for a week, not exactly a week, but almost.

I had nowhere to stay. I lived at my aunt's. My wife moved to grandma's. I had a large flat, 50 square metres in size, and a lot of rent to pay in a private tenement. I ran into debt a little. [The property administrator] she offered me a store room converted into a flat. The conditions were impossible. I moved to my aunt's. The uncle drank. I made an application after therapy and finally ended up here. No sooner had I settled in when my sentence was put back in force and I went to jail again. I returned from jail. […] The rules say you can't return if you broke the regulations. But I didn't go back to drinking […], it was only my sentence that was put back in force, which I didn't know it was. That's how I ended up here. I first came here in March 2011. A room-mate at therapy told me [about the institution] I attended an interview. Honestly, I don't remember much. I came for an induction meeting. I probably filled in some paperwork. I made an application, that is. I was waiting for a call. It was probably M. who called me. She told me the date. There was an interview with the manager and we arranged everything but I don't remember the details. I was told to come and pick up the keys. After the second interview, I was sure they would take me on.

I found it difficult to go on at my auntie's [because of the uncle's drinking], I was straight from therapy. It was like a trigger. The very smell of alcohol, his being drunk… He [the uncle] didn't do anything wrong, but […] it was the alcohol. That was probably one of the reasons why the manager took me on, so that I wouldn't go back to drinking.

There are three rooms [at the aunt's], and he [the uncle] goes on a bender from time to time. He continues for a week or two, then he stops for three weeks only to have a beer and the cycle repeats itself.

[When he came to the institution, he only had] one bag with clothes, only clothes. […] I never moved in to that flat [a converted store room]. The property manager called it a flat, but I told her there was no way one could live there. She told me my flat had been taken away.

[…] When I lived on M. Street, I had time to move out by the end of July, but I got a tooth infection and I ended up having maxillofacial surgery at the Barlicki Hospital. My life was at risk. There was no way I could leave hospital. I was given powerful antibiotics and was told to wait for surgery. […] I was still at hospital on 1 August. She [the property manager] wasn't bothered, [although] I had two more weeks to move

out, she took my stuff to the laundry room, the stuff from the flat, she locked it all up and gave me the key. 'Now you can do as you please.' There was nothing I could do with it. I had a sofa bed, a wardrobe, one more wardrobe, some flowers and a vacuum cleaner. That was everything. The wife took the lot away. I drank away the TV set. There were no precious items. There were some clothes. The clothes I took to therapy, I'd later take them whenever I went to, they would always come in handy. As for the rest, everything vanished when I went to jail [it was probably disposed by the property manager]. No valuables. Only furniture, pots and pans, some plates. This phase in my life no longer exists [this is a closed chapter]. I've realized it no longer exists. I have to start a new life.

Life at the institution:

This is nothing new to me. It's not bad, especially for me, since I've got a single room, but you're a bit like in a cage because of all these meetings, one-to-ones and duty. There's no freedom, no registered address, no way to complete any formalities. This is a transition period. So long as I have a job [I'm going to be all right]. You never know what happens if you try to change it. I have no registered address and I live at an institution. They might be able to make an exception or not. It's difficult to say. I wish I could move out as quickly as possible. The procedure is ongoing. The sooner the better. The place is not bad but it's a nuisance when you look into details. You can't take a week off, [I mean] you can, but you have to find someone to stand in for you during duty. Suppose I wanted to go abroad to work for three months, I've had such offers before, the manager is not going to agree. It's because I may go back to drinking. They might just as well say I should rent a flat since I've made some money abroad. The manager stipulates the rules. There was a gentleman who was a lorry driver. Each time he was on the road, he'd be absent for two or three weeks, and his place was empty. I'm going to take up a similar job. I have to complete training. The registered address is the problem. I have to have an ID to go abroad, [which means] I have to have an ID with a registered address. They won't let me go abroad without one.

His flat and belongings:

[Initially] I shared a twin room with K. As I was released from prison, the manager gave me this one [a single room] because one of the guys went back to drinking and there was a vacancy. […] The wardrobe and the TV set are mine, and anything I did, too, is mine. This table top, for instance. This is for my convenience. There was nowhere you could sit and have something to eat or do something or write. The room had been renovated just before I came. I only cleaned it. I have to admit that, the guy […] was one Mr Clean. […] I have some stuff to take when I move on. A washing machine, a fridge, a gas cooker. I can always buy a wardrobe or a stool, just like kitchen furnishings. [The furnishings] are ready. The washing machine and the fridge are in the laundry room. The stove is at a friend's garage, in an allotment garden.

Self-assessment:

[…] I'd like to change a lot, surely, but I don't know where to start. The money is a real setback. […] I can't have a bank account [he was careful not to share this, but he fell back with child support and he failed to pay back the arrears he had run into in his former flat]. The only money I've got is in my wallet. I have to sort this out on my own. Without losing anything, […], because people usually drink themselves to death because of failure, they take to drinking when they can no longer manage. You have to keep your feet firmly fixed to the ground, you can afford no mistakes, it's very easy to stumble. You have to move on. I do as reasonably as I can.

You can always go out, go to a swimming pool, for instance, but I don't feel the need just yet. […] when we go to the club [for non-drinking alcoholics] to dance, everything stays in the club, nobody drinks [there], everyone's sober and we do have fun. A haven't been to a pub yet. I can go to a party, to a meeting, to a family gathering, get together with the guys, but I can't imagine I'd be able to go out on the town. […] it's different when people know you're on the wagon, but strangers do give you stares when you say you don't.

I've retuned to my true self, the way I was ten years ago [when he stopped drinking] I was normal when on the wagon, […] that is, I behaved normally. I was thinking about home, family, what the future might bring. [When he drank] I was only keen to get money for the booze, I lived like there was no tomorrow, I lived only in the here and now. I wasn't bothered about tomorrow at all. It's a bit different now. The world makes you think about the future and the necessities of life. You have a job one day and you lose it the next day. The world has changed. That's how you tend to think and you act accordingly. I'm a homebody now: I don't go anywhere and I tend not to socialize. There's always fear [of alcohol]. It's not paralysing, though, that's just a matter of attitude.

I actually like it [to spend time at home]. Before I started to abuse alcohol I'd return home after work every day. And I always came home with a beer. I would sometimes have a beer at home. When I started to abuse, I tried not to drink at home. I'd only have a beer sometimes because of my wife and children. Then everything changed.

I'm [now] back to my full self. I've been struggling for several years. I've been on the wagon for three years now. I was a bit lost when I was released from prison, which was in June last year. There was Christmas in December and I was still afraid I might go back to drinking, I was bothered, all those meetings and stuff, but winter has passed and it's different now. I've finally got over it now. I'm more relaxed about the whole thing, I'm not so scared about alcohol. I had fits of anxiety. There was vodka wherever you went. I was afraid I might give in. I wasn't going to drink at home or at family gatherings, but what if I was out on the town?… As you attend therapy, you learn that one guy went back into drinking, then another, and no one can really explain how all this happened. [They said] I was going to the shops, I took one, I bought it and left. My first time [after first therapy] was exactly the same. I went to the shops to buy a beer for a friend of mine and I returned with two. […] since I'd already bought the beer, I thought it wouldn't make much difference if I had one. As I was drinking it I felt the way alcohol was going through me. I got upset. No good, I should be going home now, call for friends or family to save me. But no one saved and I got drunk in the end. It's tough sometimes.

There was a farewell party at work, they were drinking vodka and I was doing fine. I wasn't bothered by alcohol, I took it easy. Now that it's Easter, I'm no longer bothered, I take it easy. There was vodka on the table, no one had to keep it away from me. I said I'm fine with it. My sister knows about this. They could drink, they could do whatever they liked so long as there was no vodka on the table. Now there's vodka on the table and I'm no longer bothered. I'm perfectly fine. A sort of detachment, the longer the better.

The longer you're sober, the more you can achieve every day. In hindsight you can finally see the outcomes. I've been able to achieve something over a year. I don't know what would have happened if I had continued drinking. I might not be here at all.

'Mariola'

She was in her twenties. Her life on her own, with two children and subsequent partners, had come to an end three years before she entered an institution. Expecting her third baby and after a break-up with the father (because of domestic violence), 'Mariola' entered a centre for expecting mothers or single mothers with little children. She later moved to another institution, where we met.

Family home and subsequent homes – violence:

Home is home, regardless of the size. It might be large, it might just as well be small. It's simply home. Most of all, it's family. When I was a child, we lived at G., near RL. I've lived almost everywhere in Łódź. And I've spent one year in Bełchatów [a town]. I was eighteen when I left home. In what you might call dramatic circumstances. It wasn't exactly peaceful at home. I lived at my dad's. It's fine as long as we keep in touch without living together. We simply can't live together. A sheer disaster. I lived for some time at my friend's, then I met a guy. Not exactly a good choice, but never mind. They were all good for nothing. And finally I ended up here. In the meantime I rented a flat I couldn't afford.

I'd been renting most of the time. My first boyfriend and I lived at his father's. They didn't get along, so we had to leave. Then we lived at other people's flats. We broke up later. I was mature enough to be on my own, but he wasn't. I later returned to dad's, but it didn't quite work out. I later lived at my grandpa's, and at a friend's of mine. And then I met the father of my two daughters. Another disaster. We spent six years at one place. This at least was sorted out. One place and one home. I was unlucky to meet an unpleasant type. It's the past now. I had nowhere to go to [back then]. It was like a vicious circle.

You simply can't do without home. Your own home, your independence. I've been dependent on someone all my life. […] I want to be on my own, to be the queen of my castle. Suppose I don't like something, I'm on my own and I can throw the guy out. I don't have to worry he's going to throw me out instead. Home gives you a sense of security.

[…] then there was a baby, we called it N., but he [the father of her children] couldn't care less. He knew I lost touch with dad because dad hated him. And for a reason, as it turned out later. Dad would cut me out so long as I was with him. A friend of mine finally made me move in with her. When I was expecting the second baby. She saw my black eye at work, day in, day out. A different colour every day. She said I'd had enough. She left me no choice. She told me she would make me redundant ['Mariola' was her employee at the time].

I broke free. I was able to cope. I stayed at a single mothers' centre because she, too, had two children. It wasn't exactly great since she was married to a Turk. A real blunder. She's still his wife, but they separated. It's not easy to divorce a Turk. It's even harder if you have a son with one […]. She had a two-bedroom flat in Bełchatów [a town], but it was too small for my three and her two children; that's five children in total. And the two of us. Always dependent. That's why we moved to a single mothers' centre. I left my clothes there. The worst thing is I can't get back these things from the single mothers' centre. These were new and trademark clothes. I got them as part of a Christmas donation. [In the corridor] […] there were bags full of clothes to either side. We were searching the corridor while the sisters were taking care of the children in the playroom. We were picking the clothes. It was fantastic. The clothes would take up half the store room. I'd been packing for four days before I moved out. Lots of toys, a basketful of rattles. I left it all in the attic [in a flat she rented after she had left the single mothers' centre]. It was all stolen away. I just couldn't take it with me. All I could is my children and my luggage. There was no way I could carry it by myself. […]

I'm really attached to my children. They're all that matters. After all I've been through I can to tell you material objects are the last thing you need in life. Less is more, in fact. You don't have to deal with all this as you move house. And you don't miss anything. I can keep anything I like when I'm on my own. I might try to get some of these things back, actually. [But] there's no way I can get the furniture back. I'd be able to furnish an entire flat with the furniture I left behind. I'm just trying not to think about it. […]

We moved in together with another girl from the single mothers' centre. It turned out she wasn't very keen to go to work and pay the rent, which wasn't that small, after all. Tough luck. I had to give in. On the bright side, the landlord was really okay. He was a good guy, and we ran into considerable arrears. We only paid the utilities, without any rent at all. He didn't want his money back. All he wanted us to do was to move out as quickly as we could. Then I returned to my friend in Bełchatów [a town]. Then a deadlock again. I've ended up here, eventually. I'm happy living here for the time being. […].

Her experience with institutions:

[The first institution, a single mothers' centre ran by nuns – I.B.K.] was located at NS. I moved in at the end of September, while they were moving to B. in October. […] No night shelter, only the single mothers' centre and pregnant girls. They were allowed to stay from the beginning of pregnancy until the eighth month after labour. They would normally prolong their stay. Overall, it wasn't bad at all. The cleaning

regime was slightly different. The building was larger, and there were more rooms available. […] We have two rounds of duty, and they had twelve. We do the kitchen once in a fortnight, and the bathroom once a week. We did them every day there. You had duty every week. Every day the same job. If you had no disciplinary duty, you had finally a free hand to do something else. Tough luck with all this cleaning. That's their reality. We had to pass the cleanliness test, which was authorized by the nuns. They were overdoing all this cleaning. You were given a warning for one little dirty speck on the floor. Three warnings and you had to do disciplinary duty. If you were given disciplinary cleaning, you had to squeeze in two rounds of duty in a week. The girls are terrified by all this duty. I keep laughing at this. I told them to try their luck for a month at the centre. I was astonished when I moved in. The prefect says there's a duty and we do the kitchen twice a week. I can't say I wasn't happy.

One good thing about the centre was that I had a room entirely to myself. I had two [children] and was expecting a third, so the nuns gave me a separate room, just to be on the safe side. I was able to squeeze in the kids. When I came here, I was told to share a room with N. It was awful. [N. moved out]. Just terrible. She used to limp, she said she had a sick leg. As we were sitting in the smoking room, we often saw her walk like crazy. She looked like new.

I had a scuffle with D. on my first day [one of the social workers – I.B.K.]. It was N.'s fault. She kept these silly creams and odds and sods in her shelf, like any elderly lady. My little L. was two at the time. She moved one of her creams to the side. She didn't open or damage it; she didn't do anything or lost it; she just moved it to the side. We had a big row after that. How dare she touch the cream! [N.] complained to D. about my children and the mess they had made in her stuff. D. came up to me - she was really annoyed. I don't take this lying down, and I started on her. Don't accuse me without evidence or I'll have you. Like a feedback loop. We clashed. We lived only three days together. I was immediately transferred to a triple room to I. Everything went back to normal then. They made me join Iza. We were later joined by K. That was our personal best. Nine people in the room. Six of them were children. At one point even more than that. Ten people, counting K.'s two children in. My three kids and I.'s two. There were three of us. It was insane. Then E. came along, it was as if we had had another baby. Just terrible. I. moved to a different room. I stayed with E., but later left the room.

Three days [there, on her own]. It was a connecting room. I wasn't expecting that. I was joined by K. three days later. Basically, K. is a wool gatherer. But she's not stupid. E. was dumb. She did absolutely nothing. She would never respond, and if she did, it was always a week too late. K. is smart, but she's a bit like absent. I've always known how to drive my point home. I'm short-tempered, a madcap really. I hurl abuse like crazy. Everyone will tell you that. I had a few scuffles because I also swear when my kids are around. I know it's bad but that's just who I am. Anyway, I've already curtailed it. When I get really pissed there's nothing to stop me.

[…] It drives me crazy each time I go to the smoking room [at the shelter]. You can learn so much, about you too, something you've never heard before [from gossip]. I've learnt I was expecting a fourth baby. I once happened to visit the sisters. [A rumour came out as a result] […] I was pregnant and I begged the sister to take me back. She

refused, so I took out a loan and had an abortion. I wouldn't come up with all this by myself. Horrifying and funny at once. Some people while away their time gossiping. There are lots of more interesting things to do. They have nothing better to do with their lives and they pry instead. I don't get it.

Current contact with family:

I had no contact with mum for ten years. We had a reunion only recently. She gave us a computer. She came with a laptop for the kids. Dad can always conjure up something for the kids. He gave them a bike and lots of other things. […] He's a much better granddad than he was a dad. It's because we don't live together. They were afraid of him when we actually lived together. Basically, dad is an alcoholic. He's also on strong psychoactive medication. He goes berserk each time he mixes it with booze. There's no way you can respond normally to a mixture such as this. That's life. It's fine when we live separately. I'm more willing to help him when he's not around. I once came back from work, no sign of him anywhere, the kids terrified on the sofa. It turned out that grandpa would pop in to their room every hour or so, drunker and drunker, to check up on them. He didn't give them anything to eat. They were sitting all day long, waiting for me to return. I knew I couldn't put up with this. I had to either give up work or move out. It simply couldn't go on like this. I couldn't concentrate on work. I was only thinking about what was happening at home, if he was sober, if he took care of them or not. If they were okay or not. We do get along these days. We're going to spend Christmas at dad's. We might be able to stand each other for five days.

[…] It's like suicide or killing your own mother if I told dad that that I'm back in touch with mum. There's no way the two can meet. Dad would probably drive an axe into her head. I'm not going to risk my mother's life just because we're in touch and the two hate each other to bits. This is pure hatred. There's an issue with the first communion. Everything was simple so long as me and mum didn't reunite. Obviously, I was going to invite dad. […] mum is now trying to make up for all these years when she wasn't around. At least the kids are lucky; they've got nice grandparents. It's just awkward when you can't invite your own mother. But I can't afford not to invite dad. He's been with me all my life. The best thing I can do is to have no party at all.

Her flat:

I was allocated a flat [the decision has been made], but I've been waiting for over a month for a decision to have it renovated. It's going to take some time. […] They have to put a stove in. The flat is nothing but bare walls. It's going to take some time, a good few months, until spring or summer. There's a light at the end of the tunnel. The flat is at F., off P. […] not a nice neighbourhood really. Honestly, I wasn't very pleased when I saw the decision. You get subsidized housing in this kind neighbourhoods. But I'm not moving in there to make friends. A dodgy company. I saw them, I can tell. […] The flat is in the yard. A separate building. With two flats: mine and theirs [immediate neighbours]. They were applying for it [the flat she was allocated with]. Basically, their reaction wasn't great. […] We're not going to be friends. I'm not really keen.

I'll have to push through a plan to have running water connected. I'm not going to draw water from a hydrant. It freezes over in winter. The neighbours in the building do have running water. I think this is feasible. Though I'm not sure who's going to pay for it: me or the council. We'll see. That's the least important problem for now. I can carry water if I have to. […]

More importantly, I'm going to give up on places such as this [that is, the direct access hostel]. The kids suffer a lot in places such as this. This is my second institution, and it just drives my kids crazy.

[…] but we're on the right track now. On the one hand, I'd prefer to wait until spring. On the other, I'd like to move out as quickly as possible.

[…] [The prospect of moving house] on the one hand, this is brilliant. A place of my own. At last. I don't have to turn up at fixed hours […]. I'm sick and tired of this. You sometimes feel like spending an evening with friends. Not getting drunk and getting back home on all fours, but spending time over beer or coffee. You have to be back home at 10 pm. This isn't terribly late. I got used other people around me. That's not an easy kind of change, to be on my own in an empty flat. Children at school or kindergarten, and no idea what to do with your time. I'm not going to get bored. […] I hate to be bored. I hate monotony. I'm always busy doing something, this might be anything, like counting things, whatever. I'm always busy. I'm going to be happy when I'm on my own. I'm going to visit friends on my own, free, without children.

R. did public work [at the direct access hostel]. He had access to furniture. [Women from the hostel] would call him if he didn't have any [when they moved on]. There are different websites. You can buy some cheaply. What I'm after is beds, a gas bottle, a cooker and a fridge. That's all I need for a good start. I don't need a suite of furniture. I can keep my things in boxes for some time. Just take it easy. A place to sleep and cook is key.

[…] We're going to keep in touch [with two friends she met at the hostel]. That's a given. The rest doesn't matter to me. We don't speak to each other. I don't like to be a nuisance. They don't really need my company. We have very little in common. K. is very young […]. We get along better than the rest. She's smart and down to earth. We talk and have arguments at times. About religion. I'm a believer, she isn't. K. knows her Bible a lot.

Feeling at home at institutions:

I felt like home at the single mothers' centre. Because of the staff. […] the sisters helped us a lot. In every way possible, any way they could. They virtually led us by the hand when we lived there. Each sister did something different. Each helped us with something different, which was good for us. Sister J. was very particular. New girls were told to be careful with J.: you get in her bad books, and you're done for. It turned out to be the case. Whenever she told us to do something, to file a lawsuit for child support, for example, you had to do it on the day she told you. If you didn't, you were in for a tough conversation. She was very particular, but we needed her a lot. We needed her the most because she knew how to get things done. I'm a skiver when it comes to formalities. I feel sick each time I have to speak to officials. I'm allergic to officials. She was the only person to make me sort out the formalities.

When I moved in, I sorted out child support at the last possible moment, the way I always do. I had to because I was up against the wall.

[At the single mother's centre] I knew we were in for a hot seat. We had a meeting with the staff every Tuesday; we signed contracts with a to-do-list. Each week we took a hot seat to report on our progress. If we managed to file certificates or something. We signed commitments. We were free to choose the deadlines we liked. We would choose what to do within a month, for example. The sisters didn't have to tell us what to do and how fast to do it. They would ask us: 'What's your preferred deadline?' 'This and that.' Fair enough, she would write down the deadline. I was fine with this. They helped us a lot. It was our second home. We had a family atmosphere: Christmas Eve, Easter, you name it. It was like home. We had a shared dining area. It was different. We socialized a lot There were no scuffles with the girls because we knew each other a lot. Basically, we did everything together. We had meetings with a counsellor, anything. Suppose you had no income, you would approach one of the sisters with a shopping list for you and your baby. The sister would tell you to do the cleaning in the meantime. She would give you the stuff you needed. No issues at all. Your baby was sick and you had no money for meds, you would ask the sisters for help. The sister would give you her paycard. You'd have pay this back later. You had no money and your child was sick. What could you do? You knew you could take care of the baby even if you had no money at all. The meds were also available. A kind of first-aid kit. The midwife would visit us every day. They did rounds every morning. If there was anything happening, a speck on your baby or anything, they would examine everything and give you advice. Just brilliant. It was my third baby but the first bath had to be with the midwife.

I learnt a lot about child care back then. Some of the things I hadn't known before, which is not to say I'd done harm to the kids. However, there were things I could do differently. Surely, it would have been for the better. You live and learn.

There were only four sisters with us. There was also a counsellor, but no one attended meetings with her. We didn't trust her. You looked at her face and you felt it was her who actually needed help. She looked as if she'd been depressed. The kids didn't like her. She was always busy. We had a meeting once in two weeks' time. The sisters arranged for a lot of things. I attended a training course for job-seekers. They arranged a job for us, too. We did outwork; we'd do cardboard patterns. The supplies were delivered to your doorstep. The money was handed over to you; you didn't have to go anywhere. Life couldn't be any better. What they cared most about was the babies.

The babies were taken away from their mothers. This could happen in an instant. If anything went wrong, everything followed automatically. […] There was a pregnant girl who wanted to give the baby away. The sisters offered support and were far from condemning her. They'd never condemn anybody. She was an atheist. She didn't attend the service, nor was she forced to. She would go to a common area or spend time in her room, but that's not important. She was a smart girl, but she had her baby taken away. It was her fault, actually. The sisters reported the case. She got depressed after childbirth. She was keen to breastfeed the baby, but she couldn't. She was on antidepressant medication. Breastfeeding was not an option. I don't know if it was because of the meds, but she would sit in the corridor, the baby in the rocker. She was terribly crying [the baby], and she was like dumb. She wasn't bothered to take care of the baby.

We took T. [the baby] and escorted her to her room. She would just sit there, we made her some tea. The sisters helped us to get along. It's different here, they're like monsters, they want to harm you.

There were more of us there. There were fights of course. Each person is different. It's normal you disagree at times. But we knew how to agree to disagree. It was different. The sisters would sometimes organize meetings so that we could have it out with one another. We would have it out in public. I don't like the way you did this and that. She would reply, and that was that, sorted.

[…] No one's going to let you off. The sisters knew how to keep us together. You were new or not, you were one of us. No one made you feel bad about it. You were part of the team. The sisters knew how to match girls in the rooms. They matched us by kids' age. A pregnant girl would share a room with a girl who had a newborn. She would learn how to breastfeed or change nappies. Just brilliant. A one big women's home. The sisters knew more than we did. They were more detached. Years of practice. This place is just one big mess. It's terrible. I don't mind K., she did me no wrong. However, if someone tells you you're nobody because you've ended up here, it's them who's nobody.

Basically, we know what people think about us. You can see it in their attitude. Depending on the mood. […]. The only normal person on staff here is P. I simply adore her. I turn to her whenever I can. She's the only normal person here. Or perhaps she hasn't soaked up the atmosphere yet. Hopefully, she never will. It would be terrible if she did. And some of the janitors. Luckily, K. is finally gone […]. We're better off without her. She had the nerve to tell the kids to do what the janitors tell them. I was struck dumb, goggling at her. O. is a Dowdie Debby, she only does what her mummy tells her. 'You're one cheeky thing.' I said: 'It's you who is cheeky. The kid is to follow her mother not you. You're a stranger to her. She doesn't have to do what you tell her nor should she. You're a janitor, you only open the gate and do the cleaning downstairs. That's all you're expected to.' But there was no disciplinary […] one-to-one. I don't like it when people breach their duties. It's not their job to raise other people's children. I don't like it when someone pries. If I need advice, I'm not afraid to ask. When I was too tense with the kids, I was going through a phase at the time, I turned to P. and asked for advice. I realized anything could put me on edge. Anything could throw me off balance. Perish the thought, my own children would be scared of me. So I'm not afraid to ask whenever I need advice. I don't like it when someone offers advice unasked, especially if I don't need it.

I've been here since last July. That's terribly long. There was one P.S. with us. She also came here from the single mothers' centre. The same sisters, the same home. She was so depressed with what she found here that she got pregnant and returned to the centre. She was ready to take sacrifice. She missed the place. She got pregnant and returned to the sisters. She's on her own now, she and her two children. She's happy. That's all that counts. She returned to her beloved sisters.

[It is impossible to return to the single mothers' centre] […] They have a rulebook of their own. You can't return if your baby is more than eight months old and you're not pregnant. You have to play by the rules.

[…] I once happened [when already at the hostel] to go to the cinema with my friends. Leaving children [with other woman]. You're going out, you're having fun,

you speak to people and enjoy your leisure, but the kids are always at the back of your mind, if they're okay, if they're safe. I'll be able to have coffee with a friend once they're off to school or kindergarten. I'll finally take it easy.

[At the hostel, however] I have a curfew. Suppose I miss my tram [I have to explain myself]. There was no such thing at the single mothers' centre. We signed in the logbook. We didn't have to say who we left our kids with. It was our own business. I once left the kids with A. I did that three times perhaps. It later turned out she wouldn't be bothered. Other girls took care of the kids. She wasn't the right person. The kids were safe, though. Sister J. called and told me not to leave the kids with other girls. She gave me the reasons. […] End of story. She offered good advice without anything like you can't do this or whatever. It was my business who to leave my kids with. It's me who was going to face the consequences in the end. It would be hard to see your kids get hurt, let alone the legal consequences. It was up to the girls to decide. We didn't have to leave any memos. We made an entry in the logbook, the purpose, when we went out and came back. Return at 8 pm […]. Suppose you missed the tram, you could call the sister to tell her you were stuck in traffic or whatever. We had a driver. He would collect us from hospital. Or bring the kids from hospital. Sister J. came in person to collect me from hospital. She organized a trip for the kids to Częstochowa. For free, obviously. We have even visited the sisters' centre once.

[The sisters lived at the single mother's centre] They even delivered P.'s baby, the one I told you got pregnant on purpose. The labour began at the premises. She was taking a shower when her water broke, and she said she didn't see it. Anyway, the baby was delivered at the premises. Sister A. was palpitating. She had never witnessed anything like this before. The sister ran across the corridor; she looked like Batman or something in her black gown. She in fact saved T. [the baby] when she suctioned him. The baby started to choke. No one knew what was happening. I came in and saw all those entrails and the baby. Goodness gracious me, I'm leaving.

I had been through the same thing a month before. The water broke, and I woke up at 3 am in a bed that was completely wet. I was so terribly sleepy. I was sleepy during pregnancy. I felt like sleeping all the time. I was tucked in, all those towels around me, and no, wet again. It just couldn't be. And nothing at the ready. Nothing I could take to hospital. I wasn't ready. It came a month too early. The baby was developing well, though. I ran to my friend and told her: 'The water broke.' 'What are you talking about?' 'Call the sister.' We were safe in the knowledge they'd offer support if needed. They don't care about you here; they keep their doors shut. They won't be bothered even if you die. She came to the sisters, and it was sister A.'s turn again. Everything went well. I was taken totally unprepared. Wrapped in a bathing towel. The midwife was the first person to visit me at hospital. Right on the first day. The water had been breaking for two days. I wouldn't respond to drugs. M. hospital is awful. It was my second childbirth at M. hospital. They may butcher me in the street, but I'm not going to go there again. If I happen to, of course. Hopefully, though, I'm not going to. Not at M., surely. The first childbirth was an ordeal. The third one wasn't any better. The water had been breaking slowly for two days. As the water was breaking, and there were no labour pains on the first night, they didn't even bother to prepare my body for labour. They only gave me drugs to produce labour pains. No good. An entire bottle on the

drip and nothing. A doctor came and saw the CTG scan. 'Were there labour pains?' 'No.' 'How come no?' 'Just no. I know what labour pains are.' Another bottle arrived. The water was breaking at M., but there was not labour. They gave me an injection with the same substance as on the drip. They did a fine job of preparing me. One push and that was all. Then the doctor came and asked if I was okay with a Ceasarian, as the baby's life was at risk. A stupid question, really. So we had a Ceasarian. The anaesthesia didn't work, but they didn't even bother to ask. They pushed a lancet through my belly. I started to scream. The doctor looked: 'What happened?' I told him I could feel it. 'Impossible.' It was his duty [to check] if the anaesthesia worked. […] He was afraid of a lawsuit so he stitched me up really nicely. The scar is almost invisible. You have to look really hard to find it. A minute and thin line. I'd have sued him otherwise. Then I came back to the centre. The kids were taken care of by the sisters.

This not so obvious here [at the hostel]. Suppose one of the girls is hit by a car and goes to hospital. The kids are taken to a children's home. They can't take care of the kids [either the staff or the room-mates]. It was different there. The kids would be taken care of even if you were away in hospital for six months. The sisters would make a roster for the girls.

I don't even know if it was legal. I think they would address formalities when the absence was long. There was a girl, she wasn't even eighteen when she had a baby. She's now godmother to my L. Sister J. became her baby's legal guardian, so that the baby could stay with the mother. Everything was legit. When M. turned eighteen, there was a court hearing and she became the legal guardian. The child stayed with the mother. M. was very young, but she turned out to be a better mother than a forty-year-old. Basically, she'd rather kill than give her baby away. Just like me. I spent five days at hospital. I should have seven. I was released and got a real telling-off from sister J. She didn't know about this when she came. L. didn't want to eat at all. She was fed with a probe while at hospital. I wasn't allowed to see her because I caught a cold at the maternity ward. I was all in sweat and they opened the window. I was coughing badly. And this unbearable pain after the Caesarian. The kids were taken care of by the sisters. They had their own quarters, so that we couldn't see them without a veil. They are not allowed to show up without a veil. They had their own rooms. You rang a bell if you wanted something of them. They had to time to put a veil on. N. [the daughter] told me what their hair was like. A kid would sometimes pull their veil off. N. was riding a scooter at the sisters' quarters. I also missed them much and couldn't even see my baby. I had a cold, and she was a preemie. There was some germ at the Madurowicz Hospital. A breeding ground for germs, this hospital, the babies are dying in bulk. The only time you can see your baby is between 3 pm and 5 pm. I wasn't allowed to enter at all. I told the mums I wanted to see my baby, just once. Mine, at last. The labour was all pain. I was ripped open without any anaesthesia. They dressed me in all these masks and gowns. I wanted to see my children. I was feeling quite all right. But I paid the price, three sleepless nights, all in pain. I was choking each time I tried to lie down. I called the sister. I told her I was released on request. I asked if she could come. Sure, she would. She told me I was totally irresponsible. I'm done for. She won't be speaking to me for the next two weeks. Then something even worse happened. On my return, I entered the room and saw a layette for L., a large teddy bear with red

ribbon. Stuff for my kids, piling up. The sister didn't want to make a mess, so she gave them new things. There was no way you could move around these toys. Doll houses or something. It was terrible. Cramped like hell. I came back from hospital only to tidy up all this mess. There was nowhere to lie down and relax. I decided I would rearrange the furniture. I moved a unit from one wall to the other. It only later dawned on me what I was doing. I dragged a large unit to the middle. It was filled with stuff, I didn't take a thing out. The sister was angry and scared for me. I had been released two days earlier. And the wound was one big guesswork. They do have experience bathing wounds, and they have an entire tool kit in place. She left to bring some gauze pads and I dragged the unit to the middle of the room. When she entered, she saw me pushing it. She started to scream: 'I'm gonna kill you one day. What are you doing?' 'Is it illegal or something?' She called for the girls to finish the job. I was told not to leave my bed. I spent the next three nights sitting in bed, which was the only way I could breathe. Just terrible. At 4 am I felt my way along the wall to ask my colleague for a painkiller. I was like in a daze. She helped me and I could finally sleep at night. I walked off the pain later on. Now I know you can't rearrange furniture for some time after a Caesarian. Some people say you can't lift anything heavy for half a year. […]

If I only could move in before renovation, I'm packing my things right away. We don't have anything like this here. Meetings with staff helped a lot there, Occasional parties were marvellous. Every Mother's Day or Children's Day was celebrated. The sisters organized Mother's Day for us. We and the sisters would organize Children's Day. We came up with games, contests or barbecues. There were gifts for every occasion, loads of gifts, really. There was no way you could stash all this before Christmas Eve. There were Santa Clauses from all over town. A sister would draw a list with kids' favourite presents. She would add a room number, a kid's name and age to the list, so that the details matched. The details were put down on paper and sent to various foundations. Before Christmas piles of chocolate and other sweets would arrive for the kids. I had nowhere to stash all this. They would eat on and on and on. They wrote everything in great detail. The kids' things from the list. The local priest would act as a Santa. He lived in the same building and was always around. You could make a confession any time. […] Each party was one big laugh.

We had our own cooks [at the single mothers' centre]. Obviously, they also needed time off. Sister G. did the cooking on Saturdays and Sundays. It was her mission. She hated cooking, hence the mission. They were given missions according to their hates. Sister M. is the centre's director and she hates children. They run and scream too much. She can't stand and was appointed director. She does really well. Children adore her. I used to hate ironing. Each time I popped in to sister A. after work, she would give me some ironing to do. 'I can do the cleaning, but you won't make me iron things. I hate ironing.' 'That's why you're going to do the ironing.' 'You're killing me.' 'No, I'm making you a better person.'

I was working to buy a pram. The sisters furnished our flat. There was no single thing you wouldn't get on leaving the centre. […] [But] you had to earn it. You would clean the chapel every Saturday You had to organize furniture. There was no such thing as manna from heaven. The sisters have only limited faith in miracles. Washing machines, fridges, TV sets, everything. As they left, each girl received a set of products

to start a new life in a new flat. Cleaning products, for example. They are necessary but expensive. Including a supply of nappies and loads of other things. The sisters would give them mops, liquids and creams. But, you know, they are crazy about cleaning.

People who helped:

The sisters and P. [her friend from Bełchatów [a town] and former boss]. […] Basically, the sisters, they are all about the feelings, both good and bad. It wasn't nice to get a dressing down. More importantly, they taught me a great deal. Girls are different, some of them want to learn, but some of them don't. […] On the one hand, you're fully served. […] you don't have to cook or do the dishes. You don't have to do anything. The girls changed only if they wanted to. You have to be ready to move on. They used to live somewhere before they ended up at the centre. [Me] to the contrary. They taught me a great deal. I can now handle a lot of situations better than I did, including the kids. I've learnt a lot. I can't tell you specifically, but they helped me a lot. A great lesson in life. It's not my cup of tea to be a nun, but they're really great. They told me there's a convent for women like me. The convent admits women when their children are adults. Imagine I'm all alone and have nothing to do with life. I might just as well join a nunnery.

[P. – from Bełchatów; a town] saved my life. She helped me to find the sisters. I don't know if she wasn't more instrumental than the sisters. […] She saved me and my children.. [They keep in touch] on Facebook, neither of us has time to do this. She's having a third baby with a guy I met when I lived at her place. Take M., for example [Her friend, though,] lives from day to day because she lives in fear [of her ex-husband, a Turk]. He's a creep [her ex-husband]. I used to work for him. In fact, she also did. He said he wouldn't let his wife have a job. She pressed and pressed until she could. He isn't like other people. He didn't provide for the family. He didn't let her, and he wouldn't either. […] [he's] an utter idiot. He knew how to press my buttons. I once chased him with a knife down the shopping mall. I worked at his restaurant, I was chopping kebabs. They were fighting, about war or something. He told me that Polish people are shit with no dignity. I turned my face to him and said you are one filthy swine. […]. You came here, you cash in on other people's work, and you've got the nerve to say that to me, a Polish woman? He yelled in this language of his. I ignored him completely. He would never say anything like this again. I stood up to him Turkish style. […] He made me so angry.

[…] People should always put their family first. Family is all that matters. [Other people sometimes tend to matter more, though, for example] strangers.

'Władysław'

He was the youngest in seniority from all the residents I spoke to: he had been at the institution only for a dozen weeks or so. He was also the quickest to move on: he needed only a year to do so. As some point his father fell ill so badly that 'Władysław' had to take care of him. He never returned after his father's death.

Essentially, he did not have a drinking problem, but he was not a teetotaller either. There were episodes when he was attracted to alcohol; in other words, he liked his drink. One might venture to say he was on the verge of addiction.

The story told by 'Władysław' exemplifies difficult family dynamics. His story is similar to that of 'Mariola', in that he, too, was exposed to domestic violence. The passages on domestic violence and the emotions it triggers reveal the universal nature of abuse dynamic.

Just like those of his colleagues, his story about life is focused on work; both professional work, and work in and for the home (he converted one of the rooms into a living quarter, virtually out of nothing) fuelled conflict between 'Władysław' and people around him, including the family. Disputes started in his father's home and later continued with his subsequent wives.

Family home and family dynamics:

[I had] virtually one home, grandma's home.

Mother, well, simply…, I bear a little [grudge], you can't change your parents. I was raised by grandma. Mother passed away. [She died] of cancer at the Kopernik Hospital. I visited her as soon as I found out… She told me the truth before surgery. I turned my face, tears in my eyes, and I left, her son… There was a phone call when she died.

I couldn't get myself to enter the chapel [during funeral]. Only my mother's brother and sister's son came and asked to light the candle. I thought I would suffocate because of the tie. I had to loosen the time and didn't enter. My first ex-wife entered with the kids, but I couldn't. I just couldn't enter. I wasn't able to.

Essentially, I grew up at my grandma's. Father had a life of his own. I do miss grandma. I wish she were around, she'd be able to help me. I could always rely on her. She on me and I on her. [She died] a long time ago. She was nearly ninety-nine. […] She could climb to the fourth floor and back, just like that, to have a chat with neighbours.

My first [ex-wife] refused to take care of her [his grandma, to help him]. I gave in and was helpless. Father didn't want to help, either. Uncle would visit only on Sundays. […] There were arguments with my lady. I asked her [grandma] if she was okay with the nursing home. I knew I wouldn't make it; I knew she [first ex-wife] wouldn't help me. She wouldn't take care of the kids, either. Father had a grievance about grandma [because of the nursing home]. There was nothing I could do, I was all alone.

At one point I went to the railway tracks. I wanted to jump under the train. I later had a breakdown when I learnt grandma had died. I had a total breakdown.

I went there and had second thoughts. I said [to myself] hell is nowhere but on earth and I had to handle it. But I'm grateful to my father for the way he acted with me, the fact that he didn't want to help or whatever. It taught me I had to [help myself] on my own… Father helped a few times. He wanted me to stay in the army. I wish I had. I would be different now. Half [of those who are conscripted to the army] think it's an easy living. My second wife's sister had a boyfriend who went on missions. Wait until he comes back after service and returns to normal life. You'll see he's going to

change. You won't be able to manage him. They split up in the end. We would go out sometimes to have a beer. He told me what he saw during the missions. I said: 'Man, calm down. The past is past, you promised to keep your mouth shut about what you know and what you saw. Keep your secrets to yourself.' Some people simply have a breakdown. I've heard he married and has a family. He's been able to settle down and leave the past behind. But I know the guys who didn't: one ended in hospital and the other in the grave.

[…] I could test it on myself [what the army does with you], at first […] I was good for nothing. It took me some time to let go. I told myself past is past. I leave it all behind and return home. A different life, end of story. I'm moving on, the past is over. […] I saw real carnage. [Young soldiers] were so heavily abused by the old ones that they often gave in, had a breakdown, strangled or shot themselves to death. […] there was a shot in the evening, we ran to the spot, a guy from the other company [shot himself]. He had a breakdown and topped himself. That's not the worst thing, actually.

[…] One of my daughters is in England. The other's angry with me but I don't really know why. I don't really know what she [first ex-wife] told her. The little one like me, but he's too little now. He's only four, a baby, really. […] I saw him on the Sunday. We went to the zoo together.

How he entered an institution:

[…] I read about the place in a book and came to find out [information on move-on flats offered by the St Brother Albert's Aid Society was probably found in one of the leaflets, probably an official brochure, but it was difficult to establish which exactly – I.B.K.]. I called and came immediately. I made an application and joined the queue. A phone call came. The manager told me there was [a vacancy]. I told him I was yet to divorce, so why don't you [the manager] take on someone [else]. I'll be able once I'm through with divorce. I came here after the divorce and asked about vacancies. In fact, there was one.

[…] I lost my flat. […] The flat I inherited from grandma. I turned up at the Town Office when a notice came. I went there so that my first wife had me evicted, and I didn't even know she filed the papers. […] she didn't have me evicted and I didn't know about it. Even the judge didn't tell me I could have been evicted during the hearing. […] I went to the Town Office and told them I needed a flat. I'd leave the other flat to her, in a private tenement, but I needed a flat. I only wanted to keep my registered address there. I was fine with her, I didn't want any disputes. […] the rent was paid on a regular basis. So they had me evicted in absentia. I had no say on the issue, as they concluded they could [have me out] since I had remarried. […] they wouldn't care that my second wife's registered address was at grandma's, where there was only one room. Me and my wife with grandma in one room. There's no way you can live like this. They started to talk about the laws and the number of square metres per person. 'Fine,' I said. 'I can show you lots of empty flats, they're in abundance.' […] the gentleman told me I was not eligible due to income […] I was only eligible for something I could renovate. I said […] I'd build a house if I had the money. I went to see one of those flats, not bad at all, but the kitchen […] a whole in the floor right through to the

basement. You'd have to reinforce the ceiling and the beams […], lay a new floor. You'd have to rewire the flat and paint it, and the ceiling was high, mind you.

[…] It didn't work out, really. I lost my job and there was friction [with his second wife]. Everything was all right when I had a job.

[…] Her sister was yet to leave for England. I had to leave each time she came to visit. There were times they wouldn't let me in for the night. I'd have to spend the entire night in the streets… She would call the police. […] They came and told me: 'You can go to the shelter.' […] I don't even know if they took my details or not. I didn't touch her, did I? I went to N.S., I only saw it from the outside […]. I'm going to fight to have a job and get a flat, no matter what. If I had gone there, I'm afraid I'd become addicted. I know these guys there do, and rather quickly. One simply pushes the other into addiction.

The fact is that even when I was on the dole, I'd go out. She thought I was looking for a job. But that's not easy. You can't just go to the manager and say you won't leave unless you get something to do. I told her I couldn't find anything. She filed for separation and child support. If you're sued for separation and child support, the best thing you can do is to file for divorce […] even when we're separated, she can tell me to clear off. Blimey! I did file for divorce. I went to court the next day and filed the papers. The judge during the hearing asked the mother-in-law, whom she took with her as a witness, if we were likely to reconcile. She said we weren't. The judge asked her [the wife], and she also said no and looked at me. I was keen on reconciliation because of my little son. Initially, I wanted to show my father I was able to carry this through, but it didn't work out. If I'd hit her or had been drunk, I'd have admitted and say 'true, I drank and hit her three or four times.' She beat the shit out me twice, my son looking. […] I didn't want to get into a fight with her. I knew she was ill, and she always got the better of me. So I got beaten. There was no option I could hit her. I'm faster and I could have hit her so hard she would have ended up in hospital. I once hit a guy back at school, he was older than me. They had to call an ambulance, but he would never pick fights with me after that. I'm heavy-handed. That's all.

I can't feel it, really. The army units I was in. I didn't care after all this. Only dad told me to return and return I did. […]

[…] I've always got it in the neck, and I'm just too good… […] perhaps it was my mistake I cleaned the flat for my first wife? I was busy cleaning and when her friend popped in and said: 'Where is she?' I told her [his wife's thereabouts]. 'What are you doing?' I said: 'I'm cleaning.' She looked at me… The same here, I showed I can clean and do things, but [she didn't care to notice]. She cared only about the money. […]. When my cousin was still around, I would sometimes visit him to have a drink, but, blimey, I wouldn't kick up a fuss or anything. I would always visit… [I remembered] about my daughter, who was very ill [from his first marriage]. She had epilepsy and dyspnoea and was later diagnosed with jaundice. I was by her side at hospital. The first one [wife] didn't file for the deprivation of parental rights [only because] the judge wasn't biased against me, [and when] he saw she started pressing me, he said: 'Is there any child abuse? No. Are you hurt? No? So what is that you want exactly?' He played her right. When they asked her to give her date of birth, she didn't know what to say, she was literally lost for words.

[…] My mother-in-law also gave up her job and did nothing the whole summer. There were no grievances because I was working at Indesit [a company] and provided for the family. But I was in debt and had to pay [child support]. The judge asked her [second wife] in court: 'Did you know he had three children?' [Three children from his first marriage]. She did. And I said: 'Your Honour, that's no secret. I can't keep my kids in the closet, can I?' She would find out anyway. She knew everything all along. [She knew about] the papers the other one filed, the divorce proceedings […] I showed her my divorce files. She even knew about my mother […] I was fighting to get half of the money [an inheritance from his biological mother]. […] mum worked at a military hospital, my biological mum, that is. This, too, she knew all along. […] The judge told me at the hearing: 'You get one part, your stepfather gets the other.' 'I can't really tell him, can I? He's in the grave.' 'You have to file a case and get your brothers involved.' And so I did. I got less than 1000 *zloty* net of tax. Next to nothing really, so how can I share it with them? Quite a few brothers I've got, but I did share the money in the end. We met in front of the courtroom. I had never ever seen some of them before. I said: 'Listen, guys, this is the amount to share. This is enough to cover your travelling expenses, 150 *zloty* each, that's how many of us came.' I said: 'I can also take it all as the only son, I actually have the title to this money, but I don't want you to tell me when we meet that I'm a swindler and took it all. I saw people quarrel in court before. So what do you suggest?' As we entered the courtroom, the judge asked if I sustained the claim. I said: 'That's correct. The money either goes to me or let them share it, let them do as they please.' The judge said that the two brothers and the sister had the legal title, and the two young ones, too, my brothers' daughters, because they [the brothers] passed away. They had to file another case to inherit their fathers' money. The story came full circle. I told them: 'Here's the money, you can now have a fight, I'm clean.'

I later said to myself that after what I had been through I was going to stand on my own two feet. I have no trust in people. I've had it up to here. Father is ill, mother has cancer, he has cancer, too… I'm going to have a breakdown. […] we didn't get along with father, but it's getting better now. There were disputes initially. One thing led to another. I can now admit, I do realize, I've been drinking.

It didn't quite work out [his life]. I was keen to show my family I can do better. All this came to nothing. I've got a job now and the only thing on my mind is to get a flat.

Applying for a flat and former flats:

I'm keen to get a subsidized flat. I have a job now and I know the pattern. Your income [is too high], you have to wait, file paperwork, etc. This is ridiculous, I can pay as long as I have a job, but what if I lose it? I won't be able to pay the rent or any other thing for that matter. And I'm trapped in debt again. I'm going to run into arrears, and they're going to throw me out. A vicious circle, really.

That's what she [the official] told me: this much to get a subsidized flat. I said fine, I don't have any issues with you, but it seems the government has lost the thread somewhere. Suppose I get an allowance. I can make 200 *zloty* on the side, which makes 400 with the allowance. But you still have to pay the rent, gas and electricity…

Bloody hell. Suppose I get a larger flat. I doubt all these flats are one size only. Some of them are 19 square metres in size, but not all. When I was renting one, me and my second [wife], that is, 19 square metres were actually the size of this room [the one he shares with his room-mate]. I don't know how large this one is exactly. We, too, had only one window. I was able to convert [it] into a bedroom, a bathroom with toilet and a kitchen. Three rooms [out of 19 square metres]. I used a drywall partition to make room for a fridge and a few hanging cupboards. A basin and another cupboard to the other side. A kitchen like new. […] we took measurements to put the shower basin in and the toilet; there was no proper drain so we also had to put a macerator pump in. You could also squeeze in a little washing machine. […] I switched to 12V lighting. We paid only 20–30 *zloty* per month. We used only 12V, a TV set and other things required more voltage, but we used four halogen lamps 50 each, which gave 200 altogether, but I switched them on, only rarely when we had visitors, it was as bright as a football stadium. At a diagonal. No glaring light, the lamps were targeted at the walls. That's what you call a can-do attitude.

[…] I knew how to do some of the things, [but] you can't do everything on your own. I asked a friend of mine to help me. We brought the materials and carried everything upstairs. He helped me a lot. We were tinkering around together. He did the plumbing, I did the wires. We did our best and the fastest we could, all to the finest detail.

What I'm going to do now is apply for a subsidized flat. […] The next step is to file an application for a council flat. Once I've got a subsidized flat, I'd finally be able to buy some stuff. I may just as well move on at a later date. I will finally have it on paper: if I'm going to work where I do. We've been extending the contract twice a month: from 3 until 14 and from 15 until 21 [each month]. I don't know what the current arrangement is going to be. They're going to bring it tomorrow.

Work:

I work at Dell [a company]. Through an agency, that is. Dell hires the agency, and the agency provides the people. I was in the Czech Republic and returned very quickly. Four or five days tops. We were promised to get 75 crowns per hour. As we arrived in the evening, the 75 turned out to be only 53. […] We got there well after 10 pm, but they wanted us to attend induction training. We refused, we were tired and wanted to bed. Fine, in the morning then. We were on site at 8 am. […] we had to submit our ID to enter the site and we stayed there until 10 pm. […] They gave us an annual contract for 150 hours. But I said no way, it takes much shorter than a year to do 150 hours. Give me two or three days and I'm done with these hours. They finally explained that we'd get a job only if the component parts were at the ready. No component parts, no work. I asked if they paid idle time. No, not really. […] [The Czech crown] stands at 16 *groszes*. It's bloody cheap. As I was leaving, I was paid 15. It went up to 16 when I returned. Peanuts, really. […] when I calculated it, there was no point sitting there at all. […] there were Polish guys, some of them worked and got contracts […], while some other went to a bar and had no money to return. They later took [down payment], […] you could take as much as 2000 crowns in advance. Another option was to take 1500 crowns. What

do you need all those down payments for, I'm asking. [I asked] one guy: 'Why are you taking it? You'll get much less at the end of the month. You're done for, with no money to return.' We did a whip-around for one guy to get him back home.

I know these agencies inside out, […] I have references from various sites, but it doesn't matter because they don't read them at all. […] there was an ad in the paper, they needed a guy to operate injection presses and heat seals. I had three years' experience. Not a single phone call came. They needed toolmakers; likewise, no phone call. I'm a qualified welder, except MIG-MAG; likewise, no phone call. Blimey, I'm qualified to apply for these jobs. And no response. 'You haven't left your CV.' I said: 'Look. It's there.' She did and said: 'That's our seventh.' I said: 'And so what? You can't even read properly.' Coordinators are a bunch of idiots. They'd be better off if they called the guys who actually left their CVs. They could call them, speak about previous employment and find out if they are the right guys for the job.

I did forklift training from welfare subsidies [one of the programmes providing professional training courses], but… [I'm] a toolmaker, mechanic, electrician, welder, forklift driver, […] I did training in first aid and virtually every single stage in the production process. Fridges for Gillette, I did trays to the fridges. I also worked at Sonoco [a company]. I was packing razors. I worked at an electroplating workshop and a construction site.

When I finished school I would do anything that was available and well paid. I could always go to the labour office. Suppose the pay wasn't good enough […] or I wanted a raise, I went to the labour office. I searched the ads on display, there was always something to do. You could find something on the spot.

I went to the labour office the other day. I couldn't believe my eyes […]. Nothing but a list of agencies. I said: 'What is it that you're doing here exactly? You should be giving jobs, not agencies.' I wanted to find out if sheltered employment was available. 'No, it's not. It's not available.' […] Some people are not fit for the job they're doing. […] there was one coordinator, a guy who wasn't really cut out for the job. I remember I called him once. I said: 'M., can you bring the liquid, please?' 'You don't have any?' He would come and tell us what to do. But without the liquid?

[…] he later took me to clean the windows It turned out he took too many people, and I kicked up a row because I had no contract. I asked him one Friday if he was planning to offer me a contract. [He said] 'We'll see.' I went to the office on Monday and he said: 'There's no contract.' Just like that, without notice, he simply told me […] there was no contract. I said: 'What about overtime?' 'What overtime? There wasn't any.' I had everything on paper, my whereabouts, my tasks, I kept writing everything down. The place seemed fishy right from the start. […] I got mad and I reported the case to the National Labour Inspectorate and the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons. I told them […] what was going on. He paid overtime because he got scared and had a heart attack, as I would later learn. And he was fired. A friend of his, the manager, came here and he followed soon after. People say they took sites to do and wouldn't deliver. I was called because I rang them and the new manager told me to come, I was there when they were called about the site that wasn't done, although they were told it was. No, it's not. Why don't you come and see it yourself? [The other guy, the one who got a heart attack] […] made us climb windows at eight

storeys high to wash them, with no protection. […] a security guy would help us. [At one point, however,] a window was wide open in the other room, and the connecting door too, and he was pinned by the window [because of draught], he was lucky, though […]. [He didn't fall] because he held on to the wall. […]

I've been working at so many sites that I won't let anyone disrespect me. I know when to open my mouth and when not to. I wasn't afraid at all, I read the labour code, the codes have changed, though, but I used to read them all. [When] we started fights with managers, they knew I was no picnic. […] I wouldn't let them, simple as that.

The same story when I was working as a storage guy at B. [A colleague] complained to the manager about my abusing him. [The manager] said: 'You're such a nosy parker. That's his job, isn't it? Yes, it is. He did the job right, didn't he? He did. So why do you keep meddling all the time? Clear off, this instant.' He was his uncle, mind you. I gave him a proper dressing down [he would later complain]. Because […] I won't let anyone disrespect me, the way one Chinese guy did when I was working in storage at VT. He whistled at me. I said: 'You can whistle as long as you like. I'm not going to respond.' Only later […] his business partner told him to speak to me with an interpreter. He asked me to carry something and I said: 'Fair enough. I can do it right away but tell me exactly what to do. But [let me] finish the job first, [then] I can do something else. I can't leave one thing to do the other.' There'll be a mess. I'll be looking for something and won't be able to find it. I was doing front and back components to TV sets. There were Samsung, Panasonic and some other TV sets. We later did only Panasonic components. Other brands folded the business. He would never whistle at me, but he did whistle at other guys. He always approached me in a civilized manner, good morning, how are you, that sort of thing. […] when girls made a mistake – they put the notice in the wrong place or something went wrong, he was kicking cardboard boxes in anger. […] he was swearing like mad. […] I know they actually can in Polish. […] it wasn't my shift, but I know he hit one of the guys. He hit him in the arm. The guys got together and he wouldn't leave the site the whole night. He was so afraid. After another incident like this, the guys had it in for him and reported the case to the State Labour Inspectorate. He came down a peg or two when labour inspectors arrived; he was well-mannered and civilized all of a sudden. But the guys told me it got into his head again. […] One stupid chink, he didn't pay a *zloty* of tax for five years. Other sites in the zone [special economic zone] don't pay any tax either.

There's a new manager and they don't even have to change the brand. Once the business is in […] they can carry on like that for another five years. Just […] change a letter in the name and you get a new business. They say there's a whole in the budget. […]

'Let it be Dell,' I said. 'I'd rather do the packing at Sanoko.' They have a massive turnover, lots of new people all the time. Quite a turnaround. Some people stay and they never leave […]. I wanted to go back, but there were no vacancies. I did the tests, 100%, [they said] 'we'll call you back.' They didn't. 'What is going on,' I said. They didn't pick up my call. I went there. 'Why didn't you call me back?' 'The decision is you've worked here before and cannot any longer.' I know their tricks: it's easier to train a new guy and pay him less than take someone more experienced.

You go there, which is also through agency, you wait by the gate until your coordinator comes and gives you the badge. You go through the gate, then another gate

to the site, you get a key [to your locker], you're given the clothes, put them on and enter the factory floor. Provided the machinery is out of order, line managers may tell you there's nothing to do and you go back home. […] three times they did this to me. There is night shift to do, I'm standing at the gate, and she says: 'Can't find your name on the list. You have to wait, if the manager is fine with you, I'll let you in.' I said: 'Thanks, but no thanks. I'm going home.' They took me off the list. They didn't even text me. Either she forgot or something. Anyway, they took me off the list. You're full of expectations, […] I'm going to work in the morning, and there comes a text all of a sudden 'Idle time. No work.' You're helpless. You don't know what to do, whether to wait or not. Over and over again. Old-age pensioners work there.

My longest stint was at a fire-fighting systems plant. […] this one and Redsam [a company], these two were my longest. Five years at Redsam, and the fire-fighting site from 2000. […] back at school I was working at a casting shop, but I don't have any certificate to prove it, I lost it somewhere, and the school was closed.

I know these agencies like the back of my hand: Dell, Indesit, every single site in the area. A real nightmare. Everything's fine when you call them. They ask you about the age. You tell them, I'm getting on, forty-eight years of age. 'Thank you, sir. That's too old, I'm afraid.' Are you leaving me out, I'm asking. You could have asked me right away. You can't afford a flu or anything if you're a security guy […]. I was joking once, there's a bank robbery, an old guy at the security desk, the brats enter, he's all terrified, the job's done. This is crazy, I know what I'm talking about, I've been working as a security guy, I know former police officers and former secret police, they all run legitimate security businesses these days.

[…]. After what I've seen […], I can fairly say this country is doomed. Just look around you, Polish-English [businesses], Polish-French, Polish-German. […] I've been working [at other places], and she says [someone from HR]: 'I'm sorry, the contract has come to an end, the production line returns to England.' We were left with injection presses only.

[…] I can work at many different places, I've got lots of certificates. Forklift operator, computer skills, […] manufacturing, storage assistant. […] One day here, seven days there and eleven days at yet another. […] This is through the agency. […] A letter [of reference] through the agency. One letter directly from the plant. The reference is also directly from the plant. Contracts with agencies. These are my certificates of employment. […]. You can make a book if you put them all together.

This is short-term, they keep their nose clean, they take you on and lay you off as needed. I was reasoning with my ex-wife. Look, I can't. 'Because you don't know how to speak with them.' I told her: 'I can't go there and I can't speak to the employer. I can't tell them everything.' I showed them everything, didn't I? They can go through my details, they can ask me. It's all down to age. […].

About him:

[…] I dabbled in model building. […] It soothed my nerves each time I did a model. I was able to tune off. As I was busy, my second wife would sometimes come up and say: 'Drop it. It's like a disease. Can't you hear me? I'm speaking to you.' I said nothing.

It was so compelling. […] Now I don't [do model building], they're too expensive. I might return to it, but the first thing I promised myself to do is to take care of the flat, to keep the place clean so long as I'm here. […] my mate helped me to bring the clothes. I brought the TV set and hi-fi myself.

[…] I hate it [mess]. It gets on my nerves each time I see my trousers stained. I can't stand it, the hi-fi must be clean, the cupboards too [at work]. I don't like dust. Grandma taught me cleanliness. And cooking [she taught him how to cook]. She told me to cook chicken. […] and what if I overcook it? I managed somehow. I brought it to her, she said she liked it. I wonder if she really meant it. I cook from time to time. One thing I don't is tomato soup. I've had enough of it. I had tomato soup every day when I was with my first wife. I had it up to here. I'd eat out sometimes when I got paid.

[…] I clean every day [the room at the centre]. I sometimes forget to take my shoes off, and the sand is everywhere… I like to keep it clean and tidy. I don't want visitors to see […] [the dirt]. Fine feathers make fine birds, as the saying goes.

'Małgorzata'

She was in her late fifties. She was one of the busiest and hard-working women at the direct access hostel. Some of the women did shift work; however, only a few managed to sign a contract of employment (they usually worked without any contract). They turned up at the hostel to sleep or treated it as a stop-over or a place to relax, a workers' hostel, as it were. This is how one of the women described the institution as she helped 'Małgorzata' to find her way around the system. 'Małgorzata' would often return to this episode.

She was very difficult to meet, and we rescheduled our conversation many times. She was not reluctant or had second thoughts: she agreed to tell her story when we first met. However, she was a social worker and her timetable changed very often (*sic*).

The stories of people residing at direct access hostels and night shelters reveal the paradoxical nature of life. This was best exemplified by the life story of 'Małgorzata': before she ended up at an institution, she worked at one of the municipal welfare departments and later provided care to older persons in need of permanent nursing. She gained additional qualifications in this respect when already at the direct access hostel. The opportunity arose with one of the programmes designed to fight homelessness and unemployment.

What home is:

Not a place, for sure. Even my family home wasn't really a home. There were lots of us, I had four stepsisters. Lots of tension and lots of work. My mum made a living. My biological father passed away. A gentleman who later fathered these four playful girls,

although he would have preferred a son, also passed away. A home full of women, a real nightmare.

I've always tried to learn something first and only then set up a family. My younger sisters have done exactly the opposite. When I started university, my younger sister, two years my junior, had already been pregnant.

I finally left this flat. I initially roamed from one rented flat to another. Many years later I managed to buy a flat as an academic teacher at the University of Łódź, Faculty […].

I was naive enough to let someone into my life after the death of my first boyfriend and the loss of a baby. I had no faith in 'Solidarity'. I had no time for these things. In the end, when I met someone who I was able to trust, he conned me out of my own flat. [Because] I was able to afford a flat.

I later moved to the Tuszyn area. I spent seven years there before I came back. I also lost a home there. I lived with a lady whom I tended in her illness. She was paralyzed from the waist down. The conditions got worse over time: her son, who liked his drink, would light a fire in the furnace at 4 am. He would wake everybody up and go to the local shop; he would return four hours later completely plastered. [In the meantime] you had to carry water, 50 metres away [to the well], stoked up the furnace, washed the lady, did the laundry… They were terrified of electricity, gas, any utilities.

I later tended a gentleman with cancer and […] a drinking problem. He had a complicated family situation. The family were hostile to me. His health got only worse over time, which was due to cirrhosis rather than cancer. He was as thin as a rake and he smoked although he had only one lung left. So long as he had something to live for: to rebuild his mother's home and put new amenities in place, he sold land and had loads of money to install a jacuzzi, sauna, floor heating; so long as he did that, it was fine. He later stopped to care […] He bought livestock: a goat and miniature rabbits. […] The daughters gave put him in hospital, where he later died.

They threw me out and broke my glasses and dentures. […] they told me I might come back and collect my stuff any time. But now that [their] dad is going to hospital I'm to leave immediately. They probably suspected I had arranged for a burglary, which in fact happened. Anyway, most of the people know who'd taken their 52-inch plasma TV set. And five thousand *zloty*, which were later found. They said my belongings had been taken during the burglary. Yeah, right, the burglars were after my false teeth. [And] all my belongings. They burnt something in the garden day in, day out. Everything, my fur coat […], my sheepskin coat, everything. The community support officer helped me […], she brought a lot of clothes. Many of them were just too large. I looked like a calamity. I came here straight away. A terrible family, sadly.

Former life:

[…] I rented lots of different flats and went through a lot with this guy. We spent five years together. Four and a half too long, surely. My friends from Łódź got me into all this. At first glance he was a gallant man and everything. He made a very good impression on me. It later turned out he had done thirteen years in prison for bank fraud. He counterfeited […] PKO bank books. You were in for a pretty good sentence if you

tampered with state institutions at the time. He was jailed […] as I found out later. In a low-security prison. He learnt English in prison. His parents were dentists and he could make dentures on his own. He could have, actually. He was an electrician and electronic engineer by profession. But he was good for nothing. You wouldn't care to work in prison, would you. He ran a radio, an electronic engineer as he was or whatever. He was a real skiver, all his life.

At first he said he couldn't find any job. He would repair virtually anything, a jack of all trades he was. […]. The home was clean and tidy, the dinner was cooked. He did the housework. Problems started later. We were roaming from one flat to another, different areas and different people. He would stand you a drink rather than pay the rent. He went to rehab twice. His third time was when we were together…

Our first flat was arranged for by his uncle. […] One day he [her partner] left me without money, without anything in fact. He swallowed acrylic to poison himself. That's a chemical compound you use to make dentures. He was taken by an ambulance, and they took him to […]. He left me a letter to bring him this and that and some money, of course.

I didn't reply and never visited him. I don't really know what's become of him. I asked J. [his uncle] not to be cross with me. 'Gosia, I'm not cross with you. He's my nephew, but I understand.'

I don't want to see him ever again. I'm not checking on him. I'm not visiting him. I haven't heard from him for five years now. I had to sell the flat. At a loss, obviously. I paid back utilities.

He went there [to work], at a poultry house. A terrible place, I worked there myself for three months. Anyway, I was trying to prove myself. I was going to work more often, half an hour through the woods. On the way to a Tesco store. I worked at the family benefits department at the time. […] I did shopping at Tesco, looking for bargains. The bus would ride half an hour through the woods to get there. He wasn't bothered to pick me up with the shopping. I had enough. I gave up on the flat the uncle had arranged for us. I got my first lady rather quickly [first patient in her care].

There was something to eat; there were cigarettes. The lady [her patient] paid me some pocket money. I lived with them. Life was no picnic with a coal furnace and everything. [Her son] was always drunk.

[After break-up] I was on my own. There were some casual acquaintances, but I had no time for them.

[…] I was pretty much involved [in the Solidarity movement]. […] We set up the Scouting Association of the Republic of Poland. I'm one of the founding members.

[…] [With the help from her friends from university] I got a job at the Municipal Welfare Centre. I would have worked there. My boyfriend's mother got ill, let's call her my mother-in-law. I took care of her. No one else wanted to. I told my boss about everything. He said: 'Gosia, I can't guarantee there'll be a vacancy on your return.' More than half a year [she took care of her would-be mother-in-law].

[…] When I came to Łódź, the first thing I did was to go to the Manufaktura mall. I had never seen it before. My goodness! Łódź had changed a lot. And when I saw my faculty […], incredible. Completely different. I came back but had no job. I couldn't find anything for a long time. I just couldn't get myself to ask my friends. [One of

them] told me: 'I'm sorry, can you speak […] to my secretary.' And he did arrange [for a job at the Municipal Welfare Centre]. For a definite period of time, sheltered employment it was. Then a new boss came. When the contract came to an end, there was no way to extend it. I later left for T. I commuted from T. to Z. I was trying to work at Bobovita. And at the poultry house, 19 chickens in one cage. I was checking the eggs on the computer […] That was in winter. December, Jan and Feb. Three months all together. I would walk to work through the woods. Luckily, there was no snow. We did two shifts. Some of the guys told me that before Easter the poultry house worked 24/7. But I was gone well before Easter. And three months at Cyfral. We did intercoms. You would sit at the desk with your headphones on and check if everything was working. […] I also worked at a carpenter's shop. I painted and varnished furniture.

Life at institutions:

I came back to Łódź after seven years' absence. It turned out mum moved to my would-be mother-in-law to the seaside. The sisters took over the flat. I had nowhere to go to. I went to the Municipal Guards [where she learnt about the municipal women's shelter].

[The Municipal Guards advised me to] enter through the night shelter; I didn't know there's a direct access hostel and a night shelter in one building. I entered the night shelter. […] I didn't have my dentures and I looked like a calamity.

[…] It was in March, nothing but foul weather. Just before 10 pm. Some of the girls were still having a cigarette. They were kind enough to show me the way: 'Please press the buzzer and wait. Someone's going to let you in.' They were surprised someone would come just like that. Someone new, without the police or municipal guards, of her own accord. Sober and that. D. came up and let me in.

[…] I was there from 7 March until 5 April [at the night shelter]. It was that year [2014]. Right after Easter. She later told me [the social worker] that saw lots of strange specimens at the shelter.

But I didn't know there was a separate entrance [to the direct access hostel].

My first night [at the shelter] was an utter disaster. D. let me in. She was very kind, understanding and considerate. Other ladies [janitors, social workers] I [later] met were also very warm. [One other lady] she was more aloof. There's one [lady] I'd prefer not to speak about. The manager was also different.

[…] My family circumstances: mum passed away, forget about the sisters. One sister I was in touch with. Well, she wasn't home. It was before 10 pm. I don't know why she wasn't there. She's got three kids, after all. There was no light on, I couldn't see the windows in the yard because of the intercom. I didn't get in and had to explain myself. I had to sell my own flat. The flat in arrears, my man left me in the lurch. Electric heating in the flat, I just couldn't manage the bills on my own. I had to give the money back to my sister, who shared her building society book with me. She helped me a lot.

'So you've been deregistered from your permanent address.' [D., who let her in when she came to the shelter]. That's correct. It was several years ago, actually. She didn't breathalyse me. She was very considerate. She wouldn't notice I had no dentures. 'I'm sorry, but I have to go through your hair.' 'Go on,' I said. I used to have

a pony tail. Now I keep my hair short. And the sheepskin coat, a few sizes too large. Goodness gracious me. A real nightmare. I said fine, I understand.

I've heard about such places. The first thing I remember is dimmed light, already after cleaning duty. 'There are no free beds at the moment. We can put two armchairs for you in the corridor.' I said I was going back to Z. [to her friends] I wasn't going back if I could find a place to sleep there. I had pyjamas with me. I knew that wherever I went to I had to have one. And some toiletries. […] 'would you take me back if I don't find anything better?' 'Of course we will, but please bear in mind this is a major change. The armchairs might not be available, but there might be a different armchair or some chairs. We won't let you sleep rough in this foul weather.' I returned in two days. Sadly, I wasn't able to find anything else. Those friends of mine who were inviting me, they just lost it. Things didn't go their way. And so I returned.

[…] well, [I slept] in the corridor. I fell asleep. It's odd the way I respond to stress. I start to eat. The first thirty minutes I'm thinking hard and fast how to sort out things. Then there's this grip around my temples and I'm done. I go to sleep. That's my typical response.

Coping in new circumstances:

[…] my friends are trying to make up for all those things that happened at the time. Their mother-in-law died and they had to empty her flat. Problems piled up at the time. […] I call them my 'sponsors', tongue in cheek, of course. They'd order cigarettes from me. They'd give me tobacco, and pay for the cigarettes I rolled. They've had me over at Christmas or Easter ever since. They're just crazy about their grandson; he's seven months now. And the granddaughter, a madhouse really.

I was all alone and penniless back then [when she was admitted to the shelter]. True, they [friends] gave me 300 *zloty* to support me financially.

I was trying to get my bearings back.

First things first, a new ID. […] I should have replaced an ID in November. This one is no longer valid. I did that in March when I returned [to Łódź]. I had to register at the office. The money disappeared in no time. As I was registering at the local labour office, my employment counsellor, already at the second visit, told me I can do quite a lot. […] I didn't carry it to the very end [the studies], but I knew French. I'm fluent in French, I've been to France many times. I learnt English in Biology seminars, we had an English quarterly at our Department […]. I was editing contributions on the computer. I knew English for Biology like the back of my hand. There were joking I'd be able to write a PhD, let alone a Master's thesis, in English. I might not be able to speak English I understand a lot if they speak slowly. It's more difficult with songs. I can read, but it's far from fluent. I was fluent enough, though, to find spelling mistakes in English. […]. My counsellor told me: 'Gosia, fine feathers make fine birds. Everything's going to be all right once you get new dentures.' True. I remember I spoke to the lady [social worker at the shelter]. I needed money to buy new glasses. I want to get a job as badly as you do. I need three and a half years to retire. This needs to be documented. I said I had all the certificates. 'So why don't you show me.' She saw my certificates, from the Alliance Française and all that. I had an award for

my languages and that. She called me: 'Why didn't you show me that right away?' I'm leaving and she calls […] someone and says this girl needs help immediately. She had me transferred to the direct access hostel in two days' time.

[…] I was trying to help E. [one of the women she met at the night shelter] […] I assisted her each time she had a check-up at the local surgery. She had lung issues. Unfortunately, she had anxiety because of alcohol. She was unable to walk if there was someone coming from the opposite direction. She would clutch me by the hand for fear of an assault. 'Do you really think people are out to get you just like that?' We were walking [down the street] and a raindrop fell down her neck. She screamed blue murder. I thought she was hurt. She never went out on her own. We attended her sick-pay examination together. She got a sickness allowance and disappeared. We fell out of touch. She simply went out with a colleague from the night shelter and vanished. She would break treatment and all that. She would say she went to visit her brother. I tried to call her sister twice. She told me not to call about her. It was nice to talk but not about E. I'm no longer interested.

I was trying to make friends with S. [another woman], time permitting.

[The social worker] told me: 'Gosia, it was a little unfair and ugly at the start, but you've earned my trust. Hopefully, you're going to show you deserve it.' And right I did, I started training for child carers at the Municipal Welfare Centre. It started in July. […] We started with induction, ice-breaking and motivation activities. The second part was scheduled two weeks later after the break. Four different profiles were available. The workshop that never was. I registered and visited them to find out. I'm fifty-six years of age. Honest work is nothing to be ashamed of, especially if you're getting on and […] I'm fit enough. I had scarlet fever when I was ten. I was treated with intramuscular penicillin and debecillin injections. I've been immune to every single bug since then. The only trouble is I don't have a physique. I was a preemie. I can't strain myself too hard. I can't do hard labour. I can clean an office while the girls are working their fingers to the bone cleaning staircases and stuff. But now that I'm running back and forth… Running I can do, lifting I can't. […] I was trying my best. It later paid when a new social worker came. R. told it's my business not theirs to consult doctors and paramedics about S. I don't know if she was applying for a designated benefit [for her].

[…] The weather was foul and we were allowed to return at 6 pm [to the night shelter]. I would go to Carrefour or Ikea stores, which were far enough, to Empik stores to have something to read, [to] libraries I knew. A friend from Barlicki market helped me a lot. I used to live in the area. She ran a stand in the market. I would look after the stand and get a pair of jeans or […] a meal in return.

[…] I got 200 *zloty*' worth of Tesco vouchers […]. I haven't got through them yet. And 71 *zloty* extra, the entire allowance being 271 *zloty*. The first salary is to arrive at the end of Januray […] You could buy anything with the vouchers, barring alcohol and cigarettes. The 71 *zloty* is my cigarettes budget. I've been able to survive this month. That wouldn't be possible without it.

I started to look for a job. I registered immediately. Especially as you can get freebies at the porter's lodge. I got an old Nokia charger from a friend so that I could make a few phone calls. At least 5 *zloty* for a top-up. I bought a monthly top-up instead, 25 *zloty*

I paid. An old Nokia with an old battery. I had to charge it every single day. That's why I spent all the money. Then another place and another chapter in life. You have to get used to new surroundings, but you'll manage if you've been through a lot like I did. […]

Basically, I was trying to manage the money somehow, only 100 *zloty* left. We were served breakfasts and suppers. Hot meals only at some bars or Tesco stores or shopping malls. A cheap option, chicken wings for 2 *zloty*, or drumsticks or anything. You could survive until the end of the month. When I spent all the money, the friend I told you about helped me to go through to the end of the month. I bought glasses and had a photo taken [an ID photograph]. My first month here, I was able to [survive]. Then my friends helped me. We saw each other at the end of April, when already at the hostel.

[When she was transferred to the direct access hostel] the prefect told me: 'There's nothing to be frightened of. Nobody's going to bite you. We're all in line for a subsidized or council flat. This a bit like a stop-over, a workers' hostel really. I wonder how you're going to take it.'

My sentiments exactly. You can treat it as two weeks' stay by the seaside, I once went there with a friend of mine on business. [So] it's like a business trip, only longer and to get a grip on yourself. You're no longer at the night shelter. I did have dark moments at the night shelter. I was frightened at first, especially as they thought I was a total idler.

And so I was idling my time at Carrefour or Ikea stores. I didn't go there only to stay somewhere warm. I kept asking if they had something to do, to clean or whatever. [Likewise] at the Manufaktura mall. Then training came. I had moved to the hostel even before that.

That's after the night shelter, after two weeks of insecurity, but with some money still. The money began to dwindle away. Once I'd registered, there was nothing to be done. With no title for an allowance because I had no legitimate employment history. I was working without contract. I had to look around and knock on my former friends' doors again. I had to swallow my pride. All those visits to the Municipal Welfare Centre and the Ursuline Sisters. Me and my friends from the night shelter on Wólczańska Street were provided for [with food]. You'd have to queue every other week [for aid from charity organizations]. I wanted to have a life. There were more opportunities when I was transferred to the hostel and got an allowance.

[…] I was trying to prove myself. Should someone give me a chance, I wouldn't rest on my laurels, but seize the opportunity. That's how training for senior care assistants came up. I'd done this previously in the Tuszyn area. I did change adult diapers for the lady who lived with her drunkard son. He has diabetes now. He's on the wagon now. Better late than never. The lady was immobilized from the waist down. I had to do all the carrying by myself. True, she was much thinner, but I had to climb the bed each time. Her boy was not around. Her beloved sonny boy. He put her in a nursing home, where she died two months later.

[…] That's why I did the training. There's no way I could do cosmetology or hairstyling. I have neither talent nor passion for it. I like to have a nice hairdo, but can't imagine I'd be doing it myself. I had issues with my heart, hypertension and blood circulation. Suppose I'd be curling my hair. Two curlers and the job's done.

Anyway, there was this training for care assistants. Seven weeks [of training], four weeks of apprenticeship at the nursing home in N. I wonder what kind of home the lady from the Tuszyn area must have ended up at. She died in two weeks' [months'?] time. She could have died of longing. That's the only reason I can think of.. It must have been psychology. I visited her once. She wasn't bad. There was no time for more visits.

Anyway, I've completed the training now. In the meantime, an opportunity came up, a side job really, to work with an elderly gentleman, a grandpa as I would call him. His granddaughter also calls him like that. We could call him like that when he wasn't around. He was a tank driver, eighty-three years of age and fit, but with Alzheimer's disease. The job wasn't too hard, though. I'd come for a whole day only on Saturdays. Otherwise I worked on Mondays and Tuesdays after lunch. There was a full-time care assistant in the morning. They were at loggerheads all the time. She was around only because the gentleman tolerated her. She tried to boss around. His son-in-law would take care of him on Mondays and Wednesdays. He would stay for the night. His daughter and granddaughter would leave home. You had to have an eye on him [the tank driver]. He liked to drink and disappear. I did Mondays and Wednesdays after lunch, as the son-in-law had to attend training. I made some money on the side.

She [the trainer she met during the course organized by the Municipal Welfare Centre] called me about a meeting at the Social Inclusion Club. A meeting with a representative who was looking for people with senior care assistant training. It was on Tuesday […]. A phone call came on Thursday. They invited me to a meeting. A general meeting, that is, but A. later told us she was a manager running a group of community support workers from the Order of the Merciful Brothers. We could leave our phone number and have a conversation. I told them where I was coming from; I told them about the hostel, my experience, seven weeks of training, including four weeks of apprenticeship at the nursing home. A. told me I was the first one to come to her mind, out of those fifteen people. She was wondering if we could work together. […] We had an appointment at 8.15 am on Thursday. I don't know if for real. It was holiday time, actually. Apparently, they were short of staff. It's just as likely no one wanted to. I don't think I was so special as she told me. I agreed. I was keen to. I had been making money, but it wasn't legit. I told them the truth [at the hostel], but they said fine, so long as it was below 500 *zloty* monthly. 'Get a regular job, and then we'll start speaking about the rent.'

Christmas Eve at the granddad tank driver's was our farewell party.

[…] They offer great rates of pay [at the Merciful Brothers, even as a substitute assistant]. There's no way I could make as much at a public nursing home. Eight *zloty* net per hour, and twice as much on Saturdays and Sundays. A decent pay, really. A. told me we would sign a contract until the end of January. They may later offer me a three-month trial period or, if it pays better, a contract of mandate. So that I could take it easy and deregister from the Labour Office. [I have] an appointment on 3 Jan with […] a very nice employment counsellor. The date's been set already. I told my patients I'd have to turn up at the office.

[…] A certified nurse is my line manager. But the employment application was submitted to the prioress.

The direct access hostel, 'homeness' and homelikeness:

Let's face it. This new home of mine [the night shelter and the direct access hostel] was terrible at first. Not a home you'd like to have.

[…] It took me some time to arrive [the room] where I am. I was at […]. I was fed up with N. and her attitude to people. […]

You need to […] watch how things go. How to get along. You need a day to get your bearings. Then a conversation with girls from other rooms.

[…] A regular room on first impression. There are wardrobes to hang your clothes in. A surrogate of normalcy. And you tend to reason with yourself, it's just a night shelter. You come here to have somewhere to sleep. Not to find a home. We're given a surrogate of home, which is much appreciated. You have to accept the circumstances. There are rules you have to obey.

[…] The girls knew I'm very fond of reading. My name day is in June. They bought me a bedside lamp. The light must be off by 10 pm. People try to create a semblance of home. You can light a bedside lamp. You can have something to read. You're not disturbing anybody. […] Only this one […] A nasty piece of work [about a person in psychiatric treatment]. You can watch TV if others are fine with it. You can read if you like.

Unless you don't want to move on [stay at institutions such as night shelter or direct access hostel]. Unless you're fine with going on like that. You have to stick to the rules until you get your own place. Obey and survive. Don't make matters worse.

[…] I came back from Christmas Eve at the corporal tank driver's. […] There was only me in the room. […] The TV was on, the Christmas tree was on in the dining room and in our room too. […] Christmas Eve and there wasn't even a cat around to speak to. The terrace was closed. There was always someone around, but not on that day.

I finished cleaning up the mess at 11.20 pm [someone left a mess in the kitchen, and those residents who were around in the evening decided to clean it up on their own]. We had a cigarette together. K. went to her room. M., too, went to her room. I was all alone with a TV on. Some comments, giggles and voices [from the TV set]. [But] I wasn't in the mood for TV.

I saw [one of the janitors on duty] turn off the Christmas tree in the common area. I did the same in our room. [But later] I turned it back on. I would wake up every hour. You kind of need solitude sometimes, especially when you're surrounded by other people, someone turns over in bed […], the other snores, yet another walks by. I can tell who by the steps. I find it easy to settle down in new places. I can sleep in hotels. I don't mind that at all. When I'm sleepy, I can doze off any time, any place. Noise doesn't bother me at all. I never complain about this. […] I got used to it so much that I missed other people that evening.

[So] it turns out home is an arbitrary concept. Everything depends on your point of view.

I slept in different places. I did my best to fit in with other people I shared or rented a flat with. But deep down inside you're dreaming of being on your own. If only I could get a flat! Not necessarily subsidized housing. I'm eligible for a council flat given my income.

[…] I filed papers in April [a housing application]. I knew I was going to get new dentures. I only had to wait. You can furnish it the way you like.

[…] These are my thoughts on the home if you ask me. I get used to quickly to new circumstances or surroundings. Be it a camping or a hotel. […] I've been here for a few months now, since March [the conversation was held in January]. You get used to somehow. Beggars can't be choosers, you know. I've been waiting for a flat all this time. […] I keep calling them so that they don't forget about me. I can't forget even if I want to. Social workers won't let me. They told me to check up on the how the things are going at the end of Feb. There's a hitch, though. I can't go and tell them I have a job now. Unless I can get a council flat instead. There'll be more news in Feb. News on the period of the contract, for example.

[…] I spoke to S. at the night shelter. I wanted her to go to a public nursing home. E. vanished. J.'s at the nursing home I did my apprenticeship with. […] I kept close with S. and J. from my room [at the night shelter]. You know what it's like. We're fine, we're in the same building, but we're not too close. You can't make great friends here. Or perhaps it's me who can't. No too quickly, at least. I'm easy to get on with. I need someone close, not necessarily a friend. We share as much as we're comfortable. No one is trying to interrogate you. Well, some people are. Every man for himself. Actually, there are a few people I can ask for help. They're reliable. This can be friendship. That's how it starts at least. This is down to our circumstances, the place we live in and the fact that you can't be intimate with too many people. There are only few you can ask for help. Which is a shame.

Her experiences:

I'm happy to learn from every episode in my life: the fact I could help other people I'm not boasting. [Besides] I prefer animals to people. I know what human misery is. I've been there myself. I'm a good listener. I'm here for you if you need to get something off your chest. I'm doing my best to leave good memories. I might have been a completely different person back then. It dawned on me only later that I get my ass kicked for being too good. […] when you do good things, good things happen.

I've lost everything three times in my life. The first time when I left my family home and rented a flat. I had a scholarship. Then academic work, almost immediately. They needed someone with fluent French. I was hoarding [things at the time].

Then I rented [a flat] with [a partner] […] [The neighbour] was talking about our landlords. […] we fell back with rent once. Anyway, they barged in [just before] 10 pm. […] it was winter. Pack your things and get out. We went to our friends.

I never returned to take the rest of my belongings. This is my second time.

And the third time, those girls and the gentleman [the daughters of her second patient].

[…] I never hoarded things. I never cared to. Unless they had sentimental value. If there was something I wanted to keep, a knick-knack or a soft toy, I had to have my bag always with me anyway. Albums and family memorabilia are at my sister's, in our former flat. One thing I bought was clothes. [The sisters] they're not going to take my memorabilia from me; they're not as bad.

I happened to […] lose a baby [this mention and a previous one about the loss of a baby are the only ones in the whole interview; I decided not to explore it in detail]. My sister had already two children. Too many people considering the size. One of the rooms was mine. I left it fully furnished. My bookcase is still there. I won't say a [bad] word about my sisters. But those ladies [the daughters of her patient] destroyed everything. […] Everything was gone.

I've been trying to look on the bright side here [at the hostel]. […] I'm happy I can see the upsides, despite all this. I'm waiting [for the flat], I'm checking on how the things are progressing. […]

'Tomasz'

He was in his sixties. He'd run a variety of businesses throughout his life. He'd spent his life travelling: he'd lived on three continents and had several wives or partners. He'd been a car dealer and done physical labour. He'd run businesses, changed cars, flats and places.

Family and home:

[…] we had our own flat [with my parents]. My parents had two homes. One and the other, a place we didn't want to live [with his first wife]. It was a large plot of land, more than 10 thousand square metres, at Żabiczki [one of the neighbourhoods in Łódź]. We had a privately owned flat, in a block of flats in Konstantynów [a town]. And later we didn't, me and my wife, that is. The second wife had a flat of her own. When we sold it, we could afford a duplex flat, 110 square metres in A. We bought it together. Things began to get ugly later. I was working all the time, for a good company, I could make more money, but only in Germany, Switzerland and Northern Italy.

I'd come home only rarely, spent most of my time on business. She told me we were going to move house. She found a flat in Innsbruck. That would be nice, she was travelling to Tirol all the time. I said: 'Why don't you get things sorted. I wrote everything down. Go on, move to Tirol.' I was in Germany at the time. She moved and I came to set up a business in Poland. She was in Poland, she couldn't make if for too long because of the language. She left. […] And so I went to her to Innsbruck, I could stand it for a week, no longer; I went out for a beer, got in the car, started it and came back to Poland. From then on… She wrote letters, I have them somewhere. She wrote a lot of letters… There were lots of things to resolve, a lot of things were left unsaid. Anyway, I wasn't bothered at all because… [he was drinking].

I don't even know if we had a divorce or not. And all that insurance… I wanted my son to help me, he travels a lot, he works for one company. 'Dad, fine, but you need to come to sort things out.' He's not very keen to get things sorted, and he says there's no way he can do it with [the father's second wife].

[…] I found her contact details and called her. She wouldn't even speak to me. She hasn't been speaking to me for twenty years now… There are some issues to resolve.

I just wanted to ask a few questions, but she wouldn't speak to me. I only heard 'Krist-of' and bam.

I made contact with my son because I had brought the entire family to Austria. They stayed there. [When I went to Austria], I had already been divorced with my first wife. I was young back then, thirty-four years of age. The wife in Poland, a ten-year-old son, and well, kind of strange

She didn't want to fly to Canada, she said she would stay, but I brought them one by one. She came first, he came only after. It was the only way [legitimate]. I got a nice arrangement for him. I bought a trip to Belgrade, for the entire class of his, we took him to the airport and flew to Vienna. Sorted. […] Such were the times. The wife waited for a year to get a passport and visa, but our marriage went into pieces. I bore a grudge against her, I spoke to her several times, there were times we got along, that is, until I drank through all my money. I have to admit to this. I liked it in W. I bought a fine estate, more than two hectares of land, an old farmhouse. I was planning to run an agrotourism business. A beautiful spot. The Giant Mountains in the vicinity, scenic views, really.

I bought it [the house in W.] in the hills. The way I liked it. I didn't know what it was like on the inside, if it needed renovation or anything. I couldn't care less. A scenic location. A nice spot. I'm taking it. I bought it in winter. I wouldn't even care to see it. I bought it through real estate agents. We went there, we had a viewing, I saw the entire house. I was keen on the location, I really liked the area. [I was] after a long drinking bout, half a year in fact. […] [Things were not] getting well with the sister. They wouldn't contact me. I'd been drinking for half a year or so. The sister called me three times, she visited me when on detox. I was on the drip. I was fine for three or four days. And then again. She gave up on me and [some other family member] came and said: 'Why don't you stay at my place?' We went there, […] I was there for two weeks, no drinking at all, and in fact he did [arrange for] all this. I wasn't able to drive, I was shaking so badly that… We went there in his car. We were driving around, making calls, looking for agencies. I looked up the offers. We were driving back, the fourth day on the road, in the evening. I said: 'What's that over there, in the distance?' 'We can't reach it. It's snowed over. Nothing in the area. A middle of nowhere.' 'Is it for sale?' 'We'd have to visit the office to find out. The farm's been abandoned for years.' We went to the office. It's available. I'm taking it. 'But you haven't seen it. It's like a pig in the poke.' 'How much?' '180 thousand or thereabouts. But first you need to pay a deposit.' 'How about ten grand?' 'Fair enough.' 'Shall we sign a preliminary contract?' And I talked him [the family member] into this, there's a fine house in W., a large plot of land, 2 hectares in size. He also bought a plot with a house. He paid 60 thousand or thereabouts. A good price for a property.

I didn't return until spring. I looked around the house and said blimey, true, it does need renovation. A well was there, too. I got started. I was renovating it myself. I did the fireplace first, because I wanted to, a spacious living room, four windows, not too large, opening onto three sides: the South, the East and the West. I did a large fireplace, just enough to put a few logs in. I lived with one W. at the time, and I invited her over. The only room that was fairly roughly done, enough to have someone overnight. I did the bed and the fireplace. I liked to light the fire in the evening. I later brought an

oil heater from Austria, and a coal heater as well. You wouldn't find anything like this in Poland back then. […] I gradually turned the place into an agrotourism business.

[…] Even [the Austrian lady] came over. She's sort of artist. I met her, don't remember exactly, it must have been a party or something. A lovely lady, she says she she's an artist, she works in concrete. 'You mean it? With a chisel or something?' 'No, I do structures. Wait, I'll show you a picture.' She invited me to her studio. Odd flowers and stuff. She would wrap them in concrete and paint. These sculptures, that is. I said: 'Can you do an arum lilly?' 'Of course I can. But I need to make a structure first.' 'I can make one if you do the lilly for me.' And so I made a structure in her studio. She later sent me a letter of thanks. She was in the magazine. She got an award for the sculptures. They were massive. She was single, and so our paths crossed. She told me: 'I've got a large apartment. Why don't you come over?' That's how it all started. Actually, it became my second home. We spent several months together. But I had to go back to W. 'Would you come over?' [She did come for some time.]

[…] I told her right away, it's my vision, that's how I like it to be, my future plan. Every single detail, this goes here and that goes there. W. would often ask why I was doing all this. And I knew where to put the barbecue, a bonfire place. The design was right there in my mind. The design evolved over time.

[…] The debt collector took it all. Problems began to pile up. I spent New Year's Eve in Vienna. The son bought a new flat because he remarried. He takes after me, I suppose. He divorced one wife and married another. They were supposed to spend their honeymoon in Egypt. A brand new flat, as I still had the money. We paid 250 thousand. The wife chipped in, too. I gave only fifty, the wife a hundred, the son had some money, and they soon started renovation. I told them, I'm staying here, have a nice journey. I stayed there until Christmas. We later went to Karpacz [a town], […] with my first wife and her mother, she wanted to see W., and I told them 'It's snowed over, no access at the moment.' I had friends there and they didn't feel like going. It was only 40 kilometres away, though. 'You'll see it in spring. Everything's covered in snow now.' She didn't see it in spring. The debt collector sold it in March. […] I was pissed when I got there, I was looking for friends to help me get it back, and I lost another 100 thousand in a hotel with some chums of mine. They had my cards blocked. And so it went.

[…] I always hated blocks of flats. We've had a house and a large yard since I could remember. Me and [his first wife] and a flat in a block of flats, not too large, roughly 50 square metres, we had a child, but we lived at Żabiczki [a neighbourhood in Łódź] anyway. We put it up for lease, we spent winter there, and we would move to Żabiczki in spring.

[My ex-wife] didn't grow up in a block of flats. The wasn't very enthusiastic about the prospect, but she got used to it after some time. That was in the seventies, before the eighties, it was hard to travel short distances, say five or six kilometres without a car.

We had two cars already in 1977. I had a Volkswagen Golf and she had a Fiat 126p. She was a nurse, but fully mobile despite raising a kid. It was our lifestyle all along. I wasn't interested in blocks of flats at all. […] I wasn't particularly happy about the flat, nothing creative would come to my mind. I didn't care much about the flat, the design, the furnishings, anything. If there was space, I'd always come up with something creative.

His road to homelessness – stays at institutions:

[…] [It started] in 2009, on 2 June. I had my leg broken and drank through everything, and they threw me out, in 'Ś'. I spent one month [in a hotel], the cards were good for nothing, and I got my leg broken in the end. I sold the car, I was broke. I came here because things got ugly with the family, with the sister. I sold everything and was broke. I went to S. for some time, to have my leg treated and bounce back […]. That was my plan. That was my outlook at the time. Anyway, things changed.

I didn't know about the shelter. I knew there were animal shelters, but I didn't know there were people shelters.

Someone told me about the place. It was my sister's friend […]. I once came over to my mum […]. I came by taxi, my leg in the plaster cast, a second or third day. She said: 'Son, what happened?' She was yet to learn I was broke […] I thought I had some money as they hadn't thrown me out from the hotel yet. I was days away from it, actually. And she [the friend] told me: 'You're going to end up really badly, mark my words, in a homeless shelter.' Next week I went to her [his mother] again on Saturday because […] they had thrown me out of the hotel. I didn't go by taxi. A mate of mine gave me a lift, the one I sold my Volkswagen to, and mum knew I came by car. 'You can't drive with that leg.' 'My mate did the driving.' The car was no longer mine and I told mum about everything. 'So you finally got what was coming to you. Forget about that, I'm not going to have you over.' And so [the sister's friend] came over for a visit, as she often would, she lived nearby. I said: 'I have nowhere to go to.' […] I deregistered from my permanent address [at his partner's]. I went there once more to take some of my stuff. We had a row, and I ended up with nothing. She thought I was at W. and I was in Łódź. She must have seen me somewhere. She worked in a bar and must have seen me, apparently, without my noticing her. She called me: 'You're a liar. You tell me you're away, I can see you around in Łódź.' And so what. There's nothing between us. I left the paintings, the mirror, and some knick-knacks at her place. But later, a year later or so, she called me and asked what to do about all this stuff. 'Throw it in the bin,' I said. 'Why don't you come over and decide. It would be a pity.' I was calm again. She cooked dinner. […]

And so she [the sister's friend] told me: 'Since you have nowhere to go, there's this [place] at […].' It was in June. I said: 'What kind of place?' She said: 'I could have you over at P.' She's the manager […] at P. She even made a phone call. I spent some time at my mum's. She cooked me dinner. I wasn't in the mood. All in all I had one or two thousand *zloty*… And she [the sister's friend] said: 'Tomek, I called at S., there's a vacancy if you like. They have a bed for you, you can wait until the leg is fine again.' I took a taxi. The taxi driver didn't know the address. I was asking people, no one knew. We were driving around and couldn't find the place. I went there again the next day, I had a few essentials and some underwear […]. I bumped into this guy [the social worker], the one I wanted to beat up. 'Hi there.' 'Hi, my name's this and that. There's a bed waiting for me in Dorm 10.' 'Who do you think you are? Back off, man!' That was quite an entrance I made. […] But he made a phone call, spoke to the manager and said: 'Please come in. You're in.'

I arranged for a job pretty quickly while at S. My leg was fully fit again. I used the old acquaintances of mine, one lady gave me a job as a youth fashion sales representative. A travelling job, all around Poland. I got a car and merchandise. But this was not to last. It came to an end in December. […] At first I'd leave the car at the company's premises, but later M. [the owner] told me: '[it's] cheap, you can park it at your place.' She didn't know I was homeless. She thought I lived at Widzew [one of the districts in Łódź] and said: 'Why don't you leave it your car park?' There was over 100 thousand *zloty* worth of merchandise in this Renault van. My room-mate would often join me on the road. I didn't want him to stay all alone. I always left either on a Monday evening or a Tuesday morning and returned on Friday at night or on Saturday in the afternoon. […] there were two of us: one guy did the north of Poland, I did the south. I covered the area to the south of Gorzów [a town], Łódź and Zamość [a town]. He did the area to the north. That's how it was distributed. A dispatch every week, merchandise, on the road, phone calls. I didn't realize they'd be jealous [other residents of the direct access hostel and night shelter at S.] Her phone was in the business card. I often left the cards in the guard room. They must have called her. I'm at work right before Christmas, she comes up to me and says: 'why are you lying to me?' 'What are you talking about?' I was planning to ask her to give me a full-time contract from Jan. 'You leave the car at S. among the thieves and the homeless. You're not a thief. But you are homeless. […] how can I find you if you're gone?' 'Did anything bad happen?' 'No, I'm happy with you, but we can't go on like that. There was a phone call from S. You leave the merchandise there. The car is unattended, in the dodgy area.' I'd leave it in front of the guard room, locked, the alarm on. Nothing could have happened really, there was no one loitering around. Even those who knew about my job, they had no issues or anything. Everyone was happy, I had cigarettes to share each time I came back, but it didn't work out [he lost his job].

[…] We had the cleanest dorm in the centre, really decent, upstairs. They are decent guys, these homeless people, aren't they? And the corridor! Goodness gracious me! […] they gave me an upper bunk to sleep in, but it was manageable. […] a month like that, my leg in the cast. I was keen to get fit again, but when I met them, they sorted out crutches for me, I had mates again. Because I met the guys who liked to drink again. B. [one of the room-mates] told me: 'Stay away from them.' I would sneak out, to have a beer in the shade. No one had any issues about this, I could have a pint, take it easy.

[Drinking] it's out of bounds. But I was back on time, no one caught me red-handed. The leg was my cover, I would lie or have a nap. I'd raise no suspicions at all. July and August went by, my leg was fit again, I had a job arranged at the end of August, I was on the road and took B. for company. I later took Ł., who joined the French Foreign Legion. I had meetings [with the therapist, A.] in the meantime.

[…] A young guy joined our room, we spoke a lot, various topics, I was abroad from 1985, in the West, all around Europe. I came back in 1993, but would leave again from time to time. I came back for good in 1996–1997.

He told me he wanted to join the French Foreign Legion. The police were after him. You have to exercise then. I told him about things. He was all ears. He said: 'Do you know anyone who'd help me get there.' 'There's one uncle of mine. We can

make a phone call.' He gave me some contact details. 'Why don't you go to this website. You'll find out more about the requirements. Life in the barracks. The recruitment is only in Marseilles and Lyon. You can choose either.' […] I had to explain everything. I don't speak French, but I do speak German, I spoke German when I worked in Libya. He told me: 'I'm going to exercise.' He exercised until June, and so did I, no drinking, no smoking, we went jogging together. He left for Lyon in June to join the Legion. I later stopped [exercising], I didn't feel like it without his company. There were problems, too, because we made a multi gym at S., downstairs in the common area. It was old but unused. We put it all together, a few bricks, he [the social worker] wasn't very enthusiastic, he told us to get rid of it, it's not a place to exercise, he said.

I was all alone again, I first went back to drinking and then started smoking.

[The owner of the company] She paid me for what I did as a sales representative, […] there was still cash in March, the money came in instalments.

[After the conversation we had] I did an inventory, I checked the car, everything was in perfect order, no problems, nothing. 'Don't worry, I'll pay you when the money arrives.' […] At least 1000–1500 *zloty* each time.

[…] I went on a bender at S. They later threw me out […] to the night shelter. I carried on drinking, which was easier at the night shelter. And there was a row […]. […] I had a rash, these were festering sores actually, all because of drinking. I drank every day with the guys at the night shelter. The doctor and the nurse were making rounds one day, and I wanted her to do something for me. And he [the other social worker] wanted to throw me out […]. [The other social worker] helped me a bit, 'let's have a walk around the block,' he said. I wanted to beat the other one up […] I was […] two months on a bender. […] I had already discussed my problem with A. [the therapist], and I thought I would be able to handle it. […] she helped me to think and reconsider everything. I realized it wouldn't do any harm if I tried to control my drinking. And so I went [to detox and therapy]. […]

[I've been living in a move-on flat] since 22 January 2011. The contract started [on the day] [the 'contract' is a commitment signed by the residents; in doing so, they accept the rules and undertake an obligation to do a variety of things – I.B.K.].

I completed therapy on 1 December, but there was one problem still. The manager was new to the place and he didn't know everything; he said: 'No way. First, you have to report at S., we can't do this just like that.' It's much easier to get here these days… So I sorted things out, I was in a temporary residence centre for some time. I went to the manager and asked him to put me on the waiting list. I had to wait three weeks for a vacancy. That's how I came here.

I would have come here in 2010, that was the initial plan, but there was a cock-up because of booze. I drank, there was a name day party and I got back to drinking instead. […] I wanted to control it, but it didn't work out, and things got really nasty. […]

I went [to therapy] to control my drinking, but things didn't go the way I wanted to. It got out of hand and I had to stop. Simple as that. No one told me to. It was my decision. At some point, two weeks or so later, something finally clicked deep inside me. I realized, not everything at first, because you can't understand everything at first,

but I gave in, some part of me at least. I knew I wouldn't manage on my own. I knew I had to give in. We'll see how things go, but I give in. No one helps me. No one can, I can only help myself. I began to realize, more and more, gradually.

[…] I started working for a friend of mine. He had a large tool making shop and was in therapy; he also had issues. We were both on the wagon, […], we were in the same situation, fair enough, but he fell off the wagon six months later. He later went back to drinking. I worked a year and a half at his place. He went back to drinking at Christmas. He drank so hard that I had to take care of his business. His wife didn't want to have anything [to do with him]. She said: 'Tomek, you're the boss now, it's none of my business, I've got enough on my plate already.' I worked there until June. [I told him] 'let's square the accounts, you have to stop drinking, otherwise I'm leaving.' This continued for some time. Everyone left, some mates of mine, [the other] guy left even earlier, I finally stayed. I didn't want to leave him, but I later handed it over to his wife. He would carry on drinking. […] I joined another company. I've been working there ever since.

Life at institutions – people and places:

[When he first got a move-on flat, he shared a room] with M. He passed away. […] We were sharing a dorm in the shelter at S.

He didn't drink because he didn't want to. But he would bring vodka to Spokojna Street because he worked […] in confectionery, he was blending chocolate. He later got a flat. He sorted it out really nicely. I visited him a few times. There was sugar for free, he had access to lots of sugar. But he died. His sister, we already knew each other, called me and said M. had died. 'You two were friends. There's going to be a funeral.' I couldn't make it, I was away working. I worked in one company. I said: 'Blimey, I can't make it, the funeral's tomorrow.' She thought I was here on Trębacka Street […]. Later there was J. [another room-mate]. He sorted out a flat for himself. He fell in love. […] There was another guy in the meantime; he came, dropped his sack and asked: 'Any breathalyser on the premises?' None. He came completely smashed a week after. I wasn't around. He had his keys. […] I went to the room upstairs, [the guy's] pissed as a newt […] lying around. He didn't feel like getting up. 'Hey, matey, time to get up.' 'I'm a resident.' 'You no longer are, sorry.' I made him leave. End of story. I'm not going to call the manager, am I? I can handle the drunkard myself. 'You have a grievance, you can call anyone you like, but clear off this instant, you can even choose where to.' […] He came back after two days. We had a community meeting, but he wasn't exactly sober. The manager looked at him and asked: 'How much have you been drinking?' 'You tell me.' 'No, it's you who tells me.' 'A pint or two, maybe three.' 'Fine, get yourself packing now.' 'Seriously?'

Later P. came along [his current room-mate]. When I first saw him I thought a tricky bastard, this one. But he's communicative at least, and we do get along, We've had no issues. There's chemistry, right from the start.

I've never liked moaners or misery guts. […] now that I've got used to it, I'm more understanding. It's difficult on your own, though, at least sometimes. There's no one to talk to really.

We do the cleaning on our own, and it's not out of spite, but if you dodge your duty, the other guys have to do your share. You can't be spick and span all the time, you sometimes run out of time or there are other reasons. Others keep an eye on you. They keep an eye on the kitchen as well. You haven't done this or that. No one needs filth really. We keep it clean. The way we like it. It's nice to see everything's tidy.

[…] R., K., D., W., L. and Z., they all left within a month or so. […] other guys came along […] different types, they started to make a mess.

[We had a few scenes with the guys popping in for a visit]. […] It was difficult to fit in. But I did my best, I was keen to make it happen. The atmosphere of mutual understanding, you won't develop it just like that. […] with all this turn-over […] it wasn't easy at all. Each guy wants to push his habits onto other people. This way, that way, because I said so. Which is not going to work, everyone has to [conform]. There's one bathroom only. You've been here for some time and you know you can't have your preferred hours all the time. You can't have a shower or a shave because some other guy has just come from work [and is first in line]. It's like being in a family. If you don't care, things get complicated. The same with meals, cooking, anything really. We roughly know our habits, you like it like that and the other like that. Like in a family. If you ignore the people around you, you're likely to cause some confusion.

[One of them was] set in his ways, he had a world of his own. If you spent more time in this company, among people like us, homeless guys, something begins to develop, some guys develop an understanding, but others are sharp operators. This is a regular thing in any group of people. I was a sharp operator once. Not for me, this one's a moron, this one's so-and-so. At some point you let it go. It's like in the army or prison. […] some are trying a lot, the others can't, but they somehow [keep at it] and some other have these 'can-do' airs. That's who I call sharp operators. The guys will call you out rather quickly. We're all alike. People like you, outsiders, won't because sharp operators, you know, they have the gift of the gab, they've been so unlucky or one thing or another. Grandmas and grandpas die, children are born, one disaster after another. Things fall apart. Even others can notice. Too much misfortune for one person. […]

The shelter taught me humility. I didn't realize this but… I may have pitied them, but from a safe distance, as in a film, as if that's none of my business. There's war in Iraq, people murder one another. What a waste of life, but it's all remote. I couldn't care less. This is neither my home nor my yard.

And then I was part of it: misery, stench, filth, all of this all around me. It wouldn't cross my mind that I'm [no] different because [I thought] I'm here for the time being. We probably all make the same mistake. They are homeless, I'm not. I'm no different. Everyone has issues.

When I speak to people I don't brag about my homelessness. […] my boss once came over: 'That's your place?' 'Yes, I'm homeless.' He saw it all. 'Okay, let's get inside.' 'Would you fancy some coffee?' 'Thanks, I'm fine… Okay, let's get inside, let's have a cigarette.' He goes in and looks: everything's fine inside, but it's not so on the outside. But it was different from then on [his attitude].

The other one didn't see the shelter. I invited J. over. 'Have you seen the shelter?' 'Nope.' We went to S. We're having a chat: 'You've been here before?' 'I have, yeah.' 'Bli-

mey, kill 'em all,' he says. 'Destroy it all, or better, gas them all.' And the night shelter… I've been there myself, I know the world too, not as a tourist who goes on a trip and that's it. I know what life is, down to the smallest detail. […]

Picture this, a guy without legs, no legs at all, in cold and snow, and he drags along to the bus stop. There are other homeless guys, none of them is going to help. Because he doesn't want them to. There's a guy in the car, he can see [the one with legs], get in the car, man. He drops him off to S., and he says: 'Got a fiver?' He does. He's about to leave, we're standing and watching, and [the one without legs says] 'What a fucker. I thought he'd give me some more. What a miser.' All you can see as an outsider is that he's a poor man, with his stumps in the cold, but he's doing fine anyway.

Or some those guys who sleep in the gutter. They can go to the night shelter, only they don't really want to. They choose to drink instead. It's raining, and they lie there, covered in blankets. Wait until it gets a bit warm and snow's gone, [they are back drinking] in the gutter. They are hanging out, having their fights and their drinking sessions. Without legs, on wheelchairs, the wheelchair's knocked over to the side, [the guy's] lying there drunk. An utter and complete disaster. That's who they are, grey matter no longer working, they don't realize they can do things differently. It's in the underground [the heating network], one guy has hanged himself, the other has died, yet another is lying there still. 'Can't you feel the stench?' How can you feel anything if everyone smells, [though] a human corpse is decomposing right beside you. That's… a dog's life, really. There are individuals who stop for a moment and change their lives, but these are only individuals. Others don't want to, they don't realize. Lots of people do not realize they can live and act differently [that's about homeless people]. They don't know the value of property. They have backgrounds, but no one knows where they are actually coming from and who they are. Lots of people know what it means to lose everything, but there are lots of people who've been going on like that since childhood… [...] in tenement houses, they barely know their mothers, the only thing they got from them is beating. They saw their fathers somewhere… There grew up in the gutter. They did this and that, they were coping so long as they were young enough to cope, but there are lots of young [homeless] people who've lost health and this and that and ended up in the shelter. As a matter of fact, the shelters haven't been around for long, it's only after 1989 and the political transition. There was nothing like that when I was young. […] [Though] I remember this guy Kotański on TV.[5] I was taken aback by his intensity.

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[5] Marek Kotański rightly deserves to be called a cult figure in Poland. He was one of the pioneers of the third-sector welfare system for substance users and persons in need of assistance. A psychologist and therapist, Kotański died a tragic death in a car accident in 2002. He worked with alcohol and drug users, HIV carriers, former inmates and homeless individuals. He established Monar, an original non-governmental welfare and prevention system for substance users and other people in adverse circumstances; he also set up Markot, a support system for people leaving homelessness. He developed a network of therapy, prevention and welfare centres. He began working on the system as far back as the 1970s. The guiding idea behind his welfare system was to create therapeutic communities and support groups. Kotański also proclaimed 14th April as Homeless People's Day in Poland.

[…] you can have a try and go to S. [the shelter], [the guys who live there] are fine with stench in the rooms because they all smell like hell. [If you're an outsider] you come in and feel there's something not quite right about the place. You're from a different world completely. The air you breath is different, and the people you know, too. When A. came from S., he was a bit shocked when I told him: 'You need a bath, man.' [He carried] the stench with him. The stench came back after a week. 'Have you washed? I can feel you haven't. You need to get to the laundry, there's a washing machine. Just do it.' 'You're too sensitive.' Life is different at the shelter. You can't notice the smell. You can get used to almost anything. […] but if you're normal, an outsider, [you can feel it]. The air you breathe is different. When I'm working, I don't care, I might be welding or not, my clothes are in the locker, and they smell. But it's different in the office. Different smells, a different life.

Important possessions:

[Pointing out to a large mirror hanging on the wall] This mirror is mine. Straight from Toronto, Canada. It's over one hundred years old. It has travelled a lot: from Canada to Frankfurt am Main, from Frankfurt to Innsbruck, from Innsbruck to Poland, to Żabiczki area, and from Żabiczki [a neighbourhood in Łódź] to Widzew [one of the districts in Łódź]. This is its current destination. It was wrapped in special packaging back in Toronto. It was hanging at K.'s, he's a friend of mine. He had flown there long before I did. He ran a petrol station. I worked there on the side. The mirror is made of crystal. It was made before World War I or thereabouts. It was hanging in a store room, which I used for sleeping.

I was keen to save money. Before Canada, I'd been working in Innsbruck, Austria. I lived in a hotel with refugees. I made an application through an organization [that was looking for people] to do the logging in Canada, good rates of pay, more than 6 thousand Canadian dollars monthly, excellent conditions. I lived with one Hungarian guy, but not too long, though, three months overall. Our black foreman he used to say 'whatever works, man.' There was no social security. M. was a friend of mine, I was trying to reach him and succeeded in the end [through his ex-wife]. He divorced his wife, and I managed to find her. She worked in Toronto, in a real estate developers' company […]. She was no longer with M., so I met K., the guy with the petrol station. I stayed at their place for two weeks, but they told me: 'Why don't you rent something on your own.' [I wasn't very keen to, so] I slept in a storage room and was trying to save for a return ticket to Europe. I would check the oil, this kind of thing.

I liked the mirror a lot. I said: 'K., this storage room and all this mess don't do much justice to this mirror, you know.' 'I don't care, you can take it if you like.' And so I packed it nicely.

I had a house of my own when I returned to Poland. I had one house and then another. I was a car dealer in the meantime; I ran one company and then another.

The mirror was at my partner's, the one who bought a flat at Widzew district. I owned this one [a female nude] and a lot of other paintings. Only some of them have survived because she gave away the rest to her friends. Some things have survived, though. She was keeping the mirror because I packed it and left in a storage place.

I said: 'I'm taking it.' No other paintings have survived, the other got damaged and she gave it away.

There are some knick-knacks as well. I had stuff at W., but I was burgled three times. I would normally leave everything inside when travelling on business. I put loads of money in central heating, the farmhouse was massive, 400 square metres in size. A one-storey building, I've got a picture which I'm going to show you one day. Lots of photos are gone. I took a new set of photos the first time I was burgled. I got large compensation the first time it happened, but they weren't very keen to accept the invoices. […] I finally gave in the third time I was burgled. I was doing nothing, just waiting for spring; I was thinking of selling it, but I didn't manage to, the debt collector took it all. I was able to sell only one bit, a tiny railway station, as I call it, just off the railway tracks, conveniently located.

[…] I was left with only few possessions [once he'd lost several houses, flats and families]. I was able to afford a few nice things, which I only later had to sell. Overall, I'm not that keen on buying things. My life has turned around. I'd buy anything I liked in the past. I could afford it, and I squandered money easily. I still do. I can't help it.

There's nothing in me that would make me save money or say stop, you don't really need that. It's like it used to be, but it also has changed a little, I'm trying to be more rational and buy on rare occasions. […] previously, it was all because of alcohol. I do buy things when necessary. The things I need, the essentials. But I like to give a present sometimes. I don't care if it's necessary or not.

I used to have a lot things. I used to wear a vintage watch. I used to like vintage watches a lot. I sold the best specimens and I left others behind, this and there, in different places. I don't any more. This is the only one I've got, I've had it for a long time, it's a fake, not really authentic, but some people won't realize… ten years ago, when I was still abroad, there were no Chinese fakes like in Poland.

[…] I don't have too many possessions [now], I've always cared very little about material possessions, I didn't care much about the cars or anything. I've had a few knick-knacks instead, something suitable for a traveller like me. […] rocks, those little, fine pebble stones you can find by the seaside, in the river or in the mountains, in different colours and shades. Green, yellow and orange. I had a whole collection, but I gave it away, that's who I am, I brought them from different places I saw. Something different. I've never liked gold, I would never sport a gold watch, nor a yellow one for that matter. It's not an option with me. I'd choose white if any. I've never liked signet rings or bling. I've never been attracted to this, not my kind of thing really.

[…] There was this green rock I had. I asked her once [his former partner]: 'Haven't you seen my rocks anywhere?' 'Oh, I gave them this and that, and this to that.' I had one nice rock from Namibia, a little green rock, that is. I said: 'A., that's a gift, a little rock I brought from faraway travels. I only later learnt that it had also travelled, from the mountains, to the place I where found it.' It was green, […] a nice shade of green, I liked it a lot, 'a little green rock in my hand,' as in this song by Maryla Rodowicz. [Polish singer]. […] It was my lucky charm. And my favourite. I would put it on whenever things didn't go my way.

I'd travel with the rocks [from one place to the other]. I wouldn't take all of them, only my favourites. […] they weighed a kilo and a half.

[…] There's none left, though. I had one rock from Canada [when already in the move-on flat]. It was red, turning into beige, […] but I gave it to someone. […] I had two, if I remember well, but I gave both all away. […] I gave my favourite rock to A. [the therapist]. I had it with me when back at S. [his first time at the shelter]. I would carry it in a travel bag. […] it was always there in a little pocket. I'd always keep my favourite rocks in the bag. I used to have a travel bag, I'd had it with me for several years, my favourite, it was almost twenty years old. I gave the bag to Ł. [who joined the French Foreign Legion]. He'd bought one already, […] and then he said: 'It's so practical, this bag of yours.' 'Here, take it.'

Plans and the housing application process:

I've been waiting for a flat for two years now. […] they told me I'm not eligible because I've never had any council flat, subsidized housing or anything. I used to live in my own property. On the face of it, it should only complicate things. But it didn't. I wrote one letter and then another. And they finally accepted my application. I was a real pain in the arse.

[…] To start the ball rolling, you need to have roughly 15–20 thousand *zloty* put aside and a regular job, which is a guarantee you're going to pay the rent. Things are not looking that great, though. Plans do change all the time, it's life that changes these plans. You can't always get what you want. No one says it's going to be easy. Things do change sometimes. And my attitude also changes, the more you have it, the more you want, as they say. The plans were really humble at first, and then they started to get bigger and bigger, to go back to my previous life, but without drinking, which is not that easy.

Self-reflection:

I had a lightbulb moment once […], I'd been writing things down, some thoughts or ideas of mine, and I realized that now I wasn't drinking, my outlook on the past had become a little more philosophical and a little more profound. I now understand how one thing led to another. I now realize my life was ruined when I got a harsh sentence and went to jail. I was only twenty years old when everything went into pieces; this has left an indelible mark on me.

Seize the day, take life as it goes… On 4 August 1971 I was sentenced to twenty-five years of prison. I was twenty at the time. They did this to me on my birthday. […] I was completely oblivious for a month or so. When they took me to the Rawicz prison, I was placed in a block with [people condemned to] death sentence, life sentence, a special block it was. Only after some time, half a year roughly, it dawned on me what had happened. I started to count. All this really happened. This particular moment has stayed with me forever. I've been trying to suppress all this, but it's still in me somewhere. After two years [of prison] I was sentenced to four years [the revision of the sentence]. I did four years in prison.

I was completely innocent. It was during my military service. We went to a party before May Day. I served in a submarine in Kołobrzeg town. We were assaulted by the

Russians, who had their garrison there at the time. It was in 1971, they were senior offices. We entered, we were all young sailors. Our belts weren't too good because sailors are supplied with belts with aluminium buckles. They had decent officer's belts, and they gave us a proper bashing. We left and met some of our mates, the green guys from the infantry. We're sailors, it's a disgrace to be beaten like that, we're coming back. You see, the system was different back then, […] the sentence, the Russians, our friends, etc., brothers in arms. They say there were several fatalities in the brawl or something. Things took a different turn later on, but it all has left a scar on me.

I was later deluding myself that I had a different outlook, which had a negative effect on my life, that I should enjoy the present moment. I never tried to understand my mistakes. Past is past. I was opening a new chapter and then another, a vicious circle really, until I met A. She's a therapist and she changed my life, I went to therapy because I felt something was wrong with me. At least that's what I previously thought, that I'm a misfit because I can't control [my drinking]. They told me there was an addiction therapist. I looked at her, a young girl, she's probably out of her depth, she can't help me much. She knew how to deal with me, though. There was one conversation and then another. I said: 'It's completely useless. She doesn't know much.' She started to ask me about my drinking bouts, and I wasn't really bothered if I had a jigger or two. I did that every day. If there was opportunity. I wasn't completely drunk but I did drink. I counted the bouts, I counted places, I said I hadn't drunk in the meantime but I in fact I had. She gave me tests to fill in and she said: 'Essentially, you're not addicted. But you have to be very careful with your drink.' This kept bugging me. She would never urge or anything. She would always ask me at the end of the conversation: 'Did you struggle with this or that?' 'Nope.' It kept niggling me, though. What is she talking about? I have to speak to her and meet her again. As some point I told her: 'I did lie in the test, but it wasn't on purpose because I was drinking. Overall, the test would show I'm an alcoholic, but I don't think that's true.' And she told me there's rehab. 'You must be joking. You know well who goes to rehab… I'm fine.' 'Well, there's rehab on Niciarniana Street, you can go and have a try. […] you can always leave if you like. You can go, have a try and see it for yourself.' We spoke right after my antics when they had me out from S. 'You can have a try. It might help, you never know.' 'Fine, I'm in.'

I went there to learn something.

And it later occurred to me as I completed therapy that I'd always met someone who… [had me back on my feet]. My life has always been like that. I didn't really deserve it but I would always meet people like A. or C. They should have had me out on my ear. Get lost, man! There was always someone who'd give me a hand. I'd do exactly the same. I was different back then… I didn't like such people. You won't listen to me or understand me? Fine, see you later.

The way things started, [my] life has been evolving ever since. I was always in a hurry back then. To sort things out, to change something. I do have moments that I want to leave, change or do something. But there's this lightbulb moment that I haven't been abroad for more than four years now. It's hard to believe but I haven't. Basically, I've been in Łódź all this time. The city was just too small for me when I was on the road working. I needed it a lot, it helped to go through this phase, there was no deadlock. It bothered me lot each time I thought about it. It's different now, I'm more

relaxed. I'm leaving at the end of August or in January. We've had a word with the manager, I have to sort things out, look around abroad, Austria, Germany or Liechtenstein. I'm going to find something to do. I called a friend of mine, I used to work at his place. He's running a large business now, but age is gradually taking its toll. Other people would say, sixty-two years of age, it's high time you retired. That's life… You can contact someone in writing, on the phone or by email, but it's a different story if you do it in person. People speak to you differently.

[…] I haven't been following any rules lately, it's been half a year or so now. I'm terrified myself, I'm going somewhere and I can feel [I'm] pushing my luck. But [I'm still in the game], I wouldn't be here otherwise, there would be no conversation between us. That I know for certain. Overall, I like it on the wagon, I have a different outlook, and I like it too, but perhaps I'm only deluding myself. It's like 'wait!'. It's easy to get back to old habits. I'm well aware of this.

I'm on the right track now. It's not exactly what it used to be, only in part. […] I hang out with people who have normal lives. I tend to avoid some of the old chums of mine. The people I hang out with these days, I met them through my new partner.

[…] at first, I kept it to myself, my homelessness, when we met. But then there was our second conversation over coffee. A fine woman, she's got it all, I'm not going to lie and told her everything. She was taken aback. 'But is there anything nice about you that you could tell me?' There was a second meeting and a third… She never pried. She knew I was going to tell her… She's smart, she works as an electrical engineer in a Finnish company. We hang out with her friends. She's well-travelled, so we have lots of topics to discuss. We've been around a lot. She has seen much more, she's been travelling. I've been abroad to work only. Not too many people have been to Namibia, though. I went there to work, to a friend of mine. I went there to see South Africa, and I know the other side of it. I know what normal life in Africa is like. I met these French Foreign Legion soldiers when they came for a short visit. There were things to straighten out.

[…] It was this part of me from the time I was in jail, these types spoke like that, they were a peculiar kind of people. I used prison cant when in jail. […] It was easier to make contact and speak to people. I've always liked firearms, so we had much to talk about. […] I made contact with a French guy, P. was his name, there's always someone in the company that we like better than others. There was this thing we shared [mutual understanding]. He took me on several 'trips' [he failed to explain what he had actually been doing with the Legion soldiers]. 'All right, then, you're completely nuts, I don't want to have anything to do with you.' The contacts remained, though. I was driving to Paris, so I thought: 'I'm going to pop in for a visit.' I was a car dealer at the time and travelled a lot in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and France. I went there several times on business, but the guy was never around. We finally managed to meet, though. And we spoke […] last year. He's going to join us. […] He's got no wife, nobody really. He's been busy travelling all the time. […] I had meetings with a therapist on Niciarniana Street. I admitted I had a problem and didn't know what to do about it. Each time he came, there were only brothels, booze and bars. He said: 'I know about your issues. You're on the wagon now. […] You don't have to drink with me, but I want

you to travel with me when I come.' But he happened not to. […] Things went back to normal. He later got sick, he caught malaria or something, he was travelling somewhere in South America, and we never met again. 'You'll see. I'm going to come one day.' I'm waiting.

[…] [Alcohol therapy] was like a boundary I had to cross, to let go of everything: it gave me a different outlook, it's like a process that never stops. Day after day, month after month, year after year, always something different. Interestingly, different parts of me now open up, the cells I haven't burnt with booze, the feelings and emotions I thought I never had, all those things that were gone, scorched, smelted, the things I thought I couldn't do. It's all there [somewhere]. I can't believe I'm so open-minded, I can be a better person now. I didn't know I had it in me. But it takes time, and I would never have made it without her [the therapist].

'Dominika'

She was the youngest resident of the women's hostel. That said, she was already of full legal age. She'd spent several years there. When we had a conversation, she was waiting for a flat from the municipality. She lived there with her mum, who acted as a prefect in a group of single mothers.

The meaning of home:

Honestly, I've never had a home of my own, a place I would settle into and stay for a longer period of time. We were constantly on the move. A regular definition of home, the one I know from primary school, well, [for me] this is family. I have a family, my mum, this is my home. Not a place, walls and floors [though].

[We've moved house] more than ten times for sure. Quite a lot, right from the start, when I was little, we were constantly on the move. We were renting flats in different parts of town. Anywhere there was a flat available, the one we could afford, without going into too many expenses. We'd move in there. We know every single area in town. […] There was one place where I stayed for six years. This is quite a lot by our standards […]. We liked it there, whereas this one, we'd like to leave as soon as possible. Not a nice place, really.

[…] There was one flat we were renting when my father was still around. A fatal cock-up, really. We were made to leave the flat at once and leave everything, furnishings, photos, you name it. We left. The only thing we could take were the clothes we were wearing. I was six at the time. I already understood a lot.

We took something to eat, and that was that. There hasn't been anything tangible in my life ever since. Some possessions I'd be sentimental about. The owner just took everything. End of story.

We looked for flats that were furnished with the essentials such as a fridge. Other things you could buy as needed, we would go for the cheapest option. It's inconvenient to have lots of possessions if you live out of your suitcase. It wasn't really worth it from the moment we had lost everything.

[…] I don't like reminiscing. Past is past. There's no use crying over spilt milk. If there's anything I'm really keen to have it's this perspective where I can bring my past and my future together. That's one thing I'm keen to pursue. I'm happy with what I've got. I don't need to have any tangible objects around me. Hopefully, I'm going to carry on the way I do.

Life at the direct access hostel:

[I've been] here for four and a half years now. […] It's our second time. Our first was when we were made to leave, bag in hand. We came here.

We were running up and down. In fact, we've been [living] virtually everywhere. A complete mash-up. I lived with my mum and some four senior ladies. Total alcoholics. I still remember when my mum went to the smoking room and left me with these women. They pulled out a bottle from behind the cupboard and said: 'Would you like some?' They had a round while I sat and watched. We'd moved in two days before. I sat and watched. They were completely drunk already. They started to tear at each other's hair. I jumped to find my mum, but they shut the door. 'Don't or everybody's going to find out.' I was in tears, screaming. It was much worse back then. The women are complaining these days, but it used to be much worse. It's more organized and orderly these days. […]

Four and a half years ago, we were made to leave the place because of pending eviction. He didn't pay the rent, he wouldn't care at all [father]. Mum burst into tears and that. We had to do something about it. I said: 'Mum, we've been there before, we can return. There's no other option at the moment. We have a week to leave, there's no better plan at the moment.' And so we came here.

[…] We were lucky. At first there was a vacancy next to our current room. We only had to move once to the [current] room. That was all. No other changes. We also have a cat [they were given permission to keep a pet, even though the hostel sticks to the no-pet policy], which is good People liked us, me and my mum, when we first came here. It was just as well the managers remembered us and we don't have to move around now. At some point mum and I will have to separate. She's going to get a flat first. […] I'll be moving around still.

I'm not very proud [from the fact she's at the direct access hostel]. That's a mistake we have to correct. I don't think I'm obliged to tell anyone about this. Only those people I've known for a long time know about me. I wouldn't call them friends, I don't really believe in friendship. Acquaintances, that's more like it. Those who know about me either had to or found out by accident. Suppose they came to pick up something from me. This kind of thing. But I can't just tell someone: listen, these are my circumstances, there's no way I'd be able to it.

If you wish to develop as a person, there's one fundamental value you need: privacy. Privacy is impossible here. The same goes for studying. I'm not able to study when I really want to. I can study only at night, when kids are not running around in the corridors, when there's peace and quiet. Let alone the fact my mum is a prefect, and there's always someone popping in for a visit. It just never stops. […]

My view on things is that a flat I live in is never 'mine' […]. I've moved house so many times that it's not really shocking any more, now imagine I've been living in one place for 20 years and the place is gone [that's different]. I've never had a flat so I don't really have a massive need to have one. Obviously, I wish I was on my own, to have somewhere to sit and relax, all in peace and quiet. No one would enter without knocking. I can open the door if I like. [I have] a free choice. This kind of thing.

There are moments I'm tired of the people around me. I don't want to speak to them. There's no way you can avoid them here. It's always busy. I like it, though, I like change and when it's busy, but not too much. You can't even have five minutes [to yourself]. I can't have a good night's sleep, the kids running around at six in the morning.

Her flat:

I'm applying [for it]. I got an ID on my eighteenth birthday. The first thing I did was to file a housing application. I'm in the application process now. […] I'm single obviously. People at the Town Office told me there are lots of large families, with lots of children, […] so I'm going to wait a bit. It's going to take five or six years. Tough luck. Anyway, I just don't want to be disappointed.

At present, there's no way I can keep furniture or anything like that here or anywhere else. One thing I can do is save money to buy some furnishings in the future. So that I could be able to furnish the flat a few days before I move in. You need to have some money aside. That's all, actually. Furniture, yes, but just before I move in. I have some money on the side now, and I feel safe to have it, I can go to the shops any time I like. It makes no sense to store things here. I don't even know where I'm going to go to [which room, when her mum gets the flat first]. Besides, there's no room for this. You have two units of furniture and that's all. No chance at all. […] We wanted to take a TV set and a fridge with us but the managers said no. The place is what it is and it's out of bounds. And again we had to leave the furnishings to waste.

You have to start from scratch, again and again.

First things first, obviously, I'll have to sort out things such as furniture and all that [in the flat]. Once there's a flat at the ready, I'm going to leave this place, and as soon as possible. I can see how I'm entering my new home. I can see there's going to be a problem. I'm complaining about noise all the time, and I know it'll be too peaceful and too quiet at my place. I need a pet. I'm going to adopt a dog from the animal shelter. I don't like cats in general, I like mine, but not in general. There'll be a puppy and me. That's all. There'll be peace. I'll be able to do as I please. I'll be the host. One basic thing is to get a job. I need to pay the rent. I don't want to end up here ever again. It would kill me. I know I'm stubborn and suppose I'm about to lose something, I won't let this happen, that's for sure. No chance I will.

I'm just imagining all this peace and quiet. The furniture is also there. I don't like to do things at the last possible moment. I like stability; I like when things go according to plan. I don't want to worry. I just want to enter and enjoy the place that is entirely mine. Enjoy a few days of peace and quiet.

Life at the institution:

You can learn a lot here. If I lived here for a year I would probably thought I could learn a lot of positive things in this place. Now that I've been living here for four and a half years now, my opinion is that you can learn how to be vulgar and crude. There are only few positive things you can pick up. Some people are okay. They put a smile on your face.

[…] This is a women's shelter. It's no coincidence they've ended up here. It's their negligence. They think they can go on like that forever; they like it here, just perfect, they don't have to pay, they can kick it back. They can do as they please.

We're different socially. We have people from different backgrounds here and they have different outlooks on things. [Some] people don't feel discredited by being here. They're fine with it; they like it here. No rent to pay. Can't be any better. I don't get them really. I understand there are such people.

Contrary to what you might expect, this is the only life they have, so they say they are tough and can handle it. These are adult women, but they're not very keen to take life in their stride, they just sneak past it. With no scenario, no plans for the future. They're only keen to sneak past. They're fine if they do, they're fine if they don't. These women are mothers. I don't understand them at all. That's who they are. That's their way of life at the moment. That's an easy way out, they've been taught this by society and experience. I know it's difficult to plan because plans don't always work out. The thing is you need to learn how to plan. Plans fall through sometimes, that's normal. It's like Epicurean philosophers, you go on no matter what. You go on and don't care. You're trying to do your thing. Step by step.

You can work in a team [here]. You can learn it here. You need to fit in. Lone wolves stand no chance of survival. This communal life is not as bad as you might think it is. There's always someone to speak to. There are moments, though, when you have to speak for yourself. Take this, for example, there's no make-up, so you go around and ask others to share. I have no issues with this. Some people do get along. Some people are really okay. […] each person has a different attitude. They live and let live. That's absolutely vital. Live and let live.

You can learn how to be resourceful. To do what you're supposed to do, to see about the flat, for example. You can't just stop, sit and do nothing. […] That's exactly [what you can learn], to understand that your present circumstances are no good. You have to deal with it, you're not in a hotel, you have to improve your living standards.

In my view, home is where your family is. [In the hostel] you can [have] a tiny imitation of what your life should be like. You can, to some extent at least. Obviously, the children have it really hard [here]. That's really bad. I remember the conditions and the scenes I saw when we first came here, when I was little. […] It was just awful. In my view, you can always create something [in the hostel]. A little fragment you can use as a foundation. Nothing typical, though, because you can't have guests over. There's no way you can feel at home [here]. There's no privacy, none whatsoever. You can get used to it if you have a likely prospect of a home. That's how I see it.

A stigma of homelessness:

[…] what I'm after is the ideology of homelessness. Just look around in the media, ordinary people in the street, they say homelessness is this stinking vagrant who pisses himself on the tram. It's just plain irritating. That's why […] I hate the word [homelessness]. It's terrible, it always brings the same thing to mind. You won't think about someone who lives in the hostel and applies for a flat. You can [only] think about parasites who sponge off society and the public. They don't care at all, they live off public money. […]. That's how people see homelessness. I don't like the word, and obviously I don't accept its meaning. You may call it anything, homeness or homelessness, it doesn't make much sense to label people. These people just don't have a place of their own. Home is not only about walls and floors. […] It's about family. That's how I see it. The word doesn't do any justice to people who live here. At present, this is our home. We don't live under the sky, we don't gaze at the stars. We sleep in beds. Our circumstances are not that bad for us to be labelled as homeless. I don't even know if [you can] describe it with words. It's something you can't really describe at the moment. There's no word I would know that fully describes our experience. It's like when you bump into a man in the street who happens to be a doctor, and you only label him as a doctor. He can fit many different descriptions. One word 'homeless' carries very little meaning when you compare it with all those other descriptions. We have people [here] who have made a mistake at some point in their lives and are trying to make up for it. They make amends to others and themselves, the family and the home they currently have. That's the only one they have at the moment. […]

In my view, we know very little about homeless people, both in Poland and abroad, homelessness is rampant in many countries after all. The staff assume that each and every resident is keen to leave homelessness behind. This is not always the case. This is a transition period. I'm fine where I am, there's no rent to pay, ideal. It's just great. They don't realize that the permanent residents [of the hostel] can be helped only if you keep at it. These people don't really want your help. They sneak past and they're fine with it. They lose a flat, they go to the shelter, then they get another.

I think the only way to do something about it is to put them through a totalitarian system of some kind. You have to force them. Everything's brilliant on the face of it. This is just fine. I'm moving on, there's freedom, and things only get worse. A vicious circle. There are as many ways as there are personalities. […] Some people may feel wronged by what I'm saying. Let's say they are doing their best and everyone is happy, and there are even more [rules] to follow all of a sudden. Some others won't give a damn. There are many problems as there are people. Each of us has different circumstances and different backgrounds. We all have different habits. Some people don't know the value of work. You see, they come and get everything for free, they are fully served. They are entitled to get money; they are entitled to everything. They don't have to make an effort.

That's just beyond me. It's like learned laziness. Life goes by at the hostel. The upside is that there's financial support, the place is not expensive to keep it. There are people who pay the rent. But it's much lower than for a flat they would otherwise have to rent.

This is not what life should be about [that you live in a hostel]. You don't have to pay for the hostel, so why should you pay the rent at all. The fact you have to pay, this isn't very smart if you're in the application process, you're paying 100 or 200 *zloty* here, but you could save for furniture instead.

There are people who don't know they should go and sort things out on their own. This is a problem. You need to make an effort to get this sense of reward. It's not you get in and get something for free. It's that you get in and see about it yourself. There's been support here, but I've been able to see about things on my own. This place is not that bad, after all. I've heard stories from the other hostel, the one on Broniewskiego Street, for example, the one for single mothers. The place admits young women who are pregnant and have nowhere to go. I've heard they're given everything on arrival. You don't have to worry about anything, about food for the baby, etc. About the essentials. You only sweep the corridor and you'll get nappies for free. Then you leave the place and you don't even know where to buy them. You are fully served, which is sick, especially if you're a single mother. How can you learn your child isn't a toy or something? You don't know there are requirements out there. Now that you have a baby, and you're adult enough you'll need to provide for the baby. The baby won't provide for itself. They have everything. Child care, simply everything. You also get money. This is like pocket money, you can spend it on yourself. These mothers have all the make-up they want, and then they leave the place and don't understand they can't spend 100 *zloty* on a jar of cream. This is sick. Utter helplessness. Social rehabilitation doesn't work this way. You have to accept that life is no bed of roses. If you start from the worst-case scenario, there's always room for positive disappointment. But you can't assume you're not going to make it. Simple as that, accept that you may not be successful. I need to have plan B in case plan A misfires. There must be an emergency exit. People haven't been able to learn here, they're just like I don't need a plan, I'm going to handle it one way or another, I've been sneaking past for so long, I'm going to sneak one more time.

You can't rely on much support or anything. But it's a starting point for you. You can do something about you, you don't have to just sit and do nothing. Some people are happy about doing nothing. That's all there is to it. No one's keen to see about their things. I'm not saying they should do things for me or anyone else. They only should test what they can and cannot do to be more independent once they move on. A good counsellor for everyone. That would do. Some people dismiss the idea. They say they can do fine without counselling. They won't admit they can't. They do fine, they have everything they need. Who cares I won't have it when I move on. I'm going to manage somehow, I can always come back here if I don't.

They have this terrible habit to complain [room-mates]. I can't stand it. They've just resolved one issue only to create more. They think they're no longer homeless because they have somewhere to sleep. The hostel aside, little has actually changed. It often terrifies me. I hate to think I'd be stuck in a rut like that, fine, there's a place to stay so I can kick it back. Problems may pile up any time. I'd like to avoid this. […] Homelessness was a big problem, though. Once it was gone, you had to find a substitute somehow. […] Now that it's gone, there are no underlying causes, and I can see everything more clearly.

It would be one of the most terrible failures in my life [if I had to return to the hostel]. I do realize failure happens. It's easy to run out of luck. That's normal. You can't fail all the time, though. And you can avoid blunders. I do realize people make mistakes. Things misfire sometimes. [However,] there's no way you can fail on and on. You can get a grip on yourself, pull yourself together, make up for it, make things better. I'm not saying everything's going to be perfect, but you can have a try at least. You can make an effort. It's not like you get a flat and you can take it easy now. It later turns out you've lost your job because you did take it easy. […] You're on your own. Then pregnancy, twins, triplets, quadruplets, you name it. You lose the flat and come back again. An awful pattern. I've been here before. I saw people come and go. They left only to return. I can't imagine going on like this. This is like you're addicted to this place. If you live on your own you don't have the problems we do, but we also have it easier because we don't have to pay the rent. I don't think this is too cool, either. Welfare is good, I'm fine with this, but young women all have hands and are able to work. They can make a living. They are able to. But they don't feel like it. I don't understand these women. How can they apply for a flat after this? They make no sense to me. They are registered, waiting for a decision, then they move in and end up in debt. Hopefully, I'm not going to do the same thing. To reproduce the pattern, which is the greatest failure of all.

[…] One woman came back three times. She returned twice, on the third occasion she was told no one was going to take her on.

[Some people] are not able to learn. Their problems only multiply. Literally, one woman left with a child and returned with two. You already know she can't keep the flat. How is it that she only gets into trouble? And a child? Of all things! She knows she can't provide. She only makes matters worse. Those who come here, most of them say it's not their fault. It just happened, and they're not to blame. It's terrible to be so blind. When you learn you begin to see the problem. They only produce the problems. Fate is one thing, but what you do or fail to do is another. It's easier to say it's not my fault, the deck has been stacked against me, they only want to see me doomed, period. I can't do anything, it can't be helped. It's better to do nothing at all. There's only disappointment out there, it's not worth it. Why should I try in the first place? […]

No progress at all. Total decline. What a shame. […] When you see them return again, you see this red flag come up. You are also prone to failure. So many people fail and return, and you're no different. It just sticks at the back of your mind.

I remember four such people. They are not from the night shelter. My mum remembers them better. I don't know these ladies, I try to keep away from them. I sometimes don't recognize the faces. My mum socializes with everyone; she meets them in the smoking room. My mum used to say: 'you see, I saw her, but it was a year ago.' I remember people who were not admitted to the hostel upstairs, only to the night shelter. […] you may be refused. That's normal with hopeless cases. You were offered a good start, you come, you go, everything's all right, and then you come back again. That must be a professional failure for managers and social workers. [They] also deserve some understanding.

Self-reflection:

My mum brought me up on her own. It was like we were always together, with no curfews, though. She would never choose my hangouts or tell me what to do and what not to. I once told my mum I'd let her pry if she felt I'd let her down. I'd let her manage me. So long as I didn't, so long as everything was all right, I wanted it my way. I wanted to learn from my own mistakes; I didn't want my mum to tell me what's good or bad. I wanted to tell right from wrong myself. Only then can you remember. No one is going to choose your life for you. My mum never put me under a bell jar, gave me orders or isolated from others. I've always been free to choose. I've never let my mum down. I think that's for the better. Her trust has worked.

[…] wherever I lived, I always stayed there for a short time. [My friends] are my schoolmates. Mainly schoolmates. Some extracurricular classes, this kind of thing. Theatre outings, cinema, whatever. This is where I met people who shaped my future life. […] I wasn't keen on bonding because I knew I was going to leave the place. This made no sense to me. I was happy with whoever came by. I was fine, but I didn't seek new people, I didn't give it a try. I didn't care about this somehow. I went to school, and I never changed it. Day in day out, I took a bus across the city. I never wanted to change anything. I wanted to have something permanent. This suited me. This is where I met new people. Most of them were older, only few my age. Some of them were teachers, and we got along. They always knew about my place. We got along.

Your past is always […] with you. That's why I might be too responsible at times. This irritates me a lot. I keep thinking, goodness gracious me, I sometimes act as if I were forty or fifty. This is extremely irritating. I've always got along better with my seniors. I'm not saying I keep away from my peers. We got on all right, really, no problems at all.

[…] I've spent a lot of time here, [that's like] a moment when you grow up. Some people have left the place, and we still keep in touch, we're good friends. There will be more people who I'm going to stay in touch with; they're all right. They've helped me in a sense, and I've helped them. Cooperation is vital. For me, bonding is all about cooperation. This not to say that I'm only at the receiving end. I'm not speaking about objects, but feelings. This is more of a symbiosis. Being supportive of each other. […]

[When I leave this place], it's with a hope for the better. I've tackled a massive problem because massive problem it is. It's only going to be better, and I'm not going to spoil it. According to plan: a good and happy life.

5. CONCLUSION: NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND NEED FOR A CHANGE

The areas where I conducted my field research have been inhabited by people in crisis. When I asked them how things were going, they usually talked about their (bad) physical and mental state rather than events or facts. These conversations, or sometimes just an exchange of a few words, show that homelessness is marked by loss: it weakens or deprives people of the sense of stability, self-confidence and trust in others; it makes them learn how to live their lives day by day and adopt specific protective strategies. People who experience homelessness rarely expect any improvement in their lives. Homelessness means experiencing a life 'without a follow-up', a life which is governed by the need for immediate survival. This does not only apply to the people who live outside aid facilities, but also to those who reside in shelters.

My conversations and observations are in line with those of Bogna Bartosz and Ewa Błażej (Bartosz & Błażej, 1995). They pointed out the emotional effects of homelessness: loneliness, a sense of inferiority with respect to others, shame, helplessness and negative assessment of the world, anxiety and fear (Bartosz & Błażej 1995: 55–61). People affected by homelessness lose their professional skills and cease to communicate with those who could help them. Their environment consists of persons in a similar situation, who do not know how to escape homelessness, and have learned how to survive in this state.

This can be described as one of the most marginalized realities. In some ways, the lives of people who experience existential crises may also be considered a taboo. Some marginal groups are at the extreme point of the undervaluation scale. This is indicated by features such as their borderline experiences, traumas, deprivation and anomy which are often associated with being on the *underclass* side[1].

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[1] People from minorities and the social margins are, among others, the subject of studies conducted by Marcin P. Kafar (2014), Andrzej Perzanowski (2009), Tomasz Rakowski (2009), Aleksandra Rzepkowska (2012, 2013), Adrianna Surmiak (2010a, 2010b), Hubert Wierciński (2010, 2012, 2013), Małgorzata Wosińska (2009, 2013), and Kamil Pietrowiak (https://fonosferra.wordpress.com; http://po-omacku.klangoblog.net, 2013, 2014, Pietrowiak, Tworkowska, Zdobylak 2013). It is

It should be noted, however, that people from minorities and social margins lie within the scope of interest of the representatives of my discipline. In my opinion, this is mainly related to the view on how the mechanism of imposing strangeness and otherness is created and how it operates (see the classic ethnographic study by Bystroń: idem 1980 and Goffman 2005).

When studying the groups and individuals of the latter category, the researcher may easily start preaching about their situation and his or her (more often than not[2]) 'privileged' position. It takes much effort to maintain impartiality in such research projects, sometimes to no avail. The researchers, in their opinion, may either preserve their neutrality, teeter (more or less deliberately) on the brink of losing it or they abandon it completely.[3] This happens when, beside scientific questions, they ask more 'naive' ones, e.g. questions regarding the social order, justice, inequality and solidarity, the extent to which these values are inherent in science and its practice, and whether science can and should refer to them.

As Irene Glasser and Rea Bridgman notice, getting acquainted with homelessness makes it clear that not everyone can enjoy basic living conditions. This conclusion raises questions about the social and political institutions which lead to the

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worth noting that the above works have been published recently. I do not mention all the names that could certainly be put here. Neither do I list all the works by the authors mentioned. My selection is limited to the papers I consider to be characteristic of this trend and which I had managed to familiarize myself with until the moment of writing this book. I agree in a way with the assumptions underlying many of these texts, but I also distance myself from some of them. Nevertheless, I believe that they have contributed to the development of the research areas which are of interest to me.

[2] The researcher's supposedly privileged position may be deliberated predominantly with regard to the context set by the gender of the researcher and of the individuals who interact with him or her in specific situations.

[3] These three attitudes were analysed by Baer (2014: 13–14). She recognizes the first, neutral attitude in Tomasz Rakowski's work (2009), which is marked by 'professional compassion' rather than counteraction. At that time this researcher was not involved in modernizing projects and he even criticized them. Over time, his attitude evolved as he began to design and carry out activities which I would call modernization and participation-oriented ones, and became a moderator of the activities that promote the local culture of the 'excluded' communities (cf. e.g. Rakowski 2013). Baer mentions Natalia Bloch as an example of the second attitude, i.e. balancing engagement against science. In her studies on the situation of Tibetan refugees in India, Bloch pointed to the difficulty of maintaining a balance between activism and scientific research. According to Bloch, it was impossible to reconcile these two roles, which, in her opinion, led to "performative contradictions" (in Baer 2014: 13). The third attitude, anthropology in action, would be represented by Hanna Červinkova who, among other things, is involved in a disability activation project. She speaks of anthropology as "practising values to facilitate the emancipation of research subjects" (in Baer 2014: 14). I identify myself with this approach and with Agnieszka Kościańska's view on anthropology. The latter opts for empowering various groups of 'marginalized persons' thanks to the critical power of anthropology based on a critical analysis of the expert discourse whereby she revealed the *mainstream* mode of re-victimizing rape victims. Kościańska showed how secondary victimization takes place when seemingly neutral scientific methods are used (in Baer 2014: 14).

situations where some people have no home to fulfil their basic needs with regard to shelter, food and hygiene. According to Glasser and Bridgman, most research on homelessness stems from the willingness to understand how and why this type of existence is possible, and what systemic causes underlie it (Glasser, Bridgman 1999: 2). The answers to the latter question are related to the differences in both scientific and non-scientific views.

There are internal and external reasons for marginalization and rejection. The external causes include economic, social, political conditions and any combination of these. The internal reasons incude deficits that characterize specific individuals. Such deficits prevent or impede their benefiting from goods, rights or privileges, or fulfiling their obligations. These two levels of causes may interrelate. They mix in different proportions.

The approach that is mainly based on internal reasons very often involves the aforementioned moralistic bias, which means perceiving representatives of the *underclass* as helpless human beings who depend on aid institutions and pass on their way of life to succeeding generations (see Nalaskowski 2007). The very structure of the academic discourse on the causes of homelessness is most often based on the binary 'either/or' principle. It encourages a biased assessment of reality from specific points of view. As Kazimierz Frieske (2002) notes, the concepts of the *underclass*, *marginalization* and *exclusion* are ideological rather than purely descriptive. The term *underclass* is more popular in the USA, while in Europe it is preferred to talk about the excluded and marginalized ones. The European discourse (especially in the official language of politics and economics) avoids the term 'poverty' and its synonyms, including the 'culture of poverty'. According to Frieske and other researchers, when referring to poverty, some governments prefer seemingly neutral words such as 'exclusion' and 'marginalization'. The term 'poverty' and related words were treated by decision makers as awkward, as they contradicted the model of the welfare state based on the ideals of social solidarity (*cf.* Nalaskowski 2007). 'Exclusion' and 'marginalization' were supposed to have a less pejorative meaning[4] (*cf.* also Grotowska-Leder 2002).

The more personalized the research contact becomes, the more difficult it may be to maintain neutrality in research on the *underclass* of society and to keep a balance between science and activism. However, in the history of research on the poor, moving away from the evaluative […] approach to poverty and the poor, i.e. from the initial reliance on second-hand knowledge rather than on what the poor

[4] As regards language, one may wonder about the effect of referring to the 'excluded' or 'poor' people as 'hunters', 'gatherers' or 'practitioners of powerlessness' who fall into the category of the 'degraded man', as proposed by Rakowski (2009). These terms may evoke associations with studies on 'primitive peoples' and the scientific mythology of the 'primitive man', which was at the root of metaphysics, ontology and ethnological epistemology, decrypted by Adam Kuper (2009), for example.

themselves had to say, was believed to ensure a descriptive, empirical and scientific perspective in research on poverty (Tarkowska 2004: 2).

An additional context for studies on the members of the *underclass* of society was the method based on oral history, which Tarkowska regarded as the next step in approaching the poor. The first breakthrough was the study of personal documents (Tarkowska 2004: 8). However, it was the *oral history* research that allowed for "studying […] the people and […] social categories that had not yet had the opportunity to express themselves due to impairment and discrimination" (Tarkowska 2004: 8). To quote another researcher, Maria Bogucka, "the poor are the most silent group […]" (Bogucka 1992, in Tarkowska 2004: 8). These assumptions are in accordance with the thesis proposed by Oscar Lewis who collected a multitude of autobiographies of the poor, because, as he wrote, he "tried to give the floor to the protagonists who could not be heard otherwise" (Lewis 1970: 30).

However, a conversation (especially in the context of institutions where dialogue plays a key role in 'managing' a problem) can sometimes give a false sense of closeness and understanding. Declerck warned that a conversation could lead one astray, since everyone is "entangled in the net of discourse" (Declerck 2004: 358). All the more so as, according to Declerck, the narrative about misery

> must […] fit within the limits of the horrors the tutor could handle, because it is supposed to create the image of his or her identification with the patient. […] This identification fosters mental engagement […]. It is the condition for the emergence of mercy (Declerck 2004: 358).

As a result, an illusion of shared identity is created, which promotes solidarity. Having spent some time in the field where I developed my contacts with the studied subjects, I started to take into account the emotional scripts which linked me with them, and the ways of coping with failure, misery, death illnesses and other types of crises. This deepened my attitude, which from some point was moving further and further outside the 'professional compassion' (Rakowski 2009: 22) that anthropologists are supposed to show. The professionalization of empathy in cultural anthropology is reflected in what Rakowski called a 'specific compassionate thinking' (Rakowski 2009: 22). Declerck described a situation where the storyteller talks about something too terrible for the listener to bear. Then the monstrosity of such an experience is revealed, which prevents the listener of the story from identifying with it[5] (Declerck 2004: 359). I felt this discrepancy between myself and the subjects, precisely because of the scope, intensity and duration of the experiences that they described.

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[5] Just as with addicts who refuse treatment and are constantly returning to their addictions, despite many previous attempts to quit. Their attitude leads to discouragement and the dissipation of the motivation to help them (Declerck 2004: 359).

When the experiences that I had learnt about were beyond my cognitive scale, they appeared strange to me in view of the accepted conceptualization of the world.

Besides, the crisis stories of my male and female interlocutors showed that when someone crossed the threshold of his or her own endurance, he or she could become vulnerable to further difficult experiences. In some cases, the previous tactics of coping with the crisis proved insufficient in the face of even more intense and extreme experiences.

Declerck stresses that withdrawing into silence is as bad as empty talk or excessive wordiness. During my research, I experienced the subjects' reluctance to meet and talk to me, mainly due to the fact that they are usually supposed to report to officials on the state of their own existence (from material to legal to emotional aspects). One of their protective tactics, which additionally increased their isolation, was then to stop speaking or refraining from it.

My contacts were successful when "the speaker was in control of the speech", and this rule applied both to myself and my respondents. Only then "could the speech reach its dimension, […] interrupted by moments of silence, or refraining from speaking" (Declerck 2004: 360). Through such contact, conversation and silence, and by observing everyday life and participating in various activities, I have learned what it means to live with the experience of homelessness and whether it is possible to get rid of it. Many of the people I have met will remain excluded, although they may one day do away with the label of 'the homeless'.

I would not have arrived at many of my conclusions if not for an attitude I would call solidarity. According to Declerck, this is a side effect of identification and professionalization of empathy in anthropology. My solidarity with those people grew out of disagreement with the *status quo*. I think that an experience such as homelessness must not be considered only in scientific terms. Obviously, it would be a truism to note that different kinds of deprivation have existed "from time immemorial". Thus, the opposition against the state of affairs remains largely verbal, and any attempts at counteracting it very often turn into sham practices. When researchers do this, they can be described as being naive or as ones who have turned into activists. However, as Andrzej Leder puts it, poverty is part of the

> process […] related to […] an extreme state which dehumanizes people; it pulls man out of the community of meaning […]. Poverty means experiencing extreme states: hunger, cold, oftentimes physical suffering and, above all, fear. It allows one to act and think only at present and under the pressure of necessity, […] pushing man out of the community of meaning; [...] it also makes the relationship with the Other impossible. It does not, however, make a human being live according to nature; rather, it pushes man into that grey sphere […] outside humanity and outside nature (Leder 2014: 162).[6]

[6] I think that as the idea of equating human beings with non-human ones comes to the fore, the opposition against dehumanizing a part of our species becomes all the more important.

A system based on inequality can lead to particularly perverse satisfaction, because that is what maintaining the *status quo* is all about: "a sober insight into the history of mankind reveals that contempt for those who are members of the underclass […] was the primary source of joy for many" (Leder 2014: 177).[7]

As I tried to demonstrate it in the book, homelessness has always existed, although other words were used in the past to describe it and its causes were sought not only in an economic situation. It seems there is in no point in blaming any particular social, political and economic system for causing it, since homelessness can be seen as permanent and universal. In each and every system, there were individuals that 'did not fit' and were marginalized by others. Given the above, do the strategies of (re)integration and readaptation have their raison d'être as corrective practices for the excluded people? They have accompanied homelessness in various forms "from time immemorial".

The individuals whom most people regard as 'degraded' are not, in my opinion, the reverse side of the *mainstream* of society or an alternative world. On the contrary, they belong in society, although they can also be described as its 'product' and 'waste', as Zygmunt Bauman (2004) would put it. Their existence can be described as an extreme form of life called 'normal' and 'healthy'. This may be the reason why (re)integration and readaptation fail to yield positive outcomes: they are based on erroneous assumptions as to the 'real nature' of the needy who are viewed as strangers and outsiders.

"The subject who experiences poverty is not […] represented" (Leder 2014: 177). People do not want to look at him, so he is moved out of sight and put beyond the scope of interest. Although aid programs are aimed at social inclusion of the excluded people, they actually only mask the problem due to erroneous assumptions. The system will continue to generate exclusion, so the aid will not be adequate. The solution would be to work on a change, which should also involve the mainstream of society.

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[7] 'Getting infected' has influenced my perception of what underlies my own interests and actions. According to Patrick Declerck, "contact with the fallen world acts like poison. Our everyday reality ebbed like the tide. […] It seemed to me distant, petty and funny" (Declerck 2004: 128). Such a state occurs especially at the beginning, only to inevitably transform into a habit. It is not so much that your sensitivity decreases; rather you develop the ability to see through the things which shock others (and which, by the way, are not the most important): "The housewife […] just pointed at me with her heavily-ringed finger and shouted: – Patrick Declerck spends his life living with tramps in the subway. I would certainly have liked my years of research and consultation to have been summarized in a different way" (Declerck 2004: 131). The need to explain his research idea to others led Declerck to assume that "they suspected me of some bizarre inclinations, not to say perversion" (Declerck 2004: 132). I have also experienced similar situations, although the people around me most often reacted with silence to such 'revelations' regarding the subject of my research. Such a silent reaction is part of the 'paradigm of silence' that is characteristic of research into excluded communities (they say nothing about themselves and nothing is said about them).

Declerck wrote that he "met man in his absolute, ultimate dimension" (2004: 129). He certainly used this phrase because a large proportion of those affected by homelessness "live a life that could not be worse" (Declerck 2004: 15). Therefore, as he emphasized, the margins of society are treated as essentially different from the rest, which reduces the "ambivalence of what the excluded ones experience" (Declerck 2004: 352). This is why assigning the excluded the status of victims is as unfair as blaming them for their situation: "victims' identity – purifying from all sin – entails passivity, weakness and humiliation" (ibid.). Thus our reflection moves towards the dignity of the victim enduring misery. In this case, it is not so important to consider the responsibility or the feelings of those affected by the crisis. Instead, victims are expected to suffer their fate in silence. After all, that is what proper victims should do. It would be 'disgraceful' if they openly sought confrontation, rebellion, descended into insanity and addiction, showed escapist, aggressive or suicidal tendencies and behaviours. However, such behaviours help "to make use of the worst" (Declerck 2004: 353–354).

I tried to show this 'absolute dimension' in some way. One of the contexts in which I tried to find it was the assumption I made – both in ethical and methodological terms - that 'exclusion' and 'marginalization' are conventional concepts, just like 'poverty', 'poor' or 'homelessness', because "could the social margins or the opposite side be anything else than society?" (Declerck 2004: 350). To quote Dominika again:

> You won't think about someone [homeless] who lives in the hostel and applies for a flat. You can [only] think about parasites who sponge off society and the public. They don't care at all. […] That's how people see homelessness. I don't like the word, and obviously I don't accept its meaning. You may call it anything, homeness or homelessness, it doesn't make much sense to label people. The word [homelessness] doesn't do any justice to people who live here [shelter]. At present, this is our home. […] We sleep in beds. […] One word 'homeless' carries very little meaning when you compare it with all those other descriptions. We have people [in the shelter] who have made a mistake at some point in their lives and are trying to make up for it.

However, the approach which "Dominika" calls for begins to be adopted by the aid system *mainstream*. You may come across studies offering proposals of solutions that try to transform the existing methods of aiding the people in need.[8]

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[8] The official aid policy in Poland incorporates the system of **benefits and allowances:** The welfare system in Poland is based on a variety of benefits, which may be provided as financial or material aid. Financial aid is provided by the state via various welfare centers or the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS). Material aid is usually secured by NGOs (mainly as food provisions, but also clothing from various donors, etc.). The welfare system in Poland provides for several types of allowances, including children's allowance, attendance allowance and special caregiver allowance,

Such proposals concern changing the ideas that underlie helping, the organisation of aid institutions and the attitudes of the people who work in this sector, which indirectly also influences the attitudes toward their own situation of those who apply for aid. The changes are applicable to procedures and the authors of these proposals focus, for example, on finding a different way to manage the institutions. This should in turn foster such behavior of the residents which will facilitate the process of getting out of homelessness. The key word in this context is *inclusion*, i.e. involvement of the needy in managing their lives within and outside the institutions. The solutions of this kind are proposed, for example, in the manual of overcoming homelessness by Stenka, Olech and Browarczyk (2014, Polish title *Podręcznik. Model gminny standard wychodzenia z bezdomności*). The manual also makes the important recommendation that local partnerships be established. These are social coalitions, made up of organizations which are active in preventing homelessness and exclusion and which provide support in such situations. The partnerships are aimed at building local support systems based on the idea of cooperation and social solidarity. They bring together local associations and foundations, public institutions at various levels and individuals or

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which are available in three different categories: purpose-specific, permanent and temporary. The Social Insurance Institution provides the following types of benefits: sickness benefit, rehabilitation benefit, caregiver benefit, compensatory benefit, maternity benefit and funeral benefit. In the official Polish aid policy there is also the **council and subsidized housing:** Both types of housing are managed by local councils, with the councils acting as their owners. The councils are required to build and provide both types of housing in suitable numbers for their residents. Based on local resolutions, each council defines its own eligibility criteria for council housing. The maximum household income usually serves as the main eligibility criterion. Additionally, the resolutions stipulate who is to be given priority in awarding a flat, how one flat is to be exchanged for another and how council housing applications are to be accepted and processed. Essentially, successful candidates must have an income that guarantees they will pay the rent for a council flat, the tenant leasing the flat from the council. Council flats are generally awarded to candidates whose income is insufficient to rent or buy a property on the free market. Additionally, candidates with a legal title to other residential properties are not eligible for council housing. Other criteria defined by local resolutions include the minimum time a candidate must have resided in a given district, or have had their registered address or workplace therein before they are awarded a council flat. Councils grant subsidized housing to candidates without a legal title to any other type of housing: those with a flat in a housing cooperative, their own property or a council flat are deemed to be ineligible. Thus, subsidized flats are awarded to the poorest candidates (who nonetheless must be able to pay the minimum rent stipulated by the council) or candidates with an eviction order who meet the income criteria stipulated by the council (lower than for council flats). Subsidized housing differs from council housing in that the rent is much lower: it may not exceed a particular percentage figure calculated based on the lower rent for a council flat provided by a particular council. The lower rent also implies poorer housing conditions, the status of subsidized housing being defined by the Welfare Support Act in Poland (2004). As such, subsidized housing is usually available in old residential quarters, the flats being small in size and devoid of modern conveniences. Individuals rather than families are eligible for subsidized housing. In contrast to council flats, subsidized flats may neither be purchased nor inherited by their residents.

informal groups. Partnerships should also involve the participation of homeless people themselves, e.g. by encouraging them to set up their own associations and to take part in various decision-making processes, such as developing individual homelessness exit schemes. The issue of freedom is also raised with regard to shaping the accommodation space in shelters and other 24-hour dwelling facilities where aid is provided to larger groups. The way such facilities are organized, as proposed by the authors of the said document, should open up opportunities for male and female residents so that they could participate in their management (e.g. by creating different types of communities). This participation should include raising the funds to maintain the institution and building reintegration scenarios.

Such solutions are also in line with the tenets of those cultural anthropology sub-disciplines which place emphasis on cooperation between various entities. Inclusive practices, which in turn create a wider decision-making forum, encourage different opinions and various groups of stakeholders. This gives local partnerships an opportunity to work out their own method of managing these opinions (their own opinions), to create an adequate way of communication and to develop specific solutions.

In Łódź, the idea of joining together and cooperating was met with a positive response from the people who deal with homelessness in various ways (from working in this sector to doing research in this field). In 2014, the Łódź partnership began to form and eventually took the shape of an umbrella group. Representatives of the entities[9] which were willing to join signed a declaration of accession to the partnership. The organization operates under the name *Łódzkie Partnerstwo Pomocy w sytuacji Wykluczenia i Bezdomności* [the Łódź Partnership for Aiding in the Situations of Exclusion and Homelessness]. The partnership activity is based on jointly developed statutes. The group operates via its management board and deliberative practices regarding joint activities.

I am actively involved in the Partnership, where I hold the position of its Chairperson. As a result of the series of changes that Łódź is undergoing (a comprehensive programme of revitalization of the city centre, which also implies social revitalization), the Partnership has cooperated successfully with the local authorities. It also runs its own actions, such as *Czysta Akcja* [Clean Action], *Skrzynka Domni-Bezdomni* [Homeful-Homeless Box]. We are working on the Supported Housing Programme and lobbying for implementation of the system to the urban policy. We have become an expert team within the Social Innovation Center of the University of Łódź (since November 2017).

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[9] For more information (in Polish) about the Partnership and its members, see the following blog and fan page, which are regularly updated, https://lodzkiepartnerstwopomocy.blogspot.com/ and https://www.facebook.com/LodzkiePartnerstwoPomocy/.

Perhaps in the future, thanks to integration and strong cooperation with the city authorities, we will be able to achieve the desired effect, i.e. to reshape the attitude to solving difficult problems, or to change the systemic approach to homelessness in the city. This could transform the 'hidden curriculum' underlying the aid measures so far. The new purpose and norm, therefore, would be to include those who ask for help into society, rather than trying to fit them in and consequently, incapacitate them.

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The book presents the image of home as experienced and expressed by the men and women who are affected by the crisis of homelessness and live in specialized institutions. The author presents her own experience in carrying out research in total institutions and, above all, she focuses on describing and interpreting the stories of people from homeless centers who speak about the ups and downs of their lives. The researcher draws her attention on the stereotypically idealised image of home, which shows its real face when it is seen as a social construct, taking into account the gender perspective as well as other cultural and individual contexts.

The book is addressed to people who have a social sensibility; to people working with and for the men and women who are affected by the homelessness crisis; who work and/or managed the aid centers and who are also the volunteers in different type of institutions and associations addressed for the people in need; to the students of social and humanistic science.

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