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In the Streets. The (Non-)Everyday Life in the City of Łódź during the Great War

Abstract: In this essay, I demonstrate how extraordinary was, in fact, the ordinary life in Łódź from the autumn of 1914 to the autumn of 1918, as illustrated by the texts in *Nowy Kurjer Łódzki* and *Nowa Gazeta Łódzka*, the two Polish-language daily newspapers issued in the city. I focus on the actions which, once considered everyday, i.e. ordinary and even routine, entered into the field of extraordinariness and created new norms and new routines, or even took control, as a result. I am interested in only those practices and events which unfold in the city space, outside the home and family, i.e. in the areas associated with general accessibility to all the residents.

Keywords: everydayness, non-everydayness, Łódź, the Great War.

The Concepts of Everydayness and Non-Everydayness

The category of everydayness is a methodological concept which, as noted by Wojciech Kędzierzawski, may be helpful in

[revealing] a particular mental attitude, a natural approach which we are supposed to assume for the greater part of our lives, and the mechanisms and effects caused by the way of thinking that is characteristic to it (Kędzierzawski 2009).

If we assume ‘everydayness’ to signify the established order of daily life, the practices performed routinely and without reflection, then ‘non-everydayness’ will signify its cultural opposite—all that is not usual, that exceeds this established order and which requires cognitive activity and reflection. According to Bernhard Waldenfels, the concept of everydayness

holds for the biographical level (birth, stages on life’s way, love, death) as well as for the historical level (the founding of cities, war, revolution). This first contrast exhibits a variety of individual aspects. We must distinguish between the various modes in which the general contrast makes itself felt, be it in the temporal order (holiday, everyday), in spatial discrimination, in the emphasis on events, actions, persons, works or foods.

Non-everydayness, still following Waldenfels’s thought, may appear in “various forms, namely as an intensification of normal experience or as a deviation from it; in the former, a leveling of our experience is overcome by a surplus, whereas in the latter case an ossification of our experience is shattered by a new alternative” (Waldenfels

1982). It may therefore be assumed that both everydayness and non-everydayness are defining factors with respect to the content of the practices of daily life. Sociologists, however, express the reservation, which I find quite correct, that these are

two different ways of experiencing and effectuating daily life [underline mine—G.E.K.] resulting from the perception of its practices as differing from one another. They have no definite content in themselves, they do not consist of concrete practices or forms of behaviour; they are, however, a norm which defines the ways in which those practices and forms of behaviour are perceived and carried out (Rogowski, Skrobacki, Mroczkowska 2010).

Everydayness and non-everydayness are interconnected, but, as Waldenfels argues, “[t]he relation between everyday and non-everyday is by no means constant, but rather offers a range of historical and cultural variations. The two contrasting moments can remain more or less isolated from one another, or the boundaries can be more or less fluid” (Waldenfels 1982). A crisis may considerably disturb this relation; and war, after all, is a crisis indeed. Every war is a time and a situation of crisis, in which reality is no longer predictable and becomes difficult to accept. It is the time when not only the rules of behaviour which during the “normal,” peaceful time used to be binding are overthrown, but also the “ordinary” concerns are run differently, since they are situated outside their “normal” course (Karpińska 2002).

In this essay, I present the everyday life of the inhabitants of Łódź during the First World War and I describe the repertoire of people’s actions during its course. I am interested in only those practices and events which unfold in the city space, i.e. outside the home, family or informal groups based on kinship, friendship and neighbourly relations, and in places delineated on the basis of their “visibility,” i.e. in the areas associated with general accessibility and with all that can be generally observed, as it happens before an “audience” (Thompson 1995). I am, however, aware that many of those practices are strongly linked with life at home and with private life.

I reconstruct the city’s everyday reality by looking at texts published in *Nowy Kurjer Łódzki* and *Nowa Gazeta Łódzka*, the two Polish-language daily newspapers issued in Łódź during the First World War. In both, news from the life of the city were reported in the form of short, terse notes, not accompanied by photographs illustrating the given piece of information; the only graphic element present on the page were commercial advertisements. But the notes as much as the advertisements document the city’s life during the First World War and reveal the everyday problems of its inhabitants.

Disturbance in the Relation between Everydayness and Non-Everydayness

On the eve of the First World War, Łódź was the second-largest city in the Kingdom of Poland and an important industrial centre of the Russian Empire, with over half a million inhabitants. The local industrialists, encouraged by the increasing demand and in the face of the approaching change of the city’s administrative status (Łódź was to become the capital of a governorate), started to invest heavily in constructing new factory units or whole factories. Residential construction had been on the rise

for a long time. The city's dynamic development was accompanied by an increasing noise, traffic and overcrowding.

From the late July 1914 onward, the course of great political events triggered changes in the situation in the city. The entire army and fleet of the Russian Empire was put in the state of combat readiness. Broadsides announcing the mobilisation of privates from the reserve and informing that horses would be procured for military use were being put up in the streets. Tents for the draft commission were raised in the paths and lawns of the Żródlińska park. A colourful, noisy crowd rolled there for many days, as conscripts queued in front of the tents, many of them arriving with their families and neighbours. The announcement of mobilisation was accompanied by the prohibition on selling alcohol, and shops and public houses were ordered to have those parts of signboards which advertised the selling of drink painted over. On 2nd August, broadsides were put up on the walls to announce the declaration of war by Germany and the introduction, by the tsar's decree, of martial law in all governorates of the Vistula Country, while the proclamation of martial law in Łódź and its environs signed by the city governor was published in extra editions of local newspapers. It was then that people began to foresee that their existence would now begin to transform from "ordinary" into "non-ordinary," i.e. one inscribed on wartime and thus requiring special caution and control. Afterwards, all the subsequent commands issued by first the Russian, then the German authorities disturbed and infringed the time-honoured ordinary rhythm of the city's daily life; they regulated its existence and forced the residents to conduct their lives in a different manner than the one to which they had been habituated. Daily newspapers continued to be main source of news concerning the events in the city, even though by then the military censorship had already been introduced, which meant that the content of the reports had to be approved by the military censor.¹ The residents still carried on with the usual actions and proceedings, such as work, leisure activities, eating or shopping. They also still put small ads about some sale or purchase in the newspapers; but press reports about city life show that its ordinariness had been disturbed. Even the fact that local newspapers issued one-page extra editions every day was extraordinary.²

The newspapers informed, for instance, that the time of waiting at a tram stop had grown longer; that many parks had been closed and people were unable to take their strolls therein; that shops required their customers to pay in small change³; that the queues of customers wishing to withdraw money from the Postal Savings Bank were very long; that the demand for food was growing rapidly and so were the prices at the local food markets; that factories reduced the working hours and some closed altogether; that new tearooms and cheap kitchens for the poor were opening. The Russian authorities announced the hours in which citizens were allowed to be in the streets, and the marches of uniformed conscripts became a popular attraction, with crowds

¹ The prohibition on publishing any information as to the events in the combat zone was particularly strong.

² On 1st and 2nd August, *Nowa Gazeta Łódzka* alone published five extra editions running to a thousand copies each, which in itself was an extraordinary occurrence (Kowalczyński 2010).

³ People were certain that paper money would soon become worthless.

of spectators gathering on the pavements. Newspapers increasingly often reported problems with sanitation and the depletion of the stockpiles of coal, interspersed with the news that timber in the city forests was being overharvested for firewood and with appeals to save electricity and gas. From 8th September onwards, the newspapers repeatedly reported that the commencement of the school year was postponed again and that some of the city schools had closed: the teachers had been mobilized and the school buildings were being converted to hospitals.

Announcements concerning various courses, private tuition, English language lessons, private reading-room opening hours etc. were still being published in spite of the introduction of martial law; it is also evident that many private schools were lowering their tuition fees. Nickelodeons came back into operation and were evidently recording an increased turnout, theatres had nothing to complain about either, and announcements of concerts and fêtes at Staszic and Helenów parks did not vanish at all.⁴ In October some citizens expressed their disgust with the mass attendance at such entertainments “in the times not appropriate for leisure.”

The closer the front line was approaching to the city, the more German troops were seen in the streets. The sight of strange uniforms caused unease among the residents of Łódź, but also aroused their interest. As early as August *Nowy Kurjer Łódzki* appealed to the public:

[...] if a foreign army enters the city, it is not possible to permit ourselves even a single act of tomfoolery; one stone thrown by the hand of an immature youngster, one silly whistle may cost hundreds and thousands of lives. [...] It is necessary to prevent all opportunity for even the slightest disturbances; especially in the first days it is necessary to avoid going into the streets without cause, and it is imperative that children and youngsters be kept at home [...]. It must be taken under consideration that soldiers entering a foreign city are naturally tense and apt to take alarm at the slightest provocation [...] (*NKŁ* 1914, 11 August).

One of the first times that German soldiers entered Łódź, *Nowy Kurjer Łódzki* published an appeal to “maintain absolute composure and avoid panic” and asked the readers to preserve an “attitude of equanimity towards the entering Austro-German army,” because it is on that army that “the peace and security of our city and our loved ones shall depend.” The newspaper explained that “everywhere, the German and Austrian military are currently behaving entirely correctly and courteously in their intercourse with civilians, demanding only that some instructions issued by the headquarters are strictly followed. These instructions, which in fact are entirely acceptable, we all must follow, remembering that martial law is stern and knows no mercy” (*NKŁ* 1914, 20 August).

Non-Everydayness becomes a Thing of Everyday

If the practices resulting from the introduction of martial law are considered a serious disturbance of the relation between everydayness and non-everydayness, the taking

⁴ From the beginning of August public garden fêtes and revue shows had been cancelled for a while and the theatres and nickelodeons had been closed.

of Łódź by the Germans (twice⁵) and the military actions unfolding in its environs must be considered an encroachment of the non-everydayness on the city's life.

The fact that the German forces entered Łódź and seized power meant the introduction of new regulations governing the city's life: a different curfew time, the introduction of Central-European time and the 24-hour time notation. As a result, the shops changed their opening hours and the tramways their running hours, while theatres and nickelodeons cancelled the late-night shows. Due to the unstable situation on the theatre of war and the fierce fighting to the north-east of the city, all communication with Warsaw ceased. Łódź was also cut off from the reserves of food, coal and paraffin. The residents grew anxious and began stockpiling flour, sugar, coffee, tea and tobacco. The appearance of German horse and foot patrols was greeted with an increased curiosity. In fact, the German army which traversed the countryside in the vicinity of Łódź and the columns of German soldiers passing through the city had even earlier been a source of anxiety and even panic to some, but curiosity to others. The Prussian soldiers were, after all, strangers who entered the city wearing unfamiliar uniforms and gave orders that differed from those issued by the Russian military authorities. *Nowa Gazeta Łódzka* explained why some German soldier were wearing tall leather hats:

The shape of those hats, especially when concealed in covers, has often proved misleading, as it resembles the hats of the Austrians, for whom those soldiers had therefore long been taken. We inform our readers that the German troop did not contain even one Austrian soldier. Tall leather hats are a historical piece of a German soldier's apparel, dating from 1812, the era of the Napoleonic wars. These hats, carefully stowed, are used only during some of the more important political events, among which the current ones need to be counted. They had also been removed from army storage during the last Franco-Prussian war.

The front side of those hats bears a cross or a one-headed Prussian eagle, underneath which runs an inscription in the German language: 'For God, the King and the country' and the initials 'F. R.', which means 'Frederic Rex'—King Frederic' (*NGŁ* 1914, 12 October).

The front passed through Łódź in the autumn, bringing death and forcing people to leave their homes, to flee the city or look for shelter. As a result of the fighting which took place near Łódź in late October, the northern suburbs of the city were surrounded with earthworks and trenches with barbed wire fences (*Kowalczyński 2010*); bridges and railway viaducts in the city had been blown up. From mid-November onwards the fighting grew heavier, the residents began to fear for their lives, the perception of security and stability typical to everydayness was crumbling. Civilians were fleeing the city, heavily wounded Russian soldiers were being evacuated and so were the civil servants and employees of state agencies. Every day the press reported that the black market was booming and that the shortages of paraffin, fuel and food were getting severe. Civilians were ordered not to leave their abodes without due cause, janitors were instructed to lock tenement gates, schools ceased to operate. Russian and German artillery fire turned many houses to ruins; tenements, squares and streets were bombed and showered with shrapnel. The Jewish cemetery, its service buildings and the house of cemetery attendants were destroyed. Funerals

⁵ The first German occupation lasted from 9th to 30th October, the second from 6th December 1914 to November 1918.

at both Jewish cemeteries stopped. Civilians were dying; the number of passers-by killed in the streets was growing rapidly. Horse-drawn ambulances circled the city and transported the injured to hospitals. Carts loaded with soldiers wounded and killed during the fighting near Łódź were regularly seen in the streets. The authorities arranged the removal of corpses from the streets and their burial, as well as the burial of soldiers who died in field hospitals and city hospitals.

Everydayness

Sociologists maintain that “despite their ontological and epistemological discreteness, everydayness and non-everydayness are inseparably linked” (Rogowski, Skrobacki, Mroczkowska 2010). The boundary between them, as we shall now see, is sometimes difficult to draw. We shall also see that, still according to sociologists, their “mutual dynamics and at the same time specificity (and hence relational discreteness) are not content-related, or at least content does not play the main role here, because the fundamental difference lies in the form” (Rogowski, Skrobacki, Mroczkowska 2010).

On 6th December 1914 the Germans entered the city of Łódź once again, this time to stay for the following four years. Their commands and prohibitions brought order to the daily life of the city and its residents and thus defined the structure of the newly-introduced system. The new curfew necessitated the introduction of new opening hours for shops, restaurants and institutions and the times of theatre and nickelodeon shows. For many months, the shops would be open until 9 p.m., while on Sundays and holidays trade would be forbidden between 10 and 12 a.m. Non-compliance with the opening hours introduced by the occupation authorities was penalised. Opening hours were changed in the following years, e.g. in November 1917 shops, warehouses and all institutions were instructed to close before 6.30 p.m. in order to save electricity (*NGŁ* 1917, 16 November). The residents of Łódź had to learn to move around their city using the new (German) street names and new house numbers. They not only adjusted the forms of everyday practices to the new circumstances, but also incorporated new conditions and practices into everydayness, giving them an everyday status (Rogowski, Skrobacki, Mroczkowska 2010). In effect, during the four years of German occupation the residents of Łódź existed in the state of endurance. In Stanisław Ossowski’s perception, “endurance” is a type of existence in which a person totally assimilates the war, which unfolds far away and is entirely beyond that person’s sphere of influence, in his or her awareness and leaves the times of peace in “a mist of distance” (Ossowski 1989). The following are examples of “adaptational” measures which set the standard of what passed for normality in those days and thus expressed the essence of everydayness.

From year to year, the shortages of food, paraffin for lamps, soap, shoes and clothing were getting increasingly acute; prices skyrocketed. The authorities issued decrees setting the official prices, but this did nothing to alleviate the problem; neither did the rationing of the most needed goods. Food ration cards only allegedly guaranteed that given products would be bought for the official, not the black-mar-

ket prices. Designated points selling bread or fuel to the poor also proved ineffective. Queues (commonly referred to as “tails”) formed in front of shops and fuel warehouses for hours before the opening time. But the hopeful customers often queued in vain and returned home without the much-needed supplies. In their need, they set out for midnight expeditions to the forests to collect timber and brushwood, felled trees in the parks or stole fences, fully aware that in case of discovery they would be severely punished. Factories came to a standstill, also because of the lack of fuel, and began laying off the workforce; this increased the already-growing unemployment and poverty, making people turn to begging or start selling out their possessions. The press reported that junk markets sprang in the streets, especially in the northern part of the town and in Piotrkowska, the city’s main street: bedding, the articles of clothing and household objects were sold from portable stalls and pieces of furniture were on offer as well. Street hawking and smuggling of foodstuffs from the countryside to the city were on the rise. The police assiduously hunted smugglers and black marketeers, fining them heavily and confiscating their goods, but the residents of Łódź did not cease to set out for smuggling expeditions to bring back groats, flour or bacon back to the city. Both newspapers frequently published encouraging articles about the raising of rabbits, but the people for a long time remained unconvinced. Unused plots of land were divided into patches for cultivation and the poor eked out their living with growing vegetables, mainly potatoes, cabbages and broad beans. In 1917 *Nowa Gazeta* published a declaration of the occupation authorities, which reminded the citizens about the obligation to cultivate all the privately-owned fallow land or empty plots located within the city boundary and required the owners or lessees of such land to sow it with vegetables or potatoes (*NGŁ* 1917, 5 March). Kitchens and tearooms distributing inexpensive or free meals, soups or cups of tea never lacked customers. The press very frequently published information about kitchens run by workers, members of the intelligentsia, Jews, butchers and others, mostly with the clientele originating from the same groups in mind. These establishments greatly helped those who had no employment or income and, as *Nowy Kurjer* pointed out, they also “offered refuge in a warm room.” Towarzystwo “Kropla Mleka” [The Milk Drop Association] helped destitute children before the war; now, the press was full of advertisements announcing collections on behalf of children during the frequent concerts at Staszic and Helenów parks. The newspapers brought poverty among children to their readers’ attention, pointing out that the young ones often ran around barefoot and inadequately dressed.

Poverty, malnutrition, queues and food shortages were the cause for a significant fall in the level of hygiene and the rapid spreading of diseases. Shortages of soap and washing powder made people bathe and wash clothing increasingly rarely; in the black market, hygiene products were expensive. The German occupation authorities attempted to prevent or contain an epidemic of contagious diseases by issuing declarations which, for instance, obliged house-owners to keep the lodgings clean or announced obligatory vaccinations. The press reported that community committees and sanitary commissions arranged disinfections of houses and courtyards,

especially in the poorer areas, i.e. the northern districts of the city. The journalists highlighted the fact that in some areas sanitary conditions were particularly dismal. In Stare Rokicie, for instance, near its boundary with Retkinia, a puddle of water

or sewage, in fact, crawling with billions of maggots, gives off such a appalling stench that even half a *verst* away it is difficult to breathe without revulsion and the feeling of dizziness. This is particularly perceptible in the evening, when, after the warm days, miasma rising from the rotten water casts a murky haze on the nearby villages and the northern edge of Łódź. This puddle may become a source of many diseases if it is not drained down the above-mentioned stream soon (*NGŁ* 1915, 26 April).

To prevent an epidemic, disinfectants and hygiene products were collected and distributed to the needy. In free communal laundries the poor could “wash their garments themselves, being given hot water and the option of drying and ironing underclothes in special machines” (*NKŁ* 1916, 13 March). In 1915 *Nowy Kurjer Łódzki* wrote about communal bathhouses for workers, which lacked customers in spite of low prices. In 1916 obligatory bathing of children and the customers of cheap kitchens and tearooms was proposed and, in fact, introduced by some institutions, for instance the bakery owners’ association (*NKŁ* 1916, 8 March) or the city schools (*NKŁ* 1916, 11 March). In 1916 *NKŁ* published the German imperial decree that “passengers with contagious and repulsive diseases or vermin, as well as those dressed slovenly and in grimy rags, will not be allowed on electric trains” (*NKŁ* 1916, 7 March).

Poverty obliged people to celebrate holidays, for instance All Saints’ Day, much more modestly than before the war. In 1915 *Nowy Kurjer* wrote that “only a handful of graves was adorned with flowers and lamps, excluding which the cemetery was shrouded in the ordinary pall of autumn” (*NKŁ* 1915, 2 November). Yet everyone was hungry for some entertainment and celebration, i.e. practices belonging to the well-ordered sphere of the “normal” time. Hence, the New Year Eve parties were organised like before the war; people attended concerts and, although slightly less frequently than they used to, went to the theatre. The music scene was particularly vigorous, the press reported “brisk sell-outs” of tickets for various concerts. The Łódź Symphonic Orchestra, oratorio choirs and amateur choirs gave concerts; the popular mass concerts staged at Staszic and Helenów parks had a faithful audience. Charitable work in various forms was carried out in spite of the general impoverishment, attesting to civic solidarity. Andrzej Chwalba is of the opinion that it was precisely the war that caused the development of the civic movement on a previously unknown scale (*Chwalba* 2014). Summer parties with prize lotteries were organised in the parks, the proceeds going to various support funds, the fire brigade, orphanages, destitute children, schools etc.

In 1916 *Nowy Kurjer Łódzki* reported: “Slowly, slowly but visibly, Łódź is growing more ‘European’.” According to the paper, the new public parks, renovated streets, new street lamps which had been put up, benches in the streets and squares, the beautified New Market were marks of this process. Only the state of the pavements gave reason for complaint: in rainy weather the crumbling stone and concrete flags filled with water, forming veritable traps for a passer-by (*NKŁ* 1916, 17 September).

Actions aimed at tidying and embellishing the city space were indeed numerous. Every year, the newspapers reported that spring cleaning was in progress and flowers and shrubs were being planted in the Mikołajewski park at Sienkiewicz street and at the Źródlińska and Kolejowy parks; during heat waves they reported that plants were being watered. The opening of a new park (at Zagajnikowa street, today 3 Maja Park) made the news in 1915. Areas for children's playgrounds were allocated in the parks, and in Staszic park there was a playground for the pupils of city schools. Special plaques reminded the visitors that unsupervised children and persons in a state of inebriation or indecently dressed were not allowed into the park. In summer, the parks were frequented by crowds. *Nowy Kurjer Łódzki* reported that the parks were "filled with the public coming for a breath of fresh air and for respite from weekday worries, far from the city noise" (*NKŁ* 1916, 14 August). From spring 1918, those wishing to adorn their windows or balconies with pretty flowers could attend the very reasonably priced gardening shows organised in the parks and in the gardens owned by Baron Heinzl in Julianów, to learn how to re-pot and multiply potted plants, to prune roses and to fertilise and prune fruit trees.

The Conclusion, or on the Transformation of Non-Everydayness into Everydayness

In conclusion, I wish to call attention to the fact that wartime is usually treated in opposition to peace time, i.e. as a period in which the everyday routine is suspended and the ensuing reality is one of a different type. The wartime reality is considered to be one in which the binding values and norms are different than in the "normal" time: some of them entirely opposite, others just divergent. Hence, war is usually spoken of as a non-everyday time, a time deprived of everydayness. However, reports in daily newspapers published in Łódź during the First World War have shown clearly that wartime does translate into everydayness. As we have seen, in many areas of everydayness the city's daily life was reorganised. Together with it, as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann would point out, reorganised was the sphere of experience which until then had been considered self-evident, because the reality of everyday life is relative and situational in character (*Berger, Luckmann 1966*). Transformations were imposed on the city's life and implemented shortly after the emergence of the problem (i.e. the outbreak of war, the proclamation of martial law). As a result, the citizens were faced with the necessity of adapting themselves to new conditions, of developing a new perception of time and space, and of amalgamating the problematic sphere with the sphere of those aspects which were already self-evident. Actions considered to be everyday ones, and hence ordinary, routine, prosaic and mechanically repeated, entered (because there was no other choice) into the area of non-everydayness. They were placed in a different context, a context that resulted from the rules governing the state of war and occupation; they acquired a special status and created new norms and new routines or even became a controlling element. It was precisely those actions that shaped the non-ordinary everydayness of Łódź: the wartime everydayness.

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