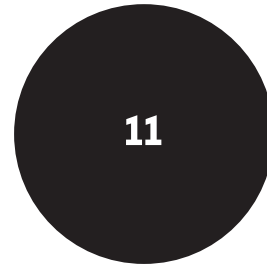




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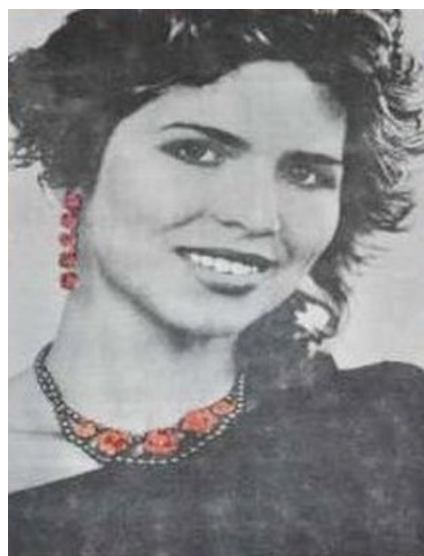
Justyna Jaworska, Agata Zborowska

Diamond Earring

Translated by Patrick Tropiz

Diamond earring
Sweet tear-drop
Means nothing but
Makes me happy.

Anna Jurkaszowicz sang about a diamond earring in 1985. [The video for the song](#) moves with its simple narrative – there are Cinderella’s dreams of wealth, an adoring guy in a tuxedo with a limo and Jablonex jewellery... The singer wears a loose-fitting trench-coat and a bat-style top; other fashionable details are also visible in the video: lace tights and high heels, hair combed back, and a head band. The earring is found by chance and must finally be returned to its owner, but Jurkaszowicz sings merrily: “I’ll make myself another, there is so much glass around, la la la.” Is this just laughing at the dreams of young girls or were the 80’s really that stylistically cheap?



Anna Jurkaszowicz, 1985. Source: [blog](#)
Moje spojrzenie wstecz

Fashion by its nature ages quickly and becomes its own caricature, going “well out”. There is a kind of dialectic here, because after some more time the rejected trends come back in: like the girl of today wearing a costume from the 40’s expresses nostalgia, with a dress from the 50’s – she looks cute, in a mini from the 60’s – sexy. But if she’s wearing polyester bell-bottoms from the 80’s she still looks strange and if you add earrings from Jablonex from the 80’s – it’s kitsch. Perhaps this is the law of generational denial whereby we are most ashamed of the clothes of our own upbringing, when we were still cutting out ourselves from the class photo. In this sense the shame of “being out” would be an arbitrary and “shifting” concept. Another aspect is that the kitsch of the 80’s and 90’s – once again today a treasure

trove of fashion inspiration – is not only a relatively fresh memory of over the top fashion, especially given that this memory does not include everything from that time. On the contrary, it would seem that kitsch was an integral part of the styles of those decades. Perhaps that's why today's "return to the past" of thirty years ago plays with the cheap so ostentatiously – sometimes these (re)creations are hard on the eyes. But there is also an objective problem with the penultimate decade of the 20th century. In the West this was a time of prosperity. Summing a century of fashion, Rebecca Arnold perceives in the 80's a growing "fashion for the over the top" and observes that at the end of that decade

the desire to create a visual simulacrum of status through dress was to have become a defining feature of fashion [...], moving from the romantic decadence of Saint-Lautent towards an increasingly brash vision. Fashion had become increasingly spectacular and blatant in its use of excess as the decade progressed, with the seasonal catwalks shows themselves turning into theatrical extravaganzas that combined music, lighting effects and ever-more famous models.¹

In 1984 Thierry Mugler held the first fashion show which was open to the public (and not only, as hitherto, for the press and clients); he sold 6 000 tickets. The runway was monumental, choirs singing Haydn and Mozart were joined by angels draped in gold dresses, with wings on their heavily accented arms. From the ceiling there fell metallic flakes. Out of all this, sharp arm lines, gold and glitter reached the wider audience of the street. But still the message was clear: wealth rules.

Indeed, it seemed as though wealth was all around. Conservatives in power lowered taxes, the prices of oil and gold were falling which in turn encouraged the wealthy to spend ever more on their attire. The biggest fashion houses like Chanel were experiencing a renaissance and sought a mass market, with sales of handbags, perfumes and accessories on an unprecedented level. And with the stronger market of luxury goods, the market in fake goods took off. Everything was either too big or too explicit: jewellery, hairstyles, oversize coats, shoulder pads, make-up. Consumption was spiralling upwards. Then in 1987 the market crashed; ten days later Christian Lacroix launched his debut collection "Luxe." He showcased a witty puff skirt with a corset top, a feminine design but exaggerated and unpractical; it was compared to Dior's



Dynasty, 1981-1989, in Poland the emission is dated from July 2nd 1990

New Look from the height of the 1947 crisis. Though this fashion was accompanied by a parallel fashion for “poor” lines (sweaters with holes were first shown in Paris by Japanese designers, with loose kirtles made of linen or cotton, shirts as aprons, new romanticism or the punk inspirations of Vivienne Westwood), nevertheless it is rather the bombastic style of Dynasty which dominates our image of this period. Fashion has always been driven by aspiration and imitation, at least in class-based societies where the middle class imitates the style of the higher orders. However, ever since the 80’s when *haute couture* was turned into a mass spectacle, luxury has become a style easily copied and the street took it over – for everyone may *aspire* to wealth.

In Poland, fashion was necessarily in a different place – above all the 80’s were not enjoying a boom market. But this did not stop Poles from aspiring and imitating. Class-based imitation (of course less evident in our circumstances) was substituted by the desire to imitate the West. State production, besides Hoffland, did not have much to offer, but in the second half of the decade boutiques started to pop up all over the place. Even before the systemic transformation of 1989 private enterprise had woken up. Huge roses from Lacroix made their way to tops which had been stitched together in a semi-professional manner; plastic jewellery was produced in garages using domestic injection moulding machines; you could also buy patterned tights or preshrunk jeans distributed via Turkish bazaars as well as leather jackets. Sewing was ubiquitous, especially following the designs and patterns available in the sewing magazine “Burda”.

Besides the shows of the German Burda, Poland was visited by several famous designers from abroad. Pierre Cardin, the French designer, came to Warsaw for the first time in 1992 and was met by Warsaw’s Mayor Stanisław Wyganowski and the Ambassador of France, along with their spouses. His fashion show was not only aimed at buyers and the media – to fill the Congress Hall tickets also went on sale, and school pupils were admitted for free, clearly for educational reasons². Barbara Hoff, the Polish designer, did not share the widespread enthusiasm, openly criticizing the subsequent Polish shows for the collections of Cardin, Vivienne Westwood, Gianfranco Ferré and other lesser-known labels: “I also go sometimes [to fashion shows], I have a look, I’m amazed – by what awful costs the organisers incur, how much effort everyone puts



The Style of Anna Burda, Your Style

into it all and what a load of trash they present us with.”³ You could also hear the disappointment with the element of insincerity and manipulation: “Why lie? Tell an uninformed public that this is a new international collection, when they are really showing odds and ends from two seasons ago etc.... The clothes on the stage are usually worse than those worn in the hall by the audience.”⁴

If we are to believe Agnieszka Osiecka, in our Polish version of the fashion world there was less fun and more ambition. In 1988 in the *Polityka* weekly she wrote:

Fashion exists but no one takes it seriously. No-one, except Polish people... An average Pole dresses brilliantly, and already goes abroad adorned with such a variety of suits and nail polish that he or she can be recognised even in Tierra del Fuego. Poland, on the other hand, sanctimoniously peruses the press for fashion and tailoring... Let’s be honest, who goes to a tailor nowadays? No-one except Polish women and a couple of housewives in Alaska⁵.

Let’s tone down these catty remarks, but they do contain some truth – the “shame” of the previous decade may also be explained by our lack of distance. The consumer society was playing with style, which was why opulence and glitter were not taken very seriously. The society on the threshold of transformation overdid it with forms that had already been somewhat overdone – and this doubling up of exaggeration unavoidably lead to kitsch.

Yet it was the fashion of the period of transformation which served the middle class in its endeavour to recreate itself from the ground up. The west of the 80’s was, whatever else it was, a decade of *power dressing*: broader shoulders, masculine elements, androgynous loose lines. The famous photographic diptych *Sie kommen* by Helmut Newton was made, it is true, in 1981, but it serves well to illustrate the situation in Poland ten years later where an army of assistants and secretaries marched on the new posts available in the new companies. In the western fashion of the early 90’s the minimalism of smooth forms from Armani or Jil Sander



Put on your seatbelts please, reportage by Jacek Szmidt, Twój Styl, March 1991 "Portraits of the stewardesses taken on the return of the plane from Paris – Maciej Osiecki. The protagonists of the reportage posed for the pictures after a very tiring flight. The plane experienced 2 hours of delay."

had already appeared, an answer to global recession, but at that time Polish women were following other trends. They were not looking for refined simplicity: they were either fighting for survival following the closure of their places of work or they were enjoying rapid career rises and therefore required suitable and stylish formal attire. They put on white blouses, close-fitting skirts, colourful jackets or the greys of professionalism. In the reportage articles of the lifestyle magazine *Twój Styl* [Your Style], we were able to read about the various areas in which Polish women were enjoying success. *Twój Styl* first came out on the turn of July and August 1990 (and as a counterpart to the men's magazine *Sukces*.) Articles like *Dziewczyny z Marriotta* [The Girls from the Marriott], *Sekrety sekretarek* [The Secrets of Secretaries], *Dziewczyny z kasyna* [The Girls from the Casino], *Humanistki w biznesie* [Humanities Graduates in Business] and reports on stewardesses working for Polish Airlines LOT – they all present new career paths, yet follow one form. This repetitiveness of the pattern was also reflected in the dress code – successful women, when asked about dress, always answer: White blouse, a skirt not shorter than the knee, low heels and mandatory tights (never bare legs!) The magazines slowly introduced the topic of depilation.

We were able to read about the most expensive hotel in Poland at the time: "One visits the Marriott to see something exotic. The Varsovian, accustomed to mess as she is, is first struck by the perfect cleanliness and then – by the luxury."⁶ And similarly for the female staff – they are well kempt, well-dressed, clean (what is frequently stressed) and they wear evident ID badges. The young waitresses come in "fresh blouses every day and in black skirts," the receptionists are in "grey jackets," the cleaning staff are dressed in "white and navy striped dresses," the security manager is in "a Chanel-type costume and a snow-white blouse."⁷ Of equal importance is modest elegance rather than ostentatious jewellery or striking make-up ("without rosy cheeks!").

The magazine supported the conviction that to achieve success in the new realities, intelligence and experience did not suffice – an essential element was also the right appearance, not necessarily attractiveness since that might even hinder you in the workplace. The employer wished for the so-called "pleasant exterior." And it was to be achieved through standardisation: "Our shops and cupboards most suffer from the lack of so-called *basics*. A few simple standard items of clothing which can easily be put together in various colour and style combinations," Joanna Bojańczyk explains, at the same time warning us that "there has yet to be a sacking for

forgetting to paint your nails or missing a visit to the hairdresser [the USA is the point of reference here]. But who knows what the coming rat race of capitalism may bring.”⁸

Work attire was supposed to recall uniforms (broad shoulders, double-breasted jackets, masculine pocket design) and even when the blouses underneath were silk, the women were to look as though they were going to war. And in a sense they went to war. In Radosław Piwowarski's film *Kolejność uczuć* [*The Order of Feelings*] (1993) the heroine's father loses his job in the mine and her mother, until now a housewife, presses herself a blouse, puts on a jacket with shoulder pads and heads off to the front line of work.

The advice on cosmetics which appeared at this time in magazines tried to awaken new needs in readers, which they had not been aware of before. The first brands to enter the market are medium-price cosmetics like Margaret Astor for example, whose cosmetics provided a feeling of western luxury but were affordable for students. The first, or one of the first, adverts for Margaret Astor was a narrative about Cinderella with a young Paweł Deląg as the prince. "It's beautiful to be yourself." „Pięknie być sobą” Yet from today's perspective we can see that this was a tale about Poland: the downtrodden low self-esteem sister of Europe who, thanks to foreign capital, was finally able to see her own "true" beauty.

The earlier [advert for the pumice Purokolor'89](#), one of the very first Polish advertisements, was also self-referential. The model has round clip-on earrings, small shoulder pads emphasizing her arms, a "terrier style" perm. It presents the pumice with an elegant lady, with a woman working a 'quarry of pumice' but finally the actress ends up in the bath where she regains her freedom of expression (the obvious sexism of this messaging was also obvious to the viewers at the time.) Alongside the advertisement there appeared a number of educational articles, condemning excess and overly visible colourful shadow and rouge on the cheeks. Work on the "foundations" also meant clothes (in every wardrobe there should be *basics*), but the main area for education turned out to be hygiene. Deodorants reached the stores, frequently heavily perfumed and their intensive fragrance was supposed to drown out the now unacceptable scent of the body ("When a man



Margaret Astor'S ADVERTISEMENT,
1993

you've never met before suddenly offers you flowers, it must be Impulse.") Into this disciplining discourse we may also add the much hyped SlimFast products (on healthiest skimmed milk) and aerobics and Callanetics video cassettes, which showed new ways of treating one's body.

The shame of the "well out" period of transformation with respect to men's fashion is above all, from today's perspective, the infamous white socks (sold on fold-away beds and worn with moccasins and even with sandals). Like a working-class equivalent for the white collar, the white socks enabled us to recognise the man of business – and the man of success. But in a Polish version, because the men in the Boss ads looked unattainably elegant. The fashion for longer hair at the front, brushed up, came back – a kind of modification of the 50's styles, at the time called "Mountain Eagles" – businessmen, the sharks of the free market were after all the new cutting edge in the job market. They were even shown on adverts from below, like the brick-layers in socialist-realist posters.

Polish women's fashion of that time had the face of popular models like Małgorzata Niemen, Lidia Popiel or Katarzyna Butowtt. Unfortunately, with the possible exception of Ewa Witkowska or Aneta Kręglička (Miss World 1989), they did not continue to make significant careers in the West, where the 80's had seen the beginning of the supermodel phenomenon. When Linda Evangelista or Naomi Campbell started to appear in large-scale advertising campaigns, and thereby achieved a level of fame previously available only to actors and actresses, Polish girls posed for photos developed on low-quality paper. Their story (as yet untold) is a narrative about Polish fashion, about aspirations and to some extent about imitation. Anna Jurkaszowicz was never to record a bigger hit than *Diamentowy kolczyk* [*Diamond Earring*], and the earring itself – well, it was a fake.



Aneta Kręglička – Miss Świata'89

Footnotes

- 1 Rebecca Arnold *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety. Image and Morality in the 20th Century*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers 2001): 9.
- 2 Monika Jaruzelska, Adam Gutowski, "Nasz gość Pierre Cardin w Warszawie," *Twój Styl* 10 (1992): 50.
- 3 Barbara Hoff, "Swetry. A jednak moda istnieje," *Przekrój*, 2378 (January 20th, 1991): 21.
- 4 Barbara Hoff, "Moda. Czy pisać o pokazach?," *Przekrój* 5, (January 31st, 1993): 21.
- 5 Agnieszka Osiecka, *Magister Chałupiec*, in: eadem, *Galeria potworów* (Prószyński i s-ka, Warszawa: 2004): 19–20.
- 6 Krystyna Kaszuba, "Dziewczyny z Marriotta," *Twój Styl*, 2 (1990): 12–16.
- 7 Ibidem.
- 8 Joanna Bojańczyk, "W czym do pracy?" [What to wear to work?], *Twój Styl*, 12 (1991): 84–87. The journalist's words fit well with contemporary interpretations of the transformation period. As Boris Buden as observed, the capitalist system, introduced in the 90's, was "more capitalist than its western original." In the context of a break with socialist ideas, capitalism became more flexible, more ruthless, wild and dog-eat-dog. See: Boris Buden, *Strefa przejścia. O końcu postkomunizmu* [*Crossing Zone. On the end of post-communism*], trans. M. Sutowski, (Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2012): 63.