The Polish Studies Center Newsletter

Indiana University • Bloomington, Indiana • Spring 2021

In This Newsletter
A Letter from the Director — 2
Announcements — 4
A Virtual Year: PSC 2020-21 Events
   2020 Wiles Lecture, Clare Cavanagh — 5
   2021 Wiles Lecture, Łukasz Stanek — 6
   i tak dalej Podcast Series — 7
   Graduate Student Symposia — 8

New Technologies: Opportunities and Constraints, an interview with Elizabeth Cullen Dunn, PSC Interim Director — 9

Graduate Research, an interview with Nicolette Van Den Bogerd, Graduate Student, Musicology and Jewish Studies — 11

On Teaching Polish, an interview with Łukasz Siciński, Lecturer in the Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Cultures — 14

Polish Studies as International Studies, an interview with Jack Bielasiak, Professor of Political Science and Adjunct Professor of Jewish Studies — 16

2020-21 Donors — 19

Łukasz Stanek and Christina Schwenkel join interim director Elizabeth Dunn on i tak dalej, the PSC’s new podcast series
As for everyone, this COVID year has been strange, confining, and yet sometimes wondrous at Polish Studies. This year, my goal was to use the new geographical reach that remote events gave us to involve new listeners, speakers, and lovers of all things Polish. We had a special focus on architecture and material culture, two topics that blend our traditional humanities focus with both social science and engineering to think sideways about Poland's politics and history.

Architecture let us think about urban living, about the practices and poetics of everyday life, and about the ways that people interact with the environment through work and play, production and consumption. How did Poland's own transition from a largely agricultural country to one with an urban industrial workforce shape the Polish landscape? How did people from the countryside bring their habits and values into the city, and change the way urban buildings looked and functioned? How were the values of state socialism embedded into buildings and streets and urban parks? How did Polish architecture shape other countries in Africa and Asia, and affect the trajectory of the Cold War? All of these questions brought humanists, historians, anthropologists, geographers, and more together to think through the role of the built environment on Poland's own culture.

Our keynote event this year was the 2021 Timothy Wiles Memorial lecture, given by Łukasz Stanek, an architectural historian. In "The Worlding of Eastern Europe: Polish Architects in Cold War West Africa," Stanek showed us how the complicated relationships between Polish architects and clients in West African countries led to unexpected understandings of both the built environment and society itself. Rather than simply exporting socialist ideals embedded in buildings, Polish architects came to see developing countries in Africa in their own cultural and historical terms, as places that had experienced colonialism in a way that was analogous but sharply distinct from Poland's own historical experience. Stanek also held a special seminar afterwards for graduate students in history, Slavic Studies, and architecture where he discussed his research on global socialist architecture in greater depth.

Along with his Wiles Lecture, Stanek joined me on the PSC's new podcast, *i tak dalej* ("Et cetera"). We were joined by Christina Schwenkel, an anthropologist who has examined the ways that East German architects tried to change urban residential living in Vietnam. The comparison was fascinating: what both Stanek and Schwenkel found was that the drive to build the New Socialist Man through new forms of living, which was so pronounced in the USSR, was sharply changed when Central European architects encountered African and Asian cities. Modifying the ways that apartments were laid out so that multiple generations could live in them, or changing courtyards so that they could become truly social spaces for gardening, animal rearing, and other "village" activities all became part of spreading global socialist architecture.
Warsaw's famous Palace of Culture and Science was the subject of another fascinating lecture, this one given by Michał Murawski of the University College of London. Murawski's work on what he calls the "Palace Complex" explains why, despite decades of strong criticism, the Palace has never been torn down or obscured by other buildings, even though there have been plans to do so. Instead, the Palace has become a beloved icon for many people, the center of social and cultural activities and a landmark that orients the city not only in space but in time. Murawski's fascinating conversation on *i tak dalej* was followed up by an in-depth session just for graduate students, who came from history, architecture, and geography to talk about urban landscapes.

Because our 2020 Wiles Lecture was delayed due to COVID, we were lucky enough to hold it in 2021. Clare Cavanagh, the award-winning translator and literary critic, talked about how the urban landscape in Berkeley, California, shaped the thinking and writing of poet Czesław Miłosz. One of the hallmarks of Cavanagh's work has been her deep knowledge of her subjects' personal and cultural worlds, and in her lecture "Along the Polish-California Border: West Coast Miłosz," she showed us how Miłosz's writing was deeply influenced by the sights and events of his time in Berkeley. She carefully traced places, buildings, signs and even ephemera like flyers and showed us how it reappeared in Miłosz's work, blending with his considerations of Polish life and ideas.

We shifted our focus from urban exteriors to interiors when Olga Drenda, the author of the wildly popular book *Duchologia: People and Things in Times of Transformation*, joined our podcast. Drenda turns an anthropologist's eye on to the 1990s, the period of Poland's transition from state socialism to capitalism. Through everything from food to clothing to household furniture, she looks at the ways that people's everyday lives were changing down to the smallest details. In our interview, Drenda talked about her complicated relationship to nostalgia: she doesn’t just want people to remember these objects fondly, but to think about how they reflected wider changes in politics, ideology, gender and generational relations, and more. In doing so, she called for a rethinking of ontology, of the way of being of an entire generation.

The anti-government protests taking place on Warsaw's streets this fall came into consideration, too. Elżbieta Korolczuk of Södertörn University visited the podcast to talk about the feminist roots of the protests, their relationship to abortion policy, and the ways that women's organizing is shaping politics. Janine Holc of Northwestern University came to talk about political symbolism, sexual violence, and the role of women's autonomy in the current protests. Political scientist David Ost of Hobart and William Smith also came to the podcast to talk about how contemporary protests relate to the Solidarity movement, and why Polish politics has been so profoundly shaped by political organizing and by anger.

The podcast also featured Renata Hryciuk, an anthropologist who studies food culture in Mexico and Poland. Learning about the advent of foreign cuisines in Warsaw was my absolute favorite episode of the entire series. I also loved interviewing Marysia Galbraith, talking about her grandmother's hidden Jewish heritage and the surprising discovery of relatives in Israel who were only found via commercial DNA testing, and Jessica Robbins, who told us about what aging in Poland is and can be. These explorations of family and generation helped us know more about the fabric of Polish life and the profound changes it has undergone in the last 100 years. To listen to *i tak dalej*, click [here](#).

So, while COVID kept us from enjoying the traditional warmth and collegiality of the PSC community, we kept on exploring new ideas (and even managed a holiday party on Zoom!). We look forward to seeing you all in person again soon!
Announcements

During the 2019-2020 academic year, Professor Halina Goldberg served as Interim Director of the Russian and East European Institute (REEI) at the Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies at IU. Among the events she spearheaded during her tenure was the symposium “Writings on the Wall: The End of the Eastern Bloc in Cultural Memory,” marking the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall (and the fall of the communist regimes of the Soviet Bloc), which was co-organized with the Institute for European Studies and the Polish Studies Center. In April of 2020, she led the same group of centers, joined by the Inner Asian & Uralic National Resource Center, in organizing an International Virtual Conference “COVID-19 in Europe.” At the Jacobs School of Music (JSOM), where she serves at the chair of the Musicology Department, she organized, in collaboration with the Chopin Institute in Poland, the performance by Sileo Quartet of the music of Grażyna Bacewicz and Karol Szymanowski in a concert titled “Intimate Soundscapes of Poland,” for which she also presented a pre-concert lecture. Goldberg was invited to give the keynote lecture on “The Banished Masters and the Shadow Legion of ‘Greats’: Contemplating the Place of Jews in Historiography of Polish Music” at the International Conference Jews in the Musical Life of Galicia (Rzeszów, Poland). Her “Chopin’s Album Leaves and the Aesthetics of Musical Album Inscription,” a broad study exploring, among others, music’s role in 19th-century keepsake albums in Poland, came out in the fall issue of the Journal of the American Musicological Society, and her scholarly anthology Descriptive Piano Fantasia, which includes musical works from Poland, was just published by A-R Editions. Goldberg also contributed a chapter to a book that accompanies the opening of a new Legacy gallery in POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and has been invited to participate in attending panels and lectures.

Padraic Kenney offered virtual presentations to conferences in Wrocław, Kielce, and Venice this winter—on the past and future of non-violent protest and on the history of political imprisonment. He also joined a panel discussion in Szczecin to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the worker uprisings on the Baltic coast in 1970-71, which can be viewed here. He published an article entitled “‘So That They Leave the Prison Cage as Conscious Revolutionaries’: How Polish Communists Used Prison” in The Palgrave Handbook of Anti-Communist Persecutions.

Justyna Zając participated as a panelist, discussant, and guest speaker in several events organized by American and European academic and non-for-profit centers. In Fall 2020, she took part in a panel on the future of the transatlantic relationship after the American elections (organized by the Institute for European Studies) and a debate on the current political situation in Poland (sponsored by Indiana University’s Europe Gateway program.) In November 2020, she was a panelist at the ISA-Midwest 2020 Conference (organized by the International Studies Association) where she presented a paper on “Foreign Policy Identity Crisis and the Revival of Geopolitics. The Case of Poland.” As an instructor in the European Academy of Diplomacy (an NGO accredited with the Polish Ministry of National Education), she led several workshops on the Polish perception of security threats and the European Union security and enlargement policy. In Fall 2020, she joined the Executive Committee of the Polish Studies Center.
A Virtual Year: PSC 2020-21 Events

The 8th Annual Timothy Wiles Memorial Lecture in Polish Studies was held on Friday, January 29th. Clare Cavanagh, Frances Hooper Professor in the Arts and Humanities at Northwestern University and Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, presented a talk entitled “Along the Polish-Californian Border: West Coast Miłosz.” Lee Feinstein (Dean, Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies) and Elizabeth Cullen Dunn (Professor, Geography) offered introductory remarks.

The lecture can be viewed here.

Along the Polish-Californian Border:
West Coast Miłosz

You've let yourself get trapped in that dance
in the European courtyard while
the twentieth century is playing out elsewhere . .
What fascinates me is the mystery of
America, and above all, California.
--Czesław Miłosz, letter to Jerzy Giedroyć,
December, 1964

slides from Clare Cavanagh’s presentation
(left); audience questions (below)
Łukasz Stanek, Senior Lecturer, Manchester School of Architecture, University of Manchester delivered the 9th Annual Timothy Wiles Memorial Lecture in Polish Studies, a talk entitled “The Worlding of Eastern Europe: Polish Architects in Cold War West Africa” on March 26, 2021. Elizabeth Cullen Dunn (Professor, Geography) offered introductory remarks.

The lecture can be viewed [here](#).

*This talk revisits one of the most under-researched topics in the history of 20th century modern architecture: African and Asian engagements of architects, planners, and construction companies from Eastern European countries. Upon their arrival to postcolonial Ghana and Nigeria, architects from socialist Poland and other countries in the region drew analogies between the historical experience of Eastern Europe and West Africa as underdeveloped, colonized, and peripheral. By focusing on the work of the designer, scholar, and educator Zbigniew Dmochowski in Nigeria, this talk will show how these analogies allowed Eastern European architects to draw upon specific design tools and procedures from Eastern European architectural culture—and how their work in West Africa testified to the limits of these correspondences.*

Łukasz Stanek is Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) at the Manchester School of Architecture, The University of Manchester, UK. Stanek authored *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011) and *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton University Press, 2020), which won the Alice Davis Hitchcock Medallion by the SAH GB (2020) and the RIBA President’s Award for History & Theory Research (2020). Before Manchester, Stanek taught at ETH Zurich and Harvard University, and received fellowships from the Center for Advanced Study in Visual Arts (Washington D. C.) and the Canadian Centre for Architecture (Montreal), among other institutions.
In October 2020, the Polish Studies Center launched its new podcast series, *i tak dalej*. Hosted by PSC interim director Elizabeth Cullen Dunn, the podcast features topical interviews with scholars, experts, activists, and more on all things Polish. Learn more and listen [here](#).

“*These are people who after 1989 did not see their life chances increase.*”
Episode 2: David Ost (Hobart and William Smith Colleges)

Elizabeth and David discuss the recent protests over new restrictions to abortion in Poland, major issues and changes in Polish politics since 1989, and the changing role of the Catholic Church in Polish, particularly with regard to the perspective of younger generations.

“The Palace of Culture and Science defines the center of the city.”
Episode 1: Michał Murawski (School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London)


“They had this sense of lost homeland, the lost Polish nation, after the borders of Poland moved to the west after World War II.”
Episode 5: Jessica Robbins (Wayne State University)

Elizabeth and Jessica discuss aging in contemporary Poland, where dramatic transformations have profoundly impacted the lives of the country’s oldest generations.

“You can think of the process of transformation as a process of reinstating the traditional gender order in Polish society.”
Episode 3: Elżbieta Korolczuk (Södertörn University, Warsaw University)

Elizabeth and Elżbieta discuss the gendered nature of activism and protest in the ongoing protests in Poland this year.

“*Kuchnia Polska* was a political project. It was published in 1954 as part of the state’s efforts to modernize Polish society.”
Episode 6: Renata Hryciuk (Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Warsaw University)

Elizabeth and Renata discuss urban foodways and the changing culture of food in Poland.

“Why do we tend to remember the fairly recent past in such a blurry way? Why do memories look like a glitchy video tape?”
Episode 7: Olga Drenda

Elizabeth talks to Olga about her Facebook page, *Duchologia*, which focuses on artifacts from the period of social transformation in the 1990s.
The first **Graduate Student Symposium** in Polish Studies (co-sponsored by the Russian and East European Institute) was held on February 5th, 2021. Graduate students in anthropology, architecture, history, and Central Eurasian Studies met for a virtual discussion with Michał Murawski to discuss field theoretical and methodological approaches architecture and urban space. Participants were asked to read Dr. Murawski’s recent book, *The Palace Complex: A Stalinist Skyscraper, Capitalist Warsaw, and a City Transfixed* (Indiana University Press, 2019), in advance and prepare discussion questions.

The second **Graduate Student Symposium** was held on March 31st, 2021 and featured a conversation with our Wiles Memorial Lecturer, Łukasz Stanek. Graduate students read and discussed an excerpt from his new book, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton University Press, 2020).
New Technologies: Opportunities and Constraints

An interview between Elizabeth Cullen Dunn, PSC interim director, and Leah Valtin-Erwinn, producer of *i tak dalej*, the Polish Studies Center podcast.

**LVE:** Of the digital formats available to you as director of the Polish Studies Center this year, why launch a podcast?

**ECD:** After the long and chaotic spring term when COVID first emerged, I felt like people were very quickly getting exhausted by Zoom events. Zoom is wonderful because it lets speakers and listeners get together without regard for space, letting us bring in speakers from all over the world, people we never could have afforded to fly in. But Zoom also locks people in front of their screens for hours at a time. Studies have shown that monitoring faces via Zoom and paying attention to endless Powerpoints is cognitively exhausting. Live events also demand that people attend at a predefined time---but why do that, when we have the technology to make events convenient to everyone? So I wanted to have a series of events that people could listen to while they were moving about, doing other things like cooking dinner or knitting, events that people could fit into the rest of their days, which would make attending easy. So podcasting seemed ideal.

**LVE:** What have you learned about translating scholarship and academic dialogues into podcast form?

**ECD:** A lot of what has happened this year has been the direct translation of in-person events into remote ones. Turn on the camera or the recorder, and boom, it follows the convention of live events. But technology offers us other possibilities for learning and listening! I love the podcast format because it let me turn long lectures into lively interviews, something much more like Terry Gross' *Fresh Air* than a traditional talk. I liked how podcasting let interviewees' personalities come through, including their passion for their subjects. By wandering a little bit, we also learned how their particular interests intersect others. When I interviewed Renata Hryciuk, for example, we started out by talking about her work on Mexican food in Poland. But by the end, we were talking about the Vietnamese community in Warsaw, food and its relationship to protest, and more. Her work became so much more in that wider context.
LVE: Our guests came with diverse expertise in a wide array of subjects, methodologies, disciplines, and perspectives. How did you go about choosing interview subjects? What topics, questions, methods, or themes did you feel merited attention in a podcast on Polish studies in 2020-21?

ECD: My original plan was to stay with the theme of urban life: buildings, interiors, food, and so on. So I chose people who could speak to that. Then the gigantic protests in Warsaw erupted, and it became clear that podcasting was the best way to consider those emerging events----rather than wait for speakers to write a formal lecture, we could talk to them while the events were still happening, get their fresh takes, and see those first thoughts about them emerging. I loved the immediacy of the podcast. On top of that, there were subjects I just thought were fascinating because of their human interest, like what it's like to get old in Poland or what it means when a DNA test suddenly shows you have an ethnic history you never knew about that. Podcasting let me slot in those interests around our main theme. It let me follow my nose.

LVE: You created a conversational tone in your interviews, asking our guests to speak about both their own research interests and more generally about contemporary debates, issues, and events in Poland. What are the advantages of creating a more informal atmosphere for a podcast rooted in academic scholarship?

ECD: I think so much of academic life is formalized and it sucks the life out of really fascinating topics. You know how when you're at the coffee shop at a conference, and somebody's telling you about their work, and it's so interesting and vivid? And then it gets bogged down in citations and heavy theorizing and academic convention and suddenly it's sort of flat and dry. I wanted to keep that freshness and excitement in the conversation. I wanted to free people up to be interesting for listeners. And I think it worked really well.

LVE: What does i tak dalej add to the Polish Studies Center's programming? How do you envision the future of the podcast, especially as in person events resume?

ECD: Well, we made a huge investment in learning the genre of podcasting. I learned a lot about interviewing, and you learned a lot about the technology. I think there's a lot more to learn, and that we haven't even begun to explore what we could do in this format. So I would like to continue it, and when I'm in Poland, start to gather audio as a kind of ethnographic data that could make these podcasts even more lively. Instead of just talking about the Vietnamese community in Poland, maybe Renata Hryciuk and a Vietnamese chef and I go eat pho! Maybe Olga Drenda and I go interview people about 1990s fashion! Even as in-person events resume, I think that i tak dalej will bring Poland closer to the PSC, and be a sort of "PSC-to-go" for people who can't make it to us in Bloomington.
Nicolette van den Bogerd is a PhD student in the Department of Musicology.

Your research centers on the music of Polish-Jewish composers. What can studying music composition tell us about Polish-Jewish relations more generally?

I investigate how Polish-Jewish émigré composers’ musical responses to the Holocaust serve as testimonies to their individual wartime experiences, and how postwar socio-political contexts influenced these musical expressions. Historians and cultural scholars have typically analyzed written documents, oral histories, material objects, and visual media to study how survivors grappled with their Holocaust experiences. My project examines how survivors who were composers captured their memories of the Holocaust in sound during the postwar era, bringing attention to another type of historical record of both the Holocaust and survivorship.

During the postwar era, Polish-Jewish composers asked important questions about their Jewish identity. They needed to come to terms with annihilation of the Jewish community and its culture in Poland, but there was virtually no public space allotted to work through this grief because the communist government emphasized Poland’s non-Jewish losses and worked to erase the Jewish Holocaust experience from its historical memory. Many composers adopted new homelands in the postwar era where public mourning was likewise complicated by political prerogatives. And yet, composers turned to music to respond to their experiences during the Holocaust; or, in other cases, employed music specifically to respond to these prohibitions on Holocaust memory in Poland and other countries. My work demonstrates how composers threaded the boundaries between public and private memory in these political spaces. Their music engages both the experience in the Holocaust and the grief that comes from silencing the victims. By studying this repertory, we learn how Polish-Jewish composers employed music composition to ensure a Jewish voice in remembrances of the Holocaust at a time when that voice was virtually absent.

Your work has also examined the music of the Holocaust. What forms of music characterized the Holocaust period? How did it diverge from previous musical trends in Europe?

I study a group of Polish-Jewish composers who were all born in historically Polish lands and came of age in interwar Poland, but they all had different Holocaust experiences. For example, one survived the Auschwitz concentration camp, another lived in hiding in the Polish countryside, and yet another lived in Poland with false identity papers. All these composers turned to music composition to commemorate the Holocaust, but they did so at different times in their lives — I examine pieces that were composed between 1946 and 1964; written in four different countries.
Because the individual experiences of Polish-Jewish composers were so profoundly personal and varied significantly—as did their postwar lives outside of Poland—there are no general musical trends that characterize their postwar musical Holocaust commemorations; however, we can observe similarities in other ways. For example, Polish-Jewish composers address common themes in their musical composition; some focus on the Holocaust and Poland while others choose to focus on Jewish postwar revitalization. By connecting music to particular themes, these composers demonstrate how the Holocaust shaped Jewish identity politics and how music was used to participate in these conversations.

**How have Polish-Jewish composers engaged with the Holocaust via musical composition?**

Polish-Jewish composers drew inspiration from a variety of sources; many incorporated in their music well-known pieces from Polish and Jewish literature—only some of which were directly related to the Holocaust—but others selected stories from the Hebrew Bible or other religious source texts about Jewish historical trauma more generally. Composers interpreted, translated, and curated excerpts from these sources to construct particular musical narratives that were often very different from the original material. Yet, it is not always clear that the music addresses Holocaust memory specifically. I focus on composers who have written at least one composition in response to the Holocaust. Some pieces have obvious titles that refer to particular events in the Holocaust. More frequently, however, the reference to the Holocaust is subtle. For example, when composers use source materials that are not obviously associated with the Holocaust—as is especially the case with biblical narratives—they serve as musical allegories for Jewish Holocaust trauma. Composers chose a range of musical genres for their compositions, including oratorios, symphonies, art songs, and operas, but all the pieces bring attention to Jewish suffering during the Second World War.

A plaque in Paris commemorating the Polish-Jewish composer, virtuoso pianist, and conductor Alexandre Tansman
How has your focus on Polish-Jewish composers illuminated the transnational nature of music in the twentieth century?

The concept of transnational identity is particularly relevant to my work because I focus on Polish-Jewish émigrés who lived in different parts of the world during and after the war. Some escaped Poland for a chance to survive the Holocaust, but eventually all of the composers settled permanently in countries such as France, the Soviet Union, and the United States in the postwar era. Because of their experiences in these different national and cultural contexts, where they led full lives with robust careers, these composers developed multiple levels of hyphenated identities. For example, one composer identified as Polish-French-Jewish-Israeli; another identified as Polish-Russian-Jewish. Their musical responses to the Holocaust reflect these complex individual constructions of transnational identity. By examining this repertoire, we learn not only how composers responded to the Holocaust and its memory, but also how music contributed to conceptions of identity in the postwar era.

Ultimately, composers asked very personal questions about their survivorship; how to honor the memory of the victims, how to write music about their experiences, and how to appropriately respond to the Holocaust. By answering these questions via music composition, Polish-Jewish composers created aural records of memory that not only augment our understanding of the Holocaust, but that also show how composers relate to their past as victims and their present as Jewish survivors and cosmopolitan composers.

*interview by Leah Valtin-Erwin*
Interview with Łukasz Siciński

Łukasz Siciński, Lecturer in the Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Cultures, teaches courses in Polish language, culture, and film.

What attracts students to learning about Polish language and culture? Even though many IU students pick a former colonial language (French, German or Spanish), a select bunch branch out and pick Polish. Why?

The reasons are usually personal, especially in the case of undergraduate students. Heritage seems to be an important factor – students often take Polish because they want to learn more about their roots or want to be able to talk to their grandparents or their Polish family. And sometimes they simply want to learn Polish because their friends speak it or because their significant other is Polish. But there are also other motivations. For example, a few years ago, I had a student who was interested in Polish hip-hop and wanted to learn the language to understand the lyrics of his favorite artists. I also noticed that, recently, more and more students decide to minor (or major) in Polish. They see Polish language and culture classes as an integral part of their education at IU and find those classes useful for their career.

Is there something special or unusual about your students that brings them into your classroom?

Learning a foreign language is a complex process. It can be fun and rewarding, but it always requires commitment and hard work. Of course, Polish is not an exception – learning Polish has its challenges and requires time, and, generally, Polish is not considered an easy language to learn for English speakers. What makes my students special, I think, is that they often know that about Polish but it doesn’t discourage them from wanting to learn it. They are curious, self-motivated learners, who want to make the best of their college experience and are willing to leave their comfort zone to meet their personal and professional goals.

What is your favorite teaching technique or approach? How do you encourage students to make progress on such a grammatically difficult language?

My main goal is to create a classroom environment that encourages students to take ownership of their learning. This is the key, I think. Whenever possible, I design my classes to be focused on collaborative work and often fashion them in a way that allows students to take over class instruction and, for example, lead their own class discussions or give presentations on topics of their choice. The relevance of the material to the world outside the classroom is also an important element of my approach; for this reason, rather than concentrating simply on knowing the language, I focus on its practical use. This, of course, doesn’t mean that I don’t teach grammar. I do teach it, but I try to show how grammar is tied with pragmatics and that even seemingly abstract issues – for example, issues of a morphological nature – can have real-world implications. What I also find very important is that students feel safe in my classroom – that they feel comfortable to be challenged, take risks, and seek help when needed.
One of your areas of expertise is Polish film. What films are you currently fascinated by? Any hidden gems to recommend?

I really like Jerzy Kawalerowicz’s films, especially his 1961 classic *Mother Joan of the Angels*. The film is loosely based on the infamous case of demonic possession that took place in the French town of Loudun in the 17th century, but its scope is universal and philosophical. It is this philosophical dimension that fascinates me. What interests me is how Kawalerowicz explores the notion of evil and uses it in the film to examine a number of theological, ethical, and epistemological issues – the question of theodicy, transgression, or the philosophical distinction between reality and appearance. The philosophical depth of this film is simply amazing. As for the hidden gems, I would recommend Grzegorz Królikiewicz’s *The Case of Bronek Pekosiński*. Practically unknown in the US, this film is often considered one of the most original Polish films.

Another area of expertise for you is, surprisingly, rubbish. How do you think about garbage and waste and the ways it intersects with Polish literature or film?

My understanding of rubbish is based on the idea that, regardless of whether rubbish exists as a physical object or a cultural category, it functions within the framework of ordering where it stands for what doesn’t belong. In that sense, it is a by-product of human sense-making activities. In my research, I adopt this general understanding of rubbish to explore epistemological issues – I use this category as a conceptual metaphor for what disrupts an established “order of things” and threatens our assumptions about the world. I’m currently writing a book manuscript, in which I explore this idea in the context of Polish literature. My analysis focuses on Miron Białoszewski’s and Tadeusz Różewicz’s writings and the way they use the notion of rubbish to question the limits of human cognition and to reformulate the basic understanding of the human relation to the world. In my view, those explorations of rubbish should not be merely considered a literary theme, but need to be discussed in terms of their philosophical potential – that is, they should be treated as relevant to philosophical discussions regarding the epistemic validity of human cognitive practices or the issues of objectivism and relativism.

*interview by Elizabeth Cullen Dunn*
Interview with Jack Bielasiak

Jack Bielasiak, Professor of Political Science and Adjunct Professor of Jewish Studies, was recently awarded the 2021 John W. Ryan Award for Distinguished Contributions to International Programs and Studies.

What international studies programs have you been a part of at IU? What benefits have you seen students and faculty derive from those opportunities?

My primary engagement in international programs was in the development of the Polish Studies Center at IU Bloomington and its counterpart, the American Studies Center at Warsaw University. Early in my academic career at IU, in recognition of my research interests in Polish politics, I participated in discussions about the exchange between the two universities under the direction of then President John W. Ryan. I was among the first IU faculty on the exchange, teaching in the Department of Sociology at Warsaw University in 1978-1979, and then served as Director of the Polish Studies Center (1986-1991) and as Associate Director of the American Studies Center (1989-90). Subsequently, I was able to take advantage of the programs with Warsaw University and Jagiellonian University to conduct research, teach, or participate in conferences on several occasions. The main benefits of the programs were to open channels of communication among scholars in the humanities and the social sciences, forging direct contacts that established long term collaboration in research and provided opportunities for teaching on both sides of the Atlantic. Undergraduate students at IU were able to take classes from Polish scholars in language, culture, history, or political science, exposing them to new subjects and ideas. Graduate students had the opportunity to travel to engage in research, often taking advantage of the exchange to improve language skills or explore opportunities for doctoral dissertations.

Since 1989, you have held positions at the University of Warsaw and at the Polish Academy of Sciences, also in Warsaw. What motivated you to pursue academic positions abroad? How did your scholarship change as a result?

1989 was a sea change, in the political as well as the academic world. Although even before, in the 1980s, there was a significant thaw in the intellectual life of Poland and opportunities for interactions between American and Polish scholars. This facilitated program development for the Centers, including hosting scholars from Poland, organizing conferences, and hosting visiting lectureships on East European and Polish culture, society, and politics. Among our key accomplishments when I was PSC Director was securing funding from the Jurzykowski Foundation to sponsor a Visiting Professorship that brought Polish scholars to IU. These were young, accomplished educators who used their time on both sides of the Indiana-Warsaw exchange to write dissertations, publish books, and make progress in their scholarship. After 1989, many became prominent in their fields of study, or in the media, or the diplomatic corps.

Bielasiak (fourth from right) with Lech Wałęsa during his visit to IU in 1998
How did international studies opportunities in Poland and the United States change after 1989? What role do international studies programs play in shaping Polish-American relations? How have academic programs served this relationship?

Of course, after the collapse of communism, many new options became available to research and teach outside previously constricted areas – as in my field of political science. Until then, my affiliation at Warsaw University was in the Department of Sociology, which was more open and less ideological. Opportunities became more abundant as universities and research centers opened up for new creative and research endeavors. For example, I initiated a research program on elections and democratization in the post-communist period with a group of Polish colleagues. The research was comparative across the countries of East Europe. It brought together East European scholars with expertise on their national politics together with faculty from Indiana University with specializations in American and comparative elections and voting. The program received funding from the International and Research Exchange Board for a series of conferences in Mondalin, Poland and Princeton, NJ and resulted in multiple publications by the participants.

In turn, my scholarship led to my selection as Distinguished Fulbright Chair in 2004. I served in that position at the Center for East European Studies, Warsaw University, conducting research on political parties and teaching students in the program about electoral politics. It also led to teaching in a summer program at the Graduate School of Social Research at the Polish Academy of Sciences between 2011 and 2016. This program brought students from the former Soviet bloc countries to pursue education and research on democratization. The work reflected similar endeavors at Indiana University, centering on hosting junior scholars and mentoring visitors from East Europe in political science and related programs.

Your work has focused on political reform and democratization in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union after 1989. You have argued that post-communist Polish politics were shaped by certain rhetorical struggles, first between former communists and anti-communists, and then by contestation between a 'liberal' orientation and what you call 'solidaristic' or more traditionalist perspective. You contend that these constituted distinctive visions of Poland that emerged after 1989. Is the 'solidaristic'/ 'liberal' discourse still the dominant rhetorical struggle in Poland today?

My initial foray into understanding Polish politics centered on the crises in the 1970s and the 1980s. I then focused on the rise of political dissident movements and the rise of Solidarity in Poland. In a series of fieldwork visits to Poland, I studied social movements and their programs. These explorations led to the observation that politics in different eras led to distinct framing of the problems and solutions faced by the nation. Different visions of the future were facilitated by appeals to past traditions and aspirations, whether at the time of the communist thaw, or the immediate post-communist period, or the subsequent divide within the former political opposition between the liberal and a more traditional, nationalist perspective. Each vision is a product of its times and needs, of the prevailing social, economic, and political conditions. To advance its program, to have an advantage, each side reaches for a different past, or rather for its understanding of the past, to articulate the politics of the present. We might well remember Faulkner, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”
Interview with Jack Bielasiak

Your work has often focused on the influence of the past on political decisions, at times juxtaposing the observable impact of the past with political agendas claiming to draw a 'thick line' between past and present. In particular, your work has illuminated how political actors in post-communist Poland sought to appropriate the legacy of Solidarity. Is there still incentive to demonstrate association with Solidarity? What other elements of the past remain salient for political actors in contemporary Poland?

I think we are in a new phase of politics that is defined primarily not by national circumstances but by global currents. A wave of discontent fueled by economic disparities, differential life opportunities, cultural grievances has risen across the world. In some ways, it can be argued that Poland is at the forefront of the contemporary questioning, of the challenge to democratic values and practices. The gulf between “Poland A” and “Poland B” is at the root of the discontent: the disparity between the urban, cosmopolitan, skilled “anywheres” equally at home in Warsaw, Brussels, or London and the rural, less educated, provincial “somewheres” restricted in their opportunities and rewards. The people left behind in Poland’s accession to the neoliberal world order feel ill-served by the ideals of Solidarity, of a common fate, or a promise for a better future. For them, regaining Poland’s sovereignty is tantamount to resolving their plight, and the best means is to revive a more distant tradition that emphasizes the values of ethnonational identity.

Recently, we have seen a number of challenges to democracy emerge in Poland and elsewhere. What implications does the changing political environment in Poland hold for the field of international studies? What is the future of international studies, as far as Poland is concerned?

Indeed, as noted earlier, the current political climate presents many challenges to the democratic and liberal commitments of the state and society. Not only are politics under stress, but there is an assault on the values and institutions that safeguard the plurality of political opinions and cultural norms – including the courts, the media, and, indeed, academia. Nonetheless, I retain hope grounded precisely in the links created over the past decades among institutions of higher learning such as Warsaw University and Indiana University, its faculty, and students. Just as in the past, the forging of mutual ties, of common research projects, of teaching exchanges fostered a climate of inquiry and tolerance to build a more open society and academy, so today international programs maintain that commitment and that capacity. I believe that international studies will continue to serve all of us in the pursuit of knowledge and tolerance. In that spirit, I would like to thank all my colleagues and generations of students, in Bloomington and in Warsaw who have contributed to that scholarly quest – the Ryan Award belongs to all of us.

interview by Leah Valtin-Erwin
The Polish Studies Center thanks the following donors for supporting the Center’s programming, including the 2020 and 2021 Wiles Memorial Lectures, this year. Dziękujemy!

Roberta Elisse Adams  
Michael Kimble Ausbrook  
Charles Berginc  
Robin G. Elliot  
Maria D Mastalerz  
Kathleen Mary Minahan  
Patricia A. McManus  
Edward J. Meros  
Frank J Nice  
Gloria Elaine Parker  
Eleanor Judith Valentine  
Peter Witczak

The Polish Studies Center greatly appreciates financial contributions for its scholarly, cultural, and social activities. Donations to the Center are crucial in allowing us to sustain and expand our programs. The Center arranges a wide variety of scholarly events including conferences, lectures, and symposia; cultural events such as concerts, theatrical performances, readings, and exhibitions; and community gatherings such as our annual Holiday Party. Your help is vital in pursuing the Center’s mission to promote the study of Polish culture, history, and society at Indiana University and beyond.

To support the Polish Studies Center, please visit polish.indiana.edu and click on “Give Now.” Alternatively, please feel free to mail donations to our office: Polish Studies Center at IU, Hamilton Lugar School, 355 N. Jordan Ave., GA 4046, Bloomington, IN 47405