**Abstract**

“Pakuska” is a book about one estate, quite small and perhaps not different from other similar estates created in Poland in the time of the construction boom of the seventies. But for that very reason, as all of them were the same, it is a book about Poland.

**Pakuska - what it was like then and what it is now**

Pakuska was a city and at the same time it was not. Pakuska was a new world which emerged from nothingness and spread. In this context, it was anything and nothing at once. Was it the return to the meaning of city? Whoever knows what the meaning of city is?! Maybe a city which makes no sense makes more sense? If so, Pakuska is an ideal city.

Pakuska, like a medieval village, was not founded on a “raw root”. People were not there, but the forest was. Soldiers, as usual, appeared first, like an invading army, even vanguard, or a reconnaissance party of progress. They combed out the area, marked it, cut down the trees, built blocks and moved in with their families. Then, civilians of all sorts came along. Everything had been precisely planned. Today, we would recognize the concept of dividing people according to their occupations or workplaces and allocating blocks accordingly. Hence, there were blocks occupied by doctors, teachers, working class etc. In those times, future residents were genuinely engaged in the construction process. They would rush to Pakuska - the estate after work and support the builders with their own hands. Let us think what would happen if a today’s developer asked a businessman to pop in in the evening and whitewash the loft’s walls.

Everybody was a stranger there. There were no indigenous people, Native Americans or Aborigines to eradicate. The houses have never belonged to evicted or dislodged residents. Therefore, nobody had a feeling that the property was taken off somebody, that a resident is unwelcome, an invader and has everything prepared without lifting a finger. Pakuska was an attempt to reconstruct the world which was supposed to be permanent, but turned out to be temporary. It was the time of makeshift structures and carelessness. Who would dare to break...
construction health and safety regulations this way nowadays? New residents had just moved into finished blocks while just metres away the work was progressing at full speed. Cranes and bulldozers were operating and new blocks were being built. Those areas weren’t even separated from the rest and children were roaming everywhere, so it is a miracle that none of them were killed. Still, what was called “finished” was not in fact completed at all. Already inhabited flats were full of defects and practically needed renovating straight away. Some blocks were not even rendered and a few were left that way for years, waiting for their turn.

Young ones integrated first. Children, if not spoilt, have no prejudice. Up to a certain age at least, they are tolerant. Then, they embrace human nature. Leaders appear. There is violence and cruelty towards weaker or not physically or mentally adjusted - swots, fatties, red-haired ones and those wearing glasses. This is how the structure of the estate was created.

Yes, my book is an attempt at describing new social structures. People who had been moved from villages, towns and different communities, worked out new relations. They were adjusting, fighting and sometimes crushing one another. Not everybody could stand it, conflicts and even suicides occurred.

In the background, we look at typical social and political circumstances of that era-socialist morality with its “saints” (Lenin, Świerczewski) and leaders with their emotionless looks (First Secretary Edward Gierek, General Wojciech Jaruzelski). All is seen through the eyes of a child soaking it up. That child, just like many others, still enjoyed immense personal freedom which today’s kids can only dream of.

Has Pakuska changed?

It is a rhetorical question as everything is changing according to principals of modernity fluctuations. Pakuska is transforming as well which I observe, not with anxiety but for sure with disgust. Firstly, the estate has become “a ghost town”. The young are leaving in search for work and better prospects as those at the estate are bleak. Apart from that, the estate is growing older which manifests itself through adaptation of former creche into offices of Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych (Social Insurance Institution). The Factory is dying. The use of a capital F is justified here, as Olkuska Fabryka Naczyń Emaliowanych (the leading Polish manufacturer of enamel goods) was like “a mother” for inhabitants of Olkusz. You either worked there, or your family members did. You could have used services provided for workers - holidays (at the seaside - Władysławowo or the Masurian Lakes - Dębowa), summer camps for children in Jelitkowo or infrastructure created by it - health centres, swimming pools and the cinema. Now Pakuska - the estate, turned its back to the factory. The estate lives at a different pace.

Apart from that, the esthetics is failing. Filip Springer, author of books on contemporary architecture, calls it “pastelosis”. The phenomenon is, in short, frighteningly consistent redecorating exteriors of blocks and insulating them with expanded polystyrene and then painting them bright, sometimes unmatched colours. Springer blamed the situation on the chairmen’s of estate managements secretaries’ taste as they choose the colours. Of course, the insulating has advantages - lower energy use, but it affects the residents’ taste and instills wrong esthetic concepts in the young generation. One can wonder - which is worse - sitting in an old block, not painted in pink, or in the space so degraded.
“Pakuska” is a book about one estate, quite small and perhaps not different from other similar estates created in Poland in the time of the construction boom of the seventies. But for that very reason, as all of them were the same, it is a book about Poland. Should somebody look for more information about that strange country -PRL and want to get to know everyday life there, I hope that book will help them.

The blocks

The blocks under construction are the best ones. Cause, what can be interesting in an inhabited block? Even if there is, nobody will let us in to browse. An unfinished block is at our disposal. We’re running around undecorated rooms, freshly concreted stairs, we go on balconies still without bannisters or recently tarred roofs. We’re trying to imagine what it’ll be like when the residents have moved in. A home without people is something incomprehensibly empty. Running like that, we often risk our lives, but we’re immortal anyway, so nothing bad can happen to us. From time to time the guard catches us, but he does it somehow not convinced, we’re little which means a small problem to him. In the past every guard had a thick moustache and wore a cap, but this one is hatless. We’re running away, laughing loudly. He refers to us as “brats” and “pups”. He shouts that he’ll kick our asses. We’re not offended. Let him shout.
**The Factory**

My parents and uncles work there. I wonder if I'll be employed there one day. My dad says that if I don't study, I'll land up there one day - at planishing machines. It's strange as dad studied and he still landed up in the factory. True, not at planishing machines, but still. What do they planish anyway and what's so awful about it?

You can't normally enter the plant, there are guards and IDs. Only on the 1st of May, on account of the holiday, the management let our parents take their children to the factory. I don't go to the planishing machines department, but to bath department cause my dad works there. The factory produces pots, sinks and baths. I personally think that baths are the most noble products and I'm happy that my dad is a foreman there. He's respected at his workplace since a big photo of him was carried at the parade. I like the plant, but the parade is boring. You're supposed to walk slowly, mustn't run or be overly cheerful. Is there a reason for joy anyway?

That you have to get up early and slave in dirty halls. The parades aren't for me. The factory is a bit scary. There's a big furnace with red fire blazing. Hell must look like that. The factory is a huge animal which lets us know that it needs us from time to time. It resembles a cow which moos in the field while grazing. The farmer needs to milk her or take her to the barn. Three times a day the sirens hoot, workers walk in like a wide stream and disappear for 8 hours. Looking at the crowds, I get the impression that there are too many workers in proportion to the factory's size. What are they all doing there? Maybe half of them do nothing. It's all so strange to me.

**The girl**

We're in love with the same girl. Actually, I don't like her that much, but a few of my close friend's are in love with her, so I'm sort of pressurised into it. We're standing in front of her entrance: Marek, Adam and I. We're looking longingly at the window on the fourth floor. The light went on, so she's in. Our excitement is growing. We wonder if we're lucky enough and she'll go to the skip with her bin. Of course, she'll pretend that she doesn't see us and we'll pretend that we're standing here purely by chance. What kind of coincidence is it if it happens every day? More like a habit. There's still a chance she'll be sent to the shops by her parents. Then, we'll follow her, a few or a few dozen metres behind, laughing loudly and showing off. We're continually pondering on who she loves more than the others. We've analyzed her gestures and words. Even her accidental glances haven't been overlooked. It led us nowhere as everything indicates that she loves us all the same.

One day, an old dog with eczema turns up. And then - another one. The following day there are three at once. The reason is that the bitch form the third floor is on the heat. The dogs growl at us. We chase them with stones.

But they come back and so do we.

**The central heating**

A sheer early warning system. Thanks to radiators, information flows fast and reaches everybody. Nothing can be hidden. Neighbours' arguments above and below. Every single sound gets into my ears. I hear crying and cursing. Somebody's unhappy. I'm lying on my bed, thinking how it is to be
unhappy. Maybe I am, not knowing about it yet? Perhaps you’ve got to be grown up to be miserable? Are my parents then?

The garages
The garages provide us with the minimum privacy. We’re playing football and suddenly somebody needs to pee. What is he to do? He runs and hides behind them. The older boys meet their girls there. We don’t even look at what they’re doing. You can get your ass kicked for spying. They’re probably kissing or even sticking their willies into the holes girls pee through. The garages are built from bricks, wood, some of them had been parts of refrigerator lorries. Gradually, new ones appear, made of welded radiators. They all look shabby, rusting, with the paint peeling off and plaster coming off, turning into junk. We aren’t bothered. The main thing is - we have somewhere to do our dirty deeds. Somehow, the garages suit the purpose.

Drunkards
They make themselves heard at night, wandering among the blocks as if they were looking for the way out of a dense forest. Completely lost - they laugh, sing, call out the names of the women they love or hate. Sometimes aggressive towards one another. They undo they zips and pee at the wall of the block at exactly the same spot as dogs. Do drunks mark their territory too?

The key
I’m attached to it. The red tape cutting into my neck. At the end - it. The key to my crib, or our flat. I mustn’t lose it or take it off or give it to anybody. Maybe the key is even more important than me. You can tell I’m a child cause adults don’t wear them round their necks. I got used to it and it got used to me. I’ve heard that some keys fit other people’s locks but I don’t know if mine does, as I’ve never tried to unlock other doors with it. I sometimes open a bottle of mineral water though. It’s gold and it’s got “yeti” written on it. I wonder why it’s called like that creature from the Himalayas. I only know one word beginning with a letter y.

A queue
It’s also called “a tail”. The longest one is to the butcher’s. With time, the queues are everywhere. Standing in them is something of a mystery as you don’t know what you’re waiting for. And after you’ve waited, you often don’t get what you’ve expected. Apart form that, a queue is a form of celebrating boredom. I hate queuing. After just a minute, I’m already fed up. Even school seems better! Surprisingly, some “queuers” seem happy as if standing for hours in one place was the meaning of their lives. Will we queue after death too? Probably yes. We’ll be standing in two queues - one to purgatory and the other to hell. The hell queue will be much longer. But there shouldn’t be one to heaven - everybody will be privileged there just like pregnant women, women
carrying infants or like veterans. Cause - if you need to queue to heaven, what kind of heaven is it?

**The neighbours**

It’s the central heating. It carries it all: unidentified noises, voices and whispers. Unselfishly and unwillingly, we participate in our neighbours’ lives: somebody’s beating somebody else, somebody’s drilling holes in the walls with a power drill, somebody’s yelling, installing wooden panels, a baby’s crying, somebody came home drunk, staggering into the furniture, throwing off objects, then swearing. But there’s nothing to be ashamed of. Tomorrow they’ll be in our shoes, listening to us, and looking at the walls, the ceiling and the floor and cursing us, shaking their fists at us. My neighbours are naive people who don’t realize how much I know about them.

**The cleaning lady**

Apparently, a cleaner can rule a country, but ours can’t even clean the staircase properly. Can’t or perhaps doesn’t want to. Our parents get really upset about the unwashed stairs, but they’ve never said a bad word. The residents backbite the cleaning lady, but on seeing her - they smile and say hello. It’s good to be a cleaner. You don’t have to study and then, for the rest of your life, don’t need to overwork either. Such a pity that a man can’t become a cleaning lady, cause if they could, I’d like to be one when I grow up. I wouldn’t do anything and the estate management would pay me for my inefficiency. And my father says that doing nothing doesn’t pay off. He’s blabbing as if he didn’t know our cleaning lady.

**The keys**

Why is it always sunny? It’s got to be rainy sometimes! Meanwhile, the sun’s shining. No, it’s an understatement - not shining, it’s blazing. It usually happens in the second half of June. There’s real shambles in front of the block - a lot of construction equipment and unfinished pavements. But there’s also a desk here with a large notebook on it. Next to the notebook, somebody had arranged some brand new, shiny keys in a row. The man sitting a the desk stands up, puts the glasses on and gets that serious look on his face. At first he’s talking about something boring and incomprehensible to me - about some sort of celebration, some volunteer work and then he calls out the names. The person called out comes up to the desk and is given their key. There is a round of applause and the smiling receiver steps back, making room for another one. I wonder, is it enough just to come up to the desk to get a flat. The block seems so big. There should be enough flats to go round. But not everybody comes up and not everybody’s happy. Some people in the crowd have grim faces and are murmuring under their breath. I don’t think they’re sharing the joy of the receivers. Fortunately, my dad was given the key. When he was back with us, we cuddled - overjoyed. Then we went to see if it the key would fit the lock. When we were leaving, I crossed looks with a woman I didn’t know. I looked down. I don’t think that lady liked me.
back to the sense of the city