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Revising the Politicized Landscape:
Nowa Huta, 1949–1957

USING NEW THEORIES of state-society relations under Communism, this article focuses on changes made to Nowa Huta’s street and settlement names in 1957 as a result of de-Stalinization, and on opinions expressed by town residents in anticipation of these changes in a public opinion survey. These events may be viewed as a dialogue between rulers and ruled, in which toponymy serves as a symbolic medium for the projection of conflicting visions of Poland’s past and future. [Poland, Nowa Huta, place names, new towns, public opinion]

Politicized Landscapes

AN OPEN LETTER to the Nowa Huta District Council,” 1954: Councilors! your task is to attend not only to the administration of this town, but to its atmosphere, its charm, its songs, and its young, growing citizens. You must give them the legend of the city and consciously create its traditions.¹

Not so long ago, Western geographers of Soviet-bloc countries were apt to describe their subject of study as a “politicized landscape” in which toponymy was disproportionately determined by politics. Peppered with the names of Party leaders and revolutionary icons, the maps of Communist countries had to be meticulously revised with every change in inner-sanctum politics and corresponding alterations to geographical names (Bursa 1985:161). This politicized landscape seemed to capture “totalitarianism” in its quintessence: As the German journal Osteuropa wrote as the Cold War waned, “In the over seventy years of the Communist Party’s total rule in the Soviet Union, the intentional renaming of cities and places was one of the means by which an effort was made to fix the legitimizing ideology of CPSU power in people’s heads” (Richter 1992:A178). What better illustration could
there be, after all, of the subordination of all other spheres of life to politics and ideology, if the very space in which ordinary people lived out their lives was defined and dominated by the symbols of power?

"In this place began the great work of erecting Nowa Huta, symbol of the socialist transformation of People's Poland, 1949–1969." All photos by author.

This essay diverges significantly from previous discussions of geographical nomenclature in “totalitarian” societies, both because it draws on original research in newly opened East European archives and because it seeks to illustrate theories of state-society relations under Communism, developed in part as a response to and refutation of totalitarian models. Where the latter assumed a “monolithic, ideological, terroristic party-state...ruling omnipotently over a passive, frozen society of atomized new citizens,” more recently, scholars have sought models for state-society interaction that allow for a more lifelike range of citizen behavior, from collaboration and acceptance of Communist rule to outright opposition and revolt (Cohen 1985:6; see also von Hagen 1997:4–7). Similarly, the nature of state domination has been reconsidered: Without denying the role of terror and coercion, scholars have also tried to understand how regimes sought (and acquired) legitimacy through non-coercive means.

One of the most interesting offshoots of these discussions has been a renewed interest in ideology and symbols. In Vaclav Havel’s formulation, ideology is such an essential ingredient in upholding the power of the Communist system that “everyone who steps out of line [by speaking the truth against ideological falsities] denies it in principle and threatens it in its entirety” (Havel 1985:40). Totalitarian models treat ideology as an implement of rule, positing “a brutal one-way...process in which the party-state ‘imposed its ideology at will’ upon an inert society” (Cohen 1985:24). Alternative models have begun to explore the rather different idea that
ideology furnished the fabric of state-society relations" (Kenney 1999:401). Implicit in some of the most innovative work on the Communist period, then, is a view of state-society interaction as a dialogue—on unequal terms to be sure—in which the "power of symbols" could be effectively mobilized—whether in support of, or in opposition to, power itself (e.g., Kotkin 1994:303).

This essay describes one such "dialogue" surrounding a set of symbols that played an especially important role in the Stalinist era in Poland (1948–56): the place names in the "new town" of Nowa Huta. Alongside Stalinstadt in the GDR, Sztálinváros in Hungary, Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria, and Nová Ostrava in Czechoslovakia, Nowa Huta was arguably the largest and most ambitious new town of postwar Eastern Europe (Aman 1992:183). Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, the image of Poland’s "first socialist city" was a recurrent trope in film, in print media, and in song. Building Nowa Huta became a heroic narrative, synonymous with "building socialism" itself.

When, however, Poland’s hardline Stalinist regime collapsed in 1956, to be replaced by the "national communist" rule of Władysław Gomułka, this preeminent symbol of Stalinist social planning needed a facelift. Following the pattern well established in the Soviet Union, a change of regime at the national level required changes in local nomenclature—for Nowa Huta, of its streets, squares, and districts. What makes this case of name-changing unusual, however, is that it was accompanied by a gesture toward popular participation: In February 1957 an opinion survey was published in the local newspaper asking readers to comment upon current names and upon those they would like to see replace them; responses were carefully collected and passed on to the city administrative body responsible for projecting the new names. It is citizens’ responses to this survey, on the one hand, and the "reply" in the form of the new names ultimately decreed by the administration, on the other, that constitute the "dialogue" to be analyzed. Citizens projected a particular certain vision of the new town through their responses—one that was inevitably highly politicized, given the upheavals of 1956–57, but that spoke broadly to Poland’s distant and recent history and to the aspirations and commitments of its inhabitants. The complex dissonance of this popular vision with official postulates is revealed in the street and settlement names ultimately appearing on the map of Nowa Huta after 1957.

"Social Revolution"

Nowa Huta was Polish Communism’s most intensely sustained effort to mobilize and transform the social body, extreme but typical of the urbanization, industrialization, and "social advancement" that constituted Poland’s postwar "social revolution." Located in southeastern Poland on the outskirts of the city of Kraków, Nowa Huta—or "New
Steelworks”—was conceived as a city by and for the working class, in contrast to “reactionary” Kraków, a city traditionally associated with the intelligentsia and the Church. The enormous Lenin Steelworks, a key element of the Soviet-sponsored Six-Year Plan (1950–55), formed Nowa Huta’s centerpiece. For the workers who would be employed there, planners envisioned a self-sufficient community outfitted with sanitary, modern homes, well-stocked cooperative shops, and a range of cultural institutions designed to uplift residents in their leisure time. Nowa Huta’s inhabitants would be mobilized and transformed by life in the new town; a “new man” would be born to greet the new age.

The story of Nowa Huta was determined by the course of Polish political history after World War II. In 1947–49, those Polish Communists loyal to Moscow succeeded, largely through terror and intimidation, in subduing rival contenders to legitimacy: the Peasant Party, the Socialists, and those within the party, like Władysław Gomułka, who advocated a Communism more independent of Soviet dictates. With the formation of the Polish United Workers’ Party in 1948 and the firm incorporation of Poland into the Soviet orbit through Cominform, the pro-Moscow coup was complete. Its result was “mature Stalinism” in Poland, defined by historian Joseph Rothschild as,

enforced imitation of Soviet political, administrative, and cultural institutions; absolute obedience to Soviet directives and even hints; administrative supervision by Soviet personnel; bureaucratic arbitrariness; police terror uncontrolled even by the local party; economic deprivation while pursuing over ambitious industrial investment programs and undercapitalized agricultural collectivization drives (“lunar economics”); colonial-like foreign-trade dependence on the Soviet Union; isolation from the non-Communist world and to some extent even from other people’s democracies; synthetic Russomania; [and] a mindless cult of Stalin adulation (Rothschild 1993:145).

Rothschild identifies as another characteristic feature of Stalinism “widespread social anomie.” As part of the broader reassessment of state-society relations under Communism, however, scholars have paid particular attention to Stalinist regimes’ “interest in transforming society through mobilization and integration, rather than merely subduing it” (Kenney 1994:1). Such mobilization included, for example, labor competitions (Stakhanovism) of the sort portrayed in Andrzej Wajda’s 1976 film Man of Marble, which is set in Nowa Huta and depicts the rise and fall of an enthusiastic but naive Stakhanovite. The film illustrates the point that Stalinist regimes in East Central Europe required—and achieved—a degree of popular participation, especially in their avowed project of overcoming both the ravages of war and centuries of underdevelopment.

In Poland, moreover, enforcement of conformity to the Soviet model was not carried to the same brutal extreme as it was elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Viewing Poland as his “most important and most difficult client state,”
Stalin, together with the Polish Communists, was wary of sparking armed resistance of the sort mounted during the German occupation (Rothschild 1993:133). So, although Gomulka was arrested in 1951, Poland did not see anything like the ferocity of repression that wracked Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the form of spectacular show trials and bloody anti-Titoist purges; the Church was treated relatively gingerly; and agriculture remained largely uncollectivized.

On the other hand, as the Soviet military’s key supplier, Poland had to shoulder the greatest burden of forced industrialization among countries of the Eastern bloc. In May 1947 a commission of the Polish Central Agency for Metallurgical Industry was called to discuss plans for a nova huta capable of producing more steel than all pre-World War II steelworks in Poland combined: some 1.5 million tons yearly, later raised to 3.5, and then to 5.5 million tons. This new steelworks was conceived as the country’s single most important economic investment and was to be financed largely by the Soviet Union. It was not until June 1949 that Warsaw ordered the building of Poland’s “first socialist city” at the foot of this behemoth. It is symptomatic of the driving importance of production to the Stalinist mindset that the steelworks was to give its name to the town it occupied (it was not until 1954 that the steelworks was officially named in honor of Lenin), and not vice-versa.

Nowa Huta was, moreover, of ideological significance by virtue of its location some ten kilometers from Kraków’s medieval Old Town. Historically, Kraków was the bearer of national tradition as Poland’s medieval capital, seat of the Wawel Castle and Cathedral (where the Polish kings had been crowned), the Jagiellonian University (founded in 1364), and many important Church institutions. During the partitions Kraków fell to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy; thanks to the relative liberality of Habsburg
rule after 1867, the city became the center of Polish artistic and intellectual life. The preeminence of the Krakovian intelligentsia survived World War II, from which Kraków was the only major Polish city to emerge with its infrastructure, institutions, and population—minus, significantly, its Jewish community—intact.

Kraków was also, according to some scholars, more resistant to the imposition of Communist rule, calling forth a "Kraków complex" among rulers in Warsaw. For many Poles it is an article of faith that "political considerations determined the location of this 'Great Building Site of Socialism,' and above all the intention to neutralize 'reactionary Kraków' through a rapid change of its social structure" (Purchla 1996:134). Recent research has shown that Nowa Huta's location was, in fact, dictated by Moscow, although the actual motivations for this decision have not yet been uncovered (Salwiński 1998:12–13). What matters most is that policy- and opinion-makers presented it to the public at the time as, essentially, an act of class warfare against "decadent" Kraków.

Work began on Nowa Huta in 1949, and not surprisingly, the realities of "building socialism" in Nowa Huta fell far short of its propagandized ideal. As a result of the disorganization and delays that plagued construction, many of the site's shock troops (some 15,000 people in 1951) continued to inhabit woefully inadequate temporary housing well into the mid 1950s. Especially problematic was the lack of housing for married couples: Illicit cohabitation in the single-sex hostels, or couples living "wild" in unfinished buildings, was widespread. The lucky ones who secured a place in the new apartment blocks, meanwhile, had to contend initially with flawed construction and overcrowding. Nowa Huta's unpaved streets were buried in mud from spring to late fall; cultural facilities and other services also were slow to develop, and consumer goods in short supply. Only vodka, it seemed, flowed freely.

"The Working Class Is Smelted"

Structures of tutelage and authority adopted from the Soviet model—composed of a range of "social organizations," such as labor unions and youth organizations, supervised by the Party—seemed incapable of establishing firm control over Nowa Huta's masses. The inhabitants were overwhelmingly young men and women from the impoverished villages of the Polish countryside, an unskilled, uneducated—often illiterate—lot, many of whom could barely remember life before the brutal Nazi occupation. Despite the good intentions of many left-leaning intellectuals and youth activists, who were inclined to view Nowa Huta as a civilizing mission, the young people of Nowa Huta turned out to be less interested in offers of free tickets to the theater than in jazz and jitterbugging. Nowa Huta soon gained an exaggerated reputation for social and moral anarchy. (Inspired by
Westerns, residents of Kraków and Nowa Huta alike referred to the most notorious part of town as “Mexico.”) After the “thaw” in political life following Stalin’s death in 1953, therefore, Nowa Huta became an obvious target for critics determined to point out the “mistakes” of previous years, as in one 1955 party memo portraying the worker hostels as dens of prostitution, “hooliganism” and “social pathology” (Jarosz 1996). Exposés by writers posing as advocates for Nowa Huta’s youth accused Party, union and industry officials of bureaucratism and indifference toward their charges. As summed up by poet Adam Ważyk in his “Poem for Adults,” the experiment had been a failure: “In coal smoke and slow torment/the working class is smelted....Much waste and to date only slag.”

The erosion of support for Nowa Huta inside and outside Party circles had consequences on both the local and national levels. Nowa Huta’s administrative annexation to Kraków in 1951 and the down-scaling in 1954 of the city plan—when a projected town hall, house of culture, palace of youth, people’s park, and labor union headquarters were scrapped—seemed to mark the abandonment of original utopian visions. (Ultimately, only the People’s Theater, which became one of the country’s most highly acclaimed avant-garde venues after opening in 1955, would rival cultural, educational, or administrative facilities in Kraków.) In 1955 Ważyk’s “Poem for Adults,” with its controversial depiction of Nowa Huta, provoked a nationwide sensation and a quiet shakedown of Nowa Huta’s party organization (Jarosz 1996). Following the violent suppression in June 1956 in Poznan of protesters demanding “bread and freedom,” pressure began to mount on Warsaw from all sides. Student and worker protests across the country, including a shopfloor revolt at the Lenin Steelworks, reached their peak in September-October 1956. On October 21 Gomułka, who had earlier been
released from prison, was elected First Party Secretary with support from reform-minded Communists. Successfully facing down threats of a Soviet invasion, the new coalition made an exhilarating, if short-lived, show of autonomy, bringing the Stalinist era to a close.

Nowa Huta’s toponymic history from 1949 to 1957 can be divided into several phases. The first of these lasted from 1949 to 1954, a time in which Nowa Huta’s rapid, chaotic, and protean growth was reflected in the absence of any internal geographical names. As one newcomer described arriving in Nowa Huta during this period:

Supposedly a new town, I thought, yet lacking in it the basic things—no street-names, orientation plaques, modern lighting, or coherence among the buildings.... Our very own Nowa Huta! A few houses smeared with plaster and that’s your city.... [Pomorski 1991:259]

In theory, Nowa Huta’s form—meant to echo ideal cities of the Renaissance—was that of a semi-circle, which was divided into four main sectors (“A” through “D”) by avenues radiating outward from a central shopping plaza and transportation hub (Central Square). The sectors were further divided into areas known as “settlements,” urban units designed for 2,000 to 5,000 inhabitants. Each settlement contained primarily three- to six-storey residential buildings, with shops at street level and other functions (e.g. clinics, schools) often located within large inner courtyards whose perimeters were formed by the other buildings. Until 1957, like the streets, settlements in Nowa Huta had no names other than the letter-number combinations assigned by the planners. Individual addresses, meanwhile, were designated by a building’s placement within a settlement, not along a street. Thus, they were a jumble of difficult-to-remember settlement and building numbers (e.g., “Settlement C-31, Building 12”), a subject of much complaint by residents. An effort by district authorities to address the problem in 1953 by painting settlement names and building numbers on the sides of buildings was little help, reported one newspaper: “Unnamed arteries cross unnamed streets, and the only signposts—roman letters and arab numerals in oil paint on the corners of the buildings—don’t dispel the chaos in the least.”

If for practical reasons alone, then, it was a matter of some significance when, in 1954, the first blue-and-white enamel street signs finally made their appearance. That the introduction of Nowa Huta’s first set of street names coincided with the onset of the “thaw” in Polish political and intellectual life makes their hardline Stalinist aesthetic—stressing productivism, militarism, and the Soviet revolutionary heritage—all the more striking. According to the District National Council, Nowa Huta’s local administrative body, the choice of street names was driven by such considerations as a desire to recognize the assistance received from the Soviet Union in building Nowa Huta; the logic dictated by local landmarks (e.g., naming the street near the hospital “Pavlov”); and the seeming propriety of aggregating names having
a “common historical source”: Marx and Engels Streets, for example, intersecting with October Revolution Avenue, and Lenin Avenue with Stalin Place. Thus, workers commuting from Kraków now rode along Avenue of the Six-Year Plan on their way to work, and while travelling to the steelworks from the center of Nowa Huta, they could gaze upon the portraits of individuals who had exceeded their production norms along Model Workers’ Avenue. Nowa Huta’s other major thoroughfares, meanwhile, gave pride of place to Lenin, Polish-Soviet Friendship, and the October Revolution. Lesser streets were named after individual Soviet engineers or writers, Polish martyrs of the left, and various political and military institutions. In this phase, Nowa Huta’s settlements retained their alphanumerical designations.

The People’s Theater

The third phase spans de-Stalinization (1956–57) to the collapse of Communism in 1989. It is still something of a mystery why the decision was made in 1957 to alter Nowa Huta’s street names. While toponymic de-Stalinization was gaining pace in the Soviet bloc—that same year, for example, the Soviet Central Committee decreed that no geographical feature should bear the name of a living person—in the other “socialist cities” of Eastern Europe, such changes seem not to have taken place until 1961, following the Twenty-Second Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, which provided explicit directives for erasing symbols of the “Stalin cult” (Bursa 1985:179; Azaryahu 1986:596). In East Germany’s Stalinstadt, for example, street names were changed in a furtive “Nacht und Nebel” action in November 1961, on the same night that the placards on Berlin’s Stalinallee were quietly removed. Simultaneously, the entire city of Stalinstadt was renamed “Eisenhüttenstadt” (Steelworks Town); likewise, Hungary’s Sztálinváros became “Dunaújváros” (Danube Town).
For us, however, the story begins in February 1957, when the local Nowa Huta paper *Budujemy Socjalizm (We Are Building Socialism)* invited its readers to answer the following four questions:

1. Should Nowa Huta have numeration by street or by settlement?
2. Suggest a few names for Nowa Huta's settlements!
3. Suggest a few names for the streets in our district!
4. Which of the present street names would you like to change?  

Scores of responses are preserved in the archive of Kraków's city administration, along with twenty-four letters from respondents who felt, as one wrote, that "an answer to your survey does not readily confine itself to a short 'yes' or 'no.' " The survey, no doubt a collaborative effort of local Party officials and journalists, is perhaps best understood both as an example of certain typical practices of information gathering by Communist regimes—what Stephen White calls "epistolary democracy" (Lovenduski 1987:308–9)—as well as a response to nationally- and historically-specific factors. The former includes actual letter-writing to leaders and other bodies (newspapers, radio stations, local complaint bureaus), expected to pass citizens' concerns on to the relevant officials (Fitzpatrick 1996); newspaper complaint columns (closely followed by authorities); and so on. In Poland, public-opinion polling per se arrived with a vengeance with the "thaw." Among the first polls appeared in 1955, when the major daily *Zycie Warszawy* surveyed readers on their views of the paper, eliciting some strikingly political criticism; after October 1956, opinion polls proliferated on Poles' views on subjects ranging from sexuality to war. The extent of public interest in opinion surveys was such that, when the newly established Center for Research of Public Opinion sought volunteer pollsters in 1958, it was overwhelmed by applicants. The low level of "don't know" responses and high level of voluntary participation in Polish surveys at this time "seems to suggest that the public considered the polls as [an] opportunity for introducing their views into [the] policy-making process" (Huszczo 1977:43, 75–78).

The fact that so many respondents to the *Budujemy Socjalizm* 1957 survey provided detailed commentary along with their responses allows us to learn how some of them felt about the act of participation itself. "I'm very curious to see what results your survey will have," writes one reader: "I am waiting impatiently and am already imagining going for a walk and not being menaced by signs saying Avenue of the Six-Year Plan." The sense of eagerness and even entitlement to express one's opinions can be striking: "Taking advantage of freedom of speech," writes one respondent, "I decided to take part in the survey so as to project the best names for our streets and settlements together with other residents of our town. I therefore resolutely represent my view based on lively discussion with workers of the mill." Another reader explains that the survey has come "not a moment too soon," since Nowa Huta's street names are a perpetual subject of discussion among its inhabitants, "not infrequently wrecking people's nerves and...taking up a
great deal of time." Significantly, most respondents sign their names. One reader’s comment sums up an apparent majority sentiment of guarded optimism: “It’s clear that the Presidium of the DRN [Dzielnicowa Rada Narodowa, or District National Council] will ultimately decide what streets and squares we’ll have in Nowa Huta. Taking part in the survey, nonetheless, we hope that the DRN...will take the wishes of inhabitants into account.”

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Without ascribing any comprehensive accuracy to the 1957 survey as a reflection of public opinion, the following analysis proceeds from the more limited position that responses are of interest, both individually and collectively, as evidence of their authors’ desire to “introduce their views into the policy-making process.”12 Emphasis will be placed on those that appear most pointedly to engage with a set of imagined interlocutors in discussions over Nowa Huta’s, and Poland’s, past and future—in other words, those aspects of the “dialogue” that resonate with the strongest sense of not being just about street names. Following a discussion of the survey responses, the remainder of the article will address the official “response” and conclude by hypothesizing about what we may be able to learn from this imagined exchange.

While diverse in detail, readers’ responses form a broad consensus on a range of significant issues. Nowhere is the consensus stronger than in answers to Question 4: “Which of the present street names would you like to change?” The answers strike a common note: “Six-Year Plan, Polish-Soviet Friendship, National Front, October Revolution”; “Six-Year Plan, Great Proletariat, Model Workers”; “Marx, Mayakovsky”; “Rutkovsky, and others from names”; “Polish People’s Army...and streets from names.” In other words, responses to Soviet names and those associated with the Soviet model are overwhelmingly negative.
The stated reasons for rejecting such names are less uniform. Several respondents object to street names that are “too long”—as one reader says of the *Aleje Wielkiego Proletariatu* (Avenue of the Great Proletariat), “3 syllables + 3 syllables + 6 syllables = 12 wasted [marne] syllables.” Others openly state that they find Soviet names, specifically, distasteful: “Lenin wasn’t a Pole and doesn’t have anything in common with Poland,” writes one; suggesting renaming Mayakovsky Street for the recently deceased Polish poet Julian Tuwim, another argues, “Let’s honor foreigners, but first and foremost love our own.” One respondent, reporting on the views of his workmates, records the following response from “Worker C”:

What does the works have to do with Lenin? Stalin ordered [Polish First Party Secretary] Beirut to name it after Lenin and that’s what he did. We workers don’t want such a name for the plant says another worker, Worker S. We consider the Soviet Union as among our best friends, but we have a rich enough Polish grammar and no shortage of Polish heroes...

The author, stating that he “is of the same opinion,” adds that he is against such names as “Socialist, Great Proletariat, Furnace....We have enough already of these dull slogans. We must give the town typical names, so that it will become a real city.”

Some respondents appear to object quite explicitly to the “politicized landscape” *per se*. It is “depressing” to find oneself at the corner of Great Proletariat Avenue and National Front Street, writes one:

Certainly such an arrangement of names isn’t to be found in all of Poland, maybe in the whole world. These names are long, heavy, exaggeratedly pompous, officious, and boring.... Absolutely necessary are names of a lesser caliber, so that Nowa Huta will be less serious and more cheerful.... Man does not live by politics alone.

To be sure, a great many of the recommendations appear to be striving for an appearance of “typical” Polish urban toponymy. Thus, national literary heroes, a common fixture of Polish city maps, are extremely popular: Besides Tuwim and K.I. Gałczyński (who, like Tuwim, had died in 1953), readers suggest the great romantic lyricist Adam Mickiewicz, romantic poet and dramatist Juliusz Słowacki, and others. Others, however, appear to embrace the idea that Nowa Huta, because it is not a “typical” town, cannot have typical names: “Nowa Huta, as the youngest district of Kraków, unfortunately cannot have [street] names like Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Tuwim etc. [because such names already exist elsewhere in Kraków], but must diligently select new names.” This author suggests names that diverge significantly from Polish traditions of nomenclature by turning to non-national, even non-European figures: Dante, Gandhi, and [Rabindranath] Tagore. Other respondents favor international figures aligned with the left or “progress”: Bertolt Brecht, Marie Curie-Skłodowska, Louis Pasteur.
It is probably more accurate to characterize the overall impulse as one to contextualize, rather than “normalize,” Nowa Huta through the selection of names rooted in regional and/or national folklore, geography, and history. References to local features—from the names of the villages bulldozed with the encroachment of the new town to those of medieval kings and queens associated with the Kraków/Nowa Huta region—eloquently emphasize a sense of place. Several responses mention Wanda’s Mound, a large tumulus on the outskirts of Nowa Huta. The mound is popularly believed to contain the remains of the legendary Queen Wanda, who drowned herself in the Vistula rather than wed a German prince; according to myth, her body washed ashore at the village of Mogila (“mound”). Another suggestion is to honor seventeenth-century King Jan II Kazimierz, who was supposed to have spent time in Mogila while fighting the Swedes. Similarly, because of the tradition that the revolutionary leader Tadeusz Kościuszko had led his armies through the district, some respondents suggest commemorating this event with a street name.
Memorializing the Recent Past

Respondents are equally interested in using Nowa Huta's place names to memorialize more recent historical events. Such responses provide us with a rare glimpse onto the construction of historical consciousness as respondents give meaning to experiences they themselves have lived through. In particular, responses focus on two moments that in retrospect, we can see as framing the Stalinist period in Poland. The first is 1944, which brought the liberation of Poland from Germany by the Soviet Union but also the mass repression of the Home Army (the underground movement of Poland's government-in-exile in the West) by the NKVD and Polish Communists. Throughout the Stalinist period, the Home Army was branded a criminal organization, and those who themselves or whose family members had fought with it were persecuted. The result, an almost total lack of public discourse about the experiences and sacrifices of a significant segment of Polish society during World War II, was embodied in a paucity of references to the wartime resistance in Nowa Huta's 1954 street names. (An exception was the street named for Communist youth activist Hanka Sawicka, who was killed by the Nazis.)

The events of October 1956, which involved the release of many Home Army soldiers among the more than 100,000 amnestied political prisoners, eased this repression of memory. Survey responses reflect the desire to rehabilitate wartime heroes like government-in-exile premier and armed forces chief General Władysław Sikorski or Polish combatants at the Battle of Monte Cassino. They seek to emphasize Polish unity during the German occupation, in sharp (implicit) contrast to the divisiveness of Stalinist politics. One respondent, after asking rhetorically what the name “Six-Year Plan Avenue” evokes (“maybe the fact that it was not in all cases properly completed”), proposes instead “National Unity” or “Rebirth,” thus recalling Nowa Huta’s alleged importance for the reconstruction of Poland after World War II. Another proposes changing “October Revolution” to “Warsaw Uprising Street,” explaining: “This uprising united all Poles without regard to social position [or] political conviction.” Someone else suggests a settlement named for those who had spent the war in exile (“Repatriantów”), adding that he has in mind “both those from the West and the East.”

Another side of the war years is also recalled. One woman writes:

Nowa Huta is a city of children—We should not forget a wonderful educator, a person who became very fond of children and wrote for them—Janusz Korczak. We should not forget, that as a prisoner of the Warsaw Ghetto he did not take advantage of the opportunity to escape, but stayed with his charges and suffered death alongside them in the gas chambers—I propose that we give one of the most beautiful streets in town, specially loved by children, his name. I would like the Avenue of the Six-Year Plan to be called Janusz Korczak Avenue.
Korczak was the pen name of Henryk Goldszmit, a Polish-Jewish educator and children’s author. In 1942, when the children in the Warsaw ghetto orphanage Korczak headed were selected for transport, Korczak turned down an opportunity to go into hiding. His calm and orderly procession with the children and orphanage staff to *Umschlagplatz*, according to Israel Gutman, “had already become a legend at the height of the *Aktion*” (Gutman 1982:216).

The second key moment, the mirror image of Stalinist triumph in 1944, is the revolt against Stalinism in 1956—including both the “Polish October” returning Gomulka to power and the contrastingly tragic Hungarian Revolution. “We already have our own October,” drily comments one respondent, who proposes that October Revolution Street should be renamed accordingly. While one reader suggests that Party Secretary Boleslaw Bierut, who died in March 1956, be honored, far more propose the creation of a “Gomulka Street.” Solidarity with the Hungarian revolutionaries is expressed in suggestions to rename street or settlements “Hungarian” or “Brothers of the Hungarians.” Others simply propose there be a “Democracy Street.”

Such clearly expressed anti-Stalinist loyalties make it all the more striking that in suggestions of names referring explicitly to the building, inhabitants, and characteristics of Nowa Huta itself, respondents embrace a view that is overwhelmingly positive toward that symbol of the Stalinist order. It is perhaps not surprising that *Budujemy Socjalizm*’s readers should perceive Nowa Huta differently from critics and writers for whom it was largely an abstraction; but it is nonetheless interesting that they should do so in terms that show such an affinity with the official discourse of Stalin-era propaganda. Thus, many responses incorporate in one form or another the concept of youth (Nowa Huta being the “city of youth”) and a brighter future.
(Cheerful, Sunny, Beautiful), which appear to be closely related to the idea of the town's modernity (Modern, Horizon, Atomic, Neon, Sky-High). These, in turn, bear some relation not only to its productive capacities (Steel, Steelworks, Marten), but to its political character (Socialist, Plenary). Such responses come into sharper focus when we note that many respondents also propose to name streets or settlements after those sorts of institutions—schools, hospitals, theaters—that so sharply distinguished life in the new town from that in Polish villages of the 1950s, differences providing opportunities for upward mobility and integration into a broader national culture that had been denied peasants for generations. One has only to think of living conditions in the traditional peasant hut to understand why the apartment buildings of Nowa Huta would seem “sunny” and “cheerful” to their new inhabitants.

Respondents also—again, not surprisingly—emphasize the heroism of Nowa Huta's builders and workers: youth brigade volunteers, miners (“in gratitude for coal for the Lenin Steelworks”), engineers, and architects. Opinion is split over the already existing Model Workers' Avenue; on the whole, it seems, respondents want to honor all workers, not just Stakhanovites, as one contributor’s proposal to substitute “Steelworkers’ Avenue” suggests. Other suggestions include “Women’s Bricklaying Brigades Street,” a reflection of Nowa Huta’s well publicized integration of a higher-than-average number of women workers into formerly all-male trades such as masonry, machine operation, and even metalworking. (One reader stresses that “there should be many streets named after women activists, and not just men.”) Similarly, the government’s campaign to settle Roma (“Gypsy”) families in Nowa Huta and the emergence of a number of Roma “model workers” is deemed worthy of note in suggestions for “Gypsy” or “Working Gypsies’ Street” (the latter revealing the negative stereotype of Roma as idlers or parasites that underlay this “productivization” campaign).

Yet respondents to the questionnaire insist on an authenticity of detail that is utterly foreign to social realist discourse: references to hardships, imperfections, and the unofficial geography of private life make this a counter-hegemonic toponymy. Several readers propose names connected with the omnipresent mud, while others seek to commemorate a popular trysting place with references to “love.” One respondent provides a checklist of tongue-in-cheek suggestions: Flawless (“to wake up the builders”), Funny (“where the most ramshackle buildings are”), Architects’ (“thank you for everything, for better or for worse”), Polish Village (“the whole army of builders from the countryside”), Young Married Couples (often forced to live in single-sex workers' hostels), Love (“running by the Mogilski Woods”), and Mud (“as a souvenir for when the mud is no more”). A feeling of popular ownership is expressed by one reader in the suggestion “Our Street.”

Although not included in the survey questions, a number of readers engage in spontaneous debate over the name Nowa Huta itself. Although some responses express satisfaction with the current name—at least because “we’ve all grown accustomed to it, as it’s [already] been commemorated in
literature, art and song"—there is a striking readiness to see the renaming process carried forward. "While in principle [the name Nowa Huta] isn’t bad," writes one, "if someone fell on a better idea...it wouldn’t hurt to change it." One respondent suggests changing "New Steelworks" to "New Kraków"; in a similar vein, another writes that "to bind our district more closely with Kraków, I propose changing its name to New World or New Town, as a contrast with the oldest district of Kraków, the Old Town." (Of course New World—Nowy Świat—has its precedent in the name of one of Warsaw’s most famous streets and Warsaw has its own New Town, founded in the early fifteenth century.) The effect of such suggestions is to claim Nowa Huta’s rightful place in Polish urban traditions while nonetheless emphasizing Nowa Huta’s “newness.”

What sort of vision of community, identity, and history emerges in responses to the *Budujemy Socjalizm* survey? Fiercely patriotic, respondents rejected the divisive politics and forced silences of the Stalinist regime, rather than socialism per se. They saw Nowa Huta as part of a historical continuum, rooted in a particular landscape and a particular past. They also saw Nowa Huta as a symbol of progress. Their heroes were poets, scientists, patriots, and workers. They felt a sense of entitlement to the city they had built and believed that its toponymy should reflect their lived experience.

In the final project put to the DRN, results of the *Budujemy Socjalizm* survey were officially one factor among many considered. These included recommendations by a “committee of experts,” the findings of various bodies of the Kraków City Council, “results of the [Budujemy Socjalizm] survey, voices from the population and questions raised by delegates.” We know that the survey responses were transmitted to the presidium of the Nowa Huta district administration, while pencilled notes on several letters also seem to indicate an attempt to establish the addresses and where anonymous, the names of writers. This would suggest that someone, at least, was taking the survey seriously.

According to the DRN proposal, the guiding principle was “to take into account [both] toponymic tradition and new elements expressing the new and permanent character of the district resulting from the productive function of the steelworks and other essentially characteristic objects.” In actual fact the new names reflected shifting political priorities following the upheavals of 1956. Entities that had been reorganized and/or renamed, or that had fallen into disrepute, were eliminated, accompanied by a process of partial de-Sovietization. The latter was most pointedly expressed in the transformation of Polish-Soviet Friendship Street into Friendship Street, but the Polish People’s Army (under de facto Soviet control through the command, from 1949 to 1956, of Red Army hero Konstanty Rokossowski) also saw its street renamed—for the writer Andrzej Strug (the pen-name of Stefan Galecki), a socialist and perhaps not coincidentally, a pacifist. Just as the grueling, top-heavy Six-Year Plan had been replaced by a Five-Year Plan (1956–60) laying more emphasis on consumer goods, services, and construction, its name on Nowa Huta’s central spoke was replaced by the pleasant-sounding
“Avenue of Roses” (although a stretch of the road from Kraków to Central Square now took over the burden). National Front Street, named originally for the body that drafted single-candidate lists for national elections, became Unity Street after the organization was renamed Front of National Unity in 1956. And so it went.

If, on the whole, streets retained “politicized” names, the new settlement names were contrastingly apolitical. Although the four settlements abutting Central Square retained their alphabetical designations (Center A, B, C, and D), remaining ones were given abstractly descriptive names (Charming, Sunny, Green, Escarpment, Youth) or identified with local institutions (Theatrical, Scholastic, Cooperative, Shopping, Sporty), areas of production (Metallurgical, Steel), or regional folk culture (Krakovians and Highlanders).

Conclusions

What can we learn, then, from this “dialogue” between rulers and ruled in one symbolically important corner of Communist Poland? On the one hand, Adaline Huszczo’s assessment seems apt: Poles’ enthusiastic response to public-opinion polling in the era of de-Stalinization indicates that they were very likely “overoptimistic about where the borders of permissible deviation from Soviet orthodoxy would fall” (Huszczo 1977:78). Nowa Huta’s new street names accurately communicated the regime’s continued entrenchment in the Soviet camp; indeed, the names eloquently circumscribed the limits of change. Although the center of gravity had shifted slightly away from Soviet toward national referents, the great pantheon of Soviet iconography—Marx, Engels, October Revolution, Red Army, and, of course, Lenin—remained in place. And the new ensemble of names kept silent over Poland’s recent past.

With hindsight, this absence of change seems to speak even more strongly than change itself. In 1957 and 1958, Gomułka began to crack down on the reformist impulses unleashed in 1956, initiating the “post-totalitarian” phase of Polish Communism. “Post-totalitarianism,” with its appeal to traditional national values, downplayed the Stalinist “social revolution” and its concomitant emancipatory rhetoric. In Nowa Huta this was signaled by the elimination of names associated with the mobilization of labor, such as Model Workers’ Avenue and Steelworkers’ Street. Significantly, the former—once the most important thoroughfare in Nowa Huta—was renamed Lenin Avenue. The vision of popular sovereignty expressed in survey responses was, therefore, even more conspicuously absent from Nowa Huta’s refashioned landscape than it had been before.

Further insight into the nature of Poland’s post-totalitarian regime is provided by the contrast between Nowa Huta’s street and settlement names after 1957. In orthodox Soviet planning theory, streets were meant to serve
as conduits for political demonstrations (Gut 1991:21–22), which perhaps explains their highly “politicized” quality here. Yet the banality of settlement names is what makes Nowa Huta’s post-1957 landscape distinctively post-totalitarian. Scholars have argued that Polish life after Stalinism was characterized by a sharp separation of the “political” and “social” spheres: The regime retreated from intervention in the social (or “private”) sphere so long as citizens kept out of the political arena (Ost 1996:36; Kenney 1999:401). Likewise, one could say that the realm of daily life in Nowa Huta (settlements) was symbolically circumscribed, but not penetrated, by the avenues of politics (streets).

Padraic Kenney has argued that the Polish Communists faced their most serious challenges when citizens threatened to de-stabilize this segregation of the political and the social (Kenney 1999:402). It therefore seems appropriate, as well as ironic, that decades later, it was in part the spatial organization of Nowa Huta that helped Solidarity to gain such a strong base there. Unlike the medieval streets of Kraków, the wide avenues of the new town provided plenty of open space suitable for marches and demonstrations. Thus, protestors in Nowa Huta were joined by thousands of Krakovians in the demonstrations of the 1980s. Nowa Huta’s geography also meant that whereas protestors in Kraków could easily be surrounded and cut off by the militia, the settlements in Nowa Huta were permeable to pedestrians but not
to tanks. Demonstrators therefore could disperse throughout the settlements when charged by the militia, disappearing into the sheltering honeycomb of apartment buildings. In this way the weaknesses of the “social contract,” posited on separate political and social spheres (Ost 1996:36), were rendered concrete.

With the fall of Communism in 1989, it was inevitable that Nowa Huta’s toponymy would undergo yet another transformation. Now, Nowa Huta’s three largest thoroughfares symbolize three towering icons of Polish postwar history: World War II Polish Army commander Władysław Anders (formerly October Revolution Avenue); John Paul II (formerly Avenue of the Six Year Plan); and Solidarity (formerly Lenin Avenue). The names evoke national traditions of armed resistance, Catholicism, labor struggle, and popular anti-Communism, while the latter two also carry particular associations with Nowa Huta. Nowa Huta’s image in the eyes of most Poles was transformed by the interrelated histories of inhabitants’ long struggle for a church—championed by the Pope in his symbolic 1979 visit to the medieval monastery of Mogiła—and the spectacular shows of popular support for Solidarity there in the 1980s. The renamings, therefore, define an identity for Nowa Huta far removed from its Stalinist past.

The names of Nowa Huta’s settlements remain unchanged, apart from those newly added (“By Arka,” i.e. the settlement where the Noah’s-Ark-looking church was finally built). The Lenin Steelworks has, of course, been renamed—for the emigre engineer and inventor Tadeusz Sędzimir. Other “great men” have been memorialized: Edward Rydz-Śmigły, chief of the Polish Army in 1939; Mieczysław Boruta-Spiechowicz, leader of Kraków-area forces during the German invasion; Stanisław Mierzwia, interwar organizer of the rural youth association “Wici” and Communist prisoner after 1945; Antoni Zachemski, a poet and publicist who championed the folk culture of the mountainous Podhale region and died in Auschwitz; and Melchior Wańkowicz, a writer known for his reports on the Battle of Monte Cassino.

Apart from the impressive Solidarity Avenue, there is little in Nowa Huta’s toponymy today that touches on the experiences of ordinary men and women, let alone that evokes the former “socialist city’s” unique origins. There is no trace either of the chaos and toil, or of the enthusiasm and hope, that characterized the decade in which Nowa Huta came into being, although these years are remembered vividly by many of the town’s older inhabitants. In contrast to the highly contested renaming of streets in newly unified Berlin, the renaming of streets in Nowa Huta has involved little in the way public controversy (Azaryahu 1986; De Soto 1996). Does the advent of liberal democracy, so long deferred, bring with it the end of the politicized landscape in Nowa Huta?
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Notes

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1 Originally appeared in Przekrój (8/8/54) as “List do Dzielnicywej Rady Narodowej w Nowej Hucie”; clipping from Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie, PDRN-NH 9 (syg. tymczasowa), no page.
2 The quoted phrase is Zbigniew Brzeziński’s.
3 The formulation is derived from the title of Jan Kubik’s book on Solidarity (Kubik 1994).
4 Archiwum Urzędu Miasta Kraków-Delegatura Nowa Huta, PDRN Nowa Huta, Wydział Organizacyjno-Prawny 185/78, no page.
6 Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie, DRN 45 (syg. tymczasowa), no page. Clipping from Echo Krakowa.
7 Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie, PDRN-NH 9 (syg. tymczasowa), no page.
8 Timothy Dowling, personal communication (12/22/98).
9 Question 1 refers to the issue of whether building numbers should be designated by their position within a settlement (as foreseen in the original design) or along a street. However, given the logic of Nowa Huta’s spatial layout, the issue was non-controversial, with most readers opting for numeration by settlement.
10 Huszczo believes that this poll was “perhaps the very first” in the Soviet bloc, but in fact, an earlier opinion survey had already been published the previous year in Budujemy Socjalizm. The 1954 questionnaire surveyed Nowa Huta residents for their opinions on their apartments and on the architecture and urban design of the district. Budujemy Socjalizm (23 Feb. 1954), p. 2.
11This and subsequent citations, unless otherwise credited, are to be found in Archiwum Urzędu Miasta Kraków-Delegatura Nowa Huta, PDRN Nowa Huta, Wydział Organizacyjno-Prawny 185/78, no page.
12 Some scholars reject all public opinion polls performed in Communist countries, citing a range of serious methodological issues compromising their results (Henn 1998:236–7). I do not claim that the results of the present survey are the result of a methodologically sound opinion-gathering procedure or that they reflect a scientifically defensible conception of “public opinion.” Those who responded to the Budujemy Socjalizm survey were a self-selected group, probably (judging from handwriting, spelling, and grammar) better educated than the average resident of Nowa Huta and in other respects not demographically representative. Moreover, there is no way of knowing whether the responses located in the archive represent the entire results of the survey or just a selection. It should be noted, however, that these are similar problems to those posed by analogous archival primary sources such as the letters studied by Sheila Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick 1996).
13 Dorota Gut, personal communication (2/25/98).
14 One notable exception is the small street called Defenders of the Cross, which memorializes the spot where local women engaged in violent confrontation with the
militia in 1960 while protesting the removal of a makeshift cross. The cross had been planted by residents on the spot where Gomułka—who later recanted—promised a delegation from Nowa Huta in 1956 that a church would be built.

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