THE FASHION SYSTEM

Clothes in strategies of violence
and survival tactics in the Łódź Ghetto

Source: The State Archive in Lodz

Rewelacyjna

wystawa mody

„Wystawa świetnie
ilustruje naszą pracę"

(Mowa w rocznicę wytwórni sukien i bielizny.)

17-I-1942 r.

Henryk Ross, *Ghetto resident being deported to the Chelmno death camp*, 1940-1944. Art Gallery of Ontario. Gift from Archive of Modern Conflict, 2007. © Art Gallery of Ontario. 2007/2063

"What is decided on, imposed, finally appears as necessary... For this to take place, it is enough to keep the Fashion decision secret; who will make it obligatory that this summer's dresses be made of raw silk?"
"There is, however, one point at which the Woman of Fashion differs in a decisive manner from the models of mass culture: she has no knowledge of evil, to any degree whatsoever."

Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*

Photo: Walter Genewein, collection of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt

Karolina Sulej
Paweł Michna

The Łódź ghetto was created in February 1940. Initially, the decision was generally accepted with relief—by then, the Jewish population had for months endured antisemitic attacks and robbery in the streets of their city. The armband with the Star of David, and later the patch sewn directly onto the outer side of an outfit, was a stigmatising marker of being subjected to extremely cruel Nazi violence.

The Litzmannstadt ghetto, as it was called, was set up in an area spanning part of the Bałuty district and the Old Town. More than 160 thousand people were crammed into an expanse of a little over 4 square kilometres. As the head of the Jewish Council of Elders, the Nazi appointed Chaim Mordechai Rumkowski, while the German overseer of the ghetto was Hans Biebow, a trader from Bremen. Biebow's philosophy was centred on a calculated profit-oriented approach. The ghetto thus became a gigantic forced labour camp, as Biebow hoped to create a new centre of industry for the Reich. Specifically, it was to be a textile and clothing production centre—forced labour in the ghetto pertained mostly to the fashion industry and textile supply. The apparel produced included not only military uniforms but also retail clothing for German citizens. Made in the ghetto were dresses, coats, swimwear and undergarments, as well as accessories like hats, handbags, shoes, leathergoods and haberdashery, often of the high-end variety.

In the eyes of Rumkowski, effective and high-quality forced labour was synonymous with a chance of survival for the Jews: as long as the ghetto operated efficiently its residents lived safely—that was the logic underpinning his decisions and policies. Working in the ghetto were people who had been Łódź's tailors, purse makers and cobblers—masters of their respective trades. Artists and graphic designers harnessed their creative powers so as to present the ghetto's output in the most attractive light possible. Produced were albums showcasing the efforts of the workers, meant to evidence just how useful the ghetto's specialists were, while exhibits of items produced were touted to the Nazi officials like displays in the finest department store. Lookbooks and fashion catalogues were published. The promotional narrative was devised with the use of modern, avant-garde-inspired stylistics in part to create a brand for the ghetto. Producing goods well and efficiently, and knowing how to present them as such, was to ensure the continued existence of the restricted Łódź

district. While that objective ultimately proved unachievable, the strategy did result in the Łódź ghetto operating longer than any other ghetto created by the Nazis.

All the while, the Jews imprisoned there suffered the extreme exhaustion, hunger, agony and violence that went along with the ghetto's totalitarian production system. The Nazi fashion machine was driven by slave labour performed under constant fear of death. Property seized from the Jews became raw material for the production of goods for the Reich, resulting in a heinous recycling model. Luxury and beauty were manufactured by people sentenced to misery, cold, hunger and illness. The theatre of fashion concealed a backstage of violence. Backbreaking toil was covered up by a patina of gold. In the streets, in gateways, in the corners of homes, and on piles of soiled blankets and sheets, people draped in rags died of hunger and exhaustion. As much as the Łódź ghetto was in and of itself a part of the "final solution" process, it was also a staging post en route to the end of the line—the extermination camp.

Individual survival tactics sometimes stood in conflict with the Jewish administration's strategy for the survival of the entire district. There were instances of open revolt to the policies imposed, like acts of sabotage and strikes, but some also chose to pursue alternative, individual methods for survival—often having to do with image, commodities or everyday routines. There was garment slavery, but there was also a garment partisan underground.

The exhibition outlines the concept of the ghetto's emergence as a productive "hub." It follows the entire production process, from the raw material to the presentation of the products and their "branding." The story of the ghetto unfolds over a series of stations/spaces arranged to reflect the garment lifecycle: from design to material decay. It tells of the fate of those who were swallowed up by the machine, rebelled against it, and wove their own stories as they wove the clothes on their bodies.

Shown in the exhibition are albums of wares from the ghetto workshops, items that remain from "there and then," and photographs by Henryk Ross, Walter Genewein, Mendel Grossman and others.

The historical part of the exhibition is supplemented with commentary from contemporary visual artists. Their works, displayed amidst the objects from "there and then", bring the story of the ghetto into dialogue with the present. Practices of stigmatisation, exploitation, isolation, plunder, objectification and forced labour —these are mechanisms of violence still in use in today's fashion and political systems. All forms of violence, even those impeccably concealed beneath a golden layer of appearances, ultimately lead towards death.

Jehuda Lubiński
Dziennik

Tuesday, 17 June 1941. Firstly, I must explain why I've been writing so seldom lately. My only excuse is that I've been working, and long hours every day. Admittedly, in recent days, my work has not changed. Today, for instance, I got back a bit after 8 because we had estimate committees for wool and silk products. I got a ration today like each of the nearly 80 clerks in my office: 50 g of bread with spinach for 30 pfennigs, which was even quite good. Yesterday, I ordered a birthday gift for Frania. The gift will be a souvenir ghetto ring with an inscription reading "Ghetto [!] 1941". Today, for the first time in my life, I brough my dad a summer hat that I paid for with money I earned myself. I was more pleased with my deed than my dear dad was with his hat.

Photo: Walter Genewein, collection of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt

Paweł Michna

In late 1941, the Łódź ghetto was the largest garment production centre in the Third Reich and probably all of Europe. The idea to set up efficiently running production facilities in the sealed-off district of Łódź was the brainchild of Chaim Mordechai Rumkowski, who had been appointed head of the Jewish Council of Elders by the Germans. Professing "our only way is work," Rumkowski believed that the ghetto could ensure its survival by assuming a prominent role in the German economy. Initially convinced that the ghetto was merely a temporary solution, the Nazi officials tended to dismiss Rumkowski's idea. The situation changed with the arrival of the Bremen-based trader Hans Biebow to Łódź, which had in the meantime been renamed Litzmannstadt, to serve as the head of the ghetto's civilian administration, the Ghetto Council. Though his motivations were entirely different from Rumkowski's, Biebow also wanted to develop the sealed-off district's industrial capacity. He saw an opportunity for personal gain in harnessing the ghetto's economic potential and exploiting its residents, as well as a way to keep himself from being sent to the front. In the ghetto, inhabited by many people who had worked in the textile industry prior to the war, this branch of manufacturing naturally flourished.

For a long time, it was maintained, including by Biebow himself, that ninety percent of the orders filled by the ghetto's increasingly numerous workshops were for the military. The German bureaucrat and war criminal stressed this number to his superiors in order to demonstrate the ghetto's importance in the Reich's war efforts. Work for the Wehrmacht was critical to prolonging the ghetto's existence as military officials are believed to have opposed the SS's takeover of the ghetto and its transformation into a concentration camp. At the same time, the clerks of the Ghetto Council actively landed ever more lucrative orders from the civilian market, and not only from within the city of Łódź but also from German businesses across the Reich. By 1942, the sales of ready-to-use goods to the armed forces and private firms had nearly evened out. For private companies, it was not only the low cost of forced labour in the ghetto that was attractive. Imposed throughout the Reich were restrictions on the production of civilian goods and factories' operations faced severe complications due to the mass deployment of their workforces to the front. These factors, however, had no impact on the work of the ghetto. And so, Jewish seamstresses made not only military uniforms but also things like dresses, blouses, skirts, corsets and bras, for clients among whom were some well-known and still-existing brands like Triumph, Felina or the

then mail-order supplier Neckermann. Orders for the Jewish district to fulfil were secured by the German staff of the Ghetto Council, who ran advertisements in the German press, but also by the ghetto's Jewish administration, who had a range of strategies for convincing representatives of German companies to place orders with the factories behind the barbed wire.

A major element in these efforts were industrial exhibitions organised inside the ghetto and visual materials like albums and posters, reproductions of which are presented in our exhibition. Put in charge of designing such promotional tools were artists confined to the ghetto, who worked in a unit of the Jewish administration specially created for the purpose in 1940, known as the Graphic Design Bureau of the Department of Statistics. Initially, the bureau processed data on matters related to sanitation and epidemiology for the Germans. Yet, when a student of Władysław Strzemiński's named Pinchas Szwarc joined the bureau, followed by other artists, graphic designers and photographers, they began to produce commemorative and promotional materials in a modern, Constructivist-influenced style. Photomontages and graphic interpretations of data on album pages and picture boards conveyed an idealised image of the ghetto, its administration and production, and of the social, health and educations systems in place.

These materials had several functions. They were produced partly with the future in mind, for people who would study the ghetto at a hypothetical time after the war. This was because, as one of the bureau's artists, Sara Fajtlowicz, stated in her postwar testimony, "Rumkowski wanted history to know that he was our guardian and father." They were also made for contemporary viewers. Though most of the albums were unofficially dedicated to Rumkowski, their target audience was also the Germans. The messages in the albums and picture boards were constructed around modern discourses, with two major narrative threads being concern for health and hygiene and efficiency and quality of production. It was no accident that they formed a counter-narrative to the negative stereotypes which underpinned the Nazis' antisemitic propaganda, which depicted people of Jewish origin as carriers of disease and social parasites. Showcasing the healthy functioning of the factories, the ghetto and the population was to convince the Nazis that the ghetto could handle large production orders and that it was rational to keep its existence going. As production became increasingly important to the ghetto's continued existence, an ever greater number of albums and picture boards were put out, showing the professional and efficient operation of the ghetto's individual *resorts* and flaunting—in catalogue form—the various goods produced therein. The message became increasingly persuasive thanks to tactics borrowed directly from the world of advertising. The modern aesthetic and

Constructivist-like style also permeated the industrial exhibitions organised in the ghetto, presented in which was a cross-section of the goods produced in the individual *resorts*, as the ghetto's factories were called, or by entire branches of industry. The largest textile goods showcase opened in April 1944 inside a building at 32 Łagiewnicka Street and was captured in a series of photographs taken by Walter Genewin, which are also shown in our exhibition.

The use of geometry and photomontage was laden with meaning before the war, suggesting the modern aspirations of those who employed them. The style was also popular in industrial design, in Nazi Germany as well. For that reason, the choice to use this style, paired with iconographic motifs connected with industrial design, in creating a vision of the ghetto's activity—accentuating the rationality and efficiency of the work performed—was a natural one. The use of photographs, photomontage and visualisations of statistical data in the form of graphs and pictograms not only exuded modernity but also, on account of the perception of these vehicles as objective means of describing reality, was to reassure the viewer about the authenticity of the vision being presented, while also masking its selectivity. The image of the ghetto built conscientiously with the use of modern graphic design means over the course of nearly four years could be interpreted as a unique type of branding strategy adopted for the ghetto.

This image—promoting forced labour and casting a positive light on the exploitation of people whose majority perished in the Holocaust, with faceless Jewish models pushing garments produced for sale on the German market, all of it framed in a Constructivist design package with the use of photomontage—can evoke a sense of unease and dissonance in people looking at it today. The vision of the sealed-off Łódź district constructed in these materials seems to violate "Holocaust decorum"—a set of aesthetic and ethical rules of representation, defined after the war, based on taboos and on the incompatibility of certain subjects with the Holocaust. Yet, in this propagandic picture of the Łódź district and its textile production industry created with the use of modern design techniques, we see a tool for the realisation of a strategy: survival through work. Though the strategy ultimately failed to save the ghetto from liquidation, the visual policy put into practice serves as an example of victims taking agency in an attempt to save themselves by any means possible.

Krzysztof Gil

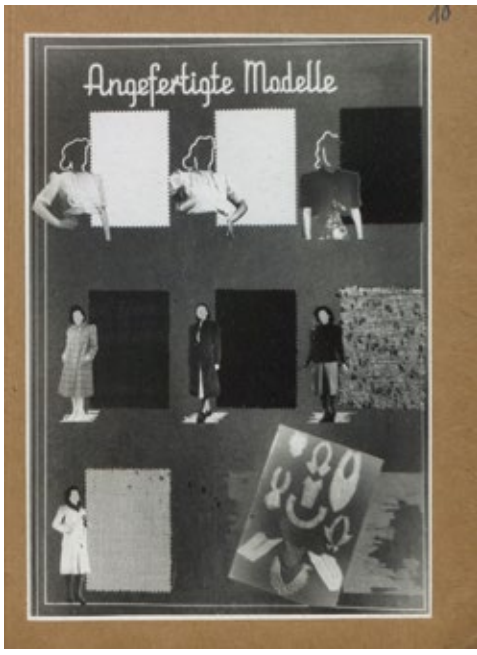
Portrait of a 'Gypsy' woman with a death card


Es wurden angefertigt
für R.A.D. 1940/42 MAI
13090 Rad-Blusen
5625 Tuchröcke
5625 Tuchjacken
5625 Tuchmäntel
4000 Arbeitskleider
Es wurden instandgesetzt
73840 Drillichhosen
65650 Feldblusen
57000 Tuchhosen
52900 Mäntel
44600 Drillichröcke
4810 Mäntel, Kleidungsstücke etc. für Kriegsgefangene
3350 Bekleidungsstücke


Schneider-Werkstätten
vom 1. Mai 1940/1. Mai 1942
wurden hergestellt:
372 277
Bekleidungsstücke


49
„Nie odstąpię od dewizy:
Dobro ogólne a nie ambicje i wygoda jednostek."
Mowa z 15. XI. 1941 r.


1 Mai 1940 - 1 Mai 1942
wurden
43836
Paar Strümpfe
angefertigt
Handschuh- und Strumpf-Abteilung



Source: The State Archive in Lodz

Alice de Buton, A Brief Cross-Section of the Ghetto

The ghetto works. That's right, the "Jewish district" or "Jews' residential quarter" (as it is officially known) works. It works for mighty Germany. This ghetto is like an industrial city; it cannot be ignored. All branches of industry have their equivalent here.
All of these things are formed and finished by Jewish hands, Jewish fingers that had essentially never been used to handling or swinging tools, or, more precisely speaking, had never been allowed to do anything. (…) For their work they receive food stuffs; work is a condition for staying alive; it applies to everyone, without exception, from ten-year-old children all the way to the elderly.

Photo: Walter Genewein, collection of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt

Karolina Sulej

Personal items and clothes tell a story of our agency and identity. They are a paradoxical bodily boundary, a deeply intimate but at the same time overtly visible story about a person, exposed to glances, remarks and blows. Fashion, or the Latin *modus*, denotes the way we dress and the kinds of clothes we wear. A free person has the right to create their own image as they wish, to manifest who they are. A person oppressed or ostracised must wear what they are told or be satisfied with the cast-offs of others. They are stripped of the right to have an identity and to decide how they wish to be perceived. Situations of cultural crisis or catastrophe—like war or economic breakdown—robustly demonstrate what clothing means to us. Times such as these expose its cultural power, which in periods of plenty lies concealed by its ubiquity and mundanity.

The fashion industry organises the "wearing of clothes" into an economic and cultural system. Fashion itself, however, is the everyday practice of living in clothes, experiencing them, assigning symbolic meanings to and analysing them, embroiling them in our sensory, psychological and sociological relationships. In extreme situations, clothes can protect, lift up, inspire and save lives, but they can also inflict pain, stigmatise, humiliate and even kill.

The Łódź ghetto was an extreme situation, an extraordinary state, of which clothing was a part on multiple levels, both in terms of contexts and systems: of violence, labour, productivity, visibility and resource management. It was also a part of individual experience, much of it entailing rebellion and stealthy tactics of survival within the system.

In his book *Images in Spite of All,* Georges Didi-Huberman writes that it is most honest to practice history in which the focus lies on relating the "then and there" as if it were the "here and now," or on a kind of sensory transportation to the moment that a person of interest would have found themselves in. In such a perspective, clothing is immensely significant. The story of things is a story of their owner, of a human being.

In 1944 and 1945, Regina Wygodska wore a colourful patchwork sweater in the Ludwigsdorf concentration camp. It was given to her by the German man she worked for, who felt sorry for her working outside in the cold. He had taken the sweater from a storehouse of things seized from the prisoners. Regina was

wearing it on the day she was set free, and several months later, when she got married. Mrs Dawidowicz, the wife of the official who married the couple, went pale and burst into tears the moment she saw them. When asked by Regina what the matter was, all she could muster was that she recognised the sweater, which had been made by her mother in the Łódź ghetto out of scraps of wool yarn left over from other sweaters. Today, this sweater of leftovers resides in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC as testimony to the perseverance and resilience of the people of the Łódź ghetto.

Garment-bound traces of everyday life in the ghetto also inhabit the accounts of survivors. Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto, August 1941: "Men's collars accepted for taking-in, 13 Lutomierska St, at the barbershop. A timely advert, and a widespread consequence of the fact that collars are getting a size or two too big. Ladies with sumptuous curves that no Mareinbad or Morshyn could tame now have svelte girlish figures. Weight loss to the tune of 20, 30 or even more kilograms is common. Certain ailments (stomach or liver problems, heartburn, etc.) are a thing of the past. Concerning, however, is the fact that for many, their weight loss has exceeded healthy limits, causing muscle loss."

Masked with humour and a light-hearted tone befitting a fashion magazine, the terror of the ghetto lurks in this excerpt from the chronicle. The levity so often at play in discussions on fashion here serves to take the mind off of the ghetto's fearsome reality. As Roland Barthes writes in *The Fashion System*, the language of fashion is a motherly language whose aim is to assure us that we live in a happy world where nothing can harm us. The ghetto's fashion system aims only to fill the hearts of its inhabitants with a false sense of comfort; its purpose is to conceal the subjugation, exploitation and violence, and to defer the inevitable – annihilation. Robbed of their assets, which became the property of the Reich, and of their precious, sentimental possessions, which lost their biographies, the workers of the ghetto work like machines to make new goods for their oppressors; goods that will forever keep hidden the story of their creation. Dehumanised things, objectified people – this is the fashion system of the ghetto.

The journalist and Warsaw ghetto chronicler Rachel Auerbach writes in her *Lament rzeczy martwych* [Lament of Lifeless Things] about the unbreakable bond between humans and the things they possess. It is a bond so close that the thing becomes part of the person. Death inflicted on the thing means the death of identity. The fate of Jewish property runs parallel to the fate of its owners.

"The death, extermination, demolition of personhood is also the extermination and demolition of things. In the picture of the Holocaust of the Jews, the holocaust of things holds a prominent place. The tragedy and disregard for things was equal to the tragedy and disregard for humans, as well as a perfect reflection of and metaphor for that disregard."

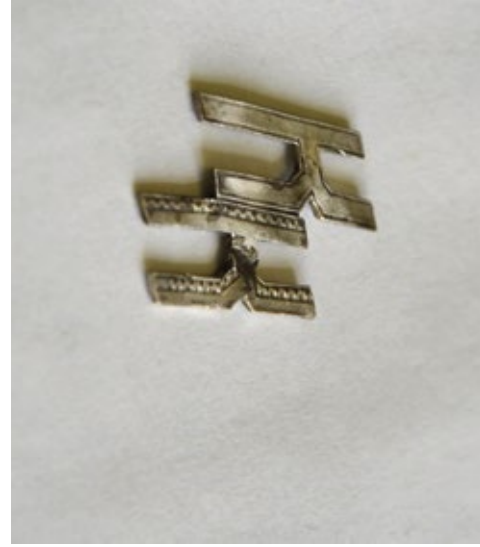
Rachel Auerbach's words resound particularly heavily when we narrow down the assortment of "things" to an assortment of "clothes and accessories." The clothes went down the same road as their owners: from internment in the ghetto all the way to the camp, where they were tossed into heaps just like human bodies were. Auerbach writes in 1940: "These things leave behind tears, and they leave behind their rage." With this, the common fashion phrase "all the rage" takes on a new and sinister meaning. War has its own fashion, its own "collection," its own "latest rage."

But in the face of the catastrophe of war, the fashion system as a part of culture also falls apart, crumbles and tears. To stay with Auerbach's metaphor, it screams with rage and pain. The screams of things are as horrific as the human kind. Forgotten and abandoned things lie scattered in the streets like corpses. Their degradation is the measure of the degradation of people. Auerbach accentuates the parallels with her frequent use of anthropomorphisms. She describes a ghetto garbage dump in 1942 as follows:
"Having crawled out from hiding, in front of the eyes of men lies a pair of panties stained with menstrual blood which some girl forgot to launder before heading off to Treblinka, and on the other side of the pile the last standing of the tenants encounter an old pigswill-stinking sweater that once belonged to the cobbler's widow, which is bosom buddies with an eye-catching but sad ski jacket missing a sleave left behind by the once well-to-do sister of the building owner."
And further: "Off to the side, all in ruddy blushes, shy and accustomed to loneliness, lies the mother's embroidered linen dowry petticoat while somebody's grandfather's Saturday-best blue velvet busby ornamented with a sable tail rolls tragicomically in a lidless wicker box. Guarded with love and respect against moths and the passage of time by a couple of generations, revered family fetishes suddenly awakened in the full light of the present, stripped of their protective cases."

For Auerbach, these rags—the remains of what had once been garments—are tantamount to carrion, refuse… equivalents of death itself. The fates of the Jews and their things are bound together with a cruel poetry. "Rags and refuse, carrion and death" side by side, increasingly countless and incapacitating. But in the pile, a piece of someone's life glints softly, a shred of beauty shimmers.

Such are the things that remain after the Jews murdered in Chełmno on the Ner River – a butterfly button, a brooch in the shape of a rose, a bead, a button. Minor traces, frozen punctuation marks in some person's rich biography. We grasp at them with our gaze to conjure at least an outline of the person, their silhouette, their tastes; the imagination serves up images, shapes. It is like in the work of the artist Paulina Buźniak, in which kerchiefs wrapped around invisible heads in an invisible crowd invite the past back into the present; in the only spiritual séance, the invocation of empathy.

Paulina Buźniak
My handkerchief



Artefacts from the former territory of Kulmhof extermination camp (a.k.a. Chełmno extermination camp). Currently part of the collection of the Martyrological Museum in Żabikowo. Coin belongs to the collection of the Museum of the History of Polsh Jews POLIN

Józef Zelkowicz
Notes from the Łódź Ghetto

Women in the ghetto go to work in a "that'll do" state, because who in the ghetto thinks about how they look? Meanwhile, the mother of "Pucia" or "Pupia" went to work looking proper – in a coat, a nice hair-do, a purse in one hand, and a bag with her soup pot in the other. "The Gdańsk madame" they called her in the streets. She carried herself in an elegant, "big city" kind of way. Her hair always done and her purse under her arm, she spoke softly, almost inaudibly. Her German was not good, but she spoke it. She was a "Gdańsk madame" through and through.

Photo: Walter Genewein, collection of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt

Joanna Podolska

THE GHETTO'S GOLDEN CURRENCY

"The ghetto is developing faster and faster. A host of new workshops and factories are opening, which with the already existing ones create a real Jewish Industrial Area, as we jokingly call it," wrote the adolescent diary writer Dawid Sierakowiak in August 1941. When he wrote these words, it had already been a year and a half since the Germans created a separate district for Jews in the north part of Łódź. They put Chaim Rumkowski in charge of the ghetto, giving him the title of head of the Jewish Council of Elders. It was Rumkowski who in April 1940 had sent a letter to the German mayor of Łódź informing him that the ghetto was full of specialists of various trades, many of whom the Germans were in need of. That letter must have been convincing enough—and the potential profit from Jewish forced labour attractive enough—for Rumkowski to be given approval to begin registering all of the ghetto's specialist tradespeople. Registered first were the tailors and undergarment makers, followed by the cobblers, shoemakers, hatters, milliners, carpenters and locksmiths. The numbers were impressive: in the course of a mere few days, no less than 14,850 tailors and undergarment makers were listed, alongside 3,345 other specialists. Rumkowski assured the Germans that he had a "golden currency" in the ghetto in the form the "work of Jewish hands." "I have first-rate tradespeople in the ghetto. If the authorities gave me permission to hire workers at a greater scale and to put more of the workforce to use, from which the authorities would also see more profits, my monetary potential would be greater," professed Chairman Rumkowski. He promised that the Jews would fulfil all of the Germans' orders quickly and at the highest quality. In return, the ghetto was to be given money for the purchase of food for its residents. Bringing his vision to life, Rumkowski plastered his slogan onto the walls of newly established workplaces: "Our only way is work."

RESORT LIFE

The first workshop (or *resort*) opened as soon as the ghetto was sealed and cut off from the rest of the city, i.e., 1 May 1940. It was a sewing shop at 45 Łagiewnicka Street. Not far behind were other facilities: a shoemaking workshop, a duvet workshop, a carpentry workshop, an upholsterer, a tannery, a textile mill, a slipper and felt shoe workshop and a metal wares manufactory. Initially making use of

prewar factory buildings, Rumkowski quickly began to annex other spaces. By the end of 1940, there were 33 workshops employing a total of 5,700 workers. As the sewing facilities received the largest number of orders, the tailors worked across several—and at times, even upwards of ten—divisions. To coordinate the work and the orders, a Sewing Head Office was established. Among the garments produced in the Łódź ghetto were Luftwaffe uniforms, drill trousers and tops, and army training uniforms, as well as civilian goods like ladies' and men's coats, evening gowns, children's clothing, corsets, fur coats, fancy hats, bags, rucksacks, furniture, and even children's toys. The Łódź ghetto also made rakes, pitchforks, therapeutic suction cups, furniture, cribs, bathtubs, firefighting gear, and dozens of other things.

Though the terms "factory" and "workshop" were used in official communications and in contact with the German authorities, the designation "resort" (a Polish word meaning something like "department") caught on among the people of the ghetto. As we read in the *Ghetto Encyclopaedia* compiled by Łódź ghetto archivists: "No-one would ever think to say 'sewing factory' or 'metal wares factory.' It was always a 'sewing *resort*' or 'metal wares *resort*.'" Not only that, the term applied to almost all aspects of life connected with work: "The ghetto knew only of a *resort* kitchen, *resort* soup, *resort* manager, *resort* doctor, *resort* clerk. The term 'resort' eventually also took hold in semi-official documents and in the official ghetto calendar," the *Encyclopaedia* goes on to say.

Though, admittedly, there was a Rubber Coat Factory, a Hat Factory and a Marysin district candy factory, in diaries and memoires we read mainly of work *resorts*. It's hard to say where the terminological differences come from.

In December 1941, there were 20,789 people working in the ghetto's 55 *resorts*, with new ones opening all the time to keep up with the orders coming in. When orders slowed down, the number of workdays was reduced or workers were reassigned to other workshops. Over time, younger and younger people were put to work, even children in the end. In August 1941, there were 91 *resorts* with a total of 58,580 people working in them. Anyone not working faced the possibility of deportation. And there was no soup or food rations for those without a job. Gradually, the Germans began to turn the ghetto into a war industry enterprise, and the profits it generated were an incentive to expand the network of slave-labour factories. Jews unfit for work were expendable. After the mass deportation action known as the Wielka Szpera (Ger: Allgemeine Gehsperre), during which the Germans sent nearly 20 thousand people to the extermination camp in Chełmno on the Ner River—mostly children under 10, the elderly and the sick, who by Nazi

norms were useless—the ghetto was transformed into a forced labour camp. In October 1942, the Gestapo proudly reported: "As a result of the last deportation, the number of Jews at the Litzmannstadt Ghetto fell to about 89.5 thousand. These are exclusively Jews fit for work, nearly all of them part of the production process." Even in the spring of 1944, despite the front getting closer, the resorts kept on working, with the biggest output coming from the sewing and carpentry workshops, which fulfilled orders for the German army. It was only in July 1944 that the Germans stopped sending in orders and called for the return of the ghetto's materials and machines. The business had ended. As the editors of the "Łódź Ghetto Chronicles" state: "The conservative estimate is that the ghetto's production in the years 1940 to 1944 generated about 2.2 billion marks of pure profit for the Third Reich." Accounting for 70 percent of the production were state orders for the Reich's armed forces, police and paramilitary organisations. Yet, about 25 percent represented civilian orders from prominent department stores and private companies. Among the brands taking advantage of the work of the Łódź ghetto's Jewish prisoners were: the German chemical company IG Farbenindustrie, the electronics company A.E.G., the still existing and well-known lingerie label Triumph A.G., and the Berlin-based Josef Neckermann company, as well as a number of Łódź textile firms, including Karol T. Buhle SA.

A SEWING HUB

In prewar Europe, Łódź enjoyed a sound reputation as a textile industry city and clothing production centre. The work of its Jewish tailors—as Rumkowski had hoped—immediately found recognition. By mid-June 1941, the Łódź ghetto had 11 sewing workshops employing in excess of 6 thousand people, both professionals and trainees. Having the largest workforce, numbering 1,160 employees, was the resort at 16 Jakuba Street. It was this workshop that Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler decided to visit when he came to the ghetto on 5 June 1941.

"How are you getting on here?" he is said to have asked Rumkowski. "We are working and building a city of labour here," Rumkowski answered. "And how is the work going?" inquired Himmler. "Not bad, I think. I expect it to improve. I am doing everything I can to ramp up and improve the work. My motto is 'Work, peace and order.'" To this the head of the SS replied, "You must work for the good of your brethren."

Today, no trace remains of the gigantic factory that once stood at 16 Jakuba Street, nor of most of the large *resorts*. The ghetto factory buildings were gradually

demolished after the war. Archival photographs show hundreds of sewing machines filling entire rooms. A 1941 register shows more than two thousand machines belonging to tailors. When the number of orders increased, machines were loaned from the clients. More sewing machines arrived in the ghetto in the spring and summer of 1942. Notes and slips found in drawers indicate that they were sent in from small towns outside of Łódź whose ghettos had been liquidated, in counties like Koło and Kutno. Also coming in from outside the ghetto were fabrics for military uniforms, coats, dresses and other apparel, as well as supplies (like thread, buttons and needles) and tools necessary for the fulfilment of the orders. The Sewing Head Office distributed the workload, kept track of deadlines and performed quality control. In February 1941 alone, the ghetto tailors produced 38 thousand articles of clothing, which included 8,100 broadcloth army overcoats, 7,000 sets of uniforms, 7,000 drill trousers, training uniforms for the army, air force and navy, and 2,000 pieces of workwear. In addition to that, there were civilian garments: 1,300 pairs of men's trousers, 957 women's coats, 1000 work shirts, children's clothes, ski vests, turtlenecks and other sportswear. The Head Office sent the finished pieces to the Bałuty Market, where they were sterilised and dispatched to the clients. Some of the orders were fulfilled using textiles that had been confiscated from Jews. One of the ghetto's main raw materials was old clothing, which was repaired or modified, with the scraps (*schmatte* – rags) utilised in a variety of ways, for instance, in rug production. In mid-1942, train cars full of clothing and undergarments confiscated from Jews started to arrive in the ghetto from nearby towns. There was also clothing coming back from the camp in Chełmno on the Ner River, as well as tonnes of uniforms from the front. The Jews sorted them, repaired them, and returned them to the Germans. Opening at 7 Widok Street was even a dedicated sewing workshop for clothing repairs. With the looming threat of children being deported, a children's sewing workshop was set up to employ children aged 10–14, and sometimes even younger ones. Fifteen-year-olds were already considered adults and they worked in the normal resorts. As the Łódź ghetto survivor and post-war journalist Aleksander Klugman recalled, work there was organised in line with the latest methods. "The sewing process was split up into small steps, thanks to which any child could easily learn their respective activity. All of the sewing workshop's equipment was adapted to the height of the workers: the tables were low like in a kindergarten, the sewing machines on their special pedestals looked like toys," Klugman writes. With their tiny hands, the starved Jewish kids from the Łódź ghetto sewed things like doll clothes that would land under the Christmas tree for German children.

For their hard, hours-long labour in the ghetto, the children received the same compensation as the adults: free soup made in the public kitchens or in one of the several so-called *resort* kitchens. For a short time, the meals handed out consisted of bread and sausage with coffee, but they were quickly replaced again with soup, the only daily meal for most of the workers.

Marian Turski, a survivor of the Łódź ghetto, once told me that, indeed, work in the ghetto was important because of the soup, but it was more than just about the food rations. It was about safety. Sometimes people would sell some of their rations to buy medication or other things on the black market, but the most important thing was that work saved you from deportation. Without work, you were in danger. Without work, you were doomed to an early death.

Paweł Żukowski

Ribbon from the Litzmannstadt Ghetto

Daily Chronicle Bulletin 247
247 for 1–5 July 1941:

In the following article, the Head of the Jewish Council of Elders announces that he will not limit himself solely to concerning himself with supplying food for the population, but that the matter of clothing for the winter is also dear to his heart. In an effort to resolve the highly important matter, the Head of the Jewish Council of Elders has decided to activate a huge repair workshop that will take in soiled, damaged and torn winter clothing from the general public. The workshop will not only repair and refresh, but also sterilise garments, charging a very small fee, with benefit recipients being exempted from all charges.

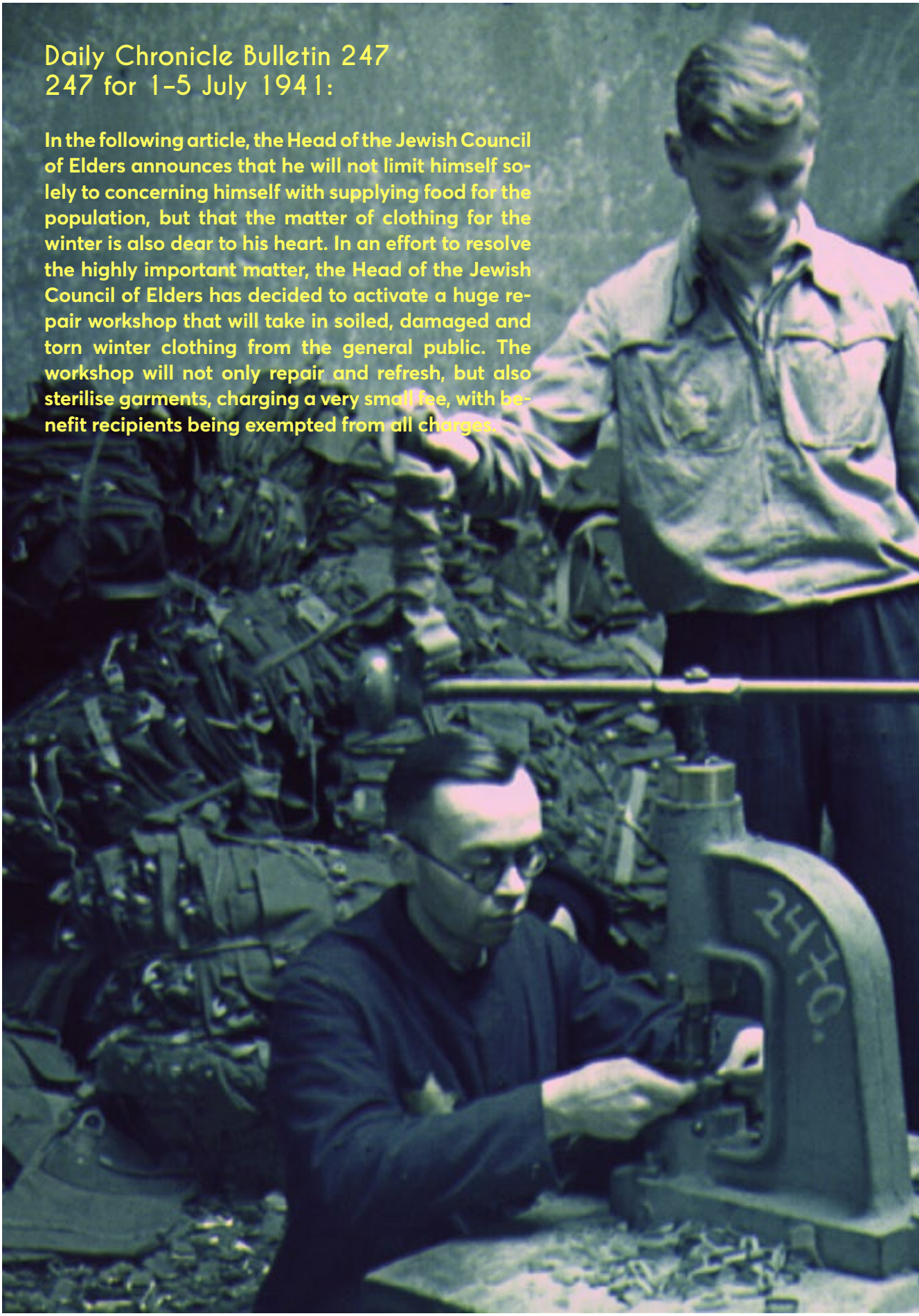


Photo: Walter Genewein, collection of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt

Photo: Walter Genewein, collection of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt

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Cover photo: Walter Genewein, collection of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt

Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto
8 January 1944

PRODUCED:

Textiles department. Sorting station: 6,388 kg cuttings and waste, wool top department: 8,471 kg cuttings and waste, rag tearing station: 14,298 kg cuttings and waste, carding station: 1,326 carded wool, spinning station: 13,409 kg yarn, thread-making station: 6,985 kg thread, corduroy mill: 9,181 m fabric, English mill: 5,827 m fabric, cottage weaving: 100 m yarn, ropemaking: 44,622 m cord and rope, wadding mill: 850 pieces of tailor's wadding. Sewing workshops. For army, air force and navy: 10,700 broadcloth horseback riding trousers, 8,230 drill trousers, 3,200 windbreakers, 2,280 overcoats, 5,550 winter trousers, 11,480 shirts, 687 ponchos, 46,133 footwraps, 5,345 quilted garments, 4,300 knee-length coats, 400 long broadcloth trousers, 54 coats, 187 various repairs. Renovations: 1,070 pieces of protective clothing, 6,342 camouflage uniforms, 4,958 camouflage jackets, 800 field jackets, 97 uniform jackets, 5,700 trousers, 8,000 uniforms, 5,200 waistcoats. For civilians: 7,144 coats, 20,168 garments, 27,355 trousers, 23 jackets.