

## Architect Waclaw Tomaszewski (1884-1969). Architecture as Autobiography

Ewa Maria Wolańska

*Only in rare cases of disasters, large fires, earthquakes, etc. is formed a task for building cities anew. Also in the present day is rare case to setting cities on virginal area, in closely defined goal to build - an interesting exception is Gdynia.<sup>1</sup>*

Not only is Gdynia a unique town because of its urban structure and the origin of setting up, but it is also a special place on the map of European modernism. In the scale of the street areas there are a diverse range of styles, each of which architects coming to Gdynia brought into the general landscape of the city. Gdynia was the result of diverse social origins, and above of all, was a result of its creators apprenticeship, which translated into their design sensibility and attitude to the spreading wave of Modernism in Europe – paralleling art to architecture.

One of the architects who came to Gdynia at the very beginning of the construction of the city, as early as 1928 was Waclaw Tomaszewski. Architectural work that he left behind is the best document of turns and architectural trends, both in Gdynia and in Europe at the time in which he lived. Analysis of more than fifty years of Tomaszewski's architectural creation is an opportunity not only to learn about his individual work, but it also helps in understanding the architectural phenomenon of Gdynia.

Waclaw Tomaszewski's life is inscribed in the three eras of political history of Europe - Europe of colonial powers, Europe after the Treaty of Versailles and the Europe divided by Iron Curtain after 1945 - on this background, respectively, the fate of the Polish State. Each of these periods had strong political and social faces, which were obviously reflected in the architecture. Tomaszewski's architecture is also a reflection of his biography, experience of great and rapid changes around him, on which he was forced to respond privately and professionally.

### The period of study and the first design work

Waclaw Tomaszewski, born in 1884 at that time of the Russian Tsar in Odessa, the son of an engineer and landowner Alexander Tomaszewski. Tomaszewski's higher education began in Kiev at the Faculty of Civil Engineering the Technical University of Kiev. After three years he decided to change direction and place of study for the Faculty of Architecture at the Technical University of Karlsruhe. He studied with the leading architects of the German Empire turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Josef Durm, Hermann Billing, Otto Warth or Adolf Weinbrenner. The time of his architectural studies in Karlsruhe (1906-1910) coincided with the heated

discussions around historicism, Art Nouveau and so called New Building (Neues Bauen in German) - the time of the very beginnings of modernism in Germany.<sup>2</sup>

Mentioned above, the architects Josef Durm and Hermann Billing are the symbol of a dispute about the future of architectural forms in Germany<sup>3</sup>. The first one is representative of monumental architecture in the classical style, with elements of neo-Renaissance and early Baroque, the defending historic forms; while the other tried to overcome the dogmatic historicism, allowing to voice new forms and spare ornament, simplified detail and smooth dynamics of solids. Billing's architecture, however, remained on the border of heavy secession with concise, monumental composition, and was far from that of its European peers, focused more on modernism, such as in Belgians Victor Horta or Henry van de Velde.

Waclaw Tomaszewski is clearly heir to the architectural ideas of both his outstanding teachers. Historicizing tendencies and monumental architecture will accompany him throughout all professional work.

The first certificates of architectural works come from the study time at Karlsruhe and they are competition works, made together with a colleague from the department: Adam Ballenstedt (1880-1942) – also an architect, who will also design significant objects in Gdynia - the building of the Maritime Office 1927 and the building of the Polish Shipping Company between 1927 and 1929. For example, to quote a competition project of a lookout tower in the town of Feldberg in the Schwarzwald, made in 1909, where there is a clear impact of Billing's aesthetics, especially features such as massive block, heavy simplified detail and emphasized by the texture of dressed stone (Fig. 1).

Waclaw Tomaszewski graduated under the supervision of Joseph Durm, and the subject of his thesis was the design of the building for a small university college, with a monumental, decorative character. Also, from his

2. Information about Waclaw Tomaszewski and his studies at the Faculty of Architecture in Grossherzogliche Badische Technische Hochschule Fridericiana in Karlsruhe are the result of archival research in KIT-Archiv (Karlsruher Institute für Technologie) in Karlsruhe.

3. Publications that discuss the works of Joseph Durm and Hermann Billing are: Ulrike Grammbitter, *Josef Durm, 1837-1919: eine Einführung in das architektonische Werk*, München: Tuduv-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1984; Gerhard Kabierske, *Der Architekt Hermann Billing (1867-1946): Leben und Werk*, Karlsruhe: Südwestdeutsches Archiv für Architektur und Ingenieurbau, 1996.

1. Tolwiński Tadeusz, *Urbanistyka, Tom II, Budowa miasta współczesnego*, Warszawa 1948, p. 176



WIEŻA WIDOKOWA POD GODLEM „HUGIN – MUMIN”.

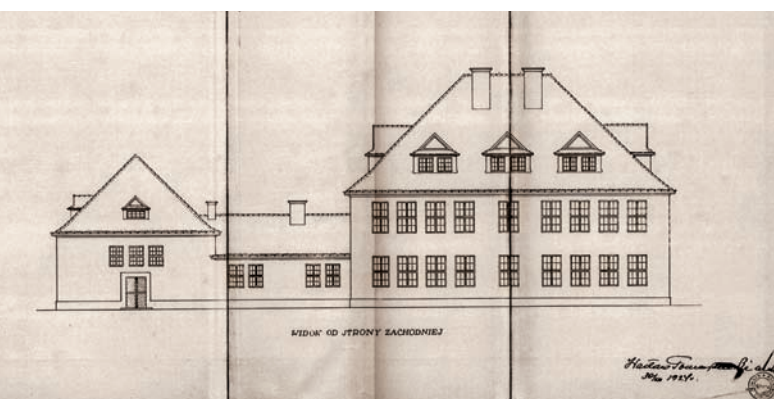
1. Competition project of observation tower in the Feldberg in Schwarzwald from 1909. Source: "Architekt", R. VIII: 1907, No. 5, table. XX

recommendation, he held practice in Italy at the work of inventory in Pompeii. He decided whilst on an educational trip to Italy, to spend a year in cities such as Florence, Rome and Naples and deepening his knowledge of antiquity, the Renaissance and Baroque. Tomaszewski, thus satisfied his classical architectural education, part of which was for example the Italian Grand Tour.

After World War I Tomaszewski found himself in Warsaw. During this time, the issues of the Polish national style in architecture found its place in the discussion among the elites, trying to give shape to the new Polish state and through architecture emphasize its history and tradition<sup>4</sup>. From this period was adopted the familiar style of the manor-house, as a form of secular architecture objects, based on the prototype Polish manor house with its typical elements: columned porch, high mansard roof and *alkierz* (alkierz –

4. An example is given by the Circle of Architects in Warsaw, renowned publication by Stefan Szyller, *Czy mamy polska architekturę?*, Warszawa 1916.

2. Project of school in Ciechanów, 1927. Source: collection of AAN in Warsaw



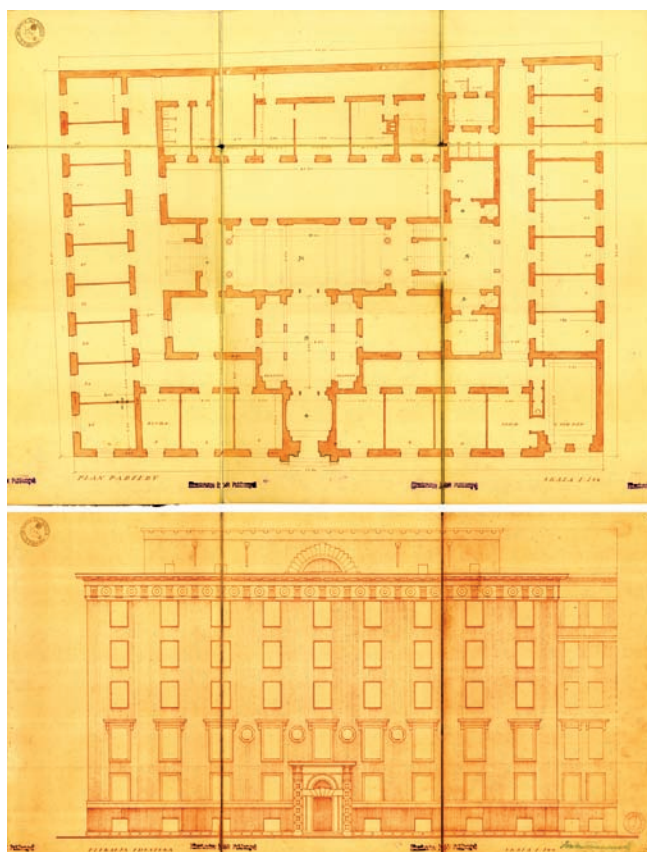
extended corner of building covered with a separated roof, commonly used as a bedroom). Tomaszewski is part of this trend along with many other architects working in Warsaw after 1918. He designs, among other things manor, houses in Kujawy and Podlasie, and a number of schools in manor style, such as a fifth year primary school from 1923, in the village Kamionka Stara, on Podlasie, and seven year primary school in Ciechanów from 1927 (Fig. 2).

However, in the same Warsaw in 1925, Tomaszewski won, underwritten by the Ministry of Public Works, a competition for the important and significant cubature object, namely the building of Supreme Audit Office. This project (finally not constructed) highlights distinctive and plentiful architectural motifs, which accompanied the author's next projects and realizations. Consider the design of a five-storey, monumental building on a rectangular plan with a centrally located entrance, like a Renaissance palace with a courtyard assumption. Here we see a massive ledge of ancient decoration, clear base, attic, medallions, massive entrance portal and simplified Renaissance border at the waist windows of the first floor. Resignation of additional historicing divisions of elevation, such as pilasters or columns reinforces the importance of decoration and simplified impression of modernity.

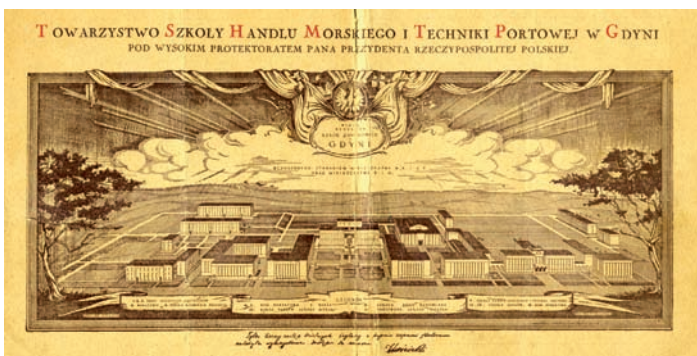
Proposed here for the first time in Tomaszewski's detail - clearly marked, although simplified cornice, plinth, portal and window frame, will be a frequent element in his later work (Fig. 3). Inside the proposed building of the Supreme Audit Office, he offered rich decorative elements, like the ancient colonnade in the entrance area, garlands and presentation laid out the steps. Also, the kind of momentum interiors of public buildings will be significant for its architecture.

The question of monumentality in architecture, which was close to Tomaszewski from the early years of his professional education and practice may seem to be his domain. The demand for this type of architecture in interwar Poland turned out to be a happy reality for Waclaw Tomaszewski, who had a great sense just for this form of architecture. There has been no return for him to the revolutionary style in the direction of modernism, such as, for example, functionalism, which was the direction of increasing importance and application in Western Europe;

3. Project of the building of the Supreme Audit Office in Warsaw, 1925. Source: collection of AAN in Warsaw







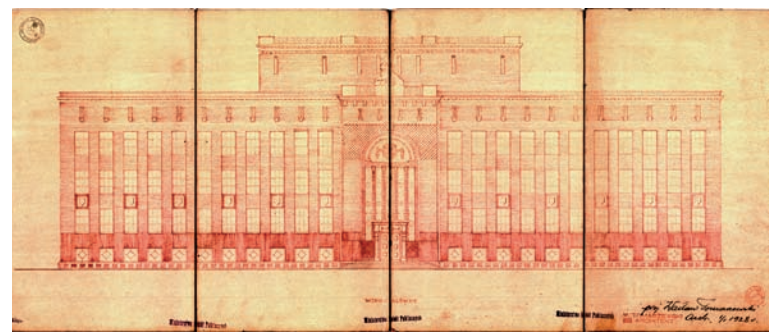
4. Illustration of a Vocational Schools Complex in Grabowo in Gdynia. Illustration from banknote - Contributions for construction – from year 1929

was foreign to him also having more and more supporters avant-garde aesthetics of the Bauhaus.

#### Gdynia interwar period, the most important realizations

In 1928 Tomaszewski was commissioned to design of Vocational Schools Complex in Grabowo in Gdynia. It was the largest architectural order in his career, and since the work on this project, he moved from Warsaw to Gdynia (Fig. 4). That's impressive size, the prestigious task, Tomaszewski understood as monumental, highly axial architectural and spatial solution. Center of the whole system was the building

6. Detail of area between windows - School of Maritime Trade and Harbor Technology. Photo by the author



5. Project of School of Maritime Trade and Harbor Technology, 1928. Source: collection of AAN in Warsaw

of the School of Maritime Trade and Harbor Technology<sup>5</sup>, located at yard, which was open on Gdańsk Highway, closed at the right side by the edifice of the National Maritime School, at left by the edifice of Bursa. The complex of buildings also contained houses for teachers and school workshops.

On the example of the building of the School of Maritime Trade and Harbor Technology are visible similarities with the building of the Supreme Chamber of Control in Warsaw (Fig. 5). Symmetrical composition of the façade, massive cornices, under the cornice zone of triglyph, clear base and simplified decorative elements façade, here in the form of pennants. Axial composition emphasizes the massive portal. The impression of monumentality increases additional storey in the form of "belvedere". This element with a flat roof is the center of the buildings complex and also is a historical reference to the palace architecture. The front elevation with the rows of identical rectangular windows is vertical composition. The spaces between the windows have form of shallow pilasters. As ornament is the way of using of the gray sand-lime brick (Fig. 6). These geometric compositions are planes between pilasters and windows. The entrance building of the School of Maritime Trade and Harbor Technology, the Port is an element that shows strongly historicizing tendencies in architecture of Waław Tomaszewski.

Inside the building the central staircase composition, in representative rooms were proposed decorations such as garlands, pilasters and simplified triglyph. The most modern of Tomaszewski's architecture is his relation to the problem of lighting (Fig. 7a) - all spaces are strongly lighted, and the auditoriums additionally by upper light through skylights.

Similar functional and aesthetical solutions were used in other buildings of the complex - with the differences in the detail. An example is the building of the Maritime School (Fig. 8). It is also the object with a symmetrical arrangement and vertical composition of the façade. The entrance portal is a central part of the building and in this case, has been created with three arches supported on consoles.

During the construction of the Vocational Schools Complex in Grabowo in Gdynia, Waław Tomaszewski was a mature architect who has already developed for his architecture a specific relationship forms of historicism and modernity.

On the few examples of the many Waław Tomaszewski's projects in Gdynia, from interwar period, we can trace the development of his unique version of the architecture. As already mentioned, many Tomaszewski's years of work in the newly established town, illustrates not only Gdynia architecture, but also stylish trends of the city itself - a place where modernism was gaining more and more importance and its various versions dominated the aesthetics of the city. Waław Tomaszewski working in this area need to respond to these trends - for instance of the expectations

5. School of Maritime Trade and Harbor Technology described in their academic works following authors: Antoni Koseski, *Architektura Gdyni w latach 1933-1939*, Warsaw 1991, doctoral thesis under the guidance of Andrzej Olszewski at the Institute of Art History of Warsaw University, p. 173; Maria Sołtysik, *Gdynia miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Urbanistyka i architektura*, Warsaw 1993, pp. 166-170; Arnold Bartetzky, Marina Dmitrieva, Stefan Troebst, *Neue Staaten - neue Bilder?: visuelle Kultur im Dienst staatlicher Selbstdarstellung in Zentral und Osteuropa seit 1918*, Köln: Böhlau, 2005, p. 39.





7. Detail portal - School of Maritime Trade and Harbor Technology. Photo by the author



7a. The interior of the object - School of Maritime Trade and Harbor Technology. Photo by the author

of the customers<sup>6</sup>:

1. In the extension of National Meteorological Institute from 1930 are visible Tomaszewski's, already known, architectural motifs as simplified decoration and its geometrical elements (cornice, consoles, entrance portal) (Fig. 9a);

2. The design of the Fisheries Office from 1930, with a public and residential function - marked by symmetry, robustness and vertical division of the façade (Fig. 9b);

3. Sailor's House, from 1932 - the object of a symmetrical arrangement, with extended central projections, detail referring to the previous implementation of Tomaszewski. The side elevations have strong dual-side bays, forming the expressionist nature (Fig. 9c);

4. The Marine Station building from 1933 was designed in collaboration with "Dyckerhoff & Widmann". "Dyckerhoff & Widmann" has been kept Tomaszewski's interior concept, but abandoned his elevation proposal, probably recognizing it as too historicizing (Fig. 9d);

5. The Bergtrans Building from 1936, with office and

residential functions. The property is almost completely devoid of architectural decoration. This solution suggests innovative direction in Tomaszewski's job, which was meeting the customer requirements (Fig. 9e);

6. Such an example is office and residential building of the company "Gdynika" - Brokers of Marine Insurance) on Kamienna Góra from 1937. This building has a flat roof, horizontal façade with windows of rhythmically repeated glazing, separated by a constant pillar between windows. The whole façade, though extremely asymmetric for the author, is very staid composition, which is characteristic for Tomaszewski (Fig. 9f);

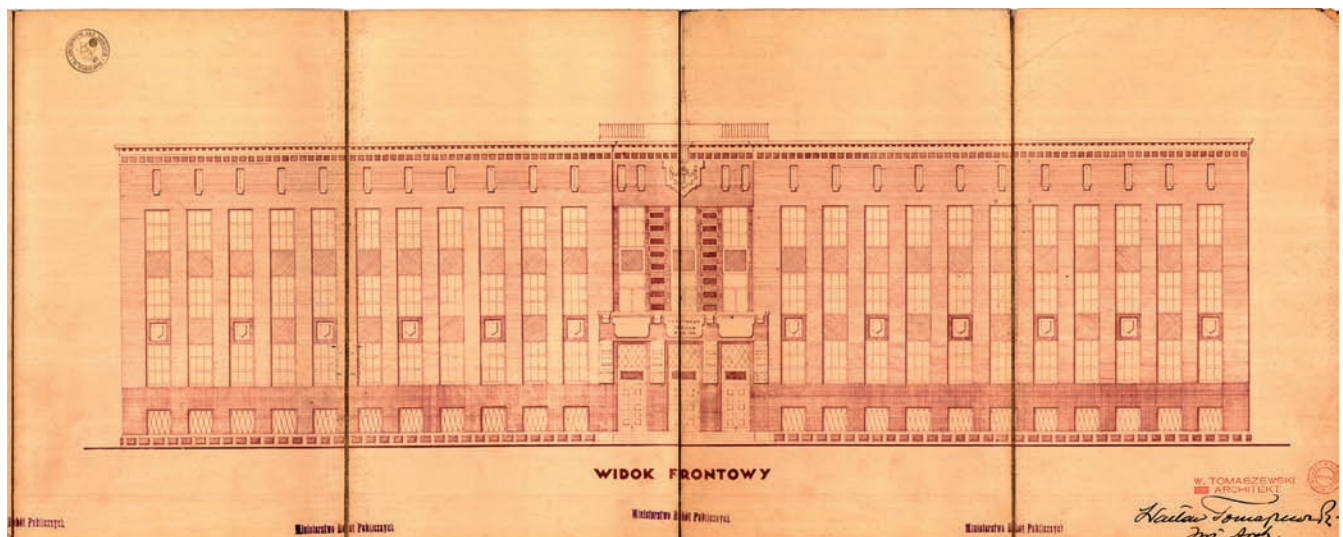
7. Building of Izba Arbitrażowa Bawełny (Cotton Arbitration Chamber) from 1938. The building was designed according to the guidelines of the initiator - Zrzeszenia Interesentów Handlu Bawełną<sup>7</sup> and satisfying the requirements of the Department of Agriculture U.S. Object of this type, built in Gdynia was one of the first in Europe.

Trade relations with the U.S., and the simultaneous import of architectural prototypes across the ocean, has in the building of Cotton Arbitration Chamber, perhaps, his best example in Gdynia (Fig. 9g).

6. These objects are listed by Tomaszewski as by him designed in his registration record of SARP Branch - Gdańsk, 1954. Were also described in the works: Antoni Koseski, *Architektura Gdyni...*, op. cit.; Maria Sołtysik, *Gdynia miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego...*, op. cit.

7. "Dziennik Bałtycki", R. II Nr 262, 23.09.1946, p. 3.

8. Project of the Maritime School 1928-9. Source: collection of AAN in Warsaw







9a



9b



9c

9a. The National Institute of Meteorology, 1930. Photo by the author, 9b. The design of the Fisheries Office, 1930. Source: collection of AAN in Warsaw, 9c. Sailor's House, 1932. Photo by the author

**The post-war period  
- design work and pedagogical**

Wacław Tomaszewski was forced by the World War II to leave Gdynia. By 1945 he was in Vilnius, Kaunas and Warsaw.

From the first months of the war he worked in Warsaw at the Ministry of Reconstruction, but after a short time he returned to the coast. The post-war political division of Europe has changed the structure of Polish access to the Baltic Sea. Gdynia was no longer the only Polish harbor - Gdańsk and Szczecin, both harbor cities, were also included on the map of the country, and thus the importance of Gdynia and its symbolism were decreased.

Wacław Tomaszewski at the end of 1945 began working at the Technical University of Gdańsk, and in 1949 was appointed an associate professor. For the first time in his work, he did projects for Gdańsk. While not in force yet no doctrine imposed, objects designed by Tomaszewski had stylish form of moderately modernist, classicist and

monumental - and thus, a form, which he often operated. In this period, e.g.: competition project of the Główny Urząd Morski (Main Maritime Office), the plan of the new development of Grunwaldzka Street in Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz with the "House of Books" and Hotel Orbis.

However, Wacław Tomaszewski's the greatest post-war architectural project is located in Gdynia. It is the complex of the railway station, built in 1950-1955 (Fig. 10). It was inscribed on the heritage list and is taken under conservation, thereby Wacław Tomaszewski is the only architect, who was working in Gdynia, and whose work pre- and post-war went through such a form of recognition. Previous station in Gdynia from 1926, designed by Romuald Miller, referring to the architecture in style of the manor-house - inscribed within, the already mentioned, architectural trend of that time in Poland. The manor-house forms have been replaced, by Tomaszewski, by Socialist Realism architecture, obligatory in Poland since the early 1950s.

Socialist Realism architecture, which aesthetics was

9d. Object of Marine Station, 1933. Source: Business directory "Dyckerhoff & Widmann", from the collection of the Deutsches Museum Archiv in Munich), 9e. Building Bergtrans 1936, 9f. "Gdynika" on Kamienna Góra, 1937. Photo by the author



9d



9e



9f





9g. Cotton Arbitration Chamber, 1938. Photo by the author

based on the compositions of the classical style and historic decorative elements, distanced itself from the modernist architecture. In this way, political conditions made, that architectural aesthetics close to Waclaw Tomaszewski's

has become current again. Monumentality and pomposity of socialist realism architecture, allowed Tomaszewski to create object, which realizes prized by the architect values as: momentum spatial richness of detail and emphasizes the importance of arts and crafts. Also, his most modernist feature, which was to approach to lighting, here found special place.

Clear, symmetrical composition of the main part of the station, vertical accents of front façades, as well as architectural detail is reminiscent of Tomaszewski's designs and realizes from interwar period, starting from the of Supreme Audit Office in Warsaw. Again window frames, strong cornice with brackets, masking attic roof slope and a clear part of the pedestal appeared. Front entry to the station concourse is a spectacular element, in the form of deeply front moved bracket, based on the columns, continued as flagpoles. The proportions of the arcade pole, forming a link with the suburban railway are also a reference to the monumental architecture.

Railway station in Gdynia is the last significant, authorial architectural design of Waclaw Tomaszewski. Active as a pedagogue at the Gdańsk University of Technology in the Department of Harbour at Faculty of Architecture participated in many collaborative project works. He created new scientific discipline - architecture of ships. After retiring in 1960, he remained active professionally. He died in Gdansk in 1969.

#### Summary

Assumptions historicizing were close to Tomaszewski from the beginning design work and reflect the nature of professional knowledge gained from the time of study in Karlsruhe, as well as its architectural sensitivity. Reluctant to give up the ornament as a carrier architectural masterpiece - it always was present in its architecture monumentality. Headwords of modernism are never in Waclaw Tomaszewski's architecture a manifesto, however, were present through continuous confrontations with modernism.

10. Railway station in Gdynia, 1950-1955. Photo by the author

