

**Exposing Wounds:  
Traces of Trauma in Post-War  
Polish Photography**

Sabina Gill



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Department of Philosophy & Art History

University of Essex

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis draws on psychoanalytic theories of trauma to interrogate works produced by Polish photographers after the Second World War. The aim of this thesis is to excavate traces of trauma latently embedded in post-war Polish art photography. By closely analysing a selection of photographs produced between the years 1945 and 1970, I argue that the events of the war cast a shadow over the lives of Polish artists. Rather than looking at photographs which directly visualise these traumatic events, I explore the ways in which these experiences manifest themselves indirectly or obliquely in the art of the period, through abstraction, a tendency towards ‘dark realism,’ and an interest in traces of human presence.

The events of the war were not the only traumas to cast their shadow on the Polish psyche. Between 1945 and 1970, Poland underwent a series of transitions and changes in leadership, population and Party politics. Periods of optimism and leniency oscillated with phases of repression and social unrest. In my analysis, I suggest that multiple traumas can be discerned in these decades. What is at stake in this thesis is the proposition that a photograph can bear imperceptible traces of events that have wounded the psyche, which could not be articulated at the time, but which were made visible at a later date. Photographs made in the post-war years provided a space to belatedly return to encrypted traumas, to relay ideas that could not otherwise be articulated, and to acknowledge events that had been disavowed.

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## INTRODUCTION: EXPOSING WOUNDS

**From the dim recesses,  
as if from the abyss of Hell,  
there started to emerge  
people who had died long time ago  
and memories of events  
that, as in a dream,  
had no explanation,  
no beginning, no end,  
no cause or effect.  
They would emerge  
and keep returning stubbornly,  
as if waiting for my permission to let them enter.  
I gave them my consent.  
I understood their nature.  
I understood where they were coming from.  
The i m p r i n t s  
impressed deeply  
in the memorial past.**

(Tadeusz Kantor, Excerpt from 'Imprints,' *Silent Night (Cricotage)*, 1990)<sup>1</sup>

The etymology of *trauma* derives from the Greek τραῦμα, meaning 'wound'. Trauma is still used in medical contexts to denote physical damage to the body. It has also come to be used to denote psychological damage; a wound inflicted upon the mind. In his influential writings on trauma, Sigmund Freud suggested that a wound of the mind does not heal in the same way as a wound of the body.<sup>2</sup> It is also more difficult to recognise and to comprehend. In fact, one of the salient features of trauma is its

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<sup>1</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990*, ed. and trans. Michal Kobialka (Berkeley: California University Press, 1993), 182.

<sup>2</sup> See Sigmund Freud, 'From The History of an Infantile Neurosis' (1918[1914]) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001); Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) (New York: Bantam Books, 1967).

incomprehensibility. Freud suggested that there occur exceptions to ordinary experience, such as accidents or life threatening events, which the subject is unprepared for and which produce stimuli powerful enough to rupture the mind's "protective shield."<sup>3</sup> Building on Freud's insight, Cathy Caruth has described how a traumatic event is akin to a "breach in the mind's experience of time, self and world," by which the wounding event is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness."<sup>4</sup> Accounts from the liberation of Nazi German concentration camps in 1945 support this theory, and demonstrate a breakdown of both vision and language when confronted with the horrors of the camps. In April 1945 the British Army's Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) entered the camp at Bergen-Belsen and more than two hundred photographs were taken. One AFPU photographer, Sergeant Oakes, recalled his incomprehension at the scenes he saw: "...we couldn't understand it. We had seen corpses, we had seen our own casualties, but these bloodless bodies ..."<sup>5</sup> In her recent study of photographs taken at the liberation of the concentration camps, Barbie Zelizer documents how the first journalists at the camps struggled with the inadequacies of language to describe what they saw; she notes that "'Words fail me', was their repeated refrain."<sup>6</sup>

While a traumatic event may be experienced bodily, it remains unassimilated by the conscious mind. Instead, an invisible 'wound' is inflicted on the subconscious psychic material, imprinting an invisible, inaccessible and indelible trace that lies dormant in the subconscious. Freud stated, "Even things that seem completely forgotten are present somehow and somewhere, and have merely been buried and inaccessible to the subject."<sup>7</sup> The excerpt from Polish artist Tadeusz Kantor's poem that begins this chapter articulates the way in which events can be retained or stored in the mind as "i m p r i n t s / impressed deeply / in the memorial past." Kantor also recognised a particular feature of these impressions, namely that at a later date they re-emerge and "stubbornly" return with

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<sup>3</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Chapter IV. Freud posited two different models of traumatic experience: childhood trauma relating to castration anxiety that forms part of psycho-sexual development; and the model of traumatic neurosis associated with war and severe accidents. My interest lies in the latter, although psycho-sexual traumas will be touched upon in the second chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Sergeant Harry Oakes, AFPU, Imperial War Museum Sound Archive interview, accession no. 19888/4 reel 2.

<sup>6</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through The Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998), 85.

<sup>7</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Constructions in Analysis" (1937), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol 23, ed. and trans., James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 260.

“no explanation.”<sup>8</sup> Freud used the term *nachträglichkeit*, often translated as ‘deferred action’, to describe this peculiar temporal structure in which the original trauma is experienced retrospectively. A trigger in the present activates the imprinted trace and returns the trauma to the conscious mind. It is only at this later date that the original traumatic event reveals itself, at a time and distance removed from the laying down of its impression.<sup>9</sup> Caruth summarised the paradox at the heart of traumatic experience, namely, “that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness.”<sup>10</sup>

In 2003 Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda reflected upon the 1957 release of his film *Kanal* [Canal], which recounted the tragic heroism of the Polish Home Army during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. Wajda suggested that making the film was for him, and by implication his generation, a necessity. He simply stated, “we had to expose our wounds.”<sup>11</sup> Wajda’s film focused on a particular moment in Polish history, when Polish resistance fighters had attempted to liberate Warsaw from German occupation, timed to coincide with the arrival of the Soviet Union’s Red Army. When the Soviet Army presence did not materialise, the Germans waged an arduous campaign which killed more than two hundred thousand people and demolished the majority of the city of Warsaw. *Kanal* tells the story of a company of Home Army fighters who escaped the German onslaught through the city’s sewers. These physical and psychic wounds of Polish history become the repeated subject of Wajda’s films. Importantly, Wajda was only able to communicate these traumas retrospectively, after a delay; *Kanal* was released more than a decade after the events of 1944 and the time lag suggests the temporal distance needed for his generation to comprehend the events of the Second World War.

*Kanal* was also the first film to be made in Poland about the Warsaw Uprising. The delay therefore speaks to another trauma in this period of Polish history, namely the rewriting of that history in the post-war years, which the art historian David Crowley has described as the “the myopic and crooked practice of History” in Poland under Soviet rule.<sup>12</sup> Events which were unpalatable to the Soviet censors, or which pejoratively implicated the Soviet

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<sup>8</sup> Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 182.

<sup>9</sup> See Freud, ‘From The History of an Infantile Neurosis.’

<sup>10</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 91-2.

<sup>11</sup> Andrzej Wajda, preface to John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowski, *The cinema of Andrzej Wajda: the art of irony and defiance*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), xii.

<sup>12</sup> David Crowley, *Warsaw* (London: Reaktion, 2003), 18.

Union, were repressed or written out of the official discourse of national remembrance. The disavowal of the perceived treachery of the Red Army in 1944 is one example that Crowley gives of the way in which “the past was blurred, deformed or ignored when it could not be squared with official ideology.”<sup>13</sup> Such manipulations and censorship influenced the ways in which the Holocaust and the events of the war were remembered – or not – in official narratives.<sup>14</sup> These gaps in the nation’s history can in themselves be understood as inherently traumatic, breaches that render the past unknowable and unavailable to consciousness. These distortions did not just possess implications for collective remembrance, but also had ramifications for individual psychology too. Other outlets had to be found to communicate traumatic events in the nation’s history.

The choice of verb used by Wajda is also significant: ‘we had to *expose* our wounds’. Exposure implies uncovering, making visible, and in the context of the Warsaw Uprising can be understood as a declared intention to reveal the inaccuracies of recent historical remembrance. Exposure also calls to mind the photographic process – the idea of light streaming through an open aperture and imprinting itself on the negative material. Wajda’s choice of words intertwines the traumatic and the photographic. In both, an impression is made on a vulnerable and receptive substance, which lies latent until later reactivated, or developed, at a distance from the original moment of recording. Margaret Iversen’s *Photography, Trauma and Trace* (2017) is the most recently published book to make analogies between the structure of trauma in the psyche and the physical structure of the photograph, both of them premised on an indexical mode of imprinting and exposure that bypasses intention and consciousness. She opens her book by stating,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. After the war the liberation of the city was claimed in official press as an unequivocal Soviet triumph. In the 1950s, Party ideologues claimed the resistance fighters were as much to blame for the destruction of the city as the Germans. Katyn serves as another salient example: under Soviet orders, 22,000 Polish officers were executed in 1940. Soviets blamed Germany for the massacre, and under Soviet rule in Poland the issues were suppressed in the official discourse of national remembrance. Gluhovic, for example, points to the ways in which Soviet involvement in the war – namely the torture, murder and deportation of millions of victims to Gulags at the hands of the Soviet regime – did not find its way into official memory. The subject of Katyn remained a taboo subject for decades, into the 1980s. (Milija Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories: Trauma, Ethics, Politics*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 6-7.)

<sup>14</sup> A scene from Andrzej Wajda’s film *Man of Marble* (2008) makes visible these gaps in remembrance. Agnieszka, a young film student, enters an art museum in search of a marble statue. A long tracking shot pans through the paintings on display, “a journey through the ‘official’ visual remembrance of the Polish nation.” However, upstairs in the attic, we are shown the artworks of Stalinist socialist realism, locked away in cages. Sørensen has described this as “a visual reminder of the repressed past in the modernised ‘people’s democracy’ of the 1970s,” the decade in which the film is set. (Bjørn Sørensen, “‘Visual Eloquence’ and Documentary Form: Meeting Man of Marble in Nowa Huta,” in Orr and Ostrowska, *The cinema of Andrzej Wajda*, 105.)

Photography as a medium is often associated with the psychic effects of trauma. The automaticity of the process, the wide-open camera lens, and the light sensitivity of film all lend themselves to this association. Just as photography, to some extent, bypasses artistic intention and convention, so also the traumatic event bypasses consciousness. Both involve an indelible impression of something generated outside.<sup>15</sup>

The shadowy revenants of photography and trauma were earlier discussed by Freud in his 1939 essay ‘Moses and Monotheism’. In this text he suggested that the process of photography bears structural similarities to trauma, observing that his notion of ‘deferred action’ could be likened to “a photographic exposure which can be developed after an interval of time and transformed into a picture.”<sup>16</sup> After Freud, numerous scholars have drawn analogies between trauma and photography. Notably Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980) offered a traumatic understanding of the photographic medium, indebted to the seminars of Jacques Lacan. Ulrich Baer’s *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (2002) also sees similarities between the two on the basis of delayed processing and unconscious registration: he writes of

a postponement or delay by which an event that occurs but is not consciously registered is only brought into experience at a later date, just as a film exposed in a flash undergoes a prolonged process of development and fixing. Traumatic events [...] exert their troubling grip on memory and on the imagination because they were not consciously experienced at the time of their occurrence. [...] Trauma results from experiences that are registered as ‘reality imprints’ or, as psychiatrists have phrased it, recorded ‘photographically, without integration into semantic memory.’<sup>17</sup>

The relationship between photography and trauma represents an active field of academic study, suggesting that my own thesis is timely in its investigation. Like Baer and Iversen, I do not propose to look at photographs of traumatic scenes, but instead to explore the

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<sup>15</sup> Margaret Iversen, *Photography, Trace, and Trauma*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays* (1939), *The Standard Edition*, vol. 23, 3-132.

<sup>17</sup> Ulrich Baer. *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), 8. See also, Walter Benjamin, ‘A Little History of Photography,’ *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Margaret Iversen, “What is a Photograph?” *Art History* 17 no. 3 (September 1994), 450-464; Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux York, 2003).

complex entanglement between art and trauma in photographs produced in Poland after the Second World War. I do not intend to study photographs of physical wounds; my interest does not lie with the literal manifestation of violence inflicted on the body. Instead, I am interested in laying bare the traces of imperceptible wounds embedded in the psyche. This thesis proposes to study photographs made after 1945 in order to discern how imperceptible traumatic traces imprinted on the psyche of Polish artists have made themselves known through photographs produced in the immediate aftermath of the war, and in the following decades.

Contentious debates surrounds the representation of personal and historical traumas of the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup> My intention is not to rehearse these debates, nor to address the ethics of representation, but rather to suggest that the events of the war were not so much difficult to represent, as impossible to comprehend. The events of the Second World War represented destruction on a scale without historical precedent, the magnitude of which was overwhelming and incomprehensible. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth asks the question, if traumatic experience is not fully assimilated as it occurs, then “what does it mean to transmit and to theorise around a crisis that is marked by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness?”<sup>19</sup> Unacknowledged imprints on the collective and individual psyche return as repeated thoughts, behaviours, dreams and actions in the years that follow. What I suggest is that the photograph also provided a space for these traumas to re-emerge.

Through a close analysis of a selection of photographs produced between the years 1945 and 1970, I argue that the events of the war cast a shadow over the lives of these artists. What is at stake in this thesis is the proposition that a photograph can bear imperceptible traces of events that have wounded the psyche, which could not be articulated at the time, but can only be reactivated and made visible at a later date. Photographs made in the post-

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<sup>18</sup> Jean François Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the Jews,'* trans. A. Michel and M. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990/1998); Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008); Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000); Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1977); Jacques Rancière, “S’il y a de l’irreprésentable?” *Genre Humain* 36 (2001): 81–102, trans. Gregory Elliott as “Are Some Things Unrepresentable?” in Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2007), 109–38. For an overview of this debate see Libby Saxton, *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008); and introduction to *Concentrationary Cinema, Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alan Resnais’ Night and Fog*, eds. Griselda Pollock and Maxim Silverman (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 5.

war years provided a space to belatedly return to encrypted traumas, to relay ideas that could otherwise not be articulated, and to acknowledge events that had been disavowed. The war was not the only event that registered as traumatic to Polish citizens. In the following chapters I suggest that photographs bear the traces of multiple traumas that relate to Poland's historical past and to events after 1945. I also look at work produced by artists who experienced the war directly, or "bodily" to quote Miłosz, and a subsequent generation of artists who inherited traumas that they did not experience themselves.<sup>20</sup> My approach has a number of key aims: to remain alert to traces of trauma embedded in the photographs produced in these years; to suggest how these traces manifest themselves; and to identify the ways in which these manifestations evolve over a twenty-five year period. The thesis will consider when and where these traces of trauma can be understood to emerge, and why.

Trauma theory has been the subject of much scholarly attention and a large body of literature has developed in the last twenty years.<sup>21</sup> Recent exhibitions have also taken trauma as their subject.<sup>22</sup> Before this point, the study of trauma had been pursued in clinical areas, and in Holocaust studies, but it has been a more recent development to expand the discussion of trauma into the study of art objects. My methodological approach has been influenced by psychoanalytic approaches to art history that incorporate the writings of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, André Bazin and Roland Barthes into formal analyses of art to reveal the ways in which art objects can speak of subconscious dreads and desires. In particular, literature by Cathy Caruth, Marianne Hirsch, Margaret Iversen, Griselda Pollock and James Young has proved instrumental in shaping my approach to the topic.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 93.

<sup>21</sup> See Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds. *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (London: Routledge, 1996). With chapters contributed by scholars from anthropology, psychiatry, and the history and philosophy of science, this volume helped establish the field of contemporary trauma theory. For texts on theoretical and clinical aspects of psychoanalysis and how they inform our contemporary understanding of individual and collective psychic wounds, see: Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994); Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> See *Trauma*, exh. cat., (London: Hayward Gallery, 2001); *Haunted: Contemporary Photography, Video, Performance*, exh. cat., (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2010); *September 11* exh. cat., (New York: P. S. 1 MOMA, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Joshua Hirsch, "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo

Young's study of monuments to the Holocaust has proved helpful. His discussion of 'anti-monuments' seeks to elaborate alternative ways in which remembrance can be activated and sustained. His analysis suggests to me that traces of memory, or indeed trauma, do not always accumulate in the most obvious of places.<sup>24</sup> Iversen's collection of essays, *Beyond Pleasure* (2007) deeply influenced my engagement with the medium of photography. Two essays in particular have long stayed with me: a chapter which used texts by Freud and Lacan to articulate the interweaving of indexicality and trauma in the photograph, formative to the development of this thesis; and a discussion of Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. Iversen suggested that this structure did not function as a typical monument, disavowing loss in the form of a fetish, but rather encouraged an active engagement with the past through the "shadowy revenants" projected by the bodies of visitors on to its smooth dark surface.<sup>25</sup> Pollock offers a feminist contribution to trauma studies, which is an approach that I do not prioritise here, but in *After-affects, after images* (2013), Pollock raises interesting questions as to how artists process traces of personal and historical traumas, and how viewers arriving at an artwork may encounter these traces and seek to transform them.<sup>26</sup> Marianne Hirsch's articulation of intergenerational trauma, interweaving theory, criticism and autobiography, has been particularly useful for analysing the photographs made by a second generation of Polish artists after the war. It has also emboldened me to acknowledge my personal connection to the topic of this thesis, to acknowledge the traumas I have inherited through my own family history and to understand how this history has influenced choices I have made in selecting work for this thesis. Collectively, the above mentioned literature have inspired me to recognise and articulate the traces of trauma in post-war Polish art photography. I also draw on the semiotic theories of Charles Sanders Peirce in my discussion of photographic indexicality.<sup>27</sup> Where relevant I also

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Spitzer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 8; Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 5-37.

<sup>24</sup> James E. Young, "Between History and Memory: The Voice of the Eyewitness," in *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma*, eds. Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler (New York: Routledge, 2003), 275-283.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Barthes, Freud and Lacan* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Press, 2007), 132.

<sup>26</sup> Griselda Pollock, *After-affects, after images: Trauma and aesthetic transformation in the virtual feminist museum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> See Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 2, eds., Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Charles S. Peirce, *Writings of Charles S. Peirce, A Chronological Edition*, vol. 2, eds., Peirce Edition Project (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982).



draw on disciplines outside of art history, taking inspiration from literature, poetry and film theory to supplement my discussion.

Much of what I write in the following chapters is directly related to the traumatic events of the Second World War. Yet the actual events of those years barely feature in my analysis, as my concern is rather the imprints those events have left on the minds of those who survived the war and the generations that followed. The events of 1939 to 1945 were not the only traumas to have cast their shadow on the Polish psyche. In my analysis, I suggest that multiple traumas can be discerned, overlapping and accumulating, in the decades that followed. Events in the present can trigger and reactivate earlier traumatic traces imprinted on the mind, with the original trauma experienced retroactively. The renegotiation of Polish borders at the 1945 Yalta conference reactivated historical traumas surrounding Poland's long contested statehood and difficulties faced in guarding its geographical territory.<sup>28</sup> The wounds inflicted at Yalta were slow to heal in other ways. At the conference, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin sanctioned the formation of a Provisional Government of National Unity in Poland, which allowed for the inclusion of communists and all but ensured Soviet colonisation of a newly re-established Poland. The years that followed were characterised by ongoing manifestations of violence and oppression, a "long duress of trauma."<sup>29</sup> Rather than single, unexpected, catastrophic event, Polish citizens under Soviet rule endured a long period of chronic suffering. Kantor described these years as an "inhuman epoch;" the horrors of war followed by "a half century when power was exercised with utter primitivism by people bearing the untouchable title of 'First Secretary', while the whole civilised world looked on with absolute indifference."<sup>30</sup>

For this reason, I have not limited my investigation to the immediate post war years but have extended my timeframe to trace the reverberations felt in subsequent decades in order to understand how latent psychic wounds may be re-opened by events at a later date. This thesis looks at a twenty-five year period, beginning with the newly constituted country under the leadership of Bolesław Bierut and ending with the dismissal of

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<sup>28</sup> Norman Davies talks about 'Poland' as an abstract idea; "It existed in men's minds, even if it could not always be observed on the ground or in the material world." Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, Volume II 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>29</sup> Milija Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories: Trauma, Ethics, Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 19.

<sup>30</sup> Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine: Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Death* (Kraków: Cricoteka, 1994a), 12.

Władysław Gomułka as First President of the *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* [Polish United Workers' Party] (PZPR) in 1970. Within these twenty-five years, Poland undergoes a series of transitions and changes in leadership, government politics and population. Periods of optimism and leniency oscillated with phases of repression, rigid control and social unrest. The three chapters that make up this thesis correspond to three stages in the socialist rule of post-war Poland. The first chapter considers the years immediately following the Yalta conference in February 1945, in which Poland faced the immense task of reconstructing Poland in terms of its borders, its cities and its people. Different factions struggled to acquire a firm power base and to establish control of the newly reorganised country, creating a situation akin to a civil war.<sup>31</sup> The late 1940s saw a period of Stalinisation in Poland under the newly formed Communist PZPR, the hard-line leadership of President Bierut and the imposition of Socialist Realism in 1949. The second chapter corresponds to the period of thaw that followed Stalin's death in 1953. Social unrest continued, most notably rearing its head in the strikes and riots of Poznań 1956, but the inauguration of Gomułka as First President ushered in a period of moderate leadership and leniency, particularly in matters of culture. The third chapter looks at the late 1960s, by which time Gomułka's reforms and overspending had led to economic losses and political difficulties for the Party. As Gomułka's popularity declined and his reforms lost impetus, the Party's exercise of power became increasingly repressive. The late 1960s saw a resurgence of anti-Jewish sentiments, which manifested themselves in purges and harassment under Mieczysław Moczar's anti-Semitic campaign. The Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 led to student strikes and riots, which were violently suppressed by security forces. Within these twenty-five years, cycles of events can be witnessed, moments when the Party returned to totalitarian rule in the face of popular resistance. The end of this thesis coincides with the end of Gomułka's tenure.

Rather than looking at reportage photography, in which the above events are more directly visualised, this thesis takes a quite specific genre of photography as its subject in order to look at the way events manifest themselves indirectly or obliquely in the art of the period. I propose to investigate art photography, defined here as photographs produced to be exhibited in art exhibitions or published in art journals. This remit

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<sup>31</sup> The provision government established at Yalta - *Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej* [Provisional Government of National Unity] - comprised members from a number of different Parties: *Polska Partia Robotnicza* [Polish Workers' Party], *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna* [Polish Socialist Party], *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe* [Polish Peasant Party] and *Stronnictwo Ludowe* [People's Party] and *Stronnictwo Demokratyczne* [Alliance of Democrats].

excludes works produced on commission for government agencies. All the photographers discussed in the following pages were employed in official capacities in some way: Zdzisław Beksiński used his knowledge of engineering to help construct factories, Andrzej Różycki was employed a photojournalist for the Toruń News Journal, and Jerzy Lewczyński designed occupational safety and hygiene posters. Often this photographic work is exceptionally interesting, and deserves to be the subject of a separate study.<sup>32</sup> Primary sources scrutinised include exhibitions catalogues and magazines and journals published in Poland. To supplement this close visual analysis, I also make use of written articles published in magazines, speeches given at official occasions, correspondence between artists, and interviews.

Polish photography has been the topic of numerous surveys. In the 1960s, art critic Urszula Czartoryska published *Przygody Plastyczne Fotografii* [Artistic Adventures of Photography] (1965), a key text in Polish photographic criticism. Retrospective exhibitions of Polish photography have been staged internationally from the end of the 1970s, and tend to have been organised as a history delineated through successive Polish photography ‘greats’ or ‘masters.’<sup>33</sup> More recent publications include the Polish photographer Jerzy Lewczyński’s *Antologia fotografii polskiej: 1839-1989* [Anthology of Polish photography] (1999), which surveyed developments over 150 years of the medium’s history in Poland.<sup>34</sup> Photography curator Adam Mazur has more recently attempted to bring this research up to date, extending his survey into the twenty-first century: *Historie fotografii w Polsce, 1839-2009* [Histories of Photography in Poland 1839-2009] (2009). Interesting, to my mind, is that these exhibitions and surveys tend to pay scant attention to the years immediately following the Second World War. For example, a 1981 Pompidou show featured almost two hundred works from the years 1900 to 1981, yet the years 1945 to 1970 featured only twenty images. Nineteenth and early

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<sup>32</sup> An exhibition of Lewczyński’s posters was staged at Asymetria Gallery, Warsaw (March–May 2013) titled *BHP, historia pewnej wyobraźni* [Occupational Safety and Health. The History of an Imagination]. Accessed April 7, 2017, [http://www.asymetria.eu/en/html/?str=podstrona\\_wystawy&id=435b02e\\_dda&t=3](http://www.asymetria.eu/en/html/?str=podstrona_wystawy&id=435b02e_dda&t=3)

<sup>33</sup> The exhibition *Fotografia Polska: original masterworks from public and private collections in Poland, 1839-1945, and a selection of avant-garde photography, film, and video from 1945 to the present*, was staged at the International Centre of Photography (ICP) in New York between July and September 1979, curated by William A. Ewing, with advice from the Polish art historians Adam Sobota, Julius Garztecki and Urszula Czartoryska. This was followed two years later by a reformulated version of the ICP show that travelled to the Centre Georges Pompidou, entitled, *La Photographie Polonaise 1900–1981*.

<sup>34</sup> Lewczyński serves as an important figure not just as an artist photographer, but also in promoting the history of Polish photography. In 1999 he published his anthology, a survey of photography in Poland featuring essays by Adam Sobota and Urszula Czartoryska that outline historical and critical appraisals of Polish photography. The book also includes a useful summary of the holdings of key photographic collections in Poland.

twentieth century photography has been researched by several authors including Matthew Witkovsky's *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe 1918-1945* (2007) which featured a large amount of work by Polish photographers, or *Les chef-d'œuvres de la photographie polonaise, 1912-1948* [Masterpieces of Polish photography, 1912-1948] (1992); and contemporary Polish photography has increasingly received critical attention, for example, *Polish Perceptions: Ten Contemporary Photographers, 1977-88* (1998), *Nowi Dokumentaliści* [The New Documentalists] (2006) and *Konceptualizm: medium fotograficzne* [Conceptual art: photographic medium] (2010).

Relatively few publications on Polish photography focus on the post war years. Exceptions include Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowska's *Egzystencje: Polska fotografia awangardowa, 2. połowy lat 50.* [Existences: Polish Avant-Garde Photography from the second half of the 1950s] (2005) or Rafał Lewandowski's *Neorealism in Polish Photography 1950-1970* (2015), a collection of essays that explore the influence of Italian cinema on Polish photography from the 1950s. This thesis aims to research further into this post-war period by drawing on psychoanalytic theory to analyse the photographs produced in these years. Theories of psychoanalysis expounded by Freud appear to have informed the thinking of Polish artists. The quote by Kantor at the beginning of this introduction is clearly indebted to the writings of Freud; similarly, the artist Zbigniew Dłubak retrospectively recognised the usefulness of psychoanalytic theory to artists of his generation attempting to work through the traumas of the war, as we shall see in the following chapter. At this most traumatic of times in the nation's history, it is surprising how few commentators have attempted to analyse the work of post-war Polish art photography in this way. Most accounts of photography from this period overlook traumatic aspects of the work in favour of a focus on cultural history. In contrast, studies addressing Polish film, theatre and sculpture have readily adopted this methodology. The theatre of Tadeusz Kantor has scrutinised for the ways in which productions such as *The Dead Class* (1975) and *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980) explore themes of memory, history and trauma.<sup>35</sup> The productions and installations of Józef Szajna have been examined in similar ways. Alina Szapocknikow's sculptures have been discussed in terms of their

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<sup>35</sup> Jarosław Suchan and Marek Świca, eds., *Tadeusz Kantor, interior of imagination* (Warsaw: Zachęta National Gallery of Art; Cracow: Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka, 2005); Magda Romanska, *The Post-traumatic Theatre of Grotowski and Kantor: History and Holocaust in 'Akropolis' and 'Dead Class'* (London: Anthem Press, 2012); Milija Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories: Trauma, Ethics, Politics*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

inscription of personal and collective traumas.<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere, Luiza Nader has analysed a series of ten photo collages, made by Władysław Strzemiński between 1945 and 1947, using Freud's concept of the 'Wunderblock' to consider the construction of memory in Strzemiński's collages.<sup>37</sup> Wajda's films, and those of the Polish Film School, have also been scrutinised for their compulsion to relive the wounding experience of war.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, most accounts of art photography from this period overlook traumatic aspects of the work in favour of a focus on the historical development of the medium.

In the introduction to his survey *Antologia fotografii polskiej: 1839-1989*, the photographer Jerzy Lewczyński acknowledged the incompleteness of his project: "An anthology is always a selection. I regret not being able to present in this album all the eminent Polish photographers and their works."<sup>39</sup> This is also something that I must concede. This thesis does not present a complete chronology of Polish art photography in the twenty five years after the Second World War. Within the parameters of this thesis, this would be both impossible and undesirable. By gravitating towards works that I believe bear traces of trauma, I have had to neglect many other equally compelling photographers, whose work proved less relevant here to my stated aims. Certainly, a focus on trauma is not the only way in which Polish photography in the post war period could be discussed. In prioritising this organising principle, I have taken the lead from another photographer discussed in the following chapters, Zbigniew Dłubak, who articulated the role of a critic in a 1955 article in *Fotografia* [Photography] magazine, "In this whole jumble the critic must find facts that interest them, find the essence of the development of the field, and evaluate the work as part of a wider phenomenon, to see if this is a step backwards or a step forward in the general progress of the arts."<sup>40</sup> What interests me is work that approaches the subject of trauma, but approaches it obliquely,

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<sup>36</sup> See the chapter "Traumatic encryption: The sculptural dissolutions of Alina Szapocznikow" in Griselda Pollock, *After-affects, after images: Trauma and aesthetic transformation in the virtual feminist museum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Luiza Nader, "Strzemiński's Wunderblock. In Memory of Friends – Jews," *RIHA Journal* 0106, Special Issue, 'Contemporary Art and Memory' (31 December 2014). Accessed April 9, 2017. <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2014/2014-oct-dec/special-issue-contemporary-art-and-memory-part-1/nader-strzeminski-en>.

<sup>38</sup> John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowski, eds., *The cinema of Andrzej Wajda: the art of irony and defiance*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, *Antologia fotografii polskiej: 1839-1989* (Bielsko-Biała: Wydawnictwo LUCRUM, 1999), 6.

<sup>40</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, "O właściwy kierunek dyskusji" [On the right direction for discussion], *Fotografia*, no. 1 (January 1955): 8-9.

bearing witness to the impressions of traumatic traces, or sometimes generating traumatic imprints of their own accord.

The thesis has three chronological chapters, which identify key artists or groups whose work can be understood to engage with the themes outlined above. The first chapter looks at attempts by photographers in the late 1940s to resuscitate the medium in the immediate post-war years. While Jan Bułhak, often dubbed the ‘father of Polish photography’, continued to champion a form of Pictorialist photography, a new generation of photographers increasingly created work that took inspiration from abstract and surrealist imagery. A series of photographs produced in 1948 by Zbigniew Dłubak will be scrutinised; he made vague and frustrating works that impede recognition and turn away from a mimetic reproduction of visible realities in favour of using the camera as a tool for the creation of abstract imagery. In their resistance to comprehension they suggest something of the unassimilable kernel of trauma. Through an engagement with Cathy Caruth’s readings of Freud and Lacan, I suggest that the series also speaks of Dłubak’s survival of the war, and the ethical implications and responsibilities that this survival entails. Dłubak combined his abstract photographs with titles taken from a series of poems written by Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. Re-interpreting these images through the poetry of Neruda, I suggest that abstraction in these post-war years might not just make evident past traumas, but also served to comment on the events of the present, as a subtle critique of the newly formed socialist government. A series of landscape photographs begun in 1950 make this critique more evident. Dłubak’s bleak response to the Polish landscape serves as a foil to Bułhak’s concept of homeland photography.

The second chapter begins by looking at a large international survey show of photography organised in Poznań in 1957 titled *Krok w Nowoczesność* [Step into Modernity]. Out of this exhibition I extricate a number of threads that allow us to unravel different narratives of trauma and different approaches to communicating their traces. The exhibition showcased a heterogeneous variety of ‘modern’ manifestations of photography, from reportage to darkroom experimentation, alongside a continued interest in abstraction. It also highlighted a turn to collectivity and collaboration in the post-thaw period, and a turn away from the centre of power in Warsaw to manifestations of art in regional provinces. The work produced in the 1950s demonstrates a response to the war that was not immediate but retrospective. Caruth quotes Michael Herr, an American war

correspondent writing from Vietnam, who stated, “the problem was that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, just stayed stored there in your eyes.”<sup>41</sup> Photographers in the 1950s reactivate these impressions after a delay of over a decade, their impact not immediate but deferred, like dreams that return to haunt the shell shocked soldier. In this convergence of past and present, the works I discuss in the second chapter can be understood to possess a double meaning that looks back to the past but also comments upon the present.

Firstly, I engage with the ‘dark realism’ of Jerzy Lewczyński and Zdzisław Beksiński, photographs that deliberately turns away from themes of socialist success in favour of melancholic reflections on the Polish landscape. The photographs share a preoccupation with Polish literature and film from the late 1950s and a desire to expose “the black spots that the socialist regime could not manage to erase.”<sup>42</sup> Photographs by Lewczyński prove especially interesting in their focus on metonymic traces that evoke the presence of absent bodies. The late 1950s also saw photographers returning to abstraction, increasingly pursuing darkroom manipulations and formal experiments, and relinquishing the photographic apparatus altogether to create cameraless images. The photographs of Marek Piasecki and Bronisław Schlabs bear the influence of Informel painting and associated notions of cathartic release. Abstraction returns, but manifests itself in a different way to Dłubak’s images: photographic framing and focus increasingly gave way to direct manipulations and destructive interventions on the negative. Actions by Schlabs and Beksiński pierce through the photographic material to lay bare the illusion of the image recorded in the emulsion. The second chapter ends with discussion of a 1959 exhibition, *Pokaz zamknięty* [Closed Show], jointly organised by Lewczyński, Beksiński and Schlabs, later labelled by the critic Alfred Ligocki as *Antyfotografia* [Anti-Photography].<sup>43</sup> The exhibition was intended to demonstrate alternative directions that photographers could pursue. Beksiński proposed arranging photographs into sets of images, and the photographers incorporated non-artistic materials into their work: found photographs, photocopies, newspaper clippings. While on one level, these proposals were attempting to breakdown notions of photographic purity, I suggest that the work exhibited

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<sup>41</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Jerzy Toeplitz, “New Trends in Cultural and Sociological films in Poland,” (report prepared for 1964 Mannheim International Film Festival Round Table sponsored by UNESCO, Paris: UNESCO 30 December 1964) in Bjørn Sørensen, “The Polish Black Series Documentary and the British Free Cinema Movement” in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed., Anikó Imre (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 11.

<sup>43</sup> Alfred Ligocki, “Antyfotografia” [Anti-Photography], *Fotografia*, 9 no. 76 (September 1959): 442-445.

in this show was also fundamentally tied to history, to a recovery of traces of the past, and a reinvention of issues around remembrance.

The third and final chapter looks at a new wave of young Polish photographers working in the 1960s, especially artists associated with the student group Zero 61. Artists discussed in previous chapters had experienced the war directly as primary witnesses or survivors. This chapter introduces a younger generation who were born in the aftermath, who did not experience the war in the same way, but who bear the traumas of previous generations. The chapter begins with the 1968 exhibition *Fotografia Subiektywna* [Subjective Photography], organised in Kraków by Zbigniew Dłubak, which took its name from Otto Steinert's concept of *Subjektive Fotografie* [Subjective Photography]. The works produced under this banner blurred the boundaries between artistic mediums and prioritised the centrality of the artist-photographer in the creative process. The montages of Andrzej Różycki are particularly interesting for the way that the past of the Polish nation appears to haunt its present landscape. The montages bring together collective memory and family snapshots, intertwining Różycki's personal histories with those of the nation. Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory guides my analysis here. Hirsch suggests that the past of one generation inhabits the psychological present of the children that follow, who are haunted by the presence of a past that they do not know. Hirsch suggests that this directs the young towards fantasy and imagination, an assessment supported by the work of the Zero 61 photographers.

In 1969 a small exhibition was staged by the Zero 61 group in an abandoned blacksmith's forge in Toruń. This remarkable show is the focus of the second section of the third chapter and traces the change from highly stylised exhibitions of art photography to an exhibition where photography was not just degraded but humiliated. Images were taken off the walls and scattered on the floor, pinned to the ceiling, glued to doors, or thrown on top of piles of rubble. Objects found on site were exhibited as ready-mades, or assembled into strange configurations. Works by Józef Robakowski and Wojciech Bruszewski foregrounded an indexical approach to artmaking. The *Kuźnia* [Forge] exhibition demonstrated a shift from taking photographs of traces (as pursued by Lewczyński in the 1950s) to using casts, imprints and moulds to create their own traces. Iversen has suggested that forms of art making that involve a physical imprint emphasise the initial



wounding moment of trauma, the imprinting of an indelible trace on the psyche.<sup>44</sup> This chapter explores how traces of trauma do not just present themselves on the surface of a photograph, but are communicated through photographic or other indexical processes of making.

Reflecting on these three decades makes evident how certain historical events recur, notably repeated episodes of anti-Semitism and persecution of Jewish citizens, in the late 1950s and again in the late 1960s. This repetition suggests that the magnitude of the horror embodied by the Second World War remained unprocessed in the collective psyche and made numerous unwanted and compulsive traumatic returns in the following years. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth suggested that the traumatised “carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess.”<sup>45</sup> Caruth suggests that what is being repeated is not the trauma, but the lack of preparedness: “The shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced *in time*, it has not yet been fully known.”<sup>46</sup> Repetition compulsion, according to Freud, rehearses the traumatic event in order to develop anxiety retrospectively.<sup>47</sup> The repetitious nature of Polish history in these years also suggests that the denial of events in official narratives of history locked the nation into a cycle of repeated return of unprocessed memories.

The art made in these decades also serves to reinforce this sense of repetition. In the following chapters, artists can be seen to gravitate towards certain themes and subject matter: abstraction; traces and mnemonic objects; entropy and destruction. The tendency towards abstraction, for example, emerges after the war, only to be suppressed in the years of Socialist Realism, and make repeated returns in the 1950s and 1960s. Why does abstraction re-emerge at these particular times? What function does abstraction serve at different historical moments? Repetition allows me to trace the evolution of these forms over time, from photographic abstractions, produced using only the properties inherent to the medium – framing, focus, depth of field – which evolve into abstractions made by working directly on the photosensitive material – spraying, dripping, tearing, burning. The interest in traces and mnemonic objects also evolves, and demonstrates a shift in the

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<sup>44</sup> See Margaret Iversen, *Photography, Trace, and Trauma*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017).

<sup>45</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 60.

way that artists figure absence: Lewczyński's photographs of abandoned shoes taken at Auschwitz in the 1950s gestures towards bodies now absent; the 1969 *Kuźnia* exhibition sees artists such as Robakowski directly exhibiting objects belonging to absent bodies, or making present the absent body through casting.

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One image in particular has stayed with me throughout the writing of this thesis. The photograph that has imprinted itself on my mind is a rather non-descript image made by Zdzisław Beksiński of a rag suspended in the air, riddled with holes [FIG.1]. In part, the image is about light, or rather degrees of transparency, as daylight emanates with varying strength through the fibres of the fabric and is released by large holes that punctuate the cloth. The image speaks of human agency, the worn nature of the rag gesturing to the ways in which it has been used. While it evokes bodies, the bodies themselves are absent, evacuated from the image. Instead, the image shows the traces that are left behind. No date is given for the image, but the grey, drab aesthetic speaks to the social conditions of post-war Poland and the aesthetic is reminiscent of other photographs produced by Beksiński in the late 1950s. In a strange way, the rag also reminds me of my own childhood, and in this way supports Marianne Hirsch's theorisation of 'postmemory'. Specifically, what strikes me about Beksiński's rag is its similarity to the cleaning cloths that my Polish grandmother used to hang out to dry in her garden. In this way, Beksiński's photograph returns me to the presence of my grandparents, who both passed away during the writing of this thesis. My grandparents – born in South Eastern Poland, now Ukraine – travelled to England via Egypt and Palestine, having both been interned separately in Siberia during the war. The photograph intertwines a picture of post-war Poland with my own personal mourning, and elides my own family history with that of the Polish nation.<sup>48</sup> Beksiński's melancholic photograph prompted me to think about my own connection with the Polish landscape and the traumas I may have inherited unknowingly from my grandparents' generation. I wondered at how such a non-descript image could be so intensely evocative to me and serve to synthesise and condense my interest in the topic of this thesis.

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<sup>48</sup> For their stories see Hubert Chudzio, Anna Jekczyk and Adrain Szopa, eds. *Pokolenia odchodzą: Relacje źródłowe polskich sybiraków z Wielkiej Brytanii: Bradford*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, 2015), 79-98; 99-112.

I was thinking about this image while lecturing students on photographic theory, particularly texts by Sigmund Freud, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan. Barthes's *Camera Lucida* brought these ideas together, reflecting on the connection between photography and trauma, via an indexical understanding of the medium. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes suggests that the photograph bears a physical connection to its referent through light; the photograph as a physical imprint of an object transferred by light onto light sensitive paper. Barthes declared that "the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent," and "a sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed."<sup>49</sup> While this evocatively conjures "a certificate of presence," Barthes acknowledged that this presence is illusory, and in fact covers an absence, a void.<sup>50</sup> He understood the photograph as the spatial configuration of a moment which has since disappeared and can no longer be accessed. Iversen has eloquently summarized Barthes's conclusion:

like the rays of light from a distant star that reach us only after the star has ceased to exist, the photograph can only attest to the past existence of the object; the photographic declaration, 'that-has-been,' hovers between presence and absence, now and then. Part of what is traumatic about photography is that it is an indexical trace of someone or something that is no more, or no longer the same. We are dealing, then, not with presence but *past* presence, which is to say, the hollowed-out presence of an absence.<sup>51</sup>

At its heart then, the photograph is structured around this void. Beksiński's *Welon* [Veil], a photograph of a cloth which partially conceals a seemingly empty landscape, seems to self-reflexively acknowledge the structure of the photographic medium as a porous membrane covering an absence.

Jacques Lacan identified a void at the core of the psyche, a lack generated by castration anxiety; the veiling of this lack, Lacan suggests, structures our desire. In *Seminar V*, he uses the example of a hysteric who uses a veil to "stimulate desire." The veil covers the lack, encouraging the belief that something lies beyond the veil and perpetuating the idea

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<sup>49</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 5.

<sup>50</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 87.

<sup>51</sup> Iversen, *Photography, Trace, and Trauma*, 6.

that the lost object exists, even though it always remains veiled and out of sight. To remove the veil would be to extinguish this desire by revealing that nothing lies behind it.<sup>52</sup> The veil has repercussions for the Symbolic order, one element of a tripartite system that Lacan developed to describe different levels of psychic phenomena. His system is rooted in Freudian notions of infantile sexuality, specifically the mirror stage. When an infant first encounters a mirror, they experience a picture of themselves as whole and coherent. The Imaginary order becomes an internalised image of this ideal, whole self, geared towards coherence rather than fragmentation; the Symbolic is associated with rules, language and writing, and organises the way a subject functions socially according to agreed conventions. The Real represents everything that cannot be articulated or symbolised in the two previous orders – it is that which resists representation, which is pre-mirror, pre-imaginary, pre-symbolic.<sup>53</sup> To sustain an ideal and illusory vision of a coherent self in the Imaginary, the child has to expel everything that cannot be assimilated into this picture. Lacan identifies these banished fragments as the Real. Trauma, for example, would belong to the register of the Real: “The trauma is Real in so far as it remains unsymbolisable – a kernel of nonsense at the heart of the subject.”<sup>54</sup> For Barthes, the defining feature of photography is also its relationship to this register. In the opening pages of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes makes direct reference to Lacan’s *Seminar XI*, suggesting that a photograph is defined not by its attachment to the Imaginary and Symbolic orders, but to another register, a third which lies outside of both these orders,

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<sup>52</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious (1957-1958)*, May 7, 1958, 11. This lack or void that structures our desire is, for Lacan, generated by an anxiety around castration, which involves the recognition of an absence. The lack of phallus in the mother generates anxiety in the child about their own body, and becomes metonymically linked to the recognition of lack. This opens up a gap in the desire of the child. The acknowledgement of a ‘lack’ in the Other creates a hole in the Symbolic Order, which leads to a constant search for that lost object. In 1964, Lacan developed the idea of *objet petit a*, part objects which we use to fill this void – objects which embody this fundamental lack and which displace the desire for the lost object onto something else: “The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but insofar as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, first, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack.” (Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 4 March 1964, 104.) The purpose of the *objet petit a* is also partly to veil from the subject the terminal nature of its loss.

<sup>53</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Symbol and Language,” in *The Language of the Self* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956); Jacques Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus,” *Ecrits*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1958); Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience,” *Ecrits* (London: Tavistock, 1977).

<sup>54</sup> Margaret Iversen, “What is a Photograph?” *Art History* 17 no. 3 (September 1994), 454-5.

namely the Real: “...in short, what Lacan calls *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression.”<sup>55</sup>

For Lacan, the Imaginary register is intended to veil the subject from the Real, for to get too close to the Real would be “equivalent to psychic death.”<sup>56</sup> Removing this veil entirely would be too painful, but Barthes suggests that there are moments when the Real ruptures the veil of the Imaginary and erupts in traumatic returns. Barthes defines this as the *punctum*, a tiny detail lurking within the image that takes the viewer by surprise and alters his understanding of the image. The viewer does not seek out the *punctum*, but rather this detail, Barthes suggests, is an “element which rises from the scene; shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.”<sup>57</sup> Bursting through the photograph, this detail breaks up the illusion of coherence within the frame. Significantly the terms used by Barthes to describe this all suggest their relation to lack: prick, tear, wound, hole.

Beksiński’s *Veil* resonates with the image Barthes selected for the frontispiece of *Camera Lucida*, a colour photograph by the French photographer Daniel Boudinet, *Polaroid* (1979), which shows curtain fabrics drawn against bright light. This melancholic image consolidates a number of ideas in Barthes’s text. First, it suggests the idea of the photograph as a screen that mediates between the viewing subject and the Real, obscuring the Real that lies behind it. Boudinet’s image also seems to make visible a moment of rupture; a small gap at the bottom of the curtains that allows a chink of light to erupt into the image. At the start of Barthes’s book then, the *punctum* is visualised for the reader as a piercing of the veil that allows the Real to intrude. Beksiński’s photograph appears to suggest something similar. His piece of fabric is quite literally torn through, making visible the idea of puncturing and tearing, bringing together notions of screen, Real and *punctum*. The fabric is riddled with multiple holes, saturated to the extent that the integrity of the material is compromised. The bleached white sky that lies behind the cloth speaks of the searing quality of the Real, and the pain involved in any attempt to directly look upon it. Hal Foster identified moments in recent art making when artists

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<sup>55</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 4. See also Margaret Iversen, “What is a Photograph?” *Art History* 17 no. 3 (September 1994).

<sup>56</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: the avant-garde at the end of the century*, (Cambridge: MIT, 1996), 138-141.

<sup>57</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26.

have invoked these notions and attempted to deliberately puncture the screen, in order “to look upon the impossible real.”<sup>58</sup>

Iversen has suggested that after *Camera Lucida* a change can be discerned in artistic practice. Lacan’s analysis of Hans Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) leads her to identify a new paradigm, namely that “art, the beautiful illusion, contains within it a seed of its own dissolution.”<sup>59</sup> At the bottom of his painting, Holbein includes a shadowy entity that cannot be seen or understood, “a blind spot in conscious perception,” and which only becomes clearly visible when the painting is looked at from an angle different to that of classical renaissance perspective.<sup>60</sup> It is only in walking away from the painting, and renouncing a position of visual mastery, that the viewer realises this shadowy stain is in fact a skull. Set again the transparency and fullness of vision associated with the Imaginary register, “this stain or spot must be approached indirectly, viewed awry, glancingly, without conscious deliberation.”<sup>61</sup> Iversen uses this example to suggest a shift in art making, whereby “the work of art based on the figure of the mirror was replaced by a model that invokes the anamorphic image, the stain, and the blind spot.”<sup>62</sup> In a circuitous way, Iversen’s analysis takes me back to my thesis and my stated intention to make visible the moments of traumatic return in post-war Polish photographs, moments when the Real can be understood to puncture the veil, or create a blind spot or stain. I am interested in the ways that photographs can be understood to communicate these traumas indirectly, belatedly and obliquely. Rather than just analysing the works that present on an Imaginary plane – that is to say, the coherent images presented on the surface of the photographic paper – I intend to ‘view awry’, to push aside the veil, and to make visible the stains and blind spots that disrupt the visual field and gesture towards the unassimilated traumas that lie beyond.

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<sup>58</sup> Hal Foster, “Obscene, Abject, Traumatic,” *October* 78 (1996): 109. See also Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 138-141.

<sup>59</sup> Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure*, 11.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Iversen, “What is a Photograph?” 457. On the link between stain and *punctum*, Iversen says that, “There is, then, a blind spot in the orthodox perceptual field which Lacan calls the stain (*la tache*), defined, like the gaze, as that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness.” (Iversen, *ibid.*)

<sup>62</sup> Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure*, 6. Lacan introduced this figure in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, where he used the distorted skull floating in the foreground of Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* (1533) to figure the blind spot in conscious perception. See *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 1964.

## CHAPTER I

### MODERN POLISH PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographs taken in the immediate aftermath of the war had the potential to work through cathartically the recent events that had indelibly imprinted themselves on the collective and individual psyche. Many photographers working after 1945 had experienced the war directly, or “bodily,” to quote Czesław Miłosz.<sup>1</sup> However, what interests me is not a direct engagement with imagery that makes visible the horrors of the war, for example, the documentary photographs taken at the liberation of the concentration camps, but rather photographs which approach this subject indirectly, and which perhaps even unknowingly bear the traces of this trauma. In this first chapter, I compare the photographs of Jan Bułhak and Zbigniew Dłubak. Bułhak had lived through not one, but two wars, and in 1945 found himself homeless due to loss of territories in the east of Poland. He subsequently resettled in Warsaw. Dłubak had been arrested following the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 and imprisoned at Auschwitz-Birkenau before being transferred to Mauthausen concentration camp. The war was not the only event to cast a shadow on the photographs being produced in these post-war years. After 1945 photographers also found themselves in the first years of a newly reconstituted nation with a vastly changed population, Soviet colonisation of the country and political infighting between factions of the *Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej* [Polish Provisional Government of National Unity]. Alongside mourning for the recent past, artists also participated in the “euphoria of reconstruction,” an impulse to rebuild the Polish cities after wartime destruction.<sup>2</sup> As Polish citizens came out to clear the tons of rubble that filled the country’s streets, they saw Poland was a nation that was going to be rebuilt, and photographers contributed to disseminating this message.

I begin by introducing Jan Bułhak and his aesthetic renderings of the Polish landscape, before turning to the abstract imagery created by Zbigniew Dłubak in the same years. This turn to abstraction can be understood as one possible response to the question of

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<sup>1</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Just after the War*, Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, October 3, 2015 – January 10, 2016.

making art after the war. Abstraction was something that the Polish writer Czesław Miłosz suggested was “preferred” in the immediate aftermath of war, in the face of a lived reality that was “the source of deep traumas.”<sup>3</sup> Rather than representing a reality that was beyond representation, artists might turn inwards to their own subjective responses. However, I will argue that abstraction does not solely consist of an abdication of responsibility in favour of a turn inwards. In scrutinising a series of works made by Dłubak in 1948, I will suggest a more nuanced reading of his abstraction through the psychoanalytical writings of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. I will also suggest that the work did not just look to the past, but was very much rooted in the present political atmosphere. This theme continues in another series begun by Dłubak in 1950, *Krajobrazach* [Landscapes], which documents marginal areas in the suburbs of Warsaw. At a moment when the heroic reconstruction of Polish cities was being proclaimed by official media, Dłubak’s photographs offer an alternative reflection on the Polish landscape.

The comparison of work by Bułhak and Dłubak reveals a battle between the old guard of Polish photography and a younger generation of photographers intent on pursuing an altogether different direction that responded to developments in other artistic mediums. Two exhibitions will be examined to make evident the divergent styles of the Bułhak school of photography and Dłubak’s alternative vision: the 1947 *I Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografiki* [First National Exhibition of Art Photography], which continued the pre-war tradition of photographic pictorialism, and an exhibition organised by Dłubak in Warsaw in 1948 titled *Nowoczesna Fotografika Polska* [Modern Polish Photography], in which photographers decisively turned away from both realism and Pictorialism in favour of abstraction. Dłubak’s exhibition was staged at a critical moment when artists attempted to defend their work from increasing interference from the Ministry of Culture and Arts, the source of another potential trauma.

One of the first post-war manifestations of photography in Poland was a one man show given to Jan Bułhak at the Muzeum Narodowe [National Museum] in Warsaw in 1946, titled *Ruiny Warszawy* [The Ruins of Warsaw] [I.1]. Poland’s capital city had suffered a particularly violent assault during the war, with Adolf Hitler having personally instructed

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<sup>3</sup> Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, 93.



that the city be “razed to the ground.”<sup>4</sup> The vast majority of Warsaw’s buildings had been destroyed, reducing the city to “a vast sea of rubble.”<sup>5</sup> In the immediate post-war years, visual imagery of ruins “appeared with compulsive, even melancholic, regularity,” as noted by David Crowley in his study of the visual and cultural history of the city of Warsaw.<sup>6</sup> The iconography and symbolism of ruins has been much discussed, notably by David Lowenthal, Brian Dillon and Andreas Schönle, and I only intend to pause here to note the frequency with which Polish photographers were documenting their destroyed cities, which suggests a behavioural pattern comparable to the symptoms of repetition compulsion.<sup>7</sup> Jan Bułhak took almost a thousand photographs of the city of Warsaw, some of which were displayed at the Muzeum Narodowe exhibition. From 1945 Leonard Sempoliński also systematically photographed Warsaw’s Old Town street by street, documenting ruined monuments, destroyed facades and close-ups of architectural details [I.2]. Sempoliński intended these subdued, melancholic images to immortalise the destroyed city that was to be cleared and rebuilt. He retrospectively wrote: “I was walking through the places of torment and ruins of the town in a state of strange excitement. I felt and read the tragedy of Warsaw out of each piece of paving-stone and block of ruin. I knew that this was the end of a chapter in life, and at the same time the beginning of something new.”<sup>8</sup>

Bodily terms abounded in the descriptions of ruins in these years, with ruins invoked as the ‘wounds’ of the city, a metaphor for bodily mutilation. This affective corporeal invocation of the ruin served an allegorical purpose, metonymically standing in for bodies no longer present. Yet Sempoliński’s quote suggests that his photographs did not simply testify to tragedy, or serve as indexes to the destruction; they also incorporated the promise of future reconstruction. This message was harnessed by a Soviet-backed socialist government. Andreas Schönle, studying the link between ruins and historical consciousness, has noted how Soviet authorities “were keen to exploit ruins as a

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<sup>4</sup> Cited by Stanisław Jankowski, “Warsaw: Destruction, Secret Town Planning, 1939-44, and Postwar Reconstruction” in *Rebuilding Europe’s Bombed Cities*, ed., Jeffrey M. Diefendorf (London, 1990), 79.

<sup>5</sup> David Crowley, “‘Memory in Pieces’: The Symbolism of the Ruin in Warsaw after 1944,” *Journal of Modern European History* 9 no. 3 (2011): 352.

<sup>6</sup> David Crowley, *Warsaw* (London: Reaktion, 2003), 27.

<sup>7</sup> See David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Michael S. Roth, Claire Lyons and Charles Merewether, *Irresistible decay: ruins reclaimed*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1997); Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds. *Ruins of modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Brian Dillon, *Ruins: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Leonard Sempoliński, “*Dlaczego fotografowałem Warszawę*” [*Why did I Photograph Warsaw*] in *Warszawa 1945*, ed. Emilia Borecka (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1975), 293.

propaganda device,” walking “a fine line in calibrating the allowable portrayal of ruination” in the media and in exhibitions.<sup>9</sup> At a time of political uncertainty, images appeared in exhibitions and in Polish magazines; the journal *Stolica* [Capital City] contrasted views of Warsaw in ruins with new facades under construction, to demonstrate the achievements of Poland’s reconstruction. David Snyder has discussed these sets of photographic pairings, and described them as a “rigorous publicity campaign using photographic images and ideological pronouncement cloaked in nationalist rhetoric, [that] aimed to remould collective consciousness.”<sup>10</sup> Certainly the photographs were infused with ideological meanings. David Crowley has suggested that the ruined city of Warsaw became a symbol of national revival; the task of remaking Warsaw was turned into an “opportunity for a muscular display of the might of a command economy and state socialism.”<sup>11</sup> This demonstration was carried out primarily through photographic imagery. Magdalena Wróblewska’s study of Sempoliński’s photographs goes one step further and suggests that a focus on the reconstruction of the city was in fact tantamount to a form of denial. Images of reconstruction served to disavow the original destruction and erase it from national consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

The process of reconstruction was likened in the Polish press to a resurrection, and the words used to describe the reconstruction in the Polish press frequently utilised biblical metaphors. The *Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy* [Bureau for the Reconstruction of the Capital] (BOS) was the government agency tasked with rebuilding Warsaw. Their official publication *Stolica* chronicled the ‘New Socialist Warsaw’ rising from the ashes. A November 3, 1946 issue of *Stolica* featured a photo-essay which once again paired before and after images of the city of Warsaw. The title of the article would have possessed particular resonance with a readership, which for the first time in the nation’s history, was predominantly Roman Catholic. Titled “Beautiful Warsaw that is, Alas, No More, and which We Will Resurrect,” the Polish verb *wskrzesić* [resurrection] is used rather than rebuilding or reconstructing, which Snyder suggests served two functions; it articulated

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<sup>9</sup> Andreas Schönle, *Architecture of Oblivion: Ruins and Historical Consciousness in Modern Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 155; 161.

<sup>10</sup> David Snyder, “Rhetorics and Politics. Polish architectural modernism in the early post-war years,” in *Alternative Visions of Post-War Reconstruction: Creating the Modern Townscape*, eds. John Pendlebury, Erdem Erten, Peter J Larkham (London: Routledge, 2015), 176.

<sup>11</sup> Crowley, *Warsaw*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Magdalena Wróblewska, “Warsaw photographed: time, place and memory,” *Image [&] Narrative* [e-journal], 23 (2008). Accessed March 24, 2017.  
<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/timeandphotography/wroblewska.htm>.

“the martyr status of Warsaw and reinforced the well-established Polish self-image as ‘the Christ of the Nations’ (*Polska Chrystusem narodów*).”<sup>13</sup> Interestingly this trope of Polish identity had its roots in Adam Mickiewicz’s epic poem *Pan Tadeusz* (1834), written in the wake of 1830 Uprising following the eighteenth century period of partitioning the 1815 Congress of Vienna, which rendered South-Eastern Polish lands a puppet state of the Russian empire.

*I OGÓLNOPOLSKA WYSTAWA FOTOGRAFIKI* [First National Exhibition of Art Photography] (1947)

The language of ‘resurrection’ also found its way into the art world. The *I Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografiki* [First National Exhibition of Art Photography] was a group exhibition dedicated to art photography that opened in April 1947 at the *Muzeum Wielkopolskie* [Museum of Greater Poland] in Poznań, organised by the *Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Fotografii* [Association of Photographic Enthusiasts] [I.3]. The introductory text written for the exhibition catalogue is revealing on a number of levels. The text was written by Marian Schulz, a reporter on photography at the Ministry of Culture and Art, whose choice of language deserves close scrutiny. Instead of referring to photographic technique or subject matter, as one might expect for an exhibition of photography, Schulz cites biblical references. The start of one paragraph emphatically declares, “In the beginning was the word,” compounded by phrases which refer to elements of the Catholic Mass, such as “smoke on the altar of beauty” and “the eating of the bread.”<sup>14</sup> Schulz also quoted the first verse in the Gospel of St. John, a gospel which recounts Jesus’s acts of spiritual salvation, physical healing and his deliverance of his followers from the influence of evil – acts which take on a particularly charged meaning when transposed to the post-war context. The message of resurrection that BOC perpetuated in the articles of *Stolica* were reinforced in the context of the art world.

Rather than dwelling on the past, Schulz advises Polish artists to start afresh, his words pointing to new beginnings. This is compounded by references to a redemptive light:

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<sup>13</sup> David I. Snyder, “Rhetorics and Politics. Polish architectural modernism in the early post-war years,” in *Alternative Visions of Post-War Reconstruction* eds. Pendlebury, Erten and Larkham, 166.

<sup>14</sup> Marian Schulz, introduction to *I Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografiki* [First National Exhibition of Art Photography], exhibition catalogue, *Muzeum Wielkopolskie*, Poznań (April-May, 1947), n.p.

“From the point of view of the psychological hygiene of modern man – the intricate mental process of artistic creation moved out from the stuffy atmosphere of the past – into the sun, light and bright. The sun as a factor in revealing the beauty of life in our surrounding world, has become a symbol of photography and its staunchest ally.<sup>15</sup> The implied message in Schulz’s words, as endorsed by the Ministry of Culture, was that photographers should create imagery that focused on the beauty of life, rather than referencing the tragedies of the past. This was later stressed by Jakub Berman, the minister for public security and leading member of the Politburo, in a speech at a 1950 writers’ conference titled *O właściwe stanowisko* [The Correct Position]: “It is yet another appeal to the literary conscience of those writers who want to derive the material for their work from life and struggles, who do not want to become narcissists focused on their loneliness and past; who do not want the fast current of the new life to flow by them.”<sup>16</sup> Berman’s words suggest that in 1950 the period of coming to terms with the past was over, and was to be replaced with a more constructive activity, namely the building of socialism. This can perhaps go some way towards explaining the lack of art photography in these post-war years that directly addresses the events of the war, despite many photographers having experienced the war directly.

Schulz’s opening paragraph also reveals a fundamental disparity between the message that the Ministry wished artists to communicate, and the reality of events in post-war Poland. Schulz stated that an attitude geared towards “revealing the beauty of the world” would be “in keeping with the atmosphere of our artistic present, with respect to which no one is experiencing any conflicts.”<sup>17</sup> This appears to reference post-war peace after the damaging years of the Second World War. At the same time, it denies conflicts that were ongoing after the official end of the war in 1945. Mass arrests, expulsions and executions still continued, and many Poles in areas of Eastern Poland found themselves forcibly deported, their home territories having been integrated into areas of the Ukraine and Baltic States. The immediate post-war years also saw thousands of Polish independence fighters oppose the new communist regime, launching attacks on the offices of Soviet law enforcement agencies. These clandestine resistance organisations continued to fight against the Stalinist government of Poland for a number of years, although their actions

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jakub Berman’s words at the Writers’ Association conference in 1950. Adam Wazyk, “O właściwe stanowisko” [The Correct Position], *Kuznica* 10 (1950).

<sup>17</sup> Schulz, introduction to *I Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografiki*, n.p.

were violently suppressed. Schulz's seemingly innocuous words actively avoided any mention of these events. This points to a wider question of truthfulness and, specifically, the truth value of photography in post-war Poland, a theme that is explored later in the chapter.

The exhibition also made clear the status of art photography in Poland at this time. All the exhibited artists were members of the *Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików* [Union of Polish Photographic Artists] (ZPAF), which was founded in 1947 by Jan Bułhak and Leonard Sempoliński.<sup>18</sup> Bułhak, frequently dubbed the 'father of Polish photography,' is remembered as one of the leading Pictorialists of the early twentieth century in Poland, known for his soft-focused renderings of bucolic Polish landscapes [1.4]. Bułhak and Sempoliński were both exhibited in the 1947 exhibition and several of the featured artists had been their students, so the work on display clearly remained within this tradition. The inclusion of a text by a representative from the Ministry suggests that a perpetuation of this genre of photography was supported. The accompanying catalogue detailed the photographic processes used to create the works in the show: alongside silver gelatin, photographers also made use of bromoil, gum bichromate and gevaluxe, a printing paper that mimics the appearance of velvet; this list reads like secessionist work from the turn of the century, rather than an articulation of contemporary concerns in photography almost fifty years later.

Pictorialist photography had gained international support at the turn of the twentieth century through the efforts of Secessionist groups in Europe and America which brought together like minded photographers keen to claim the artistic value for their medium. These groups largely consisted of serious amateurs attempting to mark a distinction between themselves and a newly emerging mass hobby culture for photography, created by the introduction of affordable, easy-to-use camera technology. Using photography as a means of artistic expression, Pictorialist photographers often imitated the effects of painting, drawing and etching in their photographs to create hazy, impressionistic landscapes and portraits, and used elaborate, time-consuming printing processes involving platinum, gum, bichromate and carbon, all of which allowed for a great deal of handwork on both the negative and the print. After the first decade of the century, heavy manipulation and hazy atmospheric images had fallen out of favour with many

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<sup>18</sup> Originally named the Polish Union of Art Photographers [*Polski Związek Artystów Fotografików*] but renamed ZPAF in 1952, the name by which it is still known today.

photographers, who saw the mechanical properties of the camera as better suited to representing the fast-paced modern industrial world. Nonetheless, Pictorialist imagery continued to be utilised as a signifier for artistic photography for several decades and indeed flourished in the 1920s and into the 1930s in Poland.

After the war, support of Pictorialist photography did not lose momentum, and Bułhak continued to be an influential figure.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the art historian Magdalena Wróblewska has retrospectively commented that, after 1945 “Pictorialism was the only established and legitimate aesthetics in photography.”<sup>20</sup> The persistence of a Pictorialist aesthetic was aided by Bułhak’s persuasive rhetoric, articulated in numerous articles and texts that he authored, and it received institutional support through organisations such as ZPAF and the *Polskiego Towarzystwa Fotograficznego* [Polish Photographic Society] (PTF). In fact, Bułhak dominated the post-war photographic milieu in more ways than one. The photographer and writer Wojciech Nowicki recounted how a particular photograph adorned the wall of a regional photography association in Gliwice, in southern Poland: “Over the heads of the members, all of them neatly labelled, looms a portrait of the Founding Father: Jan Bułhak in all his glory, in a fur cap and a fur collar. There’s no need to label him.”<sup>21</sup> All regional photographic associations hung Bułhak’s portrait in their premises. This “heavy burden” made it difficult for photographers to distance themselves from the tradition.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps this return to a pre-war aesthetic also served a useful psychological function. Denial is a common psychological defence against trauma, and at a time when Poland and its people had experienced an unprecedented series of shattering events, the immediate post-war return to a popular pre-war mode of photography could be read as a refusal to acknowledge the traumas of the recent past, and suggests a desire to establish a reassuring

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<sup>19</sup> For details of Bułhak’s influence see, amongst others, Jerzy Lewczyński, *Jerzy Lewczyński “Archeologia Fotografii”: Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński ‘Archaeology of Photography’: Work from the years 1941-2005], exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Kropka, 2005); Adam Mazur, ed. *Nowi Dokumentaliści* [The New Documentalists], exhibition catalogue (Warszawa: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, 2006); Laura Hamilton ed. *Polish Perceptions: Ten Contemporary Photographers, 1977-88*, exhibition catalogue (Glasgow: Collins Gallery, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> Magdalena Wróblewska in *Schlabs poszukujący: fotografia z lat 1952-1957* [Schlabs - the seeking one: photography from 1952-1957], eds., Dorota Łuczak and Magdalena Wróblewska (Poznań: Fundacja 9/12 Art Space, 2011), 40-41.

<sup>21</sup> Wojciech Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu* [Jerzy Lewczyński: memory of the image] (Gliwice: Muzeum, 2012), 254.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

sense of continuity in spite of these events. However, certain photographers were intent on exploring new directions and attempted to overthrow this ‘heavy burden.’

*NOWOCZESNA FOTOGRAFIKA POLSKA* [Modern Polish Photography] (1948)

The following year, Zbigniew Dłubak organised a very different exhibition of photography at the *Klub młodych artystów i naukowców* [Club of Young Artists and Scientists] (KMAiN) in Warsaw. *Nowoczesna Fotografika Polska* [Modern Polish Photography] ran from September to October 1948, with the title already signalling Dłubak’s intention to break with the past and explore new possibilities for image making. The exhibition can retrospectively be understood as an important moment for photography, promising the first manifestation of modern tendencies specific to photography in the newly constituted Republic of Poland. Dłubak later stated that the exhibition “was conceived as a broad demonstration of attitudes opposing tradition” and that it “testified to the need to look for new solutions.”<sup>23</sup> Dłubak consciously differentiated his show from the previous year’s manifestation of art photography: he staged his exhibition at KMAiN in Warsaw, a meeting point for young radical avant-garde artists, rather than in an established national museum, and the show was supported by the *Polskie Towarzystwo Fotograficzne* [Polish Photographic Society] rather than *Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Fotografii* [Association of Photographic Enthusiasts]. Furthermore the cover of Dłubak’s exhibition catalogue was markedly different; heraldic crests and symbolic eagles were eliminated in favour of an abstract design of radiating circles, ink spots and lines resembling an automatic drawing [I.5].<sup>24</sup>

Dłubak provided a text for the catalogue, citing a passage from his *Z rozmyślań o fotografice* [Reflections on Photography] published earlier that year in the journal *Świat Fotografii* [World of Photography].<sup>25</sup> References to altars and holy bread are eliminated, replaced by Dłubak’s ruminations on the photograph’s connection to the material world and the ways in which this connection could be transformed. Dłubak suggested that previous attempts at photographic artistry have been “treated only as a kind of

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<sup>23</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, “Introduction,” in *Edward Hartwig: Fotografika*, exhibition catalogue (Warsaw: Zacheta, 1972), n.p.

<sup>24</sup> White crowned eagles have been used for centuries as a symbol of Poland. For a more detailed discussion on the symbol of the White Eagle, see Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols Against Symbols of Power* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, “Z rozmyślań o fotografice” in *Nowoczesna Fotografika Polska* [Modern Polish Photography], exhibition catalogue (Warszawa: Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców, 1948), (n.p.). Also published in *Świat Fotografii*, no.10 (1948): 2.

embellishment upon the work of a craftsman,” resulting in a “cliché-ridden range of ‘romantic moods’.”<sup>26</sup> In the text, Dłubak called for a change of attitude in the handling of imagery among modern photographers:

The naturalistic convention has such a strong hold on our artistic consciousness, that we do not have enough courage to drop the unnecessary ballast and we do not use the rich yet unexploited resources – the suggestiveness of the forms of objects and their associative values. Rather than treating these factors as marginal, we must turn to them in our search for a possible new approach to photography – making it a form of high artistic quality. Such an approach to the problem will contribute to the abolition of the present slavish dependency of photography upon nature. Reality may then become the material for art in the full sense of the world, not only letting us go beyond the range of directly presented images of nature, but also opening perspectives for new means of visual expression, not available in other domains of art.<sup>27</sup>

In illustration of these points, Dłubak selected ten photographers for the show, each of whom could be understood to be breaking with these “naturalistic conventions” by abstracting or transforming reality in various ways.<sup>28</sup> All the works selected by Dłubak for the exhibition showed artists beginning to explore more experimental modes of image making that complicated photography’s connection to naturalistic depiction.

Fortunata Obrąpalska was one such artist. Her early pre-war work had been greatly influenced by Bułhak’s pictorialist style, but after the war Obrąpalska, together with her husband Zygmunt, moved to Poznań, where she became associated with the artistic collective 4F+R, and from 1947 begun pursuing a more experimental style of imagery.<sup>29</sup> In the *Nowoczesna Fotografika Polska* exhibition she exhibited works from her series *Dyfuzja w cieczy* [Diffusion of Liquids], which appeared to be indebted to her earlier study of chemistry. Beginning with a glass jar of water, Obrąpalska added drops of ink

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Full list of artists exhibited: Jan Bułhak, Roman Burzyński, Zbigniew Czajkowski, duo of Marian and Witold Dederko, Zbigniew Dłubak, Edward Hartwig, Fortunata Obrąpalska, Zbigniew Pękosławski, Leonard Sempoliński, Irena Strzemieczna.

<sup>29</sup> 4F+R stands for: form, paint, material, fantasy + realism [forma, farba, faktura, fantastyka + realism]. Founded in 1947 by the artists Ildephonsus Houwalt, Alfred Lenica and Felix M. Nowowiejski with the aim of propelling art in Poznań towards the more modern tendencies being pursued by Kantor in Kraków. The group staged two exhibitions of Obrąpalska’s work in 1947 and 1949.



and photographed the subsequent dispersal of the ink within the water.<sup>30</sup> While the series as a whole is given a scientific title, the images themselves possess more evocative and metaphorical names – *Ciszę* [Silence], *Przekleństwo* [Curse], *Tancerka* [Dancer] – which affect our reading of the images, activating our subconscious associative mechanisms to render the traces of ink almost figurative. In *Przekleństwo* [Curse] (1947) [1.6], the image has been rotated 180 degrees, so that the ink unexpectedly flows upwards instead of down, resembling ephemeral curls of smoke. At the centre of the image, we are tempted to read a talismanic figure, stirring up a storm of dark forces. *Tancerka* [Dancer] (1948) [1.7] is suggestive of the graceful movement evoked by the floating dye, the large globule of ink resembling a head upon the neck of an undulating body. This associative quality led Polish critics to liken Obrąpalska's works to Surrealism, a link supported by an essay that Obrąpalska published in *Świat Fotografii* in September 1948, titled 'Efekty surrealistyczne w fotografice' [Surrealistic effects in photography]. Although Obrąpalska did not identify with the ideological basis of surrealism, she borrowed from its manner of expression.

Obrąpalska also experimented with darkroom techniques to create unusual visual effects. With its silvery, almost metallic tones, *Tancerka* is a solarised photograph; the accompanying image, *Tancerka II* [Dancer II] [1.8] flips this original image along a vertical axis to produce a mirror image, and has been inversely printed, inverting the expected tonal relationships. In doing so Obrąpalska confuses the relationship of dark and light tones, causing light areas in the original to take on a deep black hue, while the original areas of darkness are transformed into bright almost luminescent white. In each of the works exhibited by Dłubak in his 1948 exhibition, the role of the photographer becomes increasingly crucial in transforming an otherwise descriptive documentary photograph into an articulation of his or her own subjective vision. This is made explicit in Obrąpalska's image *Studium II* [Study II], illustrated in the exhibition catalogue, in which we see a black shadowy figure looming over the image, perhaps the author herself [1.9]. Alongside her shadow, we also see a face and body reflected back at us. Obrąpalska's presence in the work is insistently felt, her hands raised and poised akin to a puppeteer, as if ready to conduct proceedings, or like a sorceress over a cauldron stirring

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<sup>30</sup> The series was reproduced in the May 1948 issue of *Świat Fotografii*, and was awarded First Prize in a competition sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Arts. Obrąpalska had to abandon her photographic work in the darkroom at the end of the 1950s after developing an allergy to the chemicals she had been using.

and controlling the photographic emulsion. The image insistently points to the role of the photographer in transforming the photographic material. Interestingly, her fingertips appear to meet the fingertips of the ghostly apparition, making visible a moment of connection between these two selves. The image appears to make visible the notion that Roland Barthes would later articulate in *Camera Lucida*, namely that a connection through light is established between the viewer of a photograph and its subject via the osmotic surface of the photographic paper:

From a real body which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.<sup>31</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly, Dłubak also chose to include the pre-war photographers Bułhak and Sempoliński in his show. Yet even here, we see a reality under transformation. Sempoliński's *Koniec zabawy* [End of Games] appears to be a simple documentary image of reflections on water carefully framed to eliminate the horizon line and remove all sense of perspective [I.10]. In the context of this exhibition, Dłubak invites viewers to read the image as an exercise in formal patterning and texture. Understood in this way, the image becomes increasingly disorientating; it proves difficult to differentiate the three planes – the pond scum on the surface of water, the sky above and the reflection of its clouds in the water – all of which are collapsed into one flat field.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps most unexpectedly, Bułhak himself was also included.<sup>33</sup> Bułhak's silver gelatin print *Kościół P. Marii – Gdańsk* [Church of the Virgin Mary] [I.11] was taken in the northern town of Gdańsk, and it retains the hazy composition of his earlier bromoil prints, but reveals an element of abstraction in his work. The photograph documents the interior of a church, with pillars dappled in sunlight and shadow, but details are obscured by the heavy patterning created

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<sup>31</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wand, 1981), 80-81.

<sup>32</sup> In the late 1960s Sempoliński breaks with the documentary mode altogether, producing a series of "agrographics" [*agrografie*] that had little to do with reality: abstract compositions created by applying chemicals directly to photographic paper, referencing *informel* painting. This direction of photography will be addressed in the section on abstraction in the following chapter.

<sup>33</sup> Dłubak possessed a certain amount of respect for Bułhak, acknowledging the merits of his practice even though it diverged from his own interests. Furthermore this respect was reciprocated; Bułhak was one of the main advocates for Dłubak's election to ZPAF.

by light streaming into the church through the leaded windows. The participation of this leading Pictorialist in an exhibition of modern photography was significant, especially at this moment of transition between the two styles. His inclusion suggested that the formula of photographic modernity being propagated by Dłubak was beginning to usurp the position previously held by Bułhak's formulation of photography. Dłubak later suggested, "we considered the sending of a photograph by Jan Bułhak to the exhibition as a sign of alliance with the young, a certain kind of tolerance on the part of the master who understands the mechanisms of the movement of history."<sup>34</sup>

Dłubak's 1948 exhibition marked a significant shift for the medium of photography, harnessing the camera as a tool for the creation of original imagery rather than the slavish reproduction of a visible reality or the imitation of painting. This new direction met with criticism. The art critic Wiesław Hudon later recalled how the exhibition was inscribed into the history of Polish photography as "an exhibition of lunatics."<sup>35</sup> The work exhibited by Dłubak certainly broke with the prevailing current of artistic photography; the photographer Jerzy Lewczyński later acknowledged that Dłubak's efforts had "opened a new period of attempts to liberate photography from the existing canons of art."<sup>36</sup>

## ABSTRACTION

This new direction was best exemplified by the photographs that Dłubak himself contributed to the *Nowoczesna Fotografika Polska* show. He included a selection of curious photographs, which had been the subject of his first solo photography exhibition earlier that year at *Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców* [Club of Young Artists and Scientists] (KMAiN) in Warsaw in June 1948. These strange and disorientating images seem intent on frustrating the evidential quality of the photograph in favour of something more allusive and enigmatic; their mysterious quality compounded by evocative titles. *Nocami straszy męka głodu* [The Agony of Hunger Haunts at Night] features an ambiguous structure that resembles coral, but could equally be a magnified particle of dust, a scientific molecule, or an amorphous apparition from a nightmare [I.12]; *Dzieci*

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<sup>34</sup> Dłubak, "Introduction," in *Edward Hartwig: Fotografika*, n.p.

<sup>35</sup> Wiesław Hudon, "Wariaci i egzaltowani" ['Lunatics' and exalted], *Fotografia* 12 no. 186 (December 1968): 266-276.

<sup>36</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, *Antologia fotografii polskiej: 1839-1989* (Bielsko-Biała: Wydawnictwo LUCRUM, cop. 1999), 93.

*śniq o ptakach* [Children dream of birds] resembles a wire structure or mesh, or perhaps refractions of light on water [I.12]. The images in this series possess various degrees of legibility, often impeded by blurring and selective focus. Rather than looking outwards, they seem to direct the viewer inwards, towards the realm of the imagination. The art historian Lech Lechowicz has described these works as “dream images, freed from the rigours of logic, in which commonplace situations and ordinary objects present themselves in surprising configurations, sometimes with unusual clarity, transformed and strange.”<sup>37</sup> The result is a series of suggestive images that possess a “disturbing mysteriousness and intriguing strangeness,” and frustrate any attempt at conclusive identification [I.12; I.13; I.15-I.18].<sup>38</sup>

While Dłubak’s images come close to abstraction, they are still rooted in reality. In *Dzieci śniq o ptakach*, what appear to be twists of wire or water reflections are in fact several blades of grass photographed in extreme, almost microscopic, close up, with a shallow depth of field. Throughout this series, Dłubak took familiar commonplace objects and rendered them decontextualised and unfamiliar through photographic techniques of foreshortening, careful framing and close-ups. Karolina Lewandowska distinguishes different categories of abstraction within the series: the first, photographs recorded by the camera on a scale similar to human vision but using shallow depth of field and varied focus to create forms that the eye would not usually chance upon; the second, photographs that show a reality inaccessible to the human eye, registering the objects in a new macro-scale.<sup>39</sup> The photographs demonstrate a different approach to recording reality with a camera, using the apparatus to register a picture of the world that looks different to the way it is received by the human eye. The curator Łukasz Ronduda has drawn attention to Dłubak’s fascination with “penetrating aspects of reality not generally visible to human senses.”<sup>40</sup>

The role of the camera in transmitting an image and mediating the way we see the world interested Dłubak. His photographs from the late 1940s testify to a two-fold fascination

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<sup>37</sup> Lech Lechowicz, “Photography and Media in the Polish Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde. Historical Essays as Side-Notes to the Collection of the Bieńkowski Brothers,” in *Fotoobrazy: gest plastyczny w fotografii ze zbiorów Dariusza i Krzysztofa Bieńkowskich* (Łódź: Muzeum Szuki w Łodzi, 2006), n.p.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Karolina Ziębińska-Lewandowska, “Praktyka Widzenia: Twórczość fotograficzna Zbigniewa Dłubaka w latach 1947 – 2000” (master’s thesis, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2001), n.p.

<sup>40</sup> Łukasz Ronduda, *Polish Art of the 70s* (Warszawa: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski, 2009), 213.

that what exists in nature can be recorded in the photograph; and also that which does not exist in reality can be registered on the photosensitive material. Driving Dłubak's photographic activity was a self-acknowledged desire to show that the vision facilitated by photography "has so much altered the normal, banal views, such as the one we are used to, that it has created a new world."<sup>41</sup> Dłubak's interest in transforming vision resonates with the ideas that the avant-garde Polish artist Władysław Strzemiński was developing. His *Teoria widzenia* [Theory of Vision] presented a series of articles, in which Strzemiński presented the history of art as the evolution of ways of seeing and the growth of visual awareness. He argued that our vision of the world, the way we look at things, changes as a result of historical, social and political conditions: "In the process of seeing it is not important what the eye seizes mechanically, but what man becomes aware of in his vision. Increased visual awareness thus reflects the process of human evolution."<sup>42</sup>

Later in 1948, Dłubak's abstract photographs were exhibited in Kraków at the *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej* [First Exhibition of Modern Art] which opened at the *Palac Sztuki* [Palace of Art] in December 1948 and featured important inter-war artists alongside the younger post-war generation. As well as exhibiting existing work, Dłubak had also been invited by the curator of the show, Tadeusz Kantor, to participate in the design of the exhibition. Kantor had in mind an ambitious installation concept: the viewer's route through the exhibition was to be a journey, which began with each visitor passing through an instructive entrance gallery before they entered the main exhibition hall. For this room Dłubak created six large photographs which were mounted on blocks or plinths turning them into sculptural objects that obstructed the visitor's path into the main hall, requiring visitors to walk between and around them. Dłubak's images consisted of large-scale enlargements of everyday objects: a cross section of a cabbage head magnified several times; the inner mechanisms of a watch, a telescopic photograph of the stars and an X-ray of a human chest and lungs [I.14]. The photographs showed a reality transformed by the instruments of science: telescopes, microscopes, X-rays, demonstrating a new way of looking at the world made possible by the development of technology, particularly those

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<sup>41</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, interview with Jarosław Suchan, in *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej - 50 lat później* [First Exhibition of Modern Art – 50 years later], exhibition catalogue, (Kraków: Galerii Starmach, 1998), 21.

<sup>42</sup> Władysław Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia* [Theory of Vision] (Kraków, 1958), 15. This text was not officially published until 1957, but it had been written in 1948 and circulated among artists. Dłubak had links with Strzemiński after inviting him to collaborate on projects for KMAiN.

technologies that utilise photographic means. Together Dłubak and Kantor appealed to the visitor to think differently about the way in which one could look at the world. The painter Andrzej Wróblewski wrote a review of the exhibition and asked, “An image of a man in an X-ray photo is different from the photograph in the family album. Is it less true or real? Reality is not confined to that which we see superficially.”<sup>43</sup>

The theorist and art historian Mieczysław Porębski later stated that Dłubak’s photographs in Kantor’s show were intended to “liberate the spectator from his everyday visual habits.”<sup>44</sup> Revealing extraordinary views of the world that are not part of our habitual visual experience had the potential to disrupt conventional perception. Texts by Dłubak in the late 1940s articulate the belief that photographs could teach the viewer something about how they look out onto the world, could train our perception, and by implication, could attempt to “change the mentality which was the result of natural but schematic behaviour.”<sup>45</sup> One of the key features of photography for Dłubak was that in the medium lay the potential “to cast doubt on our ability to see that world.”<sup>46</sup> This cultivation of doubt was key for Dłubak; in 1948 he stated that it “opens a wide field of investigation.”<sup>47</sup>

While critics today, such as Lechowicz, write enthusiastically about the new possibilities for the medium that Dłubak was exploring, critics at the time remained sceptical. Dłubak noted that in the post-war years, his abstract photographs were seen as “shocking” or “disturbing,” contradicting what critics expected of the photographic medium when compared with Bułhak’s pictorial imagery.<sup>48</sup> Most frequently, critics tended to invoke visual comparisons with Surrealism. Urszula Czartoryska, for example, described the hallucinatory qualities of his works as possessing a poetic, vague, and dreamlike vision, which she identified as linking his work to Surrealism on the basis of formal

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<sup>43</sup> *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej - 50 lat później*, 114.

<sup>44</sup> Mieczysław Porębski, *Dłubak – fotografie 1948-1950* [Dłubak – photographs 1948-1950], exhibition catalogue (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 1995), 14.

<sup>45</sup> Janusz Zagrodzki, “Zbigniew Dłubak i Grupa 55” [Zbigniew Dłubak and Grupa 55] in *Dłubak i Grupa 55* [Dłubak and Grupa 55], eds., Marcin Bauer and Anđzelika Wesołek, exhibition catalogue (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, 2003) 123.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Zbigniew Dłubak, Meudon, October 1995. Józef Bury, “Contexte d’apparition des pratiques de type performance en Pologne: Entretien avec Zbigniew Dłubak, Włodzimirz Borowski, Jerzy Beres et Józef Robakowski” [Context of the appearance of performance practices in Poland: Interviews with Zbigniew Dłubak, Włodzimirz Borowski, Jerzy Beres and Józef Robakowski], *Æsthetica-Nova* no. 6 (1996), 40-70.

<sup>47</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, “Rozmyślania o fotografii” [Reflections on Photography], *Świat Fotografii*.10 (1948): 2.

<sup>48</sup> Dłubak in Bury, “Contexte d’apparition des pratiques de type performance en Pologne,” 40-70.

resemblances rather than any real commitment to surrealist principles.<sup>49</sup> Although Dłubak acknowledged an interest in Surrealism, together with an acknowledgment of the usefulness of Freudian psychoanalysis, he was keen to disavow any claim that his work was surrealist. He suggested the purpose of his artistic activity to be fundamentally different. In a later interview with Józef Bury, Dłubak remarked of this period, “I was already drawn to surrealism before the war – perhaps it was the effect of reading Witkacy, but despite a certain formal affinity, my photographs were mostly intended as a reflection on the possibilities of looking at the world through an optical apparatus, looking at the real world, so they dealt with the issue of visual perception.”<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps a more fertile link to Surrealism can be drawn through an exploitation of the photograph’s indexical connection to the material world, an approach that Dłubak shared with earlier surrealist artists. Rosalind Krauss’s writing on photography and surrealism proves instructive here. In ‘The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism’, Krauss describes the photograph as an imprint of the real, “a photomechanically processed trace causally connected to that thing itself in the world to which it refers.”<sup>51</sup> The indexical connection gives the photograph an evidential quality which assures that the subject of the photograph once stood before the camera’s lens. Krauss suggested that the medium’s indexical character was exploited by Surrealist photographers as a tactic; they utilised the seamlessness of the final photographic print to suggest to the viewer that manipulations wrought by the photographer were in fact moments of convulsion in reality itself. The strangeness of Dłubak’s photographs is similarly augmented by this direct connection to the material world. In his photographs, we cannot easily equate what we see in the images to anything we have seen or experienced in the world, and this ambiguity produces a disquieting effect. Dłubak’s photographs appear to make visible a moment in the everyday or commonplace situation where something strange or marvellous has erupted into that reality, where reality itself has been convulsed.<sup>52</sup>

Surrealism came to exert a considerable, albeit brief, influence on Polish artists in the late 1940s. Several artists travelled to Paris at this time; Kantor visited Paris in 1947,

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<sup>49</sup> See Urszula Czartoryska, *Fotografia polska: featuring original masterworks from public and private collections in Poland, 1839-1945, and a selection of avant-garde photography, film, and video from 1945 to the present*, exhibition catalogue (New York: International Center of Photography, 1979).

<sup>50</sup> Dłubak in Bury, “Contexte d’apparition des pratiques de type performance en Pologne,” 40-70.

<sup>51</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism,” *October* 19 (1981): 3-34.

<sup>52</sup> Breton articulates the notion of convulsive beauty in a number of texts; at the end of the book *Nadja* (1928), for example, he states, “beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all.”

returning with surrealist publications and catalogues, including Breton's *Surrealism and Painting* (1928). Piotr Piotrowski, in his study of post-war Polish art, suggested that interest in surrealism after the war constituted an attempt to find an adequate language in which to describe the situation in Poland.<sup>53</sup> For Piotrowski, the Surrealist's anarchist attitude, "which rejected every dogma," appealed to Polish artists and provided a welcome tonic for the reality of life under occupation.<sup>54</sup> Dłubak followed a different route to Surrealism than Kantor. Dłubak had been interned in Mauthausen concentration camp for his participation in the Warsaw Uprising. He was introduced to Czech Surrealism through the Czech artist Zbyněk Sekal during their incarceration together in Mauthausen and, after the liberation of the camps, Dłubak travelled to Prague and met with Czech artists who were preparing a posthumous exhibition of Jindřich Štyrský, a prominent Czech Surrealist painter, poet and photographer.<sup>55</sup> Dłubak later suggested that a renewal of interest in matters of the human mind and the unconscious, helped to explain why an engagement with Surrealism was revived in Polish art after the war. He elaborated, "The camp, guerrilla warfare ... This all created a surreal atmosphere. And it seemed to us that in reaching for surrealist methods, one would be able to reveal the layers in the human psyche that can explain - if you reach them - the essence of what happened during the war and straight afterward."<sup>56</sup> Dłubak suggested that Surrealist interest in bypassing consciousness and accessing the depths of the subconscious might serve to work through war time trauma, stating that these methods "carried with them the possibility of getting rid of the nightmare of war and the possibility of freeing imagination by way of penetrating the most deeply concealed secrets of the human soul."<sup>57</sup>

The difficulty inherent in any attempt to describe trauma is that it resists comprehension. Implicit in its structure is the impact of its own incomprehensibility and invisibility. Since its emergence in the work of Freud and Pierre Janet, the notion of trauma has confronted us with what Cathy Caruth has described as "a fundamental enigma concerning the

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<sup>53</sup> Krystyna Czerni, *Nie tylko o sztuce: Rozmowy z Profersorem Mieczysławem Porębskim* (Wrocław, 1992), 30.

<sup>54</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *In the shadow of Yalta*: 47.

<sup>55</sup> See "Od Klubu Młodych Artystów i Naukowców do Krzywego Kola. Rozmowa Barbary Askas ze Zbigniewem Dłubakiem" [From Club of Young Artists and Scientists to Crooked Circle: Interview Barbara Askas with Zbigniew Dłubak], in *Galeria 'Kryzwe Kolo': Katalog wystawy retrospektywnej* ed. Janusz Zagrodzki (Warsaw, 1990). For an account of Surrealism in Czechoslovakia see Lenka Bydžovská, "Against the Current. The Story of the Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia," *Papers of Surrealism* 1 (Winter 2003).

<sup>56</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, interview with Jarosław Suchan, in *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej - 50 lat później*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Dłubak, "Introduction," in *Edward Hartwig: Fotografika*, n.p.



psyche's relation to reality."<sup>58</sup> Caruth comments on the paradox involved in any traumatic experience, namely, "that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it," and consequently this "suggests a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known."<sup>59</sup> Dłubak's series of abstract photographs in the late 1940s seem to mimic this structure. With subjects that are frustratingly incomprehensible and unrecognisable, these abstract and vague images are about seeing, or rather the impossibility of doing so. When placed alongside Dłubak's statements on vision and optics, statements made at the same time he was producing these pictures, the disparity is striking. What I find interesting is that his words speak of a desire to see the world in new ways, but the world that he shows in his pictures appears impenetrable and perplexing. While his photographs may allow us to see the world in new ways, we cannot make sense of what we see.

Dłubak's abstract photographs could certainly fold into arguments around the turn to abstraction in the wake of trauma. Czesław Miłosz, for example, suggested abstraction was preferred in the immediate aftermath of war, in the face of a lived reality that was "the source of deep traumas."<sup>60</sup> Miłosz asserted, "once reality surpasses any means of naming it, it can be attacked only in a roundabout way, as it is reflected in somebody's subjectivity."<sup>61</sup> Margaret Iversen has recently discussed the blurred history paintings of German artist Gerhard Richter in terms that prove useful to understanding Dłubak's photographs. Speaking about a group of portraits depicting the Baader Meinhof group, Iversen suggests that Richter's technique of blurring creates distance and room for thought, and is harnessed by Richter as a means better suited for the representation of trauma than a purely transparent representation of events.<sup>62</sup> Dłubak's photographs operate in a similar way, blurring not with paint but with focus and depth of field. Both register as a form of painting or photography "against itself," which "acknowledges the limits of representation."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 91.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-2. Caruth also cites Michael Herr's despatches from the Vietnam war, "The problem was that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, just stayed stored there in your eyes." Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 10.

<sup>60</sup> Czesław Miłosz, "Ruins and Poetry," in *To Begin Where I Am: Selected Essays*, eds. Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline G. Levine (New York: Farrar, 2001), 356.

<sup>61</sup> Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, 93.

<sup>62</sup> Margaret Iversen, *Photography, Trace, and Trauma* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2017), 98.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

Dłubak's titles for his photographs are significant. It is only during this brief period in the late 1940s that Dłubak titled his individual works; from the 1950s, captioning is abandoned and only the series as a whole is given a title. In a 1948 article, *Rozmyślania o fotografii* [Reflections on Photography], Dłubak touched on this relationship between image and text, asserting that a title of a work of art should,

... specify as precisely as possible, what the artist wished to tell us by making the work; it is to direct the viewer's attention towards the essential meaning of the work. [...] The title must reach deeply into the visual content of the picture, it must reveal the photographic metaphor [...] or share with him a powerful experience of events or objects encoded in the visual forms.<sup>64</sup>

The titles Dłubak chose for these abstract photographs are frequently melancholic phrases suggestive of human fears and anxieties. Frequent references to thinking and remembering appear – *Przypominam samotność cieśniny* [I remember the loneliness of the straights] [I.15], *Zamyślenie* [Deep in Thought] [I.16]; while *Odkrywcy zjawiają się I nic z nich nie zostaje* [Discoveries appear and disappear without trace] [I.17] seems to reference the workings of the psyche. Other titles evoke states of sleeping, dreaming and nightmares – *Budzę się nagle w nocy myśląc o dalekim Południu* [I Wake up suddenly at night and think of the distant south] [I.18], and the previously discussed *Nocami straszy męka głodu* [The Agony of Hunger Haunts at Night], *Dzieci śnią o ptakach* [Children Dream of Birds].

To illuminate this discussion, it is useful to turn to the writings of Freud, in particular, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), in which Freud recounts the story of the burning child.<sup>65</sup> In this case study, a young child had died from a fever, and his body still lay in his room. As the boy's father lay sleeping in the next room, the bed clothes of his child caught fire from a candle. Oblivious to the fire spreading in the room next door, the father heard in his dream the voice of his dead child pleading, 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?' In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth provides an astute analysis of this dream, first through Freud and then through a later analysis by Lacan, which prove useful in informing an understanding of Dłubak's series, whose titles locate the images in the

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<sup>64</sup> Dłubak, "Rozmyślania o fotografii," 3.

<sup>65</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 5, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 509.

world of dreams, sleeping and memory. It may be possible, then, to understand his abstract photographs as a response to trauma.

Freud's story shows the father being urgently called to action in his dream, to wake up and quell the flames in the next room, but instead of waking up in response to this plea for action, the father continues to sleep. This raises the question for Caruth, "In the context of a violent reality, *why dream rather than wake up?*"<sup>66</sup> Freud's analysis suggests that the father continues to sleep, not because he wishes to keep his deceased child alive in the form of the dream, but because his own consciousness desires to keep itself suspended in the dream state, even when faced with the child's urgent plea. The dream serves as a delay, it delays the father from having to respond to the waking reality. Freud consequently states: "All dreams ... serve the purpose of prolonging sleep instead of waking up. The dream is the guardian of sleep and not its disturber ... Thus the wish to sleep ... must in every case be reckoned as one of the motives for the formation of dreams, and every successful dream is a fulfilment of that wish."<sup>67</sup> The dream is therefore tied to the desire of the father's consciousness not to wake up, to continue sleeping, and to turn away from a reality in which he has to acknowledge the death of this child and the loss of his body to the fire. It is interesting, therefore, that Dłubak insistently locates his photographs in the realm of dreams and the subconscious, both through their titles and the allusive and incomprehensible worlds he creates within the images. Dłubak's 1948 series appears to be linked to a desire from within his own consciousness, and perhaps more broadly from a collective consciousness, to continue sleeping, to not wake up to the reality of life after the war and to remain blind to the new social and political changes in post-war Poland. If the traumas of war are asking to be seen and acknowledged, the desire of Dłubak's consciousness to remain blind to these pleas appears to override.

The force of the trauma encoded in this dream is not just the death of the child, but the father as having been unable to witness the child's death as it occurred, his lack of preparedness for the event. Lacan analyses the same dream of the burning child from a different perspective. Instead of asking what it means to sleep, he asks, what does it mean to awaken?<sup>68</sup> To wake would be the site of another trauma, a repeated failure to respond in time. Caruth, through Lacan, suggests, "waking up in order to see, the father discovers

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<sup>66</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 94.

<sup>67</sup> Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," 233-34.

<sup>68</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 4 March 1964.

that he has once again *seen too late* to prevent the burning.” She continues, “to awaken is thus precisely to awaken only to one’s repetition of a previous failure to see in time.”<sup>69</sup> Lacan suggests that the dream is not about a father sleeping in the face of external death, but rather it is about the very identity of the father as bound up with the death that he survives. For Caruth, this constitutes Lacan’s profound insight: “If Freud reads in the dream of the burning child the story of a sleeping consciousness figured by a father unable to face the accidental death of his child, Lacan, for his part, reads in the awakening the story of the way father *and* child are inextricably bound together through the story of a trauma.”<sup>70</sup> For Lacan this constitutes an ethical relation to the real; awakening from the dream engages a larger question of responsibility. Caruth summarises, “to awaken is thus to bear the imperative to survive: to survive no longer simply as the father of a child, but as the one who must tell *what it means not to see*.”<sup>71</sup> What does this mean for Dłubak, himself a survivor of the camps? To awaken from the dream world that he has created in his images would be to awaken to his survival, to his status as witness, and to acknowledge his inability to have seen those events in time, his lack of preparedness for the events of the war. Caruth suggests that through the act of survival, the repeated failure to have seen in time becomes “the imperative of a speaking that awakens others,” an imperative to transmit this failure to have seen in time to others. Interestingly the message Dłubak chooses to transmit in the post-war years is characterised by incomprehensibility, his photographs speak of the frustration of vision and the impossibility of seeing.<sup>72</sup>

Dłubak created this series within a particular political climate in late 1940s Poland. In September 1948 Bolesław Bierut was appointed Secretary General of the Central Committee of the *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* [Polish United Workers’ Party] (PZPR), an appointment which cemented Soviet influence in Polish politics. Poland was subjected to increasingly restrictive rule under the influence of Stalin, especially in matters of culture. Art increasingly came to be seen as a way of measuring “the sincerity of the artist’s relationship with socialism.”<sup>73</sup> The year prior to his appointment, Bierut had made a speech to mark the opening of a radio station in Wrocław. This speech in November 1947 set out the role the Party expected art to play in society: “Of the various

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<sup>69</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 100.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>71</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 103.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>73</sup> Vít Havránek, “The Post-Bipolar Order and the Status of Public and Private under Communism,” in *Promises of the Past*, eds. Christine Macel and Nataša Petrešin (Zurich: Jrp Ringier, 2010), 27.

means of affecting people, it is art that probably has the most profound and universal impact on society, improving it, enlightening and nurturing it. A work of art can profoundly affect the mind as well as the feelings and the imagination, can electrify people, persuade and captivate them.”<sup>74</sup> Bierut’s words make clear that art had a function, a specific job to do, and the form that this art was to take became increasingly debated. The Polish art critic Urszula Czartoryska retrospectively noted that “the evolution of experimental photography reached its apogee in 1948,” a trajectory that was abruptly curtailed the following year with the imposition of Socialist Realism.<sup>75</sup>

At this charged moment, in both culture and politics, Dłubak chose to title his abstract photographs with excerpts from a poem by the Chilean writer Pablo Neruda, *El corazón magallánico (1519) [The Magellan Heart]* (1942), an epic poem that was translated into Polish by Czesław Miłosz.<sup>76</sup> Dłubak appropriated his titles from the headings to different sections of the poem: *Budzę się nagle w nocy myśląc o dalekim Południu* [I wake up suddenly at night thinking of the distant south] [I.18]; *I remember the loneliness of the straights [Przypominam samotność cieśniny]* [I.15]; *Odkrywcy zjawiają się I nic z nich nie zostaje* [Discoveries appear and disappear without trace] [I.16]; *Dosięga Pacyfiku* [It Reaches the Pacific]. Lech Lechowicz suggests this was one of the first attempts in Poland to connect photography with poetry. The photographs served as a visual complement to the poem, suggesting associative meanings that could be produced from the combination of image and text. *El Corazon Magallanico* begins with a sailor who is lost and disorientated; the first nine lines recount how he is unable to remember who he is, what day it is, where he is from. This disorientation invoked at the start of the poem is reinforced in Dłubak’s accompanying picture, *Budzę się nagle w nocy myśląc o dalekim Południu* [I.18] which is almost impossible to decipher; we see a surface that resembles glass or frozen water upon which appear globules of water and painterly brush marks. A nebulous cloud of faint droplets resembles stars in the distant cosmos; the large bright circle that looms behind could be the disk of a setting sun or a rising moon. There is very little we can say for certain about the image. Just like the sailor, the viewer is at sea.

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Adam Czerniawski, “Engineering the People’s Dreams,” in *The Mature Laurel. Essays on Modern Polish Poetry* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1991), 136.

<sup>75</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, “Avant-garde photography in Poland,” in *Présences polonaises: l’art vivant autour du Musée de Łódź*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1983), 25.

<sup>76</sup> Published in the magazine *Cuadernos Americanos* [American Notebooks] in 1942.

Dłubak's evocation of the poetry of Neruda in 1948 seems a purposeful statement in itself. *El corazón magallánico* forms part of a collection of poems, the *Canto General* [General Song], which recounts a history of the Latin American people. Published in two volumes in 1950, the poems that make up *Canto General* were written over a twelve year period in which Neruda had become politically active. Neruda had been elected senator in 1945 and joined the Communist Party of Chile, but following his involvement in protests against the repressive policies of President González Videla he was forced into hiding and eventually fled the country in 1949. The poems of his *Canto General* communicate Neruda's interest in the plight of oppressed people in their perpetual confrontation with those more powerful. Set in Patagonia, the most southern point of South America, the *El corazón magallánico* references Ferdinand Magellan, one of the most famous conquistadors of the sixteenth century, the historical moment in which the poem is set. Neruda's words remind the reader that these powerful conquistadors, working at the service of the Portuguese and Spanish empires, are far from immortal and their reign of power will come to an end, their future death invoked by Neruda's reference to the "magotty beard" that will consume them in death. The subject of the poem is social justice and the perpetual confrontation between oppressors and liberators; Neruda was implicitly equating the exploitation effected at the hands of historical conquerors with present day twentieth century dictators. Perhaps, therefore, Dłubak chose to illustrate Neruda's poem to imply a connection between these two historical moments. South America was a country dramatically changed by the arrival of these conquistadors, just as Poland was a country radically overhauled since communist colonisation of the Polish government after the war; Neruda's comment on the powerful conquistadors and their inevitable demise perhaps would find a parallel in the Soviet controlled Republic of Poland. For Dłubak, a supporter of socialist politics, the reference to Neruda's poem suggests that though he supported the politics, this did not automatically equate to being uncritical of the practices and actions of the Soviet-led political regime.

## SOCIALIST REALISM

On 19 January, 1949, the *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej* [First Exhibition of Modern Art] was shut down, less than a month after the show had opened, and officials seized and destroyed copies of the show's catalogue. The exhibition was staged at a time when a

dramatic struggle in Polish art was being waged, described by Dłubak as “the final moments of a desperate fight to save the values of art.”<sup>77</sup> Soviet cultural policy increasingly conceived of art as a powerful tool of state propaganda, whose potential was to be fully exploited. The exhibition proved to be the last display of modern art where decisions over content were decided by its authors; from henceforth this was decided and imposed from above. The following year, at the annual Congress of the *Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków* [Association of Polish Artists and Designers] (ZPAP) in Katowice, Socialist Realism was officially inaugurated and decreed as the only form of artistic expression permitted.

The opening of the Kraków exhibition had been attended by Party representatives and the exhibiting artists used this opportunity to make impassioned speeches in defence of their right to artistic freedom. Artists such as Mieczysław Porębski, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Nowosielski and Maria Jarema attempted to convince policy makers that modern art and abstract tendencies could be aligned with the demands of a socialist art. Dłubak also delivered a speech, titled *Uwagi o Sztuce nowoczesnej* [Remarks on Modern Art]. In this presentation, he expressed his desire to participate in a socialist art project, and tried to persuade the Party representatives that modern art was not antithetical to their objectives, but could be incorporated into their project. Warning against a return to past art forms, which he believed had exhausted possibilities for artistic development, Dłubak advised that “we should not return to a primitive wooden plough if that is the only tool a peasant knows how to use, but we should teach him how to use a tractor – that is what socialism is all about.” He concluded, using words swathed in appropriate socialist rhetoric, “modern art is a tractor which must be used for positive, creative ploughing.”<sup>78</sup>

For some artists, including Dłubak, the turn to socialism in 1945 had been a cause for celebration. Czesław Miłosz, writing retrospectively in 1953 stated, “After the experiences of the War, none of us, not even nationalists, doubted the necessity of the reforms that were being instituted. Our nation was going to be transformed into a nation of workers and peasants and that was right.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly Dłubak stated, “The political climate immediately after the war was very democratic. There was a period of

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<sup>77</sup> Dłubak in Bury, “Contexte d’apparition des pratiques de type performance en Pologne,” 40-70.

<sup>78</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, “Remarks on Modern Art: A Statement delivered at the opening of the I Exhibition of Modern Art, Kraków, 1948,” in *Zbigniew Dłubak: selected texts on art, 1948-1977* (Warszawa: Art text, 1977), 16.

<sup>79</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 166-7.

fascination, hope, social justice, and the discussion on the role of art in this new society was very justified.”<sup>80</sup> He agreed that art had a role to play in the building of a socialist society, contributing to social progress and reaching an audience previously unconcerned with matters of culture, but he could not support the notion that art should be used as an instrument of political propaganda. In 1948 Dłubak therefore found himself in an uncomfortable position, as his aspirations for art under socialism increasingly diverged from that which authorities were demanding, and his initial optimism over the social possibilities of art quickly dissipated. Dłubak stated that between the years 1949 and the end of this phase of Socialist Realism in 1955, “everything was brought to a staggering absurdity,” with issues of culture being decided by the Ministry of Public Security.<sup>81</sup> The Polish curator and art historian Adam Sobota later summarised the situation: “a totalitarian system imposed upon Poland by the communist regime directed from Moscow discarded the last semblance of democracy and subordinated culture to the last dogma of social realism.”<sup>82</sup>

For photography, the imposition of Socialist Realism in 1949 came at a crucial juncture, just at the moment when Pictorialism was being renounced in favour of more modern approaches to photography. The introduction of Socialist Realism effectively curtailed post-war modern tendencies. Persistent advocates of modernism were threatened with arrest. The artist Strzemiński was deprived of all artistic materials, thrown out of the ZPAP and dismissed from his professorship at the art school in Łódź in January 1950. He died in poverty only two years later. Dłubak articulated the fear felt by artists during this period: “In 1949 we had no illusions. Our worst fears materialised - arrests, censorship, revisionism, infiltrations – the tragedy of Strzemiński but also other lesser known dramas testifying to the methods of Socialist Realism.”<sup>83</sup> Strzemiński’s plight demonstrated how indirect methods of control were used to ensure compliant artists. Membership in the artistic unions could be withdrawn or withheld, and without membership in the unions, it was difficult for artists to exhibit their work, or gain even menial artistic commissions or teaching posts, upon which artists were financially reliant. Materials were allocated not according to an artist’s need, but according to his standing with the Ministry. In contrast, submissive loyalty meant financial security and ensured certain privileges: galleries,

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<sup>80</sup> Dłubak in Bury, “Contexte d’apparition des pratiques de type performance en Pologne” 40-70.

<sup>81</sup> Dłubak in Bury, “Contexte d’apparition des pratiques de type performance en Pologne,” 40-70.

<sup>82</sup> Adam Sobota, *Antyfotografia i ciąg dalszy* [Anti-photography and continuation] exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 1993), 38.

<sup>83</sup> Dłubak in Bury, “Contexte d’apparition des pratiques de type performance en Pologne,” 40-70.



studios, artist retreats. For the right-minded artists, the demand for propagandistic art increased opportunities for employment. The period of hard-line Socialist Realism can be regarded as a passing phase, but at the time, artists were troubled by the uncertainty of the situation. Maciej Szymanowicz retrospectively observed that Socialist Realism constituted “a silent background, the ceaseless and necessary point of reference in the activities of each artist.”<sup>84</sup> As Dłubak commented, “The worst part was that nobody could predict how long this situation would last.”<sup>85</sup>

Speaking specifically about Soviet photography, Ekaterina Degot observed, “The communist art project was oriented not toward the creation of beautiful, unique objects [...] but toward the distribution of information including images.”<sup>86</sup> Within this context “the photograph emerged as an effective tool for broadcasting and disseminating state-approved visual material to the masses.”<sup>87</sup> Photography was fast, cheap and precise, downplayed individual authorship, and proved easy to disseminate on a large scale. As a consequence, photographically illustrated magazines and newspapers proliferated in the early 1950s. Between 1951 and 1969, the magazine *Świat* [World] was published in Poland to an audience of around 300,000 readers. Commenting on current affairs, the editors allotted as much space as possible to photography, presented either individually or arranged into dynamically composed photo stories spread over several pages. The monthly publication *Polska* [Poland] was another important forum for photography. Magazines were reliant on grants from the Ministry of Culture, which allowed the Ministry to exert pressure and dictate content. One of *Świat*'s contributing photographers, Jan Kosidowski, noted the change in the type of imagery expected of magazine photographers: the immediate post-war period was dominated by ruins and reconstruction; in the following years “photographers were encouraged to cover important political events, the reconstruction of the country – the building of new houses and industrial installations on the ruins left by the War. Above all, however, reporters struggled to portray people at work.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Maciej Szymanowicz, “The Versatile Formalist: On the Work of Bronisław Schlabs in the First Half of the 1950s,” in Łuczak and Wróblewska, *Schlabs poszukujący*, 62.

<sup>85</sup> Dłubak in Bury, “Contexte d’apparition des pratiques de type performance en Pologne,” 40-70.

<sup>86</sup> Ekaterina Degot, “The Copy Is The Crime: Unofficial Art and the Appropriation of Official Photography,” in *Beyond Memory: Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-related Works of Art*, ed. Diane Neumaier, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 107.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>88</sup> Jan Kosidowski in Czarторыska, *Fotografia polska*, 38.

The first magazine to be dedicated to photography after the war was *Świat Fotografii: pismo poświęcone sprawom fotografii artystycznej i użytkowej* [World of Photography: A magazine devoted to art photography and its uses], which was published in Poznań by the PTF between 1946 and 1952. Fortunata Obrąpalska served on the journal's editorial board from 1948, and her photographs were published in the journal.<sup>89</sup> Her abstract series *Dyfuzja w cieczy* [Diffusion in Liquids], discussed earlier in this chapter, saw Obrąpalska move away from Pictorialism to pursue a more abstract and suggestive mode of image-making, creating effervescent and fluid worlds housed within glass jars of water. The introduction of Socialist Realism in 1949 curtailed the production of such imagery, and the photographs she produced for publication in magazines saw her focus more on the world around her.

*Armia Pokoju* [Army of Peace] [I.19] shows a marching crowd of youngsters holding Polish flags in a May Day parade; the word 'POKOJ' [PEACE] looms large in the top left corner. The May parades were well documented, Sempoliński also photographed similar celebrations for the pages of Polish magazines [I.20]. The parades were spectacles, intended to be extensively photographed and printed in the pages of magazines.<sup>90</sup> The PZPR also called upon artists to depict the transformation of Poland into a more industrialised country. In 1939 Jan Bułhak had stated: "Ours is a nation of farmers, not factory workers, a rural nation. Not an urban one; peasants and nobility, not proletariat and merchants."<sup>91</sup> Increasingly in his photographs from the early 1950s, pre-war images of dusty roads, country manors, wayside shrines and crosses gave way to motifs of industry such as coking plants, electricity pylons and factory towers and heroic scenes of human effort and modernising cities. Photographs, Bułhak postulated, should be imbued

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<sup>89</sup> Lewczyński, *Antologia fotografii polskiej*, 93.

<sup>90</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> May was a festival traditionally celebrated in Poland, devoted to the signing of the First Polish Constitution on that same day in 1791, which established the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The date had long been celebrated as a national holiday, marked with parades and public celebration. After the war, the Soviet-backed government cancelled this event, on the basis of its connection to the era of Polish kings and noblemen. In its place, a new communist holiday was established – International Workers' Day – which was celebrated on the first of May. Polish citizens were obliged to participate in these celebrations, with absence considered a serious offence. One of the key tasks for writers was to implant what Jan Prokop has termed the 'founding myths' of People's Poland in the collective imagination. The chief objective of these myths was to realign Polish culture, downgrading its links with Western Europe in favour of reinforcing the primacy of the Soviet experience. See Jan Prokop, *Mity fundatorskie Polski Ludowej* [Foundation Myths of the Polish People's Republic] (Cracow, 1994), 21-24.

<sup>91</sup> Jan Bułhak, *Polska Fotografia Ojczysta*, (Poznań, 1939), 4.

with revolutionary rhetoric, and artists must be encouraged to create images that “depict the dynamic vigour of the country’s reconstruction and modernisation.”<sup>92</sup>

Socialist Realism did not only demand a specific iconography; the style in which this content was conveyed was also crucial. Charged with the task of educating and inspiring the masses, art had to communicate a didactic message in clear and simple forms. The growing interest in abstraction and surrealist art was criticised for being disconnected from the reality it was intended to represent. These ‘modern’ tendencies were labelled as “cosmopolitan formalism,” intolerably “bourgeois”, and condemned for being “alien to socialist ideology” and too far detached from life.<sup>93</sup> The painter Włodzimierz Zakrzewski, writing in the 1950 issue of *Przegląd Artystyczny* [Artistic Review] stated, “formalism abstracts a value of the beauty from the surrounding world [...] thereby distorting or destroying the true image of the world.”<sup>94</sup> Obrąpalski’s husband Zygmunt, writing on the eve of the post-Stalinist thaw in 1956, noted, “the vigilance of the ‘Socialist Realism experts,’” who would intervene by “measuring the diameter of a whortleberry and calling it cursed formalism the moment it was blown up above natural size.”<sup>95</sup> At the same time, he acknowledged that in contrast to other mediums such as painting, there existed areas of photography where a little experimentation was permitted; “in photography there were certain gaps, for instance in the shape of landscape or nature photography where at times one could create something interesting without coming into conflict with the official programme.”<sup>96</sup> This sentiment is reiterated by Mikołaj Jazdon, writing retrospectively about Polish film in the late 1940s. Jazdon suggested that one way filmmakers sought to evade censorship was through an experimentation with form, finding ways “to create content through allusions and metaphors, thus making censorship more difficult.”<sup>97</sup> In his essay, Jazdon identifies a variety of filmic experiments, such as deformations through the employment of different filters, additional lighting and the extensive use of close-ups, devices which he suggests moved film away from the demands of photo-reportage and distanced them from the required stylistics of propagandist documentaries.

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<sup>92</sup> Bulhak, *Fotografia Ojczysta*, 9.

<sup>93</sup> Wróblewska, “In Search of Modernity,” in Łuczak and Wróblewska, *Schlabs poszukujący*, 42.

<sup>94</sup> Włodzimierz Zakrzewski, “Nowe zadania wyższych szkół plastycznych” [New activities of art schools], *Przegląd Artystyczny* 5-6, (1950): 30.

<sup>95</sup> Zygmunt Obrąpalski, “Oddział poznański Polskiego Towarzystwa Fotograficznego,” *Kronika Miasta Poznania*, annual vol. XXIV (1956): 260. Quoted in Łuczak and Wróblewska, *Schlabs poszukujący*, 73.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Mikołaj Jazdon, “The Search for A ‘More Spacious Form’: Experimental Trends in Polish Documentary, 1945-1989,” in *The Struggle for Form: Perspectives on Polish Avant-Garde Film 1916-1989*, eds. Kamila Kuc, and Michael O’Pray (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014), 67.

Obrąpalska also attempted to combine Socialist Realist themes with formal experimentation, testing the limits of acceptability. Images such as *Elektrownia* [Power Station] demonstrated a keenness to experiment with darkroom techniques, within officially sanctioned themes [I.21]. The photograph has been solarised, partially exposed to light during its development in the darkroom, a technique utilised by surrealist photographers in the 1930s. Obrąpalska's use of this technique in this image can be understood as adding to the ideological content of the photograph: a power station signalling a modernising country; the solarisation generating an effect that makes the pylons appear to glisten with radiating energy. *Murarze* [Bricklayers] shows men at work, engaged in a collective effort to rebuild Polish society [I.22]. This socialist theme has again been subjected to darkroom effects, solarisation rendering the light-dark relations strange and bathing the figures in a silvery moonlight. The process bestows upon the men a metallic machine-like quality that befits their role as industrial workers. Some works, however, appear to include a subtle element of critique, at a time when the depiction of the present landscape was "closely patrolled."<sup>98</sup> In *Wysilek* [Exertion] [I.23], an image of men in overalls clearing rubble in the city of Poznań, the solarised areas appear to corrode the men's bodies, erasing their identifying features and dismembering their limbs so they resemble carcasses hanging in an abattoir. The image suggests to me that Obrąpalska was attempting to use form to subtly equate the efforts of these men, who are pictured rebuilding the Polish landscape in the service of Socialism, to the slaughter of animals.

#### *KRAJOBRAZACH* [Landscapes]

It was against this backdrop that Zbigniew Dłubak took up photography again after a brief hiatus. In 1950 Dłubak had withdrawn from official artistic life, having been denied permanent employment. He lost his job, was discharged from the military and was forced to make a living from commissions, photographing the *Państwowe Gospodarstwo Rolne* [State Agricultural Farms] and publishing a pocket guide to portrait photography.

Although he continued to create personal work, photographing and drawing in private, he did not exhibit this work publically during these years. It was not until 1953 that Dłubak was reinstated in public office and appointed editor of the monthly journal *Fotografia*

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<sup>98</sup> John Michael Bates, *The PUWP's Preferences in the Contemporary Polish Novel, 1959-1985* (Ph.D diss., University of Glasgow, 1997), 11. Subversive activities were not new to Obrąpalska; during the war she and her husband Zygmunt had organised conspiracy exhibitions in their apartment in Poznań.

[Photography]. In this post, which he held until 1972, he received a studio, financial support and was given editorial control of the magazine.<sup>99</sup>

The magazine *Fotografia* was published between 1953 and 1972, and was intended to be distributed among the members of Polish art organizations, primarily ZPAF and PTF. Initially the circulation of the magazine was around 10,000 copies, but after six months this doubled due to increased numbers of amateur photographers. By the early 1970s the figure had reached 40,000. In contrast to *Świat Fotografii*, the articles in *Fotografia* were largely written by professional art critics and historians rather than practicing photographers.<sup>100</sup> The first issue of the magazine had been edited by Adam Johann, a pre-war photographer, writer and member of ZPAF, and the first page of his first issue made explicit the role photography was expected to play in the newly constituted *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa* [Polish People's Republic] (PRL). Johann published an article by Ignacy Płażewski, a photographer who also served as president of the PTF. Titled *Fotografia i jej rola społeczna* [Photography and its Social Role], this was a short article in which Płażewski made clear the lenience that had been afforded to photographers and set out in coded language what was expected of photographers in return:

Photography is understood and appreciated by the State. The State has allowed photographers to organise themselves and has taken on a tremendous part of the financial burden associated with this, allowing the organisation of photography exhibitions by helping both ideologically and materially. [...] We cannot imagine today's political, social or economic life without the participation of photography, either in the recording of the changes taking place in our lives, or as a means of

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<sup>99</sup> There was a lot of merit to Dłubak's appointment, he was a young photographer whose debut work had been received favourably in 1948, he was a member of ZPAF, and he authored interesting theoretical texts which drew on Marxist theory. He was also an active advocate of socialism. John Michael Bates, studying government control over literature in post-war Poland, has suggested that the official stance of the PZPR was to create the broadest possible base for the supporting the regime. For example, those who had been associated with the Home Army, such as Dłubak, could be used to bring others out of the underground and to bring them on board in support of the new regime. (Bates, "The PUWP's Preferences in the Contemporary Polish Novel, 1959-1985," 104.)

<sup>100</sup> Regular contributors to the magazine included Urszula Czartoryska, Alfred Ligocki, Roman Burzyński, Janina Mierzecka, Jan Sunderland, Lech Grabowski, and to a lesser extent, Janusz Bogucki, Janina Mokrzycka, Maria Stpiczyńska, Zbigniew Pękosławski, Leonard Sempoliński, Marian Szulc, Edward Hartwig, Ignacy Płażewski, Szymon Bojko, Krystyna Łyczywek, Zbigniew Łagocki, Henryk Latoś, Marcelli Bacciarelli, Wiesław Hudon, Stefan Wojnecki, Antoni Dzieduszycki. The magazine was well illustrated, with around twenty photographs in each issue, alongside exhibition reviews, theoretical articles, minutes of ZPAF meetings and reviews of publications. For more information see: Karolina Ziębińska-Lewandowska, "Między dokumentalnością a eksperymentem: krytyka fotograficzna w Polsce w latach 1946-1989," (PhD diss., Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2010).

mobilizing the nation to carry out the monumental plans of socialist construction defined by the Party and the Government. Photography has become a political agitator – and this is its meaning and social role in our reality.<sup>101</sup>

Plażewski made no direct threat, but seemed to offer photographers an ultimatum: photographers were obliged to contribute to the development of the state by creating ideologically appropriate imagery if they wished to continue to receive allowances – financial support, opportunities to exhibit. The article was accompanied by illustrated examples of the imagery expected [I.24]: a marching parade of women in Constitution Square; a miner at work drilling; a sculptor chiselling a heroic statue out of stone; and a portrait of three men holding hammers and other tools photographed from a low angle, with electricity cables and billowing cooling towers looming above.

Dłubak subsequently replaced Johann as editor in the second issue of the magazine, and his early issues took refuge in safe topics such as technical photographic advice, the burgeoning amateur photography scene and articles dedicated to photography competitions that featured images of picturesque snow covered landscapes, children at play or women tilling fields in traditional Polish dress. Working under the pressure of cultural policies, Dłubak largely focused on safe subjects, such as the construction of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, sports events, marches and rallies that suggested the “greatness” of life in the PRL [I.25]. It was not until the following year in 1954 that Dłubak allowed open criticism of socialist realist doctrine in the magazine. On the occasion of the *IV Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografiki* [Fourth National Exhibition of Artistic Photography], Dłubak published an article by Leonard Sempoliński, then the president of ZPAF, criticising the schematism of the works on show at the exhibition and denouncing Socialist Realist photography for being devoid of any aesthetic or artistic value.<sup>102</sup> As Dłubak gradually gained confidence, he also began to pronounce more confidently upon the alternative roles that photography and aesthetics could play within a socialist society. He published several articles including *Polskie Towarzystwo Fotograficzne na nowej drodze* [Polish Creative Photography on a New Path], *O właściwy kierunek dyskusji* [On the Appropriate Direction for Discussion] and a

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<sup>101</sup> Ignacy Plażewski, “Fotografia i jej rola społeczna” [Photography and its Social Role], *Fotografia* 1 (July 1953): 4.

<sup>102</sup> Leonard Sempoliński, “IV Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografiki. Przemowienie prezesa ZPAR LS na otwarciu wystawy” [Fourth National Exhibition of Artistic Photography: Speech of the President at the opening of the exhibition], *Fotografia* no. 6 (1954): 2.

discussion between himself and Sempoliński, *Dyskusja o fotografice* [Discussions on photography].<sup>103</sup> His texts attempted to align two seemingly antithetical standpoints, the ideological position of the state alongside a renewed interest in modernist art forms and the need to adopt a creative attitude, pronouncements which the art critic Martin Patrick has described as “subtler attempts to derail dogmatic Socialist Realism.”<sup>104</sup>

Dłubak’s official role and public statements exist alongside the photographs he was making privately. In 1950 he set about creating the series *Krajobrazach* [Landscapes], which continued into the early 1960s [L.26-29]. The series was made in and around Poland’s capital city of Warsaw, documenting marginal areas on the fringes of the city. The title of Dłubak’s series evokes notions of idyllic countryside, but these gloomy and oppressive vistas are far from the picturesque Polish landscapes and impressive restored cityscapes that featured in the pages of his magazine. Rather than focusing on the recognisable buildings and emblematic public spaces in the centre of the capital, Dłubak photographed peripheral areas at the edge of the city that were usually overlooked: dilapidated buildings, deserted streets, a murky overgrown canal. With no crowds, no workers, and no pompous parades, Dłubak’s de-ideologised and explicitly anti-aesthetic landscapes provided a vastly different depiction of reality to that found in propaganda imagery. Karolina Lewandowska has described Dłubak’s depiction of the country’s capital as a “no man’s land,” a description which takes on a particular significance when understood in the context of a country still struggling to recover from a devastating war.<sup>105</sup>

It is worth returning briefly here to Jan Bułhak, whose photographs demonstrate that depictions of the landscape could still be political, even if the images themselves were not overtly propagandistic. In the late 1930s Bułhak had published a number of texts which outlined his theory of *fotografia ojczysta* [homeland photography].<sup>106</sup> The purpose of homeland photography, according to Bułhak, was to “explore the soul of the nation,” and

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<sup>103</sup> *Fotografia* 2 no. 8 (July 1954); 1 no. 19 (January 1955); 3 no. 21 (March 1955).

<sup>104</sup> Martin Patrick, “Polish Conceptualism of the 1960s and the 1970s: Images, Objects, Systems and Texts,” *Third Text* (Spring 2001): 39.

<sup>105</sup> Ziębińska-Lewandowska “Praktyka Widzenia: Twórczość fotograficzna Zbigniewa Dłubaka w latach 1947 – 2000,” n.p.

<sup>106</sup> Bułhak’s concept of ‘Homeland Photography’, which strictly translates as ‘Fatherland Photography’, appears to be modelled upon the German *Heimatphotographie* program as outlined by Paul Lüking, President of the Association of Photographic Societies in Germany, during a visit to Poland in the mid-1930s. See Maciej Szymanowicz, “Antoni Wiczorek: A Photographer at the Turning Point,” *History of Photography* 32:3 (Autumn 2008), 267.

he envisaged a nationwide project, in which amateur photography clubs dispatched their members with their cameras to capture the essence of local villages and towns.<sup>107</sup> For Bułhak in the 1930s, Poland's 'essence' was to be found in its "countryside;" he suggested that Poland "was first an agrarian nation."<sup>108</sup> Hazy scenes of tilled fields and dusty tree lined roads were intended to illustrate this characteristic feature of the Polish nation [L.30]. After the war he reformulated his concept of Homeland Photography, postulating that photographs of Poland "should be imbued with revolutionary rhetoric," with artists encouraged to "depict the dynamic vigour of the country's reconstruction and modernisation."<sup>109</sup> Consequently landscapes gave way to coking plants, electricity pylons and factory towers.<sup>110</sup> More broadly, this points to the way Bułhak's landscapes were used as a tool for naturalising a particular message and for constructing a sense of national identity. It also helps to explain why Homeland Photography received considerable institutional support after the war, with numerous state-sponsored exhibitions.

This official support of Bułhak's photographs was also tied to a need to visually and culturally assimilate areas that had been incorporated into Poland's newly reconstituted borders. Bułhak intensively documented the Regained Territories, areas of land previously held by Germany and Czechoslovakia which had been politically re-unified and incorporated into the new Republic of Poland in 1945. Combined with forced migration and wartime losses, the very identity of Poland had fundamentally changed. The 1950s continued to be a time of social change; as Jan Kosidowski noted, "the expansion of industry caused extensive migration of the population from the country to urban centres, creating newly constructed towns. Customs, social strata, dialects, habits and prejudices, usually differentiated by regional boundaries, mixed together to create a new national framework. This was loosely structured and undefined."<sup>111</sup> Adam Mazur described Bułhak's documentation of post war wreckage, 'recovered territories' and 'typically Polish' landscapes and texts around 1948 as "ideology-soaked." Karolina Lewandowska has gone one step further to suggest that Bułhak's Homeland Photography evolved into a propaganda project, to photographically 'appropriate' the Recovered

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<sup>107</sup> Jan Bułhak, *Polska fotografia ojczysta* [Polish Homeland Photography] (Poznań 1939), 48.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>109</sup> Jan Bułhak, *Fotografia Ojczysta* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1951), 9.

<sup>110</sup> See Matthew Witkovsky, *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918-1945* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 166.

<sup>111</sup> Kosidowski in Czartoryska, *Fotografia polska*, 38.



Territories.<sup>112</sup> The photographs certainly served a need to assimilate, visually and culturally, the new areas that found themselves within Poland's reconstituted borders and to promote Poland as culturally and ethnically homogenous in order to consolidate a nation that had been altered beyond recognition.

I suggested in the introduction to this thesis that the representation of Poland's past was carefully controlled; what I have tried to suggest in this chapter is that the image of the present was also carefully patrolled and subject to distortion. Dłubak began his series of landscapes within the same year that Jakub Berman, the minister for public security, proclaimed that art should "show the greatness of our times."<sup>113</sup> Berman was a high ranking member of the ruling Politburo of the PZPR who held primary responsibility for security, ideological purity and propaganda. His words suggested that artists should not seek to depict reality; rather artists were engaged in a tacit agreement with the ministry to show a reality which confirmed the official ideology. In the 1950s, building projects and reconstruction continued to transform Warsaw's cityscape. Construction on the Palace of Culture and Science began in 1952 and was completed in 1955; in 1953 the rebuilt Old Town was officially dedicated, and this newly reconstructed Warsaw served as "the indisputable emblem of post-war Polish national identity."<sup>114</sup> Warsaw was intended to be an icon of Polish heroism and endeavour, a city that made manifest "socialism's greatest project in post-war Poland."<sup>115</sup> Illustrated magazines with large circulations and readership disseminated this message to the population.

While a propaganda of success was intended to assure Polish citizens of the realisation of communist reforms, the reality was very different. Forced industrialisation and centralised planning led to unprecedented rapid urbanisation. Over the period Dłubak made his *Krajobrazach* series, Poland's urban population soared from 7.5 million in 1945 to 14.4 million in 1960 as people moved from rural settings to the cities of industry.<sup>116</sup> The result was urban overcrowding and huge food shortages. Speaking specifically about Warsaw,

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<sup>112</sup> Karolina Lewandowska, "'Fotografia Ojczyzna' i Nowi Dokumentaliści" ['Homeland Photography' and New Documentalists] in *Nowi Dokumentaliści* [The New Documentalists], ed. Adam Mazur, exhibition catalogue (Warszawa: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, 2006), 30.

<sup>113</sup> *Jakub Berman, "Pokazcie wielkosc naszych czasów"* [Show the Greatness of Our Times], *Nowa Kultura* 1951, nr 45: 1. As a leading member of the ruling Politburo of the PZPR, Berman had primary responsibility for security, ideological purity and propaganda.

<sup>114</sup> Snyder, "Rhetorics and Politics: Polish architectural modernism in the early post-war years," 161.

<sup>115</sup> Crowley, *Warsaw*, 9.

<sup>116</sup> See Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, *A History of Eastern Europe: Crisis and Change* (London: Routledge, 2007), 474-5.

David Crowley has drawn attention to the way the “tempo” of the city’s reconstruction noticeably slowed down in the 1950s: “New buildings took years to be completed while architects and construction workers combined their “official” jobs with work on the informal economy (or queued outside the city’s shops). Buildings were not renovated or improved.”<sup>117</sup> This created a glaring disparity between what was seen in photographic propaganda and the lived reality experienced by Polish citizens. Rather than celebrating the reconstruction of the city and the achievements of the reconstruction programme through heroic feats of human endeavour, Dłubak’s series shows distinctly ordinary scenes that testify to continued social decline, rather than resurrection. By turning his camera away from the ceremonial areas of the city, the images allow us to see beneath the veneer of published photographic propaganda imagery. Dłubak’s photographs show that the image of Warsaw as an icon of national identity was a façade, a veil, which concealed the reality of life in Poland for the majority of its citizens. Dłubak’s landscapes do not therefore just show us the physical topography of the city, but also tell us something of the politics of photographing that landscape. At a time when some photographers chose not to photograph ‘reality’ but the version of that reality that confirmed the official ideology, Dłubak described the world that he did see, rather than the world he was instructed to see.

A larger question of truth is at play in Dłubak’s series of landscapes, specifically the purported veracity of the photographic medium premised on its indexicality; a photograph made by a direct physical trace made by light on sensitive material promised a one-to-one relationship with the reality that it represented. Propaganda photography, and its preference for the straight photograph devoid of darkroom manipulations, harnessed this characteristic feature of the medium, in order to claim as truthful the images presented within the frame. Yet this imagery did not show the world as it appeared, but obscured it and screened it. A thesis by John Michael Bates on post-war Polish literature discussed the relationship of Socialist Realism to reality. Bates describes the Socialist Realist novel as an “intertext,” by which he means that, “the question was therefore not of the work’s relation to reality, but of its subordination to ideological statements about that reality. ‘Reality’ therefore came to be applied exclusively to those factors which affirmed official ideology.”<sup>118</sup> The same can be said for photography. The authenticity of the mimetic

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<sup>117</sup> Crowley, *Warsaw*, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Bates, “The PUWP’s Preferences in the Contemporary Polish Novel, 1959-1985,” 13-14.

images was not given by the nature of the photograph's physical relationship to the reality it pictured, but by its relationship to texts, speeches, or pronouncements that told Polish citizens how that world should look. The gap between appearance and reality will be picked up again in the next chapter, in a section discussing the work of Jerzy Lewczyński and Zdzisław Beksiński.

An article that Dłubak wrote and published in his magazine at the end of the 1950s sheds light on his understanding of photographic truthfulness.<sup>119</sup> Written while he was still engaged in making his *Krajobrazach*, it was published in *Fotografia* in the context of a continued debate over the role abstraction was to play in art photography. Numerous critics still urged that photography's role was to document the world rather than to abstract it or create new worlds in the darkroom. These debates will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, but is interesting to note here, in the context of the above discussion on Socialist Realism, Dłubak's contribution to the debate. Rather than setting up an oppositional antagonism between reportage and abstraction, Dłubak suggested a point upon which both converged. Both types of imagery, he suggested, should be understood as constructions. Although abstract imagery is more obviously fabricated from the imagination of the artist, Dłubak articulated his belief that straight photography should also be understood as a construction. Although photography is "automatic, in principle," he suggested that it involves selection, framing, prioritising certain elements at the expense of others.<sup>120</sup> His seemingly simple statement was the first acknowledgment in the magazine of the straight photograph as a construction, rather than a faithful transcription of reality. Later, in an interview with Józef Bury, Dłubak suggested that he had hoped to provoke an awareness among his readers; while photography "plays a very important role as a carrier of information," a discerning viewer must always "be critical" of the image they see.<sup>121</sup> Reflecting back now upon the period of Socialist Realism in Poland, although the Party refused to accommodate abstraction within the artistic remit of a socialist art project, the straight documentary photograph was just as much a form of abstraction as the most deforming formal manipulations.

In 1956 Józef Stalin was denounced by Nikita Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This heralded a period of thaw in Poland, years

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<sup>119</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, "Czy istnieje fotografika abstrakcyjna" [Is there an abstract photography?] *Fotografia* 7 no. 73 (July 1959): 315-318.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Dłubak in Bury, "Contexte d'apparition des pratiques de type performance en Pologne," 40-70.

of temporary liberalisation under the new leader of the Polish PZPR Władysław Gomułka. The following chapter looks at photography produced in the Thaw years and picks up a number of themes already discussed in the preceding pages, specifically the relationship between photography and abstraction; using photography to address social realities; and imagery that bore traces of the unspoken traumas of Poland's past and its present political situation.

## CHAPTER II

### STEP INTO MODERNITY

The art historian Piotr Piotrowski has described the year 1957 as the “apogee of the cultural ‘thaw’ in Poland.”<sup>1</sup> Stalin’s death in March 1953 was followed the denouncement of Stalin’s reign in 1956 by his successor as Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev. In Poland, factions appeared within the *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* [Polish United Workers’ Party] (PZPR), a split between hard-line Natolinians and more liberal Puławians seeking change. The return of Władysław Gomułka and the Puławian backed appointment of Gomułka as First Secretary in 1956 saw a greater degree of freedom, particularly in matters of culture; a period of thaw which came to be known as the Polish October.<sup>2</sup>

In May 1957, an exhibition of “artistic photography” was organised in the city of Poznań by the young photographer Bronisław Schlabs, with the commanding title *Krok w Nowoczesność* [Step into Modernity]. This large and ambitious show was the first post-war exhibition in Poland intent on defining the possibilities for a modern form of art photography, and as such it can be understood as “a show of crucial importance” to the development of the medium.<sup>3</sup> Schlabs brought together the work of eighty-three photographers from Poland and abroad; one hundred and sixty-one photographs were selected for the exhibition, which showcased a variety of interpretations as to what constituted ‘modern’ photography. The majority of photographers included in the show were young artists, debuting their work publically for the first time. Pre-war figures such as Bułhak were omitted, replaced by a younger generation of photographers who were creating a “lobby of modernity” within the *Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików* [Union of Polish Photographic Artists] (ZPAF) and the stagnating world of art

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<sup>1</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *In the shadow of Yalta: art and the avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Reaktion, 2009), 67.

<sup>2</sup> See: A. Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Dorota Łuczak, “Fotograficzny gest (s)twórcy” [The Photographic Gesture of the Creator] in *Bronisław Schlabs. Krok w nowoczesność* [Bronisław Schlabs. Step into Contemporaneity], (Poznań: Fundacja 9/11 Art Space, 2012), 117.

photography.<sup>4</sup> Several key names from this group will be discussed in the following chapters: Jerzy Lewczyński in Gliwice, Zdzisław Beksiński in Sanok and Bronisław Schlabs in Poznań, who formed an informal group, identified as the *Trzech Twórców* [Three Creators].<sup>5</sup> Lewczyński, Beksiński and Schlabs were also exhibited alongside another group *Podwórko* [Yard], led by Bożena Michalik in Wrocław.<sup>6</sup> Beksiński and Lewczyński formed a friendship with Marek Piasecki, who was more closely affiliated with the Kraków Group, under the leadership of Tadeusz Kantor. The photographer Andrzej Pawłowski was also connected with this milieu; Kantor enthusiastically debuted Pawłowski's work in exhibitions at the Krzysztofory Gallery in Kraków in 1957.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of this post-thaw creativity in photography was its pursuit of collectivity and collaboration as opposed to solitary artistic pursuits. This turn towards collectivity was combined with a reorientation away from the main creative centres of Kraków and Warsaw towards regional groups and associations in more remote towns and cities. *Krok w Nowoczesność* was held at the Poznań branch of the *Polskie Towarzystwa Fotograficzne* [Polish Photographic Society] (PTF) during the months of May and June, later travelling to *Krzywe Koło* [Crooked Circle] Gallery in Warsaw. Presiding over the organisation of the exhibition was the photographer Bronisław Schlabs, aided by Fortunata Obrąpalska, who supervised the artistic section of the Poznań PTF, and her husband Zygmunt, the former vice-president of the branch. Staging the show in Poznań marked a significant shift away from the capital of Warsaw towards the lively activity that was taking place in the peripheries. In fact a number of significant exhibitions were staged at these regional branches in the late 1950s, including the *I Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografii Abstrakcyjnej* [First National Exhibition of Abstract Photography] which took place in Wrocław in 1959. The same year a small but fascinating *Pokaz zamknięty* [Closed Show] was organised by Lewczyński, Beksiński and Schlabs at the Gliwice Photographic Society, the topic of the final section of this chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Sobota, "In the Spirit of the Avant-Garde" in *Polish Perceptions: Ten Contemporary Photographers, 1977-88*, ed. Laura Hamilton, exh. cat., (Glasgow: Collins Gallery, 1988), 16.

<sup>5</sup> The three men were given this name following an exhibition held in 1958 at *Krzywe Koło* [Crooked Circle] Gallery, Warsaw, titled *Wystawą trzech twórców* [Exhibition of Three Creators]. The physical distances separating these artists was compounded by the difficulties of communicating openly. Lewczyński lived in Gliwice, Upper Silesia in southern Poland; Beksiński in Sanok, south-east Poland; and Schlabs in Poznań, located in the west of Poland. Visits were possible though infrequent, but the three men maintained communication through regular correspondence. They exhibited together only three times, first at the *Krzywe Koło* gallery in 1958, followed by the *Pokaz zamknięty* [Closed Show] of 1959 in Gliwice, and several years later their work was exhibited by Otto Steinert in Cologne in 1961.

<sup>6</sup> Other members included the photographers Wadim Jurkiewicz, Zbigniew Staiewski and Edmund Witecki.

The development of Polish photography during this period was largely aided by the ambitious amateur photography movement centred around regional associations. The PTF consisted largely of amateurs who possessed “a commonly shared view on artistic photography as one of the fine arts.”<sup>7</sup> Established in 1947 as a national organisation that aimed to revive the amateur photography movement and develop photographic skills, the PTF organised exhibitions, reviews, debates and lectures. Critical reviews of photography were also organised in which members would meet, show their pictures anonymously and criticise each other ruthlessly. Lewczyński, a prominent member of the Gliwice branch of the PTF, recorded all these sessions and later recalled, “It seemed so explosive at the time, so avant-garde, but then I listened to it some time later and I see that it’s foolish.”<sup>8</sup> The art historian Wojciech Nowicki suggested that members of these associations became so “feverish about photography as it was often their only release valve.”<sup>9</sup>

In part, this investment in the regional sites of Poznań and Gliwice can be understood as a response to the centralisation of artistic life in Warsaw in the early 1950s under official organisations such as ZPAF.<sup>10</sup> Power was increasingly taken away from regional associations, which were seen to be competing for authoritative control. Immediately after the war Poznań had served as an important centre for photography: from 1946 the first post war professional photography periodical *Świat Fotografii* [World of Photography] was published from the city; the National Photographic Art Exhibitions were annually staged there; and in 1947 the Executive Board of the PTF established their headquarters in Poznań. In 1952 *Świat Fotografii* was closed down and replaced by the journal *Fotografia* [Photography] based in Warsaw; the following year the Executive Board was relocated to Warsaw; and in 1954 guidelines were introduced for regulating the activities of the PTF, a program of marginalisation that attempted to control the activities of the associations’ members, most of whom were also members of ZPAF.<sup>11</sup> ZPAF served as the only channel through which photographers could gain commissions for work, so when directives were issued by the union banning its members from

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<sup>7</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński to ZPAF in Warsaw, October 11, 1957. Cited in Jerzy Lewczyński, *Antologia fotografii polskiej: 1839-1989*, (Bielsko-Biała: Wydawnictwo LUCRUM, cop. 1999), 64.

<sup>8</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński cited in Wojciech Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*. [Jerzy Lewczyński: memory of the image], (Gliwice: Muzeum, 2012), 263.

<sup>9</sup> Wojciech Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 263.

<sup>10</sup> In 1947 the Ministry of Culture and Art had adopted a program of cultural management, centralising all agencies and offices that controlled artistic work to the capital of Warsaw. ZPAF was directly subordinated to the Ministry, serving as its department for photography.

<sup>11</sup> For example, members of ZPAF were now instructed to train all activities in the PTF. See *Biuletyn informacyjny* [Polish Photographic Society] no.1 (1954): 9.

exhibiting in PTF events, a decisive majority of the artists were forced to renounce their activities in the PTF and hand back their membership cards. Speaking about the situation specifically in Poznań, Szymanowicz noted, “the methodological marginalisation of the Poznań centre provoked the natural opposition of the local artists and engendered attitudes which were alternative to the main current of artistic life.”<sup>12</sup> Staging *Krok w Nowoczesność* in Poznań can therefore be understood as a defiant renunciation of the authority of centralised organisations.

From the eighty-three photographers included, only thirty-nine were Polish; the remaining participants consisted of representatives from eleven different countries, making the show a truly international affair.<sup>13</sup> After several years of relative isolation from developments in the West, combined with the limited availability of photographic monographs, historical surveys and exhibition catalogues in Poland, Schlabs’s exhibition provided an opportunity for Polish artists to become re-acquainted with the work of Western photographers and developments abroad. In fact, over the following years Schlabs demonstrated an extraordinary ability to network and promote his work both in Poland and abroad.<sup>14</sup> At this same moment, Dłubak also opened up the journal *Fotografia* to the work of foreign photographers. Until this point only Polish or Soviet authors had featured within its pages, but in 1956 Dłubak included articles on American photography: features on the *Family of Man* exhibition appeared in the April, May and June issues of the magazine in 1956; an article from October of that year showcased *Photography from MoMA New York* featuring the work of Alfred Stieglitz, Eugène Atget, and Edward Weston, among others. From 1957, Dłubak increasingly included internationally orientated articles, transforming the periodical into a means by which photographers could learn about current photographic activities in Poland and abroad.

The title of the Poznań exhibition, *Krok w Nowoczesność*, took its name from an article written by the art critic Urszula Czartoryska and published in the January 1957 issue of

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<sup>12</sup> Maciej Szymanowicz, “The Versatile Formalist,” in *Bronisław Schlabs. Krok w nowoczesność* [Bronisław Schlabs. Step into Modernity], (Poznań: Fundacja 9/11 Art Space, 2012), 64.

<sup>13</sup> The show included artists from Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Holland, West Germany, East Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Great Britain and Italy.

<sup>14</sup> Notably, communications with Otto Steinert led to Schlabs’s inclusion in the 1958 exhibition of *Subjective Fotografie* [Subjective Photography] in Cologne. Nine of his works (dating between 1957 and 1958) were also purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The works were exhibited at a 1958 exhibition of *Photographs from the Museum Collection* and later at the 1961 thematic show *A Sense of Abstraction in Contemporary Photography* in which seven of Schlabs’s untitled photographs were exhibited alongside works by Coburn, Callahan, Man Ray and Siskind.



*Fotografia* magazine in which Czartoryska spoke of the necessity of developing new modern art forms. In the October 1956 issue of the periodical, Dłubak published an article titled *O fotografice 'nowoczesnej' i awangardowscy* [On 'Modern' and Avant-Garde Photography] in which he described socialist realism as an “unpalatable tradition,” condemning its “bad taste” and “annihilation of any avant-garde thought.”<sup>15</sup> Dłubak called for artists to “pull away from the accepted norms, look for new forms of expression and aim at expressing new themes,” no matter how “unacceptable” they may appear, driven by the need to “discover new things and to express current views on the reality.”<sup>16</sup> These sentiments were reiterated by Grabowski in the same issue, in a more emphatically titled article *Nowoczesność pilnie poszukiwana* [Modernity is urgently sought].<sup>17</sup> This issue of modernity continued to preoccupy critics throughout the late 1950s. Writing two years later in 1958, Alfred Ligocki suggested that modern photographers must display “a desire to participate in an expedition into new areas of artistic vision and new measures for imaging, which make them suitable for expressing and reflecting the complex face of our world.”<sup>18</sup> Later that year, Ligocki quoted the critic Julian Przyboś: “The modern is what exceeds the state of imagination and artistic thought already achieved,” subsequently advising photographers to “work in a modern way, constantly seeking new solutions, operating with a continuously fresh look at the world around us.”<sup>19</sup>

Pictorialist photography was still prevalent in the late 1950s, visible in *VII Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografiki* [Seventh National Exhibition of Art Photography], a show which was supported by the official body of ZPAF.<sup>20</sup> Reviewing this exhibition in the January 1958 edition of *Fotografia*, Ligocki observed that the “stuffy but sophisticated atmosphere” of post-war Pictorialism still reigned, with photographers utilising the same

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<sup>15</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, “O fotografice ‘nowoczesnej’ i awangardowości” [On ‘Modern’ and Avant-Garde Photography], *Fotografia*, 10 no. 40 (1956): 6-7. Reprinted in Zbigniew Dłubak, *Zbigniew Dłubak: selected texts on art, 1948-1977*, (Warszawa: Art text, 1977), 36-9.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Lech Grabowski, “Nowoczesność pilnie poszukiwana” [Modernity is urgently sought], *Fotografia* 10 (October 1956): 3

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Ligocki, “Optymistyczna wystawa” [Optimistic Exhibition], *Fotografia* 1 no. 55 (January 1958): 11-15.

<sup>19</sup> Alfred Ligocki, “Fotografować czy malować?” [To photograph or to paint?], *Fotografia* 6 no. 60 (June 1958): 270-272.

<sup>20</sup> The term ‘fotografika’ is distinct from the word ‘fotografia’, the latter of which strictly translates as photography. The concept of ‘fotografika’ was first used much earlier by Bułhak in 1927. As opposed to ‘fotografia’, Bułhak intended ‘foto-grafiką’ to designate artistic photography from scientific or craft applications of the medium, with the emphasis on graphics suggesting a link between photography and graphic arts of painting, drawing and printmaking. The term implied that photography was not being used simply as a means to take pictures, but to create art.

conventions from sixty years ago: ‘picturesque’ landscapes, objects “weaved in arabesque lines, spirals and circles,” veiled in “mists,” or lost in “violent contrasts of light and shadow.”<sup>21</sup> Ligocki stated that such images “which reigned almost omnipotently for decades in our exhibitions of art photography and which even socialist realism gave up on, make a similar impression as a *Vatermoerder* [grandfather] too old for contemporary clothing and too close in time for historical costume.” For Ligocki, the result was an exhibition full of images that “remain undigested like a tough steak and insoluble in the juices of photographic artistic vision.”<sup>22</sup> Ligocki recognised the difficulty for contemporary photographers in disassociating their work from this tradition, especially given the still recent thawing of cultural control, with the result that art had “only two years previously” awoken “with prolonged lethargy.”<sup>23</sup>

Increasingly, however, photographers endeavoured to break the medium’s ties to these traditions. After years of subsuming the medium to ideological demands and misuse under the “infamous tradition” of socialist realism, and tired of deferring to an antiquated conception of aesthetic value based on a fossilised pictorial aesthetic that had been repeating the same formal solutions for several decades, photographers struggled to find a new identity for their medium and a modern means of expression.<sup>24</sup> Schlabs’s 1957 Poznań exhibition showcased a number of divergent and often contradictory manifestations of a “modern” and “artistic” photography. Subject matter mostly focused on the traditional topics of landscapes, street photography, portraits, or nudes. However, these themes were formally expressed in a variety of experimental ways that assimilated various notions of previously “forbidden fruit.”<sup>25</sup> The exhibition served as a microcosm of the wider situation in which art photography found itself in the late 1950s, where a number of these often contradictory trajectories can be traced; a similar variety of imagery was to be found within the pages of *Fotografia*. Reportage featured heavily, inspired by European and American photojournalism, and influenced by Edward Steichen’s highly successful *Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in

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<sup>21</sup> Ligocki, “Optymistyczna wystawa”, 11-15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Wróblewska when analysing the text incorrectly reads this as *niestrawna*, meaning unpalatable. The original actual text reads *nieślawną*, meaning infamous, although both adjectives could be used to describe the tradition of socialist realism. Magdalena Wróblewska, “In Search of Contemporaneity,” in *Schlabs poszukujący: fotografia z lat 1952-1957* [Schlabs - the seeking one: photography from 1952-1957], (Poznań: Fundacja 9/12 Art Space, 2011), 38.

<sup>25</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, “Drogi poszukiwan” [Roads for Exploration], *Fotografia* 11 no. 41 (1956): 2-3, 14; ‘Drogi poszukiwan II’ [Roads for Exploration II], *Fotografia* 11 no. 41 (November 1956): 2-3.

1955, which was touring Europe in the late 1950s and was widely reported in the Polish photographic press. However, the critic Wojciech Kiciński noted that the “ruling, almost omnipotent reportage” was “living its last days” in the face of a growing interest in “formal frolics.”<sup>26</sup> Photographers increasingly turned to formal experimentation, utilising “special techniques” and darkroom manipulations to create works that “converge the photographic image with activities of paintings or printmaking.”<sup>27</sup> This was tied to developments in Germany, centred around Otto Steinert and his exhibitions of *Subjective Fotografie* [Subjective Photography] which steered photography away from a faithful transcription of the world towards a highly personal vision filtered through the subjectivity of the artist-creator. In Poland these “formal frolics” paved the way for photographic abstractions that entirely divorced the final image from the reality it was purported to represent.<sup>28</sup> Increasingly in the late 1950s, the turn to abstraction by artists such as Bronisław Schlabs and Marek Piasecki challenged the attempts of Polish photography critics to define photography as a medium best suited to the recording rather than the re-ordering of reality.

The appropriateness of each of these directions was debated by critics in Dłubak’s journal *Fotografia*. Critics such as Ligocki and Henryk Kaden vociferously clashed in their opinions as to the precise form that a modern art photography should take, what should be its subject matter, and how it should be visualised. One of the main points of contention concerned the borderline separating photography from other mediums. Kaden denied any particular specificity of photography, instead articulating his belief in a shared lineage between photography and painting, despite the fact that the mediums are created by different means.<sup>29</sup> In response, Ligocki defiantly stated that a modern photography would not be achieved by “swallowing the hook of painterly eclecticism.”<sup>30</sup> Instead, he advocated “organising a creative plane of the image without recourse to the experience of painting – in a word specifically photographic means of imaging.”<sup>31</sup> In response to Kaden, Urszula Czartoryska asserted that painting and photography differed in the means by

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<sup>26</sup> Wojciech Kiciński, “Nowe drogi czy własne ścieżki” [New roads and their own paths], *Fotografia* 9 no. 63 (1958): 426.

<sup>27</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, “O nieistnieniu dogmatów w fotografii artystycznej” [On the non-existence of dogmas in artistic photography], *Fotografia* 2 no. 56 (February 1958): 67-69.

<sup>28</sup> Exhibition of *Podwórko* [Yard] group, *Fotografia* 6 no. 60 (June 1958): 282-284.

<sup>29</sup> Henryk Kaden, “O dogmatach i mitach w fotografii artystycznej” [On the dogmas and myths in artistic photography], *Fotografia* 2 no. 56 (1958).

<sup>30</sup> Ligocki, “Fotografować czy malować?” 270-272.

<sup>31</sup> Ligocki, “Optymistyczna wystawa,” 11-15.

which they were created: while the painter “builds an image” from brushstrokes, according to his own imagination or his own thought, the photographer sees and fixes a specific situation. The photograph is composed “through selection not by the process of creation.”<sup>32</sup> For Czartoryska, “the uniqueness of photography has its source in the contact, the incomparable closeness with which it is associated with reality,” an early articulation by Czartoryska of an indexical understanding of the photograph.

These debates were tied to wider attempts in the 1950s to specify the intrinsic properties of each artistic medium, a strategy promoted by Clement Greenberg and defined in his text *Modernist Painting* published in 1961. In aligning themselves with these debates, Polish critics attempted to create a prominent role for photography in the arts, but a role based on photography’s own specific features and autonomous principles. However, such attempts were complicated by the complex position of Polish art photography at a time when its main protagonists were working across a variety of different mediums.

Beksiński was trained as an architect and created paintings alongside his photographic work, before renouncing photography entirely in the late 1960s to concentrate on drawing and painting; Piasecki also created sculptural objects and assemblages. Only Lewczyński remained dedicated to the medium, while other photographers increasingly relinquished it in favour of other artistic pursuits. Even Czartoryska later retrospectively acknowledged that it is precisely in these poorly defined border areas between different mediums that remarkable work can be produced: “The most interesting achievements are concentrated at points where the boundary between various disciplines – painting and sculpture, photography and film, photographic exhibition and journalism, and also between what comes from the artist’s hand, and things readymade, such as are happily being exploited now.”<sup>33</sup>

Due to the heterogeneity of the work created in these years, it proves difficult to trace one dominant influence; Wróblewska has described the situation as “frantic, multi-directional searches rather than consistent systematic processes in the attempt to develop forms of a contemporary image.”<sup>34</sup> The variety of artistic means harnessed at this time certainly betrays a sense of creative restlessness. In the following sections of this chapter, I will elaborate on several of these manifestations of ‘modern’ photography that emerge from

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<sup>32</sup> Czartoryska, “O nieistnieniu dogmatów w fotografii artystycznej,” 67-69.

<sup>33</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, “Zdzisław Beksiński” *Fotografia* 5 no. 83 (May 1960): 162-165.

<sup>34</sup> Magdalena Wróblewska, “In Search of Modernity,” in *Schlabs poszukujący: fotografia z lat 1952-1957* [Schlabs - the seeking one: photography from 1952-1957], (Poznań: Fundacja 9/12 Art Space, 2011), 38.

Schlabs's 1957 exhibition: namely, dark reportage, subjective photography and abstraction. Any attempt to neatly synthesise these various currents proves impossible, not least because these trends were not mutually exclusive and were often pursued simultaneously by authors who were experimenting concurrently with a variety of aesthetic styles. Dłubak described this situation as "a jungle" in which the viewer can easily get lost: "the lost spectator of art tries to find a wide, clear path," but "of course, he will never find it."<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, the impenetrability that Dłubak described seems to evoke the incomprehensibility of trauma, as outlined in the introduction to this thesis, and perhaps a connection can be drawn between the operations of the psyche in relation to traumatic events, and this dense muddle of heterogeneous practices being pursued by photographers in the late 1950s.

What can be seen to have united these various tendencies was a desire to modernise photography, to manoeuvre it away from the "erroneous paths" it had been following and to prioritise photography as a form of art-making that could claim its rightful place alongside painting and sculpture.<sup>36</sup> This predicament was recognised by Beksiński in a 1958 text published in *Fotografia* entitled *Kryzys w fotografice i perspektywy jego przezwycięzenia* [The Crisis in Photography and How to Overcome It].<sup>37</sup> Beksiński suggested an alternative formulation for a modern form of photography, examples of which were exhibited by Beksiński, Lewczyński and Schlabs in the *Pokaz zamknięty* in Gliwice in 1959, discussed in the final section that concludes this chapter.

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<sup>35</sup> Dłubak, "O fotografice 'nowoczesnej' i awangardowości," 6-7.

<sup>36</sup> From the title of an article by Lech Grabowski, "Błędne drogi nowoczesności" [Erroneous paths of modernity] *Fotografia* 9 (1958): 425.

<sup>37</sup> Zdzisław Beksiński, "Kryzys w fotografice i perspektywy jego przezwycięzenia" [The Crisis in Photography and How to Overcome it] *Fotografia* 11 no. 65 (November 1958): 540-543.

## DARK REALISM

Jerzy Lewczyński exhibited three works at Bronisław Schlabs's exhibition *Krok w Nowoczesność*, including *Nokturn* [Nocturne], which had previously been published in the December 1956 issue of *Fotografia* [II.1]. Lewczyński trained his lens on a rundown wall in a state of disrepair, the plaster peeling away to expose the brickwork underneath. A stark geometric patterning is created by the stairs and handrail, eliminating any sense of depth and collapsing the picture into a play of pattern and detail. The central band of pale grey is set against deep black shadow that encloses the image from above and below, generating an oppressive sense of foreboding. In another image from the same year, Lewczyński presented an interior courtyard with similarly dilapidated grey walls [II.2]. Photographed from a low angle, the camera points upwards towards a pale grey sky that offers some respite from the miserable interior. Both images are empty, devoid of human presence, registering as quiet reflections on banal elements of the landscape of the *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa* [Polish People's Republic] (PRL) in the late 1950s. The title of this latter work, *Ukrzyżowanie* [Crucifixion], indicates that Lewczyński was probing his surroundings for symbolic content. The poetic title invokes Christ on the cross, a reference that would have been quickly understood in a now predominantly Catholic country. In Lewczyński's photograph, tight framing and purposeful composition allow the viewer to discern a triangular shape at the centre of the composition, delineated by two shadows falling on the dilapidated façade of the building. The introduction of an element of allusion transforms an otherwise innocuous documentary image of a rundown courtyard into something more evocative. The corner of the courtyard emerges from the shadows in a streak of light. Jean-Fraçois Chevrier observed how "gray light has split the black shadow, the walls seem to stretch out their arms towards the sky," suggesting an element of rupture and subsequent resurrection.<sup>38</sup> Both title and image invite the viewer to read religious content into this otherwise non-descript landscape.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-Fraçois Chevrier, "Jerzy Lewczyński – Bezkształtnie" [Jerzy Lewczyński – Formlessly], in *Jerzy Lewczyński: informément* (Warszawa: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii; Gliwice: Muzeum w Gliwicach, 2012), 99.

<sup>39</sup> At the opening of an exhibition as part of Kraków Photomonth in 2012, Lewczyński gave a short speech to the audience: "If I see something interesting, I take out my camera and shoot. And I want to give you all a little advice. Try to see the real meaning in what you are thinking about photographing. Don't photograph

The first chapter of this thesis discussed the use of biblical metaphors in Party communications in the late 1940s, drawing particular attention to the language of resurrection. David Snyder has suggested this articulated “the martyr status of Warsaw and reinforced the well-established Polish self-image as ‘the Christ of the Nations’ (*Polska Chrystusem narodów*).”<sup>40</sup> The image of crucifixion appeared in Andrzej Wajda’s *Popiół i diament* [Ashes and Diamonds] (1958), featuring a scene in which the two main protagonists see an upturned crucifix in a chapel, immediately after which Maciek discovers the bodies of workers he has killed. The juxtaposition of these two scenes lends forceful symbolic power. Lewczyński’s invocation of the cross is communicated more obliquely; there are no bodies or wooden crosses in his image, but rather an image composed around light and shadow which invokes Christ’s body on the cross. Presence is thus suggested through absence.

These images certainly stand in contrast to the “gentle picturesque landscapes” still being created under the banner of Pictorialism, which were held in high regard among amateur photographers; images which Lewczyński believed were “betraying the experiences of war and the times of hypocrisy.”<sup>41</sup> In place of willow trees and river banks, Lewczyński photographed rundown suburbs; hazy impressionistic light effects are substituted for dark foreboding images; and the painterly process of gum bichromate is rejected in favour of the straight silver gelatin print. Lewczyński was interested in capturing a different sense of beauty to these charming Polish landscape photographs, a “peculiar beauty” that he believed was manifested in “corners of ugliness.”<sup>42</sup> Edward Steichen’s popular exhibition *The Family of Man* also reached Poland in 1959, opening on September 18 at the *Teatry Narodowego* [National Theatre] in Warsaw, but the show had previously been reviewed three times in the April, May and June 1956 issues of *Fotografia* magazine.<sup>43</sup> The *Family*

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the surface — always look twice and always look carefully.” In Per Eklöf, “The Young and the old in Polish Photography.” *Baltic Worlds* 3-4 (2012): 22-23.

<sup>40</sup> David I. Snyder, “Rhetorics and Politics. Polish architectural modernism in the early post-war years,” in *Alternative Visions of Post-War Reconstruction* eds. Pendlebury, Erten and Larkham, 166.

<sup>41</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński. “To tell the truth” in *Jerzy Lewczyński “Archeologica Fotografii”: Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński ‘Archaeology of Photography’: Work from the years 1941-2005], exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Kropka. 2005), 40-44.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> First staged at the Museum of Modern art in 1955. The show’s European tour began in West Berlin in September 1955, before moving on to Munich. It toured the world for eight years, making stops in thirty-seven countries on six continents. Alfred Ligocki’s review in June was largely favourable; he suggested that the individual photographs chosen for inclusion did not always possess outstanding artistic merit, but likened their cumulative display in the exhibition as a whole to “a philharmonic orchestra under the conductorship of Steichen playing a monumental composition on the commonality of the fate of people around the world”. (Alfred Ligocki, “Jeszcze raz o wystawie ‘Wielka rodzina ludzi’” [Once again about

of *Man* arrived in Warsaw at a time when humanistic photojournalism enjoyed “high prestige” among Polish photographers, who were producing similar reportage work for Polish illustrated magazine such as *Świat* [World] or the monthly *Polska* [Poland]. The notion of a global community seemed to appeal to a Polish audience in the late 1950s. Lewczyński recalled how Steichen’s exhibition had left an “excellent” impression on Beksiński, but that he had voiced “reservations over the excessive idealisation of the human condition” leading him to re-read some “difficult literature”, namely Witkiewicz, Kafka, Sartre and Robbe-Grillet.<sup>44</sup>

The following section takes as its subject photographs by Lewczyński, Beksiński and Dłubak in these years towards the end of the decade. In the face of universal humanism and picturesque Polish landscapes, all three photographers produce melancholic reflections on the Polish landscape. While they acknowledged the influence of Italian neorealism on their photographs, they also seem to share preoccupations with *Czarna seria* [Black series] documentary films produced in the PRL in the 1950s. By drawing these comparisons, I hope to elaborate on the attempt by Polish photographers to reveal the increasingly widening gap between appearance and reality. This section of the chapter will also look at the turn to metaphor in these years, driven by the need to comment obliquely on past and present traumas, and an increasing interest in photographing banal objects. Scrutinising the works of Dłubak and Lewczyński, I suggest that these objects served to articulate traces of trauma in a particular way, by evoking the presence of bodies now absent.

In December 1956, the photographer Edward Hartwig published an article in *Fotografia* reviewing an international photography exhibition that had taken place in Venice earlier that year.<sup>45</sup> A reciprocal relationship seemed to exist between Italy and Poland at this time, as Italian photographers such as Italo Zannier were also included in Schlabs’s 1957 survey exhibition in Poznań. Art critics have increasingly drawn attention to the links that can be delineated between Polish photography in the 1950s and Italian Neorealist

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the exhibition ‘The Great Family of Man], *Fotografia*, 6 no. 36 (June 1956): 9-11.) Further articles on *Family of Man* in *Fotografia*: “Sztuki która głosi prawdę” [Art that Speaks the Truth], *Fotografia* 3 no. 34 (April 1956); “Wystawa w Paryżu” [Exhibition in Paris], *Fotografia* 5 no. 35 (May 1956); “Z wystawy ‘Rodzina człowiecza’” [From the exhibition ‘Family of Man’], *Fotografia* 10 no. 76 (October 1959).

<sup>44</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński” [My conversations about photography with Zdzisław Beksiński] *Format*, no.24/25 (1997): 32-34.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Hartwig, “O fotografice we Włoszech” [On photography in Italy], *Fotografia* 12 no.42 (December 1956: 8-9.



cinema.<sup>46</sup> Wojciech Nowicki, for example, has retrospectively noted that, “Poles watched these films and through this filter saw the world.”<sup>47</sup> Krzysztof Jurecki cited Vittorio De Sica’s 1948 film *Ladri di biciclette* [Bicycle Thieves] as a specific inspiration to Lewczyński, an influence that Lewczyński himself acknowledged.<sup>48</sup> In a letter drafted in 1957, Lewczyński stated that “man” must be the “decisive element” in the work of Polish photographers at this time; “living man, such as those who are seen, among others, in Italian neorealism.”<sup>49</sup> Although made over a decade apart, similarities can be traced between De Sica’s film and Lewczyński’s photographs from the late 1950s. At its crux, De Sica’s story recounts a fairly banal incident, devoid of high drama, in which a father searches for his bicycle. An unemployed man is offered a menial job pasting movie posters around the city, on the condition that he owns a bike. His wife pawns their belongings in order to purchase the bike, which is then stolen on his first day of work. The film follows the man and his son on their search to recover this lost possession. Failing to find the bike will mean the father loses his job, and with it the means to support his family. Neorealist film depicted the hardships of post-war life, and it is this concentration on the everyday trials faced by individuals that proved so compelling to Lewczyński. The Italian filmmaker Roberto Rossellini stated, “great gestures and great facts arise in the same manner, with the same impact, as the small facts of everyday life; I try to show both with equal simplicity.”<sup>50</sup> Lewczyński expressed similar sentiments in a letter to Beksiński: “My dear, it is precisely details that are life, and this expounds to me so: the common reality of small events and elusive everyday initiations comprises our fate and determines our destiny.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See a recently published book on Italian Neo Realism and Polish photography: Rafał Lewandowski and Tomasz Szerszeń, eds., *Neorealism in Polish photography 1950-1970* (Warszawa: Argraf, 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Wojciech Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu* [Jerzy Lewczyński: Memory of the Image] (Gliwice: Muzeum w Gliwicach, 2012), 256.

<sup>48</sup> Krzysztof Jurecki, “From pictorialism to “archaeology of photography”: The meaning of Jerzy Lewczyński’s artistic output,” in *Jerzy Lewczyński “Archeologica Fotografii”: Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński ‘Archaeology of Photography’: Work from the years 1941-2005] (Września: Kropka, 2005), 46.

<sup>49</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, letter to ZPAF in Warsaw, Gliwice, November 11, 1957. Photocopy, Jerzy Lewczyński Institute archive, Warsaw.

<sup>50</sup> Roberto Rossellini, “Dix ans de cinema,” in Paweł Mościcki, “The Archaeology of Reality,” in *Neorealism in Polish photography 1950-1970*, eds., Rafał Lewandowski and Tomasz Szerszeń (Warszawa: Argraf, 2015), 23.

<sup>51</sup> Lewczyński, cited in Rafał Lewandowski. “Neorealism as Language,” in *Neorealism in Polish photography 1950-1970*, eds. Rafał Lewandowski and Tomasz Szerszeń, trans. Marcin Wawrzyńczak, (Warszawa: Argraf, 2015), 6.

Rather than capturing grand spectacles or decisive moments, the work of Lewczyński and Beksiński in the 1950s captures the banality of everyday life. In the late 1950s Beksiński was mostly photographing in and around his hometown of Sanok, a small, unremarkable town in south-east Poland. Beksiński noted: “At that time, I lived in a small provincial town, in which reality was even less interesting than, for instance, in Warsaw, that is to say the scope of subjects was limited to two streets and several acquaintances who strolled along these streets.”<sup>52</sup> Beksiński acknowledged Sanok to be a place in which events of interest rarely occurred, making it difficult to find anything lively, spontaneous or noteworthy to photograph, asking “What could possibly happen there? The Martians had not landed, a war had not broken out, an earthquake had not occurred. As a matter of fact, there was not even an idea for a photograph.”<sup>53</sup> One photograph shows a young boy dressed in black walking past a stained, dilapidated wall, at the centre of which is a painted black rectangle, with globules of black paint congealing at the edges and running down the wall [II.3]. The title of the image, *Okno* [Window], guides the viewer to interpret this black form as a window through which we would expect to perceive an exterior or interior reality. The only view this window provides is onto pitch black darkness, rendering the title somewhat ironic. While a window can offer the tantalising allure of escape into another reality, in Beksiński’s image this black void offers no such possibility. The young boy with his cap pulled over his head is trapped in this grim, grey PRL. After visiting Beksiński in Sanok, Lewczyński acknowledged, “I then understood better, why his photographs are full of the perfect mood of a lost province. Photographs without sun, fragments of dilapidated walls [...] perfectly capture the sense of grey everyday life.”<sup>54</sup> These works of ‘dark realism’ appeared to possess another function for Beksiński, namely to voice a sense of psychological despair or social decline.

In *Depresja* [Depression], a tall wooden fence serves as a monotonous backdrop, at the bottom of which appears a woman’s head, the contrast of the immense height of the fence making her head seem exceptionally small [II.4]. The woman’s expression is blank, yet the placement of her head within the composition evokes a sense of being imprisoned, overwhelmed, almost crushed by the feelings of hopelessness and despair signalled in the title. Wiesław Banach, writing about the photographs of Beksiński, has suggested this

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<sup>52</sup> Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011) 54.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński,” 32-34.

image serves as “a symbol of the greyness and confinement of provincial life.”<sup>55</sup> Another photograph from 1957 takes a market as its subject, traditionally the heart of a small community [II.5]. Here the market is empty, closed and boarded up, addressing the economic poverty after the war, a theme also addressed in Neorealist film; De Sica’s *Ladri di biciclette* shows crowds of unemployed men jostling for much needed work, a topic that is intimated in Beksiński and Lewczyński’s photographs of Polish landscapes. No human presence is visible in Beksiński’s image, only the head of solitary horse that emerges from behind the right stall, embodying the sentiment of the work’s title, *Samotność* [Loneliness]. The title certainly conjures a sense of isolation, all the more pressing after the war in which many friends had lost their lives. The image also articulates a sense of the slowness of life in Poland at this time, the tempo of life in Sanok as having come to a halt. David Crowley has noted how the 1950s were years in building projects stalled and the reconstruction of Polish cities ground to a halt. He describes “long periods where time seemed to drag. This was an everyday sensation, experienced watching the hands of a clock tick in the queue for food in the corner store of one’s name move slowly up the waiting list for an apartment.”<sup>56</sup> Even in the making of the photograph a sense of slowing down can be understood. In contrast to the speed and spontaneity associated with reportage photography, Beksiński noted how it took hours for him to capture this moment. He stated, “If only you knew how much time I had waited for the horse to move its head.”<sup>57</sup>

In contrast to the “pompous slogans” of official propaganda, Lewczyński and Beksiński’s works invoke a “pitiful and nostalgic mood”, showing the reality of life in the PRL to be banal, ugly, depressing and far removed from the illusion of economic and social prosperity promoted by the state.<sup>58</sup> Instead of the symbolic sites of public spectacle, such as the *Pałac Kultury i Nauki* [Palace of Culture and Science] (PKiN) in Warsaw, we are shown dilapidated courtyards and stairwells or provincial backwater villages. The critic Wojciech Nowicki described Lewczyński’s images as “dark, pitchy works, full of strong effects,” seemingly created by an artist that “had been submerged in a barrel of sadness.”<sup>59</sup> An overwhelming sense of pessimism is certainly articulated in Lewczyński’s

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<sup>55</sup> Banach, *Foto Beksiński*, 54.

<sup>56</sup> Crowley, *Warsaw*, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Banach, *Foto Beksiński*, 60.

<sup>58</sup> Adam Sobota, “In the Spirit of the Avant-Garde,” in *Polish Perceptions: Ten Contemporary Photographers, 1977-88*, ed., Laura Hamilton, exhibition catalogue (Glasgow: Collins Gallery, 1988), 18.

<sup>59</sup> Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 256.

works, in which he portrayed a drab, monotonous and lethargic socialist Poland, a country that the critic Wiesław Banach later described as “grey, colourless, deprived of any perspective, of any hope.”<sup>60</sup> Delving into Lewczyński’s archive reveals a contrasting life, characterised by pleasure rather than dejection; photographs of Lewczyński enjoying the company of friends and family. Nowicki has acknowledged that although life was difficult for artists, it was not dominated by the melancholy that is evidenced in their images. He concluded that the pursuit of grey, desolate imagery was a purposeful choice by certain authors.<sup>61</sup> In opposing the optimism of Socialist Realism, this genre of “dark realism” represented “an alternative to the framework imposed by the socio-political systems and conventions.”<sup>62</sup> Understood in this way, the photographs of Lewczyński and Beksiński align with the interests of Polish filmmakers in the 1950s. The journalist Aleksander Jakiewicz in the influential weekly *Po Prostu* [Plain talk] coined the term *czarna seria* [black series] to describe a number of anti-propagandist Polish documentary films “that rendered visible the darkest sides of reality, which previously had not been filmed.”<sup>63</sup>

Jerzy Hoffman and Edward Skórzewski produced a number of films which asked questions about the fate of the nation’s youth. *Dzieci oskarżają* [The Children Accuse] (1956) looks at children with alcoholic parents; *Uwaga! Chugligani!* [Look Out! Hooligans!] (1955) focuses on teenage delinquency and criminality. Bjørn Sørenssen compares this latter documentary with an earlier *Polska Kronika Filmowa* [Polish Film Chronicle] newsreel from 1953, in which young ‘delinquents’ were seen drinking, listening to jazz and loitering in public places. At the end of the newsreel, these apparent reprobates had been transformed into model citizens through sport, swept up in a wave of positivity that provided a “positive image of Polish youth that the censors would approve.”<sup>64</sup> Hoffman and Skórzewski’s depiction of this same subject ends with a somewhat different message. Unfolding in a dark alley, glimpses of faces are revealed

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<sup>60</sup> Banach, *Foto Beksiński*, 54.

<sup>61</sup> Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 256. Nowicki draws a comparison with the writing of Franz Kafka, who also utilised a similar melancholic register, but in fact led an ordinary life and worked in an office.

<sup>62</sup> Ked Olszewski, “Memory of the Image,” Interview with Jerzy Lewczyński, *Lensculture* (2005). Accessed April 17, 2017. <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/jerzy-lewczynski-memory-of-the-image>

<sup>63</sup> Mikołaj Jazdon, “The Search for A ‘More Spacious Form’: Experimental Trends in Polish Documentary, 1945-1989,” in *The Struggle for Form: Perspectives on Polish Avant-Garde Film 1916-1989*, eds., Kamila Kuc and Michael O’Pray (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014), 73.

<sup>64</sup> Bjørn Sørenssen, “The Polish Black Series Documentary and the British Free Cinema Movement,” in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas* ed., Anikó Imre, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 183-200.

through the light of cigarettes; after a fight breaks out, the scene ends with a lifeless body on the ground. The documentary asked real questions about the effects of communist rule on this younger generation. Mikołaj Jazdon, in his study of Polish documentary film, concludes that *Uwaga! Chugligani!* “offered a pessimistic view of Polish youth as a ‘lost generation,’ deprived of prospects and cheated by Communist propaganda.”<sup>65</sup> When compared to official newsreels, the power of these documentaries can be felt. Jazdon concludes, “This depressing, indeed black, picture of reality was powerful. It offered a bitter truth, which worked as an antidote for the viewers who were fed up with the sickening sweetness of unrealistic Socialist Realist documentaries.”<sup>66</sup>

The documentaries also turned their attention to stalled reconstruction of Polish cities. Jerzy Bossak and Jarosław Brzozowski’s film *Warszawa 56* (1956) begins with scenes of tourists admiring rebuilt palaces and streets in Warsaw on a bright and welcoming summer’s day. Their ceremonial route around the city ends with the newly completed PKiN, the symbol of Warsaw’s glorious resurrection. Abruptly, the film switches to a different viewpoint, in which the vista onto the Palace is dominated by derelict and ruined housing. Subsequent scenes show appalling and unsanitary living conditions among ruins which were still waiting to be cleared a decade after the war. The film’s voiceover offered a stern rebuke: “Six thousand Varsovian men are waiting for rooms that are still illegally occupied by offices and bureaus. We have built enough office blocks in Warsaw. They are capable of housing all administration and headquarters. Dwelling quarters belong to the people of work and their children. They need to be returned to their owners.”<sup>67</sup>

Speaking about the *Czarna Seria* films, Jazdon summarised:

Filmmakers in the Warsaw Documentary Film Studio (Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych or WFD), fascinated by Italian neorealism and put off by the falseness of the cinema of Socialist Realism, used the Thaw period as an opportunity to express their disappointment with social problems: crime, prostitution, alcoholism – subjects that until then were submitted to heavy censorship. Their cameras looked beyond the surfaces of rebuilt government buildings, known from popular propaganda films, to show that there were still many people who remained living in the ruined buildings, as if the war had only

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<sup>65</sup> Jazdon, “The Search for A ‘More Spacious Form’” in *The Struggle for Form: Perspectives on Polish Avant-Garde Film 1916-1989*, eds., Kuc and O’Pray, 73.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>67</sup> *Warszawa 56*, dir. Jerzy Bossak and Jarosław Brzozowski, 1956.

just ended. These ‘black films’ [...] presenting evidence that supported the filmmakers’ thesis that the conditions of living in post-war Poland needed drastic improvement.<sup>68</sup>

The appearance of these films and their direct treatment of taboo subjects seems quite remarkable given the restrictions of censorship in the 1950s. As a body of films, the *Czarna seria* documentaries present an unrelentingly critical and accusatory view of social conditions in Polish cities. They also implicate the PZPR, laying the blame for these ruined cities, disaffected youth and people living in poverty at the feet of Party officials. How could it be possible to make such films in a strictly controlled Soviet ruled country? Sørensen suggests that criticism of the Party was in fact encouraged by factions within the PZPR who were working for change in the period of de-Stalinisation. He cites a Plenum meeting of the Central Committee of the PZPR in November 1954 as the starting point for this change, in which “a very critical attitude was adopted towards the Politburo and party leadership.”<sup>69</sup>

Between 1957 and 1960 Lewczyński created a series of photographs titled *Głowy Wawelskie* [Wawel’s Heads]. The title of the series refers to the courtly portraits and sculptural busts of Polish Senators that filled the interiors of Wawel Castle in Krakow. Lewczyński recalled, “during this period, the Castle opened the Senatorial room, in which beautiful sculptures of the heads of royal senators looked down from the ceiling onto the visitors.”<sup>70</sup> In response, Lewczyński created *Nieznany* [Unknown], a ‘portrait’ of an anonymous worker: a solitary man centred within the frame, grasping a shovel with dirty hands, perhaps the tools of his trade [II.6]. The spade is held directly in front of his face, obscuring his identity and rendering him a symbol for all workers. The work is easily mistaken for a self-portrait, but the unknown worker in the image was a man that Lewczyński happened to meet by chance: “We were driving to build a factory chimney in Świnoujście. Along the way we stopped for a rest and then I noticed that the spade belonging to one of the Silesians was shining. And he stood as I told him to stand and I took the photo. Later I found out that he was a peasant, a Silesian boy. His name was

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<sup>68</sup> Jazdon, “The Search for A ‘More Spacious Form’” in *The Struggle for Form: Perspectives on Polish Avant-Garde Film 1916-1989*, eds., Kuc and O’Pray, 73.

<sup>69</sup> Ray Taras, *Ideology in a Socialist State: Poland 1956-83* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 47.

<sup>70</sup> Ked Olszewski, “Memory of the Image,” Interview with Jerzy Lewczyński, *Lensculture* (2005). Accessed April 17, 2017. <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/jerzy-lewczynski-memory-of-the-image>

Heinrich Koenig. In other words, the King.”<sup>71</sup> For Lewczyński, men such as Koenig possessed “greater importance than the heads of senators and noble portraits of leaders,” although he recognised that they would never be memorialised in the same way as the illustrious figures of Polish history.<sup>72</sup> *Nieznany* serves as Lewczyński’s ennoblement of the worker and his tribute to the unknown man.

It is worth comparing an earlier photograph by Lewczyński taken in 1955, *Homo Sapiens*, which also takes a worker as its subject [II.7]. In this image, a faceless man is shown at work on a chimney tower, the brick structure photographed from a low angle, soaring diagonally across the composition and endlessly into the sky, dominating the composition. The image speaks of the role of industry in rebuilding the PRL, alongside the mobilisation of “the enormous human effort” of the worker.<sup>73</sup> The dynamic composition borrowed formally from Russian inter-war photography, and spoke optimistically of man and industry working together to build a new socialist society. Wiesław Banach has suggested we should read Lewczyński’s later image of the worker with his spade as “open mockery of socialist realism, of Stakhanovists, who were praised by the authorities at the time.”<sup>74</sup> *Polska Kronika Filmowa* newsreels in the 1950s celebrated the heroic Stakhanovite worker and their exemplary productivity, self-sacrificing workers honoured and rewarded for their diligence in increasing production.<sup>75</sup> The chance sighting of Heinrich Koenig and his shovel sparked a realisation for Lewczyński: “I saw the shovel and his face and I thought that on the next day Henio would be, completely anonymously, building something that would serve the socialist state.”<sup>76</sup> Koenig, ‘the King,’ loses his individuality in the service of an ever more demanding system which prioritises the production of goods. Lewczyński’s *Nieznany* reinforces this loss of humanity and individuality: in opposition to the idea of the worker hero the state wished to propagate, Lewczyński’s unknown worker suggests there were no individual heroes in the PRL, but rather a faceless mass who worked to survive. The

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<sup>71</sup> Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 255.

<sup>72</sup> Olszewski, “Memory of the Image,” <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/jerzy-lewczynski-memory-of-the-image>

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński*, 106.

<sup>75</sup> Maureen Turim, “Remembering and Deconstructing the Historical Flashback in *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron*,” in *The cinema of Andrzej Wajda: the art of irony and defiance*, eds., John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowski (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 97.

<sup>76</sup> “Uboga sztuki. Z Jerzym Lewczyńskim rozmawia Magdalena Rybak” [Poor Art. Jerzy Lewczyński talks to Magdalena Rybak], typescript in artist’s private archive, Jerzy Lewczyński Institute archive, Warsaw.

image was therefore intended to convey the hypocrisy of Party propaganda. Lewczyński recollected,

It was the 1950s, a time of rampant socialism and Stalinism. We lived in hypocrisy, taught that everything Soviet was beautiful and everyone was happy. During that time, the Trasa W-Z thoroughfare was being built in Warsaw. I saw a significant disproportion between what the press wrote about the life of the common worker and what it really was. I felt a need to make a statement about the situation I lived in. And I started doing it. Spontaneously and intuitively...<sup>77</sup>

Lewczyński's words find their parallel in a speech made by the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, Władysław Gomułka, on October 24, 1956. Gomułka addressed a crowd of three hundred thousand people, articulating his belief that, 'Words did not find a reflection in the actual reality.' The speech was filmed for PKF with the title *Wielki wiec* [The Great Gathering] and Bjørn Sørenssen notes that Gomułka's slogan later appeared on hundreds of movie theatre screens across Poland.<sup>78</sup> While the photographs of Lewczyński and Beksiński make visible the economic and spiritual poverty of the PRL, they also reveal a scepticism over the use of the photographic image. Both photographers betray an awareness of a fundamental disparity between the reality of life as experienced by those living in the PRL and the distorted image of that reality promoted in official imagery. Thus, their photographs demonstrate a desire to critically re-evaluate socialist imperatives against individually experienced reality. In doing so they partake in a criticality over the veracity of the photographic image and the reality it purports to represent.

Returning to Beksiński's *Okno*, we can perhaps decipher a critique of the mimetic function of the photograph at the very heart of the image. The title is self-referential, acknowledging that the photograph itself has often been described as a transparent window onto the world. At the centre of the image is another possible 'window', a dark rectangle at the centre of the image, a frame within the frame of the photographic support. Through a window, one would expect to perceive an exterior or interior reality, but Beksiński's 'window' provides no such illumination; all we see is pitch black darkness.

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<sup>77</sup> "Uboga sztuki. Z Jerzym Lewczyńskim rozmawia Magdalena Rybak" [Poor Art. Jerzy Lewczyński talks to Magdalena Rybak], typescript in artist's private archive, Jerzy Lewczyński Institute archive, Warsaw.

<sup>78</sup> Sørenssen, "The Polish Black Series Documentary and the British Free Cinema Movement," in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, 185.



By implication, though a photograph purports to show what the world looks like, it actually reveals very little about external realities; the photograph is a ‘window’ that had been rendered opaque or obscure in the PRL for the purposes of propaganda. The propagandistic abuse of the photograph at the hands of Soviet authorities can be understood to have made a scar on the politics of the camera’s image. Lewczyński has spoken of his own anxiety in this regard. He acknowledged that photography had often been chosen over the medium of painting in order to “fully render the truth about the appearance” of past times. However, in the PRL, where the photograph has been used to describe that reality in a one-sided way, he suggested that people have come to possess a “suspicion that photography can be manipulated or that it becomes discredited.”<sup>79</sup>

It is worth returning for a moment to the film *Warszawa 56*, paying closer attention to the particular words used in voiceover. The narrator states, “1956 is different from the previous years. The chronicler watches more carefully and sees what he earlier tried not to see.”<sup>80</sup> This reminded me of Lacan’s invocation of the *stain*, defined by Iversen as “a blind spot in the orthodox perceptual field which Lacan calls the stain (*la tache*), defined, like the gaze, as that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness.”<sup>81</sup> Jerzy Toeplitz, the co-founder of *Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Filmowa, Telewizyjna i Teatralna im. Leona Schillera w Łodzi* [Leon Schiller National Higher School of Film, Television and Theatre in Łódź] seemed to evoke similar language in a report prepared for the 1964 Mannheim International Film Festival in which he reflected on these documentary films. Titled, ‘New Trends in Cultural and Sociological films in Poland,’ his report stated: “After a succession of panegyrics depicting life in Poland in the rosiest of hues, there came the famous ‘black series’ – a series of exposures of the worst ills of society, the black spots that the socialist regime could not manage to erase, with films on alcoholism, prostitution, the family crisis and delinquent youth.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński. “To tell the truth” in Jerzy Lewczyński *Jerzy Lewczyński “Archeologia Fotografii”*: *Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński ‘Archaeology of Photography’: Work from the years 1941-2005], exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Kropka. 2005), 40-44.

<sup>80</sup> *Warszawa 56*, dir. Jerzy Bossak and Jarosław Brzozowski, 1956.

<sup>81</sup> Margaret Iversen, “What is a Photograph?” *Art History* 17 no. 3 (September 1994), 457.

<sup>82</sup> Jerzy Toeplitz, “New Trends in Cultural and Sociological films in Poland,” (report prepared for 1964 Mannheim International Film Festival Round Table sponsored by UNESCO, Paris: UNESCO 30 December 1964), 11. Cited in Sørenssen, “The Polish Black Series Documentary and the British Free Cinema Movement” in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, 192.

The above quotes, in their invocation of black spots that cannot be erased, and seeing what one tries to avoid, both suggest to me a relationship with the theories of Jacques Lacan. In the introduction to this thesis I drew on Lacanian theory discuss the stain and its relationship to the gaze and by implication to desire. I used another work by Beksiński, *Welon* [Veil], to illuminate a discussion around Lacan's concept of the Imaginary. For Lacan, there exists an Imaginary order geared towards coherence and illusion. The Imaginary veils all that cannot be assimilated into a picture of illusory and ideal coherence, or anything that is too painful or difficult to come close to. Lacan identified these surplus elements outside of the Imaginary as the Real, the *Tuché*, the stain.<sup>83</sup> However, there are moments when the Real pierces the veil of the Imaginary and "erupts in traumatic returns," allowing itself to be seen.<sup>84</sup> In *Beyond Pleasure*, Margaret Iversen used Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) as one such example of when the Real can intrude. At the bottom of the painting, Holbein includes a shadowy entity that cannot be seen or understood, "a blind spot in conscious perception," and which only becomes clearly visible when the painting is looked at from an angle different to that of classical renaissance perspective. It is only in walking away from the painting, and renouncing a position of visual mastery, that the viewer realises this shadowy stain is in fact a skull.<sup>85</sup> Iversen suggests this has implications for the gaze and our sense of visual mastery over any given scene. The stain, the blind spot, the eruption of the Real, forces a realisation that our sense of visual mastery is in fact an illusion. The stain obstructs, but it also reveals. The *Czarna seria* films, and the photographs produced by Beksiński, Lewczyński, and indeed Dłubak in the late 1950s, function as stains in the Imaginary order of visual propaganda.

In the first chapter of these thesis, I discussed a series of photographs begun by Zbigniew Dłubak in 1950 which continued into the early 1960s. *Krajobrazach* [Landscapes] [I.26-29] documented marginal areas in the suburbs of Warsaw. At a moment when the heroic reconstruction of Polish cities was being proclaimed by official media, Dłubak's photographs offered an alternative reflection on the Polish landscape. The series was made in and around Poland's capital city of Warsaw, documenting marginal areas on the

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<sup>83</sup> Jacques Lacan, "Symbol and Language," in *The Language of the Self* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956); Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," *Ecrits*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1958); Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," *Ecrits* (London: Tavistock, 1977) (1949).

<sup>84</sup> Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure*, 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

fringes of the city. The series shares many of the concerns addressed above in relation to the works of Lewczyński and Beksiński and the *Czarna seria* filmmakers. Rather than focusing on the recognisable buildings and emblematic public spaces in the centre of the capital, Dłubak photographed peripheral areas at the edge of the city that were usually overlooked: dilapidated buildings, deserted streets, a murky overgrown canal. With no crowds, no workers, and no pompous parades, Dłubak's de-ideologised and explicitly anti-aesthetic landscapes provided a vastly different depiction of reality to that found in propaganda.

Dłubak's landscapes evolved and continued into another series, *Egzystencje* [Existences], created between 1959 and 1966, in which he moved away from the street and photographed exclusively inside the confines of his studio and apartment on Puławska Street in Warsaw [II.8-11]. The series consisted of large format photographs that documented the banal objects cluttered around the space: kitchen utensils, fragments of appliances, rolls of paper, tins of paint, fresh canvases. A historical imperative can perhaps be understood to underpin Dłubak's investment in the world of objects. Czesław Miłosz wrote that "human affairs are uncertain and unspeakably painful, but objects represent a stable reality, do not alter with reflexes of fear, love, or hate, and always "behave" logically"; "a chair or table is precious simply because it is free of human attributes and, for that reason, is deserving of envy," it "is free of feelings, that cause of suffering. It has no memory of past experience, good or bad, and no fear or desire."<sup>86</sup> The traumas of war seem to serve as the silent backdrop to Miłosz's observations, and they also can be understood to inform Dłubak's artistic practice at this time. Although his photographs bear no obvious signs of trauma, these experiences manifested themselves more overtly in the title of a series of abstract paintings made in the late 1950s, *Wojna* [War] [II.12].

The roots of Dłubak's photographic imagery can be traced to the Polish predilection for "miserablism," a current that emerged in Polish painting and literature at this time and exerted considerable influence on artistic production. Miserablism was seen as a continuation of the austere, anti-aesthetic paintings that had been exhibited in the 1955 *Ogólnopolska Wystawa Młodej Plastyk* [National Exhibition of Young Art] at the Warsaw Armoury, which had been accused by critics of promoting ugliness or anti-

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<sup>86</sup>Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1983), 89-92.

aestheticism; Wojciechowski had described the paintings exhibited in the show as evoking the “bottom of the greyest reality.”<sup>87</sup> In literature, one of the main proponents of miserablism was the poet Miron Białoszewski. Miłosz found a politically urgent imperative in Białoszewski’s predilection for miserabilism, suggesting that his poetry was driven by a desire to make visible a reality that had long been concealed: “I find in these poems the rough simplicity of a writer who looks directly and freshly at a world of objects which has been veiled from people in this part of Europe by the abracadabra of pseudo-scientific doctrines. He is exploring a zone which has been strictly forbidden to poets and painters in Eastern Europe for many years.”<sup>88</sup> The veil invoked by Miłosz returns Białoszewski’s poetry, and I would suggest, Dłubak’s series of photographs, to the concerns of Lewczyński and Beksiński in making visible a concealed reality, discussed in the preceding paragraphs. At the same time, one could also understand Dłubak’s predilection for miserablism as betraying a desire to seek the traces of human existence.

While Dłubak’s photographs from the late 1940s had experimented with focus, perspective and scale to create disorientating images and present objects that remained mysteriously unidentifiable, from the 1950s he pursued straight photography single-mindedly without straying into experimental darkroom techniques or abstraction. Photographs from both *Krajobrazach* and *Egzystencje* present their subjects from a perspective that mimics the human eye, with minimal distortion, leaving no ambiguity on the part of the viewer as to what they are looking at. Two articles titled *Drogi poszukiwan* [Roads for Exploration], published in the November and December issues of *Fotografia* in 1957, set out Dłubak’s attitude to photographic vision. This “objective, dispassionate study of nature” was in Dłubak’s opinion “very informative,” “it puts us in the right proportions in relation to the world, reminds us of our limitation and further stimulates cognitive efforts.”<sup>89</sup> This cognitive stimulation was to be located in a reassessment of the way each viewer looked at the world, in order to coax the viewer out of the “stupefied sensation among the multitude.” By photographing empty roads, barren yards, radiators and pipes, Dłubak drew attention to those “modest and unseen existences that escape our

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<sup>87</sup> Aleksander Wojciechowski, *Młode malarstwo polskie 1944-1975* (Wrocław, Warsaw: Ossolineum, 1975), 62. Pursued by painters, with banal, unattractive landscapes perpetuated by Jan Lebenstein, Stefan Gierowski and Rajmund Ziemiński among others.

<sup>88</sup> Czesław Miłosz, “Encounter,” *Five Polish Poems*, published in *Encounter*, (February 1958): 31-33.

<sup>89</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, “Drogi poszukiwan” [Roads for Exploration], *Fotografia* 11 no. 41 (1956): 2-3, 14; “Drogi poszukiwan II” [Roads for Exploration II], *Fotografia* 11 no. 41 (November 1956): 2-3.

everyday perception”. Asking the viewer to reconsider forms that usually go “unnoticed in everyday life” would not only bring “the chance for progress in art photography” but would also “create a new worldview, because they are based on a constantly expanding exploration of the world.”<sup>90</sup> The process of looking becomes central to the photographic work. As a consequence, photographers and viewers alike would “sharpen our sensitivity” and “enrich our understanding of the world, expanding our vision in the literal and figurative sense.”<sup>91</sup>

Białoszewski articulated in his poetry an interest in the everyday and the nondescript, described in a simple and unadorned manner. Poignant poems from this period include *Ballada o zejściu do sklepu* [A ballad of going down to the store] and *Ach, gdyby, gdyby nawet piec zabrali* [And even, even if they take away the stove], ironically subtitled *Moja niewyczerpana oda do radości* [My inexhaustible ode to joy].<sup>92</sup> Czesław Miłosz introduced Białoszewski’s work in the following way: “His poetry pushes enmity toward eloquence to an extreme, and explores the life of the most undignified objects, which are associated with the greyness and monotony of everyday existence. He is a poet of dirty staircases, rusty pipes, old stoves, kitchen utensils, mouldy walls.”<sup>93</sup> This, for Miłosz, was “life at its most down-to-earth. People go to a store, they use a dish, a spoon, and a fork, sit down on a chair, open and close the door, in spite of what happens up there, ‘above.’”<sup>94</sup> Dłubak shared a similar fondness for “insignificant daily incidents.”<sup>95</sup> The photographs of *Egzystencje* suggest no metaphors, no comparisons, but rather a notation of the banal, objects that surround him, conveyed in a direct and matter-of-fact manner.

The series *Egzystencje* was also inspired by a short story that Dłubak had written in 1958 titled *Centralne ogrzewanie* [Central Heating], published in the monthly *Ty i Ja* [You and I] magazine in 1962. Lewczyński was familiar with Dłubak’s text and concluded that it

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<sup>90</sup> Dłubak, “Drogi poszukiwan,” 2-3, 14.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> *And even, even if they take away the stove. My inexhaustible ode to joy.*

I have a stove / Similar to a triumphal arch!

They take away my stove / similar to a triumphal arch!!

Give me back my stove / similar to a triumphal arch!!!

They took it away.

What remains is a grey / naked / hole. / Grey naked hole.

And this is enough for me; / grey naked hole / grey naked hole / greynakedhole.

Trans. Czesław Miłosz. *Five Polish Poems*, published in *Encounter*, February 1958, pp.31-33.

<sup>93</sup> Czesław Miłosz, ed. *Post war polish poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1970), 103.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 88.

was a “good story” about “mysterious pipes and coils, trembling rhythm reaching from the top to the interior of the earth.”<sup>96</sup> The imagery evoked in Dłubak’s writing was close to his photographs of the period, and the story is comparable to the poetry of Białoszewski. *Centralne ogrzewanie* described the journey of an anonymous man through an abandoned tenement block crammed with a variety of worthless, dysfunctional objects of “useless practicality.”<sup>97</sup> The cold and exhausted protagonist comes across a hot radiator which he uses to keep warm. In Dłubak’s story, objects are brought to life by abundant metaphors that invite the viewer to reconsider and even anthropomorphise these mundane items; in one example, the damaged doors to the entrance of the tenement, composed of protruding planks and nails, are described as lying broken like “the wings of an enormous bird.”<sup>98</sup>

These objects serve as traces of human activity that conjure up the presence of a person now absent: “The debris of planks and beams that once lay scattered on the ground was collected by the patient hands of poor passers-by;” “you sat on a handful of bricks stacked into a jumbled heap. So there was someone here already, someone trying to make this abhorrent interior at least resemble a space fit for human existence.”<sup>99</sup> The objects survive to tell the story of their use and to gesture towards the bodies who once used them. This interest in traces of human activity is similarly evident in Dłubak’s photographs. In *Egzystencje*, Dłubak photographed his own apartment, the site of his own existence. He remains absent from the images and instead photographed objects that gesture indexically to his presence in the space: a wrinkled apple, a half eaten lunch. Speaking about the series, Agata Pietrasik, writing about this series, stated, “ordinary objects are more strongly marked by human presence, being traces of the everyday life of inhabitants, reflecting their activities and routines.”<sup>100</sup>

Similar concerns can be understood to underpin Lewczyński’s series *Głowy Wawelskie*. After his portrait of the unknown worker, Lewczyński continued to take photographs under the banner of this series title. Lewczyński recalled, “I started noticing such symbolism in other situations as well. I took a whole series of anonymous pictures. As a

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<sup>96</sup> Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński,” 2.

<sup>97</sup> Zbigniew Dłubak, “Centralne ogrzewanie” [Central Heating], *Ty i Ja* no. 4 (1963): 8-9.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Agata Pietrasik in Karolina Lewandowska, *Zbigniew Dłubak: Wewnątrz* [Zbigniew Dłubak: Interior] exhibition catalogue, (Warszawa: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, 2010).

kind of revolt against reality.”<sup>101</sup> One image, *Koszula* [Shirt] (1957), is a banal photograph of a shirt that has been hung out to dry on a washing line, rendered translucent by the rays of sunlight shining through the thin, worn fabric [II.13]. The image is also known by the alternative title *Skóra*, meaning ‘skin’, a corporeal analogy that underscores the physical connection between garment and body, and summons the index to invoke the absent body that this shirt was intended to cover. Rafał Lewandowski suggests that what emerges in Lewczyński’s photographs from the late 1950s, “is the idea of the image as a new *language*, where authors speak about man not directly but rather using the concept of the ‘hidden man’, invisible in the picture.”<sup>102</sup> Lewandowski draws here on a manifesto that Lewczyński published in 1957 in which he called for his fellow photographers to invoke the “hidden man” concealed in the photographic image: “A man is hidden in his old shoes, or in the environments he created.”<sup>103</sup> Specifically, I would argue that Lewczyński evokes this hidden man through reference to theories of the index.

A theory of the ‘index’ was developed by Charles Sanders Peirce as part of a tripartite division of signs, all of which he suggested related to the object they represent in their own particular way; the icon is related by visual resemblance, the symbol through arbitrary convention, while the index relies on a direct or physical connection.<sup>104</sup> Peirce described the index as a trace or imprint of its object, akin to a footprint or fingerprint. The index is a sign that is made by direct contact, and implies a physical connection to the object that created it. Lewczyński’s shirt functions as a physical trace of the body, akin to a skin that has been shed. The frayed cuffs and loose threads add to this sense of presence, pointing towards the way the object has been worn. *Koszula* pertains to Mary Ann Doane’s description of the index as “evacuated of content, a hollowed out sign.”<sup>105</sup> But this is only one of the ways the index can be understood, and as Doane has suggested,

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<sup>101</sup> “Uboga sztuki. Z Jerzym Lewczyńskim rozmawia Magdalena Rybak” [Poor Art. Jerzy Lewczyński talks to Magdalena Rybak], typescript in artist’s private archive, Jerzy Lewczyński Institute archive, Warsaw.

<sup>102</sup> Rafał Lewandowski. “Neorealism as Language,” in *Neorealism in Polish photography 1950-1970*, eds. Rafał Lewandowski and Tomasz Szerszeń, trans. Marcin Wawrzyńczak, (Warszawa: Argraf, 2015), 9.

<sup>103</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, letter to ZPAF in Warsaw, Gliwice, November 11, 1957. Photocopy, Jerzy Lewczyński Institute archive, Warsaw.

<sup>104</sup> See Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 2, eds., Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Charles S. Peirce, *Writings of Charles S. Peirce, A Chronological Edition*, vol. 2, eds., Peirce Edition Project (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982). Mary Ann Doane suggests that the photograph can be used as an example of a sign system that merges icon, index and to some extent symbol: indexical because of an existential bond with its object; iconic, relying upon a similarity with that object; and photographs have recourse to language, invoking the symbolic realm. (Doane, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” 134.)

<sup>105</sup> Mary Anne Doane, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” *differences* 18 no.1 (2007).

the index as trace is “not necessarily the most crucial.”<sup>106</sup> The index as “deixis” operates in a slightly different manner, as a pointing finger or the demonstrative pronoun “this,” which relies less upon a physical connection between sign and object, and instead operates by directing or focusing attention.<sup>107</sup> Lewczyński’s *Skóra*, I would argue, gestures in this way towards the body that once occupied the shirt, but is now absent. The work hovers between presence and absence.

Tomasz Szerzeń has described Lewczyński’s shirt as “a phantom referencing post-war absence and an impossibility to reintegrate a world of which only shreds remain.”<sup>108</sup> Another series of photographs by Lewczyński more insistently invokes these traces to remind the viewer of the great void that was created in European society as a result of the Second World War. In the late 1950s, Lewczyński travelled to the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Majdanek to reflect upon the poignant remains of the camps nearly fifteen years after their liberation at the end of the Second World War [II.14].<sup>109</sup> Photographs taken by Lewczyński at Auschwitz show vast quantities of abandoned objects strewn in large heaps: shaving brushes, glasses, prosthetic legs and shoes [II.15]. Szerzeń, quoting Didi-Huberman, observes that these objects “turn out to be more long lasting than human experience and stubbornly endure, becoming ‘images in spite of all’, absurd in their uselessness.”<sup>110</sup> Despite Szerzeń’s assertion, the abandoned objects Lewczyński photographed do possess a use value; as mnemonic objects they serve a memorial function. In *Unrecounted*, W. G. Sebald suggests that memories can be locked within material objects. He stated, “Because (in principle) things outlast us, they know more about us than we know about them: they carry the experiences they have had with us inside them and are –in fact – the book of our history opened before us.”<sup>111</sup>

This memorial strategy has been harnessed within the camps themselves. In a building labelled *Rzeczowe dowody zbrodni* [Material proofs of crime], endless mounds of objects

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<sup>106</sup> Doane, “Indexicality and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” in *The Meaning of Photography*. eds., Robin Kelsey, Stimson Blake (Williamstown, MA.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008), 6.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Tomasz Szerzeń, “Shreds of the World and an Impossible Film. Passageways,” in *Neorealism in Polish photography 1950-1970*, eds., Lewandowski and Szerszeń, (Warszawa: Argraf, 2015), 31.

<sup>109</sup> In an informal conversation, the photographic historian Adam Sobota suggested this was not a commission but an independently pursued project. Wrocław, September 17, 2015.

<sup>110</sup> Szerzeń, “Shreds of the World and an Impossible Film. Passageways,” in *Neorealism in Polish photography 1950-1970*, 26.

<sup>111</sup> W.G. Sebald, “As Day and Night, Chalk and Cheese: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp,” in W.G. Sebald and Jan Peter Tripp, *Unrecounted*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 78-79.



are displayed: suitcases with Stars of David and names daubed in white paint; prosthetic limbs in a chaotic jumble. These exhibits can still be seen today. In the presence of these objects, what is striking is not the ordinariness of the traces that are left to testify to human existence, but rather the sheer scale of the displays and the overwhelming accumulation of objects present. It is worth pausing for a moment to return to De Sica's film *Ladri di biciclette*, a discussion of which began this chapter. A particular scene in the film reminded me of my own visit to Auschwitz and my physical presence before these displays; it also called to mind Lewczyński's photographs. In this scene, the protagonist takes his wife's dowry bed sheets to be pawned for cash, the money needed to buy the bicycle that he needs to do his job. As the bedsheets are taken away, a long tracking shot shows piles upon piles of bed sheets laid upon shelves that stretch endlessly into the distance. The scene conveys a sensation of being lost in an overwhelming excess of objects. This relentless accumulation of objects seems to preoccupy Lewczyński, and indeed the potential for the annihilation of these material traces can increasingly be understood to drive his whole approach to photography from the late 1950s in his series *Archeologia fotografii* [Archaeology of Photography].<sup>112</sup>

In studying memorial culture, Laurie Beth Clark has suggested that large volumes of objects recovered on site at the concentration camps point to the scale and enormity of the crimes committed there, by standing in for the victims.<sup>113</sup> The vast quantities of accumulated objects certainly testify to the extent of the annihilation of life in the camps, but Clark fails to elaborate on how specifically these objects can be understood to stand in for the victims. These objects wrenched from their everyday use are not just a collection of items, but rather "personal effects" that seem to betray something of their owner. Margaret Iversen has discussed found objects wrenched from their owners, as "empty husks that signify absence or death."<sup>114</sup> I would argue that these objects do not just signify absence, but also invoke past presence. Lewczyński's *Buty* [Shoes] invoke the index in order to summon the presence of the men, women and children – now absent – who once wore those shoes. At this point it seems apt to return to the statement Lewczyński made in

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<sup>112</sup> See Jerzy Lewczyński "Archeologica Fotografii": *Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński 'Archaeology of Photography': Work from the years 1941-2005]. Exhibition catalogue. Wreńnia: Kropka, 2005.

<sup>113</sup> Laurie Beth Clark, "Mnemonic Objects: Forensic and Rhetorical Practices in Memorial Culture," in *Memory and Postwar Memorials: Confronting the Violence of the Past*, ed. Marc Silberman and Florence Vatan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 165.

<sup>114</sup> See Margaret Iversen, "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph," *Art Journal* 63 no. 2, Special issue on Aesthetics/Anti-aesthetics, (Summer, 2004): 44-57.

his 1957 manifesto, his call to photographers to invoke the 'hidden man' who is concealed in "in his old shoes."<sup>115</sup>

In a September 1958 article on the photographs of Lewczyński and Beksiński, Wojciech Kiciński stated that with this particular image, Lewczyński "speaks the whole truth about the death camps."<sup>116</sup> While Lewczyński may articulate a truth about this particular historical moment, he does so indirectly. His image engages with the atrocities of the war, but in a form that avoids direct representation in favour of a focus on the traces that are left behind. Photographs from the late 1950s by Polish photographers, particularly Lewczyński, Beksiński and Dłubak, can thus be understood to address the traumas of Poland's recent past. At the same time, they offer a melancholic, even accusatory, commentary upon lived reality in the present day PRL. Dark realism is only one way through which these photographers communicated the impact of trauma. In the following section of this chapter, I discuss a turn to formal experimentation and abstraction, darkroom deviations that can also be understood to not just make manifest traumas, but actively repeat them.

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<sup>115</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, letter to ZPAF in Warsaw, Gliwice, November 11, 1957. Photocopy, Jerzy Lewczyński Institute archive, Warsaw.

<sup>116</sup> Wojciech Kiciński, "New roads and their paths," *Fotografia* 9 no. 63 (September, 1958): 426.

## FORMAL FROLICS

In an article from 1958, the critic Wojciech Kiciński suggested that photographers were “developing new paths for artistic photography, consistent on one point, namely that the still ruling almost omnipotent reportage lives its last days.”<sup>117</sup> Kiciński described the work produced in these years as “an arena of high class formal frolics.”<sup>118</sup> This section of the chapter will examine how a number of photographers in the late 1950s turned away from a faithful documentation of external realities in favour of exploring ways in which the medium could be utilised for the possibilities of formal experimentation and abstraction. This manifested itself in a wide variety of applications: simple interventions such as framing and cropping in order to de-familiarise a given scene; darkroom manipulation including, but not limited to, solarisation and combination printing; more overt authorial interventions such as direct manipulation of the negative; and images produced entirely without a camera. Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowska, in her study of Polish photography from the late 1950s, has observed that this heterogeneous work was unified by a refusal of photography’s function of reproduction. The negative was not a final product, but a “starting point for further interpretation of the image.”<sup>119</sup> The negative also became the focus for acts of physical destruction. The following pages will attempt to unravel the appeal abstraction held for photographers working in 1950s Poland, and will also suggest that abstraction served as an oblique way to manifest unspoken traumas relating to Poland’s past and its political present.

Lech Grabowski first addressed the issue of abstraction in a 1957 article in *Fotografia*, and his words hint at how contentious the topic would prove to critics. He acknowledged that the work exhibited in the show had been divided into two very specific camps: photographers who took pictures “associated with life, the real world,” and those whose work diverged from that reality, “cranking out formalizing abstraction.”<sup>120</sup> He concluded that the latter was becoming too prolific in Polish photography. While this turn to abstraction was not new – the previous chapter delineated the ways in which Dłubak and

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<sup>117</sup> Kiciński, “Nowe drogi czy własne ścieżki,” 426.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Kordjak-Piotrowska, *Egzystencje: Polska fotografia awangardowa, 2. połowy lat 50*, 9.

<sup>120</sup> Lech Grabowski, “Dwa przykłady i kilka uwag o I Międzynarodowej Wystawie Fotografii w Warszawie” [Two examples and some comments about the International Exhibition of Photography in Warsaw], *Fotografia* 8 no. 50 (August 1957): 216.

Obrąpalska had experimented with abstraction immediately after the war – the post-Thaw years saw increasing numbers of photographers exploring the possibilities for abstraction. These included Zdzisław Beksiński, Jerzy Lewczyński and specifically Bronisław Schlabs, who single-mindedly pursued photographic abstraction from 1957, but also Bożena Michalik, Marek Piasecki and Andrzej Pawłowski. What differentiated this period from the late 1940s was the means by which these abstractions were made. This turn to abstraction led to a heated debate amongst photographic critics. Articles by Lech Grabowski, Alfred Ligocki, Urszula Czartoryska and Zbigniew Dłubak, printed in *Fotografia* over the years 1957 and 1959, set out various claims as to what could and should constitute art photography. Alongside these texts, the photographic works themselves will be scrutinised in order to decipher the impulses that drive photographers to take up ‘formal frolics’ in the face of such vitriolic criticism.

On July 14, 1958, an exhibition opened at the *Krzywe Koło* [Crooked Circle] Gallery, featuring the work of Beksiński, Lewczyński and Schlabs alongside the Wrocław group *Podwórko* [Yard], led by Bożena Michalik. The review of the show in *Fotografia* remarked on the variety of approaches that photographers were pursuing at this time [II.16]. Lewczyński exhibited works discussed in the preceding section of this chapter: *Koszula* [Shirt], known also as *Skóra* [Skin], together with *Buty* [Shoes] and the portrait of an unidentified worker, *Nieznany* [Unknown]. These examples of Lewczyński’s ‘dark realism’ were shown alongside *Baczność* [Attention], in which Lewczyński experimented with composite printing. This experimentation was not new to Lewczyński; at the age of sixteen, one of the earliest images he made utilised this technique of montaging negatives: *Fotografia marzeń z czasów wojny* [Dream Photograph from War Time] (1941) [II.17]. Included within the image is the following text, which explicitly describes the components of the image and the method of its creation:

During the time of a gloomy night of occupation in 1941 photography turned out to be a means of virtual escape from the tragic reality.

From the negative of a 6x9cm photograph of myself in a meadow with a friend, I cut out the silhouettes with scissors, then I copy this onto a found 6x9 negative of a marine vessel.

In this way I ‘transfer’ myself to a distant unknown world.

Crudely montaging a self-portrait taken during war time in his hometown of Rachanie with a ship, billowing with steam, the combination of the two images speaks of Lewczyński's stated desire to 'escape' from his surroundings. There is no attempt to hide the artificial construction of the final print, in fact Lewczyński quite literally spells out his artificiality to the viewer: the accompanying text notes how he 'cut' the photographic paper with scissors. His words suggest that an act of destruction is necessarily involved in satisfying his desires. I will return to this theme later in the chapter.

Works from the 1950s make such interventions appear seamless. In *Baczność*, Lewczyński superimposed two negatives, printing them together to create a single composite image; the first a photograph of a brick wall, the second a photograph of prosthetic limbs from Auschwitz [II.18]. By printing these images in combination Lewczyński constructed a dream-like space that invokes Freudian notions of condensation. Freud suggested that in a dream, the features of two or three people converge around a single collective figure, multiple images projected on to a single plate; certain features common to both are emphasised, while those which fail to fit in which one another cancel one another out and become indistinct in the picture.<sup>121</sup> Freud noted how the content of a dream accomplished "a tremendous *work of condensation*;" that is to say, "the dream is meagre, paltry, and laconic in comparison with the range and copiousness of the dream thoughts."<sup>122</sup> Lewczyński's image similarly brings together two photographs to generate an interplay of associations between the images; the montage as possessing an interpretative value greater than the sum of its constituent parts.

Combination printing is a technique that has been harnessed since the early years of the photographic medium, and was taken up by Surrealist artists in the early twentieth century to produce illogical scenes. Specifically, Rosalind Krauss has drawn attention to the way in which Surrealists used this technique to present a strangely unreal image that relied on the forcefulness of the medium's indexicality and its perceived ability to produce faithful documents. Manipulations wrought in the darkroom, when presented on the surface of a seamless photographic print, can suggest a convulsion in the very fabric of the world itself.<sup>123</sup> In a 1956 essay in *Fotografia*, Dłubak raised a note of caution

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<sup>121</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Dream Work, The Interpretation of Dreams' (1900), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* vol. 4, ed., James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 175.

<sup>122</sup> **IBID.**

<sup>123</sup> See Rosalind Krauss, *L'amour fou: photography & surrealism* (London: Arts Council, 1986).

against appropriating these ideas. In *O fotografice 'nowoczesnej' I awangardowości* [On 'Modern' Photography and the Avant-Garde] published in the October issue of the magazine, he suggested that photographers were grasping at "a great number of trends" borrowed from the inter-war avant-garde in the search for an appropriate form of artistic expression.<sup>124</sup> Dłubak outlined how the avant-garde "came into existence in certain defined circumstances and in order to achieve a definite goal. They solved definite artistic roles in support of theses connected with people's outlook on life. Consequently, they served some ideology and social class."<sup>125</sup> The problem Dłubak identified with post-Thaw borrowings, was that artists failed to take into account "the circumstances in which those media came into being, what aims they were to serve and how our aims are to benefit by them."<sup>126</sup> Instead, Dłubak suggested that Polish photographers were now transposing the formal properties of this work unthinkingly into their images. He identified Surrealism as a particular target: "It would be difficult to suspect somebody of an avant-garde attitude who, for example, at present is creating art on the principles of Surrealism. It is a trend which, for a long time now, has not had the same meaning in the West as it had a few decades ago. Besides, our social conditions do not demand forms which result from those artistic ideas but actually exclude them. Such a trend, even at its most daring, cannot be treated as avant-garde in Poland at present."<sup>127</sup> Dłubak recognised that while it is "absolutely indispensable to profit from and to draw conclusions" from other art works, "it is the attitude of thoughtless imitation that deserves such strong criticism."<sup>128</sup> Dłubak asked post-Thaw avant-garde artists to consider "why we wish to make use of certain artistic media" and to think about how this would enable them to "express current views on reality."<sup>129</sup>

Lewczyński's *Bacność* appears to reference, knowingly or not, Man Ray's *Imaginary Portrait of the Marquis de Sade* (1938). Man Ray portrayed the Marquis de Sade as a bust viewed in profile before the Bastille, the building where he had been imprisoned. His body is shown to be constructed out of grey stone blocks; the portrait as a monument to Sade built from the stones of the very building in which he had been incarcerated for a decade. The photography historian David Bate has suggested the portrait depicts Man

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<sup>124</sup> Dłubak, "O fotografice 'nowoczesnej' I awangardowości," 6-7.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

Ray as “a castle of isolation” in which Sade is “mounting a defence against the destruction of his own body.”<sup>130</sup> An interpretation by Simon Baker suggests a possible link to Lewczyński’s work. Baker wrote that the portrait invokes Sade’s presence, but at the same time speaks of absence and obliterated traces. By portraying Sade in relation to the Bastille, Man Ray constructed “a special kind of monument. This had to stand for both Sade and his disappearance.”<sup>131</sup>

In contrast to Dłubak’s assertion that photographers were using avant-garde techniques unthinkingly, Lewczyński appears to use the technique of combination printing to express contemporary concerns, putting into play notions of presence, absence, disappearance and remembrance, as read through recent wartime trauma. Different orders of representation overlap, appearance, disappearance and erasure. The title, *Baczność* or ‘Attention,’ calls to mind a military order, while the content of the image speaks of the violent actions of man; prosthetic limbs photographed by Lewczyński at Auschwitz as testifying to the destruction and mutilation of human bodies. Combining the evidence of the physical effects of the war with the bricked wall suggests that the two are interwoven; trauma as knitted into the very fabric of the Polish landscape. By utilising this process of combination printing, Lewczyński acts as “memeticist,” that is to say “someone who interferes with live structures of memory.”<sup>132</sup> Lewczyński interrogates how history is constructed through the photographic image, how memory can be manipulated and impeded, how photographs can be used to synthesise new information and to ask questions about collective memory.

The technique of montage was also utilised by Lewczyński in *Październik* [October] (1956) [II.19], to make a comment on the political situation in the PRL. The title calls to mind the October Revolution in Russia; it also references the more recent Polish October of 1956. 1956 marked the election of Władysław Gomułka as First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR), following the death of Bolesław Bierut in March. This appointment was controversial, particularly in the Soviet Union. Gomułka had been ousted in the Stalinist campaign of 1948 and was imprisoned for a number of years in the 1950s. Soviet leaders had opposed Gomułka’s appointment, and relationships with the

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<sup>130</sup> David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 169.

<sup>131</sup> Simon Baker, *Surrealism, History and Revolution* (Pieterlen: Verlag Peter Lang, 2008), 282.

<sup>132</sup> The term ‘memeticist’ appropriated here from a text on a contemporary Polish artist, Zbigniew Libera. Małgorzata Jurkiewicz, ed., *Opowiedziane inaczej* [A Story Differently Told], exhibition catalogue (Gdańsk: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, 2009).

Soviet Union remained tense. October 1956 therefore represented a moment of potential change, a shift in Polish politics away from Soviet rule towards liberalisation under a more moderate leader. On October 24, 1956, Gomułka addressed a crowd of three hundred thousand people, a speech that was filmed for the Polish Newsreel *Polska kronika filmowa* with the title *Wielki wiec* [The Great Gathering]. Earlier that year, in June 1956, another large crowd had gathered, this time in Poznań near the city's Ministry of Public Security headquarters. Protests by workers demanding lower food prices, increased wages and better working conditions showed the depth of discontent among the populace. The protests were violently suppressed, with the Polish People's Army ordered to fire at civilians. Lewczyński's montage shows a great throng of people marching, and appears to condense these two events of 1956, namely the crowds gathered for Gomułka and crowds protesting in Poznań. Over Lewczyński's crowd loom unidentified white shards, an effect created by scattering offcuts of paper on top of the negative during printing. The Polish photographic historian Krzysztof Jurecki has described these shards as bestowing an "aura of threat," as they efface the features of the people below.<sup>133</sup> Wojciech Nowicki talks about the image in similar terms, describing it as "a trembling image, smeared with life," which makes the assembled group "seem ever more crowded, dangerous, as if something unsettling may appear."<sup>134</sup> Gomułka's speech at his 'Great Gathering' also deserves scrutiny. It is in this address that he articulated his belief that, 'Words did not find a reflection in the actual reality,' a slogan that Bjørn Sørensen notes later appeared on hundreds of movie theatre screens across Poland.<sup>135</sup> Gomułka's words pointed to a discrepancy between official propaganda and life as experienced by citizens of the PRL. Lewczyński's intervention also raises questions about the reality portrayed in photographic images. His addition of the white strips frustrates the documentary value of the photograph and flattens out the image, emphasising its two-dimensionality. Lewczyński reminds the viewer of the illusory nature of photographic imagery: the photograph not as window onto the world, but as artificial construction.

Beksiński was similarly experimenting with different styles of photography. In *Na Moscie* [On the Bridge] [II.16], the shadowy outline of a man's head and shoulders casts a silhouette onto a bridge. The scale of the individual elements seems out of kilter, with the

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<sup>133</sup> Krzysztof Jurecki, *Oblicza Fotografii* (Września: Kropka, 2009), 157-161.

<sup>134</sup> Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 255.

<sup>135</sup> Bjørn Sørensen, "The Polish Black Series Documentary and the British Free Cinema Movement," in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed. Anikó Imre (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 185.



man's silhouette in the foreground incongruously large; it is an image artificially montaged in the darkroom to create a fictional scene. Strong black and white contrasts accentuate the linear geometry of the bridge railings and the shadows they cast. Rather than using the medium to faithfully reproduce a visible reality, Beksiński used fragments of this reality to fabricate an imagined pictorial world. Nyczek surmised that Beksiński's work from this period "never really showed reality as it is; it was always a certain image of it, sometimes heavily processed, more artificial than real."<sup>136</sup>

The 1958 *Krzywe Koło* exhibition also showcased more overly abstract photographs, created by Bożena Michalik and Bronisław Schlabs [II.20; 21]. Upon first appearance, the work of these two photographers appeared very similar. In both, the subject matter remains largely unidentifiable, leading the viewer's eye to wander over the surface texture and patterning, guided by the rhythms of the abstracted matter. However, the images were produced by very different means. Michalik photographed directly from nature. The series *Woda* [Water] [II.20] studied the "poetic delicate arabesques" produced by running water, isolated through close ups and purposeful framing.<sup>137</sup> Recognition is impeded but not impossible. The forms produced are strangely unfamiliar and playfully suggestive, intended to evoke associations in the mind of the viewer. In *Smok* [Dragon] the swirls of water become anthropomorphised, the patterning of foam on water transmogrified into the mythical beast identified in the title. Michalik stated of her works, "I photograph what others can't see."<sup>138</sup> In this simple statement, she aligns herself with the abstract photographs produced by Zbigniew Dłubak, discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

Initially Schlabs experimented with macrophotography in a manner very similar to Michalik, enlarging appropriately framed fragments of nature (leaves, icicles) so as to render them abstract. His later photographs were created entirely in the darkroom. From 1957 he eliminated the camera all together and began a series of *Fotogramy* [Photograms] created by working directly on light sensitive material, either celluloid film or glass plates

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<sup>136</sup> Tadeusz Nyczek, *Zdzisław Beksiński* (Warszawa: Arkady, 1992), 22. In an interview Beksiński declared that he could not stand anything natural, instead stating his preference for all things artificial: "I hate anything "straight from the cow." I drink instant coffee, instant milk, powdered soups and only canned meat, vitamins in tablets – music too must be powdered or in tablets." Nyczek suggests this preference contradicted the inclinations of the majority of the Polish population, who in an era full of artificiality, were more interested in escaping this falseness for something more natural. (Nyczek, *Zdzisław Beksiński*, 8.)

<sup>137</sup> Kiciński 'Nowe drogi czy własne ścieżki,' 426.

<sup>138</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, *Antologia fotografii polskiej: 1839-1989* (Bielsko-Biała: Wydawnictwo LUCRUM, cop. 1999).

[II.21-26]. The title of these works calls to mind nineteenth century photogenic drawings or the early twentieth century photograms of Christian Schad, László Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray, who all experimented with layering material on light sensitive paper and exposing their compositions to light to create unique photograms. While Schlabs borrows this name, his images were created in a variety of different ways. The specific details of Schlabs's working methods were a matter of debate, remaining "secrets of the workshop."<sup>139</sup> Czartoryska noted that Schlabs the "inventor" did "not like to reveal" his "recipes," so an element of conjecture is required in deciphering his technique.<sup>140</sup> In *Fotogram 10/57* (1957) [II.21], for example, Schlabs layered shards of glass and fragments of celluloid film on top of the negative, before exposing it to light. He also applied chemicals to the photosensitive material, the subsequent reactions creating chance patterning, as in *Fotogram 7/57* (1957) [II.21]. Elsewhere the photo-sensitive material was soaked in water, or subjected to heat, sometimes even scratched or scraped with a sharp instrument [II.22-23]. In 1958 Schlabs began to create *informel* compositions, painting directly onto the plate or the film with sweeping gestural brush strokes, before exposing the negative to light [II.25-26]. Ligocki noted how in one instance Schlabs smeared a glass plate with a layer of Nivea cream.<sup>141</sup> Inklings of recognisable imagery or anthropomorphic figures reveal themselves. In *Fotogram T16/58* (1958) circular swirling forms congregate around a 'T' shape, sparking a process of free association in the mind of the viewer and evoking the religious symbol of the crucifix [II.27]. Elsewhere forms that seem to derive from the organic world appear, evoking comparison to cellular activity studied under a microscope. Magdalena Wróblewska has noted how Schlabs's works "sometimes resemble clusters of biological forms, microorganisms or cells. Elsewhere, a solidified and cracked layer of dead tissue."<sup>142</sup> The resulting images were then reproduced either through contact printing or enlargement. Despite the disparity in their method of production, images were mostly titled *Fotogram*, a term that possessed a different connotation in Poland, where it was used by art photographers to distinguish their works from non-artistic uses of the medium.

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<sup>139</sup> Alfred Ligocki, "Rozwieść fotografię artystyczną z fotografiką" [Divorcing artistic photography from art photography], *Fotografia* 11 no. 65 (November 1958): 523-527.

<sup>140</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, "Fotogramy Schlabsa" [The photograms of Schlabs] *Fotografia* 7 no. 73 (July 1959): 340-341.

<sup>141</sup> Ligocki, "Rozwieść fotografię artystyczną z fotografiką," 523-527.

<sup>142</sup> Magdalena Wróblewska, "Między materią a obrazem. Eksperymenty Bronisława Schlabsa z medium fotografii" [Between Matter and Image. Bronisław Schlabs's Experiments with the Photographic Medium], in *Bronisław Schlabs. Krok w nowoczesność* [Bronisław Schlabs. Step into Modernity] (Poznań: Fundacja 9/11 Art Space, 2012), 26.

Reflecting back on the 1958 *Krzywe Koło* exhibition, Lewczyński concluded that while the majority of the work had been “basically traditional,” it was only Schlabs who had exhibited truly abstract photography.<sup>143</sup> Artists increasingly explored cameraless photography, and Beksiński advocated this work as a “direction in contemporary photography, which has before it a bright future.”<sup>144</sup> Marek Piasecki created a series of *Miniatures* [II.27]; small, intimate, unique prints in which Piasecki drew with chemicals and tools directly onto the paper, sometimes even scorching the paper with heat. He also produced *Heliographs* [II.28], in which he arranged objects and liquids on a sheet of glass which was sandwiched with light sensitive paper before being exposed to light. Piasecki’s technique borrowed from the heliographic method developed by Karol Hiller in 1928, and from which Piasecki’s works take their name. Hiller’s technique was similar to cliché-verre, painting compositions with gouache and tempera on glass plates or celluloid film - either representational images or rigorously designed geometric abstract compositions – which were then exposed to light and photochemically fixed. In Hiller’s process the photochemical element is relinquished to a secondary role; in contrast Schlabs and Piasecki often utilised photographic materials – chemicals, transparent materials - to generate the compositions to begin with.

Andrzej Pawłowski also eliminated the camera at this time and explored the basic photographic elements of light and photosensitive materials. In *Luxogramów* [Luxogramy] (1954) he exposed photo-sensitive paper to light shone through three-dimensional paper models, creating abstract compositions of interpenetrating forms with varying degrees of transparency, the results of which were published in *Fotografia* [II.29]. He also attempted to set these *Luxogramów* in motion. In 1956, he constructed a handmade projector out of simple materials – a cardboard box with two broom handles which he turned to slowly rotate the box. Inside he placed objects of varying transparency: pieces of cellophane, Christmas baubles, light bulbs and lenses. Light was shone through a small aperture on one side of the box onto a piece of tracing paper hung on the opposite wall as a screen. As the box rotated the light refracting through the objects contained inside, creating a graceful and hypnotic performance on the screen as biomorphic forms fluidly metamorphosed: transparent outlines approaching and receding, sometimes overlapping to merge into new composite forms before retreating and

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<sup>143</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński,” 32-4.

<sup>144</sup> Beksiński, “Kryzys w fotografice i perspektywy jego przezwycięzenia,” 540-3.

separating once more. Pawłowski's projections seemed to evoke the depths of the psyche, referencing the appearance and disappearance of forms flickering within the subconscious. These fleeting and ephemeral projections were incorporated by Tadeusz Kantor into his programme for *Cricot 2* in Kraków, and were later consolidated into a film, *Kineformy* [Kineforms] [II.30] released in 1957, accompanied by a dynamic sound composition by Adam Walaciński. Describing Pawłowski's film, the critic Juliusz Garztecki wrote: "Forms appear on the screen. Fantastical, dreamlike, indescribably, emerging from a hazy abyss, coming and going, coloured or black and white, exceptionally beautiful. They did not represent anything and could thus be associated with anything, utterly abstract, organic, alive in an inexplicable and urgent way, coming to life and dying the most real death, dramatic to the point of breathlessness."<sup>145</sup>

In 1959, *Fotografia* published an article on the *Experimentelle Fotografie* [Experimental Photography] of the German photographer Heinz Hajek-Halke. Consisting of cameraless light studies or "light graphics" created by shining a flashlight directly onto light sensitive paper, this work was hailed by the magazine as an example of "the rich possibilities photography held for creating expressive abstract works of art on a par with those by earlier and contemporary masters in painting and sculpture."<sup>146</sup> Polish photographers took up similar experiments. Beksiński uses a comparable working method, leaving the camera shutter open to record the circular movements of a lit torch swinging in the darkroom. The final result appears frenetic and chaotic. Lewczyński similarly worked in the darkroom to register patterns of light on the negative; the rectangular and linear forms create a more geometric composition. At an artistic committee meeting of ZPAF, Edward Hartwig, declared with enthusiasm upon seeing a light graphic work by Beksiński: "Here is born the new Jan Bułhak of Polish photography! These photographs by their "otherness" threw themselves into my eyes and to this day (which reaffirms this) have been remembered."<sup>147</sup>

While Hartwig and Beksiński were certainly enthusiastic about this direction that photographers were increasingly pursuing, not all critics expressed similarly positive sentiments. Over several issues of *Fotografia*, between August 1958 and April 1960, critics contributed to a debate that occupied many pages of the magazine, registering as

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<sup>145</sup> Juliusz Garztecki, "Andrzej Pawłowski," *Ty I ja*, no.6 (1963).

<sup>146</sup> "Jak fotografuje Hajek-Halke" [How Hajek-Halke photographs], *Fotografia* 5 no.59 (1958): 232-5.

<sup>147</sup> A photograph created from two negatives: clouds and a light drawing. Lewczyński was present and recalled the statement. Lewczyński, "Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński," 32-34.

one of the most important discussions during this period. This debate was initiated by a strongly worded article written by Lech Grabowski reviewing the 1958 exhibition of Lewczyński, Beksiński, Schlabs and the *Yard* group at the *Krzywe Koło* Gallery, discussed at the start of this chapter. The title of Grabowski's article – *Błędne drogi nowoczesności* [Errant paths of modernity] – already signalled his attitude to the experimental work of these photographers.<sup>148</sup> The title was damning; the text vitriolic: “It is difficult for even the most zealous supporters of modern art to find reasons to be enthusiastic after seeing the exhibition. How can we try to justify the existence of such art?” The formulas of modernity showcased in the exhibition – studio work, montages, closely framed abstractions, direct work on the photographic material – were described as “photographic absurdities.”<sup>149</sup>

How to classify such work proved a key issue. Alfred Ligocki published an article titled, ‘*Rozwieść fotografię artystyczną z fotografią*,’ which confronted contradictions over terminology.<sup>150</sup> Translating Ligocki's title requires prior knowledge of the term ‘*fotografiką*’, a word that had been formulated by Jan Bułhak in the late 1920s as an umbrella term for all artistic photography, intended to distinguish these manifestations from commercial or applied uses of the medium. In contrast to the word *fotografia* (photography), ‘*foto-grafiką*’ emphasised the link between photography and graphics. (Ligocki's title could clumsily be translated as ‘Divorcing artistic photography from photo-graphics as art photography’.) Lewandowska suggested that by the late 1950s the term ‘*fotografiką*’ had lost its readability, as much photographic work increasingly imitated the appearance of ‘graphics’ – drawings, etchings, printmaking techniques such as woodcuts or linocuts, and poster design – confusing the meaning of the term.<sup>151</sup> The term ‘*fotografiką*’ was still being used to describe what Ligocki saw as two very different tendencies in photography: the “creative interpretation of reality,” as witnessed in reportage, set against “the creation of new forms of visual reality,” which Ligocki suggested belonged not to photography but to painting and printmaking. Ligocki wanted

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<sup>148</sup> Lech Grabowski, “Błędne drogi nowoczesności” [Errant paths of modernity], *Fotografia* 9 (1958): 425.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Alfred Ligocki, “Rozwieść fotografię artystyczną z fotografią” [Divorcing artistic photography from art photography], *Fotografia* 11 no. 65 (November 1958): 523-527.

<sup>151</sup> Ziębińska-Lewandowska, *Między dokumentalnością a eksperymentem: krytyka fotograficzna w Polsce w latach 1946-1989*, n.p. In exploring new possibilities for their medium, photographers had previously turned to other forms of art making for inspiration. In the late 1950s, this did not manifest itself in a borrowing from painting, as had been the case with Pictorialism, rather Polish photographers began to imitate the appearance of graphics.

to mark a clear separation between these two strands in order to avoid confusion: “We will never come to terms with the criteria of valuation, if we continue to pack into one bag the pictures of Cartier-Bresson or Weston with pseudo-drawings or solarization, with pseudo-poster izohelia and abstract photographs reminiscent of entire ‘dictionaries of abstract painting.’”<sup>152</sup> He concluded. “I believe it is high time for that which clearly belongs to artistic photography, to be clearly separated from that illegitimate child, born of the flirtation of photography and painting and prints.”<sup>153</sup>

The photograms of Schlabs received the most attention. Kiciński went so far as to describe these works as “pointless.”<sup>154</sup> Czartoryska somewhat condescendingly stated, “the unique beauty of contrasts and values, a beautiful black and white lustre [...] Applied to the interior of one of the restaurants in Poznan, his compositions will be an interesting, eye-catching accent.”<sup>155</sup> Lech Grabowski provocatively asked, “Is this even a photograph?”<sup>156</sup> All critics unanimously agreed that such work could not be classified as photography. Czartoryska stated: “The existence of this kind of creativity should not raise protest from alarmed supporters of pure photography, loyal in nature – because as determined by logic, there is no longer a contradiction, but only the non-antagonistic phenomenon of ‘exclusion’. Direct work on the film by graphic methods is not modern photography [...] It is part of contemporary artistic production, which now covers all the techniques of painting and printmaking.”<sup>157</sup>

This superficial debate over semantics concealed a deeper root of unrest, namely the debate as to whether photography should be used as a means of mechanical reproduction, to document existing forms in nature; or whether photography could be a tool for artistic construction, to create new forms with no basis in reality. Schlabs advocated the latter position. In a letter written to Lewczyński in 1958, he suggested, “Avoid a literal approach to photography. This is the biggest trap for artistic photography. [...] The

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<sup>152</sup> Izohelia, or Isohelia, was a technique developed by the Polish photographer Witold Romer in the early 1930s, in which you begin with a positive print, from which repeated negatives are printed with increasing exposure times. Certain dense areas can be emphasised, while in other areas information is minimised or erased. These negatives are then recombined to make one final print. Using this technique, greyscale almost disappears and the image becomes starkly black and white and heavily contrasted.

<sup>153</sup> Ligocki, “Rozwiesć fotografię artystyczną z fotografiką,” 523-527.

<sup>154</sup> Kiciński, “Nowe drogi czy własne ścieżki,” 426.

<sup>155</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, “Fotogramy Schlabsa” [Photograms Schlabs], *Fotografia*, 7 (1959): 340-341.

<sup>156</sup> Grabowski, “Błędne drogi nowoczesności,” 425.

<sup>157</sup> Czartoryska stated of Schlabs’s compositions, “if not for their gloss and rich blacks from the bromine” give the impressions of “monotypes,” “one of the new graphic techniques.” (Czartoryska, “Fotogramy Schlabsa,” 340-341.)

surrounding objects should be treated as a material to build from.”<sup>158</sup> As Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowska has retrospectively observed, this necessitated “a completely different understanding of the sense and function of photography, understood not as an instrument to know reality, but above all as a means of artistic creation.”<sup>159</sup> For Ligocki, photography was a documentary medium. He stated that photographs possessed specific “resources and tasks,” rooted in the medium’s capacity to document forms that “recreate the visual appearance of objects.”<sup>160</sup> In an article from the following year, Wojciech Kiciński suggested that it was precisely thanks to these “literary-journalistic reportage features” and the use of these features to probe the “problems faced by the man of our troubled age” that photography had come to occupy a respected place among the fine arts: “A green light on human affairs has gained the photograph a mass audience, placing it alongside art with the broadest social impact.”<sup>161</sup> He concluded by stating that increasingly experimental ‘creative’ photography “did not represent a step forward for the medium, in fact, “such work does not develop photography’s positive achievements, it is only - for most authors – an arena of formal frolics of high class.”<sup>162</sup>

Ligocki formulated a rather narrow definition of what he thought constituted a photograph. For Ligocki, any works that did not allow the photographed object to be identified by the viewer were abstract and as such could no longer belong to the realm of photography, on the basis that they denied the medium’s “basic function” to “recreate the visual appearance of objects.”<sup>163</sup> In illustration, Ligocki gave the example of a work by Beksiński that “crossed the threshold of recognisability” and could not be classified as photographic: a photograph of an ink stain closely magnified to render it abstract and “evocative of some cosmic landscape.”<sup>164</sup> Ligocki stated, the work is “abstract, not because it does not correspond to any object in nature (because we know that it is ink), but because we do not commonly watch the drying of ink in multiple magnification, therefore no chains of connotation are able to bring us to it.”<sup>165</sup> Another *Fotografia* critic,

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<sup>158</sup> Patrycja Jastrzębska, “Immodest Dream of Three Artists?” *EXIT: New Art in Poland*, no.3 (79), 2009. Accessed 24 April 2017: <http://kwartalnik.exit.art.pl/article.php?edition=31&id=550>

<sup>159</sup> Kordjak-Piotrowska, *Egzystencje: Polska fotografia awangardowa, 2. połowy lat 50.*, 9.

<sup>160</sup> Ligocki, “Rozwieść fotografię artystyczną z fotografiką,” 523-527.

<sup>161</sup> Kiciński, “Nowe drogi czy własne ścieżki,” 426.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Ligocki, “Rozwieść fotografię artystyczną z fotografiką,” 523-527.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* Beksiński refused to be drawn on this matter: “Opponents and often supporters of these forms of expression do not want to call it photography. I do not undertake to settle the dispute. I admit, moreover,

Lech Grabowski, refuted Lagocki's narrow classification and formulated a different definition using ontological, rather than epistemological criteria. Grabowski asserted that the element guaranteeing a connection with reality was the camera. Any image produced with a camera, together with light sensitive materials, should be classified as a photograph, even if the image itself was not easily identifiable and did not correspond to any recognisable entity in nature. Just because it "does not resemble a reality known to us," does not mean that the work "ceases to be a photograph."<sup>166</sup> By this criterion, Michalik's "dazzling" abstractions still found themselves within Grabowski's remit for photography. He noted of Michalik's work, "This is the truest photography, strictly as document [...] This photograph has not lost its function to present."<sup>167</sup> In contrast, works made without a camera – drawing on the plate, creating directly on the photosensitive material, or eliminating light entirely in favour of the application of chemicals – were created "without regard for reality" and as such could not be classified as photographs.<sup>168</sup> Kiciński agreed with Grabowski, concluding that Schlabs's work "cannot be counted as photography" since the author "bypassed the photographic apparatus."<sup>169</sup> Instead he called it "a new species of printmaking," "whose material is negative and light sensitive paper."<sup>170</sup> Piasecki appeared to agree with this distinction, distancing his heliographs from photography: "Heliography is a type of graphics, (though sometimes unreproducible) operating with light and photo-sensitive paper."<sup>171</sup> He labelled such work "chemical painting."<sup>172</sup>

These debates betrayed an anxiety on the part of critics over the blurring of boundaries between photography and other areas of the fine arts. There appeared to be a consensus that photographers were borrowing too heavily from painting. The resemblance of Schlabs's work to abstract expressionist painting, for example, particularly troubled Ligocki: "when at Schlabs's exhibition two Pollocks were paraded before me, reduced to a range of black and white, and one de Stael, de Kooning, Maresierze, or Vieira da Silva, and further with half a dozen other famous painters, the situation become very serious and

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that the question of the name is for me completely indifferent." (Beksiński, "Kryzys w fotografice i perspektywy jego przewyciezenia," 540-3.)

<sup>166</sup> Grabowski, "Błędne drogi nowoczesności," 425.

<sup>167</sup> Lech Grabowski, "Abstrakcja - wielka przygoda fotografii współczesnej" [Abstraction – the great adventure of contemporary photography], *Fotografia* no.4 (1959): 169.

<sup>168</sup> Lech Grabowski, "Rozstajne drogi," *Fotografia* 1 (1959): 172.

<sup>169</sup> Kiciński, "Nowe drogi czy własne ścieżki," 426.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> A. Bujnowska, *Marek Piasecki*, exhibition catalogue (Krakow: Galeria Starmach, 2004), 91.

<sup>172</sup> Kordjak-Piotrowska, *Egzystencje: Polska fotografia awangardowa, 2. połowy lat 50*, 13.



smelt like sorcery.”<sup>173</sup> Critics were asking questions as to what constituted a photograph, how to define photography’s specific features, and how photography should be distinguished from other mediums. This seems to tie into questions of medium specificity, raised at this time by Clement Greenberg, and the need to uphold the ‘purity’ of each medium.<sup>174</sup> For Ligocki, photography’s specific feature was its ability to faithfully document existing forms in nature. This was in contrast to the essence of painting, which Greenberg defined as being characterised by the delimitation of flatness. However, it was by these painterly terms that the work of Schlabs and Pawłowski was increasingly being described.<sup>175</sup> Polish critics frantically attempted to uphold these boundaries between mediums in the face of growing pressure from artists to sweep them away.

Much of the photographic abstraction produced in the late 1950s can be considered a photographic version of *art informel*. *Informel* had dominated the *II Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej* [Second Exhibition of Modern Art] which opened at Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw in 1957. The title of the show positioned it as a second instalment to the *Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej* [First Exhibition of Modern Art] that had been organised almost a decade earlier in Kraków in 1948, stressing the continuation, the lineage between the two exhibitions, in spite of the obstinate intervention of socialist realism in the intervening decade. While the first exhibition revealed a mobilisation of abstraction and surrealism, this second instalment was dominated by *informel*. Piotrowski has noted how this term was used to encompass a variety of painterly styles popularised in Paris after the war: “the term *informel* signified a general cluster of features characteristic of non-objective but also non-geometrical painting. It has been often treated as a synonym of the painting of gesture, *tachisme*, the “other art” (*art autre*), *art brut*, lyrical abstraction, and [...] the painting of matter (*la peinture de matiere*).”<sup>176</sup> Tadesuz Kantor was the most

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<sup>173</sup> Ligocki, “Rozwieść fotografię artystyczną z fotografią,” 523-527.

<sup>174</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting” in *Art and Literature* no. 4 (Spring, 1965): “The essence of Modernism lies ... in the use of the ... methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.” Greenberg continued, “the task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any ... effect that might conceivably be borrowed from ... any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered ‘pure’.”

<sup>175</sup> “One of the main values of Pawłowski’s photography are special effects, the interpenetration of transparent models arising in different zones of sharpness. The background however always remains flat, neutral. The pictures are slightly reminiscent of abstract painting – the variation of the classical, geometric, or slightly later, where he composes a picture of the more dynamic organic forms.” (Urszula Czartoryska, “Abstrakcyjne fotogramy Andrzeja Pawłowskiego” [Abstract Photograms of Andrzej Pawłowski], *Fotografia* 4 no. 4, 1957.)

<sup>176</sup> Piotrowski, *In the shadow of Yalta*, 132. *Informel* had become the dominant mode of painterly production in Paris in the immediate aftermath of World War II, where Kantor, the most prominent Polish representative of the *informel* movement, had encountered it first hand during a trip in 1956. Piotrowski has

notable representative of Polish *informel*, although it was also pursued by Jerzy Kujawski, Alfred Lenica, Zdzisław Salaburski and Teresa Tyszkiewicz. Works by Kantor such as *Pacyfik V* [Pacific V] from 1958 [II.31] demonstrate a violent, gestural style of art making, with paint thrown on to the canvas, bearing the trace of Kantor's actions.

Kantor synthesised his own definition in an essay titled *Abstrakcja umarła – niech żyje abstrakcja* [Abstraction is Dead – Long Live Abstraction], published in the journal *Życie Literackie* [Literary Life] in 1957, a text which Piotrowski has suggested can be read as a manifesto of Polish *informel*.<sup>177</sup> Kantor set up a contrast between geometric abstraction and this new branch of non-representational art. He suggested geometric abstraction of the interwar avant-garde was born out of a need to contain the world within a rational order, “subject to the rigour of construction, limited, demarcated with the beginning and the end, calculated and stiff, it has represented life as a meticulously ordered string of causes and effects.”<sup>178</sup> In contrast, by the late 1950s, Kantor found this language of reason unsuited to a world ruptured by trauma, which could no longer be “rationally controlled.”<sup>179</sup> Rather than looking to geometry, “which appealed to the intellect and the rational mind,” Kantor suggested that artists turn to imagination, instinct and emotion, and utilise techniques of automatism and the invitation of chance, as ways of generating work that was more suited to the present moment.<sup>180</sup> These techniques were adopted into the terrain of photography as photographers experimented with spontaneous gestural methods; chemicals were splashed onto photosensitive materials; materials were daubed onto the negative. In Beksiński's *Metamorfoza* [Metamorphosis] (1957) [II.32] a photosensitised sheet was pressed into contact with other material, then ripped away to create flowing patterns and swirling plumes where the photo-chemical material has been distorted. In 1958, Schlabs began painting sweeping gestural compositions directly onto celluloid film, the results of which were then exposed to create prints [II.25]. These methods implied a sense of abandonment, manifesting a desire to relinquish rationality and mechanisms of control. The art historian Sarah Wilson, discussing Kantor's work, observed that the expressiveness of *informel* “was always related to its opposite

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suggested that the adoption of *informel* by Polish painters was due a desire to inscribe themselves within the value system of Modernism and to re-establish contact with the Western contemporary art scene.

(Piotrowski, *In the shadow of Yalta*, 157.)

<sup>177</sup> Piotrowski, *In the shadow of Yalta*, 134.

<sup>178</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, “Abstrakcja umarła – niech żyje abstrakcja” [Abstraction is Dead – Long Live Abstraction], *Życie Literackie*, no. 50 (1957), supplement *Plastyka*, no.16: 6.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

(memories of fascism, confinement and control).<sup>181</sup> Photographers can therefore be understood to have adopted techniques that promised a sense of cathartic release, needed after years of war time trauma and repressive censorship.

Wilson identifies two different branches of *informel*: one that is gestural and extrovert, a tendency to “dramatise” as a “riposte to a climate of death and violence;” another that is intimate and materialist, meticulously layering materials and gouging into those forms.<sup>182</sup> A similar point of divergence can be discerned here between the more gestural works of Beksiński and Schlabs and the *Heliographs* of Piasecki, which are much more precise and controlled in their manner of creation and do not possess the same sense of abandonment. Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowski described the intricacy of Piasecki’s creations, noting how he “created smooth forms, free, sometimes covered with a delicate marbling, elaborately made, as if with a jeweller’s precision.”<sup>183</sup> Piasecki still attempted to bypass the rational control of the author, but the automatism of his technique was to be found in the way he courted the chance effects produced by uncontrolled chemical reactions on the photosensitive material.

By the end of the decade *informel* had become extraordinarily popular among photographers in Poland, giving rise to a ZPAF sponsored national exhibition of amateur abstract photography that took place in Wrocław, *I Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografii Abstrakcyjnej* [First National Exhibition of Abstract Photography]. With so many photographers “cultivating this barren plot,” Ligocki rather begrudgingly recognised the extent of the dissemination of this trend. He acknowledged that it was “gaining international awards, has its feted champions in ZPAF, fills most of the columns of great photo magazines - in fact, lays a claim to exclusive representation of artistic photography.”<sup>184</sup> The question remains, what was the overwhelming appeal of abstraction for Polish photographers in the late 1950s? Why did photographers choose to return to abstraction almost a decade after Dłubak began his experimental abstract photographs and organised his exhibition *Nowoczesna Fotografika Polska* [Modern Polish Photography]?

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<sup>181</sup> Sarah Wilson, “Kantor’s Art from Informel to Installation,” in *Kantor was here: Tadeusz in Great Britain*, ed., Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, (London: Black Dog, 2011), 132.

<sup>182</sup> Wilson traces the source of these directions to two figures: Jean Fautrier and Georges Mathieu. Fautrier built up layers of paste on paper sprinkled with powders and chemicals, which he then worked with a palette knife: a quasi-indexical gouging which bore witness to horror; Mathieu’s riposte to a climate of death and violence was a performance of free gesture and personal signature. (Wilson, “Kantor’s Art from Informel to Installation,” 129.)

<sup>183</sup> Kordjak-Piotrowska, *Egzystencje: Polska fotografia awangardowa, 2. połowy lat 50*, 14.

<sup>184</sup> Alfred Ligocki, “Antyfotografia” [Anti-Photography], *Fotografia*, 9 no. 76 (September 1959): 442-445.

Did the insistent denigration of abstraction as a suitable path for photography by the *Fotografia* critics make photographers all the more intent on pursuing these paths? Or perhaps as Przemysław Chodań suggested, the disenchantment of life in the PRL had a part to play, “inciting artistic escapes and withdrawals;” compensation for a grim grey hopeless PRL was found in a turn away from reality towards the imagination.<sup>185</sup>

Certainly abstraction drastically deviated from the idyllic picturesque landscapes of Pictorialism and Bulhak’s Homeland Photography, this “arrière-garde refuge” of photography that still lingered on in Poland anachronistically.<sup>186</sup> Adam Mazur suggested that photographers in the late 1950s were “united ideologically” in their “rebellion against classical aesthetics, and a boredom in the ways of representing reality.”<sup>187</sup> The popularity of abstraction and formal experimentation also aligned the work of Polish photographers with developments abroad, correlating to developments in America, where Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind and Minor White were pursuing an abstract style of art photography. This work appeared in *Fotografia* in 1956, and Schlabs recognised Siskind as a source of particular inspiration to his own practice, organising an exhibition of Siskind’s work at the Poznań PTF in 1959.<sup>188</sup> This creative trend in Poland also possessed parallels with the German photographer Otto Steinert’s photographic vocabulary, discussed further in following chapter.

The restrictions of socialist realism on art practice also exerted a key influence on this turn to abstraction. Wiesław Banach, writing about the work of Beksiński, noted, “In Poland, abstraction became the farthest reaching revolt against socialist realism imposed by the state, a manifestation of freedom and artistic liberty.”<sup>189</sup> Certainly abstraction clashed with the basic principles of photographic recording as asserted by the Soviet authorities, namely to present information in clearly comprehensible forms without distorting reality, fuelled by an apparent concern that abstracted imagery would be inaccessible to mass audiences. While Polish photographers were allotted a degree of

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<sup>185</sup> Przemysław Chodań, “Marek Piasecki: heliografie i obiekty” [Marek Piasecki: heliographs and objects], accessed 24 April 2017: [http://www.galeriaaff.infocentrum.com/2010/piasecki/pias\\_p.html](http://www.galeriaaff.infocentrum.com/2010/piasecki/pias_p.html)

<sup>186</sup> Łuczak, “Fotograficzny gest (s)twórcy,” 116.

<sup>187</sup> Adam Mazur, “Nowe źródła subiektywnej fotografii? Rozmowa z Rafałem Lewandowskim” [New Sources of Subjective Photography. Conversation with Rafał Lewandowski], *Obieg*, 2009, accessed April 22, 2017: <http://www.obieg.pl/rozmowy/10581>

<sup>188</sup> “Fotografia w Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Nowym Jorku” [Photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York], *Fotografia* 10 no. 40 (October 1956). This dialogue was not one way; seven of Schlabs’s *Photograms* were exhibited in 1961 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York at an international exhibition entitled *A Sense of Abstraction in Contemporary Photography*.

<sup>189</sup> Banach, *Foto Beksiński*, 87.

leniency in comparison to other Soviet satellite states, the trend towards “cosmopolitan formalism” was still subjected to criticism, touched upon in the first chapter of this thesis.<sup>190</sup> Consequently, in the wake of the Thaw, photographers were eager to play with scale, framing, tonal register; reorganising the world rather than representing it. Kordjak-Piotrowska has suggested that Bekiński’s *Odbicie* [Reflection] [II.16], for example, should be interpreted as breaking “the face of socialist realism,” shattering of the idea of photography understood as a “mirror of reality.”<sup>191</sup> Socialist Realist doctrine therefore lends an important subtext to the ways in which artists were choosing to investigate the world: formal experimentation and abstraction becomes a site of symbolic resistance to official forms of image making.

The popularity of abstraction in the late 1950s PRL cannot be disputed. The question that arises is why photographers were intent on creating abstract photographs using painterly and material means. This is further complicated by the fact that many photographers were pursuing both painting and photography in tandem. Piasecki and Beksiński were both creating abstract relief paintings, heavy with thickly textured paint; Schlabs created similar work, using roofing tar, solvents, industrial waste and metal, even incorporating cables, wires, rusty buckles, into the paint [II.33]. Despite the different means of production, these sculptural painted works often resembled the photographic abstractions produced by the same authors. If photographers could generate these effects using paint on canvas, why did they choose to pursue the same type of imagery in photography, a medium that critics such as Ligocki insisted was predicated on its documentary capabilities and ability to generate faithful images of nature? Czartoryska suggested that artists now approached the materials of photography as just one option available among many with which to create artworks. Modern art, she stated, is “looking for new material, not content with the traditional - oil paint, watercolour or prints. One of these materials can be, like any other, light-sensitive film and photo paper.”<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Zygmunt Obrąpalski, “Oddział poznański Polskiego Towarzystwa Fotograficznego,” *Kronika Miasta Poznania*, annual vol. XXIV (1956): 260. Ekaterina Degot, discussing Soviet art, notes how overemphasis on technique and style “disqualified a work as inappropriate to Socialist Realism, the ideal work of which should, it seems, have no properties at all.” Artists should adopt a “style without style.” (Ekaterina Degot, “The Collectivization of Modernism,” in *Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era*, eds., Boris Groys and Max Hollein, exhibition catalogue (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 101.)

<sup>191</sup> Kordjak-Piotrowska, *Egzystencje: Polska fotografia awangardowa, 2. połowy lat 50.*, 9.

<sup>192</sup> Czartoryska, “Fotogramy Schlabsa,” 340-341.

However, there seems to be more at stake in the turn towards photographic abstraction by Schlabs, Beksiński and Piasecki, namely a tendency to incorporate deforming and destructive processes at the heart of their work. In Schlabs's *Fotogram T16/58* [II.26], sharp black bands have been scraped into the emulsion; other works show evidence of scratching, gouging and tearing [II.22]. Schlabs did not just work into the materials, but overlaid and accumulated materials, which can also be understood as an act of destruction. Piasecki's *Miniatures* are not only scraped with a sharp implement, but scorched with heat [II.28]. Elsewhere negatives are melted or submerged in water, chemicals used to corrode the photographic surface. All these register as violent and destructive actions that are intended to bring about a disintegration of the negative material. The photographs can perhaps be understood according to the terms Kantor used to describe his painted *Informel* canvasses, words that acknowledge the threat of destruction at the heart of his paintings:

1955

*... Space thickens forms/ changing its molecules/ In this gigantic/ mobility/ rapid decision/ intervention/ spontaneity of action/ brushes constantly/ with chance...*

1961

*... the action of painting/ takes place in this process/ of permanent annihilation...*<sup>193</sup>

Beksiński's photographs from the mid-1950s make visible a dismemberment of the human body, in particular the female form. Some images use mirrors to fragment the body (*Odbicie* [Reflection]), while in *Gorget sadysty* [Sadist's Corset] [II.34] the dismemberment of the female figure is made more explicitly sadomasochistic, the body of Beksiński's wife has been tightly bound with an irregular web of rope. Tadeusz Nyczek has compared the woman's body, trussed up with rope, to "a piece of meat for broiling."<sup>194</sup> A trajectory of violence inflicted on the body can be understood to develop

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<sup>193</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, "Repères," *Le Rocher*, Chexbres, February 1964, trans., Sarah Wilson, in Wilson, "Kantor's Art from Informel to Installation," 132.

<sup>194</sup> Nyczek, *Zdzisław Beksiński* (Warszawa: Arkady, 1992), 22. The image certainly shocked viewers at the time, with displays of nudity remaining controversial in Poland well into the 1960s. Several critics, including Krzysztof Jurecki, have commented on the potential convergence of this work with performance and body art. Jurecki, "Twórczość fotograficzna Zdzisława Beksińskiego w latach 1953-1960" [The

in Beksiński's work, which culminates in works that enact this violence in a different way, that is to say through the materiality of the photograph. An untitled image from 1956 shows a naked female body reclining on a couch, her features partially obscured by swathes of darkness, where the surface layer of emulsion has begun to flake and peel away to reveal the paper support below [II.35]. This defacement is made more explicit in another untitled image in which a woman's head is completely effaced by a dark void [II.36]. These images seem to evoke a narrative of destruction and violent effacement, the dramaturgy of history as recorded in these actions and their traces.

The inflicting of a wound on the human body links these images to the theories of Sigmund Freud. In the introduction I outlined the way in which Freud differentiated between a wound of the body and a wound of the mind. These two ideas are brought together in the story of Tancred and Clorinda, outlined by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.<sup>195</sup> Using an example from literature, Freud tells the story of Tancred, who accidentally kills his love Clorinda:

The hero, Tancred, has unwittingly slain Clorinda, the maiden he loved, who fought with him disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he penetrates into the mysterious enchanted wood, the bane of the army of the crusaders. Here he hews down a tall tree with his sword, but from the gash in the trunk blood streams forth and the voice of Clorinda whose soul is imprisoned in the tree cries out to him in reproach that he has once more wrought a baleful deed on his beloved.<sup>196</sup>

The point of the story for Freud is that catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves in the actions of those who survive them. He formulated these ideas in relation to the repetitive nightmares of shell shocked soldiers after the First World War, who repeatedly returned to painful traumatic experiences in their dreams. This suggested to Freud an impulse that was not orientated towards pleasure seeking principles, but was orientated towards destruction and disintegration, which he came to theorise as the 'death drive'. Cathy Caruth picks up on Tancred's story in *Unclaimed Experience*, and suggests, "The

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photographic creativity of Zdzislaw Beksiński in the years 1953-1960], *Fotografia* 1 no. 43 (January 1987): 15-18.

<sup>195</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18, ch. 3, ed., James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953-74).

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

actions of Tancred, wounding his beloved in a battle and then, unknowingly, seemingly by chance, wounding her again, evocatively represent in Freud's text the way that the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will."<sup>197</sup>

Tancred's second wounding is not a literal murder, rather it is to be understood as a symbolic act that takes the form of a slashing or piercing. A direct link can therefore be drawn with the destructive actions of photographers working in the 1950s, which involved similar acts of gouging, piercing and wounding of the photographic material. If, as Caruth suggests, Tancred's actions are to be understood as 'the unwitting re-enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind,' then these repeated attempts in the late 1950s to inflict a wound upon the photographic material should be understood as a symptom of a traumatic neurosis, actions which re-enact the destructive events of the Second World War more than a decade after those events took place.<sup>198</sup> The repetition of these actions suggests that Polish photographers failed to assimilate these events, and that the war still cast a shadow on their lives, having left an unacknowledged wound in the depths of their subconscious.

The story of Tancred and Clorinda also raises another important point, namely that it is only in the second wounding of Clorinda that Tancred understands the first fatal wounding. It is only through the second symbolic death that Clorinda's voice is released and Tancred can understand the ramifications of his earlier actions. Repeated wounding carries with it a sense of release and assimilation. Perhaps it was only by carrying out these acts of destruction that Beksiński, Schlabs and Piasecki could bear witness to a past that they have never fully known. I quote here at length from Caruth:

...what seems to me particularly striking in the example of Tasso is not just the unconscious act of the infliction of the injury and its inadvertent and unwished-for repetition, but the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound. Tancred does not only repeat his act but, in repeating it, he for the first time hears a voice that cries out to him to see what he has done. The voice of his beloved addresses him and, in this address, bears witness to the past he has unwittingly repeated. Tancred's story thus

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<sup>197</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Trauma*, 2.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent's repeated and unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know.<sup>199</sup>

A wound, on the mind or the body, leaves a void. This is quite literally manifested in Beksiński's photograph [II.36]; the face of the woman is evacuated to show the black nothingness that lies beyond, a dark hole at its core. The photograph reads as a membrane over absence, a fragile material that is subject to rupture and which exposes the void beyond. I used similar terms to discuss another image by Beksiński – *Welon* [Veil] – in the introduction to this thesis, which also made visible the tearing and puncturing of a piece of fragile material. Reading this through the writing of Barthes and Lacan, I suggested that Beksiński's *Welon* could be understood in terms of a desire to make visible the Lacanian Real, to burst through the veil and come close to the painful Real that lies beyond the Imaginary order. The symbolic void around which Beksiński's untitled photograph is structured is also coupled with a very real void within Polish society. This emptiness behind the photographic emulsion achieves particular poignancy in the context of post-Holocaust Poland, referring to the profound emptiness that developed after an exceptionally destructive war in which millions of real bodies were completely destroyed, leaving no tangible trace.

The voids in Beksiński's photographs also make visible the German critic Siegfried Kracauer's suggestion that the photograph "gathers fragments around a nothing."<sup>200</sup> Kracauer posited that a photograph isolates a moment out of the continuum of time, recording the "spatial configuration of a moment" which has since disappeared and can no longer be accessed.<sup>201</sup> Barthes similarly posited that the "the photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially."<sup>202</sup> He elaborated his understanding of the photograph as the "spatial configuration of a moment" which has since disappeared and can no longer be accessed. Emptied of the subject's physical presence at the moment of exposure, the photographic surface registers both a presence and an absence. While the

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>200</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," (1927) in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed., Thomas Y Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 56.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 4.

photograph can evocatively conjure “a certificate of presence,” Barthes acknowledged this presence is illusory, and in fact covers an absence, a void.<sup>203</sup> These acts of destruction by Beksiński therefore possess another function; namely, they expose the ‘illusion’ of the photographic image. By drawing attention to the ‘nothingness’ beyond the flat image contained within the surface emulsion, Beksiński insists upon the illusory nature of all photographic imagery. Tears, rips, and scratches make the materiality of the photographic support evident. By foregrounding the material support of the photograph-as-object, Beksiński’s void exposes the inner workings of the photograph.

The context in which these photographers were working in the late 1950s provides an important subtext: the insistence on materiality rather than illusion can be understood as a loss of faith in the veracity of representational imagery after years of misuse. The testimonial force of the photograph, predicated on the medium’s indexical nature, had been harnessed by the Party to lay a claim to the objectivity and truthfulness of socialist propaganda, naturalising the photograph’s ideological message. In the wake of the Thaw, certain photographers seemed eager to counter the propagandistic use to which the medium had been put. The art critic Dorota Jarecka goes further in suggesting that the visual propaganda of socialist imagery in the PRL “had a disastrous impact on the younger generation of photographers,” having “impaired the relationship with reality” and created a fundamental “trauma.”<sup>204</sup> This loss of faith had led photographers to turn to abstraction, or overtly constructed or manipulated images, in an attempt to “loosen the binding of photography with the “here and now” of reality; to weaken the ‘this has been’ of the photographic referent, Barthes’s ‘ça a été.’”<sup>205</sup> Photographic abstraction signalled a desire to refute the representational role assigned to photography in post-war Poland. Freed from being tethered to the faithful registration of appearances, photographers use this ‘truthful’ and ‘transparent’ medium to create images that are entirely fabricated and

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>204</sup> Dorota Jarecka, “Świat przedstawiony,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 2, 2004. Jarecka’s comments arose from two exhibitions of Eustachy Kossakowski and Leonard Sempoliński. Jarecka suggested that only in 2004 could photography once again establish contact with reality and rebuild the genre of documentary photography. Her article triggered an interesting debate with Kinga Kenig and Piotr Wojcik about Polish photography and its ties with the present reality. Accessed 17 April, 2017: <http://fototapeta.art.pl/2004/eko2.php>

<sup>205</sup> André Bazin suggested that photography promised something that painting could not, giving the example of the Turin shroud: “We are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced.... There is a transference of reality from the thing to the reproduction”. (Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” *Film Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Summer, 1960): 8.) Barthes sought a more precise characterisation of the intentionality involved in the perceiving of a photograph, summed up in the phrase that has been – i.e. that I can never deny that the thing has been there. In contrast, no painted portrait could compel me to believe its referent had really existed. (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6-7.)

possess no connection to recognisable realities. Lech Lechowicz argues that the key to understanding these photographs is “transformation;” namely “a kind of manipulation that deprives the photographic image of its verism and univocality.”<sup>206</sup> This is tied to an awakening of criticality in the viewer, as “the old conception of the mechanical objectivity of the photographic process is shown to be an illusion.”<sup>207</sup>

The turn to abstraction in 1950s photography also differs to manifestations of abstraction in the late 1940s, as practiced by Dłubak or Obrapalska; abstract photographs from the late 1950s placed greater emphasis on the medium’s materiality, rather than its iconicity, undermining the photograph’s traditionally mimetic function. The photographs of Schlabs, Piasecki and Beksiński can be understood as driven by an impulse towards self-referentiality, producing works that presented the very matter from which the photograph was created. Schlabs confronted the viewer with “the pith of the photographic process” – photosensitive plates, chemicals, light.<sup>208</sup> Usually these elements are perceived by the viewer indirectly; attention is focused on the ‘transparent’, smooth surface of the photographic print. The title of Schlabs’s image *Powierzchnia* Surface (1957) [II.23] draws attention to what is at stake in these images: narrative or realistic description is abandoned and all sense of perspective or three-dimensionality eliminated, in order to insist that the illusionistic space is constructed by the photographer on a flat piece of paper.

In 1959 Schlabs, together with Beksiński and Lewczyński organised a small exhibition in Gliwice, in response to what they saw as a crisis in photography. In this provocative show, discussed in the following section of this chapter, all three men explored different approaches to photography. Schlabs continued to exhibit his abstract photographs. Beksiński and Lewczyński adopted a different working method, assembling found images and text together in sets, which had to be read and decoded by the viewer. This registered as a provocative act, and led the critic Alfred Ligocki to label the work *Antyfotografia* [Anti-Photography].<sup>209</sup> While on one level, these photographers were attempting to breakdown notions of photographic purity, in the face of critics attempts to uphold

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<sup>206</sup> Lech Lechowicz, introduction to *Photoimages: plastic gestures in photography, from the collection of Dariusza and Krzysztof Bieńkowski*, exhibition catalogue (Łódź : Muzeum Sztuki, 2006).

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Magdalena Wróblewska, “Between Matter and Image: Bronisław Schlabs’s Experiments with Photographic Medium,” in *Bronisław Schlabs. Krok w nowoczesność*, 33

<sup>209</sup> Alfred Ligocki, “Antyfotografia” [Anti-Photography], *Fotografia*, 9 no. 76 (September 1959): 442-445.

medium specificity, I suggest that the work exhibited in this show was also fundamentally tied to history, to a recovery of traces of the past, and a reinvigoration of issues around remembrance.

## ANTI-PHOTOGRAPHY

On June 20, 1959, a small exhibition opened without fanfare in the town of Gliwice at the local branch of the *Polskie Towarzystwa Fotograficzne* [Polish Photographic Society] (PTF) [II.37]. Organised by Zdzisław Beksiński, Jerzy Lewczyński and Bronisław Schlabs, in answer to what they saw as a ‘crisis’ in photography, the three men decided to stage something “completely different,” an unusual presentation of their own work that was to serve as an “experimental workshop.”<sup>210</sup> This second chapter ends by scrutinising this small but fascinating *Pokaz zamknięty* [Closed Show]. For such a small exhibition in a provincial town, lasting only two weeks, it is perhaps surprising that the exhibition has retrospectively been hailed as one of the most important events in Polish photography.<sup>211</sup> The exhibition was intended to demonstrate alternative directions for photography. Schlabs continued to exhibit his painterly abstractions, but the works exhibited by Lewczyński and Beksiński suggested a more conceptual and linguistic approach to image making. Moving away from condensing multiple images into a single montage, Lewczyński and Beksiński exhibited photographs side by side as a discrete set of images. Taking inspiration from literature, their photographic works were intended as texts to be read. The show also has implications for interrogating the relationship between photography and trauma. Beksiński’s photographs blend Freudian childhood traumas of psycho-sexual development with another model of traumatic neuroses associated with war and severe accidents. Lewczyński can also be understood to excavate material traces of wartime traumas, and to interrogate the psychological mechanisms by which those traces are stored. Both men incorporated non-artistic materials into their sets of images: found photographs, photocopies, newspaper clippings. While on one level, these inclusions were an attempt to break down notions of photographic purity, I suggest that the works exhibited in this show were also fundamentally tied to history, to a recovery of traces of the past, and a reinvigoration of issues around remembrance.

In an article published in 1958, *Kryzys w fotografice i perspektywy jego przezwycięzenia*, [The Crisis in Photography and How to Overcome It], Beksiński synthesised his thoughts

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<sup>210</sup> Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński,” 32-24.

<sup>211</sup> The show was re-staged in October 1993 at Muzeum Narodowe in Wrocław, pieced together and reconstructed by the photography historian Adam Sobota: *Antyfotografia and Continuation: Beksiński, Lewczyński, Schlabs*. The following year it travelled to CSW Zamej Ujazdowski in Warsaw.

on the predicament faced by Polish photographers.<sup>212</sup> Beksiński's article was a riposte to Alfred Ligocki's unequivocal belief, articulated in the previous section of this chapter, that the only path for modern photography was to concentrate on straight photography, which he claimed to be the most faithful to the specificity of the photographic medium.<sup>213</sup> Beksiński challenged the notion that the straight documentary image could be the saviour of art photography, or even a valid direction for art photographers to be pursuing. Artistic reportage, he suggested, had been "exhausted" and its prospects were "very meagre and not very encouraging for the future."<sup>214</sup> In fact, Beksiński suggested that an overinvestment in such work had led to the current 'crisis' identified in the title of his essay. It was not just reportage that found itself admonished by Beksiński, but also the pursuit of 'formal frolics', which increasingly forced him to "ask the question whether photography is art at all, or whether it simply has the semblance of art, deceiving the viewer with spectacular sets of forms."<sup>215</sup> Beksiński certainly believed himself to be well qualified to assess the merits of these different branches, having experimented with "all the directions of contemporary photography" over the preceding four years, trials that had left him unsatisfied and with the feeling of "indigestion."<sup>216</sup> Beksiński suggested that the impasse at which art photography had arrived could be resolved by adopting two different strategies: firstly, cameraless abstractions in the form of direct action on light sensitive paper, as pursued by Schlabs; secondly, he suggested compiling individual images into sequences or sets, by which he meant "compositions of several images to be interpreted together."<sup>217</sup> Beksiński concluded, "So far all previous photography has only given us faithful images of the world. The time has come to draw conclusions, to juxtapose individual images, and to create interpretations of the world."<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Beksiński, "Kryzys w fotografii i perspektywy jego przezwyciezenia," 540-3.

<sup>213</sup> Ligocki, "Rozwieść fotografię artystyczną z fotografią," 523-527.

<sup>214</sup> "...artistic Reportage, which, according to most critics is the best path and uses the specificities of photography, and upon which they are pinning great hopes for the future. It depends on showing the world and human relationships in all their manifestations. It is based on realism and expressionist realism. This is the theory. In practice, the school of reportage is based on fairly primitive borrowing from neorealist cinema and press photography and a certain amount of homemade recipes, such as heavy grain, the apparent randomness of shots, etc. [...] This begs the question: How many opportunities still exist and have they already been fully exhausted?" (Beksiński, "Kryzys w fotografii i perspektywy jego przezwyciezenia," 540-3.)

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Zdzisław Beksiński, letter to Jerzy Lewczyński, 27 June 1956 in Zdzisław Beksiński, *Listy do Jerzego Lewczyńskiego* [Letters to Jerzy Lewczyński], ed., Olga Ptak (Muzeum w Gliwicach, Gliwice, 2014), 63.

<sup>218</sup> Beksiński, "Kryzys w fotografii i perspektywy jego przezwyciezenia," 540-3.

Bronisław Schlabs had first broached the idea of creating a ‘modern’ group in Polish photography in a letter to Zdzisław Beksiński in 1956. Jerzy Lewczyński was later invited to join, having become personally acquainted with both men during the organisation of Schlabs’s 1957 exhibition *Krok w Nowoczesność* [Step into Modernity]. Beksiński particularly admired Lewczyński’s image *Ukrzyżowanie* [Crucifixion] [II.2], and upon this basis recommended to Schlabs that they invite Lewczyński to join their informal group. For Lewczyński, allegiance within these ranks registered as a “significant moment,” having long admired Beksiński’s work.<sup>219</sup> With the inclusion of Lewczyński in 1957, an informal alliance was formed between the three men. Communication was made difficult by the physical distances separating the artists. Lewczyński lived in Gliwice, Upper Silesia in southern Poland; Beksiński in Sanok, south-east Poland; and Schlabs in Poznań, located in the west of Poland. Despite the physical distances separating them, they maintained contact through occasional meetings and regular correspondence in which the men shared information, debated ideas and critiqued work.<sup>220</sup> Beksiński also shared philosophical readings with the men, communicating his fascination with existentialism, and pointing them in the direction of the books of Franz Kafka, Witold Gombrowicz and Bruno Schulz.<sup>221</sup> Reflecting upon this period, Lewczyński concluded that Beksiński served as the driving force behind the group’s creative output.<sup>222</sup> The alliance remained informal as the trio published no defining manifesto, staged very few exhibitions exclusively dedicated to their own work, and gave the group no name, although they were recognised as the *Trzech Twórców* [Three Creators] in an article published in *Fotografia* magazine.<sup>223</sup> The three men were united by a shared attitude

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<sup>219</sup> Lewczyński later recollected, “sometime in 1956 I noticed this interesting photography of Beksiński that was published in the monthly *Fotografia*, which deviated from the existing aesthetic template. It was different, distinguishing itself above all in its mood, composition and subject matter. (Lewczyński “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński,” 32-24.)

<sup>220</sup> Visits were possible though infrequent, but the three men maintained communication through regular correspondence. Lewczyński recollected how they “corresponded animatedly, presenting our views and thoughts, criticising each other.” He elaborated, “We even corresponded on magnetic tape. Fortunately I have a thick notebook, where I summarised the conducted conversations.” (Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński,” 32-24.)

<sup>221</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński *“Archeologiczna Fotografii”*: *Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński ‘Archaeology of Photography’: Work from the years 1941-2005] exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Kropka, 2005), 46.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>223</sup> The three men were given this name following an exhibition held in 1958 at *Krzywe Koło* Gallery, Warsaw, titled *Wystawę trzech twórców* [Exhibition of Three Creators]. They exhibited together only three times, first at the *Krzywe Koło* gallery in 1958, followed by the *Pokaz zamknięty* of 1959 in Gliwice, and several years later their work was exhibited by Otto Steinert in Cologne in 1961.

towards photography and a common project, specifically the need for an artistic rebellion. Lewczyński retrospectively elaborated:

We were agreed, that our contemporary photography was some sort of charmless, eclectic mixture! We found with indignation that domestic and international salons were overviews of vanity, a quest for cheap, showy beauty, touching only the surface of life. [...] In conversations we constantly emphasised the need to create such photography, which could be called art! This was perhaps a little “over the top”, because we did not immediately clearly know how this was to look. What else but painting! But photography understood as art required knowledge of the whole arsenal of means of expression, which was not easy for us then to determine. [...] One thing was certain. There was almost no such photography in Poland.<sup>224</sup>

In 1959 the three men decided to stage an “experimental workshop,” presenting their more recent work in the Gliwice Branch of the PTF.<sup>225</sup> Gliwice is a small town in lower Silesia, southwest Poland, in which a lively photographic community was thriving in the 1950s around the local PTF.<sup>226</sup> Lewczyński, a prominent member of the association, noted how the photographic society was perceived as a means by which to rebuild the city’s cultural life.<sup>227</sup> Professional artists were members, alongside amateur photographers from a variety of backgrounds – workers, miners, students, scientists from the Silesian University of Technology. Meetings were held every Friday night, lectures and workshops were organised, and the Association possessed an excellent library that included periodicals scarcely available at the time. Members showed their work anonymously, often ruthlessly criticising each other. Lewczyński later recollected that the atmosphere at the association was “feverish,” explaining, “It seemed so explosive at the time, so avant-garde.”<sup>228</sup> Nowicki has suggested the intense atmosphere at the association was due to photography being their only “release valve” in an otherwise restrictive

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<sup>224</sup> Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński,” 32-24.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> The Gliwice branch of the Polish Photographic Society (PTF) was formed in 1951 and transformed in 1961 to an independent, regional association called the Gliwice Photographic Society (Gliwickie Towarzystwo Fotograficzne) (GTF) until 2000. for a more detailed history of the GTF see Anna Kwiecień, ed., *Fenomeny i Fantomy: Gliwickie środowisko fotograficzne w latach 1951-2000* (Gliwice: Muzeum w Gliwicach, 2006)

<sup>227</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, “Photography in Gliwice in 1951-2000,” in Anna Kwiecień, ed., *Fenomeny i fantomy: gliwickie środowisko fotograficzne w latach 1951-2000*, exhibition catalogue (Gliwice: Muzeum w Gliwicach, 2006), 147.

<sup>228</sup> Lewczyński cited in Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 263.



environment.<sup>229</sup> Gliwice members were widely exhibited, won several awards and many were admitted into ZPAF.<sup>230</sup> All this developed at a swift pace, with Lewczyński having recalled that “not long before we were still learning the basics, making enlargers from boxes.”<sup>231</sup> This flourishing creative environment attracted the attention of photographers and critics who visited the town to attend exhibitions or give lectures, including many of the names that appeared in *Fotografia*.<sup>232</sup> The critic Alfred Ligocki stated in 1958,

To the Gliwice Branch of the PTF I always go with pleasure, and this is not only because of the great hospitality of the hosts. There is here, at least in the most active of the group’s members, a healthy and invigorating climate. In beautiful premises on the street Gorne Wały besides good black coffee you can always find the latest issues of the most important foreign photographic magazines and partners for fervent discussion on issues of artistic photography and the latest trends. As far as I know, such a climate in a centre of the PTF can probably only still be found in Poznan.<sup>233</sup>

The exhibition of the *Trzech Twórców* in 1959 was to be a *Pokaz zamknięty* [Closed Show], in which only selected guests were invited to attend. Various figures are given for the number of people in attendance; Lewczyński estimated that around forty people were present, including the art critics Alfred Ligocki and Urszula Czartoryska, together with colleagues from the Gliwice PTF and the neighbouring association in Katowice.<sup>234</sup> Two psychologists had also been invited to analyse the work on display. This policy of restricted entry was to avoid trouble with the authorities; Lewczyński later explained that “the closed form resulted from the desire to avoid possible censorship and excessive publicity.”<sup>235</sup>

Adam Sobota noted how this exhibition in Gliwice was formulated “in an atmosphere of crisis resulting from renewed political pressure on the arts and from the exhaustion of

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Members included Kazia Dyakowska, Piotr Janik, Zofia Rydet, Michał Sowiński, Czesław Siemianowski.

<sup>231</sup> Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 263.

<sup>232</sup> The photographers Edward Hartwig, Zbigniew Dłubak, Zdzisław Bekiński, Piotr Janik and Adam Sheybal all visited. Critics including Urszula Czartoryska, Juliusz Garztecki and Alfred Ligocki also visited.

<sup>233</sup> Alfred Ligocki, “Exhibition at the Gliwice PTF,” *Fotografia* 8 no. 62 (August 1958): 396-99.

<sup>234</sup> Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Bekiński,” 32-24.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

experiments undertaken in 1956-57.”<sup>236</sup> The same year, a number of photography exhibitions opened in Poland, notably Steichen’s *Family of Man* finally reached Warsaw, after having been frequently featured in the pages of the photographic press since its initial appearance in New York in 1955. A national exhibition of abstract photography was opened in Wrocław in 1959, *I Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografii Abstrakcyjnej* [First National Exhibition of Abstract Photography], although enthusiasm for experimentation and “formal frolics” in photography was waning. After much oscillation between artistic styles, no definitive path for a modern art photography had been agreed upon. Kordjak-Piotrowska retrospectively suggested that the Gliwice exhibition allowed the three men to stage “a specific aesthetic rebellion, in opposition not only to the aesthetics of socialist realism, but also the domination at that time of conceptions of modern photography.”<sup>237</sup>

Around forty works were exhibited, including Beksiński’s *Gorget sadysty* [Sadist’s Corset] [II.34] which featured alongside a selection of images from Lewczyński’s series *Głowy Wawelskie* [Wawel’s Heads] [II.6; II.13], while Schlabs presented twelve abstract compositions. New work created specifically for the show was also exhibited.

Lewczyński presented seventeen works in total, including two new untitled sequences of images, each of which consisted of three photographs, mostly images of banal objects, inscriptions and signs [II.38-39]. Taking up the gauntlet laid down in his ‘Crisis’ text, Beksiński also began to organise single images into sets [II.40-43].<sup>238</sup> Eleven of these works were presented, each consisting of between three and five images mounted together on a rectangular sheet of fibreboard around one square metre in size. Each work was captioned with a single word title stencilled on the board, often metaphorical or ambiguous in nature: *Kołysanka* [Lullaby], *Nóż* [Knife], *Glód* [Hunger]. The *Pokaz zamknięty* provided the first and only showing of this work. In fact, Tadesz Nyczek retrospectively identified these works as “valedictory photographic collages” since they were to be Beksiński’s last engagement with photography before he abandoned the medium entirely in favour of painting and drawing.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Adam Sobota, *Antyfotografia i ciąg dalszy* [Anti-photography and continuation] exhibition catalogue, (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 1993).

<sup>237</sup> Kordjak-Piotrowska, *Egzystencje: Polska fotografia awangardowa, 2. połowy lat 50*, 10-11.

<sup>238</sup> The idea to create sets of images was first discussed informally by Beksiński in a letter to Lewczyński dated June 1958 after which both artists began to search for old photographs and negatives for this precise purpose.

<sup>239</sup> Nyczek, *Zdzisław Beksiński*, 8.

Beksiński glued his images directly onto large black boards which were hung with wire on the walls [II.43]. If the manner of presentation was unusual, the content of the work also proved shocking to the assembled audience. *Kolysanka* consisted of three images: from left to right, an anatomical drawing of a foetus, likely appropriated from a scientific textbook; a photograph of a young girl dressed for Holy Communion, looking at the camera with her hands in prayer; and a photograph showing the corpse of a soldier, decomposing in a field of grass [II.40]. At the opening of the exhibition this work proved the most controversial, and a heated discussion between the invited guests ensued. Lewczyński acknowledged, “We were suspected of sexual perversions,” with questions asked as to the narrative of the three images: why was the work titled *Lullaby*? Was it intended to suggest a circular link between life and death? Or did the young girl at the centre insinuate erotic implications?<sup>240</sup> Beksiński refrained from explicitly commenting on the sequences, but he did elaborate briefly on this one work at the opening. Lewczyński recalled, “The author explained that adolescent girls often combine their subconscious sexual interest with matters of life and death.”<sup>241</sup> According to Lewczyński, Beksiński’s statement “was received by laughs, protests and then further bursts of laughter. [...] Beksiński’s erudition was admired, but people also commented that the strange works were simply a result of the atmosphere of boredom in such a ‘godforsaken hole’, as Sanok [Beksiński’s hometown] was considered by the audience at this event.”<sup>242</sup>

*Nóż* brings together another set of images: a portrait of a man on the left, which seems to have been appropriated and enlarged from a newspaper given the poor quality of its reproduction; a photograph of a knife, de-contextualised from its domestic environment; and four pornographic images of a woman in a domestic situation, in various states of undress [II.32]. Read together, there is an implied sense of voyeurism and scopophilia, the intimation of a destructive desire. The knife, as both title and central image, links the man who looks and the exposed woman who is the subject of his gaze, imparting a threat of violence to the eroticism of the naked female form. By summoning psychoanalysts to the exhibition and asking them to interpret the works on display, it seems that Beksiński was inviting his sets of images to be understood in terms of Freudian theories of infantile sexuality and castration anxiety. In the introduction I outlined Freud’s theory of trauma in

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<sup>240</sup> Czartoryska acknowledged that she privately referred to the image as ‘What do little girls think about?’ Urszula Czartoryska, “Zdzisław Beksiński,” *Fotografia* 5 no. 83 (May 1960): 162-165.

<sup>241</sup> Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński,” 32-24.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

relation to traumatic neurosis, associated with accident victims or war veterans. Freud also theorised a model of trauma based on infantile sexuality: childhood trauma relating to castration anxiety that forms part of psycho-sexual development.<sup>243</sup> Freud posited these as two different models of experience, but they appear to collide and coexist in Beksiński sets. In fact, perhaps wartime trauma functions as a symbolic castration that generates anxiety within both sexual and neurotic planes.

The sets certainly read as cryptic puzzles to be deciphered, much in the same way that Freud analysed the dreams of his patients in order to uncover the latent and invisible traces of trauma. Beksiński explored how imagery with little in common could be brought together within a sequence to generate meaning. *Dno* [Down] appeared to make a link between childhood and death [II.42]. A set of three images placed side by side without any spacing: a studio portrait of four young girls dressed in identical outfits, a section of a dictionary, and completing the triptych, a detail from a gravestone in Sanok, in which an ornamental cherub sits above a photograph of the deceased man. The central image showing entries from a Polish dictionary read: *ślub* [wedding], *ślusarz* [locksmith], *śmiać się* [to laugh], *śmiały* [brave], *śmiech* [a laugh], *śmiecie* [rubbish] and the last word *śmierć* [death]. The words delineate a life cycle, from wedding to decomposition and death, which is dramatised in the triptych as a whole by the images of youthfulness set against eternal entombment. Reviewing these works, Ligocki noted how the individual images “play a game with their neighbours,” awakening associations through clashes of content and meaning. He recognised that in these sequences, both Beksiński and Lewczyński “strive to surprise and mobilize the imagination and intellect.”<sup>244</sup>

While Beksiński’s sequences may at first seem aleatory in their manner of creation, each sequence was in fact meticulously composed by the author. Beksiński produced detailed working plans alongside the final works, suggesting the order in which the images appear was intended to guide the viewer’s interpretation of the work. [II.44]<sup>245</sup> Kordjak-Piotrowska has drawn attention to the theory of film montage developed by the Soviet director Vsevolod Pudovkin as a point of comparison to Beksiński’s sequences.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> See Sigmund Freud, ‘From The History of an Infantile Neurosis’ (1918[1914]) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001).

<sup>244</sup> Alfred Ligocki, “Antyfotografia” [Anti-Photography], *Fotografia*, 9 no. 76 (September 1959): 442-445.

<sup>245</sup> See Banach, *Foto Beksiński*.

<sup>246</sup> Kordjak-Piotrowska, *Egzystencje: Polska fotografia awangardowa, 2. połowy lat 50.*, 10

Pudovkin treated the film as a type of language, in which individual frames played the role of words. Similarly, Beksiński expressed his desire to study the syntax of these suites of images, exploring how the meaning of the work as a whole was to be constructed by the juxtaposition of its constituent elements. Quoting Beksiński, each image, adjacent to another “may intensify each other's pronunciation, and may also as a result of this interaction say something completely different than they contain in themselves, something broader and deeper.”<sup>247</sup> He described the individual elements as “letters of the alphabet, which adequately summarized by the author can create whole words and sentences.”<sup>248</sup>

The filmic quality of the sequences was noticed by several critics. Ligocki suggested at the time that they resembled “script boards;” Nowicki later compared the sequences to “short films laid out frame by frame.”<sup>249</sup> Beksiński acknowledged that the works “have some features in common with a film sequence, joining together the individual photographs in a way similar to film montage.”<sup>250</sup> However the frames do not possess the narrative progression promised by traditional cinematic film, instead they are structured by the juxtaposition of disparate images. The concept of montage as elaborated by Sergei Eisenstein proves useful for thinking about Beksiński’s sets. Eisenstein advocated a departure from the documentary conventions of cinema in favour of self-reflexivity, in the form of flashback, dreams, vision, utilising the rapid progression and alternation of images. The collision of two unrelated frames in succession was a self-reflexive device for breaking the plot line and rupturing the flow of the narrative. Andre Bazin, discussing Soviet montage, suggested that this method also served another purpose for Eisenstein, namely as a device by which he attempted to reveal the “essential quality” of any given scene, “its metaphysical kernel.”<sup>251</sup> In Eisenstein’s film *Стачка* [Strike] (1925), scenes of soldiers shooting are montaged with pictures from a slaughterhouse. Individually they possess their own connotations, but montaged together they generated “a sense or meaning not objectively contained in the images themselves but derived exclusively from

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<sup>247</sup> Beksiński, “Kryzys w fotografice i perspektywy jego przezwyciezenia,” 540-3.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 261.

<sup>250</sup> Beksiński had harboured childhood ambitions of a career as a film director. Beksiński, “Kryzys w fotografice i perspektywy jego przezwyciezenia,” 540-3.

<sup>251</sup> André Bazin. “Death Every Afternoon,” in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed., Ivone Margulies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 29.

their juxtaposition.”<sup>252</sup> ‘Butchering’ here was Eisenstein’s intended “associative link.”<sup>253</sup> The scenes produce this meaning not in isolation, but only when brought together as part of a greater whole. This notion of ‘intellectual montage’ was also utilised by Beksiński in his suites of images, where a variety of unrelated material – different authors, different sources, different timeframes – collide within the space of each board, challenging the viewer to intuit the ‘associative link’ reverberating between the disparate images.

The materials used to compose the sequences also proved controversial. Only around half of the photographs exhibited by Beksiński at the exhibition were his own, with the rest appropriated from a variety of sources. Lewczyński noted that Beksiński prepared his sets “using a variety of old things sent to him;” military photographs, x-rays, medical illustrations, reproductions of artworks sourced from newspapers, magazines and books, or alternatively enlargements from negatives of anonymous authors, both professional and amateur.”<sup>254</sup> The artistic merit of the images was subordinated to their use value within the overall scheme. The use of mixed media and old photographs can in part be explained by the expense and varying quality of photographic materials and colour film in late 1950s Poland. Krzysztof Pijarski has suggested one motive for bringing together original images with reproductions and found imagery, namely that Beksiński was intent on “challenging the traditional divide between high art and craftsmanship, original and reproduction, art created by a unique author and art created collectively.”<sup>255</sup>

Precedent for this can be found in the experimental films of Polish artists Jan Lenica and Walerian Borowczyk. *Nagradzone uczucie* [Love Required] (1957), for example, was constructed from an assemblage of ready-made elements and fragments of paintings from the naïve artist Jan Płaskociński. Another short film, *Dom* [House] (1958), montaged a variety of assembled elements, including photographs, fragments of video clips, old prints, illustrations, engravings and postcards [II.45]. These various were taken out of context and filmed using the stop motion technique to create animated sequences, juxtaposed with original scenes filmed with actors. An experimental approach to image making is therefore shared by Beksiński and his fellow Polish filmmakers, both flouting

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<sup>252</sup> André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” in *What Is Cinema? Volume 1*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>253</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” in *Film Form*, ed. Jay Leda (New York: Harcourt, 1977), 57.

<sup>254</sup> Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński,” 32-24.

<sup>255</sup> Krzysztof Pijarski, “Fotografia Dokumentalna i Historie” [Documentary photography and stories], in *Nowi Dokumentaliści*, 39.

conventions and breaking down the boundaries between artistic mediums. Lenica stated: “I have always liked to move at the periphery of Art, at the crossing of genres. [...] I have enjoyed [...] combining elements which were seemingly distant, if not quite foreign, blurring the borders between adjacent areas, transplanting noble qualities to ‘lower’ genres, in other words - quiet diversion.”<sup>256</sup> This sentiment was reiterated by Beksiński, who stated, “The individual branches of art were never separated from each other by walls and have never existed in a pure state. Mutual permeation of similar disciplines and the blurring of distinctions on the periphery is absolutely not proof of the lack of prospects for the development of these disciplines, nor is it proof of their lesser status.”<sup>257</sup> While I do not dispute that these artists intended to question notions of originality or artistic purity, something more pressing seems to be at stake in this appropriation of found imagery.

In his study of Polish cinema, Jonathan Owen has described *Dom* in the following terms: “a Victorian playbox of ravenous objects, automated minds and bodies, jerky Muybridge duellists and male mannequins that splinter upon erotic contact, *Dom* is a domain pervaded by destructive desire, psychic compulsion and uncanny confusions between life and death, the animate and inanimate.”<sup>258</sup> This undertone of destructive eroticism certainly links *Dom* with Beksiński’s sets of images. Both also adopt unconventional narrative techniques, sparking visual associations free from cause and effect. This technique seems to borrow from the Surrealist notion of ‘psychic automatism,’ which André Breton advocated as one way to bypass the mechanisms of the conscious mind in order to access the depths of the subconscious and all that is stored there.<sup>259</sup> Lenica noted the influence of Surrealist films on his work, films which he felt had “completely torn down the barrier between reality and fiction, between the realm of the visible and the imaginary. [...] The camera could not only capture the real world in a manner that was

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Beksiński, “Kryzys w fotografice i perspektywę jego przezwyciężenia,” 540-3.

<sup>258</sup> Jonathan L. Owen, “Avant-Garde Exploits: The Cultural Highs and Lows of Polish Émigré Cinema,” in *The Struggle for Form: Perspectives on Polish Avant-Garde Film 1916-1989* eds. Kamila Kuc and Michael O’Pray. (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014), 99.

<sup>259</sup> André Breton, ‘Surrealist Manifesto’ (1924): “Surrealism, n., Pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other matter – the actual functioning of thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.”

out of the reach of the eye, it could also demonstrate the processes of the unconscious, making the invisible perceptible.”<sup>260</sup>

In *Compulsive Beauty*, the art historian Hal Foster noted the Surrealist fondness for found objects and cultural detritus. He suggests that the Surrealist predilection for found objects betrays a desire to discover an object that can effect a moment of connection between the present and a time that is now past. For Foster, the flea market *trouvaille* represents “an uncanny return of a historically repressed moment,” that can spark a connection between historical dimensions, illuminating a past productive mode, social formation or structure of feeling for the object’s new owner.<sup>261</sup> Foster stresses that the discovery of the found object is the result of an active form of encounter that exists beyond the will of the subject; the found object is “at once underdetermined and over determined, *imprévu* and *déjà vu*,” the finding of the object is always in fact a re-finding of it, a response to the unspoken desires of the psyche.<sup>262</sup> This desire can link the found object to a primal loss. Freud suggested that infantile anxieties, such as the disappearance of the mother and the trauma of threatened castration, seal our fate as desiring subjects haunted by absence and lack.<sup>263</sup> The object found by chance promises to restore a lost unity by filling the space carved out by the traumatic primal experience. The harnessing of the found object in the 1950s, as seen in the work of Lenica and Borowcyk, Beksiński and indeed Lewczyński perhaps serves to assuage the threat of more recent wartime traumas.

Lewczyński declared that his use of found imagery was intended as a purposeful turning away from an overinvestment in photographic skill and technique and lofty notions of photographic artistry, which he held in contempt. An original vintage print possessed to him “the same value” as a reproduction of an old photograph, or writing on a wall.<sup>264</sup> What interested Lewczyński was not a fetishisation of the original art object, but what was contained within the frame, that is to say, “the social relevance of the picture,” the photograph as “an image, an illustration.”<sup>265</sup> Lewczyński later stated, “I wanted to convince the audience that both reproductions and writing on a wall could transfer a

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<sup>260</sup> Jan Lenica, “Film I formy narracji wizualnej,” *Projekt*, no.6 (1970).

<sup>261</sup> Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 161.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>263</sup> See Sigmund Freud, ‘From The History of an Infantile Neurosis’ (1918[1914]) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001); Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) (New York: Bantam Books, 1967).

<sup>264</sup> Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 246.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.



certain value.”<sup>266</sup> While Beksiński utilised medical diagrams, military photographs and found portraits, the imagery that Lewczyński chose to present in his triptychs is seemingly even more banal. Lewczyński constructed his triptychs from a combination of his own photographs and copies of found objects and existing cultural products: “I made reproductions of school exercise books, and also notices on the wall, numbers from a locker room. This was like anonymous photography.”<sup>267</sup> Lewczyński arranged the photographs to lie alongside one another on tables, which were covered with a pane of glass. One suite of images consisted of a photograph of a poster advertising a cabaret show, ripped and peeling away from a wall; a photograph of cemetery gates pasted with warning notices and signs; and a page from a school notebook in which a child’s handwriting spells out nonsensical sentences [II.39]. In contrast to Beksiński’s sequences, the sequences prepared by Lewczyński are more allusive and oblique in their meanings.

The common theme in these untitled works appears to be writing: typed advertisements, printed words, hand written notes. The second triptych exhibited in *Pokaz zamknięty* featured printed numbers, redundant scribbles and memorials carved in stone [II.38]. Sobota has written, “for Lewczyński, literally and metaphorically, the image is like writing and writing is like the image, since many of his photographs are images of writing.”<sup>268</sup> The works certainly seem to prioritise the linguistic value of the image over the visual; the photograph understood as a text to be read. The words that Lewczyński chose to present in the 1959 show appear banal and meaningless, apparently selected indiscriminately. Closer scrutiny reveals the material selected for inclusion to be historically charged. One triptych begins with a fragment of a Jewish gravestone, recognisable from the Star of David and the Hebrew typescript. Half the image is cast in shadow, but the name JOSEF identifies the man and states his date of death as February 12, the year rendered incompletely but with enough information to understand that he died in the twentieth century. Next to this image, Lewczyński placed a photograph orientated along a landscape format, which shows rows of round coins and oblong panels with numbers hand-painted on their surface. Arranged horizontally, they fill the picture frame. The image seems banal, until we realise that the coins are in fact tokens from the cloakroom in the Majdanek concentration camp, chipped and broken tokens which were never to be exchanged for the return of their belongings. The third image in the set is a

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<sup>266</sup> Lewczyński, “Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński” 32-24.

<sup>267</sup> Kordjak-Piotrowska, *Egzystencje: Polska fotografia awangardowa, 2. połowy lat 50.*, 11.

<sup>268</sup> Adam Sobota, cited in Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 257.

restaurant bill, with numbers crossed out. It is an intriguing set of images that presents disconnected letters and numbers, but “represents a highly interesting and original statement about the history of the Polish territories and their inhabitant’s experiences in World War II.”<sup>269</sup> By concealing his surname and the year of his death, Josef becomes an everyman, a symbol representing not only every Jew who died in the Holocaust, but also a figure that represents all other victims of Nazi brutality, including the Roma, homosexuals and the disabled. Interestingly, Beksiński also made preparatory sketches for a set of images centred on Jewish men, but this set remained unrealised [II.46]. The set featured a photograph of a door daubed with graffiti and the seemingly unfinished phrase *Rzyd zmył* written in white paint (which seems to reference Jews [*Żyd*] and the act of effacing or washing away [*zmył*]), together with a series of six passport sized identification photographs of men photographed against a white background. There is no indication when or where these photographs were taken, but by displaying these photographs together, we assume the six men to be Jewish. Beksiński proposed four different, and largely melancholic, titles for this series: *Oczekiwanie* [Expectancy]; *Kartoteka* [File Index]; *Nagrobek* [Tombstone] and *Epitafium* [Epitaph].

In both these sets of images, Lewczyński and Beksiński appear to concern themselves not just with memories of the war, but specifically the implications of the Holocaust for a Jewish Pole. It was not until 1961 that Adolf Eichmann, a Lieutenant Colonel of the Schutzstaffel stood trial in Jerusalem. Eichmann had been responsible for managing the deportation of European Jews to the Nazi camps between 1942 and 1944. He was found guilty and executed the following year.<sup>270</sup> In the late 1940s and 1950s, books by Theodor Adorno, Arthur Koestler and Hannah Arendt explored Nazi anti-Semitism and drew attention to a specifically Jewish experience of the war. Such narratives were conspicuously absent in other historical accounts. During the Nuremberg trials in the late 1940s, for example, the systematic massacre of Jewish citizens was marginalised during the proceedings, registering as just one peripheral charge in a long list of offences. As David Cesarani has noted, Jewish experience was “submerged within wider plight of the

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<sup>269</sup> Pijarski, “Fotografia Dokumentalna i Historie” in *Nowi Dokumentaliści*, 39.

<sup>270</sup> David Cesarani. *After Eichmann: Collective Memory and the Holocaust since 1961*, 1.

‘victims’ of fascism.”<sup>271</sup> Prior to 1960 the Jewish losses had only been commemorated among Jewish communities, or by those who had been directly affected.<sup>272</sup>

Under Soviet Rule, the reception of the Holocaust in Poland was subject to denial. Gluhovic notes how control of public space, limited access to archives, and Party censorship all “deeply influenced the ways in which the Holocaust has been remembered – and not remembered – in Eastern European official narratives.”<sup>273</sup> The fate of the Jews was folded into narratives of more general fascist crimes; the suffering Pole interchangeable with the suffering Jew.<sup>274</sup> David Crowley has discussed this “wilful amnesia” and suggested that ignoring the plight of Jewish victims was made easier by the destruction of Jewish synagogues and the remnants of Jewish life in Polish cities. He also notes that when material traces did survive, such as the Jewish cemetery pictured in Lewczyński’s photograph, these remnants were subsequently threatened with erasure. Crowley recounts the statement of a post-war architect in Warsaw, who reported that 5400 tombstones in the oldest part of the Jewish cemetery could be cleared for a new road, because they served “no memorial value.”<sup>275</sup>

The issue of Polish anti-Semitism was also barely addressed. Michael Stevenson, studying filmic representations of Polish-Jewish relations, has described this as a “peculiar silence” which had the effect of “disabling a national discussion of the Holocaust and thus any possibility of a reconciliation of these matters.”<sup>276</sup> After the war, anti-Semitism continued in Poland. Returning Jews were harassed or intimidated, expelled from their homes, dismissed from their jobs. An anti-Semitic revue even took place close to Auschwitz in 1947. Many Jews who had survived the war were killed in brutal pogroms that took place in Polish cities in 1945 and 1946. These narratives, including the complicity of non-Jewish Poles in these events, were suppressed in national consciousness, any discussion of Polish-Jewish relations disavowed. Events repressed in the psyche have a tendency to return, and the mid-1950s saw a resurgence of anti-Semitic sentiment. The 1956 Thaw resulted in a desire to settle accounts with the abuses of power

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Milija Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories: Trauma, Ethics, Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 6.

<sup>274</sup> Omer Bartov, “Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective: Eastern Europe as the Site of Genocide,” *Journal of Modern History* 80 no. 3: 557-93.

<sup>275</sup> Crowley, *Warsaw*, 19.

<sup>276</sup> Michael Stevenson, “Wajda's Filmic Representation of Polish-Jewish Relations,” in *The cinema of Andrzej Wajda*, 84.

during the Stalin era. Jewish Poles were certainly well represented in positions of power within the Party, particularly in the Ministry of Public Security, in which Jews such as such as Jakub Berman occupied prominent roles. The term *Żydokomuna* [Jewish-Communism] was used to describe the perceived Jewishness of the Party, a remnant of “an old prejudice associating Jews with Russian communism,” which was used in the service of a renewed articulation of anti-Semitism in the 1950s.<sup>277</sup> After Gomułka’s appointment as First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) in 1956, a number of high ranking Jewish security officers were used as scapegoats, put on trial and driven out of the Party. Beatings, dismissals and persecution followed, and in the years following 1956, tens of thousands of Polish Jews fled the country. Lewczyński and Beksiński’s decision to evoke Polish-Jewish relations in their 1959 sets of images reads as an attempt to expose the wounds of their nation’s history, drawing attention to recent and repeated bouts of anti-Semitism and the blame that Polish citizens must bear for this continued persecution. Lewczyński’s set specifically addresses the presence of Jews in Poland through their material traces, but also their troubling absence. Invoking the partly effaced gravestone of a Jewish Pole addresses the gaps in national remembrance, and the failure to adequately commemorate the millions of Jewish Poles who had lost their lives in the Holocaust as well as those who were killed after the war.

Lewczyński’s commentary on Poland’s recent traumas avoided vast panoramas of destruction in favour of images that registered fragments and traces of human activities: the cemetery epitaph discussed above, but also posters, notes, inscriptions, signs. An earlier section of this chapter drew attention to the piles of used objects that Lewczyński had photographed at Auschwitz [II.15]. These banal items show the triviality and ordinariness of the objects that accompany human life, but for Lewczyński these “traces,” “the refuse of human presence, say more about the truth of the times, about the character of an era.”<sup>278</sup> An untitled photograph from 1959 shows a particularly banal scene, a wooden fence filled with posters [II.47]. These notices no longer fulfilled their original function; to inform of dates or events, to warn, to inform. Instead they have become degraded and effaced. They speak of time that has elapsed, the weather that has eroded the paper, the passerby who has torn away a corner. Lewczyński’s posters speak of the life of the objects themselves, rather than the messages they carry, the words of which

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<sup>277</sup> Crowley, *Warsaw*, 20-21.

<sup>278</sup> Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 248.

have long since vanished. Lewczyński regularly photographed these signs; posters and placards, but also slogans, drawings and captions scrawled on walls or fences, betraying a twofold interest in the messages they carry and their materiality. Paweł Mościcki has recently suggested that Lewczyński's interest in these objects was rooted in "the language of material entropy written out for small events that imprinted their minimal mark on the urban walls."<sup>279</sup> Lewczyński's interest in these objects can be likened to those of the French artist Jacques Villeglé who was also making use of posters found on the walls of Paris' city streets.<sup>280</sup> François Bon has suggested that the issue at stake in Villeglé's works was time: in the posters "the layers of time are peeled away" or "time itself comes flooding back."<sup>281</sup> In an interview with Nicolas Bourriaud, Villeglé stated, "When working, I felt like a kind of archaeologist, though without being useful in any way. Archaeology is useful for imagining the past, for knowing how people who went before us lived, for perceiving the chains of all the people who went before us."<sup>282</sup> The notion of archaeology became intrinsic to Lewczyński's practice from the late 1950s, when he began his longstanding *Archeologia Fotografii* [Archaeology of Photography] project, which attempted to excavate and salvage material traces of the past, including photographs, but also any documentation that could testify to a person's existence. The project betrayed an anxiety over the inefficacy of memory, and the potential for remembrance to be misused or suppressed in historical narratives. For Lewczyński, these "enchanted" objects that he photographed possessed their own history, simple fragments that could "transfer the story of people from another time."<sup>283</sup>

Lewczyński described these recovered traces as "refuse," "pieces of garbage," suggesting a certain uselessness, alongside an element of decay and deterioration. This notion is also intimated in Beksiński's sequence *Dno*, which frames a dictionary entry that begins and ends with *śmiecie* [rubbish] and the last word *śmierć* [death], suggesting a link between the two, both involving a process of decomposition and degradation [II.42]. Another work by Lewczyński from 1959, which was also exhibited in the *Pokaz zamknięty* is particularly pertinent in this regard: *Zagubione słowa* [Lost Words] shows lines of typed black lettering on a white page, the words rendered almost illegible through continuous

<sup>279</sup> Paweł Mościcki, "The Archaeology of Reality," in *Neorealism in Polish photography 1950-1970*, 24.

<sup>280</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, "An Urban Comedy. Interview with Villeglé," in *Jacques Villeglé*, ed. François Bon (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), 127.

<sup>281</sup> François Bon, "Peeling Back the Layers of Time," trans. Deke Dusinberre in *Jacques Villeglé*, 163.

<sup>282</sup> Bourriaud, "An Urban Comedy. Interview with Villeglé," 127.

<sup>283</sup> Nowicki et al. *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu*, 257.

over-printing, matting the letters together into dense black stains [II.48]. The work evokes a sense of cumulative accretion: one layer of text settles over another, like layers of sediment which have fused together; the photograph as a crucible in which constituent elements become melded together under extreme pressure. With this photograph, Lewczyński suggests the power of destruction does not just lie in the act of annihilation or eradication, but can be achieved through accumulation.

In the essay 'Other Criteria,' Leo Steinberg offers a different understanding of the rubbish heap, suggesting it could be understood as a metaphor for the mind: "dump, reservoir, switching centre, abundant with concrete references freely associated as in an internal monologue – the outwards symbol of the mind as running transformer of the external world, constantly ingesting incoming unprocessed data to be mapped in an overcharged field."<sup>284</sup> *Zagubione słowa* appears to visualise Sigmund Freud's description of the *wunderblock*, or mystical writing pad, a children's toy that allows for infinite inscriptions, which Freud used as an example with which to illustrate the workings of the conscious and subconscious mind. Composed of a wax block covered by a sheet of plastic, when the pad is written upon an inscription appears on the plastic, the result of its contact with the wax below; when the plastic layer is lifted away, the written traces disappear and the pad is wiped clean. In contrast to paper, which can be written on only once, or blackboards, which can only be written over once previous inscriptions are erased, the *wunderblock* remains infinitely receptive, preserving all information recorded. Although the surface marks on the plastic disappear, a permanent recording of those traces is retained in the waxy block below. These inscriptions are stored but unreadable, similar to the words in Lewczyński's image which are visibly imprinted but 'lost'.

Freud used the *wunderblock* to describe how he believed the perceptual apparatus of the mind could receive and record experiences. For Freud, the subconscious has the potential to retain an infinite amount of information. Impressions are received, embedded and preserved, while the conscious mind appears unmarked by these events. Only after the experience has been stored can it become subject to recollection.<sup>285</sup> The implication is that we do not apprehend the world directly, but only retrospectively; our sense of that which is beyond ourselves is the product of previous memories and previous inscriptions.

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<sup>284</sup> Leo Steinberg, *Other criteria: confrontations with twentieth-century art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 89.

<sup>285</sup> Sigmund Freud, "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad,'" (1925) in *General Psychological Theory*, Chapter XIII, trans., James Strachey, 469.

*Zagubione słowa* could, therefore, be understood as a key to unlock the significance of Lewczyński's photographic practice in the late 1950s, which increasingly took as its subject the excavation of material traces, making visible traumas that had wounded the body and the mind in recent years. Perhaps it also provides a framework within which to understand the variety of works on display in the 1959 *Pokaz zamknięty* exhibition, a show that appears to mine the collective psyche for traces of events that have been hidden or obscured from view, unacknowledged and unassimilated, events which have returned to haunt the nation.

Due to the closed nature of the exhibition in Gliwice, the work was seen by relatively few members of the public, but a number of articles reviewing the show appeared in the press. In a letter to Schlabs and Beksiński prior to the exhibition, Lewczyński expressed his concern about their 'experimental' presentation and about the reception of his newly created sets of images: "I'm the most concerned about my works. These literal photographs are very interesting in my opinion but I'm afraid no one will understand."<sup>286</sup> After the presentation, he concluded, "our attempt to show a different type of photography proved successful."<sup>287</sup> The three men disbanded after this presentation, with Beksiński renouncing photography to concentrate on painting.<sup>288</sup> Schlabs also abandoned photography following the death of his wife, later dabbling with photographic montages in the 1980s. Lewczyński was the only one of the three men to pursue photography with intent, making use of found imagery under the auspices of his project of *Archeologia Fotografii* [Archaeology of Photography].<sup>289</sup>

Not all critics wholeheartedly agreed with Lewczyński's sentiments. Alfred Ligocki reviewed the show in the September issue of *Fotografia*.<sup>290</sup> He acknowledged that Schlabs's abstract photographs possessed a "high artistic level," but refused to acknowledge these were photographs, instead describing Schlabs as a painter equipped with photographic materials. Ligocki repeated the idea that the role of photography was to

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<sup>286</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, letter to Bronisław Schlabs and Zdzisław Beksiński, Gliwice, April 27, 1959 in Lewczyński, *Jerzy Lewczyński "Archeologica Fotografii": Prace z lat 1941-2005*, 48.

<sup>287</sup> Lewczyński, "Moje rozmowy o Fotografii z Zdzisławem Beksiński," 32-24.

<sup>288</sup> Beksiński: "I have more imagination facing inwards, not outwards, therefore the photograph often imposed too many limitations on me." Zdzisław Beksiński, "Robię to, na co mam ochotę" [I do what I want], in *Zdzisław Beksiński*, 125. He went on to create the fantastical, sci-fi painting for which he is most commonly known.

<sup>289</sup> See *Jerzy Lewczyński "Archeologica Fotografii": Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński 'Archaeology of Photography': Work from the years 1941-2005], exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Kropka, 2005),

<sup>290</sup> Ligocki, "Antyfotografia," 442-445.

consolidate the commonly perceived appearance of objects. In an evocative metaphor, he likened Schlabs to a highland peasant who had emigrated to America, the realm of the fine arts, and who proceeded to send back clothes to his village family, understood pejoratively to be the territory of photography. He did however conclude that Schlabs's work was "vastly superior to the experiments of the second group," referring to the sequences of Beksiński and Lewczyński, which failed to fit into Ligocki's understanding of the medium, leading him notoriously to label the work "anti-photography," the name that became associated with the show, and by which it is now known. Ligocki stated that this work "deserves the name of anti-photography, since it strikes at what is regarded as the most sacred in artistic photography: the artistic value of ordering the marks of colour on the plane, the self-contained nature of the photo, and its very process of production, for example, when Beksiński makes use of the other people's photographs."<sup>291</sup>

Ligocki's invocation of anti-photography had a specific point of reference drawn from literature, namely the French 'anti-novel'. In his review, Ligocki remarked of Lewczyński and Beksiński's sets: "I found there two attitudes, which reminded me right away of certain phenomena in recent French literature, the so-called anti-novel. This is a supposed attack by a group of young novelists like Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, and Michel Butor, on the form and conventions of the traditional nineteenth-century novels."<sup>292</sup>

Ligocki finds a point of comparison with this literature on the basis of its deconstruction of the established narrative structure. Discussing the literature of Robbe-Grillet, Roch Smith has suggested that French authors were trying to create a literature specific to their time; a time in which "phenomenology was increasingly occupying the whole field of philosophical investigations, the physical sciences were discovering the realm of the discontinuous, psychology itself was undergoing, in parallel fashion, a transformation just as total."<sup>293</sup> This resulted in narratives that did not develop through linear succession or chronological time, and possessed no "teleological sequence of events linked by some principle of causation; that is, the events are bound together in a trajectory that typically leads to some form of resolution or convergence."<sup>294</sup> Instead, Robbe-Grillet challenged these novelistic conventions to produce literature that was fragmentary, open-ended and

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Roch Charles Smith, *Understanding Alain Robbe-Grillet* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 4-5.

<sup>294</sup> Brian Richardson, "Beyond the Poetics of Plot," in *A companion to narrative theory*, eds. James Phelan, and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Malden, MA: Oxford Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 168.



contradictory. Published in 1957, his novel *La Jalousie* [Jealousy] possesses no identifiable narrator and no apparent plot line. Instead, Robbe-Grillet presented fragments of detailed objective description, articulated with a “camera-like objective realism.”<sup>295</sup> With the overload of information, the narration remains obscure and incomplete, presenting fragmented passages without apparent connection.

One technique used by Robbe-Grillet is that of “nodality:” rather than narrative progression from one event to another, the same event is repeated, albeit in a slightly altered form.<sup>296</sup> *La Jalousie* presents the same event nine consecutive times, each version containing variations. A similar technique is utilised in Beksiński’s sequence *Delegat* [Delegate], which presents four images in succession across a horizontal board with no spacing: a cross isolated against a pale sky; a portrait of a man with a black square obscuring his identity; the same portrait repeated, but with a white K now written on the black square; a very banal photograph of a wall, which takes up the majority of the composition obscuring the sky [II.43].<sup>297</sup> David Hayman explained that in a traditional narrative “what follows phenomenon A is a phenomenon B, the consequence of the first” while in the works of Robbe-Grillet, instead of “a series of scenes which are connected by causal links, one has the impression that the same scene is constantly repeating itself, but with variations; that is, scene A is not followed by scene B but by Scene A, a possible variation of scene A.”<sup>298</sup> Dina Sherzer suggested that the purpose of this structure is to produce texts that are open ended: “no one referential or morphological element brings about the sense of an ending or a feeling of completion; other variations and repetitions could be added to the existing ones, lengthening the text but not changing it otherwise.”<sup>299</sup>

Ligocki invokes this literature to elucidate the structure of Beksiński and Lewczyński’s sequences, which similarly present disjointed fragments without apparent connection, without the reassurance of authorial clarity. The sets possess the potential to generate infinitely variable readings. One result of these narrative devices is to turn attention onto the text itself. The reader of Robbe-Grillet’s literature is invited not only to consider the

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<sup>295</sup> Smith, *Understanding Alain Robbe-Grillet*, 44.

<sup>296</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet, “Order and disorder in Film and Fiction,” *Critical Enquiry* (1977): 5.

<sup>297</sup> Interview with Adam Sobota, Wrocław, September 17, 2015. Sobota suggested the ‘K’ in this set of images was intended to stand for Kafka, and perhaps one way of analysing this set, *Delegat*, is as a commentary on the Kafka-esque bureaucracies within the PZPR.

<sup>298</sup> David Hayman, “Reforming the Narrative: Toward a Mechanics of Modernist Fiction 1987,” *A companion to narrative theory*, eds., Phelan and Rabinowitz, 174.

<sup>299</sup> Dina Sherzer, *Representation in Contemporary French Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 14.

story being told, but also to reflect on how that story is told. As Smith observed, “Rather than holding up a mirror to the world, his novels turn that mirror inward on themselves.”<sup>300</sup> Lucien Dallenabach has similarly stated, “the more the novel reflects itself, the less it will be able to mirror anything other than itself.”<sup>301</sup> Fragmenting the narrative in this way makes it clear that “this is a deforming mirror with multiple refractions, like those that form the labyrinth of an amusement park fun house [...] Robbe-Grillet’s self-reflexivity reveals the reader’s role not just in passively tracing the labyrinth but in creating it.”<sup>302</sup> The same is true for Lewczyński and Beksiński’s sets; the works “not only solicit but energetically demand the active participation of the reader.”<sup>303</sup> Beksiński and Lewczyński’s interrogation of photographic narrative structure could therefore be seen to serve another purpose, suggested by Deleuze. In *Cinema and National Identity*, Deleuze argues that classical, mainstream cinema serves to sustain “dominant ideology and a hegemonic vision of history.” In contrast, more open narrative structures allow a questioning of that history.<sup>304</sup> Perhaps the *Pokaz zamknięty* was intended by its creators to activate the viewer and call into question these master narratives. In its use of jumbled, fragmented and multiplied narratives, the show does not present or establish one dominant narrative or viewpoint, and by implication one dominant memory, history or identity. Instead, the show presents the possibility of opening out those notions.

In Ligocki’s review of the 1959 exhibition, he did not use the term ‘anti-photography’ pejoratively. He acknowledged that the works of Lewczyński and Beksiński were “highly ambitious” and opened up “extraordinarily interesting perspectives on photography.”<sup>305</sup> He concluded, however, that although they opened up these perspectives, “they do not fully realise them. For it must be admitted that they are still very primitive and their aesthetic value is rather modest.”<sup>306</sup> I would argue that the Polish artists discussed in this chapter, were not just concerned with breaking down notions of photographic purity and specificity, but that they also used found objects and non-artistic elements, together with

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<sup>300</sup> Smith, *Understanding Alain Robbe-Grillet*, 1.

<sup>301</sup> Lucien Dallenabach, quoted in Smith, *Understanding Alain Robbe-Grillet*, 49.

<sup>302</sup> Smith, *Understanding Alain Robbe-Grillet*, 60-1.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>304</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts,” in *European Cinema and Intertextuality. History, Memory and Politics*, ed. Ewa Mazierska (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 14.

<sup>305</sup> Ligocki, “Antyfotografia,” 442-445.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

multiple images and convoluted narratives structures, to explore the psychology of looking and the histories that are contained in outmoded objects. The artist Józef Robakowski expressed his disapproval that such a pioneering show had been seen by such “an unfortunately small number of the public” and chastised “the so-called state curators” for failing to promote this work.<sup>307</sup> Beksiński and Lewczyński’s works registered as “pioneering gestures” that Robakowski suggested “aroused serious unrest” among those who had seen it.<sup>308</sup> Reflecting back on the exhibition today, one can understand why historians of Polish photography today are intent on retrospectively hailing *Pokaz zamknięty* as one of the most important events in Polish photography. In the following section, I will explore how Robakowski and a new wave of photographers, take up the mantle of the *Trzech Twórców* in the 1960s, culminating in another groundbreaking but underappreciated exhibition by the *Zero 61* group in 1969 that continues this ‘degradation’ of art photography, but also explores the desire for material traces. If the 1950s saw artists seeking to unlock the traces of history that are encrypted within the photograph, the *Zero 61* group push this exploration in a different direction, producing their own traces which can be understood to operate photographically.

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<sup>307</sup> Robakowski, “Moje multimedialne peregrynacje ... + 5 obrazów i kilka autodygresji,” 15.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER III

### SUBJECTIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

The third and final chapter of this thesis looks at artists associated with the student group *Zero 61*, representing a new wave of young Polish photographers working in the 1960s. I begin by looking at their contribution to a 1968 exhibition *Fotografia Subiektywna* [Subjective Photography], organised in Kraków by the photographers Zbigniew Dłubak and Zbigniew Łagocki. The show took its name from Otto Steinert's concept of 'Subjektive Fotografie', propagated in Germany in the 1950s, but which gripped the imagination of Polish photographers and continued to exert an influence into the Sixties. The works produced under this banner blurred the boundaries between painting and printmaking, and also betrayed the influence of literature. Steinert's prioritisation of the author, together with the reactivation of the role of creativity in the act of photography can be understood as responses to the subordination of photography to politics in the preceding decade. The montages of Andrzej Rożycki will be closely scrutinised, exploring ways in which they combine collective national memory and personal family photographs. Rożycki's work brings together past and present; the events of history as haunting the present-day Polish landscape. His montages blur the line between the private and the collective, entwining his own family history with that of the Polish nation, a history marked by a successive series of violent losses.

In the introduction to an extended essay, 'Air War and Literature,' printed in *On the Natural History of Destruction* in 1999, the writer W. G. Sebald made the following comment about his experience of the Second World War, as a German born in the penultimate year of the war. He stated, "Born in a village in the Allgäu Alps in May 1944, I am one of those who remained almost untouched by the catastrophe then unfolding in the German Reich. In my first Zürich lecture, I tried to show, through passages of some length taken from my own literary works, that this catastrophe had none the less left its mark on my mind."<sup>1</sup> The artists I have discussed in the previously chapters of this thesis

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<sup>1</sup> W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* [1999] (London: Penguin, 2003), vii-viii.

experienced the war directly, as primary witnesses and survivors of trauma. This chapter introduces a new generation, born in the aftermath of 1945, who did not experience these events for themselves, and whose relationship to those events has been mediated by temporal distance and cultural memory. Marianne Hirsch has identified this phenomenon as ‘postmemory’, in which traumas and desires can be transferred to subsequent generations through objects, stories, behaviours and images; a generation haunted by the presence within their psyches of a past that they had not experienced for themselves.<sup>2</sup> Important to this discussion is that knowledge is not transmitted from one generation to another; rather what is passed down is a void, a gap in knowledge, which Hirsch suggests has to be compensated for through fantasy and imagination.

The previous chapter outlined the ‘formal frolics’ pursued by photographers in the late 1950s, and mapped the antagonism this provoked between photographers who wished to use the medium to fabricate forms in the darkroom and pursue more experimental directions, and critics who understood the specificity of the photographic medium as situated in its ability to document and record existing forms. In the following decade, experimental work came to the fore and increasingly dominated critical discourse. In this chapter I trace a trajectory from the late 1950s to a 1968 exhibition of *Fotografia Subiektywna* [Subjective Photography], which promoted photography as an expression of artistic creativity. The following year, in 1969 the *Zero 61* artists staged a very different exhibition, a student led show staged in the ruins of an abandoned blacksmith’s workshop. By comparing these exhibitions, I hope to delineate a move away from the poetics of ‘creative’ photography towards a different understanding of photography predicated on the trace and the index.

#### STEINERT AND *SUBJEKTIVE FOTOGRAFIE* [Subjective Photography]

The work pursued by photographers such as Schlabs, Beksiński and Lewczyński at the end of the 1950s bore obvious parallels to the concept of ‘Subjektive Fotografie’ that Otto Steinert had been promoting in Germany after the war. Steinert had emerged as a key figure in theorising and promoting an experimental style of photography, establishing the

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<sup>2</sup> Hirsch first used the term “postmemory” in an article on Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*: Marianne Hirsch, “Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning and Post-Memory,” *Discourse*, vol.15, issue 2 (1992-93): 3-29.

‘fotoform’ group in 1949 alongside Siegfried Lauterwasser, Ludwig Windstosser, Peter Keetman and Toni Schneiders. In the founding manifesto, Steinert articulated the need for “a new photographic style” that served “the demands of our time.”<sup>3</sup> This was particularly aimed at the last vestiges of antiquated Pictorialism, which in Germany, as in Poland, still gripped the imagination of amateur photographers after the war.<sup>4</sup> Steinert’s manifesto was also directed against applied photography serving documentary or commercial ends, which he felt needed to be distinguished from more creative artistic uses of the medium. Rather than using the camera to faithfully record external realities, Steinert urged photographers to manipulate the chemical and optical processes of photography to abstract the appearance of the world around them. In this regard Steinert was searching for a “modern” but also a “specifically photographic mode of expression.”<sup>5</sup> Steinert enumerated the “purely photographic means” which were to be utilised, clearly indebted to the experimental techniques developed in avant-garde photography of the 1920s by László Moholy-Nagy and Herbert Bayer at the Bauhaus, but equally by Man Ray and the Surrealists in Paris: framing and isolation, choice of lens, point of view, close ups, strong black and white contrasts, multiple exposures, manipulation of light, radical cropping, solarisation, inverted prints, playing with time through short or prolonged exposures.<sup>6</sup>

Through a number of international exhibitions organised throughout the 1950s, Steinert disseminated his concept of ‘subjective photography’ to an informal network of artists.<sup>7</sup> Steinert’s exhibitions were broadly inclusive, bringing together darkroom manipulations and abstract works to be exhibited alongside humanist reportage photography. In many respects the content of Steinert’s exhibitions resembled the 1957 *Krok w Nowoczesność* [Step into Modernity] show that Schlabs had organised in Poznań, discussed in the previous chapter. Schlabs had articulated his idea of a modern photography through the presentation of a wide variety of artistic work: documentary, landscapes, experimental and abstract photography. Schlabs had enjoyed personal correspondence with Steinert, and was the only Polish photographer chosen by Steinert for inclusion in his 1958

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<sup>3</sup> Otto Steinert, preface to *Subjektive Fotografie I* (Munich, 1952).

<sup>4</sup> Steinert and his circle uttered many a harsh word against the “old fogies” and the continued pursuit of “secession” style photography. See *Highlights of Photography: 30 years of Photokina Picture Exhibitions* (Cologne: Photokina, 1980), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Steinert, preface *Subjektive Fotografie I*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The first exhibition was organised by Steinert in 1951 in Saarbrücken, and later travelled to Cologne, with two further shows following in 1954 and 1958. Further exhibitions were staged overseas, in Paris in 1955 and Tokyo in 1956.

exhibition. Later in 1961 Steinert selected Schlabs's work, alongside that of Lewczyński and Beksiński for the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie* [German Society for Photography] exhibition in Cologne. This subjective vocabulary correlated to developments in America, where Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind and Minor White were also pursuing an abstract and metaphorical style of art photography.

Steinert was insistent on reanimating the role of creativity in photography. Rather than using the medium for faithful reproduction, the object photographed was to become subordinated to the personal transformative vision of the photographer. Steinert's understanding of photography prioritised the artist-photographer's active presence and intervention in the image-making process, over the mechanical and seemingly objective eye of the camera. Steinert stated, "it is not the motif which brings about the pictorial effect produced, but the creative faculty of the photographer shaping the subject into a picture."<sup>8</sup> Reality was not the object of representation here, but the author's creative interpretation of that reality; the photograph as a vehicle through which the artist-photographer could express a privileged subjectivity. A photograph from Peter Keetman at the beginning of the decade, *Spiegelnde Tropfen* [Reflecting Drops] (1950), dramatised this point. The image is part of a series of closely cropped photographs of water and oil droplets. Subject matter becomes subordinated to design in Keetman's image, as he directs the viewer towards a concentration on form, pattern and tonal contrasts. A hazy figure can be discerned reflected in the drops: the artist standing symbolically at the centre of his work.

Tellingly, many Polish artists created self portraits in the late 1950s, perhaps due to this heightened awareness of their creative presence at the centre of the image. In a self-portrait from 1955 Lewczyński places himself at the centre of the image, positioned behind his camera. The focus falls squarely on Lewczyński as operator, working with complete control and mastery over his technical apparatus. A self-portrait by Schlabs from 1955-6 frames his head and shoulders as he stares out towards the viewer, his eyes obscured behind dark sunglasses. An accompanying image reverses these tones through negative printing: light areas are exchanged for black, whilst dark areas appear luminously white. Dorota Łuczak draws attention to the way in which the eyes of the photographer are "penetrated by light" and compares this to x-ray imagery, finding a

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<sup>8</sup> Steinert, preface to *Subjektive Fotografie I*.



similarity in the way they both “betoken infiltration within, underneath the surface of things unseen with a naked eye.”<sup>9</sup> The image announces Schlabs as an artist concerned with replacing trite forms of naturalistic imagery with a new world of optical experience, characterised by vivid graphic appeal. Beksiński also created a series of self portraits, taken over many years in different periods. In these images Beksiński explored the performative aspect of portraiture: he disguised himself in costume and pulled strange faces; elsewhere we see more sombre portraits, with an unshaven face. The result is a series of stylised self-portraits as a sailor, worker, a Red Army soldier, detective or a person on the verge of suicide, which betray an eagerness to explore psychological self-portraiture as a tool which might reveal or mask identity.

Prioritising the centrality of the author in the creative process takes on particular significance at a historical moment in which exacting restrictions were placed on personal agency. The concept of subjective photography would have appealed to Polish photographers forced to work on commission and surrender their personal creativity to the demands of the state. Piotrowski noted that in “a Communist society there was no painter but people who paint as well as do other things.”<sup>10</sup> Lewczyński, for example, was asked to create health and safety posters.<sup>11</sup> The appeal of Steinert’s manifesto therefore became bound up with notions of artistic autonomy and signified a restitution of creative freedom. In an essay published in 1988, James Hugunin drew attention to mutual points of interest that can be drawn between Steinert’s concept of ‘subjektive fotografie’ and the existential phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre, namely in the “transition from a natural, non reflexive perception of things to an intensified, self-reflexive grasp of key aspects.”<sup>12</sup> The existential insistence on individuals as responsible for creating meaning in their own lives was, Hugunin concluded, an “ideologically useful” philosophy in an era leaving behind the horrors of the Third Reich and facing the ideological threat of communism.<sup>13</sup> The intellectual climate in Poland in the late 1950s was permeated by existential

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<sup>9</sup> Dorota Łuczak, “Bronislaw Schlabs – the Seeking one,” in *Schlabs poszukujący: fotografia z lat 1952-1957* [Schlabs - the seeking one: photography from 1952-1957], Dorota Łuczak and Magdalena Wróblewska (Poznań: Fundacja 9/12 Art Space, 2011), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *In the shadow of Yalta: art and the avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Reaktion, 2009), 134.

<sup>11</sup> An exhibition of Lewczyński’s posters was staged at Asymetria Gallery, Warsaw (March–May 2013) titled *BHP, historia pewnej wyobraźni* [Occupational Safety and Health. The History of an Imagination]. Accessed April 7, 2017, [http://www.asymetria.eu/en/html/?str=podstrona\\_wystawy&id=435b02e\\_dda&t=3](http://www.asymetria.eu/en/html/?str=podstrona_wystawy&id=435b02e_dda&t=3)

<sup>12</sup> James R. Hugunin, “Subjektive Fotografie and the Existentialist Ethic,” *Afterimage* 15, no.1 (January 1988): 135.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

philosophy, with texts by Claude Lévi-Strauss translated into Polish after 1956; Sartre and Albert Camus also became popular.<sup>14</sup> Existentialism's emphasis on the individual, on inner experience, and subjectivity represented a value shift. Piotrowski suggested that the "emphasis on the freedom of a single human being rather than that of the community was definitely a reaction to the institutionalisation of Marxism in Central Europe and a polemic with the main ideas and values of the official philosophy: materialism and collectivism."<sup>15</sup>

Steinert's approach to photography certainly stirred up debate in the German press. The work of 'fotoform' photographers had first been showcased at the 1950 Fotokina in Cologne. Upon seeing the fotoform display, the art critic Robert d'Hooge described this work in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* as "the atom bomb in the compost heap of this exhibition."<sup>16</sup> However Steinert's concept of 'Subjektive Fotografie' was frequently met with scathing criticism by other factions of the German press. Critics in German photographic journals argued that the movement represented no fundamental expansion of the photographic language, and in fact was proving detrimental, by engendering a decline in the quality of photographic art. A series of articles about subjective photography by the GDR critic Berthold Beiler published in the German journal *Fotografie* in the 1960s were scathingly titled 'Western Photography at the Dead End of Late Bourgeois Philosophy.'

From the late 1950s, Steinert also appeared in the pages of Dłubak's *Fotografia* [Photography] magazine in Poland, bringing his work to the attention of Polish photographers, and on the whole, reviews of the work were favourable.<sup>17</sup> Marian Schulz reviewed Steinert's 1958 Saarbrücken exhibition in an article published in *Fotografia* the following year, acknowledging the lineage to early avant-garde photography and the debt to existential philosophy. Schulz suggested that at a time when photography in Poland found itself "deadlocked," Steinert's concept possessed "infinite creative and representational possibilities" that could serve as "a breakthrough," showcasing "the

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<sup>14</sup> Józef Bury, "Contexte d'apparition des pratiques de type performance en Pologne: Entretiens avec Zbigniew Dłubak, Włodzimir Borowski, Jerzy Beres et Józef Robakowski," *Æsthetica-Nova*, no.6 (1996): 40-70.

<sup>15</sup> Piotrowski, *In the shadow of Yalta*, 132.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Hugunin, "Subjektive Fotografie and the Existentialist Ethic," 149.

<sup>17</sup> Catalogues of Steinert's exhibitions were also available in the library at ZPAF.

creativity and intelligence of the artist.”<sup>18</sup> His review drew attention to what was at stake in Steinert’s conception of photography: “a personal vision, an image created by a man with the help of a camera, but not the camera alone.”<sup>19</sup> The resulting works, Schulz suggested, “require reflection and thought” and demanded from the viewer “delicate sensitivity and the ability to analyse their own mental processes.” While the show had excited critics and connoisseurs, Schulz noted that it had been “mostly bypassed” by the public, for whom “most of the celebrated show was little understood.” He stated, “those who long and carefully explored the show were the most seasoned art connoisseurs or high-profile names. You could see their serious interest and approval: it was a show for them.”<sup>20</sup>

#### *FOTOGRAFIA SUBIEKTYWNA* [Subjective Photography] (1968)

Almost a decade later in 1968, the exhibition *Fotografia Subiektywna* [Subjective Photography] opened in Kraków at the *Biuro Wystaw Artystyczny* [Bureau of Art Exhibitions] (BWA), the title of the show recalling Steinert’s series of exhibitions of the same name staged earlier in the 1950s. Jointly organised by the photographers Zbigniew Łagocki and Zbigniew Dłubak, the exhibition synthesised much of the work Dłubak had showcased in his journal in the preceding years.<sup>21</sup> A short introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition was provided by Urszula Czartoryska. Czartoryska differentiated between what she saw as two distinct phenomena in photography: a “fascination with authenticity,” and an interest in the “realm of fantasy, exempt from existing anchors in reality.”<sup>22</sup> As a result of its perceived privileged relationship to reality, the photograph had been harnessed as a means to faithfully reproduce the world; the work in this exhibition, much like the German ‘fotoform’ photographers, used the photograph not to

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<sup>18</sup> Marian Schulz, “Fotografia Subiektywna” [Subjective Photography], *Fotografia* 1 no. 67 (January 1959): 16-19.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Dłubak only became involved in the final stages, when the exhibition had been mostly organised. Łagocki suggested it was useful to have Dłubak on board, as it allowed them some leeway with ZPAF. Interview with Marek Grygiel. Accessed April 24, 2017, <http://fototapeta.art.pl/2001/lagocki.php>

<sup>22</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, preface to *Fotografia Subiektywna* [Subjective Photography], exhibition catalogue (Kraków, 1968).

document, but as a means by which to create a new reality and to prioritise “the artistic invention of the author.”<sup>23</sup>

The “means of photographic alchemy” that Steinert had advocated in the 1950s had been popularised in the 1960s, no longer restricted to a small bastion of art photographers, but widely taken up by professionals and amateurs alike. Certainly the title of the exhibition suggests the widespread acceptance and influence of Steinert’s concept. Steinert re-appeared in *Fotografia* in the late 1960s, with two articles reviewing a newly published book entitled ‘Otto Steinert and Students.’<sup>24</sup> Karolina Lewandowska has suggested that this title was significant. In their endorsement of the term ‘students,’ Polish photographers were asserting their claim to be disciples of Steinert themselves, “using the collected teachings, but converting them in their own way.”<sup>25</sup> The year before the Kraków exhibition, Łagocki had written a text in *Fotografia, Uwagi o sytuacji w fotografii polskiej* [Remarks about the situation in Polish photography], in which he called on Polish photographers to formulate their own version of ‘subjective photography,’ encouraging further experimentation in order to fill Steinert’s “code name” with new meaning.<sup>26</sup>

*Fotografia Subiektywna* was sponsored by the *Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików* [Union of Polish Photographic Artists (ZPAF)] and BWA, a prominent cultural institution which monitored exhibitions. The show was housed in a vast pavilion on Plac Szczepański, the largest gallery in the Małopolska province and the largest municipal gallery in Poland.<sup>27</sup> The exhibition was arranged over two floors and covered over one thousand square metres. To fill this space, a large amount of work was exhibited: twenty-four artists and around 200 works in total, making it the first exhibition in the history of ZPAF on this scale. The artists exhibited were mostly members of ZPAF, as were the two curators, Łagocki and Dłubak. Exhibitions in the PRL did not happen within an institutional void, particularly ambitious exhibitions of this scale. The show was supported by institutional apparatus of the state and featured approved artists, giving the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. In 1965 Czartoryska had published a book entitled *Przygody plastyczne Fotografii* [The Adventures of Art Photography] and had been regularly contributing articles on art photography to the journal *Fotografia* [Photography].

<sup>24</sup> *Fotografia* 11 (1965); *Fotografia* 3 (1968). The title could also perhaps translate as ‘disciples’.

<sup>25</sup> Karolina Ziębińska-Lewandowska, “Między dokumentalnością a oku eksperymentem: krytyka fotograficzna w Polsce w latach 1946-1989,” (Ph.D diss., Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2010), n.p.

<sup>26</sup> Zbigniew Łagocki, “Uwagi o sytuacji w fotografii polskiej” [Remarks about the situation in Polish photography], *Fotografia* 4 (1967): 75.

<sup>27</sup> The exhibition later travelled to Galeria Współczesnej in Warsaw.

impression that formal experimentation in photography had come to be recognised as a legitimate and accepted style of art photography.

Juliusz Garztecki recounted how Łagocki and Dłubak actively sought out more controversial work for their exhibition, visiting the studios of colleagues hoping to be shown photographs that artists would otherwise not have dared to send for an official large scale exhibition of this type.<sup>28</sup> Within this vast array of work a number of themes could be discerned: objects abstracted from nature (Paweł Piercsinski, Tadeusz Suminski); metaphorical, psychological work that verged on the unsettling (Marian Kucharski, Wojciech Plewinski); and graphic abstract work characterised by black and white contrasts (Edward Hartwig, Andrzej Zborzki). Hartwig had emerged as a highly esteemed representative of the Polish variant of subjective photography in the Sixties. He described photography as the “creative interpretation of the realities around us”, and suggested that photography could only become art “when we find a direct relation of the artist and his work, his personal impression, his engagement, his perception and ability to transpose the world [...] the author’s artistic comment upon the rich, complicated reality”.<sup>29</sup> Artists such as Jerzy Lewczyński, Zofia Rydet and Waclaw Nowak increasingly grouped images into sequences: Nowak grouped together nudes into triptychs or nanotychs; Dłubak exhibited a grid of eight female nudes that in its seriality appeared to borrow from conceptual practices. Lewczyński showed *Dziwny jest Świat* [The World is Strange], a group of five photographs that mixed found images with family photographs, incorporating references to his own personal history. Retrospectively, Lewandowska ultimately concluded that the work exhibited was “less important” than the fact that the exhibition was staged and the response it provoked.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most insistent tendencies to be showcased in the exhibition was a turn to metaphorical, symbolic imagery, often created by means of transformations in the darkroom: multiple exposures, solarisation, physical manipulation of the negative, experiments with chemical processing. The most notable proponents of this genre of photography in the exhibition were a group of young and dynamic photographers from

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<sup>28</sup> Juliusz Garztecki. “Plotka o Zerowach” [Tales of the Zeroists], Unpublished manuscript, courtesy of author.

<sup>29</sup> See Ewa Gajewska, ed., *Edward Hartwig: Wariacje fotograficzne* (Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1978).

<sup>30</sup> Ziębińska-Lewandowska, “Między dokumentalnością a eksperymentem: krytyka fotograficzna w Polsce w latach 1946-1989,” n.p.

Toruń. The *Zero 61* group – which included Czesław Kuchta, Jerzy Wardak, Andrzej Różycki and Józef Robakowski – had formed while students at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Robakowski recalled it as an institution in which “dormant a serious intellectual-creative force lay dormant.”<sup>31</sup> A particularly lively atmosphere enveloped the university, which was composed of more than four thousand students. *Zero 61* emerged from two student photography groups at the university: *Oko* [Eye], formed in 1961, and *Rytm* [Rhythm], which functioned between 1962-3, but the interests of the Zeroists extended beyond photography. Group members also contributed to the student film club *Pętla* [Loop], one of the longest running film clubs in Poland which had been founded after the 1956 Polish October. The Zeroists remembered *Pętla* as being crucial to the shaping of their intermedial attitude. No formal manifesto united the work of the *Zero 61* group, except a shared opposition to straight photography, which they deemed “devoid of creativity.”<sup>32</sup> Instead the Zeroists called for experimentation and transformation. The curator Piotr Lisowski recognised two tendencies in the work the Zeroists were producing in the 1960s: on the one hand, Dadaistic, disruptive activities, a search for alternative modes of presentation, and a desire to break down the boundaries dividing different artistic media, which will be discussed further in the next chapter; on the other hand, highly metaphorical photographs belonging to the subjective trend.<sup>33</sup> It was through this latter tendency – evocative, lyrical works produced in the darkroom – that the Zeroists were represented in the *Fotografia Subiektywna* exhibition. In fact, the exhibition was hailed by critics in the photographic press as a ‘festival’ of the *Zero 61* group; Zeroists had featured most prominently in the show, supplying almost a third of the work exhibited.

Jerzy Wardak presented a number of montages at the 1968 exhibition, a technique which the Zeroists employed “to achieve polysemous reality.”<sup>34</sup> Wardak stated, “Pure

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<sup>31</sup> Józef Robakowski, “Moje multimedialne peregrynacje ... + 5 obrazów i kilka autodygresji” [My multimedia peregrinations ... + 5 images and some digressions] in *Odwaga Patrzenia: eseje o fotografii*, ed., Tomasz Ferenc (Łódź: Fundacja Edukacji Wizualnej), 15.

<sup>32</sup> One group member, Antoni Mikołajczyk stated, “If photography is to give us full artistic expression, it must possess in itself the possibility of evocative actions, it must become the subject of artistic emotions. This action is achieved by the development of creative, processing and surreal phenomena around us. Artists must create their own individual character and a new means of artistic expression. Antoni Mikołajczyk, essay in *Kuźnia* [Forge], exhibition catalogue (1969), n.p.

<sup>33</sup> See Piotr Lisowski, “From the amateur phenomenon to a mental space. The exhibition of group Zero-61 at the forge as a place of interaction with the exhibition space,” in *Kuźnia* [The Forge], exhibition catalogue, (Toruń: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Znaki Czasu, 2010), 4-7.

<sup>34</sup> Jerzy Wardak, essay in *Kuźnia* [Forge], exhibition catalogue (1969), n.p.

photography does not give me the opportunity to say what I want. [...] I go beyond the materials of reportage photography, which is always a fragment from life, that I want to broaden and deepen.”<sup>35</sup> Images such as *Refleksje* [Reflection] [III.1] were pieced together by hand according to a pre-existing sketch, utilising a large number of photographs – sometimes several dozen are montaged together in one print. The final composition was then photographed to create a seamless print characterised by strong black and white contrasts. Wardak described his photographs as ‘easel paintings’, referencing the highly convoluted manner of their construction, and cited the symbolist art of Arnold Böcklin as particular inspiration.<sup>36</sup> Czartoryska likened his montages not to painting, but to poetry, which she suggested shared an “inherently associative” nature, “in which associations sparkle so unexpectedly.”<sup>37</sup> In *Refleksje*, a naked female sits at the base of a tree which has been detached from the ground, exposing its network of roots. The woman’s body, the tree and the roots all appear to meld into one entity, evoking the archetypal notion of a ‘tree of life’. Ten images by Józef Robakowski were included in the *Fotografia Subiektywna* exhibition, including molten, viscous self-portraits in which the photographic emulsion had undergone process of defacement [III.2], or more evocative montage works that spoke of a symbolic dream narrative [III.3]. Robakowski also possessed a self-acknowledged interest in “doubling - combinations with the apparent real world, in mirror reflections,” an interest that was articulated in double or triple portraits created by multiple exposures. Writing in *Fotografia* in 1987, Czartoryska later stated that these works were full of “mysterious and suggestive metaphors,” a “poetics of mystery, questions about fate, suggestions, drama.”<sup>38</sup>

In a study of Polish cinema, Ewa Mazierska has suggested that the turn towards dense, anti-realist, formalist films in the early 1960s should be understood as product of the particular time in which they were made. Mazierska uses the title of Tadeusz Różewicz’s play *Świadkowie albo nasza mała stabilizacja* [Witnesses of Our Small Stabilisation]

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Wardak’s montages often utilise a tall vertical column-like format, and the composition is built around a single theme; frequently a woman is the theme, symbolically positioned at the centre of the composition, from which other elements radiate. Some are subjected to additional darkroom processing to render the scenes even more unreal.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, “Identyfikacja zakwestionowana: o grupie zero 61 lat sześćdziesiątych” [Identification challenged: the group Zero 61 in the 1960s], *Fotografia* 3 no. 45 (1987): 20-24.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

(1962) to describe “the stable but colourless and thwarted decade of the 1960s.”<sup>39</sup> Under the leadership of Władysław Gomułka, and following the short political and cultural thaw of the late 1950s, Mazierska concludes that Poland, “for the first time in its post-war history, was encouraged to enjoy relative prosperity and stability and allowed a degree of individualism.”<sup>40</sup> Mazierska discussed films such as Tadeusz Konwicki’s *Salto* [Jump] (1965); Jerzy Skolimowski *Bariera* [Barrier] (1966) and Wojciech Solarz *Molo* [The Pier] (1969), all of which show broken and frustrated characters who attempt to escape from boredom, a desire frustrated by the uneventful times in which they live. The films intentionally de-naturalise reality, depicting places that did not belong to the contemporary urban environment, but appeared to be suspended somewhere between past and present, between dreams and the waking world. The films, Mazierska suggests, shared a structural strategy of “undermining the gulf between the past and present by situating them in the same space and foregrounding the constructed nature of narrative forms.”<sup>41</sup>

Similar terminology has been used to describe the 1960s photographic work of the *Zero 61* group. Marek Janczyk’s recent analysis of these works suggests that a consistent motif that could be recognised in the group’s photographs at this time was a detachment from the “daily humdrum,” in favour of “recalling an unreal world: ideas, symbols, dreams, national myths and memory, individual and collective.”<sup>42</sup> The most overt manifestation of these themes was to be found in the montages of Andrzej Różycki. For Różycki, this moment of ‘small stabilisation’ appeared to allow him to reflect upon the events of the recent past, utilising the means of synthetic photographic construction at his disposal. In a previous chapter I suggested that Lewczyński utilised the technique of combination printing as a means through which to express his commentary on Polish history. Różycki picks up this technique a decade later. He stated that his understanding of photography

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<sup>39</sup> Ewa Mazierska, *Jerzy Skolimowski. The Cinema of a Nonconformist* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 46.

<sup>40</sup> Ewa Mazierska, “Squeezing space, releasing space: Spatial research in the study of Eastern European cinema,” in *Cinema, State Socialism and Society in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1917-1989* eds., Sanja Bahum and John Haynes, (London: Routledge, 2014), 19.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Marek Janczyk, *Miesiąc Fotografii w Krakowie*. [Krakow Photomonth] exhibition catalogue (Kraków: [s.n.], 2008), 34.



was characterised by the medium's ability to "return to past themes, giving new meaning to old worlds."<sup>43</sup>

## POSTMEMORY

In the exhibition *Fotografia Subiektywna* Różycki showed ten works, including *Legenda* [Legend] (1968) [III.4]. This combination print presents a formal portrait of a group of uniformed soldiers from a Polish army regiment. The features of the soldiers are very faint, partly effaced by a superimposed landscape, in which a tree-lined path opens into a country field. In an interview with the artist, Różycki revealed that he had found the photograph of the soldiers by chance when visiting the town of Grudziądz in northern Poland.<sup>44</sup> While he could not trace the specific soldiers in the photograph, he had identified them as pre-Second World War cavalry. Różycki combined this found image with a landscape photograph, which had been solarised during printing. The countryside featured in the image was local to Różycki's birthplace in Baranowicz, formerly Eastern Poland, but after the war incorporated into the territory of Belarus. Różycki created a situation in which these two different realities meet in a strange encounter, utilising the technique of combination printing to weave together Poland's history with its landscape. *Legenda* can be understood to serve as a crucible, in which a number of different traumatic impressions can be distilled.

During the course of the twentieth century, the town of Baranowicz, now Baranovichi, changed hands repeatedly between Germans, Poles and Russians. The Soviet Union gained control of the city in September 1939, only for the Germans to occupy the city until 1944, whereupon it was seized back by the Red Army, with a significant part of the Polish population expelled to Siberia or Poland. Baranowicz and its landscape therefore represents a lost homeland for Różycki, a place to which he cannot return. Exile, as Edward Said has noted, is tied to "the loss of something left behind forever."<sup>45</sup> The lost homeland can be understood in terms of a primal loss, an irrevocable separation from an

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<sup>43</sup> Andrzej Różycki, *Chodzę swoimi drogami: dotknięcie: zobaczyć* [I walk my own paths, to touch, to see], exhibition catalogue (Kraków: Muzeum Historii Fotografii w Krakowie, 2004), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Andrzej Różycki, Warsaw, January 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Edward W. Said, *Reflections on exile and other essays* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000), 173.

original plenitude that one desires to regain. Whilst there exists a desire for a restored union, a return to the time before the rupture of exile, this remains frustratingly unobtainable. For those who have experienced exile, the photograph can serve as an important object for those “whose points of reference elsewhere have been altered beyond recognition,” the photograph can compensate for lost or abandoned landscapes that can no longer be physically accessed.<sup>46</sup> Henryk Dasko has discussed this state of ‘homelessness’ in Polish post-war culture, and suggested that those who find themselves dislocated from their place of origin can become “permanently suspended in an in-between world,” caught between two communities, two cultures, two languages, and unable to wholly belong to either.<sup>47</sup> Różycki’s montage therefore appears to capture this sense of his own homeless suspension.

Not only does the photograph bear witness to a lost home town, it also testifies to a past that Różycki does not know. The found photograph of the cavalry soldiers in fact opens onto a series of lacks or voids: as a found photograph, the image denies Różycki any knowledge of the moment of exposure, he does not know where the photograph was taken, or by whom. As a photograph taken before the moment of Różycki’s birth, it also reveals to him a history that he did not experience himself. Marianne Hirsch has written eloquently about the ways in which traumatic events possess the potential to mark people who do not experience them directly. Her theory of “postmemory” directly concerns those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, specifically here, a generation of Polish citizens such as Różycki who find themselves haunted by the presence of an unspoken past that they did not experience for themselves.<sup>48</sup> Różycki’s composite print presents a pre-war world that he never knew, and shows it to be quite literally intruding into the present, with dislocated intimacy. Important to this discussion is that, according to Hirsch, this past is not transmitted as a direct memory, but is passed down as a void, or a gap in knowledge. It involves “an admission of an unbridgeable distance separating the participant from the one born after.”<sup>49</sup> This void, Hirsch suggests, is compensated for through fantasy and a turn to the imagination. The Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda serves as a useful point of reference here; he has spoken about this

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<sup>46</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xv.

<sup>47</sup> Henryk Dasko, “Place of Estrangement: Homelessness at Home in the Works of Three Postwar Polish Writers,” in *Framing the Polish Home* ed. Bozena Shallcross (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003), 157.

<sup>48</sup> See Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29:1 (Spring 2008): 103-128.

<sup>49</sup> Marianne Hirsch, “Marked by memory: Feminist reflections on trauma and transmission,” in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, Community*, eds., N.K. Miller and J Tougaw (Urbana: Illinois University Press), 76.

particular feature of his memory and its relevance to his experience of the war as a teenager. Returning to these events forty years later, he suggested that war was something he felt he ought to have experienced, but did not, and which he sought to address through his films:

...these films were in a sense an extension of a lack in my biography. I made them out of a deep conviction that this ought to be part of my life, and perhaps the engagement in them, and the themes of war and occupation which flow obsessively through them, met a need to supplement my own biography. For if fate had spared me this reality, it was my duty to make up for this in my films.<sup>50</sup>

In his autobiography, he stated that as a result of this breach in his experience, “the whole war was played out in our heads, in the imagination.”<sup>51</sup>

Hirsch asks how later generations are to give shape to experiences that they have not directly witnessed, how do they fill the gaps in their experience? The photograph plays a significant role in this process. Objects such as photographs, Hirsch suggests, can transfer or transmit these traumas and desires to a subsequent generation.<sup>52</sup> Without direct memories, Hirsch suggests that a turn to imagination is required, fed by films and images that offer a means by which to give shape to formless intimations of unspoken experiences. Hirsch concluded, “Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.”<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the turn to creative photography and darkroom manipulations in the 1960s, premised on this very idea of fantasy, escapism and highly synthetic forms of image making that involve imaginative creation, can be better understood through Hirsch’s theory of postmemory.

In *Compulsive Beauty*, Hal Foster considers the psychological significance of the found object, in a discussion around the Surrealist recovery of “cultural detritus of past

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<sup>50</sup> Andrzej Wajda cited in John Orr, “At the Crossroads: Irony and Defiance in the Films of Andrzej Wajda,” in *The cinema of Andrzej Wajda: the art of irony and defiance*, eds., John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowski (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>51</sup> Andrzej Wajda, *Autobiografia* [Autobiography] (Kraków: Znak, 2000), 20.

<sup>52</sup> See Marianne Hirsch, “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 5-37.

<sup>53</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.

moments” from Parisian flea markets.<sup>54</sup> Describing the flea market *trouvaille* as “an uncanny return of a historically repressed moment,” Foster suggests that harnessing objects belonging to the past can spark a connection between historical dimensions.<sup>55</sup> For Foster, the found object betrays a desire to discover an object that can effect a moment of connection between the present and a time that is now past.<sup>56</sup> Różycki’s montage, which incorporates found imagery, does not just spark a connection between past and present, it appears to fuse them together. His combination print creates a space in which different historical planes overlap on the same sheet of paper in a subtle play of layers – over, under, visible, invisible. The Polish soldiers appear as a latent trace in the landscape, akin to a traumatic impression embedded latently in the subconscious which flickers between appearance, disappearance and erasure. In this regard, the work evokes Freud’s *wunderblock*, discussed in relation to Lewczynski’s work *Zagubione słowa* [Lost Words] in the second chapter. Freud compared this child’s toy with the structure of the human psyche; the *wunderblock* and the psyche both function as receptive surfaces in which no memory trace is lost.

The translucency of the soldiers makes them appear to haunt the scene, and by implication the very fabric of the Polish nation seems to be haunted by ghosts of the Polish past that bring to bear questions about the present. The work ties together Różycki’s own personal history – through the invocation of the landscape of Baranowicz – with the collective consciousness of the Polish nation, figured through the cavalry soldiers. Marianne Hirsch asks the question: “are we not constructed, collectively, in relation to these ghosts and shadows? Are we not shaped by their loss and by our own ambivalence about mourning them?”<sup>57</sup> Różycki’s image suggests that while the traumas of Poland’s history may be suppressed in both individual and collective consciousness, these events “continue to ask difficult questions not only about the past but above all

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<sup>54</sup> Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 159.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>56</sup> In *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Andreas Huyssen suggests mechanical technologies of reproduction such as film and photography mean that “the past has become part of the present in ways simply unimaginable in earlier centuries.” Images fixed on celluloid render the past ever present. In this way, photography and film allow the past to “impinge upon the present”, with the result that “temporal boundaries have weakened.” (Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1.)

<sup>57</sup> Shimon Attie staged a series of projections which are haunted by shadowy figures. After searching for historical photographs of Berlin’s Jewish quarter during 20s and 30s, Attie made slides and projected them onto the precise locations where they were originally taken. Attie rebuilds the ruined world on the very site of the ruin. Re-photographing these projections, creating layered images that become movable memorial sites which each of us can invest with our own nostalgic and elegiac needs. Marianne Hirsch. “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile,” *Poetics Today* 17 no. 4 (Winter 1996): 659-686.

about the present”, the montage becomes a space for unwanted revelations.<sup>58</sup> Another montage made by Różycki in the same year seems to ask similar questions.

In *Polska jesień* [Polish Autumn] (1968), Różycki montaged a photograph of soldiers on horseback with the skeleton of a leaf, which looms large over the composition, possessing an incongruous scale in comparison to the soldiers [III.5]. The magnification of the leaf structure reveals intricate veining and draws attention to its fragility, as parts begin to disintegrate. The montaged image has been crudely painted over by hand, broad brushstrokes around the figures giving the suggestion of movement, but also effacing details of specificity. The title draws attention to the autumnal season, and the image appears to make visible this time of transition from the vigour of summer fading into the bleakness of winter. A similar sentiment is communicated by the over painting, which fades the figures into the background, blurring their bodies into the landscape. The image speaks of transition, disintegration and effacement, and Różycki appears to use this montage to make a statement about the lives of these men being led away to war. The photograph was originally taken by Różycki’s father in the late 1930s, as he watched the mounted cavalry soldiers engaged in formation training. His father was not in the army himself, but by using his image, Różycki implicates his own family’s history with the history of the nation. In particular, the title equates it to the particularly catastrophic German invasion in the autumn of 1939.

In the late 1930s, the ‘cult of the cavalry’ had become highly fetishised in Polish society. This pre-modern form of warfare was promoted as a viable alternative to mechanised war machinery. Freed from burdens of cumbersome equipment and machinery, the cavalry would be able to serve as a premier military force. Christopher Caes has analysed the significance of the cavalry in Andrzej Wajda’s films and notes how large albums were published, “constructing in words and images the exploits of the Polish cavalry from its origins into the future.”<sup>59</sup> In September 1939 this was forcibly put to the test, as Germany invaded Poland by land, air and sea drawing on the full range of Germany’s modern war equipment. In the face of tanks and bombs, a war carried out by Polish soldiers on horseback proved to be futile and fatal. Paul Coates, also writing about Wajda’s film, has retrospectively noted how the fate of the cavalry “allegorically represents that of a gentry-

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<sup>58</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 266.

<sup>59</sup> Christopher J. Caes, “Catastrophic Spectacles: Historical Trauma and the Masculine subject in *Lotna*,” in *The cinema of Andrzej Wajda*, 125.

led pre-war Poland ill equipped for modern technologies of warfare.”<sup>60</sup> Andrzej Wajda’s film *Lotna* (1959) tells the story of a cavalry horse, who brings tragedy to each of its subsequent riders. An emblematic scene in the film features a Polish cavalry unit charging against German tanks, reminiscent of the scenes from 1939.

The cult of the Polish cavalry had captured Wajda’s imagination as a young boy, and he recalled watching the spectacle of cavalry drills with awe, an admiration that was shattered once the war began:

In 1939, when the Germans invaded Poland, I was 13 years old. Through the eyes of a boy I saw the horrible, crushing defeat of the magnificent army, in which my father served as an officer. Just a few years earlier, watching riders drill on horseback with sabre and lance, I had seen images so beautiful they took my breath away [...]. Now in despair I watched columns of thousands of officers being led into German captivity.<sup>61</sup>

The defeat of the cavalry therefore represented a twofold trauma. The defeat made clear that the Polish army had been entirely unprepared for modern warfare. Secondly, the Polish historian Kazimierz Wyka recognised retrospectively a loss of faith in the political and social order: “the attitude of trust towards the ruling party, which had been forced on the people, turned out to be based on blindness, lies and irresponsibility. And for this reason in September 1939, the blow to the uniform spread its sense of defeat over all that had led up to it.”<sup>62</sup>

The defeat of the cavalry also possessed personal implications for Wajda, who was the son of a Polish Cavalry officer killed during the Katyn massacre, in which 22,000 Polish officers were executed in 1940 under Soviet orders. Following Hirsch’s theory of ‘postmemory’, Wajda appears to have inherited the trauma of his father’s death. He stated, “Our gaze was fixed on our fathers. We considered it the duty of our generation as sons to bear the testimony of our fathers, to recreate their experiences, for the murdered

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<sup>60</sup> Paul Coates, “Wajda’s Imagination of Disaster: War Trauma, Surrealism and Kitsch,” in *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda*, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Wanda Wertenstein, ed., *Wajda mowie o sobie: wywiady i teksty* [Wajda speaks about himself: interviews and texts] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000), 178. For a more detailed account of Wajda’s film and an analysis that links the cult of the cavalry with male desire, see Christopher J. Caes, “Catastrophic Spectacles,” in *The cinema of Andrzej Wajda*, 116-131.

<sup>62</sup> Kazimierz Wyka, *Zycie na niby* (1985), 90.

can no longer speak.”<sup>63</sup> The older generation could no longer testify to those events because they failed to prevent the catastrophe, they did not see their deaths in time. Caruth has elaborated on this lack of preparedness; reading Freud, she suggests that, “The shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced *in time*, it has not yet been fully known.”<sup>64</sup> Freud had earlier suggested that this lack of preparedness, could be witnessed in the symptoms of repetition compulsion that he saw while treating shell shocked soldiers from the First World War. The desire to relive wounding experiences was, Freud suggested, an attempt by the psyche to rehearse the original traumatic event in order to develop anxiety and preparedness retrospectively.<sup>65</sup> Wajda’s films have been discussed in terms of their compulsion to relive the wounding experience of war.<sup>66</sup> In *Lotno*, for example, Wajda’s characters are locked into a repetitious cycle of death. For Wajda, it was not his own trauma that he was reliving, but a trauma passed down from a previous generation, an overflow of the experience of his father. Różycki’s invocation of the cavalry in *Polska jesień* similarly returns to past events that he did not directly witness, and can also be understood to show the symptoms of repetitive compulsion as a result of an inherited trauma. The action of overpainting, if understood in this way, does not suggest movement, decay or a turn to generalities over specific details, as I had first suggested. Instead, the effacement of the Polish soldiers through paint can be understood as a violent action that repeats the death of the Polish cavalry at the hands of German tanks, an action that suggests Polish history to be locked into a cycle of repeated martyrdom.

The disastrous Polish campaign against the German invasion of September 1939 can also inhabit a wider narrative of historical fatalities, such as the death of Dąbrowski’s Polish Legion in their trip to Haiti in 1802-3. Around four thousand men had travelled to Santo Domingo to crush a slave rebellion, and almost all perished, were taken captive, or joined the rebels, only to be decimated by swamp-fever.<sup>67</sup> This episode was taken up as a subject

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<sup>63</sup> Andrzej Wajda, “Referat” [Reference], in Moderska, ed. *Andrzej Wróblewski w 10-lecie Śmierci*, (1971), 29.

<sup>64</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 62.

<sup>65</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 60.

<sup>66</sup> Orr and Ostrowski, eds. *The cinema of Andrzej Wajda*. Specifically, see Christopher J. Caes, “Catastrophic Spectacles: Historical Trauma and the Masculine subject in *Lotna*,” 116-131.

<sup>67</sup> See Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland Volume II 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13.

in Polish romantic literature; authors such as Adam Mickiewicz “applied the usual Romantic obsessions with agony, horror, separation and death to specifically national subjects.”<sup>68</sup> The hymn that expressed their plight, sung to a *mazurek*, has formed the national anthem since 1926:

*March, march, Dąbrowski!*

*From Italy to Poland!*

*Let us now rejoin the nation*

*Under your command.*

The repeated return to these events in art and literature suggests a Polish nation characterised by a sense of heroic doom and eternal victimhood. By invoking the events of the Polish Autumn, Różycki’s montage conflates this history of martyrdom with the events of his father’s generation, located in the very landscape of the Polish nation. By combining these elements on one sheet of photographic paper, Różycki traps the nation in a circle of repeated victimhood. Różycki seems to suggest that the Polish nation can only repeat, compulsively and tragically, the mistakes of the past.

Various sources of inspiration have been cited for Różycki’s images; surrealism, kitsch aesthetics, naive art and Polish symbolism. The latter is most explicitly stated in another work exhibited in the 1968 show, *Zatruta studnia* [Poisoned Well] [III.6].<sup>69</sup> Różycki’s montage directly referenced a painting of the same name by the Polish artist Jacek Malczewski, often referred to as the father of Polish Symbolist painting. In 1906 he created a series of seemingly bucolic paintings filled with rosy cheeked peasant women, who enticed men to a well where they drank to their deaths. These pastoral scenes belied a more sinister meaning, intended as a comment on the fate of all Poles. Różycki was well versed in Malczewski’s paintings, through a lecturer at his university in Torun, Puciata-Pawłowka who specialised in Polish symbolism; a fellow student, Józef Robakowski, recollected that “her lectures were so suggestive that nearly all the students were

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>69</sup> Marek Janczyk suggested *Zatruta studnia* [Poisoned Well] should be placed alongside another work exhibited in the 1968 exhibition - *Melancholia cementarna* [Melancholy Cemetery]. Both use the same motifs; the same girl appears in both, alongside dried flowers, wilted leaves, and both works suggest a narrative of childhood youth leading to death. (Marek Janczyk, Iwona Święch, eds., *Andrzej Różycki*, exhibition catalogue (Kraków: Muzeum Historii Fotografii, 2004), n.p.)



enchanted by that art.”<sup>70</sup> Robakowski suggested that this education in Polish symbolism “saved us from the socialist-realist world of everyday life. Those photos are simply not the reality in themselves, are detached from it.”<sup>71</sup>

Różycki’s images draws on these Polish artistic traditions. A black and white photograph of a pensive young girl standing by a well, is combined with various images pasted above her head, as if to represent her thoughts or dreams. These are colour images lifted from fashion magazines or advertisements are arranged in a strangely surreal composition: young women in fashionable clothing, men and women engaged in sports, appearing to dive towards a pair of red lips, and a bottle of red nail polish at the top of the frame. Images of youthful attractive bodies that have been put in service of commerce and advertising. A warning inscription written on the well – “Water not for drinking” – can be understood as a warning by Różycki against the temptations of these modern and consumer pleasures. Ewa Mazierska’s discussion on ‘small stabilisation’ also seems to support this theory; she stated that this period “was about the modesty of material aspirations of Poles, but also about consumption replacing cultural values.”<sup>72</sup>

Różycki increasingly incorporated ready-made objects into his collages. *Zatruta studnia* combined black and white prints with colourful clippings lifted from the pages of illustrated magazines, newspapers, advertisements but Różycki also used holy images, papier-mâché objects and dried plants, all pasted onto his photographs. Różycki snatched material from life, and the material that he quoted could be seen to derive from a Pop mentality, which “merged realms of high and low by quoting materials, fragments, motifs of mass culture.”<sup>73</sup> In *Chodzenie różnymi drogami* [Walking various paths], also exhibited in the 1968 *Subjective Photography* show, an angel was shown scattering real razor blades over Różycki’s self-portrait [III.7]. Robakowski noted, “In the late 1960s, Polish art still operated in specialised channels – the channel of music, of film, of

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<sup>70</sup> Danuta Ćwirko-Godycka, “Być z Józefem Robakowski” [Being with Józef Robakowski], *EXIT* no. 3 (July-September, 1990): 66-75.

<sup>71</sup> Piotr Lisowski, “Grupa ZERO-61. W poszukiwaniu języka fotograficznego.” (master’s thesis, Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń, 2007), n.p.

<sup>72</sup> Mazierska, *Jerzy Skolimowski. The Cinema of a Nonconformist*, 46.

<sup>73</sup> Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 131.

photography, of visual arts and so on.”<sup>74</sup> He recalled that there was “no room for joint, integrative media. This room had to be created.”<sup>75</sup>

In contrast, the Zeroists immersed themselves in other media. Wardak recognised the influence of literature in his work, particularly the evocative allusions and lyrical visions of the Young Polish Movement group of writers and the poetry of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, as well as existential alienation in the poetry of Edward Stachura, which Czartoryska acknowledged had “indirectly marked the tone of this generation.”<sup>76</sup> The Zeroists “predisposition” to this poetry was noted with curiosity by Czartoryska, who suggested it betrayed “significant emotional distress.”<sup>77</sup> The link between poetry and photography was particularly strong among the Zeroists. The poet Janusz Żernicki frequently collaborated with the group, his poems were exhibited alongside the Zeroists’s photographs in exhibitions and his poems appeared in almost all *Zero 61* exhibition catalogues. One work by Wardak even appropriated its title from the poetry of Żernicki.<sup>78</sup> This was not without precedent in Polish photography; we can recall that Dłubak had combined the poetry of Neruda with his abstract photographs in the late 1940s. Alongside exploring the link to poetry, the Zeroists also drew influence from film and performance, experimenting with different media, mixing genres and conventions. This radical, intermedial approach became characteristic of the *Zero 61* mentality. In exhibitions throughout the Sixties, the Zeroists incorporated elements of painting, assemblage, installation and performance. Różycki articulated his belief that “there are no exclusive rights to literature, painting and film. You need to use the help and experience of those arts where necessary. [...] I am not afraid to use and borrow materials seemingly foreign to photography. I am still searching.”<sup>79</sup>

#### *‘WARIACI’ I EGZALTOWANI* [‘Lunatics’ and exalted]

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<sup>74</sup> Józef Robakowski in Jan Kotłowski, *Toruńska grupa fotograficzna “Zero-61”: przypomnienie*, exhibition catalogue (Toruń: Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2001).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Czartoryska, “Identyfikacja zakwestionowana,” 20-24.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> The poem read: “Wśród mgły gdy nas zabraknie / Powrócą widma okrętów / Wzdłuż ziemi która okrągła / Więc bez celu daleka.”

<sup>79</sup> Andrzej Różycki, essay in *Kuźnia* [The Forge], exhibition catalogue (1969), n.p.

Two reviews were published in *Fotografia* in the immediate aftermath of the show: Czartoryska's favourably titled *Bardzo ważna wystawa* [A Very Significant Exhibition] and Wiesław Hudon's seeming pejoratively titled, *'Wariaci' i egzaltowani* ['Lunatics' and exalted], but in the following years references to the show appeared in more than a dozen texts.<sup>80</sup> Czartoryska acknowledged the show's importance and welcomed the diverse range of photographic experiments exhibited, but admonished photographers for two failings: "Two important things were missing, in my opinion, from the exhibition in Kraków: a more consistent blurring of lines (in the field of technology and photographic trace in the previously sacrosanct notion of uniqueness and autonomy of the individual work), and the introduction of bold, modern pulsating motifs of the present day."<sup>81</sup> Overwhelmingly in the exhibition, she also noted that photographers "did not depart from the sworn commandment of the single photograph on the wall."<sup>82</sup> Czartoryska "lamented" the "exclusive production and exhibition of 'easel' works of art, designed for interior gallery spaces."<sup>83</sup> She suggested that the unique art object to be framed and hung on the gallery wall, had lost its "raison d'être" and instead she called on photographers to "challenge the uniqueness, the stability, of two-dimensional works."<sup>84</sup> Czartoryska's review was written at a time when modes of exhibition were increasingly being sought by both artists and photographers. Traditional "salon" displays were "experiencing a crisis" and increasingly photographers attempted to "dynamise their displays" using different formats, different lighting, "enriched" by light or sound, "bringing together "complex spatial objects," assemblages, and "fun, sharp clashes of various objects."<sup>85</sup> An exhibition by the *Zero 61* group staged the following year picks up on a number of these themes and is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The one exception she highlighted was Dłubak's *Ikonosfera* [Iconosphere], the second version of an environmental photographic installation that had first been produced for a show at Galeria Współczesna in Warsaw a year earlier in February 1967 [III.8-9].

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<sup>80</sup> Other reviews included: Alfred Ligocki, "Niefortunne zmartwychwstanie," *Fotografia* 12 (1970): 267-9, 281-2; Józef Robakowski, "Mysliwi chwytajcie za strzelbyl," *Fotografia* 3 (1971): 55-6.

<sup>81</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, "Bardzo ważna wystawa" [A Very Significant Exhibition], *Fotografia* 11 no. 185 (November 1968): 244-252.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, "Czego fotografowie poszukują?" [What are photographers seeking?] *Fotografia* 6 (1971): 123-132; 138-140.

<sup>84</sup> Czartoryska, "Bardzo ważna wystawa," 244-252. The previous year in 1967 Czartoryska had published an article expressing her interest in exploring new ways in which to exhibit photography. Urszula Czartoryska "Przymierze," *Fotografia* 7 no. 181 (July 1968).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Czartoryska had previously struggled to describe the display: “it is difficult to find the right terms to describe it accurately. This was not an exhibition of photography, although there was photography exhibited. The photographs presented at the show were not self-constituted objects of contemplation: rather they fulfilled their purpose as a whole, in their various ways of installation, various scales and their architectural labyrinth system.”<sup>86</sup> Large scale nude photographs of Dłubak’s wife from his earlier series *Egzystencje* [Existences] (1959-1967) were hung loosely in a narrow corridor, affixed to the walls by their upper edges, the prints undulating in a breeze created by a fan in the corridor.<sup>87</sup> The prints were densely stacked, overlapping, creating a curtain of bodies. The viewer’s experience of the work necessarily changed. The installation incorporated a tactile dimension, as the photographs brushed against the viewer’s body as they passed through the corridor. The materiality of the print was emphasised; the photograph presented not just as image, but also as a physical object. The final wall of the exhibition featured a life size mural of silhouettes of the female body, created by direct contact of the body on photosensitive paper. Czartoryska described how “photography can provide a tangible trace of the body,” a theme that is explored in more detail in the following chapter.<sup>88</sup>

Jerzy Lewczyński remembered *Ikonosfera* as an “unprecedented form of exhibition” whose meaning “was keenly debated.”<sup>89</sup> Certainly Dłubak’s *Ikonosfera* possessed a scopophilic undertone; the male artist photographing the female form and using it as part of a tactile spatial environment.<sup>90</sup> Ronduda has retrospectively suggested that *Ikonosfera* could also be understood as a comment on the visual landscape of the PRL. This appears to have been a pressing issue in these years, as the Polish theorist Mieczysław Porębski also published a text on the “Iconosphere” in 1972.<sup>91</sup> The term refers to man’s entire visual environment; the ‘iconosphere’ as a complex and immersive space that incorporates all elements of the visual landscape. Within this space, images compete

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<sup>86</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, “Ikonosfera,” *Fotografia* 5 no. 167 (May 1967): 101-103.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Jerzy Lewczyński, *Antologia fotografii polskiej: 1839-1989* [Anthology of Polish Photography: 1839-1989] (Bielsko-Biała: Wydawnictwo LUCRUM, cop. 1999), 122.

<sup>90</sup> Dłubak stated: “It is a matter not only of form but also of certain feelings, certain psychological processes associated with the response to the female body. As a man I react to them in a very specific way, if a woman did these photographs, then would probably be quite different.” (Zbigniew Dłubak, interview with Hanna Maria Giza. Accessed April 24, 2017.

[http://www.rosikonpress.com/wywiad\\_435/Zbigniew\\_Dlubak.html?Personalizuj%5BWaluta%5D=2](http://www.rosikonpress.com/wywiad_435/Zbigniew_Dlubak.html?Personalizuj%5BWaluta%5D=2))

<sup>91</sup> Mieczysław Porębski, *Ikonosfera* [Iconosphere] (Warsaw: PIW, 1972).

against each other in order to attract the attention of the viewer.<sup>92</sup> Ronduda suggested that Dłubak's installation "replicated and condensed the aggressive and omnipresent nature of the photographic images that fill the public sphere," creating a space for "the photographic image to do its work of persuasion."<sup>93</sup> Interpreted in this way, Dłubak's *Ikonosfera* can be understood as a statement on the abundance and pervasiveness of visual imagery that assaulted the Polish viewer on a daily basis, an attempt to draw attention to the mechanisms at work in the totality of the visual sphere.

While Czartoryska found elements of the 1968 exhibition engaging, she also expressed her reservations over the "fatal" title chosen for the exhibition. Czartoryska questioned the value of Łagocki and Dłubak's re-activation of a style of photography that had been initiated by Steinert nearly two decades previously. Steinert in 1949 had articulated the need for a photography that served 'the demands of our time'; two decades later, the political, social and cultural landscape had changed. Czartoryska challenged the belief that this position of subjectivity was still alive in the Sixties, recognising that in 1968, "photography is something completely different from a dozen years ago."<sup>94</sup> What was the value in aligning Polish photography in 1968 with a trend that had reached its apogee in the 1950s, especially at a time when photography was being radically overhauled? I suggested earlier in this chapter that the turn to overt construction, manipulation and formalism could be linked to the period of 'small stabilisation' in the early 1960s. I also suggested that for Różycki in particular, imaginative darkroom manipulations allowed an articulation of traumas that had been passed down from previous generations. For Czartoryska, writing in 1968, reflection along these lines was not possible. Instead, she suggested that this "provincial Kraków manifestation" had "closed once and for all these explorations of a purely aesthetic character."<sup>95</sup>

The photographer and art critic Wiesław Hudon also wrote a review of the show for *Fotografia* which was published in December 1968, the month after Czartoryska's article. Hudon exclaimed that the "exalted photo-salon has found itself in a phase of apogee," and

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<sup>92</sup> Roman Gubern has described the 'Iconosphere' as "a socio-holistic concept: social, in what concerns the behaviour of the audience, socialising the human vision, subject to a daily pedagogy and 'inculcation', and holistic for the interactions among the different iconic media." See Roman Gubern, "The Iconosphere and the New Mekanographic Media," in *Advances in Visual Semiotics: The Semiotic Web 1992-1993*, eds. Thomas A. Seboek, Roland Posner and Alain Rey (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 644.

<sup>93</sup> Łukasz Ronduda, *Polish Art of the 70s* (Warszawa: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski, 2009), 213.

<sup>94</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, "Bardzo ważna wystawa," *Fotografia* 11 no. 185 (November 1968): 244-252.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

concluded that “denial is the order of the day.”<sup>96</sup> The title *‘Wariaci’ i egzaltowani* traced a lineage back to another exhibition Dłubak had helped to organise: the *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej* [First Exhibition of Modern Art] in Warsaw in 1948, discussed in the first chapter, which critics at the time had labelled an ‘exhibition of lunatics’. Hudon drew attention to the way in which the 1948 exhibition had demonstrated “a parallelism of certain trends between Polish and global photography movements,” notably a shared tendency towards abstract and surrealist imagery. Twenty years had passed since this show, but the 1968 exhibition repeated similar ideas, showing mostly surrealist, poetic work with echoes of symbolist painting. Hudon emphasised, “this does not mean that between 1948 and 1968, between the two exhibitions, we can put an equals sign. After all the way we think has changed since that time.”<sup>97</sup> While Dłubak’s *Ikonosfera* offered some optimism for the future, he questioned using “the old language of montage” at a time when “many outstanding works” were pursuing “a new language.”<sup>98</sup> Hudon outlined his “boredom” with the type of work, which no longer “makes any impression on us.”<sup>99</sup> He stated, “The ideas of the avant-garde are now firmly established in our everyday experience of art, photography, poetry and we are the richer for these experiences. A surreal imagination is present even today in our everyday life, in everyday language and absurd humour, children’s drawings and urban street graffiti.”<sup>100</sup> Hudon questioned the value of rehashing this type of imagery two decades later:

our lives are richer than it and we demand the formulation of problems corresponding to the new way of thinking and new aesthetics. If art does not precede life, does not articulate the problems that have not yet been spoken, does not develop a new sensitivity, then this art work - creativity does not exist at all, and turns into ornamental activity and ceases to have any meaning.<sup>101</sup>

Hudon advocated a search for new ‘lunatics’ of the present day, who could respond to and re-activate the current climate; “this is where optimism for the future must lie.”<sup>102</sup> He surmised, “Now we have a right to expect no more new surveys, new collective

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<sup>96</sup> Wiesław Hudon, “‘Wariaci’ i egzaltowani” [‘Lunatics’ and exalted], *Fotografia* 12 no. 186 (December 1968): 266-276.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

exhibitions of subjective photography, but a large series of thoughtful individual exhibitions, because only such exhibitions are able to show a new face of Polish photography.”<sup>103</sup> He concluded his review by emphatically stating, “the boldest projects in Kraków herald - I stress this emphatically - a new way of thinking in photography. And in order that after the next twenty years, we do not open a new exhibition of subjective photographs, we must realize that this new way of thinking cannot be for us any experiment, trial, or other luxury. It is simply a necessity.”<sup>104</sup>

The next section of this chapter looks closely at a particularly provocative exhibition organised independently by the *Zero 61* group in the ruins of an abandoned blacksmith's workshop which does outline a new way of thinking about photography. The 1968 exhibition in Kraków had made clear to certain members of the group the need to move away from “creative eclecticism,” “unnecessary decorativeness [...] or complete confusion of concepts.”<sup>105</sup> Several of the Zeroists had been students of Dłubak, and enjoyed a good relationship with him, but Robakowski later stated, “we could not forgive him for the title of the exhibition in Kraków – as the concept of ‘subjective photography’ had already been too long promulgated.”<sup>106</sup> Their exhibition in 1969 brings together several of the themes sparked by Czartoryska and Hudon's reviews: an intermedial approach to art making; the turn to environmental displays of photography; and a different understanding of photography premised on the notion of the index that makes manifest traces of the body.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Józef Robakowski, “Proces kształtowania się polskiej neoawangardy FOTOGRAFIA – FILM (1946-1969),” in *Grupa Fotograficzna Zero-61*, exhibition catalogue (Toruń: Muzeum Okręgowym, 1986), 10.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

## FORGE

One of the most vociferous critics of the 1968 *Fotografia Subiektywna* [Subjective Photography] show had been Józef Robakowski, a young photographer from the *Zero 61* group whose work had featured in the exhibition. Robakowski voiced strong concerns about the exhibition, labelling it a “provincial Kraków manifestation,” a “fatal” show that made clear the need to end “once and for all [...] explorations of a purely aesthetic character.”<sup>107</sup> For Robakowski, the show’s “modest artistic practice at the end of the 1960s looked like child’s play, banal and trivial. It was necessary after such a [second-rate] exhibition as *Fotografia Subiektywna* to finally change the style of action.” He did concede that “from a historical point of view, this was an important event,” but only in so far as the exhibition “could serve as a springboard from which one must jump off as soon as possible.”<sup>108</sup> The following year, the *Zero 61* group staged their own group exhibition in Toruń. This was to prove a very different presentation to the show Dłubak and Łagocki had organised the previous year. The Zeroists exhibited their work in the ruins of an abandoned blacksmith’s forge, after which the show was titled: *Kuźnia* [Forge]. As a location, the blacksmith’s workshop possessed certain connotations that help to decipher the Zeroists intentions; it is a place in which material is made malleable and transformed through effort or expenditure. The exhibition was intended to be scandalous, a deliberate provocation, a tactic that the Zeroists had been honing in the past eight years of the group’s existence. The critic Urszula Czartoryska attended the show and later reflected: “In 1969, the group invited the whole Polish photographic community to see an exhibition of prints that had been crumpled, deformed and rolled up [...] This exhibition and the discussions around it were another phase in the process of undermining classical standards of artistic photography.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Józef Robakowski, “Moje multimedialne peregrynacje ... + 5 obrazów i kilka autodygresji” [My multimedia peregrinations ... + 5 images and some digressions] in *Odwaga Patrzenia: eseje o fotografii* ed. Tomasz Ferenc. (Łódź: Fundacja Edukacji Wizualnej), 16.

<sup>108</sup> Józef Robakowski, “Proces kształtowania się polskiej neoawangardy FOTOGRAFIA – FILM (1946-1969),” 10.

<sup>109</sup> Urszula Czartoryska, *Fotografia polska: featuring original masterworks from public and private collections in Poland, 1839-1945, and a selection of avant-garde photography, film, and video from 1945 to the present*, exhibition catalogue (New York: International Center of Photography, 1979), 38.



In this chapter, I pull out various strands from the *Kuźnia* exhibition to understand the impulses driving the Zeroists to stage such an incendiary show. The works exhibited can be understood to reference specific traumatic events in the late 1960s. It also makes evident a tension between the de-materialisation of the art object and an insistent re-materialisation of the banal everyday object. The show therefore marks a transition from the photographs of traces made by photographers in the 1950s, discussed in the second chapter, to manifesting those traces as physical objects. A number of these objects can be understood to operate photographically, exploring the medium's indexical nature in an attempt to make contact with absent bodies. *Kuźnia* therefore makes evident a search for a different form in which to express traces of trauma, which prioritises an investment in the index.

The group *Zero 61* was founded on the joint initiative of Józef Robakowski and Jerzy Wardak. Membership of the group changed over the years, but the longest serving members alongside the two founders were Czesław Kuchta and Andrzej Różycki [III.10].<sup>110</sup> The group never wrote a defining artistic statement or manifesto in explicit terms; instead the Zeroists constituted a peculiar constellation of artistic personalities, with each member possessing their own artistic individuality, their own vision and their own aesthetic proposals. What united the group, according to Piotr Lisowski, was a shared sense of “defiance and rebellion against the existing practice of art.”<sup>111</sup> Zeroist Jan Kotłowski noted how the group did not wish to identify with “‘official’ exhibitions opened (with the obligatory participation of the so-called ‘officials’),” nor did they wish to create “classic work ‘hung on rope,’” or “‘pretty’ pictures, traditional pictures.”<sup>112</sup> The critic Juliusz Garztecki recalled how the group used the slogan “Gardzielewska will cry!” to symbolize their opposition to the type of work being created by Janina Gardzielewska, an art photographer working in Toruń, who enjoyed popularity in the sixties mostly photographing landscapes or cityscapes.<sup>113</sup> In contrast, the group sought to consolidate a

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<sup>110</sup> Original members were Czesław Kuchta, Roman Chomicz, Wiesław Wojczulanis and Lucjan Oczkowski. Later, the composition changed: Oczkowski, Wojczulanis and Chomicz left the group and Andrew Różycki, Roman Dabek, Michael Kokot, Wojciech Bruszewski, John Siennik and Antoni Mikołajczyk joined. The longest serving and most active members of the group were Kuchta, Józef Robakowski and Jerzy Wardak.

<sup>111</sup> Lisowski, “Grupa ZERO-61. W poszukiwaniu języka fotograficznego,” n.p.

<sup>112</sup> Jan Kotłowski, *Toruńska grupa fotograficzna “Zero-61”: przypomnienie*, exhibition catalogue (Toruń: Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2001), 12.

<sup>113</sup> Juliusz Garztecki, “Plotka o Zerowach” [Tales of the Zeroists], unpublished manuscript, courtesy of the author. Gardzielewska mostly photographed landscapes or cityscapes in and around Toruń, taking in

confrontational attitude against this ossified approach to traditional artistic photography, and set out with an “uncompromising attitude” to make fresh, innovative work.<sup>114</sup>

The Polish *Zero 61* group overlapped chronologically with the German *Zero* Group, which were founded in 1957 upon the initiative of Heinz Mack together with Otto Piene, disbanding in 1966. The reason for invoking this link is that both groups shared a number of defining characteristics, which will be pulled out in relation to the Zeroists in different strands of this chapter. Both groups possessed a similar mode of collaborative practice; in 1964 Otto Piene insisted,

There is no president, no leader, no secretary; there are no ‘members’, there is only a human relationship among several artists and an artistic relationship among different individuals. The partners in Zero exhibitions are always changing. There is no obligation to take part, no ‘should’ or ‘must’ [...] For me the essence of teamwork is the chance for a synthesis of different personal ideas. This synthesis might be richer than the few ideas which a single artist usually is able to investigate.<sup>115</sup>

Their iconoclastic outlook on art can be also compared with the later Polish Zeroists. In 1958 Heinz Mack spoke of an art that “unexpectedly disturbs our common sense and provoked in us an uncommonly critical attitude;”<sup>116</sup> while the need to abandon traditional art forms and materials was voiced by Otto Piene in 1961: “The pictures of the old world were equipped with heavy frames, the viewer was forced into the picture, pressed as though through a tube, he had to make himself small to see into this channel; he was brought low to experience the realm of art. Man stood in chains in front of the old pictures and palaces.”<sup>117</sup> Otto Piene commented on the choice of name for the group, “From the beginning we looked upon the term not as an expression of nihilism – or a dada-like gag, but as a word indicating a zone of silence and of pure possibilities for a new beginning as at the count-down when rockets take off – zero is the incommensurable

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historical buildings, squares, streets, but she also photographed theatrical productions. Her work sometimes featured in *Fotografia* magazine.

<sup>114</sup> Lucjan Oszkowski, in *The activity of the artistic group Zero-61 as a form of self-education in the student circle of Torun in the 1960s*. DVD.

<sup>115</sup> Otto Piene, “The Development the Group “ZERO,”” in *The Times Literary Supplement* (London, 1964); Reprint Heinz Mack und Otto Piene, *ZERO 1-3* (Cologne 1973): 46.

<sup>116</sup> Heinz Mack, “The New Dynamic Structure,” in *ZERO 1* (Düsseldorf 1958); Reprint Heinz Mack and Otto Piene, *ZERO 1-3* (Cologne 1973), 14.

<sup>117</sup> Otto Piene, “Paths to paradise,” in *ZERO 3* (Düsseldorf 1958); Mack and Piene *ZERO 1-3*, 148.

zone in which the old state turns into the new.”<sup>118</sup> Heinz Mack, speaking retrospectively expanded,

ZERO itself sought new answers to new questions, everything seeming to have already been thought, done and said [...] we were goaded on by the question, how could we make a fresh start, having resolved irreversibly that we would abandon the old, secure niches. We were motivated to take on the crisis in order to overcome it by creative means. [...] The zero-point that was ZERO’s premise was a piece of fiction by which we hoped to be able to overcome ossified matrices of thinking and seeing, in favour of a more open world. We wanted, and had to, forsake the familiar territories in order to seek out new spaces whose coordinates were unknown. In these wayless spaces only the way was the goal. There were times when ZERO was animated by this spirit.<sup>119</sup>

The Polish Zeroists were an extremely pro-active group, collectively organising nineteen exhibitions, on average twice a year, and they participated individually in many more.<sup>120</sup> In 1966 the Zeroists contributed to an exhibition organised by another Toruń student group, *Krąg* [Circle], which registered as a particularly iconoclastic presentation. Robakowski described the exhibition as follows:

In front of Artus Court they hung a large wheel as a symbol [...] the door opened and in a large historical building was revealed the exhibition project of K. Pęcińskiego, who used beams lying in the yard for scaffolding and out of them ‘built’ a mattress on which the works of artists were exhibited: graphic designers, sculptors, painters, photographers and the work of the poet J. Żernickiego [presented as] boards of texts. In this circumstance, absurd objects were also

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<sup>118</sup> Otto Piene, “The Development the Group “ZERO,” 46.

<sup>119</sup> “What Took Place Between 1958 And 1966?” Accessed April 17, 2017, <http://www.zerofoundation.de/statements.html>

<sup>120</sup> The group organised a Festival of Student Art Photography in Toruń in May 1962. Robakowski, Wardak, Wolczulanis, Kuchta, Oczkowski and Chomicz were exhibited in October 1962 in Toruń as part of a show titled *Landscape*. The Zeroists frequently exhibited their work in Od Nowa [From the New], a student club, concert venue, theatre and gallery in Toruń, belonging to the Nicolaus Copernicus University. The group also exhibited their work abroad: Wardak participated in a 1963 international exhibition in Scotland organised by the Edinburgh Photographic Society; the following year group members were permitted to travel to France. Robakowski participated in the International Photographic Exhibition in Moscow, winning a prize for which he received a movie camera. In 1966, Wardak and Kuchta were exhibited in Canada, at the International Exhibition of Student Photography in Winnipeg.

‘inserted’ [...] stuffed birds, a two-headed calf, a vertebra/skeleton of a whale, and other curiosities.<sup>121</sup>

This multi-sensory and multi-disciplinary show was filled with various oddities, presenting what Robakowski has described as “a cabinet of absurdities.”<sup>122</sup> The show opened on April 1, a date that signalled the playfulness of its intent. Alongside the assembled objects, spontaneous actions and events occurred. At the opening, Kuchta recalled, “a real, street gypsy band played,” “bells” were struck in the nearby church, “sirens” were sounded, and a bugle was played from the Toruń tower.<sup>123</sup> Robakowski recalled how “these exhibitions were like quasi-theatrical happenings, with all kinds of actions, ‘tricks’, transforming exhibition presentations into spectacles.”<sup>124</sup> The show attracted nationwide interest; a review in *Gazeta Kujawska* by the critic Marcel Bacciarelli stated: “the opening took place exactly on April 1, and the reactions will be possible to predict. Here is a student prank. [...] Any impression that this was just tomfoolery disappeared immediately upon entering the room, which gave the impression of a serious encounter with art.”<sup>125</sup>

The daringness of the *Kraq* exhibition impressed itself in the mentality of the Zeroists and future activities of the group took on a decidedly “ludic” and spontaneous tone. Kuchta suggested that the most important element of *Zero 61* activity was “fun, and our artistic demonstrations largely assumed a playful character.”<sup>126</sup> For Robakowski, the work from this period was “connected with the idea of playing – of searching in that rather dull Polish reality for the cheerful, the absurd, the fantastic.”<sup>127</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin’s celebration of the carnivalesque can be summoned when analysing the work of the *Zero 61* group. Bakhtin understood the carnivals of medieval Europe as liberating occasions when the

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<sup>121</sup> Józef Robakowski, in Lisowski, “Grupa ZERO-61,” n.p.

<sup>122</sup> Józef Robakowski in conversation with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *Józef Robakowski: My Own Cinema*, ed., Bożena Czubak (Warschau: Adam Mickiewicz Institute, 2012), 17.

<sup>123</sup> Kuchta quoted in Lisowski, “Grupa ZERO-61. W poszukiwaniu języka fotograficznego,” n.p.

<sup>124</sup> Józef Robakowski cited in Karol Sienkiewicz, “Józef Robakowski,” 2008. Accessed April 24, 2017. [http://www.culture.pl/en/culture/artykuly/os\\_robakowski\\_jozef](http://www.culture.pl/en/culture/artykuly/os_robakowski_jozef)

<sup>125</sup> Marcel Bacciarelli. *Gazeta Kujawska*. It was only after this 1966 exhibition that critics began to pay the Zeroists serious attention. The first mention of Zero 61 had been in an article written by the critic Juliusz Garztecki in the monthly *Kultura* [Culture] magazine on “the phenomenon of the amateur group from Toruń.” Garztecki exclaimed that “In Toruń something alive is growing!” and questioned why “ZPAF up to this point had not invited them into the ranks of the association. They would be a valuable injection of young, fresh blood,” (Juliusz Garztecki, “Fenomenon Zero-6” *Kultura*, no.9 (1966).) Robakowski, Kuchta, Wardak and Różycki were invited to join ZPAF in 1966.

<sup>126</sup> Kuchta in Lisowski, “Grupa ZERO-61,” n.p.

<sup>127</sup> Robakowski, in Czubak *Józef Robakowski*, 13-14; 17.

political, legal, and ideological authority of the church and state were temporarily inverted for the duration of the festivities, when these institutions had little power to control the revellers. The wider significance of the carnival for Bakhtin was that it cleared the way for a ‘carnavalesque’ spirit to enter public discourse and to pave the way for overturning oppressive structures and subverting traditional hierarchies. The carnival, according to Bakhtin, “celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.”<sup>128</sup> Turning the world on its head, suspending daily routines and putting to one side traditional rules, was accomplished in a spirit of humour and chaos in which “eccentric behaviour” could be revealed without fear of reprisals or punishment. Above all, the carnival spirit cleared the way for a new order, a new outlook on the world and “the creation of a completely new order of things.”<sup>129</sup>

#### PHOTOGRAPHY DEGRADED

In 1969 the *Zero 61* members staged an exhibition of photography within an abandoned, dilapidated blacksmith’s workshop located at 32 Podmurnej Street in the city of Toruń [III.11].<sup>130</sup> The ideas initiated in the *Kraq* exhibitions were taken up and in a sense culminated in this 1969 presentation. Forms of exhibition display were interrogated, elements of spontaneous playfulness were incorporated, and, as the Polish critic Juliusz Garztecki recognised, the Zeroists “cut a personal path across recognised convention and authority.”<sup>131</sup> The *Kuźnia* show was clearly intended to continue the spirit of the Artus Court exhibition: outside the 1966 *Kraq* exhibition in Artus Court a wooden wheel had been hung on the front of the building; in this 1969 exhibition a metal ring was also hung from an iron support above the entrance in the courtyard [III.12].

<sup>128</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. I. Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), 10.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 34. The Polish critic Jan Świdziński suggests in a 1971 article published in *Projekt* that the art of exhibition is in itself playful and carnivalesque. Taking as his starting point nineteenth century competitions for national pavilions, he suggested that the exhibition itself is a form of play, contradicting the seriousness of normal behaviour, transgressing the boundaries of everyday life into the sphere of temporary activity with its unique tendencies. (“Świdziński. Kategorie wystawiennicze” ‘PROJEKT’ no.1 (1971): 45-47.)

<sup>130</sup> Many photographs documenting the Forge exhibition survive, including photographs by Anna Chojnačka, Elizabeth Teichman, Andrzej Rozycki and Jerzy Lewczyński. *Retrospective exhibition restaging the Kuźnia that opened in 2010 in Toruń and Zero 61 exhibition in 2016 Lodz.*

<sup>131</sup> Juliusz Garztecki, *Kultura*, 1971.

The name of the show – *Kuźnia* – described the very building in which the exhibition was staged, an old blacksmith’s workshop. The show annexed the entire space of the building, spanning both the dilapidated interior and an exterior cobbled courtyard, enclosed from the street by a crumbling brick wall. At the top of the building, a chimney rose from the roof, daubed with ‘O 61’ in white paint - a reference to the name of the group which had commandeered the space. A wooden door made of uneven planks served as the entrance into *Kuźnia*, within which a small opening framed the visitor’s initial view into the space. In the middle of the courtyard stood a dark woollen overcoat tinged with white, which appeared to stand, somewhat miraculously, without the aid of a body to fill it [III.11-12]. Titled *Plasz matki* [Mother’s Coat], Robakowski had hung an old coat on a clothes hanger, and filled it with plaster to produce a solid shape that could stand upright on its own accord. Facing out onto the street, the exterior wall featured a photograph that served as the exhibition’s publicity poster, a portrait featuring five family members in a picturesque garden, with mother and father seated, and three children (one girl, two boys) standing around them in formation. The clothes they wear suggest the image is not contemporary, corroborated by an inspection of the print which appears to have been created from an old glass negative; some of the surface emulsion in the lower right hand corner has worn away. This was the first photographic work the visitors would have seen before entering the exhibition; it was enlarged and pinned to the exterior wall with the added graphic *Wystawa grupy zero 61* [Exhibition group Zero 61]. The interior of the space brought together photographs that had been created throughout the group’s eight year existence.

The manner in which this material was presented was radically different from traditional exhibitions of ‘salon’ photography. Photographs were exhibited in both the interior and the exterior courtyard of the forge, exposed to the elements [III.13-17]. The interior space was divided into two floors. At ground level, an uneven floor was littered with woodchips, bricks and rubble, and photographs were printed and hung on the walls of the exposed brickwork. Rather than being mounted, framed and hung in neat formation, the prints were exhibited without frames or support. Prints by Andrzej Różycki were tacked to pieces of dowelling mounted to interior walls, the bottom edges of the prints left unsupported, causing the photographs to twist and curl. A photograph by Antoni Mikołacyzk was pasted to the ceiling, causing the viewer to look upwards, to see plaster flaking away to reveal the wooden floorboards of the level above. Further images by

Robakowski and Wojciech Bruszewski were installed upstairs, including two portraits propped up against a beam at floor level in which figures were deformed by the addition of chemicals in the darkroom. Further photographic works were chaotically hung from rafters, strewn on the floor, leant against walls, glued to rotten planks of wood or thrown on top of piles of rubble. Works could be touched, moved or walked over by visitors in the space. Photographs were also integrated with the architecture of the space; a collection of passport sized photographs by Bruszewski were multiplied and pasted diagonally in rows onto a wooden door.

This was an exhibition of photography, but the photographs were displayed alongside objects constructed from 'ready-made' materials found on site: a broom, torn rags, and a shovel were all exhibited as art works in their own right. The objects salvaged from the site were mostly displayed as they were found. A rake leant against a wall could be picked up and used to rake the debris around the courtyard. These objects were interspersed with further detritus, planks of wood stacked against walls and piles of rubble. These everyday objects were presented alongside art objects: photographs, found objects as sculpture, assemblage works, even the architecture of the building. Names of the artists were sometimes painted underneath the works exhibited around the *Kuźnia*. The photograph *Listopad* [November] was attached to a rotting door, half fallen off its hinges, on which the author was acknowledged by an arrow in white paint pointing to the artist's name "A.RÓŻYCKI" sloppily scrawled in capitals on the wood below [III.19]. When a name was not given, the artist could be deduced by consulting a key that hung next to the main entrance, which allowed visitors to identify the author of each work.<sup>132</sup>

One work seemed to make clear Robakowski's conception for the exhibition. A pane-less window frame was attached by its side edge to an exterior wall, protruding out into the space of the courtyard and purposefully framing a view within the space for the visitor [III.20]. This work seems to be intended, within the context of a photography exhibition, to self-reflexively refer to the way in which a camera frames and extracts a view from any given scene. Robakowski has suggested that the show was not just meant to be an exhibition of photography, but also a space in which objects were to be photographed, a call to photographers to take up their cameras and frame their own views within the

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<sup>132</sup> A different colour of paint was assigned to each author, so their works could be recognised from the colour of the paint that was daubed underneath their work. From the surviving black and white documentary photographs from the exhibition - Bruszewski was dark grey, Robakowski black, Rozycki white and so on.

space.<sup>133</sup> This instruction seems to have been heeded; numerous photographs taken at the opening of the exhibition show visitors – including the photographers Jerzy Lewczyński, Elzbieta Tejchman and Andrzej Różycki – photographing the space with their own cameras [III.21]. With this exhibition, the Zeroists hoped “to broaden the frontiers of photography and to transgress them.”<sup>134</sup> This was certainly a very different presentation to the type of exhibition visitors would have been accustomed to seeing in immaculate gallery presentations of photography. The overall impression was raw, brutal, and decidedly anti-aesthetic. Photographic critics reviewing the show struggled to understand the photographic element of the exhibition. They described the show as a “degradation,” a “negation” or, to quote Czartoryska, a “humiliation” of photography.<sup>135</sup>

Robakowski’s keenness to ‘break away’ from the 1968 *Fotografia Subiektywna* exhibition was partly motivated by an anti-institutional impulse. For Robakowski and the Zeroists, the aesthetics being espoused by ZPAF and promoted in officially sponsored exhibitions had become too implicated with the priorities of the governing authorities. The *Fotografia Subiektywna* show belonged to the tradition of large state-financed shows organised by the National Art and Photography associations, associations which were themselves controlled by the Ministry of Culture. Other artistic open air events and symposia initiated during the 1960s – such as at Puławy, Osieki or Elbląg – also belonged to this tradition, organised by the state or funded by state-run companies, enlisting prominent artists to give credence to the state’s supposedly lenient cultural policy.<sup>136</sup> It is within this claustrophobic environment of “strictly rationed” artistic freedom that Ewa Tatar has suggested “types of self-governed deviations appeared.”<sup>137</sup> Robakowski noted, “To distribute our artistic ideas that were created outside of professional official circulation we had to create an absolutely new independent scene.”<sup>138</sup> Robakowski, in

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<sup>133</sup> Karol Sienkiewicz, “Józef Robakowski,” *Culture.pl*, accessed April 28, 2017, <http://culture.pl/en/artist/jozef-robakowski>

<sup>134</sup> Lisowski, “Grupa ZERO-61,” n.p.

<sup>135</sup> Czartoryska, “Identyfikacja zakwestionowana,” 24.

<sup>136</sup> The openness of Polish authorities towards such manifestations concealed a strategy of the PZPR to earn the trust of artists whilst at the same time allowing them to appropriate artists’ energy to support the Party’s own position. (See ‘Art in the Changing World — Puławy 1966 at Wrocław Contemporary Museum 20.6.13–23.9.13) Muzeumwspolczesne.pl. Accessed April 19, 2017. (<http://muzeumwspolczesne.pl/mwww/kalendarium/wydarzenie-specjalne/sztuka-w-zmieniajacym-sie-swiecie-pulawy-1966/?lang=en>.)

<sup>137</sup> Ewa Malgorzata Tatar, “Polish women artists on femininity, what is public, and exhibition/gallery space in the 1970s,” *Tranzit.org*. Accessed April 24, 2017. <http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/essays/ewa-malgorzata-tatar-instytut-sztuki-wyspa-polish-women-artists-on-femininity-what-is-public-and-exhibitiongallery-space-in-the-1970s>

<sup>138</sup> Robakowski, “Moje multimedialne peregrynacje ...” 15-16.



particular, felt the need “to consciously abandon the official state scene rather than strive for it” and vocalised his intentions to turn to “irrelevant” and “private gestures” in search of “a sense of freedom” against “POWER/AUTHORITY.”<sup>139</sup>

In response, the Zeroists moved outside of the transitional museum and gallery space and staged their show directly in the public domain. The Zeroists had been experimenting with alternative exhibition spaces since the early 1960s – book shops, students spaces, university buildings. With *Kuźnia*, the Zeroists removed themselves altogether from both the art world context and the university framework in favour of situating the exhibition directly in a suburban street, open and exposed to the elements, outside of the protective enclave afforded by a gallery space. As Robakowski acknowledged: “It was amazing that photography was taken into the backyard. It was amazing it happened in an abandoned *Kuźnia*. These were incredibly important acts back then.”<sup>140</sup>

Taking place over two days (10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> May, 1969) *Kuźnia* was timed to coincide with a national symposium organised by ZPAF in the city of Toruń, dedicated to celebrating the mutual influence of art and photography. *Kuźnia* was not part of the official program, it was rather a small student presentation staged concurrently in a rundown building in the city centre, but the coincidental timing meant the exhibition was well attended by the influx of artists and critics travelling to the city for the symposium. Photographs from the opening event show figures such as Czartoryska and Lewczyński among the assembled crowd of visitors. The timing also coincided with another series of exhibitions staged at Zachęta gallery in Warsaw in 1969, part of a propaganda program to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the communist regime in Poland. One display at Zachęta surveyed the past twenty-five years of photography in the PRL, largely through images of modern urban landscapes. Another display featured Sempolinki’s photographs of ruins, mentioned in my first chapter, melancholic images which were intended to communicate the extent to which the city of Warsaw had changed during two and a half decades of Soviet rule.<sup>141</sup> In contrast, the Zeroists staged their exhibition within a physical ruin, which spoke more of decay and social decline than optimistic transformation.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> See Magdalena Wróblewska, “Warsaw photographed: time, place and memory,” *Image [& Narrative]* 23, 2008. Accessed April 19, 2017.  
<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/timeandphotography/wroblewska.htm>

The politics of space was touched upon in the first chapter, discussing Dłubak's series of *Krajobrazach* [Landscapes]. If public areas in the PRL were to display the power and the success of the PZPR reforms, then the location the Zeroists chose for their exhibition suggests a bold statement of critique. Their chosen location was a blacksmith's workshop that had long been abandoned and left to decay, with bricks crumbling and window frames missing panes of glass. Rather than celebrating Poland's industrial transformation and resurrection in the twenty-five years since the war, the Zeroists chose a space that highlighted the decline of Polish industry at a time when Gomułka's overspending on heavy industry had led to economic losses for the country. The suggestion of social decline was also reiterated in the street outside the walls enclosing the forge; documentary photographs from the opening of the show reveal grey monotonous streets, roads in need of maintenance, buildings facades in a state of disrepair with stained exteriors and crumbling plasterwork, and reconstruction attempts still incomplete. If the choice of location was meant to articulate the Zeroists' sentiments on the economic and political poverty of 1960s Poland, then the ruined space of the Kuźnia, filled with detritus, provided a fairly bleak and pessimistic outlook. Reviewing the exhibition in a later article surveying the work of the Zeroists, Czartoryska suggested that it was not only the photographic works that had been humiliated, but that "the whole artistic procedure has become a metaphor for a far wider notion of the incompatibility, the maladjustment of life and civilisation, of the individual and his environment. It has become a metaphor for the incoherence of life as a whole."<sup>142</sup>

It was not just the politics of space that the Zeroists were interrogating, but also the very concept of exhibition display. A lineage for this can be traced back to the 1959 *Pokaz zamknięty* [Closed Show] in Gliwice, and the move towards multi-sensory environmental art had become a pressing issue for certain Polish artists and critics in the late 1960s.<sup>143</sup> The objections Urszula Czartoryska raised in her review of the *Fotografia Subiektywna* exhibition largely touched upon the unadventurous and reactionary nature of the 1968

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<sup>142</sup> Czartoryska, "Identyfikacja zakwestionowana," 24.

<sup>143</sup> Urszula Czartoryska cited a trajectory for expanded exhibition forms in Poland that included the 1966 Symposium of Artists and Scientists at Puławy in which the Polish artist Feliks Falk created a cramped maze made from fibreboard adorned with a frieze of banal advertising and reportage images. Czartoryska also cited another 1967 undertaking, Zbigniew Gostomski's *Environment*, a display which embraced the whole of the Foksal Gallery interior. (Urszula Czartoryska, "Czego fotografowie poszukują?" [What are photographers seeking?] *Fotografia* 6 (1971): 123-132; 138-140. Another self-consciously titled *Environment* arranged by Zdzisław Jurkiewicz in 1969 at Gallery Współczesna in Wrocław saw irregular forms and undulating surfaces made from cardboard placed around the gallery which was steeped in a pulsating red and blue light.

Kraków show, which she believed had not done enough to acknowledge these developments towards environmental installations. In contrast, *Kuźnia* appeared to fulfil the criteria of an ‘environment’ offered by Susan Sontag, a term that had come into circulation in the late 1950s to designate artistic spaces that the viewer could enter: “this environment typically is messy or disorderly and crowded in the extreme, constructed of some materials which are chosen for their abused, dirty and dangerous condition.”<sup>144</sup> The Zeroists had long been experimenting with exhibition display. In a 1965 exhibition staged in a courtyard at Toruń University they deployed photographs of trees and shrubs in the recesses of windows, on wooden benches, on steel fences and on; at the Circle exhibition in Artus Court, they transformed a dramatically lit space into a ‘cabinet of absurdities’.

Tadeusz Kantor also experimented with installations in the 1960s; for Kantor this was intended to mark a definitive move away from traditional displays of easel painting, towards an “active environment” that had the capacity for altering “the viewer’s perception from analytical and contemplative to a fluent and active ... co-presence.”<sup>145</sup>

The lack of ‘pictures’, / those frozen formal systems, / the presence of the fluid, vivid mass, / of tiny charges, / reflecting energy, / c h a n g e s the audience’s perception / from analytic and contemplative / into a fluid almost creative i n v o l v e m e n t / in the field of living reality. / The EXHIBITION is not longer an indifferent means / of presenting and recording, / it becomes an ACTIVE ENVIRONMENT / involving the audience in adventures and traps, / refusing them and not satisfying / their reason of being spectators, / beholders and visitors.<sup>146</sup>

Kantor’s words speak of fluidity, change, and an attempt to frustrate the satisfaction of the viewer. In *Kuźnia*, this sense of fluidity was generated by the placement of the works themselves, which moved around the forge during the course of the exhibition.

Documentation shows that several works migrate and appear in different places. Kokot’s *Fiddler*, an image of a violinist dressed in white with head melancholically bowed, was hung from a ceiling rafter but later shown lying on the floor below, with part of its right

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<sup>144</sup> Susan Sontag, “Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition,” Textrevue.net. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.text-revue.net/revue/heft-7/happenings-an-art-of-radical-juxtaposition/text>

<sup>145</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, “Manifest Anty-Wystawy,” in *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938-1974*, ed. K Pleśniarowicz. (Kraków: Cricoteka, 2000), 249-50.

<sup>146</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, “Anti Exhibition,” in *Emballages*, trans P. Graff (Warszawa: Galeria Foskal PSP Books, 1976), 20.

edge ripped and torn away [III.17]. A photographic sculpture by Bruszewski, *Tors* [Torso], hung in a high window looking out on the courtyard, later shown suspended from the middle of the ceiling on the top floor. The family portrait, which served as the exhibition poster, was originally pasted on the exterior wall facing out on to the street, but in another photograph it is placed in the corner above the courtyard, akin to a Russian icon painting, jostling for attention along the exposed brickwork and looking down onto the scene unfolding below [III.11; 13]. The *Kuźnia* exhibition therefore required a different form of engagement from the spectator. Direct visual contact with a single art object was replaced by an experience within the space as a whole. The spectator now became corporeally implicated, their bodies physically involved to a greater degree. Rather than a sanctified exhibition in which works of art could be appreciated as closed aesthetic units from a distance, the *Kuźnia* was constructed as a “sensory obstacle course,” through and around which the viewers were to manoeuvre.<sup>147</sup> Visitors were encouraged to explore the space, to walk between the objects, sometimes to walk directly on them, to get close up and touch them. The life size scale of many of the objects in the *Kuźnia* set up a more direct connection with the body of the spectator. A documentary photograph from the opening taken by Różycki shows one visitor lifting up pieces of paper attached to Robakowski’s *Po człowieku* [After Man] in order to read the contents of the attached letter [III.22]. Robakowski touched upon the uniqueness of this opportunity to interact with the works: “It was amazing that we were allowed to touch these photographs, manipulate them. Before that they were always behind glass as salon gems. [*Kuźnia* was] a totally different way of understanding all this.”<sup>148</sup>

In 1968, in the text *Okolice Zero* [Near Zero], Kantor expressed his frustration that “the very term ‘work of art’ had become too heavily encumbered with past practices.”<sup>149</sup> He proclaimed: “A work of art, an isolated panelled piece, brought to a deadlock and closed up in a structure and within a system, unable to change or survive – forms an illusion of creation.”<sup>150</sup> Kantor described how the object should “vanish”; the art work would lose its material support and instead become a “support” for “mental processes.”<sup>151</sup> Individual

<sup>147</sup> Borrowing a phrase from Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>148</sup> Robakowski in *The activity of the artistic group Zero-61 as a form of self-education in the student circle of Torun in the 1960s*. DVD.

<sup>149</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, “Okolice Zero” [Near Zero], in Kantor, *Metamorfozy*. 246.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, “Zanikanie przedmiotu” [The Disappearance of the Object], in Kantor, *Metamorfozy*, 354.

paintings and performances were to be forsaken in favour of a “mental and spiritual” space in which ideas, concepts, images constantly fermented, a space he recognised as “the interior of the imagination.”<sup>152</sup> Robakowski used similar terms to describe his own conception for the *Kuźnia* exhibition, describing it as an “arrangement of mental space.”<sup>153</sup> In an article published in *Fotografia* about the show, Robakowski broached the subject of this transition between the tangible art object and the awakening of more ephemeral operations of the mind:

I am aware of the huge responsibility, the seriousness, complexity, the presumed role of the creative act. The process of interaction between the creator and the recipient is a prerequisite here. However I do not wish easy contact without engaging the intellect of the recipient. Many authors suffice with just toying. [...] I am thinking here about decorative art, using or causing only some form of emotional ecstasy. I wish, however, that my statements also liberate the realm of thought, the uppermost order, given only to man.<sup>154</sup>

The *Kuźnia* required thought, it asked the gathered audience to look, to experience the space and to think how the assembled objects might be understood, to find the threads of connection that drew together this disparate material. Robakowski’s invocation of a ‘mental space’ implies that the exhibition is about more than art, it is about a place in which all the elements (photographs, objects, architecture, readymade) can percolate in the imagination and can awaken the analytical thought of the spectator. As Robakowski later stated, “an unthinking mind is entirely useless here.”<sup>155</sup>

*Kuźnia* certainly fed into wider artistic trends in the late 1960s that de-prioritised the creation of a finished unique object, in favour of transformative and open-ended processes of thought and action involving both the artist and the viewer. The year 1969 saw two seminal exhibitions open in Amsterdam and Bern: *Op Losse Schroeven. Situaties en Cryptostructuren* at the Stedelijk Museum and *When attitudes become form. Live in*

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<sup>152</sup> Paweł Polit, “‘Aneantisations’ and Matrixes of Death: On Zero Tendency in Tadeusz Kantor’s Art,” in *Tadeusz Kantor. Interior of Imagination*, eds., Jarosław Suchan and Marek Świca (Warsaw: Zachęta National Gallery of Art, 2005), 13.

<sup>153</sup> Józef Robakowski, “Podrzuceni ‘mistrzowie’: tekst interwencyjny nr 21,” *local.pl*. Accessed April 20, 2017. <http://lokal30.pl/lokalna/?cat=34>

<sup>154</sup> Józef Robakowski, “W starej kuźni,” *Fotografia* 9 (1969): 211.

<sup>155</sup> Józef Robakowski, “On the material of art,” *Nurt* 11 (1976); reprinted *Powiększenie* 3 no. 31 (1988): 127.

*your head* curated by Harald Szeemann at the Kunsthalle.<sup>156</sup> Lázló Beke, writing about the turn to conceptual practices in East European art, suggested that the de-materialisation of the work of art possessed a particular significance for Eastern European artists that “should be considered specific to its development in the region;” namely that artists used it as a specific “strategy for evading authority.”<sup>157</sup> Beke suggested that “the immaterial nature of the work,” the “poorness of the media employed” and the homemade manner of production “made communication easier and censorship more difficult.”<sup>158</sup> Robakowski retrospectively acknowledged the benefits of this more ephemeral mode of art making in these years: “The so-called ‘other media’ (multimedia installations, photography, experimental films, video, visual poetry, performance, expanded cinema, intervening actions, self-publications, occasional prints, etc.) and mail art in particular, enabled artists involved in this movement to enter actively into open social space independently from government sponsored official cultural establishments such as culture centres, arts schools, museums, galleries, cinemas, etc.”<sup>159</sup>

*Kuźnia* seemed to participate in this wider step towards de-materialisation, art “without the goal of picturemaking,” and the preceding paragraphs have outlined the ways in which the Zeroists de-prioritised physical content in the exhibition in favour of process, activity and the activation of a “mental space,” and this is a narrative certainly supported by recent literature on the Zeroists.<sup>160</sup> The problem with this reading is that if one scrutinises the works on display, then it becomes increasingly difficult to support this conclusion. *Kuźnia* is a space that is quite literally filled with objects, which draw attention to their materiality – if anything it was a re-materialised space. This makes it difficult to compare the *Zero 61* exhibition with other, more obviously de-materialised and concept driven art practices in Poland, for example, the scripted happenings of

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<sup>156</sup> Also in the same year : Prospect 69, organized by Konrad Fischer at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; 557,087 by Lucy Lippard at Seattle Art Museum, 1969; *Konzeption – Conception* at the Städtisches Museum in Leverkusen and the following year *Information*, a group show of conceptual art at The Museum of Modern Art New York.

<sup>157</sup> Lázló Beke, “Conceptual Tendencies in Eastern European Art,” in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, exhibition catalogue, eds. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss et al. (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 42.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Józef Robakowski, “Żywa Galeria. Łódź 1995-1997,” accessed April 17, 2017, [http://robakowski.eu/tx3\\_ang.html](http://robakowski.eu/tx3_ang.html)

<sup>160</sup> Robakowski in Piotr Lisowski, “Od fenomenu amatorskiego do przestrzeni mentalnej. Wystawa grupy ZERO-61 w kuźni jako pole gry z przestrzenią wystawienniczą.” *Obieg*, 2010. <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/teksty/19113>

Kantor. How, then, do we interpret Robakowski's call for a 'mental space,' and what is at stake in this insistent return to a degraded materiality?

In the exhibition, Mikołajczyk presented a photographic self-portrait montaged with an image of a tree, which had been printed on a sheet of canvas, specially prepared with photosensitive chemicals, and the resulting object tacked onto a wooden frame. [III.23]. In using canvas as a material for this work, Mikołajczyk knowingly took on the legacy of traditional easel painting in terms of its physical materiality; the visible brushwork from the application of the chemicals reinforced this invocation of a painterly medium and drew attention to the role of the painter in the creative process. This link was further underscored by the inclusion of an easel in the courtyard of *Kuźnia*, made from planks of wood found on site, upon which various works were displayed. The use of a painterly support (canvas) and a painterly technique (brushstrokes) to present a photographic work suggested a crossing of established boundaries between mediums in order to deny a modernist fetishisation of medium purity. Elsewhere within the blacksmith's forge, photography and hybrid sculptures were displayed alongside non-artistic materials and found ephemera, mixing "fine art material with the material order of life." [III.24]<sup>161</sup>

Boring, unspectacular objects were also displayed, most of which were found on site – shovels, rakes, a pile of bricks on the floor. These were left around the space as objects for contemplation in their own right. Mikołajczyk mounted an old tyre to a wall, and gave it the title *Chora opona* [The Sick Tyre] [III.25]. The show seemed to borrow from the Duchampian strategy of dislocating commonplace objects from their practical use value in order to exhibit them as objects of art, but Robakowski acknowledged the Russian avant-garde artist Mikhail Matyushin as a more explicit source of inspiration for these actions: Robakowski recalled how Matyushin "pulled roots out of the ground, put them in a gallery and said: this is sculpture."<sup>162</sup> Robakowski acknowledged that he was no longer interested in the field of art, but declared his intention to consciously pursue activities "in the context of this and not another reality."<sup>163</sup> Robakowski's words echo those of Tadeusz Kantor, who similarly professed a desire to engage with objects that possessed a "strong saturation with reality."<sup>164</sup> His 1963 *Popular Exhibition (or Anti-Exhibition)* [III.26] was

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<sup>161</sup> Lech Lechowicz, "Grupa Zero-61. Zapomniana tradycja z lat sześćdziesiątych," *Exit 2* (1999): 1958.

<sup>162</sup> Józef Robakowski in conversation with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, in *Józef Robakowski: My Own Cinema*, 23

<sup>163</sup> Robakowski, "Moje multimedialne peregrynacje ..." 12.

<sup>164</sup> Kantor, "The Autonomous Theatre" in *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990* (University of California Press, 1993), 47; "Rozmowa z Tadeuszem Kantorem" [conversation with

intended to serve as a “a storage of forms,”<sup>165</sup> filled to bursting with 937 of the “least expected things.”<sup>166</sup> inartistic objects (collage, assemblage, emballage) but also ephemeral detritus, scraps of paper, discarded notes and things of ‘low status’ and common use.”<sup>167</sup> This jumble of objects haphazardly filled the space, forming accidental configurations. In *Kuźnia* everyday objects were similarly strewn around the space. The mundane object functioned as a trace of the material world and served as a rejection of representation in favour of the real, physical object. The critic Wojciech Roszewski reviewing the *Kuźnia* exhibition in 1969 wrote: “the artistic object duels here with the real object and obviously loses the fight, losing its aesthetic character. We are dealing here with a significant act of levelling down, self mockery, a pernicious candour.”<sup>168</sup>

Magda Pustola, writing retrospectively, has suggested that the impetus for this turn to everyday objects can be located in the visual culture of the PRL. In the face of the spectacular propaganda imagery that populated the public realm, Pustola identified a turn among artists towards: “the unspectacular, boring, sometimes mute [...] noticing the difference, the division, the unsticking of the simulated and over-simulated reality from the real world.”<sup>169</sup> The second chapter discussed the turn to banality in the 1950s, in relation to the photographs of Dłubak, Beksiński and Lewczyński. The Zeroists certainly betrayed a similar fondness for banal objects. However, the objects selected for inclusion in *Kuźnia* were not just unspectacular, they were also worn and degraded, often damaged and dirty. Mikołajczyk’s *Koszula* [Shirt] featured a stained, ragged shirt draped from its arms around the top corners an old wooden window frame [III.27]; the *Chora opona* was damaged beyond repair, part of the rubber casing of the tyre ripped away thereby rendering it entirely useless.

Critics such as Czartoryska, reviewing *Kuźnia*, remarked that the photograph had been “humiliated” or “degraded” by the Zeroists.<sup>170</sup> The photographs were certainly not treated with the respect usually afforded to a fine art object. Abandoned to the scrap heap, Czartoryska noted how “the pictures themselves have become objects, charred, turned

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Tadeusz Kantor], in W. Borowski, *Tadeusz Kantor* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1982), 17.

<sup>165</sup> Mariusz Hermansdorfer. *W Kręgu Nadrealizmu* [Around Surrealism] (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 2007), 89.

<sup>166</sup> Polit, ““Aneantisations” and Matrixes of Death,” 81.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Wojciech Roszewski, “Zero 61,” *Fotografia* 9 (1969): 204.

<sup>169</sup> Magda Pustola, “Cultural Producer or Producer of Culture?” 45-6.

<sup>170</sup> Czartoryska, “Identyfikacja zakwestionowana,” 24.



backwards, rolled up, glued on a scrap of cloth, put on a pile of scrap metal, shattered in front of the viewer.”<sup>171</sup> Walked over, handled by the spectator, propped up on the floor; the photographs came to show the signs of their use, their wear and tear, with edges curling and ripped, sometimes with whole corners torn away. The physical damage endured by the photographs can be seen to evoke a narrative of destruction, reminding the viewer of the relentless flow of time in which physical forms change, matter dissolves into nothingness and, as the Polish writer Czesław Miłosz observes, “what seemed invincible crumbles.”<sup>172</sup> For Lechowicz this worn, damaged quality conferred an additional texture to the image. The tears and creases possessed an expressive value, suggesting that the way in which the photograph-as-object had been used pointed to the object’s physical existence.<sup>173</sup> As Mary Ann Doane has summarised, “The historicity of a medium is traced in the physical condition of its objects.”<sup>174</sup>

It is worth invoking the link with Kantor here again, for he was similarly drawn to objects “somewhere between a dustbin and eternity.”<sup>175</sup> In contrast to the usual ennoblement of the object, Kantor had a predilection for detritus, for objects of the “lowest rank.” This had been earlier stressed in his 1963 manifesto “Annexed Reality”, which featured a section on “The Poor Object”: by which he understood, “the simplest/most primitive/old/marked by time/worn out by the fact of being used, / POOR.”<sup>176</sup> Kantor stated:

Only the ‘lowest rank,’ ‘poor’ objects, on the verge of the garbage can, wrecks, having lost their existential, practical functions, and having lost the aesthetical values that covered them – reveal their autonomous, ‘objective’ existence. Hence the fascination with poor reality, the lowest regions in the hierarchy of objects, sentenced ‘to the dump’, on the verge of destruction...<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid/.

<sup>172</sup> “Rozpada się to, co wydawało się niezwykłe,” in “Hymn,” Czesław Miłosz (1935), in *The Collected Poems 1931-1987* (London: Viking, 1988), 14.

<sup>173</sup> Lechowicz, “Grupa Zero 61: Zapomniana tradycja z lat szesćdziesiątych,” n.p.

<sup>174</sup> Mary Anne Doane, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” *differences*.18 no.1 (2007): 144.

<sup>175</sup> Wojciech Suchoki, “Poor Little Room of the Imagination,” in *Tadeusz Kantor. Interior of Imagination*, eds. Jarosław Suchan and Marek Świca (Warsaw: Zachęta National Gallery of Art.,2005), 20.

<sup>176</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, “Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990,” in *Kantor was here: Tadeusz in Great Britain*, ed. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (London: Black Dog, 2011), 144.

<sup>177</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, “Rezerwat ludzki” [The Human Reservation], in *Metamorfozy*, 359.

His interest in these lowly objects lay less in their status as ready-made art objects, but more in their potential to access the most basic layers of reality, a reality that has not yet been processed by the intellect. Paweł Polit has suggested that such objects become a forceful “catalyst of catharsis, knocking the recipient out of their everyday mode.”<sup>178</sup>

Polit’s link to catharsis can be pushed further. Sigmund Freud, after all, described the practice of psychoanalysis as the attempt to find meaning from “the rubbish-heap, as it were, of our observations.”<sup>179</sup> It is out of this detritus that the analyst can uncover “secret and concealed things from unconsidered and unnoticed details.”<sup>180</sup> If we push the link even further, perhaps an analogy can be drawn between the physical space of the forge strewn with detritus, the ‘mental space’ of the exhibition that Robakowski invoked, and the very structure of the human psyche. All of these structures present us, I suggest, with clues that a viewer and analyst must decipher in order to reveal the imprinted, encrypted traumas. For me, the clues that are revealing, are elements that set up a commentary on the photograph as a physical, material trace and which invoke the index to summon the presence of absent bodies.

## INVOKING THE INDEX

The *Kuźnia* exhibition was intended by the Zeroists to be an earnest attempt to explore new paths for photography, away from the decorative, pictorial or symbolic image. The very concept of art photography was being ‘degraded.’ Although the art photograph was abandoned to the scrap heap, the photograph still served a purpose in the *Kuźnia*; namely, to show the photograph not as image, but as material object. Luiza Nader, discussing post-war East European painting, has suggested that attempts “to demythologise the role of the object in the artistic process can also be viewed as pointing to the problem of the relation between illusion and reality.”<sup>181</sup> After producing highly synthetic works for several years that were based on symbolism and metaphor, the Zeroists used the *Kuźnia* exhibition to renounce such imagery and to expose the illusion of the photograph as a

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<sup>178</sup> Polit, “‘Aneantisations’ and Matrixes of Death,” 90.

<sup>179</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Totem and taboo and other works*. Vol. 13, *The Moses of Michelangelo (1914)* ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 222.

<sup>180</sup> Polit, “‘Aneantisations’ and Matrixes of Death,” 90.

<sup>181</sup> Luiza Nader, “Conceptual Art in Poland: Spaces of Discourse,” *Culture.pl*. 2006. Accessed April 18, 2017. [http://www.culture.pl/en/culture/artykuly/es\\_sztuka\\_konceptualna](http://www.culture.pl/en/culture/artykuly/es_sztuka_konceptualna)

hollow mimetic device. In the words of Robakowski, the group were in search of “the very opposite of artifice.”<sup>182</sup> The Zeroists did not solely question the photograph as a means of artistic expression but also drew attention to the very material from which the photograph is constructed, contrasting photography as a mimetic image-making medium with the photograph as a material object.

This was evident in the photographs Wojciech Bruszewski chose to exhibit at *Kuźnia*. Bruszewski was the youngest member of the *Zero 61* group, and the last to join, but he presented perhaps the most radical form of investigation, hence the nickname ‘Trojan Horse,’ bestowed upon him by Robakowski. Bruszewski presented several prints made from found photographic negatives, which had been subjected to various levels of degradation. The images were untitled, a decisive shift away from the earlier symbolic titles the Zeroists had given their photographs. By foregoing titles, Bruszewski asked the viewer to concentrate on what was presented within the frame of the image itself. In one work, the naked body of a man photographed from behind is partially obstructed by diagonal scratches, the emulsion worn away in diagonal swathes to reveal the support material beneath [III.28]. Another photograph depicts a young boy standing in a domestic interior holding a framed picture which he presents to the camera. The details of his face are concealed by several large black holes, gouged out of the original negative.

In Bruszewski’s prints, flakes of degraded emulsion can be seen surrounding these fissures where the chemically produced surface layer of the image has lifted. Both images foreground the material support of the photograph-as-object upon which an illusory image is constructed. By drawing attention to the ‘nothingness’ beyond the image contained within the surface emulsion, Bruszewski insisted upon the photograph’s flatness and emphasised the illusory nature of all photographic imagery. Rather than attempting to disguise or conceal this illusion, Bruszewski was intent on exposing the inner workings of the photograph. In an article written in 1970 for *Fotografia*, Bruszewski stated, “Grain, scratches and dust, revealing of the negative, perforation, repetition and abandonment of the rectangle – thus, stripping the wonder of illusion creates a situation in which a photogram no longer pretends to be a thing; it becomes a thing.”<sup>183</sup> A concern with the physical composition of the photograph-as-object becomes the subject of the image. As Bruszewski later observed: “Photography, as well as all its

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<sup>182</sup> Czubak, *Józef Robakowski*, 19.

<sup>183</sup> Wojciech Bruszewski, “Continuation,” *Fotografia* 8 (1970).

related techniques, lives a double life. It is a thing, paper, celluloid film, silver particles, pigment molecules, gelatine, projection, etc. And at the same time it is: a representation, a relation about something, an image of something; something which it itself is not.”<sup>184</sup>

These untitled images dramatised for Bruszewski “a battle between the illusory and the material.”<sup>185</sup>

This was also explored by Robakowski in films made in the early 1970s while studying at the Film School in Łódź (Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Filmowa, Telewizyjna i Teatralna im. Leona Schillera [Leon Schiller National Higher School of Film, Television and Theatre in Łódź]). *22x* (1971) was a collaborative work instigated by Robakowski, in which he supplied twenty-two participants with several metres of unexposed film and invited each participant to work directly on the film stock to create “brief, personal artistic statements.”<sup>186</sup> Each segment of film was subjected to a variety of violent acts: scratched in different ways with knives and razors, or even hacked at with chisels to produce a variety of effects – swirls, circles, diagonal lines, thick vertical stripes and arrows. Robakowski then edited all twenty-two parts together into one long sequence. In *Próba* [Test] (1970), Robakowski perforated film stock with several dozen round holes of varying sizes. When the film was projected, the darkened room was illuminated with flashes of bright light leaked by these punctures, in an arrhythmic pattern, matched by a staccato soundtrack. The light emitted by the projector was intense and direct, uncompromised by any filter. *Próba* viscerally attacks the body of the spectator, registering an imprint or after-image on the retina of the viewer.

These tendencies reconciled Bruszewski and Robakowski’s work with counterparts abroad, notably structural filmmakers such as Paul Sharits or Peter Gidal. Mary Ann Doane, discussing structuralist film of the 1960s and 1970s, suggested that medium specificity for these artists was incarnated in the film’s material base – the celluloid was subject to scratching, the grain of the film revealed, the gap shown between film frames and its production of the illusion of movement.<sup>187</sup> In his 1975 essay ‘Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film’, Peter Gidal articulated his manifesto:

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<sup>184</sup> Janusz Zagrodzki, *Wojciech Bruszewski: fenomeny percepcji*, exhibition catalogue (Łódź: Miejska Galeria Sztuki w Łodzi, 2010), 12.

<sup>185</sup> Wojciech Bruszewski, *Forge* [Kuznia] exhibition catalogue, 1969.

<sup>186</sup> Galen Joseph-Hunter and Łukasz Ronduda, *The Workshop of the Film Form, 1970-1977: early film work from Poland*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, 2004), 37.

<sup>187</sup> Doane, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” 129.

Structural/Materialist film attempts to be non-illusionist. The process of the film's making deals with devices that result in demystification or attempted demystification of the film process. ... The dialectic of the film is established in that space of tension between materialist flatness, grain, light, movement, and the supposed reality that is represented. Consequently a continual attempt to destroy the illusion is necessary.<sup>188</sup>

Bruszewski recognised that he was touching upon “structural” concerns with his 1969 photographs, and stated that these were, “My first ‘conscious’ photographs. There is a struggle within them, the layer of illusion against the material layer.”<sup>189</sup> He added, “Conscious, but I was not aware then.”<sup>190</sup> His words strike me as significant. In his invocation of a delayed temporality and an event not consciously acknowledged, Bruszewski suggests an alternative way to understand his photographs, not solely through structural concerns but also through theories of trauma. In Chapter 2, I discussed works by Zdzisław Beksiński in the late 1950s, which also featured rips and tears, and suggested that they evoked a narrative of violent effacement. By inflicting wounds on the bodies in the photographs, I suggested Beksiński was repeating the destructive acts of the war after a delay, an “unwitting re-enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind.”<sup>191</sup> Beksiński’s actions therefore suggested to me a failure to assimilate the events of the war as they had happened, leaving unacknowledged wounds which returned to haunt the conscious mind and manifest themselves through compulsive repetitions at a later date. Bruszewski was born too late to experience the war directly, but as the discussion of ‘postmemory’ in the first section of this third chapter outlined, traumas can be inherited by later generations and reactivated by present day events. The persecution of Jews insistently returned to consciousness in 1968 following a resurgence of anti-Jewish sentiments, which manifested itself in harassment and purges under Mieczysław Moczar’s anti-Semitic campaign, in which around twenty-five thousand Jews were forced to leave the country in the last two years of the decade. Bruszewski’s photographs

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<sup>188</sup> Peter Gidal, “Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film,” in *Structural Film Anthology* (London: BFI, 1976), 1. Bruszewski quotes Gidal’s essay in the introduction to his 1978 video work *Input Output*, (<http://www.voytek.pl/ainput1.htm>) and in the same catalogue discusses the “groundlessness in looking for reality in recording,” citing structural cinema as an influence on his own experimental work. (Wojciech Bruszewski, *Wejście Wyjście* [Input Output] exhibition catalogue (Łódź: Galeria g.n., 1978).

<sup>189</sup> Wojciech Bruszewski, *Forge* [Kuznia] exhibition catalogue, 1969. Reprinted in “W Starej Kuźni” [In the Old Forge] *Fotografia* 9 (1969): 200-204; 210. Also in Zagrodzki, Janusz. *Wojciech Bruszewski: fenomeny percepcji*, exhibition catalogue (Łódź: Miejska Galeria Sztuki w Łodzi, 2010).

<sup>190</sup> Wojciech Bruszewski, *Forge* [Kuznia] exhibition catalogue, 1969.

<sup>191</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Trauma*, 1.

therefore continue to repeat these. But perhaps there is more at stake, particularly when one considers these images within the wider context of the *Kuźnia* exhibition. In the following paragraphs I will suggest two themes can be discerned in the show in the abandoned blacksmith's workshop: firstly, an evocation of absent bodies, and secondly, an attempt to re-establish a material and tactile connection with those bodies.

The notion of the 'index' was developed by Charles Sanders Peirce as part of a tripartite division of signs, all of which he suggested related to an object in their own particular way; the icon is related by visual resemblance, the symbol through arbitrary convention, while the index relies on a direct or physical connection.<sup>192</sup> The photograph, it has been argued, operates on all three levels, but it is most often discussed in terms of the index, which Peirce described as a trace or imprint of its object, akin to a footprint or fingerprint.<sup>193</sup> The index is a sign that is made by direct contact, and implies a physical connection to the object that created it. Both Bruszewski and Robakowski betray a fascination with the semiological order of the index; their writings and photographs profess a desire to explore the idea of the photograph as trace. At a 1966 exhibition in Toruń, Robakowski presented *Kowal* [Blacksmith] [III.29], a large image which featured the imprint of a man's hand that had been coated in photosensitive chemicals and pressed onto a sheet of photographic paper. At the centre of this hand print was mounted a small photographic portrait of a man, the blacksmith to whom the title refers. Both elements of Robakowski's compositions read as portraits of the blacksmith: the handprint operates as physical trace; the photographic portrait as iconic rendering (that also functions indexically), but both in different ways evoke the presence of the man.

In his catalogue text for *Kuźnia*, Bruszewski discussed the ontological status of photography, quoting at length from Andre Bazin and describing his understanding of the photograph as 'matter touching matter':

The essence of the transition from Baroque painting to photography is not about the usual technical improvements, but is based on a psychological fact: in order to

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<sup>192</sup> See Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 2, eds., Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Charles S. Peirce, *Writings of Charles S. Peirce, A Chronological Edition*, vol. 2, eds., Peirce Edition Project (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982).

<sup>193</sup> Mary Ann Doane suggests that the photograph can be used as an example of a sign system that merges icon, index and to some extent symbol: indexical because of an existential bond with its object; iconic, relying upon a similarity with that object; and photographs have recourse to language, invoking the symbolic realm. (Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity," 134.).

fully satisfy our need for illusion through a mechanical reproduction process from which man has been excluded. /.../ the faithful drawing may in practice give us more information about the model than the photograph, but despite our intellectual efforts [the drawing] will never have this irrational force that photography possesses, a force that compels us to believe in its reality. /.../ This image may not be sharp, be deformed, discoloured, deprived of value documentary, but it works through an ontological genesis model: is itself a model. /.../ Andre Bazin – ‘Ontology of the photographic image’. Dłubak has determined photographic specificity as the fact of matter contacting matter. In fact, it seems to me, he is talking in the same terms as those written by Bazin, despite the fact that it covers a wider range of phenomena called photography. It is worth considering, however, whether only light-sensitive material is here in question.<sup>194</sup>

It is worth paying attention to one of Bazin’s footnotes, which draws a direct connection between death masks and photography, both of which, he suggested, are premised upon the idea of the trace: “There is room, nevertheless, for a study of the psychology of the lesser plastic arts, the moulding of death masks for example, which likewise involves a certain automatic process. One might consider photography in this sense as a moulding, the taking of an impression, by the manipulation of light.”<sup>195</sup> As the result of a physical imprint of an object transferred by light onto light sensitive paper, the photograph bears a physical connection to its referent, and consequently the photograph can be understood to convey something of the subject’s being, a “transfer of reality.”<sup>196</sup>

Bruszewski went on to compare photography to other forms of image making, all of which revolved around the trace: “Photographs can be made using a much cheaper

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<sup>194</sup> Wojciech Bruszewski, *Forge* [Kuznia], exhibition catalogue, 1969. Reprinted in “W Starej Kuźni,” 200-204; 210. Bazin’s text reads: “the essential factor in the transition from the baroque to photography is not the perfecting of a physical process (photography will long remain the inferior of painting in the reproduction of color); rather does it lie in a psychological fact, to wit, in completely satisfying our appetite for illusion by a mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part. [...] A very faithful drawing may actually tell us more about the model but despite the prompt-ings of our critical intelligence it will never have the irrational power of the photograph to bear away our faith. [...] No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking, in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model.” (André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” trans. Hugh Gray, *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Summer, 1960), 7-8.)

<sup>195</sup> Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 7.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

method. One can simply cover people in white paint and imprint them onto black paper. The effect would be essentially the same”. He continued,

Chopin’s death mask was made in similar way. Using the negative – the mould – one can cast in any material. Such an understanding of elements of photography can be found in contemporary sculpture, such as the recent works by Alina Szapocznikow. [...] In Hiroshima, after the atomic bomb exploded, a shape of a human figure was imprinted on the wall. Matter contacting matter.<sup>197</sup>

Bruszewski concluded by asking “Do we really need photographic paper?”<sup>198</sup> A non-photographic work by Robakowski in the *Kuźnia* appeared to illustrate this point. *Cień* [Shadow] consisted of the outline of a human figure sprayed in white paint onto a wall in the courtyard using a specially modified vacuum cleaner nozzle [III.30]. The work pertains to Mary Ann Doane’s description of the index as “evacuated of content, a hollowed out sign.”<sup>199</sup>

This is a trope that also appeared in American art at this time. The conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner created a work using a similar method, *Two Minutes of Spray Paint Directly upon the floor from a Standard Aerosol Can* (1968). I invoke this connection to stress the difference in Weiner and Robakowski’s projects, a divergence which is already made clear in the titles. Weiner’s descriptive title reads as an instruction; Robakowski’s more concise title invokes the idea of something insubstantial that is causally connected to the object that created it. Robakowski’s work gestured towards an absent body that had once stood before the wall, the outline of this body marked by spray paint. Bruszewski’s invocation of Hiroshima in the catalogue text is also summoned forth in Robakowski’s work, a body instantaneously evaporated by the force of an atomic blast, leaving only an evacuated outline.<sup>200</sup> A work by Bruszewski similarly articulated an interest in

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<sup>197</sup> Bruszewski, *Forge* [Kuznia], exhibition catalogue, 1969. Reprinted in “W Starej Kuźni,” 200-204; 210.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 92.

<sup>200</sup> In *Black Sun*, the Japanese photographer Shomei Tomatsu recalled visiting Hiroshima:

1946: Hiroshima: There,  
One year after the bombing  
I searched for  
one of my missing friends.  
As a substitute for him  
I found a shadow man.  
The atomic ray instantly  
disintegrated his whole body,



indexicality; in *Odcisk* [Imprint] he poured plaster into a recess in the floor of the courtyard and physically created the imprint of a foot [III.31]. Both Robakowski's *Cień* and Bruszewski's *Odcisk* operate in the same indexical mode as a photograph – they present a direct trace of a person now absent either by the outline of their body or the imprint of their shoe. Both create a direct link to the person that once stood in front of the wall or stood in the pit of plaster, a direct causal connection between object and sign.

These works answer the question posed by Bruszewski in his exhibition catalogue text – ‘Do we really need photographic paper?’ Robakowski recalled, “It was amazing that not using photography we called it photography: that an object was enough. Taking a picture was not important. Because the same thing was to be transferred.”<sup>201</sup> Critics reviewing the *Kuźnia* struggled to understand the photographic elements of this show, which was supposed to be an exhibition of photography: asking “where are the photographs?” Perhaps critics were looking for the wrong things in the wrong places. I would suggest that the photographic element of the exhibition was to be found not in the photographs, but in works and objects assembled in the space that operated photographically. Martin Lefebvre, speaking about the indexical nature of photography has stated, “What is at stake then, is the ability of the photograph to stand in, for the photographer or the spectator, for what once lay in front of the camera’s lens by virtue of the existential link that obtains between them.”<sup>202</sup> In *Kuźnia*, it is objects that can be seen to possess this function, rather than the photographs.

These works discussed above operate indexically as trace; but this is only of the ways the index can be understood, and as Mary Ann Doane has suggested, the index as trace is “not necessarily the most crucial.”<sup>203</sup> The index as “deixis” operates in a slightly different manner, as a pointing finger or the demonstrative pronoun “this,” which relies less upon a physical connection between sign and object, and instead operates by directing or focusing attention.<sup>204</sup> Certain objects in the *Kuźnia* can be construed in this way.

Robakowski's work *Po Człowieku* [After Man (Memory Board)], presented in the

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all – but shadow alive on a concrete wall.

<sup>201</sup> Robakowski in *The activity of the artistic group Zero-61 as a form of self-education in the student circle of Torun in the 1960s*, DVD.)

<sup>202</sup> Martin Lefebvre, “The Art of Pointing. On Peirce, Indexicality, and Photographic Images,” in *Photographic Theory*, ed., James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 220-235.

<sup>203</sup> Mary Ann Doane, “Indexicality and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” in *The Meaning of Photography*, eds., Robin Kelsey and Black Stimson, (Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008), 3-14, p.6

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

courtyard of the *Kuźnia*, consisted of a wooden board featuring an array of ephemera: a pair of shoes, a tie, shirt, wallet, pencil and a handwritten letter [III.32]. The various materials are brought together to generate a specific meaning – namely, to point to the presence of a person through their belongings. The following year in 1970, Robakowski made a film devoted to his aunt that used the same title – *Po Człowieku* – which consisted of one long camera shot that recorded, in a linear and objective manner, the items that remained in his aunt’s flat after her death; an absent body made present through her daily accoutrements. It could therefore be argued that Robakowski’s *Po Człowieku* also functions as a portrait. Not as a traditional portrait that operates through iconic resemblance, but as a portrait of a man as constituted through his belongings. This portrait predicated on the index rather than iconic resemblance requires more active imaginative engagement from the viewer.

*Po Człowieku* was displayed in the open courtyard of *Kuźnia*, next to a work by Antoni Mikołajczyk, titled *Koszula*, in which a stained and ragged shirt was draped from its arms from an old wooden frame [III.27]. In its physical appearance, it evokes to me Beksiński’s *Veil*, discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Perhaps more explicitly, it draws a connection with Lewczyński’s photograph *Koszula* [Shirt] or *Skóra* [Skin], taken in 1957, which features a shirt hanging from a clothes line. Both Mikołajczyk and Lewczyński’s shirts invoke the index by drawing attention to the absent bodies that would have occupied those garments. The alternative title for Lewczyński’s photograph, *Skóra*, underscores the physical connection between garment and body. Both shirts function as metonyms for absent bodies, but the manner in which those bodies are evoked has evolved. Lewczyński presents a photographic trace of an object; in Mikołajczyk’s work, the layer of photographic emulsion is removed in favour of a direct engagement with a physical object that signifies indexically.

## WORKS DESTROYED

The final ‘degradation’ of the photograph in the *Kuźnia* exhibition occurred when the works were destroyed on site, suffering their ultimate humiliation. The artists burnt their works in front of spectators; photographic documentation from the exhibition shows works being set alight in the pit of Bruszewski’s work *Odcisk* [III.31]. Spectators stood

around the pit, watching the objects burn, as Bruszewski tended to the fire with a stick. This action certainly underlined the ephemeral nature of the installation; after fulfilling their purpose for the duration of the exhibition, the art works and objects disappeared. The critic Roszewski suggested that this destructive culmination of the exhibition was just as important as the duration of the exhibition itself; the burning of the works, he suggested, created an afterimage, a retinal imprint that cannot be easily shaken: although “photographs and items will be removed, everything will return to its original state, but *Kuźnia* will continue to haunt you.”<sup>205</sup> If earlier work by the Zeroists, in particular the montages of Andrez Różycki, demonstrated the ways that images from the past could return to haunt the present psyche, this act of destruction in the forge produced traces that were to leave imprints on the minds of the assembled spectators, quite literally generating traces of trauma.

The destruction of works at *Kuźnia* can be tied to a wider turn towards active impermanence in art making, which Susan Sontag suggested was tied to the issue of freedom, “a protest against the museum conception of art – the idea that the job of an artist is to create things to be preserved and cherished.”<sup>206</sup> Kantor elaborated his own sentiments on the destruction of artworks when discussing his 1963 play *The Madmen and the Nun*: “Reaching zero, destruction, nullification [aneantisation] of phenomena, elements, events, / relieves them of the / burden of leading / a practical life.”<sup>207</sup> Discussing the tendency towards ephemerality in Eastern European art, Luiz Camnitzer suggested that it should be understood as rooted in the local context of the work’s production: “Evasion of material substance made possible a kind of political dissent that was too dangerous to formulate in more concrete form.”<sup>208</sup> This sentiment was reiterated by Robakowski, who stated, “The only way to make political art was to exclude politics.”<sup>209</sup> Speaking specifically about the Zeroists, Lech Lechowicz has suggested that the *Zero 61* group members were “determined in their artistic aspirations” but “wanted to work without heed to current political circumstances. [They were] not interested in the

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<sup>205</sup> Roszewski, “Zero 61,” 21-22. At a recent restaging of the Forge exhibition at Centre for Contemporary Art (CSW) Torun, original prints by Bruszewski, Kokot, Kuchta and Różycki were exhibited, which seems to suggest that only some of the prints were destroyed.

<sup>206</sup> Sontag, “Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition.”

<sup>207</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, “The Autonomous Theatre.” in *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990* ed. and trans. Michal Kobialka (University of California Press, 1993), 50.

<sup>208</sup> Luiz Camnitzer, *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), ix.

<sup>209</sup> Józef Robakowski interview with Kata Krasznahorkai in Czubak, *Józef Robakowski*, 3.

political situation, nor in the Gomułka reaction after the thaw of 1956.”<sup>210</sup> Lechowicz suggests that the Zeroists decision to explore structuralist concerns seemed to purposefully evade politics in favour of an insular concentration on medium specificity. However, I remain wary Lechowicz’s assertion that *Zero 61* group members remained neglectfully disengaged from politics, and in fact, I would argue the opposite. The burning of work at *Kuźnia* was not political in itself, but it directly referenced specific events in the late 1960s which were more overtly political.

The *Kuźnia* was staged in 1969, a particularly charged moment in European history in which “progressive thought attacked both the alienation of consumer society and the inhuman dictatorships of Eastern Europe.”<sup>211</sup> The previous year had witnessed the culmination of this period of “disenchantment,” with the Prague Spring of 1968, the reinstatement of a Stalinist style regime in Czechoslovakia, and student uprisings across Europe.<sup>212</sup> In Poland, the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 had incited protests and riots, which had been violently suppressed by security forces, and which provoked an anti-Semitic purge. In December 1970, First Secretary of the PZPR, Władysław Gomułka was removed from office, having ordered the Army to fire on a group of striking workers. Crowds are invoked in the catalogue to the Zeroist’s exhibition, perhaps in response to this wave of discontentment and mass protests that had occurred in Poland the previous year. In the catalogue, text takes up one half of the page, while the other features a dense crowd of people, multiplied and repeated several times. The crowd is also not particularly diverse, all the men seem to be of a European ethnicity and of a particular age, and no explanation is given to why these men are together. Perhaps the Zeroists drew on this motif to suggest the mobilisation of the masses, intended to incite political action and agency.

Two specific events in 1968 allow us to understand the burning of the works in the courtyard of the blacksmith’s forge as a politically resonant action, or even an openly critical statement against the regime on the part of the Zeroists, undermining Lechowicz’s claims that in their work the group “consciously left out reality and current events.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Lech Lechowicz, “Grupa Zero-61: zapomniana tradycja lat sześćdziesiątych” [Zero-61 group: forgotten traditions of the 60s], *EXIT.2* no. 38 (1999): 1954

<sup>211</sup> Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, *A History of Eastern Europe: Crisis and Change* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 122

<sup>212</sup> Barry Barker, “When Attitudes Become Form,” *FlashArtonline*, *Amarcord* no. 275, November – December 2010. Accessed April 25, 2017. <http://www.flashartonline.com/article/live-in-your-head/>

<sup>213</sup> Lechowicz, “Grupa Zero-61: zapomniana tradycja lat sześćdziesiątych,” 1956.

The destruction of works by fire in *Kuźnia* could be understood as a response to an act of self-immolation undertaken by a Polish accountant and former Home Army resistance veteran Ryszard Siwiec. On September 8, 1968 Siwiec committed suicide by setting himself on fire in the Tenth Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw as an act of sacrifice in political protest to the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia that same year. The act was captured on camera, but no mention of the incident was to be found in the Polish press, with all information of the event suppressed by the communist authorities. Siwiec's death foreshadowed the more widely known act of self-immolation by Jan Palach, a Czech student, in Prague several months later. These two incidents were clearly in the forefront of the Zeroists' minds. Kuchta also created a work in response to the action – *Memorial J. P. (Jan Palach)* which consists of a montage of two negatives [III.33]. A photographic portrait of a man, his gaze directed to the floor, has been overlaid with a second negative where chemicals have been used to create distortions in the photographic material, distortions which resemble scorching flames and plumes of smoke emanating from the base of the image. (The man who appears in the photograph is in fact *Zero 61* group member Andrzej Różycki.) The combined effect is to create a portrait in which the man appears to be engulfed or consumed by these chemically produced distortions in the photographic material. The two works serve very different methods of memorialisation – Kuchta's iconic rendering of the act in a photograph versus Bruszewski's action in real space, a fire in the courtyard of the *Kuźnia* that was more direct, more visceral, and that replicated the very act of burning itself. The choice of Bruszewski's *Odcisk* as the location for the burning of the works thus assumes additional significance: the footprint as an indexical trace of a man no longer present; the burning of the works an eloquent memorial to the two men who had been similarly consumed by flames.

These two different responses to the same event are characteristic of a wider divide within the *Zero 61* group as a whole, a split between members who were inclined to pursue formal experimentation in traditional photographic media, and those more intent on direct live action and engagement with social space. The *Kuźnia* exhibition represented a moment of rupture within the group. Robakowski, Bruszewski, Mikołajczyk, Różycki, and Kokot used the *Kuźnia* as an opportunity to form the group *Zero-69*, a rebellious act that brought to a close the activities of *Zero 61*. A photograph taken in the doorway of the *Kuźnia* show the members holding aloft a sign emblazoned with their new name [III.34]. Czesław Kuchta, who had exhibited his work in the *Kuźnia*, was conspicuously absent

from the breakaway group *Zero-69*. A photograph by Różycki summarised the crossroads at which the artists found themselves in 1969. *Na drodze z Torunia do Łodzi* [On the Road from Toruń to Łódź] showed two men with their backs to the camera, walking down a road, with a sky ominously full of clouds above [III.35]. A large tear separates the two men, the result of an actual rip torn into the negative before printing. Różycki's image eloquently articulated the way in which the members of the *Zero 61* group now occupied polarised positions. Two camps had formed within the group: those who experimented with photography, exploring the technical procedures that could be utilised to extend the artistry of that medium; and those who had recently taken up studies at the Film School in Łódź (Robakowski, Bruszewski, Mikołajczyk, Różycki), who appeared more intent on interrogating the material properties of the medium, exposing the illusion of the photographic image and exploring issues around photographic perception. *Kuźnia* makes manifest an understanding of photography in line with these latter concerns: photography that no longer seemed preoccupied with securing for itself the status of a fine art, but rather photography that self referentially explored its own indexicality.

## CONCLUSION

In setting out to write this thesis, I had intended to survey the field of post-war Polish photography with a view to tracing developments within the history of the medium. Increasingly, it became clear to me that as I was, in fact, more interested in history, specifically the traces of historical experience that could be communicated in those photographs. I found myself drawn to photographs that bore what I understood to be the faint scars of trauma, manifested obliquely in abstraction, entropy and destruction. This realisation also made evident that my own psyche was haunted by a “powerful and very particular form of memory,” identified by Marianne Hirsch as “postmemory.”<sup>1</sup> Hirsch saw a generation haunted by the presence of a past that they had not experienced for themselves, but which had been handed down to them by previous generations; traumas and desires transferred through objects, stories, behaviours and images. Hirsch noted,

to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.<sup>2</sup>

The events that cast their shadow over my mind relate to the traumas experienced by my grandparents during the Second World War. I understood these traumas largely through objects: the portrait of my great grandmother, who I only knew through the painted portrait that hung in my grandparents’ house, a canvas that my grandmother had hidden as she was forced to leave her home in Horodenka, formerly south-eastern Poland, now western Ukraine, for Siberia in 1940. Or through the small scraps of photographs that my grandfather shared with me, photographs that showed him as a young adult, as a member of the Transport Company in the Polish Army in Palestine, where he had arrived after a period in Siberia and found himself by chance reunited with his father. Mostly however, their experiences of the war were not communicated directly, and what was passed down to me was a gap in my knowledge of those events, a void, which I have subconsciously

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<sup>1</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography Narrative and Postmemory*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29:1 (Spring 2008): 107.

sought to fill with photographs. It appears I have been seeking photographs that, to borrow from Barthes, could ‘pierce me,’ wound me, and allow me to approach this gap in my experience.

This thesis lays out a rich field of post-war photography that bears a relationship to trauma. I proposed to study photographs made between 1945 and 1970 in order to discern how imperceptible traumatic traces imprinted on the psyche of Polish artists have made themselves known through photographs produced in the immediate aftermath of the war, and in the decades that followed. I have endeavoured to excavate what I understood to be traces of traumas embedded in the photographs produced in these years. Many of the artists I have chosen to discuss experienced the war directly, as primary witnesses and survivors of trauma. I also included a younger generation of artists whose relationship to those events, like my own, has been mediated by temporal distance and cultural memory. This thesis is, however, a subjective account and a selection, in which I have prioritised mostly male photographers working in the first three decades after the war. Consequently there are two deficits that can be acknowledged. The work of women photographers in Poland during this period represents a fertile avenue for future research, particularly around the figures of Fortunata Obrąpalska, Bożena Michalik, and Zofia Rydet. There is also scope to extend this research beyond 1970; I have written elsewhere about themes of trauma, remembrance and desire that can be discerned in Jerzy Lewczyński’s series *Archeologia fotografii* [Archaeology of Photography], and also Zofia Rydet’s *Zapis socjologiczny* [Sociological Record], begun in 1978.<sup>3</sup> Both bodies of work provide rich material for exploration of embedded traumatic traces.

Reflecting back on the first twenty-five years in Poland after the war reveals that history repeats itself. In particular, violent episodes of anti-Semitism recur in each decade: the persecution of Jewish citizens in the pogroms of the 1940s, Party purges in the late 1950s and harassment under General Moczar at the end of the 1960s, with thousands of Jews forced to flee Poland. This suggests that wartime traumas remained unprocessed in the collective psyche and made numerous unwanted and compulsive returns in the following years. Traumas that cannot be assimilated at the time have a tendency to “erupt in

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<sup>3</sup> Sabina Gill, “From the Universal to the Regional: The Desire for Truth and Identity In the Photographs of Three Post-War Polish Artists,” (Master’s thesis, Sotheby’s Institute of Art, London, 2009).



traumatic returns,”<sup>4</sup> and the repetitious nature of events in the post-war years suggests the Polish nation to have been locked into a cycle of the repeated return of unprocessed memories. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth suggested that the traumatised “become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess.”<sup>5</sup> The denial of these events was not just to be found in the psyche, but also in the suppression of these events in official narratives of history under Soviet rule. The “peculiar silence” that surrounded the events of the Second World War in official remembrance, in particular the silence around difficult Jewish-Polish relations, had the effect of “disabling a national discussion of the Holocaust and thus any possibility of a reconciliation of these matters.”<sup>6</sup>

Within the twenty-five years of my study, Poland underwent a series of transitions and changes in leadership, population and Party politics. Periods of optimism and leniency oscillated with phases of repression and social unrest. Throughout this period, there remained certain wartime events that could not be spoken. For example, the massacre at Katyn, Soviet involvement in the Warsaw Uprising, and deportation of Poles to Siberia were suppressed, disavowed and denied. Any events that cast a shadow over the Soviet Union were erased from official narratives. Zbigniew Dłubak’s dismissal from his role as editor of *Fotografia* [Photography] magazine in 1972 suggests that the representation of history was continuously policed and guarded. In the March 1972 issue of the magazine, the young art historian Julius Chrościcki published an article that was illustrated with fifteen photographs, including images by Jan Bułhak, which referenced the battle between Russian and Polish armies in Vilnius in 1919. The inclusion of these photographs incited the indignation of authorities when it reached the Soviet Embassy, who deemed it unacceptable for images referencing the war between Polish and Soviet armies to have been published in Lithuania. In 1972, around 10,000 copies of *Fotografia* were exported to various Soviet states. Although Dłubak was away in the United States on a scholarship when the issue was published, he was not spared from the reprisals. The Central Committee Department of Culture, as a result of intervention from Moscow, dismissed almost the entire editorial staff, including Dłubak, and control of the magazine was given

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Barthes, Freud and Lacan* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Stevenson, “Wajda’s Filmic Representation of Polish-Jewish Relations,” in *The cinema of Andrzej Wajda*, 84.

over to the *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk* [Central Office for Control of Press, Publications and Events]. Even in 1972, events in the nation's history could not be communicated or acknowledged openly. This speaks to another trauma in this period of Polish history, namely the rewriting of history in the post-war years, which the art historian David Crowley has described as the “the myopic and crooked practice of History” in Poland under Soviet rule.<sup>7</sup> It also stresses the need to find alternative ways in which Polish artists could communicate traumatic experiences.

Unacknowledged imprints on the collective and individual psyche return as repeated thoughts, dreams and actions in the years that follow. What I suggest is that the photograph also provided a space for these traumas to re-emerge. This thesis has attempted to make visible the stains and blind spots that disrupt the visual field and gesture towards the unassimilated traumas that lie beyond the surface of the photographic paper. What is at stake in this thesis is the proposition that a photograph can bear imperceptible traces of events that have wounded the psyche, which could not be articulated at the time, but can only be reactivated and made visible at a later date. Photographs made in the post-war years provided a space to belatedly return to encrypted traumas, to relay ideas that could otherwise not be articulated, and to acknowledge events that had been disavowed.

The photographs made in these decades can be understood to reinforce this sense of traumatic repetition. A tendency towards abstraction emerges after the war, only to be suppressed in the years of Socialist Realism, and make repeated returns in the 1950s and 1960s. Ruminations on decay and destruction repeatedly appear at different moments. Traces of human presence are frequently evoked by photographers across the three decades. These repetitions bear the hallmarks of repetition compulsion, which Freud first identified in soldiers returning from the First World War. Caruth later summarised Freud's belief that “the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will.”<sup>8</sup> Symptoms would take the form of “repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts and behaviours stemming from the event.”<sup>9</sup> The patient would rehearse a traumatic event in order, Freud

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<sup>7</sup> David Crowley, *Warsaw* (London: Reaktion, 2003), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Trauma*, 62.

suggested, to develop anxiety retrospectively.<sup>10</sup> Caruth suggests that what is being repeated is not the trauma, but the lack of preparedness: “The shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced *in time*, it has not yet been fully known.”<sup>11</sup> I would argue that the work of photographers presented in the preceding chapters, can be understood as belated attempts to prepare for a trauma that was missed at the time, a trauma that was seen too late.

This repeated return to abstraction, to dark realism and to photographs that communicate the traces of human presence has allowed me to consider how these articulations have evolved over time, and what function they each serve at different moments in the nation’s history. Abstraction can be witnessed throughout the post-war period, as a turn away from mimetic reproduction of visible realities in favour of using the camera as a tool for the creation of original imagery. In the 1940s, Zbigniew Dłubak’s series of evocatively titled abstract photographs proved frustratingly difficult to decipher, remaining unknowable and unassimilable. Evoking dream-like worlds, they raised questions about the ethics and responsibility of looking and witnessing. When photographers returned to abstraction in the 1950s, images were increasingly made by relinquishing the photographic apparatus altogether to create cameraless images. While Dłubak had drawn on photographic framing and focus to generate abstractions, photographers in the 1950s such as Bronisław Schlabs and Zdzisław Beksiński increasingly began to work directly on the photosensitive material – spraying, dripping, tearing, burning. These destructive interventions did not just make manifest traumas, but actively repeated them, and in doing so they suggested the potential for cathartic release.

Photographs produced in the 1950s articulated a response to the war that was not immediate but retrospective. Latent impressions in the subconscious appeared to have been reactivated by events in the present, after a delay of over a decade. In the 1960s, the turn to producing synthetic, abstract works in the darkroom allowed Andrzej Różycki to ruminate on the ways in which the nation’s past still haunted its present landscape. His montages brought together collective memory and family snapshots, intertwining Różycki’s personal history with that of the Polish nation, a history marked by a successive series of violent losses. His montages suggest that the past casts a shadow over

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<sup>10</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 60.

<sup>11</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

the present, and that events in the present can reactivate these historic traumas embedded in the psyche.

Straight documentary photography offered a means by which to voice a veiled critique of life in the Poland under Soviet rule. Dłubak's *Krajobrazach* [Landscapes], begun in 1950, turned to marginal areas in the suburbs of Warsaw to offer an alternative reflection on the Polish landscape at a moment when the heroic reconstruction of the Polish capital was being proclaimed. This was taken up again towards the end of the decade by photographers and filmmakers using photography to address social realities more directly. Jerzy Lewczyński and Zdzisław Beksiński's photographs share preoccupations with *Czarna seria* documentary films in their desire to expose "the black spots that the socialist regime could not manage to erase."<sup>12</sup> Their photographs deliberately turned away from themes of socialist success in favour of melancholic reflections on the Polish landscape. In the pursuit of both 'dark realism' and abstraction, there can be discerned a shared desire to draw attention to the impaired relationship between photography and reality. The authenticity of the mimetic photographic image was no longer given by its relationship to the reality that it purported to represent, but by its relationship to texts, speeches, or pronouncements that told Polish citizens how that world should look. Distrust of the image manifested itself in attempts to undermine the transparency of the information recorded on the surface of the photograph, and to reveal the image suspended in the photographic emulsion as an illusion, as a construction. The need to look beyond the veil of the image is suggested more insistently in actions by Schlabs and Beksiński, and later in the 1960s by Wojciech Bruszewski. These photographers quite literally pierced through the photographic support of the photograph-as-object to lay bare the Lacanian Real, the nothingness, that lies beyond the image recorded in the emulsion.

The 1950s also saw artists increasingly seek to recover the traces of human existence. Dłubak's *Egzystencje* [Existences] pointed to the traces of his own body in the space of his apartment; Jerzy Lewczyński's photographs of abandoned objects at Auschwitz gestured towards bodies, now absent, that once occupied the camps. This interest in traces and mnemonic objects evolves; at the provocative 1969 *Kuźnia* [Forge] exhibition, artists such as Józef Robakowski removed the photographic support altogether and directly

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<sup>12</sup> Jerzy Toeplitz, "New Trends in Cultural and Sociological films in Poland," (report prepared for 1964 Mannheim International Film Festival Round Table sponsored by UNESCO, Paris: UNESCO 30 December 1964) in Bjørn Sørensen, "The Polish Black Series Documentary and the British Free Cinema Movement," in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed. Anikó Imre (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 11.

exhibited objects belonging to absent bodies. Absent bodies were also made present through direct casting or imprinting, an attempt by the Zeroists to lay their own traumatic traces. Margaret Iversen has suggested that forms of art making that involve the creation of a physical imprint emphasise the initial wounding moment of trauma, the imprinting of an indelible trace on the psyche.<sup>13</sup> *Kuźnia* therefore shows Polish photographers searching for a different way in which to articulate traumas. Rather than mimetic forms of artmaking that upholds the Symbolic or Imaginary registers, the Zeroists appeared to prioritise the index, manifested in their desire to create physical traces of human presence, and to invoke a physical or causal connection with an absent body.

Throughout this thesis I have invoked Czesław Miłosz's suggestions that the war was experience by Poles "bodily."<sup>14</sup> Although relatively few photographs that I have discussed have directly pictured the human form, a preoccupation with the body can nonetheless be understood to underpin many of the works discussed in the preceding chapters. Bodies are significant in their absence; Lewczyński's *Skóra* [Skin] gestures to an evacuated human presence; in *Kuźnia*, physical objects were used to invoke a tactile connection to a lost body. Works by Marek Piasecki and Beksiński in the 1950s betray a desire to inflict wounds on the body, to deform or destroy, manifested in violent acts such as gouging or scraping the photographic material; these impulses are repeated again in the 1960s by Wojciech Bruszewski. Works by 'subjective photographers' in the late 1950s and 1960s showed bodies made malleable, distorted and reconfigured through darkroom processes of montage and double exposure; Różycki's Polish landscapes are haunted by spectral bodies. In 1962 Robakowski made his first film, the title of which suggests what is at stake in this repeated return to the representation of body: *6,000,000* [IV].

The title of the film invokes the overwhelming and incomprehensible number of Polish people who perished as a result of the war, estimated at six million Poles, which amounted to around a fifth of the pre-war population. In his 1962 film, Robakowski montaged found fragments of German military documentaries, photographs and scenes from Wojciech Słowikowski's film *Warmia* to summon some of the most traumatic images of the Holocaust.<sup>15</sup> The fragments were shown in quick succession, set to a waltz

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<sup>13</sup> See Margaret Iversen, *Photography, Trace, and Trauma*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 93.

<sup>15</sup> See Łukasz Ronduda, "Subversive Strategies in the Media Arts: Józef Robakowski's Found Footage and Video Scratch," (2004). Accessed April 24, 2017: <http://video.wrocenter.pl/en/tekst/m2m/strategie-subwersywne-w-sztukach-medialnych-realizacje-found-footage-i-video-scratch-jozefa-robakowskiego/>

by the Polish composer Frédéric Chopin, and interspersed with images of murmuring willows and typically Polish country landscapes, as seen in the early work of Jan Bułhak. The photographs that Robakowski used to convey the horrors of the war were familiar images, such as prisoners trapped behind barbed wire in concentration camps; images that have seared themselves on the collective psyche. The film suggests that these direct representations of trauma can become abstracted from their content. Robakowski's film suggests to me a desire to find alternative ways in which to represent the six million people who lost their lives. Over the preceding pages, I have outlined a turn by Polish photographers to abstraction, to acts of destruction, to the documentation and creation of indexical traces. These approaches represent a variety of attempts to communicate traumas in ways that do not directly visualise, but require an active and alert viewer to unpick and decipher the latent traumas obliquely embedded in the image. For as Robakowski himself suggested, "an unthinking mind is entirely useless here."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Józef Robakowski, "On the material of art," *Nurt* 11 (1976); reprinted *Powiększenie* 3 no. 31 (1988): 127.

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# ILLUSTRATIONS

## **List of Illustrations**

Please note: Full details not always provided. All known details have been stated.  
All measurements in cm.



FIG. I

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Welon*

[Veil]

[n.d]

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).



FIG. I.1

**Jan Bulhak (1876–1950)**

*Ruiny Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie*

[Ruins of the Royal Castle in Warsaw]

1948

Gelatin silver print

H.29, W.37.5

Source: <http://www.artinfo.pl/aukcje/jan-bulhak/ruiny-zamku-krolewskiego-w-warszawie>



FIG. 1.2  
**Leonard Sempoliński (1902–1988)**  
*Zamek Królewski*  
[Royal Castle]  
1945

Source: Wróblewska, M., Warsaw photographed: time, place and memory. *Image [& Narrative* [e-journal], 23 (2008):  
<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/timeandphotography/wroblewska.htm>

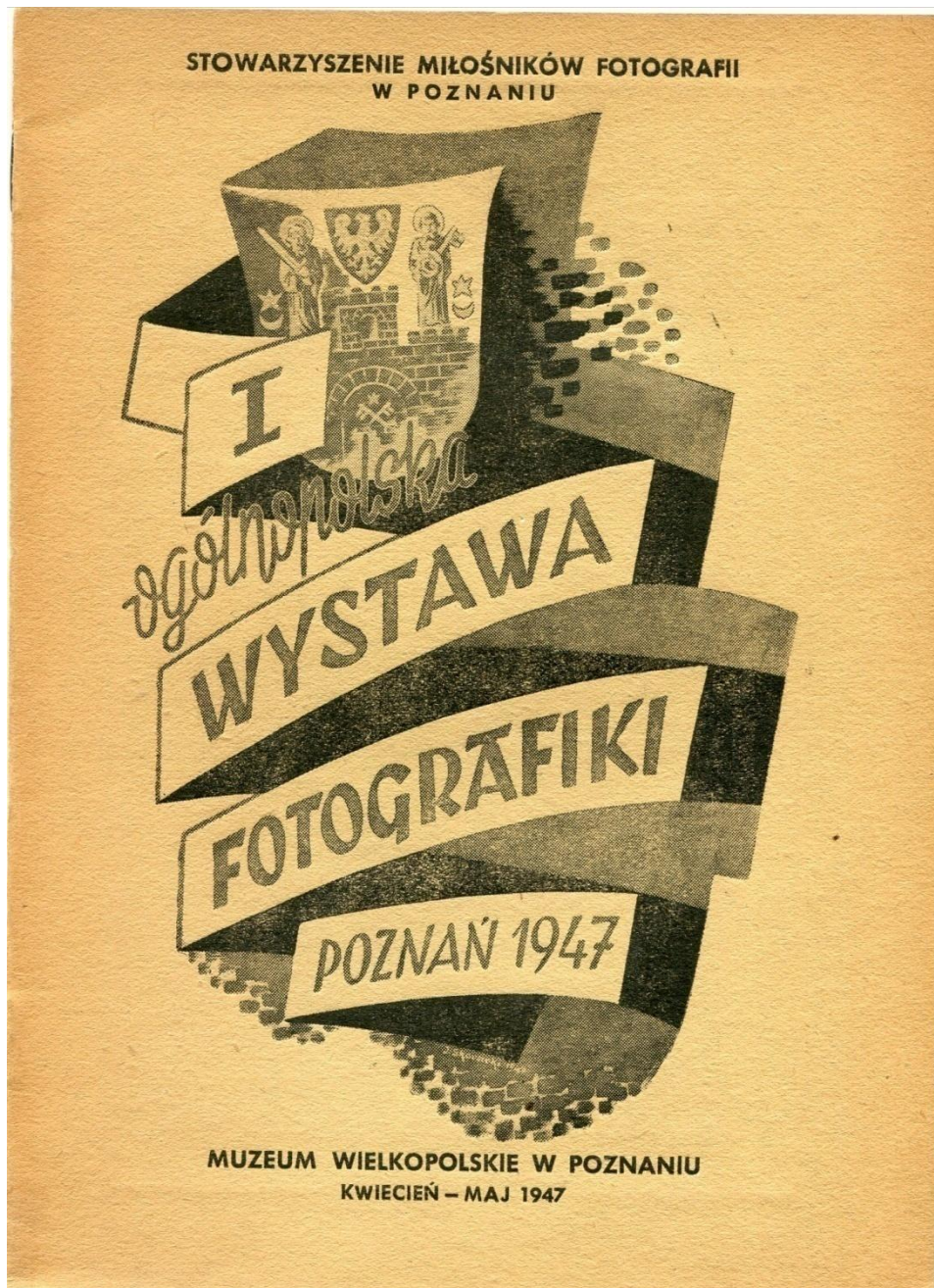


FIG. I.3

*I Ogólnopolska Wystawa Fotografiki*

[First National Exhibition of Art Photography]

1947

Exhibition catalogue

Muzeum Wielkopolskie w Poznaniu (April–May 1947)

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. I.4

**Jan Bułhak (1876–1950)**

*Bogdanów - Field with solitary birch*

[Bohdanów - pole z samotną brzozą]

1925

H.37.5, W.28

Source: <http://fototapeta.art.pl/2006/bhk.php>

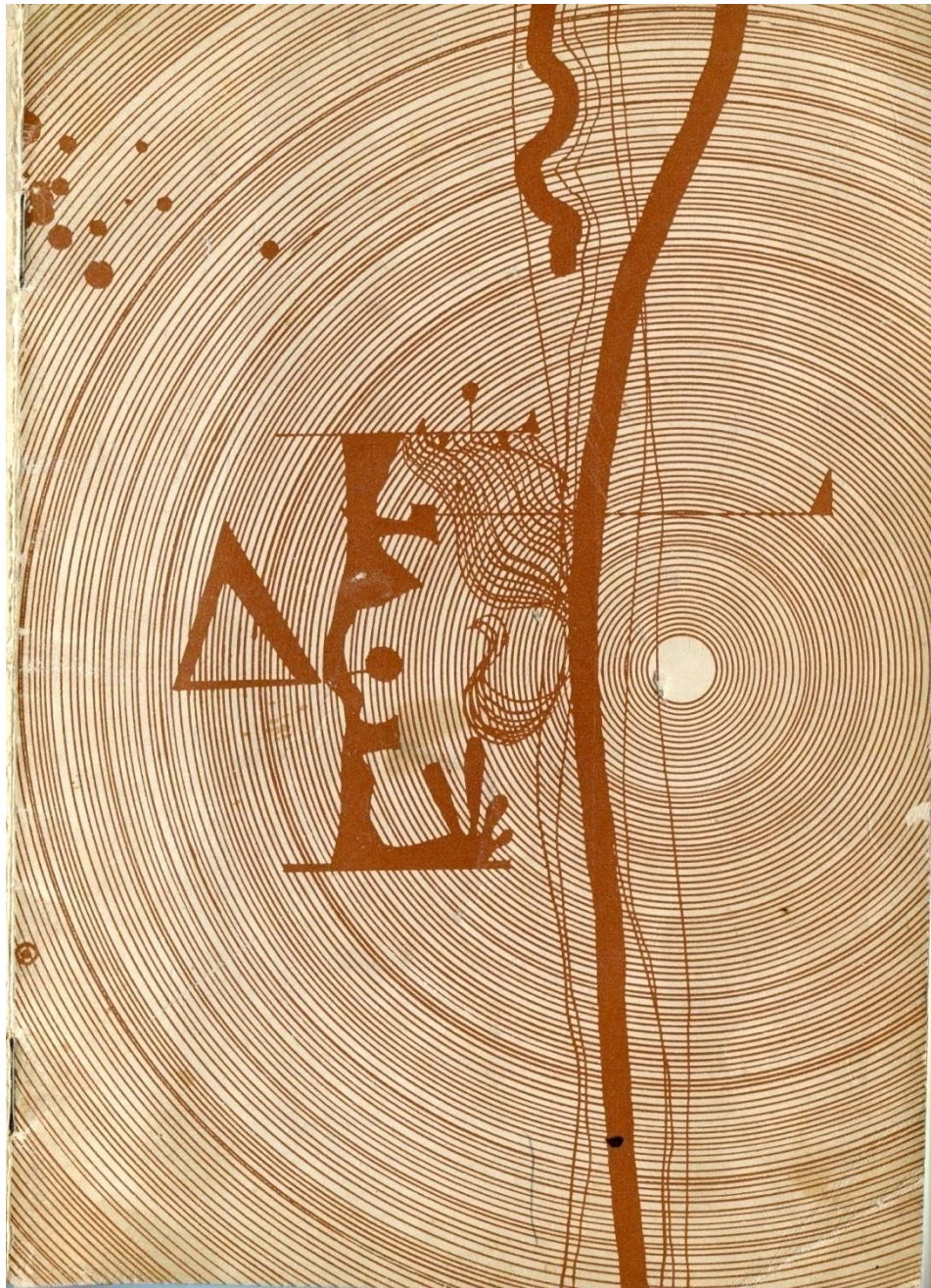


FIG. I.5

*Nowoczesna Fotografika Polska*

[Modern Polish Photography]

1948

Exhibition catalogue

Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców, Warszawa (September–October 1948)

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. I.6

**Fortunata Obrapalska (1909–2004)**

*Przekleństwo*

[Curse]

From the series *Dyfuzja w cieczy* [Diffusion in Liquid]

1947

Gelatin silver print

H.39, W.25

Source: Mariusz Hermansdorfer, ed. *Fotografia: katalog zbiorów* (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 2007).





FIG. I.7

**Fortunata Obrąpalska (1909–2004)**

*Tancerka*

[Dancer]

1947-8

Source: *Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików* [Union of Polish Photographic Artists].



FIG. I.8

**Fortunata Obrapalska (1909–2004)**

*Tancerka II*

[Dancer II]

1947-8

Source: *Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików* [Union of Polish Photographic Artists].



FIG. I.9

**Fortunata Obrąpalska (1909–2004)**  
*Stadium II*  
[Study II]

Source: *Nowoczesna Fotografika Polska* [Modern Polish Photography], exhibition catalogue, (Warszawa: Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców, 1948).



FIG. I.10

**Leonard Sempoliński (1902–1988)**

*Koniec Zabawy*

[End of Games]

Source: *Nowoczesna Fotografika Polska* [Modern Polish Photography], exhibition catalogue, (Warszawa: Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców, 1948).

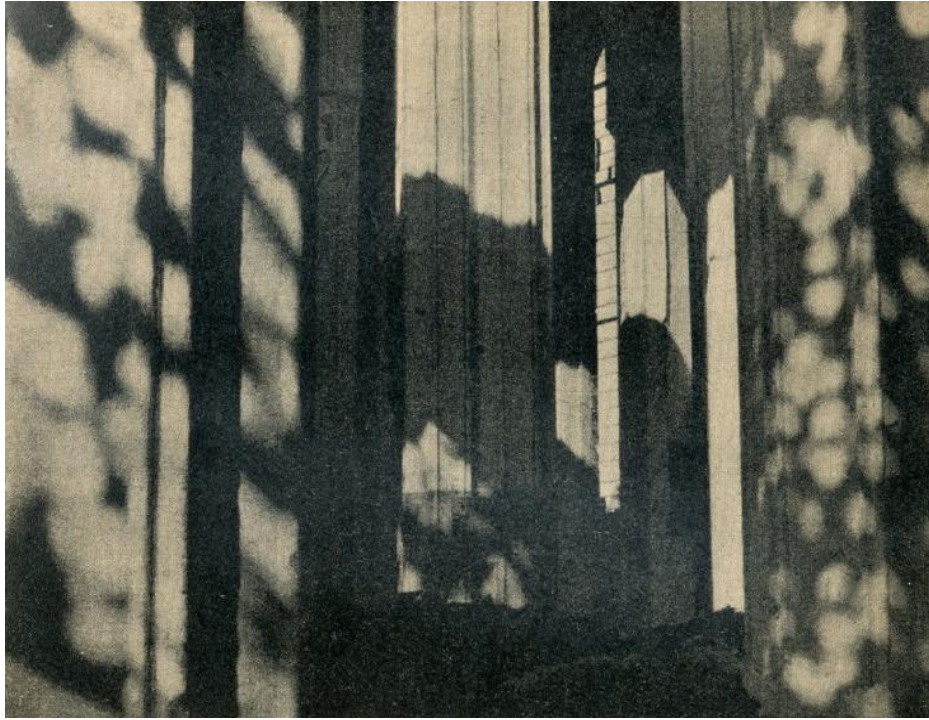


FIG. I.11  
**Jan Bułhak (1876–1950)**  
*Kościół P. Marii – Gdańsk*  
[St. Mary's Church - Gdańsk]

Source: *Nowoczesna Fotografika Polska* [Modern Polish Photography], exhibition catalogue, (Warszawa: Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców, 1948).

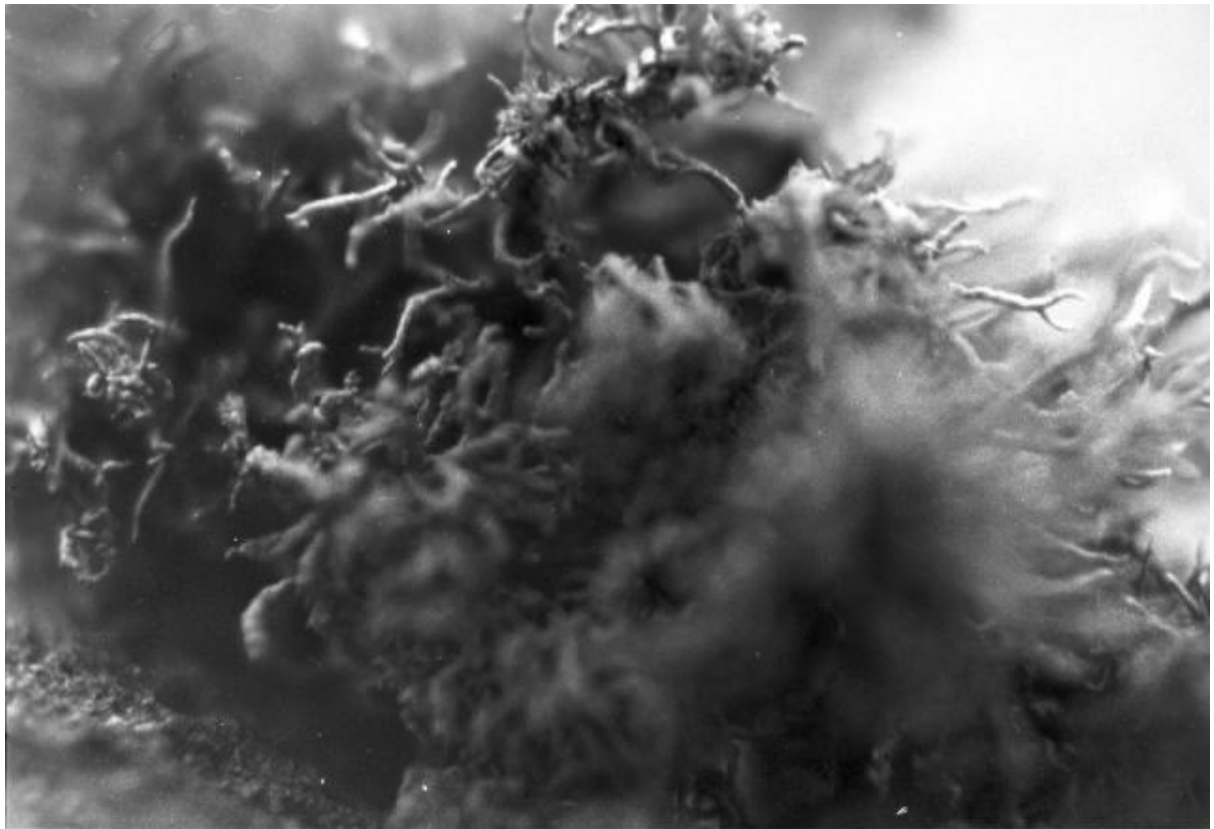


FIG. I.12

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

*Nocami straszy męka głodu*

[The Agony of Hunger Haunts at Night]

1948

Gelatin silver print

H.32, W.49

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.

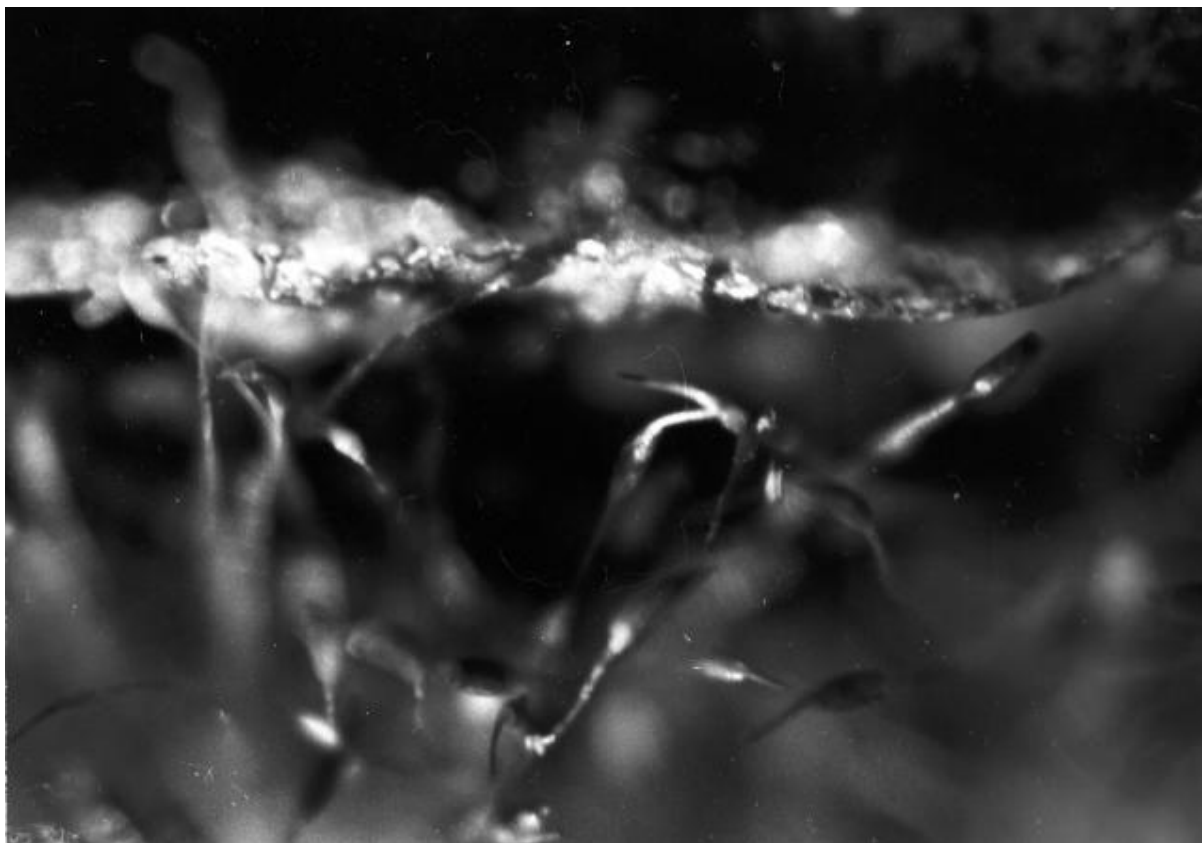


FIG. I.13

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

*Dzieci śnią o ptakach*

[Children dream of birds]

1948

Gelatin silver print

H.32.4, W.48.6

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



**FIG. I.14 Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**  
Plansze dydaktyczne [Didactic Boards] (1–4) 1948  
Source: Zachęta, Warszawa.





FIG. I.15

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

*Przypominam samotność cieśniny*

[I Remember The Loneliness Of The Straits]

1948

Gelatin silver print

H.45.5, W.32.1

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. I.16

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

*Odkrywcy zjawiają się i nic z nich nie zostaje*

[*Discoveries appear and disappear without trace*]

1948

Gelatin silver print

H. 40.2, W.30.2

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. I.17

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

*Zamyślenie*

[Deep in Thought]

1948

Gelatin silver print

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. I.18

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

*Budzę się nagle w nocy myśląc o dalekim południu*

[I wake up suddenly at night thinking of the distant south]

1948

Gelatin silver print

H.45.1, W.32.8

Source: Lech Lechowicz and Jadwiga Janik, *Dłubak: Fotografie 1947-1950* [Dłubak: photographs 1947-1950], exhibition catalogue, (Łódź: Muzeum Szuki, 1995).



FIG. I.19

**Fortunata Obrąpalska (1909–2004)**  
*Armia Pokoju II*  
[Army of the Peace II]  
1950-3

Source: *Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików* [Union of Polish Photographic Artists].



FIG. I.20

**Leonard Sempoliński (1902–1988)**

*Pochód 1-majowy*

[Procession 1<sup>st</sup> May]

1949

Source: *Swiat Fotografii*, no.16, April 1950.

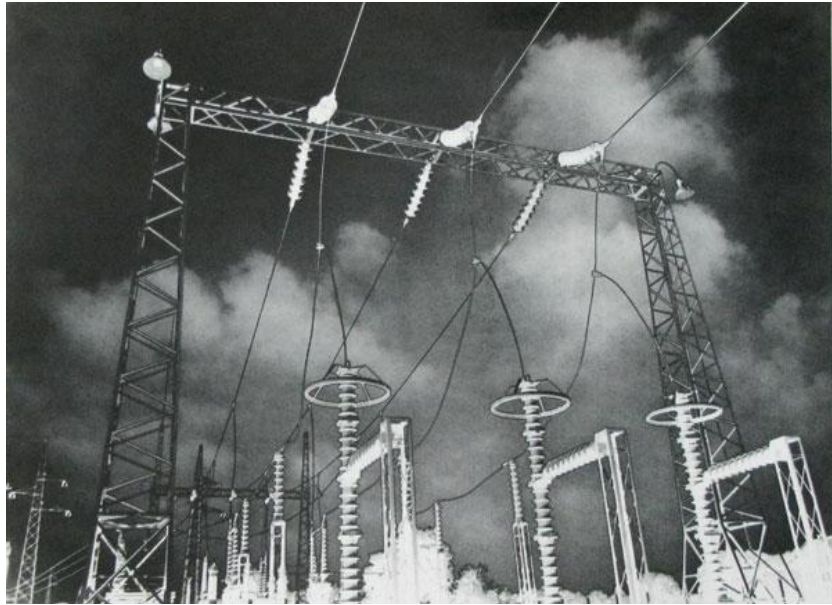


FIG. I.21

**Fortunata Obrąpalska (1909–2004)**  
*Rozdzielnia Elektryczna*  
[Power Station]

Source: Asymetria Gallery, Warsaw.



FIG. I.22

**Fortunata Obrąpalska (1909–2004)**

*Murarze*

[Bricklayers]

1949

Source: *Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików* [Union of Polish Photographic Artists].





FIG. I.23

**Fortunata Obrapalska (1909–2004)**

*Wysilek*

[Exertion]

Source: *Fotografia*, 4 (58) April 1958: 168.



FIG. I.24

Ignacy Płazewski, 'Fotografia I jej rola społeczna' [Photography and its Social Role], *Fotografia*, 1 July 1953.



FIG. I.25

Zbigniew Dłubak, 'Fotoreportaż z naszego życia' [Photo-report from our lives],  
*Fotografia*, 4 October 1953

Source: *Fotografia*, 4 October 1953.



FIG. I.26

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

From the series: *Krajobrazy*

[Landscapes]

Gelatin silver prints

1950-1962

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. I.27

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

From the series: *Krajobrazy*

[Landscapes]

Gelatin silver prints

1950-1962

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. I.28

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

From the series: *Krajobrazy*

[Landscapes]

Gelatin silver prints

1950-1962

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. I.29

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

From the series: *Krajobrazy*

[Landscapes]

Gelatin silver prints

1950-1962

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



**I.30**

**Jan Bulhak (1876-1950)**

*Highway to Minsk*

[Gościniec do Mińska]

1916

Gelatin silver print

H.26, W.41cm

Source: National Gallery of Washington.





FIG. II.1

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Nocturn*

[Nocturne]

(Various dates given: 1955, 1957, 1959)

Gelatin silver print

H.16.9, W.11.9

Source: Jerzy Lewczyński, *Jerzy Lewczyński “Archeologica Fotografii”: Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński ‘Archaeology of Photography’: Work from the years 1941-2005], exhibition catalogue (Wreńnia: Kropka, 2005).



FIG. II.2

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Ukrzyżowanie*

[Crucifixion]

1956

Gelatin silver print

H.49, W.39

Source: Wojciech Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu* [Jerzy Lewczyński: memory of the image] (Gliwice: Muzeum, 2012).



FIG. II.3

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Okno*

[Window]

1958

Gelatin silver print

H.26.3, W.38.8

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).



FIG. II.4

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Depresja*

[Depression]

1956

Photomontage, gelatin silver prints

H.38.3, W.27

Source: Mariusz Hermansdorfer, ed. *Fotografia: katalog zbiorów* (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 2007).



FIG. II.5

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Samotność*

[Loneliness]

1957

Gelatin silver print

H.28.6, W.38.6

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).



FIG. II.6

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Nieznany*

[Unknown]

From the cycle *Głowy Wawelski* [Wawel's Heads]

1957 / 1959

Gelatin silver print

H.49, W.39

Source: Jerzy Lewczyński, *Jerzy Lewczyński "Archeologica Fotografii": Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński 'Archaeology of Photography': Work from the years 1941-2005], exhibition catalogue (Wreńnia: Kropka, 2005).

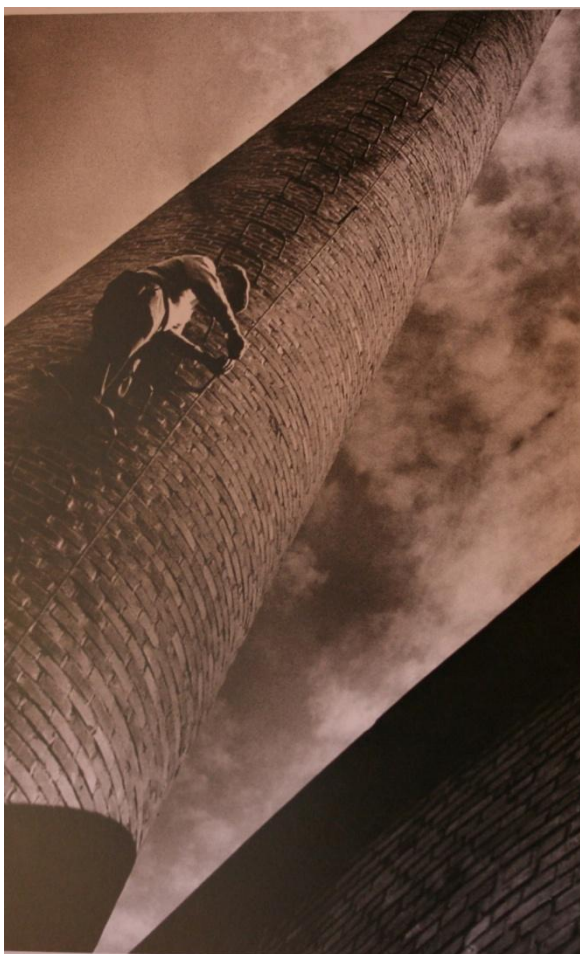


FIG. II.7

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Homo sapiens*

1955

Gelatin silver print

Source: Jerzy Lewczyński, *Jerzy Lewczyński "Archeologica Fotografii": Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński 'Archaeology of Photography': Work from the years 1941-2005], exhibition catalogue (Wreńnia: Kropka, 2005).

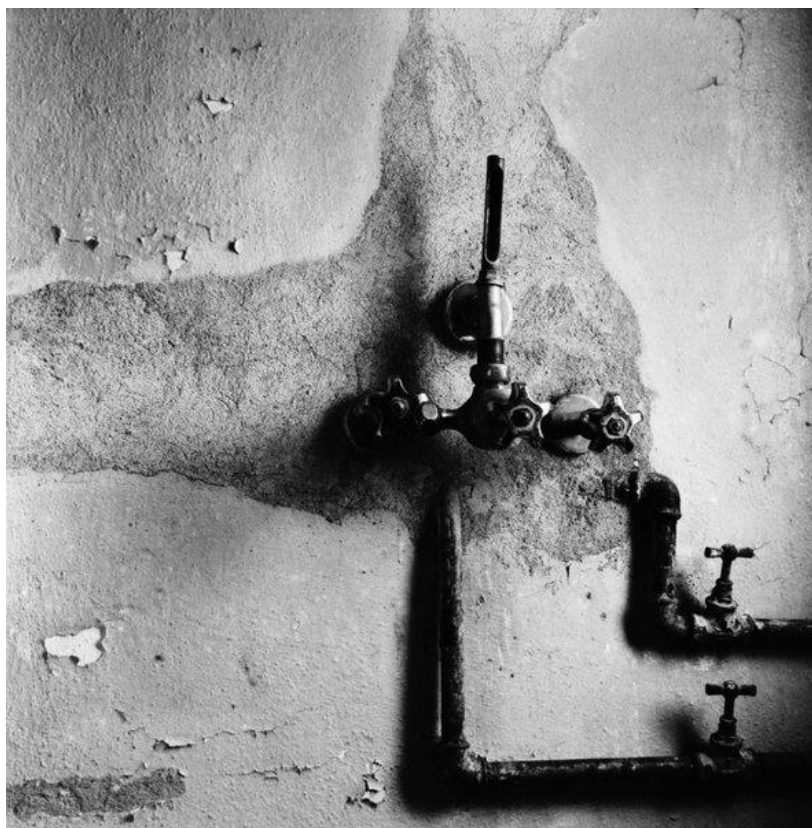


FIG. II.8

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

From the series: *Egzystencje*

[Existences]

1959-1966

Gelatin silver prints

H.6, W.6

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.





FIG. II.9

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

From the series: Egzystencje

[Existences]

1959-1966

Gelatin silver prints

H.6, W.6

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. II.10

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

From the series: Egzystencje

[Existences]

1959-1966

Gelatin silver prints

H.6, W.6

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. II.11

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

From the series: *Egzystencje*

[Existences]

1959-1966

Gelatin silver prints

H.6, W.6

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



FIG. II.12

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

*Cień człowieka*

[Shadow of Man]

From the series: *Wojna* [War]

1957

Oil paint

Source: Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

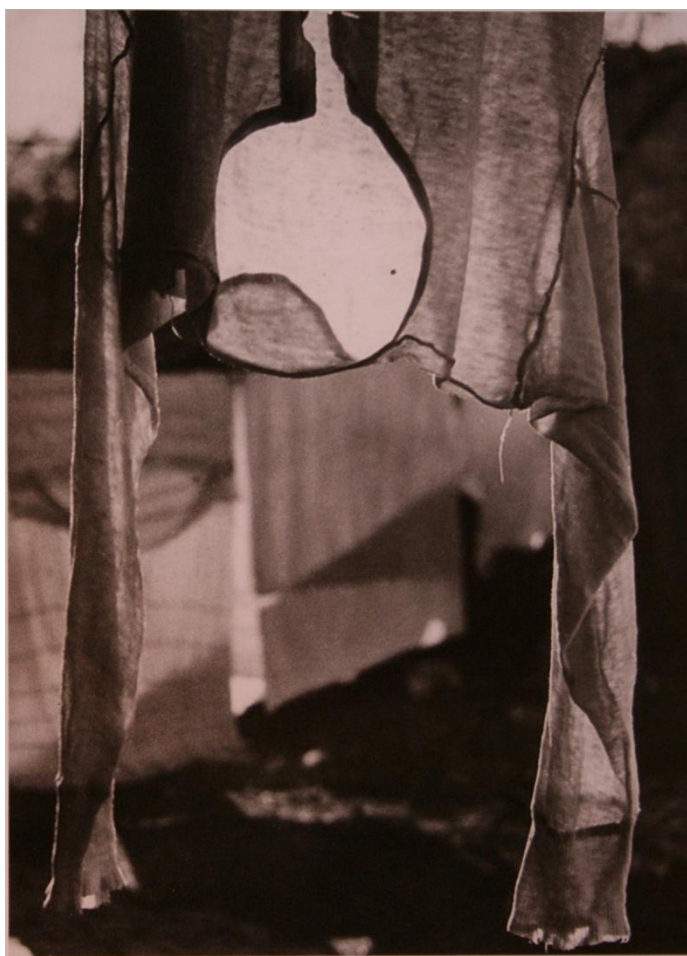


FIG. II.13

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Koszula* [Shirt]

Or *Skóra* [Skin]

From the cycle *Głowy Wawelski* [Wawel's Heads]

1957

Gelatin silver print

H.49, W.39

Source: Jerzy Lewczyński, *Jerzy Lewczyński "Archeologica Fotografii": Prace z lat 1941-2005* [Jerzy Lewczyński 'Archaeology of Photography': Work from the years 1941-2005], exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Kropka, 2005).



FIG. II.14

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Auschwitz*

1959

Gelatin silver print

H.17.4, W.12.5

Source: Galeria Asymetria, Warszawa.



FIG. II.15

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Buty*

[Shoes]

1957

Gelatin silver print

Source: Source: Wojciech Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu* [Jerzy Lewczyński: memory of the image] (Gliwice: Muzeum, 2012).



FIG. II.16

Clockwise, from top left: Zdzisław Beksiński, *Akt* [Nude]

Zdzisław Beksiński, *Odbicie* [Reflection]

Zdzisław Beksiński, *Na Moscie* [On the Bridge]

Jerzy Lewczyński, *Baczność* [Attention]

Jerzy Lewczyński, *Skóra* [Skin]

Source: *Fotografia 9* (63) September 1958.



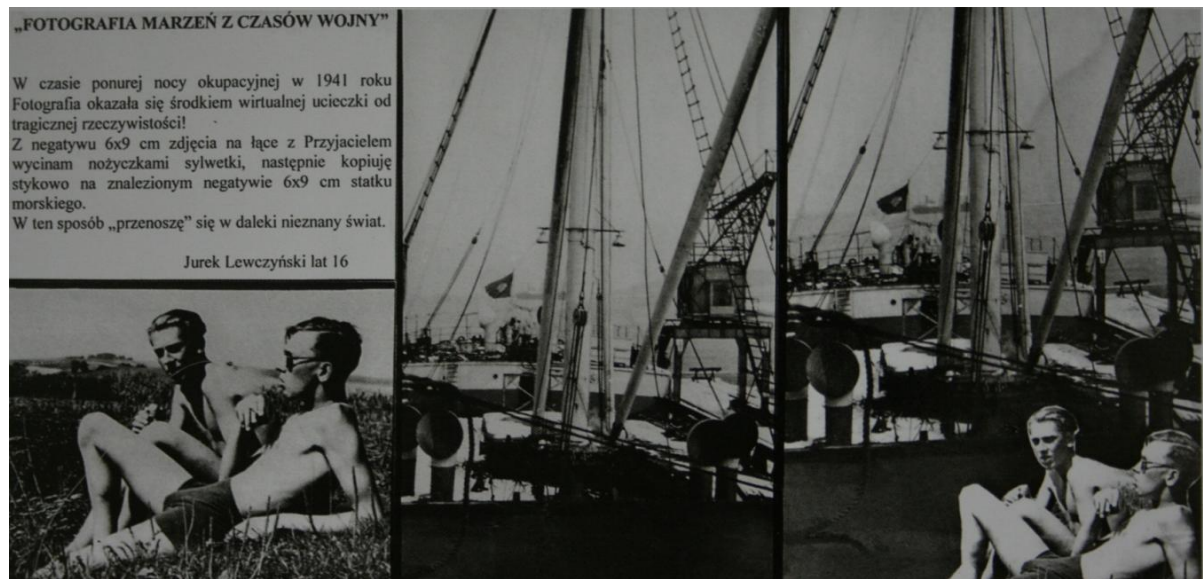


FIG. II.17

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**  
*Fotografia marzeń z czasów wojny*  
 [Dream Photograph in War Time]  
 1941  
 Photomontage

Source: Jerzy Lewczyński, *Jerzy Lewczyński “Archeologica Fotografii”*: Prace z lat 1941-2005 [Jerzy Lewczyński ‘Archaeology of Photography’: Work from the years 1941-2005], exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Kropka, 2005).

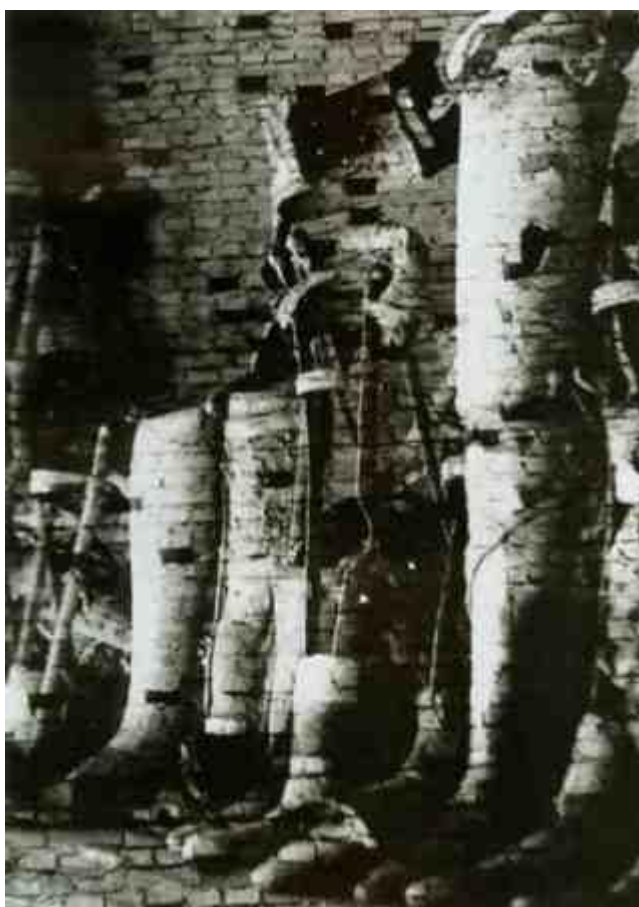


FIG. II.18

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Baczność*

[Attention]

1958

Combination print

Source: Wojciech Nowicki, *Jerzy Lewczyński: pamięć obrazu* [Jerzy Lewczyński: memory of the image] (Gliwice: Muzeum, 2012).



FIG. 11.19

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**  
*Październik*  
[October]  
1956

Source: Muzeum w Gliwicach.

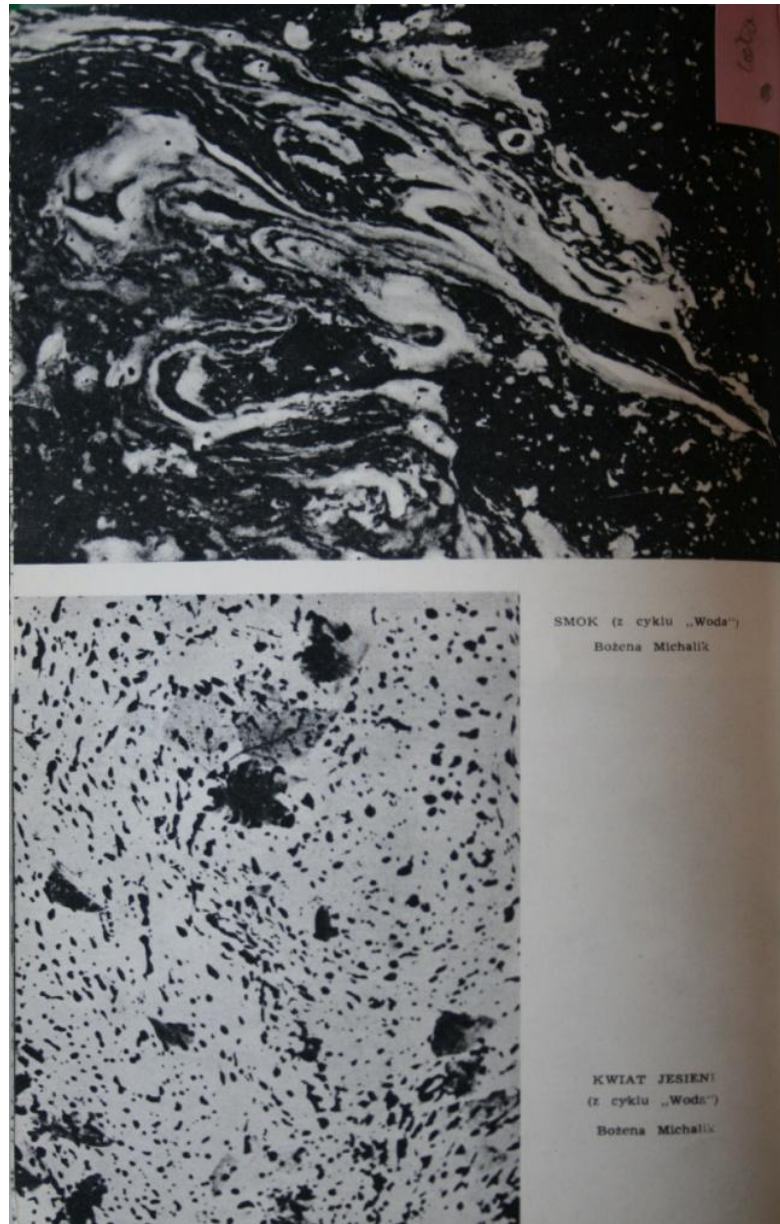


FIG. II.20

**Bożena Michalik (1907–1995)**

*Above: Smok [Dragon]*

From the series *Woda [Water]*

*Kwiat Jesieni [Autumn Flower]*

From the series *Woda [Water]*

Source: *Fotografia* 9 (63) September 1958.

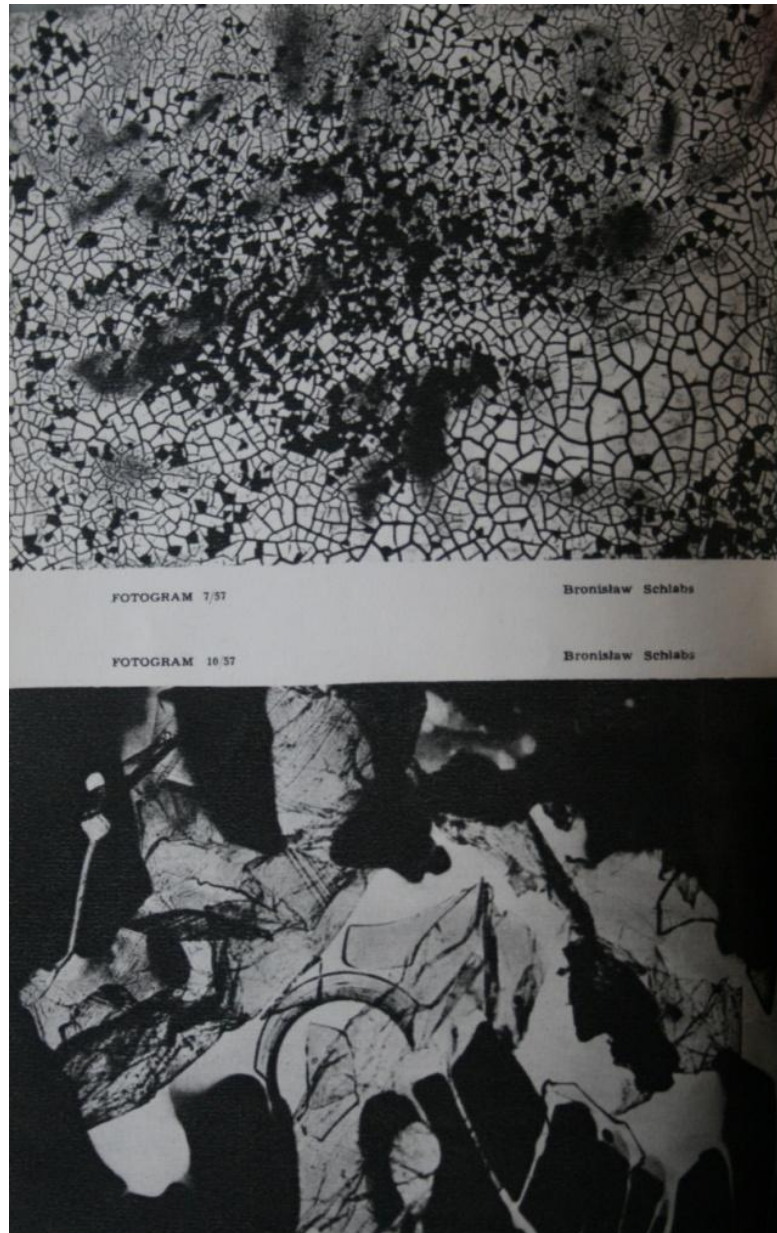


FIG. II.21

**Bronisław Schlabs (1920–2009)**

*Above: Fotogram 7/57*

*Below: Fotogram 10/57*

Source: *Fotografia* 9 (63) September 1958.



FIG. II.22

**Bronisław Schlabs (1920–2009)**

*Fotogram 15,57*

1957

Source: Tomasz Darowny and Ewa Hornowska, *Bronisław Schlabs: fotogramy 1956-1962*, exhibition catalogue (Poznań: Galeria Piekary, 2005).



FIG. II.23

**Bronisław Schlabs (1920–2009)**

*Powierzchnia*

[Surface]

1957

Source: Tomasz Darowny and Ewa Hornowska, *Bronisław Schlabs: fotografie 1956-1962*, exhibition catalogue (Poznań: Galeria Piekary, 2005).



FIG. II.24

**Bronisław Schlabs (1920–2009)**

*Fotogram 54, 58*

1958

Source: Tomasz Darowny and Ewa Hornowska, *Bronisław Schlabs: fotogramy 1956-1962*, exhibition catalogue (Poznań: Galeria Piekary, 2005).





FIG. II.25

**Bronisław Schlabs (1920–2009)**

*Left: Kompozycja*

[Composition]

1958

Negative

*Right: (fragment of final print)*

Source: Galeria Piekary, Poznań.



FIG. II.26

**Bronisław Schlabs (1920–2009)**

*Fotogram T16/58*

1958

Source: *FOTOGRAFIA* 7 (73) July 1959



FIG. II.27

**Marek Piasecki (1935–2011)**

*Untitled (Heliograph)*

1958

Ferrotyped gelatin silver print

H.24.3, W.17.6

Source: Mummery + Schnelle Gallery.



FIG. II.28

**Marek Piasecki (1935–2011)**

*Untitled (Miniature)*

1955-67

Unique gelatin silver print

H.17.9, W.12.9

Source: Mummery + Schnelle Gallery.

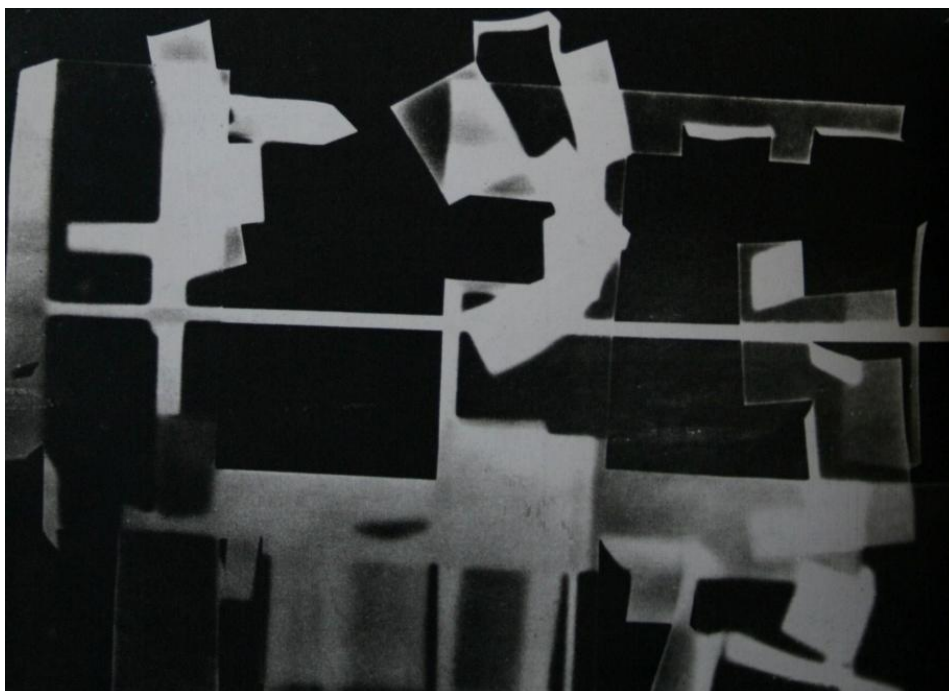


FIG. II.29

**Andrzej Pawłowski (1925-1986)**  
*Untitled*

Source: *Fotografia* 8 (74) August 1959



FIG. II.30

**Andrzej Pawłowski (1925-1986)**

*Kineformy*

[Cineforms]

1956-1957

Source: [www.culture.pl](http://www.culture.pl)



FIG. II.31

**Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990)**

*Pacyfik V*

[Pacific V]

1958

Source: Muzeum Narodowe, Poznań.

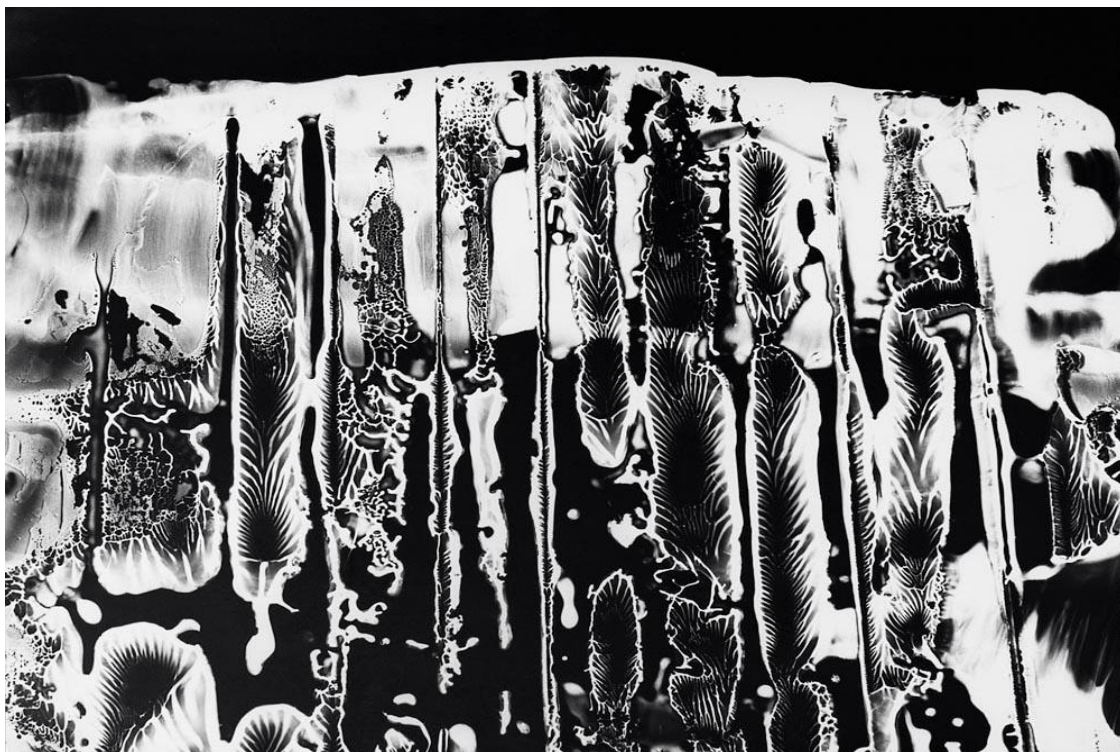


FIG. II.32

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Metamorfoza*

[Metamorphosis]

1957

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).





FIG. II.33

**Bronisław Schlabs (1920-2009)**

*Obraz z metalem*

[Picture with metal]

1957

Source: Galeria Piekary, Poznań,



FIG. II.34

R: **Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Gorset sadysty*

[Sadist's Corset]

1957

Silver gelatin print

H.48, W.33

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).



FIG. II.35

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Untitled*

1956

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).



FIG. II.36

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Untitled*

1956

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).



FIG. II.37

*Gliwice – Pokaz zamknięty*

[Gliwice – Closed Show]

(Zdzisław Beksiński, Jerzy Lewczyński, Bronisław Schlabs)

June 20, 1959

Source: Adam Sobota, *Antyfotografia i ciąg dalszy* [Anti-photography and continuation], exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 1993).

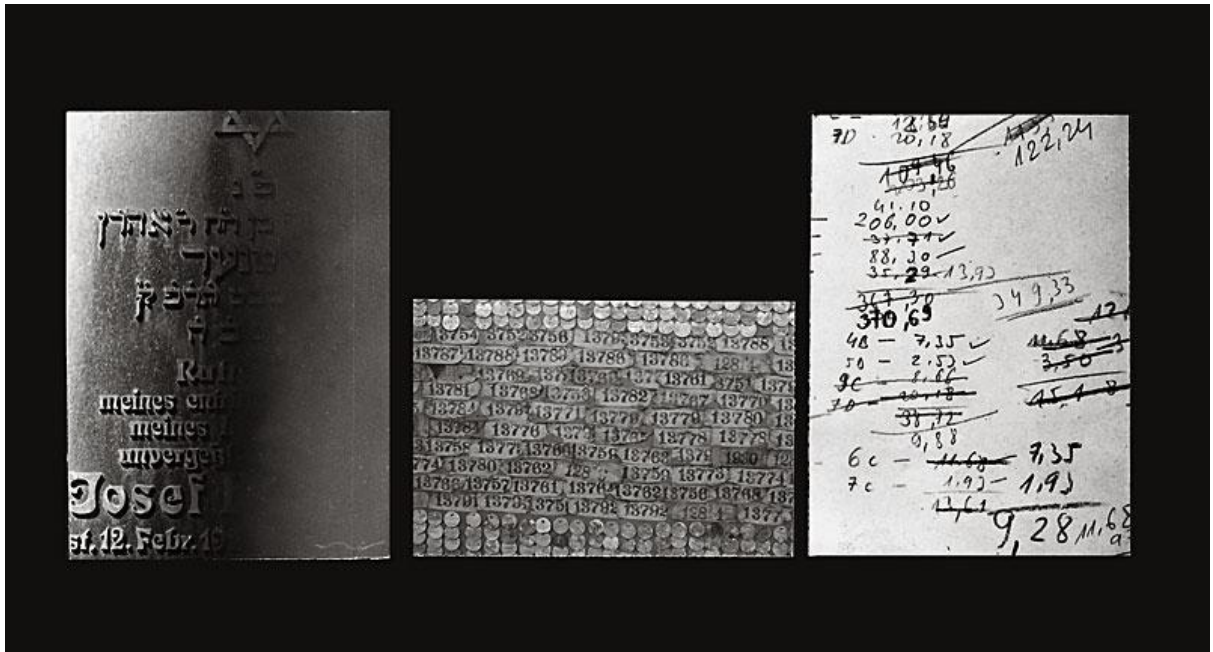


FIG. II.38

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Untitled*

From the series, *Antyfotografia* [Anti-photography]

1959

Source: Adam Sobota, *Antyfotografia i ciąg dalszy* [Anti-photography and continuation], exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 1993).



FIG. II.39

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Untitled*

From the series, *Antyfotografia* [Anti-photography]

1959

Source: Adam Sobota, *Antyfotografia i ciąg dalszy* [Anti-photography and continuation], exhibition catalogue (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 1993).

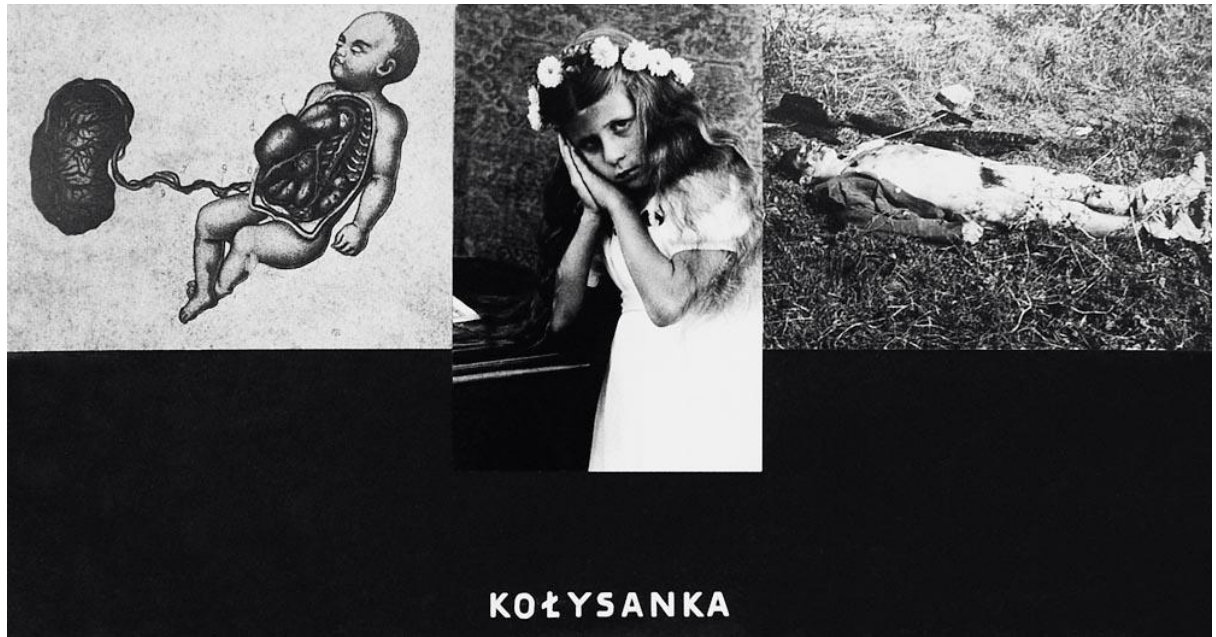


FIG. II.40

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Kołysanka*

[Lullaby]

1958-1959

Photomontage on fibreboard

H.53.6, W.104.5

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).





FIG. II.41

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Nóż*

[Knife]

1958-1959

Photomontage on fibreboard

H.55, W.85.5

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).

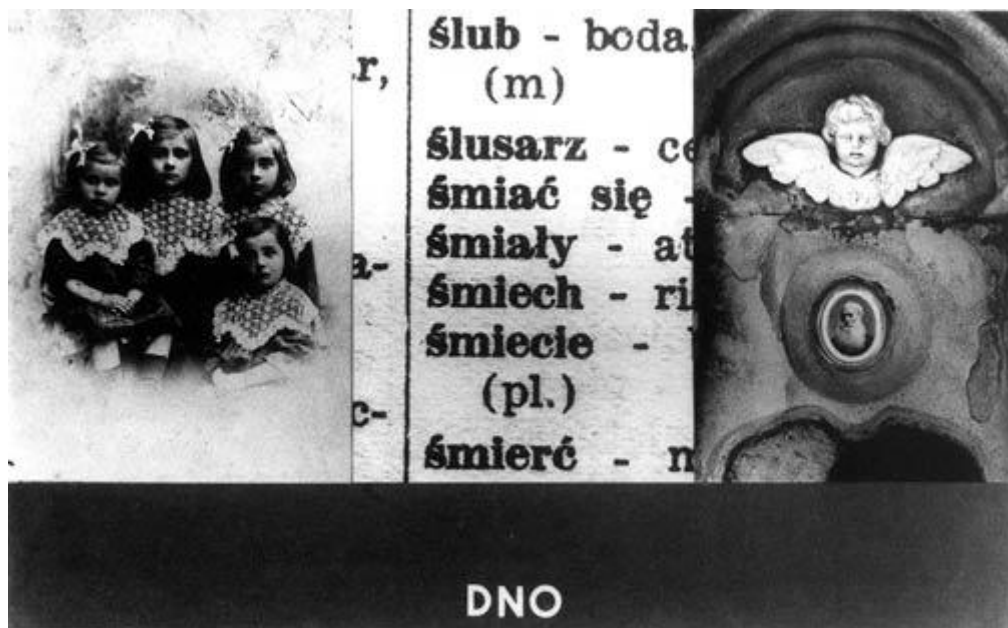


FIG. II.42

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Dno*

[Down]

1958-1959

Photomontage on fibreboard/plywood

H.52, W.84

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).

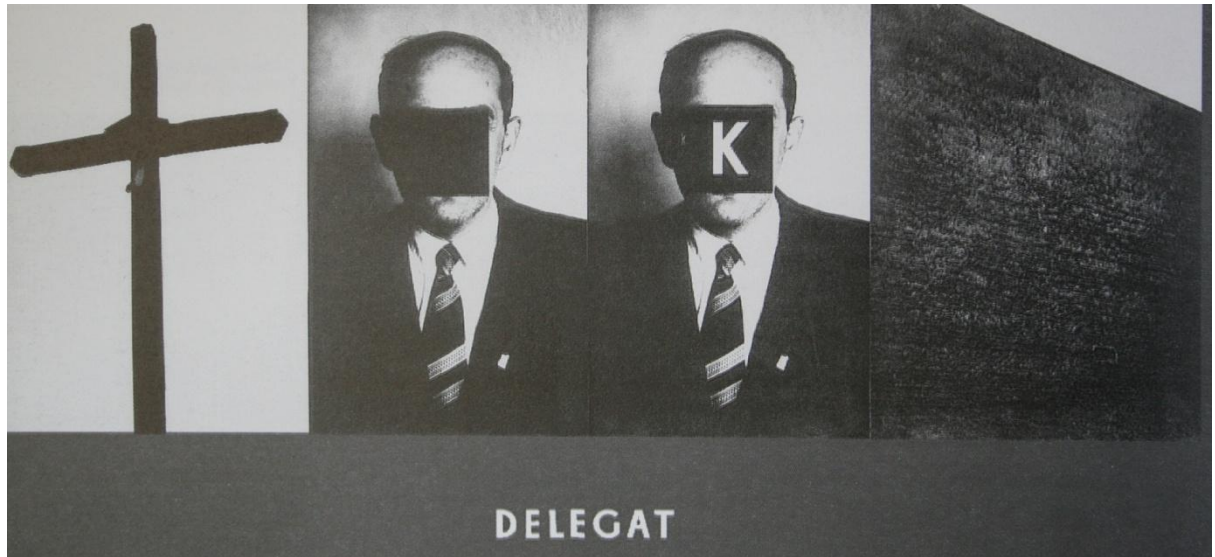


FIG. II.43

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

*Delegat*

[Delegate]

1958-1959

Photomontage on fibreboard

H. 50.5. W.110

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).



(installation view)

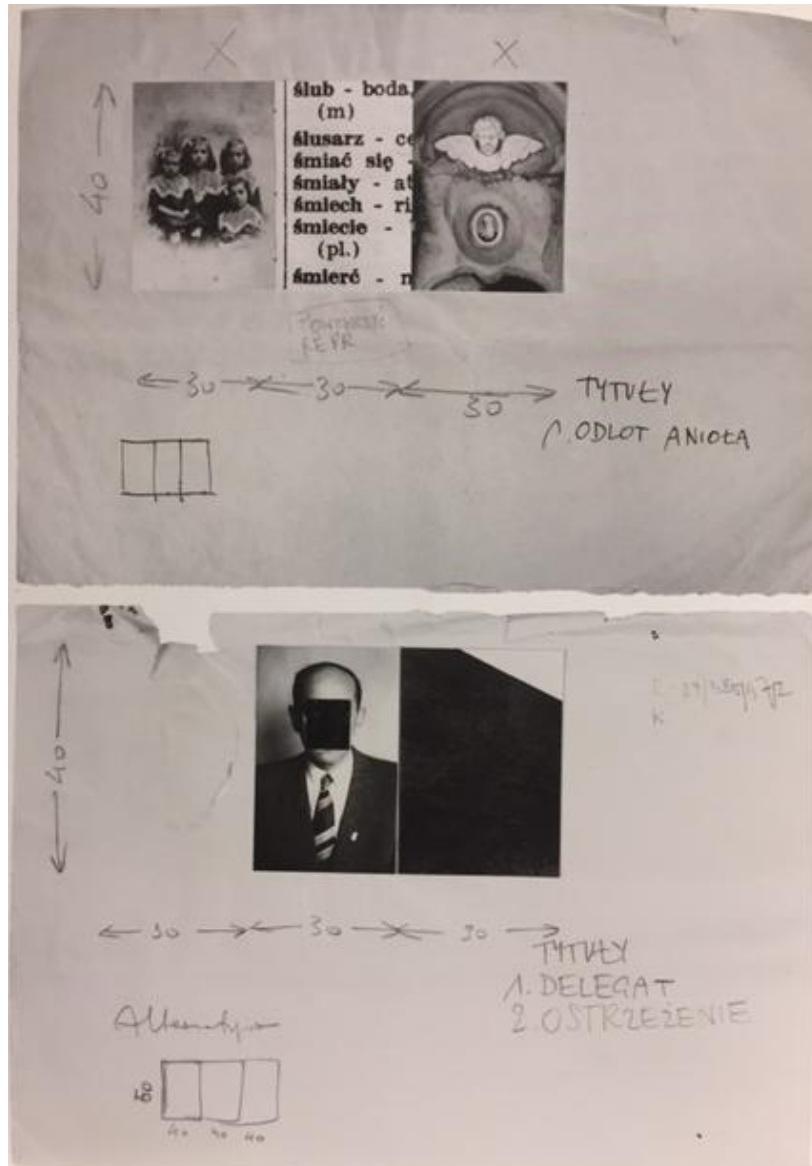


FIG. II.44

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

Preparatory sketches

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).



FIG. 11.45

**Jan Lenica (1928–2001); Walerian Borowczyk (1923–2006)**

*Dom*

[House]

1958

Film, 12 min.

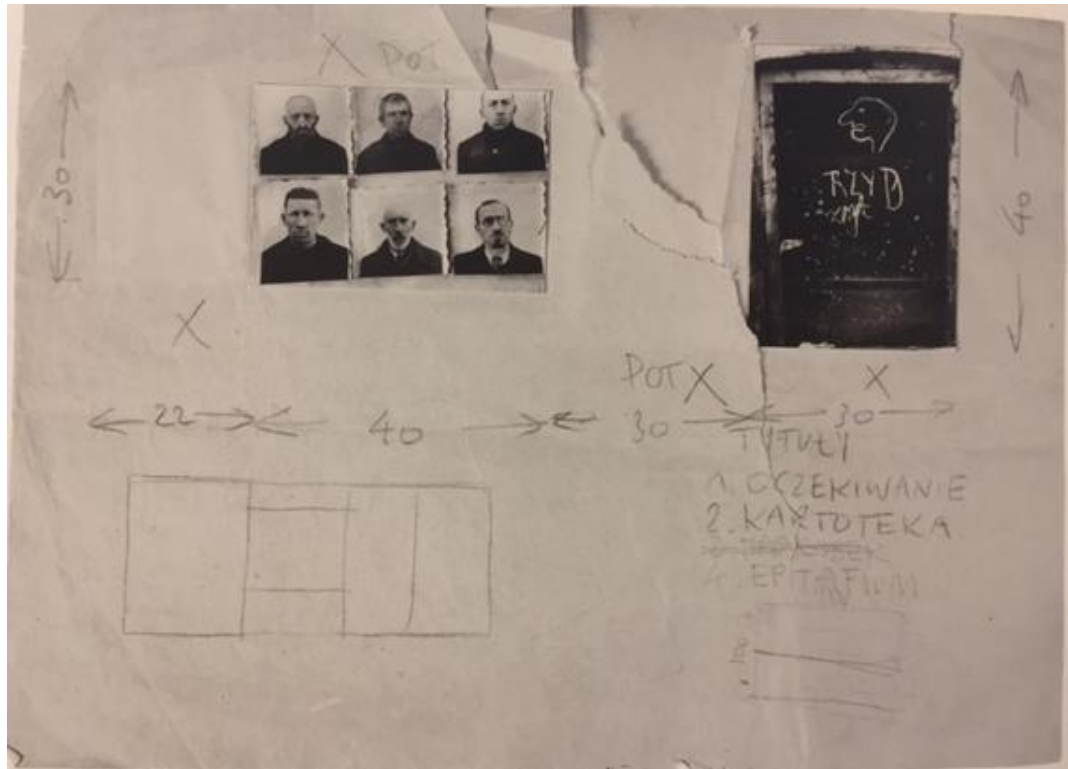


FIG II.46

**Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005)**

Preparatory sketch for an unrealised work

*Oczekiwanie* [Expectancy]

*Kartoteka* [File Index]

*Nagrobek* [Tombstone]

*Epitafium* [Epitaph]

Source: Wiesław Banach, *Foto Beksiński* [Photo Beksiński] (Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, 2011).



FIG. II.47

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Untitled*

1959

Gelatin silver print

H.9, W.14

Source: Galeria Asymetria, Warszawa.



FIG. II.48

**Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014)**

*Zagubione słowa*

[Lost words]

1959

Gelatin silver print

H.48, W.36

Source: Muzeum w Gliwicach.





FIG. III.I

**Jerzy Wardak**

*Refleksje*

[Reflection]

1967

Silver gelatin print

H. 98.7, 54.4

Source: *Fotografia 3* (178) March 1968.



FIG III.2

**Józef Robakowski (b.1939)**

*Autoportret trzymany w rękach*

[Self portrait held in hands]

1967

Source: [www.robakowski.net](http://www.robakowski.net).



FIG. III.3

**Józef Robakowski (b.1939)**

*Sen*

[Dream]

Source: Dłubak, Zbigniew and Zbigniew Łagocki. *Fotografia Subiektywna*. Exhibition catalogue. Kraków, 1968.



FIG. III.4

**Andrzej Różycki (b.1964)**

*Legenda*

[Legend]

1968

Gelatin silver print

H.39.5, 50.5

Source: *Fotografia* 12 (186) December 1968.



FIG. III.5

**Andrzej Różycki (b.1964)**

*Polska jesień*

[Polish Autumn]

1968

Montage

H. 92.3, W.56

Source: Miejska Galeria Sztuki, Łódź.



FIG. III.6

**Andrzej Różycki (b.1964)**

*Zatruta studnia*

[Poisoned Well]

1965

Collage

Source: Muzeum Historii Fotografii w Krakowie.



FIG. III.7

**Andrzej Różycki (b.1964)**  
*Chodzenie Różnymi Drogami*  
[Walking various paths]  
1968  
Collage

Source: *Fotografia* 12 (186) December 1968.

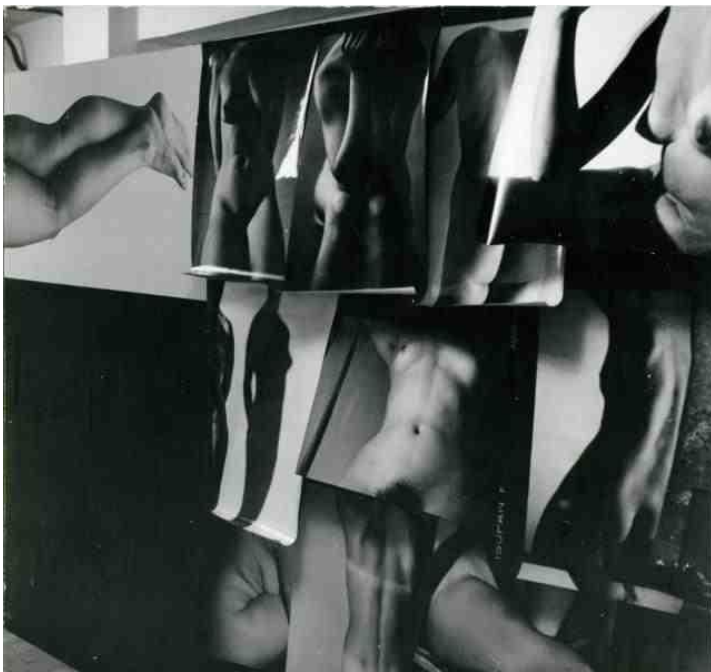


FIG. III.8

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

*Iconosfera I*

[Ikonosphere I]

1967

Photo credit: Elżbieta Tejchman

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa.



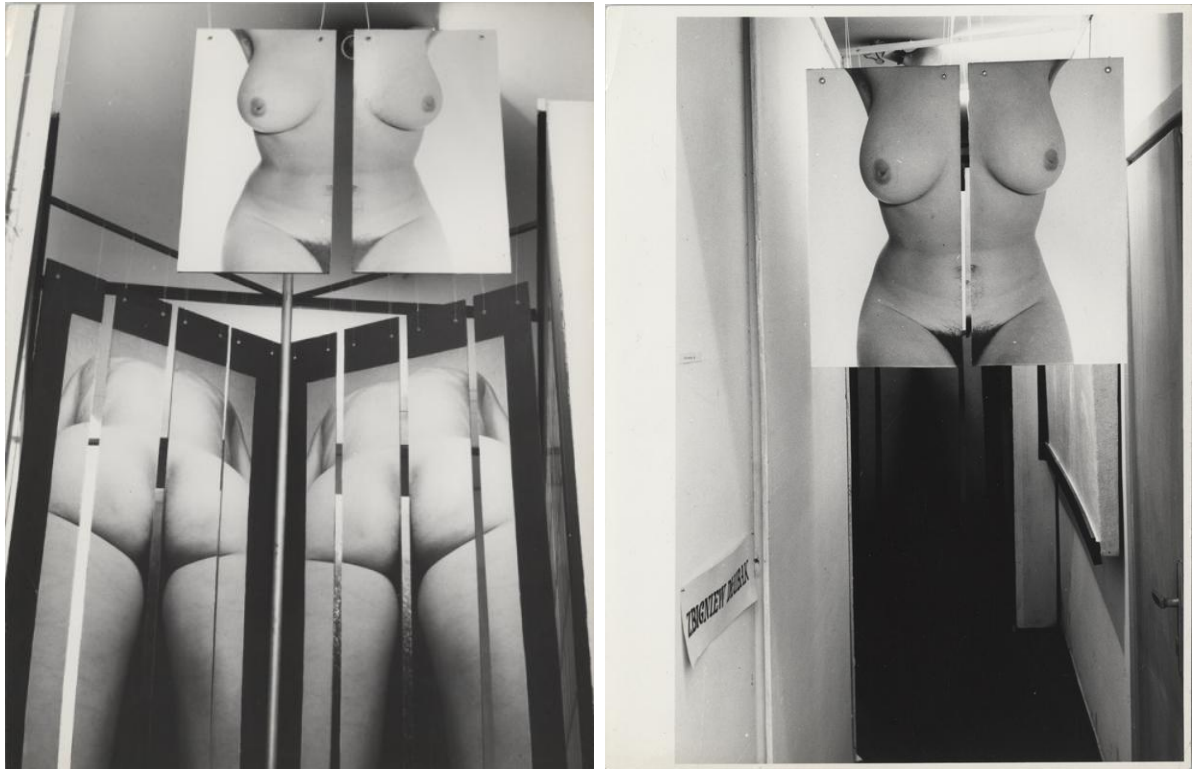


FIG. III.9

**Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

*Iconosfera II*

[Ikonosphere II]

1968

Photo credit: Elżbieta Tejchman

Source: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, Warszawa



FIG. III.10

*Wystawa Fotografii Subiektywnej*  
[Subjective Photography exhibition]  
Kraków 1968

From left: W. Bruszewski, A. Różycki, A. Mikołajczyk, J. Robakowski, Cz. Kuchta, J. Wardak

Source: Piotr Lisowski.



FIG. III.11

*Kuźnia*  
[Forge]  
1969  
(exterior view)

Photo credit: Elżbieta Tejchman.

*Unless otherwise stated, all images relating to Forge sourced from:  
Centre of Contemporary Art, Torun.*



FIG. III.12

**Józef Robakowski (b.1939)**

*Plasz matki*

[Mother's Coat]

Object

Photo credit: Andrzej Różycki.



FIG. III.13

*Kuznia*  
[Forge]  
1969  
(exterior view)

Photo credit: Elżbieta Tejchman

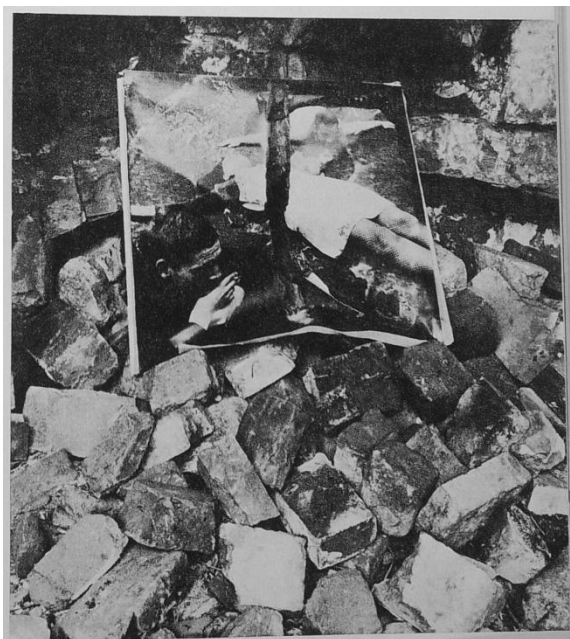
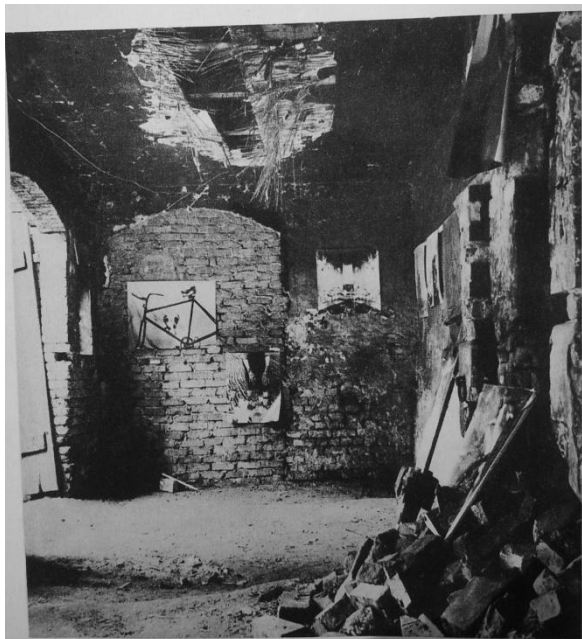


FIG. III.14

*Kuźnia*  
[Forge]  
1969  
(interior view)

Source: *FOTOGRAFIA* 9 (195) September 1969



FIG. III.15

*Kuźnia*  
[Forge]  
1969  
(interior view)

Photo credit: Elżbieta Tejchman



FIG. III.16

**Andrzej Różycki (b.1964)**

L: *Klatka* [Birdcage]

R: *Studium perspektywny* [Perspective Study]

*Kuznia*

[Forge]

1969

(interior view)

Photo credit: Elzbieta Tejchman.





FIG. III.17

**Michał Kokot (1944-2014)**

*Skrzypek*

[Fiddler]

1969

*Kuźnia*

[Forge]

1969

(interior view)

Photo credit: Anna Chojnacka

Photo credit: Elżbieta Tejchman



FIG. III.18

**Wojciech Bruszewski (1947-2009)**

L: *Układ fotograficzny* [Photo-object]

R: *Tors* [Torso]

*Kuźnia*

[Forge]

1969

Photo credit: Andrzej Różycki.

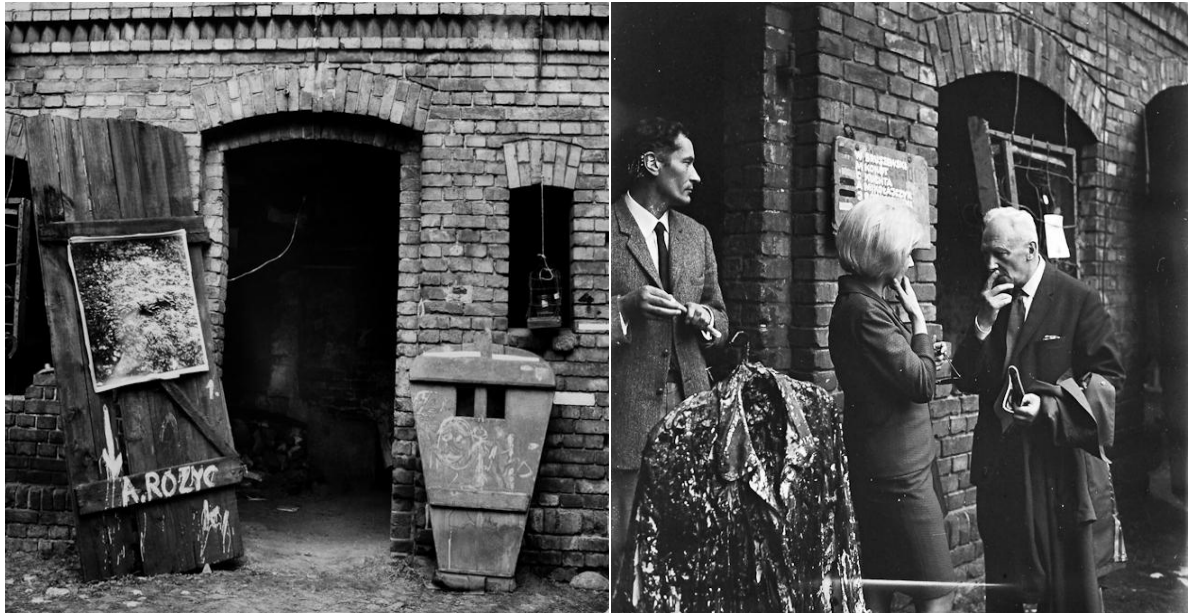


FIG. III.19

**L: Andrzej Różycki (b.1964)**  
*November* [Listopad]  
Photo credit: Elzbieta Tejchman

**R: *Kuźnia* [Forge] 1969 (exterior view)**  
Photo credit: Andrzej Różycki



FIG. III.20

Kuznia  
[Forge]  
1969  
(exterior view)

Photo credit: Elżbieta Tejchman



FIG. III.21

Kuźnia  
[Forge]  
1969  
(exterior view)

Photo credit: Elżbieta Tejchman



FIG. III.22

**Józef Robakowski (b.1939)**

*Po człowieku* [After Man (Memory Board)]

*Kuźnia* [Forge] 1969 (exterior view)

Photo credit: Andrzej Różycki.



FIG. III.23

**Antoni Mikołajczak (1939-2000)**

*Self Portrait*

1969

Canvas

*Kuźnia* [Forge] 1969 (exterior view)

Photo Credit: Jerzy Lewczyński.



FIG. III.24  
**Antoni Mikołajczk (1939-2000)**  
*Mascaron*  
[Gargoyle]

*Kuźnia* [Forge] 1969 (exterior view)





FIG. III.25

**L: Józef Robakowski (b.1939)**

*Po człowieku*

[After Man]

(object)

**R: Antoni Mikołajczk (1939-2000)**

*Chora opona*

[The Sick Tyre]

(object)

*Kuźnia* [Forge] 1969 (exterior view)

Photo credit: Andrzej Rozycki.



FIG. III.26

**Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990)**

*Popular Exhibition*

1963

Galeria Krzysztofory, Kraków

Photo credit: Tadeusz Chrzanowski

Source: Cricoteca



FIG. III.27

**Antoni Mikołajczak (1939-2000)**

*Koszula*

[Shirt]

1969

Kuźnia [Forge] 1969 (exterior view)

Photo credit: Andrzej Rozycki.

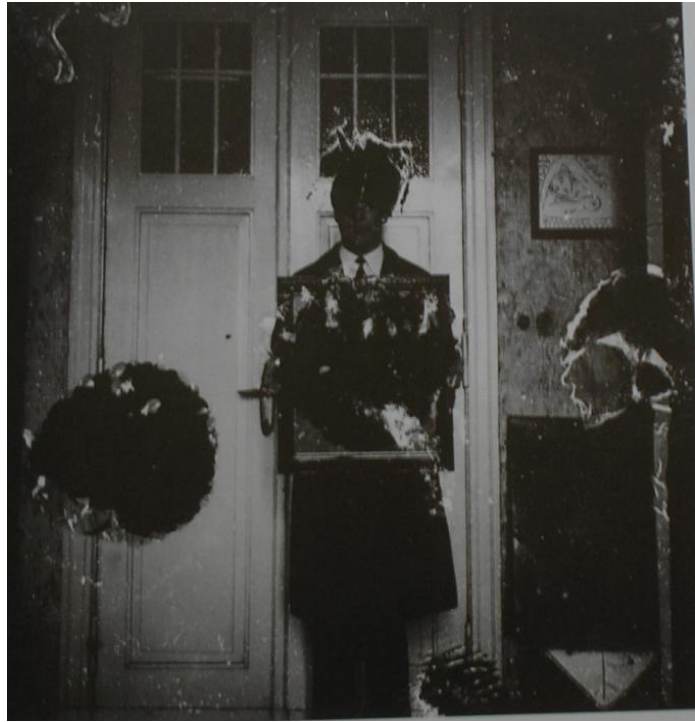


FIG. III.28

**Wojciech Bruszewski (1947-2009)**

L: *Untitled*

1969

H.22, W.15

L: *Untitled*

1969

H.17, W.18



FIG. III.29

**Józef Robakowski (b.1939)**

*Kowal*

[Blacksmith]

1962

Source: Robakowski.net



FIG. III.30

**L: Józef Robakowski (b.1939)**

*Cień*

[Shadow]

(spraypaint)

**R: Antoni Mikołajczk (1939-2000)**

*Koszula*

[Shirt]

(object)



FIG. III.31

**Wojciech Bruszewski (1947-2009)**

*Odcisk*

[Footprint / Imprint]

Imprint, poured gypsum

*Kuźnia* [Forge] 1969 (exterior view)



FIG. III.32

**Józef Robakowski (b.1939)**

*Po człowieku*

[After Man (Memory Board)]

1969

*Kuźnia* [Forge] 1969 (exterior view)

Photo credit: Andrzej Rożycki





FIG. III.33

**Czesław Kuchta**

*Pamięci J. P.*

[In Memory of J. P.]

1968

Source: Piotr Lisowski.



FIG. III.34

Group ZERO 69 at the exhibition *Kuźnia* [Forge] 1969  
(From left to right: A. Rożycki, A. Mikołajczyk, J. Robakowski, W, Bruszewski, M. Kokot)



FIG. III.35

**Andrzej Różycki (b.1964)**  
*Na drodze z Torunia do Łodzi*  
[On the Road from Toruń to Łódź]  
1969

Source: *Fotografia 4* (226) April 1972.



FIG. IV

**Józef Robakowski (b.1939)**

*6,000,000*

(1962)

5 min., 16mm, b/w

Source: The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.