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Defining Reality: Photography and the Surrealist Concept of the Image in Poland in the 1940s

Abstract

The text discusses definitions of photography formulated in Poland in the 1940s. The author analyses Zbigniew Dłubak's series of photographs inspired by the poetry of Pablo Neruda in reference to surrealism, Marxism, and, primarily, to Władysław Strzemiński's theory of vision. Particular emphasis is placed on the concept of the image shared by Dłubak and Strzemiński, a concept that links the issue of realism with individual expression, allowing for a formal differentiation of representation (abstraction). In consequence, the analysed series by Dłubak is presented as sharing similarities with seemingly formally remote series of collages *To My Friends the Jews* by Strzemiński. Both demonstrate an ambition to express in the modern form both collective realism as well as individual memory, primarily of the war events. Proposed interpretation suggests that the use and understanding of photography as a medium closely tied to reality had a decisive meaning for the new formula of the image constructed right after 1945 – formula open to experimenting, yet also ideologically radical, addressing the existential problems of the individual involved with the new political order.

Keywords: realism, surrealism, Marxism, aesthetics, avant-garde photography, Polish modernity after 1945

In Polish art history, the immediate aftermath of World War II is considered a transitory period – a time when the pre-war avant-garde ideas were redefined by individual experiences of liminal situations and by new political impulses. Formulating his reflections on the “surrealist interregnum” of the 1940s, Piotr Piotrowski defined the spectrum of this reconfiguration by noting that surrealism was a phenomenon primarily concerned with ideology and only secondarily with painting.¹ Dorota

¹ Piotrowski wrote about the “ideological understanding of surrealism” in the first years after World War II in Central Europe, one that was absent in the interwar period; e.g. in Hungary

Jarecka addressed this issue in her discussion of Polish art history writing and questioned the notion that surrealism never existed in Poland.² She suggested that surrealism – as a specific worldview – was present in post-war Poland in the form of “gestures and attitudes”.³ The scholar made a crucial observation in this respect: “the most attractive aspect of surrealism was its concept of the image,” which showed the potential of becoming the fundamental element to define modern art.⁴ Thus understood surrealism is a mode of thinking about representing reality, also in political categories. At the time, the choice of surrealist poetics was “not only [...] a gesture of neutrality, a purely formal gesture, but [...] a political one” – the awareness of the leftist sympathies of French surrealists was significant for artistic choices made by Polish artists.⁵ This way, the “surrealist orientation” would be closely linked with the problem of realism, a crucial issue for the theoretical and critical debates of the 1940s. Realism was understood as an engagement in social reality in its socialist guise with formal experiments that guaranteed the freedom of individual expression. I suggest that the issue of effectively operating “on” and “towards” reality, which concerned many artists and intellectuals, involves one more important aspect: the interest of the “moderns” in photography. This problem has not been thoroughly investigated as yet. Much more often, the focus was placed on the autonomous discourses of histories of photography or painting. This is not very surprising since visual artists rarely admitted to their interest in photography and especially to their use of it, as exemplified by Jadwiga Maziarska.⁶ Meanwhile, if photography as a point of reference is considered, the consequences of debates about realism can be shown in a new light; moreover, these perspectives broaden our understanding of the modern conception of the image formulated back then that crossed the boundaries of individual media and was driven by surrealism.

The poetic image – reaching to the depth of things

In 1947 photography was symbolically included into the field of art – an Office for Photography was founded at the Ministry of Culture and Art. In his exposé

surrealism was understood “not only as liberation of imagination, but as manifestation of intellectual condition of post-war Europe” and, as such, it defined political and aesthetic attitudes. See: P. Piotrowski, „Surrealistyczne interregnum”, in: T. Gryglewicz et al., eds., *Mistrzowi Mieczysławowi Porębskiemu – uczniowie*, Kraków, 2001, p. 300.

2 See: P. Krakowski, „Problem surrealizmu w sztuce polskiej”, in: *Wystawa malarstwa metaforycznego* [ex. cat.], Galeria Krzysztofor, Kraków, 1961, as cited in: J. Chrobak, ed., *Grupa Krakowska. Dokumenty i materiały*, Kraków, 1991, p. 148.

3 D. Jarecka, „Surrealizm i polityka”, in: D. Jarecka, B. Piwowarska, *Erna Rosenstein. Mogę powtarzać tylko nieświadomie*, Warsaw, 2014, p. 27.

4 Idem, „Artysta na ruinach. Sztuka polska lat 40. i surrealistyczne konotacje”, *Miejsce. Studia nad sztuką i architekturą polską XX i XXI wieku*, 2016, no. 2, p. 5.

5 Ibid., p. 6.

6 B. Piwowarska, „Inżynier i majsterkowicz. O fotoszkicach Jadwigi Maziarskiej”, in: *Kolekcjonowanie świata: Jadwiga Maziarska – listy i szkice*, ed. B. Piwowarska, Warsaw, 2005, pp. 7–35.

published in "Świat Fotografii" magazine, Bohdan Urbanowicz, the director of the Department of Visual Arts, expressed shared artistic as well as ideological expectations of the "new" medium:

Perhaps we haven't yet created a form for contemporary culture, distanced by the rapid course of still revolutionary civilisation. Photography, born in the final stage of our civilisation, might with its technical nature, its ability to record motion, be able to capture the forms of our thoughts and our needs, to define the paradoxes and confront the contrasts of the new life.⁷

This way, Urbanowicz implied the need to intensify the debates on the shape of modern photography, with its reliance on the language of realism yet independence from models derived from painting.⁸ In keeping with these postulates were artistic investigations of Zbigniew Dłubak, who realised a series of photographs commonly associated with surrealism in 1947–1948 (Fig. 1, 2).⁹ It was inspired by the work of the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, particularly his *Magellan Heart*¹⁰. A brief reading of the poem suggests that Dłubak titled works in his series with "subtitles" and phrases from Neruda's poem that defined subsequent stages of Magellan's journey. In Neruda's work, this journey takes the form of a recording of the subject's consciousness when it is confronted with a new alien world; it is a particular kind of confrontation, effected in the process of exploration and recognition, but also of appropriation of a new territory. The sailor drifts through a hallucinated landscape that he cannot recognise since he is stranded outside culture. An alienated lyrical subject, who stands for the historic traveller, but can also represent a poet or photographer, becomes an agent, participant, and chronicler of violence. It is very unexpected – the conqueror and discoverer do not so much confront the fascinating new phenomenon, but reaches the limits of humanity, the dark corners of reality and his own "self."

"The art of the Polish modern 1940s did not show war directly, but it employed geographical metaphors to address the issue of wartime violence" – wrote Jarecka in her interpretation of these photographs.¹¹ She understood Dłubak's choice of Neruda's poetry as an ideological declaration. Indeed, the photographer's reference

7 B. Urbanowicz, „O nowy program fotografii”, *Świat Fotografii* 1947, nos. 1–2, p. 2.

8 More on this topic in: K. Ziębińska-Lewandowska, *Między dokumentalnością a eksperymentem. Krytyka fotograficzna w Polsce w latach 1946–1989*, Warsaw, 2014.

9 Apart from Dorota Jarecka's, see also a comprehensive interpretation of these photographs by Marcin Lachowski. Focusing on the impact of the photographic form, he refers to the surrealist category of "convulsive beauty" (in Hal Foster's reinterpretation) and applies a perspective oriented at reading the wartime trauma: M. Lachowski, "Piękno konwulsyjne: Zbigniew Dłubak", in: idem, *Nowocześni po katastrofie*, Lublin, 2013, pp. 180–195.

10 It was published in 1948 in issue 18 (179) of "Odrodzenie" – translated by Czesław Miłosz; other works by Neruda were published by the magazine the same year, also translated by Miłosz. Among them were *Alberto Rojas Jimenez Come Flying, Almeria, Arrival to Madrid of the International Brigade, Offended Lands*.

11 D. Jarecka, op. cit., p. 27.



Fig. 1. Zbigniew Dłubak, *Przypominam samotność cieśniny* (Pablo Neruda, *The Magellan Heart*), 1948 © Armelle Dłubak, Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii.



Fig. 2. Zbigniew Dłubak, *Odkrywcy zjawiają się i nic z nich nie zostaje* (Pablo Neruda, *The Magellan Heart*), 1948 © Armelle Dłubak, Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii.

opens up a space for tracing very complex political and aesthetic links, some of which were revealed by Jarecka's postcolonial reading. I suggest that Dłubak's photographic cycle seeks to communicate both the traumatic experience of war, as well as the equally absurd and bitter experience of its "aftermath." Marcin Lachowski took note of this fact without referring to the literary context: "Dłubak's images did not evoke macabre memories; their inherent idea of death referred to the here and now – it described the fracture of subjectivity tangled by memory, incessantly searching for lost unity".¹² Dłubak's choice of Neruda – a renowned poet and active communist – as a literary reference should be seen as a political gesture. Coming with a subtle interplay of forms, this reference has been commonly seen as a simple act of equipping the images with a "subtext." Meanwhile, the photographer's decision to combine his images with these particular texts – texts in plural because before his translation of *The Magellan Heart* Czesław Miłosz had published also other pieces by Neruda¹³ – seems to have resulted from a very thorough considera-

¹² M. Lachowski, op. cit., p. 193.

¹³ Those were: "Battle of the Jarama River, Hymn and Return, Young Angela, Ocean, Three Material Songs: I. Entrance into Wood, II. Apogee of, Celery III. Statute of Wine" published in

tion. As a result, Dłubak produced a work that, I think, formulates his programme as well as positions itself at the centre of the current debates on art.

Miłosz compared Neruda's poetry to the painting of Pablo Picasso, which, in the words of Carrera Andrade: "does not invent reality, but merely tears down its mask, revealing its hidden name and secret vocation".¹⁴ These elements, which in Neruda's text are orientated towards the object and its appearance in consciousness, can be directly referred to the forms evoked in Dłubak's photographs. Lachowski argued that: "objects become the function of memory, filling with their growing structures the microcosm of the image".¹⁵ However, much more relevant in this context seems not so much *The Magellan Heart* but the poem *Three Material Songs*. Its imagery is much more disturbing and very dark. Much like the photographs, it evokes the act of dissecting and "dismembering" reality observed by the subject: "I fall in shadow, in the midst / of destroyed things, / and watch spiders, and graze in forests / of secret inconclusive wood, / and walk among damp fibers extirpated / from the living being of substance and silence".¹⁶ The studies of trees, bark, understory, with which Dłubak launched his photographic practice, manifest his analytic approach and emphasise the entangled, organic forms.¹⁷ Yet, much more important is that *Three Material Songs* is also a kind of poetic *credo*, a realist's manifesto: "I speak of things that exist, God forbid / my inventing things when I am singing! / I speak of the saliva spilt upon the walls, / I speak of the slow stockings of the whore / I speak

Odrodzenie 1947, no. 23 (132). Around 1948, Latin American poetry became popular in Poland; Czesław Miłosz became "a guide [...] for new values" that arrived in Poland with the poetry of Latin America. See: Jap, "Pisarze chilijscy o Polsce", *Odrodzenie* 1948, no. 2, p. 4. Poems by Miłosz also display inspiration with the syntax of the Chilean poet (e.g. *We wnętrzu róży*). The above-referenced text on Chilean poetry quotes Neruda's words: "I would like to greet Poland, its intellectuals and its masses. We greedily read all that comes from its soil [...]. All peoples have been very joyful about Poland's transformation after its earlier martyrdom. [...] New waves move across the world, Poland's old windows tremble and open up." Translations of Neruda's poetry came with a text, *W obronie poety Pablo Nerudy* (an open letter "In defence of poet Pablo Neruda"), which addressed the poet's senator's immunity being revoked and an arrest warrant issued against him for his critique of the Chilean government abroad (particularly the letter he sent to intellectuals of both Americas). The author of the Polish text admitted that the letter was distributed in Poland. Jmn, "W obronie poety Pablo Nerudy", *Odrodzenie* 1948, no. 18, p. 4.

14 C. Miłosz, [Słowo od tłumacza], *Odrodzenie* 1947, no. 23 (132), p. 5.

15 M. Lachowski, op. cit., p. 193.

16 Pablo Neruda, "Three Material Songs", in: idem, *Residence on Earth, and Other Poems*, trans. Angel Flores, New York, 1946, p. 81.

17 Dłubak began his photographic career in 1946–1947. In 1946 he was treating his tuberculosis at a resort in Otwock where he possibly made his first works. Notably, Dłubak fought in the Warsaw Uprising (as a member of the People's Army (Gwardia Ludowa/Armia Ludowa)) and was a war prisoner. He stayed initially at the Auschwitz camp and later in Mauthausen; he was often ill and he worked there at a photography lab. After his return, he volunteered for the Polish Army, in May 1946 he was promoted to lieutenant colonel at a political-educational corps. In 1946–1948 he was the Chief of Staff of the minister of national defence, Marian Spychalski.

of the chorus of the men of wine / striking the coffin with a bird's bone".¹⁸ This infernal world of hallucinations is a reality of the subject who is an observer and a participant in a dark spectacle: "I am in the midst of that song, in the midst / of the winter which rolls through the streets, / I am in the midst of the drinkers, / with eyes opened toward forgotten places, [...] Remembering nights, ships, orchards, / deceased friends, circumstances, / bitter hospitals and half-open girls: remembering a pounding of wave on some rock [...]".¹⁹ Observation of reality and the state of one's consciousness produces a quasi-surrealist vision where the world is revealed almost in a flash, on the junction of perception and recollection, in fragments – it is painfully tangible, yet defies conventional representation. Interestingly, Neruda's text carries a subtle overlay of the translator's syntax, whereby the process of realist expression in this work is played out through a heroic, even affected rhetoric of struggle for a just cause, oppression and its overcoming, observed from a nostalgic perspective: "Guard your light, O fatherland, hold aloft / your hard grain-ear of hope in the midst / of blind, trembling air".²⁰ Some linguistic clichés suggest Polish poetry with its romantic notes ("Regions buried / in endless martyrdom, by the interminable / silence, pulse, / of bee and exterminated rock, / land which rather than wheat and clover / shows signs of dry blood and crime"²¹). The choice of *The Magellan Heart* was, then, a non-radical declaration, masking other potential references. Recurrent organic motifs in Neruda's poetry, such as "tree," "pine," "root," feature in Dłubak's photographs as well, resembling those taken by Alexandr Rodchenko in the 1920s. Photographs of this type can also be found as illustrations in a poetic volume by Stanisław Marczak-Oborski, published by the Club of Young Artists and Scientists (Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców) in 1949,²² which I will discuss further on.

18 P. Neruda, op. cit., p. 89.

19 Ibid.

20 Idem, "Hymn and Return", in: idem, op. cit., p. 169.

21 Idem, "Offended Lands", in: idem, op. cit., p. 139.

22 The Club of Young Artists and Scientists published in their series another volume of Marczak-Oborski's poetry around the same time. Titled "Poszukiwania i anegdoty" ("Investigations and anecdotes"), it was dedicated to the "memory of deceased poets" and illustrated with drawings by Marian Bogusz. According to the editorial information, both volumes were printed in January 1950. Graphic design was by Bogusz (covers with shapes of urban ruins and ships). Marczak-Oborski (1921–1987) debuted – as Juliusz Oborski – during the war, publishing his underground *Arkusz poetycki* as the 3rd issue of "Droga" magazine, which he edited. He took part in the September campaign and in the Warsaw Uprising, as a result of which he was a war prisoner in Mühlberg (he worked there as a forest worker, among others). He studied Polish and Philosophy at the University of Warsaw. In 1945 he was employed as an assistant at the Jagiellonian University which was interrupted due to an illness – he was treated for 18 months for tuberculosis in Zakopane. As an editor and critic, he worked with numerous magazines, such as "Kuźnica," "Nurt," "Po prostu," he also published his work during Stalinism, when he worked for the Central Theatre Board. Since 1956 he worked at the Art Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) where he was the head Contemporary Theatre Studio (Pracownia Teatr Współczesny); in 1982 he was awarded habilitation in the humanities. He published numerous works on the history of the theatre, particularly of the interwar period.

With his introduction of a poetic text, Dłubak performed a kind of political gesture: he formulated an intimate statement and expressed an artistic programme that was then also introduced through critical texts. He created images that were a lot like riddles – they had to be deciphered by an active viewer. This kind of thinking is intensely linked with the surrealist concept of the image as a poetic image, fully emerging only in the subject's mind; it is also linked with the role of photography as defined by surrealists. David Bate, drawing on Rosalind Krauss's semiotic interpretation of photography, argued that there is no such thing as surrealist photography, but rather there are sur-real meanings that such photographs generate. These meanings are produced through effected contradiction between the signified – the object of reference, and the signifier – the image. Surrealist photography *sensu stricto* generates "enigmatic" meanings, that is, it provokes cognitive confusion.²³ What we can see is uncertain, indefinite, entangled in unconscious processes of reception/reading. The author of an enigmatic content is not fully aware of the meaning he produces, while the viewer uses the contradiction between the signifier and the signified so that the work of imagination and memory can complete given image. The enigmatic effect stemming from the fracture of conventional representation of reality can also be generated by supplementing the image with text – either in the form of a title, or – as it was done in surrealist magazines – a more complex text. This produced both the effect of complementing the message as well as that of its dismantling, i.e. incoherence.²⁴ The disruption of the relationship between the signifier and the signified occurred both within the visual order, as well as on the grounds of linguistic logic. The latter was the source of the fundamental surrealist category of the "miraculous" (*le merveilleux*). Originally, it referred to the 16th- and 17th-century reflections of the purpose of poetry. At the time, this function was defined as the creation of an ephemeral, extraordinary image in the reader's mind. This mechanism resembled the workings of the emblem, where the pivotal relationship between image and text was meant to reveal a poetic image. This way, an elitist "esoteric language" was formed, a code, but also an egalitarian means of communication with uneducated masses, where ethical and religious content could be articulated.²⁵ Very often, both variants, the "low" and the "high," intermingled, producing, as a result, a dream-image that made a mark on the viewer's mind – an obsessive image that fixed itself within his body.²⁶ Within the surrealist universe, a photograph could become a matrix of reality upon which enigmatic meanings

23 D. Bate, *Photography and Surrealism. Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*, London, 2003, p. 22. The author writes about three types of the signifier that define the way photography was used to produce a "surrealist" meaning: a) mimetic (illustration, imitation), b) protophotographic (the photographed object is surrealist in its own right and then arranged or staged), c) enigmatic (both the photographed object – "the signified" – as well as the "signifier" – the print, the photographic means – are modified).

24 Ibid., p. 32ff.

25 Ibid., pp. 35–36.

26 M. Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, London, 1963, p. 170. See also: K. Janicka, „Teoria poezji”, in: idem, *Światopogląd surrealizmu. Jego założenia i konsekwencje dla twórczości i teorii sztuki*, Warsaw, 1969, pp. 221–240.

could be imprinted. Reality and the subject's consciousness, together with its dreams, memories, desires, and para-psychic experiences, could meet and unite.

Contrary to what is commonly claimed, photography, as an element of the intertextual concept of the image, offers not so many new configurations of forms, but the ability to capture the relationship between reality and the work of eye and imagination. Only in space of encounter thus defined is there a room for experiencing "progression" in another dimension – political dimension that connects the trauma of war "from a while ago" with the actuality of emergent new reality. The latter, if Neruda's text is carefully followed, will be as tempting as bitter or even brutal: "At the last, your paradise is lost, / at the last, your garrison accursed, [...] at the last, the small sun of the paramo, / the dead day, / trembling, in its hospital of waves and stones, / reaches your ringless fingers".²⁷

Dłubak's photographs inspired with the poetry of Neruda were displayed as part of the 1st Exhibition of Modern Art (I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej). Their programmatic potential fitted well with the idea for this exhibition, which oscillated around the ideal of political engagement understood as shaping the viewers' aesthetic sensibilities. However, there were also other works by Dłubak on display, presented in the room dedicated to photomontages. Dłubak showed pages with enlarged images of parts of everyday objects (Fig. 3). Shown without a textual component, they worked with their scale, encouraging the viewers to immerse in the matter/object, the texture of the new universe of form. What was crucial here was the act of seeing – innovative forms were to provoke the viewers to reconstruct their visual consciousness and, this way, open up to the new reality of ideas. The object was formally de-actualised, structured, yet retained a distinct reference to the original. The realism of thus construed form was direct and unobvious at once, while the spatial dimension of works suggested a possibility of transforming art into the frames for everyday existence. Not unlike constructivist exhibition designs, including those made for propaganda purposes, where photo-murals played the main role (El Lissitzky et al.), or didactic boards made by Bauhaus, photography was here used as a medium outlining the new way of thinking about reality and of its artistic expression. In other words – photography was to explain painting that was incomprehensible to a common viewer. What was important here was the relationship between the viewer and his surroundings. The medium of photography was able to adequately capture and "reframe" reality for given didactic content. Andrzej Wróblewski's painting, *Treść uczuciowa rewolucji* (Emotional content of revolution), hanging nearby, did not offer equally clear conclusions about how to express social reality. Dłubak's proposal to approximate the object, a kind of journey of discovery, was, therefore, also a process of familiarising the eye with the new way of seeing.²⁸ This journey was to support the aesthetic revolution where the language of

27 P. Neruda, "The Magellan Heart", trans. Anthony Kerrigan, in: idem, *Selected Poems*, ed. Nathaniel Tarn, Boston, 1990, p. 209.

28 "New way of seeing" is also meant in a literal sense, since a "new vision" in photography meant a modern set of stylistic effects, shots in close-up, foreshortenings, and geometrical rendering,

“New Objectivity,” developed by Albert Renger-Patzsch among others, encountered a more radical and avant-garde programme – known for instance from the 1929 exhibition *Film und Foto* co-created by László Moholy-Nagy. This new filter of photography made possible a transformed seeing and representation of reality, as well as an adequate recognition of the role of various artworks in this process.



Fig. 3. Zbigniew Dłubak, *Plansza dydaktyczna I* [*The Didactic Plate no. 1*] – one of four black and white photographs, 90 x 60 x 16 cm, 1948/1999, ZACHĘTA – NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART.

Document – a matter of memory

As is well known, Władysław Strzemiński did not show his works at the 1st Exhibition of Modern Art. Two years earlier he had made a series of collages titled “To My Friends the Jews” (“Moim przyjaciółom Żydom”), where photography played an important role. The cycle was recently comprehensively analysed by Luiza Nader.²⁹ The scholar pointed to the artist’s use of photography, noticing its role in the complex mechanism of how the works affect the viewer. Collages employ repeti-

typical for the 1920s and 1930s, also within new objectivity (in Poland these two notions in photography were used interchangeably).

²⁹ Nader proposed an alternative version of the series title, *In Memory of Friends – Jews*, which she found in one of W. Strzemiński’s letters; L. Nader, “Teoria widzenia”, *rysunki wojenne*, “Pamięci przyjaciół – Żydów”, Warsaw, 2019, pp. 251–255.

tion and palimpsestic overlay of fragments of drawings made during the war with documentary images that functioned in the iconosphere of 1945–1946. Strzemiński used his original poetic titles. A method of working similar to that of Dłubak's is not surprising taking into consideration the period's propensity for allusiveness. Nevertheless, it is intriguing to trace the similarities in these works, since they both reveal the problem of confronting memory, as evoked by photography and its realism. Admittedly, Dłubak's photographs contain testimonies of a speaking subject rather than material "facts," such as print or reproduction. However, the metaphor of a journey, of entering and penetrating reality, defines the work of memory, which is required to approximate an experience of self/other, to express and overcome it.

Recovery after the experience of the camps – as an (un)conscious subtext – is additionally revealed through another text. I mean here the already mentioned poetic work of Marczak-Oborski, Dłubak's peer, at the time a debuting critic. The artist illustrated a poetic volume titled "The Romantic Gesture" ("Gest romantyczny") with three photographs showing "woodland" organic forms (Fig. 4, 5, 6) and one photomontage (Fig. 7). The poems, although interesting for historical reasons, are rather mediocre in artistic categories; in their poetic imagery and subject matter, some passages resemble Neruda's poetry that had already been known in Poland.



Fig. 4. Zbigniew Dłubak, *Untitled* [in:] Stanisław Marczak-Oborski, *The Romantic Gesture*, Warsaw, 1949.



Fig. 5. Zbigniew Dłubak, *Untitled* [in:] Stanisław Marczak-Oborski, *The Romantic Gesture*, Warsaw, 1949.



Fig. 6. Zbigniew Dłubak, *Untitled* [in:] Stanisław Marczak-Oborski, *The Romantic Gesture*, Warsaw, 1949.



Fig. 7. Zbigniew Dłubak, *Untitled* [in:] Stanisław Marczak-Oborski, *The Romantic Gesture*, Warsaw 1949.

In Marczak-Oborski's work, the subject confronts reality at the moment of transition. Perspectives "before" and "after" the war were clearly marked, when the new political order and new perception emerged: "[P]ożegnaj młodość śmieszłą górną / wczorajszym romantycznym gestem / abyś mógł światu dłonie podać / i jak towarzysz mówić: jestem" (say goodbye to pathetic youth / with a romantic gesture of yore / so you can greet the world / and tell it: here I am – as a comrade).³⁰ The caesura, however, is not very distinct because the poems written during the occupation are mixed with the post-war works, but also due to the accentuated temporal perspective of "now" – of the one who speaks, allowing him to observe the dynamics of changes that are mixed with memories and imagination. Memory seems to take precedence here, coming as a source of melancholia, doubt, and bitterness, a peculiar "homelessness": "Robotnicy mają twarde ręce, / Robotnicy mają siłę i partię, / A ty jesteś zmęczony – nic więcej; / Kibic, nie partner [...] Tobie zostały tylko oczy, / Patrzące z boku, / w zadumie" (Workers have hard hands, / Workers have party and power, / And you are tired – nothing more; / A fan, not a partner [...] You have only your eyes left, / Looking from aside, / in wonder).³¹ The existential note in these poems verges on escapism: "W cichutkim pochodzie

30 S. Marczak-Oborski, [untitled; an opening poem], in: idem, *Gest romantyczny*, Warsaw, 1949, n.p.

31 Idem, [untitled: "Robotnicy mają twarde ręce...", a closing poem], in: idem, *Gest romantyczny*, n.p.

robaczki i mrówki zgubione lasem, / milczeniem rozkwitną gałęzie i pnie wyrzeźbi spokój. / W tym świecie zapagnij pozostać, przytulić mchy do oczu, / las w ziemię wrośnięty dębami przytaknie ci bezruchem” (Marching quietly, worms and ants lost in woods, / branches will bloom with silence and trunks will be carved by calm. / Stay in this world, put your eyes to the moss, / the wood anchored with oaks will concur motionless)³². The poetry of Marczak-Oborski is more of a record of a crisis ingrained in the subject than an expression of excitement with “the new.” The photomontage that closes the volume, a portrait of the author overlaying a rising urban structure (perhaps of rebuilt Warsaw?) illustrates a specific kind of belief in what tomorrow shall bring – what shall be seen is important to the lyrical subject, yet it is alien (“Tunel i węgiel, stal i gmach, / Kombinat fabryk, portowy dźwig, / W trudzie, bez łez, budują świat, / Który będzie naprawdę ich” (Tunnel and carbon, steel and edifice, / Factory complex, a port crane, / With toil but no tears, building their world, / One that is truly theirs)³³) and it will not be able to conceal what had already been seen („Tramwaje kołem okrążają miasto, / Wplątując czerwień w płaską dal. / Wiozą niepokój – i nie uciekną, / nawinięty na taśmę szyn” (Trams circle the city, / Mixing red into flat horizon. / Carrying fear – it will never cease, / wrapped on the tape of rails)³⁴). The political aspect of the artistic programme revealed in the configuration of text and image consists not so much in the communication of ideas, but in the deepening of reflection on reality. This happens with full awareness of what happened with art during a wartime crisis, but also what surrealism was at the time – a return to the analysis of the “self”: “Skończył się irrealizm jako postawa i forma. / Stropieni artyści również poczęli stawiać na – czyn. / I uwierzyli w przemoc, w zbrojnie dźwięczące: imperium, / aby okłamać serce, drżące od trwogi i krwi” (The end of surrealism as attitude and form. / Troubled artists now want to act. / They believe in violence, in crimes chiming: empire, / to lie to their hearts trembling with fear and blood).³⁵

Photography presents itself both as a medium that reflects the new reality directly, a medium supported by the proponents of strict realism,³⁶ as well as a medium that allows one to approach the sphere of consciousness, and through this approach initiate a platform for communication between the subjects. This exact purpose was served by compositions modelled on painting, but primarily by “associations that lent an emotional tone to the work as a whole,” which were “dependent on the relationship of our consciousness with the objective side of the image.”

³⁷ The documentary aspect of photography allows for showing the matter of the

32 Idem, “Fragment poematu”, in: idem, *Gest romantyczny*, op. cit., n. p.

33 S. Marczak-Oborski, *** [untitled: “Robotnicy mają twarde ręce...”], in: idem, *Gest romantyczny*, n.p.

34 Idem, „Wiersz z pytaniami”, in: idem, *Gest romantyczny*, n.p.

35 Idem, „Z poszukiwań”, in: idem, *Gest romantyczny*, n.p.

36 He wrote: “[...] the essence of photographic interpretation, its attribute, is its faithfulness and directness towards the object.” Z. Dłubak, „Z rozmyślań o fotografice. Seria pierwsza”, *Świat Fotografii* 1948, no. 10, p. 2.

37 Ibid.

world creatively, in fact, in the way that makes it unreal, while the introduction of the text – for maintaining the space for dialogue: “One should not [...] be afraid to use a poetic metaphor” that defines the direction in which the image works.³⁸ The world of forms was to open up to social space, to include in its scope the consciousness of an individual who could participate in an ephemeral spectacle from which the subject emerged as aesthetically and morally improved. A gaze that dissected reality, an eye that touched upon the surface of objects was an eye of that who becomes himself – not so much learns to see anew, because he believes in a new political reality and his participation in it, but hopes for the emergence of its component that reveals a humanist, communal aspect of socialism. Understandably, the notion of utopia should be mentioned here as a side note. However, on the other hand, aesthetic programme thus constructed could be seen as perilous in ideological categories – on the one hand, it offered the author the ability to initially control his message, to use the text in a persuasive function, on the other hand, with its inclination to activate the interpreter, it allowed for an uncontrolled generation of images that became entangled in a range of different subtexts.

In Strzemiński's collages, the act of collecting fragments of reality through photography takes on a different aspect. Photographs clipped from newspapers are cropped and formed through analogy with drawings, but – much like in Dłubak's work – their referential function is “distorted” in an individual perspective which engages both memory (palimpsests, drawings, copies) and text (poetic titles). The image is “montaged,” while its dynamic is poetic, which can be defined in the context of the theory of vision formulated back then, where the major role is attributed to the relationship between seeing and knowing. “In the process of seeing, it is not so much what is captured by the eye that is important, but what an individual is aware of seeing”³⁹; more important than representing the observed world is the “human cognitive activity”.⁴⁰ In this respect, Dłubak's reflection is analogous – the reality is important since it is seen (“vision” in Strzemiński's theory), and then this experience can be expressed in an art form (this act of expressing involves knowledge – “conscious seeing”). At the same time, this expression was conceived as deeply realist: “There is one criterion. What is identical to visual consciousness – is a realist. The means that express the truth of visual consciousness – are realist means, yet they might not be subjectively considered as such by everyone. E.g. to a visual consciousness developed to a lower degree its higher kinds might seem non-realist.”⁴¹ Therefore, what seemed enigmatic in Dłubak's photographs was to become – through the education of the viewer's eye – realist and direct: “This way, reality can become artistic material in the fullest sense, which rather than reduce realism to directly represented images of nature, opens up perspectives for new means of

38 Ibid.

39 W. Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia*, Krakow, 1969, p. 15.

40 Ibid., p. 16.

41 Ibid., p. 21.

artistic expression [...]”.⁴² The role of the text would be to offer a further elucidation of the nature of the process of transition, that is, a poetic metaphor that appeals to emotions so that formalism (“idealistic subjective response”) could be avoided and the conditions of the observation of the object are expressed with utmost precision. What helped avoid formalism in photography and allowed for creating a realist image (broadly understood) was the medium itself, treated as mechanical, “pure” and therefore directly representing reality. Fundamental here was, therefore, the modernist concept of the specificity of photographic means, which was a starting point for the reconfiguration of forms through seeing. In a sense, the process of perception had to entail a deconstruction of this mechanism, each time dealing with “conscious seeing” that could work both as a barrier as well as a facilitator of communication. “Conscious seeing” was then both an element of artistic strategy, as well as its goal, since the novelty of forms worked to shape the visual consciousness of a common viewer, and ultimately: “Each historical period meets society with new challenges, forces it to observe new topics, produced by the life of each era. In order to see this new content of a new topic, one needs to change the mode of observation. In order to find in old objects their new historical context, one needs to find in them new, real components of seeing”.⁴³ New challenges – let us refer to them as the task of overcoming the crisis within the new political reality – did indeed produce new topics. Therefore, the mode of observation had to be changed: deconstruction of seeing was necessary. A capacious concept of the image as a conglomerate of what and how is seen was the essence of realism thus construed. The camera could work as an ancillary tool that helped observe seeing, as Strzemiński once noted.⁴⁴ So this kind of redaction of realism could be seen both in terms of a surrealist/poetic image, as well as a more conceptual, abstract image; the difference could be determined, for instance, by a text – poetry or propaganda, etc. – important in the context of the process of “observing” visual consciousness. Undoubtedly, equally important in this case is that both artists displayed a strong and long-term interest in the synthesis of work and image and its artistic consequences.

42 Z. Dłubak, op. cit., p. 3.

43 W. Strzemiński, op. cit., p. 21.

44 For instance, when he analyses accommodational seeing, which allows him to argue with George Berkeley’s theory, Strzemiński emphasises the similarities between the structure of the eye and that of the camera, which is compatible with the conclusions of 19th-century photographers and theoreticians inspired by Helmholtz’s theory (Henry Peter Emerson), and based on the comparisons of the structure of the eye and that of camera obscura made since the times of Kepler. I. Luba, „Wprowadzenie do nowej edycji ‘Teorii widzenia’ Władysława Strzemińskiego”, in: W. Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia*, Łódź, 2016, pp. 15–16. Notably, Lenin, among others, examined Helmholtz’s theory and found it inconsistent in terms of philosophical reflections on imagining objects as symbols; he recognised that his approach was occasionally consistent with materialism (“inconsistent Kantian”); Wł. Lenin, *Materializm a empiriokrytycyzm. Krytyczne uwagi o pewnej reakcyjnej filozofii*, in: idem, *Dzieła*, vol. 14, Warsaw, 1949, p. 267.

Representation – Marxism and lyricism

Dłubak's and Strzemiński's approaches show affinities also in terms of an innovative approach to Marxist aesthetics. Up till now, there have been few attempts to provide an answer to the question (posed by Piotrowski among others) how modern visuality, including its discussed "surrealist" component, was linked with a Marxist discourse.⁴⁵

According to Strzemiński, the artist makes an impact on reality presented through the reason-engaging process of seeing rather than represents it directly. A historical and social framing of seeing, as well as becoming actively aware of one's own "visual consciousness" and possibilities of its shaping, are guaranteed by the creation and intellectual factor, which – as Nader argues – was desired in Marxist theory but, in practice, it was criticised. In this discussion of the problem of realism and a related issue of photography, I would like to refer to "reflection theory." An important part of the Marxist theory of cognition, it refers to the relationship between consciousness and reality (matter).⁴⁶ In most general terms, it posits that humans are not creative by nature and are only capable of making reflections of objective reality (matter). In such understanding, the subject is cast in the role of a photographic camera, that is, a mechanical tool. It is the metaphor of photography that Marxist thinkers would propose when they explained the term of "reflection" in non-philosophical terms – as a physical-optical reflection, a copy of the original: "[...] in [Lenin's] 'Materialism and Empirio-Criticism', the words reflection, photography, image, print, copy, etc. are used as synonyms or interchangeably [...]"⁴⁷

45 A lot has been written on the links between Strzemiński's theory of vision and Marxist aesthetics; e.g. Stefan Morawski examined its polemical attitude to Marxist aesthetics (particularly in reference to aspects of 20th-century art): S. Morawski, "Teoria Strzemińskiego – pro i contra", *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 1958, no. 4, pp. 145–151. After 1989 this issue was investigated by Grzegorz Sztabiński (G. Sztabiński, „Od 'obiektywnej rzeczy' do wyrazu świadomości wzrokowej. Koncepcja sztuki Władysława Strzemińskiego", in: W. Strzemiński, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, Kraków, 2006, pp. VII–LXVI), Jerzy Lepieszkiewicz (J. Lepieszkiewicz, „Władysław Strzemiński jako filozof", *Słupskie Studia Filozoficzne* 2008, No. 7, pp. 139–160), Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska (A. Rejniak-Majewska, „Historia oka według Strzemińskiego", in: J. Lubiak, ed., *Powidoki życia. Władysław Strzemiński i prawa dla sztuki*, Łódź, 2012, pp. 249–272), and Tomasz Załuski (T. Załuski, „Władysław Strzemiński po wojnie: modernizacja, marksizm, socrealizm", in: A. Sumorok, T. Załuski, eds., *Socrealizmy i modernizacje*, Łódź, 2017, pp. 229–268).

46 Reflection theory has been often interpreted, as well as criticised; its foundations were formulated by Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908). An attempt to organise this issue from a Marxist perspective comes from Peter Katona who argues that "reflection theory" is often mistaken with the theory of "man as a maker" and examines the problem of "activity of conscious reflection" that could help connect those two together. Peter Katona, "O treści teorii odbicia", *Acta Universitatis Lodzensis. Folia Philosophica* 1981, no. 1, p. 113.

47 Ibid., p. 116. The term comes from the writings of F. Engels – "Spiegelbild" (mirror reflection); Engels wrote: "Is our mind able to cognate the real world, are we able to create in our imagination and our notions a truthful reflection of reality?"; he also used a semantically identical term of "Abbild" – an image of reality existing outside us, when he wrote about "sense-perception";

One can suppose that thus construed reflection theory was an important problem for artists with declared Marxist sympathies but wished to retain the freedom of formal pursuits. However, according to some scholars, it could entail some kind of activity on the part of the subject, since reception and reflection of reality were considered a conscious process, based on reason, expressed in practical activity, and ensuring the individual's contact with society (a social-historical aspect). This way, consciousness did not have to be responsible for the construction of reality, but for its creative representation, since the qualities of objects are reflected in the subject's impressions when his or her cognitive process sustains and reproduces the laws of matter:

Human consciousness reflects reality and thus constructs scientific abstractions, creates them, brings them to life in the process of cognition and this is how its creative, constructive potential is being realised. Meanwhile, scientific abstractions are reflections, copies, imprints. In this sense, art is making representations of reality, while the latter (representation) is a creative process.⁴⁸

In Dłubak's and Strzemiński's understanding, the subject, the artist as well as the viewer, is, understandably, a creative observer engaged with reality. Their approach corresponds with the tenets of dialectical materialism and constitutes, in a sense, an attempt to resolve the contradiction between reflection theory (defined by Lenin among others) and another Marxist idea – the theory of human as a maker (as formulated by Marx). By no means was this approach an orthodox one at the time.⁴⁹ Both Dłubak as well as Strzemiński relied on an expanded conception of realism, which, on the formal level, could be realised in a non-figurative image. They both put the focus on active consciousness, its function and its dynamic in the cognitive process.⁵⁰

W. Lenin, op. cit., p. 111, 128; "Engels says nothing of symbols or hieroglyphs, but of copies, imprints, images, mirror reflections of things," Ibid., p. 266.

48 P. Katona, op. cit., p. 121.

49 Dłubak offers a critique of commonly shared opinions about socialist realism when he writes: "Yet if because of our present tasks we lose our perspective – we are not mature enough for these tasks, and worse still if the mistake is not acknowledged but hidden behind a false interpretation of a sound theory. Socialist realism understood in this manner does not grow from a great, revolutionary process and is hardly a stage in art's further developed with new experiences and forward-thinking. The idea of socialist art is vulgarised." Z. Dłubak, „O niektórych aspektach marksistowskiej teorii sztuki (Na marginesie I Ogólnopolskiej Wystawy Plastyki)", in: idem, *Wybrane teksty o sztuce 1948–1977*, Art. Text, Galeria Remont, Warsaw, 1977, p. 26.

50 "[...] new art, the art of socialist realism does not put forward any preconditions regarding technical skill, yet its practice forces us to take a scientific stance on history and to organise our notions of contemporaneity, in short, it requires from us a consistent materialist worldview, which is Marxism with its unity of theory and action [...]"

Z. Dłubak, op.cit., p. 35. Sometime later he made the following comment: "I would like to recall at least two meanings that were then attached [at the time of the Nieborów conference debates – K.D.] to socialist realism. They reflected rather precisely the variety of ideological approaches. In 1949-1950 we understood that new art would be connected with new condi-

Equally relevant is it to take a closer look at the notion of “matter” that Strzemiński employs in this theory. It is tempting to suggest that Dłubak used this term playfully and indirectly through his use of a poetic intertext – Neruda’s poem *The Three Material Songs*. The title is significant in this context, while the issue of the artistic language discussed in this poem should be regarded in ideological and aesthetic terms – as a problem of both Marxist and modern form.

In Marxism, matter is a primary being, a foundation of eternally changing world.⁵¹ Strzemiński wrote:

We are the same matter as the matter that lies beyond us, and there is no artificial, isolating partition that can be erected. Matter is continuous and each of its parts works on another part. [...] Negating the material changes that we undergo in the cognitive process would entail, in fact, that we experience not with our bodies (eyes etc.), but with our spirits, which are not transformed when they encounter matter. Only then would it be justified to present the objective world of external objects as a true one and eliminate the internal world as spiritual, subjective, and false. But if we recognise that we are bodies, then we should base our visual consciousness on all observed facts of the material process of seeing.⁵²

Nader interpreted Strzemiński’s definition of matter also in scientific categories, i.a. in the context of natural science, emphasising the physiological and “corporeal” aspect of this concept, which helped cross the boundary between the subject and the object. This way, she shows the artist as one who – perhaps unintentionally – moves beyond dialectical materialism.⁵³ However, Strzemiński could also be expressing specifically defined materialism, one that expands the definition of matter in such a way that a significant role is ascribed to consciousness and its activity

tions that formed in Poland. The most important change was the social control of means of production, which was to lead directly to a socialist system. Art was to be socialist as well. The fundamental theoretical premise of this system was dialectical materialism. Art understood as a part of culture, which is determined by society, is connected with reality, therefore it is realist. It shows not only the existence of extra-subjective world but accepts its impact and introduces this influence into its ideology. This way, socialist realism meant new art for new times, which was shaped by the natural rules of dialectical development.” Z. Dłubak, „Przyczynek do sporu o społeczną rolę sztuki (1946-1950)”, in: idem, *Wybrane teksty o sztuce 1948-1977*, p. 10.

51 There are numerous Marxist definitions of matter, yet the most general – and at the same time the most controversial within the movement itself – is Lenin’s (gnoseological) definition of matter, according to which matter is an objective reality (not so much a substrate but a collection of material objects), independent of consciousness and perceived by the senses. According to Lenin, there is an infinite number of material objects (“inexhaustibility of matter”). Curiously, this definition comes with a metaphor of photography – “matter is a philosophical category that describes objective reality given to individuals through impressions copied, photographed, reflected by our senses, yet which exists independently from these senses.” W. Lenin, op. cit., p. 145. Of course, such a limited definition stood in contradiction with scientific theories (physics, natural sciences), since it did not consider elements of reality that were invisible to the “naked eye.”

52 W. Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia*, Krakow, 1969, pp. 161-162.

53 L. Nader, op. cit., p. 109.

(reflection theory) without any damage to the creative potential of an individual or even broader – to society. Moreover, we cannot forget that at the time it was not only the philosophical academic magazines that were involved in the discussion on key notions of Marxism, including the notion of matter and the very definition of this intellectual trend.⁵⁴ After all: “A materialist approach is a scientific approach”.⁵⁵

Reality, understood through the lens of a broad definition of matter, is closely tied to the condition of the subject and his or her inherent visual consciousness.⁵⁶ To interrogate reality means to interrogate the subject as well – which is particularly significant in the moment of crisis of both these categories when confronted with the experience of the world after the catastrophe. This is why it seems crucial to highlight the position of the one who looks – a witness/observer, like the one in the series *To My Friends – Jews*; this condition is also relevant in the context of Magellan’s metaphorical journey, yet it would be even more directly related to the “programme” of a photo camera. The photographer is always a witness, he or she creates “upon” the matter of the experience of observation. The modernist postulate of the specificity of photographic means, so passionately defended by Dłubak, could also find a Marxist justification – the vital distinction between a direct “image” and a rejected “symbol” that requires interpretation: “An image must unavoidably presuppose an objective reality of that whose image is being recreated”.⁵⁷ Photography defended the “surrealist,” poetic conception of the image from the claim that it was cast off from matter.

Miłosz first published his translation of Neruda’s poems in “Odrodzenie” in 1947, while two issues later a fragment of Strzemiński’s theory of vision was pub-

54 Published for instance in “Odrodzenie”: P. Konrad, „Marksizm bez przyłbicy”, *Odrodzenie* 1947, nos. 14-15, p. 10. Particularly relevant is the following fragment: “Now and then we hear calls to move beyond the dogmatic repetition and talmudic commenting of texts to develop and modernise Marxist theory. Yet, most often, those who encourage others to sail on deeper waters cowardly stick to the shore, feeling safe only with the ground of classic formulations under their feet and hysterically avoiding the depths awaiting those who venture onto the dangerous vortices of revisionism.” Another writer who wrote about Marxism and debates around it for “Odrodzenie” and “Kućnica”, particularly in the context of socialist humanism, was Adam Schaff, who argued with the above-cited text by Konrad.

55 Ibid. “A scholar who [...] accepts the authority of experience but does not recognise the authority of a priori judgements, who, finally, reviews critically his own notions and methods – fulfils all the postulates of dialectical materialism.” Another text by this author, *Marksizm nieprzedawniony*, was published in No. 23 of “Odrodzenie” from that year – notably, the same issue featured translations of poems by Pablo Neruda.

56 Strzemiński wrote: “the alleged objectivism of seeing objects as they are ‘in themselves’, independent of the human visual apparatus, reduces the verifiable, measurable and definable act of seeing – to an isolated notion, to abstraction that we construe as an independent entity. Processes at work in matter are thus deprived of material content, defined not as process of material change, but as an immobile and unchangeable idea. This illusory objectivism is, in fact, a scholastic return to idealist logic. The highest achievement of the middle class – empirical materialism – cannot be opposed with logical idealism (reactionary to it), but with dialectical materialism,” W. Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia*, Krakow, 1969, pp. 232–233.

57 Polemics with Helmholtz’s theory of symbols in: W. Lenin, op. cit., p. 269.

lished, corresponding with a programme formulated by Dłubak, who owned a typescript of Strzemiński's work and must have also known it from his conversations with the artist.⁵⁸ Dłubak's photographs and his aesthetic programme published in "Świat Fotografii" display a distinct resemblance with the theory of vision. Notably, in the published fragment, Strzemiński wrote about two kinds of realism, the first based on three-dimensional/renaissance perspective and immobile vision, and another, based on a physiological human vision that included the temporal aspect. Strzemiński considered the latter kind of realism a revolutionary event after which humans were no longer reduced to "suppliers of objects" within the reality of capitalist system: "In this case we receive not the realism of things and commodity that is in front of us, but the realism of the visual process – a complex, intricate, and deeply human phenomenon".⁵⁹ This way Strzemiński defined the process of a shift away from figurative art that relied on three-dimensional perspective towards modernity – since seeing is no longer "dehumanised," but based on "real seeing and a will to form." And then – quite surprisingly – this process would produce "lyricism":

And at least at this point there are no limits to this complex and lyrical realism that communicates what we feel and responds to what we see. And the subsequent development of painting moves along the line of increasingly greater enrichment of the visual content, increasingly greater contradiction between the produced relationships and a growing significance of the act of conscious selection as a response to the chaos and contradictions of observed world. The human unity of the process of seeing and the human unity of lyricism as responses to the vision of the world.⁶⁰

It is hard to imagine words that could offer a stronger inspiration for Dłubak's programme, as aware as he was of the surrealist conception of the poetic image, and capable of emphasising the "lyrical," emotional space of dialogue between the artist's consciousness and reality, also the reality of the viewer.

The concept of the image rooted in surrealism, closely linked with the Marxist theory of cognition, shed some light on the words of Porębski: "We reject surrealism in the name of socialist reality [...], but we also propose modern art powerfully drawn from the tradition of surrealism".⁶¹ The opposition between surrealism and socialist realism, seemingly obvious, can be upheld, but modernity also has a realist and socialist tone. Not only was surrealism – as Jarecka wrote in the context of Andrzej Wróblewski's *Surrealist Execution* ("Rozstrzelanie surrealistyczne") – a way to return to the experience of "surrealist" cruelty at the moment of cultural crisis, to confront an uncertain status of subject/artist located between the perspective of the oppressor, victim, and witness,⁶² but – primarily – a frame for a systematic,

58 See: P. Słodkowski, „Kalendarium”, in: Z. Dłubak, *Teoria sztuki Zbigniewa Dłubaka*, ed. M. Ziółkowska, Warsaw, 2013, p. 247.

59 W. Strzemiński, „Widzenie impresjonistów (Rozdział książki o malarstwie mającej się niebawem ukazać w druku)”, *Odrodzenie* 1947, no. 25, p. 4-5.

60 Ibid., p. 303.

61 P. Piotrowski, op. cit., p. 310.

62 D. Jarecka, op. cit., p. 11.

theoretical reworking of these problems through a conscious interplay of relations between reality and individual and collective consciousness. Formal choices had a deeply existential meaning, but they were also related to ideological stances. A surrealist gesture could, certainly, be a political or even a romantic gesture: it showed the direction of the revolutionary transformation of the consciousness of individual and society.⁶³

Consequently, if the specific surrealist concept of the image is considered, one that emerged in the avant-garde of Polish art in the first years after the war, it seems it would not be fully understood without a reference to the Marxist understanding of the relationship between the subject and reality. Focused on the medium of photography, Dłubak's aesthetic programme connects with Strzemiński's theory of vision, and even seems to be partly derived from it or polemical towards it. Postulates published by Dłubak in "Świat Fotografii" gain their justification not only as derived from formal similarities defined with a general term of "poetics." Confrontation with the "achievements of French surrealism" takes place within the frameworks of the concept of the image as a dynamic space, a space open to reality and linked with individual and collective consciousness, a space able to shape such consciousness.⁶⁴

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⁶³ According to Michael Löwy, surrealism and romanticism – as specific worldviews – linked a "revolt of spirit" with "social revolution." See: M. Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*, Austin, 2009, p. 29. This aspect is also relevant in the context of Dłubak's programme, because he both declares the need to refer to a local – "national" – avant-garde tradition (formism), but at the same time, featured poetic texts often confront romantic tradition, Polish and other. In the immediate aftermath of the war – "Odrodzenie" and other forums – sought to reinterpret 19th-century (realist) poetry and prose, primarily Mickiewicz, but also French writers such as Flaubert and Hugo. See for instance: J. Przyboś, „Ręce za lud walczące” [on the poem by Adam Mickiewicz], *Odrodzenie* 1947, no. 8, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Z. Dłubak, „Z rozmyślań o fotografice (II)”, *Świat Fotografii* 1948, no. 11, p. 6.

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