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## Applying the Avant-Garde: Display Experience in the Exhibition of Modern Art (1948)

### Abstract

The *Exhibition of Modern Art* (*Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej*) organized in 1948 in the Palace of Art (Pałac Sztuki) in Cracow was one of the most prominent art events in Poland during the last century. It is considered one of the unprecedented moments in shaping the modernity. The exhibition was thought to be designed as a whole venture, integrating the modern art demonstration with the will to make it accessible to all the social groups. The desire of the authors was to endear the authorities, since the Stalinist repressions were approaching, and present the modern art as accessible to the society and needed in the “new socialist order”. Simultaneously, the primal context for the exhibition, underlined by its authors as well as the critics in subsequent years, were the surrealist exhibitions in Paris. This new avant-garde mode of displaying, so attractive for the Polish artists, put in the foreground not the traditional reception of art, implied by the traditional museology, but mostly focused on the spectator’s experience and used all possible kinds of tools to enhance it. These two approaches were usually presented as antagonistic and impossible to reconcile. The article attempts to analyze the tools which the display’s authors used to merge the avant-garde display with didacticism. While looking at the *Recovered Territories Exhibition* which took place a couple of months earlier, one might notice that the *Exhibition of Modern Art* was not the first display that accommodated the avant-garde solutions to the didactic and propagandistic venture.

**Keywords:** Exhibition of Modern Art, Recovered Territories Exhibition, history of exhibitions, curatorial strategies, surrealism, surrealist exhibitions, environmental design, postwar art, propaganda exhibitions, Polish exhibitions

The *Exhibition of Modern Art* (*Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej*) was one of the most prominent events in the Polish art during the last century and it is considered as one

of the essential moments in shaping the modernity. The exhibition was defined as the point of departure for future progressive realizations and occurs in the literature as an essential moment for surrealist tendencies in Polish art.<sup>1</sup> Since 1957 the word “*First*” has been added to the name of the *Exhibition of Modern Art* in order to emphasize its connection with the *Second Exhibition of Modern Art* (*Druga Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej*).<sup>2</sup> In this paper I will discuss the exhibition’s design regarding its political context and the special role surrealism played in the 1940s in the Polish art. I will examine the tools which were used to influence the mass audience and that allowed to integrate the avant-garde display with didacticism.

The exhibition opened on 18 December 1948 in the Palace of Art in Cracow (Pałac Sztuki), the base for Kraków Society of Friends of Fine Arts (Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Sztuk Pięknych). It was organized by the avant-garde Artists’ Club (Klub Artystów), with Tadeusz Kantor as the main coordinator and designer, and Mieczysław Porębski as the commissioner. The Artists’ Club was an association of young artists based in Cracow. Some of them started their careers during the inter-war period, and for the others, the first interval after the war was a stage of their debuts and first artistic experiences. The group didn’t have any specific programme and was more an alliance of individuals, however, a formalization of the artistic commonality was, at the time, the only way to get public support from the government.<sup>3</sup> The Artists’ Club was anticipated by the Group of Young Artist, an informal association, presenting their works together for the first time in 1946 at the Palace of Art.<sup>4</sup> Simultaneously, the Club of Young Artists and Scientists (Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców) functioned in Warsaw. Established in 1947 at the Polish Army Home (Dom Wojska Polskiego), provided the centre of artistic actions in the capital, with lectures, discussions, and exhibitions in their programme. In the lead of the arts department was Marian Bogusz, an artist and animator of the Polish artistic life after the war. In 1947 a common exhibition was held at the Polish Army Home, *The Exhibition of Modern Visual Artists* (*Wystawa Prac Plastyków Nowoczesnych*), which gathered together the artists from Warsaw, as well as those from the Artists’ Club in Cracow, and from Władysław Strzemiński’s artistic circles in Łódź.<sup>5</sup> *The Exhibition of*

1 See e.g. P. Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Janty*, Poznań, 2005, pp. 53–59.

2 The *Second Exhibition of Modern Art* opened on 18 October and closed on 17 November 1957, and was organized in Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw. The organizing committee was formed by Marian Bogusz, Oskar Hansen, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Nowosielski, Mieczysław Porębski, Henryk Stażewski, Alina Szapocznikow, Bogusław Szwacz, Stefan Wegner, and Marek Włodarski. It is considered the essential moment of the Thaw in Polish art.

3 “Mieczysław Porębski interviewed by Marek Świca”, in: *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej pięćdziesiąt lat później*, Exhibition catalogue, ed. J. Chrobak, M. Świca, Cracow, 1998, p. 21.

4 The exhibition of the Group of Young Artists opened on 12 November 1946. The display’s scenario included artworks by Tadeusz Brzozowski, Maria Jarema, Tadeusz Kantor, Jadwiga Maziarzka, Kazimierz Mikulski, Jerzy Nowosielski, Erna Rosenstein, Jerzy Skarżyński, and Bogusław Szwacz.

5 *The Exhibition of Modern Visual Artists* was divided into two parts with the first opening on 30 September 1947, and the second in December the same year. It opened simultaneously with an individual exhibition of Marek Włodarski’s drawings. It included artists from Cracow

*Modern Art* in Cracow was another attempt to bring those artistic groups together. The ambition was to integrate all the artistic milieus in Poland and to create, the first of its kind, universal demonstration of modernity, intended as a summary of some era.<sup>6</sup> The display was meant to be the last demonstration of modernity before the Stalinist repressions came to dominate and transform the artistic life for the next few years. Moreover, the proceedings of the event were already determined by the forthcoming repressions, first evidenced by the destruction of almost all of the copies of the catalogue before the opening of the exhibition, and finally by its premature closing in less than one month. One might think that the fate of the project was sealed even before it opened, as due to the directions from above several pieces had been eliminated.<sup>7</sup>

The exhibition occupied the first floor of the Palace of Art. The quotidian entrance was covered with a montage poster and another entrance was opened, located on the left side of the vestibule. This way, the spectator was directed to the first hall, placed on the south-west side of the building, called "common room" (światlica). Inside there were four structures 2 x 2.3 meters, serving as the boards for Zbigniew Dłubak's photograms, and Ali Bunsch's spatial form hung from the ceiling. There was an explanatory text: "For the modern artist, the art is a method of the imaginary assimilation of the world. That is why the horizons of modern art, science and technology are common. The photograms placed in the entrance room showed the world, which is, to the same extent the world of an artist, that it is the world of a scientist-researcher or a practising man technician".<sup>8</sup> The intention

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(Tadeusz Brzozowski, Ali Bunsch, Maria Jarema, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Kujawski, Jadwiga Maziarska, Kazimierz Mikulski, Jerzy Nowosielski, Jerzy Skarżyński, Jan Świdorski), Łódź (Lech Kunka, Hanna Orzechowska, Władysław Strzemiński, Teresa Tyszkiewicz, Bolesław Utkin, Stefan Wegner), Poznań (Alfred Lenica), Szczecin (Łukasz Niewisiewicz, Marian Tomaszewski), and Warsaw (Marian Bogusz, Maria Ewa Łunkiewicz, Henryk Stażewski, Bogusław Szwacz, Romuald Kamil Witkowski, Ignacy Witz, Andrzej Wróblewski).

6 The attempt to unite the whole artistic milieu of that time was ultimately dismissed with the resignation of Władysław Strzemiński, also Katarzyna Kobro wasn't invited. Eventually, there were 37 artists taking part in the exhibition, including the representatives of Cracow (Tadeusz Brzozowski, Ali Bunsch, Zofia Gutowska, Maria Jarema, Tadeusz Kantor, Janina Kraupe-Świdorska, Jerzy Malina, Jadwiga Maziarska, Kazimierz Mikulski, Jerzy Nowosielski, Erna Rosenstein, Jerzy Skarżyński, Jonasz Stern, Marian Szulc, Jan Tarasin, Jerzy Tchórzewski, Jadwiga Umińska, Andrzej Wróblewski, Andrzej Cybulski, Kazimierz Wojtanowicz), Warsaw (Marian Bogusz, Janina Brosz-Włodarska, Zbigniew Dłubak, Jan Lenica, Roman Owidzki, Leonard Sempoliński, Henryk Stażewski, Bogusław Szwacz, Bogdan Urbanowicz, Marek Włodarski), Poznań (Alfred Lenica, Fortunata Obrąpalska), Łódź (Judyta Sobel, Teresa Tyszkiewicz, Stefan Wegner), and Lublin (Edward Hartwig), see *Wystawa sztuki nowoczesnej zorganizowana przez Klub Artystów w Krakowie*, Exhibition catalogue, Warsaw, 1948.

7 W. Kozioł, "The Conception of Materiality Presented at the Exhibition of Modern Art (1948). Regarding the Topic of the 'Heightened' Realism in Modern Art", in: *DeMATERIALIZATIONS in Art and Art-Historical Discourse in the Twentieth Century*, eds. W. Bałus, M. Kunińska, Cracow, 2018, p. 58.

8 Original version: „Dla nowoczesnego artysty sztuka jest metodą wyobraźniowego przyswajania sobie świata. Horyzonty nowoczesnej sztuki, nauki i techniki są wspólne. Pomieszczone

was to initiate the narration of the exhibition regarding a scientific approach and to demonstrate the parallels between the world of science and the world of art. The abstract forms on the photograms were in reality macroscopic photos of the scientific discoveries associated with the space exploration or the evolution of biological or medical studies, like planetarium, the clock's internal mechanisms, a piece of moss, a maple seed, an iron construction, a slice of a cabbage with its internal structure, and X-ray images of the lungs. In the main hall, there were, most of all, paintings hung on the walls in the asymmetric arrangement, with pictures placed on different heights and with various distances between the frames. There were also freely arranged chairs ("the accumulation of chairs") with drawings placed on the seats. On the floor, there were standing boards for drawings and other forms on paper, like sketches or projects, that could be removed due to non-constant pinning, conjuring up the attitude of a workshop. The north side of the building was divided into three separate spaces: the hall devoted to sculptures and drawings together with the photomontage room, and on the east two parallel spaces, the models hall alongside the north wall, and the office placed in between the model hall and the main hall. In the models hall, called also the Hall of the Forms of Contemporary Reality, there were displayed spatial models prepared by Jerzy Nowosielski, Andrzej Wróblewski, Marian Bogusz, Jadwiga Maziarska, Marian Szulc, and Tadeusz Brzozowski. The models were created mostly of the everyday utilities, like the oven's chimney or a net. Mieczysław Porębski called this space in the exhibition catalogue "a kind of a storage of forms".<sup>9</sup> These forms aimed to illustrate the notions of scale, spatial structure, movement, contrasting, and object's invention. There was an explanatory text on the wall that proclaimed that "by the gathered models we tried to show how a modern artist understands and resolves elementary issues of his artistic language – the problems of space, scale, material, and movement".<sup>10</sup> In the main hall, there was a megaphone installation and the display was accompanied by a special music program. The exhibition was constantly filled with sound, such as a selection of music, poetry readings, manifestos, and commentaries read by the actors from Cracow – Marta Stebnicka, Tadeusz Łomnicki, and Krystyna Schnerr-Mierzejewska.<sup>11</sup> It is impossible to ascertain if those manifestos were correspondent to the preserved notations of speeches, declaimed during the opening, however, one can assume it is highly probable.<sup>12</sup>

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w tej sali fotomontaże ukazują świat, który jest w tym samym stopniu światem artysty, co światem naukowca lub technika", see *The Exhibition of Modern Art* (commentary), a typescript from Mieczysław Porębski's archive, in: *I Wystawa...*, p. 82.

9 Original version: „jest jakby magazynem form”, see *Wystawa sztuki nowoczesnej zorganizowana...*, p. 2.

10 Original version: „Na zgromadzonych tu modelach przestrzennych starano się pokazać, jak plastyk nowoczesny pojmuje i rozwiązuje elementarne zagadnienie swojego języka – zagadnienia przestrzeni, skali, materii i ruchu”. *The Exhibition of Modern Art* (commentary), a typescript from Mieczysław Porębski's archive, in: *I Wystawa...*, p. 82.

11 Ibid., p. 11.

12 During my research, I've never found any sufficient elaboration concerning sounds as part of this display. No sufficient attention was paid to the exhibition planning during the 20th

Two aspects of the event are emphasized in most of the interpretations. One of them is the surrealistic approach to the exhibitions and the inspiration derived from the surrealist exhibitions in Paris. The other underlines most of all the desire to endear the authorities and present the modern art as accessible to the society and needed in the “new socialist order”. These two analyses were usually presented as antagonistic and impossible to reconcile. However, while looking at the *Recovered Territories Exhibition* which took place a couple of months earlier, one might see that the *Exhibition of Modern Art* was not the first display that accommodated the avant-garde solutions to the didactic and propagandistic venture. The *Recovered Territories Exhibition* was organized along with the Congress of Intellectuals in Defense of Peace in 1948.<sup>13</sup> The Exhibition was an enormous undertaking, the most recognizable and large scale propaganda project among the Polish exhibition designs of those years. The architecture of this venture was supervised by Jerzy Hryniewiecki and engaged many notable architects, including Czesław Wielhorski and Tadeusz Zieliński. Both these architects designed the *Pavilion of Destructions*, conceptually similar to the exhibition *Warsaw Accuses*, organized by the Bureau for the Capital City Reconstruction (Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy) in the National Museum in Warsaw. Maybe the most excellent hall of the display was the *Coal pavilion*, one of the several themed displays in the Four Domes Pavilion (Pawilon Czterech Kopuł). The special design was prepared by Wojciech and Stanisław Zamecznik. The space of this section was occupied by a multimedia installation, with, among others, pieces of coal on the walls, a selection of movies about mining, propaganda charts glorifying the Polish coal’s export, and an enormous shape of a globe under the ceiling. Jan Lenica in his article “Zagadnienia plastyczne Wystawy Ziem Odzyskanych” published in 1948 in *Odrodzenie* defined the *Recovered Territories Exhibition* as the first modern arrangement of a display.<sup>14</sup> In the spacial organization of the exposition he found the

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century and a lot of information is impossible to recover. Sometimes, there are even missing plans and scenarios of the spatial arrangement, which makes all the ephemeral means of expression almost impossible to recreate. It is no different when it comes to the *Exhibition of Modern Art*. The information about the sonic extension of the exhibition is dispersed and was never described in detail.

- 13 It was noticed by Alicja Kępińska that “the assumptions and ambitions of the participants of the *Modern Art Exhibition* have found its parallels in the program of another exhibition, opened a couple of months earlier, the *Recovered Territories Exhibition*. It also became a manifestation of the modern technical and artistic thought, some kind of attempt to familiarize the society with the approaching modernity”, A. Kępińska, *Nowa Sztuka. Sztuka w Polsce*, Warsaw, 1981, p. 24; also Bożena Kowalska noticed some similarities in the modern approach to arranging the exhibition’s space in case of those two displays, B. Kowalska, *Polska awangarda malarska 1945-1970*, Warsaw, 1975, p. 24; it is also known that the *Recovered Territories Exhibition* was widely discussed in the Club of Young Artists and Scientists, see A. Pietrasik, “Antagonizm w polu sztuki. Działalność Klubu Młodych Artystów i Naukowców (1947-1949)”, in: *Zaraz po wojnie*, eds. J. Kordjak, A. Szewczyk, Warsaw, 2015, p. 219.
- 14 J. Lenica, “Zagadnienia plastyczne Wystawy Ziem Odzyskanych”, *Odrodzenie* 37, 1948, reprint-ed in: *Czas debat. Antologia krytyki artystycznej z lat 1945-1955*, vol. 1, *Upowszechnianie kultury i mecenat państwowy*, eds. A. Pietrasik, P. Słodkowski, Warsaw, 2016, p. 176.

influence of modern art – abstract art and surrealism. He wrote that while visiting the *Hall of Destructions* with Jan Kott, they discussed how important it was to use the surrealist methods of displaying to enable people to understand the message of a display as well as to increase their impressions. He quoted the significant words of Jerzy Hryniewiecki "[...] we step into the world of artistic concepts, exceeding traditional ways of thinking. As we enter the 'applied surrealism', abstract art gets closer to us. We live with resurrected dynamics of futurism, surrounded by the artistic tendencies that were incomprehensible before. The 'elite' art is finally capable of affecting the masses. What is unintelligible and difficult while displayed in art salons – appeals to the crowd on the exhibitions and fairs with a language of propaganda and advertising".<sup>15</sup> The success of modern language, confronted with the mass audience was also noticed by Helena Blum who wrote that the Polish artists created a large-scale social order.<sup>16</sup> The author argues that the display revealed that the modern art might be understandable for every spectator, even (or, just on the contrary, particularly) when they come to the "surrealistic" *Hall of Destructions*. The organizers of the exhibition wrote: "a dynamic exhibition – which means involving all the technical solutions (motion, light, film, sound) to the greatest extent" and "an exhibition similar to the book, which means a display where the direction of the tour and the order of viewed elements are actually predetermined by the logical sequence of themes presented on the exhibition".<sup>17</sup>

This multimedia approach, the environmental design, and the "active surrounding"<sup>18</sup> were used both in the propaganda displays and in the avant-garde

15 Original version: „[...]wkraczamy w świat pojęć artystycznych, niemieszczących się w ramach myślenia tradycyjnego. Wchodzimy w 'stosowany surrealizm', bliski nam staje się kierunek sztuki abstrakcyjnej. Żyjemy na nowo wskrzeszonym dynamizmem futurizmu, otacza nas atmosfera prądów plastycznych dotychczas niezrozumiałych. Sztuka 'elitarna' znajduje wreszcie swą przekładnię dla oddziaływania na masy. To, co jest formą niezrozumiałą i trudną na salonach sztuki – na wystawach i targach zaczyna przemawiać do mas językiem propagandy i reklamy". J. Hryniewiecki, "Zamówienie społeczne na krótki termin. (Na marginesie architektury Międzynarodowych Targów w Poznaniu)", *Architektura*, 1948, 5, pp. 2–3, quoted after J. Lenica, op.cit.

16 H. Blumówna, „Architektura i plastyka na WZO", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1948, 39, reprinted in: *Czas debat...*, p. 184.

17 Original version: „Wystawa dynamiczna – tzn. wykorzystanie w jak najszerszym zakresie wszelkich możliwości technicznych (ruch światło, film, dźwięk)", „Wystawa-książka, tzn. wystawa, której kierunek i kolejność zwiedzania w zasadzie są z góry określone w związku z logicznym ciągiem problemów na wystawie postawionych", trans. Aleksandra Szymczyk, Sprawozdanie Komisarza Rządu ds. Wystawy Ziem Odzyskanych, 1950, the Archives of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych), no. 2/377/43, fol. 28, quoted after T. Fudala, "The Crisis-Time Visionary. Exhibitions by Wojciech Zamecznik vs. Shortage Policy", in: *Wojciech Zamecznik. Projektowanie totalne (Total Design)*, ed. K. Puchała-Rojek, A. Szewczyk, Warsaw, 2018, p. 31.

18 Originally „aktywne otoczenie"; this term was used by Tadeusz Kantor while describing his *Anti-Exhibition* (or *Popular Exhibition*) in 1963, quoted after M. Hussakowska "Dwie wystawy", in: *Display. Strategie wystawiania*, eds. M. Hussakowska, E. M. Tatar, Cracow, 2012, p. 137.

realizations. The multisensory appeal, as well as some curatorial decisions, statements and reviews, together with Kantor's residence in Paris in 1947, imposed the surrealist interpretation on this show.<sup>19</sup> There is a set of traits that are always mentioned when it comes to the Duchampian roots of the exhibition in the Palace of Art. Besides its multimediality, the aberrant placement of the chairs in the main hall is usually the essential indication towards the surrealist reading of the exhibition's project. It is considered that the surrealism had a huge impact on the generation of artists who were starting their careers just before the war. Włodzimierz Nowaczyk described the extensive influence of Helena Blum's article about the *Exposition Internationale de Surréalisme* in the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris. For the Polish artists, it was one of the most inspiring points of reference to the Western art at that time. The exhibition of 1938 remained in the collective memory as "the distant role model, impossible to follow, almost a dreamlike one".<sup>20</sup> This new avant-garde mode of displaying, so attractive for the Polish artists, put in the foreground not the traditional reception of art, implied by the traditional museology, but mostly focused on the spectator's experience and used all possible kinds of tools to enhance it. During the memorable exhibition in the Galerie Beaux-Arts, the spectator was confronted not only with coal sacks hung from the ceiling and withered leaves on the floor but also with the German military music serving as a background for this venture.<sup>21</sup> Łukasz Guzek in his book *The Art of Installation* excerpts Mary Anne Staniszewski's approach to the exhibition installations. She states that the contemporary interactivity of spectator, the specificity of a place, multimedia, electronics, and the use of installation as a tool in the exposition design is rooted in the arrangement of projects of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She calls the avant-garde displays of that time the "prehistory" of the art of installation. This author suggests that the exhibition design was an important part of the artistic activities until the 1950s, whereupon during 1960s and 1970s the conventionalization of the layouts of display occurred, caused by the musealisation of the avant-garde and the appearance of the institutional critique.<sup>22</sup> The beginning of the exhibition installations might be affiliated with first Dadaist appearances. Later, the most emblematic were the realizations designed by Friedrich Kiesler with his major project, the *Endless House*, which was a manifestation of his Correalism theory. The main assumptions

19 See e.g. M. Lachowski, „Wokół I Wystawy Sztuki Nowoczesnej”, in: *Nowocześni po katastrofie. Sztuka w Polsce w latach 1945-1960*, Lublin, 2013, pp. 123–152, or W. Nowaczyk, „Tropy nowoczesności”, in: *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r.*, ed. P. Piotrowski, Poznań, 1996, pp. 36–45.

20 Original version: „odległym wzorcem, niedoścignionym, niemalże sennym marzeniem”. Ibid., p. 37.

21 Helena Blum mentioned also „hissing, unidentified sounds, strong smell and strange objects” („dźwięki syczące, nieokreślone, zapachy ciężkie i dziwaczne obiekty”). H. Blumówna, „Nadrealizm. Refleksje po wystawie paryskiej”, *Nike*, 1939, 1, pp. 38–47, reprinted in: *Grupa Krakowska (dokumenty i materiały)*, vol. 1, ed. J. Chrobak, Cracow, 1991, p. 86.

22 Ł. Guzek, *Sztuka instalacji. Zagadnienie związku przestrzeni i obecności w sztuce współczesnej*, Warsaw, 2007, pp. 149–150.

of Kiesler's approach were based on the idea of a total artwork, a correlation of the construction's architecture and the objects that would be assigned to its structure, such as artworks, furniture, and other items, along with the spiritual condition such as the mythology or magic. Another *Gesamtkunstwerk* designed by Kiesler was the project of the Peggy Guggenheim's gallery Art of This Century. The most famous of the three separate spaces, the Surrealist Gallery, was a designed environment with the unframed paintings hung at different angles, the biomorphic-shaped furniture, and the curved walls. The light in the exhibition's space turned on and off periodically during the visit, confronting the viewer with unexpected darkness. At the same time, the sound of a train interrupted the silence, alternating the spectator's senses. The spaces between canvases were called the *Galaxies*, which defined the constellations of paintings and its integration with space.<sup>23</sup> Finally, there was a post-war manifestation of an exhibition installation, *Le Surréalisme en 1947* in the Galerie Maeght in Paris, organized by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp. This project, popular in Poland, was designed as a total work of art and implemented the idea of "a new myth", the magical and esoteric initiation. There was the *Salle du Superstition* with the project of space designed by Kiesler in the spirit of an idea of Correalism. Duchamp was an author of *Le Dédale*, a labyrinth with twelve altars, which contained the magical figures – surrealist fetiches. The audience's perception was constantly interfered by the sound of an electric bell.<sup>24</sup>

The Duchampian impact on the *First Exhibition of Modern Art* was also enhanced by the very organizers of the display in the Palace of Art. Porębski asserted in the interview with Marek Świca that in the arrangement of chairs "there was some inspiration by the surrealist exhibitions – namely those, where there was shutting, tangling with lines, threads [...] we knew it from the photos, literature, we also knew that after-war exhibition of surrealists and probably it was the one that influenced the plastic character of ours interiors, it was *an installation* for a large scale".<sup>25</sup> Further he adds that "the layout of paintings in different distances from the walls, swellings, smooth lines – it was breaking out with previous expository practices. Back then, it was new for us, although this kind of practices had its avant-garde past. In the end, the exhibition was meant to be arranged as exhibiting itself, then one of a kind in Europe, because neither painters from Jeunes Peintres de Tradition Française, nor those from Fronte Nuovo delle Arti in Italy, nor any others, have prepared this kind of exhibitions. However, our exhibition has never gained interna-

23 Ibid., p. 152. Guzek links this approach with the tradition of collage technique.

24 A. Kuczyńska, „Le Surréalisme en 1947 – occultism and the post-war marginalization of surrealism”, *Art Inquiry. Recherches sur les arts*, 2014, 16, p. 92.

25 Original version: „Podejrzewam, że tutaj właśnie była jakaś inspiracja surrealistycznymi wystawami – tymi, które oni zabudowywali, zasnuwali jakimiś sznurkami, nićmi... Myśmy to znali raczej z fotografii, z literatury, znaliśmy też tę powojenną wystawę surrealistów i prawdopodobnie ona również jakoś wpłynęła na wyraz plastycznych samych wnętrz, bo to była taka 'instalacja' na dużą skalę”. „Mieczysław Porębski interviewed by Marek Świca”, in: *I Wystawa...*, p. 23.



tional significance”.<sup>26</sup> This interpretation, the accentuation of the avant-garde and innovative approach applied on “this first large assemblage”<sup>27</sup> lasted for years in the literature. This analysis might have been escalated by confrontation with the posterior Kantor’s curatorial projects, mostly the *Anti-Exhibition* of 1963, also called the *Popular Exhibition*, and “the first environment in Poland”, as named by its author, or the exhibition of Erna Rosenstein’s artworks in Zachęta in 1967.<sup>28</sup>

The recent years brought some new interpretations of the Exhibition of Modern Art. Piotr Słodkowski in his essay “Particular meanings of modernity. The visual aspect of the First Exhibition of Modern Art (1948) with references to the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme (1947)” indicates that the exhibition was much more traditional than it used to be considered. Among others, he points out that the paintings were hung in groups determined by the artists’ affiliations and their stylistics.<sup>29</sup> One might also add here that the surrealists were mostly playing with the ex-

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26 Original version: „Zawieszenie obrazów w różnej odległości od ścian, spiętrzenia, płynne linie – to było zerwaniem z dotychczasową praktyką wystawienniczą. To wszystko było dla nas wtedy nowe, choć mające swoją awangardową przeszłość. Tak więc, wystawa wyszła jako aranżacja sama dla siebie, jedyna w swoim rodzaju wtedy w Europie, bo ani malarze Jeunes Peintres de Tradition Française ani Fronte Nuovo delle Arti we Włoszech, ani nikt inny tego typu ekspozycji nie urządzał. Ta nasza wystawa nigdy jednak rangi międzynarodowej nie zyskała”. Ibid., p. 23.

27 Original version: „pierwszy, ogromny *assemblage*”. Ibid.

28 One might mention here one more exhibition in Cracow that was using sound to emphasize the surrealist and modern effect. A jazz concert during the *Exhibition of 9 Painters* in 1955 was mentioned by Jadwiga Maziarska in her letter to Erna Rosenstein, see *Kolekcjonowanie świata. Jadwiga Maziarska listy i szkice*, ed. B. Piwowarska, Warsaw, 2005; Moreover, in 1959 there was a display of Phases group organized in Krzysztofor. Thanks to personal acquaintance between Janusz Bogucki, organizer of the event, Édouard Jaguer, and the artists from the André Breton’s circle it was possible to display artworks of foreign artists, such as Roberto Matta, Pierre Alechinsky, Corneille, or Jerzy Kujawski, lived in Paris. Alongside, three Polish artists were also invited to take part in the event – Marian Bogusz, Tadeusz Brzozowski, and Jerzy Tchórzewski. Jean Jacques Lebel represented the artists from abroad. One component of the display was a tape that Label brought from Paris, recorded especially for the event in Krzysztofor. The recording comprised a message by André Breton addressed by the poet to the Polish intellectuals. It started with a quotation from *The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation* by Adam Mickiewicz. The tape also included speeches connected to the exhibition, as well as surreal poetry and music, see J. Dąbkowska-Zydroń, *Surrealizm po surrealizmie, Międzynarodowy ruch „Phases”*, Warsaw, 1994, see also J. Bogucki, *Sztuka Polski Ludowej*, Warsaw, 1983, pp. 150–151.

29 The author made a reconstruction and conducted an analysis of the spatial arrangement of the *Exhibition of Modern Art*, based on the 32 preserved photographs and reference materials. The effect was a precise reconstruction of the display, providing information about the distribution of most of the exhibits. Słodkowski made an assumption that, in fact, the arrangement proposed by Kantor and Porębski was distant from the widely used method, based on hanging paintings in one or two rows, adopted from the 19th-century impressionist shows, which provided a suitable distance between paintings and neutralized the surrounding. However, the act of rejection of those widely accepted methods wasn’t complete. The author argues that the composition of painting was in reality much less freely arranged and conservative than it looked like on the fragmentary photos. He proved that all of the artworks created by one artist,

position's space making the works of art less accessible (maybe except for Kiesler's project in Art of This Century gallery), while in Cracow the situation seemed to be completely the opposite. However, even if the exhibition's scenography was much more conservative than it used to be perceived, the display was still created in the spirit of times when surrealism was the synonym of modernity and its influence on the exposition's scenario cannot be denied. Piotr Piotrowski in *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe 1945-1989* defines the years 1945 to 1948 as the "surrealistic interregnum", a period when the previous formulas of representing the world were no more valid and the new ones didn't arrive yet.<sup>30</sup> For Piotrowski, the *Exhibition of Modern Art* was both the beginning and the end of the surrealist tendencies in Polish culture. The author suggests that the organization of the *Exhibition of Modern Art* led to a formative change in the character of surrealism in Poland which became not only artistic, but also a political proposal.<sup>31</sup> The author quotes the words of Mieczysław Porębski from the exhibition's opening, pointing out that the organizers of the exhibition wanted to demonstrate that the avant-garde art is in accordance with Marx's dialectics and might be included into the language of social realism.<sup>32</sup> In 1946, an article entitled "The Group of Young Artists for the second time. *Pro domo sua*" was published in "Twórczość" by Kantor and Porębski. It included their manifesto of the "intensified realism" („realizm spotęgowany”).<sup>33</sup> As Anna Baranowa points out, the tenor of this paper might seem "a bit progres-

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besides small compositions on paper, were hung in groups, likewise, the order of those exhibits was far from being random. The configuration was also determined by the artists' affiliations, as well as their generation, and thereby, the stylistics of the paintings. He points out that despite using the innovate media, like photography, the artworks were displayed separately in the exhibition's space, segregated according to its type. Słodkowski also suggests, that the distances between paintings didn't diverge from the classical approach to displaying, what makes the exhibition different from the avant-garde condition, and its negation of a single object. Słodkowski also follows Kantor's stay in Paris in 1947. He argues that, while analyzing the artist's account from the visit to France he found that Kantor described the exhibition only once, without going into details. Moreover, when it comes to chronology, which was possible to recreate from the preserved correspondence, one might assume that Kantor left Paris before the show in Galerie Maeght was opened on July 7. That leaves us with the conviction that the artist was in fact in the gallery, but only during the preparatory stage and he might have seen only a part of the scenography, most likely only the architecture of the Labirynth. He argues that during the exhibition in Gallerie Maeght, Maria Jarema and Bogusław Szwacz were in Paris, however, their impact on the *Exhibition of Modern Art* seemed to be irrelevant, see P. Słodkowski, "Partykularne znaczenia nowoczesności. Wizualność I Wystawy Sztuki Nowoczesnej (1948) w świetle 'Exposition internationale du surrealisme' (1947)", *Artium Quaestiones*, 22, Poznań, 2011, pp. 247–266.

30 P. Piotrowski, op. cit., p. 52.

31 Ibid., p.59.

32 Ibid.

33 See T. Kantor, M. Porębski, "Grupa Młodych Plastyków po raz drugi. *Pro domo sua*", in: *Twórczość*, 9, 1946, pp. 82–88. The article was written as a response to Tadeusz Dobrowolski's article „O hermetyzmie i społecznej izolacji dzisiejszego malarstwa", *Odrodzenie*, 1946, reprinted in: *Czas debat...*

sive, marked with confidence that one appeals to 'the fresh, constructive intellectual forces and the young, unprejudiced imagination of the working classes'.<sup>34</sup> The defence of the "intensified realism" strived to preserve abstract art and modern, more independent forms of artistic creation, but also, on the other hand, to justify their presence in the post-war world and in the modern society that was about to recover. In her essay "To Those Who Fought for Realism", published in the catalogue of the *Just After The War* exhibition, Dorota Jarecka discusses all "realisms" that occurred in the post-war period: "intensified realism" (realizm spotęgowany), "direct realism" („realizm bezpośredni”) (Wróblewski), "working realism" („roboczy realizm") (Starzyński) and "realism of the visual process" („realizm procesu wzrokowego") (Strzeмиński).<sup>35</sup> All these "realisms" were striving to fit into the forthcoming new order of the Stalinist repressions with its steadfast rejection of everything that went beyond its limits.

First years after the war were the time of unprecedented integration of analyzing the shape and condition of modern art with the social engagement and the will to influence the mass spectator. Making culture accessible for all the social groups was particularly important.<sup>36</sup> Attempts to fit into the new reality, within which art remained entrenched, were already visible during the exhibition of the Group of Young Artists in 1946. The most symptomatic painting for the show was the *Washerwoman* by Tadeusz Kantor, considered as the programmatic artwork of the "intensified realism".<sup>37</sup> The *Exhibition of Modern Art* complied with the conditions of a didactic event. It was prepared to target a mass audience, a working-class man and other heroes of the socialist era. The organizers were analyzing techniques of gaining the recipient's attention and methods to attract it to the exhibition's space. The aim was to demonstrate that the modern art might be much closer to the real-life and appeal to mass audience than it used to be assumed. The necessity of social effect in modern art was emphasized by Zbigniew Dłubak. Therefore, his speech prepared for the exposition's opening was written in the spirit of real communistic propaganda. He underlined that the proprietorship of art used to be in the hands of the possessing class and art was influenced by its ideology. The proletariat used to be detached from all the expressions of "higher" art and condemned to the effects of the artistic production, mostly cheap and tacky, of other wage-earning proletarians.

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34 Original version: „[...] progresywna tonacja, wiara w to, że przemawia się do 'świeżych, konstruktywnych sił intelektualnych i do młodej, nie uprzedzonej wyobraźni klas pracujących'". A. Baranowa, "Realizm spotęgowany i co dalej?", in: *W cieniu krzesła. Malarstwo i sztuka przedmiotu Tadeusza Kantora. Materiały z sesji zorganizowanej przez Instytut Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Zakład Historii Sztuki Nowoczesnej oraz Fundację im. Tadeusza Kantora w dniach 14-15 czerwca 1996*, ed. T. Gryglewicz, Cracow, 1997, p. 34.

35 D. Jarecka, "Tym, co walczyli o realizm", in: *Zaraz po wojnie*, eds. J. Kordjak, A. Szewczyk, Warsaw, 2015, p. 166.

36 See A. Pietrasik, P. Słodkowski, "Introduction", in: *Czas debat...* pp. 32–41.

37 This remark was made by Mieczysław Porębski, see K. Świącicki, "W kręgu II Grupy Krakowskiej: środowisko radykalnej awangardy plastycznej wobec zmian społeczno-politycznych w Polsce w latach 1945-1958", *Historia Slavorum Occidentis*, 1(4), Warsaw, 2013, p. 93.

He pointed out that after gaining power, the new heads of the communist society are not prepared to the reception of modern artistic tendencies, therefore they are faced with a challenge to upgrade the social level of the artistic knowledge. They must understand the modern art, and even more, allow to create new means of artistic expressions, adequate to a new social situation. Dłubak emphasized that before this process of education will profit, it is necessary to protect the existing achievements: "one doesn't go back to the wooden plow, if the peasant has the knowledge how to use it; instead, one teaches him how to drive a tractor – that's how the socialism works".<sup>38</sup> Afterwards, he claims that "the modern art is like a tractor, however, it must be used for the positive and creative tillage, not for the destruction of the basis of the new social life. In front of the big movement of the masses towards culture, there must be a place for artists. By the deep understanding of the theoretical basis of new life and the practical social-political activity, they will gain a new form of consciousness, which will eventually affect their artistic creation. The connection between the development of art and raising the artistic knowledge of the broad masses will at last yield as a result the new socialistic forms of art – social realism".<sup>39</sup> Dłubak later admitted that the leftist beliefs and ideas he held at the time, just like the others in his surrounding, were based mostly on superficial overview of the communist and socialistic lectures. They were not aware of what actually they had to deal with, and back then they really hoped for the real change and progress. However, he also indicated that his opening speech was to be a tactic move and the language he adopted was chosen intentionally to influence the party figures.<sup>40</sup> However, at that time the idea of the social engagement of art was really appealing to the artists. The relations between art and reality permitted, once and for all, to contest the postimpressionist legacy. Marian Bogusz determined the abstraction and functionalism as the essential elements for modern art. The next stage of development was surrealism that „creates the art of the struggle for the human's liberation". The new recipient, the „soil" for art, is the working class.<sup>41</sup>

Eventually, one can't forget that large part of the participants of the *Exhibition of Modern Art* had leftists views, suffice it to mention Andrzej Wróblewski and the

38 Original version: „Nie wraca się do drewnianej sochy, jeżeli chłop tylko nią potrafi orać, uczy się go prowadzić traktor – na tym polega socjalizm”, see Z. Dłubak, „Uwagi o sztuce nowoczesnej. Referat wygłoszony na wernisażu I Wystawy Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Krakowie 1948”, in: *W kręgu lat czterdziestych*, vol. 2, ed. J. Chrobak, Cracow, 1991, p. 36.

39 Original version: „Nowoczesna plastyka jest traktorem, który jednakże musi być użyty do pozytywnej, twórczej orki, a nie do miażdżenia podstaw nowego życia społecznego. Naprzeciw wielkiemu ruchowi mas do wysokiego poziomu kultury wyjść muszą plastycy. Przez dogłębne zrozumienie podstaw teoretycznych nowego życia, przez praktyczną działalność społeczno-polityczną osiągną nowe ukształtowanie zawartości swojej świadomości, co z kolei wpłynie na ich twórczość. Zejdzie się linii rozwojowej sztuki z linią podnoszenia poziomu kulturalnego szerokich mas da dopiero przez wzajemny wpływ tych czynników – nową socjalistyczną sztukę – socjalistyczny realizm”. Ibid., p. 36.

40 „Zbigniew Dłubak interviewed by Jarosław Suchan”, in: *I Wystawa...*, p. 25.

41 Original version: „Nadrealizm stwarza sztukę walki o wyzwolenie człowieka”. Ibid., p. 158.

Self-Education Group (Grupa Samokształceniowa). The social involvement also influenced the exhibition's further program. There was a special scenario of the labourers' visits to the exhibition, prepared by Andrzej Wróblewski, with a description of all the display halls and their importance for understanding the character and social role of modern art.<sup>42</sup> The participation factor was also significant. There was a questionnaire prepared for visitors, which contained questions like: "how the painting should influence us?"; "did I find on the exhibition paintings that correspond to my wishes?"; "do the models as a whole make it easy to understand the rules modern art is based on?"; "should exhibitions like this one take place?", and so on. The arrangement of drawings in the main hall, the possibility to touch them, or even change its place on the board, influenced the attitude of the public engagement. The artists were available during the event in case of questions or a need for discussion. Combining music with the visuality of the display was a means to affect the recipient's emotions and allow her or him to fall into the narration.

An important part of the exhibition's display was its music component. It occurred in relations between the visitors and artists. Jerzy Skarżyński recounts the jazz music played from the records. He offered two albums of his own, one by Armstrong and one by Ellington, which were played on repeat during the show.<sup>43</sup> The music blaring in the Palace of Art also exists in Marian Warzecha's memories: "while passing next to the Palace of Art, once I decided to get in and suddenly I saw some weird looking exhibition. Everything there was different. There was a time when people were extremely quiet visiting exhibitions. In the museums, they used to whisper, at that time there were no guides or excursions. Getting into the museum space was equivalent to getting into silence. While there, there was jazz music playing".<sup>44</sup> Jazz music was popular and in vogue during the interwar period in Poland. After the war the forthcoming repressions didn't allow jazz music to develop properly, bringing by the end of the 1940s the "catacomb period" in the history of Polish jazz. This name refers to its condemnation by social realism and to the impossibility to perform it legally.<sup>45</sup> However, at the time, the Stalinist repressions weren't so readily perceptible in the field of music. For the artists, music was a territory where lack of literality was still allowed and the absence of an authentic representation was socially comprehensible.<sup>46</sup> During the *Exhibition of Modern Art* music was distributed not only from the records. There is a copy of the *Programme of Contemporary Music Concert* in

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42 Andrzej Wróblewski, a commentary to *The Exhibition of Modern Art*, a typescript from private collection, *ibid.*, p. 110.

43 "Jerzy Skarżyński interviewed by Jan Trzupek and Andrzej Knapik", *ibid.*, p. 36.

44 Original version: „Przechodząc kiedyś koło Pałacu Sztuki, wszedłem do środka i nagle zobaczyłem jakąś dziwną wystawę. Wszystko tam było zupełnie inne. Wtedy na wystawach ludzie zachowywali się szalenie cicho. W muzeach rozmawiano szeptem, nie było jeszcze przewodników czy wycieczek. Wejście do muzeum czy na wystawę to było wejście w ciszę. Natomiast tam szedł jazz”. Marian Warzecha, reported by Piotr Cypriański, *ibid.*, p. 38.

45 See e.g. K. Brodacki, *Historia jazzu w Polsce*, Cracow, 2010, pp.135–151.

46 (A statement by Alfred Lenica), *W kręgu lat czterdziestych*, vol. 2, ed. J. Chrobak, Cracow 1991, p. 66.

the archives of the Palace of Art.<sup>47</sup> It was organized by the Artists' Club in collaboration with the Polish Composers' Union (Związek Kompozytorów Polskich), the Society for Contemporary Music (Towarzystwo Muzyki Współczesnej), and the Polish Music Publishing House (Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne) on 17 January 1949 just before the closure of the show.<sup>48</sup> The schedule included music of Witold Lutosławski, Artur Malawski, Antoni Szałowski, Karol Szymanowski, and Andrzej Panufnik.<sup>49</sup> The exhibition in the Palace of Art witnessed one of the last performances of music by these composers before the Stalinist repressions came. The inclusion of music into the display narration was part of completing the narration about modernity. There is a note in the exhibition's scenario prepared by Kantor and Porębski, among the commentaries applied to the main hall, that includes an assertion that "the appropriate musical programme constitutes the emotional background for the exhibits".<sup>50</sup> A similar assumption appears amid the "theses for discussion" prepared for the Artists' Club in 1948, where it is said that „the visual language is, likewise the musical language, a language of emotions. It has to organize the emotions of the recipient”.<sup>51</sup> These statements determine the reception of sounds that accompanied the exhibition of modern art as an integral component of a whole venture. The meanings of the show were imbued to the audience with all the possible methods. Worth discussing is also the use of photographs. While photography was a leading tool of propaganda representations, introducing real-life into the museum walls, its adoption into the *Exhibition of Modern Art* and the display of Dłubak's photograms demonstrated the connection between the visual abstraction and the forms of real

47 See *Programme of Contemporary Music Concert, Cracow 1948*, Palace of Art's Archives in Cracow (Archiwum Pałacu Sztuki w Krakowie).

48 There are ambiguities in dating the closure, some sources date it on 9 January, others on about 17, what might suggest that the concert has never taken place, however, there is a review by Anna Maślakiewicz-Brzozowska where she stated: "There are some rumours that the infamous exhibition is about to be closed, but its existence was prolonged by a dose of music that might serve to settle the plastic deficiency", what allows to assume that the closure took place on 18 January 1949, see A. Maślakiewicz-Brzozowska, "Wspomnienia z Wystawy Sztuki Nowoczesnej – czyli dumanie nad rurą od pieca", in: *I Wystawa...*, p. 134.

49 The program included Witold Lutosławski's *Melodie ludowe* performed by Józef Hoffman on the piano, Artur Malawski's *Miniatury* performed by Józef Hoffman on the piano, Antoni Szałowski's *Suita*, performed by Eugenia Umińska on the violin and by J. Szamotulska on the piano, Karol Szymanowski's *Źródło Aretuzy* performed by Eugenia Umińska on the violin and Jadwiga Szamotulska on the piano, Artur Malawski's *Burleska* performed by Eugenia Umińska on the violin and Jadwiga Szamotulska on the piano, Andrzej Panufnik's *Interludia* performed by the composer, see *Programme of Contemporary...*

50 Original version: „Odpowiedni program audycji muzycznych stwarza tło emocjonalne dla eksponatów”. *The Exhibition of Modern Art*, a typescript from Mieczysław Porębski's archive, in: *I Wystawa...*, p. 82.

51 Original version: „Język plastyczny jest, podobnie jak język muzyczny, językiem emocjonalnym. Zadaniem jego jest organizowanie wzruszenia odbiorcy”, see *Dotyczy Klubu Artystów w Krakowie*, 1948, a typescript from Mieczysław Porębski's archive, *ibid.*, p. 81.

life. The montage techniques have also visual correspondence in the beginnings of the history of propaganda displays, in the famous *Pressa* exhibition in 1928 and its visual communication language applied by El Lissitzky. El Lissitzky abandoned the traditional symmetrical space arrangement, creating instead a dynamic project with the unconventional use of materials like cellophane. He also changed the scale of display by confronting the visitors with enlarged photographs.<sup>52</sup>

The correlation between abstract forms and reality was also demonstrated in the Hall of the Forms of Contemporary Reality with spatial models made of implements from everyday life. The rigid and imposing path of the visit has a propaganda-like importance. In the initial version of the exposition, the common room was thought as a labyrinth structure (inspired by the exhibition in Gallerie Maeght?) that introduced to the main hall. The idea was to create giant pincers, closing up the room and forcing the visitor to wait for being free to enter the main hall and continue the “didactic walkabout” („wędrowka dydaktyczna”).<sup>53</sup> The exhibition’s design left no space for the individual read-out or interpretation, which was emphasized by the megaphones, the tours’ scenarios, and the artists acting as consultants. The implemented sound component, besides serving as an “emotional background”, repeating the manifestos and explicatory announces, affected the environmental attitude and facilitated to receive the exposition as a coherent structure, as well as intensified the intentions of the organizers to present all the aspects of modernity and convince the audience (and the decision makers) of its utility.

The propaganda displays were preceded by the world exhibitions’ projects in the interwar period. The pavilions integrated the visual content with sounds, movies, and united all the symptoms of the artistic life with the industrial design. While taking over the power, the communists needed architects to communicate with society via the language of visual propaganda. The number of propaganda exhibitions was increasing during the following years and their reception was prodigious, creating a well thriving indoctrination machine.<sup>54</sup> Similar devices were used among all the propaganda manifestations. The most prominent at the time was certainly MoMA’s propaganda cycle organized by Edward Steichen. The spatial arrangements of those displays were designed by Herbert Bayer, an architect and graphic designer, connected with the Bauhaus school, where he was in charge of printing and advertising departments. Bayer compared projecting the exhibitions to the psychology of advertising. In 1961 he published the article “Aspects of Exhibitions and Museums”. His exhibitions’ planning amounted to “concentrating the message” and “improving techniques of communication”. He implied that “the elements of communication and display must be incorporated and integrated into a scheme that conforms to a desired sequence of impressions and to the visitor’s perceptive abili-

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52 H. Bayer, “Aspects of Design of Exhibitions and Museums”, *Curator*, 4, 3, 1961, p. 267.

53 „Mieczysław Porębski interviewed by Marek Świca”, op. cit., p. 22.

54 See T. Fudala, “Przestrzenie powojennego humanizmu. Wystawy Czesława Wielhorskiego (1911–1980)”, *Miejsce*, 2, Warszawa, 2016, p. 87.

ties. The organization of the floor plan should ensure an uninterrupted flow of traffic and permit and induce the visitor to view all exhibits".<sup>55</sup> He claimed that all the widespread means of communication should be engaged to confront the spectator with a "total application of all artistic and psychological means". As those means, he listed "integrated use of graphics with architectural structure, of advertising psychology with space concepts, of light and colour with motion and sound".<sup>56</sup> Similar assumptions were made in the "Fundamentals of Exhibition Design" from 1937, a summary of his preceding year's achievements, including the *Deutscher Werkbund Exhibition* in 1930 in Paris, prepared with Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, where for the first time he put into practice his extended field of vision theory.<sup>57</sup> What was interesting, to demonstrate "the freedom gained from this theory", Bayer displayed some of the chairs on the wall.<sup>58</sup> This new mode of exhibitions' planning should "rest on the universal application of all known means of design: diagram, lettering, word, photography, architecture, painting, sculpture, tone, light, film" – "all powers of design"; "the theme should not retain its distance from the spectator, it should be brought close to him, penetrate and leave an impression on him, should explain, demonstrate, and even persuade and lead him to a planned and direct reaction".<sup>59</sup> In 1938 the exhibition *Bauhaus 1919-1928* was opened in the Museum of Modern Art, where the guest's directions were indicated by the footprints and shapes painted on the floor. In the following years, Bayer co-worked with Edward Steichen on his famous propaganda exhibition's cycle for MoMA, created during the World War II, that travelled all over the country. In 1942 the *Road to Victory: A procession of Photographs of the Nation at War* was opened at MoMA, followed by the *Power in the Pacific: Battle Photographs of our Navy in Action on the Sea and in the Sky* (1943), *Airways to peace* (1943) and finally, the most famous propaganda realization at the times of the Cold War, the *Family of Man* (1955).<sup>60</sup>

The *Exhibition of Modern Art* was, on the one hand, a presentation of the avant-garde art pieces, but on the other, it indicated brand new assignments for surrealist and abstract compositions, trying to incorporate them into the new reality. Jerzy Hryniewiecki's term of "applied surrealism" seems to suit perfectly to the reality of artists participating in the *Exhibition of Modern Art*, as well as to some of the anticipating expositions after 1945. To „apply" the avant-garde art and to make it useful for the requirements of a socialist realist seemed the only way to survive. Wojciech

55 H. Bayer, "Aspects" ..., p. 257.

56 Ibid., p. 258.

57 See H. Bayer, "Fundamentals of Exhibition Design", Dec 1939 – Jan 1940, *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*, <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/90f27111-9715-4fc1-e040-e00a18064ba4> [accessed 2 May 2020].

58 H. Bayer, "Aspects...", p. 270.

59 H. Bayer, "Fundamentals...", p. 17.

60 See e.g. K. Gresh, "The Politics of Photography: The Family of Man and the Museum of Modern Art's War Program", in: *On Display. Visual Politics, Material Culture, and Education*, eds. K. Priem, K. te Hessen, Münster, 2016, pp. 127–143.



Włodarczyk indicated that at the same time the *Exhibition of Modern Art* opened, other art expositions were starting for celebrating the United Congress of Polish Workers' Party and Polish Socialistic Party (Kongres Zjednoczeniowy Polskiej Partii Robotniczej i Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej).<sup>61</sup> The date of the exhibition's opening had so strong a political undertone, that it couldn't even try not to fit in the new reality and requirements. At almost the same time when the *Exhibition of Modern Art* was opened, at the Polish Army Home in Warsaw was starting an exhibition of artworks created by the miners.<sup>62</sup>

What is symptomatic, the participating artists, especially those from Cracow, disclaimed the propagandistic approach and didacticism in favour of the avant-garde. Piotr Słodkowski indicated that an attempt to create the avant-garde aura around the show demonstrated the centre/periphery discourse that the creators of the exhibition and, later, the critics were involved in.<sup>63</sup> The *Second Exhibition of Modern Art* was the first step to the increasing mythologization of the show during the Thaw, which was repeated in the following years. Mieczysław Porębski in the introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition stated that "The notion of modernity is relative and its range is variable. It doesn't mean, however, that it didn't have an established right of citizenship in Polish visual arts. The year 1917 (the Formists), the year 1923 and following ('Blok', 'Praesens'), the thirties ('a. r.', 'Artes', the Cracow Group), the forties ('young artists'), the year 1949 (the *Exhibition of Modern Art* in Cracow), are all the successive moments of one continuous process that shaped its extent and specified its attitude".<sup>64</sup>

From today's perspective, it seems to be pointless and anachronic to evaluate between the avant-garde and propaganda displays. The environmental approach, "active surrounding", and using various media to influence the spectator were used as well by the avant-garde and propaganda artists and architects, although for another purpose. The recent years and the latest studies resulted in some changes in the dominant narratives and dichotomy that used to function for years in Polish art history, and permitted to reread some of the key events in post-war Poland.<sup>65</sup>

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61 W. Włodarczyk, "Pięć lat", in: *Zaraz po wojnie...*, p. 39.

62 The exhibition entitled *Wystawa prac malarskich górników urządzona z okazji święta górniczego – Barbórki* opened on 4 December 1948 in the Club of Young Artists and Scientists (Polish Army Home).

63 P. Słodkowski, op. cit., p. 263.

64 Original version: „Pojęcie nowoczesności jest pojęciem względnym, a jego zakres jest zmienny. Nie znaczy to jednak, żeby nie miało ono w plastyce polskiej ustalonego prawa obywatelstwa. Rok 1917 (formiści), rok 1923 i następne ('Blok', 'Praesens'), lata trzydzieste ('a.r.', 'Artes', grupa krakowska), lata czterdzieste ('młodzi plastycy'), rok 1948 (Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Krakowie) to kolejne momenty jednego nieprzerwanego procesu, który kształtował jego zasięg i precyzował wymowę”. 2. *Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej*, Exhibition catalogue, Warsaw, 1957, p. 5.

65 See e.g. the *Zachęta Archives* series under the guidance of dr hab. Gabriela Świtek.

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