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The Post-War History of Pictorialism as Exemplified by Exhibitions at the Zachęta and the Kordegarda (1953–1970)

Existing academic works examining Polish fine-art photography¹ in the 1950s and 1960s are most often based on an analysis of the debates that took place within professional circles and the views of specific artists as expressed in specialist periodicals published at that time.² Thus, the relevant literature primarily offers new interpretations of narratives constructed by the artists themselves – written assertions of their views on the theory and aesthetics of a photographic image. It must, however, be noted that these programmatic postulates were often at variance with the actual practices.³ What is more,

- 1 The term “fine-art photography” constituted the primary point of interest for artists in the period under analysis. For this reason, the phrase is used consistently throughout the present article, even though it ceased to function as a category in post-modern academic discourse. The phenomenon was seen in opposition to “press photography”, which was done on commission (and frequently entailed in-field cooperation with journalists) and subject to strict control and censorship due to the limited access to film and the fact that photographs were not developed by the artists themselves, but by laboratory workers employed by press editors. Press photography was thus a separate type of activity, one which could hardly be associated with artistic freedom.
- 2 The present article was written as a part of the research project entitled “Historia wystaw w Zachęcie – Centralnym Biurze Wystaw Artystycznych w latach 1949–1970” [The History of Exhibitions at Zachęta, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in the Period 1949–1970] conducted within the framework of the National Programme for the Development of Humanities (2014–2017), no. 0086/NPRH3/H11/82/2014. The present analysis is based primarily on source material found in the archives of the documentation department of the Zachęta gallery. These were compared with documents kept at the National Museum in Warsaw, the photography archive of the ZPAF and the Jerzy Lewczyński Institute in Warsaw.
- 3 This assumption was proved e.g. by Juliusz Garzdecki, who compared programmatic manifestos (which also changed as the years went by; the terms and concepts used in

diagnoses regarding the Polish photographic milieu are frequently based on a very particular source, namely the monthly magazine *Fotografia*.⁴ Its editor-in-chief, Zbigniew Dłubak, represented a modernity-oriented approach; the influence of the traditionalist Association of Polish Art Photographers (Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików; ZPAF) on the published material was limited.⁵ Urszula Czartoryska contributed articles on the history of art that presented a wider cultural context for artistic phenomena, and the periodical showcased various photographic forms (including abstract ones). Due to all of the above factors, an analysis of *Fotografia* projects an image of an artistic society enjoying a relatively high degree of autonomy. Consequently, it may be surmised that, after the short episode of persistent didacticism that was typical of Socialist Realism, in the decades preceding the emergence of Photomedialism this aspect of artistic activity was not forced to convey the propaganda messages that the authorities wished to present to the public.⁶

such documents acquired different meanings and could be interpreted differently by the artist) with their final execution by Zbigniew Dłubak; see J. Garztecki, *Próby myśli względnie uporządkowanych. Tezy estetyczne Zbigniewa Dłubaka* [Attempts at relatively organised thoughts. The aesthetic theses of Zbigniew Dłubak] – a typewritten manuscript kept at the Jerzy Lewczyński Institute in Warsaw. The surviving documents and visual material allow scholars to analyse the nature of the presented exhibitions and to form conclusions regarding their reception.

- 4 See K. Ziębińska-Lewandowska, *Między dokumentalnością a eksperymentem. Krytyka fotograficzna w Polsce w latach 1946–1989* [Between documenting and experimenting. Photography criticism in Poland between 1946–1989], Warsaw, 2014; L. Lechowicz, “Między politycznym bezpieczeństwem a polityczną poprawnością. Rozważania nad sztuką medialną w Polsce dekad powojennych” [Between political security and political correctness. Remarks on media art in post-war Poland], in: *Przestrzenie fotografii. Antologia tekstów* [Areas of photography; an anthology], ed. T. Ferenc, Łódź, 2005, pp. 155–160; J. Piwowarski, “Socjalistyczna w treści, narodowa w formie. Polska fotografia artystyczna w okresie socrealizmu na podstawie analizy prasy specjalistycznej z lat 1946–1955” [Socialist in content, national in form. Polish fine-art photography in the period of Socialist Realism presented on the basis of an analysis of specialist press 1946–1955], in: *Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie. Edukacja Plastyczna: Fotografia*, 2011, VI, pp. 61–81.
- 5 M. Grygiel, “Wartości kontra komercja. Rozmowa ze Zbigniewem Dłubakiem przeprowadzona w 1993 roku” [Values versus commercialism. A conversation with Zbigniew Dłubak recorded in 1993], *Fototapeta*, <http://fototapeta.art.pl/2001/dlb.php> [accessed 28 September 2015].
- 6 The opening date for the time brackets of the present analysis was chosen not only due to the historical caesura of the political thaw (external to artistic phenomena) but also due to the fact that 1953 was also the year when the much more conservative magazine *Świat Fotografii* was replaced by the new periodical *Fotografia*. The examination of the post-war history of Pictorialism ends with the year 1970 as the symbolic moment when the phenomenon of Photomedialism took root in the artistic scene of Poland (with the debut of a young generation of artists unfamiliar with the inter-war tradition), thus triggering changes in the reality of how gallery institutions functioned.

This seems to suggest that after the political thaw photographers enjoyed a high degree of freedom in their artistic expression. However, the present study represents a different research approach, inspired e.g. by the works of Bruce Altshuler⁷ and Kenneth Luckhurst,⁸ who postulated the re-orientation of art history away from biographical works focused on the individual subject towards a discipline understood as the history of exhibitions. The form of the present analysis was also influenced by Donald Preziosi's⁹ critical evaluation of museum institutions – his diagnosis regarding the political and ideological conditioning of museum space and its role in promoting a specific image of the state. Following the course set by the above-mentioned scholars, one may come to the conclusion that an analysis of the place that photography occupied in the official exhibition strategy implemented in the 1950s and 1960s in the prestigious Warsaw galleries of the Kordegarda and the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (CBWA) may provide an interesting new contribution to the current state of research. A study based on an examination of the history of exhibitions may help to answer the question of whether all forms of photography were equally approved by the authorities at a time when the rules of cultural policy of the Polish People's Republic became more lenient. It also makes it possible to evaluate the degree to which autonomy and heterogeneity (features which may be associated with the magazine *Fotografia*) were legitimised through presentation in a state-owned, politicised public space.

A look into who was granted the privilege of an individual presentation in the halls of the Zachęta and the Kordegarda in the period in question reveals that although the doctrine of Socialist Realism was abandoned, the authorities preferred and promoted a new type of aesthetics which had emerged at the time. As far as the exhibition strategy is concerned, the form that gained the most popularity was photojournalism inspired by the notion of the "decisive moment" as introduced by Henri Cartier-Bresson.¹⁰ Practised in Poland (Edward Falkowski, Lucjan Fogiel, Alfred Funkiewicz, Adam Kaczowski, Wiesław Prażuch, Zbyszko Siemaszko) and beyond its borders (Wacław Kapusto, Tadeusz Trepanowski, Maksymilian Wrocławski, Antoni Nowosielski),¹¹ the genre was based on the immanent realism of the medium. Its key

7 See the "trilogy" of Altshuler's works on this subject: B. Altshuler, *The Avant-garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th century*, Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1998; *Salon to Biennial. Exhibitions that Made Art History 1863–1959*, ed. B. Altshuler, London–New York, 2008; *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History 1962–2002*, ed. B. Altshuler, London–New York, 2013.

8 See K. Luckhurst, *The Story of Exhibitions*, London–New York, 1951.

9 D. Preziosi, "Brain of the Earth's Body: Museum and the Flaming of Modernity", in: *The Rhetoric of the Frame. Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. P. Duro, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 96–110.

10 J. Kosidowski, *Zawód: fotoreporterzy* [Profession: photoreporters], Warsaw, 1984, pp. 28–31.

11 A full overview of photographic exhibitions, which in itself might become one of the works produced in the course of the National Programme for the Development of

features included recognition of the presented reality and the limited use of technical means that facilitated distortion of the image. Such photographs not only had an informative and documentative value (showing exotic locations such as Africa or China) but, more importantly, recorded and preserved the fleeting moments of everyday life. They offered a glimpse into various types of human activity and human interactions with the environment. Their principal value that captured the interest of the audience lay in the successful combination of the (more or less) fortunate composition of the frame with the narrative of the specific situation that was being recorded. These photographs were intended to present the observed reality as faithfully as possible; the frames could not be (or seem to be) artificially arranged. Artists associated with the genre shied away from the pictorial processes or strong, invasive retouching.

When analysing this issue, as Karolina Ziębińska-Lewandowska¹² did, in the context of the evolutionary concept of art and the dialectic system of the old versus the new, one must note that the realism ingrained in the nature of Polish photojournalism did not situate it on the side of the avant-garde. The genre stood in strong opposition to trends favouring interference in and modification of the image in the course of the darkroom developing process. Consequently, it shied away from experiments with form which, in my estimation, are inherently connected with the drive towards modernity, manifesting itself through contradicting the base properties of the material and the mechanistic precisionism of the camera. Photojournalism was regarded as a recipe for modernity at the time, as it followed Western models (*The Family of Man* exhibition, the works of the Magnum group) and opposed pictorial tendencies, yet, claimed by the politicised portrayal of socialist reality, it became a convention that fell into monotony.¹³ The emphasis on the “correct” exposure of the negative and processing of the prints, coupled with the artificially imposed

Humanities grant, would exceed the spatial constraints of the present work, as it would require an extended commentary.

12 K. Ziębińska-Lewandowska, op. cit., p. 165.

13 Photography inspired by Italian Neo-realism or the “Black Series” of Polish documentary (such as the works of e.g. Jerzy Lewczyński and Zdzisław Beksiński) ought to be regarded as a separate phenomenon. It is very often labelled as photojournalism, even though its origins, visual form and the underlying ideology (derived from Existentialism) situate it in a different realm of phenomena in art than the one that was represented by photojournalism at that time. On the presence of existential motifs in the works of Beksiński and others, see W. Kobylińska-Bunsch, “Peryferie w cieniu wojny i egzystencjalnej katastrofy – o metaforycznych obrazach prowincji w dorobku Zdzisława Beksińskiego i Jerzego Lewczyńskiego” [Peripheries in the shadow of war and existential disaster – on metaphorical images of the countryside in the oeuvre of Zdzisław Beksiński and Jerzy Lewczyński], in: *Regiony wyobraźni. Peryferyjność w kulturze XIX–XXI wieku. XIV seminarium metodologiczne Katedry Teorii Sztuki i Historii Doktryn Artystycznych KUL* [Regions of imagination. Peripheralness in culture in the 19th–21st centuries. The 14th methodological seminar in the History of Art Theory and Artistic Doctrines Department of the Catholic University in Lublin], ed. M. Lachowski, Lublin, 2016 (in print).

approach of the “humanitarian”¹⁴ optics of perceiving the human subject, led to photography becoming rigidly fixed, closed in an exceedingly hermetic form, which Adam Mazur described as “positive photojournalism”.¹⁵

The history of individual photographic exhibitions at the Zachęta and the Kordegarda reveals another trend, namely the return of Pictorialism,¹⁶ which had (perhaps too hastily) been regarded as outdated. At the time of the political thaw this genre may have seemed utterly disgraced; even before the grip of the system was loosened, Zbigniew Dłubak expressed severely critical views on photography which was not able to “go beyond impressionism”,¹⁷ pronouncing it a stalemate in the artistic discipline. What is more, in 1949, faced with the choice between promoting works that derived from Pictorialism and progressive attempts resembling those presented at the *Wystawa sztuki nowoczesnej* [Exhibition of Modern Art], the authorities decided to favour the former. Representational, figural images featuring a classical composition proved effective as a means of shaping the socialist consciousness of the masses. Unlike the metaphorical or slightly surrealist photograms,¹⁸ Pictorialist photographs seemed to entail a limited number of possible interpretations. Thus they complied with the basic stipulation of Socialist Realism – they were clear and comprehensible to the average person, all the more so given the

14 Z. Tomaszczuk, *Łowcy obrazów – szkice z historii fotografii* [Image hunters – essays on the history of photography], Warsaw, 1998, p. 54.

15 A. Mazur, *Historie fotografii w Polsce 1839–2009* [The histories of photography in Poland 1839–2009], Warsaw–Cracow, 2009, p. 221.

16 Pictorialism – a movement in fine-art photography that reached its peak of popularity in the late 19th century. The style strived to endow the resulting image with features of a painting. In principle, Pictorialists opposed images that were sharp in focus and constituted an ideal representation of reality. They approved of manipulating the images and adding unique features to the prints. The final effect of such free artistic expression was supposed to prove that the status of photography is not lower than that of other forms of visual art. The French model of Pictorialism (as represented e.g. by Robert Demachy and Constant Puyo) was adopted in Poland in the inter-war period and acquired special significance as one of the keystones of a programme formulated by the pioneer of Polish photography, Jan Bułhak (1876–1950). For Bułhak and his contemporaries, the notion of “native photography” gained the position of a well-established theoretical framework. Socially involved photography that showed the beauty of the country was consistently popularised by Polish publications. Due to its solid intellectual justification, the style enjoyed a more stable position in artistic circles than other (usually fleeting) trends. The rapidly gained supremacy of this “native”, Polish Pictorialism, with its atmospheric, blurry images conveying patriotic messages, could not be easily broken by foreign, uninvolved forms of modern photography.

17 Z. Dłubak, “Z rozmyślań o fotografice. Seria pierwsza” [Thoughts on photography. Series one], *Świat Fotografii*, 1948, X, p. 2.

18 The term “photogram” remains ambiguous in Polish literature. In the present study the term is interpreted as in foreign-language sources, i.e. as a photographic image made on light-sensitive material without the use of a camera. The term was used by artists such as László Moholy-Nagy and indicates the avant-garde origins of any given work.

fact that an appropriate title chosen by the artist or imposed by censorship ultimately fixed the place of any given image within the ideological framework.¹⁹ Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of Poland did not develop its own models of photography which would express the apotheosis of the new authorities; there was no new, codified set of aesthetic rules accordant with the cultural policies of the day. Instead, it tried to appropriate the pictorial models of perceiving an image, along with Bułhak's notion of recording the beauty of his native land. The patriotic programme of native photography,²⁰ with its supreme objective of promoting a positive image of the country, constituted a very appropriate model for post-war, politically-involved photography which was supposed to glorify the new reality. What did change was the subject matter. The emphasis, formerly placed on landscape or landmark photography, was shifted towards images presenting "contemporary people in their creative struggle for new forms of living",²¹ i.e. rebuilding the country and supporting the political system. For this reason, at the end of the 1940s, heroic images presenting the ethos of a working man started to appear even among the works of artists such as Edward Hartwig²² or Janina Mierzecka.²³ Very soon, however, the artistic milieu started to reject all attempts at imposing some artificially devised form of photography.²⁴ The rhetoric of political agitation was renounced, the worker/peasant subject matter abandoned and their visual medium, Pictorialism, seemed to have been utterly rejected in favour of photojournalism.

However, individual expositions presenting the works of the doyens of Polish photography, as co-organised by the CBWA and the ZPAF, indicate that

19 W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950–1954* [Socialist Realism. Polish art between 1950–1954], Cracow, 1991, pp. 121–122.

20 Bułhak's best-known publication on native photography was published as late as in 1951, yet the idea had been well established in Poland since the 1930s due to various lectures, programme manifestoes and publications written not only by Bułhak himself, but also by other photographers who supported his views. See J. Bułhak, "Ojczyzna bez fotografii i fotografia bez ojczyzny" [Homeland without photography and photography without a homeland], *Fotograf Polski*, 1938, I, pp. 2–5; E. Czerny, "Fotografia ojczysta jako czynnik propagandowy i wychowawczy" [Native photography as a factor in propaganda and education], *Fotograf Polski*, 1938, II, pp. 24–27; A. Wiczorek, "Myśl o fotografii ojczystej w Polsce" [Thoughts on native photography in Poland], *Fotograf Polski*, 1938, VI, pp. 82–84; J. Bułhak, *Polska fotografia ojczysta*, Poznań, 1939.

21 E. Zdanowski, "22 lipca" [22nd of July], *Świat Fotografii*, 1950, XIII, p. 6.

22 See e.g. *Robotnicy i maszyny* [Workers and machines], 1948 (inv. no. DI 83251/27) or *Tempo pracy* [Pace of work], 1949 (inv. no. DI 96271/38) in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw.

23 See *Żniwa* [Harvest], 1948, inv. no. DI 83251/30 in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw.

24 As early as in 1950 Witold Dederko criticised the practice of theoreticians imposing ready-made models on photographers. See W. Dederko, "Fotografika przedstawia się na socrealizm" [Photography turns to Socialist Realism], *Świat Fotografii*, 1950, XVII, p. 2.

the criticism, which mostly involved suggestions that the so-called noble photographic processes should no longer be used,²⁵ did not prompt the artists to introduce dramatic changes to their preferred mode of expression. Irrespective of the post-war annexation of the pictorial aesthetics, the founding members of the ZPAF did not reject the traditions of the *Fotoklub Polski* [Polish Photography Club].²⁶ It may therefore seem surprising that this framework also encompassed solutions that could be regarded as modern. The lack of unambiguous external directives allowed the Pictorialists to continue implementing Buřhak's concepts and, as Lech Grabowski observed, to "contemporalise"²⁷ them, i.e. introduce individual changes. The analysis of the post-war history of Pictorialism as outlined in the present article indicates that the style offered a "safe haven" in which to make discreet attempts at breaking the sanctioned forms, aimed at the search for form and the utilisation of the associative potential of the produced effects.

Exhibitions focusing on the aesthetics of inter-war photography appeared in the Zachęta in 1954; they featured the works of Janina Mierzecka and Tadeusz Wański.²⁸ Having been educated in Lvov, Mierzecka remained faithful to the teachings of Henryk Mikolasch – the exhibition featured both pre- and post-war photographs created using noble processes. In the 1950s, Mierzecka was not interested in the potential of "pure photography", even though her earlier works showcased in the album entitled *Ręka pracująca* [The working hand] seem to resemble the aesthetics of New Objectivity. The emphasis on precision present in the 1939 publication, as well as the attention to detail and the tendency to change the scale of a given fragment of reality to show it outside of any context, were motivated by the wish to arrive at an accurate representation of skin problems that were associated with specific professional groups. They did not stem from a search for a more innovative

25 S. Sommer, "Czy techniki szlachetne?" [The question of noble processes], *Fotografia*, 1954, IV, p. 2.

26 Fotoklub Polski, active in the period of 1929–1939, was the first nationwide association of the most acclaimed photographers. It had a profound impact on the development of this artistic milieu in Poland, promoting photography as a discipline equal to painting. This being said, the conservative views of this organisation were not conducive to accepting or popularising avant-garde solutions. The members of the Fotoklub Polski liked to refer to Pictorialist aesthetics and to follow the canon established within that framework. Only 44 photographers were accepted to this hermetic, prestigious organisation; members included Tadeusz Cyprian, Henryk Mikolasch, Jan Sunderland and Tadeusz Wański. Jan Buřhak served as the first chairman.

27 This term was used by Lech Grabowski in relation to Janina Mierzecka's post-war works. See L. Grabowski, *Janina Mierzecka*, Wrocław, 1969, pp. 19–20.

28 The poster and invitations advertised this exhibition as *Photography works of Janina Mierzecka, Henryk Lisowski, Tadeusz Wański*, yet the analysis of the related press material indicates that the exposition was arranged as three individual presentations. The artists did not choose a unified range of subjects; each of them presented their own, independent set of photographs in their preferred aesthetic style.

form. The photographer²⁹ and her husband Henryk Mierzecki,³⁰ who worked as a doctor, stated that the photographs of hands afflicted by skin diseases serve primarily as an illustration for research focusing on dermatology and work hygiene. Thus they saw the photographs as utilitarian, documentative and “scientific” in nature. The fine-art pieces chosen for the exhibition from the heterogeneous set of Mierzecka’s works were rooted in pre-war traditions, especially the use of noble photographic processes³¹ such as bromoil, oil print process or gum bichromate.³² Mierzecka’s interest in endowing an image with an individual character through the processing of the basic material (in the inter-war period she compared the negative to a sketch which only served as the basis for designing the proper work of art)³³ bore fruit after the war, as she made gentle attempts at reformulating the Pictorialist concepts that were present in her earlier photographs. Choosing to depict relations between people and nature (*Powrót z kościoła*; Returning from church) or artefacts of cultural heritage (*Wrocław, fragment katedry*; Wrocław, a section of the cathedral), she modified the form, bringing it closer to the realm of the abstract.³⁴ The objects she photographed could, however, be recognised at least partially (*Duch lasu*; The spirit of the forest), which made Mierzecka different from the throngs of photographers who fell into the trap of making images based on “a collection of blotches and lines, helpless and unjustified in the realm of photography, as they are composed in accordance with the aesthetic principles of painting and emulate Informalist painting”.³⁵ The 1954 exhibition of Mierzecka’s works was the first hesitant step on the road towards changing the implications of using pictorial processes – in Mierzecka’s approach, such works

29 Mierzecka compared the photographs from the “Working hand” series to photographs depicting works of art. Although she did send them to, for instance, the salon of the Royal Photographic Society, they were in the category of images labelled as “scientific”. See J. Mierzecka, *Cale życie z fotografią* [A life with photography], Cracow, 1981, pp. 127–129.

30 H. Mierzecki, *Ręka pracująca* [The working hand], Warsaw, 1939, p. 6.

31 She propagated and defended such processes in various periodicals both before and after the war. See J. Mierzecka, *Luźne uwagi o nowoczesnej fotografice* [General comments on modern photography], Lvov s.d., pp. 2–4; J. Mierzecka, “Dlaczego techniki szlachetne” [Why use noble processes], *Fotografia*, 1954, VII, p. 2.

32 This information is based on Mierzecka’s own statement included in the catalogue of a jubilee exhibition. See *Janina Mierzecka w 90-lecie urodzin – wystawa fotografii* [Janina Mierzecka on her 90th birthday – an exhibition of photography], Warsaw, 1986, unpaginated.

33 J. Mierzecka, “Rozważania o gumie jako technice indywidualnej” [Thoughts on gum bichromate as an individual technique], *Fotograf Polski*, 1928, IV, p. 82.

34 Since no exhibition catalogue was published and the relevant press materials provide no information in this respect, it is now impossible to ascertain which works by Mierzecka were actually on display at the Zachęta in 1954. For this reason the present article refers to later photographs, which are the result of her search for artistic expression undertaken in the mid-1950s.

35 L. Grabowski, op. cit., p. 14.

were not an attempt at imitating painting techniques (which would be tantamount to dismissing photography as a less important artistic discipline), but a means towards implementing imaginative ideas for modifying the negative.

Another photographer presenting his works at the Zachęta at that time, Tadeusz Wański, also decided to continue the style he had developed in the inter-war period.³⁶ Photographs by Wański, who was enamoured of native landscapes, often feature a “fortunate and deliberate choice of staffage”;³⁷ the human figures depicted in the images are but a pretext for showing the beauty of a given scenery, be it architecture or landscape. In Wański’s works the homeland is presented as a mythical land untouched by time. He offers a photographic testimony of the “mythical kinship between mankind and the Earth”.³⁸ The photographs showcased at the Zachęta – *Zaczarowany zamek* [Enchanted castle], *Spotkanie w lesie* [A meeting in the woods] (Fig. 1), *Na zakręcie* [Around the bend] – were impressionistically atmospheric. The visual appeal of these images lay primarily in the harmonious, subtle chiaroscuro, distinctively blurred contours and soft lines. The critic reviewing the exhibition for *Słowo Powszechne* wrote that these features make the photographs lose the semblance of reality. Wański, a member of the Poznański Trójlistek group,³⁹ managed to create “fantasy-world images out of physically existing objects”.⁴⁰ Thus the common denominator in both Mierzecka’s and Wański’s exhibitions consisted in the need for sophisticated laboratory processing – the applied procedures altered and modified the images to give them a more painterly or pictorial form, yet in both cases made the finished works stand in opposition to naturalism. Consequently, although Pictorialism appeared to have been entirely discredited by its earlier connection with the official preferences of the ruling party, it proved to be a space in which modernity could slowly surface.

36 Z. Dłubak, “Trzy wystawy indywidualne” [Three individual exhibitions], *Fotografia*, 1954, III, p. 6.

37 *Katalog wystawy Związku Polskich Artystów Fotografików Delegatury Poznańskiej i indywidualnej wystawy fotografii Tadeusza Wańskiego* [The catalogue of the exhibition of the Poznań Branch of the Association of Polish Art Photographers and Tadeusz Wański’s individual exhibition], Poznań, 1954, unpaginated.

38 J. Bułhak, “Motyw rysunkowy a motyw malarski w krajobrazie” [A pictorial motif versus a painterly motif in a landscape], *Fotograf Polski*, 1926, X, p. 185.

39 Poznański Trójlistek [Poznań Trefoil] was the name used in the inter-war period to denote the non-formalised but nonetheless often uniform activity of three Poznań-based photographers – Tadeusz Cyprian (1898–1979), Bolesław Gardulski (1885–1961) and Tadeusz Wański (1894–1958). The phrase pointed to the ideological and formal analogies with the Viennese *Trifolium* with Hugo Henneberg (1863–1918), Heinrich Kühn (1866–1944) and Hans Watzek (1848–1903), who were interested primarily in making prints that resembled paintings (mostly using the gum bichromate method).

40 St. Sz., “Z warszawskiej Zachęty. Trzech fotografików i dwie techniki” [From the Zachęta in Warsaw. Three photographers and two techniques], *Słowo Powszechne*, 1954, XLV, p. 6.



Fig. 1. Tadeusz Wański, *Spotkanie w lesie* [An encounter in the woods], before 1958, gelatin silver print, current location unknown, after: Tadeusz Wański. *Wystawa pośmiertna. Katalog wystawy zorganizowanej przez Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików i Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych* [Tadeusz Wański. A posthumous exhibition organised by the Association of Polish Art Photographers and the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions], ed. K. Lelewicz, Gdynia, 1959, p. 25

Pre- and post-war photographs were presented to the Polish audience once more in 1954, when the Kordegarda organised an exhibition of the works of Marian Dederko.⁴¹ A year later the same gallery showcased the photographs of his son, Witold. The exhibited works included photograms made without the use of a camera, photomontages, as well as one work that had utilised the Sabattier effect, which consists in the partial reversal of a negative to a positive image (this visually attractive effect appealed to Man Ray's taste). The choice of works, testifying to the extensive range of technical skills, showed Witold Dederko as an heir to the interests and artistic pursuits that had been initiated by his father. Marian Dederko had won acclaim in the inter-war period for his exceptional achievements in gum bichromate photography and was recognised as the inventor of a new method called "photonite" [in Polish: *fotonit*], which was hailed as a "protest against naturalism in photography".⁴² Marian Dederko's individual technique involved manual manipulation of a photographic image – the positive was heavily retouched with

41 Unfortunately, any details regarding the shape of this exhibition are impossible to ascertain.

42 W. Dederko, *Warsztat techniczny artysty fotografa* [The technical skills of a photographer artist], Warsaw, 1985, p. 159.

paint.⁴³ Inspired by criticism⁴⁴ of the trends of the day, he used the same means as the advocates of Pictorialism did (i.e. removing selected elements of the composition, adding rays of light or shadows), although the latter did not accept such radical changes in the style of the image.⁴⁵ It is therefore difficult to judge whether photonite could be regarded as innovative: on the one hand, the technique was inspired by geometrised, cubist and dynamic art, on the other, it retained the element of creative manipulation and the uniqueness of “painterly” prints – features that were rather far from the modernist set of artistic means. Jerzy Piwowski was correct in calling Dederko’s solution an important harbinger of modernity; in his opinion this was one of the factors that had prompted photographers to a debate on the need for changes and the possibility of expanding the means of artistic expression.⁴⁶ The same may be said of the post-war expositions⁴⁷ of Marian Dederko’s son Witold. He managed to introduce innovative, unique elements into works that fit the model of photography that was appropriate (neutral landscapes or apologetic views of Warsaw) and traditional (standard silver-based processes or gum bichromate). The fact that photographs made without the use of a camera or utilising the pseudo-solarisation effect were exhibited in an official gallery could be seen as an attempt at making the way for the avant-garde in gradual (not radical) steps by tipping the established balance of power in the artistic circle of photographers.

The year 1959 brought about an exhibition with extraordinary visual power. Two rooms at the Zachęta gallery were used to house a heterogeneous collection of works that differed in terms of subject matter, but almost always contained an element of artistic expression borrowed from the avant-garde set of technical solutions. Edward Hartwig presented landscapes and portraits that hovered on the verge of representational art – owing to the use of the

43 The technique consisted in retouching the positive image; after the changes had been made the image was printed again, which made it possible to get rid of any unnecessary details. For more specific information on the photonite process, see *ibid.*, pp. 158–160.

44 M. Dederko, “Krytyka a modernizm” [Criticism and modernism], *Miesięcznik Fotograficzny*, 1930, XI, p. 165.

45 This solution was criticised even by Antoni Wiczorek, who favoured modernist, sharp lines in photography. See A. Wiczorek, “Fotonizmowi do pamiętnika” [For the diary of photonism], *Polski Przegląd Fotograficzny*, 1930, XI, p. 221.

46 J. Piwowski, *Fotografia artystyczna i jej wystawiennictwo w Polsce okresu międzywojennego* [Fine-art photography and its exhibitions in Poland in the inter-war period], Częstochowa, 2002, pp. 27, 29.

47 The Kordegarda exhibited Witold Dederko’s works on two other occasions, i.e. in 1961 and 1965. The first of these expositions, entitled *Moja Warszawa* [My Warsaw], was a tribute to the capital city made on the 40th anniversary of the photographer’s artistic debut. The second presented a broad spectrum of works made using the gum bichromate technique. In 1965 Dederko showcased portraits, a fragment of a cycle focusing on Warsaw, as well as landscape and landmark photographs.

Sabattier effect and a high contrast which resulted in clean, austere images. In the inter-war period, Hartwig was counted among Bułhak's students; he avoided high contrasts by blurring his images with an atmospheric mist and taking care to include a wide variety of tones – an element which was crucial in the artistic programme of his teacher.⁴⁸ At the end of the 1950s, however, he decided to abandon this repertoire of forms and to limit his scale of tones. He started creating dramatic compositions featuring the bold use of two basic tones – black and white (Figs. 2–4). Hartwig's new works were simplified; he rejected the Pictorialist richness of fluctuant, soft shapes, and he justified his choice in the following words:

As years went by I tried to limit the visual form to the minimum, since I came to the conclusion that given the 'talkative' nature of photography, simplicity has crucial significance. For this very reason I changed the style of my work, but the results are, of course, achieved by purely photographic means.⁴⁹

The conclusions pertaining to the exhibition at the Zachęta were consistent – the reviewers agreed that Hartwig had truly mastered the technique: for him there is no "bad negative, in his alchemist's study he is able to conjure a masterpiece of composition and visual impact out of every single image".⁵⁰ However, the critics were less unanimous in their evaluation of the photographer's oeuvre. Wojciech Kiciński noted many assets of the exposition, but disapproved of the pseudo-solarised works:

The barely contained abundance of feelings, visual concepts and interest had some negative effect on his [Edward Hartwig's – W. K.-B.] work. The exhibition featured images that will certainly be counted among the legacy of Polish photography, but also photographs that bordered on ordinary kitsch. [...] In these cases Hartwig the artist was evidently led astray by Hartwig the technician.⁵¹

There is, however, no doubt that Hartwig's exhibition presented significant innovations in the style of landscape photography. Scenery designed around the synthesis and rhythm of black and white acquired in his works an unsettling, austere mood (especially the series entitled *Wierzby* [Willows]). Interestingly, when describing this aspect of Hartwig's oeuvre reviewers returned to the rhetoric that used to be associated with the classic works of Pictorialists. One critic noted that the crisp contour in Hartwig's images resembled "painting

48 M. Szymanowicz, "W kręgu fotografii piktorialnej" [Around pictorialist photography], in: *Jan Bułhak. Fotografik*, ed. Z. Jurkowlaniec, Warsaw, 2007, p. 139.

49 Z. G., "Wizyta u mistrza kamery" [A visit to the master of camerawork], *Żołnierz Polski*, 1959, XV, p. 6.

50 (LJ), "Edward Hartwig – alchemik światła" [Edward Hartwig – the alchemist of light], *Kurier Polski*, 1959, LXII, p. 4.

51 W. Kiciński, "Fotografika Edwarda Hartwiga" [The photography of Edward Hartwig], *Trybuna Ludu*, 1959, LXXXIII, p. 4.



Fig. 2. Edward Hartwig, *Taniec* [Dance], ca. 1958, no data on the photographic technique, currently in a private collection, after: III Auction of Contemporary Art, 15 March 2007, in Desa Unicum, lot no. 001, <http://www.desa.pl/pl/Aukcje/III-Aukcja-Sztuki-Wspolczesnej-15-mar-ca-2007-r/001.html> [accessed 28 September 2015]

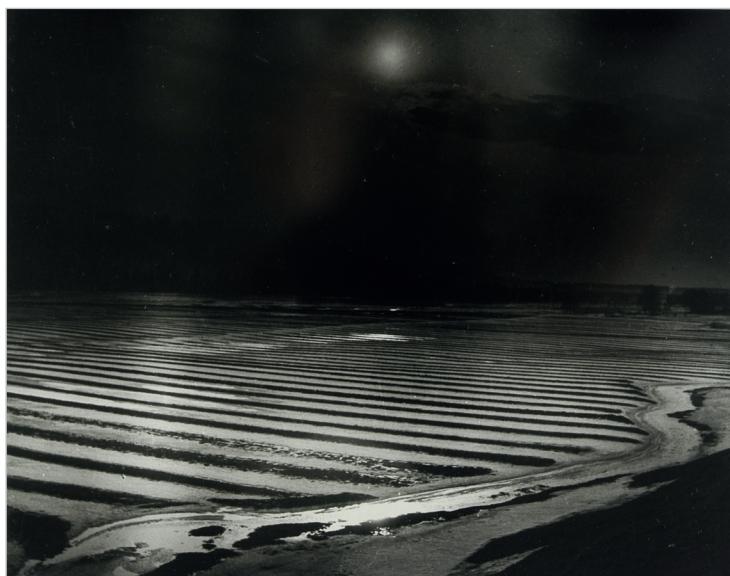


Fig. 3. Edward Hartwig, *Przedwiośnie* [Early spring], 1955, silver gelatin print, the National Library, signature F57310, <https://polona.pl/item/5947041/0/> [accessed 28 September 2015]

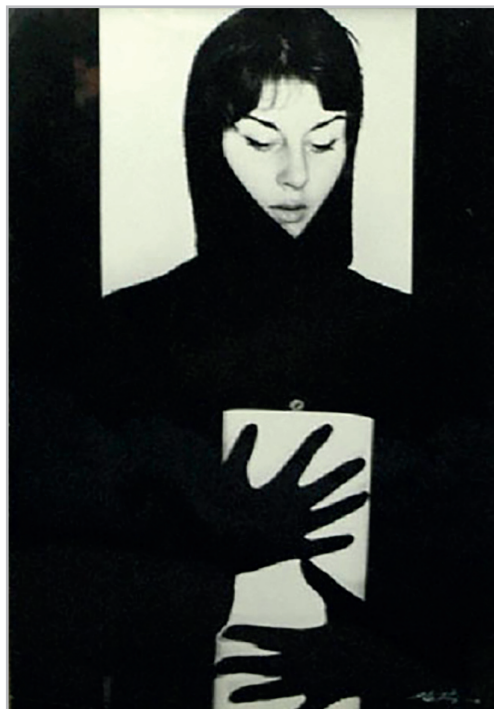


Fig. 4. Edward Hartwig, *Portret dziewczyny z rękawiczkami* [A portrait of a girl with gloves], 1950, gelatin silver print, in the collection of the artist's family, after: M. Plater-Zyberk, *Edward Hartwig (1909–2003). Fotografie ze zbiorów rodziny artysty i Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie. Katalog wystawy* [Edward Hartwig (1909–2003), photographs from the collection of the family and the National Museum in Warsaw], Warsaw, 2004, p. 85

with a camera lens” and even referred to his works as paintings.⁵² Kiciński, in turn, wrote a review that emulated the language of describing native photography – in his view Hartwig’s landscape style “aptly captures the features of Polish scenery, beautiful in its simplicity and reverie”.⁵³ Hartwig’s recipe for modernity could not break free from the yoke of patriotic duty. He was able to present works that went beyond the official visual doctrine in an official gallery such as the Zachęta due to the historical legitimisation of his style. Until 1959, Hartwig was perceived as an artist firmly rooted in pre-war traditions, the inheritor of Bułhak’s concepts. The subject matter appearing in photographic albums such as *Ziemia rodzinna* [Native land] (1955) consolidated that image. It should be emphasised that even after the success of *Fotografika* [Photographic art], published in 1960, Hartwig’s albums were often designed to showcase the beauty of Polish land and became export goods.⁵⁴ The same objective – to satisfy popular demand – was associated with Hartwig’s next exhibition, *Kartki z albumu Warszawa* [Images from the Warsaw album] which

⁵² H. K., “Malowane obiektywem” [Painted with a lens], *Sztandar Młodych*, 1959, LXII, p. 3.

⁵³ W. Kiciński, op. cit., p. 4.

⁵⁴ The albums entitled *Kraków* (1969) and *Warszawa* (1974) were published also in English and German.



Fig. 5. Edward Hartwig, *Widok. Panorama Warszawy* [Landscape. A view of Warsaw], 1968, gelatin silver print, the National Library, signature F.57279, <https://polona.pl/item/5946755/0/> [accessed 28 September 2015]

was organised in the Kordegarda in 1970. As Adam Johann⁵⁵ noted in the catalogue, the exhibition constituted a tribute to the city, paid on the 25th anniversary of its liberation. It was also a way to repay the debt of gratitude for the artistic prize of the capital city of Warsaw, which Hartwig had been awarded in 1961 for his outstanding achievements in photography. The exhibition was implicated in the politicised narrative of the capital city; images that offered an innovative, insightful look at Warsaw appeared alongside rather common, trivial motifs (Fig. 5). Attempts at using an innovative visual form to capture images of the capital city did not appeal to everyone, as evidenced by, for instance, the following opinion published in *Życie Warszawy*: “In a word, Hartwig’s Warsaw is more of an experience than a document. The question of whether such an approach benefits the audience must, however, be answered with a healthy dose of scepticism”.⁵⁶

55 *Wystawa fotografii Edwarda Hartwiga. Kartki z albumu “Warszawa”* [The exhibition of Edward Hartwig’s photography. Images from the Warsaw album], Warsaw, 1970, unpaginated.

56 Ibis, “Warszawa Hartwiga” [Hartwig’s Warsaw], *Życie Warszawy*, 1970, XIX, p. 5.

The anonymous reviewer was right to observe that in the vast majority of his works Hartwig rejected the documentary function of photography. The titles of the works identified the places where the photographs were taken, yet in many cases the formal means used to create the images made it impossible to determine the specific location; for instance, the dynamic effect in the photograph *Tunel – trasa W-Z* [A tunnel – the East-West Route] was achieved through a long exposure time and the decision not to use a tripod. The details of the resulting image are obscure; the moving vehicles are blurred, their lamplights distorted into shaky, elongated lines. Photographs such as *Warszawa – Barbakan*, in turn, referred to the poetics that had been developed by Hartwig in his earlier works – the effect of graphicalisation and increasing contrast: the image did not present the fortification in detail, showing only a dark outline of the outer wall. A presentation of images so different from photojournalist photography could only be possible owing to Hartwig's established status and the fact that the subject matter was (at least seemingly) engaging for the public and in line with the interests of the authorities.

The publication of Edward Hartwig's album *Fotografika* [Photography] coincided with the opening of a retrospective exhibition of Benedykt Jerzy Dorys's work, organised on the 35th anniversary of his artistic debut. The focal point of the exhibition, presented at the Kordegarda in 1960, was a series of photographs of prominent artists and people from cultural circles that had been initiated in 1948 on the ministry's commission. The exposition also included earlier works – images of celebrities made by Dorys in 1929–1939, which had brought him acclaim as a portrait photographer. Although the set of works from the 1920s and 1930s was not representative (many photographs from that period did not survive the war),⁵⁷ Dorys himself stated that he had learnt his skill from artists such as Zygmunt Szporek. It may therefore be surmised that he was familiar with the Pictorialist aesthetics.⁵⁸ He used softening filters and sepia tones, processed his portraits using techniques such as gum bichromate or bromoil.⁵⁹ However, the unwavering interest that the public showed for the posed photographs of dignitaries, actors and musicians – which brought the label *Foto-Dorys* commercial success – slowly started to overwhelm and discourage the artist. In several interviews Dorys admitted that he sometimes felt tired of the tyranny of stereotypes and artificiality associated with

57 L. Dobrzyńska, "Benedykt Jerzy Dorys. Portret utrwalony we wspomnieniach drugiego pokolenia" [Benedykt Jerzy Dorys. A portrait preserved by the memory of the second generation], in: *Dorys: między pokoleniami* [Dorys: between generations] ed. L. Dobrzyński, Warsaw, 2010, p. 10.

58 Dorys's own statement recorded in the documentary *Benedykta Jerzego Dorysa życie szczęśliwe* [The happy life of Benedykt Jerzy Dorys], directed by M. Kwiatkowska, 1980.

59 A. Johann, *Wystawa fotografii Benedykta Jerzego Dorysa „Kazimierz nad Wisłą 1931–1932”* [The exhibition of photographs by Benedykt Jerzy Dorys "Kazimierz nad Wisłą 1931–1932"], Kazimierz Dolny, 1983, p. 1.

arranged studio photographs.⁶⁰ As a means of escaping this style, he carried out a project entitled “Kazimierz nad Wisłą (1931–1932)”. The cycle, which involved taking candid photographs with a 135 mm Leica camera *en plein air*, was a vastly different enterprise than the time-consuming, carefully arranged portraits of celebrities taken in a studio. The exhibition at the Kordegarda marked the first time that the photographs from Kazimierz were shown to the public, almost thirty years after they had been taken.⁶¹ In his studio photography Dorys sought to present the model in the most flattering, idealised manner, yet during his walks around the city of Kazimierz he pointed the camera towards the most depressing, gloomy alleyways – perfect examples illustrating the bitter crisis. The series of expressive photographs showing ruin and poverty hiding behind the attractive townhouse facades was hailed as the first work of Polish photojournalism.⁶² As Adolf Rudnicki noted, Dorys had captured the “spirit of the moment”.⁶³ The Kazimierz series, which preceded the emergence of Italian Neo-realism,⁶⁴ inevitably caused a stir. The attractive, eye-catching portraits of famous people and the pioneering photographs from Kazimierz effectively overshadowed all other images presented at the Kordegarda exhibition. The reviews made no mention of the series of photograms entitled *Etiuda* [Etude] or of Dorys’s photomontages. In *Profil architekta K* [The profile of the architect K] (Fig. 6) and *Kwiaty* [Flowers] (Fig. 7), a traditionally developed high-contrast photograph was combined with a luxograph that had been made separately. *Kwiaty*, a rare example of Dorys’s still lifes, is composed of two images: the image of a plant and an optical outline of a flower blending with its structure. In this case, however, the avant-garde solution, i.e. direct contact of separate images, serves more as a decoration than as an element of surreal narration. On the one hand, Dadaist photograms originated from a fascination with discarded, used, accidentally encountered items; on the other, as ephemeral traces, they constituted an act of their dematerialisation.⁶⁵ The imagination of artists such as László Moholy-Nagy or Christian Schad revealed unexpected qualities of things which, incorporated into enigmatic compositions, became almost entirely unrecognisable, thus gaining new meanings. The creative potential of luxography also seemed fascinating to Tristan Tzara, who commented on Man Ray’s works with much enthusiasm: “what

60 R. Kłosiewicz, “Szaleństwo z Leicą w Kazimierzu” [Playing with a Leica around Kazimierz], *Fotografia*, 1977, VI, pp. 12–13.

61 Dorys made no prints out of these negatives but hid them; they were only found after the war. The exhibition in the Kordegarda included only a selection of the photographs – the series was not presented in its entirety until 1977.

62 J. Busza, “Pierwszy reportaż fotograficzny” [The first photojournalistic reportage], *Kultura*, 1977, XXV, p. 12.

63 A. Rudnicki, “Niebieskie kartki” [Blue paper], *Świat*, 1960, XLVII, p. 11.

64 J. Ficowski, “Wystawa fotografii B. J. Dorysa” [The exhibition of photographs by B. J. Dorys], *Nowa Kultura*, 1960, XLVII, p. 3.

65 S. Laxton, “Flou: Rayographs and the Dada Automatic”, *October*, 2009, CXXVII, p. 28.



Fig. 6. Benedykt Jerzy Dorys, *Profil Architekta K.* [The profile of the architect K.], 1955, gelatin silver print, the National Library, signature F.105626/IV, <https://polona.pl/item/1143571/0/> [accessed 28 September 2015]

was revealed is the power of a subtle and refreshing blaze that surpasses all constellations so pleasant to the eye”.⁶⁶ The dynamic, abstract effect which Tzara found so appealing is, however, absent in the works of Benedykt Jerzy Dorys. The visual precision of *Kwiaty* seems more akin to William Talbot’s “photogenic drawings” that recorded specimens of flora, or to Anna Atkins’s cyanotypes; the Polish photographers may have used an array of innovative methods, but without the intellectual concepts that had originally been associated with these techniques.

The above analysis, conducted from the perspective of exhibition history, makes an important shift in the significance of Pictorialism – from a topic on the margins of academic interest to a harbinger of modernity, and thus a central subject in the discourse on Polish photography in the post-war period. Rather surprisingly, it appears to be the slogan that legitimised the more innovative and modern forms of photographic art in official contexts of the day. The post-war history of Pictorialism indicates that the style attempted to break the impasse that could be observed in official photographic salons. Abstract photographs were published in *Fotografia* as early as in the 1950s,⁶⁷ yet – as Altshuler

⁶⁶ T. Tzara, “Fotografia z odwrotnej strony” [The reverse side of photography], *Obscura*, 1988, II, pp. 14–15.

⁶⁷ U. Czartoryska, “Abstrakcyjne fotogramy Andrzeja Pawłowskiego” [Abstract photograms



Fig. 7. Benedykt Jerzy Dorys, *Kwiaty* [Flowers], 1957, gelatin silver print, the National Library, signature F.105511/IV, <https://polona.pl/item/1140152/0/> [accessed 28 September 2015]

aptly observes – only by being present at an exhibition could they transform alternative art forms into messages directed at the wider public.⁶⁸ A periodical targeted at specialists and photography enthusiasts remained a much less significant medium. The artists mentioned in the article – Edward Hartwig in particular – had managed to smuggle a new method of photographic imaging into the official exhibition space and to use means of artistic expression that had avant-garde origins, justifying their actions by the “noble ideal of presenting our homeland to our nation and to the world in its most beautiful and most artistic guise”.⁶⁹ Luxographs, photomontages and pseudo-solarisations appeared among photographs that did not deviate from a style worthy of Ruszczyc’s paintings. The thick veil of noble photographic processes hid the will to transform images in original ways, leading to an almost complete rejection of figurativeness, the breaking of all connections with the factually

by Andrzej Pawłowski], *Fotografia*, 1957, VII, p. 164. The subject of abstractionism in photography was discussed e.g. by Zbigniew Dłubak. See Z. Dłubak, “Czy istnieje fotografia abstrakcyjna?” [Does abstract photography exist?], *Fotografia*, 1959, VII, p. 314.

⁶⁸ B. Altshuler, *The Avant-garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, Berkeley–Los Angeles, 1998, p. 8.

⁶⁹ This is how Marian Dederko described the intentions of artists such as Wański, who stayed faithful to Bułhak’s ideals. See M. Dederko, “Fotografia ojczysta i krajowa” [Native and national photography], *Fotograf Polski*, 1938, III, p. 37.

photographed subjects and to the creation of new autonomous beings. It should, however, be emphasised that despite their search for unusual forms, the above-mentioned artists did not break away from the utopia of “things to look at”. The photographers discussed in the present article did not stray from the perception of photography as a “sworn” work on the wall of a gallery: a separate, complete, autonomous image to be enjoyed.⁷⁰ What is more, the seemingly neutral post-war Pictorialism was not entirely apolitical. The artists’ escape into landscape photography, the propensity for ornamentation and the choice not to offer radical comments on the current reality indicate that the attitude of the members of Fotoklub Polski ought to be described as disposed towards compromise.

(Translated by Julita Mastalerz)

Abstract

Existing academic works examining Polish artistic photography in the 1950s and 1960s are most often based on an analysis of the debates taking place within professional circles and the views of specific artists as expressed in the specialist periodicals that were published at that time. Such diagnoses are frequently based on a single and very particular source, namely the monthly magazine *Fotografia*. The pages of this periodical project an image of an artistic society enjoying a relatively high degree of autonomy. The present study represents a different research approach, inspired e.g. by the works of Bruce Altshuler and Kenneth Luckhurst, who postulated the re-orientation of art history away from biographical works focused on the individual subject towards a discipline understood as the history of exhibitions. Following the course set by these scholars, one may come to the conclusion that an analysis of the place which photography held in the official exhibition strategy implemented in the 1950s and 1960s in the prestigious Warsaw galleries of the Kordegarda and the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (CBWA) may provide an interesting and new contribution to the current state of research. A study based on an examination of the history of exhibitions may help to answer the question whether all forms of photography were equally approved by the authorities at a time when the rules of the cultural policy of the People’s Republic of Poland became more lenient. It also makes it possible to evaluate the degree to which autonomy and heterogeneity (features which may be associated with the magazine *Fotografia*) were legitimised through presentation in a state-owned, politicised public space. Conducted from the perspective of exhibition history, the analysis presented herein makes an important shift in the significance of Pictorialism – from a topic on the margins of academic interest to a harbinger of modernity, and thus a central subject in the discourse on Polish photography in the post-war period. Rather surprisingly, it appears to be the slogan that legitimised the more innovative and modern forms of photographic art in the official contexts of the day.

70 The crucial significance of the conceptual background for specific projects is situated among neo-avant-garde phenomena. In these circles, photography mostly served as a method for direct recording that was devoid of aesthetic connotations.