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We discuss here a special category of works where the illusion of space depicted on a flat photographical image is on an equal footing with the elements of the real space in which the image is viewed, creating together with them an object. This real environment of an illusion can be an empty space or a set of material elements; it can change with exposition or can constitute a permanent arrangement. In many ways, photo-objects are closest to the field of sculpture, where the symbolic message of the work always strongly interacts with the perception of its tangible material as well as with its environment. Since the 1960's, sculptors representing the conceptual approach were increasingly taking into account the photograph as a means of crossing the boundaries of artistic genres, rejecting the traditional aesthetic categories, developing an intermedia strategy, and emphasizing the "processuality" of art. Photo-objects may have, however, different sources and are founded on a paradox.

They not only confront the illusory with the real but also challenge such essential qualities of the photographic medium as reproducibility and universality of the way in which it is perceived. A photo-object is unique and does not have its "negative" from which it could be reproduced. Moreover, the meaning of its message consists in the combination of the different elements of the object; only these relations define the importance of photographic components. Such a category of works cannot be precisely defined because their "intermediality" gives them a boundary status. Their diversity results also from the fact that photographic objects can be derived from the traditions of various fields of art: sculpture, painting, scenography, film, and of course from the photography itself. Today, this kind of works is perceived mainly in the light of post-conceptual tendencies but one shall keep in mind that the expansive power of photography manifested itself by seeking to take control of the entire field of visuality, and to produce as many forms of expression alternative to its standard manifestations as possible. For this reason, photo-objects (or forms related to them) can be found in the entire history of photography.

The camera obscura is one object from the borderlands of photography. Once a prototype of the photo camera, it still remains an attractive form of experiencing the optical phenomena, whether observed from inside or from outside. A similar function was performed by other old optical instruments, e.g. a magic lantern. Some of them recorded images while others were used to observe changing phenomena. The relations between the static and the dynamic were at the heart of some works that one may see as photo-objects. An example is the sculpture by Umberto Boccioni – Unique Forms of Continuity in Space / Formy Ciągłości w Przestrzeni (1913) – a synthesis of a sequence of positions of a human body in space, studied by the artist based on Etienne Marey's chronophotography.

The Shroud of Turin can be regarded as a photo-object of a sacral character. A trivialised version of its message are porcelain photographic portraits placed on gravestones, which refer to the metaphysical meaning of existence unifying the transience and the presence.

The widely different sizes of photographs are one of the factors influencing the perception of photography as an object. Miniature Daguerreotype portraits, which in the mid-nineteenth century were placed in small pendants or signets, became an integral part of these forms. Besides, a typical daguerreotype had a rich framing made of decorated cardboard, metal and glass; was stored in a special etui and treated as a special object. On the other hand, giant formats of photographs also accentuate its doubled relationship with the space. In that respect, they resemble the old painting dioramas. Large copies gradually appeared in the late nineteenth century; as late as in 1917, a large print of 335 x 610cm presented at a Canadian exhibition of war photography caused sensation. Another example of photo-objects were also the large glass negatives, which were sometimes exhibited independently of the copies made of them. Reversed tonality and spatial arrangement endowed the perception of such images with special flavour. In the 1970s, this effect of exhibiting the negatives was used by Jerzy Lewczyński in his exhibitions of The Archeology of Photography / Archeologia fotografii series.

Photographs using the properties of spatial objects also appeared in the nineteenth century as part of scenography for various, e.g. industrial, exhibitions. Such a practice expanded to modern art after the First World War. Russian constructivists used it for propaganda exhibitions, e.g. El Lissitzki for the project of the USSR pavilion in Cologne in 1928 or Gustav Kłucis during Moscow exhibition in 1932, where he glorified the construction of Dneprostroi Dam / Dnieprogres with huge photographic portraits of Lenin set against a giant documentation of the dam. In Poland, after 1945, such designing ideas were being implemented, among others, by Wojciech Zamecznik, e.g. while designing, together with Oskar Hansen, the National Exhibition of Interior Design / Ogólnopolska Wystawa Architektury Wnętrz (Warsaw, 1957). Even closer to the essence of photo- objects were installations. They became an innovative form of art in the 1960s, even though they originated in the displays of Dadaist and surrealist art between the First and the Second World War. In Poland, the precedent was set by the Popular Exhibition / Wystawa popularna organized in 1963 by Tadeusz Kantor who gathered in the gallery a variety of items, including photographs. Another early example are the manipulated photographic self-portraits which have been part of Włodzimierz Borowski's Syncretic Shows (Pokazy synkretyczne) since 1966. The first exclusively photographic installation in Poland, Iconosphere / Ikonosfera by Zbigniew Dłubak, was completed in 1967; he forced the viewers to crowd among the loosely hanging photographs to experience their presence in different ways. Several photographic installations made in 1969 were also of pioneering nature. In Toruń, In the Old Forge / W starej kuźni, members of the Zero-61 group (Wojciech Bruszewski, Michał Kokot, Antoni Mikolajczyk, Józef Robakowski, and Andrzej Różycki) organized a collective show by arranging their works freely at a deserted smithy as if they were its existing equipment. Linked with Tadeusz Kantor's Cricot 2 theatre, the so-called Second Group (Lesław Janicki and Wacław Janicki, Jacek Stokłosa) presented The Bromine Record / Zapis Bromowy an essential part of which was a photo-object in the form of a 40-meter long photographic paper roll with the imprints of the bodies of female models. In Poznań, Stefan Wojnecki organized the show called Faces / Twarze during which the audience was complementing the exhibition by showing their faces in the holes cut in the photographic portraits. In Polish art, this was the pivotal time for the popularization of installation as a form of expression and for

the emergence of numerous photo-objects, which was confirmed, among others, by the exhibition titled Photographers' Quest / Fotografowie poszukujący in January 1971.

Of course, these works also had antecedents. They combined two types of works: works functioning as three-dimensional objects and objects designed specifically for photographing. An early example is The Newspaper Man / Człowiek gazeta, c. 1855, i.e. a man wearing an outfit made of newspapers, designed and photographed by Hermann Krone, a photographer born in Wrocław. Krone also prepared for the students of the Royal Polytechnic in Dresden 150 Teaching Boards/Tables / Tablice dydaktyczne, each of which presents a photographic technique or an application of photography. Such tableaux are often more than a mere collection of flat photographs. In the twentieth century surrealist objects for photographing were being created e.g. by Man Ray (the originals could function interchangeably with their photographs), as exemplified by the cast of the artist's face (1932) placed in the box as an archaeological artefact. In the 1930's, Hans Bellmer was using fragments of dolls to make figures, then photographed them, and thus they could be displayed in both forms. We cannot forget about the avant-garde collage technique, where forms from different sources were combined on a single plane. Collage has by nature a layered structure and as a unique object may aspire to actual three-dimensionality. Usually, however, it is treated as a flat object, and photo collages were commonly shoot and reproduced in the form of prints.

In Polish art, the earliest photo-objects, in the narrow sense of the term, are the works of Marek Piasecki made between 1957-1959. These are abstract heliographic compositions or photographs of dolls placed in spatial housings 3-6 cm deep, closed at the front with

a pane of glass. A wooden housing, painted white inside, creates there a kind of a tapered view-finder. Another pioneering work was Józef Rybakowski's Colander / Durszlak (1960) where the photographed colander "hangs" on a real nail driven into an illustrated hole in its handle. In 1965 -1966, Stefan Wojnecki created his first Duograms / Duogramy by placing the photographs in a deep wooden frame behind the profiled glass working as a screen. Since the late 1960s, also Alina Szapocznikow's works were entering the game. She was immersing portrait photos in blocks of transparent plastics. More ephemeral were works that involved screening slides on certain items. Such projects were being undertaken at the faculty of Sculpture of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw (in the late 1960s) to develop the "open form " program proposed by Oskar Hansen and Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz. In 1968, Grzegorz Kowalski presented, at the same Academy, his work involving the projection of slides on viewers who served as a living screen. This type of activities was also conducted by Przemysław Kwiek and Zofia Kulik, then students of the Academy. In 1968, one of student works of Zofia Kulik consisted in placing photographs of various objects on the walls of cubes.

The early 1970s brought a wealth of experimental solutions in the form of photo- objects, installations, actions and analyses of methods of photomechanical transfer. At the above-mentioned exhibition Photographers' Quest of 1971, Józef Robakowski showed a series of such works: a chair tightly covered with hundreds of small photos, a kaleidoscope with internal projection of multiple images, and a set of identical portraits on several moving rollers. Wojciech Bruszewski, in turn, presented A Sackful / Worek, i.e. a photograph of an army jacket printed on canvas and stuffed, so that one could kick it on the floor. Another work of his was The

Ear / Ucho, i.e. a large print of Władysław Gomułka's (First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party) ear cut into vertical strips and hanged in space at intervals. The so-called Second Group presented, among others, A Bath by Ingres / Kąpiel według Ingresa, where the nude photograph printed on canvas was dipped in a bathtub. Zdzisław Walter juxtaposed a rocking horse with a large print of hand. The work by Natalia LL called An arrest warrant / List gończy also attracted attention. Here, photographs of Jerzy Ludwiński's head and elements of his clothes and documents were attached to walls of cubes, that could be set up in any configuration. Her Intimate Zone / Strefa Intymna, a creation on the borderlands of installation and photo-object, was formed of boxes with walls covered with photographs; erotic scenes inside the boxes were difficult to see (some of them could only be viewed through a viewfinder). At that time, Zbigniew Dłubak presented a large spatial form, where on one wavy side a modified nude photograph was glued. His other works, called Tautologies / Tautologie, juxtaposed real elements of the exhibition hall (window handle, heater) with photographs placed next to them.

Worth mentioning is also the posthumous installation by Zbigniew Targowski at the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw at the turn of 1971/1972, where all the walls of the room (including the floor and ceiling) were tightly covered with around 3,500 18x24 cm photographs depicting banal views of urbanized areas. In 1972, in the Museum of Art in Łódź, Ireneusz Pierzgalski presented an installation with slides screened on different objects. In 1973, Jan Berdak showed life-size nude photographs cut out of the background and placed on chairs or on a couch. A figure cut out of the photograph also featured in the action of the group Format, called Joseph's Creation / Kreacja Józefa, at the Jazz on

the Oder Festival in Wrocław in 1976. This figure "participated" in the festival and appeared in the audience, at the bar, in the toilet, etc. In the 1970s, also Zofia Rydet started creating interesting objects made of pieces cut out of her documentary photographs. Portraits of old women - formed in the shape of a cylinder – were exhibited as standing sculptures, in a way similar to her altars and shrines. At that time, Tadeusz Kantor created such objects as a studio camera on a tripod with a rifle barrel "installed" in the place of the lens, or a series of canvas bags filled with soil on which he placed photographic portraits of his mother.

Art shows including installations with the use of photography and works questioning the photographic illusionism through its "reification " gradually became, in the 1970s, the mainstream activity of Polish artists working with new media. This phenomenon was associated with post-conceptual trends in world art; it included several related strategies. A conceptual demand for researching the material and ideological conditions of media coverage was the most common one. Consequently, works revealing the decision-making and the technical determinants of images, their material basis, and components of the final impressions of the viewer were produced. This is exemplified by works where a selected photo was subject to analysis and experiment in order to reassemble its components (as in a portrait series "Marek " by Janusz Bąkowski made between 1968-1970, or in the work Our enlargement / Nasze powiększenie executed by Jerzy Lewczyński in 1971). A related strategy was based on the experience of avant-garde film: it emphasized the serial nature of images, transferred cut sections of a film tape on the photographic paper, or exposed the tape or photographic film as an object itself (this was done e.g. by Wojciech Bruszewski, Wiesław Hudon, Paweł Kwiek,

Józef Robakowski, Zygmunt Rytka, and Ryszard Waśko). Bruszewski produced in 1972 an impressive work consisting in a hanging long strip of photo paper with an image of the soundtrack trace on a film tape recording the sound " oh ". Bruszewski also pioneered video installations in Poland, beginning with his work Outside in 1975. The use of television cameras, monitors, and then video cameras was the core of the activity of the "Workshop" group ("Warsztat"), which operated since 1970 at the Łódź Film School. Taking a start from its Workshop Action / Akcja Warsztat at the Museum of Art in Łódź in January 1973, multimedia installations - where photographic and film image was presented as an element of the material substance of the entire apparatus – became more popular in the next decades, due to growing accessibility of such equipment, especially in the age of image digitalization. Yet another type of opportunities was the art of performance, where, while performing his action, the artist himself was becoming the object of art. Performances were recorded via photographs and film; they were often produced only in front of a camera and made available to viewers exclusively through documentation. In this way, the author as a photo-object and his depiction were both separated and fused.

At the exhibition Polish Inter- media Photography of the eighties / Polska Fotografia Intermedialna lat 80-tych, held by Stefan Wojnecki in Poznan in 1988, numerous photo-objects reflected these varied artistic interests. A work by Jan Berdyszak indicated the simultaneity of the image and the substantial being through the use of mirrors. Wieslaw Brzózka created an installation of sculptural forms with photographic coating. Wojciech Bruszewski proposed Home Installation / Instalacja Domowa based on the system of flashes of light sources placed in a home interior. Krzysztof Cichosz showed his first works based on the division of selected photographs into layers, on the use of screens, and on the reassembly of these elements into three-dimensional objects. Leszek Golec used photographs as an element of collages representative of certain observations and experiences. Isabella Gustowska presented a video installation that was also a performance referring to the idea of a presence. Romuald Kutera presented compositions made of rows of shredded film tape specially tinted to obtain additional shapes of triangle. George Lewczyński called for the autonomous qualities of negatives to be more appreciated as art objects. Zbigniew Libera in his Intimate Rites / Obrzędy Intymne complemented a video recording with items related to the situation of a sick person being documented. Grzegorz Przyborek combined photographs and sculptural arrangement as determinants of reaching some generalizations. Many other close variants of dealing with photographs were presented by nearly all the 80 artists present at this exhibition.

Nowadays, the situation changed mainly due to the proliferation of digital recording and internet communications. As regards the screen forms of photography and its possible print-outs, each attempt to materialize it with the use of traditional techniques makes this object unique. Another change is that concepts of realism and objectivity became relative, so that photography is increasingly being recognized as a means of expression, and to a lesser extent as a document. Hybrid forms of images being promoted by mass culture have become a model for visual communication at every level. Photo objects, therefore, do not have a provocative potential they used to have, because the line between imitation and reality in not any longer perceived as sharply as it used to be. The virtual world intertwines at many levels with the natural world. The most recent technology allows even for the production of three-dimensional objects from

photographic images. Doubts about the value of such an extended simulation are, however, not rare. Critics of the media culture (Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, and Slavoy Žižek) strongly emphasize that computerized reality stays in opposition to the ordinary life present in the realities of nature, of the physical body, and of the practical reason. Žižek in The Plaque of Fantasy / Przekleństwo fantazji (Wroclaw, 2001) says that if we are able to distinguish imitation from simulation, we are able to keep the already existing level of rationality.

Imitation is what sustains our belief in the pre-existing "organic" reality, whereas simulation dematerializes the scene of reality.

Today, it is thus possible to reverse the situation in which the photography was an illusory part of the photo-object. It is still possible, however, to produce such a tension between its components that the viewer will discover in it a cognitive problem, and not just an aesthetic endeavour.