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'Archetypal Load of Tension': Idiosyncratic Idioms of Surrealism Created by Aleksander Krzywobłocki and Margit Reich-Sielska in the 1930s in Lviv

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Abstract: This article examines the artistic contributions of two members of the 'artes' group, active in Lviv (Lwów during the interwar period) from 1929 to 1935: Aleksander Krzywobłocki (1901–1979) and Margit Reich-Sielska (1900–1980). Situated within the 'artes' milieu, which emerged as the most cohesive community among phenomena with a surrealist profile in the history of Polish art, their creative endeavors have faded from the collective memory of subsequent generations of art historians and critics, both within and beyond Poland. With the aim of elucidating the distinctive characteristics of Krzywobłocki and Sielska's artistic attitudes, deeply rooted in the cultural landscape of interwar Galicia, this study explores their work as both manifestations of the avant-garde milieu in Lviv and contributions to the transnational surrealist movement. This examination takes a relational approach, considering their artistic output within a framework of trans-local and trans-regional connections. Drawing upon the works of various surrealists active in different European centers, I juxtapose the artistic approaches of Krzywobłocki and Sielska with other practitioners of the movement to highlight both convergences and differences in their expressions. By situating their artistic profiles within the broader modalities of surrealism as a polycentric movement and within the unique cultural context of Lviv—a city marked by its multiethnic, multicultural, and multiconfessional character—I argue that their imaginings should be classified as idiosyncratic idioms of surrealism. This hybrid expression, which developed on the peripheries of European artistic hubs, is primarily distinguished by an 'archetypal load of tension'—a continual quest for archetypal content that has been lost in the modern world.

Keywords: surrealism; interwar Lviv; experimental photography; photomontage; photocollage; Aleksander Krzywobłocki; Margit Reich-Sielska

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1. Introduction

I will begin my narrative by noting that the surrealist movement never materialized as a consolidated trend in Polish art, although surrealist poetics did manifest in the works of some artists, particularly during the years 1945–1949 and the 1950s–1960s (Piotrowski 2001; Słodkowski 2015; Turowski 2019; Jarecka 2021; Doroszuk 2024). To explore the subtle traces of surrealism within the Polish artistic scene, I will delve into the avant-garde milieu of the 'artes' Association of Artists, active in Lviv (Lwów during the interwar period) from 1929 to 1935, which proved to be the most cohesive artistic community among phenomena with a surrealist profile. Within this vibrant circle, two artists, Aleksander Krzywobłocki (1901–1979) and Margit Reich-Sielska (1900–1980), emerged as exemplary and distinctive representatives. However, I selected them from the 'artes' members primarily because their creative endeavors, deeply immersed in the cultural landscape of interwar Galicia, have faded from the memory of subsequent generations of art historians and critics, both within and beyond Poland.

The policentrism, multilingualism, and polymorphism of the surrealist project, transcending geocultural boundaries and erasing barriers between different art disciplines, as

well as art and everyday reality, along with the appeal of the proposed cultural subversion and social rebellion, resulted in the global reach of the movement. The diverse aspects of surrealism have been extensively studied and continue to stimulate the activity of artists and provoke reflection among researchers across various fields who seek overlooked or disregarded paradigms of the movement.[1] The scholarly intensification around the surrealist trend is evident in initiatives such as the recently established Bloomsbury publishing series titled 'Transnational Surrealism', edited by Gavin Parkinson. Additionally, the International Society for the Study of Surrealism (ISSS) has been organizing an annual convening series since 2018, named 'Surrealisms', creating a transnational research platform for surrealist idioms. Exhibitions like 'Surrealism Beyond Borders', showcased in 2022 at the Tate Modern Gallery in London and The Metropolitan Museum in New York, further highlight the growing prominence of surrealism in the academic and artistic spheres, as well as curatorial practices.

Considering the pluralism and diversity of research perspectives applied to the movement, it is particularly noteworthy that, regardless of whether we draw from the conceptual framework of transculturalism (Lewis 2002, pp. 14–32; Bru et al. 2009), employ the tools of 'horizontal art history',[2] or borrow discursive categories from anthropology and social sciences such as creolization, indigenization, and glocalization (Robertson 1992), one of the main objectives of the multifaceted research on surrealism remains the unveiling of the specificity of surrealist paradigms that originated in marginal localities and territories, on the fringes of the main cultural centers (Appadurai 1996; Mitter 2008; DaCosta Kaufmann et al. 2015; McLean n.d.).

As the goal of this study, therefore, I set out to define the unique characteristics of the creative attitudes of Krzywobłocki and Sielska. I perceive these stances both as an emanation of the artistic and intellectual milieu that flourished in Lviv in the 1930s and as idioms contributing to the transnational surrealist movement, albeit shaped in the peripherally situated capital of Eastern Galicia, nestled within the confines of the Second Polish Republic. Lviv was characterized by its multiethnic, multicultural, and multiconfessional milieu,[3] serving as a fertile ground where modernist architecture and art took root during the interwar period, despite the prevailing conservative inclinations that permeated the establishment. I endeavor to explore the distinctiveness of the chosen Lviv artists relationally, within a network of trans-local and trans-regional connections, liberated from the constraints of the direct impact of established artistic paradigms and the imitation of existing patterns. Whereas, in relation to the 'artes' circle, I will employ a comparative–contextual method to emphasize the idiosyncratic position of Krzywobłocki and Sielska. When juxtaposing them with practitioners of surrealism in milieus beyond Eastern Galicia, I will embark on the path of an inter-textual interpretative method, allowing for a lack of accurate historical evidence of personal interactions and the flow of influences (Kristeva 1980).

My objective is to examine whether the works of Krzywobłocki and Sielska transcend the canonical themes of the Bretonian faction of surrealism. In essence, I seek to ascertain whether the subjects they addressed exhibit notable semantic distinctions, deviating from the conventional discrediting of the rational and the exploration of the dialectics between dreams and reality, as well as the revealing of the uncanny in the surrounding world. I also aim to determine if their works extend beyond the sublimation of repressed libidinal desires on the one hand and socio-political anti-systemism on the other. On the morphological plane, I will investigate whether Krzywobłocki and Sielska developed creative methods distinct from the talismanic concept at the heart of Breton's thought, namely 'psychic automatism', to capture the unconscious and instinctual.

As a comparative material for the artistic approaches of Krzywobłocki and Sielska, I will invoke several practitioners of surrealism active in different European centers, whose idioms of expression exhibit both convergence or analogies with the ventures of the Lviv artists, as well as significant differences. Consequently, I will place the artistic profiles of Krzywobłocki and Sielska within the network of modalities and *modi operandi* of surrealism understood as a polycentric movement and simultaneously, within the perspective of the

cultural uniqueness of Lviv.[4] My intention is to draw attention to the 'invisible' figures in the field of art historiography, here represented by Krzywobłocki and Sielska, challenging gaps in both Western-centric and Eastern-centric European discourses on interwar avant-gardes.

It is noteworthy that research on the 'artes' circle is marked by a limited bibliographic presence. The primary source remains Piotr Łukaszewicz's 1975 monograph, *Zrzeszenie Artystów Plastyków ARTES 1929–1935* (Łukaszewicz 1975), which was preceded by the exhibition catalog *Artes 1929–1934*, edited by Łukaszewicz and presented at the Silesian Museum in Katowice in 1969 (Łukaszewicz 1969). The most insightful analyses of the avant-garde dimension of the group's art can be found in press reviews written in the 1930s, particularly those by Debora Vogel.[5] In contemporary art historiography, reflections on 'artes' appear in sparse fragments of publications related to interwar art in Poland (e.g., Pollakówna and Rudzińska 1982, pp. 37–39; Turowski 2000, pp. 293–303) and modernisms in Eastern and Central Europe (e.g., Mansbach 1999, pp. 131–34). Monographic catalogs of exhibitions featuring some members of 'artes', such as Marek Włodarski,[6] Ludwik Lille, and Margit and Roman Sielski, also contribute to our knowledge about the endeavors of the Lviv avant-garde (Askanas 1981; Łukaszewicz 1986; Łukaszewicz 2004; Mudrak 2019, pp. 37–44).

Years ago, a retrospective exposition dedicated to Krzywobłocki was accompanied by a modest catalog (Sobota 1975). His selected experimental photographs and photomontages found a place in cross-sectional presentations dedicated to the history of Polish photography (Sobota 1977). Krzywobłocki's photographic explorations have been further explored in articles within journals focusing on the cultural landscape of East Central Europe (Kossowska 2009, 2011). Stanisław Czekalski's monograph, which examines the development of photomontage in Poland during the 1920s and 1930s, includes analyses of some interwar artworks by both Krzywobłocki and Sielska (Czekalski 2000, pp. 317–18, 321–29). However, in more comprehensive publications on the history of photomontage, the works of these two Lviv artists have been overlooked (Frizot 1991; Becker 2008; Ades [1976] 2021). An exception is the monograph *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918–1945* by Matthew Witkovsky, which succinctly outlines the artistic profiles of both Lviv surrealists (Witkovsky 2007, pp. 127, 131, 231, 235, 246). Sielska, on her part, occupies a completely marginal position in Polish art historiography, as, apart from the catalog of a joint exhibition with her husband, Roman Sielski (Łukaszewicz 2004), no analytical studies have been dedicated to her.

Quite recently, however, Karolina Koczynska published an article in the *Open Library of Humanities Journal* titled "From Print to Digital: Reappropriation of the Ready-Made Image in the Works of Margit Sielska and Weronika Gęsicka" (Koczynska 2022). In her article, Koczynska applies a distinctly feminist perspective to the interpretation of three of Sielska's four surviving photocollages discussed in this text. Koczynska's approach contrasts sharply with mine, as we employ different interpretive frameworks and offer divergent readings of the semantic layers in Sielska's work. My critique of Koczynska's analysis will be addressed in the chapter "Margit Sielska's Dialogue with the Old Masters".

To clarify the placement of this chapter within the overall structure of the article, it is important to note that "Archetypal Load of Tension" employs a chronological narrative while juxtaposing both Sielska and Krzywobłocki with several other exponents of the surrealist movement. The article's structure is irregular, with a predominant focus on Krzywobłocki's interwar photographic and photo-based works, along with his reflections on the creative process. In contrast, the chapter on Sielska's work, which was initially influenced by Krzywobłocki, is notably shorter, as only four of her 1930s photocollages, considered surrealist, have been preserved. Despite the limited number of works, these montages reflect the unique sensibility of the sole female artist among the members of 'artes' and feature a visual language distinct within both interwar Polish art and the transnational surrealist mainstream.

The subsequent chapter, titled "In the Aftermath of the Second World War," shifts the focus back to Krzywobłocki, presenting three sets of his photomontages created in

Wrocław during the periods 1948–1949, 1955, and 1970–1977. This chapter acts as a succinct complement to the earlier sections devoted to Krzywobłocki, which, in line with the main topic of the article, explore his works from the Lviv period in the 1930s. It aims to demonstrate how the artist's late photomontages show a gradual fading of his surrealist approach, giving way to decorative configurations of forms, some of which adhere to the constructivist principle of maximum economy in visual language.

The "Conclusion" underscores the distinctiveness of Krzywobłocki's and Sielska's surrealist stances within the context of both the avant-garde milieu emerging in interwar Lviv and the transnational surrealist movement.

2. Local Artistic Context

Seeking to determine the idiosyncratic features of Krzywobocki's and Sielska's attitudes in the context of the Lviv avant-garde, I will briefly outline the character of art created within the 'artes' circle.[7] The succinctness of this collective description is dictated by the stylistic heterogeneity of the group and the diversified artistic visions of the members. Hence, within the scope of this article, there is not enough space to discuss individual profiles of the 'artes' proponents separately.

While the group did not articulate a cohesive artistic and ideological program, its exponents absorbed a range of artistic sources; in addition to surrealism, they appeared to draw from the mechanomorphic imagery of Fernand Léger and constructivism. In the early 1920s, Sielska, Włodarski, and Hahn were counted among the students of Fernand Léger at the Académie Moderne, which Léger founded and conducted together with Amédée Ozenfant in Paris. Moreover, several other future members of the group—Mieczysław Wysocki, Jerzy Janish, Aleksander Riemer, and Roman Sielski—resided in Paris primarily from 1924 to 1929. This timeframe coincided with the heroic phase of the surrealist movement, marked by the inaugural exhibitions of surrealist painters at Galérie Pierre and Au Sacre du Printemps, André Breton's first manifesto, and the subsequent publication of his seminal text 'Le Surréalisme et la peinture' in *La Révolution surréaliste* (Łukaszewicz 1975, pp. 39, 82).[8]

The exposure to the newly born trend though entailed embracing selected aspects of surrealist imagery by the Lviv-based artists. Predominantly, they rejected the movement's fundamental principles, such as the concept of a purely internal model and the method of psychic automatism. According to their perspective, creativity, rooted in free associations of the imagination, extended beyond the realm of objective chance and allowed for the intentional intervention of the artist. "I do not govern myself by chance, but only by conscious creative will," underscored Aleksander Riemer in *Ulotka Artes* (the *Artes Leaflet*) in 1931 (Janisch and Streng 1931). Nevertheless, in line with surrealist poetics, the proponents of 'artes' incorporated unforeseen combinations of figures, objects, and biomorphic shapes into their imaginings, endowing them with an ephemeral existence that emerged from constellations of lines and color blots (Janisch), while also corresponding to Breton's concept of mimicry (Foster 1993, p. 10). Adhering to the surrealist law of universal analogy, living elements seamlessly blend in their paintings and drawings with inanimate matter, biological microorganisms undergo anthropomorphization, and human figures lead an anonymous existence akin to mannequins (Włodarski). The atmosphere of dreamy visions is evoked by expansive seaside landscapes (Sielski), vast seafloor views (Włodarski, Riemer, and Lille), barren landscapes populated by puppet-like figures, and veiled beings lacking substance (Wojciechowski). Phantoms of figures sculpted from magma of unspecified origin or woven from lace (Włodarski, Lille) are as evocative as cosmic spaces filled with forming matter (Włodarski) and autonomous hands and eyes appearing in tissues entwined from plants and material objects (Hahn).[9]

However, what truly defined the imagery created by the 'artes' exponents was an esoteric vision steeped in the ambiance of provincial Galicia—in artisanal and working-class neighborhoods, bustling fairs, religious festivals, and the rich tapestry of urban and suburban folklore. Their imagination was stimulated by shop displays, signs advertising

services, and kitschy trivial objects such as socks, combs, or ties.[10] In his review of Deborah Vogel's novel *Akacjes blien* (Acacias Bloom) (Vogel 2006), Bruno Schulz[11] adeptly captured the atmosphere of the streets, squares, and commercial passages of interwar Lviv, as rendered by the writer who was closely connected to the 'artes' milieu and whose narratives reverberated with similar visual impulses.

'There is no individual hero in this book; instead, there is an anonymous crowd of doll-like mannequins from hairdressing displays, passersby in stiff bowler hats, manicurists, and waiters, all lost and entangled in the city's mechanism of "street walking," faceless and devoid of individuality figures. [. . .] We find ourselves in a surreal landscape, limited by flat windowless houses, advertising figures, and signs, under a cardboard and lacquered sky, in late and predestined light. This world of colors, materials, tacky labels, and signs, metals and geometric masses, obedient to the course of its own calendar, is the moving backdrop of life. It expresses, in the transformations of its successive phases, the meaning of this life, the fluctuations, and the returns of the eternal affair of human hearts. Accounting for these faceless mannequins circulating in the cardboard cosmos of this book, the author recapitulates the mundane history of the female heart, encapsulating it in quotation marks' (Schulz 1936a).

To articulate Krzywobłocki's position within the context of 'artes', I will argue that references to local provincialism appear only infrequently in his works. He distinguished himself through both the motifs he depicted and the techniques he employed. Krzywobłocki, the first in the diverse milieu of 'artes' in terms of artistic practice, ventured into experiments with photography, photocollage, and photomontage. He was the sole artist consistently employing these media throughout his entire creative career. His production exhibited certain parallels to surrealist photography, embracing photoperformance-like compositions, staged portraits featuring mirrors, and oneiric visions.

3. 'Photo-Messages': The Experimental Photography of Krzywobłocki

While studying architecture at the Lviv Polytechnic (1922–1928), Krzywobłocki attended a one-year course in photography (1927–1928) taught by Henryk Mikolasch, the most influential local pictorialist practicing traditional technique and manifesting conservative taste (Łukaszewicz 1975, p. 98). Krzywobłocki, however, even in his early photographs, attempted to capture the object in a way that would disclose its as yet unperceived aspects and unforeseen qualities.[12] This was achieved by enhancing luminous reflections on polished or matte surfaces of everyday items, occasionally mirrored for added effect (*Photographic montage (with a fragment of a kettle)*, 1930; *Photographic composition (curves and glass brick)*, 1933).

From 1928 onward, Krzywobłocki executed photographic images resembling photoperformances, which he defined as 'photo-messages'. Intrigued by the act of composing a photograph, he aimed to juxtapose figures and objects to achieve a predetermined visual expression. He arranged the scenes either in their original state ('montages from nature') or by manipulating existing photographic material, including photographs he had taken and clippings from newspapers, magazines, and graphic albums.

In a photograph taken in around 1930 featuring three human figures lying on an embankment (*Montage from nature*. Figure 1), the silhouettes, posed rigidly and distinct from the furrowed soil, appear inscribed within a space that extends deep into the photo's frame. It is as if they are carried by a stream of eternally changeable animated matter. In this composition, Breton's belief that the surreal resides in reality itself seems to materialize.

By juxtaposing an 'alienated' limb, whether a foot or hand, with spherical glass vessels (e.g., *Photographic Composition*, 1930), Krzywobłocki created a sense of peculiarity and oddity through the contrasting forms and textures. These components, matte matter, light-absorbing surfaces, and (semi)transparent materials, react differently to light, resulting in varied light reflections. In *Photographic Composition (with a Foot)* (ca. 1930; Figure 2), the glass vessel vividly reflects light, while the foot both absorbs and reflects light, creating an intriguing visual effect.



Figure 1. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Montage from nature*, ca. 1930, black-and-white photograph, National Museum in Wrocław.

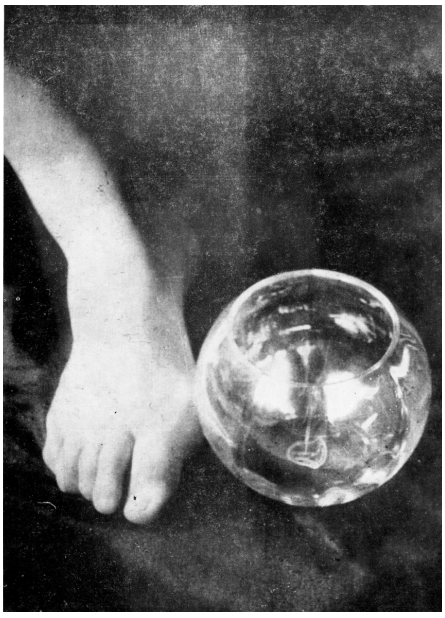


Figure 2. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Photographic Composition (with a Foot)*, ca. 1930, black-and-white photograph, 16.7 × 11.7 cm, reproduced in Wiesław Hudon. Wyobraźnia i konkret, *Fotografia* 1968 (10).

As we examine Krzywobłocki's relationship with surrealism, we can consider his photography within several comparative contexts, all of which demonstrate several artists' determination to transcend the conventional boundaries of the photographic medium. In exploring inter-textual relationships, it is worth noting that Krzywobłocki's approach to close-ups and cropping in photographs of the human body intersects with the works of Raoul Ubac, where organic forms are juxtaposed with tangible objects. However, in compositions like Ubac's *Hand and Stone* (1932), light effects do not play as significant a role in creating an aura of extraordinariness as they do in Krzywobłocki's works. This heightened sensitivity to light effects might also be a reminiscence of the lessons imparted to the young Krzywobłocki by Mikolasch, renowned as an experienced pictorialist.

Expanding the scope to encompass broader international ramifications of Krzywobłocki's experimental oeuvre, it is notable to draw parallels with the photographic ventures of Flo-

rence Henri (Krauss 1981, pp. 3–6). Henri was immersed in the milieu shaped by the ideas of László Moholy-Nagy, who, starting in 1923, advocated for photography to transcend its purely documentary and reproductive function. After establishing her photographic studio in Paris in 1928 and participating in several landmark exhibitions across Europe, Henri gained a reputation, particularly for her portraits and still-life compositions, evoking a purist aesthetic. She frequently incorporated mirrors to create intricate illusionistic intra-image spaces (Czartoryska 2005, pp. 141, 266). Similarly, in his preconceived arrangements, Krzywobłocki introduced an interplay between the actual model and their mirror reflection, thereby blurring the distinction between two dimensions of reality with distinct ontological statuses (*Portrait of Mrs. Dr. I. Hornung*, 1930. Figure 3).



Figure 3. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Portrait of Mrs. Dr. I. Hornung*, 1930, black-and-white photograph, 16.9 × 11.8 cm, Museum of Art in Łódź.

In photographs like *The Studio of Wanda Diamand—Lviv* (1930. Figure 4), the artist multiplied geometrically altered spatial segments captured within the camera frame by using two (or more?) mirrors, akin to Henri's approach in the photograph of Margarete Schall (1928). However, beyond the portrayal of Wanda Diamand, cropped in the foreground by the picture frame, and her mirrored reflection, Krzywobłocki introduced two additional figures in the background that partially overlap, resembling ethereal apparitions. In doing so, he rendered the visible interior space much more surreal than Henri, evoking associations with the complex realm of memory.

The primary point of reference for Krzywobłocki's photographic approach, however, could be constituted by the innovations introduced by Man Ray.[13] The meticulously arranged photographs by the Lviv artist bear a resemblance to Man Ray's compositions featuring female nudes, where their figures are radically cropped within the camera frame. In a quasi-portrait captured by Krzywobłocki (*Montage*, 1929), the shadow cast by the woman's head onto her naked neck takes center stage, while her face lies just beyond the camera frame. Ethereality and the potential vitality of the disheveled shadow are juxtaposed here with a tangible material object, specifically, the fabric of a blouse adorned with a geometric pattern. This framing technique alludes to Man Ray's works, such as the *Neck* (1929).



Figure 4. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *The Studio of Wanda Diamand—Lviv*, 1930, black-and-white photograph, 13 × 10.5 cm, Museum of Art in Łódź.

Furthermore, in his photoportraiture, particularly in the embrace of the *mise en abyme* mode, Man Ray ingeniously either identified or linked the sitter with their representation by adeptly employing internal picture frames and mirrors. In Krzywobłocki's *Portrait of Ms. H. A.* (1935), much like in Man Ray's *Kiki de Montparnasse* (1930), the interplay between the real model and her reflection in an oddly placed mirror encapsulates the essence of the 'double' image of a young woman, evoking the duality of the human psyche—a motif expressive of the ambiguity of self-reflection. The reflection of Ms. H. A's prominent eyeballs brings to light the disturbing nature of content repressed in the unconscious. Furthermore, the inner space of the photograph, confined within its tight frame, transcends its borders through the mirror's surface, which extends beyond the frame and penetrates into the viewer's space, causing a 'direct' confrontation between the model and the observer. Thus, the viewer's position undergoes immersion into the realm of the photograph.

In one of Man Ray's 'living pictures', the *Portrait of Jean Cocteau* (1922), the inner frame interrupts the continuity of the real space captured in the photograph and creates an intriguing interplay between what is real and what is fictional, calling into question the nature of reality. Additionally, the introduction of a sculpted head in the background, reminiscent of late Renaissance portraiture, intensifies this interaction. This approach, adopted also by Krzywobłocki, serves as a prime example of what Rosalind Krauss described as the "experience of reality transformed into representation" (Krauss 1981, p. 29).

The photographic portraits arranged in advance by the Lviv artist (*Portrait of the Painter Margit Sielska*, 1929; *Portrait of Jerzy Janisch*, 1932) encompass both an imprint of physical reality, which is the figure of a model seen in their immediate surroundings and their representation contained within an inner picture frame. The use of the inner frame differentiates the picture 'plane' from the real setting, and at the same time, just like the Derridian *parergon* (Derrida 1978, pp. 24–43), connects the representation to the outside world. Krzywobłocki, similarly to Man Ray, assumed a referential context that transcended mere everyday reality, delving into an artistically transformed reality exemplified by museum art. In his premeditated photographic portraits, he skillfully paraphrased the iconographic motifs and conventions of representation of the Renaissance masters. Notably, the female models themselves hold the picture frames into which their silhouettes are inscribed (*Portrait of a Woman*, 1932. Figure 5). However, in a departure from the opulence of curtains made of rich fabric, these 'living pictures' incorporate ordinary wallpaper, tablecloths, and pottery borrowed from a modest provincial household in Lviv. Hence, due to the intentional reference to the old masters, the mundane realm here serves as a mere imitation of idioms of depiction consecrated by tradition.



Figure 5. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Portrait of a Woman*, 1932, black-and-white photograph, 19.4 × 16 cm, Museum of Art in Łódź.

Moreover, Krzywobłocki staged a scene where a figure reminiscent of the mythological Venus (*Portrait of Mrs. Adler on a Sofa*, 1932. Figure 6) resonates with the compositional schemes found in masterpieces by artists of the highest stature, such as Titian and Manet. Though sprawled in a stylish dress on a modern sofa, the Galician Venus lacks the traditional companions of Cupid, a musician, or a servant. Instead, she is positioned beside a glittering and crumpled scroll of paper,[14] which, through the activation of cultural memory embracing museum pieces, alludes to the eroticism embodied by the mythical Amor.



Figure 6. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Portrait of Mrs. Adler (on a Sofa)*, 1932, black-and-white photograph, 11.1 × 15.4 cm, Museum of Art in Łódź.

The question of the mediating role of 'museum art' in evoking mythical archetypes becomes even more apparent in Krzywobłocki's work when considered in the context of the poetic prose and drawings of Bruno Schulz, who had close connections to the 'artes'

circle (Łukaszewicz 1975, pp. 92–93). By tirelessly trying to uncover the primordial myth embedded within layers of culture, Schulz referenced the art of the old masters in the titles and compositional devices of his prints and drawings (Kossowska 2004, pp. 53–56; 2007, pp. 43–46; Olchanowski 2001). For instance, in a version of the title page of *The Booke of Idolatry*, a portfolio of 28 cliché-verres executed between 1920 and 1922, he introduced the motif of adoration of a woman idol sprawled in an alluring pose on a bed. This scene can be interpreted as a pastiche of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and its subsequent incarnations, such as Velázquez's *Venus with a Mirror*, Goya's *The Nude Maja*, and Manet's *Olympia*.

Schulz replaced the servants and Eros who usually accompany the goddess with Pierrot, holding a mirror, symbolizing the artist himself. However, he significantly transformed the meaning of the motive borrowed from the 'museum art', turning it into a visual equivalent of an ironic detachment from the act of idolatry. The woman looks provocatively at the viewer with no apparent interest either in her own reflection or in her admirer. The Pierrot is just as insensitive to the ostentatiously manifested beauty of the supposed object of adoration.[15] This inversion not only aimed to decode the primordial meanings enchanted in myths but also to reveal the centuries-old cultural strata bequeathed to modern civilization, which had lost its archetypal significance.

A similar ironic tone is also discernible in Krzywobłocki's photograph displayed within a museum frame, portraying the image of the Galician Venus, whose admirer has been completely objectified, transforming into a scroll of paper. As much as in Schulz's works, the level of fictitiousness is doubled here, owing to the 'picture-in-a-picture mode'. Thus, the banal world of the Galician province, when viewed through the prism of European culture, turns into a supernatural reality and engenders a cultural meta-commentary.

4. Amalgamating Constructivist and Surrealist Assumptions

Parallel to his photographic practice, Krzywobłocki engaged in experiments with the combinatory technique of photocollage and negative photomontage. His self-portrait from 1929 (Figure 7) serves as an early exemplification of his ventures in this technologically innovative domain. In the self-image, the artist's figure has been immersed in an abstract background composed of intersecting prismatic surfaces with differentiated luminosity—referred to as 'the network of <stained-glass> vaulting', as stated by Krzywobłocki himself (Krzywobłocki 1967–1970). The result was achieved by superimposing two negatives.



Figure 7. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Self-Portrait*, 1929, photomontage, reproduced in Wiesław Hudon. Wyobraźnia i konkret, *Fotografia* 1968 (10).

In his subsequent montages, a characteristic interplay of imagination emerged, reminiscent of surrealism, weaving together fragments from disjointed dimensions of reality. In a 1928 photocollage titled *S.O.S.*, a ship undergoes a surreal transformation, morphing into a hybrid human figure reduced to an empty sleeve and a hand reaching skyward, replacing the head, all while floating on the tumultuous waves of a rough sea.

The motif of a hand—'a closed or open hand—a holding hand—a supporting hand—a grasping hand', as underscored by Krzywobłocki (Krzywobłocki 1967–1970), recurs obsessively in the artist's oeuvre. In another iteration of the *S.O.S.* photomontage (1929–1931. Figure 8), the hand emerges from geometric abstract forms with a grainy texture reminiscent of a rough wall surface. Refined from its corporeality by light, it becomes more of a sign of a hand than a mimicry of a human limb. Accompanied by components of machinery typical of construction sites and set against an inverted seascape, this unexpected arrangement might suggest the critically perceived constraints of technicized civilization imposed on the human being. Similarly, in the *Photomontage* from 1933, an open-fingered hand grows, resembling a warning signal or a cry for help, from an undefined architectural support within a partly visible architectural surrounding dramatically illuminated by light.

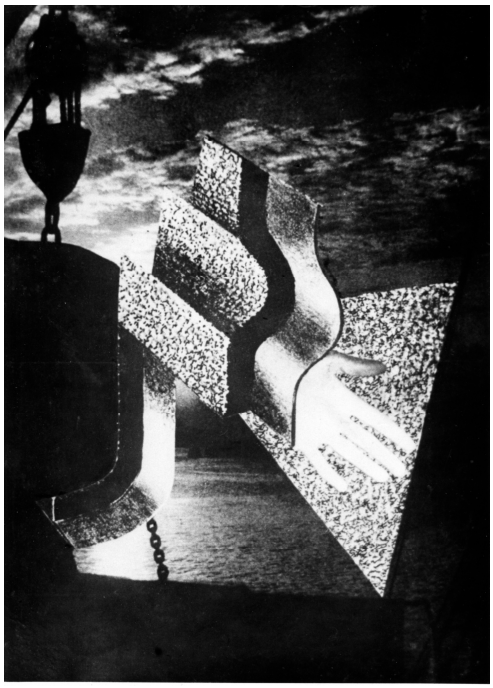


Figure 8. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *S.O.S.*, 1929–1931, photomontage, 16.7 × 11.7 cm, Museum of Art in Łódź.

In the photomontage from 1929 to 1930, in turn, two hands emerge from architectural volutes, which connote petrified stereometrically synthesized sleeves, as if metonymic fragments of the attire of an absent figure. Such a dualistic interpretation of the materiality of this construction appears to encapsulate a faint trace of Breton's concept of 'convulsive beauty' (Krauss 1981, pp. 29–31).

Regarding the recurring motif of a hand in Krzywobłocki's photomontages, Debora Vogel insightfully observed the following:

'The motif of a human hand ending an architectural fragment of a column or protruding from a wall is very common in Krzywobłocki's work and is a surreal element. At the same time, it is a constructivist motif, as long as it is used from the point of view of the mutual relationship of the forms, their kinship despite the distance of the sphere from which they come. The small number of connected elements and the nature of these elements create a painterly impression. Krzywobłocki also creates an interesting montage

of geometric forms based on the principle of constructivism. As an architect, however, he has a preference for architectural elements and a great sense of their materiality' (Vogel 1934, p. 9).

The above analysis aligns with my observation that within Krzywobłocki's oeuvre, two paths ran concurrently: the constructivist-surreal and the surrealist. Essential to this diagnosis is the inherent potential for a relation with Czech surrealism, particularly evident in the contributions of Karel Teige, the leader of the avant-garde Umělecký svaz Devětsil (Art Union Devětsil). Lviv, which remained part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918, maintained numerous cultural connections with Vienna[16] and Prague. During the 1920s, the capital of Czechoslovakia emerged as a vibrant center of European avant-garde, hosting key figures in constructivist architecture and art (Šmejkal 1989, p. 16–18; Sayer 2013).

A highly effective platform for the dissemination of innovative ideas among avant-garde milieus in Central Europe was formed through the well-functioning circulation of 'little magazines', anthologies, and other avant-garde publications across the continent (Brooker et al. 2013; Forbes 2022; Srp 2002b, pp. 110–13). This phenomenon, rooted in the avant-gardists' advocacy of transnationalism, allowed the progressive artistic circles in Lviv to possibly become acquainted with Czech experimental photography and graphic design based on photomontage, even if not through personal inter-relationships, but rather by exposure of Czech developments in journals and on book dust jackets (Lechowicz 1986, pp. 5–19; 1990, pp. 125–45; Šmejkal 1989, pp. 15–16, 20–26; Witkovsky 2007, p. 13). Teige himself cultivated a robust international network, as evident in various photographic journals featuring his work, and this was further underscored by his pioneering typographic innovations (Dluhosch and Švácha 1999; Srp 2002a; Michalová 2016). The program of poetismus (poetism), formulated by Teige and Vítězslav Nezval (Šmejkal 1989, pp. 20–26; Zusi 2004; Witkovsky 2007, p. 131), might have particularly intrigued Krzywobłocki, who could have been drawn to Teige due to their mutual pursuit of amalgamating constructivist and surrealist elements in their creative endeavors (Czartoryska 1985, pp. 107–25).[17]

Similar to Teige, Krzywobłocki did not relinquish the rationally controlled aspect of the creative act, despite recognizing the affective dimension of montage as a technique of depiction. Both artists fortified their rationalistic stance through engagement with contemporary architectural issues. In the case of Krzywobłocki, his architectural and monument projects distinctly showcased his familiarity with functionalist architecture and constructivist sculpture (Łukaszewicz 1975, p. 74).[18]

Teige, on his part, actively engaged in architectural criticism and theory, championing purist principles. This involvement led to his lectures at the Bauhaus in 1929 and sparked a polemic with Le Corbusier on the subject of modern architecture (Stefański 2008, pp. 94–104).[19] The logic of tectonic construction manifested itself in his collages by emphasizing a geometrically well-balanced compositional structure based on verticals, horizontals, or diagonals that delineated distinct fields containing more or less irrationally juxtaposed components of the surrounding reality recorded in photographs, postcards, and advertisements. The thematic realm of the photocollages produced by the leader of the Czech avant-garde in the 1920s was defined by civilizational achievements, the rhythm of life in the modern metropolis, and transoceanic journeys. Simultaneously, his montages served as a metaphor for a journey transcending all possible boundaries. The vehicle transmitting the message of modernity relied on morphological innovations, incorporating advertising slogans and maps into montage frames, thereby correlating the visual language with a textual dimension to achieve a synesthetic synthesis of the senses (Srp 2002a; Forbes 2020, pp. 365–84).[20] Poetism preceded the strictly surrealist phase of Teige's work in the 1930s when the artist endorsed the psychological liberation of Breton's idiom of art freed from the oppression of intellect.[21] Throughout that decade, in the created montages, the artist crafted dream-like worlds populated by hybrid figures born out of the act of profound introspection and the penetration of the unconscious.[22]

However, in the case of Krzywobłocki, as I have already mentioned, photomontages based on constructivist principles coexisted with montages devoid of geometric rigor,

evoking poetic associations, saturated with lyricism, or invested with dramatic tension. In photomontages that reveal the influence of constructivism, Krzywobłocki directed his focus toward simple forms and everyday objects, fundamentally distinguishing him from Teige. Nevertheless, he also blended the discipline of geometric order with surreal poetics. His compositions, showcasing arrangements of half eyeglasses alongside indistinct objects, snippets of landscapes, and geometric abstract elements, illustrate a fusion of economic condensation principles and effective shortcuts with the concept of arbitrarily amalgamating alien realities (*Photomontage*, 1932. Figure 9).

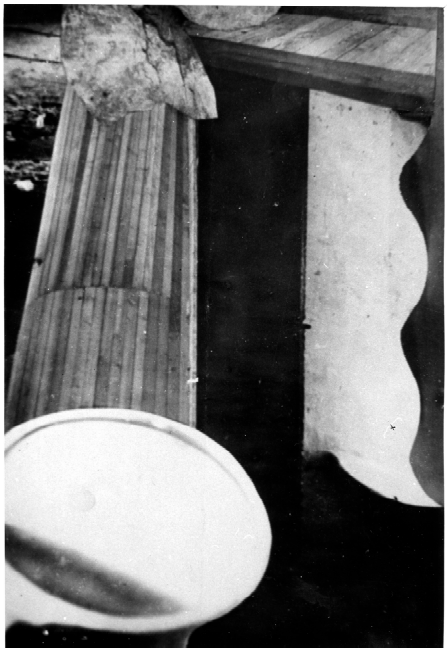


Figure 9. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Photomontage*, 1932, photomontage, 17 × 11.6 cm, Museum of Art in Łódź.

Now, I will construct yet another inter-textual relationship for Krzywobłocki's oeuvre. Promoting photomontage as an experimental medium capable of generating entirely new visual experiences, the Lviv artist explored a diverse and intricate range of motifs' enlargements and distorted shooting perspectives, demonstrating analogies with Moholy-Nagy's photographic experiments at Bauhaus.[23] The distant reminiscences of framing techniques in Moholy-Nagy's series of views of the Eiffel Tower (1925) and the Berlin Radio Tower (1927–1928) are evident in Krzywobłocki's photomontage titled *Stan Zji and Maryla Lilien* (1936). A fragment of an irregular lattice, created from unidentifiable elements, is superimposed on blurry photos of an interior fragment merging with an architectural facade. The sharpness has also been lost in the background, where the silhouettes of the titular characters are vaguely discernible.

In Krzywobłocki's output, we can identify parallels with the works of yet another artist also affiliated with the Bauhaus. The use of a multiplied motif featuring a female mannequin leg in a fluffy shoe, as seen in Krzywobłocki's *Photomontage* from 1932 (Figure 10), can be linked to a photograph by Umbo (Otto Umbehr) (Witkovsky 2007, pp. 83–84). In Umbo's *Untitled* (1928/1929), the molded legs of a mannequin are deliberately removed from their geo-historical context of place and time. By 'posing' within an unspecified interior setting, they embody the obsession with an artificial human, serving as a metonymic representation of the realm of commercial advertising and consumer display, which elicits erotic desire. In his *Photomontage*, Krzywobłocki not only referenced Umbo's motif but also crafted a pastiche by duplicating it, flipping it upside down, and embedding it within the context of a metaphorical journey. The associations come to light in adjacent photos: on the left side, the converging perspective of railway tracks contrasts with the rhythmic

row of legs, while on the opposite side of the main motif, there is a blurred cityscape captured from an aerial perspective and rotated 90 degrees. The overall image can be interpreted as a desire for swift transitions to locales reminiscent of fashion advertising and vaudevillian entertainment. However, the inversion of the stockinged mannequin limbs imbues the picture with ironic distance. Therefore, the metaphorical dimension of the photomontage is ambivalent, possibly connoting an introspective journey into the unconscious. Krzywobłocki's dreamscape not only evokes sexual connotations through the exposure of female calves and feet in feathery slippers but also through a cascade of long feminine hair. This hair acts as a mediator between the mannequin's dismembered limbs and the photograph of the railway line as if being blown by the gust of a racing virtual train.



Figure 10. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Photomontage*, 1932, photomontage, 16.7 × 11.7 cm, Museum of Art in Łódź.

The associations with a voyage in Krzywobłocki's work seem to find confirmation in another photomontage dated from 1930 to 1932, titled *Voyage*. In this composition, above two sheets hanging on a line, an amorphous shape reminiscent of a trail of smoke hovers, embracing a fragment of a rocky seaside landscape, rotated 180 degrees. The image is suspended in a space penetrated by a diffused light, resembling the effect of an explosion of energy of unknown origin.[24]

5. 'A Condensed Load of Tension': Krzywobłocki's Reflections on Photomontage

When creating his otherworldly realms, Krzywobłocki utilized techniques characteristic of surrealist photography, including selective focus, unconventional foreshortening, and distorted shooting perspectives. He sharpened the contours of some motifs, blurred the recognizability of others, disturbed the scale and proportions of the juxtaposed objects, and obscured the distinctiveness of the photographs juxtaposed in the photomontages, creating a unique and integrated whole. By emphasizing the interplay of abstract features such as tones, textures, light, and shadow, the contrast between organic and abstract forms, which we might define as a painterly quality, was an idiosyncratic feature of his photographs and photomontages. The artist himself wrote about perceiving the surrounding world, resulting in abstracting from material realities and extracting luministic qualities: '[. . .] as human beings, we undergo astonishing adventures when the world, reality, collapses within ourselves and shimmers like a kaleidoscope, in thousands of combinations of forms,

rainbow polarizations, or in arrangements of unparalleled luminosity'. (Krzywobłocki 1967–1970).

A perfect exemplification of his surrealist visions is found in his *Photomontage* from 1930 to 1932 (Figure 11). In this composition, a hybrid form that evokes a fragmented human figure, accompanied by long flowing hair and crowned with a wing-like fan-shaped structure, hovers in a space reminiscent of a macro-landscape with indistinct contours. The image is animated by floating and flickering particles of unknown origin. These oneiric visions manifest Krzywobłocki's broader belief in the homogeneous nature of matter infused with a spiritual element and subjected to an infinite process of transformation from one state of existence to another. He explores this theme through empirically cognizable metamorphoses, as forms become alike or undergo anthropomorphization, aligning with the law of universal analogy cherished by surrealists.



Figure 11. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Photomontage (with a Fan)*, 1930–1932, archival photograph, National Museum in Wrocław.

By juxtaposing photos of various surfaces and substances—walls of different textures, sheets of water, clouds, and hair with fragments of aerial photographs—in sharp contrast or through soft transitions, Krzywobłocki alluded to the phenomenon of constant somatic 'ferment' in the real world, a concept metaphorically expressed by Bruno Schulz. Schulz asserted, 'All organizations of matter are transient and loose, easy to regress and dissolve' (Schulz 1964, p. 80). In his *Treatise on Mannequins or the Second Book of Genesis*, he described the inner vitality and simultaneously the amorphousness of matter as follows: 'The entire matter undulates with infinite possibilities that pass through it in delightful shivers. Waiting for the invigorating breath of spirit, it endlessly pours itself, tempting with a thousand sweet roundnesses and softnesses that it extracts from itself in blind fantasies' (Schulz 1989, p. 35).

Krzywobłocki's creative endeavors, much like Schulz's limitless imagination, were guided by affections, giving rise to evocative visions akin to the mechanisms of dreams.[25] The initial impulse for assembling a photomontage usually stemmed from visual material personally collected by Krzywobłocki, and emotionally connected to him through memories and recollections. The artist believed that objects and visual motifs possess a peculiar ability to interconnect and intrinsically create 'mental' bonds with each other, which the artist sought to extract and enhance without arbitrarily imposing any compositional solutions. 'The material already contains the inherent (archetypical) load of tension—smoldering, sparking [...] in the following bursts of inspiration', he emphasized (Krzywobłocki 1967–1970, part II, p. 20). The evocative character of the juxtaposed objects elicited a vision of the whole composition

and provoked the artist to complete the arrangement with subsequent elements. 'In the moment of montage [. . .], an important factor is the sensitizing-sublimating element, an orientation towards specific forms, shapes, arrangements, and emotions—transferred and emanating within the photo-element—which, during the assembly of the whole, I further saturate to enhance the power of the extracted plastic expression', explained Krzywbołocki in his memoirs (Krzywobłocki 1967–1970, part II, p. 22).

Thus, the montage of photographic clippings and cut-outs was conditioned by visual and psychological phenomena and the emotional resonance between the photo snippets and the artist. Consequently, while providing an idiosyncratic interpretation of the canonical presumptions of surrealism, Krzywobłocki rejected the method of psychic automatism and the concept of a 'purely internal model' (Breton 1972, p. 4). Creativity, in his view, although rooted in the free associations of imagination, was not exclusively the domain of objective coincidence and did not exclude purposeful interference by the artist. The artist perceived his photomontages as 'a miniature recording-montage related to subjective sensation, perception, and also containing [. . .] as if a condensed load of tension, smoldering, emitting like a fuse at the flash of inspiration [. . .] revealing sensations, concepts of forming, photomontage'. (Krzywobłocki 1967–1970, part II, pp. 22–23). The montage aimed to enhance the mental content of particular 'photo-elements', strengthen the power of their visual expression, and release the 'load of tension' captured in them. The sublimation of emotions occurring during the montage resulted from the intensified sensitivity of the artist to certain visual motifs.

6. Margit Sielska's Dialogue with the Old Masters

In the artistic circle of the 'artes', Krzywobłocki's concept of photomontage had a profound influence on Margit Reich-Sielska.[26] However, among her preserved and documented works, only the four photocollages analyzed in this chapter—all dating from around 1934—are considered part of the surrealist movement. During her studies in Paris (1925–1926), she painted still lifes featuring simplified geometrized shapes arranged in rhythmically structured compositions, influenced by Léger. In the late 1920s and 1930s, she shifted toward landscapes, images of women, and figurative scenes depicted in a style reminiscent of l'art naïf, employing a vibrant color palette. Although Sielska's surrealist phase was relatively brief, it does not diminish her significance in both Polish art history and European surrealism. On the contrary, as the only female member of the 'artes' group, Sielska held a unique position, further distinguished by the idiosyncratic character of her imaginings. Nonetheless, the limited number of works from this period—especially in comparison to Krzywobłocki's substantial oeuvre—explains the brevity of this section.

Building on the influence of Krzywobłocki's photomontage techniques, Sielska developed a distinct montage idiom that diverged from that of her 'mentor'. Her works are grounded in juxtapositions of reproductive materials, crumpled colored papers, and fragments of nets and lace.[27] Notably, three of her photocollages metaphorically explore the theme of female sexuality, a subject only vaguely present in the works of Krzywobłocki and other members of 'artes'. At the same time, following Krzywobłocki's lead, she also explored the potential of the hand as a motif unique to surrealist poetics.

In the photocollage *Voilà: Composition with a Hand* (Figure 12), Sielska skillfully integrated a human hand, either reaching for or releasing an abstract circular form, with elements of varied texture. The image of a hand cut out from a magazine or photograph is subordinated to architectural tectonics reminiscent of Leger's mechano-aesthetic. Conversely, the pink-tinted background, made of crumpled paper, brings to mind Krzywobłocki's preference for materials such as *papier mâché*.

Returning to literary contexts in Lviv, it is worth recalling Schulz's penchant for kitschy materials and *papier mâché*. Schulz eloquently elaborated on this inclination in his artistic manifesto, titled *A Treatise on Mannequins or the Second Book of Genesis*, where he developed his concept of creativity:

'We are simply entranced and enchanted by the cheapness, shabbiness, and inferiority of material. Do you understand [. . .] the profound meaning of this weakness, this passion for colorful tissue paper, for papier-mâché, for lacquer paint, for scraps, and sawdust? This is [. . .] the proof of our love for matter as such, for its fluffiness or porosity, for its unique mystical consistency. The Demiurge, that great master and artist, made matter invisible, causing it to disappear beneath the surface of life. Conversely, we adore its creaking, its resistance, its clumsiness. [. . .] In one word [. . .] our desire is to create man anew—in the shape and semblance of a tailor's dummy' (Schulz 1989, pp. 35–36).[28]



Figure 12. Margit Reich-Sielska. *Voilá* (*Composition with a Hand*), ca. 1934, photocollage, 31.5 × 22 cm, National Museum in Wrocław.

In Sielska's *Voilá*, however, unlike in Krzywobłocki's photomontages, the inserted hand does not make a dramatic gesture but rather directs the viewer's attention to the black-and-white form of the circle, which may symbolize fullness—the absolute—eluding the open hand, strongly embedded in the mundane reality personified by diagonally arranged roof tiles (a metonymy for the roof) and an architectural pillar. The 'voilá' gesture can therefore be interpreted as an expression of the inherent human sense of unfulfillment.

In several other photocollages, Sielska skillfully integrated the motif of a hand, seamlessly merging it with paradigms of the European artistic tradition while simultaneously blending it into the fabric of contemporaneity. In the *Composition with a Nude* (ca. 1934. Figure 13), two hands, that of an adult and a child, determine the foreground of the compositional inner space. Their juxtaposition with the naked body of a sleeping woman lying on a bed would be astonishing if not for the referential context established by the well-known representations of Venus and Danaë in museum galleries. The child's hand outstretched toward a ribbon, as if toward an adornment of a dress, hints at the figure of the mythological Cupid accompanying the resting goddess of love. A more literal image of the mischievous Cupid is to be found in Joshua Reynolds' painting *Cupid Undoing Venus's Belt* (1788), which transposes Titian's prototypes. The other hand, encompassed in the photomontage as if striking the strings of an imaginary harp, echoes Titian's paintings that evoke music. It also draws upon the figure of a servant who, into her apron, collects the golden shower in the Danaë scenes painted by the Renaissance master. In Sielska's photocollage, the shower of gold has been transformed into a fisherman's net dematerialized by golden reflections

sliding on the ropes. Multifaceted allusions to famous mythological motifs in Sielska's work lead to what Bruno Schulz (1936c) described as 'a sudden regeneration of primeval myths', particularly those related to feminine sexuality. However, the motif of the net introduced into the composition carries an ambiguous meaning. It can be interpreted as a transparent yet impenetrable barrier, confining the woman—who is the object of sexual desire—within an interior that connotes a bedroom, much like a 'golden cage'.



Figure 13. Margit Reich-Sielska. *Composition with a Nude*, ca. 1934, photocollage, 21.5 × 17.5 cm, National Museum in Wrocław.

Moreover, the photocollage *Eve* (ca. 1934. Figure 14) is reminiscent of museum masterpieces while referring to Peter Paul Rubens's image of Venus chosen by Paris in a 'beauty contest' (*The Judgement of Paris*, ca. 1636).[29] The golden apple in Eve's hand becomes ambiguous, symbolizing both temptation and sin, as well as a trophy won by a modern Venus. This contemporary dimension is emphasized by household utensils, elements of the everyday surroundings of this mythological-biblical figure. A lace curtain—a favorite motif of the Lviv surrealists—emphasizes her provincial identity while also symbolizing her confinement within the domestic sphere.[30]

In Schulz's prose, a characteristic tension emerges between the adoration of a woman's physical beauty and her objectification within an idolatrous cult. In *The Treatise on Manequins, or the Second Book of Genesis*, the woman is depicted as an 'idol of oakum and canvas', a short-lived artifact (Schulz 1989, p. 36). Similarly, Sielska's photocollages reveal the dissonance between feminine sensuality and its instrumentalization within the oppressive social realities faced by women. As a result, in her perception, the archetype of femininity lost its coherence and fragmented under the weight of cultural conventions and stereotypes.

In the montage titled *At the Window* (ca. 1934, Figure 15), in turn, Sielska reimagined the tradition of Romantic painting. The favored motif of the romantics, confronting human figures with the landscaped expanse viewed through the window, is paraphrased here by the figure of a young woman, reminiscent of a Biedermeier portrait. The landscape, simplified and allusive, hardly looms behind a torn wire netting, diminishing the importance attributed to nature by the romantics. Behind the figure of the girl—cut out from a theatrical magazine or film still—Sielska collaged pieces of marbled paper streaked with multicolored and gray splotches of varying intensity. These amorphous seemingly fluid patches evoke a sense of psychological unease, which may be interpreted as a projection of

the 'actress's' inner tension. This tension is further heightened by the disturbingly lifelike bunch of grapes—abundant and prominently placed in the foreground. Diverging from the late Romantic poetics of comfort (*Gemütlichkeit*), the grapes connote the Dionysian myth, a theme Bruno Schulz eagerly explored in his *Bacchanalia* drawings. At the same time, the impenetrable mesh barrier isolates the woman from the outside world, confining her to an interior that could symbolize a projection of her ego, where her sexual desires are amplified or alternatively, positioning her as the object of erotic attention, trapped within societal constraints.



Figure 14. Margit Reich-Sielska. *Eve*, ca. 1934, photocollage, 25 × 19 cm, National Museum in Wrocław.



Figure 15. Margit Reich-Sielska. *Montage (at the Window)*, ca. 1934, photocollage, 25.8 × 30.8 cm, National Museum in Wrocław.

It seems that these two montages are semantically complementary, presenting a vision where the alluring power of eroticism, encapsulated in ancient myths, is subdued by the moral norms of bourgeois society, particularly the conservative establishment of Lviv. In Sielska's photocollages, elements that, according to Krzywobłocki, attract each other, take on the shape of bits elicited from the cultural memory mixed with scraps of the everyday experience, yet assembled differently than in their mythical prototypes, adapted to the modern era—a syncretistic epoch in search of its origins. Complementing Krzywobłocki's creative concepts, Sielska's work conveys a metaphorical reflection on the role of women in society, linking domestic space and the objectification of sexual desire.

As mentioned earlier, Sielska was trained as an artist in Lviv, Krakow, Vienna, and Paris. She belonged to the artistic and intellectual elite of interwar Lviv and pursued an independent professional career, despite being the only female member of the 'artes' group and marrying a fellow adherent, Roman Sielski. She must have been aware of the changes taking place in the process of women's emancipation in the Second Polish Republic. Nevertheless, she may also have viewed gender politics critically, including the societal role of women confined to domesticity and prevailing female stereotypes. I, therefore, agree with Karolina Koczynska that Sielska's photocollages might be interpreted from a feminist perspective, but I reject the arbitrary attribution of anti-nationalist leftist views to her, as well as her positioning in the context of public discourse promoting birth control and debating forced motherhood. There is no evidence to support the claim that Sielska's attitude aligned with such ideological stances. Koczynska's interpretation abstracted Sielska from both the body of her work and the artistic avant-garde of Lviv, ignoring the fact that the artist did not join the left-wing faction that emerged within 'artes' in 1933.[31]

7. In the Aftermath of the Second World War

The feminist undertones discernable in three of the four photocollages discussed in the previous chapter did not reappear in Sielska's work created in Lviv from the 1950s to the 1970s. During this period, Sielska primarily focused on landscapes and genre scenes rendered in post-impressionist and realistic styles, particularly in paintings with socialist–realist themes, depicting scenes of labor in agriculture or construction. In the 1960s and 1970s, she tended to emphasize decorative and coloristic qualities, incorporating geometric compositional discipline to highlight the overall structure of her paintings. Consequently, her post-WWII and late art, which lacked surrealist connotations, is not explored in the article.

In contrast, Krzywobłocki continued to practice photomontage with surrealist affiliations from the 1940s through the 1970s. However, as indicated by the article's title, the emphasis is on the unique expressions of surrealism developed by Krzywobłocki and Sielska during the 1930s. Consequently, this chapter serves as a brief complement to earlier sections that examine Krzywobłocki's artistic practice in Lviv and his reflections on the montage technique. The brevity of this section is also due to the shift in Krzywobłocki's late works toward formal experimentation rather than exploring archetypal depth, which weakened his surrealist stance. As a result, the late phase of his creativity is less effective in illustrating the 'archetypal load of tension', a concept central to this article.

After a hiatus caused by WWII, during which the majority of the artist's interwar works were destroyed, Krzywobłocki, settled in Wrocław,[32] where in the years 1948–49 he created a set of 21 photomontages dominated by architectural and sculptural forms captured in changing configurations.

I will argue that in this series of artworks reminiscent of the Greco-Roman past, one can discern an escapist gesture, leading into the depths of the author's psyche and simultaneously into the depths of history, to the cradle of Mediterranean civilization. From the post-war perspective of Poland, ravaged by Nazi and Soviet occupations in terms of economy, material substance, and infrastructure, depleted of a significant portion of its population, robbed of cultural assets, and above all deprived of political freedom by the communist regime, the ancient foundation of European culture might have seemed

more like a mirage than a lasting point of reference. The late 1940s were a time when the communist ideology and normative aesthetics of socialist realism imposed by the USSR were being implemented in Polish culture. It seems that the stimuli invigorating Krzywobocki's memory, akin to Paris and Bauhaus-derived paradigms of European surrealism, gained strength at that time, matured, and became more distinctive, serving as a vehicle for his imagination. Under the pressure of wartime trauma and current experiences, the Greco-Roman cultural pillar transformed in Krzywobłocki's vision into a scenic decoration against which fragments of the ancient world appear like theatrical props.

Anthropomorphic motifs, petrified faces, masks, busts, and heads of ancient statues, or sculptural figures that have been decapitated, are most often the central motif of these photomontages in which material substance is enclosed in rigid geometric shapes such as columns, arches, cornices, stairs, mosaics, fragments of brick walls, and segments of steel constructions (*Bouquet Composition*, 1948/49. Figure 16). This architectural solidity is contrasted with softly draping folds frozen in stone shapes and with aerial photographs capturing the urban axes of cities or sections of a clouded sky. Architectural components, though stylistically referring to antiquity, bear a closer resemblance to the modernist-classicizing mode of construction in Benito Mussolini's EUR district than to the ancient monuments of Rome. Therefore, manipulating fragments of past and present reality, captured in surprising perspective shortcuts and unprecedented juxtapositions, creates a surreal world highlighting the layers of civilization here.

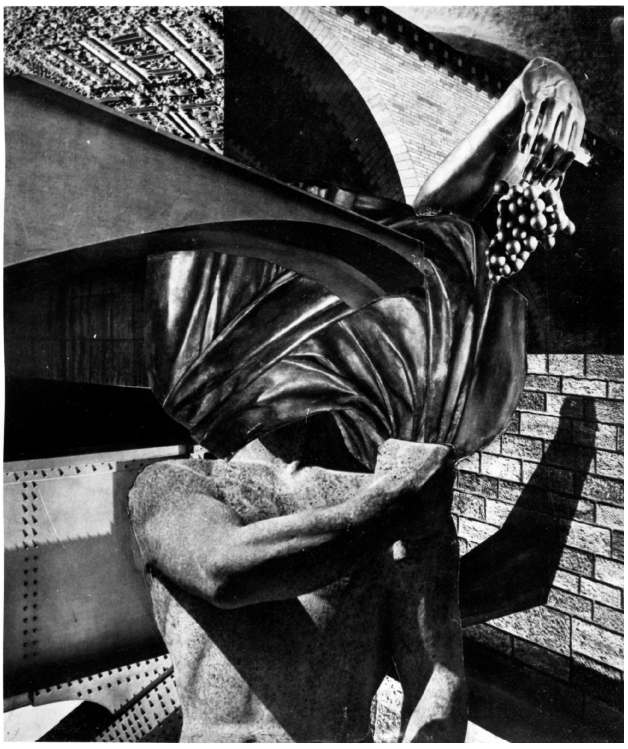


Figure 16. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Bouquet Composition*, 1948/49, photomontage, 38.2 × 33.5 cm, National Museum in Wrocław.

On the other hand, beneath the mask of antiquizing decorativeness, a hidden criticism seems to be present regarding the contemporary appropriation of antique tradition, implying a juggling of its components treated as theatrical accessories devoid of essential mythical meaning. It is my contention that the metaphorical dimension of these images alludes to the *pittura metafisica* of Giorgio de Chirico, whose impact on the 'artes' milieu has been proven in the relevant literature focused on the group's characteristics (Łukaszewicz 1975, pp. 81, 85, 96).

De Chirico also ironically conveyed the distance between contemporary civilization and the legacies of antiquity and the Renaissance (Daehner 2011, pp. 65–71). The artist depicted the weight of the past diminished to a mere prop, treated instrumentally by the contemporary individual preoccupied with the pursuit of novelty and technological progress. In his metaphysical paintings, he placed statues of ancient gods and historical heroes in the empty squares of the provincial towns of Torino, Firenze, and Ferrara. Illuminated by the afternoon sun, these monuments cast disproportionately long shadows, creating an unsettling and disquieting atmosphere. De Chirico perceived them as hollow forms lacking any mythical significance, serving as surrogate objects of worship without real equivalence. He believed that contemporary civilization had lost touch with the essence of the archetype (Belting 2003, pp. 24–25).

To extend the inter-textual perspective, I will recall another reference point established earlier for Krzywobłocki's imagery, namely the photography of Florence Henri. In the mature phase of her work, Henri was primarily fascinated by ancient architecture and sculpture. While Krzywobłocki, like Henri, produced photomontages that re-imagined antique architecture through the effects of close-cropping and rearranging, the walls, stairs, and cornices in his compositions have not been strained by time, whereas in Henri's photographs, the ravages of time have left their destructive mark. I presume that this disparity in how Krzywobłocki and Henri interpreted traces of the past represents, in his case, a psychological inversion concerning the post-war landscape of ruins in Polish cities.

On the other hand, the recurring motif of drapery, incorporated in various variants into Krzywobłocki's photomontages, brings to mind the softly pleated fabrics integrated into the montages of František Vobecký, an aforementioned exponent of Czech surrealism. Going back to the inter-textual relations with the Czech surrealist movement, in Krzywobłocki's photomontages from 1955, one can discern a correlation with Teige's collages from the 1930s when the artist abandoned the rationality of creative thinking in favor of the free play of imagination and deep introspection (Šmejkal 1990, pp. 65–83). The dreamlike visions of Teige, in which architectural elements or fragments of landscapes are superimposed by or juxtaposed with female nudes, hands, and fragmented limbs, find their counterpart in the densely saturated with visual motifs photomontages of Krzywobłocki.

In the series created by the artist in 1955, consisting of five pieces, architectural and sculptural motifs are interwoven into a compact fabric crafted from stiffened lace or occupy a discontinuous space dominated by sharply cut patterns adorning crystal vessels (*Lace Impressions*, 1955. Figure 17). As a result, strong contrasts of (semi)translucent and matte, geometric and rounded forms, and hard and latticed matter emerge. In these works, the arabesque of lines and the decorativeness of shapes prevail over the analysis of their intrinsic 'archetypal load of tension', thereby blurring the surrealist dimension of representation. To further contextualize Krzywobłocki's oeuvre, it is noteworthy that, unlike Teige, he never exhibited the same level of radicalism in dismantling and hybridizing the female body, even though his works frequently featured the motif of the alienated human hand.

Krzywobłocki returned to creating collages toward the end of his life. In the years 1970–1977, a series of 15 collages emerged, characterized by the multiplicity and diversity of the used motifs. The mutual interweaving of biomorphic and abstract shapes leads to the loss of their distinctiveness in favor of the play of volumes, spots, and lines. Textural and tonal nuances intensify the 'painterly' dimension of these enigmatic images, which is a hallmark of Krzywobłocki's artworks, as I have already indicated. The leitmotif once again becomes the hand—foregrounded or multiplied—disappearing in the thicket of organic tissues of unknown etiology, subdued by the unrestrained vitalism of nature. Also, the motif of flowing hair, known from the artist's early period, reappears, obliterating the distinction between what is representational and what is abstract.

With varied masses of biomorphic motifs, the artist associated planar elements—geometric arrangements of lines and silhouettes of dense bundles or rows of leafless trees, expressing the continuous variability of the world and existence (*Panta rhei*, 1970. Figure 18). In turn, in

Vibrations (1970. Figure 19), the gesture of the exposed hand focalizes abstract compositional elements shaped in the likeness of beams and strings, evoking the titular vibrations. In photomontages such as *Expectation* (1970), one can discern allusions to the human silhouette seemingly absorbed by the forces of nature. In *Stone Storm* (1970), whirls of petrified waves intruded into the architectural space, engulfing a hand clenched on stone support.



Figure 17. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Lace Impressions*, 1955, photomontage, 36.2 × 27.7 cm, National Museum in Wrocław.



Figure 18. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Panta Rei*, 1970, photomontage, 60 × 48 cm, National Museum in Wrocław.

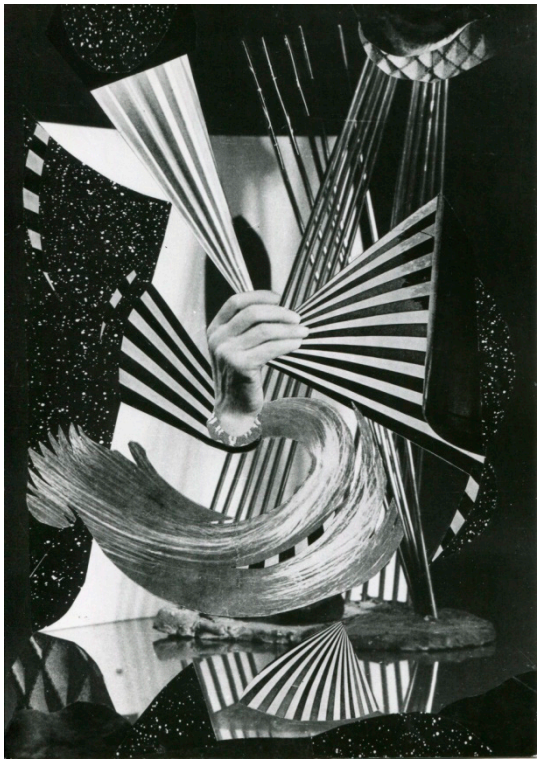


Figure 19. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Vibrations*, 1970, photomontage, 39 × 28 cm, National Museum in Wrocław.

The most allusive form took on the motif of Pegasus (*Pegasus*, 1973. Figure 20), whose flight is attested only by the trajectories of arched lines defining two abstract shapes culminating in synthesized wings. The metaphorical dimension of Krzywobłocki's late collages is signaled by the titles given to them by the artist, but the exploration of the effect of the mutual attraction of forms and the inherent 'load of tension' within them slightly faded in favor of a spectacular formal play that occurs within a pure abstract space evoked by a neutral white plane. Thus, the artist brought inspirations derived from surrealism and constructivism to a level where they partially lost their programmatic background in order to blend into a genuine artistic vision based on the aesthetic assumptions of avant-garde experimentation. I contend that Krzywobłocki's imagination came full circle in the 1970s, revisiting and transposing the artistic solutions he employed in the early 1930s.

Moreover, the analogies between Krzywobłocki's work and Schulz's poetic prose remain in force. As a tireless explorer of the primordial myth and fragments of archetypes scattered across cultural strata, Schulz amalgamated seemingly heterogeneous elements derived from diverse and sometimes conflicting sources into a cohesive artistic vision. While forging his distinctive personal mythology from 'broken pieces of sculptures and ruined statues of gods', he delved into various aspects of cultural heritage, as discussed earlier. Drawing inspiration from both ancient mythologies and more contemporaneous narratives, he viewed the latter as a 'transformed and mutilated' rendition of primeval beliefs (Schulz 1989, p. 366).[33]

Both Schulz and de Chirico evoked a space of memory that remained wholly unfathomed, unbounded, illogical, and filled with surprising associations and poetic tensions in their imagery (Kossowska 2017, pp. 475–96). In de Chirico's case, this effect was achieved through views immersed in the aura of autumn afternoons, where motionless squares, overwhelming in their enormity, dwarfed the miniature silhouettes of the philosopher-poet and prophet, lost in the vastness of mystery. Schulz multiplied references (often parodic) to canonical works of European art, the literature, and philosophy, wielding a syncretistic memory that absorbed the present while providing a fundamental impulse to create an idiosyncratic supernatural

reality into which real places, characters, and objects are embedded. The dreamlike sequences of images he developed in his stories resonated with the experiences of surrealists seeking hidden contents within individual and collective unconsciousness.

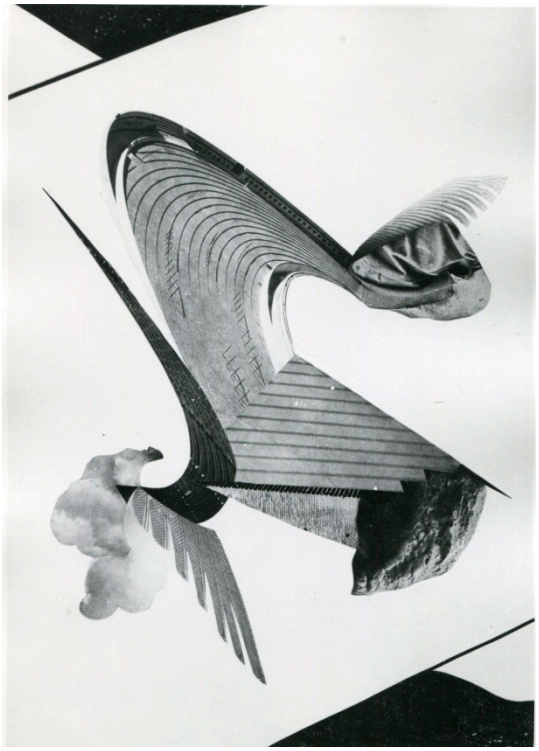


Figure 20. Aleksander Krzywobłocki. *Pegasus*, 1973, photomontage, 70 × 51 cm, National Museum in Wrocław.

8. Conclusions: The Quest for the 'Archetypal Load of Tension'

Krzywobłocki and Sielska shared a yearning for the unattainable with Schulz and de Chirico (de Chirico 1985, pp. 83–88)—a desire to grasp the 'essentiality' (Schulz 1936b, p. 4) of the universe and achieve a perfect unity encapsulated in a prehistoric myth. However, over the centuries, this myth lost its homogeneity, and its semantic congruity disintegrated into thousands of derivative, fragmentary, or impaired images and narratives.

I therefore argue that the endeavor to engage with archetypal content, undertaken by both Lviv artists, was manifested in a manner distinct from that of surrealists who sought to rejuvenate art and life through the 'primitive', by rejecting cultural Eurocentrism and delving into archaic non-European civilizations, as well as navigating mentally destabilized spheres. On the contrary, Krzywobłocki and Sielska crafted idioms of surrealism deeply rooted in the European culture of bygone centuries. They employed metonymic signs of this cultural heritage by instrumentally treating the artworks of the old masters. Krzywobłocki primarily utilized this approach to diagnose the condition of contemporary civilization in his post-war works, while Sielska focused on exploring the tensions and conflicts within the female psyche. The libidinal undertones of Sielska's photocollages can be interpreted as the liberation of desire—sexual satisfaction, artistic fulfillment, and the social emancipation of women in the local conservative environment. However, this liberation unfolds differently than Breton advocated. On the other hand, in his interwar photomontages, Krzywobłocki aimed to reveal the archetypal core of natural phenomena, objects, and fragmented human beings. It is a core that recognizes and attracts 'related' phenomena and objects, resonating in the artist's psyche and creating oneiric visions subject to constant transmutation.

Debora Vogel, who accurately delineated the constructivist–surrealist lineage of Krzywobłocki's photomontages, as discussed earlier, also astutely identified a context distinct from 'museum art' for Sielska's combinatory practice of cutting and pasting pre-existing

images and ordinary objects. She situated Sielska's work within a modernist framework, pointing to the cubist genealogy of collage. The writer remarked, 'The selection of diverse materials and paper textures, along with the introduction of the materiality of fabric, expresses a contemporary tendency toward the apotheosis of material, the consistency of materials. Simultaneously, such a concept recalls Cubist paintings and sculptures composed of pieces of various materials incorporated into pictorial elements' (Vogel 1934, p. 4).

I undoubtedly endorse Vogel's observation concerning both Sielska's photocollages and Krzywobłocki's staged photographs and photomontages, viewing them as symptoms of negotiation between convention and innovation, between the local and transnational, residing in the borderland between the presumptions of Breton's surrealism, Jungian exploration of archetypes in the collective unconsciousness, the cubist–constructivist montage paradigm, and the pastiche of works by the old masters.

In conclusion, I assert that the imaginings of both Lviv artists, as discussed above, can appropriately be classified, following the insights of Partha Mitter (Mitter 2008), as 'alternative surrealism', a hybrid expression that emerged on the peripheries of European artistic centers. It developed in cultural conditions distinct from those in Paris, Prague, and Bauhaus but was rooted in the shared desire for freedom among the co-creators of this policentric and transcultural movement.

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Notes

1 Comprehensive exemplifications of the broad spectrum of research on surrealism are provided by publications such as Rosemont and Kelly (2009), as well as the essential reference anthology edited by Ades et al. (2016).

2 Within the theory of 'horizontal art history', Piotr Piotrowski conceptualized the West as a region of historical importance equal to that of many other parts of the world, but the most expansive one. He aimed at deprioritizing trendsetting Western art centers and at erasing the center-periphery dichotomy, ipso facto abolishing the hierarchical approach to cultures that depreciate the margins, thus giving primacy to the pluralism of cultural narratives (Piotrowski 2008; 2009a, pp. 5–14; 2009b, pp. 49–58).

3 From statistical data from 1921, it emerges that 51% of the population of Lviv were Catholics, 35% were residents of the Jewish faith, and 12.4% were Greek Catholics. According to the census of 1931, 63.5% of the population used the Polish language, 24.1% used Yiddish and Hebrew, and 11.3% used Ukrainian or Russian (Bonusiak 2000).

4 The literature pertaining to interwar Lviv, especially memoirs and fiction, includes a wide range of bibliography (e.g., Tyrowicz 1991; Kallenbergh 1991; Szolginia 1992–1997; Jakubowska 1998; Biedrzycka 2012; Kotyńska 2015; Mick 2015; Kato 2017).

5 Deborah Vogel (1900–1942) was a Jewish philosopher, novelist, poet, and art and literary critic active in Lviv. She published works in both Yiddish and Polish languages. Vogel not only demonstrated a particular interest in new modes of visual expression within the milieu of the Lviv avant-garde but also drew inspiration from and actively contributed to them in her poetic prose and review activities. In her statements, she crafted an insightful meta-commentary on the yet unrecognized cultural phenomenon of 'artes' at the beginning of the 1930s (Vogel 1928, 1931a, 1931b, 1932, 1934, 1937; see also Bojarov et al. 2017).

6 A unique position in terms of critical reviews and the scholarly literature on 'artes' is held by Marek Włodarski/Henryk Streng, who has attracted and continues to attract the most attention from researchers studying his interwar achievements and/or post-war activities until 1960. Notably, Piotr Słodkowski stands out in this compilation with an insightful and detailed analysis of the artist's creative work and political engagement, published in his book (Słodkowski 2019), along with preceding articles leading up to the monograph (Słodkowski 2013, 2015, 2017).

7 The group included three founding members, Jerzy Janisch, Mieczysław Wysocki, and Aleksander Krzywobłocki, as well as Otto Hahn, Ludwik Lille, Aleksander Riemer, Margit Reich-Sielska, Roman Sielski, Ludwik Tyrowicz, Marek Włodarski (Henryk Streng), and Tadeusz Wojciechowski.

8 It is worth noting, however, that the interactions of 'artes' members with the Parisian surrealist milieu were not as direct as, for example, the Czech exponents of the movement, who personally met Breton in Paris and hosted him, along with Paul Eluard, in Prague during lectures delivered in the Czech capital by the founders of the movement (1935) (Šmejkal 1990, p. 65; Sayer 2002, p. 90).

[9] From a formal perspective, the artistic production of the 'artes' proponents was characterized by an aversion to illusionism, a tendency toward painterly effects, the brutalization of impasto textures, and the primitive simplification of forms resembling naïve art.

[10] Notably, in 1933, a split occurred within the group due to the final crystallization of ideological and artistic priorities among some members. They favored explicitly engaged art, manifested in a narrative-figurative formula of left-leaning realism, commonly known as 'new realism' or 'factorealism' (Hahn 1935). The group then modified its name to 'neoartes' (Łukaszewicz 1975, pp. 57–58). In the imagery of the left-wing faction, themes of revolution and antimilitarism began to dominate. Similarly, though not identical to the Parisian milieu that faced controversies between Breton and Aragon, as well as Bataille, regarding the interpretation of Marxism (Ades and Baker 2006), the degree of politicization in the art of individual artists varied. In the *Artes Leaflet* (1931), presenting the ideological and aesthetic beliefs of individual members of the group, Krzywobłocki did express his pro-social stance, but his interest in the working-class environment did not find reflection in his visual art. The ideological polarization within the group resulted in Sielska taking a position diametrically opposed to left-wing ideology. The artist focused on surreal–intimist motifs and landscape painting, approaching decorative colorism.

[11] Bruno Schulz (1892–1942) was an outstanding Polish writer, literary critic, painter, draftsman, and printmaker of Jewish descent. Born and residing in the industrial city of Drohobych (present Ukraine), he maintained close ties with Deborah Vogel, exchanging letters on artistic and everyday matters.

[12] The largest collection of artworks by Krzywobłocki is held in the Museum of Art in Łódź. However, among the interwar works, only the *Photomontage* from 1932 is an original piece. The rest of the artist's output from the 1930s was destroyed during WWII. The remaining works are replicas, lacking precise dating. Krzywobłocki's post-war photomontages and collages are part of the collection at the National Museum in Wrocław.

[13] Apart from many other international platforms connecting avant-garde milieus and interchanging source texts and visual materials, Man Ray's photography was showcased in 1931, in Krakow, during the presentation *I wystawa fotografii modernistycznej* (First Exhibition of Modernist Photography); among others, it was attended by Man Ray and László Moholy-Nagy (Lechowicz 2010, pp. 452–79).

[14] I will draw attention to certain analogies between Krzywobłocki's photoperformances and the photographic practice of František Vobecký, one of the representatives of the Czech surrealist movement, at this point (Czartoryska 2005, p. 265). Notably, the use of specially crafted paper objects in Krzywobłocki's *mise-en-scène* photographs, as exemplified in the *Portrait of Mrs. Adler*, was a procedure equivalent to the approach of Vobecký, who crafted tabletop assemblages featuring a combination of seemingly harmless and potentially menacing objects specifically intended for photographic purposes (Witkovsky 2007, p. 131).

[15] The sadomasochistic ritual of idolaters—the key motive in *The Booke*—returned in a series of drawings that Schulz executed in the 1930s. Thus, the archetype of a feminine ideal known from the paintings of the old masters was revived in many variants, paraphrased, and semantically ambivalent.

[16] For example, in 1924, Janisch and Włodarski traveled to Vienna to see the presentation of international contemporary art, Internationale Kunstausstellung, at the Secession exhibition hall (Łukaszewicz 1975, pp. 36–37).

[17] In his memoir written in 1967–1970, Krzywobłocki emphasized that 'artes' continued, in several aspects, the principles of Polish constructivism. The connections between the members of the group and the Łódź constructivist milieu were noteworthy, as confirmed by the 'artes' exhibition held in Łódź in 1932 (Łukaszewicz 1975, p. 52). The interest of Lviv residents in Łódź constructivism is also evidenced by Deborah Vogel's text titled 'Composition of Space' (Vogel 1933), dedicated to the theoretical interpretation of constructivism proclaimed by Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro. On the socio-political front, Krzywobłocki expressed progressive social convictions. However, he never committed himself as strongly to the radical restructuring of society and art as Teige did, nor did he prioritize collective activities to the extent that Teige did.

[18] Krzywobłocki was not only an architect by education and practice but was also engaged in the documentation of historical architecture while working at the Lviv Conservation Office. His avant-garde thinking in architectural design, therefore, intertwined with direct interaction with the substance of past architectural epochs. This dynamic connection could have influenced the development of his creative vision, where contemporary elements coexisted with traces of the past.

[19] Teige's essay 'K teorii konstruktivismu' (Toward the Theory of Constructivism), published in 1928 in the journal of the Architect's Club 'Stavby', was primarily devoted to architectural issues (Stefański 2008, p. 102). As a member of the editorial board of 'Stavby' from 1923 to 1931, Teige significantly contributed to the international reputation of the magazine as a constructivist publication (Šmejkal 1989, p. 16).

[20] The textual–visual strategy of Devetsil's proponents related to the research conducted within the Prague Linguistic Circle led by Roman Jakobson (Mansbach 1999, pp. 64, 73).

[21] In 1934, Teige joined the Surrealist Group in Prague (Šmejkal 1990, pp. 67–68).

[22] For a discussion on Breton's concept of 'real photographic thought', see Rosalind Krauss (1986, p. 103).

[23] Moholy Nagy's texts concerning photography and film were published in Polish avant-garde journals such as *Praesens* in 1926 and 1930 and *Film Artystyczny* (Artistic Film) edited by Stefan Themerson in 1937.

[24] In 1934, Krzywobłocki, together with Janisch, illustrated with photomontages the volume of collected stories by Alina Lan entitled *Kometa Halleya* (Halley's Comet).

[25] Other members of the 'artes' group also emphasized the affective impact of the image, without exhibiting psychoanalytic ambitions to explore content repressed into the unconscious. Janisch declared, "The image [. . .] is a tool for communicating emotions; an image is not painted or made but lived through." (Janisch and Streng 1931).

[26] Margit Reich was born in 1900 to a Jewish–Ukrainian family, the daughter of Izaak and Zajra Reich, in Kolomyia, a small town that was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time. After studying art at the Free Academy of Fine Arts in Lviv (1919–1920) and the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków (1920–1921), as well as in Vienna (1921–1922), she continued her artistic education at the Parisian Académie Moderne under Fernand Léger (1925–1926), as mentioned earlier.

[27] The largest collection of Sielska's works is housed at the National Museum in Wrocław. However, the majority of her interwar works were destroyed in Lviv during the Second World War.

[28] The essence of humanity's imitation of God's creative act was similarly captured by André Breton, who discussed it in the introduction to the catalogue for Giorgio de Chirico's 'metaphysical' paintings exhibited at the Paul Guillaume gallery in Paris in 1922.

[29] Stanisław Czekalski identified this figure differently, as a motif borrowed from Pierre-August Renoir's painting (Czekalski 2000, p. 317).

[30] Karolina Koczynska asserts that the tree trunk incorporated into the background of the composition is a 'direct quote from a reproduction of Josef Šíma's *Double Paysage* (1927)' (Koczynska 2022). While the motif bears a strong resemblance to the tree on the right-hand side of Šíma's painting, it is not an exact citation.

[31] What is also surprising in Koczynska's article is that, while analyzing the technical aspects of Sielska's work, the author describes the montage method as photomontage, whereas Sielska actually created photocollages.

[32] In Wrocław, the artist held the position of conservator of monuments from 1946 onward.

[33] While the name of Carl Gustav Jung is not mentioned in Schulz's writings, some researchers link Schulz's exploration of humanity's cultural heritage with Jung's analytical psychology. They draw connections to the Swiss psychologist's belief in the fundamental role that an individual's relationship to the collective legacy of humanity, personified in the unconscious realm of archetypes, plays in shaping the psyche (Olchanowski 2001).

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