

Imagining the Magical Freedom in Poland of the Communist Era: How Ibero-American Literature Influenced the Neo-avant-garde Artists

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——— Analogies can be drawn between the contents of writings by Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges and Poland's neo-avant-garde art of the 1960s and 70s, produced in the context of the oppressive reality of a Communist state: the literary category of 'magical realism' finds its counterpart in the actuality of an authoritarian regime, which is equally grotesque. The works by Maria Stangret-Kantor, Janusz Kaczorowski, Barbara Kozłowska, Ewa Partum, Zdzisław Sosnowski, Wojciech Bruszewski, or Natalia Lach-Lachowicz and the theoretical views expressed by Andrzej Lachowicz and Andrzej Kostołowski, which resulted from working with language as an artistic means, can be interpreted as expressions of one's striving for imagined freedom – objections to the manipulation of meanings in the public sphere.

Keywords: magical realism, Polish neo-avant-garde, Julio Cortázar, Jorge Luis Borges, 1970s art.

Definition of the Problem. Magical Realism and the Neo-avant-garde in Eastern Europe

In 1971, Wydawnictwo Literackie (Literary Publishing House), based in Kraków, began publishing translations of contemporary works by Ibero-American writers. Arousing an enormous interest, the books became something of a cult among young intellectuals¹: to carry a copy bearing one of the characteristic Aztec pictographs and to cite the authors in conversations, arguing over why some of them should be credited as more accomplished than the others, were the done things. Among the idols, the star shining brightest was that of Julio Cortázar. Poland's audiences greeted the Argentinian as if he had been one of the Rolling Stones. During the author's evening in May 1975, Warsaw's student club 'Kwant' was packed; people tried to enter using doors as well as windows, and the Citizens' Militia was eventually sent in to maintain order. Incidents like that and entire editions selling like hot cakes gave grounds for myths about the quality of that literature.

The case of the Polish boom, however, was not an isolated one², reflecting worldwide trends and correlating with an actual crop of literary talents who shared a fondness for courageous, experimental forms – thus offering a fresh, original reading experience – and pursued such aims in the contexts of local, folk fascinations. In that literature, themes of irrationality and credence given to phenomena beyond reason came to the fore on an equal footing with the great tradition of European thought. The works praised highest included those classified as “magical realism”, and with conviction close to certainty I suppose that what made the Poles' interest in magical-realist literature unique were the plots' “kindredness” to the rather bizarre living under Communist rule: life marred by the regime, on the one hand, and the characters' embroilment in oppressive structures of literary narration, on the other, were likely to be seen as cut from the same cloth.

Giving a clear definition of magical realism seems problematic today: in circulation since nearly a century ago, the term has become blurred and is not quite unambiguous anymore. The concept, although discussed

1 Such were the cases of Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, Ernesto Sábato, Juan Rulfo, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Eduardo Gudiño Kieffer, and many others.

2 Małgorzata Gaszyńska-Magiera, *Recepcja przekładów literatury iberoamerykańskiej w Polsce w latach 1945–2005 z perspektywy komunikacji międzykulturowej* (Reception of translations of Ibero-American literature in Poland in 1945–2005, as seen from the perspective of intercultural communication), Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2011.

widely among literary scholars, emerged in relation to painting: Franz Roh first used the designation “magical realism” for describing a specific tendency he had observed in the arts around 1920³. As time passed, the category became a keyword in literature – and in 1970s Poland it functioned as a distinctive genre, supposedly represented by a significant proportion of the Latin American output⁴. Magical realism is hence considered equivalent to a certain mode of writing, one where narration makes the real and the fantastic worlds complement each other and constitute a complete reality together. In its most captivating expressions, the magical-realist convention manifests a need for an unconventional perspective and sharply objects to any deeply rooted intellectual doctrines. Some explain the term’s career as driven by the clash of identities stemming from the European canon of Western philosophy and from Pre-Columbian myths and beliefs⁵. The locality and the related peculiarities of regions developing away from the centres are common traits of Latin America’s and Eastern Europe’s artistic cultures – that of Poland included – where the longing for the civil standards of the West has coincided for centuries with the reluctance to adopt them on the part of Catholic and folk people.

In the light of the above, the use of the term ‘magical realism’ for describing certain aspects of neo-avant-garde art requires clarification. I myself understand this concept as a convention that combines a clear comprehensible message with fantastical content – and I find analogies for those in Poland’s artistic output of the 1960s and 70s. Speaking of literature, I only consider here the influence of writings by Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges – of notable texts whose popularity among the Polish readers has been nothing short of remarkable. Playing with norms and common practices, their highly original stories exposed the paradoxes and the shortcomings of any description of such a reality where too little can be taken for granted, which is a characteristic akin to those deducible from interpretations of experimental works of neo-avant-garde art. Further below I highlight the devices employed by writers and artists to infuse reality with inappropriate or uncanny attributes that undermine rational perception of

³ Franz Roh, *Nach-expressionismus: magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei*, Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1925.

⁴ Tomasz Pindel, *Realizm magiczny. Przewodnik (praktyczny)* (Magical Realism. A (Practical) Guide), Kraków: Universitas, 2014, pp. 13–17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

the world and produce messages intended to subvert both the artistic traditions and the social and political actualities.

With the advancement of research on art in the last few years, a stable set of arguments allows to perform comparative studies of the output of post-war artists from Latin America and Eastern Europe. The propositions cited by such scholars as Piotr Piotrowski and Klara Kemp-Welch as well as the curators Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler when justifying similar deliberations cover, among other things, political convergence: both regions suffered from authoritarian regimes, under military and Communist dictatorships. Another point concerns artistic geography and the hierarchy derived from it: both regions operated in the margins of the cultural centres of the West, which were determined by the North American and the Western European circles respectively – but they did operate within their orbits too. Consequently, the art of both regions has usually been compared to that of the predominant movements rather than to each other. Still, the experimental art produced in the 60s and 70s in Latin America and in Eastern Europe proved to be original. Resulting from a need to reject the traditionally vertical, centre/margin hierarchies, a horizontal view on the history of art is now called for, democratic in that it shall emancipate the peripheral, domestic contexts⁶ – and examining the past of Eastern Europe in order to describe what happened here in the arts may be an essential manifestation of such strategies.

This article is an attempt to draw analogies between selected works of Ibero-American literature and of Poland's visual arts of the 1960s and 70s, which – in the context of the Polish People's Republic's actuality – echoed certain neo-avant-garde idioms. By looking at Julio Cortázar's and Jorge Luis Borges's magical-realist narratives and at artistic experiments and events penetrating the political and social life I intend to show how the imaginations of South American literature and of Polish art of the period were alike.

⁶ Klara Kemp-Welch, Cristina Freire, "Artists' Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe", in: *Art Margins*, June–October 2012, pp. 3–13; Piotr Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie sztuki Europy Wschodniej* (A Global Approach to Eastern Europe's Art), Poznań: Rebis, 2016; *Subversive Praktiken: Kunst unter Bedingungen politischer Repression 60er-80er / Südamerika / Europa* (*Subversive Practices: Art Under Conditions of Political Repression: 60s–80s, South America & Europe*), eds. Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler, Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2010.

The definite aim of this article, however – to examine the strategies exercised by the influential Ibero-American writers and by Poland’s neo-avant-garde artists, looking for similarities, for concurrence or convergence – is a matter not yet explored or tested; after all, drawing analogies between literature and the artistic neo-avant-garde is, if anything, cumbersome. Luis Camnitzer, for instance, the author of a monograph on South American Conceptualism, stated that there is no way one could precisely trace the influence of Borges on the visual arts. Perhaps incontrovertibly, too, it was the medium of literature that allowed Latin America to voice its concerns and conceptions best – and most of that region’s breakthroughs in the arts were closely related to its literary achievements⁷. Therefore, the pursuits undertaken by Latin American artists serve further below as points of reference for the artistic practices pursued in Poland.

Similarities between this part of the world and Latin America include rather few concerning the attitudes of novelists and poets only. The prominent ones representing the Polish New Wave (Nowa Fala), such as Adam Zagajewski, Julian Kornhauser, and Stanisław Barańczak, have neither observed any likeness in this respect nor admitted experiencing any direct impact – on the contrary, in their aesthetic manifesto for a new literature, whose title introduced the notion of an “un-represented world”, Kornhauser and Zagajewski insisted on depicting reality thoroughly and objectively⁸. What turned out to prevail, nevertheless, in the post-conceptual art circles was the popularity of books from the South American series. It should also be noted here that Poland’s literary scholarly discourse was very quick to generate synthetical studies, monographs, and academic commentaries⁹. Taking that into account, I decided to investigate how the strategies known from writings came to be absorbed – in artistic pursuits – by Maria Stangret-Kantor, Janusz Kaczorowski, Barbara Kozłowska, Ewa Partum, Zdzisław Sosnowski, Wojciech Bruszewski, or Natalia Lach-Lachowicz, as well as by Andrzej Lachowicz and Andrzej Kostołowski – in their written reflection. Bracketed with the narrations of literature, the neo-avant-garde

⁷ Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007, pp. 122–124.

⁸ Julian Kornhauser; Adam Zagajewski, *Świat nie przedstawiony* (The Un-Represented World), Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974.

⁹ See, for example, the issue of Poland’s leading world literature magazine devoted to Ibero-American prose: *Proza iberoamerykańska*, “Literatura na Świecie”, No. 9, 1983.

art is, to me, a sign of intellectual freedom in the shadow of dictatorship. But when setting out to reconstruct this particular connection between texts and visual pieces, one must bear in mind that this has been a one-way relationship: while the writings of Cortázar and Borges contributed to the global literary discourse, the works by the artists from Poland only remain significant locally, not having made it to the universal artistic canon; and besides, the cultural products of these two parts of the world have ultimately been determined by non-identical economic and political systems, by dissimilar arrays of dependencies, and by disparate societal hierarchies.

Fantastical Depictions of Reality

In my view, an analogy can be drawn between that literary narration and the reality of social life determined by real socialism – not in terms of their aesthetic constituents, however, but in those of structural rules, and of the operation of the structures so enforced. Existence overshadowed by the Communist regime, whose system envisaged collectivising the citizens' functions in the society and at the same time failed devastatingly in most areas where attempts to do so were being made, involved a constant affliction of unfulfilled wishes and an omnipresent absurdity. With visions of the future founded upon an orthodox faith in principles whose inadequacy made itself felt on a regular basis, the system's failures, instead of inspiring to review the operative beliefs, only prompted incessant hunts for culprits – for those who committed the sin of not believing deeply enough. The workings of the system outlined in the short story *On Exactitude in Science* by Jorge Luis Borges are similar, where the author describes a zest for something irrational which is dictated by nothing else other than thoroughness and goodwill. The interest that the empire's forefathers had taken in cartography, so elevated to the status of ideology in Borges's account, has not come there to be shared by the descendants, causing the ancestor's achievements to fall into neglect. The grounds for this abandonment are not revealed to the reader; all we know is that with subsequent generations, the old piety vanished and the orthodoxy ceased – the rules once abided by have been misapplied, as is symbolised pitifully by numerous artifacts buried in the

deserts, testifying only to an ancient, now defunct magnificence¹⁰. Under real socialism, as in Borges's imagined territory, the doctrine was there to stay: even if the passion for it continued somewhat sinuously, giving it up completely was inconceivable – and the doctrinaires' overinvolvement, with its uncanny outcomes, instilled fiction into people's circadian reality. That said, reading strikingly inventive literature, I suppose, was sort of an antidote to the gloomy and grotesque everyday life.

Similarly, in his best-known texts Julio Cortázar erected multifaceted realities where time and space fall outside factual determinants, combining the empirically evidenced mundanity with fantastical, sometimes nonsensical and absurd life. The protagonist of one of his short stories keeps moving easily, back and forth, between the real and the realm of dreams; the illusions eventually become more realistic than reality itself, and the subject of the modern civilisation ends up – as the title goes – sacrificed on an Aztec altar many centuries back, “[in] the night face up”¹¹. All in all, even the temporal and the spatial, perceived intuitively, came to be undermined by the compelling literary descriptions that escaped the logic of the real life as well as by the brilliant rhetorical experiments that made one barely able to tell truth from fiction. Such devices effectively caused dismay and wavering on the part of the reader. The clever passages seemed like ready-made metaphors for the tangled reality of Poland, a country governed by the so-called “people's democracy”, where civil liberties, freedom of speech, and human rights were not respected exemplarily; where fictions were part and parcel of the quotidian, and truth intertwined with propaganda.

Considering the above, it should come as no surprise that one term used frequently for describing the conditions of life in Poland in the 1945–1989 period is “unreality” (*nierzeczywistość*)¹², a word more than useful when attempting to interpret the products of visual culture developed in

¹⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, *On Exactitude in Science*, in: Idem, *A Universal History of Infamy*, transl. Norman Thomas di Giovanni, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975, p. 131.

¹¹ Julio Cortázar, *Blow-Up and Other Stories*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1985; the Polish edition: Julio Cortázar, *W nocy twarzą ku niebu* (The Night Face Up), in: Idem, *Opowiadania zebrane* (Collected Stories), Vol. 1, transl. Zofia Chądzyńska, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977, pp. 7–15.

¹² Cf. e.g. Tomasz Gryglewicz, “Rzeczywistość i nierzeczywistość w twórczości grupy ‘Wprost’” (Reality and unreality in the output of the ‘Wprost’ collective), in: *Świat przedstawiony? O grupie “Wprost”* (The World Represented? On the ‘Wprost’ Collective), ed. Małgorzata Kitowska-Lysiak, Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego Jana Pawła II, 2006, pp. 77–87.

suppressive contexts. The image of that time emerging from a researcher's inquiry is incoherent, skewed by varied representations; it is not a logical sequence but a series of excerpts. Depictions of the Communist era created by artists – by film-makers in particular, above all by Andrzej Wajda – and propagated by the mass media, have become inherent parts of the processes of inducing notions and conceptions (e.g. of the Polish soldier's valour), beliefs (about the rightness of his fight), and sentiments (through relics, for instance)¹³. Objecting to a situation so defined, the instigators of a most compelling movement in Poland's literature called for images of a hitherto "un-represented world"¹⁴. The self-referential neo-avant-garde art, situated at the opposite pole of cultural circulation, eagerly drew on the grammar of the mundane, on archetypes and motifs that, reproduced and repeated, would gain new significance in use – these were manifestations of "unreality" that nevertheless existed physically. Some of this output was critical, some irreverent or confessional; its form often hardly tallied with the content, which revealed the society's aspirations for – and dreams of – freedom¹⁵.

Subversive Art and Uncanny Representations of Reality

The reality of the Polish People's Republic (PRL, Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa) was permeated by the unpoetical language of propaganda, which symbolically transformed the government's leading officials into icons carried around on rallies¹⁶ – a sign of the revolution's ideals being rejected in favour of creating an air of terror. Tensions only grew because of the inevitability of politics in any dimension of civilian life¹⁷. In artistic formulae, however, dictions associated with the public sphere carried altered

13 Ewa Mikina, "PRL-u nie było? (The PRL didn't exist?)" in: *Sztuka w okresie PRL-u: metody i przedmiot badań; materiały z seminarium naukowego zorganizowanego przez Instytut Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Zakład Historii Sztuki Nowoczesnej w dniach 11–12 grudnia 1997 roku* (Art in the period of the Polish People's Republic: methods and research subject; materials from a seminar organised by the Institute of Art History of the Jagiellonian University, the Department of Modern Art History, on December 11th–12th, 1997), Kraków: Instytut Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1999, pp. 127–130.

14 Julian Kornhauser, Adam Zagajewski, *op. cit.*

15 Hal Foster, "Subversive Signs", in: *Recoding: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1986; Łukasz Ronduda, *Strategie subwersywne w sztukach plastycznych* (Subversive Strategies in the Plastic Arts), Kraków: Rabid, 2006.

16 Peter Burke, *The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, London: Reaktion Books, 2001.

17 Andrzej Turowski, "Polska idea (The Polish ideosis)", in: *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku. Materiały sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki* (Polish art after 1945; materials from a session of the Art Historians' Association), Warszawa: PWN, 1987, p. 31.

messages, so becoming means for subversive strategies devised to expose the automatism – or even autism – of everyday existence; the artists resolved to seek out models for their own subversive identities.

But right after 1968, life in PRL was full of dread: with suspicion in the air, concealment and sidestepping were common practices. Spending the late summer of that year in Poland, Umberto Eco reported for the Italian press the events on the country's streets as well as the stands taken by the Polish intellectuals. Altering the facts and identities in order not to expose his interlocutors to state repression but possibly keep his friends behind the Iron Curtain safe, he deliberately published an article filled with pieces of news that were not entirely true in terms of journalistic diligence¹⁸. Taking part in reality and commenting on it required the participants and the commentators alike to combine realism with fiction into credible renditions of the prevalent fear and absurdity. Artistic analogies communicating a similar atmosphere can be found in the experimental art of Latin America. One of the region's groups to have explored how reality is modelled by the mass media was Argentina's El Grupo de los Artes de los Medios Masivos. Guided intellectually by Oscar Masotta, an essayist and semiotician drawn to psychoanalysis, as part of *Total Participation* (1966) they got national newspapers to print accounts of a grand-scale happening that had actually never happened¹⁹.

In the summer and autumn of 1968, while the army of the Warsaw Pact suppressed Czechoslovakia's democratic transformation, cinemas in Poland screened Michelangelo Antonioni's classic *Blow-Up* (1966). Based on Cortázar's short story from 1959 (*Las babas del diablo*, literally signifying 'devil's drool'), the film itself is remembered as a look at the swinging London of 1966, just before the counterculture exploded. The literary text, however, – its criminal strand in particular – must have meant something different to the people living in socialist democracies, where the questions of truth and justice were not merely satisfying subjects of philosophical and ethical reflection through art but related rather directly to any adult's day-to-day existence.

¹⁸ Umberto Eco, *Mój 1968. Po drugiej stronie muru* (My 1968. On the Other Side of the Wall), transl. Jarosław Mikołajewski, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008.

¹⁹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London–New York: Verso, 2012, pp. 106–113.

“[F]ilaments of angel-spittle are also called devil-spit”²⁰, the author wrote. Examining certain photographs, the protagonist keeps zooming and making new prints only to discover a picture within a picture, concealing plans and further threads: the documentation of a crime. No photographic depiction can impartially do justice to how complex reality is. Also the photographs taken at that time in Prague reveal something peculiar – that is, protesters approaching war machine crews, whose members seemed equally unhappy about being there and then, in such awkward circumstances. Eco, too, mentions that when the army was heading for the Czech capital, the inhabitants of villages and towns nearby dared to turn the signposts on the way, in desperate attempts to mislead the tanks and make them stray²¹. Real life and filmed events shared the sense of grotesqueness and absurdity.

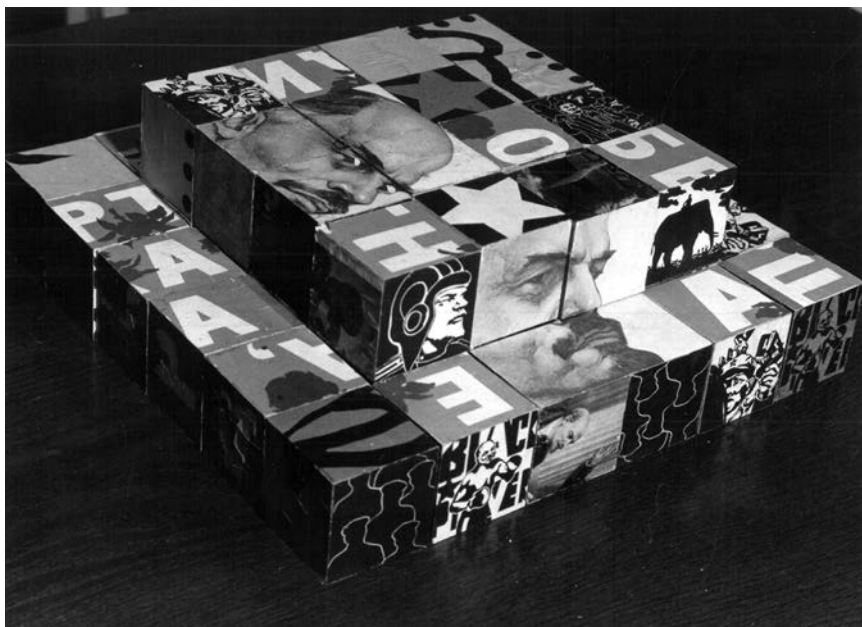
A decade later, the same short story served as the basis for a curatorial concept by Urszula Czartoryska, an eminent photography expert. The 1976 show during the 6th International Graphic Art Biennial in Kraków, featuring works by Douglas Davis, Janusz Ducki, Tadeusz Kantor, Tadeusz Pierzgalski, and Edward Wasilewski and titled *Sygnaty mijającej rzeczywistości* (The Signals of an Elapsing Reality) – for such were the function and the power she associated with photography²² – dealt with the extent to which photographs shape our memories. In any case, the experience of art and life may be one of intricately woven fiction whose authors have nearly perfect media at their disposal. That was the first ever exhibition at the Biennial to admit this new, contemporary medium, and documentation – so allowed, finally – of how the everyday existence changed was what dominated one of the region’s most important art festivals that year.

As far as images of reality in art after 1968 are concerned, the oeuvre of Janusz Kaczorowski (1947–1987) deserves particular attention. Active on the scene rather fleetingly due to his political and literary experiences – only at the turn of the 60s and 70s – he cofounded the 848 group, named after the year Marx and Engels issued *The Communist Manifesto*

20 Julio Cortázar, *Blow-Up*, transl. Paul Blackburn, in: *The Short Story and Photography, 1880’s–1990’s: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jane M. Rabb, Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 1998, p. 206.

21 Umberto Eco, *op. cit.*

22 Urszula Czartoryska, *Przygody plastyczne fotografii* (The Plastic Adventures of Photography), Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1965. The exhibition *Sygnaty mijającej rzeczywistości* was organised by the Institute of Art History of the Jagiellonian University.



1.
Janusz Kaczorowski, *Mausoleum*, linocut on cubes, 1972, photo by Ryszard Kornecki, lost work



2.
Vladimir Lenin as Ernesto
Che Guevara from Janusz
Kaczorowski, *Mausoleum*,
linocut, 1972, private
collection

(1848), whose members – that is, Poland’s radically oriented poets, referring to the revolution’s ethos – attempted to use the Communist party language of newspeak in a way showing how preposterous it was and unburying devalued yet noble socialist ideas. The concepts that Kaczorowski executed in his works of the arts were analogous. The one most significant – but also lost, and never found – *Mauzoleum* (Mausoleum), an installation dated 1972, took the form of a toy consisting of several dozen bricks [Figs. 1–2]. To the sides of the cube-shaped elements, unusual likenesses of Vladimir Lenin were glued, extending the leader’s iconography – such as meeting factory workers – to include many unexpected images: Lenin riding an elephant, Lenin as a boxer, Lenin as Superman, Lenin as Saint Christopher, etc. The piece was an irreverent critique of visual indoctrination. The designs incorporated in the structure of the toy also included an image of Lenin as Ernesto Guevara; the skilful double portrait was made up of Lenin’s profile, Che’s unkempt beard, and a beret bearing the symbol of a five-pointed star.

To the Communist idealists like Kaczorowski, the myth of the 1953–1959 Cuban Revolution and the story of a devoted guerrilla fighter and physician murdered by the right-wing dictatorship were inspirations for thought, providing new bursts of energy. At the time, while post-revolutionary Cuba became PRL’s sister state, the Polish People’s Republic itself was becoming a Communist dictatorship ruled by pragmatic politicians – by people growing less idealistic and more corrupt each year. In 1972, Fidel Castro – no less affected already by the pragmatism and the ideological corruption – visited Poland, and his coming was met with due pomp and circumstance. One meaningful memory survived from Kraków’s factory district Nowa Huta (The New Steel Mill, literally): on the administration building of the plant then called Vladimir Lenin Steelworks, an enormous banner was hung, portraying Che Guevara and based on Alberto Korda’s iconic photograph titled *Guerrillero Heroico* (1960). The view photographed by Stanisław Gawliński²³ is rather bizarre, as if someone had displayed an Andy Warhol design on a socialist-realist edifice in Eastern Europe – contemplated a few decades on, the visual message once sent out to welcome the dictator looks pretty much like a work of politically engaged art [Fig. 3].

²³ A photojournalist connected to the magazine *Głos – Tygodnik Nowohucki* (The Voice – Nowa Huta Weekly).



3.
Stanisław Gawliński, Nowa Huta, photography, 1972, courtesy of the author

Kaczorowski's interest in revolutionary attitudes manifested itself in writing as well. In the poem *Câmara* (1970)²⁴ he expressed his curiosity about Christian Marxism, a theory given little attention in Poland. Besides Hélder Câmara, the Brazilian bishop who advocated a poor Church for the poor, among the figures inspirational to Kaczorowski was that of Camilo Torres Restrepo, a Columbian priest and guerrilla fighter, the forerunner of the so-called liberation theology, which was an Ibero-American synthesis of the teachings of Jesus Christ and socialism²⁵. In Poland, combining

²⁴ Janusz Kaczorowski, "Câmara", in: *Jaszczurowy Laur. Antologia utworów nagrodzonych na turniejach jednego wiersza w latach 1966–1970* (The Lizard's Laurel. An anthology of prize-winning works from single-poem competitions in 1966–1970), ed. J. Leszin, Kraków: Zrzeszenie Studentów Polskich – Centralny Klub Studentów Krakowa "Pod Jaszczurami", 1971, p. 91.

²⁵ Camilo Torres, *Stula i karabin* (A Stole and a Rifle), Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1970.

socialism and Christianity was not so much uncommon as possibly uncanny, and inappropriate too – to such an extent that Karol Wojtyła, having been elected Pope, eradicated the socialist movement from contemporary theology²⁶.

A single likeness of Vladimir Lenin disguised as Ernesto Guevara; a formally ‘pop-art’ portrait of a Communist partisan placed on a building that had been designed as a monument to the myth of the industrialisation of a socialist country; Marxist guerrilla fighters reading the Gospels – such examples illustrate certain peculiar moments in the histories of the two regions. That period, however, began dramatically, as the aftermath to March 1968, with students in major Polish cities getting pacified by the Militia for having demanded freedom of speech in the public sphere. The unrest of Students’ March laid foundations for a democratic – and still left-wing – opposition. Looking back on it, March’s political crisis brought about the triumph of anti-totalitarianism, more clear-cut with each decade and eventually seen as the legacy of an entire generation²⁷. The March events finally proved the Polish youth’s social sensibility to be very close to the wider, universal tendencies in this respect, resulting in rebellious marches taking place almost all over the globe in 1968. Regardless of where people lived – be it Mexico, Berkley, Paris, Prague, or Warsaw – their determination stemmed from the defiance of authority and rule, and they all shared one desire: to experience freedom. The hijacking of public images by artists, as well as other subversive strategies they engaged in, produced uncanny representations of reality, to be construed as criticism of the *status quo* – and the case of Janusz Kaczorowski demonstrates that the catalysts for revising the depreciated socialist doctrine might include the contemporaneity of Latin America and the audacious ethos of a partisan.

Art which Entangles the Viewer in a Dangerous Game

Artistic pursuits conceived upon reception of literary texts sometimes followed the formula of disputing what had been established within the

²⁶ Artur Domoślawski, “Jan Paweł II. Teologia wyzwolenia” (Pope John Paul II: Liberation Theology), in: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 7 1998.

²⁷ Jan Józef Lipski, “Kilka refleksji po dziesięciu latach” (A few reflections, ten years on), in: Idem, *Pisma polityczne. Wybór* (Political Writings. A Selection), Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011, p. 57.

art world, which correlated with the era's air of anxiety; rather obviously, too, after 1968 the heightened political and social awareness added momentum to revolutionary creative pursuits.

The painting by Maria Stangret-Kantor (1929–2020) titled *Gra w klasy* (Hopscotch), dated 1970, has a spatial dimension. It consists of two modules joined by a grid-like structure, which is indeed a court for the popular playground game. One module, made up of three square-shaped fields, has its beginning on the floor and rises towards the wall. So making the narration flow from the horizontal flooring onto the vertical partition accentuates the inclusion of space in a recipe for a flat work of art; perhaps this is also meant to invite the viewer to take part. The other module is made up of four figures: two horizontal rectangles, a square, and a semicircle. Hung on the wall, it gives the painting its traditional form, defined by the stretcher bar. The piece, besides challenging the conventional definitions of a painting, simply cannot be interpreted today without considering the reception of Cortázar's famous novel bearing the same title (*Rayuela*, 1963), published in Poland in the memorable year of 1968²⁸.

The experimental book became famous for allowing the reader to proceed in two different modes: to either read it cover to cover or follow another sequence of chapters, suggested by the author. That method implies something quite significant – that is, parts of the novel, although practical, are inessential. The writer's ambivalence towards his own work co-existed with a tentative yet effective invitation to interact with the text. And multidirectional, many-sided readings of textual and pictorial imagery are an important feature of such neo-avant-garde artistic strategies as those employed in Lawrence Weiner's concepts of visual literature and concrete poetry, or by Stanisław Dróżdź in Poland; after all, such artists were eager to contain their productions in game-like formats. The similarities between Cortázar's pursuits and those of Stangret-Kantor also responded to the demands of experimental art, manifested in seeking materials and methods for activities which to that point had been unrelated to art; this peculiar de-professionalisation²⁹ could turn out well through borrowing from children's

28 Julio Cortázar, *Gra w klasy (Hopscotch)*, transl. Zofia Chądzyńska, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1968.

29 John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Ready-made*, New York–London: Verso, 2007.

play. Thus, the gestures of the two authors were acts of democratisation within the art system, as they aimed at making the boundaries between the author, his or her work, and the audience illusory.

But related to the strivings of artists intent on realistically capturing the uncanny manifestations of reality, the piece by Stangret-Kantor suggests that the most substantial artistic and mental experiment consisted in revolutionarily setting aside the intellectual discourses of Western civilisation and instead encouraging an alternative look at the work of art; this way, those thinking differently were given voice. One of the protagonists in Cortázar's *Hopscotch* is an exemplification of such an unconforming stance: it is the eccentric and childishly naive La Maga, who believes in magic and attends the meetings of the Serpent Club, a bohemian band who convene to cultivate unconventional conduct. The frightened intellectual and artistic circles, joined by the poor in the reality depicted by the writer, bring together people who are adrift, lost and confused. In Poland, too, endless discussions, debates, and disputes marked the activity of intellectuals, with the country's fandom setting up their own Serpent Clubs³⁰.

Such terms of establishing a relation with the work have their counterpart in the literary devices that Julio Cortázar employed, repeatedly making the reader aware that he himself or she herself is becoming an element of fiction. In installation art, too, the viewer is an essential and indispensable part of any piece – its object or subject, depending on the concept. Several propositions more extreme in this respect have been advanced by Argentinian artists. Oscar Bony, for instance, executing the action *La Familia Obrera* (The Working Class Family) in 1968, put a family – husband, wife, and son – on plinths; over the course of the exhibition held in Instituto Di Tella, Buenos Aires, the three of them continued to live like that for eight hours a day. Graciela Carnevale in turn, as part of an action titled *Encierro* (Confinement) and executed the same year, unexpectedly locked up the audience in an empty gallery; following a phase of confused anticipation, the prisoners of art smashed a window and left. What Bony or Carnevale did was, without a doubt, much more immersive than any of the pieces by Stangret-Kantor and stronger than even the most uncompromisingly

experimental literary narratives – but still, equivalent are the meticulously arranged devices meant to entangle the viewer or the reader in the vague relationship between reality and fiction, inextricably intertwined in a game whose rules are never clear. Notwithstanding the non-physicality of how literature operates, Julio Cortázar remains an undisputed master at provoking such conflicts, lending an air of oppression to his short stories, in particular to the already mentioned *The Night Face Up*, which makes one profoundly unsure how he or she is supposed to understand the witnessed events³¹.

In view of the above, the question arises: Can artistic experiments of interacting with the viewer or the reader – of interlacing fiction with reality, in other words – be considered critical practice when propagated in the context of an oppressive political system? The new transitory formulae and modes of neo-avant-garde artistic activity were disturbing to the rulers, on account of the low controllability of such pieces. The work could be reduced to a message easily dispatched somewhere far away in the world³², while various conventions of actionism enabled the extension of the work's structure to include the audience and made evident the ephemerality of its substance. The censors had actual trouble controlling both these kinds of practices³³. Therefore, the artistic revolution manifesting itself in Cortázar's writings and in Stangret-Kantor's paintings can be understood as a critical and freedom-oriented phenomenon – experimenting within the field of art was an act of resistance against manipulations to which the commonplace would consent³⁴.

Formulae for a Conceptual Piece According to Jorge Luis Borges

No person has influenced the intellectual life of Latin America more than Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) did in his time; and as the

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Clemente Padín, "Mail Art: A Bridge to Freedom", in: *Art Margins*, June–October 2012, pp. 36–44.

³³ In Communist Poland, every art show had to be approved in order for it to go public—but ephemeral actions, happenings, and performances, for their real-time nature, hardly allowed any effective supervision, which made them potentially dangerous to the regime.

³⁴ This possible way of reading the prominent manifesto of conceptual art was put forward by Piotr Piotrowski, who suggested that for the development of the neo-avant-garde, the contexts of the falsified reality of real socialism emphasise the critical significance of artistic strategies. Piotr Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od Melancholii do Pasji (Art According to Politics. From Melancholy to Passion)*, Kraków: Universitas, 2003, p. 185; Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy", in: *Studio International* 178, No. 915, October 1969.

Argentinian's output has had an exceptional power to inspire, the significance of that region's literary culture became unquestionable. Often tagged as a magical-realist author, Borges himself – witty as ever – used to classify his own writings simply as “fantasy”. Starting from the 1940s, the pieces foretold changes within the then-valid paradigm of knowledge production, shifting it towards an open and interdisciplinary mode. His brilliant ideas – game strategy, the motif of labyrinth, or crime fiction as philosophical play, to name a few – not so much resembled the practices employed by self-reflexive conceptual artists since the late 60s; they very much served as devices to bring one's own work closer to self-reflexive and conceptual art³⁵. Borges's short stories question all sorts of beliefs about reality, revealing that real-world laws can be magically overturned.

In *Babel* (1979), Barbara Kozłowska (b. 1940) – a conceptual artist who often drew on literature – invited the audience to chalk single letters on a wall, following the sequence in a sentence she had chosen from the short story *The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim*. The action ended as soon as the quote emerged before the viewers in its entirety: “Mir Bahadur Ali is, as we have seen, incapable of evading the most vulgar of art's temptations: that of being a genius”³⁶. Dealing with the status of the artist and with the eventual originality of his or her work, the concept refuted people's confidence in the uniqueness of what is going on between the creator's hand and the work's substance. Setting the quotation against the assembly's astonishment, it also expressed aversion to artistic pursuits being sacralised.

What motivated Borges was a reductionism analogous to that which guided many experiment-oriented visual artists. In his introduction to *The Garden of Forking Paths*, dated as early as 1941, he wrote:

It is a laborious madness and an impoverishing one, the madness of composing vast books – setting out in five hundred pages an idea that can be perfectly related orally in five minutes. The better way to go about it is to pretend that those books already exist, and offer a summary, a commentary on them.³⁷

³⁵ Gregory Leland Ulmer, “Borges and Conceptual Art”, in: *Boundary 2*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Spring 1977, pp. 845–862.

³⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, *The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim*, in: Idem, *Collected Fictions*, London: Penguin Books, 1999.

³⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, *The Garden of Forking Paths*, London: Penguin Books, 2018.

A similar awareness among the artists, encouraging them to dematerialise objects, had been occasional in the arts before 1966, and became, as Lucy R. Lippard shows, a frequently employed method after³⁸.

It has to be noted that Borges's status in the history of the visual arts is peculiar. Indices in most books on art of his time do include the Argentinian's name – but what it refers to in such contexts is, more often than not, just some artwork inspired by the stories or compared to some particular concept proposed by the writer. It usually ends there; any accounts seem superficial, as if captivation coexisted with distress, with a plain terror of the text itself. Luis Camnitzer observed another thing:

The writings of Jorge Luis Borges <...> had given us an education in creativity: he had shaped our vision of the cosmos as a great tautology, while underlining both the power and the inanity of naming.³⁹

But he did propagate a characteristic use of language, which coincided with kindred ideas and needs in the artistic domain, and the situation in Poland was not unlike that norm: an entire generation of artists had a fascination for the Borgesian skills of demonstrating the incognisability of the world and exposing the paradoxes and the shortcomings of conventional approaches to it⁴⁰.

The Polish conceptual artists felt there was a need to define balance between realness and fiction. In 1974, Alicja Kepińska (1932–2019), a prominent observer of the artistic scene, made a statement on the matter when discussing the subject of the annexation of non-artistic space for the purposes of art. She called it: “art's pressure on the extra-artistic reality, as a result of which space is given attributes which had been reserved for the sacred. Thus, a surge of art into life enables one to comprehend reality in an increasingly magical manner”⁴¹, as is the case in Borges's short story – from his collection *Fictions* – titled *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*.

38 Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years. The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Berkeley–Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997.

39 Luis Camnitzer, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

40 Tomasz Pindel, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

41 Alicja Kepińska, “26.12.74.”, in: *Refleksja konceptualna w sztuce polskiej. Doświadczenie dyskursu: 1965–1975* (Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art. Experiencing the Discourse: 1965–1975), eds. Paweł Polit, Piotr Woźniakiewicz, Warszawa: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski, 2000, pp. 190–194. The translation of the quotation is mine.



4.

Natalia LL, *Artificial photography*, 1975, courtesy of ZW Foundation / Natalia LL Archive

Conditioned idealistically, the inhabitants of the planet Tlön surround themselves with two kinds of things: real and fictional ones. The latter, invented but definitely existing, are produced by the imagination, and as soon as one does not need them anymore, they disappear⁴². Reception of this text also manifested itself in the works and writings by the notable artist Natalia Lach-Lachowicz (b. 1937). Between 1975 and 1976 she developed the concept of “artificial reality” (*Sztuczna rzeczywistość*), conceived in this instance as a specific mirror that reflects us in a dozen or so dimensions, and beyond time too⁴³. In the film *Artificial Reality*, dated 1975, she recorded herself performing banal actions enriched with irrationality and sensuality [Fig. 4].

⁴² Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, transl. Andrew Hurley, New York: Penguin Group, 1999; the Polish edition: Jorge Luis Borges, *Fikcje* (Fictions), Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1972.

⁴³ Natalia LL, *Hypothesis*, in: Idem, *Texty* (Texts), Bielsko-Biała: Galeria Bielska BWA, 2004, p. 330.

Further descriptions of the living conditions on Tlön tell about the possibilities opened up to artists. In that world there are, for example, no single-word nouns; instead, what represents any object in language is an accumulation of adjectives, paired with verbs when designating phenomena. Tlönians understand the world to be numerous trains of thought that testify to communal bonds. It has further been determined that all works originated with a single author, timeless and anonymous; the idea of plagiarism does not exist on Tlön. Art theory did not arrive at such a conclusion until the mid-80s⁴⁴, when the conventions stemming from appropriation art crystallised; earlier, at the turn of the 60s and 70s, having just given up the traditional materiality in order for the genuine work to extend to the stages of production and exhibition, art had barely started to inspire action.

But the inhabitants' idealism has paralysed Tlön's science: truth is no one's business, and the same goes even for mere "probableness", because people are only after bewilderment. Writing a manifesto for the Permafo group, which existed between 1970 and 1981, Andrzej Lachowicz (1939–2015) considered art to be an attempt to map reality, which itself is an infinitely convoluted structure. A map and reality, he believed, even if the former approximates the latter with an infinite accuracy, can never bear the relation of identity⁴⁵. This was a rather obvious assimilation of one of the passages Borges had written back in 1946, providing a history of an empire where cartography was so valued a craft that the most accurate of maps were the size of the territories themselves⁴⁶. That metaphor, as a matter of fact, was favoured in Poland's critical thought; also Andrzej Kostolowski (b. 1940), an esteemed art critic, made a reference to it in his analysis of Piet Mondrian's abstractions, while pondering geometrical art in terms of the difference between notation and calligraphy⁴⁷. Another giant of the native neo-avant-garde, the structural film-maker Wojciech Bruszewski (1947–2009) used to substantiate his translations of reality into the languages of photography and moving picture employing the lingual workings of a world

44 Rosalind Epstein Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985.

45 Andrzej Lachowicz, "Sztuka permanentna" (Permanent art), in: *Permafo*, ed. Anna Markowska, Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 2012, p. 208.

46 Jorge Luis Borges, *On Exactitude in Science*.

47 Andrzej Kostolowski, "Geometria: zapis czy kaligrafia?" (Geometry: notation or calligraphy?), in: *V Salon Marcowy* (The 5th March Salon): exhibition catalogue, Zakopane, 1970.

whose concepts and definitions he had encountered in Borges's *The Library of Babel* – the Argentinian posited that a vast knowledge about reality may be acquired by exhausting all the possible combinations of various elements within language⁴⁸.

The writings of Borges were of importance to many artists active in the field of concrete poetry. Marzena Kosińska, for instance, has drawn inspiration from his short stories directly⁴⁹: she authored tautological type-written poems – such as *Chwila to tyle* (A moment is just this much) from 1970 – where the geometric shapes that the phrases take stress their visual meanings. Similar analogies can be found in the output of most Polish concrete poets and other artists working with the substance of language. By the force of the contexts of particular acts of reading, words and sentences changed their meanings and, to the audiences' amazement, ceased to conform to the rules of logic or physics. In 1974 the feminist art giant Ewa Partum (b. 1945) inscribed the invitations to her exhibition with the motto "Now my idea is a golden idea" ("Moja aktualna idea jest złota idea"), typeset in gold letters [Fig. 5]. "I am asking you to move the Earth one metre closer to the Sun" ("Proszę przesunąć kulę ziemską o jeden metr w kierunku słońca") was another conceptual formula, put down by Zdzisław Sosnowski (b. 1947) in 1970 [Fig. 6]. In these instances, the unusual or fantastical elements of works were of a functional nature: they helped the viewer grasp a certain philosophical notion. What was then regarded as art was the magical power to create unreal objects or, more often, processes bearing all the hallmarks of works – to do so in the very reality of life – and apart from the questions of literary and artistic imaginativeness, that tendency was deeply rooted in experiencing mundanity.

In the 21st century, Wojciech Bruszewski proved himself to be an inventive writer of prose as well. The well-received novel *Fotograf* (The Photographer), where he plots a tale of the native artists' and photographers' movements of the 70s, is set "in a country located rather unluckily: Poland". Woven with anecdotes about the artistic circles, the story combines into a single volume such extraordinary episodes as the landing of a UFO

⁴⁸ Wojciech Bruszewski, "Problem Satori" "Problem Satori" (The Satori problem) (1974), in: *Żywa galeria* (A living gallery), ed. Józef Robakowski, Łódź: Łódzki Dom Kultury – Galeria FF, 2000, p. 138.

⁴⁹ Cf. Małgorzata Dawidek-Gryglicka, *Historia tekstu wizualnego. Polska po 1967 roku* (The History of Visual Text. Poland After 1967), Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2012, p. 324.



5.
Ewa Partum, *Moja aktualna idea jest złotą idea* (Now my idea is a golden idea), flyer, 1974, courtesy of the artist



6.
Zdzisław Sosnowski, *Proszę przesunąć kulę ziemską o jeden metr w kierunku słońca* (I'm asking you to move the Earth one metre closer to the Sun), serigraphy, 1970, private collection

at a rural bus stop or an artist's heroic struggle for official permission to have – as the first man in the country's history – a VCR shipped home⁵⁰.

Conclusion

The influence of Ibero-American literature on conceptual art reached far beyond the borders of the continent – and its reception in the neo-avant-garde circles of Eastern Europe and Poland has been exceptional: the process of absorbing literary standards was a sign of cultural universalisation progressing horizontally in the second half of the 20th century, a phenomenon significantly divergent from the traditional relationships between a centre and its peripheries.

Conceptual works of art, understood as lingual constructs, also carried clear literary connotations; directly arising from the interpretation of texts or not, they did employ similar methods in stylistic terms. Prose – especially that of Jorge Luis Borges – being intellectual play of the highest order, inspired the Polish artists whose works displayed the late-avant-garde wish to simplify one's own language of expression without neglecting the necessity of experimenting, which in this particular case involved probing the possibilities of fiction. (Kinships between literature and the arts also included the conscious use of conventions). Artists were keen on borrowing images from non-artistic realms, on inviting the viewers to actively take part in artistic events, and on creating space for multidirectional relationships; they skilfully administered the feelings of surprise and detachment – and at times, uncanniness.

The characteristic uncanny narration of literary magical realism contradicted what the dominant movement in Polish literature called for, namely the reduction in concealed substance; the visual artists, conversely, tended to explore all kinds of paradoxes and complexities – and the images produced in the arts by the neo-avant-garde were not uncoupled from the strong manifestations of everyday life under the dictatorial Communist rule. The fantastical literary fictions and the artistic conventions of the time appear similar when compared to the absurdities of the reality of PRL – considering the rules of reasoned assessment of the situation and rational

⁵⁰ Wojciech Bruszewski, *Fotograf* (The Photographer), Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2007.

judgement in the face of common problems, they all come across as inappropriate. The Ibero-American prose foregrounded the possibilities of writing from a perspective unbound by the real world, and the visual arts readily made use of illogical language constructs, while Poland was a country preposterously organised around an ideological doctrine – consequently, the interdependencies of life and culture translated into preponderantly fictional depictions.

The local contexts of Ibero-American literature and of Eastern European art additionally enriched the conceptual and post-conceptual methods of creation, saturating them with domestic qualities. The fact of openly drawing inspiration from the literary output of Latin America, which itself was produced in oppressive political circumstances, can therefore be interpreted as a gesture in defence of the systemically restricted intellectual liberty. Experiments in the arts perceived as a rebellious bid for independence must at once display a critical attitude towards any articulation of a totalitarian state – and as far as Poland's art is concerned, one can discern in them a need to imagine freedom in the public sphere.

In Poland, the decade that followed the year 1968 could be seen to have brought a relative sense of freedom and political stabilisation, as contrasted with the prior expressions of the Communist regime. This is not to say, however, that the rulers had given up the idea to control the society and pacify it in its democratic aspirations; only the events of that period were, perhaps, less dramatic, or to put it another way: beguiling the people with false impressions of freedom, the leaders managed to prevent the society from pushing back specific boundaries. With Poland opening up to Western countries, the availability of consumer goods increased, and it became easier to travel abroad. In August 1980, the State agreed to the demands of factory workers and consented to the foundation of NSZZ “Solidarność” (Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity”) – a sensation in the region, resonating around the world and prompting a wave of euphoria domestically. But the dream of liberty, which seemed within reach already, had to be called off due to the instigation of martial law in December 1981. Proclaiming a Communist dictatorship, the authoritarian state put an end

to any opposition and, by decree, suspended the activity of all cultural institutions. Artistic pursuits could not continue, at least not in an unchanged mode, also meaning a wind-up to Poland's neo-avant-garde discourse. Time was about to show that the freedom of the previous years had only been a short-lived fiction, intended to turn people's attention away from the true nature of the system. The spell was broken.

Translated from Polish by Błażej Bauer

Received ——— 2022 01 11

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Santrauka

Magiškosios laisvės įsivaizdavimas komunistinėje Lenkijoje: Lotynų Amerikos literatūros įtaka naujojo avangardo menininkams

Krzysztof Siatka

Reikšminiai žodžiai: magiškas realizmas, Lenkijos naujasis avangardas, Julio Cortázaras, Jorge Luisas Borgesas, XX a. 8 deš. dailė.

Straipsnyje siekiama išvesti paraleles tarp Lotynų Amerikos rašytojų Julio Cortázarą bei Jorge Luiso Borgeso kūrybos ir XX a. 7–8 deš. Lenkijos naujojo avangardo. Gretinamas „magiškas realizmas“ literatūroje ir groteskiška komunistinės Lenkijos realybė. Pastebint, kad Maria Stangret-Kantor (*Žaidžiame klases*, 1970), Janusz Kaczorowski (*Mauzoliejus*, 1972), Barbara Kozłowska (*Babelis*, 1979), Zdzisław Sosnowski (*Prašyčiau patraukti žemę vienu metru arčiau saulės*, 1970), Ewa Partum (*Dabar mano idėja tapo auksinė*, 1974) ir Natalia LL (*Dirbtinė realybė*, 1975) savo kūrybą vystė naudodami kalbą kaip meninę priemonę, siūloma jų kūrinius interpretuoti kaip įsivaizduojamos laisvės siekio išraiškas, kuriose protestuojama prieš viešojoje erdvėje vykdomą manipuliavimą prasmėmis. Pasitelkus istorinį ir politinį kontekstą, atskleidžiama, kaip literatūrinių „magiškojo realizmo“ naratyvų ir naujojo avangardo sandūroje vykusios eksperimentinės praktikos įvaizdino laisvę ir ją mitologizavo.