

WALDEMAR MAJOR FYDRYCH, SURREALIST À LA POLONAISE AND HIS “LIBERATED IMAGINATION”

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Abstract: The present text is a contribution to the reflection on the work and activities of Waldemar Major Fydrych – a prose writer, poet, and happenener, the initiator of the Orange Alternative movement as a continuator of Jan Brzękowski's concept. The latter was the creator of the concept of “liberated imagination” in reference to the activities and works of the first Surrealists, while Fydrych, recognized as one of the most important contemporary continuators of the Surrealist concept, gave “liberated imagination” a new dimension, consisting in the free interpenetration of artistic activities such as happenings with poetry, prose and even commentary on artistic experience.

Keywords: happening, liberated imagination, creator, poetry, Orange Alternative

1. The concept of “liberated imagination” and its creator

Would it be an exaggeration to call Waldemar Major Fydrych an absolute surrealist and the author of the modern form of “liberated imagination”? After all, the creator of the concept of liberated imagination was Jan Brzękowski (1903-1983) – a poet, writer and theoretician of poetry, who wrote in French and Polish. In 1928 he traveled to France, where, in the milieu of the Paris bohemia of the time, he co-founded the Polish-French magazine *L'Art Contemporain*. Brzękowski studied at the Sorbonne and the École du Journalisme.

During World War II, he was active in the French resistance movement. After the war, he published critical sketches and essays in the French and Polish press. An exposition of the surrealist artist's concept of liberated imagination can be found in a collection of theoretical and literary works under the title “Liberated Imagination” from 1933¹.

The book contains essays on the author's creative and theoretical activities. Brzękowski focuses mainly on avant-garde poetry and theoretical contributions to the emergence of the New Poetry in Poland and Europe, yet Fydrych make the surrealist imagination a perpetuum mobile of the “unbridled” work of surrealists creating in French and Polish, then associated with Paris. According to the author of the collection of sketches, poetic creativity is organized primarily by the concept of imagination, its absence or presence, to which related images are subordinated.

Brzękowski considers imagination to be the main element and spiritus movens of poetry, which in turn subordinates to itself the various varieties of fantasy that are revealed in the creative process. Brzękowski analyzes surrealist works as an example

¹ J. Brzękowski, *Wyrobrażenia wyzwolona i inne szkice*, PIW, Warsaw, 1966.

of “poetry in action,” a multidimensional creation where word and image complement each other. “The poetic act only releases the already existing elements of fantasy².

In other words: the process of creation of a poetic work and its recording is a complete act of liberated imagination. The poet uses the concept of metarealism, which he strongly distinguishes from French surrealism)³. Metarealism, according to Brzękowski, is an expression of a certain whole, combining elements derived from reality with poetic elements in a systematic way, according to a certain plan, a hierarchy of associations. This is how metarealism is connected with the automatism of associations. Creativity is the fruit of an imagination that is “aggressive and predatory,” but organized and controlled. It is an active imagination, both visible in the domain of fine arts, as well as in prose and poetry, and Waldemar Major Fydrych - the creator of the Orange Alternative protest movement - is its continuator.

According to Brzękowski, the creative act and its effect - a literary and artistic work, because in this sense, much broader, we will use the concept of 'liberated imagination' for the purpose of these considerations. As an exemplification we have chosen selected aspects of the creative activities and publications of Fydrych, who, despite the fact that he shares with Brzękowski the difference of almost two generations and artistic experience, is an example of a Polish multidimensional surrealist, applying the principles of 'liberated imagination' in a much broader, universal, and indeed transcendental dimension.

Brzękowski derived his analytical experience from a long-standing fascination with surrealism, but never crossed the “limit” beyond being a critic and poet, while Fydrych made multi-dimensional surrealist transformations - between the written word, happenings and programmatic texts, which were also the most important texts for my generation.

2. A successor of Brzękowski?

Waldemar Major Fydrych was born and raised in Toruń (Poland). In 1980 he graduated from history (MA), and in 1987 from art history (Dr). He was the initiator and leader of the Orange Alternative movement, which came to be known as the “Carnival Revolution.” In 2012 he defended his doctoral thesis at the Academy of Arts in Warsaw.

He was active in art and opposition activities while still a student. As early as the 1980s, he used the title of commander of Fortress Wrocław. The Orange Alternative, created by him, was awarded the prestigious “Ashes and Diamonds” award (1988), referring to the Cyprian Kamil Norwid symbolism of the literary work.

Waldemar Major Fydrych is the idol of that part of the generation that came into the world in the second half of the 1960s, and which did not succumb to

² K. Waśkiewicz, *Rygory wyobraźni wyzwolonej: o metarealizmie Jana Brzękowskiego Pamiętnik Literacki: czasopismo kwartalne poświęcone historii i krytyce literatury polskiej* 63/3, 1972, p. 111-141.

³ J. Brzękowski, *Wyobraźnia wyzwolona*, p. 56-67.

communist and socialist indoctrination. Major Waldemar Fydrych formulated the Manifesto of Socialist Surrealism in 1981, just as the philosopher and poet André Breton - author of the *Surrealist Manifesto* - did in 1925. The Orange Alternative issued its own. The present discussion is only a contribution to the analysis of program texts and selected poetic works by André Breton and Waldemar Major Fydrych - the creator of the Orange Alternative phenomenon as the creators of the two concepts of surrealism. It also aimed to revive the social marasm that gripped our country during martial law and after its revocation. Embittered, yet ready to change reality, it needed a new charismatic leader with a broader outlook than just a political one, courageous and uncompromising, original, and giving its “adepts” a kind of creative ecstasy, hope for change, but also a kind of sense of security.

He wrote about himself as follows:

„One night I woke up. Before my eyes I had the image that Winkler had escaped, that he had slipped away to Afghanistan with my novel, its only copy, and that I was being chased through the streets of Paris by a flock of ostriches. I, on the other hand, fled from my pursuers to the Castle, whose towers were illuminated by a strangely diffuse light. The outline of the castle was visible. I felt that an invisible eye was watching me. [...] The relief of awakening was not a solace for me, but the worst were the thoughts on waking up.⁴”

“It is enough to take any monthly magazine in hand and observe the people around you to see that thoughts, emotions and deeds are pulled up under a common garret, this is solidarity. The whole of modern civilization strives to be fashioned in a common fashion. And I say that one must be completely free of this collective will. And this is one of the most difficult things. Until you free yourselves from this obstacle, you cannot know within yourselves that which is eternal. It is necessary for you to become a light unto yourselves, and then the fear of failure, the expectation of success, will disappear. In fact, there is neither error nor failure. To have a pattern, to follow a general standard, is failure, but to live strongly and intensely on one's own, failure is never; it is continuous learning, so there is no authority or difference, no master or disciple⁵”.

Fydrych's “scattered” imagination for the creation of program texts of the Orange Alternative Movement - not only contesting against the assumption of Polish communism in practice, but also purely artistic, surrealist, where the main audience was random passers-by, becoming in time co-creators of artistic events.

3. Breton - Fydrych - Brzękowski: surrealism liberated

Fydrych, like French surrealists, sought to create a crisis of “paseist consciousness”, considering the unlimited role of exploration of the creative imagination. Both visionaries attached great importance to the content of program manifestos, making them sets of timeless directives,... The concept of “liberated

⁴ *Okres 1989–1990*, <http://www.orangealternativemuseum.pl/#1989–1990> [18.11.2024].

⁵ *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa nr 4*, https://web.archive.org/web/20060206160910/http://www.pbn.biskupin.wroc.pl/archiwa/tlumaczenia/pomaraneczowa_alt.html#poma-rancz2 [18.11.2024].

imagination” borrowed from Brzękowski and updated - with an anti-communist dimension by Fydrych, encompassed the transfusion of the reality of the 80s and 90s of the past century to an unbounded, metaphoric criticism of the system.

Through its happenings, the Orange Alternative also offered an appropriate response to the widespread cognitive dissonance created by the contrast prevailing between the idea of a socialist paradise and the gray reality of the citizens. Due to the use of poetic theater (poetic theatricalization) and “carnival fun” in its actions, the Orange Alternative's defense was not only the carnival setting of its actions, but also its metaphorical content, expressed in the language of surrealist poetry.

Fydrych's surrealist imagination combined Breton's oneiric projections, Brzękowski's metarealist concept with the political themes of the reality of the time in communist-dominated Poland:

„The Second Secretariat also saw the emergence of color television to protect the interests of informants. The cultural model was an elevation of the state's exposure. New car silhouettes appeared, small palaces called dachas were built. The First Secretary personally said he would make Poland a second Japan under the slogan “A Pole can do”. At meetings he shouted: “Will you help?” The first revolts against eggheads similar to boiled eggs took place in the provinces. At the end of the Second Secretariat, punks appeared. They were people-punks to whom socialist morality did not reach. The beaten units of young samurai directly, with short blows, exhausted their forces. They dressed in skins and tinsel, despised furs - it often happened that they cut sheepskins, the dream of those times. Socialist morality became a convenient field of action for groupies.

The orders of technocrats and eunuchs were not respected. The picture was simple – the Katowice steelworks ceased to please the eye. Provincial camarillae were not in control of the situation”⁶.

The slogan proclaimed by Fydrych: “All proletarians be beautiful,” and the texts themselves were often formulated along the lines of a surrealist game known as *cadavre exquis*. The technique was invented by the Surrealists and is similar to an old parlor game called *consequences*, in which players take turns writing on a piece of paper, fold it to hide some of the writing, and then pass it to the next player who adds another element. The game was an intimate affair, but at some point it “took to the streets,” i.e., the artists, seated at outdoor café tables in Paris, encouraged passersby to participate, much as mimes do today, encouraging tourists to play chess at tables at the entrance of bistros. Breton stressed that at first it was just a kind of entertainment, which over time became a kind of intellectual skirmish. He recalls that the custom of playing *cadavre exquis* together was started in Paris in 1925, by a group of Surrealists.

Waldemar Major Fydrych - not only as a happenner, novelist, artist-painter, but also as a poet created a surrealist message based on the synthesis of the arts. The concept of “liberated imagination” was perfected by him by combining the work

⁶ W. Fydrych, B. Dobosz, *Hokus-pokus, czyli Pomarańczowa Alternatywa*.

with a surrealist setting, giving it another symbolic layer, a dimension of a kind of theatricality:

“Waldemar Fydrych enters the improvised stand. The major reads his poem about the recent strikes. He is dressed in a navy blue suit and a wig that approximates his appearance to that of the figures held in the portraits. An orange scarf is tied around his neck. He reads in a strong voice. A poem recited on the street takes on a new content, as it were. It carries something of the atmosphere of frustration after the May strikes⁷.”

„Within the limits where they operate (or are thought to operate) dreams give every evidence of being continuous and show signs of organization. Memory alone arrogates to itself the right to excerpt from dreams, to ignore the transitions, and to depict for us rather a series of dreams than the dream itself. By the same token, at any given moment we have only a distinct notion of realities, the coordination of which is a question of will. (Account must be taken of the depth of the dream. For the most part I retain only what I can glean from its most superficial layers. What I most enjoy contemplating about a dream is everything that sinks back below the surface in a waking state, everything I have forgotten about my activities in the course of the preceding day, dark foliage, stupid branches. In "reality," likewise, I prefer to fall.)”⁸.

4. The metaphorization of reality

Surrealist metaphor combined with the manifestation of imagination is not born of the need to reduce the unknown to the known. The creator has at his disposal an unlimited number of configurations, bridges the “distance” between concepts, objects and subjects, has the power to create an alternative reality. Metaphor gave character to the accelerated evolution of poetry of the first half of the 20th century and, as in retrospect, it should be believed, was the most effective stylistic, aesthetic and artistic “tool”, with the assumption of interference between literature and art in a protest directed against creativity and past values.

Its significance was easily recognized and appreciated by the Surrealists, primarily the French, while in Poland it was mainly the Futurists originating from the Warsaw milieu and the heirs of the Cracow Avant-Garde, led by Brzękowski. Thus metaphor became an obligatory means of expression in allegorical poetry, drawing not only on the unlimited possibilities of associations libres, but also on somnabulic content and the subconscious. “Liberated imagination” is an expression of creative power, causal force in metaphorized form, which Fydrych eagerly exploited.

The basis of the work and activities of the Surrealists is the metaphorization of reality - also in culture, literature and art throughout the 20th century. It combines in itself, incoherent elements (as in the case of surrealist objects) - belonging to foreign fields of life, art and even technology existing in a new contextual

⁷ W. Fydrych, B. Dobosz, *Hokus-pokus...*, p. 87.

⁸ A. Breton, Excerpt from the *First Manifesto of Surrealism in Art In Theory 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Charles Harrison & Paul Wood Eds. Oxford Blackwell Publishers Oxford, 1992.

connectivity. A metaphor, hiding an apparent semantic incoherence, functions as long as it enters permanently into the resources of language.

„A dwarf climbed onto the standing militia Nysa. Hands outstretched in a gesture of victory, applause. From the car's loudspeaker comes a voice calling for dispersal. After this appeal, the Nysa begins to wobble dangerously. More and more dwarves proceed to rock the car. Finally, the militiamen drive away. Applause, „hares,” candy falls on the Nysa.

“Do you know, dear children, that in every democratic country in the West, such postponement of the property of law enforcement and all public institutions is defined as terror against things and punished according to the law. Well, aren't you stupid that this time the 'smurfs' outsmarted you?”⁹

Few surrealists remained faithful to the movement's programmatic assumptions, oscillating around surrealism and... poetry, the most perfect form of metaphorical-nonconformist expression, exploited - next to the artwork - as the most effective method of “pure expression”, which Breton precisely defined, while focusing on the role of truthfulness of the dialogue between the receiver and sender, understood as two autonomous intertwined internal monologues. He also stressed that the artist's relationship with Surrealism is permanent, for the rest of his life, and acts like a drug, causing constant craving . Isn't this form of expression the manifestation of “imaginatively liberated”.¹⁰

Surrealism as a literary practice has inspired and continues to inspire to this day many people of the pen and artistic activities of a happening nature. Some critics even claim that there has never been surrealism in its pure form in Poland. Being cautious, they look only for crumbs or examples of literary play with the surrealist tradition . However, we disagree with such a method and attitude, combining neo-surrealist creativity with scientific activity.

5. „Lives of Orange People” as an example of „imagination in action”

Among all of “Major's” works, „*Lives of Orange People*” most vividly introduces the viewer to the world of Polish anarchists, hippies, unruly people, from whom the legend of the Orange Alternative, the largest happening movement in the history of the world, was born. The book opens with an introduction by Anne Applebaum. This may come as some surprise, since Anne Applebaum's choice gives the book more of a political dimension than a surreal one. „The Lives of the Orange Men” is a multi-faceted work, in which communism is treated like an “ironic work of art,” and the Orange Alternative's actions as crumbling the foundations of communist ideology. The author emphasizes the importance of the conventions of fairy tales, man's love of freedom and the concept of “liberated imagination.”

Fydrych managed to perfectly reconcile the associationist contradictions between the significance of the American landing on the moon and the manifestations of the “candidate” stupidity of Polish society. There are echoes of

⁹ B. Dobosz, W. Fydrych, *Hokus Pokus, czyli Pomarańczowa Alternatywa*, Inicjatywa Wydawnicza Aspekt, Wrocław 1989, p. 47-48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85-89.

Hegelianism in the surrealist (auto)biography: the school principal was the antithesis, and Fr. Tadeusz Rydzyk as an oppositionist was the thesis, while in “social unreality” it is the other way around. One of the foundations of “Major’s” social surrealism is based on the law of cyclical development of reality, in which the social antithesis resembles the foundations of the concept of literary associationism in the “classical” version of surrealism.

Instead of reading Brzękowski, Fydrych suggests the works of Breton, Aragon. December 1929 with the publication of the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* brought a dramatic change in the conception of the movement's activity. Mental automatism is replaced by political commitment - in the case of the Orange Alternative, the “automatism” of the liberated imagination intensifies the artistic expression and multidimensionality of political activity. “Before I continue, let me remind to the readers of these historical moments: it was in the midst of the so-called Second Cold War, when Reagan was still talking about Star Wars, and “glasnost” had not yet really begun. Washington and Moscow still kept nuclear warheads pointed at each other.”¹¹

The recipient, however, does not have to deal with a travesty of Plutarch's *Lives of Famous Husbands*, viz: Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Demosthenes, Marcus Tullius Cicero, Gaius Marius or Lysander, but a commemoration of the “founding fathers” and an interpretation of the mechanisms driving the Orange Alternative, this bizarre stream of consciousness from political, philosophical and artistic inspiration: The Orange Alternative undermined the foundations of communist ideology not by fighting it, but by laughing at it. The young people who flocked to the happenings probably harmed the regime with their mockery more than a whole decade of riots would have done. They proved that the king is naked, that the regime is intellectually bankrupt. On the pages of the *Lives* we meet Major Waldemar Fydrych, Zenon Zegarski, Robert Jezierski, Andrzej Dziewit, Piotr “Pablo” Adamcio, Józef Pinior, Krzysztof Skiba.

“Militiamen,” recalls ‘Major,’ “surrounded me. I handed out flowers, asters. I was holding a bucket of water. Next to me sat some guy. (...) He began to shout: 'Heather! Heather! Heather! I understood that this was an operational slogan, that this is how militiamen recognize undercover officers. So I also started shouting: „Heather! Heather!” The militiamen let us go. Being excentricly dressed, I convinced them that I was the undercover policeman. Then the undercover officer, to prove his function, pulled out his service card. Part of the audience started clapping.”¹²

A sizable portion of the gathering also began to shout: “Heather!”, pretending to be undercover officers. Seeing such a large number of citizens pretending to be undercover agents, the militiamen decided to move away in cars, taking with them the arrested photographers, some clappers and some of the props, including a stand

¹¹ W. Fydrych, *Krasnoludki i gamonie*, Wydawnictwo Pomarańczowa Alternatywa, Warszawa, 2006, p. 137.

¹² W. Fydrych, *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa. Rewolucja krasnoludków*, Wydawnictwo Pomarańczowa Alternatywa, Warszawa, 2007. p.,45-47.

made of cardboard. Thanks to the militiamen, "Major" was reaffirmed in his belief that art is done mainly so that others can develop their artistic talents.

6. "Liberated imagination" as part of the spiritual testament

Surrealist activities - among them, on Polish soil, the phenomenon of the Orange Alternative - can become a starting point for introducing a "new spirit" into the curriculum of art pro-film subjects, taking into account the emotional-cognitive experience, drawing on the works of the masters. It can, for example, fit into the method of projects, in which young audiences choose the topic, materials and form of transmission of acquired knowledge, treating creative activities wrapped around the history of the Orange Alternative not only as an analysis of experience, but re-experiencing - this time without the political background of creation.

"In the meantime, in 2004. The Orange Dwarfs are participating in the Orange Revolution in Ukraine as part of the Kyiv-Warsaw Common Cause action. Happeners also work on national stereotypes in France, and burst the bubbles of financial consumerism in Times Square in New York. They are also organizing the First Street Cabaret in Berlin in 2009 to mark the global crisis and opening the Museum of World War III and the End of the World in Warsaw. They bravely fight against genetic modification of the surrounding nature. Finally, in 2011, they deal a final blow to post-modernism and commercialism in art"¹³.

Fydrych drew up a kind of spiritual testament based on paradox, expressions that are contradictory internally, but bring unexpected truth using the mechanism of juxtaposing contrasting contents and establishing a kind of inclusion between these contents. He made allusive wit an indispensable means of expressing political and satirical allusion. He used word games, ambiguities or even ambiguities of terms to make the artist's expression a tool. Universally surrealist.

He kept the message of "liberated imagination" making it timeless and at the "interface of all arts." Referring to allusive satire, he used defragmentation, phraseological ellipsis glorifying semantic neologisms.

Fydrych did the impossible, coloring and transforming the ossified reality of the „commune time" into a surreal constellation of events, „revisits", ideological clues populating it with symbolic dwarfs. Thesis, antithesis and synthesis took on a new meaning, giving the oppressed hope and those caught up in inertia a chance to participate in the transformation towards good.

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