

**“LIVES OF ORANGE MEN”, OR HEROES OF INDEPENDENT CULTURE
ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM. A CONTRIBUTION TO THE PORTRAIT
OF THE CREATORS OF THE ARTISTIC PROTEST MOVEMENT
“ORANGE ALTERNATIVE”**

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Abstract: *This text is a contribution to cultural studies of the artistic protest movement „Orange Alternative”, with particular attention to the role played by the “Orange Men” - not only the title characters of Waldemar “Major” Fydrych’s book, but also the leaders of the movement: Waldemar “Major” Fydrych, “Lieutenant” Zenon Zegarski, Robert Jeziorski, Andrzej Dziewit, Józef Pinior and Krzysztof Skiba. Their biographies, presented by the leader of the movement in the convention of fiction, complement the life stories of participants in major historical events. Included in the text are references to the concepts of freedom, joy and socialist surrealism as ideological pillars of the Orange Alternative.*
Keywords: *Orange Alternative; freedom; contestation; joy; program texts; happenings*

1. Introduction

"There is a tale of sleeping knights living inside the Great Mountain. These brave warriors, according to source accounts, will be awakened when danger arises." - this is how the introduction to the *Lives of the Orange Husbands* begins. This book is one of the most important texts contributing to the portrait of the Orange Alternative's leaders. They were co-founders of the movement, whose apogee of activity was in the last two decades of the last century. The most important part of legacy of the Orange Alternative is occupied not only by preserved information about street happenings, turning into large political demonstrations, but also by texts addressing the issue of civil liberties. “*Lives of the Orange Husbands*” in this regard is of special importance and "(...) is a work that goes beyond fiction, it is a story showing man's love for freedom. Like any work of this type it also has an archaeological layer, which, when uncovered, reveals to us the genesis of the dismantling of the foundations of the “Berlin Wall.” This passionate story arose simply. In Wrocław, cut by the Oder River canals, ordinary people met. They created history.”¹

The slogans proclaimed by the legendary leader of the movement, Fydrych, are not only part of the stream of post-Solidarity negation of the former communist regime in Poland; this also an example of the ludic expression of surrealism in the

¹ W. Fydrych, *Żywoty Mężów Pomarańczowych*, Wydawnictwo Pomarańczowa Alternatywa, Wrocław-Warszawa 2001, p. 5.

Polish variant ². Fydrych was the leader of the Orange Alternative movement, which came to be known as the “carnival revolution”, and the idol of part of the generation that came of age in the second half of the 1960s. The Orange Alternative was a combination of humor, surrealism and contestation directed at ridiculing the authorities. Isn't the ridiculous celebration of the anniversary of the October Revolution, the initiation of the course of their own invented holidays, the proclamation of subversive slogans, such as “Join Africa to the USSR!” or “Pacifists to the Pacific!” not an act of courage which intended to create the idea of a “new surrealism”? As Jakub Kornhauser points out, “One can view surrealism as a challenge to reason, cause-and-effect logic and the 'beast of habit.' One can see it as a laboratory of experimental creative practices based on chance and the power of the subconscious. Or a great offensive of the non-human objects, specters and anthropomorphized abstracts. But it is also possible to grasp in Surrealism, above all, as a model of perfect social revolution, both on the general plane and - mainly - on the individual plane”³.

The recipients and participants of the Orange Alternative's activities were primarily average Polish citizens, so there was a need for content that would reach the imagination of any audience, regardless of the type of imagination⁴. Thus, one can describe the movement's activities as a form of “democratic surrealism,” which Fydrych called “socialist surrealism,” and whose numerous echoes can be found in *“Lives of the Orange Men”*.

2. Towards freedom and surrealism

The Orange Alternative did not accept the mechanisms of socialism enslaving the “simple man” and rejected them openly having the street crowds and student communities representing various universities in Poland on its side⁵. It's rebellion against classicism, realism, empiricism, rationalism, utilitarianism and conventions in art shaped it's consistent love of freedom⁶.

“Socialist Surrealism” more emphatically than its French prototype glorified the need to expose unreal elements in counterpoint to a faithful reflection of reality⁷ and was a veiled means of conveying content which didn't compute with the official government message. The creators of the Orange Alternative decided to draw primarily on the visual “expression of inner perception,” close to the work of

² M. Moldovan-Cywińska, *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa jako forma nadrealizmu – wybrane konteksty*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Biznesu i Finansów Vistula, Warszawa 2023, p. 12-23.

³ J. Kornhauser, Vaneigem/Dupuis: surrealizm jako wieczna potencjalność <https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/server/api/core/bitstreams/674c8ae8-ea29-4150-942a-08689c2ce234/content> [18.07.2025].

⁴ L. Romanienko, *Antagonizm, absurd i awangarda: rozbrojenie opresji sowieckich za pomocą środków teatralnych przez polski solidarnościowy ruch „Pomarańczowych”*, <http://w.orangealternativemuseum.pl/#lisiunia-a-romanienko-esej> [18.07.2025].

⁵ M. Moldovan-Cywińska, *Op. cit.*, p. 34-45.

⁶ N. Gourgau, *De l'agit-prop au happening* <http://w.orangealternativemuseum.pl/#nicole-gourgau-praca-doktorska> [18.07.2025].

⁷ M. Moldovan-Cywińska, *Op. cit.*, p. 12-13.

Salvador Dalí and Juan Miró⁸, both in verbal messages and during organized street events of a protest-artistic nature. The Orange Alternative organized its first happenings in 1986, and the most notorious were those organized in Wrocław in the 1980s. They referred to various forms of restrictions on civil liberties. Their theme was mainly official political events, anniversary celebrations and national holidays, and excerpts of their description can be found in "*Lives of Orange Men*". The color inherent in the movement's name was a direct reference to the Provo art grouping, whose activity in the Netherlands occurred in 1965-1967. Among the most important programmatic texts of the Orange Alternative are the "*Manifesto of Socialist Surrealism*"⁹ and the "*Manifesto of Flowers*"¹⁰ exposing visions from the line between reality and dreams, but also journalism¹¹.

Among all the works of the "Major," however, it is "*Lives of the Orange Men*" that most vividly introduces the viewer to the world of Polish anarchists, hippies from whom the legend of the Orange Alternative, the largest happening movement in the history of the world, was born. Fydrych has managed to perfectly reconcile the associationist contradictions between the significance of the American landing on the moon and the naiveté of Polish society worthy of *Candide*¹². Fydrych's book includes biographies of the movement's leaders, presented in a surrealist convention, including "Lieutenant" Zenon Zegarski, Robert Jezierski, Andrzej Dziwiał, 'Rotmistrz' Wiesław Cupała, Piotr "Pablo" Adamcio, Józef Pinior, and Krzysztof Skiba. The headmaster of Fydrych's childhood school is the antithesis, and the well-known priest Rydzyk as an oppositionist is 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 à la française.

The first stage is based on the thesis in opposition to the antithesis, from which the antithesis emerges. The Hegelian triad is one of the most essential "keys" to Fydrych's surrealist visions and understanding of creative freedom and the concept of freedom promoted by the Orange Alternative. According to Hegel, "from opposites a synthesis is produced, which in turn becomes a thesis, which is then joined by an antithesis - and so a triptych develops the world"¹³. In this context, it is essential to recall the famous statement of "Major", which caused a

⁸ W. Fydrych, *Krasnoludki i gamonie*, Wydawnictwo Pomarańczowa Alternatywa, Warszawa-Wrocław 2006, p. 25-26.

⁹ W. Fydrych, *Manifest Surrealizmu Socjalistycznego* <http://w.orangealternativemuseum.pl/#manifest-surrealizmu-socjalistycznego> [18.07.2025].

¹⁰ W. Fydrych, *Manifest kwiatów* <http://w.orangealternativemuseum.pl/#major-waldemar-fydrych-opowiadania> [18.07.2025].

¹¹ B. Dobosz, W. Fydrych, *Hokus-pokus, czyli Pomarańczowa Alternatywa*, Wydawnictwo Aspekt, Wrocław 1989.

¹² Wolter, *Kandyd* <https://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/kandyd/> [18.07.2025].

¹³ M. Rosiak, *Hegel's Dialectics. A Critical Commentary on the Main Metaphysical Texts*, Universitas, Kraków 2011.

stir at the police station in Łódź, during martial law, in the fall of 1982: "I practice Dialectical Painting of Great Social Forms. According to the Hegelian Dialectic, Quantity transforms into Quality, That is, the more Dwarfs, the better."¹⁴

One should risk saying that the street activity of the Orange Alternative (happenings, publications, performances) is also a combination of manufacturing skills and creative thinking, as well as the peculiar courage of the "Orange Men" - leaders of the movement with the use of various forms of artistic expression in a manner unique on a European scale. It can also mean a hidden "reproduction" of avant-garde phenomena - in this case referring to Dadaism and French Surrealism - not in the dimension of "cultural redundancy"¹⁵, but by enriching the communist reality imbued with the domination of the communist system.

3. Freedom and imagination

Freedom is one of the most important philosophical concepts related to anthropological reflection, also understood as the formation of human autonomy, natural and inviolable right to self-determination and the ability to choose tasks that realize the development potential of the individual¹⁶. Violetta Kopinska reminds us that the sense of freedom and freedom are not the same¹⁷

Since 1949, Poland had been governed by socialist doctrine, which was preaching ideological and political involvement in art, while Fydrych proposes involvement "on the other side of the barricade," creating, as it were, the antithesis of the previous ideological and aesthetic order.

The essence of the notion of freedom redefined on the basis of surrealist premises is most fully reflected in the Orange Alternative's programmatic texts, above all in the "Manifesto of Socialist Surrealism" by the leader of the Orange Alternative leaders - Fydrych. Formulated on the model of the "Surrealist Manifesto" published in 1925 by the poet André Breton¹⁸, Fydrych's manifesto glorifies the freedom of imagination, polemicizing with Jan Brzękowski's concept of "liberated imagination"¹⁹, according to which the poet constantly seeks elements of a certain order only through the word. The leader of the Orange Alternative encourages observing the inconsistency between the inconsistency of experienced impressions and the harmony of expression. Fydrych opposes Brzękowski's

¹⁴ J. Warda, *Wrocławskie krasnoludki. Wielopoziomowość szczegółów warunkiem urody miasta* <https://kulturaenter.pl/article/wroclawskie-krasnoludki/> [18.07.2025].

¹⁵ M. Cywińska, *Głos pokolenia Pomarańczowej Alternatywy (PA) w kontekście poszukiwania wartości oraz na tle dziejów awangardy* (in:) a (red. naukowa) K. Najder-Stefaniak, A. Hamling, *Filozofia i praktyka tworzenia. Humanistyka - pedagogika - socjologia*, Wydawnictwo SGGW, Warszawa 2019, p. 63-64.

¹⁶ Szkudlarek T. *Postmodern freedom and the pedagogy of deconstruction*. [In:] (ed.) M. Reut, *Dilemmas of freedom*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 2001.

¹⁷ V. Kopska, *The concept of freedom and its theoretical connotations*, Culture - Society - Education No. 1, 2012. Poznań 2012. p. 121-139.

¹⁸ 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

¹⁹ J. Brzękowski, *Szkice literackie i artystyczne 1925-1970*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1978.

concept, glorifying the paradigm of Dadaism - surrealism - imagination unlimited in art, in street protest-art activities and in philosophy.

When, at the beginning of the summer of 1982, the Security Service got onto the trail of the activists with whom Fydrych was staying, he initiated a kind of happening, namely, he hung an ad on the fences saying "I will sell an automatic washing machine: small, Yugoslavian" ²⁰. The ad was perceived by many as genuine, and the visiting potential "customers" made the apartment teem with life. This is an example of a surreal verbal message par excellence Polish, for a similar or identical message under completely different political conditions - French or Belgian - would not have been comprehensible to the recipient. Symbolic thinking is thinking in terms of analogy, relation, synthesis, oriented towards the whole," Lurker stresses, showing the relationship between the inner and outer worlds as mutually complementary²¹. One would have to ask whether Fydrych's autobiographical story contained in "Lives of Orange Men" is merely as an artistic provocation and an attempt to complement the ideas presented in the "Manifesto of Socialist Surrealism" or a kind of spiritual testament for the future generations? The question remains open.

The recipients of the Orange Alternative's street actions and programmatic texts were people anguished by the lack of prospects, plagued by daily shortages of supplies, lost, passive, avoiding confrontation with the communist authorities, or on the contrary: desiring confrontation to shout "Polish misery." The Orange protesters gave Poles a sense of freedom - illusory at the time, perhaps, and short-lived, but offering hope for the bloodless overthrow of the communist system. The militiamen gained a humorous, perhaps more "human" face. Participants in happenings dressed as dwarfs and militiamen co-created a world of liberated imagination. Mikhail Bakhtin emphasizes the strong connection between joy and a sense of freedom²². This was also the message of the organizers of the "orange" street happenings and rallies. In this context, it is essential to recall the famous statement of "Major", which caused a stir at the police station in Łódź, during martial law, in the fall of 1982: "I practice Dialectical Painting of Great Social Forms. According to the Hegelian Dialectic, Quantity transforms into Quality, That is, the more dwarfs, the better" ²³.

4. The merits of the "Orange Men"

Should the information contained in "Lives of the Orange Men" be considered reliable and accurate? Lieutenant Zegarski is compared to the Little Prince, Alexander Zebrowski "standing on the roof of a militia car brought ten thousand people to ecstasy. Men wanted to love, and women inspired love. "1

²⁰ B. Dobosz, W. Fydrych, op. cit., pp. 46-59.

²¹ M. Lurker, *Przesłanie symboli w mitach, kulturach i religiach*, Wydawnictwo Alethea, Warszawa 2023, s. 36.

²² M. Bachtin 1995, *Twórczość Franciszka Rabelais'go a kultura ludowa średniowiecza i renesansu*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1995, p. 164-166.

²³ W. Fydrych 1982, *Nie ma wolności bez krasnoludków* <http://www.majorfydrych.com/> [18.07.2025].

The author himself describes his book as "a story showing man's love of freedom. Fydrych touches on the "archeological layer of the work, referring to the Paris period. "The times of the Orange Alternative were an era of living poetry, it was a golden period of artistic movements. "The Lives of the Orange Men" is a surrealist work par excellence; in the introduction, Major points to two interpretive attitudes: surrealist and scientific as not mutually exclusive. One should risk the claim that the street activity of the Orange Alternative (happenings, publications, performances) is also a combination of the the ability to produce and think creatively, as well as an example of the bravery of the "Orange Men" - leaders of the movement using various forms of artistic expression in a unique way.

On the pages of "Lives" we meet Major Waldemar Fydrych, Lieutenant Zenon Zegarski, Robert Jezierski, Andrzej Dziewit, Piotr "Pablo" Adamcio, Józef Pinior, Krzysztof Skiba. The recipient, however, does not have to deal with a travesty of Plutarch's "Lives of Famous Men," 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 and the 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 came to the happenings probably hurt the regime with their mockery more than a whole decade of rioting would have done. They did it with good humor. The Orange Alternative, by offering great fun, was able to move young people, make them laugh, and then engage them in their actions in a way no one else could. "It's well known that in an academic paper you can't dwell on dwarfs. The times of the Orange Alternative were an era of living poetry, a golden period of art movements. In later years, many people tried to emulate it. None of them reached the level of what it was, because who can match such Orange Knights as Jacek Kudłaty or Andrzej Kielar, who organized a strike in a phone booth? They paralyzed the police, launched worldwide agencies in the pre-internet era. Today, if anyone wanted to emulate them, they would have to be born twice or more."²⁴ - Fydrych wrote.

"Manifesto of Surrealist Socialism" mentioned in "Lives of the Orange Men" is an à rebours manifesto not only because of its conformity to the idea of oneuristic associationism of combining seemingly distant associations into a single, coherent unity²⁵, but by an ironic reference to the Marxist doctrine that governs the world. The leader of the 'The' Orange, or 'The' State, Alternative, opposed the concept of Surrealist Socialism to any manifesto of an exclusively political nature, propos permission to "reconstruct" Polish society, based on

²⁴ W. Fydrych, *Żywoty...*, p. 310.

²⁵ W. Fydrych, *Manifest Surrealizmu...*, p. 1.

unlimited freedom and imagination. The „*Manifesto of Surrealist Socialism*” compels the viewer to interpret from the images, and to think symbolically.

The second fundamental programmatic text of the Orange Alternative to which the author refers is “Manifesto of Flowers”²⁶ which contains a list of laws governing hyper reality, while questioning the norms of a society built by homo sovieticus. By defining the new man Fydrych proves that his intellectually enslaved predecessor co-created an ideology according to which a work of art had to combine surrealist form and socialist content. The literary alter ego of the most important leader of the presented protest-art movement talks about writing his master's thesis on fires, meetings with an interviewer who analyzes the importance of happenings in the context of dreams of freedom, promoting the music of protest bands. The author of “Orange Man” is also constantly searching for his own identity: “Who was Major? Was he a dissident, an oppositionist, a cabot, a militarist or a schemer? A man of providence, a strategist equal to Napoleon or Caesar? Or was he someone like Fouché - the chief of police in Napoleon's time? This type of consideration is also an excuse to reveal dreams of freedom.

“Despite so many misfortunes and this time Zenon Zegarski did not go away manifesting his rainbow light. He wrote one of the world's greatest books: “Stories of the Gray Prince”. The stories of the Gray Prince are known only to a few, to those, who open their hearts to him. And he continues the work of the great sages. He gives a part of his being to every person he meets”²⁷ - with such words Fydrych also described the figure of “Lieutenant” Zenon Zegarski - co-founder and participant in the Orange Alternative movement. In 1988 he was a member of the Orange Coordination Committee, which firmly established the activities of the Orange Alternative active in Wrocław, including participation in happenings organized in the late 1980s on Świdnicka Street in Wrocław. He annotated Zegarski's surreal “portrait” with the following comment:

“This is the story of Lieutenant Zegarski, Pointing the Way to the Light, Shepherd of Unlimited Love, the Great and Famous Orange Man.”²⁸ Fydrych also recalls the figure of Robert Jezierski - co-initiator of the Orange Alternative happenings, during which he was repeatedly detained, editor and publisher of the independent magazine *Free Wrocław*, and participant in the occupation strikes at the University of Wrocław in 1987 and 1988. This is what Fydrych wrote about him: “Jezierski went through many offensives. He was wounded. He was decorated on the battlefield. He was the commander of the Red Horse, the Grand Ensign carrying the torch of Freedom and Peace with dignity. The history written here is a drop in the ocean of his merits”²⁹. On the

²⁶ W. Fydrych, *Manifest kwiatów*, p. 1.

²⁷ W. Fydrych, *Żywoty...*, p. 216.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

pages of the book we also find references to Andrzej Dziewit - the main organizer of, among other things, the street actions of the Orange Alternative in Wrocław - the Easter Peace March and the Anarchist Saturator. Fydrych writes about him as follows: "Andrzej Dziewit walked the longest possible path for a spirit clothed in a human body. The impressions he evoked depended on the personality and predisposition of the observer.

He was seen as a sensitive, complicated and noble man. At times strange, as if coming from another planet, a Little Prince³⁰". In "Lives of the Orange Men," Fydrych also devoted a lot of space to Wiesław Cupała, a.k.a. Rotmistrz - a protester, writer, mathematician, editor of the website of the Freedom and Peace Movement, then a lecturer at the Wrocław University of Technology. He wrote about him as follows: "Rotmistrz was an advocate of the absentee strike. He nurtured the idea that all of Poland would sit at home, watching TV, just like he or the Engineer³¹". The author constantly compared him to Peter "Pablo" Adamcio, as did the other "Orange Men". Listing his many qualities using military terminology, he portrays musician Krzysztof Skiba in a completely different way, saying that Skiba had a conflict with authorities.

This prominent Orange Man has many pages mysteriously unwritten and unknown in his life. There are many conjectures about his birth. According to research by competent public services, he was born in a circus. It is not stated where: in the arena, the audience, or in any of the cages³². Fydrych describes the performances and happenings organized by Skiba, his mocking attitude to the authorities of the time, and mentions the musician's master's thesis, dedicated to the Orange Alternative³³ concluding: "This is the story of the Orange Famous Husband, Krzysztof Skiba, who performed superhuman deeds. He created in his life "Circus" the largest, television cabaret, the most scandals. As an artist, he became famous for his extremely fast earnings and expenses. He knew where he was coming from and where he was going. He made a permanent mark in history. Glory to him.³⁴".

In "Lives of the Orange Men", Fydrych pays tribute to the tens of thousands of "Orange Men" who took part in street protest-art forms. He emphasizes that: "Lives of Orange Men" is an unfinished item. The absence of many biographies, of Leszek Kudłaty, Lucol, Andrzej Kielar (Adasio) and Janek Kaczyński, is evident and makes one think that the work should be continued³⁵". Unfortunately, "Lives" still has not lived to see a follow-up.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.2 37.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 298.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

5. To summarize

Freedom and surrealism inextricably linked concepts for understanding the complex interdisciplinary phenomenon of the Orange Alternative - one of the largest protest-art movements in Europe in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The strategy of this interdisciplinary movement was based on actions aimed primarily at the student fraternity, but also at random passers-by by organizing happenings as a form of struggle against the system, and "socialist surrealism" gave it an ideological casing. The phenomenon of the Orange Alternative shows the timelessness of the symbol: dwarfs in funny orange caps, for the choice of symbolic color is important. It represents not only an aesthetic experience, but also a spiritual one, and is a carrier of meaning³⁶.

"Mentioning some heroes, I did not forget about others, which I will write about sooner or later. Nor have I presented the history of the Ladies of Orange. Unfortunately, I do not have sufficient qualification in this matter. If I were to write about them, these beautiful Marchionesses, I would have to create another "Tale of a Thousand and One Nights." However, I hope that the work I put into this book can serve the next generation seeking liberation³⁷" – Fydrych concludes.

What kind of freedom did the leaders of the Orange Alternative want? Freedom of speech and artistic expression, for they wanted to freely express their views, both political and artistic, without interference from the authorities. Political freedom - opposing communist dictatorship and advocating democratization of public life and civil liberty. They also wanted individual freedom, so that citizens could think, speak, create and act freely, without fear of repression by the state. Their dream was also freedom from the absurdity of the system, and they gave expression to this through actions full of irony and nonsense exposing the absurdity of the authorities and the system, which treated citizens as a threat, even if they only painted dwarfs on the walls.

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³⁶ M. Lurker, *Op. cit.*, p. 269.

³⁷ W. Żywoty..., p. 319.

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