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## **Analysis of the Dynamics of the Post-War Modern Photography in East-Central Europe Based on the Case of the Polish Response to Otto Steinert's Subjective Photography (Subjektive Fotografie)**

Past studies concerning the photography in the Polish People's Republic focused either on the genres (such as reportage or landscape photography) most favoured by the government or on the role of the 'environments period' in the mid-1960s. In consequence, there is still a strong belief that in the Polish photography of the 1950s innovative, avant-garde spirit was absent. The main purpose of this paper is to break this assumption by presenting the diversity and complexity of the Polish photography in this period of communist regime. The presented fragment of my dissertation concentrates on the most prominent, yet still forgotten, informal artistic group of three photographers: Zdzisław Beksiński (1929–2005), Jerzy Lewczyński (1924–2014) and Bronisław Schlabs (1920–2009). All of them struggled for financial and artistic survival. Their original proposal of radical modernity was in strong opposition to the ruling trends, such as techniques oriented on traditional and pictorial solutions. Their attempts to break through the canon met with strong resistance from the critics. Moreover, mentioned artists were the only representatives of the Polish photographic milieu that, along with Piotr Janik, have established artistic cooperation with Otto Steinert (1915–1978) – well known founder of the movement called 'Subjective Photography' (*Subjektive Fotografie*).

In 1961 Steinert undertook a role of initiator and curator of the exhibition in Cologne (Köln) called *Photographs from Poland (Fotografen aus Polen)*, where images created by mentioned trio were presented. Press releases concerning this event, underlined that Polish artists well imitate the style of 'Subjective Photography' movement. In the critics' eyes Polish artworks resembled the achievements accomplished earlier in the vital worldwide photography trend, thus the three photographers were presumed followers – they only legitimized artistic production initiated in different country. However, materials preserved in the collections of Historical Museum in Sanok and Association of Polish Art Photographers (such as unpublished photographs and negatives, artists' letters and documents), as well as

information gathered from the archive issues of the journal 'Photography' ('Fotografia' – the only Polish photographic magazine in the 1950s) prove that works by Beksiński, Lewczyński and Schlabs had a greater value. My project, by closely examining the relation between the Polish works and Steinert's *oeuvre*, sheds new light on the rarely acknowledged issue of the significance of the contribution of the less known artists into the 'Subjective Photography'. Proposed approach not only diversifies the widely accepted image of the Steinert's movement and the Polish photography in the 1950s. The change of the optics of the research proposed in this essay also justifies (in terms of methodology) that modern cultural studies should consider East-Central Europe as a region and resign from operating with anachronistic (but still strongly present) binary opposition: centre – periphery.

In conclusion, the aim of this paper is to analyse how the process of reintroducing modernity into the Polish photography in the 1950s proceeded and how the artistic relations between neighbouring states looked like. Are the artistic similarities only confirming that countries such as the Polish People's Republic were merely the sphere of influence of the more important (in the artistic, political and economic sense) ones? How relevant for the artistic matters is the fact that some regions had to face greater challenges of reconstruction after the war than the others?