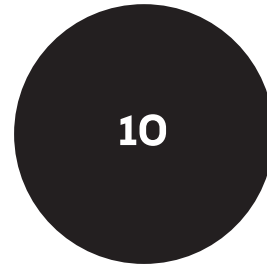




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“The Five Fallen” as a Meta-image of Polish Culture in the Mid-19th Century

translated by Patrick Trompiz

Romantic Fever

At the beginning of 1862, a patriotic fervour was spreading across Warsaw. Celebrations honouring the 30th anniversary of the Battle of Olszynka Grochowska had been planned for the 25 February and, as posterity would know, the first of the demonstrations was to prepare the ground for the January Uprising of 1863.

Demonstrations took place on 11 June 1860 and invoked the spirit of the earlier November Uprising of 1830–31. The funeral of Katarzyna Sowińska – the widow of General Sowiński, hero of the November Uprising – acquired the character of a patriotic demonstration. For she was, “the wife of the elderly soldier who died defending Wola [a district of Warsaw], that leader who died from a bullet standing at the altar... .” According to Franek Plewa, the hero of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski’s *Dziecięcia Starego Miasta* [The Child of the Old Town], Sowiński died a “martyr for the Polish cause.”¹

The Russians were aware of the February plans – in fact announcements had been put up all round the city calling for participation. The first idea put forward was to hold a church service on the site of the battlefield itself. The Viceroy of the Kingdom of Poland, Michaił Gorczakow, did not take any steps towards realising this idea, however. At the suggestion of the Petersburg authorities, he considered organising a mass for the Russian casualties of the battle. In the end, however, the Czarist authorities were aided by the weather: the thaw moved the ice on the Vistula and under this pretext the boat bridge was disassembled and Warsaw lost its connection with Praga (district of Warsaw on the opposite side of the Vistula from the Old Town). The demonstration was then moved to the Old Town.

For a long time, the Army and Gendarmerie desisted from intervening in the processions. Ultimately, however, the gathering was dispersed and thirty people

were arrested. But the waves of revolutionary spirit continued to grow. They were also boosted by the talks, taking place in Warsaw, concerning agricultural policy (including the ending of feudal relations). This issue – besides independence and attitudes towards the Russians – was the biggest matter bringing division in Polish society. Landowners travelled to the city for the congress of the Agricultural Society, its chairman, Count Andrzej Zamoyski, was one of the leaders of the Polish side. It was in this atmosphere that the students of the School of Fine Arts and the Medical-Surgical Academy immediately called for another demonstration, for 27 February, appealing, among other things, for solidarity with those being held.

It started with a church service for the fallen in 1831, in the Church of the Carmelites on Leszno Street; but the culmination came later on the so-called *Narrow Krakowskie Przedmieście Street*, along which protestors marched. The Russians opened fire and the following demonstrators were killed: Filip Adamkiewicz – a journeyman tailor, employed in the construction of the Vistula bridge; Michał Arcichiewicz – a high school student; Karol Brendel – a welder, factory worker and landowner; Marcei Paweł Karczewski and Zdzisław Rutkowski – both members of the Agricultural Society. Accounts of the course of events vary in their details – and in the emphasis placed on specific aspects of the situation. It seems that chaos reigned on the Russian side and Gorczakow rather did not seek armed confrontation.² General Wasyl Zabołocki led the Cossacks and he gave the order to shoot at the crowd. That protestors had mixed in with the funeral cortege moving along Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, and got jammed between the narrow streets of the nearby Old Town. People were stirred up by rumours that the Russians in the tumult had broken a cross; at the same time the crowd was confused, some say they attacked soldiers with bricks and pieces of ice. In any case they did not obey the soldiers' orders to disperse. According to Mikołaj Berg, 55 shots were fired³ and those shots which hit their targets brought further events and an escalation of tensions in their wake, ultimately leading, on the 14th October 1861, to the introduction of martial law in the Kingdom.⁴



Artur Grottger, *Pierwsza ofiara* [First Victim], from the series *Warszawa I*, 1861. Source: Galeria Malarstwa Polskiego

In February, however, the Russian authorities continued attempts to restore peace. Gorczakow withdrew the army from the city streets and agreed to the formation of the City Delegation, a civic representation for the Polish society. He also accepted from the hands of the Delegation an address to the Czar, demanding a change in the Polish political situation. A joint funeral for the victims was also agreed, although the Viceroy was aware that this would inevitably turn into a patriotic demonstration. The funeral service took place on the 2 March in the Church of the Holy Cross, from where the remains were taken to the Paszkowski Cemetery and buried there in a shared grave (located at quarter 178).

The funeral did indeed turn into another occasion for the manifestation of patriotic feelings and feelings of national unity, the myth of national unity having been strengthened in the carnival of freedom of 1860-1861.⁵

Estimates from the period speak of 150 000 participants in the funeral procession, including "representatives of all professions, levels of society and faiths," including delegations from Kraków and Poznań, and also priests and members of the Jewish community and Evangelical pastors. The unifying symbol was the cross (as one might

expect there was a ban on displays of national colours.) This can be seen in the symbolic presentations of the painting of Aleksander Lesser (1861), depicting the funeral with a separate group of spiritual leaders at the cemetery, and the painting of Henryk Pillati (1865), where above the funeral procession there stands out the figure of Christ, the statue in front of the Church of the Holy Cross.

Adam Mickiewicz's 1830 poem *Do Matki Polki [To The Polish Mother]* compared the Passion of Christ and the suffering of the Mother of God with the fate of the Polish conspirators (who would "get the dry wood of the gallows") and their mothers. The analogy of suffering but without bitterness was assumed whereby the fallen demonstrators would be glorified and promised "resurrection-*insurrection*". Their wounds were deliberately exposed in full public view and the coffins were decorated with red lace – these were the most evident signs of the cult which almost from the moment of their deaths began to surround the fallen. It passed momentarily to the image of the nation as we can read in the circular from the 3 March, attributed to the Archbishop Antoni Fijałkowski, and calling for national



Aleksander Lesser, *Pogrzeb pięciu poległych* [Funeral of the Five Fallen], 1861. Source: Wikimedia Commons

mourning:

Women can wear their wedding dresses only on the day of their wedding. Let us nobly bear the (...) the bitter and deep wounds of the nation, avoiding juvenile behaviour or plain showing off – then we shall always be a people of oneness and devotion. Today and for years hence our national emblem shall be a crown of thorns, like the one born yesterday by the coffin of the fallen. Do you not know that that crown means patience, suffering, devotion, liberation, forgiveness? We hereby oblige Poles of all faiths to spread these few phrases to the farthest corners of the land. (Przyborowski, p. 113).

The Cult of the "Five Fallen"

Just after the Russian attack, the body of the youngest victim – Michał Arcichiewicz – was carried to his parents home. They lived in a rented flat in Pałac Zamoyskich (today at 67/69 Nowy Świat Street). The bodies of the other victims at first wandered (here sources differ somewhat in their accounts⁶); but were finally brought to salon No. 64 of the Hotel Europejski where they were guarded honourably by other demonstrators. And this was when they became a place of pilgrimage for Warsaw inhabitants who were interrupted only once – by the official autopsy. There also quickly appeared a box of armbands. "Some people asked passers-by: »You Polish?« When the answer was in the affirmative: »Give me your left arm, Sir«. So you held out your arm and the symbol of mourning was attached." (Berg, p. 148). By the evening it was as if the whole of Warsaw was already wearing the armbands.

At this moment, the author of the account wonders: "What really happened? How did we reach this fever pitch? On the one hand – What did the police do? The government? "How did it come about that the bodies of the victims of the confrontation of the army with the people were left with the crowd?" The answer can be found in the overall evaluation of the Russian authorities: "this kind of spectacle is what we might expect from the chaotic and thoughtless Russian governments, who can never be relied on and who



Death Portrait of Michał Arcichiewicz.
Photographed by: Karol Beyer, 1861.
Source: Polona

take responsibility for nothing." On the other hand it was striking to witness the triumph on the Polish side of an exaltation of independence from the "crazies and brats" previously held back by social elites. Here the national character of the reactions was significant and "an important role was played by the well-known recklessness of the Warsaw population. Nowhere else is there as many mentally deranged people as here and nowhere else is group mania so contagious, spreading in an instant to everyone and everything." (Berg, pp. 148–149).

This fever found expression in the widespread demonstrations of patriotism, mostly manifested in a patently religious form but also drawing on other cultural practices. And photography played a role in this madness and in this cult. On the ground floor of the Hotel Europejski there was a retouching lab for the photographic studio of Karol Beyer (1818–1877), at that time the most important photographer in Warsaw. The proximity of the studio was not the main reason, however, why it was Beyer who took the posthumous pictures of the fallen. He was one of the more respected citizens of the city, for a moment a member of the Municipal Delegation (which he also photographed), and at the same time he was a photographer gifted with intuition and inventiveness in taking on a series of topics. In a sense he took pictures wherever technical conditions permitted – for instance the documentation of the building of the Aleksandrowski Bridge, which took place in the same period as the demonstrations. And Beyer took pictures of *everyone*: he left us with a huge collection of portraits of Warsaw inhabitants.

Beyer photographed the five fallen in profile, from head to waist. With the exception of Arcichiewicz, whose portrait was taken in his family home, they were photographed with bare torsos so as to clearly expose their wounds. The images made appearances in the form of individual displays, but were also combined into a tableau which included all five and which appeared in various versions, always exhibited in decorated frames and surrounded by religious symbols: with black, a cross and references to Golgota together with the promise of resurrection (*Resurgam*). Ewa Toniak analysed the symbolism of these displays in detail in her book about heroic death in Poland of the first half of the 19th century. Toniak placed these pictures both in the tradition of presentations of martyrdom and in the tradition of the posthumous daguerreotypes. However, of the author of *The Dearh of the Hero* is mostly interested in the presence of an aesthetic component ("surplus," as she writes) in the images. This component reveals the subsequent

steps, subsequent images by means of which death itself ("the corpse") is removed from the national imagination, to be replaced by a "messianic consolation."⁷ We may ask though, whether it is proper to speak here of such a messianic escalation: or whether it is really the photographer who caught and preserved the sublime present in the corpses?⁸

Once again it was Mikołaj Berg who described the circumstances in which the pictures were taken, and it is his interpretation which is usually repeated in subsequent accounts.⁹ At the time Berg (1823–1884) was already a recognised historian and Russian columnist, a veteran of the Crimean war and the Garibaldi uprising. He was a remarkable witness of the era who had come to Poland at the beginning of 1863, two years after the events described in this article, intrigued by the explosive January uprising. In the middle of 1864 the then Viceroy of the Kingdom, Fiodor Berg (mere coincidence of surname) invited him to write an account of the situation ("plots and uprisings") in Poland. Berg-the-writer gained access from Berg-Viceroy to both public and confidential Police information, documents of the Czarist and Polish authorities, personal accounts as well as all other archives of written or visual documentation. At the same time, his book does not contain any reference to documents, and the author himself emphasizes his right to his own views and to the protection of his sources (besides the czarist archives). So Berg's reports require caution – but here they are important to the extent that they present the circumstances in which the law enforcement passed symbolic power over the events to the victims.

Thus Berg wrote:

General [Amilkar Paulucci, the new Chief of Police for Warsaw] went to Room 64, where the coroner's examinations of the victims were in progress, carried out by the second court department of the Warsaw police, all of whose personnel had come together with a notary and twelve civilian witnesses as per the law of the time. An interesting motley rabble



Tableau of the Five Fallen.

Photographed by: Karol Beyer, 1861

was squeezing into this room. There was also, with his camera, national photographer Bayer [sic!] and he *captured the look of the victims* in photographs with all their horror and wondrousness, with their *gaping wounds*. These pictures in *countless numbers* of copies circulated around all of Poland. (p. 169, my emphasis)

In this account, there are at least three things worth emphasizing.¹⁰ First of all, the attitude to photography which is a matter of "capturing the look" (literally, as historically in English in portraiture: "taking the likeness"). The documentary aspect, the close connection between portrait and portrayed is here the assumed feature of the photographic. Secondly, on the level of interpretation

– seeing – this document is transformed into a noble symbol: the wounds become "wonderful". Thirdly, these displays are all the more powerful the greater is their number – the reproductive essence of photography is here revealed with all its strength. So photography was also to transfer specific ideas to every "nook and cranny" of the land. The emotional bearing of the bodies across Warsaw, before they found their 'resting place' in the Hotel Europejski, was to show Gorczakow, to show Zamoyski and, finally, to show the Warsaw public – this course of events was recorded in photographs.

Walery Przyborowski also wrote about this, mentioning Berg in the process but removing the latter's pathos: "Then photographer Bayer [sic!] took the likenesses of the victims, in somewhat theatrical poses with the wounds made visible, uncovered. These photographs, ugly and poorly done, went round the whole country in their thousands." Photography had been enlisted in the service of the nation. (Przyborowski, p. 88)

A Metaimage of Culture

These events, including the propaganda role of Karol Beyer's photography and its wide influence, have been described several times in other places.¹¹ I present them here, in as short a form as possible, because I believe that even if photography's role should not be exaggerated, this role does nevertheless pose several as yet unanswered questions. Following John Berger, we may interpret historic material in



Death Portrait of Zdzisław Rutkowski.
Photographed by: Karol Beyer, 1861.
Source: Polona

a 'radial' way, which allows us to perceive the subsequent layers of meaning and practice of Poles of that time.¹²

The circumstances in which these photographs were taken, the manner in which they were written into existing symbolic patterns, the way they were distributed – this together means that we are able to see in them, as in a lens, the basic values of Polish culture of the 19th century; secondly, we may perceive in the pictures a particular encounter – a characteristic one I feel – between modernity (represented by the medium of photography) and the culture's existing forms and values.

The conception of the of *metapicture*¹³, proposed by W.J.T. Mitchell in *Picture Theory* is inspiring in this regard. Łukasz Zaremba, the Polish translator of Mitchell's *What Do Pictures Want?*¹⁴ writes in the introduction to the Polish translation:

For Mitchell, *image* more or less denotes that which circulates without embodiment within the imaginative sphere. It is only by becoming *pictures* that these images take on a material form. *Image* is a category both general and broad, an overarching domain (in *Iconology* Mitchell lists *pictures* as one of the types of *images*). This is why we have translated *image* as the Polish *obraz*¹⁵, and we have translated *picture* as "przedstawienie wizualne," ["visual presentation"] and even "przedstawienie" alone ["presentation"], the latter being understood as the realisation of a given image, for example, as a statue.¹⁶



Tableau of the Five Fallen.

Photographed by: Karol Beyer, 1861.

Source:

Mitchell is not fully consistent in his use of these two terms. He does distinguish them clearly when he wishes to emphasize these two levels of functioning of visual imagination. In *Picture Theory* he explores visual presentations/pictures – i.e. specific realisations of images – which have a self-referential character and it is these that he calls "metapictures."¹⁷ These may be self-referential in three senses. Firstly, the picture may include multiple presentations of itself. Secondly, a part of the picture/presentation may be another presentation, in this way undergoing re-contextualisation or reframing. Thirdly, the picture/presentation may be a part of a discussion about image. According to Mitchell, almost every image may become

a metapicture, as almost every image may provoke reflection on the nature of pictures.

Mitchell most of all emphasizes the first of these understandings: the self-referential aspect of pictures/presentations which speak about themselves or about a specific kind of presentation. The "Five Fallen" is a more complicated case or perhaps a more fluid case than any of the above. If we take as our starting point one of the tableaux composed of the five photographs, in this one picture/presentation five others are hidden. And they express so much meaning because they are in some sense "the same": they are both individual and subjected to the symbolic matrix by means of which they have been reframed in a new whole. Here at work is the connection between the technical-reproductive aspect of photography and the potential "multiplication" of saints in the Catholic tradition - as role-models to be imitated. This matrix, drawing on the language of Tyrtaeus-martyrological romanticism and at the same time preserving that language with great strength, has its roots in another kind of presentation, i.e. in icons and/or smaller holy pictures. Using the distinction we have assumed here, this matrix belongs to the level of imagination, i.e. to *image* in Mitchell's technical sense. At the same time, the subject of this matrix is not only a presentation which includes another presentation, but the whole of the following process: photography takes up the ornamental style of tableaux originating with holy pictures. The whole image made out of photographs "swallows" the individual photograph, subordinating it to the overall symbolism. The whole clearly invokes not only other presentations, but a whole series of practices related both to religious imagery and the renewal of the cult. At the same time the effect of the modern medium of photography is invoked. Both these orders - religious imagery and the modern development of photography - intertwine, creating a new presentation which may be said to be "multistable."¹⁸

The multistability of images is usually illustrated, as it is by Mitchell, by means of the rabbit-duck illusion, where, depending on the focus of our gaze, particular accommodation on the level of recognition (not perception), we see either a drawing of a rabbit or a duck. Again, in a certain sense, every image is multiply stable to the extent that we see either the picture or the subject, either the depiction or the depicted ("I can at will focus on the scenery or on the window-pane," as Roland Barthes wrote¹⁹). The tableau of the "Five Fallen" works here on several levels. We see at the same time the image-thing (memento) and what is

presented; we see both parts and the whole. But the basic tension is of course between the documentary power of photography (and its iconic potential) and the stability of reworked and thereby preserved holy presentations; between event and the great symbolic narrative.

The dynamic character of the presentation of the "Five Fallen" reveals the kind of self-reference at play in the work, but above all it forces us to shift our focus to the relational nature of the work in general – its being located in an entire network of practices and signs, other presentations and images. Beyer's tableau is a product both of its historical circumstances and its cultural context, and in effect is a statement about those origins and therefore a witness to the beginnings of modernity. That is why I describe it as a metaimage (and not a metapicture), adding the qualification: a metaimage of culture. The conditions for the status of being a metaimage in this perspective are not only the internal features of the image but also the right context for the culture as a whole – its unique practices, genres and visual media as well as the system of values and modernizing transformations.



Tableau of the Five Fallen.
Photographed by: Karol Beyer, 1861.
Source: Polona

This last point, besides allowing us to view the presentations to be analysed in a truly broad conception, it also allows us to go beyond a certain contradiction which has been taken to be obvious – between new media and old narratives and symbols (and their corresponding media).²⁰ Even Marshall McLuhan, though he left an unsolved complex of technological determinism in his work, when he stressed that the medium itself is the "message" – transforming as it does both the consciousness and the subconscious of the subject – he also noticed that the effect of particular media also depends on the state or the degree of development of the society which that message reaches.

The Modern Photographic Mania

Photography and modernity were joined at birth. If we take modernity to be not

a philosophical *project*, but the *realisation* of that project: modernity is the time when human experience transformed into a modern experience and there was at the same time a recognition of this fact. This civilizational moment took place in the first half of the 19th century: precisely at the birth and subsequent rapid development of photographic practice.²¹ At the same time its expansion (as with the later development of cinema) was related to the expansion of the West. The borders of the modern world became the borders defined with the aid of recording devices. From the middle of the 19th century: photography is the world and what is not photographed – does not exist.

The daguerreotype and subsequent improvements to photography arrived in Poland relatively quickly (due to Beyer), with at most a delay of a few years from their appearance in western markets (which at the time meant in practice Paris). Before 1860 photography had already become a popular medium in Polish cities. In 1854, the format *carte de visite* was patented; it allowed for the simultaneous exposure of 8 photographs in a 6x9 cm format on one glass plate. The inventor or rather populariser of this idea was André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri (1819–1889). Karol Beyer had been actively looking for new technical solutions at foreign exhibitions and specialist fairs. The right equipment arrived in his atelier in 1859. Economic considerations are here strictly tied to the capacity to distribute pictures, as well as with the possibilities for developing new methods. The *carte de visite* do indeed find application as calling cards; above all, however, they become the subject of trading, exchange and collectors' items – they are exhibited as memorabilia in the shop windows of factories and in apartments; they are widely collected into the albums frequently to be found in urban homes. As André Rouillé has written, these cards became images representing the trust in presentation which goes together with economic exchange.²²

Susan Sontag put it like this:

a society becomes "modern" when one of its chief activities is producing



Stanisław Hiszpański, cobbler,
member of the City Delegation.
Photographed by: Karol Beyer, 1861.
Source: Polona

and consuming images, when images that have extraordinary powers to determine our demands upon reality and are themselves coveted substitutes for first-hand experience become indispensable to the health of the economy, the stability of the polity, and the pursuit of private happiness.²³

She refers here to the preface of Feuerbach's 1843 *The Essence of Christianity*, where Feuerbach wrote that "The present age... prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence... for in these days illusion only is sacred, truth profane."²⁴ Marx perceived, in the middle of the 19th century, the phenomenon of the circulation of goods *as signs*. The distribution of photographs adds an important context here: signs themselves become "goods." On the one hand, they have exchange value, on the other they are mass produced and in effect act in a reproductive manner by formatting poses, styles of dress, aspects of belongingness and social roles. Photography was to become the first instrument of "technological reproduction" – to use Benjamin's phrase²⁵ – which acts in a modernising way to the extent that it irons out differences and provides mass distribution of unified contents.

This photography, despite the static nature of the single shot, is really mobile. It reaches many recipients with a variety of social positions. In the case of patriotic pictures, Beyer even resigned from seeking his dues as author (on other photographs he placed the printed warning: "Karol Beyer's print. Copies will be sought out"²⁶), and he sold the photographs to school-groups with large discounts. Commercial mechanisms undergo are negotiated, as they must defer to higher values. On the other hand, the same situation provokes a veritable photographic mania, which of course boosts the economic activity of photographic studios. The apogee of this activity is the time of the uprising when there are portraits of men in uprising attire being taken on a mass scale, as well as of women in mourning. It is difficult to assess the scale of the phenomenon in precise numbers, but the newspaper *Kurier Warszawski* [*Warsaw Courier*] already in 1862 claimed that in only one studio alone 30 000 portraits were discovered.²⁷ And these photos really did find their way to the farthest flung corners of the Empire. Both photos and entire studios found their way to Siberia together with the inmates. Beyer himself was sentenced in 1863 to one year in Novohopersk, where he continued his photographic activity. The photographs, being published abroad, sustained

a sudden interest in Poland related to its social instability. The beginning of the 1860's was the time the illustrated press came into existence, though the pictures are reproduced using engraving i.e. in a mediated manner. The *Illustrated London News*, the first illustrated weekly in the world, appeared for the first time on 14 May 1842 (promoted on the streets of London by 200 "sandwich men"). In Warsaw, the *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* [*Illustrated Weekly*] came out for the first time in 1859.

So the photographs of the "Five Fallen" already functioned in the living environment of technical pictures as well as in the context of many other pictures/presentations which were strictly related to the "issue" and so providing the context for, or even co-creating, this cultural metaimage. Above all the members of the City Delegation had their pictures taken, with a special insignia of three white stripes, but also with symbols of their social position and profession. Stanisław Hiszpański, the cobbler famous for his verbal battles with Górczakow, became very well known.²⁸



Michał Landy, victim of the 8 April 1861 manifestation, lying in the mortuary of the Saint Roch Hospital. Photographed presumably by Karol Beyer. Source: Wikimedia Commons

The first photography of the events of February 1862 was taken by Warsaw Oberpolicmajster Fiodor Trepow (for a moment substituted by Paulucci). He went out to the crowd in the Old Town, intending to check the scale and course of the events of the demonstration of 25 February, at the request of the Viceroy, and he was hurt in the crowd. Warsaw street culture came up with a small poem on the occasion: "Na Starym Mieście, przy wodotrysku / Pan policmajster dostał po pysku" [In the Old Town, by the fountain / Mr Policeman got a punch on the chin]. The next day our injured hero reported to Beyer's studio in his bandages to have his picture taken. And many more pictures were to come in the following months: the picture of the Jewish boy Michał Landa, injured during the demonstration of 8 April during which he had been holding a cross (he died in the Hospital of St. Roch); the posthumous portrait of Archbishop Fijałkowski; later insurgents, including the National Government, were frequently portrayed in the form of tableaux using the portraits of the members; reproductions of painted and graphical presentations for instance the aforementioned pictures of Lesser and Pillati or the portraits of Kościuszki, and later of course the paintings of Jan Matejko and the graphics of Artur Grottger both of which were fundamental for Polish national mythology.

Thus the photography of the "Five Fallen" became a part of a complex collective action which expressed itself in various media and was based on repetition: the demonstration of 27 February was to be a repetition of the demonstration of 25 February, which was intended to be an invocation of the spirit of the events of 1831; the fate of the "Five Fallen" became the fate of Christ – at the same time a repetition and an exhortation to further repetition. The technology of reproduction here works effectively: everyone had their picture taken in similar poses, against the same backdrops, placed in similar frames. Every time an individual with all their specific social attributes stands before a camera, they are placed in a uniform matrix. As with the economic dimension of photography – there is a negotiation with the supervening order of collective values.

An A-modern Moment

The same poses, the same background and the same framing nevertheless mean something entirely different depending on whose hands the photograph reaches. As for Trepow's photograph: he holds it up as proof of his own heroism; for the Polish public the same photo was a souvenir of a pleasant victory over the Russians. A particularly spectacular example is the so-called *policmajster album* – a collection of photos collected by Platon Frederiks, Warsaw *policmajster* from 1863 to 1878 and titled by him *Pamiątka buntu (Pamięć miatieża)* [A Memento of Insurrection].²⁹ There are over 700 photographs of Polish people who are mostly wanted, missing, arrested, deceased. Their pictures were confiscated by the Russians while carrying out searches and arrests. In the hands of the *policmajster* the pictures change their function, yet they are still mementoes – perhaps because they lack a unified form, for the form itself was not subjected adequately to police routines. And so the appearance retains an emotional charge, which is presumably why the album remained with Frederiks once he had finished his service, to be passed on to his family, as private property and not state property.



Artur Grottger in uprising dress.
 Photographed by: Jan Mieczkowski
 (1830–1889), ca 1863. Source: Polona

So we may claim that the police of the time – and not only the Russian police – were aware of the usefulness photography, but they had yet to discover the right photographic language for the police's own variety of photography. The first photographs taken at the behest of law enforcements agencies – like the portraits taken of prisoners by Carl Durheim at the request of the Swiss prosecutor in the 50's³⁰ – did not differ at all from portraits taken in the atelier. But perhaps it is worth pointing out that the photos often were of members of classes who still lacked their own symbolic and economic access to photography. Telling in this regard is the famous picture of Alexander Payne (made famous by Roland Barthes' analysis in *Camera Lucida* where the picture is a case study for Barthes' idea of *punctum*.) This conspirator against the highest authorities in the USA, an accomplice in the assassination of President Lincoln, was photographed in 1863 three months before his death, in three shots each with the same background. The frames of these photos are set up stiffly but within their limits the subject behaves freely, with a certain nonchalance – quite out of place for the taking of a police photograph.

Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914) started to introduce more appropriate photographic procedures at the beginning of the 70's of the 19th century. These procedures were a part of a complex biometric system which enabled the systematic and professional identification of suspects and criminals. The goal of police photography in this conception was to "observe, checking or controlling of bodies: it's a matter of uncovering from them new regions, the acquisition of new knowledge ready to be passed on to the new authorities."³¹ However, as Agnieszka Pajczkowska remarks on the basis of the analysis of identification practices in KL Auschwitz-Birkenau³², this was not only a matter of creating a given presentation; it was also about forcing the prisoner, the convict or the sick to perform a set activity – the photographed subject participated in a kind of dramatization, which made him a prisoner before he was placed in this role permanently. This performative model was yet to become available for the police photograph at the moment we are considering (1861) and the frames of the photos are yet to be cut with a guillotine.

From contemporary accounts including those of Berg, we can see that Beyer's photography was produced if not with the agreement of the Czarist authorities, then at least with their awareness.³³ The pictures of the deceased from the start

were made with the daguerreotype process, i.e. practices which were already established. What was new was the use made of the camera's objective revealing its 'surgical potential'³⁴, approaching the painter's brush in creating sublime pictures.³⁵ Not only did the Russian authorities permit the use of the existing symbolic order, but for a certain period of time refrained from pursuing either the photographers or the photos themselves. This situation changed after a few months, with Beyer himself being arrested for the first time already in 1861.

We can call this moment 'a-modern' – by which I do not mean to place it in a linear or chronological order, with respect an assumed process of developing modernity. Instead I would locate this time next to this development or in a unique intersection of the modern and the stable – what is synchronic with respect to yesterday and tomorrow.³⁶ At the moment we are speaking of, there were some kinds of language, certain possibilities which were yet to come into existence. Yet there were others which had been established earlier and which were equally open to the influence of the reproductive machine.

At this time there was also no separate or marked out sphere of pictorial circulation. In a certain sense we can say there is no such separate sphere, but with a film screening, even when we watch at home, we do switch off other media for a certain time. The photographs in question here were used as a tableau with the "Five Fallen" constituting a paradigm or model. Those same photos functioned within a whole flurry of oral and performative practices. Their currency, which according to Walter Benjamin is so significant for photography, intersects here with a static technology which ironically removes the tension of the moment from the picture. In a similar way, *myth* is brought to contemporary life here thanks to the power of photography as *document*. By the power of mimesis we bear witness to a concrete event, but by the use of symbols this event is immediately transported in the sphere of myth. When you own a picture of the "Fallen" it is "somewhat akin to having a nail from the real Cross." That's why I believe it is misleading to interpret Beyer's photographs in terms of genres like photomontage and photojournalism.³⁷



Fighters in the January Uprising (tableau). Photographed by: Walery Rzewuski (1837-1888), post 1868. Source: Polona

The similarity which turns on placing the pictures next to each other disguises a much more crucial difference – the subsuming of the event under the national-religious myth, as we have mentioned several times. By showing the wounds these pictures do not threaten or terrorize, instead they build up a religious parallel – in effect they take the event out of historical time which one would have thought to have been the appropriate time for photography – and place the event in an eschatological horizon. The reality of “here and now” is not the reference point, nor relation – as in photojournalism, nor the harmonising of a disconnected world – as in photomontage.

Instead the photographs become an element of a national mass or national prayer, a holy souvenir – often more of an object than an image of something. They become an essential element of a community’s story – both a confirmation of that story and an enrichment of it.

Polish Narcissus

Portrait photography occupies a special place at the border of public space and private space. It has a public circulation – for instance today, when photographers exhibit their work in a shop window for advertising purposes.³⁸ In the middle of the 19th century portraits served mainly to present social status and roles, i.e. a reasonably lasting (relative to a human lifespan) dimension of personal identity, but more and more the result of individual choices (such as the choice of profession). At the same time, the background of the atelier was an ambiguous combination of universal cultural motifs (ancient or rustic for example) with the “padded casing” of the over-furnished bourgeois interior that Benjamin wrote about.³⁹ The craze for photography in Poland between 1861 and 1864, however, related above all to national identification, i.e. the collective identity whose expression in public space was limited or even forbidden. The most common uses of portrait photography were private uses – like the aforementioned “Policmajster’s Album” – and they establish a shift into the private realm at the same time being a use of photography as a political declaration. This situation is partly the result of the fact that the public life of Polish society in the Polish Kingdom took place in private space (street



City Delegation. Photographed by: Karol Beyer, 1861. Source: Polona

demonstrations were the a rare, revolutionary form in this context). Patriotic jewellery, photographs as mementos sometimes in medallions or even rings, but also photos on *étagères* and tables were a part of the communal sphere, i.e. the private space which was accessible for the public and its purposes – be those political meetings, charitable balls or, later, home schooling.⁴⁰

So a visit to a photographer became an act confirming one's membership in the community. This fact was noticed at the time, though while some took part in the activity, others only commented on it – and not without the occasional dig. Walery Przyborowski, mentioned already several times, perhaps simply did not like photographs; while appreciating the reach of the photographs of the "Five Fallen", he did as I mentioned, find them ugly. He wrote with critical irony about the photographs of the City Delegation (p. 160):

Dressed for mourning, but differently from the others, those mere mortals, placing three white stripes stitched on their sleeves they made Beyer takes hundreds of his photos to tell the whole nation – nay, the whole world and all posterity.



Portrait of Cyprian K. Norwid.
Photographed by: François Joseph Delintraiz, 1861. Source: Polona

Opponents of national intensification also made their feelings known. In the satirical paper *Komunały* [*Banalities*], edited by Aleksander Miniszewski (a supporter of Aleksander Wielopolski), the following derisive text was published:

Since every moment has its characteristic marks and properties, at the present photography is in bloom. And since everyone is in possession of photographic albums, large or small, no-one need any longer bother themselves with *creativity* or *thinking* that might give one a headache. So, whether privates or generals, let us photograph their feathers [part of the insignia of their uniforms – trans.] in an orderly fashion, all alike and as agreed."⁴¹

This is the kind of assessment, which rings of Baudelaire and his contempt for the awestruck masses with their fascination for photography. As the French poet wrote

wrote: "our squalid society rushed, Narcissus to a man, to gaze at its trivial image on a scrap of metal"⁴² The act of self-amazement on seeing one's own photograph became widespread, yet these acts of narcissism were fed by the illusion of individuality, the uniqueness of the subject. Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Polish poet, but a Parisian at that time, contemporary of Baudelaire, had his picture taken at almost the same time as the French poet – except the Pole in his picture taken in 1861 was sporting his national clothes. Photography gave the Polish nation the opportunity to identify with the community with all the reproductive power of this technology, thus strengthening the image of the National costume and the noble death one undergoes when one dies wearing it. We cannot but perceive here the love felt for the wounds and the beauty of "the victim" – the nation's victimhood, collective victimhood, one's own victimhood. To the threat of real physical violence, photography in Poland replied with protection from harm in the world of myth. The photographs of the "Five Fallen" represent an old-new matrix of symbolic violence in a new medium.

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Footnotes

1 In the account of Franek Plewa, the hero of the book, the crowd gathered in spite of the whispered 'suggestions' of the Russian Gendarmerie, in the book referred to as "red collars". They asked provocatively: "Why would Catholics need to be attending a Lutheran funeral?" The whole novel revolves around the patriotic mobilisation of 1860 and 1861. Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, *Dziecięcia Starego Miasta* [*The Children of the Old Town*], (Poznań: Jan Konstanty Żupański, 1863).

2 Original sources concerning the events of 1861 are represented by the description given by Mikołaj Wasylewicz Berg, *Zapiski o powstaniu polskiem 1863 i 1864 roku i poprzedzającej powstanie epoce demonstracji od 1856 r.* [Notes on the Polish Uprising of 1863 and 1864 and the Preceding Era of Demonstrations from

1856 on.], trans. Karol Jaskłowski (Kraków: Spółka Wydawnicza Polska, 1898); the text was translated literally by K. J. [Karol Jaskłowski] from the Russian original published with the financing of the government and subsequently destroyed by the censor. In subsequent citations, I will give the relevant author and the page from this publication. This text is the point of reference for, among others, Walery Przyborowski in his work about the 1860's. Compare Z. L. S. [Walery Przyborowski], *Historia dwóch lat: 1861–1862. Cz. 1, Rok 1861. T. 2 (styczeń–maj)* [A History of Two Years: 1861–1862. Part 1, The Year 1861. Volume 2 (January – May)], (Kraków: privately financed edition of L. Anczyca i Spółki under the management of Jan Gadowski, 1893), especially the fifth chapter *Pięć ofiar* [Five Victims] (in further citations I will give the author's surname and the page only); compare also *Przed powstaniem styczniowym. Rozprawa w Kole literacko-artystycznym we Lwowie nad książką Historia dwóch lat 1861–1862 przez Z. L. S.*, [Before the January Uprising. A Discussion in the Literary-artistic Circle of Lviv concerning the book 'A History of Two Years 1861–1862' by Z. L. S.], (Lwów: edition of Włodzimierz Zawadzki, 1894). Spelling of Polish words in citations has been changed to contemporary spelling. For studies of the period, see above all Stefan Kieniewicz, *Powstanie styczniowe* [The January Uprising] (Warszawa: PWN, 1972) oraz Stefan Kieniewicz, *Warszawa w powstaniu styczniowym* [Warsaw in the January Uprising] (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1983), as well as Franciszka Ramotowska, *Rząd carski wobec manifestacji patriotycznych w Królestwie Polskim w latach 1860–1862* [The Czarist Government's Attitude to Patriotic Demonstrations in the Kingdom of Poland 1860–1862], (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1971).

3 Berg, 145.

4 We should above all mention at this point the demonstration of 8 April 1861, organised in protest at the dissolution of the Agricultural Society; 100 people died and 200 were injured at this demonstration.

5 Compare, for instance: "For the first time after long years of oppression, our land breathed the air of freedom; for the first time, after long years of suffocating silence, there came forth from the hearts of a thousand a cry of pain. And the sound of this cry reached the farthest corners of our country, accompanied by the sound of the word 'brotherhood', brotherhood of all states and all our faiths under the banner of love for a shared motherland." Aleksander Kraushar, *Pięciu poległych*

[*Five Fallen*], in: K. Dunin-Wąsowicz, comp. *Warszawa w pamiętnikach powstania styczniowego [Warsaw in the Diaries of the January Uprising]*, (Warszwa: PIW, 1963), p. 171. From the rich literature on this subject, compare among others: Marian Płachecki, *Wojny domowe. Szkice z antropologii słowa publicznego w dobie zaborów (1800–1880) [Civil War. Notes in the Anthropology of Public Discourse during Partition of Poland]*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2009), especially the chapter *Pieczęć Rządu Narodowego. Z etnografii stanu wojennego. Królestwo Polskie 1861–1864. [The Seal of the National Government. From the Ethnography of Martial Law. The Kingdom of Poland 1861–1864.]* We should, however, add that this felt unity was as per the times – it included the representatives of a few city states (without commoners) and the nobility, only men of course.

6 Besides Berg i Przyborowski, compare also the recollections of Aleksander Kraushar, *The Five Fallen ...*

7 Ibid, p. 134.

8 What in Poland is always a somewhat grotesque affair: as Przyborowski mentions (p. 89), the arm of another victim was placed into Rutkowski's coffin by another participant of the demonstration; on the other hand the Jewish community waited for the death of a Jewish person injured in the demonstration, to make the death toll 6 – "he did not die and continued to not die for another several weeks." (s. 90)

9 Aleksander Karoli alone mentions that the photographs of the Five Fallen were in fact taken by Marcin Olszyński. He closely cooperated with Beyer, so it was obvious to attribute the act of taking the picture to himself as something belonging to the master of the "workshop" (as had been the case for painting). Compare Aleksander Karoli, *Karol Beyer*, in *Fotograf Warszawski [Warsaw Photographer]* 7 (1912), p. 99. Compare also Eugenia Triller, "Udział Karola Beyera w manifestacjach narodowych i powstaniu styczniowym [The Role of Karol Beyer in National Demonstrations and the January Uprising]," *Ze Skarbca Kultury. Biuletyn informacyjny Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich [From the Vaults of Culture. The Newsletter of the National Ossoliński Institute]* 46 (1988), pp. 109–138.

10 This description originally appeared in Russian; it was naturally the Polish translation that spread throughout the community, which is why the Polish

formulation has greater interpretative significance here.

11 Compare, among others, Aleksander Maciesza, *Historia fotografii polskiej w latach 1839–1889* [*The History of Polish Photography from 1839 to 1889*], (Płock: Towarzystwo Naukowe Płockie, 1972), especially the chapter *Czasy przedpowstaniowe i powstaniowe (1852–1863)* [*Before the Uprising and the Uprising itself*]. There is a full documentation of photography from the period 1860–1865 in K. Lejko, comp., *Powstanie styczniowe i zesłańcy syberyjscy. Katalog fotografii ze zbiorów Muzeum Historycznego m.st. Warszawy. Cz. 1* [*The January Uprising and the Exiles to Siberia. A Catalogue of Photography from the Collections of the Historical Museum of Warsaw*], (Warszawa: Muzeum Historyczne m.st. Warszawy, 2004).

12 Compare John Berger, "The Uses of Photography", in: John Berger, *About Looking* (London: Vintage, 1992).

13 W.J.T. Mitchell, "Metapictures," in: W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), pp. 33–82.

14 W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

15 In its normal usage the Polish word "obraz" may be both *image* and *picture*. – trans.

16 Łukasz Zaremba, Iwona Kurz, *Potęga i nędza królestwa obrazów. Animistyczna ikonologia W.J.T. Mitchella* [*The Power and Poverty of the Kingdom of Images. The Animistic Iconology of W.J.T. Mitchell*], in: W.J.T. Mitchell, *Czego chcą obrazy? Pragnienia i miłości przedstawięń wizualnych*, trans. Łukasz Zaremba [Polish translation of *What Do Pictures Want?...* *ibid.*], (Warszawa: NCK, 2013), p. 22.

17 We may add that Mitchell uses yet another phrase indicating a particular kind of theoretical or knowledge-imparting image – *hypericon*. This topic goes beyond the scope of this article, since it concerns general ideas which take the form of an image (e.g. Plato's cave), and not images/presentations as the bearers of ideas. W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 6.

18 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 50.

19 Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984.)

20 In Polish culture this apparent opposition frequently returns in journalistic references to high profile Church undertakings – the publication "Rycerza Niepokalanej" ["The Immaculate Knight"] of Father Maksymilian Kolbe (its circulation reached 800 000 at the height of its popularity, just before WWII) and Radio Maryja of Tadeusz Rydzyk (here the audience figures are less impressive than the strength of the message in bringing listeners together.)

21 We do not have the space here to present a full reconstruction of this process, but I have following here above all Walter Benjamin as a commentator of modernity, as well as Jonathan Crary. In Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge – London: MIT Press, 1990), he analyses transformations in fields of vision and in the looking subject at the beginning of the XIX century.

22 André Rouillé, *Fotografia. Między dokumentem a sztuką współczesną* [La Photographie: Entre document et art contemporain], trans. Oskar Hedemann (Kraków: Universitas. 2007), p. 52.

23 Susan Sontag, "The Image World", in: Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Picador, 2001), p. 153.

24 English translation from Ludwig Feurbach, Z. Hanfi (comp. and trans.), *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972).

25 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. Harry Zohn, in idem, *Illuminations*, (New York: Schocken/Random House, 1968). Benjamin is aware of the existence of earlier techniques of reproduction – for instance lithography – but he believes that the ease and the mass-scale and the precision of photographic copying together introduce a qualitative shift. Secondly, he thinks that the reproductive possibilities of photography are not only an instrumental dimension but an intrinsic feature – the photographic image is *always* a reproduction. At the same time we must admit it has incomparable mimetic

power.

26 Cited in: Danuta Jackiewicz, *Karol Beyer 1818–1877*, (Warszawa: Dom Spotkań z Historią – Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 2012), p. 25 – part of the series *Fotografowie Warszawy*. As of now, this is the only monograph on Karol Beyer's work.

27 Cited in Krystyna Lejko, "Fotografia w powstaniu styczniowym – jej dzieje i rola [Photography in the January Uprising – its History and Role]," in: *Powstanie styczniowe i zesłańcy syberyjscy... [The January Uprising and the Siberian Exiles...]*, p. 25.

28 Both Berg and Przyborowski write about this.

29 Compare Henryk Latoś, "Album policmajstra i polskie 'carte de visite' [The Policmaster's Album and Polish 'carte de visite']," *Fotografia* 4, 1971, pp. 86–91.

30 Jens Jäger, "Photography. A means of Surveillance? Judicial Photography, 1850 to 1900," *Crime, History & Societies* vol. 5 no. 1 (2001), pp. 4–5. For more on the history of identification photography see: J.-M. Berliere, P.Fournié (eds.), *Fichés? Photographie et identification 1850–1960* (Paris: Perrin-Archives nationales, 2011) and Allan Sekula, "TheBody and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986).

31 André Rouillé, *Fotografia...*, p. 84.

32 A large portion of Pajęczkowska's MA thesis on this subject has been published in two articles: Agnieszka Pajęczkowska, "Zdjęcia identyfikacyjne w KL Auschwitz-Birkenau. Rekonstrukcja i interpretacja praktyk, [Identification Photographs in KL Aushwitz-Birkenau. A Reconstruction and Interpretation of Practices]," *Kultura i Historia*[*Culture and History*], 2011, <http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/2563>; and eadem, "Obraz odzyskany. Fotograficzne portrety ocalonych, [Image Regained. The Photographic Portraits of the Saved]," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały*[*The Extermination of the Jews. Studies and materials*] 8 (2012).

33 He wrote, with a touch of vindictiveness, about the autopsy: "Not only are we given most serious descriptions of the position of each of the corpses on their mattress in such and such number of the hotel, to where they were brought after long travels and where they have been laid in the most apt positions to have their

picture taken, even the soiling of certain body parts are recorded in the report, the incompletely digested potatoes in the stomach of another, or the detailed description of the bullet pulled out of another. In a word, this was not a serious matter, but was rather a children's game of the children who have broken free of their Nanny. And that impertinence, the ironic mockery of the authorities and the government – all this had to be countersigned by the delegated Deputy of the Russian Army!" (Berg, p. 170).

34 Compare Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*...

35 That this is not at all obvious is evidenced by photographs taken two decades later – of the fallen Paris communards – exposed and bereft of their dignity. The latter photographs are attributed to Disdéri.

36 According to Svetlana Boym's suggestion – close to my own – in reality there only exists *off-modernity*, i.e. de-modernity or a-modernity in which we should move around like a knight on the chessboard – to use Viktor Shklovsky's image. Compare Svetlana Boym, "The Off-Modern Mirror," *e-flux journal* 19 (October, 2010), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-off-modern-mirror/>, accessed 27 February 2016.

37 This is the suggestion of Krystyna Lejko and Ewa Toniak, among others. Adam Sobota wrote this is "a form of political activism heralding twentieth century photomontage." See his comments in "Ankieta – 150 lat fotografii [Questionnaire – 150 years of Photography]," *Fotografia* 1 (1989), pp. 5–10.

38 Ceramic gravestone photographs are a separate phenomenon which developed in Poland in the mid-1860's. Karol Beyer was one of the pioneers in this area as well.

39 Walter Benjamin, "Paris – Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in idem, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge – London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 1–27.

40 It is worth noting in the margin that this is an imprecise division of home and public sphere, in contrast, for example, to Victorian culture. It is also significant for the unobvious role of women in Poland.

41 Cited in Krystyna Lejko, "Fotografie z okresu powstania styczniowego w zbiorach Działu Ikonografii Muzeum Historycznego m.st. Warszawy, [Photography from the Period of the January Uprising in the Collections of the Department of Iconography in the Historical Museum of Warsaw]," *Almanach Muzealny [The Museum Almanach]* 2 (1999), p. 213.

42 Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1859," in: *The Mirror of Art*, trans. J. Mayne (New York: Phaidon Press, 1955), 228.