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Misery and Blob. The Work of Adam Kozicki and Bartosz Zaskórski in the Context of Generational Images of Exhaustion

author:

Aleksy Wójtowicz

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Even before 2015, critics were pointing to a conservative turn in Polish contemporary art. The rising dominance of non-realist efforts, especially in painting, prompted a shift in reception toward the assessment of new art through the prism of the influence of being “tired of reality,” conformism toward the market, and indifference to socio-political realities. This essay interrogates the image of young artists entrenched in critical circles – especially the usefulness of the category of “generation,” and the validity of an ethical opposition between realism and surrealism. Against this background, the text examines the figures of Adam Kozicki and Bartosz Zaskórski, two artists considered part of the “fatigued generation.” Their “self-portraits in an extended field” and their interest in the transforming body directly relate to the late-capitalist condition, to which they propose an “off-modern” strategy as a potential solution.

Aleksy Wójtowicz - Graduate of the Faculty of Visual Culture Management (Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw). Art historian, critic, editor of "Szum" magazine. Interested in visual culture, sociology of art, history of the Polish field of art after 1989. Member of AICA and the informal group Consortium of Post-Artistic Practices; co-initiator and organiser of the Anti-fascist Year initiative.

Misery and Blob. The Work of Adam Kozicki and Bartosz Zaskórski in the Context of Generational Images of Exhaustion

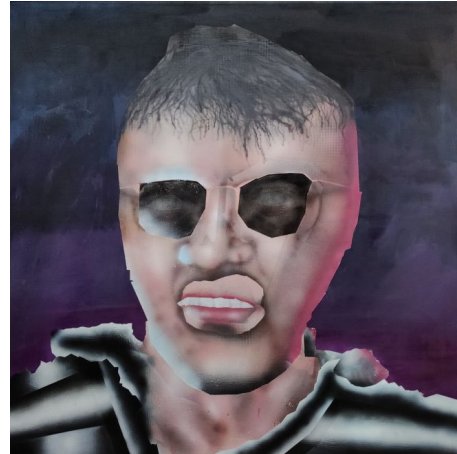
In 2014, Mark Fisher wrote that “the 21st century is oppressed by a crushing sense of finitude and exhaustion.”¹ Living in late-capitalist reality, today’s 30- and 40-year-olds often exceed the endurance limits of their bodies and minds, falling into a pathological state of exhaustion.² The productivity cycle of the body is interrupted and the future is scrapped, while culture – according to Fisher – finds itself in the grip of formal nostalgia,³ overstimulated and at the same time extremely tired. Similar findings have been voiced by Anne Helen Petersen, who diagnosed modernity as a world deprived of lasting rest and the possibility of catharsis, leaving only the “background hum of exhaustion.”⁴

French neuropsychiatry pioneer Philippe Tissié wrote in 1887 that “[t]he present generation is born fatigued; it is the product of a century of convulsions.”⁵ Examined using scientific categories since the 1860s, fatigue became a broad metaphor for modernity, as well as a medicalized illustration of cultural, political, and moral crises.⁶ Capitalist reality was already recognized as capable of producing neurasthenia in the mid-1800s,⁷ and, as Anson Rabinbach writes, subsequent psychophysiological experimentation into the subject (performed, among other researchers, by Angelo Mosso, Emil Kraepelin, and Józefa Joteyko) was never free from concerns about the alarming condition of the social body.⁸ It seems that after two centuries of convulsions, current generations are born so fatigued as to reach burnout after only two or three decades of life.

The birth of the “fatigued” in the age of exhaustion

In the Polish visual arts, interest in the metaphor of fatigue appeared more broadly in 2009, on account of the concept of “zmęczeni rzeczywistością” [tired of reality]⁹ coined at the time, apparently affecting a group of neo-surrealist painters who were finding increasing acclaim. Writing about their work, Joanna Ruszczyk said that these artists were “disaffected with what is essentially journalism in painting.

Over socio-political issues, they would much rather focus on exploring the imagination.”¹⁰ The international careers of Jakub Julian Ziółkowski and Tomasz Kowalski soon became a pivotal reference point for the field of Polish art – both for artists debuting in their wake and critics looking to capture the zeitgeist through definable artistic tendencies. After the 1990s (strongly marked by critical art and attendant controversies)¹¹ and the first decade of the 21st century (when the landscape was mostly shaped by Wilhelm Sasnal, Rafał Bujnowski, and Marcin Maciejowski, alongside the so-called “Young Polish Art” movement), a new, non-realist type of painting emerged. Although the work of these “fatigued” artists was not explicitly surrealist, it was described using a related category, that of neo-surrealism, characterized by the primacy of subjective imagination over reality and its claim to objectivity. With time, this concept, misunderstood as an expression of a broader “generational sensibility,” has become almost exclusively



Adam Kozicki, *Trudny do ukrycia, obciążający atrybut biedoty (Antifiarz)* [A hard-to-hide, incriminating attribute of poverty (Antifa member)], 2020, acrylic and oil on canvas. 90 x 90 cm

confined to a select handful of artists, and the short-lived phenomenon of artists “tired of reality” is most likely entirely over.¹²

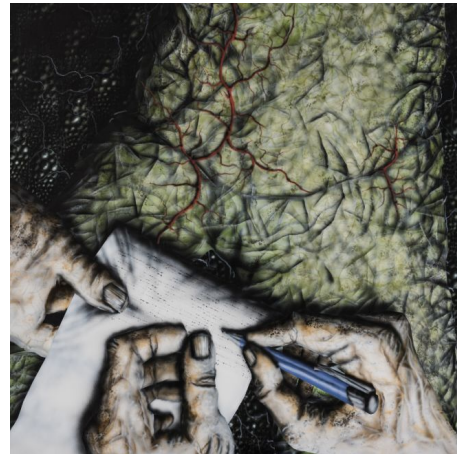
The influence of the metaphor on Polish contemporary painting, however, especially its reception and critical description, remains strong. The legacy of “tired of reality” shapes the wishful image of work produced by the most recent crop of artists – described as another “exhausted” generation that, like its predecessors, avoids confrontation with reality by shunning realistic means of expression. Moreover, their artistic response is deemed inadequate to the challenges of today (especially those tied to rising ideological polarization and culture wars); it is perceived as a manifestation of escapism, decadence, or even conformism.

The point is that, following Fisher’s and Petersen’s diagnoses of the late-capitalist condition, we are no longer dealing with “tired of reality” but with the people who are exhausted by it, and therefore immersed in a pathological state which constitutes a whole area of concern in itself.¹³ This essay, while largely based on observations rooted in the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, does not aim to retrace the contemporary condition of the field of visual arts in Poland. The first part of the text attempts to identify factors that shape Polish art criticism’s perceptions, which tend to reduce the diverse field of the work of younger artists (especially painters) to an expression of average “generational sensitivity.” Here, I point out the inadequacy of the concept of generation and the specific conditions of reception encountered by cross-sectional exhibitions after 2015 featuring the work of younger artists – especially the unprecedented pressure exerted on the field of visual arts by the market and the political sphere. Another key context is the aversion toward non-realistic conventions, entrenched in the history of the Polish arts and affecting the youth’s view of their own work.

The second part of the text offers an introduction to the work of two relatively young artists, somewhat reflexively included in the ranks of the “post-fatigue generation” – Adam Kozicki and Bartosz Zaskórski. Both willingly use motifs of death and exhaustion, failing institutions, and alienation, and also draw on digital visuality and freely exploited cultural resources.

In their view, reality is crippled and dangerous, and the beings populating it are victims of a more or less consensual transformation. At first glance, the work of Kozicki and Zaskórski has little in common – they hail from different backgrounds, have different experiences, debuted at different times, use different aesthetics and media. It is also difficult to identify their common generational

experience. To date, their works have not been compared by curators¹⁴ or critics. But what they do share is a connection to a certain cohort – marked by relatively privileged status, habituses far removed from the middle class, and leftist political leanings. The third part of the essay proposes a breakdown of the specificity of their works, examining the roles played by their “self-portraits in an extended field” and themes such as internalizing (pop) culture in the context of exhaustion, late capitalism, and the opposition between realism and non-realism.



Adam Kozicki, *a ci znowu swoje [here they go again]*, 2022, acrylic ink with airbrush on canvas. 130 x 130 cm

The conservative turn before the conservative turn

The term “conservative turn” first appeared in connection with Polish art in 2014, alongside the Museum of Modern Art in

Warsaw's exhibition *Co widać? Polska sztuka dzisiaj* [*What Do You See? Polish Art Today*], which sought to explore some of the more prevalent tendencies in the field at the time; in the words of curator Sebastian Cichocki's accompanying essay:

The current situation is best described as a conservative turn in art, encouraging attitudes best described as regressive, conformist, focused only on the immediate surroundings, maintaining a certain social and material order that the artists grew up in. It is usually salon art, and while not devoid of skill and flair, it can carry dark undertones and impulses.¹⁵

After a relatively unsuccessful attempt to introduce a new formalism (or "zombie formalism"),¹⁶ around 2015, the return of a broader fascination with surrealism – or magical realism, to be more precise – resurfaced in the field of Polish art, as in the 2021 group exhibition *W te dni zgiełkiwe, płomiennie i oszałamiające, przenoszę się myślą* [*In These Noisy, Fiery, and Bewildering Days, My Thoughts Move*] at the Gierowski Foundation. The curator's essay accompanying the exhibition stressed that the presented artists "do not engage in critique or irony toward the extant social reality"¹⁷ but rather explore the virtual and somewhat magical nature of modernity.¹⁸ The 2022 show *Niepokój przychodzi o zmierzchu* [*Disquiet Comes at Dusk*] at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw – one of the biggest showcases for younger artists in the last ten years – became an opportunity for a broader diagnosis of contemporary art and definition of its most prevalent tendencies. Unfortunately, the exhibition was wrongly labeled "generational," on account of the specific institutional and political context, which framed it as "the first (and last) of its kind at Zachęta."¹⁹

Critical reception of the show strongly emphasized its relationship with the conservative turn – first identified in 2014 and conceived around decadence, aestheticization, and strong ties to the market – reflecting the conservative turn in

cultural politics following the United Right's victory in the 2015 Polish parliamentary and presidential elections. Some reviewers saw it as overly mercantile, escapist, and, most damningly, "in a bourgeois way," lacking any ambition to critique the existing socio-political landscape and the very context of the exhibition venue.²⁰ A similar opinion on the overall "state of painting" was expressed in Piotr Policht's comprehensive text "Strefa komfortu. Rozkwit i upadek nowego malarstwa 2013-2023" [Comfort Zone: The Rise and Fall of the New Painting 2013-2023].²¹ In an essay penned six years earlier, he had called the relationship between young painters of the period and the "tired" crowd an affirmative one; a relationship devoid of "patricide, instead building on the experience of previous generations."²² In 2023, however, the critic held a much harsher view of the new painting, accusing it of "performative transgression, and instead specializing in offering only blissful comfort; ossified in forms once fresh, but grown predictable and pedestrian in the course of multiple repetitions."²³

One could, therefore, risk the argument that while the art market is enthusiastic about the new "tired" artists, critics are clearly weary of them (and their works). The exhaustion identified in this context is treated as overly drawn out and unwarranted: it is the laying down of weapons in battle, the choosing of inappropriate tools to examine reality with, and/or an incorrect reaction to an external stimulus. The accusations of conformism, meanwhile, are especially salient, mostly due to the principles governing the field of art – described in detail by Bourdieu – within which conformism is seen as the domain of the subfield of large-scale production, tied closely to the bourgeoisie and mercantilism (market and political), and, as such, the very opposite of the avant-garde, associated primarily with young artists.²⁴ Seeing their work as an extension of the efforts of the "tired" consequently suggests a double burden – moral (an

inappropriate reaction to reality relative to the expectations placed on young artists) and artistic (an ill disposition toward avant-garde attitudes, epigonism).

The ethical dimension of being a non-realist

In arguments over recent art, and debates around the presence of “surrealist tendencies”²⁵ within it, a key role has been played by what the disinclination toward portraying reality “as it is” actually means. Refusing to reproduce the world in favor of constructing a counter-reality was usually interpreted as escapism, and only rarely as protest or critical commentary. An interesting light is cast on the negative reception of non-realist (but still representational) tendencies by Dorota Jarecka’s findings on the dynamics of the critical-artistic debate around realism and surrealism in the immediate post-war period. In her book *Surrealism, realism, marksizm* [*Surrealism, Realism, Marxism*], the art historian conceives of realism as a “fluctuating agglomeration of beliefs, a discourse, and a strategy,”²⁶ with strong historical connotations, perpetually burdened by a moral aspect. Perpetually – meaning that discussions of what realism is are still relevant, and that realism itself is still valued positively, also as a position testifying to a “loyalty to social realities and needs.”²⁷ In the early post-WW2 reality, realism was contrasted first and foremost with surrealism – and construed as inadequate to tackle reality and methods of remembering the past. Writing about realism, Jarecka draws on the concept of the “empty signifier,”²⁸ around which the identities of specific interest groups develop; surrealism, meanwhile, appears to be everything that realism is not. Consequently, it is both too outmoded (bourgeois) and too progressive (avant-garde).

Naturally, much of the art created by the youngest generations cannot be described as surrealistic – particularly not using Jarecka’s definitions. Likewise, the atmosphere of the 1940s and

1950s is not compatible with attempts to describe contemporary tensions between realism and non-realism, just as the political motivations of critics are wholly different from the historical debate examined by Jarecka. However, the contemporary understanding of realism might reflect its historical stages, given that – following Bourdieu²⁹ – the structure of the field is the product of its own history. Furthermore, the fields of art and criticism find themselves in homologous relation, mutually shaping the reading of their currents, attitudes, and strategies, along with their assessment of political and ethical burdens. Consequently, the post-WW2 conflict over what realism is (and what constitutes “loyalty to social realities and needs”)³⁰ still seems to resonate within Polish art. Framed in such a way, the appearance of “byproducts” of surrealism (in the form of those “tired of reality”), in reaction to the realism of the late 1990s and early 2000s (manifested in critical art and the work of later painters associated with Grupa Ładnie), paints a picture of successive artistic “generations” which – driven by the logic of infighting within the field – have their own definitions of “loyalty to social realities.” This is why the first group of those “tired of reality” (more broadly: fatigued with post-transformation reality and the sorry current condition of the field of art) quickly found favor with critics, who saw the neo-surrealism of Ziółkowski and Kowalski as an adequate representation of the zeitgeist. Their distance from “journalism in painting” was perceived as legitimate fatigue with social themes, as well as a response to the relative stability of Poland and a consequence of a short-lived boom in Polish art. Following the metaphor of the “basic comforts” era [the Polish name literally translates as “hot-water-on-tap politics,” implying the management of public sentiment by limiting public administration to providing basic material comforts, utilities, and amenities, and avoiding large-scale political objectives or comprehensive reform – trans. note], used by Jakub Banasiak to describe changes in the field of art

during the last 30 years,³¹ this tendency was acceptable due to its specific external contexts.

As I pointed out above, around 2014, the diagnosis of the condition of art (especially painting) that developed alongside debate on the *Co widać* exhibition indicated that there was a growing rift between the expectations of most critics and the offerings of the artists – which gave rise to the concept of the “formal” conservative turn. Ever since, the refusal to simply reproduce reality (or “avoiding realism,” to put it differently) has been associated with escapism, conformism, and lack of commitment. In other words: art no longer met the needs outlined by critics, a shift that only grew in intensity after 2015, when the United Right took power (which marked the “institutional” conservative turn). Liberals in critical circles labeled this refusal a sign of “bourgeois tendencies,” academism, or just plain subordination to the market trends of “zombie figuration” (conformism).³² Conservatives, meanwhile, following the “aesthetic discourse of degeneration,”³³ mostly see these areas of artistic effort as “politically and ethically” harmful, because they are averse to the 19th-century idea of realism, more recent photorealism, and the very idea of Art, traditionally understood as the triad of Truth–Beauty–Goodness.

As a result, recent non-realist art finds itself in a triple-bind of accusations. First, its attitude toward reality is inadequate, not critical or affirmative enough, while, second, the art itself is either too conservative or too “Marxist.” It is not “strictly” surrealist, nor does it necessarily see itself as “surrealizing,” but it has become so due to the historically entrenched opposition of realism and surrealism. Additionally, the young artists who refuse to return to realistic forms and social themes are considered as epigones of tendencies harking back to being “tired of reality.”

The problem with generations and painting

Widespread use of the concept of “generation” has also contributed to the strict assessment of artworks created by young people today. Regardless of the impossibility of defining a common horizon of cultural reference – or, to borrow from Kazimierz Wyka’s authoritative definition, a shared generational experience – “generation” is still used reflexively as the standard category in art criticism.³⁴ Consequently, generational manifestos are still universally expected. In the Polish arts, turning 35 is usually seen as the moment when “young artists” become just “artists,” but the boundary is not rigid, given how artists associated with the so-called Young Polish Art movement, or what has come to be known as the “Sasnal effect” (meaning people born in the 1970s and early 1980s) are still seen as representatives of “new” art. In this case, Bourdieu’s observation about the difference between biological and artistic age applies³⁵ – meaning that individuals considered “young artists” can be examined without taking their age into consideration, even by conservatives among art critics (who see them as representatives of a “new arts paradigm,” disinclined toward academism) and the Polish art market.³⁶

However, the category of generation is extremely effective in creating arbitrary collective identities used to mask significant differences (economic status, habitus, gender, and identity) between groups of people born in specific periods. This is obviously tied to the dominant neoliberal narrative, which deliberately ignores social and habitus inequalities, especially in the context of defining individual barriers to entry and available career paths to those involved in the arts.³⁷ No less importantly, a key role is played by the attractiveness of the “generation” as a discursive instrument in attempts to diagnose the field of art as such, and to determine its future through the dominant, liberal (but not leftist) voice of critique. The deliberate “generational

flattening” also coincided with the misguided framing that equated painting with art as a whole. After 2015, in the face of the “institutional” conservative turn and political upheaval, the continued absence of “realism” from painting (i.e. a direct relationship between it and reality) was, to paraphrase Policht, interpreted as a decision to remain in the “comfort zone.” And this zone extended so far as to cover the practice of painting – perceived as the most conservative of the arts while enjoying the greatest privilege within the art market and extra-constitutional contexts.

It ought to be noted that the growing trend of young artists choosing painting as their primary career path did not arise in a political and economic vacuum. Given the cultural conservatives’ takeover of arts institutions in Poland, the trend could be considered a form of economic self-censorship: facing economic pressure, young people choose painting because the extra-institutional system (private and commercial galleries, auctions, etc.) favors this domain. On the one hand, the choice may be read as mercantile (incompatible with the “art for art’s sake” approach characterizing the field of limited production and avant-garde strategies),³⁸ while on the other – justified as a result of distinct economic necessity.

The latter interpretation seems especially pertinent given the overrepresentation of painting competitions in the overall pool of arts contests, the reticence of collectors toward media other than painting, and the specific expectations of the art market itself toward artists. Here, it should be mentioned that critical and analytical interest has also contributed to this situation: for the last few years, every text that sought to paint a broader picture of “new art” created in “new Polish realities” looked almost exclusively at painting (or, as in the case of Adam Nehring’s text, “painting objects”).³⁹ Likewise, the first Polish documentary looking at the domestic art market – the 2022 film *Ile za sztukę?* [the title is a double entendre, meaning both “How

much for art?" denoting the art realm in general, and "How much for the piece?" or "How much for the item?" – trans. note] (dir. Andrzej Miękus) – is focused almost exclusively on painting.⁴⁰ The reasons for the situation, as well as its consequences for the field, warrant further investigation. Most likely, however, the situation itself is testament to the systemic and historical domination of painting in Polish art and, consequently, the tendency to equate painting with all of art, prevalent even in specialist critic circles.

This dual flattening – through the category of generation and the medium of painting – has become an effective instrument of fashioning a narrative that complements the image of young creators prevalent in liberal media. The hopes placed in the "youth," seen as the most radical part of society, have not been fulfilled. And as for the very specific circle of people involved in the arts, the supposed continuation of disengaged "fatigue," instead of a brisk return to (engaged) realism, led to the diagnosis of passivity, mercantilism, escapism, and even narcissism.⁴¹ The diagnosis itself, however, was nothing short of lazy, built on generalizations and uninterested in answering questions about who actually creates art and the methods they use. The next part of this essay seeks to do just that, with potential answers pointing directly at exhaustion and overstimulation with reality, rather than mere fatigue with it.

Self-portraits in an extended field

A self-portrait is a representation of the artist shaped by the way they want to be perceived, using specific means to emphasize a personal perspective. The enduring popularity of the form is driven by more than just its rich historical tradition: as indicated by the findings of Yi Zhou,⁴² the use of self-portraits by artists is also a profitable strategy (generating, among other results, higher sales prices), which – to put it simply – translates into greater visibility in the field (additional interest from the

public, specialist press, galleries and institutions, etc.), and, consequently, improves prospects for obtaining greater symbolic capital. In the context of self-portraits, visibility has a dual meaning – denoting not only the potential for improved accumulation of all sorts of capitals, but also the very act of visualizing the artist. According to Luc Boltanski, in light of the expedited circulation of works of art and value attribution processes, “the force of the *œuvre* is measured less in the number and sophistication of the interpretations, spread out over a long period, that it provokes in commentators, than in the potency of events that mark its circulation.”⁴³ It is no coincidence, therefore, that I chose the self-portraits of Kozicki and Zaskórski as starting points for reflection on their work. For both artists, the self-portrait is not a common motif, appearing only a few times across their bodies of work – in contrast to the sheer number of self-portraits in an extended field that both have created.⁴⁴ Self-image in the latter sense means a departure from the classical reading of the self-portrait as a picture of an artist’s visage or figure in favor of a first-person perspective – the direct use of personal point of view (POV), *porte-parole*, deliberately delegating the self-portrait (or self-directed gaze) onto another object/objects, or internalizing (pop) culture.

The face as an attribute of poverty

Trudny do ukrycia obciążający atrybut biedy (Antifiarz) [*Burdensome, Hard-to-Conceal Poverty Attribute (Antifa Guy)*] is one of Adam Kozicki’s two “strict” self-portraits. Painted in 2020, Kozicki’s final year at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts’ Faculty of Painting, it is one of the few works in which he uses a brush and an airbrush. With a certain dose of seriousness, this self-portrait could be seen as formative to his artistic strategy – signaling a shift away from oil painting toward acrylic ink, perceived in the hierarchy of artistic techniques as less noble but definitely more modern. The painting features Kozicki’s self-

portrait, but eschews the usual tropes of the genre (like idealizing or emphasizing certain physical attributes) and depicts him rather unfavorably, while the pictured attributes, running counter to the principle of visibility, seek to mask his identity. The artist portrays himself in dark glasses, crookedly positioned, and while his features are deformed by a nylon stocking pulled over his head, the resemblance makes identification relatively easy.

This is a depiction of someone captured in a rather grotesque moment, breathing through his mouth, grimacing, with hair plastered on his sweaty forehead. The “Antifa Guy” in the title, along with certain attributes featured in the picture, suggests typical associations with the anti-fascist movement: on the one hand as a group whose members mask their identities for security reasons, and on the other – seen as guerrillas, criminals, or terrorists. The painterly bust is complemented by a hint of clothing – around the neck is something akin to the gathered folds of a blouse, treated *à la* Fernand Léger. It is a self-portrait that functions as a bootleg of the visage, bringing to mind the aesthetics of early video games, with low-quality graphics and the generalization of shapes forced by the limitations of computer hardware. The facial anatomy, flattened by the airbrush (and the stocking), and the jagged edges of the figure, can be read as a sort of digital glitch.

Aside from the tension between attempts at anonymization and the continued potential for identification, the artist’s decision to indicate poverty as an attribute in the very title of the self-portrait – the lack of privilege replacing triumph – is also key. In this case, the attribute of poverty is the face – and, consequently, the artist himself, his views, and his situation at the time: work in the food-service industry, uncertainty over his future and career path, which he was soon to choose as the graduate of an arts university. This early piece not only suggests the formal direction that Kozicki would follow, but also indicates his interest in themes

like the body and its relationship to power structures, especially in the autobiographical context.

The exploration of these themes would return especially in one of his later series, showcased at the exhibitions *Nigdy nie będziesz szła sama* [You Will Never Walk Alone]⁴⁵ and *Środki przymusu*

bezpośredniego [Means of Coercion].⁴⁶ These works,

embedded in his personal experience of being detained and jailed, show fragments of the body

(hands, knees, etc.) seen “with his own eyes,” according to the POV strategy. The bending of the vanishing point and the narrowing of the field of view used in the paintings are more than just a faithful recreation of the first-person perspective, known from video games, which Kozicki employs; they are a manifestation of the desire to visually reflect trauma by using tunnel vision, a phenomenon typically produced by a strong stress response. Likewise, the different textures utilized by the artist in his compositions are intended to sharpen visual stimuli to the point of discomfort – just like another of his frequent tropes, involving covering objects and subjects with a thick web of bulging veins.



View of the exhibition “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” Exhibitions Bureau, Warsaw. Adam Kozicki, *tam musisz być twardy* [you’ve got to be tough there], 2022 (left); *szybciej, kurwa* [hurry the fuck up], 2022. Photo by Bartek Zabielski / Zetlab, courtesy of the Polish Modern Art Foundation.

The victim’s point of view

As Kozicki recalls, the works making up the series were created as an attempt at a psychotherapeutic counter-trauma method, invoking agonizing scenes from the past and being tired and bored with them, to make them familiar and ultimately become detached from their emotional impact. He admits, however, that exhibiting them and discussing their backstory proved surprisingly emotionally exhausting.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the

strategy of filtering the experienced reality by picking selected traumatic imagery and displaying it to an audience is also a type of testimony. Pointing to an important example of similar efforts, Kozicki brings up Karl Schwesig's *Schlegelkeller* (1935–1936), a series of illustrations exploring Schwesig's memories of prison, published in *LIFE* magazine as evidence of the political persecution of anti-fascist opposition in the Third Reich.⁴⁸ Despite their historical separation and different political contexts, comparing Kozicki's and Schwesig's cases seems valid – also because the works of the Polish artist exposing traumatic events were included in court proceedings over damages for Kozicki's wrongful arrest.

The artist portrays himself detained by the police and portrays his experience with law enforcement as the driver of his mental trauma. Depicting oneself as a suspect and detainee may even prompt revictimization – exclusion, loss of “face” in arts circles, and negative reactions from potential audiences. Furthermore, the aforementioned series also features images of retaliation – including in *pomoc medyczną wzywa się tylko do poważnych spraw* (Frans Masereel – *Debout Les Morts*) [medical assistance is called only in serious cases (Frans Masereel – *Debout les Morts*)] and *jak możesz nie pamiętać nazwy swoich leków?* [how can you not remember the names of your medications?] – which undermine the stereotype of the “ideal,” forgiving victim. These attempts at capturing reality and reclaiming agency, however, fail to bring the desired



Adam Kozicki, *to już* (Frans Masereel – *Mon livre d'heures*) [that's it (Frans Masereel – *Mon livre d'heures*)], 2022, acrylic ink with airbrush on canvas. 200 x 150 cm

detachment, only amplifying the experience and visualizing it for others. This strategy refuses to draw on the popular category of empathy – because the ability to “immerse oneself in the experience” is available to a very narrow audience. Instead, it is an attempt to subvert the default comfort by bringing to light socially unwanted images. Helplessness, physical and mental exhaustion, and loneliness are confronted here with an act of negligible agency, obtained solely through artistic means. Consequently, its emotional charge must necessarily warp reality, and the attendant labor of the imagination precludes its use as a foundation for cold realism.

The transforming body

A similar strategy was employed by Kozicki in his graduation series *too late for late capitalism*, which explored symbolic representation of the post-1989 transformation. Here, the category of self-portrait in an extended field is different than when it uses POV – as direct experience of pre-transformation Poland is unavailable to the artist due to his year of birth (1992) and necessarily mediated, based to a large extent on other people’s stories (described, among other places, in anthropological interviews by Katarzyna Duda that the artist found very important),⁴⁹ as well the artist’s childhood observations. The latter, however, have little in common with stereotypical nostalgia for “the colorful 90s,” idealizing those times, which Svetlana Boym would label “restorative.”

Instead, Kozicki’s paintings seem to feed off nostalgic reflection and a Boymian “off-modern approach,” which “recovers



Adam Kozicki, *too late for late capitalism*, 2021, acrylic ink with airbrush on canvas. 190 x 240 cm. Collection of the Bielsko Art Gallery BWA

unforeseen pasts and ventures into the side alleys of modern history at the margins of error of major philosophical, economic, and technological narratives of modernization and progress.”⁵⁰ Kozicki stands “on the side of multiple ‘obstacles’”:⁵¹ his imagery features characters with broken backs, grotesque shadows of people or their remains inhabiting dingy interiors, barn floors with thuja trees and concrete fences, muddy tracts, boxy cars. As such, they’re situated in spaces that the artist himself remembers from past experience – a childhood spent in Warsaw’s Białołęka neighborhood, growing up in a working-class family. The subjects transform, but not of their own volition, losing their humanity and merging with unwanted visions of the past. It is hard to speak of any retribution in this case – the reluctance here to reproduce clichés circulating in the mainstream, including those describing the rush of new capitalist possibilities and economic success, constitutes the act of dissent. The depictions of subjects straddling the line between life and death derive from Kozicki’s skeptical attitude toward dominant neoliberal narratives, as well as the glut of images of the past, among which it is difficult to place one’s own history. And here, “one’s own” does not necessarily mean “individual,” because it skirts the broader context of humans perceived as “obstacles,” disparaged as *Homo Sovieticus*, who either “have been halted in the course of their evolution toward capitalist normalcy”⁵² or simply do not belong to the default middle class.⁵³

The blob that lives in your head

For Bartosz Zaskórski, five years Kozicki’s senior, painting is just one of many means of expression. In his work, he uses a variety of media – from illustrations, drawings, and installations to site-specific objects, radio plays, and conceptual musical albums. Comic books constitute a key part of his activity, as well as the central point of his academic output; since 2023, he has run the Comic Book and Artbook Workshop at the University of the

National Education Commission in Kraków.

In Zaskórski's work, the motif of the "strict" self-portrait is best visible in *Głowa [Head]* – an intermedia installation and part of the larger 2019 project *Circle of Life, Order of Death*. While the eponymous silicone cast is modeled from the artist's bust, Zaskórski has said that no one he presented it to actually realized the resemblance.⁵⁴ From the edge of the bust hangs a piece of black plastic garbage bag, shrouding a bundle of cables with no power running through them, a vacuum cleaner hose, plugs hanging sadly, and PCV tubing. The only "working" element in the installation is an LCD screen mounted on the lower part of the stand. The screen displays three short films in a loop (*love; the source of love; love of dogs and self love*), each a dozen or so seconds long, suggesting that the decapitated head is still alive and capable of generating moving images. What seems dead (a head with no body) nevertheless has a consciousness, dreaming of bodies and the concept of love. The first film (*love*) features digitally generated, shapeless naked bodies – suspended in an undefined space and revolving around their axes; the second (*the source of love*) contains a pulsating, hairy and furrowed organism, alongside a smaller, smoother object that at one point penetrates the larger structure, which can be read as the suggestion of a non-human sexual act. The third (*love of dogs and self love*) is a first-person-perspective video narrative which shows the short journey from the bed of two dogs through the



Bartosz Zaskórski, *Head*, 2019, silicone, wood, LCD, pipes and electro-waste

hallway and to the bathroom in the artist's family home. In the final moments, the camera's POV is directed at the bathroom mirror, but rather than show the "image" of Zaskórski, it reveals a hairy, creased blob.

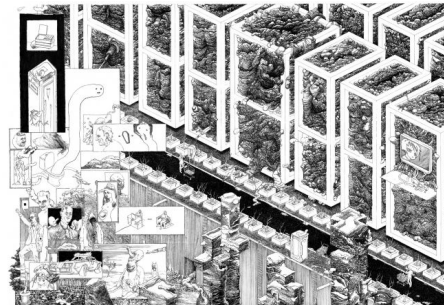
And thus, the artist's self-image in *Głowa* is multiplied – appearing literally in the dead bust, which then serves as the frame (or vessel) for alternative representations: organic blobs, resembling animated teratomas or polyps. In Zaskórski's description of the series to which *Głowa* belongs, he mentions a number of memories and inspirations – impressions left upon him by Baroque painting, the sci-fi films *Hardware* (dir. Richard Stanley, 1990) and *Alien* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1979), and the writings of J. G. Ballard and Franz Kafka. The installation is therefore not only a structure that dreams of a lost body, but is itself formed from a multitude of tropes, easily identifiable to the audience because they are sourced from the canon of Western popular culture. The use of the trope of a head separated from the body is the artist's attempt to express the state of being oppressed while entirely immobilized and stripped of agency. In this piece, depersonalization and decapitation are one and the same – the separated head might seem dead, and yet there is life coursing within it – a different, foreign body that has retained the breadth of its vital functions and the need for love, however diversely defined.

Writing about the works of Tony Oursler, another artist known for his use of shapeless forms, art historian Anna Markowska says: "the blob fluctuates between fear of the other, of being attacked and subsumed, and empathy, willingness to help, and even changing identities [...] The blob is you and you no longer have any idea who you are."⁵⁵ It is alive, but with no apparent reason for it, nor a clear source of its vitality;⁵⁶ likewise, it is difficult to discern to what extent it is something that came from outside or just the product of one's own body, maybe

nothing but the memory of a body (literally or figuratively) lost. A similar question can be raised about *Głowa*, which strongly draws on body horror tropes: is it the artist, trapped in an exhausting coma, generating the image of himself as a blob, or is the vision suggested to him by something implanted in his skull? In the back of the eponymous head, between the mass of creased folds of faux hair there sits a modeling clay "smiley." These simplified faces, a hallmark of Zaskórski's work, "smile regardless of the horrors unfolding around them."⁵⁷ Just like the blobs so frequently used by the artist, the smileys suggest lifeforms that endure despite everything: they are parasites endowed with consciousness or capable of implanting that consciousness into unconscious human bodies. Not only that – they try to adapt to the worlds created by Zaskórski: post-apocalyptic trash heaps of history, full of tubing, sewage drains, and wastelands.

Do blobs dream of Poland?

The works of H. R. Giger and Moebius, which Zaskórski retains for his own purposes, serve as an important artistic reference for him. Components inspired by those artists make up his series *Postapolska*, which tells the story of a future following an undescribed disaster. Policht has called this project of Zaskórski's "nostalgic,"⁵⁸ but the label most likely results from the artist's specific style choices – inspired by depictions of disasters and life in their wake, body horror, science fiction, and 1980s video games. Such a reading is suggested by the origins of *Postapolska*, which was conceived as a backstory for a character developed by Zaskórski for a music project. In it, a traveler from the future appears in 1987 (the year the artist was born) "and is caught in a time loop, forced to repeat it time



Bartosz Zaskórski, panels from the comic book *Postapolska*, 2021, published by Hollow Press

and again.”⁵⁹ This loop might be a reference to Mark Fisher’s warning that “[t]he problem is not, any more, the longing to get to the past, but the inability to get *out* of it.”⁶⁰ In response to being stuck and unable to return to “his” time, the traveler begins to sublimate his frustration into music, based on synth-pop and industrial. In this way, the artist travels back and forth in time, trying to construct a never-written chapter in the history of Polish 1980s electronic music, told from the perspective of an unspecified subject in an alternative vision of the future, struggling with the aftermath of some unnamed disaster. As in the case of Kozicki’s transformational series, this strategy is consistent with Boym’s off-modern approach. Here, however, rather than exploring the ruins of transformation, Zaskórski brings a counterfactual history to life and sets it in a post-apocalyptic frame.

In the comic book that serves as introduction to this world, *Postapoland*,⁶¹ life wastes away under a diabolical, smiley sun. Everything that still endures its rays is mutated and focused on senseless struggle. But one day, a devastating war between two mutants is brought to an end after they decide to adopt a dog together. Friendship with the only non-human subject not to mutate in the realm of Postapoland is marked by a specific hedonism: in this limbo, the touch of dog fur enables continued survival.

Zaskórski’s use of the trope of a human and a dog finding a deep bond in the aftermath of a global disaster seems an extension of similar post-humanist themes found in the work of Clifford D.

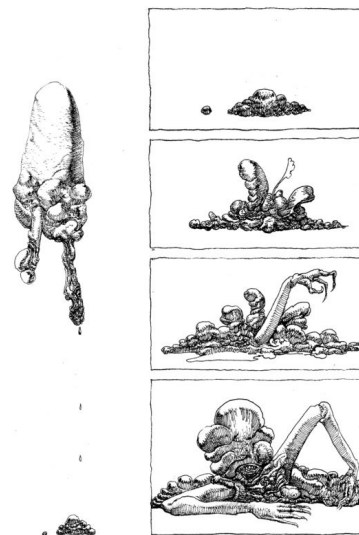


Bartosz Zaskórski, panels from the comic book *Postapoland*, 2021, published by Hollow Press

Simak and Kurt Vonnegut, among other authors.⁶² It may also be associated with the cult sci-fi flick *A Boy and His Dog* (dir. L. Q. Jones, 1975), based on the Harlan Ellison story of the same title.

The next chapter in Zaskórski's tale – *Weird Tales of Postapoland*⁶³ – offers further insight into the realities of the setting by way of visual essays exploring the lives of its inhabitants. The deliberate lack of grounding in narrative enables a meticulously detailed crafting of the setting (along with a companion game and soundtrack), governed by grotesque and cruel mechanics – decay, mutation, swelling, but also consumption and reproduction. Aside from the respite dogs, the world is populated by blobs, ghosts, bio-machines, and anthropomorphic figures. Most, if not all, are capable of generating their own culture, because, aside from wastelands and drainage tubing, the setting also features gallery spaces displaying in-world art and gadgets available for purchase. As the artist points out in the album's foreword, *Postapoland* is made up of reflections of the real world.

It is hard to unambiguously determine which of the mutated blobs living in the rattling organic trash heap is the artist's *porte-parole*. A trace of Zaskórski, however, can be found in one of the mutants that befriends the dog – an autobiographical motif that will continue to resurface across his body of work. His face, relatively easy to identify, also appears in the first volume – but according to *Postapoland* logic, the visage finds itself in transformation, with one half already decaying, turning



Bartosz Zaskórski, panels from the comic book *Weird tales of Postapoland*, 2022, published by Hollow Press

into a blob. Meanwhile, Zaskórski's self-portrait in an extended field can be found in the series of inspirations and references the artist is very open about, going so far as to attach a detailed list to every comic book. Zaskórski himself says that he finds crucial "the opposition between a safe and closed world and reality in all its diversity, which makes it impossible to secure, account for, and close up."⁶⁴ Closure, therefore, could be conceived as an indexing of reality's protrusions and familiarizing oneself with them to the extent that allows one to function between them, internalize them as one's own. The artist constructing a parallel world in the form of a mutating blob and then inhabiting it might bring to mind a form of accelerationism: reducing the world and its mechanics to a self-destructing caricature.

But Zaskórski is much more focused on the confessions flowing from inside the derelict, crippled hardware (bodily or systemic) that hold the remnants of life. This vestige takes a form far from human, endlessly morphing from bio-machine to organic blob. In a passage cited by Markowska, the aforementioned Oursler – another connoisseur of the blob and its mutations – writes that forms like these tend to occur when we take interest in something other than real life – which is when we become vulnerable.⁶⁵ For the creator of *Postapolska*, however, interest in the non-human condition (and at the same time texture) represents the actual life he's experiencing, filtered through a personal perspective.

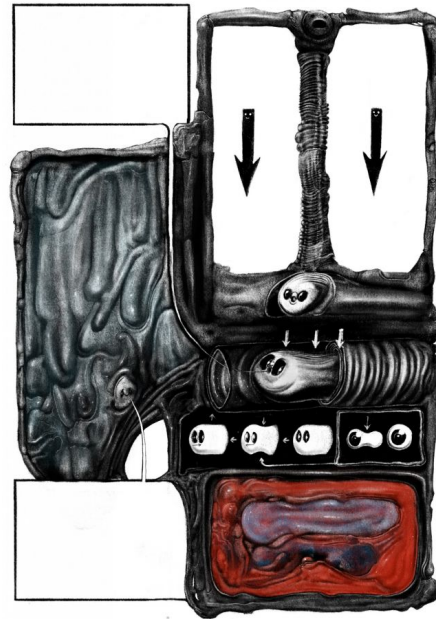
Beyond your own history

For Kozicki and Zaskórski, the refusal of a mimetic reproduction of reality in favor of non-realist strategies is a gesture that enables them to tell the story of the circumstances they live in. It is also an example of a very critical assessment of the condition of both the social and the individual body; their own, but also those of others. Furthermore, this assessment comes from the depths of a biological structure subjected to

transformation and left vulnerable to sweeping processes that it can only be a witness to, never a participant in.

These strategies lay clear both artists' interest in bodies that are marginalized, pressured, and forced into metamorphosis. The bodies the two are interested in cannot simply be called "Polish" – as was the case with critical art, which willingly labeled its experience in national terms. Neither is this body art – as featured in the iconic critical art exhibition *Antyciała* [Antibodies] of 1995, which sought to examine the abovementioned conditions through the lens of biopolitics.

But the spaces that both artists bring to life still carry a trace of Polishness – of the past, from the synth wastelands and treacherous shallows of transformation; of the present – from sites of isolation or entrapment; and traces of an unspecific but equally oppressive future. The imaginations of Kozicki and Zaskórski thus remain permanently linked to reality, but their attention is often focused on non-human subjects: nature and traces left by humankind as vestiges of late capitalism. Representations of exhausted bodies with blurry outlines or subjects with repulsive textures are furrowed with biopolitics. Therefore, if we were to look for afterimages (in other words, the mediated inspiration) of surrealism in their work, our best chance would lie in morphing subjects and objects – and, as Gustav René Hocke suggests, "the greater the belief in the uncertain status of the object, the greater the mistrust of reality it exists in."⁶⁶ However, as non-realistic (thus suspected of "surreality"), they can only function in the context of their



Bartosz Zaskórski, panels from the comic book *Weird tales of Postapoland*, 2022, published by Hollow Press

incompatibility with critics' views about the "loyalty to social realities and needs" that "contemporary" realism is supposed to be distinguished by.

Although both artists draw on autobiographical themes, and at least some of their work has an autotherapeutic dimension, it is their own bodies – contrary to warnings about the narcissistic and entirely subjective character of the artistic efforts of individuals whom contemporary critics collectively label a "generation" – that are rendered into carriers of their stories rather than just the subjects thereof. Kozicki's and Zaskórski's multiple self-portraits in an extended field do not refer to their own family stories or the attributes of personal advancement; instead, they are the mediated stories of others, or inspirations taken from someone else. And in their case, the stories typically deal with decay, oblivion, non-existence, or being trapped in a limbo less terrifying than reality, rather than any sort of advancement.

Compositions based on early 20th-century illustrations (Kozicki deliberately misrepresenting the works of Masereel and Schwesig) and frequent references to culture, especially those strains considered "popular" (Zaskórski's emphasis on the visuality of sci-fi classics, and the focus of both artists on video games) constitute a very individual approach to distorting reality. In other words, both artists transform their cultural experience, framing it as familiar, internalized, and cataloged splinters of the reality they inhabit. And given the communal nature of texts and works of culture – especially after the spread of the Internet – they achieve a possible universalization, using the individual ingredients to fashion stories about the social body and its condition. They participate in them, visualize them, or testify to their existence, but never use them as backdrops for personal narratives – stories centering on artists who have made a name for themselves and are now engaged in autohagiography. It is also likely that Kozicki and Zaskórski are too distrustful of late-

capitalist realities to trust the temporary status of objects and subjects. Especially given their affinity for Boymian off-modern strategies, which look carefully at narratives of modernization and progress, including those hailing from the field of art itself, where celebrating individual careers (“geniuses”) is intended to justify the systemic exploitation of those seen as “obstacles.”

- 1 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2014), 18.
- 2 Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 1990), 152–153, 163.
- 3 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 23.
- 4 See: Sean Illing, “How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation. Author Anne Helen Petersen on Why Millennials Have Internalized the Worst Parts of their Condition,” *Vox*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/21473579/millennials-great-recession-burnout-anne-helen-petersen> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 5 Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 22.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 21–22.
- 7 See: Małgorzata Nitka, “Literature of Exhaustion: Representations of Mental Fatigue in Joris-Karl Huysmans’s ‘Against Nature’ and Wilkie Collins’s ‘The Woman in White’,” *Er(r)go. Teoria–Literatura–Kultura* vol. 46, no. 1 (2023), 170–173.
- 8 Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 23.
- 9 While “reality fatigue” may be a better translation, “tired of reality” is already widespread, and therefore used throughout.
- 10 Joanna Ruszczyk, “Zmęczeni realem,” *Newsweek*, June 10, 2010, <https://www.newsweek.pl/kultura/zmeczni-realem/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 11 See, for example: Emilia Brzozowska, “Potoczny odbiór sztuki krytycznej w Polsce. Sztuka pretekstem do eksploracji społecznych wartości, norm, stereotypów, doświadczenia życiowego,” *Panoptikum* no. 7 (2008), 338–349; Paweł Moźdzysłowski, “Rekonfiguracje i dezorientacja. Pole sztuk plastycznych w Polsce 1989–2015,” *Sztuka i dokumentacja* no. 13 (2015), 11–28.

- 12 See: Piotr Policht, "Strefa komfortu. Rozkwit i upadek nowego malarstwa 2013–2023," *Magazyn Szum*, March 17, 2023, <https://magazynszum.pl/strefa-komfortu-rozkwit-i-upadek-nowego-malarstwa-2013-2023/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 13 Nitka, "Literature of Exhaustion," 171.
- 14 One exception was the exhibition *Niepokój przychodzi o zmierzchu* [*Disquiet Comes at Dusk*], curated by Magdalena Komornicka and held at the Zachęta National Art Gallery in Warsaw. Notes on the exhibition and its specific reception can be found later in the text.
- 15 Sebastian Cichocki, as cited in: Karolina Plinta, "SZTUKA NA GORĄCO: Kilka powodów, dla których lepiej nie być 'młodym' artystą," *Magazyn Szum*, October 22, 2013, <https://magazynszum.pl/sztuka-na-goraco-kilka-powodow-dla-ktorych-lepiej-nie-byc-mlodym-artysta/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 16 See: Chris Wiley, "The Toxic Legacy of Zombie Formalism, Part 1: How an Unhinged Economy Spawned a New World of 'Debt Aesthetics'," *Artnet*, July 26, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world-archives/history-zombie-formalism-1318352> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 17 *W te dni zgiełkiwe, płomienne i oszałamiające, przenoszę się myślą*, curated by Michalina Sablik and Kamil Pierwszy (Warsaw: Fundacja Stefana Gierowskiego, August 15 – October 17, 2021), <https://fundacjagierowskiego.pl/stefan-gierowski/wystawa/w-te-dni-zgiełkiwe-płomienne-i-oszałamiające-przenosze-sie-mysla/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 18 For my polemic on the subject, see my critique of the exhibition: Aleksy Wójtowicz, "Wysypisko wrażeń sennych. 'W te dni zgiełkiwe, płomienne i oszałamiające, przenoszę się myślą' w Fundacji Stefana Gierowskiego," *Magazyn Szum*, October 8, 2021, <https://magazynszum.pl/wysypisko-wrazen-sennych-w-te-dni-zgiełkiwe-płomienne-i-oszałamiające-przenosze-sie-mysla-w-fundacji-stefana-gierowskiego/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 19 See: Michalina Sablik, "POV: pierwsza (i ostatnia) wystawa w Zachęcie," *Magazyn Zachęta Online* no. 37 (2022), <https://zacheta.art.pl/magazyn/pov-pierwsza-i-ostatnia-wystawa-w-zachecie/> (accessed February 16, 2024).

- 20 See: Aleksy Wójtowicz, "Wystawa, którą kochacie nienawidzić. 'Niepokój przychodzi o zmierzchu' w Zachęcie," *Magazyn Szum*, September 2, 2022, <https://magazynszum.pl/wystawa-ktora-kochacie-nienawidzic-niepokoj-przychodzi-o-zmierzchu-w-zachecie/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 21 See: Policht, "Strefa komfortu."
- 22 See: Piotr Policht, "Ornament to nie zbrodnia. Horyzont młodego malarstwa," *Magazyn Szum* no. 16 (2017), 58–70.
- 23 Policht, "Strefa komfortu."
- 24 See: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 121–126.
- 25 See: Dorota Jarecka, Dorota Jagoda Michalska, Ewa Opałka, and Aleksy Wójtowicz, "Nie Magritte, nie Dali. Rewizje surrealizmu. Debata wokół 38. numeru SZUMU," *Magazyn Szum*, January 27, 2023, <https://magazynszum.pl/rewizje-surrealizmu/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 26 Dorota Jarecka, *Surrealizm realizm marksizm. Sztuka i lewica komunistyczna w latach 1944–1948* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich, 2021), 189.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 140.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 198–201.
- 29 See: Anna Matuchniak-Krasucka, "Odbiorca sztuki czy agent pola artystycznego. Elementy socjologii sztuki Pierre'a Bourdieu," *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Sociologica* no. 32 (2007), 39.
- 30 Jarecka, *Surrealizm realizm marksizm*, 140.
- 31 See: Jakub Banasiak, "Normalizacja i dwie modernizacje. Pole sztuki po 30 latach przemian," *Magazyn Szum* no. 27 (2019), 102–104.
- 32 See: Alex Greenberger, "First There Was Zombie Formalism – Now There's Zombie Figuration," *ARTnews*, July 9, 2020, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/figurative-painting-zombie-figuration-peter-saul-surrealism-1202690409/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 33 See: Jarecka, *Surrealizm realizm marksizm*, 197–201.
- 34 See: Agnieszka Mrozik, Anna Artwińska, Anna Zawadzka, and Małgorzata Fidelis,

- "Pożytki z 'pokolenia.' Dyskusja o 'pokoleniu' jako kategorii analitycznej," *Teksty Drugie* no. 1 (2016), 347–366.
- 35 See: Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 149–150.
- 36 In this context, the auction format "Sztuka współczesna. Pokolenie po 1989" [Contemporary Art: The Post-1989 Generation], launched in 2013 by Poland's biggest auction house, Desa Unicum, warrants particular attention. Alongside paintings of those "tired of reality" and artists associated with the Young Polish Art movement, the format also features the works of much older creatives, as well as those born in the 1980s and 1990s. See, for example: "Sztuka współczesna. Nowe Pokolenie po 1989," <https://desa.pl/pl/wyniki-aukcji-dziel-sztuki/sztuka-wspolczesna-nowe-pokolenie-po-1989-slva/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 37 See: Monika Kostera, "Gra w klasy," *Nowy Obywatel*, September 11, 2019, <https://nowyobywatel.pl/2019/09/11/graw-klasy-2/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 38 See: Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 121–123.
- 39 See: Adam Nehring, "W polu obiektów malarskich," *Restart* no. 11 (2023), <https://restartmag.art/w-polu-obiektow-malarskich/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 40 See: Aleksy Wójtowicz, "Świadek niedojrzałości, czyli ciemna materia patrzy na boom. Wokół filmu 'Ile za sztukę?'," *Magazyn Szum*, May 26, 2023, <https://magazynszum.pl/ciemna-materia-patrzy-na-boom-wokol-filmu-ile-za-sztuke/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 41 See: Agnieszka Jankowska-Marzec, "Czy rzeczywiście młodzi są narcyzami...? Narcystyczne wątki w twórczości najmłodszej generacji polskich artystów współczesnych," in: *Projekt Narcyz*, ed. Andrzej Bednarczyk (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Akademii Sztuk Pięknych, 2017), 156–166.
- 42 See: Yi Zhou, "Narcissism and the Art Market Performance," *The European Journal of Finance* vol. 23, no. 13 (2017).
- 43 See: Luc Boltanski, "From Object to Œuvre. The Process of Attribution and Valorization of Objects," trans. Jason McGimsey, in: *Joy Forever: The Political Economy of Social Creativity*, eds. Michał Kozłowski, Agnieszka Kurant, Jan Sowa, Krystian Szadkowski, and Jakub Szreder (London: MayFly Books, 2014), 24–27.
- 44 See: Jankowska-Marzec, "Czy rzeczywiście młodzi są narcyzami," 163.

- 45 *Nigdy nie będziesz szła sama*, curated by Katie Zazenski (Warsaw: Biuro Wystaw, January 28 – March 3, 2023).
- 46 *Środki przymusu bezpośredniego* (with Gosia Mycek), curated by Gabi Skrzypczak (Poznań: Galeria Łęctwo, December 16, 2022 – January 7, 2023).
- 47 See: Bogna Stefańska, "Spirala śmiechawy," *Notes na 6 tygodni*, July–September 2023, 118–119, https://issuu.com/beczmiiana/docs/nn6t_148_digital (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 48 See: Kirk Johnson and Willa M. Johnson, "Karl Schwesig's 'Schlegelkeller': Anatomy of a Rejected Warning of Prewar Violence at LIFE Magazine," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* no. 30 (2016), 4–5, 18.
- 49 See: Katarzyna Duda, *Kiedyś tu było życie teraz jest tylko bieda. O ofiarach polskiej transformacji* (Warsaw: Książka i Prasa, 2019).
- 50 Svetlana Boym, "The Off-Modern Mirror," *E-flux* no. 19 (2010), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-off-modern-mirror/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 51 Karolina Rychter, "Trudne piękno niezrealizowanych możliwości – Svetlana Boym o ruinofilii i nostalgii," *Magazyn Wizje*, April 14, 2019, <https://magazynwizje.pl/aktualnik/karolina-rychter-trudne-piekno-niezrealizowanych-mozliwosci/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 52 See: Michał Buchowski, "Widmo orientalizmu w Europie. Od egzotycznego Innego do napiętnowanego swojego," *Recykling idei* no. 10 (2008), 101.
- 53 See: Dorota Olko, *Stosunek do ciała a nierówności społeczne. Analiza praktyk cielesnych klas ludowych w Polsce*, doctoral dissertation (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2023), 257–262; Monika Borys, "Jak zostać damą? Telewizyjne lekcje klasy w polskich adaptacjach zagranicznych reality shows," *Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej* no. 27 (2020).
- 54 See: "Circle of Life, Order of Death," <https://bartoszzaskorski.pl/circle-of-life-order-of-death/> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- 55 See: Anna Markowska, *Komedia sublimacji. Granica współczesności a etos rzeczywistości w sztuce amerykańskiej* (Warsaw: DiG, 2010), 281.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 280–281.

- 57 See: Filip Lech, "Moment zasypiania w ciepłe zwierząt jest dla mnie czymś wyjątkowym," *Culture.pl*, September 23, 2020, <https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/bartosz-zaskorski-moment-zasypiania-w-ciepłe-zwierząt-jest-dla-mnie-czys-wyjatkowym-wywiad>.
- 58 Piotr Policht, "Braci się nie traci," *Magazyn Szum* no. 37 (2022), 79.
- 59 Lech, "Moment zasypiania w ciepłe zwierząt."
- 60 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 103.
- 61 Bartosz Zaskórski, *Postapoland* (Foggia: Hollow Press, 2021).
- 62 See: Peter Sýkora, "Post-dog tales about human extinction," *World Literature Studies* vol. 13, no. 1 (2021), 18–30; Gerry Canavan, "After Humanity: Science Fiction after Extinction in Kurt Vonnegut and Clifford D. Simak," *Paradoxa* no. 28 (2016), 135–156.
- 63 Bartosz Zaskórski, *Weird Tales of Postapoland* (Foggia: Hollow Press, 2022).
- 64 See: Lech, "Moment zasypiania w ciepłe zwierząt."
- 65 Markowska, *Komedia sublimacji*, 284.
- 66 As cited in: Jakub Korhnauser, *Całkowita rewolucja. Status przedmiotów w poezji surrealistycznej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2015), 64–69.

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