

Poetry as mixed media: Darek Foks's *Eurydyka* [Eurydice]

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The relationship between text and images in Darek Foks's poetry may be analyzed from many different perspectives, but one thing is certain: he is one of the most prolific Polish multi-modal writers. Foks is interested in and creates literature which functions outside traditional media in an intramedia environment. Of course, his works may be read like traditional literature. Foks rarely uses two codes/ media at the material and visual level. However, even when he employs one writing system visually, he forces the reader/viewer to see literature in the expanded field.¹ Indeed, as W.J.T. Mitchell argued that “[t]he image/text problem is not just something constructed ‘between’ the arts, the media, or different forms of representation, but an unavoidable issue *within* the individual arts and media. In short, all arts are ‘composite’ arts (both text and image); all media are mixed media (...).”² In Foks's poetry we always find the arts (plural). His poems operate in a broad contextual field and construct photographs and films. Considering the above perspective of poetry as mixed media, in the present article I shall examine the photobook *Eurydyka* [Eurydice] (2021).

¹ This is, of course, a reference to Rosalind E. Krauss's phrase “sculpture in the expanded field”. See: *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press: 1986), 276–290.

² William John Thomas Mitchell, “Beyond Comparison: Picture, Text, and Method”, in *idem: Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 94–95.

Exposition

Darek Foks does not publish photobooks often. His first photobook was *Co robi łączniczka* [What Does the Female Liaison Officer Do?]. *Eurydyka* is his second photobook, although in *Historia kina polskiego* [The History of Polish Cinema] we may also find photographs taken by the author – they play a role in the story. However, Foks assigned such an important role to photographs only in his two books, and *Eurydyka* is special in this respect, because the photographs were taken by the poet. While they play a very important role in the narrative, they also distract one from reading through the sheer pleasure of looking.

Foks's photobook refers to – characteristically for him – complex fields of contexts, including film, painting, and literature. Employing multi-layered allusions, abbreviations, and repetitions, it resists immobility because it works with transposition, translocation, and transfiguration. A plot may be found between the lines, although the author does not seem to particularly care about connections – sometimes, unexpectedly, a single thread may be found in a series of poems and sometimes it simply disappears. Some parts are particularly loaded with meaning. These are longer repetitive and narrative sequences: *Wiersz o malarstwie* [A Poem on Painting], *Eurydyka* [Eurydice], *Wymiana i dar* [Exchange and Gift], and *Kwadrans z Heglem* [Fifteen Minutes with Hegel]. Foks's poems often rely on political narratives; they render abstract concepts more concrete by transforming them into patterns borrowed from other fields, most often warfare. However, the poems are quite diverse. They feature leading characters: more than one person speaks, sometimes they talk to us, and sometimes they intimately address someone else. The rhythm, meter, and lengths of the poems vary: some are just single lines and others extend over multiple pages. The addressed topics also vary. Some poems are narrative and anecdotal (they often allude to Polish political life). Some poems are minimalist (one person declares their love to another). Others talk about spending time in hotels in Prague. One is an extensive poem about love – *Eurydyka*.³

This complex figure of *Eurydyka* means that certain images, scenes, and sentences transform into disturbing allegories, and many details, motifs, and variants seem to be interconnected in the suggestive architecture of Foks's book. The world both makes sense and falls apart. If it were not for the cover, it would be more difficult to find the compositional principle: “This book was born and grew up in Prague, where I spent a few months as part of the Visegrad Literary Residency Program in 2015 [...]”⁴ However, the nature of the text remains a mystery: we do not know whether we are on a film set or whether we are reading a constantly updated script (influenced by the author's actions), or whether we are dealing with a still different instance of truth and fiction intertwining. *Eurydyka*, distributed over many planes and media, encompassing film, photographs, and text, clearly shows that Foks has for years been experimenting with new concepts and new formats of the book. The book becomes an extremely complex object, a choreographed arrangement of text, writing, and photographs – writing in

³ Oskar Meller comments on *Eurydyka* in detail in “Przechwycić porządek pożądania” [To Intercept the Order of Desire], *Notatnik Literacki* 1 (2023) <https://notatnikliteracki.pl/teoria/przechwycic-porzadek-pozadania-2/>, date of access 25 Aug. 2023.

⁴ Darek Foks, *Eurydyka* [Eurydice] (Wrocław: Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Warstwy, 2021), 4. Subsequent quotations are referenced directly in the text.

photographs, mirrors in photographs, photographs in photographs – which transgresses its front and back covers.

The arrangement of poems and photographs suggests that they have something in common. Additionally, the title of each photograph is the title of a movie. *Eurydyka* [Eurydice] is made of poems, photographs, and film titles, organized on a timeline (starting with winter and ending with autumn and an additional off-season poem, *Wyciemnienie* [Darkening]). There does not seem to be a single rule/model governing the connections between photographs, film titles, and poems. I am not sure if there are any predetermined rules at all that govern the order in which photographs, poems, and titles appear. Looking for similarities, additions, and supplements to poems through photographs will prove unsuccessful. Foks provides film titles that traditionally and conventionally refer to photographs but none of the photographs are shots indicated in the title.

Let us try to find our way through this excess and ask why Foks needs multimodality. To talk about looking, desire, love, and time travel? To talk about a fascination with film, faces of actresses, women's bodies, and nudity? It is believed that nudity determines the emotional depth of the image – so we have to ask: is it an object of desire, mockery, or a critical reinterpretation of the patriarchal gaze (an insight into macho culture) or something else? Such questions point to the three levels of *Eurydyka*: the concept and structure of the photobook, the concept of photography as a (unique and at the same time mass) medium, and visual representations of women.

Other traditions of the photobook

Eurydyka is a photobook. However, Foks seems to have ignored the tradition and history of this work of art, which dates back to William Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* (1844–1846). If we agree that the origins of this form lie in the interdependent relationship between the verbal and the visual, with the dominant role of the semiotic order, it becomes clear that *Eurydyka* challenges such a tradition. The photographs are not dependent on the verbal. The respective media do not illuminate one another but follow their own paths, suspended in the history of bodies searching for other bodies.

However, the rich tradition to which Foks refers is visible in the extensive contexts. Eurydice is not only a mythological character, an Orphic fantasy, but above all a reference to the lyrics of a song which appeared at the beginning and the finale of Jerzy Skolimowski's 1965 movie *The Saragossa Manuscript*: "Eurydice, do not wait for me, I'm slowly forgetting you. / Eurydice, life breaks us, it never starts again / Eurydice, where can I find you, / my heart is overcome with grief / Eurydice, do not wait for me, / I do not even want to know if you're dead." The list of film and photographic inspirations can go on and on. They are convoluted yet numerous and it is impossible to list all of them. For example, Victor Burgin's *Fiction Film*, based on André Breton's 1928 book *Nadja*, illuminates *Eurydyka*. In connection with *Nadja*, Breton asked: "and when will all the books that are worth anything stop being illustrated with drawings and

appear only with photographs?”⁵ Foks’s idea, paired with Skolimowski’s film and interpreted as yet another variation on the theme of the journey and encounters with women, refers to the visual level of *Fiction Film*. Burgin thus commented on photographs which imaginatively documented a lost film supposedly directed by Breton:

We may reconstruct the lost film of André Breton’s *Nadja* only in imagination, in the interstices of all that now remains of it: isolated frames from rejected laps dissolves, perhaps gathered by some infatuated assistant editor from the cutting-room floor, and which are themselves fictions.⁶

In his project, Burgin recreates something which never happened: although the novel is based on Breton’s autobiographical love story, it was not adapted into a movie. The photographs that Burgin shows imitate the black and white frames of the imagined film: formal mimicry creates the atmosphere of a tragic love story. One of the photographs shows it literally: a huge female face is towering over a burning flipped car.

Stories conveyed in the poems engage in a dialogue with stories introduced by movie titles and mottos from novels, including Andrzej Strug’s *Dzieje jednego pocisku* [The Story of One Bullet] and Don DeLillo’s *Point Omega*. The first quote reads: “Do you want to die? I want to live and I want to die!” and it later appears as a photograph titled *Only Lovers Left Alive*, a movie directed by Jim Jarmusch. An entire page is shown, two sentences from which were quoted in the motto. Next to the book in the photograph we can see used condoms and other items which refer to a “love” story. The quote from DeLillo’s novel reads: “What else? A simple head shot.” *Point Omega* opens with a description of a 24-hour screening of the movie *Psycho*, projected in slow motion by Douglas Gordon.

Photographs of hotels and cities also evoke vague contexts. They make us think of Sophie Calle’s conceptual books, especially her 1983 book *Suite Vénitienne*. Calle explores what it feels like to follow a stranger met at a party. It is a highly eurydical book, insofar as it focuses on following, looking, tracing. This theme is not as obvious in Foks’s book, but this context renders it more powerful.⁷

What is the meaning of this transcending movement, this act of going beyond the cover, comparable, in my opinion, to breaking out of the frame of a painting? Embodied perception is constantly disembodied. We react to images in and through our bodies, but we are forced to mentally detach from them. Our attention is repeatedly diverted from the “inside” of the book to the “outer” world – movie titles, people in the photographs, and contexts of the staged photographs work like links. It seems that the media (photography, film) take us beyond the book: in order to read it and view it, we are constantly looking beyond its covers. We are constantly being ousted out of the book – we are looking for plots signaled by film titles – and beyond the page – the photographs play with repetitions and ruptures. As such, *Eurydyka* is a combination of negations. It is an object that cannot be read and cannot be viewed.

⁵ See: Krauss, 98.

⁶ See: Victor Burgin, *Fiction Film*, <https://collections.lacma.org/node/173259>.

⁷ See : Sophie Calle, *Suite Vénitienne* (Los Angeles: Siglio, 2015).

Simulation without seduction

In “On the Invention of the Photographic Meaning,” Allan Sekula writes about two 19th-century photographic discourses. The first one, represented by *Camera Work*, postulates that photography is a unique work of art, a fetish, an affective power. In the second discourse, rooted in empiricism, photography is seen as a document. Its most fundamental feature is reproducibility. Thus, photographic meaning circulates between two radically different approaches: the photograph is either a precious and unique artifact or a mass and easily accessible object.⁸ Sekula is not the only one to point to this ambivalent status of photography, adding that “[t]he invention of the photograph as high art was only possible through its transformation into an abstract fetish [...]”⁹ At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, artists also transcended photographic meanings suspended between an abstract fetish and a commercial product:

This problematizing operated on several fronts: on one side they were opposed to art photography that assumed the values of the unique image associated with painting; on another side they were suspicious of media photography that worked that worked to produce effects of consensus in the news and of persuasion in advertising. [...] These postmodernists treated the photograph not only as a “serial” image, a multiple without an original print, but also as a “simulacral” image, a representation without a guaranteed referent in the world.¹⁰

Such an understanding of photography is shared by Foks. He works in series and distributes similarities and other types of codes between them. He also simulatively triumphs over referential effects: the face of the woman we see in the photograph titled *The Dark Passage* (p. 213) is a montage of four other faces that we already know from the screen shown on the previous page, titled *The Fifth Element*, like a movie by Luc Besson (p. 211). The face of the woman from *The Dark Passage* is therefore a symbiosis of the faces of other actresses. She has, for example, Kate Winslet’s nose, and becomes, by default, the titular Eurydice. She is a face and a fetish emerging from the deep black background.

Indeed, such simulative – although today, to avoid using postmodern terms from the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, we would say performative – effects are created when Foks writes about the film set of *Die Panzerschlacht bei Prochorowka*, to which “Susanne from Brno dragged him.” *Die Panzerschlacht bei Prochorowka* is an “experimental movie by Gudrun Reckhaus.” It adds to the fictional contexts of narrative photographs; for example, it helps explain why women’s bodies are shown in a military context. Indeed, we can see a woman in a gas mask, a female breast with a tattoo of a crowned eagle, a naked female torso and a plane. There are more such overt simulations. In some other photograph, we can see Darek Foks walking with Kate Winslet against the background of a block of flats (p. 39). Then, this photograph becomes a film still: we are in a movie theater and the audience is watching Foks and Winslet walking down the street (p. 41). The narrative threads form an even more intricate pattern when we

⁸ See: Allan Sekula, “On the Invention of the Photographic Meaning,” *Artforum* 13.5 (January 1975), <https://www.artforum.com/features/on-the-invention-of-photographic-meaning-212642/>, date of access 8 Jul. 2024.

⁹ Sekula.

¹⁰ *Art Since 1900: Modernism · Antimodernism · Postmodernism*, ed. Hal Foster et al. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 586.



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refer to the two poems which accompany the photographs: *Wiersz dla Kate Winslet* [A Poem for Kate Winslet] and *Drugi wiersz dla Kate Winslet* [A Second Poem for Kate Winslet]. Both refer to dreams, the film set of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Eclipse*, and Antonioni's absence. *The Eclipse* is not so much where Foks and Winslet meet but rather the title of the corresponding photograph in which we see a classic scene from a psychoanalytic session: a woman is lying on a couch and someone is sitting next to her with their hands in their pockets. The photograph is accompanied by the text: "Where's your husband? He's fucking someone's wife" (p. 42).

Seriality and simulation – which rely on the avant-garde montage and the pleasure derived from the possibility of transforming and creating geographically and historically improbable events, situations, and meetings – are the most important features of these photographs. Perhaps the most spectacular expression of this relationship is the meeting between Gloria Grahame, who is watching Munk's *Pasażerka* [Passenger] (the still shows Aleksandra Ślaska as a camp supervisor) in an erotic pose, and Darek Foks, who is sitting next to the actress and

looking at a computer screen over her naked shoulder. A tall microphone stand may be seen above. The photograph is titled *Paths of Glory*. This is the most – so to speak – complete photograph in the series: the scene documenting this fictitious meeting is created slowly, in the subsequent photographs. The first is the photograph of the speaker stand. It is the most abstract image among the photographs in *Eurydyka* which show things. Titled *The Conversation* (p. 11), it shows the stand almost suspended in a vacuum, as if cutting into the black background. It is not a conventional representation of an object. On page 51, there is a photograph of the actress Gloria Grahame watching Aleksandra Śląska in *Pasażerka* (titled *Scent of a Woman*). On page 113, Foks shows himself staring at a screen – the darkness swallows almost every-



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thing. His face is a bright circle, but the body is consumed by blackness. The photograph on page 191 is the most detailed one: the above-described arrangement is repeated, and two new elements are added, a computer screen and Foks looking over Grahame's shoulder. The meeting of Foks and Grahame is also documented in the photograph on page 233, titled *The Wild Bunch*. Foks is lighting Graham's cigarette. They are standing under the poster advertising *Man on a Tightrope*, which fits halfway into the frame, showing the legs of a woman sitting in a car. As a result, simulation is combined with the fetishization of bodies – legs, faces, lips, and hands – which stand out from the dark background. We come close to a total objectification of bodies. They almost, and the emphasis is on almost, become abstract fetishes. Even though most photographs of women's bodies focus our attention on details – breasts, wombs, crotches, buttocks, faces, lips – as they emerge from the black background, as if they were drifting outside time and context, it would be difficult to talk about their seductive or sensual power. This, of course, matters when it comes to the ideological character of these photographs. I will return to this point later.

We should also look at these photographs through the prism of their ostentatiously non-aesthetic effects. All of them – regardless of whether they depict apartment interiors, everyday objects, urban landscapes, or human bodies – are blurred, black and white, and grainy. Figures/characters can hardly be distinguished from the black background, remaining as if on the brink of readability and visibility. This black page, the black background of photographs and montages, may seem to be a distant equivalent of Dadaist white pages analyzed by Rosalind E. Krauss. The scholar compared how Cubists, Dadaists and Surrealists used white pages in their collages, arguing that dada montage gives a very strong impression of gaps, cuts, spaces – the white page serves as a matrix, thanks to which individual isolated elements of the represented reality are clearly visible:

The white page is not the opaque surface of cubist collage, asserting the formal and material unity of the visual support; the white page is rather the fluid matrix within which each representation of reality is secured in isolation, held within a condition of exteriority, of syntax, of spacing.¹¹

These gaps, spaces, and cuts destroy the effect of the real: the reality of the montage cannot in any case constitute photographic evidence, as the supposed transparency of the photographic image is usually read. It is immediately clear that, as Krauss writes, “we are not looking at reality, but at the world infested by interpretation or signification, which is to say, reality distended by the gaps or blanks which are the formal preconditions of the sign.”¹² Surrealist montage, on the other hand, does not work with the white page but instead relies mostly on doubling: “Through duplication, it opens the original to the effect of difference, of deferral, of one-thing-after-another, or within another: of multiples burgeoning within the same.”¹³

If we take into account the traditions of the montage – be it cubist, dadaist, or surrealist, which defined the aesthetics of the 1920s and which were later incorporated into the neo-avant-

¹¹Krauss, 106-107.

¹²Krauss, 107.

¹³Krauss, 109.

garde aesthetics of photography, as exemplified by Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol¹⁴ – then Foks seems to propose various variants (levels) of readability of his black pages. They establish characters and things in unity, as a materially coherent reality that – unlike in the montages semiotically interpreted by Krauss – does not refer us to signs, interpretations, or representations. On the contrary: although we know that the source of photographs is never the real presence of the actresses but only their photographic representations, the blackness from which they emerge isolates them from their lived realities and gives them not so much new meanings but a new temporality, within which the traditional distinctions between fiction and document, presence and sign, do not matter. The work of imagination and memory that brings “real” fictions into existence seems to be more important.

However, the bright, radiant figures are neither astral nor disembodied. On the contrary, the black background transforms the abstract experience of the image into bodily sensations and memory impressions. Perhaps it does not matter whether the photographic background is black or white. According to Ludwig Wittgenstein, black and white are opaque, material colors – they are not simply color fields. Black additionally gives forms depth and three-dimensionality.¹⁵ Wittgenstein further refers to “matt” and “luminosity” in his discussion of the color black:

Black takes away the luminosity of a colour. [...] Black is the darkest of the colours. We say “deep black” but not “deep white.” [...] The difference between black and, say, a dark violet is similar to the difference between the sound of a bass-drum and the sound of a kettle-drum. We say of the former that it is a noise not a tone. It is matt and absolutely black.¹⁶

White renders forms flat. “If all colours became whitish, the picture would lose more and more depth.”¹⁷ In *Eurydyka*, black also refers to Skolimowski’s black and white movie. But above all, it both adds depth and three-dimensionality to corporeality and transports the body beyond the somatic sphere. Foks needs the black photographic background to tell his love story, to tell the story of erotic explorations. What emerges is the “luminous” surface of a bodily form – not a body, not a representation – but a materiality that can be made visible in an artistic medium using points, lines, colors, and tone. At the same time, however, due to the relationship between matter and the illusion of a non-flat surface, we see these forms as bodies that are constantly in danger of disappearing into the background. The photograph is both a system of visual signs (fields, colors, lines, tones) and an image of a body mediated by means of various aesthetic regimes. Language/text also adds to this duality of representation; this is a different issue, but it is worth emphasizing it now. Even if we agree that language is not necessary in reading/seeing photographs, we should acknowledge that the aesthetic planes of texts and photographs come together to convey an anti-idealistic message. If Foks’s poems draw on sentimental literary patterns, these patterns are always “challenged” by references from completely different stylistic fields and the principles of repetition and seriality, i.e.

¹⁴See: *Art Since 1900*, 591.

¹⁵See: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on colour*, trans. Linda L. McAlister, Margarete Schättle (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2007), 110.

¹⁶Wittgenstein, 80.

¹⁷Wittgenstein, 94.

they are composed like photographs: “Mówię, że cała ta miłość / to dolina brzmiaça / moim lamentem, rzeka, / co zaraz wyleje, dzikie / zwierzę, stado ptaków, / srebrna ryba w potoku, myśl, co się wnosi, / zalesione wzgórze, ścieżka / donikąd, kształty / we wspomnieniach, serce / zdrętwiałe, najczystsze / powietrze, ład, morze, / twarze, stopy, ramiona, / bujny gąszcz włosów, / tu i tam domostwo, / wzrok czysty i tkliwy, / opowieść o niczym, / która dziś coś znaczy, / oraz cała reszta w moich białych majtkach, / a on liże mnie trochę / chaotycznie z nadzieją, / że moja cipa rychło / odpowie na te zaczepki” [I say that all this love / is a valley resounding / with my lament, a river / that is about to flood, a wild / animal, a flock of birds, / a silver fish in a stream, an elevated thought, / forested hills, a path / to nowhere, shapes / in memories, a numb / heart, purest / air, land, sea, / faces, feet, arms, / thick lush hair, / here and there a house, / clear and tender eyes, / a story about nothing, / that means something today, / and everything else in my white panties, / and he licks me a little / chaotically, hoping / that my pussy will soon / respond] (*Eurydyka*, p. 156). Texts, photographs, and the plots of movies which exist only as titles do not function as separate media but – as in the case of the translation of spatial sculpture into a drawing, as described by Krauss – they correspond to different levels of readability.¹⁸

It seems that understanding the relationship between the metaphorical nature of Eurydice and Foks’s experiments with photography is of fundamental importance for this project. Photography and the female figure of the lost lover complement one another: Eurydice is both an abstract fetish – precious and unattainable – and a figure made available in many narratives which circulates between times and worlds – she may be used quickly, like advertising or propaganda photography. Foks tries to find escape routes from these stories and narratives both for photography and for his female protagonist: he reproduces photographs devoid of the aesthetic values of a unique work of art, trivializes and at the same time brutalizes the image, distances himself from the high ambitions of photography, and at the same time experiments with documentation practices. He shows us photographs of Prague and Brno, of urban and residential spaces, documenting the comings and goings of different characters. Respectively, many of those encounters never actually took place. Like Victor Burgin’s *Fiction Film*, they are suspended between the abstraction of dreams and the materiality of the medium, color, and montage cuts.

Nudity: Composing a scene for the viewer

Let me say something more about photographs of naked female bodies. This is the most controversial part of Darek Foks’s project.

In the late 1970s, we stopped treating photographs as an expression of the author’s originality or intentions and realized that the meaning of the image stabilizes in relation to other images or signs. Photographs of naked bodies were considered intimate photographs. It appears to no longer be true. In *Eurydyka*, visual contrasts between real objects (motifs) and implicitly sexual images of women’s bodies are not based on intimacy. Visual references and

¹⁸Krauss, 124.



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experiments with repetition (seriality) point towards an impersonal message and not towards spatial, temporal, and emotional relationships.

In fact, Foks creates the filmic, photographic, and textual identity of Eurydice. However, this process is more complex than in colonial or patriarchal orders – where “she should be a sign, and he – the holder of meanings”¹⁹ – because in the love poem *Eurydyka* it is the woman who talks to the man about her desire and sexuality. The man is also photographed, although it is always the fully dressed Darek Foks. Moreover, the gaze directed at women’s bodies is reflected thanks to mirrors, which of course changes the relationship between the viewer and the photographed object: we are looking at someone who is looking at themselves in a mirror or posing in front of a camera. Most images of women (nudes) are representative of what Mi-

¹⁹Anna Wiczorkiewicz, *Czarna kobieta na białym tle. Dyptyk biograficzny* [Black woman on white background: A biographical diptych] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Universitas, 2013), 28.

chael Fried calls the absorbent mode – the person in the photograph appears not to be aware of the fact that they are being photographed.²⁰

The photograph on page 129 is a good example. A woman is putting on stockings. Absolutely concentrated on this activity, she is sitting on the edge of a bed. A camera captures her from the side. Her breasts, thighs, neck, hands and face are exposed, luminous. A computer screen emerges from the dark background, with a photograph of a different woman. It can be considered a metaphor for the viewer: the woman on the computer screen is looking at the woman getting dressed. Likewise on page 13, we can see a woman's face, doubled, through some kind of an opening/window and as partially obscured by a telephone. The photograph of a masturbating woman, whom we see in a mirror, resists dominant beauty standards and – like most photographs showing women in the absorbent mode – emphasizes the self-referential and autoerotic potential of the visual, linguistic, and bodily medium. Autoeroticism and self-referentiality interact, and thus an understanding is established between the media, thanks to which Foks takes us to where we expect intimacy to appear. Of course, not all photographs show the processes of being exposed to the gaze in/through mediations in the absorbent mode. There are many photographs in which women look straight into the camera, as if addressing us and transcending the closed system of looks. These differences in the modes of presenting objects are also responsible for differences in the ways in which photographs are perceived. And most importantly – the dynamics of reception is not conditioned by texts; Foks's photographs are narrative, as defined by Marianna Michałowska.²¹ Meaning offered/created by linguistic commentary is superfluous. The photographs' aesthetic, political, and ideological implications adjust in relation to one another, adapting to stories and images about all kinds of pleasures.

Therefore, *Eurudyka* is not a story which reveals male psychosexual fears, as the story of Orpheus and his attempts to bring Eurydice back might be interpreted. In fact, the Orphic tradition is not prominent in the book. The two attributes most often criticized in patriarchal culture – voice/language/speech and the gaze – are not only reclaimed by female characters but also greatly complicate the relationships between the figures associated with them. The doubling of the gaze (women in the photographs look at themselves and at other women) creates a continuous voyeuristic spectacle. It is difficult to say who has control over bodies, desires, and signs. We are all part of this spectacle, and Foks's story cannot be told without the risk of ideological dilemmas: a look, a shot, or a naked body (part) will always be suspicious. Just as giving a voice to a female character may be suspicious – an interpretation which focuses on an extremely instrumental treatment of women may also be justified.

But Foks is not interested in presenting multiple perspectives and different points of view. He does not wish to prove that various (historical) contexts determine the political and ideological meanings of (naked) bodies, agency, power, and language. Foks guides us through images and texts, multiplying ideological and cognitive controversies. He does not want to use

²⁰Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

²¹Marianna Michałowska, *Foto-teksty. Związki fotografii z narracją* [Photo-texts. Relationships between photography and narrative] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2012).

linguistic and visual media in a safe manner. He shows the body in a risky way, accepting the fact that he may be accused of sexism: body parts he shows function as signs of the objectification of the female body – they are burdened with their own cultural meanings. Can we read these photographs as liberating? Or at least as resisting an interpretation in which the body is a precious commodity?

Perhaps the key to understanding such resistance is to notice the refusal of the photographed women to satisfy aesthetic criteria. They do not have ideal, slim, harmonious bodies. If we bear in mind that in the poem *Eurydyka* some lines (which do not form a refrain) refer to female sexual pleasure and desire, described literally, we could conclude that Foks thus transcends and challenges traditional contexts of female nudity. Moreover: in the ancient tradition, the story of Eurydice ends tragically. Focused on fear, loss, and the horror of death, the story does not talk about women's desires. In Foks's *Eurydyka* – even if the poet does not talk about photography and does not show the body from the point of view of the photographed object but instead multiplies mirror reflections and introduces other media of perception – the story of Eurydice is ultimately a story of pleasure. It is an accumulation of shameless nudity that is not degrading or harmful. Foks removed the signs of violence, fear, and shame from all media – photography, language, and the body. Naturally, only to such a degree as it is possible in a message/object that still functions in patriarchal capitalism.

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KEYWORDS

medium

photographs

PHOTOBOOK

ABSTRACT:

The article “Poetry as mixed media: Darek Foks’s *Eurydyka* [Eurydice]” discusses a unique multimodal nature of Darek Foks’s photobook *Eurydyka*. Focusing on three issues – the tradition of the photobook, an understanding of photography, and the aesthetics of representing the female body – the author argues that the three media that constitute the book (text, photographs and, implicitly, film) should not be construed as separate orders of meaning but as different levels of readability and visibility.

collage

NUDITY

seriality

SYMULATIONS

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

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