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MALINOWSKI THE PHOTOGRAPHER

In discussing some of Malinowski's Trobriand field photographs, Terence Wright (*JASO*, Vol. XXI, no. 1, pp. 41-58) calls attention to his 'concern with imagery' (p. 50) and his 'familiarity with the characteristics of visual expression', as well as his practice of making drawings (p. 51). In her subsequent comment, Elizabeth Edwards (*JASO*, Vol. XXIII, no. 1, pp. 89-91) draws attention to the lack of integration between Malinowski's photography and his fieldwork, something on which, she points out, Malinowski himself remarked (p. 91). With reference to these two aspects of Malinowski's field photography I wish to remind *JASO* readers of his friendship with Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, to which long-standing readers will remember having their attention drawn by Krystyna Cech in 1981. Known to Malinowski as Staś and more generally, after his own styling, as Witkacy, Witkiewicz was a renowned dramatist, novelist, painter and, we must add, photographer, whom Malinowski had known since childhood.

In her essay, Cech (1981) argued that knowing about Malinowski's early life, his friendships, his social circle and the intellectual and cultural life in which he was involved, is essential if one wants to understand 'Malinowski the man' (especially as revealed in his diaries). I suggest that knowing in particular about Malinowski's friendship with Witkiewicz may well be essential if one wants to understand 'Malinowski the photographer'. Having no Polish I cannot explore to their full extent the sources of further information about this relationship that are available (see, for example, the references in Cech 1981; Gerould 1981; Jakimowicz 1987; and Ellen *et al.* (eds.) 1988). What I can do is report the bits and pieces of information that I have been able to gather and that strike me as significant.

First, photography was more than a casual interest of Witkiewicz's. He had been taking photographs—of trains, landscapes and people—since he was fourteen years old, since before he and Malinowski became friends. The Witkiewicz

scholar Daniel Gerould claims (1981: 3 n.2) that Witkiewicz was 'an excellent photographer' and reports him taking 'many photographic portraits of himself, his father, and his friends and associates' between 1905 and 1914.¹ It is clear that photography was an essential aspect of Witkiewicz's artistic practice. I can do no better here than quote, from the English translation of Irena Jakimowicz's account of Witkiewicz's life and art, a passage that will provide food for thought for anyone interested in understanding Malinowski's field photographs:

When speaking about artistic experiences of young Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz one cannot fail to mention photography; its impact was both significant and many-sided. In Witkiewicz's hands the camera played a two-fold function: an instrument of knowledge used for documentary purposes; and also of a medium opening up new creative possibilities. The photography allowed him to compile systematically arranged collections: whether of landscapes, locomotives, or of models who sat for his drawings and paintings, often photographed in the same costumes. Even in the early period the young artist started to take pictures of scenes deliberately arranged by himself. At the same time, however, the camera lens was a tool which revealed unexpected ways of handling objects: it not only 'perceived' landscapes according to the prevailing art nouveau style, but also anticipated matters yet unknown. Sometimes, when regarding a given face, it mercilessly exposed and enlarged the texture of the skin with all its flaws; at other times, it blurred the contours of the face, covering it with an idealizing mist. Some photographs acquire unusual qualities thanks to unconventional framing, in others, the face is repeatedly photographed in different modes, as if the artist wanted to make it more and more unreal. (Jakimowicz 1987: 10-11)

Was Malinowski interested in photography before he embarked on his anthropological career? Given Witkiewicz's intense interest, it is difficult to imagine that the two of them did not discuss photography at length, as they discussed everything else, perhaps even taking photographs together as Malinowski was later to do in the Trobriands with Billy Hancock. I can only speculate, but a trawl of the available primary sources—letters, diaries (including the unpublished parts of Malinowski's own) etc.—might tell us something.

The potential importance of this relationship between anthropologist and artist for understanding Malinowski's later field photographs is strengthened by a fact that has remained largely unremarked by historians of anthropology. As Cech relates (1981: 182), Witkiewicz accompanied Malinowski on his visit to Australia in 1914 to attend, as Marett's secretary, the meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Witkiewicz's trip was arranged to get him away from Europe, where his fiancée had recently committed suicide. According to

1. Krystyna Cech, who kindly read a draft of this comment, tells me that Malinowski was often the subject of Witkiewicz's photographic experiments. Examples of such photographs are to be found, she tells me, in a book of Witkiewicz's photographs published in 1986 (see Witkiewicz 1986); see also plates 9, 10 and 11 in Ellen *et al.* (eds.) 1988.

other authorities, however, the plan was not just for Witkiewicz to accompany Malinowski to and around Australia, but for him also to go with Malinowski to New Guinea as draughtsman and photographer to the 'expedition' (see Degler 1974: 36; Gerould 1981: 13; Wayne 1988: xvii; Kubica 1988: 99; Jerschina 1988: 141). While it is not clear from the brief accounts these authorities give how serious this plan was, it does seem that for a while at least Malinowski was expecting to have someone else make drawings and take photographs in the field.

As it happens, Witkiewicz did not accompany Malinowski on his first field trip to Mailu. On the outbreak of war, Witkiewicz returned to Europe to fight with the Tsar's forces. By doing so he lost himself a greater part in the history of anthropology (our loss, not his, no doubt), but perhaps ensured Malinowski a greater place than he might have achieved if he had not carried out his first fieldwork 'alone'. It is remarkable, though, how the very fact that Witkiewicz was with Malinowski in Australia and was planning to go with him to New Guinea has been omitted from accounts of Malinowski's early researches. Even the published edition of Malinowski's diary explains who Staś is, but without mentioning his presence in Australia (see Malinowski 1967: n. 3), while Michael Young's (1988) authoritative account of Malinowski's first field researches does not mention Witkiewicz at all.

To return to the photographs. Given even the little extra information we now have, would it be too much to see Malinowski's 'visual sophistication', on which Wright comments, as a product, in part at least, of his friendship with Witkiewicz? And might the lack of integration between Malinowski's photography and his fieldwork, on which Edwards comments, be at least partly explicable as a result of his having to take on a task that he thought his friend Witkiewicz was going to undertake? Furthermore, if Malinowski did, as Wright elsewhere (1992: 21) suggests, 'evolve an exploratory use of the camera in the field' might not this owe something to the photographic experiments of his friend Witkiewicz?

Any influence that Witkiewicz had on Malinowski's field photography would presumably have been at its greatest at the time of Malinowski's first field trip to Mailu in 1914-15, while the remarks of both Wright and Edwards are directed towards Malinowski's later Trobriand photographs of 1918 or thereabouts. But there is no reason to suppose that Witkiewicz's influence would have waned completely by the time of Malinowski's Trobriand researches. Moreover, any attempt to understand Malinowski's Trobriand photographs would surely benefit from comparing them with his earlier, Mailu, photographs, while any attempt to understand the latter would have to take into account Malinowski's experience of photography before he first went to the field. Any complete account of Malinowski's field photography, therefore, will have to take into account his friendship with Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz.

JEREMY COOTE

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