Stefan Morawski

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Stefan Morawski, **Dwie awangardy – stara i nowa (Two Avant-Garde Formations of the 20th Century)**, "Miesięcznik Literacki", 1975, No 3, pp. 20.

The two avant-garde formations of the title are the avant-garde of the years 1905–1930 and that which emerged at the end of the 50's. After sketching the theoretical framework, the author presents the above mentioned artistic phenomena and confronts the achievements and drawbacks of both formations, laying stress primarily on the present day situation.

1. Disputing with the well known book of Poggioli, the author views the phenomenon of the avant-garde as characterized by the following features: the growing disparity between the wider public and the most advanced artistic challenge (which was due to the democratization of culture and the beginnings of the mass culture in the result of the French revolution); opposition to artistic standards which stick to the principle of communication reaching all intelligentsia; fidelity to oneself against any tradition, artistic school etc. (which can be traced back to Romanticism and its emphasis laid on the individual rebellious expression); the questioning of the whole cultural structure in the name of new values, both those which were just appearing and those of the future (due to the bohemian, out-of-the-saddle position of the artist since the mature capitalist era); extravagancies and eccentricities, fascination with ideas in vogue, the tomorrow-oriented feverish search for novelty, pursuing a novelty already waning (characteristic of the period of transition, i.e. instability and adventurism).

Thus the avant-garde is a typical historical phenomenon of modern times, an offshoot of the bourgeois systems in their period of success and then gradual decay.

From the very start the avant-garde movement took different forms, of which two extreme ones were of the highest significance: that as its main frame having the artistic realm, as in the case of the Gautier's circle and later *bohème*, and that for which such a frame-work was the socio-political reality, e.g. Saint-Simonian and Fourierist ideas in G. Sand, or later Marxist or anarchist-oriented *oeuvre*, as in Freiligrath, Heine, Courbet. Between these extremes spread a continuum of diverse attitudes.

2. According to the author, in the avant-garde formation of

the period 1905 – 1930 (the demarcation lines being obviously only approximate) we can distinguish four main models: autotelic, eschatological, catastrophistic and functional-constructivist. The autotelic model, as seen for instance in Mondrian and Kandinsky, Duncan and Craig, Apollinaire and Khlebnikov, the film avant-garde of the early 20's, Schönberg and Webern, stressed the peculiarity of aesthetic qualities and treated the artist as an expert and virtuoso. Ideological engagement, seconded by a kind of social eschatology and connected with artistic experimentation can be found in Mayakovsky and Eisenstein, Meyerhold and the film group "Feksy", Grosz and Heartfield, Aragon and Eluard, Brecht and Piscator, or Siqueiros and Rivera. The model of catastrophism (or negative utopia) was associated with some original poetics and included works of Joyce, Musil, Eliot, Trakl, St. I. Witkiewicz, Bruno Schulz, or Barlach, Kokoschka, Beckmann, while aesthetization of the applied art and everyday environment, which meant extending the sphere of artistic values on construction and function, from now on considered aesthetically as important as form, found its expression in Bauhaus, De Stijl, L'Esprit nouveau, industrial design. There were, beyond any doubt, some works, as those of Pevsner or Mies van der Rohe, combining features of two or more of the described models; generally taken, however, all the most important achievements of this avant-garde formation can without a distortion be listed as being representative for one of the above mentioned types.

3. What constitutes the recent avant-garde formation can also be classified as belonging to one of four models, although the models themselves will be different from those of the previous period. And thus such phenomena as the Brooklyn EAT, cyborgs, films of Whitney brothers or Nam June Paik, electronic music, Stan van der Beek's spectacles or Takis' magnetic sculpture represent the technological art, resting primarily on serial production, the use of computers, holograms etc. Emblems of everyday stereotyped consciousness (from pop-art to superrealism) are characteristic of another model, that referring to the domination of mass media. Aleatoric art, founded on spontaneous gesture, improvisation, play, games, etc. manifested itself in phenomena from action-painting to happening, music *ad libitum*, Ginsberg's poetry, Cortazar's mosaic novels, cosmic and sexual works of New American Cinema or

The Living Theatre. Finally, meta-art, i.e. replacing the sensuous structure by methodology, pushing forward the verbal message at the cost of iconic material, and philosophizing on the nature of artistic production, can be seen in Tel Quel novels, conceptualism, poetry of Queneau or graphical music.

The predecessors of these types of creation can be easily noticed in the years 1914–1939, although it was only the appearance of new civilizational and cultural patterns that brought to the fore the manifold anti-art movement. All extraartistic causes, which generated this fundamental transformation sweeping away the ages-long aesthetic paradigms, can be reduced to four essential factors: a) the informative explosion (mass media), b) techno-scientific revolution (development of physics, astronautics, genetic engineering), c) the counter-culture which radically challenged the present Leviathan – that is, bureaucratized and anthill-like states, d) crisis of art's status, related to the critical situation of all-embracing philosophical systems or socio-political doctrines which occurred to be no less dubious than religions.

There is no doubt that the recent avant-garde practice (both works and manifestos) undermined the aesthetic categories which for centuries had been held as undeniable. *Technè*, form, expression or mimesis are no longer deemed to be the constitutive qualities determining what can and should be acknowledged as belonging to the artistic realm. There is, however, a constant controversy about the avant-garde character of the recent artistic challenge. Its avant-gardism is questioned by some scholars who find the contemporary artistic production well adjusted to the mass culture and to the predominant technological values or entirely reconciled with idolization of sciences. Modern endeavours towards anti-art or post-art are considered by such scholars to be too nihilistic and too venal to deserve the name of the avant-garde. The author of the article shares the opposite view with those who point to the rebellious and utopian thinking in the aleatoric art and, to some extent, also in the technological art (e.g. Buckminster Fuller). Moreover, there is quite a lot of perversion and irony in the pop-art model, and the conceptualist strategy as all meta-art is clearly directed towards changing of the cultural and civilizational *status quo*. Venality is not the proper term to grasp the commercial side of the recent avant-garde, since this

art sells so easily and expensively only to prove the bankruptcy of aesthetic criteria and corruption of the art establishment. Its nihilism is the sympton of the Great Labirynth our world became at this juncture, i.e. during the hectic and expensive passing from the industrial to the post-industrial era. The dramatic tensions and ambiguities of the modern avant-garde reveal problems and antinomies of existence of mankind today in the same way as does the searching of contemporary philosophers for new, not known yet, axiological foundations. It is obvious that the avant-garde formation of our time must differ from its forerunners of the 1905–1930 period. With the whole civilizational context altered, the social status of art became highly dubious and shaky. No one can be sure today whether art survives and, if it does not, what will take its place in the not-so-far-away future.

Sum. and transl. by the author

Ryszard Handke, **Pomiędzy baśnią a science fiction (Between the Fairy-tale and Science Fiction)**, "Teksty", 1975, No 1, pp. 19.

The question on the mutual relation between these two literary forms raises further questions: can typical science fiction function as a fairy-tale and if so, to which traits do we owe this relationship? Can a contemporary fairy-tale identify itself with science fiction by taking on its features while, at the same time, not losing its own and retaining its connection with the tradition of its own genre? *Robots' Stories* by Stanisław Lem are considered to be such a hybrid. If certain works bring to mind both fairy-tales and science fiction, they do not have to do this in completely equal measure.

There are though, numerous similarities between fairy-tales and science fiction, although some of them also embrace other types of works. One of these mutual similarities is the aim of taming the unknown. The fairy-tale was one of the first experiments in this field. At present, science fiction is trying to overcome the isolation of man who, having become the subject of changes taking place in the world, cannot keep up with adapting himself to situations created by himself and with fear and hope he tries to