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The Paths of Early Pluralism. Polish Aestheticians Between Eras

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Abstract

Early artistic and aesthetic pluralism is not an accidental phenomenon in Polish aesthetic theories. This article shows its nineteenth and twentieth century origins and various theoretical considerations, and brings to the foreground the philosophical motifs entangled in the historical events of Poland. Cited documentary material focuses on two selected topics. They are: the philosophized version of history, in particular the multicultural history of aesthetics (W. Tatarkiewicz) and the extended categorization of the active site of subjectivity (R. Ingarden).

"Humans need art. Differently but no less than they need to still hunger or find shelter"¹.

Actuation as a Value

Reflections on one's own cultural tradition are perforce hampered by many limitations, some of which will need to be clarified for this rather selective essay to be readable. I have decided to refrain from rigid chronology in favour of an arbitrary review of those Polish aesthetic theories which emerged and functioned not so much *in* the 1920s or the years following World War Two, but in the period *between* these two intellectually and socially so very different realities. Those years were indeed somewhat similar to the 1920s, however I chose to focus not on this era's mature phase but its more dynamic moments. On transience and change, that which came to life and that which died. In other words – on the fluid process which led it from its beginnings to its close.

As Polish aesthetics in the two decades between the first and second world wars have been subject to rather broad study, I see the need to establish certain criteria by which to select issues for the present debate. Consequently, I assume that the sequential, spatial-temporal area in which essentially all historical experience is born and located extends between the significance of the bygone

¹ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Parerga*, PWN, Warsaw 1978, p. 92.

(that which has irrevocably become a part of the past) and its contemporary presence.

This theoretical area enables a good view of what I consider to be the basic issues pursued by Polish aestheticians at the time – namely their share in efforts to describe the broadly-understood subject (entity) and object categories and their participation in an implicit philosophical/aesthetical debate around definitions of existential identity. Here, two matters appear to be most in the foreground: *first*, building individual identity by defining relations to history as an indisputable system of values, and *secondly* seeking values in the intensive co-creation of theoretical substantiations for subjectivity, and through this imbuing essence into one's own individual existence. The first problem guided aesthetics scholars towards the values of history (history of aesthetics) while the second entailed interest in existence's dynamic form and focused on sophisticated descriptions of the intensifying processes leading to the individual's subjectivisation.

Both categories – history and subject/entity – found different and extensive expression in the Polish aesthetics of the discussed period. They were dealt with by many eminent authors but the material is so extensive that for practical purposes I will treat it selectively here. The key I have chosen for this aim should enable a general picture of the motivations underlying the evolution of aesthetics in the Poland of the day. Both the historical and subjective category carried a problem located beyond aesthetics in the strict sense. A problem which did not directly concern art and the quality, typology and classification of aesthetic experience [which, of course, most aesthetics scholars concentrated on], but the much more essential dilemma of whether the construction of entity theory should be subordinated or in opposition to history and its course. The second option entailed the rejection or disregard of these claims as a supreme value and, in their stead, the ennoblement and introduction of the subject concept in an extra-historical understanding beyond and above time, and possibly free of non-aesthetic dependencies.

In keeping with the above interpretation the first option is expressed by the recognition of the primacy of history of aesthetics, as exemplified by Władysław Tatarkiewicz. Representative for the second option is the aesthetic theory developed by Roman Ingarden.

The Aporias of Heritage

The imperative to actuate the past is usually associated with popularisation, i. e. disseminating and reminding. In the research sphere, however, the quest for an inter-generational *iunctim* finds expression in such activity as the re-interpretation, by means of successive readings, of materials (not infrequently freshly-discovered manuscripts) and reference to diverse direct and indirect sources.

When we speak about masters in a given field, we usually do not refer to the present but the past. In fact it could well be that the image of a charismatic

master is slowly but steadily becoming a primarily historical association. However this may be, it must be said that the position of mastery and the master always was and still is inseparably tied not only to scholarly attainment but, first and foremost, to ethos pursued in line with the principle that, "To teach thoroughly is to touch that which is most vital in a human being"². The master's pursuit of this credo was usually visible in the conduct of his students and followers, who carried on his work or sought guidance from it in their own.

Such bonds are complex by nature. In our contemporary times imitation of, or other forms of identification with the views of even the most valued master are no longer a primary goal. Prevalent for our era is rather that "the student (...) feels compelled to surpass the master, liberate himself from him, in order to become himself"³. Does this find confirmation in contemporary aesthetics? Is it able to define itself against its beginnings and past masters (certain of whose attainments it is our intent to outline here)? In light of the serious changes of the subject of aesthetics as well as its scope (*aisthesis*), and in the context of differences in approach to the art work and art itself and the emergence of new art and expression forms, the question that arises is whether reference to the past aims at a narrowly cognitive, informative and at times perhaps strategic, or a purely retrospective effect? And another, more serious question: did the theories and concepts developed by the below-discussed aestheticians anticipate or inspire modern-day Polish aesthetics?

It is evident that attempts at even a precursory answer to these questions must be undertaken primarily in discourse. In order to avoid the reminiscential/ anniversary convention which naturally suggests itself here, I suggest we order our rather broad material in the spirit of Władysław Tatarkiewicz's favourite road metaphor⁴. "Road" is, of course, by nature a stylistically heterogeneous figure with abundant variations – paths, turns sidings, ducts, and a multitude of other, sometimes hardly predictable, expanses. The essence and value of the road is primarily viewed through the ends it serves and the direction it takes. In effect creative work and creative influence, the overstepping of set boundaries and the resulting changes in aesthetic awareness produce values which become new perception objects – and thereby inspire new ways in which these objects are experienced.

On the Borderline. Dynamic Entity

Reflections about the beginnings of contemporary Polish aesthetics must make room for the fact that the formation period of this discipline in the 1920s and 30s was a time when Poland was in the course of regaining its long-nonexistent statehood. This was an exceptional period in which numerous philosophical and aesthetic theories were born, flourished and died. The country's situation and

² G. Steiner, *Nauki mistrzów*, transl. by J. Łoziński, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2007, p. 25.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁴ W. Tatarkiewicz, "Zapiski do autobiografii", in: Teresa i Władysław Tatarkiewiczowie, *Wspomnienia*, PIW, Warsaw 1979, p. 170.

specific history came together to create an important context, which engaged the activity and efforts of both artists and scholars. Reference to the roots and beginning stages of a studied process, especially unavoidable in investigations of situations like the above-mentioned, inevitably carries some danger of arbitrariness in the choice of discussed phenomena, facts and events. A researcher's already-possessed knowledge, from the outset imbued by his subjective stance towards the issue at hand, may acquire a new sense in a new context. With this in mind, one can well understand the caution professed by Roman Ingarden when he wrote, "I will know what I am now only when the present 'now' will belong to the past"⁵. For the sake of orderliness I will recount some well-known⁶ facts which led to the formation of the specific entity that is our culture – an entity open to multitude, diversity, variability of expression and plurality of form.

The period of our interest is a time when Poland was regaining independence after the memorable year 1918. Whatever can be said about the country's position at the time, it undeniably lay between East and West, on a crossroads between European and non-European thought. Like its neighbours, Poland was an in-between country, which is why our art and aesthetics carry Latin and Mediterranean traits (e.g. our fascination with the Italian Renaissance under the Vasa dynasty or our later leanings towards French art), Byzantine influences visible in our penchant for Orthodox iconography, Ukrainian and Lithuanian traces, and that which is so well described in the works of Isaac Singer. Being "in between", an eternal borderland was the source of deep and multi-layered intellectual and emotional tension and a periodically stronger or weaker fascination – and fear – of outside influence.

Interpretations of the above-described situation have their unintended but logically substantiated theoretical consequences. History, especially the long years without statehood, led to a predominance of defensive attitudes – which, however, were not destructive to culture. To the contrary, they inspired a broad array of specific defences against its annihilation. Tension and cultural restlessness gave rise to new forms of implicit communication, which were enabled by art and knowledge about art. Chronologically, therefore, the here-discussed material relates to the formulations of aestheticians who began their work before 1939. During the Nazi occupation of 1939-45 these scholars, unmindful of the tragic conditions of the day, continued their earlier studies in the underground and revealed them after the war when Polish universities reopened.

I am aware that the here-adopted criterion for the selection of authors and their works is not exhaustive. First and foremost, it programmatically omits many aestheticians from a generation which today not only boasts considerable theoretical achievement, but is also responsible for the introduction to aesthetic studies of totally new themes from happenings, TV, film and dance to a new kind of cultural participation.

Nonetheless, the selection that has been made will allow sufficient insight into the specifics and importance – beyond narrowly-understood aesthetics – of

⁵ R. Ingarden, *Książeczka o człowieku*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 1972, p. 55.

⁶ I wrote about the multithreaded character of culture in the introduction to a selection of Tatkiewicz writings, *Wybór pism*, Universitas, Cracow 2004.

earlier investigations into art, its reception and cognitive functions. We owe the circumstance that World War II failed to completely destroy Polish aesthetics to those aestheticians who managed to survive it – notably Roman Ingarden, Władysław Tatarkiewicz, Henryk Elzenberg, Stanisław Ossowski, Leon Chwistek and Mieczysław Wallis. It was they who resumed studies in philosophy and aesthetics immediately after the war ended. As equally important I consider the fact that in some areas their aesthetic concepts anticipated later solutions of controversial aesthetic issues and determined the field's further development both in- and outside Poland (Ingarden).

The rebirth of academic life soon brought the resumption of the 1898-founded periodical *Philosophical Review* ("Przegląd Filozoficzny"). The editor's note to the 1949 volume read: "The forty-four to-date *Philosophical Review* volumes contain numerous essays in aesthetics. The currently broad representation of scholars in this field has inspired us to bring out a special edition devoted to aesthetics"⁷. This volume, titled *Contemporary Aesthetics*, featured material by Polish authors like R. Ingarden, W. Tatarkiewicz, K. Zwolińska or S. Skwarczyńska, as well as foreigners like H. D. Aiken. The editors also sought out and published posthumous material by young-generation aestheticians, in the mentioned volume this was an essay by Jan Gralewski⁸, one of the many Tatarkiewicz students who perished in the war.

Simultaneity or Source Reference?

Of paramount importance for the development of aesthetics in Poland were foreign aesthetic studies and the already-constituted models of approaching art. These influences, upheld by personal ties between scholars at international conferences and congresses, were multidirectional both in the theoretical sphere (publications) and on the personal plane (teaching, students and followers). Polish aestheticians thus crossed the threshold to 20th century European aesthetics, represented among others by Max Dessoir, Emil Utitz, Etienne Dufrenne, Jacques Maritain, Luigi Pareyson – and especially Edmund Husserl⁹, whom the young Ingarden considered his Master, formulating much of his argumentation and theses about phenomenological aesthetics in his correspondence with the German scholar. Important for the establishment of international ties by Polish aestheticians was their participation in international congresses¹⁰. The 1937 2nd International Aesthetics Congress saw presentations by young Polish scholars: Henryk Elzenberg submitted a paper entitled, *La coloration affective de l'objet esthétique et le problème qu'elle suscite*; Roman Ingarden – *Das ästhetische Erlebnis*, published in *II-ème Congrès International d'Esthétique et des Sciences de l'art*, vol. I, Paris; Władysław Tatarkiewicz published his essay *Ce que*

⁷ *Przegląd Filozoficzny*, vol. XLV, book 1-2, Warsaw-Cracow 1949.

⁸ Jan Gralewski died in 1943 in an air disaster over Gibraltar.

⁹ "Fenomenologia Romana Ingardena", *Studia Filozoficzne*, special edition, IFiS PAN, Warsaw 1972, pp. 63, 64.

¹⁰ There exist no data on the participation of Polish aestheticians in the 1913 First International Congress of Aestheticians in Berlin.

nous savons et ce que nous ignorons des valeurs in Actualities Scientifiques et Industrielles (no. 539, Paris, 1937). This way Poland made acquaintance with and creatively incorporated Europe's aesthetic views – however without passive imitation of existing theories. Noteworthy here is that this incorporation mainly focused on aesthetics relating to art and its role, this was what Polish aesthetics of the day based upon and its main interest. Here Polish aestheticians moved together with the predominant European trends of the day, which strove to define aesthetics and its tasks as knowledge and stressed the intuitive and intellectual need for insight into the *core of things*. Somewhat less prominent in Poland were connections between aesthetic theory and emerging new art. In this respect a somewhat separate group were philosophising artists like Leon Chwistek and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, who supplemented their unique artistic work with related philosophical studies.

It would appear worthwhile to seek an answer to the question why there were no bonds between the aesthetics and art of that era. Especially as the two inter-war decades were a period marked by a flourishing interest in art and artistic culture with novatory trends appearing in literature, drama, and even film art. Nonetheless, the avant-garde work of constructivists like sculptor Katarzyna Kobro or painter Władysław Strzemiński found theoretical response chiefly in the artistic press and were not a subject of great interest for philosophical aesthetics. Kobro's progressive experiments degraded the role of the solid in sculpture and annihilated the traditional linear approach to its boundaries. The basic novelty in Kobro's work was expressed by her belief that "the solid is a lie in the face of the essence of sculpture". This was because the solid "closed the sculpture in and separated it from space, existed for itself and treated exterior space as something quite different from interior space"¹¹. This traditional, heretofore meticulously observed boundary was now brought down and became an open border which in a sense connected the sculpture to space. Władysław Strzemiński's Unism theory constituted a re-interpretation of the concept of the whole. Other similarly avant-garde artistic groups included the Formists and the Colourists, most notable among whom were the Kapists¹².

Most noteworthy amidst the multitude of issues undertaken by the beginning aestheticians of the day was, I believe, the category of *aesthetic and artistic pluralism*, which became an alternative to the paradigm of history understood as tradition-based, compact, near-total unity. Here it must be said that in aesthetics this plurality-totality antinomy underwent some transformation, not only losing its sharpness, but acquiring properties which bound both opposing components together. Alongside the theoretical motivation mentioned at the outset, its mention in this rather narrow account of inter-war Polish aesthetics is dictated by the fact that the then quite young Polish state was in a very

¹¹ K. Kobro, "Ankieta Europy", in: *Europa*, no. 2, 1929, quoted after in: *Katarzyna Kobro 1898-1951: w setną rocznicę urodzin, 21 października 1898 – 17 stycznia 1951*, red. E. Fuchs et al., Łódź Art Museum, Łódź 1998, p. 156.

¹² Among them were members of the Kapists (Tytus Czyżewski, Zbigniew Pronaszko) and other Colourist groups (Hanna Rudzka-Cybisowa, Piotr Potworowski, Jan Cybis, Maria Jarema, Tadeusz Kantor, Erna Rosenstein).

specific cultural situation as it was building an identity of its own after years of enslavement.

History of Aesthetics as a Prologue to Pluralism

At the time Poland's young-generation aestheticians had two living masters of world renown – Roman Ingarden and Władysław Tatarkiewicz. Both have enriched aesthetics with fundamental content, both have followers in the academic world and both have influenced several generations by their work. Their aesthetic concepts vary considerably, the main difference lying in the research method (terminology, categories, systemic approach) they use. Interestingly however, despite their fundamental theoretical differences Ingarden's phenomenological and Tatarkiewicz's historical aesthetics have something in common – both are best-comprehensible in a broader philosophical context.

Unlike Roman Ingarden, Władysław Tatarkiewicz in his extensive writings deliberately avoided the temptation to create or even initially outline a comprehensive philosophical system. He analysed theories relating to aesthetic experience, the truth of artistic perfection, *mimesis*, and many others, but founded his own vision of the world and essence on history. Without delving deeper into the question of *aesthetic historicism*¹³ I will only say that Tatarkiewicz strove to reduce his role to that of an "ordering observer", who "had no other ambition but to explain and order thoughts, and shape a proper vision of the world".

Behind this modesty, however, lay a clear-cut research method and a historicism-based multivalence concept. Tatarkiewicz believed that it was history with its multiple threads that gave true insight into the simultaneous plurality and unity of the surrounding world. His accentuation of the multithreaded character of the formation and development of aesthetic concepts not only considerably extended the field but enriched knowledge about the connections between aesthetics and other forms of awareness.

The question Tatarkiewicz asked himself when he underscored the importance of historical research – and which is also useful for our present reflections – was: why, in my aesthetic studies, did I devote most attention to the history of aesthetics? Can we be satisfied by the answer he himself offered – "I wanted to explain the possibilities of this world to myself basing on history"?¹⁴

I believe that in his historical writings Tatarkiewicz had more in mind than just documenting facts: knowledge about them, their description and interpretation – as well as their sheer multitude – confirmed the multiplicity and multi-hued diversity, and simultaneously the unity and continuity, of art and culture. Tatarkiewicz regarded historical fact as the source of contemporary man's Decalogue, the mission allotted to artistic endeavour and the exceptional position of the artist. Alongside the above-described motivation behind

¹³ I have approached this subject several times in my writings but recall it here in outline to retain the logic of Tatarkiewicz's reasoning.

¹⁴ W. Tatarkiewicz, "Zapiski do autobiografii", p. 157.

Tatarkiewicz's focus on history lay his desire to preserve and present continuity and constancy as values consistently opposed to changeability and transition.

Subjectivity. Beyond or Beside History?

It is difficult to disagree with Mircea Eliade when he writes that "the more aroused consciousness is, the more it transgresses its own historicity"¹⁵. Knowledge about the fate of aesthetic objects indeed extends the limits of awareness and imagination – and thereby deepens the receiver's understanding of the flow of time – but provides no intellectual instruments to strengthen his individual subjectivity.

In his philosophical aesthetics Ingarden focused on this "transgression of history" into the extra-temporal by exposing the role of art, and, consequently, aesthetics in the consolidation of subjective identity. His formulation of the so-called "aesthetic situation" as the subject of aesthetics means he understood aesthetics as a platform on which the artist (and receiver) *associated* with the work of art. The receiver's intensive activity is a crucial condition for the creation of the aesthetic object, which puts the work of art (the object) in existential dependence from the subject (the receiver). The basic ontological distinction embraces the existential fundament of the work of art, which contains indeterminate areas. Purely intentional objects are characterised by dynamism and fluctuation, the receiver's *association* with the work of art helps fill out the indeterminate areas and create the aesthetic object.

According to Ingarden "the processes leading to the concretisation and constitution of a valuable aesthetic object may take a variety of courses (...). Both processes are inseparable and neither can be examined in total isolation from the other. This is the essential postulate of aesthetics, which has realised that the basic thing it should start its investigations from is showing man's encounter with a certain external object which is different, and at the moment of encounter still independent, from him"¹⁶. As Ingarden insists, "this is not merely a lifeless contact but an animated encounter full of activity and tension." It leads to the filling out of indeterminate areas and the constitution of a valuable aesthetic object. The potential reception possibilities – or diversity of ways in which the work of art can be co-created – contained in this formulation legitimises *multiplicity* and *diversity* as aesthetic/philosophical values.

The specific intentional existence category has far-reaching implications in Ingarden's philosophical aesthetics and embraces not just the individual but the human community at large. Ingarden emphasised the special existential status of culture products in the process of co-creating a work of art. Humans live on the border between two worlds: natural and cultural. Ingarden notes that, "human nature consists in a ceaseless striving to overstep the boundaries set by the animality contained within the human being, and rise above it by means of humanity

¹⁵ R. Ingarden, *Książeczka o człowieku*, p. 34.

¹⁶ *Idem*, "Studia z estetyki", in: *idem*, *Dzieła filozoficzne*, PWN, Warsaw 1970, vol. III, pp. 18-41.

and man's role as a creator of values"¹⁷. Cultural products satisfy human spiritual needs, they express a longing for absolute (aesthetic and moral) values and the contemplation of metaphysical qualities. In his description of intentional existence Ingarden refers to more than the work of art when he writes, "the existence of this world decides about our existence as a separate nation"¹⁸.

At this point Ingarden reflections meet with Tatarkiewicz's historically-grounded apotheosis of art and its role¹⁹. This "encounter" confirms the earlier hypothesis about the specific extra-aesthetic position of art in the society of the here-discussed era: the artistic acquired an ontological status and the relation to art works became an integral part of individual existence. Thanks to the phenomenological description of experiencing works of art the "existence" and "to exist" categories, for years founded upon values identified with historical diversity, opened to the diversity of current cognition acts and their essence-generating establishments, whose benchmark were the *multiplicity* category and its partner, the category of *unity*.

These two, frequently intertwining paths – historical and subjective – inspired interest in pluralistic aesthetics, although each in its own way.

Aesthetic Pluralism vs. Absolutism

Most noteworthy in the here-outlined theories and study trends is, in my opinion, their well-perceived multiculturalism. The rather unique social context in which this multiculturalism functioned made it radiate quite strongly. The main aim of philosophical aesthetics in the discussed era was to create a general overview of the multitude of existing values and establish rules by which they could coexist. An early expression of this was pluralism, which based on the view that culture was a multithreaded and multivalent construct. Pluralism in its general sense appeared in several versions in this period's philosophy and social thought. For Tatarkiewicz it involved recognition of, "the diversity of the manifestations of beauty, art, aesthetic attitudes"²⁰.

The pointedness of this statement becomes clearer when set against statements by other aestheticians, notably artists like the painter, logician and philosopher Leon Chwistek, who in 1921 wrote, "dogmatic faith in a one and only reality leads to paradox and cannot be accepted by all people"²¹. The philosophical theory of multiple realities and the postulate to create multiple individual systems gave very effective support to the work of avant-garde artists.

Tatarkiewicz's programmatically history-based pluralism exemplifies a more general methodology. In 1913 Tatarkiewicz published an essay titled *Development in Art*²² and he himself gave a lecture on *Pluralism in Aesthetics*, in which he saw "a common base, a common thought" in the conviction about "the

¹⁷ R. Ingarden, *Książeczka o człowieku*, p. 34, footnote 2.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Parerga*, p. 92.

²⁰ *Idem*, *Droga przez estetykę*, PWN, Warsaw 1975, p. 6.

²¹ L. Chwistek, *Zagadnienia kultury duchowej w Polsce*, Gebethner i Wolff, Warsaw 1933.

²² W. Tatarkiewicz, "Rozwój w sztuce", in: *Świat i człowiek*, Al. Heflich & St. Michalski Pub., Warsaw 1913, book IV.

diversity of manifestations; of beauty, art, aesthetic attitude, not to mention the diversity of concepts and views about beauty, art and ethics over various eras, in the works of various writers, or even one and the same writer"²³. This conviction Tatarkiewicz called aesthetic pluralism.

Tatarkiewicz returned to the aesthetic pluralism theory more than once. In it he emphasised that because aesthetics had gone through a variety of embodiments over history, its own history must be polymorphous. He also offered a broad explanation of the "pluralistic character" of aesthetics-related phenomena. Tatarkiewicz's entire intellectual effort to investigate the various "possibilities of thought and creativity" was a quest for the truth and its essence, also in the views expressed by other cultures. The historic character and artistic multiformity of cultural produce is why truth in culture is related to time, place and sphere. Tatarkiewicz's culture theory has no room for one ultimate and absolute truth. The search for axiological order should not be understood as defining the objective and absolute value of truth, or categories like beauty. What it is is a presentation of aesthetic pluralism, i. e. the ambiguity of aesthetic concepts and multitude of aesthetic theories. However, although he emphasised pluralism, Tatarkiewicz in his *The Concept of a Value* opposed both the subjectivistic and relativistic theory of value. These are the basic threads of this leading pluralism representative's concept; there are, however, others, which he scrutinises with emphasis on their various horizontal and vertical relations (e.g. in *A History of Six Ideas. An Essay in Aesthetics*).

Emphasis on multifariousness in the evolution of aesthetic concepts not only broadens the field but also deepens and enriches knowledge about the ties of aesthetics to other forms of awareness.

Tatarkiewicz offers a specific summary of the plurality question in his aesthetic views in his so-called alternative definition of art and the work of art. As he himself admitted, this definition evolved from his studies of contemporary-day art concepts and interpretations of the old conflict between sensualists and spiritualists. Here, Tatarkiewicz concluded that definitions of the work of art could not be reduced to any one of its functions²⁴.

"However we may define art – whether by reference to its intent, its relation to reality, its influence or its values – we will always end up with an "either-or" alternative"²⁵.

However, Tatarkiewicz's alternative art definition seems to have been inspired by more than historical studies. It may be assumed that an essential inspiration were the avant-garde artistic movements emerging in Poland at the time, which definitely did not correspond with traditional aesthetic criteria. Aestheticians found themselves confronted with the need to define themselves towards them which was a very difficult task. Here artistic praxis made theoreticians aware of the complexity of the theoretical situation. The alternative definition of art offered a compromise and was simultaneously derived from aesthetic pluralism. As Tatarkiewicz wrote, the alternative art definition leads to the conclusion that

²³ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Droga przez estetykę*, p. 6.

²⁴ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Dzieje sześciu pojęć*, PWN, Warsaw 1975, pp. 50/53.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

art, "is the reproduction of things or the construction of forms, or the expression of experiences, however only the kind of reproduction, construction or expression which is able to enchant, move or shock"²⁶. The pluralism-related theory of value and reception was not homogeneous. Tatarkiewicz recognised the validity of its various versions and considered them all equal. He returned to pluralism several times in various writings and congress addresses, especially in the essay *The Truth About Art*, where he tied pluralism to moderation.

Stanisław Ossowski²⁷ outlined his somewhat different pluralism concept in 1928, somewhat later than Tatarkiewicz (1913). Ossowski's pluralism theory was largely sociologically inspired, he assumed the existence of different kinds of values and related experiences. In his main work, *On the Foundations of Aesthetics*, Ossowski accepts aesthetic pluralism *expressis verbis*, calling it "the only possible position to maintain".

Mieczysław Wallis distinguished between artistic and aesthetic pluralism: "If in the study *On the Comprehension of Artistic Strivings* I spoke in favour of artistic pluralism in the sense of recognition for a multitude of different but equivalent types of art, then here I stand on the position of aesthetic pluralism or the view that there exist various types of aesthetic experiences – of beauty, characteristic ugliness, elevation, etc., and corresponding types of aesthetic objects – beautiful, characteristically ugly, elevated, etc., and various types of aesthetic values – beauty, characteristic ugliness, elevation, etc."²⁸

To be found in subject literature are opinions that the pluralistic sympathies displayed by Polish philosophers were a defence of cultural individualism and diversity against mounting unification, or uniformisation under an absolute "one and only truth". Here I will leave aside my personal opinions about the experiences that may have led to these conclusions, however I must draw attention to the diversity of the artistic praxis of the day, which, while it indeed failed to inspire philosophical aesthetics, effected in a diversity of criteria by which art was judged and thus allowed departure from traditional methodological patterns.

Were the leanings to intellectual and aesthetic pluralism an isolated phenomenon, related solely to abstract aesthetic theories which were distant from other knowledge fields? No. There were other motives and connections, whose reconstruction, however, will require further and detailed research.

In application to Polish aesthetics the road metaphor recalled at the outset fully reveals its stylistic and varietal heterogeneity. In the course of preparing his definition of art Tatarkiewicz wrote: "We have found ourselves on uneven ground and don't know what lies in store. The comparison which comes to mind is a river which flows over unevennesses and boulders, forms eddies, and changes its flow. And sometimes returns to its old bed and flows evenly and straightly"²⁹.

Translated by Maciej Bańkowski

²⁶ W. Tatarkiewicz, "Definicja sztuki", in: *idem, Dzieje sześciu pojęć*, p. 52.

²⁷ S. Ossowski, "O przeciwieństwie przyrody i sztuki w estetyce", in: *idem, Dzieła*, Warsaw 1966-1970, 4 vols, quoted after: S. Ossowski, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, ed. B. Dziemidok, Universitas, Cracow 2004.

²⁸ M. Wallis, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, Universitas, Cracow 2004, p. 214.

²⁹ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Dzieje sześciu pojęć*, p. 61.