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AXIOLOGY IN STEFAN MORAWSKI'S AESTHETICS, SEVERAL CRITICAL DOUBTS

Abstract: The article tries to answer the question of what the specificity of Morawski's aesthetics is. I indicate that Morawski is in favour of historical-cultural relationalism, where aesthetics is practised as a philosophical discipline, whose object of cognition is aesthetic qualities and values, and in art they are reduced to artistic qualities and values which it ultimately replaces with a set of aesthetic invariants. In the concluding part I undertake a polemic with Morawski's standpoint on reducing artistic qualities and values in art to aesthetic qualities and values and with his diagnosis of the end of art.

Keywords: Stefan Morawski, historical-cultural relationism, philosophical aesthetics, aesthetic qualities and values, artistic qualities and values, the end of art

The answer to the question, when and in what way Stefan Morawski shaped what is the core of his aesthetics, forces us to go back to 1956, when he started to work in the Department of Aesthetics at the University of Warsaw, headed by Professor Władysław Tatarkiewicz. On the one hand this period, from 1956 to 1968, was the most creative and fruitful in independent achievements, while on the other hand it was a period of consistent work on the formulation of his own position.

Morawski worked on the core of his own position in three successive stages, each complementing the others. The first was acquainting himself with and understanding the views that played an important role in his own decisions. The next stage was a criticism of the key views and those concurrent with the constructed theory. The third, resulting from the two previous stages, was to also build his own position in the field of aesthetics, which he criticised and modified in subsequent disputes and polemics. Thus, he did not achieve his own position in a final and absolute way, in fact his goal was *in statu nascendi*. It is not surprising, therefore, that the way to understand important decisions in the field of philosophy, philosophy of culture, philosophical aesthetics, history and theory of art was, among others, publishing reviews.

During this period (1956–1969) Morawski published about 58 reviews of books, journals and articles.

I feel it is worthwhile to firstly answer the key question of what the specificity of his aesthetics was. Firstly, Stefan Morawski is convinced that aesthetics is a philosophical discipline, or more precisely, it is an axiological discipline. “[...] aesthetics deals with qualities of value and the values that are built upon them, as well as with the criteria of valuation. Thus [...] I understand aesthetics [...] as an axiological discipline”.¹ That is why Morawski thinks that aesthetics should answer the question: what is the artistic or aesthetic value, what are the varieties of values, how do they arise, how do they function. Aesthetics, therefore, should study the process of formation and social functioning of values and should aim to find the criteria of value. It concerns both the research of criteria of defining what a value is and what a work of art is, as well as the criteria of scaling values or hierarchising objects which have already been recognised as artistic, which in Morawski’s proposal is consistently distinguished. He distinguishes between two kinds of criteria: the criteria of valuation and the criteria of evaluation (hierarchising).

1. The axiological core of Stefan Morawski’s aesthetics

Stefan Morawski’s definition of the concept of aesthetic value presents a cultural-historical position (earlier he called it “socio-cultural relationalism”²). Its author held that values “are object qualities which, in specific cultural situations, because of specific reactions, probably related to the dispositions of the *homo sapiens* species and to the unchanging conditions of his social existence, have been established in the consciousness as values”.³ As far as artistic values are concerned, Morawski adds that “they can be understood as either specific qualities or a set of objective qualities, or corresponding object and subject qualities”.⁴ Due to the fact that we are dealing here with a position that takes into account the historical aspect, it is difficult to expect that a work of art will be defined by a single isolated quality. Therefore, the concept of artistic structure is accepted, shaped in the course of history, which is characterised by its own complementary features.

Morawski distinguishes three such understood groups of features: “I – a coherent quality system of sensory data, II – containing expressive elements, evoking the conviction that this arrangement is a manifestation of psychic forces, III – as if separated from reality due to its apractical character [autotelicity and relative autonomy – P.J.P.]”.⁵ These groups of features correspond to the qualities constituting artistic

¹ S. Morawski, *O przedmiocie i metodzie estetyki*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1973, pp. 51, 52.

² Idem, *O wartości artystycznej*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 1962, nr 4, p. 47.

³ Idem, *Wartości i oceny* [editorial discussion], “Studia Filozoficzne” 1967, nr 4, p. 47.

⁴ Idem, *Zarys układu kryteriów oceny*, “Studia Estetyczne” 1965, t. II, p. 36.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 37.

values: structural and formal coherence, i.e. “the internal correspondence of either representational elements (the content) and form in the case of representational art, or utilitarian function and form in the case of applied art”⁶; expressivity, an object property that informs about a certain “emotional aura” of the artistic structure, as well as about real or apparent mental states or dispositions (the term derives its scope of meaning from Henryk Elzenberg’s term “psychoid revelation” and Rudolf Arnheim’s “physiognomy of a given system of elements”); mimeticity⁷ which is related to expressivity.

Artistic values understood in this way fall into three peculiar orders. Artistic qualities of the first order – proto-artistic values, as Morawski calls them – concern what is commonly understood as *métier*. In the presented theory of values they are qualities which do not decide about the specific axiological status of a work of art. It should be understood that they are a vital, but not necessary condition of most works of art. The second row, building on the first, consists of three kinds of qualities: formal, expressive and mimetic. Only the juxtaposition and harmonisation of these qualities makes it possible for superior artistic values, such as sublimity, beauty, tragedy, realism, etc., to appear.

For Morawski, the key to determining how values arise and exist was the biopsychic dispositions of *homo sapiens*. He included: the drive for homeostasis, the sense of rhythm and the imitative drive. These unchangeable biopsychic antecedents, as a result of the social character of human existence, lead to the formation of the ability to experience aesthetic values and the resulting aesthetic awareness. Aesthetic value is created through the correspondence of qualities known to a subject with a historically determined level of aesthetic consciousness with qualities contained in a work of art. This process is of course gradual and long-lasting. According to Morawski, the aesthetic experience was shaped in the continuous process of man’s culturalisation of experiencing nature. The basis of this phenomenon is that “aesthetic experience in the face of nature is invariably a derivative of experiences formed in contact with art”.⁸ In my opinion this process concerns only civilised man, and aesthetic experiences and needs are earlier.

It seems interesting to ask whether man was sensitive to these qualities before producing objects that have aesthetically valent qualities. It can be assumed that he

⁶ Ibidem, p. 38.

⁷ The concept of mimesis was presented by Morawski in the article entitled *Rzecz o mimetyzmie*, “Studia Filozoficzne” 1989, nr 5, pp. 19–41. He consistently indicates there that mimesis in the strict sense of the word is an individual quality (referring to the “microscopic” aspects of reality), as opposed to realism, which refers to the macroscopic perception of reality, resulting from the accepted philosophical assumptions, and these from the decisions of the worldview nature. Morawski defines the concept of mimesis as “maximally approximate correspondence between what is being reproduced and what has been reproduced, given by sensual contact, direct or mediated by verbal description” – p. 19.

⁸ S. Morawski, *O estetycznym i pozaestetycznym przeżyciu wobec natury, czyli o ucieczce od życia albo powrocie do źródeł*, “Aura” 1982, nr 12, p. 2.

would not be able to produce such objects if he did not have this sensitivity, which Morawski agrees with. Thus, we can accept the claim that aesthetic experiences in contact with nature are shaped by the experiences of civilized man in contact with art. It is hard to imagine that *homo sapiens* before the creation of civilisation was deprived of such sensitivity to aesthetic qualities and values. Representatives of evolutionary aesthetics, among others, are in favour of such a solution.⁹ Morawski's position on this issue is different and, as we can suppose, more difficult to defend. He tries to consistently point to the process that shaped such sensitivity through the culturalisation of the *homo sapiens* species. For this purpose he uses the category of the rationalisation of the need for aesthetic experience and the category of aesthetic consciousness (which Morawski does not define).

The rationalisation of the need for aesthetic experience is built in two dimensions (genre and individual) diachronic and synchronic. Within it we deal with its broadening and deepening. Broadening, both individual and genre, among other things, concerns the recognition of qualities and values as aesthetic in an ever widening spectrum of cases that come into play with the passage of time. Deepening, both individual and genre, will occur over time with more precise and complete reflection and understanding of what aesthetic experience is based on what it actually is. As in the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the context of socio-historical processes is the basis. Man does not create art by "aesthetic instinct", but his aesthetic consciousness developed gradually as human skills developed and controlled larger areas of the material world. At a relatively advanced stage of this process, when sudden need became less urgent and skill more developed, the sensory response to the world became more articulated and differentiated, and the aesthetic response emerged as a relatively autonomous activity.

According to Morawski, the rationalisation of the need for aesthetic experience went through five distinguishable spiral phases of development. The first phase is a period where aesthetic experience was formed on the basis of *homo faber's* disposition in the Neolithic era. Emotional experiences were formed during joint work on objects in which we now see artistic value (cult objects, cave paintings, sculptures and figurines). According to Morawski, it was during this period that the awareness of the feeling of separateness from nature was formed, which is the basis for partial contemplation and initial self-reflection. It was also at that time that creating and perceiving were distinguished. The second phase in the evolution of aesthetic experience was dominated by religious sensations. The characteristic feature of this stage is the metaphysical-symbolic environment of aesthetic experience. Religion brought in a significant new element: the experience of transcendence. Nature began to be perceived as the work of God's creation. Morawski places the beginning of the

⁹ Among the rich literature on the subject, let us point to: D. Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure and Human Evolution*, Bloomsbury, New York 2009; R.O. Prum, *The Evolution of Beauty: How Darwin's Forgotten Theory of Mate Choice Shapes the Animal World – and Us*, Doubleday Press, New York 2017.

third phase in the period of the mature Renaissance, and the end at the beginning of the 20th century. A characteristic feature is the formation of aesthetic experience as distinctly isolated from everyday experiences and contrasted with intellectual, moral, and religious attitudes. Morawski points to the Kantian distinction of these issues, which results in treating art as the main area of aesthetic experience, while nature as a secondary system of reference. As a result of such distinctions artistic beauty becomes the measure of nature's aesthetic values. In the Hegelian conception we deal with the consequence of this assumption which treats the beauty of nature as mystification. The fourth phase of the evolution of aesthetic experience dates from the 1920s. According to Morawski, "the demarcation line of this phase would be marked by the absolutised cult of the demiurge, using exponentially developed and improved technical means, focused on the absolute predominance of pragmatic-instrumental values, controlled and directed by reason".¹⁰ The essence of this phase was presented by constructivism, which later gave rise to Soviet productivism and the Bauhaus school. Contemporary extension of this phase should be seen in land art, earth art and anti-art (representatives of these trends were: Marcel Duchamp, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, Oscar Dominguez, Jackson Pollock, Jean Dubuffet, Robert Rauschenberg, Yves Klein, Heinz Mack, Piero Manzoni, Barry Flanagan, Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria, Christo, Joseph Beuys). We are not dealing with an aesthetic experience, but with its deconstruction and negation. It is itself marginalized, "emphasising the crisis state of human existence".¹¹ The fifth phase, whose formation we are observing at present, is a return in the spiral movement to the first phase. It comes not from the aesthetic tradition, but from the ecological movement. It leads to the aestheticisation of our contacts with nature, "it is a return to biological pulsations in ourselves, and at the same time it is a spontaneous expression".¹² The sense of this process, according to Morawski, is based on saving the human species from the traumatic experiences inflicted by the hyper-rational culture, which is blindly pragmatic and devoutly cultivates technological progress.

The formation of aesthetic consciousness is presented in an analogous way. Morawski distinguishes three basic stages in it. The first stage is the constitution of a specific kind of experience, related to autotelic structures. Their crystallisation is possible due to the group character of human work and communication. The area of acceleration is the contact between the world of magic and the world of work existing in every primitive community. The second transgression consists in realising and registering in words the relative independence of these structures. The third stage is the maintenance and deepening of the common aesthetic tradition of humanity. From the vertical perspective it goes from a kind of experience related to autotelic struc-

¹⁰ S. Morawski, *O estetycznym i pozaestetycznym przeżyciu wobec natury...*, op. cit., p. 4.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 5.

¹² Ibidem, p. 6.

tures, through the birth of aesthetic consciousness to the articulation of aesthetic judgments first verbally and then in written form.¹³

Morawski superimposes the results of historical development on this area of disposition of species data and concludes that the starting point is common to all cultural circles. This is primitive culture with its common elements of magic and production. This forms the basis of every art in evolution throughout history. The diversity of the present is the result of the diversity of conditions during development, while the core – that which is formed on the basis of the biopsychic properties of man – is unchanging, invariant. In the historical process, these invariants are born and perfected, because despite the definition of new norms and aesthetic canons, the same questions arise, which are answered in similar ways, which accumulate in the species consciousness.¹⁴

Stefan Morawski understands invariants as a kind of Jungian archetypes, which are confirmed by the similarity of aesthetic ideas in cultures distant in time and geography. Contrary to Jung's theory, he does not need metaphysical sanctioning to justify them. They can be sufficiently explained by psychophysiological and cultural reasons.¹⁵ Detecting and defining invariants understood in this way is a breakneck endeavour. It would be necessary to analyse the birth of the aesthetic sense and art, their gradual, processual autonomy, the relationship of art to other forms of social consciousness, and the relationship of the aesthetic sense to other forms of assimilation of the external world. The detection of interconnections, dependencies, and oppositions is also important here. All in all, a work conceived in this way is a task for a competent team of people who devote themselves to this common endeavour. Therefore, it is not surprising that Morawski takes as his basis for formulating the basic invariants, first, the striking convergence of the formation of aesthetic ideas in cultures that are distant in time and geography, and second, the repetition of certain value categories in the subject literature of the East and the West.

We should begin by capturing the common features of Post-Homeric art (and we know about it from surviving sources), compare them with objects of the Oriniac-Perigordian period (figurines from the Rideaux cave in Lespugue and Kostienki on the Don, silhouetted monochrome paintings from Font-de-Gaumes or Les Combarelles, engravings from Spanish caves and caves in the Dordogne), and on this basis qualify this structure as artistic. The method underlying this procedure assumes

¹³ Compare S. Morawski, *Wartości...*, op. cit., p. 51.

¹⁴ The basis for such a position is the evolutionist anthropological concept, where Morawski cites, among others, the work of M. Mead, *Continuities in Cultural Evolution*, Yale University Press, New Haven–Yale 1966.

¹⁵ Justifications, carried out in an analogous manner, are indicated by Morawski in the works: H. Read, *The Forms of Things Unknown. Essays Towards an Aesthetic Philosophy*, Horizon Press, New York 1960; M. Bodkin, *The Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, Oxford University Press, London 1934; W. Abell, *The Collective Dream in Art*, Schocken Books, New York 1966.

that crystallised forms of social consciousness allow for the reconstruction of the crystallisation process.

Morawski introduces two classes of invariants whose distinguishing criterion is the area of their occurrence. The first group of aesthetic invariants (universal) are invariants that remain stable despite the changeability of art and different cultural circles from the Paleolithic to the present day. The second group are invariants that occur in given varieties of art (paradigmatic). To the universal invariants of the aesthetic field Morawski included: *techné* (technical skill, virtuosity) – “created structures, relatively independent from the surrounding reality, are given in such a way that their content is perceptually palpable, and equipped with the objects of the so-called presented (fictional) world or devoid of these objects it is particularly intense”¹⁶; artistic form – “the construction of these structures accented by the mentioned intensity of the content is aimed at revealing the mastery, processing of the material, used means of expression, composition”¹⁷; expression (a relational property) – it stems from the intensification of the content and the particular construction of the given whole, it can result from the objective properties of the object or also from “the relation between the creative intention and its sign given in terms of the object, and to the dominant creative styles, that is, to the relation between the patterns of artistic consciousness and its individual modifications”¹⁸. An example from this repertoire of invariants is mimesis, where in the representational arts its meaning ranges from faithful imitation to the processing of reality; in utilitarian objects it is the conformity of construction and function.¹⁹

The use of invariant quality has far-reaching implications. It points to: recognition of the decisive role of invariants in the socio-cultural process, the effect of which is, among other things, the formation of aesthetic consciousness; the cultural-social character of the objectivity of aesthetic judgments and the truthfulness of aesthetic judgments resulting from objectivity understood in this way. The basis here is, of course, the justification of the objective existence of the aesthetic value. Morawski assumes that values exist in the cultural-social field. The argument justifying the objectivity of the existence of aesthetic values in the vertical and diachronic perspective are the inclinations of the human species (discussed above). The argument that justifies the horizontal-synchronous perspective is the occurrence of invariants

¹⁶ S. Morawski, *Sztuka dawniej i dziś*, “Odra” 1973, nr 1, p. 49.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ In the first phase of formulating the concept of aesthetic invariants Morawski assumes their homogeneity, listing harmony, rhythm, symmetry, mimesis, expression, catharsis and “homo ludens”. Compare S. Morawski, *Wartości...*, op. cit., p. 55. In comparison with the later proposal, we are dealing here with a confusion of invariants proper to all objects called artistic with invariants proper to a given variety of art. The reason for the “shading” of the understanding of the notion of invariants can be found in the adaptation of this category to neo-avant-garde practices. Analogically to science, where existing paradigms are subject to falsification, in art paradigmatic invariants, along with the passing of particular varieties of art, go to the museum to await their return.

that are common to the tastes of the collective subject – all of humanity. Morawski calls this argument the model of expanding circles. Invariants occur on the last circle of creation and objectification of the existence of aesthetic values.

The starting point for the existence and objectification of aesthetic values on a horizontal plane is individual momentary pleasure as a response to an object quality. The reconciliation of the pleasure thus experienced with personal taste provides the first step in the objectification of value. The second consists in its agreement with the tastes accepted in a given living environment. The third is the acceptance of those that correspond to the tastes resulting from ideological attitudes, and the fourth are choices dictated by the tastes resulting from a given national culture, where preferences for specific works, or even artistic currents, may come into play. The penultimate level, at which such selected values may be exchanged, is their circle resulting from the preferences of “vast cultural historical communities”. On the last level there are invariant values, selected from the point of view of the preferences of the collective subject – the whole of humanity.²⁰

For Morawski the value of objectivity of the aesthetic value is proportional to its socio-cultural level of acceptance, to the range of its intersubjectivity. It should be remembered, however, that values in such a model of their existence are arranged in the shape of a pyramid. At the top there are invariants, while the base is the ever-living human reaction to the qualities given objectively, which are subject to the pressure of culture, place and time. In my opinion, a separate issue, which is quite closely related to the discussed problems, is the notion of originality and novelty as understood by Morawski – it should be explained that he links the notion of novelty with the diachronic dimension, and originality with the synchronic dimension.

Aesthetic values do not exist only in the cultural-historical field, but also in natural objects. Stefan Morawski argues that there is a close connection between the formation of a species aesthetic awareness due to the production of autotelic objects and the way nature is perceived through this prism: “aesthetic value is given both in natural objects and in works of art [...]. The aesthetic value of nature is shaped by artistic experience and the resulting mode of perception (called aesthetic)”.²¹

To fully define Morawski’s position on the relation between artistic and aesthetic values of a work of art it is necessary to extract the conditions which he considers necessary to define an object as a work of art. These conditions consist of: technè, understood as a specific skill (called artistry) and its result; the structure of qualities given by the senses, creating the harmony of the whole; the relative separateness of such a product from the external environment (entity autonomy); the necessity of the existence of surplus in relation to the instrumental system in which the given objects appear.²² This is a typically traditional position on the relationship between artistic

²⁰ Compare S. Morawski, *Wartości...*, op. cit., pp. 49–50.

²¹ Idem, *O wartości...*, op. cit., p. 47.

²² Ibidem, p. 49. Morawski later modifies his position, by the term work of art he means: “An object constituting an expressive structure of sensually given qualities, directly or indirectly viewed

and aesthetic values of art. Morawski recognises the concept of aesthetic value as broader – it includes the beauty of a landscape, a work of art and a functional object, while the artistic value is narrower, proper only to works of art: “the aesthetic value is a broader concept than the artistic value”.²³ The relation that exists between the artistic and aesthetic value is that the aesthetic values are built according to the pattern of artistic works. Thus, the beauty of nature exists for us because we respond to the artistic values inherent in art. In terms of art, contrary to what Morawski advocates, I think that artistic values do not boil down to aesthetic values, which does not mean that aesthetic values in the field of art come down to artistic values.²⁴ In this respect Morawski’s position coincides with the representatives of analytical aesthetics, among others, with the concepts of Monroe C. Beardsley, Jérôme Stolnitz, Harold Osborne, Richard Wollheim, the structuralist Jan Mukařovský or the Russian researcher Leonid Stolovich.

There is a certain inconsistency in such a position, because on the one hand Morawski accepts certain human predispositions to respond to valent qualities, and on the other hand he states that our sensitivity to the beauty of nature is formed by communing with art. How then can one deal with the time when our species communed only with nature, was it then deprived of aesthetic sensitivity, not noticing or reacting to the aesthetic qualities of the surrounding world?

2. Some critical doubts about reducing the artistic values of art to its aesthetic values and about the end of art

The reduction of artistic values of art to its aesthetic values and the recognition of the aesthetic paradigm of art as a permanent paradigm became a source of dilemmas for Stefan Morawski.

The common area, and therefore the essential property of products defined as works of art, is the aesthetic sacrum, and aesthetics examined this common area in the axiological dimension. The fundamental assumption here, I think, is the conviction that through art and in art man experiences aesthetic qualities and values that are identical with artistic qualities and values. The concept of aesthetic values is broader and includes the concept of artistic values. Morawski, while making this assumption,

(semantised), functioning in a relatively autonomous manner, i.e. separated from the authentic reality of which it remains a component; this object is at the same time an artefact, directly or indirectly obtained, and expresses more or less strongly a given creative individuality” – S. Morawski, *Próba określenia pojęcia sztuka* [in:] *Ruchome granice*, red. M. Grześczak, Wydawnictwo Morskie, Gdynia 1968, p. 54.

²³ S. Morawski, *O obiektywności sądów estetycznych*, “Studia Estetyczne” 1967, t. IV, p. 259.

²⁴ Morawski does not accept the distinction between artistic and aesthetic values introduced by Roman Ingarden. The justification of his position is presented in: S. Morawski, *Szkola stawiania pytań*, cz. 2, “Studia Estetyczne” 1971, t. VIII, pp. 243–256 and repeated in: idem, *Współczesne spory o naturę sztuki i przeżycia estetycznego*, “Sztuka i Filozofia” 1993, nr 6, p. 207.

excludes the possibility of forming the experience of aesthetic qualities and values in man in contact with nature. He believes, for example, that our experiencing the beauty of the landscape is the effect of communing with art. Adopting this solution turns out to be fraught with consequences. It delineates an area peculiar to art, namely its aesthetic nature, and thus maintains its relative autonomy. But is this solution, advocated by Morawski, not subversive? Well, the claim that only through contact with art we develop the ability to recognise and experience aesthetic qualities and values is questionable. There are plenty of examples of people who have never communed with art, but who have an above-average sensitivity to aesthetic qualities and values. Thus, in an argument about the aesthetic nature of art, it would lose its exclusive right to shape such experiences in us. Narrowing aesthetics to just art seems problematic.

Another issue that determines the understanding of the crisis of aesthetics in the presented position of Stefan Morawski is the assumption of the aesthetic nature of art. The main function of art is its aesthetic function, which consists in providing properly prepared recipients with aesthetic experiences while communing with a work of art. Furthermore, it is believed that the factors that constitute a work of art are aesthetic qualities and values. Therefore, if art has an aesthetic nature, then consequently aesthetics should make qualities and values, and the value criteria connected with them, the subject of its study. The position of the aesthetic nature of art had both staunch supporters and opponents. One of the supporters was Roman Ingarden, whose aesthetic theory Morawski repeatedly referred to.

In the fifties, as Bohdan Dziemidok points out, the aesthetic concept of art was denied universality by questioning the possibility of detecting and defining the essence of art in general (among others Walter B. Gallie, Morris Weitz, Paul Ziff, William Kennick). The 1960s brought a reaction to this criticism – the anti-essentialist current was severely criticised (Maurice Mandelbaum, Monroe C. Beardsley, Joseph Margolis, George Dickie, Terry J. Diffey). However, an important effect of the anti-essentialist critique of the aesthetic nature of art was to demonstrate the futility of searching for the essence of phenomena such as beauty or art because of their constant changeability. Moreover, following the path of Dziemidok's deliberations, the aesthetic conception of art has been questioned by some philosophical theories of art: Nelson Goodman's cognitivist theory of art, continued by Arthur Danto; George Dickie's institutional theory of art, Timothy Binkley, Marcia Muelder Eaton; the Poznań school of philosophers of culture (Jerzy Kmita, Teresa Kostyrko, Włodzimirz Ławniczak). But the most serious shock, as Morawski rightly notes, was the phenomenon of neo-avant-garde art (happening, conceptual art, body art, earth art, minimal art, environment, etc.), which proved the existence of art beyond its aesthetic nature. Morawski draws a conclusion about the deep crisis of both art and aesthetics, the main reason for which is the departure from the aesthetic sacrum. He decides to explore and theoretically master the neo-avant-garde, recognising it as anti-art. Consequently, he calls aesthetics concerning this phenomenon anti-aesthetics. In the light of the criticism of the aesthetic nature of art, and taking into account the arguments

that support the unsubstantiated universality of the aesthetic conception of art, one can have some doubts about such decisions.

Positions that question the aesthetic nature of art (which results in an understanding of what aesthetics is) have very strong arguments. Let us consider the position taken in Bohdan Dziemidok's work *Sztuka, wartość, emocje* (Art, Value, Emotions) (1992).

Bohdan Dziemidok believes that the universality of the aesthetic concept of art is unfounded. Firstly, the possession of aesthetic value by an object is not a sufficient condition for its recognition as a work of art; the nature that surrounds us is not devoid of such values. Secondly, if all products of the artistic avant-garde (including the neo-avant-garde) are considered works of art, then aesthetic values are not a necessary condition either. Thirdly, if the above arguments are correct, then also the arousing of aesthetic feelings by some human product is not a necessary or sufficient condition for a given artifact to be considered a work of art. Fourth, as Władysław Tatarkiewicz pointed out, the diversity of values in particular kinds of art causes that they do not constitute a uniform class of values, but a pseudo-class. Fifth, diversity also concerns the sensations aroused by these values. Sixth, aesthetic sensations felt on seeing nature and those felt on seeing artistic works of man are not comparable – the latter are more complex. Seventh, the concept of the aesthetic nature of art is flawed because, like all other essentialist theories, it is based on the mistaken assumption that art has a detectable essence. Eighth, there is no way to detect the cultural nature of art. Dziemidok is inclined to think that the aesthetic sacrum, so important for Morawski, is an effect of the conjuncture existing or not in a given historical period, which does not cause the existence or non-existence of either art or aesthetics.

In thoroughly characterising the work of the artistic neoavantgarde, Morawski repeatedly stresses that in contrast to the classical avantgarde of the early 20th century, which questioned only certain canons of the aesthetics of traditional art (e.g. *mimesis*), the artistic neoavantgarde firmly and consistently rejects the entire aesthetic paradigm of art to date.²⁵

In this conflict between the neo-avant-garde and traditional art, Morawski takes the side of the neo-avant-garde. He states repeatedly that the category of creativity displaces the category of art. Art is also a form of creativity, but this variety of creativity has ceased to be particularly interesting and is giving way to other forms of creativity.²⁶ Art, of course, has not died. Art persists without ceasing to provide satisfaction to millions of people. What is more, even “and in its realm there are great works that attack with extraordinary force the depraved consciousness and *praxis* of

²⁵ Compare S. Morawski, *Na zakręcie od sztuki do po-sztuki*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1985, pp. 177, 189–190, 197, 281, 318, 320; idem, *W labiryncie aksjologicznym* [in:] *O wartościowaniu w badaniach literackich*, red. S. Sawicki, W. Panas, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 1986, pp. 127, 131.

²⁶ Compare S. Morawski, *Czy zmierzch estetyki?* [in:] *Zmierzch estetyki – rzekomy czy autentyczny?*, t. 1, red. S. Morawski, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1987, pp. 101, 117, 133.

our day. Nevertheless, such works are rare”.²⁷ Generally speaking, however, according to Morawski, one can speak of the twilight of art, consisting in “the disappearance of its cultural significance and prestige”²⁸. He makes no secret of the fact that he takes “the side of those who claim the progressive decline of the prestige of art”²⁹. The adventures of the avant-garde are much more fascinating and thought-provoking for him. Morawski does not claim that the death of art is inevitable, but he believes that the predictions of its disappearance are not just fortune-telling, and the arguments of the defenders of art’s eternity are, in his opinion, “not very strong”³⁰. Morawski correctly observes that “the attitude of the postmodernist is burdened with an unrelenting ambiguity. One crosses the area of intentional art – while still remaining on its periphery”³¹. His own attitude is no less ambiguous, of which he is well aware. On the one hand he takes the side of the neo-avant-garde that questions the aesthetic paradigm of traditional art, proclaiming the twilight of this art and its accompanying aesthetics. On the other hand, however, he cannot “break away from aesthetics completely, because the new categories and the new internally coordinated knowledge that corresponds to them have not yet been formed”³².

As a result, Stefan Morawski, who is not only an excellent expert in the artistic neo-avantgarde, but also a great enthusiast of it, is as orthodox towards it and traditional art as Harold Osborne, an English aesthetician criticised for his aesthetic conservatism (due to his negation of avantgarde art).³³ Both of them deny art the right to go beyond the aesthetic paradigm, for they believe that by rejecting this paradigm art ceases to be art. For the same reason they both deny the artistic status to neo-avantgarde art (although they evaluate it completely differently), which Morawski considers anti-art. Binkley’s position, which recognizes the work of the artistic neo-avantgarde as an art form, concludes that aesthetics is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for achieving artistic status, is considered by Morawski to be breakneck. It is a breakneck position because Binkley allows for the possibility of the existence of “two opposing kinds of art, one whose determinant will be aesthetic qualities, and the other that does without them”³⁴. Binkley reportedly also cuts the work from the maker, classifying the work as an aesthetic dominion and the creative act as a cultural one. Well, not only does Binkley not include the work in the “aesthetic dominion”, but he protests against regarding the work of art as an aesthetic object and limiting artistic

²⁷ Idem, *W labiryncie...*, op. cit., p. 132.

²⁸ Idem, *Czy zmierzch...*, op. cit., p. 137.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 161.

³⁰ Idem, *Na zakręcie...*, op. cit., pp. 307, 309.

³¹ Idem, *W labiryncie...*, op. cit., p. 131.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Compare H. Osborne, *Aesthetic Implication of Conceptual Art, Happenings, etc.*, “The British Journal of Aesthetics” 1980, Winter, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 6–22.

³⁴ S. Morawski, *Czy zmierzch...*, op. cit., p. 116.

creation to the creation of aesthetic objects; for art does not have to be aesthetic, as the artistic practice of the neo-avant-garde proves.

Binkley also protests against replacing the question: “What is art?” with the question “What is a work of art?” For he believes, rightly I think, that art cannot be reduced to a collection of works of art. For it is not a collection of any objects but a form of cultural activity, just like philosophy or mathematics.³⁵

Why does Stefan Morawski so persistently defend the permanence of the aesthetic paradigm of art? Perhaps it is because the history of art has not known such a decisive rejection of the whole prevailing paradigm. Individual aesthetic canons, conventions and styles have been questioned before, but the whole paradigm has never been questioned so decisively, despite the chronic changeability of art. However, the history of other fields of culture, such as science and philosophy, has often provided such examples. Science develops in such a way that old paradigms are discarded and new ones are created, while a radical paradigm shift does not transform science into anti-science.

In contemporary philosophy, the questioning of the Cartesian epistemological and ontological dualism that dominated in European philosophy for almost two centuries are considered to be such a paradigm shift. I think that an even more radical rejection of the old paradigm was proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein and the analytic-linguistic philosophy he inspired. If the German philosophy of the nineteenth century, with its absolutist tendencies and maximalist cognitive aspirations, is to be regarded as a permanent model of true philosophising, then analytic philosophy should be regarded as anti-philosophy. After all, this philosophy no less decisively questioned and rejected all the basic assumptions of prevailing philosophy, criticised it for essentialism, cognitive maximalism and pretensions to detect objective laws of reality, denying even the right of generalisation, reducing the tasks of philosophy to analysing the use of various concepts in science and in everyday language. Was Morris Weitz’s thesis that the philosophy of art should give up hopeless attempts to find an answer to the question: “What is art?”, replacing it with the question: “what kind of concept is ‘art’?” not an equally radical questioning of the paradigm of hitherto existing philosophy of art?

3. Conclusion

At the beginning I would like to point out that in philosophy and especially in aesthetics formulated judgments result not only from the strength of the presented arguments, but also from impressions and feelings that can hardly be given an objective status. This is in contrast to rivalries in sports competitions, which are based on objective, verifiable criteria and rules that are commonly binding in given disciplines. I am fully aware, therefore, that the following judgements and assessments as well as the final proposals that I present to the readers are of an authorial nature.

³⁵ Compare T. Binkley, *Przeciw estetyce* [in:] *Zmierzch estetyki...*, op. cit., pp. 426, 433–435, 437.

Stefan Morawski, in my opinion, was the world's most outstanding representative of professional aesthetics inspired by Marxism in the second half of the 20th century. In the first half of the 20th century, the key figures for this current in aesthetics were Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933) and György Lukács (1885–1971).

Morawski's open attitude towards other currents of philosophy (phenomenology, analytical philosophy, pragmatism, etc.) was treated as heterodoxy³⁶ in Poland from the beginning of the 1970s. His book *Inquiries into the Fundamentals of Aesthetics* (1974), in which he laid out the foundations of a Marxist-inspired authorial approach to art, never appeared in Polish. His Marxism, at home and especially abroad, was referred to as liberal historicism, for which, in my opinion, a better name is historical-cultural relativism. Morawski, on the basis of the accepted worldview solutions, built his own original axiology of aesthetics which was still inspiring. At the end of the sixties, due to his dismissal from the University of Warsaw, he started working on the genesis, function and typology of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde art. In the summary of his work devoted to cognition and understanding of the avant-garde, Morawski presented six statements which are the basis of his theory of the avant-garde, and at the same time the result of nearly twenty years of interest in this phenomenon³⁷. From the end of the 1980s, he focused his interest on the phenomenon of postmodernity and postmodernism, culminating in the book entitled *Niewdzięczne rysowanie mapy... O postmodernie(izmie) i kryzysie kultury* (Drawing a map ungratefully... About postmodern(ism) and the crisis of culture) (1999). His research perspective has not changed, still remaining inspired by Marxism as he continued and remained faithful to historical and cultural relationalism. Admittedly, his interests have shifted towards the category of the so-called crisis of culture, but he considers the manifestations of postmodern art in the context of more general socio-historical transformations, thus continuing his worldview orientation of decades past. It should be emphasised that "It is, however, a Marxism purged of questions about art's ideological equivalents, its class function, its political dimensions [...]"³⁸ undoubtedly because they have lost their significance in the civilisational and cultural transformation currently taking place.

Morawski plays a very important role in Polish aesthetics. Thanks to him and his contacts abroad, for decades the community of Polish aestheticians were able to follow the discussions and disputes that determined the development of this discipline. He was a student of Prof. Władysław Tatarkiewicz, who took care of his master's and doctoral

³⁶ This apt notion is used by Louis Harap in a communication on the Marxist aesthetic theory of Stefan Morawski: L. Harap, *The Marxist Aesthetic of Stefan Morawski*, "Science and Society" 1976, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 341–351.

³⁷ Compare S. Morawski, *O słabościach praxis neoawangardowej i niedostatkach teorii awangardy* [in:] *Wybory i ryzyka awangardy. Studia z teorii awangardy*, red. U. Czartoryska, R.W. Kluszczyński, PWN, Warszawa–Łódź 1985, pp. 20–21.

³⁸ S. Morawski, *O marksistowskiej myśli estetycznej* [in:] *Estetyki filozoficzne XX wieku*, red. K. Wilkoszewska, Universitas, Kraków 2000, pp. 155–156.

theses. His passion for the history of ideas and for a precise, analytical scientific workshop developed in this relationship. Moreover, his critical studies of Prof. Roman Ingarden's phenomenology and aesthetics, as well as the direct contact and exchange of ideas he had with him, enabled Morawski to consciously construct his own original proposal. I think that in terms of his contribution to Polish aesthetic thought, Stefan Morawski is placed right after Roman Ingarden and Władysław Tatarkiewicz. This is also due to the fact that Stefan Morawski, thanks to his publications abroad, his systematic active participation in world congresses on aesthetics and other international conferences, as well as his many lectures at European universities and universities in the USA, is a more recognised figure than, for example, Mieczysław Wallis or Stanisław Ossowski.³⁹

The Marxist-inspired aesthetics developed in Poland, of which Stefan Morawski was the leading figure, functioned alongside other schools and styles of research. This forced, in a natural way, respect and tolerance towards a different position. In this sense Marxist aesthetics and philosophy of art also enriched philosophy in Poland, and itself received lessons of respect for other positions and achievements within them.

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³⁹ Compare I. Wojnar, *Profesor Stefan Morawski i międzynarodowe kongresy estetyki* [in:] *Przekraczanie estetyki*, red. Z. Rosińska, A. Łabuńska, Wydawnictwo Wydziału Filozofii i Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2003, pp. 161–179.

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