

Reports on Philosophy

Reconsidering Aesthetics...

Edited by Krystyna Wilkoszewska



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MICHAŁ OSTROWICKI

Application of Systems Theory in Aesthetics

Genesis of Systems Approach in Aesthetics

The problem of systems approach in aesthetics results from the application of methodology of systems theory in this domain. The aim of systemal description of aesthetic field consists in conceiving its objects so that through revealing their systemal character, certain problems or observed phenomena become explained. The assumption about possibility of applying methodology of systems theory in aesthetics is fundamental here¹. Therefore, in this essay I shall try to discuss the problem of possibility and justification of systems approach in aesthetics, taking into account the genesis of such description. I shall also try to present its effects.

Aesthetic problems like, for instance, the author or the recipient, the work of art, the process of creation and reception, etc., seem possible to describe on the ground of systems theory, because they satisfy the basic condition of such description, i.e., they may be subjected to the procedure of modelling. Since they have their own, described structure which is an arrangement of elements, they can be treated as systems. It is an assumption that should be confirmed through examination of functions of given beings. Thus, the assumption about systemic nature of the objects of aesthetics consequently leads to justification of the assumption about systemic character of aesthetics and then to examination of the systems themselves as well as relations existing between them. It should be stressed that it is also possible to describe the phenomena that take place as a result of mutual influence of systems when feedback occurs between them. Conse-

¹ Systems theory assumes that the whole reality may be treated as a set of hierarchic systems which remain interrelated, exerting mutual influence on one another (L. von Bertalanffy, "History and Status of General Systems Theory", in: G.J. Klir (ed.), *Trends in General System Theory*, Toronto: Wiley-Interscience, a Division of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1972).

quently, application of the systems theory in aesthetics is connected with a specific perception of its objects, i.e., they are treated as partly isolated systems (open systems)².

Application of the systems theory has originated from several approaches represented by aestheticians, structuralists, anthropologists, theoreticians of art or art critics. Generally, among the fundamental views conducting to construction of systems approach in aesthetics we can distinguish, among others, Prague Structural School³ (1926–1948), represented, for instance, by Jan Mukařovský and Roman Jakobson, structural anthropology represented by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jean Piaget, Umberto Eco's conception of an open work, Roman Ingarden's stratal conception of the work of art and Maria Gołaszewska's conception of aesthetic situation. In the later stage of the development of systemic approaches in aesthetics we find elements of theory of information applied in the domain of art theory.

Probably, the genesis of systemic approaches in aesthetics should be searched for in re-formulation of the traditional concepts of form and content. This means that in systems approach we strive to overcome such understanding of the concepts of form and content in which they characterise the dichotomous nature of the work of art. We assume that such distinction is difficult to accept in a definition of the work of art. We recognise that these concepts are abstract and lead to schematisation in a description of the work of art.

Introduction of the concept of structure to the analysis of the work of art made it possible, first, to formulate the concept of form anew, as connections (relations) between elements, and secondly, to explicate the content as superstructured over the structurally conceived form. Abstract conception of form and content is connected here with the definition of structure, and it always refers to a definite work of art together with its struc-

² By definition we can speak of three kinds of systems: 1) open systems; 2) closed (isolated) ones; and 3) partly open (partly closed or partly isolated) ones. Due to the fact that they do not possess limits (limitations), open systems would become processes. This is why we can claim that they are merely a theoretical postulate having no designate on the part of reality. As regards closed systems, due to the fact that, at least on the theoretical level, they are closed, also to our acts of cognition, we cannot recognise their existence. Therefore, in a description we may use partly isolated systems only (M. Heller, M. Lubański, S.W. Ślaga, *Zagadnienia filozoficzne współczesnej nauki. Wstęp do filozofii przyrody* [Philosophical Problems of Modern Science. Introduction to Philosophy of Nature], Warszawa: ATK, 1980). In turn, partly isolated systems can be called open, because the term "open" means here "partly isolated" and in their content these concepts are of equal range. For instance, L. von Bertalanffy uses the term "open" to describe systems which are, in fact, partly isolated (L. von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory*, New York: George Brazillier, 1973).

³ M.R. Mayenowa, *Praska szkoła strukturalna* [Prague Structural School], Warszawa 1966.

ture. This means that introduction of the concept of structure changes the understanding of the concept of form and content through defining them on the ground of a structural description. Introduction of the concept of structure allows for understanding of the work of art independently of, e.g., understanding of the concept of content or form, because its meaning regards recognition of functions of elements and kinds of relations within the structure of the work of art. The goal of such approach consists in describing the elements of the work of art from the point of view of its whole – as a system, and not from the point of view of a given element, i.e., of a formally-contextual approach. Such understanding of the work of art anticipates its systemic description and its definition as a system of functionally interrelated elements together with the relations existing between them. We may accept that it was structuralists from the Prague structural school who were the first to emphasise this structure of the work of art and who – as a result – influenced structural anthropology of C. Lévi-Strauss.

Independently, we can indicate two basic trends that tend to apply systems theory in aesthetics. The first, structuralist trend is represented by the above mentioned Prague Structural School, R. Ingarden and M. Gołaszewska. The second, genetic trend is represented, for instance, by Piotr Graff. Genetic approach exists also on the ground of information theory.

Structuralist direction regards conceiving the system of the work of art as a general object of studies, in which it is possible to distinguish stable elements in the form characteristic for the structure of the work of art (or for its fragment). Such approach allows for analysing a work of art as a relatively stable system whose description refers partly, e.g., to its physical character or to artistic and aesthetic values.

Obviously the connection between structuralism and the achievements of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics as well as that of Russian formalists should be emphasised. In de Saussure's conception language is conceived as a social phenomenon, a set of socially obligatory norms serving interpersonal communication; it is a system of elements expressing concepts and having meaning⁴. Here we have in mind the division of "language" into *la langue* (an abstract system of elements and relations between them), and *la parole* (a definite language realisation and understanding of its content by the subject).

In turn, semioticians of culture, represented by Russian structuralists, focussing their attention on studies of social communication, used concepts like semiotic analysis that allow them to take into account all elements of the structure of social communication and emergence of culture as a realisation of semiotic systems⁵. In this way, semiotics allows for dis-

⁴ F. de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique generale*, Paris: Payot, 1955.

⁵ E. Janus, M.R. Mayenowa (eds.), *Semiotyka kultury* [Semiotics of Culture], Warszawa: PIW, 1975.

covery or description of the sense of human action and the development of culture. The concept of functional "secondary modelling systems" resulting from the processes of communication within the society on the level of natural language is introduced here.

Roman Ingarden applied systems analysis to describe the man in the book *Man and Value*, but certain elements of systems theory occur also in regard to his other ontological studies, including ontology of a work of art. In this sense R. Ingarden writes that a work of art "becomes open" before the recipient and, being open, is accessible to aesthetic cognition. When the object is "open" the subject has a chance to conceive a given state of things as a work of art. Recognised as closed, the work of art is suspected of being inaccessible to proper cognition⁶.

Structural description of a literary work of art on the ontological level is characteristic here. R. Ingarden conceives a work of art as a multilayer structure consisting of four strictly interrelated strata constituting a work of art as a scheme possible to be concretised⁷. Therefore, he takes into account the structural relation between a work of art and its recipient – a literary work of art of its essence is subject to the recipient's influence and due to this interaction it starts to exist as an aesthetic object.

The model of aesthetic situation is an example of structuralist approach in systems theory⁸. Here I particularly mean Maria Gołaszewska's model of aesthetic situation. One could claim that the concept of aesthetic situation is involved in all aesthetic problems. Its model includes elements like the author, the work of art, the recipient, the real word and the word of values, which are treated as partly isolated systems⁹. In this approach we have to do with the systemic description of particular components of aesthetic situation as well as with holistic conceiving of their interrelations. Aesthetic situation is treated as a metasystem in relation to subsystems of which it consists, and determines a theoretical field of research in aesthetics.

Methodology of systems theory takes into account the dynamic of the system of aesthetic situation. This means that it is possible to perceive mutual influence of its various components. Thus the description of man as

⁶ R. Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The basic example here is aesthetic situation described by M. Gołaszewska in *Świadomość piękna. Problemy genezy, funkcji, struktury i wartości w estetyce* [Awareness of Beauty. Problems of Genesis, Functions, Structure and Values in Aesthetics], Warszawa: PWN, 1970. Aesthetic situation was also a subject of studies of M. Mitias and S.D. Ross.

⁹ M. Gołaszewska interprets Ingarden's world of values applying systems analysis in the article "Ingarden's Concept of Aesthetic Values in the Light of his Theory of Partly Isolated Systems", in: *Phenomenology Information Bulletin. A Revue of Philosophical Ideas and Trends* 8, 1984/85.

a dynamic system as well as the dynamics of the process of creation or reception is also taken into regard. On the ground of the model of aesthetic situation it seems possible to analyse the relations between the work of art and the world of values or the work of art and the real world.

Application of systems theory allows for uniform description of mutual influence of elements in the model of aesthetic situation. On the one hand it recognises the systemic character of particular examined elements, on the other hand it studies the problem from the general perspective. This means that systemic description of the work of art can be compared to a systemic description of man as an author and a recipient, the world of values and the real world. It is a holistic approach in aesthetic, developed thanks to application of methodology of systems theory.

The assumption about mutual influence of systems between which there exists feedback, together with the analysis of the structure of aesthetic situation leads to the thesis that a work of art should also be subject to real influence of other systems in aesthetic situation. This means that in the system of aesthetic situation there is transmission of information which, crossing the boundaries of particular systems, modifies their structure. Therefore the work of art also receives information causing modification of its structure. Such information may include, for instance, the communicates "you are a work of art because you are in contact with the world of aesthetic values" or "you are a work of art". Modification of the structure of the work of art, taking place within certain limits assumed by the artist, allows for the existence of the work in each aesthetic experience, determines its changeability and ambiguity. This kind of ontological description of a work of art makes it possible to recognise its unique character as a specific being with essential structure. This structure can be called rudimentary, inherent in the work of art or belonging only to work of art¹⁰. In this sense, the rudimentary structure is dynamic; it undergoes real changes in contact with the system of man or with the world of values. Other beings, e.g., beings from the real world possess a different structure – a non-rudimentary one. The way of conceiving the structure of a work of art described above is a result of application of systemic description. It results in revealing the nature of a work of art through indicating its essence – the dynamic rudimentary structure.

In turn, in his conception Jan Mukařowský conceived the work of art as a sign with multi-dimensional structure. He describes it as creating meaning, ordered, undergoing constant transformation. A work of art is in feedback with the world of culture, the development of social consciousness and knowledge. J. Mukařowský defines the functions of a work of art

¹⁰ M. Ostrowicki, *Dzieło sztuki jako system* [A Work of Art as a System], Kraków–Warszawa: Wyd. Naukowe PWN, 1997.

issuing from the dynamics of the system that facilitates transformation and evolution of its structure. Thus the work as a sign regards the recipient's overall attitude towards reality¹¹.

In another theory, Mieczysław Wallis recognises the structure of a work of art as a certain typical connection or arrangement of interdependent semantic and a-semantic elements, or a certain typical way of using semantic and a-semantic elements¹². M. Wallis dealt mostly with painting and sculpture where he distinguished semantic structures, for instance, in the works of symbolists he distinguished a representing layer, a layer of represented objects and that of symbolised objects¹³, he understands history of art as a process of changes of artistic structures, which consists in evolution of works of art, disappearance of certain structures, occurrence of new ones or transformation of the existing ones.

Mieczysław Wallis discusses transformation of an object which is not a sign into an object which is a sign, calling it a process of semantisation, and a reverse one called a process of desemantisation¹⁴. This means that the statement about the existence of semantic structures say something to the recipients, i.e., works of art as typical arrangements of mutually dependent semantic and a-semantic elements, is justified. The use of the term 'semantic field' is also important. M. Wallis understands it as a special or temporal arrangement in which a sign assumes various meanings depending on the place it occupies in the arrangement. Thus, it is a sign that becomes the object of analysis. This sign performs treble function: representative (it represents an object different from the sign itself), communicative (evokes a thought about this object), and expressive one (expresses the thought of its author or recipient)¹⁵.

Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropological structuralism is less adequate for systems approach in aesthetics, though, to a certain extent, it embraces conceptions of art as well. It assumes the existence of universal symbolic cultural structure related to intellectual structures. Culture is treated as a set of symbolic systems which are based on stable logical relations. Art, as a subsystem of the system of culture is for C. Lévi-Strauss a language of signs, while a work of art is a production of the artist's mind revealing before the recipient intersubjective knowledge on a general level that is not

¹¹ J. Mukařovský, *Wśród znaków i struktur* [Among Signs and Structures], Warszawa: PIW, 1970.

¹² M. Wallis, "Dzieje sztuki jako dzieje struktur semantycznych" [Art History as History of Semantic Structures], in: *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 2, XII, 1968.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

fully recognised. Therefore, the work of art as a sign includes the relations to other works of art and to man's objective reality.

Generally, we can say that structuralist conceptions of the work of art are basically limited to presentation of a certain structure (of layers, elements or relations). They put the stress on ontological studies and attempts at describing a work of art as an intentional being. To a little extent do they describe the work's function, for instance, its realising of concretization process, relating to values or including of qualities in its structure. Consequently, on the ground of structuralism we have to do only with the description of structure: of elements and relations.

The other of the above mentioned trends, genetic one, regards this way of conducting research in systems aesthetics, in which the transformations within the system of a work of art are of continuous character, take place in an evolutionary process and are connected with historical development of culture.

Conception of art as a system, formulated by Piotr Graff, was an attempt at application of systems theory in aesthetics. Art is conceived here as a social system or an institution¹⁶. The author represents sociological approach in aesthetics, where the society is understood as a metaindividual entity whose aim is to achieve a varied system of values. Art is to facilitate realisation of values by social institutions. P. Graff emphasises the relations between the system of art and the strata of the social system taking into account statistical, historical and comparative studies.

P. Graff understands art as the area of social influence in which not only works of art but also values are born. This means that between the world of values and the reality of cultural and social life there exist various relations of functional character. P. Graff's conception is connected with sociological approach to art, which is manifested by the dependence of art's functioning upon the way of life of social classes in a diversified society. The author conceives reception of art and its intensity as a game between various social groups striving for domination and leadership. Finally, art is treated as an institution of social life which consists of all artists, their products as well as other persons taking part in artistic life, i.e., art critics, collectors, museum workers, etc.

A similar orientation is adopted in the analysis made by Marian Golka, who assumes the existence of an artistic system consisting of two basis subsystems: institutions and works of art¹⁷. A work of art as a product of

¹⁶ P. Graff, *Sztuka jako system* [Art as a System], Warszawa: PAN, 1987.

¹⁷ M. Golka, *Kultura jako system* [Culture as a System], Poznań: Ośrodek Wydawnictw Naukowych, 1992, p. 152.

a human being is here recognised as a specific system cannot be conceived independently of other works of art or in isolation from other elements of the artistic system with which it constitutes in complementary system. Due to this, a work of art should be received together with other products, e.g., other works of art, art criticism, history of art and culture or religion. At the same time it is assumed that the given work of art retains its autonomy and identity¹⁸.

M. Golka assumes that an artistic system is a product that possesses a certain level of adaptability. This issues from the process of acceptance of new work o art, their meaning as well as their aesthetic valuation. This process causes establishment of the presence of certain works of art in the artistic system and rejection of other which are of lesser importance for the development and perseverance in human culture.

Also, application of information theory tends to offer genetic definition of a work of art¹⁹. This is connected with the assumption of the excessive character of art and the process of redundancy taking place in the perceiver in his aesthetic experience. Interpretation of aesthetic problems on the basis of theory of information was offered by Abraham Moles, Mieczysław Porębski, George Birkhoff, Max Bense and, to a certain extent, Marian Mazur.

Their basic goal was application in aesthetic of a possible far reaching, logically-mathematical formalisation and recognition of aesthetics as a brunch of theory of information. From this point of view art is treated as a system of signs which are understood as messages broadcaster by the artist and received by the perceiver. Application of mathematical method on such a scale reduced the problem of phenomena in aesthetics to mathematical dependencies between countable elements. Therefore, a number of issues lost their meaning. For instance, aesthetic qualities and values were treated as messages, which transferred them beyond the problem of a work of art. Aesthetic values are treated here as one of the factors constituting the message which facilitates or reinforces its effectiveness as a content carrier. Mazur's qualitative information theory²⁰ was an attempt at overcoming the abovementioned limitations, though we should expect that treating information as qualitative and not quantitative does not influence the fact that information remains a message, which, in fact, changes the meaning of the concept of aesthetic quality.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ M. Porębski, *Ikonosfera* [Iconosphere], Warszawa: PIW, 1972.

²⁰ M. Mazur, *Jakościowa teoria informacji* [Qualitative Information Theory], Warszawa: WNT, 1970. We assume that qualities or values belong to the work of art in an objective way, that they belong to the world of values or to the subject. Thus we can speak of a message containing information about qualities and not of treating qualities as a message (or its parts).

The result of application of information theory consists in recognition of a work of art as a message (set of messages), and aesthetic experience is definite in the categories of a language encoded by the artist and possible to decode by the perceiver in the process of reception. In connection with this, the aim of application of formalisation in aesthetics consists in acquiring of knowledge about, e.g., a work of art (physicality, formal structure), an artist (artistic tendencies), or a perceiver (the way of evaluation of works of art)²¹.

Besides, most of these conceptions assume the existence of the process of redundancy taking place in the perceiver during the aesthetic experience. In this way their authors strive to explain the concept of "aesthetic information" as a type of information. The principle of building subjective information is clearly described in information theory and we may expect that the concept of "aesthetic information" is not beyond the range of the concept of information. Distinguishing of these two concepts issuing from the conception of a work of art understood as a sign consisting of aesthetic elements, characterised by a high level of unpredictability or containing dependencies of geometric nature, does not lead to a satisfying definition of the concept of "aesthetic information".

On the ground of information theory we assume that art issues from historical development and means engaged in its creation. It is treated as a message functioning within social institutions. Also, historical genesis as well as sociological dimension of great masterpieces understood as a *credo* of their days are emphasised while the artist's message is recognised as profound. In this way, the approach using information theory examines the specific structure of works of art taking into account the historical point of view as well as conditionings of the genesis of the world of art in the social context²². Such approach can be used in the domain of art criticism, in historical studies of art and we cannot expect that it may refer, for instance, to ontological description of a work of art.

Generally, we can claim that genetic conception of a work of art presents its historical dimension, taking into account the development of the system of culture and, to a lesser extent, ontology of a work of art, its essence or structure. The sociologism occurring here leads to describing the problems of art functioning and not to solving ontological or epistemological problems.

²¹ As an example of this approach we can quote R. Jacobson, who introduces the concept of the so-called "poetic function of a language". It is a reductionist approach, because artistic language is something more than a specifically ordered natural language (M. Mayenowa, *op.cit.*).

²² M. Porębski, "Teoria informacji a badania nad sztuką" [Theory of Information and Art Studies], in: *Estetyka* 3, 1962.

Umberto Eco's theory of an open work is another elements supporting emergence of systemic approaches in aesthetics. U. Eco uses assumptions of semantics and cybernetics. He aims at recognising interdependencies between the form of a work of art and its openness in the situation of reception. This means that it is possible to determine the limits within which a work of art may achieve maximum ambiguity without ceasing to be a work of art if we assume activity on the part of the perceiver. Therefore, a work of art is understood as an object of specific structural properties which make possible various interpretations without destroying it. A work of art is recognised here as a limited whole that comes into being in the process of aggregation of general ideas, feelings, emotions, the author's possibilities, artistic material, organisation of creative process, content, etc.²³. "Structure" is understood by U. Eco as form, i.e., as a system of relations between elements and planes of a work of art, including a semantic, syntactic, emotional, topical, ideological, physical planes as well as the plane of the perceiver's structure.

The conception of an open work can be recognised as one of the earliest conceptions of systemic character because, i.a., it is assumed that it does not include evaluating judgements. The concept of an "open work" is of a descriptive and not normative character, that is, it does not serve to decide of better and worse works of art. U. Eco understands the process of the development of art as a development from closed forms to open ones, which he treats as a feature of art. Therefore, the dynamics of the development of art is conceived as a transformation of its internal, formal structure and the level and rhythm of changes issues for the mutual relations between the work of art and its perceiver. This transformation includes also the formal structure of a work of art, which assumes or excludes multitude of interpretations and their kinds. On the one hand the author shows the perceiver an open work allowing for various interpretations; on the other hand the perceiver faces a work which is understood as a kind of a programmed spectre of information which he perceives depending on his individual possibilities.

The assumptions about evolution of works of art from the closed works to the open ones allows for application and understanding of the concept of an open system, and assumes aesthetic conceptions using methodology of systems theory. In this approach we do not lose the historical dimension of a work of art trying to determine its essence.

²³ U. Eco, *Opera Aperta. Forma e indeterminazione nelle poetiche compentoranee*, Milano: Valentino Bompiani & Co.

System's Methodology in the Field of Aesthetics

Modern aesthetics is a complex philosophical discipline requiring solutions in the area of ontology, epistemology, axiology, etc. Consequently, we should strive for integration of aesthetic problems. Application of a systemic description in aesthetics should also take into account the results of other academic disciplines like art history, psychology or sociology. Besides, a description of this kind should give a homogenous methodological basis for all studies in aesthetics.

Systems theory is a perfect instrument facilitating analyses of phenomena on various levels of their complexity, taking into consideration processes and functions of systems, and finally finding the sense, nature and essence of the examined beings. By way of example we can mention treatment of beings as partly open systems, thus recognising their fundamental nature characteristic of the whole human reality.

It should be added that there exist fundamental links of the systems theory with structuralism represented by C. Lévi-Strauss and J. Piaget. We assume that structuralism is a reduced approach as compared with systemic description. A structuralist description refers to a given being, and although it includes a comparative procedure, it basically refers to a single being or to structurally similar beings, i.e., those, whose formal structure is similar. A systemic description takes into account all elements that might influence functioning of a given system. This means that it includes a functional aspect of the system no matter what the level of similarity is. For instance, a systemic description of a work of art refers to all works of art recognising the basic features of their structure as those of dynamic functional systems, while structuralist description is limited to examination of a given structure on the level of description and comparison of corresponding structures.

Systemic methodology does not assume limitations in a description; it tries to include all possible contexts and conceptions. On its basis a holistic description of a work of art, i.e., a description of various works of art as regards their genre (e.g., literary work, film, theatrical play, paintings or sculptures, pieces of music, etc.) and kind (e.g., paintings from various epochs, by various artists from the same epochs or different works of the same artists) is possible.

A research attitude of an aesthetician is not closely connected with humanistic or naturalist approach. It is difficult to determine the limits for application of logically-mathematical formalisation or to give up applying it.

Applying methodology of systems theory on the ground of aesthetics we obtain a range of problems perceived holistically, being able to use

every beneficial, non-contradictory research procedure. Systems aesthetics issues also from the obtained results of studies which would not have been possible to achieve without application of this methodology.

On the ground of systems theory aesthetics must take into account the basic distinction between works of art as real systems and as their models. Therefore, we are here in the position of metaphysical idealism, thus taking into consideration possibilities of human cognition and ontology of a work of art conceived in this way²⁴. We assume that it is possible to model objects of aesthetics and that application of such a description will enable us to cover all works of art including those which will be produced in the future. In aesthetics we encounter attempts at modelling. By way of example we make quote classifications of values or qualities²⁵, modelling of the structures of a work of art, its author or recipient²⁶, as well as distinguishing of phases of a creative process or an aesthetic experience²⁷.

Modelling by application of the concept of aesthetic situation is a separate approach. This kind of systemic description allows for describing the structure²⁸ of the studied object taking into account its functions. The goal of existence of a given structure, which is an element of the description, leads to defying a being as a system. Another type of function is possessed by the work of art as, e.g., a special space, an intentional being or a physical object, and still another is ascribed to the subject: the artist or the recipient or the object from the real world. The problems of modelling refer in particular to the system of a work of art (apart from modelling, for instance,

²⁴ A model is the only source of cognition of a real system; it is a conceptual, hypothetical object on which we can perform simulations that reflect the nature of the examined system.

²⁵ In aesthetics, several classifications of values or qualities have been worked out, e.g., by G. Hermeren, T. Kulka, Ch. Lalo, E. Souriau, H. Osborne, M. Mitias, R. Ingarden, M. Gołaszewska.

²⁶ As an example we can indicate the conception of man as a relatively isolated systems discussed by R. Ingarden in *Man and Value*, München: Philosophia Verlag, 1983.

²⁷ Here we can quote phases of aesthetic experience distinguished by R. Ingarden in his work *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

²⁸ There exist at least two basic definitions of structure. The first states that the structure is a set of relations between elements, while the second claims that it is a set of elements together with the relations existing between them. The structure of a system cannot be reduced to a description of relations only (such description is not complete), because in such a situation we do not know what in fact the structure is as "something" internal for the system, which is not reduced exclusively to the description of relations. This is why we accept the second kind of the definition of structure. On the other hand we define the system through indicating the structure as a description of relations together with elements as well as functions and purposefulness of its existence.

the systems of man, of the real world or of the creative process or that of reception).

On the ground of systems theory we accept that all human cognition is based on cognition of a model of a system existing in reality²⁹. In connection with this, in cognition we have to do directly with a model. It is connected with the assumption that a work of art should be treated as a being in itself. Besides, a work of art is an exceptional being that differs from other beings, e.g., from those of the real world or from ideal beings. This means that it possesses features issuing from the genesis of its emergence in the creative process (process of creation or a decision). Thus, a work of art can be treated as partly reflecting the artist's mind no matter to what extent the creative process is conscious. In an aesthetic experience the recipient also encounters a "special" being – a work of art which is treated by him in a "special" way. When the recipient constructs a model of a work of art in the process of reception, he indirectly discovers the contents of the artist's consciousness, which means in turn, that he has an indirect contact with the artist's consciousness. The problem of the model of a work of art ensues several consequences and creates a possibility of examining not only the nature of a work of art, but also, for instance, the creative process that would be understood as a process of constructing a special structure of a work of art and presentation of values in it thanks to this structure.

Studying ontology of a work of art with the use of systems theory we must take into account the problem of the mode of existence of values. This means that in the systemic description of a work of art the description of values like technique of performance, novelty and originality or beauty, ugliness issues from the assumption that they are elements or relations of structure or that they do not belong to the work of art at all. Such approach is possible thanks to the observed feedback between the system of the work of art and the system of values. The work of art would be defined as a being of a specific structure allowing for execution of such feedback in result of which the work would represent values or direct the recipient to them (to the world of values).

Besides, aesthetics based on methodology of systems theory makes it possible to take into account general properties of systems to which a work of art is subjected, that is, opportunities of creating feedbacks with other systems. Such approach allows for conducting an analysis independently of the problems of art critics, historical description or interpretation. Thus, the knowledge on a work of art can be identified with determining the kind of structure and its functionality (e.g., artistic structure as opposed to

²⁹ R. Staniszewski, *Teoria systemów* [Systems Theory], Wrocław-Warszawa: Ossolineum, 1988 and R. Kulikowski, *Analiza systemowa i jej zastosowanie* [Systems Analysis and its Applications], Warszawa: PWN, 1977.

the structure of a physical object or organism) as well as the changes taking place in it, the way of adjustment or the range of liability. In this kind of description there is no need to take into account extra-structural dependencies, and the idea of systemic approach assumes that all factors composing the shape of the examined system are possible for the structural description. This is connected with striving to achieve a proper relation between the real being and the model. A description should be systemic and not, for instance, structural, semiotic or phenomenological³⁰.

The ability to create this kind of description seems particularly important in aesthetics, where it is difficult to imagine an analysis of a work of art without the context of the creative process, reception or the question of values. A systemic description takes into account the genesis of the observed phenomena depending on the kind of their determination. It also takes into consideration stochastic factors, which causes that the description includes general characteristics of output while input is assumed. The system of a work of art in the process of creation or aesthetic experience can be subject to such a description. Hence, systems methodology allows for application of various models as well as different approaches to the way of representation of contents, for instance, through application of mathematical description, game theory, information theory or construction of heuristic models.

We assume that the kind of structure of a work of art determines its nature. The starting point is the general model of a work of art through which we try to understand its nature in general, that is, to describe the structure or distinguish its essential fragments and show its properties. As an example we may quote non-autonomous nature of the work of art as a scheme as well as its ability to modify its own structure within the limits of a change (assumed by the author). Due to this the work of art participates in the whole world of culture and enters an aesthetic situation. We can also pose a hypothesis that the structure of a being such as a work of art is more complicated than that of the object from the real world and different than that of a human being. Therefore, it cannot be reduced to physical object or a set of properties.

In its studies of art, aesthetics can or should use information theory because, to a certain extent, it considers the finite character of works of art as well as freedom of the subject's creative and receptive invention. It also tries to take into account all circumstances participating in the process of reception. Within the frames of the theory of information transmission is

³⁰ The difference between phenomenological description and structuralist one is a subject of analysis. In the area of phenomenology eidetic studies are conducted while in structuralism description and studies of structure, its functions and relations are referred to reality.

not an ideal, univocal system including qualities, symbolic forms or conventions. It is a "live", changeable process which can reach the recipient independently of environmental situation, epoch or culture.

Theory of information describes a work of art absolutely independently of the kind of information it includes. The aim of this description is examination of the structural properties of transmission, recognition of the existence of messages thanks to which the transmission of information is executed, e.g., the existence of transmission routes and possibilities of occurrence of elementary states, types of sequences, arrangements, states and signs in it. This is connected with the assumption that between the work of art and the recipient there exists a certain code which makes the reception and organisation of information transmission possible³¹. Besides, it is assumed that the information acquired by the recipient is not fully dependent on the author. This issues from the fact that the artist applies a code which may differ to a certain extent from the code used by recipient. Therefore, the code and the procedures of code changes become the main object of description in the studies of art with the use of theory of information. In this way it is possible to take into account conscious or unconscious intentions of the author or the recipient as well as elements of common consciousness having their sources in archetypes.

Conclusion

The assumption that the work of art is a whole structured from the point of view of some criterion is the basis for the systemic approach in aesthetics. Thanks to this there is a chance of conducting of any analysis of a work of art, for instance referring of this work to values, its existence in an aesthetic experience or its relation with the subject.

We accept that a work of art is an object distinguished in some way from the real world. In connection with this the space in which it fully exist is different from the space of, e.g., real objects. Similarly, the time of a work of art should be understood in a different way than real time. A work of art is, as it were, a witness of the epoch. Through its ability to communicate it reveals, for instance, historical reality in a direct way, it includes the eternal mystery of human nature and expresses universal goals. A work of art is a unique, genuine object created by a man of unique personality. From an infinite number of arrangements the artist chooses one which is – for some reason – important to him.

³¹ M. Porebski, "Teoria informacji a badania nad sztuką", *op.cit.*

Systemic approach in aesthetics, particularly in the case of traditional art, emphasises the kind of relation between the work of art and values. In the case of modern art it is possible to face the challenge of its analysis and understanding. We may expect that thanks to its taking into account numerous factors and phenomena, systemic methodology allows for the answer to some questions arising in this area.

It is important that systemic approach strives to revert the Cartesian direction of conducting research. We understand it as departure from atomistic description and replacing it with a holistic one³². Atomistic approach consisting in a far-reaching fragmentation of the problem leads to reduction of phenomena, that is to isolating particular elements and processes and disturbing the understanding of causal nexus. This, in effect, leads to inadequacy of a model or a description in relation to reality. This essence of systemic studies was expressed by Ervin Laszlo, who stated that the concept of a system is opposed to analytical thinking³³.

Systemic analysis allows for the analysis of the world, that is, of works of art too, in the multitude of relations existing between various systems. The nature of the examined being as one existing thanks to or in relation to other beings emerges then – the vision of functions and sense of existence is borne. This shows that systemic thinking is similar to phenomenological thinking, which means that the examined beings can be understood as phenomena.

All philosophical disciplines can be found in systemic aesthetics. This means that we have a chance to observe such objects of examination as ontology of a work of art, to take into account cognitive processes or criteria of axiological evaluation.

We may expect that the concept of system or systemic approach in aesthetics is a new paradigm which will facilitate new organisation of earlier achievements of various aesthetic theories and – with the help of the methods of systemic analysis – will lead to construction of a holistic, reliable and satisfactory conception in aesthetics.

³² L. von Bertalanffy, *op.cit.*

³³ E. Laszlo, *The Systems View of the World*, New York: George Braziller, 1972.

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