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THE COGNITIVE VALUE OF ART IN A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The functioning of art in a social environment is very often based on conviction that, besides its structure of purely artistic and aesthetic values, art also possesses a structure of semantic values. The latter type of structure is often of a very diversified character, depending on the nature of the work itself and on the adopted form of artistic expression – the fact which may prompt us to make at least a very general division of the works of art into the semantic and non-semantic ones. At this point, however, we should remember that by the mere fact that art is functioning together with social culture, it gets readily entangled in a web of meanings, and due to this, every aesthetic object is gaining its semantic dimension just because it exists in a predetermined social reality. This has already been indicated by B. Croce, W. Dilthey, J. M. Guyau, B. Malinowski, H. D. Duncan, M. C. Albrecht. Within the scope of analysis of the function of art, this problem was examined more comprehensively by, among others, M. Kaplan¹, who discriminated the function of art as a form of knowledge.

Therefore, the appearance of a work of art within the realm of social reality means that even the non-semantic works of art, by the mere fact that they were born in a specific cultural area, are enriched with a semantic dimension, often without the least intention of their creator. As an example may serve here, if nothing else, at least some pieces of music which, though by their nature usually deprived of a semantic structure, through the mere fact of having been conceived in a definite context of situation, society, or culture acquire some definite semantic connotations.

At this point a very obvious reservation comes to our mind, namely that perceiving the semantic structure of a work does not mean reducing this work to a level of mere announcement; it means only that another aspect of the work has been observed, due to which the reception of aesthetic objects as pieces of art becomes more comprehensive. The structure of semantic values cannot replace the structure of artistic and aesthetic values. On the contrary, it complements them. This attitude, though not very common, gets many ad-

¹ M. Kaplan, *The Arts. A Social Perspective*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, New York 1989, pp. 28–37.

vocates in the field of both aesthetics and the history of art, as well as sociology or the psychology of art.

Perceiving the presence of semantic structure in a work of art is the very reason why the problem of a cognitive value of the arts becomes so important in researches. The arts, by functioning in a cultural space as an expression of a unique form of social communication¹, become capable of performing some cognitive functions and, as a consequence, turn out to be a perfect source of knowledge². Yet, from the point of view of the problem posed in a title of this study, which assumes a sociological perspective of looking at the arts, we shall be interested not so much in any arbitrary field of knowledge which this art is capable of transmitting to us, but rather in this knowledge which can be useful in sociological reflections. So, the problem posed will not be related with a general approach to the question of a cognitive value of art, but with the applicability of art as a tool in sociological analyses and in the workshop of a sociological scientist.

Therefore, the key position in the enunciations described herein should take the following questions: Does art in general present any cognitive value in the aspect of sociological reflections? Can it tell us anything about the society? And if so, then it would be worthwhile to think in what way it can provide us with knowledge of this type and to what extent the knowledge thus acquired can be reliable, since on these facts will depend the cognitive value of art in a sociological perspective.

The point of departure for a problem thus defined will be without any doubt asking about the status of a sociological reflection on art. In other words, asking: what is the sociology of art, and what are its specific objectives and tasks? The cognitive value of art in the workshop of a sociological scientist will depend to a great extent on a general concept of this discipline and on its approach to the work of art regarded as a social fact. Generally speaking, two perspectives can be distinguished here.

The first of them perceives the sociology of art as a branch of science dealing with art, which, besides the history of art, aesthetics, or psychology of art, touches on the problems of artistic creativity. However, the sociology of art in this understanding will focus, first of all, on a social context of art and on the position that its creator is expected to hold in society, with less orientation on the work of art as such. It will be based on a statement that both the arts and the process of their creation as well as the accompanying aesthetic values are to be understood as an autotelic act and, as a consequence, the role of thus understood sociology of art will consist, first of all, in supporting the analyses carried out in the field of the history of art and aesthetics³,

¹ To this aspect of the work of art has already drawn attention H. D. Duncan, stressing that it can substitute language as a tool of communication. See: H. D. Duncan, *Language and Literature in Society*, University Press, Chicago 1953, also: H. D. Duncan, *Literature as Equipment for Action: Burke's Dramatic Conception* in: *The Sociology of Art and Literature*, (ed.) M. C. Albrecht, J. H. Barnett, M. Griff, Praeger Publisher Inc., London 1970.

² This thesis is often considered obvious and as such is proved very rarely.

³ It is worth stressing that the attractiveness and significance of sociological problems when referred to art, is the very reason why within an aesthetic reflection some tendencies are observed to regard the sociology of art

since in this approach the work of art itself will remain beyond any sociological reflection. In the case of thus defined perspective, the problem of a cognitive value of art will be of minor importance for the sociology of art itself, since the announcement of artistic experience will not be within the sphere of its interests.

The second perspective can see in the sociology of art mainly one of the sciences about the society, which in the works of art (artistic events) perceive, first of all, an expression of the mechanisms picturing the way in which this society is functioning, and which are at the same time regarded as a source of knowledge about the society itself. In this approach, the sociology of art remains science all the time; the science whose interests are focused on the society and where the creative power of an artist is regarded as a symptom of social activity (the process of creating a work of art), or as a stimulator (the process of reception of this work of art), owing to which we can obtain some additional valuable knowledge about the examined society, since functioning of art in a society offers us the possibility of describing and analysing the rules which govern the behaviours of this society. In this perspective, art is no longer an autotelic entity, but starts playing the role of an *indicator* of certain specific social conditions and phenomena. This does not mean, of course, the social determinism of artistic phenomena similar to that represented by L. Goldman or A. Hauser, because we do not restrict the genesis of art to social factors only. It does mean, on the other hand, that the mere existence of the works of art, irrespective of what were the reasons of their creation, is a carrier of information about the society in which they have come into being, and in which they are being received. So, in the way of perceiving artistic events, the sociologist studying the arts resembles rather a historian for whom the material culture can be a proof of the existence of a definite reality, and who becomes, as perfectly grasped by M. Kula, *a carrier of the historical memory*¹. For the sociologist of art this role can be played by the work of art, because the mere fact of its creation as well as a way in which it is received by the society are a proof of the existence of certain social conditions and relations. In thus outlined perspective, the cognitive value of art becomes an issue quite fundamental.

Adopting in the sociology of art this second approach, whose essence lies in perceiving the works of art mainly as symptoms of some social conditions or phenomena (though, by no means, confining the arts to this dimension only) and in posing the question to what extent art is capable of extending the scope of social knowledge and reflection, we must focus our attention, first of all, on the communicative dimension. In great simplification, the process of communication assumes the presence of the three fundamental elements: Creator – Work of Art – Receiver. Yet, within this process, the most important for us will be not so much its individual components as rather the relations formed between these components. This also means that, although the work of

as a supporting branch of science. This trend has been observed to prevail mainly among the aestheticians and historians of art.

¹ M. Kula, *Nośniki pamięci historycznej*, Wyd. DiG, Warszawa 2002.

art itself is a carrier of semantic values, the definite scope of social knowledge will lie not so much in the work itself as rather in a relation by which the creator and receiver are supposed to be bound to an artistic object. For a sociologist most interesting will be all this that is related with the creator's or receiver's activities oriented at an aesthetic object. So, in this approach, not the work of art itself will be in the centre of scholar's interest, but all this that forms an *environment* to this work, that is, the way it has been designed or created by an artist, or the way it has been received by a group of receivers. In this aspect two types of relationships can be distinguished, and to them our attention will be drawn during these studies:

— the relation: Creator – Work of Art; this is a relation of creation, in which the element most important to us will be the process of connotation of some specific meanings comprised in a work of art, irrespective of whether their occurrence has been intended by the creator or not,

— the relation: Work of Art – Receiver; this is a relation of reception, in which the element most important to us will be the process of denotation of some specific meanings comprised in or accompanying this work.

Each of the relations indicated above is capable of providing some cognitive values important to the sociological scientist, and as such it can be a source of knowledge about the society. And yet, in each of these relations, both the scope as well as the means by which this knowledge has been provided will be quite different.

At the same time, a reservation should be made here that the point of view disclosed in this study is not meant to be an attempt at solving the problem of an ontic status of the semantic values present in a work of art because, irrespective of what nature the final decisions regarding ontological issues may be, the sociological perspective will be focused on a social process of their connotation or denotation, since the course that these processes follow is the very source of our knowledge about the society. So, the perspective here adopted does not involve the problem of ontology of the semantic values present in a work of art.

An analysis of the Creator – Work of Art relation enables us to penetrate deeper into the essence and peculiarity of the process of connotation of the semantic values present in a work of art. The course of this process, being a specific form of symbolic interaction, existing under the specific conditions of social reality, makes a detailed or general description of the society in which this process takes place possible. At the same time, the social knowledge which we can assimilate will be comprised in both the connoted values co-creating a work of art, as well as in the author's own comments (e. g. in comments of the type: *in this work I wanted to discuss ...*), accompanying this work in a social area. At this stage, the task of a scholar is to analyse the process of connotation in a sociological perspective, which should give him the possibility of revealing some social contents related with the work of art and determine the level of reliability and consistency of the acquired knowledge, perceived as a knowledge about the society. In this situation we acknowledge the fact that the creator and his work of art can be regarded as elements *representing* (expressing, speaking on behalf of) the society, and thus we

admit that a relation existing between them should enable us to reproduce some specific fragments of a *picture* of the society. At the same time it has to be remembered that the acquired knowledge will refer to the social reality of creator, and hence it will be a *picture* of the artist's society with all the limitations resulting from this fact. This *picture* enables us to grasp, first of all, the peculiarity of a relation that is said to exist between the creator and the social reality surrounding him, and which becomes a basis for further descriptions and explanations of this reality.

In an analysis of the Work of Art – Receiver relation our attention will be focused on the peculiarities of the process of denoting the values in a work of art; the process which is also a specific form of symbolic interaction, uniting the creator and receiver, and achieved through reference to a work of art. In this case, the source of knowledge about the society will be all means used by the receivers to specify and interpret the values comprised in a work of art. The source of knowledge can also become the mere fact of accepting or rejecting a work of art. In this case the receiver and the work of art *replace* the society. Yet, it should be emphasized here that this is the society of a receiver and not that of a creator. Therefore the acquired knowledge will refer to quite a different social reality than it happens in the case of a Creator – Work of Art relation; this is the social reality of a receiver.

Analysing the process of connotation, the scholar can place the creator in the two potentially possible roles:

- as an *expert* in social affairs, and
- as a *respondent* and a source of knowledge about the society.

The artistic expression of creator perceived in the role of an *expert* is treated as a special form of para-scholarly treatise on some specific social issues. Here, the creator is considered to be a connoisseur of the subject, conducting his own analysis of the problem and formulating his own genuine conclusions of some cognitive value¹. A basic difference between this form of statement regarding social problems and a scholarly treatise will consist in a specific nature and form of the discourse; the scholarly discourse is here replaced by an artistic discourse. The main problem faced by the scholar will be proper interpretation of a treatise of this type, wiping it up from the spots of indeterminacy (as understood by R. Ingarden), and translating it next into the language of sociological theories. This task is in a sense similar to that of a researcher who analyses the ideas of the protagonists of his scholarly discipline and explores the contents which he thinks are worth stressing in the context of some new discoveries taking place within this discipline. Perceiving the creator in the role of an *expert* is possible in respect to those

¹ S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych* in: *Dziela*, t. 4: *O Nauce*, PWN, Warszawa 1967, p. 287 wrote: *After all, a good novel or drama often add a lot to our knowledge of the human world, unveil the new aspects of reality, multiply its 'dimensions', disclose some invisible relations, pose new social and psychological problems, often in a way much more suggestive than a sociological treatise can do. They can drive changes in our attitude towards people, make us think of revising the gradation of values adopted until then, deepen our understanding of certain social phenomena and types of personality; and can make the man wiser. The sociological and psychological revelations whose significance consists in drawing our attention to certain facts, certain similarities, or certain causal relationships are made not only by scholars but also by poets, dramatists and novelists.*

creators who have been consciously taking the social issues into consideration, and the reflection present in their works is of a great cognitive value. This specific circle includes, among others, artists like: H. Bosch, P. Brughel, F. Goya, F. Dostojewski, H. Balzac, W. Gombrowicz, W. Shakespeare, or S. Mrożek.

The artistic expression of a creator perceived in the role of a *respondent* is treated as an expression of individual opinions of a member of a given society. Basing on this source of information, the scholar is capable of drawing some definite conclusions about the social reality of the *examined* respondents. In this case it will be necessary to find an appropriate number of artistic expressions which will guarantee to us an intersubjectivity in presentation of the social world, and due to this will let us formulate valid conclusions about a selected group or circle of society. These expressions will have the status of a statement made by the respondents and will be subjected to analysis according to the rules of interpretation applied in qualitative research.

In the artistic expressions of the creators perceived in the role of *respondents*, the scholar will be looking, first of all, for the elements recurring in many statements, and this will enable him to make a comparative study of the available empirical material. This, however, means that the scholar will be forced to search for the similarities and not for the differences. Consequently, his attention will have to focus on all the things which are repeated and recurring, and not on the elements which in an artistic expression are of a unique and exceptional nature.

At the same time, one fact should be definitely stressed here, namely that an immediate consequence of this approach will be treating in a similar way both the eminent creators as well as the mediocrities, since as a *respondent* each of them will possess equal rights, irrespective of the level of his artistic skills. This results from the fact that it is not the level of artistic qualities present in a work, or the professional skills of its creator, but the contents and the character of an announcement comprised in this work which will become the criterion used by scholar in designing of his test *sample*.

At this point we should also become aware of the fact that perceiving the creator in the role of an *expert* will depend on whether he is willing to assume this role. This means that an opinion about a society expressed in a work of art should be formulated with some intention. The artist must be conscious of the fact that he is analysing social life, and although by this fact he cannot automatically become a sociological scientist, he still has his contribution to making the horizon of social reflection open wider. On the other hand, regarding the creator as a *respondent* does not require from him any adequate creative intention; neither does it require that the communication as such be of an intentional character. In this case one can even assume that the artistic expression will not be used to this purpose at all.¹

Yet, irrespective of which role, this of an *expert*, or that of a *respondent*,

¹ To this fact points out the great variety of means used in presentations of the social world in art, among which we can distinguish both the purposeful and intentional presentations of this world as well as presentations done *on occasion* while discussing quite different problems. More comprehensive analysis of this problem is in: P. Kisiel, *Sztuki piękne jako źródło wiedzy o społeczeństwie* in: *Socjologia i wyzwania społeczne*, (ed.) A. Węgrzecki, A. Karwińska, M. Pacholski, AE, Kraków 2000, pp. 191–197.

will be ascribed to the creator, his statements can be expressed in two ways¹:

— through mimetic qualities, i. e. the qualities expressing in a given work the peculiar nature of a real world, thus promoting the creation and dissemination of values found in a social world. This expression may assume the form of visualisation (picturing) of the surrounding world, problematisation of the most important issues, e. g. the social ones, done in the form of *let the receiver think of it for a while*, and explanation, which consists in searching for answers to the posed questions, assuming the form of artistic concepts or visions. It is worth mentioning here that these tasks can be performed either at a textual level, when art reflects the true or ideal (virtual) social reality, or at an intertextual level, understood in a spirit of structuralism, when a definite total or fragmentary concept of the world is expressed through implicit elements, e. g. the structure of work understood as a definite wholeness, and relations existing between the individual elements forming parts of this structure². It should be emphasized, however, that this form of expressing the cognitive values is a very peculiar one, and comprehensible only on the ground of the mimetic arts.

— through metaphysical qualities, which enable grasping the essence and the depth of meaning. These qualities are not only related with the aesthetic values but beyond these values are not even likely to exist³. Taking into consideration the fact that these values are independent of the material and form of artistic expression, they are comprehensible not only on the ground of the mimetic arts but also on the ground of the non-mimetic ones.

The analysis of a denotation process revealed in a Work of Art – Receiver relation enables scholar to perceive the receiver only in the role of a *respondent*. Here, the source of knowledge about the society will be the mode of reception of some specific works of art and the mode of their valuation and interpretation made by a definite group or a society of the receivers. Yet, in this case, the stress will be put not so much on the individual interpretations as on some features common to a number of receptive interpretations. This means that the mode of denoting the values comprised in the works of art typical of a group of receivers will serve us as an indicator providing some knowledge about the society. At this point of discourse our attention should be drawn to the fact that of the greatest cognitive value will be the reception process observed in the case of the, so called, ordinary receivers. Opinions of qualified critics will not be the best source of social knowledge here, as they usually express the mode of reception of a work of art which is heavily influenced not only by the work itself and by what we know about this work

¹ In E. Borowiecka's opinion, three types of cognitive values should be distinguished here. Besides the two mentioned here, she distinguishes the third one – the truth comprised in verbal arts. It seems, however, that the third type of the values is a subtype in the group of metaphysical values. See: E. Borowiecka, *Poznawcza wartość sztuki*, Wyd. Lubelskie, Lublin 1986, pp. 178–190.

² The intertextual character of a work of art was perceived and strongly accentuated in a structuralistic perspective and in a perspective of psychoanalysis or Marxism. As an example may serve, among others, the works written by C. Levi-Strauss, R. Barthes, E. Panofsky, H. Sedlmayr, S. Freud, C. G. Jung, A. Hauser.

³ E. Borowiecka, *Poznawcza wartość sztuki*, p.185

and its creator, but also by other factors resulting from the current trends in cultural politics, adopted by the individual opinion-forging centres. So, the critic's reception will be true when grasped in a historical perspective, but false (because less representative) when grasped in a sociological perspective, as incapable of expressing all this that in a given work of art the wide circles of ordinary receivers can perceive. This information will be comprised in the opinions of ordinary receivers, and it will provide us with the possibility of establishing in a more reliable way which subjects are really spontaneously perceived in a work of art, and how they are interpreted within a specific social reality of the receivers.

Here it should be stressed that the possibility of using the received information as a source of knowledge about the society requires that the objects whose reception is examined were objects of mass reception and that the public could be regarded as a representative sample of the examined population. Of course, the examined population may be the whole society or a part of it only.

Studying the cognitive value of art in a sociological perspective, a question also raises about the reliability of sociological knowledge acquired during analysis of the Creator – Work of Art and Work of Art – Receiver relations. It is also worth mentioning that an assessment of the reliability of the knowledge thus acquired will depend on the relation of creation or reception and on the role played by a creator or receiver, since the value of art as a source of social knowledge will not consist in providing the scholar with a picture of society, but in making the picture once obtained closely related with a specific social reality, due to which we can regard it as being of some cognitive value. The scholar can use art as one of the possible sources of knowledge only when it can provide us with some knowledge about the social conditions existing in reality. It does not mean, however, that the creator's rights to artistic fiction should be restrained in any way, providing that the fictitious reality be expressed only at a textual level. The presence of artistic fiction at an intertextual or metaphysical level makes any interrelation between the acquired knowledge and social reality impossible.

In the case of a Creator – Work of Art relation it is necessary to pay special attention to the four key elements. They point out to immanent restrictions correcting our assessment of the reliability of the social knowledge comprised in an aesthetic work of art.

First, a question should be posed to what degree the creative vision of an artist can be reliable in expressing the peculiar nature of social reality in an artistic presentation. So, this is a fundamental question about the creator's capability of reproducing in a work of art the social reality of any kind, remembering that the creator may use to this purpose both mimetic and metaphysical values. At the same time, another fact should be taken into consideration, namely that an assessment of how faithfully the reality is reflected in a work of art, and hence an assessment of its cognitive value, will depend, first of all, on the way in which the scholar perceives the relations that exist between the creator and the surrounding society. At least a few characteristic attitudes adopted by art scientists, representing a perspective of the his-

tory of art, the aesthetics, and the sociology of art, can be distinguished here:

— the creator is fully autonomous in respect of the society (e. g. A. Riegl), which means that the creator can play only the role of an *expert*. On the other hand, the lack of any relation between the society and the creator perceived in the role of a *respondent* makes the latter totally incapable of being a reliable representative of this society,

— the creator is totally influenced by the external social world, and then he becomes the only representative of what is *inherent* in the society (among others, A. Hauser, L. Goldmann, the principle of *mimesis* in Ancient Greece). An effect of this attitude is acknowledgement of the fact that creator can represent society, and so he will be good in the role of a *respondent*, while his ability to play the role of an *expert* will be limited, because his social reflections will not be autonomous but will be determined by an influence coming from a specific society or group,

— the creator is dependent on a complex system of external factors (society, history), which jointly influence the artist (among others, M. Dvorak, F. Nietzsche, P. Francastel, E. Panofsky, V. Kavolis) – this is not, however, a creator-determining system but it forms an important context in which the artist is functioning. A result of this situation is that the creator preserves his right to both represent the society and play the role of a reliable *respondent*; he also preserves the skill of formulating a social diagnosis based on his own ruminations, an output of which will be his ability to assume the role of an *expert*.

The choice of one of the above specified attitudes will be the factor shaping the form which the criterion of the truthfulness of the creator's invention and its exemplification in the form of a specific work of art will assume. However, the problem of truth in a work of art perceived from a perspective of the sociology of art will be referred to later in this study.

Second, we should think about the question to what extent the creator can represent the examined society, as on this will depend our right to claim that an artistic expression is the element speaking about a given society, although when the creator is acting as an *expert*, this problem is of no greater significance, since this role can be ascribed only to the creator most eminent, quite exceptional even, as regards his interest in social problems. This exceptionality accentuates even more the subjective nature of an artist's viewpoint and is the reason why his diagnosis cannot have the features of a representative judgement. The creator in the role of an *expert* is not able to provide us with objective knowledge about the society; what he can offer are the subjective interpretations referring to some specific social problems, which also undergo the process of a subjective selection done by the author. This issue assumes quite a different form when the creator is acting as a *respondent*, since then the choice of artistic expression should preserve the feature of representativeness. The only problem is that within the compass of the ages of the arts existence the creator has never been a *typical* representative of the society. He always used to hold in the society quite a peculiar position on account of his special skills and tasks that were imposed on him. As a result, creators once belonged to the lowest-class society, to be raised to an elite on another

occasion, or to be functioning as outsiders of some kind. Consequently, it is difficult to regard the creator as someone intentionally expressing a typical way of thinking about the social reality. This does happen, however, in presentations of an unintentional character, displayed not through artist's creative vision but as a result of general knowledge about the society or as an output of cultural competence, functioning as something *natural* (e. g. people's dresses in some portrait displays).

Third, one should ask the question to what degree the creator's inventiveness can find its embodiment in a specific work of art. Emerging here, the divergence between the creator's original intention and the finally obtained work of art reduces the cognitive value of this work. The reason is that the work either starts getting some values which the author has never intended it to have, or – on the contrary – it may be deprived of the values which, according to the author's creative invention, should have been there. This divergence pushes the work of art still farther from the social reality it should represent, and finally it may happen so that some social issues unintentionally comprised in a work are present there quite incidentally.

And fourth, it seems worth thinking for a while to what degree the concretisation made by scholar can really reflect all these, and only these, values which are comprised in his work. As indicated by R. Ingarden, the concretisation made by a receiver is a synthesis of the creator's intentional reality and the receiver's typical reality. Therefore, it is not limited only to what is comprised in a semantic structure of the work itself, but is also an output of scholar's projection who, in H.–G. Gadamer's opinion, by this fact makes the work contemporary to himself. Due to this, the process of concretisation performed by a receiver is the next constraint in achieving full *congruence* between the embodied by a receiver–scholar reality comprised in a work of art and the depicted social reality.

In the case of a relation of reception it is necessary to pay special attention to the two key problems. First, one should answer the question to what degree the reception of a specific work can be representative of a society, a group, or a social community which the receivers of this work represent. To determine this relationship is of utmost importance because on this will depend the truthfulness and reliability of the acquired knowledge. This is, however, by no means a simple task, as there is no certainty that by preparing a representative, e. g. in respect of social–demographic features, sample of the receivers will provide us with the possibility of recording some typical runs of the process of reception, mainly because reception of the arts does not depend on these features only. By analysing a set of conditions accompanying the process of participation in artistic events we can see that the course which the process of art reception takes will depend, among others, on the type of social functions ascribed to art. Therefore, keeping the sample representative in respect of a distribution of this variable will be, due to some obvious reasons, impossible.

And second, some attention deserves the problem to what degree the receptive concretisation of a work done by the scholar is free from an impact of the surrounding society in which this scholar is naturally functioning. This issue is very important inasmuch as a receptive concretisation done by the

scholar can serve as a reference point in interpretation of other receptive concretisations. Consequently, the knowledge that we acquire about a society will come out as a product of analysis of the divergencies which are said to exist between these concretisations.

The above analysis of the conditions on which the reliability of the knowledge obtained through the works of art depends makes us think also about some adequate criteria of truthfulness referred to social knowledge. Generally speaking, with reference to a work of art, the following criteria of truthfulness can be distinguished¹:

- the truth as a consistency of the work with reality,
- the truth as a consistency of the work with creator's ideas,
- the truth as an internal consistency of the work (stylistic coherence),
- the truth as a manifestation of artist's sincerity, that is, the consistency with the creator's thoughts and feelings,
- the truth as a consistency with the collective ideas, that is, keeping an adequacy between the representations and, commonly occurring in society, ideas about the world.

The first criterion of truthfulness distinguished here may have, of course, some applicability in our studies on the cognitive value of art in society, but the scope of this applicability will be rather limited. It is true that by using this criterion the obtained picture of society can be verified basing on, e. g., historical sources, but it is also true that this criterion can be used only for announcements done at a textual level. It cannot be, on the other hand, used in an analysis of the metaphysical or mimetic announcements done at an inter-textual level.

The second criterion of truthfulness is very important, but the scholar has practically no means at his disposal to verify a work basing on this criterion. A verification of this type could have possibly been done by the creator himself, and in the case of a positive result we would be able to see if the social contents of a work truly express artist's convictions.

The third criterion of truthfulness is, within the scope of problems relevant to us, of no major importance. The internal stylistic coherence of a work has no greater impact on a semantic value of this work, perceived in a perspective of the sociology of art. Thus, this problem is beyond the sphere of the sociologist's interest.

The fourth criterion is very important to both the creator and the receiver. Artistic expressions can be valid only then when the creator assumes an attitude of sincerity. If he does not, the cognitive value of such expressions will be of minor importance, because the scholar can be, to some extent, *manipulated* by an artist. Yet, at this point, we should realise the fact that the attitude of sincerity is impossible in the case of mass art; mass art is opportunistic by its very nature and subjected, first and foremost, to the rules of the market where a mass receiver is reigning. This subjection of mass art is in conflict with creator's sincerity. On the other hand, we have to remember

¹ Wł. Tatarkiewicz, *Dzieje szczęściu pojęć*, PWN, Warszawa 1976, p. 357.

that the power of mass art and a measure of its success do not consist in the principle of sincerity, but in the principle of satisfying the expectations of the receivers. Therefore the standard lack of sincerity observed in mass art can make it attractive to mass receivers, whereas creator's sincerity by raising the arts to a higher level and transforming the works into something grand and lofty can make them in attractive to us. So, it is not possible to match sincerity with creation of mass objects, and therefore mass art is not the best carrier of cognitive values, if perceived in a context of the creator–work relation.

On the other hand, mass art can be a carrier of cognitive values if perceived in a context of the relation of reception, since objects of mass art enable their receivers to preserve the attitude of sincerity. But then we should allow for the fact that the criterion of truth may apply in equal grade to the sincerity of receiver in contact with a work of art. So, this means that the sincerity in reception of a work of art can guarantee that our knowledge about the society obtained through this work will be reliable.

The fifth criterion assuming the existence of a compatibility between the work and the collective ideas also refers to a relation of reception. In the light of this criterion we could assume that what is considered true by the receivers exists as truth by fulfilling the criterion of truthfulness. Yet, thus structured, the criterion of truthfulness would apply to the work itself rather than to the social reality. The picture of social reality can be interpreted only after a work has been recognised as true, and the peculiar nature of this reality is best testified by the act of recognising a work as true. In this approach, the social meanings which express a socially approved interpretation of the works of art can become an excellent source of knowledge about the social reality.

Summing up the statements made so far it can be concluded that art can be a valuable source of knowledge for a social scientist. This on condition, however, that the perspective which he takes when looking at the works of art will consequently result from the need of searching for knowledge about the society. This means that art placed within the scope of sociologist's interests is not an autonomous being, but will always appear jointly with its creator or receiver, and it is the existing relation of creation or reception which should be the principal area of sociological analyses.

Adopting this perspective in research enables us to learn about the social reality through art. Based on this perspective, the performed cognitive research can ensure that the assimilated social knowledge will be both valuable and reliable. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering the restrictions which this perspective unavoidably carries with itself, and whose discrimination will depend on the adopted research concepts.

Analysing the relations of creation and perceiving the creator in the role of an *expert* we should remember that, first and foremost, through art the creator expresses his own opinions and judgements. Thus, what we assimilate is the knowledge about the judgements and beliefs of some specific individuals living in a specific social reality. In this situation, however, we speak about the separate entities and not about the attitudes and systems of values accepted by a wide circle of society. Our knowledge about the system of values and the way of perceiving social reality according to H. Bosch is not a

basis which would authorise us to conclude about the system of values adopted by a Hertogenbosch society in the late part of the Middle Ages.

Analysing the relations of creation and perceiving the creator in the role of a *respondent* requires that we pay attention to the necessity of preparing a test sample to check to what extent the assimilated knowledge is reliable. This means that the interest of a social scientist should focus not only on those who are considered eminent creators, but also on the creators of less recognised rank. On the other hand, we should not forget that the less eminent is the creator, the less eminent is his creative personality, and the more susceptible he becomes to the effect of external phenomena. If this *external steerability* happens to be related with social phenomena, the acquired knowledge will adequately describe the social consciousness of his environment. If, on the other hand, the *external steerability* is of an ideological character, the acquired knowledge will represent only the ideology of the individual social groups or political elites, and as such will not be capable of reflecting the social consciousness in an adequate way.

When analysing the relation of reception it is worth noticing that the assimilated social knowledge will be most valuable and universal when we study aesthetic objects evaluated by mass audience, as only then the group of receivers (*respondents*) will be most diversified and can be representative to the greatest degree possible. At the same time, we should remember that the aesthetic objects attractive to mass audience are as a rule not the most valuable ones and, additionally, incite the reactions which are not individualised and spontaneous but mass-controlled. Thus, the reception of mass culture is related with the sphere of mass behaviours, described so perfectly by J. Ortega y Gasset in *La rebelión de las masas*. It is true that dominance of the masses is a feature typical of our modern times, and it is this mass dominance that best describes the character of modern society, though it also means that the ratings of a *Big Brother* program or of a telestory can tell us more about the society and its present-day features than the creativeness of modern artists can. Nevertheless, for sociologist, a constation like this must be a pill hard to swallow.

From the remarks made above it follows that for the purpose of research and exploration made by the sociology of art, the perspective most attractive is analysis of the works created by artists of the highest rank. In this case, however, the choice for ever remains the scholar's subjective choice. The baggage of social knowledge thus obtained can serve us as a guideline in further studies, and the work becomes thereby a source of inspiration, encouraging explanations, or drawing models of the examined social phenomena, in the same way as a source of inspiration may become every social event which we happen to deal with.