

## Jan Białostocki and George Kubler. In an Attempt to Catch Up with the System

Wojciech BAŁUS

### I.

*The Shape of Time* begins and ends with an attack on iconology.<sup>1</sup> According to George Kubler, the research method applied in art history which is based on Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms has led to reductionism and simplifications, excluding from scrutiny everything that was not associated with the morphology of a work of art. That is why Jan Białostocki's interest in the booklet published by the American scholar must have aroused and continues to arouse surprise. Sergiusz Michalski referred to this interest "as a very specific aspect of Jan Białostocki's views on the research methods used in art history".<sup>2</sup> In the review

published in *The Art Bulletin*, the issue of iconology naturally takes up quite a lot of space, but the paper also contains a fair amount of praises of Kubler's work. One may of course assume that the reviewer acted in accordance with the simplest possible critical recipe which boils down to three fundamental elements: to sum up – to praise – to criticize, and only decided to sweeten the polemic with little known words of acceptance and delight. Yet this view seems to be contradicted by the Polish edition of the review,<sup>3</sup> and above all by the frequency and the way in which *The Shape of Time* is cited in the articles and papers dating back to the sixties and seventies. We learn from them that Kubler is "one of the leading

<sup>1</sup> KUBLER, G.: *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the History of Things*. New Haven – London 1962, pp. VII-VIII and 127-128. From the perspective of the present article, Kubler's critical remarks on the structuralism of the so called Vienna school are not important. The latter had been described by MICHALSKI, S.: *Strukturanalyse, Gestaltismus und die Kublersche Theorie. Einige Bemerkungen zu ihrer Geschichte und Abgrenzung*. In: VAYER, L. (ed.): *Problemi di metodo. Dizioni di esistenza di una storia dell'arte. Atti del XXIX Congresso C.I.H.A.* Bologna 1982, Vol. 10, pp. 73-74.

The titles of Jan Białostocki's books and articles have been quoted here in an abbreviated version:

– Review of George Kubler, *The Shape of Time*. In: *The Art Bulletin*, 47, 1965, pp. 135-139 – Review of Kubler;  
– *Teoria i twórczość. O tradycjach i inwencji w teorii sztuki i ikonografii* [Theory and Art. On Traditions and Invention in the Theory of Art and Iconography]. Poznań 1961 – TtT;  
– *Sztuka i myśl humanistyczna. Studia z dziejów sztuki i myśli o sztuce* [Art and Humanist Thought. Studies in History of Art and Thought on Art]. Warszawa 1966 – SiMH;  
– *Pięć wieków myśli o sztuce* [Five Centuries of Thought on Art]. Warszawa 1976 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) – 5W;

– *Refleksje i syntezy ze świata sztuki* [Reflections and Syntheses from the World of Art]. Warszawa 1978 – RiS I;  
– *Historia sztuki wśród nauk humanistycznych* [History of Art among Other Humanistic Disciplines]. Wrocław 1980 – HSWNH;  
– *Symbol i obraz w świecie sztuki* [Symbols and Images in the World of Art]. Warszawa 1982 – SiO;  
– *Refleksje i syntezy ze świata sztuki. Cykl drugi* [Reflections and Syntheses from the World of Art. Cycle Two]. Warszawa 1987 – RiS II;  
– *The Message of Images. Studies in the History of Art*. Wien 1988 – MI.

<sup>2</sup> MICHALSKI, S.: Jan Białostocki a ewolucja historii sztuki po roku 1945 [Jan Białostocki and the Evolution of Art History after 1945]. In: POPRZEĆKA, M. (ed.): *Ars longa. Prace dedykowane pamięci profesora Jana Białostockiego* [Ars longa. Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Professor Jan Białostocki]. Warszawa 1999, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Kształt czasu. Kryzys pojęcia stylu i teoria Kublera [The Shape of Time. The Crisis of the Concept of Style and Kubler's Theory]. In: SiMH, pp. 135-145.

theoreticians in the research on the art of our times”, who has written a “fascinating book”.<sup>4</sup> His conception was to have constituted a reply to the crisis of the concept of style, and above all, an attempt to overcome the paradigm of stylistic unity of periods and the single-file march of styles throughout history.<sup>5</sup> He was able to show that at every moment of history there co-exist numerous developmental sequences which create, as it were, bundles of tradition; and thus a single art product contains forms which are descended from the earlier phases of evolution, that is, it is not possible to create a monograph of a single object, without taking into consideration the above-mentioned sequences.<sup>6</sup> He introduced the concepts of “prime objects” and their “replicas” which hark back to them, in this way creating a category which is in some way similar to Braudel’s “longue durée”, and in this way created the possibility of classifying, e.g., the Polish sepulchral dome chapels from the period of the Renaissance, with the Sigismund Chapel as a “prime object”.<sup>7</sup> Finally, he prepared instruments which enabled one to analyze and understand the functioning of the concepts of tradition and innovation.<sup>8</sup>

All of the above-quoted arguments (except the comparison to Braudel) had already been presented in the review of *The Shape of Time*.<sup>9</sup> Thus Jan Białostocki’s attitude toward Kubler’s theory was entirely positive, regardless of some critical comments, mainly regarding his evaluation of iconology. Thus, one is bound to ask, what had caused Białostocki’s fascination?

II.

Sergiusz Michalski once remarked that Białostocki was not a typical iconologist. In his substantial academic output, there is no “single study which would take up an analysis of the multi-image or multi-thematic decoration... for the professor... preferred short studies of the iconographic type – to mention, such excellent studies as, for instance *Puer sufflans ignes* on the motif of ‘*Esilio Privato*’, or a study on the motif of the ‘*Door of Death*’ in the sepulchral sculpture, both of which were based on partial findings or quite narrowly defined topics”.<sup>10</sup> In reality, the majority of Białostocki’s iconographic studies have concrete and quite precisely defined topics; nonetheless, in most cases, the researcher’s goal here was not to explain a single work of art, but to present a reconstruction of a sequence of transformations which themes had undergone in the course of their existence. In his review of Kubler’s book, Białostocki remarked that iconography scholars may also be interested in “sequences of solutions”, particularly when they “try to find out how the same idea or the same myth used to be expressed by art at various moments”.<sup>11</sup> Thus although in the case of “the door of death”, it was the Warsaw tomb of Jan Tarło that became the pretext for the article, yet its final version showed the presence of the motif from antiquity up to the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Giorgione’s painting had stimulated deliberations on the transformations of the character of Judith from the time of the Middle Ages to the period of Art Nouveau.<sup>13</sup> The focus on the process of “longue durée” is best visible

<sup>4</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: “Alt” und “Neu” in der Kunstgeschichte. In: *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen*, 20, 1975.

<sup>5</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Pojęcia i problemy współczesnej historii sztuki [The Concepts and Problems in Contemporary History of Art]. In: *RiS* I, pp. 9-22; HSWNH, pp. 48-50.

<sup>6</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Rokoko: ornament, styl i postawa [Rococo: Ornament, Style and Attitude]. In: *RiS* I, pp. 168-169; BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: O faktach i uogólnieniach w historii sztuki [On Facts and Generalizations in Art History]. In: *RiS* I, pp. 252-253; HSWNH, pp. 49-51.

<sup>7</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI 1975 (see in note 4); BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: *Renesans polski i renesans europejski* [The Polish and the European Renaissance]. In: *RiS* I, p. 42; BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: *The Art of the Renaissance in Eastern Europe. Hungary, Bohemia, Poland*. Oxford [a.o.] 1976; HSWNH, pp. 51, 78.

<sup>8</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI 1975 (see in note 4); BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: *Tradycja i innowacja* [Tradition and Innovation]. In: *RiS* II, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Review of Kubler, pp. 135-137.

<sup>10</sup> MICHALSKI 1999 (see in note 2), pp. 57, 58.

<sup>11</sup> Review of Kubler, p. 138.

<sup>12</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: *The Door of Death: Survival of a Classical Motif in Sepulchral Art*. In: *MI*, pp. 14-41.

<sup>13</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: *Judith: The Story, the Image, and the Symbol. Giorgione’s Painting in the Evolution of the Theme*. In: *MI*, pp. 113-131.

in the author's study of the Nereids in the Sigismund Chapel. The narration does not begin here with the titular chapel, but with a presentation of ancient sarcophaguses with the images of the so called sea *Thiasos*, which makes the Cracow low reliefs but a chain in the centuries-long iconographic sequence.<sup>14</sup> The article devoted to the issue of *vanitas* is an example of the author's ambition to present a single issue in a comprehensive and exhaustive way.<sup>15</sup> The crowning of the thus conceived studies could be a history of art as seen from the iconographic perspective;<sup>16</sup> the latter approach was postulated by the scholar who had even presented its tentative outline.<sup>17</sup>

Thus Jan Białostocki was focused on great and vast issues which recur throughout history. He was interested in categories that are capable of capturing the historical processes in their most general and fundamental forms, such as "*longue durée*", or "*tradition and innovation*".<sup>18</sup> He wrote about "*facts and generalizations*" in art history, about replicas and copies, about symmetry in visual arts as well as about ways of presenting time as carriers of meaning.<sup>19</sup> The conception of the encompassing theme also constituted an attempt to work out a general iconographic category which would be capable of explaining the persistent recurrence of certain formal presentations; it did so by pointing out to a permanent link between composi-

tion and the expressed idea, regardless of the detailed theme of a concrete work of art.<sup>20</sup> Białostocki often undertook to carry out syntheses of controversial or contentious problems which often possessed vast literary sources that were contradictory in their conclusions. Such was the origin of his studies devoted to Late Gothic, Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo or Romanticism.<sup>21</sup> In the above studies, Białostocki always drew attention to the pluralism of the analyzed phenomena; he pointed to their polymorphic character, to the co-existence of innovative and traditionalist tendencies in them. He also tried to prove that history, and in particular the history of the human thought and creativity, is never one-dimensional and that it is impossible for one to present it in the form of a single, all-explaining formula.

Thinking in global categories and trying to introduce order into general phenomena, the scholar needed concepts that would be able to ensure the right tectonics to the erected edifice. He thought about them already in the 1950s and getting acquainted with Kubler's book only assured him that he was heading in the right direction. In a treatise devoted to traditions and iconographic transformations, he, among others, wrote: "*But once the images, stories and allegories are created, they begin to live their own lives. It is a continual conflict between the forces of tradition*

<sup>14</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: The Sea-Thiasos in Renaissance Sepulchral Art. In: *Studies in Renaissance and Baroque Art Presented to Anthony Blunt on His 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday*. London [a.o.] 1967, pp. 69-74.

<sup>15</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Vanitas: z dziejów obrazowania idei "marności" i "przemijania" w poezji i sztuce [Vanitas: On the History of the Presentation of the Concepts of "Vanity" and "Passing" in Poetry and Art]. In: *TiT*, pp. 105-136.

<sup>16</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Romantische Ikonographie. In: BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: *Stil und Ikonographie*. Köln 1981, p. 214.

<sup>17</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Skizze einer Geschichte der beabsichtigten und der interpretierenden Ikonographie. In: KAMMERLING, E. (ed.): *Ikonographie und Ikonologie. Theorien – Entwicklung – Probleme: Bildende Kunst als Zeichensystem*. Vol. 1. Köln 1979, pp. 16-42.

<sup>18</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI 1987 (see in note 8), pp. 11-17.

<sup>19</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: O faktach i uogólnieniach historii sztuki [On Facts and Generalizations in Art History]. In: *RiS I*, pp.

247-254; BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: O replikach i kopiach – dawniej i dziś [On Replicas and Copies – In the Old Times and Today]. In: *RiS II*, pp. 225-233; BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Uwagi o symetrii w sztukach wizualnych [Some Comments on Symmetry in Visual Arts]. In: *RiS II*, pp. 62-69; BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Modi di rappresentare il tempo nelle arti visive come veicoli del significato. In: *Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Roberto Salvini*. Firenze 1984, pp. 589-594.

<sup>20</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Encompassing Themes and Archetypal Images. In: *Arte Lombarda*, 10, 1965, pp. 275-284.

<sup>21</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Spory o późny gotyk [Arguments Concerning Late Gothic]. In: *SiMH*, pp. 93-118; BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Pojęcie manieryzmu i sztuka polska [The Concept of Mannerism and Polish Art]. In: *5W*, pp. 190-211; BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Two Types of International Mannerism: Italian and Northern. In: *Umění*, 18, 1970, pp. 105-109; BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Rokoko: ornament, styl i postawa [Rococo: Ornament, Style and Attitude]. In: *RiS I*, pp. 158-177; BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Romantyzm malarski w Polsce i w Europie [Romanticism in Painting in Poland and Europe]. In: *RiS I*, pp. 80-89.

and innovation. In fact there are no images, in which some form of iconographic transformation has not taken place, except these very first images 'prototypes' that constitute the first mature visual presentation of some idea. Just as there exist typical images, iconographic 'types', there also exist formal 'types', and one might say that an analogous phenomenon relating to transformations can also be observed in the field of formal development. Only the 'prototypes', the stylistic 'archetypes', such as the Gothic choir in Ile-de-France toward the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, like the Florentine palace dating back to the era of quattrocento, like Raphael's Madonna, a Palladian villa or a Roman Baroque church, they constitute pure, typical and 'prime' stylistic creations."<sup>22</sup> The above treatise was published only once in *Teoria i twórczość* (Theory and Creativity). It appeared about a year before the publication of Kubler's book. Yet, in the treatise, we can come across categories which are very similar to the ones introduced by the American scholar. Białostocki wrote about the pure "first" creations, from which series of subsequent works are descended; he wrote about iconographic types which are subject to transformations and in which one can discover traces of former decisions; he also wrote about the continual struggle between tradition and innovation throughout history. While dealing with iconography, he also mentioned similar phenomena which occurred within the formal structure of works of art. In this way, he was fully prepared to accept such terms as "prime objects and replicas", "invention and transformation", "replication", "form sequences", "rejection and preservation" or "quick and slow events".<sup>23</sup>

### III.

Thus we can say that Jan Białostocki thought in a systemic way which allowed him to become fascinated with *The Shape of Time*. In his review, he emphasized the systemic character of Kubler's reflections, stating that his book had grown out of a tendency to

"find points of view from which the whole world of human art can be grasped as a visual manifestation of human history".<sup>24</sup> However, Białostocki himself was the author of the article entitled "W pogoni za schematem. Usiłowania systematycznej historii sztuki" (In Pursuit of a Paradigm. An Attempt to Present a Systemic Art History) which had appeared a few years earlier. Already the very use of the words "pursuit" and "attempt" in the title of the article betrayed its critical and polemic tone. The young author opposed the attempts aimed at the discovery of a simple, "a few beat rhythm of art history", and presenting the foundations of art in the form of binary oppositions of the type: classical – non-classical or classical – primitive.<sup>25</sup> Whereas in his article he did not oppose attempts to create a comprehensive, systemic vision of art history. "Is it not right," he asked, "to find types of artistic expression that are specific and common to various artists due to their similar mental constitution and a similar milieu, understood in the widest possible way? For it is not only the mind of the perceiver that has a tendency to come up with classifying interpretations – the mind of the artist is also human and thus, the created work should be commensurate with classifying interpretations which we would like to find in it."<sup>26</sup> The author rejected exclusively simplified and schematic interpretations; he stated that a characteristic feature of art history is "a permanent coexistence of various strivings and tendencies with an unquestioned predominance of some of them in certain periods", and that "no single period in art history obtains an absolute and unattainable homogeneity in all of its artistic endeavors".<sup>27</sup> Therefore already in the 1940s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he observed a need for a pluralist view of the history of the art process and he postulated that such a system should be built in the future. "It is a painstaking process," he concluded, "and a one which does not produce such dazzling or alluring effects as the ones with which the two or three-beat systems appear to dazzle us. The number of elements will be bigger here; there will be more combinations and links, and even more resultant forms – but

<sup>22</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Tradycje i przekształcenia ikonograficzne [Traditions and Iconographic Transformations]. In: *TiT*, pp. 139-140.

<sup>23</sup> KUBLER 1962 (see in note 1), *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> Review of Kubler, p. 135.

<sup>25</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: W pogoni za schematem. Usiłowania systematycznej historii sztuki [In Pursuit of a Paradigm. An Attempt to Present a Systemic Art History]. In: *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, 9, 1947, pp. 225-239.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 238.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 238.

*the results will be more certain, less arbitrary and more perfect. The material itself should provide us with a leading thread. Whereas the combination of various attitudes and preferences should allow us to create works of art that are more intricate in their infinite variety.*"<sup>28</sup>

#### IV.

An inclination to think systemically so as to encompass the analyzed reality in its entire complexity could also be perceived in Jan Białostocki's views on the methodology of the discipline which he had practiced. In his work entitled *Historia sztuki wśród nauk humanistycznych* (History of Art among Other Humanistic Disciplines), he tried to "reconcile" various contradictory views and opinions, and derive some important and useful lesson from each one; whereas views which he regarded as harmful or dangerous to further development of research on art were simply neutralized by him. He opposed tendencies to depreciate iconology on the grounds that a critique and rejection of iconology were equivalent to undermining the uniform theoretical foundations of the entire discipline.<sup>29</sup> Agreeing that "every method of interpretation has its limits", and that "its might is not eternal", Białostocki argued that the "methods shaped and implemented into everyday practice, in reality never die. For each of them constitutes a tool which opens up some aspect of history. It is only all of these methods taken together which create a researcher's arsenal."<sup>30</sup> Talking about a crisis of his profession, he referred to a lack of a general theory which "is necessary for a scientific discipline to operate in an effective way" as well as a lack of "any norm, in accordance with which it could shape its evaluating opinions".<sup>31</sup> Thus the crisis was for him a consequence of a weakening of the system and a lack of universal principles. That is why, his wish to "reconcile" and piece together various methodological approaches was not so much the result of his own academic practice, but of a striving to preserve and strengthen the entire structure of art

history. Yet this attempt had only led to the postulate of methodological eclecticism. The fullest and most exhaustive exposition of this method is presented in the above-quoted book. "History of art," Białostocki wrote in the last sub-chapter of his book, "is a complex discipline. It consists of many research methods of a different character, different origin and is sometimes closely bound up with other disciplines of knowledge. These fibrous bundles represent different ages and in this the history of art reminds one of the object of its research, that is art itself."<sup>32</sup> The metaphor of "fibrous bundles" comes from *The Shape of Time* and was cited in the second chapter of *History of Art among Other Humanistic Disciplines*: "... we can imagine the flow of time as assuming the shapes of fibrous bundles, with each fiber corresponding to a need... and lengths of the fibers varying as to the duration of each need and the solution to its problems."<sup>33</sup> Yet the sense of the metaphor had been altered by Białostocki. For while the American wrote about the pluralism of traditions occurring, at the same moment the Polish scholar tried to say something about the research methods. For Kubler, a bundle was yet another term relating to the *shape* of time; by resorting to it, one could describe past events, whereas Białostocki saw in it a joining together of heterogeneous attitudes. Yet the present does not have to be a bundle; the contemporary times do not have to assume any particular shape; they only define the simultaneous character of earthly existence. Neighborhood does not guarantee a community, and therefore various methodologies may equally well complement each other, like an analysis of historical sources, identification of style and iconographic interpretation, or exclude and clash with each other. When treated in a general way, the metaphor of a bundle becomes therefore a kind of an alibi for eclecticism, a rhetorical rescue for the system which in reality is not based on solid foundations. The edifice which was so carefully being erected in *History of Art among Other Humanistic Disciplines* was in reality a colossus on clay feet.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 239.

<sup>29</sup> BRYL, M.: Czy samobójstwo teorii historii sztuki? O "Bildwissenschaft", bałkanizacji, polskim kontekście i suwerenności sztuki [Suicide of the Theory of Art History? On "Bildwissenschaft", Balkanization, Polish Context and Independence of Art]. In: *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, 26, 2001, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> HSWNH, pp. 30-31.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, pp. 28-29.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 130.

<sup>33</sup> KUBLER 1962 (see in note 1), p. 122.

It seems that Białostocki's failure to construct a methodological system of art history was caused by paradigmatic conditionings. In the year 1970, Polish philosopher and catholic priest Józef Tischner published an article entitled "Schyłek chrześcijaństwa tomistycznego" (Decline of Thomist Christianity), thereby initiating a ten-year long stormy philosophical debate. One of the arguments which he used concerned the continual efforts of Thomism to create a closed and exhaustive system which would constitute a synthesis of "*Christian revelation and the findings of science and philosophy*".<sup>34</sup> Yet, according to the author, "*explanatory syntheses*" were a thing of the past; they belonged to a different epoch. For although "*explanatory syntheses*", he wrote, "*allowed one to think about a subject, yet they did not allow one to get to know it*".<sup>35</sup> This diagnosis was to some extent in accord with Lyotard's report on the state of knowledge of 1979. Thinking, that is story-telling, and "*Grand Narrative*" were receding into the shadow. What began to count now in science and learning was concrete cognition, that is, effectiveness.<sup>36</sup> Art history had also experienced its time of "*Grand Narrative*". It was associated with the formalist attitude, when it was art understood in general terms<sup>37</sup> that was regarded as the aim of research. The methodological approaches proposed by Riegl, Wölfflin or Focillon allowed one to tell long stories about stylistic transformations and to think in terms of the category of *Kunstwollen*, of "*pure vision*" or independent "*life of forms*", yet they did not provide sufficient instruments to penetrate into an individual work of art. Kubler's book seems to belong to this way of interpreting art history. Although the author wanted to deal with the "*history of things*", he was not interested in the functional aspects of objects (such as the traditional history of material

culture), nor – God forbid – in their cultural sense (which constitutes the nucleus of research of contemporary anthropology).<sup>38</sup> From things he distilled their visual form, treating it as the titular "*shape of time*". Yet by doing so, he founded his methodology on an irrational, illusory "mental" category which was perceptible only through the consequences of activity. *Time* is to be recorded in the form of *shape*. Therefore, we are returning to Focillon and his conceptions. Yet through the formula of "*life of forms*", we are going back even further in time, to the concept of *Lebensphilosophie*, for which life was perceptible not directly, but exclusively, as Dilthey wrote, "*through its externalizations*".<sup>39</sup> Similarly, one could get to know *Kunstwollen* exclusively indirectly, through works of art.

The new approach resigned from systematic ambitions, focusing on the individual work of art. In his review of Kubler, Białostocki wrote that "*iconology deals with individual works of art. History of things deals with sequences, the solving of problems, with prime objects and replications. Iconology tries to find out how the unique meaning is expressed through the unique form in a selected work. For the 'history of things', one work is of little interest: it is its chains, sequences, and general laws ruling its relations with other works – invention, replication, retention and discard – that form the object of research.*"<sup>40</sup> It was not important at that point whether and to what extent iconology was really able to focus on the uniqueness of the individual works of art, for it rather quickly dissolved them in the cosmos of culture, that is, it reverted to "*Grand Narratives*". The essential thing was that in the above-cited fragment, Białostocki drew attention to the effectiveness of becoming acquainted with a single painting or sculpture and thereby shed light on the bipolar character of his own approach.

<sup>34</sup> TISCHNER, J.: Schyłek chrześcijaństwa tomistycznego [Decline of Thomist Christianity]. In: TISCHNER, J.: *Myslenie według wartości* [Thinking by Values]. Kraków 1982, p. 222.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 223.

<sup>36</sup> LYOTARD, J.-F.: *The Postmodern Condition*. Manchester 1984, chapters 8-11.

<sup>37</sup> That is how I understand the sense of the concept of "*Grand Narrative*". – LOCHER, H.: *Kunstgeschichte als historische Theorie der Kunst, 1750 – 1950*. München 2001.

<sup>38</sup> BARAŃSKI, J.: *Świat rzeczy. Zarys antropologiczny* [The World of Things. An Anthropological Outline]. Kraków 2007, pp. 7-32.

<sup>39</sup> DILTHEY, W.: Typy światopoglądów ich rozwinięcie w systemach metafizycznych [Types of Outlooks and Their Development in Various Metaphysical Systems]. In: DILTHEY, W.: *O istocie filozofii i inne pisma* [On the Nature of Philosophy and Other Writings]. Warszawa 1987, p. 120.

<sup>40</sup> Review of Kubler, p. 138.

A continuation of the above citation can be seen in the scholar's opinion concerning the presence of sequences in the meditations on iconography. Thus while opting out for an interpretation of individual art phenomena, the author at the same time did not want to lose touch with the total historical process, with the "life story" of art objects. He wanted to combine a microscopic vision with the panoramic view. Maybe just like Tischner's adversaries, he was vexed by the bleak vision of the world devoid of a rigid framework of the system – of an incomplete and fragmentary image. But the time of great syntheses was definitely over. Jan Białostocki was aware that a "certain period in art history had come to a close".

He spoke about this during the discussion in Rogalin on the 14 November 1973. Unfortunately, neither then nor later in his life did he specify what this closing consisted in, except for a single statement that "theoretical reflection is born when we look at issues that are already closed, as it were from beyond the caesura which had taken place".<sup>41</sup> That is why he continued to strive to construct a comprehensive system of theoretical foundations for the whole discipline, whereas a symbol of his attempts to catch up with the receding system was the metaphor of the bundle – a complex of methods that were bound exclusively by their temporal proximity.

<sup>41</sup> BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: [voice in the discussion]. In: *Interpretacja dzieła sztuki. Studia i dyskusje* [The Interpretation of the Work of Art. Studies and Discussions]. Warszawa – Poznań 1976, p. 196.

\* The original Polish text – "Jan Białostocki a George Kubler. W pogoni za systemem" – was published in *Białostocki. Materiały z Seminarium Metodologicznego Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki "Jan Białostocki – między tradycją a innowacją"*. Ed. Magdalena WRÓBLEWSKA. Warszawa 2009, pp. 77-85.

## Jan Białostocki a George Kubler. Pokus o prekonanie systému

### Resumé

Publikácia *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven – London 1962), ktorej autorom je George Kubler, sa začína aj končí útokom na ikonológiu. Vedecká metóda založená na Cassirerovej filozofii symbolických foriem viedla podľa Kublera k zjednodušeniam, vytesňujúcim zo skúmania všetko, čo nesúvisí s morfológiou umeleckého diela. Záujem Jana Białostockeho práve o túto prácu vplyvného amerického historika umenia preto bol a stále je prekvapujúcim faktom.

Recenzia zmienenej publikácie, ktorú Białostocki vydal v časopise *The Art Bulletin*, obsahovala popri dominantných ikonologických reflexiách aj množstvo pochvalných vyjadrení na adresu jej autora. Recenzent tu pravdepodobne zvolil ten najjednoduchší kritický prístup, redukovateľný na tri základné kroky – zhrnúť, vyzdvihnúť, kritizovať. Poľské vydanie recenzie a predovšetkým frekvencia a spôsob citácií *The Shape of Time* v štúdiách zo 60. a 70. rokov však túto možnosť sponchybnujú. Białostocki sa v nich snažil formulovať odpovede na krízu konceptu štýlu a prekonať paradigmy štýlovej jednoty jednotlivých

historických období a priamej štýlovej postupnosti v priebehu dejín. Dokázal, že v každom okamihu koexistuje množstvo vývojových sekvencií, tvoriacich „zväzky“ tradícií. Umelecké dielo obsahuje formy odvoditeľné zo skorších fáz vývoja a jeho monografiu nie je preto bez ich reflexie možné spracovať. Predstavil koncepty „prvotných objektov“ a ich „replík“, kategórie v niektorých aspektoch blízke Braudelovmu „*longue durée*“. Ich prostredníctvom bola umožnená klasifikácia napríklad poľských kulpových pohrebných kaplniek z obdobia renesancie s krakovskou Žigmundovou kaplnkou ako ich „prvotným objektom“. Napokon, Białostocki pripravil aj nástroje pre analýzu a pochopenie fungovania konceptov tradície a inovácie.

Všetky vyššie citované argumenty (okrem porovnania s Braudelom) sa objavili už v spomenutej recenzii Kublerovej publikácie. Predkladaná štúdia sa preto podrobnejšie venuje dôvodom Białostockeho zaujatia Kublerovým dielom, paralelám a odlišnostiam ich prístupov.

Preklad z angličtiny M. Hrdina