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CHANGE, BREAK, CRISIS, OR FULGURATION – WHAT IS A TURN IN ART?

Abstract: The aim of the article is to find the main determinants of the changes/transformations in art that would satisfy the necessary conditions for defining some phenomenon as a 'turn'. The first part of the study presents some attempts to specify the nature of a cultural turn, and the methodological positions offered by the contemporary humanities. The point of departure here is the conception of Doris Bachmann-Medick. Assuming that the inflation of cultural turns is a signal of profound change, we will ask about the impact of such processes on art. It is not a question of the response of art to changes, but of art as a fragment of the changed reality. In this context, the article refers to Umberto Eco's concept of art as an epistemological metaphor of reality and Mieczysław Wallis's theory of continuity/discontinuity, or gradual and abrupt changes in art. The concepts characteristic of the early stages of modern consciousness have been tested according to the criteria for the contemporary understanding of transformation in art, termed 'a turn'. For this purpose, we have considered the different meanings of the concept of 'change/transformation' and of the concept of 'turn'. The material used as an example is the history of the reception of Art Nouveau, and the problem of radicalness of the avant-garde turn. The final part of the study discusses different uses of the concept of turn, employed in art in recent years. Two 'turns' have been distinguished; an affective turn, linked with the somatic one, and a social turn. Both of them can be treated as constituents of a culture-wide turn: the performative turn. The postulated direction of the research on contemporary turns in art is finding a new formula of esthetic experience.

Keywords: turn, transformation, radical change, negative and positive crises, continuity and discontinuity in art, contemporary art.

The concept of a turn has become an attractive research category in the humanities in recent years. It is used so often that it is difficult to imagine descriptions and analyses in academic research and culture without the employment of this tool. The concept is usually evoked when another turn occurs, to confirm that the change going on at a particular moment satisfies

the necessary conditions to be called a turn. The academic sources in various disciplines of the humanities in recent decades use the concept to describe all kinds of changes. They would talk about linguistic, anthropological, iconic, interpretive, narrative, dramatic, or topographic turns. The term also applies to the changes observed at the intersection of many research fields – e.g. cognitive, pragmatic, ethical or performative turns. Finally, the concept is used as a general category to define the cultural turn. It should be stressed at the outset that the semantic fields of the foregoing and other turns overlap and often spread from one discipline into others; in time, many of them become universal categories signaling the direction of the changes in the whole of culture. The large number of turns made the German philosopher and culture studies scholar Doris Bachmann-Medick attempt to define a cultural turn. This scholar maintains that the number of turns in the humanities since the mid 20th century has been so large that we can speak of an upheaval or even revolution in the studies on culture. The mechanism of the turns is similar in most cases: each new turn focuses on the cultural discourses and practices that were formerly negligibly present or marginalized. When the previously suppressed problems are introduced into the area of cultural research, a new language with its metaphors and its accompanying research tools emerges. The attraction of the studies conducted as part of such a turn consists, inter alia, in the freedom of moving between research areas without having to respect the traditional, obligatory division.¹ The greatest advantage of Bachmann-Medick's book is the attempt to give the category of turn a different meaning than that established in our culture. After all, it is not new, especially since the emergence of the linguistic turn, which, by opposing the time-honored tradition of *Geisteswissenschaften*, “the sciences of the spirit”, was quickly recognized as the cultural turn. Criticism of the linguistic trend and its consequences subsequently became part of the postmodern campaign against Grand Narratives. Bachmann-Medick proposes to replace this generalized concept of a turn by its understanding as an observable trend/direction, a research project, which, with time, makes the studied phenomenon a tool of analysis. For example, theorists in many disciplines focused attention on the category of space, thereby making space the key concept in interdisciplinary research combining different viewpoints. These two features – the transformation of an investigated phenomenon into an analytical category, and interdisciplinarity, give a research trend the character of a turn. There are many turns in culture; therefore, the concept of the cultural turn should be avoided.

¹ Cf. D. Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. Nowe kierunki w naukach o kulturze*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2012. Originally published as *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt 2006.

Relationships between turns understood as characteristic trends intersecting the tissue of culture may be stronger or weaker; they develop between sometimes very distant research areas with different traditions and methodological background. "Each trend has its own features but none of them exists separately, they all exist in mutual contact, having irremovable features of *hybridity*".² Bachmann-Medick's conception was an answer to the need for creating new research instruments that would grasp the observable changes in the humanities.

Scholars have long had doubts whether within the humanities we can speak of turns in the sense of pragmatic changes, i.e. such models of transformation that lead to complete breaking off with the language, tools, and research practices within a given discipline. Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm is not easily compatible with the humanities, in which ideas change positions, influenced by new research schools, rather than die out altogether, replaced by others. The authors of the Polish publication on turns (which, incidentally, appeared before the translation of Doris Bachmann-Medick's book) compare the image of the humanities with many turns to Lotman's semiosphere, which is "full of co-existing languages, intersecting at different levels or even incommensurate with one another, which compete for recognition in the area of contemporary culture".³ The paradigmatic concept of "turn" would be, in this understanding, a kind of "strong" turn, apart from which there would be "weak" turns within the binding paradigm. As can be seen, describing the situation in the humanities by means of the concept of turn is not easy and makes it necessary to revise the meanings established in the history of academic thought. From this point of view, Bachmann-Medick's suggestion that a turn should be understood as "directed narrative with a medium range" appears to be devoid of the problems attributed to grand narratives and paradigms that "excessively uniformize the living field of cultural events and processes."⁴

Almost all the authors who use the concept of turn as an analytical category are aware that the variability of turns is a reaction to that "living field of cultural events". I agree with the opinion that "we are witnessing the emergence of a new style of thinking – one whose dynamics and range is growing stronger".⁵ The authors of the cited publication point out that as late as in 1968 the

² S. Krzemiń-Ojak, „Nowy przewodnik po współczesnych naukach o kulturze”, [A New Guide to Contemporary Cultural Sciences] *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy*, Selected texts of 2012, Part A, p. 184.

³ J. Kowalewski, W. Piasek, eds., „Zwroty” *badawcze w humanistyce. Konteksty poznawcze, kulturowe i społeczno-instytucjonalne*, [Research “Turns” in the Humanities. Cognitive, Cultural and Socio-Institutional Contexts], IF Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie, Olsztyn 2010, p. 10.

⁴ S. Krzemiń-Ojak, op. cit., p. 187.

⁵ J. Kowalewski, W. Piasek, op. cit., p. 1.

dictionary of Polish, edited by Witold Doroszewski, did not list the meaning of “turn” as “a significant, distinct change, variety, a new trend” and they conclude that we may be dealing with a change in viewing the world.

If changes are indeed so deep and their scale so large, then we should ask about the impact of such processes on art. It is not a question of the response of art to changes, but of art as a fragment of the changed reality. As Umberto Eco aptly puts it, art is an epistemological metaphor of the world we live in, which means that we are dealing with the “structural resolutions” or “a widespread theoretical consciousness (not of a particular theory so much as of an acquired cultural viewpoint)”. They represent “the repercussion, within formative activity, of certain ideas acquired from contemporary scientific methodologies”. It is “part of the poetics of the artists themselves”.⁶ This poetics of a widespread theoretical consciousness should naturally be understood in terms of analogy rather than reflection. The next reservation applies to Eco himself, who, as a writer and theorist at the same time, is not an exemplar of the functioning of the academic-methodological principles in artistic creativity. Nevertheless, it might be in order to refer to the concept of epistemological metaphor, which defines the relationships between the changes in science, popular consciousness, and in art because this concept is the product of a certain stage of the modern period.

To let us see which aspects of changes are particularly visible in artistic structures, Eco lists the features of the modern period that show its dynamism and quick pace of development, compelling scientific theories to be constantly verified, and thereby prompting changes in art. In his description Eco employs concepts that are part of the semantic field of the term ‘turn’, without explicitly using it. What he uses are the categories of transition, evolution, constant change, and transformation. He applies the concept of revolution to science, but only when speaking of the breakdown of all classical values. Obviously, the histories of a concept and of a phenomenon do not necessarily have to be parallel, but certain reflections on the different temporal horizon then (in the past) and now arise of themselves. It might seem that Eco, the theorist of the neo-avant-garde, would have many reasons for describing transformations in art in terms of a turn, as a radical change. However, the descriptions of changes in art are based on distinct philosophical assumptions, which suggest opposition against change as the break of continuity in art. I will use a short excerpt, which is a summary of the article by the French painter Georges Mathieu. It seems to be characteristic of Eco’s style of thinking and, I believe, the style of many

⁶ U. Eco, *Dzieło otwarte. Forma i nieokreśloność w poetykach współczesnych*, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1994, p. 165. [English citations: *The Open Work*, Harvard University Press, p. 87].

theorists of the 1960s. "The painter tries to retrace the progress of Western civilization from the ideal to the real, from the real to the abstract, and from the abstract to the possible (...) According to Matthieu the evolution of forms is parallel to that of scientific concepts."⁷ It is not difficult to predict how a text with a similar context would be read by a contemporary theorist. There is no room here to study in detail the differences in the philosophical background of the theorists of Eco's generation and the scholars who started their creative work already after or during the postmodernist debate. On their scholarly path, both of them had to cope with epistemological modernism, take a stand on Thomas Kuhn's or W. O. Quine's naturalist epistemology, to be finally convinced (or not) by the postmodernist, pragmatist perspective of the philosophy of science, most fully represented by Richard Rorty. I am thinking of a general cultural debate rather than specialist discourses within the humanities, including art theory. It seems that Eco's position on structuralism and art theory only signals the confrontation between the theory of representation and the language of the language games theory. In contrast, the advocates of turns in science and art confirm the exhaustion of the debate using the "old" language which has lost its attraction because it no longer provides satisfying descriptions of the dynamically changing reality. The concept of the turn belongs to the "new" language. Regardless of the understanding of a turn, this concept has become established for good in the language of academia in recent decades. Should the overproduction of "turns" be regarded as a kind of sign of the times? Or is this a sign of the incompatibility of the cultural areas between which there is no flow of ideas, and which, consequently, mark their development with turns to signal their existence? Should we seek the common causes of extensive and deep processes taking place in culture or should we treat the inflation of the term as a manifestation of the late modern game, this time of turns?

The concept of a turn in art appears even less precise than its analogous use in science. Are we dealing with turns in art and in what sense? Are the turns in the sphere of theories and their derivative concepts in the widespread theoretical consciousness reflected in contemporary artistic creativity? To answer such questions, we should first identify the concept of "change", or "transformation" present in all semantic fields of the term "turn". "Change" is a weaker term than "turn", and it recurs in the language of art history and esthetics. It is rather a descriptive term, and it is only in specific contexts that it acquires a positively or negatively evaluative meaning. This usually happens when we add to it an adjective that defines the degree or extent of the change. A radical change is closer to a turn, and like a sudden change, it suggests a break. The

⁷ Ibid, p. 88 [for English citation].

Polish aesthetician Mieczysław Wallis complemented the question of a break or continuity with an otherwise modern remark about the need to recognize different competing concepts of the history of art. The history of art cannot be understood as one continuous process, as the history of one artistic tradition. In the article *O ciągłości i nieciągłości (Ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ciągłości i nieciągłości w dziejach sztuki)* [On Continuity and Discontinuity (With a Special Emphasis on Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Art)] Wallis tried to determine whether sudden transitions, for example from one architectural style to another, correspond to sudden transitions or even upheavals in the social and economic fields. Do such transitions involve changes in all domains of culture? This article, once banned by Communist censorship, is worth recalling. Although it was included in the volume of Wallis's selected writings⁸ several years ago, it still does not function in the literature on the subject, although it could be useful in the discussion on the concept of "turn" in art. The Polish aesthetician introduced the distinction of the processes by means of which we describe transformations in art.

He proposed to distinguish between continuity and discontinuity, and gradualness and abruptness (change by leaps and bounds) in the history of art, and he analyzed some examples of changes in the history of fine arts, mainly in architecture, using these very categories. While referring sporadically to those still interesting analyses of the particular changes in style, I will confine myself to presenting the author's general analytical remarks. According to Wallis, continuity or discontinuity in the history of art is first of all the continuity or discontinuity of artistic tradition. It consists in passing down both material products of creative activity, and the ability to commune with them: to correctly perceive, comprehend and interpret works of art, and to impart a certain amount of knowledge and ability necessary for creating such objects.⁹ We can speak of continuity in the history of art in the strict sense when we mean the passing down of a certain range of themes and motifs, and consciously developing them. Wallis believed that each of the foregoing aspects may involve both continuity and discontinuity. We can speak of a radical break of continuity when one tradition entirely drives out another tradition in all its dimensions. According to Wallis, it would be only in this sense that we would be dealing with a genuine turn. He himself did not use the concept.

Closer to the contemporary concept of a turn, used in the humanities e.g. by Doris Bachmann-Medick, would be the transformations described by Wallis as continuity/ discontinuity resulting from the intersection of different traditions.

⁸ M. Wallis, *Wybór pism estetycznych* [Selected Aesthetic Writings], Introduced, selected and edited by T. Pękala, Universitas, Kraków 2004, pp. 80-86.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

A new quality then emerges, involving a continuation of the selected aspects of those traditions, and a break with some of the others. Wallis gives the example of Greco-Indian sculpture – so-called Gandhara art, or Gothic-Moorish architecture – so-called Mudejar style.¹⁰ Interrelationships, influences, and relations can embrace many traditions at once. Wallis’s reflection on continuity in art history was oriented in a different direction than the inquiries of contemporary critics, and it serves here only as an example of organized auxiliary categories used in interpreting turns in art, such as change or radical change. This structuring is clearly absent from the discussions on what is (or is not) a turn in art. The concept of change or transformation in art is one of the most often cited determinants that characterize the turn.

Another pair of concepts that describe transitions between artistic forms is “gradualness” and “abruptness”. Wallis characterizes this kind of change arguing that “in the history of art there are both gradual transitions, a gentle flow of some forms into others, and abrupt transitions, the emergence of new forms that are not continuations of the previous forms, transitions by leaps (and not only in the case of an invasion of a style from outside)”.¹¹ He observes that in architecture, transition-period edifices were erected. “But these are all mixed-form buildings rather than structures with intermediate forms”.¹² If we can clearly distinguish Gothic and Renaissance components in a building, this does not show that one style is gradually transitioning into another. The absence of intermediate forms confirms that an abrupt change is taking place. A new original style is arising. There is no transition, Wallis writes, between the Romanesque and Gothic styles, and between the Gothic style and Renaissance style, whereas the Baroque gradually evolved into Rococo.

There is no room here for discussing whether Wallis’s vision of the history of art is right. I refer to the category of gradual and abrupt (i.e. by leaps) transitions as the conceptual tools which we can employ while characterizing changes in art. In an attempt to introduce order, as far as possible, into the conceptual chaos around the meaning of a turn in art, these basic determinants should be borne in mind. The preliminary observation summing up the survey of the already distinguished concepts, made with the awareness of the historical value of Wallis’s conception, is as follows. The break of continuity in the history of art is an exception, and if it does occur, it has the characteristics of a turn. In the history of art, both at the level of artistic practice and within its accompanying discourse, many changes occur at the same time, different traditions are combined, there are also stronger or weaker ties between art with its theory and

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 82.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 82-83.

¹² Ibid, p. 84.

the external domains of science, economy, politics, or religion. These important and necessary relativizations should be complemented with another one, to which we have been sensitized by hermeneutics: the perspective from which we make an assessment in terms of a transformation, a turn, or a break.

A very good example of a radical change in such assessments is the turn (I am using the term deliberately) in the views on Art Nouveau – from being regarded as a synonym of bad taste, it advanced to the status of “the dawn of the modern period”. I have written on this subject on many occasions, therefore there is no need here to repeat the arguments in favor of this position.¹³ I bring in the example of the reception of the *belle époque* art because of one more research tool, which is important in describing the change, transformation, and turn in art, i.e. the category of a crisis. Jan Białostocki regards crises in art as negative phenomena, with which I am not going to argue at this point, or as positive phenomena. Crises in the positive sense, as they are understood by René Thom, K. Burchardt, or Thomas Kuhn, contribute to the acceleration of the process of formulating new theories, new viewpoints, new values, and establishing new paradigms. Carl-Friedrich von Weizsäcker describes the “dazzling/lightning” moment, in which one perceives new roads and abruptly enters them, giving up previous habits, using the Leibnizian term *fulguration* (also employed by Konrad Lorenz). According to Jan Białostocki, the fulguration of modern art took place in the very beginning of the 20th century.¹⁴ Following Wallis and other art historians – there is no room here to discuss their conceptions – I have tried to demonstrate that it was the Art Nouveau movement that abruptly separated from the nineteenth-century tradition and appeared at the same time, around 1890, in different points of the globe: London, Chicago, Barcelona, or Brussels. The abruptness of its break with traditions and its large-scale spread in many independent centers has all the marks of a turn in art.

The example of Art Nouveau is important for the question already raised and requiring an answer. Can negative crises in one field co-occur with positive crises in another field? Jan Białostocki leans towards the view that although art responds to the crises occurring in other areas of life, “one seldom encounters a situation in which the whole area of artistic creativity would be disrupted by a crisis”.¹⁵ Sudden “fulgurations” contradict the thesis about the concurrence of the crises in art and in other spheres of life. This approach calls into question Umberto Eco’s historical conception about the analogy of the changes

¹³ T. Pękala, *Secesja. Concretizacje i interpretacje* [Art Nouveau. Concretizations and Interpretations], Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 1995.

¹⁴ J. Białostocki, *Kryzysy w sztuce* [Crises in Art], Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Lublin, grudzień 1985, PWN, Warszawa 1985, p. 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

in science and art and in the popular consciousness producing a characteristic *episteme* of the period, and it requires reserve in approaching the assumption that the problem of turns in art can be examined by analogy with the turns in the humanities in general. We should ask again: which of the accepted and acceptable meanings, or which of the semantic shades of the word “turn” could be reasonably applied to art? Let us begin with an example of a radical change which covers all fields of art.

While Art Nouveau may be an example of a “positive crisis” within art, which did not question its concept, the avant-garde is regarded as putting an end to the aesthetic paradigm in art. This thesis is not confirmed in all trends and in all periods, but the avant-garde did strongly disrupt this paradigm. There are many reasons to think that this was actually a change that, according to the present-day criteria, constituted a turn in art. It satisfied the criteria for both a turn as a radical change and the criteria set for the category of the turn in the humanities by Doris Bachmann-Medick. The range of influence of the avant-garde movements, the large number of the avant-gardes, the blurring of the boundaries between individual arts and artistic genres, and the combining of the means of expression of different arts resemble, by analogy, the conditions for cultural turns set by Bachmann-Medick. The avant-garde was indisputably a turn in culture, but it was also a radical breakthrough. Was it a medium-range turn or a turn in the paradigmatic sense, criticized as an inadequate criterion for the humanities? To answer the question of what kind of turn we are dealing with, we have to adopt a specific historiosophical strategy.

The assessment of the avant-garde in the political history of the contemporary world looks different than the recognition of its impact on the social/moral changes, its influence on the theories of culture and philosophy, let alone the role it played in intra-artistic transformations. The significance of the avant-garde for the history of modern art, and of the avant-garde discourse for aesthetics and other art sciences can be enlarged or diminished by presenting the avant-garde as a new kind of art, but also as a successive link in the chain of the history of artistic forms and ideas, or, from another perspective, by showing the avant-garde as anti-art deliberately opposing the artistic, and giving up its autonomy. What decides this issue is the historiosophical strategy: the analysis in terms of a “break”, “destruction”, “crisis”, or “long duration”, “common horizon of understanding”, “the spirit of the times”, or the favorite post-modernist strategy of interpreting art according to the rules of the heterogeneous “language games”. The perspective of discontinuity, focusing attention on the features clearly distinguishing the avant-garde from pre-avant-garde art - e.g. going beyond the area of art, anti-aestheticism, allows us to ask about the specificity of avant-garde attitudes combining the avant-garde, the neo-avant-garde, but also the proto-avant-garde or post-avant-garde. The analysis of genetic

determinants within this research strategy attributes the principal role in the origin of the avant-garde precisely to political, economic, and cultural antinomies of the modern period. The research perspective assuming the continuity between traditional art and the art of the Great Avant-garde points to the new approach to selected elements of tradition with the simultaneous negation of other elements. When we look today at the changes in art introduced by the avant-garde, from the perspective of a turn, we can arrive at the conclusion that just as with the application of the earlier categories, in this case it is the methodological choice that places (or not) the investigated facts within the traditional aesthetic paradigm. The historical avant-garde, in an individualizing interpretation, was a radical upheaval in modern art, which it deconstructed, and it was also a revolt that started the postmodern art. In the global sense, the avant-garde caused the most radical upheaval not so much in art as in thinking about art. It exposed the utopian idea of separating the moments of eyewitnessing (evidence) from intelligibility, and particularism from universalism, creation and language of forms. I abide by my opinion expressed elsewhere that the greatest merits of the avant-garde lie in starting not only debates focused on art, but also relevant philosophical discourses on the problems of human existence in the context of identity and difference, “dispute” and “game”, self-creation and responsibility.¹⁶

It is interesting to ask, in the context of the earlier discussion, how the avant-garde impulse ran out and whether the next “turn” was inevitable. “The avant-garde perceives the world as broken, filled with fragments, scraps of the past experiences”.¹⁷ This reflection, referring to the melancholic attitude of the avant-gardists, applies to the experiences of the second avant-garde, aware of the failure of their revolutionary intentions. In the assessments of the “avant-garde age” it was an undisputable point of reference for the subsequent changes. While discussing the subject of the role of the avant-garde and the arriere-garde in the modern philosophy of the art of the 2000s I also did not use the concept of the “turn”. The concept of transformation was, however, burdened with so many reservations that already at that time I finished the part about the radicalism of the avant-garde with the words: “We can explain only the sources of the radical transformations (my emphasis, T. P.) started by the avant-garde,

¹⁶ The opinions on the avant-garde cited in the last paragraphs come from the book T. Pękala, *Awangarda i arriergarda. Filozofia sztuki ponowoczesnej*, [The Avant-Garde and the Arriere-Garde. Philosophy of Postmodern Art] wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2000, pp. 54-55, 208.

¹⁷ A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, *Między melancholią a żałobą. Estetyka wobec przemian w sztuce współczesnej* [Between Melancholy and Mourning. Esthetics vis-à-vis Changes in Contemporary Art], IK, Warszawa 1996, p. 7.

which we still call transformations in art, but with growing doubts and with an increasingly strong feeling of discursive pressure”.¹⁸

The doubts concerned both the concept of art, oscillating towards the institutional definition, and the category of “transformation”, which lost its operational sense in view of the kaleidoscopically changing image of art. In recent years it has been replaced by the “turn”, appropriating some and excluding other “transformations”. Intuitively, the difference consists in the degree of radicalness and range of a transformation.

The avant-garde, like earlier Art Nouveau, confirms our belief that the meaning of such terms as “change” or “crisis” in reference to art may differ from their meanings in other spheres of life. Their relationship should not be ignored, particularly when art itself gives up its autonomy, but it should be also remembered that only some of the meanings describing transformations and turns belong to the same family of concepts. As has been said above, in the language of art theory we are dealing with weak and strong turns. In the reflection on recent art there are no attempts to structure the turns that are taking place. This term defines, firstly, retrospective interpretations, as suggested by the title of a recent exhibition (September 2015) “Impressionism – Expressionism: The Turns in Art” at the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin. The term “cognitive turn” is used in the history of art to denote the attempts to apply cognitive research to the interpretation of specific works of art, as proposed by David Freedberg, John Onians, or Pamela Sheingorn. The American professor of history and theater explicitly uses the term “cognitive turn” in the title of her study.¹⁹ The term “turn” is also employed to define social attitudes in the reception of art, oriented towards both specific actions by artists and certain, mostly socially sensitive, issues. In 2009, in the context of the activities of the Łódź Kaliska artistic group, the term “conservative turn” appeared in discussions, denoting the responses of the receivers of their art to the motifs associated with feminism and genderism.²⁰ The foregoing turns have little in common; we could say that they are part of the terminological aura of the turn as a distinctive feature of a trend in research, discussion, or interpretation.

Among the turns appearing in the literature in recent years there are also such as need closer attention because of the presence of the phenomena to which they apply in many, often very distant fields, and because of their importance for the whole of culture. One of them is the so-called “affective turn”. It is a trend dynamically functioning in Western studies, of analyzing

¹⁸ T. Pękala, *Awangarda i ariergarda...*, p.181.

¹⁹ P. Sheingorn, “Making the Cognitive Turn in Art History: A Case Study”, *Emerging Disciplines*, Rice University Press, <http://cnx.org/content/m34254/1.4/>. [26.07.2015]

²⁰ I. Kowalczyk, strasznasztuka.blox.pl/html.

literary and artistic phenomena from the perspective of the category of affect. The affective dimension of experience arouses interest mainly because of its extra-linguistic character, which prevents it from being easily accessible to human condition. The problems of “embodied thinking”, of the corporeal, have long been present in aesthetics; there is even a subdiscipline of somaesthetics, with its own tools and terms, and its scholars investigating boundary situations, the sphere of the pre-linguistic community. It is not accidental that the groundbreaking moment for the theory of affects to appear in the field of interest of the contemporary humanities was the 1990s, when the theory of trauma was developed. The orientation of research towards the theory of affects in the humanities indicates a critical moment arising from the disillusionment with the accepted methodologies and ways of analyzing the work of art, but it is also an expression of certain theoretical helplessness as regards the sphere of the daily life. It is no accident that this sphere is described with the phrase “the theater of life” derived from the theory of theater. The range of the affective trend is very broad; it extends from the philosophy drawing inspirations from Deleuze’s readings of Spinoza and the books by Deleuze and Guattari, as practiced by Brian Massumi, van Alphen, and Mieke Bal, to psycho-biological inspirations by Silvan Tomkins’s conceptions developed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank. These research currents are not linked by any distinct connecting lines apart from the general orientation towards the otherwise differently interpreted affects. “These paths probably will not cross, and it seems futile to derive some general characteristics or determine the parameters of this ‘turn’ in humanities research. Therefore, in this sense it does not seem justified to speak of the turn towards affects or the establishment of a new, affective paradigm in the humanities. It appears that the point is rather to shift attention and sensitivity to a somewhat different field, to show other possibilities of cognition in the world in general and in the world of scientific research, to privilege or enhance the models so far excluded, considered worse, and finally, to show new ways of practicing criticism, and, not less importantly, new ways of practicing history, including the history of literature, art and theater”.²¹ The opinion of Katarzyna Bojarska, critical of the rhetoric of the turn, is isolated and perhaps overly critical in this particular case.

In a profusion of local, though not insignificant turns, the affective turn, associated with the somatic turn is indisputably an interdisciplinary current of high social significance. I single out “the affective turn” because it appears that

²¹ K. Bojarska, „Poczuć myślenie: afektywne procedury historii i krytyki” [To Feel Thinking: The Affective Procedures of History and Criticism], *Teksty Drugie* 2013 no. 6: *Zaafektowani* [The Affect-ridden] <http://tekstydrugie.pl/pl/news/item/id,61,title,2013-nr-6-Zaafektowani.html> [26 July 2015].

the theories functioning within the scope of its influence can be and already have been employed in interpreting and understanding contemporary theater, or analyzing a large group of works drawing on the new trends in historiography.²² They validate the existence of the sphere excluded so far from interpretation: the sphere of bodily perception, the memory of the body. Theater has always referred to and drawn on this level of perception; in performative arts in general the structure of reception is based on the affective and the symbolic. It was only the latest scientific theories and new technologies as well as multimedia art that explicitly brought home to us the problem of the affective and the somatic. Giving significance to the affective message as a part, not less important than others, of social message is without doubt a watershed in epistemological terms, and art provides inexhaustible material for research here. I would hesitate to maintain that the affective turn or the somatic turn is indeed a turn in art: its tradition is too long. However, it now plays a considerable role in the discourse of art, and the term “turn” is justified here.

Another trend in research and social practices, which, not without reason, aspires to the status of a turn, is “the social turn” in contemporary art. Leaving aside the discussion on the origin of both the term itself and the phenomenon with its many origins dating back in history, I will confine myself to only one determiner of the turn in question, i.e. to the category of effectiveness.²³

The question of the extent to which art can/should impact social life today requires specification of what exactly this impact should consist in. How should we settle the clash between the instrumentalization of artistic practices and symbolic autonomy? Doesn't a turn consist in the transition from the sphere of symbolic influence to real action? The attempt to stage Rodrigo Garcia's *Golgota Picnic* during last year's Malta Festival in Poznań, and the events that occurred following this attempt can be treated as an example of the symbolic order, in that case represented by a work of art, clashing with reality. This kind of change is an actual interference in the established order, which is manifest for example in the polarization of social groups, and even in generating actual violence. The turn, in comparison with the ethos of socially engaged art, consists in the ability of artistic practices to effect real cultural changes. The scale of these changes does not matter, what is essential is the transition from the sphere of influence through a mental-affective experiment to the level of actual interference with the public sphere. The efficacy of art treated as an assigned task can be dangerous. The old problem of using art for political gains returns. The direction of some artistic measures, defined as a turn, requires

²² Cf. T. Pękała, *Estetyczne konteksty doświadczenia przeszłości* [The Aesthetic Contexts of the Experience of the Past] Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2013.

²³ <http://msl.org.pl/wydarzenia/skutecznoscsztuki> [26 July 2015].

critical consideration without the pressure of political correctness or becoming part of the obligatory discourse of art. Different variants of the problem of effectiveness of contemporary art are presented in the book *Skuteczność sztuki*. [The Effectiveness of Art] edited by Tomasz Załuski.²⁴

The two turns, somatic and social, have become, to a different degree and within a different scope, part of the most discussed performative turn today. In her already classical publication, Erika Fischer-Lichte pointed out the change in the subject/object relationship in theater, and the replacement of a theatre play by an “event”.²⁵ The process of transformation, which occurs as a result of the events characterized by different degrees of effectiveness, is not confined to the fictional world that was a laboratory of transformations for the audience. Performance, as is the case with somatic or socially engaged art, requires a real reaction, sometimes directly oriented to a specific result. Initiated by the twentieth-century avant-gardes, the process of blurring the boundaries between art and reality should be reinterpreted from the viewpoint of today’s artist/performer, and from the perspective of the work/event. If we are dealing with a turn, then we should again take the transgressive potential of art into account and consider which hitherto uncrossed boundary has been traversed. Performativity can be already spoken of not only as another “turn”, but a dangerous bend, fraught with many dangers. Different means of the performative impact on the viewer/participant in an event that enforce activity through bodily, affective, volitional or intellectual stimuli arouse as much hope as concern. The free use by performers of technological and electronic achievements and other benefits of civilization makes the institution of art an attractive field of political, corporate, and other influences. This danger is discerned by the representatives of performative arts: they protest against the appropriation of the name “performance” by various “actors on the public stage” (another linguistic borrowing).

Finally, I would like to ask an important question: Is there a fine line of the renegotiated autonomy of art and where does it run? This question returns to the classical questions of continuity in the history of art, of its identity, and its place in the postmodern world. I believe that it is too early to assess which transformations in art described with the concept of “the turn” will turn out to be weak turns and which strong ones, and whether they will permanently change the image of art. If we are to look for some regularities in the occurring processes, I have high hopes for the research oriented towards changing the position of aesthetic experience in contemporary culture.²⁶

²⁴ *Skuteczność sztuki* [Effectiveness of Art], ed. T. Załuski, Wyd. Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Łódź 2014.

²⁵ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, p. 29.

²⁶ U. Brandstätter, *Ästhetische Erfahrung*, Handbuch Kulturelle Bildung Online, 15; <http://www.kubi-online.de/artikel/aesthetische-erfahrung> [26 July 2015].

The aesthetic experience, first studied as a phenomenon, has become an instrument of analysis, supporting the conceptions of the aestheticization of reality in aesthetics, culture studies, or historiography. When using the principal category of this study, we can say that we are dealing with the turn that inevitably has to influence art. The artistic turns are also the search for a new formula of the aesthetic in art.

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ZMIANA, ZERWANIE, KRYZYS CZY FULGURACJA – CZYM JEST ZWROT W SZTUCE?

(streszczenie)

Zadaniem tekstu jest próba określenia głównych wyznaczników przemian w sztuce, które spełniałyby warunki konieczne zjawiska określanego terminem zwrotu. W pierwszej części tekstu zaprezentowane zostały próby odpowiedzi na pytanie czym właściwie jest zwrot w kulturze i jakie stanowiska metodologiczne oferuje współczesna humanistyka. Punktem wyjścia jest koncepcja Doris Bachmann-Medick. Przyjmując założenie, że inflacja zwrotów w kulturze jest sygnałem głębokiej zmiany stawiamy pytanie o odzwierciedlenie zachodzących procesów w sztuce. Nie chodzi o reakcję sztuki na zmiany, ale o sztukę jako fragment zmienionej rzeczywistości. W tym kontekście przypomniana została koncepcja sztuki jako metafory epistemologicznej rzeczywistości U. Eco, teoria ciągłości/nieciągłości, stopniowości i skokowości w sztuce Mieczysława Wallisa. Koncepcja charakterystyczne dla wczesnych etapów świadomości nowoczesnej zostały poddane sprawdzianowi wedle kryteriów współczesnego rozumienia przemiany w sztuce określanej mianem zwrotu. By sprostać tak sformułowanemu zadaniu rozważane były różne znaczenia pojęcia „zmiany, przemiany” a w dalszej kolejności „kryzysy pozytywne i negatywne” występujące w polach znaczeniowych terminu „zwrot”. Materiałem przykładowym były dzieje recepcji sztuki secesyjnej, problem radykalności przełomu awangardowego. W końcowej partii tekstu rozważano różne użycia pojęcia zwrotu w odniesieniu do sztuki ostatnich lat. Wyróżnione zostały dwa „zwroty” : afektywny , łączony z somatycznym i społeczny. Obydwa można potraktować jako składowe zwrotu o zasięgu ogólnokulturowym – zwrotu performatywnego. Postulowanym kierunkiem badań nad współczesnymi zwrotami w sztuce wydaje się analiza nowej formuły doświadczenia estetycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: zwrot, transformacja, radykalna zmiana, negatywny i pozytywny kryzys, ciągłość i nieciągłość w sztuce, sztuka współczesna.