

WIEK OŚWIECENIA

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Wiek XVIII. Polska – Włochy

Lodovica Braidà, The Use of Anonymity in Eighteenth-Century Italian Publishing. The Ambiguities of the “Author Function” • Alessia Castagnino, The Italian Translator’s Art and Craft In the Eighteenth Century: Historical and Critical Insights • Dorota Dukwicz, The Most Recent Studies on the Polish-Russian Relations in the First Partition Era, 1760s–1770s • Jarosław Dumanowski, Culinary Art, Taste and Utility. Reading Polish Culinary Texts from the Eighteenth Century • Andrea Gatti, The Philosopher’s Choice. Władysław Tatarkiewicz Remarks on 18th Century Aesthetics • Giovanni Iamartino, The Lexicographer As Anatomist: Body Words In Eighteenth-Century English Dictionaries • Jacek Kordel, Was the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth a Kingdom of Anarchy in the Eighteenth Century? Foreign Perceptions, Political Narratives, and the Justification of Partition • Andrea Mariani, From Cis-Jesuit to Trans-Jesuit Historiography. The Latest Contributions to Jesuit Studies in Poland-Lithuania (2017–2024) • Anna Maria Rao, La Pologne Cosmopolite De Franco Venturi • Michał Zwierzykowski, The Main Directions of Research on the Eighteenth-Century Parliamentarism of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth after 1989



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Warszawa 2025

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CONTENTS

Patrizia Delpiano, Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, <i>Introduction</i>	9
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Articles

Lodovica Braidà, University of Turin, <i>The Use of Anonymity in Eighteenth-Century Italian Publishing. The Ambiguities of the “Author Function”</i>	13
Alessia Castagnino, University of Florence, <i>The Italian Translator’s Art and Craft in the Eighteenth Century: Historical and Critical Insights</i>	33
Dorota Dukwicz, IH PAN, <i>The Most Recent Studies on the Polish-Russian Relations in the First Partition Era, 1760s-1770s</i>	51
Jarosław Dumanowski, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, <i>Culinary Art, Taste and Utility. Reading Polish Culinary Texts from the Eighteenth Century</i>	59
Andrea Gatti, University of Bologna, <i>The Philosopher’s Choice Władysław Tatarkiewicz Remarks on 18th Century Aesthetics</i>	81
Giovanni Iamartino, University of Milan, <i>The Lexicographer as Anatomist: Body Words in Eighteenth-Century English Dictionaries</i>	97
Jacek Kordel, University of Warsaw, <i>Was the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth a Kingdom of Anarchy in the Eighteenth Century? Foreign Perceptions, Political Narratives, and the Justification of Partition</i>	115
Andrea Mariani, Adam Mickiewicz University, <i>From Cis-Jesuit to Trans-Jesuit Historiography. The Latest Contributions to Jesuit Studies in Poland-Lithuania (2017-2024)</i>	143
Anna Maria Rao, Université De Naples ‘Federico II’, <i>La Pologne Cosmopolite de Franco Venturi</i>	165
Michał Zwierzykowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, <i>The Main Directions of Research on the Eighteenth-Century Parliamentarism of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth after 1989</i>	181

Reviews

- Utopia Beringtona w nowym francuskim tłumaczeniu. Rec.: Simon Berington, *Les Mémoires du Sieur Gaudence de Lucques* [*The Memoirs of Signor Gaudentio di Lucca, 1737*], tłum. i opr. Jean-Michel Racault, Presses Universitaires Indianocéaniques, Université de La Réunion 2024, 318 s. 195
- Rec.: Dorota Dukwicz, *Na drodze do pierwszego rozbioru. Rosja i Prusy wobec Rzeczypospolitej 1768–1771*, Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2022. 201
- W królestwie kokietek i kokieterii. Rec.: Laurence Sieuzac, pt. *La Coquette. Naissance et fortune d'un type sociolittéraire (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles)* [*Kokietka. Narodziny i studium typu socjo-literackiego (XVII–XVIII w.)*], Classiques Garnier, coll. « L'Europe des Lumières », Paryż 2024, 854 s. 207
- Rec.: Edward Gibbon et Lausanne. *Le Pays de Vaud à la rencontre des Lumières européens*, dir. Béla Kapossy et Béatrice Lovis, Gollion, Infolio, 2022, s. 525, il. 213
- Promieniowanie wieku świateł. Rec.: Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, *Wokół Oświecenia. Studia i szkice*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN i Pro Cultura Litteraria, Warszawa 2024, 225 s. 219
- Rec.: Sebastian Musiał, *Jan Paweł Woronicz w świetle nieznanych dokumentów z lat 1795–1829*. Warszawa 2024. Instytut Badań Literackich PAN/Akademia Humanistyczna, ss. 312. 231
- Rec.: Powrót do listów z wierszami. Recenzja: Wiesław Pusz *Epistolografia mennipejska w oświeceniu postanisławowskim*, Wydawnictwo Biblioteka, Łódź 2015. 239
- Rec.: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rozważania o rządzie polskim i jego zamierzonej reformie*, w przekładzie i opracowaniu Anny Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, Warszawa, Muzeum Łazienki Królewskie, 2023, 152 s. 245
- Polsko-ukraińskie badania nad Biblioteką Stanisława Augusta. Rec.: *Splendor i wiedza. Biblioteka Królewska Stanisława Augusta. Katalog*, t. 1–2, red. Alina Dziecioł, Tomasz Jakubowski, Arx Regia. Wydawnictwo Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie – Muzeum, Warszawa 2022, 376 i 407 s. Rec.: *Splendor i wiedza. Biblioteka Królewska Stanisława Augusta. Eseje*, red. Alina Dziecioł, Tomasz Jakubowski, Arx

-
- Regia. Wydawnictwo Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie – Muzeum, Warszawa 2022, 288 s. 251
- Rec.: Michał Dymitr Krajewski, *Leszek Biały, książę polski, syn Kazimierza Sprawiedliwego*, wydał zespół Koła Edytorstwa Naukowego „Kustosz” pod kierownictwem Magdaleny Bober-Jankowskiej w składzie: Małgorzata Nawrot, Aleksandra Ostaszewska, Weronika Rychta, Emi-lia Zaczowska-Szypowska, Sandra Zielińska. Objasnienia z zakresu kultury antycznej przygotowała Ariadna Masłowska-Nowak, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo IBL, 2023, 512 s., Biblioteka Pisarzy Polskiego Oświecenia nr 23. 257
- O „przykładnym małżeństwie” według Elżbiety Drużbackiej. Elżbieta Drużbacka, *Przykładne z wiernej i statecznej miłości małżeństwo*, wydała Aldona Sieradzka-Krupa, Biblioteka Pisarzy Polskiego Oświecenia, t. 26, Warszawa 2024, 380 s. 263

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THE PHILOSOPHER'S CHOICE WŁADYSŁAW TATARKIEWICZ REMARKS ON 18TH CENTURY AESTHETICS

Abstract

This paper will explore how Tatarkiewicz addresses eighteenth-century aesthetics in his works, focusing particularly on *History of Aesthetics* (1960-67) and *A History of Six Ideas* (1975). The aim is to assess whether his treatment of this subject remains relevant and valuable for contemporary scholars. Tatarkiewicz's *History of Aesthetics* concludes just before the onset of modernity, offering only a brief overview of the period under the heading "The End of the Epoch". This paper seeks to investigate the rationale behind and the consequences of Tatarkiewicz's conception of eighteenth-century aesthetics from both historical and theoretical perspectives.

Keywords: aesthetics, philosophy, Tatarkiewicz, Enlightenment, eighteenth century.

It is crucial for anyone engaged in the study of aesthetics to become acquainted with the work of the Polish philosopher Władysław Tatarkiewicz (1886-1981), who represents a seminal figure in the field. He is also one of those theorists and historians of ideas to whom even the most experienced scholar regularly refers for the wealth of documentary information and theoretical insights contained in his writings. In the course of my initial research, I soon came across Tatarkiewicz's *History of Aesthetics* (1960-67). I have continued to consult not only the third and final volume of the Italian edition, which deals with modern times, but also the first volume on classicism. In my view, this volume, together with the section on Renaissance aesthetics, represents his most significant and valuable contributions to the field.

This paper examines how Tatarkiewicz engages with eighteenth-century aesthetics in his two major works, *History of Aesthetics* and *A History of Six Ideas* (1975), and considers whether his approach to the subject remains relevant and valuable for contemporary scholars. I recognize that analyzing eighteenth-century aesthetics through the lens of an

author whose most significant work is situated on the threshold of modernity – and who offers only a brief synopsis of the period under the designation “The End of the Epoch” – may seem somewhat unconventional.¹

Nevertheless, the aforementioned title is of intrinsic interest because of the questions it raises. It prompts the reader to consider whether “the end” truly marks a definitive conclusion and to reflect on the specific “epoch” to which Tatarkiewicz was referring. By addressing these questions, one can gain insight into some of the fundamental principles of Tatarkiewicz’s historiographical approach, which might otherwise be obscured by what appears to be a clear and explicit methodological stance.

1. The Italian Reception of Tatarkiewicz’s Aesthetics

When the *History of Aesthetics* first appeared in Italy, there were not many works to compare with it in terms of detailed account and wealth of documentation. Among these was Benedetto Croce’s 1902 ‘classic’ *Estetica come scienza dell’espressione e linguistica generale (Aesthetic, as Science of Expression and General Linguistic)*, in which the first theoretical part (summarizing much of the Neapolitan philosopher’s aesthetic thought, from the concept of lyrical intuition to that of the relationship between intuition and expression), tended to overshadow the historiographical part; and although Croce had intended to juxtapose the two parts,² the latter is still functional to the former insofar as the implicit aim of Croce’s historical reconstruction was to highlight in classical and modern theories a conception of the beautiful and of poetry that would remove the latter from all heteronomy and rhetorical functionality. In his work *Ästhetik* (1858-65), Robert von Zimmermann engaged in a polemic with Vischer’s idealist conception, advocating a formalist aesthetic system that offered a less than neutral view of the history of the discipline.

¹ See W. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 3. *Modern Aesthetics*, ed. by D. Petsch, London, Continuum, 2005, p. 452 (ch. IX).

² B. Croce, *Aesthetics as Science of Expression or General Linguistics*, Engl. transl. by D. Ainslie, New York, The Noonday Press [Farrar, Straus and Co.], 1975,¹⁰ p. xxvii: “two independent, but complementary books”. On Croce’s aesthetics see: H.W. Carr, *The Philosophy of Benedetto Croce*, London, Macmillan, 1917; B. Bosanquet, ‘Croce’s Aesthetic’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 9, 1919, pp. 261-288; G. Orsini, *Benedetto Croce: Philosophy of Art and Literary Critic*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1961; M.E. Moss, *Benedetto Croce Reconsidered: Truth and Error in Theories of Art, Literature, and History*, London, University of New England Press, 1987. For a comprehensive account of Croce’s life and work see P. D’Angelo, *Benedetto Croce. La biografia*, vol. I: *Gli anni 1866–1918*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2023, of which vol. 2 is forthcoming.

Zimmermann's system divided the arts into three categories: the representation of material (sculpture and architecture); the representation of perception (painting and music); and the representation of thought (literature).³ Additionally, Bernard Bosanquet's *History of Aesthetics* (1892) continued to stimulate interest during Tatarkiewicz's era. However, its idealistic framework espoused an overtly spiritualist perspective and a Hegelian approach to the appreciation of art as a revelation of men's inner feelings.⁴ Other attempts were less comprehensive, focusing on particular aspects of the discipline. In 1968, Augusto Simonini published a work entitled *Storia dei movimenti estetici nella cultura italiana* (*History of Aesthetic Currents in Italian Culture*), in which the limitations of his research are already evident in the title. In the same year, 1968, the publication of *Momenti e problemi di storia dell'estetica* (*Moments and Problems in the History of Aesthetics*) was released. This work, which was begun ten years earlier, was published in Milan by Marzorati and consisted of four volumes. Due to the involvement of specialists from different cultural periods, the work lacked a unified method and perspective.

When Tatarkiewicz's *History of Aesthetics* was published in 1979, the scholars of the Western world finally had a comprehensive reference work.

Tatarkiewicz⁵ was born in Warsaw in 1886 and received his education at the University of Warsaw. Following student riots in 1905, he was expelled from the university after the Russian imperial troops imposed a closure. He proceeded to pursue his studies initially in Zurich, subsequently in Berlin and ultimately in Marburg from 1907 to 1910. Tatarkiewicz was trained as a neo-Kantian, graduating from Marburg with a thesis on the structure of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* under the

³ On Zimmermann's aesthetics: E. Winter, *Robert Zimmermanns philosophische Propädeutik und die Vorlagen aus der Wissenschaftslehre Bernard Bolzanos. Eine Dokumentation zur Geschichte des Denkens und der Erziehung in der Donaumonarchie*, Vienna, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975; V. Ionescu, 'Zimmermann's Aesthetics and Riegl's Art Theory. Influences and Resistances', *Ars*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2013, pp. 86-93; K. Arens, 'Rereading Herder as Heritor of Idealism: Robert von Zimmermann's *Aesthetics*', *Herder Jahrbuch*, vol. XIII, 2016, pp. 129-146; D. Fiset, 'Robert Zimmermann and Herbartianism in Vienna: The Critical Reception of Brentano and his Followers', in C. Maigné (ed.), *Herbartism in Austrian Philosophy*, Berlin und Boston, De Gruyter, 2021, pp. 33-62.

⁴ B. Lang, 'Bosanquet's Aesthetic: A History and Philosophy of the Symbol', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1968, pp. 377-387; D. Jacqueline, 'Bosanquet's Concept of Difficult Beauty', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1984, pp. 79-88; A. Vincent, 'Bosanquet and Social Aesthetics', *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, vol. 12, 2006, pp. 39-66.

⁵ On the life and work of Tatarkiewicz see M. Jaworski, *Władysław Tatarkiewicz*, Warszawa, Interpress, 1975.

supervision of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. He subsequently pursued further studies in Paris, attending lectures given by Bergson and Michel.

He commenced teaching at the University of Warsaw at the advent of World War I. The university was inaugurated by the Germans, eager for Poland's support during the war, and Tatarkiewicz assumed the role of head of the Philosophy Department from 1915 to 1919. He was appointed at other universities and, in 1930, returned to German-occupied Warsaw, where he delivered lectures in philosophy on an unofficial basis. In addition to the works on aesthetics for which he is best known in Italy, he also wrote a massive *History of Philosophy*, the first two volumes of which were published in 1931, while the third was published in Warsaw in 1950. Additionally, he authored an essay entitled *On Happiness*, which was published in Kraków in 1947. Following the conclusion of the Second World War, Tatarkiewicz was prohibited from continuing his work at the university by a group of seven students affiliated with the Polish United Workers' Party. These individuals publicly denounced him in a letter ("Letter of 7") for espousing bourgeois rather than Marxist principles in his lectures and for opposing the establishment of socialism in Poland. He resumed his teaching duties in 1957 and remained in this position until 1960.

In Italy, Tatarkiewicz is regarded as a leading figure in the field of aesthetics, particularly for his two seminal works, *History of Aesthetics* and *A History of Six Ideas*. The *History of Aesthetics* was completed by the author between 1960 and 1967 and was subsequently published in Italy in 1979 in three volumes (Ancient, Medieval, Modern Aesthetics) edited by Gianpiero Cavaglia and published by Einaudi in Turin. The work was met with immediate success and garnered numerous reviews from experts in the field, who expressed appreciation for the author's ambitious undertaking. The Italian edition of Tatarkiewicz's other significant work, *Storia di Sei idee (A History of Six Ideas)*, was promoted by Luigi Russo, the inaugural president of the Italian Society of Aesthetics. Translated into Italian by Olimpia Burba and Krystyna Jaworska and edited by Jaworska herself, *Storia di Sei idee* was published in 1993 by Aesthetica edizioni. The continued popularity of the work is evidenced by the recent reprinting of a revised edition in 2020. The original version was first published in Warsaw at PWN (Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe) in 1975. It was subsequently translated into English by Nijhoff in 1980, and into Spanish in 1987.

It is also noteworthy that in 1961, Tatarkiewicz's essay, *Due concetti di forma e due concetti di contenuto (Two Concepts of Form and Two Concepts of Content)*, was published in the Turin *Rivista di filosofia*; while his

article, *Due concetti di bello (Two Concepts of Beauty)* was published in the *Rivista di estetica* in 1980.⁶

The two major works on aesthetics are evidently distinct and serve to exemplify a significant methodological challenge that is inherent to any historiographical reconstruction. This challenge pertains to the selection between a historical account based on the actions of specific individuals and a historical account based on the theoretical concepts that underpin them. This is the fundamental distinction between Tatarkiewicz's two principal aesthetic treatises. Concurrently, however, they exhibit certain enduring characteristics of Tatarkiewicz's historiographical perspective, which I intend to re-examine in order to demonstrate whether these persistences are driven by a genuine relevance that concerns not only Tatarkiewicz's work but also our contemporary evaluation of it.

2. Tatarkiewicz's Choice

In the context of the history of aesthetics, Tatarkiewicz's choice to conclude his analysis at the beginning of the 18th century represents a significant departure from the prevailing view that considers that century to be the cradle of the discipline. Traditionally, philosophical aesthetics is regarded as having emerged at this juncture. This is due in part to the fact that the discipline of aesthetics was deliberately established as a philosophical issue by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, who in 1735 coined the term 'aesthetics' (derived from *aisthesis*, meaning sensation), to define the field of study related to aesthetic experience. This provided an epistemological and cognitive approach to the subject.⁷

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that aesthetic reflection existed prior to Baumgarten, particularly in England. The subjects addressed by works such as Lord Shaftesbury's *The Moralists* (1709), Joseph Addison's *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1712), Francis Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), and Edmund Burke's *Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757-59) represent early forms of advanced aesthetics, despite the fact that their inquiries were not part of a formally defined field of study.

⁶ See K. Jaworska, 'Appendice biobibliografica', in W. Tatarkiewicz, *Storia di Sei Idee*, (1975), ed. by K. Jaworska, Italian trans. by O. Burba and K. Jaworska, scientific consultation and afterword by L. Russo, Palermo, Aesthetica, 2020, pp. 419-421: p. 421.

⁷ In his *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (1735) Baumgarten employs for the first time the term 'Aesthetica' (a cura di B. Croce, Bari, Laterza, 1900, p. 41, §CXVI).

Jaworska elucidates the reasons behind Tatarkiewicz's selection by reference to the author's assertion that when aesthetics attains the status of an autonomous discipline (a phenomenon that did not occur until the eighteenth century), a distinct methodology of inquiry is imperative.⁸

This explanation is only partially satisfactory, and I will attempt to provide further reasons for explaining Tatarkiewicz's choice. However, the author's intentions are evident from the outset: his objective is to delineate a theoretical stance concerning concepts, categories and meanings through an investigation of the historical evolution of aesthetic reflection. A dichotomy analogous to that between history and theory pervades the entire work, as Tatarkiewicz's aesthetics is characterised by a constant interplay of opposing assumptions. These include the study of beauty and the study of art, aesthetic theory and aesthetic practice, subjectivist and objectivist aesthetics, descriptive and normative aesthetics, and so forth. As evidenced by the following excerpt from the opening lines of the work: "The study of aesthetics proceeds along many lines, containing both the theory of beauty and the theory of art, investigating both the theory of aesthetic objects and of aesthetic experiences, employing both descriptions and prescriptions, both analysis and explanation".⁹ It follows that methodologies themselves must differ according to the aims they pursue. Tatarkiewicz thus identifies what he defines as an 'implicit aesthetics', which can be discerned in works that are not expressly designed for philosophical analysis and which may be derived from artistic practices. "Some works of art", writes Tatarkiewicz, "allow us to deduce aesthetic theses which without being explicitly stated, are nevertheless revealed through them [...]. [Aesthetics] should embrace not only aesthetic theory, but also the artistic practice which reveals that aesthetic theory".¹⁰ The same applies to works of art criticism: Pliny and Philostratus, with their comments on ancient works of art, gave rise to aesthetic systems, as did the sculptures of Phidias.

Now, there are a number of general problems that confront the historian of ideas when dealing with eighteenth-century aesthetics. I will

⁸ K. Jaworska, 'Presentazione', in W. Tatarkiewicz, *Storia di Sei idee*, pp. 9-25 (p. 20 the quotation: "Nel congedare il terzo volume della Storia dell'estetica l'autore specificava che essa si arrestava quando la materia non esisteva come disciplina autonoma, e che un'elaborazione dell'estetica posteriore avrebbe richiesto un altro metodo" ["In dismissing the third volume of the *History of Aesthetics*, the author specified that it stopped when the subject did not exist as an autonomous discipline, and that a later elaboration of aesthetics would require another method"].

⁹ W. Tatarkiewicz, 'Introduction', in *History of Aesthetics*, vol. I. *Ancient Aesthetics*, ed. by J. Harrell, London, Continuum, 2005, pp. 1-10: p. 1.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

mention some of them and then concentrate on the specific case of Tatarkiewicz.

First, the abundance of documents. This is one of those cases in which the historian of ideas is embarrassed to choose authors to deal with, precisely because of the abundance of possible options. It can be observed that there is no necessary correlation between the systems of aesthetic theory proposed by great philosophers and their contributions to metaphysics or the theory of mind. This is exemplified by the cases of Locke and Berkeley, whose theories in these areas are not as developed as their contributions to these other fields. Conversely, it is often the case that the most insightful perspectives emerge from authors who do not occupy a prominent position in the history of philosophy as a whole (Addison does not feature in any such historical overview). However, their works are fundamental to our understanding of the evolution of the discipline; this is evident in the case of Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, Edmund Burke, Alexander Gerard, Lord Kames. David Hume is the philosopher who perhaps combines the two characteristics (which, incidentally, explains his influence on Kant), and behind him come Adam Smith and Thomas Reid. The eighteenth century is what George Dickie called 'the century of taste',¹¹ and indeed the question of taste becomes fundamental at this time. In the eighteenth century, thinkers identified taste as a significant aspect of an individual's existence. It is notable that Kant, in addition to his analysis of pure and practical reason, should add to his critical plan a critique of judgment – aesthetic and theological. Not to mention a whole host of *peintres-philosophes* whose theorising about art often produced results that had a far from insignificant influence on contemporary thought: from Jonathan Richardson to William Hogarth, from Joshua Reynolds to Henry Fuseli, from Benjamin West to Blake himself.¹²

The growth in interest in aesthetic questions was not solely the result of a specific set of historical circumstances; it was also shaped by a distinct social urgency. This urgency emerged from a sort of inferiority complex within the artistic domain that England felt in comparison with other European cultures, particularly France and Italy. In these nations, aesthetic education was significantly more advanced, contributing to their primacy among the most civilised in Europe. The absence of

¹¹ This is the title of one of Dickie's most successful works: *The Century of Taste. The Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996.

¹² On the connection between theory and practice in eighteenth century painters, see for instance E. Wind, *Hume and the Heroick Portrait. Studies in Eighteenth-Century Imagery*, ed. by J. Anderson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986; P. Mattick (ed.), *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

a national art school was a notable deficiency in early eighteenth-century England. Despite the influx of artists from Italy and Flanders during the first part of the century, it was arguably with the advent of artists such as Jonathan Richardson and William Hogarth that England began to forge a unique artistic identity. In the latter half of the century, there was a desire in England to establish an Academy of Fine Arts, modelled on those in France and Italy. It was not until 1769 that the Royal Academy of Arts was founded, with Joshua Reynolds serving as the inaugural president until 1790. Reynolds' collection of annual *Discourses*, delivered at the conferral of prizes to the most accomplished students, constitute a corpus of aesthetic thought worthy of study.

The other issue arises from the syncretic nature of eighteenth-century aesthetic reflections, which oscillate between incipient empiricism and traditional neo-Platonism. This results in peculiar mixtures, where it is unclear whether to categorise the treatises as *Kunstliteratur* (in accordance with Julius van Schlosser's definition) or as philosophy in its own right.

3. Tatarkiewicz and Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics

Although Tatarkiewicz concludes his *History of Aesthetics* with an examination of the late 17th century, it is nevertheless evident that in the history of thought, omissions can be just as significant methodologically and epistemologically as positive statements. Just as significant are the oversights, the inaccuracies, which are not lacking in either work. In the preface to the Italian edition of *A History of Six Ideas*, Jaworska had pointed out the "suboptimal" editing of the text, denouncing the "albeit numerous oversights and inaccuracies that dot the work".¹³ These issues are also present in *History of Aesthetics*. In light of these observations, it seems pertinent to examine the omissions in the latter work in relation to the contents of the various lemmas that constitute the former.

In his *History of Aesthetics*, Tatarkiewicz declares his intention to limit his considerations to theories developed in France and Italy during the 18th century. This is due to the fact that they represent a substantial divergence from the poetics and theories of art that had been dominant for the preceding three centuries.¹⁴ Furthermore, they represent a tran-

¹³ Jaworska, *Presentazione*, p. 27: "L'edizione originale (e anche quella inglese) non gode di una redazione ottimale. [...] numerosissime sviste ed inesattezze [...] costellano l'opera" ("The original edition [and the English one] does not enjoy an optimal editing. [...] numerous oversights and inaccuracies [...] dot the work").

¹⁴ "The turn of the 18th century, unlike the three that preceded it, brought no events of particular importance in the history of aesthetics, though there were some

sition towards a fully aesthetic dimension, as they concentrate on what is referred to as general aesthetics. The proponents of this movement, as selected by Tatarkiewicz, are Yves-Marie Andrè, Andrè Crousaz and Jean-Baptiste Du Bos in France; Muratori, Gravina and Vico in Italy.

The author observes that “the flowering of British and German aesthetics did not begin till further on into the century”,¹⁵ and this, he declares, is a sufficient reason not to mention it. Such assertion seems somewhat anomalous when one considers, for instance, the contributions of Lord Shaftesbury, who is regarded by Cassirer as “the first great aesthetician that England produced”.¹⁶ The Third Earl published his *Characteristics* in 1711, in which he collected earlier essays such as *Soliloquy or Advice to an Author* (1710), *Essay on Wit and Humor* (1710), and his masterpiece, *The Moralists* (1705), which influenced many writers throughout Europe, including Italy and France.

Another significant author, Joseph Addison, published his *Pleasures of the Imagination* in 1712, rather than “later in the century.” Furthermore, he wrote it seven years before Du Bos’s *Reflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), and it is noteworthy that Tatarkiewicz provides a comprehensive analysis of Du Bos’s treatise, additionally observing that the Frenchman “brought to the writing of his *Réflexions* considerable artistic experience, and wide reading, not only of the French literature, but also of such writers as Addison and Gravina”.¹⁷

In 1725, Vico published the inaugural version of the *Scienza nuova*, which coincided with the publication of Hutcheson’s *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. If Tatarkiewicz’s criterion is based on a chronological approach, it is unclear why he does not address the latter, in addition to devoting a chapter to the former.

In Germany, Wolff defined beauty as perfection in his *Empirische Psychologie*, published in 1732. Tatarkiewicz notes that Baumgarten coined the term “aesthetics” in 1750, although, as previously stated,¹⁸ the term first appeared as early as his *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (*Reflections on Poetry*) of 1735, ten years before Muratori’s *Della forza della fantasia*, which Tatarkiewicz also mentions.

The chronological assumption, which the author has evidently disregarded, does not, therefore, appear to justify his decision to exclude

developments of lesser weight in France and Italy at this time”, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 3, p. 427.

¹⁵ Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 3, p. 428.

¹⁶ See E. Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England* (1932), Engl. transl. by J.A. Pettegrove, Austin (TX), Texas University Press, 1953, p. 166.

¹⁷ Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 3, p. 433.

¹⁸ See above, note 7.

the English and the Germans on the grounds that their flowering commenced “later in the century”.

We will have to look elsewhere for the reasons why the Polish philosopher does not do much justice to eighteenth-century English thought: so much so that some dates in the bibliography are out of focus in terms of aesthetic relevance;¹⁹ he attributes to Hume a phrase (“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and each eye perceives a different beauty”) that Hume reported as a prosaic *topos* of common sense, not as a personal reflection.²⁰ Tatarkiewicz, however, attributes this directly to Hume, thereby positioning him as the main proponent of the aesthetic relativism that Hume, on the contrary, sought to circumscribe in his essay on the *Standard of Taste* (1757).

It is evident to the reader that when Tatarkiewicz includes Hume among the proponents of the union of beauty and utility, he is referencing the section “Of Beauty and Deformity” (2.1.8) of the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40). In this chapter, Hume addresses the concept of beauty in a cursory manner and from a heteronomous perspective, with the aim of illustrating certain principles pertaining to the passions. It is evident that Hume, in the subsequent essays in which he addresses aesthetics in greater depth and with greater reflection, not only rejects the Socratic notion of beauty-utility in favour of more ‘modern’ perspectives; but also, as is well documented, disavows the *Treatise* in its entirety. Indeed, he was so critical of the work that he decided not to include it in the collection of his complete works, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*.²¹

¹⁹ Tatarkiewicz claims that during the eighteenth century every generation in England produced a great writer in the field of aesthetics, but in Hume’s case he mentions the date of 1739, which coincides with the publication of the first two parts of *Treatise of Human Nature*, which are certainly of great importance, but not in aesthetic terms (*A History of Six Ideas. An Essay in Aesthetics*, Engl. transl. Ch. Kasperek, The Hague-Boston-London, Nijoff, 1980, p. 138). His most famous essay, which established Hume’s fame as a writer on taste and beauty, is *Of the Standard of Taste*, published in 1757, although he had written several aesthetic essays since the 1740s.

²⁰ Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas*, p. 140. Cfr. D. Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste*, in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, London, Cadell, 1777, pp. 241-266: “Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty” (p. 245); he adds a few lines below: “But though this axiom, by passing into a proverb, seems to have attained the sanction of common sense; there is certainly a species of common sense which opposes it, at least serves to modify and restrain it” (ibidem).

²¹ In the “Advertisement” for the 1777 edition of the *Essays and Treatises*, vol. II, Hume wrote: “Most of the principles, and reasonings, contained in this volume, were published in a work in three volumes, called *A Treatise of Human Nature*: A work which the Author had projected before he left College, and which he wrote and published not

In light of these facts, what possible reasons can we hypothesise for Tatarkiewicz's choice not to engage with Enlightenment poetics, and some poetics in particular? I would like to suggest just a few reasons.

The initial issue pertains to the crisis of the "Great Theory".²² Tatarkiewicz offers an original and valuable contribution to our field by defining this concept. He employs it to synthesise the most enduring and pervasive thesis, spanning from Classicism to Modernism, which objectifies beauty and aligns it with proportion, order, and measure.

The philosopher was, however, aware that the Great Theory had lost its value in the eighteenth century. He explains that this was due to the fact that, "tastes had changed [...]. Late baroque, and then romantic, art and literature had made their appearance and won followers. Both were completely non-classical. But classical art had formed the basis for the Great Theory, which sank into irrelevance because it was difficult to reconcile with current trends".²³

I am somewhat reluctant to concur with such an assessment. Indeed, during the eighteenth century, there was a pervasive sentiment of disdain towards Baroque painting, which was perceived as excessively sensual and unbridled in comparison to the intellectual and rational tenets of eighteenth-century art. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to present any evidence to support the assertion that the artistic movement *par excellence* of the eighteenth century was Neoclassicism. To find actual examples of anti-Classicism during the century, one should rather turn to its last decades and to artists such as James Barry, Henry Fuseli and William Blake, in whom pre-Romantic suggestions and the detachment from the rational formalism of Classicism are present. Furthermore, the Gothic revival of the late 18th century and the so-called 'return to nature' of painters such as John Constable and poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel T. Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) provide additional evidence of the significant transformation in artistic conceptions that occurred at the turn of the century.²⁴

long after. But not finding it successful, he was sensible of his error in going to the press too early, and he cast the whole anew in the following pieces, where some negligences in his former reasoning and more in the expression, are, he hopes, corrected. [...] Henceforth, the Author desires, that the following Pieces [which do not include the *Treatise*] may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles".

²² Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas*, pp. 137-140 (IV.6. "Crisis of the Great Theory").

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 138.

²⁴ For an analysis of the transition from Classical to Romantic poetics, see W.J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic. Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*, New York, Harper & Bros., 1961; R. Rosenblum, *The Dawn of British Romantic Painting*

The second reason I advance is not intended to refer to any psychologicistic considerations, but it seems undeniable that a systematic and classificatory instinct emerges as an objective fact from reading Tarkiewicz's two major aesthetic works. The Polish philosopher appears to have constructed his *History of Six Ideas* on personal notes, divided into themes, written and collected over the years, and assembled into an organic whole in which he applies the same concept of order and coherent disposition that informs the Grand Theory. In this way, he assumes the roles of theorist, disseminator and practitioner of the theory in question. By classifying aesthetic theories into conceptual and terminological classes, he himself adopts that criterion of order which refers to the unity and organicity of intellectual and artistic work. It is also noteworthy that among the positive aspects he ascribes to the Enlightenment, he cites the more perfected classification of the arts.²⁵

Another rationale for justifying the philosopher's rejection of eighteenth-century aesthetics is that he was more inclined to examine the paradigms of the Classical and Renaissance traditions than to delve into the compelling narrative of their dissolution, according to modern scholars, in the eighteenth century, when they were supplanted by a multitude of positions and forms of 'modern' relativism.

This is particularly evident in *A History of Six Ideas*, where he offers commentary on this pivotal cultural transition in rather telling terms. With regard to the concept of form, he states, "In the eighteenth century the problem of the relation of form to content ceased attracting attention; other problems had come to the fore." While this assertion is, on the surface, accurate, it is, in fact, only partially so.²⁶

With regard to art: "... around 1750, the old concept yielded place to the modern one. Now art meant the production of beauty. This latter concept became just as universally accepted as had the ancient one. For more or less a century and a half the new concept seemed suitable, to the extent that aestheticians and art theoreticians did not consider

1760-1780, in *The Varied Pattern. Studies in the 18th Century*, ed. by P. Huges and D. Williams, Toronto, Hakkert, 1971, pp. 189-210; K. Clark, *The Romantic Rebellion. Romantic versus Classic Art*, London, J. Murray and Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1973; F. Haskell, *Past and Present in Art and Taste. Selected Essays*, New Haven (CT) and London, Yale University Press, 1987; M. Brown, *Preromanticism*, Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, 1991; M.J. Tolley, *Preromanticism*, in D. Wu (ed.), *A Companion to Romanticism*, Hoboken (NJ), Blackwell Publ., 1999.

²⁵ *A History of Six Ideas*, p. 60: "This division [*scil.* of fine arts] was brought about only in the Enlightenment. It was only then, too, that the term 'fine arts' was established".

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 231.

changing or improving it".²⁷ Regarding the concept of creativity, Tatarkiewicz records its changes going directly from the Church Fathers to the 19th century.²⁸

About imitation, or mimesis: "The 18th century inherited this idea, adopted it, and *ceased pondering over it*".²⁹ And again, "The theory calling for an art equally rational as nature (and thereby equally perfect as, if not more so than, nature herself) reached a peak at the end of the 17th century, in the French academic aesthetics [...]. Later *the theory broke down*".³⁰

In Tatarkiewicz's view, the eighteenth century marked the decline of the comprehensive, long-standing theoretical frameworks that had previously informed the aesthetic debate. This period witnessed the waning influence of the Great Theory, in particular: "The dominance of the objective aesthetic thus lasted for long centuries (although accompanied by opposition from subjectivists, now slackening, now gaining in force). Until at last, the 18th century saw the victory of the subjectivist aesthetic. Subjectivism now found numerous adherents and exponents in France, even more in Britain".³¹ This led him to make some critical remarks about 1) a certain incongruity between theory and practice; 2) the loss of a methodological order; and, more importantly, 3) the inevitable inconsistencies of any reflection that renounces a problematic and systemic order: "And a curious thing happened: it was the subjectivists' concept that supplied arguments to their opponents. The initiator of the subjectivist concept, Hutcheson, had observed that such a sense [*scil.* the sense of beauty] has a passive character. And if it is passive, then it registers the objective state of things, objective beauty: even before the end of the century, Price and Reid were to exploit this as an argument in behalf of objectivism".³² To the satisfaction of Tatarkiewicz, one might say, who illustrates the complex course of the split between objectivism and subjectivism, and how it led to a paradigm shift that has not been replaced by anything convincing. The advent of modern subjectivism meant that "this character of the question has prevented it from acquiring a universally convincing solution and its history from stopping at some more or less constant position, and on the contrary has caused it to shift repeatedly from one position to another".³³

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 23.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 251ff.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 274, emphasis mine.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 296, emphasis mine.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 215.

³² Ibidem, p. 216.

³³ Ibidem, p. 253.

In conclusion, Tatarkiewicz's works demonstrate the significance and value of aesthetic reflection as a pervasive and multifaceted concept, elucidating not only aesthetic developments but also ethical and sociological shifts in taste. His concept of 'implicit aesthetics' provides an intriguing lens through which to reconstruct the trajectory of documented thought and facilitate comprehension of critical practices and assumptions in contemporary art for the contemporary reader.

The divorce between beauty and art that occurred at the beginning of the last century, coupled with the latter's approach to conceptual dimensions, led to a transformation in art-making. This transformation was brought about by the advent of the so-called *avant-gardes*, which transformed art into a sort of an aesthetic in practice. This current, which may also be described as an 'implicit aesthetics', is constantly evolving and unfolding.

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