

# FIGURATIVE ART: WHAT ARE OBJECTS SYMBOLIZED BY IT?

Ryszard Krasnodębski, Wrocław

Reading of Tsion Avital's paper *Symmetry: the Connectivity Principal of Art* (Symmetry: Culture and Science, Vol. 7 N. 1, 1996, pp 27 - 50) was for me the secondary and conclusive incitement to deliberate over opposition: figurative art from one side and abstract art from the other one. The primary and irresistible impulse arose in the distant past when I looked for the first time at Strzemiński's 13. unistic composition (in the museum in Lodz). However, only just the possibility of presenting my conception on a session of Janusz Rębielak's seminar induced me to state possibly precisely the implications which have been involved by author's genius in the picture. The lecture titled *On Władysław Strzemiński's Unistic Composition 13.; Philosophical, Physical and Mathematical Aspects* is prepared for publication in the Quarterly of the ISIS - Symmetry.

I would like to display in this paper that the Strzemiński's composition 13. - picture treated as abstract one - may be seen as a symbol in the Avital's meaning. I point out that it fulfils "The central thesis of [Avital's] essay", i.e. "that the most basic function of symbols is at one at the same time *connectivity and differentiation*". The composition which we are interested in is a symbol realizing the symmetry (the notion

is used here in the Avital's meaning and not in the geometrical one) of object which belongs to a reality. The reality is a fragment of this one which should be considered on higher level of our body of knowledge. In order to be equal to this task I should refer some notions to Aristotelian metaphysics. It is however a necessary thing to contribute to this *philosophia perennis* some modifications.

Being and existence (*ens et esse*) are the fundamental notions in metaphysics. Both create what we call *reality* or, if it is necessary, *the reality*. In our deliberations we are interested in other notion, namely *relation*. It is treated in the classical metaphysics not so essentially, as I have emphasized in my lecture mentioned above and, as I insistently think, it should be treated. It should be said that concept of *relation*, I put in consideration about reality, differs significantly from that which is used in formal (mathematical) logic. Relation scrutinized in logic is a generalisation of function: *assignment* is the leading notion explaining the last one. We find in the meaning field of relation metaphysically understood, the following notions: connectivity, taken root, individualization, metamorphosis, process and assignment, of course, but as something what is a consequence of previous notions. We concentrate our attention on two-members relation. So, such a relation connects two beings in a way depending from the nature of both of them. If we consider some organic beings, it would be more essentially to say, that the relation *is taking root* in both of them.

It can be said that relation individualizes both beings *from out* the world which surrounds us and distinguishes them at the same time *in* the world which surrounds us. Both beings - if they are organic - are involved in a process of metamorphosis and at the same time the process cause this transformation. If a being is organic and the other one is not, the first one of them only may be involved in a process and consequently submits a metamorphosis creatively transforming the relation.

I mention a generalisation: it is a necessity to consider in some cases relation connecting many beings.

Sciences of all branches are interested in such appearances (in such symptoms) of the reality which could be observed and eventually perceived by our senses, may be equipped with some implements. It should be emphasised: not in the reality as a whole. Metaphysical notions have, of course, their source in observations of the

reality; they are, however, created in such a way that they enable us to grasp the reality as a whole and beings in their most fundamental aspects: existence, essence and other ones.

I assume, contrary to the classical metaphysics, that relation connecting any substantial beings, two or more, is a *substantial being*. I mention two examples of relations any of them taken root in two beings. The first one is most expressive and the other one, let us say, most inexpressive: marriage and distance of a pair of solids. In the second example, the distance - the most elementary relation - together with the two beings which the distance determine, we regard as a substantial being, thus as a reality. A fragment of this reality belongs to the physical world and other one to the world *beyond* it. (Physics is interested in the measure of the distance not in the distance as a being). It is easy to see that distance is a reality indeed and in many cases fundamentally valid, especially if we consider the relation which takes root in two or more human beings. The relevant distance, i.e. one of the components calling into existence a relation, effectuates in some easily exemplified cases a quite essential mode of action of people connected by the relation. If so, why we would refuse that distance as such - involved in any relation we consider - is real? It should be treated consequently as a substantial being not only as the measure.

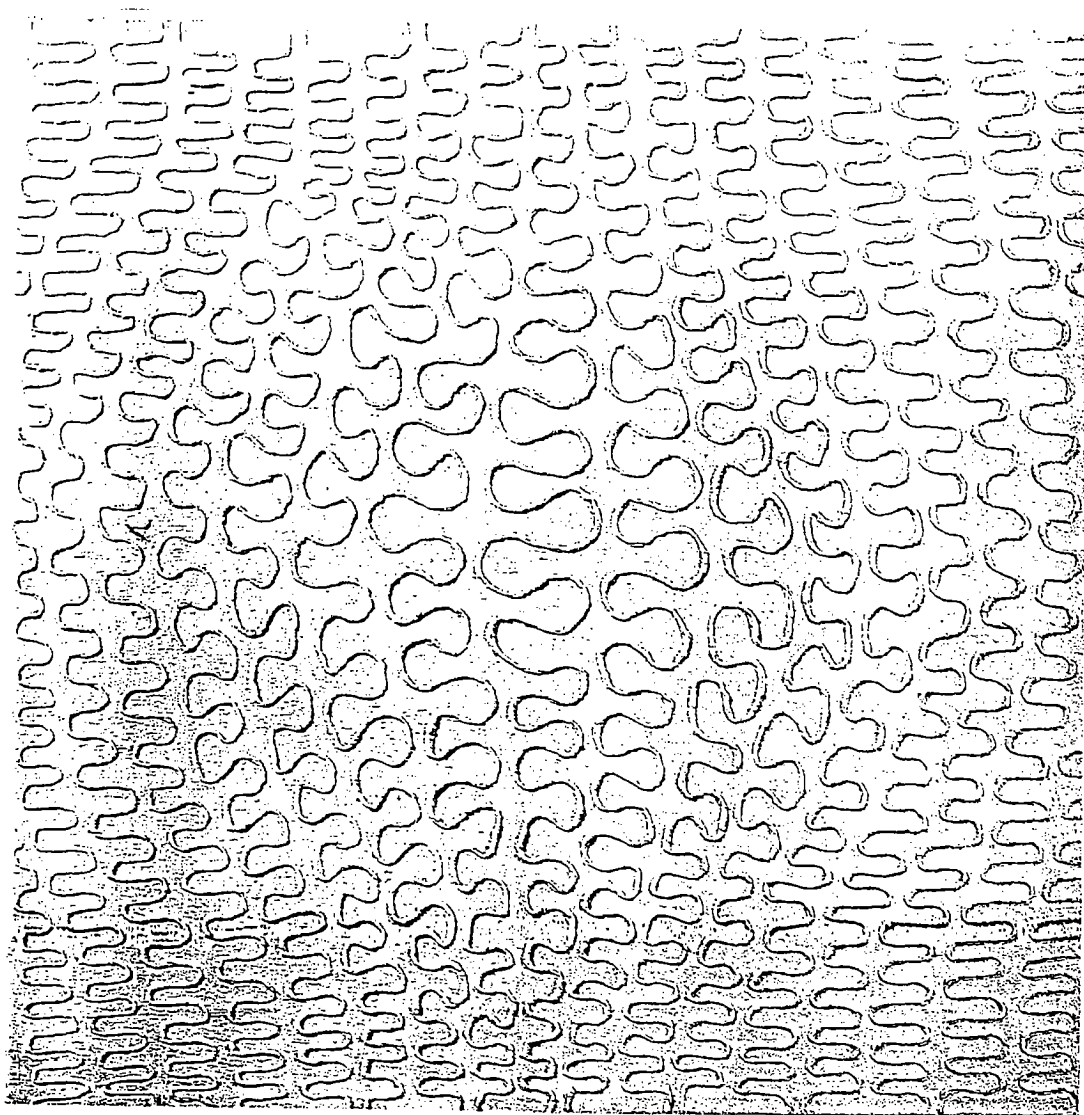
All what I have discussed in the matter of relation let us have in mind when we consider the process in which an artist observes the world surrounding him. Using language we have been sketched above the following assertion is justified: the relation which takes root in the artist's intellectual power from the one side and in this fragment of visible world he observes from the other one is a *substantial being*. The relation undergoes a transformation or a metamorphosis in the artist's mind. Two kinds of transformations from among many of them (may be from infinite many) are the ones we call *differentiation* and *synthesization*; both direct him to revealing symmetries. There are, of course, many of them; he takes into account some of them. They are of his interest when he decides what objects of the synthesized relation he would present on his painting.

The Strzemiński's composition 13. is not figurative one in the Avital's sense. Using his unequivocal distinction we should say: it is abstract. Consequences of this distinction expresses the following Avital's view: "The geometrical symmetry found in

certain 'abstract' works has no reference to anything external to those works, and therefore does not connect anything, but is on the contrary *connected* by means of a pattern that is external to it" (op. cit., p. 45)

If we agree that the relation defined and considered in this paper is something real - let us emphasise: is real as a substantial being - the Strzemiński's composition 13. loses its abstract nature understood in the classical meaning. Avital discloses shrewdly the fundamental tension sharing in the Real World. He writes (p. 48): "The dialectic of connectivity-disconnectivity, recursiveness-invariance, hierarchy-randomness, complementarity-discreteness, symmetry-asymmetry and others are among the basic rules of a cosmic game, in which matter, life, thought, figurative art and other cultural areas partake, but not 'abstract art'." I think however that this *dialectic* is apparently seen in the painting I contemplated possible thoroughly in my previous paper and in some respect in this one, too. Every aspect of this dialectics appears as having a degree of intensity; the intensity degree of various kinds of dialectic is a characteristic feature of the phenomena under consideration. If we accept that relations as defined in this paper are real, i.e. that they belong to the Borderland - partly to the visible world and partly to the invisible one - Strzemiński's composition 13. occurs figurative one.

I would like at the end of this paper to look at the problem expressed in the opposition *figurative art-abstract art* in a different manner. Not all figurative paintings - in the classical meaning - are, of course, the ones which represent figurative art. The criteria commonly accepted are assumed as a result of the work performed by many artists' generations. The persistence that the 'abstract product' is an art-work is in present time not burdensome. It is rather difficult to expect that in this field of art commonly accepted criteria would be elaborated. The XXI century will be possible more rigorous in this matter and future generations would not let they to deceive what the abstract art would be.



Władysław Strzemiński, 13. unistich composition, 1934  
[Reproduction devoided of colour]