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TEORIA • INTERPRETACJE • PRAKTYKA



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TEORIA • INTERPRETACJE • PRAKTYKA

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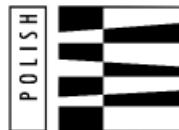
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- Rafał Koschany
CONTEMPORARY CULTURE: AN ACADEMIC QUARTERLY
AND A RESEARCH OBJECT — 7

NARRATIVES IN CULTURAL STUDIES

- Krzysztof Łukasiewicz
ON THE ORIGINS OF POLISH CULTURAL STUDIES — 12
- Ewa Kosowska
E PUR SI MUOVE: ON NARRATIVES IN CULTURAL STUDIES — 23
- Marta Kosińska
IN-CULTURE DIAGNOSIS AND CULTURAL 'FIELD' STUDIES — 33
- Piotr Filipkowski
ORAL HISTORY – EVEN MORE VERNACULAR? — 53
- Tomasz Kukołowicz, Rafał Wiśniewski
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FOR CULTURAL POLICY: A RETROSPECTIVE — 69

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF CULTURE

- Magdalena Matysek-Imielińska
WEAVING AN OPEN WORLD / EXPERIENCING URBAN UTOPIAS
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR URBAN EXPERIMENTS IN THE SPIRIT
OF TIM INGOLD — 84
- Renata Tańczuk
ON THE AUTONOMY OF THE SELF AND NATURE:
SOME REMARKS ON OLD FEARS IN NEW TECHNOLOGICAL SCENERY — 96
- Piotr Zawojski
AGAINST (INTELLIGENT) MACHINES?
ON ART IN THE TIMES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE — 109
- Anna Nacher
DIGITAL ARCHIVES / DATABASES: A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN ACTION — 122

RAFAŁ KOSCHANY

CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

AN ACADEMIC QUARTERLY
AND A RESEARCH OBJECT

INTRODUCTION

Kultura Współczesna. Teorie – Interpretacje – Praktyka (*Contemporary Culture: Theories – Interpretations – Practice*) is an academic quarterly jointly published by the Polish Cultural Studies Association and the National Centre for Culture. Appearing regularly since 1993, it quite recently celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with the 2018 one-hundredth issue, which provided an opportunity for narratives summarising not only the past and present of cultural studies in Poland but also the past and present form of the journal itself.

From the beginning of its existence, the journal's goal has been to analyse the most recent cultural processes and phenomena in their context – regional, national as well as universal, since reflection in cultural studies cannot be done well without knowledge of global cultural processes. *Contemporary Culture* has also tried to account for the methodological context of cultural research, mostly by way of – often transformative and critical – reception of the findings of the humanities worldwide. The quarterly has been highly successful, on the one hand, in identifying the most interesting trends in global cultural and scientific thought. On the other hand, it often succeeded in setting new trends for the more intimate circle of its readers. Thus – from its inception until today – the journal has continued to be an important Polish platform for the exchange of ideas and knowledge, substantive (concerning all aspects of contemporary culture) as well as epistemological and methodological (associated with the presentation of emerging and evolving research approaches).

Special attention is deserved in this regard by one of the most remarkable relationships connected with these two levels on which the journal has been operating. I mean by that, to put it most briefly, the various cross-disciplinary marriages of cultural studies. They are manifested in the institutional affiliations of both the authors of the journal and the readers who choose it, precisely due to their research, as well as non-research, interests. Of course, this tendency is not a question of hastily constructed interdisciplinarity but of fundamental changes in the

institutional and methodological footing of cultural studies, and the increasingly blurred lines between particular areas of social and human sciences. Contemporary culture – as a research object – required with increasing intensity a perspective capable of grasping its complex ‘nature’. *Contemporary Culture* – as a medium presenting reflection on this topic – has been a witness to those changes and a *sui generis* experimental field in the transformations undergone by the discipline: from its beginnings rooted in the conventional study of culture to the deeply transdisciplinary present. We are convinced that the sheer number of authors who have published their papers in the more than one hundred issues of our journal has contributed, on the one hand, to the solidification of Polish cultural studies and, on the other hand, to their popularisation.

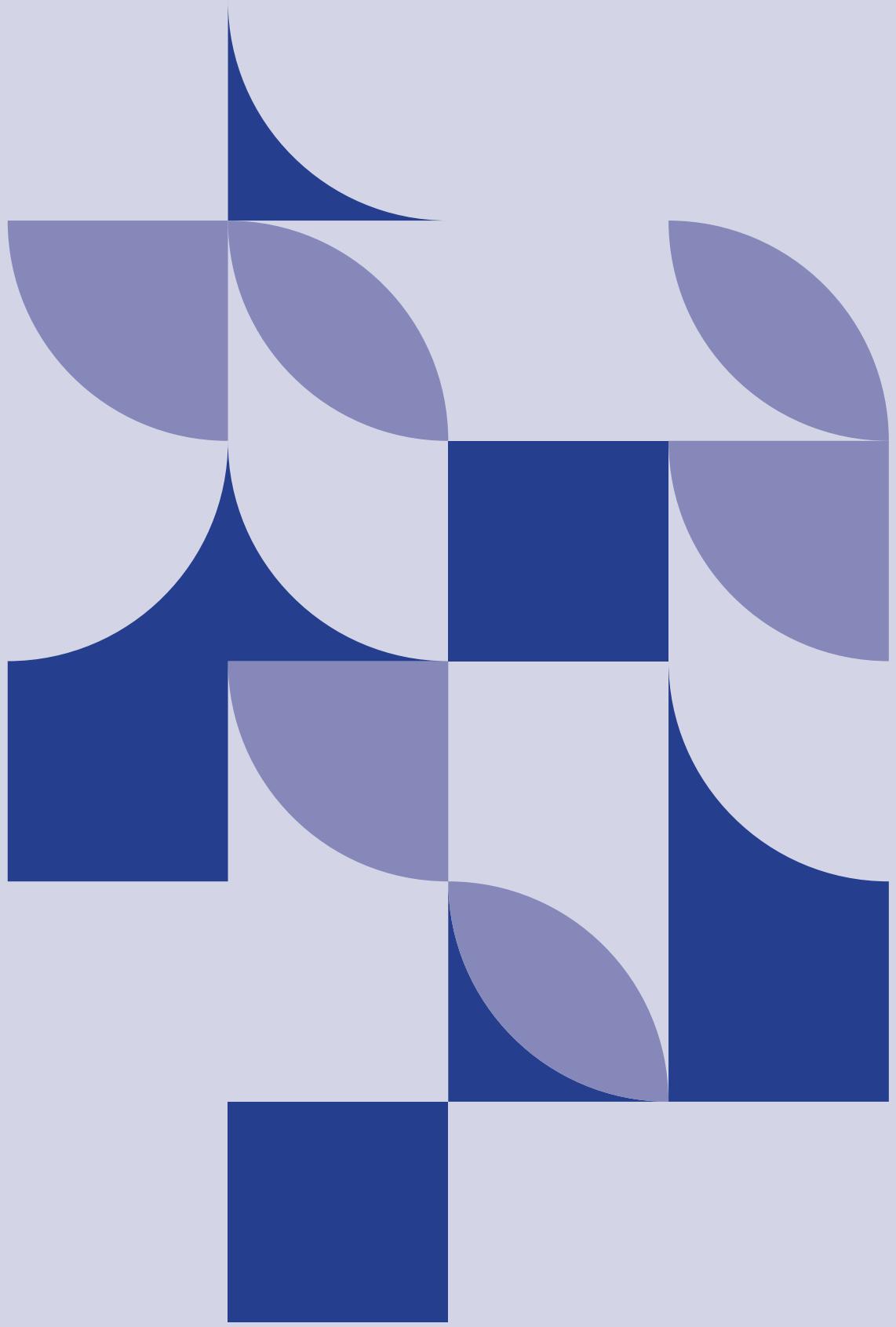
Over the last few years, the themes of particular issues have been selected in open competitions. This guarantees that the editors (the competition winners) and the authors that they invite will speak/write about matters that they find to be of most urgent importance to culture today. This special issue, however, followed a different path: the presented articles were selected by the Editorial Board among the journal’s best, most valuable, most read, and most quoted papers of the recent years. For almost three decades, *Contemporary Culture* has been a crucial medium familiarising the Polish reader with the key developments (ideas, books, artistic events) in the global humanities. Now – without giving up those founding ambitions – we would like to modify the direction of information flow and widen our readership. We sincerely hope that this English-language issue reaches readers beyond our culture and language area and also beyond the Polish institutional context of cultural studies. With this initiative, the quarterly has come full circle: from facilitating the Polish reception of the international context to presenting both the emerging and well-established achievement of Polish cultural studies to the international reader.

This special issue is divided into two thematic sections. The first one is devoted predominantly to methodology. It focuses on identifying the distinguishing features of cultural studies as an academic discipline. This is done in terms of historical reconstruction and recapitulation (texts by Krzysztof Łukasiewicz and Ewa Kosowska) but also synchronically, so to speak, in terms of reflection on today’s status of the field and possible directions of its development. The papers chosen for this section clearly show that ‘theoretical’ cultural studies today demand an empirical component. One of the forms this tendency has taken on is ‘in-culture diagnosis’, postulated as a transdisciplinary research method subordinated to the researcher’s (self-)reflexivity (see Marta Kosińska’s article). A similar feedback loop is also to be observed in Piotr Filipkowski’s text. Based on his own projects concerning the life histories of former concentration and forced labour camp prisoners, he reflects on the boundary conditions differentiating a ‘successful’ oral history research project from an ‘unsuccessful’ one. Another implementation of ‘the concept of pragmatic research’ (as proposed in their paper by Tomasz Kukołowicz and Rafał Wiśniewski) is closer to what might be termed ‘diagnosis of culture’. The authors concentrate on methodological considerations

about various relations between studies of cultural life and those devoted to cultural policy.

The second section is more analytical in character, even though reflection on research and description methods is an indispensable element of each of the presented texts. Above all, however, these contributions' common trait is that they all treat the aspects of culture they discuss as objects *in statu nascendi* and, simultaneously, oriented towards future and development. That is probably one of the reasons why the authors formulate reservations that need to be voiced within such discussions: the pace of changes, the elusiveness and fluidity of the studied 'objects', fears associated with particular paths of development, etc. And so, the classical cultural studies topic of the city is analysed here by Magdalena Matysek-Imielńska in reference to urban utopias and Tim Ingold's theory. Renata Tańczuk poses questions about the status of new technological beings and tries to identify the everyday fears caused by emerging technologies, including fears for the loss of human autonomy. One of the elements of contemporary, or perhaps already future, culture is of course art. Its possible directions of development in the context of artificial intelligence are pondered by Piotr Zawojski. At the same time, Zawojski is 'testing the boundaries' of the humanities themselves, which unavoidably enter into various inter- and transdisciplinary relations in analyses of this kind. Questions about today's status of the humanities – and of academia – are likewise raised by Anna Nacher, who places in this context her narrative concerning the blurring line between research and educational practice in work with databases and digital archives.

Translated by Jakub Ozimek



NARRATIVES IN CULTURAL STUDIES

KRZYSZTOF ŁUKASIEWICZ

EWA KOSOWSKA

MARTA KOSIŃSKA

PIOTR FILIPKOWSKI

TOMASZ KUKOŁOWICZ

RAFAŁ WIŚNIEWSKI

KRZYSZTOF ŁUKASIEWICZ

ON THE ORIGINS OF POLISH CULTURAL STUDIES

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It is only upon first impression, and only without proper historical knowledge, that one can be surprised and – from a modern point of view – puzzled by the strict assertion, in equal measures descriptive and evaluative, made in 1888: ‘Everywhere and all the time there is talk about culture’. This comes from the opening page of the introduction to a work with the succinct and equally telling title of: *Das Problem der Cultur*. Its author was Robert von Nostitz-Rieneck (1856–1929), an Austrian Jesuit specialising in pedagogy and historiosophy. In anticipation of potential objections, he immediately explained that he did not mean the title itself to be ‘an empty slogan’ and that was not employing the word ‘culture’ simply because it was ‘in vogue’. He indicated two reasons that induced him to take up the titular issue:

Firstly, the problem of culture is in very close relation with the most important social questions [Fragen] plaguing the modern world. [...] Secondly, the problem of culture is of ever greater significance [Geltung] in the historical examination of the past: there is an undeniable movement leading through historical works toward the history of culture. [...] Thus, even in academic life, the problem of culture has a huge meaning.¹

¹ Robert Nostitz-Rieneck, *Das Problem der Cultur*, Herder, Freiburg in Breisgau 1888, p. 1–3. The spelling of the word for ‘culture’ is in line with German

Today, Notitz-Rieneck's work is remembered only by historians of reflection on culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With some detriment to the author's intellectual efforts, manifested both in his answer to the question about the essence of culture and in the concluding chapter entitled 'The Culture of Humanity and the Kingdom of Jesus Christ', even for these specialists the book is mainly an indicator of the more general semantic and mental shifts and processes. This is also true of Andreia Seier, for whom the use of the word 'culture' in the Austrian Jesuit's work is an excellent illustration of its role as both an integrating and a fragmenting principle: one could classify, compare, hierarchize – and simultaneously observe, organise and predict, all in the name of culture. This systematic statement is closely connected with a more strictly historical assessment: 'At the end of the nineteenth century, the notion of culture becomes the central leitmotif of political and scientific debates'.²

The above introduction to reflections on the emergence of Polish cultural studies serves at least five purposes. First, it refers more or less accurately to how things were in other places, which as a rule is connected – in varying ways and with varying intensity – to the temporal dimension. It reveals straight away that referring the Polish cultural studies (*kulturoznawstwo*) to the Anglophone *cultural studies* is of recent origin and that it is by no means 'innocent'.³ Likewise, it is not exactly right to evoke the *Kulturwissenschaft* tradition as the most influential point of reference. Second, it bears on framing local tradition in the light, or as part, of the supra-local. Third, it speaks up for adopting a historical perspective to one's own position – and furthermore, a perspective including more than just the things one approves of. Fourth, it makes us appreciate the social and intellectual context of the formation of Polish cultural studies, which – when looked at from a different angle – also demonstrates that reflection on culture cannot be reduced to this discipline alone. Indeed, Polish cultural studies had to fight for their place

orthography of that period. See, Fritz Wefelmeyer, 'From Nature to Modernism: The Concept and Discourse of Culture in Its Development from the Nineteenth into the Twentieth Century', in: *Politics and Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. William Niven, James Jordan, Camden House, New York 2003, p. 26–28. For Georg Bollenbeck (*Bildung und Kultur: Glanz und Elend eines deutschen Deutungsmusters*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am M. 1996, p. 230), Notitz-Rieneck's book is one of the works attesting to the category of culture gaining ground at the expense of education, a process related to accelerated modernisation. On the latter question, see, Rüdiger vom Bruch, Friedrich W. Graf, Gangolf Hübinger, 'Einleitung: Kulturbegriff, Kulturkritik und Kulturwissenschaften um 1900', in: *Kultur und Kulturwissenschaften um 1900: Krise der Moderne und Glaube an die Wissenschaft*, ed. Rüdiger vom Bruch, Friedrich W. Graf, Gangolf Hübinger, Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1989.

² Andreia Seier, 'Überall Cultur und kein Ende': Zur diskursiven Konstitution von «Kultur» um 1900, in: *Der Gesellschaftskörper: Zur Neuordnung von Kultur und Geschlecht um 1900*, ed. Hannelore Bublitz, Christine Hanke, Andrea Seier, Campus, Frankfurt am M. 2000, p. 112. For the sake of clarity, it is worth quoting Seier's explanation of the meaning given to the term 'cultural sciences': The term *cultural sciences* (*Kulturwissenschaften*) is an umbrella notion, integrating philosophy, literary studies and historiography, political economy and the nascent disciplines: sociology as well as anthropology or pedagogy' (A. Seier, 'Überall Cultur und kein Ende', p. 113). It is symptomatic that 'sciences' are used in the plural here, even though in German-speaking cultures, the term 'cultural science' was used prior to that, at least since the publication of Gustav Friedrich Klemm's *Allgemeine Culturwissenschaft* (Leipzig, 1855), and – even earlier – Moritz von Lavergne-Peguilhen's *Grundzüge der Gesellschaftswissenschaft* (Königsberg, 1838). In an extensive review of a later edition of Klemm's book, Józef Bohdan Oczapowski rendered *Kulturwissenschaft* as *nauka kultury*, or 'science of culture' (Józef Bohdan Oczapowski, 'Z dziejów socjologii', *Biblioteka Warszawska* 1, 1882, p. 458).

³ For a somewhat different take, see, Paweł Łuczeczkko, 'Władza a kultura, czyli jak doszło do powstania studiów kulturowych w Wielkiej Brytanii i dlaczego nie ma ich (jeszcze) w Polsce', in: *Historie nieoczywiste: Szkice z dziejów socjologii polskiej*, ed. Paweł Łuczeczkko, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2010.

at the table, as their progression to autonomy was often hindered, for reasons not always and not entirely epistemological. Fifth, invoking Nostitz-Rieneck's almost forgotten book makes it clear that many issues related to studying culture and to more or less institutionalised activities for its sake are independent of time and space, since they touch on the very core of the question of culture, and keep recurring on the strength of the object's own logic.

It is difficult to find a direct counterpart to *Das Problem der Cultur* in the Polish literature of the late nineteenth century, but for the purposes of this discussion I will disregard the changes that occurred both in culture itself and in reflection on culture over the twenty years following the book's publication – and quote a speech given by Józef Teodorowicz in Vienna at a rally to support the construction of an Armenian cathedral in Lviv:

The culture today elevates man to the level of stars. – And so as to delve into the spirit of this movement, I must touch upon culture. It is verily a difficult task to separate and tell apart the lights from the shadows. Yet if I could, at this very moment, speak to culture, I would tell her: Oh, culture! I admire you in the splendour of your works, ceaselessly created by your insatiable spirit that always thirsts for progress. Yet I bemoan you whenever you combine your genius with hubris, which – even more insatiable than your desire of knowledge – throws you into a realm of conviction that you can solve each and every problem that life confronts us with!⁴

These words may seem just as historically exotic as the passage from Nostitz-Rieneck, and both authors do indeed have much in common. At this point, however, let them serve as further evidence of the very distinct emergence of 'the problem of culture' in the intellectual discourse at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both quoted texts bear clear marks of the authors' worldview. That, however, only underlines the significance of this issue, which you had to address and consequently, with time, make it one of your concerns and reframe it according to your basic philosophical and ideological tenets. In other words, in the worldview struggles fought at the beginning of the previous century, the category of culture played a considerable role, and – to travesty the title of the perhaps most important Polish text concerning this subject matter, penned by Stanisław Brzozowski⁵ – historical materialism was not the only philosophy of culture.

We have to leave aside the question of the place reserved for the notion of worldview in various systematically developed conceptions of culture – although 'view of the world' and even 'view of the world and life' were among the topics written about at that time and a bit later. It is nevertheless important to emphasise that the epistemic and scientific approach to culture formed as part of a much broader and richer current of cultural reflection. To relate this to the emergence of Polish

⁴ Józef T. Teodorowicz, „Ojcze nasz” kultury, transl. Jan Miodoborski, Drukarnia E. Winiarza, Lwów 1908, p. 6.

⁵ The author alludes to Brzozowski's essay 'Historical Materialism as Philosophy of Culture', first published: Stanisław Brzozowski, 'Materializm dziejowy jako filozofia kultury. Program filozoficzny', *Przegląd Społeczny* 8, 1907; *Przegląd Społeczny* 9, 1907 (translator's note).

cultural studies as an academic discipline – a discipline aware of its relatively autonomous status, and offering a university degree, which was postulated and discussed in Poland with increasing resolve in the late 1960s – one might say that part of the intellectual and social context of this emergence was the various, including intellectual, effects of appreciation of culture by the Second Vatican Council. For some time, the discipline was largely devoted to carrying on the tradition of Christian reflection on culture, which saw a vivid enough development in pre-World War Two Poland, albeit focusing mainly on the conspicuous theme of so-called crisis of culture. The Polish cultural studies of today also have many points of convergence with conceptions that clearly accentuate their ideological character.

Due to its ambiguity, the term ‘culture’ would at times become something of a *Kampbegriff*, a rally call to intellectual debates and social action. Despite the distinctively negative connotations of *Kulturkampf* in the Polish, but also German, memory and historiography, I propose to follow Georg Bollenbeck in noting – not so much to exorcise the term but to get a wider perspective – that it referred to all sorts of activities intentionally directed at cultural goals.⁶ Without a doubt, the status of culture as a category, its social and historical determinants, and even the history of the word itself, differ in many respects between the German and Polish contexts. William II’s state was among the most powerful empires in Europe, while Poland was not even on the map, but beginning in the end of the nineteenth century, efforts at changing this state of affairs and resurrecting Polish sovereignty intensified in all spheres of the social life.

It is of course impossible to reduce the Polish independence struggle to the struggle for Polish culture. Yet even if we were to consider the latter as the only available form of, or as a camouflage for, the former, it still brought with it a deepening of cultural reflection. A more detailed analysis and description of this subject is contingent on the adopted understanding of the political sphere and its influence on the ways culture is reflected upon. An equally important question, yet one all too often approached superficially or easily instrumentalised, concerns the more narrowly defined cultural policy. On the one hand, institutional stabilisation of Polish cultural studies as an academic field and a university course was connected to the intentions and actions of particular state agencies; on the other, one of the tasks of cultural studies was to consider the foundations, possibilities and forms of cultural policy. Even if this was used in ‘strategic’ talks with decision-makers and public presentations of the competences of a cultural studies specialist, at the same time (as has been described in more detail elsewhere⁷) an argument was made – from a specific political position and applying a particular definition of culture – that cultural studies were not a necessary element of social and political life. Furthermore, it should be remembered that cultural policy

⁶ See, Georg Bollenbeck, ‘Warum der Begriff «Kultur» um 1900 reformulierungsbedürftig wird’, in: *Konkurrenten in der Fakultät: Kultur, Wissen und Universität um 1900*, ed. Christoph König, Eberhard Lämmerl, Fischer Taschenbuch, Frankfurt am M. 1999, p. 17. One of the sources for this opinion is the body of answers to a survey about the future of culture announced in April 1909 by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

⁷ See the publications associated with the grant *Polish Cultural Studies: The History and Legacy of the Discipline* (Grant No. 0063/NPrH2/H11/82/2014: *Kulturoznanstwo polskie. Historia i dziedzictwo dyscypliny*).

had also been raised as an epistemic problem in interbellum Poland, which was a period abounding in attempts to politicise culture.

The conception of Stanisław Brzozowski mentioned above was a point of reference and a source of inspiration for Eugeniusz Krasuski, author of the 1913 book *Questions of Culture* (*Zagadnienia kultury*). Krasuski engaged in polemics with Karol Irzykowski over Brzozowski's *Voices in the Night* (*Głosy wśród nocy*), supported establishing the Stanisław Brzozowski Society, and was an activist in and for the city of Łódź,⁸ where he headed the local Public Library Society; his First World War diary appeared in print a few years ago. His other publication was a brochure with one of his talks (*Ideas and Life, Idealy i życie*, 1916), but *Questions of Culture* remains Krasuski's most important and most ambitious work. It was noticed years ago by Ryszard Nycz for its symptomatic character.⁹ It is also, one may add, an eclectic work, but its eclecticism, while still being a fault, lays bare the period's dominant ways of thinking. Krasuski located the 'essence of culture' in a network of relations stretched between the will, values, science, and life. In keeping with the modernist programme, his definition was closest to Georg Simmel's. As he wrote:

real culture is no 'state', no 'status quo' but an unceasing striving, an activity manifesting itself in continuous cooperation by everyone for everyone. It is a collective phenomenon, a socio-national manifestation. Especially in Poland, this is not remembered enough.¹⁰

It was a time when Polish thought, just as European thought in general, was occupied by the question of culture, and no effort was spared in introducing structure to this new and increasingly popular sphere. For instance, Wilhelm Feldman proposed to adopt the following distinction:

The process of change in values that we are currently experiencing is essentially a question of culture. This question embraces all issues of our individual and social life, and an immense part of the misunderstandings and non-understandings that we encounter at every turn results from identifying culture with civilisation.

We speak about the need to adopt the forms of economic production from the West, and its political forms; we call this culture. We speak about strengthening our intellectual life, about new ideas that see as the goal man's struggle with nature, man's taming of nature with a view to ruling the universe; this, too, we call nature. Meanwhile, all these issues are merely civilisation.¹¹

⁸ In Czesław Domański and Alina Jędrzejczak's history of statistics in Łódź, Krasuski is characterised as a 'social and political activist from the period of Poland's re-emerging statehood' (Czesław Domański, Alina Jędrzejczak, *Rozwój statystyki łódzkiej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2015, p. 45). Cf. also *Bezbronne miasto. Łódź 1914–1918*, ed. collectively. Wydawnictwo Jacek Kusiński, Narodowe Centrum Kultury, Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Wojewódzka Biblioteka Publiczna im. marsz. J. Piłsudskiego w Łodzi, Łódź 2014.

⁹ 'This type of sociological-cum-cultural perspective on the alienating mechanisms that intensify in the phase of accelerated technological and civilizational modernisation turned out to be the most popular in Polish thought of that period' (Ryszard Nycz, *Język modernizmu. Prolegomena historyczno-literackie*, Wydawnictwo Leopoldinum Fundacji dla Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1997, p. 72).

¹⁰ Eugeniusz Krasuski, *Zagadnienia kultury*, Nakładem księgarni Wincentego Jakowickiego, Warszawa 1913, p. 132.

¹¹ Wilhelm Feldman, 'Cywilizacja a kultura', *Krytyka* 1 (2), 1910, p. 65.

Foreign authors were well known in Poland. One example, apart from Simmel, is Ludwig Stein. While his *An der Wende des Jahrhunderts: Versuch einer Kultur-Philosophie* (1900) was not translated, even in part, some of his writings in social philosophy were available in Polish. Despite the use of ‘philosophy of culture’ in the subtitle – which in itself is very telling – *An der Wende...* contained considerations that were closer to sociology than cultural theory. This had to do with the fact that more conscious attempts at distinguishing between social and cultural issues had not yet been undertaken. For Krasuski, these spheres were closely connected in a number of ways, but it was philosophy of culture that proved a more binding perspective. This is attested by the reception of *Questions of Culture*. Treating the book as an impulse for the formation of a new philosophical subdiscipline and a harbinger of its author’s more independent works, Kazimierz Błeszyński concluded his review by distinguishing between the ‘impassive cultural science’ and the ‘vivid philosophy of culture’.¹² Błeszyński’s preference was self-evident but we should not overlook the recognition of ‘impassive cultural science’ as a pre-existing point of reference for philosophy of culture. Let us also note that Krasuski’s work received a very general but favourable review by the young Florian Znaniecki,¹³ and that the distinction made by Błeszyński echoes in the subtitle to Znaniecki’s 1921 work *Decline of the Western Civilisation: A Sketch from the Interface of Philosophy of Culture and Sociology* (*Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej. Szkic z pogranicza filozofii kultury i socjologii*). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the dilemma conveyed by this distinction was shared by many thinkers, and as late as in 1926, disheartened by his previous occupations, Stanisław Ossowski wondered whether he should not ‘ditch aesthetics and take up – this time for good – sociology and philosophy of culture (I need to relate one concept to the other, somehow)’.¹⁴ The following year, he named ‘philosophy of culture (the human world in nature)’ among ‘questions for the future’ and pondered at length about semantic differences between two forms of the Polish adjective derived from ‘culture’ – *kulturalny* and *kulturowy*.¹⁵ A summary of a university class taught ten years later by Tadeusz Kotarbiński includes, in its turn, the following words:

cultural theory renounces establishing judgements and norms – as a ‘cold’ discipline; philosophy of culture contains emotional elements – judgements, and establishes norms; historiosophy deals in doctrines concerning the entirety of history, its formation and development tendencies; finally, sociology looks for laws governing social change. A question arises if deliberations of this type are justified. Their scientific value is often disputed. Indeed, if being scientific requires intersubjective verifiability of results, then deliberations from the field of, for instance, philosophy of culture or historiosophy are scientific only to a minimal

¹² See, Kazimierz Błeszyński, ‘Z literatury filozoficznej’, *Krytyka* 40 (1), 1913, p. 254. For other reactions to Krasuski’s book, see, [C.W.], ‘Nauka i studja’, *Echo Literacko-Artystyczne* 15 (2), 1913, p. 1451–1452, and [K.], ‘Z ruchu wydawniczego’, *Kurier Warszawski* 292 (93), 1913, p. 4.

¹³ Florian Znaniecki, ‘E. Krasuski, Zagadnienia kultury’, *Książka* 13 (11), 1913, p. 561–562.

¹⁴ Stanisław Ossowski, ‘Fragmenty „Dziennika”’, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* (4), 1983, p. 33.

¹⁵ S. Ossowski, ‘Fragmenty „Dziennika”’, p. 39.

degree. Despite that, they can be engaging and profound, like, say, good journalism, provided that they are done intelligently. What can we do to become an intelligent humanities specialist? It is best to train the scientific mind (ścisłość umysłu) in the more suitable fields outside the humanities (like logic or mathematics), and only then work in the humanities: the skills will get transferred. Apart from the accuracy of scientific thinking (ścisłość myślenia), an intelligent specialist in the humanities should be characterised by the ability to discern things that are of import and essence.¹⁶

This history of philosophy of culture in Poland is a separate subject altogether, but let us note that the opinions about its fundamental meaning, and even warnings against its dominance, which one could hear in the interbellum years were vastly exaggerated. What is more, the polemics of the period show that the ‘impassive cultural science’ mounted a counteroffensive and was slowly getting an upper hand. One could even argue that with the strengthening of the state and the social, civilizational and cultural change, there was increasing demand for sociological reflection, considered to be more modern. After a collapse immediately after World War Two,¹⁷ philosophy of culture gradually regained its status as a subdiscipline; it had its proponents and even some institutional footing, but when Polish cultural studies were stabilising, it was not philosophy of culture that was their point of reference. Still, the cultural studies’ first projects were accused of being mistaken in identifying their scientific status, which meant, in a stronger version, that the new discipline was in fact crypto-philosophy, or, in a weaker version, that it concentrated solely on the philosophical foundations of the scientific endeavour. The further debates about and within philosophy of culture are beyond the scope of this paper, but to provide a better understanding of the initial phase of cultural studies as a university discipline in Poland, it also bears invoking the polemic of Jerzy Kmita¹⁸ with Marek Siemek’s characterisation of modern philosophy. In the context of this thread it is also worth to invoke the premises adopted by the Department (now Institute) of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. Years later, these premises found their expression in the research project *Polish Culturology of the Twentieth Century* (*Polska kulturologia XX wieku*). The project’s head, Andrzej Mencwel, offered the following description in 1987:

Polish cultural thought is a crucial aspect of Polish cultural history. It is not identifiable with literature, philosophy, pedagogy or social theories, but cuts across and at the same time unifies these fields. This stems from Poland’s peculiar modern history, in which the question of the wholeness of national culture and of its historical role provoked reflection

¹⁶ ‘Seminarium filozoficzne pod kierunkiem profesora Tadeusza Kotarbińskiego. Rok akademicki 1937/38’, *Studia Filozoficzne* 1, 1978, p. 154.

¹⁷ I share the opinion that Bogdan Nawrockiński’s 1947 work *Życie duchowe. Zarys filozofii kultury* ‘concluded [...] the first half-century of the formation of Polish philosophy of civilization and culture’ (Włodzimierz Kaczocha, *Filozofia cywilizacji i kultury. Teorie filozoficzne rozwijane w Polsce w pierwszej połowie XX wieku*, Ars Nova, Poznań 1998, p. 9), but it did not open a new one.

¹⁸ Jerzy Kmita, ‘Filozofia drugiej połowy XX wieku’, *Studia Filozoficzne* 9, 1979. Siemek’s position was later challenged from a different angle by Andrzej Kołakowski (Andrzej Kołakowski, ‘Kulturalizm i filozofia kultury’, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 5, 1995).

that was articulated in various languages (literary, philosophical, one of social or pedagogical thought, also artistic) but was generally uniform precisely when it came to culture.¹⁹

A few lines later, while sketching culturology's trajectory of development, he added:

This historical situation (and hence, our research situation) gets even more complicated at the beginning of the twentieth century. Cultural thought, having transformed into philosophy of culture, seems to become the central problem of a number of programmes, works, and achievements. Philosophy of culture, or the question of the human character of historical reality as the 'object of our obligation', the domain of possible conscious project and conscious realisation.²⁰

Two problems arise at this point. The first one, less important to our present discussion, has to do with terminology. Apart from causing some semantic inconveniences, the move from 'cultural thought' to 'culturology' implies affinity to anthropological thinking rather than to philosophy of culture, which is indicative of shifts in the wider epistemic field. The other, more significant issue is the close connection of Polish cultural thought with Polish socio-historical reality. That questions of this kind are easily ideologised does not negate their importance, but they do require much more methodological and interpretative vigilance. This is well recognised by scholars specialising in philosophical and sociological thought,²¹ who have studied on numerous occasions the tension between the particular and the universal in the fields of their mother disciplines and have pondered the consequences of this tension for research practice. Mencwel's stance in this regard was firm, but the question of culture, despite its local colouring in Poland, had a more universal character.

In one of his last texts prior to World War Two, Bogdan Suchodolski offered a succinct characterisation of the field when he wrote that culture had existed for centuries, but the problem of culture was of a much more recent provenance. Suchodolski himself put much effort into his own project, also formulated in the interbellum period, of organising the more interesting among the dispersed statements about culture made by Polish thinkers. There had been many ideas regarding the name for the research field that emerged from these statements or was inherent in them: cultural science/sciences (*nauka/nauki o kulturze*), civilizational science/sciences (*nauka/nauki o cywilizacji*), culturology, culturalistics (*kulturalistyka*), culturalist thought. The term *kulturoznawstwo* also appeared in

¹⁹ Andrzej Mencwel, 'Wstęp', in: *Historia i kultura. Studia z dziejów polskiej myśli kulturalnej*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 1987, p. 7. For a somewhat different perspective, see, Jerzy Jedlicki, 'Narodowość a cywilizacja', in: *Uniwersalizm i swoistość kultury polskiej*, ed. Jerzy Kłoczowski, Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, Lublin 1989–1990 and J. Jedlicki, 'O narodowości kultury', *Res Publica* 2, 1987.

²⁰ A. Mencwel, 'Wstęp', p. 8.

²¹ Leaving older literature aside, I refer the reader to an excellent article by Stanisław Borzym (Stanislaw Borzym, 'O przedmiocie historii filozofii polskiej', in: *Filozofia polska w tradycji europejskiej*, ed. Stanisław Pieróg et al., Wydział Filozofii i Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2011) and the very instructive study by Piotr Sztompka (Piotr Sztompka, 'Czy istnieje socjologia polska?', *Studia Socjologiczne* 2 (2011), 2011).

the interbellum period (in philological discussions, among other places), but was used rather sporadically. Names were not the decisive factor, but attention paid to thinking in a precise and systematic way helped to curb their randomness. This is perhaps also a good place to admit that despite the work on the history of the term ‘culture’ done before 1939 by Stanisław Wędkiewicz, and later on by Marian J. Serejski and Czesław Głombik, we still do not have a monograph detailing the Polish history of the word and the category.²² This is even more true regarding the terms ‘cultural/civilisational science’ (*nauka o kulturze/cywizacji*) and ‘cultural/civilisational theory’ (*teoria kultury/cywizacji*), although the latter could boast a long genealogy. In 1823, in an article published in the *Dziennik Wileński* daily, Jan Waszkiewicz argued, following other, mostly French, authors: ‘I call an immaterial fruit, or an inner good, any such fruit that is outside the jurisdiction of the senses, that is, not comprised of matter, one which has value for its usefulness. A set of fruits of this kind we call a *nation’s civilisation*’.²³ What is more, since civilisation – which satisfies, directly, ‘moral needs’ and, indirectly, ‘physical needs’ – has an impact on ‘wealth’, it is in political economy’s best interest to ‘get to know more thoroughly the principles that this immaterial production follows in its advancement’.²⁴

This yet another forgotten episode in the history of Polish thought warrants a mention because it demonstrates the multitude of sources and factors lying at the roots of Polish cultural theory. Ultimately, civilisation/culture did not enter the established lexicon of political economy, but the fact that the discipline did take up this question testifies to its connection with the progressing processes of modernisation. Following many other authors, Suchodolski traced the origin of the problem of culture back to the Enlightenment, and then confirmed this genealogy in his own historical research. Stanisław Pietraszko, to whose great commitment and determination we owe the emergence of Polish cultural studies as a university discipline, similarly noted the singling out of culture as a separate whole in Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski’s *Thoughts on Polish Writings* (*Myśli o pismach polskich*, 1801, 1810), even if the work was a long way from any coherent description of this whole. A century later, the term ‘culture’ became widespread and as such needed a more comprehensive conceptual characterisation which would go hand in hand with changes in the cultural life. That is why in pursuing the establishment of cultural studies as a field of knowledge and a degree course, both purely epistemic and ‘practical’ arguments were raised. On the one hand, it was contended, the existing ways of perceiving culture were inadequate. On the other, the proposed models of shaping it were at variance with the needs of contemporary cultural life. In somewhat simplified terms, the situation of Polish cultural studies as they were ‘obtaining citizenship’ might be portrayed as follows. In the epistemic sphere they collided with the claims of sociology of culture, which in the meantime had succeeded in

²² This role is not played by Bartosz Działoszyński’s recent book (Bartosz Działoszyński, *Cywizacja. Szkice z dziejów pojęcia w XVIII i XIX wieku*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2018).

²³ Jan Waszkiewicz, ‘Teoria cywilizacyi. Wyjatek z rękopisu pod tytułem: Krótki zbiór ekonomii politycznej, ułożony podług sławniejszych w tey nauce autorów’, *Dziennik Wileński* 10, 1823, p. 164.

²⁴ J. Waszkiewicz, ‘Teoria cywilizacyi’, p. 174. For more on Waszkiewicz, see, Wojciech Giza, ‘Narodziny polskiej myśli ekonomicznej w ośrodku wileńskim’, *Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Ekonomicznej w Krakowie* 585, 2001.

securing a reputation of the academic discipline best equipped to study cultural issues. The task of educating cultural workers was, in turn, claimed by cultural and educational pedagogy (*pedagogika kulturalno-oświatowa*), which promoted very peculiar models of cultural participation. While sociology of culture was a new subdiscipline, pedagogical conceptions and programmes had a longer tradition, which sometimes – albeit seldom – featured proposals to ground the pedagogical recommendations and methods in cultural theory. But regardless of these competing claims, Polish cultural studies emerged as an answer to the challenges brought about by the changing socio-cultural reality. They also constantly proposed new ways of tackling these challenges, which nevertheless did not shield them from criticism for alleged lack of practicality or ‘escaping into theory’. In other words, cultural studies’ self-promotion as a new field of knowledge was contrasted with a conviction that their proclaimed area of interest was already parcelled out and sufficiently attended to.²⁵ In this context, the analysis of other disciplines’ theories of culture undertaken by Pietraszko revealed their usurpations. Similar work was done by the Poznań school. And when cultural studies were introduced into Polish universities – which in fact confirmed the field’s epistemic and social significance – the accompanying texts did refer to, older or newer, tradition, but also emphasised that the discipline kept up with the newest intellectual currents and trends. Another often stressed point was the cultural studies’ focus on more general questions, which was juxtaposed with the narrow areas covered by each particular ‘cultural science’ – provided, of course, one accepts such collective characterisation. Even this advantage could be presented as a fault, yet if we reject reducing culture to a loosely connected set of fields, then the attractiveness of cultural studies will consist precisely in this integrating approach, able to transcend inter-field differences. This latter ability is a necessary condition of providing orientation in the increasingly complicated and fragmented world.

The more narrowly treated and more precisely defined cultural studies have not overshadowed other approaches to culture, although they have caused major shifts in the balance of power. As a self-limiting intellectual programme, Polish cultural studies have their roots in a wide discourse about culture that arose in the beginnings of modernity, but gained momentum at the turn of the twentieth century. The discourse had many participants, who entered it with different intentions and backgrounds, engaged in various interactions with one another, and at times decisively changed its shape and form. Cultural studies – whether or not one subscribes to this interpretation of their origin – were among the most active actors in this polyphony. Today, too, ‘everywhere and all the time there is talk about culture’, but the talking is largely done by other people, to other people, using different words, and with different goals in mind.

Translated by Jakub Ozimek

²⁵ I decided not to refer to ethnology/anthropology, psychology, historiography, art studies, and literary studies not so much due to the conciseness of this text but because I consider sociology / sociology of culture, in theoretical terms, and broadly understood cultural and educational pedagogy, in practical terms, to be the best background against which to present the epistemic and educational proposition that was Polish cultural studies.

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ABSTRACT: The article presents the rise of Polish cultural studies to a scientific discipline and academic trend, placing it in a broader perspective of culture as such and of early-modernist intellectual approaches to it. Revealing the philosophical, social and political context behind cultural studies, the paper uses it as a background to discuss different approaches to reflection on culture which cultural studies had to confront on its path to its cultural identity. This is where culture in its general theoretical dimension meets the specific Polish historical conditions.

KEY WORDS: the concept of culture, philosophy of culture, Polish thought, sociology of culture, modernism

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E PUR SI MUOVE

ON NARRATIVES IN CULTURAL STUDIES

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The more than forty-year-long history of Polish cultural studies recently became the subject of many analyses and partial reconstructions, usually done in an emotional manner. However, it was only the surprising proposal by the minister Jarosław Gowin in autumn of 2017, announced at the National Congress of Science in Cracow, that sparked the academic community's interest in the fate of the degree course and the related discipline. Initially, the reason given for this proposal was to adjust the list of Polish scientific disciplines to a similar list issued by the OECD. However, with time, this interpretation became less evident. Specialists in cultural studies saw this announcement as a dangerous attempt to question the value of many years of work by numerous Polish scholars who pioneered research on culture as a separate subject of the humanities in our part of Europe. At the time of concluding the present article, the outcome of this situation remains unclear.

Last year, amidst attempts to answer the ‘why’ question, we saw the return of old and the emergence of new narratives trying to interpret and explain Polish cultural studies’ problematic status.¹ Among

¹ Some narratives were formulated in the nascent period of cultural studies as a degree course, other – during anniversary ceremonies of courses

various ways of speaking about the discipline, the leading one was always the *founding* narrative containing heroic elements. Its formation was initiated by comparing the working conditions of the cultural studies' founding fathers in different academic centres. The authors of this narrative noted individual initiatives, commented on local and central authorities' attitudes towards the new discipline, mentioned organisational and substantive obstacles, and discussed compromises that were inevitable (and sometimes absurd), especially in hindsight. They praised the discipline's proponents and animators for their conduct, as well as their stance in conflict situations. At the same time, they put aside the need for thorough mutual study of the postulated discipline's various theoretical foundations as formulated by its different founding fathers. The collective memory preserved gratitude for authors of those foundational programmes, but the pioneering schools and research groups established at that time usually consisted solely of ardent supporters of one approach who did not always feel the need to study competing concepts. The situation repeated itself at the turn of the 21st century, when many universities made successful attempts to open degree courses in the discipline, which at that time enjoyed a period of popularity. During this second phase, the founding fathers and mothers of new courses usually drew on elements of tried and tested theoretical concepts.

Perhaps for this reason, the founding narrative led to the formulation of an '*ornithological*' narrative, according to which cultural studies slowly hatched in scattered nests. These nests were of different sizes and locations, some visible, others not, but in all of them thrived new life. The parents were interested in constructing their dwellings and bringing up children. Seemingly, it was not important where exactly the nests were made and who cared for the nestlings. What was crucial was the possibility to open a new degree course that – unlike other disciplines, which saw cultural studies as supplementary or contextual to its own research – made studies of culture the essential subject of autonomous academic teaching and the research that supported, in fact shaped, the teaching practice. For over twenty years, the existing nests cared for their independence and reputation, competing against one another to promote their own vision of the course and the founding fathers' legacy. This situation was expressed in a series of *substantive* narratives. Among them, two leading voices were the reflection on the ontology of culture and the theory of values (Stanisław Pietraszko), and the concept of integrated humanities and regulatory function of culture (Jerzy Kmita). Studies on specific features of social class cultures, forms of modern culture, including popular culture, animation of culture, and cinema and theatre theories were also being developed. Scholars also interpreted various other cultural phenomena drawing on selected elements of the theory and history of culture. To this day, substantive narratives define the academic

or the chairs and institutes that run them. Such celebrations provided an opportunity to present these academic units' achievements and research plans. Today, most of them have their own version – sometimes, a number of versions – of the discipline's history and transformations. See, *Historia mówiona polskiego kulturoznawstwa*, ed. Piotr J. Fereński, Anna Gomóła, Piotr Majewski, Krzysztof Moraczewski, Wydawnictwo Naukowe 'Katedra', Gdańsk 2017.

status of cultural studies. Their diversity and predominantly interdisciplinary character guarantee the discipline's strong position in the Polish and international humanities.

The 'ornithological' narrative was not explicitly present in cultural studies during the first two decades of their existence. In fact, it appeared later, as an attempt to present differences between various academic centres and was driven by the need to raise the status of existing research directions. Soon afterwards, it became the starting point for a *consolidation* narrative. The necessity of consolidation was identified in the late 1990s, following a meeting of cultural studies' representatives in Poznań, which provoked a lively discussion on this subject. Its participants called for closer cooperation between universities and a joint effort to have cultural studies recognised as an academic discipline. At the time, degree courses in cultural studies were very popular. Frequently, ten or more candidates applied for each place. The course was perceived as interesting and useful, but it was evident that it did not offer good career prospects even to the most gifted graduates. Without official recognition as an academic discipline, cultural studies could not offer doctoral degrees and habititations (with the exception of two doctoral degrees awarded in Wrocław). Consequently, the consolidation narrative underlined the historical primacy of cultural studies in Wrocław, the significance of the agreement between Warsaw and Poznań that led to the aforementioned meeting, and the necessity of systematic cooperation with the universities in Łódź, Katowice, and Cracow. A significant part of this narrative consisted of statements and comments related to the creation of the Polish Association of Cultural Studies (*Polskie Towarzystwo Kulturoznawcze*), the participation of cultural studies scholars in the University Accreditation Committee (*Uniwersytecka Komisja Akredytacyjna*), the establishment of the Committee on Cultural Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (*Komitet Nauk o Kulturze Polskiej Akademii Nauk*), the introduction of a new thematic profile of the *Contemporary Culture* (*Kultura Współczesna*) journal,² the launch of the *Cultural Studies Review* (*Przegląd Kulturoznawczy*) quarterly, and, finally, the official recognition of cultural studies as an academic discipline. This recognition allowed the strongest programmes in cultural studies to provide doctoral and later also post-doctoral (habilitation) degrees. The meeting in Poznań revealed the aspirations of several more universities to offer variously focused new courses in cultural studies based on the already existing experience and teaching traditions. Many academic lecturers based in Classics and Modern Languages departments but interested in different aspects of culture looked for more independence in their research and teaching. The universities in Lublin, Białystok, Opole, Gdańsk, Szczecin, Toruń, and other cities started preparations to open their cultural studies programmes. In the letters of intent, the initiators pointed out the compliance of their research with the already existing courses in

² Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, 'Diagnozy współczesności', *Kultura Współczesna*, 28–29 (2–3), 2001. This article was the introduction to this particular issue of the *Contemporary Culture*. However, it became a sort of a manifesto of the journal in general. The journal turned into a platform of the Polish Society of Cultural Studies. The title 'diagnoses of contemporaneity' remains topical today, and Polish researchers continue their presence among scholars who describe the transformations of modern culture.

cultural studies and linked their proposals with the pre-World War Two tradition of Polish studies on culture.³

Initially, this interest in cultural studies enhanced the position of the degree course and proved its indispensability. However, as an attractive and trendy degree, it very quickly became a sort of emergency exit for these universities that could not find students for their other courses. After cultural studies received an academic discipline status, a reshuffling of academic staff was often enough to launch a course with an attractive learning programme. In the first decade of the 21st century, obtaining permission to open a new course in cultural studies was not difficult. Narratives accompanying this process followed two lines. On the one hand, they accentuated the interdisciplinary character and attractiveness of the course. On the other hand, they underlined that cultural studies, as a unique degree, facilitate the survival of rare specialisations. Sometimes, new formal opportunities were hurriedly used without reflecting or commenting on the rationale of the resulting structural transformations. Today, the latter part of the academic community seems to be the least interested in protesting against the planned changes.

The expectations of ‘new’ specialists in cultural studies were met by an initiative to abandon teaching standards, which the ‘old’ academic centres usually treated as a burden from the past and a disgraceful continuation of the so-called ‘ministerial subjects.’ However, the presence of these subjects had a positive impact on the uniformity of teaching in all the universities and laid down the substantive foundation of the discipline. The abandonment of standards was meant to free cultural studies from a restrictive corset of subjects perceived as an inheritance from the contested pre-1989 era. Instead, it resulted in a conviction (shared not only by specialists in the discipline) that if ‘everything is culture’, then cultural studies can teach and study anything.⁴ Consequently, when cultural studies were recognised as an academic discipline, they became a victim of their own appeal and the diverse and multi-directional character of their research and teaching. Somewhat contrary to the official consolidation narrative, cultural studies started to fall apart from within and became an object of critique from ‘traditional’ disciplines. Perhaps the first to recognise this problem were members of the Committee on Cultural Sciences, who called for the creation of a document outlining the substantive framework of the discipline. However, their efforts did not lead to any satisfactory results. Meanwhile, the degree course lost its elite status and became a part of the academic mainstream. The cultural studies’ programmes were increasingly shaped by individual interests of the growing number of senior scholars who – contrary to official declarations – often located their research within the traditions of their mother disciplines. This freedom, beneficial in

³ Cf. *Kulturologia polska w XX wieku*, ed. Andrzej Mencwel, Grzegorz Godlewski, Andrzej Kołakowski, Joanna Kubicka, Paweł Majewski, Paweł Rodak, Małgorzata Szpakowska, Vol. 1, A-K, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2013.

⁴ Cf. Dorota Wolska, ‘Kulturoznawstwo jako wiedza humanistyczna: od kulturoznawstwa “negatywnego” do “nie-wyraźnego”,’ in: *Perspektywy badań nad kulturą*, ed. Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2008.

epistemological terms, turned out to be a kind of a trap. As cultural studies were losing methodological and scientific cohesion, they were turning into a discipline without discipline.⁵ On the one hand, their inclusive research perspective opened opportunities for interdisciplinary inquiries. On the other hand, they enhanced reflection on these areas of culture, especially artistic culture, that previously, despite efforts, had not gained formal independence within academic structures.

Perhaps for the reasons outlined above, stories about the past of cultural studies contain elements of a *resentful* narrative. According to this narrative, the degree course created in the early 1970s should be treated, at best, as a lesser evil. If it had not been for the political and administrative decisions of that time, there could exist within the Polish humanities such disciplines as theatre or film studies. The fact that these subjects were for more than two decades the fundamental and practically the only fields of cultural studies was, and still remains, unsatisfactory for some scholars. Although this situation opened opportunities for different interdisciplinary relations, it closed the way to potential independence for these research fields. The situation of art history was also unclear. It functioned as a separate discipline but not every university could launch it as a degree course because of formal requirements. At the same time, it could be a part of a course in cultural studies. Inconsistent decisions of legislative authorities, which granted independence to art history and musicology (and limited the possibility to offer degrees in these disciplines) but not to studies on theatre, cinema, folklore, or popular culture, were perceived as unfair and politically motivated. Years later, the dramatic problems posed by a lack of senior scholars with the required record of academic achievements to open a degree course was rarely mentioned.

At the turn of the 21st century, many participants in the intellectual debate on the cultural studies research subject (which had been seen as related to the human as a creator and maker, including his intellectual and artistic products, systems of values, regulation, and concepts, as well as patterns of thought, life, and behaviour) found it convenient to use a narrow and not explicitly formulated definition of culture. Among other reasons, this approach made it easier to analyse intellectual and artistic practices. According to the then most widespread perspective, culture was not so much the legacy of humankind (philosophical tradition) or a particular group of people (anthropological tradition) but rather an aggregation of activities in different fields of science and arts, complemented by initiatives supporting, promoting, and animating these activities. It is telling that nowadays the legislative authorities are trying to return to such an understanding of the discipline's research field. Consequently, cultural studies either disappear altogether from the draft Polish versions of the OECD list or become a part of a new discipline called 'culture and arts studies.'

However, it is important to point out that the expanding teaching offer in cultural studies and the growing number of research fields within the discipline

⁵ Ewa Kosowska, 'Uwagi o stanie kulturoznawstwa', in: *Perspektywy badań nad kulturą; Kulturo-znawstwo. Dyscyplina bez dyscypliny?* ed. Wojciech J. Burszta, Michał Janusziewicz, Szkoła Wyższa Psychologii Społecznej, Warszawa 2010.

brought about a gradual adoption (albeit not in all universities) of a broad definition of culture, which determined the intellectual horizon of cultural studies. As a rule, the most gifted graduates of the degree course obtain tools for thinking about culture and its study. Consequently, they are usually able – perhaps even more thoroughly than graduates in other disciplines of the humanities – to approach cultural phenomena in their historical and contemporary contexts. They can also notice how the broadly understood culture of a given time and place forms a complex background for artistic and not only artistic creativity. To shape and consolidate this kind of research competencies takes a much longer time than a single generation of students. Today, students in cultural studies who graduated during the last several decades have their own narratives and usually speak in positive terms about the education they received. Doctoral students and lecturers from this cohort claim that their research perspective, which pays attention to phenomena and interdependencies often neglected by other disciplines, is only at the beginning of its development and offers excellent prospects for the future.

If we look at the history of cultural studies in Poland from the perspective of cultural history, we can see it as a part of a *meta-narrative* about the rules governing the creation of a new generation of the local elites. Traditionally, this mechanism relies on an intergenerational conflict where the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ associates the ‘old’ generation with conservatism and the ‘new’ generation with radical change. The call for change usually stems from a seemingly universally accepted idea, the interpretation of which varies, however, in different groups depending on their dominant interests. The leading idea at a given moment – the validity of which is (temporarily, of course) out of discussion – stimulates action aimed at using its potential. This process allows for a change in a given sphere of social life and provides opportunities to fulfil broadly understood individual and group ambitions. In Polish culture, these ambitions usually seem to focus on gaining status and prestige rather than developing specific competences, which are treated as a means to achieve another goal rather than a goal in itself. The appearance of the widely accepted idea results in a short period of solidarity and cooperation between many previously unrelated people. This, usually emotion-driven, cooperation leads to informal alliances within and between academic communities, achieved by means of negotiations and temporary compromises. Their goal is to consolidate power in the struggle for personal and collective leadership, understood as the source of certain cognitive, moral, financial, and social profits. The outlined model, perhaps more discernible in the political sphere, also applies to other domains of social activity. As such, it constitutes, to some extent, a common thread in narratives about the origins of Polish cultural studies.

The founding and substantive narratives were accompanied by *contextual* narratives. The latter underlined the fact that a short history of Polish cultural studies overlapped with a series of shifts in the humanities worldwide, and ideological and political transformations in Central Europe. These processes were reflected in continual changes of degree course curricula. They also had a profound

impact on cultural studies' methodological preferences and the understanding of their main object of inquiry. The above mentioned shifts did not help the nascent discipline to gain strength within its newly defined borders. Starting from the last years of the 20th century, *critical* narratives – which not only undermined the legacy of predecessors but challenged the very paradigm of science based on fixed assumptions – prevailed in cultural studies and other disciplines of the humanities. The popularisation of Western postmodernism caused a retreat from the principle of following the existing paths. As a result, scholars started to explore peripheries, gaps, and areas deliberately neglected in earlier works. A part, especially if previously marginalised, replaced entirety as the main subject of fundamental reflection. This turn resulted also in the reconceptualisation of scientific truth. The latter became a question of perspective, epistemological premises, and restrictions imposed by language as a means of representation of non-linguistic aspects of reality. Within critical narratives, scholars advocated for the radical transformation of cultural studies' profile and turned their attention to current social practices, especially those influenced by modern technologies. Subsequent 'turns' in the humanities were related, for example, to ecology, BioArt, transhumanism, and human activity in cyberspace. They were accompanied by accelerated replacement of everyday objects and by changes in customs and aspirations of people. These turns and social processes, aimed at transforming human reality and preparing people for cohabitation with artificial intelligence, pushed to the background the questions about cultural invariants and the value of tradition. When the epistemology of modern scholarly inquiry was questioned, cultural studies came dangerously close to the domain previously reserved for artistic expression. Epistemological relativism gradually affected also other disciplines of the humanities.⁶ Theories considered by the contemporary humanities to be forms of creative practice resulted in many interesting concepts. However, they turned out to be of little use against unexpected legislative decisions.

The belief in a single historical truth was not the only thing weakened when scholars acknowledged the impact of language – an irreducible tool of both description and interpretation – on idiographic sciences. This realisation also challenged the value of ethnographic and sociological accounts, questioned the objectivity of psychological research, shed new light on philological interpretations, and gave rise to the concept of post-truth in philosophy. From their early days, cultural studies, which joined the humanities quite late, tried to respect the established standards of scholarly inquiry and, at the same time, pay attention to

⁶ Among them – and particularly among the disciplines established before the mid-19th century, when Auguste Comte proposed the first modern formal classification of sciences – it is worth mentioning how epistemological relativism influenced the methodological consciousness of historians. According to Leopold von Ranke (1821), the mission of history as a discipline was to reconstruct past events 'as they had been in reality.' In the 20th century, presentism and constructivism uncovered mechanisms of historical knowledge production and control. These two methodological currents uncovered irreducible processes in which historians construct an image of the past according to their present preferences. An interesting phenomenon from popular culture is the demand for the *fantasy* genre, which presents an imagined history – much more interesting for the reader or spectator than history reconstructed by specialists and based on preserved documents. In turn, Hayden White's proposal accentuates the narrative character of every historical account, thereby subordinating the truth of reconstruction to the truth of language.

radical changes in the methodological foundations of research in the humanities.⁷ More and more often, specialists in cultural studies ask about the ontological status of mental and linguistic constructs. These questions bring them closer to research on human cognition (this is a telling shift, especially in the context of postulated in-depth research on artificial intelligence and its role in human culture). Simultaneously, other researchers try to understand the significance of unconscious dispositions and habits that secure people's identities but impede intercultural communication. Together with many other current lines of inquiry, these two research fields testify to an enormous development of cultural studies during the last four decades.

Cultural studies are one of the last academic disciplines established in the 20th century. Formed according to legal, organisational, and substantive requirements, they have significantly contributed to the development of contemporary humanities. Cultural studies are not a homogenous discipline. Their representatives see it as an advantage and continuously refine their research fields, questions, terminology, and methods. The individual effort and determination of the many scholars who have created and developed cultural studies cannot be overestimated. However, their example proves that to lay down a new discipline's fundaments is a long-term process. It shows that almost half a century of intense work in a growing number of academic centres was just the beginning of the process of constituting cultural studies. In the relatively near future, the continuation of this work can turn the discipline into a valuable export of Polish academia. The idea to stop this development in the name of placing cultural studies within an external taxonomy of academic disciplines can, possibly, be justified by short-term formal and organisational gains but is hard to accept in terms of progress of knowledge.

For this reason, over the last year, the debate about cultural studies has become increasingly heated. The situation has deteriorated partly because the much anticipated explicatory narrative, which was supposed to precede and explain legal and formal reforms, has not been explicitly formulated. This lack of a clear message has generated fears that the philosophical concept of post-truth can find its unexpected realisation in a post-cultural studies narrative. Scholars participating in the debate about the future of cultural studies have tried to reconcile their defence of the discipline with interests of other disciplines of the humanities, whose identities have also been endangered. The attempts to balance individual and collective claims, respond to the needs of various disciplines, and do justice to the legacy of different academic centres – combined with the awareness that tradition is important, but changes are inevitable – resulted in spontaneous and fragmentary, sometimes more emotional than rational, statements. Like other national humanities, the Polish humanities are territorially dispersed and thus their persuasive power seems weak in the face of decisions of central authorities.

⁷ Quite often, this situation leads to interesting paradoxes. For example, the Cartesian proposition that thinking proves human's existence (*cogito ergo sum*) has been not so much negated as developed. Today, it could run as follows: 'if I think that something exists, then this something exists.' This reformulation partially results from the penetration of gaps between previously defined research fields and granting ontological status to the findings from these gaps.

Axiological principles of humanities cannot withstand financial and formal-organisational decisions, which belong to an altogether different order. This is, perhaps, related to the fact that the most accomplished cultural studies scholars were always independent thinkers, some of whom reduced their material needs to bare minimum and sustained themselves from charity or back-breaking work. Others ‘wasted’ their family property to buy books and pay for expensive education. In modern economic systems, universities depend on various subsidies and scholars become contract workers. In official discourse, the humanities lose to these branches of science whose development can bring immediate profit. It seems, however, that to abandon the achievements of cultural studies as a young but already fairly established discipline is an extravagance that Polish science cannot afford.

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ABSTRACT: The article presents selected types of narratives that have accompanied the development of cultural studies for the past four decades. They include programme texts, interpretations of cultural phenomena of various methodological focusses and elements of a public debate on the significance and role of the currently available findings. The images of cultural studies emerging from these narratives provide the basis for a reflection on the actual possibility to establish a new humanistic discipline in the rapidly changing formal and legal conditions.

KEY WORDS: cultural studies, discourse, scientific discipline

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IN-CULTURE DIAGNOSIS AND CULTURAL ‘FIELD’ STUDIES

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IN-CULTURE DIAGNOSIS AS AN ELEMENT OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Diagnosis is a research method usually applied with a strictly defined aim (epistemological, social, mobilising, or political). It responds to a specific demand for knowledge about socio-cultural reality. If those who conduct a diagnosis are aware that they do so ‘in culture,’ this diagnosis will follow a certain, loosely defined, set of rules derived from reflexive cultural analysis and multi-sited ethnography. The idea to locate the concept of ‘in-culture diagnosis’ in the context of multi-sited ethnography originates from an interdisciplinary team of scholars, including the author of this article, who worked on the volume *In-Culture Diagnosis*.¹ This idea was then further developed by the author. In-culture diagnosis and cultural diagnosis are not synonymous. The *in-culture diagnosis* blurs the subject-object division between the researcher and culture understood as a closed set of elements. Situating a researcher *in culture* implies reflection on the consequences of his or her immersion, rather than attempts to obscure or reduce these consequences. Similarly, in-culture diagnosis and cultural analysis are not identical and overlapping sets of practices. The former can be a part of the latter

¹ *Diagnoza w kulturze*, ed. Marek Krajewski, Agata Skórzyńska, Narodowe Centrum Kultury, Warszawa 2017, <https://nck.pl/upload/attachments/318698/Diagnoza%20w%20kulturze.pdf> (accessed 20.11.2020).

if it respects at least some rules and assumptions of interdisciplinary studies on culture. In Polish research practice, ‘studies on culture’ and ‘studies in culture’ are conducted from various perspectives, including sociology, anthropology, ethnography, cultural studies, and linguistics, all of which follow their discipline-specific assumptions. However, I propose that ‘in-culture diagnosis’ can have a transdisciplinary character and establish a common ground for different parties involved. I also argue that fieldwork is particularly suited to respect certain epistemological and ontological foundations of cultural analysis. I extract the basic set of assumptions governing cultural analysis from the legacy of international studies on culture, chiefly from historically oriented version of British culturalism. Nevertheless, other more or less akin contemporary cultural theories are also worth mentioning, such as the relational notion of culture and concepts developed after the action and practice turns. Below, I will show what these theoretical perspectives can tell us about fieldwork, what general and specific suggestions they offer to researchers who already work on cultural diagnosis, and with what knowledge they equip scholars who are about to enter the field.

One of the essential theoretical frameworks for my understanding of in-culture diagnosis is multi-sited ethnography.² This orientation has profound consequences for understanding and doing fieldwork in diagnostic research. It also carries the rather heavy baggage of the reflexive turn in social sciences, especially in anthropology and ethnography. As Douglas R. Holmes and George Marcus point out, this baggage results, on the one hand, from the fact that cultures under anthropologists’ and ethnographers’ scrutiny undergo globalisation-induced transformations that lead to their fragmentation, increased mobility, and internal differentiation, as well as to intercultural conflicts. On the other hand, it results from the postmodern revision of social sciences themselves, which took place predominantly in the last decade of the twentieth century (a significant contribution to the articulation and implementation of this revision came from cultural studies).³ Thus, contemporary anthropology and ethnography complicate both their research object (cultures) and subject (the reflexive scholar, researched as co-researchers). However, within multi-sited ethnography what is most profoundly and critically revised are namely the notions of field and fieldwork. This method significantly expands the field as a concept so that it accommodates various forms of knowledge, discourses, power, and materiality. Being in the field means here not only the documentation of different practices but, first of all, a sensibility to new ecologies and politics of knowledge. Researchers collaborate not with local informants but rather with people who specialise in their own worlds and are experts in their own cultures. They take people’s knowledge seriously and approach it as a para-theory of a given aspect of reality. Hence, ethnography starts to perceive itself as a sort of expert knowledge that cannot

² See, Marta Kosińska, ‘Tereny’; Agata Skórzyńska, Tomasz Rakowski, ‘Ujęcia’, in: *Diagnoza w kulturze*.

³ See, Douglas R. Holmes, George E. Marcus, ‘Refunctioning Ethnography: The Challenge of an Anthropology of the Contemporary’, in: *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd Edition, ed. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, Sage Publications, London – Thousand Oaks 2005.

make claims to objectivity and exclusivity. It meets other sorts of knowledge in the field, steps back from scientific discourse in which it assumes the role of a judge, and takes the position of one among many. Such ethnographic discourse relies on negotiation and cooperation. Consequently, we increasingly observe the ‘fieldwork’s entanglements in multiple sites of investigation and in complicitous forms of collaboration that have changed markedly what anthropologists want from “natives” as subjects.’⁴

CONSTRUCTING THE FIELD: WHAT CAN ONE SEE THERE AND HOW TO REFRAIN FROM CONQUEST?

Fieldwork in ethnography and anthropology underwent a significant change at the turn of the 21st century. This change was so profound that it has revolutionised field research in virtually all social disciplines, including sociology and cultural studies. Generally speaking, the classical empirical analysis in a positivistic spirit has been gradually replaced by research founded on cooperation, dialogue, and mobilisation, or activity guided by the principle of social justice.⁵ Selecting from a whole range of different forms of participant observation, researchers have increasingly defined their role as participants in the communities they study. Usually, this participation takes one of the following three forms: peripheral membership (a researcher enters the group but does not take part in its core activities), active membership (a researcher enters the group and engages in core activities but does not commit him or herself to the group’s essential norms and values), and complete membership (a researcher participates in the group’s life, accepts its values, and act as its spokesperson).⁶ When fieldwork – including in-culture diagnosis – is done in a community similar to the researchers’ own social environment, they should (regardless of the form of their membership) actively contextualise and reflect on their own values, attitudes, interests, and strategies vis-à-vis the studied community.

It would be difficult to imagine a contemporary form of in-culture diagnosis in which researchers take roles entirely detached and distanced from the reality they study. Consequently, it is also difficult to think about fieldwork in which they assume a possibility of entirely objective and disengaged observation. Today, such a conviction should be discarded, together with other positivistic myths about the objectivity of sciences. It is replaced by researchers’ active reflection on the relations they establish and maintain with different elements of the cultural reality they study. Among other things, an in-culture diagnosis

⁴ D. R. Holmes, G. E. Marcus, ‘Refunctioning Ethnography’, p. 1100.

⁵ See, Michael V. Angrosino, ‘Recontextualizing Observation: Ethnography, Pedagogy, and the Prospects for a Progressive Political Agenda’, in: *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd Edition; Michael V. Angrosino, Kimberley Pérez, ‘Rethinking Observation: From Method to Context’, in: Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd Edition, Sage Publications, London – Thousand Oaks, 2000; Małgorzata Dudkiewicz, ‘Metodologiczny kontekst badań aktywizujących’, *Animacja życia publicznego. Zeszyty Centrum Badań Społeczności i Polityki Lokalnych* 2 (5), 2001.

⁶ Michael V. Angrosino, *Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research*, Sage Publications, London – Thousand Oaks 2007, p. 55–56.

is a form of such a reflection. This idea was expressed most clearly by Michael Angrosino and Kimberley Pérez when they wrote that fieldwork creates (nothing more and nothing less than) a situational context in which researchers assume different roles.⁷ Thus, what comes to the foreground is an interactive and situational character of the field where one engages in different relations. The relational, situational, and interactive character of fieldwork ‘inserts,’ so to speak, a researcher in relations of power, interdependence, subordination, and various interests. This perspective of someone ‘inserted’ into the field allows him or her to see it from within and in an interactive and relational manner. Consequently, it is difficult to perceive the people one meets in the field as ‘objects of study.’ It is worth remembering that the researcher–researched relationship, once achieved, is reciprocal and allows us to treat each other as collaborators and co-researchers.

The late 1990s saw a decisive opening of fieldwork research to a cultural studies perspective. Cultural analysis allowed a broad and critical view on collected data and presented everyday practices as embedded in the context of power, politics, and domination. Within this inclusive and contextual perspective, the concept of the ‘field’ also expanded significantly. The idea of a research field as something *given* was gradually replaced by acknowledging its *constructed* character. Furthermore, the field ceased to be perceived as a geographical place inhabited by a society characterised by some particular culture. As a result, it has been ‘released’ from locality, put into motion, defragmented, and – consequently – deconstructed. If we accept the assumption about the relational, interactional, and situational character of the field, then its defragmentation means the process of connecting and disconnecting different perspectives allowed by the researcher’s mobility. In other words, fieldwork resembles the process of drawing a map that depicts cultural practices and features of a researched group. It is also a translation from one explanatory perspective to the other, and a search for agreement between different sites.⁸ As a result, a researcher assumes the role of a mediator.

Because cultural practices and qualities grow fast in the meshwork of social ties and networks, they are not limited geographically (provided that the diagnosed groups are characterised by various forms of online and offline mobility). Such a perception of the field does not need cartographic skills. Rather, it requires an ability to produce problem-oriented, socio-cultural topography, which unfolds not only horizontally but also vertically – on the temporal axis. For this reason, an essential element of the methodologies and methods of in-culture diagnosis is historically oriented cultural analysis. When we recognise some aspects of life as cultural, we also admit their historical character: the fact that they were shaped in a certain way at a certain time and as a result of the particular entanglement of reconstructable events and circumstances.

⁷ M. V. Angrosino, ‘Recontextualizing Observation.’

⁸ See, George E. Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1998, p. 84.

REFLEXIVITY OF THE DIAGNOSING SUBJECT

To be sure, neither cultural studies nor relational concepts of culture sanction a privileged role of the simplistic version of sociologically oriented diagnosis. Such a – still often used – diagnosis is limited to surveys and interviews with inhabitants of a given ‘field.’ Even if, at first sight, the methods of obtaining data for such diagnosis may seem attractive and ingenious (they use games, workshops, visual materials, art supplies, etc.), their deficiency stems from the fact that they only allow collecting information from ‘respondents.’ Hence, this kind of diagnosis does not take advantage of:

- 1) ethnographic methods and tools, such as field observation, participant observation, and cooperation with research subjects treated as co-authors or collaborators;
- 2) methods and tools of cultural studies, including the analysis of narratives, discourses, contexts, historical aspects, and visual representations. Most importantly, it does not apply from the onset of research a problem-oriented and contextualised approach to the conceptual operationalisation of ‘diagnosis’ and ‘field.’

The basic form of sociologically oriented diagnosis always reaches for the same fixed set of tools (surveys and interviews) regardless of who orders and conducts the diagnosis, what are the aims of this diagnosis, and what are the characteristics of the ‘field’ the researcher enters. Furthermore, these tools are mistakenly taken for methods of diagnosis.

Reflexivity is, as it were, an implicit feature of in-culture diagnosis as a research strategy based on the awareness that researchers are not actors who enter the field from completely external reality, but that they live in this field and are entangled in its meanings. Reflexivity is a particular mode of being adopted by qualitative researchers in cultural studies, anthropology, and sociology. Each of these disciplines went through the process of reflexive self-correction. For today’s qualitative research, the most vital and inspiring of them is the reflexive turn in anthropology.⁹ In-culture diagnosis is less concerned with these aspects of the reflexive turn that are related to the construction of ethnographic text or ways of recording research and its ‘scientific’ representation. The aspects that are more relevant for in-culture diagnosis pertain to data production, selection, and theoretical operationalisation, as well as to researchers’ position as producers of knowledge about a given community.¹⁰

For a wide range of research on culture, a key achievement of the reflexive turn was a retreat from thinking in terms of ‘peoples and cultures’ where the latter were ‘integral entities’ inscribed in the lives of particular communities.¹¹ This was

⁹ See, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Routledge, Kegan Paul, London 1978; *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford, George E. Marcus, University of California Press, Berkeley 1986.

¹⁰ However, we must acknowledge that it was the critique of knowledge representation and the construction of anthropological narration that posed the question about culture as researcher’s construct rather than an epiphenomenon of some symbolic entity discovered by means of empirical research.

¹¹ See, Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, ‘Culture, Power, Place: Ethnography at the End of an Era’, in: *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Ethnography*, ed. Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, Duke University Press, Durham 1997.

a move in the opposite direction from the one made by Franz Boas, who separated the notion of culture from the natural order and thus gave an independent status to the research on culture.¹² Now, thinking about culture has returned to a dense meshwork of interrelated animate and inanimate beings, from which it is difficult to ‘extract’ any pure finding which one might call culture.¹³ As far as fieldwork, including in-culture diagnosis, is concerned, these developments reveal a set of difficult and subtle problems: How to classify cultural phenomena and differentiate them from social issues? How is culture ‘visible’ during fieldwork?

What is ‘visible in the field’ during in-culture diagnosis results not only from participant observation but also from previously adopted methodologies and methods. The latter two terms are not synonymous in cultural analysis. Methodologies allow for creating a set of epistemological and ontological assumptions that inform a diagnosis. Based on them, methods specify a set of research tools and techniques of data gathering, processing, and documentation.¹⁴ An essential difficulty in understanding the concept of the field in in-culture diagnosis stems from the specific epistemological situation in which the previously accepted methodological assumptions outline the contours of this field. At the same time, these contours result from field observation during which a researcher is aware that easy, ‘armchair’ conceptualisations can obscure knowledge coming from field data. None of these two aspects is sufficient in itself as an independent research approach. Unfortunately, the complexity of diagnosis stems from the fact that it requires a subtle balance between the two.

Keeping the balance between careful selection of methodological premises and conscious choice of diagnostic methods is possible, for example, following the cultural studies programme proposed by Angela McRobbie and later Ann Gray.¹⁵ According to them, one needs to start from ethnographic observation of

¹² A. Gupta, J. Ferguson, ‘Culture, Power, Place.’

¹³ Such an understanding of culture as a ‘purified object’ was popular in both anthropology and cultural studies. For example, one finds it in Marshall Sahlins’ understanding of culture as a sort of structural ordering and in the distinction he made between prescriptive or semiotic-normative and performative or operational cultural structures. Culture forms a ‘separate order’ also within Clifford Geertz’s concept of ‘culture as text.’ We find various manifestations of similar thinking in British cultural studies, starting from Leavis’ school with its concept of culture as the order of values and man’s highest achievements, which was contested by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, to Raymond Williams’ understanding of culture as the order of ideas and meanings permeating practices of everyday life, and even to his notion of ‘structures of feeling,’ to Stuart Hall’s notion of structures of meaning. However, we must acknowledge that different forms of British culturalism and structuralism tried, to a various degree, to preserve the dialectics of meanings versus habits, semiotics versus politics, and the normative versus the material. See, Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950*, Anchor Books, Doubleday, Garden City, New York 1960; Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Vintage Books, New York 1966; Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems’, in: *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972–79*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, Paul Willis, Routledge, Taylor-Francis, London – New York 2005; Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, ‘The Uses of Literacy and the Cultural Turn’, in: *Richard Hoggart and Cultural Studies*, ed. Sue Owen, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008; A. Gupta, J. Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*; Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1985; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, Basic Books, New York 1973.

¹⁴ Ann Gray, *Research Practice for Cultural Studies: Ethnographic Methods and Lived Cultures*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks – London 2003, p. 4.

¹⁵ A. Gray, *Research Practice*, p. 7; Angela McRobbie, ‘Post-Marxism and Cultural Studies: A Post-Script’, in: *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, Routledge, Abingdon – New York 1992, p. 730.

‘relational interactive quality of everyday life’¹⁶ or, in other words, of different ways in which social and communicational relations between people develop. Such an approach allows us to overcome the logic of the binary opposition between text and experience. Following contemporary relational concepts of culture and object-oriented philosophy, we can extend this observation of culture’s interactive quality beyond interrelations of human beings to include objects, animals, technologies, and all sorts of matter. This perspective, which embraces materiality, is not new to cultural studies. For instance, in Jim McGuigan’s approach, cultural analysis has a multidimensional character as it ‘seeks to make sense of the ontological complexity of cultural phenomena, [...] many-sidedness of their existence, [...] the circulation of culture[,] and the interaction of production and consumption, including the materiality and significatory qualities of cultural forms.’¹⁷ It is worth adding here that also the ethical dimension of McGuigan’s cultural analysis is fully compatible with the imperatives of in-culture diagnosis. As far as their goals and values are concerned, both perspectives seek to serve the public interest.

Ann Gray underlines that the methods and tools of cultural studies need to be applied reflexively. This means that one cannot select them once and for all already during research planning. It is also better not to treat them merely as a set of skills with which the diagnosing subject is equipped. There is no such thing as a set of methods in an iron box of tools, always to be used when one studies ‘cultural processes, meanings and practices’.¹⁸ Following Gray’s suggestion formulated for cultural studies, one should treat methods as implicit in a given research field. This means that a researcher should not impose them from above. Instead, he or she should gradually and carefully select and adjust them to the specific character of the research field as it unfolds in time. Hence, the selection of tools is in itself a reflexive process developing under the influence of all other elements of research. It is difficult to say which of them is the most important because they are all reflexively interrelated.

WHAT IS INVISIBLE IN THE FIELD: DATA AS CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

The relational and interactional nature of fieldwork reveals a constructed character of cultural ‘orders’ collected from the field. Data never ‘speak for themselves.’ The acknowledgement of this fact is among the crucial achievements of this strain of cultural studies that engages in ethnographic research. Paul Willis underlines that there exists no pre-theoretical way of observation. More precisely, the very observation of any object takes place through the lens of data organisation. According to Willis, the search for unexpected data or ‘non-prefigured’ knowledge should not turn into dangerous illusions about research activities. It is essential to be conscious of our limits as researchers and not to conceal the personal pre-judgements with which we start our projects.

¹⁶ A. McRobbie, ‘Post-Marxism and Cultural Studies’, p. 730.

¹⁷ Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Analysis*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks – London 2010, p. 1.

¹⁸ A. Gray, *Research Practice*, p. 5.

Every diagnosis brings from the field things that are not there, namely personal pre-judgements of researchers.¹⁹ It requires skill to notice and suspend them, especially since they usually concern key issues of in-culture diagnosis, such as social relations and their determinants on the one hand, and analytical procedures on the other hand.²⁰ Nevertheless, in the process of continuous thematisation of our own constructs about the research field, we need to be open to these aspects of the field that we do not anticipate; to expect 'being surprised.' According to Willis, to do so, we need to remember an essential, if often overlooked, requirement of qualitative research, namely to acquire as many relevant data as possible. This requirement is often simplified by contrasting qualitative research as based on a small sample with quantitative research as based on a large sample.

In Willis' rendition, data collection and analysis are not two separate stages but one multi-layered and circular process in which we move back and forth between data and theory.²¹ This approach received the name of reflexive methodology. It is typical for cultural analysis but, at least on a basic level, it also applies to in-culture diagnosis. The main feature of reflexive methodology is that the priority is given to theoretical interests over technical aspects of research. This theoretical approach includes reflexivity or, in other words, an understanding of one's own social position and the resulting 'expectations, codes and cultural forms of understanding.'²² Hence, Willis calls for an abandonment of the hegemony of research methods. Instead, he proposes a loose set of methods that can take different shapes in a relatively unconstrained way. It includes various forms of participation in studied communities and methods based on social interaction. The final selection of techniques of data collection depends on the researcher's inventiveness. In this respect, Willis offers researchers considerable freedom. The role of inventiveness is also underlined by McRobbie, who points out the example of Stuart Hall. Without aspiring to 'sociological accuracy,' Hall's analyses present a 'micrological politics of meaning,'²³ indicate specific flashes of meaning on a micro-, rather than macro-, level, and seek to inspire new and develop existing research threads.²⁴

OBSERVATION THROUGH A DATA ORGANISATION SYSTEM: ARRANGING THE FIELD

A departure from thinking in the categories of 'peoples and cultures' also means a departure from imagining culture as bonded to a particular place or form of locality.²⁵ It is not the opposition of local versus global that shapes the fieldwork.

¹⁹ Among contributions to this auto-reflexive view on researchers' entanglements in social reality, it is worth to mention C. Wright Mills' sociological approach. See, A. Gray, *Research Practice*; Charles Wright Mills, 'On Intellectual Craftsmanship', in: Charles Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1959. In this work, Mills defines research attitude as a sort of everyday, systematic craftsmanship.

²⁰ Paul Willis, 'Notes on Method', in: *Culture, Media, Language*, p. 80.

²¹ P. Willis, 'Notes on Method', p. 81.

²² P. Willis, 'Notes on Method', p. 81.

²³ Angela McRobbie, *The Uses of Cultural Studies*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks – London 2005, p. 16.

²⁴ See, Paul Willis, *The Ethnographic Imagination*, Polity Press, Cambridge – Malden 2000.

²⁵ See, Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, "Beyond Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference', *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1), 1992.

Such an opposition assumes that the ‘field’ we enter is already given as local and that, from this perspective, we can comfortably observe how the local is influenced by the global. However, it is better to approach the categories of locality and place as *constructed* and not as *given*. Consequently, we can also adopt the stance according to which being in the field is about the researcher’s movement as he or she follows the mobility of the researched subjects. Mobility and change are two current categories that we have to consider when asking fundamental questions about the field: How do the people whom we study think about this field? Does anybody really consider our field as his or her *place*? What maps of this place do people carry in them? By what means (such as actions, values, relations, or meanings) is the ‘commonality’ of a place established? Does this ‘commonality’ prevail over individuality or is it the latter that dominates? Finally, if it turns out that our field is not anyone’s place, then what is it?

The opposition between local and global is certainly not a binding dichotomy for multi-sited ethnography, which moves away from a ‘static’ model of thinking about the field as a definite, local ‘point’ thrown into a specific ‘context’ of global interdependencies. Instead of *gazing* at one fixed point, multi-sited ethnography prefers to *look* from different perspectives, progressively moving in between them. Such an approach allows for a better understanding of the research problem. It challenges the traditional ethnographic arrangement of the field as a *mise-en-scène* that a researcher has in front of his or her eyes. Rather, multi-sited ethnography offers a complex and continuously moving sequences of scenes.²⁶ It replaces dichotomies of place versus context and local versus global with more complex trajectories of interrelations between different perspectives of understanding. Instead of ethnography as a theatrical staging with the field as a scene and the researcher as a spectator, we get a perspective that evokes contemporary performance and installation art, where mobile representations construct the space of the research field.

This new and inclusive arrangement of the research field concerns also in-culture diagnosis. Diagnosis as a recognition, understanding, giving voice, and recommendation inherits several essential features from multi-sited ethnography and its redefinition of the field. First, in-culture diagnosis can translate between different languages: from expert to everyday, from everyday to para-ethnographic, from para-ethnographic to political, and from political back to everyday. A researcher conducting diagnosis needs to know how to translate one perspective into another and how to reach an agreement concerning their use with different subjects, communities, and groups of interests.

Second, in-culture diagnosis is characterised by a particular sensitivity towards oppressed and marginalised groups, following the ethos of ‘research for social interest and the call to strengthen social justice.’²⁷

²⁶ See, G. E. Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*.

²⁷ This ethos comes from applied anthropology and sociology, at least to the degree to which these disciplines are expected to provide binding solutions for the public sector. As far as anthropology is concerned, what I am referring to is public expertise combined with response to socially significant questions in the spirit of ‘public anthropology’.

Third, in-culture diagnosis assumes a critical position in the same sense as different currents of critical ethnography and cultural studies do.

The two last features, namely critical approach and giving voice to subjugated groups, do not form a set of strict rules for in-culture diagnosis. Rather, they formulate a sort of *critical intention* of the diagnosing subject, who needs to ask him or herself the following questions:

- On whose behalf do I conduct this diagnosis?
- What and whose interests does it serve?
- Can it lead to the marginalisation of or a discrimination against certain persons or groups?
- Whose voices were thus far neglected in research of this particular cultural field?
- Has it ever been the case that a specific ‘politics of diagnosis’ aimed at these people or groups caused their marginalisation, silenced some of their voices, or led to the situation in which certain problems could not be adequately expressed?

The list of questions related to the process of constructing the field for diagnosis shows that ‘research’ in general, and in-culture diagnosis in particular, is a form of knowledge production located among and in close relation to other ways of knowledge production. The politics of this production starts already with the construction of the research field.

A DISORDERED PICTURE: THE EVOCATIVENESS OF THE FIELD

A researcher who enters the field should remember that he or she is not looking for culture as something to be discovered, but a process and a reservoir of continuously produced and reproduced cultural relations, objects, and qualities. The most significant finding of reflexive anthropology is that culture as an ‘extracted totality’ is a fiction or a narrative construct produced by the researcher. For a long time, the dominant approach to culture in sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies was to present it as a specific order, a pattern of human activities, or a system of values and structures of meaning. The reflexive turn in all these disciplines questions the very concept of culture as a particular quality characteristic of a given place or society; it also questions the assumption that there exists an ‘internal’ order of culture.²⁸ For a researcher who enters the field, the consequence of this reflection is that to search for cultural order is a futile task and to imagine such an order as an aspect of culture is premature. The reality we observe can be full of tensions, internal conflicts, and contradictions that do not match the order of logical reasoning. It is, then, essential to be aware – already during the field observation of phenomena that may present themselves as meaningless chaos – of one’s intellectual inclination to organise the reality.

See, Barbara Tedlock, ‘The Observation of Participation and the Emergence of Public Ethnography’, in: *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd Edition.

²⁸ A. Gupta, J. Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*.

Cultural analysis – or, at least, this part of cultural analysis that engages in ethnographic fieldwork – explicitly advocates the search for and analysis of contradictions and incoherencies in culture. These can include

*contrasting moments of subjective experience, tensions between what is said and done, differences between what collective forms or materials seem to say or promise and what actually happens or is experienced – and between the researcher's expectations, codes and cultural forms of understanding and those which he or she is uncovering.*²⁹

The traditional, naturalistic approach cannot deal with contradictions. Consequently, it sees them as errors or failures. On the contrary, in the qualitative methodology, contradictions are the source of crisis that is inspiring and pregnant with meaning; they provide moments of creative uncertainty.

The reflexive choice of research methodology likewise defines the researcher's political stance and intention and confirms his or her decision to conduct an in-culture diagnosis. In order to position him or herself in a diagnosed social reality, the researcher must ask *who speaks* in the diagnosis, whose voices are allowed to make a statement, and *who is the recipient* of this diagnosis. In this model, in-culture diagnosis is the product of collective work. Consequently, it gives voice to particular groups and communities situated vis-à-vis other groups and communities. It can have an integrative power, but it can also lead to the differentiation of and antagonisms between social groups.³⁰ For these reasons, in-culture diagnosis is always evocative, which means that it takes its shape in a dynamic process of giving and denying voice to particular individuals, groups, entities, or problems. It evokes different social and political voices, languages, dialects, and discourses. Such a character of in-culture diagnosis has its roots in 'ethnography as an *evocative* genre of cultural analysis.'³¹ The reflexive turn in research practices of ethnography and anthropology has revealed that various forms of fieldwork, including diagnosis, always give or deny a voice and that researchers never take positions that are neutral and detached from the politics of social reality. This activist and evocative form of in-culture diagnosis is not just another stage in the development of diagnosis as a research practice. Rather, it results from the reflexive exposure of two facts: that every diagnosis is characterised by an implicit modality of evoking some voices while hiding other voices, and that every diagnosing subject is involved in different forms of politics and relations of power. Furthermore, the current anthropological experience of the field – the latter having expanded dramatically since the initial research on non-literate cultures – reveals serious difficulties in maintaining an 'expert' discourse of diagnosis. Often, such a discourse cannot stay isolated from competitive ways of describing social

²⁹ P. Willis, 'Notes on Method', p. 81.

³⁰ Elspeth Probyn, *Sexing the Self Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London 1993.

³¹ Punima Manekkar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India*, Duke University Press, Durham 1999, p. 49 (original emphasis – translator's note)

reality and can be challenged by diagnosed groups who have their own concepts of themselves.³²

In this context, an approach presented by the researcher conducting an in-culture diagnosis may be similar to that of the cultural worker, who acts for and together with local communities and supports good practices of cultural production. The history of this public role stretches back to the American activism of the 1930s and the origins of cultural studies in Great Britain, where scholars of culture acted as public intellectuals.³³ Another approach relevant to this discussion has developed within the community arts movement, where a researcher assumes the position of research facilitator. In this case, he or she combines research with support for a given community – he or she collects not only field data but also presents the conclusions to the community, informs it about the diagnosis, and discusses with its members the results of the project.³⁴ Finally, the research approach that originates from art-inspired qualitative research and is most closely related to relativist concepts of culture is A/R/Tography. It positions researchers-artists as A/R/Tographers of social relations. Inspired by relational aesthetics, it searches for and finds meanings at the relation-conductive intersection points – not only between human subjects but also among inanimate objects, and between people and things.³⁵ Thus, in-culture diagnosis casts researchers in different roles as it triggers situational and relational mechanisms of informing, correcting, talking, consulting, and advocating – all of which serve as tools for collective reflection in the joint projects of diagnosis. In this context, it may be worth reminding ourselves about the status of method in cultural analysis. It has been identified as a ‘social relationship’ driven by contradiction, inconsistency, rupture, and predicament, all of which are various manifestations of the crisis in social relations.³⁶ This crisis needs to be addressed and worked through. In this sense, the social method is dialectical. As Paul Willis puts it, the focus on the ‘the rich veins of “lived” contradiction is what can most distinguish the “qualitative” approach.’³⁷

THE FORMS OF CULTURE’S VISIBILITY IN THE FIELD

How is culture ‘visible’ in the field? What ‘cultural stuff’ can one search for and expect to find in the process of diagnosis? Obviously, answers to these questions depend on the concept of culture adopted as a part of the diagnosis’ theoretical toolkit. If the researchers’ theoretical assumptions are based on the relational approach and international cultural studies, they will look at culture in a holistic

³² M. V. Angrosino, ‘Recontextualizing Observation.’

³³ See, Deborah Barndt, ‘Touching Minds and Hearts: Community Arts as Collaborative Research’, in: *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J. Gary Knowles, Ardra L. Cole, Sage Publications, London 2008.

³⁴ D. Barndt, ‘Touching Minds and Hearts’, p. 355.

³⁵ See, Stephanie Springgay, Rita L. Irwin, Sylvia Kind, ‘A/R/Tographers and Living Inquiry’, in: *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*.

³⁶ With its particularly strong emphasis on intra-cultural location of researchers and the consequences of this fact, Paul Willis’ old proposition to understand research method as social relationships provides interesting implications for in-culture diagnosis.

³⁷ Paul Willis, ‘Notes on Method’, p. 82.

way. In cultural studies, this holistic doctrine resulted from the culturalism of Raymond Williams, who defined culture as ‘a whole way of life’³⁸. Later, it was further strengthened by the idea of ethnographic research as aiming for a holistic description of individually and collectively experienced symbolic systems. In Williams’ anthropologically oriented concept of culture, the idea was not to study some objectively existing cultural orders viewed as separate entities. Instead, it was to ask how cultures are experienced in their entirety, what is the complex attitude of people and their aggregations towards their worlds and lives, and how they ‘live their expressive lives as a symbolic whole.’³⁹ An essential feature of this understanding of culture was its relational character. It focused on presenting in cultural analysis how systems of relations and interdependencies between different elements of lived worlds are organised. According to Willis, ‘In order to see the spirit move in those pieces one has to reach for the central unifying symbolic concepts that are deposited in no single-artifact or activity, but only in the dialectical relation of all parts to each other.’⁴⁰

This call was expressed in an even more potent form by the relational concept of culture, where the latter is defined as a particular way in which characteristic and unique elements of a given group are interconnected.⁴¹ Here, culture is a trait, a mode, and a quality of connections and relations. This concept is constructed so as not to reduce an understanding of culture to only one out of many possible approaches, for instance, ideational, behavioural, or substantive, but to allow researchers to focus precisely on the character of existing relations. Relational view on culture offers – like earlier British culturalism did, if for slightly different reasons – a democratising approach that broadens the cultural field and, at the same time, expands the notion of culture to include also non-human groups and communities. To put it simply, whenever in the process of diagnosis we find aggregations that are interwoven into a network of connections and relations, we can say that they have a specific culture. When directed properly, a relational look – if we are able to shape in this particular fashion the researcher’s sensitivity – is non-hierarchical and tries to embrace all interconnections that are constitutive for a given group. Following the multi-sited ethnography approach, it also strives to view these interconnections from many different perspectives. It is an inquiring look, which does not automatically accept these relations in the field that come to the fore and seem obvious. Rather, it pays attention to the sets of relations that are serendipitous – temporary and resulting from seemingly insignificant and accidental arrangements. Relational perspective is also particularly sensitive to different forms of participation in culture, understood as creating, being in, maintaining, or destructing relations. This conceptualisation underlines

³⁸ R. Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950*, p. xiv.

³⁹ Paul Willis, ‘Symbolism and Practice: A Theory for the Social Meaning of Pop Music’, *Soundscapes – Journal on Media Culture* 4, 2001, http://www.icce.rug.nl/~soundscapes/VOLUME04/Symbolism_and_practice.shtml (accessed 20.11.2020).

⁴⁰ P. Willis, ‘Symbolism and Practice’.

⁴¹ Marek Krajewski, ‘W kierunku relacyjnej koncepcji uczestnictwa w kulturze’, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 1, 2013.

a socialising effect of participation in culture and shows that behind every configuration of cultural relations there is always some (inevitably political) project of socialisation.⁴²

NORMATIVE ORDERS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES: A TRAP OF ACCEPTED AND RESPECTED ORIENTATIONS ON VALUES. OR, HOW TO FIND OUT WHAT PEOPLE REALLY DO.

The relational approach offers scholars a wide range of possibilities for fieldwork and very innovative research. It opens up a space for participant observation that allows for identifying the main kind of relations that constitutes a given group. Furthermore, a conceptualisation of the research field as a field of connections, situations, and interactions allows researchers to thematise the relations they are involved in. Of course, the relational perspective does not neglect loosely structured in-depth interviews, in which interviewees themselves indicate what is vital to them and choose the narrative paths. However, this perspective's stress on *character, sort, and quality* of relations and interconnections suggests that the information provided by interviewees should be verified through observation, cooperation, and participation. This is so because research participants may not explicitly thematise all cultural and social ties important to them. They might focus only on those relations that are particularly constitutive, disturbing, problematic, or intense for them at the moment of diagnosis, but omit these relations that seem obvious or not worth mentioning. Moreover, the feelings research participants have regarding the character of crucial cultural ties can reveal their different quality when we look at them from a slightly different perspective.

An old dilemma of cultural analysis of how to distinguish between accepted and respected judgements (opinions or convictions) may also accompany the in-culture diagnosis. In the most basic sense, what is at stake is the ability to discern what people think (or think that they do) from what they really do. The social-regulative concept of culture distinguishes between the *acceptance* and the *respect* of a judgement or opinion. In the first instance, the subject of an action is conscious of a normative judgement which is attached to this action and which says, 'this is the way things ought to be.' In the latter case, the subject respects an opinion in practice – in that he or she systematically undertakes that specified action – but is in fact unaware of the normative judgement ('this is the way things ought to be') that he or she thus follows.⁴³ The difference between accepting and respecting the cultural judgements is clearly marked in surveys or qualitative in-depth interviews often used in diagnostic research. When the researcher does not recognise the difference between these two possibilities – consciously accepting and the merely respecting certain judgements – the results can be full of paradoxes. Below, I indicate just a few of them:

⁴² See M. Krajewski's statement in: Krzysztof Stachura, Piotr Zbieranek, *Transformacja pola kultury. Modele działań i strategie adaptacji*, Instytut Kultury Miejskiej, Gdańsk 2015, p.17.

⁴³ See, Jerzy Kmita, *Późny wnuk filozofii. Wprowadzenie do kulturoznawstwa*, Bogucki Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Poznań 2007, p. 52–54.

- A situation in which a person declares the acceptance of certain values and normative convictions but, at the same time, systematically acts in a way that indicates that he or she respects entirely different beliefs. For example, this person declares that road safety is essential to him or her but continuously breaks the rules, exceeds the speed limit, overtakes other cars where it is not permissible, and, sometimes, drives under the influence of alcohol, or does not react when someone else drinks and drives.
- A situation in which a person consciously accepts a negative normative judgement but, simultaneously, systematically acts in a positive way, therefore respecting a judgement that is contradictory to the accepted one. For example, this person declares his or her lack of acceptance of people belonging to some faiths and cultures but stays in close and friendly relations with such people.
- A situation in which a person systematically engages in a certain activity thereby respecting a particular normative value but asked about this value is unable to recognise it as the subjective reason for undertaking this activity. For example, this person is deeply engaged in the everyday support of neighbours but does not say that ideals of voluntary work or social engagement are important to him or her. Rather, he or she understands this kind of support as 'natural' and embedded in his or her family traditions.

These examples indicate that drawing solely on research participants' declarations may lead to incorrect conclusions. If we want to learn what people think about, how they justify, and where they place in their lived worlds a practice we study, a diagnosis needs to confirm their declared convictions through observation. This sort of confirmation is also necessary when we check to what extent the convictions that a given person declares find reflection in his or her everyday practices. Cultural practices and their motivations, or actions and values behind them, can contradict one another, thus negating the concept of culture as an organized order.

Relational diagnosis tries also to notice marginal relations in the research field. But how can we know which of the observed socio-cultural relations are marginal, if we avoid a judgmental and hierarchising look? Relational observation is an approach resulting from a theoretically oriented methodology. We assume that a researcher applies it consciously and accepts certain epistemological foundations typical of relational perspectives. Such a theoretical and practical toolkit can be described as a sort of strategy that facilitates the researcher's movement in the field of cultural relations. This strategy allows the researcher to adopt an appropriate position, such as conscious acting against hierarchical cultural approaches. We should remember that we encounter such approaches not only in social sciences and the humanities but also in the media, public education, cultural policy at different levels of government, or in strategies adopted by cultural institutions. They evaluate various forms of participation in culture as more or less valuable and more or less 'cultured.' In a way, relational perspective acts against these approaches as it presents and highlights as equally important all sorts of relations and all parts of a group within the scope of the diagnosis.

CULTURAL MODES OF SOCIAL LIFE: LANGUAGE, INTERACTIONS, NARRATIVES, MEMORY, IMAGES

Does relational perspective in diagnosis focus solely on cultural relations and ties, thus abandoning the once key subjects in cultural studies such as values, norms, language, interactions and communication, texts and discourses, images and visual orders, relations of power and knowledge, and – most importantly – cultural practices as such? Definitely not, because when we diagnose the character of relations that can transform the aggregations of animate and inanimate beings into collectives that coexist as cultures, we also ask about these relations' qualities and features. We can imagine relations based on a highly normative set of values (for instance, religious). Alternatively, we can think about an intensely interactive character of cultural ties manifested through specific forms of social interaction, as it the case with youth subcultures. It may also happen that the community ties rely on some sort of discrete practices that evolve over time. At first glance, it can be challenging to establish what ties keep such a seemingly shapeless, unspecific, and anomic community together. This is the proper moment to look for hints among these, usually marginalised, aspects of the community that involve non-human animate and inanimate beings: people's relations with architecture, public space (urban and rural), animals, natural environment, forms of dwelling and mobility, or management of space and time. The list of possibilities is virtually endless. Hence, depending on the character of studied relations, we can apply relevant research tools of diagnosis, including linguistic, visual, practice-oriented, communicational, and artistic methods.

We thus can see that the relational perspective in diagnosis is non-reductionist and does not limit the scope of methods traditionally associated with cultural analysis. Rather, it gives us an opportunity to reorganise the whole range of methodologies, methods, and tools at the very moment when we apply them in our research. This perspective allows for postponing the decision regarding our methodological approach until the relations binding the studied community together are 'projected' before our eyes. It is difficult to think about a research approach that would be more transdisciplinary than this kind of in-culture diagnosis that waits for a green light – i.e. the researcher's decision about 'how we are going to do it' – with the entire toolkit of humanities and social sciences at hand. During in-culture diagnosis in the field, it is also important to bear in mind both the dialectical character of the notion of culture and the resulting research consequences of this character. This dialectics – clearly expressed in British culturalism and essential for the relational concept of culture, as well – is based on the recognition that culture is a dynamic process permeating everyday life practices and that, simultaneously, it emerges from these practices. More precisely, cultures are located in the dynamic relation between doing things and the things that have already been done. From the perspective of British cultural studies, Dick Hebdige described this dialectics as a tension between two understandings of culture: as a process and as a product.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See, Meaghan Morris, 'A Question of Cultural Studies', in: *Back to Reality? Social Experience and Cultural Studies*, ed. Angela McRobbie, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1997. See also, Dick Hebdige, *The Meaning of Style*, Routledge, Abingdon, New York 1988.

For researchers doing fieldwork, the above observation points to an important fact that a static perspective on, for example, cultural institutions operating in a given place – including the number of visitors, the types and calendar of events, and the profile of the staff – offers only a partial view on the institutional-cultural order in that place. This sort of perspective is hardly able to show how – thanks to or despite what factors – this order exists. Hence, it is important to plan diagnosis in such a way as to grasp the very moment of doing things, of entering into relations, establishing coalitions, solving problems, and all other modes of acting that create and sustain certain cultural forms in a given area. Moreover, this kind of diagnosis approaches the already existing cultural forms both as a resource and the context for subjects operating in the area of research. Recognition of this fact opens up the possibility for a more critical diagnosis, which values the historical contextualisation of the cultural conditions that we grasp as static at a certain moment. The scope of methods and tools used for this sort of diagnosis reaches far beyond those approaches that only allow us to grasp ‘momentary impressions.’ In this context, it is worth remembering that the diagnosis can benefit from taking into account both material and semiotic aspect, as one does not exist without the other. Like in cultural studies, one can approach material aspects of culture as conditions, qualities, and effects of relations and interactions between different subjects (actors/actants/participants). Within this perspective, our relations, actions, and their interdependencies take place in the material world, are limited by material resources, and lead to tangible effects (even if these effects reveal themselves only at a later time). One can also think about materiality in the categories of the relational concept of culture: not as about the environment in which human activities occur, but as their co-factor, an actant, and an element of relations forming the culture of a given group. Furthermore, cultures do not function without communication. Culture is a trait of communities and societies rather than individuals who live in isolation – it would be difficult to find a theory of culture that claims otherwise. This means that cultures are shared and permeate human relations and interactions. Hence, it would be quite inconvenient to study them without paying attention to how people communicate and interact. Among British culturalists, Raymond Williams spoke up for the role of communication in cultures:

[...] *the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change.*⁴⁵

Williams emphasised the real, material circumstances and consequences of communication processes and, by extension, cultural processes. He also underlined their dynamic, processual, and changing-inducing character. One of the most important battles in international cultural studies was fought to save culture from being reduced to its semiotic and ideational aspects (related to cultural

⁴⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Broadview Press, Peterborough 2001, p. 55.

norms and values) and to study it as a whole, in its semiotic, ideational, and material dimensions. Stuart Hall's concept of encoding-decoding was one of the attempts to preserve this dialectics in descriptions of communication processes in culture. From the perspective of in-culture diagnosis, which respects some assumptions of cultural analysis, his concept can prove very useful because it broadens the researcher's field of view. It also allows us to understand why culture is a process (and not a static state of affairs). In cultural studies, this processual character of culture was traditionally understood in terms of cultural production. The circulation of meanings and values in cultural communities cannot do without physical 'tools.' It requires both material resources and 'sets of social [...] relations.'⁴⁶ Culture is about continuous, processual reproduction of certain forms of the already known reality and their transformation into new, previously unknown forms. Hence, it can be understood as a never-ending chain of reproduction and production. The researcher who starts an in-culture diagnosis can approach his or her task in terms of different aspects of dynamic cultural production, as proposed by Hall:

- *production* (culture is made according to specific rules, with specific tools, in concrete places, by certain animate and inanimate individual and group subjects, under particular institutional and political order, and so on);
- *circulation* (culture is spread and shared by specific institutions and individuals, permeants human communication, interactions, and forms of cooperation);
- *distribution* (culture not only spreads in informal networks of grassroots practices of everyday life, but some of its aspects are systematically distributed by means of various self-government, national, media, non-governmental, or educational institutions);
- *consumption* (some aspects of culture, such as practices, ways of behaviour, trends, and goods, are objects of cultural practices of consumption);
- *reproduction* (Culture is a process. Although culture seems to stay 'the same,' different people and communities transform it in different ways each time when they engage with, and thereby 'reproduce,' cultural resources. The cultural reproduction means that the culture simultaneously *is* and *is changing*).

Stuart Hall's model can be no more than just an initial roadmap for researchers undertaking diagnosis – a perspective that increases their sensitivity during observation. It would be naïve to assume that when we enter the field, we will be able to see culture with the 'naked eye.' When young students of social studies enter the field, they often ask with surprise: 'But, actually, what are we supposed to study?' The above map depicting different aspects of culture can help us identify its various 'modes' and 'circuits,' and most importantly, steer us towards thinking about observation in terms of access. Finally, another crucial question to be asked in a cultural analysis is which subjects, institutions, and organisations are included in and which are excluded from particular cultural processes, and why

⁴⁶ Stuart Hall, 'Encoding, Decoding', in: *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During, Routledge, London – New York 1993, p. 508.

this happens. The critical character of the presented project of in-culture diagnosis emerges, first of all, from historically increasing reflexivity in cultural studies. The shift from textual orientation towards realist, materialist, and performative understanding of cultural processes has led to the re-evaluation of meanings and values as traditional elements of culture and their firmer embedment in the materiality of social and political reality. In methodological terms, this re-evaluation has allowed us to move away from ‘radical interactionism’ (i.e. cultural studies’ fixation on processes of interaction, communication, and production of meaning) and turn our research attention towards questions of political conditions and consequences of the processes of cultural production understood as the processes of socialisation.

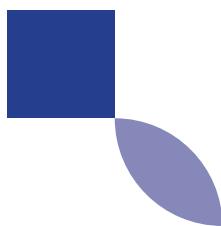
Translated by Konrad Siekierski

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ABSTRACT: The text presents a concept of diagnosis in culture with a particular emphasis on the field research practice as well as on a broadened definition of field. Diagnosis in culture is discussed as a particular form of cultural analysis, and as a research practice theoretically anchored in the field of reflective and critical cultural studies and relational approach to culture while relying on lax rules worked out on the ground of multi-sited ethnography in what concerns methodology. Diagnosis in culture shows researchers as subjects engaged in cultural practices being examined, as socially active subjects who establish various social relationships within the field of diagnosis, subjects adopting a particular mode of reflectivity that draws its rules from theoretical field of practice and performance oriented cultural studies.

KEY WORDS: in-culture diagnosis, cultural studies, cultural analysis, ethnographic methods



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ORAL HISTORY – EVEN MORE VERNACULAR?

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Oral history is based on an ethical imperative to give voice to hitherto silenced people. However, historians ‘take control’ over narratives through a number of procedures undertaken between the story of a particular person and the final written text. This is usually done by selecting ‘fitting’ quotations from interviews and including them in their own story about the past. Such a strategy allows historians to take full control over the text and prevent ‘unscientific’ vernacular interpretations from gaining an independent voice. Scholars do not necessarily select the ‘best’ excerpts, although this is usually the case. In some cases, they can also choose the ‘worst’ quotations and then decidedly distance themselves from them. The important thing is to continue playing the role of hosts who invite guests on a stage and keep the right to a concluding, normative appraisal of each performance. By giving voice (place in the text) to new sources, scholars can widen the scope of historical knowledge. However, they must retain the privilege (and duty) of creating the maps of the newly annexed territories. Sources may be vernacular, but maps have to remain academic.

In this article, I will look at ‘unsuccessful’ interviews that potentially escape the mechanisms of inclusion into a historical narrative. This happens because such interviews are ‘awkward’ and do not provide any specific story. Alternatively, they present

their own strong narrative and thus do not fit the research project, researcher's expectations, or accepted norms of the genre. The analysis of such 'lower' and 'upper' limits of oral history will allow me to reflect on its essence and, perhaps, formulate an even more radical programme for this research method.

WE GIVE VOICE TO WITNESSES...

Give voice to the voiceless! – this call was and sometimes still is repeated *ad nau-seam* in all, or almost all, research projects done under the banner of oral history. Although some of the roots of this method stretch back to the practice of recording the life of American political elites,¹ the tradition of 'giving voice' to previously 'voiceless' individuals and groups became the primary foundation of oral history. It gave this research method its basic meaning – certainly one that has been the most important and provided the strongest legitimisation.

The 'voiceless' people could be economically, socially, or culturally disadvantaged groups such as labourers, people of colour, or women. Alternatively, these could be people whose historical, usually traumatic, experience (of wars, death camps, or genocides) was identified as missing or underrepresented in historiography, or, more often, in collective memory and consciousness. Roughly, we can say that the former kind of absence was usually identified in the so-called Western world. There, oral history entered into alliances with engaged historiography and left-wing social history.² In our part of Europe, these research approaches became available only in the last twenty years. Here, the focus is still (although, perhaps, gradually less so) on the latter sort of absence: absence from political and factual history.³ Of course, this is a broad generalisation. In particular research projects, both perspectives can intersect and reinforce each other. In some cases, one can also undermine the other. A fresh example is the documentation of stories and heroic acts of the Warsaw Uprising 'insurgentesses'.⁴ However, these differences in recognising the 'voiceless' who should 'receive voice' do not obscure the main principle of all oral history practices. Although we want to see (hear) different persons and groups on the opposite side of the microphone, our reasons to document and describe historical experiences with the microphone's help are very similar.

I propose to divide these reasons into two basic categories that draw on and expand the titular call to give voice to witnesses. The first category rests on ethical

¹ See, Allan Nevins, 'Oral History: How and Why It Was Born', in: *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, ed. David Dunaway, Willa Baum, Sage Publishers, Thousand Oaks – London 1996; Rebecca Sharpless, 'The History of Oral History', in: *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Meyer, Rebecca Sharpless, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2007.

² See, *Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet, 1930–1960*, ed. Lutz Niethammer, Alexander Von Plato, Dietz Verlag, Bonn 1989; Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 1991; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2000.

³ Dobrochna Kajwa, 'Historia mówiona w krajach postkomunistycznych', *Historia i Kultura* 18, 2000, <http://www.kulturalnihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/1887> (accessed 23.11.2020).

⁴ Weronika Grzebalska, *Płeć powstania warszawskiego*, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Narodowe Centrum Kultury, Warszawa 2014.

foundations, which we can summarise in the following way: if we give voice to the people who otherwise left no trace on history (understood as the past – *res gestae*) then the history (understood as the story about the past – *historia rerum gestarum*) that we tell about the world they inhabited will become more democratic and just owing to their oral narratives. Consequently, it will become better and more ethical. This stance is easy to understand because dealing with history is always – despite various declarations to the contrary – driven not only by epistemological principles. Oral history discloses this ethical entanglement more openly than other forms of engaging with the past.

Leaving no trace in historiographical practice means in this case a lack of clearly individualised, preferably first-person, narrative sources concerning these people. Other sources that can tell us something about them are boundless: from weather records to the architecture of urban (or rural) residential neighbourhoods, influenza statistics, and the content of garbage dumps, to give only the arguably most depersonalised examples. Oral history confronts this immensity of ‘external’ sources with an individual voice of a witness who speaks about him or herself and the personal experience of/from the past.

This kind of argumentation is based on the conviction that the absence of the first-person narrative in history (historiography) is wrong; that it turns its silent participants into victims of oblivion. When these people are also victims of past events and historical processes, the power of the ethical argument is doubled. This is so because such an argument is directed both against history as the past when people became victims and against history as a narrative (i.e. historiography), the blind spots of which leads to their further, this time symbolic, victimisation. Today, we clearly see this power – this affect veiled by argumentation – in shifts of historiographical interests from heroes to victims, from soldiers to civilians, from war to occupation, from men to women, and so on. Oral history plays a significant, sometimes even leading, role in these shifts.

It is easy to see that such ethically motivated ‘restoration of presence’ is a form of commemoration (the phrase ‘restoration of presence’ needs quotation marks because nothing and nobody is really ‘restored’. This restoration concerns representations of the past and not the past as such. Hence, it would be more precise to speak about ‘introduction to representation’. However, this phrase sounds awkward and smacks of football jargon⁵). In this practice, history (historiography) is taken *a priori* as something positive. To live quietly and just be there is not enough. A human being should be described, immortalised, and commemorated. Best of all – and this is why we have oral history – in one’s own ‘authentic’ words. It is, then, necessary to tell one’s story or even utter oneself.

Many practitioners of oral history share an idea that every personal experience is worth telling and preserving. Obviously impossible to fulfil, this idea – which is a radicalisation of the ethical impulse – outlines the far horizon (there is no other one), both illusive and real, that sustains the oral history’s sense of purpose.

⁵ One of the meanings of the Polish word *reprezentacja* is ‘representation’, another is ‘national team’ (translator’s note).

Such an impulse is based – perhaps more emotionally than consciously – on the fear of annihilation, of losing oneself in the abyss of time. Indeed, history as a record of the past or a narrative about it, offers the promise of immortality. This immortality – created by human work and tailored to human needs – is fixed and recorded in products of culture. Oral history mediates between diffused and elusive practices of speech and talking and the culture of writing, printing, and visual media, which are increasingly more processed and multiplied in digital circulation. Hence, it makes the promise of immortality accessible to everyone, first of all to the weakest men and, perhaps even more, the weakest women. As oral history is usually concerned with elderly people, this interest becomes a sort of consolation prize for them.

This ethical drive is perhaps the most important source of implicit, not fully recognised and expressed, power and vitality for oral history. However, in the academic sphere, the rules of the game dictate justifications that are scientific – rather than ethical – and thus (pretending to be) more objective and rational. When approached as a historical source, stories told by ‘witnesses of history’ (as they are awkwardly and confusingly called)⁶ should allow us to present history that differs from what we knew before. This history can be new in substantive terms, revealing unknown facts (‘positivist’ option). Alternatively, it can present previously unrecognised and unnamed historical experiences (‘subjectivist’ option). Usually, however, oral history reveals both new facts and new sources, because it is difficult, if possible at all, to separate one from another. Indeed, past experiences are a sort of historical facts.

What I mean here are not only facts or experiences that are entirely individual and unique, as it happens in traditional historical biographies focused on ‘outstanding figures in the context of the epoch’ and their influence on the course of history. Rather, I mean a more nuanced and comprehensive access to social groups and their lived worlds. In this understanding, oral history is, first of all, a means to broaden the scope of history. In the words of Michael Frisch, one of the oral history’s leading American theoreticians, it provides ‘more history.’⁷

Both in the factual option (new facts in the stories) and the experiential option (experiences of the speakers), we focus more on the past than on the story itself. One could naively ask: what is strange about that? Is it not the aim of history to tell how things were in the past? Today, this question does not necessarily imply a radically positivist ‘how things really were.’ Instead, this can be a question about approximate account that allows us to understand the past and take an intellectual control over it. Such control over ‘things that were’ tends to turn into different forms of power over ‘things that are’ today or even over ‘things that should and will be’ in the future.

During the last several decades, none of the many guerrilla wars against this model of historiography brought significant results. Among them, the most

⁶ In Polish, *świadek historii* (translator’s note).

⁷ Michael Frisch, “Oral History and Hard Times”: A Review Essay’, *Oral History Review* 7, 1979.

important was (and still is?) fought by narrativists inspired by Hayden White's works. No essential change was also brought by fact that oral history entered, albeit slowly and not without resistance, academic curricula in history. Surely, reflexive oral history practitioners clearly understand that they work with stories about the past and not with the past itself. However, if they want to become or remain 'true' historians, they have no choice but to filter out 'things that happened' from what they were told, or, more precisely, from what they were able to hear. In other words, they capture animated spoken word and turn it into lifeless written word. They do it on their own terms, or, more correctly, on the terms of their academic discipline, the professional assumptions of which they might have accepted as their own. (Scholars can also challenge these assumptions. They usually do so in methodological introductions to their works where they express opinions on the matter and present their 'dissenting positions.' It is only seemingly paradoxical that such distancing in fact helps them achieve a better position within their academic field.) This capturing of words by historians is known under its professional name of source critique.

Obviously, source critique as a concept and research practice belongs to the dominant historiographical discourse. Historical sources are indispensable; they are the essence of professional history. Nevertheless, allowing oneself to be controlled by the sources is a professional mistake (in contrast, various 'Handbooks of Sources' are proper results of historians' work as they suggest domination over sources rather than subordination to them). The sources also have to be 'critically' selected and interpreted (the quotation marks are due to the fact that this critique can turn to apologetics). This way, a historian executes the power of speaking about the past and delineates the boundaries between the vernacular sphere (for instance, the memory of witnesses) and the academic-cum-professional domain.

Evidently, this 'controlled access' to the professional discourse concerns not only oral history interviews. Source critique has (is meant to have) a universal application in historiography. However, in the case of oral history, its defensive role becomes more problematic and ambivalent. On the one hand, the source itself – a story of a witness, narrator, or interlocutor – comes from a different time than an 'external' historical fact or 'internal' experience of the past. Thus, from the start, it is anachronistic and provides an easy target for critique (indeed, many historians decisively reject oral history already at this initial stage). On the other hand, the same story can contribute to historical exploration and, consequently, enlarge the realm of historiographical domination. Not only ethnographers have their research fields, historians also possess their fields, territories, and realms. They symbolically conquer them not by prolonged and repeated stays but by 'filling gaps' in historical knowledge, addressing previously untouched topics, or writing in a new way (which is less frequent and more challenging). The easiest way to do this is to draw on new and previously unknown sources or read anew the ones that are already known.

In oral history, researchers have to 'extract' sources (although increasingly one can also use archived interviews done by someone else). Hence, they can be

tempted by easy historiographical conquests. The temptation can increase when ethical claims come into play (as I tried to show, they do not only come to play but are, actually, always present). There is no doubt that such conquests would be more frequent – because it is always possible to find another witness of history – if not the efficiency of barriers against the vernacularisation of historiography. When researchers want to use interviews in academic work, they need to critically evaluate them, put these interviews under their control, and only then admit them to scientific writing.

In historical writing, this means that the authors use quotations from interviews to illustrate and support their claims about the past.

...AND THEY DO NOT WANT TO SPEAK

Anyone, who at least in general terms agrees with the above – simplified and exaggerated – description and has experience with reflexive oral history (or some other academic practices of ‘giving voice’, for example, ethnography and sociology) may recall now some of his or her unsuccessful interviews. By unsuccessful I mean these interviews that could not be quoted, captured, and translated to our historical, sociological, ethnographic, or other academic narratives about the past. Alternatively, they could be only used by force, by quoting them in a way that runs counter to either the meaning or the context of the entire story.

There are also instances when I try to interpret either my own or archived interviews, but there is nothing to take from them – no stories, no meaningful series of statements, no reconstructions of the past. This is so not because memory fails the narrators (I put these cases aside) but because they have no story to tell us. Or, their stories are so immersed in the oral, situational, and momentary character of the interaction that we cannot translate them into a written language. We remember the meeting and perhaps even feel that we recognise and understand the experience of our interlocutor. However, it is impossible to prove that with any excerpt from the source. There is nothing to quote and no reason to quote because the transcript does not match what we were told. Moreover, what we were told and how it was said did not fit the content of the conversation. Alternatively, and perhaps most probably, both this content and the actually uttered words did not match our expectations built on many more typical examples, as well as on films, books, and other texts of culture.

So, we give voice to witnesses and they do not want to speak or have little to tell us. If oral history is a means to introduce the experience of ‘ordinary people’ to a historical narrative and to turn a scattered vernacular memory into social or collective memory that can be systematised and described, here we reach its limits. We run across a vernacularity that resists inclusion if we want to do it on our terms. It is scattered, diffuse, elusive, and – first of all – highly individualised. This last feature does not allow to describe it in terms of vernacular ‘culture’. We cannot even speak of gestures or practices of ‘resistance’, although such non-stories resist our interpretations and editing attempts. This is so because, actually, these are no gestures at all but only signs of autonomous and self-contained memory, which does not seek to commemorate the experiences it contains.

THE VERNACULARITY OF QUIET RESIGNATION

Finally, I will give an example. As a part of the Mauthausen Survivors Documentation Project, we recorded in Poland almost 170 interviews with former prisoners of the Mauthausen-Gusen camps.⁸ Initially, the aim of this documentation project was to record as many biographical stories of survivors as possible. They were asked to speak freely about both their camp and other life experiences. A research project based on this collection was planned for later. The fact that – against the current economy and practice of academic work – the project did not start by defining research questions, was its strength. The project's problem was the lack of funds to transcribe the recorded interviews.

We transcribed only around half of the collection, selected for specific research, the publication of sources, or exhibitions. This gave us a huge amount of texts. Nevertheless, we were conscious that we had left the second half untouched. This part consisted of interviews that, for different reasons (usually of technical nature: some research participants mumbled, muttered, or spoke in a low voice, sometimes a recorder failed), we did not select for transcription. Consequently, they remain (almost) unprocessed in the archive. Although over ten years have passed since the end of the project, interviewers still remember them as 'waiting to be discovered.' Now, I have reached for one of these interviews that were left not transcribed and unused. I remember well the person, the meeting with him, and his non-story, although I was not the one who recorded the interview.⁹

The oral history of Mauthausen survivors was meant to 'give voice' to the people who had suffered the worst – the imprisonment in the concentration camp – and who up until that point had not had an opportunity to bear witness to this experience. To secure the survivors' freedom of expression, we used the methodology of the biographical narrative interview. The central part of such an interview is, at least according to methodological assumptions, a spontaneous narrative about one's 'entire life'.¹⁰ However, when asked to tell about his life, Stanisław started with the following words:

When I was seven years old, I started to go to school.../ I completed seven grades... / I lived with my parents... / I lived with my parents. In 1943, I was arrested by the Gestapo and

⁸ The Mauthausen Survivors Documentation Project (MSDP) is the name of the 2002–2003 project conducted at the University of Vienna under prof. Gerhard Botz's supervision. The project resulted in more than 800 biographical interviews with former prisoners of the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camps, recorded in Europe, the United States, and Israel. The Polish part of the projects was conducted by the KARTA Centre, where I worked at that time. Interviews recorded in Poland were archived and made available in the History Meeting House in Warsaw. The results of the project included the book *Ocaleni z Mauthausen – wybór świadectw*, ed. Katarzyna Madoń-Mitzner, Ośrodek KARTA, Warszawa 2010, a historical exhibition presenting fragments of interviews, and my doctoral thesis published as: Piotr Filipkowski, *Historia mówiona i wojna. Doświadczenie obozu koncentracyjnego w perspektywie narracji biograficznych*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2010.

⁹ Interview no. MSDP_064, available in the KARTA Centre's Archive of Oral History and the History Meeting House. The research participant was born in 1923. Until the war, he lived in a village not far from Częstochowa. In January 1943, he was arrested and sent to Auschwitz. After two months, he was relocated to Gusen – the largest branch of Mauthausen camp, where he worked in a quarry. After release, he returned to his hometown, started a family, and worked first as a tailor and then as a foreman in a cardboard factory. In this text, his name was changed.

¹⁰ See, Fritz Schütze, 'Biographieforschung und narratives Interview', *Neue Praxis* 13, 1983.

sent to Oświęcim [Auschwitz – translator's note]. I was in Oświęcim until April 1943. / But maybe I should speak a bit louder?

– No, this is good.

In 1943, I was taken to the concentration camp Mauthausen Gusen. I will not give my number, yes. I stayed in the camp until Americans liberated it. Yes.

– Please, tell us more about the camp.

Well, in the camp I worked in a quarry. It was hard work, yes. Later, near the end, before the liberation, I got work in a machine gun factory for some two months or so. It was Steyr, this is where I worked. And then Americans liberated us, I was released.

– And what happened next?

I was there, in Linz, for almost a year. Again, in a sort of a camp... this was the camp for us, for those who..., until 1946, until May. In May, after one year, I returned to Poland. And in Poland, as always, I had to search for work. I worked here, in a cardboard factory, for all these twenty-something years. Since 1948... twenty-something years.

– And what did you do?

Cardboard factory. They produced cardboard here. So, I worked. Here in the factory, I worked in different... first in transportation, later I was, I mean the one... / in transportation, I was a foreman, and later I worked with machines that produced cardboard. Until I was fourt... / I don't remember. Because later I got sick and went on an invalidity pension, yes.

And a little later:

– What do you do on a daily basis?

Nothing. Because I have no land. I made a living only from work in the factory. Later on, my wife too, when I left, my wife went to work in this factory. And so it was, I went on a pension. But it is not enough. It is difficult to make ends meet.

Not only the beginning of this conversation is difficult. The following minutes do not bring any significant change. The interviewer asks more and more – increasingly detailed – questions. In response, we hear only a few words or short and unfinished sentences, which do not form any longer narrative sequences. Two and a half years in Auschwitz and Gusen, many months of work in a quarry (the most difficult in the camp), and constant hunger (this motif does return in many of these short answers) are reduced to scattered shreds of memories. They are not connected by any plot and do not form a 'life story'. This is true even for the time in a camp – the period that many other former prisoners remember in detail and describe in dense, story-like narratives. Such narratives are attractive because they make interviews easy to summarise, analyse, and quote.

Being in a camp is one of the most profound life experiences. It has distinct cultural representations that offer a set of ready-made patterns of remembrance and narration. However, in the above case – the first I had in my mind and took as an example – these representations do not help activate memories, construct a story, and fulfil the role of a 'witness'. This could be easily, and today also conventionally, explained in terms of unresolved trauma that stops Stanisław from offering a narrative representation of his camp experience. However, I would rather choose an

interpretation that was suggested by Stanisław himself. When asked about details of his experience in the camp, he responds several times with the word ‘normally’.

– How did they transport you to Mauthausen?

Normally, we travelled in a cattle car.

This depiction of camp reality as normal and ordinary is not ironic. Instead, it is presented here as yet another twist of difficult fate. And the nature of fate is that it can be difficult. It is also inevitable, so it has to be accepted. One can complain, as many former prisoners do. One can recount his or her suffering and the similar or even more difficult experiences of others (as we know, to respond to people’s need to speak and be listened to is often the primary function of oral history). However, one can also – as Stanisław does – leave random accidents or, to put it more emphatically, the accidents of fate, non-traumatically untold. Such a person escapes historians (including oral historians), sociologists, ethnographers, and all others who search for and in (not) their territories.

I forgot. In general, I don’t have a good memory now.

– And do you recall the camp from time to time?

I don’t think about it anymore.

– You don’t think about it?

I don’t think. I have had enough. Even when someone, you know, when someone asks me – not like you, this is different – how it was there and so on, I can’t say anything. I don’t want these memories at all.

Thus, we reach the limit of representation. It is not a dramatic limit, when something cannot be said, or someone wants to speak but is not able to. Rather, the limit is marked by what narrators do not wish to say because they prefer to keep their personal histories and life experiences only to themselves. History as science has nothing to do with it (and even if history wants something here, it is not clear how it should approach this task). In this case, perhaps, the only duty of oral history is to mark this boundary and make us aware that behind it, there exist vast territories of unnamed and untold personal experiences that remain inaccessible to our conquests.

I think that the lesson of conscious resignation that we receive here from oral history is comforting. It signals, or even documents, the existence of non-stories which are, as I understand them, a sign of truly fundamental human autonomy and quiet, internal experience of one’s life (even life in a camp, about which other people want to scream). A ‘simple’ life, without the burden of (excessive) representation.

THE VERNACULARITY OF LOUD USURPATION

However, this is not the only limit of translatability I have found during my years as an oral historian. As I outlined and exemplified in the previous section, beyond the first, or ‘lower’, limit, we can see (or, rather, hear) an expression of

what I called the vernacularity of silent resignation. Beyond the second, or ‘upper’, limit, which I want to discuss now, we find the vernacularity of loud usurpation. Perhaps, every reader of this article has heard about professional witnesses of history. These are the persons who – thanks to frequent and often prolonged training – are specialists in telling their (and not only their) stories. Oral history does not like them and avoids interviewing such people. This should not be surprising. After all, oral history legitimises its practices by appealing to the authenticity and spontaneity of word-of-mouth, which it then tries to incorporate on its own terms into professional academic circulation.

Hence, we are not eager to record interviews with survivors, former prisoners, or other witnesses of history who publish memoirs, participate in TV shows, give anniversary speeches, attend meetings with schoolchildren, or are active members of institutionalised groups of people with similar life experience. The reason for this reluctance is the fact that – in one way or another – their patterns of remembering and sharing or concealing personal experiences have ossified. Why should oral history give voice to the people who give it to themselves in public and already take care of their historical immortality?

However, I am not going to talk now about these people (although, perhaps, it is worth asking about the vernacularity of such practices on another occasion). Instead, I am thinking about persons we sometimes meet during our documentation and research projects conducted under the banner of oral history who surprise us with the power of their voice. This voice offers its own story, which is independent of our story and does not fit what we want to say, rather than simply provides us with historical information (about experiences and facts) that we could use in our professional narratives. It would probably be possible to cut out, quote, and interpret on our own terms this or that statement. But we see that these fragments are an integral part of a separate and autonomous whole, which uses a different vernacular map.

The most interesting thing about this map is that it is not only independent from but also alternative to our official, professional, and non-vernacular map. Although the story charts the territory that seems familiar to us, we see, upon closer scrutiny, that something is wrong here, namely that the interpretative paths lead to unknown and unexpected directions.

Now it is time to give an example, again from my own backyard. As a part of the International Slave and Forced Labourers Documentation Project,¹¹ I recorded and edited interviews with former forced labourers and camp prisoners in the Third Reich. Analogously to the project on Mauthausen, the aim was to record – in

¹¹ The International Slave Forced Labourers Documentation Project (ISFLDP) was initiated by the German ‘Memory, Responsibility, and Future’ Foundation (*Erinnerung, Verantwortung, Zukunft* Stiftung) and conducted in 2004–2005 under the supervision of Alexander von Plato (Fernuniversität Hagen). The project recorded more than 600 interviews with former forced labourers and concentration camps prisoners based throughout Europe, in Israel, the United States, and several other countries. All video and audio recordings are available in the Internet archive at the website www.zwangsarbeit-archive.de. Furthermore, around 70 interviews with Polish prisoners and labourers are available in the KARTA Centre’s Archive of Oral History and the History Meeting House. Among the project’s results was the book *Hitler’s Slaves: Life Stories of Forced Labourers in Nazi-Occupied Europe*, ed. Alexander von Plato, Almut Leh, Christoph Thonfeld, Berghahn Books, New York – Oxford 2010.

a spontaneous form and in as much detail as possible – life stories of research participants. Most were audio recordings, but every fourth interview was registered on video.

One of the persons recorded on camera was Władysław,¹² during the war a forced labourer in the Third Reich. Describing him through the prism of this experience – as this was the reason for including him in our group of research participants – I already suggest a particular sequence of biographical experiences and, less explicitly, a specific way of their representation. The idea of ‘giving voice to the voiceless’ was central to this documentation and research project. It was also one of the main reasons to conduct it. The traumatic war experience of a great number of forced labourers – people working for German farmers, in small manufacturer’s workshops, or in large factories¹³ – was absent from the German collective memory for several post-war decades. The efforts to commemorate them as war victims and pay them compensation came many years after – also much belated (if we count the delay as a number in years and decades since the end of the war) – recognition of camp prisoners and Holocaust victims. The documentation project to which I refer here was one of the initiatives aimed at ‘restoring’ this memory.

In Polish collective memory and commemoration practice, which has been actively renegotiated over the last twenty years, this group of war victims also lacks a clear representation. This is surprising in the country where victimhood memory (which goes further than the commemoration of victims) is celebrated with great intensity. There are different reasons for this absence. I will not discuss this issue here, but two of these reasons are worth mentioning in the context of vernacularity.

Forced labour was mainly the experience of people from the so-called lower classes: manual workers, peasants, and residents of villages or small towns. Furthermore, this experience was dispersed, both geographically (labourers worked ‘everywhere’) and in social terms (contrary to camp prisoners, forced labourers rarely established strong ties and perceived themselves as a group of shared fate). Among other factors, including political ones, these two reasons rendered the labourers unable to create explicit general representations of their different personal war experiences. They lacked cultural competencies because there were no writers or film and theatre makers among them who could create culturally attractive, ‘intellectual’ representations of these experiences. Forced labourers also lacked social cement to facilitate their integration and institutionalisation as a separate group of memory. This situation has slightly changed in recent years, mainly thanks to compensations for forced labour offered by the Foundation of Polish-German Reconciliation in cooperation with the German ‘Memory, Responsibility, and Future’ Foundation.¹⁴

¹² Interview number in the KARTA Centre Archive: ISFLDP-051; the name of the research participant was changed in this text.

¹³ Historians count some 12 million forced labourers in the Third Reich. Among them, there were 1.5 – 2.5 million Polish people.

¹⁴ *Die Entschädigung von NS-Zwangsarbeit am Anfang des 21. Jahrhunderts: Die Stiftung ‘Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft’ und ihre Partnerorganisationen*, ed. Constantin Goschler, José Brunner, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, Phillip Ther, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen 2012.

I give all these details to explain why during interviews with former forced labourers we were convinced that we were introducing everyday, grassroots, or ‘folk’ – in a word, vernacular – memory into new and ‘higher’ spheres: those of the archive, academia, and education. Successive ISFLDP meetings and interviews only strengthened this conviction.

However, as soon as I turned on the camera and asked Władysław to tell his life story, his narrative took a full speed. For several hours (barring only the necessary technical breaks to change video cassettes), he related to me his life’s adventures with great satisfaction and zest, smiling, and gesticulating with a broken arm. His war experience turned out to be particularly rich, with several different sorts of forced labour, escapes from German farmers, ‘setbacks’ and arrests by the Gestapo, a return to his native Warsaw, and one more detention. Finally, towards the end of the war, it included work in a coal mine in Gelsenkirchen, one more failed escape, and stays in several prisons.¹⁵

This multitude of Władysław’s war adventures is astonishing. What is even more astonishing is that he presented them precisely as his personal adventures over which he exercised control both as a protagonist and narrator. Whatever happened, whatever external factors entered the stage, he remained the main player. In fact, war conditions, forced labour, and imprisonment, offered little room for manoeuvre. However, he used various tricks to outsmart an oppressive reality. When we talked, he also used different narrative, or – more broadly – communication, tricks. He spoke with laughter, gesticulated, downplayed sufferings, and accentuated his individual agency.

Here is a short, randomly selected, excerpt from his very long and dense story:

I think to myself. I will work here for a while and escape again. And so I did. After a month, when I got a few Deutschmarks, I escaped in the morning. This is how it was: I knew when he [the host – translator’s note] was to wake us up very early in the morning. The train was leaving at the same time when he was to wake us up. The farm was quite far away from the station. So, I thought that he would not catch me, right? I waited for a train there. The train arrived; I am getting in / the cart was constructed in such a way that there were two steps along the entire wall to enter compartments. I catch a door handle, and suddenly I feel someone pulling my collar. I look and see that this is my host riding a bike and... [laughter]. And he tries to pull me down from the steps. So, I kicked him. I didn’t look, just kicked. He fell off the bike, and I left.

I reached Metz and stayed there for a few days. There, the police put me under arrest. They caught me just when they, they... / the transport was about to leave. I didn’t have any documents, so they separated me from this transport, from the people they gathered. Later someone came to take me. I already understood some German, so I grasped that he was

¹⁵ In 1941–1945, Władysław worked or was detained in the following places: the camp in Warsaw at Skaryszewska Street, Vigny – France, police arrest in Metz – Germany, Ars-sur Moselle – France, Stara Dąbrowa – Poland (then the Third Reich), police arrest in Szczecin, Haus Westfalen forced labour camp in Gelsenkirchen – Germany, prisons in Katowice, Wrocław (Breslau), Dresden, Leipzig, Halle, Kassel–Wehlheide, Hamm, Dortmund, Essen – Germany, and Solgne – France, and the Consolidation Der Mannesmannröhren-Werke AG Gelsenkirchen factory in Gelsenkirchen-Rothausen.

speaking about me. He said that I was a city boy who knew little about farming but that they had a big farm so they should have me look after cows. Indeed, they had twelve cows and a bull. In the beginning, they showed me how to look after them.

A few minutes later – and several verses below in the transcription – we can hear or read:

So, I planned my escape again [laughter]. I thought to myself that I have to escape again to Poland, maybe I will manage to do it. This was around... I still have a postcard. I keep postcards that I sent to my family in Warsaw. And on one of them I wrote... My sister was going to send me a parcel. It was going to be a parcel for Christmas. I responded to her on this postcard: 'Please, do not send me anything. We will eat Christmas supper together at home'. I wrote this. And I really managed to escape. But I had many adventures...

As we can guess, here starts a long story about the narrator's adventures on a hundreds-kilometre-long train journey from Lorraine to Warsaw; a journey he made in the middle of the war, without a ticket, and without permission (or, more precisely, as an outlaw). These adventures are full of suspense and unexpected turns of events. But they lead to a happy ending – Christmas supper with the family. As it turns out, however, this happy resolution is only temporary. Soon follow the next war adventures, one more detention, forced labour again, a new escape... and so it went, until the liberation. No, actually not until the liberation. Rather, until today, because the narrator presents his post-war experiences in the professional sphere (subsequent jobs), private life (partnerships and partings), and as a pensioner, in a similar way, again as adventures.

What should we do with such a story? We wanted to 'give voice' to someone who did not have it, whose dramatic (today, we are more likely to say 'traumatic') war experiences remained unrecorded and not adequately represented in our collective memory. Instead, we received a strong and independent voice that goes off script and even slightly ridicules all existing narrative schemes (without necessarily questioning the experiences beyond them).

This is the voice of a rascal who creates an oral picaresque novel right in front of our eyes and ears; the voice of citizen Piszczyk.¹⁶ However, it is not a purposeful artistic creation but a spontaneous fictionalisation of a 'common man' experience, done by this man himself and for himself (and – by extension rather than on purpose – for the sake of our conversation). He produces his narrative in spite of war historiography, theories of trauma, homiletic oral history (not all oral history is like this) that wants to 'include the excluded', and biographical sociology focused on war trajectories, descriptions of chaotic life changes, and the overwhelming pressure of external factors.¹⁷

¹⁶ Jan Piszczyk is a fictional protagonist of two Polish comedy movies: *Zezowate szczęście* from 1960 and *Obywatel Piszczyk* from 1988. He is a man who tries hard but rather unsuccessfully to find his way through the turbulent period of the 1920s–1950s (translator's note).

¹⁷ F. Schütze, 'Biographieforschung', pp. 283–293; Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek, *Chaos i przymus: Trajektorie wojenne Polaków – analiza biograficzna*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2002.

When he smiles during his story and afterwards shows us postcards he sent from forced stays in the Reich as if they were greeting cards from holiday destinations, our protagonist turns the above categories upside down. His memory is perversely vernacular as it ignores our historical and mental maps and follows its own map. This is what I call the vernacularity of loud usurpation. It is practiced – analogously to the vernacularity of silent resignation – entirely privately, for one's own use.

Of course, contrary to the previous narrative, this story suggests many different interpretations of experiences and their representations. Maybe these experiences were not so horrible if they are told this way? Maybe the fate of some labourers and prisoners was relatively good? Or, perhaps, this extensive talking is the way to deal with traumatic war experiences, get rid of them, and retake control over one's fate, which, in reality, was very limited? These are just examples of questions that could and should be asked.

The fact that the list of such questions is not definite and answers can only be preliminary is enough – unless we are prepared to abandon the hermeneutics of trust, which is a rule generally accepted in the interpretation of similar stories – to show that historically powerless people can have strong and independent personal narratives. Such stories exist despite dominant patterns of collective memory and oblivion, which – as the sociologists of memory claim – have a powerful yet invisible influence on us.

Thus, along its other, already recognised, functions, oral history can also search for and present the narrative power of the powerless. It can present 'strong poets' – to use Harold Bloom's category – of their own experience, who construct vernacular epics of their fate in a personal manner. Like in the above example, these epics allow for transforming one's fate into a series of personally initiated adventures. Consequently, they allow one to reclaim, even against the facts, one's agency and subjectivity.

THE LIMITS OF ORAL HISTORY

Based on two examples, I have tried to name the limits of oral history that had previously been discerned only intuitively. The first of them is the lower limit of private resistant silence. The second is the upper limit of unruly narrative about past experience. They are connected by a common resistance to appropriation. Without significant losses in meaning, none of them can be translated to the dominant (in symbolical but not necessarily in quantitative terms) professional discourses about the past. They offer resistance, each in its unique, vernacular way. We can try to break such resistance by quoting excerpts from these or other similar interviews in historical (sociological, ethnographical, cultural studies) works and incorporating them into our academic stories with the feeling that we are making these stories more democratic. Alternatively, we can close our ears to these voices, locking them in the folder containing unsuccessful, bizarre, and useless interviews. At least for now, but maybe one day...

Finally – as I urge historians, including myself, to do – we can approach these stories as autonomous entities that represent just themselves and have little

regard for their historical duties. It is worth considering this more radical programme of oral history. Such a programme is radical because it calls us to replace a practice of compiling, more or less arbitrarily, quotations from interviews (this is a widespread practice in various disciplines) with giving voice to other people in a consequent and unconditional manner. At the very least, it urges us to listen to people attentively. And to do so not because we want to add yet another detail to our well-worn maps but to show that it is possible to use entirely different personal maps or consciously give maps up altogether. Such a radical vernacularity of oral history still awaits discovery, both in the field and in archives.

More precisely, it awaits constant rediscovering. The aim is not a one-time turn or a contestation of the significant contribution of oral history to research practice. Rather, it is to broaden the discipline's limits. Finally, and more profoundly, the goal is to push the limits of knowledge we are ready to gain from oral history.

Translated by Konrad Siekierski

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ABSTRACT: The text attempts at overcoming the dominant paradigm in contemporary practices of oral history, founded on an ethical rather than cognitive postulate

of giving voice to those, who were deprived of it in traditional historiography. The author illustrates his diagnosis with a preliminary analysis of specific interviews. However, these case studies can be dubbed ‘unsuccessful’, as they break away from the logic of ‘giving voice’. Two variants of this breakaway are analyzed, both well known to oral history practitioners. The first one consists of a refusal to speak, as well as a non-traumatic silence and an underestimation of even the most significant historical experiences; the author calls it silent resignation. In contrast, in the second variant the respondent out-talks the researchers and imposes his or her own historical logic, quite distinct from the dominant and familiar one; the author describes it as loud usurpation. Both these breakaways are interpreted through the categories of vernacular culture.

KEY WORDS: oral history, vernacular memory, historiography, representation of experience



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EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FOR CULTURAL POLICY

A RETROSPECTIVE

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In 2001, Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska described the experience of Polish cultural studies specialists in socialist times. She underlined a significant distance separating them from the research activities and achievements of their Western colleagues:

Arduous and burdensome search for necessity goods took us even further from the world we knew from works by Western philosophers, sociologists, or cultural studies scholars. (...) To a large degree, we constructed our identity from a sense of lack. We took positive aspects of this construction from the feeling of being a part of tradition and community.¹

The strength of the local research community could only partially substitute for the lack of access to international publications and the possibility to participate in global academic discourse. Systemic transformation, the opening of borders, and, finally, Poland's accession to the European Union brought a change in the forms of international cooperation.

¹ Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, ‘Diagnozy współczesności’, *Kultura Współczesna* 28–29 (2–3), 2001, p. 174.

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Currently, researchers of culture participate in inter-institutional networks and take advantage of global data systems. In 2006, Zina Jarmoszuk and Anna Wieczorek² identified the need to create a repository of reports on culture. In response, the National Centre for Culture (Narodowe Centrum Kultury, NCK) established the collection that today counts over 450 reports. These reports describe diverse dimensions of cultural life: participation in culture, economic and institutional situation of authors and artists, the economy of culture, the functioning of cultural institutions and informal cultural initiatives, the role and meaning of the virtual world, and many other topics. The database is not only a source of knowledge but also – in line with its founders' and administrators' intentions – a remedy for the confusion caused by excess of information. This is achieved by a systematic review of new publications and the subsequent positioning in the database of high-quality interpretative and applied analyses.

As intended by the editors, the hundredth issue of the *Contemporary Culture (Kultura Współczesna)* journal offers an excellent opportunity to apply retrospection as a method of in-depth reflection on the changing aims and methods in studies on culture. For obvious reasons, we will present only a small part of this research field, putting aside specific features of academic disciplines and various methodological controversies. We will focus on research initiatives that proved to be essential for cultural policy, not only by responding to current needs but also by providing information to the Polish government. They engaged both scholars and non-academic experts. What is important is that they all received funding from public institutions, including the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, MKiDN).

The concept of pragmatic research has accompanied the *Contemporary Culture* quarterly since its inception. The editors always carefully select the

² Zina Jarmoszuk, Anna Wieczorek, 'W stronę Laboratorium kultury', in: *Kultura i przyszłość. Prace ofiarowane prof. Sławowi Krzemieniowi-Ojakowi z okazji 75-lecia urodzin*, ed. Alicja Kisielewska, Natalia Szydłowska, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymostku, Białystok 2006.

leading topics in the artistic and scholarly discourse on culture. Their choices often outpace strategic shifts in cultural policy. In this regard, a telling example is the second issue from 2016, titled *Game Research – Critical Approaches* (*Badania gier – podejścia krytyczne*). It analysed contemporary culture in terms of the typical forms in which it was reflected in computer games and the impact exerted on culture by the gaming industry. In the autumn of 2016, MKiDN launched the grant programme ‘Development of Creative Sectors’ (*Rozwój sektorów kreatywnych*). One of its main goals was to support innovative developers of computer games. Other issues of the journal presented an in-depth reflection on the questions tackled by officials shaping the national cultural policy. For instance, the second issue from 2015 discussed the social role of libraries in the local culture. In the last few years, the journal’s section titled ‘Culture Observatory’ (*Obserwatorium kultury*) presented the results of applied research.

On the institutional level a substantial contribution to cultural policy research is made by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the National Centre for Culture. For many years, this second institution has facilitated the integration of researchers from different disciplines and disseminated knowledge from academic experts to cultural institutions and public administration units responsible for cultural policy. The current management of NCK wants to continue this tradition under the banner of ‘Reaching beyond the present, we cherish the past.’ Following this formula, we will present the history of applied research, focusing on the role of the Centre and the *Contemporary Culture* journal in supporting cultural policy research. We will also present an overview of the collection of reports gathered by the Centre.

In other words, this article’s primary aim is to evaluate the recent research for cultural policy. Approaching this task, we are well aware of the interrelations between power and knowledge. Taking statistics as an example, Alain Desrosières’ excellent analysis of such interrelations points out that ‘description and decision – “there is” and “we must”³ are in constant interaction. Knowledge has a dual nature that depends on its recipients’ intentions: they can approach it either as an element of description or the basis for decision-making. Hence, for some people, statistics is a branch of mathematics, whereas others see in it the instrument on which the modern state is founded. The same mechanism exists in research on culture. On the one hand, such research provides ideologically neutral knowledge. On the other hand, independently from the authors’ intentions, the research results become a part of political processes, adding to their context, serving as arguments in public debates, or becoming decision-making factors.

THE HERITAGE OF THE CULTURAL INSTITUTE

The first issue of the *Contemporary Culture* was published in 1993 by the Cultural Institute (Instytut Kultury) – an interdisciplinary research and innovation centre

³ Alan Desrosières, *The Politics of Large Numbers. A History of Statistical Reasoning*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 3.

under the Ministry of Culture and Arts (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki).⁴ The Institute gathered information about research on culture, compiled quantitative data on the cultural situation in Poland, drafted evaluation methods, conducted research on cultural economy, and prepared reports about cultural policy. Moreover, the Institute was a venue for an in-depth reflection on culture, combining anthropological, sociological, philosophical, and cultural studies perspectives. The Cultural Institute's activities involved many scholars, some of whom in later years moved from the cultural sphere to other research areas.

In the first half of the 1990s, the Institute produced a series of publications, which are valued by specialists also today. Here, we will recall three of them. *Commercialisation in Culture: Challenges and Opportunities* (*Komercjalizacja w kulturze. Szanse i zagrożenia*), edited by Stanisława Golinowska, is a post-conference volume. During the conference, which took place on 30 November and 1 December 1990,⁵ the participants discussed the situation of culture in a free-market context, which was then a new phenomenon in Polish reality. The transformation of the economic system was accompanied by many dilemmas. On the one hand, there was hope that authors and artists would become more independent from political decisions. On the other hand, there were fears about their economic condition and the deterioration in cultural production quality (resulting from the commercialisation, mentioned in the volume's title). Among the questions covered in the volume, some had a novel character. One example is Antonina Kłoskowska's prediction regarding the future of the book industry:

In Poland, no more than 30 per cent of the population read books regularly, and 40 per cent can recall anything of what they read in the past. Without countermeasures, such as a serious reform of the education system that will support traditional media recognised for their value, we should fear that the book industry will continue to shrink.⁶

This prediction turned out to be very accurate. Indeed, the Polish book industry is in decay. At the same time, we can observe that it is impacted by the educational system in a way unforeseen by Kłoskowska; namely the decision to offer elementary school handbooks free of charge accelerated the collapse of small, independent bookstores.

The second publication that remains surprisingly fresh today is *The Barometer of Culture* (*Barometr kultury*), edited by Mirosława Grabowska.⁷ The book contains a detailed analysis of two empirical studies: a survey on cultural participation conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (Centrum Badań Opinii Publicznej, OBOP) on a representative group of 1,500 Polish people, and questionnaire research in 2,454 (more than 95 per cent of all existing) territorial communities

⁴ Teresa Kostyrko, 'Działalność Instytutu Kultury w latach 1974–2001', *Kultura Współczesna* 33–34 (3–4), 2002.

⁵ *Komercjalizacja w kulturze. Szanse i zagrożenia*, ed. Stanisława Golinowska, Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1992.

⁶ Antonina Kłoskowska, 'O komercjalizacji w kulturze historyczne', in: *Komercjalizacja w kulturze. Szanse i zagrożenia*, p. 14.

⁷ *Barometr kultury*, ed. Mirosława Grabowska, Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1992.

(*gmina*)⁸ in Poland. The collected data offer a clear picture of social moods at the early stage of the country's political and economic transformation. The book remains a model of academic work in terms of empirical data and the sophistication of analysis. We return to this publication on various occasions, including the NCK's evaluations of local governments' spending on culture⁹ and our research on the amateur theatre movement.¹⁰

The third publication is *The Atlas of Culture in Poland, 1946–1980* (*Atlas Kultury Polski 1946–1980*).¹¹ Almost completed in 1983, this monumental work by Aleksander Wallis was published posthumously only in 1994. It presents a novel approach, in which a vast scope of statistical data is presented by means of geo-spatial analyses. The idea to present information in the form of maps was applied again by Barbara Fatyga and her research team. In 2009, they started to construct a database of indexes of culture presented in spatial configurations. This project was conducted in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the website *Moja Polis*. Currently, cultural data presented on maps are provided by Statistics Poland (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny*, GUS) as a part of its Geostatistics Portal.¹²

Frequent changes in research financing and operation of research and innovation centres limited the Institute's scope of activities. New regulations, implemented at the end of 1991, obliged such units to self-finance their activities. The lack of commercial potential of research on culture made it impossible for the Institute to survive in free market conditions. The Institute had to reduce its staff, change location, and pay for commercial rent of office space. Finally, it closed down at the turn of 2002 and 2003.

THE RESEARCH OF THE NATIONAL CENTRE OF CULTURE

The *Contemporary Culture* journal was inherited by the National Centre of Culture, created in 2002. Continuing traditions of the Cultural Institute, the Centre took over some of its research responsibilities. From today's perspective, one can see parallels between activities of the Cultural Institute and of the National Centre of Culture. These include the interdisciplinary character of research, the focus on practical outcomes, and cooperation with leading figures in the academic sphere. Such analogies result from a similar context of operation of the two institutions, in which both institutions have operated. Furthermore, the National Centre of Culture intentionally draws on solutions created by the Cultural Institute. In particular, the research of the Institute and the Centre have been linked together by the idea to reactivate the Culture Observatory.

⁸ *Gmina* is the principal unit of the administrative division of Poland (translator's note).

⁹ Tomasz Kukolowicz, Marlena Modzelewska, Paweł Siechowicz, Aleksandra Wiśniewska, 'Rola samorządu terytorialnego w finansowaniu polityki kulturalnej w Polsce w latach 1990–2015', *Studia BAS* 2, 2016.

¹⁰ Anna Kozak, Marcin Zarzecki, *Amatorski znaczy 'miłośniczycy': Raport z jakościowego badania amatorskiego ruchu teatralnego*, <https://www.nck.pl/badania/projekty-badawcze/raport-z-jakosciowego-badania-amatorskiego-ruchu-teatralnego> (accessed 20.11.2020).

¹¹ Aleksander Wallis, *Atlas kultury Polski 1946–1980*, Eco, Międzychód 1994.

¹² GUS, Portal Geostatystyczny, <https://geo.stat.gov.pl/> (accessed 15.10.2018).

The concept of the Polish Culture Observatory was developed in 1999 by Andrzej Siciński and Zina Jarmoszuk for the Ministry of Culture and Arts.¹³ The Observatory was to monitor the transformation of cultural life in Poland and gather information on the most significant cultural phenomena in Europe. The Observatory was to respond in this regard to the needs of the Ministry, local authorities, cultural institutions, non-governmental organisations, and individual researchers. The authors of the project identified data gathering and processing followed by the preparation of analyses and reports as the primary objectives of the Observatory. The declared main spheres of interests were cultural education, participation in culture, and cultural economy.

Several years passed from the conceptualisation to the institutionalisation of the Observatory. Formally, it was created in 2009 within the MKiDN's grant project 'Cultural Education and the Diagnosis of Culture' (*Edukacja kulturalna i diagnoza kultury*). During these several years of preparations¹⁴ and diagnosis in cultural sphere, the *Reports, Analyses, and Opinions* (*Raporty, analizy, opinie*) series was launched. The series presents expert works on the labour market, the dynamics and spatial configurations of cultural participation, as well as on similar cultural observatories in other European countries. Applied and practical aspects of research on culture were also continuously discussed in the *Contemporary Culture* journal. In the editor's introduction to the first issue published by the National Centre of Culture, Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska wrote:

From the next issue, the journal will slightly change its title: we are going to replace 'critique' with 'practice' (this change will not eliminate the critical character of the journal but will significantly increase the scope of our interests and our potential audience).¹⁵ Already in the short presentation of our goals, published in the journal's first issue, we stressed the importance of relations between theoretical-interpretative reflection and the practice of promoting cultural participation. We claimed that we must look beyond 'narrow academic circles' and reach all readers who want to consciously and reflexively shape their cultural participation.¹⁶

Following these declarations, the selection of topics of the journal included cultural issues in the context of European integration (*Contemporary Culture*, 1–2, 2003), cultural education (*Contemporary Culture*, 3, 2003), alternative culture (*Contemporary Culture*, 3, 2004), and local culture (*Contemporary Culture*, 4, 2004).

A significant point in the timeline of cultural policy research was the publication of a series of reports on the preparation work for the 2009 Congress of Polish Culture (Kongres Kultury Polskiej). In total, fifteen reports were produced,

¹³ See, Zina Jarmoszuk, 'Informacja o kulturze – Obserwatorium Życia Kulturalnego w Polsce', *Kultura Współczesna* 31–32 (1–2), 2002.

¹⁴ See, Małgorzata Kisilowska, *Obserwatorium kultury jako ośrodek zarządzania wiedzą*, 'Raporty, analizy, opinie' series, Instytut Adama Mickiewicza, Warszawa 2005; Z. Jarmoszuk, A. Wieczorek, 'W stronę Laboratorium kultury'.

¹⁵ The journal's full title is *Contemporary Culture: Theory, Interpretation, and Practice* (translator's note).

¹⁶ Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, 'Od redakcji', *Kultura Współczesna* 33–34 (3–4), 2002.

including expert opinions, problem analyses based on pre-existing data, and studies drawing on empirical research.¹⁷ In most cases, the selection of subjects was done according to different disciplines (reports on museums, books, audiovisual media, and so on). Together, these publications presented a multidimensional picture of cultural policy in Poland.

The ‘Culture Observatory’ grant programme contributed significantly to our knowledge about cultural policy. The National Centre of Culture supervised grant competitions in 2010–2011 and 2015; the competitions in 2009 and 2012–2014 were overseen directly by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage¹⁸ The programme priorities changed from year to year, but most of the 200 accepted proposals were research projects.¹⁹ Their thematic scope was extensive, and grant receivers varied from cultural institutions conducting research activities to non-governmental organisations, universities, and private companies. Included among them were the following observatories of culture: the Lived Culture Observatory Research Network Foundation (Fundacja Obserwatorium Żywej Kultury – Sieć Badawcza), the ROK AMU Culture Observatory (Regionalne Obserwatorium Kultury UAM), the Observatory of the Regional Institute of Culture in Katowice (Obserwatorium Regionalnego Instytutu Kultury w Katowicach), and the Observatory of the Institute of Urban Culture in Gdańsk (Obserwatorium Instytutu Kultury Miejskiej w Gdańsku).

The National Centre of Culture not only initiated and financed research projects but also gathered and disseminated their results. In 2010, Anna Ciecierska started to publish information about current projects by the NCK’s Research Unit on the website of the Centre and on Facebook. Based on responses on Facebook, she began to collect and describe research activities by NCK, MKiDN, and other Polish and foreign institutions. With time, a ‘Research Database’ subpage was added to the NCK website and equipped with search and thematic filter functions.

The gathering and dissemination of reports was a natural and logical response of the Centre to the problem of knowledge availability. Herbert A. Simon was among the first to identify this issue. As he wrote already in 1971, ‘in an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients.’²⁰ The so-called excess problem reached Poland as one of the results of systemic transformation. The idea of culture observatory, developed since the end of the 1990s,

¹⁷ See, Kongres Kultury Polskiej, http://www.kongreskultury.pl/title,Raporty_o_stanie_kultury,pid,135.html (accessed 15.10.2018).

¹⁸ In most projects supervised by the Ministry, the application process starts in the year preceding the project’s realisation. In turn, the Centre calls for research that should take place in the same year. As a result, MKiDN supervised grant programmes in 2013–2015.

¹⁹ See, Grant Programs, the National Centre of Culture, <http://www.nck.pl/badania/archiwum-projektow/obserwatorium-kultury/programy-dotacyjne> (accessed 15.10.2018).

²⁰ Herbert A. Simon, ‘Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World’, in: *Computers, Communications, and the Public Interest*, ed. Martin Greenberger, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1971, p. 40.

was envisioned as a modern solution for information management. In 2006, Zina Jarmoszuk and Anna Wieczorek characterised the situation in the following way:

The ease with which we can process information, combined with a lack of control over the quality of this information, is among the factors responsible for its overproduction, which can lead to information 'fog.' Today, the classification and quick access to the information is becoming a problem.²¹

In recent years, cultural institutions paid particular attention to information excess in cultural policy. Tomasz Szlendak wrote about 'the culture of excess in the times of deficiency'.²² Based on the analysis of reports and their use by cultural institutions, he concluded that when these institutions construct solutions for the cultural sphere, they completely ignore factual data ('When we looked at the life cycles of reports, we realised that the publication of a report is usually also the moment of its death.'²³) The authors of two reports on the influence of research on cultural policy in Lesser Poland reached similar conclusions.²⁴

The National Centre of Culture continuously monitors the needs of decision-makers responsible for cultural policy in Poland. It supported the 'Report on Reports' (*Raport o raportach*) and 'Local Cultural Centres: Activities and Diagnoses' (*Lokalne centra kultury: działania a diagnozy*) projects. In the autumn of 2014, the Centre studied the statistical needs of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. This research was linked to the activities of the Inter-Ministerial Methodological Group on Cultural Statistics. Moreover, for the sake of more in-depth exploration, the heads and staff of eight ministerial departments took part in semi-structured in-depth interviews. This research revealed a paradoxical situation in which some critical data are missing, but, at the same time, available information is used in a fragmentary and haphazard way.

The practical result of research on the Ministry's statistical needs was the launch of the *NCK Research News* (*Nowości Badawcze NCK*) quarterly in Spring 2015.²⁵ The journal publishes overviews of recent reports. These short texts present a broad scope of information and analysis. Currently, the quarterly consists of the following sections: 'From the NCK Research Program' (*Z programu badawczego NCK*), 'New Dictionary of Cultural Policy' (*Nowy słownik polityki kulturalnej*), 'Polish

²¹ Z. Jarmoszuk, A. Wieczorek, 'W stronę Laboratorium kultury', p. 151.

²² Tomasz Szlendak, 'Kultura nadmiaru w czasach niedomiaru', *Kultura Współczesna* 76 (1), 2013.

²³ 'Wybuch raportowego wulkanu. Raport z raportu o raportach o stanie kultury', a conversation of M. Roszkowska with K. Olechnicki and T. Szlendak, *Notes na 6 Tygodni* 100, 2015, p. IX.

²⁴ Jagoda Komusińska, Wojciech Kowalik, Judyta Lubacha-Sember, Łukasz Maźnica, Dawid Sobolak, Jan Stycharz, *Lokalne centra kultury: działania a diagnozy*, Warsztat Innowacji Społecznych, Agencja Artystyczna GAP, Kraków 2016, http://www.nck.pl/upload/attachments/318755/lokalne_centra_kultury_raport_2016.pdf (accessed 15.10. 2018); Piotr Knaś, Maria Piątkowska, Dawid Hoinkis, *Diagnozy w kulturze. Badania i analizy w projektowaniu i wdrażaniu samorządowych polityk kulturalnych*, FRDL Małopolski Instytut Samorządu Terytorialnego i Administracji, Kraków 2017, http://www.mistia.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/1_Raport_koncowy_Diagnozy-w-kulturze-Badania-i-analizy-w-projektowaniu-i-wdra%C5%82owanych.pdf (accessed 15.10. 2018).

²⁵ Available at: <http://nck.pl/badania/publikacje>. Until the second issue of 2016, the journal's title was *Culture Observatory Research News* (*Nowości Badawcze Obserwatorium Kultury*).

Reports' (*Polskie raporty*), 'Heritage and Memory' (*Dziedzictwo i pamięć*), 'Foreign Reports' (*Zagraniczne raporty*), 'Scientific Articles' (*Artykuły naukowe*), and 'Books' (*Książki*). The editorial team focuses on empirical research on the condition of and processes in the cultural sector. The 'New Dictionary of Cultural Policy' section presents reports containing significant cultural policy concepts, which do not necessarily stem from systematic and measurable research-based observation of cultural reality. The section devoted to academic articles does not strive to offer an exhaustive review of research done in Poland. Instead, the editor, Aleksandra Wiśniewska, devotes particular attention to two key academic journals in the field of cultural policy: *The International Journal of Cultural Policy* and *The Journal of Cultural Economics*. Until today,²⁶ NCK published fourteen issues of the quarterly.

Besides the quarterly, the National Centre for Culture undertook the task of creating a yearbook that presents a synthesis of knowledge from dispersed sources. The quarterly widens our understanding of the current situation by introducing new research and analyses produced in Poland and abroad. In turn, the yearbook's primary goal is to present current knowledge by selecting the most up-to-date and reliable domestic and foreign sources. The scale of this enterprise turned out to be so large that the initial concept of the yearbook prepared solely by NCK was replaced with more effective inter-institutional cooperation. Within it, the Centre is responsible for content editing, task coordination, and publishing. The first issue of the *Polish Culture Yearbook* (*Rocznik Kultury Polskiej*) went to print at the turn of 2016 and 2017. The 250-page-long publication included works by representatives of fifteen institutions doing research for cultural policy (and supervised mainly by MKiDN). Professor Piotr Gliński, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture and National Heritage, penned the introduction to the issue. Following the suggestion of Piotr Łysoń from Statistics Poland, the publication counted as a pilot issue. In the next year, the number of authors increased thanks to the cooperation of twenty institutions. The 2017 issue counted 300 pages, including introductions by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage and the head of the National Centre of Culture. The journal appears in two languages, Polish and English.

Another area where the Centre intensified its activities is empirical research. All results are presented on the NCK's website, followed by in-depth scientific analyses published in *Contemporary Culture*. From the cultural policy perspective, the most significant research projects have included *Between Play and Art: Cultural Choices of Children's Guardians* (*Między zabawą a sztuką. Wybory kulturalne opiekunów dzieci*), *A Passion for the Past: A Report from Qualitative Research of History Enthusiasts* (*Przeszłość jako pasja. Raport z jakościowego badania pasjonatów historii*), and *History, Culture, and Polish-Ukrainian Relations from the Ukrainian Perspective* (*Ukraińcy o historii, kulturze i stosunkach polsko-ukraińskich*). We encourage all interested readers to refer to the reports on the NCK's website (<http://nck.pl/badania/projekty-badawcze>) and articles in the *Contemporary Culture* quarterly.

²⁶ I.e. until 2018, when the Polish version of this issue was published (translator's note).

NCK'S REPOSITORY OF REPORTS

Since 2010, the collection of the Centre (www.nck.pl/badania/raporty) has grown to over 450 research and statistical reports. Today, it is the largest Polish repository of reports on cultural policy. Over the last years, the collection has been supervised by Anna Ciecierska, Natalia Nowińska, Katarzyna Zarzycka, and Natalia Szeligowska. The information needed for the purposes of the database has been prepared by the Research and Analyses Unit staff and NCK interns. The catalogue of the repository allows the users to filter and find reports by phrase search or to browse them by subject, language (Polish or foreign), and the publication year. In addition to the title, information about the author and the link to download the full version of the report, each record includes an abstract of the publication.

As for June 2018, the collection included 47 reports published prior to 2009, i.e. before the first version of the database was established, 168 reports from 2010–2015, when they were gathered solely for the purposes of the collection, and 261 reports from 2015–2018, when the *NCK Research News* quarterly was published. The last period is also the shortest one (it covers three and a half years), but the number of reports is the highest. This dynamic is the result of a more systematic approach to collecting reports and statistical accounts.

In terms of language, a dominant group of 271 reports deals with Polish culture. The rest are foreign publications, mainly in English. In a global context, cultural phenomena and processes in different parts of the world are interrelated and thus important from the cultural policy perspective. The transfer of knowledge has become more dynamic. The solutions created in the West are immediately noticed and, in some cases, implemented in the policy of other countries. The collection's scope is limited by its focus on British, American, as well as international organisations' and global foundations' reports (for example, by UNESCO). The experience of our region, where most reports on cultural policy are published in national languages, remains underrepresented in the repository.

Each report in the collection is classified by subject. The list of subjects, which has evolved over the years, makes the collection more useful for a wide range of readers. The number of reports under a given subject roughly indicates how much attention in cultural policy the subject receives.

The most popular subject is 'cultural participation' (89 reports). This leading position dovetails with global trends in public policy.²⁷ In Polish cultural policy, the significance of cultural participation is confirmed, most notably, by the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Art. 6, Par. 1): 'The Republic of Poland shall provide conditions for the people's equal access to the products of culture which are the source of the Nation's identity, continuity and development.'²⁸ Other popular subjects include 'cultural institutions' (59 reports) and 'cultural heritage' (49 reports). In the former case, this popularity indicates a vital role of such institutions

²⁷ See, Tal Feder, Tally Katz-Gerro, 'Who Benefits from Public Funding of the Performing Arts? Comparing the Art Provision and the Hegemony-Distinction Approaches', *Poetics* 40 (4), 2012.

²⁸ *The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2nd April, 1997, as published in Dziennik Ustaw No. 78, item 483, <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/angielski/kon1.htm> (accessed 20.11.2020).*

in cultural policy: they act as intermediaries between the public administration and participants in culture.

The special focus on national heritage is not only confirmed by the Constitution (Art. 5), but also results from a particular research tradition in Poland. In recent years, cultural heritage and historical policy are among the subjects that experience the most dynamic development, require most ‘saturation’ with empirical data, and need continuous control of internal shifts. Museums rapidly expand their infrastructure and scope of activities. We observe new forms of participation, such as historical reenactment. The digitalisation of archival resources and their publication on the Internet influence the perception of the past. Another popular subject in the repository is ‘cultural policy’ (63 reports). This is a strategic subject because the collection’s main objective is to facilitate access to relevant knowledge for people who shape and study this policy. The subject covers publications that deal with cultural policy in general, rather than with particular questions within it.

CONCLUSIONS

Since its inception, the *Contemporary Culture* journal has offered a space for academic and expert discourse, where theoreticians can meet with practitioners of culture. The National Centre of Culture has supported the journal in this task for the last fifteen years.

Staying true to the main principles of *Contemporary Culture* and supporting research for cultural policy, we created an experiential platform that integrates good practical solutions with research-based analyses. The one hundred published issues make the journal a vital voice in the discussion about the key issues for Polish cultural policy. In turn, 450 reports gathered in the repository of the Centre form an essential factual data collection for this policy. In the cultural sphere, the durability of initiatives is a good indicator of their value. NCK’s digital resources are among the key regional and interregional tools supporting research on culture. The processual approach in the analysis of cultural policy implies application and close integration of various data sources and research perspectives. For this reason, access to digital resources guarantees both that the policy-makers’ decisions are based on proper foundations and that the subsequent steps of policy making are logically interconnected.

Translated by Konrad Siekierski

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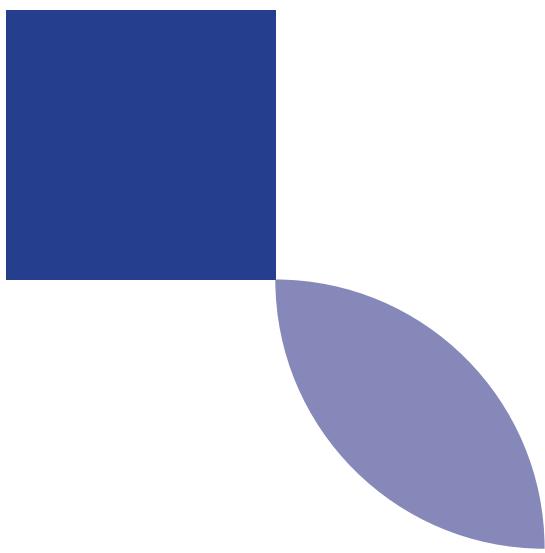
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ABSTRACT: Following the logic of diachronic analysis, the article discusses systematic diagnoses intended to shape and develop cultural policy, while presenting the evolution of research that has been conducted for the purposes of cultural policy ever since the early 1990s, with a particular focus on the strategic role of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, National Centre for Culture (NCK) and quarterly *Kultura Współczesna*. The starting point for the discussion are the actions of the Institute of Culture, the first publisher of *Kultura Współczesna*, followed by the research activity of the National Centre for Culture continued for the purposes of cultural policy and including for example the NCK Culture Observatory and NCK Repository of Reports.

KEY WORDS: cultural policy, attention economics, the culture of excess, database of reports





THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF CULTURE

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WEAVING AN OPEN WORLD / EXPERIENCING URBANUTOPIAS

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR URBAN EXPERIMENTS IN THE SPIRIT OF TIM INGOLD

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UTOPIA – FROM PLACE TO TIME, TO HOPE

Reinhart Koselleck undertakes an interesting analysis of how the notion of utopia changed from a spatial category (an island, a Nowhere) into a temporal one – namely, the future. His aim, then, is to study the temporalisation of utopia, and its semantic transformation in the history of philosophy.

If, following Koselleck's suggestion, we focus on the content of utopias, we can trace recurring motifs which have featured in them since Antiquity. One such motif is the belief that society can be designed and planned: rationally, morally and spatially. This kind of rational planning of rules governing social life is, of course, legitimised by science (for instance, for Karl Marx, what cannot be scientifically justified is simply utopian). Another belief characteristic of utopias is one about the possibility of a rational self-control which is voluntarily accepted, since it results from shared moral foundations or moral pressure (often also from an upbringing aimed at creating the new human enthusiastically giving in to this social self-control). Whatever differences one might

trace between particular utopias (concerning, for example, the role of common goods, private property, position of women, architectural solutions, and the role of power), they are all undoubtedly marked by rationally justified planning and prior cognitive conceptualisation of the postulated order and its subsequent material realisation. Utopias present definitive, closed, and final models. Thus, an unchangeable, eternal vision has taken over the idea of the city – a place which, after all, is open to spatial and social change, inclusive, and welcoming to newcomers, for instance merchants. The city may be surrounded by walls and moats, but its gates are open and permeable. In its daily life, it is unclosed and diverse.

After the alleged islands had been described, after the happenings taking place in the Nowhere had been recounted, the disputes over and fascination with these stories turned to the question of whether these projects could be realised. Koselleck, following Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, evokes the notion of *figmenta utopica*. Unlike *figmenta vera* (accounts dealing with the truth: something admittedly made up, but nevertheless probable in the existing world) and *figmenta heterocosmica* (that which is possible in all possible worlds, or rather in a multiplicity of worlds), Baumgarten's third group of accounts, *figmenta utopica*, 'utopian accounts', deal with what is impossible in any conceivable world. It is this last group of accounts that Baumgarten thinks should be excluded from literature. 'The dark shadow of impossibility of realisation loomed over utopia beginning from the first critiques levelled at More and up until the 19th century. However, as we shall see, in the 19th century this objection would come to be posed under a new banner'.¹

Since the French Revolution, we observe an ever wider use of the notion of utopia, which started to refer not just to projects for an ideal world but also to strategies of political behaviour. 'Utopians' has become a term denoting those who want to realise things that are impossible. Koselleck demonstrates how the scope of what is utopian has been changing throughout history:

If someone has a perfect plan and thinks he or she can give grounds for it, then these grounds can lead to the opposite of what was intended. Bentham was reacting already to the French Revolution and to what might be called the temporalisation of utopia. The possibility of realising visionary constitutional projects and their pertaining societal models no longer referred to a point in space but to the future. People who had been called utopians or adhered to what might be described as utopianism did of course intend to realise their plans. Thereby, the dimension of the future has been introduced to the notion of utopia. It was no longer a spatial Nowhere but a temporal implication, which has become a conceptually essential part of utopia.²

This brings it closer to the present.

¹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Dzieje pojęć: Studia z semantyki i pragmatyki języka społeczno-politycznego*, transl. Wojciech Kurnicki, Jarosław Merecki, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2009, p. 275 (this text has not been translated into English; for the German original, see: Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2006, p. 255). Cf. also: Reinhart Koselleck, 'Temporalization of Utopia', in: Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, transl. Todd S. Presner et al., Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002.

² R. Koselleck, *Dzieje pojęć*, p. 276 (*Begriffsgeschichten*, p. 256).

Thus, Koselleck shows spatially understood utopia changing its meanings to include a future-oriented thinking about the impossible. At the same time, he also shows utopia's changing structure. For while all spatial utopias might be verified by experience, provided that we find that particular place, 'such test of experience is impossible when it comes to utopias of the future. The future is impossible to reach *in situ* through any experience'.³ Koselleck notes. The notion of utopia is thus changeable, it is subject to historical relativisation. After all, much of what was once impossible becomes attainable today. This is a question not only of technological progress but also of what we can demand in the public space. Yet a more resolved and unwavering understanding of utopia is still associated with unattainability. And if we try to realise such a project, we should expect negative results.

A different approach was adopted by Ernst Bloch,⁴ who spoke about concrete utopia as a convergence of the future – or more precisely, a hope for a better future – with a present desire and concrete action. 'It is a mystical convergence', Koselleck writes, 'which removes temporal tension and by virtue of the permanence of utopian hope wants to activate a concrete ability to transform every situation'.⁵ This kind of thinking allows for a new look at utopia today. That is why I consider it worthwhile to ask: has the time come when we can observe a removal of the temporal tension and certain shifts on the scale of potentiality? Do we today treat utopianism as a belief in the possibility of social change seen less as a conceptual plan that is then implemented and more as a hope for the transformation of every situation that we have thus far been unable to independently shape to our liking? In introducing the category of hope to our thinking about utopia, we simultaneously open up all those interpretations which involve theories of action, agency, and experience – interpretations that are concerned not so much with what is not there or what is possible as with our potentiality. In other words, what is released by hope is the becoming. 'Reality is changing so rapidly', we are reminded by Koselleck, 'that utopia needs to hurry to catch up with it'.⁶ I suggest examining his proposition from the perspective of the Anthropocene and our current climate fears. To adopt this viewpoint is to turn our attention to thinking about the potent and at the same time adversary impact of our actions on the environment. And if that is the case, we have no choice – we have to hope that 'the utopias need to catch up with reality in order to prevent such a catastrophe',⁷ to give future generations a chance.

Perhaps this is precisely the reason why when we think of the utopian city today, what comes to mind are neither fanciful megastructures, nor Le Corbusierian visions, nor cities as finite projects. This apocalyptic mood prevents us from

³ R. Koselleck, *Dzieje pojęć*, p. 281 (*Begriffsgeschichten*, p. 261).

⁴ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1986 (originally published as *Geist der Utopie*, Duncker & Humblot, München 1918). Cf. Ernst Bloch, 'Rzeczywistość antycypowana, czyli jak przebiega i co osiąga myślenie utopijne', transl. Anna Czajka, *Studia Filozoficzne* 7–8, 1982; the translator of the latter text is also the author of the most extensive Polish monograph about Bloch: Anna Czajka, *Człowiek znaczy nadzieję: O filozofii Ernesta Blocha*, Wydawnictwo FEA, Warszawa 1991.

⁵ R. Koselleck, *Dzieje pojęć*, p. 288 (*Begriffsgeschichten*, p. 267).

⁶ R. Koselleck, *Dzieje pojęć*, p. 289 (*Begriffsgeschichten*, p. 267).

⁷ R. Koselleck, *Dzieje pojęć*, p. 289 (*Begriffsgeschichten*, p. 268).

looking to a fantastic, high-tech future, since we are not sure if there will be a future at all. It is not by chance that when prompted about utopian cities, scholars tend to quote all those urban initiatives that are realised owing to informal relationships, grassroots activities, and self-organisation of various minorities which – despite appalling conditions and overwhelming feeling of hopelessness – still strive to shape and organise their immediate worlds, homesteads, lifestyles, and new ways of dwelling.⁸ In a spontaneous, efficient, and creative way, they make use of discarded materials or transform abandoned buildings. One might say they work with the material, make the impossible possible, and the useless useful. Introducing order to the disordered, with no ambition of total control over things, they nevertheless make use of them, giving them new life. These informal cities – this ‘architecture without an architect’ – are often likened to ‘pirate utopias’ (Hakim Bey) and ‘pirate urbanisation’ (Abdou Maliq Simone).⁹ They also include refugee camps, quasi-cities that spring up in temporarily demilitarised zones – makeshift, built in the rush of the state of emergency, extremely unstable, and yet continually existing and functioning.

FROM PLANNING TO REALISATION

Modernity has convinced us that we should regulate the social world by means of controlling nature and adjusting ourselves to the world of culture, and that human impulses and feelings ought to be reined in and harnessed for the benefit of society. According to this modern way of thinking, any manifestations of a spontaneously active social world which is regulated from below and self-organising are deemed impossible and therefore utopian. People need to be controlled from above, power needs to be oppressive, buildings need to be designed first, then built according to plan and populated with residents.

Can we, then, still claim to be invariably modern when we think about informal cities as utopias? Let us see if our way of thinking changes, if we follow Tim Ingold in abandoning the building perspective in favour of the dwelling perspective. Although Ingold does not write about cities, his findings might nonetheless prove useful in attempting to rethink urbanity.

“ENVIRONMENTS ARE NEVER COMPLETE BUT ARE CONTINUALLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION”¹⁰

Ingold’s point of departure is a series of extremely interesting questions about the lines between artificial and natural worlds. Why, he asks, do we consider

⁸ Examples of literature on this kind of urbanism include: Justin McGuirk, *Radical Cities: Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture*, Verso, London 2014; Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, Verso, London – New York 2007; Katarzyna Wiącek, ‘Architektura bidonville w Casablance’, *Kultura Współczesna* 102 (3), 2018, p. 180–181.

⁹ Hakim Bey, T.A.Z. *The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, Autonomedia, New York 2003; Abdou Maliq Simone, ‘Pirate Towns: Reworking Social and Symbolic Infrastructures in Johannesburg and Douala’, *Urban Studies* 2, 2006.

¹⁰ Tim Ingold, ‘Building, Dwelling, Living: How Animals and People Make Themselves at Home in the World’, in: Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, Routledge, London – New York 2000, p. 172.

human-erected buildings to differ from constructions of animals? What makes us identify artificial with man-made? And further, ‘where, in an environment that bears the imprint of human activity, can we draw the line between what is, and is not, a house, or a building, or an instance of architecture?’¹¹ Or, for that matter, between a house and a cave or a yurt. These questions obviously derive from our thinking in terms of project and its realisation. After all, we assume that humans are intentional authors of their own projects and cognitive constructions which they then realise. Consequently, worlds are first designed, then made, and only then inhabited – this assumption lies at the basis of the distinction we make between architecturally transformed environment and nature.

The belief that it is precisely the form which is the ultimate aim of projects and concepts is rooted in fundamental dichotomies of anthropological thought, those between culture and nature, history and evolution, and project and realisation. The forms that the human mind envisions, the projects it designs (be it in the imagination or in real material) stem from humans’ engaged being, their immersion in the world, their dwelling in it, their practical relations with their surroundings. In short, they stem from the human experience of environmentality (more so than simply the environment). Yet humans live in particular surroundings that have been set up by earlier generations. Consequently, our ways of dwelling are inscribed in our bodies, bodily practices, and concrete skills and dispositions. As Ingold explains,

by adopting a dwelling perspective – that is, by taking the animal-in-its-environment rather than the self-contained individual as our point of departure – it is possible to dissolve the orthodox dichotomies between evolution and history, and between biology and culture. For if, by evolution, we mean differentiation over time in the forms and capacities of organisms, then we would have to admit that changes in the bodily orientations and skills of human beings, insofar as they are historically conditioned by the work of predecessors (along with the enduring products of that work, such as buildings), must themselves be evolutionary.¹²

We can thus say that dwelling is a process: dwelling means living in a space that is continuously transformed and at the same time open, unlike the final and ready space envisioned for the utopian city. The dwelling perspective eliminates the distinction between planning, designing, making and using. Indeed, the activities of residents that make up dwelling are not categorically different from the activities that make up building. The dwelling perspective is close in this respect to the childhood experience of building a house, a shelter, a fort, or whatever else the children call it. For them, the very activity of building is in itself play. Once the house/fort is complete, playtime is over. Simply sitting in the house/fort is, after all, not an especially enthralling process. There’s no end to improving, transforming, reconfiguring the fort. The point is the process, not the product.

¹¹ T. Ingold, ‘Building, Dwelling, Living’, p. 174.

¹² T. Ingold, ‘Building, Dwelling, Living’, p. 186–187.

If we were to insist that the activities associated with dwelling begin after a project, and a design, is realised, then we have to recognise that there is a certain moment in which the action of building ends, yielding the concrete result that is the finished building. Is that really the case? Is this the moment that we call architecture? In his examination of art history, Stewart Brand claims that ‘the whole idea of architecture is permanence’.¹³ And yet, which of the mediaeval cathedrals can be called completed? Which one was constructed in full according to an original design? Buildings get expanded, other buildings get added to them, their uses change. All these transformations of historic structures continue to this day. Looking from a wider perspective, we can easily see that buildings are a part of the world, and the world itself ceaselessly changes and is continually transformed. A building is, therefore, a process.

If modern efforts to draw up a comprehensive plan for the construction of the city as a conclusively harmonious vision of ideal order used to be called utopias, this was precisely because, taught by historical experience, we knew full well that cities are not born ready-made in the ideal plan of a genius architect or urbanist. Rather, they are a process of dwelling, settling, building, reconstructing, demolishing and destroying. They are the arena both of social or political struggles and of natural processes: storms, gales, acid rains, volcano eruptions, and earthquakes. The city is a complicated whole comprising many parts that do not always cooperate, do not always harmonise, if only because each of the city’s components is determined by its purpose, uses, and the properties of the material from which it was formed. We can therefore safely say that the new conceptions of utopian cities arise from discarded dystopias.

In view of this dialectic and fluctuation of utopia and dystopia, today’s (post-modern) urban utopia can thus be associated with rejecting universalist and functionalist claims in favour of diversity and heterogeneity, of inclusion for both urban subcultures and regional (or ethnic) traditions. This collage city, rooted in the power of self-organisation, is a whole comprising many parts, yet it does not squeal or grind; it is emergent in its own way, self-developing and self-managed. Ingold, however, does not believe in self-organising structures. He seeks balance between the project and a realisation that befits its conditions and follows the material; between episodic and processual features, and between organisation and continuity. He is not concerned with a direct relation between form and matter but rather with the relation between materiality and forces. Ingold puts forward a radical manifesto with the aim of abolishing the Western hylomorphic model, which has us thinking about an agent (architect, urbanist, social reformer) in whose mind exists a project, a form to be imposed on the matter. He is also critical the new humanities’ ongoing debate on the agency of subjects. According to Ingold, authors like Bruno Latour are engaged in attempts at rebalancing the hylomorphic model when they argue that it is not subjects which act on objects but rather objects acting, being agents, being endowed with some form of agency,

¹³ Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They’re Built*, Penguin, London 1994, p. 2.

like a speed-bump, whose agency substitutes for the agency of a living traffic policeman.

Ingold writes,

My ultimate aim, however, is more radical: with Deleuze and Guattari it is to overthrow the [hylomorphic – MMI] model itself and to replace it with an ontology that assigns primacy to the processes of formation as against their final products, and to the flows and transformations of materials as against states of matter. Form, to recall Klee's words, is death; form-giving is life. I want to argue that what Klee said of art is true of skilled practice in general, namely that it is a question not of imposing preconceived forms on inert matter but of intervening in the fields of force and currents of material wherein forms are generated. Practitioners, I contend, are wanderers, wayfarers, whose skill lies in their ability to find the grain of the world's becoming and to follow its course while bending it to their evolving purpose.¹⁴

FROM THE CITY OF SPECTACLE TO SELF-ORGANISING CITY

Does this train of thought within the contemporary humanities – focusing on processuality, relationality, flexibility of working with the material, and represented, on the one hand, by Ingold and Richard Sennett, and on the other, by authors like Latour, Alben Yanev and Rem Koolhaas – not predispose us today to look for utopia in places where, at first sight, processualities seem to perform splendidly?

Huge gaps and contrasts between cities are now more visible than ever before in modern cultural history. We thus have, on the one hand, the cities of spectacle. These are global megacities like Dubai, Caracas, Rio de Janeiro, Jakarta, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and many other megapolises located in Asia. We also have cities built from scratch, like the Chinese ghost cities, with apartments, shops, and restaurants, yet without residents or consumers. These megacities are all impressive, consumable, offering their temporary inhabitants superb, gigantic, stately or fancy architecture in the style of Zaha Hadid or other great starchitects (such as Koolhaas). Yet the inhabitants have no control over, say in, or impact on these cities. The modern megacities are spaces you visit, explore, rent, and photograph, but not spaces you inhabit, since spectacle wipes out all alternative ways of being in the city, safe for the most spectacular ones. Modern cities are thus dominated by the building, not the dwelling perspective.

On the other hand, as never before in the history of modern culture, we are seriously considering the possibility that cities might be ending, that urban reality is a process of unavoidable change, environmental degradation, and rotting of the walls that so far seemed indestructible. We see cities bursting at the seams with the abundance of people, cities without boundaries, with no outside; spaces melting due to climate-induced overheating of the urban plastic, smog, and spilling garbage. This is the material/problem that today's city-dwellers

¹⁴ Tim Ingold, 'The Textility of Making', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34, 2010, p. 92.

have to deal with. There is also no planner in sight willing to bring order to the ‘dis-order’ of the informal, overpopulated, sprawling, and uncontrollable cities. And no one believes now that such potential planner could be effective. We are, then, forced to look for all those practitioners: ‘wanderers, or wayfarers’ who have experienced the materiality of today’s cities, their substantiality, who have followed the materials. These people could be called urban alchemists, since – as James Elkins convincingly writes – the alchemical perspective allows for experiencing not a world of matter but rather substances, and to do so based on the substances’ physical properties: appearance, touch, smell and observation of the processes of their transformations and transmutations. ‘Alchemy is the old science of struggling with materials, and not quite understanding what is happening’.¹⁵

Yet does this perspective not distort the image of all those city dwellers who inhabit the favelas, the *barriadas*, the districts which develop informally and live their own life, the garbage cities? Do we, in a romantic gesture of orientalisation (Edward Said), not assign alleged agency to subject who have been excluded from the cities of spectacle and left without livelihood? Aren’t we not confusing creativity and the activities of Latourian actor-network with lack of alternatives and of prospects for a decent life? These questions are inspired by, among other sources, the experiences of Koolhaas during his 1998 research project in the capital of Nigeria. In Koolhaas’ interpretation, Lagos became a model city of the future. This, the architect-cum-researcher claims, is how cities worldwide will function in 50 years, or even sooner. Lagos is ‘a pressure cooker of scarcity, extreme wealth, land pressure, religious fervor, and population explosion, Lagos has cultivated an urbanism that is resilient, material-intensive, decentralized, and congested. Lagos may well be the most radical urbanism extant today, but it is one that works’.¹⁶ Koolhaas discovers that the city, despite the initial impression of chaos and utter disorganisation, blockage of traffic, and overcrowding, nevertheless works, propelled by some emergent force, by the uncontrolled ‘sheer intelligence of the self-organising system’.¹⁷ This initial impression, it bears reminding, was corrected by another perspective – the bird’s eye view. Afraid of Lagos’ dangerous streets, Koolhaas first observes the city from a helicopter. As a matter of fact, Koolhaas’ text about Lagos and Alaba is abundant with bird’s eye view photographs, as it is namely this perspective that, according to the author, allowed him to notice the grassroots order. Thus, in the massive market of Alaba, Koolhaas sees a microsystem of justice, with its own courts of law and even a local prison. Yet, as Matthew Gandy has demonstrated, treating Lagos as ‘the neutral space of research laboratory’¹⁸ (to use Koolhaas’ formulation) is to depoliticise the urban space and to deprive it of the context of historical experience of urbanity. Kacper Poblocki is

¹⁵ James Elkins, *What Painting Is?*, Routledge, London 2000, p. 17.

¹⁶ Stefano Boeri, Rem Koolhaas, Sanford Kwinter, Nadia Tazi, Hans Ulrich Obrist, ‘To Lagos’, in: S. Boeri, R. Koolhaas, S. Kwinter, N. Tazi, H. U. Obrist, *Mutations*, ACTAR Arc-en-Rêve, Barcelona 2000, p. 718.

¹⁷ Joseph Godlewski, ‘Alien and Distant: Rem Koolhaas on Film in Lagos, Nigeria’, *TSDR* 23 (11), 2010, p. 11.

¹⁸ Matthew Gandy, ‘Learning from Lagos’, *New Left Review* 33, 2005.

more blunt: ‘The “black collars”, as the local mobsters call themselves, are one of the most important city-making factors in the metropolises of the global South, albeit a factor that is utterly at odds with Koolhaas’ romantic vision of spontaneous urbanisation’.¹⁹

Where some researchers see social inequalities and a city of poverty, others notice a smoothly working self-organising environment. Fredric Jameson is even compelled to state:

*It is an extraordinary travelogue into the future, (...) to which may be added the question: is a new kind of space emerging – control space, junk space? And what does all this imply for the human psyche and human reality itself? (...) What does it imply for the future and for Utopia?*²⁰

Can we use Ingold’s proposition in order to avoid this type of orientalisation and aestheticisation of poverty, to demonstrate that the dwelling perspective is simply closer to our experience of the city, and to prove that real-life cities are tireless work on the part of their inhabitants, a constant process in the midst of unceasing realisation, a flexible space of change? I am unable to answer this question. Yet I find it profoundly important for a number of, mainly epistemic, reasons. I also consider it ethically indispensable. For whenever we think of ideal systems or ideal cities, a question looms about what sacrifices will have to be made (who will have to be excluded or removed from the city, what will have to be demolished), as well as who will be made responsible for future mistakes and for the perversions and failings of the experiment.

DOES ‘WEAVING AN OPEN WORLD’ HELP TO INHABIT CITIES?

Let us allow people to act in the city, to work with its materiality, to shape their immediate environment. The proposition made by Ingold is indeed radical. Let us stop using Euclidean geometry, which has us thinking about lines, circles and outlines in an abstract, conceptual, and rational manner. Let us imagine a drawing not as a geometric projection of some rationally conceived image but as a trace of a gesture. In his essay ‘Bindings Against Boundaries’, Ingold suggests an experiment: take a pen and draw a circle. Look at what you have drawn. What you see is probably the figure of the circle, a static perimeter which delineates in an empty space the division between the inside and the outside. Ingold calls this modern way of thinking the ‘logic of inversion’. He asks us to try to abandon this logic, or at least suspend it, if only for a while. Think of what you see as about the trace of the gesture of your hand which took a turn around while holding a pen. The modern logic of inversion usually makes us overlook this gesture. It is this logic that turns ‘pathways along which life is lived’ into boundaries within which life remains trapped, closed, and cut to line. Consequently, it outlines the space of the

¹⁹ Kacper Poblocki, ‘Deliryczne Lagos’, *Magazyn Miasta* 11, 2015, p. 61.

²⁰ Fredric Jameson, ‘Future City’, *New Left Review* 21, 2003, p. 66–68.

world. Having presented this experiment, Ingold goes on to formulate his aim, which is

to recover the sense of what it means to inhabit the world. To achieve this, I propose to put the logic of inversion into reverse. Life having been, as it were, installed inside things, I now want to restore these things to life by returning to the currents of their formation. In so doing, I aim to show that to inhabit the world – rather than to occupy it – is to live life, as we say colloquially, ‘in the open’.²¹

What this means is a world of processes and transformations, inhabited both by the observers of these processes and by the phenomena which the observers observe. It is, then, a question of focusing on inhabiting rather than occupying space; on movement rather than restrictions; on the medium rather than the surface; it is a question of tying the substance and the media together into living forms.

On the one hand, then, Ingold’s proposition is a part of the growing current of thinking about the city as an element of an ecosystem, whereby cities become one of numerous actors in a post-environmentalist transformation of the globe and as such need to be flexible, open, and readily responsive to changes.²² On the other hand, it strengthens the current that criticises the cities of spectacle and the closed and finite architecture of the global megacities. It facilitates conceptualising the city as a sphere of self-organisation, of weaving together and untying the knots of the world (and not of urbanised space). It also corresponds with Richard Sennett’s perspective that focuses on experiencing the world’s materiality. Tom Dyckhoff, who joins other authors in using the category of the city of spectacle, is critical towards it:

We should not be passive spectators. We should take part, and be transformed through the experience. We should be given the power to make our own places, our own towns and cities, our architecture. That is the only way we will truly feel attachment to and ownership of the land beneath our feet – by weaving the richness of ordinary human experience back into the production and experience of the landscapes we live in, creating little utopias in the city from which change might spread. And perhaps, in the burgeoning movements against gentrification in towns and cities across the world, or campaigns for affordable housing, a tax on increasing land values or the ‘right to the city’, something of the communal, subversive spirit we saw in Covent Garden and countless other cities in the 1960s and 1970s is returning. The question, today, as well as back then, though, is how to ensure these unstable

²¹ Tim Ingold, ‘Bindings Against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World’, *Environment and Planning A* 40, 2008, p. 1797.

²² The proposition is a philosophical version of the argument made by Agnieszka Bugno-Janik, Borys Cymrowski, Marek Janik and Justyna Łuksza, who write about urban commons, invoking Great Transitions as one of development trajectories, cf. Agnieszka Bugno-Janik, Borys Cymrowski, Marek Janik, Justyna Łuksza, ‘Urban Commons: Czy z utopii można zrobić rzeczywistość?’, *Kultura Współczesna* 106 (3), 2019. The concurrence of both conceptions shows one possible understanding of Ingold’s gesture of unmaking the opposition between history and evolution, between culture and nature.

*coalitions of such different peoples stick together; and even, once that fragile unity is achieved, what to campaign FOR, as well as against. Opposition is the easy bit. Coming up with an alternative to the entrepreneurial city, that's the rub.*²³

I read this as a hopeful call to build urban utopias, to develop our experience of dwelling. I think this is the reason why Dyckhoff refers to Sennett and his concept of jointly, socially developed rituals of dwelling, of city formation, of following the city's materials to understand its properties. Perhaps this will enable utopia to catch up with reality and prevent global disasters: climate, migration, economic and other catastrophes that have so far been driven with impunity by the ideology of growth.

Translated by Jakub Ozimek

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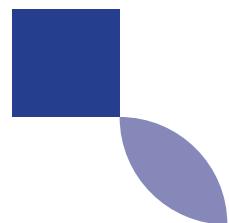
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ABSTRACT: Referring to Reinhart Koselleck and his arguments, this article discusses the changing nature of utopias in terms of their categories and meanings, while using dialectics to explain their phenomenon and historical attempts to implement them, as well as the rise-and-fall process of utopias and dystopias. Following in the footsteps of Tim Ingold, the author asks whether 'dwelling perspective' (in contrast to 'building perspective') and radical rejection of the Western hylomorphic model may be useful to understand two contemporary, and yet contradictory urban trends: self-organising (informal) cities and spectacle cities. Can the former be recognised as utopias in the context of the latter losing their urban values (dystopia)?

KEY WORDS: utopia/dystopia, Tim Ingold, informal cities, spectacle cities, urban space



RENATA TAŃCZUK

ON THE AUTONOMY OF THE SELF AND NATURE

SOME REMARKS ON OLD FEARS
IN NEW TECHNOLOGICAL SCENERY

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The digital revolution and technological progress, including progress in the field of bio- and nanotechnology, promise to solve many basic existential problems, concerning individual and public safety, well-being, quality of life, and death, to name just a few areas. Yet at the same time they generate anxieties, and even fears. Fear is related to cultural standards and ideas. We experience fear when we are unable to accept events that contradict them. We also fear when in the deposits of our collective ideas we find no tools to help us understand either what is happening to us or what might happen to us in the near future.

New technologies confront us with questions regarding the status of our creations, the nature of technological beings created in science laboratories, and ‘living machines’ and their boundaries. Inevitably, they also change us, and so these questions also concern the human nature, our identity and boundaries, our future as a species, and the possibilities of interacting, co-existing, and forming communities with new actants. The existing thought patterns prove

insufficient to fathom the products and interventions of laboratories.¹ These issues provoke lively debates both within the humanities and in everyday life; stimulate the development of posthuman and transhuman visions of subjectivity and the person; and contribute to the formulation of new laws and norms regulating the human–non-human collective. However, these new conceptions are not yet part of the general social imaginary.

Predictions now spell the end of the *Homo Sapiens* due to a climate catastrophe or the substitution of natural selection with the intelligent design of bio-engineers: the creation of cyborgs and ‘non-organic life’.² Even if we consider them, with increasing hesitation, to be figments of wild imaginations, these images confront us with a thought experiment that is difficult to face:

We don't like to contemplate the possibility that in the future, beings with emotions and identities like ours will no longer exist, and our place will be taken by alien life forms whose abilities dwarf our own. [...] What we should take seriously is the idea that the next stage of history will include not only technological and organisational transformations, but also fundamental transformations in human consciousness and identity. And these could be transformations so fundamental that they will call the very term 'human' into question.³

Catastrophic visions express the fear about the extinction of our species which has been haunting the popular imagination at least since the Middle Ages, and which is itself a generalised form of fear of individual death.⁴ These visions also stem from our inability to control the consequences of the changes we cause. Tadeusz Ślawek writes: ‘Ultimately, fear is a recognition of the power of that which

1 Cf. Ewa Bińczyk, *Technonauka w społeczeństwie ryzyka. Filozofia wobec niepożądanych następstw praktycznego sukcesu nauki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2012, p. 260.

2 The concept of non-organic life has been used by Yuval N. Harari to denote beings like computer viruses, which evolve on their own accord. He also pointed to three ways of implementing intelligent design (Yuval N. Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Vintage Books, London 2011). On the end of *Homo Sapiens*, see, Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us*, St Martin's Press, New York 2007; Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, Picador, New York 2002; Y. N. Harari, *Sapiens*, p. 445–464; Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, Viking Books, New York 2005. In his introduction to the collective volume *Suicide of Enlightenment? How Neuroscience and New Technologies Lay Waste to the Human World*, Andrzej Zybertowicz formulates – ‘so that they do not materialise’ – two cautionary prognoses. The stronger prognosis is that ‘processes are in action, and are accelerating, which, combined, will with great probability lead either to the extermination of humanity as a species or else to the physical extermination of humans. Extermination of humanity as a species can take on various forms: the end of the *human* world as we know it, a world with human, bodily, conscious persons. These persons would be substituted either by forms more or less susceptible to cyborgisation, or by various conscious hybrid beings (e.g. animal-human beings), or even by purely virtual, digital minds. Physical extermination means that some forms of existence created by humans – like nanobots or artificial intelligence – will eradicate our species completely. [...] the point is that the laying waste to the human world by new technologies is so advanced and takes place in so many areas that there are processes already at play which, in a way, compel humankind to use this possibility (Andrzej Zybertowicz, ‘Wprowadzenie’, in: Andrzej Zybertowicz, Maciej Gurtowski, Katarzyna Tamborska, Mateusz Trawiński, Jan Waszewski, *Samobójstwo Oświecenia. Jak neuronauka i nowe technologie pustoszą ludzki świat*, Wydawnictwo Kasper, Kraków 2015, p. 14). Note, however, Rosi Braidotti’s comments regarding these alarmist statements. While she shares their concern for the status of the human being, she does not share the fears associated with the human’s changing position (Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Polity, Cambridge 2013, p. 64).

3 Y. N. Harari, *Sapiens*, p. 462–463.

4 Urszula Jarecka, ‘Konceptualizacja zagrożeń biotechnologicznych w kulturze audiowizualnej’, in: *Nie tylko Internet. Nowe media, przyroda i „technologie społeczne” a praktyki kulturowe*, ed. Janusz Mucha, Zakład Naukowy Nomos, Kraków 2010, p. 296.

is outside of me and upon which I am dependent'.⁵ What we are dependent on today is technology⁶ – which now seems just as unpredictable as the nature that it was supposed to tame was perceived to be not so long ago. Technology was supposed to be a means of mastering, managing, and structuring the irrepressible and unpredictable natural and social dimensions of our existence. Instead, it itself is increasingly uncontrollable. More than that, it is technology which is controlling. No longer a tool, it is taking the place of the masters, making them instruments in its own pursuits. It is now technology that requires taming – technology is becoming nature. This unexpected role reversal, this claim to being like us or to being nature, is a key motif of films about androids and artificial intelligence, and of art actions. These expressions also articulate anxieties about the loss of *anthropos'* central place in the world, about the machines appropriating the basic determinants of subjectivity and the status of separate human person, and about their becoming part of an autonomous techno-nature.

This article looks at two works of art presented in 2017 at the Eco Expanded City festival in Wrocław. One is the performance *Orchestrer la Perte (Perpetual Demotion)* by Simon Laroche and David Szanto; the other is the film *Lost Drones* by The Fortunists art group.⁷ Both works deal with the question of technology's position vis-à-vis the human subject and nature. Rather than shock the audience with threats from technology, the authors turn to the relatively traditional concepts of the subject and nature that still structure our thinking about ourselves and the world. As we have seen, the undermining of these concepts by new technologies leads to the loss of crucial thought patterns that provide order to our world and – as a result – ensure our sense of existential safety. What is more, unsettling the ideas of human nature, personhood, and pre-existing autonomous natural order calls into question essential cultural values, such as freedom,⁸ individuality, authenticity, and the human life.

THE SELF – HE, SHE, AND IT

In his book *The Power of Fear: The Impact of the Apocalypse and Cold War Fears on Selected Currents of Popular Culture*,⁹ Piotr Jezierski writes that the late 1970s saw a change

5 Tadeusz Ślawek, 'Lukrecjusz i Defoe. Dwie lekcje lęku', *Kultura Współczesna* 75 (4), 2012, p. 24.

6 Throughout this text, I use the term 'technology' to denote not only the means of action enabled by the achievements of modern laboratory science as well as the production process of particular devices and the associated premises, goals, and values – but also the devices themselves. This approach is inspired by: Mirosław Gwiazdowicz, Piotr Stankiewicz, 'Wprowadzenie', *Studia Biura Analiz Sejmowych Kancelarii Sejmu* 43 (3), 2015, p. 9.

7 I would like to thank Dagmara Domagała of WRO Art Center for helping me locate and access the materials used in writing this text.

8 The relation between using biotechnology to design human life and issues of axiology has been pondered by Krzysztof Solarewicz (Krzysztof Solarewicz, 'Nadnatura. Wizje człowieka przyszłości we współczesnej debacie naukowej i popularnonaukowej', *Prace Kulturoznawcze* 14 (2), 2012). Quoting the argument of Michael Sandel from his work *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*, Solarewicz point out that 'insistent efforts to limit what fate brings – unlike efforts to overcome fate – can strip us of our capability for empathy and for recognising the subjectivity of others. As a consequence, they can pose a threat to freedom. Firstly, to negatively defined freedom – the freedom from being genetically determined by the will of others, for instance the parents. Secondly, limiting the impact of fate may also endanger positive freedom – the freedom to choose one's own path, be it ethical, social, or professional' (K. Solarewicz, 'Nadnatura', p. 102).

9 Piotr Jezierski, *Sila strachu. Wpływ Apokalipsy i lęków zimnowojennych na wybrane nurtury kultury popularnej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Katedra, Gdańsk 2012.

in the position of machines in popular culture. Increasingly, they are portrayed as a threat to humans: ‘The cold war fears of deadly technology, which can bring about the end of our civilisation, evolved to a more intimate form. [...] The bomb attack “from outside” was replaced by a technique of manipulating “from inside”’.¹⁰

One of the crucial elements of fear of technology is now the fear of losing humanity, of threats from machines that are more and more like us, and consequently, of being unable to tell the human from the non-human. Machines that gain self-consciousness, become intelligent, make decisions, self-replicate, communicate, machines that can lie or speak the truth, kill and save, feel and express emotions, demand civil freedoms and rights. All these traits, thought to a varying degree, are present in subsequent non-human-increasingly-human film protagonists – from *Blade Runner* (1982), through successive instalments of *Terminator* (starting 1984), *The Animatrix* (2003), and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995–2017), to *Ex Machina* (2015), *Her* (2013), *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), and some episodes of *Black Mirror* (starting 2011).¹¹ These productions reveal the horror of a posthuman, machinocentric world, where the exceptional status of the human and the individual, at least in the shape we envisioned, is irreversibly lost. It is not things, technological devices, machines that are our tools – it is us who are becoming mere instruments for things, devices, and machines. On the one hand, this blurring of the line between the human and the non-human takes place within the human person (hybridisation and cyborgisation of the human). On the other hand, it takes places outside the human, in the machine itself, for instance in an android or the artificial lifeform that is a replicant.

Regardless of their non-essentialist (poststructuralist, posthuman, transhuman) visions of the individual’s subjectivity and identity, the contemporary social imaginary and psychology are still predominantly based on the classic, Western conception of the person.¹² A systematic discussion of that conception was presented many years ago by Clifford Geertz, who confronted it with Javanese, Balinese, and Moroccan ideas. In his essay “From the Native’s Point of View”: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding, Geertz wrote:

*The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures.*¹³

The Western vision of the world, which is rooted in Greek philosophy and in Christianity, has at its heart the human individual: a self-conscious, self-contained,

¹⁰ P. Jeziorski, *Sila strachu*, p. 142.

¹¹ The listed films are just examples, albeit perhaps the most well-known ones, of cinematic debates concerning the postanthropocentric world.

¹² The film productions listed above seem to confirm this observation.

¹³ Clifford Geertz, “From the Native’s Point of View”: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding’, in: Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*, Basic Books, New York 1983, p. 59.

and integral bodily and spiritual being that is the source of action, is entitled to dignity and autonomy, and strives for originality and authenticity.¹⁴ This conception of the person may not be accepted uncritically in scientific and philosophical debates and might not even structure the reflection on the human subject anymore. But it is nevertheless this conception which is a persistent phantasm of the collective imagination and an object of desire whose ultimate loss causes fear. We care about the status and position of the human and about the individual self ('We are sensitive when it comes to the self, we care about it, we preach tolerance and the need to understand difference. Behind all this lies a deep fear about ourselves, a desire to remain in a safe reality'.¹⁵) We ceaselessly maintain our aspiration to be the One, the dominant, autonomous being. Thus, the identity and autonomy of the individual are a source of modern fears. We are afraid of not recognising who we are, of losing ourselves, of not being our authentic selves, of giving in to the power of someone else's gaze, and of being forced to seek recognition from others, without which, as it turns out, it is impossible to define oneself.¹⁶ If in modernity being an autonomous individual is not a choice¹⁷ but a compulsion; if authenticity is the moral ideal that we must all live up to, then the destruction of the traditional subject means undermining the values that have been crucial to modernity and have structured the life of Western societies. Of course, the realisation of these values has not been without negative consequences, suffice it to mention the debate related by Charles Taylor in his defence of authenticity as an ideal, or Erich Fromm's considerations about the loss of freedom.¹⁸

In his article *Identity as Nuisance: Two Genealogies of the Modern Hamartia*, Leszek Koczanowicz argues that the feeling of being not oneself, of being out of place – which the author describes using the category of hamartia – gets democratised in modernity and becomes a universal experience.¹⁹ At the roots of this experience is the abovementioned conception of the subject that modern individuals are unable to live up to: 'Yet almost simultaneously [with the cultural formation of the strong subject – author's note] a belief develops that real human existence can never be achieved because it contains as inherent elements of (self-) alienation. Humans are always at a wrong place and through no fault of their

¹⁴ It is important to remember that the Western tradition formulated more than one philosophy of the subject. The above characterisation points out some of the traits of the subject as described in the modernist approach (cf. Marek Majczyna, 'Podmiotowość a tożsamość', in: *Tożsamość człowieka*, ed. Anna Galdowa, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2000, p. 38). Both this approach and the associated essentialist understanding of personal identity have been criticised from a number of angles. Authenticity and originality are features of the modern subject which have been the individual's object of care and aspiration only since the rise of the ethics of authenticity in the eighteenth century (cf. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1991).

¹⁵ P. Jezierski, *Siła strachu*, p. 166.

¹⁶ For more on recognition, see, Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. Terry Pinkard, Michael Baur, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2018, chapter 4; C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.

¹⁷ Cf. Leszek Koczanowicz, 'Lęk i olśnienie', *Pismo* 6, 2018, <https://magazynpismo.pl/lek-i-olsnienie/> (accessed 20.06.2018).

¹⁸ C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*; Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, Farrar & Rinehart, New York 1941.

¹⁹ Leszek Koczanowicz, 'Tożsamość jako niewygoda. Dwie genealogie nowoczesnej hamartii', *Teksty Drugie* 170 (2), 2018.

own!”²⁰ This lack of autonomy, Koczanowicz points out, manifests itself in the spheres of politics, interpersonal relations, and culture. In all these domains the individual is torn between the poles of autonomy and dependency, authenticity and inauthenticity. These tensions now appear in the sphere of civilisation as well, bearing both real and projected technological potential of interference in our bodily and spiritual constitution, in our selves.²¹ In the catastrophic visions of technological interference into the human world and human existence, we are not only not ourselves. We also go beyond our humanity, as the once strong and autonomous subject through which humanity was defined loses its authenticity and agency in favour of intelligent machines within and without. The associated fear is caused by the uncertainty regarding an alien presence within us, our subordination to technological agents, which is bound to translate into anxieties regarding autonomy in our activities, authenticity in our experience of emotions, and even the content of our memories. It might be justified to perceive the film androids and replicants as reflections of the modern subject, who interrogates his or her technological alter ego (e.g. in *Blade Runner 2049*) to see how far he or she can go in being not oneself and out of place, or who tries to establish an intimate relationship with a mechanical subject and thereby starts a dialogue with his or her own self alienated within a machine (*Her*). Perhaps these attempts are also a way of seeking a posthuman vision of the subject that would free us from the modern hamartia.²²

Koczanowicz’s remarks may also inspire us to address another type of fear connected to losing oneself, namely the fear of being deprived of the position of Master in the interaction with technologies. This issue is taken up by Simon Laroche and David Szanto in their 2014 work *Orchestrer la Perte (Perpetual Demotion)*. Laroche is an artist and teacher of Electronic Arts and New Media at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Szanto is a gastronomic scientist who studies nutritional practices, and former head of the Representation, Meaning, and Media graduate programme at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo, Italy. *Orchestrer la Perte*, their first joint project, tackles the problem of human–machine relations. Its main character is a robot which feeds the visitors ‘a mysterious organic substance’²³ prepared by the artists.

A common justification for the development of robotics and construction of androids is the need for intelligent helpers and caretakers for the elderly and sick. This function is supposed to be performed by increasingly anthropomorphic machines, which might even be better at the job than humans. In his commentary to the project, Simon Laroche notes that the relations between humans and machines are becoming more intimate and that, at the same time, they have come to shape our perception of the world. The project establishes and explores one such

²⁰ L. Koczanowicz, ‘Tożsamość jako niewygoda’, p. 339.

²¹ Consider, for instance, neurotechnological interventions like brain implants.

²² Whatever Rosi Braidotti’s conception of the subject could be such vision is a topic for another study.

²³ Simon Laroche, David Szanto, *Orchestrer la Perte / Perpetual Demotion*, WRO Art Center, 2014, <https://wrocenter.pl/pl/perpetual-demotion/> (accessed 20.06.2018).

intimate relation, that of feeding. At the beginning of our lives we are fed by our mothers, who nourish us, take care of us, and give us a sense of security. Later on, this role is played by ‘significant Others’ – family members, friends, and lovers. It is only in situations of extreme lack of self-reliance that we are fed by people from outside these groups, by strange caretakers we are forced to trust. The artists wanted to examine our reaction to being nourished by a robot. The robot they used does not resemble a human, it is a geometric construction, a classic machine which certainly inspires no friendly feelings. It is equipped with a polished sphere which reflects the distorted faces of the visitors, so that they can see themselves as they are being fed. Laroche explained that his intention was to show ‘the uneasiness with which we sometimes interact with technology’.²⁴ If, however, we anthropomorphise the robot, perhaps unjustifiably so, and consider the polished sphere to be its ‘face’, then the reflection represent *its* perspective on those fed. The artists, we might note, point our attention to the asymmetrical nature of our relations with machines, and to the inadequacy of the images that machines create of the human partners of their interactions. The participants must give in to the machine, otherwise they will not be fed. A condition of entering a relation with the robot, of receiving its recognition and care (of which feeding is a form), is submission:

*It's a machine that forces you to adapt to it. It's not adapting that well to you, but you have to give a little bit of control to the machine. The machine is therefore not a tool that does something for you but a nursing robot, something that tries to put you into a situation where you are half-controlled by it.*²⁵

The artists do not reveal what it was that the participants were fed by the robot (during the Wrocław presentation, it was a meal prepared according to instructions from the city’s residents). Those partaking had to put their full trust in the performance: the food could be tasty and healthy but it could also be revolting and harmful.

In his part of the presentation, David Szanto stressed that his intention was to emphasise ways in which food is related to ‘questions of power, political, cultural, historical, that exists here’.²⁶ The problem of power is central to the way the work problematises human-machine relations. The authors essentially reverse roles of the human Master, the creator of machines which are supposed to serve him, and the robotic Slave. Here, it is the human assisting the robot, fitting it with the spoons containing food, who is called a Slave. But I think that those allowing themselves to be fed are slaves as well. The short description of the work features the following statement: ‘The process of feeding, as a symbol of power and depriving of power, of superiority, growth but also decomposition and death,

²⁴ EEC / Simon Laroche + David Szanto – *Orchestrer la perte / Perpetual Demotion* / installation, WRO Art Center 2016, <https://vimeo.com/214156898> (accessed 15.11.2020).

²⁵ EEC / SSimon Laroche + David Szanto.

²⁶ EEC / SSimon Laroche + David Szanto.

illustrates the complexity of relations between humans and technology, a relation characterised by slow yet seemingly unavoidable reversal of roles'.²⁷ We may call it a turning point in the history of the human and of human constitution; a point initiating the titular 'perpetual demotion'. Should we view the dynamic explored by Laroche and Szanto in Hegelian terms, as a process of achieving self-consciousness? If so, then their work also shows a human-machine relationship constitutive of the posthuman subject.

TECHNOLOGY AS NATURE

The modern conception of nature, like that of the human subject, has a stable position in the social imaginary. Somewhat like the modern human subject, nature is conceived within it as a separate existence, independent of the human and human culture, autonomous, governed by its own laws. This idea of nature features even now in the debates over climate change and the engineering projects of mitigating its consequences.²⁸

In its nascent period in the Renaissance, modern science treated nature as an object of study, 'a synonym of logic and order',²⁹ a knowable domain. Knowledge of nature was supposed to be the key to controlling the world, to controlling nature itself, whose fear-inspiring destructive power had to be tamed. Regardless of modernity's anthropocentric, or biocentric,³⁰ perspective, nature remains an autonomous given. Because of devastation inflicted upon it by human actions, it is an object of attention and care. The disappearance of its phantasmal original state is a cause of concern.

Until recently, technological interference into nature did not breach the law of selection that regulates its evolution. Today, the works of bio-engineers and creators of artificial life break the law of natural selection, and the development of nature is beginning to be shaped by what Yuval N. Harari termed 'intelligent design'. New technologies do away with the hitherto accepted line between nature and 'artificial nature', and turn nature into techno-nature,³¹ which is becoming equally threatening and dreadful as the nature that modernity promised to tame.

Bio-inspired machines are slowly settling themselves as elements of this techno-nature. Cyborg insects are now used for surveillance and as weapons. They stir our imaginations and, above all, arouse anxiety. Insects capable of uncontrollable

²⁷ S. Laroche, D. Szanto, *Orchestrer la Perte / Perpetual Demotion*.

²⁸ Both the human subject and nature have of course seen various conceptualisations, in the past as well as at present. The conception discussed here is therefore not the only possible one, neither does it reflect the new approaches to nature that abolish the crucial modern opposition between nature and culture, proposing instead the concept of nature-culture (see, Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, transl. Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1993; Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, transl. Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2004).

²⁹ Julia Fiedorczuk, *Cyborg w ogrodzie. Wprowadzenie do ekokrytyki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Katedra, Gdańsk 2014, p. 40.

³⁰ J. Fiedorczuk, *Cyborg w ogrodzie*, p. 53–54.

³¹ See, Renata Tańczuk, 'Drony piękne jak motyle, natrętne jak komary i pracowite jak mrówki. Uwagi o naturze i sprawstwie bionicznych owadów', in: *Czego pragną drony?*, ed. Rafał Nahirny, Aleksandra Kil, Magdalena Zamorska, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Katedra, Gdańsk 2017.

reproduction, undergoing mysterious metamorphoses, forming swarms that appear out of thin air to attack us and are impossible to hide away from – all these frightful images are visualised in representations of drones as buzzing drone bees circling in search of enemy, or a mosquito-like drone pricking your finger.³² The fears associated with mechanised insects are described by Hugh Raffles in his book *Insectopedia*:

There is the nightmare of the military that funds nearly all basic research in insect science, the nightmare of probes into brains and razors into eyes, the nightmare that should any of this reveal the secrets of locusts swarming, of bees navigating, or of ants foraging, the secrets will beget other secrets, the nightmares other nightmares, the pupae other pupae, insects born of microimplants; part-machine, part-insect insects; remote-controlled weaponized surveillance insects; moths on a mission; beetles undercover; not to mention robotic insects, mass-produced, mass-deployed, mass-suicide nightmare insects. These are the nightmares that dream of coming wars, of insect wars without vulnerable central commands, forming and dispersing, congealing and dissolving, decentered, networked; of netwar, of network-centric warfare, of no-casualty wars (at least on our team), dreams of Osama bin Laden somewhere in a cave. These are the nightmares of invisible terrorists, swarming without number, invading intimate places and unguarded moments. The nightmares of our age, nightmares of emergence, of a hive of evil, a brood of bad people, a superorganism beyond individuals, ‘swarming on their own initiative – homing in from scattered locations on various targets and then dispersing, only to form new swarms’.³³

A decidedly less frightening vision of drones is presented in the mockumentary *Lost Drones* (2015) by the German collective The Fortunists. The film's main character is Roland Niehn, who runs a sanctuary for stray drones. Drones provoke many emotions, some of them negative. On the one hand, they are yet another class of devices designed to enhance our field of view – an external prosthesis of the eye – and as such, they are an object of consumerist desire. On the other hand, they also symbolise contemporary practices of surveillance and supervision, which offer a sense of safety in exchange for that of privacy and freedom. The authors begin their tale of strangely behaving drones by pointing to this surveying function of unmanned aircraft. The film's opening shots show us the world as seen by a drone's virtual eye. The narrator informs us about an exceptionally high demand for these devices among Germans living by the Dutch border. Armed with them, they can spy on their foreign neighbours with no inhibitions. We then learn that strange behaviour of drones has been observed: the machines seem to operate on their own, autonomously, as no people can be found who control them. To get to the bottom of these occurrences, the authors set out to meet Roland Niehn, who searches the border area for lost but still functional drones. We follow him on his daily round, during which he collects drones the way entomologists collect

³² Cf. R. Tańczuk, 'Drony piękne jak motyle.'

³³ Hugh Raffles, *Insectopedia*, Vintage, New York 2010, p. 170 (internal quotation from: Scott Atran, 'A Leaner, Meaner Jihad', *New York Times*, March 16, 2004).

insects. We learn about the habits and favourite spots of these machines and ways of capturing them. Niehn uses special traps which allow for the drones to be caught in a safe and stress-free manner. Some of the contraptions sooth them by imitating the original boxes in which they were kept right after they were born. The specimens collected in the forest are brought to the backyard drone sanctuary. There, having spent an average of eight days adapting to the new conditions in a hutch (called the ‘familiarisation cage’), they are taught to avoid all kinds of dangers, like crashing into surrounding objects, to fall down in a correct way, to trust in their skills and in themselves, to develop a feeling for flight, and to keep appropriate distance from other drones. Niehn also watches, archives, and catalogues using self-made categories, the footage shot by the drones.

As it turns out, drones differ starkly in behaviour patterns. The film’s hero demonstrates the different techno-natural species. The camouflage drones, which, like some insects, blend into the environment, are very independent – one of them even seems to draw energy from an apple, which would suggest that it has developed its own way of feeding itself. There are also the extremely nimble, fast, and aggressive nano-quads and the huge quadro-copters. The solo-copters can only go straight up and therefore are often found exhausted and injured. Some species are rare, like the crypto-copter and the octo-copter. The drones, we are told, are often attacked by birds, especially crows. They become more and more like wildlife and start to evolve. The quadro-copters ‘develop a nest-building desire – or imitate it’,³⁴ the nano-drones collect nectar; at night, the sphere drones behave like moths and ‘swarm around the round streetlights like insects in a mating dance’,³⁵ while one of the solo-copters tries to float on the water surface like a duck.

The narrator commenting on these observations states that the drones’ behaviour in the natural environment ‘is a sign of emerging artificial intelligence. It is admirable that the drone turns to the animal world instead of concerning itself with mankind, as hoped for by many epigones of the technological singularity’. He goes on to ask:

*Are drones independent living creatures? Technically it is a machine. The ambivalent definitions of life cannot be simply applied here. The feedback from the animal world offers a hint: drones get attacked as well as every other living creature that intrudes a home range. Animals acknowledge drones as equals and thus as living creature[s]. The ability to fly, to move through time and space, is the premise for experience. And merely the possibility of having experience can shape intelligence. The question arises if the much evoked dawn of artificial intelligence has occurred in the German-Dutch border area. This we can say with certainty: the drones we met are mechanical living creatures which move autonomously.*³⁶

³⁴ All the quotes from the film come from the English subtitles in: Die Fortunisten, *Lost Drones* (eng subs), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESXTbCmOf6Y> (accessed 15.11.2020).

³⁵ Die Fortunisten, *Lost Drones*.

³⁶ That the fictitious autonomy of drones presented by the artists signals serious problems is demonstrated by the debates in governments, parliaments and among lawyers whether a machine can be granted legal personhood and be held individually accountable for its actions.

Roland Niehn has no family. He lives alone and is alone in the interest he pays to the self-naturalising drones. When asked to explain his commitment to drones, he replies that he has always been ‘interested in animals, man and man-animal-products’. He also mentions a tragic event for which he blames himself: when he worked as a telecommunications technician at a chicken production facility, a fire broke out, and ‘the man-animal-products were destroyed ahead of schedule’. ‘But that will never happen again,’ he declares, ‘things have to be brought to their end. And if I don’t take care of the drones, who else will? They are so cheap, nobody is interested in them!’ According to Niehn, drones and man-animal-products, like animals, deserve our care. We are responsible for them.

Does the film’s gesture of animalising drones serve to neutralise our fears of technology, which becomes naturalised, or does it exacerbate those fears? In *The Fortunists’ vision*, with its depiction of a caretaker of lost drones, techno-nature is most of all an object of care and responsible cultivation. According to the artists, the film ‘focuses on the possibilities of a more humane treatment of man’s exo-prosthesis: the drones’.³⁷ But it also articulates the fears associated with the autonomy and power of nature, whose new technological form is increasingly unpredictable and develops in line with its own laws. In the end, naturalising technology does not neutralise fear. Noting that one of the drones has adapted to the natural environment, the interviewer says: ‘For me that sounds like a step forward in evolution. Isn’t that slightly creepy?’³⁸ This question, while rhetorical, communicates the anxieties that I wrote about above. The film’s narrator interprets the presented evidence for the evolution of drones as signs of an emerging artificial intelligence. Thus, ultimately, *The Fortunists’ work* is concerned with artificial intelligence, as are all the works discussed in this article. In a presentation of *Lost Drones*, its authors ask: ‘Did mankind miss the crucial point of the growing self-awareness of artificial intelligence and does it therefore turn to wild-life?’³⁹ The film seems to answer in the affirmative, which means that it recognises the ongoing uncontrolled evolution of artificial intelligence and the fears it can engender.

The film opens with a quote from Alan Turing, the purported father of artificial intelligence: ‘We can only see a short distance ahead, but we can see plenty there that needs to be done’.⁴⁰ What can and what needs to be done with new technologies and the possibilities they open up to us is one of the most asked questions today. It gets phrased in various ways, among which are the questions concluding Yuval N. Harari’s examination of mankind’s entire history: ‘What do we want to become?’ and – considering that ‘we might soon be able to engineer our desires too’ – ‘What do we want to want?’⁴¹ Answers to these questions might liberate

³⁷ The Fortunists, *Lost Drones*, WRO 2017, <http://wro2017.wrocenter.pl/works/lostdrones/> (accessed 20.06.2018).

³⁸ The original word rendered in the English subtitles as ‘creepy’ is *unheimlich*. The Polish translation of this line done by the author for the Polish version of this article reads ‘Doesn’t it give you goose bumps?’ (translator’s note).

³⁹ The Fortunists, *Lost Drones*.

⁴⁰ Alan Turing, ‘Computing Machinery and Intelligence’, *Mind* 236, 1950, p. 460.

⁴¹ Y. N. Harari, *Sapiens*, p. 464.

us from some of the anxieties concerning ourselves and the changing world we inhabit. And yet it seems unlikely that we will be able to formulate such answers. And this perhaps should be the source of our greatest fear. For, to quote Harari, ‘is there anything more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don’t know what they want?’⁴²

Translated by Jakub Ozimek

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⁴² Y. N. Harari, *Sapiens*, p. 466.

ABSTRACT: Fear is related to our cultural measures and imaginations. We experience it while the reserves of social imaginarius don't offer us any tools to explain what is already happening and what might happen to us. I am analyzing *Orchestrer la Perte* by Simone Laroche and David Szanto and *Lost Drones* by The Fortunists, artistic works which juxtapose technology with the human subject and nature. The authors refer to rather traditional concepts of the subject and nature, which still tend to influence our attitudes. The challenge brought to them by new technologies implies a loss of significant categories organizing the world, which guarantee a sense of safety, and a threat to essential values.

KEY WORDS: modern subject, nature, techno-nature, social imaginarius



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AGAINST (INTELLIGENT) MACHINES?

ON ART IN THE TIMES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is currently one of most topical debate subjects not only among highly specialised scientists and academics interested in this field professionally but also in many communities seemingly unrelated to issues of information technology, artificial life, algorithms, linguistics, or robotics. For scholars in the humanities, including those studying contemporary art, artificial intelligence has become, out of necessity, another crucial area demanding deep reflection. Located in the borderland between exact sciences, philosophy, neurology, cognitive studies, and psychology – to name just a few domains – artificial intelligence places humanities scholars in a most difficult position. Namely, their competences usually prove woefully insufficient to allow for successful and cognitively fruitful excursions into issues of fuzzy logic, neural networks, genetic algorithms, export systems, or artificial life (AL). Even publications aimed at giving an accessible introduction to this fascinating world¹ are a formidable challenge for a reader coming from the humanities. Yet it

¹ See, e.g., Krzysztof Ficoń, *Sztuczna inteligencja nie tylko dla humanistów*, BEL Studio, Warszawa 2013.

is a challenge that has to be confronted before any attempt at understanding the modern world of new media art.

AI is an extremely complex and ambiguous area. I will, however, refrain from delving into definitional issues. For our intents and purposes, artificial intelligence is a phenomenon from the fields of technology and information science, used to solve complex questions falling outside the operational scope of traditional computer code; AI is aimed at self-improvement, learning, and enhancing its cognitive capabilities, in which it can resemble human intelligence. The point of AI, however, might not be for it to become similar to human intelligence but to create something different altogether, which rather than compete with natural intelligence would cooperate with it in an integral fashion.

All these aspects find their necessary or possible elaboration in the realm of robotics. John Spacey² distinguishes as many as thirty-three types of artificial intelligence. Let us list just some of them: Activity Recognition, Artificial Life, Bot and Chatterbot, Computer Automated Design, Computer Vision, Evolutionary Algorithms, Neural Network, Self Replicating Systems, Strong Artificial Intelligence, Superhuman, Superintelligence, Technological Singularity. This diversity translates into dozens of possible applications of different types of AI in different areas of human (and machine) activity, including the area of artistic strategies. In this paper, I will not address the fascinating theme of superintelligence and technological singularity. I wrote about the latter in some detail elsewhere,³ referring to the concepts of Vernor Vinge and, above all, Ray Kurzweil. Superintelligence, especially in the transhuman milieu, is in its turn a very enticing and interesting theme, but one not directly related to the art of creative machines or considerations regarding the potential for art creation by non-human subjects. The possible ‘intelligence explosion’ connected with the development of AI has been heralded on many occasions, yet most observers remain cautious in predicting a particular point in time when it could occur. Therefore, instead of fuelling the great expectation and hopes, it is worthwhile to focus on what already is our everyday reality. Although one cannot help but be impressed by the lists compiled by Nick Bostrom – perhaps the most prominent and influential transhumanist philosopher – which clearly demonstrate that already today artificial intelligence achieves decidedly better results than humans in many areas, for instance in a range of different games.⁴

The world of new media art is an environment where the subject matter of artificial intelligence has naturally been present for a long time. It is not by accident that the main theme of the 2017 Ars Electronica Festival was *Artificial Intelligence – The*

² John Spacey, *33 types of Artificial Intelligence*, <https://simplicable.com/new/types-of-artificial-intelligence> (accessed 1.10.2018).

³ See, Piotr Zawojski, *Technokultura i jej manifestacje artystyczne. Medialny świat hybryd i hybrydyzacji*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2016, p. 25–29.

⁴ See, Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, p. 12–13. Bostrom points out that various systems of artificial intelligence have beaten humans in such games as checkers, chess, backgammon, scrabble, and go. What is meant here are not isolated events (like Deep Blue’s game with Garry Kasparov in 2007) but AI outperforming humans in a repeatable way, as proven in many games. It is, however, important to add that in any activity other than chess Deep Blue would be completely ‘thoughtless’ and could not manage the simplest of tasks requiring ‘logical thinking’.

Other I. The festival is the world's major event devoted to cyber art and the most important trends in modern societies dominated by new technologies. Once again, its organisers were able to aptly recognise the key cultural and civilizational trends emerging at the crossroads of art, science, and technology in the given historical moment. Over the last two decades, the themes have included: *Code – The Language of Our Time* (2003), *Hybrid – Living in Paradox* (2005), *Goodbye Privacy* (2007), *A New Cultural Economy – The Limits of Intellectual Property* (2008), *Human Nature* (2009), *Origin – How It All Begins* (2011), *Total Recall – The Evolution of Memory* (2013), and *Post City – Habitats for the 21st Century* (2015). Of course, as is usually the case with large festivals organised under a theme, not all presentations, activities, exhibitions, conferences, concerts, and performances address the leading subject. Yet practically each of the organisers' chosen topics was at the heart of current debates concerning the arts, technology, and society. After all, while the subject of AI has, with varying intensity, been present in the public space for over sixty years, it has undoubtedly recently become a recurring theme in the press, the mass media, and popular culture. What is more, it is now also a rapidly developing area of knowledge. If we add to that the broadly defined knowledge-based market and economy, we can safely say that there is not a single area of human activity today which would not warrant reflection on the possible applications of AI and its impact on reality.

One such area is art, which is subjected to the influence and expansion of new technologies but simultaneously is essential to shaping the constantly renewing – one might say, upgrading – technium, or ‘the modern system of culture and technology’.⁵ Technium is the foundation, even though in fact it is fluid or rather in the state of constant becoming. This state of becoming is the essence of protopia (from both *progress* and *process*) as one of twelve inevitable traits/processes that will determine the development of humanity in the nearest future. Protopia offers a way to go beyond the black-and-white dichotomy between technophobes and technophiles, or utopians and dystopians, which keeps reappearing among authors dealing in futurism. Other processes supposed to shape the future include flowing, filtering, remixing, screening, interacting, sharing, and – importantly in the context of our discussion – cognifying.

Cognifying might be characterised as the advancing artificial intelligence spreading into new fields and permeating all possible objects, machines, tools, and finally artificial creatures. As Kevin Kelly writes: ‘It is hard to imagine anything that would “change everything” as much as cheap, powerful, ubiquitous artificial intelligence. To begin with, there’s nothing as consequential as a dumb thing made smarter’.⁶ These words might offer a vantage point for considering

⁵ Kevin Kelly, *The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future*, Viking, New York 2016, p. 273. Elsewhere, Kelly offers a more precise description of his understanding of the technium as ‘that largest network of all the technologies working together to support each other, and while this pen [I’m writing with] is definitely not alive, there is a sense in which the technium as a whole exhibits life-like behaviors in the same way that your neuron doesn’t really think, but the network of neurons in your brain can make an idea’. Kevin Kelly, *The Technium*, https://www.edge.org/conversation/kevin_kelly-the-technium (accessed 30.09.2018).

⁶ K. Kelly, *The Inevitable*, p. 29. It bears reminding that already almost twenty years ago, Howard Rheingold in his book *Smart Mobs* (Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*, Basic Books, New York 2002) pointed out the significance of artificial intelligence permeating wide masses of people and the tools they use. This thread

the fundamental change that is currently ongoing also in the arts. Jacek Dukaj – who is an original thinker as well as an excellent writer – calls this phenomenon the second phase transition in the history of Homo Sapiens' culture, meaning by that 'the transformation of culture by the broadly understood artificial intelligence technology'.⁷

The first phase transition, according to Dukaj, was accurately identified by Walter Benjamin in his study *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.⁸ This essay, which has inspired a very rich literature and has been commented on countless times, is one of the most influential texts about the non-auratic art, which was emerging in the 1930s. The possibility of mechanical reproduction of an artefact from the field of art not only completely changed the art world. It also laid foundations for a radically new life of artistic objects in the public space and forced a rethinking of fundamental aesthetic issues, like those of the original and the copy, authenticity and originality of the artwork, or authorship.

In the art field, artificial intelligence is often linked with using robots as, firstly, human-made tools and objects, and, secondly, as independent machines which themselves become the producers (or creators? – see below) of objects of artistic character that might be considered in aesthetic categories and therefore belong to the world of art. Reflecting on the possibilities of robot replacement, Kevin Kelly presents a typology of situations in which robots might take over jobs that have thus far been done (or not done) by humans. He distinguishes four such types: '1. jobs humans can do but robots can do even better; 2. jobs humans can't do but robots can; 3. jobs we didn't know we wanted done; 4. jobs only humans can do – for now'.⁹ Does the fourth type of jobs include artistic activity as the domain of the creative human? This leads to another question, concerning the essence of creation and creativity: are they an immanently human trait, reserved exclusively to us? Today, there is no general agreement in this regard.

Even now, humans are authors of creations which can make other creations. It is, nevertheless, disputed if the latter can be considered art, or is 'fetishised authenticity' – as Jacek Dukaj puts it, echoing Benjamin's category of auracity – reserved solely for the creative beings that are people. And is authenticity still tenable as a criterion of creativity? Dukaj's opinion is decisive: 'the conviction that "machines cannot be creative" is a relic of a Turing's era philosophy of mind, along with statements like "machines have no soul" [...], already today, in specific fields, programs are as creative as humans'.¹⁰ I share his view (at least its first part – as for machine 'souls', my convictions are not that clear-cut). Machine creations, or creative machines, are the next step in the technological revolution

was continued in Rheingold's next work (Howard Rheingold, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA – London 2012), in which his idea of artificial intelligence development is based above all on the use of intelligent network systems in an increasing range of situations.

⁷ Jacek Dukaj, 'Sztuka w czasach sztucznej inteligencji', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4–5 November 2017, p. 25.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm> (accessed 15.11.2020).

⁹ K. Kelly, *The Inevitable*, p. 54–60.

¹⁰ J. Dukaj, 'Sztuka', p. 5.

related above all to the fields of information technology and robotics, or to the incredible, tightly interwoven development of both these areas.

Within new media art, there is a rich, and well documented,¹¹ tradition of human creators sharing with non-humans their hitherto exclusive areas of activity. One of the most significant examples is algorithmic art. Works of algorists like Georg Nees, Frieder Nake, Manfred Mohr, and Roman Verostko have entered the new media art canon due to their pioneering employment of computer algorithms in the arts. In algorithmic art, which uses ‘code as a kind of material’,¹² the artist shares authorship with the system he or she has designed. The system achieves some degree of autonomy and independence and produces a creation which is equally (or in various proportions) a work of a human and a machine. Thus, the basic feature of generative arts, its distinguishing attribute, ‘is appropriately designed automated system of rules, to which the author delegates some responsibility for the form of the resultant artefact’.¹³ The delegation might be done in many ways that encompass various practices. Sometimes, like in the case of software art,¹⁴ the produced artefacts are not highly autonomous, in other projects (not only within the arts), the main idea guiding the creators is designing a system in which the role of machine will be equal to that of human.

The changing relationship between the artist as demiurge (controlling in full not just the tools used to create art but also the results of their application) and autopoietic systems is well illustrated by the boundary case of Brian Eno’s generative art,¹⁵ both his music and audio-visual productions. Accepting as his basic tenet that ‘machines are art’, Eno started experimenting with generative procedures as early as in the mid-1970s (his ground-breaking album *Discreet Music* appeared in 1975). In this early stage, his main venue was creating ‘music environments’ based on a system of parallel multi-channel playback of various audio tracks, with every moving listener (‘immersant’), wrapped around in a distinctive sound bubble, mixing a never-ending musical composition that consisted not in repetition but in diverse and unique works co-created each time by the listener.

The multi-channel sound installations were only the beginning. Later on, Eno turned to audio-visual works, the most famous of which is probably the *77 Million*

¹¹ See, e.g., George Stiny, James Gibbs, *Algorithmic Aesthetics: Computer Models for Criticism and Design*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1978; Cynthia Goodman, *Digital Vision: Computers and Art*, Harry N. Abrams, New York 1987; Dominic McIver Lopes, *A Philosophy of Computer Art*, Routledge, London – New York 2009; *Mainframe Experimentalism Early Computing and the Foundations of the Digital Arts*, ed. Hannah B. Higgins, Douglas Kahn, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2012; Grant D. Taylor, *When the Machine Made Art: The Troubled History of Computer Art*, Bloomsbury, New York – London – New Delhi – Sydney 2014.

¹² Joachim Sauter, ‘A Touch of Code’, in: *A Touch of Code: Interactive Installations and Experiences*, ed. Robert Klanten, Sven Ehmann, Verena Hanschke, Gestalten, Berlin 2011, p. 5.

¹³ Marcin Składanek, *Sztuka generatywna. Metoda i praktyki*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2017, p. 10.

¹⁴ Bruce Wands notes that although in this type of art the source of the work is the program (algorithm), the latter is nevertheless written by the human. Automated creation of artistic objects is, in this case, essentially similar to the traditional model of creativity, in which authorship is assigned unambiguously to humans. Bruce Wands, *Art of the Digital Age*, Thames & Hudson, New York 2006, p. 164.

¹⁵ I wrote in detail about Eno’s works in: Piotr Zawojski, *Sztuka obrazu i obrazowania w epoce nowych mediów*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2012, p. 252–291.

Paintings project.¹⁶ Starting in the mid-2000s, the artist realised dozens of exhibitions, using specially designed software to turn a finite number of elements into infinite audio-visual works of art. Two DVD editions of the work also appeared. This kind of ‘visual music’ stemmed from Eno’s views on the autonomy of music, its ability to produce new constellations of sounds, which he likened to the view from a house overlooking the sea, with ostensibly always the same but in fact constantly changing view.¹⁷ He managed to realise his dream about infinite music that never repeats itself. Once initiated, owing to the algorithmic procedures, the track plays continuously anew, driven generatively by the internal logic of the designed yet autonomous system. This software solution can hardly be called creative. Rather, it is a highly autonomous system producing an infinite stream of non-repeating sound structures.

From here, it is only one step to realisations that are not merely human-designed and – to a greater or lesser extent – human-controlled creations, but can produce (create?) completely on their own artefacts which might be treated as works of art, or at least aspire to that status. Historically speaking, a number of various artistic experiments might be named here which consisted in creating works, tools, or systems tasked with making other creations. Starting from eighteenth-century automata constructed by Jacques de Vaucanson (*The Flute Player*, *The Tambourine Player*, *The Digesting Duck*) or Pierre Jaquet-Droz and his collaborators (*The Writer*, *The Musician*, *The Draughtsman*), to Jean Tinguely’s kinetic sculptures (*Machine à dessiner*, 1955), to AARON by Harold Cohen (1973), and MEART – *The Semi-Living Artist* by Guy Ben-Ary (2002–2006). These projects anticipated proto-algorithmic and algorithmic strategies or themselves used algorithms as elements in the creation of works less and less dependent on humans. As such, they may be considered a necessary transitory mode towards the subsequent stage, in which tools are sought that would generate creations in full autonomy. The creations sometimes resemble artistic artefacts. Sometimes, on the other hand, they prove that human-devised programs can become so independent that the program’s/algorithm’s creator can in no way predict the ultimate effect of its work/creative process.

I will quote just a few examples that compel us to rethink our traditional views regarding the status of the artist, creator, and author – a status which up till recently was reserved for humans. The StatsMonkey software (and its successor, Quill) is a tool for automatic generation of sports news that uses raw data to ‘write’ elaborate and original press reports from sports events. Authors of the software went on to found a firm, called Narrative Science, which soon added new areas to its portfolio, including economic texts that are better (in substantive terms) than the work done by professional (human) analysts. Some observers of the press market project that in the nearest future these ‘meta-writers’ of ‘robonews’ might be responsible for over ninety per cent of all journalistic and analytical texts,

¹⁶ See, <https://www.lumenlondon.com/77galleries> (accessed 1.10.2018); Brian Eno, *77 Million Paintings*, DVD-ROM and DVD. Hannibal Records, New York 2006.

¹⁷ Cf. Brian Eno, *Music for Installations*, booklet accompanying the six-CD edition, Opal Records, Leigh-on-Sea 2018, p. 45.

essentially replacing human labour in that area. According to Kris Hammond, within a few years, a text-generating algorithm will be awarded the Pulitzer Prize.¹⁸

These experiments (and now full-fledged activities) would be impossible if it were not for the recently ongoing process of rethinking some fundamental questions about the essence of creativity, hitherto reserved for the human – more precisely, for the human brain. Looking for ways to build creative machines, scientists turned to certain analogies. One of them was the Darwinian natural selection and its information technology consequences: genetic algorithms. Already in 1990,¹⁹ John R. Koza sought to implement genetic algorithms. This led to his studies where the algorithms are used as ‘automated invention machines’.²⁰ As was to be expected, his research showed that in most cases genetic algorithms copied – or, at most, slightly modified – existing solutions. On some occasions, however, they also created new inventions which could be patented as solutions to thus far unresolved problems. In short, and allowing for certain simplification, we might say that creativity does not have to be treated as an exclusively human trait, and that it can be achieved by artificial intelligence. This view has been met with strong opposition. Lev Grossman, for instance, is convinced that real creative activity in the field of arts (and not only arts) is inextricably linked with consciousness, the self, and a sense of personal identity. He writes:

*Creating a work of art is one of those activities we reserve for humans and humans only. It's an act of self-expression; you're not supposed to be able to do it if you don't have a self. To see creativity, the exclusive domain of humans, usurped by a computer built by a 17-year-old is to watch a line blur that cannot be unblurred, the line between organic intelligence and artificial intelligence.*²¹

Below I will present some examples of using human-made machines in a way which makes them create certain artefacts, which might be regarded in the context of artistic strategies. David Cope is a musicologist, composer, but also a programmer whose software and algorithms analyse musical pieces and compose their own music. In the early 1990s, he developed EMI software (*Experiments in Musical Intelligence*) that applies artificial intelligence to write music imitating the styles of particular composers. At first, EMI specialised in mimicking the style of Johann Sebastian Bach (*Bach by Design*, 1993). Its next album (*Classical Music Composed by Computer*, 1997) contained imitations of both Bach and other classical composers, including Chopin, Rachmaninov, Stravinsky, and Beethoven. These compositions are worth listening to. Let us add that Cope's original music is also composed in synergy with computer programs.

¹⁸ See, Steven Levy, ‘Can an Algorithm Write a Better News Story Than a Human Reporter?’, <https://www.wired.com/2012/04/can-an-algorithm-write-a-better-news-story-than-a-human-reporter/> (accessed 4.10.2018).

¹⁹ John R. Koza, ‘Genetic Programming: A Paradigm for Genetically Breeding Populations of Computer Programs to Solve Problems’, <http://i.stanford.edu/pub/cstr/reports/cs/tr/90/1314/CS-TR-90-1314.pdf> (accessed 4.10.2018).

²⁰ Martin Ford, *Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future*, Basic Books, New York 2015, p. 110.

²¹ Lev Grossman, ‘2045: The Year Man Becomes Immortal’, *Time*, 10 February 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2048299-1,00.html> (accessed 5.10.2018).

Another David Cope project was Annie, a virtual author of music and poetry, whom he created after his earlier ‘authors’/programs: Sara, Emma, Emily Howell, and Alice.²² In 2011, Cope published *Comes the Fiery Night: 2,000 Haiku by Man and Machine*, which brought together – or, to put it better, mixed together – haikus written by Annie (a machine) and by humans. Hardly any of the surveyed readers of these formally traditional pieces of poetry was able to tell poems written by a human from those created by Annie, a computer program based on algorithms and the use of artificial intelligence. In 2017, a Microsoft-developed artificial intelligence system, known as XiaoIce (or Xiao Bing, or Little Ice), allegedly guided also by emotional intelligence, appeared as the author on the cover of *The Sunshine Lost Windows*. The volume contained 139 pieces selected from tens of thousands of poems written by the ‘artist’. The book’s reception was mixed but dominated by critical voices arguing that the phenomenon should be treated not as poetry but rather as ‘marketing for a technology’.²³

Simon Colton is another name active in the ‘robot artists’ field, who tackles the questions of intelligent machines as creators of ‘machine art’. Are the artefacts produced by these machines ‘non-human’ art, or are they different art, just like artificial intelligence is ‘different’ intelligence? Colton is the creator of an AI program, called The Painting Fool, which ‘can identify emotions in photographs of people and then paint an abstract portrait that attempts to convey their emotional state. It can also generate imaginary objects using techniques based on genetic programming’.²⁴ On the project’s website,²⁵ the software introduces itself, ‘saying’ that it is a computer program, and an aspiring painter and creative artist. The interesting fact is that The Painting Fool uses an art-critiquing program called Darci to verify its achievements and develop self-criticism.²⁶ Colton draws attention to problems associated with defining art and classifying some artefacts as artistic objects, and to the controversies that have grown up around the notion of creativity. His painting-making software raises important questions. Can software grow increasingly autonomous and develop its own, distinctive style, not limited to producing photorealistic images of reality? Can it ‘work through’ external data in a critical and original manner, and then create unique paintings? Or even: can it create without ‘seeing’ digital images beforehand, and without needing to consult them?

In 2012, the London Symphonic Orchestra performed *Transits – Into an Abyss*. The piece was composed by a computer, in fact a computer cluster, constructed by Melomics Media²⁷ and located at the University of Malaga. In essence,

²² See, David Cope, *Tinman Too: A Life Explored*, iUniverse, New York – Bloomington 2012, p. 300.

²³ Beata Wasilewska, ‘Robot szuka czytelnika’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 7 February 2018, p. 14.

²⁴ M. Ford, *Rise of the Robots*, p. 112.

²⁵ <http://www.thepaintingfool.com/index.html> (accessed 6.10.2018).

²⁶ See, Kadhim Shubber, ‘Artificial Artists: When Computers Become Creative’, *Wired*, 7 August 2013, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/can-computers-be-creative> (accessed 6.10.2018).

²⁷ The term ‘melomics’ was coined as a blend word of ‘genomics’ and ‘melodies’. More precisely, the word is derived from ‘genomics of melodies’.

the working principle of this computational system – called IAMUS – consists in utilising biological algorithms to automatise the process of composing contemporary music. Having received a quite modest amount of data (including, for instance, what instruments will be performing), the system needs a relatively small time to produce/create a practically unlimited number of compositions. What kind of compositions are they? One way to find out is to listen to the 2012 album called simply *Iamus*, which features the London Symphonic Orchestra's performance of the system's compositions.²⁸ Do they have aesthetic value? If we were to organise a blind test, even among seasoned connoisseurs of contemporary music, would they be able to tell that the author of this music is a creative machine?

One more example: Taro Yasuno and his vision of 'zombie music'. The music is machine-performed by robots of Yasuno's construction, which play wind instruments using synthetic fingers and pressure pumps. In the future, the creator and programmer prophesises, mankind will die out, but the autonomous machines of his design will continue to play their music, which reaches far beyond human perception habits and listening 'pleasure'. Listening to Yasuno's work is in fact more of a 'displeasure', the music is difficult to evaluate in aesthetic terms. Yet its conceptual background is certainly food for thought, not only about the future of music but also more broadly about the procedures of producing artefacts which aspire to recognition as art.²⁹ Experiments of this kind encourage reflection on a range of topics, not always pessimistic, they also bring awareness of the need to rethink our views – historically-founded yet unchanging over centuries – about who is and who can be a creator, an author, and an artist.

The above examples are well supplemented by one of the exhibitions within the aforementioned 2017 edition of the Ars Electronica Festival. Its title – *Media Art Between Natural and Artificial Intelligence* – neatly encapsulates the explorations undertaken by the many contemporary new media artists who focus on organic (natural) and non-organic (artificial) intelligence, and their convergence. The exhibition presented twenty-six works variously addressing a number of issues, including:

1. machine-created poetry (*AI Poetry Hits the Road*, Kenric McDowell);
2. visualised archive, taking on the form of an immersive video installation generated by algorithms and a deep learning system operating on 1,700,000 images/documents (*Archive Dreaming*, Refik Anadol);
3. a work inspired by the neural network of the human brain and by deep learning, aiming to automatise the cognition of textual, visual, and aural datasets (*Learning to See: Hello, World!*, Memo Akten);
4. using the brain-computer interface to control a hi-tech robot painter (*A3 K3. Intermedia/Trans-technological Performance/Installation*, Dragan Ilić);

²⁸ For more on IAMUS, see, Sylvia Smith, 'Iamus: Is This the 21st Century's Answer to Mozart?', <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-20889644> (accessed 5.10.2018).

²⁹ On a performance of the concert version of the project, see, Katarzyna Ryzel, 'Piękne zaskoczenie', *Ruch Muzyyczny* 1, 2018, p. 52.

5. controlling machines with the use of biometric data collected from sensors placed on the human body (*Neurotransmitter 3000*, Daniel de Bruin);
6. artificial intelligence algorithms creating images based on the ways the human brain works while interpreting data (*Latent Space. Closed Loop*, Jake Elwers);
7. a project using Brian Eno's generative music and an enormous number of photographs documenting the twentieth-century history of mankind as 'remembered' or recorded in images (*Brian Eno's 'The Ship' – A Generative Film*, Dentsu Lab Tokyo).³⁰

One of the most extraordinary and fascinating among the recent projects of Patrick Tresset and his collaborators is Paul³¹ – a robot sketching portraits with the now classic Bic pen. The experience of the portrayed person is unique, especially if he or she has sat for paintings or photographs before (the author of this text has done both). This time it is not a human but a creative machine, itself a work of art, that tries to create a portrait based on the observation of the model's face. Tresset stresses that his aim

*is to develop autonomous systems that are capable of conceiving and producing artifacts that have a range of qualities and characteristics that enable their status as a work of art. Objects, to be considered as having such status, must be exhibited–evaluated–appreciated–acquired in a contemporary art context, and in the same manner as artist-made artworks.*³²

Paul and other 'embodied agents', the artist admits, 'only implement very low-level creative behaviours',³³ with various measuring standards for creativity used. At the same time, however, there can be no doubt that we are dealing with a special kind of machine, which – designed by a man – is on its way to autonomous action. How would that be expressed? Above all, in the development of its own style, which would in no way imitate any pre-existing style or way of capturing reality but strive for a distinct style-space: an original, unique manner of transforming the observed objects (for example, human faces). Tresset admits that 'the systems are not yet able to develop their own style-spaces'³⁴ – but neither are their works mechanical imitations. The adopted aim of developing a distinct, non-imitative style is a fundamental task for every (organic) artist but likewise for a creative machine which 'embodies' the agentive character of the human-developed system allowing for the creation of original works. Paul is an astonishing creative machine: not yet a subjective artist conscious of his worth but already a system transcending simple imitation. His presence inevitably undermines the

³⁰ The complete list of presented works, along with their descriptions, is to be found in the catalogue: *Artificial Intelligence. Das Andere Ich*, ed. Gerfried Stocker, Christine Schöpf, Hannes Leopoldseder, Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2017, p. 58–89.

³¹ Paul's essence, construction and principles of operation have been described in detail in: Patrick Tresset, Frederic F. Leymarie, 'Portrait drawing by Paul the Robot', *Computer & Graphics* 37, 2013.

³² Patrick Tresset, Oliver Deussen, 'Artistically Skilled Embodied Agents', p. 1, https://kops.uni-konstanz.de/bitstream/handle/123456789/27046/Tresset_270467.pdf (accessed 15.11.2020).

³³ P. Tresset, O. Deussen, 'Artistically Skilled Embodied Agents', p. 1.

³⁴ P. Tresset, O. Deussen, 'Artistically Skilled Embodied Agents', p. 3.

long-established belief that only an organic intelligence, deposited in wet organic flesh is capable of creating original works.

Unarguably, both Paul and Tresset's next project (e-David, led by Oliver Dussen and Thomas Lindemeier) force us to radically reformulate many of our views on the essence of the creative act, creative process, and the concept of authorship. In today's era of new technologies, distributed authorship, whereby humans share their demiurgic agency with other beings, is accepted as normal. Yet it is a different matter entirely to not simply make an intelligent machine a co-author but to set it free completely by endowing it with unlimited agency. In other words, to make it an autonomous creator/artist. Tresset is certain that, for the time being, his machines only work the way each computer system works – mostly on the basis of existing knowledge (gathered data), and only to a small extent learning and modifying their own future decisions. Although seemingly debatable in an era of self-learning systems, Tresset's conclusion is unambiguous: 'both systems cannot at present be evaluated as being creative'.³⁵ The words 'at present' sound like a rational assessment of the current capabilities of his machines, an assessment conscious of their limitations. Nonetheless, is this perspective not bound to soon become a relic of the conviction that only humans can be rightful creators of art?

The persons, projects, inventions, and experiments presented in this text are all very interesting and inspiring but they are only symptoms of a process of freeing artistic creativity from domains reserved exclusively for humans the way we know them, as organic beings. It is nowadays a commonplace that a robot artist, in its digital form, can produce an object in a technically superior way than the (still analogue, albeit digitally enhanced) human. In an act of self-defence, we keep repeating that the machines will never be as creative as we humans, they will always be mere media-replaying apparatuses. That, however, is neither obvious nor does it seem certain, even in the nearest future, not to mention a longer perspective.

In times of AI supremacy, of postdigital, ubiquitous algorithms steering and controlling our every online move, every choice, every purchase, every like, all the decisions we make regarding our artistic and aesthetic preferences – it is rather dubious to assume that the global artificial intelligence might be stopped from dominating over the human creativity by an autonomous gesture of the artist. As Yuval Noah Harari writes: 'The idea that humans will always have a unique ability beyond the reach of non-conscious algorithms is just wishful thinking'.³⁶ There is strong and progressively universal conviction that the human – and more generally: every organic creature – is nothing but an algorithm or a system of algorithms for data-processing. The Quantified Self Movement expresses this idea explicitly: the self is simply a set of mathematical patterns that the human mind is so far unable to understand.

³⁵ P. Tresset, O. Deussen, 'Artistically Skilled Embodied Agents', p. 7.

³⁶ Yuval N. Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, Signal, New York 2016.

The homocentric worldview is being replaced by the dataist and datacentrist perspective. It is a perspective that is techno- rather than posthumanist, the latter being seen as a threat to mankind. Separating the obligatory intelligence from the optional consciousness is a challenge brought about not only by the development of AI but also by art as an area of creativity manifestation for both humans and the autonomising and emancipating machines. Let us quote Harari once more: ‘According to the life sciences, art is not the product of some enchanted spirit or metaphysical soul, but rather of organic algorithms recognising mathematical patterns. If so, there is no reason why non-organic algorithms couldn’t master it’.³⁷ This, however, is not to say that future humans will no longer create masterpieces, only that they will probably increasingly be assisted in their artistic endeavours by artificial intelligence.

Translated by Jakub Ozimek

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³⁷ Y. N. Harari, *Homo Deus*.

ABSTRACT: The article presents reflections regarding creative machines which use algorithmic principles to create, such as biological algorithms, generative designs, neural networks, learning systems and deep learning as well as robotic tools. One of the most distinctive examples of an artist that constructs autonomous machines capable of creating artistic artifacts is Patrick Tresset and his Paul. The discussion focuses on the recurring question: Is the position of the artist in the times of AI still reserved strictly for humans, or can artistic and aesthetic values be also attributed to works of creative machines?

KEY WORDS: artificial intelligence, new media art, algorithms, robotics, creative machines

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DIGITAL ARCHIVES / DATABASES

A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN ACTION

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In his 2004 book¹ on how the dynamic development of information technology has been affecting knowledge culture, Alan Liu posed key questions regarding the role of the humanities in the new order emerging along with the computing technologies becoming easier to use and more effective. At the same time, such an order has brought a domination of post-industrial 'knowledge economy' rooted in business logic. He called this new order 'the new cool'. After more than a decade, Liu's questions are worth revisiting, given how academia has changed during this time, having undergone increasingly evident practice of forcing academic life to fit corporate model. The implementation of content and human resource management systems aimed at boosting 'work efficiency' has also significantly transformed the way we think about universities and their role in society. Finally, the last fifteen years saw a forced decline of the humanities in the form they took on between the 1960s and the 1990s, a decline brought about by particular policies of both the governments and universities. In recent years, these changes have provoked a lively debate focused around a number of issues, including:

- the aberrations and pathologies effectuated by a system of narrowly defined and purely bibliometric assessment of academic outputs,

¹ Alan Liu, *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2004.

- the corporate and business strategies of dominant actors in the academic publishing market (punctuated, however, with news of a growing number of universities, and sometimes entire countries, suspending cooperation with Elsevier²),
- the deteriorating working conditions of the academic staff being forced into mobility and flexibility of employment (epitomized by the precarity of adjunct professors in the US),
- and the pressure placed on the staff by new evaluation systems for teaching and research (the UK's Teaching Excellence Framework and Research Excellence Framework, respectively). Although these topics may seem divergent, they all exemplify a major global crisis of academia (especially the humanities³).

In this perspective, the problems experienced in Poland are by no means unique (a fact that still remains largely unnoticed in the local debate).

This, of course, is a huge topic in itself, and one which demands many notes detailing various points of reference. Nevertheless, I shall refrain from addressing it on this occasion, and instead turn my attention to one aspect of the changes described by Liu, which have since become by and large the core of the academic practice. Namely, I will focus on digital (Internet) archives/databases and the multifaceted work made possible by these resources that blurs the line between research and educational practice. It is also one of the fields of the by now very wide area of the digital humanities, an area whose perception in Poland – despite some significant achievements – is sometimes still driven by fundamental misunderstandings.

To offer a meaningful discussion of this field, born at the junction of rich domains of reflection abounding in profound theoretical findings and vast archives of case studies, I will focus on a clearly defined section of the subject, namely, the

² An intensified debate over the dominating position held on the academic publishing market by, effectively, two corporations: Elsevier and Thomson Reuters, including protests against what has been deemed unethical business practices (inflating the price of access and of publication in the so-called Gold Open Access model), has resulted in a burgeoning boycott of Elsevier. The boycott is manifested not only by grassroots community initiatives, like The Cost of Knowledge website, but also by institutional policies. A resounding example was the 2017 decision of 60 major German research institutions united in the DEAL consortium (headed by the Max Planck Society) to break off their partnerships with Elsevier. The latest episode in the ongoing debate occurred in 2019, when a similar decision was made by the University of California, following in the footsteps of Swedish, Finnish, and Norwegian institutions. An exhaustive description of the academic world's dispute with Elsevier warrants a separate study; the matter is much more serious than might be suggested by its echoes that reached Poland in the context of the controversies over adopting indexation in the Scopus database as the main indicator in evaluation of research work. That the debate requires a highly nuanced approach is demonstrated, for example, by an article discussing The Cost of Knowledge initiative, cf. Tom Heyman, Pieter Moors, Gert Storms, 'On the Cost of Knowledge: Evaluating the Boycott Against Elsevier', *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics* 7 (1), 2016.

³ This subject is obviously vast, and I can barely touch upon it here. Suffice it to say that Liu's assessments were confirmed by Toby Miller's book from almost a decade later (Toby Miller, *Blow Up the Humanities*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 2012), not to mention the fundamental contributions from Martha Nussbaum (Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2010), Stanley Fish (published in *The New York Times* in 2008–2010, cf. e.g. 'Will the Humanities Save Us?', 6 January 2008, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/06/will-the-humanities-save-us/> (accessed 10.02.2019); 'The Uses of the Humanities, Part Two', 13 January 2008, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/theuses-of-the-humanities-part-two/> (10.02.2019)), and the numerous responses to Fish's articles. In Poland, the debate was touched upon by issue 2 from 2016 of *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy*, tackling the crisis of the university. The digital humanities are likewise a topic of lively discussion; a good example – apart from the well-known works by Liu, David Berry or Matthew Kirschenbaum – is the thematic issue of the *Differences* journal (issue 1 of 2014).

sustainability of digital archives, understood in its human and technical, rather than purely infrastructural, aspect. To this end, I will look at the formation of communities of practice centred around the ELMCIP Knowledge Base. Founded and developed at the University of Bergen, this database is one of key resource for studies on electronic literature and digital culture.

In approaching this topic, it is important to remember that free circulation of information, its dispersion, or communal mechanisms of its creation are not progressive or emancipatory in and of themselves, as demonstrated by the very complex information mechanisms of the post-truth world or by such circles as the alt-right and the neoreactionary (NXr) movement.⁴ With that in mind, I differentiate between communities of practice (which focus on more or less regular activities aimed at sustaining a specific, material knowledge source) and communities of circulation (whose activities are merely discursive in character). This distinction is relevant and interesting for yet another reason. Liu devotes an entire chapter of his book to contrasting the ahistorical perception of innovation/creative disruption in corporate strategies with its historical revaluation in the humanities (for Liu, such a differentiation reveals the humanities' particular potential). This part of the book is entitled 'The New Enlightenment'. Nick Land and the neoreactionary movement – whose primary mode of reflection and discussion are the Internet, the blogosphere, Twitter, and a number of threads on the infamous Reddit and 4chan platforms, rather than traditional academic forms of debate – propose instead the concept of Dark Enlightenment.⁵ Both its proponents and critics recognise this term as a reaction against the contradictions inherent in key ideas that lie at the foundations of Western modernity and liberal democracy. (This, according to Yuk Hui, is the reason for the inevitable gesture of repeating the Spenglerian narrative about the decline of the West and for the return to the contradictions and debates of the original Enlightenment project.)

Philosophical discussions aside, we should not forget that another issue essentially at stake is the basic institutional mechanisms of verifying what counts as 'knowledge' in its two variations: one rather productive (communities of practice), the other rather destructive ('Dark Enlightenment'). In a sense, my analysis

⁴ It may come as an illuminating and apt remark that I owe this latter point of reference to a few discussions on the master's thesis of my student, Gabriela Korwin-Piotrowska; I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her inspiring contribution. The neoreactionary movement (also known under the cryptonym NXr) is a platform associated with the general antiliberal and antidemocratic tendencies of the contemporary extremist movements contesting the legacy of Euro-American liberalism. These movements are often inspired by the inconsistent set of eclectic propositions from the fringes of Western philosophical thought, and are inclusive of all types of spiritualist and mystical currents, like the bizarre intellectual amalgams constituted by the ideas of Julius Evola, on the one hand, and Aleksandr Dugin, on the other.

⁵ Nick Land, *The Dark Enlightenment*, <http://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/the-dark-enlightenment-by-nick-land> (accessed 10.02.2019), with annotations by Mencius Moldburg (Curtis Yarvin). Cf. also the philosophical analysis of the concept by Yuk Hui: 'On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries', *e-flux* 81, 2017, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/125815/on-the-unhappy-consciousness-of-neoreactionaries/> (accessed 12.02.2019). Considering that the debate was initiated by Peter Thiel (and takes place under a considerable ideological influence of the Silicon Valley), the neoreactionary movement may be seen as a consequence of the socially regressive libertarianism characterising the so-called Californian Ideology, disputed in the 1990s by the community of the Nettyme mailing list. Cf. Paulina Borsook, *Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High Tech*, Public Affairs, New York City 2001.

also implies an answer to a crucial question. Can we prevent the dismantling of knowledge legitimation mechanisms brought about by increased traffic of Internet content, which separates information from its source and is itself often a by-product of partially or fully automated algorithmic procedures? This, it seems to me, is the real stake of the (necessary) change in educational formulas: to provide better answers to challenges of this kind.

ARCHIVES, DATABASES, AND MEDIA LABS: FROM INFRASTRUCTURE TO A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

ELMCIP (Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice) started as a three-year project, funded in 2010–2013 within the HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) programme. Coordinated by the Digital Cultural Research Group at the University of Bergen, Norway, it was carried out in cooperation with six European universities: Edinburgh College of Art, Blekinge Institute of Technology, University of Amsterdam, University of Ljubljana, University of Jyväskylä, University College Falmouth at Darlington and the New Media Scotland initiative. As noted by one of the originators and coordinators, ELMCIP was, from the onset, a collaborative project: ‘As a starting point, we asserted that creativity is not best understood as a manifestation of genius or inspiration within any particular individual, but instead as the collective, performative practices of communities’.⁶ Consequently, attention is paid less to archiving or providing access to collections of works (artefacts) by individual writers and artists, and more to ‘the conditions and environment in which creativity takes place’.⁷ As a result, ELMCIP features records referring to art pieces, pieces of criticism and research projects, names of electronic literature writers, platforms where the works were created, teaching materials (including syllabi), publishers and periodicals, organisations, events, other databases and archives, and thematic collections compiled for research purposes by prominent figures in the field (among them Leonard Flores, Natalia Fedorova, Patricia Tomaszek – curator of *Collection of Polish References* – and Talan Memmott). Another major link in the specific media ecology of electronic literature is the *ELMCIP Anthology of European Electronic Literature*⁸, one of the main resources for this area, beside the tripartite *Electronic Literature Collection*⁹ published under the auspices of the Electronic Literature Organization (ELO). Also of note is the Electronic Literature Directory, a database of critical texts and analyses of selected works and artists, supported by CELL (Consortium on Electronic Literature),¹⁰ an umbrella structure for this and a number of similar databases and archives.

⁶ Scott Rettberg, ‘Bootstrapping Electronic Literature: An Introduction to the ELMCIP Project’, in: *Remediating the Social: Creativity and Innovation in Practice*, ed. Simon Biggs, ELMCIP University of Bergen, Bergen 2013, p. 9.

⁷ S. Rettberg, ‘Bootstrapping Electronic Literature’, p. 9.

⁸ *ELMCIP Anthology of European Electronic Literature*, ed. Maria Engberg, Talan Memmott, David Prater, Bergen 2012, <https://anthology.elmcip.net/> (accessed 5.02.2019).

⁹ *Electronic Literature Collection*, vol. 1 (October 2006), vol. 2 (February 2011), vol. 3 (February 2016), <http://collection.eliterature.org/> (accessed 5.02.2019).

¹⁰ Electronic Literature Directory, <http://directory.eliterature.org/> (accessed 20.02.2019).

Moreover, the last three years have brought information flow and synchronisation of information structure between the CELL and ELMCIP databases. Cooperation was also initiated between the Electronic Literature Organization and Rhizome.org,¹¹ one of the most important initiatives aimed at documenting the ephemeral digital art (which often relies on defunct, decommissioned or outdated software and hardware solutions). In his 2019 book, Scott Rettberg emphasises that databases, archives, and media labs are an ‘essential aspect of electronic literature research infrastructure that has become increasingly well developed in recent years’.¹² The examples given by Rettberg include media-archaeology-inspired media labs devoted to the conservation and dissemination of works by a single author (often a pioneer of electronic literature or new media art, like Deena Larsen, Stephanie Strickland or Michael Joyce). Some of the centres involved are key research and documentation hubs: Washington State University’s Electronic Literature Lab, headed by Dene Grigar, Nick Monfort’s Trope Tank (which might be considered the birthplace of platform studies), and the Media Archeology Lab in University of Colorado at Boulder. In Poland, an important foothold of this kind is the UBU Lab, organised and run by Piotr Marecki at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow.¹³ All the initiatives mentioned above are well described in existing literature.¹⁴ Here, it bears stressing what I wrote above about the motivation of the ELMCIP’s initiators. All these initiatives are obviously about documentation (and the exceptionally complex issues of digital culture heritage and forms of preservation of original works are the subject of lively debate). Yet it seems that, gradually, the main focus is shifting towards the formation a specific community of practice, where the borderline between research activity and educational project becomes highly fluid. This is another aspect of the field that, as Monika Górska-Olesińska argues, is best characterised by the prefix ‘trans-’.¹⁵

FROM LITERARY PRACTICE IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA FIELD TO COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The ELMCIP database and the community of practice crystallising around it are symptomatic of both the changing university curriculum under the increasingly vague banner of the digital humanities (or perhaps of university curriculum

¹¹ Electronic Literature Organization members mailing list messages, *ELO's President Report, News and Updates*, 29 August 2018.

¹² Scott Rettberg, *Electronic Literature*, Polity Press, Cambridge – Melford 2019, p. 201.

¹³ Piotr Marecki’s interview with Lori Emerson is well worth a read in this regard: ‘Media Archeology Lab: Experimentation, Tinkering, Probing: Lori Emerson in Conversation with Piotr Marecki’, *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 33 (3), 2017.

¹⁴ Cf. Lori Emerson, *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2014; Dene Grigar, Stuart Moulthrop, *Traversals: The Use of Preservation for Early Electronic Writing*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 2017; Darren Wershler, Lori Emerson, Jussi Parikka, *The Lab Book: The Situated Practices in Media Studies*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2020, <https://manifold.umn.edu/projects/the-lab-book> (accessed 23.03.2021).

¹⁵ Monika Górska-Olesińska, ‘Literary Practices and Performances in Transmedia Environments: Introduction to the Special Issue’, *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 33 (3), 2017.

in general) and of the equally dynamic development of electronic literature. The latter field is progressively dominated by work with various forms of digital archives and databases (the fact that one of the most popular genres of net poetry of the recent years is bot poetry may come as symptomatic of this trend). Another relatively new trend is netprovs – online performances where text is essentially a pretext for a dispersed net action improvised within a predefined framework. This evolution has been aptly summarised by Urszula Pawlicka, who – following N. Katherine Hayles – proposes a processual approach that befits the ever fluctuating nature of electronic literature itself.¹⁶ Pawlicka points out that ‘electronic literature becomes a platform for digital research, textuality, art, and other forms of expression.’¹⁷ This processual approach, it is crucial to add, involves also focusing on such factors as change, exploration, and collaboration.

In the case of ELMCIP, playing the role of such a platform is made possible by both the database infrastructure (a system of links, data export capability, etc.) and a range of activities incorporated into academic teaching – among other possibilities, it allows for carrying out projects whereby students work with the database and the popular data visualisation tools that it integrates. One such occasion is the Digital Humanities in Practice course (within the post-graduate programme in Digital Culture at the Department of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic Studies, University of Bergen). In December 2018, I participated in the end of course examination. The students’ projects were divided into two parts: independent research work on a selected topic was combined with the practical activity of data structuring (which usually consisted in the structuring of tags, which are user-generated in ELMCIP, although it also features hint mechanisms). The data were then processed with a popular spreadsheet program and visualised using GEPHI. The last stage was preparing a written report and presenting it before the exam committee comprising the tutors (Professor Scott Rettberg and his assistant Hannah Ackermans, today the Editor of ELMCIP) and an outside examiner (this function was performed by myself). The students’ papers were similar in terms of structure, which reflected the basic components of the research procedure: operationalisation of the research question, outline of the theoretical background (the fundamental concepts used in research work), description of the work with the ELMCIP Knowledge Base, the methodology and ways of working with data, analysis proper, conclusion (including reflection on the mistakes made), and bibliography. All in all, the course resulted in almost twenty valuable analyses of selected aspects of the ELMCIP collection. Some of the very diverse topics were: connections between works of art and narratological terminology, electronic literature’s evolution from purely textual forms to the visual form of digital animation, the content of the narrative games subgenre, differences between literary games and various forms of video games, the influence of the programming language on electronic literary forms, the presence of works from

¹⁶ Urszula Pawlicka, ‘An Essay on Electronic Literature as Platform’, *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 33 (3), 2017.

¹⁷ U. Pawlicka, ‘An Essay’, p. 439.

outside the English-speaking area, the category of interactivity in 2002–2013 ELO Conference presentations, and works annotating China and Chinese culture. The subjects – which determined ways of analysing and using but also developing and amending the archive – were wide in scope and often showcased the students' considerable creativity.

My aim, however, is not to describe an academic practice that offers a chance of bringing a breath of fresh air to academic teaching; it is not even to identify ways of activating and stimulating the students' creative potential or to list computer analysis and data analysis skills. Propositions of this sort are abundant and almost every institution (also in Poland) that runs a programme in broadly defined digital culture has already developed its own standards and tools. Instead, I would like to point to building a community of practice as an essential mechanism which facilitates the operation of digital archives and contributes to their permanence.

The notion of communities of practice was put forward – not without inspiration from John Dewey and American pragmatism – by two anthropologists studying forms of situated learning,¹⁸ a process of informal sharing of knowledge, techniques, and skills, such as the passing on of crafts in indigenous communities. Knowledge becomes in this context a common ground, giving meaning to the actions taken and attracting new members. Importantly, within this notion, community refers to the social fabric forming around skill-learning and knowledge-sharing, while practice concerns a form of focusing the group's energy and activity around a shared goal associated with the knowledge and skills being transmitted. To be sure, this theory does provoke some doubts (it is brimming with the optimism characteristic of the 1990s and has since been coopted by the corporate approach). Nevertheless, it is a substantial reformulation of some educational tenets in a way that promotes the sharing of knowledge resources. What is even more important is that the concept may be a chance to work out some degree of permanence for digital archives, which in this day and age of 'archives fever' are under constant threat of becoming mere 'data silos' – large virtual networks full of objects whose digital life is fading away, since they never have any type of contact with the social space. That this threat is real (and quite commonplace in Poland) is demonstrated by a report from the Małopolska Institute of Culture 2017 research project entitled *Digital Practices and Strategies of National Heritage Promotion and Reception in Poland, 2004–2014 (Cyfrowe praktyki i strategie upowszechnienia i odbioru dziedzictwa kulturowego w Polsce w latach 2004–2014)*.¹⁹ The report, admittedly dealing with the process of digitalisation rather than archiving born-digital objects, paints a grim picture of digitalisation as a solely technical process, undertaken with no reflection whatsoever regarding the future

¹⁸ Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991; Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998.

¹⁹ Cf. a series of reports published on the project's website by a research team comprising: Mariusz Dzieglewski, Anna Fir, Aldona Guzik, Marta Juza, Piotr Knaś, Kinga Kołodziejka, Jadwiga Mazur, and Weronika Stępnia, <http://cyfrowe-dziedzictwo-kulturowe.mik.krakow.pl/> (accessed 20.02.2019).

circulation of the digital objects or the type of community of practice that could sustain their digital life.

There is, however, one more thing to add. As I mentioned above, in the case of digital databases and archives – two functions that ELMCIP seems to combine – the practices of working with data increasingly translate into performative reflection/action, which is simultaneously a form of sustaining and invigorating the archive. Moreover, the archive's sustenance – or preservation – is not limited to its infrastructure (albeit this aspect is also crucial, a case in point are the efforts made by the Digital Culture Research Group to maintain the analysed resource after the research project ended). Other activities undertaken to this end include the decidedly creative teaching methods. Yet the micro research programme carried out in ELMCIP-enabled cooperation between the academic staff and students still serves one more purpose. It can be perceived as a series of necessary strategies for a (self-) defence of the humanities. In the prospect identified by Liu, the world will be / is being given over to a 'dominant mode of knowledge associated with the information economy and apparently destined to make all other knowledges, especially all historical knowledges, obsolete'.²⁰ The forms of knowledge subjected to information technology are to form an autotelic whole – with the sole exception of 'the knowledge of all the alternative historical modes of knowledge that undergird, overlap with, or – like a shadow world, a shadow web – challenge the conditions of possibility of the millennial new Enlightenment'.²¹ According to Liu, the goal of the arts and of cultural criticism is what might be described as 'hacking' the foundations of 'knowledge society' or, more precisely, its technological foundations shaped by the corporations and profit-oriented entities – an operation akin to introducing a virus, not unlike the tactic presented in the ending scenes of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. In a world where innovation takes on a total character and becomes creative disruption that causes considerable epistemological, social and cultural disturbances, Liu envisions a special role for literature: its job is no longer to be creative but instead to be a 'dark kind of history [...] the history not of things created – the great, auratic artifacts treasured by a conservative or curatorial history – but of things destroyed in the name of creation'.²² It is difficult not to perceive this diagnosis as a mirror image of the media archaeology project, in terms of both theoretical postulates and initiatives aimed at clearing variantological paths of technological progress, being brought to life in material terms in media labs.²³

This seems like a more suitable perspective through which to view the various forms of distant reading encouraged and provoked by databases and archives of

²⁰ A. Liu, *The Law*, p. 7.

²¹ A. Liu, *The Law*, p. 8.

²² A. Liu, *The Law*, p. 8.

²³ Media archaeology is a complex set of theories and methodologies, whose programme is of course very diverse and rich. Here, I am referring above all to Siegfried Zielinski's proposition, articulated in a series of anthologies devoted to variantology and the project of rooting media history – as a result of an intersection of artistic, scientific and technological discourses – in the notion of radical difference. See, above all, *Variantology 1: On Deep Time Relations of Arts, Sciences and Technologies*, ed. Siegfried Zielinski, Silvia M. Wagnermaier, Walther König, Köln 2005; *Variantology 2: On Deep Time Relations of Arts, Sciences and Technologies*, ed. Siegfried Zielinski, D. Link, Walther König, Köln 2006.

this kind. The distant reading tools – like visualisations, network analyses, stylometry and cartography – allow one to go beyond thinking about literature in terms of the canon and beyond working with text. As aptly demonstrated by Joseph Tabbi – who references the performative turn to action and Latour's disposition against critique – activities of this type have expanded rather than limited the humanities' array of engagement with cultural texts, while also broadening the application of critical reading practice to systems and algorithms, which fall outside the scope of traditionally defined cultural analysis.²⁴ We are thus dealing with something more than simply another iteration of participation culture, a widening of digital literacies, or an educational renaissance. This is the very core of the humanities' well organised resistance against, as Siegfried Zielinski once put it, the *psychopathia medialis*: the standardisation and unification that are undergirded by the illusion of a linear history of technological progress.

Translated by Jakub Ozimek
Revised by the author

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²⁴ Joseph Tabbi, ‘Relocating the Literary: In Networks, Knowledge Bases, Global Systems, Material, and Mental Environments’, in: *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Electronic Literature*, ed. Joseph Tabbi, Bloomsbury Academic, London – Oxford – New York 2018.

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ABSTRACT: This article is an attempt at an analysis of digital archiving as a process of forming a community of practice. Such community has coalesced around the ELMCIP Knowledge Base developed by the University of Bergen. It is seen not only as a shift in academic pedagogies, where boundaries between professors and students become blurred, but also as a strategy of the humanities aimed at reclaiming the knowledge work in the age of a novel, ‘cool’ and ubiquitous innovation. The latter is often presented as a goal in itself contributing to fundamental digital disruption, supposedly reorganising society and culture at large. Moreover, establishing such communities of practice is seen as a crucial factor to safeguard the sustainability of digital archives that extends beyond purely infrastructural and technical circumstances.

KEY WORDS: digital archives, archiving, electronic literature, digital humanities, ELMCIP Knowledge Base



POLISH ASSOCIATION OF CULTURAL STUDIES

Established in 2002, the **Polish Association of Cultural Studies** aims to:

- Design, conduct and support scientific research on culture;
- Disseminate and popularise knowledge about culture;
- Promote Polish culture and knowledge about Polish culture;
- Implement actions related to cultural education.

The Association was called into being and is qualified to:

- Discuss the state of knowledge about culture, its needs and future prospects;
- Issue expert opinions and reports on the condition of culture;
- Act as an advisory body on matters related to cultural life.

One of the Association's objectives is to strengthen cultural studies as a research discipline and profession, as well as develop active partnerships with research and educational institutions as part of cultural programmes. Operating through ten regional branches (Białystok, Katowice, Kraków, Lublin, Łódź, Poznań, Rzeszów, Toruń, Warsaw, Wrocław), the Association gathers humanists passionate about cultural research and the popularisation of cultural studies.

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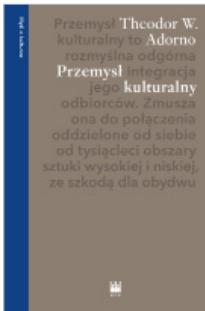
Transcending beyond the present, we nurture the past

The National Centre for Culture initiates and implements activities aimed at the development of culture and promotion of Polish national heritage. As one of the largest organisers of cultural life in Poland, it is engaged in a broad spectrum of cultural operations. It organises and co-organises national and international events such as festivals (e.g. *Eufonie*, *East of Culture*), concerts, reviews, conferences, training courses, webinars, etc. Its activities also include cultural education, research, and organisation of exhibitions. As part of the latter, the Centre manages the Kordegarda Gallery, where it presents works by leading Polish artists.

The Centre is also actively involved in celebrating important events and people related to culture, while promoting the Polish language and the culture of the word. It works for the professionalisation of human resources in the cultural sector, offering support to institutions, organisations and artists through a wide range of grant and scholarship programmes (Very Young Culture, Culture Centre+, Culture Interventions, EthnoPoland, Native Tongue – Add to Favourites, Young Poland, Gaudē Polonia, Polish-Ukrainian Youth Exchange, Culture Management, Archi-Adventures). The Centre publishes books, including Polish premieres of the classic authors of Western humanities, games, and CDs. It also produces films (e.g. pioneering projects using virtual reality technology), murals, and podcasts dedicated to culture (www.audycjekulturalne.pl).

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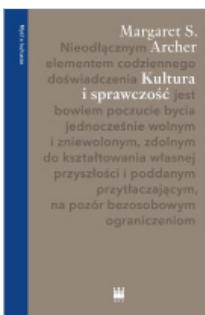
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THE CULTURE INDUSTRY SELECTED ESSAYS ON MASS CULTURE

Theodor W. Adorno.
translated into Polish by Marta Bucholc

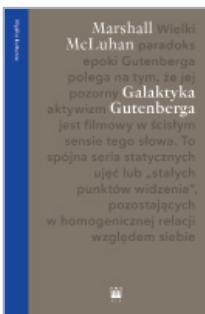
Theodor W. Adorno's concept of the 'culture industry' is a part of his larger critical social theory. The author points out the prevalent commercialization and standardization of the cultural goods' production process, where these goods become similar to other commodities. Adorno's analysis stresses the harmful impact of mass culture and reveals the mechanisms of brutal manipulation. The book consists of ten essays devoted to music, television, film, fascism and other subjects.



CULTURE AND AGENCY THE PLACE OF CULTURE IN SOCIAL THEORY

Margaret S. Archer.
translated into Polish by Paweł Tomanek

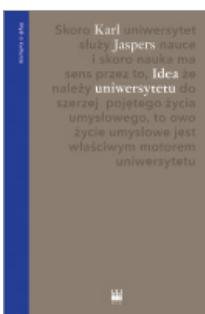
Culture and Agency by the British sociologist Margaret S. Archer is a groundbreaking work within the field of 20th century social theory. The author presents a vision of the cultural system as a partly autonomous sphere formed by individuals and groups, but with its own impact stemming from objective logical relationships between its elements.



THE GUTENBERG GALAXY

Marshall McLuhan.
translated into Polish by Andrzej Wojtasik

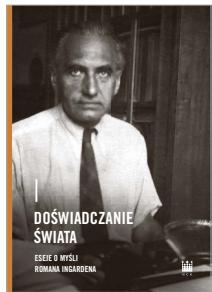
Marshall McLuhan, a literary scholar and a tireless cultural researcher, stood out against the stiff constructs of academic science. This first unabridged Polish version of his most important work, The Gutenberg Galaxy, presents the consequences of the invention of the movable type printing press. The book has been declared a modern literary classic on the topic of the mutual relations between culture, society and the media.



THE IDEA OF THE UNIVERSITY

Karl Jaspers.
translated into Polish by Wojciech Kunicki

Written soon after the World War II, The Idea of the University (second edition, revised) is a deep reflection on the mission of universities, undoubtedly significant for the human condition and for numerous aspects of human actions.



EXPERIENCING THE WORLD ESSAYS ON THE THOUGHT OF ROMAN INGARDEN

edited by Tomasz Maślanka

A jubilee volume on the 50th anniversary of Roman Ingarden's death collects scientific articles and essays by outstanding contemporary humanists on the life and work of the famous Polish philosopher. It constitutes the most important issues within the broad field of the professor's research and scientific fascinations including phenomenology, metaphysics, culture, art and literature. The authors show Ingarden's life and oeuvre from the perspective of the newest research.



WE ARE THE STRENGTH OF OUR SPIRIT ESSAYS ON INDEPENDENT POLAND

edited by Rafał Wiśniewski

Outstanding personalities, authors, scholars and researchers from the world of humanities, including Jadwiga Pubynina, Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, Anna Nasiłowska, and Krzysztof Dybcia were invited to work on the publication. The authors show the backdrop to events that took place in 1918, as well as actions taken during the inter-war period, from the present day perspective.



TAMING THE CHANGEABLE LOCAL CULTURE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL CENTRES

collective work

Cultural centres become subjects of interest for the researchers, who focus on their respondents: directors, staff, co-workers, activists, managers, NGO's representatives, local parishes and authorities and all those involved in the everyday workings of cultural centres. These people told their stories relating not only to cultural centres, but also to the lives of local communities, often seen as little homelands. Thanks to the respondents' stories researchers could point out the problems which many cultural centres struggle with, but also show how much one can achieve with commitment and creativity.

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