

Andrzej Tadeusz Kijowski

## The romantic age, or the age of culture

These reflections are inspired by the Polish practice, suspended between the wars and the longing for the European gardens of civilization. They will probably come off as idealistic and pessimistic, perhaps even religious; only spiritual inspiration, however, can explain why *Homo sapiens*, having walked the face of the earth for 80 thousand years, suddenly, in the last six millennia, rose to the level of the Ark, the palaces of Crete and the Pyramid of Cheops, never to surpass this height of sensitivity and knowledge. The decline of culture and revival of global slavery<sup>1</sup> at the turn of the third millennium CE seem proof enough of that fact.

These observations, however, are a product of their time, an age of culture that eludes authority and heads toward self-annihilation. Ours is also the age of great literature, which has shaped culture and bound it ever tighter with the realm of money and power from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, we should begin by clarifying several general issues, such as the concept of “romanticism” derived from the modern conception of the “fine arts”, the interpretation of “culture” and individual components of “cultural life”, and last but not least, the understanding of “democracy” and its relationship with the mechanisms of “market economy” and the ideas of “civil society”.

### Romanticism

“Romanticism” is not understood here as a purely esthetic term, instead referring to the period in literature and the arts between 1789 and 1848 in Europe and between 1822 and 1863 in Poland. Not unlike the Enlightenment and the Renaissance, it is an ideology that encompasses a set of philosophical, economic, political, moral and artistic ideas outlined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789, and later specified in greater detail in the American, Polish and, lastly, French constitutions. Its beginnings can be traced back to the French Revolution

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UN data indicate that there are more slaves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than there were at any point in world history. Official estimates run into millions. Anywhere from 1 to 5 million people are sold into slavery each year under the pretense of “recruiting cheap workforce”. The value of labor performed by contemporary slaves and semi-slaves is calculated to be several dozen billion dollars per year. Cheap laborers without any personal freedom are in ever higher demand, and human trafficking is the most lucrative business globally, second only to drug trafficking and weapon sales, with estimated turnovers of more than 10 billion dollars per annum. Slave trade takes place in more than 80 countries around the world, from Asia to the Americas. Approximately 50 to 60 thousand slaves are brought to the United States each year, and in certain Asian and African countries, human trafficking is once again legal in practice. Agencies in the Ivory Coast overtly recruit children aged 9 and above to work in mines for several dollars per month. Mines pay the agency 50 dollars for each child laborer; the family only receives half of that sum. Experts from the U.S. Department of Labor claim that slaves are cheaper today than they were 150 years ago. Before the American Civil War, slaves in Georgia were sold for 700-1000 dollars (the equivalent of 30 to 50 thousand dollars today). Today, 100 dollars are more than enough. Even though slavery is officially illegal all over the world, the number of slaves is estimated at 27-30 million, more than twice the number of people exported from Africa throughout the 400 years of slave trade. Cf. Kevin Bales, *Understanding Global Slavery: A Reader*, 2005.

and the Napoleonic Wars, which, for the next 200 years, riven by wars and uprisings, froze the European continent into the shape drawn at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The period that then began seems to have culminated in the Polish Solidarity movement. Inspired by the last romantic political homilies of John Paul II, in 1989 it started a new wave of peaceful velvet revolutions that redrew the map of Europe and made it crystallize, at the turn of the third millennium, into a new political constellation: the European Union, today shaking at its foundations.

Put very briefly, romanticism is the belief in the equality of everyone with everyone else, even those unequal with those more equal, the belief in freedom even for the enemies of freedom, and in brotherhood taken to its extreme, which undermines the value of blood ties and affirms various pathologies.

Romantic ideology was born out of beautiful ideals that sought to enlighten the common people, alleviate the fate of the working classes, acknowledge the inner worth of the individual and, like all currents, degenerated in its later phase: freedom devolved into anarchy, equality into disorder, brotherhood into profligacy.

## Culture

It is difficult to choose one from the 178 definitions of culture compiled by Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn in their “Culture. A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions”<sup>2</sup>. My own reflections are closely informed by the historic definition formulated by Stefan Czarnowski: *“culture is a collective good and collective achievement, the fruit of creative and transformative effort of countless generations... It is the collection of objective elements of social achievement, common to a number of groups and, due to their objectiveness, stable and able to expand in space.”*<sup>3</sup>

## Cultural life

Cultural life is usually understood to cover the forms of cultural participation typical of a given nation, class, social stratum, or individuals living in a given territory. Cultural participation may be based on custom, spontaneous or organized. Its organization is subject to processes referred to as cultural policy. In a scholarly definition: *“Cultural participation can have various*

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Kroeber, A. L., Kluckhohn, Clyde, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Cambridge, Mass. Publisher, Papers of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 1952.

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Stefan Czarnowski, *Kultura*, [in:] *Dzieła*, ed. by Nina Assorodobraj and Stanisław Ossowski, PWN, Warszawa 1956, vol. 1, pp. 13 – 23.

*manifestations, from following the media to joining all kinds of artistic events*". Surveys conducted by the OBOP public opinion research centre asked Poles, for instance, about their "contacts with selected areas of culture in its broadest sense, such as press, books, cinema, theater, concerts, exhibitions, art and sports events, as well as personal interests that motivate them to directly participate in culture."<sup>4</sup>

Conceived of as a certain "good", culture takes on a positive dimension. The worth of a human being depends on their participation in culture; the importance of states, nations and civilizations is judged on the basis of cultural heritage. And this cultural heritage, or better yet, cultural production, defines what is commonly known as cultural life.

Put crudely, cultural life involves experiencing cultural products: paintings, books, music and dance pieces and architecture, but also information. It means experiencing all that expands the horizons of life.

### **Civil society**

Experiencing cultural products may have many connotations. In an almost organic fashion, the notion of culture is connected to an acceptance of hierarchy. Not without reason, people have always passed value judgments on culture and distinguished its high, national, folk, mass and popular varieties. Culture, then, is accompanied by a certain elitism.

The history of cultural production is in its essence a history of domination. In his analysis of the emergence of civil society, straddling, as he claims, "*the borderline of utopia*", Piotr Gliški writes: "*We can say, with a high degree of confidence, that while many institutions of Polish democracy were designed and imposed from above, Polish civil society was indeed constructed from below, and with foreign influence, by a rather narrow segment of the nation and often against the wish of its alleged elites. For this reason, it is rather insular and limited in scope.*"<sup>5</sup>

### **Democracy and market economy**

Democracy is closely linked to civil society. So is economic freedom. Some say that democracy is bad but nobody thus far has come up with anything better. Democracy is the power of the people, the principle that a course of action must be agreed upon by everyone, regardless of their education, origin, upbringing and the principles they live by. The principle of democracy

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Cf. Życie Kulturalne Polaków, Badanie OPOB, Warszawa, September 1968.

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Piotr Gliški, *Style działań organizacji pozarządowych w Polsce. Grupy interesu czy pożytku publicznego?*, IFiS PAN, Warszawa, p.18.

assumes that people not only have equal stomachs but also equal rights, no matter how they choose to use them. Everyone, therefore, has the right to live and shape the fate of their community regardless of how they use their rights, and even if their actions endanger the very existence of the community.

The notion of democracy is also linked to the idea of the market. The act of buying and paying is no longer based on an arbitrary decision of the lord and owner, who flings his purse at the craftsman or a songster; the position of the lord and the weight of his moneybag, rather, depend on demand, that is, on collective choice.

The principle of free choice tacitly assumes that whatever appeals to the majority must be good. The principle is uniformly applied to popular politicians, commodities and works of art.

As we all know, democracy can be divided into direct and indirect. The former was invented by the Greeks but never really put into practice. Poland went through a period of gentry democracy, people's democracy and a slew of parliamentary democracies. As their names suggest, each of those systems defends the interests of a certain group of people: the gentry, the dictators who style themselves as champions of the working class, or the parliamentary class, that is, members of parliament increasingly recruited from the ranks of a hereditary oligarchy.

In theory, democracy is a good blueprint for local governance in peacetime. It can never work in a state of danger. Whenever people need leadership, heroism, honor and courage, opportunistic horse-trading or democratic agreements have no *raison d'être*. "*Mediocribus non licet esse poetis*", there is no room for mediocrity in war or poetry and democracy is its corollary after all.

Democracy is the opposite of struggle. It relies on peaceful conflict resolution and strives to reconcile contradictory interests. In reality, however, it is but an abstraction. While it is still possible to see a common overarching interest within some kind of a "polis", nations indifferent to patriotic values and oblivious to the dangers that threaten their existence can hardly reconcile the contradictory goals of various groups and social classes in a peaceful manner.

Contemporary parliamentary democracy only seemingly serves the society that it is supposed to represent. In reality, it represents the interests of those who, having usurped the mandate of social trust and the influence on power, regardless of their rank on the political scene form a privileged class of social trust owners, regulating media access and creating the system of a contemporary media-based political oligarchy.

The goal of politicians today is not to achieve the victories promised to their constituency or to keep their promises; it is to remain part of the political game, that is, to keep their seats.

The degeneration of democracy into oligarchy is now common knowledge. In his last poem of 2003, Czesław Miłosz likened uneducated "voters" to hungry rats lured by a rat-catcher playing

giddy promises on his flute.<sup>6</sup> Philosophers like Professor Stawrowski spoke about democracy giving way to “demoncracy”<sup>7</sup> and Krzysztof Pomian commented on the dangerous “*oligarchic degeneration of democracy*”.<sup>8</sup> The process is no doubt at its height among the deputies to the European Parliament who no longer represent anyone, not even their own country and essentially vie for total power, seeking to take full financial control over the continent, which is very diverse, lacks shared interests and is now being stripped even of Christian values, the only cement that bound Europeans together.

The trend could be detected long before now. In a treatise written in the middle of the previous century, entitled *La Couronne d'herbes: esquisse d'une morale sur des bases purement esthétiques*, Étienne Souriau wrote: “*Anyone with a basic grasp of probability theory and its applications will concur that by drawing a random collection of 900 people based on pure accident alone, we shall arrive at a sample much more representative of society at large than through any other selection procedure*”.<sup>9</sup> The group will include drunkards and whores, indeed, but since they are also part of society, and a well-defined one at that, they are better off representing themselves. The tragedy of politics, argues Souriau, and rightly so, is that it is run by professional politicians. Electoral procedures do not generate a faithful representation of society since the only candidates vying for power are those with a political calling. Souriau is not alone in his stochastic fascination with democratic theory. Ten years after the publication of *La Couronne d'herbes*, in 1985, John Burnheim came up with a similar idea and suggested that democracy be replaced with demarchy.<sup>10</sup> Demarchy differs from democracy in that power is not held by parties; there are no representatives who speak on our behalf. Their place is taken by people who are drawn at random from the group directly affected by a given issue and receive the mandate to represent it. In this manner, we could avoid the concentration of power in the hands of the few and the system would be more open to the needs of the people.

Demarchy could be introduced gradually, step by step. Demarchs (randomly selected persons) would manage the affairs entrusted to them directly or through a group of officials. The

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Czesław Miłosz “Flet szc zurołapa”, 2003.

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Z. Stawrowski, *Niemoralna demokracja*, Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, Kraków 2008.

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“*On top of that we have a profound crisis of democracy. It is connected to the economic crisis because, in large measure, it is the Anglo-Saxon model of capitalism that is to be held responsible for the oligarchic degeneration of democracy.*” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 51, 18.12.2011, “Europa to nadal szansa”, Piotr Kosiewski’s interview with Krzysztof Pomian, director of the Museum of Europe in Brussels.

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Étienne Souriau, *La Couronne d'herbes. Esquisse d'une morale sur les bases purement esthétiques*. Paris 1975.

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J. Burnheim, *Is Democracy Possible? The alternative to electoral politics*, Cambridge 1985.

advantage of such leadership, as its mastermind explains, is that demarchical bodies are less susceptible to pressures from interest groups. They do not need to worry about reelection, party funds or attracting acolytes. They can act as independent judges who assess the merits of proposals. Although they could be unable to propose their own solutions, with a little training they would no doubt excel at assessing reform ideas and policies. In *Is Democracy Possible?*, John Burnheim assures us that demarchy can be instantly introduced in education, healthcare, social services and labor unions. He considers his idea a utopian project; it is utopian, however, not because it is infeasible, but because no one has tested it in practice in our contemporary world thus far. Demarchy was introduced, in Burnheim's opinion, by the ancient Greeks and this should be enough to convince us that it is indeed possible and effective.<sup>11</sup>

The notions of democracy and market economy are both rooted in the conviction that wants can be satisfied by agreement. Just as the price of a painting or a slave is agreed on at an auction, contemporary politicians outcompete one another with promises, in a bid to win as many electoral votes as possible. However, the idea of democracy, like that of the market, works best in its place of origin: the market, the center of a certain polis. After all, goods don't have an absolute monetary value, and attempts by global stock markets to put a price on, for instance, a barrel of oil or an ounce of gold, do little to change the fact that in the global economy a liter of petrol can cost more than 2\$ in Germany and less than 2¢ in Venezuela at the same time.

This is not the time or place to question the idea of economic play and the free market, raise objections as to the price mechanism, or argue the advantages and disadvantages of market regulations. I am a student of Professors Semkow and Szeworski, a follower of Kowalik, reader of Kuczyński and Sadowski. I am not an economist, but I lived through one of the largest economic transformations in history, when, in the space of just forty years (1949-1989), national wealth was squandered by inept clerks and common thieves under the banner of socialism, only to be ravaged, in another quarter of a century (1989-2014) by political bandits and slyboots under the banner of the market economy. Looking at how the markets of Greece, Spain and Poland are being destroyed today, I cannot help but conclude that the political economy of socialism is indeed, as Professor Szeworski would put it, "*searching for a black cat in a dark room in which there is no cat*"; on the other hand, the only tools that allow the free-market player to capture "*the black cat in the murky room of political economy of capitalism*" are the British gallows and the nets of pirates, the French guillotines and the American six-shot colts.

The price, of course, can be the function of demand. Value can be agreed upon in the process of market negotiation, of which exchange is the most primitive form, present in every

culture. Culture as such can even be said to be founded upon exchange. Its emergence is associated with the act of assigning a certain value to things and actions (be it a mirror or a dance) that are not essential for life. As long as there is no money and the added value is not intercepted by those who usurp the right to issue currency, we are dealing with a primitive culture, emerging naturally within a community that is safe and wants to secure its safety. Money means the state, the treasury and the drive to subordinate the people, ensure their security and unite them by means that also include instilling culture.

The primitive, pre-state principle of exchange is well known to all children. It does not matter in the slightest that a trailer to a Matchbox toy costs more than a small towing car. A boy who has two Matchbox trailers but no toy cars will gladly trade with the car-owner because everyone prefers to have a complete vehicle rather than to hoard items. Similarly, one Ken can be worth two Barbie dolls, a pair of silk tights – a bra, and a Swiss pocketknife... a three-dimensional image of a nude woman. And thus, imperceptibly, we have arrived at the value of the work of art and its market.

## Art

Fine arts can be understood in a narrow or a broad sense. In the narrow sense, fine arts and the academies *des beaux arts* that form around them, refer to the plastic arts. The broad understanding is no more than 250 years old and we owe it to Charles Batteux: “*We will define painting, sculpture and dance as the imitation of beautiful nature conveyed through colors, through relief and through attitudes. And music and poetry are the imitation of beautiful nature conveyed through sounds, or through measured discourse*”.<sup>12</sup>

There is no doubt, however, that the idea of an art market, if taken seriously, can only apply to the plastic arts, those often indispensable objects that satisfy our need to look at ourselves and our close ones, at unknown landscapes and sometimes (before photography stripped painting of its original mimetic role) fulfill that longing to uncover and glorify human intimacy.

In “Sztuka cenniejsza niż złoto” [An Art Worth More than Gold], a masterpiece of the literary description of painting, Jan Białostocki points out that art first emancipated itself in the *quattrocento* period in Florence when commissions ceased to be granted by political or religious rulers and became the province of the prosperous middle class: as soon as they felt the need to

We have thus far attempted to show that the fine arts are based on imitation and that its object is the beautiful nature perceived by the inspired mind (*enthousiasme*). It now remains to show how this imitation proceeds and we shall know the difference between the individual arts whose common goal is the imitation of beautiful nature

[...] Charles Batteux – Zasady Literatury - Rozdział V. W jaki sposób sztuki naśladowają – trans. M. Walecka-Gabalińska

commemorate themselves in an object more permanent than a bar of gold, the families of Strozzi and De Medici assumed the role of the patrons of the arts.

*“When Alberti arrived in Florence (1436)...”, recounts Białostocki, “the trading house of the De Medicis was rising to prominence. Patronage over the arts shifted from bishops, abbots and princes to merchants, financial entrepreneurs and trading house owners. They were merchants with a humanist mindset, whose pride, snobbery and thirst for fame were tempered by deeper artistic, scientific and philosophical passions. The new patrons of the arts came from the families of the De Medicis, the unofficial rulers of Florence, who fought their competitors in not always respectable ways, as well as from other families involved in banking and trade, the Strozzi, the Pazzi, the Pitti, the Rucellai, the Baroncelli.”*<sup>13</sup>

The second stage took place in 17th-century Antwerp. It turned out that there was no longer a need for a commissioning party. The art market, i.e. the demand for art products, was born. The artist now worked according to his own plan, confident that his art was valuable and in popular demand. He created a product and put it up for sale, allowing its price to be determined by the market price mechanism. *“Initially, artists worked on commission, for a specific client, such as a prince, an abbot, or a parish priest. In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they started painting on their own initiative; they offered the finished product to potential buyers, releasing it to the market. The issues that arose accordingly had to do with competition and the need to keep a market presence, as well as the need to acquire a distinct character, an easily recognized original flavor.”*<sup>14</sup>

With the advent of capitalism, Batteux’s system, which defined the common principle of art as the imitation of beautiful nature and aligned plastic artifacts with works of literature, music and dance, helped expand the market evaluation mechanism to cover the latter group as well.

However, it is also worth noting that both the free market principle and the notion of fine arts are the products of the same time; though their harbingers can be found as far back as the Renaissance, they are closely related to the rise to power of the third estate, i.e. the burgher class. The burgher class glorifies the idea of freedom, along with free movement, prohibition of slavery, liberties for the fairer but weaker sex and, with time, for other, albeit less enticing, vulnerable groups: the disabled, the immature, the poor, the uneducated, the foreign, the colored.

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Jan Białostocki, *Sztuka cenniejsza niż złoto*, PWN, Warszawa 2011, p. 258.

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*Ibid.*, p. 422



This specific “episteme”<sup>15</sup>, as it would probably be called by Michel Foucault, who coined the notion of the Cartesian episteme, is best referred to as romantic. Its timeframe can be defined as 1789-1989.

### The romantic age

Something inarguably important happened during those two hundred symbolic years between 1789 and 1989, or even the 225 years that elapsed between 1750, when Baumgarten first used the term “esthetics”, and 1975, when Étienne Souriau built his entire moral and philosophical system on purely esthetic foundations. A number of concepts serve as the intellectual basis of the new age, an age in which man, or better yet, the people, the collective that Taine called society, is not merely the subject, but also the highest arbitrator and the sole guarantor of morality. These romantic ideals include “youth”, “nations”, “equality”, “art”, and the Kantian “disinterestedness”. Last but not least, they also involve “culture” and its institutions.

French cultural managers like to joke that their greatest contribution to the history of European culture after WWII is the establishment of the “ministries of culture”. This is not true. It was in Poland, in 1918, in the government of Jędrzej Moraczewski that the first ministry of culture and fine arts was formed, headed by Medard Downarowicz. The ministry survived until 1920 when it was converted into a department in the ministry of religious denominations and public education.

There is more truth to the words of Jean-Michel Djian, who says that the concept of cultural policy, i.e. the conscious management of creative production and cultural heritage begins in France and can be traced back to the beginning of the 17th century: *“cultural policy is a French invention, born from the constant preoccupation of monarchical, imperial or republican rulers to monopolize, in the name of a national myth, the protection of artistic heritage and thus to encourage what will become part of it”*.<sup>16</sup>

The French ministry itself, in fact, was established to provide a government post for André Malraux, a fervent supporter of De Gaulle, whom the general wished to have by his side in his

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In her commentary on “The Order of Things”, a part of which she translated for “Twórczość”, Małgorzata Szpakowska wrote: *“Épistème” is a principle of thought that typifies each age distinguished by Foucault; it conditions the cognitive model characteristic of a given period, the manner in which the relationship between the thing and the sign is established*”.  
M. Foucault, Historia, trans. M. Szpakowska, “Twórczość” 1968, vol. 9, p. 84.

In his introduction to the Polish translation of “The Archeology of Knowledge”, Jerzy Topolski remarks: “Foucault’s epistemes are unconscious patterns of thought, a sort of epistemological a priori that determines the epistemology of a given culture”.  
J. Topolski, Wstęp, [in:] M. Foucault, Archeologia Wiedzy, Warszawa 1977, p.14.

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Jean-Michel Djian, La Politique culturelle, la fin d’un mythe, Gallimard, 2005, p.9.

second cabinet, leaving the name of the ministry to his administrators. These could have hardly chosen a better function for the outstanding writer; he simply had to be called the minister of culture. The name stuck all around Western Europe. Its adoption is hotly contested in Germany, on account of the federal nature of the state<sup>17</sup>, and the United States, despite boasting a great wealth of film, theater and literature, as well as great museums, also considers that formation to be totally unnecessary. On the old continent, however, ministries of culture have mushroomed.<sup>18</sup> What the homeland of Beethoven failed to achieve has materialized in the EU in the form of the European Commission of Culture. An important role was also played by the ministries of culture in socialist countries, where the new caste of clerks, administrators and managers quickly began to take shape and soon dominated all areas of social life from economy to culture.

This process involved the emergence of a clerical apparatus. There is a lot to suggest that, after the transformation of 1989, the West did not bring freedom and the free market to the East, but, rather, the socialist system spread to the West, as evidenced by the domination of the caste of cultural managers in the structures of the European Union. The competence of this official cultural patronage is variously defined. It is worth comparing how the name and scope of relevant ministries have changed in France<sup>19</sup> and Poland<sup>20</sup>, for instance. From the Ministry of Information, run by André Malraux in the first De Gaulle cabinet of 1945, through the Ministry of Culture established

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Autonomia kulturalna krajów związkowych - To nazwa dokumentu?

In Germany, culture is the basis for the independence of the 16 constituent states. Because the Constitution reserves only limited competences for the federal government in this area, most cultural institutions are maintained by the states and individual communes. The separateness of cultural life in individual states has spawned cultural centers all around Germany. Even smaller towns boast cultural events of international importance

<http://www.tatsachen-ueber-deutschland.de/pl/kultura/inhaltsseiten/glossary09.html?type=1>.

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Cf. Cinquante ans après. Culture, politique et politiques culturelles. Sous la direction d'Elie Barnavi et Maryvonne de Saint Pulgent est publié aux éditions La documentation française.

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Successive names of the ministry:

3 February 1959 Ministry of Cultural Affairs (Ministère des Affaires culturelles)

January 1974 Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the Environment (ministère des Affaires culturelles et de l'Environnement)

June 1974 State Secretariat of Culture (Secrétariat d'État à la culture)

1976 Ministry of Culture and the Environment (Ministère de la Culture et de l'Environnement)

1978 Ministry of Culture and Communication (Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication)

1981 Ministry of Culture (Ministère de la Culture)

1986 Ministry of Culture and Communication (Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication)

1988 Ministry of Culture, Communication, Great works, and the Bicentennial (Ministère de la Culture, de la Communication, des Grands travaux et du Bicentenaire)

1991 Ministry of Culture and Communication (Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication)

1992 Ministry of National Education and Culture (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Culture)

1993 Ministry of Culture and the Francophonie (Ministère de la Culture et de la Francophonie)

1995 Ministry of Culture (Ministère de la Culture)

1997 Ministry of Culture and Communication (Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication)

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Changes in the name of Polish ministries of culture after the partitions:

Ministry of Culture and Art of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic of Poland [17.11.1918-5.3.1922]

Department of Religious Denominations and Public Education [5.3.1922-30.9.1939]

Ministers of Culture and Art of the People's Republic of Poland [22.7.1944-31.12.1989]

Ministry of Culture and Art in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic of Poland [1.1.1990-19.10.1999]

Ministry of Culture and National Heritage [19.10.1999-31.10.2001]

Ministry of Culture [31.10.2001-31.10.2005]

Ministry of Culture and National Heritage [31.10.2005-]

after the general's return to power ten years later and the restoration of the Fifth Republic, all the way to the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Culture and Communication. The same holds for Poland: each government chooses its own name and each uses the name of this (sometimes deemed unnecessary, sometimes strategic) ministry to express its attitude to the past, to education, and to the memory that it wishes to leave behind.

Culture is memory. Asked in 1991 whether a ministry of culture makes sense, i.e. whether culture should be managed, Zbigniew Herbert replied: *“Protection should be extended over art schools, national heritage, editions of classic works of literature, and selected top-class theaters, operas, libraries from the local to the national level. But this is all in the discretion of the ministry of national education; a ministry of culture is totally unnecessary”*.<sup>21</sup>

Many theorists question the need for cultural management, but it is clear that it has become extremely popular in the last 50 years. Herbert himself put it succinctly, and not without a touch of self-irony. In an interview, he was once asked:

“Should culture be subsidized?”

“No”, he replied, “Only deserving old artists should be supported...”

Thus, culture needs support, not management. If it is to be managed at all, it requires an enlightened Patron. But can a machinery of trained clerks who take over hundreds and thousands of new cultural offices and departments across Europe be truly enlightened?

The 20<sup>th</sup> century, after all, ended in an intense eruption of economic, organizational and political endeavors that resulted in what we now call the culture sector and the cultural industry; the sector now plays an important role in the labor market. Cultural workers and cultural managers emerged as a profession. Prizes and distinctions are awarded to cultural activists. Posts in the cultural sector are longed for by students who dream of a pleasant and useful job. In the 1970s, the first university courses opened in cultural studies, culture and education, theater studies, and film studies. Their increase in number, however, had little to do with the actual demand for professionals in the field.

But can the actual demand be calculated at all? Is culture, or a cultural paradigm, an important, stable notion that can be abstracted in a theoretical and practical sense? Theoretical abstraction includes reflections about culture as such; practical abstraction involves creating culture for its own sake, for the sake of the cultural apparatus that at once generates and consumes the products of clerical culture.

Based on my rich experience within the realm of culture, where I have worked as a manager, artist and theorist, I want to propose a **thesis** that **abstracting the concept of culture was**

**the biggest mistake of our time, a colossal deception, which extracted, distilled and separated the concept from its spiritual roots, and thus, in the last two hundred and fifty years has engendered a special form of cultural barbarism.**

Culture exists, but only as an element in a relation; it only exists in relation to the family, the homeland and the Church. **Culture is not a department**, even if no department can survive without it. Alone, it dies. The worshippers of the idol of culture, who put it on a pedestal, homogenize it, globalize it, turn it into a mass, utilitarian, ready-for-sale product, set out to destroy the very cultural roots of Judeo-Christian civilization.

The establishment of the cultural episteme is the great but recent mistake of the industrial era that occurred over the last two hundred to two hundred and fifty years; it began with the breakthrough discovery, narrated by Mickiewicz:

“...that some Frenchmen to new notions came,  
And invented a rule that all men are the same;  
Though it's what the Lord's Book for a thousand years teaches,  
And every priest on Sundays from his pulpit preaches.”<sup>22</sup>

There is a good reason why France is mentioned in this context. The romantic episteme, with its ideals of liberty, equality, brotherhood, youth, nationality, democracy and cult of the artist, is deeply rooted in French thought; it matures in the France of Victor Hugo and comes to an end in the contemporary Arab-European melting pot, in the large quantifier of Michel Foucault's liberal ideas.

Let us recapitulate. At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the romantic episteme, or as some would have it – modern thought, begins to emerge, in which the authority of the individual is replaced by the dignity of the institution, the role of hierarchy by the quest for applause, the principle of labor *ad maiorem dei gloriam* and for nothing but the heavenly compensation – by public esteem, financial remuneration, and, last but not least, fame. The concept of an artist as a subject also begins to take shape.

The period also sees the dawn of the institutionalized cultural management system, as it is broadly defined. It takes hold in the sphere of production, now referred to as creation, distribution and reception. All individual activities of creating and contemplating works of art and culture are subjected to corporate, i.e. collective, management. And this whole cultural apparatus decides their social existence, allowing them to come into being, survive, reach an audience, and win public acclaim.

Acclaim can be measured by fame or money. The path to approval requires institutional maneuvers. “A work of art for this society (or perhaps just a milieu or social group)”, as George Dickie wrote at the end of the era, “is an artifact, upon which some person acting on behalf of a certain social institution has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation”<sup>23</sup>.

After 1989, at the close of the era of our interest, there is a ministry of culture financed from the state budget in almost every European country. At all levels of local government, a dedicated structure governs the education of cultural staff, allocates money resources to culture, and regulates its distribution.

A powerful lobby has formed in the last two hundred years. It is the cultural class, a legion of clerks, teachers, students and animators, an entire cultural sector, an immense cultural industry. French scholars rightly point out that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, culture has become religion and cultural activists its priests.<sup>24</sup> Culture ceases to be a feature of man or society and becomes a status symbol.

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23

G. Dickie: What is Art?, [in:] Culture and Art, ed. L. Aagard-Mogensen, Nyborg – Atlantic Highlands 1976. p. 23.

24

*“Intellectuals are recruited from the ranks of the dominant class or those who aspire to join it. The intellectual, the artist effectively assumes a title that puts him on a par with members of the ruling class. Molière dines with the king. The artist is invited to the duchess, like an abbot. I ask myself how disastrously the ranks of artists would shrink if that prerogative was abolished. It is enough to look at the care that artists take (with their clothes and their particularizing behavior) to make themselves known as such and differentiate themselves from the common folk.”*

La nouvelle religion et ses prêtres, cf. Jean Dubuffet, Asphyxiant Culture, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 2007 (ed.), pp. 9, 10, 22-23.