

CULTURAL THEORY  
AND HISTORY:  
THEORETICAL ISSUES



Krzysztof Moraczewski

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Poznań 2014

SCIENTIFIC REVIEW  
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The publication founded by Narodowe Centrum Nauki  
(Projekt został sfinansowany ze środków Narodowego Centrum Nauki)

ISBN 978-83-62243-21-1

EDITORS ADDRESS  
WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE WYDZIAŁU NAUK SPOŁECZNYCH  
UNIwersytetu IM. ADAMA MICKIEWICZA W POZNANIU  
60-568 Poznań, ul. Szamarzewskiego 89c

PRINTED  
ZAKŁAD GRAFICZNY UAM  
61-712 Poznań, ul. Wieniawskiego 1

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# Introduction

The perspective assumed here is determined by two main points of interests: the theory of culture and particular field of the cultural analysis of music. The former will remain a central topic, while the latter will come into question only marginally, although searching for tools allowing for better explanation of specific phenomena of musical culture is my main and personal motivation.

Anybody who deals with culture, as long as he or she is not blinded by some kind of theoretical dogma or prejudice, meets time as the necessary dimension of every cultural process. We use the word “history” to name a way in which a scholar of human affairs deals with time. Theory of culture then is always lurking on the border of history and vice versa. This crossing has some bad tradition though, founded mainly by Philipp Bagby: the theoretician considers history to be not ordered enough, not enough suited to the particular needs of theory, not theoretical enough. In effect this theoretician feels obliged to instruct the historian how history should be “properly” practiced.

Here I assume exactly the opposite strategy. The theoretical aspect of history is, I believe, deep and effective, and it lies in a multitude of important theoretical consequences of the historian’s work. I’m not searching, then, for “proper” or “correct” model of history. Everything’s all right with history. Instead I’d like to examine the said consequences of historians’ ideas for a theoretical understanding of culture. To confront theory and the history of culture is of course not an astonishingly new idea, although such a confrontation rarely has followed the line I have proposed above. This is but a kind of work that needs to be periodically taken anew: without searching for theoretical consequences, the potential of history cannot be

fully realized, just like theory of culture not grounded in history is always in danger of degenerating into a set of empty conceptual operations. Such a confrontation must of course start with probably the most influential historiographic tradition of the last century: the French history of mentality.



## Chapter 1

# Troubles with “mentality” and historians badmouthing theory

At the end of the previous century Robert Darnton<sup>1</sup> summarized up the main theoretical dilemma haunting the historical research based on the idea of “mentality,” detectable especially in the French tradition of “Annales.” In conclusion he proposed to substitute the concept of “mentality” with the concept of “culture.” Darnton actually meant a very specific concept of culture, i.e. Clifford Geertz’s “semiotic theory of culture.” Yet the differences dividing Geertz’s proposition and many concepts of “mentality,” starting from Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and following the line up to the French historians of 1980s, are serious enough to provoke questions. Is Darnton’s choice really so obvious? The problem can gain some clarity if we will confront three concepts usually used to organize scholarly activity within the history of culture: mentality, the image of the world (treated as a critical counterproposition to the concept of mentality, one that came from within history itself) and the concept of culture. Such a confrontation should also have consequences for basic assumptions that some of Polish cultural theoreticians – including myself – tend to follow, and maybe allow to correct these assumptions to make them more effective in dealing with the temporal aspect of cultural phenomena.

The concept of “mentality” is in constant use – and under equally constant critique – starting with the 1920 up to today, but it has never

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<sup>1</sup> R. Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette. Reflections in Cultural History*, W.W. Norton, New York 1990.

been theoretically unified and elucidated in an actually ordered manner. Many of existing publications on this topic, and there's quite a few of them, come from the historians' workshop and deal with the detailed problems of source interpretation, etc., not having any intention to theoretically generalize the problem of "mentality" itself. There are probably two main reasons for this. First, there is a kind of antipathy to any theory shared by many historians and not without a solid justification. This antipathy has been generally overcome during the debate on narrativism, when avoiding theory for any longer threatened an inability to recognize the presumptions and implicit strategies of one's own scholarly practice. Before the narrativistic breakthrough though, any effort aiming for a systematic, theoretical ordering of history was usually suspected of a more or less evident restitution of the "positivist" nomothetic model of history. Along with some extreme forms of positivism, such a model has always been mistrusted by historians, and even in the philosophy of history, after the decomposition of Hempel's model of nomothetic history, it did not receive a good press. And when the "theory of history" was not suspected of nomothetism of this kind, it was still suspected of "historiosophy," and usually for a reason. Suspicions of this kind did good work, making every historian, and in fact every scholar of human matters, fully aware of the dangers that come, when one interprets historical sources or human behaviour in the light of philosophical and theoretical assumptions, taken *a priori* in the name of systematic coherence or even personal beliefs (political, social, religious, etc.). Lucien Febvre expressed this kind of mistrust with rhetorical emphasis in his famous motto, ascribed to him at least anecdotally: "Philosophizing is the capital crime of a historian."

The second reason that probably worked against the theoretical elaboration of the concept of mentality as a historical idea, is connected with the fact that the concept itself has been borrowed by historians from other disciplines, i.e. ethnology, sociology and social psychology, for it could be then treated as obvious and not needing any additional elucidation. Especially ethnological theory by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl<sup>2</sup> proved to be influential amongst historians.

But during the last decades both reasons that made the theory of mentality not necessarily needed by historians, changed their status and we cannot now look at them in the way Lucien Febvre, for example, did.

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<sup>2</sup> L. Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, Allen – Unwin, London 1923.

There are a few serious obstacles that disallow to continue today the traditional, historical antipathy for theory – some of them coming from history itself, many recognized during the last few decades in the general field of the humanities. It was decades ago, when Marc Bloch,<sup>3</sup> analyzing the methods of interpreting history, pointed out that the historian’s questionnaire and unavoidable (even if minimal) set of his assumptions is, so to say, “shaping ahead” every possible historical knowledge. Bloch’s work was quite disillusioning with respect to Ranke’s belief, shared by most of historians, that it’s their only aim to describe past events *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. In a famous comparison Bloch treated historical facts, established thanks to the analysis of sources, as bricks, used to construct the building we call “historical knowledge.” And we do construct it according to architectural rules that cannot be simply deduced from the qualities of the bricks themselves. To put it less figuratively: writing history is the activity governed by structural rules that predetermine possible connections between the facts, the hierarchy of their importance, relevance to historian’s questions, etc. According to Bloch, then, history is not simply describing the past, but interrogates its traces from a point of view that is belonging not to the past itself, but to the time of the historian. History is the interaction between the past and the present, and the past itself is something constructed. This construction will change, following changes in the historian’s own interests. The development of historical knowledge cannot be then considered fully progressive or even cumulative: it consists of changing complementary perspectives; history not only deals with time, it is itself the effect of time. So not the autonomous, “authentic” shape of the past is determining historical knowledge, but our contemporary questions and interests, i.e. the shape of our present. Or to put this in another way: there is interaction between our present and their present, because every part of our past was somebody’s present. This is what Bloch called “the structural interdependence of ages.” It changes history from a “knowledge of the past” into the “knowledge of human beings in time.”

This is of course the constructivist’s interpretation of Bloch’s view, which shouldn’t go too far. Continuing the architectural metaphor, we can say that even if the qualities of the building cannot be simply deduced from the material used, the material remains meaningful, nevertheless. At least, it determines what kind of construction is possible and what kind

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<sup>3</sup> M. Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1953.

is not. The role of fact in history can be treated in a similar way: the set of known facts limits the field of possible historical constructions, even if we do construct them according to many other factors, some of them indicated above.

If during the 1930s and 1940s Bloch managed to describe the character of historical knowledge as something constructed according to other-than-factual cognitive agents, then during the late 1970s Hayden White<sup>4</sup> in a spectacular way pointed out the consequences of the fact that history is inevitably written. Written history deals with all the problems of linguistic and aesthetic representation. Critical responses to White's *Metahistory*, just like the analogous if slightly later responses to *Narrative Logic* by Frank Ankersmit,<sup>5</sup> are widely known. They became especially fierce during the 1990s and after 2000. Still, the critique was aimed mainly at some extreme interpretations of narrativism, inspired less by White and Ankersmit than by – if we can transform Wolfgang Iser's term – “journalists' postmodernism.” There were also more problems with some details of narrativist theories than with basic discoveries. One can, of course, reject White's idea of founding the poetics of historical writing on Northrop Frye's theory of tropes. Still it does not disqualify the general thesis that history – being something shaped in language – is governed not only by theoretical presumptions, indicated by Bloch, but also by the specific forms of poetics. It's hard to deny that history has its poetics. The tempered thesis of narrativism, formulated after all the critical response, could be expressed like this: at least some part of connections and relations between the events and processes described by the historian is not causal, functional, etc., but come from literary rules of narrating; the understanding that we gain thanks to historical knowledge, is then at least partially dependant on the specifics of the literary means of representation, means that are poetical or rhetorical and that can't be eliminated from the text of history; any historical representation of the past includes elements of aesthetic representation. These theses stand firm even if we reject the solutions of particular problems proposed by White or Ankersmit. Historians were aware of these problems much earlier anyway, for example the function of aesthetics in historical representation of the past was

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<sup>4</sup> H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1973.

<sup>5</sup> F. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague 1983.

fully recognized, starting with Johannes Huizinga. But it was thanks to the effort of the narrativist philosophers of history during the 1970s and 1980s that these problems were moved into the nexus of epistemological debate. The topic was, of course, continued by many more scholars, like Jerzy Topolski<sup>6</sup> or Paul Veyne.<sup>7</sup>

Both the historians’ self-analysis and philosophical debate made it clear that there is an intricate web of theoretical and rhetorical factors, modifying or even constructing historical knowledge. Febvre’s famous motto cannot be repeated today. Philosophizing arose from “historian’s first crime” to the position, exaggerating only slightly, of the historian’s obligation. At least, this is so if a historian doesn’t want his or her knowledge to become the playing field for unrecognized and then uncontrolled factors and prejudices of many kinds. Regarding the history of culture, the whole of this situation indicates the necessity of crossing the line between history and the theory of culture, going towards scholarly disciplines specialized in theoretical problems, like philosophy and anthropology. On the other hand, no cultural theoretician can neglect the temporal aspect of the human phenomena and the crucial problem of change. This means crossing the line between history and theory in the opposite direction and becoming a historian of a kind. The two disciplines inevitably intertwine and lose their borders.

There have been other analogous impulses, coming from many places, above all from other fields of the humanities and social sciences, strengthening the tendency to “theorize” history. The perspectivism of every meaning-creation process and every interpretation, the including interpretation of historical sources, has been indicated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche’s theory of cognitive perspectivism can be elucidated as a conjunction of two basic statements: that every interpretation engages a particular point of view, i.e. that every interpretation is situated against some particular system of values and interests (up to the broadest one: the perspective of *Homo sapiens*, determined by biological evolution – the broadest but still particular); that every act of determining

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<sup>6</sup> J. Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, Warsaw 1996.

<sup>7</sup> P. Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1984.

<sup>8</sup> F. Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999.

meaning is also the act of valuation, depending on the previously assumed interpretational perspective.

Many ways of understanding the status of knowledge, including the historical one, proposed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were – in this way or another – indebted to Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s heritage is especially important for psychoanalytical interpretations and for scholars following Michel Foucault – to name but a few, who openly admitted their debt. Although the theories of history proposed by Foucault or Dominick LaCapra are detailed and thoroughly worked out, they still remain within the intellectual horizon opened up by Nietzsche. Even the interpretation of the construction of historical knowledge construction according to class interests, typical for Marxist historiography, can be understood as a form of perspectivism, although originally independent of Nietzsche. To accept this point of view means to accept the belief that every possible aspect of historical knowledge is involved in an intricate web of interests, which can be only brought to light by critical thinking (of many shapes: from Freud to Gramsci). We can express this in a language similar to the statements of the German philosophical school of Frankfurt: the theoretical awareness has only one alternative: naive and unaware ideology. We could point out many philosophical concepts following this path, from the critical theory of society up to deconstructivism, but for our needs indicating the main tendency should be sufficient enough.

From today’s perspective, then, history without historiosophy seems no longer possible, it would be only a history unaware of its implied historiosophy. Antitheoretical inclinations, inherited from one of the forms of philosophical positivism, and strengthened by some forms of recent nominalism (recognized by the Polish philosopher Leszek Nowak as a kind of neo-neopositivism under the misleading name of “postmodernism”<sup>9</sup>), fruits not with disengaged and neutral knowledge, but with a knowledge that naively absolutizes its own involvement in interests, unaware of its theoretical categories and literate strategies. There’s no reason, then, to not interrogate the history of mentality from the perspective of its theory. There is also no reason to avoid the theoretical history of culture in general.

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<sup>9</sup> L. Nowak, *Byt i myśl. U podstaw negatywistycznej metafizyki unitarnej*, vol. I: *Nicość i istnienie*, Zysk i S-ka, Poznan 1998.

## Chapter 2

### **Troubles with mentality: status of the concept**

If the concept of mentality, central the most influential tradition of cultural history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been borrowed from outside history, why should the historian look any elaborations on it different than those proposed in psychology or ethnology? Ethnologists, after strong criticism, generally rejected Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's theory of "primitive mentality" and with it also the concept of mentality itself. Its place was taken by the concept of culture or even the much broader concept of society. The criticism toward Lévy-Bruhl included the belief that no society projects a unified mentality and concepts like "primitive mentality" artificially and arbitrarily generalize heterogeneous phenomena, and the belief that social and cultural phenomena, that are group phenomena, can't be explained by categories borrowed from individual psychology. Some of these accusations reappeared decades later in the critical discourse on the contemporary history of mentality. In the field of social psychology, similarly, neverminding the great career of the concept of mentality in the time of Maurice Blondel and Henri Walon, the concept has been largely abandoned, as not differentiated enough and much too unclear. Contemporary social psychology, for example in Pilip Zimbardo's version, does fine without the concept of the collective mentality. In fact it was decades ago when historians with their category of "mentality" were left alone.

The problem is that this stubborn use of a generally abandoned concept was not any kind of intellectual regress: during the years of its being in use,

the word “mentality” gained in history very specific set of meanings. This specific historians’ “mentality,” although widely commented on, discussed and “remarked” was never – as far as I know – systematically analyzed and elucidated, but usually reduced to some kind of psychological consideration. The range of this category is usually not covered by alternative propositions, even by Clifford Geertz’s concept of culture proposed by Darnton in place of “mentality.” In fact, as we will see, it is these that are the concepts of cultural theory, if they are to deal with what historians call “mentality,” that may need to be revised.

Describing the content of the “mentality” concept, as it was shaped during decades of historical inquiry, is not an easy task. The presentation of a set of exemplary concepts that were already used as equivalents or specifications to the concept of “mentality” may prove to be the most efficient way. Such a concept as mentality includes, among others, ideas of a social consciousness, collective mentality, mental equipment and image of the world. Some of them were even treated as synonymous to “mentality,” more or less precisely.

The two first categories above, i.e. social consciousness and collective mentality, belong to classic theories. Social (or collective) consciousness is the term borrowed for the history of culture from Émile Durkheim’s sociology.<sup>1</sup> It denotes a kind of cognitive reality and may be elucidated as an aggregation of judgments, including factual statements and valuating judgments. This concept doesn’t provoke any ontological doubts, because it doesn’t establish any new sphere or level of reality. Social consciousness is not levitating over individuals’ heads, but consists of beliefs that are shared by individuals. This aggregation of beliefs could be even defined according to the terms of mathematical set theory to avoid any misunderstandings. To express it otherwise: we do not need to assume any kind of separate cognitive sphere of reality (of a special ontological status), but only a simple fact that some people may share the beliefs of some other people. The content of social consciousness can be, then, determined empirically.

The coherence and importance of the collective consciousness depends heavily on – in Durkheim’s terms – the type of solidarity, characterizing the given group. In the society of mechanical solidarity the collective consciousness, especially the obligation to share evaluating judgements, functions as the “social adhesive” and the criterion of identity. The coher-

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<sup>1</sup> É. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, Free Press, New York 1997.



ence of such a society requires, then, developed techniques of “ideological” control and also an expanded system of punishments, associated with any kind of non-conformism. In societies of organic solidarity, coherence and effectiveness is assured by functional dependencies, created by the social division of labour. The real threat to such a society doesn't lie in the refusal of judgement-sharing but in the refusal of participating in the labour-organization system.

Collective consciousness is – in societies of organic solidarity or, to put it in the language of another theory, of functional integrity – of secondary importance, up to the possibility of its decomposition. This possibility was described by Jerzy Kmita as the project of society deprived of axiological symbolization.<sup>2</sup> This kind of deprivation implies the possibility of complete decomposition of the set of shared values of the society, replaced by functional relations and only communicative symbolization (which is, of course, functionally necessary). Even if we remember that pure mechanical and organic solidarity can be only understood as ideal types and every real society employs both types of solidarity to a different extent and in different proportions, it's easy to recognize a tendency typical for industrialized societies, leading to the replacement of mechanical relations with organic ones. For any history of culture or history of mentality that accepts Durkheim's categories, it implies a risky methodological situation. The more industrialized (or post-industrialized) the society, the less such a history of this society is even possible and the less it explains (because the inquired sphere of shared statements and values is of lesser and lesser social importance). This problem is somehow omitted if instead of Durkheim's concept of social consciousness we apply the idea of collective mentality.

“Collective mentality” is exactly the term that was borrowed by historians from psychology and ethnology. In the latter case it denotes a mental pattern or general psychological configuration belonging to some society. Some anthropologists accepted such an idea as a supplement to the generally accepted theory of behavioural patterns (following the example of Ruth Benedict<sup>3</sup>). The mental pattern can be also alternatively described as the aggregate of formal patterns of reasoning, styles of thinking, recognized types of relations between things, etc., accepted by a given society.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Kmita, *Jak słowa łączą się ze światem: studium krytyczne neopragmatyzmu*, Wyd. Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii UAM w Poznaniu, Poznań 1998.

<sup>3</sup> R. Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston – New York 1934.

Hypothetically some societies may accept only logical relations, while other may accept only metaphorical connections. The inquiry into these problems branches back at least to James Frazer<sup>4</sup> and his differentiation of magic, science and religion as three separate systems of thinking, based on rules specific for them only. Today's ethnological solution to similar problems differ from Frazer's in this respect, as they no longer assume the idea of progressivism, tending to replace it with a vision of a multitude of incomparable "styles of rationality," to use Peter Winch's<sup>5</sup> term.

Explained in this way, the concept of mental patterns provokes some kind of reductionism, reducing "mental" to its cognitive element, while historians of mentality (and Benedict, Margaret Mead or Lévy-Bruhl before them) included also socially shared patterns of feelings or emotional reactions. Some of the most famous studies in history of mentality deal with the history of love, fear, etc. One could, of course, doubt if, for example, Jean Delumeau managed to write true a history of fear in the culture of the West,<sup>6</sup> insisting that it is in fact a history of the ways in which fear was socially imagined and communicated – history of the semiotics of fear, not the history of fear itself. This point of view has been openly assumed by Niklas Luhmann in his *Love: A Sketch*.<sup>7</sup> There is then a solid reason to ask if the history of emotions is even possible, if the hermeneutic approach of historian (necessarily hermeneutic, because there will never be any participating observation of past events) always deals with things already mediated by semiotics and somehow communicated. We will come back to this dilemma yet, for now, it's enough to point out, that the idea of the collective mentality implies more than only cognitive patterns.

Of course, such a category may raise many more doubts than Durkheim's ideas. What exactly collective can the mentality be? What can it denote? It's easy to understand what does it mean to share beliefs; we can comprehend even how the "styles of rationality" can be shared, thanks to enculturation and then accepting and rejecting utterances according to how they with the accepted pattern. Still, what does it mean to say the

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<sup>4</sup> J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998.

<sup>5</sup> P. Winch, *Understanding a Primitive Society*, "American Philosophical Quarterly" I (1964).

<sup>6</sup> J. Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of the Western Guilt Culture 13<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 1990.

<sup>7</sup> N. Luhmann, *Love: A Sketch*, Polity, Cambridge 2010.

people in 13<sup>th</sup> century Europe loved differently than they did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? How exactly should we understand the statement that there's a social pattern of how we do fear? There always were many doubts and even a lot of sarcasm about "collective mentality." And this is hardly surprising. It was suspected of metaphysics, i.e. of introducing a separate ontological level of unclear status and hardly convincing necessity (up to Carl Gustav Jung's "collective unconsciousness"), and of "multiplying the entities," i.e. avoiding the "Occam's razor." It was also suspected of an unreasonable yet total "culturization" (or socialization) of human beings, annihilating any individual aspect of existence, even in respect to emotions, and of hiding (intentionally or unintended) the differentiated and often conflicting character of people's mental approaches. And no doubt: for example neglecting the difference between primal emotion (shaped by biological evolution) and secondary emotions (shaped by society) was not the proof of wisdom. Shame, as an emotion socioculturally produced, undoubtedly has its history, but again: how can a primal emotion like fear have a history other than told by biologists? Rejection of the history of primal emotions does not render books like Jean Delumeau's unimportant, but forces a question about their exact subject-matter. Finally, the concept of collective mentality has been denounced as notoriously unclear, a kind of conceptual sack, where one can put anything one manages to find. It is hard to call any of these doubts unfounded.

In the history of mentality, as it was, and more often than not still is actually practiced, the mentality itself usually denotes a conjunction of social consciousness, mental patterns and emotional characteristics. The obscurity of the basic concept and its doubtful coherence should provoke some serious theoretical work. One can easily share the irritation of some historians used to theoretical discipline, for example coming from the field of anthropology, like Darnton. But there is still one factor that disallows the rejection of the idea of "mentality": clear or unclear, conceptual sack or not, it has mothered dozens and hundreds of the most influential, innovative and enlightening studies in history that have come through the last century. It basically proved to be effective. It was the fundamental tool of some of the greatest achievements in modern historiography. Its sheer effectiveness demands rather improvement than rejection, and historians are fully aware of this – which is why they proposed certain concepts that were supposed to solve the problems: mental equipment and image of the world.



## Chapter 3

# Explaining the mentality: mental equipment and image of the world

The concept of *ouillage mental* played the crucial role in the enterprise undertaken by Lucien Febvre in his *Problem of disbelief in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: The Religion of Rabelais*,<sup>1</sup> the book that can be considered a kind of counterpoint of the famous book on François Rabelais by Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>2</sup> The concept it presents differs significantly from the concept of collective mentality in one important point. While most historians of mentality understood and sometimes still understand mental patterns as a determining factor (the factor that regulates mental acts), the author of *Problem of disbelief* interpreted them as tools. We can say, then, that the vision of the individual as something strictly determined by collective mental patterns (a vision criticized so many times and so fiercely) has been replaced by Febvre with the vision of the active and creative individual, who uses the collective mental patterns as tools at hand. This kind of equipment, we can imagine today, contains not only concepts and categories but also patterns of reasoning and rules of their transformation. But how an actual transformation will proceed, how far will it reach, depends in large part on the initiative of the individual. Mental equipment doesn't determine the way we think or experience the world; but it determines the borders of our creative autonomy, and limits possible transformations and ways

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<sup>1</sup> L. Febvre, *Problem of disbelief in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: The Religion of Rabelais*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge – New York – London 1985.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1984.

of thinking in a way in which other tools limit what can be done with them. The possible uses of such tools are probably wide enough to be not exhausted by any actual, historical society. The study of mental equipment never allows to answer questions like “why did Rabelais think in the way he did?” Instead it promotes different and much more important questions that truly opens the understanding of his work: what was possible and what was not for the 16<sup>th</sup> century French writer, what kind of intellectual tools he had at his disposal, what was the limit for his thinking and acting set by given configuration of *outillage mental*? Febvre answers: in the world of Rabelais the thesis of atheism was such a limit – not the doubt, sacrilege, blasphemy, rebellion, rejection, hatred toward priests or even God himself, religious indifference, etc., but the atheism in its most strict and literal meaning. One can easily imagine the 16<sup>th</sup> century mercenary soldier, who doesn’t care for his salvation and even challenges God and the Church, preferring the pleasures of the Earth and the plagues of Hell over the boredom of Heaven. In fact we do not need a lot of imagination, we know such *condottieri* by name. Still, it doesn’t make them atheists. According to Febvre, the thesis of actual atheism could not be articulated with the help of 16<sup>th</sup> century intellectual tools, for it lies out of the reach of this specific *outillage mental*. This discovery also sets limits for the historical interpretation of the work by Rabelais. Febvre could be right or wrong (historians’ opinions differ), but even if he is mistaken in this particular case, it does not render his theoretical ideas less important.

The concept of intellectual equipment, unlike the traditional concept of collective mentality, gives justice to the originality and creativity of individual acting, enables the understanding of intellectual innovation, for example the artistic and philosophical originality of Rabelais. One could even say that it simply enables an understanding of the greatness of such outstanding individuals, while at the same time preserving the importance of sociocultural factors. The theoretical consequences of this concept reach far and will yet require inquiry. It is, then, more than surprising, especially if we consider the position of Febvre as a “classic” author of modern historiography, quoted and referred to in every proper handbook, that so few scholars followed his ideas and developed their potential abilities. Specialized researching of *outillage mental* remained Febvre’s almost personal domain. Maybe the reason is that, compared to the traditional idea of the collective mentality, the concept of mental equipment narrowed the scope too drastically for some historians.

Undoubtedly, the scope isn't narrowed by the concept of the image of the world, alternatively defining the field of research of the history of culture or historical anthropology; "or," because the most important author in this regard, Aaron Gurevich, used both these names almost interchangeably.

The concept of the image of the world has been theoretically worked out by Gurevich in his methodological essays, in his polemics on the epistemological basics of historiography and in texts presenting the main concepts and achievements of the French "Annales" school (the school to which, so to say, Gurevich "critically belonged").<sup>3</sup> Still, much more important than direct theoretical and methodological remarks are the series of historical studies in which the Russian historian put his ideas to use, starting from the general shape of the Latin medieval image of the world, going through more specific problems of the individual in the medieval world<sup>4</sup> and construction of the world image amongst the Western medieval peasantry<sup>5</sup> and finishing with detailed studies on medieval Scandinavia. If we will follow both his theoretical writings and historical studies, we can try to elucidate the concept of the image of the world in quite a systematic and complete way (as Gurevich never did). Of course we risk a kind of "overinterpretation," but this risk is acceptable, I daresay, as long as its effects are useful and theoretically important.

The world is not something common and simply shared by peoples of different times and places. At any given time, it is socially constructed and this social construction sets the environment that frames the life of individuals, their behaviour, and their cognitive and expressive acts. Images of the world, connected with actual societies and historically changing, may not be easily translated one into another, and this is the job of the history of culture (or historical anthropology) to reconstruct no longer existing images of the world, that enable the understanding of events and signs coming from the distant past.

One can of course ask, why Gurevich speaks consequently about different images of the world instead of speaking directly about differently constructed worlds or even just different worlds. The Russian anthropol-

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<sup>3</sup> A. Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology of Middle Ages*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992.

<sup>4</sup> A. Gurevich, *The Origins of European Individualism*, Wiley, New York 1995.

<sup>5</sup> A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990.

ogist and historian seems to suggest in such a way, that somewhere under the stratum of historically and culturally differentiated images of the world lies a separate world itself, independent from the ways of its imagining. It means in consequence that knowledge of this proper world, gained for example thanks to modern Western science, allows the rejection of some world-images as false and the acceptance of others – in a word, their valuation in such a way that is hardly imaginable as an aim of anthropological research and that was never supported by Gurevich himself. Speaking about “images of the world” was, then, quite risky, but there seems to be strong reason for taking such a risk.

Let's follow the event that was recalled by Gurevich in one of his books.<sup>6</sup> Here Vikings land for the first time on the shores of Lindisfarne and local monks go to the beach to greet unknown guests. We can guess how it was bound to finish. Sometime after the monks lie dead, and the Vikings are plundering the island and looting the monastery. The monks of Lindisfarne interpreted the appearance of the Viking longships according to the rules of their own image of the world, within which the seafarers took the place of the guests. This interpretation was followed by the proper act of greeting, being a part of the required hospitality. They were answered, however, according to a different image of the world, in which they were not granted the place of a hospitable and welcoming host, but that of an obstacle between the warriors and their loot – an obstacle that should be removed and – being not of the warrior's own society – is not protected by the suppression of killing (very strong *within* Scandinavian societies). Here two different images of the world met, and the “world itself” should not be understood as an “objective reality” but as the space of this meeting. This “world” can be then described as the space of interaction between world-images. If we agree on such a reasoning – that comes from us, not Gurevich – the idea of a world differentiated from its images is even methodologically necessary to analyze the processes happening between societies of different world-images. It belongs to the scholar's responsibility that such an idea would not be transformed into a philosophical fundamentalism (or simple ethnocentrism).

Within Gurevich's works the crucial stratum of the world-image seems to be a system of categories. The way in which Gurevich uses the term “category” can be only roughly referred to its philosophical tradition of previous uses, i.e. logical and transcendental, reaching back to Aristotle

<sup>6</sup> A. Gurevich, *Pokhody Vikingov*, Izd-vo Nauka, Moscow 1966.



and Immanuel Kant. Taking a closer look at Gurevich's study on the Latin medieval system of categories, allows to define this set as certain basic ontological determiners of world construction, grouped somewhat similarly to Kant's proposition and containing such individual categories as time, space, labour, etc. On this level Gurevich project resembles Peter Frederick Strawson's idea of "descriptive metaphysics."<sup>7</sup> This idea can be expressed as the belief that traditional questions of metaphysics are not "empty questions" (as they tend to be considered starting at least with Kant's analysis of the aporia of pure reason or even with ancient scepticism and medieval nominalism), but are not also the fundamental questions, touching the general nature of being, as traditional metaphysics understands them, starting not later than with Parmenides. As fundamental questions they, of course, truly fall prey to all the dilemmas pointed out by Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason*. But, nevertheless, every possible human society assumes in its practices sets of metaphysical answers or decisions, not necessarily expressed, but sometimes "acted out," considering the general nature of things existing. The "descriptive metaphysics" – to interpret Strawson's idea in an anthropological way – is not researching the reality then, but it reconstructs social constructions of the world, the multiple metaphysics or conceptual schemes that underlie any socially accepted reality.

Gurevich's point, that ontology of the world is socially and culturally constructed, historically changing and – last but not least – possible to be described as a set of categories, is already proved to be an effective assumption for historical explanation, even if we consider only Gurevich's own studies. But if we look more carefully at the list of categories that were analyzed by him, we can notice that not all of them deal with the cultural ontology of the world. Some of them, like the category of labour, are connected with social organization, but on the most fundamental level, that we could name with György Lukács's term as the "ontology of social being" (modifying strongly the notion, of course). Such a heterogenic system of categories covers then both the construction of "the natural" and "the social," and a decision to mix ontological and social categories may yet find its justification in fact that the line dividing "social" and "natural" is itself a part of a particular (even if our own) image of the world and should not be imputed *a priori* to other images.

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<sup>7</sup> P. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, Taylor – Francis, Abingdon 1959.

By the way, if I speak in here about a crucial, categorial level of world-images as the ontological stratum of the world's image, the reference is rather being made to traditional, pre-Heideggerian notion of ontology. From Heidegger's point of view all the inquiry of world-image remains on an ontical plane and never reaches ontological thinking.

The second stratum that we can recognize in the whole that Gurevich researches as the "image of the world" is a system of statements on reality that a given group holds true or false. The statement like "There are many unicorns living south of Mediterranean, while in the north this animal is extremely rare" belongs to this second stratum. It lacks a categorial character and we can change its logical value without disturbing the system of categories. The second, descriptive stratum of the image of the world is then much more mobile, can change easier and is partially independent from the set of categories. Such independence can be only partial, because the status of many statements becomes clear in the light of the categories that form for them the interpretational or semiotic frame.

Let's illustrate this with an example taken from art history, representing a common and stubborn misunderstanding, present chiefly in popular handbooks rather than in professional art historians' writings. The visual representations of creatures like chimaeras or unicorns, etc. in the arts of the Middle Ages are sometimes called "the Romanesque fantasy" and considered to be fictional or fantastical. This category is sometimes even extended to cover visual representations of mystical visitations of the Afterworld, images of infernal torments, etc. The misunderstanding lies in interpreting these visual representations according to the constructional rules of our own image of the world, instead of referring them to the image of the world that could be shared by a painter or a sculptor around the year 1000. From his point of view the world of representations isn't divided into great realms of "realistic" and "fantastical" as we can divide it, and statements like "chimaeras exist" are held true. The visual representation of the chimera is not a fantasy then, but an imaginary effort to represent the existing animal or monster. Such an effort is imaginary, because the artist lacks any direct visual experience that could teach him how a chimera looks. But he can learn it from the testimony of learned books, or the words of preachers and travellers. The authority of ancient authors renders such testimonies true. Of course the artist follows a criterion of truth different from the criteria that we tend to accept, but the criteria of truth has – in Gurevich's use of this word – the character of

a category and belong to the image of the world. By the way, it is the categorical character of the truth-criteria that strongly links categorial and descriptive strata of the world-image. And similarly, the specifics of truth and validation categories in the medieval image of the world exclude any doubts about the ecclesiastically confirmed relation from the Afterworld voyage. There was no such thing then as the “Romanesque fantasy” and it could be only created as the effect of the adaptation of Romanesque art to a different world-image. It’s striking, by the way, that representations like the Last Judgment are not interpreted in this way. The cause may be that common opinions on art history were shaped on the threshold of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the socially shared image of the world – except for a narrow intellectual elite – still treated the eschatological element as belonging to reality. The interpreter living in the hypothetical society of atheists and carelessly imputing his own world image to the artworks of the past, would have to extend the idea of fantasy to the representations of the Resurrection, Transfiguration, etc.

Even if we distinguish in Gurevich’s reconstructions of different world-images two different strata of categorial system and of descriptive statements on reality, we still have some more aspects to deal with. In his studies Gurevich deals with yet a third dimension of world-image, even if he never distinguished it theoretically. (Gurevich himself treated the concept of the world-image as a unified whole, only distinguishing the categories – the rest of the stratification is my proposition.) The third stratum of the world-image consists of evaluating judgments. They do not render what is true or false in reference to the world, as the statements of the second stratum did, but map the world with axiological references, creating at the same time the link between the systems of religion, law, ethics, etc. and everyday experience. In effect, images of the world are always axiologically evaluated and the world – seen not as a construct of a scientist, but as somebody’s past or present *Lebenswelt* – is never neutral.

We can try a very simple but somewhat enlightening example of interdependency between the three strata of world-image that we have distinguished so far. The stratum of categories (the category of real): the real is not limited to what can be sensually experienced and includes purely spiritual beings. The statement assuming a previous idea of reality: there is only one God. Valuation linking the system of statements with human acting: God is the source of values, determined by his commandments and forbiddances and then, killing, for example, is an evil act, strictly for-

bidden by God's will). A society, whose world image includes these three exemplary elements, will have to decide, amongst other things, what to do with its professional warriors. Here we leave the simplified example and touch the problems of real past societies. The decision will probably be made according to factors different from the internal logics of the world-image: according to the functional needs of society (which render the strict rejection of professional warfare probably impossible), conflicts and contests within the society, inconsistencies and contradictions within the world-image, intercultural processes, etc. The Latin West of the Middle Ages will hesitate between continuing the contradiction within its image of the world, accepting both the Ten Commandments and pre-Christian apology of the warrior at the same time (this internal conflict will become visible as a chasm between the ideals of the Latin community of *docti* and the Occitanic ideal of knighthood), and the strategy of reshaping the ideal of the warrior so that it could somehow fit in with the Christianity (thanks to enterprises like Bernard of Clairvaux's *militia Christi* or more generally replacing the ideal of the knight with the Church ideal of the crusader). On the other hand, the Greek-speaking world of medieval Christianity, coming from different traditions and facing different challenges, will follow a different path: it will admit the impossibility of the true Christian warrior and in effect will prefer the use of professional, more often than not foreign mercenaries, holding them at the bottom of the social hierarchy (because they still must be held: the Slavs, Bulgarians, Arabs, Persians and others are not going anywhere).

If one accepts such an interpretation of Gurevich's concept of the world-image, one can be immediately struck by its similarity to a theory widely known and strongly discussed in the past, i.e. to the concept of "total ideology," proposed many decades ago by Karl Mannheim in his *Ideology and Utopia*.<sup>8</sup> Mannheim distinguished two different dimensions of ideology. The first of them, which he calls the "particular ideology" denotes the same thing that Karl Marx's use of the term "ideology" did: the system of cognitive and valuating judgments that is created and used by some social group (social class for Marx) as a tool of social struggle and domination. It is exactly the original meaning of the term "ideology," that Napoleon Bonaparte used to describe the intellectual activities of his political opponents (naming them "ideologists"). It is also partially covered

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<sup>8</sup> K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, Routledge, London 2002.

by Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Starting from Marx – or, nevermind the different words in use, even with the French *philosophes* of the Enlightenment – the critique of “particular ideology” became an emancipating effort of philosophy. It is continued not only by Marxists, but by every “hermeneutics of suspicion,” from Nietzsche to Foucault, no matter if the word “ideology” itself is used.

Unlike the term “particular ideology,” “total ideology” in Mannheim's terms is not a functionally determined instrument of social struggle, but a unified vision of the world. The name “ideology” can be justified as much as Mannheim deals primarily with its relation to social needs and interests, and only secondary with the representation of reality.

This kind of “family resemblance” between Mannheim's and Gurevich's concepts – admitting the chronological primacy of Mannheim – should not cloud the differences. First, then, the theoretical purposes of both concepts are different. Gurevich's concept of the world-image is supposed to enable the reconstruction of the past realities and creates the semiotic frame for the interpretation of the remains of those realities. The purpose of Mannheim's concept is to demystify: it tries to explain how the play of interests and needs shapes every possible type of knowledge. These are then, respectively, those purposes situated in different fields of the history of culture (historical anthropology) and the sociology of knowledge. Furthermore, one could not easily distinguish strata of analysis within Mannheim's concept of “total ideology” and, ultimately, Mannheim follows the Marxist ideas of economical and social determinism, which are virtually absent in Gurevich's theory. Both scholars seem to follow opposite directions: Gurevich asks how the meaning of human acts and their products can be established within the given world-image, while Mannheim asks how the “hard” economical and social factors form “soft” knowledge. These differences render Mannheim's concept much less attractive for both the historian and the theoretician of culture than Gurevich's one: with too much simplification and too many schematics in the picture of the relations between different aspects of social life. From the Marxist point of view, the main weak point of Mannheim's concept was indicated by his colleague of the “Frankfurt School,” Max Horkheimer.<sup>9</sup> According to Horkheimer the concept of “total ideology” annihilates the possibility of any critical

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<sup>9</sup> M. Horkheimer, *A New Concept of Ideology?*, in N. Stehr, R. Grundmann (eds.), *Knowledge: Critical Concepts*, Routledge, London 2005.

theory of society, to which Mannheim intended to contribute, because by interpreting every form of knowledge as ideology, Mannheim ceased any relation of knowledge to truth, making any critique of ideology only another ideology, i.e. undermining all of Marx's philosophical (and political) project. Even the word "ideology," we can add, becomes useless, because it ceases to distinguish anything. As we yet shall see, this annihilation of the concept of truth is not implied by Gurevich's ideas, even if it is quite easy to interpret them in the spirit of extreme relativism.

Against the first impressions, Febvre's and Gurevich's theoretical propositions may be conciliated. The main difference lies not in any disagreement on the most proper substitute for the misty concept of "mentality," but in a way in which the relation of knowledge to acting is conceptualized: as a semiotic frame, which make human acts and their results meaningful (Gurevich) or using knowledge as a tool (Febvre). We'll go come to this problem further, but even without much arguing we can say: why not both?

Still, even if we somehow conciliate the concepts of *ouillage mental* and image of the world, we will not yet achieve a proper, theoretically clear equivalent to the concept of "mentality." There's more to it.

First and above all, all the emotional aspect of "collective mentality" still lies out of our reach. Then, our proposition still doesn't cover the field actually researched by historians as "mentality." One can try to solve this riddle by seeking help of so different authors as Martin Heidegger and Nelson Goodman. Second, what's the relationship of non-instrumental components of world-images to human acting? What's the link between what we think and feel and what we do, apart from using some parts of knowledge as tools? This is, of course, the traditional problem of the theory of culture.

The emotional aspect of human experiences enters the realm of the historian's or cultural theoretician's interest as something that was already expressed or communicated. If we don't want to transmute the history of culture into amateur psychology, we should postulate the limitation of inquiry to only those symptoms of emotional life that enter the inter-subjective space of communication and symbolization. The psychology, that is an alternative to such limitation, would be bound to remain an amateur enterprise, because it would lack any basis in direct observation (not even mentioning the experimental basis) in respect to the past and it would have to assume some "collective subject" of the emotions, a kind of common mind that is able to feel, a concept not even similar to Durk-

heim's collective consciousness, probably impossible to defend. Limiting ourselves to expression and symbols of emotions, we can rightly say that they have a social style, specific for a given time and place, and while researching it we could even neglect the difference between primal and secondary emotions: they both can be symbolized. This would be a hasty decision though. We need to distinguish them to move a step further.

If we consider some emotion, for example that of shame, to be of a secondary character, i.e. originating in sociocultural circumstances, it would be legitimate to write not only the history of its symbolization, but also a history of its construction or its origins. Such a history of shame, if aiming for completeness, would have to be not only the history of representations, but also a history of socialization and the enculturation practices that induce this emotion in individuals. Such a history would be probably purposeless in the case of primal emotions: the explanation of their origins should be left to the biological theory of evolution or evolutionary psychology.

On the basis of such a history of the styles of the symbolization of emotions (and of the social construction of secondary emotions), another classical question of the traditional history of mentality can be issued. In a given society the ways in which secondary emotions are constructed and all the emotions are symbolized seem to have some unifying qualities. For example in the Latin west of the 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries we can observe in the visual arts quite a unified way of expressing fear and representing that which is terrifying. A coherent set of customs and artistic practices may be also recognized in the medieval, knightly representations of love. The classical study of knightly courtesy provided by Norbert Elias<sup>10</sup> showed that there was a specific social construction of shame, common for significantly large groups of people and radically different from contemporary constructs (not including, for example, the physiological excretion as shameful or even embarrassing or awkward). This allows to ask about the general emotional style of a given time and place, and renders the first intuition of the mentality historians fully valid. This is with but one correction: the history of emotional styles is not a psychology of people long dead, but the history of their symbolization and social practices. The emotional factor, in psychological meaning, remains highly hypothetical and everything we can actually research is mediated by the semiotic sys-

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<sup>10</sup> N. Elias, *The Court Society*, UCD Press, Dublin 2006.



tems that organize the symbolization of emotions (or rather: what remains of this symbolization after centuries, sometimes doubly mediated, like the description of a custom). Isolating what originally was an emotional experience of the individual is impossible. On the other hand, there's no reason to introduce any "collective subject" of the emotions in the place of an individual. The historical inquiry of emotional styles can still, even limited in such a way, distinguish many different forms of organized symbolization and connect them with actual societies, up to a point where we can justly speak about communities that are of different "mood" (such as that of Weimar Republic).

Introducing the English term usually used as an equivalent to Heidegger's *Stimmung*<sup>11</sup> is of course risky and the reasons why I've decided to take this risk must be made apparent. It is enough to emphasise that in *Sein und Zeit* mood is an ontological category, and it belongs to the construction of existence, i.e. to the way in which *Dasein* is. Any emotions that were expressed, intersubjectively communicated or symbolized, and that means every emotions that can become the point interest of history, belong, in Heidegger's terms, to the ontical sphere (although they are ontologically grounded). The German philosopher would then never accept such a use of the term "mood." Let it be clear: I'm using the term while suspending any reference to Heidegger's ideas. With the term "mood" I want to denote the socially enforced disposition of individuals to symbolize and interpret their own emotional states according to obliging emotional styles (especially strong in the case of secondary emotions). This disposition can modify also the cognitive acts of individuals, and this aspect of the phenomenon is not covered by the term "emotional style."

The emotional style can be included into the cultural image of the world as it's next, fourth stratum and in this way a concept may be achieved that finally catches the intuitions connected with mentality as the object of historical research. We can speak now about differently "mooded" images of the world. But such a decision provokes further doubts and questions, with the first of them concerning the relationships between the first three strata of the world-image and the mood. At least two aspects of these relationships can be easily noticed.

The first of them is implied by the fact that the image of the world always includes evaluating judgements; and values of any kind cause

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<sup>11</sup> M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Blackwell, Hoboken 1967.



emotions, which is quite an obvious observation. If for any human community the world is evaluated, then, the world is automatically the object of emotional reactions. Now we can define mood a bit more closely: it also denotes the emotional relations of the community to the world, based upon the process of the valuation. The mood obviously has its psychological aspect, but we deal with it as long as it works as a frame, within which the human acts and their results are possible to understand. It would be hard to understand what happened, for example, in Clermont in 1095 without any reference to this emotional frame.

The second aspect of relationships between intellectual components of the world-image and mood is easily comprehended in the light of Nelson Goodman's deliberation of the cognitive functions of emotions, presented in his *Languages of Art*.<sup>12</sup> The American philosopher noticed something that, after he had noticed it, that is, seems so obvious and overlooked by many. According to Goodman our actual mood, i.e. our current emotional states and dispositions, modify our everyday cognitive processes, and our cognition of *Lebenswelt* is partially determined by emotional processes (I would add: we can develop special techniques to minimize this impact, like in the natural and formal sciences). Considering in this light the importance of cognitive elements of the image of the world, its categories and statements, it is reasonable to include the aspect of mood directly into it. The mood modifies the character of the whole of the image, creating a kind of emotional filter through which truths and values are seen. Goodman's examples come from the field of arts and we can follow him in this regard. Let's consider some basic phenomena of romantic music. The melancholy of *Symphony in b* by Franz Schubert, popularly although improperly known as *The Unfinished Symphony*, may be, as an emotion, something that we, listeners, never experienced in our everyday life. Being an aesthetic value established within the artwork, it may be as well something that Schubert too never experienced (Schubert was, small thing to remember, a composer: he knew how to construct a proper expressivity of musical work). Listening to *Symphony in b* is, nevertheless, not limited to reactive "oh!" and "ah!" but also, in one of its aspects, a cognitive adventure: we are learning both some new kind of emotion and also how the world looks through the lens of this emotion. The art of

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<sup>12</sup> N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis 1976.

this kind allows us to experience the world in experimental moods and thanks to this, to understand alien images of the world. The art, even the art concentrated purely on emotion, is above all a form of cognition and understanding, and in this regard its offer may be, as in this case, deeper and much less problematic than the effects of scholarly study.

I fully agree with Goodman both on the function of emotions within the arts and the cognitive character of emotions. Researching these phenomena requires special carefulness though. An artwork, like Schubert's symphony, or even a set of artworks, Schubert's "b minor moods" as Richard Taruskin baptized them,<sup>13</sup> do not necessarily bring any insight into the emotional style of Vienna in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even if it did, why should Schubert's "b minor moods" be any more representative than Beethoven's "c minor moods" for instance? Artworks may be individual, experimental, compensative, archaic, prophetic, socially marginal and more often than not ambiguous. Still, neglecting them would mean the loss of sometimes the only chance to understand the emotional aspects of past life. The solution is to move away from the autonomous study of artworks to a study of their reception: what kind of emotions were interesting for the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Viennese composer and his audience? What kind of emotional images were fascinating? What was deemed to be a "deep" emotional life? Eventual fascination – in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century an actual one – with musical works like *Symphony in b* is not a testimony to an explosion of collective melancholy. But it does testify to social interest in melancholy, and shows that melancholy, subjectively experienced or not, belonged to the socially required emotional style of a time and place; at least this is true for some part of the people.

Accepting the thesis on cognitive frames formed by emotions, on the "cognitive moods," there is no longer any reason to not include mood as a rightful stratum of the image of the world. Such an image can be, then, described now as consisting of four strata: the categorial system, the system of descriptive statements about the world, the set of evaluating judgements and the emotional style.

Some previous remarks on the problems of researching the emotional styles have already shown the crucial importance of semiotic processes in communicating and shaping images of the world. Every world image

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<sup>13</sup> R. Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 3, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2010.

is dependent on the characteristics of many semiotic systems, thanks to which it can gain intersubjective accessibility and then social validity. There's not much risk, in hypothesis, that every image of the world has some semiotic specifics that cannot be separated from it. If this is the case, these semiotic characteristics of the world-image must be necessarily included to the image of the world itself as its fifth stratum.

The concept of such a stratified world-image, achieved in this way, is already something quite different from Gurevich's concept, although the differences lie more in explicit theoretical decisions than in the actual practice of research. Even if not distinguished and named by Gurevich, all the strata that we have previously described are objects of Gurevich's own studies. Many essays brought about the detailed study of categorial system. *Medieval Popular Culture* is in large part dedicated to a study of what we call here the stratum of descriptive statements. The problems of values and world-valuation can be found in almost every study that Gurevich ever wrote. Also the studies concentrated on the fourth and fifth strata of the world-image can be pointed out. There is a fascinating study in *Historical Anthropology of Middle Ages* on what we call the emotional style, dealing with medieval Scandinavia: *On Heroes, Things, Gods and Laughter in Germanic Poetry*. There's also last but not least, an extended study on the relationship between the world-image and its main semiotic system (that is language, of course) based upon the analysis of the old Nordic terminology of land ownership. We have in this chapter remained true, I hope, to Gurevich's historical anthropology.



## Chapter 4

# From mentality to culture: knowledge and act

It seems that thanks to Febvre and above all Gurevich we managed to achieve a somewhat ordered equivalent to what historians of culture habitually call the “mentality.” There’s a paradox within this analysis though: every detail has led further and further away from the first psychological and ethnological intuitions. The final step, the five-strata structure of the image of the world, doesn’t resemble much Lévy-Bruhl’s concept of mentality and probably no psychologist would agree to name it with this term. What we came to is, in fact, a socially organized and structured system of knowledge that is shared, to greater or lesser extent, by the members of some group. Even the emotional style we included as part of the world-image’s cognitive frame and style of emotion-symbolizing. This system falls completely under the definition of cultural knowledge or, in other words, under the cognitive definition of culture. In its most popular and classical version, proposed by Ward Goodenough,<sup>1</sup> it even includes socially shared emotions or at least socially induced emotional dispositions. It’s probably high time to finally replace the term “mentality” with the more accurate term “culture.” The analysis provided here suggests that the so called “history of mentality” always was *de facto* the history of culture anyway.

Let’s be just, though: there are some reasons for which many historians may still prefer the term “mentality.” The name “history of culture” quite usually denoted and often still denotes a special species of historical output:

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<sup>1</sup> W. Goodenough, *Culture, Language and Society*, Addison-Wesley Modular Publications, Reading 1971.

the recital of products of symbolic and material activity, the catalogue of names, the list of baroque buildings and writings in 17<sup>th</sup> century Rome, the list of Gothic churches in Silesia, etc. This kind of historical output, this kind of “history of culture,” criticized and often ridiculed, is still far from being abandoned. And it represents just “battle-history” in a different field – exactly what the French historians of the “Annales” tradition intentionally and so fiercely opposed. One can easily understand such a sentiment toward even a tantalizingly unclear concept, like mentality, that became also a banner directed against such a “history of culture.” And such a history was even further from the “Annales” postulates than any political history, especially political history of a high self-awareness like the school founded on Leopold Ranke’s tradition. Today, we probably shouldn’t name such “catalogue-history” a history of culture any longer. A name like “history of artistic and scientific output” would be more proper (or even more correctly: a chronicle of the artistic and scientific output).

It’s now perhaps a good moment to go back to a problem previously mentioned as the second most important dilemma connected with the concept of mentality: the relationship between mentality and human acting. After replacing the idea of mentality with a proper concept of culture, we can now express this problem differently: what is the relationship between cultural knowledge and human acting? What is the relationship between culture and social practice? And this is, of course, the classic problem of cultural anthropology, philosophy of culture and sociology. The answer proposed long ago in the form of the typology of acting by Max Weber,<sup>2</sup> proved to be influential up to today and probably the most canonical one. It served well during the critique of the nomothetic model of history within the analytical philosophy of history provided by William Herbert Dray.<sup>3</sup> It served well also in construction of hermeneutical philosophy of history proposed by Paul Ricoeur.<sup>4</sup> In Poland it formed the basis for one of the most influential theories of culture, i.e. the social-regulatory theory of culture formulated by Jerzy Kmita.<sup>5</sup>

Let’s start with Kmita’s proposition. The Polish philosopher assumed the generalized in comparison to Weber theoretical model of rational acting,

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<sup>2</sup> M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, University of California Press, Oakland 1978.

<sup>3</sup> W.H. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1957.

<sup>4</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1984–1988.

<sup>5</sup> J. Kmita, *Kultura i poznanie*, PWN, Warsaw 1985.

covering Weber's categories of purpose-rational acts and value-rational acts, allowing also the interpretation of traditional acting. It doesn't cover the category of affective acting though.

According to Kmita's conception, the subjective-rational acting can be described as being regulated by a determinant which includes two elements: the norm and the directive. The norm points to the purpose of the act, in other words it prescribes a value realized by acting. The directive, subdued to the norm, indicates the way to achieve the normatively prescribed value. Both the norm and the directive are accessible as long as they are articulated in the medium of language, and therefore they are always given as normative and directival judgements and can be described semantically as the denotations of respective utterances. From the point of view of the acting subject, we can speak about normative and directival beliefs. If we consider the whole of the normative and directival beliefs of a given subject, we can describe them as hierarchically ordered.

Such a conception of human acting can be only accepted if one previously accepts the so called "assumption of rationality." This requires some slight elucidation, because Kmita's conception tends to be misinterpreted at this point. Neither the substantial idea of reason, nor the similar idea of rationality is assumed here. Rationality is assumed only in the meaning proposed by decision theory, although "loosened" in comparison to its uses in mathematics, economics, cybernetics or engineering. In a simplified form, this concept of rationality can be elucidated in the following way: every acting subject disposes a set of possible purposes, although they are preferred to different degrees. The hierarchy of possible purposes forms the order of preference, which can be expressed by assigning to every possible purpose a numerical value from 0 to 1 (where "0" denotes the unwanted purpose, while "1" denotes a maximal preference). The acting subject has also a certain knowledge about the circumstances of his or her acts and about the probability of achieving different possible purposes. This subjectively comprehended probability of achieving a certain purpose in the circumstances given can be also expressed by a numerical value from 0 to 1, just like in mathematical probability theory. The highest product of multiplying the value of preference and the value of esteemed probability, contained of course between 0 and 1, indicates the action that will be taken. Such a concept may be, of course, useful when dealing with purely theoretical game situation or trying to predict the mass-behaviour of groups. When trying to explain an action taken by an individual, however, this concept of rationality requires modification.

The most general assumption stands: that individuals, while acting, remain true to their beliefs (axiological hierarchy) and to their knowledge about the means and circumstances of their acting. All the mathematical apparatus must be abandoned however. First, this is because the individual's hierarchy of purposes may be the object of continuous changes and remains notoriously unclear. Assigning to these purposes strict numerical values does not then make much sense. At the same time though, the quality of the decision-rationality concept that many value most, its ability to fund a valid prediction, is practically lost. After the rejection of the quantitative model, the concept may only help in explaining acts already actually taken. But cultural theory may well limit itself to such explanations, giving up the ambition to predict. Second, the most valuable element of decision-rationality theory to be preserved is the reference not to an "objective" hierarchy of purposes or to "objectively true" knowledge about the circumstances of acting, but to subjective beliefs of the person acting. This is why Kmita used the term "subjective-rational determinacy" and not "rational determinacy."

Assumption of rationality, reduced to the assumption of the consequence of subjective knowledge and acting, is not a psychological statement and states nothing, or rather is not obliged to state anything, about the psychological process of deciding. It is only a methodological assumption that renders human acts possible objects of interpretation. In other words, without the assumption of rationality no connection can be established between human acting and human beliefs or, on the scale of society, between cultural knowledge and social practice. It would probably not be an exaggeration to say that without the assumption of rationality, neither the history of culture nor its theory are possible, or at least they lack acceptable criteria and can become the realm of phantasmagoria. Of course, it's true that real people seem sometimes to behave in a contradictory manner to even such a narrowly defined rationality. Usually though it means that either we lack a proper knowledge about people's beliefs and axiology, or that we are dealing with such an act that is determined by factors other than cultural and which therefore cannot be explained by cultural theory. We may point here to physiologically determined reflexes (rationality and beliefs have nothing to do with how our eyes react to light, and extending cultural explanation to behaviour out of conscious control would have ridiculous consequences, like assuming that falling stone realizes such a value like "falling down" according to its



knowledge about gravity as a mean of acting...), actions taken under extreme emotional tension, actions determined by mental illness and a few other phenomena. There's no need to claim the explanatory omnipotence of cultural theory; it's more important to remain within the realm of phenomena for which cultural explanations are valid.

Anyway, Kmita's concept of subjective-rational acts and the respective mode of explanation, called the subjective-rational explanation or humanistic interpretation (I will consequently use the first term to not provoke misunderstandings: the term "interpretation" remains traditionally connected not with explanation but with what German philosophy calls "understanding"), agrees well with both Max Weber's sociological tradition and many concepts proposed by historians and philosophers of history: from Johann Gustav Bernhard Droysen's idea of "moral forces"<sup>6</sup> and the forms of historical explanation considered in analytical philosophy after Carl Gustav Hempel, up to Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy of history.

Subjective-rational explanation deals with the acting of the individual, and to formulate a concept that would connect the cultural image of the world with social practice, we need to move to the social plane. This step has been made by Kmita. The social practice is the name that the Polish philosopher uses to describe the whole complex of subjective-rational acts taken by members of a given society. Social practice can be divided into different types, gathering similar acts, according to the social division of labour (at least in most of known societies). Every type of social practice (for example artistic or political practice) can be characterized by a set of recurring norms and directives, regulating repeatable acts. These can be reconstructed as socially shared normative-directive complexes. Such a complex is, of course, the effect of scholarly reconstruction, not the separate "ontological level" of reality. Kmita named such complexes with the term "forms of social consciousness," borrowed from Marx in a slightly modified meaning. We have then a "social form of consciousness – type of social practice" system. The set of social forms of consciousness, connected with different types of social practice, is what Kmita called "culture." We can then replace the description of the system with a broader one: "culture – social practice." "Culture" defined in this way consists of socially shared but subjectively held beliefs and can be described as "mental reality" as long as we remember that it is reconstructed thanks to ideation and we do not interpret it psychologically.

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<sup>6</sup> J. G. B. Droysen, *Outlines in the Principles of History*, Ginn – Company, Boston 1897.

What exactly is the status of such beliefs and their connection with acting? The modes of this are described by distinction between “accepting” and “respecting” the beliefs. The acceptance of cultural beliefs is without any doubt a mental act, that – curiously – does not always need to accompany the acts taken in agreement with these beliefs. Take language: we do not mentally accept the rules of grammar, we simply follow them. Beliefs, granted to us in the process of enculturation, can be treated as being of “a second nature” and we do not even need to be fully aware of them to respect them. Respecting the cultural norms is then something not mental but behavioural: we follow them regardless of our acceptance and awareness. Four types of connection between culture and acting can be then deduced from Kmita’s theory: respecting the norms with acceptance, respecting without acceptance, acceptance without respecting (for example non-practicing Christians) and, of course, the lack of both acceptance and respecting, i.e. the rejection of one’s society’s culture. Kmita’s theory, misunderstood sometimes for some kind of strict cultural determinism (not without Kmita’s own responsibility, thanks to the frequent use of the word “determination”) includes then, although implicitly, types of behaviour ranging from extreme cultural conformism up to a rebellion. To generally describe the relation of culture to social practice Kmita preferred the term “regulation,” hence the name “social-regulatory theory of culture.” But the situation of rebellion seems to escape “regulation,” even if it’s still dependent on the cultural context. Here we touch the first of at least two important points, where Kmita’s theory and my previous theses do not agree. It’s worthwhile to take a closer look at this disagreement.

The situation of rebellion, but also of accepting beliefs without respecting them, seems to point to a different relation than the regulatory one between cultural knowledge and social practice. It may also mean that the idea of “regulation” is a bit too narrow. We already know how to extend it: the answer is in Febvre’s theory of *ouillage mental*.

Both Kmita’s and Febvre’s theoretical propositions, taken separately, describe only a part of the possible connections between knowledge and acting. Cultural beliefs can, of course, take regulative functions and even the most creative and non-conformist individual respects lots of social norms unawares: so much is obvious. We can safely assume that even a person so impressively free from group intellectual habits like, say, Friedrich Nietzsche, rented his hotel rooms as was customarily done. Why should he do it otherwise? Just the same, he respected – and with

what an effect! – the rules of German language, which guaranteed his communicational effectiveness. On the other hand, even seemingly the most conformist and non-creative individual regularly uses the cultural norms and directives as tools: if a humble clerk, in everyday life perfectly embodying the “Keiser und König cultural conformism,” suddenly refuses to shake hands with his superior, or even to properly greet him (because he, for example, feels mistreated too much), he no longer respects the rules of custom and instead uses them to manifest something through cultural disobedience (like preserving his own personal dignity). “Regulating” and “serving as tools” seem, then, to describe two crucial modes of the social functioning of cultural knowledge, modes that are coexisting and that are not mutually exclusive. We move between them spontaneously and without effort and they can define our behaviour in different circumstances and different fields of life.

Even the typology of cultures is imaginable according to their preference of one of these modes above another. It's enough though to differentiate two distinct model states of cultural knowledge. I'd call them figuratively “sleeping” and “awoken” culture. “Sleeping culture” is characterized by a strong dominance of the regulative mode over using cultural knowledge as a tool. So called “traditional cultures” probably belong here, including many non-European cultures and traditional peasant-cultures. The change in such cultures may be the effect of the imperfect transmission of cultural knowledge or unintentional innovations more than the effect of intentional acts. The “waking of the culture,” i.e. its moving towards the dominance of using the cultural knowledge as a set of tools for creative acting, usually manifests itself in radical changes and takes place under circumstances that can be recognized and researched. I think such a wakening is what Arnold Toynbee tried to research as part of the “birth of the civilization.” There are some “permanently awoken” cultures, like in the Western world starting with the industrial revolution or even with the Italian Renaissance or the Reformation. There are also spectacular cases of a sudden “waking up” of traditional cultures, that obviously demand close study from this point of view. Such a case is the Ghost Dance movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Native Americans, inspired by the Paiute prophet Wovoka.<sup>7</sup> It's a very rare example of the activity of a founder of religion in a well documented chronological period, of an “American Muhammad,” although one lacking sufficient economic and military support.

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<sup>7</sup> M. Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1990.

If assuming the interdependence between the regulatory and tool modes of the functioning of cultural knowledge removes the first disagreement between Kmita's theory and my previous propositions, there are still other disagreements remaining, above all the terminological and theoretical conflict between the concept of culture proposed as an effect of the analysis of Gurevich's ideas and the definition of culture in Kmita's theory.

Let's recall: the culture, as a theoretic equivalent to the unclear concept of "mentality," has been defined as a stratified image of the world, shared by the members of some community. Kmita, on the other hand, defines culture as the normative and directival knowledge connected directly with acting. If we want to preserve both the effects of the previous analysis of historians' concept of mentality and the link between knowledge and acting proposed in Kmita's theory, this disagreement must be solved. Luckily, it is based more on the different terminological choices than on deep, theoretical conflict.

The whole sphere that is here described, after Gurevich, as a cultural image of the world is also considered by Kmita, but as a part of the whole broader than culture, i.e. as a part of social consciousness. Why Kmita narrowed the meaning of the word "culture" so much is easy to comprehend. At least two goals are simultaneously achieved thanks to such a semantic narrowing. First, culture is strictly connected with human behaviour, and its concept excludes everything that cannot be observed in social practice. In this way the traditional contradiction between the concept of cultural knowledge and older concepts of culture as behavioural patterns has been overcome. This solution should not be underestimated, because it allows to integrate both different theories and different empirical researches. Second, in this way an empirical criterion is established for any reconstruction of cultural knowledge: its validity can be estimated thanks to the reference to social practices. Kmita's decision was, then, well founded.

At the same time, though, this well founded decision somewhat contradicts basic intuitions that are connected with the term "culture," shared by most of scholars and expressed in a straightforward way by Yuri Lotman: "Let's emphasize, that the concept 'culture,' belonging to the most fundamental in the cycle of sciences about humans, could become and not once became the subject-matter of a separate book. It would be strange, if we had aimed in here for the solution of contested problems, connected with this concept. It's very capacious: it contains morality, a whole world

of ideas, human creativity and many other things.”<sup>8</sup> Of course, I’m also not trying to solve all the dilemmas around the concept of “culture,” but still I hope to propose a formulation useful for cultural-historical research and following these basic intuitions. Preserving these intuitions forces us to take diverge from Kmita’s terminological decision, even if I consider it to be well founded. One of the reasons for this is simple but still relevant: narrowing the definition of culture in Kmita’s way, against commonly shared intuitions, would provoke (and really has provoked and provokes) constant terminological misunderstandings. But there is also a theoretical reason: I believe, that every serious research on the normative and directival knowledge forces a broader perspective and includes research on what Kmita calls the broader “social consciousness.” Let’s consider an example.

In some contemporary societies, for example in Poland, quite a common practice can be observed: many people follow the Roman Catholic observances, socially considered to be of great importance, like baptizing their children or marrying in the church. Not all of them are actual Catholic believers, and not so few are cultural conformists. The difference between baptizing a child by a believer and a nonbeliever can be yet expressed as different sets of norms and directives. The same directive “to achieve a goal *x*, and baptize your child according to Roman Catholic practice,” can serve different norms: “you should assure the place of your child within the community of the redeemed by washing off the original sin” for a hypothetical believer, and “you should assure the safe, not discriminated place in society for your child” for a hypothetical nonbeliever (and some acts may try to achieve both these goals). But the meaning of baptism or the set of meanings associated with baptism, the semantics of this act in a word, remain different for the believer and the non believer. This difference is not founded in the goals of their acts but in their different world-images. Reconstruction of the meaning of a symbol, and baptism is a symbol, demands an inevitable recursion to the sphere placed by Kmita beyond culture in the strict sense. This argument could be strengthened by almost every study in the history of culture, that always deals, under one name or another, with world-images. Why limit then the meaning of “culture” if actual research must cross this limitation anyway?

These two reasons, above, are, in my opinion, strong enough to justify following the broad meaning of the word “culture.” Still this broad

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<sup>8</sup> J. Łotman, *Rosja i znaki. Kultura szlachecka w wieku XVIII i na początku XIX*, słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdansk 2010, p. 5.

meaning can be defined precisely. Culture then will be understood in here as a conjunction of two great spheres of socially shared knowledge: the stratified cultural image of the world and the set of norms and directives, that connect culture with social practice. The empirical criterion has been sadly weakened in this way, and drastically weakened, but it can be less a problem for the history of culture than it seems: past behaviour and its direct results cannot be observed anyway, and are reconstructed by means more hermeneutical than empirical.

To save such a concept of culture from eclecticism, the next question must be necessarily issued, now concerning not the relationship between culture and social practice, but between the main spheres of culture, i.e. the image of the world and the norms-directives complex. Apart from describing these relations as multiple, two different forms of them can be distinguished.

There are some situations when cultural norms must be explicitly formulated and defended, for example when their validity is challenged by a part of society. Such an explicit legitimization of cultural norms, especially when not provided by professionals like theologians, philosophers or political ideologists but used in everyday discourse, tend sometimes to become multileveled: you should not fornicate, because it is forbidden by the Sixth Commandment, and the Ten Commandments are a direct expression of God's will, and one should be obedient to His will, for it is the only source of knowledge of good and evil; and you should do good not only for the fear of punishment, but also out of love to God, etc. Let's notice that every single statement of such a discourse makes sense only within a certain image of the world, which includes the existence of a transcendent and moral God, which evaluates human acts according to their moral effects; let's notice then that cultural norms are legitimized by statements belonging to a certain world-image. The first type of relation between the image of the world and normative-directive knowledge is the legitimization of norms by statements belonging to the world-image. Let's call such statements, when considered in this particular function, the norm legitimizing judgements. Of course, not always do cultural norms require explicit legitimization, not when they are simply followed – it can be probably connected with the degree of “awakefulness” of the given culture. Even rarer, but gender relations in contemporary Europe are striking example of this rarity, are situations, when cultural norms become an object of public debate and deliberation. They seem characteristic for

societies shaken by industrial revolution, but even within such societies primacy seems to still belong to the mechanics of conformism, discursive power, social exclusion, etc., in a few words, to all the processes described by Gramsci<sup>9</sup> as domination and hegemony (and that, he believed, may be overcome). This primacy, unsympathetic as it is, against all appearances, is valid also for “highly developed societies,” if one is colonially minded enough, to accept such a term. But even in most traditional groups we usually find a set of myths or otherwise formulated religious beliefs that provide a strong and legitimizing link between world-image and cultural norms. The same function can be fulfilled by a metaphysical system or political ideologies. The practical significance of these forms of knowledge for the processes of enculturation may differ, although 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian societies provide examples of extremely high importance. If image of the world is connected with set of norms and directives as its legitimization, it’s also indirectly connected with social practice and human acting.

Let’s consider a second way in which the world-image and normative-directive knowledge are connected, one already analyzed in detail by Kmita, although in different terminology. If we go back to our simplified example of multileveled dependencies between norms and legitimizing judgements, we can emphasize now that actual behaviour based upon the forbiddance of fornication depends to a lesser extent on any legitimization than on a semantic decision. Both the history of language and the history of religions teach us that the meaning of the word “fornication” is flexible, historically changing – this means that the exact meaning of forbiddance itself is the object of change and relative to the semantic context. Even within different forms of Judaism and Christianity it may denote only adulteration in the narrowest meaning or every sexual act not aimed at proliferation, including ones within heterosexual marriages. Actual human behaviour may, then, be rooted in the history of semantics, and the meaning of norms is always comprehended within the frame of the world-image, including its valuations. A bit closer look at Kmita’s semantic conception should make it clear.<sup>10</sup>

Kmita claims that units of language (words, sentences) do not only denote objects of reference. The latter are determined not by any metaphysical relation between the language and the world, but by the social practice of using language, similarly to the later ideas of Wittgenstein. The object

<sup>9</sup> A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Columbia University Press, New York 2011.

<sup>10</sup> J. Kmita, *Kultura...*



of reference of a given unit can be then defined as the social acceptability of using this unit to denote a given object for the competent linguistic community (usually a community of native speakers). Denotation is not all the meaning, though, because mapping the language by the practice of using it never happens in a neutral world, but in the world that is already characterized and evaluated. In the terminology proposed here, we can say that language is not mapped onto “the world” but onto the cultural image of the world. Kmita conceptualized this situation by introducing the concept of semantic presumptions. Semantic presumptions are judgements, descriptive or valuating, that do not indicate the denoted object of a given semantic unit, but provide knowledge and valuations that are implicitly assumed in the act of communication. For example the Polish words “zabójca” and “morderca” both denote a person who has killed someone, but the presumed valuations are different. Every killer can be called “zabójca” (it’s relatively neutral term), but we reserve the word “morderca” for crimes and especially offensive acts. We wouldn’t name anybody who killed in self-defence or a soldier who killed an enemy soldier in a clear combat situation with the word “morderca.” If one calls a soldier “morderca,” one usually challenges the social order legalizing war killing, or suggests that some war crimes have been committed. Personally, I can’t recall any use of this word to denote the act of self-defence. In European languages we meet similar semantic oppositions quite often, like the English “killer” – “murderer” or the German “Attentäter” – “Mörder.” Such a distinction is fully comprehensible only if we consider all the history of the European images of killing, starting with the ethics of the knighthood and the idea of honour. It demands the study of the Western cultural image of the world then. Using one of these words – and its only an example of a common situation – we start a full chain of semantic presumptions, both descriptive and valuating, belonging to our image of the world (including, more often than not, some of its past versions that could seem no longer functioning). The second connection between the cultural image of the world and normative-directival knowledge is established by the semantic presumptions, thanks to which norms can establish values. There’s no need to additionally emphasize the fact that valuating presumptions are crucial for explaining subjective-rational acts.

Let’s consider now the theses that were proposed here up to this point, and some more theses that are rather non-controversially accepted in the contemporary humanities: that the basic link between the main spheres



of culture (the image of the world and normative-directival knowledge) is of a semantic character; that both these spheres are accessible only if they were expressed as sets of signs, above all as utterances in language; that every process of enculturation or socialization is communicationally mediated by the use of signs; that every subjective-rational act, either culturally regulated or manipulating cultural knowledge in the form of a tool, requires understanding of the signs, i.e. requires interpretation; that no semiotic system is fully transparent, i.e. the qualities of semiotic systems modify what is communicated (up to the famous saying of Marshall McLuhan's: "the medium is the message").

These theses can be, I think, accepted now without additional deliberation and such an acceptance places the theory and history of communication and symbols in the centre of the study of culture. In short, it places semiotics in a somewhat privileged place. Yuri Lotman expressed such a belief very strongly: "According to what we said, culture is something common for a given community – a group of people living at the same time and connected by a certain social organization. It implies that culture is a form of *communication* between people and it's possible only in a group in which people communicate amongst themselves. [...] Every structure serving the sphere of human communication is a language. It means that it creates a certain system of signs, used according to the rules that are familiar to members of given society."<sup>11</sup> I don't think that Lotman intended to *limit* the theory of culture to semiotics. Such a limitation is not desirable for a few reasons, above all for the necessity of connecting cultural knowledge and human acting with their environment (both social and geographical). This will yet become an important problem here. The rejection of semiotic reduction, though, does not remove semiotic problems from the centre of the theory of culture. Most of them could be interpreted, by the way, as hermeneutic, not only semiotic problems.

All the elucidation of the concept of culture proposed here is, of course, not lacking its own problems. At least one of the possible theoretical accusations, of the most general nature, should be considered before moving any further.

Replacing the concept of "mentality" with the concept of culture doesn't automatically solve problems; furthermore there is a danger of repeating the same errors under a different name. The concept of culture seems to

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<sup>11</sup> J. Łotman, *Rosja i znaki...*, p. 5.

still assume the existence of a relatively unified collective consciousness of unclear status, so it seems to repeat both ontological dilemmas and the unifying effects of the concept of mentality. Additionally, the concept of cultural knowledge seems to cut the world of shared ideas off from the economic and geographical context just as the concept of mentality did. Finally, the concept of culture has been so far considered only structurally and synchronically: where's the time and the change? Did we not lose history meanwhile? The second and third doubts will be further studied in detail, but the first requires some kind of immediate answer.

Cultural knowledge don't have to be treated as a separate dimension of reality and its concept is not doomed to provoke ontological dilemmas. It's enough to assume that we are always dealing with the beliefs of individuals, and only individuals, and that such beliefs can be shared at least to some reasonable extent by other individuals. Cultural knowledge is then nothing more but a scholar's construct, serving for explanation and understanding of those human phenomena that are involving many individuals in a similar way, like speaking the same language. Is such a construct necessary, if ultimately it can be decomposed into sets of individual beliefs? What can we achieve thanks to it that could not be achieved from the individualistic perspective?

Individual beliefs are not accessible unless they were expressed or communicated, i.e. articulated according to the rules of some semiotic system, usually language. Semiotic systems, though cannot be reduced to individual phenomena: no system of this kind can be fully controlled by any individual, and its full individualization would cease its communication effectiveness (*via* the paradox of private language). None of such systems is also fully transparent or neutral. The belief generally, even if we do not intend to communicate it to any other person, as long as we speak about beliefs, not emotions, is always semiotically shaped. Our own beliefs are given to us in a form mediated by language, that is, not purely ours.

This can be expressed even more strongly: thanks to the interdependency of language and thinking, no user of language presents himself or herself in an unmediated way: even for ourselves we are objects of interpretation and we do not have "direct access" to ourselves (if anything, this is what can make each human quite a unique being and defines the difference between an animal and a human). What we call our singularity or innermost experience includes the presence of elements social and cultural. Singularity is founded not in self-reflection, but in the uniqueness of our body and its

particular experiences: pain, pleasure, etc.; at least this is so as long as we do not start to think what our pain can indicate and read it as a symptom of illness only. So, against Schopenhauer's claims we are not given to ourselves as "Ding an sich" but as a chain of changing interpretations, formulated in accordance with the rules of semiotic systems, that are never truly our individual products, even if we use them in an extremely individual way, on the border of idiosyncrasy. This state of human affairs was described by traditional structural and early poststructural theories, treating the individual as only the result, the "crossing point" of different structures and grammars, starting with language. Michel Foucault expressed it in his famous thesis on "the death of man," removing human beings, these "results" only, from the field of view of the humanities and replacing them with autonomous relations between different structures. We do not need to follow Foucault's extremism here after we have allowed to treat cultural knowledge, the semiotic system and social practices ("discourses" in Foucault's terminology) as not only regulating factors, but also as tools to be creatively used. This even renews the problem of what it means to be human and of human singularity. It's tempting to call it "the rebirth of human" to directly challenge Foucault: we are going not towards a vision of grammars and structures determining and "producing" the human, but towards a human using those grammars and practices to produce himself and his world. There is no need to challenge Foucault here, though, as the French philosopher noticed the very same problem and followed a similar path in his so called "late writings." If *Discipline and Punish*<sup>12</sup> brought the study of "subject production" by social and discursive techniques of power, the second and third volume of *The History of Sexuality*<sup>13</sup> brought an altered vision of the subject, manipulating elements of discourses as tools and "producing himself" (the subject) with the use of what I call culture. This study was based on hellenistic techniques of sexual ethics and medicine. To a very large extent I share this vision of the relationship between the individual and culture.

If we are dealing, then, not with the matter of the ontological status of culture, but with the usefulness of such a concept in the explanation of human acts and their results, we are of course reaching back to the

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<sup>12</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, New York 1977.

<sup>13</sup> M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, New York 1990.

traditional opposition, dividing methodological individualism and anti-individualism. It was a traditional individualist view that social and cultural phenomena are off-products or even the sum of individual acts. Such a standpoint was assumed, for example by the psychologistic theories of the threshold of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Anti-individualist's point of view assumed the contrary standpoint, that superindividual structures like language, social organization, ideology, etc. follow autonomous rules and determine the individual phenomena. It was the standpoint of authors as different as Hegel, Comte, anthropological and sociological functionalists and structuralists, up to and including *Discipline and Punish*. The conciliation of these points of view is usually deemed impossible, and the choices of the scholars always included more ideological commitment than the scholarly arguments. This is nothing surprising or exceptionally unhealthy, when both sides have strong scholarly arguments and still none of them seem decisive. Anti-individualism never managed to ultimately exorcise the ontological dilemma haunting it from the beginning and expressed in the famous saying: "It's not the culture, who paints the nails." It also failed quite spectacularly when applied to the explanation of the empirical behaviour of the individual. On the other hand, the individualist didn't do any better, while dealing with any phenomena of an obvious group character: the rules of marriage, systems of kinship, social stratification, and above all language. Individualistic solutions to these problems create an encyclopaedia of forced scholarly inventiveness. These were exactly the problems that could be easily and convincingly solved from the anti-individualist point of view.

The debate proved to be inconclusive and is sometimes treated today as belonging to the history of humanities, and yet every scholar of human affairs still is making such a choice when trying to work. The current tendency seems to favour the individualist solution, especially when dealing with contemporary Western societies of loosened cultural regulation and high individualization. This tendency is visible in anthropological practice, especially in the anthropology of contemporary societies, of replacing the idea of culture with "the cultural," no longer objectified but treated as an aspect of a holistic act. No longer is the culture identified as the object of research but as a cultural dimension of human activities. The same tendency within history is marked by similar shift in terminology, from the "history of culture" to "cultural history." As long as this tendency is justified by the belief, that the individualization of modern life renders

group structures less important, it could be repelled: the decomposition of shared knowledge and values seems to be accompanied now by the unprecedented functional integration of society thanks to labour organization, patterns of consumers' behaviour, etc. But the tendency towards methodological individualism doesn't need to rely on this particular justification. It is justified enough by the effectiveness of both the individualist and anti-individualist points of view in different explanatory areas and the lack of any decisive closure to the old debate.

The point of view that I try to assume here tries to find some way out of this situation. It can be elucidated in the following way.

Only individual people think, act, produce and communicate. But everything that is said, written, produced or done becomes separated from the acting person. The basic mechanics of this process has been recognized and described in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Hegel and Marx. First is what Hegel calls "inequality of intention and effect": everything we do is determined by materials and circumstances that we don't fully control and which inevitably enters the intersubjective space, where other people will act in a way we can neither predict nor control. The last factor is especially important for every act of communication, rendering every meaning the object of social manipulation. What we had intended to do, then, never equals to what we have actually done and the effects of our acts stand against us as an outer reality. Things, thanks to other people, gain a history separate to the maker's intentions, like a painting covered by hundreds of years of interpretations. And we never act alone: while other people act we meet their actions and their products as part of the outer reality and we do with them what others did with the effects of our acts. In the end, nobody fully controls the world of the effects of human acts and this world itself seems to follow some set of impersonal rules. It stands against us as a reality that requires understanding, if we are to act effectively. For example, every economic act is ultimately done by an individual: some empiric person is buying, selling, speculating, estimating the risk, etc. But the effects of many such acts are out of anybody's full control, stand out as a reality we call the market, and have to be studied as an autonomous whole if we want to enter it into a successful way. In this process individual acts and their results are "alienated" from acting individuals and become themselves parts of the world that we must deal with. Even a philosopher who cannot be suspected of any sympathy for Hegel or Marx, Karl Raimund Popper, implicitly accepted this reasoning

when he distinguished his famous “third world” of objectified and autonomized products of human acts, next to the worlds of the physical and the psychological.<sup>14</sup> We can call culture, following Hegel, alienated thinking. It doesn’t mean we follow Hegel any further: such an expression is only a way to emphasize the fact that every individual stands against the world that is already given and cannot be fully in control, and in effect forms a part of reality. From this point of view, elements of culture, like the grammar of the language or the system of law are as hard a reality as the realm of the physical. Outer reality then is the place from where we take also semiotic systems, even if we creatively use them as tools, thanks to which we can become aware of ourselves.

Everything individual is, then, social and everything social becomes individualized: it’s a vicious circle of human reality, from which both methodological individualists and anti-individualist try to isolate the “ruling side.” There’s probably not such a side and maybe a circle is not so vicious – everyday we manage to live within it more or less successfully, hanging between the singularity of the body and the general character of language. This situation doesn’t allow any questions on the genetic primacy of the social or the individual: we have to yet find a proper pre-culture people. And even if we did, we would need to somehow communicate or interact with them. From this far ahead they would be no longer pre-cultural. But just as we lack an individual before culture, we never find culture outside of individuals: everything we reconstruct is someone’s act, product or utterance. If I am even slightly right, methodological individualism and anti-individualism are different cognitive perspectives, favouring different aspects of human life as objects of their study. Both have proved effective in their proper areas, and a scholar may still choose between them according to scientific needs or preferences. Rather it’s the tendency to reduce one to another or to reject one in the name of another that seems to be a dead end. Anyway, this is how culture seems to become superindividual.

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<sup>14</sup> K.R. Popper, *The Tanner Lecture on Human values*, delivered on April 7, 1978.

## Chapter 5

### Troubles with culture

What I am trying to do here, is do dispel the doubt over whether the proposed concept of culture, supposed to solve at least some problems touching the idea of mentality, does not evoke the very same dilemmas as mentioned thus far. One such problem, already mentioned above, is the enforced unification of diversified individual and group ways of thinking and acting into an artificially created whole. But any culture, even what we previously called a “sleeping culture,” is always an object of constant diversification. This process requires somewhat closer attention.

Contemporary cultural research, either empirical, historical or theoretical is especially sensitive to internal conflicts and contests, to any kind of group or individual resistance, and for a reason. This sensitiveness comes from the anthropological conceptions of hybridization and from the post-Foucault analysis of discourse, but also from detailed ethnographic and historical studies. These are not necessarily very recent studies. Tadeusz Manteufel,<sup>1</sup> studying movements of voluntary poverty in the Latin Middle Ages, showed the hybrid, diversified and conflict ridden character of Latin medieval culture and he did it many decades ago. No supposed cultural monolith stands under the closer examination, and experiences of microhistory have taught humanists to look very closely. New sensitiveness to differences and conflicts can't be then denied.

In the terminology proposed here we should consider not only the perspectives of the differentiated individual use of cultural knowledge, but primarily internal group-conflicts within the seemingly integrated

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<sup>1</sup> T. Manteufel, *Narodziny herezji*, PWN, Warsaw 1963.

culture. Every culture, supposedly every possible culture, but for sure every culture actually met, is internally diversified and open to potential conflict (and more often than not ridden with very actual conflicts). Contemporary humanities and social sciences recognized few important lines of division determined by social organization, but reflecting strongly on the level of shared cultural knowledge and processes involving it. The social division of labour should probably be named first; it also has the longest tradition of specialized research, including not only implied economic stratification but also class structure. Nobody would today deny that the “medieval culture” of the French peasants is something different than the “medieval culture” of the Aquitanian knights or something different than the “medieval culture” of the Byzantine monks and the “medieval culture” of the city-dwellers of Tuscany. Although seemingly obvious, differences of this kind are sometimes even now surprisingly omitted, generally in the case of traditional and no longer lively discussed – but still functioning – concepts. A good example is the presentation – not by professional historians but in popular discourse and in educational practices – of the culture of the Polish *szlachta* in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries as “Old Polish culture,” without limiting it properly to only one group of past Poles. It is, of course, less about methodological errors and more about ideological choices.

As obvious as class divisions – whoever of the theoreticians we will follow in respect to the concept of social class – are the divisions based upon ethnicity or religion. Both anthropological tradition – starting even with the proto-ethnographers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, usually Jesuit missionaries – and recent cultural studies pay close attention to stratifications and conflicts connected with differences of gender and age. The structural differentiation of culture according to lines of social organization, to differences of class, age and gender and connected with geographical organization (like the rural-urban opposition), seem to precede individual differences. Detailed study of any actual culture may supposedly discover some other stratifications of this kind, sometimes of a unique character; in this regard studies dedicated to contemporary postindustrial societies are especially enlightening.

Culture, then, as the object of scholarly research, can be described as a system of differentiated subcultures and these subcultures are furthermore subjects to processes of individualization of different degrees. For these reasons, many processes within a unit that is researched as distinct



culture are similar to intercultural processes. Three main forms of relations between distinct class, gender, etc. subcultures should probably be, then, regulated by systems of communication, exchange and violence. Of course, distinction of these three systems is a theoretical idealization, because in empiric study we meet mixed forms, when one of these systems functions as an environment for others (some situations of violence may be an exception to such a rule).

Of these systems, only the system of communication may be relatively effectively researched from a purely cultural point of view, while systems of exchange and violence require the application of a sociological perspective. The term “communication” denotes here the whole set of semiotic processes both within a distinct culture and between cultures. It is, then, a very wide concept, including what is usually distinguished as communication, manifestation, symbolization or expression. This is of course a very complex process, and scholars differ in their opinions, whether such a process can be explained by extending the analyses of linguistic communication. Let’s assume the communication involving two distinct subcultures of the same culture. Taking again the example in Aaron Gurevich’s spirit, let’s imagine an 11<sup>th</sup> century, Gallician peasant listening to a sermon – the only part of the liturgy presented in his vernacular, provided by an educated member of the Latin *docti*. If the sermon deals with, for example, the saints and their theological function, we can expect a very distinctive situation. The priest will be preaching from the perspective of rationalistic, theological knowledge, but his utterances will be interpreted by the peasant according to the rules of a magical culture, in which he still participates – the line that divides participants of this communication is exactly what Weber described as the “first disenchanting of the world.” Trying to understand the difference between what the priest said, and what the peasant heard, we will recall first the rules of the used vernacular language, probably *langue d’oc* in this case, but this reference will not suffice.

For many utterances or even singular words, the reconstruction of semantic presumptions will be needed and can show that although our communicators share some deal of cultural knowledge – because they belong to the same social organization – they still differ significantly in many points of their image of the world. These differences, equipping the same utterances with different semantic presumptions, including evaluating ones, cause an inequality between the told and the heard. Why even call it “communication”? Wouldn’t the name “discommunication”

be more proper? If we had reserved the name “communication” for only such a situation when the communication sent is perfectly equal to the communication received, we would then limit ourselves to artificially constructed formal languages that lack semantic presumptions, and in conclusion reject the very idea of cultural communication. While this is not a solution unheard of – it can be even obvious from the point of view of cybernetics and some forms of radical, philosophical epistemology – it doesn’t help much cultural theory or history. Inequality of the message sent and received is recognized well by many humanist concepts, like hermeneutic philosophy or deconstructivist literary criticism, and expressed in the famous maxim “every reading is misreading.” The theoretical notions contained in conceptions of the cultural image of the world, and semantic presumptions seem sufficient to explain this situation.

Internal cultural exchange denotes here the process during which the element of a distinct subculture is taken by another subculture with or without a change of its function and meaning. The difference between communication and exchange can be easily illustrated. The assimilating and integrating of elements of the Christian world-image by the European medieval peasantry included both communication and exchange processes. Changes within the peasants’ image of the world can be explained as the effects of communication, but for example the assimilation of “Gregorian water” as a magical object used in rituals of fertility is the case of exchange. The Christian meaning of holy water was neither interpreted nor assimilated: just the opposite, both the meaning and the functioning of holy water within Christianity has been abandoned and replaced with new ones. Another case: in European folk music from many regions the tonal structures typical for Franco-Roman liturgical music are quite regularly met. This is also a good example of cultural exchange: assimilating structures typical for plainchant didn’t require the understanding or even awareness of its rules, formulated by Carolignian scholars, or its symbolism or tonal relations, but bases upon treating the plainchant as a set of “ready-mades” or patterns for imitation, that could be taken and used, either in their entirety or in any fragments (or even by borrowing some distinct features). One more musical example: the difference between communication and exchange can be illustrated by the difference of attitude towards folk music that divides ethnomusicologist and practicing musician. Ethnomusicologists aims at the understanding of folk musical culture and presentation of this understanding to educated readers (for

whom folk music is usually the product of an alien subculture). The researcher then assumes the attitude of hermeneutics in its most literal meaning, as a translator working on the threshold of differing subcultures and evoking processes of communication (even if the effect of this work may be a one-directional, and then limited, communication). A practicing musician, say a rockman, including elements of folk music in his production, follows different a set of cultural rules, and it is enough if he can appropriate these elements without even worrying about their original context and meaning. Exchange is enough for him.

Of course the distinction between cultural communication and exchange is of an idealizing character as far as both these systems will usually work together. Still, they can be researched separately – this made the diffusionism in anthropology even possible, regardless of its later critiques. Theoretically, a “pure” pole of exchange would probably have to be limited to the transmission of tools, techniques and other elements, that can be sufficiently characterized by their functions and uses. The processes of communication and exchange find their point of indifference, on the other hand, in the assimilation of signs.

The third mode of internal relations between subcultures takes the form of violence, and even this phenomenon – maybe except for some of its extreme manifestations – remains closely interwoven with the process of cultural communication, because an act of violence, say, a public execution, can take the form of a sign. Some forms of symbolizing violence are even only possible within a symbolically integrated society. Two main dimensions of violence as a relation between distinct groups of society – and, for us, distinct subcultures – may be described by evoking the famous distinction between “domination” and “hegemony,” proposed by Antonio Gramsci.<sup>2</sup> The term “domination” denotes the system of power-relations within a certain society, based upon a disproportion of material force thanks to techniques of control and oppression, that are supported by physical violence or that can effectively activate such violence at will. “Hegemony” on the other hand denotes control and power enforced by symbolic means, i.e. the control of one group of people over the cultural knowledge of another group thanks to systems like education, the media, etc. This is exactly what came to be known as “symbolic violence.” In the terms proposed here, the hegemony can be precisely described as a situ-

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<sup>2</sup> A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Columbia University Press, New York 2011.

ation when one group of people forms or modifies in its own interest the culture of another group, especially the evaluating judgements of their world-image, and it can happen both as an intercultural relation and as an internal one. In the case of domination purely cultural explanations will obviously not suffice, but also the study of hegemony involves the necessary study of “hard” social organization. Assuming the primacy of either domination or hegemony would make analysis simpler, but it would be hard to verify or falsify such an assumption; doubtless, though, these two forms of violence interact and modify each other.

Many effects of internal power-relations within culture and society could be pointed out and at least two of them seem to be prevalent effects of the game of domination and hegemony, involving images of the world and their human bearers. These are hierarchy and conflict (or contest, which can be interpreted as a different species of conflict). Every act of violence, both physical and symbolic, establishes the hierarchy of power. If power-relations can't be deleted from the analysis of any sociocultural reality – that much of Michel Foucault's heritage is doubtless – then also constant hierarchization as a process and sociocultural hierarchy as its effect should be studied for every sociocultural structure. It's worth a special emphasis that not any given, this or another hierarchy, for example the hegemony of an elite artistic culture over a popular one, is a constant and necessary feature of the given culture, but the process of hierarchization itself, regardless of its content. Fernand Braudel emphasized hierarchy as a feature of every society for a reason. Hierarchies are reflected directly in their cultural images of the world and legitimized in this way, but their analysis still demands the study of their economical and social conditions.

And studying both the hierarchies contained in images of the world and hierarchies enforced by economical and political reality, allows to observe a phenomenon that I would call the latency of hegemony: the situation when changes in the cultural hierarchy of hegemony, i.e. the hierarchy of contesting axiological systems, discourses, etc., are latent to the changes in economical, political and social hierarchy of domination. Such a latency characterizes the aforementioned hierarchy of the elite and popular artistic culture in contemporary postindustrial societies. Under conditions of political democracy, the legitimacy of enforcing artistic hierarchies by traditional elites, including scholarly and academic elites, has been not only questioned, but withdrawn. And under unchallenged primacy of the market in regulating the circulation of symbolic products, the dominance

of popular culture is both unprecedented and probably unchallengeable at the moment. Which part of the artistic culture dominates now, in economical and social terms, is currently without doubt. But this hierarchy of domination is, nevertheless, confronted with a web of inherited and still continued discourses, trying to reproduce on the level of their world image the older hierarchy, i.e. trying to secure the traditional hegemony for the elite artistic culture. This latent hegemony has already been challenged: with contemporary discourses questioning the social position of the elite arts and “high culture” in general, proposed for example by cultural studies in English-speaking countries, which supplement current change in the structure of domination by analogous shift in the realm of hegemony, securing a new stability of the domination-hegemony system. Movement towards higher stability of this system doesn’t represent any “historical necessity” or “structural law” but a possibility that will or will not be actualized by acting human agents.

The opposite latency, the domination latent to hegemony or hegemony forming “the avant-garde of domination” is of course possible. Admitting only one direction of such a latency would be equal to claiming access to one of the traditional determinisms, either Marxist (or, in the softer version, cultural-materialist), or idealistic, in fact post-Hegelian. For reasons provided further on, I would claim access to neither of them.

Even so simplified an example of changes within the domination-hegemony system already have made the second crucial effect of cultural hierarchization clearly visible.

The conflicts, in which the participants of different subcultures may find themselves, can be represented by two different models, the vertical and the horizontal. By vertical conflict I mean here the conflict between two forms of cultural knowledge, occupying different places in the social hierarchy and coming into contest; the previously mentioned conflict between contemporary discourses enforcing the hegemony of elite and popular artistic culture is still a valid example. Such a conflict is strongly connected with challenging the existing hierarchy and belongs to important factors of sociocultural change. The challenge to the hierarchy may prove successful or not, but even a failed attempt at changing the hierarchy can fruit in a new and different distribution of meanings, new strategies of interpretation, etc. Dependency between vertical conflicts and sociocultural hierarchies can be described as circular: the existing hierarchy itself, regardless of its actual shape, creates the possibility of

conflict, postponed as long as the domination-hegemony system remains effective. On the other hand, every vertical conflict not only challenges but also re-establishes conflict-producing hierarchy.

I use the term “horizontal conflict” to signify the conflicts between different subcultures and their participants, occupying an equal level of the sociocultural hierarchy. It can be exemplified by many *querelles*, engaging competitive forms of art or scientific theories. Such a conflict, as history of the arts teaches, can follow at least two different paths. It may then produce a plurality. If two forms of art occupy similar positions within the domination-hegemony system, the conflict cannot be easily solved (agonizing options dispose equal power). Prolonged conflict of this kind, involving public arguments and manifestations, sometimes next to a few less sympathetic attempts, provokes its sides to develop a high awareness of their own options and more often than not to participate in a kind of artistic competition with good effects for everybody (and for the arts in the first place). The plurality of competing forms of avant-garde art in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, sometimes fiercely antagonized, is an enlightening example of such effects. But this plurality of contesting options may be replaced with a verticalization of the conflict: some of the options may find a way to associate themselves with such an element of sociocultural hierarchy, which, occupying a stronger position, can offer an advantage of power over the opponent. Something like this happened with the conflict of traditional and avant-garde art in Europe, first in the totalitarian regimes in Germany and the Soviet Union, where the traditional art, associated with political power – not necessarily by the choice of artists – gained an enormous advantage, and after World War II in the Western world, when thanks to its association with the power of state institutions and the political idea of its being “art of a Free World,” the Avant-garde gained a decisive advantage. As long as the conflict remained horizontal, it produced heterogenic “third and fourth options,” like what Milan Kundera refers to as “anti-avant-garde modernism,”<sup>3</sup> represented by Pablo Picasso, Igor Stravinsky, Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann. The specifics of non-avant-garde modernism in music has been also recognized by Hermann Danuser.<sup>4</sup> Politically enabled verticalization of the conflict during the Cold War changed the situation, assigning to only one side

<sup>3</sup> M. Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed: An Essay in Nine Parts*, HarperCollins, New York 1996.

<sup>4</sup> H. Danuser, *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Laaber-Verlag, Laaber 1984.

the tools of both domination and hegemony: through the management of artistic institutions, academic discourses, expository space, media support and money. After World War II, this situation has been even called in Poland “the dictatorship of the Avant-garde” (as far as I know, Tadeusz Szeligowski coined the phrase before it became almost colloquial). The horizontal contest has been reshaped as much more dynamic and as the vertical conflict of power-structures.

For a cultural theoretician, writing after Foucault and many other analyses of cultural phenomena in terms of power relations, it's always easy to overemphasize their impact. Structures of domination and hegemony, especially the latter, tend to overshadow the importance of more “classical” forms of violence, like criminal and military violence. It's not out of place then to emphasize, for reasons both theoretical and methodological, that these relations form a nexus with systems of communication and exchange, and some of them, like hegemony, are in fact determined by communicational processes. The statement that the sociocultural sphere in general may be defined as a field of clashes, conflict and contest is one more reductionism, as doubtful as the previous, economical, geographical, etc., reductionisms. Even taking part in a sociocultural contest cannot be fully described in terms of power-relations. Let's continue our example. The artistic contests and conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century activated all axiological systems of an aesthetic, ethical and cognitive character, and participants of the contest did not always instrumentalize them for the needs of their struggle. For the cultural historian or theoretician, the artist's belief in aesthetic autonomy is not “ideology” but part of his image of the world, it is a matter of fact. Reducing human beliefs to their function within power-relations cancels all the profits of the theory of cultural knowledge, trying to deal with the real content of human consciousness. This remark may seem obvious, but it's worthy of writing down, even if only to separate the option proposed here from reductionists' the position, that involve the same traditions, namely, of Gramsci and Foucault.

All my reasoning so far can be summarized as follows. Culture is understood here as socially shared knowledge, divided in to two main spheres: the cultural image of the world and normative-directival knowledge. The cultural image of the world is stratified and includes the strata of a categorical system, of descriptive judgements about the world, of axiological valuations of the world and of shared “emotional styles.” The cultural image of the world is the source of semantic presumptions for cultural

norms and communicative units, and the normative-directival knowledge connects culture with human acting as a regulatory element or as a tool. Culture as a whole is accessible thanks to processes of communication and then depends on the features of corresponding semiotic systems. Culture is more or less heterogenic and within it a set of subcultures can be distinguished. Processes involving distinct subcultures can be described as the interaction of systems of violence, exchange and communication. This interaction affects – amongst others – the internal hierarchies and conflicts. Culture, as a superindividual sphere, is constructed thanks to the cognitive procedures applied by a historian, anthropologist, geographer, etc., and it doesn't form any kind of ontologically separate entity. This construction is justified by the observed phenomena of sharing beliefs and by repeatable patterns of behaviour.

Such a concept of culture doesn't claim any privileged position amongst other similar concepts, but it seems to conceptualize in a somewhat ordered way the sphere traditionally described, at least in the important parts of history, by the notoriously unclear term "mentality." Conceptual order is not the only profit though; such a concept allows a theoretical integration of the historical knowledge gained by the history of mentality and may even inspire some historical research.

This conclusion closes the first part of my considerations and allows a transition to a second crucial question: how culture is related not only to social practices but also to the external conditions of these practices? Divided into more detailed and specific questions this problem can be considered as a matter of the relations between human acting, social organization and material conditions: economic, technological and geographic. We've already been dealing with the first aspect, the relation between cultural knowledge and human acts, and the point of view assumed here should be now clear enough. Also, the second aspect has been already touched upon, thanks to the problems of hierarchy and conflict. Still there remains a problem of economic and geographic conditions. The solutions proposed by Jerzy Kmita, Arnold Toynbee and Fernand Braudel seem to provide a good starting point for its consideration.



## Chapter 6

# Cultural, social and geographic

Upon further examination the theoretical model of the connection between culture and social practice proposed by Jerzy Kmita, so far introduced here only in elements, can surprise, because it seems to suddenly reverse the hierarchy assumed by the Polish philosopher during the process of the defining of culture. If at first cultural norms and directives were assumed to regulate, in the subjective-rational mode, the human activities of which social practice consists, now even the presence of these norms and directives is described as functionally determined by the needs of social practice and its conditions.<sup>1</sup>

But what exactly does Kmita mean, when he speaks about “functional determination?” For a moment we need to follow his ideas on epistemology, starting with separating functional determination and the respective functional explanation from other forms of determination and explanation. We’ve already introduced Kmita’s concept of subjective-rational determination and a type of explanation connected with it, i.e. the subjective-rational explanation or humanistic interpretation. Now we can limit our effort to a presentation of the concepts of causal, function and functional determination.

We speak about a causal relation between two states of affairs *a* and *b* under two conditions: *b* is not later than *a* (it may be then concurrent) and *a* is a sufficient condition of *b* (*b* happens always when *a* happens). If this is the case, we call *a* the cause and *b* the effect, and the relation between them the causal determination. Causal determination connects

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<sup>1</sup> J. Kmita, *Kultura i poznanie*, PWN, Warsaw 1985.

particular and singular states of affairs, but causal explanation, having a general character, formulates the rule (law) governing this connection: it establishes the causal relation between the classes of the states of affairs *A* and *B*, containing respective states of affairs *a* and *b*. Causal explanation takes, then, the form of a general law, like “if a state of affairs belonging to the class *A* happens, then a state of affairs belonging to the class *B* has to happen.” Causal determination is, of course, well recognized in epistemology and there is no danger of mistaking it with functional explanation (even if, according to Ernest Nagel, functional explanations can be interpreted as the re-wording of causal explanations<sup>2</sup>). The case is not so obvious with the distinction of function and functional determinations, proposed by Kmita.

The usual mix-up in this regard is caused mainly by linguistic habit allowing to use the term “functional” to cover both these different forms of explanation (sadly, Kmita’s terminological distinction is far away from being widely used in epistemology, but here we’ll try to follow it consequently). But more important is the mixing of two different meanings of the word “function,” because it does denote two different concepts.

The first is the mathematical concept of function (avoiding formal definition in terms of Cartesian products, we can just say that it’s a relation in which every input is related to one and only one output). This is the concept of function provides the foundation for what Kmita calls “function explanation.” Such explanations relate some set of inputs with the set of unique permissive outputs (it is for example, the relation between time and velocity in any motion of constant acceleration, or between time and the road in the motion of constant velocity). The regularity which governs relations of this kind should be expressible as an equation, defining exact dependencies between input and output. The possibility of such explanations in the social sciences has been allowed by important scholars, like Claude Lévi-Strauss and others, although nobody has managed to propose any reasonable criteria to judge a correctness of establishing such a relation between states of affairs that cannot be quantified. It’s good enough reason, valid as long as a set of such criteria is not proposed, to postulate the limitation of function explanation to quantified phenomena (of course, present in researching sociocultural problems, for example in demography or economics). Moving outside of these limits and applying

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<sup>2</sup> E. Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1979.

function explanation to phenomena like cultural knowledge seems not only problematic, but also, to be honest, like faking science.

Functional explanations recall a different meaning of the word “function,” understood now as a role, fulfilled by a given element in some general system. This meaning should be separated from the mathematical one and usually is assumed both in biology and in the everyday use of language. If functional explanation relies, generally, on pointing out the function of an element within a broader system, then it needs a set of cognitive tools to recognize such dependencies. More formally, the concept of functional determination can be elucidated as follows.

Given here is a relational system  $R$ , characterized by possession of a global property (i.e. feature, quality or characteristic)  $P(R)$ . Elements of  $R$  are of course connected by relations in the meaning of set theory, and the global character of  $P(R)$  means, that it is not a property of any element but of a system as a whole. The motion ability of a mammal's organism can be an example of such a property, if we take this organism as a relational system. The relational system contains elements  $e_1, \dots, e_n$ , and these elements are characterized by their different states (for example the element of the organism, the heart, can, hopefully, assume the state of rhythmic contractions). States of elements can be considered not only as isolated, but also in their series. Let's imagine such an exemplary series including contractions of the heart, level of oxygen in blood, qualities of muscles and neurons, etc. We can distinguish series of states of elements within the system of the “mammal's organism” that is responsible for maintaining the property “motion ability.” Furthermore, if the series had been cancelled, the property would disappear. We can then say that maintaining the global property  $P(R)$  in the relational system  $R$  is the function of a given series of states of elements, or in different words, that the series of states of elements is functionally determined by maintaining the global property  $P(R)$  in the system  $R$  (the same system may be of course considered from the point of view of its other global properties). The system of these dependencies we call a functional system in respect to the given global property. The mammal's organism can be then described as a functional structure in respect to its motion ability (or to many other global properties), and states of its elements can be considered as functionally determined. Functional explanation is, of course, founded upon recognized causal relations, as the states of elements are causally connected with different states of the system (once again in agreement with Nagel's remarks).

Explanations of this kind, regardless of their formalization, are abundant both in biology and the social sciences, and functional determination was occasionally raised in anthropology or sociology to the level of the organizational basis of society. Theories proposed by Bronisław Malinowski, Talcott Parsons and in some elements by Karl Marx and even Émile Durkheim are proper examples. Many sociologists, including Anthony Giddens,<sup>3</sup> provides us with extended critiques of systematic functionalism. Also, sociological tradition reaching back to Max Weber is not very friendly to this kind of social theory. Kmita's conception is difficult to interpret in this point, as he seems to be very close to systematic functionalism, while at the same time he follows the options widely recognized as the opposite: the theory of cultural knowledge and Weber's concept of rational acts.

Kmita claims, then, that social practice and culture (in his narrow definition, i.e. limited to norms and directives) forms a functional structure in respect to a specific global property: the reproduction of the objective conditions of production. The latter are understood, in accordance with Karl Marx, as the conjunction of productive forces and relations of production. Reproduction of these conditions is *conditio sine qua non* for the endurance of any society: breaking the continuity of reproduction threatens the biological and economical fundamentals of society and may even eventually cause its destruction. Still following Marx, Kmita differentiates two kinds of material reproduction: simple reproduction and extended reproduction. The former relies on the non-regressive reproduction of initial conditions, while the latter is characterized by a constant extension and development of productive forces and the relations of production. For different societies, either simple or extended reproduction may be considered as their global property. The necessity of economic reproduction determines directly the practice of production, economic exchange and consumption (Marx's "material practice" or in Kmita's terms "basic practice" – at term probably more appropriate, as it includes such a non-material element as the relations of production).

There are, of course, some conditions for basic practice: some system of moral norms or norms of law, securing the economic exchange, some system of social communications, etc. Such systems, only indirectly – but still functionally – are determined by the property of economic reproduction.

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<sup>3</sup> A. Giddens, *Functionalism: Après la lutte*, „Social Research” 43/1976.

Furthermore, the normative system requires some kind of legitimization, that can be secured by religions or ideologies, and religions or ideologies require both semiotic systems to be communicated and other social practices, like the public cult and rituals, to gain their normative force. All these dependencies form a complex, functional hierarchy, and the system of social practice and culture can be in effect described as a hierarchical functional structure. Here Kmita still follows Marx, although against many forms of Marxism, claiming for example direct dependency between the arts and economics. The concept of hierarchical functional structure gives a solid content to Marx's remark on "determination in the last instance."

Social practice and culture can be considered as functional structures with respect to global properties other than economic reproduction – Kmita is far from rejecting such options<sup>4</sup> – but the primacy of simple reproduction is justified at least so far as no society, and then no culture, can endure without securing it.

What is original in Kmita's theory is not necessarily his theoretical elaboration of the concept of hierarchical functional structure, neither even his disciplined definition of culture, but the risk he took by connecting two traditions considered to be in contradiction, functional conceptions and the concept of cultural knowledge, and unifying them in a single, coherent theory. Again, let's start with a simplified example. Some honest Catholic believer and a nobleman lives in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, regularly attending Roman Catholic mass. The Protestant dissidence in the country is now very weak, at least in comparison to its peak in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the group identity of the Polish *szlachta* is built largely upon the foundation of the Roman Catholic Church. Attending the mass is then first – in its social effects – a manifestation of solidarity with the rest of the "political nation," i.e. the *szlachta* or nobility, but also an act of differentiation from other groups: the foreign nobility present in the country and the townsfolk, often Protestant and speaking German (we are, by the way, in the period of the famous anti-Protestant tumult in Torun). Our nobleman, on the other hand, probably still received a Jesuit upbringing, played his roles in school theatre, etc., and his religious passion is true. He follows both his religious needs and the need of social distinction, and may be fully aware

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<sup>4</sup> G. Banaszak, J. Kmita, *Społeczno-regulacyjna koncepcja kultury*, Instytut Kultury, Warsaw 1994.

of both these aspects – the concept of religion as *instrumentum regni* was well known in Poland at least from the time of Stefan Bathory – but only the subjective, religious intention must necessarily be conscious. Without a conscious intent, one cannot search for religious satisfaction (at least as long as we speak about cultural knowledge and not psychoanalytic “unconsciousness”), while group integration and differentiation will work whether intended or not. The behaviour, attending the mass, follows then both the structural function (social integration and differentiation), and the subjective intent (religious experience). The traditional division of theories would provoke here a question of “true” explanation: which one is right, the functional or subjective-rational? Kmita’s answer would be “both” are correct, in accordance with common sense. Instead of a theoretical contest, Kmita then proposes a different question: what’s the relation between the order of function and the order of meaning, if our behaviour follows both?

Kmita will ultimately admit the primacy of functional order, but according to the following model. The whole of human rational acts, and sets of norms and directives regulating them, form a hierarchical functional structure and within this structure different functions must be fulfilled if the structure is to endure. From this point of view, the subjective aims followed by individuals are neutral, as long as the effects of individuals’ acts secure proper functions. The neutrality of subjective aims is a consequence of the frame character of functional determination. The frame character of functional determination means that from the point of view of the stability of structure, it doesn’t matter which states of which elements secure a given function as long as the function is fulfilled. Functional determination, then, determines the functions to be fulfilled but not the ways in which society fulfils them. Practically, it means that any structural function can be fulfilled by a broad set of possible behaviour and its effects. It of course drastically weakens traditional determinism and separates Kmita quite radically from most of the functional theoreticians. Cultural knowledge in particular can be described as only partially functionally determined, because some of its elements may be functionally irrelevant (and couldn’t be then explained this way), and even elements functionally determined must only fit the functional frame in a way that cannot be deduced solely from the structure. At least these are the conclusions provoked by Kmita’s concept of “frame determination.” In the case of such functional structures as the “social practice-culture system,” the affairs are

complicated by their obvious diachronic character. Let's hold a moment yet with a consideration of this problem.

Anyway, the idea of "frame functional determination" still allows the usage of functional explanations with respect to cultural, social and economic phenomena, but renders such explanation insufficient; even more insufficient, if one doesn't follow – and here we don't – Kmita's decision to limit the field of culture to normative-directival knowledge only.

Another problem is the connection between the system of culture and social practice with its external conditions, above all geographic ones. In Kmita's theory there is in fact only one significant connection of this kind. Environmental conditions are mediated by the concept of productive forces and they enter the realm of the social and cultural as natural resources, the source of food, sources of energy, etc. Although other connections were not explicitly excluded, they rather seem to occupy places beyond Kmita's interest. Such a point of view implies the basic thesis of Marx's anthropology on the universal mediation of the society-environment relation by labour. It's obvious that such a conception is insufficient for any research concentrated on cultural knowledge, either historical or anthropological. The connections described by Marx and emphasized by Kmita remain the object of scholarly interest, but anyone dealing with cultural images of the world constantly meets other connections of an interpretational and symbolic character, from the vision of nature as the creation of a malevolent God within some forms of ancient gnosticism, through the Christian vision of nature as a "desert that calls," up to the contemporary struggle against the reduction of the natural environment to productive forces, fought by ecological movements. In this respect, then, we must seek help in other conceptions, starting with one already recalled.

The solution proposed by Arnold J. Toynbee, the dialectic of challenge and response, although belonging to the classic repertoire of theories, still demands attention.<sup>5</sup> Its potential has never been fully actualized, as Toynbee's conceptions remained for decades on the margins of scholarly interest, not without his own responsibility. The label "historiosophy" ascribed to Toynbee's ideas is not accidental and cannot be blamed on historians' professional prejudice against theory and philosophy. There is a crucial moment when Toynbee actually leaves the field of the theory of

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<sup>5</sup> A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. I: *Introduction. The Geneses of Civilizations, Part One* and vol. II: *The Geneses of Civilizations, Part Two*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1934.

civilization and historical processes in favour of an ideologically committed philosophy of history, and it can be pointed out precisely, even if the British historian did not care to inform the reader, that the epistemological status of his utterances had suddenly changed.<sup>6</sup> Describing the development and succession of civilizations Toynbee introduces the concept of *interregnum*, as a chronological interval between successive civilizations, and claims, upon not bad historical evidence, that the structures usually enduring the decline of civilization, and then mediating between it and its successors, are churches. Churches then are responsible for the diachronic transmission of elements of civilization and become the medium of intercivilizational processes in time. The obvious example is the Catholic Church, mediating between the ancient Mediterranean civilization and what we know as Western European civilization. So far, so good: regardless of the accurateness of his observations, Toynbee proposes a historical and theoretical approach. And suddenly, like *deus ex machina*, the dependency between civilization and churches is reversed: civilizations are now interpreted as discontinuous episodes within the continuous and progressive history of churches, and this history proves to realize the idea of spiritual progress. From this point of view the history itself is read as being disposed with inner meaning and aim, and this meaning of history becomes a responsibility of the churches. It would be difficult to find a more obvious example of the abandonment of history and theory for doubtful – because untouched by critical thinking – ideology, and the angry reactions of so many scholars are easily justified. But there still remains an open question, if the reader really has to follow Toynbee in his ideological turn, and if this turn, sympathetic or not, renders the historical and theoretical content of *A Study of History* altogether irrelevant? The theoretical theses proposed by Toynbee and his ideological turn do not seem to be logically connected, therefore the turn itself is arbitrary and not obliging. From my point of view, this is rather a virtue than a vice, as it makes the use of Toynbee's theoretical achievements still possible, as long as we do not follow his arbitrary changes of perspective.

Sadly, problems with Toynbee's propositions do not end here, however. Even interpreted in purely theoretical terms, his conception seems to represent an unloosened, nomothetic model and in consequence it must face all the arguments formulated during the debate on Hempel's model of histor-

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<sup>6</sup> J. Marzęcki, *Wprowadzenie*, in A.J. Toynbee, *Studium historii*, PIW, Warsaw 2000.



ical knowledge. Nomothetism of this kind seems especially incompatible with the cultural point of view, dealing with human interpretations of the world. But the status of general laws within Toynbee's theory is somewhat unclear, and the respective chapter of *A Study of History* doesn't bring many conclusions. On one hand, when considering the definition of civilization as the smallest explainable unit of historical research, Toynbee limits the validity of historical laws to the field of a particular civilization: what was the law for Victorian England, was not the law for Romanovs' Russia, etc. The term "law" does not denote here a universal regularity, but a local regularity, determined by the specifics of a given civilization. The term "law" is, then, here rather misleading; it would be better to speak about civilizational regularity or about a structural rule or even about a grammar of civilization. If Toynbee had consequently used the term "law" in such a meaning, his "tough" nomothetism would be only a misunderstanding, caused by an unlucky terminological choice and it would be sufficient to replace his terminology. But Toynbee follows the much harder concept of general law when he elucidates his theory of the origins, development and decline of civilization. This time he tries to establish a set of general rules governing these processes and claims their universal validity – these rules form then general laws in the classical meaning. As general laws in the classical meaning they are probably false anyway, because they are falsified by any singular event that doesn't follow them.

Still and against all the doubts lots remains valid, but this "lots" demands interpretation and sometimes contradict Toynbee's intentions. What cannot stand as a general law, however, can stand as a theoretical model. The model allows exceptions and allows alternative models of the same phenomena, governed by different theoretical questions; the model always can be perfected, polished and even rebuilt. To use all the potential hidden in Toynbee's work it seems to be necessary to interpret his utterances within a different theoretical framework and different methodology. It requires not only a careful division of the theoretical and historical utterances from the ideologically committed philosophy of history, but also reading his sets of general laws as generalizing and hypothetical models of processes. Read in this way, Toynbee's historical and theoretical models prove to be still extremely inspiring.

The model describing the connection between sociocultural structure and its external environment, formulated by Toynbee during his consideration of the genesis of civilization, is then the model of challenge and

response. It assumes a dialectical dependency between the environment and a society active within it. The geographical environment is a challenge, that must be successfully answered under a threat of social disorganization or even of disabling the continuity of society. Examples of such geographical stimuli are the floods of the Nile, or the sands of Sahara. The effective answer, given by society, is not determined, but creative: the same stimulus can be answered in many effective ways, just like the Egyptian system of irrigation or the organization of the trans-Sahara trade based upon caravanserais are such answers. This model is not limited to geographical challenges, it covers also stimuli of social origin, like being conquered, living under the military pressure of another society, being discriminated against, etc. We can find a good example of differentiated creative answers to the same challenge in various forms of religious renewal answering to the new situation of Israel under the ultimate Roman conquest, like the movements of the *kannaim* (zealots) and *chaweim* (Pharisees) or Christianity. Another example, this time involving the challenge of the geographical environment, can be taken from medieval Scandinavia. Extreme environmental challenge, i.e. geological and climatic circumstances rendering agriculture barely possible, found an answer in replenishing the basic resources thanks to the extortion of the Viking raids (mainly in Norway and Denmark), but also thanks to the far reaching trade of the Swedish Varangians, emigration and mercenary work as far as Byzantium (like the famous Varangian Guard of Constantinople, before it became a largely Slavic unit). The model of challenge and response, being an open model – Kmita would probably call it a “frame model” – allows the explanation of actual events, but not a prediction (one more strong reason to interpret it as a model and not as a general law).

The dialectical aspect of Toynbee’s model lies in the fact that every successful answer interacts with the environment, producing a new challenge that requires new answer, etc. The system is not static, and the model describe a set of processes, demanding also – thanks to stimuli coming from other societies – intercivilizational analysis. An effective answer, given to some challenge by a society, may also prove to be a challenge for other societies, just like the effective response given by the Vikings to their environmental challenge proved to be one of the hardest challenges that the societies of the British Isles and northern Gaul ever faced, and one threatening the very existence of what we call “Western European civilization.”

Toynbee gathered huge historical evidence to support the model of challenge and response, sufficient enough to prove it useful or even necessary. The evidence is sufficient, though, only if we understand Toynbee's model as one of many models of environmental relations, even if a crucially important one, and not as a law of the origin of civilization. Fernand Braudel's criticism was also directed against the latter interpretation and not against the usefulness of the model in historical explanation. From the perspective of the theory of culture the challenge-response model demands attention for two reasons: it's an open, non-determinist model, as I have already emphasized, explaining also the situations of failure or those lacking a response. Additionally, it connects diversified elements of the superstructure, mediating between geographical, social and cultural elements. No unchanging hierarchy of structural dependencies needs to be assumed, as the response is supposed to be creative and to reshape those dependencies. Putting aside the attempt to present the challenge-response model as quasi-natural law, as a model of sociocultural change and a model of structural connections it remains even more open and mobile than Kmita's conception of frame functional determinations.

Braudel's approach to environmental dependencies has never been fully elucidated by him and lacks the theoretical articulation of Toynbee's and Kmita's theories. Still, it remains quite clear in his detailed analyses and can be reconstructed without a very big effort. Let's start with such analyses, presented in *Capitalism and Material Life*<sup>7</sup> and partially in *A History of Civilizations*.<sup>8</sup> The first is dealing with the conditions that allowed the creation of monumental architecture in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica without a threshold in technology. Such a condition is first met by the availability of huge quantities of human labour to be used without replacing important part of it thanks to technology. In agricultural societies of Mexico this human labour could be gained exclusively by limiting the number of days during the year that must be fully dedicated to tending the crops. The second necessary condition was the ability to organize and manage the freed labour force. The first condition can be fulfilled only in geographic circumstances that allow to base the food production on crops requiring low expenditure of labour. This condition was met in Mesoamerica thanks to corn farming. In comparison to wheat, millet or rice, agriculture based

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<sup>7</sup> F. Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life 1400–1800*, Harper, Colophon 1975.

<sup>8</sup> F. Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, Penguin Books, London 1995.

on corn can be characterized as extremely efficient in terms of the food gained/labour spent ratio. According to Braudel the expenditure of labour could be limited even to few dozens of days per year without risking famine and social disorganization. This gives incredible an quantity of labour disposable for other enterprises, be it architecture or military expansion. In consequence, limiting the labour expenditure thanks to technology is not necessary, if all the available labour can be organized thanks to an adequate social hierarchy, administration and enforced control. The examples of Toltec, Teotihuacan or Natchez come to mind. The labour can be also organized thanks to the execution of power over militarily conquered peoples by a relatively small but unchallenged group of conquerors as in the Aztecs' empire. It doesn't matter if the data available to Braudel still hold their validity, because we are trying to reconstruct his explanatory procedure, not the history of Mesoamerica. By the way, similar reasoning could be probably proposed for the dependency between whale hunting/fishing and labour organization amongst the Kwakiutl and other communities of Northwest America or maybe even between maize farming and the forms of political activity of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois).

The second example concerns a very classical question: why in classical antiquity and ancient China nothing similar to the industrial revolution ever happened, despite the presence of the required technological knowledge and skills? Mechanics, despite of its advancement, remained there a field of philosophical experiment, of entertainment or of luxury – a classic example of innovations that did not provoke any sociocultural change and a feature that strongly differentiates the modern industrial and postindustrial societies of Europe and China from their historical predecessors. For a scholar who, like Braudel, tries to understand the process of industrial revolution, it is a question of crucial importance. There are some similarities to a former question, and a few elements of Braudel's answer are also similar. The system of social organization, based on a strict, continually enforced hierarchy and precise distribution of functions, forced by agriculture based upon irrigation and especially by the Chinese "wet" rice agriculture, taking the sharpest articulation in ancient Mediterranean slavery, produced huge quantities of cheap labour. In such a situation even technologically sophisticated goals could be achieved by the extensive management of the available labour, and reducing the expenditure of the labour did not even appear as a problem to be solved, not even speaking about a pressing necessity. There was then no functional pressure to apply

the available knowledge to production. Quite the contrary: such an application, freeing a lot of labour, could even undermine the social system based on slavery and/or administrative control. Of course, Braudel based his explanation on the available demographic and economic data.

On a side note: it would be an interesting experiment to express the very same explanation in Kmita's terms: in the societies of ancient China and the Mediterranean the simple reproduction was secured without the need of technological change. Such a reformulation reveals one more question, not appearing in Braudel's questionnaire. Why, at a certain historical moment, did simple reproduction cease to satisfy Western societies and the necessity of change started to be forced by the needs of extended reproduction? We can reverse this question: every known society applies some kind of technology, be it bow and arrow or flint tools, that are proofs of former change and the former extension of the means of production, thus every society went through a period of extended reproduction – what is the reason then of re-establishing the rule of simple reproduction within so many societies? To a broad extent it is a question which addresses the specifics of the Western world, which we, of course, do not attempt to solve here.

Two models, slightly differing but complementary, of environmental conditioning may be deduced from Braudel's exemplary analyses. The first is the model of the environment as a limit-setting factor: the environment, social or geographical, limits the spectrum of possible changes of any given elements or sub-structure. In this way the climatic conditions of agriculture – on a given technological level – set a limit for the labour force arising from food production, as the necessity of food production takes precedence in every society under the threat of depopulation and extinction (contemporary postindustrial societies are by no means an exception to this rule). The environmental conditions set obvious limitations to accessible forms of material life (there will be no whale-hunters communities in medieval Bohemia...), just like the forms of material life set limits to the accessible forms of social organization (no nomadic "wet" rice farmers, of course) and group behaviour and even forms of cultural knowledge (no dolphin cult in inner Mongolia!). Again we find, then, a non-deterministic conception, based on a version of frame-conditioning.

The second model applied by Braudel is in fact a brilliant species of Toynbee's challenge-response model: this time it's a paradox situation of response without a challenge. It can be expressed like this: it's the perspective of an industrial society, which recognized the impressive effectiveness

of technology as the response to the challenge of extended reproduction, that even allows to ask why such technology did not become a factor of civilizational change in ancient societies. In a society without a challenge of extended reproduction, technical innovations prove to be neutral; they don't become a factor of change, as they are not placed within the functional order of dependencies. A "response to a non existing challenge" is maybe the most effective way to explain why so many innovations fail to provoke sociocultural change of any kind. This claim, of course, doesn't oppose the possibility of functionally neutral uses of such innovations, neither the possibility of their future functionalization.

The models of environmental dependencies proposed by Toynbee and Braudel can be easily reconciled if we reject the interpretation of challenge-response dialectics as the law of the origins of civilization. Such a reconciled model can be elucidated in the following way, starting with the proper definition of environment. The environment is the whole of a system surrounding any of its distinguished subsystems; a web of interdependencies connects the system with any of its sub-systems, and from the perspective of the subsystem these connections form the environmental conditions. The concept of the environment is then relative to the way in which we construct the general system and its subsystems. For example, a social structure can be assumed to be a subsystem of a broader system, containing geographical milieu, including climatic, geological, biological factors, etc. and all these elements form the environment of a social structure. We can speak then meaningfully about the geographical environment of the economic life, the economic environment of the processes of social stratification, or the social environment of the dissemination of cultural knowledge, as distinguishing systems and subsystems being governed by our scholarly interest and our questionnaire.

The connection between any subsystem and its environment is of a frame character. The features of the environment don't determine the features of a subsystem in a causative way, that could be expressed as a set of laws. The forms of the subsystem-environment dependency can be pointed out. First, there is the "all-too-familiar-for-us-now" form of a challenge to be creatively and then not fully predictably answered. Second, there is the matter of limitation – not the determination – of the possible forms of the subsystem (the environment more often than not makes some solutions impossible than it forces a determined behaviour).

The environment is being constantly reshaped by human actions, including transformation within the sphere of cultural knowledge, and

the dynamics of the whole is going through continuous changes. The last feature is what Toynbee called “the dialectics” but it is a good moment to ultimately move away from this term. It served obediently to Toynbee’s shift from a theory of historical processes to unmasked historiosophy, when the challenge-response model was placed within the broad, dialectic frame of the progressive realization of truth, thanks to the sequence of universal churches (at this moment Toynbee achieved at last some philosophical resemblance to Hegelian dialectics). Additionally, it is being used in the theory of history in too many contradictory ways – it would be not possible, for example, to reconcile Toynbee’s idea of dialectics with Braudel’s use of the term, as the name for relations between historical processes of different duration. The term “dialectics,” however, generally suffers under the burden of so many philosophical uses that it seems a bad idea to use it outside of philosophical discourse, where all these uses could truly become meaningful. It’s tempting to replace Toynbee’s dialectics with a simpler term “feedback,” but that would be only one more metaphorized technical term. Let’s name then the system connecting a given element and its environment with the exact term “interactive structure.” Both Braudel and Toynbee treat the environmental dependencies in exactly this way.

One more example can illustrate such an interactive structure in action, showing the importance of different forms of geographical and social environment and challenge-response relations. Once again we can recall some facts from the history of North America.<sup>9</sup>

Before the colonial invasion, the vast terrains of Eastern Woodland and The Lakes had been inhabited by populations based upon either wild rice gathering or, more frequently, maize agriculture. The European pressure, as a challenge, could be – and was – answered in many ways, but probably even more important than King Philip’s war was the migration of many populations, among them groups of Dakota, westward, towards the Plains, where up to now practically only Blackfeet and Shoshone were regular inhabitants, contested by groups of seasonal hunters coming from surrounding agricultural societies like Skidi Pawnee. The refugees could try to rebuild their way of life based on farming, although this would not be easy, or become regular hunters replacing maize with buffalo. What was the factor which led to the realization of a second possibility and in effect to the creation of a new form of social life, known to us as the civilization of

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<sup>9</sup> B. Trigger, W. E. Washburn (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996.



the Plains and popularly believed to be the “original civilization of Native America” (actually originating not before the 17<sup>th</sup> century)? The enabling factor seems to be rooted in intercultural exchange, as two fundamentals of a new form of life, the horse and firearms, were taken – both figuratively and literally – from the invaders. The horse meant a new definition of space and new *modus operandi* – in fact, quite a new environment, unknown to the pedestrian Shoshone or Blackfeet – leading to a socio-economic organization unprecedented in North America: the societies of nomadic mounted hunters – and former farmers – centralized around hunting and war, the with Holy Trinity of buffalo, horse and gun (and fading memories of how “we lost the corn”). This techno-economical change provoked an analogous change in sociocultural structures: with the new definition of gender obligations and status, new forms of initiations thanks to the wide acceptance of Arapaho’s Sun Dance, etc. Within a culture based upon oral transmission these new elements were quickly traditionalized and included into the cultural image of the world. When in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a few events like the discovery of gold in the Black Mountains and the necessity to protect Bozeman and Oregon Trails created an opportunity to extend the colonial invasion westwards, the invaders met peoples under familiar names, but economically, socially and culturally reshaped. We can suspect that the new image of the world and new axiological systems were not of secondary importance – along with the now limited possibilities for escape and further migration – to a different response to the same challenge of military and political pressure. Europeans on the other hand, for whom the Native America formed an intercivilizational environment, met this environment as changed, due to their own former actions: instead of the societies of pedestrian farmers armed with bow, arrow, club and shield there were mounted hunters-warriors, still armed with bow, arrow, club and shield but also with firearms and a new appreciation for war as a main form of social activity. The response now was, then, war, but not only war, also a political transformation, bordering on a new ethnogenesis, leading to broad coalitions – like the Dakota-Cheyenne-Arapaho coalition of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – based not upon kinship but territoriality. The response proved to be insufficient – the political transformation was in its childhood and, against the efforts of individuals like Red Cloud or Crazy Horse, the normative system governing war activities remained centralized around the set of ritualized war deeds and the individual prestige of warriors, while virtually neglecting the effectiveness needed as a governing value. The ineffective



response brought the Plains people to social disorganization and even to the verge of extinction, but also to a new challenge, created by the colonial situation. The biogeographical environment changed after the decimation of the Plains buffalo, rendering the continuation of the buffalo-hunters civilization impossible; the social structure ceased to function properly thanks to the enforced privatization of land property in the family farms system; economical and political independency was replaced by state-founded reservations; the cultural transmission was broken by the forced education of children according to European patterns and the propagation of Christianity. Toynbee's model of "the stimulus of penalization" fits this situation perfectly. A new kind of response to this challenge develops up to today, starting with the Wovoka and Ghost Dance movement. Even if Ghost Dance was supposed to help get rid of the invaders in a religious way, after the military way ended with ultimate failure, it started a transformation towards overcoming the traditional conflicts dividing Native Americans and towards a new definition of group identity: not in the terms of kinship and tribal affiliation, but in terms of shared cultural heritage. This movement is being continued today in the form of the Pan-Indian identity of the "First Peoples" and has proved to be at least sufficient enough to preserve the remains of Native societies, and with time, to reforge the protected cultural heritage into a strong market offer within the contemporary economics of tourism.

The true analysis of this example could and should take into consideration the whole multivolumed monograph, but even treated so roughly it makes the acting of the interactive structure, of environmental dependencies and of the challenge-response model, evident enough. We can see clearly how the environment, both geographical and social, provokes the responses and how it is changed in effect, providing new challenges, forming a non-teleological sequence. In my opinion, the possibility of such analyses is a strong argument in support of a model of environmental dependencies and sociocultural structure, proposed here thanks to the reconciliation of Braudel's position with chosen elements of Toynbee's formulation. The ability to generate acceptable explanations of historical events is the strongest virtue of any theory.

The explanatory efficiency of the proposed model may still be improved and I didn't refer to Kmita's model for bibliographical reasons. There is, of course, a similar emphasis put on the frame character of environmental causality in both Kmita's conception and in our "Toynbee-Braudel model," but there are also important differences. First, there is the difference

between the model of the interactive structure and Kmita's model of hierarchical structure, based upon Karl Marx's diachronic functionalism. Second, there is the difference between the many forms of determination in the "Braudel-Toynbee" model" and the strict functional connections in Kmita's model. The former difference should be weakened. Within any interactive structure, when it is considered at a certain moment of time and according to a given questionnaire, a dominating direction of dependencies and a current hierarchy of structural elements is inevitably established. The interactivity is of a diachronic character and the point is to remember that any given synchronic hierarchy is always an object open to diachronic change. Reduction of the interactive structure to a hierarchic one is then the effect of the synchronic point of view, and it is more and more difficult and problematic, if we consider the processes of longer and longer duration. There's no reason, though, to oppose the recognition of current hierarchies within any sociocultural structure. On the other hand, there's no reason to suppose that the hierarchy of dependencies described by Kmita is immobile and eternal. It's easy to assume that Kmita's own reconstruction of hierarchy and the relations between elements of structure is fully valid for certain societies in certain periods of time, but it may require revision in the case of other societies or different periods in the history of the same society. In my opinion, Kmita catches perfectly the hierarchy of functional dependencies within modern industrial and postindustrial societies or at least provides us with an ideal type of such a society, articulating – in Marx's terms – its historical tendency (the tendency to replace all social relations with functional relations and to functionally subdue every human activity to economical development, while eliminating or marginalizing social practices that, like the history of culture, resist such an operation. This tendency is articulated to its fullest in neoliberal ideology, but it still not fully realized, being rather a postulated state of affairs). Kmita's model can't be, then, expected to fully fit non-industrial societies of the past.

It's impossible to reject Marx's and Kmita's claim, that the reproduction of the conditions of productions is necessary for the survival of any society, but there's no reason for assuming that securing this reproduction, especially simple reproduction, requires the subduing of all elements of the social structure and cultural knowledge (and there's enough historical evidence to make such an assumption doubtful). Kmita's model should be interpreted not as a universally valid description of sociocultural structure,

but as an idealizing model of a specific case of western capitalistic, industrial and postindustrial societies. I would move so far as to suggest, that the primacy of extended reproduction in these societies is not their “original” determinant but it is itself promoted by an axiological system based upon the central value of maximizing profit (and this is exactly the definition of capitalism as a form of social consciousness as followed by Fernand Braudel in the previously recalled study) By the way, in this perspective the contemporary postindustrialism can be interpreted as a radical capitalistic effort to extend the regulation by the value of maximizing the profit to the fields left at least partially outside by classic industrialism, like religion, fine arts or the humanities – practices that were considered to realize sets of values different than those capitalistic ones. Interpreted in this way, Kmita’s model remains a very effective tool for the analysis of societies both western and westernized, and it even allows for a very precise definition of westernization as such a reorganization of functional dependencies within a given society that aims towards the western model of functional unification.

Two more points still require a short commentary. The possibility of interactive and not necessarily hierarchical dependencies within the sociocultural structure was implicitly admitted by Kmita, at least in the form of the interplay between “the order of functions” and “the order of meaning” so that both cross the sociocultural structures in different directions. And next, the assumption of the strict functional determination of all the parts of culture by the need of economic reproduction is possible only if Kmita’s narrowing of the concept of culture itself is first accepted. Kmita never claimed that his thesis is valid for all the broad sphere that he calls “the social consciousness.” If we extend, as we did here for reasons previously elucidated, the concept of culture to include socially shared images of the world, the situation complicates itself. It would be more than difficult to indicate a functional connection reaching in a mediated way to the conditions of production for many elements of world-images (what is, for example, the link between the conditions of production and the idea of the dream as a journey of the soul separated from the body?), up to a moment when explanations become tantalizingly arbitrary. This situation does not render functional explanations invalid; it even still allows to consider them as a privileged form of social explanation, but requires a careful estimation of their validity in every particular case.

After all these remarks the system “environment – social practice – culture” can be then described in the following way. It is an interactive

structure, interconnected by frame dependencies. The frame character of respective dependencies allows a multitude of variants of the realization of the same structural dependency. The variability of the structural response is determined by the creative character of human acting (which may be, by the way, explained ethologically by a constant variability of human behaviour). Amongst the possible models of dependencies the functional model (the challenge-response dependency can be interpreted as a functional connection) and model of limiting choices by environmental factors (delimitation of the field of possibilities) have been pointed out. The hierarchies of determinations within the whole structure is the object of change, so it would be better to speak about a system organized by processes of continuous structuration, than about a structure. In this context, the phrase “functional need,” whenever it occurs, should be understood as a name for the structural relation without any psychological connotations, neither with respect to the individual nor social psychology.

It should be obvious now that all the previous remarks on the importance of contest, conflict and internal diversification, formulated with respect to the concept of culture, remain valid also with respect to this broader structure. Such a theoretical model can be used as a tool in the creation of empirically or hermeneutically based, detailed models, aiming for the reconstruction of particular cultures. In this perspective, Kmita's model – i.e. the model of hierarchical functional structure, determined by the necessities of economic reproduction – can be treated as an example of such a detailed elaboration (in this particular case, with respect to modern capitalistic, both industrial and postindustrial, societies).

Accepting the theoretical construct proposed here results in one particularly important conclusion that culture cannot be researched in isolation and treated as actually an autonomous entity or, to express it otherwise, that a valid object of research is always the totality of the system and isolation of its elements fruits in drastic narrowing of the field of possible explanations. The history of culture, then, cannot be understood as a history of isolated phenomenon, namely, of cultural knowledge, but is always an integrated history of the whole environmental, economic social and cultural system, although governed by a specifically cultural questionnaire. It's specifics lies in the fact that elements of the system other than culture enter the field of scholarly observation in their relation to the sphere of socially shared knowledge and are recalled to explain the processes occurring within this particular part of the structure.

I would gladly use the term “cultural history” instead the “history of culture,” if it was not already used to denote a theoretical position, which, in accordance with a part of contemporary anthropology, tends to eliminate the very concept of superindividual structures, replaced with an idea of the “cultural dimension” of individual existence (I’ve already expressed my doubts concerning this way of thinking).

I believe that the position achieved here remains in accordance with the demands formulated by historians active during the 1930s and 1940s, especially by Bloch and Febvre, and with their project of “integrated” or “integral” history. And of course I have to accuse the history of mentality of an improper isolation of one element, now privileged, of a much broader structure. The whole of the interactive and diachronic structure is always an object of research for history, sociology, anthropology or cultural studies, although disciplines differ thanks to their methods and questionnaires. Repeating the description of the whole of this structure every time, one needs to mention, is hardly convenient though. Toynbee proposed to use the old term “civilization” to denote “the smallest possible unity of historical explanation.” Although the tradition of the “civilization – culture” opposition is quite complex and differs in different languages, there’s no reason, I believe, to reject his proposal. To make it clear, then, and avoid unnecessary confusion: I use the term “culture” to denote socially shared knowledge, including world-images and normative-directival knowledge, and the term “civilization” to denote a structure connecting environmental conditions, social practices (including economic practice), social organization and culture. The term “civilization” in this usage is not related then to “material” as opposed to “spiritual” nor to an “advanced society” as opposed to a “primitive” one. This is also the way Braudel used the term “civilization” in his *A History of Civilisations*, although he tried at the same time to preserve the civilization-culture opposition with respect to technological advancement, an opposition completely abandoned here.

No civilization is ever fully isolated and every study of civilization includes a study of intercivilizational (and, obviously, intercultural) processes. The main topics of such a study have been already introduced with respect to the internal relations within culture, and it’s enough to name them here again: communication, exchange and war (as the intercivilizational equivalent of internal violence). Maybe the order of these topics should be reversed, to emphasize their respective importance. Not without a reason Toynbee claimed that historically the basic form of contact

between civilizations is that of assault. Even if civilizations are explicable as relatively separate and coherent wholes, their study is always open to intercivilizational extensions – and in this way every history becomes inevitably, as Braudel was fully aware, a global history.

## Chapter 7

# Cultures and time

The previous short remarks on the processes of structuration replacing the concept of established structures, like a few other remarks, remind once and again about the specifics of any historical research, including any cultural topics. This specifics is of course the diachronic point of view. The discussion of this aspect of the history of culture has been now delayed enough. I've started with associating myself with Bloch's definition of history as a study of people in time, and almost exclusively filled the previous pages with a discussion of the synchronic and structural approaches. Adding now time as the next dimension to the already characterized structures would be a misleading strategy. To avoid this, I shall discuss the problem of time under two main topics: models of the diachronic processes and the internal temporality of cultures.

The first topic is related to possible theoretical models organizing the study of diachronic processes. Although many such models were proposed, their multiplicity may be reduced to two "clear" and contesting approaches, one deduced from the writings by Febvre<sup>1</sup> and the second defended by Bloch.<sup>2</sup> Febvre, usually siding himself with structural approaches, preferred a study of synchronic reconstructions of past phenomena and his position became even more attractive under the growing influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology. Diachrony is introduced as a comparative study of synchronic cross-sections, taken in different moments of time. In this way, the changes in functioning of both the el-

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<sup>1</sup> A. F. Grabski, *Dzieje historiografii*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznan 2011.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1953.

ements of the structure and in the rules of organization are undoubtedly recognizable and such a method may even be a preferred way of their description. If that's the virtue of Febvre's model, its vice, however, is of no lesser importance: the comparison of static structures, representing different chronological moments, represents the effects of change, but not the process of change. This problem was fully recognized by Michel Foucault in his study of the "archaeological" method as a general problem of structuralism.<sup>3</sup>

The minimal requirement would be, then, to supplement the comparative study of synchronic structures with a study of the rules of their transformation. Supplemented in this way, this model would achieve a close resemblance to system theories, rooted in the development of semiotics, like the theories proposed by Niklas Luhmann<sup>4</sup> and Yuri Lotman,<sup>5</sup> and could implement cybernetic knowledge about the dynamics of systems. Still, the necessity of the transition from a study of synchronic structure to a study of the rules of transformation seems to depend less on theoretical presumptions than on the specifics of the given questionnaire. Simplifying matters a bit, the synchronic and structural approach seems to be preferred when scholarly interest is concentrated around a reconstruction of the past states of affairs, for example if one is – as Febvre was – asking for things like the *outillage mental* at the time of François Rabelais. The situation changes when a questionnaire is built around the problems of origins and transformation. Now the comparative study of synchronic structures proves to be unacceptably limited. It effectively recognizes changes, their range and effects, but does poorly in their explanation. The change is something that always happens exactly in between the synchronic cross-sections, and their comparative study inevitably omits the process of change itself. Regardless of determining the chronological point  $t$  and  $t'$  when synchronic cross-sections are taken, the process of recognized change takes place in between  $t$  and  $t'$ .

The duality of the synchronic-structural study and diachronic study mirrors then the duality in understanding the purposes of history itself: the distinction between history as knowledge of the past, aiming for a reconstruction of the past and the no longer existing shapes of the world, and history as knowledge of change, aiming for the explanation

<sup>3</sup> M. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Vintage Books, New York 2010.

<sup>4</sup> N. Luhmann, *Social Systems*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Y. Lotman, *Culture and Explosion*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 2009.



of processes and of the relations between humans and time. These two concepts of history are neither contradictory nor independent, particularly as history as a theory of change is impossible without history as knowledge of the past events. This situation renders Febvre's idea of the comparative study of synchronic cross-sections as a relevant, even if not fully sufficient, method of studying changes. But this dependency works also in reverse, even if in a less obvious way. Assuming Bloch's concept of the "structural dependency of ages," it should be emphasized that every synchronic cross-section is partially determined by the sociocultural (and subjective) world of the researcher, and that the world of the researcher and the reconstructed world of the past are intertwined and connected by a relation of a diachronic character. Thanks to this, no study of the past, regardless of the purity of its synchronic and structural approach, is immune to a diachronic construction of the research act itself. This may be expressed quite clearly. Let  $t(h)$  denote the point in chronology occupied by the historian and  $t(o)$  the point reconstructed, i.e. the point of synchronic cross-section. Any possible historical reconstruction of the state of structure  $S$  in moment  $t(o)$  is determined by the characteristics of  $t(h)$ . The effect of historical reconstruction is not then a description of  $S$  at  $t(o)$  but the image of it, determined by the structural qualities of both  $t(o)$  and  $t(h)$ . Therefore, the effect of the reconstruction can be denoted by  $S(o,h)$ . This is how the "structural dependency of ages" works out.

Next to the structural model of diachronic phenomena the second model can be described – let's name it, for now, the genetic model – that treats diachrony as a basic historical problem. Usually connected with Marc Bloch – opposed in this case to Lucien Febvre – it can be traced back to Max Weber and his treatment of history. Based upon the dynamic relations between events, this model is mainly concerned with historical causality. Both Weber and Bloch noticed immediately that the application of the classical concept of causality – as it is explicated by Kmita and assumed in Newtonian physics – to historical phenomena fruits in too many troubles. From my own point of view I would describe these troubles as follows.

First, in the case of sociocultural phenomena – and historical phenomena are of a sociocultural character – determining the proper classes of states of affairs, supposed to be connected by causal relation, is problematic. The exemplary utterance "if any event (dynamic state of affairs) belonging to the class Revolutions occurs, then an event from the class Terror will occur" is susceptible to the previous definitions of revolution and terror –

its acceptability depends on the delimitation of these classes of states of affairs. In this exemplary utterance both the assumed classes of events are unclear and belong to legitimate objects of definitional discussion. The utterance can be then defended by the proper construction of the class “revolutions,” which excludes the cases when revolution was not followed by terror – such a definition of revolution as the “violent change of the sociopolitical order resulting in a period of revolutionary terror” could be acceptable, even if it turns the previous causal explanation into a tautology. And the very same utterance can be undermined by such a definition of terror that will exclude many forms of revolutionary violence, for example by defining terror as an excess, a violence that is not functionally needed for the establishment of new political power. In effect, causal explanations in history prove to be mainly a semantic operation and depend more on definitional decisions than recognized connections between events.

Second, the classic concept of causality is contradictory to the concept of “frame determinations” assumed here. Agreeing that sociocultural dependencies are of a frame character, one has to accept a statement that the occurrence of an event belonging to a class *A* causes the occurrence of any event belonging to one of the classes *B*, ..., *N*. Meticulous historians faithful to both their knowledge of source evidence and the concept of causal explanation did not hesitate to formulate this consequence. Arnold Hauser<sup>6</sup> stated – and many historians shared his belief – that in history the same causes lead to different effects. True or not, such a statement in fact marks the departure from any controllable concept of causality. Causality changes from explanation to rhetoric.

Third, causal relations in history are usually established not between classes of events but between individual events. (The exception may be the purely nomothetic model of history, that one could call “positivist” if one wanted to engage oneself in the debate of what exactly the positivist vision of history was.) These singular events are often deemed unrepeatable, singular or even idiosyncratic. If this is the case, the individual causal relation may be recognized, but without a recognition of causal law or regularity. And, of course, if there’s no causal regularity, no test can be proposed to check the correctness of a recognized individual causal relation. This situation seems to be the main reason for the inconclusiveness of so many historical debates on “causes” and “effects” (inconclusive de-

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<sup>6</sup> A. Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, Routledge, London 1999.

bate, leading to new discoveries and introducing new evidence, can still be fruitful though). We have more examples than we need of debates on causes (the cause of the decline and fall of the Imperium Romanum, the causes of the Mongolian invasion, causes of the French Revolution and of the October Revolution, causes of the partition of Poland, causes of the industrial revolution, causes of National Socialism, etc. – or, as one of Joseph Heller’s characters puts it, “why Hitler?!”), and debates on effects (the effects of the crusade movement, effects of the Norman invasions, effects of the Reformation, effects of the Council of Trident, effects of the reforms during the reign of Peter I, effects of the 19<sup>th</sup> century workers movement, effects of the Great Depression, etc.). None of these debates has been concluded and there’s no risk in predicting that none ever will be.

Partially this is because – and this is my fourth point – even if a causal regularity would have been established it still would lack any experimental test. There is no need for regret though. One should be comforted by the impossibility – in usual circumstances – of experimental revolutions and the falls of empires.

Many problems of this kind may be solved by a concept introduced by both Weber and Bloch, regarding “complex causality.” The concept can be expressed as a thesis that for any event  $e$  within structure  $S$  there is always a series of necessary conditions  $c_1, \dots, c_n$ , but there is no singular sufficient condition. The hypothetical sufficient condition of  $e$  can be understood only as a whole series  $c_1, \dots, c_n$  (ultimately this would be just the state of structure  $S$  at a given moment). The concept of “complex causality” explains the inconclusiveness of many historical debates on causes but also their usual fruitfulness. Except for mistakes in connecting events, which can be and eventually are pointed out, the contest must remain without a winner, because contesting explanations represent complementary analyses of different components of complex cause, i.e. they form partial analyses of the necessary conditions of a given event. Partiality of this kind cannot be comprehended as a vice, as completeness of explanation may be impossible to achieve for practical reasons. It is even tempting to say that in the explanation of historical causes completeness and conclusiveness is a bit, and sometimes not only a bit, iffy. It must be emphasized that in this context particular elements of causal series are defined as necessary conditions, while all the purpose of causal explanation in the classical meaning is finding out sufficient conditions. Sufficient condition is also the most common and general definition of the cause. If the sufficient condition is

treated as a complete series of necessary conditions (the state of a given structure at a given moment), then the search for the sufficient condition of any event must be interpreted as a regulative ideal (in Karl Raimund Popper terms<sup>7</sup>): as a necessary ideal, that organizes any research and allows its improvement by critique, regardless of the possibility of its actual realization. It is, then, a function analogous to one fulfilled by the idea of truth in the general construction of scientific knowledge: Popper regarded the truth as a regulatory idea of scientific practice, while any actual research is evaluated as more or less corroborated. The need for corroboration itself is, of course, founded on the regulative activity of truth. By the way, misunderstanding in this matter seems to be the main rationale for the effort to abandon the very idea of truth, as the truth is not a feature of any actually gained knowledge (for dozens of reasons pointed out in the anti-scientific philosophy of the last hundred years). We can say then, in a more modest way, that the search for sufficient condition is a regulative idea of causal explanations in history, regardless of the effect actually gained.

The concept of complex causality provokes also a slightly different approach to the problem of general laws in history. From this point of view, their function seems also to be above all that is regulative. General laws equip historical explanation with normative patterns of possible connections between events and logical norms of reasoning. Against the traditional nomothetism, then, a historian is not obliged to formulate laws of actual empiric content, but against the traditional idiographism a historian is not abandoning the idea of scientific law, as he is making a constant recourse to a logical form of a general law. It is this logical form that underlies any efforts for historical understanding. Even the most vague and uncertain causal explanation, even the most cautious search for a singular necessary condition, assumes a logical ordering of the utterance by a formal construction of the general law.

The problem of historical causality seems, then, complex enough to provoke a question in Richard Rorty's style, if it is not "making more trouble than it's worth." But without the language of causality, historical analysis would actually have to limit itself to the description of purely synchronic dependencies or even to a catalogue of unrelated singularities. It would be even difficult, although not impossible, to supplement synchronic reconstructions with a study of the rules of structural transformation. Most of

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<sup>7</sup> K. R. Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1972.

the diachronic relations, especially diachronic relations between singular events, would be thrown out of the field of explanation. For the history of culture, and especially for the history of artistic culture, this would be unacceptable, and causal language may be still the only explanatory language able to somehow deal with singularity and exceptionality. Why for artistic history especially? Theory of culture deals with shared knowledge and repeatable regularities of behaviour, it is a grammar of the typical, whilst modern Western art is the domain of the untypical, individual and unrepeatable – at least in its highest achievements (i.e. achievements socially recognized as the highest). The language of vague necessary conditions is also guarding history against a specific reductionism, one opposite to the reductionism recognized as a danger, either openly or implicitly, by so different scholars as Bloch, Febvre, Braudel, Toynbee, and before them by Burckhardt, Droysen or Lamprecht. If they have univocally warned against the reduction of history to a set of unrelated facts, to the plane of events – infamous “battle-history” – then also an opposite reductionism should be named and shamed: the reduction of history to the plane of structural organization, eliminating the individuality of an event (an artwork, for example). Braudel was not unaware of the dangers connected with this kind of reductionism, even if his main interest was placed elsewhere.

The approach to diachrony that is not simply “adding time” to synchronic structures, but takes time as its starting point is, of course, not limited to causal explanation. In the Polish tradition of historical methodology, for example in ideas proposed by Jerzy Topolski,<sup>8</sup> causal explanations have been differentiated from genetic explanations. Not causal, but genetic explanations were pointed out as the “daily bread” of a historian, especially the “traditional historian,” relying to a greater or lesser extent on the traditions of 19<sup>th</sup> century German historiography. Genetic explanations, thanks to their often intuitive and theoretically unclear character, are much more difficult to formally reconstruct than causal, functional or subjective-rational ones. Also, Topolski did not attempt their formal characterisation. Generally speaking, genetic explanations are aiming for the recognition of the origins of given phenomena, explaining the states of affairs in the moment  $t'$  as the consequences of the states of affairs in a previous moment  $t$ . The nature of the connection between events (causal, functional, etc.) is usually not pointed out. Genetic explanations may, then,

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<sup>8</sup> J. Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej*, Wyd. Poznańskie, Poznan 1983.

and often do, prepare evidence for other forms of explanation, and the doubt about whether they are really explanations at all is not unfounded. It'd be more proper to speak about genetic relations as a basis for further explanation, though an attempt to change an accepted, at least in Polish, terminological habit, goes against all the odds. "Genetic explanations" are, then, chronologically ordered sequences of states of affairs (of the different chronological states of a given structure), that are suspected to be mutually related. Recognition of the character of these relations is a matter of other explanatory approaches. Therefore "genetic explanations" are always introductory and insufficient, while at the same time necessary for further research. More often than not, the genetic ordering of events forms a basis for causal explanation. The model of historical knowledge based upon this classical genetic-causal connection may be generally called a genetic model.

Both structural and genetic models of historical diachrony can be successfully defended from the theoretical point of view, and their effectiveness in explaining actual historical phenomena has been already proven by many applications. It's not surprising that the idea of their unification, less as an articulated topic, more as a practical problem of historical research, became valid some decades ago. Again, both these approaches influenced the concept of diachrony in Braudel's and Kmita's propositions, and we shall continue their discussion.

Kmita's main model is transforming the functional and hierarchical structure, and the basic rules of its transformation are obviously of a functional character. The functional change, starting from the functional balance, the equilibrium of the structure, going through instability and achieving a new equilibrium, was the object of research in anthropology, and there's every reason to assume that Bronisław Malinowski's<sup>9</sup> and George Peter Murdock's<sup>10</sup> elaborations of this topic should be also applied to Kmita's model. But Kmita differentiates two kinds of functional structures, according to their relation to time, namely, synchronic and diachronic ones. Synchronic functional structures lack determining connections between non-concurrent states of structure (and/or states of its elements). The chronology of the states of structure and states of elements is then irrelevant to the explanation of their changes. Diachronic functional structures are, oppositely, vulnerable to chronology, and this vulnerability can be expressed as a thesis, that non-concurrent states of structure and

<sup>9</sup> B. Malinowski, *The dynamics of Cultural Change: An Inquiry into Race Relations in Africa*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1965.

<sup>10</sup> G. P. Murdock, *How Culture Changes*, Oxford University Press, New York 1956.

states of its elements are connected by the relations of determination. In diachronic structures non-concurrent states are – in previously elucidated meaning – genetically related.

Within the functional structure though, the genetic determinations lose their vagueness: the direction of changes is functionally determined and, on the other hand, the frame character of the functional determination is limited, although not cancelled, by the genetic factors. As we know, it is irrelevant how a given function within the structure is fulfilled, as long as it is fulfilled, but the range of possible functional responses is now drastically limited by the previous state of the structure and its elements. For this reason, functional explanations prove now to be insufficient in the case of the diachronic structures and have to be replaced by the more complex procedure of a genetic-functional explanation. And sociocultural structures are obviously diachronic structures. Kmita's model effectively integrates the structural and genetic approaches in the realm of history.

The procedure of the genetic-functional explanation can be illustrated by the proper interpretation of Max Weber's<sup>11</sup> discourse on protestant ethics and the birth of capitalism. In this case – oversimplifying the example – the change in the axiological system is caused by the functional need of a legitimization for capitalistic economic practices. The religious shape of this legitimization is genetically determined by the previous state of *Weltanschauung*, also of a religious character. But to interpret Weber in this way is to reverse the order of determination actually assumed by the German sociologist. A much better example could be taken from Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.<sup>12</sup> It's worth mentioning that the methodological analysis of Marx's explanatory strategy in this article led Gerald Cohen,<sup>13</sup> as far as I know independently from Kmita, to the very same model of genetic-functional explanation, incorporated then to the methodological basis of the analytical Marxism propagated by the September Group. Also Marvin Harris, characterizing the importance of Karl Marx for anthropological theory, names his explanatory approach as "diachronical functionalism."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> M. Weber, *The protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Courier Dover Publications, New York 2003.

<sup>12</sup> K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Mondial, New York 2005.

<sup>13</sup> G. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2000.

<sup>14</sup> M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*. Updated Edition, Altamira Press, Walnut Creek 2001.



Braudel's version of approaching the relation between structural and genetic elements in history differs from those solutions based on Marx's tradition and this is connected with his more than famous conception of the multiplicity of historical durations. There are two, undoubtedly correct, observations that found this conception. First, structural regularities in history are identifiable with respect to great scales of observation, both socially and chronologically; second, historical events taken in all their individuality, seem to not follow any identifiable grammar or structural rule (and, I would add, different scales of observation lead to different, nomothetic and idiographic, philosophies of history). And there's also an educated intuition, that nevertheless the structural plane of history and the plane of events have to be connected – somehow – but for sure reciprocally.

Braudel<sup>15</sup> differentiated three forms of historical duration, although sometimes he referred to the fourth form of the “longest duration.” Processes of long duration, lasting for centuries or even longer, are characterized by a slow rate of changes and for this reason are often perceived as constant factors, *datum* out of history and a basis for more rapid processes. Observation on the great chronological scale discovers the mutability of these processes, overlooked by the hasty history of events. Structural regularities are found on this plane, forming, so to say, a skeleton of history, a structural frame for processes of less visible or invisible regularities. In this specific meaning, Braudel could name his own position a “structuralism,” based upon the study of long durations and highly independent from the linguistic and ethnological structuralism.

The second plane of historical duration is processes of medium duration, including cycles and tendencies lasting for decades (down to the so called “secular tendency”). They articulate the processes of long duration, but preserve a kind of autonomy, as – characteristic of the medium duration – they cannot be simply derived from structures of long duration. Braudel tended to consider the medium duration as the next plane of regularities, even of regular cycles, undoubtedly under the influence of the economic theories proposed by François Simiand, but cycles can be reasonably researched only for quantifiable states of affairs, like an increase and decrease in prices and wages or demographic changes. It's much harder to propose any acceptable criteria for establishing cycles in, for example, changes within cultural knowledge. The reasons for these difficulties are

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<sup>15</sup> F. Braudel, *On History*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1982.



exactly the same as in the previously analyzed case of function explanation in the humanities: to speak responsibly about the cyclic character of any process, one must be able to describe the changes of a given element as a function of time.

Lastly, we have those processes of short duration or simply events, where regularities are observable only if a given event is considered as a symptom of processes of the long or medium durations. Both the long and medium duration can exist only as a relatively long sets of events and are accessible only by the study of such sets. The history of the long duration doesn't then cease to be a history of events, but changes the hierarchy of their importance. In the perspective of the long duration – and not by some enmity toward political history – the introduction of potatoes to the British Isles is a much more important event than the battle of Lepanto. The short duration appears then to be a heterogenic conglomerate of structurally determined events and contingencies, “events-comets,” that cannot be easily derived from long lasting structures, but are still explainable by a recourse to human values, motivations, etc. (and occupy the attention of everyday witnesses and makers of history).

Here lies the challenge of historical analysis: the historian is always confronted with a seemingly chaotic and uncoordinated set of events, which do not manifest their relation to structures. The observation on large chronological scale seems to be the only remedy, requiring, amongst other things, a vast erudition (under a threat of changing the “large scale” into a large oversimplification). The main focus of Braudel's conception is, I think, not a simple differentiation of historical durations, but a study of the dependencies between them. Events do not simply articulate structures and cycles, they create them. The long duration itself cannot be comprehended otherwise than as a long series of related events, or the theory of long duration will turn into metaphysics of a poor quality. The matters complicate: all forms of the historical duration constitute each other and require simultaneous study (notice how important in Braudel's study of long duration is the example or even the anecdote). This complex and dense web of dependencies between processes of different duration is what Braudel called – with yet another meaning – the dialectics of history.

Introducing or not the plane of the “longest duration” is probably less important than it could seem, as the exact disposition of levels of duration is mainly a heuristic matter. Nobody is assuming here that history is “actually” happening on many chronological levels. What is assumed

here is that historical changes and processes are happening at a different tempo, and simplifying this into three or four levels is useful as a tool of historical analysis. This tool can be modified or perfected according to analytical needs.

The models proposed by Kmita and Braudel are not contradictory, but the latter has an important advantage: it does not cancel the diversity of possible historical relations to only one type of them (which was already discussed here), allowing a rich and sophisticated analysis, including the type of relation considered by Kmita as a rational-subjective determination, and introduced as a motivational explanation in the analytical philosophy of history.

But even the theoretical model of a multi-durational, interactive diachronic structure is not sufficient to properly deal with the problem of diachrony. In every historical discourse diachronic dependencies between events are constructed not only by cognitive models and explanatory procedures, but also thanks to forming a strength of the narrative. Many authors, including Arthur C. Danto<sup>16</sup> and Jerzy Topolski, demonstrated, often independently, that every effort of relating each event to another, in opposition to noting down their occurrence, involves a narrative utterance, connecting at least two different chronological points. This is the difference dividing a historical record and a chronicle in Topolski's terms. Even accepting the possibility of history expressed in a medium other than language – and there are historical phenomena, like past soundscapes, which may privilege other media – the explanation will still remain a matter of language. The results of quantitative or serial history, for instance, may be presented as tables and diagrams, but their explanation will involve linguistic utterances, and narrative remains the main form of representing diachrony in language.

I don't claim here that it's impossible to omit the narrativist philosophy of history, but I do claim that no history can omit a narrative organization of utterance. Paul Ricoeur aptly named narrative the basic form of articulating the human experience of temporality. As long as history is dealing with time – and time, Braudel once said, “sticks to historian's thoughts as the sand to a shovel” – the historical knowledge will have to rely on the narrative. Narrative ordering of any linguistic representation

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<sup>16</sup> A. C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1968.

of the simplest diachronic sequence, and the dependency of other forms of representing the past on language for any explanatory effort, assures an introductory understanding of history, of "people in time." Putting it otherwise: every explanatory model of history (structural, functional, genetic or any other) relies upon the previous ordering of diachronic dependencies by a linguistic form of the narrative.

The relevance of the theory of historical diachrony for a particular field of history of culture is direct and partially self-explanatory. Every possible cultural image of the world and every possible configuration of normative-directival knowledge, or simply every possible culture in its connection to the whole of civilization, may be reconstructed synchronically if that is what is required by the scholar's questionnaire. But still every culture, every human affair in fact, is temporal and always, before it becomes an object of scientific explanation, already narrated. On the basis of the narrative knowledge many complementary theories of historical diachrony can be built, and probably many should be built, as the diachronic structure of civilization seems rather complex. Is, then, a unified model of diachrony even required? Without doubt, integrity is a theoretical virtue, but uniting existing models of diachrony would be placed on the verge of eclecticism, as for different topics different models prove to be effective. The web of temporal relations within civilization is dense and intricate; there's no reason to limit ourselves to only one path.

But still there's more to the complicity of historical and cultural diachrony. Cultural images of the world more often than not include the image of history and of temporal relations and this image itself is a valid topic of historical research. The topic is hardly covered by the traditional opposition of *res gestae* and *res rerum gestarum*, although cultural images of history belong to the latter. In the perspective of all the previous considerations this differentiation cannot be interpreted as the opposition of "real" historical events and their historiographic representation: it is rather the difference between what is being constructed (*res gestae*) and the tools of construction (*res rerum gestarum*). The set of intellectual tools used to construct the representation of the past is, of course, a part of culture and may organize, to different extents and in different ways, not only the professional practices of historians, but also the social frame of imagining and experiencing the past. The specifics of this situation can be properly interpreted by a slightly artificial, but useful distinction between history and "historicality." "Historicality" would denote the conceptual

frame – belonging to a cultural image of the world – for organizing, ordering, narrating, understanding and experiencing the diachrony by the members of a given society. As many configurations of such a frame can be recognized, we can speak about the different modes of historicity. I would think about the modes of historicity as belonging to the categorical sphere of world-images.

Different modes of historicity may gain the support of members of the same society and in effect historicity may become the next place of sociocultural competition. For example, in the Western historiography of the last few decades we can observe the contest between the models of historical continuity and discontinuity, both rooted in much older narratives. I have already had a chance to present my position on this topic elsewhere, and here I'm going to only point out some of the most important observations as an illustration. Even the definitions of historical continuity and discontinuity are difficult, because both these concepts are metaphors based upon projecting mathematical terms onto the realm of the unquantifiable. There is, of course, nothing metaphorical in the distinction of mathematical functions of continuous and discontinuous input, with linear functions as an example of the former and trigonometric functions of the *tangent* and *cotangent*, of the latter. Also in history phenomena can be recognized as continuous or discontinuous, without a recourse to metaphor, only if they can be represented by a corresponding mathematical function (as for example the changes of prices and wages can). Again, we encounter the already all too familiar problems of function explanation in the social sciences and humanities. Metaphors or not, the concepts of historical continuity and discontinuity belong to the forms of narrating the past in actual human practices, and even if they do not seem to be best suited as tools of explanation, they still are a valid object of explanation. They belong to researched cultures. To understand them better, it's important to precisely reconstruct their meaning.

Let us start with an observation that historical phenomena are usually considered to be "continuous" when they can be explained by a recourse to the structural regularities of the unit in concern, and they are called "discontinuous" when such a recourse does not support any sufficient explanation. This leads to some consequences. First, the very same phenomena may be considered both continuous and discontinuous respectively to the construction of the unit of research. A famous catastrophe provides us with a proper example. The earthquake in Lisbon on 1 November 1755

shook not only the life of Portugal and the city itself, but also the moral and religious beliefs of many educated Europeans, mainly the French (and, as Bertrand Russell has put it, the faith of Voltaire). In the interpretational perspective of the French deists and atheists it was truly a catastrophe, an unpredictable event coming from outside and not explicable in terms of meaningful historical relations – a classic example of historical discontinuity. And the earthquake in Lisbon actually “intervened from outside,” as long as we remain within economic, social or cultural history. Regularities of social and economic structure do not explain this event, so it appears to be arbitrary and indetermined, but violently changing “from outside” researched structures. For a historian of religious beliefs in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the earthquake – although not its interpretations – is an abruption. But a geologist constructs and delimitates his field of research differently. In his perspective, thanks to his reference to a differently delimited structure, the earthquake of Lisbon is completely comprehensible, explainable thanks to a recourse to structural regularities and belongs to the continuous realm of the history of the Earth. Historical continuity and discontinuity then depend on the *ouillage mental* and form modes of historicity; they can't be found in the “events themselves.” The debate on historical abruption and continuity, which so strongly opposed Braudel's theory of long duration and Foucault's concept of the “archaeology of knowledge,” seems then to be a debate on *Weltanschauung*, not only on the methods of dealing with diachrony.

The second consequence is that if this is the situation, then methodical research on the modes of historicity must be postulated along with a study of their meaning in organizing the historical discourse, as historical discourse proves now to be itself shaped by contesting cultural images of the world. Matters of historical continuity and discontinuity do not exhaust the problem of the modes of historicity. In the field of the history of music for example, the ground is already solidly prepared. Conceptualizing the problem of modes of historicity in different terminology – Jean-François Lyotard's terminology of master narratives – Richard Taruskin gathered abundant evidence and started the interpretation.<sup>17</sup> Basing on his more than impressive study, at least a few such modes, organized by narrative schemes or central metaphors, can be pointed out in the literate musical

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<sup>17</sup> R. Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 3, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2010.

culture of the West, their origins explained and their contests traced. There is, then, the powerful metaphor of the “new beginning,” traceable to the early Christian concept of *Cantica nova*, through the rhetoric of the 14<sup>th</sup> century *Ars nova* and the enthusiastic reception of John Dunstable’s *musica voluptuosa* in 15<sup>th</sup> century continental Europe, up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century conceptualizations of electronic music. There is a “narrative of repetition” observable in the complex effort to repeat the effects of *musica antica* and the Platonic concept of melody, undertaken by some Italian composers connected with Florence Camerata at the threshold of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and underlying the no less complex efforts of the Benedictines of Solesme to restore the original liturgical chant of the Roman Catholic Church. There is a narrative of culminating perfection, based upon metaphors of continuity and exemplified by the 16<sup>th</sup> century concept of *Ars perfecta* and by centuries of composers’ emulation practices. There is a narrative of progress and development, of Hegelian origins and founded by the influential Neue Deutsche Schule, and active throughout many forms of musical modernism. And there are probably some more, although undoubtedly less central. The historicity of Western literate music may be, then, described as a network of different contesting and cooperating modes. The analysis of this interplay requires a separate book. Here, I’m just taking the opportunity to illustrate a theoretical topic with historical material that comes from my personally favoured field of research.

## Towards conclusions

During all the considerations presented so far, as the reader will have undoubtedly noticed, the terms “explanation” and “understanding” have been used in somewhat a liberal way, sometimes even interchangeably. This chosen tactic perhaps requires some justification at last. The debate on explanation and understanding in history and all the humanities, a century old now and connected with Wilhelm Dilthey’s opposition of *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, Johann Windelband’s opposition of the nomothetic and idiographic sciences, Max Weber’s idea of *Verstehende Soziologie*, and later, the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, is vast and rich. Trying to follow its history here would be pointless, especially if we remember that the debate is not closed, and important voices and additions still appear, to mention only Georg Henrik von Wright’s writings.<sup>1</sup> All that can be done on these pages is to support the reader with a clarification of the point assumed here.

Three forms of scientific explanation, well defined in their logical structure, have been in this work introduced as postulated in the history of culture: the causal, functional-genetic, and subjective-rational explanations (the latter being very close to the motivational explanations proposed in the analytical philosophy of history after Hempel). They do not need to be discussed again. These three procedures would be recognized by Dilthey and others as classic examples of explanation, as they all assume a logical form of a general law (the presumption of rationality fulfils this function in the case of the subjective-rational explanation). Still, we have found a peculiar trait of their usage in history: they serve as logical forms

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<sup>1</sup> G. H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2004.

organizing the possible connection between states of affairs (for example allowing to construct causal chains), while more often than not they do not lead to a formulation of empirically specific laws: causal relations between singular events are recognized regardless of the formulation of any empirically non-empty causal law. The events in history cannot be subdued to any particular law (and are then not considered to be particular cases of general regularity) but only to a logical form of the law. The idea of law becomes more heuristic than empirical. In a few words, general laws as patterns of reasoning logically organize the historical discourse.

But also other components of historical comprehension were systematically emphasized, with components rendering a purely explanatory or the “scientists” models of history insufficient. The necessity of using narrative to represent the diachronic dependency of events within any linguistic discourse was pushed so far that Ricoeur’s thesis on narrative as a fundamental form of the human understanding of temporality has been openly admitted. No narrative, though, is cognitively neutral or transparent. Narrative representation includes literary means, stylistic, poetic and rhetoric which were the object of Hayden White’s research in the 1970s. Thanks to various literary strategies, the narrative not only diachronically organizes the representation of events, but also equips it with introductory interpretations, establishing connections and engaging the reader in certain modes of historical perception, or at least suggests interpretational approaches. In this way or another, the narrative is always already a form of historical comprehension.

Explanation then, unlike in Dilthey’s concept, is a procedure, or better, a set of procedures, that is applied to a reality already ordered and comprehended by the narrative. Explanation is not reserved for the natural sciences; it appears now as a specific method of extending our understanding of history, a different entrance, in philosophical terms, into the hermeneutic circle.

If historical explanation depends on the given narrative, it is then also dependant on the forms of aesthetic representation, always present in any narrative. Some interpreters have tried to reduce history to this aesthetic element, but even if such a reduction is not acceptable in confrontation with the actual practice of historians, many considerations on the relation between history and aesthetics remain valid. They were proposed by authors as radically different as Johan Huizinga, Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit. As long as history is reported in language, this connection cannot be neglected.



Historical cognition forms, then, a nexus of narrative and an aesthetic representation of the past, and scientific explanation, the latter based on the introductory work of the former, but itself more often than not also presented in the form of narrative. Neither scientific procedures nor aesthetic representation is able to do justice to history while isolated each from the other. Such isolation seems arbitrary and ideologically committed either to “scientism” or – so popular in the recent times of postmodernism – to an enmity toward science. Unluckily, it is less committed to actual history. Max Weber described history as a hybrid. In this case being a hybrid is not a vice, it is a specific of historical cognition, that by the way made the “scientist” and “humanistic” reductions of history equally possible, equally founded in properly chosen aspects of history – and equally incorrect. If one should speak about a cognitive hybrid or about an ontologically unified and original structure of comprehension is the matter of philosophical debate, crucial to understanding the character of human knowledge, but of probably lesser practical consequences for the historical research. The effects achieved by this hybrid discourse can be generalized in the form of mobile theoretical models instead of the elucidation of laws. I can’t find any better term to name a historical cognition in general than “understanding.” Such understanding does not oppose, but includes explanation.

The debate on the scientific character of history (or anthropology, or musicology, or art history, or sociology, or any other discipline in English classified usually as a part of the social sciences or the humanities) has been going on for over a century now and, at least in Poland, became “hardwired” into the thinking of any historian or cultural theoretician. During the debate, the term “science” was in fact reserved for the natural and sometimes the formal sciences, although this is a decision far from attaining universal convention, specific to English terminology, but forced today by some organizational changes in the non-English speaking countries. Of course, no English-speaker would describe most of history with the term “science,” but other languages carry, well, different cultural images of the world. There is no reason to privilege one connected with English. German, Italian, Russian, French or Polish linguistic habits, connected with different socially accepted images of social practices, treat their equivalent of the English word “science” (rough equivalents, as we can see) in diversified ways. If history is a science then, it is a matter of semantics and of... the history of culture.

But there’s more to this than semantics. Name it science or scholarship, but this field forms a distinctive type of social practice, even if differently

conceptualized. Karol Berger,<sup>2</sup> modifying the conception proposed by Alasdair MacIntyre, elucidated a concept of social practice based not only on the social division of labour, but also on patterns of perfection, ascribed to different practices. Although he doesn't explicitly mention ascribed regulative ideas, in following the analyses of artistic practices, Berger makes also such ideas the object of research. Science as a form of social practice can be characterized in a similar way: not only by method and logical procedures, as neopositivist philosophers of science tried to utilise, but by its regulative ideas (following Karl Raimund Popper, of course) and the means of connecting them with procedures. We have two such ideas to choose from: the regulative idea of truth, pointed out by Popper, and the regulative idea of technological effectiveness, proposed by Jerzy Kmita. According to Kmita, they are not contradictory: technological effectiveness functionally connects science with the rest of sociocultural structure, while the idea of truth regulates subjectively the practices of scientists. In terms of technological effectiveness, there's no place for the theory and history of culture in the realm of science. But there's also very limited space for some parts of mathematics or astrophysics. The popular saying "where there's no patent, there's no science" throws not only the humanities out of science. But as long as we define science not in terms of function, but in terms of socially recognized meaning, by a recourse to the regulative idea of truth, cultural theory and history may well remain within the field of science, as long as they accept the discipline of truth. Philosophical problems with the very idea of truth are less important in this case than it would seem at first glance, not even an agreement of scholars on the elucidation of this idea is actually necessary. Agreement on a shared, common goal suffices enough, even if the goal itself would be deemed practically unreachable. This differs the field of science from other human practices but also from the "science of scientism" (and English linguistic custom), where science was limited to a set of procedures and logical patterns acceptable for a given philosopher (yes, philosopher: such an idea of science remained a postulate of philosophy, actual sciences, even physics, were never pure enough, up to the moment when Paul K. Feyerabend lost his nerves and wrote *Against Method*). Science as the practice of an intersubjectively controllable searching for truth crosses at last the inherited dichotomies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It includes the humanities, as long as

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<sup>2</sup> K. Berger, *A Theory of Art*, Oxford University Press, New York 1999.

they share the same central value. Those humanities that follow different aims – and of course we do not lack such humanities – still should be classified elsewhere. The practice of the theory and history of culture as described here belongs, I believe, to the broadened field of science.

It's time to shortly sum up all the previous considerations. The history of culture is, then, a scientific approach to the temporality of human cultures, i.e. systems of socially shared knowledge, consisting of cultural images of the world and normative-directival knowledge, in their mutual connections with other dimensions of social existence: the social structure, geographic environment, etc. All previous definitions and remarks should be repeated here. If such a history is being regulated by a questionnaire including questions on structural dependencies and the dynamics of change – as it usually has been during the last hundred years – it contains an implied theory of culture that we have tried to reconstruct here and confront with some other propositions. Such a history of culture can be justly called a theoretical one, as it also is a necessary field of validation for any cultural theory. Not every history of culture must be theoretical and theoretical history is not necessarily privileged: different questions demand different approaches and strategies. But every theory of culture must be historical, under a threat of being cognitively empty, and cultural theory, as we hopefully have seen, has much to gain by including the effects achieved by historians.

As was mentioned at the beginning, I am particularly and personally interested in the consequence of history-theory threshold for researches concentrated on musical cultures. The history of artistic culture is obviously a part of the history of culture itself, and a proper questionnaire can turn it into a theoretical history just the same. The separate discourse in this regard is unnecessary, the only effort needed is a proper delimitation of the field of research, i.e. the musical culture itself. Traditionally, for Alan P. Merriam for example,<sup>3</sup> musical culture in general can be defined as a set of regularities in the human usage of sound. John Blacking even defined music as “humanly organized sound.”<sup>4</sup> But everything that was presented in this work leads to the conclusion that behavioural regularities in music making can be “ideatively” represented as a set of normative and directival

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<sup>3</sup> A. P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1964.

<sup>4</sup> J. Blacking, *How musical is Man*, University of Washington Press, Seattle – London 1973.

judgements, regulating the musical practice. These norm and directives, as any cultural norms and directives, find their place within a certain fragment of a cultural image of the world (in ways already considered at length). It's impossible to determine *a priori* how big a fragment of the cultural image of the world must be considered as important for making music. The historian of, for example, the 20<sup>th</sup> century serial music could potentially limit himself only to the world of aesthetic ideas, while the historian of liturgical music, dance music or of music in a magical society would have to include much bigger fragments if not the virtual entirety of their world-image. The part of the cultural image of the world directly relating to music and representing it as a numerical harmony of the universe or the rhetorical art of affections or aesthetically autonomous system of sounds, is always connected with the rest of the image by various links.

The history of musical culture is, then, a specific perspective, assumed within the general history of culture. Only the emphasis shifts. Cultural knowledge surrounding music, as any cultural knowledge, is interwoven in social practices and inexplicable when isolated. All the problems of the connections between cultural, social, economical and geographical factors and of internal diversity and conflicts preserve their validity in this particular field. This kind of history of musical culture has the additional virtue of being in full agreement with the theoretical utterances and methodological approaches assumed by ethnomusicologists, starting with Merriam up to the current formulations proposed by Jeff Todd Titon.<sup>5</sup> The coincidence is especially strong in the case of the cognitive anthropology of music as practiced by Hugo Zemp or Steven Field, but obviously new topics, determined by the specifics of the tradition of Western literate music, do also appear. The history of musical culture can be imagined as a kind of historical anthropology or “ethnomusicology of Western art music,” as postulated, among others, by John Blacking.

The history of musical culture is, of course, intensively practiced and doesn't need to be postulated. It formed the basis of the scholarly program of American New Musicology. But if Joseph Kerman,<sup>6</sup> Susan McClary<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. T. Titon (ed.), *Worlds of Music. An Introduction to the Music of the World's Peoples*, Schirmer Cengage Learning, Belmont 2009.

<sup>6</sup> J. Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2009.

<sup>7</sup> S. McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2002.

and many others managed to break away from the naturalistic, transcendental and formal models of conceptualizing music to the social, cultural and historical point of view, they remained dependant on interpretational models and a general epistemological assumption on the form of thinking usually labelled as “postmodernism.” Their “interpretational anarchism” and often arbitrary choices of cultural context (one needs to mention only McClary’s *The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach year*<sup>8</sup>) provoked criticism. The criticism is two-folded. The positions rejecting the very idea of a sociocultural explanation of musical practices, represented for example by Pieter C. van den Toorn,<sup>9</sup> can be safely left without response as an ideology. Music is something made by human beings, and the idea that human practices and their products can somehow be independent from the sociocultural conditions with which humans are acting is impossible to accept in the light of everything that we know thanks to the social sciences and history. Declaring such dependencies as existing but ultimately irrelevant to an explanation of musical practices could be even justly called an intellectual monstrosity. But there is also a criticism aiming to correct the naiveties and errors of New Musicology, while following its methodological and historical program, by introducing proper scholarly discipline. I would connect this position with Richard Taruskin’s approach. And – a good reason for optimism – this kind of criticism was warmly welcomed.

And what with “mentality,” the first and forgotten topic of this text? The true history of mentality, and the French history of mentality which was identified as mainly the history of culture, could be something more. This “more” is of a truly psychological and, sooner or later, neurophysiological character, mediating between *homo symbolicus* and the human being as a biological organism. This mediation appears now as one of the greatest challenges for science. Here this problem will be left open. The conceptual systems of both the natural sciences and the humanities may be internally coherent, but the logical relations between them make any mediation problematic, as it was described by Florian Znaniecki, Jerzy Kmita, Donald Davidson and others. This conceptual duality is much more difficult to reconcile than the dualism of social function and subjective meaning.

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<sup>8</sup> R. Leppert, S. McClary (eds.), *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987.

<sup>9</sup> P. C. van den Toorn, *Music, Politics, and the Academy*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles 1995.



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