

Maciej Dudziak

## The Time of Paradox. A Time of Redefinition

**Summary.** The author is of the opinion that contemporary times could be described by the concept of a paradox forcing a redefinition of the fundamental concepts sanctioning the functioning of what until now would have seemed permanent states of focus of culture. On the one hand the satiated and ostensibly safe Western Civilisation is dealing with ever more problems it has produced for itself, whether in the form of post-colonial legacy that it is having to contend with, or the effects of hazy and inefficient multiculturalism projects, while on the other hand for over a decade, symbolically since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world has been undergoing fragmentation, and the tribal sentiments of diverse groups, who previously had no say of their own or were denied the right to have one, are being heard.

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In their famous book *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, today a classic, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn conduct a review of theories of culture published to date and adopted or rejected by the world of science. Back in the year of the book's publication, i.e. in 1952, the open set of concepts defining the essence of culture based on diverse disciplines in the humanities, the social sciences

and also the natural sciences numbered 164.<sup>1</sup> The book's fundamental value, quite aside from its obvious contribution to scientific development systematising knowledge in this field, or its outstanding quality as a textbook, lies above all in its defining a fundamental value: that of the world of science seeking a solution that is universal in character, verifiable in any conditions and in any cultural context. Kroeber and Kluckhohn thereby provide an extremely powerful stimulus for stating that the search for a universalising solution, and therefore one totalising culture, has little point. In terms of methodology the above problem may be explained by applying Thomas Kuhn's solutions highlighted in another classic, the book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,<sup>2</sup> published in 1962. By applying the concept of paradigm, Kuhn reaches the conviction that science is not a uniform and thereby cumulative process of creating, i.e. of producing knowledge, but is variable in character, and a key role in it is played by revolutions, or in other words intellectual turns providing the stimulus for new paradigms, thereby expanding the knowledge produced to date. Kuhn also draws attention to the role of scientists whose research efforts always possess a certain context of their emergence, thus negating the accepted opinions regarding their objectiveness. Wojciech Józef Burszta adds that:

the 'monastery of culture' is one great delusion; it was already so in regard to simple cultures, let alone the realities of postmodernity. Because postmodernism is a sort of tangible state of 'culture,' in which the 'culture' ultimately 'dissolves,' loses its regulative and determinative quality, and ceases to bind as a normative order. Human individuals are like the Kmita's 'mayflies,' they are the 'fabric of convictions and desires' that at a particular moment are nourished, transient, not passed on, and self-interpretative. What we are dealing with is but a certain entirety of convictions and desires, devoid of subject or object, which may be associated in space and time with its human bearer of some kind. Two individuals may in particular represent two appropriately different 'cultures' – one behaves and thinks in one way, the other in another; yet neither one nor the other make use of the actual resources of culture, because it does not exist or is inaccessible to them.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to place the above comments in the context of the classic Anglo-Saxon typology of science, making a fundamental distinction into *science* (empirical, repeatable and result-based sciences) and *art* (interpretative sciences as defined by

<sup>1</sup> A. L. Kroeber, C. Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, New York 1952.

<sup>2</sup> T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago 1962.

<sup>3</sup> W. J. Burszta, *Teoria kultury, czyli „dłużej klasztoru niż przeora”*, in *Kultura jako przedmiot badań. Studia filozoficzno-kulturoznawcze*, eds B. Kotowa, J. Sójka, K. Zamiara, Poznań 2001, pp. 157-169.

Clifford Geertz<sup>4</sup>). By deriving the term *art* from the Latin *ars* and *artis* one can also indicate that this word possesses the following meanings: *ability, trick, learning, knowledge, method, manner, character* and *talent*. Such understanding of science and its role in the process of shaping reality belongs to the age of late modernity, to cite Anthony Giddens' definition, where a fundamental change takes place in regard to reflection over science and its role.

The above was ascertained exclusively as an attempt at answering the question about what kind of condition reflection regarding knowledge is currently in, and how this reflection is translated into preferred directions of development. The conclusion is not very optimistic, as the world is entering another age of fundamentalisation, resulting among other things from the parcelling out of knowledge into micro-segments not remaining in close mutual correlation. A good example here is the fresh dispute between Noam Chomski<sup>5</sup> and Daniel Everett<sup>6</sup>; during fieldwork in Amazonia, the latter reached the conclusion that the rules of Chomski's universal grammar, and in particular the fundamental rule of recurrence, does not apply in the language of the Pirahã Indians. As such, the main thesis of universal grammar, about the unity of so-called human nature in the area of language, is discredited. The article *Cultural Constraints on Grammar and Cognition in Pirahã*, published in *Current Anthropology* in 2005, provoked serious discussion that Chomsky summarised as follows: the theses proclaimed by Everett cannot be taken into account as serious or scientific (although they may be interesting from an anthropological point of view) because they contradict his, Chomsky's, rules of universal grammar.

We are living today in times of a paradox forcing a redefinition of the fundamental concepts sanctioning the functioning of what until now would have seemed permanent states of focus of culture: on the one hand the satiated and ostensibly safe Western Civilisation is dealing with ever more problems it has produced for itself, whether in the form of post-colonial legacy that it is having to contend with, or the effects of hazy and inefficient multiculturalism projects, while on the other hand for over a decade, symbolically since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world has been undergoing fragmentation, and the tribal sentiments of diverse groups, who previously had no say of their own or were denied the right to have one, are being heard. To cite Karl Popper, the modern day lacks distinction between truth and certainty<sup>7</sup>. Western Civilisation, which with its multitude of shortcomings, defects and numer-

<sup>4</sup> C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*, New York 1973.

<sup>5</sup> N. Chomsky, *On nature and language*, Cambridge 2002.

<sup>6</sup> D. Everett, *Cultural Constraints on Grammar and Cognition in Pirahã*, "Current Anthropology" vol. 46, no. 4, 2005, pp. 621-646.

<sup>7</sup> K.R. Popper, *Świat skłonności*, Cracow 1996, p. 12.

ous slip-ups is the only one to possess an immanent load of self-reflexivity capable of redefining fundamental concepts, is facing a challenge: What next? Events of the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

1. A global war on terrorism launched on an enormous scale following the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, and its consequences in the shape of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, opened a period of global solidarity in the name of the peculiarly understood claim of local problem solving.

2. The Arab Spring and its consequences in the deposing of nepotistic governments of local dictators embraced mainly Northern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>8</sup> What is significant here is that these events did not initiate processes of change as a result of which the situation of the local population underwent major change, but only pushed aside the former old orders in favour of newly-forming liquid relations.

3. The second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has also seen a wave of revolutionary protests in Europe: France, Albania and Montenegro (2011), as well as Bosnia and Hercegovina, and recently Ukraine (2013/2014). These events reveal a problem knocking on the gates of the western world, not only on its peripheries but also in its centre, at the very juncture of the administrative borders of the European Union, which in this case constitutes a synonym for the western world.

4. Remarkably, the Western world, which for 400 years has been a factory of order, is now producing chaos at a steadily growing pace in its creation of solutions to problems that it created itself. Cultural order is attempting to fight with cultural chaos, not only in the conditions of borderland areas where the Western world meets the outside, but also such struggles are occurring in the very middle, or inside the factories producing this order.

The problems in each of the cases indicated above were articulated, whether at the source or as a consequence of the *vox populi*, manifested in the form of mass-scale and determined social protests on a scale previously unseen in these areas. People uniting around a common idea, understood in the broadest sense as enabling participation in the decision process, in which self-determination and democracy are at stake, came together – to cite Michel Maffesoli – in emotional communities, where the:

multiplicity of the self and the community ambience it induces will serve as [...] an 'aesthetic paradigm,' in the sense of fellow-feeling. Indeed, whereas the individualistic logic is founded on a separate and self-contained identity, the person (*persona*) can only find fulfilment in his relations with others. [...] No longer is my personal history

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<sup>8</sup> Here I have in mind: Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Jordan, Oman, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Morocco, Djibouti, Iraq, Somalia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Western Sahara.

based on a contractual arrangement with other rational individuals; rather it is a myth in which I am an active participant. Heroes, saints or emblematic figures may be real, however they exist more or less as ideal types, empty 'forms,' matrices in which we may all recognize ourselves and commune with others.<sup>9</sup>

The tribal understanding of reality, as defined by Maffesoli, would not have the chance to function if the spatial context of today's world had not become, as Zygmunt Bauman suggests, a global frontier-land in which "agility and cunning count for more than a stack of guns. In a frontier-land, efforts to give conflicts a territorial dimension, to pin divisions to the ground, seldom bring results."<sup>10</sup>

The author of *Modernity and the Holocaust*, in his own style and usage of metaphor, creates a bracket in which he also includes globalism not standing in opposition to localness: because what was previously traditional of the frontier-land had also become emblematic for global problems, although for the frontier-land itself – understood in the traditional manner – it still holds true.

Although the European frontier-lands, and especially those of Central and Western Europe, seem to be a space of buried fears, the events of the nineteen-nineties in the Balkans, as well as – or perhaps especially – the situation in Ukraine in 2014, lead one to the reflection that the security and prosperity of the contemporary world, above all Europe, are being displaced ever faster, and point by point, by fluidity and fear, while areas of uncertainty are proliferating at a pace previously unknown to the societies of the western world.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> M. Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, London 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Z. Bauman, *Society under Siege*, Cambridge 2002.

<sup>11</sup> The Arab Spring mentioned earlier is not the only example of postmodern agora having its say in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Greek terms polis and agora seem rather adequate concepts due to the character of the vox populi: the citizens; although, unlike in the Greek model, all citizens regardless of origin, or religious, class and ethnic affiliation, determine the influential power of this postmodern agora. As Wojciech Józef Burszta says, "the Greek *patriotes* means 'kinsman,' and that refers to *pátrios*, 'coming from the same father.' So what bonds kinsmen is *patér*, the biological and spiritual guarantor of family continuity. In today's understanding of patriotism, the 'father' is the fatherland (not always identified with the state), in whose territory all those termed kinsmen live. The semantic shift typical of most notions of Ancient provenance, and the metaphorization of the original meaning, performed by modern national languages, is particularly interesting and instructive in the case of patriotism." W. J. Burszta, *Kotwice pewności. Wojny kulturowe z pop nacjonalizmem w tle*, Warsaw 2013, p. 100. The worldwide crisis of 2008, which began in the United States, spilt worldwide, also – and perhaps above all – affecting the European Union. The mass protests in Greece, Spain or Portugal, combined with the events in France since 2005 based on ethnic and religious conflict, force one to reflect that the western world no longer constitutes a European embodiment of the American Dream.

Never in history, in a manner so universal, have the terms Europe, identity, solidarity and community been mentioned in a single sentence, in a single line, in the media, in geopolitical analyses, public speeches or during academic debate. One has to add that at the same time these terms have been accompanied by words of opposite tone and meaning: disintegration, escalation, cold war two, division, collapse and nationalism.

The Euro-American world is based on functional antinomies: the cultural and social production of order, solidarity and security carries with it the consequences of bringing into being chaos, particularism and fear. The more order is produced, the more fear and uncertainty blossom. Order and chaos are coupled together for better and for worse, whilst not having a clearly defined area in which they function: areas once perceived as factories of order, free from the element of uncertainty, may constitute areas of heightened risk, and vice versa. To cite the penetrating studies of Zygmunt Bauman,<sup>12</sup> it is a world of fluid and constantly changing values and ideas, where increasingly often it is not only about their political or economic application, but also about their real implementation with the use of all available means, including military.

The European Culture Congress that ended late in the summer of 2011 in Wrocław took place at a rather noteworthy moment, as pointed out by numerous people commentating on the event, which should be examined not only in terms of a cultured but, perversely enough, also a cultural project.

The moment in question is the Crisis – as broadly understood – which for several years now, again and again, has been having successive local eruptions (in Greece, Spain, Portugal, Iceland and also Ireland), contributing with its waves of unrest and fear of an uncertain tomorrow towards change in the entire system, the broader structure of Europe, wanting to remain consistent with Levi-Strauss's theory of structural change. This crisis, of which we are witnesses *on-live* and *on-line*, is only described by a few commentators as a coherent and logical cultural phenomenon, while simultaneously drawing special attention if not exclusive attention to the economic dimension. One may state with certainty (although in postmodern times certainty is a luxury carrying exceptionally unfavourable connotations), that the events and phenomena comprise a certain process, the pulsating and influencing epicentre of which is cultural in character, while its beginnings reach deeper than just a global convergence of economic processes and their mutual dependence and stimulation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge 2000; idem, *Liquid Times. Living in an age of uncertainty*, Cambridge 2003; idem, *Liquid Fear*, Cambridge 2006.

<sup>13</sup> As an illustration of this statement, it is worth pointing out only that the collapse in the mortgage loans market in the USA (of 15 September 2008) is widely considered a kind of proto-cause of the

Without delving too deep into the socioeconomic essence of the crisis, which would seem to be of a heterogeneously pulsating character, then for a certain orderliness one should note a few of its distinctive features. Firstly, the character of unrest and social fear, the already mentioned absence of the certainty of tomorrow looking with uncertainty at the phantom of the socially produced conviction of unpredictability, has its source in the fundamental opposition to the times of benign peace and relative idyll widespread in the Europe of the nineteen seventies, eighties and nineties. Secondly, one can clearly see that at least some of the problems are generated by decision epicentres not in possession of a fixed abode, escaping traditional perception of the world in categories of national ownership, and thus of a speculative-virtual character and not resulting from real economic collapses.

And thirdly, the crisis we are currently experiencing is, at least in part, also a consequence of Europe's former colonial policy and its post-colonial fluctuations, translated into the post-immigration societies actually functioning, but which have not carried out the process of assimilation, thereby not dissolving (despite obvious expectations) in the receptive and civic (nominally) society of Western Europe, understood here above all as the European Union.

To the economic crisis outlined above one should add the Arab Spring, mentioned in the *Introduction* to this book, which has shifted from its revolutionary phase into a phase of mass production of uncertainty and chaos,<sup>14</sup> and the revolution in Ukraine from early 2014.

The basis of the current crisis therefore has its source in Europe's cultural identification as, to some degree or other, a homogenous and therefore monadic community, with a defined European identity, albeit one constantly on the move.

The project of building a Common Europe, motivating the Founding Fathers of successive incarnations from the early nineteen-fifties, seems to be dissolving in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, consumed by the ad hoc acids of post-nationalism resentments, as testified to rather well by the examples of measures taken by Victor Orbán's Hungarian government, balancing on the border of nationalistic populism (including the freezing of the exchange rate for the Swiss franc, in which most Hungarians are repaying their mortgage loans, levying special taxes on foreign companies and banks, and the announcement and implementation of the slogan of no further limitation of economic autonomy imposed by external financial institutions, resulting in a rise in charges for the citizens of Hungary), or the significant

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current situation in Europe; this was caused by the collapse of the Lehman Brothers bank, founded in 1850 by Jewish immigrants from Germany, the brothers Henry, Emanuel and Mayer Lehman.

<sup>14</sup> The most glaring example is the case of Syria, where the wave of revolutionary change transformed into full-blown civil war, lasting since 2011.

*votum separatum* by Great Britain during the December summit of the European Union in 2011, at which the British, via their prime minister, David Cameron, strongly opposed Europe's so-called fiscal pact, intended – among other things – to counteract uncontrolled (and therefore adding to problems really existing) measures taken by national governments.

It is precisely this crisis of European identity, identity that is under construction and constantly on the move, that the current fears, anxieties and uncertainties of tomorrow nourish on; identity (broadly speaking) is, today, one of the central topics in the minds of Europeans. Entering the Polish word for this term – *tożsamość* – in Google.pl gives a result of 7,881,000 links in 0.09 seconds, while a similar search with the term in English comes up with an answer achieved in a slightly worse time, 0.14 seconds, but with the mind-boggling number of 801,000,000 links. No matter what one might say about identity in postmodern times, it is without a doubt one of the central issues drawing the attention of the modern day.

## Literature

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