

Alicja Węclawiak

## Culture as Dialogue

**Summary.** The aim of the study is to demonstrate the paradoxicality determining human life. The natural aspiration of the subject is to strive to achieve order, enabling a reasonably satisfying and passably predictable life, guaranteeing the essential sense of security both on an individual and on a social dimension. The ancient writers and thinkers saw the origins of differentiation, and thereby of the impossibility of achieving coherence and order, in the external reality. Views of thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries show not only a demand for diversity to be taken into consideration, but also reveal their picture of culture as something highly heterogeneous that cannot be reduced to just a single, preferred vision. Multitude of models and values creates the potential for dialogue, which is irregular and spontaneous.

**Keywords:** cultural studies, philosophy of dialogue, paradoxicality.

Alicja Węclawiak, Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań, Institute of Cultural Studies, Szamarzewskiego 89, 60-568, Poznan, Poland, e-mail: alicja.weclawiak@amu.edu.pl.

In Krzysztof Kieślowski's cult film<sup>1</sup> the fortunes of the protagonist are determined by chance. How the fortunes of Witek Długosz unfold depends on his attempt – successful or otherwise – to catch a train pulling out of the station. The director thereby shows how much human lives depend on diverse decrees of fate, which – like it or not – one must face up to, frequently without even realising that this is so. After all

---

<sup>1</sup> K. Kieślowski, *Przypadek*, 1981.

Witek Długosz, just like anybody else, has but one life, and – remaining in the film world – follows a single scenario, though one created spontaneously and impossible to anticipate. Kiesłowski rises above this perspective, showing alternative possibilities. He proves to the viewer that human life depends to an enormous degree on external reality – diversified, chaotic, and random. As a result of what would seem such a trivial thing as a train trip, the protagonist's entire life changes. But Kiesłowski shows something else as well: in each of the three cases presented in the film, each of the three possible, potential fates, Witek Długosz not only has a different life – he himself is a different person. Living in the same reality, meeting the same people, the same protagonist is a different person. For example, the director portrays him as both a communist party activist and as a member of the opposition. In the reality of communist Poland, a person's attitude towards the prevailing system was a fundamental issue, as they had to side with one side or the other. In practice, of course, this matter was not simply black-and-white, yet it is hard to believe that one and the same person could take a totally different stance towards such an important matter. Kiesłowski is therefore suggesting that not only is external reality diversified, chaotic and random, but so too is the actual person, the subject, coping throughout their life with paradoxes of which they are the creator.

The purpose of this introduction is not, of course, to analyse Krzysztof Kiesłowski's film. It is to demonstrate the paradoxicality determining human life. This, to a large degree, is what is pondered over by applied cultural studies – a project that reveals the weaknesses of the social sciences, which are important and useful in terms of prognosis but are yet unable to reach the declared *logos*<sup>2</sup>. The solution is not a return to philosophy, because “philosophical considerations are as if enslaved by the conviction that it is only the single person, every individuum, that thinks, comes to know and acts, because these are the attributes of every individual subject”:<sup>3</sup> In the meantime it would be worth dwelling on supra-individual reality, and seeking models and rules there – even if only contextual or adventitious – as the concealed regulators of social life. Culture, which thanks to its diversity creates a situation of potential dialogue, is this reality. To stop for a moment longer at the fortunes of Witek Długosz, then whereas in private life one can – and even frequently has to – apply the logical principle of either/or<sup>4</sup>, from the broader perspective, in supra-individual

---

<sup>2</sup> V. P Rotengruber, *Man in a World of Values. What is Applied Cultural Studies?*, „Journal of Applied Cultural Studies” 2015, vol. 1.

<sup>3</sup> A. Pałubicka, *Gramatyka kultury europejskiej*, Bydgoszcz 2013, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> After all, you cannot simultaneously manage to catch and miss the same train, or simultaneously board it and remain on the platform.

reality, taking opposite options into account is advisable at the very least. And this is what is tackled in this article, by revealing the dialogical character of culture, which has been shaping itself in just such a manner since the days of antiquity.

The deliberations here are split into a few sections. To begin with the dialogical character of culture in Ancient Greece is demonstrated. This is followed by a presentation of the subject's attitude towards a particular problem, and therefore their attempts at giving order to the world. Finally I present the alarming diagnosis of primarily 20th century thinkers, who also proclaimed dialogical postulates. The article concludes with a summary showing the lofty role of culture, which out of necessity is a dialogical, unstructured and paradoxical creation.

### The Cultural Significance of Paradox – the Ancient Perspective

The manner in which unstructured reality is coped with was, for centuries, the object of thinkers' deliberations and efforts. The natural aspiration of the subject is to strive to achieve order, enabling a reasonably satisfying and passably predictable life, guaranteeing the essential sense of security both in an individual and social dimension. It is worth tracing how these aspirations developed from the days of Ancient Greece, how the subject's efforts proceeded, and what they led to in the context of the thesis – significant for these deliberations – of the dialogicality of culture.

It is exactly from Antiquity that culture draws its dialogical origin. Much has been written on this issue by Anna Pałubicka<sup>5</sup>, who distinguishes two attitudes of key importance for considering European culture: the attitude of the person involved in *making the world* and the attitude of the person watching the world, the observer. In Pałubicka's opinion, this dualism formed the basis for all of the subsequent philosophy – even making its emergence possible – and the European culture that would be formed over the next 2500 years. Pałubicka signals her concern regarding the state of contemporary European culture, and deems its crisis, which she identifies as originating in the departure from the category of dualism, to be of great significance in determining the cultural life of the subject. The author believes that the coexistence of both attitudes – practical and theoretical – is needed, favourable, stimulating and energising. Pałubicka considers the attempt at merging the two attitudes, demanded *inter alia* by Edmund Husserl<sup>6</sup>, to be a misguided idea, as it excludes the possibility of dialogue, which is such a key issue for the development

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, pp. 43–44.

<sup>6</sup> E. Husserl, *Kryzys europejskiego człowieczeństwa a filozofia*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 35–36.

of European culture. She defines the beginning of European culture by taking into account the factors differentiating European culture from the cultures of Europe's neighbours. One of the most important of these factors is, in Pałubicka's opinion, the birth of philosophy, and together with this the formation of a theoretical stance.

Pałubicka believes that it is precisely the coexistence of the two attitudes – the practical and the theoretical – that paved the way for European culture to achieve significant success and a leading position. And this is because together with the birth of philosophy, the subject's attitude changed. Magical thinking, which the author identifies with the stance of involvement, is transcended when distance is born, enabling theoretical reflection. "An important feature of what I call the cultural manner of thinking therefore emerges, and namely two concepts: perception of the world – the mental image seen by the subject and the world – its description"<sup>7</sup>

The birth of philosophy allows for reflection on man's ontological situation in the world. At this point it would be worth recalling the ancient tragedians, with whom representatives of the Stoic School agreed. The views of the Stoics regarding man's entanglement in situations over which he has practically no say are illustrated perfectly by the ancient tragedies. When studying the fate of Antigone or Oedipus one can observe what little room for manoeuvre, what limited options for action are available to these characters. They can choose to take certain steps or others, yet this only creates an illusion of control over their own destiny, which is entangled in *fatum*. This category was meant to explain the diachronic nature of reality to the ancients. The ancient writers and thinkers saw the origins of differentiation, and thereby of the impossibility of achieving coherence and order, in external reality. A play that shows the diversity befitting man himself, in an excellent, penetrating yet bitter manner, is Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*.<sup>8</sup> The eponymous and now aging Krapp listens, on his birthday, to a tape recorded years earlier. Back then, still young, he set himself various goals and challenges, described a brainwave he experienced during the spring equinox, and finally decided to abandon love in favour of dedicating himself to literature. Years later Krapp laughs bitterly at this; he did not achieve his goals, his *opus magnum* proved a fiasco, he cannot even remember that brainwave, and as for love – that, unfortunately, departed never to return. Beckett shows that everybody is a Krapp – a person who today is different than the person they were yesterday and different to the person they will be tomorrow. The source of this diversity in fact lies within the person.

---

<sup>7</sup> A. Pałubicka, op. cit., p. 27

<sup>8</sup> S. Beckett, *Ostatnia taśma Krappa*, Poznań 1980.

Following these literary contemplations, it is time to return to philosophy, which was dialectical at its roots. Dialectics occupied a significant place in the philosophies of the first thinkers – and this lofty position was emphasised by the Schools of Late Antiquity, and of course earlier on by the sophists and Socrates. This is a point worth lingering over. Both the sophists and Socrates had their own, separate views regarding the individual's entanglement in reality. As opposed to the Stoics and the tragedians, the sophists were convinced that the external world is essentially paradoxical and diverse. But the subject is rational, and with the assistance of reason they may put order into that world, in accordance with the Protagorean maxim: "Of all things the measure is Man". This is because according to the sophists there is no external measure, every person perceives reality differently, and since cognition is based on the observations of the senses, which do not fulfil the criteria for true knowledge, it is relative. Heterogeneous reality is thereby reduced to homogeneous judgments. This leads to a certain coherence – although only useful to the individual – but at the same time this view removes the necessity of their collision with the inevitability of *fatum*.

A different view on this matter was held by Socrates, who sought universal truths and juxtaposed the concepts of the sophists with the category of virtue: *arete*. In attempting to investigate universal solutions, the principles of learning and acting, Socrates wanted to indicate identical benefits for the whole of humankind, yet by singling out *arete* he set himself apart from the relativism proposed by the sophists and restrained from making judgments, the peak achievement of which was the Socratic maxim: "I know one thing; that I know nothing". Nietzsche<sup>9</sup> held all of this against Socrates, seeing in the birth of philosophy attempts at confining man within rationality. Nietzsche criticised Socrates, convinced that he was the one who should be blamed for the establishing of a closed project, systematically created, sealing off the entirety of human knowledge and creating a dissonance between the recipe for the good life and the good life itself, believing that human existence cannot and should not be shut off within rational discourse.

Besides, Nietzsche is not the only one to discern a blow to the subject in ancient philosophy; Martin Heidegger also levels this accusation at Parmenides, whose statement that "apart from what-is nothing else/either is or will be"<sup>10</sup> closed the door to diachrony before man, commanding him to forgo what is different. In the meantime perhaps the later thinkers, such as Plato and Aristotle, should be held responsi-

---

<sup>9</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Narodziny tragedii czyli hellenizm i pesymizm*, Warszawa 1907.

<sup>10</sup> Parmenides, *The first Philosophers, The Presocratics and the Sophists*, Oxford World's Classics, transl. R. Waterfield, Oxford 2009, p. 60.

ble for such a state of things. They are the creators of the first philosophical systems, and it is in their activities that Pałubicka discerns the birth of the theoretical attitude. Although Plato is known primarily for his dialogues, it is worth pointing out that he does not appear in them himself; his views are presented by a variety of speakers, while the author himself rather occupies a director-like position, which Pałubicka describes as a contemplative-theoretical attitude.<sup>11</sup> Plato's contribution to the ascent of homogeneity can also be observed in his positioning of the perfect world of ideas above the paradoxical, diverse and non-ordered material world.

Aristotle even went a step further. It is to him we owe the correspondence theory of truth, according to which "to say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true".<sup>12</sup> This concept, and Aristotle's law of non-contradiction, according to which something cannot exist and not exist at the same place and time, or possess certain qualities and not possess them ( $\neg (p \ \neg p)$ ), and so it is false that  $p$  and not  $p$ ), contributed to the fact that people began to forgo what was different in the learning of reality and the unearthing of the truth, including in philosophy. The longing for a uniform and homogeneous world, in which evidence of rationality and logic can be seen in the conduct of learning subjects, led as a consequence to the likelihood of becoming entangled in intellectual schemata, and although a clear investigative horizon could thereby be established, it would be limited by dint of excluding everything incompatible and incommensurate with these schemata.

In this manner, ancient thinking attempted to rediscover the subject in heterogeneous reality. The Ancients focused above all on discerning the origins of the diachrony outside of man himself, which resulted in systematic reflection, the emergence of a theoretical attitude, and human aspirations to imbue their own existence with order, on the basis of the *ratio* category, the apogee of which can be observed in the age of the Enlightenment. The sciences of culture, with their origins reaching back to philosophy, developed in the schema thus outlined. At this point, in keeping with this article's declared structure, it would be right to conclude our deliberations regarding Ancient Greece and to trace in what manner cultural reality affects the subject's attitude to diversity, the origins of which should be sought not only in the external world, but also in humans themselves. Unlike philosophy, which – as was previously mentioned – primarily addresses the individual, "culture (its norms and directives, the vision of the world organised by them) has the status of inter-subjective, supra-individual convictions. For the human individuum partic-

---

<sup>11</sup> A. Pałubicka, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Arystoteles, *Metafizyka*, Warszawa, 2003, p. 31.

icipating in culture this is the Absolute, which provides a specific person's mind with models of conduct, enlightens him, fills with senses, and Intentionality with a capital "I", in other worlds cultural".<sup>13</sup>

### The Subject Entangled in Culture

On the basis of the deliberations so far, reality may be ascribed an infinite number of qualities, but one most definitely cannot say that it is orderly. A particularly important issue, as it is one that determines the thinking and directions of human actions to a significant degree, is precisely this state of chaos, or – to be less radical – the confusion that human beings have to deal with in both social life and private space. Efforts undertaken on a daily basis by individuals – and by communities as well – are supposed to ultimately bring about a certain harmony, which constitutes a guarantee of stability and security, and marks out lasting and regular frames of functioning. Determining factors conducive to the desired order have been sought over the centuries, while diverse historical and cultural formations have turned in various directions in attempts to find the truth determining their fate. Ever since Ancient Greece much hope has been placed in reason above all else, and each successive era, though with varying intensities and slightly different distributions of emphasis, has also headed in the direction of *ratio*, the culmination of which could be seen in the 18th century. These hopes were not so much futile as only partially realised; reality still is diachronic, while the reality so cherished by the Enlightenment only allowed the world to be partially ordered. Yet for obvious reasons the subject is not wearying in the attempts to break free of the randomness or diversity of life, which constitutes the subject's goal and point of reference in their everyday efforts. Diverse reality and the human aspiration to imbue it with order is therefore a key issue determining the directions of human actions. Interestingly, this issue seems to be have been neglected, and is rarely cause for reflection – perhaps due to the subject being unaware, perhaps due to the irrefutable obviousness of the aforementioned claim, resulting even in downright banality, and more probably so for both of these reasons.

"In the Orient, the oddest, the most idiosyncratic Western thinkers would never have been taken seriously, on account of their contradictions. This is precisely why we are interested in them. We prefer not a mind but the reversals, the *biography* of a mind, the incompatibilities and aberrations to be found there, in short those think-

---

<sup>13</sup> A. Pałubicka, op. cit., p. 68.

ers who, unable to conform to the rest of humanity and still less to themselves, cheat as much by whim as by fatality. Their distinctive sign? A touch of fakery in the tragic, a hint of dalliance even in the irremediable<sup>14</sup> writes Emil Cioran. This issue is certainly worth consideration. Because attempts at seeking unchanging guarantors of regularity – though important and necessary – are doomed to fail at the outset, allowing at the most for the development of certain relatively fixed rules, not applicable in all areas of reality and sometimes even in contradiction with one another. And it is here, on these contradictions, that the core of the matter is waylaid: as people we were, are, and will be exposed to contradictions, and moreover – we ourselves are frequently responsible for generating them. After all, occasionally an individual or a collectivity takes a different approach to the same matter in different moments. For example: a group takes a decision regarding which every participant separately has serious doubts, yet being convinced that this is in keeping with the will of the others, they do not voice their opposition. The effect is action which, paradoxically, nobody actually wants. One could multiply such exemplification.

Surprising events that result in groups undertaking measures incomprehensible to the rest but also to themselves; judgments that are not issued on the basis of what the individual actually thinks, but that are rather in keeping with what is expected of this individual, and which are altered depending on the approach and position in relation to what are after all the same phenomena; or even individual apparent contradictions in the face of which one makes choices that, at first glance, are mutually exclusive – all this comes across as paradoxical. Situations familiar to everybody from everyday experience are a source of astounding diversity, as well as numerous quandaries and dilemmas. This is because a person who thinks, says or does something that is ultimately ruled out may question their own rationality. Yet in the meantime it turns out that others also behave in a similarly unordered manner, and so either we are all encumbered with intellectual dysfunctions or nobody is encumbered with them – apart from those suffering from sickness of the spirit of course. Despite such enormous paradoxicality and the experiencing of aporia at every step, individuals and collectivities accept reality in this shape, and strive to function within it in as satisfactory a manner as possible, frequently even without pondering over the source of this diachronic nature. This is not reflected on probably because the basis of these paradoxes is also usually something of which one is unaware, something that affects one from beneath the skin. Culture.

As a certain abstract, as reality that is intangible or mainly intangible, or rather exists in thought, and is ideational – culture creates a certain conglomerate of mod-

<sup>14</sup> E. Cioran, *The trouble with being born*, New York 2012, p. 46.



els, values and attitudes determining the thinking and action of its participants. It is therefore something that – though unperceived – has an enormous influence on people's lives. In the light of the multitude of definitions grasping culture in diverse ways, it would be hard to explicitly declare what it is and close it within some defined linguistic construct. It is worth noting that problems with selecting a single, universally binding definition, one with which everybody agrees – and that disputes over finding the right designation for a given concept or polemics *a propos* how something should be understood – mainly apply to complex and heterogeneous phenomena of great importance, though people are frequently unaware of them. For example, attempts at defining what freedom, truth, art or religion are end not so much in fiasco as in showing that perhaps these phenomena cannot be grasped within a single definition. The case is similar with culture: one cannot perceive it in itself, yet it is easy to see its consequences.

The manner in which everyday events unfold, both in the life of the individual and socially, is conditioned by culture. Seemingly clear situations conceal within them a multitude of attitudes and meanings.<sup>15</sup> One could refer here to the metaphor of the iceberg: with only the peak visible, it does not allow one to fully realise the scale of the phenomenon in question. And that is exactly how culture works, steering human activity via camouflaged models and values. Thus it turns out that it is created (and may be interpreted) not only by a narrow circle of inspired persons predestined for this task, but by all of its participants, influencing the attitudes of individual subjects, their mutual relations, and their relationship with reality. What is important, though, is to notice that these models are highly dynamic; culture is not a state, but is rather a process. It takes place in contexts, and as such its situationality is important.

The question therefore arises as to why, in this case, we strive so hard to fight the paradoxicality in the life of the individual, but above all in the supra-individual dimension. Diversity within a local scope is undoubtedly less problematic, while in a broader context we strive to work out certain regularities in order to negotiate the world, avoiding collisions as much as possible. Hence too the incessant need to lend order to experience, and the efforts made to transform heterogeneity into homogeneity. Despite performing actions that are sometimes contradictory, human beings consider themselves to be rational entities, although they actually operate according to varied values. They also generate such models that, depending on the given situation, will prove the most effective. Broadly speaking, the aspirations to acquire an orderly reality, and thereby the possibility of controlling it, were favoured

---

<sup>15</sup> C. Geertz, *Interpretacja kultur*, Kraków 2005.

by modern science. But at a certain moment, when the success of the project of the Enlightenment was in doubt, criticism of the activity of science increased. The attempts at achieving a uniform and homogenous world, in which proof of the rationality and logic in the conduct of cognitive subjects was discerned, led as a consequence to the possibility of entanglement in mental schemata. Although these, in turn, establish a clear investigative horizon, on the other hand they significantly constrain it, by excluding the diachrony of reality from the field of reflection. It is sufficient to follow the history of any community or even just a selected human individual to see that this differentiation very often takes place, causing divergence between the adopted assumptions or perceptions and reality, or even between what remains in the subject's awareness and the way in which the subject participates in the world around. This dissonance frequently leads to various kinds of conflict, yet it is impossible to eliminate. Any attempts to do so are simply doomed to fail from the start, and they may even bring about a sense of failure in the struggle for a homogeneous, systematised world, or – in the case of an individual subject – to the feeling of a dangerous – or at the best unhealthy – dichotomisation or far-reaching scission. This does not mean, of course, that one should accept the chaotic state and disorderliness of reality and not aspire to create a certain order, but one should realise that efforts of this kind – despite being undeniably sensible and necessary – do not guarantee the success of such a venture. It is then worth bearing in mind that it is not human beings who are mistaken from a cognitive point of view; their sense of being lost or even of impasse is a natural consequence of the intense search for uniform, homogeneous solutions.

The Renaissance is a time when that which should ultimately explain and simplify man's reality, and render it subordinate to man, gains shape: modern science. The discovery and learning of the world around is served above all by natural science, enabling progress in civilisation on a previously unheard-of scale. It would be impossible to challenge the momentousness of the technological achievements, which undoubtedly contributed to an improvement in the human condition. However, this great success ultimately did not fulfil all the original expectations; according to many thinkers, modern science became, over time, no more than a collection of information about the world, investigating pure and irrefutable facts. This contributed to making life easier in the pragmatic sense, while in the overall balance it did not guarantee an increase in one's feeling of happiness, purpose, or fulfilment in an individual perspective. The development of technological and applied knowledge had not ensured a uniform recipe for life, which still took place within a modern reality, and which was still complicated, non-uniform and paradoxical. Investigation of facts

proved insufficient, which in turn contributed to the development of the humanities, which were based on values. These disciplines, constituting at their foundations sciences of the spirit, did not focus on explaining the world, but on understanding it. Yet as the years passed, doubts emerged here too – and in regard to the humanistic sciences in general the accusation was made that they only take into account their own research subject-matter, and as such fence themselves off from other co texts. Specific fields, which did not guarantee that the truth would be attained, even though they had declared *logos* as their ontological principle, were questioned in more detail: anthropology did not manage to formulate a general theory of culture, dealing with the problem of relativism on the one hand and ethnocentrism on the other; psychology did not eliminate the quandaries of the individual; and sociology too disappointed in a prognostic sense.

### Diversity Within Culture

Thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries wrote about exactly what the consequences of a departure from the dialogical understanding of reality would entail. Their views show not only a demand for diversity to be taken into consideration, but also reveal their picture of culture as something highly heterogeneous that cannot be reduced to just a single, preferred vision. An author who understood the world in just such a diachronic manner, and who also discerned the beginnings of this in Antiquity, was the aforementioned Friedrich Nietzsche. One could describe his philosophy as elitist – the message articulated by Nietzsche was not addressed to all. Neither can one distinguish a specific system that he created; he was hostile to such constructs. Sceptical of Socrates' activity, he believed that it was from his day that philosophy began producing closed projects, systematically created and embracing the entirety of human knowledge within specific theories.

Nietzsche saw a danger in this, caused by the dissonance between the recipe for a good life and its materialisation in practice. He believed that human existence could not be shut within dogmatic rationality, while the *Übermensch* he postulated eludes the divalent logic appropriate for systems of this type. The description they formulate is, in his opinion, a distortion, an illusion, showing life in a false way. In his treatise *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche wishes to ascertain what caused the Greek desire for tragedy, and their fondness for ugliness, pain and despair. He distinguishes the two elements that play the most important role in the process of the birth of tragedies: Apollonian and Dionysian. "With those two gods of art, Apollo and

Dionysus, we link our recognition that in the Greek world there exists a huge contrast, in origins and purposes, between visual (plastic) arts, the Apollonian, and the non-visual art of music, the Dionysian. Both very different drives go hand in hand, for the most part in open conflict with each other and simultaneously provoking each other all the time to new and more powerful offspring, in order to perpetuate for themselves the contest of opposites which the common word "Art" only seems to bridge".<sup>16</sup> Thus Nietzsche pronounces that Apollo and Dionysus are opposites, and although their art – with Greek tragedy at the top – is a common denominator; painting, sculpture and the epic were born from the Apollonian element, while from the Dionysian element came lyricism and music.

Nietzsche turned these divine patrons into symbols of a kind: Apollo became the synonym of light, restraint and measure, and symbolised the world of dreams and phenomena. Whereas Dionysus was connected to chaos, to the untamed, wildness, inebriation and ecstasy. Leaving aside the significance Nietzsche gives to Dionysianism and Apollonianism in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is worth pondering over the manner in which these criteria influence human existence. Nietzsche diagnoses a dominance of the Apollonian element, which he laments when proclaiming its insufficiency for a happy life. Also essential is Dionysianism, an expansion of which the philosopher predicts, though fearing that "[t]here are men who, from a lack of experience or out of apathy, turn mockingly away from such [Dionysian] phenomena, as from a "sickness of the people", with a sense of their own health and filled with pity. These poor people naturally do not have any sense of how deathly and ghost-like this very "Health" of theirs sounds, when the glowing life of the Dionysian throng roars past them".<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche discerns the causes of man's existential feeling of being lost in the insufficient presence of Dionysus.

A similar diagnosis is given by one of the representatives of the Frankfurt School involved in the critique of culture – Herbert Marcuse, whose reflections are imbued with the Freudian spirit. Marcuse proclaims that man is primarily governed by the urges of Eros and Thanatos – the life instinct and the death drive. Apart from this he also distinguishes two principles in relation to which life is organised – not only that of the individual, but that of society as well. These are the pleasure principle – with which he identifies Eros – and the reality principle. According to Marcuse, man is above all a creator, functioning under the influence of Eros, and in his opinion every subject that makes an effort towards organising their life in the manner most appropriate for them is creative. But the problem – as he says, echoing Freud –

<sup>16</sup> F. Nietzsche, op.cit., p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 25.

is civilisation, subordinate to the reality principle. This brings with it a series of norms that man must submit to and which he internalises. Life therefore poses a challenge for everybody – and first of all one should focus on reality, as there will be time for creativity later on. Marcuse, though, reaches the conclusion that in fact this time is not there; Eros is being gradually ousted from the world surrounding the subject, although paradoxically it is precisely Eros who is largely responsible for the existence of this world.

Progress can make it seem that man has coped with the challenges posed by reality – and therefore its pressure should be weaker. Yet in fact exactly the opposite is the case. “Civilization plunges into a destructive dialectic: the perpetual restrictions on Eros ultimately weaken the life instincts and thus strengthen and release the very forces against which they were “called up” – those of destruction”.<sup>18</sup> The reality principle is displacing Eros, although Marcuse argues there is no longer such a civilizational necessity, as he claims technology and science are overdeveloped, which leads him to put forward the thesis of hyper-repression. Thus we reach the point at which life is governed not by Eros, but by Thanatos, together with the calamitous desire for self-destruction, since a person who cannot be creative doubts the sense of their existence.

Nietzsche and Marcuse offer a similar diagnosis. In both cases they indicate different factors that create the individual as well as society. It is precisely these factors – that would seem to contradict each other, ruling each other out – that create cultural reality, and all constitute equally significant components in this act of constructing. Friedrich Nietzsche and Herbert Marcuse are of course not the only thinkers who indicated such a state of things and warned against neglecting the consideration of diverse elements. Similar diagnoses have also been put forward by other thinkers, if only to mention Max Scheler, who distinguished vital and utilitarian values; Martin Heidegger, who distinguished the *Dasein* from the *they*; or Hannah Arendt, who diagnosed two ways of living characteristic for European culture. This diagnosis resonates with Anna Pałubicka’s distinguishing of the attitudes of the involved person and the person remaining at a distance. Arendt called the former *vita activa*, and the latter *vita contemplativa*.<sup>19</sup> A peculiar spontaneity and practicality is characteristic for the first path, and according to her the subject functioning in the foreground builds and experiences the world in which they participate. *Vita contemplativa* on the other hand entails an inevitable distance, enabling observation, which then – thanks to generalising – gives birth to theoretical knowledge, which is later used in practice.

<sup>18</sup> H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization. A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, Boston 1966, p.44.

<sup>19</sup> H. Arendt, *Kondycja ludzka*, Warszawa 2010.

Hannah Arendt emphasises the momentousness of both of these attitudes in European culture, indicating their separateness and the different type of knowledge linked to each of them. *Vita activa* equates to *knowledge of how*, while *vita contemplativa* is equivalent to *knowledge that*.<sup>20</sup> The contemporary subject is a depository of western civilisation formed in this way, and both practical activity and the extremely mighty intellectual heritage – in terms of “quantity” as well as its power to influence and alter the world – played an enormous role in the development of this civilisation. Arendt appeals for an appropriate balancing of the relations between thought and action, so as to retain the continuity and dynamics of culture, and to avoid the dangerous and calamitous descent into extremes, which carries the risk of misguided and radical actions. Therefore she indicates that cultural reality is shaped by extremely different factors. Her demand, one also voiced by the thinkers mentioned above, is that one should not fall into extremes but should rather take them into account, consider them. To rule out diverse and mutually opposing criteria, to attempt to supersede them, get them out of sight and head in only one direction results in a narrowing of horizons and a violation of the equilibrium, a consequence of which – as the thinkers insist – may be a crisis both in the culture and in the subject participating in and creating it. In addition, this is a discussion about something obvious; diverse culture cannot be reduced to a single dominating factor.

As we approach the conclusion of these deliberations, it would be worth analysing how this diversity is portrayed by the Poznań School of Methodology, constituting an exceptionally important centre for the shaping of contemporary reflection in cultural studies in Poland. At this point Jerzy Kmita’s social-regulative concept of culture has to be mentioned. In his opinion, culture constitutes a “set of normative and directival convictions that (1) are widely respected in the community concerned, (2) forming subjective-rational conditionings of the functional measures regarding the established global state of this community treated as a structural context of these measures”.<sup>21</sup> Thus Kmita differentiates between norms and directives, which is to say that he indicates the convictions harboured by the subject regarding what one should do and in what manner one should proceed in order to achieve a selected goal or a goal set from outside. The respecting of these convictions constitutes participation in culture, analogous to the involved attitude, while the equivalent of *vita contemplativa* is conscious acceptance of these convictions. The subjective-rational conditions of certain types of patterns of culture correspond to the views of

---

<sup>20</sup> V. G. Ryle, *Knowing How and Knowing That*, in *Collected Essays 1929–1969*, London-New York 2009, pp. 222–235.

<sup>21</sup> J. Kmita, G. Banaszak, *Spoleczno-regulacyjna koncepcja kultury*, Warszawa 1994, p. 43.

a given subject that determine their actions, while the functional conditions are equivalent to the external reality creating the framework of this activity. The former show how the perspective of an individual's knowledge, intersubjective in character, influences the realisation of the selected intentions. This knowledge varies between different individuals – and as such the activities are subjectivised precisely to this knowledge, varying in character, depending on the context. The functional conditions make it apparent that the individual's knowledge is fragmentary. The image of the world is not universal; the subject is structurally coerced to function within a certain pool of choices. There exists a defined panoply of possibilities beyond which the individual is incapable of stepping, because they cannot even think outside of the options provided by culture.

Culture thus understood is, for Kmita, an ideational creature, a form of social consciousness and a hidden regulator of social life, as is indicated by the very name of the concept. Thus the subject is entangled in culture, whose role is not limited purely to a peculiar distribution of content of significance for the contemporary world in terms of technological and applied knowledge. Culture also functions as a medium of values, the common sharing of which enables the creation of such normative convictions that allow for a fusion of distinct communities.

### **Conclusion. Culture as Dia-Logos**

Diversity is therefore something that has always accompanied human beings. It is what determines external reality, and what is within the subject itself. Aspirations to lend order to this diachrony will not cease – as the desire to work out order sufficiently so as to ensure oneself the possibility of a collision-free negotiation of common social space, and to achieve in one's private life the comfort of defining oneself within a reasonably coherent vision, even if it were only to remain in force for a short time – as in the case of Beckett's Mr Krapp.

“The cultural turn in the humanities therefore does not signify the appearance of some new kind of discipline: the disciplinary boundaries of cultural studies cannot be delineated (which does not mean that discussion can proceed in an undisciplined manner devoid of integrity or argumentative rationality). However, this should not be cause for regret. One should rather speak of hope. Hope for dialogue, through which we shall want to deepen ever further our understanding, of the world, life and

culture, or in other words – of us ourselves. But this dialogue, in its essence, cannot lead to some kind of definitive understanding<sup>22</sup> writes Wojciech Burszta.

The situation is not without hope. A heterogeneous cultural element is indicated, for example, by Friedrich Nietzsche, Herbert Marcuse, Hannah Arendt and Jerzy Kmita, while Anna Pałubicka emphasises the fundamental dualism of European culture and warns against walking away from this project. The deliberations to date show that the multitude of models and values creates the potential for dialogue – irregular and spontaneous it has to be said, but nevertheless a connection of various issues.

## Literature

- Arendt H., *Kondycja ludzka*, Warszawa 2010.
- Arystoteles, *Metafizyka*, Warszawa, 2003.
- Beckett S., *Ostatnia taśma Krappa*, Poznań 1980.
- Burszta W., Januszkiewicz M., *Kulturo-znawstwo – dyscyplina bez dyscypliny?*, Warszawa 2010.
- Cioran E., *The trouble with being born*, New York 2012.
- Geertz C., *Interpretacja kultur*, Kraków 2005.
- Husserl E., *Kryzys europejskiego człowieczeństwa a filozofia*, Warszawa 1993.
- Kmita J., Banaszak G., *Spoleczno-regulacyjna koncepcja kultury*, Warszawa 1994.
- Marcuse H., *Eros and civilization. A philosophical inquiry into Freud*, Boston 1966.
- Nietzsche F., *Narodziny tragedii czyli hellenizm i pesymizm*, Warszawa 1907.
- Pałubicka A., *Gramatyka kultury europejskiej*, Bydgoszcz 2013.
- Parmenides, *The first Philosophers, The Presocratics and the Sophists, Oxford World's Classics*, transl. R. Waterfield, Oxford 2009.
- Rotengruber P., *Man in a world of values. what is applied cultural studies?*, "The Journal of Applied Culture Studies" 2016, vol. 1.
- Ryle G., *Knowing how and knowing that*, in *Collected Essays 1929–1969*, London – New York 2009.

---

<sup>22</sup> W. Burszta, *Kłopot zwany kulturoznawstwem*, in *Kulturo-znawstwo – dyscyplina bez dyscypliny?*, eds. W. Burszta, M. Januszkiewicz, Warszawa 2010, p. 21.