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European Social Order Transformation, Mass Culture and Social Marginalisation Processes

Introduction

Europe has been a geographical space in which – such as in the whole world – the process of deep and important transformation of social order on an unprecedented scale take place. The process is caused by changes occurring in terms of general civilisation and their effects in the areas of economy, politics, international order, morality, demography and habits. The scale and nature of that transformation justify calling it the process of globalisation.

The European Union, due to its size and meaning, has not only been an object, but also a subject of this sort of historical *game of globalisation*, pivotal for humanity. One can go as far as say – with no emphatic exaggeration – that not only the fate of inhabitants of Europe, but actually of the world as the whole, depends upon our ability to understand the nature and sense of that enormous transformation.

The European Union has been relatively conscious actor of that transformation. There is a broad debate taking place in Europe, although it seems not intensive enough considering the scale of threats and opportunities the processes in question bring with themselves. Nevertheless, it is true that the issue of transformation along with its consequences, both cultural and social, has been an object of reflection to a certain degree in the European Union. New strategies of action and implementation policies are prepared, a broad range of resources are mobilised, numerous regulations are drafted. All this considered, one is still left with an impression that it's not enough after all, compared to the overwhelming scale of problems we face. It is the

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more so that – as mentioned above – the processes in question have taken place globally but their incidence and consequences elsewhere have dramatic impact upon societies and situation in the European Union.

It is due to such reasons that it is so vital to properly understand the very essence of modern day: not just one or another aspect thereof, but the fundamental sense of the transformation the present generations are witnessing. Perhaps, quite paradoxically, one can hardly have anything more practical in our days than a good theory, expressed as the so-called *grand narration* and a profound, open-minded debate. Of course, this article is only meant to deal with a certain aspect, one of many facets of the whole problem. And, naturally enough, it is only meant to contribute to our understanding of the thing. Nevertheless, what we are dealing with is one of very important contributions to understanding the contemporary global and European crisis, which, furthermore, seems rather underappreciated.

This article discusses complex processes of transformations occurring in the modern world, and in particular their specific consequences, *i.e.* the formation of z new *quasi* social class – namely, of the excluded. This time the process responsible for ongoing exclusion of larger and larger masses of people is that of development of modern technologies, together with changes it implies at the level of a global order as well as in social orders of individual States and nations.

Considering that not even a concise analysis of that problem could fit within limited size of this paper, our actual scope of interest has to be restricted to effects of the global transformation taking place globally in the area of two specific elements of social order, *i.e.* in culture and in social structure. The article mainly deals with a narrow aspect of this subject: with how a certain specific kind of culture – a *quasi* culture that mass culture is – influences the formation of a particular *quasi* social class – that of the excluded.

1. The context of transformation

Nineteen-seventies brought quite a dramatic breakdown of the very foundation of social order of a late stage of industrialism, and especially of economic and cultural fundaments it had relied upon. This, in turn, undermined any other fundament of the whole system. Much has been written about the crisis of institutional order or – plainly speaking – of modern liberal democracy as well as on enormous transformations taking place in the area of social structure.

In my opinion, however, the reason thereof is not, or at least not principally – the crisis of industrialism[1], this model having been largely mitigated by that of market economy oriented towards social aims, by modern State conceived as one that represents the interest of all its citizens and deriving its reason to be in playing the roles of both a mediator and warrantor of a compromise achieved between the principal social classes of employers and employees;[2] and by an international balance that ensures peace (at least on the global scale and in places where such a system operated).[3]

On the other hand, the system had its weaknesses and found its bitter critics who accused it of actual narrowing of the scope of alternatives available as a result of consolidating party system and – as a further effect – of programmes of different parties becoming really quite similar; of economic burdens inherent in the system of welfare State (in consequence of applying such a *distributive correction* the compromise was disturbed here and there and overstressed in the opposite direction); of a lack of social space for young generation that criticised the State as false-hearted and full of hypocrisy when politics and morality are involved.[4] Irrespective of a lot of tensions the post-war years have brought, this social order was still functional right until the Seventies of the past Century.

A number of sociologists and economists tend to relate the erosion of that order with the economic crisis that took place during that decade, this, in turn, being seen as stemming from the notorious oil crisis.[5] This explanation fails

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[1] To analyse changes occuring in our civilisation I have used fragments of the following article: K.Wielecki, *Podmiotowość w dobie kryzysu postindustrializmu. Między indywidualizmem a kolektywizmem* (*Subjectivity at the Time of Postindustrialism Crisis. Between Individualism and Collectivism*), Warsaw 2003.

[2] See: J.Habermas, *Kryzys państwa dobrobytu i wyczerpywanie się energii utopijnych* (*The Crisis of Welfare State and depletion of utopian energy*), "Colloquia Communia", no. 4-5(27-28)/1986 (J.Habermas, *Die Krise des Wehlwahrfstaates und die Erschörfung utopischer Energien*, in: *Die naue Unübersichtlichkeit*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1985, p.141-169).

[3] See: K.Wielecki, *Globalisation and Free Market*, "Yearbook of Polish European Studies", vol. 8/2004, pp.165-186; K.Wielecki, *Community, the Crisis of Post-industrialism and Perspectives for European Integration* in: *On the Road to the European Union Applicant Countries' Perspective*, eds. D.Milczarek, A.Z.Nowak, Warsaw University Centre for Europe, Warsaw 2003, pp.319-349.

[4] K.Wielecki, *Youth, Transformation and Mass Culture* in: *Youth and Political Changes in Contemporary World*, ed. J.Garlicki, Warsaw 1998 and *Społeczne czynniki tożsamości pokoleniowej młodzieży* (*Social factors in generation-wise self-identity of youth*), „Studia Socjologiczne", no. 1-2/1990.

[5] See, *e.g.*: R.Boyer, *State and Market. A New Engagement for the Twenty-First Century?* in: *States Against Markets. The Limits of Globalization*, eds. R.Boyer, D.Drache, London – New York 1996, p.93; see also: A.King, B.Schneider, *Pierwsza rewolucja globalna. Jak*

to convince me. In my opinion, no breakdown in fuels market, no matter how serious, could have acted as a sufficient reason for so enormous economic turbulence. I also believe that the social order of those days, as well operating as it was, would have ultimately overcome this sort of problems, rather than fallen into a decline of no return.

Neither I am convinced by explanations referring to politics. Namely, what I mean is the importance of political personalities who declared themselves with much determination against the model of welfare State. To be precise, I leave apart the point that solutions proposed by both Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan at the end of their respective terms of office have mostly proven wrong. What I mean is that the Iron Lady could have been so unyielding mainly because by that time changes taking place in the very core of our civilisation effectively undermined the foundations of the post-war social compromise.

Several reasons of disintegration of industrialism can be named, one of the principal ones being general progress achieved in terms of civilisation, including scientific and technological achievements that have translated, in societies that were most advanced in those areas, into serious technological transformation since at least the Seventies. Such changes, in turn, imply other deep and comprehensive changes occurring at a very fast rate.

This is, after all, not the first time that technological and scientific discoveries or new technologies bring thorough changes to the world. The same happened when people learned to cultivate land and breed farm animals. That civilisation change, however, took place thousands of years ago. A similar thing happened when discoveries and inventions made in the Eighteenth Century contributed to the outset of industrial civilisation. This, however, only lasted for about two hundred years. The present transformation has been changing the world we live in for about thirty years and is incomparable to any previous one, especially as we consider its dynamics.

Social repercussions of changes in the area of civilisation are interesting, as well. The problems mentioned most often in this context include unemployment, disappearance of certain professions and radical changes in the status of individual social layers and classes. Another problem is that of the axiological order of the world under transformation. "*It seems* – King and Schneider write – *that both societies and individuals have lost the whole system of values that previously had provided them with the feeling of consistence and the power of adaptation. In some cases this stems from the loss of both religious faith and belief in ethical values it brought. In other*

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przetrwać? (*First Global Revolution. How to Survive?*), Report of the Council of the Club of Rome, Warsaw 1992, p.34.

cases this occurs as the result of a loss of trust in the political system...".[6] There is no agreement as to whether it is changes in the field of institutional order (mostly those taking place in the area of politics) that influence the moral order (or – in broader understanding – culture as the whole) or radical economic transformations play the crucial role in this respect. Subsequent questions to ask in this context is whether it is the former ones that imply alarming demographic processes or is the matter quite opposite and which is the role and meaning of profound changes occurring in the area of social structure within this reason-and-result sequence? Nevertheless, it is almost generally believed we live at present in times of serious transformation the original reason of which lies in changes taking place in civilisation and culture (they are mostly understood as progress of knowledge, new technologies, scientific discoveries and technological inventions).

What is the matter of actual debate is rather the scale and effects of those enormous changes. A great deal of scientists tend to see the future in bleak colours – this notably relates to D.Bell[7] However, not everybody has been so pessimistic in their views. R.Dahl presumes that processes of on-going globalisation, interrelated with *the third transformation* of democracy, are going to bring just an extension of its mechanisms, but on a larger scale.[8] A.Giddens, while certainly observing great changes occurring in the present day, believes that it is much exaggerated to regard them catastrophic. According to him, new times also provide us with great opportunities and it wholly depends upon us whether we take the chance or miss it. The same author notes a large number of threats and extremely complex problems. He maintains, however, that not all diagnoses of modern times are right and many of them are either badly exaggerated or premature.[9]

"Many prominent authors point it out – observes Giddens – *that certain kinds of technological changes are particularly important in the process of shaping the present directions of development of capitalist societies. The most*

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[6] Ibidem, p.63-64.

[7] See, in particular: D.Bell, *Kulturowe sprzeczności kapitalizmu* (*The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*), Warsaw 1994 and *The Third Technological Revolution and Its Possible Socio-Economic Consequences* in: *Industrialisation. Critical Perspectives on the World Economy*, ed. P.K.O'Brien, vol. 2, London – New York 1998.

[8] R.Dahl, *Demokracja i jej krytycy* (*Democracy and its Critics*), Kraków – Warsaw 1995, p.441 and elsewhere, Yale University 1989.

[9] See: A.Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. „Ja" i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, Warsaw 2001 (A.Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Polity Press, Blackwell Publishers Reprinted 1993) and *Socjologia* (*Sociology*), op.cit., as well as *Trzecia droga. Odnowa socjaldemokracji*, Warsaw 1999 (A.Giddens, *The Third Way. The Renewal of Social Democracy*) and *The Third Way and Its Critics*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2000.

important idea in this respect argues that we are at present entering an age no longer dominated by traditional industry as it used to be in the past. Instead, this is the age of «information technology». This way, the authors in question, rather than speak about «post-capitalist society», in fact speak about «post-industrial society». The role the science plays in modern production, ubiquitous use of computers and more recently of technologies of micro-chips, is going – according to them – to have very serious and significant influence upon the hitherto-existing social order.

Consequences as mentioned above are indeed quite likely, although the microchip technology is so recent that its actual impact is rather imperceptible so far. Of course, declaration of «second industrial revolution» is at best premature. Moreover, some reservations may be had as regards the idea that industrialism is giving way nowadays to a new type of society and hence that «post-industrial» system is going to be totally different than modern societies".[10]

Zygmunt Bauman has been another author who refuses to consider that great civilisation change in terms of disaster. "*There is no doubt* – he admits – *the world at present is different than it used to be a hundred of two hundred years ago. What is its peculiar feature is rather a process of permanent social disturbing and re-creating of global order*",[11] which the author evaluates as positive. This is in no contradiction, however, to the opinion that some tremendously important change that takes place in our days, which – according to the Polish sociologist – has to lead to a radical revision of traditional sociology and to development of a new one, called *the sociology of post-modernity*.[12]

Therefore, there may be several attitudes distinguished among sociologists that are either completely or at least partially different.[13] Whilst they are mostly concurrent in acknowledging peculiarity of modern times, some of them believe that social changes that take place bring either improvement of human fate or at least a hope thereof and other ones, quite on the contrary, tend to see the present times in catastrophic perspective. A third opinion can be met as well, proposing that modernity is an *open bill*, a new perspective,

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[10] A.Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość* (*Modernity and Self-Identity*), op.cit., p.71-72.

[11] See, *e.g.*: Z.Bauman, *Wieloznaczność nowoczesna nowoczesność wieloznaczna* (*Modern Ambiguity, Ambiguous Modernity*), Warszawa 1995, p.21 *ff.*

[12] Z.Bauman, *Socjologia i ponowożytność* (*Sociology and Post-Modernity*) in: *Racjonalność współczesności*, eds. H.Kozakiewicz, E.Mokrzycki, M.Siemek, Warszawa 1992, p.9-10.

[13] Along with the above-mentioned Bell's works the following seems worth mentioning: J.Naisbitt, *Megatrendy*, Poznań 1997 (J.Nasbitt, *Megatrends. Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*, Warner Books Inc., New York 1997).

full of both opportunities and threats, partially not defined yet, but in any case certainly depending upon human actions. This is the world *in statu nascendi.*

I thus have mentioned three principal positions as regards modernity:

1. pessimistic and catastrophic;
2. optimistic, assuming progress and improvement of fate, both in social terms and of individuals;
3. *the open bill* theory.

I subscribe to the third of the above-mentioned attitudes, however I am also the one to state in a very determined way that modernity has been a situation characterised by a very serious crisis, the scale of which is comparable to the one that implied industrialism – although the nature of the present crisis is of a completely different nature. In fact, what we have experienced is basically caused by disintegration of traditional social order, as Z. Bauman and others maintain.[14] The world ceased to be unambiguous for people, such as, in fact, society is essentially not unambiguous, either. Nor is it going to be – and this is largely an effect of processes initiated by *the information revolution*. People simply have to live with all those ambiguities.

Technological changes drive the process of globalisation and a radical current of it sees gradual transformation of many aspects of contemporary people's lives. Sociologists and politologists sometimes argue that an entirely new type of global society has been forming in these days.

There is much evidence to suggest that such a process has already started.[15] Creation of the future global social order may be seen in such phenomena as formation of global market (as an economic factor) and of global institutional order. Let me remind, however, that the fundamental subject of this article is an analysis of two specific processes: changes occurring under the influence of globalisation in the area of social structure and dissemination of a specific (since also globalised) kind of culture, *i.e.* mass culture. In this context we shall consider only one, but very important process – that of social marginalisation which is responsible for formation of a new important and quantitatively impressive *quasi* social class – that of socially excluded.

2. Changes in social structure

We are unable to foretell today how a social structure of potential global society and its constituent societies are going to look like. What can be observed nowadays is significant changes taking place in that area. A core of

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[14] Z.Bauman, *Socjologia i ponowożytność* (*Sociology and Post-Modernity*), op.cit. and in: Z.Bauman, *Wieloznaczność …* (*Modern Ambiguity…*), op.cit., p.11 *ff.*

[15] See: W.Morawski, *Socjologia ekonomiczna* (*Economic Sociology*), Warszawa 2001.

a supranational society has already been forming. In particular, elites of education, power and wealth seem to create new forms of global integration and to identify with them. It also seems that elites of the European Union find it particularly easy to build their identity through relations they have with Europe. Theses are people that also create an area of social legitimacy for an international, global economic and social order. Similar characteristics can be attributed to a class of managers and highly-educated professionals.

Middle class, however, and especially lower middle class is quite a different story. Its pauperisation is evident in a lot of places world-wide. Since this process deteriorates the middle class position, it is accompanied by its lack of acceptance for many aspects of modernity, including, in particular, to the process of globalisation and for ways its manifests itself. In order to regain their sense of meaning, of roles they have played and – above all – of their sense of safety and self-acceptance, people belonging to middle class keep narrowing the social space they can identify themselves with, mostly by revoking to the values of nation and national State.

The scale of this phenomenon is quite serious and this also concerns the European Union in which the middle class is extensive and very large numbers of people feel in threat and losing their traditional roots because of the above-mentioned reasons. As anybody can see, all sorts of political parties or movements subscribing to ideas of nationalism or even xenophobia grow more and more successful. Whilst there certainly have to be other reasons of that phenomenon, as well, it wouldn't be wise to underestimate this specific sense of a subjective loss, of suffering stemming from a crisis of identity of many, many people. This is where at least some reasons should be sought of seemingly epidemic growth of neuroses, psychiatric conditions, frailty of social ties, impermanence of marriages, alcohol abuse and addiction, aggression and increasing numbers of suicides.

Worse still, the same processes can be observed, only on an even more aggravated scale, in lower classes, which often goes in pair with tendencies to reject many values of democratic and liberal order, going as far as to sympathise with various contemporary variants of nationalism and racism. And beside that, there formed a peculiar group of lower class employees who became nomadic and travel the world for employment, in which they are paradoxically similar to representatives of elites.

The above-mentioned excluded or *marginalised* form yet another category, which in most cases escapes a stiff division into employers and employees, since they have been laid off and unable to get a job on a long-term basis, just as most of their relatives, neighbours and friends.

If we adopt another criterion of analysing societies and structural patterns of layers and classes, we are going to notice people who have already formed

ties using means of modern technology, such as *networking communities*, and, on the opposite end, those who are hardly confronted with achievements brought by science and technology in their everyday lives and in fact live quite like ancient communities of the agrarian era, in small, mostly isolated communities. Another paradox experienced in our days is that of direct contact between people who live according to logic of quite different civilisations. What is especially noteworthy is a phenomenon of subjective isolation of human communities, as exemplified by people living in certain villages who keep themselves mentally isolated from the whole social of their society and civilisation.

The *marginalised* we have mentioned above in many cases live in a similar way as they cut themselves off in their consciousness from the world outside, acquired a habit of taking from modern civilisation only as much as they necessarily need, but mentally remain in a world of bleak nooks and corners of urban railway stations, municipal sludge pipelines or slums and squats, regarding those most essential goods of civilisation they still use as depersonalised forces of nature. This way they may take advantage of night shelters, free meals or community hospitals when really necessity, but – notably – they treat such facilities just people take from nature which enables them to enjoy a bath in a river or satisfy their hunger eating wild forest fruits, but without having to identify themselves with a source of such goods and without entering in any kind of objective relations or, the less so, any profound acknowledgement or understanding thereof. This phenomenon could be described as mentality of selective user of civilisation, rather than a social subject; if we understand selective in this case as extremely alienated and actively alienating themselves users of civilisation, rather than true social subjects.

Therefore, it is certainly justified to speak about a crisis of contemporary social structures as well as about some signs of formation of a specific global social structure, in part beyond traditional national divisions and in part above them. In that sense, a specific hierarchy evolves, of more and less wealthy nations – a division which has a number of common points with other divisions, well-rooted in literature, such as that into the first, second and subsequent *worlds* or into the *North* and *South* or *Centre* and *Peripheries*, *etc*.[16]

In parallel to those processes of breaking down of old structures and formation of new ones, a growth – transitional, perhaps – should be observed,

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[16] See, *e.g.*: S.Huntington, *Zderzenie cywilizacji*, Warszawa 1997 (*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*); B.R.Barber, *Dżihad kontra McŚwiat*, Warszawa 2000 (*Jihad vs. McWorld*, Times Books, a division of Random House Inc. 1995).

of something that could most aptly be described, from the point of view of sociologic theories, as social mass.[17] Indeed, more and more people in our times either completely lack some important characteristics of society or have them seriously impaired. The features in question include being tied up within a certain social structure, being a member of a network of bonds, interests, values and cultural divisions, and so on. What is also quite evident is similarity of such forms of social existence in different countries, in different regions of the world or under jurisdiction of different States.

3. Mass culture and marginalisation

It is my opinion that cultural reasons have to be added, too, along with other factors of those processes - economic, political and referring to civilisation. The problem is that the very notion of culture is so imprecise that it in fact makes it very hard to tell what influences what and why, thus resulting in all sorts of possible misunderstandings. As we read it argued with so much consistence in modern sociological and economic literature that contemporary culture has been one of the principal elements (along with health service, education and social welfare) upon which economic success of societies has been based upon, we probably tend to agree with that. However, if we make an effort to reduce such a general statement to more specific terms and try to analyse what it really means, the issue might as well look quite different.[18] And as we hear somebody say that also in direct terms, in commercial categories, investments *in culture* belong to the most profitable ones, we also might believe it, but in fact it is obvious that this relates to entertainment and show business industry rather than to true culture.

As we consider Kluckhohn managed to count as many as over two hundred definitions of culture, we know for sure that the issue we are dealing with is all but simple.[19] Let us further note that the same author, together with

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[17] See: H.Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism. New edition with added prefaces*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1973; S.Giner, *Mass Society*, Martin Robertson, London 1976; W.Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1960; A.Swingewood, *The Myth of Mass Culture*, Macmillan, London 1977; A.Swingewood, *A Short History of Sociological Thought*, Macmillan, Basingstoke 1991; K.Wielecki, *Podmiotowość…* (*Subjectivity at the Time…*), op.cit.

[18] See, *e.g.*: A.Sen, *Rozwój i wolność* (*Development and Freedom*), Poznań 2002 (A.A.Knopf, *Development as Freedom*, a division of Random House Inc., 1999); *Kultura ma znaczenie*, ed. L.E.Harrison, S.P.Huntington, Poznań 2003 (*Culture Matters. How Values Shape Human Progress*, eds. L.E.Harrison, S.P.Huntington, Basic Books, 2000) *etc*.

[19] C.Kluckhohn, *Comparison of Value Emphasis in Different Cultures* in: *The State of Social Sceinces*, ed. L.White, Chicago 1956, as well as: *Culture and Behavior*, New York 1962.

Kroeber, also managed to put all those definitions in some order classifying them in six principal types, however, any proper analysis of that striking variety of points of view would not fit into the format of this article. Let us then start from the simplest and one of the oldest definitions proposing the notion of culture as opposed to nature or, in other world, that culture is the pool of human creation. Of course, such a description explains little because it attracts a great deal of doubt and questions right away.

We are also going to pass over an insolvable dispute about whether society is one particular dimension of the world of culture or, the other way round, whether culture is one of the areas in which society operates. Variety of definitions is, in most cases, the result of various ways of understanding the essence of what the society really is. Interactionists tend to consider culture in a context of social relations,[20] representatives of symbolic interactionism to do the same in categories of signs and symbols,[21] Marxists are going to emphasise the role of culture for reproduction or in overcoming the rule of dominant social classes,[22] *etc*. Postmodernists, on the other hand, tend to analyse culture as texts in which unjustified claims for power are hidden.[23] It is quite obvious, however, that from the point of view of sociologists culture is the creation of a society rather than of individuals.[24]

The idea that man, in his human essence, is a creation of culture in a similar way as culture is a creation of man (here understood as society), deeply rooted in Durkheim's concept of *homo duplex*[25] has been one of more significant positions in the issue under consideration here.[26] Followers of Husserl, such as Plessner and Scheler[27] put forth an idea intended to solve the dilemma faced by phenomenologists concerning relations between the sphere

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[20] M.Douglas, *Risk and Blame*, London 1992.

[21] See: D.Bell, *Kulturowe…* (*The Cultural Contradictions…*), op.cit.

[22] H.Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press 1964; M.Horkheimer, T.Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Allen Lane, London 1973 *et. al.*

[23] M.Foucault, *Archeologia wiedzy* (*The Archeology of Knowledge*), Warszawa 1977; R.Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativity and Truth. Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, Cambridge 1991.

[24] See: P.Sztompka, *Socjologia* (*Sociology*), Kraków 2002, p.233 *ff.* and J.C.Kaufmann, *Ego. Socjologia jednostki* (*Ego. Sociology of the Individual*), Warszawa 2004, p.75 and furher (*Ego. Pour une sociologie de l'individu*, Paris 2001, Nathan).

[25] É.Durkheim, *Le dualisme de la nature humaine et ses conditions sociales* in*: É.Durkheim (1858-1917). A Collection of Essays with Translations and a Bibliography*, ed. K.Wolff, Columbus Ohio 1960.

[26] See: A.Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method*, Stanford 1993.

[27] See: M.Scheler, *Pisma z antropologii filozoficznej i teorii wiedzy* (*Writings in Philosophical Anthropology and the Theory of Knowledge*), transl. S.Czerniak, A.Węgrzecki, Warszawa 1987.

of facts and that of observations. It can be said, albeit in most general terms, that intersubjectivi-sation of individual experienced worlds takes place within culture, within its creations and within consciousness of those who create.

Stefan Czarnowski described culture as the *entirety of objectified elements of heritage* of social groups.[28] Margaret Mead, as many other authors, considered culture in categories of adaptive functions of individuals and societies.[29] Bronisław Malinowski laid foundations for the tradition of conceiving it taking needs of individuals and social groups into account.[30] In traditions stemming from German humanist school and from American pragmatism, enriched with many other currents present in humanistic current of thought, culture is a result of some sort of action. For authors assuming subjective perspective, this is the only acceptable point of view, however, what they also point out is its feedback influence which also structures actions of individuals.[31]

Culture then, as can be seen, is extremely heterogeneous. Literature lists several types of culture: high and low culture, folk, artistic, working class, personal, technological and many other kinds of culture. And no wonder this is so, considering how various social creations are. If it is so difficult to close all this variety into any systemic categories, it's because wealth, vividness and a sort of chaos of human life tends to evade precise definitions and subordination to any order.

In other words, in doesn't seem possible to contain all functions of culture within any single closed typology. Even if one only considers the world of values, their enormous variety is striking. For believers most important are those that stem from transcendent sources and their sense is in that they provide guidelines how to live to deserve salvation and better future life available for those who knew how to respect the dignity of their human status. Others, however, tend to conceive values mainly as regulators of social relations, valid here and now, in order for the society to form a harmonious entity. Values are created by men so they are culture in its proper meaning. Still other ones are convinced that values are just guiding marks for an individual who desires to be happy.

Undeniably, cognitive penetration of the world is an important function of culture. It enables to understand the world one lives in, to learn to live

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[28] S.Czarnowski, *Kultura* (*Culture*) in: *Dzieła*, v. 1, Warszawa 1956.

[29] M.Mead, *Kultura i tożsamość* (*Culture and Self-Identity*), Warszawa 1978.

[30] B.Malinowski, *Naukowa teoria kultury* (*Scientific Theory of Culture*) in: *Szkice z teorii kultury*, Warszawa 1958.

[31] M.Archer, *Culture and Agency. The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, Cambridge 1988; A.Giddens, *Stanowienie społeczeństwa*, Poznań 2003 (*The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Polity Press, Blackwell Publisher Ltd. 1984).

therein, to minimise losses and to gain as much happiness as possible. However, it seems that one condition of being happy for man is to experience at least a minimum harmony in relations with other people and with nature. Man wishes to understand the meaning of his life, man wants to believe that the world is sensible and that his individual being in it does have a certain meaning. Man desires to be intimate with others, to win their respect, friendship or love. In order to achieve that, one has, at least superficially, to conceive oneself and others. Knowledge has been a necessary condition of man's survival, both individually and as a species. Man's chances beyond culture are poor.

Cognition, however, has other roles to play, as well. Among other things, it meets man's important need to satisfy one's disinterested curiosity. Such curiosity This is one of man's constitutive features, one of characteristics of his existential nature. We want – out of pure curiosity, too – to know who we are, who is man in general, how are we made, which is our potential, our abilities and limitations and also, whether God exists and if so, then which is his nature.

Culture provides us with language which acts as a condition for making real use of the potential we have, both individually and collectively. Language enables us to communicate, to understand others and to understand oneself. It sets limits and perspectives of such understanding. It is an important factor in development of intelligence and emotions. Culture is also a source of values – of socially created values, whilst as far as transcendently established values are concerned, culture acts as their custodian. Once revealed, they are accumulated and safely kept in culture. Then, through socialisation and education – *i.e.* via processes of cultural transmission – they are handed over from one generation to another, but not only in such a vertical way, but from one culture to another and from one cultural circle to another, as well.

Another extremely important function of culture is that of social integration. Values, language, patterns and models, collective rationalisations, rites and rituals, tradition – are factors contributing to bind groups and societies together, to give them features of communities, of continuity and of compactness. Culture provides people with shared horizons, shared points of reference and framework for action, it creates opportunities for communication, equips people with communication codes, methods of interpretation, *etc*. With no culture, no society could possibly exist, as contact with culture is an indispensable condition of acquiring, by any child, of a complete human potential. However, there is another reason to justify the same: in fact, not even a smallest social groups could exist without ties binding individuals together and ties, in order to take place, require values and

their necessary condition because it is values that regulate ties in an axionormative sense.

Culture or its individual dimensions, creations, *etc.*, may be values in themselves. Sometimes a work of art or some sort of moral values need no further justification, being valuable and precious just as they are. However, another important function of culture is also that it provides forms and models for expression, which is another crucial human need. It seems that satisfying the need of expression enables man to stay in good mental health, to maintain his sense of self-identity or that of belonging to a certain collective entity (a family, a group, a nation, a cultural circle, and so on). It should be added that expression of feelings or ideas doesn't have to occur as an individual process – it can assume collective forms, as well. Furthermore, such expression has additional meaning of reproducing its community and consolidating its integrity, culture, sense of intimacy, *etc*.

Whilst we are not going to present the issue of functions of culture in all its complexity, the above discussion seems necessary in order to be able to better understand what is mass culture, which in most cases is considered in categories of taste.[32] It certainly has its adherents and opponents, however, in my opinion, relationship thereto largely depend on how it is understood.[33] If one conceives it just as culture transmitted by mass communication media, then it reveals to be an inevitable effect of civilisation progress, which, however, can turn out to be double-edged weapon.

An evaluation depends on the type of contents of cultural communication, rather than on its medium. After all, in the case of precious values of culture, nobody seems to complaint of it being universally accessible. On the other hand, one could quite justifiably be anxious about whether its general accessibility, whether cheapness of retail access to a *cultural product,* coupled with subordination of mass communication media to market mechanisms, causes an imminent danger of deteriorating the quality of culture transmitted in this way and – in consequence – of causing cultural degradation of some beholders and reproduction of cultural exclusion from areas of higher culture among those groups who had been excluded therefrom in the first place.

Seen this way, mass culture, along with its generally known weaknesses and threats would also assume the role of strengthening social divisions and petrifying them, together with privileged position of educated elites and

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[32] C.Greenberg, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* in: C.Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, Beacon Press, Boston 1989.

[33] See: A.Kłoskowska, *Kultura masowa: krytyka i obrona* (*Mass Culture: Critic and Defence*), Warszawa 1980; M.Czerwiński, *Przyczynki do antropologii współczesności* (*Contributions to Anthropology of Our Day*), Warszawa 1988; D.Macdonald, *Theory of Mass Culture* in: *Diogenes*, 1953.

homogenisation of the rest of society at a lowest possible level of culture. This way it would contribute to creation of mass society and to degradation of larger and larger parts of society down to a status of being no more than members of social mass. As a result of that, new social structure in the future would consist of a narrow education elite (with other status-building elements most likely being concurrent with this one), few rather small transitional social layers and a vast majority left at the level of mass society. Considering such consequences, it seems reasonable to redefine the notion of mass culture and describe it as *quasi* culture of social masses and, at the same time, culture that acts as an important factor in bringing society down to a status of a mass.

It is disputable whether mass culture understood this way can still be seen as culture at all, considering that mass culture (in the meaning as outlined above) fails to fill the most important functions of culture. It can't be denied it provides a common language, a common system of meanings and symbols, of rules and in many cases of models and patterns, rationalisation, lifestyles, *etc*. However, the quality of things it communicates is too poor for it to become a functional factor of social order or a regulator of life of human communities. Its principal weakness is scarcity of true values it brings. Worse still, it proves unable to fill roles of culture needed by individuals, that being due to such factors as low profile of abstraction in communication through mass communication media, economic necessity to adapt contents to the level of beholders who are least demanding because of their inability to understand any sophisticated communication, and, finally, making contents and forms wholly universal in a pursuit for a market share, which makes any product totally uniformed and trivial. This makes mass culture in fact non-functional.

Optimists tend to mitigate this picture saying that after all certain price has to be paid for making culture more democratic, *i.e*. for providing equal access to the same things, irrespective of one's social status. In my opinion, they are wrong: the culture that we experience in our days acts as one of the most important factors of social exclusion. The happy few belonging to narrow elites are going to protect their high and distinguished culture this way or another. But the traditional mechanism of culture transmission – from the elite down to middle classes, down to lower classes, is thus undermined.

In fact, the former model had hardly been democratic, as admitted by Ortega y Gasset. However, what replaced it has been a dictate of masses and their standards of cultural demands which, unfortunately, fail to meet the minimum functional requirements of social systems, especially of societies facing such a difficult, new and ambiguous situation as we do in the present days of post-industrialism.

The transformation that takes place nowadays in our civilisation and the crisis of social order that it implies result in specific adaptation problems

experienced both by individuals and entire communities (including global community), causes an enormous crisis of identity, meaning and sense of the world as well as of individual life, ontological and axiological void. Culture cannot solve the problem since it copes with a serious crisis itself. All it can do is anaesthetize through a daze, take any ideological validity away, trivialise – however, to minimise the pain of existence in the world like that it cannot.

Complex challenges of modern day require people's collaboration in efforts to solve grand problems of civilisation and of humanity: political, economic, ecological and many more, some of which are quite critical to our further existence. Narrow elite of splendidly educated minds, no matter how talented, will not do to cope with all those problems. Any true improvement in modern world has to be achieved jointly with intelligent partners in all social layers.[34]

This is clearly not advocated by social exclusion of a major part of society. True problem is not about the lack of elites capable of taking on the crisis. Rather than that, it is about hem not feeling really responsible, either for society or even for themselves.

Among factors that have influenced this situation popular version of post-modernism should be mentioned, which invalidates relevance of the sense of mission, ambitions of conceiving the world in unambiguous way, aspirations to understand and reconstruct social order. Another guilty is found in the modern version of Nineteenth-Century liberalism with its trust in an *invisible hand* that releases any visible hands or minds from an obligation to bring order tot he world.

Elites have probably been capable of taking up the challenge in the face of such a profound global crisis as our post-industrial times bring, however, other conditions for the problems in question to be solved are not met, the above-mentioned problem of insufficient awareness of the crisis among elites and inadequate responsibility for that being just one of such unsatisfied conditions. Others include normal circulation of ideas, models, values, rationalisations *etc*. components of culture between elites and the rest of society.

This way, elites create their culture in the sense of a lack of duty, but also of impossibility to communicate with anyone but a small circle of authors of exclusive culture (sometimes as small as several professionals specialised in a given field). Meanwhile, the rest of society satisfies their cultural needs

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[34] See, *e.g.*: M.Crozier with contribution from B.Tilliete, *Kryzys inteligencji. Szkic o niezdolności elit do zmian* (*The Crisis of Intelligence. An Essay About Elites' Inability of Self-Change*), Warsaw 1996 (Michel Crozier avec Bruno Tilliette, *La crise de l'intelligence. Essai sur l'impuissance des élites à se réformer*, InterEditions, Paris 1995).

directly from means of mass communication which seem inclined to do anything to consolidate social masses in their narcissistic sense of self-acceptance and in belief on ill justified arrogance of those whose cultural aspirations are more refined. The lack of sense of communication aggravates the *revolt of artists* (or perhaps of scientists, as well) *against the philistines*,[35] which in fact further closes science and art in an exclusive circle and discourages those who still attempted to enrich their meagre intellectual diet.

Efforts by mass-media – sometimes undertaken using shocking methods – to plant a conviction in their audience that a crap product is capable of satisfying even a connoisseur taste, are often backed by some intellectuals, enthusiastic about post-modernistic ideas which – in an appropriately vulgarised form – become such popular sayings as: *there is no disputing about taste*, *facts are indisputable*, *any opinion is right when shared by someone,* or *beautiful is not what is beautiful, but what one likes*. This way experts or authorities who demand any intellectual effort from a beholder are rejected as ones who usurp the right to embarrass folk revealing its ignorance. Or – as Foucault put it – as those who use symbolic violence in behalf of unjustified sense of rule.[36]

All this takes place in a falsified climate of freedom. The truth is no such freedom exists when one needs especially much effort and money not to be fed with what mass culture has to offer. The latter offer is not only available anywhere, at any time; worse still, it goes as far as pushily intrude and impose itself even to those who wish it not. In order to enjoy more sophisticated culture, instead, one usually has to take some time to find it, to be adequately prepared through proper education, and in most cases to pay much more for ambitious cultural offer.

Summing up, culture within which it could be possible to take up the challenges the present day confronts us with lives in a ghetto and is in regrettable condition, whilst mass pedagogy seems to have declared itself for mass culture. As one of consequences thereof, both individual and collective ability to resist the offensive of mass culture is on the wane as is the potential to solve true problems posed by the crisis of post-industrialism. Admittedly, mass culture, which has mainly been based upon thinking in categories of definite images, impairs human abilities of abstract thinking, of formal operations, which is quite indispensable in the complex world.

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[35] See: H.Arendt, *Między czasem minionym a przyszłym. Osiem ćwiczeń z myśli politycznej* (*Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought*), Fundacja Aletheia, Warszawa 1994.

[36] See, *e.g.*: M.Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses*, Paris 1966; *The Order of Things. An Archeology of Human Sciences*, Routledge, London 1970.

Real democracy is only possible in society. Social masses, contrarily, form a factor favourable for totalitarianism to arise. The process under consideration here, seen this way, is very serious indeed as it is closely related with formation of a certain type of social order. Forecasts the process has given so far are dim. In this context one is tempted to quote de Tocqueville's opinions regarding individualism and collectivism. The French author wrote argued that in certain conditions individualism might quite easily change into self-confident, self-accepting egoism that contests any authority and voluntarily gives up its freedom.

A clinical example of this condition is found in post-industrial society in which mass culture appoints each and every individual (in very real, rather than abstract terms), irrespective of one's education, achievements or merits, as the centre of axiological order of modern day. Using slogans of exceptional status of everybody, the status that deserves particular protection (*be yourself!)* and should become a genuine object of expression (*express yourself!*), mass culture at the same time cringes to the customer, *public*, electorate, and in the end it levels and evens down all individuals, it makes them all alike. As an ultimate consequence, however, each one ends up being like any other, a cell of scarce significance, easily replaceable element of mass society.

This impairs people's motivation to self-development, to evolve and improve, to change oneself and change the world, to regard the better educated, more cultural or moral as models to follow. Furthermore, it deprives people, to a certain degree, of a sense of meaning of their very lives and of sensibility of the world. Promotion of happiness understood in narcissistic and hedonistic categories, which encourages people to get uncritically enthusiastic about mass culture, petrifies people at their current level of mental growth, of needs and impulses they feel. This way and under such an influence people become incapable of altruistic attitudes. In their restless pursuit of insatiable feeling of fun, of total satisfaction of desires, in thirst for ecstasy of pleasure, they lose their ability to develop and to sense real happiness and satisfaction, such as is in fact attainable by those a man who knows how to take up the challenge of human dignity and of human fate.

Social mass is not only contradiction of society, it is only one of the most degenerated forms collectivism may possibly take, such as narcissistic, self-focused individual, which unconditionally accepts itself and is void of the sense of responsibility for either itself or others, is one of the most degenerated forms radical individualism may assume.

It is not the author's ambition to discuss all problems concerning mass culture. The aim of the article has been just to reveal the influence of culture upon how society differentiates. Variety as such is not necessarily wrong at

all; in fact, in many cases it accounts for a precious value. However, not when it leads to pauperisation and marginalisation, to long-term unemployment, to cultural uprooting, social alienation and moral degradation of major parts of society. In the world under transformation, with all the new technologies, these are the differences that may either prevent or at least hinder making the most of the opportunities provided by the enormous change in civilisation that we live in. Worse still, it may well occur that mass culture acts as one of driving factors of realisation of a bleak scenario. Instead of becoming a source of social peace, culture might become a reason of unprecedented revolutions, wars and terrorism.

Society under globalisation needs cultural fundaments, however questions about which kind of culture this is and what does it bring with itself are all but irrelevant. The European Union has got a great potential to influence the outcomes of the *globalisation game*. However, it is not going to perform this function successfully, unless it properly understands what is it really about. Accordingly, it is a dramatic necessity to launch a comprehensive debate about the change in terms of civilisation we are experiencing in our days and about an outline of the future world that gradually appears from the chaos of change. This is an obligation of intellectuals, of the whole intelligent class, of all people educated enough to participate. Matters concerning mass culture and social marginalisation it brings must not be sidelined in such a global debate.