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WHERE IS CULTURE HEADING? CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON STEFAN MORAWSKI'S PROPOSALS

ABSTRACT

In this article, I present the position of Stefan Morawski – one of the most eminent Polish aestheticians and philosophers of art – on culture and its axiological dimension. On the other hand, I critically verify what culture's central diagnosis is: a cultural crisis. I believe that to reach such a goal, I need to present the following central issues that make up this position: an understanding of the concept of culture and civilization; the ontology of value; an understanding of the cultural and civilizational crisis; Morawski's typology of this crisis; and Morawski's suggestions as to what distinctive features of culture testify to its crisis. This, I think, creates the opportunity to try to answer the question posed in the title: Where is contemporary culture heading?

Key words:

culture, crisis, postmodernism.

Basic considerations

Stefan Morawski's decisions arose from the interiorization of human values. Today, an attempt is being made to redefine humanism. This is due to symptoms that testify to its weakening condition and transformation into posthumanism. As we experienced the decline and fall of geocentrism and theocentrism, today we might be witnessing declining anthropocentrism. Scientific development is forcing the creation of a new metaphysics, resulting in founding new aesthetics, ethics, and philosophical anthropology. Such decisions are most effectively formulated based on "new materialism/radical ma-

terialism.” Its representatives – such as Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, Diane Coole, and Samantha Frost – argue that limiting ourselves to the subjective treatment of one species is unauthorized. Instead, we should focus on answering the following question: Which beings should be considered worthy of humanitarian treatment? (I ignore here the etymological meaning of this word.) Robert Pepperell writes in *The Posthuman Manifesto*, “It is now clear that humans are not the most important things in the universe. This is something the humanists have yet to accept”¹.

Morawski’s path was not a clash with posthumanism, but a “private war”² with postmodernism. Having recognized the symptoms of modernist myths giving way, he supported those who advocated the crisis of culture – from which he derived the crisis of aesthetics, which he believed resulted from the crisis of art. Thus, on the one hand, the crisis of culture in this position is a supreme – but not basic – assumption, while on the other hand, Morawski favored recognizing that processes and phenomena occurring in this superior structure influence the sub-structures co-creating it. Therefore, if we assume that they point to a deepening crisis, then this crisis consequently encompasses science, philosophy, art, and religion.

Morawski criticized contemporary culture through diagnoses and considerations regarding contemporary art and aesthetics. In accordance with the assumptions of the adopted methodology, he searched for the justification for the metamorphosis of the object of cognition of aesthetics in the diachronic-synchronous regularities and the genetic and functional developmental changes of this discipline of knowledge. In addition, he incorporated these changes in the superior empirical structure – that is, in art – for which he conducted analogous explorations, resulting in argumentation justifying the validity of decisions concerning aesthetics. The transformations of both aesthetics and art, however, originated from the superior structure – the cultural and civilizational structure. It is here that the processes Morawski considered fundamental for the changes in and the shape of contemporary art and aesthetics took place.

It seems reasonable to present the basic categories and their understanding in the proposal of what the cultural crisis is and how it manifests itself according to Morawski, in order to take a clear position on the subject. The task is not easy, because Morawski studied this phenomenon from the

¹ R. Pepperell, *The Posthuman Manifesto*, www.intellectbooks.co.uk/File:download,id=412/Pepperell2.PDF [access: 19.09.2018].

² A. Szahaja, *Stefana Morawskiego prywatna wojna z postmodernizmem*, „Odra”, 2001, 1, p. 56–61.

late 1960s until the late 1990s³, thus devoting over thirty years to this reflection.

I wish to extract the essentials, but I omit the very interesting metamorphosis of understanding the crisis category and its interpretation, which would fundamentally dismiss us from the mainstream of considerations. I assume that Morawski finally specified the position regarding the crisis of culture in the book *Niewdzięczne rysowanie mapy ... O postmodernie(izmie) i kryzysie kultury* (1999), an important supplement of which is a 1999 article "W Janusowym widnokręgu."

The validity of this diagnosis of the crisis of culture in the understanding presented by Morawski should be postponed till the end. I think the most important doubt concerns the scale and size of the crisis, but also the sources of the crisis.

³ Important sources on this topic include S. Morawski, *Trojaka funkcja wychowawcza sztuki*, "Estetyka", 1963, 4, 19–71; idem, *Z aktualnych problemów estetyki amerykańskiej. U źródeł kryzysu sztuki*, part 2, „Literatura na Świecie”, 1973, 1, 238–269; idem, *Fotografia to wielofunkcyjny instrument*, "Nurt", 1978, 2, 2–5; idem, *Kryzys neoawangardy?* [an interview by Stanisław Urbański], "Zdanie", 1983, 3, 11–14; idem, *O końcu ery nowożytnej*, "Projekt", 1983, 1, 34–38; idem, *Uwagi o końcu ery nowożytnej i złym samopoczuciu neoawangardy europejskiej*, [in:], *Na zakręcie: od sztuki do po-sztuki*, Kraków 1985, 362–377; idem, *Warianty interpretacyjne formuły "zmięch sztuki"*, [in:], *Na zakręcie...*, op. cit., 279–307; idem, *Wstęp*, [in:], *Na zakręcie...*, op. cit., 5–21; idem, *O współczesnym kryzysie kultury*, [in:], *Przemiany techniki dźwiękowej, stylu i estetyki w polskiej muzyce lat 70.*, Kraków 1986, 11–33; idem, *O współczesnym kryzysie kultury* [detained by censorship in the Ossolineum Publishing House, the text was to appear in *Edukacja kulturalna a egzystencja człowieka*, Wrocław 1986], 37–4; idem, *W labiryncie aksjologicznym*, [in:], *O wartościowaniu w badaniach literackich*, (ed. S. Sawicki, W. Panas), Lublin 1986, 95–138; idem, *O filozofii sztuki i kryzysie racjonalizmu*, "Twórczość", 1987, 5, 53–57; idem, *Perfidna gra z przeszłością. (Awangarda, postmodernizm. Czy sztuka jest w stanie kryzysu?)* [an interview by M. Karpiński], „Polityka”, 1988, 49, 8; idem, *Kultura wzywa pomocy*, „Po prostu”, 1990, 19, pp. 1, 5; idem, *O wyróżnikach postmodernizmu w sensie kulturowym*, "Universitas", 1992, 2, 62–70; idem, *W aurze kryzysu (sztuka i estetyka wobec kulturowego tła)*, [w:], *Humanistyka jako autorefleksja kultury* (ed. K. Zamiara), Poznań 1993/95, 75–90; idem, *Ani wolności, ani równości, ani braterstwa – a co w zamian?*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy", 1994, 5, 12–18; idem, *O kulturze w czasach marnych*, „Odra”, 1995, 1, 60–64; idem, *Mitologiczne aspekty postmodernizmu (jeden z papierków lakmusowych „kryzysu kultury”)*, "Konteksty", 1996, 1-2, 9–13; idem, *O świecie smutnym, który wydaje się wesoły*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy", 1996, 14, 183–194; idem, *Po co technika*, "Przegląd Techniczny", 1996, 40, 6-7; idem, *Theses on the 20th Century Crisis of Art And Culture*, "Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities", 1996, 47, 451–467; idem, *Dwa różne końce dwóch stuleci*, "Dekada Literacka", 1997, 10-11, 12; idem, *O tak zwanym kryzysie kultury w relacji do postmoderny(izmu)*, [in:], *Niewdzięczne rysowanie mapy... O postmodernie(izmie) i kryzysie kultury*, Toruń 1999, 273–331; idem, *W Janusowym widnokręgu*, [in:], *Humanistyka przelomu wieków*, (ed. J. Kozielecki), Warszawa 1999, 287–308; idem, *Obraz kultury na przełomie wieków*, "Przegląd Artystyczno-Literacki", 2000, 7-8, 138–144.

Understanding the concepts of culture and civilization

To formulate the meaning of the concepts of culture and civilization, Morawski drew from Lucien Febvre's *Civilisation: le mot et l'idée* (1930) and Philippe Bénéton's *Histoire de mors: culture et civilisation* (1975). On their basis, he built an understanding of these categories in opposition to what nature is. Morawski took this distinction between nature and culture with full consciousness of the historical context. In addition, he formed part of the currents of thought that distinguish the concepts of culture and civilization, sources of the latter seen in the nineteenth-century philosophy of the German and German-Austrian cultural and historical school. We can also see here a clear connection with the works of Florian Znaniecki, especially in such publications as *Cultural Reality* (1919) and *Nauki o kulturze* (1952). This connection, however, does not refer to Znaniecki's idealism in its epistemological dimension. Morawski was inclined toward the views of Jerzy Kmita, who linked the understanding of the category of culture with its socio-regulatory function, in the center of which ideological value lies.

The basic question is, of course, what is meant by the concept of culture. The answer, especially among researchers aware of its consequences, is entangled in earlier or determines later decisions of a methodological, epistemological, philosophical and axiological nature. In the case of Morawski, an answer is dictated by his worldview choices. What was culture in his opinion? He wrote, "through culture I understand not only [...] spiritual creations in the field of religion, philosophy, science, art, etc. [...] but the whole social life considered in terms of values, norms, ideals, and directives that affect the beliefs and way individuals act"⁴. Importantly, in this sense Morawski embraced not only symbolic praxis, but also what affects the historical level of social consciousness existing at a given moment. In the center of social awareness, he placed its axiological dimension, which is also realized in the sphere of moral and political life and the pragmatics of everyday life.

Morawski's concept of civilization crystallized through the extraction of differences between the concepts of culture and civilization. Culture, being a place of values, defines what is good, whereas civilization embodies and concretizes these goods. Belonging to the sphere of consciousness, and in it to its highest level – identity, culture finds its complement in civilization, because civilization is a structural and institutional skeleton, and its ontological dimension manifests itself in things, events, interactions between them and people, and interpersonal relations themselves. The distinctive feature of

⁴ S. Morawski, *Niewdzięczne rysowanie mapy... O postmodernie(izmie) i kryzysie kultury*, Toruń 1999, p. 278.

civilization is its strict dependence on culture. Admittedly, it is civilization that brings culture to life, but it also undertakes the effort to achieve what in culture is an idea, an intention, a utopia. According to Morawski, this feature of civilization is dictated by the deep conviction that values, norms, and ideals co-determine human fate. The achievements of past generations affect both civilization and culture, except that civilization, unlike culture, is less susceptible to such influences. Unlike civilization, however, culture is less influenced by foreign patterns⁵.

Ontology of values: Historical and cultural relationism⁶

These sets of antithetic properties, extracted by confronting the understanding of the concepts of civilization and culture, do not answer the very basic question: How is it, first, that we realize in what axiological universe we operate, and second, that we know where the universe ends and the earth begins to come to us: a world of values we cannot accept? A question asked that way requires, at the very least, an indication of Morawski's point of view on the ontology and epistemology of values.

In a synthetic way, Morawski's position can be described as historical-cultural relationism. Its basic assumption is that values exist in our world because of our biopsychic needs. In addition, values are formed in an intersubjective judgment and learned by identifying them in both nature and the human world. In this learning process, one realizes that they are values: either a sensory-detectable quality or a set of qualities, existing in a given object or thing, or the goal that is worth effort and sacrifice to achieve. These goals and the sensory-detectable qualities are determined by the level of collective and individual consciousness at a given historical moment. Since they differ between epochs, we deal with relationism in the diachronic (vertical) dimension. This historical dimension overlaps with the relational dimension of values resulting from the environment, the nation, and the cultural circle, all three creating the values. This is a synchronous (horizontal) dimension. The advantage of historical-cultural relationism is its openness to understanding what value is and what can be a value, because a set of values is determined

⁵ Ibid, p. 278-279.

⁶ About Morawski's theory of artistic (aesthetic) values, I wrote comprehensively in the article *O teorii wartości artystycznej (estetycznej) Stefana Morawskiego*, "Principia", 2002, XXXII-XXXIII, 159-188, and in the book *Filozofia sztuki Stefana Morawskiego*, Gdańsk 2010.

based on the empirical experience of social practice, but is not passed down for implementation.

Second, not deleting the quality or goals that can be found in this set does not negate the existence of values specific to particular epochs, cultural circles of axiological paradigms, that is, certain matrices according to which the selection and hierarchization of these values is made. Situations in which these paradigms are changed arouse awareness of what has been in force so far. S. Morawski drew attention to this by stating that “because we are absorbed in a given axiological tissue or we are aware (thanks to reflection), or it happens without reflection, but in both cases it usually happens that a certain hierarchy of values is accepted via its interiorization, in accordance with the dominant canon or even the axiological paradigm. Only when there is disruption or the threat of destroying it, we become fully aware of the syndrome of goods we are immersed in”⁷. To this, we can add the following: What we are talking about, where we see good, and where we are afraid of evil. In fact, in this understanding of how the axiological dimension functions, there is the conviction that everything that is axiologically marked constitutes a world of culture. And because there is no area of life that would be deprived of value, our existence is both culture-shaped and culture-shaping in strict dependence with what has been defined by the concept of civilization. This position of Morawski's, to justify the understanding of culture as a habitat of values, is not and does not have to be universal and binding. Just read Samuel Huntington's book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), to learn about the negation of this understanding of culture. An advantage of Morawski's position on this matter lies in the sharp definition of the axiological nucleus of culture – which determines what in fact this culture is. Moreover, the concept of culture understood this way makes it easier to explicate the tensions and dependencies existing between it and civilization, and makes it impossible to identify the two concepts with each other.

Understanding the concept of crisis

In its etymological roots, the very concept of crisis brings the meaning of the moment of the rejection of what is unacceptable and the acceptance of what remains after this rejection. In total, we can distinguish three basic ways of how the meaning of this concept functions. The first one is related to the understanding of the crisis as a low point followed by improvement (in medi-

⁷ Ibid., p. 279.

cine and astronomy); in economics, the meaning is similar, except that the phenomenon is cyclic.

In the second sense, the crisis is – in contrast to the first understanding, which stresses its episodic character – chronic and permanent. This understanding is appropriate for religious and theological thought, where sin as an act of free will is tied to human existence, and every departure from good is deepening the area of crisis – evil (sin). To find an exemplification for such an understanding of this category, it is enough to recall the diagnosis of the crisis of culture and the way of overcoming it which Nikolai Berdyaev presented in *The New Middle Ages*. Instructive here may be Jacques Maritain or the more orthodox Étienne Gilson.

The third understanding is close to Morawski's. It is emphasized that this understanding results from a radical discrediting of the existing social system. This understanding adopts the thoughts of Reinhart Koselleck, who pointed to the following distinctive features of the crisis phenomenon. First, the crisis refers to socio-historical breakthroughs of varying intensity. Second, it should not be identified with a catastrophe, because it is irreversible and final – while the crisis finally passes away. Third, the basis of the crisis is the clash of existing and set needs and expectations with experience that challenges these needs and expectations, disrupts current ideas about the world, and provides a sense of alienation. Fourth, the crisis is connected with a change in various spheres of human life, characterized by the increasing acceleration of changes and transformations, including those in the axiological sphere⁸.

Morawski advocated understanding the concept of the crisis of culture as a shock that encompasses the entire existing axiological structure, a shock that consists of the demolition of its foundations, which were accustomed to being considered inviolable. This shock's consequence is the compulsion to review the accepted – as obvious – paradigm, according to which certain values are higher while others are lower⁹. In essence, he was referring to the domination of objective, pragmatic-useful values, as opposed to those which in the previous centuries were considered primary. "By the crisis of culture, I understand the collapse of the axiological hierarchy, which has been observed to varying degrees since ancient times. It is the core of the Greco-Judean-Christian heritage, of which we have been depositaries for centuries. The crisis of culture is raising civilization's goods to the top, that is, the growing wealth of products, more and more effective technology, improved usability of activity: It is the career of values such as consumerism and ac-

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 282-283

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 283.

ceptance of everything as a condition for a good and happy life”¹⁰. Morawski believed that we are witnessing the usurpation of the priority of civilization over culture, a property characteristic of a new cultural formation known as postmodernism. However, what we are witnessing did not appear suddenly: It is the result of phenomena and processes that have been occurring in the European culture for over three centuries. These phenomena were the subject of analysis and reflection by Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Johan Huizinga, and many others. Morawski was not original in terms of his interests. He pointed out, however, that the source (the genesis) of this phenomenon lay in the choices and their consequences made in the eighteenth century. In addition to delight over reason and science, this century had self-awareness of the price that had to be paid for the fascination with the development of science, a price which included the loss of spontaneous authenticity and alienation in multiple dimensions.

If, as Morawski proposed, it is justified to date the contemporary history of the disintegration of the present axiological paradigm after Oswald Spengler’s works, one must assume that this process complements the rapid progress of civilization. Therefore, should one question – in the name of the professed axiological universe – what brings about the progress of civilization and hits these values? To what extent is this attitude consistent with historical-cultural relationism, and to what extent, as Morawski described it, “can [it] be considered quixotic, remembering that it is first necessary to introduce into the calculating argument [...] that the disagreement with the status quo is something pitifully funny”?¹¹

Typology of the concept of cultural and civilizational crisis

The idea of a crisis of culture and civilization has been formulated in various ways, depending on the decisions in the field of culturology, the methodological approach, the adopted philosophical assumptions, the worldview, and the system of values. In his proposal for the typology of the concepts built around this topos, Morawski took the metacriterion of time, dividing the 20th century into two periods. The first one lasted till the end of the Second World War; in fact, this caesura is determined by 1947, the date of the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) by Theodor

¹⁰ S. Morawski, *W Janusowym widokręgu*, [in:] *Humanistyka przelomu wieków*, (ed.) J. Koziński, Warszawa 1999, p. 306.

¹¹ S. Morawski, *Niewdzięczne rysowanie mapy... O postmodernie(izmie) i kryzysie kultury*, Toruń 1999, p. 286.

W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who presented the widely known crushing criticism of technological progress. The second period, spanning the time period after the Second World War, begins – according to Morawski – with Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*.

In the first period, Morawski distinguished five basic types of understanding the concept of cultural and civilizational crisis. The first way, which can be called naturalistic, finds the causes of the crisis in non-cultural factors – meaning that it is issues arising from nature that are of fundamental importance. This is how we can interpret the Freudian conflict between libido and the id or the concept of entropy in Henry Adams' understanding of topos of crisis.

Morawski saw the second type of crisis source in such social processes as alienation and objectification. Emphasized in this context are the specific mechanization and reification of interpersonal relations; decreasing the level of knowledge resulting from its democratization; and uncompromising unification and modeling of people, so that it becomes easier to guide them, by shaping their views and predicting their behavior. This idea can be found in many works from that period, but, as Morawski rightly pointed out, the most representative examples of this type of understanding of crisis include Witkacy, F. Znaniecki, Ortega y Gasset, J. Huizinga, and Karl Mannheim. What connects such different personalities is relating analyses and conclusions to totalitarian systems, which contain all the causes of this type of crisis.

Scientific mind as a source of crisis is typical of the third type. Here, reflections deal with social phenomena in which the hierarchy of values is dominated by the mind, accused of increasing instrumentalization and an ever-closer link with technology and engineering. This leads to the betrayal of philosophy and reducing the mind to its pragmatic dimension. As Morawski accurately observed, representatives of this trend include E. Husserl, K. Jaspers and M. Heidegger.

In the fourth type of understanding the concept of cultural and civilizational crisis, the source of the crisis is thought to lie in the expansion of atheism and agnosticism: departing from faith, a paucity of theodicy, and pushing the Church into the role of supporting actions of the state. We can find this kind of reasoning in the works of Christian thinkers such as N. Bierdiajew, Marian Zdziechowski, and J. Maritain, a co-founder of the concept of the Second Vatican Council.

This period is complemented by the criticism of industrial societies, whose development is, paradoxically, considered the cause of the crisis – this is the last, fifth, way of understanding the cultural and civilizational crisis in

the first period of the twentieth century. This undoubtedly most accurate and penetrating analysis and diagnosis of the crisis is contained in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Morawski pointed out that "in the context of our triumphant civilization, capable of developing an atomic bomb and death factories on a gigantic scale, this work evidenced the total bankruptcy of totalitarian systems, but also of parliamentary democracy of the American type; of the idea of the primacy of indigenous communities, but also of the idea of flattening all goods of Kulturindustrie [the mass culture industry]; of instrumental mind associated with the fetishism of goods [...], but also of blind, irrational powers pushing towards the murder of the lower race"¹². This complements the criticism of the technological society closes the first part of the description of the topos of the cultural and civilizational crisis. The basis and justification for these Cassandran diagnoses undoubtedly lay in the trauma of the First World War. The Enlightenment myth in the WWI was empirically questioned, and its face shown – a face that had never been seen before. It was the experience of the WWI that marked the main direction of doubts; let us just mention Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man without Qualities*). The Second World War confirmed these fears and diagnoses. The victory over the Third Reich and the end of the WWII did not solve the existing problems. On the contrary, it forced societies to respond to new processes and to revise their assumptions.

Like in the first period discussed above, in the second – after 1945 – Morawski distinguished five ways of understanding the cultural and civilizational crisis.

A continuation of the naturalistic position, the first way looks for causes of the crisis beyond cultural factors. It is mainly the reinterpretation of the legacy of Freudian psychoanalysis and the consequences that can be derived from it. In the case of H. Marcus's *Eros and Civilization* (1956) and Norman Brown's *Life against Death* (1959), it is an attempt to solve the Freudian aporia between libidinal energy (Eros) and the instinct of death (Thanatos). Unlike in Sigmund Freud's diagnoses and interpretations, culture does not have to be a source of suffering, bodily elements can be accepted without dispute with the id that displaces them, and non-repressive sublimation can be reached.

Erich Fromm complements this point of view in an interesting way. In his proposal, Eros transforms into biophilia, and Thanatos into necrophilia. It is the widening of necrophilic tendencies in human nature that is a cause of the crisis. A panacea is to develop biophilic skills (formative and creative skills as well as the ability to love, build, and affirm life). According to

¹² Ibid., p. 288.

Fromm, our epoch shapes necrophilous attitudes – because objects become an area of human reality. We contact each other through objects and run into their world, being fascinated by their capabilities, feeling safe and unpunished in their surroundings. It unleashes the ability to establish lasting relationships with other people (because they require too much effort), leads to the instrumental treatment of oneself and the environment, and shapes an attitude oriented towards having and not being.

The second way of understanding the cultural and civilizational crisis, which started to dominate over others around the beginning of the 1960s, can be described as technological. It resulted from the conviction that technological and civilizational progress lead to crisis. This means that, despite their beneficial influence on the quality of human life, successive inventions and scientific discoveries lead to the cultural crisis. Of course, such pessimism has had its opponents, such as Alvin and Heidi Toffler and Richard Buckminster Fuller. Morawski proposed the designation of the continuum of the crisis-generating nature of technological progress from Lewis Mumford through Robert Boguslav to Stanisław Lem, who all indicated that civilizational progress causes the gadgetization of human life and determines its relationship with the “Other,” thereby impoverishing the values that culture has treated so far – and does continue to treat – as the highest¹³.

In the third type, the source of a crisis is self-perpetuating production for production sake, the devastation of natural resources, and gargantuan consumption. These crisis-generating properties are closely related. The intensification of production devastates natural resources, and the goods produced await their buyers, whose desire to have them needs to be aroused. This self-propelled spiral works because many believe that the more products they collect, the faster they should use them. Those who share this way of understanding the cultural and civilizational crisis believe this spiral leads to self-destruction. Among thinkers adopting such reasoning, Morawski listed Guy-Ernst Debord, a counter-cultural representative associated with the neo-anarchist ideology. Debord demasked the society of the spectacle, based on representations and ad hoc values, whose list, however, is not exhausting.

A concept that made spiritual production the subject of its cognition, sought for the causes of the cultural and civilizational crisis in the metamorphoses of science, philosophy, and art. It referred to the topics already mentioned by O. Spengler, Witkacy, and representatives of the Frankfurt School. According to the concept, the crisis of science resulted from its departure from the ideal of truth rooted in logos in favor of practical and useful truth, characterized by its profitability, in the broadest sense of the word. The crisis

¹³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 290.

of science manifests in close connection with the possibility of its use and application – hence the alliance of science with technology and politics. In addition, the crisis triggered the realization of the dependence of its paradigms upon the socio-historical and cultural contexts. Enough to mention Michael Polanyi, Paul Feyerabend, Thomas Kuhn, and Stephen Toulmin.

Like in other fields of knowledge, the crisis in philosophy was revealed in the critics of its metaphilosophical assumptions and in refining its methodological technique. Morawski aptly captured the effect of these procedures as follows: “The more the pressure of pragmatic criteria, the more devout the worship of the method (of its accuracy) and of the technical efficiency of argumentation, the clearer was [...] the breakup of love and wisdom in favor of the achievements probably accurate, but characterized by just a partial perspective”¹⁴. Instead of offering universal proposals and a holistic apprehension of the world, this reasoning is merely relativism feeding on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and Ludwig Wittgenstein, resulting in the dusk of philosophy¹⁵.

Art, the distinctive feature of which was autotelic values (or values that are aesthetically valuable), lost contact with reality, becoming more a narcotic than a means of expressing changes in both culture and civilization that would genuinely keep up with them. As a reaction, the creation of anti-art, post-art (the beginning of which date from avant-garde art, such as Marcel Duchamp’s readymades, to Neo-Avant-Garde (new avant-garde)), and various new arts flourished, such as conceptual art, happening, performance and body art, and pop-art and hyperrealism, which for post-art was an inspiration in the mainstream known as postmodern art (including Jeff Koons, Mark Kostabi, Mike Bidlo, and David Salle).

Finally, the fifth way of understanding crisis in the second period manifested itself, according to Morawski, in questioning – as a result of civilizational progress and conformism – the values of Christian culture. The continuum of this phenomenon – today recognized as New Age – stretches between Nikolai Bierdyaev and Jacques Maritain through Arnold Toynbe and Rudolf Steiner to Theodore Roszak and Carlos Castaneda.

Of course, Morawski’s typology of crisis does not assume that the literature to which he referred includes positions which exactly correspond to the crisis types he identified. On the contrary, they cross each other and support argumentation. Morawski recognized that each type revealed its corresponding truth about the cultural crisis – and the types combined together reflect the multidimensional picture of this phenomenon. He argued that they

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 292.

¹⁵ S. Morawski, *W Janusowym widnokregu*, op. cit., p. 299.

all made up the general topos, whose origin can be seen in the subsequent disenchantments of the world, in Max Weber's understanding.

Why did all those thinkers attempt to diagnose crisis symptoms? And why did they defend their diagnoses? According to Morawski, they did this "against the crystallized system of values, in order to defend the undermined axiological system, whose elements should be: (i) contact with nature and spontaneous liberation of one's carnality; (ii) continuous exploration of one's strengths and meditation on the sense of personal existence; (iii) going out towards transcendence and opening up to its mystery [...]; (iv) self-realization in syntony with another person and with the community – not only the closest one, but also the universal one; (v) balancing all mind powers [...]"¹⁶. Ultimately it was about axiology that would prevent the one-dimensionality of people, in H. Marcuse's understanding. In addition, according to Morawski, this concept helped realize that European civilization was running towards a dead end.

It is worth asking the follow question: Why did Morawski introduce a caesura, by dividing the distinguished types into the two periods – before and after the Second World War? I think the former typology contains features that in modernism are symptomatic for the upcoming postmodern formation, after which postmodern properties are intensified and enriched. Morawski assumed the 20th century was a "shortened" age: It begun with the outbreak of the First World War and ended with the emergence of a permissive, consumer society – the postmodern one¹⁷. A fundamental difference between the "shortened" 20th century and postmodernity is based on the change of the axiological paradigm – a change for the worse. "Living for the moment and in a constant hurry shapes a specific axiological perspective. Everything becomes fluid, nothing is illicit, one gets away with everything"¹⁸.

Distinctive features of contemporary culture

Contemporary culture is distinguished by negative values. Morawski believed this was because civilizational progress precedes cultural progress. This precedence has important effects, such as blurring the difference between value and worthlessness; flooding society with information that functions as either a commodity or a political and ideological message; increasing

¹⁶ Idem., *Niewdzięczne rysowanie mapy...*, op. cit., p. 294-295.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 287.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

already tremendous consumption, forcing buyers to exchange their goods constantly and frequently, in the hope that this would increase their prestige; emphasizing marketing and giving it the most privileged position, through self-perpetuating consumption; dominating mass culture over high culture, a domination that flattens the latter and pushes it to the margins of social life; and subordination of the ethos of work to the anti-ethos of use, for which there is no limit. In *Amerique* (1986) by Baudrillard, we can also find blurring and detaching – thanks to realistic fiction – from reality and the desertification of the cultural landscape, proportionally to the spiritual emptiness. A social matter itself – with its mad carousel of artifacts, objects-signs, or signs-objects – takes on a hyper-realistic shape, thereby eliminating the difference between the performance and what is presented. Greedy existence becomes the meaning of life, with the universe of discourse specifying the possession of more and more in more and more different ways.

Distinctive features of contemporary (post-modern) culture are consumerism and permissiveness, in contrast to the outgoing modernity, dominated by the values Zygmunt Bauman called “gardening.” What could be a possible reason for this change? Morawski believed that it resulted from the exhaustion of the Enlightenment recipe for happiness. Subsequent experiences of the 20th century undermined the cultivated myths of Enlightenment, a process analyzed, among others, by M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), H. Marcuse shows a “happy” human life. According to Morawski’s diagnoses, we live in ambivalent times. On the one hand, these times represent a closure of the Enlightenment ideals, and they even caricaturize and monsterize them. On the other hand, they carry elements of the upcoming new cultural and civilizational formation that are emerging in front of our eyes.

Morawski’s diagnosis was radically pessimistic. He also predicted the intensification – in the foreseeable future – of such phenomena as the Americanization of culture, the domination of mass culture, the spread of multimedia art, the decline in the prestige of scientists and science itself, and the dominance of mythos over logos¹⁹. Why would this particular trend strengthen? For Morawski the reason was obvious: “Behind postmodernism is the

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 291. Morawski also draws attention to the processes opposite to the post-modern trend: the renaissance of religiosity (but not institutional religiosity) and Muslim fundamentalism. I mean here, among others, the New Age phenomenon, about which I wrote in P. J. Przybysz, *Źródła estetyki nowej duchowości*, “Przegląd Religioznawczy”, 1997, 4, p. 19–29; this subject is considered, among others, in the comprehensive work *New Age. Filozofia, religia, paranauka* by A. Zamojski (Kraków 2002).

notion that it promotes an easy, entertaining, and ludic life, and that it most completely satisfies the hopes and dreams of Schlaraffenland”²⁰.

Where is modern culture heading?

I am far from repeating the accusation of G. Dziamski that “one should distinguish the general and specific (regional) concepts of crisis – the crisis of aesthetics as a research discipline from the general cultural crisis”²¹. The argument that combining both crises causes mutual support does not convince me: In practice such support does not have to occur. Secondly, as Dziamski claimed, combining these crises transfers the general cultural drama to regional crises (in art and aesthetics)²².

The methodology Morawski adopted justified comparing and looking for relationships and interactions between structures. There is no question of combining crises, but rather of changing one’s perspective: from the inside on the one hand and from the outside on the other, in both diachronic and synchronous perspectives. If we were to follow the trail of combining crises, then we could combine an existential crisis with a cultural crisis or a crisis of art, but I think that it is impossible to absolutely separate the above-mentioned types of crisis. What can be legitimately questioned is how Morawski understood crisis is its unique and unprecedented scope and tragic character. It is easier to defend a position promoting the thesis that crises are a phenomenon typical of cultural and civilizational development. From the historical perspective, along with ongoing technological development, we deal with crises of an increasingly wide range and with more and more serious consequences. From a synchronous point of view, however, a crisis is unique for the society experiencing it, has an unprecedented scope, and triggers tragic experiences. So, if the unique character of a crisis is stated, it is always relative to those that have taken place before and relative to our experiences here and now. However, crises that are to arise will be superior to those experienced before, just like ours exceed those experienced by previous generations. I would be inclined to claim that crisis is an immanent element of human history.

A second doubt, which I think can be formulated, is the treatment of postmodern culture as a clinical case of crisis that is deep and unprecedented

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 305.

²¹ G. Dziamski, *Postmodernizm wobec kryzysu estetyki współczesnej*, Poznań 1966, p. 45.

²² Cf. *ibid.*

in every area (philosophy, science, art, and religion). According to Morawski, culture in this sense cannot fulfill the hopes placed in it. I think this results from a specific perspective that is the principle of criticism of postmodern culture. Morawski used the modernist axiological universe, a basic criterion for the evaluation of postmodernism (in this way he can be placed in a row with such eminent critics of postmodernism as Jürgen Habermas, Ernest Gellner, and Fredric Jameson). Since it is so bad, why is it so good? In other words, why is culture such a widespread and consumed good? Consistently moving along the path set by modernist values, Morawski pointed out that postmodern culture was kitschy, eclectic, consumeristic, hedonistic, and entangled in a game on the supply and demand market, whose goal is profit. Jeff Koons, Mark Kostabi, Haim Steinbach, Sherrie Levine, Mike Bidlo, David Salle and Julian Schnabel are artists who, in Morawski's opinion, form the core of what postmodern art is. Is it not so, however, that in wanting to set and at the same time hit the center of the shield, Morawski reduced what this shield was made of? In addition to being entangled in the market, this art leads the game with the market, uses irony and context through quotation, pastiche, and eclecticism. The game using conventions and with the conventions of mass culture exposes its bias and scandal. This art's feature is "dualism," because it is understood by the recipient seeking only entertainment and simple experiences, but also by the recipient who appreciates "intertextual games"²³.

Third, a final evaluation of what would be included in this period of postmodernism (after F. Jameson, I use this concept as a periodizing concept) is premature because the period has probably not ended yet²⁴.

Fourth, if one adopts the position of historical-cultural relationism, one should not take offense against culture (including art) when it does not meet one's expectations. Art radically changed during the 20th century, starting from great avant-garde, through neo-avant-garde, and ending with postmodern art. Along this path, the "aesthetic sacrum" of art was subjected to multidimensional negation. Works of art began to lose their distinctive features. As B. Dziemidok put it, "Destruction also embraces the work of art

²³ Some elements that are similar to the suggestions presented here can be found in a review of S. Morawski's book *Niewdzięczne rysowanie mapy... O postmodernie(izmie) i kryzysie kultury*, Toruń 1999, by A. Szahaj, *Stefana Morawskiego prywatna wojna z postmodernizmem*, "Odra", 2001, 1, 56–61. I wrote more about Morawski's critique of postmodern art in P. J. Przybysz, *Stefan Morawski's Critique of the Postmodern Art*, [in:] *The Great Book of Aesthetics. The 15th International Congress of Aesthetics*, (ed. Ken-ichi Sasaki), Tanehisa Otabe, Japan 2001, CD.

²⁴ Cf. F. Jameson, *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*, [in:] *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture* (ed.) H. Foster, Washington 1986.

itself, which does not have to have any aesthetic values, and it can be (some even think it should be) aesthetically neutral. It does not have to have any finite structure, and it should even be programmatically open and co-created by the recipient. It does not even have to be a special creation by people; it can be, for example, a human body, an element of nature, or an industrial product to which the artist has given artistic status through the act of choice itself. An artistic object does not have to be permanent, either. [...] It later turned out that an object is not necessary at all (conceptual art). [...] This is because many artists and theoreticians think that art is not to be aesthetically contemplated. On the contrary, it is to knock its audience out of indifferent contemplation, to catch their attention and force them to think or to shock them, arousing intense and often unpleasant emotions, and finally to free their creative abilities and force them to co-create”²⁵.

In postmodern art, we analogously deal with other types of perceptive subject. It is a recipient who understands and interprets, or a shocked recipient who experiences unpleasant experiences, or a co-creator, who interacts with a work of art. Hence, as aptly pointed out by B. Dziemidok, postmodern art is accompanied by theories (e.g., by N. Goodman, A. Danto, U. Eco, J. Łotman, J. Kmita) that essentially deal with issues such as cognitive, communitive, or worldview values of art. This does not mean that the “postmodern human” has lost their aesthetic needs. Actually, I think contemporary art helps satisfy these needs even in a more – not less – effective, intense, and mass way than ever before. It is not museums and galleries where such needs are satisfied, however, but hypermarkets, fashion salons, car showrooms, mass sports and stage events, advertising, music videos, tourism (especially its segment that offers emotions related to the beauty of nature), and the like. Does it make sense to get offended by such a culture and exclude it from the area of the cognition of aesthetics? True, this type of “art-like production” is oriented towards primitive aesthetic needs and vulgar tastes – but I think no argument is strong enough to disqualify some aesthetic needs at the same time considering others worth fulfilling²⁶. Aesthetics cannot deal with satisfying only sophisticated and subtle aesthetic needs; that way, it would cut off the entire sphere of cultural facts – for we are experiencing a deepening process of de-aesthetization of art and the aesthetization of everyday life. As

²⁵ B. Dziemidok, *Główne kontrowersje estetyki współczesnej*, Warszawa 2002, p. 304.

²⁶ I use the distinction between artistic and aesthetic values proposed by B. Dziemidok, *O potrzebie odróżniania artystycznych i estetycznego wartościowania sztuki*, [in:] *Primum philosophari. Księga pamiątkowa Stefanowi Morawskiemu ofiarowana*, (ed.) J. Brach-Czaina, Warszawa 1993, p. 53–75; B. Dziemidok, *Osiągnięcia i słabości formalizmu artystycznego*, “Sztuka i Filozofia”, 1993, 6, p. 106–126.

Morawski aptly points out, this process is due to the distinctive features of postmodern culture: consumption, hedonism, and permissiveness.

Final remarks

An issue that arouses respect and which, I think, results from worldview decisions is the anthropological axiological universe rooted in modernist ideals, a universe Morawski advocates for. What can be a panacea for this type of challenge? Morawski replies that in this awareness of universal happiness, it is philosophers who play the role of leading troublemakers: those who argue over which solutions are the best among the possible ones. Such an attitude towards philosophy results from the understanding of philosophizing as disagreeing with prevailing opinions and not sticking to the status quo, which means taking the responsibility for degrading the most previous values and an attitude towards the postmodern syndrome represented by the phrase “non possumus”.

I wonder what attitude Morawski would take towards the contemporary proposal of posthumanism. Would he declare his “private war” with it, as he did with postmodernism? Since in posthumanism we deal with the connection of all beings and anti-anthropocentrism, the humanistic attitude that accepts such a state of affairs forces us to forgo egoism against non-humans. In addition, to break with the connotation *bios* reserved for anthropos, Rosi Braidotti introduced a radical egalitarianism for all forms of life understood as *zoe* – the *zoe*-centered egalitarianism²⁷. Thus, this proposal does not reduce the axiological universe, but – on the contrary – opens us up to otherness and diversity. A characteristic feature of Morawski’s construction of his own position was an argument-based dispute and an openness to different solutions. I suppose that Morawski would engage in a “private war,” but its result would differ from what he achieved in his war with postmodernism.

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²⁷ R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, Malden 2013, pp. 50, 86–88, 143–146.

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**DOKĄD ZMIERZA KULTURA?
KRYTYCZNA REFLEKSJA
NAD PROPOZYCJAMI
STEFANA MORAWSKIEGO**

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule niniejszym podejmuję próbę z jednej strony prezentacji stanowiska Stefana Morawskiego, jednego z najwybitniejszych polskich estetyków i filozofów sztuki, na temat kultury i jej aksjologicznego wymiaru. Z drugiej strony to co jest jej centralną diagnozą – kryzys kultury poddaję krytycznej weryfikacji. Sądzę, że dotarcie do tak określonego celu wymaga przedstawienia następujących centralnych zagadnień składających się na to stanowisko: rozumienia pojęcia kultury i cywilizacji, ontologii wartości, rozumienia kryzysu kultury i cywilizacji oraz przeprowadzonej przez Morawskiego typologii tego pojęcia, wskazania na podstawowe cechy dystynktywne, które zdaniem Morawskiego świadczą o jej kryzysie. To jak sądzą, stwarza możliwość podjęcia próby udzielenia odpowiedzi na pytanie postawione w tytule: Dokąd zmierza współczesna nam kultura?

Słowa kluczowe:

kultura, kryzys, postmodernizm.