

Sławomir Magala

The Concrete & the Ecosystem : Ecology of the Embodied and Socialized Knowledge

Rocznik Naukowy Kujawsko-Pomorskiej Szkoły Wyższej w Bydgoszczy.
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Sławomir Magala

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM (EM.)

JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY CRACOW

THE CONCRETE & THE ECOSYSTEM: ECOLOGY OF THE EMBODIED AND SOCIALIZED KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION

Gregory Bateson distrusted mainstream methodologies of academic knowledge production between the Treaty of Versailles after WWI and the birth of cybernetics after WWII. Applying Alfred North Whitehead's¹ distrust of misplaced concreteness, Bateson had suggested "Going native" at the expense of imposing a theoretical "grid" supposed to cover all empirical data and to fit all sizes of problems. His *Steps to an ecology of mind* appeal to the qualitative and participative, constructivist and – avant la lettre – "postmodernist" researchers, who trace social narratives arising "bottom up" in complex societies. The case of an interactive academic experiment in a struggle for identifying and attracting top talent at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam and the case of the reinterpretation of one of the most successful mass movement's political aftermath reveal the role of Bateson's self-reflection in redesigning educational events. The cultural (narrative, linguistic) turn in social sciences and the humanities testifies to the attractiveness of Bateson's idea of harmonizing the individual, social and eco-systemic levels of knowledge production and sociocultural processes in an era of emotional capitalism.

Gregory Bateson was aware of the cognitive, philosophical, epistemological, paradigmatic or methodological problems in dealing with knowledge ideologies. He had profoundly distrusted the latter, following Alfred North Whitehead long before Isabelle Stengers (2011) suggested "thinking with Whitehead". He had also suffered as a cultural anthropologist – his long-term empirical studies conducted together with Margaret Mead had not been the-

¹ Cf. A. N. Whitehead & B. Russell (1910–1913). *Principia mathematica* (3 volumes). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press; , A. N. Whitehead (1925). *Science and the modern world*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (Lowell Institute Lectures). Editors' note.

oretically edited nor publicly presented. His intellectual position in research communities was strong enough, but he had also been considered marginal, eccentric, a typical “niche” case. Clearly defined and institutionally entrenched research communities drifting through the Manhattan projects, silicon valleys and complex managerial constructions resembling “Atlas” super project in Geneva’s CERN have already transformed into new, networked and relatively little known forms of cooperation and collision (cf. Boisot et al., 2011, Child & Ihrig, 2013). Hence a newly increasing attention paid by philosophers and historians of science to the first signals sent by Bateson (in his *Steps to the ecology of mind* from 1972), but also by Merton (I mean his concept of serendipity, cf. Merton, Barber, 2004) or, – very recently – Becker (*What about Mozart? What about murder?* cf. Becker, 2014) to the helmsmen, the navigators, the captains of academic consciousness and socially organized pursuit of legitimate (i.e., academically certified) knowledge.

Is Bateson’s ecology of mind an attempt to decipher an evolutionary attempt of our species, which consists of taking over the steering wheels of the evolution? Is this an attempt to decode the intelligent design through an analysis of its forsaken and unsuccessful past disguises – to analyze them as eugenic, class, ethnic or racial projects? Shouldn’t we become more vigilant, more self-critical when becoming aware how we explain, investigate, learn, teach, apply, experiment, design, that is before we jump to meta-conclusions (Bateson would have called reaching these conclusions an arrival at a meta-dialogue), before we wash our hands in the holy water of scientific methodology, washing away our methodological sins? Bateson came from a clearly atheist family background and his favorite mode of self-reflection has been styled on the meditation practices of Zen Buddhism. Hence we can hardly suspect him of implying an existence of an intelligent design on the part of a higher being, when trying to contribute to the harmony of individual with a society and with an ecosystem. He was probably closer to the idea of a harmonization of the scientific-instrumental knowledge with religious and aesthetic experiences. In his view, art and religion were less instrumental domains of organizing experiences and making sense of them than science (which had additionally been constrained by the neopositivist ascetic drill). Harmful neopositivist ascetic drill had been abandoned by quite a lot of top intellectuals shaping our thinking in the 20th century – Bronisław Malinowski and Witkacy (Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz), Karl Popper and Ludwik Fleck, Gregory Bateson and Margareth Mead – all went in a similar direction, while Florian Znaniecki and Max We-

ber, Pitirim Sorokin and Theodor W. Adorno chose different directions still, though also far away from the neopositivist dictatorships. All of the above-mentioned thinkers had modified the ecosystem of knowledge created by researchers in social sciences and in the humanities.

**CONCRETIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE ECOSYSTEM
OF A UNIVERSITY AS A KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION FACILITY:
ON THE CASE OF THE ERASMUS HONORS PROGRAM**

Let us begin with a very concrete case of a meta-dialogical application of research in ethical, economic and sociological aspects of culture to the methodology of didactic work in an academic environment (lecturing and conducting interactive seminars). First of all by doing so we are clearly evoking a very old European tradition. Empirical illustrations of abstract theories have always been very popular, from Plato to the Bible and from the Bible to the Enlightenment. Herodotus or Thucydides did tell concrete stories, and so did the apostles or the great writers of the Renaissance – after all, a practical and concise guide to conquering and maintaining power has been illustrated by Machiavelli with a selection of concrete cases from the ancient Greece or Rome and from his contemporary Italy. The mechanism of such concretization is simple. We begin with an abstract idea, say a salvation of soul or a construction of a classless society, or a balanced and sustainable growth. The idea of salvation implies leading a life, which helps make people around a given individual happier, better, more likely to reach the same salvation as will be reached by a blessed virtuous person leading such a life and manifesting it in many concrete ways. Since we have no material evidence that some souls fare better after the death of their bodies than the others, we assume, though we do not know with certainty, that this is how it should be. Then we look for a personal history, recorded by historians, trying to demonstrate that decent behaviour has paid and that an acknowledgment (say, beatification) on earth had been prolonged by a posthumous recognition and a tenure in heaven. Admiration and respect of the following generations are indirect pieces of evidence testifying to the success of a virtuous individual. Lives of saints and case studies do look like this. Let us also begin with a case, a story about a concrete individual action in a didactic ecosystem of a contemporary university.

For the past few years we – my Dutch colleague, an economist of culture, Arjo Klamer and I – conduct special seminars designed for the top students

of all faculties of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. Seminars, which altogether form a semester-long project called “Erasmus Honors Program”, are supposed to provide an additional intellectual investment into the most successful, elitist, best evaluated part of our student body. We are, in fact, preaching to the preselected members of a student meritocracy. We are interested in initiating and stimulating a self-reflection, in asking questions about their relations with the important others and in becoming aware of the values repertoires in their environments and of the choices they made and will be making in future. Arjo Klamer is an economist, but not a very typical one, since he focuses on the economics of culture and on the values, which are not immediately price-able in market terms (in fact, he thinks that market values are derivative and that the underlying values are not of the monetary or even primarily material type). Economic life is ultimately about cultural values, because all life decisions we make turn around the core values we choose and decide to stand for. He is also a very active citizen – recently he had reduced his job commitments at the university in order to serve as an alderman on the city council in his native city of Hilversum (his portfolio includes social affairs and he sits in the city hall on behalf of the socialist party). The third reason for considering him an atypical economist is that he belonged to the school of thought best exemplified by the Chicago historian of economics, Deirdre McCloskey – that is a school devoting its attention to the rhetoric of the economists and to the critical analysis of the methodological claims made by the top representatives of this academic discipline.

I have met Deirdre McCloskey through contacts with other economists of culture at the Vienna Economic University and in the Barcelona-based business school ESADE, which organizes bi-annual conferences on narrative methodologies in business management – in both cases the clusters of researchers involved in these events have tended to drift towards qualitative rather than quantitative research methodologies and towards the humanist aspects of management rather than purely functional ones. McCloskey started her career with the rhetorical analysis of the language of top economic publications and arrived at the multi-volume study of bourgeois values and the praise of Adam Smith’s “Theory of Moral Sentiments” (which is somehow overshadowed by the most famous publication of this Scottish author, namely “The Wealth of Nations”). The pool of the keynote speakers at the Barcelona conferences usually included Deirdre McCloskey, Barbara Czarniawska, J.C. Spender, and the present author. The late Max Boisot used to take part in our discussions.

We hope that at least some of our students, participating in Erasmus Honors Program, will start asking themselves questions, which will take them beyond curricula dictated by markets and states, that they will be able to ask questions about fundamental values, which have to be asked, which we hope will be asked. These are the questions, which make us wonder if consumption, along with production and distribution contributes – to follow the arguments listed by Viviana Zelizer – to the most profound shaping of the interactions, relations and the dense network of our social embedding. Zelizer also warns against the tendency to overrate the power of money and market relations to control our behavior at the expense of driving values or dreams, which do not necessarily have to be “for sale” (Zelizer, 2011, pp. 428–429).

CONCRETE APPLICATIONS OF THE ECONOMIC STUDIES OF CULTURE IN THE ACADEMIC ECOSYSTEM OF PEDAGOGICAL DIALOGUE: A COMPETITION IN STIMULATING STUDENT SELF-REFLECTION

We hope that our ideas will not be covered with virtual dust on electronic pages of specialist periodicals and therefore we try to present our ideas to students, who are looking for a humanist, liberal (as in “liberal arts college” not as in “neoliberalism”), broader multidisciplinary approach. Our egalitarian dialogues with elitist students are supposed to illustrate the metaphor of culture as an ongoing conversation of mankind. We are talking about the cultural roots of our values, about the origins of our moral sentiments, and of their role in motivating our actions. We are talking about cultural roots of our values, which prompt them to want something better than meeting the targets. Before we start leading those dialogues – we sign contracts with the university administrative unit – Erasmus Academy – which falls outside of the regular structure of faculties and deals with the special projects. We do so invited by a professor of philosophy, who manages the Erasmus Honors program, although he contradicts all expectations and assumptions about the academic performance and economic viability of public education. His name is Awee Prins and his PhD materialized when he was already middle-aged – but then, his large volume of essays entitled “Out of Boredom” became a best-seller and had been repeatedly re-issued, in spite of the heavy fare loaded with quotations from Martin Heidegger, Bruno Latour or Reiner Maria Rilke.

The face-to-face sessions with students take place every Monday or Tuesday evening, starting at 6.00 PM and ending around 9.00 PM, with catering

company arranging for our snacks and drinks so that the session does not have the format of a regular teaching event. In order to keep the temperature of our discussion up, we switch roles with Arjo Klamer while presenting the main ideological and philosophical controversies of the epoch – since students have much to say, we try to blur the difference between the stage and the audience. There, in the space in-between stage and audience, we play the roles of a contemporary conservative (values do exist for sure, even if we doubt the existence of God as the metaphysical guarantee of their validity – which has become fashionable after Enlightenment) and of a post-modernist relativist (values are a projection of our dreams mixed with experiences, we redesign, reengineer and renegotiate them all the time, so that everything solid does indeed melt into thin air, or rather into the topic of ongoing negotiations).

Second, in order to stay close to the other domains of culture – for instance the artistic zone – we encourage students to visit the art exhibitions, to watch theatre performances, to listen to the concerts in concert halls. Last not least, we urge them to read decent novels – *The Magic Mountain*, 1927, by Thomas Mann (German: *Der Zauberberg*, 1924) *Ferdydurke*, 1937, by Witold Gombrowicz, *The Plague*, 1948, by Albert Camus (French: *La Peste*, 1947), or *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1970, by Gabriel García Márquez (Spanish: *Cien años de soledad*, 1967), I have to admit that this is strong stuff: an unusual experience of watching future medical doctors, lawyers or managers discuss who has the right, like Pimko in Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke* – to design their curriculum. This is how we try to present to them the contemporary critique of a cynical reason. We do have a certain right to do so, since I used to watch the performances of Jerzy Grotowski Theatre Laboratory in Wrocław together with members of the student theatre of the 8th day in my student times, and when teaching in Rotterdam, I had also been a member of the Board of Directors of the Rotterdam Theatre Foundation. Art as a cultural platform for subtle investigation of the role of values and their evolution in our choices, has definitely been moved by the Grotowski's, the Brooks, the student counterculture. Arjo Klamer had organized the first research institute on performing arts at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, and had been serving on the board of directors of Rotterdam's largest museum, the Boymans-Beuningen museum. Once a year we invite the managers of libraries, theatres, orchestras, cultural departments and other cultural institutions offering them coaching and training programs in order to teach them how to survive without subsidies. Nothing cultural is strange or foreign to us. And since the participants in our

programs have to pay about 2000, – euro for two-three days of training, we can proudly claim that nothing economic is foreign to us, too.

Third, we are trying to illustrate our attitudes with the concrete cases of our taste-based choices, preferences, or assumptions. Arjo Klamer likes playing a role of a contemporary neo-conservatist, who starts his economic analyses not with a study of labor relations or a market mechanism but with the household economic choices, with *oikos*, with the value of taking care of my family. He then tries to answer the question – why do we all want to live in freedom and be wealthy, what do we need profits for, what does accumulation of capital accomplish, or the accumulation of power, or of fame (even if it is just a celebrity status), etc. My role is the one of a skeptical postmodernist, who questions the position of the neopositivist concept of truth in her capacity as the regulator of the knowledge industry. I am also a postmodernist of sorts when I quote the ontological concretists in cosmology and in the philosophy of science (for instance Roberto Mangabeira Unger, Lee Smolin, 2015) or novelists (more Thomas Pynchon than Paulo Coelho) and when I stress the changeable, mutable, evolutionary character of the “eventist” ontology.

Eventism is an ontology, which assumes that an event is the basic building block of reality, while descriptions of objects or objects of cognition are secondary derivatives distilled from events and their configurations (the succinct introduction to this ontology can be found in Whitehead’s classical study “Science and the Modern World”).

A CONCRETE ASIDE: WHITEHEAD’S EVENTIST ONTOLOGY AND A VISUALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEMS

Why should we prefer an idea, an intellectual concept, which draws our attention to a being experienced as reality visualized as a flow of processes through the tempo-space? Why should we care primarily for a recognition and acknowledgment of an event (and not of an object, nor consciousness, nor experience) as the basic, the simplest component and building brick of such processually represented reality? Because eventism is closest to the phenomenological, hermeneutic and existentialist grasp of the flow of reality, which should not be imprisoned in mathematical formulas. After all, biologists and historians are closer to the beating heart of the truth emerging from tempo-spatial mutability than physicists or mathematicians, especially those specializing in topology or geometry.

Sometimes we switch our roles of a conservative and of a post-modernist so that students can notice that in a world of struggle for reliable and actionable knowledge a party bigotry is not particularly welcome. In order to make it easier for our students to follow our concrete views on concrete issues, we stay close to the concrete reality. Namely, we point out that although Arjo Klamer is closer in his theoretical and methodological views to conservatism and I tend to be closer to postmodernism, the opposite is the case in our private lives. I am happily married to the same woman for more than forty years, while Arjo Klamer lives with his second wife and with two sets of children. I am also closer to the patriotic view of homeland, repeating after Zbigniew Herbert that these bonds should be the last to go when a rebellious man cuts all bonds, links and ties – though I live not in Poland, my first homeland, but in the Netherlands, my second one.

Concrete self-reflection: The exceptional status of a single individual against the background of record-keeping and performance-evaluation within professional communities.

Ecological criteria of harmonizing the Batesonian triad – individual, society and ecosystem.

The more dense the abstract concepts, which drift around us when we engage in ever more frequent communications and interactions in hyperlinked environment, the more eagerly we are looking around the surrounding events, scanning them for the concrete components, which could provide us with some leverage against the hot shower of meteor-like abstract concepts. Leverage in both senses of the term. First, leverage as support – the same support we are looking for when looking for the firm ground under our feet or taking hold of a rail. But also leverage as a counter-force, as an element of resistance, a possibility of undertaking an action. We try to escape the abstract reasoning, to find a concrete anchor, a green tree of life to oppose to a colorless abstraction, to experience real emotions. We would like to feel a firm ground, a solid bottom line under the flow of events, since we were forced to stop freezing the blow-ups of fragments of events in order to stop, stoop and reflect. We do not think that analyzing dead remnants of events – dead butterflies pinned down in a collection, will bring us much closer to understanding processes, flows, streams of events. Hence our growing distrust of Pimko-like explanations of frozen fragments of past realities as a living piece of evidence about life as a process of events. Pimko's professors want us to dance on the theatre stage of Kant, where our dancing partners are old spinsters of Space, Time and Causality.

The stage designed by Immanuel Kant is not for Erwin Schrödinger's cat (a thought paradox described in 1935) nor for God who plays dice nor is it a stage on which a free and autonomous historical subject of the Polish trade union "Solidarity" can perform. It is hard to play a dream of a concrete event in the newest political history of the late communist societies on a stage of those abstract categories. It is misleading to look for guidance of abstract formulae in explaining a slow emergence of a bottom-up improvised vision of the Gdansk strikes and the August 1980 agreements of the communist party leaders with the spontaneously emerging leaders of the anti-communist trade union. Members of power elite who sign the agreements are still confident that theirs is a temporary setback, which can be remedied by the Round Table secret clauses, and not a historical transformation, a point of no return. They are wrong, but the victorious workers are not certain of their future either. The Kantian stage makes it difficult even to perform the breaking of the Berlin wall – with the East German border guards still armed, but unable to use their weapons against thousands of their compatriots streaming into the western part of the city, with Trabant cars of East German produce as *raison au cheval* in 1989...

The concrete and the historical stage on which contemporary processes are performed appears to have changed. The exceptional, independent status of every single, individual human being is not only one of the numerous labels ascribed to a human organism conceptualized as an autonomous agent. This exceptional, independent status with the new brand of "singularity" attached to it is also employed to brand and label more complex constellations, networks, movements, systems and even the Batesonian ecosystem. We have introduced a multiplicity of new singularities into our daily environment, cultural environment. Where can we trace changes? We can trace them primarily to our eco-systemic imagination. The stages on which we perform spectacles of our imagination have changed, but we can still recognize them as our own designs. Unarmed sociological eye allows us to trace transformations often referred to as neo-pragmatic or neo-phenomenological revolutions – what we notice is that our imagination does not tolerate any authoritarian ontology of the former or newly emerging dictators of an intellectual or a pragmatic fashion.

Sartre, for instance, lost much of his status as an intellectual guru when the long-term effects of his justification of the Stalinist genocide set in, while Camus, who refused to tow the communist party line, went up the informal rankings of intellectual merit. A similar comparison in many areas of science,

art, religion, politics and ideologies has frequently been made, for instance between film directors (in the Polish case Andrzej Munk's or Jerzy Skolimowski's ratings went up, while those of Andrzej Wajda declined, among visual artists Mirosław Bałka's ratings dropped, while the ratings of Kwiekułik (the duet of Zofia Kulik i Przemysław Kwiek) went up. Everything is mobile on a volatile stock exchange of evaluations and negotiations of value – what we think about the past creative individuals, what we expect from those to come and what we make of our contemporaries – all three rating processes lead to unexpected and mutable results. Even a personal dedication written by Andy Warhol on one of his silk prints did not suffice to convince the Andy Warhol Foundation about the authenticity of his work.

Our imagination witnessed very dramatic changes of the entire environment created as a result of a clash of visions, ideologies or policies. For instance, the Polish communists thought that they had killed memories of the Polish underground resistance against the communist rule imposed by Stalin on Poland after WWII. The communist government of People's Poland decided to devote monuments to Russian soldiers and their Polish communist collaborators and to bury their victims in unmarked mass graves. One of the changes in public memory – a change in the ecosystem of historic memory and political imagination of contemporary Polish society can be traced to this re-evaluation. The monuments to the killers of the Polish resistance soldiers are erased, the ones devoted to their victims are erected. Those re-evaluations are a very common occurrence on a global scale. Not only political ideologies and politicians are undergoing revised trials of memory and forgetting. The founders of contemporary cultural ecosystem, for instance Sigismund Freud, are subjected to revised trials and new evidence about psychoanalysis and its declining psychological and medical value is revealed and publicly discussed. The same happens to Marx, who is now moving to these places in memory of the European thinkers, which are closer to Charles Sandes Pierce, John Dewey or William James than to Vladimir Lenin or Mikhail Bakunin. Existential doubts of Roman Ingarden and Martin Heidegger, of Hannah Arendt and Edith Stein seem to us much closer to their contemporaries in an intellectual ecosystem of the European thought – to John Maynard Keynes or Friedrich Hayek, then to Neokantians or neopositivists. Economic crises of 1927 or 2008 loom large on their cultural horizon – in our memory if not necessarily in theirs. We doubt the uses of abstract models in the hands of economists when we face the breakdown of large-scale ecosystems of economic activities.

Richard Thaler's nudging or Warren Buffet's investment advice do not seem to convince us that computer simulations fare better than old-fashioned glimpses of informed intuition.

Let us then ask the question: where shall we find a concrete thinking, which will enable us to check the abstract cards for intellectual game with high stakes – what is at stake is the understanding of the ecosystemic balance or imbalances. The explanations are not emotionally innocent – the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach reprimands philosophers for wanting only to understand the world, not to change it. This exhortation is not entirely justified in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's case – although Karl Marx had directed it mainly to him. Hegel, after all, managed to express his admiration for *raison au cheval*, for Napoleon Bonaparte implementing the design of reason on European battlefields. After Hegel and Bonaparte the positivists decided that flights of imagination have to be curbed with the concrete empirical evidence. However, they have imposed very rigid rules on the concrete, so that what was supposed to be a concrete evidence became in fact a convenient abstract instrument in the hands of an academic bureaucracy or its elite, which had been able to decide which facts are factual and which aren't. New players in the philosophy of science and in the dynamic sciences of biology, history and language/cognition started challenging the neopositivist dogmas checking for bluffs. Can abstract formulas be checked by concrete empirical evidence and not by a rival abstraction? The coach of my PhD thesis, one of the three representatives of the Poznan school in the philosophy of science in the 1970ies, Leszek Nowak, used to say that ideologically speaking the procedure of testing theories has already been solved by a political dogma. We idealize eastwards and dig up concrete empirical evidence westwards. After 1989 the compass has been relabeled and rebranded, and the directions changed – we dug up empirical evidence for the failure of state socialism/ communism and idealized the market's marriage to parliamentary democracy. It took the Polish left intellectuals twenty odd years to produce – in 2015 – a political pamphlet entitled "Other Republics Are Possible" (cf. Jan Sowa, 2015). Its author claimed that the concrete continuation of the mass social movement, of the Polish "Solidarity" from August 1980, requires an "emic" and not "etic" (as in emic/etic, not ethical), i.e. internal and not external analysis of what the Polish employees of state companies wanted to express in August 1980.

**PARADISE OF MANIPULATED ILLUSIONS AGAINST
THE CONCRETE SPATIOTEMPORAL DATA (ECO-STREAMS
OF INTERACTIVE-COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS EXPERIENCED
BY CONSCIOUS INDIVIDUALS, DIVIDED SOCIETIES AND ECOSYSTEMS)**

Statistics, data bases, superfast search engines, all this was supposed to help. Concrete data caged in googled schemes had to liberate us from tedious tasks in cognition – but a concrete remains invisible without the abstract looking-glass between an event and an eye, between an experience and awareness, between market-states and sociocommunicative citizen sets full of individuals, each with a unique *Lebenswelt*. We all dream of setting cognitive foot on a concrete set of data, but we are also aware that facts are a highly artificial construction, dependent on our favorite illusion – at least this is what we know since Ludwik Fleck had published his reflections on a scientific fact in 1935, and this is what we have been reminded in 1984 with Bruno Latour's study of Louis Pasteur. Otherwise, how could we explain that educated, sane and normal researchers are capable of imagining democratic eugenics. Independent individuals with unique *Lebenswelten* are capable of experiencing aesthetic bliss reading Thomas Mann, Witold Gombrowicz, Thomas Pynchon, even Mark Z. Danielewski, are perfectly capable of getting furious reading passages from Hayek or Friedman. But what exactly is a personal experience of a concrete literary work of art (not only a literary one as a matter of fact), a concrete experience registered by a concrete individual in a concrete moment in space, as a single event? How does a novel excite and provoke our admiration?

In the Polish phenomenological tradition Roman Ingarden differentiated between layers and ways of existence of a literary work of art. He concretized his philosophical reflections in ethics (a small booklet with a subtle reflection on ontology of morals –Ingarden's *A little book on man* (Polish: *Książeczka o człowieku*, 1947) still waits for a rediscovery) more often than in aesthetics. If we look at the European culture on trial, with Gombrowicz as a witness of the prosecution, we see that his caricature of a functionary of educational bureaucracy, Pimko is not a fan of the concrete, while the audience eagerly awaits the sensuous manifestation of the concrete – a naked body of a young, elusive, divinely concrete Albertine the girl. From a bodily concrete of a naked woman on a theatre stage to an abstract definition of a concrete in a flexible, compromise-rich language of a Wikipedia:

„Concrete (łac. *concretus* – thick, hard, solid) – the complimentary concept of the abstract. A concrete is an object, which is:

- singular;
- physical (in the sense of being located in time and space).

There is a controversy in philosophy about which class of objects (abstract, concrete or both) can be assigned real existence, which is usually defined as being transcendent with respect to a mind. Nominalism claims that only concretes really exist, cognitive realism claims that abstracts also exist (it is hard to find a doctrine claiming that only abstracts exist, although some interpret platonism in this way).

Category: ontology (entry in the Polish Wikipedia, accessed on August 20, 2015).”

What can we learn in concrete reflection on the virtual paradises of consumer-marketing-PR realities generating an abstract seduction easily accessible in all regions of our consciousness, but available also in subconsciousness, and contaminating imagination’s ecosphere with invisible but poisonous radiation? Our daily life is increasingly based on abstract transfers and calculations, for instance the monetary ones. However, our emotional lives are usually anchored not in an abstract idea of femininity (available in the course of market transactions of selling and buying) but in a morally more ambitious project of a mutual construction of a stable relationship with a single, unchangeable person, with – to use the phrase of Witkacy – “unique singular individual being”. Relationships of this kind (erotic, sexual, love-based according to a well-known typology of Octavio Paz) fascinate artists, startle passersby but they also function as the training grounds of socialization. It might amuse a concrete-hunter to note that even the most concrete intimacies of stable relationships cannot continue without the props provided by abstraction. Concrete data become pieces of useful information only when sprayed with the sauce of abstract interpretations. Our life among relationships which are less stable and less close or demanding than the marital ones is even more distant from the concrete. Had it not been the case, it would be virtually impossible to divide and antagonize groups of colleagues, friends or family members along such dimensions as religious views, political ideologies or world outlook philosophies, since a concretely experienced closeness and unreplaceability would not allow partners to use a mechanical grid of ideological superstitions in order to measure and assess intimate events. And yet abstract grids do penetrate even intimate relationships. Marketing thrives on this selling not

a concrete object (say, a car or a cigarette) but an abstract vision of a desirable identity, and so does political PR.

Sociologists and economists who publish analyses demonstrating the enculturation (cultural saturation with meaningful symbols) of economy and of the economic colonization of cultural consumption (cf. DuGay, Pryke, 2002) do point out difficulties with concretization of the concept of culture. They claim, following Williams, that the concept of culture is being used as an abstract cognitive category, which may be taken to refer to:

- a generalized process of an intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development (culture becomes a noun, but it is flexible among different events and cannot be reduced to a property of a single individual);
- a generalized way of life of a concrete community, of a definite period or of a group/set/population (culture is still a noun but it becomes behaviorally traceable in spatiotemporal dimensions);
- a generalized proper name, an abstract noun, which labels entire range of diverse works, artefacts, behavioral practices, intellectual skills, and artistic talents.

Sociologists may employ all three meanings attributed to the term “culture”, but the basic research intuition, which informs their search for empirical evidence and hides behind their attempts at a meaningful, significant and sense-making interpretation is that the effects of culture as a process, way of life and creativity cannot be measured in consumer goods alone, because culture brands and flavors all processes composing contemporary social life. Values are not simple abstractions reminding us about the Platonic ideal essences of things, unavailable to our senses, though available (according to Plato) to the best and the brightest (who were expected to follow Plato’s philosophy), because of their talents, intellectual discipline and imagination anchored in essentialism. Contemporary interpretation of the concept of culture allows researchers to assume, no matter how Platonic their preferences, that culture does leave material, concrete traces, which are readily available for empirical research. Entire school in cultural sciences, sometimes linked to Jeffrey C. Alexander, is responsible for the so called “cultural turn” in social sciences and in humanities.

Among the researchers who devoted methodological reflection to the consequences of the cultural turn one should mention Richard Biernacki, whose latest studies are devoted to the ritual spectacles of repeating a current popular banality instead of attempting a reliable analysis of sense-making and the social construction of meanings – instead of – to use the title of my book – the

analysis of *The Management of Meaning in Organizations* (cf. Magala, 2009). Biernacki begins with the comparison of complaints sent by the German and British workers to their trade union newspapers at the end of the nineteenth century. Comparing them he concluded that concrete complaints about exploitation demonstrated differences, which allow us to speak of a different understanding of “labor” and of a different construction of facts out of data about exploitation. Biernacki then analyzes personal documents, for instance diaries and memoirs of pharmacists and store owners. His research led him towards the problems of “coding” soft data, since he had become aware of the fact that coding means erecting scaffoldings, which in turn help to build, construct a fact in social sciences. Biernacki likes to quote Clifford Geertz, but he mentions also Max Weber or Erving Goffman, and his favorite Canadian sociologist of culture from Harvard, Michelle Lamont. Let us add that it was within this cultural turn and cultural sociology school that Ron Eyerman analyzed the cultural premises of the murder of Theo van Gogh, who had been killed by a Moroccan citizen of the Netherland, well educated, befriended by members of the Amsterdam social elite, apparently quite well integrated with his tolerant environment. But sociology of culture and researchers penetrating borderlands between culture and economics do not come from well-defined “cultural turn” schools. Their backgrounds vary. Ann Swidler, a sociologist of culture has this to say about cultural codes:

“Culture conveys meanings through adherence to and deviations from locally established expectations or conventions. There are three aspects to this incoherent coherence. First, cultures communicate by bringing (usually small) changes on established expectations, so meaning systems are necessarily more innovative and unstable than we usually imagine. Second, partly because of this innovativeness, semiotic systems often have intense local variations, so that a small subculture, or even a subgroup within a subculture, may experiment with new variations on established meaning systems. Third, this local variation means that while particular codes have systemic qualities, people necessarily keep multiple ones on tap. Thus the problem of meaning and of cultural coherence cannot be solved without some way of understanding how people switch from one code to another, what contextual cues signal which code is in effect, and how people keep multiple interpretations of action available simultaneously, crystallizing situations and meanings only occasionally.” (Swidler, 2001, p. 184)

Swidler quotes the abovementioned study of Biernacki (“The fabrication of labor”) about German and British workers and then compares his methodological assumptions to her own, especially from the point of coding data gathered in interviews. The most general conclusions drawn by Swidler refer to her respondents, whom she had interviewed. She has noticed, for instance, that when she asked for some comment on a scene from a marital life described by a respondent, the answers appeared incomplete, or incoherent – but then she caught herself assuming automatically that culture is a coherent system of internalized meanings and practices (or, as Brendan McSweeney would have said criticizing Geert Hofstede – that people tend to be cultural dopes and in their behavior simply reproduce patterns of culture programmed within their socialization processes). She had thus revised her vision of culture: culture is knowledge, consciousness, awareness of how available codes work and how one could use them in the most typical, frequent situations:

“It is this publicly available (indeed sometimes unavoidable) configuration of codes, contexts, and institutions that actually structures our cultural usage. Exploration of this complex set of interactions can allow some of the sophisticated new ways we have of thinking about culture to be incorporated into more powerful theories linking culture and action.” (Swidler, 2001, p. 180)

The main problem consists of the fact that those more powerful theories refer to the controversial domains of culture (a value of human life measured with the preferences about abortion appears differently to a heterosexual man who believes in God and to an atheist lesbian woman) and to the even more controversial problem of legal license to intervene in intimate relationships. The current situation is – to use an understatement – fairly dynamic. Amnesty International wants a global revolution in legal approach to prostitution, which should be professionalized, entirely institutionalized and legally regulated, decriminalized. Lesbians and homosexuals fight for a recognition of their bonds as equal to marital bonds procreate by law in the western world. The leftist tradition, popularized for instance by Jean L. Cohen from Columbia University in New York (as the life partner of Andrew Arato from New School for Social Research she continues, to a certain extent, a critical theory of the Frankfurt School) suggests subjecting legal acts to a broad public discussion, to negotiate and renegotiate it all the time. Influenced by Habermas, she quotes him at the beginning of her book on responsible law-making and on the role of a self-reflection in the critical collective shaping of the law with due respect for individual autonomy and communitarian spirit. But her re-

reflections put her in a clear opposition to her fellow-citizens who vote Republican and believe that God exists. Remaining within the sociological analysis of emotional capitalism, which is supposed to reveal the uses of body and emotions for exercising social control, let us end up quoting Bourdieu, who has already introduced the role of a carnal, bodily presence of interacting human agents, in a sense evoking body as a theoretical serum against the sterile Platonic reduction of what exists to the abstract essence, expressed in general, abstract formulae. According to Eva Illouz, Pierre Bourdieu introduces the concept of carnal knowledge, with a body as an embodiment of social experiences and emotionally loaded reflections and self-reflections. In other words, the way through our culture towards transcendent values (let us note that the Samoan experiments of Margaret Mead, Bateson's first wife, were focused on this carnal socialization), economic exchanges and carnal interactions (all this Bateson would easily subsume under the heading of "relationships") leads towards the individual processing of carnal knowledge in the light of symbolic abstract codes, which allow us to code experience, store and revise it, and then negotiate and re-negotiate it with the others within egalitarian communities, in which an argument about values never ends. Steven Fuller and Weronika Lipińska, who wrote a philosophical pamphlet in praise of a genetic manipulation (enhancing our carnal and intellectual skills) in the best interests of mankind, have asked a question which does indeed transport the argument about values into another, definitely much more concrete than abstract dimension. They claim namely that we should focus our attention on:

"How to promote a climate of tolerance in a society whose members are no longer compelled by a sense of common ancestry and are inclined to veer into increasingly divergent futures." (Fuller, Lipińska, 2014, p.134)

The question seems quite fundamental, and yet most sociologists are reluctant to ask it. The answers might run against the grain of most available ideologies and they might be rejected by the preformatted modes of media communications (including social media). Nevertheless, some sociologists dare to ask this and similar questions. For instance, two Polish philosophers and sociologists, Andrzej Szahaj in a political pamphlet claiming that "another capitalism is possible" (Szahaj, 2015) and Andrzej Zybertowicz with a team of sociologists from the Copernicus University in Torun (Maciej Gurtowski, Katarzyna Tamborska, Mateusz Trawiński and Jan Waszewski, cf. Zybertowicz et al., 2015) in a study about the suicide of Enlightenment? (with an apt subtitle telling "how neuroscience and new technologies devastate human world").

The fundamental problem of balancing and harmonizing ecosystems, which for a young Bateson still seemed abstract and suitable for mostly academic pursuits is currently becoming a pragmatic question, asked with concrete urgency by empirically minded and evidence-based decision makers – politicians, managers, media communicators. The question is also voiced on streets filled with angry demonstrators – suffice it to mention contestators of ACTA, or activists of Occupy Wall Street. Would Bateson smile at them? And will the ecosystem of our species-bound self-reflection profit from such populist remedies propping up the failing democracy?

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