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Cultural Heritage Within Postmodern Reality

Abstract: This article tries to reconstruct possible issues could appear when the post-modern mode of interpretation is applied to the problem of cultural heritage. The problem is more complicated because the idea of cultural heritage is mostly founded on the humanistic management theory and this theory also tries to use postmodern tools but more generally. So it is impossible to consider connections between heritage and postmodernity in separation to the discipline of humanistic management. The solution lies in the universal characteristics of postmodernity, especially in its theory about the knowledge. Article refers this issue through the concepts by Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault. These concepts underline relativeness and localness of the knowledge. The same attributes affect categories it uses like historicity, identity and even genuineness or humanity. In that case it is impossible to treat heritage as a simple order of succession, but rather as a local effect. But there is also a limit in this treatment which is constituted by the subject, the man, who ought to build his subjectivity against polyphonic and meaningless form of world. This also refine the fundamental bet between the heir and the testator much more important than the circular movement of goods within community which stands behind the modern form of cultural heritage.

Key words: cultural heritage, postmodernity, postmodernism, humanistic management

This article presents the issue of cultural heritage mainly in the general perspective of humanistic management.¹ The research context allows the general perspective to emerge beyond the principal issues related to the studied sub-

¹ The publication is based on the article: R. Maciąg, "Dziedzictwo kulturowe jako temat ponowoczesny," *Zarządzanie w Kulturze* 2014, Vol. 2, pp. 19–27.

ject, i.e. specific context within which the heritage is placed, and an approach based on postmodern assumptions. It does emerge because postmodernity takes up the problem of scientific knowledge as such, i.e. it also tackles its individual domains. Hence, there is a double connection postmodernity has with the presented issue of cultural management: content-related, objective and epistemological, superior to it, which will inexorably comprise the background of the entire study.

The perspective of management based on achievements of humanistic sciences seems to be especially well chosen when the theme of cultural heritage is related to *par exemple* philosophical concept. However, the postmodern thought was also principally developed along the social and even political deliberation, and thus describes contemporary civilization together with its domains. This means that it attempts to interpret certain historical phenomena, and at the same time provide theoretical principles to understand practical circumstances of selected social products. Among them we can find all sort of organizations and norms operating within them and outside of them.² In this area postmodernity is used more in the sense of postmodernism. Although the semantic areas and denotations of both these notions are defined differently, they emerge from the same source within which they function as synonyms. Their symbolic inauguration into being is the 1979 work by Jean-François Lyotard *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (English: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*).³ It opens and explains most general premises in understanding the notion of *postmodernity/postmodernism*,⁴ which later underwent multiple reinterpretations gaining new meanings and connotations.⁵

Humanistic management, as I attempted to prove somewhere else,⁶ validates the consistency of its identity in two ways: the first is more objective, and refers to some reality within which it separates an area of phenomena

² This topic is taken up by Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard.

³ J.-F. Lyotard, *Kondycja ponowoczesna. Raport o stanie wiedzy*, transl. M. Kowalska & J. Migasiński, Warszawa 1997 (English edition: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. G. Bennington, B. Massumi, Minneapolis 1984).

In this work I will use Polish source materials and providing English counterparts (if it is possible), for the benefit and further study of the English speaking reader. However, the number of pages quoted may differ, so this must be rechecked by the reader.

⁴ Although Lyotard's work presents the expression "postmodernity," in the first paragraph of the Polish translation we already see the term "postmodernism" referring to the condition of knowledge in the most developed societies, *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵ An attempt to sort out the confusion of notions in this respect if the work by A. Burzyńska, *Antyteoria literatury*, Kraków 2006, p. 108.

⁶ In: "Zarządzanie humanistyczne – rozważenie teorii opartej na podejściu pragmatycznym," *Zarządzanie w Kulturze* 2013, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 7–17.

realizing some subjective dispositions defined as “humanistic” – in reality it means diversified participation in cultural proceedings. In its analyses, it is particularly focused on the area of organized processes, the so-called cultural sector, including social, political and economic contexts.⁷ The other means is based on a different foundation. It refers to a more profound activity, inlaid into the idea of management, which is attempting to rationalize⁸ a certain domain of phenomena in order to carry out pragmatic actions. To that end it uses a variety of humanistic tools, including these originating in postmodern ideas, called here post modernistic.⁹ One of these tools is the category of narration.¹⁰

The level of *praxis* cannot be absent in management, however access to that level is neither easy nor obvious as presented on the basis of numerous observations collected by theoretical works devoted to management. They result in blurred, vague ideas, poly-themed or poly-methodical nature of research within the framework of management.¹¹ Moreover, these observations project the results onto the above mentioned level of *praxis*, undermining the interpretative stability of objectified material reality. However, we need to see that, on the other hand, many valuable analyses referring to it are performed. They show that it preserves its vitality and value, especially on the level of principal research, and makes an excellent basis for the improvement of management actions. As a result of the defined double incentive, humanistic management oscillates between the Scylla of organizational practice within the sector of culture, and Charybdis of theoretical humanistic principles. This, however, by no means signifies being lost, just on the contrary, it presents an epistemological impetus.

In the same way the issue of cultural heritage, viewed in postmodern perspective, is inherently complex, somehow assuming the burden of the area it exists within. Postmodernity, according to the statement of Jean-François Lyotard presented in the *The Postmodern Condition*,¹² considers phenomena of cultural reality within the context of the broadly defined language and the

⁷ Thereby implicitly referring to the materialist view of culture represented by Raymond Williams, for example, in the work *The Sociology of Culture*, Chicago 1995 (the original English edition: *Culture*, London 1981).

⁸ In the previously mentioned text relating to this issue I use the notion of conceptualization, attempting to draw attention to pragmatism of such procedure.

⁹ This trend includes an already classic work by Monika Kostera, *Postmodernizm w zarządzaniu*, Warszawa 1996.

¹⁰ Comprehensively described by Barbara Czarniawska in: *Narratives in Social Science Research*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi 2004.

¹¹ Research on this issue is conducted and described by Łukasz Sułkowski in: *Epistemologia i metodologia zarządzania*, Warszawa 2012.

¹² J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition...*, p. 26.

identifiable constructions it creates. Among the latter ones, the priority is taken by discourse, whose concept has generated numerous written works and bears many interpretations.¹³ However, this paper presents the meaning of discourse, as depicted by Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault. Both of the thinkers deem discourse to be the most complex language form, being realized on the epistemological level and determining the existence of social world with its key domains: power and knowledge.

The two above mentioned researchers differently describe the process of this realization. In his renowned book, *The order of things*,¹⁴ Foucault uses the notion of *episteme*, attempting to present the specific, a priori knowledge operating on the highest level of generalization. It is historical in character, and becomes a sort of repository, facilitating all the cognitive effort, as well as suggesting thinking constructions and respective notions. On the lower levels of discourse similar a priori forms are quite common, found virtually at the origins of every opinion. Practised in the language, they provide most general structures of speaking about the world and belong to the current cultural and moral patterns, etc. Jerzy Topolski describes them as “subconscious forms of thinking, sort of epistemological a priori defining epistemological space within culture,”¹⁵ which are naturally realized in the form of discourse – the practical area, where linguistic and cognitive constructions emerge. And it becomes their only tangible transporter.

As language is directly involved in social and historical context, discursive forms of the past knowledge have the ability to directly influence this context, and at the same time remain in a dialectical game with it. Tensions arising in the game are projected onto social interactions; they are pursued by Foucault in many other works. He undertakes the analysis of categories that cannot be disregarded as they refer to social or existential issues as burning as the problem of health (and illness), normality (and insanity), sexuality, etc. While diligently researching the theme within its natural historical context he takes the opportunity to discover not only their changeability, but also disposition, which he defines as power. The mode of its operation was precisely described in his 1970 lecture, published as *L'Ordre du Discours* (English: *Order of Discourse*¹⁶).

¹³ The comprehensive review of these is presented by Halina Grzmil-Tylutki in *Francuska lingwistyczna teoria dyskursu. Historia, tendencje, perspektywy*, Kraków 2010.

¹⁴ M. Foucault, *Słowa i rzeczy. Archeologia nauk humanistycznych*, transl. T. Komendant, Gdańsk 2006.

¹⁵ J. Topolski, “Foreword,” in: M. Foucault *Archeologia wiedzy*, transl. A. Siemek, Warszawa 1977.

¹⁶ M. Foucault, *The Order of Discourse. An Inaugural Lecture at the College de France Given December 2, 1970*, transl. I. McLeod, London 1981.

Jean-Françoise Lyotard uses a different notion to explain the function of discourse and even further, the role of the language, in enabling the existence of knowledge. First of all, Lyotard claims, scientific knowledge is the one that seems to be validated in its judgments or becomes appropriately legitimized.¹⁷ This issue arises as a result of imbalance within this validity, which, in turn, becomes the result of historical changes within the social and political reality: "knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the post-industrial age and cultures enter what is known as the post-modern age."¹⁸ To explain the essence of this alteration, Lyotard makes references to narration (metanarration), which has the ability to legitimize scientific knowledge – a complex story, constructing principal elements of human understanding of the world.¹⁹ The nature of metanarration is of historical character, it is related to certain estates of the realm and worldview, and thus could be the source of power.²⁰ The progress of sciences assisted postmodernity in overthrowing the faith in one and only validity: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives,"²¹ says Lyotard. As a result, we start a heteromorphic game of possible scientific knowledge legitimizations, which, in the mind of the author, is strongly influenced by the informatization of society.²² Nevertheless, the principle of the described fundamental change is the fact that "scientific knowledge is a type of discourse,"²³ a discourse that has been socially and historically contextualized.

Both described groups of opinions, presented by Michel Foucault and Jean-Françoise Lyotard, are by all means pragmatic in character, as they refer to social *praxis*. They can also become the grounds for interpreting various social experiences. Their principal conviction, and at the same time the starting point of possible continuations, is the ascertainment that there are no superior, "objective" transcendent categories able to support scientific (i.e. binding due to their proven reliability) judgments. They describe something on the contrary – a heteromorphic game of equal, often contrasting suggestions, emphasizing social grounds for phenomena and their interpretations, which result from the essence of language and are projected onto its constructions, such as discourse. Moreover, for the same reason these categories can become

¹⁷ J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition...*, p. 35.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁹ The concept of narrative caused a lot of confusion. In *Apostil on Narratives* he explains: "they aim to legitimize the institution of socio-political practices, systems of law, ethical systems, and ways of thinking." J.-F. Lyotard, *Postmodernizm dla dzieci. Korespondencja 1982–1985*, transl. J. Migasiński, Warszawa 1998, p. 29.

²⁰ J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition...*, p. 20.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

a source of power and even violence – this theme, prevailingly present in Foucault's work is, for instance, continued by Judith Butler.²⁴

Cultural heritage is studied as split into two aspects. On the one hand, it seems to be a good notion, well-defined by a number of definitions, validated by UNESCO documents, or the mission of National Heritage Board of Poland,²⁵ and International Cultural Centre.²⁶ Extensive literature on the subject also signifies that the concept has been quite clear cut.²⁷ On the other hand, specialists voicing their opinions are against this certainty, as they observe conflicts arising in practical reality. One of them, Łukasz Gaweł, quite decisively states his opinion, "we cannot speak about certain and lasting definitions in relation to cultural heritage. The issue is moreover complicated by the fact that heritage is always an autonomous choice. Heritage is the past, identity and self-identity."²⁸ By making the definition dependent on individual context and introducing the issue of identity, it steers in the direction of recognition based on postmodern definitional (and essential) pluralism, this heteromorphic language game mentioned by Lyotard.

To understand the nature of setting both themes of research on cultural heritage in opposition, and especially grasp the method, which is a concept quite foreign to postmodernity, it is recommended to invoke the description made by Zygmunt Bauman, whose work *Postmodernity and its discontents*²⁹ considerably contributed to explaining the notion of the former. His previous work *Modernity and Ambivalence* describes the period of modernity, which made cultural heritage a clear and meaningful category,

We can say that existence is modern as far as it is effected and lined by design, manipulation, management and engineering. The existence is modern in as far as it is administered by resourceful (that is possessing knowledge skill and technology) sovereign agencies. Agencies are sovereign in as far as they claim and successfully defend the right to manage and administer existence: the right to define order and, by implication lay aside chaos, as that left-over that escapes the definition.³⁰

²⁴ For example in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Polish translation used: *Walczące słowa. Mowa nienawiści i polityka performatywu*, transl. A. Ostolski, Warszawa 2010.

²⁵ <http://www.nid.pl/idm,4,o-instytucie.html> [accessed on: 25 June 2003].

²⁶ <http://www.mck.krakow.pl/page/misja> [accessed on: 25 June 2013].

²⁷ There are over 200 items in the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków, which include „cultural heritage” in their titles, https://www.bj.uj.edu.pl/uj/katalog?sessionId=2013062517395006168&skin=default&lng=pl&inst=consortium&host=192.168.1.3%2b1235%2bDEFAULT&patronhost=192.168.1.3%201235%20DEFAULT&search=HEADING&searchid=H1&function=HEADING_INTR&sourceselect=1&pos=1 [accessed on: 20 June 2013].

²⁸ Ł. Gaweł, *Szlaki dziedzictwa kulturowego. Teoria i praktyka zarządzania*, Kraków 2011, p. 20.

²⁹ Z. Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, Oxford 1997.

³⁰ Z. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Cambridge 1993, p. 7.

The order mentioned by Bauman can be perceived as representation of motivated development or otherwise progress.³¹ In this perspective history is deemed as research and clarification of this progress, within which certain tangible and intangible goods are transported throughout ages as a natural process working towards further enrichment, cultivation and administration of order.

Cultural heritage, which is perceived as performing similar tasks, seems to take its place within the modern tradition. However, to fully show the complexity of its nature it needs a much wider spectrum of categories, including not only historicity and continuity, but also erudition, appropriateness or reliability, and even the features of verity as well as humanity. *Ipso facto*, it belongs to the way of thinking especially valued in postmodernity – it proves the mobility of meaning and the contextualization of them all. One of them is history, especially vulnerable from the perspective of heritage. It does not exist within this reflection as a complete, inherently ordered thread of consequences, but as a mobile space of crossing discourses providing language, thoughts and speech with sort of specific, local archives. Foucault reverses the meaning of the last mentioned term – he robs it of the function to passively serve memory, and treats it as a living a priori source of current meanings “a system governing the emergence of expressions as individual events.”³² The idea of history embroiled in local reality, excluding any superior and universal order repeats the general principle of postmodernity. “The other of modern intellect is,” says Bauman “polysemy, cognitive dissonance, polyvalent definitions, and contingency; the overlapping meanings in the world of tidy classifications and filing cabinets.”³³ Wolfgang Welsch states that the postmodern is the “overcoming of nostalgic unity,”³⁴ Lyotard identifies it with a natural state as summarized by Bohdan Banasiak in his *Foreword to Poróżnienie* (English: *The Differend*): “heterogeneity or multitude.”³⁵ For Michel Foucault and Lyotard the enumerated categories are merely discursive constructions, dependent on its context and purpose.

Stubborn and profound queries taken up in postmodern tradition research the pragmatic, and historical reality of the language as well as its entanglement with social and political reality, including the power to judge and

³¹ It is how Lyotard interprets the idea of progress in his essay: “Note on the meaning of Post,” in: *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence, 1982–1985*, Minneapolis 1993, p. 75.

³² M. Foucault, *Archeologia wiedzy...*, p. 165.

³³ Z. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 21.

³⁴ W. Welsch, *Nasza postmodernistyczna moderna*, transl. R. Kubicki, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Warszawa 1998, p. 50.

³⁵ B. Banasiak, “Foreword,” in: J.-F. Lyotard, *Poróżnienie*, transl. B. Banasiak, Warszawa 2010, p. XIX.

punish,³⁶ analyze the emergence of meanings and functioning of symbols,³⁷ and even dispute the European tradition of logic negating metaphysical basis for human thought.³⁸ Postmodernity emerges here as a type of self-awareness presented in a historiosophic perspective referring directly to principles of knowledge formation. It is, indeed, a universal background for all the above mentioned categories providing them with meanings, although the background is flexible and meanings local. In this sense postmodernity leads to changes of paradigms within humanistic sciences, which cannot be disregarded due to the pragmatic, historical and social context. The last circumstance is synthetically described by Wolfgang Iser:

The real feature of the overall situation, which has been produced, is the simultaneity and interpenetration of different concepts and expectations. Postmodern pluralism is trying to cope with these principal demands and problems. This situation is not his invention, he is considering it. He does not shut it out, but bravely faces the new times and their demands.³⁹

This state of simultaneity and interpenetration is expressed by Łukasz Gaweł, when he indicates the necessity to make particular choices while defining cultural heritage, and at the same time expressing the multitude of possibilities within the definition.

Owing to these briefly summarized elements belonging to the branch of postmodernity, which first produces its own understanding of knowledge, and then the principal categories of identifying phenomena and ordering their world, cultural heritage cannot avoid the uncertainty of the principles it used to rely on. I mean here these principles that appear in its formal definitions referring rather to postmodern tradition and functioning within the current, pragmatic activity. It also cannot do it, because, on the contrary to what Iser claims in his works, postmodern description of the situation is not a hypothesis, but a specific diagnosis. It means that the thought concerning heritage, rotating within the previously mentioned and many other accompanying categories, cannot ignore the cited paradigmatic alteration or disregard the absence of their complete and stable interpretations. It is entangled into the heteromorphic game of senses and motivations, which sets a certain type of limits and duties formulated within postmodernity, observing at the same time the instructions referring to the processes of scientific knowledge as such. It signifies a change in examining the object of cultural heritage's study, which must now be interpreted only as a circumstantial re-

³⁶ Michel Foucault undertakes this effort in virtually all his works.

³⁷ Among many thinkers we can mention Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard.

³⁸ This theme is pursued by Jacques Derrida.

³⁹ W. Iser, *Nasza postmodernistyczna...*, p. 8.

sult of a local situation – historically, socially or in various recognized, newer alternatives, e.g. within the context of violence or emancipation.

However, concluding the elaboration of the possible consequence of postmodern thinking based on the cited statement of Welsch would be robbing it of the most important, but less known part. Tadeusz Gadacz states it directly, “If the postmodern thought can be accused of relativity, the boundary of this relativity has always been the ethical compassion towards the other.”⁴⁰ This compassion is encountered in Lyotard’s idea of the differend⁴¹ and Richard Rorty’s idea of solidarity.⁴² It also guides the thought of Foucault, when, emphasizes Tadeusz Komendant, he draws an analogical idea of an ethical project that we constitute for each other, establishing our own subjectivity.⁴³ In the light of these final enunciations cultural heritage would gain meaning within the postmodern reflection in some specific conditions. It could only occur if it did not testify for the benefit of processes, values and other similar discursive structures realized in the entire group of categories I mentioned before, but first of all pursue the theme of a person, an individual building its own subjectivity with hardship and standing no chance to achieve it. Postmodern legacy that could be the source of cultural heritage would not be the promotion of collectivity – a social designer of knowledge and its derivatives: history, tradition and others in postmodern perspective,⁴⁴ but the endorsement of individuality, a subject, human being, man. Thus, the proper parties in will inheritance would be reinstated, we would again have the testator and heir instead of a unified social situation, where inheritance goes a full cycle returning to the collectivity which issued it.

⁴⁰ T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii XX wieku*, Vol. 1, Kraków 2012, p. 34.

⁴¹ J.-F. Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, transl. G. van Den Abbeele, Minnesota 1988.

⁴² R. Rorty, *Obiektywność, relatywizm i prawda. Pisma filozoficzne*, Vol. 1, transl. J. Margański, Warszawa 1999, pp. 50–51.

⁴³ T. Komendant, “Testament Michela Foucaulta,” in: M. Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, transl. B. Banasiak, T. Komendant, K. Matuszewski, Warszawa 2000, p. 9.

⁴⁴ This collectivity replaces a human individual with its instances up to the point of the most general conceptual structure called humanity.

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