



Krzysztof Wielecki,
Kultura versus kultura masowa
[Culture versus Mass Culture].
Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury,
2024, 662 pages

The term “culture” is one of the most basic and at the same time problematic terms in the humanities and social sciences. Its meaning has changed and developed throughout history, depending on philosophical, anthropological, sociological and historical contexts. In a basic sense, culture refers to everything that a man creates as an expression of his creativity, value system, spiritual dimension and social life. It is a system of meanings, symbols, practices and forms of behaviour that is handed down from generation to generation and shapes our identity, way of thinking and existence. Mass culture, on the other hand, is a modern phenomenon closely linked to the development of technology, mass media, globalisation and consumerism. It emerged during the Industrial Revolution and developed especially in the 20th century with the advent of radio, television, film and, later, digital technologies. Unlike traditional culture, which is a vehicle for spiritual richness, depth and reflection, mass culture focuses on the production of entertainment, sensation and consumable content for the widest possible audience. Its goal is not primarily the cultivation of the spirit, but the satisfaction of the emotions and desires of as many people as possible.

The book *Kultura versus kultura masowa* [Culture versus Mass Culture] by the Polish sociologist and philosopher Krzysztof Wielecki, published in 2024 by the National Centre for Culture, is a comprehensive and profound analysis of the current state of culture in confrontation with the phenomenon of mass culture. On more than 660 pages, the author offers a multidisciplinary perspective that combines sociological, philosophical, psychological and pedagogical approaches, creating a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of cultural processes in contemporary society. The author's achievement represents his long-standing effort to create a coherent theory based on ontological, epistemological and axiological foundations.

Wielecki's work deals with the question of whether mass culture, often perceived as a democratizing element of cultural life, actually contributes to the development of society or, on the contrary, leads to its degradation. The author argues that mass culture replaces authentic cultural experiences with superficial and standardized products, thus weakening the ability of individuals to think critically and to have deeper emotional and intellectual experiences. This attitude is symbolically expressed on the cover of the book, where the word "culture" is crossed out in the phrase "kultura masowa", indicating the author's critical attitude towards this phenomenon. The book is divided into two main parts with several logically following chapters that gradually develop the author's argument. Wielecki examines the historical development of the concept of culture and its connection with civilizational processes.

The introductory chapter of the first part of the book bears the provocative title of "Wieża Babel koncept kultury—wybrane stanowiska filozoficzne (do czasów współczesnych)" [The Tower of Babel Concept of Culture – Selected Philosophical Attitudes (up to the Present)], which perfectly names the analyzed issue—the plurality, but also the ambiguity of philosophical approaches to culture. In this section, the author presents the most important philosophical views on culture and points out that the diversity of approaches poses a significant challenge to contemporary cultural discourse. The chapter is structured historically and philosophically, and reflects on culture in close connection with the ideas of virtue and education as shaping a good and harmonious life. Wielecki puts the philosophical emphasis on transcendence but also its materialist justifications. In the second chapter, Wielecki pays special attention to selected psychological conceptions of culture. The author claims that culture has not only a socio-historical and philosophical dimension, but is also closely connected to the dynamics of the human psyche. Therefore, he is devoted to the reflection of culture from the point of view of psychological schools, which sought to grasp culture as part of the psychological organization of the individual. It refers to the work of Carl Gustav Jung, who emphasized the archetypal

dimension of cultural expressions. In Jung's conception, culture is not merely the product of historical circumstances, but is deeply rooted in the collective unconscious of humanity. The symbols, myths and rituals preserved and transmitted by culture shape the psychic balance of the individual and society. Mass culture, by reducing, trivializing or commercializing symbols, undermines the integrity of the individual psyche because it ceases to provide meaningful "maps" for orienting oneself in the world. According to Fromm, true culture cultivates the ability "to be"—that is the ability to be oneself, to contemplate, to love, and to create. Mass culture, on the other hand, fosters the orientation of "to have"—that is to consume and possess. This shift has serious implications for a person's mental health because it promotes alienation, anxiety, and the inability to establish deep interpersonal relationships. Another interesting point is Wielecki's reference to behavioural psychology which often reduces culture to a set of learned responses and behavioural patterns. While these approaches have their value, the author warns of their risk of reductionism, that is of grasping culture only as a functional tool of social adaptation and, as a result, losing its spiritual and transcendent dimension. In the first part of the book, Wielecki also analyses culture from the perspective of selected sociological theories, noting that culture is perceived not only as a set of values, norms and symbols, but as a dynamic process of identity formation of individuals and societies. The review begins with Vic and ends with Parsons's functionalism, where culture has a stabilizing function and promotes social cohesion. It is seen as a mechanism that integrates individuals into society by communicating shared values and norms. Wielecki's analysis aptly shows that although sociological theories of culture provide different lenses of perspective, they can nevertheless be used to critically reflect on the state of contemporary culture, especially its mass aspect. The author deftly weaves together insights from these theories to create a picture of mass culture as a phenomenon that, while formally fulfilling the requirements of pluralism and accessibility, in reality undermines the authenticity, spiritual depth, and cultural literacy of the modern man.

The second part of Krzysztof Wielecki's book represents the culmination of the author's critical analysis concerning the crisis of modern culture in the context of post-industrial society. It consists of a set of four interconnected chapters that develop a theoretical interpretation of civilizational changes, revealing their impact on the understanding of culture, subjectivity and human suffering. Wielecki emerges here as a sociologist and philosopher who seeks to link the macro level of social structure with the micro level of individual experience, employing elements of critical realism, of which the British sociologist Margaret Archer is a prominent exponent. Wielecki, like Archer, develops his own theoretical position through critiques of both canonical and other authors. Archer's morphogenetic approach and her

emphasis on the analytical duality between structure and agency find fruitful application in Wielecki's work because they explain the dynamics between social conditions and personal decision-making in the contemporary cultural situation. Culture is not a deterministic framework, but an active field of tension in which the subject (agent) can reflexively react and transform given conditions. While individuals are shaped by dominant cultural models, they also carry within them the potential for reflection, defiance and rebirth. Finally, mass culture is not only a closed system of manipulation, but also a challenge to the development of critical consciousness and deeper cultural renewal. Wielecki exploits Archer's emphasis on the importance of reflection on the ontological basis of the person, his/her personal continuity, his/her capacity for self-reflection and his/her moral discernment, which are often distorted in conditions of the post-industrial chaos. It is precisely the ability to sustain reflexive agency, as Archer describes it, that is key to the rediscovery of culture as a site of spiritual formation in Wielecki's study. In this way, we can say that critical realism connects with personalist anthropology, creating a desirable bridge between social theory and philosophical anthropology. The philosophical basis allows Wielecki to penetrate beneath the surface of cultural phenomena and to point to the deeper anthropological and spiritual dimension of the crisis that the modern man is experiencing.

In the context of the aforementioned view of subjectivity, the author examines how the image of a man is changing under the conditions of post-industrial capitalism: a person is gradually becoming a functional individual primarily responsible for his own performance and success. Wielecki's position is critical of an anthropology that narrows the human being to a consumer and a bearer of competence. In opposition to this, he favours a conception of the man as a relational being, that is a person who is formed through interpersonal relationships, value anchoring and the spiritual dimension of existence. The loss of these elements leads to "psychological emptiness", anxiety, and a sense of meaninglessness. Wielecki argues that mass culture, while formative, leads to the uniformity of cultural expressions and undermines individual creativity and the capacity for reflection. According to the writer, mass culture "hypnotizes" its consumers like a snake hypnotizing a rabbit, depriving them of the ability to think critically and to have authentic cultural experiences. The author also points out that mass culture often replaces real life with superficial substitutes that, while providing instant gratification, lead to emotional and intellectual emptiness in the long run. He encounters the paradigm of the "civilizational turn", according to which humanity now finds itself at a crossroads: it will take the path of spiritual rebirth or it will continue the destructive dominance of technocratic rationalism. The crisis, according to Wielecki, is not only economic or ecological, but is above all anthropological because it is about a loss of meaning, identity

and relationships. Particular attention must be paid to the dehumanizing aspects of mass culture, which—instead of shaping the person—lead to his atomization, passivity and loss of autonomy.

Kultura versus kultura masowa [Culture versus Mass Culture] is an important contribution to the debate on the current state of culture and its development in the context of globalisation and technological progress. The critical analysis of mass culture presented here provides valuable food for thought concerning the direction our culture is taking and what consequences this may have for individuals and society. Wielecki's writing style is both erudite and accessible. The author uses rich language and frequently refers to various philosophical, sociological and psychological theories, which adds depth and complexity to his argument. At the same time, however, he emphasizes clarity and lucidity, allowing the reader to follow his train of thought effectively. The book is enriched with numerous examples that help to flesh out the author's arguments. The book is intended not only for social scientists but also for a wider audience interested in cultural processes and their impact on everyday life.

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