


THE
AVENUE
NEVER
SUSPENSE

Noemi Staniszevska-Żuravska

Is it possible
not to work?



„We are creating these
laws to bring order to
the chaos.
Then bending them as
much as we can to make
it possible to live on.”

rapper Wini in song *Ej świat*

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To Albert

may he learn to hurry up as late as possible

THE
AVENUE
HERE
S

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INTRODUCTION

Capitalism is not just an economic system – it is a way of thinking. To put it more mildly: the principles which govern the economy in capitalist systems impact the way we think about the world, or the other way round: the way we see the world allowed capitalism to form. It is not my goal to discuss at length this cause and effect dilemma but to specify the points where transferring the economic mode of thinking onto the world view as well as thinking about relations and yourself occurs and the consequences it bears. It is significant to point out at the beginning that this dissertation is not going to deal with economic analyses. If some elements of them appear, they will serve merely as a context for deliberations of another kind.

The sociologist and philosopher of religion Max Weber wrote about the spirit of capitalism, the semiotician of culture Marcin Napiórkowski works on the mythology of capitalism. I conduct my research from the perspective of an artist. When someone asks what perspective on capitalism may be offered by an artist, the first answer that comes to mind could be focusing on the category of beauty (or ugliness) of capitalism. However, connecting the notion of beauty with art seems no longer adequate, at least from Duchamp's *Fountain*. Whether it is good or bad that this has happened is a topic for completely different considerations. For me, it is not a problem that someone might deem beauty as a subject which is too obsolete for modern art's considerations. It seems that a lot remains to be done in this field. The ugliness of capitalism may be seen as streets full of billboards, mass production of low-quality objects (which, on the other hand, are cheap) or degraded environment with loads of rubbish which come from overconsumption. These issues open a broad field for the activity of graphic or item designers as well as landscape architects. Painters often made references to what is brought into the sphere of visibility by capitalism. This was the source of inspiration for Andy Warhol or Richard Hamilton, etc. However, I am not going to conduct the analysis of capitalism in terms of its aesthetic as the course of my interest is different. My research omits the issue of beauty and take the direction of another category – impression.

Impressionists dealt with impressions nearly 150 years ago so this approach can also be referred to as obsolete, just as the previously mentioned reference of art to the category of beauty. Thanks to this archaism, such attitude may also be established enough to make an impression a just area of interest for artists. Importantly, the use of the phrase *impression of capitalism* means that in my research, I do not refer to what capitalism actually is like but to the impression it makes.

I submit the whole dissertation to the thesis that **time is not money**. This is more of a figurative statement than a scientific one. It is a reference to the



1. Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962 r.



2. Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's home's so different, so appealing?*, 1956 r

famous Benjamin Franklin's quotation from the *Advice to Young Tradesmen* from 1748. Franklin's words – *time is money* – function commonly as a saying. They have become a part of our vocabulary, beside other truths of life. Truths of life serve an educational function. They are supposed to shape people's attitudes. When it comes to sayings, we can say "too much of a good thing" until we have a different opinion. Then, we can add "never" at the beginning of the sentence. As you can see, the fact that strong statements can be contradictory does not undermine their messages or push them out of circulation. It may be so due to the fact that we use plural when we talk about truths of life. It reveals our attitude to the statements in the sayings. On the one hand we see them as true while on the other we know that they are not the sole truths. In his conversations with Stanisław Obirek, Zygmunt Bauman says "Maciej Kalarus, an exceptionally astute scholar of our polyphonic world [...] demands that the word 'truth', similarly to words like 'scissors', 'goggles' or 'trousers', should only be used in the plural [...]. Indeed, using the word 'truth' in the singular in a polyphonic world is like trying to clap with one hand...".¹ It is impossible to prove that the thesis *time is not money* is true if we adopt a traditional understanding in which there only is one truth. The saying that *time is money* does not arise from any factual circumstances. It is a result of an impression. We get an impression that time is money when we transfer economic thinking onto thinking about life, when we apply the measure of effectiveness to life and look at it from the angle of market mechanisms. Therefore, my goal is to examine the sources of such an impression as well as its consequences and whether it is possible to set yourself free from the impression.

Studying impressions requires a different approach than seeking the truth. In the first part of the dissertation, I will introduce the methods I have adopted for writing my theoretical paper which, at the same time, could be treated as methods of creative work. If we capture [this dissertation and the paintings] as a whole, the methods which I describe are the way a doctorate in an artistic discipline is seen. Because of this, I start by attempting to find a common field for art and science. This is a search for space and way for an artist's statement in a scientific format of a doctoral dissertation. As I have already indicated when I wrote about the existence of multiple truths instead of a sole and ultimate one, the purpose of this dissertation is not to definitely solve the research problem. I feel entitled to adopt this path, as the act on higher education system points out that an original artistic accomplishment may be an alternative for presenting scientific problems in a doctoral dissertation.

1 Z. Bauman, S. Obirek, *Of God and Man*, transl. K. Bartoszyńska, Polity Press, Cambridge 2015, <https://books.google.pl/books?id=McxpCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false>, DOA 9.10.2022.

Therefore, proving the originality of a work of art becomes the key purpose of this dissertation. "Original" means that it is not a copy or plagiarism but also that it reaches into the origins. The dissertation's authorial originality is its important aspect. I understand the criterion of originality as the criterion of artistic sincerity which is creation in consonance with one's artistic conscience. Because of this, I am not going to avoid describing personal impressions or experiences. Walking a reader (and a viewer) through the process of the work's coming to existence is an aid when it comes to proving originality of a piece of art. Therefore, I am not going to abandon presenting older paintings in the final set. Similarly, in the theoretical paper, I include information which led me to my final conclusions, however, it is not directly connected to them. The last assumption is to write the paper in as light language as possible and to avoid scientific jargon, rather than to emphasize it deliberately. It is also my intention not to tire the future reader of this dissertation because, as it will later turn out, the desire to free myself from tiredness was one of the reasons why I took up this dissertation's subject.

After the introduction of the methods I have adopted, with reference to the aforementioned criterion of sincerity, I will explain the reasons which convinced me to adopt the thesis that time is not money. My interest in the subject begun when after graduating from MA studies, I began a full-time job. The notions of time and money connect with work, because if time is money, than the transformation of one into the other takes place through work. Therefore, work becomes the sales of time. Analogously, we can buy time by commissioning work which was supposed to be performed by us to someone else. When we buy and sale time, we can get lost in the thicket of transactions and end up at the point where we no longer have time (for anything). Time is inseparably connected with human life. We cannot exist outside time. Does money take the same fundamental position in our lives? While we cannot imagine life outside time, can we imagine life outside the circulation of money? Therefore, to reach the distinction between time and money and therefore rupture Franklin's equation, I pose the leading question of this dissertation: **Is it possible not to work?**

A question formulated this way may be understood in several ways. It contains the question whether a world without work is possible but also whether people are allowed not to work and if they are even capable of this. I will begin the main part of this dissertation by analysing the potential possibility of a workless world's existence. What I mean here is a situation, where no one has to work and unemployment is not a life problem but more of a natural condition. Based on, among others, the prognoses by John Maynard Keynes, I will refer to the assumptions that the increase in wealth is unlimited and, as a consequence,

human material needs could one day be satisfied. Among the heralds of this vision coming true, there are discussions on universal basic income guarantee and attempts to implement it. The world without work could also be one in which work is no longer profitable. In his famous book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Thomas Piketty presents an economic principle according to which the rate of return on capital is higher than the rate of economic growth. The assumption is put to a practical test by the artists of the Goldin+Senneby duo. They make the installation *Eternal Employment* whose essence is employing a person who does nothing at work and his salary comes from interest on the grant which the artists received for making the installation. The arrival of the world without work is also discussed in the context of progressing robotization. The issue is popular with the media but often, instead of being presented as a deliverance from work, it is defined as a threat. Why should a world without work be a threat to us? Why do we approach proposals like basic income or other social welfare programs with mistrust, noting, that someone has to earn to finance them?

After the presentation of the theoretical possibilities of a world without work existing, I will edge away from investigations of the economic bases. It is significant for me that such proposals exist and the impressions they make. However, I cannot judge how probable they are. After all, in spite of the fact that Keynes wrote about solving the economic problem almost one hundred years ago, we still work. But if we did have a possibility to live in a world without work, would we take it at all? Therefore, I will turn to the other understanding of the question – are people allowed to not work?

To explain why it seems to us that we should work, I will discuss the notion of meritocracy. The capitalist system is considered one in which we all have equal opportunities and our success depends on our engagement only. Therefore, we prove our value through work. If we do not achieve the intended results, it means we have not been working hard enough. Such attitude justifies the existence of income inequalities, which are discussed in the part where the *Eternal Employment* piece is presented. One of the strands concerning the impressions of capitalism which I discuss is the connection between the notion of free market and fairness. Another aspect I will focus on is consumerism. Satisfying the basic material needs is not the only purpose of work. The term *basic needs* implies that there may be many more. Similarly, the universal basic income's name contains the information that it is basic but the possibilities to make use of one's income are unlimited. Though technological progress provides us with tools which allow to work faster and faster, a working week has not shortened since the 80s. Instead of having more free time, we have more things. The things we own or would like to own do not have a practical

function only. As the phenomenon of a brand appears, owning things satisfies spiritual needs too. Therefore, the impression that who we are depends on the material goods we consume will be discussed. After I have discussed the mechanisms which make us want to work (and therefore earn) more, I will move on to the one which prevent us from breaking free from work. I will analyse the way work allows to control society and the methods that are used to minimise the possibility of an employee revolting. There, I will refer to the story of a man who gave up living surrounded by four walls and settled in a lorry parked near the company for which he worked. Commuting to his workplace took so much time that the only thing he did in his apartment was sleeping. Therefore, he considered renting it cost-ineffective. Work filled his life to such an extent that finally he decided to live at his workplace. It is a rather extreme example in which there is nothing else but work in his life. We are talking about a situation in which not only time is money but also life is work. Locating the meaning of life in work leads to considerations of the relation between work and other media of existential meaning. Therefore, I move on to the third understanding of the question asked – are people capable of not working? Or maybe a human was created for work?

When I talk about being created for work, I, for example, mean the words of Genesis: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Gen. 2,15).² Though there remuneration is no mentioned here, taking care of a garden fits into the definition of work as an activity, whose goal is to transform the environment. In Judeo-Christian mythology, work becomes a human calling. When man is expelled from Paradise, work becomes charged with a new aspect – effort. God addresses man with the following words: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.” (Gen 3:17) Not only were humans created for work – a moment later they are doomed with it. Another aspect of the matter: work as a purposeful activity has not been made social here. The scenes described in Genesis are only one of many examples of religion's connection with work and, going further, with money too. I will work on these very relationships in the final part of the dissertation. The relation between time and money included in the thesis is also one of them. The phenomenon of lending money at interest and all the regulations on it are included in the religious laws fit into it perfectly. Usury was forbidden as it came down to earning money on time, which, as it was believed, belonged to God. Even

² All the biblical quotes and abbreviations come from the *New International Version*, <<https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Version-NIV-Bible>>, DOA 9.10.2022.

the Franklirian *time is money* results from religious aspects – the protestant ethics which, as Max Weber shows, lies at the base of capitalism. Religion and money seem to stand so close together that, in a way, they evolve into faith in money.

Here, I am going to introduce the notion of a heavenscraper – a skyscraper which does not associate with a tower or a really tall building but with religion-like faith. This very perspective on skyscrapers is one of the main topics of my paintings. We can work in various buildings intended for the purpose, for example factories, or, as the experience of the pandemic shows, in our own homes. However, as a visual medium of the impression of capitalism which I discuss, I have picked skyscrapers because of the semantic potential I see in them. The definition of a skyscraper I have adopted is pretty simple – it is a building intended as a workplace which is high and glazed in. Therefore, I will analyse the meaning hidden behind the use of glass in elevations as well as the extraordinary height of the buildings themselves. Building vertically brings to mind a myth which is important for the Judeo-Christian civilisation – the story of the tower in the city of Babel. At the end, I will present an interpretation of the biblical text in reference to the impression of capitalism which I describe. It is a story of unity and dispersion as well as uniformity and diversity. About the relation between structure and chaos, their attractive and restrictive aspects. In other words, about the things I touch upon in my paintings.

In his *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger says: “In a painting all its elements are there to be seen simultaneously. The spectator may need time to examine each element of the painting but whenever he reaches a conclusion, the simultaneity of the whole painting is there to reverse or qualify his conclusion. The painting maintains its own authority”.³ Berger juxtaposes this perspective with the language of film which has a narrative, so it “unfolds in time and a painting does not. In a film the way one image follows another, their succession, constructs an argument which becomes irreversible”.⁴ It is similar with written word. So let's start from the beginning. Or maybe... we are going to make another circle?

³ J. Berger, *The Ways of Seeing*, <<https://www.ways-of-seeing.com/ch1>>, DOA 9.10.2022.

⁴ Ibidem.

NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

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The introduction was translated by **Marta Skibińska**.

Please keep in mind that the remaining text was machine-translated, with the use of the translation systems based on artificial intelligence. That means the following translation should not be considered as final and its purpose is only to give some preview of the content of the dissertation. In case of quoting, please contact the author to determine the exact translation of the selected passages.

17

CHOSEN METHODS

DIFFERENCES

There was a time in my life when I worked on film sets. I remember students at the Gdynia Film School who struggled to write scripts for their films. Instructed by their lecturers, they were looking for stories in which conflict could be vividly shown. But this is not an isolated characteristic of film scripts, and the same is true of novels and all forms of storytelling. Dr. Michał Larek, in materials provided by Maszyna do pisania – a Polish school of creative writing, the text *How to Plan a Novel* begins with the words: “There is no story without conflict. Something has to happen for the story to move forward”.⁵

Because conflict has been needed since the beginning of the world for something to happen. It is not known how long the bliss in Eden lasted, and whether we can speak in the context of the Garden of Eden about the passage of time at all. Although God created the celestial bodies “to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years” (Gen 1:14) He did so not until the fourth day. How was the lapse of the previous three days counted? Perhaps it’s an indication that the passage of time doesn’t really matter when no one grows old and dies, when nothing happens. It only begins to happen when, along with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, there is the ability to choose. Choice means the existence of different possibilities, a break with uniformity in favour of diversity. This dissertation, too, was framed around the differences – between structure and chaos, between principles and liberty, between work and leisure, between what one must and what one would like to do.

The method mentioned at the beginning, which is based on conflict to build up the drama of the stories told, can be compared to the use of contrast in the visual arts. However, this does not mean that in painting, for example, only Caravaggio matters, and Luc Tuymans’ ‘faded’ paintings are not noteworthy. The example of Jim Jarmusch shows that a film doesn’t have to have a high-speed action at all for someone to want to watch it. Conflict and contrast don’t have to use their full spectrum, and the differences that are handled can be subtle, not obvious. Perhaps it is the lack of obviousness that keeps stories from becoming banal and draws the line between art and kitsch.

As a doctoral student wishing to obtain an academic degree in an artistic discipline, I find myself in a non-obvious position from the very beginning.

⁵ M. Larek, *Jak zaplanować powieść*, „Maszyna do Pisania”, 02.05.2017, <<https://www.maszynadopisania.pl/jak-zaplanowac-opowieść>>, DOA 12.09.2021.

I remain settled, as it were, in two different worlds – on the one hand in the world of science, and on the other in the world of art. Therefore, I have to start by facing this exact difference that is contained between science and art.

WHAT CAN AN ARTIST TALK ABOUT?

When, even before I was accepted to my doctoral studies, I presented to my supervisor, Professor Roman Gajewski, the topic on which I would like to focus my doctorate, the professor asked me a question: on what basis am I going to speak about the subject of the work, if I am not a sociologist? As it turned out later, the question was one of those meant to provoke me to deliver my argumentation, not to bring me down at the very start. However, the doubts it raised remained with me for a long time.

Indeed, it would seem that I would not be able to write a scientific dissertation on the subject of labour, since I am not an economist, sociologist or psychologist. Besides, even if I had decided on a topic related to art, I expect that there might be voices saying that I do not have the tools to analyse it accurately, after all, I am not an art historian or theorist. However, I remain a practitioner of art, and from that position I can speak about it. Being an artist, I can talk about art, and in particular about my own work, which has a broad context covering areas not usually associated with the visual arts. I see no reason why contemporary artists should exclude from their interest and commentary the areas of reality in which they participate, just because these areas may seem 'non-artistic' to someone. This dissertation is a description of the context of my paintings – they are the entry point for the considerations presented further on.

But even here difficulties arise – Hans Georg Gadamer writes: „It seems instead to belong to the experience of art that the work of art always has its own present. Only in a limited way does it retain its historical origin within itself. The work of art is the expression of a truth that cannot be reduced to what its creator actually thought in it.”⁶ I dare: „Naturally it is not the artist

⁶ H-G. Gadamer, *Aesthetics and hermeneutics*, trans. D.E. Linge, <<https://www.thinkingtogether.org/rcream/archive/Old/S2005/127/gadamer.pdf>>, DOA 13.09.2022.

who is speaking here. The artist's own comments about what is said in one or another of his works may certainly be of possible interest too. But the language of art means the excess of meaning that is present in the work itself. The inexhaustibility that distinguishes the language of art from all translation into concepts rests on this excess of meaning.”⁷

At first impulse, Gadamer's words aroused my disagreement. It might seem that the thought of the artist is redundant, he is only a medium that allows art to materialise, while it speaks to the viewer completely independently. The quoted passage indicates that what is most important happens on the line of artwork-receiver, without the participation of the artist. Any additional commentary can threaten the identity of the work, including the author's commentary. So why should the artist verbalise the meaning of his own work at all?

Gadamer describes the viewer's relationship with the artwork through the words *this art thou* and *thou must alter thy life!*. Underneath the words *this art thou* is what we find in a work of art, which we would never see if it were not already part of our own history. This is the field where content completely unintended by the author of the work can appear, resulting from the relationship that is established between the work and the viewer. *Thou must alter thy life!* is an impulse, something that is not yet in us, an element from the outside, but one that works only because it occurs in tandem with what we have already come to know, that is, the layer *this art thou* of the work. In this way, the hermeneutic wheel comes full circle.

In order to accept Gadamer's words from the position of an artist, I needed a certain rearrangement of the situation. Let the artist stand in the role of the recipient of his own work, that is, to assign to him the same characteristics of interaction with the work of art as to its other recipients. The issue *this art thou* seems clear – the work of art comes out of what the artist has experienced, read, thought about, what he has learned so far and how skillfully he uses his technique. In this aspect, the work is the artist, and his ideas matter.

There remains the second, less obvious part – you must change your life. The materialisation of the work itself, can be considered an impulse coming from beyond the area *this art thou*. The end result always differs from the original idea. This is not necessarily due to an inability to transform your thoughts or feelings into art objects. Sometimes, the finished work may even be unintentionally better than one intended.

⁷ Ibidem.

I submit this dissertation, which is a description of the work's context, to what I could, referring to Gadamer's words, call *this art me*. I want to describe my impressions and thoughts captured in the paintings, while not denying others the opportunity to discover their own meanings in the works I have created. Therefore, I do not try to grasp and explicitly verbalise the meanings contained in the paintings. I deliberately use the phrase description of the context of the work instead of description of the work. When speaking about the work, the artist expresses other, additional content, and does not duplicate those contained in the work itself. When I write about the context of the work, although I draw my knowledge from other fields, I remain in my discipline, still operating in the field of art.

Taking this point of view, it is possible to conclude that an artist can speak about his art, but there is still an unanswered question – can an artist speak about it scientifically?

DOES RESEARCH HAVE TO BE SCIENTIFIC?

In October 2020, took place a national academic conference entitled *Czy badania naukowe?* [Does Artistic Research?] organised by the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław. As you can read in the conference description: "Artistic research, situated at the intersection of creativity, knowledge and science, has been one of the problems profoundly discussed in the West for more than 20 years [...]. Despite the appearance of the first manifestations of interest in this issue on the part of Polish artists and art theorists in the last decade, however, it seems that the subject has not been exhaustively explored or permanently embedded in domestic academic discourses."⁸ Indeed, in Poland the very word research is by definition associated with science. According to the *Dictionary of the Polish Language* – research is "work aimed at knowing something by means of scientific analysis."⁹

⁸ Materials available on conference's website, *Czy badania artystyczne?*, 22-23.10.2020, Wrocław, <<http://czybadaniaartystyczne.pl/>>, DOA 09.12.2020.

⁹ [entry:] *Badanie*, [in:] *Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN*, <<https://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/badanie.html>>.

Google Translate, one of the most popular text translation tools, stubbornly translates the word research into scientific research, not even allowing the possibility of its other aspects. However, let's try to look at the issue of research without assuming in advance that it is scientific. Julian Klein in his article *What is artistic research?* cites UNESCO's definition of research. Research is: "Any creative systematic activity undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this knowledge to devise new applications".¹⁰ Klein sums up this definition with the words: "Research therefore means not-knowing, rather: not-yet-knowing and desire for knowledge".¹¹ This perspective, while not taking anything away from science, leaves room for artistic research as well.

However, it is worth specifying at this point what knowledge is. In this case, the Polish definitions leave a certain gap, which makes it possible not to associate knowledge only with science. The *PWN Encyclopaedia* states that knowledge is "in the most general sense the result of all possible acts of cognition; in a narrower sense - all reliable information about reality along with the ability to use it; in modern societies, knowledge in this sense is primarily, but not exclusively, scientific knowledge [...]. Knowledge is a very broad concept, so often additional terms are added to it, indicating what knowledge is meant".¹² In the case of art, unsurprisingly, it is about artistic knowledge. This concept is explained by Julian Klein as follows: „Some authors require that artistic knowledge must nevertheless be verbalized and thus be comparable to declarative knowledge. Others say it is embodied in the products of art. But ultimately it has to be acquired through sensory and emotional perception, precisely through artistic experience, from which it can not be separated. Whether silent or verbal, declarative or procedural, implicit or explicit – in any case, artistic knowledge is sensual and physical, «embodied knowledge». The knowledge that artistic research strives for, is a felt knowledge.”¹³

Such perceived knowledge is difficult to measure. As for knowledge in the scientific sense, on the other hand, its estimation is easier, or at least a number of methods for its verification have already been developed, to which we have become used to. After all, the estimation of scientific knowledge has

DOA 12.09.2021.

¹⁰ [entry:] *Research and development* [in:] *OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms*, 12.03.2003, <<https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=2312>>, DOA 12.09.2021.

¹¹ J. Klein, *What is Artistic Research?*, "Gegenworte 23", Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2010, <<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/15292/15293>>, DOA 09.09.2021

¹² [entry:] *Wiedza* [in:] *Encyklopedia PWN*, <<https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/3995573/wiedza.html>>, DOA 09.09.2021.

¹³ J. Klein, op. cit.

accompanied us since childhood, when the amount of information and skills learned was verified with the help of exams and competency tests. Being able to measure the results allows us to prove effectiveness. Artistic knowledge, on the other hand, is difficult to grasp, and as a result is marginalised. It is scientific knowledge that is favoured in our culture and treated as the one that can guarantee that the answers it provides are true. Meanwhile, artistic knowledge and research, while different from scientific knowledge, need not necessarily mean lesser. Trying to establish an equal place for those values in our lives that are unquantifiable is one of the goals of this dissertation. Because, after all, what is unquantifiable can still have an impact too, what is felt can also expand our knowledge of the world and, finally, what is unprofitable can also have value.

Direct application of scientific methods to artistic practice can have an disadvantageous effect. The unambiguity that results from the precise formulation of a thought in a scientific statement will not necessarily apply to an artistic statement. Similarly, adapting art to meet market demand can have fatal consequences for its quality – what exactly I mean here I will describe in the next chapter.

RELAXING PAINTINGS AND WHY I WILL NOT PAINT THEM

According to the Polish Law on Higher Education and Science, Article 187. paragraph 2: “The subject of a doctoral dissertation is an original solution to a scientific problem, an original solution to the application of the results of one’s scientific research in the economic or social field, or an original artistic achievement”.¹⁴ Accordingly, happily for artists, it is enough for them to accomplish something original – and then describe this accomplishment in the dissertation. However, during my doctoral studies, some of the lecturers argued that a doctorate (regardless of discipline) should solve a problem. In my opinion, art which instead of just pointing out certain problems, gives

¹⁴ Law on Higher Education and Science Article 187 paragraph 2. of July 20, 2018 [Journal of Laws 2018 item 1668].

ready-made solutions to them, comes dangerously close to propaganda. Nevertheless, led by the need to make art effective, I began to wonder, what problem could my paintings solve?

I assume that the starting point of my reflections, and therefore the key problem to which I draw attention, is tiredness and a permanent lack of time. So I thought that perhaps I should paint such paintings that will put the viewer in a state of relaxation. They may not provide answers, but they certainly will not ask difficult questions either, and thus will not make the viewer feel uncomfortable. After all, as one of the titles of the lectures in the series *Akademia po godzinach* – art makes you tired.

What relaxes some may irritate others. So, should relaxing paintings be full of detail, drawing the viewer in deeper and deeper until he or she gets lost in them and stops thinking about what is bothering him or her? Or minimalist, calm, subdued, probably with lots of blue? In order not to shatter these questions unsupported by facts and not to rely on stereotypes, it would be worthwhile to conduct scientific research. After all, I could enter into cooperation with a psychologist (I even managed to have a preliminary conversation about starting such a project) and conduct tests - how viewers feel before, during and after contact with a work of art. It would also be worthwhile to test whether, in order to paint a relaxing picture, the artist himself must be relaxed. On the basis of such tests, it would be possible to create works that are more and more tailored to expectations, more and more relaxing (and, by the way, also provide oneself with some relaxation funded by the grant obtained for this purpose).

But would a painting painted not in harmony with itself, but in such a way as to meet the demands of the research results, still fall into the categories of art, or would it be just a product? To undertake such a project would be to legitimise art, to give it a clear function, and, to make matters worse, such a function that can be accurately measured and described (e.g., ‘this painting has a relaxing effect on 23% of those surveyed’).

Art should never fall into the trap of efficiency, into that imperative of profit specific to capitalism. In the words of Max Weber, “Capitalism is [...] the pursuit of *profit* in continuous rational capitalist action: a constantly *renewable* profit, a «profitability». For it must be such.”¹⁵ Weber clarifies earlier that this is by no means about the unbridled lust for possession, which is even incompatible

¹⁵ M. Weber, *Etyka protestancka a duch kapitalizmu; Protestanckie „sekty” a duch kapitalizmu*, transl. B. Baran, J. Miziński, Aletheia, Warsaw 2010, p. 8.

with the spirit of capitalism he describes (based on Protestant asceticism). It is about this kind of thinking, right at the very beginning of planning, which will take into account whether the activity will be profitable. In the case of setting up a business, this approach seems as right as possible. Trouble begins when we try to transfer this way of thinking to other areas and require art to have a rational justification. One cannot demand efficiency and productivity from art. It is governed by different laws, and the fact that it does not fit into a scientific framework does not at all mean that it is meaningless or useless. That is why I will not paint relaxing pictures or even try to figure out what such a concept would actually mean. Art cannot directly solve our problems. The meaning of its existence is a lot less obvious, and the purpose of this dissertation is not to make it clearer, but rather to demonstrate that the world is a much richer and more complex place when one allows existence of what is unquantifiable and unprofitable, intuitive and felt and also leaves room for what is artistic alongside with what is scientific.

A COMMON FIELD

Art and science do not need to stand in opposition. Professor Jacek Dominiczak, in the monograph *Miasto Dialogiczne i inne teksty rozproszone*, writes: "The equivalence of science and art reflects today the equal value of truth and liberty. The difference seems to be only in the method: while science experiments with truth to achieve liberty, art experiments with liberty to reach the truth."¹⁶

In my opinion, art and science, despite their different methods and different goals, achieve the same results – multiply doubts. Each scientific discovery raises new questions, and the areas of research expand like the universe. As Professor Roman Gajewski writes in the text *Szkiełko, oko i sztuka, czyli o rozsządku oraz malowniczych od niego odstępstwach*: "Science's exploration of the infinite, which focuses the attention of many physicists, does not mean it is explored entirely, it means only the exploration of the infinite. The same is true in art: the search by artists for beauty does not mean finding it, it only means searching for beauty".¹⁷ The pressure to achieve measurable results seems to

¹⁶ J. Dominiczak, *Miasto Dialogiczne i inne teksty rozproszone*, Wydział Architektury i Wzornictwa Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Gdańsku, Gdańsk 2016, p. 63.

¹⁷ R. Gajewski, *Szkiełko, oko i sztuka, czyli o rozsządku oraz malowniczych od niego odstępstwach*, [in:] *Synchronia. Nauka i sztuka w Muzeum Zegarów Wieżowych w Gdańsku*, ed. by Idem, Muzeum Gdańska, Gdańsk 2020, p. 230.



3. An example of what an object covered with *Vantaback* substance looks like

come from a completely different area – from the need for perpetual growth and progress; from the world of capitalism, in which what does not bring profit does not have a right to exist. Researchers complain that nowadays they are required to be able to determine the outcome of their research at the outset.¹⁸ It is difficult to obtain funding for research whose results might not appeal to sponsors. Science, which has found its place alongside business, unfortunately has to reckon with a restriction of liberty. Art, although it does not lack liberty, sometimes pays the price of underfunding.

„Art and science are not separate domains, but rather two dimensions in the common cultural space”.¹⁹ As we will see in the next chapter, this common space is not as open as one might expect. The boundaries within it are set by property rights – both material and intellectual. The noble ideas of science and art are not excluded from the laws governing the market, since the effects of their actions arrive in the form of goods, the availability of which is limited and sometimes even deliberately restricted.

¹⁸ Writings on this subject include: R. Bregman, *Utopia dla realistów. Recepta na idealny świat*, transl. S. Paruszewski, Czarna Owca, Warsaw 2018, p. 20; D. Graeber, *Praca bez sensu. Teoria*, transl. M. Denderski, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2019, p. 297; N. Klein, *No Logo*, transl. M. Halaba, H. Jankowska et al. Muza, Warsaw 2017, p. 30.

¹⁹ J. Klein, op. cit.

THE BLACKEST OF BLACKS

In 2014, British scientists from the UK National Physical Laboratory developed a substance called *Vantablack*, which absorbs almost all visible light (99.965%). The substance has attracted the interest of space and military agencies, but also artists, especially since a version of the substance in the form of paint has been developed. Using the substance allows for an interesting visual effect, spatial objects covered with it look as if they were completely flat.

Except that *Vantablack* could only be used by one artist – Anish Kapoor. It was he who in 2016 bought the exclusive rights to the blackest black.²⁰ When this information circulated in the media and was confirmed by Surrey NanoSystems, the company that distributes the substance, the art community was outraged. The most spectacular expression of this outrage came from Stuart Semple, a British painter who uses handmade pigments in his works. In payback to Kapoor, he composed a pigment that he described as the pinkest pink and put it up for sale on his website. The pigment could be purchased by anyone... except Anish Kapoor. When ordering the product, one had to make a statement that one was not Kapoor or someone related to him, was not acting on his behalf, and had the conviction that the pigment purchased would not go to Kapoor. The whole action received a lot of publicity, with Semple selling 5,000 jars of pigment. However, one of them ended up not where the artist intended. In December 2016, Anish Kapoor posted on Instagram a photo of his middle finger dipped in Semple's pigment. The Instagram post resonated and led Semple to enter into a collaboration with other artists who were outraged by Kapoor's actions. Together they managed to create *Black 2.0* pigment, which, while not as black as *Vantablack*, also visually flattens the painted object. What's more, the pigment is much cheaper and easier to produce, and therefore generally available. The reservation of the rights to *Vantablack* to Kapoor was due to the fact that Surrey NanoSystems was unable to produce a large quantity of the substance, so they decided to work with only one artist. Therefore, we have a solution to the problem – thanks to the collaborative, grassroots effort of artists, maybe not the blackest, but very black black is

²⁰ The case was widely reported in the media, much of the information I used can be found in the article by A. Rogers, *Art Fight! The Pinkest Pink Versus the Blackest Black*, "Wired", 22.06.2017, <<https://www.wired.com/story/vantablack-anish-kapoor-stuart-semple>>, DOA 12.09.2021.



4. A photo that Anish Kapoor posted on his instagram profile *dirty_corner*

available to all who would like to use it. With that said, it is not only the solution that is interesting here, but also, and perhaps most importantly, the conflict that sparked it.

When Anish Kapoor bought the right to use *Vantablack* the controversy stemmed from the fact that he gained exclusivity for the use of this substance in artistic creation. This vividly demonstrated how wealth allows one to achieve advantage in the art world as well. According to the romantic vision of what an artist is, we would like to see success in this field determined by talent, creativity and skill, not by the wealth of one's wallet. However, as in other fields, here too, access to resources opens many doors that remain closed for the poorer ones. On a day-to-day basis, perhaps, this slips our attention and only arouses controversy in such an extreme case, when the right to use a certain colour is reserved for one artist.

The outcry that the reservation of *Vantablack* for Kapoor has caused is definitely dearer to me than recognizing the situation as completely natural or even desirable, and such voices have appeared as well. Alberto Bellan describing the case on the Intellectual Property Blog concludes his argument this way: "As technology is becoming more and more important in artistic creation, IP rights seem to make apparent what many artists have been alleging since a while [...]: art is not so different from other businesses, and artists could well-be like other businessmen – creating their products, protecting them via soft- and hard-IP rights, and acquiring immaterial assets to distinguish their works from

the others on the market. [...] [I am] not entirely sure that the Vantablack's tale should be considered so badly. It's not a disgrace, it's avant-garde".²¹

However, it is precisely this kind of avant-garde that I do fear, and it is what this dissertation is meant to warn against – not to look at art as any other business. This does not only apply to art, by the way. As I have already pointed out, I am not an economist, and it is not against the economic system that I stand here, but against the thinking by capitalism. Marcin Napiórkowski devoted his book *Kod kapitalizmu* [The Code of Capitalism] to such thinking. The words with which he ended the chapter on the Disney company and its fight against fakes also seem to comment on the Kapoor and Vantablack case: "Contrary to appearances, this was not a story about how copyright is bad, creators should not be paid for their hard work, and in general everything should be free. [...] I am also not saying that capitalism is bad and should be replaced by some other, better system – although I am trying to show that from a certain point of view it turns out to be a prison for the imagination".²²

IF NOT AN EFFECT, THEN WHAT?

If not the effect then the process, or in other words, instead of reaching the destination – the path that leads to it. This belief accompanied me in my master's thesis and has remained with me until now. Back then I used the highway as a metaphor for the modern path of life. I opened my thesis with a quote from Milan Kundera's novel *Immortality*: "Earlier than from the landscape, roads have disappeared from the human soul: man no longer desires to wander on roads and take pleasure from wandering. He also does not see his life as a path, but as a highway: as a line leading from one point to another [...]. The time of life has become a mere obstacle to be overcome with ever-increasing speed."²³

²¹ A. Bellan, *Paint it Vantablack - Artists owning colours and the dark side of IP*, "IPKat", 25.04.2016, <<https://ipkitten.blogspot.com/2016/04/paint-it-vantablack-artists-owning.html?m=1>>, DOA 12.09.2021

²² M. Napiórkowski, *Kod Kapitalizmu: jak Gwiezdne wojny, Coca-Cola i Leo Messi kierują twoim życiem*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2019, p. 168.

²³ M. Kundera, *Nieśmiertelność*, transl. M. Bieńczyk, PIW, Warsaw 1995, p. 171.

When I was thinking about velocity, it was the increasing speed that caught my attention. These days I look at it in a slightly different way. Increasing speed is only one of the actions that can be taken to increase efficiency. The lifetime that has become an obstacle is especially free time. In this context, it can be said that the opposition of leisure time is high-speed time, that is, time in which as many effective activities as possible can be accomplished.

I undertook my doctoral studies with the path in mind, not the destination. It is important to me that this dissertation is a record of that path. This includes the paintings, which, although they may seem inconsistent in the set, are an expression of searching – and not necessarily finding. If I were to start my studies again, I would spend time analysing other fields. However, I gained this awareness only after I checked out those areas of knowledge that were my first choice. Once again, the figure of the hermeneutic circle can be brought up. This circularity of gaining experience, but also the circularity of time, is of great importance in the context of seeking alternatives to a world that looks only forward. In an efficient world, mistakes are censored, a place is left only for ready-made solutions and for obvious utility. I have planned the content of this dissertation in chronological order. This means that I will present the problem of a world without work in such a way as to simultaneously illustrate the process of my perception of the topic and the following areas in which I looked for an answer to the question: *is it possible not to work?* Frankly speaking, such an order can also be called autobiographical, because honesty and self-reference are another criteria I follow in this dissertation.

ORIGINAL MEANS GENUINE

While writing about relaxing paintings and the matter of solving the research problem, I referred to the record in the Law on Higher Education, which states that "the subject of a doctoral dissertation is [...] an original artistic achievement".²⁴ Now let us spend some space on how to understand originality and how to verify it.

²⁴ *Law on Higher Education and Science*, op. cit.



5. Architecture in frescoes from the 1st century BC un villa of Fannius Synistor in Boscoreale. (left) compared with a fragment of Giotto di Bondone's 13th-century fresco, *Exorcism of the Demons at Arezzo* from the series *The Legend of Saint Francis* located in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi (right)



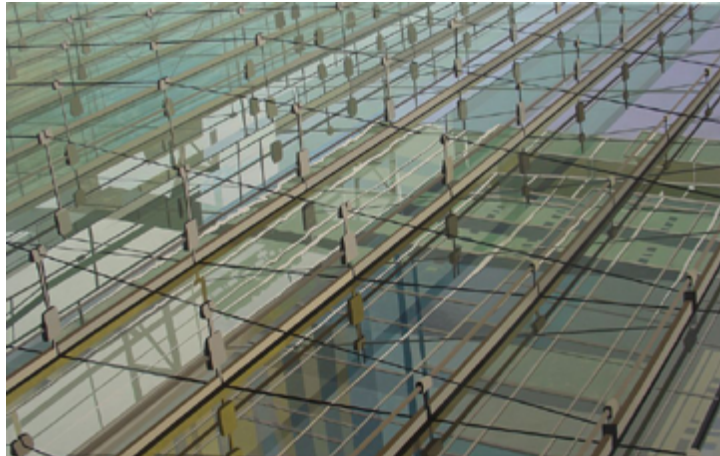
6. Another part of the frescoes from the villa of Fannius Synistor (left) and a fragment of Giorgio de Chirico's 1913 painting *Piazza d'Italia* (right)

The simplest explanation of the word original may be the term 'not being a copy'. However, it seems that the requirement of originality applied to a doctoral thesis also hides other meanings besides the warning against plagiarism. Original can be understood as differing from what is commonly known or accepted. On the one hand, any artistic work that is not a literal and successful copy of another work is to some extent different from other existing works, and is therefore original in the sense above. However, looking from another perspective – it is impossible to create a work that does not resemble any of the already existing works. The history of art is made up of breakthroughs, when artists begin to create in ways never seen before. Such boundary-crossings are characteristic of contemporary art in particular. Thus, we have a moment when, along with the emergence of ready-mades, artists actually stop creating their works, their artistic gesture is limited to the selection of the object. Then, with the advent of conceptual art, even objects disappear, and only the documentation of artistic actions has a material form. It may seem that all the boundaries of art have already been crossed. To put it in the words of the Azorro Group – *Everything Has Been Done*. In the highly amusing video with this title – as you can read in the description provided by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw – “the Azorro Super Group confronts the paradigm of originality in art. The absurd exchange of innovative ideas for a work of art, each of which turns out to have already been used, undermines the requirement of uniqueness imposed on artists”.²⁵ Based on the assumption that art should be original – in the sense of pioneering, while conceding that everything has already been done, one can reach the conclusion in another Azorro Group video that art has come to an end. The artists of the Supergroup announced the *End of Art* in 2002,²⁶ but after that date art was created and continues to be created. I believe that surprising with novelty is not the primary goal of art, and that what is alike in works of art can be just as interesting as what sets them apart.

In my paintings I consciously abandon the pursuit of novelty. Perhaps such a nostalgic look backward is partly a characteristic of all contemporary painters, after all, visual arts are now realised in much younger forms, such as performance, installation or video art. Thus, if one chooses to go for classically practised painting, it is likely to be driven by an attachment to what is familiar and well-established. Within painting, however, one can still experiment, look for new techniques and new materials, such as the recently popular epoxy resin

²⁵ Description provided by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw based on materials from the National Museum in Cracow, <<https://artmuseum.pl/pl/filmoteka/praca/azorro-grupa-wszystko-juz-bylo-1>>, DOA 12.09.2021.

²⁶ Description provided by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, <<https://artmuseum.pl/pl/filmoteka/praca/azorro-grupa-koniec-sztuki>>, DOA 13.09.2021.



8. Paintings by artists from Polish Tricity (fragments), from left: Anna Reinert *Canary wharf, facade 2*, 2010; Dariusz Syrkowski *Construction II*, 2017; Teresa Kłaman, from the *Metropolia* series, 2017.

or the previously mentioned Vantablack substance. The oil painting technique I practice has a long history and refers back to Jan van Eyck's fifteenth-century invention, so there is no point in talking about novelty here. On the other hand, if we look at the selected theme, the tradition of painting architecture goes back even further than oil painting. This motif can be found, for example, in frescoes from the villa of Fannius Synistor in Boscoreale dating back to the first century BC.²⁷ The fantastic buildings from Pompeii appear similar to those we know well from Giotto's frescoes fourteen centuries later in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.

Another fragment from the villa of Fannius Synistor is reminiscent of a 20th-century painting by Giorgio de Chirico.

The similarities between these works do not make them unoriginal at all. The visible parallels may be due to the fact that the artists, although separated by many centuries, worked in the same geographical region, so they were united by the heritage, atmosphere and sunshine of Italy.

The influence of the environment is inevitable. Narrowing the analysis of the theme of my paintings, not referring holistically to architecture, but only to the skyscrapers themselves, I find similarities already in the closest environment, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk. I mean the glass facades and the reflections visible in them from Anna Reinert's paintings; the motif of geometric towers from Dariusz Syrkowski's *Constructions* or the masterful drawings of skyscrapers known from Teresa Kłaman's work.

If I were to go further and list artists unrelated to the Tricity who deal with themes similar to the one I am undertaking, I can use the analyses that are already available, I just need to refer to the exhibitions in which I have participated. For example, this will be a selection of paintings made by Katarzyna Zahorska, curator of the exhibition *The Sadness of Modernism, Oppression and Depression*. The text for the exhibition states: "[In young Polish painting] for many years there has been a tendency to dress up artists' gloomy moods in depictions of modernism-inspired architecture."²⁸ Among the paintings in the exhibition that correspond to this tendency, the skyscraper motif can be found in Celina Kanunnikava's painting *I Hear You*. Moving away from the theme of architecture, many artists who, like me, refer to economic

²⁷ Information on the frescoes is from the website of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cubi/hd_cubi.htm>, DOA 13.09.2021.

²⁸ K. Zahorska, *Smutek modernizmu: opresja i depresja*, Galeria Miejska we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2019, p. 7.

issues in their art gathered the 16th Survival Art Review under the motto *Capital*, curated by Michał Bieniek, Anna Kolodziejczyk and Anna Stec. In the context of considerations that are the subject of this dissertation, it is worth recalling the work of Michał Szota *Czasopieniądz*, presented at the review. It is a sound installation, a kind of clock that reads the current hour every minute in the way the amount of money is read (that difference is specific for polish language and untranslatable).

I invoke the situation of a group exhibition and refer to the work of the curators to show that similarity in art is not an undesirable thing. It is even possible that fitting into a trend does not weaken the value of the work, but highlights the broader significance of the existing tendency. In my understanding, the originality of a work of art is not about being different from other works. I see the meaning of the word original in its etymology. The Latin *origo* means *origin*, *beginning*, *source*. Original, then, would mean authorial, self-contained, going back to the root. We are all subject to external influences, and it does not seem advisable to cut ourselves off from these influences. After all, cultural and art education aims to learn about the context in which one creates. It seems crucial, however, to relate this context to oneself and identify what is one's own, authorial. I finally understand the criteria of originality as a criteria of self-awareness and artistic sincerity, because sincere means not hiding one's thoughts, feelings and intentions. For this reason, in this dissertation, I do not intend to avoid referring to my own experiences.

Proceeding, in accordance with this principle, I will begin, by describing my encounter with the world of hired labour and by presenting the personal feelings that led me to ask the question – *is it possible not to work?*

IS WORK REALLY A PROBLEM?

HOW IT HAS BEGUN

In 2014, I graduated from the Faculty of Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk. The topic of my master's thesis was the influence of speed on the condition of modern society. Speaking of speed, I meant the ever-increasing pace of life, resulting from: instant access to information (the Internet), the possibility of immediate contact with another person (mobile telephony) and the speed of transportation (aeroplanes, highways, high-speed railroads). As a result of the spread of these solutions, a person is confronted with an ever-increasing number of stimuli and is confronted with an immensity of possibilities, still having the same amount of time at his disposal in a day, a year, his life. The amount of time we can spend on decision-making is shrinking, or we are giving up decision-making altogether, resorting to process automation.

The diploma series of works *Paintings about speed are being painted slowly* depicting highways, which are a metaphor for the path of life, where it is no longer the journey that matters, but getting from one point to another as quickly as possible. When painting the works in this series, I was keen to maximise the number of decisions made during the creation of the painting, for example, by using paints in only three colours and white, so that each colour used was mixed from scratch. I also abandoned the use of a digital projector when transferring the painting design to the canvas. Instead, I measured individual points on the design and then applied them to the painting. Such actions definitely increased the time needed to complete the paintings. The creative process became manifestly anti-efficiency, deliberately removed from the imperative of constantly increasing productivity. I was keen to draw a clear line between creating and making, or perhaps even producing, paintings.

Perhaps mentioning efficiency in the context of art making seems unauthorised. We may still associate artists with figures of dreamers detached from mundane matters, and thus with the ethos of the artist dating back to the Romantic era. For such a perception of the artist, the figure of Van Gogh is iconic. The story of a painter struggling with mental illness and dying in poverty is extremely gripping (and, by the way, carries powerful marketing potential materialising in countless cups, T-shirts and other gadgets associated with the artist). This, however, is a story from 150 years ago. The most famous contemporary artists are celebrity artists and billionaire artists at the same time (such as Jeff Koons or Damien Hirst). This is hardly surprising, after all, with great popularity today comes great money. A share in artistic fortunes, however, falls to a few. Artists who do not belong to this narrow group face a daily dilemma: how to create in harmony with themselves and at the same time be able to make a living?

To confirm this assumption, let's take the statements of two female artists from the debate *Nadprodukcja i postwzrost w czasach pandemii* [transl. *Overproduction and Postproduction in Times of Pandemic*] organised by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2020. By the way, the very need to organise a meeting with artists and cultural people around the issue of *overproduction* already signals the existence of such a problem. The use of economic nomenclature – phrases such as *production* or *manufacturing* of art, which are far from the aforementioned romantic ethos of the artist, is also telling. Alicja Rogalska, who participated in the debate, speaks of the overproduction of art in these words: "In the case of many female and male artists, overproduction is more of an existential necessity and not a choice at all. [...] There is a similar situation in many countries, not only in Poland, but also in the UK. This necessity of overproduction is related to the economics of art and to the economics of attention."²⁹ Katarzyna Wojtczak speaks in a similar vein: "In order to survive we have to produce [...] in fact, production often involves subsistence." At the same time, she states that "it is ethical today not to produce anything," because "the number of events limits the visibility of events," which may suggest that the art world is flooded with works created, or perhaps in this case just produced, without conviction, resulting from the need to satisfy subsistence needs, rather than 'from the need of the heart.' These works compete for the audience's attention, which may be dwindling over time. After all, by coming into contact with art products that are closer to the criteria of quantity than quality, potential viewers may lose interest in art and trust in artists. In this way, artists harm themselves. At least, this is how I interpret Wojtczak's words about how ethical it is today to produce nothing.

The artist calls the possibility of not producing art a privilege. Perhaps this is how it looks from the perspective of those struggling to survive in the art world, without conviction taking part in every new project to make their living. To me, also, the overproduction of art seems unethical. However, I would not call non-participation in overproduction a privilege. Rather, in my view, it is a decision that is available to each artist, although it is certainly difficult, because of the consequences it brings. Deciding not to (over)produce art (and thus not to depend on art profits for one's income) can mean not creating art at all. At the time I faced this decision, its consequences were not yet so clear to me.

After completing my master's degree, I continued to follow the same way of thought that guided me during the creation of my diploma series.

²⁹ The video recording of the conference *Nadprodukcja i postwzrost w czasach pandemii* was provided by the National Museum of Art in Warsaw, <<https://www.facebook.com/MuzeumSztukiNowoczesnej/videos/1377900215733779>>, DOA 13.09.2021.

I wanted to make sure that the process by which my paintings are created can be unquestionably called creation, not production. In order to avoid commodification of my art, I decided to start working full-time, thus giving up trying to make a living from painting. At the time, I made the assumption that I was earning money so that I could paint, not – I was painting to earn money. This was to protect my paintings from the influence of trends and adapting them to what was currently selling well. I also wanted to avoid the pressure of time, a situation in which I would have to produce a certain number of paintings to earn my living, and so I feared exactly the situation that artists complain about in the overproduction debate. This solution, however, meant that in addition to my full-time job, I had enough time and energy at most to be a weekend hobby painter. This is definitely not enough. So then the question arose in my mind about whether such a condition is unavoidable. Are artists doomed to choose between creating under economic duress, or not creating at all, or possibly severely limiting their ambitions and engaging in art on a casual basis? Later, this question grew, it was not only limited to artists. I started to wonder if we really have to do what pays off, instead of what we see meaning in? Is there any way out of this situation possible? In other words – is it *possible not to work*?

This question may seem naive. However, it concerns a fundamental issue. I could not reduce my art to production – this path remains unavailable to me for ethical reasons. Thus, if I was to accept that art, because of the aforementioned limitations, would occupy a marginal place in my life, I had to be sure that this was inevitable. It would be a mistake to accede to such a state of affairs without ascertaining whether there were any alternatives. However, if the world must be arranged in such a way that a person will always work, it would be useful to know what the reasons for this are, instead of settling for a simple 'this is the way it is'.

IS ARTISTIC CREATION A JOB?

In order to be able to answer the question about the possibility of a world without work, it is first important to determine what understanding of the word *work* this question concerns. In the previous section, I described the reasons for asking this question. It is important that it was born in a situation of discord, at the moment of having to choose between artistic creation and work.

Accordingly, I will base the definition of work adopted for this dissertation on what distinguishes it from artistic creation.

Looking at the dictionary explanation of the word *work*, it may seem that there is no fundamental difference between work and artistic creation. The *PWN Dictionary of Polish Language*, although the description of the term is very brief, includes the production of cultural goods as a result of the work undertaken. The explanation of the issue reads as follows: "Work [is] intentional human activity aimed at producing certain material or cultural goods."³⁰ This is a very general definition. Looking further, we can turn to the *PWN Encyclopedia* – there we can find information about the fact that the purpose of work is "to transform the wider environment in such a way as to increase the chances of survival of the human species."³¹ The juxtaposition of such a statement with art is somewhat problematic, since it would require defining the purpose of artistic creation and, above all, its utility. However, I imagine that it is defensible to say that art enhances the survival of the human species, if only for the reason that without art the species would be less human.

In the expansion of the quoted encyclopaedic definition, compiled by Professor Wiesława Kozek, we can read that "each society, for its own use, creates its own definition of work and the working man: work is what a given society considers it to be."³² As I have indicated before, I am treating this dissertation authorial, that is I am referring to my experience. Speaking of work, I will therefore refer to such an understanding of this concept as is characterised by the society in which I live, so I will move in the circle of Western culture and the capitalist economy. Further on in Prof. Kozek's text we read: "In economies based on the market mechanism [...] three forms of work are distinguished [...]: employment (including self-employment), unpaid work at home (mainly women's, but also all do-it-yourself activities) closely linked to the concept of leisure, and volunteer work, undertaking purposefully oriented efforts for the benefit of the social environment."³³ Artistic creativity seems to fit a little into all the mentioned forms of work. It is a self-employment activity, it can be described

³⁰ [entry:] *Praca*, [in:] *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*, <<https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/praca.html>>, DOA 17.09.2022.

³¹ W. Kozek, [entry:] *Praca*, [in:] *Encyklopedia PWN*, <<https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/praca;3961600.html>>, DOA 13.09.2021.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ibidem.

as a 'do-it-yourself' action, and at the same time it is an effort to benefit the social environment. These explanations thus fail to capture a perception of labour that separates it from artistic creativity.

We can make such a distinction rather by referring to another passage in Prof. Kozek's study: "In economies based on the market mechanism, labour expresses itself in a service or product that someone in the market wants to buy".³⁴ What we have here is a link between work and the market and the definition of the purpose of work, which is to sell a particular product or service. In my opinion, the difficulty of defining the precise purpose of art essentially separates it from labour. Although art is sometimes treated as an investment of money, its material value does not derive from its artistic qualities, because these cannot be objectively measured. A work of art, unchanged in any way for years, can still change its price. The value of a painting created by an artist that is already present on the art market will increase after his death, because this will give certainty that the number of his works is finite, making it easier to value them. It is the supply and demand of artworks that shapes its market value, not the appearance of the work per se. Of course, the look of a painting is a factor in the need to own it, but in my view, the artist should not be interested in satisfying the existing market demand for art. This should not be understood as a total disagreement with the sale of art. I mean here only the purpose of creation, which must not be primarily profit, because that would turn artistic creation into work in its colloquial sense.

To make sure that the difference between creativity and work is contained in the sentence quoted earlier about the market mechanism, we can try to transform this sentence by switching terms. If, instead of using the word *work*, we say that "artistic creativity finds expression in a service or product that someone in the market wants to buy", this will sound false. Although artists sell their products and services, this is not the main motor of their activity. Artistic creativity should not be defined by its connection to the market. On the contrary, this statement is true in relation to work. Identifying this distinction allows the first attempt to formulate a definition of work in this dissertation – work is an activity undertaken primarily for the purpose of material gain (earning money). However, this term is still too broad. We can imagine other activities undertaken for this purpose, such as playing the lottery or selling off one's possessions. However, it is impossible to call them work. Therefore, additional clarification will be needed.

³⁴ Ibidem.

WORK AS A SALES OF TIME

By defining the purpose of work as earning and linking it to the market, we can consider work as a form of sale. What is important, however, is what is subject to this sale. The work referred to in the thesis is understood as the sales of time. Going back again to the initial impulses that prompted me to pick up this topic, it can be seen that it was the lack of time to devote to art that was a key problem for me. In this sense, the topic I undertook can be seen as a development of the issues I dealt with in my Master's thesis. The lack of time, which I analysed then in the context of the increasing pace of life, in this case I place around the concept of work. It should be noted that the treatment of work as a sales of time is relatively new, linked to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century. In order for it to occur, it was necessary to think separately about work, man and the output resulting from his efforts. As David Graeber writes: "When buying an object from an ancient craftsman, one did not acquire his work, but an object precisely, created by him in his own time and on his own terms. By contrast, in purchasing an abstraction, labour power, it is the purchaser and not the «owner» who acquires the title to use it in the time and on the terms he himself determines."³⁵ For the conversion of time into money, a precise form of time measurement was also needed, which had to be uniform – standardised just like the measures of money. The spread of clocks – starting from tower clocks to the pocket watches worn by each individual – contributed to this change. If we think about how time was measured before the emergence of clocks, we can see the remarkable reversal that has occurred; before that time was measured in relation to activities, not activities in relation to time. A perfect example is the measure of time that corresponds to the length of reciting a particular prayer, for example 'three Hail Marys'.

I will return to these issues in subsequent chapters, when I will elaborate on the links between work and religion, including the origins of the Franklirian maxim *Time is Money* found in Protestant ethics. At this point, I am interested in pointing out that treating work as the sales of time is not the only one possibility and has not always accompanied humanity. At the same time, this perception of work is associated with major changes in the way we think about the world. It leads to a situation of time deficit that would not have been possible before. Prior to the mentioned change in thinking, each person had

³⁵ D. Graeber, op.cit., p.156.

all his or her time at his or her disposal, which was not subject to buying and selling transactions. Nowadays, “the worker’s time does not belong to him; it belongs to the one who bought it. If the worker is not working, she is stealing something for which the employer has paid well [...]. According to this moral logic, idleness is not dangerous. Idleness is theft”.³⁶ This market perception of time does not abandon us even when we leave work. The very potential opportunity to ‘invest’ time in some productive activity makes it a waste not to do so. In this view, rest is a luxury that only the most privileged can afford. There are so many ‘worthwhile’ forms of spending time that it is hard to be lazing around carefree – carefree, and therefore without feeling guilty.

The question of whether it is possible for a person not to work is therefore not a call for total idleness and no effort at all. It is an attempt to find a legitimate place for rest, but also for activities that are not profitable, although socially valuable. It is a question of whether it is still possible to think about time without applying an economic measure to it. Hence the thesis of this dissertation, indicating the need to change the perception of time – time is not money!

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH WORK?

In the previous chapters, I related the problem of lack of time to my own experience. Now I would like to show that the phenomenon of selling time affects a much wider range of people and can have very unpleasant consequences.

In mid-2021, the WHO, together with the International Labour Organisation, published a report on the harmful health effects of overwork.³⁷ In 2016, there were almost 750,000 deaths due to overwork. The report shows that working more than 55 hours per week significantly increases the risk of stroke and heart disease. Even more worryingly, this problem – exceeding the 40-hour

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ F. Pega, B. Náfrádi et al., *Global, regional, and national burdens of ischemic heart disease and stroke attributable to exposure to long working hours for 194 countries, 2000–2016: A systematic analysis from the WHO/ILO Joint Estimates of the Work-related Burden of Disease and Injury*, <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160412021002208>>, DOA 14.09.2021.

working week and thus exposing oneself to more harmful effects of work – is increasing. Over 16 years, the number of deaths has risen by as much as 42%, and this is certainly not the end of the trend. It is important to remember that the data used in the report comes from before the coronavirus pandemic, which changed the face of work for many people. WHO experts emphasise that the transfer of work to the home has the effect of reinforcing the tendency to work to excess.³⁸ When the boundaries between work and leisure are blurred, work is a much more expanding force that consumes leisure time. I will be writing more about such a phenomenon in the chapter on Brandon – a Google employee who took up residence in the car park beneath the company where he worked. Admittedly, in this case we are dealing with the opposite situation: it is not the work that is moved to the home, but the home to the work. However, the effects of this relocation seem to be similar.

Working to excess does harm, but even when we keep it in moderation, selling our time raises problems arising from the very construction of this type of face of work. David Graeber, quoted earlier, talked about how when we work for someone, our time no longer belongs to us, but to the person who bought it, that is, the employer. This portrayal of the situation highlights how much control over our actions we are forced to cede to someone else when we work. The fact that we cannot decide for ourselves is an extremely frustrating factor. Ulrich Schnabel writes about this in his *Sztuka Leniuchowania* [The Art of Laziness], citing Robert Sapolsky’s research findings: “[...] for both man and animal, the decisive factor [of stress] is whether he has control over the conditions of life. Those who can decide their own actions feel less stress and are healthier. The question of whether we have more or less time at our disposal, whether we have more or less work to do, is secondary. After all, we are much more affected by the fact that we have no control than by the fact that a lot is demanded of us”.³⁹ Being master of one’s own time seems crucial.

The abdication of control at work is even more painful when we are forced to perform actions that we ourselves consider meaningless. Human beings deeply need the feeling that they have an impact on the world around them. This phenomenon called *pleasure of being a cause*⁴⁰ was observed by the German psychologist Karl Groos as early as 1905. He based this on the observation of infants who display extraordinary joy when they discover that they can

³⁸ World Health Organisation press release, *Long working hours increasing deaths from heart disease and stroke: WHO, ILO, 17.05.2021*, <<https://www.who.int/news/item/17-05-2021-long-working-hours-increasing-deaths-from-heart-disease-and-stroke-who-ilo>>, DOA 14.09.2021.

³⁹ U. Schnabel, *Sztuka leniuchowania: o szczęściu nicnierobienia*, transl. V. Grotowicz, Muza, Warsaw 2014, p. 45.

⁴⁰ D. Graeber, op. cit, p. 147.

“produce predictable effects in the world, practically regardless of what these effects are and whether they can be considered to be of any benefit to them”.⁴¹

It is worth noting that it happens to define the concept of work precisely as an activity that transforms the environment. It would seem, then, that work is pure pleasure (of being a cause). However, when we think of work as the sales of time, thus assuming the performance of hired labour, we may come across work that has no impact on the surrounding world, at least in the perception of those who perform it. A number of such cases are discussed by David Graeber in his book *Bullshit Jobs. A Theory*. I will address his research findings more extensively in the following chapters.

The problem with selling time, then, is that we lose the possibility to dispose of it ourselves. This could be considered a necessary price to pay in order to be able to live in decent conditions, thus gaining in return the possibility of self-determination in another dimension – the material one. Work, although it may be reduced to the performance of meaningless activities, has a purpose for the worker himself in the form of the payment he receives for it. Sometimes, however, working turns out to be meaningless in this respect as well, and instead of increasing our material status, it ultimately lowers our standard of living. Such situations are described by Naomi Klein in her book *No Logo*. In her report on working conditions in Asian factories, the author quotes a girl who states that, despite the poverty that prevails, she had a better life when she lived in the countryside because she received family support there. Here are her words: “Yes, working in the countryside is difficult but there we were among family and friends”⁴² and further: “Many other women said that they would have stayed at home if they could but the choice was made for them [...]”.⁴³ A description of a similar phenomenon can be found in sources covering quite different topics. Reading, not about the difficulties of work but about leisure in Peru, in a guidebook by the Pascal publishing house, we come across the following description of the country's social class structure: “The Indians are probably the poorest social group in material terms, but the richest in terms of culture and way of life. Despite the lack of electricity or material goods, they are doing better than the paupers of Lima. In the countryside, the standard of living of the lowest class is higher compared to the city. There is always something to eat and there is always a neighbour to help.”⁴⁴ Examples from Asia or Latin America perhaps seem too distant (for European readers).

41 Ibidem.

42 N. Klein, op.cit., p. 243.

43 Ibidem.

44 D. Grzybowska, S. Adamczak et al., *Peru i Boliwia*, Pascal, Bielsko-Biała 2018, p. 24.

So let's take a look at the labour problems in Poland.

The problem of overwork cited at the beginning of the chapter and presented on a global scale is as closely applicable to the situation in Poland. According to the OECD ranking, in 2019 Poland was ranked 8th in the world in terms of the highest number of hours worked per year (1806).⁴⁵ This gives it third place in Europe, behind Russia and Greece. Long hours spent at work are not the only negative phenomenon characteristic of the Polish employment market. The scale of the problem has been underlined by the appearance in recent years of numerous collections of reportages focusing precisely on this subject. It is worth mentioning such items as Marek Szymaniak's *Urobieni* from 2018 and Kamil Fejfer's *Zawód* and Olga Gitkiewicz's *Nie hańbi*, both books from 2017. Such a concentration of publications on the hardship of work, especially after the 2008 crisis, is explained by Rafał Woś in his book *To nie jest kraj dla pracowników*: “[...] Polish capitalism had to bite the middle class and the intelligentsia (including journalists themselves) in order for the public opinion to want to address the problem systematically, and not just by devoting one tearful reportage or another to the excluded”.⁴⁶

What so affected the Polish intelligentsia was its inclusion in the precariat class and the consequences this brought. Precariat is a term popularised by Guy Standing with his book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. It refers to a flexible and precarious form of employment, which in Poland is reflected in particular in the prevalence of ‘junk contracts’ – the use by employers of commissioned contracts instead of employment contracts. Woś links the existence of the precariat to the observation that in Poland society's education is too high in relation to the country's level of development. As he writes: “A large part of the young generation entering the labour market has the impression that the only jobs they can get are well below their expectations.”⁴⁷ Thus, a situation arises in which the opportunity to do interesting and socially valuable work, often requiring specialised education, is treated as a reward in itself, and the pay remains disproportionate to the effort put in. This phenomenon fits like a glove to work in the cultural sector. In 2015, it became quite notorious for the open letter that Radosław Orzeł sent to the trade union Inicjatywa Pracownicza [Workers' Initiative]. He described the situation of precariats working in the culture sector using his experience of working at the Wyspa Art Institute as an example. “The dominant emotion of the precarious is

45 Statistics made available by the OECD, *Average annual hours actually worked per worker*, <<https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ANHRS#>>, DOA 14.09.2021.

46 R. Woś, *To nie jest kraj dla pracowników*, W.A.B., Warsaw 2017, p. 221.

47 Ibidem, p. 224.

fear. [...] The precarious person is neither employed nor unemployed, nor is he covered by legal protection (like the unemployed and the employed), so he does not exist in any statistics. The precariat is invisible to the system".⁴⁸ The course of the above conflict is described by Szymaniak in *Urobieni*, giving space for statements from both employees and employers at the Wyspa Institute of Art.⁴⁹

The prevalence of 'junk contracts' is part of a broader image of the labour situation in Poland. The low quality of employment is related to the consequences of the political transformation. After the transformation, Poland, unable to compete with the West in terms of technology, began to build its position on the international market on the basis of cheap labour. The difficult situation of the Polish employee, apart from the abuse of civil law contracts, is due to such factors as: the weakness of trade unions (Szymaniak, Woś and Sawulski write about it),⁵⁰ legal loopholes allowing for the existence of such a phenomenon as permanent temporary work – common, for example, in courier companies (this topic appears in Woś's and Szymaniak's books),⁵¹ or the high market share of small and medium-sized enterprises characterised by a tendency towards an autocratic management style (Sawulski discusses it).⁵² As these phenomena have been extensively described in the cited publications, I will not go into them further. In more general terms, it is enough to say that according to the *Job Quality Index* (which takes into account factors such as salary levels, form of employment, job security, working time, opportunities for skills development and representation of employees' interests), Poland is at the tail end of European countries, ahead of only Greece, Romania and Spain.⁵³

Based on the above examples, we can see that the problems of work in the world, as well as in Poland, are many and varied. Instead of dealing with each of them individually, perhaps it would be enough to eradicate their common source, that is, work itself? While this may seem like an absurd concept, let us take a moment to ascertain whether it is so in reality. Man has arranged a world in which there must always be someone to work for. But would a different world order be possible – a world without work?

48 R. Orzeł, *Wyjęci spod prawa czyli życie intymne prekariuszy w OPP – sytuacja pracownika nieetatowego na przykładzie Instytutu Sztuki Wyspa*, <https://ozzip.pl/informacje/ogolnopolskie/item/download/171_d6f3e03122cf6dc5913e1084e353b85b>, DOA 20.08.2022.

49 M. Szymaniak, *Urobieni. Reportaże o pracy*, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2018, p. 26-35.

50 J. Sawulski, *Pokolenie '89: młodzi o polskiej transformacji*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2019, p. 79; M. Szymaniak, op.cit., p. 140; R. Woś, op. cit., p. 181.

51 M. Szymaniak, op. cit., p. 22; R. Woś, op. cit., p. 191.

52 J. Sawulski, op. cit., p. 100.

53 A. Piasna, *'Bad jobs' recovery? European Job Quality Index 2005-2015*, European Trade Union Institute, June 2017, <<https://www.etui.org/publications/working-papers/bad-jobs-recovery-european-job-quality-index-2005-2015>>, DOA 14.09.2021.

IS A WORLD WITHOUT WORK POSSIBLE?

UNLIMITED GROWTH OF WEALTH

While the world's natural resources are finite and non-renewable, the situation is different with wealth. It is worth remembering that the economy is not a zero-sum game. A gain by one country, for example in trade, does not necessarily mean that the other party to the transaction loses out. This means that, in theory, the growth of global wealth is unlimited. This assumption is also reflected in reality. Over the past 200 years, there has been a revolutionary improvement in the world's quality of life. In 1820, 84% of the world's population lived in extreme poverty, that is, on less than \$1.25 a day – which is considered the amount necessary for survival. By 1981, this percentage had declined to 44%, and is now below 10%.⁵⁴ So can we count on the fact that when the world's wealth continues to grow so will we participate in this growth to the point where we will soon all be wealthy enough to stop working?

Observing the trend of rapid growth in prosperity in the post-industrial revolution period, the English economist John Maynard Keynes hypothesised in a text from 1930 that the world's economic problem could be solved within 100 years.⁵⁵ In doing so, however, he imposed a condition: for this assumption to come true, the development of the economy must not be halted by the outbreak of a major war. Due to events that took place barely nine years after the publication of Keynes' text, we will not have the opportunity to convince ourselves of the validity of his prediction.

Despite the wartime turbulence of the twentieth century, global GDP continues to grow.⁵⁶ This does not, however, make us work less, although Keynes, in his essay *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren*, predicted that the most important challenge for future generations will be to resolve the question of how to use the excessive amount of free time.⁵⁷ One of the reasons why global increases in wealth are not translating into reductions in working time is because of growing economic inequality (which will be discussed further in the next chapter). Although we are averaging more and more wealthy, with a more detailed look we will see that much of the world's wealth is held by a handful

⁵⁴ R. Bregman, op. cit., p. 7.

⁵⁵ J.M. Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion*, W.W.Norton & Company, New York 1963, p. 366.

⁵⁶ World Bank's data <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.PP.KD>>, DOA 19.09.2022.

⁵⁷ J.M. Keynes, op. cit., p. 358-373.

of people. According to a report by international humanitarian agency Oxfam, in 2017 the wealth of the world's eight richest people was equal to that of the poorest half of humanity.⁵⁸ Although those who are now among the poorest would have been considered rich two hundred years ago, inequality prevents this wealth from being enjoyed. "No matter how rich a country becomes, inequality will always spoil the overall picture. Being poor in a rich country is very different from being poor a few centuries ago, when almost everyone, almost everywhere was a pauper."⁵⁹ Large differences in material status within society mean that social mobility decreases, distrust in relationships increases, and with it grows stress and its consequences in terms of health.⁶⁰

The social gap between the poorest and the richest is widening year by year, even though it might seem that after the 2008 financial crisis, regulations would be put in place to stop this process. French sociologist Alain Touraine, in his book *After the Crisis*, writes that "the behaviour of the richest has played, and continues to play, a key role in the disintegration of the entire social system"⁶¹ and signals as early as 2010 that the financial crisis could lead to the strengthening of nationalist movements, the shutting down of states to international cooperation and a focus on their internal problems. A similar situation occurred in 1929. The Great Economic Crisis is recognised as one of the factors that led Hitler to take power in Germany.

On the one hand, therefore, inequalities can be the cause of outbreaks of armed conflict; on the other hand, it is wars that can reduce these inequalities. As economic historian Walter Scheidel says in an interview with Rafał Woś: "In Japan, for example, the second war reduced the wealth of the wealthiest by 70%. [...] As a result, Japan emerged from the war as an incredibly exsanguinated society, but at the same time incomparably more egalitarian than in the 1930s. [...] Britain found itself on the winning side in both wars, but the wealth of the upper class shrank first by 23% and then by a further 36%. Similarly in France, where the richest one per cent [of citizens] became 47% poorer between 1939-45. There were also significant declines in the United States [...]." ⁶²

⁵⁸ D. Hardoon, *An Economy for the 99%: It's time to build a human economy that benefits everyone, not just the privileged few*, Oxfam International 2017, p. 2, <<https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620170/bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-en.pdf;sessionid=D7018A-25DA78D8C23399B7EC114677A6?sequence=1>>, DOA 20.08.2022.

⁵⁹ R. Bregman, op. cit., p. 70.

⁶⁰ K. Rowlingson, *Does income inequality cause health and social problems?* <<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/does-income-inequality-cause-health-and-social-problems>>, DOA 20.08.2022.

⁶¹ A. Touraine, *Po kryzysie*, transl. M. Frybes, Oficyna Naukowa, Warsaw 2013, p. 60.

⁶² W. Scheidel, R. Woś, *Czterej jeźdźcy ekonomisty*, „Polityka” 24.05-30.05.2017, no. 21 (3111), p. 39.

So we fall into an interesting loop – Keynes says that if there is no war, prosperity awaits us. Without major crises, wealth grows, but only among a select few. However, it is the outbreak of war (or some other factor, such as revolution or plague) that is needed to remove economic inequality, with the implication that such a violent event will suppress the predicted increase in wealth.

To break this spiral and bring the vision of universal wealth to reality, it would be necessary to reduce existing economic inequalities in a peaceful manner. Walter Schneidel points out that so far no one has succeeded in doing so.⁶³ This is not to say that it is impossible, but it certainly does not give cause for optimism. So let us try to look for hope for a world without work based on other concepts.

THE LAW OF CAPITAL R>G

Thomas Piketty, in his well-known book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, presents the results of a study based on the analysis of a considerable amount of historical data. Based on the information gathered, he concludes that the rate of return on capital is higher than the rate of economic growth. The artist duo Goldin+Senneby decided to test how this correlation works in practice. They have designed an installation entitled *Eternal Employment*, which will involve employing, potentially for all time, a person who will do nothing (and certainly cannot do any work). This person's salary is to be financed by the interest that will be generated by the grant received by the artists, for the realisation of this installation. The idea behind the project is to confirm that the value of capital grows faster than the value of labour. On a micro scale, this could be evidence that it is possible not to work. So let's take a closer look at this project and see if indeed a skilful use of the principle formulated by Piketty could lead to the realisation of the vision of a world without work. As an aside, I am also discussing the work of *Eternal Employment* here because it is a vivid example of the fact that artists can and do successfully deal with economic concepts in their work.

⁶³ Ibidem, p. 40.

The Swedish duo Goldin+Senneby have been working in the field of conceptual art since 2004. Their latest work is, so far, only a project to be realised in 2025. According to the artists' assumptions, the project's duration may never end. The artists won an award from the Swedish Public Art Agency, which announced a competition for a site-specific realisation to be part of one of the two stations under construction for the new West Link metro line in Gothenburg. The design for Haga station was won by Huang Yong Ping, while Goldin+Senneby will realise their work at Korsvägen station. The competition slogan was 'chronotopia', a word derived from the Greek *Χρόνος* [chrónos] time and *τόπος* [tópos] place.⁶⁴ The organisers wanted the winning entry to refer to Gothenburg's past, present and future, as well as its location in space.

Gothenburg is Sweden's second-largest city and was a very important port for trade with the world in the 18th century. But a port means not only the movement of goods, but also of people. In the 19th century, Swedish emigrants sailed from Gothenburg to America. Today, this city is often the first destination for immigrants arriving in Sweden in search of work. It is therefore not surprising that the proposal by the duo Goldin+Senneby, who have been dealing with the themes of globalisation and finance in their work for years, won the jury's approval.

The curators have indicated that they are keen to ensure that the artwork that will be created as part of the competition is not just an addition to the finished architecture. That is why the Public Art Agency, in cooperation with the Swedish Transport Administration, announced the competition for the artistic realisation so far in advance. This gives artists the opportunity to work with architects and urban planners already during the construction of the metro station and to influence its final shape.

What we will see at Korsvägen station, once the *Eternal Employment* project has started, is a space that is a cloakroom for the employee, a clock timer and fluorescent platform lighting that will only light up when the person employed is on site. A bell will also be heard to announce the end of work. For it is the work that is most important in all of this. The artists want to employ one person at Korsvägen station. This will be full-time employment, for an indefinite period. The monthly salary will initially be SEK 21 600, which is in line with the average earnings of a public sector employee in Sweden as are the other terms and conditions of employment, including working hours, holidays,

⁶⁴ The project documentation, together with the authors' description and the jury's commentary on which I am basing my overview of this project, can be found at this address <<https://publicartagency-sweden.com/konst/eternal-employment>>, DOA 20.08.2022.



8. isualisation of the Eternal Employment installation by the Goldin+Senneby duo this is how the employee's changing room and time clock should look like

pension benefits, termination period, etc. The project also provides for annual wage increases to comply with collective agreements. If an employee resigns or retires, a foundation set up by the artists will select another person so that the project can potentially go on forever. As for the employee's responsibilities — he simply has to come to work. He or she can do absolutely anything; there are no requirements for this other than that he or she must not be working for someone else at the time.

The job announcement was formulated in Goldin+Senneby's characteristically humorous form. For this, the artists used a poem by Lina Ekdahl, full of gratitude, addressing the reader directly, an emotional poem — although actually a mocking one, inspired by the rhetoric used in offers formulated by the Swedish Public Employment Service. The whole is maintained in a similar tone to the short passage quoted: " You're standing there. Right there. Standing there like what? Like a prawn! A positive prawn! A flexible prawn! An unpretentious prawn! A goal-oriented prawn! Thank you! Thanks!".⁶⁵ It was in response to this unusual job offer that the *Eternal Employment* project received a lot of media attention. On the Polish Internet, you could read about it on sites such as ofeminin or tanie-loty.com.pl, websites that by no means deal with the subject of contemporary art. This shows how much interest there is in employment issues in our society and how much attention we devote to

65 L. Ekdahl, *Eternal Employment*, job offer, <<https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/eternal-employment>>, DOA 20.08.2022.

arranging our professional lives, while art is a secondary issue in this case. One could even say that art only gains the attention of the popular media when it pays off (and in a very literal sense). Articles on the aforementioned sites describe the job offered by artists with the words: "A job where you do whatever you feel like"⁶⁶ or " Do whatever you want".⁶⁷ However, it is significant that the essence of the Eternal Employment concept, which is much more serious in tone, is completely ignored in these messages.

Describing their idea, the authors say that, nowadays, owning capital pays more than labour itself, and they explicitly admit that this is the only reason why their project has a chance of success. It is therefore an attempt to verify in practice the law $r > g$ quoted at the beginning of the chapter (the rate of return on capital is higher than the rate of economic growth). This situation on the financial markets leads to a widening of wealth inequality. It is significant that the installation, which directly addresses Piketty's assumptions, is being created in Sweden — a country where inequality is among the lowest in the world. It may be that Swedish society does not accept rising inequality (its increase is a trend observed worldwide), while countries with much higher levels of inequality do not react because they follow too strongly a meritocratic mindset (which contributes to and justifies the rise in inequality). As James Suzman writes: "Numerous [...] research projects have shown that people living in countries with the deepest social inequalities are unaware of the magnitude of this phenomenon, while those living in countries where most of the national wealth is in the hands of the middle class tend to have a greater understanding of it, and sometimes even exaggerate it".⁶⁸ Perhaps inequality in Sweden has not increased, as in other countries, exactly because of social awareness and its resistance.

The artists refer to the history of Sweden, where for a time, work gave a better return than money, but in the 1970s the situation changed when regulations forced by global markets were introduced. Nowadays, more and more people are working in a 'flexible' way, which really means no social security, black labour, a decline in the importance of trade unions, and therefore the already discussed problems with the quality of work that can be found all over the world.

66 *Praca, w której robisz, na co tylko masz ochotę. Każdy może aplikować!* <<https://www.ofeminin.pl/swiat-kobiet/kariera/praca-w-ktorej-robisz-na-co-tylko-masz-ochote-kazdy-moze-aplikowac/bry9n-qs>>, DOA 21.08.2022.

67 A. Ryś, *Praca, w której możesz robić co chcesz. Zawsze*, <<https://www.tanie-loty.com.pl/czytelnia/ciekawostki/praca-w-ktorej-mozesz-robic-co-chcesz-zawsze>>, DOA 21.08.2022.

68 J. Suzman, *Praca: historia tego, jak spędzamy swój czas*, transl. F. Filipowski, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2021, p. 405.

In practice, the enactment of the r>g law in the *Eternal Employment* installation is as follows: the artists have set up a foundation that invests the money earmarked for the project. This capital is an award from the Public Art Agency and money from the Swedish Transport Administration. In total, this adds up to around \$650,000. With the amount projected to multiply faster than salaries will grow, the employment may indeed be perpetual. The artists asked Erik Penser Bank for a financial analysis, which showed that the success of the project is more than likely guaranteed for at least 120 years.

The artists' action is perverse: if Piketty's law fails, their project will collapse because they will run out of money for wages. On the other hand, the premature end of the project may actually turn out to be a moral victory for the artists, because it will signify a state of equality (justice) in which labour is at least as profitable as capital. Things may also turn out quite differently – the project will collapse and the artists will have no ideological reason to be happy at all. It is possible that Piketty was wrong, and neoliberalism or some other future economic system will introduce solutions that will not allow the *Eternal Employment* project to last forever, and not by increasing income from employment, which would probably please artists. Such a black scenario could be, for example, an even greater intensification of inequality. In *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Piketty analyses the endowments funds of American universities, proving that large capitals bring in more income.⁶⁹ If a sufficiently small number of the richest people own a large enough amount of wealth, the money raised by the Goldin+Senneby Foundation will not receive a sufficient return on capital to cover salaries, as the amount they have accumulated so far may prove to be too small and not achieve the predicted returns.

The aforementioned Keynes indicated that the world's prosperity would grow and that people would soon be faced with the problem of what to do with their free time. The artists in their project address a similar problem, but point to the development of artificial intelligence and automation as a reason for this, which could render our lives useless. Predictions of robotisation are another aspect that could herald the arrival of a world without work. I will discuss these issues in the next chapter. Goldin+Senneby talk about the uselessness of art in this context. In their description of the project they quote their colleague who said that "everyone is an artist, but only artists are aware of this". This saying is a creative development of Joseph Beuys' opinion (pan-creativity).

The *Eternal Employment* project is intended to offer a different understanding

69 T. Piketty, *Kapitał w XXI wieku*, transl. A. Bilik, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2015, p. 552.

of work and to question the imperative of progress and growth that is characteristic of modern thinking about the world. What is left of work without productivity is time. In the duo's understanding, their work is anti-performance because it is not about one artist at a particular time, but makes a witness to the time of everyone who is employed for an infinite amount of that time. This hired person will act without a script, without a turning point or climax. The artists expose the meaninglessness of work, or perhaps more, the meaninglessness of a life dedicated to work that leads nowhere and is just a sequence of repetitive actions.

The way in which artists treat work, stripping it of its content and retaining only its form, that is, staying in a certain place, coming and going at certain times and being paid, brings to mind an association with structural film. By this I mean the abandonment of narrative, the rejection of metaphor and symbol, and the focus, as it were, on the internal construction of the work, to the exclusion of its meaning, that is, the production of any goods or the provision of services.

In addition to its economic contexts, *Eternal Employment* has some historiographic potential. The jury of the Public Art Agency competition says that the work has the potential to metaphorically transcend the walls of the railway station where it will be located. It can break away from the site because it can become part of the city's handed down oral history. This involves anecdotes and jokes, urban legends. There are neighbourhoods in Gothenburg that have a working-class identity; there is, for example, a Volvo car factory. The artists suggest that as a result of the local community's reaction to *Eternal Employment*, the expression 'you work as if you were in Korsvägen', meaning you do nothing, you slack off

In this area, the expectations of the curators working on behalf of the city coincide with the artists' proposal, but this is not the case in every instance. The artists write that Gothenburg today is a city of events. It used to base its identity on the fact that it was a port city, but now there are marketing campaigns to promote the city's entertainment. The city has an extensive tourist offer, concert halls, hotels and amusement parks. The artists, on the other hand, perversely offer the city boredom in their project.

It might seem too early to judge the *Eternal Employment* project by virtue of the fact that it is at a very early stage and its aims have not yet been realised. However, it is important to remember that it is a work of conceptual art. Joseph Kosuth wrote in his manifesto *Art After Philosophy* that all art after Duchamp

is conceptual in its nature, because art only exists conceptually.⁷⁰ In this regard, I see no obstacle to already analysing the work of the Goldin+Senneby duo. Its conceptualisation is very precise and logical, yet not lacking in humour and lightness. The themes taken up by the artists deal with contemporary problems of the neo-liberal world that require a quick solution. By locating the installation at a significant transport point in the city, it will reach a wide audience and raise public awareness of wealth inequality and its causes. On the other hand, the station installation itself will not be spectacular and may be overlooked by many people. I think this is a deliberate move by the artists, who do not want to resort to marketing tricks and choose a much more intimate form of presentation. This is not insignificant, especially since Goldin+Senneby speak of boredom, of everyday life deprived of grand and momentous events. They bring to light problems that we have somehow become accustomed to ignoring and have accepted as subject to the unchangeable rules of the world. It is good, therefore, that artists show the absurdities of the system we live in and find the right form to translate complex economic problems into the language of art. As far as the potential possibility of a world without work is concerned, there is nothing left for us to do but wait for the results of the project, or we can try to participate ourselves and send our CVs to the Goldin+Senneby duo.

ROBOTISATION

In recent years, we have heard frequently about the globally advancing phenomenon of robotisation. More and more jobs are being taken over by machines and people are no longer needed in their former positions. We have been dealing with this process since the industrial revolution. The classic evidence of its existence as far back as 200 years ago is the Luddite rebellion of the early 19th century. These were riots ignited by English textile workers who were losing their jobs en masse as a result of the widespread use of the weaving machine in factories. The suppressed protests resulted in the British Parliament passing the *Frame-Breaking Act*, which made the destruction of machinery a crime punishable by death. More than two hundred participants in the rebellion were sentenced to death by hanging.⁷¹ The violent expression

70 J. Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1991, p. 18.

71 R. Bregman, op. cit., p. 194.

of social dissatisfaction was thus unable to stop the changes brought about by technological progress.

It is now forecast that 47% of all jobs in the US and 54% in Europe could be lost in the next two decades as human labour is replaced by the use of machines.⁷² There are sectors that are more and less vulnerable to robotisation. For example, according to a report by the British Retail Consortium, an organisation representing UK retailers, one in three people employed in retail today will lose their jobs in the British Isles by 2025.⁷³ While we are used to thinking of manual labour jobs as the most likely to be replaced by machines, the problem is increasingly affecting the world of white collar – upper middle class jobs.⁷⁴ On the UK BBC website, we can use a special search engine based on the results of a study by Oxford researchers – Carl Benedikt and Michael Osborne. By typing in the name of one of the 366 professions included in the study, we receive information on how likely it is that robots will replace this profession.⁷⁵ As for artists, unsurprisingly, they are at the bottom of the list, with the threat of artists being replaced by machines at only 4%. However, this is not as safe a profession as, for example, a psychologist, whose risk of automation is only 0.7%.

Looking at the data above, it seems that a world without work is not only possible, it is also very close. However, the prospect of an imminent liberation from work does not fill people with optimism at all. Robotisation is seen as a threat. Articles about it seem to be aimed at alarming the reader. It is said that robots will 'take away' our jobs. Similar terms are used in the anti-immigrant narrative. We fear foreign visitors, even though, viewed from another perspective, we might be happy to have someone do the work for us, often a job that almost no one wants to take on.

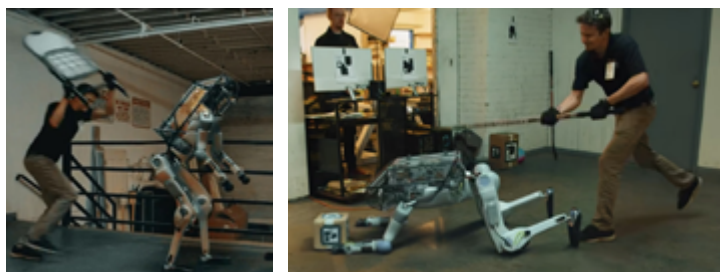
We can look at the sources of fear towards robotisation in two different ways. There is something about robots that makes humans fearful, something that lies at the heart of countless science fiction stories describing a robot revolt. But what actually lies behind the term robot? This word has made a worldwide career – it sounds the same in English, German, Spanish or Russian. It has its origins in the Czech language. It comes from Karel Čapek's play *Rossumovi*

72 C.B. Frey, M. A. Osborne, *The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?*, Oxford Martin School, 2013.

73 M. Kaczmarczyk, *Maszyna za ladq*, „Newsweek”, 23.06.2017, <<https://www.newsweek.pl/biznes/maszyny-vendingowe-maszyny-za-lada/hlm12d0>>, DOA 23.08.2022.

74 M. Ford, *Świt Robotów. Czy sztuczna inteligencja pozbawi nas pracy?*, cit. per R. Woś, op. cit., p. 263.

75 The aforementioned search engine based on the results of the study by C. Benedikt and M. Osborne is available at this address: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-34066941>>, DOA 23.08.2022.



9. Frames from a film 'documenting' the inhumane treatment of robots

Univerzální Roboti [translated as Rossum's Universal Robots] from 1920. The word robot already existed in Czech at that time and meant human forced labour. The similar Polish word – *robota*, which is in use today, although it has slightly pejorative overtones, is not explicitly associated with slavery as it was before. The etymological dictionary of the Polish language states that the word *robota* derives from the Proto-Slavic *orbota*, which meant "being a slave, slavery".⁷⁶ So we see that the word we use to describe machines that perform mechatronic tasks is derived from a word that once meant slave. Perhaps this is why we fear robotisation, subconsciously fearing a revolt of robots – disgruntled slaves who experience neither payment nor gratitude for their hard work.

The robots in Čapek's play were humanoid,⁷⁷ now such robots are referred to as androids, leaving the term robot for blenders and automatic hoovers, to which no one is likely to attribute higher feelings. However, when robots take on human or animal form (such as Boston Dynamics' AlphaDog, for example) we can be under the illusion that such machines have a soul. Additionally, the ability to move independently seems to imply the existence of a will. When we look at the word *animation* we see that it comes simultaneously from the Latin *anima* – soul and *animō* – I bring to life. In 2019, the internet was circulated by a video recording the tests that Boston Dynamics allegedly conducted on its humanoid robot Atlas. In the footage, the robot is seen attempting to pick up a package, but workers make it difficult by attacking it with hockey sticks. It is hard to resist the impression that the video is a recording of some brutal practices and humiliation. In response to the video, the online community sympathised with the robot and objected to the 'cruelty' recorded in the

⁷⁶ [entry]: *Robota*, [in]: *Dydaktyczny słownik etymologiczno-historyczny języka polskiego*, <<https://sowniketymologiczny.uw.edu.pl/entry/126>>, DOA 23.08.2022.

⁷⁷ *Skąd się wzięło słowo „robot”?*, Portal robotyka.pl Centrum Polskiej Robotyki, <<https://robotyka.pl/skad-sie-wzielo-slowo-quot-robot-quot-2>>, DOA 23.08.2022.

footage. Ultimately, the video was found to be fake news.⁷⁸ The robot isn't real, it's just a 3D animation, and thanks to the fact that the footage spread across the internet in poor resolution, the details to spot the hoax were blurred, so it looked like a recording of a real scene. The scale of the outcry from the online community seems to confirm that this is a fairly common phenomenon – I experienced it first-hand, when I first saw the video, I didn't realise it was fake and I also felt sorry for the robot that had been abused.

I think what influences such a vivid response from people is the clumsiness of the robot's movements, indicating its vulnerability and innocence. Non-verbal communication is an important part of communication for both humans and animals. Through these primal reflexes, we interpret the robot in the film as a defenceless creature being attacked by its tormentors. The reflection that it is just a machine comes later. So we can assume that androids make us fearful because we fear that they are like us and can feel emotions. We fear that the robots will feel mistreated and their feelings will find expression in hatred and a desire for revenge, which could ultimately lead humans to extinction.

A different interpretation of the fear of robots is presented by Tomáš Sedláček. According to his conception, we are frightened not by the potential feelings of the machines, but, on the contrary, by their perfect rationality. "Cyberpunk reverses the old optimistic view of progress (both of consumption and of science and technology) and turns it into a nightmare. Machines [...] take control of themselves, but act in an extremely rational way: they have no feelings, no compassion [...]. Moreover, machines tend to remodel the world in their own image: they bring destruction to human 'animals' and replace them with robots".⁷⁹ Sedláček concludes that the popularity of the motif of robot rebellion in cultural texts reflects people's fears about their own qualities and their own humanity – in this case, the threat is extreme rationality. The fear of robots also expresses the fear of progress, loss of control and the abolition of the old world order.

So we have discussed the symbolic dimension of the fear of robotisation and, as we have seen before, a world of work overtaken by robots is not just a fantasy, but a fast approaching new reality. The effect of advancing robotisation is increasing labour productivity, but this does not cause wages to rise. This is because jobs are becoming harder to get as workers compete with each other

⁷⁸ J. Vincent, *That video of a robot getting beaten is fake, but feeling sorry for machines is no joke*, <<https://www.theverge.com/tldr/2019/6/17/18681682/boston-dynamics-robot-uprising-parody-vid-eo-cgi-fake>>, DOA 23.08.2022.

⁷⁹ T. Sedláček, *Ekonomia dobra i zła*, transl. D. Bakalarz, Studio Emka, Warsaw 2015, p. 293.

as well as with machines. As a result, wages are falling – for example: the average wage of a working person in the United States fell by 14% between 1969 and 2009.⁸⁰ The number of workers is decreasing, while corporate profits are increasing – in 1964, each of the four largest US firms employed an average of 430,000 people, while by 2011 this number had decreased fourfold, although the value of the companies themselves had doubled.⁸¹ These processes have the effect of widening economic inequality.

Therefore, once again, it turns out that a world without work, although possible, must be combined with an appropriate redistribution of wealth in order for it not to become a nightmare for us. As Krzysztof Ludwiniak writes in his article *Kapitał w erze robotów* [transl. Capital in the Age of Robots], “An innovative economy [...] needs an innovative economic system. New technological generations must be based on new systemic generations, taking into account, in the legal and institutional dimension, the changing modes and conditions of production, labour relations or forms and structures of ownership of productive capital”.⁸² As a remedy to growing inequalities, the author proposes a change in the ownership structure of the means of production, postulating the introduction of Louis Kleso’s concept, which would statutorily guarantee workers a share in the investment capital of the enterprise. This and other forms of predistribution are supported by Rafał Woś, mentioned earlier. But there are many more ideas for combating inequality, and they need not be mutually exclusive. Thomas Piketty, for example, favours greater tax progressivity and the introduction of taxes based not only on income, but also on wealth. Rutger Bregman, quoted in this chapter, recommends combining tax progression with the introduction of a basic income. Let us take a closer look at the last concept – of those mentioned above, it seems to be the one that could lead to a world without work, which at the same time does not mean living in deprivation.

80 M. Greenstone, A. Looney, *Trends*, Milken Institute Review, 2011, p. 13.

81 D. Thompson, *This is What the Post-Employee Economy Looks Like*, The Atlantic, 2011, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2011/04/this-is-what-the-post-employee-economy-looks-like/237589>>, DOA 23.08.2022.

82 K.S. Ludwiniak, *Kapitał w erze robotów*, „Gazeta Bankowa”, 28.05.2018, no. 05/2018, <<https://www.gb.pl/kapital-w-erze-robotow-pnews-1316.html>>, DOA 23.08.2022.

UNCONDITIONAL BASIC INCOME

Many studies have been written on the subject of basic income. Among the most comprehensive studies published recently is a book by British economist Guy Standing *Basic Income – And How We Can Make It Happen* (2017, Polish edition 2021). Standing is the founder and co-leader of the Basic Income Earth Network – an association promoting the idea of a basic income. But this idea is by no means a contemporary novelty and has quite a long history. The proposal to introduce a basic income in the United States was voted on as early as the 1970s – during the Nixon administration. Although it was passed by the House of Representatives, after being rejected several times by the Senate, attempts to approve the project were finally abandoned in 1978.⁸³ Earlier, in the 1940s, it had been discussed in the UK and was then referred to as a social dividend.⁸⁴ However, the roots of the idea of a basic income go back even further in history. The Speenhamland social assistance programme, a form of pro-poor support operating in England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, can be seen as its prototype. This programme, aimed at the poorest rural residents, was implemented in the form of wage subsidies. It was introduced as an amendment to the Elizabethan Poor Law, in force since the early 17th century and considered the first form of state social assistance in history. Despite a long history of discussion and numerous experiments around the subject, an unconditional basic income has so far failed to be introduced. What makes this benefit different from others that have been in place up to now? What exactly would its introduction consist of?

The first extremely important feature of basic income is its unconditional nature. The money would be given to everyone and for nothing. It would therefore not have an income criterion, which has to be met as is common in other aid programmes. Besides, basic income is not described as a form of assistance, but as a right. The unconditional nature of the income makes it non-stigmatising and reduces inequalities not only in terms of wealth but also in social terms. A study of basic income in India showed that giving the same amount of money to each person taking part in an experiment resulted in a more gender-equitable treatment within the community or a fuller integration of the disabled into the group.⁸⁵

83 R. Bregman, op. cit., p. 44.

84 R. Woś, op. cit., p. 304.

85 D. Graeber, op. cit., p. 430.

The second important feature is what is implicit in the term basic, meaning one that provides the opportunity to live at a decent level. This means that an unconditional basic income could replace the need to earn a living through work. An adequate benefit sum, allowing independence from employment, would increase freedom in terms of decisions such as childcare or continuing education. The described situation could also have a positive impact on the quality of work itself, giving employees a much better bargaining position, as the loss of a job would not result in a loss of financial stability. As Graeber writes: "Even a modest basic income programme would be an important step towards a profound transformation of all, a complete disconnection between work and the subsistence of one's own existence".⁸⁶

As far as the funding possibilities for the programme are concerned, it seems that its introduction is achievable, although it would require major changes in the ways in which the state budget is funded, such as higher wealth taxes or the taxation of financial transactions.⁸⁷ It would undoubtedly be helpful to address the problem of hiding income in tax havens – this issue, however, requires supranational cooperation and harmonisation of laws. Advocates of the introduction of a basic income point to the large savings in terms of the welfare system as one source of its funding. The unconditional nature of the income would also remove the costs generated by the entire administrative machinery of verifying whether and to whom the money is entitled.

So, if we assume that a basic income would have a positive impact on society and at the same time be financeable – why is there so far no place in the world where such a solution has been implemented on a larger scale than just a time-limited experiment? Public distrust of the concept appears to be key. A perfect example is the referendum held in Switzerland in 2016. Only 23% of voters were in favour of introducing the benefit.⁸⁸ Commenting on the results of the referendum, Luzi Stamm, a member of parliament from the Swiss People's Party, said that he would only recommend the introduction of a basic income if Switzerland were an island. Otherwise, the country would not be able to cope with the multitudes of people who would want to settle there and become beneficiaries of the benefit.⁸⁹ So we see an interesting correlation, the problem is not the very idea of paying citizens a benefit that would allow them to stop working, but, as Graeber calls them, 'free riders'. The aversion to

⁸⁶ Ibidem, p. 434.

⁸⁷ R. Woś, op. cit., p. 306.

⁸⁸ *Switzerland's voters reject basic income plan*, 5.06.2016, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36454060>>, DOA 24.08.2022.

⁸⁹ Ibidem.

'freeloaders' is so strong that we would rather not receive the benefit ourselves than have it go with us to someone we don't think deserves it.

I will return to this issue when discussing the moral aspect of work. At this point, when looking at the concept of a basic income as a path that could lead to a world without the necessity of work, we must reject it. The abandonment of work by the beneficiaries of the programme is treated not as a goal, but as an undesirable side-effect. Interestingly, even those who advocate the introduction of a basic income are reassuring that even when people have the financial capacity to stop, they still work. Graber states that: "Most people would prefer not to pass their days sitting around watching TV, and the handful who actually have a passion for parasitism would not be a major burden on society, as the total amount of work required to keep people comfortable and secure is not that great. Compulsive workaholics who insist on doing more than they actually have to would more than offset the lethargy of occasional slackers".⁹⁰ He is echoed by Bregman in these words: "There is plenty of evidence to show that the vast majority of people actually want to work, whether they have to or not".⁹¹ In doing so, he cites the results of Roy Kaplan's study on the behaviour of people who win the lottery. It turns out that such events rarely make people quit their jobs.⁹²

Social programmes are by no means designed to make it possible for a world without work to exist, as we can see from an example much closer to us and interesting in that it exists on a large scale. I am talking about the Polish 500+ programme. Some women, under the influence of receiving the benefit, decided to stay at home with their children instead of going to work. This situation was commented on in the media as a negative side effect of the programme. In an article on the subject in Business Insider, we can read: "Are women giving up lower-paid jobs because of 500 plus? [...] The aforementioned unwanted effect can be assessed on the basis of the results of the Labour Force Survey".⁹³ Significantly, the article is from 2017, that is, prior to the abolition of the income criterion provided in the benefit until July 2019. In his analysis of the programme, Jakub Sawulski pointed to this very issue as the reason for recipients dropping out of work: "500+ is therefore not a universal programme. The effect of the income criterion is that some families start to calculate – if the

⁹⁰ D. Graeber, op. cit., p. 435.

⁹¹ R. Bregman, op. cit., p. 48.

⁹² R. Kaplan, *Lottery Winners: The Myth and Reality*, *The Journal of Gambling Behavior*, 1987, p. 168-178.

⁹³ *500 plus to największy program socjalny w historii Polski. I szalenie trudny w ocenie*, 21.04.2017, <<https://businessinsider.com.pl/finanse/makroekonomia/efekty-500-plus-podsumowanie-progrmu-500-plus/r8kwrhn>>, DOA 3.03.2022.

husband/wife goes to work, we will exceed the threshold and lose '500+'. And if one of us doesn't work, we will get 500 PLN a month more".⁹⁴ This example fits in with the arguments cited for the necessity of the unconditionality of basic income. In order for it to have the intended social effects, it must not be subject to income restrictions. Assurances by Graeber or Bregman that people will not give up work refer to a situation in which the amount of benefit is not dependent on other income received.

The abandonment of employment in favour of raising children is also linked to the discussion on the payment of care work (mostly women's work). In this context, a basic income comes back into play again, which would avoid the need to distinguish what is work and what is not, and to convert into profits for GDP activities that we do not undertake for material reasons. The danger of such an approach is described by the French thinker Andre Gorz: "The drive for greater productivity would lead to the standardisation and industrialisation of such activities, especially those involving feeding, watching, raising and teaching children. The last enclave of individual or community autonomy would disappear; socialisation, 'commodification' and top-down programming would be extended to the last refuges of self-determined and self-regulated life".⁹⁵

However, this is not the place to decide whether or not raising children should be treated and rewarded as paid work. However, we can see from the comments made about the 500+ programme that it was not designed to allow parents to reduce the time they spend at work or give it up altogether in order to look after their children. Beyond the demographic issue, the programme aims to stimulate GDP growth: "The government at the start of rolling out the programme said explicitly that money for children also has a purely economic dimension. It is about increasing consumption".⁹⁶

So we see that government actions, which have the potential to enable us to live without work, do so on the sidelines, as it were. It seems that people are expected to be economically active even if their material needs are met. What immediately comes to mind, moreover, is the argument that it is not just about money. We can't just stop working, because nothing will do itself, after all. It is true that robots, as discussed earlier, can take over some of our duties, but

⁹⁴ J. Sawulski, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

⁹⁵ A. Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-industrial Socialism* cit. per D. Graeber, *op. cit.*, p. 428.

⁹⁶ 500 plus to największy program socjalny w historii Polski. I szalenie trudny w ocenie, *op. cit.*

humans still have a whole host of very important tasks to perform. But do they really? Does the mere existence of a workplace mean that it is essential? And what if a lot of the work we do doesn't really make sense?

MEANINGLESS WORK

We are used to the idea that if a job exists, it means that it is needed. This follows from very simple reasoning – if someone decides to pay for a job, it must make sense, after all, no one would want to spend their money in vain. What we are observing here is an interesting correlation that shows that money has the power to make decisions meaningful. Such a belief is an outcome of the belief in the invisible hand of the market, that is, the ability of market actors to self-regulate. A company that employs people to do unnecessary work operates inefficiently. It will therefore quickly fail and be replaced by one that maximises utility. So we believe that if a job exists and someone allocates resources to maintain it, it must be needed for something. Tomáš Sedláček sees in the invisible hand of the market the features of social Darwinism, which he calls tautology: "We are unable to say what would have to happen for this theory to be false. [...] those who know how to survive are always the best adapted. But actually who is the best adapted? Well, the one who survives."⁹⁷

The second idea, which allows us to believe in the meaning that comes with money that is spent, is the concept of *homo oeconomicus*. It assumes that man is a rational individual and that his decisions are always guided by the maximisation of profits. This assumption lies at the heart of classical economic models. This view of man was a necessary simplification to allow further theories to be built on its basis. However, reality is proving to differ from economic models and to be loaded with completely irrational jobs.

According to a study by polling agency YouGov, 37% of Brits surveyed admitted that their work does not give anything meaningful to the world. In the Netherlands, the result was even worse with 40%.⁹⁸ The anthropologist David Graeber, already quoted above, devoted an extensive study to this issue. In his book *Bullshit Jobs. A Theory*, he discusses jobs that could disappear

⁹⁷ T. Sedláček, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

⁹⁸ D. Graeber, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

altogether (such as telemarketers, for example), as well as those that are quite meaningful, but that can be done in far less time than is allocated to them, making it necessary for employees to pretend that they have some important job. After all, we are usually paid by the hour (especially when it comes to the predefined job of selling time), so we cannot complete all the tasks assigned to us and simply leave the place of employment. The time that someone has bought from us we can no longer allocate to our own needs. So even if the tasks that are set before us are meaningless, we are morally obliged to perform them.

What Graeber describes as bullshit jobs on Polish soil was described by Jarosław Górski in his article for noizz.pl. In it, he talks about a senseless but visible busyness.⁹⁹ The text was written in the context of the 2019 teachers' strike, which divided Polish society. Alongside people who supported the teachers' demands, there were also those who felt that this professional group had no right to demand higher salaries because it works less than the standard 40 hours per week. Górski cites people disgusted by the fact that teachers only teach lessons for 45 minutes per hour and spend the remaining 15 minutes in the staff room drinking coffee.

Both Graeber and Gorski, in the context of work, speak of its moral aspect. "I think the religious factor is very important, even for the secularised followers of the cult of meaningless visible busyness. This is the same type as doctors refusing anaesthesia to women in labour. It hurts because it has to hurt. God punished a woman by giving birth in pain for original sin, so it is supposed to hurt. He punished the man (the woman, too, as it turns out) by working up a sweat, so it is supposed to show that work and that sweat while working".¹⁰⁰ This is a completely irrational approach, and therefore does not fit into the concepts of the invisible hand or *homo oeconomicus* cited at the beginning. Underneath these ideas, pragmatic in their assumptions, are reasons that are far less quantifiable in their nature. Even though we could afford to work much less, meaningless jobs are not being abolished. Once again, a world without work seems possible, but despite this, we are not moving towards it at all. However, before we start looking for answers as to why this is happening – let us summarise.

99 J. Górski, *Bezsensowny, ale widoczny zap***dol to świętość dla Polaków, felieton Jarosława Górskiego*, 20.10.2021, <<https://noizz.pl/opinie/felieton-o-bezsensowej-pracy-po-polsku/lj87pjn>>, DOA 24.08.2022.

100 Ibidem.

WHY?

As I showed earlier, there are indications that a world without work is possible. We began by discussing the unlimited growth of wealth. In theory, everyone could be so rich that they would not have to make a living from work. Another phenomenon that could lead to the end of all employment is robotisation. The trend of replacing more and more jobs with machines is continuing and progressing. Less and less work is left for humans to do, especially meaningful work. We discuss this problem by referring primarily to David Graeber's study.

Despite the existence of these opportunities, we are not moving closer to a world without work. One reason is the widening economic inequalities. These make it impossible to share in the growing prosperity and limit it to a narrow group of the privileged. The potential benefits of robotisation (for example, a reduction in working time) turn into a threat of losing the ability to earn any livelihood. From this perspective, it is clear that humanity is in no hurry at all to live in a world without work.

However, there are ideas on how the problem of inequality can be solved. These include the idea of introducing an unconditional basic income. This benefit could completely break the link between the need to earn a living and taking up work. However, it is significant that so far, despite years of discussion and numerous experiments with positive results, this concept has not been introduced on a wider scale. The potential beneficiaries themselves are not keen on the idea. This is clearly illustrated by the referendum held in Switzerland, where less than one third of those who took part in the vote were in favour of the introduction of a basic income.

The issues raised here are certainly more complex and dealing with them is better left to specialists. It was not my intention to carry out a strictly scientific economic analysis. My aim was to present the stage of the path that led me to the conclusion that, even if we were able not to work, we would very likely continue to do so. This situation might lead to the reflection that we work because we want to. However, this conclusion does not resonate with the work-related problems discussed in the previous chapter. Suffice it to say that data collected by the Gallup Institute shows that, worldwide, only 15% of employed people are engaged in their work.¹⁰¹

101 J. Clifton, *The World's Broken Workplace*, 13.06.2017, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/chairman/212045/world-broken-workplace.aspx?g_source=position1&g_medium=related&g_campaign=tiles>, DOA 24.08.2022.

This raises another question – what makes us work? It is not the need to provide for ourselves – this would be removed by a basic income, which does not have much public support. Nor do we work for pleasure, at least not for most of us. So perhaps the fact that we take up work is the result of some compulsion of which we are not fully aware? So who wants us to work and why? Let us return to the guiding question of this dissertation, but this time look at it from a different angle. When asking whether *it is possible not to work*, let us not treat it as a question of whether a world without work would be possible, but whether we *are allowed not to work*?

ARE PEOPLE ALLOWED NOT TO WORK?

MERITOCRACY

After analysing the factors that could make us stop working, I would like to deal with what makes us keep working after all. One of the reasons for this is the belief in the fairness of meritocracy. Let's start by introducing the term.

Meritocracy is a concept formulated by sociologist Michael Young in his 1958 essay *The Rise of Meritocracy*. It refers to a system in which social positions depend on competence verified by objective evaluation systems. This means that meritocracy in its assumptions is an alternative to hierarchical structures such as aristocracy, where positions are inherited, or plutocracy, where they depend on wealth. In theory, "in a system based on meritocracy, all wealth and privileges are just rewards for competence and merit, rather than gifts of blind luck resulting from circumstances beyond our control".¹⁰² On the face of it, such an arrangement seems much fairer than relying on the stroke of luck, which may (or may not) make it possible to be born into an aristocratic family or to inherit a significant fortune. Perhaps it could even be so, provided that everyone had the same opportunities to expand their competences, was born and grew up in identical conditions. However, this is not the case and, consequently, equality of opportunity is illusory.

We may give the impression that the free market is fair because it is self-regulating, independent of the arbitrary decisions of individuals. However, even its most passionate advocates, such as the economist Friedrich von Hayek, warn not to treat as synonymous the concepts of fairness and self-governance (that is, actions that happen spontaneously, without external interference). As Dr Hubert Kaczmarczyk writes in his text *F.A. Hayek jako krytyk pojęcia sprawiedliwości społecznej* [transl. *F.A. Hayek as a Critic of the Concept of Social Justice*]: "The functioning of the market is [...] an impersonal phenomenon and can be considered neither just nor unjust".¹⁰³ On the contrary, "justice, according to Hayek, can only refer to the conscious actions of human beings".¹⁰⁴ It is a bit like the weather – although the water cycle in nature is closed and constantly self-regulating, making it so that what once evaporated will eventually have to liquefy, we do not expect the weather to distribute itself fairly. We may be saddened by the fact that Poland has an

¹⁰² M. Clifton, *Nie wierzyć w merytokrację*, transl. M. Domagata, 9.04.2019, <<https://krytykapolityczna.pl/swiat/nie-wierzcie-w-merytokracje-mark>>, DOA 24.08.2022.

¹⁰³ H. Kaczmarczyk, *F.A. Hayek jako krytyk pojęcia sprawiedliwości społecznej*, 16.11.2010, <https://mises.pl/blog/2010/11/16/h-kaczmarczyk-f-a-hayek-jako-krytyk-pojecia-sprawiedliwosci-spolecznej/#_ftn2>, DOA 25.08.2022.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

average of only 66 days of sunshine a year,¹⁰⁵ while Bali has as many as 300,¹⁰⁶ but we do not conclude from this that Indonesians somehow specially deserve such a friendly aura. When it comes to the distribution of wealth, however, we prefer to think that it is a direct result of how much effort has gone into acquiring it.

The widespread belief in meritocracy is reflected in research. In the UK, 84% of respondents to the 2009 British Social Attitudes survey said that hard work is either necessary or very important for career success,¹⁰⁷ and a study by the Brookings Institution found that almost 70% of Americans believe that intelligence and skill are rewarded in life.¹⁰⁸ However, looking at the scale of income inequality, it is hard to believe that people in low-paid professions such as a teacher, nurse or paramedic do not put significant effort into their work compared to highly paid advertising and marketing professionals. The same is true of the social utility of these professions. In 2017, US economists Benjamin Lockwood, Charles Nathanson and Glen Weyl published the results of their research on the social value of individual professions. They show that for every dollar they are paid, teachers bring one dollar of profit to society, while advertising and marketing employees take 30 cents out of society.¹⁰⁹

Salaries are therefore not at all based on merit. And when it comes to competence, it is important to remember that "universal education does not eliminate inequalities arising from birth or social background (cultural capital, assets, networks, etc.)".¹¹⁰ This means that some people can broaden their competences with much less effort, when for others it may not be possible to acquire certain skills at all. Even when it comes to artistic careers, issues of inheritance are of considerable importance, as Anna Louie Sussman demonstrates in an article with the telling title *Can Only Rich Kids Afford to Work in the Art World?*¹¹¹ Art graduates in America are among the lowest paid, with a marked increase in earnings after the first five years after graduation. As

¹⁰⁵ A. Mędrzak, *Dlaczego następnecznienie w Polsce jest optymalne do fotowoltaiki? Sprawdź!*, 4.03.2022, <<https://ekohub.pl/następnecznienie-w-polsce>>, DOA 25.08.2022.

¹⁰⁶ A. Bielska, *W tych miejscach słońce świeci nawet 300 dni w roku*, 13.04.2016, <<https://blog.noclegi.pl/w-tych-miejscach-slonce-swieci-nawet-300-dni-w-roku>>, DOA 25.08.2022.

¹⁰⁷ M. Clifton, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ J.B. Isaacs, *International Comparisons of Economic Mobility*, p. 1, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/02_economic_mobility_sawhill_ch3.pdf>, DOA 25.08.2022.

¹⁰⁹ D. Graeber, op. cit., p. 328.

¹¹⁰ M. Zadbyr-Jamróż, *Bunt przeciw tyranii merytokracji*, <<https://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/sandel-bunt-przeciw-tyranii-merytokracji>>, DOA 25.08.2022.

¹¹¹ A.L. Sussman, *Can Only Rich Kids Afford to Work in the Art World?*, 15.02.2017, <<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-rich-kids-afford-work-art-world>>, DOA 25.08.2022.

the author points out, this situation highlights the importance of the financial support received from parents during the first years of an artistic career. Those who do not receive it may be forced to give up their efforts to establish themselves on the art market. This makes the artistic environment, despite its apparent openness, even more hermetic. Apart from material considerations, it is also worth mentioning the cultural capital we receive from our parents or educators. Even the place where we were born matters, it affects which cultural institutions we will have access to, and this will have an impact on our artistic awareness.

The factors that influence the likelihood of success, whether we are talking about the arts or completely different fields, are many. It seems impossible to equalise the opportunities for everyone. Even if we wanted to introduce some utopian, ultra-egalitarian system of wealth distribution, we cannot make all parents equally intelligent and eager to pass on knowledge or ensure that no one is affected by illnesses that stand in the way of competence development.

The fact that the existence of inequalities is inevitable does not mean that attempts should not be made to redress them. However, the problem with meritocracy lies elsewhere. It is not due to the existence of inequalities per se, but to ignoring their impact on performance, resulting in the belief that we are 100 percent the masters of our own destiny. As Ha-Joon Chang writes in his book *23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism*: "While it is foolish to blame the socio-economic environment in which people are raised for everything, it is equally unacceptable to believe that anyone can achieve anything they want if they just «believe in themselves» and try hard enough".¹¹² This attitude consequently makes us much harsher towards ourselves as well as others. In addition, we cannot look for excuses for failures in unfavourable circumstances – if things don't go our way we have obviously made the wrong decisions or put too little effort into overcoming obstacles. Thomas Piketty writes that: "Modern meritocratic society, especially American society, is much harder on losers because it wants to base its dominance on justice, virtue and merit, not to mention the insufficient productivity of those at the bottom".¹¹³ He is echoed by Rutger Bregman: "If success is our choice, the same applies to failure. Lost your job? You should have worked harder".¹¹⁴ The effect of such reasoning is to reduce empathy and negative attitudes towards those lower down the social hierarchy, those in crisis of homelessness or on

¹¹² H.-J. Chang, *23 rzeczy, których nie mówią Ci o kapitalizmie*, transl. B. Szelewa, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2016, p. 280.

¹¹³ T. Piketty, op. cit., p. 513.

¹¹⁴ R. Bregman, op. cit., p. 23.

welfare, but also those who are simply less wealthy and in what are considered low-prestige jobs. Interestingly, in the first moment of panic caused by the coronavirus pandemic, it was possible to observe an increase in social respect for professions normally treated as a lesser category. It became apparent how indispensable cashiers, food suppliers or couriers were at such a crisis moment. Robert Rękas, head of the Lewiatan chain of shops, in an interview with the money.pl portal admitted: "The time of the epidemic has shown the value of the work that salespeople carry out. For many years, the position of a salesman, cashier was undervalued".¹¹⁵

On the one hand, meritocracy makes it easier for us to exclude the poor – we can attribute a number of negative characteristics to them such as laziness, stupidity or lack of resourcefulness, while relieving ourselves of guilt when we fail to support them – after all, they have earned their fate. On the other hand, we judge our own achievements by the same measure. When everything is successful, it is pleasant to think that it is the result of our own hard work. Admitting to ourselves that our success can only be a lucky coincidence takes away a lot of satisfaction. However, this is less of a problem than when failures happen to us. Not only have we met with failure, but we have to take all the responsibility for it on ourselves. What is more, we should not expect support or consolation – our bad result shows our incompetence, perhaps it would even be better not to admit it to anyone. When we do not achieve financial success we may feel guilt and a sense of not being good enough. Michael Sandel, an American philosopher and author of *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, links the rise in so-called deaths from despair (that is, deaths from suicide, drug overdoses and alcoholism) to the effects of believing in meritocracy.¹¹⁶

If these beliefs have such unpleasant consequences, who benefits from them and who might care to maintain their popularity? First of all, meritocracy justifies large income inequalities and thus the existence of, to use Piketty's nomenclature, 'super cadres' – people in managerial positions earning 50 or 100 times the average salary.¹¹⁷ Following the logic of meritocracy, we cannot consider these salaries to be obscenely high. If someone is paid such a salary, it only proves their extraordinary competence and is fully justified. The same is true of entrepreneurial superstars, who have recently become as popular as

¹¹⁵ *Epidemia otworzyła Polakom oczy. „Ludzie poznali wartość pracy sprzedawcy”*, <<https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/epidemia-otworzyła-polakom-oczy-ludzie-poznali-wartosc-pracy-sprzedawcy-6539748276598401v.html>>, DOA 25.08.2022.

¹¹⁶ M. Zadbyr-Jamróz, op. cit.

¹¹⁷ T. Piketty, op. cit., p. 514.

celebrities such as actors or singers (although it should not be forgotten that this is not a completely new phenomenon: figures such as Henry Ford and John Rockefeller also enjoyed high visibility and media attention). Ha-Joon Chang warns against looking at entrepreneurship from an individualistic perspective. He reminds us that the successes of individuals that we recognise as outstanding are the result of a collective effort. He points out that the success of a venture is influenced by factors such as “the scientific infrastructure that enabled them to acquire knowledge and experiment within it; the corporate and other commercial laws that enabled them to later build their companies – large and complex; the education system that provided a supply of well-educated scientists, engineers, managers – employees for their companies; the financial system, [...]; the patent and intellectual property rights that protected their inventions; the readily available market for their products, and so on”.¹¹⁸ Against this, the popularity of figures such as Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk confirms the societal belief that success is an individual merit, the result of hard work and indomitable character. How we link the ability to make money and accumulate wealth to the possession of virtues and competence can be seen by analysing how the news of the fate of Steve Jobs' inheritance was received.

In February 2020, an article was published stating that Powell Jobs – the widow of the Apple CEO – plans to give away her fortune to charity. The woman stressed that she did not intend to build up the family fortune and pass the money on to her children. At the same time, she pointed out that her late husband was also of a similar opinion. “I'm not interested in legacy wealth buildings, and my children know that. Steve wasn't interested in that. If I live long enough, it ends with me”.¹¹⁹ Powell Jobs based her decision on her belief that the accumulation of capital in the hands of a small group of the world's richest people is a threat to society.

While the widow's intentions appear to be as noble as possible, they were met with a negative reception by the online community.¹²⁰ Many comments have questioned their sincerity, suggesting that she will donate the money to foundations to be managed and profited from by her children, while avoiding inheritance taxes. Others reproached Powell Jobs for hypocrisy, pointing out that she herself should not inherit the money from her husband. There were

¹¹⁸ H.-J. Chang, op. cit., p. 217.

¹¹⁹ A. Hartmans, *Laurene Powell Jobs says she won't pass down her and Steve Jobs' billions to their children: 'It ends with me'*, 28.02.2020, <<https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/laurene-powell-jobs-children-wont-inherit-billions-2020-2-1028950353>>, DOA 25.08.2022.

¹²⁰ I refer to the comments on the article posted by users of the wykop.pl portal, <<https://www.wykop.pl/link/5358039/wdowa-po-steve-jobs-ie-rozda-caly-mojatek-24-milardy-usd>>, DOA 27.08.2022.

also those who described her as a bad mother with no concern for the welfare of her children.

I cite this situation because it perfectly illustrates how meritocracy sucks the empathy out of us. Powell Jobs' fortune is estimated at \$24 billion. Such an amount of money is hard to imagine. In polish billion written down in shorthand looks a bit like a million, and if one were instead to write down the number without using the shorthand, it would take a lot of attention to count all the zeros without making a mistake. Therefore, let me use a comparison. The dominant salary¹²¹ in Poland for 2018, according to the Central Statistical Office, was PLN 1765 net.¹²² This means that with such a payment, which is the most common salary in the country, one would have to work 4.5 million years to earn the equivalent of Powell Jobs' fortune. Again, it is hard to translate this figure into any conceivable value, after all, 4.5 million years ago there were no beings of the genus *Homo* yet and the earth was inhabited by *Australopithecus*.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that Powell Jobs could provide herself and her children, and even their grandchildren, with a prosperous life for a fraction of the money she currently has. So why the outrage of Polish Internet users at the fact that she wants to share the money? It is only justified if we agree that the money we are able to earn is proof of our worth as human beings. If Steve Jobs' fame and good name is constituted by the fortune he has earned, it is no wonder that the dispersal of this fortune aroused opposition among those for whom Jobs is a role model. They disregard the positive effects that the money could have on education, the environment and helping immigrants (such causes are mentioned by Powell Jobs). All that matters is that the wealth is not to be 'frittered away'. If we believe that the wealth Steve Jobs has amassed reflects the virtues and competences he possesses, he must have superhuman status. If this is the case, giving away his wealth to charity becomes a kind of sacrilege.

Meritocracy legitimises the existence of economic inequalities and even helps to turn a blind eye to their widening. It ensures that people at the bottom of the social ladder do not revolt, believing that the distribution of wealth is fair. Instead, they receive the promise that anything is possible, and that

¹²¹ The dominant salary, meaning the amount most frequently occurring in the surveyed set. This is an indicator that gives a better picture of the salary structure than the national average, which, as it is inflated by the share of the highest salaries, remains inaccessible to two-thirds of Poles (according to data for 2021 published on Twitter by the head of the Governmental Analysis Centre – Norbert Maliszewski), <<http://shorturl.at/BCNQX>>, DOA 27.08.2022.

¹²² 1765 zł na rękę – oto najczęstsze wynagrodzenie w Polsce, 26.02.2020, <<https://businessinsider.com.pl/finanse/makroekonomia/dominanta-najczestsza-placa-w-polsce-dane-gus-za-pazdziernik-2018-r/q8vbryj>>, DOA 27.08.2022.

their situation can improve any time, they just need to put a little more effort into working towards their success. “Contemporary culture, Leonidas Donskis suggests, is keen to blur the line between «can» and «must». «I can, therefore I must» is the motto that evolving technology is increasingly instilling in our hearts, making the exploitation of opportunities into a new moral imperative”.¹²³ It is precisely such meritocratic beliefs that keep us going. Professional and financial success allow us to define our worth as individuals. Richard Sennett speaks of the birth of a new type of character “a man determined to prove his morality through work”.¹²⁴ This means that we cannot stop working because we would have to consider ourselves lazy and useless. The money we earn has a symbolic dimension and allows us to compare ourselves with others. Perhaps the charm of meritocracy lies precisely in the fact that it offers the possibility of, seemingly, objectively measuring a person's worth. Such a one-size-fits-all measure must necessarily be simplistic, and this makes it rife with the negative social effects I have tried to portray. So we work to earn and, through the ability to earn money, build our sense of worth. But it is not only the money earned that has its hidden meaning, the objects acquired also have it. Let us therefore look at the phenomenon of consumerism in the next chapter.

CONSUMERISM AND THE CONCEPT OF BRAND

Consumerism is a topic that has been taken up frequently in recent years and has appeared in public debate since the second half of the 20th century. Due to the vastness of the issue, in this thesis I will only address those threads of the issue that make it possible to present the impact of consumerism on the taking up of paid work and that make it possible to describe the mechanisms behind this phenomenon.

The first point is that consumerism satisfies not only our material needs, but also our spiritual needs, allowing us to define our identity. It is worth recalling

¹²³ M. Napiórkowski, op. cit., p. 279.

¹²⁴ R. Sennett, *Korozja charakteru: osobiste konsekwencje pracy w nowym kapitalizmie*, transl. J. Dzierzgowski, Ł. Mikotajewski, Muza, Warsaw 2006, p. 142.

in this context the concept of the brand, which arose as a consequence of the industrial revolution. Mass production meant that objects were no longer sold by the same people who made them, so they became anonymous. As a result, they lost their individual character and the buyer had no way of distinguishing which product came from their preferred manufacturer. In order to keep their customers with them, instead of relying on the randomness of their choices, manufacturers started to label their goods. Label-free bulk packaging (barrels or bags) disappeared from the shops, replaced by portioned and pre-packaged products.

This process, which began in the 19th century, has taken on a completely different face in the 20th century. Branding no longer serves merely to distinguish the object of one manufacturer from another, guaranteeing that the customer receives a product with certain characteristics. Mass-produced goods are becoming less and less different from one another. So the idea that emerged in the 1980s – one should sell not the product, but its image – is gaining popularity. As Naomi Klein writes: “The search for the true meaning of brands [...] gradually pulled advertising agencies away from individual products and their attributes, pushing them towards a psychological/anthropological study of the role of the brand in people's culture and lives. This was crucial because corporations make products, but consumers buy brands”.¹²⁵

Anyway, the question of manufacturing itself has also undergone its own evolution. The product, which initially separated from the individual manufacturer, soon also parted from the walls of the factory. At least the one that ultimately signs off on it. Companies that are particularly focused on creating their image allocate massive resources to marketing, while production is subcontracted. The Asian factories where products from companies such as Apple and Nike are made are a case in point. The material value of these goods (understood in this case as the cost of producing them) is much lower than the price we see in the shop. So why don't corporations, instead of spending huge sums on advertising, start competing with each other by lowering the prices of their products? The answer to this question is an event called Marlboro Friday.

It was the second of April 1993 – the day Philip Morris announced that it was going to cut by 20% the price of the cigarettes it made, so that it could compete with other, cheaper brands on the market. The result was a sharp collapse in the US stock market. The listings of all companies offering everyday products fell, including, of course, Philip Morris. This was because the action

¹²⁵ N. Klein, op. cit., p. 41.

of the cigarette giant seemed to herald – the end of brand hegemony and a return to the days when measurable attributes of a product determined its value. Marlboro had for many years based its sales on image, the decision to fight the competition by lowering prices was meant to show that marketing is not everything after all. Important is the background to these events – the recession of the 1990s in the United States. The deterioration of Americans' living conditions made them less receptive to advertising messages and more attentive to the price of products. As a result, there was a rift in the marketing world. Some of the companies decided to invest the money previously spent on advertising in consumer incentives such as promotions and competitions. The other group went the complete opposite way, instead of abandoning advertising – they intensified it. In this way, those brands that treat the products they sell as a carrier of sensation or a marker of prestige have strengthened their position in the market. This allows them to dictate the prices of goods in isolation from their quantifiable value, inflating them considerably. Corporations want buyers to feel connected to the brand, indeed to define their identity by identifying with the values represented by the brand. Scott Bedbury, vice-president of marketing for coffee chain Starbucks, acknowledged that "because "consumers don't believe there is a big difference between products",¹²⁶ the company needs to build an emotional connection with its customers through the 'Starbucks Experience'.¹²⁷ Meanwhile, the coffee chain's CEO Howard Schultz described what draws people to their locations as "a sense of warmth and community".¹²⁸

So we see that consumerism is not the same as materialism and does not imply any attachment to objects. On the contrary, Zygmunt Bauman points out that there has been "an almost complete rupture of the emotional bond with the objects we possess. What matters now is the moment of acquisition, not a lasting relationship. [...] What needs to be constantly pursued is style, not the objects of possession themselves, and style requires that its material determinants change at an ever faster pace".¹²⁹ This mechanism allows consumption to be sustained, one's status needs to be constantly affirmed, and one's identity constantly updated by making consumptive choices from the ever-emerging possibilities.

The brand mechanism works both ways – we build our identity from brands,

¹²⁶ S. Bedbury, in an address to Association of National Advertisers, [after]: The New York Times, 20.10.1997, cit. per N. Klein, op. cit., p. 53.

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

¹²⁸ H. Shultz, *Pour Your Heart into It*, Hyperion, New York, 1997, p. 5, cit. per N. Klein, op. cit., p. 53.

¹²⁹ Z. Bauman, *44 listy ze świata płynnej nowoczesności*, transl. T. Kunz, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2014, p. 70.

but at the same time we make a brand out of ourselves. The ways of the market have infiltrated our social relationships. Marcin Napiórkowski in *Kod Kapitalizmu* writes: "Today, nations, universities, and churches are becoming brands. Those who want to exist in the collective imagination must invest millions in visual identification, recognition studies and well thought-out sponsorship strategies. Ultimately, this even applies to individual people. If you want to operate effectively in this world, to become «relevant in the market» [...] you have to make yourself a brand. And all of this is to be found, to be known, to be understood".¹³⁰ This makes us see in market terms nowadays interpersonal relationships ('increasing reach') or knowledge acquisition ('investing in oneself').

Not even the art world is immune to these marketing influences. Zygmunt Bauman in his essay *Co się stało z elitą kulturalną?* [transl. *What has happened to the cultural elite?*] presents a picture of a culture that has also become a consumer good – "it consists of offers, not norms".¹³¹ It no longer serves to elevate society, it is no longer guided by a mission, but "tailored to the needs of individual freedom of choice. [...] It is to ensure that making choices becomes something inevitable: a life imperative and a duty".¹³²

As we can see, market logic has infiltrated areas of life that on the surface may have seemed unrelated to it. Consumerism is the way we function in the capitalist world, it determines how we see ourselves and how others see us. However, we cannot consume for free, we need the means to do so. We sacrifice our time, acquiring material resources far beyond the level of basic needs. In this way, consumerism drives us to keep working. But can we stop ourselves in this consumerist rush? Is there any way to limit the emergence of ever new desires and needs?

¹³⁰ M. Napiórkowski, op. cit., p. 90.

¹³¹ Z. Bauman, op. cit., p.119.

¹³² Ibidem, p.118.

DESIRES THAT ARE NEVER FULFILLED

While the dispute over whether man can tame his desires fits perfectly into the economic narrative, it is primarily a philosophical dispute. The long history of debate on this topic goes back to antiquity and the diametrical difference of opinion represented by the Stoics and Epicureans in this area. On the one hand, the hedonistic attitude presented by the Epicureans recommended that one's desires should be pursued – to seek to maximise pleasure and minimise annoyance, seeing the satisfaction of needs as the meaning of existence. On the other side stood the Stoics, urging rather restraint – happiness was to be ensured by freeing oneself from desires. A similar attitude was represented by the Cynics, among them Diogenes of Synopa, who is supposed to have said that “it is the attribute of the gods to need nothing, and the attribute of men, who wish to be like them, to need little”.¹³³ Echoes of both of these attitudes still resonate today, while showing that the dispute over the nature of man has not been definitively resolved. Diogenes' ideals can be found in the recently popular online challenge The 100 Thing Challenge, which encourages people to own just one hundred objects. Similar in tone is Project 333, promoted by Courtney Carver, author of the book of the same name, which involves trying to narrow down one's wardrobe to 33 items of clothing for a period of three months. This idea is part of a wider trend, which we can see in the film *Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things*, directed by Matt D'Avella. Despite the presence of this type of message on popular platforms offering access to films and series, the trend towards minimalism is more of a niche, emerging as a response to the opposite, dominant tendency. Capitalist societies are rather closer to Epicurean thought (to be more precise, utilitarianism, which has its roots in hedonistic ideas). This is because classical economic models are based on the aforementioned concept of homo oeconomicus, which assumes that man strives to maximise his profits and presupposes the egoistic nature of the individual.

Faced with the question of whether the economic system can influence people's behaviour regarding the satisfaction of their needs, or whether human nature is immutable in this aspect, opinions are divided. William Stanley Jevons – English logician and economist – argued that “consumer

133 D. Laertios *Żywoty i poglądy słynnych filozofów*, p. 361, <<http://biblioteka.kijowski.pl/antyk%20grecki/%20diogenes%20-%20%E5%BBywoty%20i%20pogl%E4%85dy%20s%E5%82awnych%20filozof%E3%B3w.pdf>>, DOA 27.08.2022.

goods in the market serve to maximise individual happiness”.¹³⁴ On the other hand, John Stuart Mill, an English philosopher and economist, noted that “happiness is not achieved by aiming at it directly, but rather by pursuing some other goals”.¹³⁵ He also claimed that “the individual will be primarily rational in the pursuit of his needs, rather than being swayed by ideologies which are the product of a particular stage of economic development”.¹³⁶ This stands in fundamental opposition to Karl Marx's claim that “the selfish nature of the individual is a product of capitalism, a system with limited resources for which there must be constant competition. This nature is not immutable. It can evolve. A change in the economic system can lead to a change in human nature”.¹³⁷ According to Max Weber, treating work as a vocation and making earning money the purpose of life is not natural to man, it has been implanted so that capitalism can function. “Man «by nature» does not want to earn more and more, but simply wants to live as he is accustomed to live, and to earn as much as he needs”.¹³⁸ However, as a result of living under the influence of capitalist impulses, “man sets himself up to earn money as the goal of his life, rather than as a means to the goal of satisfying the material needs of life. This, for the typical attitude, nonsensical reversal of the ‘natural’ [...] state of affairs is as necessary a leitmotif for capitalism as it is for man unspoiled by its breath – something completely unknown”.¹³⁹

Whatever human nature actually is, it is undoubtedly that the capitalist system seeks to increase human need as consumer spending creates economic vitality and growth. What this comes down to is that it seeks not to ensure adequate supply, but to create demand. This is handled by the advertising industry, and a prime example is the entire beauty and fashion sector. As Hadley Freeman writes in an article for the *Guardian*: “The fashion industry is not interested in making women feel better about themselves. Fashion is about making people want something they are unlikely to get [...] and any satisfaction achieved is fleeting and faintly disappointing”.¹⁴⁰

134 M. Gorazda, *Filozofia Ekonomii*, Copernicus Center Press, Cracow 2014, p. 21.

135 Ibidem, p. 170.

136 Ibidem, p. 169.

137 Ibidem, p. 160.

138 M. Weber, op. cit., p. 41.

139 Ibidem, p. 36.

140 H. Freeman, *Sexual abuse of models is fashion's dirty secret*, “The Guardian”, 9.09.2009, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/sep/09/hadley-freeman-sexual-abuse-models>>, DOA 26.10.2022

In the 17th century, the English economist Dudley North pointed out that “the principal engine of commerce, or rather industry and creativity, is the unlimited human appetite, which makes them take the effort to work to satisfy it, when nothing else could induce them to do so. If man were content with only the things necessary for survival, we would have a poor world”.¹⁴¹ And indeed, the world is not poor (as already discussed in the chapter Unlimited Growth of Wealth), but we do not stop working. Let’s trace how consumerism affects the length of time we spend at work.

WORKING TIME

Analysing the history of employment, working time has been increasing and decreasing. From the mid-19th century onwards, we saw a downward trend that continued until the 1980s. In the preceding years, economic growth translated into more leisure time and more consumption, but around 1980, although consumption continued to grow, the shortening of the working week came to an end. This happened against predictions and trends continuing since the industrial revolution. A world filled with leisure time was predicted by the aforementioned Keynes, but we could also hear such predictions from other sources, including Nobel Laureate George Bernard Shaw, who in 1900 claimed that the year 2000 would bring work down to two hours a day.¹⁴² Why hasn’t this happened?

It turns out that technological advances, which were supposed to relieve us of our responsibilities, work in the opposite way – we allocate the regained time to more work. This way, productivity increases and we can afford to satisfy increasingly sophisticated consumption needs, but we do not gain more leisure time. The social status we have gained requires that we maintain it, and the new opportunities that arise with progress require our time to exploit them.

Yuval Noah Harari, in his book *Sapiens*, in which he attempts to describe the history of man from its very beginnings, points out the existence of this dependency many centuries ago. He states that, by abandoning the hunter-gatherer lifestyle and turning to agriculture, man has lost more than he has

¹⁴¹ D. North, *Discourses upon Trade: Principally Directed to the Cases of the Interest, Coinage, Clipping and Increase of Money*, cit. per M. Gorazda, op. cit., p. 101.

¹⁴² R. Bregman, op. cit, p. 132.

gained (at least if we take an individual perspective). This was due, among other things, to a less varied diet as a result of the agrarian revolution, which negatively affected health. The change in lifestyle has even had such far-reaching consequences for people as a reduction in their brain capacity.¹⁴³ While what was most significant in the context of this dissertation was the increase in working hours. “While [...] people in developing countries [work] up to 60-80 hours [per week], today’s hunter-gatherers living in the most hostile environment – the Kalahari desert – devote 35-45 hours per week to work. They hunt only once every three days, and gathering takes them 3-6 hours a day. [...] It is highly likely that ancient hunter-gatherers living in more food-rich areas needed even less time to gather food and raw materials”.¹⁴⁴ Despite these disadvantages, the agrarian revolution has benefited the species as a whole. The amount of food increased and the ability to obtain it became much more regular and controlled, and this in turn contributed to an increase in reproductive capacity. For the species *homo sapiens*, as a whole collective, the change therefore proved beneficial, but the quality of life for individuals declined. However, there was no longer any chance of reversing these decisions, as the population had increased so much that a return to a hunter-gatherer mode would have meant death by starvation for many. Harari refers to this phenomenon as the *luxury trap*, writing that: “One of the few iron laws of history is that luxury mostly becomes a necessity and gives rise to new responsibilities”.¹⁴⁵

Harari’s book refers to phenomena from 10,000 years ago, but shows a mechanism that seems to still accompany humanity. In the 20th century, the invention and improvement of household appliances such as the washing machine, Hoover, dishwasher and gas cooker contributed to a revolution in the labour market. The reduction in the amount of time needed to run the household, enabled many women to enter the workforce. In the United States, within 100 years, the share of married white women working outside the home at the prime working age (35-44), rose from a few per cent in 1900 to almost 80 per cent in 2000.¹⁴⁶ By no means do I want to suggest that the professional emancipation of women is a negative phenomenon. However, it is important to note that the increased participation of women in the labour market has not reduced the work of their partners. In the 1950s, couples worked a total

¹⁴³ M. Henneberg, M. Steyn, *Trends in Cranial Capacity and Cranial Index in Sub-Saharan Africa During the Holocene*, cit. per Y.N. Harari, *Sapiens. Od zwierząt do bogów*, transl. J. Hunia, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2019, p. 64.

¹⁴⁴ Y.N. Harari, op. cit., p. 66.

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. III.

¹⁴⁶ C. Goldin, *The quiet revolution that transformed women’s employment, education and family*, „American Economic Review”, 2006, vol. 96, no. 2, p. 4, graph 1.

of five to six days a week; today it is seven to eight days.¹⁴⁷ This means that, although in some countries (such as the USA, the Netherlands, France and Germany), weekly working hours have been progressively decreasing in the 20th century;¹⁴⁸ the more numerous presence of women in the labour market means that, overall, we work more.

The luxury trap means that the leisure time gained through technological advances is not allocated to rest, but contributes to productivity. Time seems to speed up, or perhaps rather thicken, allowing more and more efficient activities to fit in and leaving no empty space. Interesting in this context is Ulrich Schnabel's observation that "people, accustomed to a consumer society that satisfies every need with the right products, also treat idleness as a consumer good".¹⁴⁹ As a result, rest is also becoming subject to the laws of the market, we want to relax as efficiently as possible, to fit as much relaxation as possible into the shortest possible time. So we have to earn rest, just like any other consumer good, – put effort into acquiring and organising it. So we arrive at a paradox – in the world of consumerism, the possibility of not taking action becomes a luxury. This brings to mind Katarzyna Wojtczak's words quoted earlier about privileged artists who can afford not to create art ('it is ethical today not to produce anything'). It turns out that in order to be able to stop consuming, special conditions must also be met. One would like to say that "it is ethical today not to consume anything, but who can afford it?".

A good example to illustrate this is what David Graeber calls *compensatory consumerism*. It consists in the fact that, as we spend a large part of our time at work, we do not pursue our passions and do not build social bonds. As a result, the only pleasures we experience are those that allow us to fit into self-contained, predictable time slots and are part of the easily accessible consumerist offerings. As Graeber writes: "These are things that can be done to compensate for the fact that one does not have a life, or at least has very little of one".¹⁵⁰

The relationship between work and consumption runs in two directions. On the one hand, we work so that we can consume, and on the other hand, we consume to compensate for the time we spend at work. It is worth noting, however, that how many hours a day we devote to earning money is not always

¹⁴⁷ R. Bregman, op. cit., p. 138.

¹⁴⁸ Ibidem, graph 9, p. 138.

¹⁴⁹ U. Schnabel, op. cit., s. 39.

¹⁵⁰ D. Graeber, op. cit., s. 386.

entirely up to us, and not everyone is free to plan their schedule as they wish. The problem of not having enough time is not only an individual problem, but is also a collective one. Top-down regulations and prevailing standards play a major role. What would happen if a six-hour working day were introduced instead of an eight-hour one? Or if, instead of working five days a week, we extended the weekend so that only four days a week were left for work?

According to the Polish Economic Institute, research shows that reducing working hours while maintaining the current salary has a positive impact on the productivity of employees, as well as on their mental health. Not only does it not cause economic collapse, it also improves the quality of life – resulting in lower levels of stress, lower levels of sickness absence, and higher levels of satisfaction with the ability to balance private and professional life.¹⁵¹ This leads to the suspicion that there are motivations other than economic reasons behind the continuation of work and that an important function of employment is its potential to control. I will devote a separate chapter to this issue. However, before we turn to it, let us briefly discuss one more factor that drives us to earn money.

Despite the fact that sociologists have been raising the alarm for many years and describing the demonic face of consumerism, we still have free will and do not allow ourselves to be completely overwhelmed by advertising. Of course, there are individuals who fall into a debt spiral, and indeed many countries live on credit (I mean the national debt), but it is not the case that all of us unthinkingly spend all our money on consumption or live beyond our means. Many people do manage to put something aside.¹⁵² So why do we work to get money that we do not spend? Let us look at the phenomenon of saving.

SAVING

Saving is not a desirable phenomenon for the economy (unlike investing). States are not keen on frugal citizens and corporations are not keen on frugal customers. Zygmunt Bauman points out that consumption is now treated as

¹⁵¹ P. Kukotowicz, *Czy krótsza praca poptaca?*, „Tygodnik Gospodarczy PIE”, 2.09.2021, 35/2021, Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, p. 3.

¹⁵² According to survey *Barometer Providenta* from 2019, more than 60% of Poles do have savings, *Ile oszczędności ma 30- i 40-latek?*, 9.05.2022, <<https://businessinsider.com.pl/poradnik-finansowy/oszczednosci-mlodych-osob-co-mowia-na-ten-temat-badania/hfm5jhl>>, DOA 28.08.2022.

a form of patriotism. By participating in shopping, we “fulfil our civic duty”¹⁵³ and “save the country from recession”.¹⁵⁴ As far as businesses are concerned, after the 2008 crisis, it was complained that consumers were losing the habit of buying on impulse.¹⁵⁵ Thoughtful buying is therefore a problem for the economy, but refraining from spending is even worse.

For the purposes of this discussion, let us put aside saving understood as collecting money for some major purchase in the future, as we can consider it as a form of consumption postponed in time. Let us look at saving as collecting money and, of course, I do not mean numismatics. In this case, the physical aspect of money is not important, and even, as we will see in a moment, their potential for exchange for goods is not entirely relevant. What is most important is their symbolic meaning. For it turns out that we happen to earn and then save money just to possess it. Thomas Piketty points out that even when we have no one to pass on our wealth after our death, this does not affect the discontinuation of saving: “In particular, one does not see the tendency predicted by life-cycle theory to withdraw from saving in old age [...]. This is no doubt explained by the desire to pass on wealth to the family [no one really wishes to die without wealth [...]], but also by the logic of pure accumulation and a sense of security [...]”.¹⁵⁶ As he concludes, “[...] childless people accumulate as much as others”.¹⁵⁷

So why does money, which does not seem to be accumulated for any useful purpose, remain attractive to us? We can look for the answer in concepts that explain the psychological meaning of money, such as the *Money as a tool*, *money as a drug* theory by Stephen E.G. Lea and Paul Webley.¹⁵⁸ The researchers discuss two aspects related to approaches to money. The first is money treated as a tool. In this case, money is used to obtain goods and services, so it is not a value in itself, but it allows these values to be obtained, so what matters is its power to do so. This approach to money resonates with consumerism. The second aspect – money as a drug, correlates much better with saving. Researchers compare money to a drug because it is able to trigger reactions in the brain in a similar way to psychoactive substances. They

¹⁵³ Z. Bauman, op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁵⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 221.

¹⁵⁶ T. Piketty, op. cit., p.492.

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁸ S. E. G. Lea, P. Webley, *Money as tool, money as drug: The biological psychology of a strong incentive*, cit. per J. Wierzbicki, *Pieniądze jako narkotyk, pieniądze jako narzędzie. O znaczeniu pieniądza w naukach społeczno-ekonomicznych*, <<https://cdv.pl/blog/blog-ekspertki/pieniadze-jako-narkotyk-pieniadze-jako-narzedzie>>, DOA 28.08.2022.

stimulate the reward system, but the feeling of satisfaction is illusory and not supported by any functionality, it is not reflected in reality.¹⁵⁹

Empirical confirmation of these assumptions can be found in the research conducted by Kathleen D. Vohs.¹⁶⁰ She showed that simply thinking about money influences our behaviour. Most interestingly, it turns out that directing our thoughts towards money changes the way we approach social relationships. One experiment conducted by Vohs involved exposing a group of participants to stimuli related to finance – they read economic articles and stared at a screensaver with falling banknotes. After such exposure, they were given a task that required the participation of a second person. It turned out that the participants took 70% longer to ask for help than the control group, which had not been exposed to thinking about money. Moreover, when they themselves were asked for help, they were less willing to provide it.

Another experiment conducted by Vohs also involved two groups – one was to count a bundle of coloured paper, the other was given money to count. After such a ‘warm-up’, participants in the study took part in a simple team game, which was deliberately manipulated by the researchers. The person being tested was deliberately left out of the group, and did not receive passes of the ball as often as the other players. Among those who had not been directed to think about money before the experiment, this caused unpleasant feelings – they felt rejected. On the other hand, the group that counted banknotes tolerated the exclusion much better, with some not even noting at all that they had been treated unfairly by their team.

The link between the need for social acceptance and thinking about money has its explanation in neuroscience. As brain scans have shown, both issues involve the same area of this organ – the striatum.¹⁶¹ When we occupy our mind with money, we pay less attention to interpersonal relationships. This leads to a weakening of the social nature of human beings, we are more willing to work alone and we are also more willing to spend our leisure time alone. As Agata Gąsiorowska writes in her book *Psychologiczne znaczenie pieniędzy* [transl. *Psychological Meaning of Money*]: “Promoting the idea of money implies a focus on oneself and one’s goals [...]. Thinking about money [...] strengthens the drive to achieve goals, gives us a sense of causality and effectiveness,

¹⁵⁹ J. Wierzbicki, op. cit.

¹⁶⁰ K.D. Vohs, N.L. Mead, M.R. Goode, *Merely activating the concept of money changes personal and interpersonal behavior*, cit. per J. Wierzbicki, op.cit.

¹⁶¹ J. Chytkiewicz, *Mózg Harpagona. Dlaczego pogoń za pieniędzmi oznacza samotność?*, 24.08.2019, <<https://www.newsweek.pl/wiedza/mozg-harpagona-dlaczego-pogon-za-pieniedzmi-oznacza-samotnosc/58721e1>>, DOA 29.08.2022.

supports us in difficult moments when we experience pain, social rejection, failure or lack of control, strengthens self-esteem – especially in those people who do not have a particularly high self-esteem”.¹⁶² Money can therefore reward us for failures in interpersonal relationships, but this is dangerous because it acts as an anaesthetic rather than a solution to the problem. As a result, social isolation can worsen and the need for money can increase. Kathleen Vohs, in an interview with the monthly magazine *Charaktery*, said: “Recalling money causes the mind to turn towards thinking of everything as a transaction. [...] Intimate relationships, however, do not work this way. A close relationship is not a commercial transaction. What matters is being sensitive to the other person’s needs, putting their goals above your own. There is no place for thinking of a relationship in commercial terms”.¹⁶³ The description of the breakdown of social bonds as a result of thinking about money seems to be similar to one used by authors describing the negative effects of meritocracy or an excessive focus on consumption in life. Social isolation seems to be inscribed in the mechanisms of capitalism. Is it possible that it is not just an unwanted side-effect, but the result of a deliberate action?

At the beginning, I pointed out that saving is not a desirable economic phenomenon because it takes money out of the market, resulting in an economic slowdown. However, when we identify saving as the accumulation of money in isolation from its exchange function, we can look at it from a different perspective. The psychological significance of money results in its impact not on the economy, but on interpersonal relations. These are reflected in the way societies function. Consequent weakening of bonds and observed atomisation of communities make them easier to control.

So let’s return to the question of whether people are allowed not to work and look at the disciplinary role of work.

¹⁶² A. Gąsiorowska, *Psychologiczne znaczenie pieniędzy*, cit. per P. Rosik, *Krąży, krąży złoty pieniądz – czyli jak bogactwo wpływa na mózg*, 20.10.2019, <<https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/forma/recenzje/krazy-krazy-zloty-pieniadz-czyli-jak-bogactwo-wplywa-na-mozg>>, DOA 29.08.2022.

¹⁶³ A. Chrzanowska, D. Krzemionka, K.D. Vohs, *Dwie strony pieniądza*, 12.02.2016, <<https://charaktery.eu/arttykul/dwie-strony-pieniadza>>, DOA 29.08.2022.

INSTRUMENTS OF CONTROL

In modern capitalism, a worker is disciplined in a variety of ways that weaken his position and strengthen the structures of power. Capitalism cannot be regarded merely as an economic system guided by objective free market principles – it is deeply intertwined with politics. On the one hand, as Ha-Joon Chang points out, an entirely free market does not exist, while political structures influence the economy.¹⁶⁴ Individual states adopt more or less free-market strategies, but these are always based on some kind of regulation. Examples are restrictions on international trade or a lack of freedom of migration, which is, after all, not indifferent to the labour market situation. Both have economic repercussions and, at the same time, are linked to non-economic beliefs. On the other hand, corporations are themselves transnational political forces. “Out of the hundred richest economies, as many as 51 are multinational corporations and only 49 are states”.¹⁶⁵ This concentration of capital allows corporations to have a powerful influence on the functioning of societies and to wield not only economic but also ideological power.¹⁶⁶

In my master’s thesis, I cited Paul Virilio’s conception of the highway as a tool of totalitarian systems from his book *Speed and Politics*. He points out that authority, in order to prevent revolution, must first and foremost control the movement of individuals, preventing them from moving outside of designated routes and gathering into groups. This is one form of maintaining control through the appropriate organisation of space. Another tool for exercising power and preventing societies from revolting is to control their time. This role is perfectly fulfilled by engagement in work.

It might seem that the workplace environment does not meet Virilio’s requirements, as it encourages the formation of communities. However, there are a number of actions being taken today that undermine the strength of the social bonds formed in the workplace. One such strategy is the short-termism of employment. As Richard Sennett writes in *Together*, a book dedicated to analysing the phenomenon of cooperation in the era of new capitalism: “Management practices specify that a work team should not function for more

¹⁶⁴ H.-J. Chang, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁶⁵ N. Klein, op. cit., p. 360.

¹⁶⁶ Many examples of corporate interference in policy decisions can be found in the 2020 documentary *The New Corporation*, directed by J. Abbott and J. Bakan.

than nine to twelve months – otherwise employees will become excessively «grown into» the team, that is, they will simply become personally attached to each other”.¹⁶⁷ Such a situation could lead to employees becoming loyal to each other rather than to the employer. Despite the impression of promoting good team relations, evident, for example, from the popularity of organising team-building workshops in companies, the bonds between employees should not become too deep. Rather, we are encouraged to see each other as competitors, because then we will be driven to work more efficiently.

The imperative of maintaining a positive atmosphere, and at the same time its superficiality, is revealed by an experiment conducted by PKO bank in 2019.¹⁶⁸ The company installed sensors in selected branches that counted the smiles of its employees. Each smile was converted into points that could be exchanged for prizes. The bank boasted that the number of smiles increased by 130% over the course of the experiment. Interestingly, Adam Bodnar, the Ombudsman, took an interest in the case, pointing out that the tested system was striking at the privacy and dignity of employees.¹⁶⁹ He sent a request for an investigation into the matter to the State Labour Inspectorate, which, however, did not find any violations in the action carried out by the bank. It should be noted on this occasion that the participation of employees in the experiment was voluntary. However, this does not mean that the smiles directed at the customers were genuine. In any case, it seems that no one particularly cared. According to the bank, the aim of the project was “to investigate the impact of smiles on the quality of customer service” and “to accelerate the process of building a more frequent manifestation of positive emotions in the workplace, as well as in life”.¹⁷⁰ Feelings are therefore stripped of their authenticity and become commodified and even become subordinated to the logic of increased productivity and acceleration. The team of employees is supposed to give the impression that it is in sync and should not enter into internal conflicts (or at least not externalise them), whereas it is not supposed to create lasting bonds.

Examples of companies undermining the sense of community, as well as the sense of security of workers, are numerous. Naomi Klein raises the issue of

¹⁶⁷ R. Sennett, *Razem: rytuały, zalety i zasady współpracy*, transl. J. Dzierżgowski, Muza, Warsaw 2013, p. 20.

¹⁶⁸ PKO Bank Polski i Quantum CX policzq uśmiechy klientów, 25.06.2019, <<https://media.pkobp.pl/70981-pko-bank-polski-i-quantum-cx-policza-usmiechy-klientow>>, DOA 29.08.2022.

¹⁶⁹ J. K., *Adam Bodnar zaniepokojony nagradzaniem pracowników PKO BP za uśmiechy. „To może naruszać prywatność i godność”*, 22.10.2019, <<https://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/arttykul/adam-bodnar-zaniepokojony-nagradzaniem-pracownikow-pko-bp-za-usmiechy-to-moze-naruszac-prywatnosc-i-godnosc>>, DOA 29.08.2022.

¹⁷⁰ PKO Bank Polski i Quantum CX policzq uśmiechy klientów, op. cit.

the alienation of those employed in Philippine factories; she talks about how migrants, rather than members of local communities, are deliberately chosen for the work. Most often, these are young women with no education, who lack the support of relatives and do not know their rights.¹⁷¹ In this way, the worker is detached from the community she knows and her ability to resist is weakened.

Zygmunt Bauman draws attention to another trend that makes it impossible for employed people to build a new community around their workplace. He is referring to freelance work. One out of 44 *Letters from the Liquid Modern World*, the sociologist devotes to the story of a married couple who gave up permanent full-time employment and encourages others to make a similar decision. Bauman warns that this is a dangerous path that will lead the mentioned couple to be on their own and deprived of the support of the workplace as well as the social security that comes with a full-time job. He sees the rise in popularity of freelance work as a permanent trend, not coincidentally promoted by the authorities. He lists it alongside other strategies designed to weaken the position of the worker and to help consolidate power and increase corporate profits: “The boards of directors and supervisory boards of multinational corporations, with the open and quiet support of the major political forces, have decided to crush the foundations of workers’ solidarity by abolishing collective agreements, by overpowering trade unions and marginalising their role, by manipulating terms and conditions of employment, by outsourcing and subcontracting managerial functions and labour duties, by deregulating [«flexibilising»] working hours, by signing ever shorter contracts of employment while increasing labour turnover [...]; in short, by doing everything possible to challenge the rationality of collective self-protection and increase the attractiveness of vicious individual competition for the favour of superiors”.¹⁷²

The procedures mentioned by Bauman are the various faces of employment flexibility. This form of work is promoted as giving freedom and opening up many possibilities. However, it often has the opposite effect, restricting and making people dependent. When, in the chapter *What is the problem with work?* I mentioned the topic of permanent temporary work, I was referring to the phenomenon of employers taking advantage of a loophole in Polish labour law, which allows the overuse of temporary contracts in relation to employees who, in reality, provide full-time work. We can also use the term *permanent temporary work* in a different context, that is, in relation to those jobs which

¹⁷¹ N. Klein, op. cit., p. 244.

¹⁷² Z. Bauman, op. cit., p. 231-232.

have the reputation of being temporary, yet turn out to be an occupation for years. When I mean temporary jobs, I mean those jobs that appear to be aimed mainly at young people and are an opportunity for them to earn some extra money while they are improving their qualifications [for example during their studies] – just to leave them and start a ‘serious’ career afterwards. As such, these jobs are not expected to offer prospects for development and have no future plans attached to them. Employees do not need to be promised much and there is no need to fear that they will demand their rights. After all, they are there only for a short while and, in any case, they can easily be replaced, as these jobs are structured in such a way that they do not require very high qualifications. Examples of such jobs include fast food workers, clothing chain shop employees, waiters, bartenders or cashiers. Sometimes, however, such temporary jobs become permanent jobs.¹⁷³

Marcin Napiórkowski in the article *Szukasz pracy? Znajdziesz ją w mcdonald's! Strukturalno-semiotyczna analiza ulotki znalezionej pod cheeseburgerem* [transl. *Looking for a Job? You'll Find it at McDonald's! A Structural-Semiotic Analysis of a Flyer Found Under a Cheeseburger*] refers to such jobs as *non-jobs* (in reference to Marc Augé's *non-places*). He points out that the salary offered, in this case by the McDonald's chain, is only enough to finance minor pleasures, but is too low to be able to think about buying a flat or providing for a family. It does not provide a sense of security and the chance to become independent. As the author concludes: “To have a job at McDonald's will allow [the employed person] to mask the fact that in reality... there is no job”.¹⁷⁴ Also problematic are the working hours, which are flexible, but often not as the employee would like – the employee has no control over the shape of his or her schedule, but it is the employee who is required to be disposable. Naomi Klein describes the practices used by chains such as Walmart and Starbucks, which use algorithms to calculate what hours the stores have the most customers.¹⁷⁵ Employees' schedules, based on this data, are designed far from being regular. This method allows entrepreneurs to reduce expenses – the employee is only paid for those hours when he or she was actually needed, but it requires the employee to be constantly on call, taking away the chance to organise his or her life outside of work. Thus, a job that was meant to be temporary may

¹⁷³ For example, the research of D. Smith and C. Lusby *Analysis of Educational Needs Assessment of Retail Employees*, shows that 25% of Canadian retail workers below managerial level had worked for the same company for 11 or more years, while 39% of those employed had worked for 4 to 11 years, for more on this see: N. Klein, op. cit. p. 257.

¹⁷⁴ M. Napiórkowski, *Szukasz pracy? Znajdziesz ją w mcdonald's! Strukturalno-semiotyczna analiza ulotki znalezionej pod cheeseburgerem*, <<http://mitologia Współczesna.pl/przemiany-dyskursu-wokół-pracy>>, DOA 29.08.2022.

¹⁷⁵ N. Klein, op.cit., p. 266.

result in becoming the only option – it does not provide sufficient funds to be able to put something aside and provide a cushion of security while looking for another job. So you can't give it up, but it's also difficult to upskill and look for another job while still being employed in that previous non-job, as flexible schedules destabilise life and prevent you from taking on additional commitments. In this way, we become, so to speak, entangled in a job, and its flexibility and the freedom of choice that is supposed to go with it turns out to be just a pretence.

An interesting example of how expansionist work can be and how many areas of our lives it can hijack is the rather popular media story of a Google-employed programmer named Brandon, who decided to live in a truck he parked outside the company.¹⁷⁶ As he describes on his blog, he made this decision because he realised that he hardly spends any time in the flat he rents for a large part of his salary. He only comes there to sleep, and the rest of the day is taken up with commuting and staying at work. “for all the money I'm spending on this apartment, I'm hardly ever there! I wake up, catch the first GBus to Google, work out, eat breakfast, work, eat lunch, work, eat dinner, hang out at Google, and eventually take a bus home, pack my gym bag for the next day, and go to sleep.”¹⁷⁷

So Brandon decides to save time commuting and, at the same time, money on renting a flat and moves into a truck he bought and parks near his workplace. Although the young programmer (he was 23 years old at the time of the decision to move) keeps his blog upbeat and happy with his choice, he admits that separating his work from his personal life is a problem. He describes how, at one point, he realised that he was spending most of his time at his company's headquarters and not because he had so many responsibilities, but because he saw no other options. Brandon concludes: „When your lifestyle blurs the line between working and just living, how do you make sure that they don't amalgamate into one never-ending workday? Early on, this was a legitimate issue for me, and I didn't even realize it because of how natural it felt. During the week, I would wake up, head to a gym (at work), shower (at work), work

¹⁷⁶ Articles on this topic can be found on portals such as gazeta.pl, Fakt and naTemat.pl: N. B., *Pracownik Google zamieszkał w ciężarówce. Oszczędza 90 proc. pensji*, 22.10.2015, <<https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114871,19063933,pracownik-google-zamieszkal-w-ciezarowce-oszczedza-90-proc.html>>; *Mieszka jak biedak, a to inżynier z korporacji*, 21.10.2015, <<https://www.fakt.pl/wydarzenia/swiat/pracuje-w-google-jako-inzynier-mieszka-w-aucie-na-parkingu/4estzn1>>; J. Rusak, *23-latek pracujący w Google mieszka w ciężarówce na parkingu przed siedzibą firmy. Oszczędza 90 proc. pensji*, 21.10.2015, <<https://natemat.pl/432706,totalna-biologia-modna-pseudonauka-o-co-chodzi-w-totalnej-biologii>>, DOA 29.08.2022.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Brandon’, *Origins*, 23.05.2015, <<https://frominsidethebox.com/post/origins/5629499534213120>>, DOA 29.08.2022.

(obviously at work), and hang around the office (working, mainly) until it was time to go to sleep. Rinse and repeat. It took me a few weeks of this routine to realize that I was spending 70-80% of my waking time working. [...] It wasn't that my workload was too high, I just didn't know what else to do".¹⁷⁸

After Brandon realised how much time he was spending at work, he made a few changes to his daily routine, which were mainly based on consciously setting the hours he works and making sure he didn't do so in his free time. However, this did not come without effort for him. He concluded his blog entry entitled *Striking a Balance* with the words: „But making a concerted effort to only give a portion of your soul to your employer means that you still have some left over to put towards your dreams".¹⁷⁹ While this sentence is meant to be positive, it seems a little frightening; after all, in order not to entirely give up his soul to his employer, it speaks of having to make a special effort. The entry suggests that Brandon has already given up some of his soul to his employer, but apparently this was quite natural, and perhaps even inevitable. The fact that the man has managed to keep room in his life to pursue his dreams is considered a success by him. It seems as if work is not a component of Brandon's life, but its essence, to which he subordinates all his decisions. And in doing so, he surrenders to this process unknowingly, without feeling cheated or taken advantage of. Admittedly, he had to fight to leave room in his life for his dreams, but he describes this as a fight against himself, because no one forced him to work either.

The above examples show the two faces of work that fetters. In the case of a permanent temporary job (also referred to as a McJob or non-job), we have a situation in which the employee, although suffering the disadvantages of his or her position, can neither afford to leave an unattractive job nor demand an improvement in conditions. A number of the mechanisms described, which lead to this situation, make it possible to increase the profits of the company by reducing the costs associated with employment.

The second example, Brandon's story, is more perverse. What we have here is an entrapment in work that takes place unknowingly. The worker doesn't rebel because he doesn't feel the need to, he takes all the responsibility for the conditions of his employment and adapts the shape of his life to his work. Brandon's confession that he didn't actually know what else to do is significant. Work can fill a life and become its meaning. Therefore, it becomes important to

¹⁷⁸ Idem, *Striking a Balance*, 3.10.2015, <<https://frominsidethebox.com/view?key=5768755258851328>>, DOA 29.08.2022.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem.



10. This is what the interior of the truck that Brandon inhabited looked like

look at the problem of whether it is *possible not to work* in a new context. This time it would be necessary to consider whether man is capable of not working at all? Or is work inevitably inscribed in human existence? Before going on to discuss the entanglement of work with the meaning of existence, its links with religion and morality, let us recap and summarise the non-economic reasons for taking up work described in this chapter.

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT MONEY

In the previous section of this dissertation, I analysed the possibility of a world without work, exploring whether there is a chance to meet humanity's basic material needs without having to devote a significant part of our lifetime to work. In this chapter, I looked for reasons for taking up work that go beyond the question of providing access to subsistence-level goods.

I began by discussing the concept of meritocracy. The belief that we are rewarded at work in straight proportion to our competence makes us translate the income we earn into human self-worth. Therefore, we work not only to

satisfy our subsistence needs, but also to raise and maintain our social status. Work determines how we are perceived by others and how we judge our own value.

Next, I looked at the phenomenon of consumerism. The emergence of the brand – a new aspect in the world of commerce – has added an extra dimension to the buying of products and the use of services. Objects no longer have a primarily utilitarian function, but become carriers of ideas. Consuming material goods has become a form of self-expression and identity construction. Consequently, we spend our time working in order to acquire the means necessary to define who we are, or who we would like to be, through our consumption choices.

An important reason that makes it difficult to limit the time we devote to getting money is the unsatisfiability of needs inherent in human nature. The sense of satisfaction we feel when fulfilling our desires is temporary and leads to the emergence of new expectations. It is difficult for us to satisfy ourselves permanently. Nor is it so easy to extinguish our urges, as the Stoics once encouraged. Rather, nowadays we are provoked to discover more and more new desires because the increase in consumption has a stimulating effect on the economy. A capitalism directed towards constant growth cannot afford to stagnate.

We can see the effects of this when we look at the statistics of time spent at work in the 20th century. Although technological progress initially led to a reduction in working hours, this trend stopped in the 1980s. Today, although productivity is increasing and our standard of living is rising, we are not gaining more leisure time. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the *luxury trap*. In the accelerating machine of progress, we can no longer stop or at least slow down, the status once gained requires effort to be maintained.

Time spent at work is exchanged for money, and this exchange function allows us to satisfy a variety of needs. However, it turns out that money can be attractive in itself. As research shows, thinking about finances stimulates the brain's reward system in a similar way to the use of psychoactive substances. Directing thoughts about money, apart from the pleasant stimulation, also has its negative effects. It affects our attitude towards social connections – it makes us less willing to interact with other people and makes us more alienated.

The link between money and the way we form interpersonal relationships is even more interesting as we may encounter mechanisms at work that deliberately undermine our sense of connection with co-workers. Various forms of employment flexibility are designed to limit opportunities for

community building and collective agreements in the workplace. As a result, workers are less able to resist and demand their rights, while remaining under greater control of the employer. Work has a disciplinary function in society – it allows to control the collective by managing its time.

This intensified control can lead to a situation where we feel trapped in work. However, entanglement in work does not always have to be the result of an external pressure; it can arise from an internal conviction of its necessity. In the last section of the chapter, there was a story of a young programmer who subordinated his entire life to work; we saw how, unnoticeably, work can fill an entire life and become its essence. This raises the question of the meaning contained in work. I will devote the next chapter to those aspects of work which treat it not as a means but as an aim itself; I mean work understood as a meaning of life, a destiny or a moral duty. Yet if work is so thoroughly inscribed in human existence, is it at all possible to separate man from work? I will therefore seek to answer the question: *are people capable of not working?*

ARE PEOPLE CAPABLE OF NOT WORKING?

THE MEANING OF WORK

If we were to look for the answer to the question of man's destiny in the founding myths of Judeo-Christian culture, we would find that this very destiny is work. God creates man to tend the Garden of Eden. In Genesis, we find a passage stating explicitly why God placed man in paradise: „The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Gen 2:15) and a second, more straightforward quote, clearly linking human existence to agricultural activity, before the creation of man: „there was no one to work the ground” (Gen 2:5). As Tomáš Sedláček notes, Eden is, not coincidentally, a garden and not an oasis, a meadow or any other form of wilderness, one would like to say ‘untouched by human hand’.¹⁸⁰ Applying Heinrich Rickert's distinction – it is a place that does not belong to the world of nature, but to the world of culture and therefore needs to be cared for. Hence, one can conclude that man was created to work (in tending the Garden of Eden), with the restriction, however, that we are speaking here of work in its broad definition, meaning that it is understood as an activity aimed at transforming the environment – there is as yet no mention of work as the sale of time. In this initial stage, the task entrusted to man does not yet involve unpleasantness.

It is only when man is banished from paradise as punishment for eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge that God condemns him to work in drudgery: „Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.” (Gen 3:17). For the sake of precision, it should be pointed out that in the biblical text, the acquisition of food and thus provision of existence is ascribed to the man, while the punishment for the woman is to give birth to children in pain. The commonality of these two human duties, in which effort and suffering are inscribed, is found in the word *labour*, which means as much work as childbirth.

We can encounter a similar storyline to the Old Testament in Greek myths. Prometheus steals fire from the gods and teaches humans how to use it. For coming into possession of divine knowledge (as in the case of the Tree of Knowledge), mankind is punished. Although, in the first instance, the punishment falls on Prometheus himself, he takes his revenge on Zeus. The enraged god then takes revenge on the people Prometheus created, sending

¹⁸⁰ T. Sedláček, op. cit., p. 71.

them the cares and misfortunes hidden in Pandora's box. These also affect work. As Hesiod writes: "For you could easily work out enough in one day to last you a year, and to be idle. [...] But Zeus hid it when his heart was troubled with anger, when he was led into the field by Prometheus, whose thoughts were twisted".¹⁸¹ Going even further back, to primitive cultures, we come across a similar motif again. As Eliade states, "According to the myths of the palaeo-folk, man is what he is today – a being sexual and condemned to work – because of a murder committed in primeval times".¹⁸²

The transgression of the first people against God affects the fate of all mankind. From then on, every human being is sentenced to work in drudgery. This first sin also puts human beings before God (or the gods) in the position of guilty persons, burdened with the necessity of redeeming their sins, or at least attempting to do so. As David Graeber writes: "Life is a kind of loan taken out from supernatural forces".¹⁸³ This setting of the relationship between God and man reduces spirituality to commercial logic, using its vocabulary in the process. In Indo-European languages, the word *debt* means either guilt or sin at the same time, and the German word *Geld* [money] shares a common root with the Old English *Geild*, meaning sacrifice, as well as the modern *guilt*.¹⁸⁴ Max Weber, in discussing the Protestant roots of capitalism, recalls the God-accountant figure that existed in antiquity and notes that for the Puritans, 'the sanctification of life could almost take on the character of doing business'.¹⁸⁵

Economics has more in common with religion than it might appear at first glance, and these similarities operate in two directions. On the one hand, religion makes use of commercial logic – the God-accountant makes a balance sheet of losses and gains, counting the sins and good deeds of his followers, while the Archangel Michael at the Last Judgement by Hans Memling compares the virtues of the believers by placing them on scales like merchandise. On the other hand, economics is not as objective and 'calculating' as it seems and is to a great extent a normative field.¹⁸⁶ It appeals to values such as right and wrong when making judgements about how economies should function, what levels of GDP growth or inflation are appropriate, and so on. It also relies on expectations of how human beings should behave – for example, with the

¹⁸¹ Hezjod, *Prace i dni*, cit. per T. Sedláček, op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁸² M. Eliade, *Sacrum i profanum. O istocie religijności*, transl. R. Reszke, KR, Warsaw 1999, p. 83.

¹⁸³ D. Graeber, T. Targański, *I odpuść nam nasze długi*, „Tygodnik Powszechny”, 25.03.2018, no. 13 (3585), p. 70.

¹⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 71.

¹⁸⁵ M. Weber, op. cit., p. 89.

¹⁸⁶ T. Sedláček, op. cit., p. 19.

concept of *homo oeconomicus*. Without taking a position on what the nature of man is, it cannot create convincing economic models. Drawing attention to the interconnections between the disciplines cited above is important. Closeness of religion and economics will provide in the next section of the dissertation a starting point for a key interpretation of the symbolism of skyscrapers in the context of Christian mythology.

Meanwhile, let us return to the subject of work and the question of whether it is indeed man's destiny. Drudgery is work that is a punishment for sins. It is no coincidence that in the sacred texts we hear about it in the context of agricultural cultivation. The myths cited earlier indicate that effort did not always accompany labour. They refer to some state before man's sin, when the food necessary for survival was easily obtained. Indeed, if we break away from the myths and look at human history, we find that before the agrarian revolution, work had a very different character and was not such a torment for people. First of all, the work of hunter-gatherers required much less time to be spent on it than the work done today – I have written about this before (see the chapter *Working Time*). In addition, at that time there was not such a clear division between leisure time and work – it was rather integrated into life and not an objective as such. This situation persisted for 95% of humanity's existence,¹⁸⁷ so when viewed from this perspective, drudgery work, while recognised as man's destiny, is a novelty.

We can find out what kind of lifestyle, and therefore what kind of positioning of humans in relation to work, is natural to us by observing the behaviour of infants. The baby's cry, which is the nightmare of parents and begins as soon as he or she is put down in the bed, is the result of an evolutionary adaptation. The human infant belongs to the babywearing – a biological type of mammal that the mother carries on her body. Such carrying of babies who were not ready to move independently was a necessity for constantly wandering hunter-gatherer tribes.¹⁸⁸ The child is thus biologically programmed to detect when there is a separation from its caregiver, as this presents a danger of abandonment.¹⁸⁹ Although thousands of years have passed since the agrarian revolution, we are still born prepared for a nomadic lifestyle, and to settle permanently in one place is something we have to learn after birth. One can conclude from this that man was not made for work or otherwise – work is not

¹⁸⁷ J. Suzman, op. cit., p. 149.

¹⁸⁸ M. Szperlich-Kosmala, *Noszenie dzieci*, Natuli, Szczecin 2020, s. 16.

¹⁸⁹ K. Winder, *Why Does My Baby Wake Up When I Put Her Down?*, 14.07.2022, <https://www.bellybelly.com.au/baby-sleep/why-does-my-baby-wake-up-when-i-put-her-down/#.U7W6RII_t7L>, dostęp: 31.08.2022.

in his nature. However, if it is that simple and we are so out of touch with work, what has driven us to be so entangled in it after thousands of years of human development? Could there ever have been an alternative course of events in which humans would never have started farming and would have remained, according to their nature, hunter-gatherers forever?

TO LIVE IS TO WORK

Yuval Noah Harari in *Sapiens* puts forward the thesis that the agrarian revolution happened because, despite its negative impact on the lives of individuals, it benefited the species as a whole, allowing it to multiply considerably. Anthropologist James Suzman, in his book *Work: A History of How We Spend Our Time*, presents a slightly different conception. He invokes the concept of entropy, which comes from the field of physics and underlies the second law of thermodynamics. This principle states that the energy contained in a closed system spontaneously tends towards equalisation. Meanwhile, entropy determines the direction of these spontaneous processes. The German physicist Rudolf Clausius formulated the second law of thermodynamics as follows: "Heat can never pass from a colder to a warmer body without some other change, connected therewith, occurring at the same time".¹⁹⁰ To understand this law more easily, we can use the example of a cooling glass of hot tea. The beverage gives up its heat to its surroundings over time and takes on room temperature – the thermal energy of the objects in the room regulates itself. When it reaches a state of equilibrium, it is not possible for the tea to draw heat back from its surroundings and warm up. For this to happen, additional energy from outside the system must be used – such a change will no longer occur spontaneously. In physics, such controlled energy transfers are called work. What distinguishes living organisms from dead organisms is precisely the ability to actively take in and expend energy. An inanimate glass of tea gives off its heat spontaneously and therefore passively. From this point of view – to live means to work. Work appears as an activity that opposes entropy, it allows energy to be distributed in the system in an uneven manner, at least until the energy spontaneously regulates itself again.

¹⁹⁰ R. Clausius, *On a Modified Form of the Second Fundamental Theorem in the Mechanical Theory of Heat*, "London, Edinburgh, and Dublin Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science", London 1856, s. 86.

According to the theory of the 19th century physicist and philosopher Hermann von Helmholtz, the Universe as a whole is an isolated system and, consequently, it is also a subject to the laws of entropy. Therefore, since the thermal energy contained in the Universe tends towards an even distribution, a thermal equilibrium will eventually occur, resulting in the heat death of the Universe. Once it is no longer possible to convert thermal energy into work, the expansion of the Universe will be blocked. Nowadays, this theory is considered an over-interpretation, among other reasons because of the difficulty in proving that the Universe is an isolated system.¹⁹¹ However, this does not change the fact that entropy is a universally occurring phenomenon. By referring to it, one can define such fundamental concepts as the direction of the passage of time (described by the thermodynamic arrow of time – the future runs in the direction in which entropy increases). One can also seek answers to the question of why do we work.

This was the path taken by Erwin Schrödinger, who concluded that entropy shapes evolution. In order to understand how this occurs, one has to look at living organisms as thermodynamic engines that take fuel (food, water, air) and change it into heat energy, which they return irrevocably to their surroundings. In this way, life contributes to entropy – it searches for free energy, puts it to work and thus generates heat, which, by pursuing an even distribution in its surroundings, increases its entropy. The universe strives for thermal equilibrium and all living beings in it, through their activity, lead to an increase in entropy. Moreover, the more complex an organism is, the more thermal energy it is able to produce. The history of life on earth is a story of extracting energy from ever new sources. From bacteria to plants, eukaryotes, animals and humans; evolution has resulted in energy being expended on an ever-increasing scale.

A process that has contributed to the creation of new species is also taking place in the course of human development. When humans lived a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, they consumed and expended much less energy than when they learned to grow crops and raise animals. This is why the agrarian revolution had to happen, because it allowed the acceleration of the process of increasing the entropy of the Universe, a process that continues to move in the same direction. The industrial revolution is part of it, but so are all the inventions we have today that make it possible for us to work more and more efficiently, using more and more energy.

¹⁹¹ K. Zalewski, *Wykłady z termodynamiki fenomenologicznej i statystycznej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 1978, p. 85.

The theory that James Suzman puts forward in his book may seem rather grim. All life on Earth is created for the sole purpose of consuming energy, which, in the form of heat, diffuses somewhere in space, to one day bring about a state of absolute thermal equilibrium that will end all activity. It is as if humans, like all other living organisms, have for hundreds of thousands of years of their existence been concerned only with consuming and expelling the energy of the Universe, contributing to its decay like bacteria decomposing dead organic matter. However, this concept also has its bright side. It explains, for example, the existence of art, which from a Darwinist point of view seems to be an unnecessary activity – a waste of precious energy that should be directed towards those behaviours that directly contribute to the survival of the species. However, when we look at life from the perspective of its potential to increase entropy, wasting energy is a most desirable activity. By the way, such behaviour is not only engaged in by humans, but, for example, by masked weaver, which build a number of extremely elaborate nests during the breeding season, only to destroy them shortly thereafter for no obvious reason.

When Suzman writes that to live is to work, he draws on the definition of work from the field of physics. Indeed, in this view, work is essential to every living organism. Man is inextricably linked to it; by living, he transforms his environment and increases the entropy of the Universe. Mankind is constantly developing the technologies it uses towards ever more efficient extraction and expenditure of energy. Man's destiny, then, is to make the world more and more advanced, but this does not necessarily mean that it is to work for a living. Looking at life through the lens of the second law of thermodynamics does not determine that we must devote ourselves to getting money – there are, after all, so many other beautiful ways to waste energy. So why has work taken the form of selling time as we know it today? Does it benefit anyone in this way? When did we start thinking about work in this way?

MORAL ASPECT OF WORK

For hunter-gatherers, work was once a natural part of life, causing them no particular suffering. Later, for people living after the agrarian revolution, work became difficult to bear. The source of the torment accompanying work was explained by myths describing the transgressions of people against the

gods and the punishment sent for them in the form of drudgery work.

From this point of view, work is nothing pleasant or valuable, it is rather an unpleasant duty, and the need to fulfil it distracts us from the really important things. We see a manifestation of this kind of thinking in the views of the Ancients. For the Greeks, work was a humiliating occupation, it took up time and consumed energy – thus taking away the opportunity to devote oneself to self-improvement and contemplation. It was therefore occupied by slaves, wage earners or merchants. Citizens, that is, the few who could decide the fate of the state, were expected to occupy themselves with more dignified activities, fulfilling their political and social obligations. According to Aristotle, “manual labour deprives the soul of its freedom and makes it incapable of true virtue”.¹⁹²

This view, characteristic of southern Europe, took the opposite form in its north. There, work does not take away virtues, but shapes them, and it is through work that one can develop. This conviction is found in the way feudal societies are organised, where everyone is someone's servant.¹⁹³ The concept of servitude turns out to be extremely important in the Middle Ages; it is part of the understanding of the life cycle at that time, necessary to become a legitimate, adult member of society. The most well-known manifestation of this process is the one that craftsmen training with a master went through, first as apprentices, then as journeymen, eventually becoming masters and taking on their apprentices. However, people from the peasantry also served – girls and boys were sent to wealthier farms to apprentice in agriculture. Even the nobility was not spared from service, and the positions of page and lady of the manor were reserved for them. During their apprenticeship, young people were expected to become independent, learn manners and self-discipline in order to become responsible adults at the end of their service. Work was seen as a transformative process – it had the power to shape character and impart virtues.¹⁹⁴ This organisation of society, which ascribes an additional moral aspect to work, stems from more down to earth circumstances. The period of servitude was a period of waiting – for an inheritance, for the accumulation of sufficient wealth to be able to set up one's own farm (servants were paid) or, in the case of women, for a dowry. Therefore, this period of growing to adulthood took an unusually long time – fifteen or even twenty years and resulted in late marriages. The life cycle was aligned with the time needed to accumulate wealth.

¹⁹² M. Gorazda, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁹³ D. Graeber, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 353.

The transformative aspect of work began to disappear during the industrial revolution. It was increasingly common to work in factories, and therefore for someone rather than on one's own account. Although things were similar in the medieval master's workshop, work in an industrial factory was accompanied by a fundamental difference – there was no longer the chance to be independent. Servitude turned into work performed for those who had capital, but it did not offer the opportunity to accumulate enough capital to open a factory of one's own. The new realities of employment offered no prospects for workers. Since they no longer had anything to look forward to, they rebelled, started families earlier and earlier and without adequate material security, and this aroused the disgust of the middle class. Such workers were considered morally unready, unprepared for an adult, responsible life. The elites needed some new justification that could motivate the lower classes to work. This is where Protestant ethics came to the help, which perfectly complemented capitalism with a moral foundation.

In Protestant doctrine, work has a different role than in pagan antiquity or the catholic middle ages. The acquisition of money becomes a goal in itself.¹⁹⁵ This happens through Martin Luther and finds expression in his translation of the Bible into German. Luther translated the passage from the Wisdom of Sirach, which we know today as 'remain at your task' (Sir 11:21),¹⁹⁶ into 'remain in your profession', using the word *Beruf*, which meant *vocation* and had never before been used to describe professional work.¹⁹⁷ This procedure is a way of expressing a thought that is new to Christianity, according to which secular duties are valued as activities of the highest moral degree. Catholicism to this day recognises the division of the moral precepts contained in the Bible into the commandments of the Decalogue and the evangelical counsels. Every Catholic is obliged to observe the former, while the latter can be considered an extended set of principles. They are guidelines for those who wish to strive for perfection in their lives and are therefore often associated with the consecrated life. They are followed by priests and religious who have decided to dedicate their entire lives to the service of God. In Protestantism, the above division was removed and the evangelical counsels began to apply to the laity as well. This meant that asceticism left the monastic walls and began to penetrate everyday life. Thus, vocation no longer applied only to monks and priests. Every person had a God-given task to perform. This dogma is behind

¹⁹⁵ K.M. Kaczmarek, *Socjologia klasyczna 5. Weber Cz.4 Etyka protestancka a duch kapitalizmu*, 15.05.2020, part of the video from 14'12", <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-FAHzCfW7k>>, DOA 31.08.2022.

¹⁹⁶ New Catholic Bible translation.

¹⁹⁷ M. Weber, op. cit., s. 55.

Luther's use of the word *Beruf*, and it was in this way that work stopped being a means and became an end in itself, taking the form of ascetic training.

For Protestants, work is an activity that brings glory to God. One does not work in order to experience the delights of wealth, because it is inadvisable to enjoy the pleasures that money can give access to. On the contrary, one must know moderation and be frugal. At the same time, living in poverty is morally suspect – it indicates recklessness and wastefulness; one's wealth must be constantly multiplied. In Protestant optics, "if one wants to be poor, it is as if one wanted to be sick".¹⁹⁸ One must therefore be wealthy, but use one's resources minimally. At the same time, one cannot live on savings, for Protestants this would mean as much as rotting away. One must constantly work and multiply one's wealth; there is no upper limit, no point at which one can stop. In extreme cases, it was believed that one should not pass on one's wealth to children, because the ability to acquire money has an important impact on morality and therefore they should learn this skill themselves.¹⁹⁹ We can see echoes of these ascetic practices in the story of Powell Jobs and her husband's inheritance described earlier (see chapter *Meritocracy*).

An even stricter doctrine than the one to which Luther contributed by using the word *Beruf* is the Calvinist doctrine and its belief in predestination. According to this concept, salvation does not depend on how a person leads his or her life, but is already predetermined. This deprives followers of Calvinism of the possibility of influencing the divine verdict through the various forms of redemption of sins available to Catholics, such as confession, buying indulgences or intercession of saints. Since nothing can be done, it would seem that one could simply stop trying. However, the vision of eternal damnation is so frightening that it is impossible to ignore it and lead a dissipated life, hoping that perhaps, happily before we were born, God destined us to be saved. Especially since those who have been chosen for salvation would certainly not allow themselves to behave so inappropriately. The effect of such thinking is a kind of affirming reality – as long as I act like a person in a state of grace, there is a chance that I really am, whereas if I commit some transgression, it will mean that I do not belong to the group of the chosen ones. Behaving in a Christian manner is therefore not meant to lead to salvation (as it does in Catholicism), but is the result of already being saved. Although it is impossible to penetrate the judgements of God, Calvinists assume that one must believe in being among God's chosen ones. In order not to doubt this belief, one

¹⁹⁸ Ibidem, p. 118.

¹⁹⁹ Ibidem, p. 282.

must constantly check whether one remains in a state of grace – reject all temptations and persevere in one's profession, thus fulfilling one's vocation, thus multiplying the glory of God. This leads to adopting an ascetic lifestyle and constantly exercising control over it. All the activities a person undertakes are no longer the result of a spontaneous desire to do them; they are not, as Weber puts it, natural but rational.²⁰⁰ There is no longer room for pleasure or leisure: "Only action serves, according to the clearly revealed will of God, to multiply his glory. Wasting time is therefore the first and in principle the gravest sin. [...] Losing time on social entertainments, lazy chit-chat, luxury, even sleeping longer than is necessary for health [...] – all these are absolutely immoral".²⁰¹

The diligent work advocated by Calvinists has another function – "it becomes a tool for relieving states of religious fear".²⁰² It allows one to distract oneself from the prospect of spending eternity in hellish torment. Filling one's time with work enables one to divert one's thoughts from the difficult questions that rise to the surface when one sits idle. For Calvinists, that question is 'do I belong to the group of the saved?' whereas, as will be discussed later, work retains its function as a 'smokescreen', even stripped of its religious context.

As we have seen in this chapter, depending on the point of view taken, work can be seen as an obstacle to the attainment of moral perfection (as with the ancient Greeks) or as a means to it when it becomes a form of ascetic training (as in Protestant doctrine). Such conclusions are drawn from looking at this facet of work, in which it is anguish and punishment for sins. Work also contains a divine part, allowing a symbolic repetition of the cosmogony. By working, man creates, ordering the world according to his will, and by changing his environment, he also changes himself. Work helps shape character and can bring satisfaction. This bright dimension of work has its symbolic reference to the situation before man's expulsion from paradise. Afterwards, work shows its dark side, it becomes associated with effort, it becomes a curse. This happens at the same time as man becomes aware of his mortality. Emil Cioran calls the moment of exile from Eden the "fall into time".²⁰³ It is when one looks at work from the perspective of the limited time of human existence that it becomes an affliction. Even greater when we lose faith that beyond the life spent on earth,

²⁰⁰ Ibidem, p. 11.

²⁰¹ Ibidem, p. 113.

²⁰² K.M. Kaczmarek, op. cit, part of video from 21'.

²⁰³ M. Soniewicka, *Lekcja filozofii: Emil Cioran, Upadek w czas*, 8.10.2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7kiasM_tE&t=1611s>, DOA 31.08.2022.

there is another, better life waiting for us in the hereafter. Let us look at how work has shifted from being seen in the context of its religious significance to being an entirely secular activity.

SECULARISATION – IS THERE A LIFE AFTER THE DEADLINE?

Rather than treating work merely as a means to achieve life's goals, Protestants saw it as an ethical duty. This became fertile ground for the development of capitalism. It is worth noting on this occasion that Protestantism did not directly create capitalism, but instead contributed to its economic ethic based on the rational management of life. Today, capitalism is already doing very well without the remembrance of its ideological and religious roots. Such a development, that is, the gradual separation of capitalism from the spiritual significance that Protestant ethics brought to it, was feared by theologians as early as in the 17th century.²⁰⁴ Asceticism, modest living and the avoidance of luxuries, combined with diligent work and a focus on undertaking only those activities that are profitable, have one simple result – the multiplication of one's wealth. However, as wealth increases, the number of temptations grows too. In this way, the Protestant doctrine sets a trap for itself. Adherence to its principles leads to an increase of wealth, which has a secularising power and causes the faithful to abandon living according to strict religious rules. John Wesley, an Anglican theologian and clergyman, described this phenomenon as follows: "I fear that where wealth has multiplied, there has been an equal impoverishment of the content of religion. [...] For religion requires the working out of both diligence and austerity, and these cannot produce anything but wealth. And if wealth grows, pride, ambition and love of the world in all its possible forms arrives. [...] Thus, although the form of religion remains, its spirit gradually disappears".²⁰⁵ And its place, we should add, is taken by the *spirit of capitalism*, to which Max Weber dedicated his famous work.

²⁰⁴ For example, such as Richard Baxter, M. Weber writes on this subject in: M. Weber, op. cit., p. 112.

²⁰⁵ R. Southey, *Life of Wesley*, cit. per M. Weber op. cit., p. 126-127.

The Weberian *spirit of capitalism* is a mentality, characteristic of Western culture, filled with rationality. According to Weber, capitalism was born in the West because of certain features of the local culture that cannot be found anywhere else. These include the habit of creating systems and then organising life according to their guidelines. Above all, the “rational and orderly system of doing science”²⁰⁶ is an example, but dense ordering structures also permeate other aspects of life, such as Western art (Weber mentions linear perspective and harmonic music as examples), politics (with its elaborate apparatus of government officials), or religion (and its canon law). Although rationality has been at the heart of Western culture for centuries, it came to power so strongly in the modern era for the first time. During this time, Enlightenment philosophy becomes popular, the development of the natural sciences accelerates and technological advances trigger the Industrial Revolution. It is in such an epochal climate that modern capitalism is born. At the same time, it is a period in which science takes the lead and religion loses its importance. Tomáš Sedláček writes: “The modern era attempted to demystify the surrounding world and to represent it by mechanical, mathematical, deterministic and rationalistic means, and to get rid of axioms impossible to prove empirically, that is, for example, faith and religion”.²⁰⁷

In the light of the new leading philosophy, there is no longer a need to dedicate one’s life to work because of a God-given duty, because belief in the possibility of salvation has ended. Nevertheless, work is still the bearer of existential meaning, perhaps even more powerfully than ever before. This is because when the vision of eternity has disappeared, the time available to man has been rapidly reduced – he must reduce himself only to the temporality. If we treat our life as finite at the temporal stage, excluding any continuation after death, then we are faced with the compulsion to manage life in such a way that it is meaningful at every moment – our every action must lead to something. “We perceive our being active as a permanent overcoming of finitude, presumably in the hope of being able to overcome, on the same principle, our last finitude as well. And if it nevertheless appears, one can not only tell oneself that one has really lived, but one can also possibly point to works that will outlive us”.²⁰⁸ Work, then, allows one to give meaning to life, and if it fails to do so, it at least allows one not to confront its meaninglessness. “Stagnation is not allowed, every «empty time» reminds us of death, of ‘insurmountable’ finitude”.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ M. Weber, op. cit., p.7.

²⁰⁷ T. Sedláček, op. cit., p. 185.

²⁰⁸ P. Heintel, *Zeitverdichtung und Innovationshysterie* cit. per U. Schnabel, op.cit., p. 182-183.

²⁰⁹ Ibidem.

The moments when we do nothing are difficult to bear. In prisons, being deprived of the opportunity to work is seen as a punishment. For the unemployed, time without work does not pass as pleasantly as on holiday. When we allow ourselves to relax in our everyday life, we do so in order to regenerate and move on. Life is only one and its time is limited, so this time must not be wasted. We are annoyed when we are waiting in a queue or in a traffic jam, even the precious seconds irretrievably lost when a website loads too slowly can throw us off balance. By following this line of thought, we are contributing to the ever-increasing acceleration of life. As Hartmut Rosa writes: “According to the dominant cultural logic in Western societies, the measure of our quality of life [...] is the number and depth of temporal experiences and sensations”.²¹⁰ Therefore, we try to accommodate as many of these experiences as possible in our lives, especially as the number of possibilities nowadays seems to be almost limitless. This limitlessness of potential activities plays painfully against the limited time of our lives. Every decision to ‘invest’ time in the way we choose is at the same time closing off the way for hundreds of other scenarios our lives could unfold. There is no turning back from such decisions, the pressure is immense, so it would be worth giving them some serious thought. The problem is that there is no time for this. We have to keep rushing, because after all, *time is money*. But what does that really mean?

TIME AND MONEY

The popular maxim *time is money* perfectly expresses the rational mentality characteristic of Western culture. The phrase *time is money* is most often attributed to Benjamin Franklin, but it was already known before him. The earliest work in which these words can be found is Benedetto Cotruglie’s *The Book of the Art of Trade* from 1573.²¹¹ However, it is Franklin’s essay *Advice to Young Tradesman*, together with the context in which he set the aforementioned phrase, that is the one most popularised. When Max Weber wanted to define what was the spirit of capitalism he was analysing, he just used Franklin’s text and called it a document of the spirit of capitalism. Let us take a closer look at it to try to grasp this spirit.

²¹⁰ H. Rosa, *Przyspieszenie, wyobcowanie, rezonans: projekt krytycznej teorii późnonowoczesnej czasowości*, transl.. J. Duraj, J. Kottan, Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, Gdańsk 2020, p. 49.

²¹¹ J. Suzman, op. cit., p. 264.

The full quote from Franklin is: „Remember that Time is Money. He that can earn Ten Shillings a Day by his Labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that Day, tho' he spends but Sixpence during his Diversion or Idleness, ought not to reckon That the only Expence; he has really spent or rather thrown away Five Shillings besides.” and further „Remember that Money is of a prolific generating Nature. Money can beget Money, and its Offspring can beget more, and so on. Five Shillings turn'd, is Six: Turn'd again, 'tis Seven and Three Pence; and so on 'til it becomes an Hundred Pound. The more there is of it, the more it produces every Turning, so that the Profits rise quicker and quicker. He that kills a breeding Sow, destroys all her Offspring to the thousandth Generation. He that murders a Crown, destroys all it might have produc'd, even Scores of Pounds”.²¹²

This addition allows us to identify two meanings contained in the saying *time is money*. The first concerns the mercantilization of time. The conversion of time into money is an expression of a broader trend of thought that treats man and the time of his life in the same way as other elements of the production process – raw materials, tools or products. The concept of the *Man-Machine* by Julien Offray de La Mettrie emerged in the 18th century. The ground for this idea had already been prepared by Cartesian dualism, but with La Mettrie it went a step further. Here, we are not dealing with a soul that controls the body as in Descartes, but we are narrowing down the thinking of man to his body alone. Any phenomena that were previously considered to be states of the soul, La Mettrie recognises as arising from the purely physical activities of the body. By negating the existence of an immortal soul, and thus limiting the picture of man to only that which is material in him, he was able to move it “into the realm of Enlightenment science, into the domain of what can be counted and weighed and thus controlled”.²¹³ Human being lost its unique status, which philosophy and theology had attributed to it for centuries. It was incorporated into nature, susceptible to scientific cognition, later becoming part of rational systems. Marcin Napiórkowski regards the emergence of the concept of *Man-Machine* as a key moment in the birth of capitalism.²¹⁴ For Weber, the calculating spirit of capitalism is its constitutive feature and the governing principle of the whole way of life.²¹⁵ This is why Franklin's essay occupies such an important place in Weber's description of the spirit of capitalism.

²¹² B. Franklin, *Advice to a young Tradesman, written by an old One*, in: Idem, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 3, January 1, 1745, through June 30, 1750, ed. Leonard W. Labaree. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, pp. 304–308.

²¹³ M. Napiórkowski, op. cit., p. 251.

²¹⁴ Ibidem.

²¹⁵ M. Weber, op. cit., p. 260.

Time is money therefore means that human beings and their lives can be measured, and the results of these measurements analysed and compared, as one standardised measure – money – is applied to them. From this first Franklinian principle follows the second – missed opportunities are treated as a real loss. All activities, when we apply the measure of time to them, can be converted into money. Referring directly to the quote – if we know how much we can earn by working for an hour, it means that this is the cost we will pay if we choose to walk or lie down instead of working for that time. With this outlook on life, simple pleasures that might seem accessible to everyone are no longer so – for those who work in the sweat of their brow to multiply their wealth, they become expensive entertainments. Following this logic further, it turns out that such 'vanity' activities are only free for those whose time is worth nothing. Framing the issue in this way is a pretext for stigmatising the poor and fuels the meritocracy machine already described.

Of course, this view of time is not an isolated idea of Franklin's. It stems from an already existing climate of thought, and thus from the modern ideas mentioned in the previous chapter. Making possibility a necessity is the result of moving away from a belief in gods and transferring this belief to science and technological progress. How does this occur? With the departure of the divine, an area that was unattainable for humans has disappeared; now everything is just a matter of time – we are led to believe that science will enable us to solve the problems plaguing humanity. Many of the futurological fantasies of the 20th century have already come true. For example, in the animated series *The Jetsons* from 1962, which showed a vision of everyday life in the year 2062, autonomous hoovers, smartwatches and video calls were among the inventions that were accurately predicted (it is worth mentioning, by the way, that the weekly working time in the fantasy world of the Jetsons was nine hours – we are still a long way from realising this vision, however, this one concerns more social organisation than technological innovations). Observing the rapid pace of scientific development deepens the belief that the world is possible to know and shape completely according to human will. And since nothing is impossible, all failures are due to mistakes made or insufficient commitment to avoiding them. Whether it is active action or mere passivity turning into negligence – responsibility still lies with us.

How scientific developments have blurred the boundary between *can* and *must* is described by Marcin Napiórkowski, using an example taken from the world of the beauty industry. He analyses today's frequently raised problem of unattainable beauty standards, which are the cause of lowered self-esteem for many women and men. Some brands, such as Dove, cleverly exploit the existence of this phenomenon and run marketing campaigns to promote 'real

beauty' and contribute to the acceptance of their bodies among the recipients of such advertising. This acceptance can, of course, be helped by choosing the right brand of cosmetics and, with them, all the ideological baggage they sell – in this case, by standing for 'naturalness'. However, it is not unreal beauty that is the problem – it has been portrayed by artists for centuries and has not caused a wave of criticism on the grounds that it is the result of idealisation. Ancient sculptures of goddesses, gods and heroes are a good example. Portraying perfect bodies was supposed to evoke aesthetic pleasure, but did not cause complexes. The situation has changed dramatically since "the ideal is no longer beyond the limit of possibility".²¹⁶ The development of plastic surgery, but also increasingly effective cosmetics, diets or workout programmes, give the feeling that having a perfect body is within everyone's reach. Previously, there was nothing left to do but accept the shortcomings of one's beauty. Nowadays, there are many, often very invasive and expensive treatments available to dramatically change your appearance or stop the visible signs of ageing. The fact that not everyone can or wants to afford such interventions is secondary. If there is an opportunity to improve our image and we do not take advantage of it, it means that we are imperfect by choice. "To be able to be beautiful and not do so is one of the greatest sins according to modern culture".²¹⁷ We can say the same about being smart, rich or popular – being able has turned into a must, seizing opportunities has become the new moral imperative.²¹⁸ It is a bitter imperative, for the delusion that everything depends on us creates a sense of guilt when we notice that we fail to live up to expectations.

There is an echo of Protestant ethics in the pursuit of perfection treated as a moral obligation. As I wrote earlier, the recognition of the evangelical counsels as obligatory not only for consecrated persons, but also for the laity, moved monastic asceticism beyond the monastic walls. In this way, the pursuit of perfection became a universally binding moral requirement. Such monastic discipline is also referred to by Michel Foucault when, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, he describes the history of the prison system and, at the same time, the birth of a system of surveillance that permeates contemporary society. As he writes: "For centuries, entire religious orders acted as teachers of discipline: specialists of pace, great technicians of rhythm and regularity. These ways of managing time were later adapted to the organisation of hospitals, prisons, military units, and workplaces – "the rigour

²¹⁶ M. Napiórkowski, op. cit., p. 317.

²¹⁷ Ibidem.

²¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 279.

of industrial time long retained a religious stigma".²¹⁹ Key to these techniques was the division of time into smaller sections that were easier to control, to be sure that time was not spent on unnecessary activities. In the case of the monasteries, this was to help avoid temptation at every finer moment of life. When this temporal regime moved into factories, the aim became to maximise profits. Dividing time into small sections promotes the idea of squeezing as much out of it as possible, looking at each activity as closely as possible and optimising it. As Weber pointed out – 'the interests of God and the interests of the employer are here remarkably aligned'.²²⁰

It is no coincidence that surveillance is referred to in the context of the fragmentation of time. The division of events into short segments results in a phenomenon that Foucault called *micropenalisation*. It concerns time – punishment for lateness, absences or interruptions, but also other aspects such as inattention, carelessness or sloppiness.²²¹ The introduction of such discipline means that individuals are no longer punished for significant transgressions, but for imperfection. We suffer consequences not only for our actions, but also for what, although we could, we did not do. This is another iteration of the message contained in the saying time is money – the belief that opportunity is a necessity. For this reason, the innumerable opportunities we face every day become a cause for growing remorse.

By saying *time is money* we take away the possibility of time having a value in itself, we have to fill it with events that produce a measurable profit in order to be able to consider that it has not been wasted. By saying *time is money* we are commodifying time – we are applying a homogeneous measure to an extremely complex concept. Each of us experiences our time quite differently. There are moments that drag on forever, others pass in the blink of an eye. In order for us to function smoothly in Western society, we synchronise our lives with the time that clocks measure. It is worth noting that this is not the only possible model – anthropologist Edward Hall made a distinction between monochronic cultures – typical of Western industrialised nations and polychronic cultures – found in African, Asian or South American countries, which are characterised by more flexible schedules.²²² In our cultural circle, we are obliged to know what time it is and live according to an external time regime, tuning our daily life to it. If we want to remain included in Western society, we must remain obedient

²¹⁹ M. Foucault, *Nadzorować i karać. Narodziny więzienia*, transl. T. Komendant, Aletheia, Warsaw 2009, p. 145.

²²⁰ M. Weber, op. cit., p. 288.

²²¹ M. Foucault, op. cit., p. 175.

²²² U. Schnabel, op. cit., p. 191.

to the indications of the clocks. Only sometimes, when we are lazing around, do we feel that we are masters of our own time. These moments, however, are extremely rare in the rush of modernity. In the remaining moments, if not to us, then to whom does the power over time really belong?

POWER OVER TIME

The path that labour has taken in terms of its existential meaning, as described above, parallels the path that time has taken as it has passed under the power of ever different forces. For this reason, the chapter above can be summarised by analysing how the power over time has been formed through the centuries.

The first stage in which the earth was inhabited by hunter-gatherer societies, that is, the interval from the beginning of the species *homo sapiens* until the Neolithic agrarian revolution, is a period in which work was not clearly separated from leisure time. Rather, it was an indispensable and natural part of existence. The same was true of time, which was not seen in isolation from humans. Time was not commoditised, and therefore not an object of exchange, and therefore not in short supply. Nor was time some kind of separate subject of interest; it remained merely the medium in which events take place. As James Suzman writes: "Hunter-gatherers concentrated almost exclusively on the present and the immediate future".²²³ They did not have to think far into the future or make far-reaching plans, because they met their needs on the fly, adapting to the circumstances at hand – they hunted when they were hungry, moved camps when springs dried up or when food ran out. They also paid little attention to the past. Because they lived a nomadic lifestyle, they left no traces of history to cultivate. They did not build buildings that would last for years, even the burial sites of their dead were abandoned and forgotten within a generation or two.²²⁴ With this state of affairs, no one controlled time, no clocks or calendars were used; time, like work, simply was.

The change came with the development of agriculture. Man began to pay more attention to the passage of time, as he made his fate dependent on repeated cycles of vegetation. Cultivating the land required planning and therefore

²²³ J. Suzman, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

²²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 270.

looking ahead. The effort put into the work only brought results once the crop was harvested. It was also necessary to anticipate how much food had to be produced in order to survive until the next harvest. Living in the present was therefore a thing of the past. In this period we have a cultural perception of time as circular. It is a time over which power is exercised by nature. The passage of time is determined by phenomena associated with nature: the changing seasons, the movements of the celestial bodies, sunrises and sunsets, and biophysiological processes such as ageing.

The circularity of time is reflected in the architecture of the time. A good example is the Stonehenge stone circle, which can be considered one of the first forms of calendar. In the Polish lands, a similar architectural principle can be found in the form of stone circles, such as those in Odry and Węsiory. By indicating when the solstices and changes of seasons take place, these constructions allow reference points to be found in circular time. The settled lifestyle brought about by the agrarian revolution became the basis for being able to talk about building and architecture at all. In addition to the cessation of wandering, a change in the perception of time played its part in the birth of these concepts. Thinking about the future was indispensable when it came to the creation of structures whose construction required an effort lasting many years or even many generations (Stonehenge was built over the course of a millennium). So they were built for those who were to use the architecture in the future. On the other hand, contact with objects that had been constructed many years earlier extended the time horizon to include a glimpse into the past. Nevertheless, in accordance with the concept of eternal return contained in the circular perception of time, what had passed was simultaneously perceived as what was to come. Cyclical time accompanied agricultural societies for many centuries – this is how the ancient Greeks or the 'barbarian' tribes of Europe perceived the world, but it was not adopted by Western civilisation.

As civilisation developed, agriculture became more efficient, people settled in larger centres and societies became more hierarchical. The balance of power changed and man became independent of the influence of nature. More than that, he stepped into a role previously reserved for the gods and it was he who began to order the world to his liking. The power over time no longer belonged to nature and the perception of time changed from cyclical to linear. The spread of this type of cultural time is attributed to the development of Christianity, but linear time was already characteristic of Judaism. Both of these great monotheistic religions describe the world as moving in a set direction – having a beginning and moving towards certain future events (the coming of the Messiah or the Last Judgement). Christianity and Judaism are religions based on sacred texts. Linear time runs unidirectionally like a narrative in books,

where once written down events remain constant. Cyclical time was closer to oral transmissions, whose existence depended on their recurrence, undergoing modifications and updates. Biblical time as written down in the books is a time that does not repeat itself, but runs unstoppably towards its goal. It is a time geared towards salvation, and it is ruled by God. We can see that in the Middle Ages time is considered the property of God by looking at the prohibition of usury prevailing at the time. Money could not be lent at interest because this meant making a profit from the passing of time, which was the domain of God. "A usurer, by selling a thing that does not belong to him, is a thief of the divine good".²²⁵ So, as we can see, time belongs to God and it is God who is in control of it, because "everything happens with outgoing necessity from Him".²²⁶ God's plan has already foreseen all events in advance. In his reflections on time, Saint Augustine describes this state of affairs using the metaphor of a song.²²⁷ The history of the world is like a song, and our lives are a part of it, coming to fruition as we sing it. Although we ourselves do not have access to the future, for God the whole song is known in advance, and we in our own lives are not so much playing but rather being played out. Augustine's metaphor is reflected in the Protestant principle of predestination described earlier. Time, which is ruled by God, is correlated with work, which unfolds according to the rules of monastic discipline. Work that has a moral dimension and is intended to help achieve salvation. In the space of mediaeval cities, the sign of the divine power over time were the towers of the cathedrals. It was on these that there was a clock to which the local community could refer, and perhaps even more important in marking reference points in time was the sound of the bells spreading from the church tower to the whole neighbourhood.

For a long time, the towers of cathedrals were a dominant feature in the landscape of European cities. Until the 18th century, when the Industrial Revolution added another tall object to their skyline - the factory chimneys. They represent another change that took place in the reign of time. Modern time, though still linear, became secular time. The focus on salvation was exchanged for a belief in progress. So now the history of humanity is the history of its development. There is no longer any question of recurring cycles, but neither has a point been set at which progress would fulfil and end. Although the goal is not clearly defined, the direction of development is known. Everything that is coming is new and increasingly advanced. Technological progress has

225 C. Strzelecka, *Wartość czasu jakościowego w antropologii kulturowej*, [in:] *Jaka jakość? Igranie (z) jakości(q) we współczesnej humanistyce*, red. M. Kasprzak, Z. Reznik et al., Fundacja Wersja, Wrocławskie Huby oraz Przedmieścia Mikotajskie i Oławskie 2016, p. 184.

226 R. Safranski, *Czas: co czyni z nami i co czynimy z niego*, transl. B. Baran, Czytelnik, Warsaw 2017, p. 41.

227 Saint Augustine, *Wyznania*, cit. per R. Safranski, op. cit., p. 42.

forced a very significant change in timekeeping – its standardisation. Until now, each locality used its own local time. After the invention of the steam engine, rail travel became more widespread and movement accelerated considerably, so the problem of developing consistent timetables arose. Minor discrepancies in individual local times became noticeable. To remedy this, universal time, referring to the hour as determined by the astronomical observatory in London's Greenwich, was introduced initially in England and by 1884 worldwide.

The unification of time is a very important point in the way it is perceived. It shows how, with technological advances accelerating the pace of life, the global network of dependencies has also grown. Nowadays, if we do not want to risk being excluded from society, we have to be in sync with events all over the world. It would be impossible to live according to the local time of one's locality, not to mention one's individual time, which for each of us runs at a different rhythm. The process of synchronising individuals to the modes of the social clock was clearly evident in factories, where human work was adapted to the pace of the machine. The lateness of one worker could cause a lot of downtime in belt production, so great importance began to be attached to punctuality. Taylorism, which is a method of organising work created by Frederick Winslow Taylor to maximise efficiency and based on setting quantitative standards for work, calculated to the nearest second, became popular. Today's corporations continue to draw on this concept, with developments in technology allowing them to supervise even more accurately and introduce ever more exacting standards. Amazon, for example, uses algorithms that dismiss employees fully automatically, without any human intervention, if they are not working efficiently enough. Their productivity, in turn, is measured by, among other things, the parameter of time at work spent on activities other than the task at hand. This boils down to the fact that, as Maciej Olanicki writes in his article: "At Amazon, you can be automatically fired from your job for frequenting the toilet".²²⁸ Close monitoring of employees' activities is not only the domain of the courier industry giant, it can also be found in companies where office work is carried out. Some companies check how long their employees are actually in front of a computer, using motion and temperature sensors mounted under their desks. The heat emitted by the human body slightly increases the ambient temperature, so if an employee leaves the desk, the temperature that the sensor registers drops and the employer receives data on when and for how long the workstation was left.²²⁹

228 M. Olanicki, *Algorytmy Amazonu mogą zwalniać pracowników bez ingerencji ludzi*, 26.04.2019, <https://teamquest.pl/blog/1093_algorytmy-maszynowe-zwolneinia-pracownikow>, DOA 2.09.2022.

229 Ł. Guza, *Czujniki obecności mogą być nielegalne. Zainstalowała je pod biurkami m.in. jedna*

Careful control of workers became a necessity when time became money. It was at that time when separate jobs dedicated solely to the supervision of others working appeared. The nature of work changed, and so did the perception of time. As the importance of religion began to decline with the popularisation of Enlightenment philosophy, power over time no longer belonged to God and passed into the hands of capital. In the cityscape, factories can be seen as the visual representation of this transfer. Harari calls this new perception of time his "industrial reckoning".²³⁰ A key feature of modern thinking about time is discipline. It applies not only to factory workers, but permeates the whole of modern society. Children in educational institutions are adapted to follow an imposed rhythm of tasks. This training goes even further and, according to some educational methods, even infants have to be taught to follow sleeping and feeding schedules. However, the top-down imposition of a uniform time to live, to the rhythm of which society was adapted, is not the last of the stages in the evolution of the perception of time. After unified time comes the diffused one.

In the twentieth century, a single, shared clock measuring the minutes at work or school was replaced by a multitude of personal watches worn on the wrists. Years of social training, sometimes practised from the very first days of life, had the desired effect and discipline was transformed into self-discipline. Nowadays, we are constantly monitoring our own time and can do so even more precisely with watches with digital displays. Wrist watches with LED displays have been on the market since the 1970s, but they are only part of the clocks we use every day. We check the time on our phones, computer monitors, public transport displays, microwaves, radios and many other devices around us. Equipped with such a considerable number of tools for precise timekeeping, we have begun to incorporate Taylorian management methods into our daily lives. Constantly checking the time has become an uncontrollable habit. Each day is made up of events that must fulfil themselves within a strict time frame: starting with waking up at the sound of the alarm clock, followed by such trivial tasks as the time measured by an electric toothbrush to brush one's teeth, followed by the stress of the commute to work (because, after all, we cannot allow ourselves to be late); at work itself, overwhelming schedules and deadlines that are too close to hand; and, at the end of the day, perhaps a moment's rest, usually also time-bound, so that, in accordance with Protestant ethics, we rest only as much as is necessary to regenerate before taking on further work.

z dużych firm branży medialnej, 6.12.2018, <<https://gospodarka.dziennik.pl/praca/artykuly/586688,-monitoring-pracy-czujniki-pracownik-prawo-pracy.html>>, DOA 2.09.2022.

230 Y.N. Harari, op. cit. p. 432.

Such a life on the run consists of disconnected fragments rather than a logical sequence of events leading in a precise direction. Thus, theories have emerged claiming that nowadays there is a shift from a linear perception of time to the punctuated one.²³¹ The history of humanity as a whole, as well as the separate lives of individuals, are no longer perceived as stories unfolding towards some specific goal. They resemble more the structure of websites, where, by using links, we move to more or less related content, which, however, do not form any collective narrative. Linear time to punctuated time is like text to hypertext. Such a breakdown of internal continuity is also observed in the contemporary specificity of work. It now does not offer the same sense of stability as it once did, when one spent one's entire life with one employer or in one profession (to say nothing of the mediaeval realities, when the same profession was practised over generations). Nowadays, we change jobs statistically seven times in the course of our careers, and this trend will only increase.²³² It is harder to identify with one's work, it is harder to build relationships. A phenomenon that corresponds to the fragmentation of time is called the *uberisation of employment*,²³³ also referred to as the *gig economy*. This is work that is based on carrying out small jobs that often, despite their apparent ad hoc nature, take the form of a primary source of livelihood. This type of employment is usually obtained through digital platforms. They are used by corporations such as Uber, Amazon and Glovo. This is by no means a marginal issue, as, according to the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, by 2020 this form of employment could affect up to 50% of workers in the US and remain a growing trend.²³⁴ The tough situation of people working in this way is illustrated by the documentary film *The Gig Is Up* from 2021. Workers provide their services to particular companies, often in their company uniforms, via a shared app that, in addition to enabling them to accept assignments, rigorously collects data and feedback on their performance. Despite this, they are treated as self-employed, without rights to sickness insurance, protection from dismissal and outside minimum wage regulations. The gig is a job with no continuity, consisting of independent fragments – small assignments that can arise at any time. It therefore requires being ready to accept them at all times, otherwise the job will be taken by someone else and the algorithm will rate the employee as not committed enough. Such jobs offer neither the prospect of promotion and development, nor a sense of stability, but they are easily

231 C. Strzelecka, op. cit., p. 185-188.

232 Ile razy zmienisz pracę w życiu?, 17.05.2011, <<https://weblog.infopraca.pl/2011/05/ile-razy-zmienisz-prace-w-zyciu/>>, DOA 2.09.2022.

233 R.Woś, op. cit., p. 275.

234 Gig economy: Czy praca „na fuchach” zastąpi zatrudnienie na etacie?, 25.07.2019, <<https://www.parp.gov.pl/component/content/article/57320:gig-economy-czy-praca-na-fuchach-zastapi-zatrudnienie-na-etacie>>, DOA 2.09.2022.

accessible and this is the main reason for their popularity. Often, however, they may be the only option for a person. By doing a job in which we are seemingly self-employed, we control ourselves, because, after all, our time is money. No additional supervision is therefore needed; we ourselves know well what the consequences of our tardiness will be and whether we can afford them.

This new form of work is very different from that done in 19th century factories, just as the perception of time has once again changed. As well as control in factories, we are also subjecting ourselves to self-control. Time discipline has been replaced by self-discipline. A life tuned to the indications of the clock is now completely natural to us. "The process of civilisation leads man to transform foreign compulsions into his own. The public time of clocks regulating movement and work is internalised into a form of time conscientiousness".²³⁵ In his book *Alienation and Acceleration. Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality*, Hartmut Rosa writes about how the assimilation of time norms is nowadays at the heart of the educational process. He puts forward the thesis that temporal norms have a form of totalitarian power. They meet the criteria of totalitarianism because they exert pressure on the will and behaviour of almost all subjects, and it is almost impossible to criticise or fight against them.²³⁶ Just as it is almost impossible for a person not to work, and therefore to stop selling his time. Because, for this to happen, time should stop being treated as a commodity.

As could be seen, the process that led to time becoming money took many hundreds of years and certainly cannot be reversed overnight. However, it should be remembered that the situation was not always as it is today – once upon a time, man treated the passage of time more casually. Time being money is therefore not the only option. Therefore, it seems that it is possible to take action to influence and redirect the further evolution of the perception of time. In order to be able to oppose totalitarian rule, it is first necessary to know it. I see the visual representation of modern time control in skyscrapers. They are the architecture of the power of money. In the next chapter, I will therefore analyse the messages communicated by skyscrapers, looking for clues in their symbolism that might suggest how to escape the temporal regime of modernity.

²³⁵ R. Safranski, op. cit., p. 74.

²³⁶ H. Rosa, op. cit., p. 115-116.

HEAVEN- SCRAPERS

WHAT MAKES UP A SKYSCRAPER?

As we saw in the previous chapter, the different stages of the cultural perception of time are reflected in architecture. Architecture is a reflection of the prevailing worldview at a given moment in history. It is even sometimes considered a metaphor for philosophy. According to Prof. Jan Hudzik, the architectural metaphor captures the essence of philosophical reflection, as it “consists [...] in reaching reality by extracting it from its «disorder» and thus «building» it: giving it shapes that are assimilable to the human mind”.²³⁷ Architecture is a material sign of the spirit of the times; it is influenced by the thought climate of the era. However, this influence does not only run in one direction, as architecture influences society and shapes its behaviour. Social order corresponds to architectural order, and the organisation of space helps to maintain an organised society.²³⁸ Architecture can therefore be used as a political tool. For centuries, it has allowed rulers to add splendour, confirm their status and consolidate their dominance, as we can see from castles, palaces or triumphal arches. At the turn of the 20th century, when there was a worldwide search for national styles, architecture served to create a sense of national identity. It also influences our everyday life. Twentieth-century functionalism, which was intended to respond to human needs, according to art historian Wolfgang Welsch, uses a rather imperative language. Welsch considers that the modernist slogan *form follows function* should rather sound *life follows architecture*.²³⁹

In her introduction to the book *Space, Philosophy and Architecture*, Ewa Rewers writes: “Spatiality [...] together with the terms and concepts linking it to society, power, economics, organisation, cognition, experience, sensation, has become one of the keys for opening up individual biographies and social structures”.²⁴⁰ So when it came to translating the topic of this dissertation into visual language, architecture became a natural choice for me because of its multifaceted nature. The relationship between time and money, and the resulting situation of the working man in the realities of the new capitalism,

237 J.P. Hudzik, *Architektura jako metafora filozofii* [in]: *Przestrzeń, filozofia i architektura: osiem rozmów o poznawaniu, produkowaniu i konsumowaniu przestrzeni*, red. E. Rewers, Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, Poznań 1999, p. 15.

238 Z. Bauman, *Globalizacja*, cit. per P. Cembrzyńska, *Wieża Babel. Nowoczesny projekt porządkowania świata i jego dekonstrukcja*, Universitas, Cracow 2012, p. 256.

239 P. Cembrzyńska, op. cit., p. 80.

240 E. Rewers, *Wstęp* [in]: *Przestrzeń, filozofia i architektura*..., op.cit., p. 7.

are themes unrelated to any obvious visual representation. However, they seem to be graspable through architectural metaphors.

In my paintings I use the figure of the skyscraper, which I treat as a material emanation of the spirit of capitalism. If the architecture of socialist realism was national in form and socialist in content, the content of skyscrapers is undoubtedly capitalist. I call the skyscrapers I paint *heavenscrapers*, because I associate them rather with a religion-like faith than with their extraordinary height. What I mean by this is, first and foremost, that *heavenscrapers* express a faith in progress, but also a belief that time is money and that everything is possible if we try hard enough, in other words, a series of beliefs that the free-market economy brings with it. When I paint the *heavenscrapers*, I try to reflect the impression they make on me. I am not concerned with individual buildings, the architectural designs behind them and the engineering solutions that make them function. Individual examples of high-rise buildings are not important to me, but rather the overall idea of a skyscraper and its significance. What is relevant is everything by which we know that it is a skyscraper that we are dealing with. This is why the *heavenscrapers* I paint are partly non-existent buildings, and sometimes not even buildings but geometrical forms that only refer to the motif of a high-rise. If I paint on the basis of a photograph of an existing building, I draw attention not to what is unique and characteristic about it, but to what is most typical for skyscrapers. I try to recognise and then show what is the essence of the skyscraper.

When I speak of a *heavenscraper* in this dissertation, I mean a building used for work that is tall and glazed. Of course, office work can be done successfully in a Renaissance townhouse, and also some skyscrapers host not offices but hotel rooms or flats. But for some reason, a glance at Paris' La Défense or London's City is enough for us to realise that this is where the business centres of cities are located. So I am not looking for a precise and unassailable definition, but one that, rather than describing the functions that a skyscraper can perform, talks about what we imagine happens in it.

The three characteristics of the *heavenscraper* that I have listed are the three conditions that had to be met for the first skyscrapers to be built. They are as well the three changes that took place after the industrial revolution that made a new type of building possible.

Firstly, the glass: in order for the façade of the skyscraper to be largely glazed, it was necessary to use steel in its construction, which made it possible to relieve pressure on the walls and introduce much larger windows.

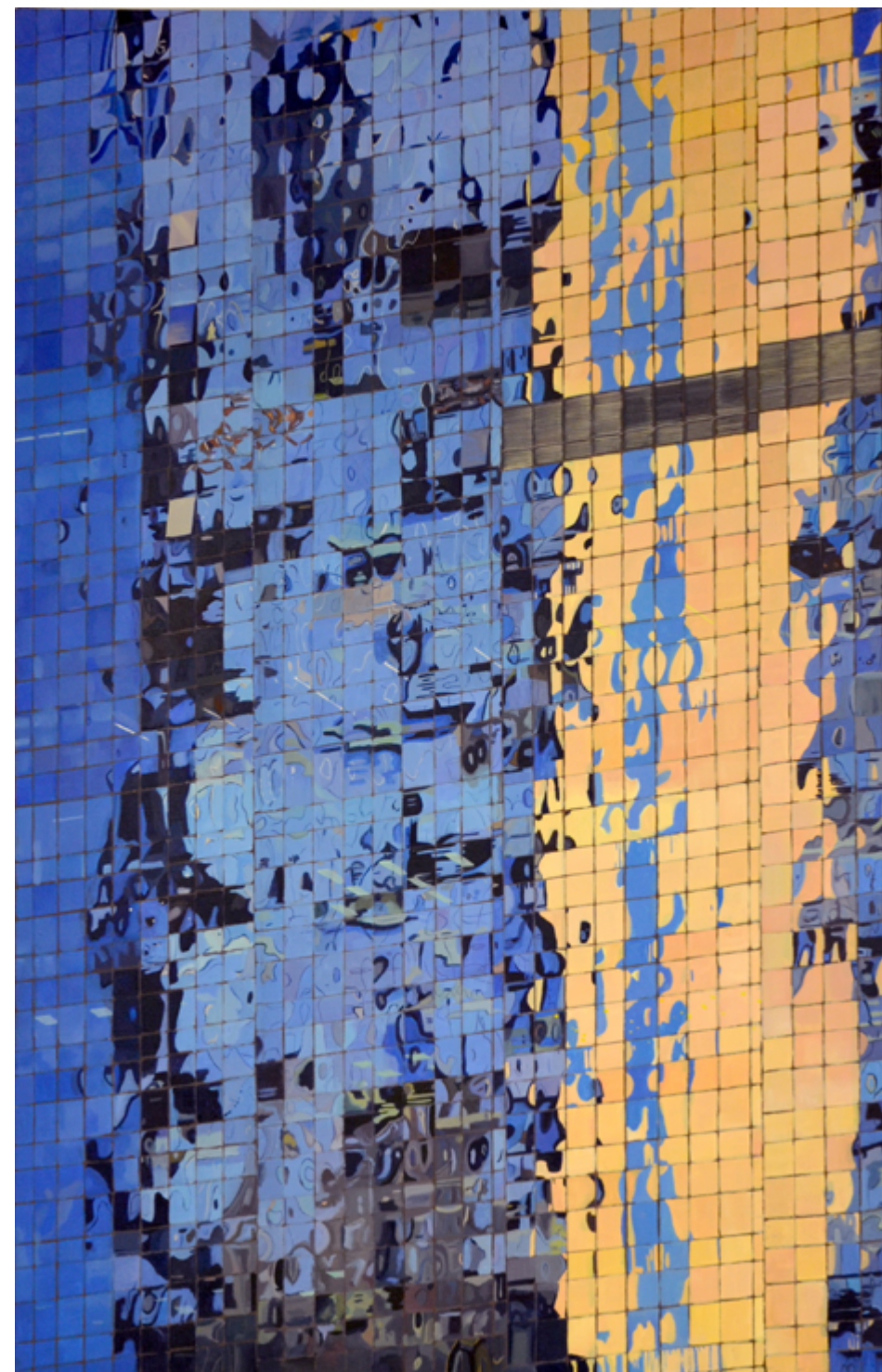
Secondly, height: although metal frame construction also allowed people to build higher, for such a building to make sense at all, another element was needed – the lift. In 1853, at the World Exposition held in New York, Elisha Otis presented the first safe elevator. If the rope pulling the lift upwards broke, the brake Otis designed could stop the cabin rushing downwards. The widespread use of this solution meant that lifts were much more popular, because people no longer feared for their lives. As a result, the upper floors of buildings became much more accessible. Previously, the higher level an apartment was, the less attractive it was and the fewer people were willing to rent it, so building high up was not really worthwhile.²⁴¹ However, when communication with the upper floors was improved, only one change was missing to seal the success of the skyscraper idea – a change in the employment structure.

In the mid-19th century, the proportion of people employed in agriculture gradually declined, the transition to an industrial society took place and services and industry expanded. The post-industrial society of the 20th century has further reinforced this trend and nowadays in the developed countries, a small proportion of the population is engaged in agriculture, while up to 80% of the workforce is engaged in services.²⁴² This progressive change in the employment structure has meant an increasing demand for office space. Even if the technological possibilities for this had existed before, the skyscraper would not have been suitable in the middle of the farmland of 18th century Europe. Only this third element completed the list of conditions that had to be met for skyscrapers to begin to populate urban landscapes.

The lift, the steel structure and the office work correspond to the three characteristics of the *heavenscraper* – a building that is tall, glazed and in which one works. Work has already been given a lot of space in this dissertation. It is, after all, a key concept, as it is the link between the relationship between money and time contained in the thesis and the figure of the skyscraper that we see in the paintings. Let us now turn to the other two components of *heavenscrapers* – glass and height. What impression does their use create? And what meaning does it carry with it?

²⁴¹ R. Gajda, N. Szcześniak, *Archistorie. Jak odkrywać przestrzeń miast?*, Znak, Cracow 2018, p. 122.

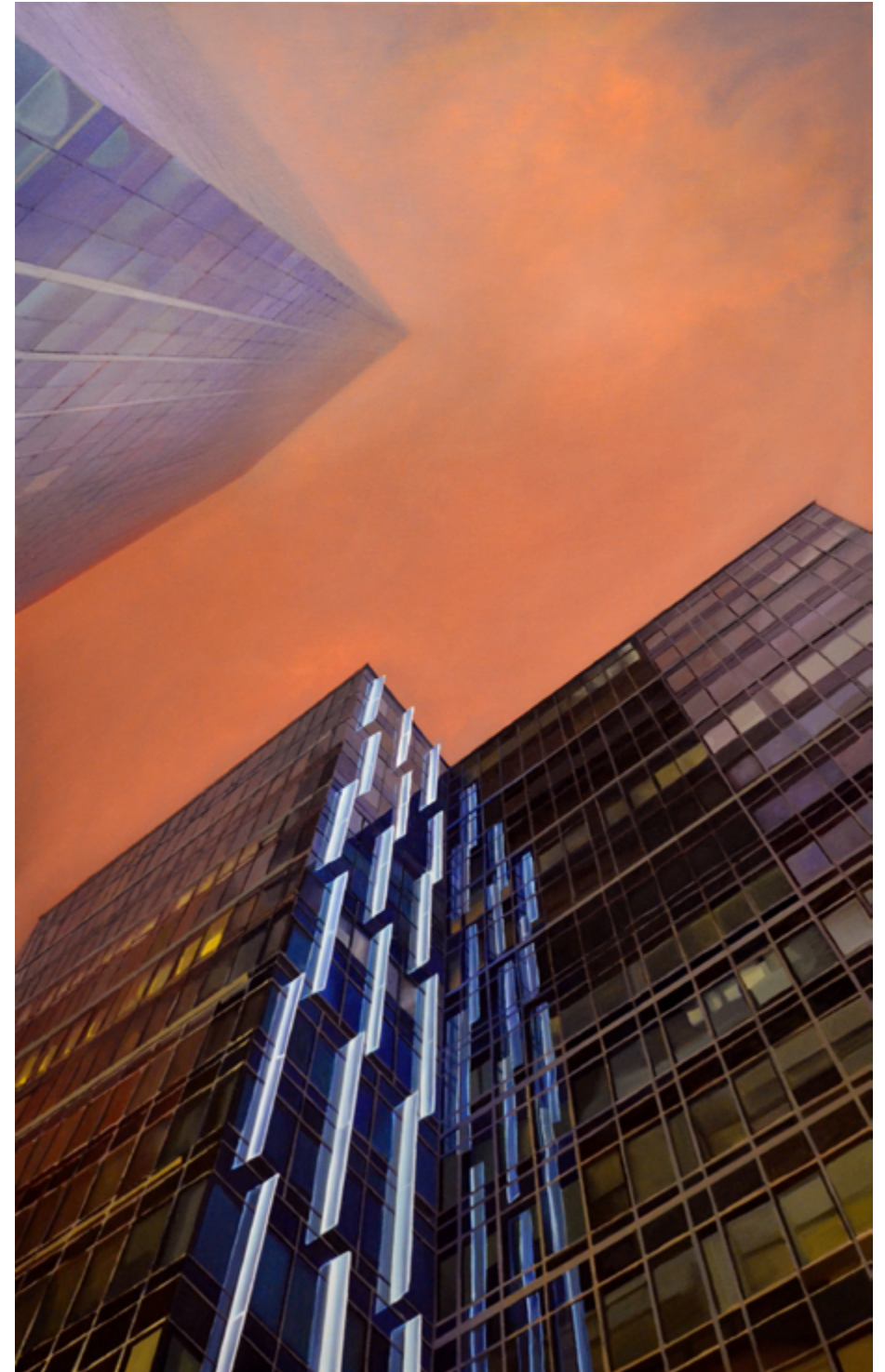
²⁴² W. Kwaśnicki, *Aby dogonić świat, musimy biec dwa razy szybciej*, 14.12.2018, <<https://forsal.pl/artykuly/1386623,aby-dogonic-swiat-musimy-biec-dwa-razy-szybciej.html>>, DOA 3.09.2022.



11. *Dubaj 11:54 AM*, oil on canvas, 140x90, 2020



12. *Dubaj 11:52*, oil on canvas, 140x90, 2019



12. *Dubaj 11:52*, oil on canvas, 140x90, 2019



14. *Londyn 10:43*, oil on canvas, 100x70, 2017

HEIGHT – VERTICALITY, MODERNITY, DOMINANCE

„It is unthinkable that a work of architectural art is created without relying on specific philosophical, theological or cosmological assumptions, even in the case (not as unambiguous as it seems) where the artwork in question is defined solely by the function it is intended to fulfil. The relationship between philosophy in the broadest sense and architecture is to reflect and express certain ways of apprehending the world, both on a conscious and unconscious level”.²⁴³ With these words, Andrzej Warmiński begins his argument entitled *Filozoficzno-symboliczna wieża architektury* [transl. The Philosophical-Symbolic Tower of Architecture]. When we consider the height of a skyscraper, that is, that feature of it which constitutes its affinity with the figure of the tower, we can rely on the same assumptions. Skyscrapers are tall, not only because of the functionality or cost-effectiveness of such an arrangement, but also because of the impression they are intended to create and the symbolism to which they refer. A purely rational justification for building upwards is not enough, especially as the great height of a building can even make it more difficult to use and increase the cost of the whole development. How is that?

When the development of technology made it possible to build higher, the absorption capacity of building plots increased. The more floors, the more square metres of office space could be accommodated on a given site. Architect Rem Koolhaas, in his iconic book *Delirious New York*, described the process of building New York's skyscrapers as “a brutal stretching up of the area of every plot of land that a developer managed to acquire”.²⁴⁴ Such an action increased the profits of the entrepreneurs building the skyscrapers, but did not go unnoticed by the landowners, who raised their prices proportionately. The more expensive land became an excuse to build even higher in order to maximise the profits from the investment made, which only fuelled further increases in land prices and the speculation going on in

²⁴³ A. Warmiński, *Filozoficzno-symboliczna wieża architektury*, [in]: *Przestrzeń, filozofia i architektura...*, op.cit., p. 61.

²⁴⁴ R. Koolhaas, *Deliryczny Nowy Jork. Retroaktywny manifest dla Manhattanu*, transl.. D. Żurkowski, Karakter, Cracow 2013, p. 99.

the area.²⁴⁵ Tall buildings also generate additional costs during construction. They require special engineering solutions to level out building vibrations or to bring running water to the top floors. The 'unconstrained duplication of space' in a vertical direction – as Rem Koolhaas calls this phenomenon²⁴⁶ – also causes problems due to the accumulation of crowds of people in a limited horizontal space. Employees starting and finishing their shift at the same time not only face traffic jams during their commute, but also have to queue inside the building while waiting for a vacant lift slot.²⁴⁷ High-rise buildings not only disrupt urban traffic routes, they even affect the airways, making the wind blow harder in their vicinity. In unfortunate scenarios, this can lead to additional annoyance for local residents, as is the case with the Neptun skyscraper in Gdansk, which whistles in strong winds.²⁴⁸ The presence of skyscrapers in cities is also a cause of death for birds that collide with their facades. The scale of the problem is not insignificant, an example is given by the Glass Trap Foundation, which deals with the subject of bird mortality as a result of collisions with glass surfaces – “millions of birds in Germany (100-115 million, or 5-10% of the country's bird population) are killed by glass every year”.²⁴⁹ It turns out that building skyscrapers is neither easy nor cheap, which may confirm that there are not only rational, economic reasons behind their construction. Skyscrapers are tall to reflect the philosophy of capitalism. This situation can, in fact, be reversed and what the philosophy of capitalism is can be read from the skyscrapers by deciphering the content they contain.

Let's start with what the height criterion actually means. According to Polish law, high-rise buildings are more than 55 metres high.²⁵⁰ However, this is insufficient to distinguish skyscrapers from other buildings. This is the case with the National Stadium in Warsaw, for example, which is 70 metres high to the roof and, including the spire, even exceeds 100 metres. A bulky stadium can hardly be mistaken for a slender skyscraper. The key aspect of the height

²⁴⁵ R. Gajda, N. Szcześniak, op. cit., p. 123.

²⁴⁶ R. Koolhaas, op. cit., p. 99.

²⁴⁷ A. Asanowicz, K. Głowacka, *Superwysokościowce – czy wyścig o najwyższy budynek świata ma sens?*, podcast Radio Naukowe, <<https://radionaukowe.pl/podcast/superwysokosciowce-czy-wy-scig-o-najwyzszy-budynek-swiate-ma-sens-e88/index.html>>, DOA 3.09.2022.

²⁴⁸ K. Koprowki, *Grający wieżowiec we Wrzeszczu*, 4.01.2015, <<https://www.trojmasto.pl/wiadomosci/Grajacy-wiezowiec-we-Wrzeszczu-n86513.html>>, DOA 3.09.2022.

²⁴⁹ It should be noted that the cause of the collision is the glazing of the high-rise buildings, not their height, which is actually a factor in reducing the risk of a collision. For more information see: R. Mikuska, H. Sztwiertni et al., *Kolizje ptaków z transparentnymi powierzchniami. Kompendium wiedzy*, Fundacja Szkłane Pułapki, Wrocław 2021, p. 30.

²⁵⁰ *Regulation of the Minister of Infrastructure of 12.04.2002. on the technical conditions to be met by buildings and their location*, (Journal of Laws 2002, No. 75, item 690).

criterion is not the number of metres, but the proportions. Skyscrapers are characterised by their verticality and the unambiguous direction they point – upwards. The international skyscraper organisation CTBUH (Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat) uses two additional determinants to help decide whether a building can be called tall.²⁵¹ The first is the use of technologies specific to high-rise construction, such as lift systems or special structural reinforcements that stiffen the building. The second is the reference to the building's surroundings. A skyscraper must stand out, towering over its surroundings. It is architecture that has to make an impression and be visible. The height of a skyscraper is therefore defined by its **verticality, modernity and dominance**.

When considering the skyscraper through verticality, we can refer to the symbolism of the vertical axis, which has a transcendental meaning. Top-down is the direction of the relationship between heaven and earth, god and man, immortal and mortal.²⁵² Mircea Eliade lists a number of examples drawn from a variety of cultures, from the Celtic peoples through the ancient Romans to the Australian tribes, where the axis of the world (*axis mundi*) is represented by a vertical form such as a sacred pillar or column.²⁵³ The upward turn expresses an attempt to connect with the sacred, to give man access to the divine. The sky appears infinite and inaccessible, and is therefore identified with the place where the gods reside. They inhabit the heavens or remain close to them, settling on the high mountains that became the model for the Babylonian sacred towers – ziggurats.²⁵⁴ The high is sacred and perfect, as is well exemplified by the phrase 'the Most High' used when addressing God.²⁵⁵

The sacred motifs contained in the skyscraper – or perhaps already at this point heavenscraper – are not coincidental. The architecture of the first skyscrapers consciously referred to the Gothic. Hugh Ferriss, architect and author of the conceptual drawings of many New York skyscrapers, “made the times of the Gothic cathedrals an exemplary era, a symbol of the elevation and evolution of the human race”.²⁵⁶ Comparing skyscrapers to cathedrals is, indeed, a popular metaphor. New York's 1913 Woolworth Building, for example,

²⁵¹ The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, *CTBUH Height Criteria for Measuring & Defining Tall Buildings*, <https://cloud.ctbuh.org/CTBUH_HeightCriteria.pdf>, DOA 3.09.2022.

²⁵² A. Warmiński, op.cit., p. 62.

²⁵³ M. Eliade, op. cit., p. 27-28.

²⁵⁴ T. Sedláček, op. cit., p. 37.

²⁵⁵ M. Eliade, op. cit., p. 96.

²⁵⁶ P. Cembrzyńska, op. cit., p. 125.

has been described as the 'Cathedral of Commerce'.²⁵⁷ In addition to the external Gothic ornamentation, its interior contains references to Byzantine temples. The vaults are covered with mosaics, but instead of images of saints in the paintings, we find, among other images, the personification of commerce.

Heavenscraper takes its cues from sacred symbolism, but is part of a secularised world. The declining importance of religion to Western civilisation has been observed since the Industrial Revolution, as mentioned earlier. However, it should be remembered that "a perfectly secular existence does not exist. No matter to what extent man has desacralised the world, no matter how determined his decision to lead a secular life was, still he will never succeed in completely rejecting religious behaviour. [...] even a radically desacralised existence reveals traces of a religious valuation of the world".²⁵⁸ The skyscraper therefore takes the place of the cathedral towers that once dominated the landscape of European cities. This change in the material world is a manifestation of another change that has taken place in spiritual life. The philosophy of capitalism has filled the gap that was created when the development of science undermined the religious myths that had previously explained the world and told people how to find their way in it. The pursuit of holiness and eternal life has been replaced by a desire to maximise experiences in mortality. In literature, we can often encounter the use of terms relating to the spiritual realm to describe the reality of life under capitalism. Naomi Klein, discussing Nike's brand marketing strategy, writes that the company's aim was not only to become the embodiment of the idea of sport, but also of transcendence through sport. The company "dreamt of its shops becoming temples" and its "advertisements becoming a religion".²⁵⁹ Another example – Professor Andrzej Szahaj, in a interview for Marek Szymaniak, says that "the neo-liberal message gained a lot of popularity in Poland during the transformation period because it was combined with an 'almost religious belief that if we just leave everything to the free market, then [...] all our problems will be solved, or – better – solve themselves";²⁶⁰ he also mentions the conviction that the free market watches over us in a providential way. On the other hand, when Zygmunt Bauman, in a dialogue with Stanisław Obirk, mentions veritable societies, that is, societies in which "the entirety of

²⁵⁷ R. Koolhaas, op. cit., p. 113.

²⁵⁸ M. Eliade, op. cit., p. 17.

²⁵⁹ N. Klein, op. cit., p. 396.

²⁶⁰ Andrzej Szahaj interviewed by Marek Szymaniak [in]: M. Szymaniak, op.cit., p. 182.

individual life, from birth to the grave, and social life is arranged according to a universally acknowledged transcendent truth", he counts among them "quasi-religious followers of GDP".²⁶¹

The verticality of the heavenscraper is a feature that corresponds to its relationship with the spiritual realm. The heavenscraper, through its soaring nature, mimics cathedrals, ziggurats and sacred pillars and columns. It is one of the faces embraced by the tower archetype and the symbols associated with transcendence behind it, such as: "deity, altar of the god (the Sun), ladder to heaven, salvation, Jerusalem".²⁶² This time, however, the upward turn is to take us to other values. Apart from its religious dimension, the tower is a symbol of modernity. This is particularly emphasised by the second characteristic of tall buildings that the CTBUH has highlighted – the use of special technological solutions. The combination of these two aspects, transcendence and modernity, makes the heavenscraper a manifestation of the belief in progress that characterises Western culture.

The development of science has undermined the validity of belief in deities, but has set humanity a new orientation. "When faith disappears, *the eschaton*, salvation, is also lost, but what remains is a focus on the future and a forward orientation. The future is the true horizon of time".²⁶³ Progress is a concept symbolised by the vertical line of the heavenscraper form. This is what signals a linear perception of time and a focus on continuous growth. For those who believe in progress, the goal of life becomes constant development, the expansion of one's potential. In its positive aspect, the tower is also a symbol of ambition, self-improvement and reaching new levels of initiation. The problem, however, is not so much the human drive to progress, but the fact that, in the constant desire to grow, we have deprived ourselves of the opportunity for respite. In the once circular time perspective, successive cycles led to solstices that marked a symbolic end, while at the same time constituting an opening for a new beginning. After exhaustion came rebirth. The subsequent transition to linear time, which Judaism and Christianity brought with them, still offered the prospect of some kind of completion and closure. Even if the reward for earthly toil was to be received only in the afterlife, it still allowed the belief that the effort made had an end.

²⁶¹ Z. Bauman, S. Obirek, op. cit., p. 8.

²⁶² [entry]: *Wieża* [in]: W. Kopaliński, *Stownik symboli*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warsaw 1991, p. 467.

²⁶³ R. Safranski, op. cit., p. 118.

It is significant that rest is even written into the Judeo-Christian founding myth. It is extremely significant that on the seventh day of the creation of the world, God rested, especially bearing in mind that this divine inaction was not the result of fatigue, which, after all, the Almighty does not feel. The rest on the seventh day is a clear indication that work must be done in such a way that the task can be completed and the results enjoyed. All activities must leave room for celebration, realising the results of the work and enjoying them. Secular time must be punctuated by sacred time, and this even at the cost of limiting the end result of the activities undertaken and giving up one's ambitions. God, in creating the various elements of the world, each time sees that they are good, but nowhere does it say that they are perfect. After all, instead of resting on the seventh day, God could have made a few more improvements to the world, created more mountains, rivers, animals and plants. Everything could have been bigger and better, for there was then, just as there is now, no outer limit saying how much is enough. But God, instead of creating a better world, created rest or, perhaps otherwise – left an empty place devoid of creation.

So we have come to live in a world that is not perfect. In a world where we ourselves have to set limits to our ambitions and accept that not everything we would like to do can be done. This is by no means a simple matter – for centuries man has tended to undertake work without rest. If this were not the case, there would also be no need for the biblical injunction to keep the Sabbath. "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work" (Ex 20:9-10). Tomáš Sedláček describes this commandment as the one that is broken most often.²⁶⁴ The unsatisfiability of human needs leads to the difficulty of giving up and letting go – one constantly wants more and can always do something better. Capitalist rhetoric only intensifies these problems because, according to the motto *time is money*, unused potential means a real loss, burdening us with remorse for all the missed opportunities. And as soon as we decide to take a break, the rushing world leaves us far behind. Zygmunt Bauman comments on this situation, using a quote from Lewis Carroll: "To continue to be where you are, you must run as hard as you can".²⁶⁵ Once achieved, success is not a reason for relief and permanent satisfaction of some need, it does not become a reason to stop trying – it is quite the opposite, we have to constantly fight for further appreciation. "No matter how successful we lived, worked and managed individually and collectively this year, next year we need to become a little faster, more efficient, more innovative and better to maintain our place

²⁶⁴ T. Sedláček, op. cit., p. 101.

²⁶⁵ L. Carroll, *Po drugiej stronie lustra*, cit. per Z. Bauman, op. cit., p. 113.

in the world – and next year the bar will be even a little higher".²⁶⁶ In this way, the imperative to progress contributes to the experienced acceleration of time. The need for constant growth is embedded in the economic logic of capitalism, but it also affects the non-market aspects of everyday life. Translating this into the reality of artistic practice – winning a prestigious competition allows only a moment of satisfaction, quickly devaluing and turning into the question – why only in one? Why so long ago? Exhibitions and paintings need to be new every year, and the blanks in an artistic CV need to be explained.

When we believe in progress, every free moment must be spent productively; doing otherwise is seen as a waste of time. Yet it is worthwhile to be bored sometimes, because boredom is a source of creativity. Some researchers point to boredom as a contributor to the emergence of culture and art,²⁶⁷ and to idleness as essential to innovation.²⁶⁸ Temporal *horror vacui*, in fact, seems to be not so conducive to the progress as it was intended to. This argument, however, is of little relevance, since the growth imperative is not as rational as it would like to pretend – it derives its roots from religious beliefs. "Markets, states, science, [...] care (even feel obliged) to ensure progress, that is, growth, as if economic development would bring us closer to heaven on earth. Any slowdown in GDP distances us from this goal and comes across as an evil. The highest good is growth".²⁶⁹ In this way, growth becomes an end in itself, it is devoid of culmination, it can never stop. The absence of the prospect of an ending is devastating to a person. For professional burnout is not due to an excess of work or a compulsion to work fast, but to the lack of "any horizon of goal".²⁷⁰ It is not a coincidence that the myth of Sisyphean work has been with mankind for centuries – a task that cannot be finalised, an effort that does not bear fruit, is indeed synonymous with torment. Unfortunately, this is what happens to us when we live in a world where it is the continuous growth that is important, not the goal of our efforts.

The belief in progress is the need for constant change, continually improving, upgrading and pushing the boundaries of what is possible. The third aspect of the skyscraper's height, the need for it to dominate its surroundings, corresponds with this characteristic. The skyscraper must surpass other buildings. The rhetoric of power is embedded in its symbolism; it manifests

²⁶⁶ H. Rosa, op. cit., p. 184.

²⁶⁷ Write about it: J. Suzman, op. cit., s. 130; R. Safranski, op. cit., p. 20.

²⁶⁸ H. Rosa, op. cit., p. 109.

²⁶⁹ T. Sedláček, op. cit., p. 244.

²⁷⁰ H. Rosa, op.cit., p. 194.

the power of those who decided to build it. The clearest example of the use of skyscrapers as a field to display one's power is the race to become the world's tallest building, which has been going on for years. This competition is detached from rationality and serves primarily to make the right impression. The super-tall buildings, which were designed to break records, often display a fair amount of uselessness. Many of their floors stood empty for years, as was the case with the Empire State Building, which became profitable 20 years after its construction.²⁷¹ For a long time, not enough people were willing to rent office space in the building. For this reason, it was even given the nickname the Empty State Building.²⁷² Although the project lacked economic justification and gained a reputation for being thoughtless,²⁷³ its symbolic potential was and remains enormous, and it is one of the icons of New York. A similar scenario occurred with the World Trade Center, which remained empty from its inception in 1973 until the 1990s.²⁷⁴ The twin towers initially failed to meet market expectations, but it was not the profit and loss account that was at the heart of their existence. They were regarded as a symbol of the global power of the United States, so telling that they became the object of a terrorist attack said to have changed the face of the world.²⁷⁵

The trouble with occupancy of space in the tallest buildings in the first years, or even decades, is because often their completion comes at a time of economic crisis, when the general economy is down and there is a shortage of people willing to rent space. Such a correlation was demonstrated in the late 1990s by Andrew Lawrence, an analyst at Dresdner Kleinwort bank. He formulated the *Skyscraper Index*, a theory linking the start of construction of a building competing for the title of the world's tallest with the announcement of an upcoming recession. Such a correlation occurs because of business cycles. Decisions to build super-tall buildings are made during an economic boom, triggered by access to cheap credit without any actual accumulated capital. In other words, the tallest skyscrapers are the result of speculative bubbles that often burst, bringing economic crisis even before the launched construction is completed.²⁷⁶ The fate of the Burj Khalifa, the building that now bears the title of world's tallest, was no different. It was completed in 2009, in the midst of the

271 P. Wilk, *Choroba wysokościowa*, „Polityka” 10.02-16.02.2016, no. 7 (3046), p. 54.

272 M. Błaszczuk, *Co zwiastują wieżowce? | Efekt Cantillona*, 13.03.2020, <<https://prostaekonomia.pl/co-zwiastuja-wiezowce-efekt-cantillona>>, DOA 04.09.2022.

273 R. Koolhaas, op. cit., p. 160.

274 P. Wilk, op. cit., p. 54.

275 P. Łepkowski, *11 września 2001 roku: Dzień, który zmienił świat*, 11.09.2020, <<https://www.rp.pl/historia/art8825261-11-wrzesnia-2001-roku-dzien-ktory-zmienil-swiat>>, DOA 4.09.2022.

276 M. Błaszczuk, op. cit.

global crisis, and it was only thanks to the financial support of Sheikh Khalifa of Abu Dhabi, who aided the bankrupt investment and to whom the building has since owed its name [originally planned as Burj Dubai].

The Burj Khalifa is a prime example of skyscraper megalomania. It shows to what absurdities the pursuit of breaking records can lead. The Dubai skyscraper is almost 830 metres high, but its highest usable floor is 585 metres above the ground. This means that 245 metres of the building is only a superstructure, which cannot be used in any way. It does, however, ensure that the building is the tallest, adding to the prestige of the city and making an impression. Prof Alexander Asanovich, in an interview for Radio Naukowe, says of the Burj Khalifa that it is so big that it cannot be seen. “It doesn't fit in the frame”²⁷⁷ when we view it from a car window, standing on the pavement we have to hold our head high to see the top of it, but we are not able to see much as everything blurs due to the distance that separates it from us. In fact, we can only look at this building from the windows of another skyscraper. The Burj Khalifa has no regard for anyone or anything. Immigrants working on its construction have experienced outrageous conditions, their protests have been suppressed and strikers deported, and there have also been cases of suicide among the workers.²⁷⁸ The true scale of the abuse of those working there is unknown, as the Emirati government is reluctant to provide such information. In the waiting line for the lift ride up to the observation deck, one can learn about the alternative history of the building's construction, where satisfied men in helmets smile at us from posed photographs. The bloody history of the construction is not the only aspect that the owners of the Burj Khalifa prefer not to mention. To this day, the skyscraper is still not connected to the sewage system, and the sewage it generates is taken away in trucks that wait in up to 24-hour queues to be unloaded at the treatment plant.²⁷⁹ The Burj Khalifa is not a rational building, it is only meant to make an impression. Skyscrapers, architectural symbols of capitalism, are expressions of extravagance rather than protean asceticism. They are meant to show power and prestige. They are a measure of the economic capacity of the state or company behind them. They are the architecture of the power of money, and money has power over time. The creators of the Burj Khalifa have communicated their ambitions in this regard explicitly – on one of the walls inside the building there is a manifesto inscribed in gold letters, phrased as if the words were addressed

277 A. Asanowicz, K. Głowacka, op. cit.

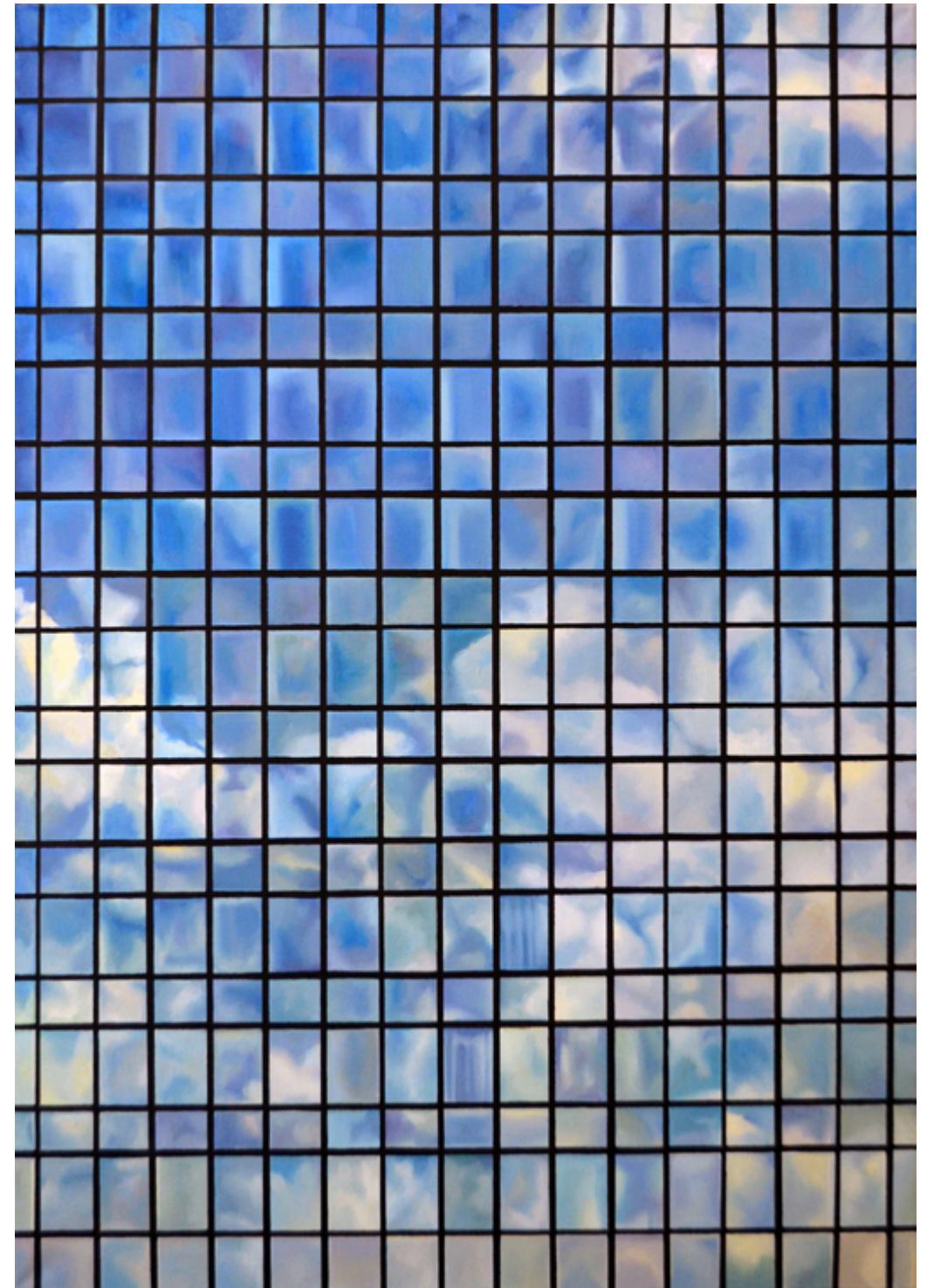
278 M. Margielewski, *Dubaj krwią zbudowany*, Prószyński Media, Warsaw 2021, excerpt provided by onet.pl, <<https://podroze.onet.pl/ciekawe/obozy-pracy-i-wstydlive-sekrety-dubaj-zbudowany-krwia-marcin-margielewski/lgbdl3>>, DOA 4.04.2022.

279 K. Ascher, T. Gross, *How The World's Tallest Skyscrapers Work*, 7.11.2011, <<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/141858484?storyId=141858484&t=1649509547177>>, DOA 4.09.2022.

to us by the building itself. It begins with the words: "I am the power that lifts the world's head proudly skywards, surpassing limits and expectations", and ends as follows: "More than just a moment in time, I define moments for future generations".²⁸⁰

To sum up – the height of the skyscraper allows it to be interpreted through three groups of symbols. The first is linked to transcendence, all meanings associated with the realm of the sacred. What is sanctified here is the idea of progress. It is related to the second group of symbols linking the height with the concept of eternal growth, the achievement of successive degrees of initiation, self-improvement, but also arrogance and over-ambition. The third dimension of the skyscraper height is surpassing, and thus the relations of power and hierarchy embedded in it. Height is a display of power, of potential (also understood as potency, as expressed by the phallic connotations associated with the tower form). These meanings, listed above and contained in the symbolic layer, are responsible for the impression that the skyscraper evokes. The basis of their functioning is an appeal to both the conscious and the collective unconscious. In this way, they operate multifaceted and are not mutually exclusive. To complete the picture created by the skyscraper, let us analyse its glass façade in a similar way.

²⁸⁰ *I am Burj Khalifa*, A photo of the wall with the manifesto can be seen, for example here: <<http://howtze.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/burj-khalifa-define-moments-for-future-generations.jpg>>, DOA 4.09.2022.



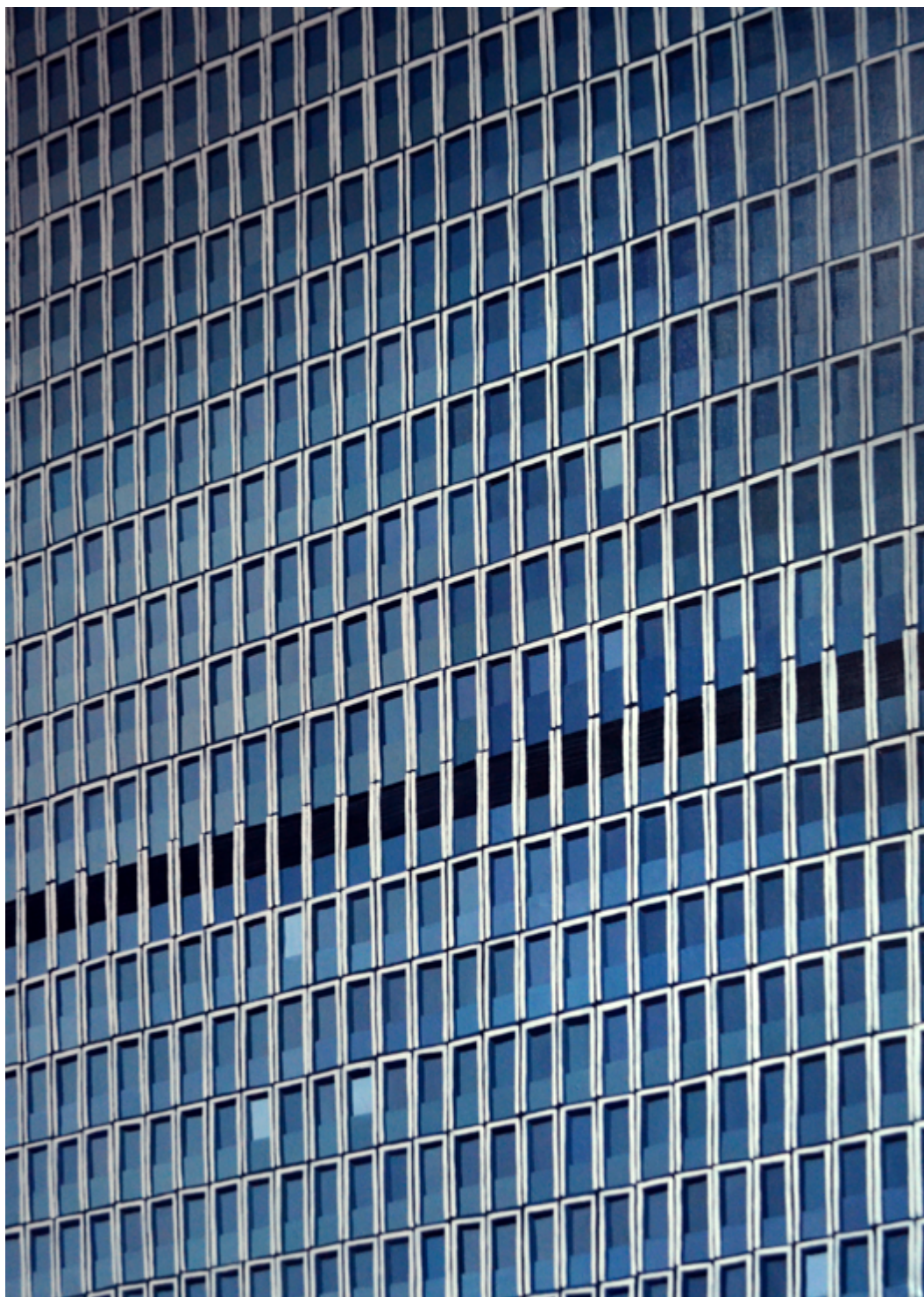
15. *Warszawa 1:04 PM*, oil on canvas, 100x70, 2016



16. *Gdańsk 12:44 PM*, oil on canvas, 140x100, 2018



17. *Bruksela 18:04*, oil on canvas, 100x70, 2016



18. *Bruksela 19:42*, oil on canvas, 140x100, 2017

GLASS – CONTROL, STRUCTURE, MYTH

The glass facades of skyscrapers are usually interpreted as an expression of the transparency of the activities of the companies that are located in a particular building. This is how the Commerzbank headquarters in Frankfurt, for example, is referred to.²⁸¹ However, this explanation for the use of extensive glazing in skyscraper architecture seems inadequate and perhaps even false. It is often the case that the tenants of an office space do not care at all that outsiders have a view of what is going on inside. This can be demonstrated by attempting to photograph or record a high-rise building with a camera. If we are not discreet in this activity, we can be chased away by the building security. Since I create my painting projects on the basis of my own photographic material, I have myself encountered such intervention by security guards while collecting the photographic material. Of course, my case is not an isolated one; such situations occur more frequently, even though there is no legal basis for prohibiting the capture of images of buildings (unless they are military or strategically important infrastructure). We can find out how such an intervention goes from one of the videos provided by *Audyt Obywatelski* [transl. *Citizen Audit*], which records security guard urging someone to stop filming the buildings of the Olivia Business Centre in Gdansk.²⁸² We can assume that the tenants of the buildings do not wish them to be photographed due to security concerns. This seems to be an expression of a not necessarily reasonable fear of a terrorist attack, an aftermath of the events of 9/11, which showed that a skyscraper can become the object of an act of terror. However, if someone is so concerned about leaking potentially sensitive information – why are they renting spaces in a building with transparent walls?

The postulated transparency of operations is not the only meaning embodied in the use of glass in a skyscraper. Particularly since, for good measure, we are rarely able to see anything by looking into the windows of skyscrapers. Firstly, many of them are simply too high, and secondly, with the right lighting, the glass turns into mirrors and instead of showing us what is inside the building, it reflects the surroundings. Skyscrapers want to be visible in order to make an impression, but they should not be observed – they do not want to reveal their interior at all. Their glass facades carry other meanings, which can be

²⁸¹ R. Gajda, N. Szcześniak, op. cit., p. 147.

²⁸² Audyt Obywatelski, *Raging security in the middle of the city on the main street. It will be a surprise!*, 23.04.2021, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZD-EQaJE10c>>, DOA 6.09.2022.

considered in three ways. Let us discuss three issues that I connect with the transparency of the heavenscrapers: **control**, **structure** and **myth**.

Gazing at the illuminated glass wall of a skyscraper, we do not see its interior, only the sky and the clouds that are reflected in it. However, the skyscraper's windows act like a Venetian mirror. Those inside remain exposed. Whether anyone can actually see them remains secondary, it is more about the impression. It is not for nothing that the term 'four walls' is used when talking about a house – a heavenscraper is the opposite of a house, it is completely devoid of walls, replaced by windows. Inside, we often encounter open spaces. So there is nowhere to hide, it is difficult to create an atmosphere of intimacy, because at work we are not supposed to feel at home. Glass is a material that creates distance, you can't touch it because it will get dirty. The heavenscraper space is therefore designed so that its users leave as few traces of their presence as possible and remain exposed. The more it is visible, the more it can be subject to scrutiny.

Heavenscraper draws on the architectural legacy of the panopticon. Bentham's model of the ideal prison involved the placement of a guard tower in the middle of the foundation, with radially-spaced prison cells around it, each with two windows. One window overlooked the tower, through which the warden could look at the prisoner. The other window was on the opposite side of the cell, letting light into the room. It allowed the prisoner's silhouette to stand out clearly from the background, so that the prisoner could not go unnoticed. The glass facades of the heavenscrapers are symbolically the very outer window that illuminates the convict. As Foucault writes – "visibility is a trap".²⁸³ The mere potential for surveillance makes it necessary to be alerted. The worker does not know at what point he is being monitored. Modern technology helps to record his every move and measure his performance. The slogan *time is money* comes to the fore once again – you have to take advantage of every opportunity to act, there is no room for rest, as any moments of downtime will take their toll on performance. "Whoever has been placed in the field of vision and knows it, assumes to his account the constraints imposed by power: he voluntarily allows them to influence him, he inscribes himself in a power relationship where he plays both roles – he becomes a principle of subjectivation".²⁸⁴ Thus, it does not matter to whom the power actually belongs, since it is exercised, as it were, automatically. Being in a panoptic situation, we control each other and we control ourselves. The ways of surveillance

²⁸³ M. Foucault, op. cit., p. 195.

²⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 198.

have already been discussed in this dissertation in the chapter *Instruments of control*. Controlling is enhanced by the development of technology and the parcelling out of time, and mutual surveillance is intensified by a systemic focus on competition instead of cooperation. The need for control stems from the belief, present in capitalism, that man acts only with his own self-interest in mind.²⁸⁵ The worker is expected to steal, bum or start revolts if deprived of control. Consequently, trust is reduced and surveillance is increased. The glass facade of the heavenscraper therefore speaks of the exposure that is needed to exercise control.

Control is also enhanced by the maintenance of the structure. This is the second attribute associated with heavenscraper glazing. The facades of skyscrapers consist of rows of windows that reflect their surroundings into each other. In this way, heavenscrapers become, as it were, invisible, hollow. We do not see the building, only the reflection. The part that remains visible is the window frames, which form a geometric grid overlaid with sky and clouds. In this case, the glass is not in itself a carrier of meaning, but its use helps to reveal the structure that holds the building together. This geometric division imposed on a changing, organic landscape corresponds to the tendency, which characterises capitalism, but also modernity in general, to create systems and set rules. "Modernity is embodied [...] by legislators, bureaucrats, engineers and architects. Its element becomes deliberations, diagnoses, grading, forecasts, expert opinions, tables, plans, formulas, canons, standards".²⁸⁶ The progress-oriented world organises, orders, categorises, and the order thus established is maintained by means of discipline.

However, ordering the world is not only a manifestation of the Western predilection for rule-making, but also one of the foundations of human existence. It is what work in its broad definition boils down to. To bring order is to repeat the act of the gods who created the world and gave it "structure, form and norms".²⁸⁷ Chaos is a primordial state that requires intervention, and man needs structures to function. Maintaining the existing system, even when it is unsatisfactory, is essential if we want to plan for the future. The stability of the structures in place also guarantees the security of future generations. As Graeber says: "You can't put money aside for a child's university education if you don't have the certainty that there will still be universities or, let's say,

²⁸⁵ This belief is rooted in the concept of *homo oeconomicus*, which in turn derives from Thomas Hobbes's views on the war of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*), as well as from Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*; more on this is written, for example, by Tomáš Sedláček in his book *Economics of Good and Evil*.

²⁸⁶ P. Cembrzyńska, op. cit., p. 78.

²⁸⁷ M. Eliade, op. cit., p. 25.

money in twenty years' time. And this, in turn, means that love for others – people, animals, landscapes – requires the constant maintenance of institutional structures that one may despise on a daily basis”.²⁸⁸ On the other hand, over-reliance on the rules in place is paralysing. By relying on what we can actually predict and purely rationally assess, we would have to abandon all risky actions. John M. Keynes is the author of the concept of *animal instincts*, which, in his view, push humans to take action. “Our actions depend much more on spontaneous optimism than on mathematical hope”.²⁸⁹ Guided only by cold calculation, we would have to give up at the start, but we believe that we will get lucky, that the unlikely will happen to us. These irrational hopes give us the motivation to act. Too much unpredictability creates confusion and disorientation, making us feel lost and incapable of taking action, but excessive order causes numbness and also paralyses action.

This dissertation and the arguments cited are not a call for revolution and praise of anarchy. The relationship between structure and chaos is not a zero-sum choice, but a certain spectrum; both elements have their strengths and should have their room. This relationship is illustrated by Richard Sennett when he analyses the strategies of the nineteenth-century social and political left.²⁹⁰ Informal, grassroots movements allow for bond-building, but lose their causal energy in trying to find consensus among members. On the other hand, those that are top-down managed and tightly controlled boast more effective initiatives, but leave no room for dialogue. The conflict between structure and chaos is central to the issue I am addressing. It makes the answer to the question, *is it possible not to work?* – not obvious. Many elements of the art and research project I have been conducting have changed along the way. However, one phrase which has accompanied me from the beginning has remained – during the recruitment process for my doctoral studies, I described the topic I undertook as that “...what constrains us in imposed structures, as well as what attracts us in them”. I am writing this dissertation from the position of a person who highly values meticulous organisation and clear rules. While seeking to argue that *time is not money*, I am also trying to convince myself of this and to carve out space for my own remorseless idleness.

The relationship between structure and chaos is an expression of my personal inner conflict, but it is also a universal problem that can be talked about using figures present in the collective unconscious. Let us return once again to the

288 D. Graeber, op. cit., p. 375.

289 T. Sedláček, op. cit., p. 39.

290 R. Sennett, *Razem...*, op. cit., p. 66.

archetype of the tower discussed in the previous chapter. A tower can signify a safe place and a refuge, it can take the form of a fortress. At the same time, the tower symbolises prison, captivity and the condemned.²⁹¹ An ordered, regulated world provides a sense of security and certainty. Trust in scientific paradigms, which have taken the place of religious dogmas, allows one to find answers to questions and dispel doubts. From the chaos of one's inner life, one escapes into work, which brings order, gives rhythm and meaning, sets tasks that are manageable and offers remuneration that is measurable. At the end of the day, it is easier to understand even the most intricate system than another human being who, contrary to what economic models say, does not always act rationally. However, when the rules become too strict and the discipline too severe, the walls of the tower that used to protect from the chaos of the outside world turn into a prison. The refuge becomes a place of isolation. By escaping from the Other, we condemn ourselves to solitude. The capitalist system favours those activities that involve efficiency at the expense of relational ones. It relies more on dialectics than on dialogue, and treats cooperation as a means rather than an end in itself. In the modern, pragmatic world, the pursuit of what can bring tangible benefit takes the place of what is unprofitable, imperfect and unpredictable, but at the same time alive and responsive. The glass facades of the skyscrapers, the geometric division they create and in which they enclose the world reflected in them; correspond to the compact structure of capitalist reality, in which even time is converted into money.

The final aspect of glass that I consider is its transparency and, therefore, its invisibility. This is also what myth must be in order to truly function. Capitalism has its mythology, although it scrupulously hides it. On the surface it is merely an economic system based on the free market, but it imperceptibly influences the language we use and creates our structure for perceiving the world.²⁹² We benefit from it when we think of our own development as investing in ourselves, when we take care of our image as if we were a brand, when we constantly strive to increase our productivity, or when we treat contact with others in terms of increasing our social capital. The mythology of capitalism provides us with answers about what to aim for in life and what to do to achieve happiness – the advertising industry in particular is at the forefront of this practice. The economic myths of capitalism include the invisible hand of the market, the myth of human freedom and self-determination, and the myth of perpetual

291 [entry]: *Wieża* [in]: W. Kopaliński, op. cit. p. 467.

292 M. Napiórkowski, op. cit., p. 17.

progress.²⁹³ As Andrzej Szahaj claims, “there is, in fact, no economic concept that does not carry with it a comprehensive vision of the world, a whole set of values, deep philosophical and moral convictions”.²⁹⁴ These beliefs, however, take the form of eternal laws of nature that cannot be changed. A good example is the markets, which are said to have the capacity for self-regulation. When economic crises occur, the blame is laid at the door of existing regulations, which have not allowed the markets to operate completely freely and, by their interference, have disrupted the natural process that would allow them to maintain balance. It is as if the financial markets were independent beings and not part of a man-made system. However, this is the essence of myth, which transforms what is cultural into what is natural in our perception. Myth shapes patterns of behaviour, thanks to it we know what is ‘proper’, ‘typical’ and ‘normal’, it underpins what we call ‘common sense’. This is why it is so difficult to argue with the myth and look for other solutions. This is how Margaret Thatcher spoke of capitalism when she promoted the slogan TINA, an acronym for *there is no alternative*.

The belief that *time is money* can also be seen as one of the myths of capitalism. Existing time norms and the associated need for constant haste and the constant struggle for recognition are treated as natural and non-negotiable. According to Hartmut Rosa, time norms have replaced moral norms in Western societies and it is these norms that coordinate and regulate society.²⁹⁵ Thus, we feel remorse not only when we transgress our ethical principles, but also when we have failed social expectations by failing to keep up with the constantly accelerating pace of modern life. We are talking, for example, about the unpleasant moment at the end of the day when we see that we have failed to achieve what we had planned for ourselves. When we feel that we have been underproductive, poorly organised and, as a result, have wasted time. “Appropriate norms function as a hidden, silent power that can make modern society see itself as a sanction-free society subject to minimal ethical restrictions”.²⁹⁶ Despite the fact that we live in a system considered to be free, we use the phrase ‘I must’ extremely often, we try to fulfil the expectations placed upon us, rarely finding a moment to consider what we really want and whether we can afford the luxury of fulfilling these desires.

When, in describing the meanings that the skyscrapers and their glass

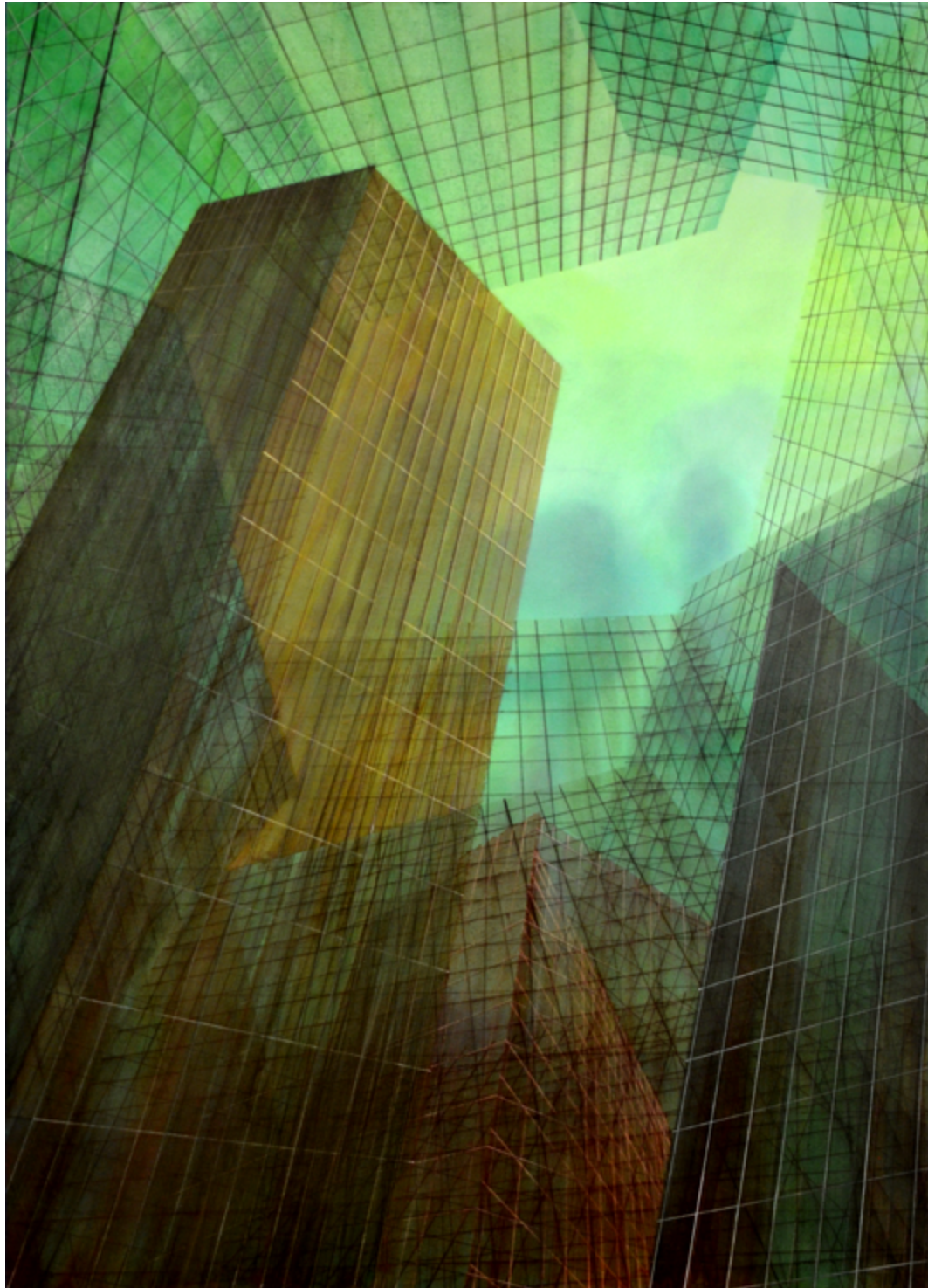
²⁹³ T. Sedláček, op. cit., p. 122.

²⁹⁴ Andrzej Szahaj interviewed by Marek Szymaniak [in]: M. Szymaniak, op.cit., p. 184.

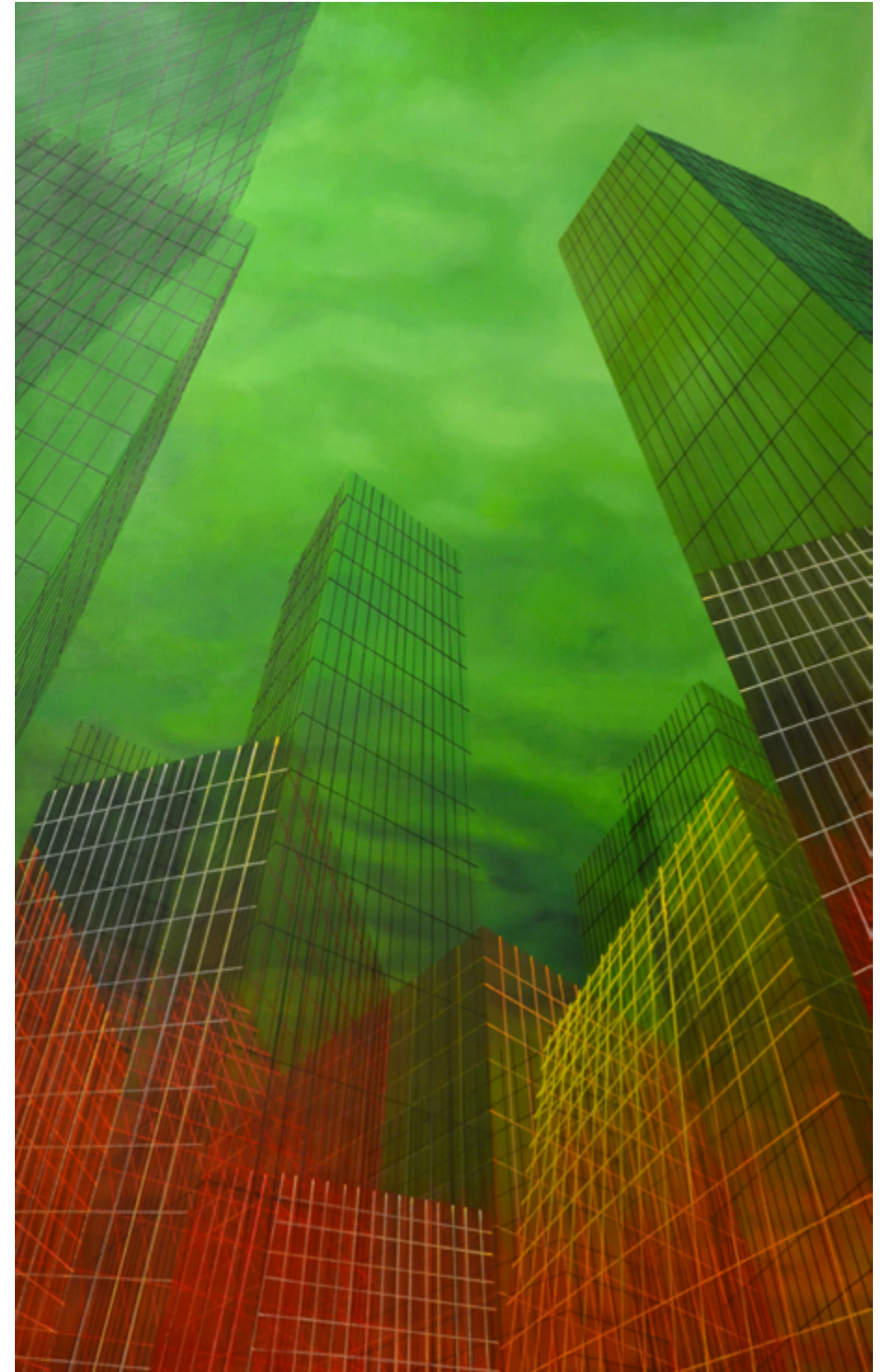
²⁹⁵ H. Rosa, op. cit., p. 114.

²⁹⁶ Ibidem, p. 115.

facades contain, I draw on the notion of myth, I want to draw attention to how capitalism tries to make itself seem invisible. By adopting the appearance of the only possible and natural solution, it consolidates its power by limiting the room for discussion. At the same time, following the example of other mythologies, it explains the world, equipping us with ways to interpret it. Modern myths, however, have grown out of the old ones. Just as today’s secular society still draws on the legacy of Protestant ethics, the existence of the mythology of capitalism does not negate the relevance of drawing on Judeo-Christian mythology, which has influenced the shape of Western culture. Therefore, while asking what skyscrapers can tell us, it is worth referring to the well-known myth of building upwards, that is, the story of the Tower of Babel.



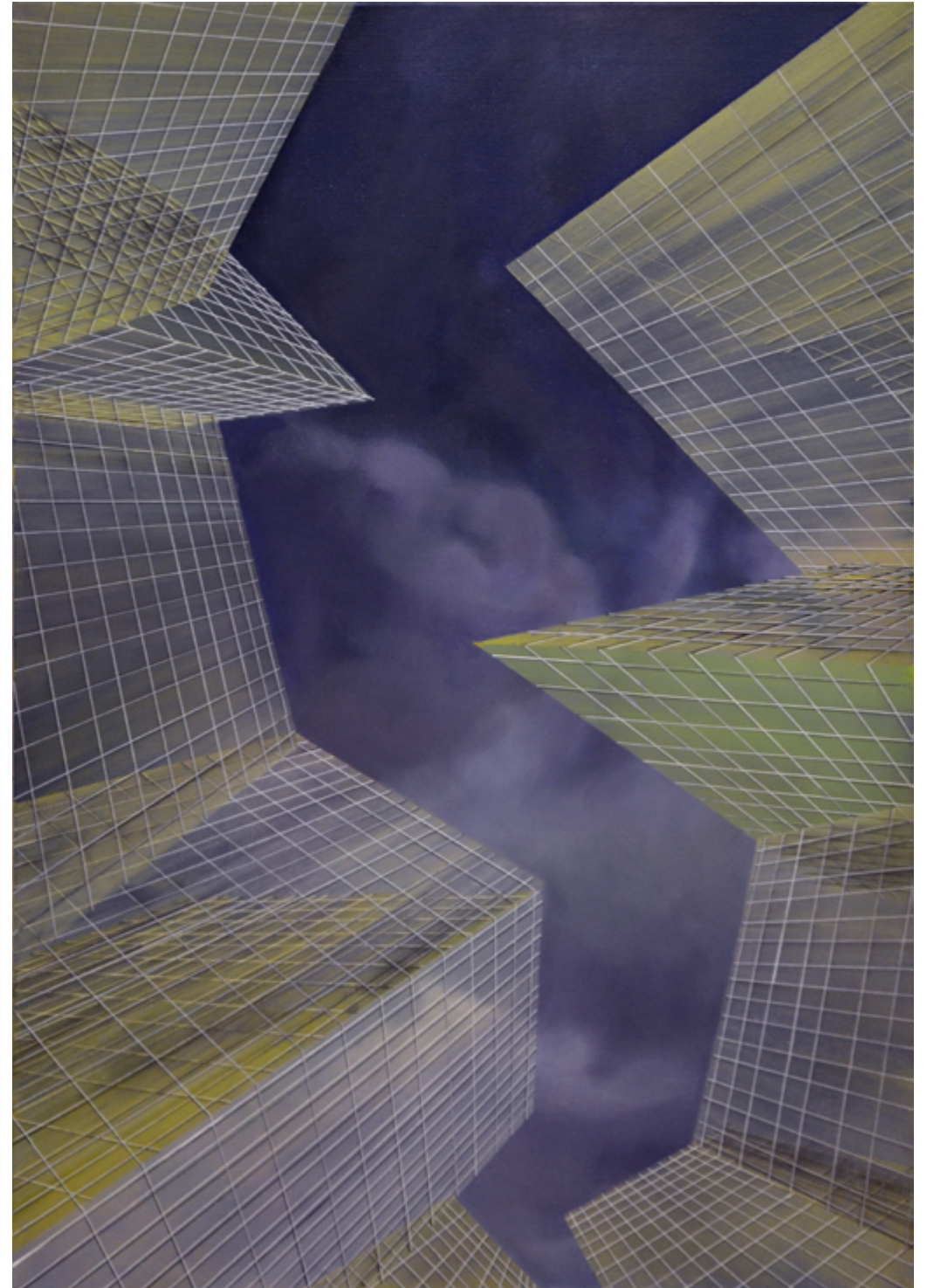
19. Agglomeration I, oil on canvas, 160x115, 2018



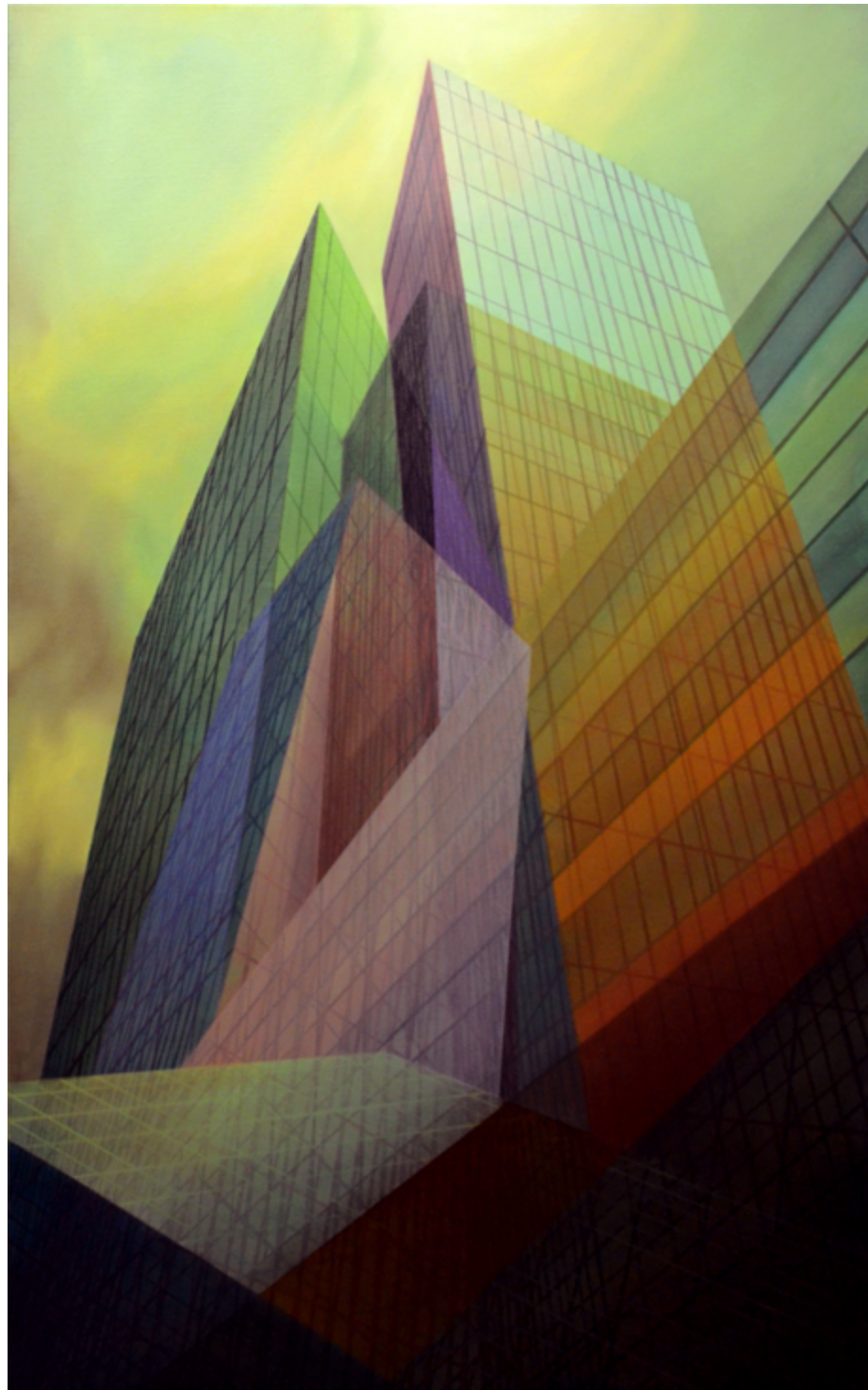
20. Agglomeration II, oil on canvas, 160x100, 2019



21. *Babel 2:19 PM*, oil on canvas, 100x70, 2018



22. *Babel 7:01 PM*, oil on canvas, 100x70, 2018



23. Agglomeration III, oil on canvas, 160x100, 2020

THE MYTH OF THE TOWER OF BABEL

Capitalism, and the skyscrapers that represent it in terms of architecture, are a product of Western culture, which has been shaped by Judeo-Christian myths.²⁹⁷ Hence, assuming that there is some common root, it is possible to read the meanings contained in heavenscrapers by looking for parallels with ancient texts and, conversely, to interpret biblical myths in relation to phenomena that are contemporary to us. When we talk about heavenscrapers, the story that most closely matches them is that of the Tower of Babel. It is a myth in which the starting point is building upwards – this is what becomes the carrier of meaning, interpreted, as we are about to see, in many different ways.

Perhaps our first association is to link the Tower of Babel with the sin of pride. In what is perhaps the most popular interpretation of the myth, people wanted to be equal to God, so they started to build a tower to reach the heavens. The Creator did not like this plan, so he punished the people for their arrogance and confused their languages. This interpretation of the Tower story is widespread and can be found in a variety of sources, from scholarly works²⁹⁸ to children's catechisms.²⁹⁹ Already from this understanding of the myth, we can look for references to skyscrapers, especially those in the race to become the tallest building, which are said to be a sign of arrogance and overweening ambition.³⁰⁰ However, when we look directly at the biblical text, we see that there is no mention of punishment, the motivation of people to start building is also different, and thus the fields for other readings of the meaning of the myth are opened up. So how does the story actually sound?

“Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, «Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly». They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, «Come, let us build

²⁹⁷ In support of this thesis, the words of Tomáš Sedláček can be quoted: “Christianity is the leading religion of our Euro-American civilization. Most of our social and economic concepts derive directly or indirectly from Christianity”, T. Sedláček, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

²⁹⁸ A. Borkowski, *Wieża Babel i labirynt – o symbolicznym unaocznieniu podróży w dziełach Jana Amosa Komeńskiego w kontekście kultury barokowej*, [w:] *Współczesne recepcje Jana Amosa Komeńskiego*, red. B. Sitarska, „Siedleckie Zeszyty Komeniologiczne”, Tom IV/2017, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach, s. 106.

²⁹⁹ W. Kubik, *Szukam was. Podręcznik do religii dla klasy VII szkoły podstawowej*, Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, Cracow 2011, s. 40-41.

³⁰⁰ P. Wilk, *op. cit.*, s. 55.

ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth». But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, «If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other». So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel — because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth". (Gen 11:1-9)

The first aspect referred to in the text is the development of technology. Stones and tar were replaced by bricks and mortar, and this allowed building in a different way than before and the emergence of new and ambitious projects. Things were similar with skyscrapers, inventions were needed to create them: the lift and the steel construction frame. However, we can also look at the issue in a broader way, especially as a third ingredient was needed for the skyscraper to exist – the growth of the service sector, and this was the result of the industrial revolution. It was this global change that opened a new chapter in human history. The development of technology brought with it social changes, and time began to be treated as money. The reference in the Tower of Babel story to technological change corresponds to the belief in progress inscribed in the heavenscrapers. However, the myth echoes the concern about whether this is the right way to go, after all, the construction of the Tower is not completed and draws divine intervention upon humanity.

The next verse of the myth reveals the reasons why the people started to build – they did so in order not to scatter. The tower is supposed to bring them together, which seems a fundamentally positive idea, there is no question of wanting to enter into some kind of rivalry with God, no pride is evident in this motivation. The tower is meant to be a symbol that will bind humanity together. What might be implied by this unifying mark? As Yuval Noah Harari writes: "The first millennium BC witnessed the emergence of three potentially universal orders, whose supporters were for the first time able to imagine the whole world and all of humanity as a single entity".³⁰¹ We are referring to the monetary order, the imperial order and the order of universalist religions. Of

301 Y.N. Harari, op. cit., p. 211.

all of these, money turns out to be the most powerful, as it is the only system of trust created by mankind that "can neutralise almost any cultural difference [...]". Thanks to money, even people who do not know or trust each other can cooperate effectively".³⁰²

Unity is needed for cooperation, and cooperation is needed to create great projects like the Tower of Babel. Such a building could not be built as an individual work, it required that people work together. This is confirmed by God's comment when he sees the people building the Tower: "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this" (Gen 11:6). If the mythical tower really existed, it could have been Göbekli Tepe – a prehistoric sanctuary in what is now Turkey. It is considered to be the oldest example of ancient monumental architecture and, as James Suzman writes, "the oldest trace on the planet of human collaboration on a major project that had nothing to do with obtaining or storing food".³⁰³ The creation of such a complex architectural structure required the introduction of an advanced division of labour – the use of the skills of people who specialised in their craft, which is why it is considered "unequivocal evidence of a society in which people with specific skills worked on a kind of full-time basis".³⁰⁴ So it turns out that cooperation is at the heart of the Tower of Babel story and the first condition for the creation of the building. Interestingly, the most iconic representation of the Tower, that of Pieter Bruegel, also takes up this theme. Bożena Fabiani, analysing the painting, points out that Bruegel depicted the Tower, showing all the stages of its construction – "from the quarrying of the stone, through its processing, the carrying of the great tiles and the laying of the stairs, the transportation of the bricks by sea, the unloading of the building materials in the port [...], to the plastering of the walls and the hustle and bustle on the various floors of the highly advanced building".³⁰⁵ From this perspective, both painting and myth tell the story of human labour.

Since we have assumed that the intentions of the people building the Tower were not sinful, God's reaction becomes problematic in this interpretation of the myth. Why was humanity punished for wanting to unite? Or perhaps it was not a punishment at all, but a preventive intervention, as Patrycja Cembrzynska interprets it, "a gesture of protection so that nothing bad

302 Ibidem, p. 228.

303 J. Suzman, op. cit., p. 227.

304 Ibidem, p. 232.

305 B. Fabiani, *Biblia w malarstwie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2017, p. 58.

happens”.³⁰⁶ God does not want to allow that “nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them” (Gen 11:6). Such omnipotence can only be the result of total uniformity. Unity can be dangerous when, instead of being the result of finding a common language, it flows from uniformity. The myth of the Tower of Babel is sometimes interpreted as a warning against trusting in total and thus totalitarian systems, “the old god of heaven tangled up men’s languages [...] so that they could not be subjected to a central authority”.³⁰⁷ However, this story can be considered not only in the context of politics and the power relations that are inscribed in it, but by relating it to human relations in general. As Patrycja Cembrzyńska poetically summarises: “The monologue of the tower drowns out the dialogue of the community”.³⁰⁸ When everyone thinks the same way, it means that the need for conversation disappears. This is rather perverse, but it shows that it is the differences that make it possible to build relationships, and that the inability to agree easily forces the need for a more attentive, empathetic view of the interlocutor. A glaring example is the attempt by a caregiver to communicate with a newborn baby. Both sides of the relationship do not understand each other; the parent, in order to be able to respond to the baby’s needs, has to try to read the slightest signals, grimaces, and nuances in the sound of the cry. One can guess that the child, too, tries all the ways at his disposal to communicate his needs, after all, it is only through efficient communication that he has a chance of getting his needs met. Such a ‘conversation’ is frustrating for both parties, but in the end it can lead to an extremely strong bond. A jointly developed understanding, despite the use of different languages, turns out to be more valuable than an unproblematic, superficial interchange. The need to commit oneself to finding a solution is not only important in interpersonal relationships, but also when it concerns the actions taken. “Resistance and difficulties encountered at work are an important source of intellectual stimulation [...] it is only when we have to struggle against adversity to understand a thing that we begin to understand that thing well”.³⁰⁹

Thus, returning to the plane of myth – the unity that humans seek involves the risk of unification, and it is this that God seeks to protect humanity from. Although the text mentions that God dispersed humanity across the earth, his intervention involved the introduction of diversity. I interpret the story of the Tower of Babel through two aspects which have, like archetypes, their

306 P. Cembrzyńska., op. cit., p. 11.

307 G. Baudler, *Bóg i kobieta : historia przemocy, seksualizmu i religii*, transl. A. Baniukiewicz, Uraeus, Gdynia 1995, p. 240.

308 P. Cembrzyńska, op. cit., p. 104.

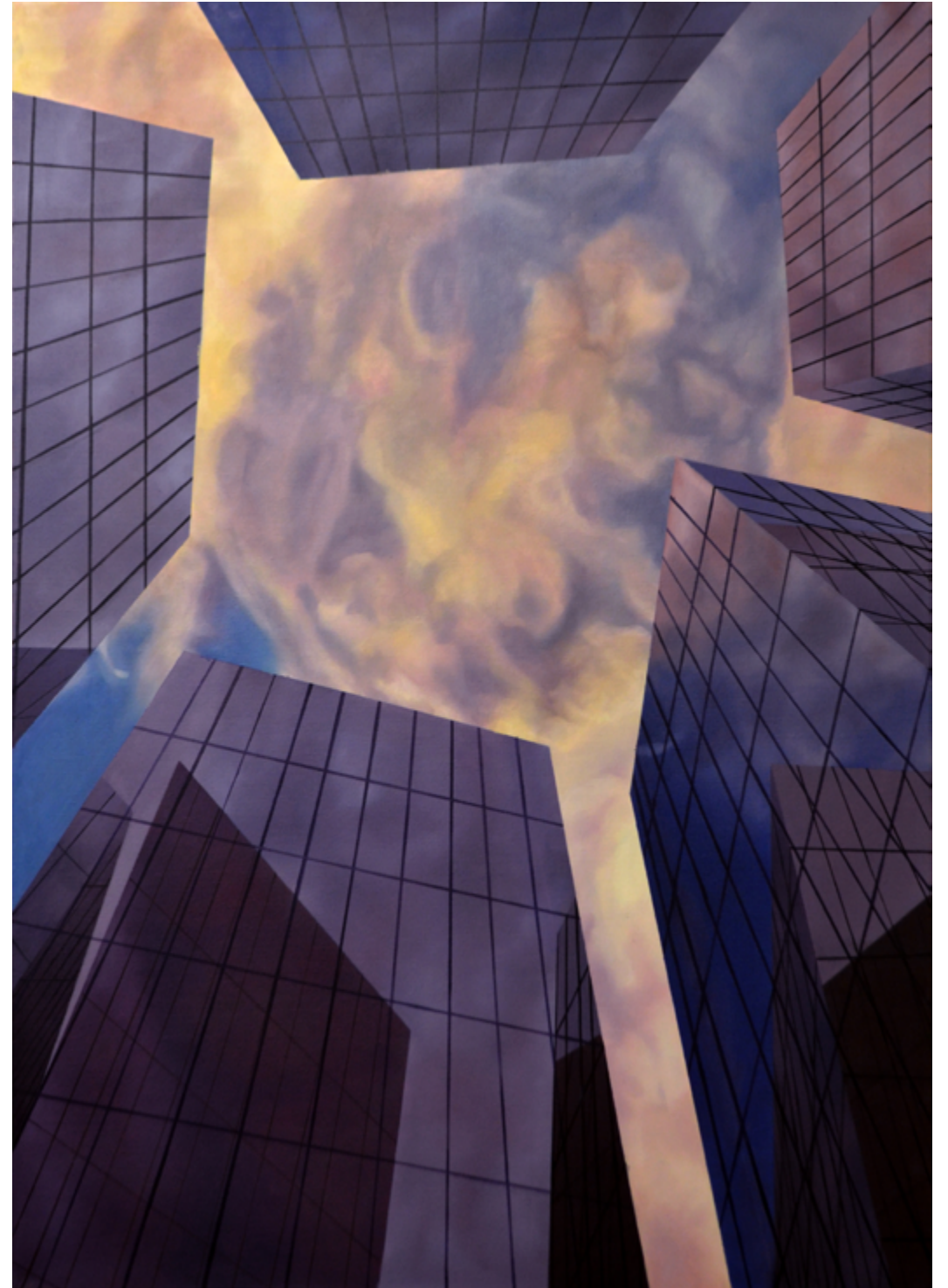
309 R. Sennett, *Korozja charakteru...*, op. cit., p. 96.

dark and light faces. The first pair is the positive unity and its corresponding negative – unification, the second is the desirable diversity and its destructive face – dispersion. Can these two facets ever be combined in such a way as to unify, and therefore cooperate and build relationships, while preserving diversity? This reading of the myth seems most interesting to me, as it touches on a dilemma already mentioned when reflecting on the question of chaos and structure. The split between unity and diversity corresponds to the contradictory directions of human needs – between the need for autonomy and affiliation, safety and liberty, predictability and spontaneity. It is like “the fear of standing out from the crowd and the fear of melting into it”,³¹⁰ it is the simultaneous fear of dependence and loneliness. There is no one right way, but care must be taken not to fall into extremes. How does the capitalist system appear in the face of these issues? Does it promote diversity or does it uniformise? Does it help unify or disperse? Let us attempt to analyse capitalism through categories taken from the myth of the Tower of Babel.

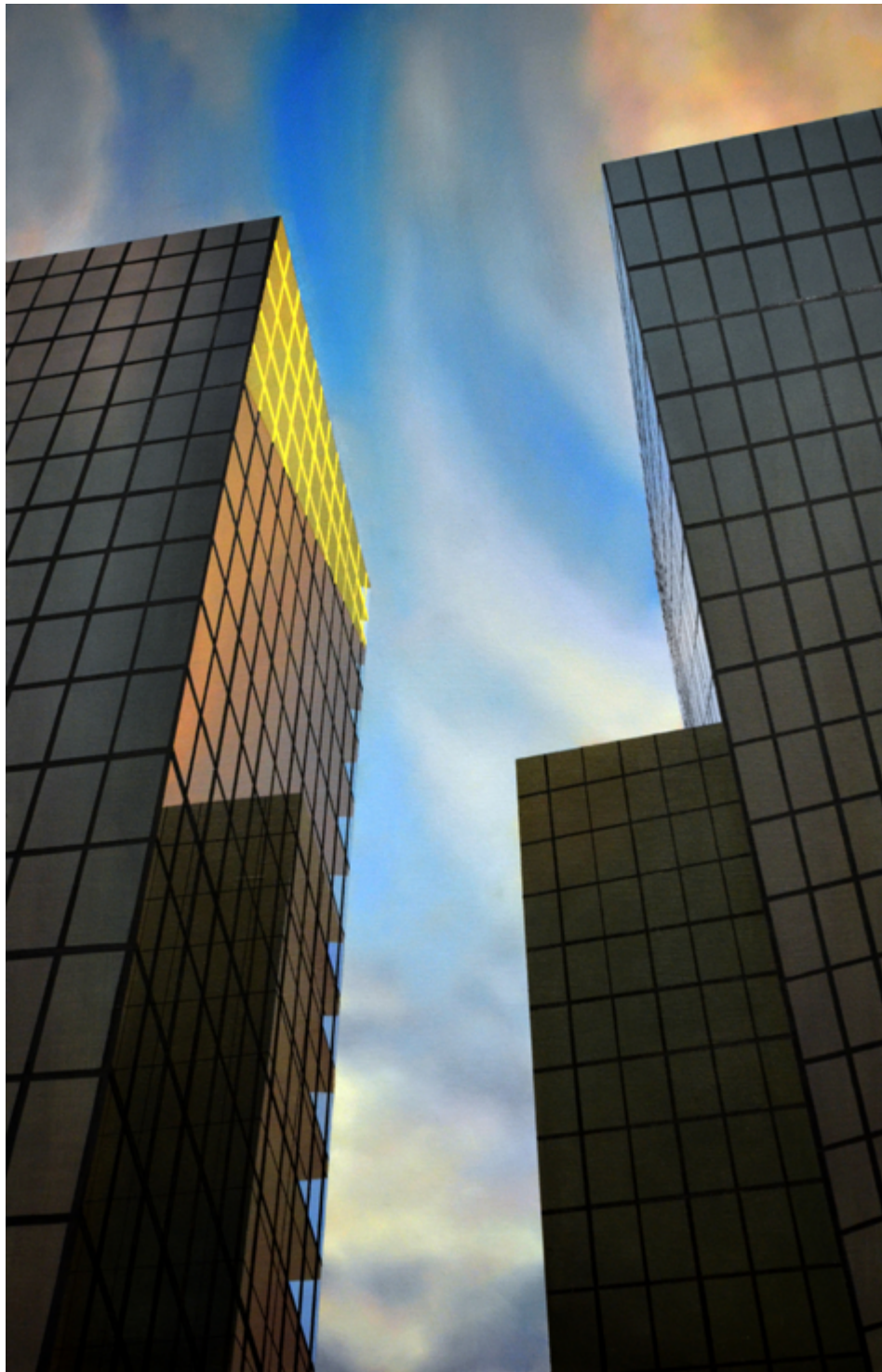
310 Z. Bauman, op. cit., p. 104.



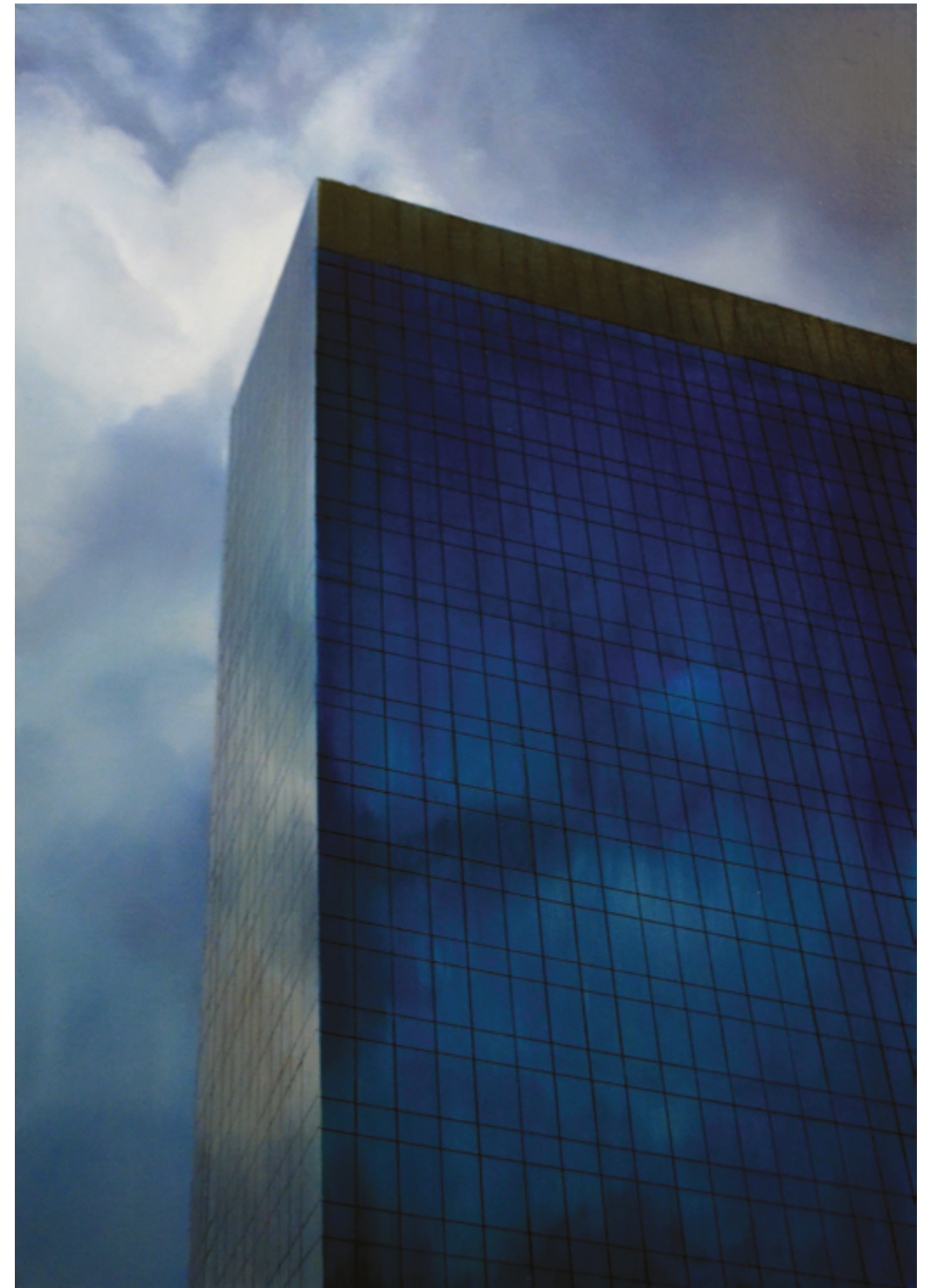
24. *Babel 3:53 PM*, oil on canvas, 160x100, 2018



27. *Babel 2:55 PM*, oil on canvas, 140x100, 2018



26. *Babel 11:27 AM*, oil on canvas, 140x100, 2018



27. *Singapore 2:13 PM*, oil on canvas, 100x70, 2017

DIVERSITY AND UNIFORMITY

As has already been mentioned in this dissertation, and can be heard from everywhere, today we are faced with an almost infinite number of possibilities. We can travel all over the world, and the whole world travels to us in all sorts of forms: from objects produced in distant countries, to exotic fruits and foods, to musicians touring internationally or instant access to cultural texts via the Internet. It might seem that modernity is characterised by unprecedented diversity. However, this free access means that boundaries are blurring and instead of being able to visit many worlds that are different from each other, we are becoming part of a single, blended, global culture that is moving towards ever deeper homogenisation. This phenomenon has been called by Naomi Klein as mono-multiculturalism.³¹¹ Let us look at what its sources are.

When the first global corporations appeared in the world, they operated according to two different methods. Some, depending on where they operated, changed their marketing strategy and adapted their products to the local market. However, this entailed additional expenditure on specially prepared advertising campaigns. Other companies remained the same – they sold the same things in the same way. This allowed for a significant reduction in costs, but ran the risk of causing controversy and committing a cultural faux pas. So a third way was born – diversity marketing. Brands now build their images to be as inclusive as possible. On posters or in advertising spots, we can see people of different races, sexual orientations and from different cultural backgrounds. This gives the appearance of openness and of working towards greater tolerance, but it is not about cultivating differences, it is about reducing everything to a single standard. Instead of multiple cultures that may represent contradictory values, a single global culture emerges that, in order to be able to unify – shallow. “Today, global marketing [is about] providing something like a marketplace of differences for everyone. [...] This approach creates a virtual One World, a place that is everywhere and nowhere, a global shopping mall that enables corporations to sell one product in many countries”.³¹² Homogenisation makes it easier to increase profits, which is why the capitalist system pursues it.

³¹¹ N. Klein, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

³¹² *Ibidem*.

Another reason to standardise is economies of scale. The larger the company, the greater the resources that can be used to fight the competition. Wholesale procurement allows better prices to be negotiated among suppliers, as is the case, for example, in the unequal competition between small shops and hypermarket chains. A large player in the market can run a more intensive advertising campaign, hire better lawyers when things go wrong, spend more on consumer taste research and innovation and, above all, can simply buy out the competition. This is how the market is dominated by giants such as, for example, Switzerland's Nestle. This company, in addition to the brands associated with it, such as Nescafe coffee or Nesquik breakfast cereal, has also become the owner of formerly local brands. In Poland, these include Winiary and Zielona Budka. In this case, capitalist unification takes the form of corporate synergies and market monopolisation. What is unified is more effective in the market game.

The same is true when it comes to management. It is easier to exercise control over a homogeneous group. Diversity is difficult to tame and, therefore, if we want to operate efficiently and effectively, we must introduce clear and uniform rules, which will necessarily be restrictive. Such strict discipline accompanied the Taylorist management system. The monotony of the production line is exactly the effect of standardisation, which, while increasing efficiency, reduces the variety of tasks performed and minimises spontaneous events that could disrupt the routine of mechanically repeated activities.

Speaking of rules, the one overriding capitalism is the pursuit of profit. The universal measure of money allows us to measure efficiency in this regard. This dangerous measure is applied in valuing the time of our lives and can lead to harmful simplifications, when someone who has money is therefore considered valuable and that what is expensive imperceptibly begins to mean what is good. Applying market rhetoric to the social or spiritual aspects of life has the same effect that uniformity also has in other cases – it deprives depth. This is the price to pay for the simplification it brings: “The function of system mythologies is to reduce complexity – to enable simple functioning in a complex world. The role of any mythology is to make sense of the world and to provide a sense of understanding and control over it”.³¹³

As we can see, modern capitalism, seemingly diverse, benefits from a number of practices that bring uniformity – among them we can mention globalisation, monopolisation or standardisation. It is in the field of homogenisation,

³¹³ M. Napiórkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

understood as the deprivation of diversity, that I build a parallel between the architectural signs of capitalism, that is, the skyscrapers and the mythical Tower of Babel. This one, in iconography, is often shown through the prism of the confusion of languages, that is, the effect produced by its construction. Its diversity is emphasised, both in its construction and in its surroundings. This can be seen, for example, in the famous Bruegel painting cited earlier. However, in my paintings I refer to the Babel before divine intervention, the one that was supposed to be the one mark that bound humanity together. So I depict my skyscrapers as monoliths, regular blocks with smooth, monotonous facades.

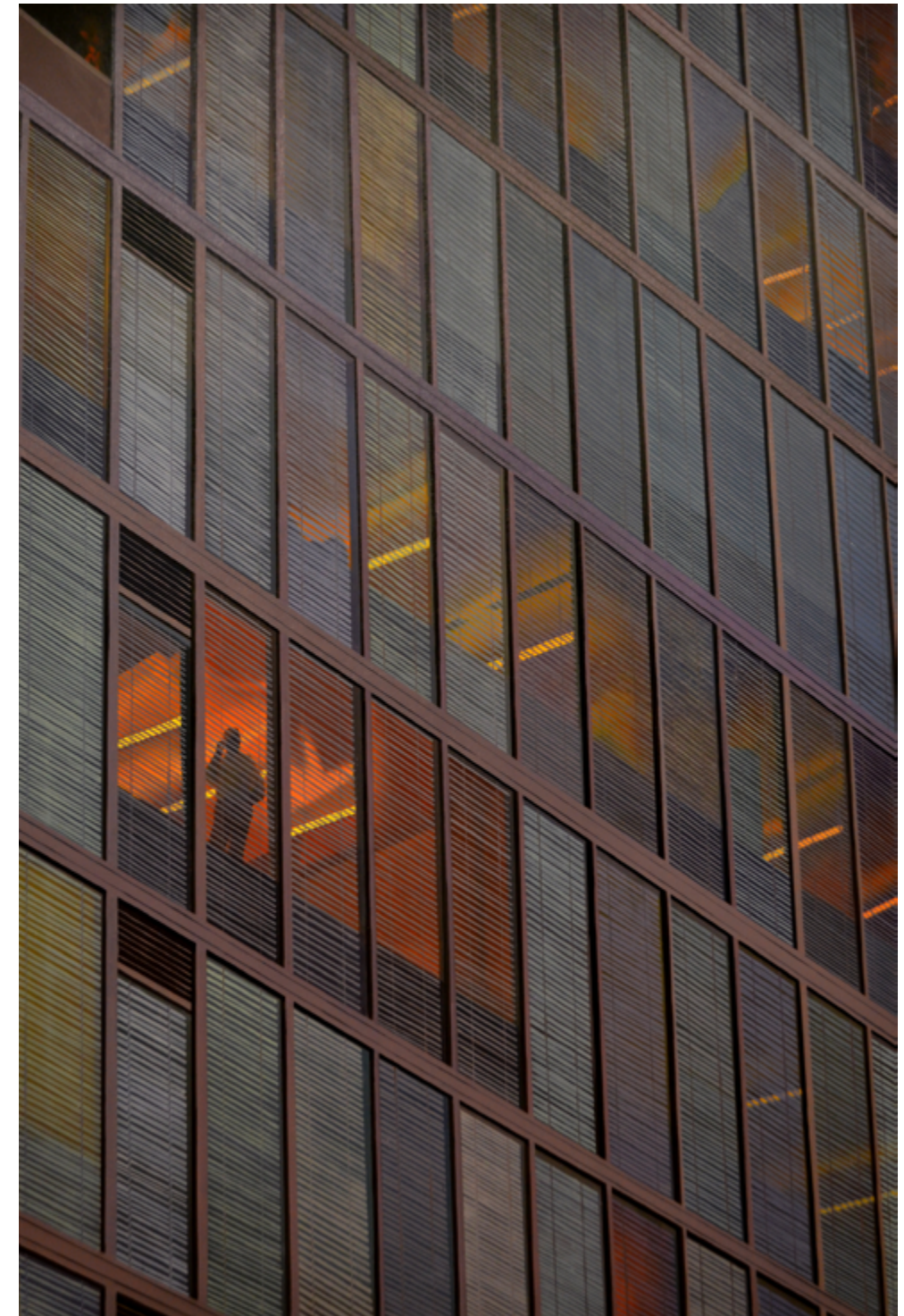
The myth of the Tower of Babel warns against uniformity because it represents the end of dialogue. Modernity is full of efficiency-enhancing solutions – processes must be made easier, faster, optimised. When it comes to users or customers, they should feel comfortable and want to return to the product. This is why aspects that may cause disputes and raise doubts are avoided. Social media algorithms analyse the content we view in order to show us only the news we like. So we only see information that is in line with our world view. As a result, we get closed in our bubbles and radicalised – we find it increasingly difficult to communicate with those who have a different opinion. According to the *Trust Barometer* survey, 53% of respondents admitted that they do not follow the opinions of people or organisations with whom they disagree.³¹⁴ “The culture of modernity increasingly deprives people of the ability to enter into a relationship with Otherness [other people, other things, other situations, events, sensations, experiences, etc.]”.³¹⁵ This is dangerous, because the less contact we have with Otherness, the more difficult it is for us to accept it. The more we wall ourselves off from strangers, the greater the fear they cause in us. And yet, as Zygmunt Bauman observes, “it is not human diversity that turns into fratricidal massacres, but disagreement with it and the intention to stake one’s claim at all costs. A precondition for peace, solidarity and friendly cooperation between people is consent to the multiplicity of ways of being human and readiness to accept the model of coexistence that this multiplicity requires”.³¹⁶

Diversity is demanding and, for this very reason, unprofitable. A homogenised world, although it is easier to function in it, is deprived of depth. Can we nevertheless unite in it? Or, despite the fact that we live united by one global culture, are we in fact dispersed?

³¹⁴ J. Sawulski, op. cit., p. 232.

³¹⁵ H. Rosa, op. cit., p. 16.

³¹⁶ Z. Bauman, S. Obirek, op. cit., p. 186.



28. *Tel-Aviv 4:01 PM*, oil on canvas, 180x120, 2018



29. *Wrocław 7:26 PM*, oil on canvas, 180x250 (polyptych), 2020



30. *Santiago 1:26 PM*, oil on canvas, 180x250 (polyptych), 2019

DISPERSION AND UNITY

Capitalism is a system built on competition. We all participate in the free market game and compete with each other for resources that are constantly in short supply – “even in a society of prosperity, the aggregate needs or wants of all individuals always exceed the number of goods available”.³¹⁷ This allows mechanisms such as interacting supply and demand curves to function, but we are doomed to a constant sense of scarcity. The conviction that there are not enough goods for everyone provokes the desire to be among those who can benefit from prosperity and places us in a competitive relationship with others. The competition inherent in capitalism is reflected in the assumption of egoism that characterises the system and the conviction that concern for self-interest is the main driver of human action.³¹⁸ This in turn results in the impression that we can only count on ourselves. As Andrzej Szahaj puts it, this system “has made the loneliness of the working man something obvious and natural, it has printed in us the conviction that if we lose, there is something wrong with us and not with the system”.³¹⁹ The individualism promoted by the capitalist system undermines faith in the sense of community action. One’s own distinctive relationship with one’s employer seems far more important than the group demands put forward through trade unions, for example. The capitalist work ethic, as Weber perceives it, is not oriented towards co-operation; rather, it results in a withdrawal into oneself and causes strangers to be treated as rivals and intruders.³²⁰

Such an unfavourable attitude could change under conditions that would foster bond-building. However, this is unlikely to happen under the new capitalism, where flexibility is valued more highly than stability. Mutual trust takes time and is created in informal situations, which are difficult to find in the often strictly controlled structure of workplaces. When what counts is quick and, above all, measurable profit, there is no space for bonding and genuine dialogue, and a superficial consensus emerges instead. Time pressure forces an attitude of systematic objectification of both others and oneself.³²¹

³¹⁷ M. Napiórkowski, op. cit., p. 84.

³¹⁸ H-J. Chang, op. cit., p. 330.

³¹⁹ Andrzej Szahaj interviewed by Marek Szymaniak [in]: M. Szymaniak, op. cit., p. 190.

³²⁰ This is how Richard Sennett interprets Max Weber’s words [in]: R. Sennett, *Razem...*, op. cit., p. 254.

³²¹ H. Rosa, op. cit., p. 175.

Not only is there not enough space to engage with others, but this also applies to the relationship with the work itself. Karl Marx wrote about objectification when he pointed out that the methods by which capitalism increases its productivity “cripple the worker, transforming him into a fraction of a human being, degrading him to the role of an addition to the machine; they make his work an torment by stripping it of its content, they make strange to him the spiritual forces of the labour process [...]; they transform his whole life into labour time”.³²² A worker who has no sense of influence over the work he does, and at the same time does not have the conviction that his work has any effect on the world, is deprived of the possibility of enjoying the positive aspects of work – its creative, causal dimension. Under such conditions, therefore, we do not feel connected either to our co-workers or to the results of our work.

Capitalism not only leads to alienation in working life, but has an impact on society as a whole. The model of a society that sees itself only as a collection of separate individuals, rather than as a community in mutual social relations with each other, is said to have been derived from the abstract formulas of the commercial contract and the circulation of money.³²³ “Selling and buying are gradually becoming the only forms available for building social bonds or even showing affection”.³²⁴ As Marcin Napiórkowski notes, even national identity is nowadays created on the basis of practices borrowed from the world of the market game. Countries now use logos in addition to their flag and emblem, have their own visual identity and marketing strategy, and need to know how to effectively sell themselves internationally. The same is true of smaller administrative units; provinces and cities have logos. Even historical events, such as the Warsaw Uprising, for example, are becoming brands. A similar cultural franchise, with a range of ‘branded’ goods (especially clothing) behind it, is the Cursed Soliders (Polish anti-communist resistance movement). In this way, the memory and sense of connection resulting from sharing a common history is expressed through the use of relevant products, and patriotism takes the form of attachment to a national brand.

Living in an individualised society today, we seek personal rather than communal experiences. Collective tasks are judged to be too impersonal³²⁵ and, when they do occur, we find it increasingly difficult to communicate due to the shrinking field of shared experiences. High specialisation makes communication more

³²² K. Marks, *Kapitał*, cit. per F. Wheen, *Marks: Kapitał: biografia*, transl. P. Laskowski, Muza, Warsaw 2007, p. 19.

³²³ M. Foucault, op. cit., p. 189.

³²⁴ M. Napiórkowski, op. cit., p. 221.

³²⁵ A. Touraine, op. cit., p. 56.

difficult. In highly developed, urban societies, the functions we perform in society are often very different from each other and we cannot easily exchange them, as used to be the case in less complex societies, such as gatherer-hunter ones.³²⁶ As a result, we have completely different worldviews, and it is more difficult to have solidarity that could be strengthened through shared habits, norms or beliefs. On the contrary – “modern individuals are indeed drowning in a sea of innumerable life possibilities and different conceptions of the good life”.³²⁷ This multiplicity, however, does not provoke dialogue, but intensifies dispersion – it causes people to close in their bubble and polarise their views. In this liberal model of a society made up of individuals, “people are supposed to seek individual solutions to the problems posed by society, rather than socially developed solutions to their private problems”.³²⁸ One of such social problems is the lack of time, which we strenuously fight against by reorganising our calendar time and time again, yet it is still not enough to keep up with the rushing and ever-accelerating reality.

As we can see, capitalism loosens bonds, and its architecture effectively reflects this impression. The urban space created by skyscrapers is not conducive to community building. When painting heavenscrapers, therefore, I do not try to show the life going on in them. If people appear in the paintings, it is always alone. Perhaps they are busy with their work, or perhaps they are immersed in thoughts of being somewhere else right now. Richard Sennett likened the architecture of high-rise buildings to the quality of contemporary relationships: “All these boxes of glass and steel that are simultaneously from everywhere and from nowhere, and the occasional patch of greenery all around, add up to a dead space. It is the same with many social relationships”.³²⁹ The reference to deadness is not accidental, as the relationship with the Other is fundamental in our lives. “Sustaining oneself in being is the work of community. [...] In order for one to feel oneself as real, one needs the help of others”.³³⁰

The myth of the Tower of Babel is a story about community. It is an expression of the fear of dispersal and, at the same time, a warning against uniformity. Free market economic mechanisms affect social practices and have the effect of breaking up community rather than supporting it. But is it even possible,

³²⁶ J. Suzman, op. cit., p. 368.

³²⁷ H. Rosa, op. cit., p. 12.

³²⁸ Z. Bauman, op. cit. p. 157.

³²⁹ R. Sennett, *Razem...*, op. cit., p. 317.

³³⁰ R. Safranski, op.cit., p. 152.

while maintaining individuality, not to lose the bond with the collective? Must diversity exclude unity? A practice that may provide an answer to these questions is ritual. But is there still a place for it in a secularised, modern world?

RITUAL AND PROCEDURE

We considered the myth of the Tower of Babel by looking at the two polar pairs of characteristics that a society can be characterised by. On the one hand, there was diversity and unity, which deepen bonds, while on the other side there was uniformity and dispersion, which have a negative impact on human relations. These two pairs relate to each other like ritual and procedure.

Ritual is a practice that allows experiences to be felt very personally, at the same time remaining connected to the community. The strength of ritual lies in its repetitive nature – it takes place in connection with tradition, it is a recreation of a scenario, a domain of convention, which, by its very nature, is social. For this reason, even when one goes through a ritual alone, it is directed outwards, reinforcing the relationship with the collective.³³¹ In this way, the personal experience is placed in a wider social context. When it comes to procedure, the situation is quite the opposite: there is no room for individual, separate treatment. Subjectivity disappears because the procedure uniformises, treating everyone in the same way. The procedure cannot leave room for exceptions, as these undermine the essence of the existence of the rule. Despite the equal treatment, the procedure does not connect us to any community; it can only include us in the structure, allowing us to move along the paths set by the system.

In the modern, capitalist world, it is procedures, not rituals, that provide us with answers on how to behave and how to deal with different situations in life. They allow us to regulate human actions, make them more efficient, disciplined and orderly. Coming from the field of rationality, procedures dominate secularised everyday life, in which the religious-magical character of rituals no longer has

³³¹ W. Burszta, M. Buchowski, *O założeniach i interpretacji antropologicznej*, cit. per G. Mańko, *Krytyczna analiza pojęcia rytuału*, 20.01.2012, <http://www.antropologia.isns.uw.edu.pl/?page_id=157>, DOA 8.09.2022.

any place. Although there are also rituals with a secular character, but they appear to be too weak to fulfil their function.³³² The role of ritual is to direct people outwards in shared, symbolic acts to relieve anxiety and interpersonal tensions. This anxiety, which cannot be relieved by procedures, builds up and contributes to a further loosening of social bonds. Perhaps it is exactly the stronger presence of rituals in our social life that could stop these changes.

Ritual has another characteristic that is not found in procedure – it offers the possibility of breaking the continuity of time. The reproduction of rituals allows the religious man to move from secular time into sacred time. The non-religious man also experiences the heterogeneity of time – some situations make time go longer, other times it escapes too quickly. However, as Eliade points out, although secular life has its moments of celebration and different rhythms of time, these are devoid of divine presence and remain only in the realm of human experience. This means that the non-religious man cannot connect with the inexhaustible time of eternity.³³³ For this reason, his life is burdened with the remembrance of finitude. A slightly different view is presented by Safranski, who, referring among other things to Nietzsche, formulates the notion of the “small eternity of the blink of art”.³³⁴ He describes how, at the end of the 19th century, religious mysticism took the place of secular mysticism, and the experience of breaking out of the ordinary course of time began to be sought in the aesthetic field. The rupture can occur through contact with art because the work of art houses an autonomous world. When we sink into it, we experience its inner eternity. The permanence of the work of art, and the possibility of returning to it at will, gives the impression that it resists time. It perpetuates and gives us access to a spiritual space that would otherwise pass away with the artist and his times. In other words – art immortalises.

Whether we are talking about religious ritual or other, secular forms of stepping out of time, these seem to be the practices that can resist the omnipresent procedure. Such moments of discontinuity are extremely valuable because they allow us to break free, if only for a moment, from the strict time regime of modernity. When we try to solve the problem of lack of time by keeping an even stricter eye on life's schedule, we may be able to get more things done and use time more effectively, more efficiently. In this way, however, we will not be able to multiply our time and escape the feeling that we are still running out of time. On the contrary, even though we will get more done, we will feel more

332 R. Sennett, *Razem...*, op. cit., p. 361.

333 M. Eliade, op. cit., p. 56.

334 R. Safranski, op. cit., p. 196.

busy, and yet one of the signs that we have time is that we do not need to rush through anything. The more we focus on controlling time, the more strongly time controls us. To get rid of the feeling that we don't have time, we need to stop controlling it, stop measuring the duration of the actions we take against the passage of time, and try to get back to a state where it was the actions that determined time. It is only at moments when we become so involved in what we are doing that we stop thinking about how much time our actions consume, that we are able to liberate ourselves from the time regime. “Self-forgetting is also forgetting time – and vice versa. It does not necessarily mean contemplative inaction. It only means total commitment to the thing or person and not to the question of what use it can be”.³³⁵ Therefore, we look for situations that allow us to “make contact and relate to the world and ourselves in a way other than the mode of optimisation”.³³⁶ Hartmut Rosa calls the conditions in which such contact occurs resonance zones. He counts art, nature and religion among them, but resonance can occur during an encounter with the Other and also during work. The condition, however, is openness to being touched, to the fact that resonance will trigger a transformation in us. This openness is achieved primarily through engagement. It is the key to freeing oneself from the time regime, to experience a different rhythm of time.

Although such moments of engagement are extremely difficult to come by in the rushing modernity, it seems worthwhile to make the effort and fight tirelessly to make room for them. It is the attentive relationship with another human being, the contact with nature, the cooperation and work that allow us to experience self-effectiveness, or, finally, the contemplation and creation of art, that give us the opportunity to step out of the cycle of time set by procedure. In such circumstances we can most fully feel that time is not money. In capitalism, the above aspects of life are undervalued. They are treated as unprofitable because they are unquantifiable and cannot be converted into profits. Thus pushed outside the margins, they do not fit into the tight structure of the system. However, they must not be forgotten, because without them any action, however effective, loses its meaning. As Clive Staples Lewis put it: “Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art [...]. It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival”.³³⁷

335 Ibidem, p. 191.

336 H. Rosa, op. cit., p. 209.

337 C.S. Lewis *Cztery miłości*, cit. per T. Sedláček, op. cit., p. 35.

SUMMARY

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In my search for an answer to the question of whether it is possible for a person not to work, I first turned to economics. This branch of knowledge was supposed to help me find out whether a world without work was even possible. After looking at selected economic mechanisms, such as the law of capital formulated by Piketty or the potential for unlimited wealth growth invoked by Keynes, it seems that it is not out of the question. Although we do not currently live in such a world, it is possible that one day it will come – with the advance of robotisation, the introduction of a basic income, or perhaps the elimination of those jobs that fulfil the Graeberian characteristics of meaningless work. However, the most important conclusion drawn from the analyses of sources on economics is that simply meeting basic needs would not stop us working. Among the reasons for taking up employment, we would perhaps list ensuring survival as the first, but it is certainly not the only reason.

It was therefore necessary to look deeper and explore other further benefits we can derive from work. First and foremost, the resources gained at work – in addition to meeting basic needs – have a number of other properties. Thus, we do not abandon employment once we have secured the minimum necessary to survive. Money determines the range of our capabilities, so we never feel that we have too much of it. Moreover, material status determines our social status. In a society that believes in meritocracy, an abundant wallet becomes evidence of merit and competence. And similarly – poverty is interpreted not only as material poverty, but the result of life's indolence, stupidity and laziness. Thus, we work because we believe that if we try hard enough, an adequate reward will await us for the effort we make. In this way, the free market, which likes to pass itself off as a natural and self-regulating process, is linked to the concept of justice, which is undoubtedly a cultural construct. We work to prove our worth to ourselves and others. Finally – we earn in order to buy, and by buying we define our identity. By attachment to the brands we choose, we manifest our worldview, through our consumer choices we create our image. Consumption helps us to compensate for various perceived deficiencies, including a lack of time. As we can see, materialism is not at all about a complete abandonment of spiritual needs, but about trying to satisfy them through material goods.

A change to a less materialistic approach would perhaps reduce the amount of time we spend at work, but this is not an easy change to make, especially as today's materialism is the result of a process that began many years earlier. The focus on worldly goods is the result of the changes brought with modernity, which resulted in the secularisation of society. This new secular optic also changed the way work was viewed. Previously, it was seen as a human destiny, a punishment for sins, and a way to multiply God's glory. However, with the spread of Enlightenment philosophy, the importance of religious dogma

diminished and its place was taken by the scientific paradigm. Thus, the hope of salvation disappeared and the time of life shrank to that of the temporal. In the face of these changes, work became a way of giving meaning to life, as well as a distraction from its finiteness. The time of life must be filled with events, because the actions taken during the temporal life must be enough to give it meaning. One must hurry up and make the most of every moment. In such a mental atmosphere, the maxim – *time is money* is born. Every missed opportunity grows into a real loss. As long as we measure the value of the time of our lives by the profit generated in it, as long as we strive for the greatest possible concentration of sensations and events, we will not be able to slow down. **If time is money, then it is impossible not to work.**

Time is money is not just a popular maxim – its context is broader. It encapsulates the spirit of capitalism. It shows how we think about the time of our lives using the market rhetoric of profit and productivity. Capitalism is not just a worldview-neutral economic system, but effectively permeates our everyday lives. In the age of modernity, it is capital that holds the power over time, and we are forced to submit to its control. I consider skyscrapers as a visual sign of this power that we can encounter in public space. It used to be that the towers of cathedrals were the highest point of the skylines of major cities. They manifested the surrender of power over time into God's hands and faith in a salvation to come. Nowadays, it is the skyscrapers that dominate urban landscapes that are becoming like sanctuaries of faith in progress. This is why I call them heavenscrapers, to emphasise that it is not so much the architectural form but rather their symbolic essence that I am concerned with. I analyse the impression made by the heavenscraper on the basis of its two essential formal characteristics: its glass façade and its height. I associate the height with the semantic load found in the archetype of the tower, present in the collective unconscious, and above all with those references which are connected with the sphere of the sacred. The heavenscraper draws on the same legacy as sacred pillars, obelisks and other structures marking the *axis mundi*. The height of the heavenscraper is its modernity; it is the result of the technological advances of recent centuries and a pretext for seeking ever new solutions. It is the idea of progress that is sanctified in the heavenscraper. The height of the heavenscraper also expresses the power relations inherent in capitalism, and therefore the hierarchy present in, for example, the structure of workplaces. The glass facade of the heavenscraper corresponds to systemic control. The heavenscraper can be interpreted as a variation on the theme of the panopticon. The use of glass also reveals the geometric structure on which the building is based. It brings to mind the fondness for creating rules and systems characteristic of the Western world. Finally, glass considered in terms of its transparency points to an association with the notion of myth, which must

remain invisible in order to be effective. It reminds us of the existence of the mythology of capitalism, to which we often unconsciously turn when seeking answers to how the world around us works.

Although capitalism has its own mythology, it grew out of Western culture, which is based on Judeo-Christian myths. Therefore, I attempt to read the meanings contained in heavenscrapers by drawing on the myth of building upwards – the story of the Tower of Babel, popular in this cultural circle. The translation of this Old Testament text into contemporary realities provides a starting point for considering the social unification and simultaneous dispersion brought about by modernity. Work under the new capitalism does not provide opportunities for bonding; the system sets us up for competition rather than cooperation. Ritual could come to the rescue as that practice which allows individualisation and at the same time unites us with the collective. However, it requires a commitment that is not easily afforded in our fast-paced modernity. However, if we want to stop the increasing acceleration, if we want to get rid of the impression that time is money, we have to fight for space for those aspects of life that are conducive to engagement and allow us to escape the time regime of modernity. What does this mean in practice? Beyond a critique of capitalism, do researchers propose any solutions? Or do we have to accept that the pace of life will continue to accelerate and that social bonds will become increasingly dispersed?

When I started looking into the topic of a world without work, one of the professors teaching doctoral students recommended that I finalise my research as soon as possible. He warned that the topic I had chosen was so timely that it would become obsolete any moment now. This was rather perverse advice, given that I intended to write about the increasing acceleration that plagues modern civilisation. I would like to be able to say now that I did not follow the professor's advice demonstrably, that I stretched out the research over time to counter the overwhelming rush of events and show that it is still possible not to hurry. The truth, however, is more prosaic – the world did not want to wait, there were too many other things to do, too much material to analyse and, of course, too little time to do it all. Modernity, full of possibilities, also gave me a hard time. Although I didn't finish my research quickly, that doesn't mean I didn't try to cope with the time pressure. Was the professor right and has the topic really become outdated in the meantime? You could say that. There were times – on the wave of economic prosperity – when the reduction of weekly working hours or the introduction of a basic income were discussed relatively often. Nowadays, the topic in the media space has been superseded by other issues. As I write these words in the summer of 2022, the global economy has not had time to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, and its problems have

been further intensified by the outbreak of war on Ukrainian territory. We are now standing on the threshold of a recession without yet knowing how far-reaching the consequences of the impending food crisis will be. If we treat the consideration of a world without work as a left-wing pipe dream for a time of prosperity, we may indeed consider that in a time of crisis we should put it aside, deal rather with belt-tightening and accept that the time has come to work even longer and even harder.

However, we can look at the situation from a different perspective. We are at a point in history where the existing world order has been questioned. As has happened before, after the turbulence of war, it will be time to reshape the rules that govern the world. The imperative for profit, often standing above morality, has allowed today's military actions to be indirectly financed through the purchase of resources. Looking at Europe's attempts to become less dependent on existing energy sources, it is clear that although such a scenario is less profitable, it does not mean that it is impossible. A separate question remains as to whether, in attempting to extinguish this fire, we are not setting our hand to further conflicts by paying for assets to resource-rich countries that do not necessarily have respect for human rights. Without going into details, the world is at a moment of violent upheaval, and when the time comes to rebuild it, it is worth being prepared not to make the same mistakes a second time and to try to make this new world a little better.

Perhaps only minor modifications need to be made, but perhaps this is the right time to revise the whole system and present a viable alternative to capitalism. After all, although it is going on, many scholars call it mature, late or outright prophesy its end.³³⁸ Karl Marx already predicted more than 150 years ago that competition between capitalists would lead to increasing oppression of the working class, which would eventually provoke revolt and the system would be overthrown by revolution.³³⁹ There will be those who recognise that this time will come any moment now, for example Rafał Woś believes that the free market model is reaching its limits because the poorest layers of society are already so poor that no further profit can be made from them.³⁴⁰ Richard Sennett, who pays attention to social relations, sees the reasons for the end of capitalism in another field. He diagnoses that the system cannot survive because it teaches people to be indifferent.³⁴¹ There are also claims that the capitalist approach

338 As, for example, in the title of Jonathan Crary's book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*.

339 F. Wheen, op. cit., p. 64.

340 R. Woś, op. cit., p. 280

341 R. Sennett, *Korozja charakteru...*, op. cit., p. 205-207.

needs to be revised as soon as possible, as it leads to the overexploitation of not only human but also natural resources. Among the authors putting forward this thesis is James Suzman, who warns that the cult of economic growth will lead us to disaster, including climate catastrophe.³⁴²

So what can be done to prevent this? There are many proposals, and individual academics present demands that relate to their field of interest. Naomi Klein calls for combating globalisation through a programme of protection and development of multiple worlds.³⁴³ Alain Touraine believes that in order to prevent further economic crises, after the one in 2008, it is necessary to begin to be guided by morality rather than profit.³⁴⁴ Rüdiger Safranski argues that the problem of leisure time must become part of politics.³⁴⁵ Rafał Woś suggests that we should measure happiness instead of GDP.³⁴⁶ There are, in fact, proposals for prosperity without economic growth or even for replacing predatory capitalism with a policy of sustainable development – the American Dream is to be replaced by its European version.³⁴⁷ Ewa Bińczyk would like to abolish the advertising industry,³⁴⁸ and David Graeber thinks we can shut down the global labour machine altogether.³⁴⁹ The list could go on. Many of the solutions are based on the need for a change of optics, the need to realise the flaws of capitalism³⁵⁰ and to move from material to post-material values,³⁵¹ which are to become the key to a good life.³⁵²

Let's leave the formulation of specific solutions in individual fields to the specialists. For artists, it is up to them to create art, which in itself can be a gesture against the materialism of the world. However, in addition to creating, it is also up to artists to ensure that there is room in the world not only for art, but also for beautiful utopias. This was one of the aims of undertaking this argument. Another was that each of us, regardless of our profession, is

342 J. Suzman, op. cit., p. 144.

343 N. Klein, op. cit., s. 471.

344 A. Touraine, op. cit., s. 196.

345 R. Safranski, op. cit., s. 144.

346 R. Woś, op. cit., p. 292-294.

347 J. Kamińska, *Nowe wspaniałe światy: współczesne projekty doskonałego społeczeństwa*, Nomos, Cracow 2012, p. 141.

348 E. Bińczyk, *Jak przetrwać w antropocenie*, 24.10.2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AH2z-RhbBRAY>>, DOA 10.09.2022.

349 D. Graeber, op. cit., p. 303.

350 J. Berger, op. cit., p. 148.

351 J. Kamińska, op. cit., p. 143.

352 J. Suzman, op. cit., p. 464.

allowed to have our own concerns about the shape of the world in which we have come to live together, to ask questions and seek our own answers.

If I had to give my answer in the simplest way, it would be as follows: it may seem that only when we would no longer have to work would we have the time to do what is really important to us. However, it seems that as long as we do not find value in life-as-itself, we will have to work to give it meaning. It is possible to be liberated from the compulsion of constant action only by understanding that **time is not money**.

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Wrocław 7:26 PM, oil on canvas, 180x250 (polyptych), 2020, source: own

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It is said that all theories are in fact autobiographies. Perhaps this is why I sometimes get emotional when reading the acknowledgements at the end of scientific books. Often authors who have presented throughout the argument lightly and as if effortlessly the results of their research, only in the acknowledgements do they show how much work and also cooperation it took to achieve the intended goal. I therefore enjoy reading the acknowledgements, and in my own dissertation I treat this part as an important point. I am pleased to express my gratitude for the kindness of so many people who have shared their knowledge, skills and, above all, their time with me, which is perhaps the most difficult to share, as we ourselves often feel its scarcity. My thanks go to:

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Noemi Staniszeńska-Żurawska

HEAVENSCRAPERS

Is it possible not to work?

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