

I. INAUGURAL LECTURE FOR OPENING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2006/2007

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ECONOMY AND ART

1. KANT AND RZECZPOSPOLITA SUPPLEMENT

The topic of this lecture has been following aesthetics and philosophy of culture for a long time, at least since the end of the 18th century when Kant introduced the concept of free beauty in his *Critique of Judgement*. It was to become manifest in an artistic object which belongs to the domain of this beauty inasmuch as its form is inner and does not serve any external purpose. Hence, it is self-oriented and exists solely for itself. An object endowed with this beauty is a source of real aesthetic experience and makes it possible to formulate judgements of taste. Kant believed that due to Beauty the mind is set free from everyday, economic, religious or political entanglements. It enjoys freedom for its own sake since it is the foundation of human entity. If a practical world combines taste with its goals, it loses its contents, and a man gets deprived of something extremely meaningful.

On the other hand, however, we know that after artists set free from direct relationships with church and lay sponsors in the modern era, they were not creating forms supposed to exist merely for themselves. They immediately were captured by the free market economy. Their uniqueness, being an aesthetic requirement and value, seemed rather to result from the necessity to fight the competition. Was the concept of Kant merely a utopia? Maybe it was just a dream to recast a magic on a world disenchanting with the religious sacrum, as Max Weber described it, and to enchant it with the vessels of artistry, overflowing with free beauty? Maybe. Theoretical research and disputes have been ongoing ever since *The Critique of Judgement* was published. The topic of economy and art has been interweaving in the aesthetics and philosophy of culture with a distinct, red thread. It is so extensive however, that even short remarks on its

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fundamental problems would demand too much time, leaving unsatisfied listeners instead of clarifying hardly anything.

Let us therefore begin with a relatively meaningful and modern example which will open up a space for contemplation to identify truly important matters and things defined by our topic. For some time, as its supplement on Fridays, the daily *Rzeczpospolita* has been issuing a cheap and plain book on classical European art. It is an album of reprints and concise monograph of the presented artist. The quality of reprints is decent, and the monograph always comprehensible and expert. The book is on sale together with the current issue of the newspaper. Being a supplement, its attractiveness seems to imply that compared to its price, the price of the newspaper is like a tip for a waitress for her competent service. Yet precisely the reverse is true: it is the book that is a tip from the publishers for such a buyer who will become interested in the newspaper and will read it regularly. In addition, publishers send buyers a message that *Rzeczpospolita* nourishes them not only with everyday prosaic ads, politics, business and gossip, but also – at a fairly cheap price – introduces them into the salons of high culture where they will be able to move around freely, without unnecessary feeling of confusion or lack of knowledge, instead with grace and satisfaction. Even if potential buyers do not purchase it, they could feel flattered by the mere chance offered because it recognizes them as entities of culture whereas they possibly do not regard themselves as ones every day.

This example (by no means peculiar, but typical for other newspapers and not only newspapers) covers some symptomatic moments revealing areas where artistic objects belong to a complex network of economic relations and linkages. These moments are linked together although they are different, and also they refer to the hidden cultural, commoditized, financial and industrial bonds. Ultimately, the topic of economy and art reveals at least some of its aspects.

As mentioned earlier, the artistic supplement to *Rzeczpospolita* deals with European classical painting. We consider here not only the unique and prominent artists of different moments in the history of art, but also those essentially belonging to school or academic textbooks, popular historical compendia and synthesizing monographs. Because the number of volumes accompanying the Friday issues must be limited (twenty five have been thought of), therefore only those artists have been selected who obviously belong to Parnassus. The conventional wisdom has it – using Gombrowicz parlance from *Ferdydurke* – that the selected classics “great artists were indeed”.

The primary goal is not to enlarge a group admirers of the presented classics, but to concentrate the market's attention on the newspaper by means of the series. Art has therefore its utility for the newspaper, and it is worthy inasmuch (or even less worthy) as a shocking bribery scandal covered in the exclusive news. This value depends on the increase of sales. But beggars cannot be choosers; why not offer Leonardo da Vinci to the readers? Especially, when such treatment of art is neatly disguised as an offer to cheaply access salons of high culture. Gombrowicz therefore may turn over in his grave because those appearances are still effective, but who cares? Nothing else adds so much to charm, magic and effectiveness of business as properly designed and applied appearances.

2. AESTHETIC PRAYER BOOKS AND ORIGINALS

Rzeczpospolita reasonably assumed that a book with reprints of painting masterpieces can mean for the readers something more and something completely different. Their visual culture has been shaped by looking at albums, postcards, stamps, cheap framed reproductions of pictures adorning flats, hotel rooms, cafes, restaurants, and wrappings of some merchandise. It is also shaped through watching films and television programmes, Internet pages and visual advertisements, which – although of mixed artistic quality – nevertheless employ significant visual forms from a more or less distant artistic past. All these together constitute – as Malraux has said – a museum of imagination of all of us.

A particular album representing a fraction of it, together with an expert commentary, is of special value. It is today an aesthetic prayer book. Even though it may represent a substitute of contemplating a masterpiece as enjoying free beauty, it suspends the everydayness, even if only for a while, and introduces us into a reality of pure forms in which a surrogate of free beauty remains. On the other hand, we usually think about works of art and perceive them as abstracts from the mainstream of social practices, existing only because we had a look at them. Hence, they are for us just pictures, sculptures or forms of architecture. Each has its known or unknown author, time of creation, meaning and aesthetic value. The same thinking and perceiving of artistic objects is unconsciously applied to their reproductions as if they were identical or transparent so that the original could easily be seen. This is not strange. Schools, artistic magazines and historical

compendia of art have been forming this habit, thus defining their roles in the aesthetic rituals.

The price, quality and format of the offered prayer books increase (or decrease) those roles. The price of booklets offered by *Rzeczpospolita* is just PLN20 making them affordable for medium wage earners. Their relatively high circulation makes it possible that the technical quality of reproduction is excellent, otherwise the project would be unsuccessful. The booklet's format does not require any special accommodation. It fits easily into a standard bookshelf. A new addition on each Friday, as long as the edition goes on as planned, will create a neat collection of volumes to be used for a ritual according to one's fancy or mood.

Their meaning is therefore twofold: artistic and economic. The first dimension is shaped by the content and quality of a given volume in the series. The second one – by the retail price and the way of its existence in a flat according to the wealth level. One might expect that these dimensions exist separately, and their unity appears at the moment of a purchase. Then the economic dimension disappears. What really counts is the artistic value of the reproduced paintings and the accompanying historical (or critical) commentary. This is however spurious again: those dimensions are an organic, inseparable whole, because the physical measurements of a single copy in the series affects its price and the purchase decision. The aesthetic reception is also influenced. Indeed, our reception of any reproduced visual form depends, amongst others, on its relation to the original: whether it is enlarged or diminished. Therefore, the artistic and aesthetic attractiveness is being torn, as a body with a thorn, by the monetary dimension. Though this is overlooked in the aesthetic ritual.

Those with incomes higher than average, and craving for artistic experiences will not even detect the newspaper's proposal. They can afford "real" albums published by the renowned houses; they also have appropriate space in their houses or flats to accommodate them. There are framed reproductions and copies on their walls, and sometimes even relatively cheap original pieces of contemporary art. Hence, their aesthetic prayer books are more noticeable and prestigious. If they buy *Rzeczpospolita*, it is because they appreciate the newspaper, not its artistic supplement. They disregard it because they consider themselves as true frequenters of the world of high culture, although the objects of their aesthetic experiences are also defined by productive and economic aspects.

However, they don't even begin to compare to those who can afford the direct, live company of original artistic works they either own or gain access

to whenever they wish because they travel unlimitedly and visit the masterpiece expositions. For those people all reproductions and copies are just more or less satisfactory imitations of art. The mere status of originality of a given masterpiece presents its aesthetic value for them. They believe that dealing with a visual original, through its reproduction which is not organically connected with the material genuine original, presents an unrecoverable loss. Both above-mentioned categories of art recipients are in agreement about that, although they do not have funds or spare time to manage such relations with the original art. Nevertheless, all are subject to similar restrictions as their visual culture is also shaped by the world of reproductions. It is their source of knowledge about the classical rank, attractiveness, and artistic values of its elements. The mere aspiration to deal with the original works of art, and the ideas of their aesthetic value strangely enough originate from this very world and from its economic entanglements.

3. REPRODUCTIONS BEFORE ORIGINALS

How is it possible? Its conclusion should be accordingly that an egg (world of reproductions) precedes its mother hen (original). But precisely the opposite seems to be rational: originals come first before reproductions! This was the case in the past. The visual forms of reproductions coincided during the first decades of the 19th century with industrial design origins and – moreover – with the first national art museums. The two phenomena were correlated. The developing capitalist countries saw an increased demand for designs of various forms of changing machines and devices, and for visual shapes decorating industrial goods (e.g., in the textile industry). This was their distinguishing feature and a competitive factor. The demand for such forms and shapes in turn drew attention to art, not only to modern art, but also to an unlimited reservoir of art at hand to be used as a source of visual culture indispensable for shaping industrial design.

Museums were thus a significant business investment, and expected long-term returns made art more valuable than gold in the literal sense. That was underlying, e.g., the parliamentary justification in the 1930s to create and develop the collections of the British Museum. It also enhanced the attractiveness of artistic originals, and stimulated origins and dynamic growth of individual collections which promptly became more prestigious. Well, according to Herbert Read, industrialists have found that they need art and therefore they would like to buy it just like they buy any other goods,

and use them in their factories or even in their machines. Such an attitude promoted purchasing art of all kinds and from all time periods, and its use in production. While styles and periods have been mixed up and tangled up, this was perceived as a sign of pursuing originality. The artistic forms have thus become the practical values as they were treated as an industrial component of business activity resources, and the designs for those forms embodied in original works of art were accordingly measured by means of financial values. Let us however study Read with diligence: industrialists mean originality which is different from what has been essential for an artist since the modern era. They do not mean the distinguishing of an artistic work, but that of a mass manufactured product. Works of art are no longer the phenomena of artistic practice, thus becoming an active moment in the world of business competition.

This is precisely what constitutes a foundation to the real socialization of art. This process means practically that art is equalled to all goods, and there arises a production demand for the education of artists and designers of industrial forms. Artefacts from various periods and eras may now quietly coexist, intermix, and emerge in the most implausible and unexpected relationships as the attributes become known of the economic value of a product: fabric, a machine, a piece of furniture, a building, through the respective imaginary material. By the way, the real creation of mass culture, or standardized culture, happened at this time point. The standardization is comparable to that of industrial products under the economic disguise of merchandise.

It is known however that a parallel influence on the shape and dynamic growth of this culture has been exerted by tools, technologies and means of photographic reproduction. Their origins are likewise due to the quest for the ways to reproduce artworks. The researchers of photography claim that the end of the 1920s saw the technical perfection of reproduction methods. They introduced the above-mentioned universal museum of imagination which was defining the visual culture for us all. Therefore, it has been shaping us as entities experiencing art. It also offers modern norms of aesthetic taste which were seemingly inborn to human nature according to Kant.

However, this museum does not exist by itself, as a myriad collection of vessels for free beauty, but it becomes present as specific productions within the cultural industry. It is these productions – not more or less successful applications of artistic shapes in machines and their manufacture – which inverts the primordial, natural order: an egg precedes its mother hen, i.e. the world of reproductions, independent and disassociated from originals, makes

a closed circulation, and influences the cultural and socio-economic existence of originals, instead of their impact on the world of reproductions. Each series of reproductions, especially of artistic classics (although not automatically so), does not (or at least does not have to) begin with the experience of a given original, but with something completely different: with replicating some vague model standard of a specific visual form, which has already been present in a commercial and cultural exchange. The reproductions multiply therefore through reflections of reproductions. In a sense, they do not need originals at all.

For example, in the 1960s, when van Gogh's *Sunflowers* became extremely popular in Europe and in Poland, the original masterpiece itself was in a very bad shape. The painter had been using poor paints and his painting faded over time. The reproductions on the other hand were brilliant! *Sunflowers* in albums, postcards, on hotel walls were flawless and "beautiful". Those who saw the original in the museum were disappointed. They were expecting to see what they knew as the reproduction, but more perfect, and instead they saw a visual nightmare.

Conservators revived its former "glory", but also produced at least two questions. First, what did conservators reproduce? Wasn't that their own model whose author was hidden behind the anonymous, technical-organizational division of work? Second, are conservatorial interventions recreative or creative? In other words: do they revive the primary "glory" of an artwork or just what is their guess? The return to the authentic form of an artwork is not possible anyway. Time has already performed its task. Original artworks suffer from organic and chemical transformations. They are influenced by light, dust, temperature, humidity, change of exposition, care or lack of care during transportation etc. Hence, if one restores its "glory" by conservatorial activities, one alters them. The status of any artwork as an original (especially a classical artwork) is somewhat dubious just like the genuineness of a female or male beauty after many facelifts.

However, neither the cultural industry manufacturing reproductions nor the owners of originals ask such questions. This world applies its own laws and model standards, and creates the specific excluded reality. As already mentioned, it shapes our visual culture. The originals of artworks are then affected not only by conservators, but they also incorporate – when we look at them – the aesthetic postviews of their numerous reproductions. They are appreciated more than the former ones, because since the beginning of the modern era the mere status of being an original has been perceived as the major aesthetic quality. Its presence in a given product of artistic practice

makes us believe in its ultimate uniqueness. Hence, there is a spurious advantage over the museums of imagination.

The comparative assessment of the two originals, however, does not depend directly on their exclusive artistic values. The assessment criteria (and auction prices) are defined in the course of economic circulation of cultural production where they are ranked high, average or just poor. Their value may be relatively constant, or variable – depending on the economic cycle. There are many factors involved. The main one is the radiation degree of reproductions or the touristic attractiveness of the original. The radiation degree may be measured by means of the demand for a choice of reproduction forms. The touristic meaning may be measured by the numbers of willing visitors. Evidently, both factors impact on each other: the more alluring reproductions of a given original, the greater number of people willing to experience the original. The reverse is also true: the number of willing visitors stimulates the demand for reproductions. The feedback however is not always symmetrical. When it happens, as is the case with classical artworks, a given original is ranked at the top of hierarchy.

There have also been cases when radiation of a reproduction and its attractiveness increased after the original disappeared. In 1911, the original *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci was stolen from the Louvre. The painting's increasing fame was further emphasized, and publishers of postcards discovered a new business. There were increased queues of visitors to the Louvre who wanted to see the empty space on the wall. In 1919, Marcel Duchamp made a *Mona Lisa* parody by adorning a cheap reproduction with a moustache and a goatee, thus changing a postcard into artistic original, filling the emptiness without the great Italian masterpiece, and also contesting the cultural almightiness of the museum of imagination.

The above-given criteria apply not only to the assessment (and pricing) of the original artworks, but also to some cultural industry products which have been manufactured far from artistic practice. For example, the historical Donald Duck figures from the oldest Disneyland parks, or copies of the first comic books have more radiation power as reproductions, greater popularity as an attraction, and hence, a higher price, than many originals of classical or modern artworks. Moreover, there is a certain abuse of those artefacts, because one seeks in them something that has not been lost. One tries to identify its specific, though so far unrevealed, artistic values. Their promotion to the high culture was thus secured by a faceless, aggregate author: the cultural industry.

There is nothing strange about this: in a modern society, it is the industry which creates criteria and barriers of the high culture and the popular culture, and at the same time, depending on the convenience for the involved economic concerns, it conceals them. New criteria are established instead of former ones, linked to the social status of people and their education. As already mentioned above, the relevant sectors of this industry are busy shaping the education media for the visual culture. Those criteria and (variable) barriers contribute to a social pattern of a cultural man who shall not live on bread alone, because of “higher needs”.

Such products of cultural industry are welcomed by school education at different levels and propagates their patterns. The mass affecting of both spheres results in social perception of the high culture, and the experience of it seems accessible by anybody, no matter what social status or level of education. The class differences between people are no longer evident. In such cultural circumstances, the world of artistic values and aesthetic experiences is open to everyone, as everyone seemingly decides upon “the higher needs”. Due to the influence of the cultural industry, we all hold kitsch in ourselves, therefore we usually rank higher – say – a figure of Goat Dummy from Pacanów than spatial forms by Hasior from Zakopane.

4. RATIONALITY AND DILUTION OF TASTE

My presentation so far proves that art is not conflicted with the business practice, and, moreover, they are harmoniously related as if the economy were natural domain for art: industrial design, reproduction of artworks, touristic attractions, original art trade, advertisement, etc. When we consider those domains together, we see that in spite of their peculiarities they embrace some identical or similar elements. Indeed, similar (or the same) objects may have been appealing for designers, or as artistic reproductions, touristic attractions (or a part of them), or originals during art auctions, or finally – as components of commercial spots. However, depending on the domain under study, we shall deal with different economic relations. Each domain is always defined by the rules and criteria specific for the given relations. Anyway, whatever constitutes them, is always subject to rational cost, profit and loss accounting. The entities to receive the artworks (or rather to deal with them) will be manager, planner, marketing specialist, at the end – bookkeeper and accountant, etc. They decide – using a crowd of

art experts – on the social presence of art in particular visual forms, places of collective life and individual existence.

Due also to their calculations and activities, the rational allocation of entry tickets takes place to the enhanced immortal world created by them – as I pointed out earlier – as a domain of high culture. Thus, art emerges as something worth serious consideration as it is backed by serious business. Therefore, its importance, rank and underlying human values will be regularly highlighted. As I said at the beginning, nothing else adds so much to charm, appeal and effectiveness of business as well shaped and applied appearances.

According to Brecht, the meaning of such appearances is universal and suprahistorical. He believes they are as old as trade, aware of its goals and contexts. In his unfinished novel *The Business Affairs of Mr. Julius Caesar*, Brecht shows with his distinctive irony that they conceal not only a mercantile attitude towards art as a utilitarian value, but also that the mere exchange of merchandise gives birth to basic ideas of European humanism which, along with the idea of freedom, were so important and cherished by Kant. Brecht's hero is scorning that one has all the right to claim that trade has introduced more humanism to people's relations. It was certainly a merchant's head where the first idea of non-violence was born, the idea that peaceful means are useful, that bloodless means may be more advantageous than bloody terror. Indeed, a sentence to death by hunger is more gentle than a sentence to death by hanging. Likewise, the fate of a milky cow is more fortunate. It must have been a merchant who first got the idea that one may extract from a man more than just his guts. We should therefore remember that a great humanitarian slogan "live and let live" means "live" for those who drink milk, and "let live" for cows.

Art is also present in a gentle whisper of goods exchange and circulation. For market games players it is a cash cow to yield fat milk of incomes, and this is why it is allowed to live, or become present in the circulations of goods. It is not however the cow from the famous painting by Tintoretto which one can only contemplate – according to Kantian aesthetics – but cannot milk. This is a cow from such a world of forms whose image might well be a cash cow! On the other hand though, its maintenance costs (i.e. an artist's allowance) are just comparable to the reproduction costs of milk yielding, or relatively low.

Hence – in these circumstances – one does not even dare to think about a conflict between economy and art, although this lack of conflicts had some price to be paid by artistic works. Firstly, they have been given a status of

utilitarian values. Thus their forms have been losing a status of a vessel for free beauty which was the reason that recipients of artistic experiences could discover the completeness of their humanity. The good taste of a man becomes diluted in this very milk. Secondly, originals have been degraded as they become now centres of reproduction radiation, touristic or exhibition attractions. Although they are ranked highly in a financial ladder, but at the same time, the artistic hierarchies of values become distorted or degraded. Thirdly, a high price is paid as art is being forced to stay passive in relation to the processes of shaping and transforming its visual forms during manufacturing reproductions. This results in turn in locating artworks as originals at the side of reproductions, as one of many possible ways of their visual occurrence. Fourthly, the price is the subjection of art to criteria of high culture established (and modified if necessary) by cultural industry. The result is that the borderlines between art and non-art become fuzzy. To paraphrase Simmel from his *Philosophy of Money*, one can say that in the domain of financial affairs all artworks are equivalent. Not because they have the same price – according to this economist and philosopher – but because they have no price. Money has the only value.

5. IN THE LAND OF COCKAIGNE

Such a rational approach to a topic “economy and art” is definitely cruel. The motivation of this lecture however was not to drastically and rudely deal with humane depth of art in order to take sadistic pleasure! My goal has been to show relations and links between art and production with its market, resulting from its logic, independent from any aspects, moods or details. Nevertheless, we know that logic represents just a structure, a framework of a given topical system, just like grammar of a language represents structure of communication. The contents here is at least as important as its form. However, the density and (relative) nonpermeability of the contents of the art world are often obstacles to perceive a structure of its social and economic occurrences. Therefore, now that I have presented what is important for those occurrences, I shall proceed to relevant topical moments.

First of all, we should pay attention to a spiritual meaning of imagination museum which was created by cultural industry. With reproductions, many styles are present and coexist, no matter where, when and in what context they were born. It was Simmel who first noticed this multitude well before cultural industry was developed, and he defined it as an internal side of

universal increase of adjustment ability and driving agility. Owing to it, people got off from the traditional fixedness in what was regarded as permanent forms of life and artistic shapes of objects. Their consciousness and imagination gained the freedom of choice among them.

However, at the time of his writing *The Philosophy of Money* (the first edition was published in 1900), it was not about the choice among object from the museum of imagination, it was about the widely perceived environment of people: choosing among styles of buildings, garden forms, sculptures, shapes of books and styles of paintings. Only after this museum became familiar with people's relations, along with the development of photography, reproduction technologies, film, television, and later, with the Internet, almost unlimited possibilities of choice among styles and their artistic concretizations have emerged. A Man, as a selector, emerged outside of them, to deal with them depending on circumstances, spiritual needs or moods. His relation with them became casual. Depending on circumstances, it was harmonious or disharmonious.

One may therefore claim that the freedom to be enjoyed by a Kantian subject of an aesthetic experience through the contemplation of free beauty, being present in a generous, self-purposeful artwork, has become effectively possible owing to its enslavement in the wheels of production and business practice. It was a completely different freedom though! A concrete artwork under its stylistic shape did not draw attention to itself, but it became just one of many visual possibilities to cast a glance at, to enjoy its view, to compare with others, to disregard or ignore, depending on one's own free will.

The recipients themselves are – if one may say so – unstylistic in the sense that they lack own style in the way people (and their works) used to have in times of the Gothic style, the Renaissance, the Baroque, etc. It is not accidental that there is no uniform modern style today, although there exist modern artistic practices. They not only compete with each other (and this is not important actually), but – no matter what the demand of their subjects – they increase the number of offers and choice of possibilities of a style among the multitude of them in the museum of imagination. The awareness of such a state of affairs underlies today an extremely significant and popular aesthetics and artistic practice of postmodernism.

Let us also notice another important problem in this context: each style of art presents a centre of distance, i.e., a kind of freedom, from goods. It alters our primordial and natural perspective of approaching reality. On one hand – as Simmel writes – there becomes a certain space from directedness of things, there is no concreteness of motivations, thus suspending between us

and things a curtain similar to a delicate, heavenly scent, resting on distant hills. On the other hand, it takes away a cold estrangement, hostility, or impartiality from things, i.e., it aesthetizes them. Subsequently, we perceive them as if they were just a materialization of a given style, although we only use its perspective of perception. This is why one says that the landscapes in Provence are as if taken from Cezanne, that some women are Rubens-like beauties, and that some countryside drinkers have swollen faces like figures on *The Feast of Bacchus* by Velazquez. This results in a certain beauty and charm of people, things and events, thus disclosing more than in a direct insight, sometimes even completely changing its connotation.

The world in the museum of imagination is therefore a delightful land of Cockaigne. The artistic artefacts and their styles dwell here in their closed and fixed shapes. There is a magic flavour above each of them; i.e., ways of seeing things, events, and situations. Getting in touch with this museum is not innocent because its objects transform and influence our visual awareness. Subsequently, our attitude towards reality seems to be proportionate with the visual culture internalized through contacts with this museum. This culture defines what we aesthetically like and what we dislike. It also leads to its certain territories, and convinces us to stay inside, or just the contrary, it pushes towards various fields of things, events and situations in order to aesthetically enjoy the built-in postview of style or a given masterpiece.

Nevertheless, even in time when *The Philosophy of Money* was written, the human eradication was already unbearable. A human entity, as a result of the unchecked intrusion of money into human interrelations, moves away from the closest groups (family, friends) to more distant ones (institutions of state, production, market and culture), linked by business affairs and some needs. Subsequently, family ties break up, autonomy gets attention, new links with spatially remote communities and circles are sought after. Simmel observes that a general picture emerging is about more distance to truly internal relationships, and less distance to external ones. The development of culture is the reason that what used to happen unconsciously and instinctively, now is happening with a clear and analyzing awareness, becomes a mechanical habit and instinctive obviousness. Likewise, what used to be most distant now becomes closer, at the price of more distance to what was close. Simmel explains henceforth a particular predilection towards artistic styles most distant in terms of time and space. Thoughts framed in this way inspire the imagination, and satisfy multiple needs for stimulation. As they are remote from our direct interests, each of those

strange and distant ideas sounds softly in us, offering a very nice stimulation to our weakened nerves.

This could explain today that generally greater radiation of reproductions is typical for the classical artworks, and also that the auction prices of original art, not necessarily the top ones – say, works of modernism, or even from between the wars – are higher than those of original artworks by renown and distinguished contemporary artists. Many of them would prefer to be their own grandfathers or great-grandfathers, to be financially independent, free artists. The same is true about the museum of imagination. The contemporary artists with their albums, catalogues and elitary exhibitions have a long and winding way to the art market and to a wide audience. The past classics seemingly bored look from their eternity to everlasting clouds of enchantment, fresh interpretations, and impressive banking accounts for “captains of cultural industry”.

Distance is a foundation of any art. It usually approaches us from a specific distance, and – as Simmel writes – it does not represent reality with a simple assurance, but with instantly elusive fingertips. It is therefore not accidental that art is being defined as a producer of means of distance. Hence, be it original art or reproductions from the museum of imagination, we supplement our lives with it, or – if circumstances permit – we live it. Owing to production and cultural industry we have it at our fingertips. It is our cultural obviousness. That this is due to a complex world of competitive free economy and its economic relations does not disavow (aesthetically or morally) either art or imagination museum. Freedom and distance, which thus belong to the features of our human condition, are not present in spite of them, but thanks to them. This opinion should not be taken as a defence of contemporary relations. I am far from such an apology. I am just showing that, as usual, a man and humanity do not stand over the social relations which produce them.

I began this lecture with Kant for whom the need to experience artworks was obvious for another reason: to indulge with freedom through the beauty of their forms. However, having said all above, this possibility seems challenging today. This does not change the fact that notwithstanding all transformations undergone in the industrial design and in all treatment by the cultural industry, they offer something essential. The aesthetical rituals with their participation are considered as significant not only aesthetically but also existentially. At the same time, they are profitable for producers. Otherwise, the *Rzeczpospolita* daily mentioned at the beginning of the

lecture or any other newspapers and media would have no reason to publish large circulation series of books about art.

What is the magic of this art, closed in a cage of utilitarian values, employed during aesthetical rituals? When I was pointing to the Kantian concept of a masterpiece, I mentioned that it may express just a dream to enchant our world deprived of religious sacrum, this time by means of artistic vessels, full with free beauty. The author of *The Critique of Judgement* might mean something more fundamental from what it was said directly. In other words, since when sacrum became transcendental, or was found beyond human perception, a man has been perceiving the world around as empty and boring. Luckily enough though, art is being created which distances him from this world (and from himself as of its particle), thus allowing to embrace him with aestheticity, as with a coat. Maybe it was his greatest discovery.

Then, as after Kant the history of culture has been examined, practical and spiritual relations of a man with the world and with himself have been analyzed, it was discovered that throughout his whole history a man was building various material and spiritual forms (not only cultural) which distanced him from what was natural and biological. Those forms are exactly his generic vessels of freedom. The artworks are their special kind. It was also observed that although it was Kant who first noticed this role of them, his look stayed fixed in this discovery. Beauty has been captured in pure artistry. It was beyond its theoretical confines that not only other forms distancing a man were found, but also social practice, public and private lives of people where those forms have multi-coloured aesthetic shapes and can be divided into yet newer varieties of beauty different from what he thought himself. Art also becomes present in them. This constitutes the need for art, whereas the means to satisfy this need are, among other things, aesthetical rituals and various albums as prayer books.