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## PRE EMPTIVE ANXIETY OR EXISTENTIAL- IST FREEDOM OF CHOICE?

### ABSTRAKT

Ten wstępny esej omawia wszystkie prace włączone do obecnego tomu Polonia Journal w świetle Teorii Afektu oraz Teorii Egzystencjalizmu. Te dwie teorie pomagają wyjaśnić niepokojące obszary myśli w załączonych tekstach. Odnosi się wrażenie że wszystkie one zawierają w sposób bardziej lub mniej ukryty głęboką obawę o teraźniejszość i przyszłość. W świetnie opracowanych artykułach mówiących o różnych aspektach współczesności, jak dzihadyzm, terroryzm, zagadki Rosyjskiej Duszy, post-socjalistyczna ideologia w krajach Wschodniej Europy, kicz, moralność w świecie symulakry, świat Baraka Obamy oraz obecność/nieobecność Jezusa w pop-kulturze, autorzy ostrożnie eksplorują te obszary w obrębie ogólnego tematu tego tomu, *Społeczne niepokoje na przestrzeni dziejów. Naukowe analizy, interpretacje i reprezentacje w literaturze i sztukach wizualnych*. W świetle tych analiz, autor tegoż artykułu konkluduje, że obie teorie, a szczególnie Teoria Afektu jest szczególnie przydatna przy interpretacji dzisiejszych zjawisk społecznych i kulturowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** niepokój, strach „na wyrost”, Egzystencjalizm, Sophia Coppola

### ABSTRACT

The paper introduces all the essays in the volume in the context of Affect Theory and the Theory of Existentialism. These two theories help explain some expected but slightly distressing zones in the enclosed texts. It seems that all these texts embrace inconspicuously the fear of the present and of the future. In their very well researched articles, dealing with various aspects of contemporary times, like jihadism, terrorism, the nature of Russian soul, the presence of the post Socialist ideology in Eastern Europe, kitsch, morality in the world of simulacra, the world of Barack Obama and the presence/absence of Jesus in pop-culture, the authors carefully explore their topics within the general theme of the volume, *Social Unrest in History. Analyses, interpretations and representations in literature and visual arts*. The author of this essay concludes her article with an argument that the area of affect should be paid closer attention than ever when analyzing the above topics today.

**Keywords:** anxiety, pre-emptiveness, Affect Theory, Existentialism, Sophia Coppola

At any point in history, the time of social unrest has led to chaotic actions and solutions. On top of this it rearranges the psychological landscape of society, the main undisguised undercurrent of which is anxiety. The feeling of constant overbearing anxiety is so overwhelming that it not only damages individual thoughts and actions but also influences illogical and destructive politics on many fronts.

In this essay, I will attempt to provide an introductory analysis of some aspects of the outcomes of social unrest, such as anxiety, fear and finally fully blown apathy and depression. In view of the dreadful social climate unfolding around us right now in clear and concrete colors, members of any society in the world have fallen into a void of uncertainty.

## PRE-EMPTIVE ANXIETY

Permanent anxiety is usually triggered by threat caused by real or often unreal and unrealistic imagined events. The threat or the perception of threat in social discourse may lead to the state of paranoia in society whereby conspiracy theories, unsubstantiated condemnations and suspicions of unsanctioned and unwelcome actions by governments and other groups in power (be it religious, cult leaders, terrorist organizations and ideological anti-establishment associations and other social bodies) may lead to the enduring state of ideological and emotional uncertainty. These phenomena transmute into a lingering fear which properly fed and nurtured, turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy, tormenting its objects with a conundrum of unexplained emotions thanks to “suppleness and compellingness of the affective logic generating them” (Brian Massumi 2010, p. 60). In his ground-breaking essay, “The Future Birth of the Affective Fact. The Political Ontology of Threat” Massumi states:

Threat is from the future. It is what might come next. Its eventual location and ultimate extent are undefined. Its nature is open-ended. It is not just that it is not just that it is not: it is not in a way that is never over. We can never be done with it. Even if a clear and present danger materializes in the present, it is still not over. There is always the nagging potential of the next after being even worse, and of a still worse next again after that. [...] The present is shadowed by a remaindered surplus of indeterminate potential for a next event running forward back to the future, self-renewing. [Massumi 2010, p. 53]

The governments or those in power feed on the imagined or real threat to argue the need for certain security procedures which are costly and mostly unnecessary when we realize that the cause of the threat was imagined as real and undisputed danger while in fact it dissipates into possibilities expressed in linguistic terms as would have /could have. As Massumi notes [p. 57], defensive preemptive action in its own way is as

capable as offensive preemptive action of producing what it fights. Together with the increasing speed and vigor of defensive action, this blurs the boundaries between defense and offense, between domestic security and military action.

Today, we are not completely sure what comes next, what kind of calamity to envision, whether to stay where we are or escape the imminent danger of war, pandemics and other threats like terrorism. But where to go when the threat is ever current and present ubiquitously on the globe.

Or, maybe, we all have a choice and may choose not to fall into despair in the situations beyond our comprehension or reach. The world staying beyond our endurance or psychological resistance to enormous feelings of guilt about the social unrests we can do nothing about. Alternatively, we can choose the existentialist freedom and stay firm in our moral choices and actions.

## EXISTENTIALISM

Jean-Paul Sartre (b. 1905 – d. 1980) tried to remain sane after the horrific events of World War Two and out of his imaginings of sanity Existential Philosophy, a powerful theory, emerged.

Sartre says that existentialism is a doctrine according to which existence precedes essence (and not the converse which would be the definition of determinism). His thesis is that human beings exist first and in choosing themselves, they create themselves. In acting, they define themselves; in short, therefore, there is no difference between being and doing. Furthermore, human being's acts and choices are always defined within a given situation, and within that situation (which is simply one of the aspects of the human condition) human beings are free and therefore responsible. [Jean Pierre Boule and Edna McCaffrey, *Introduction*, 2011, p. 2]

The accompanying feeling of “dread” experienced in choice is itself the awareness of freedom and acknowledgement that one’s future is one’s possibility. (*Euvres Romanesques*. Paris, Gallimard, Pleiade, 1981, ‘Entretien avec Jean Paul Sartre’ by C. Grisoli Sartre 1981:1913)

As Jean Pierre Boule argues in his essay “The Spanish Apartment and Russian Dolls in Nausea’s Mirror”

Freedom is the most important concept in Sartrean philosophy. For Sartre, there are two sorts of freedom. Each individual is born with ontological freedom and Sartre states that there is no difference between being born and being free. The second aspect of freedom is ‘freedom within a situation’, that is to say freedom limited by the confines of a situation, such as the slave who cannot break free from his chains. [Boule, Mc Caffrey, 2011, p. 159]

The undercurrents of pre-emptive anxiety and the courage of Existentialism emerge from all the publications building the present volume. All the essays refer to both the affect theory from which Massumi’s thoughts emerge and to Existentialism with its clear logic of being. By referring to some fragments of the essays, I will persuade the readers that in all these essays the trait of anxiety is conspicuous.

The first essay starting from the philosophical digressions about COGITO by Prof Wojciech Kaute in “Kant – inaczej. Jednostka i jej wolność w świecie aksjologicznej nicości. Wokół książki Marka J. Siemka: *Idea Transcendentalizmu u Fichtego i Kanta. Studium z dziejów filozoficznej problematyki wiedzy*,” Warszawa 1977 (“Kant – Otherwise. The Individual And His Freedom In The World Axiological Nothingness. Around The Book By Mark J. Siemek: *The Idea Of Transcendentalism In Fichte And Kant. A Study Of The History Of Philosophical Problems Of Knowledge*, Warsaw 1977”), the undercurrent of anxiety and the awareness of social conditions and contexts appears in in the context of the times Kant lived in. The author postulates the existence of the world and a human being as the autonomous and individual entity creating

himself by the participation in the events surrounding him. In this sense, Kant's thought precedes early assumptions of Jean-Paul Sartre, for whom existence and the will to self-create himself meant a freedom of choice. This freedom was an epitome of humanism. "Human existence is synonymous with freedom; we are free because "we are" [Boule, J.P., Mc Caffrey, E. (eds) *Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema. A Sartrean Perspective*, 2011 p. 3].

In „Christian Mungiu: Social Realism in *Beyond the Hills* and *Graduation*” (“Christian Mungiu: Realizm Socjalistyczny w filmach *Poza Wzgorzami i Matura*”) by Lenuta Giukin, there is awareness of social context in the discussion of the film work of the most famous Romanian film maker of the post-Socialist era. As other filmmakers in Romania and filmmakers in other post-Socialist countries acknowledge, despite the economical benefits and the general rapid development of post-socialist countries after the fall of the Soviet Union, the change in mentality and ideological standing has been slow, even non-existent in some areas. Giukin's essay is infused with a painful feeling of foreboding that the pessimistic reality of post-Soviet countries is to stay with us for a long time and nobody is able to predict its future.

“Kicz jako zagrożenie w kształtowaniu własnego życia w realizacji życiowych celów” (“Kitsch as a Threat in shaping one's own life and achieving important life goals”) by Mirosław Laszczak and Elżbieta Jaszczurowska, is a nostalgic article about high and low art with a focus on a critical approach to kitsch. It is obvious though that through a severe criticism of kitsch, which in the contemporary theory obtained the status of a separate art area worthy of discussion and epistemological debates, the article exposes nostalgia and mourning after the world all gone, the world of high art and of the respect for values represented by it. The authors persuasively expose a deep fear of the future which carries ideological uncertainty and an emotional hesitation in the face of changing values.

“Wybrane Implikacje filozoficzne w rozważaniach na temat świata wirtualnego jako symulakrum antropocentryzmu” ( Selected philosophical implications to consider the topic of a virtual world as a simulacrum of anthropocentrism) by Ewa Kubas, concentrates on the dilemmas of the active participation of the users of Internet and the virtual world in general and the moral choices the citizens of the Internet make. “The Theory of Despair” which Existentialism has been called re-emerges in new technological inventions, such as Internet, because as a provider of simulacra it also raises the question of moral values. In other words, it asks the question whether the human being will remain the same in his ethical fundamentals as in the real world, or, whether moral decency will disappear in the ethical void of the virtual reality.

The next essay, “Państwo Islamskie przeciw systemowi światowemu” (“Islamic state against the world system”) by Kornel Sawiński is a rigorously researched and written account of the history and ideology of the Islamic state. Starting from the islamization developments in Iraq in 1990 which changed Iraq’s ideology from a secular into a religious one, Sawinski traces all the bloody conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Palestine which slowly and ruthlessly led to the islamization of the region. The emergence of ISIS, its exuberant growth and ideological popularity among young people all over the world became a source of an unprecedented anxiety which reached a very high level in developed countries. Parents of young children corrupted by convincing, idealistic messages sent out by the public relations machine skilfully produced by ISIS and sent out via webpages and social media, were mortified by the youngsters’ sudden disappearance and the news of joining ISIS in the Middle East. With its control of 10 mln people and the territory of the United Kingdom size, it had the military and ideological power which it used to rob, murder and defeat weaker opponents. The memory of executions, ruthless implementation of Shariat Law, suicide attacks “for the good of the cause” have created a context of constant fear and uncertainty

which has not disappeared at all. Despite our understanding of the actions perpetrated by the warriors of the Islamic State and their ideological reasons behind them, the pre-emptive anxiety will always direct our responses to military action. As Brian Massumi puts it,

Understanding of the political ontology of threat requires returning thought to this effective twilight zone of indexical experience. In that bustling zone of indistinction, the world becomingly includes so much more than the action reveals. For that reason, thought's approach cannot be phenomenological. It must be unabashedly metaphysical. [Massumi 2010, p. 66]

“Rosja – Europa – Polska: Odwieczny Problem” (“Russia – Europe – Poland; An Age-Old Problem”) by Malgorzata Zarębska, is an ambitious essay attempting to dismantle an old myth of the “Russian soul.” The author thoroughly debates the two sides of the Russian imagined mentality: aggression and totalitarianism on the one hand, and, the other, culture, intelligence, and liberalism. Although Zarębska ultimately relegates all the “faces of Russia” to a junkyard of stereotypes and pointless generalizations, nevertheless, she uncovers the need to pay serious attention to what contemporary Russians say and do not only about Russia itself but about the outside world, as well. Only when all the discourses around Russia reveal the hidden truth about both Russia and ourselves as readers and listeners, may any kind of non-aggressive honest communication start between Russia and Poland, and, Russia and Europe. The discussion should be “distanced” and objective. As Michelle L. Darnell in her article about the need to communicate well in the film *Being – Lost in Translation* [Sophie Coppola, 2003] proposes after Sartre, “to encourage reflection on, and responsibility for, one’s freedom through a process of distancing in language impacts not only what words are chosen, but perhaps more importantly how those words are organized into a synthetic whole that contributes to the context within which meaning is established.” [Michelle R. Darnell 2011, p. 98]



Zarębska's essay supports this kind of careful analysis in the discourse which is still present and open and never-ending. In the context of international relations it means nothing positive.

"Barack Obama – fenomen przywództwa" ("Barack Obama – the phenomenon of leadership") by Matylda Lazarczyk covers another important issue for the contemporary world. Lazarczyk describes the phenomenon Barack Obama, an unprecedented example of highly informed and wise leadership thanks to which the situation of crisis was averted or lessened in the United States of America and in the world. With the leading motto of his leadership campaign, Time for Change, Obama presented hope and change in the way he did politics. He is a democrat and a liberal, someone who opened America's eyes to multiculturalism and proclaimed a need for tolerance not only towards people of different colors of their skin, but also to representatives of non-heterogeneous gender and physically and mentally disadvantaged people. He reformed Health Care and devoted his energy and charisma to ecology. Lazarczyk is very positive and gracious in her assessment of Obama thus introducing a positive and heartening twist to the whole volume.

With this one before last positive and hopeful essay, the volume emerges from the pit of desperate and frightful thoughts. After all, the times of political and social uncertainty have always been present in the history of humankind, sometimes they lasted for a longer or shorter periods. Hope was a rare indulgence which sprinkled on people only under wise and ethical leadership.

The last essay in this volume, "Głód na Jezusa. Notatki na marginesie (nie)chrystologii i popkultury" ("Hunger for Jesus. Notes at the margins of (non) Christology and pop-culture") offers a shrewd epistemic and ontological analysis of the historical figure of Jesus and of its symbolic appearance in pop-culture. Mateusz Żyła, the author of the article, examines cultural texts, historical accounts and the Christian idea of divinity. The core part of this captivating text is devoted to the presence

of Jesus in contemporary culture, like film, punk-music, musical and popular literature. In his attempt to cover the most important developments in Jesus' historiography and the exploitation of his symbolic figure in pop-culture, the author openly states after Leszek Kolakowski "Jesus remains a crucial element of European civilization."

There is no surprise that in all these essays the trait of anxiety is inconspicuously conspicuous. However, all of them describe important historical and cultural phenomena which take place around us in a series of rapid and confusing actions and more dissipated cultural involvements. All these essays, carefully researched and not committed to any specific political side or point of view, in their clarity explain the illogical logic of the phenomena they debate.

Hopefully, this volume will contribute to the understanding of the world which starts unravelling before our eyes.

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