

*Classical Utopian Model. On the Melancholy Status
of Jan Parandowski's Ancient Discourse*

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Desire of the Past

Is utopia necessarily a project for the future? Does it involve, in the sense of a desire, a kind of aspiration? From the perspective of the structure of a desire, nothing else may be inferred. Yet, the inversions of desires projected backwards (and also, perhaps, the structure of a utopian desire, as understood by Fredric Jameson who called it the “archaeology of the future”) prove that there are exceptions to this rule (Jameson 2005). The utopian temptation is a desire of ideological nature and refers to the socio-political construction of a community¹. It may be imprinted onto a strictly po-

¹ As reads a passage from Emmanuel Lévinas: „[...] one must of course be able to locate something which remains constant while content, form and function vary. This element, I would argue, is that of desire—desire for a better way of being and living. To say this is not to make a claim that there is an essential ingredient in human nature with its source deep in the human psyche, reaching towards utopia (as suggested by Marcuse and Bloch). We may claim that all utopias have something in common without making claims about the universality of utopia or the existence of a fundamental utopian propensity. Rather, where such desire is expressed—and the scope for this will itself be historically Variable—it will not only Vary markedly in content but may be expressed in a Variety of forms, and may perform a Variety of functions including compensation, criticism and the catalysing of change. [...] In conclusion then, a new definition of utopia is offered, which recognises the common factor of the expression of desire. Utopia is the expression of the desire for a better way of being. This includes both the objective, institutional approach to utopia, and the subjective, experiential concern of disalienation. It allows for this desire to be realistic or unrealistic. It allows for the form, function and content to change over time. And it reminds us that, whatever we think of particular utopias, we learn a lot about the experience of living under any set of conditions by reflecting upon the desires which those conditions generate and yet leave unfulfilled. For that is the space which utopia occupies [all emphases—R.Sz.] (Lévinas 2010: 8-9).

litical project or treated as a schematic design of a potential social opportunity. However, it always does have a source. The utopian matrix is always situated in relation to political traditions, in a paradigm of historicism and linear perception of history. Most often, the opposing relation towards these traditions can be noticed, however, a couple of positive models can be found throughout the history. The myths of the golden age, now bygone forms of history, were a vehicle for nostalgic resentments (also in modernism), indicating potential patterns of social emancipation—the signs of what has been turning into utopian impulses.

[...] History itself in its modern stage [...] amounted to nothing but an imbroglio with no exit, and as though everyone had now begun to unmake this history with an ardour equal in every way to that applied earlier to its making. Restoration, regression, rehabilitation, the revival of old frontiers, differences, specificities and religious beliefs—and everywhere, even on the level of social mores, the change of heart: apparently all the marks of liberation won over the last century are now fading, and perhaps they are all destined to disappear altogether one after the other. We are in the midst of an immense process of revisionism, but not in an ideological sense: History itself is what we are revising, and we seem anxious to finish the job before the end of the century [both emphases—R.Sz.] (Baudrillard 1993: 98).

From this perspective, melancholy is an easy way of fulfilling ideological fantasies of a creative subject. Easy, because it is devoid of any dangers and difficulties of actually turning an ideological design into reality. The lost object, together with its entire ideological background, becomes a purely intentional being which is an effect of symbolic personification and a utopian desire shaped in a text. It can be clearly seen that a melancholic ideological fantasy usually remains extremely at odds with the dominant ideological social reality of a given age. In other words, the Symbolic representation of an ideological design, meticulously crafted in the text, turns out to be completely non-real in the Real space, i.e. Absent. In this sense, it is—after the next Atlantean illusion sank—a utopian non-location. Jan Parandowski, a writer of tradition and history and at the same time a modern author through and through, locates his utopian melancholy in the classical past of the Continent. The ancient utopia only seemingly is an anachronistic notion. In the culture, society, and history of Greek-Roman antiquity, which except for couple of traces is not present anymore in the world, there is room for cultural desire, Homeric, Platonic and later strategies of a world-creating narrative. Many ancient texts feature mechanisms enabling idealization of the past. Antiquity specified the dilemmas of happiness and success of *oecumene*. If a cultural formation of Mediterranean Antiquity is now present in culture, it is in the melancholy position of the “object lost” by some modern subject

which longs for the forms of a social order from before the modern history, from Athens.

This restoratory and regenerative tendency largely applies to the literary formation of the generation of artists of the early—and still enthusiastic—modernism such as Jan Parandowski. He was always characterised by a kind of split creative personality. Being a writer, he was always dreaming of becoming a researcher. His passion and unfulfilled fantasy of archaeological profession resulted in many works in antiquity which were for him a kind of “an archaeology of the word”². He seemed not to aspire to create alternative worlds in a sense of getting the enjoyment from shaping their fictional status. For him, the only literary alternative to modernity was a kind hypothesis of the past and antiquity as the source of civilisation. The formula of “the revival of old frontiers” ideally describes the constant creative zeal of a writer-archaeologist—in essence, it is his utopian impulse. In his monumental work, he tried to cover the entire process of Mediterranean history and myth, suffering often from inconsistencies inevitable in a project of this size.

This is where an irremovable aporia comes forth. The Mediterranean myth is, in large part, founded on the Absence—in a topical sense: “non-location”. The reality of “what has been” is an existential paradox of people who study history. Due to a modest amount of preserved empirical materials, it may be assumed that Parandowski, in his need to organize knowledge, hypotheses, and cultural myths, is a quite characteristic representative of a scientific utopia. The manifestation of the past in the text is supposed to mean not a meeting with a phantasm, but rather with the Real—this is the realisation of the past. In the literary work, therefore the most important is the type of knowledge and skills which enable to credibly pinpoint a precise (in the sense of probability) status of the past evoked in the text. The history and the archaeology, serving as building blocks of a literary vision, are one of the most effective methods to reclaim the “what has been” and yet an entire ocean of non-locations and non-subjects remains.

The Absence, as a necessary and determining aspect of reality, is a nightmare haunting the ancient historians and becoming their phobia. There is not—understood as radical non-existence. There is not—regarding people and things being

² A paraphrase of the title phrase from the classic study by Michel Foucault on *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1989).

the subject of their work, what they write about. Even symbolic vestiges, commemorating “what has been”, are mostly irreversibly destroyed by the wheel of time. This kind of a strong Absence is not only a description of the actual situation but also a severe aspect of a shortage of signs and symbolic content, constituting the tools and materials used by a modern historian, writer, and essayist. This fundamental ontic shortage needs to be at least partly supplemented in the process of cognition. The existence turns out to be here an intentional outcome of the paradox of material vestiges of the past and of imaginary status of creative evocation. The contradiction enables creation. The archaeologists, while researching remaining scant vestiges, work with fragmented, out of necessity attempts (essays) on reconstructing the past. They evoke its symbolic representations.

But where does this strong imperative of regeneration originate? It is borrowed straight from the notions building the nostalgia of Rebirth: *regeneratio*, *renovatio*. Similarly, the “Mediterranean myth” (Jastrun 1973) in modernity became an important mirror of the melancholic version of the society’s modernistic desire. Seen as such, the past—presented as a gesture of *recreatio* and *renovatio* is not a sign of conservatism. In Poland only recently secularized and not yet post-Christian or post-Catholic, the neopagan revelation has become quite a revolutionary gesture. If not a revision of history, then a revision of the stereotype in the perception of the Western world history can be noticed... And this utopian, revisionist gesture is being realized through the evocation.

Evocation of the Past

The evocation suggests a possibility to replace the impasse of the Absence with the shortage, being replenished with a phantasm. The longing for an objective state of things provokes the writer’s evocative impulse. The effect of overcoming the creative aporia (the manifestation of non-existence) is the creation of fantasy within the empirical fragments of knowledge of the shadows. In the autothematic, commemorative sketch *Olimpijskie prace i dnie* [*Olympian Works and Days*] Parandowski writes directly about the evocation of Ancient Olympia as a world-building method of writing the novel *Dysk olimpijski* [*Olympian Discus*]. He was interested in making his vision of the Olympic Games to constitute a probable account of what had happened, referring to journalistic and chronicling categories. This form is what anachronistically became a modern genre: an honest sports reportage which depicts the truth of the

time as a category mimetic to the spatial and temporal location of the novel's *diegesis*. Of course, the condition was the retainable honesty towards the scant bits of historic knowledge of the Greek Olympic Games. The author realized, however, that the historical and archaeological honesty is not a method of manifesting the inviolable status of historical truth but a mere suggestion of an intangible spectral shape of "what had passed". Instead of that, one receives a hypothesis of the full shape of things in a phantasmal complementation of the existing shortages. With the absence of people and things, this anachronistic reportage could be bound together by fantasy only.

Their [the characters of *Dysk olimpijski*—R.Sz.] presence was supported by the fact that my contestants had not been "made up". Except for a couple of names, all of them can be found either in Olympian records, or in the golden book of Greek sports—in the Pindar's Odes. Maybe not all of them participated in these Olympic Games (only the winners are confirmed), but the probability was so high that I succumbed to it with no second thoughts. In this evocation of the ancient world, I would feel uneasy if I lived among the shadows who never knew a human body [emphasis—R.Sz.]. I was warmed by the thought that I can return the names wandering in the void until now, withering in scholias, that is in the comments to Pindar, knocked around in scientific works and being pushed down into their »lows« i.e. the footnotes, to the sunlight, to the track and field, and noble agons (Parandowski 1953: 26)³.

The evocation understood by Parandowski is not the usual process of manifesting in the text the utopian dream of antiquity based on a schematic image, a model of "what has been" which underpins the conceptualisation and demonstration of antiquity. The writer wants to be precise in his projection and observes that he dreams of the most accurate possible account of "what has been". He wants to be rational in his creative effort but does not steer away from the dream (*phantasm*)—the only appropriate material of the literary evocation. Thus, the evocation is defined as a peculiar characteristic of literature which brings back through linguistic mediation "what had passed" and is actually Absent from a form on intentional and virtual life. This is where an element of dispute with the science appears and it deepens the Absence with formalism and scepticism of the cognitive tools ("the void of scholias, comments, lows of footnotes", Parandowski 1953: 26). Fragmentary knowledge fed carefully and unemotionally into a scientific study does not regenerate the past. For the Absence, in order to become the Presence, the nearly magical gesture of the

³ All translations from Polish are mine, unless stated otherwise.

creator must be made. The names—representations of specific Olympians—will return in *Dysk olimpijski* to the sunlit track and will compete in agons. The literature recognizes a live voice of the past in these names. What is this gesture? A rich range of the writer's evocative techniques is best defined by the famous title of a collection of essays devoted to the art of the word. And what if *Alchemia słowa* [*The Alchemy of the Word*] (Parandowski 1956) is also a symbolic figure of the utopian desire?⁴ Why does the writer, always careful and rational, use a notion which, even if used metaphorically, is esoterical down to its core and as such absolutely obscure to an enlightened scientist?

The answer is simple and refers to the phenomenological intentionality of the work. The literature, seeking the ideal in its world-creating instinct, conjures quasi-locations, quasi-beings, quasi-persons. Hence the evocation of a socio-political phantasm is a reference not only to a specific location but also to another signature, an ideological dream, and a utopia (non-location). Understood as such, the evocation of the past is not an impossible realistic description of a past situation or a no longer present space, but something called a “description without place” (Žižek 2008: 5-6) by an English poet Wallace Stevens. A large part of descriptions in Parandowski's works does not have their locations and substance in reality anymore.

This is not a description which locates its content in a historical space and time, but a description which creates, as the background of the phenomena it describes, an inexistent (virtual) space of its own, so that what appears in it is not an appearance sustained by the depth of reality behind it, but a decontextualized appearance which fully coincides with real being. To quote Stevens again: »What it seems it is and in such seeming all things are«. Such an artistic description is not a sign for something that lies outside its form (Žižek 2008: 5-6).

A description without place seems like a notion close to the utopia. In this formula the signature precedes (or replaces) the Being and establishes a new concept of world order (since we are unable to bring the utopian worlds into real existence). In this way, the reality of what has been reveals its merely symbolic aspect precisely through and within art. If *Iliad* led Schliemann to discover the material remains of Troy, then the art can be an alchemic vehicle effectively storing the representation of the past shape of world.

⁴ We still rely on the understanding of “utopian desire” as portrayed by Fredric Jameson and Ruth Levitas. For further investigation you may consult Luisa Passerini (2002).

The Greek art, as we see it now, is just a reflection; what remains of it is just a swarm of planets shining with borrowed light, when their sun had already been lost to eternal darkness [emphasis—R.Sz.] It was, however, enough to cause the highest admiration and establish models for the modern art of various ages. And even less so, as what has been admired from the Renaissance to the 19th century came from the last period, from the times after Alexander the Great. Only the archaeological works in Greece in 19th century allowed us to discover the archaic sculpture (7th and 6th century) and classic sculpture from the 5th and first half of the 4th century (Parandowski 1978: 48).

The absence of the object and the perceptible presence of the spectre is called here “a reflection of past splendour”, i.e. a description without place and object. The reflection may be understood as a reflection of light in a mirror. What remains is just the spectral part of the light spectrum of things, the reflection as a spectral trace of an image. A reflection in an eye’s pupil, in an eye’s bottom, may also denote a reflected image retained in the cultural/signatural memory of the humanity. So the spectre is only a fragment, a “monogram” of things. The author, restricted in his cultural fixation to such objects, often resorts to this metaphor. The “borrowed light” is a “reflection” of light often already reflected many times. Planets are poor copies of originals. Suns—sources of light—are gone forever. A reflection of a reflection increases the spectrality, blurs the edges, textures, colours and shapes of things. The reflections are here also a visualisation of a metonymic process of consolidating similarities. The source inevitably fades in repeated copies from copies. Hence later in the quote the writer notes that the oldest artefacts seem to establish themselves most weakly in the aesthetic consciousness of modernity. Their spectrality is a memory of a signature and nearly completely lost awareness of their appearance.

What is a spectre made of? Of signs, or more precisely of signatures, that is to say, those signs, ciphers, or monograms that are etched onto things by time. A spectre always carries with it a date wherever it goes; it is, in other words, an intimately historical entity. This is why old cities are the quintessential place of signatures, which the flâneur in turn reads, somewhat absentmindedly, in the course of his drifting and strolling down the streets. This is why the tasteless restorations that sugarcoat and homogenize European cities also erase their signatures; they render them illegible. And this is why cities—and especially Venice—tend to look like dreams [...] In the city, everything that has happened in some lance, in some piazza, in some street on some sidewalk along a canal, in some backalley is suddenly condensed and crystallized into a figure that is at once labile and exigent, mute and winking, resentful and distant. Such figure is the spectre or genius of the place [both emphases—R.Sz.] (Agamben 2011: 38-39).

The genius of the place which exists no more is a sign, our ever-present utopia of a symbolic culture which saves our inevitably dying worlds in spectral forms. It

must be noted that Agamben expands the notion of a spectre, adding to it an important signatural aspect. He writes about Venice both as a trace spectre and an important signature. Parandowski sees this place exactly as a signature transferred through the memory of culture. In the material legacy of antiquity, a reliable record of the past is rarely found, but signs, digits and monograms generate a trace memory of a place, inspiring to complete the gaps. If they stubbornly persist in the memory of humanity, they determine an amazing status of “non-existing existence”, a holy and actual place. They determine this status in the chain of historical and cultural transformations of the signatural motive. They wander through the history of culture in the desire-like mechanism of mirrored repetitions. Finally, they return as “fixed signatures” of cultural artefacts in the tendencies of a given culture to build an “intrigue of sense”, as Lévinas calls it perversely (Lévinas 1982).

It should be noted that Agamben also refers to the fragment from Foucault’s writings which sets forth that emulations and sympathies are returning signals of analogies and relationships of meanings. The features, gestures, and words, returning in this rhythm of repetitions, reflect the core of a signature which work is not based on a mirrored reflection, but on “another” metonymic reproduction⁵. In the text, which directly analyses the theory of signatures, Agamben observes that it invalidates the conviction that *signans* neutrally denotes *signatum*, and proposes in this place the interpretation of sense by distributing signatures, calling archaeology the study of signatures⁶. What is more, he states that the nature of human language indicates its source to lie in the senses of signatural nature—returning in metonymic approximations of signatures of things. A language without signatures is impossible, because

⁵ “Resemblances require a signature, for none of them would ever become observable were it not legibly marked. [...] What form constitutes a sign and endows it with its particular value as a sign?—Resemblance does. It signifies exactly in so far as it resembles what it is indicating (that is, a similitude). But what it indicates is not the homology; for its distinct existence as a signature would then be indistinguishable from the face of which it is the sign; it is a n o t h e r resemblance, an adjacent similitude, one of another type which enables us to recognize the first, and which is revealed in its turn by a third. Every resemblance receives a signature; but this signature is no more than an intermediate form of the same resemblance. As a result, the totality of these marks, sliding over the great circle of similitudes, forms a second circle which would be an exact duplication of the first, point by point, were it not for that tiny degree of displacement which causes the sign of sympathy to reside in an analogy, that of analogy in emulation, that of emulation in convenience, which in turn requires the mark of sympathy for its recognition. The signature and what it denotes are of exactly the same nature; it is merely that they obey a different law of distribution; the pattern from which they are cut is the same” (Foucault 1989: 32).

⁶ “The theory of signatures (or of statements) rectifies the abstract and fallacious idea that there are, as it were, pure and unmarked signs, that the *signans* neutrally signifies the *signatum*, univocally and once and for all. Instead, the sign signifies because it carries a signature that necessarily predetermines its interpretation and distributes its use and efficacy according to rules, practices, and precepts that it is our task to recognize. In this sense, archaeology is the science of signatures” (Agamben 2009: 64).

no sign could function without this archaic (following Foucault—archaeological) place in speech, which does not yield to the discourse and seems to border with magic (alchemy) of the word. Importantly for us, in the analyses of signatures, building the utopian evocations of the past in Parandowski's texts, all hermeneutics in humanist and especially historical contexts, are closely related to the signaturality of the entirety of human culture. Consequently, the human memory is, in fact, based on the metonymic system of mirrored similarities of signatures. When researching the archaeology of the word, it can often happen that what initially seems to be a fundamental idea or, for example, a utopian desire, eventually turns out to be “merely” a reflection of such a signatural sense⁷.

And in reality, the history is a mysterious desire of a human soul which, walking along the stream of moments and days, keeps glancing behind at what had already passed—a mysterious desire of a human soul which seeks harmony with the past time and keeps sweeping it into a never-ending presence. The memory has been the humanity's guide from its birth, and old Latins described this function of the memory with the word *recordari*, with *cor*—heart being the core of this word. In the Latin concept, the heart is the host of the memory [emphasis—R.Sz.] (Parandowski 1970: 122).

The symbolic order of the ancient historians is definitely superior to Lacan's idea—the Real one. *Re-cor-dari*: the history written with the heart. In other words, this is the utopia of the memory of civilisation, cultural accounts of social (non)personifications of *Agape*. The ideology is in this perspective a melancholic phantasm, helping to design idealistic aspirations of humanity. The memory (of the heart) is an idealizing distortion of the past, an anamorphic phantasm of always-possible golden age. In Freudian terms, this is wishful thinking reoriented towards the past, a process of history rationalisation which emotionally interferes with unemotional shapes of spectres and signatures. *Re-cor-dari* complements the spectra with affectionate penumbrae of social sensitivity of the modern author. This constant presence of the spectre of the past which haunts the author is the mortifying force of *destrudo*—

⁷ “[...] the whole of language [...] shows its originary belonging to the sphere of signatures. Before (or better, together with) being the place of signification, language is the place of signatures, without which no sign would be able to function. And speech acts, in which language seems to border on magic, are only the most visible relics of this archaic signatory nature of language. [...] All research in the human sciences— particularly in a historical context—necessarily has to do with signatures. So for the scholar it is all the more important to learn to recognize and handle them correctly, since in the final analysis they determine the success of any scholar's investigation. Gilles Deleuze once wrote that a philosophical inquiry entails at least two elements: the identification of the problem and the choice of concepts that are adequate for approaching it. It is necessary to add that concepts entail signatures, without which they remain inert and unproductive. It may even happen that what at first appears to be a concept is later revealed to be a signature (or vice versa). Thus, we have seen that in first philosophy the transcendentals are not concepts but signatures and “passions” of the concept of “being” (Agamben 2009: 76).

death instinct—the violence of symbolic order which alluring power transcends the biological limitations of a live human organism, residing not only in the normal libidinal desire of the subject but also in paradoxically painful sphere of sensual pleasure—*jouissance*⁸. The memory of the past feeds the energy and power of the Great Other, which is a symbolic instance and cultural matrix of our behaviour in accordance with the utopian model. For Parandowski, the memory understood in this way becomes the source of sense and the quality of human life. Beginning with his early work *Dwie wiosny* [*Two Springs*], he consistently writes that the matrix of civilisation is the only sense (and a record at the same time) of humanity's existence.

Heterotopia and Heterochronia

The memory is a warranty of this matrix. It is an important and personal fragment in which the author establishes, through a philological analysis of the word memory, the sense of his literary activity of remembering and reviving what is dead. The contamination of the two notions, lost in our linguistic consciousness, seems to be the key to understanding the need to revive spectres. If in Latin memory is the domain of the heart, then the sphere of the special obligation of utopian—because social—love's (specifically as the non-egoistic, universalist *Agape* and not the pagan *Eros*) movement becomes the “dead past”. To illustrate this, a longer passage from the author's essay is to be put forward:

Rome is something common and ordinary only for Rome itself. I saw two girls jumping onto the old Della Scrofa fountain to take a handful of water from its high bowl to quench their thirst caused by a hot evening; cars stop by the fountains at St. Peter's Square, by the wonderful foamy manes, embroidered with a rainbow by the light, to wash off the dust in the thick rain of drops; in the Palatine Hill, I saw a young man lying on grass which grew over the foundations of the temple of Cybele: he was reading the last Moravia's novel; lovers embrace in the niches of baths of Caracalla; children loudly run around in the deep moat—separated from the old ruins and covered in cypresses—encircling the Mausoleum of Augustus [...] I needed this visit, I have been planning it for a long time, as I wanted to write a novella which plot was to be set under the colourful ceilings of this palace. With this in mind, I sat dawn on the capital of a broken column at the entrance. At that moment, a school trip was approaching—two rows of girls and boys led by their teachers, with Neron's name being recognizable in their chatter. They were joyful with good weather, the sun, flowers, touching sharp stones as they went past

⁸ It must be clearly stated that the text does not follow the classic Freudian understanding of the “death instincts”, but its reinterpretation proposed by Lacan. For further reading consult de Mijolla's *Death Instinct (Thanatos)* (2005) and de Lauretis' *Freud's drive: psychoanalysis, literature and film* (2008).

them—drawing with these signs of affection the fable of the world now dead closer to the fable of their young lives [emphasis—R.Sz.] (Parandowski 1970: 62).

The love of the alive to the dead is typical of historic locations filled with the presence of living people. The city of cities: Rome equals the Polis in the author's essays—the topical ideal of both a society and a civilisation. As it turns out, it is not only an ancient ideal, but an ideal constantly manifested—heterotopic in this sense. Why do we reach for a notion contrary to a utopia when discussing the utopian impulse of the ancient historians? The category of heterotopia, proposed by Foucault, describes the “place of places”, which as a concept remains in a “mirror-like” relation to the notion of utopia, “a place without a place”. Yet, it enables to locate or dislocate the space of one's desires. This idea proves to be especially helpful in describing the desired anamorphosis of the past. Tangled networks of relations determine the locations and the reconstruction of the principles of functioning in a constant (re)creation in (discursive) social practices. The heterotopia and heterochronia are accumulated in the modernist melancholic execution—which is of interest to us. “[...] First of all, there are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time, for example museums or libraries. Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit” (Foucault 1986).

In the quoted ekphrasis of the old Rome, the description is a domain of fairytale heterochronia. The movement of metaphoric associations is consistent: dead—childlike; old—young. The circle of life and the myth of return justify the ideological phantasm of *renovatio*, the turn towards the sources, “the lap of childhood” (Herbert 1990). The ancient utopia is the return to the natural state of history, which has not yet gone mad but existed within human measure and scale. Using the essay-reportage technique of fast editing of random social scenes from the daily life of Rome, the writer presents them against the background of a constantly present and updating plan of history. Even the notion of the “background” is not precise enough, as it suggests an area in a tourist photograph which is a museum-like, still object interrupted by an egocentrically dominating image of the traveller. The background of a photograph is in fact separated from us, it undergoes the process of mortifying sacralisation. This museum-like status is definitely not a permanent presence of the past in the present. It is a terrifying form of a dead spectrality which prevents any participation. In the mentioned social situation, it is exactly the opposite—the museum-like separation is discounted with the context of a modern life. The revival is a joyful, amorous and profanatory act of touching the traditionally untouchable *sacrum* of the

past. Parandowski is glad that the Romans did not care too much about the monuments around them, probably because of a superabundance of them, and thus they do make them fetishes separating us from the reality of the past. In the kaleidoscopic montage of the essay's sequence, it is important to capture the life and currency of the city within the historical space to embed and use temporal signatures for daily, profanatory (i.e. getting rid of the barrier of the sacred) purposes⁹. Such is the heterotopia of Parandowski in Rome. It is brought about by every gesture "revitalising" seemingly dead places for biological (and not only symbolic) signs of current life. This normality is nearly a personified, dreamlike evocation of the ancient in its live form. The naturalness of Romans towards the antique is a gesture removing the museum-like qualities from the ancient Rome, making one aware of its universally human dimension and the symmetry of the past in its utilitarian daily life, habits, etc. In the evocation process, the overlay of the contemporary daily life on the nostalgic (*recordare*) image of the past makes one aware of the heterotopia and heterochronia of the culture. It must be also emphasized that the daily life is here understood in the most sensual, libidinal sense. The past needs this supplementary remains (added value)—the ordinary physical passion of a sample couple kissing in Roman ruins, as a specific ignition of evocation bringing life to a dead space of a historic location. The ancient utopia exists inasmuch as it is based on the really live emotions of the time current for the author, in the meaning of a sensual experience of the author. If Rome is still a heterotopian Polis of the Western civilisation, it is so only thanks to the intentions of the subject. A similar concept is expressed in the conservative thoughts of Hanna Arendt, whose diagnosis has often been compared to the sociologic concepts of Michel Foucault.

The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be. "Wherever you go, you will be a polis": these famous words became not merely the watchword of Greek colonization, they expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely,

⁹ "Profanation, however, neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, the one which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized" (Agamben 2007: 77).

the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly (Arendt 1998: 196-197).

Parandowski is, as not many others, highly aware of how the ideological code of the Western culture (e.g. the notions of politics, democracy, tyranny, agora) stems from the Greek source. It should be noted that this fascination is ultimately validated by the belief of currentness based on the simple constative that the “Odyssean”—from the individuation perspective—way of the Western literature leads to the discovery of the symbolic Grail, i.e. the promise of the eternity of culture. And this connection with Homer is here the paradigm core of the polis. The journey of Ulysses in his search for Ithaca was supposed to lead the European civilisation to a social conviction that polis is a community, and that polis is everywhere the Hellenes are.

We remain in the culture thanks to this confidence in universal community of enduring symbolic representations of ephemeral objects/subjects. We remain in similarity to the past, because we know that polis is everywhere we have been and are, as the Greeks. The fact of remaining, as a feature of a symbolic culture, is an important advantage of antique melancholy, easy to contrast with a definitely weaker universal foundation of the catholic culture or—even so—atheism. “Wherever you go, you will be a polis” (Arendt 1998: 196-197)—but not in actual Athens or Rome. Only in heterochronic image of the past-present-future is the currency of a social dream brought to life, the eternal renewal of the Greek design of an individualistic civilisation. So, does the common *axis mundi* of Europe (Hellas, Athens, Rome) enable the constitution of the heterotopia of Paris, New York, London, or—in the past—Venice? The “location of locations” is “everywhere” thanks to the mechanism of a phantasm casting onto the modern polis (today maybe even a post-polis), mimetic projections of the past. But this “everywhere” means also “is nowhere” (Jarry 1969)¹⁰—a desire-like nature of utopia as such. The “location of locations”, internalized in the cultural dream, occurs only symbolically and is considered as a utopian location inside us, endangering the Reality of the figure of a modern location. New York may be a utopia (a city without a location), because in essence it is within the

¹⁰ A vulgar wretch like Ubu, a common little adventurer, a mister nobody from nowhere (Jarry 1969). In his introductory speech to *Ubu Roi*, Jarry stated that the action would take place ‘en Pologne, c’est-à-dire Nulle Part’ (OCBP I, p.401); and Père Ubu, escaping from his Polish adventures at the end of the play, claims that “S’il n’y avait pas de Pologne il n’y aurait pas de Polonais!” (OCBP I, p.398). In 1898 there was no state of Poland—therefore the *petits Polonais*, in the rigorous contortions of Ubuesque logic, can be no more than *petits hommes*. (Fisher 2000: 49).

phantasm of a New World (like in Baudrillard's *America*) only a carrier of old signatures, a library of signatures—as Alexandria used to be in the past. If so, then are the melancholic mimetic practices always only a recreation of a utopian ideal of antiquity? Probably this enticing metaphor is too radical, yet it would definitely convince Parandowski.

The evocation of the past as the utopian ideal sometimes takes the form of extreme subjectivisation in Parandowski's work. These are emotional examples, coming from the religion of the heart, which are described in secular *Niebo w płomieniach* [*Sky in Flames*], e.g. in the character of Teofil Grodzicki. But the most exemplary illustration of the utopian fictionality of the image of antiquity is the collection of essays entitled *Dwie wiosny* [*Two Springs*]. The book is especially subversive, as it reveals the desire-like status of the fetish of the island of idealized Greek civilisation. Again, the sense of melancholic ideology of antiquity is enhanced by words/signatures, like such “dawn” or “Spring”, which are meaningful and pivotal in the context of Mediterranean culture on which the West had been founded. A couple of striking quotes:

Nothing compares to this freshness of a spring. This was an actual spring, this was the most honest originality, owing nothing to anybody, and this is what exhilarates in Greek thinkers.

Greece is the magnetic pole of our civilisation.

I completed a pilgrimage to the holy land of our civilisation.

The thought of Greek religion imbues us with joy and happiness, because it shows us an image of people who lived in a fairy tale.

I wrote my book with simplicity typical of the Greek concepts, and I want it to be read in the same way. The Greeks mustn't be assessed against those moral concepts, at which we arrived after many centuries of chaos in our thinking. Had they known our hypocrisy, they would have said that they had not been mistaken in their opinions, calling barbaric all that resides outside of the blessing of the Greek sun (Parandowski 1926).

These are the affective arguments; but does the discourse allow also “intellectual arguments” based on the knowledge of the spectres of antiquity? Despite everything—yes, it does, even though, also here, the phantasmal melancholy of the ancient historians distorts the picture. Just a single sample fragment of Parandowski's essay:

In comparison with what the Romans did and had to keep their body clean, a modern man with a measured amount of water, cramped bathrooms at home, with the poverty of public baths, may seem an uncivilized barbarian. Anyway, the invention of waterways was almost abandoned with the Rome's

decline. Medieval Europe returned to simple wells which survived until the 19th century. The waterways in our cities are quite recent constructions. I myself, being a child, accompanied a servant on her way to a well where cans were filled with water. [...] But even today, despite impressive leaps in technology, waterways are not yet spread wide enough to reach every town in Europe in a way e.g. Pompeii—a small town of just a couple of thousands of inhabitants—had been. The Romans brought their civilisation everywhere they ruled, and one can see today the aqueduct arches in African deserts, in the wilds of Asia Minor. And similar facts are to be found in plenty of other areas of life, which shows how strangely incapable the world became after the Greek-Roman civilisation had left, how long leaps have now to be made to refer to what those people had achieved long time ago (Parandowski 1978: 137-138).

Parandowski sees and emphasizes from his post-Enlightenment perspective the superiority of the social design of Rome over the narrow-minded character of modern cities. In his layman's point of view, the baths are a better example of a higher social organization than even the most beautiful temples erected on their foundations. In this sense the baths become a useful metaphor of Rome's pragmatic nature. The subject is continued in ironic taunts over the modern level of hygiene—another argument for the superiority of the antique civilisation. After 2000 years modernity only matches those achievements. In the Roman context of a ubiquitous culture of industrial pragmatism, a special value is given to the “mega-political” city, but also to the system of water distribution in the empire. The technology of transporting fresh water from mountain springs and providing it for free to millions of Roman citizens via a thick system of aqueducts, fountains and baths is, from a modern point of view, a beautiful and optimistic utopia¹¹. The fusion of antique and modern horizons marks the heterochronic nature of Rome. The clumsiness of the human world after the fall of *Pax Romana*, the best of all existing civilisation paradigms in the history embeds the technological development into the ideology of the imperial Roman civilisation as an element of its heterotopical reading¹². This perspective is not far from

¹¹ Architecture was first described as a configurative discipline—a kind of utopian pattern making—in the writing of Italian architect and theorist Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), and it appears again in the writing and architecture of Dutch architect and theorist Aldo van Eyck (1918-1999), especially in their shared ideas regarding the reciprocity of city and house, and house and city. It is with patterns made up of interdependent parts, and the potential of these for making comprehensible wholes, that optimism and utopia begin to illuminate something about the nature of exemplary architecture that genius alone cannot explain. Across this trajectory of associations, exemplary architecture is revealed as being as much a product of genius as the result of a mind conditioned by optimism to see a small contribution (a single building, for example) as a part *within a potential whole* that begins to form it. Although he does not call it utopia, this view of architecture—room, building and city—as parts within a potential whole borrows from David Leatherbarrow's idea that each architectural invention ought to learn from past efforts in order to surpass them, and that each building ought to be envisioned as the partial completion of a potential whole (Coleman 2005: 11).

¹² From a Roman perspective, the contrast was one of civilization and barbarism, of a divide between “us” and “them” based upon ancient Mediterranean beliefs that urban communities and the civic culture that they sustained were inherently superior to technologically and politically less complex, rural, warrior societies. From a twenty-first-century perspective, the artificiality of this categorization is painfully evident. “Civilized” and “barbarian” are subjective referents

the position of modern technocrats and industrialisation enthusiasts. Parandowski is led here by a more subversive thought that the progress of civilisation should not necessarily be taken for granted after the fall of antiquity. The last sentences of this lengthy quotation are especially telling—the striking is not only the clumsiness and primitivism of the world that remains after the Greek-Roman civilisation achievements are destroyed but also the difficulty in reconstructing the social ideal that had already been there. The culture of exploitation, as displayed by Parandowski, is based here on a deep conviction that all which remains for us is just an incompetent repetition of signatures of antique “non-locations”.

The Roman Empire, in comparison with the history of the Mediterranean Sea until its time, pretended to the role of an unexpected ideal. It brought peace, safety, prosperity. All national disputes disappeared, it was impossible to have e.g. Egypt conquer Syria, or Athens—invalidate Sparta. This multitude of individual nations would consider itself a single society. This world felt like a strong, solid house, which gates, doors and castles are completely to be trusted. All borders were guarded by trained legions in fortified camps, with good provisions, forming a living and dangerous wall capable of repulsing every attack. An inhabitant of Rome, Athens or Alexandria saw no war for over two hundred years. A similar level of safety was ensured internally by the authorities and police (Parandowski 1978: 94-97).

An “unexpected ideal”—it is the utopian potential of Winckelmann’s marble image of Hellas and Rome. The image which today is virtually anachronistic. But Parandowski of early modernism inherited the idealizing illusions of German ancient historians. The constative that Rome is for the author an “unexpected ideal” is connected with its ideological universal—which basically means: paradoxical—construction. Firstly, Parandowski writes here about *coincidentia oppositorum*—the political multitude in unity, highlighting the civic awareness of empire inhabitants: various nations, one society. He is interested in the correlation of the aspect of Roman unification of Gauls, Brits, and (even culturally) much older Greeks and Egyptians with the consistent support of individual characters and cultural and ethnic particularity of these peoples. This conviction does not apply to the Republic, “insular” in its interests, but to the open empire in the imperial project¹³. Parandowski evidently com-

based upon perceptions and traditions designed to legitimize one group at the expense of others by affirming a hierarchy of cultural difference and moral worth (Smith 2005: 9).

¹³ “As a matter of fact the provinces of the Republican empire did bear some resemblance to those of our counter-factual model, but under the emperors the cultures of Rome’s subjects were transformed utterly. Cities sprang up where there were none before, new temples were raised to new gods, and even the most intimate details of life were refashioned. In Gaul men literally came down from the hills, shaved off their beards and learned to bathe themselves. Nor did these

bines this premonition and feeling with the awareness that the essence of universalism is the notion of *humanitas*. Paradoxically, the real influence in this category, in *Pax Romana*, remains closely connected with the imperialism as a colonial ideology. In connection with that, in the late social history of Rome, *humanitas* was also perceived as the opposition to the notion of barbarity¹⁴.

Secondly, regarding the external peace, internal safety, economic prosperity, and mobility enabled by lifting internal borders, the author emphasizes the practical dimension of the realisation of individual aspirations of the—essentially free—individuals inhabiting the Roman world (free at least in comparison to inhabitants of the Eastern empires). A subversive context of this pragmatic liberalisation of life of common people around the Mediterranean Sea is the fact that these freedoms are based on the political violence of the Roman law and the military power of imperial authorities supporting the Roman state at the cost of limiting the tribal, national, ethnic freedoms, and cultural and religious freedoms, etc. to a minimum extent. In other words, Rome received a right to organize a form of a social order of the whole community and in return provided a package of individual civic freedoms. These mechanisms allow to see the Roman Empire, as described by the author in his essays, as an authoritarian utopia which came true in the history of the world.

That was a time of great prosperity, and the standard of living has considerably risen. This is evidenced even today by the ruins of cities well-designed and equipped with solutions and comforts that could be an object of envy of some even contemporary cities (Parandowski 1978: 94-97).

changes affect only the richest and most prominent. The humblest altars and the cheapest pottery vessels testify to the creation of a new Preface civilization. Changes of this sort might be documented from all over Rome's empire, but did not result in a culture of imperial uniformity. Rather each region witnessed the creation of distinct civilizations—crudely described today as Romano-British, Gallo-Roman and so forth—that reflected their various predecessors but nevertheless converged on, and formed part of, an imperial whole" (Woolf 1998: IX-X).

¹⁴ "[...] the idea of *humanitas* underwrote and was sustained by a particular configuration of power, and it reflected an understanding of the world and of history that was inextricably linked to the fact of Roman imperialism. *Humanitas* encapsulated what it meant to be Roman, and understanding it is central to an understanding of how a Roman identity was acquired in Gaul. [...] Eventually *humanitas* was transformed into a characteristic of imperial civilization, opposed to a barbarism increasingly conceptualized as confined beyond the moral frontiers of the empire. Elaboration and literary subversion of these ideas were always possible. Barbarians might be represented as free from the corruption of civilization; individual Romans might be presented as behaving barbarously, and barbarians might even be attributed alternative wisdom, like the Druids, portrayed not only as savages who indulged in human sacrifice, but also as natural philosophers who taught the transmigration of souls. But these rhetorical games and intellectual speculations depended for their effect on more common Roman understandings of *humanitas* and barbarism, understandings that were little discussed precisely because they were so widely accepted" (Brucia, Daughtery 2007: 55, 60).

Altogether, we have a *quasi*-utopian novel about the success and the satiation of the civilized world which inherited the ideological universals, enabling a political incarnation of the universal success, from the poor Greece. With a shortage of a material testimony, Parandowski is keen to evoke the reality, materiality, and even the empiricity of signatural beneficiaries of this—in fact practical—civilisation. He highly values the pragmatic aspect of the Roman history and, interestingly, there is not even a hint of idealising tendency in him to compensate the Romans' materialism with some form of their spiritual elevation. In a heterotypical image, the Romans present themselves as symmetrically secular in comparison to the modernity of his dreams presented in *Niebo w płomieniach* [*Sky in Flames*].

Glosses

To conclude, two quotes, seemingly at odds, yet displaying in their antinomy Parandowski's awareness of describing in fact the desire-like status of his utopian vision of the ancient world. The first of these two fragments is written from the modern Enlightened standpoint. The melancholy is here revealed as the effect of a modernistic change and the lack of satisfaction with the result of this change. The ancient historian escapes into the safe zone of unprocessed grief over the lost ideal of his desires. For a melancholic, no matter how modern, the lost object becomes a replacement of the both socially and civilisation-wise unsatisfactory effect of modernity.

Our civilisation seems to us to be the only one possible and sensible. Not deceived by the often heard complaints, grumbling and mockery, deep down we know that it cannot be any other way, it even should not. This is a civilisation of progress, development and power over the world. Upon all of the other civilisations that preceded ours, we look as steps slowly leading where we are now. The science and expertise of the past eras, just as the economy and comfort of those times, seem primitive and illogical (Parandowski 1967: 207).

It turns out that for a still modern—regarding the ideas—author, it is still too early to display signs of a correction of a rational paradigm of development (Should it be from the position of critical modernity or maybe from the expectation of post-modern culture?). His writing about the history of civilisation, despite the cruelty of modern catastrophes, remains triumphantly modern and in the described symmetric perspective of the modern culture, it results from and contains the memory of the best traditions of rational Europe, i.e. the Greek and Roman order, Renaissance, and Enlightenment.

At the same time, this fragment sounds like a manifest of a blinded and nearly totalitarian in its determinism vision of modernity. Parandowski places himself here—with his propagandistic tone, with the affirmation of the idea of development, with his characteristic lexis—almost at the centre of the mainstream official culture of the Polish People's Republic. Progress, development, and control—these words signal confidence, not hesitation. Perhaps it should be noted that even in the 60s such comments sounded not modernly in Poland, but rather bizarrely inadequately, both to the situation of the civilisation after the Second World War, and to the socio-political situation in Poland, as well as in the context of a global bipolar conflict of ideologies. But we do not have to charge the author with the writer's servilism towards the system. The paradox of his standpoint, its anachronistic nature, results rather from the double source of the melancholic fixation. In it, equally important is the idealisation of ancient rationalism as is the idealisation of the post-Cartesian paradigm of enlightened rationalism. If this coincides with the tone of state ideology of the Polish People's Republic, it is only because of a shared optimistic vision of history. In Hegelian terms, morality is not an unequivocal instance.

The second quote is even more perverse. The pure perversion of a modern progressor and a declared liberal. A vision stemming from an ethnic complex and cramped Polish particularism. Yet, it must be asked: what if this is not only a negative expectation, but also a concerning premonition of the costs of restrictions which we pay for the burden of cultural nostalgia? An unintentional acknowledgement of Dmowski and his, contrary to the modernity, worryingly alive tradition of thought:

It is truly a pity—he said—an irreparable loss that young nations let themselves to be civilised by Rome which for a couple of centuries had already been merely a corpse. Instead of living on their own substance, full of its own juices, they fed on a rotten carrion. They renounced their gods, songs, they abandoned traditional construction methods of their homes which housed their knightly past for a thousand years, they forgot much of the old habits, they tainted their language and instead of developing it, they incorporated poor Latin into their books. How beautiful Europe could be, had it not made this fatal mistake! How much quicker would the Renaissance have come—and not that artificial one sustained on the quotes from the antiquity, but a fresh one, truly a new one, coming from the very core of those fine Celtic, German and Slavic tribes! (Parandowski 1994: 318).

The standpoint presented by the radical in the polyphonic *Niebo w płomieniach* [*Sky in Flames*] is characteristic for the early twentieth century and the Europe of national homelands. In the emotional tone and categorical approach, it seems nationalistic, if not fascist, and definitely describes an ideological position far from Parandowski. Intriguing is the bitter awareness of the author that it is possible to locate the

I totally differently and negatively towards the utopia of the ideological phantasm of the Mediterranean myth. The borderline fascist extreme of this polemic opinion within the (post)secular novel is merely a proof that the writer knew how radical his own universalistic and antinational position is. But let us skip over the risky rhetoric of ethnicity and keep from these phrases just the consideration of the fatalistic force of the past Roman and Greek utopia, determining archmodels of the modern culture. Parandowski touches here upon the sensed, while hidden perversely, real strangeness of antique to the Slavic tradition. Just as Jan Sowa describes this problem in his recent phantasmal concept of the Republic of Poland (Sowa 2012). Not only as a Pole, but maybe even firstly as—as per his declaration—a sceptical European, Jan Parandowski wrote much too few of such sentences.

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