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THE CONDITION OF CULTURE AND THE SITUATION OF THE ARTIST

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Those who visited Lithuania five or more years ago were pleasantly surprised to observe the following developments: it was impossible to attend the theater (unless relatives or friends managed to find one a ticket), none of the more interesting books were available — they were all sold out in a flash, during the memorials for classical writers held in the huge Opera Hall only the cream of people in the humanities could get in (that is, if you discounted the *nomenklatura* bosses who came to doze at the head table), even in small towns get-togethers with contemporary writers attracted 300 to 400 people, at the discussions held by the journal *Kultūros barai* everyone sat in jam-packed halls till the wee hours of the morning.¹

Those who come to Lithuania now receive more or less the directly opposite view. The theaters are quite empty; even the much advertised play "All Saint's Day" by Adomas Mickevičius, staged by Jonas Vaitkus, sometimes attracts only three rows of spectators. A world-famous theater like the Youth Theater of Vilnius could take six months of vacation and no one would miss it. It could close permanently — even that would not create much of an impression. On bookstore counters lie not only *The Collected Works* of Vincas Kudirka that everyone eagerly awaited for fifty years but also great numbers of reprinted books by émigré writers that once upon a time were sought out furtively. Even Kestutis Girmius's *The Guerrilla Battles in Lithuania* for which just recently many a reader would have paid large sums of money, paying no attention to possible reprisals from the authorities, now goes unclaimed. Public readings by writers have almost disappeared and discussions on questions of culture would probably be attended only by those organizing them. This tendency was illustrated by the seventh Lithuanian World Symposium on Science and the Arts held in Vilnius and Kaunas. Three years ago the audience would not have fit into the Sports Hall, while now half the seats stood empty even on opening day.

So what happened? Can it be that those who formerly were so interested in culture are now disinterested? Can it be that the "facade culture" deformed by communist ideology was able to attract more minds than the culture which has shaken off (or is in the process of shaking off) both the facade and the ideology? Or was it perhaps that from a professional stand point the other culture was more mature than the current one which incidentally has been somewhat tainted by folk sentimentality and exaltation? Or perhaps people's attention has waned as any mass phenomenon which has exhausted its potential must wane?

The easiest course, naturally, is to explain everything by means of world standards; i.e. to say that Lithuania is becoming a more or less normal country with a differentiated life and interests; therefore, the exaggerated attention to culture is also acquiring a normal character. After all, in the free world no one buys up poetry books in the space of a few hours and no one crowds around theater doors at dawn. This kind of explanation would, however, be exceedingly general. At first glance it may appear to be true, but it is so general and true as to reveal next to nothing concrete about the situation. In explaining concrete facts by means of "global" truths we usually succeed only in soothing our consciences. Everything seems very clear, the examples fit the model but in fact what is clear is only that which was already clear, namely that such a model exists. Great models usually fit only a rationalist solitaire, when one is expatiating ideas at some symposium or gathering of like-minded colleagues, but they do not appeal to the human heart preoccupied with the life process.

Desiring better to understand the psychological change in cultural orientation or, more specifically, the change in the psychology of the producers of culture and its sympathizers, we have to clarify the foundations of the other culture. Only by illuminating it can we see what factors are losing their power today and how in disappearing from view they carry away with them the facts and developments that they precipitated.

For many decades, essentially during the entire Soviet period, culture for the Lithuanian individual was the only refreshment, the only, even if it was illusory, way to gain recognition, silently to express oneself by identifying with the position of some artist, the world of some work, the feelings and thoughts of this or that literary character. And there is nothing peculiar about this. There was no other way for people to express themselves. There was no hope of creating and enjoying a comfortable, not to mention a luxurious, lifestyle and enjoying it through honest work: no one was allowed to earn over the maximum fixed amount. Even the men who meliorated the fields whose work lasted barely a few summer months, no matter how they tried, had no right to earn more than 500 rubles a month, even though in the winter they were paid only 100. Starting up your own business, where one could not only realize one's potential but could also improve one's surroundings, was forbidden. Enriching one's collection of impressions so one could later at least passively live from these impressions was allowed only in minimal doses: only a chosen few and usually the same chosen few traveled abroad. Taking part in organizations which had not been approved by the government meant immediately to take on the status of illegality and to expect reprisals. There were people who accepted this status — they published illegal publications, formed illegal and semi-legal committees, under the guise of ethnographic studies they collected material about the guerilla resistance, and tried to keep alive the Lithuanian spirit among the Lithuanians in Byelorussia and Poland. But these people were the exception, and moreover they were gathered together mainly in the larger cities and belonged either to the intellectual elite (like Tomas Venclova) or they devoted their entire lives to this cause (like Viktoras Petkus). In the meantime the main part of society, except for the Party elite, the economic and industrial Mafia, and those who were degraded or completely passive, continued to exist hiding their dissident feelings deep inside and controlling their critical energy like a barrel full of steam. One of my friends once told me that his greatest wish was to stand at a crossroads on a hillside and watch the Russians leaving Lithuania. He didn't want to do anything, he just wanted to stand and watch. After that, he said, he could go to his death.

It was this wish that many kept hidden inside. They kept it hidden but at the same time they also wanted to see it realized at least in a token kind of way or they wanted to see constant confirmation that their desire and their double life wasn't just someone's schizophrenic state but that others felt this way, too. They wanted intuitively to feel from hints or from metaphors at least that not only those who wish or dream have this feeling but also that those who write something legally share this desire. If there was anything that differentiated this part of society from the point of view mentioned, it was only the degree of courage and risk. Therefore, it was very painful for us when people from outside propagated the evil myth that Lithuania was quite communist, that it was not worth having anything to do with, that its intelligentsia was conformist, and so on.

Intuitively Lithuania had chosen the only path that guaranteed survival — temporarily to become a field of flexible sedge and grey grass covering and safeguarding the acorns with its roots. When the destructive storm had passed, when the degree of risk decreased, the acorns began to sprout shoots — society's feelings overflowed in a mighty wave. Now society is differentiating but on a different basis — most of the battles are for power and influence.

The producers of culture knew all along what the people expected from them. Even those who pretended not to know felt it, even those who wanted to deform, control or extinguish this expectation felt it. Society also understood to what limit of courage the writer could go; therefore, it was gripped by enthusiasm when someone crossed this boundary. An unwritten psychological convention which was never explained out loud hung over everything. It stimulated culture the most. Dissatisfaction with the status quo was the main catalyst for culture. Even though the government controlled and steered cultural life in the direction that it wanted it to go, even so it could not totally monopolize it. A peculiar, even a paradoxical situation developed: the more the government interfered with culture, the more people with their nonverbal reaction — attending plays and exhibits, buying books, clapping, commenting in the corridors — supported that against which the government raised its sword. There was even a saying: if the government wants to advertise a work, it needs only to criticize it. On separate occasions this even tied the government's hands, although essentially the government never made excuses, especially when its ideology or its positions were threatened. Acting without apologies toward the producers of culture, it could do nothing against the sympathizers toward culture, because the latter knew how to separate the wheat from the chaff, leaving the chaff for the government itself to enjoy. It goes without saying that criteria did get scrambled. After intensive efforts it was possible to convince someone that some mediocre work was actually a masterpiece, that some conformist writer was an unusual talent. Generally, however, efforts to deceive the people's taste were largely unsuccessful, unless it was to make their taste more primitive. It was possible to tell that the efforts were unsuccessful from direct contacts with the public. I have had occasion to participate in numerous meetings with writers and to read many lectures to various audiences and what made me the happiest were the anonymous notes from the audience with their questions and reflections. They were open and on target. This gave one hope.

Society correctly guessed where the authentic point the writer was trying to make lay and what was being done merely to cover this point. Therefore, it fairly readily forgave what was a tribute to the government and to the times, if it could just sense that in essence the writer or artist was different. It was possible to feel this from several verses of poetry, the palette of several pictures, several interpretations of an actor that betrayed the artist's position with regard to the fundamental questions: how the artist regarded Lithuanian independence, the Russian occupation, and communist ideas. It was possible to keep from speaking of these things out loud. But to keep from articulating the official point of view when this was universally required meant belonging to the silent opposition. This refraining from speaking especially appealed to society because it matched its model of behavior and therefore it elicited more sympathy than some solitary dissident cry. Vytautas Petkevičius could proclaim a very courageous phrase or two, but everyone felt that the body of his work was

essentially Soviet. By the same token, Juozas Aputis, Sigitas Geda, Jonas Juškaitis, or Marcelijus Martinaitis did not have to speak such phrases anywhere, yet everyone understood that these writers were absolutely alien to the official ideology. It was not so important to say "no" a time or two as never to say "yes", not even once. The latter case, by the way, was more difficult because he who never said "yes" ended up in the zone of the suspicious and the ignored. Those who said "no" a few times but "yes" many more times earned the attention and honor of the public (because, as I have mentioned, the public took these "no's" especially to heart) and earned certain privileges from the government and a fairly good life. For this reason, many a writer exploited this position: a poet wrote a slew of poems dedicated to Lenin, the Party, and peace and collected everything that was due him for these, then he would toss off a cycle of poems containing patriotic or critical notes and his sins were forgiven him by the people — the laurel wreath was on his head. A sculptor filled the town squares with idols and lesser idols, painted them full of revolutionary slogans, and then a picture or a bust or two with an allusion to Lithuania's honorable past, to the nineteenth-century national revival or the post-war resistance — and the artist was treated like a dissident patriot That was the way it was and there is nothing to be done now. The public so longed for a bright ray of light in the nightmare Bolshevik darkness, for a single living word in the noise of tractors and military bands, that it was prepared to forget an individual's identification with the government, if in his activity or work it found some evidence of that light or life. They found this mostly in culture and this is why they were drawn to it with such avarice.

Another important factor in the interest in culture was the surfeit of time. Not time in general, which people who were drawn into the difficult carousel of daily life did not especially have, but the kind of time which is devoted to spiritual interests. They could read the papers in a total of five minutes (some people did not read them at all), no one listened to the radio except for cultural programs, they watched TV usually only when it broadcast sports programs. But even the latter were viewed with the same intention of dissident self-expression; more than likely 80% of the viewers wanted the Soviet team to lose. Even when a Lithuanian or two might be playing the criterion of evaluation was very simple, one might even say it was primitively subjective: when the Russians and the Ukrainians played, they rooted for the Ukrainians; when the Ukrainians played the Georgians, they were for the Georgians; when the Georgians played the Hungarians, they were for the Hungarians; when the Hungarians played the French, they were for the French... In other words, the farther away from Russia, the Slavs, and Socialism, the better.

I know that some may contradict me by saying that there were many things in this society. They may even offer numerous examples to contradict me. Separate examples, however, even if they are in the thousands, do not change the essence. The dominant will still be the same. This dominant determined the phenomena mentioned: the overcrowded theaters and meeting halls, the pursuit of good books. The dominant created an interesting cultural atmosphere; books, plays, exhibits, meetings were vigorously discussed, especially those which expressed tendencies removed from official ideology and the canons of official art. The mistreatment of director Jonas Jurašas's plays, the ban on Kazys Saja's "The Mammoth Hunt", the building of the monument to Maironis in Kaunas, the rejection of Tomas Venclova for membership in the Writers' Union, some more daring speech at the painters' or artists' convention echoed across all of Lithuania; it even turned into a strange kind of folklore.

So a system of cultural life was created which functioned according to specific laws, recognized and understood only by those who operated within the system. Observed from outside, many things seemed absurd and grotesque, empty and meaningless — a useless expenditure of energy. However, people had no other way out; the rules of the game had been internalized and the game was played accordingly. The game wore people out, pushed them toward the quicksands of mediocrity, provincialism, and conservatism, but at the same time it yielded secret impulses; the producers of culture wanted to justify the attention paid them by society and to satisfy the public's oppositionary feelings. Culture was controlled from the outside, while it was stimulated from inside. I don't mean to praise this situation, yet sometimes the following question pops willy-nilly into my head: which is better — when the government represses the artist and the public rejects him, or when the government provides total freedom and the public ignores him? This is a problematic metaphysical question and it can have a multitude of answers. These answers would make me digress too much. Let's return to the concrete situation.

For two years now all those cultural rules of the game have suddenly appeared quite unnecessary. All the ideological taboos have fallen; Aesopean language, symbols, allusions, silences, ambiguous metaphors — these are all so much useless ballast. In cultural affairs no one can collect any gain from civic or social courage, nor from risk taking. What the public earlier searched for in culture, that with which it silently identified and so experienced emotional release, now it can maintain openly — in word and deed The necessity for such expression had ripened so much that everyone wanted to satisfy it publicly. The enormous daring of the Lithuanian people which amazed the world in 1988-90 and which continues to amaze it came from this source. It was a psychological frustration of gigantic proportions that pushed all other values and interests aside. Pushed them aside for more than just a year, it seems. To discuss politics publicly, to follow events, write declarations and resolutions meant not so much to believe that everything would change because of this as to enjoy the sweetness of the action itself filling all one's being. This stance might well be compared to the behavior of the starving at a banquet feast or of the thirsty at a mountain spring. No power could keep people from this. The rise of politics (or often just of politicking) to the foreground of values was determined by other factors as well; the radio, television, and newspapers propagated namely this type of person, and the latter in their turn somewhat arrogantly created the impression that politics was the most important thing, the only link unifying everyone. Since the content of this link essentially was not complicated, it sufficed to know a few theses (Lithuania must be independent, the Soviet Empire is destined to break apart, a market economy has to be formed in Lithuania, the communist party must withdraw from the stage) and almost anyone

could feel qualified to speak or act — the rest depended on the speaker's oratorical skills and energy. The political statements were elementary. They allowed to come to the foreground a large group of people whose cultural interests were also elementary and who rather looked down on culture and art considering them to be second or third rate things — entertainment or dessert. These people did not openly deny culture but it was as if their entire behavior propagated the conviction that everyone should now be primarily interested in politics, economics, law, social and national relations, while everything else came later. For three years now I have belonged to the elected organs of Sąjūdis — the Sejm, the Vilnius Council, and the Sejm Council — and can responsibly testify to how energetic the discussions in the meetings about the necessity to politicize society were. To tell the truth, this wasn't even necessary — the process of politicization occurred by itself. The process gave birth to a certain primitivism, one-sidedness, narrow-mindedness, the confrontation of friend and foe, and similar developments which deliberately or not distanced everyone from more subtle cultural things.

The so-called Kaunas syndrome added to this. I have no negative stance toward Kaunas, quite the opposite, I am convinced that Kaunas preserved a clearer sense of patriotic energy and action unimpeded by the relativism of the intelligentsia. Because Kaunas institutes of higher learning were geared to engineering and medicine and had no Faculty of Arts, Kaunas had become provincial as far as the humanities were concerned and had nurtured a "second city" complex with regard to this. This complex then hypertrophied into a certain feeling of revenge toward Vilnius. Kaunas could not compete with Vilnius in any way as far as the sphere of a modern understanding of culture or an elite taste went. I am not speaking here of specific people — there were creative and subtle people in the humanities in Kaunas as well — I am speaking of the prevailing tendency which during the period of change, when new people came into the arena, became determinative. The "political radicalism" (the desire to move toward independence as quickly as possible) of those from Kaunas at the beginning of Sąjūdis's activity redeemed the movement — it hastened the entire process. This gave Kaunas confidence and pride and with them came the desire to dictate their position not only with regard to politics. This is where the trouble started. The shortage of creative potential encouraged the Kaunas intelligentsia to search elsewhere for direction. Logically their patriotic feelings and the prewar status of the city as interim capital suggested a direction that also catered to their ambitions. So they turned culture toward a sterile nationalism, using life in independent Lithuania as a model and the representative peak of that life — the temporary capital with its parties, organizations, symbols, rituals, gods, and demigods. This national retro was turned into a panacea for the reviving culture, beginning with returning old names to streets, publications, and organizations, and the building of monuments, and ending with an orientation to former philosophical and religious conceptions. All this, of course, would appear to be normal, if it had been presented as the national restoration of a broken thread or tradition, as respect shown for that which had been barbarically deformed or trampled. That is to say, if it had been understood as one of many parallel directions for culture to develop. Unfortunately, it arose as the main one. It can't be said that anyone promoted it on purpose or tried to ground it philosophically (true, there were some attempts along these lines but not very many). It occurred by itself, probably as the result of a lack of creativity and a tendency toward restoration, as the eternal wish of the Lithuanian people to gather strength from the past. It was very convenient, however, for those who had a more elementary understanding of artistic culture and who very much wanted to catch up. Perhaps even to revenge themselves on people who had been engaged in cultural work legally and had earned the respect of society. All the more because it was not difficult to catch up because everyone knew that those who had worked within legal boundaries had been unable to avoid compromising their consciences. These compromises could now be used as an excuse. In this regard Kaunas set the tone for the claim that essentially modelled the recent cultural situation. It went this way: everything that was present in independent Lithuania or that was later created by the émigrés is good and everything that was created in Lithuania after the war should be viewed with suspicion. This claim in general is not a bad one but when it is made absolute it becomes a profanation of culture.

It is not easy to contradict it. The culture of independent Lithuania and of the émigrés was ignored and scorned for so many years that any hesitation about its merit may sound like residual communism. Understandably it is always best to speak the truth. The task of the intellectuals is to warn society that an uncritical evaluation of the past is equal to the simplest conservatism. But this is easy to say only in theory; in practice things turn out differently. At the beginning of 1989 I still had many an occasion publicly to cite Vytautas Kavolis's insightful idea from one of his letters: "Recently," he wrote me on 1 December 1988, "I find the most curious things in Lithuanian literary publications. Brazdžionis is equated to Basanavičius (quoting his simplest poems); Jasmantas is brought into the midst of leading poets; everything that is done by the émigrés is regarded without any criticism; (...) the old figures of authority are revered. I would like to think that this is temporary."

I cited these ideas from various tribunes and from the TV screen but I had the feeling that they were disappearing into a vacuum without producing any effect. At best they appeared premature and heretical; at worst — hostile to the new spirit. So you could talk all you wanted — the result was the same. Why?

Because in the act of distancing ourselves from the deformed Soviet culture it was necessary to have a positive counterweight and patriotic feelings dictated that one search for this counterweight first in the things that Soviet ideology denied most fervently. The law of the negation of negation came into operation: everything that had been silenced and criticized the most earlier now had to be elevated and hailed. This same process took place in the revival of religious values. No one was concerned with a more modern conception of religion; it was enough to make the liturgy legal. Even patriotically inclined atheists and the indifferent felt the need to appear publicly in church and cross themselves. Nation and God became the twin peaks of the pyramid to which everyone's gaze, brimming with enthusiasm and hope, turned. The flag and the cross became the main symbols. These were the most longed for symbols, for which many lives had been

sacrificed and many tragedies experienced. All this could have been an enormous source of creativity. But a strange thing happened: the foundation was removed from under the feet of the artists who could have interpreted this in an interesting fashion. National and religious symbolism became the object of kitsch. Businessmen fastened on to it, glutted the market; they standardized and cheapened it from the very beginning. Superficiality not only blocked the path for those wishing to go more deeply and evaluate things in an original manner but it also aroused a certain kind of repulsion which it seems to me the émigré community understands only too well. The suffering and tragedy experienced in connection with these symbols was hastily expressed in the publicistic media — in the memoirs of the exiles and prisoners. After Dalia Grinkevičiūtė's impressive memoir² it was difficult to find anything new to say about the horrors of deportation. Something new could perhaps be said but the reader's interest had already been satisfied. The writers began to feel as if they were in a space without any air: the old conventions had become meaningless, the new themes were rendered trivial, the tempting veil of mystery had fallen away. Could this be the reason why the idea of a monument to Gediminas lost its inspirational power? A contest like this should have been announced ten years ago and all the sculptors would have dropped everything and rushed to Gediminas as a matter of honor and prestige, which moreover would have had the aura of risk and added enthusiasm. Now this was absent.

To put it succinctly, it so happened that two of the greatest sources — Homeland and God — held in reserve in the belief that they would yield the most creative impulses suddenly seemed to be blocked and ran dry. No one foresaw this, though we could have foreseen it, if we had remembered the development of the first decade of independent Lithuania and of the émigré culture. But in my opinion this is not the primary psychological reason why contemporary Lithuanian culture has ended up in a creative vacuum or at a crossroads.

The most important reason is the decline in the value of protest, one could even say, the total disappearance of critical emotion. Creative freedom turned out to be an unexpected animal, one difficult to tame, for those who derived creative energy from the lack of freedom, grounding the act of creation on one or another kind of denial, orienting themselves toward the potential for denial which had collected in society. What was most paradoxical was not the fact that the artist was released from his dark cave and at first was blinded by the light and could not see where to go. One can adapt to a new situation. Most paradoxical was the fact that instead of the former inner censor formed by fear and self-preservation another inner censor, one created by responsibility and civic duty, was found. Only someone who is blind or who feels himself to blame and consciously shuts his eyes can help seeing the negative phenomena to be found in the social and spiritual life of Lithuania on the path toward independence. But to direct one's fire of protest against them up till now has seemed irreverent. Not because anyone independently wants to place limits on free thought, nor because one is afraid that hostile forces will exploit this or one's own government will get angry, but because no one has the redeeming ideas or models which could be presented as a reliable ideal to which all critical ideas could be subordinated. Abstract slogans of democracy, liberalism, tolerance, and social justice, blaming the government for symptoms of a totalitarian and authoritarian system, the identification of separate individuals with politics in general, the exaggeration of some trivial fact (let's say, the case of the pamphlet, "Twenty Kopecks") to the level of a threatening tendency derives simply from injured personal ambitions, the desire to discredit someone, to get revenge, and not from sincere respect for those ideals. It is not at all surprising that the more conscientious producers of culture also feel that something here is not quite real. So another foundation crumbles: beautiful ideals, monopolized by somewhat suspicious politicians, are covered by the patina of compromise. The artist is released into a vacuum.

Of course, the vacuum itself would not be fearsome if the Lithuanian producer of culture had been able to nurture an absolute feeling of inner freedom, if he or she had not been formed by his or her surroundings in which the individual of necessity wanted to become a citizen, patriot, teacher, spiritual leader, inspirer, beloved by the crowd, and the like. That they wanted to become so was demonstrated by the beginning of Sajūdis. At that time a great number of writers, artists, composers, stage directors, actors got involved in political activity. When the Sajūdis Sejm gathered, it seemed that it consisted strictly of people from the cultural sphere. Only the rare person could resist the temptation of political activity because it seems that the act of creating or writing did not endow their lives with fulness. Only the younger generation for whom writing alone was enough or which did not expect honor from political activity kept its distance. Now many of the older generation of artists is retreating from this involvement. Some have sensed that it takes too much time, others have taken insult because not enough attention has been paid to their person, others yet have realized that they are not fit for politics, still others want to dedicate themselves to their calling...

But retreat brings no joy. Quite the opposite — it brings bitterness and apathy. All kinds of attempts are made to justify this withdrawal, beginning with the theory of the artist as eternally being in the opposition, and ending with accenting the fact that one is unnecessary (supposedly neither the government nor society cares about culture); however, no justifications can fill the void which yawns after the spirit of protest has evaporated.

Of course, a fair number of people removed themselves from culture because they were ashamed of their former activity, while some even feel an open hostility to the changed situation. I won't speak of the latter at all; they have eliminated themselves. The former have quite a bit of difficulty in conquering their superstition of integrity; they have little desire to make fun of their earlier selves, or all the more to admit to having served the communist idea from conviction or to further their career. Society is expecting, even demanding, this kind of confession but it is demanding it overly angrily, itself standing in the proud pose of judge, desiring others to humble themselves (or be newly obedient). This injures the artist's pride and he refuses to come forth. I fear that some conflict may ripen which would not be in either side's interest, and that

society would lose many intelligent people, while talented but angry people may join some hostile force, feeling self-reproach for their actions.

Today it is important for everyone to take one thing to heart: during four decades of the Soviet regime only he who wrote nothing failed to write a red or a pink sentence, only he who did not paint failed to paint a red or a pink picture, only he who wrote no music failed to write red or pink music. Even the poet Sigitas Geda, whose fame as being in the opposition continued to spread and who it seems to me never doubted the talent which gave him power, wrote the words to a musical on the theme of the four communards while Osvaldas Balakauskas who now is angrily scourging former conformists, wrote the music to this musical. One has to know that the Soviet government especially disliked the unstained frock of the artist; therefore, in every way possible it tried to splash at least a tiny red stain on it. If temptation and blackmail did not help, they made use of an individual's bad luck or misfortune. If someone had serious problems, they offered their help in return for loyalty to the government. I often wonder why they sought this so stubbornly. Most likely the government acted this way because of its weakness — it did not believe in its own truth.

Understandably there is a great difference between those who consciously dyed their frocks red and those who paid only the necessary tribute. It would be short-sighted to put them all in one pile. Only some high school student who had no opportunity to speak publicly when his heart was in disagreement and who had no chance to be silent in public when his heart was shouting "protest!" could now stand in the war-like pose of Archangel Michael and wave the fiery sword of innocence. But even he putting his hand over his heart could not swear that he never wrote essays about the exploitation of the fanner in Petras Cvirka's novels or about Soviet patriotism in the lyrics of Salomėja Nėris. When we take these things into account, perhaps it will appear that it is not so important to waste our energy in penance and self-flagellation. Finally, there are no guarantees that the penance will not be hypocritical and that having done his penance the individual will really have been cleansed. The cleansing should be totally different. It should be used as a stimulus to creativity: inner self-reproach, suffering, and an explosive necessity for self-expression have to burst forth in the form of self-analysis and acquire a universal meaning.

I have already mentioned that people in the arts found themselves in a vacuum. This experience of theirs stored up in fighting the government and its puppets, in fighting their own consciences, their convictions, principles, and ambitions — an experience which was different for everyone — this experience today should become the greatest and most authentic source of inspiration. Making this kind of public confession the artist would lose this inspiration, as if he were making restitution, as if he were gaming tranquillity. The society which demanded this from him would once again release him into the void, would rob him of that which he has acquired like a painful kind of treasure which he can now exploit like a free individual without paying attention to any social ideas, however attractive they may be, or to the long-standing Lithuanian habit of the artist to collect honor and respect for his oppositionary stance. This does not mean that this experience has to become the theme of his work (although in literature, for example, this could very well happen). From it the artist has to create his or her own original conception about the individual and the world, about the complexity of their relations, about human nature, the sophistication and deceit of the world when it approaches the individual wanting to win his or her mind and feelings.

In literature this experience has been most perfectly exploited by Leonardas Gutauskas in his novel *Vilko dantų karoliai* (The Wolf's Teeth Necklace). Perhaps it was quite unconscious, but the writer found that personal experience is an endless source. Not only endless but inspiring, stimulating the imagination, leading to oblivion and ecstasy during the course of which the most unexpected images are born. In my view, Gutauskas's novel is one of the most serious recent literary events demonstrating the number of new and meaningful things one can force from oneself, ignoring all kinds of conceptions, constructions, models, and ideas, when one dedicates oneself only to the conscientious recording of authentic experience. Some may find the novel too loose, simply a chain of episodes, it cannot be forced into any kind of formulas (we always derive so much enjoyment from arranging things), but for this reason it is enchanting. The novel happens to demonstrate that the experience of a man and an artist who lived under the Soviet system is unique, hard to grasp from the outside but valuable just because of this uniqueness. This is why I think that this experience could be the greatest support in a situation in which the old values have disintegrated while the new ones have either not come into view yet or have managed to become standardized and trivial.

The psyche of the contemporary Lithuanian artist was somewhat shaken by the new government's attitude to the artist's economic freedom: you're free to live the way you want without any special grants, paying taxes like everyone else. The bureaucracy of the creative organizations (the Writers' Union, the Artists' Union, etc.) which had reproduced too readily was the first to ruffle its feathers. But others who for some reason imagined that they necessarily had to make a living at the arts enjoyed putting on a martyr's wreath. An artist doing physical labor or working in an office is a rarity. Not because this hindered his creative work but because it was considered dishonorable. What kind of artist are you if you wash dishes in a restaurant, what kind of actor are you if you sell cigarettes?! This style of living did not just happen. It was a devilish Soviet invention: an artist must work somewhere where he can easily be controlled and frightened, where he is constantly forced to demonstrate his loyalty. No one analyzed the meaning of this ruse anymore; everyone considered it to be simply a tradition. So it will be very difficult to break this so-called tradition. Not because it is wide-spread, but because work of an artistic nature was like an increment to the honor of the artist. If you were the chairman of the Writers' Union, this meant that naturally you were a writer worthy of attention.

The dissatisfaction of workers in the arts with the politics of the new government (decreased support and increased taxes) rose not only from concern for their daily existence (though this also had an influence), but mostly from the fear of competition because normal creative competition was an almost unfamiliar monster. And it threatens all the more now when the public's taste can easily be manipulated by all kinds of promoters of so-called "forbidden fruit" who can easily find a market, while society still hasn't crossed the quicksands of pornography, sex, mysticism, astrology, the kabbala, and other temptations. In this respect the government is taking something of a risk in throwing serious artists into the jaws of the market dragon but it has no other alternative: we have to hit bottom not only in economics but in culture as well, only then can we begin to ascend. It is very likely that this generation of serious artists will have to leave the stage proudly either in rags or in disappointment, or for some time they will have to play a double game — create real art while producing kitsch for a living, or they will have to search for new sources of income guaranteeing a decent living and leaving enough time and energy for creative self-expression. This will be a very serious and, I would say, a healthy trial because only those will engage in creative endeavors for whom they are an inner necessity. Culture will inevitably have to be differentiated into elite and mass culture; the grey mediocre cultural layer destined for no one knows whom will disappear — in reality it was needed mostly by the communist government because its ideas flourished the best there. By encouraging his ambitions, the government could demand the most obedience from an average artist because it knew that this kind of artist had nowhere else to turn.

In thinking about the future being foreshadowed here, one very serious question arises: will our society be able to support the existence of elite art at least for the first decade? I have in mind not only the financial side of the matter, not just the idea of a patron which for a long time to come in Lithuania will be in its infancy, and the aid of the émigré community is hardly a bottomless barrel, especially as recently much has been received from it not only for worthy causes but also for dubious ones. I have something else in mind: will society in making its way through hardship, disagreement, morbid economic competition, an uncertain future, a crazed love for things, plebeian tastes, and other devilish inventions soon acquire the need for an elite culture? This doubt perhaps raises the most apathy among people in the arts. This is why it is no accident that the need for exporting art arises. Theaters, ensembles, the cinema concern themselves first of all with how to be included in foreign festivals, with how to organize their appearances, leaving their own audience in second place. Of course, so-called "economic interests," the desire to earn hard currency operate here as well, but certainly not the least consideration is the diminished attention of society with regard to culture. Not only that of society but of specialists as well. Plays, concerts, books, movies, appear to be reviewed but only mechanically, casually, without any emotion being involved. The cultural weekly *Literatūra in menas* which used to be eagerly awaited by all the intellectuals now is leafed through carelessly and hastily. Neither *Šiaurės Atėnai* nor *Dienovidis* are able to spark any greater interest and lie in the kiosks for a long time. One cannot say that they are trivial, that they do not care for culture, but in reading them one gets the impression that in spite of everything they are not writing about the important things. As if their editorial staffs were working superficially, as if for them this work were only secondary. The articles lack the lively, creative, brilliant word, their ideas are bogged down in academic or scholastic reflections, and for dessert they offer some newsworthy item from the street. For a long time the official government newspaper *Lietuvos aidas* excluded people from the arts (true, for a period of time these people ignored this newspaper as a boring bulletin of parliamentary news). Now the newspaper is giving them the floor at a rapid pace and because of this its quality has improved somewhat. Of the journals of a cultural nature, *Metai* (formerly *Pergalė*) and *Kultūros barai* have retained their condition but their financial status is unenviable. All kinds of other journals and almanachs come and go. At first their organizers have a lot of enthusiasm and ideas but there is a shortage of people in the arts who could fill their pages with interesting texts. It would appear that institutions of higher learning in Lithuania produced enough graduates majoring in the arts, especially in Lithuanian language and literature, but most of them went off to be teachers and drowned in the horrible routine of education. And elsewhere — in the publishing houses, editorial and, educational offices — there were few openings and the salaries were poor. The shortage of qualified humanists was immediately felt by Vytautas Magnus University. It was no accident that the University started to turn toward the sciences (though there may be some subjective reasons at work here). The theaters have long been complaining that they need stage directors who know Lithuanian history, literature, mythology, and art because most of them were trained in Moscow and to them Lithuanian literature is terra incognita. Earlier this circumstance was less noticeable perhaps, now, however, it is becoming intolerable. A few years ago I began a campaign to bring the plays of Kostas Ostrauskas to the attention of Lithuanian theaters but realized that the directors not only do not know these works but even Ostrauskas's name is unknown to them.

This whole situation reminds me of the first decade of Lithuanian independence and it is similar not only with respect to externals (short-lived periodicals, all kinds of organizations springing up like mushrooms) but also with respect to the inner psychological conviction of artists and society (the weakening of critical thought, a lessened interest in culture, the illusory belief of artists that only government support can raise the level of culture). This year the fifth issue of *Kultūros barai* contained a round table discussion called "The State and Culture." This talk was quite similar to one held in 1926 in which many reproaches were made to the government for its stinginess and indifference to culture. In my opinion, this discussion was incisively described by Vincas Krėvė who said: "Ourselves being to blame for the stagnation in the arts, let's not blame others for it. As long as we stay the way we are, no ideas of the Ministry of Education not even the best ones, can constitute progress in the arts. It would be good unceasingly to demand from the government that it scatter funds to nurture the arts with a liberal hand if there were a greater excess of funds and they really could raise the quality of art. But as yet I have little faith in this." (*Pradai in žygiai*, 1926, no. 4-5, p. 82).

Funds can preserve artistic valuables from extinction, they are necessary to propagate the arts and to educate society's taste, they are needed to improve the artist's working conditions but they will certainly not "constitute progress in the arts." We need new ideas, new faith, and new talent. Who financed Lithuanian art in the time of Baranauskas, Kudirka, and Čiurlionis? I quite understand that historical parallels do not always help correctly to orient ourselves in the present but at least they comfort us in times of difficulty. Culture in independent Lithuania began to improve only fifteen years later when a new generation matured, one which had seen the world and understood that the departure point for art is not the copying of fashionable trends but the careful study of the nature of one's talent, and according to Antanas Vaičiulaitis, the effort to portray the world "in all its variety" and man "with all the powers of his body and soul" (*Židinys*, 1936, no. 2). We have to believe that this time will come of its own accord and the feelings of not knowing which way to turn that we observe in the spirit of the artists will not seem like a former tragedy in ten or fifteen years but like a normal period of cleansing and self-preservation. A cleansing of artificial functions and forms that had been imposed on culture, an escape from false theories, namely that someone can manage culture and that there are wise men who know how culture should look. Therefore, we should not fear of all kinds of surrogates of culture in the form of the magazine reproductions and video cassettes flooding into Lithuania. To tremble zealously and puritanically at the demoralization and deformation of taste means to arouse curiosity even more. Society has to pass through this fire of temptation. "The best way to conquer temptation," my professor Jonas Kabelka used to say "is to yield to it." To yield to it in the hope that it will become repulsive.

I believe in the vitality of the Lithuanian spirit. This vitality is strengthened today not only by the recovery of the historical past but of the present which is speaking loudly — the torment of our parents and grandparents in exile and in the solitary cells of the NKVD, the sacrifices of our fathers and grandfathers desecrated in the town squares, the ability of our brothers and sisters in time of need to become a field of grey grass so the wind would not crush them irrevocably. If I did not believe in this vitality there would be no reason to speak here, no need to get involved in the present psychological state of the makers of culture. Understanding it correctly will save us from unnecessary panic and despair.

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Translated by Violeta Kelertas

1 This article has been revised by the author for present publication. Trans. note.

2 See this memoir, "Lithuanians by the Laptev Sea", translated by Laima Sruoginytė in *Lituanus*, (1990) vol. 36, no. 4, p. 37-67.