



The political subject and hero in culture in the light of Juri Lotman's theory

The case of Lech Wałęsa

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ABSTRACT

Politics appears to have a direct impact on the quality of our lives as citizens of states. We outline here the dependence between culture and its inherent mechanism of forgetting, and between a hero and a political subject. We employ the theory of Juri Lotman, who underlines the role of individuals and of single events in culture. The primary illustration given is the figure of Lech Wałęsa, politician, legendary co-founder of the Solidarity trade union, and Nobel Peace Prize winner. He exemplifies Lotman's notion of a mobile hero, one who powered the course of history, but whose present-day political and social activity is of an empty and querulous nature, lacking a goal and deeper meaning, while the actions he performs take place within a closed semantic field. He is an example of a paradoxical hero, whose actions no longer generate tensions or build a new semiotic quality. Wałęsa's problem is the ossification of his discourse and failure to perceive that transformation has already taken place.

KEYWORDS

Juri Lotman; Lech Wałęsa; subject; hero; explosion

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Each “great” event not only opens new pathways but also intercepts a whole host of new possibilities. If this is taken into account, then the description of these lost byways is already, for the historian, no mean reflection on alternative themes (Lotman, 2009: 60).

INTRODUCTION

In this article we aim to outline the relationship between culture and its inherent mechanism of forgetting, and between a hero and a political subject. Politics is a domain of culture which does not belong to Hegel’s Absolute Spirit, namely the culture-forming fields: art, philosophy and religion. However, it is significant because it seems to directly affect the quality of our life, as citizens of states. Juri Lotman does not accept the Hegelian understanding of history as being cancelled in the presence of the Spirit, but he also disagrees with Hegel’s successors, who focus on the materiality of history, on that which can simply be described as an event, such that one can decide which of the events is more important and primary:

And so historians of the Enlightenment believed that the governing political structures served as the bearers of historical meaning. Romantic historians considered only those events and facts that bore historical meaning to be historically significant. On this basis Hegel declared entire epochs and even entire peoples to be historically non-existent; the World Spirit had passed them by without touching them. In this way, some facts were explained as historically present, others as imaginary or historically non-existent. The shift toward materialism in the philosophical movements of the mid-nineteenth century was linked to the search for the “authentically historical” in the material sphere: from the everyday existence and structures of peasant life to economic laws. Economic materialism saw the basis of history in modes of production and in the social relationships determined by them. Although provisos were made to the effect that ideological (superstructural) relations must not be ignored, their effect on the material aspects of life remained unclear. Recent discussions as to the “primacy” or “secondariness” of this or that historical stratum belong to an outmoded stage in the study of history (Lotman, 2013: 44–45).

In considering the role of a hero and a political subject, we make use of the theory of Lotman, who emphasises the importance of individuals and single events in culture. We employ the notion of a subject from Lotman’s semiotic texts (Lotman, 2019), although the semiotician from Tartu used the terminology of literary studies. However, his analysis of the mechanism of explosion, seen as crucial for development and change in culture, requires, in our opinion, the presentation of a more precise concept of a subject — not only as acting, but predominantly as programming culture. We discuss Lotman’s concept of culture in the first chapter: *Important events and forgetting in culture*. In the second chapter, *People of explosion*, we distinguish between the notions

of a hero and a subject. A person who is marked by unusual acts, valour and dedication to others is a hero. A hero may be significant for culture and politics, but they do not have to leave behind their programme; they do not always become a subject. In the last chapter, on programming culture, we stress the permanent crisis of a political subject, which is most often forgotten as it is not regarded as important for culture. To illustrate the theoretical considerations we use the example of a retired politician — Lech Wałęsa — who “once defeated the regime” and made Poland famous worldwide, and who still does not allow himself to be forgotten.

IMPORTANT EVENTS AND FORGETTING IN CULTURE

Contemporary culture as a hypertext has expanded to such a degree that it does not seem to possess size or extent. The importance of the cultural mechanism of forgetting texts was probably most written about by Juri Lotman (1922–1993) — a Russian literary theorist, historian and semiotician who demonstrated the cohesion of culture and language.

According to Lotman, culture is bombarded with texts which create around themselves a specific semantic aura. Sometimes this aura is amplified and sometimes it is subdued. The processes of adding or removing textual meaning determine the future development of culture, as texts contain programmes of culture: they programme its semiosphere. However, texts demand an author. The author of texts that programme culture will be referred to as a subject.

Lotman, with his concept of explosion in culture, confronted the dominant narrative of the *Annales*¹ school, a group of scholars associated with a style of historiography developed by French historians in the 20th century who emphasised the long-term character of social history. The goal of the *Annales* school was to build an integral, global history which would encompass the entire picture of the past in a given culture and include its lasting features, and to a lesser extent short-term changes. Particularly intensive development of the *Annales* school took place in the post-war period, when it was led by Fernand Braudel, mostly renowned for the concept of the *longue durée* [the long term] denoting a time perspective in which civilisational and religious transformations occur. From this perspective, the majority of single political events are insignificant or even imperceptible. The deepest level is formed by civilisational transformations; they are essential to comprehend the entirety of history. Braudel’s idea of the *longue durée* suggests that the history of the world illustrated by wars and the acts of particular kings or politicians is essentially pointless and does not in any way facilitate understanding of the true sources of major transformations.

¹ The name of the school comes from the journal *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale*, founded in 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre.

According to the *Annales* school, from the perspective of the actual content of major transformations, the history recorded by chroniclers, “history of incidents”, is not important. What counts is its deep structures subjected to slow change, helping to form certain patterns. Individuals, even the most influential, are only a background of the true causes of events. It is the evolution of people’s collective beliefs about the organisation of society that builds the deepest level of history. Collective knowledge is neither the sum of individual experiences nor a synthesis of them; it constitutes a thoroughly new quality, which does not have much in common with an individual’s genius.

Such a view is opposed by Lotman, who emphasises the role of the individual in culture, and the impact of the individual’s arbitrary choices on the functioning of entire social systems. Thinking about culture as the long-term memory of a society, semioticians from Tartu determined three ways in which it is filled:

1. a quantitative increase in the amount of knowledge — filling the various nodes of the culture’s hierarchic system with various texts.
2. a redistribution in the structure of the nodes resulting in a change in the very notion of “a fact to be remembered”, and the hierarchic appraisal of what has been recorded in memory; a continuous reorganisation of the coding system which, while remaining itself in its own consciousness and conceiving itself to be continuous, tirelessly reforms separate codes, thus ensuring an increase in the value of the memory by creating “nonactual”, yet potentially actualisable, reserves.
3. forgetting. The conversion of a chain of facts into a text is invariably accompanied by selection, [...] and forgetting others, marked as nonessential (Lotman & Uspensky, 1978: 215–216)

and then non-existent. Therefore, alongside the giving of meaning and comprehension, forgetting is also a semiotic mechanism of culture.

Semiotics draws our attention to important events, signs or phenomena, and determines semantic fields which should be interpreted. As noted by Lotman, in a given field there may occur a “large” event, spectacular and subversive, which is worth reflecting on. Such events turn the world of signs upside down; the world we are accustomed to, where we dwell and feel safe. In the semiosphere a myriad of individual choices are made, some of which lead to many subsequent dynamic, but not synchronised, processes which also occur at various rates. Some processes are strongly intensified. When a given field of culture is subjected to strong fluctuations, its dynamics “infect” other spheres, not necessarily directly related to it. Lotman is far from confronting the history of the *longue durée* against the history of “the short term”, an event, such as an unpredictable explosion, against gradual processes, an incident against regularities, or anonymous mass movements against individual activity. Quite the opposite: he tries to connect the two variants of events within one concept.

“The history of events, in which an individual’s will and their creative capabilities are manifested, does not have to be, as some *Annales* scholars wished, ‘the tailbone’ of history” (Żyłko, 2008: 47). Explosive processes connected with single events and individuals occur simultaneously with gradual processes in various spheres of culture. According to the Russian semiotician, both of the types fulfill important roles: one guarantees innovativeness, and the other continuity. Cultural explosions are a result of the clash of cultural languages, as well as texts coming from the outside (Lotman, 2009). The notion of semiosphere is related to a specific homogeneity and individuality which constitute the essence of culture, in a sense — its inside, separated from the external space. And that brings us to the crucial notion of the boundary of a semiosphere. The boundary is a particular kind of filter, a selective device letting in texts from other cultural spheres, as well as non-texts. It serves the function of a bottleneck for messages from the outside, which need to funnel through to become facts of a given semiosphere. To this end, they must be adapted to its conditions in such a way that the strange becomes the familiar, the external becomes the internal, and a non-text becomes a text. The boundary is usually abstract, although it is sometimes located in a real space (Żyłko, 2008: 30). It is also used to separate the elements that still possess culture-programming power from things that have lost this power and can be forgotten. Let us recall: a subject programmes culture, while a hero establishes its borders, operates at the borders, moves around semantic fields.

To sum up this chapter, Lotman views the role of the individual in culture analogously to that of small disturbances of initial conditions in the scientific theory of chaos. These disturbances sometimes cause fundamental changes in the final stages of phenomena. Lech Wałęsa was seen as such a figure, disturbing the old order in Poland, a national hero. For many years his role was viewed entirely positively, in spite of the perception of character faults and other personal imperfections of the former president. Perceptions of Wałęsa changed radically in 2017, with the establishment of a new boundary of interpretation of documents held at the Institute of National Remembrance. An expert report from an investigation conducted by that institute indicated that Poland’s former president had collaborated with the Security Service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*), the country’s political police during the communist era.

At that moment, the role played by Wałęsa in August 1980, in the negotiations that had led to the August Agreement — a watershed in the dispute between striking workers and the government — began to be portrayed not as the role of a lone leader revaluing social relations, but as the role of a government emissary giving a mere impression of changing something in the system of government.

PEOPLE OF EXPLOSION

Explosions are, for instance, historically important actions of individuals having a significant influence on the course of history, scientific discoveries and epochal technological inventions, but also individual “excesses”, including acts of madness and extreme lawlessness, which can violently change the direction of social development and cause sudden transitions from one state into another. Behaviours of individuals that lead to explosion thus have wide social consequences. This may be illustrated with the example of Peter I the Great, one of Lotman’s favourite heroes.

Perceived by the Russians as a hero, Peter I the Great (1672–1725) built the power of Russia, but at the same time was a cruel and ruthless ruler, who did not shy away from crime in pursuing his goals. The changes that he introduced covered almost all spheres of the internal life of the state: administration, finance, the army, the economy, education, culture, customs, and the Orthodox Church. “Money is the artery of war” — these were Peter’s significant words in an imperial decree of 1711. To obtain funds to wage a costly war, he imposed taxes on — among other things — windows, doors, chimneys, horse-collars, baths, mills, inns, wine cellars, watering places, and even oak coffins or wearing a beard and Russian style clothing. Also, almost all profit-earning activities were taxed. This resulted in a large increase in prices. In addition, separate officials were appointed to search for new categories of taxation (Gaca, 2010). Peter the Great created a well-organised police state. Evidence of his long-term influence includes numerous public institutions in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, in particular Moscow University, which developed in connection with Peter the Great’s reforms. This example makes clear how an individual’s decisions can affect the destiny of whole nations.

Decisions of an individual can be unpredictable in the light of previous stages of development, but they introduce significant and long-lasting innovations to the historical process. Without them, it would be completely redundant. Obviously, it would be preferable if such innovations did not produce victims, but for example originated from “higher spheres of culture” — religion, art, or philosophy. However, as illustrated by the example of Peter the Great and the like, sudden changes possess as many negative as positive aspects. Mostly, the negative ones result in individual victims, and the positive ones form a foundation for the development of culture, including art and science, and thus they serve the *longue durée*. On one hand, “explosions” close a certain period of history, making many possible developments no longer valid. On the other hand, they open up new paths and build new passages to future states of history and culture.

Lotman dealt mainly with literature, which was for him an ideal model of the world which often set norms of behaviour for real-life heroes (see, for example, the Werther effect). Lotman wrote that it is not literature that imitates

life, but it is life that strives to imitate literature (Lotman, 2013: 157). In his literary analyses he often resembled a psychologist who tries to understand a network of individual meanings, and unique and subjective models of the world, in a broader historical and cultural context. Much attention in his work (Lotman, 1990) is given to the role of a character, a hero, whose life changes the existing reality. This consists in crossing boundaries and overcoming obstacles; a hero is “an acting person”, moving from one semantic field to another, which is impossible for other characters. They may be a highwayman, wizard, spy, terrorist or superman — what is important is the fact that they are able to do what is forbidden and cross structural boundaries in semiotic space. Having crossed the boundaries, a hero enters a semantic “anti-field” in relation to the basic one, building their identity on difference. In order for this movement to be stopped, the hero must fuse with the surrounding semantic field, transform from a mobile character (acting) into an immobile one (not performing any acts). If this does not occur, the plot is not completed and the movement continues. Lotman gives here the example of fairytale heroes who belong to a different world, the world of people, but by exceeding boundaries, overcoming dangers, crossing forests, mountains, and seas, manage to reach the other side — the world of fairytales. But as they still do not stand out — in the world of humans the hero was a poor, younger brother among rich and strong elder brothers, now he is a human among non-humans — the plot does not stop. Therefore, all fairytales end at the moment a hero adapts to their surroundings. A hero in love marries a princess, warriors win, and mortals die — the plot stops and the hero is not a hero any more. A hero does not have to act; what is important is the very readiness for action, tension in the semantic opposition. Lotman writes that a ship may not sail away, a killer might not kill, Pecherin and Beltov are inactive. But the nature of their mutual relations with their environment proves that these are inactive acting characters. A ship which did not sail away and a rock which did not sail away; a killer who did not kill and a citizen who did not kill; Pecherin and Grushnitsky, Beltov and Krutsifersky are not structural counterparts, even though the acts that they do not perform are the same (Lotman, 1977: 240). Therefore, what is important is the semantic tension between structures, a character’s difference from and incompatibility with their environment, potential readiness to act and cross boundaries — so that a hero can be born. They are always able to act and have the right to behave differently from others. A character is an intersection of structural functions, disassembling a meaning and constructing it anew. Such a hero is called by Lotman a man of explosion (Lotman, 2009), who due to the unpredictability of his actions is very often regarded as a madman by his contemporaries (as opposed to a predictable fool and a sage). For example, Digenes, a hero from a Byzantine epic, performs acts which from a common point of view may be assessed as strange or mad, but perceived from the inside

are realisations of the chivalrous pursuit of perfection. Actions or creations of mad people, escaping contemporary criteria, are often appreciated from a temporal and historical perspective. An acting hero adapts particularly well to moments of historical explosion. In Poland, a hero who crossed boundaries and built a new semiotic space and a new historical plot was Lech Wałęsa — a politician and legendary co-founder of the Solidarity trade union, a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. During the strike action in the Gdańsk shipyard in August 1980 he climbed over the shipyard fence to get to the strikers, an act which took on a symbolic meaning of crossing boundaries. He is an example of the Lotmanian mobile hero who certainly powered the plot of history, but at present his political and social activity is empty, querulous, deprived of goal and deeper meaning; and the actions he performs take place within a closed semantic field. He is an example of a paradoxical hero whose actions no longer generate tensions and do not build a new semiotic quality. He is on the move, but this motion is superficial and does not form a plot. It brings to mind the mythical Sisyphus, who was punished by being assigned to a meaningless activity, a repetitive, purposeless movement, closed in a trap of meaning.

The reason for the ineffective action of a “man of explosion” may also be exhaustion of their historical time: after a transformation there is no longer a place for them. As Lotman wrote: “But here the explosion ends. Revolution turns to stagnation and the ideal of individuality gives way to that of ‘equality’” (Lotman, 2009: 62). In a time of balance and historical stability there is no room for heroes. The problem with Wałęsa consists in his ossified discourse and failure to perceive that the change has already occurred. Using Lotman’s metaphor, it may be said that Wałęsa turned from a madman of the time of transformation to a typical fool. Wałęsa’s structural closure is further intensified by his clinging to the discourse of a hero, despite clear evidence of his collaboration with the (communist) Security Service (Stankiewicz & Wilczak, 2016). Self-aggrandisement becomes more important than the truth, the hero status becomes a limitation, and his self-narrative contradicts the social discourse. Thus, in the semiotic space there are two texts about Wałęsa — “Wałęsa the hero” and “Wałęsa the traitor” — which are antitheses of one another. This follows closely the views of Lotman (Lotman, 2013), who assumes, after Ferdinand de Saussure, that culture, like language, employs binary oppositions and consists of opposites: top — bottom, earth — sky, woman — man, hero — traitor. For Lotman, the structure of language — the harmony of oppositions — is a rule that organises human reality, determining its ontological order and, in consequence, the way in which it is perceived. De Saussure repeatedly said that “in language there are only differences”, and Lotman added that as a result our reality of day and night is composed of complementary opposites. The rule of binarity also applies to characters (heroes): Don Juan differs not only in his relation to different personae, but also in his relation to himself. Appearing before Doña

Anna as a monk, as Don Diego and as himself, he behaves differently in each case. It is very important to recognise that he is not pretending: he really and sincerely transforms himself into another person (Lotman, 1977: 253). That is also why Wałęsa could be culturally involved in various types of discourse, which compose a complete character only in relation to each other. In a cultural text he can be both a traitor and a hero, or a political subject.

THE POLITICAL SUBJECT AND MECHANISMS OF CULTURE

A political subject is a collective or individual participant in political life who can influence the process of political decision-making either in a formal way, in accordance with the norms binding in a political system, or in an informal way — inconsistent with those norms. The fundamental objective of a political subject is to preserve or change existing political relations, such as binding norms.

There is a basic division into primary and secondary political subjects. Primary subjects are large social groups, national or ethnic communities, organised into a whole and possessing common interests. Secondary political subjects include various political powers, professional organisations of producers and employers, political institutions, non-governmental organisations, religious associations, as well as groups or bodies representing the interests and will of large social groups.

Let us look at the action of a political subject seen in Lotman's dynamic understanding of culture, which to the Russian semiotician seems to resemble oscillatory motion between the moment of explosion, which may stem from a minor event, and the state of organising gradual historical processes. The semiotic mechanism of culture consists in letting signs through, giving cultural meaning to certain phenomena and processes, and rejecting others. As described by Juri Lotman and Boris Uspensky, each culture separates itself, selects special areas for itself and values them highly in an axiological sense (Lotman & Uspensky, 1978), but also singles out the spheres which do not belong to it or even oppose it (non-culture or anti-culture).

Since every text encourages not only remembering, but also forgetting, it is concluded that subjects can similarly be forgotten.

The text is not reality, but a material enabling its reconstruction or programming. Culture remembers what falls within a dual model of appraisal related to the content plane and the expression plane. The dichotomy of the planes of culture obviously represents a certain ideal construct; it does not occur in a pure state. It is more of a mixture of forms and dominants, but it needs only the dominance of one of the planes so that the whole culture is given direction. On the basis of Lotman and Uspensky's paper *On the semiotic mechanism of culture*, we can observe that in the second half of the 20th century

the culture of Western Europe was dominated by the content plane, while that of Eastern Europe was dominated by the expression plane.

The two types of culture ask different fundamental questions, which lead to different consequences. The question in the content plane seems to be one of “WHAT”, whereas the question in the expression plane is one of “HOW”. For example, in the content-focused culture, it is the opposition of “orderly” and “disorderly” that prevails. It differs from the expression-focused culture with its basic opposition of “appropriate” and “inappropriate” — the pursuit of cultural expansion may not take place at all; it is more likely for culture to close within its own boundaries, to separate from anything which opposes it; non-culture becomes synonymous with anti-culture. Lotman gave the example of the culture of medieval China or the idea of “Moscow, third Rome”. What is distinctive here is a striving for the preservation of the system rather than its propagation: esotericism, not mission.

A distinct feature of the content-focused culture is that in terms of hierarchy the creator of rules occupies a higher place than the creator of texts. Here we have two different subjects: the subject in the culture of content is the creator of rules, while in the culture of expression it is the creator of texts. We can see that today Lech Wałęsa seems to be a creator of texts. However, these are not culture-forming texts. Now it is only memes based on them that could be considered significant.

In a culture where orientation towards expression prevails, the world is understood as a text and the question “what is it called?” becomes essential — wrong naming may be associated with a different meaning, i.e. with a different message, not unclear or distorted information. In the culture of novels the world of expression is a medium of the subject. “It creates the space of the ‘third person’” (Lotman, 2009: 117) — says Lotman. It enables the subject both to be the reader and to feel like the protagonist. In this sense, in literature, naming programmes a fictional reality. Even the press may help to programme reality, on condition that it brings the described world closer by means of information, and creates an emotional bond with the reader.

In totalitarian regimes, newspapers lose their informational character and become a form of ritualised communication about unfortunate, unjust, anomalous events in an “upside down” world of one’s enemies and about the just world of “one’s own,” which has been delivered from all events and unexpected happenings. The most unique positive event is seen as upholding the “positive nature” of “our” life as a whole. This is where the expression “mass heroism” comes from: “in our country everyone becomes a hero.” In such instances the newspaper ceases in fact to be a newspaper and takes on the character of a sacred text. There are well-known cases in which tossing newspapers on the ground was taken as a hostile political act (Lotman, 2013: 182).

Thus, if in the culture of content an increase in knowledge takes place through expansion to the spheres of ignorance, then in the culture of the

opposite type, and in art, an increase in knowledge is possible only by overcoming deceit. Politics today is perceived in this way, mainly on the expression plane. The topic of the profound influence exerted on politics by the media was raised by Marshall McLuhan. This Canadian media theorist claimed that if Adolf Hitler had not had the radio and Ronald Reagan the television, they would not have gained such enormous power (McLuhan, 1964).

The subject as the creator of programmes is not equal to the creator of media programmes, but their effect can also be linked to the latter. We can see from the example of Peter the Great that a political subject may even shift culture from the expression plane to the content plane. Also a hero, both in literature and in real life, by means of moving from one semantic field to another, prepares the ground for explosion, leads to the explosion, but does not programme new rules of culture or functioning within culture.

In this sense, Lech Wałęsa does not seem to be a hero or a political subject. However, there are many narratives which defend his position either as a subject or a hero. When he is attacked as an anti-hero, because he did not even climb over the famous “fence” of the Gdańsk Shipyard in 1981² and he did not secure a real political change, he is defended as a political subject — a figure who represents the programme of the Solidarity movement. When he is attacked as an anti-subject because of his passiveness towards the old regime, he is defended as the symbol of a hero, one who indeed climbed over the fence and became the face of longed-for liberation from communism.

The narrative of Wałęsa himself is interesting in the context of this event. He claims that he actually climbed over two fences, and that during the first jump he lost a shoe.³ This narrative of excess in defence of Wałęsa’s individual choices is supposed to deny the participation of a collective subject (in this case Security Service officers of the Polish People’s Republic) in creating a (seeming) change of the Polish political system in the 1980s.

Such a performative crisis of an individual subject in politics is not new; indeed, it is characteristic. In no other sphere do we observe such strong dominance of the system over the subject.

Already in the 4th century B.C. it was possible to witness a very serious crisis of *polis*, which could not be prevented by the most renowned thinkers. The conflict between a philosopher and *polis*, personified by a wise man — Socrates — dying for the truth, directed philosophy and also politics to a specific path of development which would be followed from Plato onwards. The legitimisation of active citizenship takes place through various forms of “auditions” when an

² There are many programmes demystifying that mythical moment of the beginning of the strike, e.g. *Wałęsa “Prawdziwy” skakał przez płot, czy nie skakał?*, Łukasz Korwin & Andrzej Turkowski (scen. i real.), ownership of copyright: TVP SA, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFUfGHul1c0> (09.12.2020).

³ *Ibidem*.

“appropriate” understanding of reality is evaluated. Intellectuals are obliged to refer to politics, and they essentially become proper political subjects. Hannah Arendt points to the fact that political power is in possession of those who can start anew, cancelling everything that is old. Such was Plato’s behaviour when he made a philosopher a king, although he had seen his master’s death. Today, in the 20th century we can no longer delude ourselves that it is possible to have such a beginning, programming from the start. As Arendt noted, we suffer mainly from a lack of community representation. Therefore, we turn all values into one result of any action — effectiveness, or more probably its simulation (Arendt, 2005: 40–69).

The subject as a programmer creates new algorithms of functioning in reality. A good example of such a political subject is Peter the Great of Russia. He introduced a comprehensive reform of finance which affected the functioning of the whole culture. Another example of a political subject is Socrates. The subject reforms the existing reality, while a hero breaks its continuity — for example, by winning wars, opposing regimes, etc. It is possible to be both (Socrates). It matters what remains in the memory of culture and what changes it. The subject leaves a programme, for example, a school or other institution. The hero primarily leaves memories: the memory of an event, a new understanding of it, etc. Other participants in culture fall into oblivion.

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