Summary of Course C.5.4: Special Issues in the Philosophy of Culture

General: *This course investigates the deeper "elements of the world" through ontological, harmological and methodological frameworks in order to analyze contemporary cultural phenomena in depth. At its center lies the ongoing tension between traditional cultures and Western modernity, in which Eurocentric claims to an exclusive form of "reason" are criticized in favor of cultural diversity and multiple rationalities. The course also analyses the social dynamics of the market, the shift from sacred to desacralized natural law, and the evolution of Western rationalism, which culminates in a postmodern crisis of foundations through the Enlightenment and Sloterdijk's cynical reason. Finally, the text highlights how the disintegration of overarching "metanarratives" leads to fragmentation, countercultures and a holistic New Age outlook in which humanity seeks to restore a balance with nature and the sacred.*

Introduction and Philosophical-Methodological Framework

This course deepens philosophical education by analyzing concrete contemporary cultural phenomena. To understand the contemporary lifeworld, it employs a solid philosophical foundation resting on four pillars:

- *Ontology* (theory of reality): Identifying "being" (*to on*) in all its diversity, ranging from material facts to ideal images of what is desirable and possible worlds.
- *Harmology* (theory of order): Examining the ordered relationships within systems.
- *Logic and Methodology:* Employing both deductive forms of reasoning (derivation from axioms) and reductive and inductive forms of reasoning (explaining specific phenomena on the basis of presuppositions, as applied in the humanities and dialectics).

Following the Platonic tradition and the Pauline notion of the "elements of the world" (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*), the course argues that a culture can only be understood by uncovering the deeper presuppositions (*archai*), foundations and invisible forces that govern social action.

2. Tradition versus Modernity: Ethnology, Primitivism and Multiculturalism

A central theme of the course is the persistent tension between traditional (archaic) cultures and Western, Enlightenment-based rational modernity.

- *Ethnology and Cultural Diversity:* Ethnology makes clear that a Western observer never analyses another culture neutrally, but always "translates" it through their own sociocultural presuppositions. Thinkers such as Paul Feyerabend emphasize that cultural diversity is an essential source of richness; imposing a single, uniform Western form of "reason" impoverishes culture.

- *Traditional Historiography:* The study of African griot traditions shows that history fulfils an ethical and normative function in traditional societies. Attempts to reconcile oral traditions and mythical epics with Western historical criticism demonstrate how archaic forms of thought can survive within a modernized context.

Primitivism and the Multicultural Society:

Primitivism — the idealization of a simple, "natural" beginning — often serves as a critique of artificial Western society. In multicultural reality, however, serious friction can arise. Western Enlightenment thought (which strives for universal equality and secularism), for example, sometimes clashes irreconcilably with religious or traditional legal systems. The principle of non-contradiction teaches that one cannot simultaneously uphold absolute universal individual rights and preserve traditional group rights that conflict with them.

3. Economics, Rationality and Law

In the modern world, the economic structure is a defining element of culture. The course examines the rationality and dynamics of the market:

- *The Market and the Irrational:* While Adam Smith described the market as an ordered system guided by the "invisible hand", sociologist Georg Simmel shows that the modern economy encompasses a spectrum ranging from strict rationality to the utterly irrational "adventure". Business involves risk and unpredictability, giving Western capital a dynamic and sometimes ruthless character.

- *Comparative Economic Models:* Capitalism does not take a single form. Japan's economic success demonstrates that modern technology and market mechanisms can be effectively combined with a Confucian ethical framework focused on group loyalty and harmony.

- *The Development of Law:* Law evolved from archaic-sacred law (in which the law, as a divine gift, elevates human beings above animals) towards desacralized proto-Sophistic natural law. With Protagoras ("man is the

measure of all things"), law became relative and situation-dependent, paving the way for the expansion of individual power and political pragmatism.

4. The Evolution of Rationalism and Cynical Reason

Western rationalism has taken various historical forms, each with its own effects on culture:

- *Cartesian Rationalism:* René Descartes places methodological doubt, the individual cogito ("I think") and a mechanistic-analytical worldview at the center. This led to major scientific advances, but also to a reductive view of nature and living organisms.

- *Empirical Rationalism:* John Locke builds knowledge on sensory perception and regards human experience as the foundation of knowledge and the state.

- *Sadean Rationalism:* When enlightened autonomy breaks free from every virtue or higher value, it degenerates into the cold, boundless egoism of the Marquis de Sade, in which other people become mere instruments of pleasure.

- *Cynical Reason:* In contemporary culture, Peter Sloterdijk observes the triumph of "cynical reason". Following the unmasking philosophies of Marx (economism), Nietzsche (biologism) and Freud (pansexualism) — the "three masters of suspicion" — a calculating consciousness prevails, suspecting hidden self-interest behind every elevated value or selfless act.

5. Modernism, Postmodernism and New Age

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, cultural development reaches a decisive turning point:

- *Artistic Modernism:* The avant-garde in art sought to break with tradition through a process of "creative negation", placing experimentation and continuous renewal at the center.

- *The Postmodern Crisis of Foundations:* Postmodernism emerges when faith in the grand "metanarratives" (*métarécits*, according to Jean-François Lyotard) — such as the idea of overall social progress, universal reason or the final emancipation of humanity — definitively crumbles. What remains is fragmentation, in which universal claims give way to local "little narratives" and irreconcilable language disputes (*different*).

- *Counterculture and Fusionism:* Movements such as the Beatniks and youth movements introduced a new sensibility towards life. In films such as *Le Grand Bleu*, a contemporary form of "fusionism" is expressed: an emotional, boundary-crossing desire to merge with nature or the cosmos, free from social constraints or rational structures.

- *Holism and New Age:* In response to fragmentation and materialism, holism and the New Age movement emerge. They advocate a new paradigm that understands humanity, nature and the cosmos as one interconnected, dynamic system. Through an inclusive approach, they seek to reintegrate science, ecology, human development and transrational or sacred experiences.