

СТАТЬИ / ARTICLES

WHAT DOES THE CITY SAY? SEMIOTIC AND AXIOTIC READING OF URBAN SPACES

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Cultural / culturologic studies (referred in the text as “culturology”) that being developed in Poland and Eastern Europe since 1970s, has the ambition of showing the phenomena or processes hidden behind a directly visible reality – tying them to the symbolic and axiological spheres. However, nowadays increasingly often the discourse based on values, norms, rules and meanings is enriched with issues related to ownership structures, social distinctions and relations of power. The author of the article tries to show this dialectic of various ontological orders on the example of urban studies. In functioning of city infrastructure, the basic role undoubtedly is played by “utilitarian values”. But while looking at the city as a work (something that remains in constant creation), artistic, aesthetic and ethical values seem to be the most important. The first two types (which include, inter alia, modernity, originality, beauty, order, context, chaos, ugliness, devastation), are present both in the process of shaping the urban space itself and in the formation of the styles of life occurring in it – including both everyday practices and bottom-up, spontaneous creative acts. Some of values are individual (happiness, freedom, religiousness anonymity, responsibility, care for the public good), and some are collective (community, equality, democracy, security, multiculturalism, local identity, living standards, nature, ecology). The diverse character of the social fabric of a city means clashing together various interest groups organized not only around the pursuit of power and profit but also convictions, ideologies, beliefs, and tastes. How proves Fereński, urban areas should, therefore, be seen/read as spaces of axiological disputes, strongly related to politics and economic determinants.

Keywords: culturology, culture, visual culture, urban space, city, style of life, values, axiology, economy, politics.

ЧТО ГОВОРИТ ГОРОД? СЕМИОТИЧЕСКОЕ И АКСИОТИЧЕСКОЕ ЧТЕНИЕ ГОРОДСКИХ ПРОСТРАНСТВ

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Культурные / культурологические исследования (называемые в тексте «культурологией»), которые развиваются в Польше и Восточной Европе с 1970-х годов, имеют задачу показать явления или процессы, скрытые за непосредственно видимой реальностью, – связывая их с символической и аксиологической сферами. Однако в настоящее время дискурс, основанный на ценностях, нормах, правилах и значениях, всё чаще обогащается вопросами, связанными со структурами собственности, социальными различиями и отношениями с властью. Автор статьи пытается показать эту диалектику различных онтологических порядков на примере городских исследований. В функционировании городской инфраструктуры основную роль, несомненно, играют «утилитарные ценности». Но при взгляде на город как на произведение (то, что сохраняется в процессе постоянного творения) художественные, эстетические и этические ценности кажутся наиболее важными. Первые два типа (которые включают, среди прочего, современность, оригинальность, красоту, порядок, контекст, хаос, уродство, опустошение) присутствуют как в процессе формирования самого городского пространства, так и в формировании стилей жизни в нём – включая как повседневную практику, так и преобразующие, спонтанные творческие действия. Некоторые ценности индивидуальны (счастье, свобода, анонимность религиозности, ответственность, забота об общественном благе), а некоторые – коллективны (сообщество, равенство, демократия, безопасность, мультикультурализм, местная идентичность, уровень жизни, природа, экология). Разнообразный характер социальной структуры города означает столкновение различных групп интересов, организованных не только вокруг стремления к власти и прибыли, но также на основе убеждений, идеологий, веры и вкусов. Поэтому, как утверждает автор данной статьи, городские районы должны рассматриваться / считаться пространством аксиологических споров, прочно связанных с политикой и экономическими детерминантами.

Ключевые слова: культурология, культура, визуальная культура, городское пространство, город, стиль жизни, ценности, аксиология, экономика, политика.

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Referring to the question posed in the title of this text, namely, what does a city “say” or “communicate”, first you need to determine who and from what position asks about this “expression”. It should be further clarified what the term “city” means for this asking subject, and consequently, what – according to this subject – constitutes the “city” and what is the essence of it. So let’s start with explaining who in this particular case we are “We” – a team of researchers coming from a specific scientific tradition, who formulate a certain cognitive proposal.

The city as one of the most important phenomena of the modern globalized world is the subject of theoretical interests as well as the area of empirical research of scientists coming from many disciplines. Obviously, along with these various fields of knowledge, you can talk about “reading” the city in various ways. It is worth recalling here the words of the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who in one of his most famous works on the city wrote the following: “As it currently offers itself for analysis (or, alternatively, resists it), urban phenomena show some methodologically familiar features: dimensions and levels. They help us to introduce a degree of order into confused discussions on the city and urban issues, discussions that mix up texts and contexts, levels and dimensions. We could say they enable us to establish clear codes juxtaposed or superimposed, by which to decipher the message (the urban phenomenon considered as a message). Or we could call them the vocabulary (readings) of the text and writing of the city, that is, the plan, on the one hand, and on the other, ‘urban things’ – palpable, visible, readable in context”. And continued to ask: “Can we say there is a reading at the geographical level, an economic reading, a sociological reading, and so on, of the text of the city?” [Lefebvre 2003, 136].

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The perspective presented in the article below is derived from the cultural / culturologic studies being developed in Poland, and that’s the point of view determining the problem area of the following discussion as well as the way of reading the city presented in it. Moreover, it’s a peculiar (unique) perspective. Looking at science in a broader context, it can be said that the analyses of phenomena that characterize the urban space take both an aspectual, and – as is the case with some urban studies – a comprehensive shape. One can risk a statement that the culturologic issues due to the specificity of the object of inquiry, including the assumptions concerning diversity within the human universe, are situated somewhere between what we consider to be an aspect knowledge and what a comprehensive one is. Culturology has the ambition of showing

the phenomena or processes hidden behind a directly visible reality, tying them to the symbolic and axiological spheres above all. Nevertheless, increasingly often the discourse based on values, norms, rules and meanings is enriched with issues related to ownership structures, social distinctions and relations of power. Although there is a widespread belief that culturology is a field in which new knowledge arises at the crossroads between different disciplines, its representatives rather distance themselves from those comprehensive approaches that call for the need to conduct so-called interdisciplinary research. Culturology has the status of a separate scientific discipline, as well as a relatively autonomous object of interest. The fact, however, that its autonomy is relative, manifests itself with full force in the example of analyses concerning the city's life. Namely, the systems or interconnections of the ways of being and acting manifested in urban life resemble the gray fabric (a metaphor borrowed from Willard Van Orman Quine). Studies of urban space in the aspect of values and symbols treated as causative factors of human practices (producing that space), must, however, take into account the above-mentioned relations of power and property. It can be said, therefore, that the city is a matter woven of both axiological and symbolic phenomena (idealism), as well as occurrences having an economic basis and their political implications (materialism). In our hands, the urban space develops and changes through more or less arbitrary and conscious revisions and additions. It is the gray fabric, taking white from value and black from power / property / work. Perhaps there are no reasons to think that there are threads in it which are entirely black or white, or that they can be separated completely from each other [Quine 1953, 42]. However, speaking of these – coming from two different ontological levels – causative factors of human actions, one can also refer to the phenomenon of “oscillation” in the sense in which the term defines the behavior of a pendulum displaced from its equilibrium position. Going even further, the relationship between determinants emerging from axiotic space and the determinants of material origin (the demographic, geographic, economic or infrastructural ones) can be compared to the interaction of electrostatic charges manifested by jumping of sparks. Then we are dealing with the charges constantly accumulating on the surfaces of the objects, and the sparks – jumping from those objects on which there are more of these charges, to those on which the energy is smaller at the moment.

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Research on urban issues in the Polish culturology has been so far undertaken mainly within the framework of the so-called Poznań school. Philosophical issues related to this area, in particular, were cleared by Ewa Rewers [Rewers 2005]. Nevertheless, some attempts – more laboratory-oriented – of researching the city took place in other centers conducting studies on culture, too. One example is the text written by the founder of the Wrocław culturology branch, Stanisław Pietraszko, entitled *Cultural Issues in the Research of an Industrial City* [Pietraszko 2012]. This author, while warning against the trap for phenomenal and empiricist-oriented humanities which consists in identifying the object of research with the object understood as an observable element of the real world, claimed that twentieth-century sciences, even when labeled and deemed as interdisciplinary, in fact continued to work separately, according to their own competencies and interests [Pietraszko 2012, 216]. They used to analyze the phenomena relevant to the scope of their investigations, regarded as parts of the superior common object of the very broadly understood city. Pietraszko added that although the idea of modern holism assumed dealing with the “whole”, that is not as much with specific objects as the unobservable order of reality, still – as a consequence of the phenomenalist approach – the “comprehensive” approach was reduced to the sum of separate researches carried out by separate disciplines, each of which presented the results of its deliberations in its own scientific idiom. When it comes to twentieth-century and more contemporary research on the city, the most significant (dominant) of those languages seems to be the language of sociology and effectively it is the one determining this “comprehensive” field of interest. Such “interdisciplinarity” certainly can not be the basis of cultural studies. Since sociology identifies the city primarily with the population of its inhabitants, culture is understood as the culture of city dwellers, thus in phenomenalist-empiricist conceptions, it is being reduced to behavioral syndromes and their results or physical / psychological creations [Pietraszko 2012, 217]. This, however, for culturology understood as a separate scientific discipline with a relatively autonomous object of cognition, is obviously unsatisfactory.

Pietraszko in the article cited here warns against attempts to explain the human world using the notion of culture not only in colloquial but also in a broad sense, which understanding results in combining and mixing with each other different spheres of this *universe*. In his opinion, these spheres have different properties and internal regularities, so that their separation for research purposes is indispensable. He explains: “In

research on the culture of the city, this is a particularly important theoretical and methodological problem. Especially when the subject of such research is understood as the behaviors and creations of the inhabitants of the city, it should be realized that the urban collectivity is a kind of miniature of the human world and similarly to that world also in its existence, in the behavior of individual residents are present the regularities of various spheres of the human *universe*, aside of the natural aspects of nature and human existence. That is to say, if the basic criterion of the relationship between behaviors and products with culture is their reference to values, but values understood selectively, distinguished from the benefits, efficiency or functionality, it is easy to notice that it is not such behaviors and products that dominate within a 'widely understood' culture, but above all those representing the 'utilitarian order'" [Pietraszko 2012, 222–223]. Due to the infrastructure (public communication, roads and bicycle paths, water and sewage systems, garbage disposal), the city is associated primarily with the ergonomics of solutions, technical innovations and, above all, with practical goals. The theoretician of Wrocław, however, points out that the separation (qualification) of civilizational / cultural behaviors and products in practice remains a more complicated matter, for there are cases in which actions aimed at satisfying objective existential (or "utilitarian") requirements are accompanied by practices aimed at achieving non-instrumental (or "proper" values – referred to as "autotelic"). The reversal is quite often too, when the widespread existence of some type of functional activities, bringing about various benefits stems directly from the order of value, formed and present in a given culture.

Basing on the article by the American anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber *The culture of reality and the culture of values* [Kroeber 1952], Pietraszko emphasizes the differences between the culture determined by the axiological order and the civilization related to benefits or technical solutions. The question remains whether such an understanding of "reality", closely connected to this "utilitarian order", is the most useful considering the research on the modern city. Of course, one should not have the slightest doubt that it is more and more becoming a civilizational "device". However, in order to fully understand the processes that are taking place in it today, one needs to reach for a slightly different understanding of material conditions. Namely, culture used as a "variable" for explaining various phenomena and processes of the human world – possessing specific properties, which shape the ways of its influence – must be associated with power and economics. In the epistemological dimension, it allows, among other things, to go beyond the

innate idealism of the axiological perspective, and link ethics and aesthetics of lifestyles, ways of being (and of identity, self-identification) of the representatives of lower social classes with ideologies and strategies of political and economic elites who try to sanction inequality and exploitation, securing their own interests. By using such tactics, the researcher stops working in isolation from reality – on the one hand, he takes into account values and symbols, on the other – power (including inequalities, marginalization, exclusions) and property (e.g. private and public space, fixed assets, income). The persistent dichotomy between idealism and materialism (both on the epistemological and ontological level, i.e. in the field of different manifestations of the causative factors of human actions) can be dialectically weakened with accepting a research perspective which takes into account the conclusions emerging from the use of one of the metaphors proposed above (fabrics, pendulums, sparks).

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However, before this area is specified closer, one more thing needs to be said about the research issue discussed here. That is, in the philosophical and scientific tradition of the West, one of the main motifs of reflection on culture should be considered the antithesis of freedom and determinism. It connects in various ways with other important subjects of reflection, such as the question of relations between culture and nature, and the issues of mutual relations between the human individual and culture. Freedom here means, in particular, liberation from functioning only on the level of necessity and biological or “existential” compulsions – in other words, the transgression of “ways of being” specific to the world of animate and inanimate matter. The basic distinguishing feature of a human being appears then the (self) consciousness, based not only on language or work, but on the thoughts and actions of a symbolic and axiocentric character (it is worth noting in the margins that even in the latest concepts in the so-called “non-anthropocentric humanities”, the understanding of nature and its meaning and place in the “human universe” is transformed, but it has no consequences for the status of the very consciousness within which all such approaches and articulations are made). Determinism, in turn, is not related to the attribute-specific or attribute-based approach to culture (as a characteristic of the human species), but to the distributive attitude and depends on the conditioning of individuals by patterns, norms, orders and prohibitions regulating the ways of behavior and thinking in particular collectives. However, also on this “distributive” level – thinking in terms of

meanings, symbols, values, senses – one can see in the culture a sphere of freedom. Since in the attribute-specific approach (determining the particulars of a species) it is impossible to assign passivity to a human being, it is equally difficult to recognize passivity as a substantive trait of people within a specific cultural framework (societies, communities, groups) that give meaning to the actions of individuals. The resulting cultural roles, positions, and behavioral functions those actions do not remain solely the result (a simple reflection) of shared/reproduced norms, designs, and ideas. They are also a matter of chance, spontaneity, and contestation (resistance) – that is, diverse variants of “indeterminism”. Odo Marquard in one of his books aptly noticed that “we humans are always more the result of our accidents than our choices” [Marquard 1994, 133]. He wasn’t the only author recognizing randomness as constitutively inscribed in our human (species) condition by the way. Ditto for spontaneity. It manifests itself primarily in the sphere of broadly understood creative acts (both artistic and founding), but also at the level of ethical and aesthetic choices related to preferences, convictions or beliefs, which we generally recognize as determined not only culturally but also socially – that is, resulting from the relations of supremacy and subordination, which are based on diversity in the access to resources of power, prestige, economic capital, and education, and remain related to such variables as age, sex, race, ethnicity, religion. Spontaneity understood in an anthropological way is able to transcend such social limitations, weakening the antithesis of freedom and determinism.

Hannah Arendt, in one of her critics of Martin Heidegger’s (a follower of fascism) philosophy, wrote that by concealing the notion of *Dasein*, he tried to abstract from all the human qualities that Kant tried to define with the help of concepts such as “freedom”, “dignity” and “rationality”. As Arendt aptly notes, these traits are derived from “human spontaneity, and therefore do not submit to visualizing analysis, because as spontaneous – indeed the source – features they are something more than mere functions of being, and a man transcends himself in them. Both Heidegger’s functionalism and the realism of Hobbes ultimately form such a model of the human being, that a man would function much better in a strictly determined world, because then, he would be ‘freed’ from all spontaneity” [Arendt 2008 ,90]. For Kant himself, humanity meant that each individual represented all humanity, just as for the fathers of the French Revolution the concept of man implied that all humanity could be humiliated or exalted in a single person. Heidegger, trying to provide the isolated “egos” with a common ground went in

a completely different direction, reaching for mythologized, vague terms like “people” or “earth” [Arendt 2008, 95]. Arendt prefers to stick to the “Enlightenment” thought. For the author of the Berlin Salon, spontaneity has a primary character (source, anthropological, existential) and seems to constitute the prime properties and values of human existence. They are the mentioned: freedom, dignity, rationality (at that most probably they do not exhaust the “features” contained within spontaneity).

Therefore, even if a wide range of our preferences, choices, and actions is culturally determined by axiological patterns and norms regulating the ways of experiencing, behaving, thinking within individual communities, it is still possible to point out such values, which due to their source relation to spontaneity may become in their universality – a bit paradoxically perhaps – a guarantor of “indeterminism”. Of course, cultural correlatives of values remain strongly bonded with the struggle for the resources of power, prestige, capital, and education, contributing to maintaining the stratification and reproduction of social distinctions (as well as generating divisions and antagonisms on a global scale). The concept of cultural hegemony, among others, refers to this. It is about activities that, thanks to immersion in the sphere of symbols and values, decide about maintaining power in accordance with the interest of a particular group or social class.

Apart from randomness and spontaneity, “indeterministic” behavior also seems to constitute “resistivity” – understood as non-receptivity, resistance, opposition. Of course, resistance can be combined with the experience of the body, physicality, with the process of socialization, moral convictions, the reaction to oppression or exploitation, etc. However, dignity and hope may be the most important for resistance. While the first one belongs to the prime values associated with our spontaneity, hope is something that organizes axiological experiences, defining the horizons of senses. In this way, it leads to subjective engagement, acting as a “promise” to realize values¹. For this reason, however, it is necessary to distinguish acts of resistance from antagonisms associated with axiological conflicts that result from deeply internalized patterns of behavior, preferences, beliefs, convictions, and additionally overlapping with social divisions. Considering all this, it is worth remembering about the conviction emerging from many ideas regarding the realization of utopia (making a revolution?), that it is precisely hope and dignity that are the *spiritus movens* of utopian action (even if it has disastrous effects).

¹ Remarks presented here are convergent with some reflections of J. Tischner, presented in *Myślenie według wartości*, Kraków 2000.

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In addition to the dichotomy of values / symbols and economics/ power as two different orders, elements of which are the basic causative factors of human actions, the abovementioned tension between cultural freedom and determination is, therefore, one of the main subjects of our research on urban space. Referring to the words of Henri Lefebvre quoted at the beginning, one can say that concentrating on this aporia enables us to read overlapping or connecting codes. By understanding the oscillations within these dichotomies, we have the opportunity to decipher the messages and meanings contained (placed) within the urban space and understand the phenomena or processes that are associated with them. We can define our research activities as reading the text or the “handwriting” of the city. “Urban things” in a material, tangible, visible form, become legible in a cultural context that takes into account not only the resources of power and capital, axiological patterns and norms regulating behavior but also “indeterministic” variables resulting from chance, spontaneity, and contestation. We try to read the city on various levels, then – geographical, economic, political, religious – but first of all on the cultural one. In light of this research perspective, it becomes obvious that it’s the specific cases that are relevant for us.

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As far as the functioning of urban infrastructure is concerned, the basic role undoubtedly is played by “utilitarian values”, while looking at the city as a work (something that remains in constant creation), artistic, aesthetic and ethical values seem to be the most important. The first two types (which include, inter alia, modernity, originality, beauty, order, context, chaos, ugliness, devastation), are present both in the process of shaping the urban space itself and in the formation of the styles of life occurring in it – including both everyday practices and bottom-up, spontaneous creative acts. As part of behaviors aimed at the implementation of certain aesthetic and aesthetic values, however, the third type, that is, ethical values can also be present. Some of them are individual (happiness, freedom, anonymity, responsibility, care for the public good), and some are collective (community, equality, democracy, security, multiculturalism, local identity, living standards, nature, ecology). The diverse character of the social fabric of a city means clashing together various interest groups organized not only around the pursuit of power and profit but also convictions, ideologies, beliefs, and tastes. Urban areas should, therefore, be seen / read as spaces of axiological

disputes, strongly related to politics and economic determinants. Needless to convince anyone that conflicts, negotiations, protests and even street fights have a very long tradition / history.

When looking at the urban space, at least some of its types can be distinguished, which form part of what is called “internal differentiation”. At the most general level, it is about the representative spaces and spaces of everyday life (including those marginalized or degraded). Other divisions overlap with this kind of “allotments”, particularly those related to such variables as the degree of affluence, education, ethnicity, race, gender, religion or age. With these differentiations, in turn, different types of community bonds and practices in the area of changes in the surrounding world are combined. This corresponds to the “components” of lifestyles – their material correlates are, for example, cycling paths, murals and graffiti expressing love and loyalty to a local sports club, art studios and art galleries, craft beer pubs, gay clubs, shops with healthy food, vegan restaurants, but also dens and vacant spaces occupied by people addicted to alcohol and drugs.

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Obviously, the city space is also the matter and forms in which they realize or reflect all the above-mentioned elements of urban life. What forms or what types of materiality are we talking here? The image of contemporary cities is largely determined by the above-mentioned “official” or “representational” spaces. Most often these are fragments of areas located centrally, with exposed in various ways public buildings, monuments, elements of small architecture (important due to their historical value, aesthetic and artistic values, meaning for the identity of the place), etc. They are presented as the most characteristic, city-life focusing places, defining its pulse.

The visual dominance of the representative spaces created by agents of the city’s magistrates, architects, urban planners, and artists is the easiest to notice in the functioning of today’s global metropolises. It’s these so-called “visiting cards” that determine the image and mental maps of cities. In addition to these centrally located areas, individual districts, housing estates, complexes of buildings and single constructions are identified as the most promising in expanding the attractiveness of the metropolis, then thoroughly revitalized. The “politics of show”, which allows the municipal authorities not only to retain the support of the voters but also economic prosperity, needs constant stimulation, hence the official spaces must constantly expand. However, such revitalization may lead to negative social phenomena, as in particular the process of gentrification.

However, in urban organisms, there are also objects that are the result of not so much the actions of authorities and experts as the grass-roots practices of the inhabitants. They can be described as spontaneous forms of creative activity. They are demonstrations of being – i. e. the subjectivity, existence, needs – of the residents. The presentation of various aesthetics and imaginations about the modern city, manifestations of life and actions alternative to the metropolitan standards and global aesthetics dominating in the metropolises, has become the goal of our research projects carried out in recent years in Polish Wrocław, Russian Tomsk.

It is about examining practices in the space of everyday life, activities that are undertaken due to certain material and symbolic effects. In our analysis, however, we did not limit ourselves to demonstrating the opposition or acts of resistance against the globally dominant aesthetics. We asked about whose culture materializes (actualizes) itself in the form of these objects, how do they redefine space, how do they transform places and their inhabitants. We have described the “nearby” world, elements of social life or cultural phenomena revealing various types of activity / agency. Our research aims at more fully portraying the iconosphere of cities, including the indication of the actors who co-create it, as well as the values on which their actions are directed. Objects constituting products of these activities are sometimes the carriers of values, while at other times values only manifest themselves in them. Interventions in urban space subjected to analyzes may be the result of actions undertaken by artists and activists involved in social and political changes, but many of them are of a completely bottom-up and very local nature. They are often kitschy, amateurish, provisional, sometimes provincial, “old-fashioned”, they also have ephemeral character, i. e. they are impermanent, quickly transforming, disappearing. It is precisely due to revealing this peculiar dimension of reality that our research can also remind everyone that it is the inhabitants who make up the city, that it does not belong exclusively to professional politicians, officials, specialists, experts, that it is alive, dynamic, changing, that real people in defiance of the – imposed on them – rules, rigors, aesthetic regimes, as well as negligences, adapt the space themselves according to their requirements and expectations. In addition to the representative zones, there are areas in cities where the inhabitants manifest their identity in various ways, and they adhere to a different reservoir of values, senses, and meanings. They satisfy or realize their needs and desires in different ways than those social groups / classes, to which the official spaces are dedicated. Thus, we also draw attention to inequalities, seg-

regations, exclusions, marginalizations, and conflicts related to them. Therefore, tactics or strategies of resistance are important (understood broadly – resistance is noticeable even in the – important here – hand-made aesthetics). Of course, the phenomena mentioned here have today a global range due to diffusion or resonance. At the same time, however, there is always something universal and particular in it, that is, the imagination and work of specific human hands, individuals or small groups, using what is available to them.

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Nonetheless, to understand the significance of these urban phenomena, obviously it is necessary to look at them from a wider perspective. We treated backyard gardens, graffiti, monuments, architecture, the space of the city and its environs as a “linked” and “tangled” text. Of course, our research could not cover the entire cities, so we were conducting research on examples of selected regions of Tomsk and Irkutsk, Kemerovo, Novokuznetsk. So, for last three years, we did comparative analysis of manifestations of meanings and values in the public and semi-public spaces. We selected the most important elements that determining the former and current processes associated with the production and transformation of the “visual scope” of the town’s and the styles of life of its inhabitants. We were interested in the appearance and character of city arteries, squares, promenades, squares, parks, monuments or pedestals, cemeteries, commercial and service places. We asked residents about their experience, views, ideas and expectations – regarding to urban space and the changes taking place in the city. Cultural, religious, social and economic aspects were equally important to us. We were curious about the globality and locality of cities in the context of the identity. By analyzes of images (and sounds) treated as socio-cultural codes, we wanted to reconstruct the systems of values and symbols relevant to ways of people’s lives.

Obviously, relations between the socio-cultural complexes and architecture always has been very complicated. Since its beginnings planning has been entwined with the cultural and political production of reality. That’s why it seems to make more sense to associate architecture with the diversity of social / material conditions, with the power and style of life, rather than attribute it’s to history of art. In the urban landscape, for all its complexity and variety of forms, architecture is the most common one. However, this does not mean that it is totally egalitarian. Architecture and its environs can be analyzed as a text in which manifest various types of beliefs, lifestyles, aesthetic preferences, the great modernization

projects, political ambition. As it was mentioned at the beginning, public space is a place of different – sometimes conflicting – economic and political interests, cultural systems of meanings and values. Therefore, we can say that the main aim our research in Poland and Russia was to show how we can read texts contained in the building facades, monuments, streets, squares, backyard and gardens We considered about the impact that they have on inhabitants thinking about space, about social differences and ideas of community. We tried to connect together methods of text analysis and tools from visual studies – especially connected with photography and film.

Photography, as well as video capturing, were very important in our research during research in Tomsk and other Siberian cities. Agnieszka Smutek and Katarzyna Szymańska have collected a huge and complete material from three research trips to Tomsk and among others: Irkutsk, Kemerovo, Novokuznetsk, Novosibirsk. The material has been edited by Agnieszka Smutek as a part of Bachelor thesis. The film has been edited out of the shots that legibly refer to the topics and categories belonging to the interest of our research: i. e. old and contemporary architecture, places of remembrance, objects of worship, trading spaces. Primarily, those are objects or spaces that can serve as a material manifestation of inhabitant's ways of living, thinking and acting, present on the streets, squares, plazas and other public spaces. Another crucial category belonging to the interest of our research was flora and fauna living within the borders of the city. Those categories besides of their generality, find their complexities in our research on specific objects – from city plans to yards and backyards and details that distinguish them. What is most interesting, we all have discovered a specific kind of looking at space and what constitute it.

The main question for our scientific research was: how can a contemporary humanist scholar utilize the (audio)visual tool such as camera lens to critically reflect on the examined surroundings? Firstly, to create a research report and by this treating camera lens as a tool for building the field study reports, categorizations, marking of theses, which can be later developed in written text. Taking those photographs and recordings allowed us to save what we have observed, so that it could be analyzed and/or used in our interviews that were based on the visual technique called „photo elicitation” (the term coined by Sarah Pink refers to the way in which the researcher can activate its subject by exposing him or her to the photograph).

The scientific attitude as well as the analysis of the encountered reality and the cultural phenomena happening within it was in some

way mediated by the lens of the camera. Our experience suggests, that photography gives us a chance of exploring deeper structures and uncovering previously unseen layers of reality. It allows to reveal its construction in all dimensions – religious, philosophical and ideological. This is mainly demonstrated by the analyzes carried out by Izolda Topp. Her research efforts focused mainly on sacral spaces and on practices related to them.

As it was already emphasized, the space of many today's cities is characterized by a strong division into representative and neglected areas. The former serves to manifest the political and economic power and build "official" images of the metropolis. Second are areas which "should not be shown to anyone". Increasingly, however, residents undertake a variety of activities, thanks to which they can participate in the processes of shaping urban space. The citizens of Tomsk, primarily in the backyards and home gardens, create some kind of artistic installations aimed at embellishing, familiarizing themselves with the nearest space. Using old tires, bottles, unnecessary items they create new objects in a shape reminiscent of exotic animals, plants, fairy-tale characters, etc. In this way, in areas forgotten by the local administration there are installations indicating the presence of residents. As Joanna Panciuchin argued, such acts have the potential of emancipation and restore self-agency of the inhabitants.

Grzegorz Soboń was interested in phenomena of street art and "visual interventions" to urban space. Graffiti, paintings, tags (or just a signatures) that we found during our field research became for him an empirical material that allows to create categories of visual phenomena involved in process of produce the city landscape. Most important question was: what these visual manifestations are saying about by Siberia society (in particular, residents of cities such as Tomsk)? We were searching ethical and aesthetic motivations of visual interventions into common space. Especially, we were interested how Street art in Siberian cities want to change social, economic and political relations. We asked if these phenomena can be seen as the urban "fight on / through values".

Our research included also urban animals. Distinction between the world of men and the world of animal has always been a fundamental part of philosophical idea. It is based on a whole collection of conceptions and criteria which role is to measure the distance between these worlds. Animals were neglected in the area of culture studies for a long period of time and it took a lot of research to bring their subjectivity into the discipline. The research conducted in Tomsk has inspired a new perspective on the subject, as it brought questions about what can be

heard and saw in the urban environment. These questions, seen from the angle of the academic discipline which confronts more traditional concepts of culture and its sphere of senses, symbols and values with non-anthropocentric arts and humanities can allow us to examine the existence of animal in urban cultural environment. To answer these questions, all non-human inhabitants of Tomsk and Wrocław were listed and interpreted by Katarzyna Szymańska – regarding their relationship with the city and its cultural landscape.

The subject matter described above, has only an exemplary character and does not present the entire research area extended in the framework of the long-term project: “Visual organizations of urban space: behaviors, interpretations, historical and cultural perspectives. Comparative analysis of the iconosphere and its relations to the ways of life of Russian Tomsk and Polish Wrocław inhabitants”. We hope to continue this research cooperation.

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